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LEADERSHIP MISSION VISITS POLAND AND ISRAEL

BY ISAAC BENJAMIN

In the summer of 2015, supporters from the American Society for Yad Vashem first began discussing a prospective mission to Poland and Israel. Understanding its unique status as the world's preeminent Holocaust institution, the American Society considered such a trip an exceptional opportunity to reflect on the importance of Holocaust remembrance in the 21st century. A little more than a year later, the 31 Americans on the Leadership Mission joined their international partners in this unforgettable profound testament to Yad Vashem's crucial role as the World Holocaust Remembrance Center.

Fifty-five passengers were greeted at the Copernicus Wroclaw Airport in Poland on the morning of July 6th by the large banner welcoming them to the 2016 Yad Vashem Leadership Mission. For these friends and supporters of Yad Vashem, the Leadership Mission was a weeklong journey to trace the Jewish experience in Poland and the Holocaust before flying to Israel for a rare, behind-the-scenes exploration of Yad Vashem.

The Leadership Mission had a defining spirit throughout the trip: three generations of Yad Vashem supporters joining together on this memorable journey. From octogenarians to teenagers, the group embraced their different perspectives as a bond to a shared heritage. Many of the participants were visiting Eastern Europe for the first time. Others were making their first trip back since escaping to survival more than seventy years before. Several generations of families came together,

eager to share the special experience together.

Sixteen young adults represented the American Society's Young Leadership Associates as the third

presence of the third generation was a strong influence on the entire group. "Seeing all the young people on this trip has been an inspiration. Their vitality and enthusiasm all along the

life for centuries.

Outside of *Wroclaw* was the *Wolfsberg* forced labor camp. Built as a series of tunnels underneath a small mountain, it was where thousands of Jewish prisoners were forced into hard labor. As the group walked through the damp tunnels, Yad Vashem guides recounted the story of Naphtali Stern, a prisoner at *Wolfsberg*. Trading his rations for a pencil stub, Stern wrote the Rosh Hashanah service from memory onto scraps torn from bags of cement. Stern survived the Holocaust and later in life donated his cherished prayer book to Yad Vashem. Later on, each participant received a replica of the "*Wolfsberg Machzor*," its tattered edges a reminder of the unimaginable struggles the prisoners of *Wolfsberg* faced.

It was a bright Friday morning when the Leadership Mission traveled to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Meeting at the infamous *Arbeit Macht Frei* gate, local Polish guides joined the Yad Vashem staff in leading the group through the barracks that make up the Auschwitz Museum. Block 27 is specifically curated by Yad Vashem as a permanent exhibit to commemorate the loss of Jewish life. Block 27 holds the monumental Book of Names — a collection of the names of millions of Holocaust victims. Many members of the group were able to find the names of their murdered relatives among the 4.2 million names.

The Leadership Mission was allowed unparalleled access at Auschwitz. As Dr. Mengele's torture site, Block 10 is not open to the public. As the Polish guides unlocked the dusty padlocked door, several members were too overcome with emotion and trepidation to step inside to see the stark hallways left untouched for decades. In *Birkenau*, one railroad car stands alone on the abandoned tracks as a symbol of the millions of deportees. For the Leadership Mission, Auschwitz guides opened the usually closed sliding door of the vehicle. As they were led up the otherwise gated-off stairwell to the *Birkenau* watchtower, the expansive grid of barracks came into view. For Jessica Glickman-Mauk, a grandchild of survivors and mother of three young children, "it was a sight I will never forget. I want my children to

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Mark Moskowitz, trustee of the ASYV board of directors; Ron Meier, executive director of the ASYV; and Roger Sofer, of Houston, holding the Torah at the ceremony in Auschwitz.

generation on the Leadership Mission. For American Society board member Mark Moskowitz, who came with his nephew Sam Gordon, the

way has been so moving to witness."

The Leadership Mission began in *Wroclaw*, a city once known as *Breslau*. They were led by Bente Kahan, a Norwegian-Jewish immigrant who has spearheaded the effort to restore the White Stork Synagogue as the local Jewish community's cultural center. Around the city are signs of the once-thriving Jewish community and its tragic destruction at the hands of the Nazis. The last stop was at the former site of the largest synagogue in *Wroclaw*, burned down on *Kristallnacht*. The group recited *kaddish* at the lone surviving wall of the synagogue, a monument to the community that was a center for Jewish

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THE LAST NAZI HUNTER

BY STAV ZIV, NEWSWEEK

Efraim Zuroff has accomplished much in his long career, but there's one thing he's particularly proud of: he's the most hated Jew in Lithuania. His Lithuanian friend Ruta Vanagaite agrees: She called him a "mammoth," a "boogeyman" and the "ruiner of reputations" — and that's just in the introduction to a book they co-authored.

Last summer, in a journey that helped cement his notoriety, Zuroff set off across the Lithuanian country-

pendent Lithuania" for collaborating with the Nazis and participating in the Holocaust, Zuroff tells *Newsweek*.

"I realize how difficult it could be for Lithuania to admit its complicity," he told Vanagaite in *Our People*. "It took France 50 years to acknowledge its guilt. Germany had no choice. But for your sake and your children's sake, the sooner you face this honestly, the sooner the healing process will start."

"If it took France 50 years, it will take Lithuania 50 years as well," said Vanagaite.

"No, it will take you 90 years," replied Zuroff. "Because your crimes

these days is "one-third detective, one-third historian, one-third political lobbyist," with countless hours spent tracking down witnesses, poring over archives and convincing governments to take action. Imagine *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* with the hero spending 98 percent of the movie in his school's library.

Zuroff never set out to become an object of contempt in Lithuania or the world's last Nazi hunter. He grew up in the Brooklyn borough of New York — Brighton Beach and Flatbush — hoping to become the first Orthodox Jew to play in the NBA. Though he was named for his great-uncle, Efraim Zar, who was murdered in Lithuania during the Holocaust, Zuroff's career as a Nazi hunter began only after he made *aliyah*, Jewish immigration to Israel, in 1970 and completed his PhD in Holocaust history.

In the early 1980s, he worked in Israel for the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations, which was formed in 1979 to probe and prosecute war criminals. Since 1986, Zuroff has directed the Israel office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a human rights organization that combats anti-Semitism and is named after the Holocaust survivor and legendary Nazi hunter who died in 2005. Since he operates through a nongovernmental organization that has no power to prosecute, Zuroff is considered a "freelance Nazi hunter."

Coming into the profession so late, Zuroff missed many of the big names Wiesenthal and others pursued — Mengele, Adolf Eichmann and Karl Silberbauer, the Gestapo agent who

War Criminals Master List, M-Z."

From this base, the loud but jovial Nazi hunter fields phone calls with tips on suspects through his Operation Last Chance initiative (financial rewards for information leading to the arrest or conviction of Nazi war criminals), follows up on promising leads and works with partners who can scour archival material in the languages he can't handle. He went to Copenhagen last summer to submit an official police complaint about a Danish SS volunteer who remains alive and unpunished. Since the number of living perpetrators has dwindled in recent years, Zuroff increasingly spends time writing op-eds about Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism, speaking with the press when these topics are in the news and giving lectures at universities and conferences.

"You have to start from the premise that it's almost impossible to prosecute a Nazi these days," he says, his large frame folded behind his desk and graying hair usually topped with a kippa. Many of Zuroff's critics think it's time we stop prosecuting Nazi collaborators — most of them are dead or too old to stand trial, they say, and some argue it's vindictive to dwell on events so far in the past. Zuroff scoffs at such talk. "First, the passage of time in no way diminishes the guilt of the killers," he says, launching into his oft-recited "Nazi Hunting 101" spiel. "Old age should not protect people from punishment, people who committed such heinous crimes. We owe it to the victims — that's three. Four is it sends a powerful message about the serious nature of these crimes,



Zuroff protests at an annual procession honoring the Latvian *Waffen SS* unit. Like its Baltic neighbor Lithuania, Latvia plays down its history of collaboration.

side in a gray SUV with Vanagaite, an author best known for a book about women finding happiness after age 50. Their goal: to visit some of the nation's more than 200 sites of mass murder during World War II. On the road, between destinations, they talked and talked, recording their conversations. The trip formed the basis of their 2016 book, *Our People: Journey with an Enemy*, an instant best-seller in Lithuania. It also ignited a rancorous debate among Lithuanians, who have long downplayed their country's considerable role in the Holocaust.

Zuroff, often called the last Nazi hunter, has spent nearly four decades chasing down suspects from Australia to Iceland, from Hungary to the United States. His methods are sometimes controversial, but his mission is righteous: bringing to justice every remaining perpetrator of one of the most heinous crimes in history. For Westerners, the tiny country of Lithuania might seem an odd place for him to dig in, but with most Nazis either dead or too frail to face trial, this Eastern European nation may be the Nazi hunter's last stand. He considers Lithuania one of his most important fights because it hasn't addressed its role in mass murder during the Holocaust — its citizens killed almost all of the 250,000 Jews who lived there in 1941. "Not a single Lithuanian sat one day in jail in inde-

are greater, and your ability to deal with them is less. The French prepared the Jews to be sent somewhere, and they sent them away to be murdered. Here, the Jews were murdered by your people....

"You know why everyone in Lithuania hates me? Because they know that I am right."

THE THINKING MAN'S INDIANA JONES

Zuroff wants to make it very clear that Nazi hunting isn't as glamorous as it sounds. "A lot of times, people come up to me and say, 'You have my dream job.... When I was a child, I wanted to be a Nazi hunter,'" he tells *Newsweek*, clearly amused by their ignorance. "You know — it's not doing ambushes in the jungles of South America."

Nor does it resemble the popular '70s book and subsequent film *The Boys from Brazil*, in which Laurence Olivier spends much of his time chasing Dr. Josef Mengele, played by Gregory Peck, and unraveling his evil plan to use 94 clones of Adolf Hitler to resurrect the Reich. The film doesn't hold up particularly well, and not only because of its revenge fantasy ending that features Mengele being mauled to death by a pack of Dobermans. (In reality, the "Angel of Death" drowned while living under a pseudonym in South America.)

Zuroff says a Nazi hunter's job



Lithuanian writer Ruta Vanagaite wrote about her own family members' role in collaborating with the Nazis.

led the arrest of Anne Frank and her family. "That I'm jealous about, definitely," Zuroff says, sitting in his sunny Jerusalem office, surrounded by books and overstuffed files, with framed press clippings surrounding him and a miniature basketball hoop in one corner. This could be the workspace of a genial but harried accountant, until you look closer and notice that one little drawer reads "Latvian

their importance. Five is it's important in the fight against Holocaust denial and Holocaust distortion. Six, 'superior orders' has almost invariably been rejected as a defense, so in other words, individual criminal responsibility." He insists that if the world doesn't make it "abundantly clear" that all individuals who participate in genocide will face consequences, people will

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UKRAINIAN HOLOCAUST PERPETRATORS ARE BEING HONORED IN PLACE OF THEIR VICTIMS

BY JARED MCBRIDE, TABLET

Olevsk, a sleepy if ancient town deep in the backwoods of Ukraine, became part of my life in 2003 when I came across a dozen testimonies about vicious pogroms there at the beginning of the German-Soviet war of 1941 to 1945. In the testimonies, survivors and witnesses



Taras "Bulba"-Borovets.

describe how Jews were beaten, humiliated and mutilated in the center of town in the summer of 1941. Many of their tormentors and killers were members of the *Poliska Sich*, a guerrilla force led by one of the most famous Ukrainian nationalist leaders during the war, Taras "Bulba"-Borovets. Taking his nom de guerre from a mythical Cossack leader, Bulba-Borovets ruled Olevsk and its environs during the early months of the German-Soviet war, while Germans were thin on the ground in this remote location. It was only after the pogrom violence and further abuse of Jews at the hands of the *Sich* that the Germans took over Olevsk in September 1941 and established a ghetto. The *Sich* then patrolled the ghetto and later provided the Germans with manpower to liquidate the Jewish population.

