

MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE



Vol. 44-No. 1 ISSN 0892-1571 September/October 2017-Tishri/Cheshvan 5778

AUSCHWITZ ARTIFACTS TO GO ON TOUR

BY JOANNA BERENDT,
THE NEW YORK TIMES

More than 72 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, the first traveling exhibition about the Nazi death camp will begin a journey later this year to 14 cities across Europe and North America, taking heart-breaking artifacts to multitudes who have never seen such horror up close.

The endeavor is one of the most high-profile attempts to educate and immerse young people for whom the Holocaust is a fading and ill-understood slice of history. The Anne Frank House, the Jewish Museum Berlin, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and others all find themselves grappling with ways to engage an attention-challenged world with a dark part of its past.

Yet anything that smacks of putting Auschwitz on tour instantly raises sensitivities. Organizers of the exhibition, which include the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum itself, took pains to explain that, yes, visitors would probably be charged to enter in at least some locations. But officials at that museum and the company behind the exhibition say that their intent is not to create a moneymaker out of the suffering of millions of Nazi victims.

Several prominent Jewish leaders expressed support for taking pieces of Auschwitz to people who might not otherwise see this history. They said that they were not overly concerned about an entrance fee; organizers said that they would ask for it to be small, if any, and for admission to be free for students.

"If you're telling me, 'Gee, they're coming out and they're going to be

millionaires over this,' I would object," said Rabbi Marvin Hier, who founded the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a Jewish human-rights organization. "But if they're making what is normally considered to be a fair amount of profit since the final end is that hundreds of thousands of people maybe

um, which is on the site of the former camp, in southern Poland. "We had been thinking about this for a long time, but we lacked the know-how."

Even though the Holocaust remains a major focus of study by historians and is a staple of school curriculum in many countries, knowledge about the

the trust of the board of the Auschwitz museum, which was surprised to receive such a request from an exhibition company outside the museum world.

The museum demanded that the artifacts be kept secured at all times and that the exhibition comply with the museum's strict conservation requirements, including finding proper transportation and storage, as well as choosing exhibition spaces with sufficient lighting and climate control.

The museum also insisted that the artifacts be presented in historical context, especially because many aspects of World War II are only vaguely understood by younger generations. For instance, in Spain, asking about the history and place of Jews in Europe "would probably get some strange answers." The exhibition will show that Spain — which during the war was led by Francisco Franco, a dictator and ally of Adolf Hitler — was not home to large Jewish communities and did not have extensive connections with the Holocaust; yet there were notable exceptions, like Ángel Sanz Briz, a Spanish diplomat who saved more than 5,000 Jews in Hungary from deportation to Auschwitz.

"In other words, we want to show that the Franco regime was certainly very sympathetic to the Nazis," said Robert Jan van Pelt, a history professor at the University of Waterloo in Canada and a Holocaust scholar who has been working on the exhibition. "But individual Spaniards could make, and made, a difference."

As for the morality of charging money to see artifacts from a death camp, and potentially turning a profit, Mr. Ferreiro said that traveling exhibitions like this one usually generated huge expenses. Putting the display together has already cost more than \$1.5 million, and there are no guarantees "the exhibit will even be sustainable," Mr. Ferreiro said.

Musealia will offer museums that want to host the exhibition a flat fee for transportation, installation, design and all the content.

"We need to earn an income to sustain ourselves and keep the enterprise going," Mr. Ferreiro said, "but our goal is to focus on larger social

(Continued on page 13)



A child's shoe and sock.

in different places all over the world will see the exhibit — I think that's quite legitimate."

The exhibition will include pieces from the museum such as a barracks; a freight car of the same type used to transport prisoners; letters and testimonials; and a gas mask, a tin that contained Zyklon B gas pellets and other grim remainders from the complex's gas chambers.

Seven years in the making, the exhibition is a response to growing anti-Semitism in Europe and elsewhere, those involved with it said.

"We have never done anything like this before, and it's the first project of this magnitude ever," said Piotr Cywinski, director of the state muse-

um, which is on the site of the former camp, in southern Poland. "We had been thinking about this for a long time, but we lacked the know-how."

Even though the Holocaust remains a major focus of study by historians and is a staple of school curriculum in many countries, knowledge about the

the trust of the board of the Auschwitz museum, which was surprised to receive such a request from an exhibition company outside the museum world.

The museum demanded that the artifacts be kept secured at all times and that the exhibition comply with the museum's strict conservation requirements, including finding proper transportation and storage, as well as choosing exhibition spaces with sufficient lighting and climate control.

The museum also insisted that the artifacts be presented in historical context, especially because many aspects of World War II are only vaguely understood by younger generations. For instance, in Spain, asking about the history and place of Jews in Europe "would probably get some strange answers." The exhibition will show that Spain — which during the war was led by Francisco Franco, a dictator and ally of Adolf Hitler — was not home to large Jewish communities and did not have extensive connections with the Holocaust; yet there were notable exceptions, like Ángel Sanz Briz, a Spanish diplomat who saved more than 5,000 Jews in Hungary from deportation to Auschwitz.

"In other words, we want to show that the Franco regime was certainly very sympathetic to the Nazis," said Robert Jan van Pelt, a history professor at the University of Waterloo in Canada and a Holocaust scholar who has been working on the exhibition. "But individual Spaniards could make, and made, a difference."

As for the morality of charging money to see artifacts from a death camp, and potentially turning a profit, Mr. Ferreiro said that traveling exhibitions like this one usually generated huge expenses. Putting the display together has already cost more than \$1.5 million, and there are no guarantees "the exhibit will even be sustainable," Mr. Ferreiro said.

Musealia will offer museums that want to host the exhibition a flat fee for transportation, installation, design and all the content.

"We need to earn an income to sustain ourselves and keep the enterprise going," Mr. Ferreiro said, "but our goal is to focus on larger social

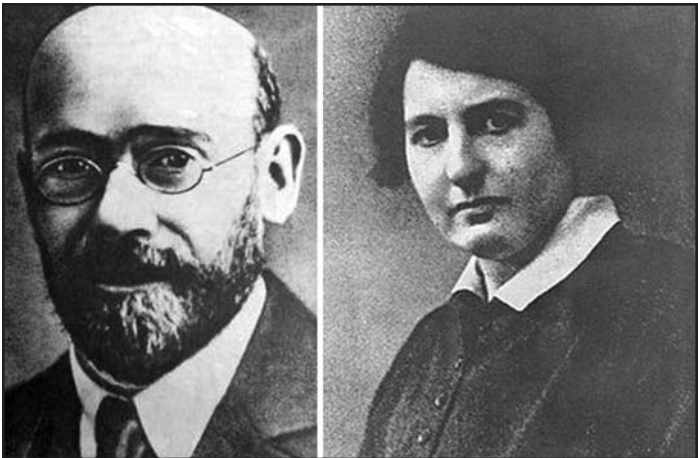
IN THIS ISSUE

Yad Vashem marks 75 years since murders of Polish Jewish educators.....	2
The Nazis built a luxury camp to lull the Jews before murdering them.....	3
Stolen words: The Nazi plunder of Jewish books.....	4
Why are there crosses on Eastern Europe's Holocaust memorials?.....	5
"He should be as well known as Schindler".....	6
Saved by art: How one man's skill got him through seven Nazi camps....	8
"I condemned my mother to the gas chamber with one wrong word".....	10
The Jews who fought for freedom in the ring.....	14
Jewish woman who entered the lion's den.....	15
Save the date: ASYV Annual Tribute Dinner.....	16

YAD VASHEM MARKS 75 YEARS SINCE MURDERS OF POLISH JEWISH EDUCATORS

BY TAMARA ZIEVE,
JERUSALEM POST

In August Yad Vashem hosted a day of events to remember Polish Jewish educators Janusz Korczak and Stefania Wilczynska, who sacrificed their lives to care for orphans in the Warsaw ghetto. Both refused to abandon the children for safer hideouts. On August 5, 1942, the Nazis rounded up Korczak,



Janusz Korczak and Stefania Wilczynska.

Wilczynska and the 200 children of the orphanage. They marched in rows to the *Umschlagplatz* gathering point, with Korczak in the lead. Together they were sent to *Treblinka*, where they were all murdered. Members of the Hamachanot Haolim youth movement participated in an educational seminar, conducted by Yad Vashem in conjunction with Yossi and Reuven Nadel of the Israeli Educational Institute in Memory of Janusz Korczak, and Liron Avnat, representing Hamachanot Haolim. Yossi and Reuven are the sons of Shlomo Nadel, who is one of two remaining Holocaust survivors who

lived in Korczak’s orphanage in Warsaw; the other is Yitzhak Belfer, 88. Neither man was able to attend the event owing to their health, but Belfer, who had been scheduled to lay a wreath beside the monument commemorating Korczak and the children sent to their deaths, released a statement in his honor.

Yitzhak Belfer recalled the “great love” he had for Korczak. “I was seven years old when I arrived at the orphanage, and was granted the opportunity to be educated under him for eight of the most important years of my life,” he said. “The doctor walked among us like any other person, never patronizing — spreading love and concern for the children’s needs. In the orphanage, we learned to believe in people, in the inclination for good that exists within each and every one of us.”

“When we talk about the Holocaust, we are not used to talking or even thinking about love,” said Dr. Naama Shik, director of the e-Learning Department at Yad Vashem’s International School for Holocaust Studies, who moderated the seminar. “We almost always think of the *Shoah* from the end — the shooting pits, the gas chambers, the terrible journeys toward them. We think about the hunger, the cold, the horrors, the threats and the loss. We think about the breakdown of solidarity and the

uncompromising battle for survival, the desperation, and often the extreme loneliness. But not about love.

“Janusz Korczak was the quintessential father figure, educator and democrat in a world of no tomorrow,” Shik continued. “He was a man of boundless love and dedication toward the children under his protection and care in the orphanage.” At the conclusion of the seminar, a memorial ceremony took place at Yad Vashem’s Janusz Korczak Square, with a representative of the Polish Embassy among those in attendance. After that, Hamachanot Haolim members flew dozens of kites, to represent Korczak’s educational worldview, and to honor his legacy of respect, love and equality of rights.

Janusz Korczak was the pen name of Henryk Goldszmit, a doctor, author and educator. He dedicated his life to caring for children, and believed they should always be listened to and respected. In 1912, Korczak became the director of a Jewish orphanage in Warsaw.

Wilczynska and Korczak met in 1909, and began working together. When World War I broke out, Korczak became a military doctor with the rank of lieutenant, leaving Wilczynska in charge of the orphanage. (He served again as a doctor in the Polish Army with the rank of major during the Polish-Soviet War.) In

1935, Wilczynska visited Mandatory Palestine and lived at kibbutz *Ein Harod* before returning to Warsaw in



Janusz Korczak Square at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.

1939. After the Nazi occupation of Poland, the members of *Ein Harod* arranged for her to leave Poland, but she turned the offer down and moved to the ghetto along with Korczak and the children. “The legacy of Janusz Korczak and Stefania ‘Stefa’ Wilczynska is an essential part of the educational mission of Hamachanot Haolim youth movement,” Avnat said. “Throughout the year we discuss and utilize many of their teachings and use many of the tools they left for us for our activities and all of our groups.... The principles and beliefs that Korczak developed, nearly 100 years later are still relevant and useful in educating our youth and future generations.”

FAMILY PIANO THAT SURVIVED HOLOCAUST JOINS YAD VASHEM MUSEUM

BY PAUL GOLDMAN, NBC

The piano standing in the living room looks and sounds like a typical instrument, but it hides in its notes a story of defiance and survival.



Shlomo Margulies, 94, sits in front of his family’s piano, which is now part of a display at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Jerusalem.

When the Margulies family fled Germany in 1939 to escape their Nazi oppressors, they refused to leave behind the instrument on which their two sons learned to play. Nearly 80 years on, the piano now

stands in Yad Vashem — a symbol of one family’s resilience. Shlomo Margulies was 15 when he escaped the German town of *Chemnitz* with his parents and older brother. “The furniture we had was too heavy to ship, but my mother didn’t want to leave our piano behind,” he said. As with so many other Jewish families of the time, the piano had pride of place in the family living room and was the center of entertainment and culture in the home. “It was common with many German families that kids learn two crucial skills by the age of six — swimming and how to play the piano,” said Margulies.

Margulies, 94, decided to donate the instrument to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem as a reminder to future generations of his family’s journey. Seeing the instrument in its new home, Shlomo refused to play it, saying: “It reminds me of this whole story of survival, it was almost 90 years ago that I played it, it’s like a dream but it’s a fact.”

The Margulies are believed to be the only family to escape Nazi Germany by chartering an airplane and one of the few who managed to save such precious belongings. In October



Bracha and her son Shlomo Margulies pose for a photo.

and November 1938, Nazi paramilitary groups’ pogroms made the family decide it was time to leave Germany. Margulies, sent to Berlin to buy ferry tickets for his family, found that there

was no more space on the boat so decided to charter a plane instead. “I have no idea if this decision to charter the flight was naive, stupid or genius, but it saved our lives,” he said. On March 26, 1939, the family left Berlin on a three-day flight to Palestine, stopping off in Italy and Greece. Their belongings, including the piano, were shipped to *Haifa*. Most of their extended family, who remained in Europe, were killed in the Holocaust. “The story of the piano and the artifacts here is a way to tell the stories of the Jews who managed to escape and those who suffered from the terrible Holocaust,” said Michael Tal, curator and director of the Yad Vashem artifacts department. Recently, Margulies stood proudly with his wife, two sons and eight grandchildren next to the piano. He said he had decided the memorial center was the right place for it. “If I were to hear this story told by another Jew I would have said he was out of his mind,” he said.

IN HOLLAND, THE NAZIS BUILT A LUXURY CAMP TO LULL THE JEWS BEFORE MURDERING THEM

BY CNAAN LIPSHIZ, JTA

Nothing about the footage that Rudolf Breslauer filmed here on May 30, 1944, suggests that it was taken inside one of Europe's largest Nazi concentration camps.

In the film by Breslauer, a German Jewish inmate of the *Westerbork* camp in Holland's northeast, prisoners are seen playing soccer enthusiastically in team uniforms, complete with a referee in a special outfit.

A middle-aged man wearing a suit and a boy who may have been his grandson stroll cheerfully in the sun past spectators. In other segments, inmates are seen putting on theater performances, working in modern factories and even going to church — an activity undertaken by many German Jews before the Holocaust, including some who had converted to Christianity just before or during the Holocaust in a vain effort to escape persecution by the Nazis.

