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SURVIVORS CLUB: LESSONS FOR OUR CHILDREN — TAKING A STAND TO PRESERVE THE FUTURE

Barbara Gutfreund Arfa Professional Development Conference on Holocaust Education

The Education Department of the American Society for Yad Vashem and its Young Leadership Associates held its twentieth annual professional development conference on Holocaust education on March 18, 2018. This year's program was generously supported by the Barbara Gutfreund Arfa Endowment Fund for Holocaust Education.

This program is a collaborative effort with the Association of Teachers of Social Studies of the United Federation of Teachers, the Educators' Chapter of the UFT Jewish Heritage Committee, and the School of Education of Manhattanville College. Participants in this year's program, included educators from all five boroughs of New York City and from the tri-state area. The program also included a display of the traveling exhibit, "Architecture of Murder: the Auschwitz-Birkenau Blueprints." This resource, along with our array of additional traveling exhibitions, is available to schools to enrich their educational programs on the Holocaust.

Through teaching we warn about the consequences of extreme and baseless hatred and prejudice. We educate to promote tolerance in the hope that through our efforts, future generations will make sure that the Holocaust, a tragic chapter in human history, will not repeat itself. This conference, organized by Dr. Marlene W. Yahalom, director of education of the American Society, has proven to be a strong vehicle to promote the mission of Holocaust remembrance and memory through education over the years. The conference was created by Caroline Arfa Massel, founding chair of the Young Leadership Associates of the American Society and Executive Board member of the American Society, in 1999.

Caroline Arfa Masse opened the program with very poignant remarks about the creation of this program and the establishment of the Barbara Gutfreund Arfa Endowment Fund for Holocaust Education in memory of her mother, Barbara Gutfreund Arfa, *z"l*. Dr. Yahalom spoke about the importance of this program in its efforts to raise Holocaust awareness through education, and offered suggestions and resources for enriching our students' knowledge and awareness on this important and timely subject.

Our theme this year, Survivors Club: Lessons for Our Children — Taking a Stand to Preserve the Future, represents an opportunity to reflect on our obligations to honor the memory of Holocaust victims, preserve the factual record of the Holocaust through education, and to make this history relevant decades later.

Dr. Michel Bornstein and Debbie Bornstein Holinstat were our keynote speakers. Dr. Bornstein, one of the youngest known survivors of the Auschwitz death camp, and his daughter, Debbie Bornstein Holinstat, spoke about the unforgettable true story of how a father's courageous wit, a mother's fierce love and one perfectly timed illness saved Dr. Bornstein's life during the Holocaust.

Shocking and uplifting, this is the story of what happened to Jews in one Polish village in the 1940s, and how through a series of photos, recently discovered documents and memories shared, we can learn, appreciate, admire and take courage from this piece of history.

Dr. Robert Rozett, our keynote guest speaker from Yad Vashem and director of the Yad Vashem Libraries, gave remarks on the important and timely subject of how we remember the Holocaust today in light of the recently passed legislation in Poland. He spoke about Holocaust revisionism, Holocaust distortion and Holocaust denial, and clarified the differences among these three challenges facing us today.

The recently approved legislation in Poland to outlaw blaming Poland for any crimes committed during the Holocaust is a serious threat to Holocaust memory, commemoration and remembrance. It arms Holocaust deniers with additional tools and facilitates the distortion of history.

It is worth noting that the story of Poland during the Holocaust is complicated. That may be the new law's

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(Left to right) Dr. Michael Bornstein, keynote speaker; Carolyn Herbst, ATSS/UFTl liaison to the American Society for Yad Vashem; Marlene W. Yahalom, PhD, director of education of ASYV; Ron Meier, PhD, executive director of ASYV; Debbie Bornstein Holinstat, keynote speaker; Caroline Massel, Executive Board member of ASYV.

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most troubling quality — it seeks to sanitize and simplify a complex and messy history. Dr. Rozett shared his expertise on the complicated reality that this legislation seeks to deny.

The workshops we offered this year included exploring the experience of children in various settings during the Holocaust, the importance of historical records and information and recording this history accurately, and the value of survivor testimony as primary evidence and as a tribute to Holocaust survivors. We noted that Holocaust survivor testimony is also a powerful response to the challenge of Holocaust deniers.

Debbie Bornstein Holinstat, keynote speaker, delivers her remarks.

To lay the groundwork for today's speakers and workshop moderators, Dr. Yahalom reviewed the educational strategy developed by Yad Vashem to study the Holocaust and its connection to Yad Vashem as an institution.

She discussed how the charge before us in Holocaust education is to convey the impossible and the unimaginable events that took place. Our aim is to empower students and educators to draw meaningful lessons from these events and to think about various perspectives on the Holocaust that otherwise might go unnoticed. Yad Vashem developed a way for Holocaust educators to address these questions.

The Holocaust is explained as a human story that involved four main categories of players: the victims, the rescuers, the bystander, and the perpetrators. Human beings were the victims and human beings also carried out the destruction. We emphasize the human components of this tragic event so that victims are seen as living people and not merely statistics on a chart.

By studying life in prewar Europe and focusing on the humanity of the victims, we can think about perspectives on the Holocaust that otherwise might be overlooked. It is the resulting raised awareness that is our constant focus in Holocaust education.

The American Society for Yad Vashem was awarded the 2015 President's Award by the Association of Teachers of Social Studies/United Federation of Teachers for the Society's contributions to social studies education nationally. This is the first time this award was given to an organization.

Dr. Robert Rozett, director, Yad Vashem libraries and guest keynote speaker from Yad Vashem; Ron Meier, PhD, executive director of the American Society for Yad Vashem; Caroline Massel, Executive Board member of the American Society for Yad Vashem.

The ATSS/UFT presented the award in recognition of the valuable part the American Society plays in social studies education, and of the American Society's turning to the ATSS/UFT for assistance in bringing programs for studying the Holocaust to the public schools of New York City. This award also acknowledges that the ATSS/UFT commends the American Society for implementing best educational practices in using documents, inquiry, and critical thinking and action for studying the Holocaust.

Participants studying the "Architecture of Murder"exhibit.

Our obligation as educators is to teach our students the importance of accurately recording historical events because this is one of many ways to honor the memory of the victims.

We must show students the need to explore and determine how historical events should be presented and re-presented over time and how to retrieve information from various kinds of resources available to them. The Arfa Conference is a very effective program to meet this obligation.

Dr. Yahalom also acknowledged the inspirational leadership of Leonard Wilf, chairman of the American Society, and how "through programs such as the conference, we can teach participants about the many themes to consider in this undertaking: the multifaceted contours of human behavior, the dangers of extreme and baseless hatred, the role of the Holocaust in public memory, the lives of the heroes and the victims, and the overarching challenge to make sure neither group is forgotten."

She concluded with a request to conference participants: "Our responsibility as educators includes that we teach our students the meaning of accurately recording historical events as a way to honor the memory of the victims. This process calls for the need to explore and introduce to our students how historical events may be presented and re-presented over time. It is exactly during this transformation of facts that we need to sustain the accuracy of the information."

For more information about ASYV educational programs and events, and Traveling Exhibitions, contact Marlene Warshawski Yahalom, PhD, Director of Education — mwy@yadvashemusa.org.

THE 1940 CAMPAIGN FOR A JEWISH ARMY TO FIGHT HITLER

BY RICK RICHMAN, JEWISH JOURNAL

In the opening months of World War II, more than a year before the attack on Pearl Harbor propelled the United States into the war, the three most prominent Zionist figures in the world — David Ben-Gurion, Vladimir Jabotinsky and Chaim Weizmann; leaders of the left, right and center of Zionism, respectively — undertook missions to America to energize the American Jewish community in support of raising a Jewish army to fight Hitler. Each of the leaders crossed an Atlantic patrolled by German submarines.

What follows is a little-known story about the Jewish people, as they began to face their darkest hour at the beginning of the most horrific decade in modern Jewish history.

The Germans did not embark on their "Final Solution" until late 1941 or early 1942, and reliable word about it did not reach America until 1943. But in 1940, readers of *The New York Times* — the most important source of information in the age before television — knew the existential crisis the Jews faced not only in Germany but also throughout Eastern Europe.

On February 7, 1937 — 2 1/2 years before World War II began — one of the *Times*' most experienced correspondents, Otto D. Tolischus, described the wave of anti-Semitism sweeping Eastern Europe in an article covering five columns in the first section of the Sunday edition. Tolischus' article began with a prescient sentence:

"Anti-Semitism, raised by Adolf Hitler in Germany to the status of a political religion, is rapidly spreading throughout Eastern Europe and is thereby turning the recurrent Jewish tragedy in that biggest Jewish center in the world into a final disaster of truly historic magnitude."

Tolischus reported that the "disaster is now taking place in Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary and Rumania and is approaching a high-water mark in Poland, the country with the largest Jewish population outside the United States." Tolischus wrote that "5,000,000 souls" were "facing the prospect of either repeating the Exodus on a bigger scale than that chronicled in the Bible … or spending the rest of their lives in an atmosphere of creeping hostility and dying a slow death from economic strangulation."

After the Nazis and Soviets invaded Poland in September 1939, the two totalitarian powers held three million more Jews captive, with plans to destroy them or their religion, or both. The October 1939 issue of the *Brooklyn Jewish Center Review*, published by one of the leading American Conservative synagogues, featured an article by Rabbi Elias N. Rabinowitz, titled "How Will the Conquest of Poland Affect Its Jews?" Rabinowitz wrote that "the tragedy of Poland has, probably, never been equaled in the recorded annals of history":

"The plight of the Polish Jew beggars description. He has been uprooted, he has been destroyed. … The Polish Republic contained the second-largest Jewish community in the present Diaspora, approximately 4,000,000 souls. … As reports reach us from various sources, starvation is rampant. The number of suicides is reported to be overwhelming."

Chaim Weizmann (left) and David Ben-Gurion meeting during World War II.

The crisis was thus well known in America, but the three Zionist leaders found an American Jewish community that faced a complicated situation. Virtually the entire country was against any involvement in the new European war, and there was significant anti-Semitism openly espoused by such public figures as Charles Lindbergh, Henry Ford, Father Charles Coughlin and syndicated columnist Westbrook Pegler, among others. American Jews worried that Zionism might bring accusations of dual loyalty, and that arguing for supporting Britain might bring charges of "warmongering."

But thousands of people came out to hear Ben-Gurion, Jabotinsky and Weizmann in their appearances in America during 1940, and the effort to build a Jewish army that year came closer to reality than most people now realize.

The three leaders knew that the Jews could form a fighting force, because all three leaders had been involved in the Jewish Legion in World War I — the 15,000 soldiers who fought alongside the British to defeat the Ottoman Empire in Palestine. Jabotinsky had been the guiding force behind the Jewish Legion and became one of its officers; Weizmann had given it critical support with his contacts in the British government; and Ben-Gurion had served in it as a private. In World War II, with the Jews themselves the expressed target of Nazi Germany, the three leaders thought they could mobilize a far larger Jewish force to meet the existential threat.

