

MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE



Vol. 45-No. 1

ISSN 0892-1571

September/October 2018-Tishri/Cheshvan 5779

TO HONOR, TO REMEMBER, AND TO NEVER FORGET

BY JILL GOLTZER

This past July, Yad Vashem's 2018 Generation to Generation Mission — From Austria to Israel at 70 brought together nearly 100 friends from five countries, ages 16 to 97, including four Holocaust survivors and over 40 young leaders. More than 80 participants came from the USA. From Herzl's home in Vienna to the horrors of *Mauthausen* and then to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, our multi-generational journey commemorated the tragedies and celebrated the triumphs of the Jewish people. When asked about the theme of the Mission, ASYV board member Mark Moskowitz said, "We're calling it Generation to Generation because *L'dor V'dor* is one of the things that is so important at Yad Vashem — to communicate, to teach, to disseminate the knowledge about the Holocaust to younger generations." After arriving in Vienna, we got a glimpse of the historic city, including the famous Belvedere Palace, and enjoyed the opening dinner in the beautiful *Wiener Rathaus* (Vienna Town Hall) with Austrian dignitaries and Lt. Shai Abramson, chief cantor of the IDF, whom we were fortunate to have with us throughout the entire Mission. Welcoming everyone on the start of this journey, Mission chair Adina Burian emphasized how "we need both on an individual level and a communal level to learn about the Holocaust." These words set the stage for the coming week.

On the first full day of the Mission, participants explored the history of Jews in Vienna and visited sites including the *Judenplatz* and the *Stadttempel*, which is the only synagogue in Vienna to survive

Kristallnacht and is still in use today. While at the synagogue, Holocaust survivor and Mission participant Felice Z. Stokes gave testimony and shared her story growing up as a Hidden Child in France. In the afternoon, we held a ceremony at Theodor Herzl's original burial site in the old Jewish cemetery on what happened to be his 114th *yahrzeit*. Mission participants placed seven stones and seven flowers from the State of Israel on the burial site, representing the

as the president of the Austrian Parliament, Wolfgang Sobotka. The highlight of the evening was meeting the chancellor of Austria, His Excellency Sebastian Kurz, who recently visited Yad Vashem. The chancellor personally welcomed the group, and especially the survivors, to the city of Vienna and reiterated that "because of our [Austria's] historical responsibility, we [the people of Austria] have the duty to fight all forms of anti-Semitism." To top off a

grandparents. At *Gusen*, Jonah Deutsch, IDF soldier and grandson of survivor Naftali Deutsch, shared his belief that "even after everything that has happened here and the unspeakable losses that we have suffered in this place...we have won because we as a people have survived."

That sense of victory was evermore present during our night in *Linz*, where we sang and danced in the very city Hitler intended to make the cultural capital of Nazi Germany. As Mark Moskowitz said, "We rocked the *Linz* Parliament with our rejoicing in a way it had never seen before." While in *Linz*, we heard from the speaker of the house of Parliament, the Austrian friends of Yad Vashem, and Mission participant Peter Till. Till aptly described the bond shared by the group when he stated, "We are now locked arm in arm through the common goal of heritage and humanity." Following a day of solemn reflection, we enjoyed a festive Fourth of July dinner marking the liberation of the *Mauthausen* camp and subcamps by the American armed forces.

After a long day filled with heavy emotion, the Mission awoke extremely early to depart Vienna for Israel. Just before landing, we were warmly welcomed by Shai Abramson singing over the flight's PA system. Upon arrival, we headed straight to the *Kotel* for a *shehecheyanu* ceremony. From the depths of despair and tragedy, the Jewish people returned home to Eretz Israel, and on this day, we retraced those steps and celebrated 70 years of a free and independent state. Rachel Shnay, YLA co-chair, beautifully expressed her love for Israel and her heritage in her speech that first night. In speaking about anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, Shnay urged us to always stand up and proudly say, "I am a Jew, I am a Zionist, and I am a grandchild of survivors, and I will never be silenced!" On that inspirational note, and despite our exhaustion, we danced the night away with Israeli singer Einat Saruf and lifted our voices to say *Am Yisrael Chai!*

On Friday, the group headed to Yad Vashem to view the two new temporary exhibits, "Flashes of Memory" (Continued on page 8)



Presenting Sebastian Kurz, the chancellor of Austria, with a gift on behalf of Yad Vashem at the Federal Chancellery in Vienna.

Left to right: Dorit Novak, Yad Vashem director general; Adina Burian, Mission chair; Leonard Wilf, ASYV chairman; H.E. Sebastian Kurz, chancellor of Austria.

seven decades of Israel's independence. Additionally, an eighth flower was placed to represent our belief in the future of both the State of Israel and the Jewish people.

In the evening, we headed to the Austrian Parliament, where we heard from Martin Engelberg, the first active member of the Jewish community to be a member of Parliament, as well

day of meaning and exploration, the group gathered for dinner at the Schönbrunn Palace.

Wednesday marked the day that many Mission participants looked upon with both anxious and nervous anticipation. Visiting *Mauthausen* reminded everyone of the very reason we embarked on this journey. We visited the *Mauthausen* and *Gusen* concentration camps, where we heard testimony from *Mauthausen* survivors Leon Green and Edward Mosberg, and *Gusen* survivor Naftali Deutsch. This was Leon Green's first time back to *Mauthausen* since being a prisoner there. He returned with his daughter, Sally, who was visibly emotional when she explained how her father was always the strongest man she's ever known. Other members of the second and third generations read aloud the prisoner cards of their parents and

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“TIME, PLACE AND RELEVANCE”: YAD VASHEM’S 10TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

Over 350 international leaders in Holocaust education, from five continents and 50 countries, gathered the last week of June at Yad Vashem’s International School for Holocaust Studies for its 10th

out an operation to gather and deport all the Jews located on the scattered islands of Greece. “Despite the advancements of the Allied forces throughout Europe and the pending collapse of Germany as World War II

and relevant for future generations.

Director of Yad Vashem’s Visual Center Liat Benhabib gave a fascinating lecture, entitled “From Newsreels to YouTube: Film and the Holocaust.” She stated: “Filmmakers try to reconstruct memory — and today, everyone is a filmmaker. Especially as survivors pass away, I believe that film will become even more important in Holocaust remembrance and education.”

On the last day of the conference, participants had the opportunity to meet and interact with several Holocaust survivors from a variety of locations and backgrounds. Frieda Kliger, whose image was used

put life into his eyes,” she remembers. Kliger now has two children, four grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, some of whom were present at the conference.

The culminating point of the 10th International Conference was a candid conversation between Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev and Director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum Piotr M.A. Cywiński. These two institutions represent two aspects of Holocaust remembrance and education: Auschwitz-Birkenau, the authentic site of the murder of over a million Jews during the Holocaust; and Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance



Teachers participating in a workshop at Yad Vashem 10th Annual International Conference.

International Conference on Holocaust Education, entitled “Time, Place and Relevance.”

The conference presented lectures, panel discussions and interactive workshops by some of the world’s leading Holocaust historians, scholars and educators. Each day of the four-day conference tackled a range of aspects connected to Holocaust education in the 21st century. The mornings were dedicated to plenary sessions, while afternoons included breakout sessions allowing participants to play a more active role in the proceedings. The conference was held in English with simultaneous translation to French, Russian and Spanish.

Director of the International School’s Jewish World and International Seminars Department Ephraim Kaye explained that the goal of the conference was to “provide an international, intergenerational and multicultural forum for an experiential dialogue on how to preserve the legacy of the Holocaust and how to face the challenges of ensuring that Holocaust education is relevant for years to come.”

Many experts from Yad Vashem’s International School for Holocaust Studies, International Institute for Holocaust Research and Archives Division presented topics related to their areas of expertise. One of the first lectures of the conference was delivered by Yad Vashem Senior Historian and Editor-in-Chief of the academic journal *Yad Vashem Studies* Dr. David Silberklang on the topic of “What Was the Holocaust.” Dr. Silberklang told how in the late spring of 1944 the Germans carried

was ending, it was a ‘seek-and-destroy’ mission of the Nazis to murder all the Jews of Europe and North Africa.”

The former Israeli ambassador to the United States, MK Michael Oren, addressed the plenary at the conference, pointing out how “all Jews, especially of my generation, walk around with their own personal Holocaust.” Oren recalled that among those growing up Jewish in the United States, the Holocaust wasn’t dis-



Shai Abramson at the conference’s closing ceremony in memory of Izzy and Babs Asper.

cussed as openly as it is today — it was “just beneath the surface.” He applauded the participants for their dedication in educating and keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive



Participants at Yad Vashem’s 10th Annual International Conference on Holocaust Education.

on many of the conference materials and posters, was in attendance. One of the only members of her family to survive the Holocaust, Kliger described how after liberation she

Center, complete with its world renowned museum complex, archives and museums, and art and artifacts collection. Each of these institutions contributes and shapes the way the world relates to the Holocaust, remembers it, and teaches it to future generations. During the session, which was moderated by Director of Yad Vashem’s International Institute for Holocaust Research Dr. Iael Nidam-Orvieto, the two shared their perspectives of where Holocaust remembrance and education is headed in an age when there will be no more Holocaust survivors left to tell their stories.

While Shalev explained how Yad Vashem stresses the human experience in its museums as well as in its educational approach and programs, Cywiński stated: “If the Holocaust is only part of history, it isn’t enough. It needs to be part of our history.”

Throughout the conference, participants had the opportunity to network with fellow educators from around the world, thus gaining new ideas for effective teaching methods. Concluded one educator from the United States: “The ‘cross-pollination’ exchange of ideas and points of view between people from different backgrounds will only enrich the educational experiences in each of our classrooms.”

noticed “only sadness in people’s eyes.” She and her late husband were among the first to marry after liberation in the *Bergen-Belsen* DP camp on December 18, 1945. “I chose to

SHATTERED CHILDHOOD

BY ANDREW PEREZ, THE SUN

Ruth Goldschmiedova Sax watched out her window as hundreds of Nazi *Schutzstaffel* (SS) soldiers marched past her house and down the streets of *Brno*, Czechoslovakia. Even eight decades later, she still shivers recalling the deafening stomp of the goose-stepping Nazis' black rubber boots as they thundered over the asphalt ushering in a dark new era.

Thud, thud, thud, left, right, left.

Sax was only 11 when the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939. Her life would never be the same. She would survive three concentration camps and endure one of the most nightmarish chapters of mankind's history. She would look into the vacant eyes of the Nazi Angel of Death. Yet Hitler, his horrors and his henchmen could not break her spirit or extinguish her hope.

Born on July 6, 1928, in *Moravsky Šumperk* in Moravia, the central region of Czechoslovakia, Sax was the only child of Oskar and Erna Goldschmied. The family moved to *Brno* in 1934, when she was six.

"Life was really beautiful and simple those first couple of years," she said. "I went to school, I played with friends, everything a normal child does. Our family lived comfortably. My father, Oskar, was a businessman who sold men's socks with elastic in them, and he was very successful. I was a very spoiled child, and while I would feel sad from time to time because I didn't have a sibling, that feeling passed quite quickly."

Her early life was uneventful, Sax recalled, but around the time she turned 10 in 1938, she began to notice people acting strangely around her.

"The non-Jewish neighborhood children would avoid me," she said. "They were afraid to play with me. At the time I couldn't understand why. I had always been a kind friend and person. My parents told me that if I really cared about my friends I would let them go because they could get into very serious trouble being around me. So, regrettably, I did."

THEN CAME THE DAY EVERYTHING CHANGED

March 14, 1939, started out happily enough. It was grandmother Klara's birthday, and the Sax family spent all day celebrating. When evening approached and the festivities wound down, the family hunkered near the radio to listen to some music. But instead of soothing melodies, a loud and brash voice rattled the tiny speakers, warning listeners that Hitler's armies were invading Czechoslovakia.

