

MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE



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THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM ANNUAL SPRING LUNCHEON

This year's sold-out Annual Spring Luncheon was held on May 13th at the Jewish Museum on 92nd Street. Over 200 people attended the event, which honored Danielle Karten for her contributions to Holocaust remembrance and education. Our guest speaker was Alyson Richman, an accomplished author, who spoke about her new book *The Garden of Letters*. Also featured on the program were Co-Chair Daniella Pomeranc and featured speaker Rachel Shnay, who are active members of our Young Leadership Associates.

Danielle Karten was presented with the American Society for Yad Vashem Achievement Award by Chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem Leonard Wilf along with American Society Executive Director Ron Meier. She was recognized for her commitment to Holocaust commemoration and remembrance, which are central to the Karten family. She continues a longstanding family tradition of being actively involved in the American Society for Yad Vashem, which is being passed on to her children — Jonathan, Sharone and Izzy.

Rachel Shnay delivered a description of the emotional trip she took to Poland with her grandfather, in which they visited Auschwitz and her grandfather's hometown. Rachel also told those gathered about her first trip to Yad Vashem, where she spot-



Ron B. Meier, executive director of the American Society for Yad Vashem; Danielle Karten, honoree; and Leonard A. Wilf, chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem.

ted her grandfather's picture among those on exhibit in the New Museum.

In her closing remarks, Daniella Pomeranc told those gathered at the Luncheon about

her family's amazing story of survival in the Holocaust. From her grandmother's daring escape from German-occupied Poland to Siberia and her grandfather's dedication as a partisan, Daniella's family's commitment to Yad Vashem has been passed to the third generation.

The 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.

Chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem Leonard Wilf, spoke about the 70th Anniversary of the end of WW II. He reminded the Luncheon attendees of the importance of remembrance, education and commemoration to ensure that those, who perished in the *Shoah*, will not be forgotten. This year's Luncheon program included a special presentation by Rachel Shnay and remarks from Daniella Pomeranc about their experiences as grandchildren of survivors. It gives us great pride to know that members of the next generation are dedicated to Holocaust remembrance.

IN THIS ISSUE

ASYV Annual Spring Luncheon.....	1, 8-9, 11
An old Holocaust secret newly told.....	2
I pretended to be German to survive the Holocaust.....	3
The Jewish Kulturbund Theatre Company in Nazi Berlin.....	4
Through hell and back.....	6
The lost children of the Holocaust.....	6
Lost in the rubble of Warsaw.....	7
Old Nazis never die.....	7
Letters from Jewish liberators.....	10
The Holocaust hero TV producer who exposed the Nazis' true evil.....	16

EX-AUSCHWITZ GUARD DESCRIBES CAMP IN CHILLING DETAIL

BY DAVID RISING,
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

A former SS sergeant described in chilling detail how cattle cars full of Jews were brought to the Auschwitz death camp, the people stripped of their belongings and then most led directly into gas chambers.

Oskar Groening is being tried on 300,000 counts of accessory to murder, related to a period between May and July 1944 when around 425,000 Jews from Hungary were brought to the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex in Nazi-occupied Poland and most immediately gassed to death.

During that period, so many trains were arriving that often two would have to wait with closed doors as the first was "processed," Groening testified at the *Lueneburg* state court.

Though he was more regularly assigned to the camp's Auschwitz I section, he said he guarded the *Birkenau* ramp three times, including one busy 24-hour shift. The main gas chambers were located at *Birkenau*.

"The capacity of the gas chambers and the capacity of the crematoria were quite limited.

"Someone said that 5,000 people were processed in 24 hours, but I didn't verify this. I didn't know," he said. "For the sake of order we waited until train 1 was entirely processed and finished."

Auschwitz survivors describe their

arrival as chaotic, with Nazi guards yelling orders, dogs barking and families being ripped apart. But Groening, 93, maintained the opposite, saying "it was very orderly and not as strenuous" on the ramp at *Birkenau*.

"The process was the same as Auschwitz I. The only difference was that there were no trucks," he said during the second day of his trial. "They all walked — some in one direction, some in another direction..."



Former Auschwitz-Birkenau guard Oskar Groening as a young man in an SS uniform; and now.

to where the crematoria and gas chambers were."

No pleas are entered in the German system, and Groening said as his trial opened that he considers himself "morally guilty," but it was up to the court to decide if he was legally guilty. He faces between three and 15 years in prison if convicted in the trial, which is scheduled through July.

Eva Kor, 81, was one of the Jews who arrived at Auschwitz in 1944. Though she doesn't remember Groening personally, she said she can't forget the scene.

"Everything was going very fast. Yelling, crying, pushing; even dogs were barking. I had never experienced anything that fast or that crazy in my entire life," she told *The Associated Press* before addressing the court.

Her two older sisters and parents were taken directly to the gas chambers, while she and her twin sister, both 10 at the time, were ripped away from their mother to be used as human guinea pigs for notorious camp doctor Josef Mengele's experiments.

"All I remember is her arms stretched out in despair as she was pulled away," Kor remembered. "I never even got to say goodbye."

Kor, who now lives in Indiana, is one of more than 60 Auschwitz survivors and their families from the US, Canada, Israel and elsewhere who have joined the trial as

complaintiffs as allowed under German law.

Thomas Walther, who represents many plaintiffs, said he and his clients were happy Groening agreed to testify, but suspected he was withholding many details.

"There is an ocean of truth, but with many islands of lies," he said.

Kor, the first plaintiff to address the court, described her experience and asked Groening whether he knew Mengele or details about files he kept, in hopes of learning more about what diseases she and her sister, who both

survived the camp, were injected with.

Groening showed no reaction to Kor's statement, and his attorney, Hans Holtermann, said his client would try to answer what questions he could, but he didn't believe that Groening knew Mengele.

Groening guarded prisoners' baggage on the ramps, but his main task was to collect and tally money stolen from the new arrivals and then send it to Berlin — a job for which the German press has dubbed him the "Accountant of Auschwitz."

While he previously testified he was "horrified" by individual atrocities he witnessed, he suggested his daily thoughts were more pedestrian, like when the guards heard a train loaded with Hungarian Jews would be arriving.

"If this is Hungary, they have bacon on board," he remembered thinking.

Though he had been investigated twice before and no charges were brought, Groening was indicted under a new line of German legal reasoning that anyone who helped a death camp function can be accused of being an accessory to murder without evidence of participation in a specific crime. Groening, who worked for an insurance company after the war, has testified as a witness in other Nazi trials.

Outside court, Kor said she wished Groening would use the trial to try and dissuade "misguided young people" today from becoming neo-Nazis, but she was still satisfied with his testimony.

"I'm going to take whatever confession he gives — it's better than no confession," she told reporters. "Maybe this is the best thing he has ever done in his life. Isn't that sad?"

AN OLD HOLOCAUST SECRET NEWLY TOLD

Israeli brothers Avraham and Peretz Hassid knew not to question their Greek-born mother Shoshana about what happened to her during the Holocaust, but an American author with her own family secret has changed the way they viewed their family's history.

BY NIR COHEN, YNETNEWS

Dozens of black-and-white photos are scattered across the small dining table in a modest house in *Rehovot*. Some of the people looking into the camera are smiling; others have a melancholic look. One does not need to know the figures in the photos to sense a tragic story deeply hidden. But until now, there was no one to tell it.

Avraham and Peretz Hassid have been the owners of the photo collection since their mother Shoshana and aunt Nina passed away. But the people in the pictures remained a mystery.

Avraham is convinced that the little girl in one of the images bears a resemblance to his mother. Perhaps the children by her side are her younger siblings, perhaps on one Purim on the Greek island of *Corfu*. The brothers Hassid had many ques-

tions that they never dared to ask. Their mother Shoshana had been through enough, they told themselves, and they had no desire to hurt her further.

Shoshana took her secrets with her to the grave. And neither brother imagined that they would one day receive a phone call that would turn their lives upside down.

"We have a story about your mother that you have to hear," said the person on the other end of the line. Their mother's lifelong secret, her personal story, was about to be revealed — and she was not there to confirm or deny it. The secret of *Ereikousa* was about to come to light.

A STORY WITHOUT AN ENDING

The events of the Holocaust in Greece have always been studied in Israel through the framework of the destruction of the large and thriving Jewish community of *Salonika*.

The smaller yet equally flourishing community on *Corfu*, which numbered about 2,000 people before the war, was taken by rickety fishing boats to the trains bound for Auschwitz, and was also almost entirely destroyed. But there are few

references to it in historical literature.

And if little has been written about *Corfu*, there is almost nothing about the nearby island of *Ereikousa*. A single article was published in Israel in



Shoshana and her brothers.

1977, describing the tiny island as a magical landscape, whose hundreds of residents run a remarkably unified community. "A markedly egalitarian society," the article says of the island.

"We have no police and no courts;

the residents are responsible for their actions towards others," the article quotes one of the elderly residents as saying. "We all belong to one family, and we are all cousins."

The old man was not quite right. Perhaps he did not know what happened on the island in 1943; perhaps he knew and chose to remain silent, as did all of his neighbors over the years. In the seven decades that have passed, not one of the Christian people living on *Ereikousa* has spoken of the Jewish family of five who hid on the island during the Nazi occupation.

It was an act of concealment shared by all of *Ereikousa's* residents, who risked their lives and those of their families. And it is a legacy that passed from the original keepers of the secret to their children and grandchildren.

The unraveling of the secret started more than a year ago. Director and writer Yvette Manassis Corporon, an Emmy winner of Greek origin, published her book *When the Cypress Whispers*, inspired by memories of her grandmother, a resident of *Ereikousa*.

The book recounts a key event in the life of Corporon's grandmother —

(Continued on page 5)

I PRETENDED TO BE GERMAN TO SURVIVE THE HOLOCAUST

Shlomo Perel convinced a German soldier he wasn't a Jew, got close enough to the Führer to take his picture, and found himself in a Hitler Youth school, wearing uniforms with a swastika — all to stay alive.

BY SMADAR SHIR, YNETNEWS

Shlomo Perel rummages through a cardboard box, finds the photo he was looking for and says dryly: "Here, that's Hitler. I photographed him with my Aqua camera from 50–70 meters away. I looked him in the eye. I was 16 years old then, a translator in the German army, with uniforms and a swastika, and I didn't know who I was at all.

"For years I've been told, both to my face and behind my back, that I'm not a classic Holocaust story because I wasn't at a ghetto or a camp, I received education and pocket money and plenty of food. Someone told me once: 'Your Holocaust is a Deluxe Holocaust.' But he could not imagine the fear I lived with every day and what I did, just so I wouldn't get found out."

Perel was born in the city of Peine in Germany. In 1936, three years before World War II broke out, his parents Uziel and Rivkah Perel took their four children and relocated to the city of Lodz in Poland.

"Pogroms started, my parents had a shoe store and residents were forbidden from buying from Jews," he recalls.

"When Germany invaded Poland, the Jews were ordered to enter the Lodz ghetto, and my parents realized this is a place you enter alive, but you don't know how you come out. So they sent me, a 14-year-old teenager, and my 30-year-old brother Isaak, to (the Soviet-controlled) eastern Poland.

"Before we left my father told me in Yiddish: 'Don't ever forget who you are.' Meaning, 'Stay a Jew.' Mother added in Yiddish: 'Go, you must live.' When a mother sends her children away knowing she'll never see them again — that's the greatest love of all."

THE FÜHRER AT CLOSE RANGE

The two brothers crossed the border, with the elder sibling going to his acquaintance in Vilna, while Perel found shelter at a Jewish orphanage in Grodno.