At the time of World War I, the proposal for a Jewish military force was a radical idea for a people with no modern military experience and an ingrained moral resistance to "militarism." For nearly 2,000 years, there had never been a Jewish army. But the formation of the Jewish Legion was a landmark in Jewish history, and Jabotinsky would later describe the 1st Battalion, consisting of Jews previously denigrated as mere "tailors," marching through the streets of London before deployment to Palestine, as tens of thousands of Jewish onlookers stood in the streets or watched from the roofs:

"Blue-white flags were over every shop door; women crying with joy, old Jews with fluttering beards murmuring, 'shehecheyanu' … and the boys, those 'tailors,' shoulder to shoulder, their bayonets dead level, each step like a single clap of thunder, clean, proud … with the sense of a holy mission, unexampled since the day of Bar-Kochba …."

Two decades later, as World War II began, the idea of forming a Jewish military force was no longer a theoretical or fanciful one. It had been done before. Two days after the Nazi invasion of Poland, Jabotinsky called Lt. Col. John Patterson, the British officer who had commanded the Jewish Legion in 1917, to request a meeting as soon as possible. They met that afternoon and agreed to work together to form not a Jewish Legion but a Jewish army.

Within days of the beginning of World War II, Weizmann and Jabotinsky each wrote directly to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, offering to provide a Jewish military force and other wartime assistance. In his letter to Chamberlain, Weizmann wrote: "In this hour of supreme crisis, the consciousness that the Jews have a contribution to make to the defense of sacred values impels me to write this letter." He told Chamberlain that the Jewish Agency was "ready to enter into immediate arrangements for utilizing Jewish manpower, technical ability, resources, etc." Jabotinsky, in his own letter to Chamberlain, recounted how the Jewish Legion had done it before.

Chamberlain declined both offers.

In 1940, Jabotinsky wrote to Rabbi Louis I. Newman, a prominent Reform rabbi in the United States, that the "mission now is to stir American Jews into some such effort of an unprecedented magnitude and daring." Weizmann wrote to an American friend that "3,000 miles of water will not save American Jewry, or America itself, if they refuse to take the right decisions now." Ben-Gurion wrote to the Zionist Organization of America that there was "no time to lose."

That same year, Weizmann traveled to America in January and stayed until March, Jabotinsky was in America from March until August, and Ben-Gurion left London for America in September and remained until January 1941. All three leaders gave remarkable speeches in America, held meetings with key groups, and prepared practical plans for building a Jewish military force to join the war. The most extraordinary of the public addresses, however, was the one Jabotinsky gave on June 19, 1940, before an overflow crowd of 5,000 people at the Manhattan Center.

The day before, new British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had addressed the House of Commons, urging members to forgo recriminations about the humiliating *Dunkirk* evacuation, urging them to "so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour.' " On the same day, Charles de Gaulle spoke from a BBC radio studio as the French government prepared to surrender to Hitler. De Gaulle argued for fighting on: "Must we abandon all hope? Is our defeat final and irremediable? To those questions I answer: No!"

The next morning's *Times* reported on the "complete military and political collapse" of France. The war communiqué of the German High Command, published in the *Times*, stated that "Yesterday alone far more than 100,000 prisoners were taken," with "booty" comprising "the complete equipment of numerous French divisions." The *Times* article was accompanied by a photograph of Hitler and Mussolini standing before a cheering crowd in Germany, with the *Times* headline reading: "Munich Is Gay as

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A BOY FROM BUSTINA

A Boy from Bustina.

By Andrew Burian. Yad Vashem Publications: Jerusalem, Israel, 2016. 238 pp. $24 hardcover.

REVIEWED BY BLU GREENBERG

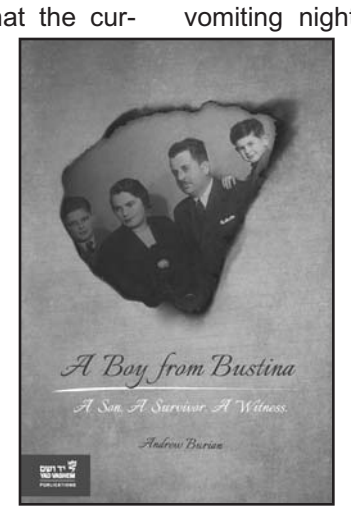
I read *A Boy from Bustina* six months ago and cannot get it out of my mind. It came to me quite by chance. As hardly anyone else I know has heard of this book, this author or this place, perhaps it is time to write a review.

Here is the story of Andrew Burian, swept into the Holocaust in 1944 at age thirteen and liberated one year later by African-American soldiers. What he endures in that horrific interlude is the gripping core of this book, written over the course of 30 years. Some of the images, the ones that return to me every night, are excruciating; some are noble and inspiring. Yet, there is nothing in this book that can be called morbid or preachy. In fact, the writing is spare and straightforward, as a first-person Holocaust account necessarily must be for a reader like myself to digest seven decades later.

The town of *Bustina*, with its greenery and intersecting rivers at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains, was then part of the Czech Republic. *Bustina* is 25 miles from *Sighet*, home of Elie Wiesel, who was also taken in 1944 to Auschwitz, at age fourteen. Wiesel details his experience in his world classic, *Night*. Because control of that area changed hands during the war, Burian, like Wiesel, suffered at the hands of Hungarians and Ukrainians, who collaborated with the Nazis. Burian lacks the power of Wiesel's understated poetry, but offsets that by giving more detail. In that sense, his book supplements *Night*. Burian's memory for detail, confirmed by historians who added footnotes to the narrative, is extraordinary.

Andrew's story begins with his idyllic childhood in a modern Orthodox, upper-middle-class family supported by lumber and other business interests. He and his brother enjoy a childhood rich with tradition, the warmth of a large extended family, an emphasis on education and hard work and a home lush with parental love and care — quite evocative of ideal Orthodox family life of today.

The poignancy of his descriptions is heightened by the reader's sense of impending doom. One reads of the beautiful family Shabbat dinners, complete with two sets of grandparents, knowing that the curtain is coming down.



And it does. Very soon. The world of evil progresses rapidly, supplanting the world of good and innocence that he has known. One of the most painful scenes takes place at the entry to the "stopover" ghetto where his family is detained before being shipped in locked cattle cars to Auschwitz. The family of four is "interrogated" in one room together. Young Andi, his father and his brother must witness his mother being forced to crouch while the Hungarian policemen, using the crook of a walking cane, do an internal search of her body for hidden treasure. He does not detail his own trauma at the scene. But I, separated by decades and oceans, am gripped by it.

Andi describes the screams of the elderly Mrs. Elefant being searched in the same fashion next door and the beating her husband suffers as he tries to protect his wife's dignity. And Andi conveys his rude awakening as he reports the sad conversation later that night with his father, who explains their powerlessness. As an aside to us, he describes how he came to realize then that his invincible father could no longer take care of him in the face of incomprehensible violence.

In Auschwitz, this skinny, picky eater, a mama's boy of 13, is separated almost immediately from his mother, father and brother, left to survive on his own in an unimaginable world. How does he manage to do this, with considerable dignity no less? He calls on many resources, his own and others.

There's the recently arrived Hungarian doctor in his barracks whose medical advice saves his life one feverish, vomiting night but whom he sadly cannot acknowledge by name for the rest of his life because the doctor's number is called in the morning, before Andi awakens. There's the truck backed up to the door of his sealed barracks, loaded by whipping guards. Its human cargo is to be delivered directly into the doors of the gas chamber to prevent the victims from scattering and escaping; however, construction at this particular crematorium has blocked direct access, so the victims alight and scatter. Bullets fly. Beatings crack skulls. Andi is small enough to crawl inside a large round concrete pipe/tube and stay there until he hears silence. Another saving miracle, he calls it. Andi describes one harrowing escape after another, each reflecting a measure of ingenuity, luck and perhaps divine intervention.

He lives by his father's parting words to him, as father is marched off to a slave labor camp: stay clean so that you will not get sick, do not lose your humanity even as you see beastly behavior all around you, and return home after the war. He lives by his wits, sleeping outside the barracks door to avoid being summoned by the *kapo* for pleasure; yet he also suffers great pain as he hears the cries through the night of another young boy being abused.

Andi lives for his endless longing and search for his beloved mother who, unbeknownst to him, went up in smoke along with her father and uncle the very night they arrived in Auschwitz. He lives by his sheer will to live: on the infamous Auschwitz Death March, the Nazi's last-stab winter evacuation, Andi mentally separates from his body his swollen, bleeding, frozen feet. By sheer will again, he manages to survive a second death march during the evacuation of *Mauthausen*, the Austrian concentration camp he is sent to after Auschwitz. He lives by soothing memories of home triggered by the sight of a blue sky, white clouds or other glimpses of nature's beauty. And he lives by a healthy joy at seeing Nazis suffer at the hands of the Russian army.

His honesty never wanes. After liberation, the Americans hand him over to the Russians since Czechoslovakia is now in the Russian sphere of influence. For a very short time he runs with a pack of crude and vengeful former prisoners. He is not proud of his behavior and regrets that short period for the rest of his life.

To me, every book of testimony on the Holocaust is a treasure, and this is an outstanding one of its genre, one of the most important books I have read in the past several years. I give it five stars. Not only should every Jew read it but every human being, for it reminds us of how vigilant we must be against bottomless evil. Yet one must also read this book because ultimately it is a story of goodness triumphing over evil, of the will to live trumping surrender to despair, and of human love that is fiercer than death.

Still, in the end it is very sad to think of how many adorable and smart bar mitzvah boys just like Andi went to their deaths. I feel grateful that Andrew Burian survived to build a second life — and to tell his story.

COMPLICITY OF POLES IN THE DEATHS OF JEWS IS HIGHLY UNDERESTIMATED, SCHOLARS SAY

BY AMANDA BORSCHEL-DAN, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

In a 1970 article, pioneering Polish-Jewish historian Szymon Datner estimated that 200,000 Jews died at the hands of Poles during World War II. Attempting to flee the Germans' cattle cars and camps, they found their deaths after being handed over to the authorities or informed upon while in hiding, or through murder by their Polish neighbors.

From 1942 to 1945, according to Datner's calculations, of the 250,000 Jews who attempted to escape the Germans in occupied Poland, only 10 to 16 percent survived.

A Jewish Holocaust survivor himself, Datner eventually became the head of the Jewish Historical Institute of Warsaw and worked as a historian for the precursor to Poland's Institute of National Remembrance (IPN). But were he alive today, he would potentially be prosecuted for his scholarly findings.

On February 6, Polish President Andrzej Duda signed into law amendments to the Institute of National Remembrance — Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation Act.

Among its amendments is this controversial section of the bill: "Whoever claims, publicly and contrary to the facts, that the Polish Nation or the Republic of Poland is responsible or co-responsible for Nazi crimes committed by the Third Reich… or for other felonies that constitute crimes against peace, crimes against humanity or war crimes, or whoever otherwise grossly diminishes the responsibility of the true perpetrators of said crimes — shall be liable to a fine or imprisonment for up to three years."

With its vague language, this amendment could be read as mandating that Datner, a respected historian who worked for the institute the bill is named for, be locked up.

In a scathing op-ed following the president's announcement, historian Jan T. Gross denounced the law, stating that rather than protect Poland's reputation, its "ultimate goal is to falsify the history of the Holocaust." Gross, it should be noted, has himself already been questioned on at least three occasions over unflattering factual statements about Poles' actions during World War II.

To be clear, there is no debate over the fact that Poles were instrumental in saving Jews. Over 6,700 Poles — more than in any other country — have been honored by Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Museum as Righteous Among the Nations: individuals who endangered their own lives to save those of Jews.

