

MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE



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AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM ANNUAL SPRING LUNCHEON

This year's Annual Spring Luncheon honored Dr. Deborah E. Lipstadt. She is a world-renowned expert on Holocaust history and a

this year's luncheon.

The trial, as Lipstadt says, was a victory for history and historians. Survivors heaped praise on Lipstadt

It is only through remaining vigilant and continuing to properly educate people that we can fight Holocaust deniers and make sure the world never forgets.

Dr. Lipstadt captivated the audience when she discussed her book *The Eichmann Trial*. The book gives an overview of the trial and analyzes the dramatic effect the survivors' courtroom testimony — which was itself not without controversy — had on the world. Until the trial, we regularly commemorated the Holocaust but never fully understood what the millions who died and the hundreds of thousands who managed to survive had actually experienced.

Her book gives a view of the world as it continues to confront the continuing reality of genocide and ponder the future of those who survive it. The Eichmann trial, which was

coming to terms with evil.

Chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem Leonard A. Wilf reminded us of the importance of raising the awareness of the next generation. He praised the co-chairs of our Young Leadership Associates, Abbi Halpern and Barry Levine, for their efforts to reach out to the third generation. Mr. Wilf also pointed out that the mission of the American Society for Yad Vashem is best exemplified by our honoree and guest speaker, Dr. Deborah Lipstadt, who has spent her life making the world aware of the atrocities of the Holocaust.

Jessica Glickman Mauk, an active member of our Young Leadership Associates, introduced Dr. Lipstadt. She pointed out that, even as recently as yesterday, we were reminded in a *Wall Street Journal* article of the continued presence of anti-Semitism, and of how the need for Dr. Lipstadt's work continues to be as important and necessary today as when she first began.

Marilyn Rubenstein, the Honorary Spring Luncheon Chair, along with Mr. Wilf, presented Dr. Lipstadt with the American Society for Yad Vashem Achievement Award. She was recog-



Marilyn Rubenstein, Honorary Spring Luncheon Chair; Dr. Deborah E. Lipstadt, 2014 Spring Luncheon Honoree; and Leonard A. Wilf, Chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem.

worldwide defender of the truth about the atrocities of WWII. Professor Lipstadt is the Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies at Emory University in Atlanta. Her book *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* was the first full-length study of those who attempt to deny the Holocaust. A notorious person in that study was David Irving, whom Lipstadt called "one of the most dangerous spokespersons for Holocaust denial." Irving's response was to file a libel suit against Professor Lipstadt, which was the subject of her latest book and the topic of her speech at

as their heroine. She explained that it was only after the trial that she understood their meaning about standing up to false allegations.

Dr. Lipstadt spoke about the continuing need to be vigilant in uncovering Holocaust deniers, especially in light of the homework incident recently exposed in a school in California. The one-page instruction sheet given to the students stated: "When tragic events occur in history, there is often debate about their actual existence. For example, some people claim the Holocaust is not an actual event, but instead is a propaganda tool that was used for political and monetary gain."

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Front (l. to r.): Gladys Halpern; Sharon Halpern, 2014 Spring Luncheon Chair; Mindy Schall. Back (l. to r.): Abbi Halpern, Co-Chair, Young Leadership Associates; Jeremy Halpern; and David Halpern.

the trial of the century, has become a touchstone for judicial proceedings throughout the world, and offers a legal, moral and political framework for

nized for her deep commitment, dedication and lifetime work on behalf of Holocaust education and remembrance.

THE NEW HOLOCAUST DISCOVERIES

BY RABBI BENJAMIN BLECH,
VIRTUAL JERUSALEM

The latest revelation about the Holocaust stuns even the scholars who thought they already knew everything about the horrific details of Germany's program of genocide against the Jewish people.

It's taken more than 70 years to finally know the full facts. And what is almost beyond belief is that what really happened goes far beyond what anyone could ever have imagined.

For the longest time we have spoken of the tragedy of six million Jews. It was a number that represented the closest approximation we could find to the victims of Hitler's plan for a Final Solution. Those who sought to diminish the tragedy claimed six million was a gross exaggeration. Others went further and denied the historicity of the Holocaust itself, absurdly claiming that the Jews fabricated their extermination to gain sympathy for the Zionist cause.

But now we know the truth.

The reality was much worse than whatever we imagined.

The unspeakable crime of the 20th century, more than the triumph of evil, was the sin of the "innocent" bystander.

It wasn't just the huge killing centers whose very names — Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau, Majdanek, Belzec, Ravensbruck, Sobibor, Treblinka — bring to mind the ghastly images by now so familiar to us. It wasn't just the Warsaw ghetto. It wasn't just the famous sites we've all by now heard of that deservedly live on in everlasting infamy.

Researchers have just released documentation that astounds even the most informed scholars steeped in the previously known statistics of German atrocities. Here is some of what has now been conclusively discovered:

There were more than 42,500 Nazi

ghettos and camps throughout Europe from 1933 to 1945.

There were 30,000 slave labor camps; 1,150 Jewish ghettos; 980 concentration camps; 1000 prisoner of war camps; 500 brothels filled with sex slaves; and thousands of other camps used for euthanizing the elderly and infirm, performing forced abortions, "Germanizing" prisoners or transporting victims to killing centers.



A group of boys taking part in Jewish religious practice in Lodz ghetto, even though it was banned.

The best estimate using current information available is 15 to 20 million people who died or were imprisoned in sites controlled by the Germans throughout the European continent.

Simply put, in the words of Hartmut Berghoff, director of the German Historical Institute in Washington, "The numbers are so much higher than what we originally thought; we knew before how horrible life in the camps and ghettos was, but the actual numbers are unbelievable."

And what makes this revelation so important is that it forces us to acknowledge a crucial truth about the Holocaust that many people have tried to ignore or to minimize — a truth that has profound contemporary significance: The unspeakable crime of the 20th century, more than the tri-

umph of evil, was the sin of the "innocent" bystander.

For years our efforts to understand the Holocaust focused on the perpetrators. We looked for explanations for the madness of Mengele, the obsessive hatred of Hitler, the impassive cruelty of Eichmann. We sought answers to how it was possible for the criminal elements, the sadists and the mentally unbalanced

to achieve the kind of power that made the mass killings feasible.

That was because we had no idea of the real extent of the horror. With more than 42,000 ghettos and concentration camps scattered throughout the length and breadth of a supposedly civilized continent, there's no longer any way to avoid the obvious conclusion. The cultured, the educated, the enlightened, the liberal, the refined, the sophisticated, the urbane — all of them share in the shame of a world that lost its moral compass and willingly acceded to the victory of evil.

"We had no idea what was happening" needs to be clearly identified as "the great lie" of the years of Nazi power. The harsh truth is that almost everyone had to know. The numbers negate the possibility for collective

ignorance. And still the killings did not stop, the torture did not cease, the concentration camps were not closed, the crematoria continued their barbaric task.

The "decent" people were somehow able to rationalize their silence.

Just last year Mary Fulbrook, a distinguished scholar of German history, in *A Small Town Near Auschwitz* wrote a richly and painfully detailed examination of those Germans who, after the war, successfully cast themselves in the role of innocent bystanders.

"These people have almost entirely escaped the familiar net of 'perpetrators, victims and bystanders'; yet they were functionally crucial to the eventual possibility of implementing policies of mass murder. They may not have intended or wanted to contribute to this outcome; but, without their attitudes, mentalities, and actions, it would have been virtually impossible for murder on this scale to have taken place in the way that it did. The concepts of perpetrator and bystander need to be amended, expanded, rendered more complex, as our attention and focus shifts to those involved in upholding an ultimately murderous system."

Mary Fulbrook singled out for censure those who lived near Auschwitz. But that was before we learned that Auschwitz was replicated many thousands of times over throughout the continent in ways that could not have gone unnoticed by major parts of the populace. Millions of people were witnesses to small towns like Auschwitz in their own backyards.

And so Elie Wiesel of course was right. The insight that most powerfully needs to be grasped when we reflect upon the Holocaust's message must be that "The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference."

AT SOBIBOR: BUILDING IN THE HEART OF A DEATH CAMP

BY MATT LEBOVIC,
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

Where the Nazis once murdered more than 250,000 Jews, authorities plan to construct a visitor center and other structures in the heart of Sobibor, the former death camp in eastern Poland.

The construction — slated to begin next year — was approved by an international steering committee, including representatives from Israel's Yad Vashem. With a projected cost of \$5 million, the project makes Sobibor one of the last former extermination centers to add significant tourist infrastructure.

"I am very impressed that they are building these things at Sobibor," said Selma Engel, one of only seven remaining Sobibor survivors who escaped from the camp during a 1943

prisoner revolt.

After carrying out a meticulous plan to kill the camp's SS masters, more than 300 Jewish prisoners fled to the forest; however, fewer than 50 escapees survived until the war's end.

"Now people will finally be able to see the camp from the road, and know the truth about what was there," the 91-year-old Engel told the *Times of Israel* in a phone interview from her home in Branford, Connecticut.

"Nobody knows about Sobibor," said Engel. "They have no idea what it is to be inside a killing machine. I think it is very important that they are doing something inside the camp," said Engel, one of only several Dutch Jews to survive Sobibor.

However, not everyone agrees that construction inside the camp itself makes sense, including archeologists

who've excavated at Sobibor since 2007. From their perspective, the site's historical integrity and future research prospects are best served by building outside the camp, and not on top of Holocaust-era remains.

"We lost the fight, and they are continuing with the visitor center and now a very long memorial wall," said Israeli archeologist Yoram Haimi. "We think they should do it outside the camp. Never build something inside the camp. But this is not our decision," he told the *Times* in an interview.

CLEARING THE GROUND

In 2006, Haimi discovered that two of his uncles were murdered at Sobibor. Within a year, the exuberant researcher — typically focused on excavating ancient Israel — arrived on-site at the former death camp,

along with Polish archeologist Wojtek Mazurek.

For seven years, Haimi and Mazurek have unearthed thousands of personal items belonging to Sobibor's victims. They've also remapped key parts of the camp by uncovering fences, buildings and — last year — what the researchers believe to be an escape tunnel.

In Camp II, site of the future visitor center, Jewish victims undressed and handed over their valuables before being herded along the so-called "Road to Heaven," a snaking path leading to the gas chambers. The path — once camouflaged and enclosed by barbed wire — was uncovered by Haimi and Mazurek during early excavation seasons, ending a decades-old debate about its precise location.

(Continued on page 13)

THE DIARY OF ANOTHER YOUNG GIRL

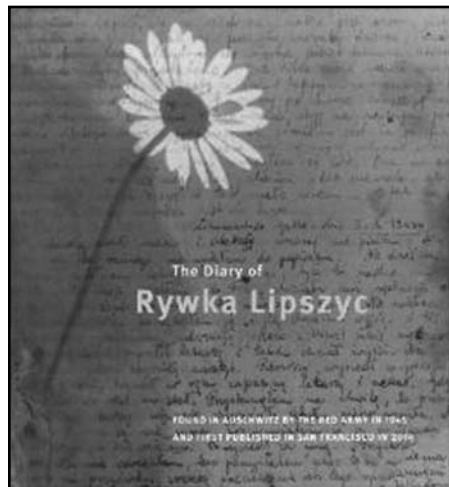
BY DAN PINE, JWEEKLY.COM

She was only 14. A sensitive Jewish girl with a flair for writing, trapped in the maelstrom of the Holocaust. The only repository for her deepest feelings: a diary, found abandoned soon after the war.

Her name was not Anne.
Her name was Rywka.

Orphaned, starving, desperately relying on faith in God, Rywka Lipszyc (pronounced "Rivka Lipshitz") wrote while living in a hell on earth, the Lodz ghetto. Seven decades later, her story at last has come to light.

The Diary of Rywka Lipszyc — published by San Francisco-based Jewish Family and Children's Services in partnership with Lehrhaus Judaica — was exhaustively researched, authenticated and anno-



tated. It took a team of historians, archivists and translators years to finalize the newly published book.

More than anything, the survival of the diary itself constitutes a modern-day miracle. It was found at Auschwitz in 1945 and then remained hidden for years in a closet in Siberia.