"I remember my mother waking me up, telling me to get ready, that there was an emergency," Sax said. "So we rushed into a taxi and went to the factory where my father worked because

we didn't know where else to go."

Blocking the entrance to the factory was its director. He wore a shiny new swastika pin on his lapel and a sour look on his face. He looked Sax's father dead in the eyes and told him gruffly to "Go home!" Sax said her father was shocked.

"They had known each other for years," she said. "The man had always been so friendly and nice. But all of that kindness was gone in an instant, replaced with hate."

The Sax family tried to hail a taxi back to their apartment, but found that the world for Jews had just turned upside down.



Ruth Goldschmiedova Sax.

"The driver refused to take us home," Sax recalled, "not because he hated us like my father's employer, but because he was afraid. He was afraid that he would be caught giving us a ride. So, he dropped us off at the train station, which still allowed Jews to travel, and we got back home that way."

HOME WAS NO LONGER HOME

As the family rounded the corner of their neighborhood, Sax saw two SS officers with revolvers at their front door. The family stood helpless on the curbside as the officers ransacked their home, helping themselves to whatever they wanted, including the keys to their brand-new car.

"A couple of days later my father told a customer of his who was not Jewish that the officers had taken his car," Sax recalled. "The customer marched right up to the SS office and got the car back — not for my father, but for himself. He told the Germans that my father had given him the car."

Life was now much different for 11-year-old Sax, her family and the rest of the Jewish community of *Brno*. They were forced to pin cloth Stars of David with the word *Jude* (German for Jew) to their clothes. Jews caught without the star risked summary execution. Groceries were severely rationed, and stores could only sell to Jewish customers between 3 and 5 p.m. All Jewish workers lost their jobs or had their businesses confiscated by the Germans. They were forced into ghettos. Sax's family was lucky to stay in its ransacked apartment because her father's factory had

already paid the rent.

Death began to rain down on Czech Jews.

"I remember my father had a cousin, Viktor, who lived across the street from us," she said. "Before the invasion, he and my father would get together every weekend and chat at a local café. One day Viktor was walking down the street, minding his own business, when a German officer came up to him and called him a 'dirty Jew.' Viktor spat at the officer, who took out his revolver and shot him dead. That shook us all."

On the night of December 5, 1941, Sax and her family were awakened by

two German soldiers who told them to get what belongings they could and leave the house. They were packed into a transport wagon with hundreds of other Jews. Germans herded them into railroad cars, cramming her family and others into a single tiny compartment.

The ride was arduous and abhorrent. Jews slept on the dirty floors and were allotted meager portions of coffee, bread and soup.

When the train finally ground to a stop at its unknown destination, prisoners were forced to walk two miles in the knifing winter cold to a gray train station. No one knew where they were. Nazis had driven the train in circles and made frequent stops to keep the passengers disoriented and confused.

At the mystery train station, Jewish captives were pushed into a different train, filthier and more dilapidated than the last. This ride was even longer, Sax said, taking almost an entire day. Prisoners were consumed with fear, dampened only by exhaustion. Then the train finally lurched to a stop. Sax trudged into *Theresienstadt*, where she would spend the next three and a half years fighting to stay alive.

Theresienstadt was a concentration camp located in *Terezin* in German-occupied Czechoslovakia. It was named for Saint Theresa, "the little flower of Jesus," but there was nothing divine in the Nazi "showplace" detention area. It would operate for three and a half years, from November 24, 1941, to May 9, 1945.

Theresienstadt was used as a front, billed in Nazi propaganda as an area

of resettlement for elderly Czech Jewish citizens, who they claimed could retire in comfort and safety. In reality *Theresienstadt* served as a transit ghetto, where the deported Jews were evaluated and sent to other camps based on their perceived usefulness to the Nazi regime as laborers, sex slaves or subjects of sadistic medical experimentation.

"As soon as we arrived we had to surrender our belongings," Sax said. "Everything was taken from us, from glasses and jewelry to the gold fillings in our mouths. Then we had to line up for inspection. The Nazis wanted only the best of us. If you were sick, or too young or too old, they took you to the side and shot you. They only wanted 18- to 38-year-olds, so I had to lie about my age in order to stay alive."

Theresienstadt was composed of five barracks. Sax and her mother lived in the *Dresdner Kaserne*, while her father had to live in *Sudeten Kaserne*. Sax would not see her father again for four years.

Sax said conditions at the camp were squalid.

"The camp was in immense disrepair," she said. "The cots were full of thousands of bedbugs, and you could feel them crawling on you in the night. There was a lack of food and drinkable water. The toilet was simply a cut-out box that was placed over a hole in the floor. It was very unsanitary, to say the least."

When she arrived in *Theresienstadt*, Sax ran into her former gym coach, Fredy Hirsch, who gave her and her mother a valuable survival strategy.

"He advised us to find a job that worked around food because you could always sneak a bite of what you were working on," she said. "He told us that if you worked (around food) you could get 800 calories a day, but if you didn't you would only get 300."

They followed Hirsch's counsel. Sax's mother worked as a potato peeler and smuggled bits of the peeled skin back to her daughter. She worked her way up to a supervisory position and got more food privileges. Since taking showers was a rare luxury, Erna would save kitchen wash water and Sax would bathe in potato water.

Sax worked in the children's garden growing vegetables. She was under constant supervision. Anyone caught stealing food would get killed on the spot. Sax faced the wrath of the officers after attempting to shake an apple out of a tree. She was lucky, she said. Instead of execution she was placed in 24-hour solitary confinement with no food or water.

While Sax and her mother found ways to survive *Theresienstadt*, others in her family did not.

Sax's grandmother Klara died of cancer in *Theresienstadt*. Camp officials knew she was ill, but gave her only simple pain medication as she wasted away. Her uncle Vilem and his

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SONS AND SOLDIERS

Sons and Soldiers: The Untold Story of the Jews Who Escaped the Nazis and Returned with the U.S. Army to Fight Hitler.

By Bruce Henderson. Published by William Morrow — An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers: New York, New York, 2017. 448 pp. \$17.72 hardcover.

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN

Not long ago, all that the world knew about Europe's Jews during World War II was that they were victims. Indeed, the expression describing them as having walked "like sheep to the slaughter" was, sadly, frequently heard. In more recent years, though, an increasing number of books have revealed how, in fact, Jews courageously fought in the ghettos, camps and forests. Bruce Henderson's interesting volume entitled *Sons and Soldiers: The Untold Story of the Jews Who Escaped the Nazis and Returned with the U.S. Army to Fight Hitler* tells us of more such courageous Jews who, little known to us till now, made it their business to fight in their own unique way. These were the Ritchie Boys — a "top secret decisive force." Who were they? What did they do? How were they unique? What special abilities did they have that made them invaluable to the Allied war effort?

In Henderson's work we learn that they all came to America in the late 1930s to early 1940s, were generally in their mid- to late teens, and often arrived alone. When the war came, all were eager to fight. However, ironically, even though they were Jews, America had labeled them "enemy

aliens" simply because they had been German citizens! Then, in 1942, "war planners in the Pentagon" realized their especial worth, opening "the first facility for centralized intelligence training in the history of the U.S. military" — Camp Ritchie, in Maryland. Thus, in *Sons and Soldiers* we follow about a half-dozen of these Ritchie Boys — these selfsame Jewish-German refugees from the camp's "largest group of graduates" — noting how their native knowledge of German, of Germany, of its culture and of the Nazi "psyche" made all the difference in their specialization: the interrogation of POWs, most especially Germans.

For example, there was Günther Stern of *Hildesheim*, Germany, born in 1922, the eldest son of Julius and Hedwig Stern. As Jewish persecution in Germany worsened, the entire family had hopes of emigrating to America. However, when only one uncle was found who could sponsor them, and his financial situation — according to the American immigration rules of the day — would only allow for one person to come, Günther's parents decided it would be him. In 1937, upon arrival in America, Günther, soon calling himself Guy, went to school and to university, and then, with the years, as luck and serendipity would have it, he became a Ritchie Boy. As a Ritchie Boy, "Guy

was a member of a six-man IPW (Interrogation of Prisoners of War) team attached to the headquarters of the massive U.S. First Army," headed by General Omar Bradley, "commander of all U.S. ground forces in Operation Overlord, the invasion of Nazi-occupied France." With the invasion, Guy's work began. He interrogated countless German prisoners for strategic information. Because of his talent for not only gathering but "collating and evaluating" information, he was soon writing "Special Reports" that became important sources for Allied action. Additionally, Guy helped bring to justice the German

responsible for the murder of two Ritchie boys — this, very much a consequence of his superior intelligence-gathering abilities.

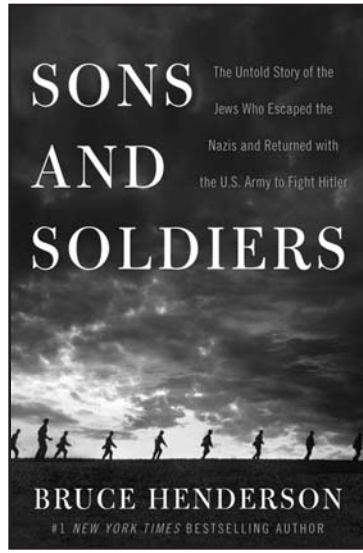
Another Ritchie Boy, Manfred Steinfeld, born in 1924 in *Josbach*, Germany, unlike Guy, had no one who could financially sponsor him in America. Still, his widowed mother, determined to rescue her son from the frightening anti-Semitism growing around her, discovered that the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) was helping some "unaccompanied children" leave Germany. In sum, Manfred, called Manny, arrived in America in 1938. He, too, went to school, and he too again, as serendip-

ity and luck would have it, became a Ritchie Boy. An "Order of Battle" specialist, he was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division. Manny, like Guy, was involved in the interrogation of German POWs; but in addition, his German language skills helped expedite the surrender of a German lieutenant general and his "army group comprising 150,000 troops with all its tanks, vehicles, artillery assorted equipment, and small arms . . . to a single division less than one-tenth its strength" — a history-making event! Because he knew some Russian, he was sent to make first contact with the Russians — as Allies who together had defeated Germany. Additionally, Manny aided in the arrest and conviction for war crimes of Ludwig Ramdohr, the brutal Gestapo chief at *Ravensbrück*. Ramdohr was subsequently sent to the gallows.

Finally, both Guy and Manny saw, and Manny, was involved in the liberation and rehabilitation of the survivors of German camps: Guy in *Buchenwald*, and Manny in *Wöbbelin*, "a transit camp for inmates evacuated from other concentration camps." Not surprisingly, that shocking experience made each of them quickly and heartbreakingly realize that those they had left behind in Germany but a few years earlier were probably lost to them forever . . .

Needless to say, *Sons and Soldiers* is an important work that should have a place in any history scholar's, and especially, any Holocaust scholar's library!

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



ITALY'S HOLOCAUST EXECUTIONERS REVEALED IN "HISTORIOGRAPHICAL COUNTERBLAST"

The Italian Executioners: The Genocide of the Jews of Italy.

By Simon Levis Sullam. Princeton University Press: Princeton, N.J., 2018. 197 pp. \$26.95 hardcover.

REVIEWED BY MATT LEBOVIC, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

Thousands of Italian civilians helped the Nazis murder the country's Jews during the Holocaust, according to a recently translated Italian book. The book directly contradicts commonly held beliefs that Italians did not cooperate with the genocidal killing machine.

In *The Italian Executioners: The Genocide of the Jews of Italy*, author Simon Levis Sullam examines the fate of more than 6,000 Italian Jews who were tracked down, deported and murdered during the last two years of World War II. The modern history professor first published his so-called "historiographical counterblast" in 2015, helping to overturn myths about so-called "good Italians" who refrained from persecuting their Jewish neighbors.

It is largely forgotten by history that Italy introduced anti-Jewish racial laws in 1938, two years before entering the war on Hitler's side. Jews were dismissed from their jobs, kicked out of schools and denounced in the media. As in Germany and the Netherlands, meticulously kept records helped identify the country's 46,000 Jews, many of whom were put under surveillance.