"At the morning of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, all of the children were woken up and told to escape east. I arrived with the fleeing masses to the outskirts of Minsk. The German surrounded us in an open field and ordered us to stand in a line, and then it was my turn. The German soldier who stood in front of me ordered me to put my hands up and asked: 'Are you a Jew?'"

That was a pivotal moment in Perel's life. "I knew that if I told the truth, I'd be facing immediate death and I had to choose between my

father who told me 'always stay a Jew' and my mother who told me 'you must live.' Luckily, mother's voice prevailed and I said: 'No, I'm German.'

"And then a miracle happened — for some reason he believed me. All of the men had to pull down their pants and those found circumcised were executed, but not only did that soldier not order me to take off my clothes, he called me a 'Volksdeutscher' (an ethnic German living outside Germany).

"He brought me to his unit, where a senior officer took a liking to me and appointed me a Russian and Polish translator — a role I had for nine months."

During that time, Hitler came to visit the front lines. "Only the high-ranked generals approached him and were allowed past his wall of bodyguards. I was hiding with a camera," Perel says.



Shlomo Perel in his home.

"After the war, I was asked many times: 'Why did you photograph Hitler instead of killing him?' And I tell the truth: Had I shot Hitler, I'm not sure I would've hit him, but I would've surely been killed on the spot. And I didn't want to get into the history pages as a hero, I preferred being an anti-hero and survive."

Does this question anger you?

"Not anymore. People can't understand the situation I was in. When I was looking at my chest, I saw a swastika, but in my head I remembered I was a Jew whose father ordered him to stay a Jew and whose mother ordered him to live. I didn't know who I was at all.

"When talking about the Holocaust, there's a clear division: The victims were Jews, and the perpetrators were the Nazis, while I was both. From the moment I wore the uniforms with a swastika on, I became my own enemy and I had to escape myself to survive."

How did you manage to hide the fact you were circumcised?

"I found all sorts of ways to avoid medical examinations, and I always entered the shower stall closest to the wall so no one could see me.

"But I was sexually abused. An army doctor had his eye on me and one of the nights, when I entered the shower after everyone left, he surprised me from behind and tried to rape me. I fought him with all of my strength until

I managed to free myself from his grasp. When I turned around he found out I was circumcised. He was surprised and said: 'You're a Jew!' I was sure this was the end for me, but he said: 'Know that there is also a different kind of Germans.'

"He didn't inform on me so as to not expose himself as a homosexual. I knew his secret and he knew mine, and after that incident he took care of me until he was killed."

Later on, Perel was sent to a Hitler Youth school in Braunschweig.

"For three and a half years I studied Supremacism and developed defense mechanisms which made me forget that I was a Jew," he says.

"I changed my name to Josef, the Germans called me Jupp, and as the days went by, the lie turned into a reality. I felt like any other Hitler Youth and I was so convinced, that no one suspected I wasn't. I stopped eating

Jewish cemetery there."

And how did the war end for you?

"Hitler issued an order that 'all of the Hitler Youths must take arms, to defend the homeland,' and I was sent to the front with a bazooka in hand. I was guarding, along with other 20-year-olds like me, the bridge of a freeway. When the American army came, I was taken hostage, but the lie was so deeply ingrained within me that I didn't even tell the Americans I was a Jew. I sat in captivity like everyone else, but for me it was a surreal situation: A Jewish youth wearing a Nazi Army uniform in American captivity."

Perel and the other Hitler Youths were freed after a few days, as the group was not recognized as war criminals.

"And for me, it was all over. I was free. But what do you do with this freedom? Who am I, anyway? The next day I met two people identifying as Jews returning from Bergen-Belsen. I asked them what that was and they pointed at the concentration camp that was not far from there. I was in shock. I've lived here for years, had fun with women, and right under my nose were the extermination trains. It was a full-on confrontation of both of my identities, Shlomo and Josef."

A MEETING WITH THE EXECUTIONER

Perel went to Bergen-Belsen ("a pile of dead bodies, awful smell"), and then continued to Munich to meet his brother Isaak, who was transferred to the Vilna ghetto and survived Dachau. After that, Shlomo moved to Palestine and joined the Hagannah.

"I went on a ship to the besieged Jerusalem and fought in the War of Independence as a Jew, as Shlomo Perel."

In Tel Aviv he met Devorah, a Pole who had been exiled to Siberia, and together they have two sons. After undergoing heart surgery, he started writing his memoirs. *I Was Hitler Youth Salomon* is the name of his book, which was later adapted in the 1990 movie *Europa Europa*.

"A German judges' panel refused to submit (the movie) to the Oscars, claiming it wasn't a documentary," he says.

"They dared suspect my story was fiction. So I went to Germany with an Israeli journalist, we located friends of mine from the Hitler Youth school and they confirmed that for three and a half years, they did not suspect I was a Jew. We also managed to locate the German soldier who believed I was German and saved my life. I asked him why he did it, and he said: 'An internal voice told me to believe you.' I felt ambivalent about him, he could've been my executioner, but on the other hand he saved me. I forgave him when I saw how much he did after the war for the Jewish community left in Lübeck, and I even had him at my house in Givatayim."

kosher and believing in God, but I believed I'll stay alive. I felt immortal, like 'it won't happen to me.'"

During these years, two identities were fighting for control over Perel's body — Shlomo and Josef.

"I was schizophrenic. During the day, I was a German youth who wanted to win the war, I sang songs against Jews and yelled 'Heil Hitler' — and at night, in bed, I cried out of longing for my family, and performed all sorts of 'operations' on myself to survive. I tried to pull on my foreskin and wrapped it with a tight elastic dressing, in the hopes that if I did that every night, despite the pain, the skin would stretch and it won't show that I'm circumcised.

"My second enemy was dreaming. When you're awake, you can control what you say, but during a dream you could cry out something about mother and father, and a roommate can hear you."

In the winter of 1943, wearing his Hitler Youth uniforms, he took the tram through the Lodz ghetto, "and this was the first time I saw the horrors. It was only after the war that I learned mother was killed in a sealed truck, with the gas from the engine entering the cabin and people suffocating during the drive. She has no grave. Father died two weeks after the army entered Lodz from exhaustion, disease and starvation, and he was buried in the



BOOK REVIEWS

THE JEWISH KULTURBUND THEATRE COMPANY IN NAZI BERLIN

The Jewish Kulturbund Theater Company in Nazi Berlin.

By Rebecca Rovit. University of Iowa Press: Iowa City, Iowa, 2012. 287 pp. \$35.88.

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN

In Rebecca Rovit's beautifully written and conscientiously researched book entitled *The Jewish Kulturbund Theater Company in Nazi Berlin*, we read about how from 1933 to 1941 the finest of Jewish theater artists — actors, musicians, and designers alike — dismissed from their positions owing to Hitler's "purge of prominent Jewish artists and intellectuals from Germany's cultural institutions," came together to create a theater of their own: "an all-Jewish theater." Brave and determined, Dr. Kurt Singer, "the former director of Berlin's Municipal Opera, had negotiated the conditions for the Kulturbund with Ministry of Propaganda SS-Kommandant Hans Hinkel, the Nazi official assigned to Jewish cultural affairs." In sum, Singer agreed that this would be a "closed" theater. In other words, it would be open only to Jewish theater artists and be seen only by the Jewish community. Additionally and most importantly, Singer agreed that Nazi officialdom — generally Hinkel and his staff — would censor all the plays to be mounted. This meant they would decide which plays could be done and which plays needed "editing" in order to meet Nazi "standards" vis-à-vis a Jewish Theater in Germany.

Thus, many of the finest Jewish per-

formers suddenly unemployed were miraculously employed once again and could practice their beloved art as part of the Kulturbund, which, in fact, had independent branches all over Germany. It was even more miraculous because many of them had absolutely no funds to "fall back on," making the Kulturbund a true "lifesaver." Finally, many — like the great majority of their audience members — had no plans to leave Germany.

For most everyone thought Hitler and Fascism were just a passing phase, soon to be forgotten . . . and Germany was, after all, their home . . .

Interestingly, this last leads to the most thought-provoking material in Rovit's book, which specifically deals with the Berlin branch of the Kulturbund (but, undoubtedly, applies to all the Kulturbunds in the country): Many wondered just exactly what a Jewish theater should look like in Germany where most Jews (certainly then) were so very assimilated. The great majority of those in the Kulturbund simply saw their theater as a theater for Jews. Thus — with artistic standards kept high — their objective was to present the best of theater by the best of writers from all over the world. For wasn't that what most of these German-Jewish theater artists had always been doing? And wasn't that what

most of their German-Jewish public was generally accustomed to? (Of course, here, Rovit makes clear, there was most definitely a difference of opinion among factions within the community and even in the theater.)

Nazi officialdom, however, didn't see it like that at all! Among other directives, Singer was strictly told not to present works that had any "assimilatory" tendencies. Judaism was not to be mixed with German culture in any

way. Aryan culture was to remain pure. The Kulturbund was not to perform "plays by non-Jewish Germans and Austrians." For that matter dramas by Strindberg and Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* were forbidden too. For these works, it was decided, "portray[ed] Nordic ideals." Instead, "Jewish-themed plays" were to be done; "but [Hinkel] censored even those plays because of

their messages about a triumphant Jewish collective."

Then again, because Hinkel and his censors knew little of the arts, and (thankfully) were themselves confused (and at times, it appears, slipshod) as to what should be permitted presentation, plays like *Judith* by Friedrich Hebbel were mounted — which according to Nazi rules should not have been! First off, Hebbel was a German non-Jew. Furthermore, in the play, *Judith*, a Jewish heroine, saves her people by seducing and

then "decapitating Holofernes, the army general for King Nebuchadnezzar, to prevent an attack on her home city of Bethulia." Needless to say, such a play "embodied unmistakable, even ironic, parallels to the times" and hence must have been very satisfying to the German Jews come to see it!

Meanwhile, especially fascinating for this reviewer and Eastern European Jew is the difficulty the Kulturbund had in doing plays like Sholom Aleichem's *Der Haupttreffer* (*The Big Win*), retitled *Amcha* by its German translator. It was the kind of material the Nazis wanted the Kulturbund to do. It was so very different from German theater work, and the Nazis wanted that difference to be boldly evident. But, in fact, most German Jews were very assimilated. They simply couldn't relate to their Yiddish-speaking compatriots in Poland, Lithuania, and Russia . . . They just didn't have a "feel" for the material or the Yiddish cultural world generally.

By the way, just to give my readership an idea of the talents that were a part of the Kulturbund in Berlin, Heinz Condell, a costume and set designer for a great many of the company's productions, survived the war to come to New York City. Once in New York, he worked for Maurice Schwartz's Yiddish Theater, the Artef, and for many, many years the New York City Opera.

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



MEMOIRS OF THE MURDERED

KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps.

By Nikolaus Wachsmann. Farrar, Straus & Giroux: New York, N.Y., 2015. 880 pp. \$40.

REVIEWED BY TIMOTHY SNYDER

"In popular memory," writes Nikolaus Wachsmann, "the concentration camps, Auschwitz, and the Holocaust have merged into one." In our confusion, we have narrowed the horror of Nazi practice. Auschwitz was both a concentration camp and a killing site for Jews, which was unusual. If we recall Auschwitz and forget the other camps, we neglect the people who were concentrated in them, most of whom were not Jews. When we identify Auschwitz with the Holocaust, we neglect the other death factories dedicated to the extermination of Jews, places where more Jews were gassed than at Auschwitz, and omit the shooting pits, where more Jews were murdered than at Auschwitz. Auschwitz is simply the place where in 1942 the history of the

concentration camps met the generally distinct history of the mass murder of Jews.