With its extraordinary recovery, preservation and publication, the world gains a renewed understanding of the human price of the Holocaust.

"It's the kind of discovery that is so powerful, you know immediately it's important," said Anita Friedman, executive director of JFCS. "I knew we had to publish this diary."

The 170-page book includes not only the full text of the diary, but also a deep analysis of it by National Jewish Book Award winner Alexandra Zapruder, as well as essays about the Lodz ghetto, the Lipszyc family, the provenance of the diary and the mystery of Rywka herself, of whom no trace has been found.

It reads like a detective novel with an unsatisfying ending.

A Soviet Red Army doctor found the diary beside a crematorium at Auschwitz-Birkenau. It was remarkably well preserved. But how did it get there? Why did the doctor keep the diary hidden away for decades until her death, and why did her son do the same for another 10 years?

Most poignantly, what happened to Rywka?

Some questions have no answers.

Those who worked on Rywka's diary content themselves with the words of a cold and hungry child who faced the worst in humanity: "At moments like this," Rywka wrote, "I want to live so much.... Really one needs a lot of strength in order not to give up."

Judy Janec noticed a new e-mail in her inbox.

The staff archivist at the S.F.-based Holocaust Center of Northern California had been forwarded an e-mail by the center's director — a note from an émigré from the former Soviet Union now living in the Bay Area. It was 2008.

Anastasia Berezovskaya, who is not Jewish, wrote to the Holocaust Center, saying she had a World War II-era document in her possession and wanted to know whether the center would examine it.

Hand-scrawled in Polish, the document appeared to be an anonymous diary, covering a six-month period starting in October 1943, and written in the Lodz ghetto, the longest-standing Jewish ghetto of the war.

Before she discovered it in 1995 among her late father's effects in his Moscow home, Berezovskaya had never heard a word about the diary. No legends, no old stories, no family lore.

"The only thing I knew was that my grandmother was in the war," said Berezovskaya, a San Francisco therapist. "She was a pretty strange woman and [stayed out of contact with] the family in her last years."

Anastasia has deduced that her grandmother, Zinaida Berezovskaya, a former Red Army doctor, entered Auschwitz with Soviet liberators and plucked the diary from the ashes of the camp. The granddaughter found the diary wrapped with an explanatory cover note and an accompanying Russian newspaper article, with a photo from February 1945 showing the exact spot where the diary was found.

Anastasia's grandmother kept the diary hidden in her home in Omsk (in southwestern Siberia) until her death in 1983. She had apparently made a few futile attempts to learn more about it, but no one had any answers. Then Anastasia's father kept it in Moscow until his death in 1995. Anastasia then took it back to San Francisco, where she had immigrated four years earlier.

"I knew it was an important document," she said of her thinking at the time. "I thought I'd like to show it to someone and do something with it. In 1995, the Internet was not widely available, so I asked around. People didn't have a clue."

A few organizations had expressed mild interest, some asking Anastasia to send the diary in the mail. But she wasn't eager to part with it. And so, for the most part, the diary remained closeted for another 13 years, until she finally brought it to Janec.

"You can imagine what it was like to

see this document," Janec recalled of the day Anastasia brought it to her office at the Holocaust Center of Northern California in 2008.

"It was an incredible experience. I said, 'This is really remarkable, but in order to move forward, we need to consult people who know more than I do.' So we very carefully and cautiously scanned some of the pages."



Zinaida Berezovskaya, the Red Army doctor who found the diary at Auschwitz.

After that, experts examined the work and weighed in, among them Zachary Baker, Stanford University's Reinhard Family Curator of Judaica and Hebraica Collections, and Robert Moses Shapiro of Brooklyn College, a prominent scholar of the Lodz ghetto.

They in turn brought in academics and researchers from Poland, including translator Malgorzata Markoff and annotator Ewa Wiatr. Their work, for the first time since the diary was written, uncovered its treasures, including the identity of its author.

"Ewa worked on the transcription, and that's when she found out who the writer was," Janec said. "Rywka identified herself in part of the diary."

That triggered an entirely new detective assignment: Who was Rywka Lipszyc? Was she dead or alive, and how on earth did her diary survive the smokestacks of Auschwitz?

Janec consulted with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and the International Tracing Service, a German-based agency that researches lost Holocaust victims. She traveled to several European countries and to Israel's Yad Vashem. Along the way, she picked up a paper trail, starting with records of the Lodz ghetto archives, which included mention of the Lipszyc family.

There were six in all. Parents Yankel and Miriam Lipszyc, and their four children, Abramek, Cipka, Tamarca and Rywka.

Yankel died in the ghetto in 1941, from complications following a beating at the hands of German guards. Miriam died of starvation a year later. Little Abramek and Tamarca perished in the *szpera* (Polish for "curfew"), the horrific 1942 roundup and murder of

seniors and small children deemed useless to the ghetto's slave labor force.

Rywka started her diary 11 months later, on October 3, 1943, abruptly ending it on April 12, 1944, four months before the Nazis liquidated the ghetto and transported all remaining prisoners to Auschwitz.

Rywka took her diary with her on that train.

Somehow it survived the journey and the terrifying first hours there, when Rywka would have been stripped of every possession. Her little sister, Cipka, was immediately selected for the gas chamber. The diary, tossed into the garbage, was likely rescued by a *Sonderkommando*, a Jewish prisoner in charge of the grimmest job at Auschwitz: manning the mechanics of mass death.

"Probably someone in the *Sonderkommando* dug it out," theorized historian Fred Rosenbaum, founding director of Lehrhaus Judaica and the author of an 11-page essay about the Lodz ghetto included in the newly published book. "Then it was available for the doctor, and she had to have the good sense to realize the significance of it, and keep it."

"I don't want to overstate this, but it's almost miraculous."

Berezovskaya picked up the diary when the Red Army liberated Auschwitz in January 1945.

But had Rywka survived?

She had. Janec discovered that much of the girl's final imprisonment was spent at a nearby labor camp, *Christianstadt*, and later at *Bergen-Belsen*, where she was liberated. Eventually the trail indicated Rywka had been hospitalized in Germany in the months after the war.

The last known record of her dated from September 1945, indicating she was still in a hospital, too sick for transfer. After that, no death record, no transfer record, no gravestone. Nothing.

Before Janec knew that, she had found a tantalizing bit of information, a record suggesting Rywka had died at age 16 in *Bergen-Belsen*. That came from the testimony of a survivor named Mina. Janec wondered if Mina was the same person named in the diary as Rywka's cousin.

Perhaps she was still alive. It turned out Mina and her sister Esther (both mentioned in the diary) were alive and well in Israel.

That's when Janec made the call.

"They were completely shocked," Janec recalled of that initial contact. "It made their hearts sick to know she had lived. [In 1945] they were very sick, too, and were sent to Sweden."

Before they left for Sweden in July 1945, the cousins had seen Rywka, lying in the hospital unconscious. The doctor told them she would not survive more than a few days. The sisters departed, believing they would never see their cousin again.

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BOOK REVIEWS

THE JEWISH PRESS AND THE HOLOCAUST

The Jewish Press and the Holocaust, 1939-1945: Palestine, Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union.

By Yosef Gorny. Translated by Naftali Greenwood. Cambridge University Press: New York, 2012. 284 pp. \$81.90 hardcover.

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN

When this reviewer first noted the publication of Yosef Gorny's *The Jewish Press and the Holocaust, 1939-1945*, her father immediately came to mind. Why? She could vividly recall how he always wondered what the rest of the world was thinking and doing — or not doing — while he was struggling to survive Hitler's Nazi hell in Europe. Indeed, throughout the years this reviewer has met and read about many other survivors who wondered the very same thing. . . . Not surprisingly, then, Holocaust researchers have been increasingly drawn to this area of study. The result is Gorny's thought-provoking book like, telling us what people in the free world were being told, how they reacted, and, most importantly and interestingly, how they understood it all. Needless to say, readers of *M&R* will find Gorny's volume especially intriguing since it focuses specifically on the Jewish press in Palestine, Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union.

So what do we learn? Till about November/December 1942, "cautious

optimism" reigned almost everywhere. In other words, these newspapers in various parts of the world were reporting what was happening to their coreligionists in Europe. It's just that most everyone reading these articles doubted the numbers murdered and the premeditated and organized aspect of these ruthless acts. Thus, what was happening was frequently compared to previous outbreaks of anti-Semitism. In sum, many thought it would soon end — as these outbreaks usually did — and the greater majority of the Jews of Europe would survive. No one imagined Hitler's devilish "plans" for the Jews for no one in history had ever had them!

Interestingly, the above is very similar to how Lithuanian Jews reacted in the early years of the war when escaping Polish Jews plainly told them of how the Nazis were horribly mistreating them. The general reaction: Lithuanian Jews didn't believe it. Oh, they understood that things weren't good for the Jews under the Nazis. But they had absolutely no idea of how bad they were — nor could they have believed it — until they experienced it themselves. So, the question is: why should Jews living so very far away have believed it? After all, it was the roughnecked Russians with their

chaotic pogroms that had always been the enemy, not the proper Germans with their worldly and breathtaking arts and culture. . . .

Meanwhile, once the aforementioned newspapers and their publics realized that what they'd thought were overblown reports coming to them from Eastern Europe were the truth, they all beat their breasts in

anguish. Then they began passionately critiquing themselves, critiquing one another, critiquing their governments, and presenting a multitude of suggestions to the democracies. Some called for the gates of Palestine to be opened. Some called for easier immigration to America. Some called for havens, any havens, to be found

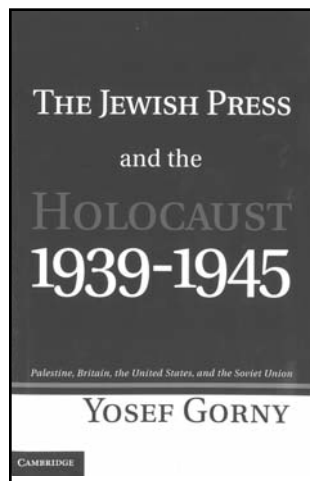
for suffering Jews. Some called for the rescue of children. Some called for protest marches. Some demanded a Jewish army be allowed to form and fight. Some demanded that the Nazis be clearly and definitively told that, in the end, they would pay heavily for their damnable deeds! Many newspapers, noting the tremendous hue and cry over what happened in *Lidice* in 1942 when the Nazis massacred many of the villagers in retribution for the killing of a highly placed Nazi,

wondered why there wasn't a greater cry going up for the many thousands of Jews being massacred in countless "Jewish *Lidices*"! Was "Jewish blood" cheaper than "gentile blood"? Many newspapers loudly protested the fact that the Bermuda Conference of 1943, called most especially to somehow rescue Europe's Jews, had no Jewish representative present . . . and came to no real solution of any kind! And then there was the angry talk surrounding the Jewish owners of the *New York Times* and how they gingerly "universalized" the Jew as just another victim of the Nazis — among their many victims. The *New York Times* refused to recognize that the Jew, unlike any other victim, was pinpointed by the Nazis for extermination, and thus deserving of special emergency measures vis-à-vis rescue!

All in all, Gorny's work proves highly absorbing, and exceptionally fascinating. Sadly, it also especially highlights the "powerlessness" of the Jew during those years — powerless all over the world. And this "powerlessness" led, according to Gorny, to "unresponsiveness."

Needless to say, Gorny's *The Jewish Press and the Holocaust* should be a part of any Holocaust scholar's library.

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



CHILDREN'S BOOKS ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

"The world must remember." This often echoed phrase has brought many people and forces together in an effort to understand the past and forewarn about the future. The expanding number of museums, books, films, and so on have brought the subject of the Holocaust into the limelight. But still, there are many adults who either don't believe in the reality of the Holocaust or find the subject too gruesome to discuss.

If we don't discuss the Holocaust and teach our children about it they will fall prey to ignorance. Our children must learn the truth about the past, since they are the builders of our future. The strength of our society depends solely on the education of our children.

So how do we educate our children? There are a growing number of lesson plans and activities to use in the classroom for educating about the Holocaust. But these programs and information will take time to spread, so parents and educators may want the children to read. Perhaps you can read these books with your children and then discuss the feelings and events that are within them.