The film is one of only two cinematic works known to have been produced inside a functioning concentration camp for Jews — the other was in *Theresienstadt*.

experts on the Holocaust in the Netherlands.

According to ten Cate, the deceit extended far beyond the possibly staged scenes that Breslauer captured with his camera. (Breslauer was sent to Auschwitz with his wife and three children in 1944. Only their daughter Chanita survived the war.)

"The size of camp *Westerbork's* hospital, which was one of the best and largest hospitals of its kind, symbolizes the Nazi lie that Jews were going to be put to work" further east, ten Cate told JTA in an interview ahead of the 75th anniversary of the first death transport out of the camp, which took place on July 15, 1942.

"It was one of a great many German efforts focused at making sure that Jews did not understand what the Nazis were up to," he added.

These efforts paid off, according to Henny Dormits, 87, a Holocaust survivor who lived in the camp with her family for two years before they were sent to *Theresienstadt*.

While Jews in many other parts of Europe were subjected to violence, torture, abuse and murder in camps, in *Westerbork*, "people were

treatment in *Westerbork* that clinched the illusion, according to Dormits.

"People were operated on here by the best doctors, they would be hospitalized for entire weeks as they healed, and when they were all better they were put on a transport," she recalled in the documentary. "This was the make-believe world in which we lived."

This form of deception was extremely effective, according to Dirk Mulder, the director of the Camp *Westerbork* Memorial Center, a non-governmental organization with state funding that is responsible for commemoration and educational work in the former camp.

The message of the hospital was, "We Germans have the best intentions for you, get better in this large hospital so we can put you to work

set up an unarmed Jewish policing unit that was responsible for taking people to the trains to be shipped off to death camps in the east.

Today, what used to be the camp grounds, in a grassy flatland, borders a large radio observatory. A memorial area contains informational plaques and several monuments, including a German cattle car of the sort used to transport Jews and a statue featuring railway tracks that curl up heavenwards.

Whereas elsewhere in Europe, former Nazi camps were preserved and used as educational exhibits about the Holocaust, the original barracks and facilities of *Westerbork* were used for housing refugees from Indonesia in the 1970s, until the facilities were stripped for wood.



Dutch Chief Rabbi Binyomin Jacobs' parents survived the Holocaust in hiding, and he often speaks about the genocide at *Westerbork* to schoolchildren.

Commissioned by *Westerbork's* commanders for propaganda purposes, Breslauer's film is a rare documentation of the sophisticated facade employed by the Nazis at the camp, where 75 years ago they began carrying out the systematic murder of three-quarters of Dutch Jewry — the highest death rate in Nazi-occupied Western Europe. *Westerbork* served as a so-called transit camp from which 100,000 Dutch Jews were shipped to Nazi death camps in Poland.

The subterfuge maintained the illusion that the camp's inmates were sent to work camps, giving them hope and an incentive to comply with orders that helped ensure *Westerbork's* deadly efficiency, according to Johannes Houwink ten Cate of the University of Amsterdam, who is among the world's foremost

not abused, they were treated correctly," she said during an interview for Dutch television in 2011. She spoke at the former living quarters of Albert Gemmeker, the Nazi commander of *Westerbork*, which is the only part of the camp that still exists today.

The Germans "did everything possible to keep people calm here so no one was afraid," Dormits recalled. And so when people were shipped off in cattle carts, "everyone assumed we'd be going to another work camp."

Westerbork included many amenities that Jewish concentration camp inmates elsewhere could only dream of, including permits to leave camp without supervision — given exclusively to people with family still inside the camp, so they would not escape — and cabaret productions with musical instruments.

But it was the quality of medical



Jews from Amsterdam on their way to the transport to *Westerbork* transit camp.

elsewhere," Mulder said in the Dutch documentary.

Still, not everyone was duped. Gemmeker, who had a friendly relationship with the Jewish filmmaker Breslauer, once told the cameraman something that made Breslauer realize the transports were a one-way ticket, according to Chanita Moses, Breslauer's daughter. Her father did not say exactly what Gemmeker told him, she told the Dutch television film crew.

Philip Mechanicus, a Dutch Jewish Holocaust victim who secretly chronicled his stay in *Westerbork* before he was murdered, wrote about his "tremendous fear" of when he would be shipped out.

On September 13, 1943, a 65-year-old woman in Mechanicus' barracks committed suicide, he wrote. She was put on a list of deportees to *Theresienstadt*, prompting her daughter to volunteer to leave with her mother. The mother killed herself "to prevent her daughter from making the sacrifice," wrote Mechanicus.

Camp *Westerbork* originally was set up in 1939 as a detainment facility by the Dutch government in a remote, rural area of the country for fewer than 2,000 Jewish refugees who fled Nazi Germany. Two years after the Germans invaded in 1940, they took over the space and massively increased its capacity. They treated the first German inmates as a preferred prisoner population. And they

The failure to preserve *Westerbork* was part of a greater reluctance in the Netherlands, where many non-Jews felt victim to the Nazi occupation, to acknowledge the uniqueness of the Jewish tragedy, according to ten Cate. He said the Dutch also were reluctant to look at the role of ordinary Dutchmen, including police officers who rounded up Jews.

This began to change in the 1990s, making way for a wave of renewed interest in the Holocaust in recent years. But the belated timing means that Amsterdam is one of Europe's very last capital cities to receive a Holocaust museum: it opened last year and is still in its "infancy stages," ten Cate noted.

Back in *Westerbork*, Dutch Chief Rabbi Binyomin Jacobs, whose parents survived the Holocaust in hiding and who often speaks about the genocide at the former camp to schoolchildren, told JTA that the camp's story is a constant reminder against giving in to wishful thinking.

"When disaster happens slowly, in installments, people have a tendency to accept each installment," said Jacobs, who in 2014 shocked many Dutchmen when he said that anti-Semitism in the Netherlands means he would advise his congregants to live in Israel or the United States. "This is what happened here. So I think we cannot afford to stay silent and just hope for the best."

STOLEN WORDS: THE NAZI PLUNDER OF JEWISH BOOKS

Stolen Words: The Nazi Plunder of Jewish Books.

By Mark Glickman. The Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia, Pa., 2016. 327 pp. \$22.31 hardcover.

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN

At this point, the world is well aware of the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust. Popular films like *The Monuments Men* and *Woman in Gold* have also made many aware of the invaluable artwork stolen by the Nazis during the Holocaust, a goodly portion of it from those selfsame Jews. Mark Glickman, the author of the fascinating, thorough and well-written book, *Stolen Words: The Nazi Plunder of Jewish Books*, now shines a bright light on the millions of books — many of them unique and priceless — stolen from the Jews by the Nazis during those years.

Wisely, in order for the reader to fully appreciate the crime perpetrated by this ruthless looting, Glickman begins his work by reviewing how central the word and hence the religious book and, indeed, all books are to Judaism. Thus, we are initially presented with a very interesting short history highlighting the stages of the development of the word becoming the Jewish religious book and books generally, alongside no less interesting and important information on the early development of the print indus-

try among Jews. It is here, too, that we read about the specific rules for the care, handling and disposal of religious books especially — such was the exceptionally high esteem they were held in!

As we approach the very heart of Glickman's work, we learn that, in fact, the idea of burning Jewish books was not "introduced" by the Nazis. "The first recorded incident of Jewish book destruction dates back to the second century BCE, during the Maccabean revolt." Then, sadly, with time and more books available, came more conflagrations, often due to the rulings of various Popes. In sum: aside from the "sturdy, boot-pounding songs whose lyrics the crowds sang with beer-hall gusto," and the "inflammatory Nazi oratory" culminating in excited mob responses of "Heil Hitler" and Nazi salutes, the burning of Jewish books in Germany in the spring of 1933 was nothing new.

On the other hand, the premeditated and organized extermination and cremation of a people, while the beloved books they lived by — "the literary legacy of an entire civilization" — were taken: that was, it appears,

"introduced" by the Nazis. Indeed, the Nazis pillaged the books and manuscripts of countless prestigious Jewish institutions, libraries, bookshops and private collections across the continent with cruel impunity,

even as they forced those Jewish scholars who had once utilized these treasured works into the painful position of sorting them — and by so doing, deciding which would "live" and which "die," or be consigned to the "nearby pulp mill" for destruction. Interestingly, here Glickman tells us how two Jewish poets, Abraham Sutzkever and Shmerke Kaczerginski tried to undermine this

"selection" process by saving the best of them . . . a highly dangerous undertaking.

So, why did Hitler and the Nazis want these books?

Among other reasons, we read how "during the late 1930s . . . Hitler . . . envisioned an academy that would demonstrate the great achievements of German intellect and culture." "One goal of this developing academic impulse was to provide scientific justification for the Nazis' racism and anti-semitism." In short, then, a great library of Jewish books was needed for "research and education," and Nazi

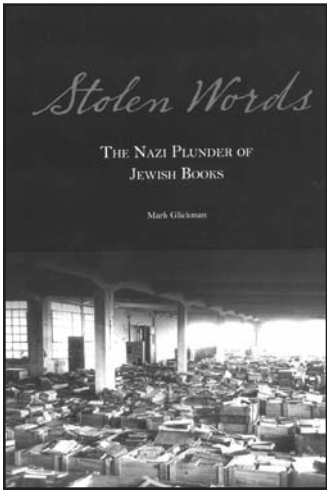
leaders, including Alfred Rosenberg and Heinrich Himmler, would compete to see to its realization.

Finally, we come to what is surely the most absorbing part of *Stolen Words*: the discovery of these books after the war, stored in "castles, abandoned mine shafts, and warehouses," and the story of the well-known scholars and Jewish leaders, including Salo W. Baron, Cecil Roth, Lucy Schildkret (soon to be Lucy S. Dawidowicz), Hannah Arendt and Judah L. Magnes, who would dedicate themselves to finding a caring home for them once more.

Needless to say, students of the Holocaust will find *Stolen Words: The Nazi Plunder of Jewish Books* exceptionally valuable. For that matter, this singular work belongs in the library of all those of us who love books!

P.S. On a more personal note: after the war, this reviewer's father, Abraham Cypkin, a well-known lyricist of the Kovno ghetto, had the honor of having a number of his works appear in Kaczerginski's 1948 collection of poems and songs written in the ghettos and camps — Lider fun di Getos un Lagern. In *Stolen Words* Glickman notes that this volume "remains the largest and most significant collection of its kind."

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



SEVEN BOOKS ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST SCHOLARS SAY YOU SHOULD READ

BY JOSEFIN DOLSTEN,
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

From Anne Frank's diary to Elie Wiesel's *Night*, books about the Holocaust remain some of the most powerful and well-known pieces of literature published in the past century. Books have the power to educate about the *Shoah's* unimaginable horrors and bring to life the stories of its victims, as well as unearth hidden details about wartime crimes.

JTA reached out to Jewish studies scholars across the country, seeking their recommendations on recently published books dealing with the Holocaust. Their picks, all published in the past three years, include an investigation into the 1941 massacre of Jews in the Polish town of *Jedwabne* (two scholars recommended the same book on that topic), a critical examination of theories trying to explain the Holocaust, and a look at how Adolf Hitler saw Islam as a religion that could be exploited for anti-Semitic purposes.

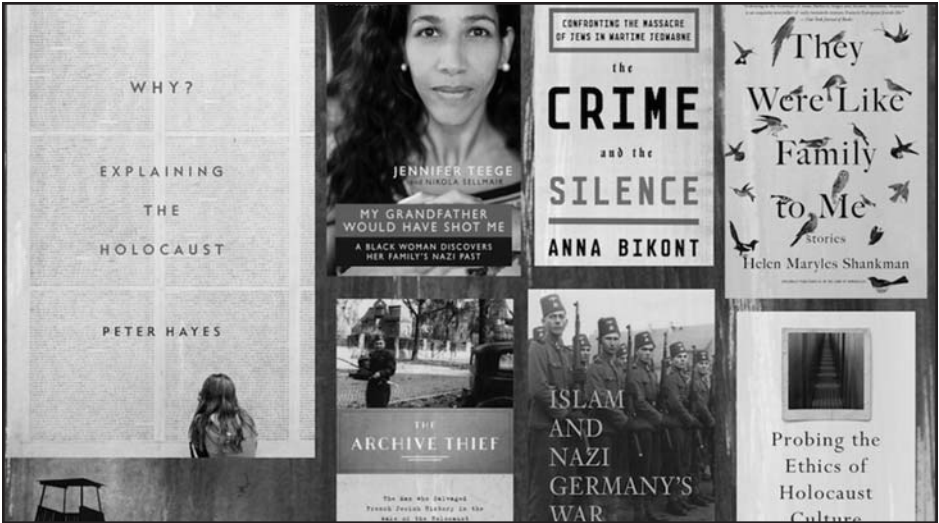
The Crime and the Silence: Confronting the Massacre of Jews in Wartime Jedwabne (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015). By Anna Bikont.

Joshua Zimmerman, professorial

chair in Holocaust studies and East European Jewish history and associate professor of history at Yeshiva University, writes:

This book, a winner of the 2015 National Jewish Book Award, was written by a Polish journalist who dis-

covered she was Jewish in her 30s and became deeply engaged in the topic of Polish-Jewish relations. After Jan T. Gross' controversial book *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (2000) proved that the local Poles — not the Germans — committed the massive pogrom in that town



for 50 years after the Holocaust. It is written in the form of a journal of the author's travels and conversations with people.

Barbara Grossman, professor of drama at Tufts University and former US Holocaust Memorial Council board member, also recommended Bikont's book. She writes:

Barbara Grossman, professor of drama at Tufts University and former US Holocaust Memorial Council board member, also recommended Bikont's book. She writes:

I first read about the *Jedwabne* massacre in Gross's book and still remember being riveted by the cover image of a barn engulfed in flames. Perhaps because my paternal grandfather was from Łomża, Poland — a city relatively near *Jedwabne* — I felt a particular connection to this atrocity, as well as gratitude to him for leaving the country years before the Holocaust. I directed Tadeusz Słobodzianek's *Our Class*, a play loosely based on the events in *Jedwabne*, at Tufts in 2012, and remain fascinated by this story of greed, treachery and cruelty, a horrific crime in which as many as 1,600 Jewish men, women and children perished. Bikont's magnificent work of investigative journalism details her meticulous reconstruction of the massacre and its subsequent decades-long coverup. It is a sobering and compelling account of anti-Semitism, denial and isolated acts of heroism.

The Archive Thief: The Man Who Salvaged French Jewish History in the Wake of the Holocaust (Oxford University Press, 2015). By Lisa Moses Leff.