In recent years, however, researchers have uncovered increas-

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HELL BEFORE THEIR VERY EYES

Hell Before Their Very Eyes: American Soldiers Liberate Concentration Camps in Germany, April 1945.

By John C. McManus. Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, Md., 2015. 208 pp. $48.41 hardcover

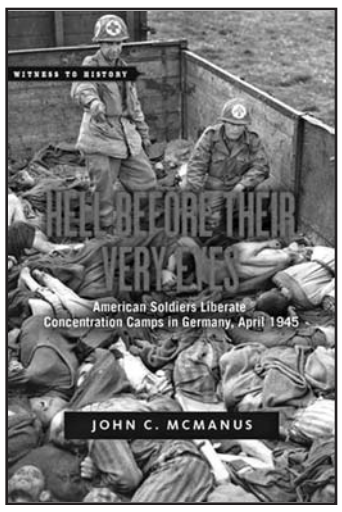
REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN

"I want every American unit not actually in the front lines to see this place. We are told that the American soldier does not know what he is fighting for. Now, at least, he will know what he is fighting against."

— General Dwight D. Eisenhower at *Ohrdruf* concentration camp after its liberation by Americans, April, 1945

Among John C. McManus's purposes in writing this volume *Hell Before Their Very Eyes: American Soldiers Liberate Concentration Camps in Germany, April 1945*, is an examination of the American soldiers' reaction upon liberating these camps — an area which has experienced little study. Another of his purposes — accomplished simultaneously with the aforementioned — is the offering up of undeniable eyewitness testimony soundly countering any talk by those who would deny the Holocaust. Both these goals, and much more presented in this book, lead to interesting, absorbing and important reading.

More specifically, the author of *Hell Before Their Very Eyes* zeroes in on the liberation of three concentration camps: *Ohrdruf*, a satellite of *Buchenwald*; *Buchenwald* itself; and *Dachau*. Carefully and conscientiously organized, the book begins with a brief overview of the history of each respective camp, in order of their liberation. McManus tells us how the Americans discovered each and just what they found. He tells us about what the Americans immediately did to care for the dead and the barely living. Meanwhile, throughout the telling — and at the very heart of this work — we read of the reaction of the American soldier to it all . . . happening before their very eyes . . .



So what exactly did the American liberating forces feel?

When we study their testimonies, it appears the overwhelming first reaction among soldiers was shock. For, as McManus writes, "when American soldiers overran Germany in the spring of 1945, most had no idea of what they were about to see," and when they did see it, they "couldn't believe it" — and this applies to even the most battle-hardened of combat soldiers! They couldn't imagine who those "haggard," shabbily dressed, malnourished, beaten survivors they accidently met on the road, telling them of a concentration camp nearby, could possibly be. They couldn't begin to fathom what all those dead bodies lining the road to a number of camps meant, nor, in one instance, the trainload of dead bodies they happened upon. Then, they most especially couldn't believe what they saw once they entered these camps. For that matter, the shock, for many, was so "unforgettable," it lasted a lifetime.

Guilt was the initial reaction of others, often accompanied by an unrestrainable flood of tears. The dead bodies piled up in the camps, particularly around the crematoriums and ovens; the thousands still clinging to life, more like walking skeletons (if they could walk!) clothed in tatters; warehouses full of belongings the Nazis had stolen from the dead and the living — all this left many soldiers feeling that if only they had come earlier they could have saved more people! Jewish GIs particularly identified with those in the camps, realizing that "there but for the grace of God" they, themselves, might easily have been inmates in such places. Not surprisingly then, well-meaning soldiers eagerly gave out their rations, unaware that inmates were far from able to digest such highly caloric foods. Once hospitals were set up to care for the survivors, that same feeling of "wanting to do something" led to soldiers lining up to donate blood.

Still others reacted with anger. And this anger undoubtedly led to Germans in the respective neighborhoods of the camps — passionately claiming to have known absolutely nothing of what was happening in them — being required by the Allied military to come and view the evils that had been perpetrated by their countrymen. "Many military leaders also forced [these German civilians, "professing ignorance"] to do the most unpleasant cleaning jobs, such as burying the dead, moving their skeletal remains, or cleaning latrines." Anger, surely, also contributed substantially to the tension leading to the shooting of some SS men, an incident McManus closely examines and discusses in conjunction with the liberation of *Dachau*.

Finally, it is especially interesting to read how General Eisenhower prophetically realized how with time there would be Holocaust deniers. Because of it, he would not only encourage the common soldier to come and witness what had been done at these camps; "he also arranged for representatives of the Allied governments and media members to visit . . . and thoroughly document their terrible realities."

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

COMPLICITY OF POLES IN THE DEATHS OF JEWS IS HIGHLY UNDERESTIMATED, SCHOLARS SAY

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ing evidence of a darker side to the interactions of Jews and Poles during World War II. And their work has been met with growing criticism and outright rejection by the many Poles who are under the impression that their forefathers acted entirely honorably during the war.

As Holocaust history is in danger of politicization, Polish-Jewish dialogue is becoming increasingly dissonant. It is "a subject that defies simplistic characterization and is fraught with emotion," said Dr. Laurence Weinbaum, the chief editor of the *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*. He applauded the "courageous" work of Polish historians in discovering uncomfortable facts.

"A certain segment of Polish academia distinguished itself by the courageous and candid way in which it dealt with the complex question of how Poles confronted the German designs to annihilate the Jews in their midst.

Holocaust survivors and activists take part at a protest at the Polish embassy in Tel Aviv.

"The excruciating historiography that emerged from their research has no parallel anywhere in post-Communist Europe, and has given us vast insight into the horrifying tragedy played out in wartime Poland," said Weinbaum.

THE FACTS

Havi Dreifuss, a Tel Aviv University scholar and director of Yad Vashem's center for research on the Holocaust in Poland, stated unequivocally this week, "We know that some Poles were involved in the murder of Jews on a few occasions."

According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, both Poles in uniform and individual citizens were complicit in condemning their Jewish neighbors to death. "Poland was brutally occupied by the Germans.... As German forces implemented the killing, they drew upon some Polish agencies, such as Polish police forces and railroad personnel, in the guarding of ghettos and the deportation of Jews to the killing centers. Individual Poles often helped in the identification, denunciation, and hunting down of Jews in hiding, often profiting from the associated blackmail, and actively participated in the plunder of Jewish property."

Most notably, there was the notorious slaughter of hundreds of Jews locked in a burning barn in *Jedwabne*, as well as similar acts in other parts of Łomża County during the summer of 1941. In those places, local Poles were "very involved in the murder of their Jewish neighbors," said Dreifuss.

Later, after war's end, as part of the postwar anti-Semitic wave that washed over Europe, there were some pogroms in Poland, of which *Kielce* is the best known. In 1946, Poles slaughtered some 40 Holocaust survivors in *Kielce* and wounded another 40. Hundreds more were killed in other places after the liberation of Poland, said Dreifuss.

"Those two events — pogroms like *Kielce* and the events in Łomża County — were perpetrated at specific times and places," said Dreifuss. "What is being studied lately is something else entirely: In the past few years, Polish researchers are trying to understand what happened to the Jews, between 1942 and 1945, who were fleeing the Nazis."

Dreifuss said that the first to refer to the scope of this phenomenon was the Polish-Jewish historian Datner, who came up with 200,000 as the number of Jews who perished at the hands of Poles.

"Current research shows they were lost not only because the Germans were hunting for the Jews, but because of a deep involvement of Poles from all parts of society. Sometimes the Jews were caught and handed to the Germans, or were caught and handed to the Blue Police [Polish police force in German-occupied Poland]. And some were killed by Poles," said Dreifuss.

"Of the tens of thousands who tried to flee — most were killed, and Poles were very involved," emphasized Dreifuss.

WHY?

The Poles' motivations in slaughtering or handing over their Jewish neighbors were varied, said Dreifuss.

"It was not always anti-Semitism. In many occasions it was greed, fear, quarrels, revenge. There were many different reasons," she said. "You can't limit or summarize the acts of communities in statistics. There were many reasons for assisting — and harming — Jews."

For scholars, the full spectrum of interactions between Jews and Poles is of interest.

Jan Grabowski's 2013 *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland* and Barbara Engelking's 2016 *Such a Beautiful Sunny Day… — Jews Seeking Refuge in the Polish Countryside, 1942-1945*, depict the oftentimes grim and gruesome "welcome" afforded Jews who sought help from their Polish neighbors. They both also devote chapters to Poles who saved Jews.

Havi Dreifuss, a Tel Aviv University scholar and director of Yad Vashem's center for research on the Holocaust in Poland.

In *Hunt for the Jews*, Grabowski describes chilling episodes in documents that portray a Polish resident of *Bagienica* called Przędział, who discovered a pair of Jews hiding in the forest near his home. Based on the book, a Guardian article denouncing the new legislation described this scene: "After he betrayed them, Przędział demanded his reward from the German occupiers: 2 kg of sugar. The rate varied. In some places, it was 500 złoty for every Jew. Elsewhere it was two coats, formerly worn by Jews, for each Jew brought in."

Not a flattering depiction of a Pole's wartime efforts.

Education Minister Naftali Bennett (2nd from l.), Rabbi Meir Lau (2nd from r.) and IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot (r.) take part in the March of the Living at the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp site in Poland on April 24, 2017.

Grabowski, a history professor at the University of Ottawa, told *The Times of Israel* that his work has received a lot of criticism, "although usually based on the rejection of knowledge and not on questioning of the facts."

Among other fields, the historian has investigated the number of Jews who died at the hands of Poles.

Grabowski explained that Szymon Datner's calculations were based upon an "intuition" that in 1942, 2.5 million of Poland's Jews were still alive in Poland, of which 10 percent attempted to flee the ghettos. Only some 50,000 lived until the liberation.

These figures, said Grabowski, "were intuitive, without any research other than his own speculation." Decades after Datner's calculations, however, a large research team led by Grabowski and Engelking "were able to confirm Datner's estimates," said Grabowski.

"Having studied, over the last five years, nine counties in Poland, we were able to confirm that Datner was not far off the mark," said Grabowski.

The team's research will be published in the two-volume compendium, *NIGHT without an END. Fate of Jews in selected counties of occupied Poland*.

As a web page for the book states, "The numbers speak for themselves: two out of every three Jews who attempted to seek shelter among the gentiles, died.

"The studies included in the two presented volumes provide ample evidence of the important, and previously underestimated levels of the scale of the complicity of certain segments of the Polish society in the extermination of their Jewish neighbors and co-citizens."

But will the Polish scholars' comprehensive work be accepted by their own countrymen?

WHEN FACT BECOMES "OPINION"

In 2001, the Polish president apologized for the notorious, well-documented massacre of Jews in *Jedwabne* by their Polish neighbors. President Aleksander Kwaśniewski apologized on behalf of himself and the Polish people, "whose conscience

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THE ONLY JEW TO SURVIVE THE 1941 ODESSA MASSACRE

Mishka Zaslavsky, 93, will never forget the massacre in Odessa*, when 22,000 Jews were burned alive. "I've been told it's not nice to say I shoved people, but that's what happened," recounts the only survivor to escape the inferno, while his mother and siblings were murdered; but he doesn't regret staying in Ukraine: "If I go, who will protect my family's bones?"*

BY YIFAT ERLICH, YNET NEWS

"A man who does not smoke or drink will die healthy," Mishka Zaslavsky quotes a well-known Odessa proverb with a chuckle. He began his morning with a small glass of vodka, but he quit smoking 30 years ago, because of the health risk. He can climb up and down the 80 steps to his fifth-floor apartment in the Cheriomoshka neighborhood in Odessa with relative ease. Impressive, because he is 93 years old.