The following books are fiction about the Holocaust written specifically for children ages 9 to 12. These books show the Holocaust and its times through the eyes of children. Though these books educate about the Holocaust, they are also wonderfully written stories of friendships, fears, and bravery. Honestly, I found most of these difficult to put down, and each brought a tear to my eye. They are all worth reading.

The Night Crossing.

By Karen Ackerman. Random House Children's Books: New York 1995. 56 pp. \$5.99 paperback.

Clara and her older sister, Marta, were chased home by other children — one of them used to be Clara's best friend. Since the persecution in Austria was increasing, Clara's father decided that they would make a "night crossing" out of Austria and into Switzerland. The family sold everything of value, including the mother's wedding band, but the mother insisted on keeping the Shabbat candlesticks. Though the Shabbat

candlesticks were hidden in the elder sister's petticoat, they often clinked together, giving away their location. When the family neared the gate to the Swiss border, they realized that they could not chance the candlesticks clinking together. So, to keep the candlesticks from making noise, they were hidden inside Clara's dolls. When they reached the gate, Clara not only had to pretend that the family had only been away on a holiday, but had to carry the family's most valued possessions. Acting brave and strong, Clara successfully answered the Nazis' questions with quick and clever answers. The family successfully made it into Switzerland.

The Shadow Children.

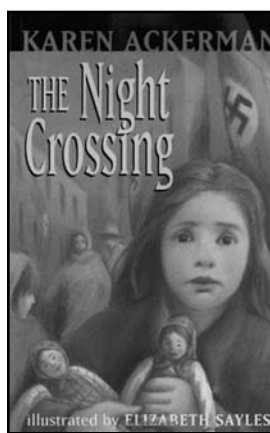
By Steven Schnur. HarperCollins Publishers: New York 1994. 96 pp. \$35.45.

Years after the Second World War, a young boy, Etienne, made his annual visit to spend the summer months with his grandfather.

On his grandfather's farm, Etienne helped with the pears and other chores and took excursions into the woods on Reveuse, the horse. At a certain point in the woods, he heard children but didn't see any. After a short discussion with Madame Joboter, a woman who helped the grandfather with house chores, Etienne was told that the location where he heard voices was haunted and that he was not to go there ever again. The grandfather pushed these stories aside and claimed that they stemmed from fears of guilty people. The grandfather did not explain what he meant by that. Etienne again went back to the location and this time saw and talked to some children. They seemed to be hiding in the woods and waiting for a train. Etienne didn't understand, and when he told his grandfather, his grandfather did not believe the story. Etienne's further journeys to this location yielded him physical items such as a pocketknife. Later, Etienne found a pen that made a blue mark on his arm. The grandfather then told the story.

Many children had been sent by

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THE JEWS WHO FOUGHT FOR HITLER

They fought alongside them, healed them and often befriended them. But how do Finland's Jews feel today about their uneasy — and little mentioned — alliance with the Nazis?

BY PAUL KENDALL,
THE TELEGRAPH

In September 1941, a medical officer performed a deed so heroic he was awarded an Iron Cross by the German high command. With little regard for his own safety, and in the face of heavy Soviet shelling, Major Leo Skurnik, a district doctor who had once fostered ambitions of becoming a concert pianist, organized the evacuation of a field hospital on the Finnish-Russian border, saving the lives of more than 600 men, including members of the SS.

Skurnik was far from the only soldier to be awarded the Iron Cross during the Second World War. More than four million people received the decoration. But there was one fact about him that makes the recommendation remarkable: he was Jewish. And Skurnik was not the only Jew fighting on the side of the Germans. More than 300 found themselves in league



Leo Skurnik, left, and Salomon Klass.

with the Nazis when Finland, which had a mutual enemy in the Soviet Union, joined the war in June 1941.

The alliance between Hitler and the race he vowed to annihilate — the only instance of Jews fighting for Germany's allies — is one of the most extraordinary aspects of the Second World War, and yet hardly anyone, including many Finns, knows anything about it.

"I lived here for 25 years before I heard about it, and I'm Jewish," says John Simon, a New Yorker who moved to Helsinki in 1982. "It's not a story that's told very much."

The reasons why it's rarely told go right to the heart of what it means to be Jewish and that race's quest to be accepted by a long list of unenthusiastic host nations. The Jewish veterans — a handful of whom are still alive today — insist they're not ashamed of what they did. But spend an evening in their company and talk to other members of the community who have examined the events in

detail, and you soon realize the "accommodation," a battlefield Sophie's Choice, has left deep psychological scars.

Aron Livson's first taste of military action came in 1939. A 23-year-old son of a milliner from the city of Vyborg, he was drafted into the army when the Soviet Union invaded Finland. In common with many Jews, he was determined to do his duty to the best of his ability, laying down his life for his country if necessary.

Almost without exception, the Jews of Finland descended from Russian soldiers who had been posted to the region during their military service. (Under Russian rule, Jews had been forced into the army at the age of 10 and made to serve for up to 25 years.) They were viewed with some suspicion by the rest of Finland, which itself had been ruled by Russia until its independence in 1917, and the war that broke out in 1939, known in Finland as the Winter War, was regarded by the small Jewish population as a chance to prove they were loyal Finnish citizens.

Livson fought in the Karelian Isthmus and, although the army was eventually forced to retreat by the far

larger Russian force, he fought so valiantly, demonstrating such great skill and initiative, that he was promoted to sergeant.

For a while, an uneasy peace reigned between Finland and the Soviet Union, but, when Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa, his surprise invasion of the Communist state, Finland saw an opportunity to regain the territory it had lost in the Winter War and joined forces with Germany.

Like all Jews, Livson had heard Hitler's venomous tirades against his people. He knew something about *Kristallnacht*, the attacks against German Jewish homes, businesses, schools and synagogues in November 1938. But, when the orders arrived to rejoin the fight against Russia, he didn't for one minute consider disobeying.

Livson is 97 now and a frailer version of the tough soldier he once was, but his voice remains loud and clear, his handshake firm and his opinions unwavering.

"I had to do my duty, like everyone," he says. "We weren't Jews fighting in a Finnish army — we were Finnish people, Finnish soldiers, fighting for our country." We have met in the cafeteria in the basement of Helsinki's synagogue, alongside Livson's wife and other members of the Finnish Jewish Veterans Society. The atmosphere is friendly, jovial even, in the way conversations among veterans sometimes are, but there is no mistaking Livson's serious intent. When he's making an important point, he bangs a walking stick on the floor in unison with each word for emphasis.

As well as doing their duty as soldiers and proving their loyalty to their country, the veterans insist they were happy to fight for another reason: as far as they were concerned, Finland and Germany were fighting separate wars, they say; one a war of self-defense and one a war of conquest. "I had nothing to do with the Germans," says Livson. "There were no Germans where I was serving. They were 200 km north of my regiment."

But not every Jew was so lucky. On the border with Russia, in the region of Karelia, Finnish and German troops fought side by side and Jews had to contend with two enemies: one in front of them and one within their ranks.

They lived in permanent fear of their identity being revealed, but, incredibly, on the occasions that it was, the German soldiers took the matter no further. The men were Finnish, they had the full support of their superior officers, and the Germans — while often shocked to find themselves fighting alongside Jews — did not have the authority to upbraid them. In fact, where they found themselves outranked by a Jewish officer, they were forced to salute.

There may have been German troops in Finland and the German command and Gestapo in Helsinki, but Finland rejected Hitler's demands to introduce anti-Jewish laws. When Heinrich Himmler, the architect of the Final Solution, visited Finland in August 1942 and asked the prime minister Jukka Rangell about the "Jewish Question," Rangell replied: "We do not have a Jewish Question."

"You have to remember," says John Simon, who has been interviewing veterans about the war for several years, "that only 20 years beforehand, Finland had gone through an ugly, brutal civil war which had split society in half. Ever since, there had been a concerted effort, led by a few brilliant politicians, to unite the country — to get the Reds and the Whites together.

Jews were part of this act of bringing everybody together.

"Politicians were determined to protect every citizen, even former Communists. If they had broken ranks, even for the Jews, it would have annihilated that argument."



Finnish Jewish soldiers outside a field synagogue a few miles from German troops.

One general, Hjalmar Siilasvuo, was positively proud of his soldiers' Jewish ancestry. In the memoirs of Salomon Klass, another Jewish soldier who was offered the Iron Cross, Klass, who had lost an eye in the Winter War, tells a story about the general calling him into a meeting and introducing him to German officers present as "one of my best company commanders." "General Siilasvuo knew full well who I was and what segment of the population I belonged to," Klass wrote. The Germans said nothing.

Perhaps more uncomfortable are incidents, revealed by the Finnish historian Hannu Rautkallio, of friendships struck up between Jews and ordinary *Wehrmacht* soldiers.

"I have heard a story about one Jewish soldier who was making his way back to camp with a German of a similar rank," says Simon. "The Jew said to the German, 'When we get back to camp, don't tell people I'm Jewish.' The German replied, 'But nothing would happen to you — you're a Finnish soldier. It's me who would get into trouble.'"

Feelings ran particularly high among the injured. A scrapbook that belonged to Chaje Steinbock, a Jewish nurse in the main hospital in Oulu, 370 miles north of Helsinki, contains several heartfelt messages from German patients. "To my darling, what you are to me I have told you," begins one from a soldier calling himself Rudy. "What I am to you, I have never asked. I do not want to know it, I do not want to hear it, because to know too much may destroy happiness. I will tell you just one thing: I would give you everything your heart desires. You are the woman I have loved over everything else. Until now, I had never believed that anything like this existed."

Another woman, Dina Poljakoff, who worked as a nursing assistant, is believed to have made such an impression on her German patients

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SURVIVORS' CORNER

HITLER'S JEWISH NEIGHBOR LOOKS BACK IN HORROR IN NEW BOOK

BY DEBORAH COLE

Edgar Feuchtwanger, the son of a prominent German Jewish family with roots in Bavaria going back centuries, vividly remembers nearly bumping into his neighbor Adolf Hitler as a boy.

It was 1933 and Hitler, who had just become German chancellor, kept a sprawling flat on *Munich's* elegant *Prinzregentenplatz* next door to Feuchtwanger's family home.

Eight years old at the time, Edgar had been taken by his nanny for a walk when they nearly collided with the country's most powerful man.

"It so happened that just at the moment when we were in front of his door, he came out. He was in a nearly white mackintosh," Feuchtwanger told AFP.

"We were in his way. He looked at me and there were a few casual bystanders in the street — it was about half past eight in the morning, and they of course shouted 'Heil Hitler!' He just lifted his hat a little bit, as any democratic politician would do — he didn't give the (straight-armed Nazi) salute — and then he got into his car."

Feuchtwanger, who said several Jewish families lived in the neighborhood, made eye contact with Hitler, who looked at him "quite pleasantly."

"I have to emphasize that if he had known who I was, I wouldn't be here," he said.

"Just my name would have been like a red rag to him."

He was referring to the fact that he was a Jew, but also to his famous uncle, Lion Feuchtwanger, one of the most popular German authors of the early 20th century.

He penned a scathing 1930 satire of the Nazi leader called *Success*, which

for a time ran neck and neck with Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in the best-seller rankings.

Feuchtwanger, who is 89, is about to go on a German tour for a book of his own, *When Hitler Was Our Neighbor*, starting, of course, in *Munich*.

He now lives in Britain, where his parents were able in 1938 to buy a visa that would save the family's lives

cars parked there, so I knew he was there even before I left the house."

Feuchtwanger believes he as a child had a keener sense of what his thoroughly German Jewish parents and their friends could not believe: that the country they loved would turn on them with such speed, hatred and, finally, blood-lust.

"We were aware of the threat probably even in 1932," he said, his

were banned and burned by the Nazis.

He and a few other relatives pooled together to give Ludwig the then hefty sum of 1,000 British pounds, upon his release, that would allow the family to escape the Third Reich.

Fourteen-year-old Edgar was sent to England first, and his parents joined him two months later.