Discovering these documents, I felt certain that such brutal pogroms must have been included in the literature on anti-Jewish violence in western Ukraine and eastern Poland in the summer of 1941. Following Jan Gross's powerful 2000 book, *Neighbors*, other historians tackled the difficult questions surrounding local participation in the Holocaust, and in particular pogroms in that fateful summer. Yet I soon realized that there was no mention of the pogroms in the scholarly literature; Bulba-Borovets, unsurprisingly, failed to mention them in his memoirs.

Five years after I discovered the testimonies, I found myself on an old Soviet bus traveling from Zhytomyr to

Olevsk, making the first of three trips to learn more about what had happened there in 1941. Debarking at the town's rudimentary bus station, I met the duo of Misha and Misha — two of Olevsk's few remaining Jewish community members. The younger Misha, in his 40s, was the de facto head of the Jewish community. A local acquaintance referred to him as "The Last Jew of Olevsk." He often helped Jewish visitors pay homage to their families. Younger Misha talked so quickly and peppered his speech with so many rural colloquialisms that my brain rushed to follow. Elder Misha was in his late 50s; he had a kind face and walked with a limp, struggling to keep up, both physically and verbally, with his younger counterpart.

We traveled in one of the only taxis in town to a mass grave outside Olevsk. Driving along the unpaved road to the village of *Varvarivka*, I couldn't stop thinking about the fact that this was the same road on which Olevsk's Jews had been taken to their deaths. In *Varvarivka*, on November 15, 1941 (some sources say November 20), the Germans and the *Poliska Sich* shot the entire Jewish population — more than 500 men, women and children. Between bumps and bursts of speed, I tried to envision the final moments of an entire community as they took their last steps. We arrived at the destination — a clearing among the trees on the side of the road. There was a small black memorial enclosed in a fence and a small crumbling white wall surrounded by weeds overtaking the cracking cement. According to this late Soviet-era memorial, "German-Fascist invaders" killed "peaceful citizens" at this spot in 1941. There was no reference to the Jewish identity of the victims.

Next, we located the *Sich* headquarters in a former nursery school building in the center of town. After taking control of Olevsk in the first week of July 1941, the *Sich* conducted its first pogrom, taking 30 to 40 Jewish men and women to the *Ubort* river to torture them. In his deposition that I had found in the archives, Tevel Trosman explained how the *Sich* treated the town's Jews "to gross mockery and humiliation in the mud for almost half an hour." Another survivor, Iakov Shklover, described how *Sich* soldiers "giggled and laughed" as they made him and the others stand and then lie down in the mud, hitting them with their rifle butts all the while. Others detailed how some soldiers enjoyed beating Jewish women with their guns. A *Sich* leader is reported in one testimony as having mutilated his victims by dragging a cart over them. By the time the pogrom ended, the *Sich* had injured dozens; soldiers had murdered the town baker and another local Jew, and they left the bodies to

rot in a yard nearby. Shklover recounted how he and several others stole away in the night to bury the bodies in secret and say *kaddish*. This was not the last of the pogrom violence, though. In a separate incident later that summer, the *Sich* again tortured the Jews, this time in the yard of its headquarters. Trosman described how the *Sich* made 300 Jews "tear out grass with their teeth" and pull weeds with their hands. They could hear the laughter of *Sich* soldiers at the headquarters as they were beaten with whips and rifles.

Neither the younger nor the elder Misha had heard of the pogrom violence until my arrival in Olevsk. They looked at me with dismay and disbelief as I told them what had happened in this place that was turned into a children's playground after the war. Of course, they knew the *Sich* had been involved in the mass shooting at *Varvarivka*—but the preceding torture and humiliation of Olevsk's Jewish community were new to them.

Together, we entered the nursery yard. I looked down at the dirt, once a

thanks to a tip by a local ethnic German. She did not know that his story had ever been recorded and wept when I showed her his handwritten testimony from the archives. We ended our day in the old Jewish cemetery, among crooked tombstones covered in weeds. In the sanctuary, we found old religious manuscripts and artifacts under layers of dust and dirt — the same ones that the Jews killed next to the *Ubort* river used to read.

On the bus ride back to *Zhytomyr*, the enormity of my experience was almost too much to bear. The tears of the survivor's daughter; the rotting tefillin in an abandoned cemetery; the black memorial that conceals the identity of the dead; and the beautiful *Ubort* river and *Polesia* forest. I knew I had to return.

Twice more, in 2011 and 2012, I visited Olevsk, always helped by the younger Misha. The golden plaque honoring the *Sich* at the site of their pogroms was eventually removed as a result of local political



German-Ukrainian parade in Ivano-Frankivsk on July 26, 1941.

scene of horrific violence. I then noticed a golden plaque in honor of Taras Bulba-Borovets and his men on the wall of the nursery building. The *Sich* headquarters were located at this place during the first few months of the war — when the pogroms occurred — and a local chapter of the right-wing nationalist *Svoboda* party had wanted to honor the *Sich*. Certainly, leaders of anti-Jewish violence and ethnic cleansing of Poles have been memorialized in other towns and cities in Ukraine. But rarely is the irony of commemorating a perpetrator as striking as when it is done at the scene of his crime.

Elder Misha brought me back to Olevsk to speak with a relative of a survivor whose testimony I had found in the archives. She was the daughter of the survivor's second marriage after the war — her father's first wife and children had all been murdered in *Varvarivka*. She told me how her father had miraculously escaped

upheaval. But in its stead, a new monument was built just down the road from where the pogroms took place. Also a pet project of *Svoboda*, it was unveiled in August 2011 with party leader Oleh Tyahnybok in attendance. The unveiling sparked some heated debate in the local paper over the place of the *Sich* in Olevsk's history — but no discussion of the pogroms in which the town's Jews were killed.

Thanks to the help of a local journalist, I interviewed two people, Maria Kolomiets and Mykola Dovhosilets, who witnessed the *Sich* taking Olevsk's Jews to their deaths, with beatings and humiliations along the way. I also spoke to Aleksei Makarchuk, who had been a teenager during the war. After telling us his story about how he escaped deportation at the hands of the local police and his service in the partisans, Makarchuk described watching the

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HITLER'S FURIES: GERMAN WOMEN IN THE NAZI KILLING FIELDS

Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields.

By Wendy Lower. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt: New York, 2014. 270 pp. \$26 hardcover.

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN

"On September 16, 1942, [in the Ukrainian-Polish border town of Volodymyr-Volynski, Johanna] Altvater entered the ghetto and approached two Jewish children, a six-year-old and a toddler.... The toddler came over to her.... Altvater grabbed the child by the legs, held it upside down, and slammed its head against the ghetto wall . . . [then] she threw the lifeless child at the feet of its father...."

A horrifying and brutal woman — we all somehow feel such a being can't possibly exist. That it's "unnatural." We are certain that deep down all women have a maternal instinct. But real life isn't like that. The lines quoted above, taken from Wendy Lower's unique volume entitled *Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields*, makes that quite evident . . . nor was Johanna Altvater an anomaly. There were quite a few other German women like her — and they weren't camp guards either!

In sum, Lower's engrossing and conscientiously researched book squarely focuses our attention on the unacknowledged and rarely if ever discussed fact that "hundreds of thousands of German women went to the Nazi East — that is, to Poland and the western territories of what was for

many years the USSR, including today's Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia — and were indeed integral parts of Hitler's machinery of destruction." "Teachers, nurses, secretaries, welfare workers and wives" — they all went to service the German troops there and, concomitantly, to "patriotically" colonize the newly won lands for Nazi Germany. Interestingly, the more personal reasons for these young "seventeen-to thirty-year-olds going" east were the supposed "professional opportunities" offered, and the pure adventure of this "liberating" experience!

So what, for example, did German nurses do — "nursing that brought the largest number of German women directly into the war and the Nazi genocide"? Yes, on the one hand, according to Lower, they cared for German soldiers physically and mentally injured in the fighting. They ministered to their wounds and socialized with them, bringing a bit of home to the front. But they also "witnessed the deprivation and murder of Soviet prisoners of war and Jews. They worked in the infirmaries of the concentration camps...." "They assisted in medical experiments, and administered lethal injections." "They stood on railway platforms while Jewish deportees locked in railway cars begged for help." Finally, "some committed mass

murder as the euthanasia program expanded from Germany into Poland."

Then there were the "legions of secretaries who kept the mass-murder machinery functioning." On the one hand they "organized, tracked, and distributed the massive supplies necessary to keep the war machine running." However, thousands of them were also employed in district offices in the Nazi East, "responsible for the dispensation of indigenous populations, including Jews, many of whom had been placed in ghettos and forced labor assignments." Some secretaries "not only typed up liquidation orders but also participated in ghetto massacres and attended mass shootings" — Johanna Altvater, specializing in child-killing, was just such a one. There were the "dutiful" secretaries who typed up all those reports handed in by



Einsatzgruppen leaders highlighting their "diligence" in the murder of Jews, reports accompanied by graphs making things easy for the upper leadership to quickly comprehend and, of course, admire!

Finally, and surprisingly, the worst of the lot were the wives that came with their men to the East. Such a one was Erna Petri. In 1942, "under the auspices of Himmler's Race and Resettlement Office, Horst Petri, an SS officer, and Erna Petri

were given the task of cultivating and defending a Polish plantation in eastern Galicia." Thus, she, her husband and their three-year-old son were soon living in a "white-pillared manor . . . in the midst of rolling meadows" — requisitioned for the family's use. It was idyllic and beautiful, and undoubtedly for Erna, a farmer's daughter whose only job had been as a house-servant, unbelievable! Before long both her husband and she were beating and brutalizing their forced laborers — Ukrainians, Poles, and Jews. In 1943 they were hunting down Jews who somehow escaped extermination. He resolutely shot any and all Jews. And Erna? All on her own, she came to cold-bloodedly kill six hapless "half-naked Jewish boys who whimpered as she drew her pistol." Indeed, after the war, this last was especially brought out in her pre-trial interrogation.

Which brings us to the justice "doled out" to these women after the war . . . or rather the lack of it. The only one who paid for her crime somewhat was Erna Petri — tried in East Germany. But even she got out of her life sentence . . . many felt, through the help of *Stille Hilfe* (Silent Aid), a silent underground SS organization, one of whose prominent members is Gudrun Burwitz, the daughter of Henrich Himmler. Petri, meanwhile, lived to be eighty . . .

Yes, this is quite a book!

Reviewed by Dr. Diane Cypkin, Professor of Media, Communication, and Visual Arts at Pace University.

AT THE GATES OF BIRKENAU, A NAME FOR A NAME

BY AVI BAUMOL,
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

A custom at Jewish cemeteries around the world is to recite the names of the loved ones departed. At hallowed places of Jewish tragedy such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, people often recite a list of names of their loved ones who were struck down sanctifying the name of God. That is what I found myself doing on a cloudy Friday in early June in front of 150 cyclists about to embark on the most meaningful bike ride of their lives.

Inspired by Robert Desmond, a young English Jew, who, three years ago, decided to bike from his home all the way to Auschwitz, over 25 days, the JCC Krakow Ride for the Living was created to memorialize the past, but also to celebrate the survival of Jews throughout Communism and the revival of Jewish life — in Poland of all places. Not just in Poland, but in Krakow, down the road from the largest Jewish cemetery in the world.

And so I began like every other person in front of such loss — reciting names:

My great-grandfather Michael ben Naftali Ferber was murdered in Berlin during *Kristallnacht*. My great-grandparents, Binyamin and Liczu Goldberg, from *Mielec*, were murdered in their city and buried in an unknown grave. My grandfather's brother, Yehoshua, murdered in *Belzec*, was just 27 years old, a scion of the *Lublin* Yeshiva. My grandfather's aunt Rachel and her husband Chaim, son of Rabbi Nisan Shenirer of *Krakow*, were murdered together with their children. Their 10 cousins of varying ages were all murdered in *Tarnow*, *Lvov* and *Buczacz*.

The list is frightening, paralyzing. What would have become of my extended family? How would the Jewish world have been different if these named did not represent death and destruction?

But then I continued with another list of names, this time not commemorating the tragic past; rather they signaled rebirth, return, revival!

Each name represented hundreds, if not thousands of young and old Poles who miraculously found their way back from being lost to Judaism.

Each name a mini-redemption, as they embody the spirit of the Jewish people — *netzach yisrael lo yeshaker* (the eternity of Israel does not lie).