KL is a definitive history of the German concentration camp system. (The title is the German abbreviation of the word for concentration camp, *Konzentrationslager*.) Mr. Wachsmann, a German historian who teaches at Birkbeck College, London, gently disassembles popular memory and draws a complete and convincing picture. He begins with the numerous improvised camps that the two paramilitary wings of the Nazi Party, the SA (*Sturmabteilung*, or "storm battalion") and the SS (*Schutzstaffel*, or "protection squad") established in the weeks after Hitler rose to power in early 1933. These were often tiny holding cells, sometimes in basements or warehouses. Heinrich Himmler, the

head of the SS, established a larger facility at *Dachau*; this would be the only camp that existed from the beginning of Nazi power to the end. The camps were about the consolidation of power and then about its allocation. The first victims were Communists and Socialists, people who might have challenged Hitler. In 1934, after the SS decapitated the rival SA in the "Night of the Long Knives," it sealed its victory by taking complete control of the camps.

At this point, it might have appeared that concentration had lost its original purpose: all enemies, within and without the Nazi Party, had been defeated or intimidated. But Himmler was ready with a new rationale: the camps could serve as a tool to improve the German race.

He found support from Hitler, which meant that the camps would have an

indefinite and endless mission. In the late 1930s, they were holding Germans seen as unfit members of society. These were the so-called asocials-alcoholics, drug addicts, homosexuals, members of minority religions like Jehovah's Witnesses and people deemed "work-shy," like prostitutes or vagrants. *Dachau* became the model for a true system of six concentration camps in prewar Germany, along with *Sachsenhausen*, *Buchenwald*, *Flossenbürg*, *Mauthausen* and *Ravensbrück*. Although in principle the "asocials" were to be reformed, by the end of the 1930s the SS began to see their labor as the basis of a special economy.

Between Hitler's rise to power and the beginning of World War II, Nazi power drastically altered the lives of German Jews. They were, however, less than 1% of the German population, and the basic Nazi policy in the years before World War II was to create conditions that would force them to emigrate. Jews entered the camp

(Continued on page 14)



AN OLD HOLOCAUST SECRET NEWLY TOLD

(Continued from page 2)

the rescue of Jewish tailor Savas, who escaped from Corfu during the Holocaust. And although the book was well received and won critical acclaim, Corporon believed that until she knew what had happened to the Jewish family, the story had no ending.

"My grandmother said Savas fled to *Ereikousa* with his three daughters and his granddaughter when the Nazis came to Corfu, and the islanders hid them," Corporon told Ynet.

"Every night, under cover of darkness, they would come out of hiding and come to my grandmother and she would welcome them with joy. The Nazis were conducting searches on another island to which Jews had fled, but despite explicit warnings that anyone hiding Jews would die along with all his family, no one revealed the secret. Everyone knew Savas and his daughters were hiding in the parsonage, but no one told."

A SHOCKING DISCOVERY

Corporon decided to try to locate Savas' descendants, to find out what had happened to them. She never imagined the huge emotional roller coaster to come, one that would span the globe.

She initially turned to the veterans of the island, some of whom remembered the Jewish tailor and his three



Savas and his daughters.

daughters, Spera, Julia and Nina, and a little granddaughter named Rosa. Some thought that their surname was "Israel," but no one was sure, and no one knew what had happened to them.

Corporon then turned to the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, whose staff had helped survivors from Corfu, in order to locate Savas' descendants. One Corfu native said that the name rang a bell, while another even said that Nina, Spera and Rosa were with him on the illegal immigration ship *Henrietta Szold* in 1946. The ship was captured by the British and its passengers were deported to Cyprus.

Staff at Yad Vashem managed to

track down a few more isolated details. "Nina married a man whose surname was Levi, Spera married a man named Vittorio Moustaki and Rosa apparently also married, lived in *Rehovot* and had children, but we did not know their names," Corporon said. Julia did not have children, and died in Greece.

"It was a very frustrating time," says Coporon. "I received an email that read: 'Unfortunately, we have reached a dead end, let us know if you have more details.'

"But I had one name — Vittorio Moustaki. I went to the MyHeritage site (a specialist in researching family trees), which I knew has a giant database of over a billion names, and typed the name 'Vittorio Moustaki.' My coffee cup almost fell out of my hand when I got results."

Corporon found a large family tree that lists Vittorio Moustaki and some first names of his family of Israel. But the details did not correspond — the ages and relationships of the family did not match. She got in touch with the principal contact listed on the family tree, and within an hour received back a family photo. Yvette quickly checked the information with people who knew the tailor's family. The people in the picture were not the ones she was looking for.

Frustrated at the impasse, Corporon asked MyHeritage for help. "It's a needle in a haystack," she was told, "but we will do all we can to help."

The details of the mysterious story reached the website's founder, Gilad Japhet, a specialist in difficult family histories. He offered to help and was immediately sucked deeper into the story.

"There is little information here, some of it contradictory," Japhet wrote to his staff. "My chances of finding relevant information through the available data are unfortunately less

than 0.1 percent."

But Japhet decided not to let it go. He plunged into a mountain of documents and rescued information, and began to study names. That same night, he found Nina. Excited by the discovery, he reported his findings.

"I am delighted to report that I did it," wrote Japhet. Of all the women in Israel called Nina, he had found one who arrived from Greece after the war, and who had the previous surname "Israel." Her father's name, as it appeared in the official recordings, was Savas, and her mother's name was Shoshana.

"Shoshana could also be called Rosa," Japhet wrote to his staff, "and there was a good chance that the

granddaughter Rosa was named after her grandmother."

Japhet located Nina's grave at Kiryat Shaul cemetery, and on the headstone was written her father's name, Shabtai — the Hebrew version of the Greek name Savas. Buried by her side, Japhet discovered, was her husband Rahamim Levi.

FINDING SAVAS

Japhet then turned his attention to Spera, assuming that if she had come to Israel, she could well have changed her first name. The name Spera, Japhet guessed, comes from the Spanish word *Esperanza* or hope; the Hebrew version, Tikva, was a common Israeli name.

Acting on this assumption, he went looking for all the women called Tikva who came to Israel from Greece after the Holocaust. The first name to jump



Spera and her husband Vittorio.

out at him seemed promising. Tikva Levi, a resident of 21 Geula Street, Tel Aviv.

"This is the same street in which I found Nina," says Japhet. "I thought it wasn't a coincidence. I assumed two family members who survived the Holocaust and came to Israel probably wanted to live next to each other."

Japhet described his findings in a detailed email to Corporon. "Year of immigration to Israel — 46. It seems that was on the ship *Henrietta Szold*. Father's name: Savas. Wow! Mother's name: Rosa. I believe that this Tikva is the Spera we're looking for, because the pieces of the puzzle fit together so well. The chances of this being a coincidence are low."

With a little more detective work, Japhet located Tikva's granddaughter in the US, Michelle Mendelowitz, and told Corporon how to reach her. "She may lead us to Rosa's children in *Rehovot*," he wrote. "I am giving you the honor of contacting her and I look forward to hearing the outcome of the conversation."

"My head exploded and spun at the same time," says Corporon. She wrote back to Japhet: "You solved the puzzle, they should save you a place in heaven."

Corporon contacted Mendelowitz in Los Angeles and told her the story.

Mendelowitz told her in turn that Spera was her step-grandmother, who had married a second time to her grandfather, after she had gone through a bitter divorce with a man named Vittorio Moustaki. Mendelowitz and her mother knew Rosa (Shoshana), who had died just a few years earlier. She gave Corporon information about Rosa's family in *Rehovot* — Bnaya, Avraham and Peretz Hassid.

MEETING ON THE STREET

In April 2014, Peretz Hassid's phone rang. On the other end was Aaron Godfrey from MyHeritage.

"We have important information about your mother from the period of the Holocaust," Godfrey announced, and asked for a meeting.

The Hassid brothers, who were suspicious, agreed to meet with Godfrey

and Japhet on the street outside their house. And soon they realized that the story they had been told was true.

"They knew everyone's name and the family connections between them," says Avraham. "They told us that our mother hid with three aunts, whom we had met, and with Savas, whom we knew nothing about, in a village in *Ereikousa* and that Christians hid them throughout the war. My mother's time in the Holocaust had been a black hole for us until that moment."

Among the pictures in the Hassid apartment, Japhet identified a photo of Savas. The MyHeritage researchers told the Hassids that their aunts were not their biological family but had formed an intimate connection with their mother as their fates became intertwined.

"The Germans invaded Corfu and began to round up the Jews," says Japhet. "We assume that Savas, who was a tailor and used to visit the neighboring island, fled there from Corfu with the help of friends, taking with him his daughters and a little girl called Rosa who had been left alone when her family was taken."

On June 6, 1944, a transport from Athens arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau, carrying 2,044 Jews of

(Continued on page 15)

SURVIVORS' CORNER

THROUGH HELL AND BACK

BY BILL HAND, SUN JOURNAL

It was on May 8, 70 years ago, that Germany surrendered to the Allies. Andre Herscovici has good reason to remember and reflect, for as a young Jew in France, he lived through the Nazi occupation and Holocaust.

And half of his family didn't.

Andre welcomes me to his home in Fairfield Harbour, N.C., and we sit at the dining room table where a stack of papers and files await. At 83, Andre has a sharply etched face, neat white hair and sharp, almost startling eyes. He talks slowly, almost without emotion, describing a life filled with victory, defeat, celebration and loss.

He was born in Paris to Samuel and Rose Herscovici. According to the Ghetto Fighters House Archives, his father was a tanner and his mother was a seamstress and housewife.

When Germany invaded France in 1940, Samuel was called to war, leaving Rose to care for Andre and his older brother Henri and little sister Georgette. A few months later, a younger sister, Claudine, was born.

"We had to survive through the discrimination and persecution," Andre recalled. He and his family donned the yellow Star of David patches on the left side of their jackets, stars with the "Juif," French for "Jew," sewn inside. "We were not allowed to take buses or even get out in the evening to go to a movie," he said.

"Things were difficult for our mother. She received a certain allocation from

the government, but we were deprived as far as food and clothing and toys," he said.

Still, they managed to get by.

In 1942, Rose sent Henri and Andre for a two-week summer vacation at a preventorium at *Beaurouvre*, 95 miles from home.

It was "kind of like a sanitarium or orphanage for people very poor or affected by certain sicknesses," Andre



Andre Herscovici looks over documents he has gathered about his family's history in the Holocaust in France.

said. He was 9 then and his brother 11. While they attended, his mother stayed home with his sisters Georgette, 4, and Claudine, 2.

The boys had not been there long when a neighbor and family friend, Madame Roby, wrote them. "My dear children Henri and Andre," the letter read, "Don't come back home. The Germans have taken your mother and sisters."

The women were transported to the *Dancy* concentration camp and from there on to Auschwitz. They were never seen again.

"My father never saw her," Andre says of his youngest sister. "And she was exterminated at Auschwitz."

Paul Coche and his wife, who ran the preventorium, found themselves with 15 Jewish children whose parents were being whisked away from their homes to their deaths. The Coches "decided to hide us throughout the entire war," Andre said.

"They saved our lives."

There were no hidden rooms or attics involved, Andre said. "We were hiding in plain sight," mixing with the other 200 or so students who stayed at the chateau. "They risked their lives, obviously," he said of the Coches. Other people in town and even their fellow students were unaware they were Jews. "We'd behave as Christians," he recalled. "So if they prayed, we prayed." Sometimes when Germans came to the chateau, the boys were hidden somewhere in the house or in the fields until the Germans left.