His aunt Bella, however, stayed behind in Prague and would die at the *Theresienstadt* concentration camp.

When the war broke out in September 1939, Feuchtwanger was beginning a new life at a British boarding school.

His start was difficult, with the English boys making fun of his German name, calling him "fish finger" and "Volkswagen."

But he would go on to outlive Hitler, study at Cambridge, marry a British general's daughter and become a history professor at the University of Southampton.

He said French journalist Bertil Scali approached him a few years ago with the idea of a "literary" memoir that would expand on the given facts.

The German publication in April has drawn wide media coverage, with *Munich-based* national daily *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* saying it read like a "spooky fairy tale — more Franz Kafka than the Brothers Grimm."

Feuchtwanger, who is still looking for an English publisher, said his birthplace now seemed completely transformed.

"I tend to look at the German newspapers on my computer. One feels that somebody like (Chancellor) Angela Merkel, she's blissfully without charisma," he said with a hearty laugh.

"One's had enough charismatic personalities in German history to last for good and all."



German-British historian Edgar Feuchtwanger, 88, who as a child lived with his family in *Munich* near the private residence of Adolf Hitler on *Grillparzer Strasse*, in Paris on January 17, 2013.

just as the noose was tightening around Germany's Jews.

Feuchtwanger said his family at first had only an abstract sense of the danger posed to them by the National Socialists and their personable neighbor.

"He went around Germany ceaselessly and he tended to come into *Munich* at the end of the week, spend a short time — he sometimes went to his favorite restaurant, the *Osteria* — and then he would move on to his mountain retreat at *Berchtesgaden*," he said.

"After about 1935–36, you couldn't any longer walk past his front door. You were kept to the opposite side of the road, but you could see these

English still lightly accented by his native German.

"But of course we didn't realize how radical that threat was, how lethal it would get. My father had got that quite wrong."

That changed during the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 9–10, 1938, when his father Ludwig, who worked for a publishing house until he was stripped of his job, was swept up in the mass arrests.

He was seized at their flat, within view of Hitler's front window, and held at the *Dachau* concentration camp north of *Munich* for six terrifying weeks.

Lion Feuchtwanger had already fled for France in 1933 because his books

HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR MEETS HER LIBERATOR AFTER 68 YEARS

BY NAOMI NIX,
THE WASHINGTON POST

It's been almost 70 years, but Marsha Kreuzman still remembers the moment she lay outside the steps of a Nazi crematorium wishing she could die.

Kreuzman had already lost her mother, father and brother to the Holocaust, and death seemed inevitable, she said.

But then an American soldier picked up her 68-pound body and whisked her to safety.

"I wanted to kiss his hand and thank him," she said. "From the first day I

was liberated, I wanted to thank them, but I didn't know who to thank."



Marsha Kreuzman.

Since then, the now-90-year-old Holocaust survivor has been on a decades-long quest to find American

soldiers who liberated the *Mauthausen* concentration camp, one that didn't have any success until she met Joe Barbella, quite by chance.

Their unlikely meeting — and now a budding friendship — has given Kreuzman a pleasant twist to an otherwise tragic story.

That tale begins in *Krakow*, Poland.

After the Germans invaded Poland in September 1939, Kreuzman and her family were sent to the *Krakow* ghetto. In 1940, her mother

was taken to the *Majdanek* concentration camp, where she was killed.

Marsha Kreuzman says the rest of the family was then taken to *Plashov*, a labor camp just outside of *Krakow*, built on top of two former Jewish cemeteries.

There, she recalls, Nazis would punish or kill those who were too sick or weak to work.

"If they were able to work, they would be able to live," said Michael Riff, director of Ramapo College's Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. "It was a matter of life or death."

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DIARY OF SECOND WORLD WAR GERMAN TEENAGER REVEALS YOUNG LIVES UNTRoubLED BY NAZI HOLOCAUST

Newly published diary hailed as remarkable documentary evidence of how millions of Germans relied on collective indifference to endure the horrors of war.

BY TONY PATERSON,
THE INDEPENDENT

Her neighborhood was bombed by the allies, the Jews around the corner were being sent to Auschwitz and the Red Army had launched its final assault on Berlin. But Brigitte Eicke, a teenaged German, was unconcerned. She was far more interested in going to the cinema, dancing to gramophone records and trying to cope with a “disastrous” perm.

The 15-year-old Berlin schoolgirl, nicknamed “Gitti,” started keeping a diary in December 1942, when the German capital was being bombed nightly and the Nazi Holocaust was killing thousands. As a trainee secretary, she recorded her daily experiences to improve her stenography skills.

Now, some 70 years on, her diary has been published for the first time in Germany and is being hailed as remarkable documentary evidence of how millions of Germans relied on collective indifference to endure the horrors of war and ignore the brutality of the Nazi rule.

Entitled *Backfisch im Bombenkrieg* (teenaged girl in bombing war), Eicke’s diary is an often banal account of everyday life. She started writing it just months before Anne Frank began her diary, but the contents could hardly be more different.

“Gitti is merely a cog in the wheels

that kept Nazi Germany turning,” is how *Der Spiegel* magazine described the author. “She is a young woman skilled in the art of blotting out ugliness, willing to believe what she’s told

D-Day landings by planning an offensive in the Ardennes, but Gitti — by now a member of the Nazi Party — is more concerned about her hairdo. She writes that she has just been



Central Berlin in 1945 after a bomb raid.

and, ultimately, one of the lucky ones,” it added.

Here is Gitti’s entry for February 1, 1944: “The school had been bombed when we arrived this morning. Waltraud, Melitta and I went back to Gisela’s and danced to gramophone records.” In another raid on her Berlin neighborhood in March 1943, two people are killed, 34 are injured and more than 1,000 are made homeless. Gitti writes: “It took place in the middle of the night, horrible, I was half asleep.”

In November 1944, Hitler is trying to cripple the advances made after the

given a “disastrous” perm by her hairdresser and is worried about going to work “looking a fright.”

Then on March 2, 1945, while Hitler’s troops are trying to halt the Red Army’s advance just 60 miles east of Berlin, Gitti, now 18, goes to the cinema. She writes: “Margot and I went to the Admiralspalast cinema to see *Meine Herren Söhne*. It was such a lovely film, but there was a power cut in the middle. How annoying!”

The humdrum tone is all the more disquieting when it comes to the steady disappearance of Berlin’s Jews — an issue that receives only

one mention in the entire diary. On February 27, 1943, she ends a trivia-packed account about how she and her friend Waltraud go to the opera and get chatted up by soldiers on the way home with the entry: “Jews all over town being taken away, including the tailor across the road.”

Brigitte Eicke is now 86. She still lives in East Berlin’s *Prenzlauerberg* district, where she lived during the war. Just around the corner from where she worked as a secretary, there was a “collection center” for Jews who were being sent to the Auschwitz death camp.

In a recent interview to coincide with the publication of her diary, she said: “My son always said to me: how could you be so oblivious? But I never saw a thing.” She added: “There were some Jewish girls in my first class photograph taken in 1933 but, by the time the next one was taken, they were all gone. When I asked my mother about them, she said they had moved to Palestine.”

Decades would pass before she grasped the enormity of the Nazis’ crimes. “It was only when I visited *Buchenwald* in 1970 that I saw photographs of the camps. It took me years to realize what had gone on,” she said.

Unlike thousands of young German women, Brigitte Eicke appears to have escaped being raped by Red Army troops when they took Berlin. But she lost her father and an uncle on the eastern front. Some German commentators have suggested that her naive and apolitical account of her experiences was an unconscious survival attempt.

NEW CASE STUDY EXPLORES ROLE OF POLISH PEASANTS IN HOLOCAUST ATROCITIES

BY JUDY MALTZ, HAARETZ

Polish peasants and villagers played an instrumental role in rounding up and denouncing Jews during the Holocaust, often taking initiative without any encouragement from the Germans, according to a study by Holocaust historian Jan Grabowski.

In *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland*, Grabowski argues that Poles living in the countryside served as enthusiastic accomplices to the Nazis and that many Jews who had managed to survive the ghettos and escape transports to the death camps eventually lost their lives only because they were turned in by their Polish neighbors.

Grabowski, a professor in the department of history at the University of Ottawa, is also on staff at the Polish Center for Holocaust Research. He presented his findings at a special symposium held at Yad Vashem on

new research pertaining to Polish Jewry during the Holocaust.

In his latest study, Grabowski delved into the history of one particular rural county in southeastern Poland, where many Jews were betrayed or murdered by local residents, after they had escaped mass deportations and killings and were desperately seeking hideouts in the countryside.

The county, *Dabrowa Tarnowska*, which is about 50 miles northeast of *Krakow*, had a Jewish population of 5,000 before the war. Roughly 350 of the county’s Jews survived by 1942, by which time the Germans had completed most of the roundups and deportations in the area, but only about 60 of them were alive by the end of the war, the majority having been killed or betrayed to the Germans by local Poles, according to Grabowski’s findings, based on court records and personal testimonies.

Speaking at a session during the symposium, the Polish-born scholar

said that this particular case study represented a widespread pattern evident in other areas of rural Poland as well.

“I have become more and more convinced that the bleak picture we are seeing in this one area is the picture,” he said.

Grabowski’s findings would seem to corroborate those of the renowned historian Jan Gross, whose controversial bestsellers *Neighbors* and *Golden Harvest* paint a damning picture of Polish complicity in Nazi atrocities committed against the Jews. Excerpts of Grabowski’s book have already been published in Poland, where, like Gross, he has come under widespread attack.

Grabowski described his latest research as quite “surprising” and “dramatic.”

“For one, I had always thought to myself that the main instigators, actors and perpetrators were the Germans,” he explained. “Second, I knew there were horrific things going

on, but I thought it was all part of a popular, disorganized activity — killing people who no longer enjoyed protection of the state and were in a free-for-all situation. What I did not know — and there was not even one single article in the entire published historiography about this — was the extent to which these efforts were organized. And this was all going on practically without any German involvement — in most cases, the Germans were sitting in cities 15–20 miles away.”

Polish collaboration with the Nazis was less common, he said, in areas of the country, such as Galicia, where ethnic Poles were a minority, and outnumbered by ethnic Ukrainians.

“If you look at Galicia, you’ll see that the Poles there were on the hit list of the Ukrainians, and this made them more likely to be sympathetic to the Jews who were also being persecuted by the Ukrainians,” he said. “But there still needs to be more research done on this subject.”

PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE AMERICAN SOCIETY



TY FOR YAD VASHEM ANNUAL SPRING LUNCHEON



Photos by Bernard Delierre.



REPORT FROM YAD VASHEM

JEWES "ON THE EDGE"

1944: BETWEEN ANNIHILATION AND LIBERATION

BY PROFESSOR DINA PORAT

The expression "on the edge," taken from Nathan Alterman's poem *Joy of the Poor*, very aptly expresses the feeling which prevailed in 1944 among the Jews of Europe, who were in the throes of a double race on which their very lives depended. On the one hand, cities from east to west, such as Vilna and Minsk, Warsaw and Riga, Belgrade and Sofia, Paris and Rome, were being liberated from the yoke of Nazi Germany; the Red Army was advancing, and the western Allies continued to bombard Germany, their landing in Normandy tipping the scales still further. On the other hand, in the same year, the Jews of Hungary were sent to Auschwitz, the *Lodz* and *Kovno* ghettos were liquidated, the last of their former inmates were deported and murdered, and death marches were initiated from the liberated territories to the heart of what remained of the Third Reich. It was a year in which everything depended on the scales of time, and the Jews remaining in Europe were asking themselves: will the Red Army from the east and the Allies from the west arrive before the Germans come to murder whoever is still alive? Or, as Alterman wrote,

which ending will come first? Events were occurring fast, one after the other, raising serious questions in their wake.

In March 1944, the Germans invaded Hungary and immediately commenced preparations for the swiftest and most organized deportation any



The crowds greet the liberating armies, Paris, France, August 25, 1944.

