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 concerns. 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 but to reach out to a more global audience.

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 normal—like $1.5 million, and there are no guarantees—that’s on the site of the former camp, in southern Poland. ‘We had been thinking about this for a long time, but we didn’t want to make 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 dark part of its past, which is on the site of the former camp, in southern Poland. ‘We had been thinking about this for a long time, but we didn’t want to make the know-how.’

The exhibition will make its first stop in Madrid, aiming for an opening around December, and then tour for seven years.

It is no longer enough to “sit inside four walls, stare at the door and wait for visitors to come in,” Mr. Cywinski said, so museum officials decided to reach out to a more global audience. The exhibit was broached in 2010 when Musealia, a family-owned exhibition company outside the museum, which was surprised to trust 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.

“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 issues.”
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, 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 Linon Avnat, representing Hamachanot Haolim. Yossi and Reuven are the sons of Shlomo Nadel, who is one of two remaining Holocaust survivors who

...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 1939, the Nazis occupied 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, 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.”

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

BY CNAAN LIPHSHIZ, JTA

Nothing about the footage that Ruslolf 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, prison-

ers are seen playing soccer enthusiasti-

acally 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 fac-

tories 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 pro-

duced inside a functioning concentra-

tion camp for Jews — the other was in Theresienstadt.

Westerbork served as a transit camp . It was built by the Nazis in 1943 on the site of a former dairy farm, originally as a detention camp for Jews. It soon grew into a concentration camp for Jews. It was the largest camp in the Netherlands and one of the largest in Europe. It was used to detain Jews and other groups of people deemed undesirable by the Nazis.

Experts on the Holocaust in the Netherlands say that the footage was shot 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.

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Weste...
Stolen Words: The Nazi Plunder of Jewish Books.


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 self-same 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 was to the Jewish people, and how this ruthless looting, Glickman says, ““research and education,” and Nazi looters should be consigned to the “‘nearby pulp mill’ for destruction. Interestingly, here Glickman tells us about two Jewish poets, Abraham Sutzkever and Shmerke Kaczerginski — that was, it appears, “selection” process by saving the best of them … a highly dangerous undertaking.”

So, why did Hitler and the Nazis want these books? A mong other reasons, we read how “during the late 1930s … Hitler’s envisioned 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 poignant part of Stolen Words: the discovery of these books after the war, stored in “castles, aban- doned mansions, and warehouses,” and the story of the well-known schol- ars 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 dedi- cate 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 excep- tionally 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 ghetto and camps — “Kavun ha’aretz”.

Dr. Diane Cypkin is a Professor of Media, Communication, and Visual Arts at Pace University.
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 handwritten words: “Jewish families were executed on this spot by the Nazis.”

“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 Stolinichi, 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 so terrible could have happened here: Cherry and apple trees grow all over the place at the entrance to the village. It needs to be changed.

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 Chernyov, 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, Begoni 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 Stolinichi always wanted to build some kind of monument, said Timoshko, a 68-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 villagers, school principal Ivan Timoshko, and 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 historiographically 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 a mistake. It creates the wrong impression about who was executed there. It needs to be changed.

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

“A cross that stands on a Jewish grave is problematic from a religious standpoint as well, said Boleslav Kapukin, 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 Wegryniewicz, the chief specialistaist in the research department at the 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 Shishova, curator of Moldova’s Jewish Heritage Museum.

While there are no Jews left in the village of Stolinichi, 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 Iuri 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 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.”

A Holocaust memorial in Odhe, Moldova.
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 to 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.

“They weren’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 photocopies 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.

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.
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 subhumans — 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 cattle wagons rolling through the streets. “Day after day the Germans were carrying out human hunting — coming 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.

“The action from 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 pensioned out under his watch.

“As he had police identification papers, I was allowed to escort lorries out that for my survival it was impossible to return 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-
SAVED BY ART: HOW ONE MAN’S SKILL GOT HIM THROUGH SEVEN NAZI CAMPS

BY EITAN AROM
JEWISH JOURNAL

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elson 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 hun-
dred 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-
lected over decades. Paintings are stacked five and six deep against each wall, with more in his bedroom and even more in a basement store-
room.

