

# MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE



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## The American Society for Yad Vashem Annual Tribute Dinner FROM HOLOCAUST TO REBIRTH

BY JILL GOLTZER

On Sunday, November 11, 2018, the American Society for Yad Vashem (ASYV) gathered at the Plaza Hotel in New York City for its Annual Tribute Dinner, honoring Celina and Marvin Zborowski and Adina and Lawrence Burian. Over 700 people attended, including more than 150 members of the younger generation, by far the most in our organization's history. Esteemed guests included Dr. Ari Berman (president of Yeshiva University), Malcolm Hoenlein (EVP of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations), our own Mark Wilf (chairman of JFNA), Andrew Lustgarten (president of MSG), Andrea Greenberg (president and CEO of MSG Networks), Hank Ratner (former president and CEO of MSG Networks), Titi Ayenaw (Miss Israel 2013), and Ambassador Danny Danon (Israel's permanent representative to the UN).

The theme for the evening was "From Holocaust to Rebirth," which, as Dinner Chair Mark Moskowitz explained, "follows the modern historical arc of the Jewish people, taking us from the depth of the horrors of the Holocaust to the exhilaration of the establishment of the State of Israel 70 years ago." The presence of so many members of our Young Leadership Associates (YLA) is a testament to

the notion of "rebirth." Our YLA was heavily involved in the evening's program, beginning with Halle Wilf and Jonathan Friedman, co-chairs of the YLA Tribute Dinner Committee, leading our guests in the *motzi*. Award-winning a cappella group Six13 then

director of ASYV, who noted that what "makes tonight extra special is that we are honoring the Zborowski family, who exemplify the first generation of survivors, together with the Burian family, who are the true leaders of the second generation." Dr. Meier also

about her experience on the 2018 Yad Vashem Generation to Generation Mission this past summer. Epstein talked about the four survivors on the trip — Felice Stokes, Edward Mosberg, Naftali Deutsch, and Leon Green, z"l. These four individuals "opened their hearts to us and reinforced the idea of *MeShoah LeTekumah* — that even after living through the atrocities of the Holocaust, rebirth was not only a possibility, but in fact a reality."

We were very fortunate to be joined by some of our esteemed Holocaust survivors. ASYV Chairman Leonard Wilf invited all the survivors in the room to stand and be recognized, and then asked everyone to join them as "we all stand as ONE!"

Mr. Wilf thanked Dinner Chair Mark Moskowitz as well as board members Rita Levy and Marilyn Rubenstein for the tremendous work they put into planning this year's dinner. He then presented the Yad Vashem Remembrance

Award to Celina and Marvin Zborowski, who were joined by their sons Mark and Ziggy on stage. "It gives me enormous *nachas* that my children and grandchildren have followed in my footsteps and that they are also involved in the organization and the young leadership," Marvin said. Celina and Marvin are both founding members of ASYV and are Guardians of the Valley of the Communities at Yad Vashem. Looking out into the audience, Marvin stated, "I will continue to do whatever I can to perpetuate our memories, so the world could never forget."

Following the moving tribute to the Zborowski family, Jill Martin invited board member David Halpern, son of Sam, z"l, and Gladys Halpern, to preside over this year's In Memoriam. Together we honored the memories of those members of our Yad Vashem family  
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Dinner honorees Adina Burian and Marvin and Celina Zborowski; Chairman of the ASYV Leonard Wilf ; and Dinner honoree Lawrence Burian.

led everyone in a magnificent rendition of "Hatikvah".

Master of Ceremonies Jill Martin, ten-time Emmy award-winning sportscaster and television personality, set the tone for the evening by emphasizing the importance of passing the survivors' stories "down to the next generation with accuracy, love and awareness." Ms. Martin then introduced Dr. Ron Meier, executive

shared stories about his personal connection to the Holocaust, specifically *Kristallnacht* ("Night of Broken Glass").

This evening fell exactly 80 years after the events of *Kristallnacht*, and a mere two weeks after the violent anti-Semitic attack that took place on October 27th in a Pittsburgh synagogue. Dr. Meier reminded us that as we try to make sense of something that is entirely senseless, what is certain is that Yad Vashem's sacred mission is as relevant today as it was 65 years ago when its gates first opened in Jerusalem. The shooting in Pittsburgh was the deadliest attack on the Jewish people in American history, and as Ambassador Danon aptly stated, "it was anti-Semitism in its classic and cruelest form."