After the war, Samuel returned from his unit to find other people living in his apartment: his wife and children were gone.

"Somebody took over and took our

furniture and everything," Andre said. Samuel managed to locate the boys through social services and, for a time, sought in hopes that his wife and daughters had survived Auschwitz.

While his father searched, the boys were sent to a Jewish orphanage in *Jouy* set up for children who had lost one or both parents in the Holocaust.

"I was never a religious person," Andre said, but in the orphanage "we learned to recapture our Jewishness. We learned some Hebrew. We learned some holidays. We basically learned that we were Jews."

"I was a very upset young man because of my experience during the war, losing my mom and sisters. I was determined to do something."

So, in July 1947, he and his brother and father joined a group organized by the orphanage who aimed to illegally join the newly forming nation of Israel. They boarded the ship *Exodus* and sailed into history once again.

The journey of the *Exodus*, a steamer packed with 4,515 people, most Holocaust survivors, would later be celebrated in movies and books. The British were determined to keep the passengers from entering Palestine and so, near Haifa, rammed and boarded the ship while the Jews put up a desperate fight to avoid being deported.

"They had frigates that were a lot better than our lousy ship," Andre said, and the Jews were quickly overpowered.

(Continued on page 13)

THE LOST CHILDREN OF THE HOLOCAUST

Polish researcher explores the untold story of Jewish children who were adopted by Christian parents during World War II and experienced a difficult identity crisis at the end of the war, some refusing to return to their families or to Judaism.

BY TALI FARKASH, YNETNEWS

About a million Jewish children lived in Poland before World War II. Only few of them survived the Holocaust, mostly after being "adopted" by non-Jewish parents. But for an unclear reason, the story of these "miracle children" was pushed aside and neglected by historians for many decades.

Until Professor Joanna Beata Michlic came along. Professor Michlic is a Jew of Polish descent, a social historian who specializes in research into the Holocaust and its effects on children and family. She embarked on a journey retracing those children's footsteps, delved into archives of



Children in the Warsaw ghetto.

Jewish organizations, orphanages and kibbutzim in Israel, and collected live testimonies. She also spent some time in Israel as a scholar as part of the prestigious Fulbright program, which advances academic-scientific cooperation between the United

States and Israel.

Her study presents a grim picture of a serious identity crisis, families which fell apart because of the war and families which fell apart at the end of the war.

"Childhood in the Holocaust is an issue which has been pushed aside," Michlic says about the exclusion of children's experiences from the academic research. "There is a dispute over the use of survivors' testimonies, particularly children, and it's extremely problematic, because if you look at research as a source of understanding history, the children and their experiences aren't even there."

A HISTORY OF A HOLOCAUST WITHOUT CHILDREN

Professor Michlic is the founder of the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute and a lecturer at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom, and is a sort of enigma. She was born and raised in Poland. A study she conducted as a student about anti-

Semitism in her country led her to information documenting the human story of the Jewish children who were saved by Polish families during the Holocaust.

Why was there no interest in what the children had to say?

"There was a feeling that the information was distorted. Children's testimonies are naturally less accurate. Their interpretation of reality is sometimes different. The fact that they were young made historians question their ability to remember. A child was of course the ultimate victim, and his testimony was a symbol — but only on the psychological level.

"Historians didn't feel that it was an important voice through which the circumstances and historical events — and the history of the childhood in general — during and after the Holocaust should be examined. And this is, in my opinion, an important part of the documentation. It's true

(Continued on page 12)

LOST IN THE RUBBLE OF WARSAW

BY VANESSA GERA, AP

The young boy emerged from the rubble of Warsaw, clinging to a woman he knew only as Mrs. Wala. She turned and walked off, and seven-year-old Mieczyslaw Kenigswein was alone, lost in the Holocaust.



Then named Mieczyslaw Kenigswein, Tirosh is the boy on the right. Mother Regina is at the top left, with daughter Stefania by her side. In the front are children Stanislaw and Rachel.

He is now 78, an Israeli with a Hebrew name, Moshe Tirosh. During a visit to Warsaw, he recalled surviving the war not knowing if his parents were dead or alive — and how random twists of fate saved his life.

Tirosh's earliest memories are of hunger and misery in the Warsaw ghetto.

Called Miecio as a boy, he was nearly five when his mother, Regina, gave birth to her third child under floorboards, biting her knuckles to keep from screaming so the Germans would not discover them.

The parents made the excruciating decision to part with the infant to increase his chances of survival.

With the help of a young Pole, Zygmunt Pietak, his mother smuggled the newborn out of the ghetto and left him on a street corner with a card

bearing the name "Stanislaw Pomorski" — meant to hide his Jewish origins.

A Polish policeman took the baby to a home for abandoned children.

The next year, Tirosh's father, Samuel, was helping other Jews plan the ghetto uprising when he decided to flee with his family.

Now six, Miecio and his four-year-old sister, Stefania, were packed in padded sacks and thrown over the ghetto walls. Then the parents climbed over.

They found shelter with a Polish family, the Raczek. The family hid behind apartment walls or in closets during German inspections. The punishment for helping Jews was severe: death to all rescuers and their families.

Mrs. Raczek decided after a few months she could no longer bear the risk.

Pietak stepped in again, this time to smuggle the Kenigsweins to the Warsaw zoo, where the director and his wife, Jan and Antonina Zabinski, had been sheltering Jews.

On a rainy night, the family climbed into a horse-drawn carriage for the trip, past German guards on both sides of a bridge.

Pietak sat next to the driver. When they approached the guards, he pulled out a bottle of moonshine and splashed the horses and himself with it.

"Halt!" the Germans ordered. When they smelled the alcohol, they shouted: "Polish pigs, go away!"

They made it to the zoo. By this time, most of the animals had been killed or hauled off to Germany, and Zabinski had turned it into a pig farm.

The Zabinskis could not keep them indefinitely. With the help of Pietak, the family found shelter in the tiny apartment of a captain in Poland's underground army. But the necessity of buying so much food for such a small household was certain to arouse suspicion.

So it was decided that splitting up

the family would increase their chances.

A shopkeeper agreed to adopt Stefania, but it was more difficult to shield Jewish boys, because they were circumcised.

Pietak found a place for Miecio with a woman he remembers as Mrs. Wala. She had a daughter about his age and agreed to take him in for money.

During the 1944 bombardment, the German response to the Warsaw uprising, sirens signaled for people to take shelter and Miecio ran into a cellar with Mrs. Wala.

The bombing caused the four-story building above them to collapse. The survivors emerged to an apocalyptic scene.

"In one hand, Mrs. Wala held a suitcase and, in the other, her little daughter's hand," he said. "I held onto her skirt and we ran."

"At one point, we stopped and I lost hold of her. ... She turned to me and made an expression that said she was very sorry that she was leaving me, and then she walked away with her daughter."

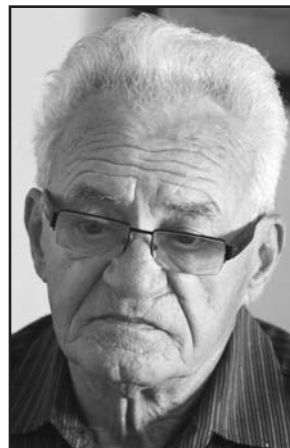
Miecio pressed his hands together and kept repeating "Jesus, where is my aunt?" Mrs. Wala had taught him to do it — to appear Catholic.

Polish underground fighters pulled him into shelter. They gave him a card saying he was an orphan and sent him on. With the help of another stranger, he made his way to an orphanage.

He was evacuated with the other orphans to southern Poland, and lived out the war in a monastery.

"There I endured hell," he said, describing hunger, flea infestations and beatings by older boys who discovered he was Jewish after pulling his pants down. Disease was rife. Every day, nuns carted away the corpses of children.

On New Year's Eve, just weeks before the arrival of the Soviet army



Moshe Tirosh.

ended the Nazi occupation, a farmer and his wife came to the orphanage to adopt a boy. Lifting Miecio's chin, the wife turned to the priest and said, "Father, we want this one."

"No, you don't," Father Andrzej said. "He is weak, and always sick."

But the couple insisted. That night, the farmer's wife bathed him. Despite his efforts to hide his private parts,

she discovered his circumcision. The next morning, the farmer returned Miecio to the orphanage.

Today, he is grateful the couple didn't keep him. Had he stayed on the farm, he might never have been found by his mother.

With six million Jews dead and survivors bereft of loved ones, the Kenigsweins were lucky: Both parents and their three children survived, and

Regina Kenigswein eventually tracked down her children.

The woman who adopted Stefania did not want to give her up but was persuaded when offered money.

The youngest, Stanislaw, had been evacuated with other foundlings to the city of *Czestochowa*, where his mother found him.

She found Miecio 10 months later in a church-run orphanage in Krakow, where he was taken after the war. At first, he didn't recognize her. The orphanage director, not knowing he was Jewish, didn't want to give him up.

"How can he be yours if you are Jewish and he is a Pole?" the director asked.

The boy was told to pull down his pants, his circumcision again the proof of his Jewish heritage.

After the war, Samuel Kenigswein made a fortune manufacturing shoe polish. Two more children were born. Then their luck ran out: Samuel Kenigswein's heart gave out in 1948, soon after his fifth child was born.

In 1957, the rest of the family emigrated to Israel. Tirosh became an army officer and married.

Today, he speaks with joy of his three children, six grandchildren and an extended family of 56.

OLD NAZIS NEVER DIE

have even advised the Syrian government, according to Efraim Zuroff, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Israel office (though without the benefit of an eye and three fingers he lost opening letter bombs over the years).

It turns out Mr. Brunner wasn't an anomaly. Many of the most notorious Nazi fugitives — members of the SS and the Gestapo — fled to South America after the war, but hundreds fanned out through the Middle East, primarily to Egypt and Syria. Eichmann was captured by the Mossad in Buenos Aires and brought back to Israel for trial and

execution. But his deputy, Mr. Brunner, was among those who carved out new lives in the Middle East, where governments sometimes recruited them to build up military and intelligence programs.

A few years ago, as the *Times'* Berlin bureau chief, I worked with a colleague on an article about the most wanted Nazi in the world, Dr. Aribert Heim. Investigators and Nazi hunters were searching for him in Chile, but we discovered that Heim had absconded to Egypt, converted to Islam and quietly lived out his days in a working-class neighborhood of Cairo.

Like Brunner, he was part of a wave of German soldiers and scientists who made their way to North Africa and the Middle East. Leaders in Egypt and Syria especially viewed the Germans as more sympathetic to their aspirations than Britain and France, which still had significant interests in the region. During World War II, many Arab nationalists had hoped the German field marshal Erwin Rommel would sweep the Allies out of the Middle East.

That respect for German military might and expertise survived the fall of the Third Reich. Following the

(Continued on page 14)

BY NICHOLAS KULISH,
THE NEW YORK TIMES

As the decades roll by, there are fewer and fewer Nazi war criminals left alive to track down. Which made the recent reports suggesting that Alois Brunner, the top lieutenant to Adolf Eichmann, may have died as recently as a few years ago in his late 90s all the more surprising.

Even more startling for many, though, was the fact that he wasn't hiding in Argentina or Brazil but in Damascus, Syria, where he had lived from the 1950s under the name Georg Fischer. Apparently, he may

PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE AMERICAN SOCIETY



2015 Spring Luncheon honoree Danielle Karten accompanied by her son Izzy Karten.



Executive Board Member Marilyn Rubenstein.



Luncheon guests on a guided exhibit tour at The Jewish Museum.



(front row) Selma Gruder Horowitz and Miriam Field; (back row) Danielle Karten, Pearl Field and Harry Karten.