It is bitterly cold outside — minus 14 degrees. A thin layer of snow covers the backyards of destitute Soviet-era homes. Zaslavsky politely refuses everyone who extends a hand to help and climbs into the high car by himself. A year ago, he adopted a new look that gives him charm and attractiveness. "I'm young," he laughs, and he runs his hand through his white ponytail. "Today, young men are growing out their hair." Despite the style, he is not young, but his mind is sharp and fresh, and refuses to be despondent.

He was born in Odessa in October 1925. His mother, Miriam, who was raised in a deeply religious home, summoned the *mohel* twice. Twice, his father, Abraham, sent the *mohel* back from whence he came. He refused to have his eldest son circumcised, because he had abandoned religion following the horrors of the First World War. The father's stubbornness saved his son in the Second World War.

"I was 16 when the Nazis conquered Odessa," relates Mishka. "Dad was drafted into the Red Army, and my mother, with five small children, could not escape to the east. On October 16, I saw my first Nazi soldier."

At the time, Odessa was known as an important center of Judaism and Zionism. About 100,000 of the city's Jews were able to escape before October 16, 1941, when the German army and their Romanian allies captured the city. About 90,000 Jews were still in the city. Odessa was severed from Ukraine, then a part of the Soviet Union, and declared the capital of Transnistria, territory that Hitler ceded to Romania. The *Einsatzkommando*, a Romanian intelligence company and local Ukranian militias succeeded in murdering more than 10,000 Jews in the first few days of the occupation.

"On October 19, a soldier came to our house and told us to get ready within 20 minutes. I remember my mother's helplessness. How are you supposed to pack for five children in 20 minutes? We went outside with my younger siblings and a few baskets. All the Jews were removed from the adjacent buildings, and we were collected together, about 3,000 people, overnight, at the school. In the morning, we were taken from there, escorted by barking dogs and murderous blows, to the city's central prison."

The prison, built of red bricks during the Tsarist era, still stands in the heart of Odessa. During a tour of the city, Mishka points to it and to the route they marched. "There was a very long line, mostly women, children and the elderly," Mishka remembers. "It was hot. Locals watched the scene from both sides of the street. There were women who wept, but there were those who stole objects and shouted, 'You deserve it, *zhidy*!' At the prison, 18 people were put in cells meant for one. No food or water were brought to us. I remember the women's cries of terror."

Numerous testimonies tell of women and girls who were taken from the cells to the prison roof, where they were brutally raped by Romanian soldiers.

On October 22, the Romanian HQ was blown up, apparently by a mine that was planted there by the Soviets before the German-Romanian occupation. The blast killed 66 military personnel and the city's military governor. In response, the Romanian ruler, Marshal Ion Antonescu, ordered the execution of 200 Communists for every officer killed and 100 for every enlisted man. In Nazi-Romanian eyes, Communists meant Jews. About 5,000 Jews were shot that same day, and thousands of them were hanged in main city streets, left there for several weeks. The hangings are etched into the memories of every survivor we met, even those who were only young children at the time.

"WHEN I REMEMBER, I WEEP"

The hangings and abuse did not diminish the Romanians' fury. "The next day, October 23, they took us from the prison in a convoy for several kilometers to the munitions bunkers," Mishka remembers. "We walked very slowly. Every time we stopped, the elderly were beaten. It is hard to remember. When I remember, I weep," he says, dropping for a moment his tough façade to wipe away the tears that well up in his blue-grey eyes.

"I walked with my five-year-old brother Alik on my shoulders. Mom carried the one-year-old Hanna, and two sisters, Yava and Zhenia, walked with an aunt. The moment we reached the gate in the bunkers' fence, I felt someone yank Alik from me. I tried to hold onto him, but I was beaten and shoved. The few men and youths, together with wounded prisoners of war, were put into the farthest bunker and separated from the women and children. There were high guard towers with soldiers. The Romanians brought trucks with fuel tanks and sprayed the outside of the bunkers with gasoline."

The Romanians put 22,000 Jews and wounded prisoners of war into the huge bunkers, which had been built in the Tsarist era on the edge of the city. So far as is known, all were burned alive, except for Mishka.

"The fire took hold of the roof and

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THE 1940 CAMPAIGN FOR A JEWISH ARMY TO FIGHT HITLER

(Continued from page 3)

Dictators Meet." The *Times* reported that "all Munich [is] riding on the crest of an exhilarating wave," bathed in the "bright sunlight of the thought that this war may now be almost ended."

That evening, Jabotinsky addressed the Manhattan Center on "The Second World War and a Jewish Army." He told reporters before the speech that, just as he had felt in 1916 that Jews must participate in World War I, he felt even more strongly that they must join the new war, since they were the explicit targets of the Nazi barbarism. And he thought that Jewish participation in the war would have an important moral and psychological effect:

"The example of Jews, long known as a most peaceful of peoples, volunteering in large numbers to fight for truth and sacrifice their lives, will inspire humanity to ever greater sacrifices at the present critical hour. … In the first World War, where the very idea of Jewish military units was unfamiliar and strange … 15,000 fighting Jews were easily got together from Palestine, England, the United States, Canada and Argentine. This time, where the stakes are greater and the responsibility heavier, I am hopeful that progress will be both speedier and greater."

In his speech, Jabotinsky reiterated that what was required was not a

Vladimir Jabotinsky (front right) in Warsaw in 1939, with 23-year-old Menachem Begin (front left).

Jewish Legion but a Jewish army, with a status like the Polish army-in-exile, to "signify that the Jewish people choose a cloudy day to renew its demand for recognition as a belligerent on the side of a good cause." He wanted not only to see the "giant rattlesnake destroyed," but destroyed "with our help." He told the audience "there is stuff for well over 100,000 Jewish soldiers even without counting American Jews," given the number of stateless Jews in the world and prospective volunteers from neutral countries:

"[H]ad our request for a Jewish Army been granted early in the war when we first submitted it to the Allies, that source alone would have yielded three to four divisions. Even now it can yield two at least."

The following morning, the *Times* quoted from Jabotinsky's Manhattan Center speech:

"This is the time for blunt speaking. I challenge the Jews, wherever they are still free, to demand the right of fighting the giant rattlesnake … as a Jewish Army. Some shout that we only want others to fight, some whisper that a Jew only makes a good soldier when squeezed in between Gentile comrades. I challenge the Jewish youth to give them the lie."

In the end, for various reasons, the Jewish army was not formed in 1940 — but not because of the absence of a huge and heroic effort by the three Zionist leaders, and not because of a lack of a significant response within the American Jewish community. The story is important to remember not only to honor those who crossed an ocean and those who responded to them, but to correct the misimpression that Jews stood by passively as their existential crisis unfolded.

PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ASYV PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE ON HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

Participants studying the "Architecture of Murder"exhibit.

Caroline Massel, Executive Board member of the ASYV; Rachel Shnay, Young Leadership Associates co-chair.

Marlene W. Yahalom, PhD, director of education of the American Society for Yad Vashem, delivering remarks at the conference.

Dr. Michael Bornstein with family *kiddush* cup salvaged from the Holocaust and gold watch with *Gam Ze Ya'Avor* inscription from his mother, *z"l.*

Helene Alalouf, presenter at professional development workshop.

Dr. Robert Rozett delivering remarks on "The Battle for the Memory of the Holocaust."

THE ONLY JEW TO SURVIVE THE 1941 ODESSA MASSACRE

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burned a hole through it. I began to push and climb up. I've been told that it is not nice to say that I shoved (people), but that's the reality. I shoved and everyone else shoved, too. A few more men and youths were able to get out of the bunker and climb the fence. The roar of the fire was incredible. It was terrifying. I jumped over the fence. The soldiers in the guard towers began shooting at everyone who fled. They didn't hit me. I jumped into a cornfield and crawled. I could not help but look back. What did my one-year-old sister do to deserve to die like that?"

By November 3, 1941, Odessa's remaining 40,000 Jews were gathered into the Slobodka ghetto. After wandering around, Mishka also ended up there. Later, Jews from the ghetto were sent out to bury the burned corpses.

Mishka escaped from the ghetto, and used forged papers to survive for a long time as an employee of the city's power station.

"Every time someone suspected I was a Jew, I showed the natural identity card that was left on my body thanks to my father. That is how I survived," he says, referring to the fact he was uncircumcised.

Later, after someone informed on him, he was arrested and forced to admit his true identity. He was sent back to prison.

He escaped with the help of a Ukranian woman who brought him food when he was put to work cleaning streets outside the prison. He nicknamed her "Aunt Mora," and she hid him in her home.

On April 10, 1944, when he was 18.½, the Red Army liberated Odessa. Mishka immediately decided to enlist. "I could have stayed in Odessa, but I wanted to avenge the death of my family. We were given new uniforms and underwent training," he explains.

Just before he was sent to the front, his father found him, having returned from the battles to the family home, where he found strangers living. "Dad found me. We hugged and I told him everything. We smoked a cigarette together; I was already a man, not a boy. We both cried. That was it. We had to go forward."

His father stayed in Odessa to live with an aunt, and Mishka went to the front. He helped liberate six countries and reached Berlin. He was wounded twice by bullets, once in the right leg and once in the left.

"And they say the Jews did not fight," he complains, pulling a jacket heavy with medals from the closet. "The Red Army did not always treat the Jews well, calling them traitors."

When he returned home, he married Ira, who passed away 28 years ago. He led a full life in Odessa working as an electrician and raised a family.

There are no other survivors known from the massacre in Odessa, except for Mishka. Detailed documentation of the mass burning can found in official Romanian documents. During the Soviet era, a neighborhood was built over the site of the bunkers. The sole commemoration of the atrocity was a small monument with general text about the killing of Soviet citizens by the Nazis.

"Shameful. It would have been better to say nothing. We argued with the authorities. We demanded to move a building and a utility pole. In the end, the area was excavated and the mass grave was found," he says, pointing to the plaza around the new monument. "The entire neighborhood is built on bones. We ultimately raised money and built a proper monument here."

Mishka's "we" is the Odessa Holocaust Survivors Organization, which was founded in 1990 by 2,500 survivors and 170 non-Jews who were recognized as Righteous Among the Nations for their efforts to save Jews during the Holocaust. Today, 340 survivors are still alive in the city, mostly children who survived in hiding, and eight Righteous non-Jews.

The survivors and rescuers jointly built a fairly unknown museum, which relates the story of the Holocaust in Odessa. The museum includes a model of the burning bunkers.

"The government gave us a very dilapidated building," says Mishka. "I was already 80, but I personally broke walls, and, as an electrician, built the museum with my comrades. I was a member of the management team for over a decade. All of us donated money for the museum to open and for free entry. Most of the survivors struggle financially, especially now given the crisis in Ukraine. But we'd sell our clothes so the museum can continue to operate. I recently resigned and passed the baton to younger survivors.

"Every year, on January 27, International Holocaust Day, we organize a ceremony in the park where the Jews were assembled before being sent on death marches. Over the past five years, since the day was declared by the UN, the Odessa Municipality has finally participated in the ceremony as well. We won't let it be forgotten. That is why we are here."