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 min-
ister of Latvia. He was 16 years old and a student at Riga’s art academy. In each place, he attracted a clientele of rank-
and-file soldiers and high-ranking offi-
cers.

“My father was the minister of Latvia and a student at Riga’s art academy. In each place, he attracted a clientele of rank-
and-file soldiers and high-ranking offi-
cers. The formula repeated itself enough to spread the word about his talent. When the guard 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.

It began in the ghetto in Riga, when Aron started drawing pictures of soldiers 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 don’t know what to do, and they die of boredom,” he said in his dining room, his eyes widening with intensi-
ty. “Boredom! And I’ll never die of boredom, as long as I have a piece of paper.”

“MOTHER AND CHILD”

D

cades before he spoke openly about what he saw during the Holocaust, Aron painted it. Until 1994, when he was inter-
viewed 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, water-
color, pastel and charcoal — depict-
ing 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 fin-
ishing 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 wit-
nessed 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 inter-
viewer, 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.”

Sherr Jacobs, an art therapist out-
side 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.

“MOTHER AND CHILD” (1951), pastel on paper on a board.

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 photo-
tograph of his parents and ordered him to draw a miniature that could fit in a locked mount on a ring.

Aron had seen Jews randomly beat-
en or shot by guards at the camp. More than anything, he was thinking about his own survival as the com-
mandant locked him in a barracks 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.”

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 materi-
als, 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)
They suffered in hot, cramped conditions without food or water. Most were sent to work on farms, 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 appearing 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.

She put them on a train bound for Chaufour-Notre-Dame, in the country’s northwest, to the small farm where she would spend the next two years in hiding. Vivianne remembers her mother crying at the station. She promised the weapons 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 countryside for a short while.”

It has been more than seven decades since the last of the camps, then targeted not only picture of her parents, who were both killed at Auschwitz.

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 portraits of each of her parents, taken from their identification papers, is all she has left of them.

In 2010, Vivianne and her two sons reenacted 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 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

Aron, 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 honey-moon 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 tableaus 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 featured 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 representational. ‘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 happen. Just remember, no one can John says.

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.

Death.

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 cramped 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. And I can’t even grieve. Not now. It will take all my concentration to survive the next minute, the next breath.

I can’t even grieve. Not now. It will take all my concentration to survive the next minute, the next breath.

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.

The next thing I know, I’m sitting in a cattle car. The man I fear above all others is at the threshold. The uniformed officer from the selection line.

Dr. Mengele, the man who

The next 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 frowns. He re-buttons his coat.

“Don’t move,” he orders as he opens the door.

“Come,” he says, and I inch forward, shaking, I can smell menthol.

“Don’t move,” 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 frowns. 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 light meal of weak broth, with little pieces

(Continued on page 12)
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 — a year ago — delivered by a local author. 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 books whose 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 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 Reichstachstelle, 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.
Auschwitz, bit by bit.

Nazis have decided to evacuate the Americans from the other. The approaching Poland from one side, into a cattle car, the Russians are there, waiting to climb a narrow ramp yard into my line.

Attention, Magda has run across the seconds that I hold his complete any second but I can't stop myself. Suddenly doing cartwheels, hands to my sister; even if she's in the Edith with her husband and baby Marianne in 1947.

Nothing matters except that I stay and see such agony. I lose track of the time we are in another. 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 hands 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. Somehow, Magda and I survive. We've gone without food for days and now we are at Mauthhausen, 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.

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, what will consume us in its flames. This time we are forced to sit on the ground. The sun is flashing around us with dynamite. With my way to open it.

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 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 around. 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 Nazi forces are determined to evacuate Auschwitz, bit by bit.

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

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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.

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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 glint 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 flashings 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. A tin of fish.

"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.

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 we 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.
The Holocaust occurred when it did, helping readers to understand why how the Holocaust was carried out. By Peter Hayes.

Leff's wonderful book that I under-

stood "the rest of the story." nahm Sarna, play bit parts in this

Nahum Sarna, play bit parts in this

and my late father, Bible scholar

home matters. Brandeis University

removal of archives from their original

cerning the fate of Jewish archives

Stealing valuable papers from the

Szajkowski, the scholar who rescued

the amazing story of Zosa

(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 speci-
hed how much. If the exhibition is

profitable, the amount the museum

receives will be increased, Mr.