Eve Wald, Rose Moskowitz and Lili Stawski.



Sigmund Rolat, Harry Karten, Samantha Asulin, Israel Yoram Edry, Danielle Karten.

TY FOR YAD VASHEM ANNUAL SPRING LUNCHEON



Terri Pomeranc, Daniella Pomeranc and Sally Pomeranc.



Members of the Karten family.



Alyson Richman, guest speaker, author of *The Garden of Letters*.



Top row (L to R): Hope Ziff, Marci Waterman, Rachel Shnay, Esther Chetrit, Azita Aghravi, Gail Perl, Wilma Aschendorf, Debbie Cooper. Bottom row (L to R): Lisa Chodosh, Gabriela Shnay, Brenda Abuaf, Ruty Fouzailoff.



Stella Skura, Cheryl Lifshitz and Paquita Sitzer.



ASYV supporters at the Annual Spring Luncheon.

Photos by Bernard DeLierre.



REPORT FROM YAD VASHEM

LETTERS FROM JEWISH LIBERATORS

BY ROBERT ROZETT

“Dearest Mom, Dad and Jackie, There is so much I must write to you about. I know you have been worried about me but the very fact that you have this letter should assure you that I am still well and trusting in God. A little tired and worn out perhaps and maybe a little older now than my 22 years — but well, nevertheless.”

Thus begins what appears to be a typical letter to his family by a young American soldier fighting in Germany in spring 1945. But as the letter continues, it is anything but typical. Its young author, Sammy, a Jewish soldier from the Midwest, went on to recount two consecutive scenes that encapsulate in high relief the encounter with Nazi camps by some of the Jewish soldiers who liberated them.

On April 29, 1945, Sammy served in the company that spearheaded the drive toward the village of *Dachau* and the infamous concentration camp that had been established there in spring 1933 by the Nazi regime. Before crossing into Germany proper, his unit, the 45th Thunderbird Division, had taken part in the bloody and costly battle to thwart Germany's last major offensive in the Ardennes Forest during the previous December and January — the Battle of the Bulge. Hardened warriors, Sammy's

company had been moving across Germany for several weeks, and most recently Sammy had written home from *Nuremberg*. Nonetheless, on the day they approached *Dachau* and later entered the camp, these soldiers would be in for a great shock.



Dachau, Germany. Concentration camp prisoners raise the American flag after the liberation.

On a street in the town, just outside of the camp, they came upon a train. The cars were filled with dead bodies, among them women and children who had died of starvation and dehydration, or had been shot. This train came to be known as the *Dachau* Death Train. It was composed of some 5,000 prisoners who had been dispatched to *Dachau* from *Buchenwald* on April 7, 1945, and had traveled for three weeks. It was held

up because of the bombing of the railroad tracks and never reached *Dachau*. Sammy wrote: “When our company first approached the camp we came upon a railroad on which there were many boxcars — all of them filled with dead bodies, and the

stink was horrific. There were many young children, women and men who had been lined up and machine-gunned to death by the SS just a few days previously.” As they entered the camp itself, which they had smelled from far away, they saw additional signs of atrocities — the dead, the crematoria and the hellish barracks — and they met prisoners in striped uniforms who told them of their terrible ordeal of brutality, suffering and murder.

The soldiers' response when they met the SS guards near the train and then in the camp itself was “to take no prisoners.” They did this because of a burning righteous anger and the belief that the SS were “no better than swine.” Sammy wrote that they killed 350 SS men. The shooting of SS men at *Dachau* is well known to historians, but remains a matter of controversy, especially regarding the number killed. Sammy's letter may well put that controversy to rest, since it was written only two days after the event, as unsolicited testimony in a letter home; it can be considered free of bias.

Following on the heels of the killings, Sammy next experienced something no less compelling, but an occurrence of a different kind altogether. When the soldiers entered the camp, Sammy related, prisoners surged forward, some falling on the ground at their feet and kissing their boots in gratitude. When the soldiers handed out cigarettes and rations, people fought over them. A Jewish prisoner asked Sammy if it was true that there were Jewish soldiers among the Americans. Sammy answered him that he himself was a Jewish non-commissioned officer and the prisoner “nearly went mad.” He wrote: “Soon I had about 50 Jewish men and women hugging and kissing me. They were starved for ‘das Yiddish geist,’”

(Continued on page 13)

YAD VASHEM SHOWCASES SURVIVORS' TOYS

BY PAUL GOLDMAN, NBC

Ina Rennert mislaid her best friend Miszou the teddy bear as the German bombs started falling.

Her family was fleeing the Nazis' 1939 invasion of Poland when the road they were traveling came under attack.

“I ran and hid under a tree ... and Miszou was left in the car,” said



Claudine Schwartz looks at a display of children's toys, including her doll Collette, which form part of the “Stars Without a Heaven: Children in the Holocaust” exhibit.

Rennert, who is now 80. “I cried hysterically and I remember my mom run-

ning to the car just to bring me my teddy bear.”

Her family, along with Miszou, escaped death on this occasion, but Rennert's father and grandfather were later caught and killed by the Nazis. Rennert eventually moved to Israel from France with her own two children.

Now Miszou — which is showing its age, having lost an ear, nose and mouth — is part of the “Stars Without a Heaven: Children in the Holocaust” exhibit in Yad Vashem Holocaust museum in Jerusalem. Some 70 toys, drawings, diaries and letters help tell the stories of the millions of children who were swept up in the catastrophe.

The experiences of the Holocaust's children — the 1.5 million who died as well as those who survived — are essential to understanding the horror that beset so many, Yad Vashem director Avner Shalev said.

“The children in the Holocaust were very vulnerable and first to be attacked; they [also] symbolize the future and hope of any given community.”

Children's toys not only provided comfort; some allowed their families to survive.

A black-and-white picture of the Schwartz family sits in the center of the exhibit. In it, Claudine stands between her parents, Miklosh and Irena, cradling a doll called Collette.

“The doll's dress is made from one of my mother's old dresses and the hair was taken from my hair,” she said. Little did four-year-old Claudine know that

Collette would help save her family after they were forced to flee Nazi-occupied Paris.

“My mother hid in the doll very valuable stones,” she said. “I never knew the doll had something important inside it, and only after the war my mother told me about this.”

Schwartz's mother sold a precious stone every time the family needed money for food and accommodation on their long journey for survival.

While Schwartz and her parents lived through the war, her grandmother, aunt, uncle and cousins died in Nazi concentration camps. In 1970,

she and her husband settled in Israel; they have four children and 25 grandchildren.

“It warms my heart to see children looking at my doll here,” Schwartz said. “Especially that we are here in Israel because here we are at home: here nobody can tell us, ‘dirty Jew.’”



Ina Rennert looks at her childhood teddy bear, which is now housed in a display case at Jerusalem's Yad Vashem museum.

THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM ANNUAL SPRING LUNCHEON

DANIELLE KARTEN: "WE WILL NEVER FORGET"

First, let us all take a moment of silence, honoring the memory of all the people who lost their lives in the Holocaust.

I'm here to accept this honor for a few people: for my incredible in-laws, Julia and Izzy Karten, may God bless their memories. For my dear sisters-in-law, Berne Bookhamer and Marcia Toledano; and for my loving husband, Harry, whose endless support I cherish, and above all, for my three sons, Jonathan, Sharone and Izzy, to whom we are passing on this legacy today.

So how did I, an Israeli woman of Sephardic background, end up standing here, you might ask? And rightfully so.

Yad Vashem and the *Shoah* were part of my childhood education in Israel. There is one particularly vivid memory I would like to share with you — my class visit to the Children's Memorial at Yad Vashem. I stood consumed by this dark hall, the echoes of the children's names, one name after another, the glimmer of the lights that represented 1.5 million innocent child victims. I will never forget my teacher telling us that it would take over six years to say all of those children's names.

Another strong memory comes from a story my grandma Simi told me about my grandpa, Rabbi Moshe, and Sheich Yossef, her father. They, along with the other community leaders, were taken by Nazis, from their homes "ulad znagiya" in a small village near Marrakesh, Morocco. The Nazis planned to leave the sheep without their shepherds. Back in the village, the community sensed trouble, fear and loss. Luckily, the end of the war came a month later, and they were all released alive.

The Holocaust reached far and wide. The *Shoah* did not discriminate; Jews were killed if you were Reform or Orthodox; Sephardic or Ashkenazi. These and many other stories are taught and stored at Yad Vashem.

My true relationship with Yad Vashem began when I married Harry and became a Karten. That is when I also married Yad Vashem. During the first few years of my marriage, I was fortunate enough to hear the heroic survival story of my moth-



Jessica Glickman Mauk, Danielle Karten and Young Leadership Associates Co-Chair Abbi Halpern.

er-in-law, Julia Grossberg Karten, z"l. When the war started, she was only 16. Her father, Moshe, felt the threat of the Nazis, and asked his wife, Berta, to sew the family gold coins into the hems of their coats: this, in case they were split apart. She was a beautiful girl with blonde hair and blue eyes and could easily pass as a Polish girl, and so it was clear that Julia was the one to be sent out on missions to find food.

One day, Julia returned to discover that her mother, Berta, had been mur-

dered and that her father, Moshe, and sister, Rose, had been taken to *Belzec* extermination camp.... An *Aktion* aimed at the one and only Jewish family in her village of *Milatyce*.

Thankfully, Julia had the presence of mind to quickly wrap the family gold coins into a handkerchief and tie it to her wrist. It was with these gold coins that she paid farmers to hide her.

Since Julia posed too much of a threat to the farmers, who could not

concentration camps.

Izzy's family was sent to *Belzec* at the same time as Julia's family. After liberation, the survivors needed to cope with their losses. Sadly, there were no cemeteries, nor any graves, to visit. Therefore Izzy and Julia joined the American Society for Yad Vashem as benefactors.

It was decided that the first major project was to build the Valley of the Lost Communities, a huge monument, dug out of natural bedrock at Yad Vashem, on Mount Herzl, in Jerusalem. This project symbolizes a large gravesite, and it is a monument for 5,000 lost European communities, whose names, including Izzy's village of *Swirz* and Julia's village of *Milatyce*, are engraved into these stone walls.

The legacy left to us by Izzy and Julia is the core of our family values. This story of our family has been told and well absorbed by the second and third generations. Four Karten brothers survived, and they have 30 descendants.

It is sad that the story of the Karten family is not unique. Each of you honored survivors have your own story to tell.

Would all the survivors please stand and allow us to applaud you? Would all the second and third generation of Holocaust survivors please join and stand with them?

This, my friends, represents the revenge we took on Hitler.

Let's applaud all of them. We are all here for one cause. Our shared history must be kept alive through education and commemoration. Our families must continue to grow as does our support for Yad Vashem.

L'Dor v'dor.

RACHEL SHNAY: "IT IS UP TO US TO SPREAD THE FLAME"

It is hard for me to put into words something that is all-consuming, is rooted from my very core and causes a never-ending flow of emotions between my heart and soul. It is my past, present and future. It gives me perspective on every life occurrence, whether joyous or solemn, it forces me to feel grateful even at my lowest points, and it offers me a zest and love for life that some may not always understand.

My name is Rachel Faiga Shnay, and I am a grandchild of four Holocaust survivors. My name, alone, represents so much history. The original Rachel Shnay, my grandfather's baby sister, was murdered in the *Belzec* gas chambers at the tender age of six and was one of the 1.5 million children taken from us; she was a victim. Faiga Shnay was my incredible, strong-willed and beautiful grandmother who escaped to Russia and was forced into a slave labor camp in Siberia; she was a survivor. In the most devastating of circumstances, I

feel fortunate to carry the names of these two holy souls.