Devora, 28, found out she was Jewish at 12 and chose to learn about her heritage, engage in Jewish life in *Krakow*, and proudly tell her friends and family — I am Jewish. Paula found out when she was 30, after bumping into a rabbi at the mall. When asked if she was Jewish her response was, "No, I am not, but my grandmother was." She has since returned to Jewish life along with her sister, mother and nieces. Marcjanna found out she was Jewish by casually asking her mom one day why her last name did not sound Polish. "Are we Russian? No, we are Jewish, did I never tell you...?" Today she is deeply involved in Jewish life in Poland and around the world.

Damian's grandfather bequeathed a treasured piece of jewelry to his grandson with strict instructions not to open it until his demise. After the Christian funeral, Damian and his mother opened up the package to find a Magen David. Today he wears it proudly. Serge found out his Jewish

ancestry after applying for a visa to study in Poland — "Oh, my great-grandfather's name was Moshe...". Agnieszka was told she was Jewish by her grandmother one day before she died. She didn't know what to do with that information until she arrived at the JCC in *Krakow* and we helped her enter the Jewish world.

And what of Agata, Gabriella, Magda, Chaya, Leszkie, Pinchas, Iwo, Iwona, Michael, Patryk, Julia, Dawid, Alicia...

The list goes on and on, names of forgotten Jews who now proudly live a Jewish life.

Today in *Krakow*, there are 600 Jewish members of the community; we believe there are thousands. In Warsaw, several thousands, and in other cities in Poland — we could reach tens of thousands.

This Ride for the Living symbolized for Jewish Poland that while we cherish the names of those lost to the Jewish people, we nevertheless have the opportunity and therefore the great responsibility to ensure that those Poles who do have Jewish roots — their names are not lost to the Jewish people forever.

AMERICAN HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS STRUGGLE “TO FINISH IN A DECENT WAY”

BY MATT LEOVIC,
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

Despite recent funding infusions to provide care for aging Holocaust survivors, the dwindling community's basic needs will outpace earmarked resources in the years ahead, according to experts.

Out of the just under 100,000 Jewish survivors of the Nazi genocide who reside in the US, more than 30,000 live below poverty threshold



Holocaust survivor Stephan Ross, founder of the New England Holocaust Memorial, participating in the 2016 *Yom HaShoah* commemoration in Boston, Massachusetts, organized by the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston.

standards, according to the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS). And as the survivor community ages, a larger segment will need increased assistance with health care and other basic needs.

Responding to the dire situation, the Claims Conference announced it will commit an additional \$500 million toward Holocaust survivors' home health care needs, and lift the cap on funded hours of care per survivor.

For Boston-area survivors, new funding will also come from sales of the English translation of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* manifesto. After decades of controversies tied to its stewardship of the book, Boston-based publisher Houghton Mifflin Harcourt recently decided to direct royalty proceeds from *Mein Kampf* to programs run by Jewish Family & Children's Service (JF&CS) for local survivors.

Totaling about \$60,000 a year, *Mein Kampf* royalties will only cover a modest portion of the survivor community's needs. Locally, the gap between these needs and available funds has hit up to \$150,000 annually, according to Rick Mann, a JF&CS volunteer and chair of the Jewish Community Relations Council's (JCRC) Holocaust outreach committee.

"I had very little idea of the severity of the problem being faced by local survivors until very recently," Mann told *The Times of Israel*. "There are hundreds in greater Boston who are in need of essential services," said

Mann, adding that many survivors live under the communal radar.

Nearly 300 survivors are served by JF&CS, according to Marsha Frankel, director of elder care services for the Boston agency. About five survivors are added each month, said Frankel, who estimates there are 2,500 in the area. Because some are "fearful of seeking help," connecting survivors to appropriate services can be challenging — even when there is funding, said Frankel.

"We see the will to live and the resilience," said Frankel of survivors she has worked with for almost two decades. "Many of them face acute chronic medical conditions and poverty," she said.

Labeling the survivors' needs as "very intense," Frankel said her agency's goal is to help them remain at home for as long as possible. This requires access to services ranging from food delivery to transportation, with home health care being "a very expensive service to provide," she said.

"If we can help people stay at home, they are feeling safe, with a sense of dignity and respect from the community at large," Frankel said.

Some people called them "greenhorns," and not many made efforts to learn about the wartime experience of survivors transplanted to the US, recalled Israel "Izzy" Arbeiter, a survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau and long-time leader of New England's survivor community.

Born in central Poland's *Plock*, Arbeiter's parents and brother were murdered in the Nazi death camp *Treblinka*. In 1939 the town's Jews numbered some 10,000 and made up 26% of the local population; by war's end only 300 survived.

In 1946, Arbeiter married his wife Anna, with whom he had survived a forced labor camp and imprisonment at Auschwitz. Within two years, Anna gave birth to a daughter and the family made their home outside Boston.

"We were not very welcomed by the Jewish community after the war," said Arbeiter in an interview with *The Times of Israel*.

The historian Barbara Burstin wrote about resettlement efforts: "Americans, both men and women, did not understand or appreciate what these 'greeners' had been through, and the survivors soon learned, if they had been so inclined, not to talk about their experiences except among themselves."

Seven decades after what many of them experienced as a frosty reception, thousands of Holocaust survivors again find themselves in need of assistance with their basic needs.

"We have a lot more people that are in need now, especially from the [former Soviet Union]," said Arbeiter. "Home care is the greatest need, along with food and medicine," he said.

For more than half a century, Arbeiter has advocated on behalf of survivors in the US and other countries, including Germany, where he received the Order of Merit in 2008 for his work on Jewish-German relations. A volunteer adviser for survivor services at JF&CS, Arbeiter has seen the community's needs increase as more members reach advanced ages.

"There are a lot of survivors who need a little help to be able to finish in a decent way," said Arbeiter. "We have got to have the tools to help these people," he added.

As put by Mann, "JF&CS has to make a 'Sophie's Choice' on a daily basis as to who gets services. The problem is going to increase, not decrease, over the next decade," he said.

In New York City, for instance, up to 30,000 survivors — about half of the community — live in "deprivation, isolation, and poverty," according to Stuart Eizenstat, special adviser on Holocaust issues to US Secretary of State John Kerry. In an interview with AFP last year, Eizenstat said about one-third of survivors in Israel cope with poverty, and these rates approach 90% in some former Soviet



Holocaust survivor Israel Arbeiter, a long-time leader in the community (right) with his wife, Anna Arbeiter (center), participating in the 2016 *Yom HaShoah* commemoration in Boston.

Union countries.

In the US, the government has started to fund social service grants specifically for aging Holocaust survivors. Some European countries have made reparations available to victims of the Nazis living outside Europe, but these funds are usually one-time infusions, as opposed to sustainable, ongoing support.

"There isn't going to be an opportunity to make this right if we do not act soon," said Mann. "We will be left feeling the pain of not having helped when our help was needed," he said.

MORE THAN SEVEN DECADES LATER, MONACO APOLOGIZES FOR DEPORTING JEWS

BY CAROL J. WILLIAMS,
LOS ANGELES TIMES

Monaco committed the "irreparable" injustice of deporting Jews to Nazi camps during World War II, Prince Albert II said in belated apology for the action 73 years ago that sent scores of residents and refugees to their deaths.

Many of the 66 people handed over to Nazi occupiers in neighboring France had sought refuge in the principality that was neutral in the first years of the war.

But on the night of August 27, 1942, Monaco authorities rounded up Jewish residents and delivered them to the Nazis. At least 24 other Monegasques living in the Riviera principality or in the surrounding French countryside were deported during the war, according to a government report released this year. Only nine of the 90 who were deported survived their Nazi detention.

"We committed the irreparable in handing over to the neighboring authorities women, men and a child who had taken refuge with us to escape the persecutions they had suffered in France," Albert said at a ceremony in which a monument to the victims was unveiled. "In distress, they came specifically to take shelter with us, thinking they would find neutrality."

Albert said the acknowledgment of wrongdoing by the wartime authorities "is to ask forgiveness," addressing his apology to Jewish community leaders in attendance, including the principality's chief rabbi and renowned Holocaust researchers Serge and Beate Klarsfeld.

The government review of Monaco's World War II relationship with the Axis powers was ordered by Albert and concluded this year with recommendations for establishing a restitution program to return the property seized from the deported Jews to their heirs. Nine compensation claims have already been approved, the government reported.

"We welcome the desire of the principality to properly examine its role during these dark days of the Nazi occupation," European Jewish Congress leader Moshe Kantor said in a statement.

The Klarsfelds had encouraged Albert's late father, Prince Rainier, to examine the wartime leadership's actions. Albert took up the mission after succeeding Rainier, who died in 2005 after 56 years as head of the House of Grimaldi.

It was Rainier's predecessor, Prince Louis II, who reigned during World War II, though under successive Italian and German occupations in the war's latter years.

IN POLAND, SEARCHING FOR JEWISH HERITAGE

BY JOSEPH BERGER,
THE NEW YORK TIMES

When I was growing up, my mother filled me with visions of her hometown, *Otwock* in Poland, describing it as a kind of Brigadoon without actually using that American word.

It seemed like an enchanted spot graced by tall pine trees, lush lilac bushes and bracing air. In an era when anti-Semitic discrimination seemed laced into the national fabric, the Jews of *Otwock* managed to squeeze much sweetness out of their hardscrabble lives through timeless religious habits and the pleasures of a resort that attracted bourgeois vacationers and Hasidim.

My sister and I recently visited the town for the first time. It was lilac season and the pine trees were still tall, the air as bracing. But we found with palpable certainty that the Jews are all gone — there were 10,000 of them — and only a few traces are left of the touchstones of my mother's girlhood.

All four synagogues, including those where her father was a cantor on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, were destroyed by the Germans. The wooden "villa" where her family had a cramped apartment had been replaced by a retirement home for priests. Even the cemetery where her mother was buried when our mother was only six was an overgrown shambles of crooked, broken headstones.

In our father's hometown, *Borynya*, across the border in Ukraine, we learned firsthand that we come from poor hill people — Berger means "mountain person" — who subsisted on farming and lumber from Carpathian spruces. We spoke to an 86-year-old woman who remembered when the sprawling village had 300 Jews; she even vaguely recalled the Bergers. But we understood more firmly how painful recounting the past must have been for our father, who lost his parents and six sisters to the Nazis. He not only did not speak about those sisters: he couldn't even tell us how beautiful the Carpathian countryside was.

Our parents' hometowns had receded into a dim past. Nevertheless, we, like many others now making this particular kind of roots journey, were enriched by the trip because we discovered a new Poland. Jews, some of them impassioned American expatriates, have planted the seeds of a reviving community in Warsaw and *Krakow*, and an astonishing corps of Polish gentiles have made it their mission to rediscover a people that had been so entwined with their own. We met a dozen such trailblazers who enlightened us about Jewish remnants and helped us locate cemeteries and repurposed synagogues.

I had seldom thought about actually visiting Poland, but after my mother's death in 2009 my curiosity seemed

aroused and so did that of my sister, Dr. Evelyn Hartman (my wife's need for a family visit to Australia made the timing ideal).

We started our trip in Warsaw, most of which was leveled in the September 1939 *blitzkrieg* and in the retaliations for 1943 and 1944 uprisings. The Poles have recreated, brick by brick, the picturesque Old Town, where we had lunch with Maria Bukowska, a Polish Mary Poppins who cared with such tenderness for my Alzheimer's-ridden mother. At the



The author, right foreground, with his parents, Marcus and Rachel Berger, and his brother, Joshua, about 1949, when they lived in a displaced persons camp.

elegant *Literatka Cafe* I confirmed that what I thought was Jewish food — an earthy mushroom soup and meat-filled ears of dough that I call *kreplach* and Poles call *pierogi* — is actually Polish food.

My mother, Rachel Golant Berger, lived in Warsaw from age 14, when her father sent her there to help put food on the table, until she was 20, when the Germans invaded in September 1939. In a memoir she hand-wrote in old age, she described the pleasures of shopping for shoes on chic *Marszalkowska Street*, attending Yiddish plays at the 2,000-seat *Nowosci Theater*, catching American movies, and savoring the cerebral hubbub at clubs for writers, socialists and Zionists.