Jewish community had ever witnessed: from the middle of May, over 430,000 Jews from Hungary were sent almost exclusively to Auschwitz, where the vast majority were murdered in the space of two months. A ray of light that year was the beginning of the return of the remnant of those exiled to Transnistria, a region in southern Ukraine where conditions were among the most horrific. At around the same time, Zionist youth, other Jewish

activists and neutral diplomats stepped up their rescue activities in Budapest, ultimately contributing to the survival of over 100,000 Hungarian Jews. However, in June, Jews from the Greek island of Corfu were rounded up and deported, and in July, the *Kovno* ghetto in Lithuania was liquidated.

Nazi ideology, which was centered around the burning desire to kill every single Jewish individual, dictated such efforts even in the final year of the war, when the Germans needed every means at their disposal to fight at the front, a need that included the urgent requirement for trains to bring them equipment and arms, and for every pair of hands that could still work to produce weapons that would turn the tide of the war in their favor.

In June, the "Auschwitz Protocols" were disseminated around the world. This detailed account, written by Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler, two young Jews who managed to escape from the infamous concentration and death camp, exposed for the first time the central role of the camp in the extermination system. Shortly afterwards, with the liberation of *Majdanek*, the hard labor and death camp near

Lublin, actual gas chambers were revealed for the first time. The industrialization of murder, the technology that acted in the service of Nazi ideology, the ability to commit crimes of such enormity in secret and over such a long period of time — all of them still deeply disturbing — were finally exposed. Following these events, the Jewish jurist Raphael Lemkin coined the term "genocide" in 1944, and participated in the drafting of a UN resolution for its prevention, approved in 1948.

In October, an uprising in Auschwitz was staged by the *Sonderkommando*, the group of Jewish prisoners tasked with the unspeakable job of handling the bodies of the murdered victims. They blew up one of the gas chambers with the help of explosives smuggled in to them by a group of young Jewish women. The question we must ask ourselves is, from where did these men and women, imprisoned in this indescribable place, draw the strength to organize, band together, choose the right moment, and actually hope to succeed?

These events are at the heart of the tension between annihilation and liberation, a tension that was literally a question of life and death for the Jews at that time, who were living on the very edge.

"WE FOUND YOUR NOTE"

MYSTERIOUS LETTER REUNITES FAMILIES SEPARATED SINCE THE HOLOCAUST

BY DEBORAH BERMAN

When sisters Nurit Baruch and Dorit Oz Gross visited their grandmother's grave at a *Petach Tikva* cemetery, they found a chilling message from someone who claimed to be a long-lost relative — someone who was reaching out to them across decades of separation in the wake of the *Shoah*. The letter was written by Alexander Gold, whose family research led him to the grave when, after years of tireless search efforts, he found new information on Yad Vashem's Central Database of *Shoah* Victims' Names and was determined to do everything in his power to seek out his surviving lost family. The information in the Names Database and the mysterious letter led to the reunion of two branches of the family that had not known of each other's existence since the end of World War II.

Growing up, Nurit and Dorit believed that most of the extended Decker family from *Budzanow*, Poland, had been murdered by the Nazis. They had always been told that of the seven Decker children, Aryeh, Sima, Leibish

and Rachel were killed, and only Penina, Esther and Chedva had survived. Nurit and Dorit, two of Penina's granddaughters, visit her grave every year and hold a joint memorial service for her and her sister Esther. They took upon themselves the role of diligently safeguarding and preserving the Decker family memory, in the belief that they were among the only surviving descendants.

During their annual visit in the summer of 2012, they noticed a dusty plastic bag under a memorial candle. The printed letter inside included a telephone number, and called on visitors to the grave to make contact, stating: "Shalom, I am the grandson of Esther Abramowich. My mother, the late Milka Freida Gold, was her niece. The daughter of Rachel, Esther's sister. My name is Alexander Gold."

After their initial shock, Nurit and Dorit realized that something in Alexander's story did not add up: since they knew that Esther Abramowitz had only one son, who was executed by the Nazis, Alexander could not be her grandson. Upon further consideration, they entertained the thought that perhaps

the author of the letter meant that he was a descendant of Esther, but was actually the grandson of Rachel Gold née Decker, who might not have been murdered as they thought but might perhaps have survived the war.

They immediately dialed the phone number that appeared in the letter. "We left my phone number because my father does not speak Hebrew well and we were afraid that he might miss the call," recalls Alex Gold, Alexander's son. "The phone rang and I heard the emotional voice of a woman who said: 'We found your note.'"

Following the war, Alexander's mother Freida had returned to eastern Ukraine and searched local archives for every scrap of information that would help her determine if any members of her family had survived. It was only when Alexander decided to conduct a search on the Names Database listing the country as Poland, instead of Ukraine, that he found a Page of Testimony commemorating Rachel Gold, submitted to Yad Vashem by her sister Esther Abramovich in 1955.

"My father did not think to search for Poland — the town *Budzanow* was

right on the border," Alex explained. "For years he entered Ukraine and suddenly, when he entered Poland, he found the name Esther Abramovich — the sister of his grandmother."

Alex helped his father continue his research in Israel to track down Esther, and eventually contacted the local burial society, who told them exactly where her grave was located within the cemetery compound. Alexander visited the cemetery, where he left the letter in the hope that someone from the family would find it.

A short time after the graveside telephone conversation, an emotional reunion took place at Dorit's home in *Modiin*. The families compared photos and documents and cross-referenced information about the Decker family. It turned out that all the information confirmed that they were indeed related. "The reunion was monumental for my family, and so important to my father," said Alex. "After years of research, trying to find any surviving members of his family, it was very, very exciting. We saw that we had the same photographs, and our documents bore the same family names. It was a really special moment."

HOW A SOVIET GENERAL INSPIRED HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

BY FRED BARSCHAK, THEJC.COM

Some of the most chilling words ever spoken by a Nazi to a Jew occur at the end of the film *Schindler's List*. On the day Germany surrenders, an SS officer tells Schindler's bookkeeper: "The worst thing we ever did to you is that, when you come to tell people what we did, no one will ever believe you."

It was this thought — making people believe the unbelievable, and the need not just to commemorate, but also to present the evidence of how and when, and where, and on whose initiative the Holocaust had taken place — that informed much of the work of the Yad Vashem — on whose committee I sat — and kindred organizations.

But the emphasis changed radically in 1991. Before that date, Holocaust deniers were treated as "Second World War flat-earthers," but in that year, their ranks were swollen by the arrival of a full-blown denier, David Irving.

Irving, in the previous 30 years, had acquired credibility as a Second World War historian, and especially as a researcher. He achieved this despite having been successfully sued for libel by Captain Broome, commander of the Russian Arctic Convoy, PQ 17, whom he had wrongly accused of cowardice.

Irving was successfully sued on four other occasions, but this was still several years before his crushing libel defeat against the journalist Deborah Lipstadt, when Mr. Justice Grey branded him an anti-Semite and Holocaust denier, and Professor Richard Evans, in his evidence, showed how he lied about Hitler.

Back in 1991, he still had supporters among the academic community, and it was not immediately clear how to deal with him.

Up to that year, Irving, who had written some 30 books on the Second World War, had contented himself by asserting that, in so far as there was a Holocaust, it was on a much smaller scale than previously thought, and, in any case, Hitler knew little about it. It was all the work of Himmler and the SS.

His change of tack can best be summed up by his statement: "More people died in the back seat of Teddy Kennedy's car in Chappaquiddick than were gassed in Auschwitz."

At the beginning of 1993, I chanced upon a placard outside the newsagent at Finchley Road station. It advertised an article in the *Listener* magazine by historian Professor Alan Bullock, entitled *The Evil Dream*. I was an avid reader of anything Bullock wrote — he was the first biographer of Hitler in 1956, and in 1993 was bringing out another book on Hitler and Stalin.

The article dealt with the split between Holocaust scholars at the time. One camp, called the "Intentionalists" and led by Lucy Davidowitz, maintained that Hitler's purpose from the very beginning was the destruction of European Jewry. The second group, called "Functionalists," saw the phenomenon as a two-way process, with not only orders coming from the top down, but also initiatives coming from the bottom up.

What Bullock did in this article was to produce a synthesis of the two ideas, which, he said, were not mutually exclusive. But one thing, he maintained, was a constant — Hitler's twin dream of the destruction of the Jews and the destruction of the Soviet Union.

I then rang Bullock, and after introductions (I'd met him at Oxford in the 1950s), he asked me what I wanted from him. I replied that if he would consent to give a lecture, we would reprint 20,000 copies of the *Listener* article, and send them to every history faculty and sixth-form college in the world.

There was a momentary pause, and then Bullock said that was an offer no one could refuse and agreed to give the lecture in London later in the year.

We arranged it for the autumn, at the Logan Hall, and pre-sold 1,000 tickets. Bullock had given his talk the title "Hitler and the Holocaust." As he began speaking, he said he would address two or three related but separate issues.

The first was the scope of the Holocaust. Bullock stated that his research showed that at the least, some five million, and at the higher end, some six million victims had been exterminated, and that this percentage of destruction of an identifiable homogenous group was the highest in history.

The second issue was that he traced Hitler's personal knowledge and control of the genocide. But it was the third part of the lecture that was to prove sensational. Bullock drew our attention to the work of Dr. Gerald Fleming, reader in German at Surrey University and someone who had been engaged in Holocaust scholarship for more than 30 years, during which time he had confronted Irving more than once.

In 1991 Fleming came across what he described to me as a KGB magazine. In it there was a letter to the editor asking why what he called the "Auschwitz archive" was kept under lock and key in Moscow. The archive contained all the material removed from Auschwitz in the first three

weeks after its liberation. The letter-writer urged that it should be made available to scholars.

From that moment, Fleming bombarded the Russians with telegrams and finally obtained permission for him and his colleague, Professor Robert Jan van Pelt, to spend two months studying the contents of the archive.

It contained all the drawings and architects' plans of everything in Auschwitz, showing who had supplied



General Petrenko.

the crematoria; who had built the gas chambers; and every detail of the operation from its beginning to January 1945. It named participants who worked in Auschwitz, and who supplied the instruments of destruction, with precise details of contracts, construction and operating procedures.

Here, indeed, were the "nuts and bolts" of Auschwitz. It was the most comprehensive information of such an operation in the Second World War. Fleming and Van Pelt published their findings in 1992–93.

The only remaining question for us was how to publish the information. But sitting in the audience at the Logan Hall that night was a young BBC producer named Isabelle Rosin, who worked for *Horizon*, a science documentary series on BBC2.

She began to urge her bosses to allow her to make a film disclosing Fleming's and van Pelt's findings. At first, the *Horizon* producers were reluctant, simply because it was a science program. Her point was that here was history revealed in architectural drawings. Finally she got her way, and in 1994 *The Blueprints of Genocide* was broadcast in 94 countries to an audience of 130 million people.

The film also chronicled the liberation of the camp, and the four officers who commanded the operation. One of them, the Soviet General Petrenko, was still alive.

We were preparing to organize the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. I got hold of a Russian interpreter and found the general's phone number. I told him that we were planning a special screening of

the *Horizon* film. "On that day," I said, "I think your place is with us."

He agreed to come to London. On the day of the commemoration, long queues formed outside the venue an hour before opening. Some 1,500 people attended, many of them survivors.

There were a number of excellent speeches, and I particularly recall the contributions of the late Rabbi Hugo Gryn and Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, both former Auschwitz inmates. The film was shown, and finally came General Petrenko's talk. It lasted for about 20 minutes and then, towards the end, came the words: "My government would like to support the naming of January 27 as an annual Holocaust memorial day."

Many years were to pass before such a day was actually set up, and there were many contributors to move the idea forward, but the fact remains that the utterance of those words by the general was the first time the idea of an annual memorial day had been raised.

Apart from thousands of Jewish partisan fighters, there were probably some 200,000 Jewish soldiers in the ranks of the Red Army; there were certainly 300 Jewish generals.

I tried to address the general's remarks in my vote of thanks. I said: "The Jewish people and the Russian people share one aspect of their lives in common. They count their innumerable dead 'approximately.' I've heard that word all my life. Approximately six million victims of the *Shoah*, approximately 22 million Russian casualties, including six million killed, or is it six and a quarter million or six and a half million? A quarter of a million up, or a quarter of a million down. And in the field of accurate scholarship it is entirely right that that word 'approximately' be used. We shall never know precisely the figure of the slaughtered."