In *The Italian Executioners*, Levis Sullam focuses on local Holocaust history, naming the leading anti-Semites in several cities, and quoting from radio broadcasts, political speeches and anti-Semitic school-books.

"Jews be burnt, one by one, and their ashes scattered in the wind," intoned a broadcaster on Radio Roma in 1938 that is quoted in the

book. Three years before the Holocaust began in conquered Soviet lands, Italians in all strata of society were already isolating and persecuting their country's Jews, according to Levis Sullam.

"The anti-Jewish polemic was as present in the Fascist press, the mouthpiece of the militants, functionaries, and the higher echelons of the Social Republic, as in the papers combining Catholicism and Fascism and in cultural reviews," he writes in a chapter on the ideological context of genocide.

As in Germany, writes Levis Sullam, "the key political importance of labelling Jews 'foreigners' and 'enemies' was echoed in the constant repetition of prejudices, accusations, and anti-Semitic myths and the invocation of radical solutions as the mobilizing and defining factors behind the

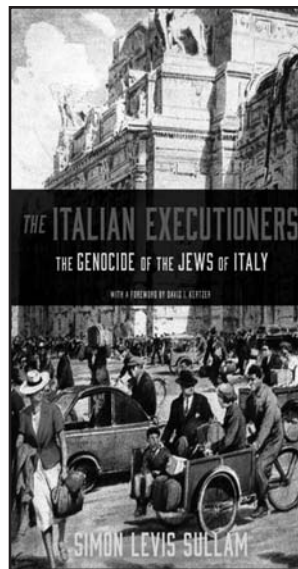
revived Fascist movement." The Holocaust was implemented in Italy beginning in 1943, by which point the population had been absorbing anti-Semitic vitriol for half a decade.

As in other parts of Europe, civilians played an essential role in not only identifying and informing on Jews, but sometimes arresting Jews for themselves. For nearly two years, citizens served as truck drivers, transit camp guards or train conductors, or in numerous other capacities to enact the "Final Solution" in Italy.

"The majority of Italian executioners were not necessarily ideologically motivated," writes Levis Sullam. "The genocide was widely carried out by bureaucratic means, through police measures and actions: actions that represented political imperatives for some, for others simply orders from superiors, and for yet others an opportunity for profit or vendetta."

In *Milan*, wrote Levis Sullam, "Fascists would prowl around the city in search of Jews or tips." By "tips," the author means information about

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RECOVERED IN PARIS FLEA MARKET, AUSTRIAN SILENT FILM IS A HOLOCAUST PREVIEW

Based on the famous novel and digitally restored, *City Without Jews* includes stunningly prescient scenes depicting passage of anti-Jewish laws and deportations from Vienna.

BY RENEE GHERT-ZAND,
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

A Jewish man is beaten up on the street. Jewish husbands are separated from their non-Jewish wives and children, and deported on trains. A Jewish community, led by rabbis carrying a Torah scrolls, marches down a dark road as it is banished from town.

These snapshots appear to be Holocaust history — but they are not.



Jews read edict of expulsion from Vienna in the restored *City Without Jews*.

These are scenes from a silent Austrian film made a decade prior to the enactment of the anti-Jewish *Nuremberg* laws, and some 15 years before the outbreak of World War II.

The 1924 film *City Without Jews* is based on a popular 1922 novel by Austrian writer and journalist Hugo Bettauer. It astutely predicted what was to come. But only partially.

The film was conceived as a satirical response to the anti-Semitism gaining popular and political strength in Austria during the early interwar period. Its plot depicted the scapegoating of the Jews for the country's problems and their subsequent expulsion.

But unlike in the real Holocaust, these Jews were eventually reinstated when the Austrians realized their country was suffering from the absence of the creative and successful Jewish community. In real life, Austria's Jews were deported beginning in October 1939, and most did not come back. Approximately one-third of Austria's 190,000 Jews were killed, and only 5,000 were in the country by the end of the war.

City Without Jews was originally presumed to have been lost to history. However, a surprise discovery by a collector of a complete and relatively intact copy of the movie in a Paris flea market in 2016 led to a yearlong

painstaking analog and digital restoration and preservation project by Film Archiv Austria, the national Austrian film archive. The archive dedicated a team of six to the effort, which cost €202,000, of which more than 40% was raised in a crowdfunding campaign.

To mark the 80th anniversary of the Nazi *Anschluss* of Austria this year, and next's observance of the centennial of the establishment of the First Austrian Republic, the restored version of *City Without Jews* is being screened throughout Austria, and in selected European cities.

"We can't celebrate the 100th anniversary of the First Republic with-

significant variations between the two copies of the film.

Although Bettauer's book has characters clearly based on political figures of the day, the film is a bit looser in its characterizations. Yet, it is clear in the film that the Christian Socialists come to power led by the fictional Chancellor Dr. Schwerdtfeger, a fanatical anti-Semite. Convinced that the Jews are ruining the republic, he has the National Assembly pass a law forcing all Jews to emigrate by the end of the year. The Jews — religious and assimilated alike — leave, taking with them whatever belongings they can carry.

Soon, everything starts to fall apart. Commerce slows down, the cosmopolitan cafés revert to seedy taverns, and the national currency goes into free fall. Realizing the terrible mistake that has been made, the National Assembly decides to pass a law welcoming back the Jews.

The hero of the film, a Jewish artist named Leo Strakosch, sneaks back into Vienna disguised as a non-Jewish Parisian painter. He, along with his non-Jewish fiancée, Lotte, the daughter of a sympathetic member of the National Assembly, scheme to ensure the new law is passed. They kidnap an anti-Semitic member of the assembly and keep him away from the chamber until voting is over.

In the book, the assembly member is committed to an insane asylum. In the film, he is merely knocked out for

success and played in the biggest Viennese theaters, but that excitement around the film petered out relatively quickly.

"It was reported that Nazis stopped or censored some of the screenings. And we know that some screenings in 1926 in Germany were disturbed," Wostry said.

The fate of *City Without Jews* author Hugo Bettauer is one reason why the book and film have not been forgotten. A Jew who converted to evangelical Christianity, the prolific and outspoken writer was lethally shot by a Nazi named Otto Rothstock. He died on March 26, 1925, at age 52.

"Bettauer called out the Viennese political leadership for creating an atmosphere of *salonfähig*, or social acceptability, when it came to anti-Semitism," said Dr. Patricia Heberer-Rice, senior historian at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

"He was trying to warn this leadership that if you remove a significant, flourishing and contributing community like the Jews, you are setting yourself up for failure," she said.

According to Heberer-Rice, it's significant that Bettauer set his novel in Vienna, and not Berlin.

"He chose the setting aptly, because it was indicative of the fierce anti-Semitism in Austria. Hitler and Eichmann were from Austria. So many of Eichmann's men were Austrian. Bettauer believed that what

out putting the finger on this point of anti-Semitism. Jewish citizens made enormous contributions to Austria. They were the most loyal citizens, and the Austrians abused this. Everyone was scapegoating the Jews. It was the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats, and not just the Nationalists doing it," said Film Archiv Austria associate director Nikolaus Wostry.

"We are taking this film as a responsibility and political statement, when anti-Semitism and the political abuse of fear is rising in Europe now," Wostry said.

According to Wostry, the flea market find was extremely rare, as more than 90% of silent films worldwide have been lost. Once talkies came along, there was little interest in preserving silent films, especially when people could make a profit from recycling them for their silver content.

Another copy of *City Without Jews* was discovered in 1991 in the Nederlands Filmmuseum in Amsterdam. However, it was only a partial copy and was severely decomposed.

The Paris discovery allowed Film Archiv Austria to create a full version of the original film. It also enabled it to discover not only differences between Bettauer's book and the film, but also



Child cries as her Jewish father parts from her in the restored *City Without Jews*.

a while, and is shown dreaming that he is trapped in a disorienting, claustrophobic cell, with Stars of David closing in on him from all directions.

Finally, the Jews are welcomed back with great fanfare — Leo Strakosch, the first among them.

"The French flea market find meant that we could now reconstruct the film in a way that was more political and show that it was clearly an anti-Nazi statement," Wostry said.

According to Wostry, media reports indicate that the film was initially a

he depicted in *City Without Jews* was a possibility in Vienna," Heberer-Rice said.

Despite having made *City Without Jews*, the film's mixed Jewish-Gentile cast and crew did not necessarily heed the film's warning. According to Wostry, they all had different fates. Some emigrated, and some were killed during the war. The film's director went on to join the Nazi party.

Those who made the film — let alone audiences — probably did not grasp just how prophetic it was.

SHATTERED CHILDHOOD

(Continued from page 3)

family were transferred to *Zamosc*, a small village in Poland, where he, along with his brother Zikmund and his wife and children, were forced to dig their own graves before being brutally shot to death.

Bodies were burned in the camp's crematory. Sax said that as the bodies were lowered into the fires of the burners there would be an incredibly cacophonous sizzling din, followed by sickening silence. An acrid odor of seared human flesh wafted into the air and clung to the atmosphere for the entire day. Death literally hung in the air.

On October 20, 1944, Sax and her family feared their lives would soon end. After three and a half years in *Theresienstadt*, Sax and her parents were transferred to Auschwitz.

An extermination camp whose sole purpose was death and destruction, Auschwitz was built in occupied Poland in 1940. It consisted of three units: Auschwitz I (the original concentration camp designed to hold Polish political prisoners), Auschwitz II-Birkenau (a central component of Hitler's "Final Solution") and Auschwitz III-Monowitz (a labor camp). An estimated 1.3 million people were sent to Auschwitz. At least 1.1 million would die by extermination or starvation.

Sax was sent to Auschwitz I. She remembered that as she disembarked the train and staggered toward the camp, she saw a full orchestra of Jewish musicians playing near the notorious gateway lettering that read *Arbeit macht frei* (Work will set you free). She recalled the music sounding so beautiful because it had been years since she had heard any form of melody. She learned later that all the talented musicians were killed.

Herded through the gates of Auschwitz, Sax was whisked away by a German officer and sent to the intake line.

"Everyone was forced to strip and be shaved from head to toe," she said. "I felt humiliated, having someone shave my most intimate parts. The Nazis would stare at our bare bodies and snicker and laugh, mocking us."

Everyone was then marched single file to stand before a tall man wielding a crop whip. Sax remembered the man's handsome gap-toothed smile, his neatly parted black hair and his pristinely pressed senior Nazi uniform.

Sax was face to face with Dr. Josef Mengele, the sadistic "Angel of Death."

"We were still naked and he would inspect every inch of us," Sax said. "He would then point his whip either to the left or to the right. If he pointed left, you were safe. If he pointed right, you were sent to the gas chambers. I would survive six encounters with Mengele."

One particular encounter proved almost fatal for Sax's aunt Elfie and little cousin Dita.

Elfie was not feeling well, and Mengele was on his way to inspect the women's barracks. Mengele sent ill prisoners to the gas chambers. Sax's mother was terribly worried and started to slap Elfie's face in a desperate effort to bring color to her cheeks. She then took a red wrapper from an imitation coffee product and

winter cold or malnutrition. Others were shot for holding up the line and left to decay on the side of the road.

Oskar and three other prisoners slipped away prior to the death march and hid for 24 hours in kettles in the camp kitchen. When they slid the lids off their hiding places, they found the camp entirely empty. After taking some fresh clothes and a few supplies, they fled into the mountains, running at night and sleeping by day.



Residents of the city of *Brno* (in Moravia) watch as Hitler's troops roll in.

smoothed the ink onto her sister's cheeks, which brightened them up considerably and feigned the appearance of a healthy glow.

Just as Sax's mother finished applying the improvised makeup, Mengele slithered into the barracks. He ordered everyone to strip and he began what he called his "appeal." Sax's mother pushed Dita between her legs and the child went unnoticed. Erna and Elfie feared Mengele would see through their ruse, but he strode by them without moving the whip. As he drifted from the building, the women were told to get dressed. Elfie and Erna breathed a sigh of relief. They would live another day.