A LAST SONG IN YIDDISH

The museum, like many other Jewish institutions in the city, is a target for anti-Semitic vandalism. When the glass windows were broken, they were replaced with metal ones. Neo-Nazi slogans in the "Jews out" style are spray-painted near the museum regularly.

Mishka Zaslavsky at the monument to Odessa's Jews.

Over the generations, most Ukrainian Jews took the hint and chose to leave. But many still remain, mostly elderly and childless. About 180,000 elderly Jews, many of them Holocaust survivors, live all over the former Soviet Union. Not much is left of the welfare system of the Communist regime that once ruled there, and the elderly live on meager pensions.

Although Holocaust survivors recognized by the Claims Committee receive financing from the German government and Swiss banks, it is not enough to live on because of the economic crisis and soaring electricity and water rates. Today, Ukraine is the poorest of the former Soviet republics, because of the civil war in the east.

A number of organizations are trying to help them, including the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, which hosted me in Odessa. Through the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and Chabad, the fellowship currently helps about 17,000 Holocaust survivors in Ukraine, providing security, distributing food and medicines, organizing community activities, and offering individual home care for the elderly.

"I don't know if Israel or Jewish communities around the world understand how difficult the conditions are. Something must be done," says International Fellowship of Christians and Jews President Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein.

"Over the years, I have made countless visits to Ukraine and elsewhere, and I was horrified by the distress. Many Jews live in remote villages that take five hours to reach because the roads are blocked and unfit for travel. There are survivors who live on the fifth floor without an elevator. Most people in these circumstances simply don't leave their homes for years. Many survivors live in utter isolation and really depend on us and our partners for their basic needs, such as food and medicine. We raise about $25 million a year from Christians in the US who want to help Jews from one of the largest communities in the world, which is also one of the poorest in the world.

"It hurts me that Jewish communities that thrive in the US, Israel and elsewhere donate very little to this endeavor. There are about 70,000 elderly Jews in former Soviet republics that no organization has yet reached, because there isn't enough money. This situation is shameful on the Jewish people. It is important to remember the Holocaust, but no less important to strive that the remaining survivors can live out the rest of their days with dignity."

Mishka is lucky in that he can still live with dignity. For our meeting, he allows himself to play the actor, like his grandfather. "Before the revolution, my grandfather was in the Jewish theater in the *shtetl*. He wrote and sang songs in Yiddish and Russian."

Mishka stands up and begins to sing in Yiddish, "I dream of the day when Jews can be free like all people."

"Jews are free in Israel. Why didn't you make *aliyah*?" I ask him.

"My homeland is here. There are good people here like Aunt Mora," he shouts. "There are good and bad people everywhere. I choose to believe in the good people. No one can remove me from here. My victory over the Nazis is my four Jewish great-grandchildren. But I won't leave here. If I go, who will protect the bones of my family?"

COMPLICITY OF POLES IN THE DEATHS OF JEWS IS HIGHLY UNDERESTIMATED, SCHOLARS SAY

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is touched" by the crime, he said.

By 2014, however, when asked by a television interviewer about the fact that Poles burned Jews in a barn in *Jedwabne*, the current Education Minister Anna Zalewska appeared to believe that this was "opinion."

Dreifuss said that one of the sad results of the latest debate over the new legislation pushed forward by Zalewska's Law and Justice party is the rise of some anti-Semitic voices, which are now heard in Poland after a period of being muted.

"It is troubling to think that this quarrel or discussion about the law, what it has awakened within some parts of the Polish population," said Dreifuss.

Weinbaum, who in May 2008 was decorated by former president Lech Kaczyński with the *Złoty Krzyż Zasługi* (Gold Cross of Merit) for his ongoing contributions in fostering Polish–Jewish dialogue, said he is saddened by today's rhetorical atmosphere.

"We are today witness to a widespread recrudescence of the crude and blistering rhetoric that characterized the worst days of 1968 — when most of the Jewish remnant remaining in Poland was compelled to leave. Those spearheading this contentious law, ostensibly anti-Communists, are, paradoxically, seeking to curtail the hard-earned civil rights for which Poles fought and died in the struggle against Communist tyranny.

"At the end of the day, however, it is up to Poles themselves to determine the ambiance in their own country. There is no denying that the present situation constitutes a great, perhaps even the greatest, challenge to the Polish-Jewish dialogue that was pioneered in the 1980s. Sadly, many 'veterans' of this encounter feel deeply disappointed and disillusioned."

An inscription reading "They were flammable" and a Nazi swastika are seen in *Jedwabne*, Poland, September 1, 2011, on the monument dedicated to Jews from the town of *Jedwabne* burned to death by their Polish neighbors in 1941.

Poland is not acting in a bubble, however. Said Weinbaum, "The wild assertions of some of the Israelis who have weighed in with sweeping charges of Polish culpability for the Holocaust, and erroneous, disparaging declarations about the provenance of Auschwitz, have also done their part to inflame passions."

ALTERNATIVE FACTS?

Fact: 90% of Poland's Jewish community was exterminated during the Holocaust. Current Polish opinion: The Poles had it worse during World War II.

"The majority of the Polish society believes today that Polish suffering at the time of war was equal or greater than the suffering of the Jews," said historian Grabowski. "I am not trying to be facetious; these are recent polls."

With that in mind, it is perhaps understandable that the revised anti-defamation legislation is receiving a warm welcome in Poland today.

It is laudable to be accurate in language when describing the Holocaust. A push to recognize that Auschwitz was a German extermination camp in occupied Poland and not a "Polish death camp" has across-the-board support on the diplomatic front and among Holocaust scholars.

But the ripple effect of legislating language is likewise potentially far-reaching.

"This law will freeze debate and research into the history of the *Shoah*, of that I am certain," said Grabowski.

In his op-ed, historian Gross stated, "The Polish authorities want to gag any debate about the complicity of Poles in the persecution of Jewish citizens, making it illegal to discuss the issue 'publicly and against the facts.'"

The Polish Center for Holocaust Research published a statement expressing its "deep concern" about the law, which it calls "a tool intended to facilitate the ideological manipulation and imposition of the history policy of the Polish state."

At Yad Vashem, too, there is concern over the possible side effects of the vague wording of the new legislation and its repercussions in the areas of Holocaust research, education and remembrance.

The Polish scholars leading the charge for factual truth, said Dreifuss, are the "leading edge of Holocaust research, not only in Poland, but across the world." Added Weinbaum, "Sadly, those unflinching scholars are now being vilified and their findings called into question."

What is at stake is the democratic principle of academic freedom.

"In normal places, research is not accepted or rejected by governments," said Dreifuss. "If there are changes occurring in Poland, or in any country, where a scholar's work will need the approval of the government, that is a very bad sign."

MY FAMILY AFTER THE HOLOCAUST: "THE URGE TO DRAW A LINE UNDER THE PAST IS STRONG"

Our grandparents lived through the horror of the war. So why do we want to reclaim our German nationality?

BY KATE FIGES, THE GUARDIAN

"Go and get back what was taken from us," my eldest daughter said as I left the house to meet my brother at the German embassy in London. We had to attend in person to receive our naturalization certificates, and I had little notion of just how powerful a moment this would prove to be.

My mother, Eva, was seven when her family left Berlin in 1939. They were assimilated Jews, born in Germany, with a business, friends and family. My grandfather, Emil, was arrested on *Kristallnacht* and taken to *Dachau* concentration camp. He was released weeks later with scarlet fever after my grandmother, Irma, paid a large bribe. While she waited for him to come home, she booked passage on a boat to Thailand, the only country that would accept Jews without visas in 1939. But my grandfather was so ill, they missed the boat. My mother's family were then among many Jewish families sponsored into Britain by the Rothschilds. They waved goodbye to both sets of grandparents, who refused to leave and subsequently died in concentration camps.

Kate Figes with her grandmother, Irma, and brother in 1961.

This is just a short summary of what my family lived through. There are no adjectives to describe the grief, the horror, the fear, and the loss of home, family and everything they possessed.

Reclaiming German citizenship felt hugely symbolic as I went to meet my brother, and not just because of the timing — it was June 8, 2017, general election day. I had been diagnosed eight months earlier with triple negative breast cancer, the most aggressive and least easy breast cancer to treat. And it had metastasized. I knew I might not live long enough to use the passport, but the urge to draw a line under the miseries of the past was strong. The one thing that really matters with a shortened life expectancy is to bury every hatchet of regret and unhappiness, so that I can live free from that past in the time I have left.

Genocide doesn't just traumatize those who live through it — such epic persecution tumbles down through the generations, distorting "normal" family life and corrupting love. As a child I knew only the vaguest outline. I never knew the details of what my mother's family had lived through, because it was never talked about and I knew not to ask. They never bought German food or wine, and Germany was the last place on Earth they would have wanted to return to. I recently discovered that, during the Second World War, my grandfather worked with the Allies as an interpreter for German prisoners of war. He was advised to change his name from Unger to something less "Jewish" in case he should be captured, but he refused and went all the way back to Berlin as the war ended. How I wish I could have had just one

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"MY MOTHER HELD ME, SURROUNDED BY DEAD BODIES"

BY TARIQ TAHIR, DAILY MAIL

A Holocaust survivor has described how she survived a ghetto in Budapest and was found with her mother surrounded by dead bodies.

Agnes Grunwald-Spier was born in the city in 1944 at a time when Jews were being deported to concentration camps by the Germans and their Hungarian Fascist allies.

Her new book, *Women's Experience in the Holocaust*, uses letters and memoirs to present first-hand accounts of what her mother and other women went through.

Stories include that of ballet dancer Franceska Mann, who shot dead an SS officer in a final act of defiance at Auschwitz.

There is also the story of Margarita and Rudolf Friemel, who were married in Auschwitz, with her young son, Edi, present. They were the only couple allowed to marry there.

She survived the war, but he was executed after trying to stage a breakout.

Also documented are the stories of women who were part of the Jewish underground in Poland and fought the Nazis during the Warsaw ghetto uprising of 1943.

All of them showed incredible courage in the face of incredible evil.

Agnes's mother, Leona, was born in 1913 to an assimilated Jewish family in Budapest, and married Philip Grunwald in Budapest in March 1942, when Hungary was not involved in the war.

Agnes (center) as a baby with her parents Leona and Phillip Grunwald. Her father was sent to Poland to work in forced labor and her mother sent to accommodation for Jewish women, where Agnes was born.

"The Hungarians had introduced their own anti-Jewish legislation, and in 1943, my father was rounded up for forced labor along with 50,000 other Jewish men," Agnes says in her book.

"Bizarrely, he was allowed home on leave, and that was when I was conceived, my mother told me.

"He was taken to Poland and worked on disposing of mines and building airfields.

'Very few came back, but my father returned in March 1945. The only thing he ever told me about the war was that mulberries saved his life when others were dying of dysentery.

"He was very embittered and wouldn't have more children after the war. He committed suicide in 1955, when I was ten, leaving my mother to bring me up alone and to provide for us."

While her father was away, Agnes' mother was forced to leave her apartment and move to accommodation designated for Jewish women. Agnes was then born on July 14, 1944.

At some point between her birth and November, Agnes' mother was told to report to the Budapest ghetto.

"I don't know what she knew about what was happening, but she was fearful enough to try to leave me with her mother-in-law, as her mother had died in 1941," writes Agnes.

