

# MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE



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## THE CHANGING IMAGE OF HOLOCAUST VICTIMS

THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM AND ITS YOUNG LEADERSHIP ASSOCIATES HELD ITS SIXTEENTH PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE ON HOLOCAUST EDUCATION MARCH 9, 2014.

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 Halpern 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

director of 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

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 of 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 of the resilience of the human spirit."

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Carolyn Herbst, Past President/Past Chairperson of the ATSS/UFT; Abbi Halpern, YLA co-chair; Professor Mordecai Paldiel; Barry Levine, YLA co-chair; Peppy Margolis, workshop presenter; Dr. Marlene W. Yahalom, ASYV Director of Education; Helene Alalouf, workshop presenter.

commemorate the event and honor the memory of the victims. Carolyn Herbst, Past President and Past Chairperson of the Association of Teachers of Social Studies of the United Federation of Teachers, spoke about the relevance of Holocaust education as a vehicle to raise awareness about intolerance and injustice. She also offered insight about the lessons of the Holocaust and their connection with current education legislation.

Professor Mordecai Paldiel, former

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 thoughtfulness and

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# DEAL WITH THE DEVIL

The first part of this article appeared in the preceding issue.

BY JOANNA M. SADEL  
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

This section of the testimony provides a fascinating look into the psychology of the negotiations with Himmler.

**Tamir:** Why was it to his advantage to release the Jews?

**Hecht:** We received information then from Musy that a struggle for power had developed between Hitler and Himmler. Hitler wanted to fight until the end and to annihilate the Jews, and Himmler wanted to approach the West. He had illusions in this matter that this was possible, and that he wanted to utilize. Our hope was to make clear to him that he had no hopes because of his atrocities toward the Jews, but if he ceased these atrocities immediately and released the remnant of six hundred to eight hundred thousand Jews, this terrible impression would be somewhat reduced.

**Tamir:** And you thought that it would convince Himmler to tell him that he had no hopes, only that the terrible impression would be less terrible?

**Hecht:** No, this is a bit complicated.

**Tamir:** Your line was more far-reaching... you raised in him hopes on purpose?

**Hecht:** This is the same thing. We wanted to show him that by not annihilating Jews, it could be that he had a chance to find a way by means of all these actions.

**Tamir:** What chance? Which way? I do not ask through what and by what means.

**Hecht:** To bring before the public through the press in America, which would see that the annihilation of the Jews had stopped.

**Tamir:** What chance would he have from this?

**Hecht:** That he would think he had a better chance to negotiate with the Allies in some way. This was his idea.

**Tamir:** Your line was to convince Himmler that by releasing the Jews he could get nearer to the Allies?

**Hecht:** I would formulate this differently. Our line was to free Jews and to exploit the illusion which seemed right to us for achieving this line.

**Tamir:** You wanted to mislead Himmler?

**Hecht:** It is difficult to answer the question.

**Tamir:** Did you tell Himmler the truth? Answer my question: Did you wish to mislead him or, on the contrary, awake in him illusions and hopes?

**Hecht:** We certainly had no intention to do Himmler any favor at all.

**Tamir:** I did not ask you whether you wanted to do Himmler a favor. Why do you evade answering every single question?

**Hecht:** It is difficult to reply to those questions yes or no.

**Tamir:** It is definitely possible to

answer yes or no. Answer the question.

**Hecht:** We wanted to exploit the political situation in order to explain to Himmler that, by releasing the Jews, he was approaching more his political intentions.

**Tamir:** What were his political intentions which he would have approached more?

**Hecht:** He wanted to get in touch with the West, and for that he needed some point of connection. And proof for this is that the negotiations with the Jews served him in this.

**Tamir:** To approach the West — that means to divide between the Allies, between Russia and the West, is it not so?

**Hecht:** In our opinion no, but in Himmler's opinion yes.

**Tamir:** So you misled him at least on this point?

**Hecht:** Yes. We knew from the Americans that this was out of the question, but they agreed that we should give him this answer.

**Tamir:** Did you think that you could deceive Himmler?

**Hecht:** Yes.

**Tamir:** And this without expertise in the international political situation?

**Hecht:** On the basis of talks with Woods, it was possible to assume this. He explained to us that if it was

**Hecht:** 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 non-evacuation of the camps (which violated the orders of Hitler) by bargaining for a guarantee of non-execution 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



Hungarian Jews on the *Judenrampe* ("Jewish ramp") after disembarking from the transport trains at Auschwitz-Birkenau, May 1944. To be sent *rechts!* — to the right — meant the person had been chosen as a laborer; *links!* — to the left — meant death in the gas chambers.

necessary to pay compliments to the devil in order to save Jews, it was allowed to do so. We would do the reckoning with him later on.

**Tamir:** Instead of encouraging the Nazis with a hope of money, you wanted to awake a hope of political advantage?

**Hecht:** Yes, because in this manner, we wanted to solve the entire problem, whereas with money we were convinced that there would be every time additional expulsions in order to make additional extortions.

**Tamir:** And based on what did you believe that those Nazis, those criminals, after they murdered six million Jews, would fall into your trap?

**Hecht:** Because part of the Nazi criminals were in a great panic and were convinced that the war was lost.

**Tamir:** Among them was Himmler?

levels of the Wehrmacht alleged before Musy that the occupying armies had arranged a lynch-trial of the guards, and they applied again to the American chief of staff, in order to renew the... according to the Eisenhower-Himmler-Musy agreement.

**The Court:** All this went through the Committee?

**Hecht:** All this was discussed in the Committee at the time. An additional proof is that Musy junior arrived just at the moment in which, in spite of the agreement, one had to evacuate the camp — I think that was the *Buchenwald* camp — for the death march. And Musy was even told that about 40% of those participating in those marches would die on the road. This was told to the senior Musy. Musy junior went therefore immediately to Berlin, to the Nazi head of for-

eign intelligence, Walter Schellenberg, and Schellenberg instructed, according to the Himmler-Musy agreement, by means of radiotelephone to *Buchenwald*, that they should cancel those evacuation orders and not carry them out.

## CONFIRMATION AT NUREMBERG

In testimony which he gave to Colonel John Harlan Amen, chief interrogator during the Nuremberg war trials, on January 4, 1946, Schellenberg confirmed that Hitler had overruled Himmler's command not to evacuate the camps. Himmler then countered Hitler's order with a second command to stop the evacuations.

**Walter Schellenberg:** I mean, for instance, the fact that after the *Reichsfuehrer SS* (Himmler) very reluctantly agreed, through my persuasion, not to evacuate the concentration camps, Kaltenbrunner — by getting into direct contact with Hitler — circumvented this order of Himmler's and broke his word in respect to international promises.

*Ernst Kaltenbrunner was chief of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt — Reich Main Security Office — and president of Interpol. He was one of the highest-ranking members of the SS to face trial at the Nuremberg trials. He delivered Hitler's orders.*

**John Amen:** Do you know of any particular case in which Kaltenbrunner had ordered the evacuation of any one concentration camp, contrary to Himmler's wishes?