Jonathan Sarna, professor of American Jewish history at Brandeis University, writes:

(Continued on page 13)

WHY ARE THERE CROSSES ON EASTERN EUROPE’S HOLOCAUST MEMORIALS?

BY JULIE MASIS, FORWARD

When school principal Ivan Timoshko decided to do something to mark the spot in his village where dozens of Jews were executed by the Nazis, he did it the only way he knew how: he built a cross.

Together with the children from his school in the village, he cut down an acacia tree, chopped away the branches and erected a three-meter-high cross on the top of a hill, just above a ravine into which the bodies fell. He painted the cross bright blue, simply because that was the only color he had. To this cross he attached a wooden board with hand-written words: “Jewish families were executed on this spot by the Nazis.”

lagers remembered exactly where the Jews were murdered, because after the war they planted poplar trees to mark the spot, Timoshko said. He still uses these tall trees as a guide when he tries to find his cross, because it is hard to see it from the road.

“There are just a handful of these monuments, because most of the [Holocaust] monuments are built by Jews,” said Arkadi Zeltser, director of the Center for Research on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union at the Yad Vashem museum in Israel. “Most likely, they were built by local activists. The authorities probably didn’t build them.”

He said he knows of two more such monuments — in *Cherikov*, Belarus, and in *Yudendorf*, in Crimea, where

dren in our village, so afterwards we decided to mark the spot,” he said.

Zeltser said he does not think such monuments are anti-Semitic or intentionally meant to erase the memory of genocide against the Jews.

“If they wanted to forget that Jews were killed there, they wouldn’t put a monument at all. When people put in their own money and their effort — I don’t think those people wanted to forget that Jews were executed there,” he said. “Do you think they know that Jews don’t put a cross on the grave? I am not sure. Believe me, it doesn’t even occur to them that for Jews it might be offensive.”

But others in the Jewish community said a cross that marks the spot where Jews were killed is not historically accurate and is disrespectful to those who died.

Boris Bruk, who helped to build 17 Holocaust monuments in Belarus in recent years, said it’s important that the word “Jew” be written clearly on memorials.

In particular, the Jewish community in Belarus is working to replace the old description of the victims as “Soviet citizens” with the word “Jews.”

“If it’s only a cross and Jews are buried there, we are not happy about that,” Bruk said. “It’s not right. It creates the wrong impression about who was executed there. It needs to be changed.”

POLIN Museum of Jewish history, in Poland.

But in Moldova, the response has been more positive.

“If Christians honor the memory of their Jewish neighbors in a fashion which is familiar to them, that’s a very wonderful thing,” said Irina Shihova, curator of Moldova’s Jewish Heritage Museum.

While there are no Jews left in the village of *Stolnichani*, Leon Akerman, who is one of the 10 Jews who still live in the nearby town of *Edinits*, said he sees nothing wrong with a cross that marks the spot where a massacre took place.

“It’s better than nothing,” said Akerman, 72, whose grandparents, aunt and uncle were murdered during the Holocaust. “A lot of places where people were executed have no monuments at all, a lot of places have been forgotten.”

For instance, retired city councilor Iurii Zagorcea, who is Christian, has erected five Holocaust monuments in northern Moldova and has lobbied the president of Moldova to include a unit on the Holocaust in the country’s schoolbooks. In the coming years he hopes to build five more Holocaust monuments.

“My goal is to educate the future generations so that it doesn’t happen again,” he said. “We must tell the truth — so that people see the stones and



A Holocaust memorial with a Christian cross in *Edinits*, Moldova.

“We didn’t know that the Jewish custom is to put a six-pointed star on the grave,” he said. “We did what we could do by ourselves; we didn’t have any financial help.”

There are a few similar monuments in villages and small towns in Belarus, Ukraine and Russia — although the phenomenon has remained largely unknown until now. Experts who have glimpsed these rare memorials say they are created with the best of intentions, but some Jewish leaders in the former Soviet Union object to the crosses.

According to the Yad Vashem museum’s database, Romanian Fascists murdered almost 100 Jews in *Stolnichani*, which sits in the north of Moldova, near the Romanian border, in July 1941. One of the peasants witnessed the massacre as it happened: The Romanian Fascists forced Jewish children, women and elderly into the forest, lined them up and began shooting. Many people who fell were only injured. But for days, the soldiers guarded the spot so that no one could come to help the injured, Timoshko said.

It is hard to imagine that something so terrible could have happened here: Cherry and apple trees grow all around, fat rabbits jump into the bushes when they hear someone approaching, and sunflower fields beg to be photographed. But the vil-

the Holocaust monument has a Christian cross on one side and a Jewish star on the other. He said there might be one or two more similar monuments in Russia. In *Cherikov*, Belarus, on the spot where between 300 and 500 Jews were executed in the fall of 1941, a monument with a cross was built after the original monument was vandalized in the 1980s, according to information on the Yad Vashem’s website.

This journalist independently discovered three more Holocaust monuments with Christian symbols in *Petrikov*, *Begoml* and *Anatovka* in Belarus and one more in Moldova — all of them built after the fall of the Soviet Union.

“It’s a new phenomenon — in Soviet times this didn’t happen,” Zeltser said. “Now it’s the new generation who believe that it’s not good when a grave of hundreds of people isn’t taken care of. So they put a monument in accordance with their own ideas of how to take care of these places.”

Indeed, people in *Stolnichani* always wanted to build some kind of monument, said Timoshko, a 69-year-old Communist and the son of a World War II veteran — but no one took the initiative until he became the principal of the school.

“We had a discussion with the chil-



Holocaust memorial in *Orhei*, Moldova.

A cross that stands on a Jewish grave is problematic from a religious standpoint as well, said Boleslav Kapulkin, spokesman for the Chabad Lubavitch community in *Odessa*, Ukraine. Jewish souls can’t rest in graves marked by the symbol of a foreign religion, he said.

Then, too, the people who murdered the Jews were Christians.

“I can understand the reaction of the Jewish community to Holocaust monuments that are built by Christians because the Germans were Christians and the Nazi uniforms had the inscription, ‘God is with us,’” said Hanna Wegryzynek, the chief specialist in the research department at the

they will know what happened here.”

Most of the monuments he built have the Star of David on them, but one — in the village of *Terebna* — features a cross on the left side with the names of the six Christian soldiers who were executed by Fascists, and on the right a six-pointed star for the 64 Jewish victims from the same village.

Next to this monument stands a tall cross.

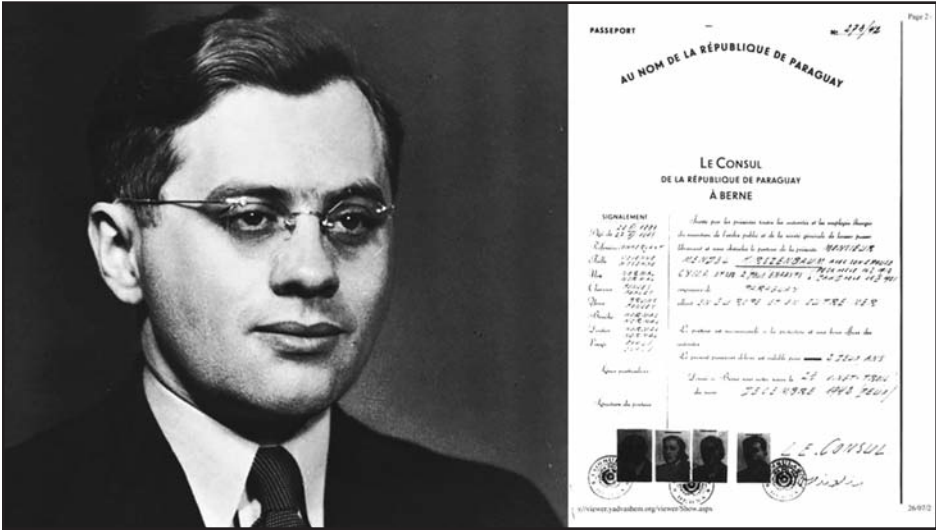
“People ask why we put a cross there,” Zagorcea said. “It is our custom to put a cross in the honorary place at the entrance to the village. It shows the respect of the local people to those who were killed.”

“HE SHOULD BE AS WELL KNOWN AS SCHINDLER”

BY MARK MACKINNON,
THE GLOBE AND MAIL

He lived for decades in relative anonymity in Toronto, where he ran a construction company. But documents shared with *The Globe* show that Julius Kuhl — who died in 1985 — should have been one of Canada’s most celebrated citizens, a hero of the Holocaust who saved hundreds, perhaps thousands, of lives.

Julius Kuhl arrived in Toronto shortly after the Second World War with his young family and a suitcase full of Swiss watches that he hoped to sell.



Julius Kuhl.

He was also carrying a story of bravery and sorrow that he shared only with those close to him — one that might have made him an international celebrity had he chosen to tell it.

Mr. Kuhl’s death in 1985 made no headlines in Canada or beyond. But documents stored in Switzerland, Jerusalem and Washington — shared exclusively with *The Globe and Mail* and *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, a Polish newspaper — reveal Mr. Kuhl’s role as a savior of hundreds, perhaps thousands of fellow Jews during the Holocaust. It is a story that deserves to be considered alongside those of famous Holocaust heroes such as Oskar Schindler and Raoul Wallenberg.

Described by his family as a short, devout and gregarious man who was constantly puffing on a cigar, Mr. Kuhl was a low-level diplomat at the Polish legation in Bern, the Swiss capital, during the Second World War. He was also the center of a network that manufactured fake Latin American passports that were then smuggled into Nazi-occupied Europe.

Personal letters, diplomatic cables and Swiss police records show that, starting in 1941, Mr. Kuhl acquired thousands of blank passports from the consuls of Paraguay and other South and Central American countries in Switzerland. He and a colleague then entered by hand the names and dates of birth of European Jews — including many who were trapped inside the Warsaw ghetto — before pasting in their black-and-white photos.

The effort continued for two years — until Swiss police, anxious to avoid irritating Hitler’s Germany, broke up the fake documents ring. They brought Mr. Kuhl and his collaborators in for questioning and demanded that the Polish legation, which represented the London-based government-in-exile of Nazi-occupied Poland, dismiss Mr. Kuhl.

“He should be as well known as Schindler, because he saved as many lives as Schindler,” said Markus Blechner, who worked for years to collect the documents proving the tale he heard as a child about Mr. Kuhl and the life-saving passports. Mr.

Blechner, the grandson of Holocaust victims, took up the cause of preserving Mr. Kuhl’s story after Mr. Kuhl attended his bar mitzvah as an honored guest shortly after the war.

Mr. Schindler protected more than 1,000 Jews by employing them at his factory in Nazi-occupied Poland. Mr. Wallenberg saved almost 10,000 Hungarian Jews by issuing them protective passports identifying them as Swedish citizens.

One of the reasons Mr. Kuhl’s story isn’t as widely known is that his passport scheme was only partly successful. Mr. Blechner, who now serves as the honorary Polish consul in Zurich, says thousands of fake passports were distributed via Mr. Kuhl’s network, but only a minority of the recipients are believed to have survived the Holocaust.

Jews holding passports from neutral countries were considered exempt from Nazi laws that confined Jews to ghettos and mandated that they identify themselves by wearing yellow stars on their clothing. Those third-country passports allowed many Jews to flee ahead of the mass exterminations that followed.

An estimated six million European Jews were murdered during the Holocaust.

While some of the Jews who received passports produced in Switzerland used them to escape from Nazi-occupied Europe, the majority were sent to internment camps — many, apparently, to a camp in *Vittel*, in Vichy France. Mr. Blechner says the Nazis’ original plan was to hold the “Latin Americans” until

they could be traded for German citizens detained in camps in Canada and the United States.

But the sheer number of Latin American passport holders in occupied Poland eventually raised suspicions. As Swiss police moved to shut down Mr. Kuhl’s passport ring in the fall of 1943, Germany demanded that Latin American countries verify that the passport holders were really their citizens.

When Latin American governments said they had no knowledge of the passport holders, the Jews in *Vittel* and other internment camps were sent to Auschwitz and the horrific fate from which Mr. Kuhl’s network had tried to save them.

Another reason Mr. Kuhl’s exploits went unheralded is that Mr. Kuhl himself was uninterested in publicizing or romanticizing his exploits.

“[He] wasn’t interested in fame. He did this for a certain period in time, then he was selling watches in Toronto, then he became a construction magnate. People say, ‘Why didn’t he promote his story?’ Because he was busy,” said Mr. Kuhl’s son-in-law, Israel Singer. “He was a man trying to build a new life, just like the [Holocaust] survivors were.”

But Mr. Kuhl did tell his four children — two of whom still live in Toronto — and many grandchildren about the work he did during the war. The inspiring story they heard is supported by documents seen by *The Globe and Mail* in Bern, as well as by photocopied passports and other records that were anonymously donated to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum shortly after Mr. Kuhl’s death. Other documents that corroborate Mr. Kuhl’s heroics are stored in the archives of the Yad Vashem museum in Jerusalem.

A 1945 letter from the Agudath Israel World Organization states that Mr. Kuhl and his colleagues played a critical role in “rescuing many hundreds of Polish Jews.”

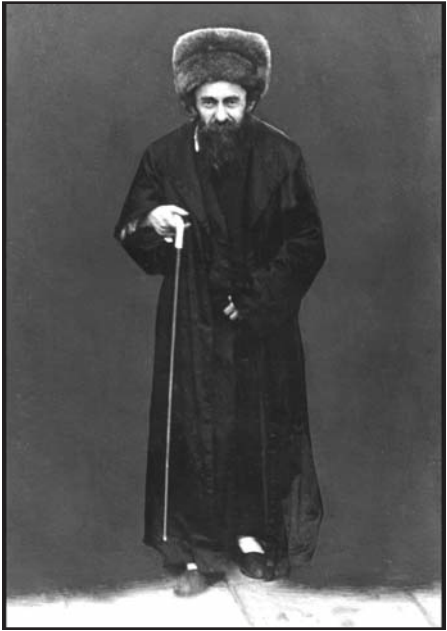
“These stories are not apocryphal. They’re actually real. There’s documentation,” said Mr. Singer, who served from 1986 to 2001 as secretary-general of the World Jewish Congress and then as chairman until 2006 — doing work, he said, that was frequently inspired by the legacy and teachings of his father-in-law.

One of the many saved by Mr. Kuhl’s efforts was Aharon Rokeach, the chief rabbi of the Belz Hasidic dynasty. Mr. Rokeach was considered a top target of the Gestapo, and saving the rabbi became paramount for the Hasidim.