Sax spent just over a week in Auschwitz, but the camp burned an indelible impression into her memory. Six times she faced the barbarous Mengele with his executioner's whip; six times she survived.

"Out of the three camps I was in, Auschwitz was the worst," she said. "They treated us like animals. They made us stand naked in a cold field for hours at a time until we were exhausted. When we went to take showers, they would taunt us. They knew we knew about the gas. They would have us stand there for 10 minutes in utter anxiety and anticipation, waiting to see if water came out of the spout or gas."

AUSCHWITZ FOR OSKAR

On January 18, 1945, the camp was evacuated and prisoners were marched single file back to *Blechhammer*, in what was called a "death march." Many died from bitter

After many arduous days on the run, Oskar reunited with his stepbrother Manfred Konka, who had managed to avoid the camps by bribing Nazis and hiding. Konka made a living selling hunting coats, ties and shirts, and was able to barter for supplies. He graciously provided Oskar money, food and lodging.

Soon the men heard some glorious news. Russian troops had pushed into Eastern Europe and the German's hellish reign would soon crumble. Oskar had somehow survived the worst cruelty mankind was capable of and the searing hatred Nazis had for the Jewish people. Yet he still held out hope that his wife and daughter were still alive.

Meanwhile, Sax and her mother were transferred from Auschwitz to another labor camp, *Oederan*, in Saxony, Germany.

Life at *Oederan* was less demanding and deadly compared to Auschwitz. Prisoners were not tattooed or forced to wear prison uniforms. Instead, Jewish prisoners' clothes were painted with a giant white X and stripe every week. Sax still has the long black dress her mother wore, the huge X and line crudely scrawled in fading white paint.

Sax was now 16, and she tried to help older Jewish prisoners at the camp and make a difference in her own way. Her Nazi guards ordered her to work at the camp's bullet factory. When no one was looking she would commit sabotage by sneaking sand into the bullet machines, making the German ammunition useless. In the winter when electricity was

rationed and there was not enough power to warm the whole camp, Sax volunteered to go out into the gnawing winter freeze to lay out electrical cable in the street.

In the early morning of April 11, 1945, Sax and her mother were roused from sleep by German soldiers, ordered to grab their belongings and sent outside.

"I remember as we went outside there was a group of Nazi youth standing there, pointing bayonets at us," Sax said. "I asked one of them how old he was and he wasn't much older than I was."

After being counted, the prisoners were hosed down and led to trains bound for *Flossenberg*, an extermination camp.

The way to *Flossenberg* was in disrepair. Roads were pocked by bomb craters and bridges damaged. Russians had come to liberate the Jewish prisoners. Hitler's Nazi Reich was in its final days. Most German soldiers went on the run, taking what they could and going into hiding. Those left behind dressed in the tattered striped pajamas of the prisoners, hoping to blend in.

Russian soldiers found the train carrying Sax and about 500 other prisoners, offering them food, water and medical supplies. She realized their Nazi captivity was over.

"The soldiers were nice to me, giving me chocolate," she said. "Though not all of them were so gentle. Some of the Russians felt that since they had liberated the Jews, they were entitled to some of the women. Many women were raped, but my mother helped me by swaddling me up in a blanket and pretending I was a baby."

Since the rails were bombed out by the Allied forces, Sax and the rest of the passengers were forced to walk and ride open wagons back to *Terezin*. The trip took two agonizing weeks. As they rounded the corner to the entrance of the citadel, survivors could hardly contain their joy.

Their hopes were quickly dashed. They were not yet free. Everyone was forced into typhoid quarantine, and they would spend the next month a stone's throw from freedom.

Time crept slowly. There is one day Sax remembered most clearly.

"I was in the kitchen working and someone yelled at me, 'Ruthie, there is someone at the gate who wants to talk to you,'" Sax said. "So I ran to the gate and I saw this really thin, clean-shaven man. At first I didn't know who it was, but then the man smiled at me and said, 'Don't you remember your own father?' My father had always had a mustache and was very portly, so it took me a while to recognize him. But when I finally did, I was in shock. All these years I had thought my father was dead, but there he was, standing on the other side of the gate. I wanted to hug him, but the gate was electrified. I ran to my mother yelling,

(Continued on page 10)

SHE SURVIVED THE HOLOCAUST WITH LUCK, FORGED PAPERS AND DARING

BY MAUREEN O'DONNELL,
CHICAGO SUN TIMES

To the end of her days, Anna Novak Heller never forgot the postcards.

As a teen, she watched German soldiers march through her native Krakow, Poland “like supermen.”

She had to wear a yellow Star of David. And she had to submit to Nazi doctors taking painstaking measurements of people’s heads and bodies, trying “to prove that the race, Jewish race was inferior,” she said in an oral history by the USC Shoah Foundation.

When the Nazis began moving masses of Jews from the ghetto, postcards — ostensibly cheerful, but in fact chilling — began to arrive from those who’d been relocated.

The cards were a Nazi bid to quell the fears of those left behind. But their prisoners used code to try and warn the others.

“Between the lines would be written in Hebrew, words like... ‘This is the end,’” she said. “They were shipping people to various camps to kill them.”

Mrs. Heller survived the Holocaust through a combination of luck, forged papers, sympathetic protectors and

her own sheer nerve.

At night, she lived in *Plaszow*, a forced-labor camp. During the daytime, she sewed German military uniforms in a factory owned by Julius Madritsch, later honored by Israel for helping the Jewish people. He pro-



Anna Novak Heller (right, in apron) before World War II, with her sister Francesca and dog Daisy.

tected his Jewish laborers, at one point working with Oskar Schindler.

At the factory, she hatched a daring escape plan. “I asked one of the Polish (girls)... if she would lend me

her ID and I could walk (out) with her, and she agreed,” Mrs. Heller told the Shoah Foundation.

When the day came, she strode past a guard. “As he was opening the gate and I was walking, I heard his voice right behind me. If he had seen me, recognized (me), he would kill me,” she said. “It was his life against mine. He actually received 50 lashes for my escape.”

“I was so terrorized,” she said, “that when I walked with this girl to maybe a block away, I wanted to go back. I just didn’t know what to do with myself, and she prevented me from doing that.”

The relatives of Mrs. Heller, 101, who died in May, say they’ll always wonder about the identity of that woman.

She could be the reason they even exist, said Mrs. Heller’s granddaughter, Diana Novak Jones.

As the war amped up, she remembered how the Nazis separated children from their parents, sometimes using whips. “It was screaming and terror,” she said.

When their children were taken from them, the women “would be howling. ...

I thought, this must be how it is in hell.”

After her escape from Madritsch’s factory, she passed for Christian, using papers with false names. “I always wore a cross and I had all these prayer books,” she said.

In 1947, she arrived in the U.S. “The first few years in this country, when I saw a policeman, I was looking at my arm (to check) if I had my (Star of David) band on,” she said.

She and her husband Henry, who also survived the Holocaust, opened a store in Chicago, Novak’s Children’s Wear. And after going to school for eight years, she earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology.

Next, she applied to the Jane Addams College of Social Work. The oldest student there, she graduated after two years with her master’s degree.

Her parents Rivka and Adolf Grinberg and her sisters Paulina and Francesca died in the Holocaust. Her son Tony died in 2014. In addition to her granddaughter and her son Dr. Rick Novak, she is survived by her stepchildren, Caroline and Tom Heller, and three other grandchildren.

She told the Shoah Foundation, “To survive is meaningful, because I have a family, because they will carry on for the rest of the family who are not alive.”

ITALY’S HOLOCAUST EXECUTIONERS REVEALED IN “HISTORIOGRAPHICAL COUNTERBLAST”

(Continued from page 4)

Jews in hiding, from which the denouncers could profit handsomely.

The chapter “Hunting Down Jews in Florence” outlines several roundups of Jews that took place in November of 1943. The mass arrests were carried out by German military personnel and Italian Fascists, including members of the notorious Carita gang, “one of the most vicious actors” of the era, according to Levis Sullam.

“On the night between November 16 and 17, the infamous gang took part in the raid on the Franciscan convent in the Piazza del Carmine, where numerous Jewish women and their children had taken refuge,” he writes. “They were held prisoner in the convent for four days before being transferred to *Verona* by truck — the *Fossoli* [transit] camp was not yet operational — and deported from there to Auschwitz.”

According to survivor accounts, “the Fascists guarding the prisoners subjected the women to sexual molestation and extortion.”

Another Holocaust role performed by at least hundreds of Italians involved posing as “guides” to smuggle Jews across the border to safety. The cottage industry of betraying Jews in this manner fills a chapter called “On the Border: Jews on the Run,” in which Levis Sullam outlines the lethal scam.

“Guides generally demanded between five and ten thousand lire per person to accompany people across the border, although the fee could rise to forty thousand if the route was particularly difficult,” he wrote. “They could double their earnings by betraying their clients: they would pocket the fee as well as the reward for turning them in.”

By the end of the Holocaust, 8,869 Jews had been deported from Italy. Of those individuals, 6,746 were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, and nearly all of them were murdered in the gas chambers upon arrival. An additional 303 Jews were killed in massacres committed on Italian soil.

In the assessment of author Levis Sullam, the Italian state has not done enough to atone for the role of thousands of its citizens during the Holocaust. In comparison to Germany, he believes, there has been a lack of “self-critical gestures” recognizing what took place during the war.

The whitewash of Italians’ role in the

Holocaust began early, according to Levis Sullam, fueled by the passage of a 1946 amnesty. Although half of Italy’s murdered Jews were arrested by Italians, as opposed to Germans, “the persecution of Jews was not considered a crime or a specific offense” after the war.

“On Holocaust Remembrance Day,



During World War II, Italian Jews at forced labor in the Italian camp at Gorizia.

or on similar occasions, there is rarely any specific mention of the roles and responsibilities of the thousands of Italians who all played varying but crucial parts in the tragic process that resulted in genocide,” writes Levis Sullam. “The only exception is an unavoidable and hasty mention of the racial laws of 1938, and occasionally

an allusion to collaboration with the Germans...”

For decades, Italy sought to portray itself as a former hotbed of resistance against Nazism, according to Levis Sullam. However, he writes, the resistance movement in Italy lasted for only 18 months, engaging relatively few people in only parts of the occupied country. By way of comparison, the Fascist movement lasted for two decades and spread to all of Italy, enrapturing millions of followers.

Far too many of the Holocaust era’s leading Italian anti-Semites were rehabilitated after the war, according to Levis Sullam. On a related note, he wrote, there is a tendency to focus “collective memory on the saviors” (By “saviors,” the author is referring to Italians who helped rescue Jews, including more than 400 men and women who have been recognized by Israel’s Yad Vashem since 1994.)

In general, Levis Sullam believes that Italy moved from the “era of the witness” — as epitomized by Primo Levi — into the “era of the savior,” without passing through an “era of the executioner.” Unlike Germany’s comparatively robust confrontation with its past, wrote the author, Italy has largely “bypassed” the work of reckoning with its homegrown Holocaust perpetrators.

TO HONOR, TO REMEMBER, AND TO NEVER FORGET

(Continued from page 1)

and “They Say There Is a Land.” We heard from Avner Shalev, chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate, and YLA member Sam Gordon. Gordon thanked Yad Vashem for serving as “the bridge that connected [him] to what happened to [his] grandparents during the *Shoah*” and for helping him understand that “it is now up to [his] generation to carry on this never-ending, all-important duty to enlighten and educate as many people as possible, both Jews and non-Jews alike.”

On Sunday, we drove south to visit the Ariel Sharon Training Campus in the Negev, Israel’s largest, newest training base and home to the Yad Vashem Educational Center. We heard from Colonel Avi Motola, commander of the training base, and visited both the medical training simulator and the Yad Vashem interactive display, entitled “The Human Image in the Shadow of Death.” Later, we traveled to kibbutz *Hatzerim* and learned about *Netafim*, Israel’s innovative and cutting-edge water irrigation system.