**Schellenberg:** Yes.

**Amen:** Will you tell the Tribunal about that?

**Schellenberg:** I cannot give you the exact date, but I believe it was in the beginning of April 1945. The son of the former Swiss president, Musy, who had taken his father to Switzerland, returned by car to the *Buchenwald* concentration camp, in order to fetch a Jewish family which I myself had set free. He found the camp in process of being evacuated under the most deplorable conditions. When he had, three days previously, driven his father to Switzerland, he was given definite assurance before he left that the camps would not be evacuated. Since this assurance was also intended for General Eisenhower, he was doubly disappointed at this breach of promise. Musy junior called on me personally at my office. He was deeply offended and reproached me bitterly. I could not understand what had happened, and I at once contacted Himmler's secretary, protesting against this sort of procedure. Shortly after, it was admitted that the facts, as depicted by Musy junior, were true, although it was still incomprehensible, because Himmler had not given these orders. I was assured that everything would be done to put an immediate halt to the evacuations. This was confirmed on the telephone personally by Himmler

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## HOLOCAUST DOCUMENTARY RAISES QUESTIONS OF GUILT

**W**hen 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?

The 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 Unjust*, 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 dupe the world — *Theresienstadt* was one of the grimmest 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 perversity... 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 *Judenaeltester* 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 1960s, 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.

**E**very 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.



Lanzmann and Murmelstein in Rome, 1975.

“(...) One of the lessons of *The Last of the Unjust*, in my view, is that at a certain point you no longer have any other choice than to comply and obey, that all resistance becomes impossible.

“That said, Benjamin Murmelstein fought tirelessly right to the end against the killers. As he said, the Nazis wanted to make him into a puppet, but the puppet had learned to pull the strings.”

As the holder of a diplomatic passport issued by the Red Cross, Murmelstein could have fled abroad after the war.

Instead, he voluntarily put himself forward for arrest by the Czechoslovak authorities after a number of Jews accused him of collaborating with the enemy.

He spent 18 months in prison before being acquitted of all charges. He went into exile in Rome, where he found life tough, but he never went to Israel.

Murmelstein’s recollections, said Lanzmann, are doubly precious, as they prompt a new interpretation of Eichmann, who was kidnapped by Mossad agents in Argentina and hauled to Israel for trial, culminating in his execution in 1962.

German philosopher Hannah Arendt, in her account of the trial, described Eichmann as the stereotypical bureaucrat, embodying “the banality of evil.”

But Murmelstein portrays Eichmann as a “demon,” fanatical in his anti-Semitism, violent and corrupt.

## REMEMBER HOW DANES DONNED YELLOW STARS TO PROTECT THE JEWS? THAT NEVER HAPPENED

BY ALEXANDER BODIN SAPHIR, TABLET

**Y**ou know the legend: At the height of the Nazi occupation of Denmark, Berlin ordered all Danish Jews to don the infamous yellow star on the outside of their clothes. But the morning the decree was set to take effect, Denmark’s King Christian X rode out into the city wearing a yellow star of his own. By evening, the message had spread and the entire population of Copenhagen was wearing yellow stars, thwarting the Nazi program by making it impossible to tell Jew from gentile.

It’s an incredible story — probably the best-known example of mass civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance to come out of World War II. The trouble is it’s just that — a story. It never happened, and couldn’t have, because the Danish Jews were never forced to wear the yellow star. But the tale was prominently featured in American news outlets during the war, and after making its way into Leon Uris’ novel *Exodus* became one of the great unchallenged myths of European resistance.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the Nazis failed to deport Danish Jews in significant numbers, thanks to an operation that became known as the “Miracle Rescue,” by which the vast majority of Danish Jews were

spirited away in October 1943 to Sweden, a neutral country, where they lived out the rest of the war in relative safety. I first became aware of the story of the “Miracle Rescue” from my grandfather, Raphael “Folle” Bodin, who was a young, talented, up-and-coming Jewish tailor in Copenhagen when the Nazis invaded Denmark. In late 1943, a high-ranking Nazi broke party rules prohibiting fraternization with Jews and came to buy a new suit at the tailor shop owned by my grandfather’s father-in-law on Istedgade, in the red-light district of Copenhagen, where my grandfather worked along with his brother-in-law, Nathan Golman.

I imagine my grandfather taking measurements and calling them out to Nathan, who noted them down on a small index card to be filed away. I imagine him trying to stop his hands from shaking and sweating as he stuck pins into the trouser hems of a man who symbolized everything evil in occupied Europe. And I imagine his astonishment when the Nazi, upon returning to collect his new garment, turned to the two Jewish men and warned them that a roundup of the Jews was imminent, telling them to flee.

They took the warning seriously and set about telling everyone they knew. Thanks to this, as well as a subse-

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## THE CHANGING IMAGE OF HOLOCAUST VICTIMS

(Continued from page 1)

Dr. Yahalom concluded that “we need to remember that although the initial master plan of the Final Solution was to divide, destroy and annihilate a nation, this chapter in history has been transformed into a topic and theme that creates unity, builds communities of respect rather than division, and opens a door to a better understanding of human rights and of the dangers of extreme and baseless hatred, to promote tolerance among individuals. Through teaching

about the Holocaust, our program aims to raise ethical questions, praise rescuers as models of behavior, and help students find sources of strength, hope, resilience, identity and renewal.”

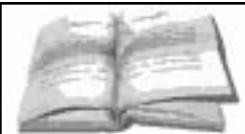
Dr. Yahalom also spoke about Eli Zborowski, z”l, founding Chairman of the American Society, and his encouragement of the education efforts of the American Society each year, and the value of partnering with dedicated educators to preserve and disseminate Holocaust history through programs such as this conference.



(Left to right) Workshop presenter Helene Alalouf, Tracy Garrison-Feinberg, and other engaged educators.

eted contours of human behavior, the dangers of extreme and baseless hatred, the role of the Holocaust in public memory, the lives of the heroes and the victims, and the overarching challenge to make sure neither group is forgotten.”

For more information about our Education Department, Young Leadership Associates and Traveling Exhibits, please contact Marlene W. Yahalom, PhD, Director of Education; (ph) 212.220.4304; email: [mwy@yadvashemusa.org](mailto:mwy@yadvashemusa.org)



# BOOK REVIEWS

## TWO AMONG THE RIGHTEOUS FEW

**Two Among the Righteous Few: A Story of Courage in the Holocaust.**

By Marty Brounstein. Tate Publishing & Enterprises: Mustang, Ok., 2011. 191 pp. \$11.01 softcover.

**REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN**

**B**oth pure evil and pure good fascinate! 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 — including the common and the uncommon 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!

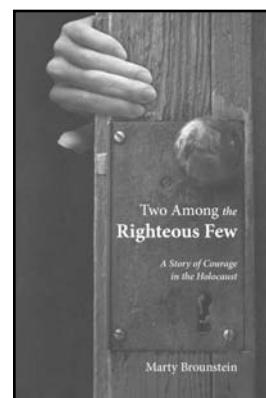
Our reaction to absolute good is much the same. We want to know where it comes from. We want to know what nurtures it. We want to encourage its development.

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 Brounstein's slim, unpretentious volume entitled *Two Among the Righteous Few* so very important and a worthy gift to us all!

Brounstein introduces us to two simple people who did the extraordinary, the couple Franciscus 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 Dieden 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.” Heroics of any kind were not on their minds nor even imagined! But then the war came . . . and Frans and Mien easily slipped into another role entirely . . .

Frans was traveling in Amsterdam selling meat and eggs (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 underfed and needed time outside the city to gain back



her strength. Frans quickly answered, “Yes, for three weeks. . . . We have enough food.” Then he went to see 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 generally murdered those who helped Jews). Still, even when he did realize them, nothing changed. Moreover, as it turned out, this young girl would stay 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.

**N**eedless to say, though, the dangers arrived 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 couldn’t understand WHY they were doing it. In fact, at one point he frustratedly cried out, “They hung our dear LORD on the cross, and you take them in your home!” Then there was the police chief in the town who threatened Frans .... Then, too, while the

Nazis had not been visible in Dieden 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 at all surprising that in 1983 Frans and Mien were recognized as “Righteous Among the Nations” by Yad Vashem. They more than deserved it! Indeed, Brounstein, 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 quickly 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 Germany are so very close . . . and the people so very different. Then again, Norway is also very close to Germany . . . and look at what Norway did for its Jews, intent on saving them; and what Germany did, hell-bent on murdering every one of them it could find! It really is curious, amazing, and exceptionally thought-provoking!