Marszalkowska Street has been rebuilt and is still a modish boulevard. But the clubs and theaters were destroyed.

When the bombing began, my mother's half-brother Simcha advised her to avoid basement shelters — they might collapse — and dodge with him through the city's parks. My sister and I visited the two parks she named, *Krasinski* and *Saxon Gardens*, both throwbacks to a state-ly Warsaw past. Lilacs were in bloom, ducks paddled in a pond, lovers kissed on benches. It was hard to imagine the human corpses and horse carcasses my mother saw.

We looked for the market at *Zelaznej Bramy* (the Iron Gate), where her brother stumbled across an abandoned sack of prunes that fed them during the monthlong bombing. The market has been shifted, but it was bustling with stalls of fresh strawberries, sausages and flowers, a far cry from wartime and Communist-era austerity.

At the shelling's tail end, my mother retreated to an aunt's home at 26 *Franciszczanska*, closer to the *Vistula River*, on her brother's theory that they would be nearer a source of water they could drink. My mother described the building's terrified tenants huddled in a courtyard.

My sister and I saw a pleasant street where all the prewar buildings had been replaced by ascetic apartment blocks. There was no Number 26. What was left of the addresses we searched for was a four-story plain gray building at 16 *Krasinaskiego* where my parents and I, their infant son, lived in 1946 after returning to Poland from their wartime refuge in the Soviet Union.

They stayed a few months, fleeing when news broke of the *Kielce* pogrom that left 42 Jews dead, and making their way to the Allied displaced persons camps. Like tens of thousands of other Jews, they gave up on Poland.

So my mother's Warsaw is no longer there, but we took time to enjoy contemporary Warsaw, which is a cosmopolitan city that can rival other European capitals in charm, intriguing shops and fine restaurants like *Dawne Smaki* on *Nowe Swiat*, where we ate *pierogi* while a woman played Chopin.

As important to us, it is a city that has made an effort to underscore its tragic Jewish past and rebuild. A New Yorker, Michael J. Schudrich, 60, is officially Poland's chief rabbi and has reignited Sabbath services at the *Nozyk Synagogue*, a surviving classic, with financing by the *Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture*.

Helise Lieberman, another New Yorker, started a Jewish school 20 years ago with financing from the *Ronald S. Lauder Foundation*. It has 240 students, half of them non-Jewish. A modest community center has been set up by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Ms. Lieberman, now director of *Taube's Warsaw office*, pointed out bricks inlaid in sidewalks demarcating the Warsaw ghetto's wall and a monument to the *Umschlagplatz* (German for collection point), the square from which 300,000 Jews were shipped by freight cars to *Treblinka*. With muffled sorrow, we read the Yiddish names on

an otherwise blank wall.

The new *Polin Museum*, too, with its inventively illuminating survey of the thousand-year history of Poland's Jews, seems a monument of atonement. As we entered, Jewish students from several countries stood outside singing "Hatikvah," Israel's national anthem.

On the ride southeast to *Otwock*, I could not help but recall that my mother walked 17 miles from Warsaw lugging the remainder of her prunes to make sure her father, Joshua Golant, a struggling Hebrew teacher, and the three small children still living at home, Esther, Chana and Shimele, were unharmed.

Jakub Lysiak, our resourceful guide, took us to where 17 *Lesna Street*, my mother's childhood home, stood. On this country lane hacked out of the pine woods, there are still wooden houses in a gingerbread style known as *Swidermajer* after *Otwock's Swider River*. But my mother's address no longer exists.

At the priests' residence we met the Rev. Jan Swierzewski, who informed us that an *Otwock* priest, the Rev. Ludwik Wolski, had been honored as "righteous" by *Yad Vashem* in Jerusalem for saving Jewish children by issuing baptismal certificates.

The wooden public schoolhouse for Jewish children that my mother attended until seventh grade — Christian children had a separate one — was demolished years ago. The *Cukiernia Lapaty* bakery that provided a memorable torte of chocolate marzipan for her school's graduates is now a commercial building.

Almost all evidence of the presence of Jews has vanished. They were herded into a ghetto, starved and brutally beaten, the men humiliated by having beards cut off. Most were sent to *Treblinka*, among them very likely (my mother never knew for certain) my grandfather and his family.

Two spots are still suffused with memory. Hidden deep in a wood is the tumbledown cemetery. We spent an hour looking for the gravestone of my grandmother before giving up. Another is a small but ambitious museum that contains artifacts from *Otwock's Jewish heyday*, found in houses where Jews had lived: a High Holy Days prayer book, a white Yom Kippur robe, a letter from a Zionist organization.

We asked the museum's director, Sebastian Rakowski, why he was interested in preserving Jewish traces, and he replied that he could not allow Jews to disappear from the town's collective memory. His own mother was born in 1944 "and she didn't know there were Jews in *Otwock*."

There was one other spot where for my sister and me ghosts walked: the venerable *Otwock* train station with its bold clock tower. After the war, my

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THE LAST NAZI HUNTER

(Continued from page 2)

assume they can get away with mass murder.

As the last remaining perpetrators die off, persuading an entire society to admit its ghastly role in the Holocaust is the last Nazi hunter's latest — and most difficult — battle.

IT'S COMPLICATED

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum estimates that 90 percent of Lithuania's Jews were murdered during the Holocaust, and some estimates go much higher.

as Vanagaite tells *Newsweek*; the former for their suffering under the Soviets and the latter for eventually breaking free of the USSR and aiding in its demise. With that mindset, it's hard for a nation to accept that its citizens could also have been perpetrators of genocide. Even those who participated in mass murder might be celebrated as national heroes for their anti-Soviet activities.

In his book *Operation Last Chance: One Man's Quest to Bring Nazi Criminals to Justice*, Zuroff recalled a 1991 dedication ceremony for a mon-

Racinkas, heatedly disputes that charge and says he "100 percent supported, supports and will support" Zuroff's primary goal of bringing Holocaust perpetrators to justice, though he calls Zuroff's aggressive methods "counterproductive."

Zuroff says Racinkas's proclamation of support is "pure fabrication. I do not remember a single statement or any effort by the commission to encourage or support the efforts of the Wiesenthal Center to help facilitate the prosecution of Lithuanian Nazi war criminals."

No country has an impeccable record when it comes to prosecuting perpetrators of the Holocaust, but some have made commendable efforts. The U.S., after years of doing nothing, denaturalized dozens of Nazi collaborators. Germany, birthplace of the Holocaust, is still prosecuting death camp guards and foresees continuing such work for another decade.

Almost immediately after Lithuania declared independence, Zuroff started pushing the country to prosecute Holocaust criminals, appearing on television and petitioning the government to pursue legal action. As Vanagaite put it in *Our People*, "[He] came to spoil the wedding." Despite his persistence, only three people have been tried for Holocaust crimes in independent Lithuania — and the

possibility of any more facing judgment seems remote. In 2001, Kazys Gimzauskas, a deputy in the *Saugumas* (the Lithuanian equivalent of the German Gestapo), became the first Nazi collaborator convicted in an independent former Soviet republic, but by then the court ruled him too ill to be incarcerated. In 2006, Algimantas Dailide, another member of the *Saugumas*, was convicted and sentenced to five years. However, a court in Vilnius ruled that he would not be imprisoned "because he is very old and does not pose danger to society."

Zuroff helped scare the third, Aleksandras Lileikis, a *Saugumas* commander, back to Lithuania from Norwood, Massachusetts, where he had been living for many years, working at a Lithuanian encyclopedia publishing company. Lileikis was stripped of his U.S. citizenship in 1996 after the U.S. Department of Justice charged that he had "concealed his involvement in the mass murder and other persecution of Jews and others" when applying for immigration. Lileikis was indicted by a Lithuanian court but died in September 2000 before his trial was

over.

The Nazi hunter's pursuit of Lileikis didn't win him any Lithuanian friends. "That old person was already half-dead," says Vanagaite, who lived next door to Lileikis after he'd returned to Vilnius and remembers seeing him in his wheelchair. "I was upset like everybody else. I said, 'If he did something wrong, then he soon will be dead and go to hell.'" She remembers seeing Zuroff on TV, talking angrily about Lithuania, and recalls wondering what "this foreign, strong, big Jew" wanted from her country's old people.

Nearly two decades later, she came to understand what Zuroff wanted and why it was so important that he get it. And then she became the Nazi hunter's unlikely, and arguably most significant, ally in Lithuania.

FRENEMIES AND NEIGHBORS

"As they say, the birds shouldn't shit in their own nest."

Vanagaite, smiling behind a pair of cat's-eye glasses, sips coffee as she calmly explains why some Lithuanians hate her for talking about their grisly crimes against Jews, as well as those likely committed by her own family. "So I am the bird — because my name is Vanagaite; vanagas is a hawk — who has been shitting in our own nest," she continues. Then she adds sardonically, "But those people who were killers? They were not shitting. I am shitting [by writing] about it."



As Nazi Germany annexes Lithuania on the Baltic Coast, *Reichsfuehrer* Adolf Hitler is accompanied by *Wehrmacht* military leaders and aides as he marches down the streets of Memel, or *Klaipeda*, to view the last addition to his Third Reich, March 23, 1939.

Regardless of which estimate you use, the Jewish death rate there was one of the highest in all of Europe. And there's a sickening twist to this already-gruesome tale: in countries like France and the Netherlands, Nazi collaboration typically meant identifying, gathering and preparing Jews to be deported to concentration camps, but collaborators in Lithuania also did much of the killing — usually by shooting their neighbors and watching their bodies collapse, one on top of another, into pits dug in the forest.

Lithuania's crimes against its own people during World War II seem irrefutable, but the country's collective memory has been muddled by several factors. For one, there is its long history of foreign occupation, particularly by the Soviets, who took over twice — first in 1940, then again in 1944, when the Red Army pushed the occupying Nazis westward. Lithuania did not declare independence from the Soviet Union until March 1990, after nearly half a century of Communist rule. Another is that, in line with much of the right-wing thinking all over Europe between the world wars, many Lithuanians associated Jews with Bolshevism — a strain of anti-Semitism stoked by Nazi propaganda. Decades under the Soviets also led many Lithuanians to see themselves as "victims slash heroes,"

ument in *Paneriai* — a suburb of Vilnius where roughly 70,000 Jews were killed. Gediminas Vagnorius, then the prime minister of Lithuania, claimed the Holocaust lasted only three months and reduced the scope of Lithuanian participation, saying "a group of criminals cannot outweigh the good name of a nation, nor can it rob it of its conscience and decency." Perhaps those comments can be shrugged off as the growing pains of a newborn nation, but even today the Museum of Genocide Victims in Vilnius, Lithuania's capital, focuses almost exclusively on Soviet crimes and resistance; its first and only exhibit on the Holocaust wasn't added until 2011.

Zuroff and Dovid Katz, a longtime ally of the Nazi hunter and founder of the web journal *Defending History*, claim that some in Lithuania are pushing what they call the "double genocide" theory, which equates Soviet crimes against Lithuanians to Nazi crimes against Jews. They accuse a state-appointed research group—the prodigiously named International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania — of promoting the double genocide theory, even by putting both Soviet and Nazi crimes in its title. The commission's executive director, Ronaldas



When Lithuania ceded *Klaipeda* to Germany, thousands of Jews like this family fled. Here, German crowds gather to jeer as the refugees pack up a cart.

Vanagaite, who was born in Lithuania, graduated from the Moscow Theater Institute and has worked as a theater, TV and event producer, as well as a journalist and political PR consultant. She published one book that dealt with elder care and another, a best-seller in her country, about women thriving as they age. Not long before she met Zuroff Vanagaite organized a program called

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THE HOLOCAUST TOLD FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A TEDDY BEAR

A teddy bear accompanied Fred Lessing in his wanderings from one hiding place to another during World War II and became a symbol after being loaned to Yad Vashem. Now the subject of a children's book, Lessing reveals how he was persuaded to let someone else tell his story.

BY DAFNA ARAD, HAARETZ

Fred's teddy bear is not the most impressive in the world; it's not even the most impressive in Jerusalem. Its fur is tattered, its gray



An illustration from Iris Argaman's book *Bear and Fred*, with "heartrending" illustrations by Avi Ofer.

head sporting eyes stitched together with red thread. It's skinny, faded, dirty and nameless — and yet it became Yad Vashem's "Mona Lisa."