Avner Shalev and Adina Burian.

Ceremonies were held in the Yad Vashem synagogue to honor Yad Vashem’s newest benefactors, Steven Baral (USA) and Evelyn and Jaime Ellstein (Mexico). Addressing the group, Baral, the son of survivors, stated “Today is one of the happiest days of my life because I am supporting Yad Vashem and because I am here with you on the Mission.” The Ellsteins were on the previous Mission and returned this year with three generations of their family. In the synagogue, we also enjoyed a wonderful and uplifting performance

We concluded the day with a delicious dinner at kibbutz *Netiv HaLamed-Heh*, followed by a performance by *Vertigo*, one of the Israel’s leading dance companies.

The group spent Monday morning at the Yad Vashem International School for Holocaust Studies, engaging in workshops on anti-Semitism. We also paid tribute to the Wilf family for their generous donation of the first building of the Shoah Heritage Campus, the Joseph Wilf Curatorial Center, which will be home to all of the museum’s curators and professional staff. In his



Dancing at the *Linz* Parliament.

by Yonina before heading to the lively Machane Yehuda Market. Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, a Holocaust survivor and the chairman of the Yad Vashem Council, joined us for *Shabbat*, and Shai Abramson led a beautiful *Havdalah* service after a relaxing day.

remarks at the closing dinner in the Square of Hope that evening, ASYV Chairman Leonard Wilf reminded everyone that “There will soon come a time when it will be our responsibility to make the voices of all survivors heard, for us to be their voices and to



The Ellstein family.

ensure that the world never forgets.” This sense of responsibility, which Yad Vashem and its supporters have wholeheartedly taken on, was echoed and applauded by many

that remembering will have to be an active effort. On the first night in Vienna, Professor Dina Porat, chief historian of Yad Vashem and scholar in residence on the Mission, asked



Mark Moskowitz.

throughout the evening, including His Excellency Mr. Reuven Rivlin, president of Israel.

It is our responsibility and our duty to honor, to remember, and to never

everyone to “please remember that just to say we will keep the memory is the very first step on a very difficult journey.” Every single person who participated in the 2018 Yad Vashem



Leon Green and Edward Mosberg.

forget. To remember and to never forget may sound redundant, but we distinguish the two because it is not enough not to forget — that seems too passive. Now that we are more than a generation removed from the Holocaust, it becomes even clearer

Mission took that step and then some. As the sun set on the 2018 Mission, we reflected on our journey from Herzl’s home in Vienna to the Jewish homeland and rejoiced in the extraordinary *mishpucha* formed over the last eight days.

INVISIBLE JEWS: SURVIVING THE HOLOCAUST IN POLAND

Eddie Bielawski is probably one of the youngest Holocaust survivors with any memory of the war years. The Bielawski family survived the Holocaust by becoming invisible. Here is the story of one of many miracles.

I was born in the town of *Wegrow* in northeastern Poland in mid-1938. Not a propitious time and place for a Jewish child to be born.

One memory that has been etched indelibly in my mind is the sight of the Nazi army marching toward Russia. Our house was located on the main road leading to the Russian frontier. Day and night they marched — soldiers, trucks, tanks and more soldiers, in a never-ending line — an invincible force. I remember my father, holding me in his arms, saying to my mother, “Who is going to stop them? Certainly not the Russians.”

One night, my father had a dream. In this dream he saw what he had to do: where to build the bunker, how to build it, and even its dimensions.

He would build a bunker under a wooden storage shed behind the house. It would be covered with boards, on top of which would be placed soil and bits of straw which would render it invisible. In order to camouflage the entrance, he would construct a shallow box and fill it with earth and cover it with straw so that it would be indistinguishable from the rest of the earthen floor. Air would be supplied through a drain pipe buried in the earth. This was to be our Noah’s Ark that would save us from the initial deluge.

It took my father about three weeks to finish the job. When he was done, he took my mother and sister into the shed and asked them if they could find the trap door. When they could not, he was satisfied.

My mother prepared dry biscuits, jars of jam made out of beets, some tinned goods such as sardines, some sugar and salt. We placed two buckets in the bunker. One bucket was filled with water; the other bucket was empty and would serve as the latrine. We also took down some blankets, a couple of pillows and some warm clothing. We were ready.

For three long years, starting in 1941 when the Nazis started the deportations and mass killings, we hid in secret bunkers, dug in fields, under sheds or constructed in barn lofts. It seems that the only way that a Jew could survive in wartime Poland was to become invisible. So we became invisible Jews.

Monday, September 21, 1942 — Yom Kippur — was the last day that

the Jews of *Wegrow* would know as a community.

The day after Yom Kippur, I remember being yanked out of bed (it was about four in the morning) and rushed down, together with my father, mother and sister, into the bunker that my father had prepared. When the commotion began, my grandmother Gittel came and locked us in from the outside as we had previously arranged, and then she returned to her own place.

I remember hearing shooting, shouting, screaming and cries of “Shema Israel” as we all sat still holding our breaths.

Later that morning, we heard Ukrainian voices. We were more afraid of the Ukrainians than of the Germans, if that was possible. It was their job to round up the Jews, put them in horse-drawn wagons and send them to *Treblinka*. They were referred to by us as the “black devils” because of the black uniforms they wore, and one could expect no mercy from them.

The black devils broke the rusty lock and came into the small shed. They looked around and started to bang their rifles on the ground, listening for a hollow sound.

As luck would have it, they stood on the trap door and hit the solid ground all around — but they didn’t actually hit the trap door itself. I remember us just sitting there, helplessly holding our breaths. We were centimeters from death, but they left without finding our hiding place. Was this another of many miracles? Probably, but no doubt my father had done a wonderful job camouflaging the entrance to our bunker and filling the shed with all kinds of junk so that it would be difficult to enter and search.

The next day, all was quiet. We all understood what had happened, although not to what extent. We stayed put day after day in the small, stifling, damp bunker, the size of a grave. At night, my father would go out to empty the slop bucket and bring water.

When my grandmother Gittel returned to her room, the Ukrainians came and ordered her and her husband out. Her husband, Mendel Laufer, refused to leave and was shot on the spot. My grandmother managed to run away and hide in a nearby wheat field for a few days. She then came to check on our situation and stayed with us for a couple of nights.

Our bunker, however, was too small to accommodate all of us. It was crowded with the four of us — five was impossible — so my father sat in the shed above the trap door

while everyone else was underground. This endangered all of us. My grandmother realized that with no space, no air and no food, we couldn’t survive. So, after two nights, she said that she was going to stay with a farmer she knew who might be able to hide her.

I believe that my parents knew that she was sacrificing herself so that we would have a chance to survive. She went out and never came back. After the war, we heard that someone had seen her being transported to *Treblinka*. That, as we all know, was a one-way trip. One story we heard was that as she was being taken to *Treblinka*, she tried to run away and was shot. We will never know what really happened. My mother carried the burden that her mother had sacrificed herself for us for the rest of her life. She always thought that maybe there could have been another way, but we all know that there really wasn’t.

Time dragged on. Food was running out and we were becoming desperate. To add to our problems, I developed a cough. I could control my voice and not cry, but I could not control the cough. If anyone heard, we were dead. What to do?

My father opened our trap door to let some air in, and lo and behold, a chicken had laid an egg right at that very spot! True, there were chickens in the area, but in all the time that we spent in our bunker, we never saw a chicken and certainly not an egg.

My father took the egg, broke it into a glass, added sugar and made a “gogel mogel” (a concoction of beaten egg and sugar). I drank it and just stopped coughing. It was one of the many miracles of our survival.

Excerpt from Invisible Jews: Surviving the Holocaust in Poland by Eddie Bielawski



AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR
יָד ושֵׁם
YAD VASHEM

SAVE THE DATE

American Society for Yad Vashem
Annual Tribute Dinner

Sunday, November 11, 2018

The Plaza
768 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY

Reception 5:00 pm
Dinner 6:00 pm

ESTEEMED HONOREES

Celina & Marvin Zborowski
American Society for Yad Vashem Remembrance Award

Adina & Lawrence Burian
American Society for Yad Vashem Leadership Award

For further information, please contact
Rachelle Grossman, Event Coordinator
rgrossman@yadvashemusa.org
212-220-4304 • www.yadvashemusa.org

AMERICA'S LAST KNOWN NAZI COLLABORATOR IS DEPORTED TO GERMANY

The last known Nazi collaborator living in the U.S. was deported to Germany in August.

Jakiw Palij, 95, had lived in New York City for decades. He served as a guard at a Nazi forced-labor camp during the Second World War.

In a statement released by the White House after Palij landed in Germany, President Donald Trump commended the actions of Immigration and Customs Enforcement for "removing this war criminal from United States soil."

"Despite a court ordering his deportation in 2004, past administrations were unsuccessful in removing Palij," the statement added. "To protect the promise of freedom for Holocaust survivors and their families, President Trump prioritized the removal of Palij."

Palij lived quietly in the U.S. for years, as a draftsman and then as a retiree, until nearly three decades ago when investigators found his name on an old Nazi roster and a fellow former guard spilled the secret that he was "living somewhere in America."

Members of New York's Congressional delegation last year urged the Trump administration to deport Palij, whose citizenship was revoked in 2003 based on his wartime activities, human rights abuses and immigration fraud. A federal court also ruled that he had assisted in the persecution of prisoners at the camp, though it stopped short of finding him

responsible for deaths.

Palij was born on former Polish territory, an area now located in Ukraine. He immigrated to the U.S. in 1949 and became a citizen in 1957, but



This 1957 photo provided by the US Department of Justice shows Jakiw Palij, a former Nazi concentration camp guard.

concealed his Nazi service, saying that he spent World War II working in a factory on a farm.

Palij told Justice Department investigators who showed up at his door in 1993: "I would never have received my visa if I told the truth. Everyone lied."

Palij later admitted to officials that he had attended a Nazi SS training camp in *Trawniki* in German-occupied Poland and then served as an armed guard at its adjacent labor camp.

The *Trawniki* camp was part of "Operation Reinhard," the Nazi operation to murder the approximately two million Jews residing in German-occupied Poland.

the *Trawniki* Jewish victims met their horrific fate at the hands of the Nazis," the White House statement said.

But because Germany, Poland, Ukraine and other countries refused to take him, he continued living in limbo in the two-story, red brick home in Queens he shared with his wife, Maria, now 86. His continued presence there outraged the Jewish community, attracting frequent protests over the years that featured such chants as "your neighbor is a Nazi!"

The White House statement added that the Trump administration conducted extensive negotiations with Germany to secure Palij's deportation because he never held German citizenship.

Germany's Foreign Office said its decision to accept Palij showed the country was accepting its "moral responsibility."

Foreign Minister Heiko Maas told German tabloid *Bild* that those who "committed the worst crimes on behalf of Germans" would be held accountable.

Germany's Interior Ministry and Justice Ministry and Chancellor Angela Merkel's office did not comment on where Palij would be taken in Germany and what would happen to him. Local media reported Palij was transferred by ambulance to a nursing home.

German prosecutors have previously said it does not appear that there's enough evidence to charge him with wartime crimes.

SHATTERED CHILDHOOD

(Continued from page 6)

'Papa is at the gate!' She was so happy to see him. He had found us by looking up our names through the Red Cross list."

On June 15, 1945, after 30 days in quarantine, Sax, her mother and the thousands of other former prisoners were told that they were free to go.

Where to go was the big question. Czechoslovakia was in shambles and supplies scarce. Sax and her family would have to rebuild their lives from scratch. It was years before they were economically stable again.

"Everything we owned was gone," she said. "The only thing I had was a blanket. My parents and I made our way from *Terezin* back to *Brno*. We relied on the hospitality of strangers and what little food and shelter we could get at the Red Cross stations scattered throughout Czechoslovakia."