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

## BOOK TRIES FOR BALANCED VIEW ON ROOSEVELT AND JEWS

**FDR and the Jews.**

By Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 2013. 464 pp. \$22.69.

**REVIEWED BY J. SCHUESSLER,  
THE NEW YORK TIMES**

**F**or decades, it has been one of the most politically charged questions in American history: What did Franklin D. Roosevelt do — or, more to the point, not do — in response to the Holocaust?

The issue has spawned a large literary response, with books often bearing polemical titles like *The Abandonment of the Jews* or *Saving the Jews*. But in a new volume from Harvard University Press, two historians aim to set the matter straight with what they call both a neutral assessment of Roosevelt’s broader record on Jewish issues and a corrective to the popular view of it, which they say has become overly scathing.

In *FDR and the Jews*, Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, professors at American University, contend 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 president 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 fairly limited options.”

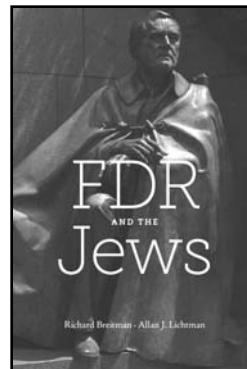
Such statements, backed up by footnotes to hundreds of primary documents (some cited here for the first time), are unlikely to satisfy Roosevelt’s fiercest critics. Even before the book’s March 19 release, the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, a research organization in Washington, has 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 personal desire to limit Jewish immigration to

the United States.

But some leading Holocaust historians welcome *FDR and the Jews* for remaining dispassionate in a debate too often marked by anger and accusation.

“**A**d hominem attacks don’t help uncover the historical truth, and this book really avoids that,” said Deborah Lipstadt, a professor at Emory University and a consultant on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s permanent 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 colleagues drew headlines with evidence, 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 Africa. 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 previous influx of some

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# "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 George Clooney's 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; the only way to rescue the Jews, they claimed, was to 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 Zionist leader Abba Hillel Silver charged.

Assembling the American delegation 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 lilies!" In any event, the president joshed, "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 delegates (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 supply ships that were returning from Europe empty.

The conferees 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 options, the British delegates 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.'"



Left to right: Dimitri Leonidas, John Goodman, George Clooney, Matt Damon, and Bob Balaban in *The Monuments Men*.

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.

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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 salvage of artistic and historic 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.

Some refugee advocates openly questioned the administration's priorities. In full-page advertisements in the *New York Times* and elsewhere, the activists known as the Bergson Group said the establishment of the monuments group was "commendable. ... It shows the deep concern of the [Allies] toward the problems of culture and civilization. But should [they] not at least show equal concern for an old and ancient people who gave to the world the fundamentals of its Christian civilization, the Magna Carta of Justice — the Bible — and to every generation some of its most outstanding thinkers, writers, scholars and artists? A governmental agency with the task of ... saving the Jewish people of Europe is the least the [Allies] can do."

he feared for the safety of its famous medieval architecture. (That was the same McCloy who rebuffed requests to bomb Auschwitz, on the grounds that such air strikes would require "diverting" planes from battle zones. In fact, throughout mid- and late 1944, U.S. bombers — including one piloted by future U.S. Sen. George McGovern — repeatedly struck German oil factories adjacent to Auschwitz, some of them less than five miles from the gas chambers.)

No doubt part of the problem was human psychology. When tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands, then millions of people are murdered, they become a kind of faceless blur, a numbing statistic in the public's mind. By contrast, the specific images of famous Rembrandt or Picasso paintings were personally familiar to many Americans — and that familiarity engendered the sympathy needed to bring about intervention.

Perhaps there is also something to be learned from the mass outpouring of sympathy for endangered animals. In a biting essay at the peak of the Darfur genocide, *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof complained that Americans would care more about Darfur if the victims were puppies. He recalled that the public contributed \$45,000 to rescue a terrier stranded on a burned-out oil tanker in the Pacific in 2002. And the eviction of a red-tailed hawk from its nest atop a Manhattan apartment building sparked an international outcry, 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.

During the 1940s, some refugee advocates noted the same phenomenon. Meeting with a U.S. senator in 1943, Rabbi Meyer 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 level of concern it accorded the rescue of cultural treasures.

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.

Historians have noted that the work of the Monuments Men was not the only instance in which the Roosevelt administration diverted military resources, or altered military plans, because of non-military considerations. A U.S. Air Force plan to bomb the Japanese city of Kyoto was blocked by Secretary of War Henry Stimson because of the city's artistic treasures. Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy intervened to divert U.S. bombers from striking the German city of Rothenburg because

# SURVIVORS' CORNER

## SELFHELP HOME HOUSES WORLD'S LAST GENERATION OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

BY SHARON COHEN,  
HUFFINGTON POST

**L**isten to the many harrowing stories of war, suffering and survival, all under one roof.

On the third floor, there's Margie. A prisoner of Nazi labor camps, she hauled backbreaking cement bags and was beaten with clubs. Sometimes, she had only a piece of bread to eat every other day. She weighed 56 pounds when she was freed.

Down the hall, there's Edith. Though pregnant, she miraculously avoided the gas chamber at Auschwitz. She lost her mother, father and husband in the camps. After liberation, she faced even more heartbreak: Her son died days after his birth.

Up on the eighth floor, there's Joe. As a boy of 10, he was herded onto a cattle car and transported to a concentration camp — the first of five he'd be shuttled to over five cruel years.

These Holocaust survivors share a history and a home: a retirement community founded more than 60 years ago for Jews who'd been victims of Nazi persecution. 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'd fled before the dark night of German occupation fell over their homeland.

In its heyday, the Selfhelp Home, as it's called, bustled with Jewish refugees from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, the dining room a babel of central European tongues. Hundreds were on a waiting list. But that was long ago. As time passed, the need for a special sanctuary faded. Others who had not endured the genocide moved in.

Only 12 Holocaust survivors — the youngest in their mid-80s, the oldest 102 — remain. So do a few dozen other Jews who escaped Hitler's reach, often leaving behind family as they started new lives in Kenya, China, Colombia and other distant lands.

They're now the last generation to bear witness to one of the greatest horrors of all time, a resilient community of friends and neighbors sharing what once seemed impossible: long lives. When they're gone, their stories will be preserved in history. But for now, their voices still echo in these halls.

Seventy-five years ago, Margie Oppenheimer awoke with a Nazi pointing a rifle in her 14-year-old face.

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 trashed the family's apartment and small department store in Oelde, Germany.

So began seven years of terror that took Oppenheimer from the Riga ghetto — escaping mass killings by German squads — to a series of labor and concentration camps. She broke concrete, shoveled sawdust, laid bricks, glued U-boats. She fought hunger and fear, lice and typhus, repeating to herself: "I will be strong. I want to live."

One day at the Stutthof concentration camp in Poland, Nazis marched Oppenheimer and others naked into an open field for inspection. Those strong enough to work were directed to the right. Oppenheimer, who was emaciated, was ordered to the left with hundreds of older women. She was placed into new barracks and had the Roman numeral II scrawled on her left forearm.

Death seemed inevitable.

"I'm thinking this is the last time I will see the sun," she recalls.

That night at the camp two friends did the unimaginable: without saying anything, they pulled Oppenheimer under an electrified fence to another side of the camp. She scrubbed off one number on her arm so she was no longer marked for death. She stayed in those quarters and at the next day's 6 a.m. roll call, she tried to hide her skeletal, barely 5-foot frame behind a tall woman.