This little toy has symbolized the memory of the Holocaust for millions of children who survived, commemorating the million and a half who perished.

The teddy bear belongs to a Dutch survivor, Alfred ("Fred") Lessing, who moved between hiding places during World War II. He later moved to the United States, with his teddy bear accompanying him wherever he went. In 1996, the teddy bear reached Israel alone and was showcased at Yad Vashem as part of an exhibition called "No Child's Play," which was on display for 17 years.

Curator Yehudit Inbar once said that when the teddy bear arrived in Israel and was taken out of a gigantic box, it looked like a fetus. She burst into tears upon seeing it, and when she told the dispatcher about the teddy bear's history, he started crying too. Since it was put on display, many tearful world leaders have been photographed next to it.

The story of this emotional journey opens *Hadoobi shel Fred* ("Fred's Teddy Bear," but *Bear and Fred* in English), a new book by Iris Argaman. This children's story about the Holocaust is told from the perspective of a teddy bear. It was published earlier this year by Hakibbutz Hameuchad, with heartrending illustrations by Avi Ofer.

Last June, it won Yad Vashem's

prize for a children's or young adult's book on the topic of the Holocaust. This prize was established by the late Sandra Brand in memory of her only child, Bruno, who perished in the Holocaust. The book is now being translated into Italian.

Argaman has aimed the book at children aged six to eight. She describes it as "a story of a friendship between a boy and his brave teddy bear, in the shadow of a terrible war." She hopes it won't be read only before Holocaust Remembrance Day. She enjoyed a long correspondence

with Lessing and, after he agreed to let her write the book, decided to visit the teddy bear in Jerusalem.

She describes that meeting in the book's epilogue: "On a rainy winter day, I went to Jerusalem, to Yad Vashem, in order to meet the bear. Dark clouds filled the sky and heavy rain fell. I reached the hall in which it was on display, wet and shivering with cold. The meeting was very moving for me. I stood in front of the little teddy bear, who stood alone in a glass case, and I couldn't move. I whispered words only he could hear. I gave him regards from Fred, and told him I'd write his story so other children would get to know him and realize how charming and special he was."

HOLOCAUST LECTURER

The teddy bear probably has a lot to say on the subject. But since it's an inert object, Argaman connected me instead to the story's other hero, Fred Lessing. He's an 80-year-old Holocaust survivor, married with four children and seven grandchildren, who lives in Birmingham, Michigan. In a Skype interview, he repeated the story of himself and his beloved teddy bear, in the manner he uses when talking to children in lectures about the Holocaust that he's been giving for decades.

"In 1940 the Germans invaded Holland. I was four years old and don't remember much about those days. My mother, father and three brothers lived in *Delft*, a beautiful city

near The Hague. When I was six, on October 23, 1942, our family was on a list of Jews who were to be transported for 'resettlement in the East,' which in retrospect meant death camps. My parents decided to go into hiding instead of getting on that train.

"It was an ordinary day, I played with my brother upstairs, a technician was repairing a stove in the kitchen and our mother called us. From her voice we could tell it was something important, frightening and serious. She hugged us and said, 'You are Jewish children but if anyone hears that they'll kill you.' This was the first time in my life that I heard I was Jewish. She asked us to pretend we were just going out, not taking anything with us, and told the technician we'd be back soon. We never returned home.

"I didn't listen to her and took my little teddy bear with me. It was the only thing I took and the only thing I had for the next three years besides the clothes on my back. The teddy bear survived the war years with me."

In the book the teddy bear's head flaps around until it's better attached. What really happened?

"He was already missing a head when I first took him into hiding after a dog pounced on him and tore it off. I was with many Christian families while I hid, going from one to the other. My parents changed my name and dyed my hair, they obtained forged documents for us, and we pretended to be Christians. For the first two and a half years I was alone with numerous families. That was a very difficult period for me. While I was hid-



Fred Lessing's teddy bear on display in the "Children in the Holocaust: Stars Without a Heaven" exhibition at Yad Vashem.

ing with a family in Amsterdam I suffered from diphtheria; my mother came to visit and sewed a new head for the teddy bear."

Lessing, who retired last year, was a psychotherapist and lecturer in philosophy, "but much of my identity is one of a Jewish Holocaust survivor. I'm a total atheist and grew up in a secular family with no signs of Jewish culture around me, but I was Jewish since Hitler said I was. For 40 years after the war, no one talked about the

Holocaust, and I grew up as a regular American kid. Toward the end of the 1980s, children who had been in hiding started coming out and telling their stories, giving interviews and meeting each other.

"The first such meeting took place in 1991, in New York. My wife and I were supposed to board a plane for New York. We were on our way out of the house when she asked if I'd taken everything. I then said — wait a minute! I felt like I had to take my little teddy bear with me. It was like in 1942, when I grabbed it just before leaving the house. It drew a lot of attention by other former children at the meeting. Even though none of us were still children, they all identified with my teddy bear. Since then it has joined me everywhere I've been invited to speak.

"Although many years have passed and I'm an adult who knows exactly what happened in the Holocaust, when I tell my story I have to remember that I was only a child then, which is why I took my teddy bear with me. I agreed to lend it to Yad Vashem after I was told the exhibition would last only a few months. I didn't want to part from him, but Bear and I decided he should go. When he reached Israel, a new chapter began in his life. Since the exhibition continued for many years, my brother Ed bought me a stand-in bear."

HARSH REALITIES

Lessing stops and goes to a baby's high chair, from which he pulls out a fat and woolly teddy bear,

the stand-in one. I exit the room and return with a sad Japanese teddy bear I had bought my daughter after reading the book. I couldn't help it.

Is it important for you that every child has a teddy bear to help it contend with harsh realities?

"It doesn't have to be a teddy bear. My daughter had a blanket she called Mynie, which served the same purpose my teddy bear did for me. An object from one's past is very impor-

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LEADERSHIP MISSION VISITS POLAND AND ISRAEL



American Society for Yad Vashem Chairman Leonard Wilf (left) and Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate Avner Shalev (right) present Israeli President Reuven Rivlin with a replica of the *Wolfsberg Machzor* at a ceremony at the President's Residence.



Yad Vashem curators highlight the document archival process. (From left to right) Shira Stein, Jessica Glickman-Mauk, Rags Devloor, Rev. Mark Jenkins.



Mark Moskowitz (right) and his nephew Sam Gordon pause to reflect on Sam's first visit to Auschwitz.



American Society for Yad Vashem Chairman Leonard Wilf and his family tour the Galicia Jewish Museum in *Krakow*. (From l. to r.) Harrison Wilf, Jenna Wilf, Leonard Wilf, Halle Wilf, Beth Wilf.



Touring the *Wroclaw* city square on the first day of the Leadership Mission. (Front row) Jessica Glickman-Mauk, Sam Gordon, Mark Moskowitz. (Back row) Yvonne Celia, Dan Celia, Robert Kucinski, Elena Kucinski, Halle Wilf, Jenna Wilf, Beth Wilf, Leonard Wilf, Rags Devloor, Joseph Paradis, Rev. Malcolm Hedding.



Young Leadership Associates on the Leadership Mission observe the Hall of Names on a private tour of the Holocaust History Museum at Yad Vashem.

LEADERSHIP MISSION VISITS POLAND AND ISRAEL

(Continued from page 1)

never forget what happened, and I hope they experience this one day.”

At the end of the day, the delegation gathered for a service to mark the visit. Dr. Piotr M. A. Cywiński, director of the Auschwitz Museum, offered welcoming remarks before the group participated in a beautiful candle-lighting ceremony. American Society board member Adina Burian, visiting Poland for the first time with her eldest son Jonah, 16, read a touching letter from her father-in-law Andrew Burian, who survived Auschwitz. The group joined together for a final spirited singing of “Hatikvah,” passing a Torah scroll around and proudly waving the Israeli flag. In closing the ceremony, American Society Executive Director Ron Meier addressed the

Leadership Associates, told stories of his grandfather’s childhood in front of pictures of a young Mosberg on display in the exhibit.

Elie Wiesel, z”l, once said, “Yad Vashem is the most important center of Jewish memory in the world simply because it is in Jerusalem.” As the group mourned the passing of Yad Vashem’s honorary chairman just one week earlier, American Society Chairman Leonard Wilf invoked the international icon’s words as the guiding inspiration for the whirlwind second leg of the Leadership Mission in Israel.

Just hours after group’s arrival in Jerusalem, Israel’s President Reuven Rivlin welcomed the Leadership Mission to Israel in a private audience at the President’s Residence.

halls of the Museum.

Yad Vashem has earned its moniker as World Holocaust Remembrance Center with its renowned departments for education, Holocaust research and victim databases, among others. The group was introduced to each division’s director as they presented their work and their goals. Treated to candid conversations with internationally respected leaders in their fields like Dr. Eyal Kaminka, the Lily Safra Chair of Holocaust Studies, or Dr. Haim Gertner, the Director of Yad Vashem Archives, allowed the group to better grasp the extent of Yad Vashem’s global influence.

Only a fraction of Yad Vashem’s vast collections of documents, artifacts and art are displayed for the general public at any one time. A

justice; Chairman of the Committee for the Designation of the Righteous Jacob Turkel; and Dutch diplomats in the Yad Vashem synagogue for the presentation. The group watched on as the descendants of the Kamphiuses and the woman they sheltered from danger shared an emotional embrace. It was one of several ceremonies throughout the Leadership Mission that brought many to tears.

The magnitude of the trip brought the delegation together. Sharing hugs, tears and intimate memories with otherwise perfect strangers quickly created a close-knit delegation. The group relished being in the Jewish homeland, an opportunity so many Holocaust victims yearned for but were murdered before they had the chance. Throughout the three days in Israel, prominent Israeli performers joined the Leadership Mission to celebrate their spiritual journey. The voices of Rami Kleinstein, Israeli Defense Force Cantor Shai Abramson, Dudu Fisher and others brought the group together several times in spontaneous dance.

The final evening of the Leadership Mission provided an opportunity to reflect and look forward. Over dinner, Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, the South African Rev. Malcom Hedding and American Society Chief Development Officer Eillene Leistner represented three contingents as they each lauded the delegation for its commitment to Yad Vashem’s mission of continued remembrance in the 21st century. In the Valley of the Communities, the largest project the American Society has taken on at Yad Vashem, Israeli Minister of Education and Minister of the Diaspora Naftali Bennett praised the delegation’s younger generation in a theme that continued throughout the evening. Mark Moskowitz offered his remarks as the only member to have been on Yad Vashem’s 60th Anniversary Mission in 2014. As the son of survivors, he recalled his family spending Holocaust Remembrance Day every year at Yad Vashem, a tradition he proudly still observes.

Shalev concluded the evening addressing the different contingents that had come together on this emotional journey, from different nationalities, religions and backgrounds. “Yad Vashem is committed to a future in which Holocaust remembrance remains relevant and the continuation of meaningful commemoration of the Holocaust is guaranteed for generations to come — and you are that future.”

As the evening came to a close, the 55 participants danced together, singing “Am Yisroel Chai” and waving the Israeli flag. They left the 2016 Leadership Mission as witnesses to the Polish Jewish experience destroyed by the Nazis, and as committed global ambassadors for Yad Vashem and its unique impact on Holocaust remembrance.



Leadership Mission participants at Auschwitz.

crowd: “As we stand here with the Israeli flag, preparing to bring in the Shabbat, it is a sign that we have overcome.”

A special guest was waiting for the group as they arrived in *Kraków* for Shabbat: Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, the chairman of the Council of Yad Vashem and former chief rabbi of Israel. At Kabbalat Shabbat in the ornately restored Tempel Synagogue and throughout Shabbat, the great rabbi and famed orator spoke about suffering through the Holocaust as one of the youngest children to survive, and about his divinely inspired life in Israel since.