But in the field of commemoration, the word "approximately" has no place. I have never met any approximate mothers or fathers, brothers or sisters, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins or friends. Each is remembered as a unique individual and recalled with great precision.

So where are we now? Acts of extermination have not ceased, nor has Holocaust denial vanished.

The raising of an inverted Hitler salute, not just on the football field but at the very gates of Auschwitz, testifies to the persistence of the longest hatred and with it "the assault on truth and memory," in Deborah Lipstadt's phrase.

Perhaps, after all, that persistence is what is meant by the words in the Haggadah: "In every generation men have risen up to destroy us." The need to confront this ongoing attempt to deny historical truth devolves upon each generation anew and in this battle, there are no permanent victories.

RECALLING THE 1943 ROSH HASHANAH HOLOCAUST ESCAPE OF DANISH JEWS

BY RAPHAEL MEDOFF,
THE JEWISH VOICE

As the final minutes of Rosh Hashanah ticked away, 13-year-old Leo Goldberger was hiding, along with his parents and three brothers, in the thick brush along the shore of *Dragor*, a small fishing village south of Copenhagen. The year was 1943, and the Goldbergers, like thousands of other Danish Jews, were desperately trying to escape an imminent Nazi roundup.

"Finally, after what seemed like an excruciatingly long wait, we saw our signal offshore," Goldberger later recalled. His family "strode straight into the ocean and waded through three or four feet of icy water until we were hauled aboard a fishing boat" and covered themselves "with smelly canvases." Shivering and frightened, but grateful, the Goldberger family soon found itself in the safety and freedom of neighboring Sweden.

For years, the Allied leaders had insisted that nothing could be done to rescue Jews from the Nazis except to win the war. But in one extraordinary night, the Danish people exploded that myth and changed history.

When the Nazis occupied Denmark during the Holocaust in 1940, the Danes put up little resistance. As a result, the German authorities agreed to let the Danish government continue functioning with greater autonomy than those of other occupied countries. They also postponed taking steps against Denmark's 8,000 Jewish citizens.

In the late summer of 1943, amid rising tensions between the occupation

regime and the Danish government, the Nazis declared martial law and decided the time had come to deport Danish Jews to the death camps. But Georg Duckwitz, a German diplomat in Denmark, leaked the information to Danish friends. Duckwitz was later honored by Yad Vashem as one of the Righteous Among the Nations. As word of the Germans' plans spread, the Danish public responded with a spontaneous nationwide grassroots effort to help the Jews.

The Danes' remarkable response gave rise to the legend that King Christian X himself rode through the streets of Copenhagen on horseback, wearing a yellow Star of David, and that the citizens of the city likewise donned the star in solidarity with the Jews.

The story may have had its origins in a political cartoon that appeared in a Swedish newspaper in 1942. It showed King Christian pointing to a Star of David and declaring that if the Nazis imposed it upon the Jews of Denmark, "then we must all wear the star." Leon Uris's novel *Exodus*, and the movie based on that book, helped spread the legend. But subsequent investigations by historians have concluded that the story is a myth.

On Rosh Hashanah — which fell on September 30 and October 1 in 1943 — and the days that followed, numerous Danish Christian families hid Jews from Holocaust persecution in their homes or farms, and then smuggled them to the seashore late at night. From there, fishermen took them across the Kattegat Straits to neighboring Sweden. This three-week operation had the strong support of Danish church leaders, who used their pulpits to urge aid to the Jews, as well as

Danish universities, which shut down so that students could assist the smugglers. More than 7,000 Danish Jews reached Sweden and were sheltered there until the end of the war.

Esther Finkler, a young newlywed, was hidden, together with her husband and their mothers, in a greenhouse. "At night, we saw the [German] searchlights sweeping back and forth throughout the neighborhood," as the Nazis hunted for Jews, Esther later recalled. One evening, a member of the Danish Underground arrived and drove the four "through streets saturated with Nazi storm troopers," to a point near the shore.

There they hid in an underground shelter, and then in the attic of a bakery, until finally they were brought to a beach, where they boarded a small fishing vessel together with other Jewish refugees. "There were nine of us, lying down on the deck or the floor," Esther said. "The captain covered us with fishing nets. When everyone had been properly concealed, the fishermen started the boat, and as the motor started to run, so did my pent-up tears."

Then, suddenly, trouble. "The captain began to sing and whistle nonchalantly, which puzzled us. Soon we heard him shouting in German toward a passing Nazi patrol boat: 'Wollen sie einen beer haben?' (Would you like a beer?) — a clever gimmick designed to avoid the Germans' suspicions. After three tense hours at sea, we heard shouting: 'Get up! Get up! And welcome to Sweden!' It was hard to believe, but we were now safe. We cried and the Swedes cried with us as they escorted us ashore. The nightmare was over," Esther recalled.

The implications of the Danish rescue operation resonated strongly in the United States. The Roosevelt administration had long insisted that rescue of Jews from the Nazis was not possible. The refugee advocates known as the Bergson Group began citing the escape of Denmark's Jews as evidence that if the Allies were sufficiently interested, ways could be found to save many European Jews.

The Bergson Group sponsored a series of full-page newspaper advertisements about the Danish-Swedish effort, headlined "It Can Be Done!" On October 31, thousands of New Yorkers jammed Carnegie Hall for the Bergson Group's "Salute to Sweden and Denmark" rally.

Keynote speakers included members of Congress, Danish and Swedish diplomats, and one of the biggest names in Hollywood — Orson Welles, director of *Citizen Kane* and *The War of the Worlds*. In another coup for the Bergson Group, one of the speakers was Leon Henderson, one of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's own former economic advisers.

In blunt language that summed up the tragedy — and the hope — Henderson declared: "The Allied governments have been guilty of moral cowardice. The issue of saving the Jewish people of Europe has been avoided, submerged, played down, hushed up, resisted with all the forms of political force that are available... Sweden and Denmark have proved the tragedy of Allied indecision... The Danes and Swedes have shown us the way... If this be a war for civilization, then most surely this is the time to be civilized!"

HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR MEETS HER LIBERATOR AFTER 68 YEARS

(Continued from page 6)

It was a strategy Kreuzman and her family would come to know intimately.

"They didn't let us live, but they didn't let us die," Kreuzman said.

At one point, Kreuzman didn't finish building a road because it was raining, and guards responded by beating her with a wet horse's whip. The scars from knots that were tied into the whip remain on her back to this day, she said. Another time, they hung her upside down on a door for several hours during the night after she tried to visit her brother, she said.

On Yom Kippur in 1943, Kreuzman's father was found hiding in a ditch, where the camp's bathrooms were. Nazi soldiers lined him and dozens of other Jews up one by one in front of the camp's occupants and shot them to death, according to Kreuzman.

"They shot him in front of us," she said.

Her brother, Stephan Grunberg, would be next.

On May 13, 1944, Nazi soldiers

rounded up some of the camp's prisoners, including Grunberg. German doctors inspected each person and sent those they deemed capable of working to the right and those who were considered unable to work to the left.

Grunberg was sent to the left — and later to Auschwitz to be killed.

"Then I was alone," Kreuzman said.

In January 1945, Kreuzman and other prisoners were marched for five days and four nights to Auschwitz. She said she was eventually transferred to concentration camps across Eastern Europe: *Bergen-Belsen*, then *Flossenburg* and finally *Mauthausen*.

By that time, Joe Barbella was serving in the 11th Armored Division. Because he had learned to type at Central High School in Newark, when he was drafted into the Army, he was quickly assigned to be a record keeper for the division's medical unit, he said.

On May 5, 1945, U.S. soldiers from the 11th Armored Division would cross the *Linz* border in Austria and liberate *Mauthausen*. Barbella would-

n't enter the camp with the medical unit until the day after it was liberated, he said.

"When we got there, we saw all these people were skin and bones," Barbella said.

Kreuzman said she remembers lying down just outside the camp's crematorium when the soldiers arrived. She heard the words: "You're free."

She fainted and a soldier carried her to a field hospital, where doctors would start nursing her back to health, she said.

After the war, Kreuzman spent a few years in England before moving to the United States in 1952. Barbella returned to New Jersey, building a comfortable life with his wife, Anne.

Working as a nurse and living in New Jersey, Kreuzman always wondered about the American men who crossed enemy lines to free her and other Jews from the Austrian concentration camp.

She even wrote letters to men in telephone books she thought might

have been connected to the Army division that liberated *Mauthausen*.

"I always look for liberators," she said. "I wasn't giving up."

Then, in October, nearly 70 years after her liberation, she came across a wedding anniversary announcement in *The Star-Ledger* for Joe and Anne Barbella's 65th anniversary.

"A veteran of World War II, Joseph served in the 11th Armored Division which liberated the *Mauthausen* concentration camp," the announcement said.

The next day, a tearful Kreuzman called the Barbellas and told Anne Barbella that she was one of the Jews whom Joe liberated.

They arranged a meeting at the Barbellas' home later that month.

"They really welcomed me with open arms," Kreuzman said about the two-hour visit.

Barbella said he felt like he has known Kreuzman for years, though he shied away from her descriptions of his work as heroic. "I'm just an ordinary soldier," he said.

AT SOBIBOR: BUILDING IN THE HEART OF A DEATH CAMP

(Continued from page 2)

At the end of 2013, archeologists unearthed a metal nameplate belonging to Annie Kapper, a murdered Jewish girl from Amsterdam, as well as a shovel probably used in the crematoria, said Mazurek.

"It's very sensitive to touch this place," Mazurek told the *Times*. "Every artifact is important, since it means it was one more human life. The feeling is always a bit sad, but it's very important we can discover these artifacts and show the world," he said.



Archeologists Wojtek Mazurek (left) and Yoram Haimi, excavators of Sobibor since 2007.

The latest excavations yielded several complete skeletons — possibly Poles who were shot by Soviet soldiers, said Haimi. Also uncovered were open-air cremation pits, close to the mass graves, bringing the total of such pits mapped to nine.

"When we opened near the mass graves, we smelled fluids from the bodies," said Haimi. "It's been 70 years, and still we smelled them," he said.

As Haimi and Mazurek dug at Sobibor, the Polish-German Reconciliation Foundation conducted fund-raising for the visitor center. Created in 1991 to assist Nazi victims and promote dialogue, the Foundation has distributed more than one billion dollars to 700,000 victims, in addition to funding projects at sites like Sobibor.

Working closely with the Foundation, the Polish government's Sobibor steering committee includes representatives from Israel, the Netherlands and the Slovak Republic. In 2012, the committee unanimously voted to construct a visitor center, museum and new memorial structures. The Majdanek State Museum — which oversees activities at the former death camps Majdanek and Belzec — was brought in to supervise the project.

"The international aspect of this project is particularly important for me," said Piotr Zuchowski, Poland's deputy minister of culture and chair of the Sobibor steering committee.

"For the first time in a project of this

scale, there has been a long-term cooperation between countries with different history and traditions, as well as with different approaches to the remembrance of the victims of the *Shoah*," said the deputy minister. "My intention in the nearest future is to invite to the project all the countries whose nationals were killed in Sobibor," he said.

In an interview with the *Times*, the deputy minister praised the steering committee for funding more than half a decade of excavations at Sobibor, a project he called "of unprecedented scope and scale."

The visitor center's design was selected through an international architectural competition held last year. The one-story structure — chosen from among 63 submissions — will include almost 10,000 square feet of exhibition halls, classrooms and a cafeteria.

Project plans also call for erecting a memorial wall —

almost a mile long — between the visitor center and the area of mass graves, parallel to the "Road to Heaven." The wall will be inscribed with historical information about the camp and will encircle the mass graves themselves, including the prominent "ash mountain" memorial.

BALANCING COMPETING INTERESTS

The plans for Sobibor are not only welcome, but long overdue, said some Holocaust educators. For decades, Sobibor has been the least visited of the former death camps, due to both its remote location and the lack of tourist facilities.

"We have to remember that the

had little more to offer a visitor than barrenness, isolation, and an eerie feeling of emptiness," Heideman told the *Times*.