Rachel — the victim in me — fuels the responsibility I feel to share and memorialize; she feeds the strong sense of urgency I feel to teach as many people as I can about the horrors of the Holocaust. Faiga — the survivor in me — ignites the passion I have for teaching Torah and Jewish values, and ensuring continuity. And that is exactly what Yad Vashem represents. Its meaning — "a place and a name," refers to memorializing those who perished and honoring those who survived.

Walking through the haunting structure of Yad Vashem, I cannot help but feel as though I am looking at the faces of my brothers and sisters. Those strangers in black and white seem so distant, yet they all have a face that seems familiar. My grandfather, Symcha Horowitz, is actually one of those faces. He is in two photographs in the liberation section: one in which he is proudly carry-

ing an Israeli flag, coming as part of Aliya Bet from Germany and arriving in then Palestine; the other, him rejoicing with other survivors as they listen to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion declare the State of Israel outside of the Knesset in Tel Aviv. How did he and hundreds of other Auschwitz survivors transform themselves from helpless prisoners into fearless soldiers, ready to fight for their own Jewish statehood? Just a few years prior, Symcha was a Chassidic little boy, the son of a great rabbi in *Lodz*, Rabbi Yaacov Dovid Horowitz, and the youngest of seven boys. He was forced to watch his father be hanged by the Nazis, his mother and four of his brothers murdered in Auschwitz. Symcha survived Auschwitz, went on to become one of the founders of the Israeli Air Force and fought in the War of Independence.

Seventy years later, on January 27th, 2015, I was fortunate to return to Auschwitz to commemorate the anniversary of the liberation, with

my grandfather, his children, grandchildren, and with 102 honoree survivors from around the world, *baruch Hashem*. As part of a WIZO delegation for the World Jewish Congress, 60 representatives from WIZO New York as well as many dignitaries from around the world attended this milestone event, and I am happy to see some of those women sitting in the room today. The Nazis' goal was clear and simple: to annihilate every Jew. Did they succeed? After sharing four awe-inspiring days with the survivors and their families, it was clear that the Nazis' objective was defeated. The message, related in beautiful tributes by both Ronald Lauder and Steven Spielberg, was that the world can never forget, especially in these days of rising anti-Semitism and the existential threat to the State of Israel. Seventy years after we defied and we resisted, we paused our busy lives to honor, to memorialize and to simply acknowledge their existence. Something

(Continued on page 13)

THE LOST CHILDREN OF THE HOLOCAUST

(Continued from page 6)

that children have a different sense of time, a different outlook. Very small children couldn't even remember their

cussed openly. But most of them are no longer alive, and the relations between them and the children they raised were broken in a very traumatic way.



A group of Jewish children just before they were executed by a Nazi *Einsatzkommando*.

name. They lost the reality of who they were, as they were unable to use their real name for a while."

PARENTS TURNED INTO STRANGERS

In her study, Michlic documents heart-rending descriptions of tragedies and traumas suffered by the lucky children who survived with a false identity.

"It was so traumatic," she says, "that after the war, when the children's relatives arrived to take them home, they saw them as complete strangers. Some of the Jewish children who were transferred to a Jewish orphanage in Poland after the war tried to escape to the people they saw as their parents. The emotional connection between them was very deep in some cases, and the separation was heart-rending."

Who were the Christians who took in those children?

"The rescuers came from a very wide variety. Some took care of them as if they were their own children. Others expressed anti-Semitic views, and some were violent towards the adoptive children, as well as towards their biological children. There were also cases in which families murdered the children they were entrusted with.

"In homes in which children were abused — sexual abuse too, by the way — they were very happy to find out about their Jewishness and leave. But in families in which they felt loved and appreciated, there were huge difficulties. Some of the parents didn't even know that the child they adopted was Jewish, and the separation was heart-rending. It took some of them years to really say goodbye."

Michlic further notes that under the Soviet regime, "the issue became a taboo. The Polish families were afraid to reveal their connection to the Jews' children, and therefore did not maintain it. The archives were sealed. Only today, when they have become local culture heroes, the issue can be dis-

"One of the most wonderful places to learn about the connection was through letters the children wrote to Jewish organizations during the civil struggle in Poland, asking that their rescuers be protected."

JEWISH KIDS PRAYING TO VIRGIN MARY

The documentation discovered by Michlic described dozens of cases of difficulties in bidding farewell to the adoptive family. Sara Avinun, one of the interviewees in Michlic's research, documented her story in the book *Rising from the Abyss*, which Michlic sees as one of the most powerful and important depictions of the child experience during the Holocaust. But this documentation, she says, didn't receive the proper research attention in previous years either.



Many Jewish children who escaped the Holocaust by being hidden as Christians discovered their true heritage later.

"She describes the experiences of a little girl, who at a certain stage, after a number of difficult experiences of sexual abuse, abandonment and more, found herself in a Christian orphanage. She was taken away from there by a childless Polish couple and created a renewed childhood for herself," Michlic says.

"After the war, when she was nine years old, her uncle arrived, and she simply refused to go with them. She

escaped back to her 'parents,' until her grandfather took her away forcibly. He was a religious person and he put her in a kibbutz with other children, because he felt that the gaps between them were too big and he wanted her to reaccept her Jewish identity."

Avinun's story ended well. "She has a wonderful family and a Jewish identity, but for a long time she kept in touch with her adoptive parents, who didn't even know she was Jewish. There were periods of great difficulties, of a mixed identity, of a rejection of anything related to Judaism and Jews. The adoptive mother refused to acknowledge the fact that the daughter was Jewish, and just wanted her back even many years later.

"And there were children who decided to stay with their Christian identity, and kept their Jewish identity a secret for many years. This group has been shrinking in recent years. There were children who found out the truth as adults, like Romuald (Jakub) Weksler-Waszkinel, who was already a Catholic priest when he learned the truth, and to this very day he lives in Israel with a split Jewish-Catholic identity."

According to Michlic, "Even if the parents survived, there were children who wanted to officially convert to Christianity. These experiences, unfortunately, were not part of the historical memory for many years. Some of the children didn't really talk about it and suppressed it, but even those who did were not heard. And so you could see a child who wants to emigrate to Israel on the one hand, and continues to go to church every Sunday on the other hand."

The division of the religious identity continued. Michlic describes many cases in which small children contin-

ued to pray to Virgin Mary, or kept her picture. And it accompanied them even when they already knew they were Jewish.

"Others," she explains, "found it difficult to get used to the idea that one can be Jewish again. These are children whose entire family, community, was erased. They were afraid to return to their Jewishness, afraid to speak Yiddish. In many cases, they were raised on anti-Semitic stories,

which increased their revulsion towards the discovery."

TRAUMA MOVED ON TO NEXT GENERATION

How did the families that survived the horror deal with the new difficulty?

"We know that the best results were achieved in cases in which the children were not forced to abandon their Christian beliefs. The family rehabilitation was the hardest. The Jewish identity was just one problem among a slew of difficult problems. For example, according to



These children at Auschwitz, liberated by the Soviet army on January 27, 1945, show their tattooed arms to the photographer.

the Jewish organizations' documentation, most of them faced difficulties concerning food.

"There were children, boys, who were forced to dress up as girls in hiding, and they continued to dress as girls for years, and their gender had to be restored. Some of the lucky children who managed to survive the Holocaust with one parent, and arrived in Israel, succeeded in developing very close relations. But what happened in cases in which the parent remarried?

"We must remember that the parents who survived had their own problems. They had survived concentration camps, death camps, even Soviet occupation, and years of hiding in Aryan areas. Some suffered from mental and emotional problems. They didn't always have the ability to deal with the child's traumas. Children were sometimes left in orphanages for a long time, until their parents managed to get back on their feet."

And what happened when the parents didn't survive?

"It wasn't always clear who was responsible for the children. Sometimes it was an aunt or uncle, sometimes an extended family. Today we know from research that children who were taken care of by relatives sometimes felt like they don't belong and didn't receive the level of care they needed. Some of them just didn't know how to deal with a child who had gone through what they went through.

"Most of the children," Prof. Michlic concludes sadly, "were not smiling 'poster kids,' but scarred children with difficult problems. The untreated trauma moved on, when they became parents, to the second and third generation. Today's Israelis have been raised and are still being raised in the shadow of this trauma. It isn't over yet."

RACHEL SHNAY: "IT IS UP TO US TO SPREAD THE FLAME"

(Continued from page 11)

so simple yet so profound.

According to Jewish law, when a person dies we hold a huge responsibility and follow strict rules to make sure that their lives are properly memorialized. All of that for one life, one Jew. Performing all of these acts is the highest form of any mitzvah in the Torah because we do not receive anything in return; it is the most selfless act possible. And yet six million could not receive the same honor.

By coming here today, by your involvement with Yad Vashem, we continue to attempt to diminish the pain, the suffering, the dehumanization not only of their lives but of their deaths. I always tell my students to look past the number because it is completely intangible; rather, think of every single life as an individual like you and me. I show them a family tree and what two people can create in just a few generations, hundreds of branches. The Talmud states, "Saving a single life is like saving an entire world," but I cannot help but wonder just how many worlds one can destroy? We must always remember that the Nazis did not only murder six million, but they murdered every single possible generation that could have, should have come out of those beautiful souls...millions upon millions.

As our group walked down the same

tracks in Auschwitz that led over a million Jews to their deaths, a group of Israeli Air Force soldiers walked past us. With snow falling around us and only the light from our candles illuminating our faces, we took the



Featured speaker and member of the Young Leadership Associates Rachel Shnay.

once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to stop and sing "Hatikva" together. The words pierced through to our core: "Lehiot am chofshi be'artzenu", "To be a free nation in our home," the exact same words that many sang as they

were forced into the gas chambers never imagining that their dreams of Zion, of an army to defend us, of a homeland, would ever come true.

As survivor Roman Kent said so beautifully in his speech at the commemoration, "We survivors do not want our past to be our children's future." I cannot urge enough how important education and tolerance are. As part of the Young Leaders of Yad Vashem, I find it imperative to spread awareness to as many people as possible, Jew and non-Jew alike. How lucky is our generation that we get to play a game of Jewish geography consisting of which day schools, summer camps and teen tours we attended, while I overheard the survivors at dinner play a similar game but with names of towns, ghettos, concentration and displaced persons camps? It was an honor to meet many of the survivors there, and being in their presence changed many of us in a

profound way. As we sat under the tent that canvassed the entrance of Auschwitz-Birkenau, we were in complete awe to be experiencing such a moment in history. Tears streamed down our faces as we listened to the

stories of the survivors, each its own miracle.

Mr. Kent continued, in what I think was the most bone-chilling statement of the trip, "A minute in Auschwitz was like an entire day, a day was like a year and a month an eternity. How many eternities can one person have in a single lifetime?" How is it that those 102 survivors, pure angels, sitting a few feet ahead of us endured so many eternities? That question will forever be lingering in my mind.

As my grandfather holds my hands, I thank Hashem for those hands. Those hands are so strong, so powerful, yet so gentle and vulnerable. And what will we do with our hands? Our hands of privilege, of freedom, of life? I ask him, "Papi, I just don't understand, how did you survive?" Without hesitation he simply said, "My name is Symcha Michael, Symcha means happiness and gives me mazal; Michael is the angel Michael, who is always watching over me." Why is it that I, 25-year-old Rachel Shnay standing here before you, get to live a beautiful life with endless opportunity while the 6-year-old Rachel Shnay never had a chance? We may carry their names, we may tell their stories, but we can never forget their sacrifice. It is Yad Vashem that has ignited the fire, and it is up to us to spread the flame.