When they finally reached *Brno*, the family found its former home had been converted into offices for the Nazis. Since Sax's father had gotten a month's head start, he had managed to procure another apartment with minimal furnishings. Its former occupants had a daughter Sax's age, and she wore the clothes the girl left behind.

The family would get meals from a local soup kitchen in a hotel basement across from the train station.

"At first the soup was very bare, just

broth," Sax said. "Then, as the weeks went by and the kitchens got more supplies, the soup grew heartier. Potatoes, leftovers, canned food. It wasn't much, but food is food."



Strutting through the streets of Prague, German paratroopers participate in a military parade after the occupation of Czechoslovakia.

Jewish children were eventually allowed to return to school, and Sax completed her primary education. She enrolled in a local design school, where she studied the history and design of clothing. She earned a

diploma in clothing design. "I have always loved clothes and sewing, ever since I was a little girl," Sax said. "My dream was to live in

Paris and follow in my father's footsteps and work as a tailor. When I came to America I became a factory worker, but I would still always be sewing, creating."

While Sax was in school, she began to correspond with a second cousin, Kurt Sax. They had played together as children.

Kurt fled Austria at the start of World War II and ended up in Northern Italy.

After being sponsored by a family in the United States, Kurt immigrated to America and opened a successful newsstand in Anderson, South Carolina. A friend gave Kurt a picture of Sax and her address. He began to write her letters and a transatlantic romance blossomed. After writing a box full of love letters, he asked for her hand in marriage.

Kurt traveled by boat all the way to *Brno* to marry Sax. The newlyweds spent their honeymoon in Czechoslovakia because it took Sax four months to finalize her passport.

"We arrived in America at Ellis Island in New York City," Sax said. "We lived there for a while and then moved to San Diego (County) on the recommendation of a friend and we've lived here ever since."

After adjusting to a new country and saving every penny, Sax was able to bring her parents to America to live with her. Oskar and Erna opened a café and market, and lived quiet and peaceful lives in the warmth of San Diego County. Erna Kohn died on February 27, 1982. Oskar Goldschmied died August 10, 1988. They died as free citizens of the world, Sax said, respected in their community and loved by their family on two continents.

THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF SHANGHAI'S JEWISH QUARTER

BY COURTNEY LICHTERMAN,
JEWISHWEBSIGHT

It's common knowledge that as Hitler's bid to rid the world of Jews escalated, so did the world's refusal to let them in. What's not well known is that when those borders, ports, doors, windows and boundaries began shutting Jews out, in part by refusing to issue them visas, Shanghai, though already swollen with people and poverty, was the only place on earth willing to accept them with or without papers. It was an exception that, for thousands, meant the difference between life and death.



Two German Jewish refugee women stand behind the counter of the Elite Provision Store (delicatessen) in Shanghai.

To understand the significance of this gesture, it's important to understand the widely held but mistaken belief that Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe were never, at any point, permitted to leave. Henny Wenkart, a Holocaust survivor featured in the documentary *50 Children: The Rescue Mission of Mr. and Mrs. Kraus*, explained this misconception: "What people don't understand is that at the beginning, you could get out. Everybody could get out. Nobody would let us in!"

In fact, until 1941, when the routes immigrants used to get to Shanghai were closed off by the war and the Germans decreed that Jews could no longer emigrate from the Reich, Jews in occupied Europe were not only allowed to leave, but were pressured to do so through a system of intimidation and force. Although they didn't make it easy, the Nazis, eager to implement their plan to rid Europe of its Jewish population — to make it *judenrein* or "cleansed" of Jews — did allow Jews to leave under certain conditions.

"Potential refugees needed to get a variety of papers approved by governmental authorities, including the Gestapo, before they could leave," writes Steve Hochstadt in an email. Hochstadt is a professor emeritus of history at Illinois College and author of the book *Exodus to Shanghai*.

"One document was the *Unbedenklichkeitsbescheinigung*, literally a 'certificate of harmlessness,' showing that there were no problems with this person, such as owing taxes. Jews needed to prove that they had registered their valuables with the authorities so they could be properly confiscated...."

Though difficult to obtain, those documents, along with proof of passage to another country and/or a visa for permission to enter another country, were enough to get one out of Europe. Surprisingly, even for those already detained in concentration camps, the door, metaphorically

speaking, was open, provided they could prove they would leave Germany once released.

But of course, to walk through the door, one had to have some place to walk to, and that, for most Jews, was their biggest obstacle. Most countries made it either virtually impossible to enter (such as Switzerland, which insisted all German Jews have a red "J" stamped in their passports), imposed untenable conditions on refugees, or just simply wouldn't issue visas.

Shanghai — already home to a few thousand Jewish immigrants who had started slowly arriving as early as the mid-19th century for business, or later to escape the Russian Revolution — not only did not require visas for entry, but issued them with alacrity to those seeking asylum. In many cases, newly arrived immigrants were not even asked to show passports. It was not until 1939 that restrictions were placed on Jewish immigrants coming into Shanghai, and even then these limitations were decided not by the Chinese, but by the amalgam of foreign powers that controlled the city at the time. This body, made up of both Westerners and Japanese who wanted to restrict the influx of Jews, decided that anyone with a "J" on their passport would now have to apply in advance for landing permission.

A plaque at the Shanghai Jewish

Refugees Museum in *Hongkou* explains the situation perfectly: "No consulate or embassy in Vienna was prepared to grant us immigration visas until, by luck and perseverance I went to the Chinese consulate where, wonder of wonders, I was granted visas for me and my extended family. On the basis of these visas, we were able to obtain shipping accommodation on the *Bianco Mano* from an Italian Shipping Line [sic] expected to leave in early December 1938 from Genoa, Italy to Shanghai, China — a journey of approximately 30 days." — Eric Goldstaub, Jewish refugee to Shanghai.

And so, without the luxury of options, and desperate to evade the tightening grip of the Nazis, Jewish refugees by the thousands, as well as a small minority of non-Jews, set sail from Germany and parts of Central and Eastern Europe, settling primarily in the *Hongkou* neighborhood of Shanghai. Having been stripped of most of their assets upon their departure from Europe, the virtually penniless arrivals found *Hongkou* much more affordable than the city's more developed districts.

Although they came in a slow but steady stream from the beginning of Hitler's rise, it was *Kristallnacht* in 1938 that catapulted the Jewish population in Shanghai from a few thousand to upwards of 20,000. Over the course of two days, Jewish businesses in Germany, annexed Austria, and what was then known as the Sudetenland (a region in what was then Czechoslovakia with a large

who could enter," writes Hochstadt.

The Shanghai of the early 20th century was in many ways an energetic, challenging city that attracted the driven and ambitious. Shopping, theater, education, music, publishing, architecture and even film production flourished, but as Harriet Sargeant, author of the book *Shanghai*, explains, the assault on the city by the Japanese proved too much: "Between 1937 and 1941 the Japanese oversaw the destruction of Shanghai. One by one they stripped away the attributes which had made it great. When they finally seized Shanghai itself in 1941, they found the longed-for city no longer existed. The Shanghai of the 'twenties and 'thirties had gone forever.

Troubled from the crushing Second Sino-Japanese War, Shanghai was a raw place. The refugee Ursula Bacon, in her book, *Shanghai Diary: A Young Girl's Journey from Hitler's Hate to War-Torn China*, describes the scene she discovered upon arrival in Shanghai: "Boiling under the hot sun and steamed by the humidity in the air was the combination of rotting fruit peelings, spoiled leftovers, raw bones, dead cats, drowned puppies, carcasses of rats, and the lifeless body of a newborn baby ..."

Nevertheless, many of the Shanghai locals, in spite of their own hardships, welcomed their new neighbors and shared what little they had, whether that meant housing, medical care or just simple kindness. Gradually, with that support, Jewish



Jewish refugees socialize in a garden in Shanghai.

German population) were looted, Jewish homes were destroyed, and Jewish men were arrested and taken to concentration camps. The migration that arose out of this traumatic event "... lasted only until August 1939, when all the foreign powers in Shanghai decided to implement restrictions, which severely cut down the number

refugees began, little by little, to create lives in their new country, and before long, the proliferation of Jewish-owned businesses was such that the *Hongkou* area became known as "Little Vienna." Like their Chinese neighbors, they did their best to survive in difficult circumstances.

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THIS WAS THE ONLY REFUGEE CAMP IN AMERICA FOR JEWS FLEEING THE NAZIS

BY NINA RENATA ARON, TIMELINE

Morice Kamhi's family was in Sarajevo when World War II broke out. The situation for Jewish families turned dire quickly. "First there was the yellow arm bands, you were forbidden to go to public places ... and then, little by little, they started taking people away," he told an interviewer for an oral history. The project, an initiative of the State University of New York at Oswego, captures the stories of the survivors who spent a rare year living in America's only refugee camp during World War II.

At the time, many Jews were trying to get from Sarajevo to Dalmatia, since parts of the Adriatic coast were controlled by Italy and, as Kamhi put it, "the Italians were not anywhere near as rough on the Jews as the Germans." Kamhi's uncle and grandfather went ahead of the rest of the family and sent a man back to retrieve the others. Kamhi's mother had to pose as the man's wife, and Kamhi as his son, but they made it to Dalmatia with fake passports. Soon after, Kamhi's father and grandfather were taken to a concentration camp, where they died.

Kamhi and his remaining family made it back to Italy on a boat transporting Italians just after the Axis power changed sides in 1943 — "the Italians were soft-hearted, so a lot of Jews got [back to Italy]," he said — only to find the area where they landed surrounded by Germans. Jews began to sell anything of value they had in exchange for passage out. Kamhi's family was supposed to depart on a boat the same night, but

they weren't able to get on — they later found out that the boat had been stopped by the Germans while at sea and everyone aboard was executed.

A couple more miracles later, Kamhi's family were among the almost 1,000 refugees who were accepted to the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter, in Oswego, New York, in 1944. The refugees, representing the neediest cases, came from 18 countries, and

prised to find that the liberator who stepped off the truck emblazoned with a Star of David was a woman," reads Gruber's *Washington Post* obituary (she lived to 105).

She would later memorialize the journey in a book called *Haven* — also made into a CBS miniseries in 2001 — which chronicles some of the harrowing and inspiring tales of survival she witnessed. One was the story of a woman named Olga, who

knew we were fine." Still, many were surprised to find their freedom in America quite literally circumscribed. They were prisoners of a sort, living walled-in, in a strange land, though this conditional freedom was infinitely better than living under threat of death in Europe and may have even lent inhabitants a sense of protection. For some, like Kamhi, it was like a dream. Arriving at Fort Ontario as a young boy "was like being on another planet," he told the interviewer. "The people were so different, the atmosphere, the air was so different ... It was a fairy-tale existence. We were still in our own environment, so to speak, but we were secure, we were no longer in danger, and yet we didn't have the culture shock of being thrown into the American community which came later."

Many refugees decided to stay in the U.S. after the war ended, and that adjustment to everyday American life, Kamhi said, was harsh, difficult and long-term. "I think all of us, when we're thrown into the American community, as much as we loved it, did have a tremendous adjustment to make. And I think many of our personalities ... all of our personalities changed radically as a result."

Another former Fort Ontario resident, Leon Levitch, corroborates this quality of life in the camp in the oral history project, saying, "Slowly, we were assigned our barracks, there was hot water, there was food, people were friendly, everything was beginning to develop in a most fantastic, unbelievable, dream-like fashion. Little by little, we began to become

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Jewish refugees waiting for the train to Oswego, New York, on August 4, 1944.

they ranged in age from babies to seniors. They came to New York by boat on the USS *Henry Gibbins* (a two-week journey) and then to Fort Ontario, built during the Revolutionary War and at the center of the small town of Oswego, close to the Canadian border.