Felreiro 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 per-
cent Jewish before the war. That histo-

ry will be followed by the origins of

Nazism after World War I.

Of the 1,150 original pieces to be dis-
played, 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

brown blanket that belonged to

Siegfried Fedrid, a Jew born in

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

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 Hiri 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 rem-
nants, last decades, where personal

survivors or witnesses, who can describe the events, are living this
planet," he said. "We will soon have no survivors.

Mr. Cywinski, of the Auschwitz

museum, said he expected the exhibi-
tion to be provocative, with some

patrons drawing connections between

the rise of Nazism and events around

the world today. He mentioned pop-

ulism, propaganda, institutionalized

hatred and an international communi-

ty 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?"

(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. Left's melic-

ulous account reads like a thriller, yet conveys invaluable information con-
cerning 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 Left's wonderful book that I under-
stood "the rest of the story."


David Engel, professor of Holocaust studies and chair of Hebrew 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 con-
centrates, 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 Fogo, 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 con-

ventional discourse on the mass mur-
der of the Jews and critiqued its popu-
lar representation. The current volume attempts to grapple with the wider impact of Holocaust scholarship, fic-

tion and representation in the interven-

ing period. It includes fascinating essays on new modes of narrating the

Shoah, the insights provided by the "spatial turn" on research and under-

standing of the event, and the politics of exceptionality, especially the con-
textualization of the Holocaust within the larger framework of modern geno-
cide. 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 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


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

Teeger's memoir, published in Germany in 2013 and translated into English in 2015, is a fascinating con-

tribution to the discussion of the ongo-
ing impact of the Holocaust over mul-
tiple generations. When she was in her late 30s, Teeger discovered that her grandfather was a Nazi war crim-
nal. And not just any Nazi: he was Amon Goeth, the commandant of Plaszów depicted in the film

Schrindler's List. Because Teeger is herself a black German woman — the daughter of a Nigerian father and a white German mother who was her-

self the daughter of Goeth's mistress — her story takes on additional reso-
nance. Interwoven with contextualizing passages by Sellmair, a journalist, Teeger's memoir both confronts histor-

ical conundrums about race, reconcil-

iagtion and responsibility for the past, and offers glimpses of very contem-

porary questions about the contours of current world designs. By earnest reck-

onning 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 li-

tature in the vein of magic realism is

more difficult yet. It risks taking the gold-hued view 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 no means factu-

al 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 Zionist Congress in Basel in 1898. Nordau, a physician and Hungarian Jewish author, was a dignified, proud individual. He sought to fight the image of the Diaspora Jew as a weakling and a coward. 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 Zuckerman — was the prominent Jewish boxer 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 and 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 moneylender, but rather a determined fighter who went into the ring and raised his fists to the name of all 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. Only one of these families in Perez’s career as a boxer took place in 1938 — 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 booted Perez, who surveyed the anti-Semitic crowd impassively.

In 1943 Perez was deported to Auschwitz, and his 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: Simon Baruch, 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 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. 
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 had 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.

But perishing wasn’t an option. Dying would mean giving up on her lover, her two brothers, her parents, 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 Third Reich. Her fiancé, Jacques, was later executed by the German regime. 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 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 nurse to soldier for the Allies, Cohn was 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 the ill-fated night when she fell into the canal) owing to faulty intelligence and the rapidly changing conditions of war.

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

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-photo 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 publically was something I didn’t expect.”

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

“I always thought I may find her,” said Cohn. “But I didn’t.” We couldn’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 for those that 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 an option.”

“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, had been “a path in the neck,” but she appreciated that her story will continue to be 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,” Cohn, who was born on the day the United States entered World War II for many people is far away. But if you look at [Cohn] still alive and not so far away, if you look at world politics, there is danger that things might repeat themselves. It’s important to not forget what happened.”

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 on to 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 skills to use. But when she arrived, she faced immediate pushback from her superiors as well. When Cohn said she 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 nurse to soldier for the Allies, Cohn was 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 the ill-fated night when she fell into the canal) owing to faulty intelligence and the rapidly changing conditions of war.

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