The American Society has a notable presence in *Kraków*. American Society Chairman Leonard Wilf’s family has generously contributed to the Jewish community of *Kraków*, including the Remah Synagogue, one of two in *Krakow* with a regular minyan. American Society Founder and Yad Vashem Benefactor Edward Mosberg grew up in *Kraków* and has generously supported the restoration of several synagogues in *Kazimierz*, *Krakow*’s historic Jewish quarter. At the historic Pharmacy Under the Eagle, in the *Kraków* ghetto, Mosberg’s grandson Barry Levine, co-chair of the Young

President Rivlin commended the delegation’s commitment to Yad Vashem stating, “You not only guard a tragic and heavy burden of memory, but you are also architects of the future of the Jewish people.” American Society Chairman Leonard Wilf echoed President Rivlin and noted that his wife Beth and their three children were able to join him on the Leadership Mission. Addressing the delegation, Wilf said, “Together, we carry forward the lessons of the Holocaust into the 21st century as leaders within the Yad Vashem family. Our resolve to never forget is bolstered by our shared experience on this Leadership Mission.”

In Poland, the Leadership Mission focused on the atrocities of the Holocaust, and the rich Jewish culture and history that were interrupted and destroyed. In Jerusalem, the Leadership Mission was treated to an intensive exploration of Yad Vashem’s diverse roles in Holocaust remembrance. Many in the group, like Gail and Colin Halpern, are longtime supporters and had visited the Holocaust History Museum previously. This visit to the Mount of Remembrance was concentrated on the Yad Vashem experience outside of the hallowed

guided tour of the temporary exhibition “Children in the Holocaust: Stars without a Heaven” was supplemented with a trip below ground to Yad Vashem’s climate-controlled Artifact Collection. Over the years, more than 30,000 items have been donated to Yad Vashem by Holocaust survivors or their families. Director Michael Tal and his team, armed in white gloves, highlighted the collection, showcasing complete prisoner uniforms, stuffed teddy bears with secret compartments and family photo albums that were miraculously kept intact. Dr. Gertner led the group on a tour of the archives. For Michael Shmueli of New York, viewing the original blueprints for Auschwitz had particular resonance. “We just came from seeing the crumbling crematoriums of Auschwitz, and these blueprints show the world what we saw and what the Nazis planned to do. I am so glad Yad Vashem has these documents protected.”

The delegation was privileged to witness a moving Righteous Among the Nations ceremony honoring Jan Willem Kamphuis and his daughter Klazien Kamphuis-Vink of Holland. The delegation joined Avner Shalev, retired Israeli Supreme Court

THE LAST NAZI HUNTER

(Continued from page 7)

"Being a Jew," which explored Jewish culture and traditions and culminated with 700 schoolchildren visiting the Lithuanian mass murder site in *Paneriai*. The project closed with a conference on Holocaust education. "I was told by all Lithuanian participants that by no means should I invite Dr. Zuroff, because they would refuse to come and sit in the same audience," she says. "So then I got curious" and invited him anyway.



Zuroff helped drive Aleksandras Lileikis from the U.S. back to Lithuania to face trial. Lileikis was stripped of his U.S. citizenship in 1996.

Zuroff couldn't make it that day, but the two met before the conference to film a video address. For decades, the Nazi hunter had been treated with hostility in Lithuania, but suddenly here was a woman, small in stature but with an outsized personality, willing to admit to her family's likely involvement in the Holocaust. (A case file in the Lithuanian Special Archives revealed that Vanagaite's grandfather, who opposed the Soviet occupation of Lithuania in 1941 and was deported to the gulag upon its return in 1944, had been part of a commission that compiled lists of Jews during the Nazi occupation. Her aunt's husband, who used to send her letters, jeans and records from America, had been the chief of police in *Panevezys* and, Vanagaite therefore assumes, helped organize the killing of Jews. A "desk murderer," she calls him in the book she wrote with Zuroff.)

But it wasn't until after the conference, when Vanagaite attended a smaller seminar for history teachers who might be selected to participate in training at Yad Vashem, that she gave more thought to Zuroff's version of the story. She couldn't stop questioning what she had learned from Soviet-era textbooks — the same narratives she says her children were taught years later that minimized or ignored Lithuanians' role in the mass murder of Jews. She wanted to know more, and she was willing to work with the "boogeyman" to reach other Lithuanians.

A few months later and after several more conversations, Vanagaite and Zuroff set out in a car she dubbed "the

Shoah-mobile" to do the research that would become *Our People*. They visited dozens of mass murder sites, local museums and towns related to their family histories. They asked locals to point them to old monuments and killing sites that were often untended and difficult to find — some still marked with Soviet-era plaques, a few unmarked — and interviewed locals old enough to remember the war or at least share stories they'd heard from older relatives and neighbors. They snacked on granola bars and lox sandwiches, always on the lookout for kosher food — no easy task in a country now home to only about 5,000 Jews.

"I know it will be very controversial," said Vanagaite of the book, speaking before *Our People* was published. "I have lost already a couple of friends because... because they think I'm betraying my people, betraying my country, and [they say] maybe Jews are paying for this [project]." Some members of her family are angry that she wrote about relatives and have refused to read the book.

It may feel like "shock therapy," she says, "but I think it's a healing book."

Their journey clearly shocked even Zuroff, who says that as a Nazi hunter, "you have to make sure it's never personal, because then you'll get consumed by the job, you'll get destroyed." For years, he was mostly successful in this regard, but the road trips with his Lithuanian co-author were "emotionally horrifying," he says. "I felt for the first time...that the *Shoah* had taken over my life."

"When the pair arrived at *Linkmenys*, the *shtetl* where Zuroff's grandfather and great-uncle once lived, he stood among patches of raspberries in the clearing where Jews had been ordered to lie face down on the ground before Lithuanians showered them with bullets. As he did at each site they visited, he stopped to say *kaddish*, a prayer of mourning. "I do not know what to do, so I move away a bit and wait for him," Vanagaite wrote of that moment. "And then I hear a strange sound. Very strange indeed. I hear the Nazi hunter crying."

TRIAL BY HISTORY BOOK

Zuroff and Vanagaite launched their book the day before International Holocaust Remembrance Day in January, gathering the press inside Submarine, a small sandwich shop in the center of Vilnius. According to Vanagaite's research, the building was for a period the headquarters of the Lithuanian "special unit" that murdered Jews.

Among those present at the press event was Tomas Sernas, a priest

and former customs officer who was the sole survivor of a 1991 Soviet attack on the *Medininkai* border post that killed seven during the struggle for Lithuanian independence. For that, he is considered a national hero, so his support helped legitimize *Our People*.

For a couple of months after the book's release, "it was the main discussion at the dinner table," says Vanagaite, "[but] society is very split." Many young people embraced *Our People*, while some older Lithuanians were deeply offended. Others old enough to have witnessed the atrocities were strangely comforted by the book's revelations. "They realize that what happened in the village, what happened in the neighborhood, was not an exception," says Vanagaite. "It didn't happen just next door. It happened everywhere."

"Few books have ever been off to such an outrageous start in Lithuania," one blogger wrote in the days after its release. For five weeks, it was the top seller at a major Lithuanian bookstore chain and it was in the top 10 as this story went to print. Zuroff and Vanagaite have signed with a Polish publisher and are working to secure deals to publish in English and other languages.

The book bolstered Zuroff's vile reputation in Lithuania, and in some quarters, it made Vanagaite the country's most despised daughter. She was giving an interview to a TV crew at her home one day when they sud-

as a spokesman for the Lithuanian State Security Department insinuated, Vanagaite says. Vanagaite was particularly incensed by critics who faulted the book for not including more positive elements of Lithuania's actions during the war, like the Lithuanians who saved Jews. "I was so pissed off that I said, 'OK, you know, this book is about the Holocaust, about the murder of the Jews. I'm very sorry that it's so negative. I'm sorry the Jews didn't smile when we were killing them.'"

BACK TO WORK

"It was clear from the beginning that absolute justice and restitution could never possibly be achieved," Zuroff wrote of Lithuania in his introduction to *Our People*. "In retrospect, I do not regret the path I chose, but I frankly underestimated the difficulties I would face."

For Zuroff, the hunt for Nazis and the fight against Holocaust distortion are seemingly endless, but both are part of a mission he can't imagine abandoning. "I comfort myself that at least I did not betray the victims and violate their memory," Zuroff wrote. "If the price for that is the enmity of local public opinion, so be it."

As he continues to field calls, pursue leads and push governments to prosecute, Zuroff must also grapple with the ways in which his job is inevitably changing. He feels there is still justice left to be served — for his great-uncle, for the tens of thousands



Lithuanian-born Holocaust survivor Yitzhak Kagan visits the Chamber of the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem.

denly demanded to see her birth certificate to prove she was, in fact, Lithuanian (and not Jewish), she says. She's also been told to "go back to Israel," and she had to explain to a concerned taxi driver that she doesn't carry a weapon to protect herself, despite the many vitriolic comments about her and the book on the Internet.

Some suggested the book was funded by Jews or the Kremlin. Others claimed it discredits the Lithuanian partisan movement and serves Putin's propaganda machine

of Jewish victims in Lithuania, for the millions of Jews throughout Europe who perished during the Holocaust and for those who have become victims of subsequent genocides.

With a burden so great, what would success look like? The world's last Nazi hunter feels that he has to keep pushing for prosecutions and acknowledgment, hoping that every small victory — like finding Vanagaite and publishing a best-seller in a country that had recoiled at his efforts for years — will bring the world a little closer to "never again."

IN POLAND, SEARCHING FOR JEWISH HERITAGE

(Continued from page 6)

mother returned to search for relatives. At that station, someone told her the Jews had all been slaughtered. She never left the platform, and took the next train back to Warsaw.

Between two visits to *Otwock*, we traveled to *Treblinka*. It is a haunted place because nothing of the death camp remains, though a tiny museum has a model camp that explains how speedily all of its 900,000 victims were dispatched in gas chambers. What has taken the place of the actual camp resembles a kind of Stonehenge, a field of stone markers arrayed almost higgledy-piggledy like a ravaged cemetery, each marker bearing the name of a locality whose Jews were deported there. We found the stone for *Otwock*, laid pebbles atop and recited *kaddish*, the Jewish prayer for the dead.

To see what a concentration camp was actually like required visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau, which we did

while in *Krakow*. We do not know of any relatives who ended up there. But we viewed with anguish the tiered bunks where 1,000 slaves per barrack — there were 350 barracks — were jammed in nightly; the heaps of shoes, glasses, even prosthetic legs that the Germans collected in their demonic meticulousness; and the grim gas chambers.

A few days later, we made the trek to the hometown of my father, Marcus Berger, in what was then Poland but is now Ukraine. And trek it was. While Poland is a 21st-century nation, the slice of Ukraine we saw is mired in the 19th, with roads so rutted it took three hours to drive some 30 miles. Cows and horses drew carts of supplies; roosters and stray dogs wandered about; ramshackle bungalows with corrugated roofs and outhouses are common; and gardens are pruned by women with long scythes.

In *Borynya*, one scythe-bearer took us to her 86-year-old toothless grandmother, Jaroslawa Kachaj. She was 12 when the Germans occupied *Borynya*, and remembered Jewish neighbors: the Stuhlbauchs, Liebermans and, yes, Bergers, who lived in three houses on the other side of town.

From her and others we gathered a collection of disjointed facts. One Berger, perhaps my father's uncle, owned a tavern. Another was a talent-



The remains of hundreds of barracks where Jewish prisoners lived. Only the chimneys remained after the Nazis destroyed the barracks at the war's end.

ed seamstress. The mayor was named Friedman. The old woman's father was hired to sell merchandise on the Sabbath. A kindly Jewish physician, Dr. Ungst, tended to all.

Alex Denisenko, our Ukrainian-speaking guide, later sent me a 1929 Polish business directory, and sure enough it had names Mrs. Kachaj mentioned. An M. Berger owned a lumber business, and "spirits" were sold by an N. Berger. Other townspeople pointed out a modest evangelical church and told us that it had been the site of the synagogue, where no doubt my father was bar mitzvahed.

When the Nazis arrived in 1941, *Borynya's* Jews were subjected to beatings and indignities, with Ukrainian policemen assisting. A girl named Chaika, the grandmother said, came to her house pleading for bread. "My mother said, 'Please eat quickly

and leave or they will kill all of us.' " Then in 1942 there were mass executions. In one, two dozen Jews were forced to sing while marching in procession and then were shot in front of open graves.