"My grandmother said she could not feed me, as my mother was breast-feeding me, so the next day my mother reported with me in her arms. My mother was fairly enigmatic, and all she told me was 'the man in charge sent back the women with children.'

"I have no idea who the 'man' was — he could have been a Nazi German or Hungarian, a policeman, a civil servant or even a Jew — a member of the *Judenrät*. The Nazis were adept at getting the Jews to do their dirty work for them.

"I always thought we had to have been put on the train to Auschwitz like most of the Hungarian Jews.

"However, only months ago I was told that the trains to Auschwitz stopped around the time I was born,

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EXAMINING HOLOCAUST HISTORY IN DENMARK AND ELSEWHERE

BY DAVID KORNBLUTH, THE ALGEMEINER

A prince of Denmark recently died, and a story in *The Algemeiner* took the opportunity to once again praise the famous escape of Danish Jews to Sweden during World War II.

Here, as with so much about the Holocaust, too many people attempt to rewrite history before it has been written.

The first go at this was the last gasp of Nazi propaganda: the claim that the *Wehrmacht* (the regular German army) was untainted, and that the murdering was done solely by the SS. It was a big lie then, and it's a big lie now.

And this lie is partly responsible for letting the vast majority of the German murderers die unpunished.

Research, initiated by Professor Omer Bartov and others, has now caught up with the racist *Wehrmacht's* central and proactive murderous role in the Holocaust. We now know, for example, that the massacre of over 33,000 Jews at *Babi Yar* was done by the Sixth Army — later to meet their well-deserved destruction at Stalingrad.

Individual *Wehrmacht* murderers can also now be identified. Von Choltitz, the savior of unburnt Paris in August 1944, was — by his own admission — the murderer of the 27,000 Jews of the Crimea. There are many other examples, and there will be more.

The professed innocence of the Austro-German army was fake propaganda. Undeniably, it was an anti-Semitic and racist army. Young Germans (and Austrians?) know this today, better than anyone else.

The Danish example is another case where the history of the Holocaust has been tainted.

The Danes did save their Jewish population, enabling them to flee to nearby Sweden.

Yes, the circumstances were favorable. The actions of the Danish police, the absence of informers, even — apparently — the cooperation of some Germans were responsible for this. And Denmark had the Swedes, who — by October 1943 — were prepared to take in the 7,742 Danish Jews, together with 1,376 German Jewish refugees in Denmark. Around 250 Jews got trapped in Denmark.

It was a great act — and should be justly praised.

And when this story became widely known in the 1960s, pioneered by Leni Yahil's book on the escape that was published by the Jewish Publication Society, the Danes became the darlings of the Jews.

Israel and the Jews, still reeling from the isolation of the 1930s and the Holocaust itself, were more than grateful for any kind of warmth and companionship. The hand of friendship was reciprocally extended.

Gradually, though, this began to feel odd. Why? Because after Hitler's election and takeover in 1933, tens of thousands of Jews had been desperately trying to flee Germany. The futile 32-nation Evian Conference of 1938 marked the low point of international diplomacy.

Simply put, no state — except the Dominican Republic — was willing to accept Jewish refugees. This includes Denmark.

Consider the history of this yourself — Jews were clamoring to escape since 1933. So why were there so few Jews in Denmark? Because, according to Andrew Roberts' *The Storm of War*, "the Danes had restricted German Jewish immigration in the 1930s, and actually closed the border to them in 1938" — as did Sweden. He adds that Nazi-occupied Denmark produced 15% of the Reich's food supply, a system overseen by only a couple of hundred administrators.

So, a touch of humility about Denmark's record in the Holocaust might be in order here — and perhaps even a little less festivity.

Other countries saved their Jews, too.

Bulgaria protected its own, though it surrendered those from territory it had occupied while allied with Germany. France saved about two-thirds of the Jews on its soil, and got very bad press for that. (Corsica saved its own, too.) Holland was just the reverse: some 80% of Jews there were murdered. Yet the Dutch came out of the war with a far better reputation than most — a major example of rewriting Holocaust history before it was written.

Albania was apparently the only country in Europe to have ended the war with more Jews than it began. Britain, unoccupied by the skin of its teeth, took in some 70,000 refugees from 1933 to 1939, mostly in the last year (the writer's mother included). But the British record will be forever blackened by the 1939 White Paper — an act of appeasement toward Palestinian Arabs.

So, Britain doesn't have a lot to be proud of — especially considering the size of its empire. And the as yet unidentified senior Canadian immigration official who said that "none is too many" when it came to Jewish immigrants, will live in infamy.

Holocaust history must be told truthfully. It's a powerful thing. Ask the Poles. Or remind the Swiss, where the memory of our murdered people crushed the disgraceful arrogance of Swiss bankers and took much of Swiss banking secrecy with it.

As for Denmark, by all means let's praise all those who saved Jews. And let's praise them highly, too. But don't forget those individuals who prevented our people's escape.

"WHO WOULD EVER BELIEVE WE LIVED IN A CAVE?"

BY FRANCINE WOLFISZ, JEWISH NEWS

Glimpsing daylight for the first time in nearly a year, little Mania Goldberg desperately covered her eyes with her hands, while her 75-year-old grandmother, overwhelmed by the bright sun, simply fainted to the ground.

For 344 days, they had survived Nazi persecution by living in total darkness inside a remote cave in western Ukraine known as *Popowa Yama*, The Priest's Grotto, alongside 36 other Jews.

Remarkably, Mania's widowed mother, Etcia, was the only woman to risk her life by leaving the cave each day alongside the men to hunt for supplies.

Now Etcia's incredible bravery has been brought to light for the first time in *344 Days Underground*, a novel written by her grandson, Valeriy Gritsiv, based on her recollections.

The story of *Popowa Yama* only surfaced in 1993 after Christos Nicola, a young speleologist from New York, came across a gypsum cave near the village of *Stilkivtcy* and found evidence that people had once lived there.

After researching *Popowa Yama* for more than ten years, he traced one of the few remaining survivors, resulting in a *National Geographic* article, a book and a documentary about their experiences.

However, the story of what had happened to Etcia was not included, and Gritsiv resolved that her role in this remarkable tale of survival should never be forgotten.

Gritsiv, who lives near Atlanta, Georgia, with his daughter, Elina, fondly recalls his grandmother as "the most amazing woman I ever met."

Speaking with a discernible Ukrainian accent, he explains: "The story was told in my house many, many times, especially in my childhood. But there was never a discussion outside the family, because they thought, who would ever believe they had lived in a cave for a year?

Etcia Goldberg, second from right, with her children Mania, Dunia and Marek, in 1949.

"Etcia was very brave, a fighter actually, and someone unafraid to take risks."

She had assumed her position as head of the family when her husband, Chaim, tragically died from leukemia just two weeks before the outbreak of the Second World War.

As a young widow, she had to keep running the family store, as well as look after her children: Marek, three, Dunia, eight, and Mania (Gritsiv's mother), 11.

But in the face of Nazi persecution, including mass shootings of Jews close to where they lived, Etcia realized she was running out of time to save herself and her family.

On May 5, 1943, she took her children and mother down into the Priest's Grotto, carrying blankets, candles and straws, joining the small group of Jewish families also hiding there.

The vast cave was pitch black, freezing cold and inhabited by bats. Only the men — and Etcia, who was widowed — were allowed out of the cave to scavenge or buy food and medicine. Dressed in men's clothing, Etcia risked her life every day under the cover of darkness.

"For her it was terrifying to have to go underground and into the darkness. But on the other hand, they had nowhere else to go and it was their only choice.

"The moment she had to leave the cave to get supplies was frightening for her and the children. It was always dangerous, and if she didn't come back, no one knew what would become of her children."

Someone with a weapon guarded the entrance to the cave at all times, and the inhabitants were so cold in the cave that they spent most of their time lying in their wooden beds. They only lit candles while preparing scant supplies of food available to them. But they were grateful to be alive.

On April 11, 1944, a local farmer dropped a message in a bottle saying the Germans had gone, and they emerged from the cave a day later.

As they settled back into their lives, Gritsiv reveals, his mother continued to be affected by her experience long after the war had ended.

"She had nightmares because of the darkness," he says. "For her it was much worse than being in any prison. I couldn't imagine spending even two or three days in the cave, constantly without light. It's unimaginable for me."

Etcia died in 1979, surrounded by her family. Gritsiv later moved to the United States, where he founded the Elina International Adoption Agency, to help Americans adopt children from the former Soviet Union.

Looking back over her story, Gritsiv says he feels inspired by the strength shown by his grandmother.

"There were many times in my life that I felt I was having a hard time," he reveals. "But I always try to tell myself that my grandmother survived in such incredible circumstances. She was so strong, and so whatever hardships I face, I also need to be strong."

WITNESS TO GENOCIDE

BY SHELDON KIRSHNER, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

"The horrible things my eyes have seen are indescribable," Marcel Nadjari, an Auschwitz-Birkenau prisoner, wrote in 1944.

Nadjari, a Greek Jew, was a member of the *Sonderkommando*, a squad of inmates charged with the grisly, inhumane task of herding newly arrived Jews into the gas chamber, extracting valuables from their corpses, removing their bodies and placing them in crematoria, and throwing their ashes into the nearby Sola River.

Of the roughly 2,000 Jews who were selected to be *Sonderkommandos* in this vast Nazi extermination camp, 110 survived their crushing ordeal. A handful wrote accounts of their experiences. Nadjari was one of them.

In 1944, he composed what would be a major document of the Holocaust — a 12-page letter outlining the tasks he was compelled to perform as a *Sonderkommando*. He placed it in a thermos, wrapped it in a leather pouch and buried it in the woods near one of the crematoria that had consumed hundreds of thousands of Jews during the Holocaust.

There it lay, mouldering away, until a Polish forestry student accidentally discovered it in the brush in October 1980, close to the crumbling ruins of crematorium 3.

Nadjari's letter was so damaged by the elements that it was virtually illegible. Thanks to modern scientific methods, a Russian scholar, Pavel Polian, was instrumental in restoring 90 percent of the legibility of Nadjari's text, the only such account in the Greek language.

Polian participated in the event "Out of the Ashes: Recovered Sources on Greek Jews in Auschwitz", which took place at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs. The panelists were Polian, the director of the Mandelstam Center at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow; Nicholas Chare, an associate professor of modern art at the University of Montreal; and Katherine Fleming, a professor of Hellenic culture and civilization at New York University.

The first Scrolls of Auschwitz, written mainly in Yiddish, were found after the war and in the early 1960s, said Polian, a geographer. They were composed by Zalman Gradowski, Zalman Lowenthal, Leib Langfus and Chaim Herman.

Nadjari appears to have written his account in the spirit of vengeance. "I wanted to live to avenge the death of Papa and Mama, and that of my beloved little sister, Nelli," he wrote in a reference to their deaths in Auschwitz.

Born in *Thessaloniki* in 1917, five years after it had ceased being a city in the Ottoman Empire, he was drafted into the Greek army in 1937 and again in 1940, when Italy invaded Greece. He returned to *Thessaloniki* (*Salonika*) in 1941, the year of the German invasion.

In 1943, most of the city's 50,000 Jewish inhabitants were deported to Auschwitz. Nadjari, having joined a Greek partisan band, avoided the roundups. Caught by the Germans and imprisoned, he was sent to Auschwitz in April 1944, shortly before hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews were dispatched there.