On board the *Henry Gibbins* was Ruth Gruber, a young journalist then acting as special assistant to the secretary of the interior, who was sent to make the trip with the refugees. "When Dr. Gruber arrived in Naples to meet the refugees, some were sur-

gave birth in an American Jeep en route to board the *Henry Gibbins* in Italy. "I never thought I would have another baby," she tells Ruth, laughing. "I'm over forty." But the baby was born safely, with fellow refugees rejoicing that it was a good omen. One older man said, "Life — after all the dying ... a baby boy, a Jew to take the place of a murdered baby, born on our way to freedom."

"Oswego was a fairy tale for all of us, even though there was a barbed-wire fence," Kamhi said.

"It didn't mean anything because we

HOW A BEER COMPANY HELPED THE NAZIS BUILD CREMATORIA

BY NEVILLE TELLER, THE JERUSALEM POST

The city of *Erfurt* in the federal state of Thuringia in central Germany has a unique claim to fame. It contains the only Holocaust memorial housed on the site of an industrial manufacturing company. The story behind that memorial is the subject of Karen Bartlett's new book *Architects of Death*.

The company concerned was J.A. Topf and Sons, a firm founded in the late 19th century to engage in the brewing of beer, based on Johannes Andreas Topf's patented firing system for heating malt, hops and water. In her meticulously researched account, Bartlett traces, step by step, how this typical small-time German firm was transformed into a major supplier to the SS of the crematoria and gas chambers used in the Nazi death camps to exterminate millions of human beings.

Bartlett shows beyond any shadow

of doubt that the brothers who headed the firm during the Nazi era, as well as the engineers, officials and other employees engaged in this aspect of their business, were fully aware of the purpose for which their crematoria were intended. The company made no effort to hide its



Buchenwald crematorium.

involvement — indeed, it stamped its Topf logo prominently in the iron of the gas ovens, achieving a sort of immortality when post-war newsreels filmed the crematoria that fueled the Holocaust.

During the 1930s, the firm's involve-

ment with firing systems led it to develop a mobile waste incinerator. In May 1939, with the *Buchenwald* concentration camp already established in Thuringia, and the number of dead bodies piling up, local crematoria were unable to cope, and the SS approached Topf and Sons. Its chief engineer, Kurt Prüfer, adapted the firm's waste incinerator into a mobile oil-heated cremation oven. An initial order for three mobile ovens followed, and the firm was set on the path that led to its full-scale involvement in the Holocaust.

As the network of concentration camps grew — and with it SS demands for ever more efficient systems of disposing of corpses — Prüfer dedicated himself to developing technical improvements to his ovens, and Topf expanded its manufacturing capacity accordingly. Most of those engaged in this gruesome business exhibited no

trace of moral objection.

Crematoria with one incineration chamber were succeeded by those with two, then three. Mobile ovens were soon followed by permanent crematoria inside the camps, starting with *Buchenwald*, where Prüfer and the Topf team were able to install four powerful machines which together could consume 9,000 bodies a day. Work at *Buchenwald* was followed by *Dachau*, then *Mauthausen*, then *Auschwitz-Birkenau*.

Following the notorious Wannsee conference in January 1942, where leading Nazis agreed to implement Hitler's Final Solution, the mad, amoral business proceeded at an even more furious pace.

In high-level SS meetings at *Auschwitz* to consider the design and functioning of the gas chambers in Bunkers 1 and 2, Prüfer offered to design and supply eight-chamber incinerators for each bunker.

This willing immersion by the Topf (Continued on page 14)

AT FORMER NAZI DEATH CAMP SOBIBOR, A POST-HOLOCAUST CONSTRUCTION BOOM

BY MATT LEBOVIC,
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

For the first time since SS men dismantled and plowed over *Sobibor* in 1943, significant construction is under way in the most sensitive parts of the former Nazi-built death camp, where up to 250,000 Jews were murdered during the Holocaust.

On the heels of a decade-long archeological dig, ground was broken this spring on a long-anticipated museum and visitor center. The structure is emerging atop former barracks in which Jews of all ages were forced to hand over their belongings, undress, and run toward “showers” that were actually gas chambers.

Set to open in 2019, the museum-memorial complex will contain an unprecedented precise map of *Sobibor*'s Holocaust-era features based on new research. The prisoner revolt that took place on Sukkot in October of 1943 will be recounted, along with the Nazis' efforts to obliterate evidence of genocide following that escape 74 years ago.

The other major change to take place at *Sobibor* in recent months was at the mass graves area, where

corpses were burned and the ashes buried in pits. Until this spring's transformation of the site, small human bone fragments rose to the surface whenever the ground thawed, dismaying visitors.



A “Palestine” pendant that belonged to a Jewish victim murdered at the Nazi death camp *Sobibor*, unearthed during excavations.

Under the supervision of rabbinical authorities, the graves were covered with permeable geotextile and a layer of white crushed marble. Surrounding the jagged-edged necropolis, a border of larger, dark-colored stones was added to demarcate graves that were extensively pillaged after 1945.

In contrast to the former Nazi death

camps at *Belzec* and *Treblinka*, the mass graves of *Sobibor* were not covered in layers of asphalt, concrete or boulders during the decades since the Holocaust.

With the exception of a rotund “ash

mound” monument, the relative barrenness of the “extermination area” helped Poland's Wojciech Mazurek and Israel's Yoram Haimi — lead archeologists at *Sobibor* since 2007 — uncover artifacts and information about the crematoria on which more than 200,000 corpses

were “eliminated” in the open air.

Sobibor has been relatively slow to add modern facilities, including a parking lot for buses. Close to the Bug River and Poland's border with Ukraine, it is a drive of several hours from both Warsaw and *Krakow*.

Planners hope their efforts will make coming to *Sobibor* more convenient,

and engaging, for both Poles and international tourists. Among museum highlights will be victims' belongings unearthed by the Polish-Israeli excavation team, including children's metal nameplates, jewelry with Hebrew inscriptions, and a ceramic mug fragment featuring Mickey Mouse.

Even with construction taking place at *Sobibor* during the next two years, archeologists hope to keep excavating at — for instance — the site of a prisoner-built escape tunnel, and in the area of “the ramp,” where victims were delivered to the disguised “transit camp.” In the months ahead, workers will erect a pavilion around the gas chamber ruins unearthed by Haimi and Mazurek in 2014, and a long, winding memorial wall with survivors' testimony will be built to encircle the mass graves.

In October, *Sobibor* will host a gathering to mark the 75th anniversary of the prisoner revolt. The commemoration may be the first of its kind to take place without survivors of the former death camp. By the time the museum opens in 2019, personal artifacts will play a larger role than ever in supplementing the testimony of eyewitnesses, of whom fewer remain alive each day.

THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF SHANGHAI'S JEWISH QUARTER

(Continued from page 11)

They established newspapers, synagogues, retail businesses, restaurants, schools, cemeteries, guilds, social clubs and even beauty pageants. They practiced medicine, started hospitals, got married, had babies and held bar and bat mitzvahs. They learned to cook in coal-burning ovens and to haggle with street vendors.

One *Hongkou* resident remembers the time and place with great fondness. The artist Peter Max, who would later become known for his signature “psychedelic” works of art, came to Shanghai with his parents after fleeing Berlin. Like many of the Jewish families who immigrated to the city, Max's father started a business: in this case, a store that sold Western-style suits. It was, Max recalls, an auspicious choice, as Chinese men were just beginning to favor them over their traditional Mandarin clothing.

“On the ground floor of our building was a Viennese garden-café,” Max recalls, “where my father and mother met their friends in the early evenings for coffee and pastries while listening to a violinist play romantic songs from the land they had left behind. The community of Europeans that gathered and grew below our house kept me connected to our roots.”

The people of that community lived their lives as normally as possible until 1942, when the history they had come so far to escape came dangerously

close to repeating itself. Shortly after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Colonel Josef Meisinger, chief representative of Nazi Germany's Gestapo to Japan, approached the Japanese authorities in Shanghai with “The Meisinger Plan,” a scheme to rid the city of its Jewish population by starvation, overwork or medical experiments. Although the Japanese ultimately rejected that plan, starting in February



From left: Jewish refugees Harry Fiedler and Heim Leiter pose next to a potato vendor in Shanghai; a Jewish refugee poses on Tongshan Road in Shanghai.

1943, they did require that every Jewish person who came to Shanghai after 1937 relocate to *Hongkou*, a relatively small area that already had an existing population in the hundreds of thousands.

Although much of the city's Jewish population was already living there, the crush of one population on another also dealt a brutal blow, with both disease and lack of food becoming

even more critical concerns. Suddenly, curfews were imposed. Passes to exit and enter the ghetto were required. Food rations were implemented. It was not uncommon for 30 to 40 people to sleep in the same room (reports of up to 200 people in one room exist) and “bathroom” facilities in general consisted of little else than literal pots emptied by local laborers each morning. Still, refugees

bolstered themselves by remembering that, in spite of these conditions, in Shanghai, they were the one thing they could not be in Europe: safe.

Between the dismal state of the still-impoorished city and the beginning of the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949, the city's postwar Jewish population eventually dwindled to just a few hundred people, although there are said to be a few thousand

Jews living there today. Eager to return to Europe or start new lives on other continents, most Jewish refugees left Shanghai at the end of World War II and with their departure began the dismantling of the culture and lives they had established in China.

Although the nearby apartment buildings that once housed both European Jews and Chinese alike are still in use, given Shanghai's current construction boom, it's not unthinkable that these monuments, too, could soon meet the wrecking ball. The White Horse Inn, a *Hongkou* café opened by Viennese refugees in 1939 that became not just a meeting place but something of a symbol of normalcy for the displaced Europeans, was demolished almost ten years ago for a road widening project. Other businesses of the era, once so crucial to the Jewish experience in Shanghai, are now represented only by rescued signage that hangs in the courtyard of the neighborhood's Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum.

The museum, which includes the *Ohel Moishe* synagogue, a center of Jewish life and worship for the *Hongkou* refugees, has become something of a touchstone of this extraordinary circumstance of history, but between the exodus of the original Jewish population after the war and the city's lack of interest in preserving this chapter of its past, one has to wonder if it will soon be the last monument to it standing.

THE SECRET SOCIETY THAT DOCUMENTED THE TRUTH OF THE WARSAW GHETTO

BY ROB GLOSTER, J. WEEKLY

The 13,000 Jews who fought to the death in the Warsaw ghetto uprising are celebrated 75 years later as heroes who refused to surrender to the overwhelming firepower of the Nazis.

But another group of Jews in Warsaw also carried on a heroic



Jowita Budnik as Rachel Auerbach, one of only three members of the secret Oyneg Shabes group to survive.

struggle, without guns or Molotov cocktails. Using pens, typewriters and paper as their weapons, they secretly chronicled life in the ghetto — and those hidden memories became the basis for much of what we now know about life within the ghetto's walls.

The 60-member group, led by historian Emanuel Ringelblum, met on Saturday mornings and called itself "Oyneg Shabes," Yiddish for "Joys of the Sabbath," to hide its true intent.

Members collected more than 35,000 pages of diaries, letters, photos and newspapers, as well as items such as food ration cards and Nazi-mandated armbands, burying them in metal boxes and milk cans — many of which were recovered after the war.

Oyneg Shabes members were determined to tell the world what life was really like in the ghetto, and not to allow Nazi propaganda films — which depicted the Jews as dirty carriers of lice and typhus — to tell their story. And when they became aware of the mass murder of Jews in concentration camps, the group also took

on the role of telling the world the horrific truth of the Holocaust.

Ringelblum and his group are the subjects of *Who Will Write Our History*, a film which is based on the similarly titled 2007 book by Samuel Kassow.

The 94-minute film, which includes footage from the ghetto and narration based on the writings of those who contributed to the archive, as well as

reenactments by professional actors, includes the final thoughts and prayers of people who knew they were doomed.