The importance of bringing more people to Sobibor outweighs the "somewhat necessary destruction" involved in creating new facilities, she said.

"Having a museum, albeit one set up facing the path on which people walked to their deaths, is meant to pay tribute to their death by perpetuating knowledge and memory of what transpired there," said Heideman.

In response to archeologists' concerns about building inside Sobibor, deputy minister Zuchowski said "exhaustive research" has already



Metal nameplate of murdered Jewish Dutch girl, unearthed at the end of 2013.

been conducted at the proposed construction site.

"It is not considered acceptable by our civilization to create a permanent archeological zone in an area of eternal rest," said Zuchowski. "This was the scene of the crime, as well as the place of eternal rest — a kind of cemetery," he added.

When ground is broken next year,

Haimi and Mazurek await permission to excavate, including — they hope — underneath an asphalt-paved square, built as a memorial in 1965. Under this square — almost the size of a soccer field — they expect to find remnants of the gas chambers.

Even in parts of Sobibor not "paved over" since the Holocaust, questions remain. At the mass graves area, unauthorized excavations during the 1990s caused considerable damage, said Mazurek. As with the asphalt square memorial, there is no record of who conducted what Haimi called "a botched dig," or what was found in the ground.

For six years, the University of Hartford's Sobibor Documentation

Project has recorded findings from each excavation season. A documentary film about the digs, called *Deadly Deception at Sobibor*, is in post-production.

"It's quite amazing to see this process unfold," said Avinoam Patt, a professor of modern Jewish history involved with the project. "The archeologists are incorporating testimonies of survivors into their research, and we are getting all kinds of information we did not have before," Patt told the *Times*.

The question of building inside former death camps revolves around "competing interests," including the pull between historical and commemorative motives, said James Young, professor of Judaic studies at the University of Massachusetts, and author of several books on Holocaust memory.

Visitors to Sobibor will experience what Young called "a weird kind of collapse between the two processes of forensics and memory."

"Despite these tensions, there should be room for ongoing discussions to find accommodation for both building and excavation," Young told the *Times*. "It seems to me that they can adjust, so long as it's quite clear in everyone's mind to what end they are doing this," he said.



The proposed visitor center will overlook the cynically named "Road to Heaven," on which victims were herded toward the gas chambers.

Nazis tried to demolish these sites to erase all memory," said Holocaust scholar and educator Elana Yael Heideman. "Until now, Sobibor has

archeologists will be on hand to supervise activities and — as permitted by Polish law — halt construction to retrieve artifacts, said Zuchowski.

THE JEWS WHO FOUGHT FOR HITLER

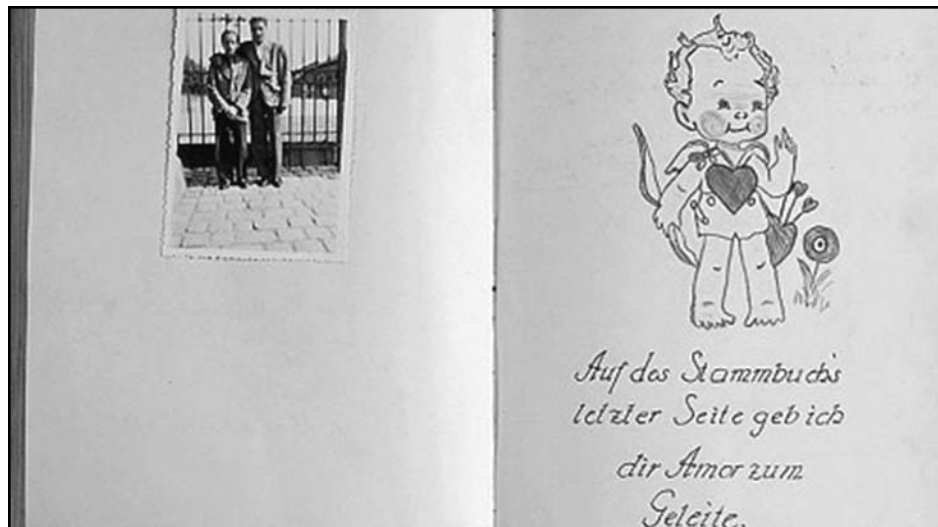
Continued from page 5)

that, like Skurnik and Klass, she was awarded the Iron Cross (the third and final Finnish Jew to have been offered the medal). “Non-Aryan women were not meant to tend to Aryan men and the Germans knew my mother was Jewish, but despite all this, they liked her,” says Aviva Nemes-Jalkanen, the daughter of Steinbock.

Germans are even reported to have visited a field synagogue that was erected near the front line. “It was an unbelievable picture,” Rony Smolar, the son of Isak Smolar, the man who founded the synagogue, told a conference in the United States in 2008. “German soldiers in their uniforms sat shoulder to shoulder with praying Jewish men. The Jewish worshippers

53rd infantry, and the German SS division with whom they were fighting, suffered heavy losses.

“It was really awful,” says Samuli. “There were a lot of casualties and my father didn’t have enough medication.” But Skurnik never gave up. At one point he even ventured into no-man’s-land to rescue wounded German soldiers when no other officers dared. Finally, with no sign of a letup in the Russian shelling, he took the decision that the field hospital had to be evacuated. That operation, across five and a half miles of bogland, won him the Iron Cross, but, like Klass, who won his decoration for clearing a path for a German charge up a hill, and Dina Poljakoff, Skurnik turned his award down.



Chaje Steinbock, a Jewish nurse, kept a scrapbook containing heartfelt messages from German soldiers.

noticed that some of the Germans even showed a certain respect for the Jewish service.”

Of course, many of the details of the Holocaust were still secret at this point. The Jewish soldiers didn’t know about the gas chambers and the horrors of Auschwitz, *Dachau* and *Bergen-Belsen*. But most were in contact with relatives in Poland and other countries in Eastern Europe.

“They got letters,” says Simo Muir, adjunct professor of Jewish studies at Helsinki University. “They knew about the deportations.”

Leo Skurnik was certainly aware of the dangers. A talented scientist whose career had been blocked by anti-Semitism in Finland, he had traveling salesmen in his family who had written to him about the gathering clouds over Europe. “He knew enough to be afraid,” says his son, Samuli. Nevertheless, as a doctor responsible for both German and Finnish soldiers, he refused to discriminate.

“If you want to describe my father, the one feature that came across very strongly was his humanity. He had taken the Hippocratic oath and, because of that, he wouldn’t turn away an injured man, whatever his nationality.”

And there were many injured Germans who needed his help. The sector where Skurnik was stationed saw some of the fiercest fighting of the war, and both his regiment, the

“When the Germans decided they’d like to give this decoration to my father, they told General Siilasvuo. He then told my father, who thought it had to be a mistake and decided to see what happened when Berlin found out he was a Jew. But, after a while, General Siilasvuo came back to my father and told him the award had been approved. He said, ‘My good friend, do you think I can take that kind of decoration? Tell your German colleagues that I wipe my arse with it!’ The general told them, word for word, what my father had said.” The Germans, infuriated, then told Siilasvuo to hand Skurnik over for punishment, but he refused.

There were plenty of other acts of mini-rebellion during the war. A doctor stationed in *Oulu*, who was less — or, some might argue, more — principled than Skurnik, refused to operate on Germans and was transferred to another sector. Sissy Wein, a Jewish singer who was Finland’s answer to Vera Lynn, refused to sing for the German troops. And Aron Livson’s father and brother, stationed in the city of *Kotka* displayed their disdain for their so-called “allies” on a daily basis. “My brother, who was an acting sergeant for the air defense, used to refuse to greet the Germans, and my father, when the Germans came into his shop, would throw them out,” says Livson. Such behavior in another part of Europe would have meant their certain death.

Nevertheless, after the war, as the horrors of the Holocaust revealed themselves, a discomfort about their special treatment spread, among both the Finnish Jews themselves and the wider Jewish community. At a meeting of war veterans in Tel Aviv in 1946, the Finns were almost thrown out as traitors. Had it not occurred to them, they were asked, that, by helping Hitler, they had prolonged his time in power and thus ensured that more Jews went to the gas chambers than would otherwise have been the case?

That discomfort is still detectable today. When I repeat the line about Finland “helping Germany,” I feel the temperature in the room drop.

“We did not help the Germans,” snaps Kent Nadbornik, the chairman of the Finnish Jewish Veterans Guild. “We had a common enemy, which was the Russians, and that was it.”

Semantics aside, the veterans’ other principal justification — that it proved their loyalty to the Finnish state — has also been under attack in recent years. The “party line” is that the existence of Jews in the army not only put paid to the country’s anti-Semitism; it also protected the entire Jewish population of Finland from the Holocaust.

A key quote supposedly delivered by the wartime commander-in-chief Gustav Mannerheim to Himmler — “While Jews serve in my army I will not allow their deportation” — has been questioned by historians, who now think Mannerheim wasn’t even aware Jews had fought in the Finnish army until a visit to a memorial service at a synagogue in Helsinki in 1944. “Perhaps,” says Simo Muir, “in the postwar era, the value of Jews fighting for Finland has been overemphasized.” If they were guilty of anything, it was of trying too hard to fit in.

Unlike Islam, which urges its followers to reform the law of their host nation so that it complies with Muslim law, Judaism’s key texts emphasize the importance of adhering to the law of the land, even if the society is secular. Hundreds of years of persecution and a desire to escape the ghettos, attend university and play a proper part in politics and society, have added to Jews’ strong drive to fit in.

“Over the centuries, Jews have wanted to prove that they were the best kind of citizens,” says Lea Mühlstein, a rabbi at the Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue. “They wanted to show there was no conflict between being Jewish and being a patriot; that there was no double loyalty.”

But the Finnish Jews were on an impossible mission. Whatever they did, there would always be one inescapable difference between them and their Finnish compatriots: the latter were fighting for their future, but, if Hitler had won, the Jewish soldiers would have had no future. What were they supposed to do? That is the question nobody can answer.

THE DOCUMENT THAT MIGHT HAVE CHANGED HISTORY

In his will, suppressed by the Nazis, Weimar-era president Hindenburg disavowed the leader he’d appointed, according to a defector’s testimony in newly opened British papers.

Declassified British intelligence papers have shed new light on the testimony of a pre-WWII German diplomat who claimed that a single document, which was once in his possession, could have changed the course of history by preventing Adolf Hitler’s consolidation of power.

A *London Times* report described the claims of Baron Fritz Günther von Tschirschky und Bögendorff, a confidant of Weimar-era president Paul von Hindenburg. He defected from Nazi Germany to the UK in 1935.

Tschirschky claimed he helped to draft Hindenburg’s last will and testament, a document which he said blasted Hitler and called on the German people to embrace democracy.

But Hitler, whom the 84-year-old Hindenburg had begrudgingly appointed chancellor in 1933, got wind of the document upon the president’s death and gave orders to “ensure that this document comes into my possession as soon as possible,” according to the *London Times* account of Tschirschky’s testimony.

Hindenburg’s son, a loyal Nazi, passed the will to Hitler, who presumably destroyed it.

According to Tschirschky, the will was a powerful attack on Hitler’s ambition.

In it, Hindenburg wrote that the army should be independent of politics, and he called for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy with clear separation of powers.

In a 1947 interview, defector Tschirschky had reportedly told *The Times* that the will called for abolishing all racial and religious discrimination.

He insisted that “Hitler would never have come into power, and there would have been no war, if the wishes of Hindenburg had been known to the German people.”

Two drafts of the will survived after Hindenburg’s death, according to the report. One was tracked down by the Nazis in Switzerland and destroyed, and the other was kept by Tschirschky, until he destroyed it — he claimed out of fear — before fleeing Germany.

British authorities never entirely trusted Tschirschky and he reportedly spent most of the war in an internment camp. Questions remain as to why Hindenburg would have waited until his death to launch his most bitter critique of the Nazi leader.

Within hours of Hindenburg’s death, Hitler consolidated the offices of president and chancellor, and thus tightened his grip on power. Several days later, the Nazis announced the discovery of the deceased president’s “political testament,” a possible forgery, which made complimentary references to Hitler.