"The commander said, 'There is one person extra. Who IS that person? Come forward!'" Oppenheimer recalls, her high-pitched voice imitating 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 living 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 front of me."

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 dubbed "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 cozy, sunlit apartment filled with four generations of family photos. She and her husband — an Auschwitz survivor — had decided long ago they'd eventually move to Selfhelp, but he died before there was a need. Oppenheimer has found comfort there. "I'm happy to know that there are people here who went through the same thing," she says.

Oppenheimer doesn't share her story unless asked, 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.'"

She can't.

"What happened yesterday — I can't remember," she says, "but what happened at that time ... it's still with me. I can never forget it."

**E**ven when it's unspoken, the past is the emotional glue for these survivors.

"I think 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 enormous, but they've not been all-consuming.

"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 sustains today with lectures, Sunday concerts 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: *gemutlichkeit* — comfort or coziness.

**T**he home actually started as an association in the mid-1930s when a branch of a New York organization called Selfhelp formed in Chicago. Selfhelp was more than a name; it was a philosophy for refugees who didn't want to depend on public aid. Instead, they started a support group, collecting meager dues to help each other find jobs or apartments, learn English and navigate daily life.

"The mission was to create a safe oasis where they could start again," says Ciocci, whose husband's grandmother was an early member.

Gerry Franks, 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 windows 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 magnificent 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 Selfhelp 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, Selfhelp — which offers everything from independent 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 community will be gone, this sense of culture will be gone, these last links to what central Europe was before the war will no longer be with us," Bensinger says. "There's a great sense of sadness for all of us."

That sorrow, though, has been tempered, 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)

# JEWISH CHILDREN HIDDEN TWICE OVER BY THE CHURCH

BY REBECCA BENHAMOU,  
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

**R**eopening a scandal that broke in 2004, the 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, 1946, directive from the French Apostolic Nunciature that author Catherine Poujol found in the Church archives in 2004 in Issy-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 baptized to be returned to their families and communities.

“For Jews today, children or grandchildren of Shoah survivors, the letter from the Nunciature is written evidence of what was once feared,” Poujol writes. “We knew that after the war, Jewish organizations did 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 hidden children throughout Europe fails to mention the atrocities of the Holocaust.

“Children who have been baptized must not be entrusted to institutions that would not be in a position to guarantee 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 no rights over them, at least until they are in a position to choose themselves.”

**A**rchbishop of Lyon Monsignor Gerlier — credited with rescuing 120 Jewish children from deporta-

“For a historian, it is very tempting to talk to the press, especially when you discover something big. But had I talked, I would have lost my credibility and the Church’s trust.”

Poujol admits, however, that without the 2004 scandal, the French Church would probably not have granted her access to its private archives.

“The Church felt cornered, and at first adopted an inward-looking stance. But soon it realized that deny-



Robert and Gerald Finaly, the most notorious case of French baptized Jewish children hidden after World War II.

tion in Vénissieux — received the letter on April 30, 1947, along with another document, entitled “Note from the Abbot Blanc.”

Explaining the opinion of a theologian consulted by the Vatican envoy in France, Angelo Rocalli, the document states: “Baptism is what makes a Christian, hence it ‘cancels the Jew,’ which allowed the Church to protect so many endangered Israelites.”

To this day, there are no reliable figures 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 reasons behind her silence.

“I didn’t want to add fuel to the fire without properly investigating the subject — and this was a very complex, lengthy process,” she told *The Times of Israel*.

“When the media published the directive, they had no evidence whatsoever of its origin and its actual impact on the field,” she continues.

ing the access to these postwar documents 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 completely independently 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.

“After the war, 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 administered 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 examples, 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, who were living in Israel, attempted to get the children back.

In 1948, French Catholic nurse Antoinette 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 spotlight when a police investigation found that several nuns of the Notre Dame de Sion order and Basque priests had arranged and executed the kidnapping and smuggling of the children in Spain in February 1953.

The boys were returned to their family 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 not to hand over the children, 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

**I**nside the walls of the transit camp of Terezin, Jewish footballers used their favorite sport as a means of psychological escape from Nazi tyranny — if only for the duration of a match. The league was finally granted official recognition by the Czech Football Association.

Locked up in the Nazi transit camp of Terezin, Jewish prisoners created their own football league, which Czech football recently commemorated by finally granting it official recognition.

“Playing football, we didn’t think of deportation or the stress caused by life in the ghetto,” famed Czech novelist and playwright Ivan Klima once said. Sent to the ghetto near Prague aged just 10, Klima played for the children’s team “Blauweiss” (Blue-whites).

He was far from alone.

Inside the walls of the former

*Theresienstadt*, the Jewish footballers used their favorite sport as a means of psychological escape from Nazi tyranny — if only for the duration of a match.

Between 1941 and 1945, a total of 152,659 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 16,852 of the Jews who passed through *Terezin* camp survived the war.

In March, the Czech Football Association executive committee declared “the football competitions and their organization in the *Terezin* ghetto during World War II an integral and important part of its history.”

In 1943, a committee of Czech, Austrian, German, Danish, French and Italian Jews led by German Fredy

Hirsch — who later perished in Auschwitz-Birkenau — created a system 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 Hrabe, head of a Czech Football Association historical committee.

Named after the jobs the players had 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 barracks as thousands of fans watched.

In 1943, the “Used Clothes Storage” team came top of the first *Terezin* League, after six victories 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 themselves in: the lineups changed from week to week as players were deported 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.

Mahrer survived *Terezin* and has since spoken of his experience, telling Frantisek Steiner, author of *Football Under a Yellow Star*, “For us, football was a kind of comfort in hell’s waiting room.”

# AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM HOSTS INAUGURAL FLORIDA TRIBUTE DINNER

**R**epresentative of major community organizations and three generations of South Floridians gathered at the B'nai Torah Congregation in Boca Raton on Sunday, March 2, 2014, 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. Consul 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 event for the Society — I would like to pay tribute to the memory of Eli Zborowski, its founder. For more than

to become active in raising money for Yad Vashem. Both of them assumed leadership positions in the Society and in turn have 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

ner 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.

**O**ne 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."



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

**C**onsul General Chaim Shacham spoke about the important role of Yad Vashem in the face of numerous threats that currently face the State and people of Israel:

"Yad Vashem means Holocaust remembrance. Israel is built on remembrance. For most states, remembrance is a pastime. For Israel, remembrance is our purpose. And for Israel, Holocaust remembrance is a permanent proactive policy."