"There was a large woman named Stuhlbauch," the grandmother told us. "They took her away in a convoy. She saw me and started crying. I saw another woman, they took away her clothes. She had only a nightgown. She was killed by a well."

Tetiana Wolczanska, a tempestuous retired schoolteacher who said she lived in a house once owned by a Jew, led us on a half-mile climb up a steep wooded hillside, requiring several crossings of a narrow stream, to a sloping meadow topped by an electric pole.

"In that field the Jews were killed," she said.

My sister and I looked up, struck by the field's quiet innocence. Here, too, we said *kaddish*. Painful as it was, the

moment again allowed my sister and me to share our legacy and brought us closer together; in our version of a roots trip, the bond we achieved along the way, as my sister said, was "one root we actually found."

On our way back, we stopped in *Turka*, *Borynya's* biggest neighbor, and were heartsick to see that one synagogue was being used as a sawmill, another as a car repair shop. Yet in Poland such buildings seem to be cared for with more dignity. In *Lesko*, Poland, a well-maintained 17th-century synagogue draws tourists even if it is used as an art gallery that sells Christian icons. So does an even more elegant 18th-century synagogue in *Lancut*, where biblical passages decorate the walls surrounding a Baroque four-pillared *bimah*, or platform from which prayers were led. A synagogue guide, Miroslaw Kedzior, taught himself

Hebrew to better understand Judaism.

"The Hasidim tell me I have a Yiddish soul," he said.

As we made several such stops on our return to *Krakow*, we came to grips with what we had known abstractly: that Poland had been almost depleted of Jews both by the Nazis, the postwar pogroms and the Communist persecutions. There are 20,000 Jews left in a country that once had 3.3 million, according to Ms. Lieberman.

Yet shards of Judaism are being restored. Part of the effort is no doubt aimed at tourism. In medieval *Krakow*, largely intact, there are a half-dozen ancient synagogues, some that hold services, a well-preserved cemetery and a street with a dozen cafes that serve gefilte fish and matzo ball soup while gentile klezmer bands play Yiddish chestnuts. While charming, it was hard not to think of it as a Jewish Disneyland without actual Jews.

Yet cynicism aside, such efforts remind people that Jews were entwined in Poland's soul. As in Warsaw, a New Yorker, Jonathan Ornstein, has led a revival, setting up a Jewish community center that boasts 550 members, some of them people who have discovered that they had Jewish grandparents who harbored them with Christian families and then perished.

"Poland has had periods of estrangement and persecution," Mr. Ornstein told us. "Let's take advantage of a good period."

While we were there, the center held a triumphant "Ride of the Living" along the 55 miles from Auschwitz to *Krakow*, with 70 cyclists taking part to underscore the hopeful future of Poland's Jews. One was Marcel Zielinski, an 80-year-old Montreal man. He last walked the route as a 10-year-old liberated from Auschwitz and hunting for his parents.

When he arrived on his bicycle in his Day-Glo green outfit alongside his son and two granddaughters, his face a jubilant grin, it was hard not to be overcome.

IN A NAZI LEGACY, A SON'S LOVE IS TESTED BY MASS MURDER

BY URIEL HEILMAN, JTA

It's hard not to get emotional watching the superbly rendered *A Nazi Legacy: What Our Fathers Did*.

But unlike with many Holocaust documentaries, the overwhelming feelings aren't sadness and loss, though there are those, too. They are exasperation and anger.

In the film, British Jewish lawyer Philippe Sands tells the story of two men, both the children of high-ranking Nazi figures.

Niklas Frank is the son of Hans Frank, Hitler's lawyer and the governor general of Nazi-occupied Poland. The elder Frank was hanged in 1946 after being found guilty at *Nuremberg*

for complicity in the murder of Poland's three million Jews.

Horst von Wachter is the son of Otto von Wachter, an Austrian who served as the Nazi governor of Galicia (now *Lviv*, Ukraine) and died in hiding in 1949 while under the Vatican's protection.

Frank, an author and journalist, is well known in Germany thanks to his controversial 1987 best-seller, *The Father: A Settling of Accounts*, which detailed his revulsion toward the man who became known as the Butcher of Poland. In his wallet, Frank keeps a photograph of his father's corpse taken right after he was hanged.

By contrast, Wachter holds his own father in high esteem, refusing to acknowledge his role in the mass

murder of the Jews, even as Sands presents him with increasingly clear and disturbing evidence of it.

Sands, whose grandfather is from the area that fell under Wachter and Frank's command, and who lost most of his family during the Holocaust, narrates the story of what happens when a son's love for his father collides with the immutable facts of history.

Both Frank and Wachter — who knew each other as children and have remained friends — were born in 1939. Wachter describes an idyllic childhood shattered by Germany's defeat in 1945. In his home, he shows Sands a family photo album that intersperses shots of family outings with photos of his father

and his Nazi associates. There's his father with Heinrich Himmler, the SS military commander. Under another photo, the scrawl reads "A.H." — for Adolf Hitler.

"I was transported back 70 years to the heart of an appalling regime, but Horst was looking at these images with a different eye from mine," Sands narrates. "I see a man who's probably been responsible for the killing of tens of thousands of Jews and Poles. Horst looks at the same photographs and he sees a beloved father playing with the children, and he's thinking that was family life."

By contrast, Frank's memories of his parents are mostly bitter. The couple had a loveless marriage, and his

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THE HOLOCAUST TOLD FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A TEDDY BEAR

(Continued from page 8)

tant for children. This is the first object one chooses to connect with. My teddy bear couldn't talk, but it had a truth and meaning that nothing else had. When I hid among different families, my teddy bear reminded me of



An illustration from Iris Argaman's book *Bear and Fred*.

my mother and family, and it was important as a symbol. It also constituted a way of expressing love and consolation. After the war it reminded me of my childhood during the Holocaust, making it a very important object. Many parents throw out such

objects since they are dirty, but I suggest that they shouldn't. These are very precious items for children."

Iris Argaman told me that it wasn't easy for you to agree to her writing this book.

"I deliberated for a long time over that issue. I was warned by other survivors not to let anyone else write my story or illustrate it, since you never know what they might do to it. Ultimately I wrote Iris a long letter, telling her I couldn't be part of it since I was the only one who could accurately relate my story — it's important to me that testimonies aren't exaggerated or stray from things as they happened. After sending the e-mail I went to bed.

"The next morning I changed my mind. I wrote her again, saying that on the previous day I'd written as a survivor but that day I was writing as a teacher. I believe in education and in the importance of children learning about the Holocaust, and that if I'm not writing a children's book about the Holocaust I'll support her. Iris was glad, and her illustrator did an amazing job. When I saw the cover I realized that he understood that teddy bear, with an illustration showing me looking after it and it looking after me. It's so deep. The book is wonderful and moving. My son cried when he read it."

Is it important to explain the Holocaust to children?

"That's a question that comes up all the time. Eighty percent of Holland's Jewish population didn't survive. All my classmates were murdered. A million and a half Jewish children per-

he's sad to be alone, that the world is scary and that he's lucky that I'm his best friend. Fred whispered those things, and while talking to me he stroked his face with my paw.



Fred Lessing visiting Bear during the "No Child's Play" exhibition at Yad Vashem in 1997.

ished. Obviously you don't show small children history books. The prevailing wisdom here is that you don't expose children under 13 to it. In conversations I have with children I always try to avoid the scary aspects of the Holocaust and tell my story in a very personal way, adapted to the audience."

In one of the book's pages Iris writes in the teddy bear's name: "Every night Fred would whisper that he misses his father, mother and brothers, that

Sometimes Fred shed small and warm tears and I wiped them away."

Who is the target audience for such a sad book?

"Iris's book is suitable for any age because of the teddy bear. It doesn't mention the word Holocaust. At the end of the book the war is over and only then do you find out there was one. I'm surprised by your calling it sad: it has a happy ending. It's one of the happy stories about an entire family that survived the Holocaust."

UKRAINIAN HOLOCAUST PERPETRATORS ARE BEING HONORED IN PLACE OF THEIR VICTIMS

(Continued from page 3)

pogrom by the *Ubort* river. Makarchuk interrupted as we were ending the interview, "I want to add something else ... down by the river, they forced the Jews to eat grass like sheep. ... They were beaten with rods and made to go into the water, then drink the water. This was done by the *banderovtsy* [the *Sich*]. I saw this with my own eyes. I saw this with my own eyes." His memories matched details I had found in the testimonies written more than 60 years earlier about the July pogrom.

The memory of Bulba-Borovets and his *Sich* has figured prominently in *Olevsk* and regional politics over the past five years. In the city of *Rivne* there are plans to build a new monument for Bulba-Borovets as commander of the *Sich*, not to mention this summer's bike race named after the *Sich*. *Olevsk* itself has more plans, including naming a park after the *Olevsk* Republic or Bulba-Borovets; naming a square after Bulba-Borovets; and creating an exposition about the *Sich* in a local museum (with plans to build a separate museum in the future). There have been celebrations of the *Sich* throughout the *Volhynia* region this

summer. Moreover, the *Sich* force has caught the interest of the Ukrainian parliament, the *Verkhovna Rada*. This past April it passed a resolution to cel-



Jews of *Yampol*, Ukraine, near the Dniester River, being deported to Transnistria, July 1941. Most of the deported Jews were murdered in the following days by *Einsatzgruppe D* and by Romanian army units.

brate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the *Poliska Sich*.

This development on the national stage should come as no surprise to anyone following the Poroshenko government's divisive policies on his-

torical memory. The driving force of this policy of whitewashing nationalist activities during the war is the Institute of National Memory, led by nationalist

activist Volodymyr Viatrovych, who believes the OUN-UPA (the Ukrainian Insurgent Army) only saved Jews during the war and did not participate in any pogroms. These ideas are being realized quickly: a monument to

pogrom leaders has been unveiled in *Uman*; a Ukrainian nationalist pogrom leader — and importantly, decorated Wehrmacht soldier who aided the Germans in suppressing the Warsaw uprising — Petro Diachenko, was celebrated by the *Rada* last year; and the Kyiv city government just voted to name a street after far-right-wing nationalist leader, Stepan Bandera, to name a few initiatives. "Decommunization" and the invocation of Western or European values serve as cover for this nationalist memory manipulation.

There has been too little debate about these policies in Ukraine. Ironically, many Ukrainians might believe that Bulba-Borovets and his *Sich* offer a safe choice for memorialization because they are traditionally considered less radical than competing nationalists. But they would be wrong. The Jews of *Olevsk*, tortured and tormented throughout the summer of 1941, and eventually shot by the Germans and the *Sich* together, deserve to have their voices heard before new monuments are raised in honor of those who killed them. If the Ukrainian government is so keen on building new memorials, I would suggest one at the *Ubort* river that lists the names of the murdered, why they were killed, and by whom.

BELGIAN NOBLES MEET JEWS SAVED BY THEIR RELATIVES IN HOLOCAUST

BY GREER FAY CASHMAN,
THE JERUSALEM POST

They are directly or indirectly related to most of the royal houses of Europe and can trace the lineage for more than a millennium. Led by Prince Michel de Ligne, 35 of them, representing four generations from several countries, are currently in Israel to close a noble circle. They are descendants of Eugène, the 11th prince of Ligne, and his wife, Philippine, who during the Second World War hid hundreds of Jewish children in Beloeil, the de Ligne family castle, which is widely known as the Versailles of Belgium.

Eugène and his wife were recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations in June 1975, long after their deaths.

Their descendants have come to plant a tree at Yad Vashem in their memories and to meet some of the children they saved, who now, as senior citizens, are living in Israel.

Six of those Jewish children accompanied the de Ligne family on its tour of the country and also accompanied it to the President's Residence to meet with President Reuven Rivlin.

Only three people knew about the Jewish children separated from their parents and sheltered at Beloeil, and they remained silent, Prince Michel stated.

One of the survivors, Avraham Kapotka, speaking on behalf of the children who had been saved, said: "We were alone. We didn't know if or when we would see our parents again, but we were in a safe and quiet place, and we thank Prince Michel for preserving the memory of our salva-

tion. We owe a deep debt of gratitude to all those who worked toward saving our lives and providing us with a safe haven."

Both Rivlin and Prince Michel referred to Elie Wiesel, who died recently, as the voice of Holocaust memory.