According to Fleming, the author of *Greece — A Jewish History*, many *Sonderkommandos* were Greek Jews because they were physically strong, having toiled as longshoremen prior to the war. Nadjari was profoundly Greek with respect to his beliefs and loyalty, even though Greek nationality was defined in explicitly Christian terms. And he wrote beautifully in Greek, she added.

The gruesome tasks he was forced to perform were extremely difficult. "Many times I thought of coming in with them (to the gas chambers)," he wrote in despair.

After the war, he returned briefly to Greece. His memoirs, accompanied by ink drawings of the crematorium, were published in 1947. He settled in New York City, where he had family and friends. He died in 1971 at the age of 54.

After his letter was found, Auschwitz museum workers succeeded in preserving it, but failed to decipher its contents. It was left to Polian and an assistant, Aleksandr Nikijaev, to accomplish that technical feat by means of a method called multispectral analysis.

Polian's plain but searing account of the horrors he witnessed in Auschwitz has enhanced our understanding of the *Sonderkommandos*, said Chare, the co-author, with Dominic Williams, of *Matters of Testimony: Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz* (2016). "But there will always be blanks that cannot be filled," he said.

NEW FILM EXPLORES POST-HOLOCAUST HUNGARY AND LOCAL COLLABORATION AGAINST THE JEWS

BY SHIRYN SOLNY, THE ALGEMEINER

The movie, *1945*, is set one year after the Jewish population of a small Hungarian village was deported to concentration camps. When two Orthodox Jews arrive in town on a morning train, the villagers — some of whom had turned on their Jewish neighbors for personal gain — confront feelings of guilt and fear. "What the hell do they want?" the locals ask. Are the new arrivals seeking revenge? To reclaim ownership of their stolen property? "We have to give it all back," some of them say. Others seek to hold on to their ill-got-ten gains.

At the height of the Nazi deportations, many locals witnessed the forced transportation of their Jewish neighbors to concentration camps and then looted their possessions. There were few who were not collaborators in the redistribution of the land, home furnishings and belongings forcibly abandoned by the Jews, but some later felt guilt and shame in doing so. In *1945*, the town is led by a clerk who had betrayed his closest friend, a Jewish pharmacist, and then took over his business. One woman confesses her remorse in revealing a young Jew's hiding place; overcome with guilt over the theft of Jewish property, another villager commits suicide. The film explores the tension between those returning from the concentration camps and those who stayed behind in the local towns and villages.

"The human stories; the small stories; the local stories tell a lot about a society," said *1945* co-screenwriter Gabor T. Szanto, in an interview with *The Algemeiner*, "and it was a real drama when the Jews came back and met with those who had seen when they were deported, who took their properties, who got their properties on behalf of the state at discounted auctions. [It] was a very dramatic element: how the state made the society of collaborators against the Jews."

Szanto — whose father's family returned to their apartment in Hungary after the Holocaust to find people living in their home — said that to understand the actions of the looters is to comprehend how impoverished the society was at the time. "It is a key element," the Jewish screenwriter explained. "Because it was a poor society, [so] it was very difficult to stand against this evil desire to get the property at half price or for free. I can imagine that the human beings were so fragile that in every political system they would make the same mistake."

A screenshot from the film *1945*.

The film's director, Ferenc Török, added, "90 percent of the society felt guilt, but people never talk about it… it stayed a secret. Now after 70 years, in the 21st century, we can ask again these basic questions."

The film has been well received so far and has won awards at film festivals in San Francisco, Miami, Washington, Jerusalem and Berlin. There are also plans to show the film in theaters and on television stations in 25 countries. Both Török and Szanto noted that the lack of public discourse regarding the years in Eastern Europe following the Holocaust was a reason why they chose to address the topic in the film.

Szanto said, "Between the great narratives of the Holocaust and the Communist dictatorship there were three years, partially democratic but partially under Russian occupation, which were not recognized in detail in history.... Very few people write about it; very few people want to realize that there was an afterlife. There was life after the Holocaust in Europe, and it was sometimes a very difficult life."

"We need to tell this story because we think a lot of people in the audience care about this time," said Török. "Something is missing here: information. Not just stories or memories. The US audience wants to learn about this age, what happened at that time. Gabor called this a 'missing chain.'"

MY FAMILY AFTER THE HOLOCAUST: "THE URGE TO DRAW A LINE UNDER THE PAST IS STRONG"

(Continued from page 10)

conversation with him about his experiences before he died when I was 15. I cannot imagine how it must have felt to return to the rubble of the city of his birth after everything he had been through. But silence was the only response for Jewish refugees who had survived the war. There weren't the words adequately to express their anguish, and it was far too painful to revisit. They needed to cut off that past just to be able to move on and make the most of their luck. And it was this admirable resilience that helped my grandparents build up a new business selling zippers and buttons, and then build their dream retirement bungalow home in the middle of a Sussex field.

As a child, I couldn't help but breathe in all of that suppressed emotion, without the intellectual sophistication to make sense of it. There always seemed to be inexplicable anxieties, which went into orbit whenever it came to traveling — for obvious reasons. Money had to be saved and spent carefully, that suitcase always packed in the hall in case the creep of anti-Semitism should happen again, and I still squirrel away every penny for that rainy day. And all of the rage, grief, loss, humiliation and guilt at having survived when others had not had to come out somewhere, and it usually did within the family, because it couldn't be expressed in any other way.

My mother always said my grandmother took out on her all her rage at everything she had lost, and I saw as a child how hard it was for them to show affection toward each other.

For the last decade of Nana's life, she refused to see my mother. "It's better that way, it's all too painful," she told me. She kept to her word: they saw each other only once more to my knowledge, on my wedding day, and my grandmother even refused to see my mother as she lay dying.

I have always attributed all this family heartache to the legacy of the Holocaust. They could not talk about it. They could not bury and therefore mourn their dead. I think, too, that the effort involved in getting her family to safety, then living through five years of war, in fear of a German invasion, meant Nana's nervous system must have been on permanent high alert. And yet when I once dared ask her how she had managed to cope, she merely said: "It's best to forgive, but not to forget."

That history is something I, and other second- and third-generation Jewish descendants, cannot forget, either. It has been handed down through the gene pool and throws an ominous shadow over the past, just as cancer does over my future.

It's an honor to carry that torch, but it can also feel like a ball and chain, dragging me back to a past I haven't experienced. With each generation, the ripples from the greatest genocide ever known grow a little weaker. But that only makes stronger the feeling of responsibility, to keep alive the memory of what happened in the hope it never happens again. Reclaiming my German nationality felt like one small way to make peace with it.

My brother and I had our appointment at the embassy early in the morning, and I was about to pull on any old thing when I remembered how important it always was for my grandmother to look smart. Nobody could accuse her of being a "dirty Jew" if she looked immaculate. So I wore a cashmere jumper (her favorite wool) and placed my mother's 1960s necklace on top, so I could take Eva with us, too.

"I present to you, Catherine, your certificate of naturalization." I burst into tears. Our grandparents' and great-grandparents' names had been put back into the bureaucracy. They existed. They had been wronged, and with this one small gesture, the German government was trying to make things a little more right. We were holding out our hands in forgiveness to shake those of younger Germans, who also bore no responsibility for the past at a time of growing nationalism and suspicion of "the other" in Europe. All of this had contributed to the making of the decision, one many older Jews might find hard to understand. But what I hadn't expected was the immediate personal sense of completeness I felt. I had grown up fearing Germany. I found the language ugly and chose French, Russian, even Arabic to study so that I wouldn't have to engage with that "mother" tongue. On the rare occasions when I have visited Germany, I couldn't help but look at people and wonder what their parents or grandparents had done during the war. But, with German citizenship, I had to accept that I was half German, too, that the darker side I had always tried to deny was an important part of me, just as my cancer is now.

Our daughters and their children can also apply now for dual citizenship, and applications are in for all four of my mother's granddaughters. There is some small sense of justice, of circularity in the way my mother's whole family is being welcomed back, even if that is just in spirit, when not so very long ago the Nazi regime reduced so many of my family, and millions of others, to dust. Restoring our citizenship is, of course, the least the German state could do, but for me that small gesture feels healing and uniting. I hope that when my daughters' and nieces' passports come through, I will still be well enough to travel back to Berlin for a holiday with my family, and have a ball.

POLISH HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR HEEDED BRUTAL ADVICE, THEN MOVED ON

BY JAMES R. HAGERTY, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Near the end of World War II, Hilda Gimpel had a small request for a Russian military officer overseeing troops in Poland.

She had lost her parents and five siblings to the Holocaust. Her husband, David, had died as a member of Jewish resistance forces in a Polish forest, where the couple had slept on the ground in rain and snow through two winters. Now she hoped the Russian officer could provide an escort so she could visit her husband's grave.

Cursing her in the vilest terms, the officer said her husband was lucky anyone would weep for him. No one would cry for her, he said. So why bother visiting graves?

The Russian had a point, she later decided. She had no time for crying, she told herself: "You're going to see what the next day is going to bring."

After the war she married another survivor, Harry Eisen. They moved to southern California and made a fortune raising chickens to produce eggs for supermarkets. After selling the business, they had time in old age to donate money to Jewish causes and play cards with other Holocaust survivors in Los Angeles.

The Russian was proved wrong: when she died last year at the age of 100 at her home in Beverly Hills, California, there were three children to grieve her, along with eight grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Hilda Gimpel was born April 25, 1917, in the Polish village of *Izbica Kujawska*, about 100 miles west of Warsaw. Her father was a baker. Her mother bought grain from farmers and sold it to mills.

In a video interview recorded by the USC Shoah Foundation in 2001, she remembered a peaceful girlhood. "We had a good life," dancing to Jewish music and occasionally going to movies, she said. "We didn't know better."

After the invasion of Poland in 1939, Jewish businesses were shut down. Belongings were smashed or stolen. Religious rites had to be concealed. "We just closed ourselves up in the house," she said.

Later, while other Jews were being rounded up, she escaped with her first husband. He had blond hair, looked "like a goy" and could find odd jobs as a mechanic. They moved from city to city.

Harry and Hilda Eisen in 1996.

"It was filth, it was hunger, fear," she said. She shook her head and added, "You just couldn't believe your eyes, what's happened around you." There was no point in dreaming about a future: "Today you're alive, in a minute you're dead."

They ended up in the *Parczew* forest with one of the ragtag groups called partisans, waging guerrilla warfare against Nazi forces. The men went on raids to grab food or sabotage the Nazis by blowing up bridges and rail tracks. The women made potato soup in buckets. One ordeal for women, she recalled, was enduring menstruation in freezing weather without cloths or tissues.

While fetching water one day, she was caught by Nazi forces and marched to a police station. Under interrogation, she was asked where the partisans hid at night. Rather than revealing that they slept in the forest, she made up a lie, saying they sneaked into towns and slept in vacant houses.

Jailed overnight, she heard a guard raping a woman in the next room and decided to make her break by leaping from a second-floor window. A sympathetic guard let her get away. She had injured a foot jumping to the ground. She had no shoes as she limped through the woods.

A man out cutting logs told her the Nazis were offering a reward for her capture: five pounds of sugar and two pounds of pork. She gave the wood cutter a few coins. He helped her find her way back to the partisans.

When the war ended, she found her childhood home in ruins and reconnected with a young man she had known as a girl: Harry Eisen. He had survived the Auschwitz death camp, and nearly all of his family was gone. They decided to marry.