Shacham stated that "For Israel, for my government, this is 1938." He then emphasized the danger of history repeating itself if Iran were to gain nuclear capabilities. "No Israeli government will sit idly by as Iran gains nuclear capability. This is true because Holocaust remembrance is a permanent and proactive policy of the

undertook to establish the International School for Holocaust Studies. Today, each year, the School



*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), Henryka Bell, Leah Johnson (Bielski partisan).*



*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.*

three decades, Eli was the driving force behind this organization. In the early '80s, Eli marshaled the efforts of survivors like my father, Harry Wilf, of blessed memory, and my Uncle Joe

State of Israel." Shelly Pechter Himmelrich talked about her family's role in her introduction of her father, Yad Vashem Benefactor Jack Pechter:

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 travelled 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 din-

The tribute to the Bielski Brigade began with Stuart Schulman, who assisted Aron Bell in the writing of his reminiscences in the forest. Stuart presented a dramatic reading from the book, *Forest Scout*. He was followed by Mickey Bielski, the oldest son of Tuvia Bielski, the commander of the Bielski Brigade. Mickey shared some thoughts about his father:

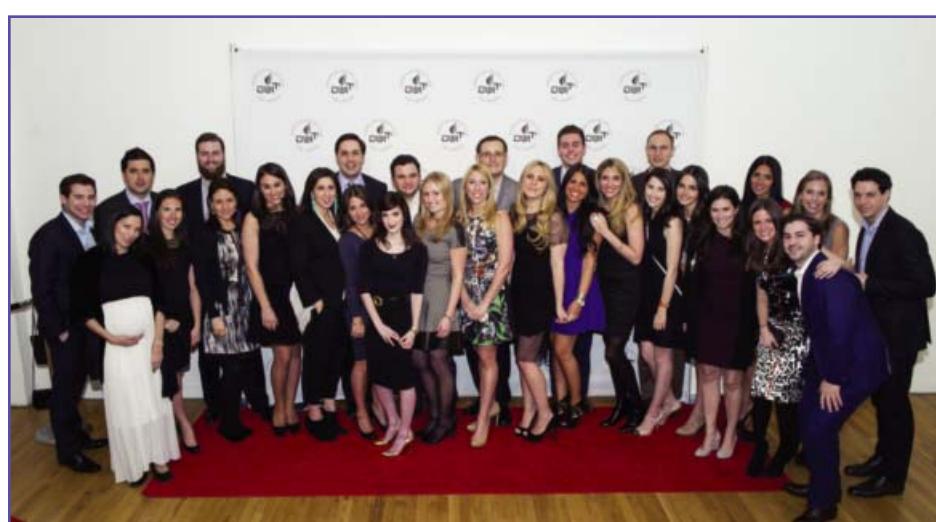
"Tuvia Bielski, my father, was an extraordinary man who was caught up in one of the most horrific moments of the twentieth century when the extinction of an entire people had been set in motion by the Nazis. Tuvia became the commander, the visionary, the holy warrior of the Bielski Otriad. Because of his leadership, Tuvia, along with broth-

*(Continued on page 13)*

## 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.





# REPORT FROM YAD VASHEM

## "I KNOW TOMORROW WILL BE MY LAST DAY"

**For years Soviet Jewry's Holocaust was a forbidden secret. Now, through letters found in archives, Yad Vashem is working to make the voices silenced behind the Iron Curtain heard.**

BY SMADAR SHIR, YNET NEWS

**T**o my dear brother, our city Priluki was taken over quite suddenly and very quickly by the German occupiers. My brother — you 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



The only picture left of Eleonora.

minute — before my eyes are closed. But this wish will also not be realized. Yuzik, I know that tomorrow is 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 spilt blood."

This farewell letter, which is now yellow and fading, is signed Eleonora Parmut, from the city of Priluki, 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 Priluki at the end of the 1930s. Many of them fled 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 into the killing pits. Some of them were buried alive.

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

### BRUTAL AND QUICK OPERATION

**W**e 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 of the Jews from the former Soviet Union. "In Poland, Germany and France we found diaries that people wrote in hiding, but from the Holocaust 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 I see them as a more democratic way of expression. They are the voice of everyone."

Eleonora's letter from Priluki was found by Dr. Prais in the Yad Vashem archives. "Her family members lived in Azerbaijan and kept this letter and her picture 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 relatives 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 unique behavior in each place. 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 murdered 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 have 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."

**T**he 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 Bolsheviks' retreat the local Ukrainian population undertook some praiseworthy actions against the Jews. For example, the synagogue in Dovreimil was torched. In Sambur, 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 next world," and SS officer August Hepner wrote from the town Belya Tserchov, 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."

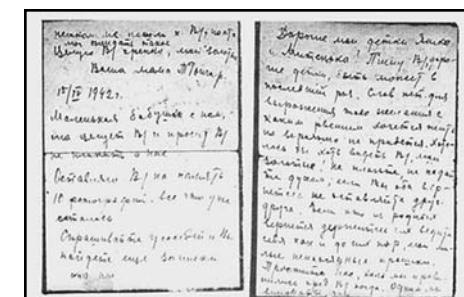
The research at Yad Vashem has led to the conclusion that the Holocaust in the former Soviet Union must receive special consideration.

"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 and passed them on by word of mouth. 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 met in 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 by the time 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."



Tomer and Aharon Guntser's letter to their sons a day before they were murdered.

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

"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 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 Great Patriotic War, (Continued on page 12)

# THREE CHILDREN UNDER THE SWASTIKA

BY JONATHON VAN MAREN,  
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

I often think that it is difficult for members of Generation Y to fully grasp the reality of the Holocaust and just how recent the geographically sprawling and bloody events actually were. Living in widespread prosperity — almost unprecedented in human history — and possessing attitudes of entitlement proportionate to that, the young people of the West in my generation have, generally speaking, never had to deal with the horrific reality of Western governments slaughtering human beings based on race or religion on a mass scale, or had to experience house-to-house warfare that might very well include our own house, or watch invaders gun down neighbors in the streets of our own villages and cities. We are the generation that possesses so much material wealth that we've coined the term "First World problems" — perhaps not realizing that a mere 70 years ago, the problems of the "First World" looked much different. In the 1930s and '40s, the unimaginable became a horrific reality.

I've had several opportunities 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 Vancouver 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 grueling 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, but under 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 entered the country...those planes came very low and they went to Rotterdam, and Rotterdam was bombed very heavily. By nine o'clock, the German troops came through the town. There were a lot of troops and horses, and so we 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.

**M**y grandmother Pia Dam 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-

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

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

"I left the orphanage, [and] my brother had taught me how to read a map. You don't need to read, you can [just] follow the road," she told me.

"Henri had taught me all these things and I smuggled myself. I always left people without saying a goodbye. That was the first thing I was taught, you never say anything. I left the orphanage and I was to meet someone on a motorcycle that was at a corner. It was a young man, and he put me in the side cart and never spoke to me the whole time he took me from Brussels to Holland. It was always at night.



German forces rolling into Amsterdam. The Netherlands was occupied by Nazi Germany for five years, from May 1940 until May 1945.

lowing 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 four years later in 1939. 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."

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 people moved quickly to assist their Jewish countrymen — often 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.

**I**n spite of new Nazi policies against Dutch Jews, Mariette's family decided that sending her to the Netherlands would be safest. Her mother, unfortunately, had believed the Nazi lies that if she registered her family with the authorities, they would be safe from arrest and deportation. Her brother Jean, Mariette remembered, was furious, and her family

"I remember the house with the windmills," she recalls, "and that is how I knew I was 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 KNOW TOMORROW WILL BE MY LAST DAY"

(Continued from page 10)

which is what they called World War II, and that the Jews were murdered like other Soviet citizens. If there was material in the library or the archive about the Holocaust it was in a closed, secret section which required a special pass from the director of that place, who in turn had to get approval from the KGB. Ninety-nine percent of the Holocaust survivors left in the USSR did not speak about what happened to them. Grandfathers were afraid to tell their grandchildren — for fear that tomorrow the grandchild would say something in school and then all the family would be in trouble and go to prison."

In 1990, with the opening of the gates, Yonin and her extended family emigrated to Israel. She was 33 at the time and married. "A miracle happened to me," says Yonin, getting emotional. "A friend of mine met with Dr. Krakowsky, director of the archives at Yad Vashem, who was searching for a professional archivist. My Hebrew was not good then, but within a month after making aliyah, I began working."

The connection between the Yad Vashem archive and the government archive in Moscow was established a year before the opening of the gates and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and USSR. According to Shalev, only after the fall of the Iron Curtain did the void become apparent.

"They were eager for knowledge about the Holocaust. In the last two years, thanks to support from the Genesis Philanthropy Group and the European Jewish Fund, a quiet revolution has begun in the research and

teaching of the Holocaust of Soviet Jewry."