He escaped Nazi-occupied Europe in 1943 using a passport created by Mr. Kuhl and sent via diplomatic pouch by Archbishop Filippo Bernardini, the papal nuncio to Bern who repeatedly used his office to aid Mr. Kuhl’s efforts. The rescue preserved the lineage of the Belzer

dynasty, which has since reestablished itself in Israel.

Mr. Kuhl’s tombstone near *Bnei Brak* in Israel says he saved the lives of thousands of Jews, including that of Mr. Rokeach. Mr. Singer says the inscription was added at the “insistence” of the rabbi’s son.



Rabbi Aharon Rokeach at *Marienbad* in 1937 for the famous rabbinical congress. The rabbi was one of many who were saved by Mr. Kuhl’s efforts.

Mr. Kuhl was born into poverty in the southeastern Polish town of *Sanok* in 1917 but was sent at the age of nine to live with his uncle in Zurich. His father had died when he was young, and his mother wanted him to get a better education than he could receive in *Sanok*. Mr. Kuhl fulfilled that wish by obtaining a PhD in economics shortly before the outbreak of the war.

His mother was deported to Siberia after the Nazi-Soviet invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. She died shortly after the end of the war.

In 1940, Mr. Kuhl was hired by the Polish legation as deputy head of the consular section, with a special remit to aid Polish refugees.

The passport-smuggling operation began in October 1941. The first rescue was accomplished by Eli Sturnbuch, a Polish Jew living in Switzerland who purchased a blank Paraguayan passport in Bern and filled it in with the details of his fiancée, Guta Eisenzweig, who was trapped in the Warsaw ghetto.

When that effort succeeded, Switzerland’s Jewish community realized they might be able to save far more people. Mr. Kuhl and his network began buying dozens, then hundreds, of blank Paraguayan passports from the cooperative Paraguayan consul in Bern.

As the operation expanded, the network began buying blank passports from other countries that had remained neutral. Bank transfers found among the documents in Bern show that American Jews aided the effort by sending money via the Polish consulate in New York.

Mr. Kuhl and his colleague Konstanty

(Continued on page 11)

THE DAY NAZIS TOOK WARSAW GHETTO JEWS TO TREBLINKA EXTERMINATION CAMP

BY ALAN HALL, EXPRESS

July 22, 1942, dawned hot and muggy in the Warsaw ghetto. Two years earlier, the Nazis had forced the Jewish population of German-occupied Poland into an area occupying just 1.3 square miles, surrounded by a 10-foot wall topped by barbed wire.

And this was the day on which they were to embark on one of the most horrifying examples of mass murder in human history.



Deportation of Polish Jews to Treblinka extermination camp from the ghetto.

Armed with lists and maps, SS soldiers moved methodically among the filthy, disease-ridden Jewish apartment blocks to round up the first candidates for extermination.

Children cried, women screamed and old men begged for mercy, but this was an operation that was to be carried out with no consideration of age, sex or infirmity.

On that first day 6,000 Jews were put aboard trains as the Holocaust moved into its industrial-scale phase. They were told they were to be resettled in the east.

Instead, the cattle wagons they boarded were destined for a complex called *Treblinka*, just two hours north of the city. It had been fitted out with 10 gas chambers disguised as shower blocks which could suffocate thousands of people per day in batches of 200.

There was no need to tattoo the inmates with serial numbers. *Treblinka* was purely a death factory, with most of its victims dead and buried within two hours of arrival.

The courage and suffering of a doomed people, carted away day after day during that terrible summer, is recalled by the very few who survived the ghetto to bear witness to a dark period the Jews called “the great deportations.”

They include people such as Ed Herman, an economist, who was born in Warsaw in 1931. A decade later he was walled up with all the other Nazi-defined *Untermenschen* or sub-humans — including Roma, Slavs, the mentally disabled and physically handicapped — in the ghetto.

“I had close relatives who lived right across from Pawiak prison, run by the Gestapo, where executions took place daily,” he recalled. “I used to visit my family there often. On one such visit to their house, crossing a checkpoint manned by police, I was beaten up by a policeman simply because I was there.”

“In the early summer of 1942, my mother decided that for my survival it was necessary for me to be smuggled out. It was just in time, because the transport of Warsaw Jews to the death camp of *Treblinka* started a few months later.”

Between July 22 and September 21, up to 300,000 inhabitants of the ghetto were deported to *Treblinka*. Herman survived by being taken in by a Christian family before making his way to Hungary. He lost many relatives, but his mother and father survived.

Maja Grabowska was also a child when she heard the nail-studded Nazi jackboots clattering through the ghetto streets.

“Day after day the Germans were carrying out human hunting — combing block after block for the whole month,” she said. “The action was proceeding with a lot of shouting, screaming, beating the helpless, firing at them and using all kinds of abuse. Surviving the first wave left us frightened and terrorized.”

“From the start of the ‘action’ our small family group — mama and I, my grandparents, and my aunt, with six-year-old Lenka — moved several times because our first temporary home at Zamenhoff Street was searched a couple of times and left deserted. Those who were not successfully hidden were taken to the *Umschlagplatz* — the collection point for the trains — and perished.

“In each house we moved into, the first thing to do was to find the hiding place: an attic, or cellar, or some wall closet, which we could disguise. The ghetto was almost empty. Houses were abandoned, apartment doors wide open. In succeeding rooms we entered there was still food on the table, clothing and toys around, unmade beds. Tenants disappeared, probably already gassed in *Treblinka*.

“I remember thinking with envy of

H.G. Wells’ Invisible Man and fantasizing about remaining invisible and not just hidden in the cellar, under the bed, in the closet or behind the furniture.

“We slept in crumpled beds, hugging each other, but this time our luck ran out. Shortly after we moved in, the



Janina Davidowicz recalls how the Jews were promised bread if they willingly boarded the trains.

next round-up began and our hiding place in the attic was discovered.”

She was marched with her family to the *Umschlagplatz* — known as the “vestibule of hell” — but their fate was deferred because the last train of the day was full.

“The last train left, leaving on the platform dead and dying people. I heard horrifying screams. Blood was flowing so profusely that it was pouring into the building nearby.”

In the event, a Jewish policeman working for the Nazis led them to

Davidowicz, 87, recalled how the ghetto Jews were lied to — promised bread if they went willingly to the collection point to board the trains.

She said: “People were offered two loaves of bread, some margarine or some sugar if they reported to the

Umschlagplatz. Nobody imagined they were going straight to a gas chamber.

“You heard every language in the street — Yiddish, Polish, Hungarian, German. We cooked on sawdust between two bricks and fetched water from a communal tap. Food was bread mixed with sawdust and potatoes.”

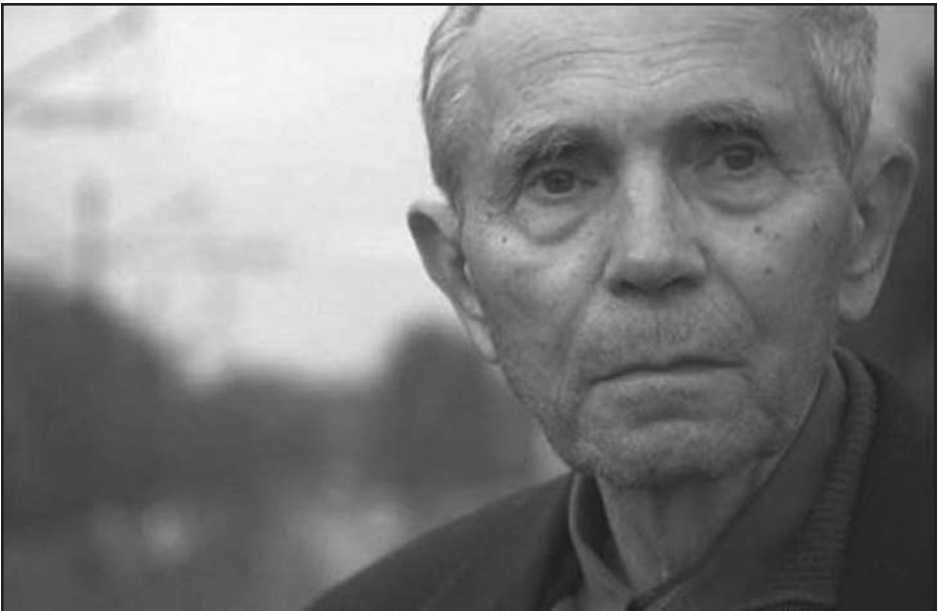
Her father joined the police and ensured their survival while their neighbors vanished around them.

“Our block of flats was empty. The father of the twins living above us threw himself out of the window when he came home and didn’t find his children there.”

In the winter of 1942 Janina’s father smuggled her to a Christian district. As he had police identification papers, he was allowed to escort lorries out through the gates, and she slipped out under his watch.

Outside the ghetto in the city, she was kept hidden by nuns and changed her name, but neither her mother nor her father survived the war.

She now lives in London. German troops returned to the ghetto in April 1943 to remove its remaining inhabi-



Ed Herman escaped the ghetto a few months before Nazis started moving its residents to Treblinka.

safety. While the rest of her family were to perish in the Warsaw ghetto uprising the following year, Maja, now 84, was smuggled out of the ghetto. But the horror of those days has never left her.

“It is always with me,” she says. Another child survivor, Janina

tants. But by then news of the mass murder had spread and hundreds of brave Jews rose up.

They all perished, but the “Jews of Warsaw” had defied the evil Nazi German state, and in doing so gave the future state of Israel, God’s promised land, its motto: “Never again.”

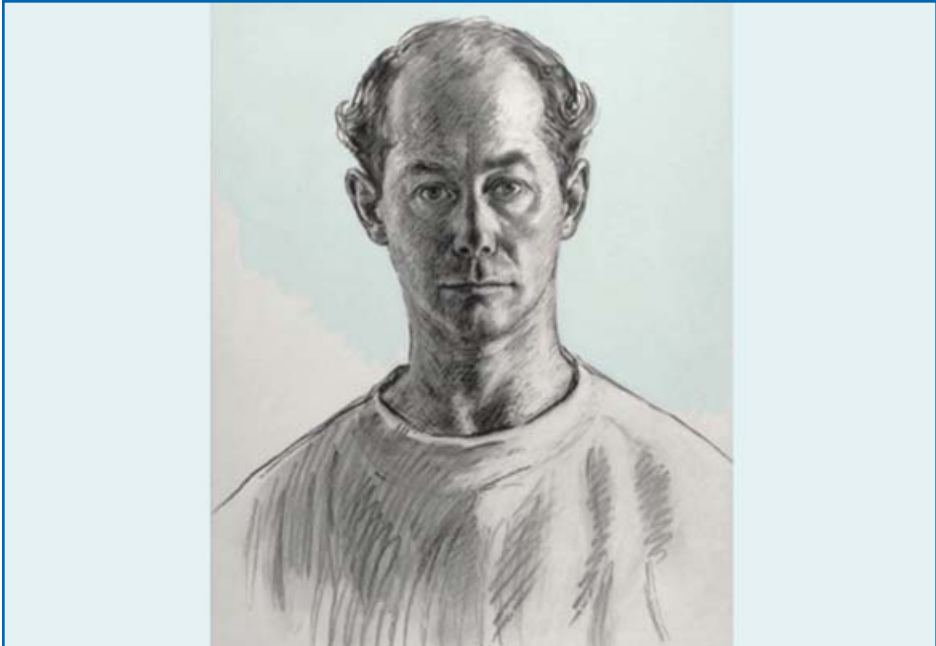
SAVED BY ART: HOW ONE MAN’S SKILL GOT HIM THROUGH SEVEN NAZI CAMPS

BY EITAN AROM,
JEWISH JOURNAL

Kalman Aron is a prolific artist. Even during his internment at seven Nazi camps, he didn’t stop drawing — and his artwork saved his life.

“I probably have in Germany a hundred drawings, drawings of soldiers,” the 92-year-old artist said during a recent interview. “They wouldn’t pay me anything, but I would get a piece of bread, something to eat. Without that, I wouldn’t be here.”

Speaking in the living room of his modest Beverly Hills apartment, Aron was surrounded by his artwork, col-



Self-portrait.

lected over decades. Paintings are stacked five and six deep against each wall, with more in his bedroom and even more in a basement storeroom.

Aron immigrated to Los Angeles in 1949 and built a life, a career and a circle of friends. They were artists and musicians. Now, apart from his wife and a part-time caretaker, it’s his paintings that keep him company.

Aron was born with a preternatural talent for portraiture. At 3, he was drawing likenesses of family friends in Riga, Latvia. At 7, he had a one-man show at a local gallery. At 13, he won a commission to paint the prime minister of Latvia. He was 16 years old and a student at Riga’s art academy in 1941 when the Germans occupied the country.

Seven camps, four marriages and nearly 80 years later, he’s proven to be a resourceful and dogged survivor. In the long and circuitous course of his life, art and survival have gone hand in hand.

It began in the ghetto in Riga, when he did a pencil drawing of a guard and showed it to him. The guard liked it enough to spread the word about his talent. The formula repeated itself over and over in the coming years of persecution and hardship.

Still, for a Jew to have writing mate-

rials in the camps was considered a risk, so German troops who wanted a likeness would hide him in a locked barrack while he drew them or worked from a photograph to draw their relatives.

“Once I did a portrait and other people liked it, they would do the same thing: lock me in the room, not let me out,” he said.

Aron managed to leverage his skill anywhere he spent a significant amount of time, particularly the Riga ghetto and the labor camps of *Poperwahlen* in Latvia and *Rehmsdorf* in Germany. In each place, he attracted a clientele of rank-and-file soldiers and high-ranking offi-

cers who rewarded him with scraps of food and pulled him out of hard labor.

What seems like lifetimes later, he believes painting still keeps him alive today.

“Friends of mine, they get old and they don’t know what to do, and they die of boredom,” he said in his dining room, his eyes widening with intensity. “Boredom! And I’ll never die of boredom, as long as I have a piece of paper.”

“MOTHER AND CHILD”

Decades before he spoke openly about what he saw during the Holocaust, Aron painted it.

Until 1994, when he was interviewed by the USC Shoah Foundation, he tended not to describe what he had seen. But during those long decades of silence, he produced a number of artworks — in oil, watercolor, pastel and charcoal — depicting his memories of that trying time.

There was Aron at the head of a line of inmates on a forced march. There was Aron at *Buchenwald*, sleeping outside with a rock for a pillow. There were haggard portraits of fellow inmates.

But the most well-known of these paintings is “Mother and Child,” which now hangs in the lobby of the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust.