"We hope to extend what Ringelblum set out to do, which is to let the Jewish people incarcerated in the ghetto and ultimately murdered in *Treblinka* speak for themselves," said Roberta Grossman, the film's director and founding partner of Katahdin Productions, an L.A.- and Berkeley-based nonprofit documentary production company that produced this film as well as her previous films, including *Above and Beyond (The Birth of the Israeli Air Force)* and *Hava Nagila (The Movie)*.

"It was also a way for people to make some sense of what their experiences were, and to make some meaning of their suffering," said Grossman.

The executive producer was Nancy Spielberg, who told *J.* that her understanding of the Holocaust only really began when her filmmaker brother, Steven Spielberg, made *Schindler's List*. She said the

members of Oyneg Shabes, like Oskar Schindler, were instrumental in preventing the Nazis from eradicating the Jewish legacy in Poland.

"In their action of writing, it was winning in some ways," she said. "It really was being able to assert themselves and to not let the Nazis win."

Grossman said her film is more relevant today because of the battle between truth and propaganda going on now in many parts of the world. That makes "the issue of who tells the story" crucial, she said.

Dorota Liliental, a Polish actress who plays the role of a soup-kitchen worker in the dramatized portions of the movie, said the archive and the film are important because they tell the story from the perspective of those who suffered.

"I'm really, really happy this film was made," Liliental said in an interview at the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. "History usually is written by those who survive and those who win, and their vision might be distorted. And here we have history written by the dead."

Along with stories of heroism and self-sacrifice, the archive tells of everyday life for the half-million Jews crammed into the ghetto and dealing with hunger, disease and Nazi brutality.

Grossman said she realizes many viewers glaze over when they encounter "another film about the Holocaust," but said Ringelblum's story is unique.

"I believe this is the most important unknown story of the Holocaust. There is nothing that compares to the Oyneg Shabes," she said. "Ringelblum made sure there were all different perspectives, so there are stories about brutal Jewish police and Jewish prostitutes and people who

turned in family members for small favors from the Gestapo."

Grossman made several trips to Warsaw to read through the archive in the basement of the Jewish Historical Institute (JHI), where the diaries and other documents were kept until a permanent exhibit opened there last November. That exhibit includes some of the original pages, as well as one of the milk cans stashed beneath the basement of a school.

The movie is told from the perspective of Rachel Auerbach, one of only three members of Oyneg Shabes to survive the Holocaust. She spent years leading the effort to search for the archive, parts of which were unearthed in 1946 and in 1950.

Auerbach, a journalist who went on to oversee witness testimony at Israel's Yad Vashem from 1954 to 1968, was assigned by Ringelblum — who led the Jewish social service agency in the ghetto — to run a soup kitchen. Her obser-



Andrew Bering as Israel Lichtenstein preparing first cache of documents in *Who Will Write Our History*.

vations of the starving Jews who came there for food became the basis of much of her writing, in Polish and Yiddish.

Among the writings on display at the JHI is the last will of one of the four people who buried the archive in 1942.

"I don't know what fate awaits me. I don't know if I'll be able to tell you what happened next. Remember: my name is Nachum Grzywacz," he wrote.

HOW A BEER COMPANY HELPED THE NAZIS BUILD CREMATORIA

(Continued from page 12)

engineering division in a wholly immoral enterprise infected the firm. Fritz Sander, a long-standing and highly respected Topf employee, was manager of the furnace construction division. Jealous of Prüfer's obvious success in developing ever more efficient methods of corpse disposal, he decided to apply his own mind to the problem, and dreamed up a stomach-churning "corpse incineration oven for mass operation" and applied for a patent.

Interrogated by the Soviet authorities after the war — for, with the exception of one of the Topf brothers,

who committed suicide, the leading Topf managers stood trial — Sander explained that his crematoria were designed "on the conveyor belt principle, with bodies carried into the ovens continuously by mechanical means."

No such crematorium was ever constructed, but by 1943 Prüfer was already hard at work planning the expansion of the Auschwitz death factory. His design for a sixth crematorium was based on continuous combustion industrial ring ovens, using a central fuel source and reducing costs by up to 70%. By the time the firm might have been ready to put the project into effect, Germany had its back

to the wall, and the Nazi genocide project had run out of time.

The first investigation into the Topf company's involvement in the Holocaust was conducted by the US Counter Intelligence Corps the day after the liberation of *Buchenwald* in April 1945. US officers had seen the Topf logo displayed prominently on the ovens. In July, the city of *Erfurt* was transferred from American to Soviet control, and subsequently three Topf managers were indicted for "criminal responsibility for their participation in the horrific acts of the Hitlerites in the concentration camps," and subject to rigorous investigation

by the Russian judicial system.

Excuses, justifications, evasions and untruths were swept aside. All three confessed to the charges laid against them and were found guilty without even standing trial. All were sentenced to 25 years of hard labor. Prüfer died in prison in 1952. The other two were released after nine years.

In *Architects of Death*, Bartlett describes in fascinating detail how a perfectly ordinary manufacturing firm came to ignore the total immorality of the business it sought, engaged in and encouraged. In parts, it does not make for a pleasant read, but it is undoubtedly a salutary one.

THIS WAS THE ONLY REFUGEE CAMP IN AMERICA FOR JEWS FLEEING THE NAZIS

(Continued from page 12)

accustomed to this fairy-tale kind of life. Sure, we resented the fence, but inside the fence was not so ominous anymore."

Levitch, an aspiring musician, was delighted to find "scads of old, broken-down upright pianos" around the abandoned army camp. Along with a fellow refugee, a Viennese piano tuner, he set about scavenging for tools and fixing them so that the camp could have music. Others describe pleasant visits from curious townspeople, especially girls eager to get a look at foreign boys, with whom they mingled through the fence.

My own grandmother describes driving up with other relatives from New York City with baskets full of food and cheerfully passing salamis and other comestibles through the wire fence to Yugoslav cousins who'd miraculously landed upstate.

But a camp is a camp, and in spite of being spared the horrors of war, refugees at Fort Ontario observed the stark contrast between their locked-in lives and those of the free New Yorkers surrounding them, to say nothing of the even more extreme disparity between their new American reality and their lives before the war. "In America, I looked out at the rest of the world and I saw normal people with everyday lives, and I felt deceived," former Fort Ontario resident Walter Greenberg told the *New York Times* in 2004.

The camp was established in June 1944, but it almost didn't exist at all. The American response to

the European refugee situation had been slow. In fact, the U.S. had drastically cut immigration during the war years. Many have argued that President Roosevelt didn't feel motivated to help the imperiled Jews because he'd already won the Jewish vote. That all changed when Josiah E. Dubois, a U.S. Treasury Department

into the human rights crisis unfolding abroad, and the Treasury had even approved the funds, but they were stalled along the way by other organs of government.)

Dubois exposed this situation. His report catalyzed the creation of the War Refugee Board in 1944, and Fort Ontario was named a safe haven



Jewish refugees arriving at Fort Ontario, Oswego, New York, on August 5, 1944.

lawyer from New Jersey, blew the whistle on the widespread obstruction of American visas for Jewish refugees. In a document titled *Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of the Jews*, Dubois shamed the State Department for conspicuous inaction in some cases and outright obstruction in others. (Dubois's frustration was born of the failed release of 70,000 Jews from Romania — the U.S. had been poised to buy their freedom for a \$170,000 bribe. It would have been a significant intervention

shortly thereafter. The board also worked to secure safe havens in other countries, including Switzerland and Sweden, and began to work in earnest to help. They sent 300,000 food packages (disguised in Red Cross boxes) into concentration camps and urged the media to detail for the American public the horrors of Auschwitz and other camps. Four million Jews had died by 1944, but the efforts of the War Refugee Board saved tens of thousands of lives.

The creation of the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter

was intended to signal Roosevelt's intention to turn the tide of the American response — he even visited the camp, to the delight of many living there — but it was also a stop-gap measure. A news report from 1944, which can be heard in *Haven from the Holocaust*, an hour-long radio program, sums up the refugee predicament. "To save their lives, they have been admitted to the United States," a female broadcaster says dourly. "Legally, it's dubious whether they are here at all. Though they are our friends, they are not enjoying American freedoms. They cannot move outside a restricted area. When hostilities cease, they must go back to Europe."

This idea may have been convenient for the U.S., but, as it happened, more than half of the refugees in Oswego had immigration cases pending by the time the war ended. As strange and novel as the experience had been, most were keen to stay and make a life in the country that had taken them in, rather than return to the devastation at home. When the shelter finally closed after the war, many were granted temporary or permanent status. Some went to live with American relatives. Those without them warily began American lives on their own.

While Fort Ontario is remembered as a special place, a symbol of eventual reckoning, it only barely offset the overwhelming human toll extracted by the Nazis. Even those spared in Oswego would have to reconcile their own fates with those of the millions killed during the war.

GETTING ANNE FRANK ALL WRONG

BY RAFAEL MEDOFF

Teenage Holocaust diarist Anne Frank died in *Bergen-Belsen* a month earlier than was previously known, according to researchers at the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam. They say their new finding is significant because it dispels the widespread notion that Anne lived almost until the day of the Allies' liberation of the camp.

But the real question is not how close Anne came to seeing the victorious Allied troops. The real question we should be asking is why the Frank family's repeated attempts to emigrate to the United States before the war were rebuffed.

The Frank family, like many Jewish families, fled their native Germany shortly after Adolf Hitler's rise to power. They settled in neighboring Holland. In 1939, with world war looming on the horizon and Hitler's persecution of Jews intensifying, the Franks began thinking about moving to America.

But the Roosevelt administration was in no mood to take them in.

After World War I, Congress had enacted restrictive immigration quotas. The combined quota for Germany and Austria was 27,370 annually — far fewer than the hundreds of thousands of German and Austrian Jews seeking haven from Hitler.

Sadly, the administration went above and beyond the existing law, to ensure that even those meager quota allotments were almost always under-filled. American consular officials abroad made sure to "postpone and postpone the granting of the visas" to refugees, as one senior State Department official put it. They created a bureaucratic maze to keep refugees like the Franks far from America's shores.

Otto Frank, Anne's father, dutifully filled out the sm all mountain of required application forms and obtained supporting affidavits from the family's relatives in Massachusetts.

But that was not enough for those who zealously guarded America's gates against refugees. In fact, in 1941, the Roosevelt administration even added a new restriction: no

refugee with close relatives in Europe could come to the U.S., on the grounds that the Nazis might hold their relatives hostage in order to force the refugee to undertake espionage for Hitler.

That's right: Anne Frank, Nazi spy.

During the period of the Nazis' mass murder of the Jews, from late 1941 until early 1945, barely ten percent of the quotas from Germany and Axis-controlled European countries were actually used. A total of nearly 190,000 quota places sat unused — representing almost 190,000 lives that could have been saved, even within the existing quota system.

That same year, refugee advocates in Congress introduced the Wagner-Rogers bill, which would have admitted 20,000 refugee children from Germany outside the quota system. Anne Frank and her sister Margot, as German citizens, could have been among those children.

Even though there was no danger that the children would take jobs away from American citizens, nativists and isolationists lobbied hard against the bill. President Franklin Roosevelt's

cousin, Laura Delano Houghteling, remarked at a dinner party that "20,000 charming children would all too soon grow up into 20,000 ugly adults." FDR himself refused to support the bill.

Anne and Margot Frank, and thousands of other German Jewish refugee children, were kept out because they were considered undesirable. One year later, however, President Roosevelt opened our country's doors to several thousand British children to keep them safe from the German blitz. And an appeal by *Pets* magazine in 1940 resulted in several thousand offers to take in British purebred puppies endangered by the war. But there was no room for Jewish children.

The reason why Jewish children, including Anne and Margot Frank, did not survive was not just because of their bad luck that the Allies arrived at *Bergen-Belsen* a few weeks too late. It was also because of a conscious decision by the Roosevelt administration to prevent all but a small number of Jewish refugees from finding haven in America.



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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NEW YORK, N.Y. 10110-4299
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PAID
SMITHTOWN, N.Y.
PERMIT NO. 15

Martyrdom & Resistance

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

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