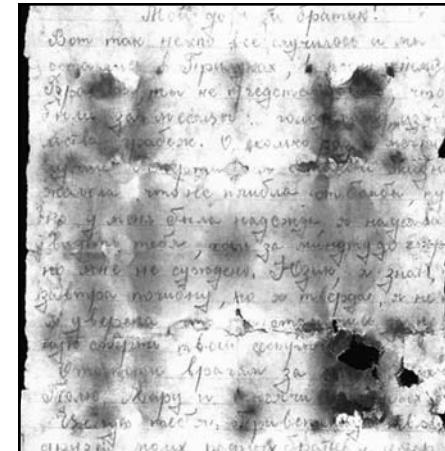
These activities include increasing dramatically the collection of materials from archives in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic states and other places; uploading a new and comprehensive website in Russian which incorporates educational materials, virtual tours and online exhibitions; launching a YouTube channel in Russian; increasing the number of academic publications in Russian; displaying various travelling exhibitions in Moscow; publishing stories of the Righteous Among the Nations who functioned in these regions on Yad Vashem's Russian-language website; creating educational curricula for teachers and for youth movements; and more.

Yonin was the first from Yad Vashem to go to Belarus, and discovered the personal questionnaires of more than 12,000 Jews in its archives. "It turns out that the Nazis required that each Jew fill out a form in order to renew his passport, including pictures and fingerprints. I opened one file and then another, and there was no end to these surprises. This was a period of discoveries. Even the archive director had no idea what treasures were hiding there."

The Belarus visit was also a strong personal jolt for her. "My father came from there," she explains. "I found something that was connected to his aunt who was murdered in the ghetto. Her Russian husband locked her in the house so that she would not be found, and one of the neighbors, who was a policeman, reported to the authorities that a Jewish woman was hiding in that house. In the archive I

found his letter informing on her.

"We searched thoroughly — until we discovered the fate of each Jew — who died, who fled to the eastern parts of Russia and was able to survive, and who went to fight on the front and returned or died there. And so we were able to connect the pieces of the puzzle, which until now was full of holes."



The last letter from 15-year-old Eleonora Parmut to her brother Yuzik.

"But the picture is far from complete. In the area of the former Soviet Union, between one and a half and two million Jews were killed, and we have only 25,000 names and personal stories. We clearly understand that we will never succeed in finding everyone, because in the eastern parts of the Soviet Union entire families were murdered without anything being recorded."

### DON'T CRY FOR US

Dr. Lea Prais, together with her colleague from the Genesis Philanthropy Group, found more than 200 letters in the archive. Many of them, like the letter of Eleonora, aged

15, express the desire for revenge.

"We don't like to stress the part about revenge since generally we want to be perceived as cultured people," says Prais, "but it is impossible to deny the fact that in their final letters upon parting from this life, the Jews expressed anger, humiliation and a desire for revenge. Some of the letter writers did not know what awaited them, but in the project 'The Untold Stories — the Murder Sites of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of the Former Soviet Union,' we will present parting letters from those who perished. They knew that they were going to be murdered and they were totally helpless."

Each letter represents a mystery that is not always possible to unravel, like the one from Tomer and Aharon Gunster from Vinnitsa, Ukraine, to their two sons Yasha and Matya, who were serving in the Red Army.

*"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 this will 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 is what was going to happen?"*

*"Your dear Grandma is with us. She sends you kisses and also asks that you 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)*

## SELFHELP HOME HOUSES WORLD'S LAST GENERATION OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

(Continued from page 6)

a wistful smile. "I laughed. I'd married the man of my dreams."

She remembers months later, herself and her mother on a transport, thinking they were heading to a German labor camp where they'd be reunited with their husbands. Instead, they arrived at Auschwitz. Her mother was dispatched to the gas chambers, Stern to work. She was ushered into the camp by a female guard who pointed to the chimneys, and delivered a chilling taunt:

"You see those flames? Those are your parents, your husbands, your children burning."

Stern also remembers the anguish when the pregnant young widow, newly freed, arrived at a Prague hospital. The staff, seeing a scrawny woman with a shaved head, thought she was a prostitute and the baby's father a Nazi. Stern says she was treated roughly at first. After three grueling days of labor, her son, Peter, was born. He had blood in his skull. He died three days later.

"He was," she says, "a beautiful

baby."

Stern moved to Chicago in 1965 and joined the staff of Selfhelp, developing an instant rapport with the other refugees. "The reason I wanted to work there was I could never do anything for my parents because they were killed," she says. "These people could have been my parents .... I loved them and they loved me."

Now a stylish, lively 92-year-old grandmother, Stern says she always knew she'd return. Moving in 14 years ago, she says, was "like coming home." Her younger sister, Marietta, who spent the war with a foster family in England as part of Kindertransport, a rescue mission for Jewish children, lives across the hall.

Stern says she and other survivors are forever bound by experiences few can comprehend.

"We had these terrible mutual memories," she says. "When I tell you about my life, you cannot imagine it. But these people can. For you, my story is like a novel. For them, it's real life."

Every one of their stories has been recorded on DVDs.

Bensinger, the documentary maker, conducted 30 interviews five years ago. Since then, more than two-thirds have died.

But on any evening, there are silver-haired, slightly stooped survivors, profiles of sheer will, determination and fate, who gather for dinner and end another day.

There's Paula, 102, an artist and sculptor, who was on the run in France during the war with her husband and young son.

There's Trudy, 100, who settled in Kenya with her husband, leaving her parents in Germany. She never saw them again.

There's Hannah, 93, the sole survivor among her family, who's never forgotten her sister's parting words: "Hannah, you were my best friend."

And there's Joe Chaba, 85, and his wife, Helen. Married 55 years, they're inseparable, holding hands on the rooftop garden, whispering to one another, sharing meals. Helen, 89, has dementia; they have 24-hour nursing care.

Now in his twilight years, Chaba thinks more about his days in a camp at age 10, constantly staring death in the face — sometimes unloading piles of bodies from trucks — but never contemplating it for himself. Life was a day-to-day proposition.

He quietly pulls two snapshots from his wallet, handsome young men with thick crowns of wavy hair. One is him, the other, his older brother, David, his protector in five camps, now dead. They were the only survivors among their family of seven.

"By God's sake I'm still alive," he says, his voice quavering. "God helped me. I believe in God."

The Selfhelp home has plaques and art — some created by the residents — that recognize the terrible events of long ago. But there is no single memorial to the Holocaust that has brought them together.

It's part of the home's philosophy, says Efrat Stein, an outreach worker.

There's no need for constant reminders of the past, she says: "This is a place to LIVE."

## AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM HOSTS INAUGURAL FLORIDA TRIBUTE DINNER

(Continued from page 8)

ers Asael, Zusha and Aaron, 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 listened to the ceremonies in Jerusalem. Five minutes into the ceremony Tuvia Bielski was quoted from his 1946 book *Jews of the Forest*. Tuvia describes an argument among the very first arrivals when he orders the rescue of all Jews. 'There won't be enough food.' 'They will find us.' 'They will kill us.' Tuvia declares, 'Let thousands come.'

"Towards the end of the war, Tuvia and his brothers emerged from the forest, having saved over twelve hundred Jewish lives. There are over twelve hundred stories of triumph to be told. To the partisans and their descendants, I send my love and respect. Those twelve hundred Jewish lives leave a legacy that numbers in the tens of thousands."