Aron moved to Los Angeles in 1949 with a young wife, \$4 in his pocket and zero English proficiency after finishing art school in Vienna. In 1951, he had a job illustrating maps in Glendale when one day, he decided to glue two city maps to a board to create an 8-foot-tall canvas.

He brought home the oversized sheet, and after four or five nights of laboring past midnight, he finished a pastel, showing a scene he had witnessed many times in the camps: a mother clutching her child tightly to her face, as if they were one, bound together no matter what abuse they might have to face.

As he worked on the painting, he recalled, “I wasn’t feeling. I saw it happening.”

He went on, “I just said, ‘I’m going to put it on paper.’ I wanted to draw them. That’s why.”

“Mother and Child” sat in his studio for nearly 60 years as he found himself unable to part with it, the glue he used to create the canvas bleeding slowly through the paper to create a brownish tint. Today, it is considered one of his masterpieces.

At the time he painted it, Aron was unable to put his trauma into words. During his later Shoah Foundation interview, as a videographer switched tapes, Aron chatted with the interviewer, a fellow survivor, apparently unaware that audio still was being recorded, and described his difficulty.

“About 30 years ago, I couldn’t do it,” he said. “I couldn’t do it. I would choke up if I did it. I’m fine now.”

Sherri Jacobs, an art therapist outside Kansas City, Mo., told the Journal that art sometimes enables survivors of trauma to express what they otherwise could not. Jacobs has conducted an art therapy workshop at a Jewish retirement home near Kansas City for 15 years, working with many Holocaust survivors. Though they rarely paint explicitly about their Holocaust experience, as Aron has, creative expression nonetheless helps put shape and form to their trauma, she said.

“They can express things in a metaphorical way,” she said, “in a way that it’s leaving their mind, leaving their body and going on paper.”

PAINTING MEN AND MONSTERS

Drawing in the camps, Aron said he was not thinking of his hatred or fear of his subjects — only of surviving.

In *Poperwahlen*, for instance, the camp commandant gave Aron a photograph of his parents and ordered him to draw a miniature that could fit in a locket mounted on a ring.

Aron had seen Jews randomly beaten or shot by guards at the camp. More than anything, he was thinking about his own survival as the commandant locked him in a barrack with

a pencil and paper.

“I mean, in my head is, ‘Am I going to be alive tomorrow?’ ” Aron said in his apartment nearly eight decades later. “Watching them killing the Jews was terrible, terrible, terrible. I have very bad nights sleeping here.”



“Mother and Child” (1951), pastel on paper on a board.

The task could have taken him two days, he said. But he stretched it over more than a week for the exemption it afforded him from back-breaking labor.

It’s difficult for Aron to estimate how many portraits he drew. He knew only that the same interaction repeated itself many times with Nazi troops.

“Wherever I was, I made sure I had a piece of paper and pencil,” he said.

As the months passed, he parlayed his skill into gaining more materials, piecing together a sheaf of drawings that he carried with him. Observing his assured manner and his materials, camp guards mostly left him alone.

“When they saw that, they knew, ‘Don’t touch this guy, he’s doing something for us,’” he said.

By the end of the war, his skill accounted for perhaps an extra five pounds on his skeletal frame, he told the Shoah Foundation interviewer — a small but critical difference.

“There also were people that were tailors and shoemakers,” he said in

(Continued on page 9)

HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR’S LIFELONG SEARCH FOR HER DEAD PARENTS

BEAU DONELLY, THE AGE

As she has done for so long, Vivianne Spiegel searches the fading photographs for her parents’ faces among the piles of bodies.

She was seven years old when she saw her mother, Tauba, for the last time. It was Paris, July 1942. Her father, Moshe, a Polish shoemaker, had already been captured and turned over to the Nazis.



Vivianne Spiegel (right) with her two younger siblings, Albert and Regine. This photo was given to their father when he was at an internment camp in Pithiviers, France. His family hope he had it with him when he was deported to Auschwitz.

He was among the first prisoners delivered to the concentration camp where history’s largest genocide in one location would take place.

Then came the notorious *Vel’ d’Hiv* Roundup: more than 13,000 Jews arrested and locked in a bicycle velodrome not far from the Eiffel Tower.

They suffered in hot, cramped conditions with no food or water. Most were sent to transit camps, then herded onto cattle trains destined for the gas chambers at Auschwitz.

In a lifesaving turn of fate, Tauba and her three children were released after appealing to a sympathetic French policeman.

When they made it back to their apartment, police tape stretched across the front door. Tauba knew the only way to protect her children was to get them out of the city.

She put them on a train bound for *Chaufour-Notre-Dame*, in the country’s northwest, to the small farm where they would spend the next two years in hiding.

Vivianne remembers her mother crying at the station. She promised the war would be over soon; that the family would be together again. She told Vivianne to take care of her little brother, six-year-old Albert, and her 14-month-old baby sister, Regine.

Not long after the train pulled out, Tauba was denounced. Years later Vivianne would learn how her mother ran up the stairs of their building when the police came for her. Tauba was finally captured on the roof.

This is the last thing Vivianne knows about what happened to her mother, except that she, too, was murdered at Auschwitz.

“We never saw her again,” Vivianne says. “She knew what was going to happen, but we didn’t know and she certainly didn’t tell us. She told me that we were only going to the coun-

tryside for a short while.”

It has been more than seven decades since the last of the men and women and their children arrived at Death Gate, were divided into groups and were sent either to work or to the grave.

Tauba and Moshe were among more than 1.1 million people who perished at the Nazi concentration camp that stretched to the horizon, spanning a terrifying 40 square kilometers.

Mostly they were Jews, but Poles, Gypsies, Soviet prisoners of war, gay and disabled people were also targeted.

Vivianne doesn’t know if her parents were reunited behind the barbed-wire fences before they died. She hopes they were. They are together now, in the frame she keeps on the dressing table in her home. The black-and-white photograph of each of her parents, taken from their identification papers, is all she has left of them.

In 2010, Vivianne and her two sons retraced her childhood in France and travelled to Auschwitz for the annual March of the Living. They walked three kilometers from Camp Number One to *Birkenau* in tribute to her parents.

“It was a nightmarish experience for me, but it was also a form of closure,” she says. “I’ll never go again. It’s too horrible.”

Born Berthe, she changed her name to Vivianne — meaning life or alive — after coming to Melbourne. She feels her mother gave her a second life when she put her on the

train out of Paris.

But for 40 years Vivianne didn’t utter a word about her parents. Not even to the family who adopted three orphans of the Holocaust shipped to Australia after the war.

Now 81, the grandmother shares her story at the Jewish Holocaust Museum in *Elsternwick*. She speaks



Holocaust survivor Vivianne Spiegel with her only picture of her parents, who were both killed at Auschwitz.

about her fear of death and of the recurring nightmares. But she is haunted most by photos of the massed bodies.

“At first I couldn’t look, but slowly I acquired the strength. And then I started looking for their faces,” Vivianne says. “When I think of them on top of the piles of corpses it sends shivers down my spine.

“But I still look for them when I see new footage. It’s something I’ve always done. I’ve never found them.”

SAVED BY ART: HOW ONE MAN’S SKILL GOT HIM THROUGH SEVEN NAZI CAMPS

(Continued from page 8)

1994. “They would also get fed much better. They were indoors. They would sew, you know. These are the kind of people that had more of a chance of survival than a guy who was digging ditches.”

RECLAIMING A WORLD OF LIGHT AND COLOR

Jacobs, the art therapist, said understanding Holocaust survivors as the product of a single experience can be misleading, traumatic though it may have been. And in trying to understand Aron through his art, putting the Holocaust constantly front and center would indeed be a mistake.

Of the hundreds of paintings that line his apartment, relatively few deal with the Holocaust. More often, they are landscapes of the places he’s visited, views from his balcony looking out at downtown L.A. and portraits of the women he’s loved. Prominently displayed is a 2006 oil portrait of Miriam Sandoval Aron, his fourth and current wife, straight-backed, wearing

a baseball cap during their honeymoon in Hawaii.

His earliest landscapes in Los Angeles are often devoid of color: *A rambling house in Bunker Hill* is rendered in shades of gray with no sign of life; a monochromatic landscape of *Silver Lake* shows not a single inhabitant. But soon enough, he took to painting colorful tableaux of the city at various times of day.

Eventually, he made enough money to rent a West Hollywood studio with high ceilings and northern light, where he hosted parties that lasted until sunrise. Over the years, his art has been exhibited at several museums and galleries. He has painted a number of celebrities and public figures, including novelist Henry Miller, pianist and composer André Previn and then-Gov. Ronald Reagan of California.

For months at a time, he traveled through North America and Western Europe — though never to Germany — stopping whenever he was moved to paint.

Recently, Aron agreed to be fea-

tured in an upcoming documentary about his life and art, backed by television producer Norman Lear.

“We’re going for the Oscar on this thing, and you can quote me on that,” said Edward Lozzi, Aron’s longtime publicist, who introduced him to the documentary’s director and executive producer, Steven C. Barber.

Aron said he hopes the extra publicity will help him sell paintings and pay rent, which even at his advanced age continues to be a concern. But in general, he’s content to sit at home and paint.

Though Aron sometimes struggles to remember words and names, he remains spirited enough, painting for hours each day and eagerly engaging visitors in conversation. “I can manage six languages,” he said. “But I can’t remember people’s names.”

These days, his paintings are mainly nonobjective rather than representative.

“I used to go to the park,” he said, sitting in an airy corner of his apartment, next to the kitchen, where he keeps his

home studio. “I used to meet people. Now, I’m not allowed to drive at my age. So I’m here all the time.”

Lacking subjects for portraiture, Aron paints sheet after sheet of shapes and colors.

“I enjoy the design, the design,” he said, holding up a recent painting, a set of undulating neon waves. “Movement, movement. This moves, it doesn’t stay still.”

Aron considers himself lucky to have a gift and a passion that keeps him occupied into his old age.

“My situation may be a little bit better than some people who came out of the camps,” he told Magee during their interviews. “They may have nothing else to do but watch television and think about those bad days in the camps. I did that in the beginning, but I got away from thinking about it by doing portraits, landscapes, traveling and painting. I think that kept me away from all this agony of ‘How did I survive?’ or ‘Why did I survive?’

“I did, and that’s it.”

“I CONDEMNED MY MOTHER TO THE GAS CHAMBER WITH ONE WRONG WORD”

Edith Eger was just 16 when she and her family were sent to Auschwitz in 1944. She accidentally sentenced her mother to death by revealing she was over 40. Here’s her story.

Music is playing as we arrive at Auschwitz. It’s a cold dawn in April 1944 and we’ve just been decanted from a cattle car, in which several people have died along the way.

But my father has just spied a big sign above the gates: “*Arbeit macht frei*,” it says — work sets you free. He is suddenly cheerful.

“You see,” he says, “it can’t be a terrible place. We’ll only work a little, till the war’s over.”

If the platform weren’t so crowded, I swear he’d break into a dance.

Soldiers start herding the men into a separate line — maybe they are being sent on ahead, to stake out a place for their families. I wonder where we’ll

test her. I don’t think at all. “Mother,” I say.

As soon as the word is out of my mouth, I want to pull it back into my throat. Too late, I have realized the significance of the question. “Sister, sister!” I want to scream.

Mengele points my mother to the left. Panicking, I start to run after her but he grabs my shoulder.

“You’ll see your mother very soon,” he says. “She’s just going to take a shower.” He pushes me to the right. Toward Magda. Toward life. My mother turns to look at me and smiles. It is a small, sad smile.

Magda and I are marched off to stand in front of some low buildings. We are surrounded by thin women in striped dresses. One reaches for the tiny coral earrings, set in gold, that have been in my ears since birth. She yanks and I feel a sharp sting.

“Why did you do that?” I ask. “I’d have given you the earrings.”

I wasn’t the only one with a talent. My sexy and flirtatious sister Magda played the piano, and our middle sister Klara had mastered the Mendelssohn violin concerto when she was five.

She was away studying music in Budapest on the night the Germans came for us. Storming into our flat, they told us we were being resettled and had to leave now.

Despite a chill in the air, I put on a thin blue silk dress — the one I’d been wearing when my boyfriend Eric gave me my first kiss. It made me feel protected.

Daylight was breaking as we arrived at a large brick factory, where 12,000 Jews would be held for nearly a month without beds, running water or adequate rations. A girl only a little older than me tried to run away. The Nazis hanged her in the middle of the camp as an example.

All too soon we were on our way to Auschwitz, 100 of us crammed in each cattle car. For what seemed like days, my parents didn’t speak.

Then, one night, I heard my mother’s voice in the dark.

“Listen. We don’t know where we’re going. We don’t know what’s going to happen. Just remember, no one can take away from you what you’ve put in your mind.”

Her words helped to save my life.

I am in shock. I can’t picture my mother being consumed by flames. I can’t fully grasp that she has gone. And I can’t even grieve. Not now. It will take all my concentration to survive the next minute, the next breath.

Night is falling when we are marched to gloomy, primitive barracks where we will sleep on tiered shelves, six to a board.

If I do anything to displease him, it could be me.

I’m dancing in Hell. I close my eyes and hear my mother’s words again: “Just remember, no one can take away from you what you’ve put in your own mind.”

And as I dance, I have a piercing insight. Dr. Mengele, the man who has just murdered my parents, is more pitiful than me. I’m free in my mind, which he can never be. He will



Dr. Josef Mengele, the infamous Angel of Death.

always have to live with what he has done.

I close my routine by doing the splits, and pray he won’t kill me. But he must like my performance because he tosses me a loaf of bread — a gesture, it turns out, that will later save my life. When he leaves, I share the bread with all my bunkmates.

“My little dancer. Come.”

After that, I work hard at developing my inner voice. This is temporary, I tell myself. If I survive today, tomorrow I’ll be free.

One day, as I’m taking a shower with other inmates, I notice a sudden quiet. I feel a chill in my gut. The man I fear above all others is at the door, gazing right at me.

“You!” Dr. Mengele calls. “My little dancer. Come.”

He leads me, naked and wet, down a hall and into an office with a desk and chair. He leans against the desk and looks me over, taking his time. I hope whatever he plans to do to me will be over quickly.

“Come closer,” he says, and I inch forward, shaking. I can smell menthol. His fingers are working over his coat buttons. I am naked with my mother’s killer.

Just as I’m close enough for him to touch me, a phone rings in another room. He flinches. He re-buttons his coat. “Don’t move,” he orders as he opens the door.

I hear him pick up the phone in the next room, his voice neutral and curt. And I run for my life.