THROUGH HELL AND BACK

(Continued from page 6)

Andre made it to the dock at Haifa, but no farther. The passengers were put into three prison ships and taken to France, where the English intended to force them ashore, but the Jews refused to leave and France refused to let the English force them out. Andre remembered his fellow passengers taking a blanket to fashion a British flag with a swastika on it as a means of protesting how they were treated.

Eventually the British decided to take them through the Straits of Gibraltar, up the European coast and back to the British Zone in northern Germany. There Henri, Andre and their father were put in the Poependorf prison camp.

He doesn't recall if they were released or escaped, but the three managed to find their way back to the orphanage and, from there, return again to Israel, this time legally.

He did not fight in the early wars that determined Israel's borders and survival because he was only 15, but he worked in the ports of Haifa and rode armored trucks to be protected from Arab fire. When he came of age, he joined the military and was stationed at a kibbutz, and also served in the building up of Eilat in the Negev Desert.

He remained in Israel for a number of years but eventually decided he wanted to start his own life. "Our life was not really very fulfilling. We suf-

fered. It was a very hard life during the war. After the war I was determined to do something for the Jews. I volunteered. My adult life was involved in volunteering. I wanted to start my life finally for myself."

He returned to France, though only briefly. "There was always an undercurrent of anti-Semitism in France," he said. But while in the military, he had a chance to see America. "I was able to visit here, and see the way Jews were living here in freedom," he said.

In 1963, he settled in America, raising a family around Brooklyn and New Jersey. He eventually retired to his present home.

Last summer he and his brother, who still lives in Israel, traveled to the old school where they had been hidden as boys — a chateau now empty and in disrepair. Their return was to honor the family who had protected them, to witness the daughter of the Coches in a memorial event.

He worries about the international situation with Muslim extremists ("It's very dangerous, not much different than the Nazis who promised to eliminate Jews and homosexuals and anybody who was not Aryan," he says). He talks with his brother on the phone. He teaches skiing at Sugar Mountain.

He's been through hell and back, but he's grown, and he's found contentment in his American home. "I really love this country," he says.

LETTERS

FROM JEWISH LIBERATORS

(Continued from page 10)

he wrote, "and I so much wanted to make them happy. I sang from 'chaznish shtieklach' for them and also 'a Yiddishe mame.' One asked if I wouldn't write my Jewish name for them on a piece of paper. Soon I was scribbling [it]."

Sammy most probably was the first Jewish soldier to enter Dachau. The juxtaposition of shooting SS men and then singing for Jewish survivors is nothing less than surreal, but it was all too real.

Sammy was not the only American soldier to ask himself why he was fighting and find his answer in his encounter with Nazi atrocities and the surviving prisoners. Nor was he the only one to feel that no punishment was enough for the perpetrators of the crimes. On April 18, 1945, two different Jewish soldiers from New York City wrote home about their first encounters with Nazi atrocities.

Keal, from Queens, wrote to his wife, posing the question, is any "retribution vicious enough?" Jake, from Brooklyn, wrote: "Dear Folks... If you had any doubt as to the authenticity of these atrocity stories, you can remove it right now.... It's a sight I'll never forget. They [the camp survivors] begged us not to show the Germans any mercy. They told me stories of barbarism that is beyond the realm of imagination." In subsequent letters Jake wrote more at length about

some of the Jews he met and how he tried to help them, thanking his mother for teaching him to be a "mensch."

American soldiers in Europe, including the Jews among them, did not enter the war with a clear understanding of Nazi atrocities. Some, especially the refugees among them, may have had some understanding and even personal experience with early Nazi persecution of Jews, but they had only the vaguest ideas of the machinery of repression and murder that had developed during the war, until they actually saw its results. The sights and smells they met shocked and angered them deeply, and meeting Jewish survivors touched their hearts.

Reading these letters seventy years later, we should not allow the passage of time to blunt the forceful indignation they express. Nor should we allow time to diminish the heartfelt impulse they depict to comfort and soothe the victims. We must try to learn from them that in the face of radical evil, war may be unavoidable and when necessary must be fought with determination. But like these battle-hardened soldiers, we must never lose our empathy and compassion for the innocent victims of ideology's violence and hate.

Robert Rozett is the Director of the Yad Vashem Libraries.

OLD NAZIS NEVER DIE

(Continued from page 7)

defeat of the Arab coalition by the Israelis in 1948, German advisers were discreetly sought out as the best resources for building new, stronger armies. In a French documentary last year, *The Nazi Exiles: The Promise of the Orient*, the French-German filmmaker Géraldine Schwarz traced the paths of German soldiers of fortune, fugitives and propagandists, including Lt. Gen. Artur Schmitt, who fought with Rommel in North Africa. The Arab League recruited Schmitt to help form a more effective fighting force.

After a trip to the Golan Heights in 1951, Schmitt wrote to an Egyptian colleague that the Arab defeat by Israel had been “the consequence of Egyptian leaders’ inability to take advantage of the early stages of fighting to wipe the state of Israel off the map with a *blitzkrieg* of two weeks at most.”

Meanwhile, a Syrian agent traveled to Rome to seek out Walter Rauff, who had helped develop the vans used as mobile gas chambers, to lead a search for military and intelligence advisers. Within months dozens of Nazis made their way to Damascus,

including Franz Stangl, who had commanded the *Sobibor* death camp.

More than 50 Germans were known to have gone to Syria, while at least 70 more went to Egypt.

In most cases, the recruitment of people accused of war crimes was kept discreet. Yet many of the Germans in 1950s Cairo, known as the “Alemanni,” lived openly as they helped modernize and train the Egyptian army. They rented luxury apartments, drove Mercedes-Benzes on their weekend trips to the Red Sea and had memberships at country clubs.

In some cases they were merely following the jobs. With military activity suspended in postwar West Germany, a career officer had few options but to find a new profession or seek his fortune abroad. In her film, Ms. Schwarz tracked down the villa in Cairo where Dr. Wilhelm Voss, a leader of the German defense

economy and former SS *standartenführer*, lived with his entourage. The *Waffen* SS member and German Special Forces commando Gerhard Mertins trained Egyptian paratroopers but also represented German businesses like Mercedes and Siemens.

Often enough the government in Bonn was happy to see its former soldiers at work in the Egyptian capital, as long as their Nazi pasts did not cause embarrassment. “Contact with the German military advisers” led to “a fundamentally positive attitude toward the Federal Republic, which has repeatedly made itself felt agreeably in negotiations,” a staff member at the German Embassy in Cairo wrote in 1957.

Some, like the propagandist Johann von Leers, remained committed Nazis and anti-Semites, and were well

aware that Egyptian leaders hoped to avenge the humiliating defeat by Israel. Dr. Hans Eisele, twice convicted for crimes as a concentration camp physician, fled to Cairo as investigators once again closed in on him. When the West German government demanded that the Egyptians extradite him, they bluntly refused.

The Israelis were concerned enough about the Cairo Germans — in particular their missile-making expertise — to dispatch an undercover agent to Cairo. A letter bomb nearly blinded the German secretary working for one of the rocket scientists. Another device addressed to Dr. Eisele exploded prematurely in the hand of his Egyptian postman. But by and large they escaped retribution.

The question for future researchers is how much influence the Germans had over these rapidly changing nations and their security apparatus. “The world as it is today was shaped after World War II, so the ‘50s are a really key era,” Ms. Schwarz said by telephone from Berlin. “The Germans were advising the army, the secret service and the police at the moment when these countries were being built.”



Walter Rauff.

MEMOIRS OF THE MURDERED

(Continued from page 4)

equation only when Germany began to destroy its neighboring states. After the *Anschluss* of Austria in 1938, some 1,521 Austrian Jews were sent to *Dachau*. That summer more than 2,000 German Jews were also sent to camps. After *Kristallnacht*, the nationwide pogrom organized by Nazi authorities that November, 26,000 German Jews were sent to camps, generally for short periods. The purpose was to intimidate heads of households so that Jewish families would leave Germany.

With the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, the character of the camps changed. Now the main victims were Poles, who were murdered and worked to death in appalling conditions. Right after the invasion, 110 Poles were placed in a cage in *Buchenwald*; 108 of them were dead by Christmas. At the new camp built for Poles at *Gusen*, the mortality rate was 5% per month. Between March and December 1940, more than 13,000 Poles were sent to *Dachau*. In the years 1940 and 1941, Poles were the largest group of inmates in the concentration camp system as a whole. The new camp at Auschwitz, built on the site of a Polish military base, was constructed in 1940 to intimidate the Polish population. As Mr. Wachsmann writes: “Today Auschwitz is synonymous with the Holocaust, but it was built to impose German rule in Poland.” There is still much to be learned from Polish sources about Polish prisoners of the camp, for example about the resistance leader

Witold Pilecki and his extraordinary choice to volunteer to enter the camp to gather intelligence and organize resistance.

The German invasion of Poland did not just mean camps for some Poles but also ghettos for almost all of the country’s Jews. The Holocaust, however, began not when Germany invaded Poland in 1939 but when Germany invaded the Soviet Union in July 1941. Although this is not his main subject, Mr. Wachsmann ably relates how the pogroms and the shooting of some Jews in the summer of 1941 became a policy of total killing of Jews in Soviet territories by the end of the year — a policy extended in 1942 to occupied Poland and then to all of occupied Europe. Auschwitz became the major site of the Holocaust only in 1943, as the Red Army advanced westward, and first the death pits and then the other death facilities could no longer be maintained.

This meant one more adaptation for Auschwitz. It had been created to punish Poles and became a death factory in 1942 in order to murder Soviet prisoners of war. As Germany conquered the western Soviet Union in the second half of 1941, it starved millions of prisoners of war in enclosures that can hardly even be called camps, and it selected tens of thousands for “special treatment” — murder — at the camps. Some 9,000 were murdered in *Sachsenhausen* alone in September and October 1941; more would be killed at Auschwitz. Mr. Wachsmann treats these Soviet victims with the same

individual attention he accords to Germans, Jews and Poles, noting where he can something about their lives and their places of origin, often in Ukraine or Belarus.

The special technique used to murder these Soviet prisoners at Auschwitz, gassing, was based on the earlier German “euthanasia” program that murdered people deemed handicapped with carbon monoxide. The use of Zyklon B at Auschwitz was an adaptation of a program with which camp commandants and guards would have been familiar. As Mr. Wachsmann demonstrates, the evolution of Auschwitz into a gassing facility for Jews only makes sense against four separate backdrops: the development of the technique of gassing for the “euthanasia” program; the German advance into and retreat from eastern Europe; the associated decision to kill all Jews while the war was going on; and the development of the camp itself.

Mr. Wachsmann calculates that 80% of the Jews who reached the entry gates to Auschwitz were selected for immediate murder. They were not, in other words, concentration camp inmates at any point: like the Jews who stood over the death pits of the East or those gassed at *Chełmno*, *Treblinka*, *Sobibor* and *Bełżec*, they were simply murdered. Jews who arrived at Auschwitz actually had a better chance of survival than Jews who were deported to those other death facilities, because at such places there was no selection for labor.

Our understanding of Auschwitz is unavoidably influenced by the

experiences of Jews who were selected for labor, since some of them survived to write accounts. The memoirs by the likes of Primo Levi or Elie Wiesel bear the weight of the Holocaust. Their power is such that they create a kind of narrative arc from concentration to extermination. In *KL*, Mr. Wachsmann’s vast erudition allows us to see Auschwitz against the larger backdrop of the Holocaust and forces us to different conclusions. The memoirs are accounts of a special moment, of an intersection between concentration and extermination when victims of the former could observe the horror of the latter.