**F**inally, 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 that we continue to 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 importance of Yad Vashem:

"We've all grown up, certainly here in the United States and I hope

around the world, learning about the horrifying realities of the Holocaust, something that happened within the lifetime of those, many of those, who still live among us here today. And yet, no matter how much you read about it, no matter how many documentaries you watch, the reality of it is truly indescribable. And perhaps the only place on earth that allows you to come face to face with it, in an unde-

Vashem you learn the names and the faces and the stories of those, not just who lost their lives, but entire families that were destroyed and histories that were rewritten and people's lives. And people that were never able to recapture the promise of their youth."

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

"The lessons of the past inform us



Bielski partisans joining together on stage to sing the Partisan Hymn.

niable way, a way that truly shakes people to the core, is Yad Vashem. And I had the opportunity to go there in November of 2010 upon my election.

"I must say that before going there, I had thought that I knew everything there was to know about this horrifying period in world history. I had read about it extensively, I knew people that had survived it, I knew families that had been impacted by it, and yet never in my life have I been impacted by an experience as much as I was upon that visit. Because in Yad

for the future. Because, while the threats are different and the world looks different, the threats are still real. There is still hatred in the world; there is still evil in the world, and there are still hateful, evil people who are in charge of some governments in the world. Some of whom openly seek the extermination of entire nations. One was mentioned here this evening. And this comes at a moment where in reality, though I don't intend to give a political speech, I believe that never in our history has the nation, has Israel, been in more dire straits than it finds

itself in today. A nation, as it has already been mentioned here by the Consul General, that was born of the Holocaust, born of the memory of it to ensure that there would always be a place on this earth where the Jewish people could find a home and refuge. And yet today, Israel is surrounded by uncertainty and danger unlike at any time in its modern history."

Senator Rubio closed by saying:

**T**he lesson of Yad Vashem that one takes away as a visitor to it for the first time is how unbelievable it is that something like that truly could have happened. How difficult it is to fathom that human beings can do that to other human beings ... That that level of inhumanity and atrocity could be systemized, that it can be carried out at this level of government over an extended period of time. That people could be relegated to simply numbers and statistics .... And while the world, I believe, is a better place today and has institutions put in place to prevent something like this from happening, it requires us to remain vigilant. To ensure that this not only never happens again to the Jewish people, but that it never happens to any people ever again.

"The time will come when none of us will be here. For, no matter how long we live, all of our times are limited. 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 organizations who assisted in this inaugural effort: The B'nai Torah Congregation, the Boca Raton Synagogue, the New Synagogue of Palm Beach, the Weinbaum Yeshiva High School, Next Generations and the Florida Atlantic University Center on the Holocaust and Human Rights.

## DEAL WITH THE DEVIL

(Continued from page 2)  
a few hours later.

I believe it was on the same day, after a meeting of office chiefs, that I informed Kaltenbrunner of the situation and expressed my profound concern at this new breach of international assurances. As I paused in the conversation, the chief of the state police, *Gruppenfuehrer* Muller, interrupted and explained that he had started the evacuation of the more important internees from the individual camps three days ago on Kaltenbrunner's orders. Kaltenbrunner replied with these words: "Yes, that is correct. It was an order of the Fuehrer which was also recently confirmed by the Fuehrer in person. All the important internees are to be evacuated at his order to the south of the Reich." He then turned to me mockingly and, speaking in dialect, said: "Tell your old gentleman (i.e.,

Musy, senior) that there are still enough left in the camps. With that you too can be satisfied." I think this was on April 10, 1945.

### WHEN THE COMMANDERS FLED

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

**Hecht:** He made a demand that all these leaders, these camp-beasts, should not be treated as war criminals, 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 agreement 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 treachery.

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 immeasurable harm to the country and the whole nation by



Walter Schellenberg.

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

Unsuccessful in an attempt to hide after fleeing 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 Lüneburg, southeast of Hamburg, Heinrich Himmler bit into a cyanide pill and committed suicide.

# 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 majority 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 perished — 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 Holland, a country as liberal as Denmark and an equally proud resister of the Nazis, lost 75 percent of its Jews, these figures are truly remarkable.

changed his mind and ordered the bombardment of Århus and Copenhagen, Denmark's two main cities, with leaflets claiming the Nazis were defending Danish neutrality against the threat of British aggression. The leaflets included a warning, or a threat, that if Denmark resisted, the next time the harmless pamphlets would be replaced with explosives. The Danish government capitulated; the battle for Denmark lasted just a little over two hours.

So began the Danish policy of negotiation 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 agricultural 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 grandfather'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 tailor's shop all those years ago to deliver a warning to Copenhagen's Jews was Werner Best, the plenipotentiary overseeing the Danish occupation — a man better known as "The Butcher of Paris."

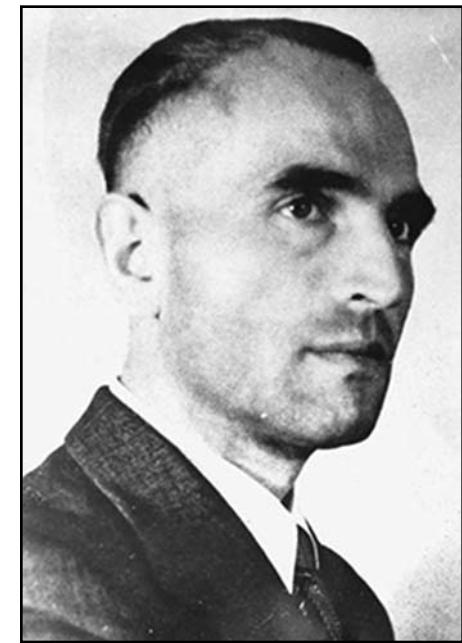
**B**est was a lifelong member of the Nazi Party — as a teenager, he founded a chapter of the National Youth League — and a protégé of Heinrich Himmler. As second in command of the SS, he was also a close member of Hitler's inner circle. Why would such a man have shown compassion toward Denmark's Jews?

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 measurement card. She went to the bureau that housed all their customer records and pulled out a dusty shoebox labelled "1940-43." Inside, amid hundreds 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 question: Why would the Nazi plenipotentiary 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



Werner Best, 1942.

autonomous state under the auspices of a Nazi umbrella. When asked where this theory of the "ideal satellite state" could be tested, Best immediately suggested Denmark.

**A**t 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 *Judenrein*. 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 fulfilling 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 temporarily 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.



The author holds a photo of his grandfather.

What I was always told was that the Danes' superior sense of morality, and the energy of their resistance movement, had caused the hardest of hardline Nazis to soften: that was the "miracle." Denmark was commonly referred to as the "Cream Puff Front" by German soldiers, and maybe the easy lifestyle the Nazi occupiers found in their northern neighbor somehow rubbed off on them.

But 70 years after the event, a new crop of Danish historians has discovered something even more miraculous — that the mastermind behind the "Miracle Rescue" was, in fact, the Nazi whose job it was to eliminate Denmark's Jews.

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**O**n April 9, 1940, the Germans invaded Denmark. Hitler initially had no intention of occupying Denmark at all and merely wanted access to its air bases as a staging point for invading Norway — but

small-arms factories on Danish soil produced munitions for the German war effort, and Danish construction companies built German roads and bunkers.

These revelations have shocked the Danish public, whose contemporary national identity is built, at least in part, on grandiose stories of resistance to the occupation and an unimpeachable moral character. (Indeed, it has recently emerged that many fishermen who ferried Jews to Sweden took payment for these trips, and in some cases charged incredibly steep prices; no Jew was left behind not because they weren't charged, but thanks to a fund set up by the Danish resistance to cover the costs of passage.) As a result, Danes no longer talk about the resistance throwing off the yoke of Nazi oppression, but rather acknowledge the fact that we cooperated with the Germans. Some historians are even saying, in hushed tones, that we "collaborated." Indeed,

## THREE CHILDREN UNDER THE SWASTIKA

(Continued from page 11)  
 couldn't use them," he explained, "and in the meantime some of 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.