"I'll tell you the truth: I got married out of fear, being scared to be alone in this world, no family, no friends," she said in the video interview. "He had the same feeling. He didn't love me, I didn't love him."

After three years in refugee camps, they sailed to New York in May 1948 aboard the SS *Marine Flasher*. They took a train to Los Angeles, where Mrs. Eisen had a cousin. Mr. Eisen found a job cleaning meat barrels in a hot-dog plant.

Once they had saved enough money, the Eisens bought 100 chickens and started a backyard farm in Arcadia, near Los Angeles. He managed despite a poor command of English. "I talked Jewish to my chickens and they laid eggs," he told a California newspaper.

Mrs. Eisen washed and packaged the eggs. Her husband loaded them onto his bicycle and sold them on street corners.

In the late 1950s they moved to Norco in Riverside County to expand their company, which became Norco Ranch Inc. When they sold the business in 2000, it had about 450 employees and annual sales of $100 million.

What others saw as big problems often looked minor to them. "They always said, 'Thank God we live in America,'" said Mary Cramer, one of their daughters.

80 YEARS ON, AUSTRIA'S JEWS RENEW DEMAND FOR HOLOCAUST REPARATIONS

BY ELDAD BECK, JNS

On the eve of the 80th anniversary of Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria, or *Anschluss*, Holocaust survivors in Israel are calling on Vienna to provide reparations for Austrians whose property was confiscated when the country was under Nazi rule.

In 2001, the U.S. government and representatives of Jewish organizations signed a deal with Austria for the symbolic reparation of Jewish property. To this end, a $210 million fund was established.

However, $1.5 billion in property is believed to have been plundered from the Jewish community, which up until the war was one of the wealthiest and most important in Europe. In accordance with this agreement, Austria paid its survivors and their descendants what amounted to a mere 14 percent of the total value of their property.

Austrian Holocaust survivors in Israel have now decided to renew their efforts to receive appropriate reparations.

Dr. Haim Galon from the Committee for Compensation from Austria was born in Austria following the *Anschluss* or annexation. His father owned a cigarette factory in Vienna. On March 13, 1938, one day after the annexation, a Nazi official entered the factory and began to confiscate property. Although the factory was estimated to be worth $100,000, Galon only received $10,000 in reparations.

"It was a mockery," said Galon. "Luckily, my father, who died at a young age, was not around to see it. One must expect Chancellor [Sebastian] Kurz will convey Austria's responsibility to the victims by means of full compensation. The 80th anniversary of *Anschluss* is an opportunity to prove they don't just make promises."

In occupied Austria, SS Nazis and local residents watch with delight as Jews are being humiliated by being forced to get on their hands and knees and scrub the pavement.

While Austria expected to receive 100,000 claims for reparations, only 21,000 were submitted, as some families were entirely wiped out in the Holocaust, and there was no one to submit claims in their name.

Doron Weisbrod, another committee member, emphasized that "in other countries, interest was also paid because of the time [that has passed]. Countries like France, Norway and Belgium — not to mention Germany — granted much larger reparations."

A SURVIVOR'S REVENGE

BY RONDA ROBINSON, AISH.COM

In 1938, 14-year-old Henry Birnbrey traveled by himself on a ship from Hamburg to New York as part of a *Kindertransport*, a special program to rescue Jewish children from Nazi Germany. An only child, he will never forget the trauma of leaving his parents behind. He would not see his family again. However, he would return to Germany years later to avenge their deaths.

He fought hard for that privilege.

Birnbrey was among many American soldiers to witness the devastation of the Nazi concentration camps. He helped liberate a "death train" deep in the heart of Nazi Germany. What he saw would change his life forever.

The images remain with him still at age 93. For many years he couldn't entertain them. Then he received an invitation to talk to high school students about being a teenager in Germany, and finally allowed himself to plumb the depths of the unspeakable.

It all began in 1937, when Henry — then called Heinz — was 13. His father, Edmund, a merchant, was arrested after telling a customer he was unable to deliver textile goods. The customer's son asked, "Is it because of the Nazi regime?" Even though Edmund said no, the customer's son apparently denounced him as a traitor to the authorities.

Edmund managed to return home after a few days in jail. However, the Germans arrested him along with many others on *Kristallnacht*, the "Night of Broken Glass," a pogrom against Jews on November 10–11, 1938. At least 91 Jews were murdered, 267 synagogues throughout Germany, Austria, and the *Sudetenland* were destroyed, and windows of an estimated 7,500 Jewish-owned commercial establishments were shattered and looted. Edmund Birnbrey was beaten up badly and died from his wounds a few weeks later.

By that time Henry already had escaped to America. A Jewish social worker greeted the young refugee from *Dortmund*, Germany, on the docks of New York and shepherded him by train to Alabama. The Birmingham Council of Jewish Women, which had sponsored his immigration, placed him in a foster home. After nine months, they moved him to a different foster home in Atlanta. "I guess I was too hard to handle," he jokes.

"I became a cousin to all the cousins. I was invited to all the family events. I've been very blessed."

Birnbrey had corresponded with his parents by mail, which was censored, and only learned about his father's death two months after the fact. His mother Jenny died soon after, but he doesn't know the cause. At least she wasn't in a concentration camp.

Henry Birnbrey.

She had tried to leave Germany and applied for visas. "What people don't realize," he says, "is there was no problem getting out of Germany in those days. The problem was getting admitted to other countries."

Swept up in the surge of patriotism in his new country during World War II and thirsting for revenge, Henry tried to enlist in the U.S. Army. At first, he was turned down because the United States considered him an "enemy alien" because of his German passport. While waiting for American citizenship, he filed a presidential appeal, and in 1943 he was allowed to serve with the American forces that stormed the beaches of Normandy.

Birnbrey then went to Germany as a scout, surveying the situation for the infantry division. "We were moving fast. Sometimes we were one to two days ahead of the Army. Our objective was to take Berlin," he recounts.

"On the way between *Brunswick* and *Magdeburg* we encountered ditches along the highway full of concentration camp victims who had been shot."

Two weeks before the war ended in 1945, the scouts came upon a shocking sight in the middle of nowhere: an abandoned, closed freight train with 20 or 30 cars full of Jews, standing room only. The Americans heard voices inside and were struck by a tremendously unpleasant smell.

"You just can't find words to describe this kind of situation," Birnbrey says. "People had been put into such subhuman conditions, it was almost difficult to identify with them as fellow human beings. Their own waste was in the freight cars. They had been so degraded by the process."

Apparently, the Germans had been transferring the Jews from the *Bergen-Belsen* concentration camp to *Theresienstadt* to avoid their rescue by the Allied forces. But fearing their own capture from the advancing Americans, the guards abandoned their prisoners. The American soldiers opened the train doors and freed them.

"We were too stunned to know what to do. There are a million things you wish you had done. It was so horrible, so unsightly, dirty, filthy, ugly. It was totally unexpected. We were totally unprepared. The only food we carried were emergency rations for ourselves. We didn't have a kitchen. We radioed back to tell people what we had seen. We were told to go on and others would take over."

Birnbrey recalls the sight often and admits it has remained in his consciousness his whole life.

More than half a century later Matthew Rozell, a non-Jewish social studies teacher in upstate New York, started researching this lost chapter of the Holocaust. He published *A Train Near Magdeburg: A Teacher's Journey, Backwards Into the Holocaust* in 2016.

Rozell also organized reunions of survivors and liberators, one of which Birnbrey attended in Bradenton, Florida. Still moved, he says: "It was highly emotional. It was very hard for any of us to speak. It was amazing where these people came from — some lived in Israel, some in America. One was the grandson of a survivor, who was in charge of atomic energy in the Barack Obama era."

One survivor called his liberators "the angels of life."

With his knowledge of German, Birnbrey later was asked to interrogate prisoners. "We could never find a single German soldier who knew what was going on," he says ironically. They all feigned ignorance.

Back home in the United States, Birnbrey, an accountant, went to law school on the GI Bill that provided educational assistance for veterans.

He and his wife, Rebecca, raised two sons and two daughters — all committed Jews. Birnbrey's brood includes 15 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren. "To consider I was a sole survivor who has 33 descendants is really something," he marvels. "I've been very blessed."

As the patriarch, he has carried the Jewish torch and lit the way for family members. Birnbrey has remained active in Jewish communal work since he returned from World War II. He has traveled to Israel 65 times! With his late wife, he always had Shabbat dinner guests, inspiring others to uphold the tradition.

"I feel it as an obligation," he explains. "Had we been more active and more knowledgeable and cared more for one another, maybe more people could have been saved."

"MY MOTHER HELD ME, SURROUNDED BY DEAD BODIES"

(Continued from page 11)

so I don't know what our intended destination was. But for the 'man' we would have been off to a, no doubt, more dangerous place."

Although better than what potentially awaited them at the end of that train journey, the Budapest ghetto was still a dangerous place to live.

Leona was a strong woman, however, and Agnes explained how she even stood up to Russian soldiers who had liberated the city.

"It was not a good place to be, as there was very little food, but I was fortunate that my mother could breast-feed me even when she had very little to eat," she said.

"It was extremely cold, with no fuel available except, perhaps, furniture that could be burnt. The Hungarian Fascists liked to take shots at the Jews in the ghetto, so many people died.

Inhabitants of Jewish ghetto in Budapest after its liberation by the Red Army.

"My mother's cousin, Pali, told me he found my mother in the ghetto when it was liberated. She was sitting on some steps holding me, surrounded by dead bodies.

"She returned to her flat, and the Russian soldiers who had liberated Budapest were marauding around. She was not tall but she had authority, and while rape and mayhem surrounded her in the block of flats, the Russians in her flat merely asked for food.

"She didn't have any, and they disappeared, returning some time later with a frozen animal.

"They cut it up, and somehow she cooked it and they all ate it. She told me she thought it was a dog. They went to sleep on the floor and left the next morning."

Other eye-opening stories about women's experience in the Holocaust are included in the book, ranging from their changing roles in the family to leading communities to resistance in the camps.

"My mother, like all the women in this book, coped with situations she could never have envisaged before 1933," concluded Agnes.

"She kept us both safe and alive, to bring me to England in 1947. So many millions of Jews were not so fortunate."

ELI ZBOROWSKI LEGACY CIRCLE

The American Society for Yad Vashem was founded in 1981 by a group of Holocaust survivors and led by Eli Zborowski, *z"l,* for more than thirty years. Recently approved by the Board of Directors of the American Society for Yad Vashem, our Legacy Circle is being named in memory of Eli Zborowski, *z"l*, who was greatly respected for his work and accomplishments on behalf of Yad Vashem and is missed by all who knew him.

The Eli Zborowski Legacy Circle is open to and will recognize anyone who includes Yad Vashem in their estate plans. This can include a bequest by will, funding a Charitable Remainder Trust or Charitable Gift Annuity, donating a paid-up life insurance policy or contributing an interest in an IRA or retirement plan, or making ASYV the beneficiary of a Charitable Lead Trust. Individuals can make gifts of any size, through a broad range of programs and investment vehicles that can accommodate those of modest means, as well as those with substantial wealth.

By including Yad Vashem in your estate plans, you assure a future in which Holocaust remembrance and education will serve as a powerful antidote to denial, hate and indifference.

"I did not find the world desolate when I entered it. As my fathers planted for me before I was born, so do I plant for those who will come after me."

The Talmud

For further information about the Eli Zborowski Legacy Circle, please contact

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