The next thing I know, I’m sitting beside Magda as we devour the daily ladle of weak broth, with little pieces

(Continued on page 12)



The Elefant family in Czechoslovakia in 1928 (left to right: Helen, Edie, Magda, Klara, Ludwig).

sleep tonight. I wonder when we’ll eat.

My mother, my elder sister Magda and I stand in a long line of women and children, inching toward a man with cold and domineering eyes. I don’t yet know that this man is Dr. Josef Mengele, the infamous Angel of Death.

As we draw near, I see a boyish flash of gapped teeth when he grins. His voice is almost kind when he asks if anyone is sick. Or over 40 or under 14. When someone says yes, he sends them to a line on the left.

My mother has grey hair, but her face is as smooth and unlined as mine. She could pass for my sister. Magda and I squeeze her between us and we walk three abreast.

“Button your coat,” says my mother. “Stand tall.” There is a purpose to her nagging. I am slim and flat-chested, and she wants me to look every day of my 16 years. Unlike me, she has realized my survival depends on it.

Our turn now. Mengele lifts his finger. “Is she your mother or your sister?” he asks.

I cling to my mother’s hand. But I don’t think about which word will pro-

tect her. I don’t think at all. “Mother,” I say.

As soon as the word is out of my mouth, I want to pull it back into my throat. Too late, I have realized the significance of the question. “Sister, sister!” I want to scream.

Mengele points my mother to the left. Panicking, I start to run after her but he grabs my shoulder.

“You’ll see your mother very soon,” he says. “She’s just going to take a shower.” He pushes me to the right. Toward Magda. Toward life. My mother turns to look at me and smiles. It is a small, sad smile.

Magda and I are marched off to stand in front of some low buildings. We are surrounded by thin women in striped dresses. One reaches for the tiny coral earrings, set in gold, that have been in my ears since birth. She yanks and I feel a sharp sting.

“Why did you do that?” I ask. “I’d have given you the earrings.”

“WE DON’T KNOW WHAT’S GOING TO HAPPEN”

Just a month before, I had been a pretty ordinary teenager — but with an extraordinary ambition. I wanted to represent Hungary at the Olympics.

For years I’d done five hours of rigorous ballet practice every day after school; then I’d discovered gymnastics and joined an Olympic training team.

Recently, my teacher had taken me aside. She was crying. My team place had to go to someone else, she said, because I was Jewish.

“HE SHOULD BE AS WELL KNOWN AS SCHINDLER”

(Continued from page 6)
Rokicky filled in each document by hand from the safety provided by the Polish legation’s diplomatic status.

Another key figure in the operation was Adolf Silberschein, a Polish Jew who fortuitously happened to be in Switzerland attending a conference when the war began. In exile, Mr. Silberschein established a group called the Committee for Relief of the War-Stricken Jewish Population and sent regular lists to Mr. Kuhl and Mr. Rokicky — sometimes two or three a week — containing the names, personal details and photographs of Jews trapped in occupied areas and in need of fake passports.

Rodolfe Hugli, the honorary Paraguayan consul to Switzerland, also played a vital role — though a controversial one, because of the profit he made. Mr. Hugli sold blank Paraguayan passports to the network, then affixed his official stamp to the documents after Mr. Kuhl and Mr. Rokicky prepared them.

Some of the documents were collected by Mr. Blechner, while others were assembled by diplomats currently stationed at the Polish embassy in Bern.

While many details of the passport-smuggling operation have become public over the decades, the scale of the Polish legation’s involvement was not publicly known until now. Nor was Mr. Kuhl’s Canadian connection.

“It is unfortunate to note that some officials of the Polish Legation were very closely mixed up in this affair,” reads a 1943 Swiss police document that lays out the scheme and its participants. “Mr. Julius Kuhl was repeatedly given Paraguayan passports by Mr. Hugli, which he then took to the Polish Legation, where the names of Polish Jews were entered [into them], although [the recipients] had no claim to the possession of such papers.”

Several documents demonstrate that the entire effort took place with the active assistance and protection of Aleksander Lados, Poland’s de facto ambassador at the time.

It was Mr. Lados who had hired Mr. Kuhl and — despite increasing pressure to dismiss his deputy consul — gave his activities diplomatic protection.

(The government-in-exile of Nazi-occupied Poland had diplomatic representation in Bern via the same building that now houses the country’s embassy here. The Swiss government granted Mr. Lados and his colleagues diplomatic status through Switzerland but, to avoid provoking the Nazis, never formally accepted Mr. Lados’s credentials as Poland’s ambassador.)

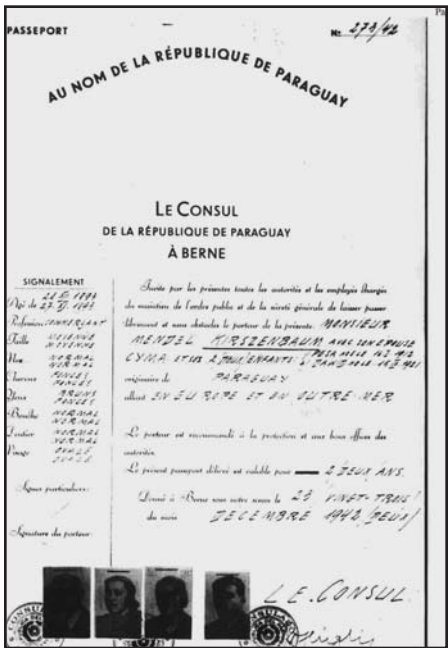
“The Polish Legation in Bern, wishing to save its citizens, is doing all it can,” reads an August 1943 letter from Mr. Silberschein, the man who compiled the lists for Mr. Kuhl’s network, to Archbishop Bernardini. “Thanks to these means, a few thousand lives have been saved.”

“Mr. Lados was the head and he tolerated and protected what Mr. Kuhl did,” said Mr. Blechner, who believes Mr. Lados should be added to the Righteous Among the Nations, an honour bestowed by the state of Israel on non-Jews who risked their own safety to rescue Jews from the Holocaust.

The possibility of obtaining a Latin American passport was a ray of hope for those trapped in Nazi-occupied Poland.

“I’d like to have Uruguayan passport, Costa Rican, Paraguayan — just so one can live peacefully in Warsaw, after all, it is the most beautiful of lands,” wrote Wladislaw Szlengel, a poet who lived in the Warsaw ghetto until he was executed in May 1943.

As the pace of the killings accelerated, so did the secret passport operation — until Swiss police broke it up.



Photos of scanned docs held in the Yad Vashem archive in Jerusalem.

Police records show Mr. Silberschein and his colleague Penny Hirsch were arrested in September 1943, and found to be in possession of an assortment of Latin American passports, as well as several foreign currencies.

Under interrogation, the Moscow-born Ms. Hirsch told police she was aware of “between 200 and 300 passports” that had been distributed to Jews living in German-occupied parts of Europe. She told the police that she and Mr. Silberschein knew they had been breaking the law but that their motivations were purely humanitarian. “We did not intend to harm Switzerland,” she added, according to a police transcript.

While American Jews provided financial support to Mr. Kuhl and his network, the U.S. government was less helpful — apparently out of concern that German spies might reach North and South America using the passports. “The Legation of the United States in Bern informed the Polish Legation some time ago that it was not satisfied with this traffic in passports,” Mr. Silberschein said during his own interrogation by Swiss police.

He said the network paid anywhere between 550 Swiss francs for a blank Haitian passport and 1,200 for a Paraguayan one. (The average hourly wage at the time was less than two francs.)

But when asked how many passports he had helped smuggle in, Mr. Silberschein claimed not to know. “I don’t have a very good memory for numbers,” he told the police.

By the fall of 1943, Swiss police had focused their investigation on Mr. Kuhl, and Mr. Lados was summoned by the Swiss Foreign Ministry to explain the activities of his diplomat.

Mr. Lados swung between pleading with the Swiss — telling them the passport scheme had been motivated by “the desire to save the lives of many good people” — and subtly threatening to expose how Swiss police had themselves granted stateless passports to Jews crossing the country on their way toward neutral Portugal and Spain.

Mr. Lados and Mr. Kuhl remained in their posts until September 1945, when they were replaced by emissaries from Poland’s postwar Communist government.

Stripped of his diplomatic status, Mr. Kuhl was told that, despite having a Swiss wife and two Swiss-born children, he had to leave Switzerland. He moved to Toronto with his young family “because the Canadians would have him. Jewish migrants were not welcome everywhere,” Mr. Singer said, adding that his father-in-law also tried living in New York but “felt lost” there.

“Toronto’s Jewish community was very welcoming to immigrants. He found his Judaism renewed in Toronto to a degree that never would have happened to him in Switzerland,” Mr. Singer said. “He arrived with a briefcase full of watches and became an important businessman and a Canadian citizen.”

Mr. Kuhl remained in Toronto until 1980, when he moved to Miami. By that point, he was already suffering from the emphysema that would claim his life.

A curiosity among the documents seen by *The Globe* is a 1960 letter Mr. Kuhl received from Roland Michener, then a Progressive Conservative MP and the Speaker of the House of Commons.

“It is indeed a remarkable story of which you have reason to be proud,” wrote Mr. Michener, who would become Canada’s 20th governor-general. But Mr. Michener appears to have been referring to Mr. Kuhl’s career in the construction industry, not his life-saving efforts during the Holocaust.

Mr. Singer says that while Mr. Kuhl never saw himself as a hero, it’s time his father-in-law was acknowledged as such.

“My view is that Dr. Kuhl was in the right place at the right time, and instead of doing nothing — like most people — he did the right thing.”

LOOTED HOLOCAUST BOOKS ARE BEING RETURNED TO THEIR RIGHTFUL HEIRS

A new search in Germany for books stolen from Jews during the Third Reich is beginning to bear fruit.

Recently, a man in California who was the only survivor of the Holocaust in his family received a book from Germany that had been dedicated to him by a teacher. The only other things he has from his childhood are a piece of clothing and one family photo, the *Deutsche Welle* news agency reported.

Last fall, it was announced that 500 books from the library of Jewish department store owners Edith and Georg Tietz had been rediscovered in the city library of *Bautzen*.

The “Initial Check” project — dedicated to finding stolen books and their rightful heirs — is a relatively new part of Germany’s government-sponsored search for stolen art, coordinated by the *Magdeburg*-based Lost Art Foundation. For over a year, three provenance researchers have been searching through libraries, starting in the former East German state of Saxony-Anhalt. In all, there are some 6,000 libraries that eventually will be examined by researchers, Uwe Hartmann, head of provenance research at the Lost Art Foundation, told *Deutsche Welle*.

The successes may not be as sensational as the returns of paintings by famous artists to heirs. But according to a report in *Deutsche Welle*, the return of a book can be just as meaningful to the family involved, as in the case of the Holocaust survivor from California.

According to Hartmann, the Nazis began confiscating books from Jews in Germany after the so-called *Kristallnacht* pogrom in November 1938. Some Jews fleeing Germany sold their books and other belongings for far less than they were worth. Other books were looted from homes and collections in Nazi-occupied areas during the war.

One source of information for provenance researchers is a list of books kept by the *Reichsstauschstelle*, an office of the interior ministry that was created in the 1920s. The Nazis ultimately used it as a resource, essentially making stolen books available to help restock German libraries that had been damaged in the war.

But for the most part, the researchers rely on help from local librarians, who know the contents of their shelves and have picked up clues over the years.

In addition to books and paintings, the Lost Art Foundation is seeking to reconnect musical instruments, furniture, household articles and even cars with their proper heirs.

“I CONDEMNED MY MOTHER TO THE GAS CHAMBER WITH ONE WRONG WORD”

(Continued from page 10)
of potato skin bobbing up like scabs. But the fear never goes away — that he’ll find me again, that he’ll finish what he started, that he’ll select me for death.

As the months go by, we starve and lose strength. In our heads, though, it’s a different story: we spend most of our time cooking.

At 4 am roll-call in the freezing dark, we can smell the rich aroma of meat we have just roasted. We give each other cooking lessons; we salivate over our imaginary dishes; we fight over how much paprika you put in Hungarian chicken paprikash, or how to make the best seven-layer chocolate cake.

I try to blank out the horrors. The day SS officers tie a boy to a tree and use his limbs for target practice. The day a woman goes into labor and they tie her legs together. I have never seen such agony.

One day, an officer separates us all into two lines. It’s impossible to tell which one leads to death.

Magda and I are in different lines. Nothing matters except that I stay

thread factory. After a few weeks, the SS come for us one morning with striped dresses to replace our grey ones.

We board a train carrying ammunition. This time we are forced to sit on top of the cars — human decoys to discourage the British from bombing the train, but they do anyway.

Somehow, Magda and I survive. We get off the train and march, maybe for weeks. There are fewer of us every day. The roadside ditches run red with blood from those shot in the back or the chest — those who tried to run, those who couldn’t keep up.

We’ve gone without food for days and now we are at *Mauthausen*, a concentration camp at a quarry, where prisoners have to hack and carry the granite destined for Hitler’s new Berlin.

Rumors shudder down the line. They make you stand along the so-called Parachutist’s Wall, at the edge of a cliff. At gunpoint, you then have to choose: either push the inmate beside you off the cliff or be shot yourself. Magda and I agree to push each other.

We limp on. A march of skeletons from *Mauthausen* to *Gunskirchen*. It is a relatively short distance, about 50 km (31 miles) or so, but we are so weak that only 100 of the 2000 of us will survive.

Magda and I cling to each other, determined to stay upright. Each hour, hundreds of girls fall into the ditches on either side of the road. Too weak or too ill to keep moving, they are killed on the spot.

Every part of me is in pain. I don’t realize I’ve stumbled until I feel arms lifting me. Magda and other girls have laced their fingers together to form a human chair.

“You shared your bread,” one of them says. A girl who shared Mengele’s loaf with me nearly a year ago has recognized me.

When we stop marching, we are crowded into huts where we sleep three deep. If someone below us dies, we don’t have the strength to haul them away.

It is now five or six months since we left Auschwitz. I can no longer walk. Although I don’t know it yet, I have a fractured spine and I’m suffering from pleurisy, typhoid fever and pneumonia.

Here, in hell, I watch a man eat human flesh. I can’t do it; I eat grass and try to stay conscious.

Once, I see Magda crawling back to me with a Red Cross can of sardines that glints in the sun. But there’s no way to open it.

One day, the SS rig the ground around us with dynamite. With my eyes closed, I wait for the explosion that will consume us in its flames.

“THE AMERICANS ARE HERE!”

Nothing happens. I open my eyes and see jeeps rolling slowly in through the pine forest that obscures the camp from the road. Feeble voices shout: “The Americans are here!”