THE DIARY OF ANOTHER YOUNG GIRL

(Continued from page 3)

At that moment, Rywka Lipszyc vanished from history. That is, until more than 60 years later when the granddaughter of the army doctor who found the diary came forth and handed it over to exactly the right people.

Rosenbaum could not believe his eyes when he first examined Rywka's notebook. The Lodz ghetto was much on his mind, as he had just finished collaborating on a memoir by Eva Libitzky, 90, a Lodz ghetto survivor whose son, Moses Libitzky, today lives in Oakland.

He knew immediately that the diary



Rywka's cousins, Mina and Esther, were the only members of their immediate and extended families to survive the Holocaust. These photos were taken in 1948. (Courtesy of Hadassa Halamish)

filled in important details about the history of the ghetto, as well as providing powerful new testimony to the savagery of the Holocaust.

"It's an original document written in real time," Rosenbaum said. "Her thoughts are not filtered by what came later. We have other diaries from the Lodz ghetto, but none cover the period Rywka wrote about. That period is of great significance because it was a period of the most acute starvation. And she writes

about that."

Another reason he believes the diary is of historical value is because of Rywka's religious faith, expressed in nearly every entry of the diary.

"While we have other diaries of teens in the war, it's rare to have one by a religious teen," Rosenbaum said. "Most of them are not religious. Here's one who has faith in God, and that becomes her only comfort and shield from the hell she's living in."

The diary captures that hell in chilling detail.

When Rywka begins it, she and her sister Cipka are the sole survivors of the immediate family. She works in a clothing factory making materiel for the German war machine.

As Rosenbaum notes in his essay, the Lodz ghetto was an urban slave labor camp. Unlike, say, the Warsaw ghetto, from which some Jewish workers could come and go (and occasionally sneak out), the Lodz ghetto was sealed tight. The area around it was a dead zone, meaning those inside were trapped, subject to starvation, deportations and countless other abuses.

That did not stop the Jewish prisoners from attempting to maintain normality. Rywka writes about attending school, Torah study and Jewish holiday celebrations. She has a schoolgirl crush on an older mentor, Surcia, and often dishes on her fellow teen girls.

It is eerily, tragically, like any other teen diary from any other era.

Rywka also reveals herself as a young writer infatuated with her new-

found self-expression. Though war brought her formal education to an end when she was 10, Rywka wrestles with language to master her thoughts. Over time, she becomes a more confident writer, despite the horrors around her.

Those horrors dominate the diary: The ever-present cold. The fear of deportation. Grief over lost family members. Almost every entry ends with a cry from the heart, a wail of sorrow.

Rywka's diary is a book of latter-day psalms, in which the young author cries out to God for help and comfort.

"It is very powerful, very touching," Rosenbaum said. "Heart-wrenching in many places. It's also uplifting and inspirational: a girl who has an abiding faith in God despite it all."

Though she could not have known the dramatic effect of her words 70 years later, Rywka's penultimate entry, from April 11, 1944 includes this passage: "Thank you, God, for the spring! Thank you for this mood! I don't want to write much about it because I don't want to mess it up, but I'll write one very significant word: hope!"

In March 2012, the diary was hand-delivered to Mina Boyer and Esther Burstein, Rywka's surviving cousins in Israel. Friedman of JFCS delivered it in person, the powerful moment captured on Israeli TV news.

"I knew it would be painful for them," Friedman said, "because it brought up

old memories. They had no idea this diary existed. They thought Rywka had died, and were upset to find out that, many months after the war, she was still alive. This poor child was all alone in some field hospital."

In the new book, Burstein co-authors a chapter. She remembers that writing gave Rywka much satisfaction in the ghetto, and that it helped her forget about the hunger



Children looking for coal in the Lodz ghetto.

and pain. As for herself, Burstein writes, "We have our great revenge in that we've survived against those who wished to destroy us. We have a big family, a tribe among the glory of Israel."

She's right. A full-page photo near the end of the book depicts dozens of Rywka's family members and their descendants in Israel. The smiles say it all.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

(Continued from page 4)

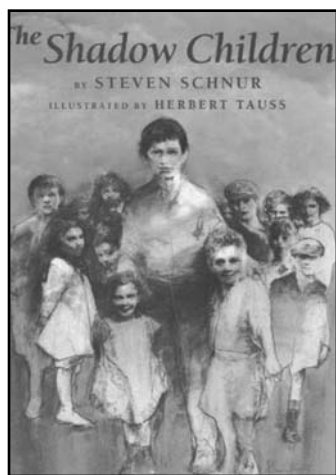
their parents out of Germany in a last effort to save their lives. Many of these children had ended up in the grandfather's small town. The townspeople tried to help these children, gave them food, mended clothing, and tried to give them a place to sleep. One day, the Nazis came and, under penalty of death, ordered all the children rounded up to be sent on a train, supposedly so that the Nazis could house and feed them. The townspeople delivered the children to the Nazis, hoping that what the Nazis had said was true. Quickly they discovered that the children would be rounded up onto cattle cars. None of the children ever came back. The townspeople hadn't spoken of the children for years, attempting to hide their guilt, but the children refused to be forgotten.

Number the Stars.

By Lois Lowry. Houghton Mifflin

Harcourt: New York, 2011. 156 pp. \$6.99 paperback.

Two young girls, Ellen and Annemarie, were not only neighbors but best friends. On the



Jewish New Year, Ellen and her family went to the synagogue for services and were told by the rabbi that the Nazis had taken the lists that had all the names of the Jews. Ellen's family were warned that the Nazis might come that night to take them away. Ellen was to stay with Annemarie's family and pretend that

Annemarie and Ellen were sisters. Ellen's parents left without Ellen knowing exactly where they were going. Late that night, several Nazis came to Annemarie's family's apartment and insisted on looking around. They questioned Ellen's dark hair, but Annemarie's father was clever and "proved" to the Nazis that she was his daughter.

Ellen, Annemarie, Annemarie's mother, and Annemarie's sister left the next day for Annemarie's uncle's house. Annemarie's uncle, Henrik, was a fisherman and was out on the water when they arrived. Several times, Annemarie's mother and her uncle seemed to be talking in some kind of code, but she wasn't sure what they were talking about. Then uncle Henrik announced that there was going to be a funeral for great-aunt Birte, but there was no such person. After privately confronting her uncle about this fact, her uncle told her that they had not told her the truth because it is easier to be brave if you do not know everything.

That night, the casket arrived in a hearse and then the mourners came. Among the mourners, were Ellen's parents. The mourners were taken in two groups to uncle Henrik's boat and hidden in a secret

compartments. A small package that was of severe importance was left behind, and it was up to Annemarie to get it to the boat before the boat left. Running through woods,

Annemarie carried the important envelope under bread and cheese in a basket. On her journey, she was stopped by Nazis with fierce dogs. The Nazis went through her basket and found the envelope. Since she did not know what was in the envelope, it was easier for Annemarie to remain brave. The Nazis left the contents within the envelope untouched, and she barely made it in time for the boat. Later, her uncle explained what was in the envelope and why it was so important for the trip. Her friend Ellen and the rest of the group had made it safely to Sweden.

Reviewed by Jennifer Rosenberg.



POPE AT YAD VASHEM: NEVER AGAIN, LORD, NEVER AGAIN!

BY ILENE PRUSHER, HAARETZ

Pope Francis gave a short speech during his visit to Yad Vashem in May, addressing humanity as "Adam" and blaming it for descending to the murderous behavior that led to the deaths of six million Jews.

Rather than mentioning Jews — or Nazis, Germans, concentration camps or World War II — Francis took a more global and theological approach to the Holocaust. The speech began with the question "Adam, where are you?" — a line from Genesis 3:9 in which God inquires into the first human beings' whereabouts when it is clear that Adam and Eve have gone astray.

"Who convinced you that you were God? Not only did you torture and kill your brothers and sisters, but you sacrificed them to yourself, because you made yourself a god. Today, in this place, we hear once more the voice of God: Adam, where are you?" the pope posed in a speech he delivered in Italian.

"Here before the boundless tragedy of the Holocaust, that cry — 'Where are you?' — echoes like a faint voice in an unfathomable abyss," he said. "A great evil has befallen us, such as never happened under the heavens. Now, Lord, hear our prayer, hear our plea, save us in your mercy. Save us from this horror."

The pope continued: "Grant us the grace to be ashamed of what men have done, to be ashamed of this massive idolatry, of having despised and destroyed our own flesh which you formed from the earth, to which you gave life with your own breath of life. Never again, Lord, never again!"

Pope Francis, on the third and final day of his Holy Land tour, became the third pope to visit Yad Vashem. Pope Francis rekindled the eternal flame in the museum's Hall of Remembrance and then laid a wreath. He bowed his head deeply, listening as a farewell letter was read aloud in Italian. The letter was from a young woman to her sister just days before her deportation from Romania. The woman, Ida Goldish, and her young son Vily died a few days later.

As part of the official ceremony, the

pope greeted six Holocaust survivors, shaking their hands and listening to brief highlights of their stories. These included Moshe Ha-Elion, Avraham Harshalom, Chava Shik, Joseph Gottdenker, Eliezer Grynfeld and Sonia Tunik-Geron.

Afterwards, Ha-Elion, who spent 21 months in Auschwitz as well as having been in three other concentration camps, said the pope's speech felt more like a prayer than an address.

"His focus was asking humanity, how did we deteriorate to such a situation? It was a general question for humanity, more than it focused only and specifically on the Holocaust. But



Pope Francis accompanied by Israeli President Shimon Peres, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Rabbi Israel Meir Lau and Avner Shalev, Chairman of the Yad Vashem directorate, during a ceremony in the Hall of Remembrance at Yad Vashem.

I think his approach was appropriate," said Ha-Elion, 89.

Another survivor in the audience, Miriam Aviezer, said she wished the pope had seized the moment to say something about anti-Semitism.

Avner Shalev, the Chairman of the Yad Vashem directorate, said separately from the formal ceremony that "anti-Semitism is strengthening in Europe — there is no denying it," he said. Everything that we do here is focused on getting people to learn from what happened not long ago, so clearly we have to do more in terms of education."

Shalev, who has overseen the visits of all three popes to Yad Vashem, said that Pope Francis' words were a testament not just to the Vatican's recognition of the Holocaust, but to this particular pope's view of the Shoah as a break in humanity. He also noted that the pope had offered to open the Holy See's archives from the period of World War II, which have thus far been closed, and said he believes the pope will stand by his word regardless of what might be found. Some critics say the Catholic

Church did not do enough to oppose the Nazis' plan, though there were many cases of individual churches, clergy members and average Christians who helped save Jews.

Shalev also said that the pope's invitation to President Shimon Peres and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to come to the Vatican for a prayer meeting was a "bold statement." Many analysts have noted that the invitation is unusual and suggests a different path for this pope, perhaps hearkening back to a time when the Holy See played a much more prominent role in politics.

"Everyone knows that the peace process needs to advance somehow," said Shalev. "So he asked them and they immediately responded. I think that's the most political that it can be, and coming from him, I think there is a power in that invitation."

Rabbi Arthur Schneier, an American rabbi accompanying the pope on the visit, said it was a remarkable moment in the history of Israel-Vatican relations — which after all were only made official in 1993. Schneier, an Austria-

born Holocaust survivor and the rabbi of the Park East Synagogue in New York, has been involved in trying to forge better relations between Jews and the Vatican since 1965.

Schneier noted that during the visit to the president's house shortly after the visit to Yad Vashem, the pope did specifically mention anti-Semitism and racism.

"I think this trip is a very positive and constructive step in the relationship between the Catholic church and the Jewish people and also the Vatican's respect for the state of Israel. That is a very significant and clear reaffirmation of something that began with Vatican II," he said, referring to a 1965 decision of the Catholic Church to state that it does not view Jews to be responsible for Jesus' death.

"He is the one to take it even further than his predecessors. In the history of mankind, we can't look at it measured in days or weeks," Schneier said. "For Israel, it's 20 years after diplomatic relations. I think it will give further encouragement to other religious leaders who are either silent or afraid of interfaith relations."

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