**N**ot all Dutch were satisfied with being helpless. Joe den Bok's uncle, he recalled, was the head of a resistance cell in that part of the country. "They tried to sabotage the Germans," 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 gunned 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."

Mariette Rozen's memories of the war years in Holland are also disjointed and traumatic. "Seeing people picked up," she said in another interview, "I remember a man with no nails or toenails. I found out later on that his nails were pulled out and he was tortured. Hunger. I don't think I want to go into any more details than that."

**T**he war ended in May of 1945, with the Netherlands being liberated by Canadian forces. The Netherlands was plunged into celebration and an explosion of revenge. "I'll never forget that morning when the neighbor came and said that the war was over," Joe den Bok recalled.

"And even on that particular morning there was a German who was still trying to shoot and kill some people...and as soon as the war was over [the Dutch] got out the truck and loaded up all the NSBers [the NSB being the Dutch Nazi organization]."

"On a Friday night," Pia Dam remembered, "a neighbor tapped on the window saying 'We're free! We're free!' Then the family knelt down and prayed."

For the den Bok and Dam families, the end of the war meant the long process of struggling to support their families in a country shattered by the four long years of Nazi occupation. For little Mariette Rozen, the Jewish girl from Brussels, the future looked quite different. "We were all picked up and put in different age categories of orphanages and held there," she said.

"They came and said that anyone that wanted to leave the country was to go to the city hall and fill out this form. I went because I didn't trust anybody, and acted like I was somebody else picking up papers for another child and that my mother was sick at the time."

Two years later, in 1947, at the age of eleven, Marie Doduck left for Canada along with three of her siblings, reunited by the Jewish Congress. She had lost her mother and several of her siblings to the Holocaust, the horrors of which the world was only just beginning to grasp.

Fifteen years later, in 1960, Joe den Bok met Pia Dam and married her, and they too headed to Canada. They settled down and raised a family in Chilliwack, British Columbia, a mere hour away from where Mariette now lives.

Mariette now focuses on bringing her story to people like myself. While my family, too, experienced Nazi persecution, their experience pales in comparison to the horrors that she and Jews from Belgium, the Netherlands and across Europe were subjected to. The message she brings, however, is one of hope.

"To us, we believe there is only one God," she told me from her home in Vancouver, "and we believe that one person can save the world. One person can save the world. Change it. That is what I am saying to you."

And perhaps, if enough people hear her, we can.

## "I KNOW TOMORROW WILL BE MY LAST DAY"

(Continued from page 12)  
 am leaving you this letter, perhaps my last. Tomorrow we are going to the stadium; if they will leave us there, then I will write again. In meantime I will say goodbye to you. Be happy and healthy. Behave well and remember us and what we are going through. Continue to grow and be good. Look out for and protect each other. If you are still alive, it is a sign that you will continue to live. Yours, Father, Aharon Guntser, with love and kisses."

The day after writing the letters, the Guntzers were taken to the stadium in Vinnitsa and from there by trucks to the killing pits where they were murdered.

"After much hard searching we discovered that one son died in a battle and did not get the parting letter from his parents, but the other brother survived and did get the letter," recalls Prais. "We tried to find him, but it turned out that his wife is not Jewish and she didn't want to hear anything about Yad Vashem, Israel or the Holocaust."

The information about the family of Eleonora is also short on details, but Prais focuses on the photo of her in which she is holding a book.

"Three years ago I was in Paris at an exhibition arranged by the municipality displaying photographs of Jewish children sent to the camps, particularly to Auschwitz, and all of them were memorialized while they are reading. I also have a picture like that, from first grade, holding a book in my hand. To me, that is a typical Jewish pose."

## BOOK TRIES FOR BALANCED VIEW ON ROOSEVELT AND JEWS

(Continued from page 4)

5,000 refugees to that country, who may have been admitted under the terms of a previously unknown deal between Roosevelt and the Cuban leader Fulgencio Batista, who got reduced tariffs for his nation's sugar in return.

**T**he book notes that the *St. Louis* affair unfolded against a backdrop of intense isolationist and anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States while Roosevelt was preparing to press Congress to allow the sale of weapons to nations victimized by German aggression.

"Imagine if Roosevelt had let in 937 passengers but had limited success easing the Neutrality Act," Mr. Lichtman said. "He would be far more negatively judged by history than he is now."

The authors offer a similar calculus for one of the most contentious issues they discuss: the Allied refusal to bomb Auschwitz. The idea that the Allies could and should have bombed the crematories or the rail lines leading to them came to wide public attention with a 1978 article in *Commentary* by Mr. Wyman, who reprised it in a best-selling book, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, which became the basis for the 1994 PBS

documentary *America and the Holocaust*.

Many people, the authors say, believe that Roosevelt refused to bomb the camp (an option, historians note, that became feasible only in May 1944, after 90 percent of Jewish victims of the Holocaust were already dead). But the book contends that there is no evidence that any such proposal came to him, though a number of Jewish leaders did meet with lower-level officials to plead for bombing. And while the authors call the objections raised by those officials "specious," they maintain (echoing others) that bombing would not have significantly impeded the killing.

"You've got two symbols" — the *St. Louis* and the absence of Auschwitz bombing — "taken as the bookends of American indifference and worse," Mr. Breitman said. "But both symbols are off."

By contrast, the book points to the War Refugee Board, established by Roosevelt in 1944, which they say may have helped save about 200,000 Jews — a number that, if even 50 percent accurate, they write, "compares well" with the number that might have been saved by bombing Auschwitz.

Such claims are not convincing to Rafael Medoff, the founding director

of the Wyman Institute, which is dedicated to furthering the research of Mr. Wyman, a former professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst who is not directly involved in its day-to-day activities. In *A Breach of Faith* Mr. Medoff argues that Jewish immigration levels in the 1930s were largely below established quotas because of Roosevelt's animus, not as a result of anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic sentiment in Congress and the State Department.

Roosevelt's vision for America was "based on the idea of having only a small number of Jews," Mr. Medoff said in an interview. Mr. Breitman and Mr. Lichtman's book, he added, is just an effort "to rescue Roosevelt's image from the overwhelming evidence that he did not want to rescue the Jews."

Mr. Breitman and Mr. Lichtman scoffed at that charge, noting that their book is certainly not always flattering to Roosevelt. They depict him as missing many opportunities to aid Jews and generally refusing to speak specifically in public about Hitler's Jewish victims, lest he be accused of fighting a "Jewish war."

"This is not an effort to write a pro-Roosevelt book," Mr. Breitman said. "It's merely pro-Roosevelt in compari-

son to some things that are out there."

In the end, however, their verdict is favorable, crediting Roosevelt's policies with helping to save hundreds of thousands of Jews, as well as preventing a German conquest of Egypt that would have doomed any future Jewish state.

"Without F.D.R.'s policies and leadership," they write, "there may well have been no Jewish communities left in Palestine, no Jewish state, no Israel."

Mr. Lichtman pointed out that contemporary disagreements about Israel loom behind the Roosevelt debate today. Last year, the book notes, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel cited America's refusal to bomb Auschwitz as providing potential justification for a preemptive strike against Iran's nuclear facilities.

Henry L. Feingold, the author of *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, bemoaned the rise of "accusatory" history that elevates retrospective "what ifs" over historical context. Roosevelt, he said, had one overriding concern: to win the war.

"The survivors said, 'You didn't do enough to save us,' and who could deny it?" Mr. Feingold said. "But do you write history as it should have been or as it was?"



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