Watching from the tangle of bodies, I see men in fatigues. I see an American handing cigarettes to inmates, who are so hungry that they eat them.

“Are there any living here?” the Americans call out in German. “Raise your hand if you’re alive.”

I try to move but I can’t. A soldier shouts something in English. They are leaving.

And then a patch of light explodes on the ground. The sun is flashing on Magda’s sardine tin. Whether on purpose or by accident, she has caught the soldiers’ attention with a tin of fish.

I feel a man touching my hand. He presses something into it. Beads. Red, brown, green, yellow.

“Food,” the soldier says. He helps me lift my hand to my mouth. I taste chocolate.

He pulls the dead away from me,

and now Magda is beside me in the grass. She is holding her can of sardines.

We have survived the final selection. We are alive. We are together. We are free.

COULD I HAVE SAVED MY MOTHER?

After recuperating, Magda and I were reunited with Klara. My boyfriend Eric had died in Auschwitz the day before liberation.



Edith Eger in 1956.

At 19 I married Bela, a Slovakian whose mother had been gassed at the camp. He wasn’t the love of my life but he made me laugh and feel protected. Later we’d have three children, divorce and marry each other again.

In 1949, my husband, Magda and I emigrated to the US, where she worked as a piano teacher and I did a PhD in clinical psychology, becoming an expert on post-traumatic stress disorder. I was helping others, but it was years before I felt free in my own mind.

Could I have saved my mother? Maybe. I can continue blaming myself forever for making the wrong choice — or I can accept that the more important choice is not the one I made when I was 16 and hungry and terrified, when we were surrounded by dogs and guns and uncertainty.

It’s the one I make now, to accept myself as I am: human, imperfect. The choice to stop asking why I deserved to survive. The choice to stop running from the past.



Edith with her husband and baby Marianne in 1947.

with my sister; even if she’s in the death line, I want to die with her.

I don’t have a plan. And then I’m suddenly doing cartwheels, hands to earth, feet to sky. I expect a bullet at any second but I can’t stop myself.

A guard raises his gun. But he doesn’t shoot; he winks at me. In the few seconds that I hold his complete attention, Magda has run across the yard into my line.

Now they are herding 100 of us toward the platform. As we stand there, waiting to climb a narrow ramp into a cattle car, the Russians are approaching Poland from one side, the Americans from the other. The Nazis have decided to evacuate Auschwitz, bit by bit.

I lose track of the time we are in motion. We end up working at a

Night falls and word goes round: we’ll be killed tomorrow. Have we really been marched these many hundreds of miles only to die? What has it all meant? I think of my boyfriend Eric’s voice and lips. If I die tomorrow, I’ll die a virgin.

I wonder what a man looks like naked. There are naked dead men all around me: it wouldn’t hurt their pride for me to have a look. Afterwards, I feel satisfied: at least I won’t die ignorant.

At daybreak, the line starts to move. Some wail. Some pray. Everyone is being sent in the same direction. It really is the end.

And then the line stops. We are led toward a crowd of SS guards by a gate. “If you fall behind, you’ll be shot,” they shout at us.

AUSCHWITZ ARTIFACTS TO GO ON TOUR

(Continued from page 1)

goals such as enlightenment and education.”

The Auschwitz museum will get a fixed amount that will be given to it yearly to cover any expenses arising from the project, though neither museum officials nor Musealia specified how much. If the exhibition is profitable, the amount the museum receives will be increased, Mr. Ferreiro said.

The story of Auschwitz, as told through the artifacts, will cover the physical location of the camps and their status as symbols of structuralized hatred and barbarity. The exhibition will begin with the history of *Oswiecim*, the Polish site of the German camps, whose population was about 60 percent Jewish before the war. That history will be followed by the origins of Nazism after World War I.

Of the 1,150 original pieces to be displayed, 835 will come from the state museum. The rest have been lent by other institutions, like Yad Vashem in Israel, or directly by survivors and their families; many of those pieces have

not been displayed before.

Each artifact, however, was chosen to help lay out the history of the Holocaust. Mr. van Pelt mentioned a

Vienna who was a prisoner at Nazi camps in *Lodz*, a city in central Poland, and Auschwitz. The blanket is on loan to the exhibition from the



Siegfried Fedrid, who survived Nazi camps in *Lodz*, Poland, and Auschwitz, with his family before the war in 1927 Vienna.

brown blanket that belonged to Siegfried Fedrid, a Jew born in

Holocaust Center for Humanity in Seattle, which got it from the family of

Mr. Fedrid, who died in 1963.

Mr. Fedrid shared the blanket with five other prisoners, probably saving their lives during a grisly winter march.

Rabbi Hier said that the Holocaust artifacts must travel the world to make sure memories of the era do not fade away.

“We’re in the period of the last remnants, last decades, where personal survivors or witnesses, who can describe the events, are living on this planet,” he said. “We will soon have no survivors.”

Mr. Cywinski, of the Auschwitz museum, said he expected the exhibition to be provocative, with some patrons drawing connections between the rise of Nazism and events around the world today. He mentioned populism, propaganda, institutionalized hatred and an international community that he regarded as sometimes seemingly blind to these social forces.

“Memory that is intelligent, reflexive, is not limited to the past, but allows you to define the reality and project the future,” he said. “Otherwise, why would we even need memory?”

SEVEN BOOKS ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST SCHOLARS SAY YOU SHOULD READ

(Continued from page 4)

This award-winning book recounts the amazing story of Zosa Szajkowski, the scholar who rescued archives that might otherwise have been lost in the Holocaust. Szajkowski wrote numerous books and articles, but was also a known archive thief, caught red-handed stealing valuable papers from the New York Public Library. Leff’s meticulous account reads like a thriller, yet conveys invaluable information concerning the fate of Jewish archives during and after the *Shoah*, and why removal of archives from their original home matters. Brandeis University and my late father, Bible scholar Nahum Sarna, play bit parts in this story. I remember Szajkowski, too; in fact, I took a class with him as a Brandeis undergraduate. He told lots of stories in class about his archival experiences during and after World War II, but it was only after reading Leff’s wonderful book that I understood “the rest of the story.”

Why? Explaining the Holocaust (W.W. Norton & Company, 2017). By Peter Hayes.

David Engel, professor of Holocaust studies and chair of Hebrew and Judaic studies at New York University, writes:

I recommend this book for a lucid, well-crafted introduction to the history of the Holocaust. Unlike most works on the Holocaust written for a general audience, which tend to emphasize how the Holocaust was carried out and experienced, Hayes’ book concentrates, as its title suggests, on helping readers to understand why the Holocaust occurred when it did,

where it did, in the manner it did and with the results it produced. It offers readers a window onto how historians go about finding answers to these questions, why some answers turn out to be more compelling than others and how new evidence can change understanding.

Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture (Harvard University Press, 2016). Edited by Claudio Fogu, Wulf Kansteiner and Todd Presner.

Omer Bartov, professor of European history and German studies at Brown University, writes:

This book comes out a quarter of a century after the publication of Saul Friedlander’s crucial edited volume, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”* (1992), which had challenged the conventional discourse on the mass murder of the Jews and critiqued its popular representation. The current volume attempts to grapple with the wider impact of Holocaust scholarship, fiction and representation in the intervening period. It includes fascinating essays on new modes of narrating the *Shoah*, the insights provided by the “spatial turn” on research and understanding of the event, and the politics of exceptionality, especially the contextualization of the Holocaust within the larger framework of modern genocide. As such, it enables readers to understand both the ongoing presence of the Holocaust in our present culture and the different ways in which it has come to be understood in the early 21st century.

Islam and Nazi Germany’s War (Belknap Press, 2014). By David

Motadel.

Susannah Heschel, professor of Jewish studies at Dartmouth College, writes:

This is a major work of scholarship, examining the various ways the Nazis fostered a relationship with Muslims both before the war and especially during the war. Jeffrey Herf wrote a book a bit earlier, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, detailing Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda sent, in Arabic translation, to North African Muslims, and Motadel expands the range of influence: that Hitler understood Islam as a warrior religion that could be exploited for propaganda efforts and to serve in both the *Wehrmacht* and the SS. The indoctrination of Muslims with Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda may well have had effects lasting long past the end of the war, a topic that deserves additional attention.

My Grandfather Would Have Shot Me: A Black Woman Discovers Her Family’s Nazi Past (The Experiment, 2015). By Jennifer Teege and Nikola Sellmair.

Michael Rothberg, professor of English and comparative literature and chair in Holocaust studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, writes:

Teege’s memoir, published in German in 2013 and translated into English in 2015, is a fascinating contribution to the discussion of the ongoing impact of the Holocaust over multiple generations. When she was in her late 30s, Teege discovered that her grandfather was a Nazi war criminal. And not just any Nazi: he was Amon Goeth, the commandant of *Plaszów* depicted in the film

Schindler’s List. Because Teege is herself a black German woman — the daughter of a Nigerian father and a white German mother who was herself the daughter of Goeth’s mistress — her story takes on additional resonance. Intercut with contextualizing passages by Sellmair, a journalist, Teege’s memoir both confronts historical conundrums about race, reconciliation and responsibility for the past, and offers glimpses of very contemporary questions about the contours of German identity. Her earnest reckoning with family and national history can inspire us all to reflect on what it means to be implicated in histories of racial violence, even those we have not participated in directly.

They Were Like Family to Me: Stories (Scribner, 2016). By Helen Maryles Shankman.

Jeremy Dauber, director of the Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies and professor of Yiddish at Columbia University, writes:

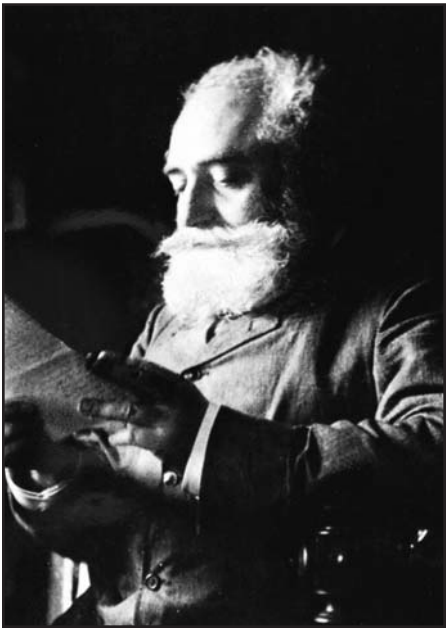
Writing literature about the Holocaust is many things, but it is never easy; and writing Holocaust literature in the vein of magic realism is more difficult yet. It risks taking the great horror of the 20th century and rendering it ungrounded, imaginative, even — God forbid — whimsically slight. But when a skillful writer pulls it off — David Grossman, for example, and now Shankman — the fantastic casts illuminating and terrible light on the dark shadows of the history of the war against the Jews. The stories in her collection are by no means factual in all respects. But they contain unmistakable truth.

THE JEWS WHO FOUGHT FOR FREEDOM IN THE RING

Back in the 1920s, there were more Jews with professional boxing licenses than any other ethnic group in the United States. It was part of a new Jewish ethos that called for self-defense.

BY USHI DERMAN, HAARETZ

“Muscular Judaism,” which became a popular Zionist slogan, was a term coined by Max Nordau during the Second Zionist Congress in *Basel* in 1898. Nordau, a physician and Hungarian Jewish author, was a dignified, proud individ-



Max Nordau sought to fight the image of the Diaspora Jew as a weakling and a coward.

ual. He sought to fight the image of the Diaspora Jew as a weakling and a coward, someone who, during pogroms, chose to hide behind the pages of his Talmud and Mishna instead of swinging a punch. Nordau's call for a conscious revolution did indeed resonate here and there. However, old habits die hard, and aversion to the use of force was still deeply rooted in Jewish consciousness during this period.

Five years later, in 1903, a Jew named Hayim Nahman Bialik visited the city of *Kishinev* in the Bessarabia region of the Russian empire, and was shocked to discover tens of Jewish women, men and children spread out lifeless on the ground, their limbs askew and the fear of death reflected in their wild eyes. Appalled by the barbarity of the pogroms, but even more so by the helplessness of the Jews, Bialik wrote his famous poem “In the City of Slaughter.” In it, Bialik rebukes his fellow Jews who hid in their holes and prayed that the evil would not come to them, when in front of their eyes their mothers, wives and daughters were raped and killed.

The *Kishinev* pogrom was a watershed moment in the history of Jewish power. Bialik's poem shook the Jewish public, and Jewish self-defense units sprang up like mushrooms after the rain. In Palestine, a group called Bar Giora was created; the Bund, a socialist self-defense organization, was established in Eastern Europe; and in other areas

sports organizations were founded, including Hakoach, Shimshon, Hagibor and others.

There was a new Jewish ethos: the ethos of boxing. This influenced not only the *Ostjuden* (Eastern European Jews) who migrated eastward toward the Vistula River, but also the many Jews who crossed the ocean at the end of the 19th century and emigrated to the United States. The fact that in the New World pogroms were not a significant threat did not mean that these Jewish immigrants were able to leave their sense of fear and victimization, inherited from their ancestors, at Ellis Island, the entry point to the U.S. However, in contrast to previous generations, these immigrants adopted the new ethos and chose to fight (both literally and figuratively) for their freedom.

RAISED FISTS IN NEW YORK

In his fascinating book *When Boxing Was a Jewish Sport*, Allen Bodner describes the golden age of Jewish boxing in the United States, from the days of mass immigration until the Second World War. During this period, Bodner counts 23 different Jewish boxers who won world titles. The scope of the phenomenon of Jewish boxing is reflected in the fact that in 1928 there were more Jews with professional boxing licenses than any other ethnic group in the United States. Between 1905 and 1934 there were 10 world champion title matches that were fought between two Jews — when there could be only one champion from each weight category.



Benny Leonard, crowned the greatest Jewish boxer of all time.

Among the major Jewish boxers during this era — including Eli Stoltz, Artie Levine and “Lefty” Lew Tendler — the most prominent was Benjamin Leiner, whose Hebrew

name was Dov Ber ben Avraham Gershon and who later adopted the American name Benny Leonard. Leonard was born on the Lower East Side in New York. He commented, “I grew up in a Jewish neighborhood. ... to the south were the Italians, to the north were the Irish, and the public bathhouses were down the block on our street. When the Italian and Irish kids came to bathe, we had two options: to fight, or not to leave the house.”