Mr. Wachsmann’s most impressive achievement in this synthetic work is his portraits of individual human beings. It takes hard effort to assemble enough sources on inmates or SS men to sustain them as characters in a book of this length. The prisoners had a range of references to describe their ordeals, from the Book of Exodus through Dante’s *Inferno*. In the generations since, their experience has become one of our points of reference in moral discussions, and it is all the more gratifying to see the camp inmates portrayed here with unvarnished humanity. Mr. Wachsmann has in effect united the best of the German and the British schools of grand World War II history: hugely but humbly exhaustive research with attention to character and to detailed narrative. His arguments will be described as “revisionist,” which is true only in the sense that all good history revises and corrects the errors of collective memory, which follows its own muses.

AN OLD HOLOCAUST SECRET NEWLY TOLD

(Continued from page 5)

Corfu. The German documents from Auschwitz place Shoshana's father, Peretz Belleli, at *Buna-Monowitz*, the forced labor camp next to Auschwitz. According to the records, he was murdered on March 9, 1945. Details of the rest of the family have not yet been found.

The Hassid brothers were finally learning their mother's history. And in a Skype call from the US, an emotional Corporon told them for the first time the story of the family's rescue on the island of *Ereikousa*.

"Suddenly we realized where it all



Shoshana at her wedding to Yaakov Hassid.

began," says Peretz. "We were never allowed to ask our mother about the war. Occasionally we would hear her talking to our aunts in Greek, but we were not allowed to interrupt. It is very moving to think that an entire island was involved in the rescue and that we are here thanks to the people there."

Shoshana Hassid, it turns out, was married in the 1950s to Yaakov, an immigrant from Turkey. In 1964, just a few years after she rebuilt her life, her husband was killed in a work accident.

"At that moment, her life was over for the second time. She had seven years of relative happiness, that's all. After that she only wore black and knew no happiness," says Avraham.

"The world was cruel to Shoshana," says her friend Rina Mizan, herself an Auschwitz survivor from Corfu. "She did not have a moment's relief in life. She would occasionally come to my house, and we would be silent together."

The most dramatic moment of the

meeting with Shoshana's sons occurred at its close. Sigalit Hassid, Shoshana's daughter-in-law, suddenly recalled that a few years earlier, her daughter Inbar had been investigating the family's roots.

Sigalit thought that perhaps her daughter's school project included something about the Holocaust, and rushed off to look for it. Shoshana, it turned out, did not tell her children anything, but could not refuse her granddaughter.

"The Germans came to the island of Corfu, where my grandmother lived," wrote Inbar. "They gathered up all the Jews in Corfu, including my grandmother's family, her parents and her brothers, and killed them all. My grandmother and three aunts were saved because they were hidden from the Germans by good gentiles who agreed to help."

All the information finally fell into place. The *Ereikousa* story was true.

A BROTHER WHO SURVIVED

My Heritage researchers began to map out all the information known to them, collecting all the documents in Greek left by Shoshana, all the pictures and all the contacts, and began looking for relevant documents from around the world.

After many conversations with Auschwitz survivors from Corfu, it emerged that Savas had another son, Solomoninio, who was more than likely killed by partisans who suspected him of collaborating with the Germans.

In the documents Shoshana submitted to Yad Vashem in 1999, she listed the names of just two of her six siblings — Menachem and Gabriel. MyHeritage staff contacted government officials in Greece and Israel, and they agreed to help.

A document in Greek found in Shoshana's apartment, with a birth certificate signed by a notary, led to the discovery of a file from the 1990s containing Shoshana's request for compensation, at the archives of the Ministry of Finance. The file also contains a testimony by Shoshana, in her own handwriting.

"In '43, the Germans came to Corfu and immediately began to round up all the Jews, but the Germans could not catch those who fled. I ran into the mountains and villages with the help of other people. After the Germans occupied the city,

I wandered from place to place with no clothes and no food. I feared that the Germans would catch me."

The file states that Shoshana was the only one of her family who remained alive, and that she had been afraid her entire life that the Germans would return and take her too.

To obtain conclusive evidence about her family, MyHeritage staff explored every possible avenue, including the testimony by Shoshana, who had been just nine when the Germans caught her family.

"My brother Gabriel Belleli, 15, was killed in Auschwitz," she wrote in her testimony at Yad Vashem. But international searches turned up an exciting fact: Gabriel Belleli, born in Corfu in 1930, is on the list of survivors of the *Bergen-Belsen* concentration camp. The last recorded date on which Belleli appears is September 1945, six months after the war ended. Could it be that Shoshana's older brother survived?

The information converges with the examination of documents at the City Hall in Corfu, and chances of this being the right person drastically increase. Gabriel Belleli, born in 1930, is the son of Peretz — the same name as Shoshana's father.

In 1955, Gabriel Belleli is removed from the population registry in Corfu, and is now listed as "Not in Existence."

"Now the task is to track down Gabriel Belleli," say the MyHeritage staff. "If he managed to survive, it is possible he never knew his sister Rosa survived the Holocaust and immigrated to Israel."

COMMON FATE

For Avraham and Peretz, this is startling information. Until recently, they knew nothing about their mother's history, and suddenly the family that they knew was no longer the same. They look at the picture of the three young children, and wonder whether one of them is Gabriel, and whether he survived.

"Seventy years after the Holocaust, suddenly everything is up in the air," says Avraham. "It pains me that my mother is no longer alive and I cannot talk to her about what happened there, as I now know what happened to her."

As the investigation continues, the story reached the organization of Jewish communities in Greece, who decided to hold a special ceremony to honor the residents of *Ereikousa*

for the rescue.

Corporon, who has found the end to her book, was suddenly hit by a fateful event. In April 2014, thousands of miles from Israel, a neo-Nazi opened fire at a Jewish community building in Kansas City, killing three people. The motive for the murder was anti-Semitic, but the dead were passersby and Christians.

Two of the dead, 14-year-old Reat Underwood and his grandfather, Dr. William Corporon, were Yvette's relatives. "In one moment, at the height of the investigation, I became a victim of anti-Semitism myself," she tells Ynet. "My fate is now tied to the fate of Savas' family."

Savas' daughters, Nina and Julia, were married but neither had children. Julia remained in Greece, and was married and died in Athens, where she is buried in a Jewish cemetery. Nina died in Israel, as did Spera.



Solomoninio Peretz.

Now, the investigation is focused on trying to locate Gabriel Belleli and finding the burial place of Savas, who apparently died after the war and was reportedly buried by his daughters with their own hands. The trauma experienced by Savas' daughters during the Holocaust went with them to the grave.

Avraham and Peretz, the last surviving biological members of the family, will go to *Ereikousa* in June for a ceremony, during which Savas' old sewing machine will be placed in the parsonage where the family was hidden during the war.

Corporon is now working on a documentary of the full story.

THE HOLOCAUST HERO TV PRODUCER WHO EXPOSED THE NAZIS' TRUE EVIL TO THE WORLD

BY LAURA CONNOR, MIRROR

For Adolf Eichmann, architect of Hitler's Final Solution, it was to be the final reckoning.

For Milton Fruchtmann, a U.S. TV producer, the Nazi henchman's 1961 trial in Jerusalem was the chance to hold up for the first time the Third Reich's full evil.

Eichmann, it showed, organized the systematic genocide of six million Jews during the Second World War. He had them hunted out, scheduled their trains to the camps and then organized the killing.

American Fruchtmann cajoled Israel into letting him broadcast the trial, had to use cameras hidden by chicken wire and then endured death threats for doing the job.

said: "A gruff voice, with a heavy German accent, said: 'Hello. Are you the head of the recording of the trial.' I said 'Yes.'

"The voice said: 'You must stop now, or we will take action, and it will not be pleasant.' The voice was cut off."

He received weekly letters warning of "severe action" if his team continued.

Eichmann had gone on the run after the war but was captured in Buenos Aires, Argentina, by Israeli intelligence and taken to stand trial.

The harrowing case over 57 days showed the reality of Nazi death camps.

All the while, day after day, dad of two Fruchtmann and his team transmitted pictures of Eichmann's cold gaze behind bulletproof glass to 37 countries.

One cameraman who had lost his family in the Holocaust passed out hearing the story of a woman on top of a mass grave being repeatedly shot at.

A Polish man gave testimony of a Nazi chasing a woman carrying a baby.

He said: "He caught the woman, pointed his pistol at her and the baby. The woman pleaded for mercy — that she be shot first and leave the baby alive.

"From behind the fence Polish people raised their hands, ready to catch the baby. She was about to hand the baby over the fence.

"The Nazi grabbed the baby from her arms, shot the woman twice and took the baby in his hands. He tore the baby as one would tear a rag."

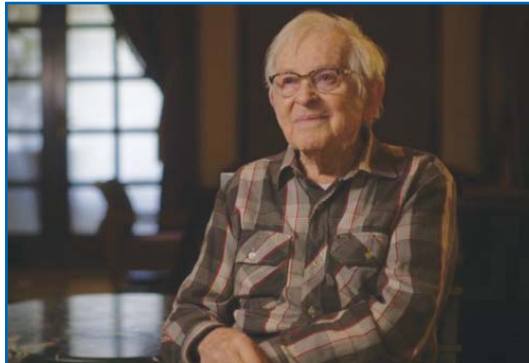
The world watched as mid-to-lower-level officials from the death camps were brought to justice and victims, whose stories had been dismissed as too horrific to be true, were believed.

One such was Jewish artist Yehuda Bacon, 85, who was imprisoned in Auschwitz when just 14 and lost all his family in the Holocaust.

He had worked at the camp's crematorium and recalled that: "Sometimes we took the ashes of human beings from the crematorium

to put on the frozen paths."

He said: "Before the trial people who heard my story would say 'shut up' — they couldn't believe the reality of a child seeing what I did. Only afterwards did people have any sense of how much we had suffered.



Bearing witness: Yehuda Bacon.

"Eichmann for me was a symbol of all this cruelty, an architect for people waiting for their deaths."

The Nazi maintained a "steady, cold gaze" through the trial, said Fruchtmann, and prompted reporter Hannah Arendt to coin the term "the banality of evil" about him.

Fruchtmann said: "Eichmann tried to communicate an attitude of intellectual powers, referring to philosophers like Kant. He attempted to convey what he considered to be intellectual superiority. Some of his testimony was ludicrous."

He insisted he had been following orders.

But Prosecutor Gideon Hausner produced evidence Eichmann had stated in 1945: "I will leap into my grave laughing because the feeling I have five million human beings on my conscience is for me a source of extraordinary satisfaction."

In court, the accused, 56, said he meant enemies such as the Soviets.

He was found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity and was hanged on June 1, 1962. His ashes were scattered on international waters just hours later.

The film also stars Anthony LaPaglia as director Leo Hurwitz, who was blacklisted during the McCarthy period.

Martin Freeman said: "Maybe it was the first time the scale and breadth of what happened had had a human face put on it — the face of the survivors."

He said those responsible for such atrocities are not monsters with two heads but looked and sounded like us: "Which is the scariest thing of all."



Martin Freeman stars as Milton (center) in The Eichmann Show with co-stars Dylan Edwards and Anthony LaPaglia.

Now the remarkable story is told in a BBC film, *The Eichmann Show*, starring *Sherlock* and *The Hobbit* star Martin Freeman as the filmmaker.

Martin, 43, has said: "This is where the Holocaust really became the Holocaust."

The program shows how Fruchtmann, now 88, had a man armed with three grenades and a revolver outside his office during the shoot.

Two days into the trial, a phone call tried to warn him off.

Fruchtmann, who lives in New York,

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