Prince Michel de Ligne (front left) and descendants of a Belgian royal house meet President Reuven Rivlin (front right) and Jews saved by the family during the Holocaust, Jerusalem.

Rivlin said that Wiesel was "perhaps the greatest example of the strength of the human spirit — a man who gave the Holocaust a face and the victims a voice."

Albert Pacimora, who came on *Aliya* with his wife two years ago and now lives in Ramat Poleg, was with four other children when the Nazis began rounding up Jews in Brussels.

A member of the Jewish resistance called the mothers of all five and warned them that their children were in danger of being either killed or

deported to Germany. Four of the mothers felt there was nothing they could do to change the situation.

The only mother who thought differently was Pacimora's mother, Frida, who was also in the resistance and delivered food to Jews in hiding. She was the only mother who came to

protect her child. At first he was sent to Waterloo for five months and then to Beloeil, where no one mentioned the word "Jew."

"We Jewish children became very good Christians," he recalled, "the girls more so than the boys." The youngsters had to recite their catechism every day, "and if we didn't do it properly, the nuns would give us a wallop on the ear. I can still feel it after all these years.

"At the time we thought they were cruel — but they saved our lives, while other Jewish children died."

Pacimora's father, Mojszek, was one of the heroes of the resistance and after the war was decorated by the king. Pacimora brought his medals and ribbons as proof. He also brought an inscribed medal that was given to his mother by Israel's founding prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, during a visit to Belgium in 1948. Pacimora paid his personal debt to Belgium by serving in the Belgian army.

For Prince Michel, this is his second visit to Israel. The first was in the mid-1970s, when Israel still had control over Sinai. He spent two and a half months in Israel on that occasion, traveling from the extreme north to the extreme south.

Two of his aunts, Yolande de Ligne and Ginette van der Straeten Ponthoz, who personally took care of the children during the war, would have loved to come to Israel, he said, but both are in their 90s and the journey would have been too strenuous for them.

His sister Princess Anne de Ligne spent a month as a volunteer at Kibbutz Nir David in the Beit She'an valley in northern Israel. She was 20 years old at the time and had studied agriculture in Germany and Belgium, and thought it would be a good idea to get some hands-on experience in Israel.

What impressed her most during that time was an elderly woman who endlessly peeled potatoes in the kitchen, and, when asked if she wasn't bored, replied: "I'm doing this for my country."

On this particular visit Prince Michel became enamored with Jerusalem, and told *The Jerusalem Post*, "I wish I could come back and work here."

DUTCH MAN AND DAUGHTER WHO HID JEWS DURING HOLOCAUST HONORED

In July Yad Vashem held a ceremony posthumously honoring Jan Willem Kamphuis and his daughter Klazenia Kamphuis-Vink, from Holland, as Righteous Among the Nations.

During World War II, the two hid a Jewish couple, Henny and Manfred Kurt Lowenstein, in their home and saved them from the Nazis.

The medal and certificate of honor were presented to Anthonie Vink, son of Klazenia Kamphuis-Vink and grandson of Jan Willem Kamphuis.

Henny Dünner was born in 1918 in the city of Cologne, Germany. Her father, Rabbi Dr. Eliezer Dünner, was the local rabbi. Henny attended the local Jewish Yavne School until her studies were cut short when her parents decided to send her and her siblings to family living in Amsterdam. This was shortly after the rise to power of the Nazis, and Henny's parents felt that their children would be safer if they left Germany.

In 1939, Henny's parents joined their children in Amsterdam. Henny

decided to halt her studies in order to learn a trade; she trained to be a seamstress.



The extended Vink and Loewenstein families gather in the Garden of the Righteous Among the Nations following an emotional ceremony in Yad Vashem's synagogue.

In the spring of 1943, Henny was arrested and taken to *Hollandsche Schouwburg*, the Jewish theater that served as an assembly point for Jews who had been arrested and were awaiting deportation. There, she told the authorities that she had experience caring for children and was

transferred to the adjacent children's home, where she helped the children before their deportation.

Henny successfully escaped from the children's home together with her future husband, Manfred Kurt Loewenstein. Shortly thereafter, the two found a hiding place in the home of Jan Willem Kamphuis, a widower who lived together with his daughter, Klazenia, in *Driebergen* near the city of *Utrecht*.

Despite the danger, Jan Willem and Klazenia opened their home to Manfred and Henny. For eight months, the couple hid in a small room in the attic of the house.

Although Henny and Manfred never dared venture outside except to hide out in the nearby forest when imminent danger loomed, the neighbors became suspicious of the Kamphuis home, and in February 1944, the situation became more dangerous, particularly because some of the neighbors were Dutch Nazi party members.

With the help of the local resistance, Henny and Manfred were taken to another hiding place, where they stayed through the end of the war. Shortly before their liberation, while still in hiding, Henny gave birth to their son, James.

Meanwhile, Rabbi Dr. Eliezer Dünner and his wife had been arrested together with their children and deported to *Bergen Belsen*. Fortunately, the family was part of a prisoner exchange for German Templars from Mandatory Palestine and thus survived the war. One of Henny's sisters, Ruth Dünner, was sent to Auschwitz and murdered there.

FOR SAM SHAMIE, A PLEDGE IS A PROMISE

BY ISAAC BENJAMIN

In the spring of 2008, Sam Shamie and his family visited Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. On a guided tour, the family of four explored the museum and the various exhibitions and institutions dedicated to the Holocaust. Moved by the experience, Sam was inspired to make a \$200,000 pledge to the American Society for Yad Vashem. Partnering with Yad Vashem, Shamie and his wife Nancy dedicated their pledge to digitizing Yad Vashem's 130,000-piece photography collection. Just as the new digital library was emerging online, however, the great recession set in.

As a real estate developer in metropolitan Detroit, Shamie was admittedly hit hard. "It really hurt me financially," said Shamie. The long-time Michigan resident saw his business and the entire Detroit market decimated by the crash. The Shamies were forced to suspend their support during their tumultuous journey back to stability.

Throughout his personal troubles, Shamie always remembered his commitment to Yad Vashem. Born into the Syrian Sephardic community in Brooklyn, the son of immigrants from Aleppo, Shamie didn't know much about the Holocaust growing up. According to Shamie, "Many Syrian Jews didn't have family directly affect-

ed by the Holocaust, and it wasn't a major focus." Over time, he discovered that "many Sephardic Jews were in fact oppressed and persecuted during the war." Having visited the Yad Vashem campus several times, he makes a point of always seeking out stories of Sephardic communities affected by the Holocaust.



Sam Shamie.

As a proud Jew, he has become passionately committed to spreading Holocaust awareness. His ambition is clear: "I don't want the world to forget what happened to my people, your people, our people... Ever!"

Sam and Nancy have embraced this adage as a Shamie family value. Their children have received the in-depth Holocaust education their father never had. Along with studying the Holocaust in school, the family traveled to Yad Vashem to celebrate

their oldest daughter Natalie's bat mitzvah. At Yad Vashem, the family learned about an 11-year-old girl, also named Shamie but no known relation, born in Aleppo, exiled to Greece and eventually murdered in Auschwitz. Natalie Shamie participated in the Museum's B'nai Mitzvot program, marking her bat mitzvah with the memory of the young girl who never reached the pivotal age of 12.

During that same visit, Sam had an experience that still brings tears to his eyes.

"We were at the Children's Exhibit where you see the thousands of shoes from the concentration camp. I watched my younger daughter, Jackie deep in thought. This is a girl who is very stylish and absolutely loves shoes. She was staring down at her brand-new sneakers and then at the sea of black shoes in front her. She was just stunned by the magnitude of the sea of shoes belonging to children her age who were murdered. 'All of these people were killed just because they were Jewish?' she asked. She was overwhelmed," Shamie shared.

Just as teaching his own family the lessons of the Holocaust is important to Shamie, so is educating others. As a philanthropist, he has made Holocaust education a priority. The Shamies are part of the Yad Vashem Legacy Circle, having designated Yad Vashem in their estate to establish the Nancy and Sam Shamie & Family

Endowment Fund. Jackie, now 14, once asked her father why their gifts are always from the Shamie family; why aren't the children's names included? Sam responded with a challenge to his daughters that they continue his legacy of charity and that eventually, they choose causes to attach to their names.

Shamie actively supports the nearby Detroit Holocaust Memorial Center but believes that the Yad Vashem experience is unique. "To me, Yad Vashem is different. The rich diversity of stories, the magnitude of the exhibits. It thoroughly touches so many people." As the world's preeminent Holocaust education center, Yad Vashem remains a priority for Shamie.

This dedication brought Sam Shamie into the American Society for Yad Vashem New York office in early April. Eight years after the recession upended his life, he hand-delivered a check completing his pledge. "I have always remembered this pledge and have always hoped to fulfil it. This is fulfilling an obligation." He needlessly apologized for the delay, but support from the likes of Sam Shamie never needs an explanation. Their dedication to Yad Vashem makes Sam and Nancy Shamie and family stand out as an inspiration to us all.

Find out more about the ASYV Legacy Circle by contacting Chris Morten at (212) 220-4304 or CMorton@yadvashemusa.org.

IN A NAZI LEGACY, A SON'S LOVE IS TESTED BY MASS MURDER

(Continued from page 12)

father wanted a divorce. But Frank's mother appealed to Hitler, who forbade the divorce until after the war. Hans Frank obliged.

"My father loved Hitler more than his family," Frank says.

Frank recalls visiting the Krakow ghetto as a young boy with his mother, who went to "shop" for furs because she knew the Jews could not refuse whatever price she named. Frank is unsparing in his assessment of his father.

"My father really deserved to die at the gallows," he says.

The film intersperses interviews with Frank and Wachter with film and photos from the war. Some of the archival material is astonishing, including footage of Hitler and other top Nazis. Sands goes with Frank to the cell at Nuremberg that held his father until the day of his execution. The three men visit the remains of the synagogue where Sands' own family likely spent their last Shabbat before the synagogue was burned to the ground by Nazis under the command of Wachter's father.

All along, Wachter cannot bring himself to acknowledge his father's crimes, offering one excuse after another and relying on vague generalities to rebut evidence that he bore responsibility for the deaths of tens of thousands of Jews.

For us, the facts are irrefutable. Otto von Wachter established the Jewish ghetto in Lviv, then known as Lemberg. He ran the transportation that shipped Jews off to concentration camps. He passed up Himmler's offer to return to his native Vienna, choosing to stay put and see

believed Hitler would change his politics."

Several pivotal scenes anchor the film, each intensifying the effort to get Wachter to come to terms with his father's crimes. In one, a panel discussion with Sands, Frank and Wachter, the audience turns on



Horst von Wachter, left, and Niklas Frank with Philippe Sands, rear, at the site of a mass grave outside Zolkiew, Ukraine.

his job through.

For Wachter, none of it is enough to change his fundamental belief that his father was a good man who played but a bit part in the Nazi regime.

"He was absolutely somebody who wanted to do something good," Wachter says. "His fault was that he

Wachter for his unapologetic admiration of his father. Wachter squirms in his seat but holds firm.

In another, the three men visit the hall in Lviv where in 1942 Frank's father announced the implementation of the Final Solution, crediting Wachter's father for his work. Within a

month of that speech, 75,000 local Jews were killed.

In the third, the three men visit the killing field in Galicia where some 3,500 Jews were shot by the Nazis and Sands' own family members met their fate. Wachter wanders around, maddeningly resisting all efforts to admit his father's culpability in the mass murder.

"There must be tens of thousands of Austrians lying [dead] around here, too," Wachter argues. "I see this as a battlefield, you see."

The film has its flaws. We're told practically nothing about Frank and Wachter apart from the war, including what they do for a living or anything about their spouses or children. But these shortcomings aren't central to the narrative.

Near the end of the film, the three men attend a memorial ceremony for Ukrainian nationalists who fought the Soviets during World War II. They talk with a middle-aged man who wears a swastika around his neck and tells them how proud he is of his division's wartime legacy.

Then they run into an elderly World War II veteran. When the man is told who Wachter's father was, he shakes Wachter's hand enthusiastically, telling him his father was a decent man.

Wachter, pained for so much of the film, finally seems at ease. He smiles.



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