Leonard, who regularly boxed with a Star of David on his shorts, symbolized the New Jew, who was no longer a wagon driver, a peddler or a money-lender, but rather a determined fighter who went into the ring and raised his fists in the name of all of the previous generations. Leonard was already crowned as the greatest Jewish boxer of all time at the beginning of his career, over the course of which he earned 88 victories, 68 of which were knockouts. His love for boxing did not end with his retirement, when he chose to become a referee. He also fulfilled the phrase “he died doing what he loved” when he died of a heart attack in the middle of a fight he was refereeing in New York.

FROM THE RING TO THE CAMPS

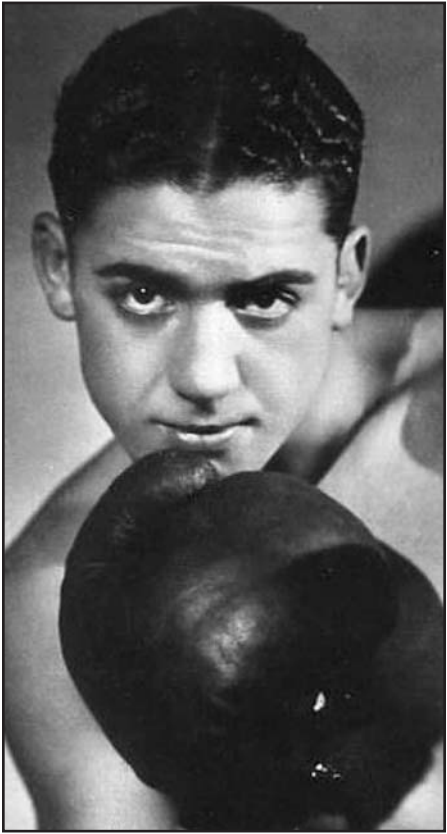
The connection between death and boxing became more chilling during the period of the Holocaust, and was embodied by two famous Jewish boxers: Salamo Arouch and Victor Perez. A Tunisian Jewish boxer who found success in Europe, Perez was born in 1911 in Dar El-Berdgana, the Jewish quarter in Tunis, the capital of Tunisia. At 5'1" (158 centimeters), his short stature did not prevent him from dreaming about a boxing career, and when he was 17 he forged a passport and moved to Paris to make his dreams a reality. During the day he worked as a shoe salesman, and in the afternoon he would train. After three years in Paris, Perez was crowned the premier flyweight boxer in Europe and France.

When he returned to Tunisia in 1931, Perez was given a royal welcome. At the port, no fewer than 100,000 fans waited to receive him: the biggest welcome in the history of the country. The celebration upon his return also included donations to the synagogue and the Jewish school in his city. One of the most famous fights in Perez's career as a boxer took place in 1938 — days after *Kristallnacht* — when he fought in Berlin against a German champion while wearing shorts embroidered with a Star of David. When he entered the arena, the Nazi spectators booed Perez, who surveyed the anti-Semitic crowd impassively.

In 1943 Perez was deported to Auschwitz. Nazis in the camp identified him, and not long thereafter he became the camp's boxing entertainer. Perez was forced to participate in a series of showcase fights against

Nazi opponents. He won them all except for one particularly cruel and unusual bout that he fought against an extremely heavy German. During this time the Nazis made sure Perez worked in the kitchen so he could have enough food to continue to fight. In the kitchen Perez met another great Jewish boxer: Salamo Arouch, the Balkan champion who lived in *Thessaloniki* and, like all the city's Jews, was sent to Auschwitz in 1943.

In one of the first roll calls in Auschwitz after Arouch's arrival, an



Victor Perez.

SS officer walked among the prisoners and asked if anyone there knew how to box. Arouch was pushed out of the line by those who knew him and his boxing history. That night he won his first fight in the camp. He would fight approximately 200 more times, all of which he finished on his feet as the winner. Because of boxing, Arouch was able to survive Auschwitz until he was transferred to *Bergen-Belsen* in 1945, where he worked as a slave laborer until the camp was liberated. After the war, Arouch met Marta Yechiel and they fell in love. The couple was among those who came to Israel during the illegal immigration of 1945. Once in Israel, Arouch continued to box during his free time, but not professionally.

Unlike Arouch, Victor Perez did not survive the Holocaust. During the death march, Perez tried to give food to a friend, but was shot by the Nazis. His body was left to freeze on the snowy ground on the side of the road, without a burial or a sign marking the place where he was murdered. A number of years later, the stories of these champions were told on film in France and the United States — *Triumph of the Spirit*, about Salamo Arouch (1989); *Victor “Young” Perez*, (2013); and a short film by ESPN about the career of Benny Leonard.

JEWISH WOMAN WHO ENTERED THE LION’S DEN

BY ALEX SUSKIND,
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

The 4’11” French Jewish woman was walking through a field of snow when the ground underneath her began to crack. She was a spy for the Allies, sent to infiltrate the German front, but her military guide had neglected to mention the frozen body of water along the way. When the ice broke and Marthe Cohn fell into the canal, she wondered if this was finally the end.

“I told myself, if you don’t get out from here as fast as you can, you’re going to die of hypothermia,” recalled Cohn, now 97.

But perishing wasn’t an option. Dying would mean giving up on her top-secret mission and squandering the courage those closest to her had shown in the face of terror.

Her siblings worked to save fellow Jews from the horrors of the Nazi regime. Her fiancé, Jacques, was also involved with the resistance. He was later executed by the German army for his actions.

Cohn herself had been threatened and insulted for her religion. But she was a spy now — a spy with an important task, and she had no intention of returning to her superiors empty handed.

“I was very lucky,” Cohn told *The Times of Israel* recently about that night. After pulling herself out of the canal, she wandered around in circles for hours. In the morning, she met up with a Moroccan army regiment. She would have to try again another day.

In the chaos and confusion of war, countless stories of bravery and heroism can slip through the cracks. For five decades, one of those tales belonged to Cohn, a young Jewish woman who snuck into Germany to spy on the Nazis at the tail end of the war. Her rise from loving sister and friend to nurse, to intelligence officer, is one of remarkable perseverance, and will soon be explored in an upcoming documentary, *An Unusual Spy*, from German director Nicola Hens.

“This woman needs to be portrayed as long as she’s still alive,” said Hens. “There are not so many witnesses to the life [of a spy in World War II], and not so many who have such a great ability to express themselves and are actually willing to talk about it.”

“WE WERE SO NAÏVE”

From her home in *Rancho Palos Verdes*, sitting among framed family photos and the honors and awards she received for her work in World War II, Cohn spoke about her upbringing and the events that led to her work for the Allies.

Her story begins in the city of Metz, where she was raised with her four sisters and two brothers. Her parents, both fluent German speakers (a skill they passed onto their children), were

Jewish, and her grandfather was a rabbi who founded the Orthodox synagogue in town. But with the rise of Adolf Hitler, everything changed.

“We were horrified, but we never thought that it could come to France,” she said of the Third Reich. “We were so naïve.”

When the Germans pushed into France, her family was urged by the French government to leave their home and head south to *Poitiers*. There, they assisted Jews fleeing persecution.

“Hundreds of people would ring our bell,” said Cohn. “We never knew where they came from or who they were, but they needed help.”

Meanwhile, Cohn was training to become a nurse at the French Red Cross School of Nursing. After Paris was liberated in 1944, she joined the army, expecting to put her medical



Marthe Cohn being filmed by director Nicola Hens for the upcoming documentary *An Unusual Spy*.

skills to use. But when she arrived, she faced immediate pushback from a superior officer, who accused her of not doing her most for her country since she never officially joined a resistance group. She explained to him that she had tried but had been rebuffed.

“Several times I was interviewed by the chief of the resistance,” said Cohn. “They looked at me — I was only four-foot-eleven, I was very thin, I was very blond with blue eyes and had light skin — and they felt I had absolutely no substance. So they never accepted me.”

Instead of letting her become a military nurse, the officer relegated Cohn to social work, which she didn’t know anything about, but accepted nonetheless. A few weeks later, she met another officer, Colonel Fabien, who asked her to answer his phone during a lunch break.

“I went with him to his office, he showed me around, and said, ‘I am sorry, there is nothing to read here for you. I have only German books,’” recalled Cohn. “And I said, ‘But I read German fluently.’”

Intrigued, Fabien asked if she spoke German as well. When Cohn said she did, he offered her a transfer into the army’s intelligence service. Cohn said yes immediately.

“I didn’t even think,” she said. “He

left and then I sat down in a chair and wondered if I was a little crazy, and what predicament I had put myself in. But it was too late.”

BEHIND ENEMY LINES

Off Cohn went to *Mulhouse*, and later *Colmar*, in eastern France to train, learning how to identify German uniforms, read maps, fire guns — something she had never done before.

“It was amazing, I was 100 percent. I had very, very good eyesight,” she said.

Most importantly, she developed her alibi: that of a young German woman named Martha Ulrich, whose parents had been killed in a bombardment and whose Nazi fiancé had been captured by the Allies.

She was then assigned to the commanders of Army of Africa, a regiment of the first French army. Cohn was asked to interrogate prisoners of war, and eventually sent to cross the German front, a mission that failed more than a dozen times (including that ill-fated night when she fell into the canal) owing to faulty intelligence and the rapidly changing conditions of war.

But her biggest challenge was yet to come: going into Germany itself.

“I was sent to Germany for two purposes,” she said. “To get military information, but also information about how the German civilians were reacting to the war, because we didn’t know. We had very little information.”

After crossing through Switzerland into Germany, she stayed in the country for a month, gathering intel and sending it back to her handlers.

For a Jew in Nazi territory, the work was extraordinarily dangerous. But Cohn survived thanks to her strong alibi and the relationships she developed with Germans.

“I helped them any time I found the possibility to do it, and in exchange they offered me to stay at their homes and fed me,” she said. “That did not prevent me of getting in deep trouble several times, but I always found the right thing to tell them to get out of it.”

The information Cohn would gather there about a military encampment in the Black Forest — along with infantry units, numbers and strengths she had memorized thanks to her near-photographic memory — helped Allied commanders prepare for German troop movements. For her efforts, she was awarded the Croix de Guerre, a French military decoration given during World Wars I and II.

“I hadn’t become a spy for the glory,” wrote Cohn in her 2002 memoir,

Behind Enemy Lines. “To be thanked for my efforts so publicly was something I hadn’t expected.”

When the war ended, she wasn’t able to grasp why she was alive and so many others had perished. It would be seven years before Cohn even learned of her sister Stéphanie’s fate, which was ultimately deportation to Auschwitz.

“I always thought I may find her,” said Cohn. “But I didn’t. We didn’t know what was going on in the concentration camps. The American and English governments kept us in the dark....”

But when we drove north with the regiment, I met survivors. I thought they were coming from a psychiatric hospital. I couldn’t believe what they were saying. It was inconceivable that it happened. That’s where I understood that she probably didn’t live.”

THE SECRET IS UNVEILED

Years later, Cohn would marry an American medical student named Major L. Cohn, move to the States and give birth to two children. But she would keep her past a secret.

“I felt as long as I didn’t talk about it, it was a very pure story,” she said. “And once I talked about it, it was not as pure anymore.”

“I never even asked how she got into the army. All I knew was that she was a nurse and she ended up in Germany,” added her husband, Major.

But in 1996, the truth finally came out when she reached out to the Shoah Foundation after spotting an advertisement that asked for those who fought the German army to be interviewed about their experience.

Then, in 1998, on a trip back to France, Cohn decided to approach the French military for copies of her records, which led to her being awarded the Medaille Militaire, one of the highest military honors in France. She was later given the title of Chevalier of the Order of the Legion d’Honneur, in 2005, and the VerdienstKreuz, the Order of Merit of Germany, in 2014.

Along with her memoir, the additional honors gave Cohn’s story a boost. The new documentary aims to do the same.

Back at home, in between sips of tea, Cohn joked that the filmmaking process, which included Hens documenting her speeches and trips back to France, has been “a pain in the neck,” but she appreciated that her story will continue to get told.

Even at 97, Cohn’s mind is still sharp, and she is able to recall dates, names and other events with remarkable clarity.

“I think it’s just important to keep the memory alive,” said Hens. “I think World War II for many people is far away. But if you look at [Cohn] still alive, it’s not so far away, and if you look at world politics, there is danger that things might repeat themselves. It’s important to not forget what happened.”

The American & International Societies for Yad Vashem cordially invites you to attend our Annual Tribute Dinner

CARRY THE TORCH

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 12, 2017
The Pierre Hotel
2 East 61ST St, New York, NY
RECEPTION 5:00PM | DINNER 6:00PM

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Ari'el Stachel
Making his Broadway debut in The Band's Visit

HONORARY DINNER CHAIRS

Neil W. Book, Scott M. Book & Douglas B. Book

DINNER CO-CHAIRS

Rita Levy & Mark Moskowitz

Esteemed Honorees

Amy A. & Robert H. Book
Yad Vashem Leadership Award

Abbi Halpern
Yad Vashem Young Leadership Award

Barry Levine
Yad Vashem Young Leadership Award

Black Tie Optional | Dietary Laws Observed

American & International Societies for Yad Vashem

MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE

500 FIFTH AVENUE, 42nd FLOOR
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10110-4299
Web site: www.yadvashemusa.org

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
SMITHTOWN, N.Y.
PERMIT NO. 15

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION: A PLANNED GIFT TO ASYV

Empower, educate and strengthen our future by making an endowment gift to the American Society for Yad Vashem. Your legacy will help to support Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and keep the memory of the *Shoah*, its victims, survivors and heroes alive forever.

You can make a generous contribution through a bequest in your will by designating ASYV as a beneficiary of a Charitable Remainder Trust or Charitable Gift Annuity. You can also contribute through a life insurance or retirement plan, by naming ASYV as a beneficiary of a life insurance policy, IRA or other retirement vehicle.

Our ASYV staff are here to help you accomplish your estate planning goals.

For more information or assistance with your estate plan, please contact Chris Morton, Director of Planned Giving: cmorton@yadvashemusa.org or by phone at: 212-220-4304, extension 213.

Martyrdom & Resistance

Ron B. Meier, Ph.D.,
Editor-in-Chief

Yefim Krasnyanskiy, M.A.,
Editor

*Published Bimonthly
by the American Society
for Yad Vashem, Inc.
500 Fifth Avenue, 42nd Floor
New York, NY 10110
(212) 220-4304

EDITORIAL BOARD

Eli Zborowski**
Marvin Zborowski
Mark Palmer
Sam Skura**
Israel Krakowski**
William Mandell
Sam Halpern**
Isidore Karten**
Norman Belfer
Joseph Bukiet**

*1974-85, as Newsletter for the American Federation of Jewish Fighters, Camp Inmates, and Nazi Victims
**deceased