Following a video message from Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev, Jill Martin invited YLA member Laura Epstein to say a few words

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## FROM HOLOCAUST TO REBIRTH

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who have passed on since the last time we gathered. Eleven YLA members then solemnly stepped onto the stage carrying *yahrzeit* candles. Each recited the name of one of the eleven victims of the recent shooting at the *Etz Chaim* synagogue in Pittsburgh. Surrounded by our young leaders, singer and songwriter Arianna Afsar performed a beautiful rendition of "Somewhere over the Rainbow" in honor of those who were murdered just because they were Jewish.

Dinner Chair Mark Moskowitz introduced Adina and Lawrence Burian and presented them with the Yad Vashem Leadership Award. Adina and Lawrence were both founding members of the YLA and are now extremely active members of the ASYV board. They were joined that night by their parents, siblings and four beautiful children. Their eldest son, Jonah, expressed the immense pride he and his siblings have for their parents. "Seeing my parents and their commitment and passion for working with Yad Vashem...inspires both me and my sib-

lings to continue that legacy as we grow older, to want to participate, and to get involved as much as we can."

In accepting this well-deserved honor, Lawrence talked about working with his father, Holocaust survivor Andrew Burian, and Yad Vashem to publish a book about his father's experience during the war. For Lawrence, this was one of his greatest satisfactions. He and Adina "feel privileged to be part of an organization that so wholly preserves our past while treasuring the foundation of our future; an organization which

welcomes and honors people of all backgrounds and of all faiths."

The evening's program ended with an uplifting medley of Hebrew songs performed by award-winning a cappella group Six13. Throughout the night, our wonderful honorees, Celina and Marvin Zborowski and Adina and Lawrence Burian, inspired everyone with their lifelong commitment to Holocaust remembrance and their unwavering dedication to the ASYV. Guests sang and danced into the night, celebrating the sanctity of life, the miracle of rebirth, and hope for the future.

## FRIEND OF THE JEWS: HOW DR. ADÉLAÏDE HAUTVAL DEFIED THE NAZIS AND SAVED JEWISH LIVES

BY MENUCHA CHANA LEVIN,  
AISH.COM

Dr. Adélaïde Hautval was a psychiatrist who lived in a Vichy-controlled area of southern France. In April 1942, Hautval was told of the death of her mother, who had lived in occupied Paris. In order to attend the funeral, she applied for a pass to cross the demarcation line.

Although her request was rejected, Adélaïde attempted to cross over. She was arrested and taken to the *Bourges* train station for an identity check. While waiting on the platform, she noticed some Germans mistreating a Jewish family. Speaking calmly to them in German, she told them to leave the family alone.

"Don't you see that they are only Jews?" asked the German.

"So what? They are people like the others, leave them alone," Adélaïde bravely insisted. Her answer landed her in the *Bourges* prison, where she would witness further cruelty toward Jews.

"A Jewish woman was placed in our cell, and I discovered that she was wearing a yellow star sewn on her jacket. To attract the attention of the Gestapo, I attached a piece of paper to my clothing," Adélaïde explained. It stated, "Friend of the Jews." Whenever she could, she boldly defended her friends.

When Adélaïde was being interrogated, the Germans offered her a compromise: "Deny what you said about the Jews and you will be released."

"But how can I say something else? Jews are like other people," Adélaïde insisted.

"So you defend them? You will share their fate!" the Germans harshly informed her. Because of Hautval's refusal to change her attitudes, the Gestapo compelled her to stitch a Star of David on her coat along with a cloth band marked "A friend of the Jews."

Dr. Hautval was sent to the *Birkenau* death camp together with other French prisoners. A devout Protestant and daughter of a pastor, she was housed with 500 Jewish women, who

called her "the saint." Utilizing her medical knowledge to treat Jewish prisoners suffering from typhus, she secluded them in a separate part of the camp to prevent contagion. By not reporting the prisoners' illness, she saved them from the gas chambers.

In April 1943, Adélaïde was sent to Block 10 of the main camp of Auschwitz, where sadistic experiments took place, including the sterilization of women by injection of caustic products. She was supposed to assist with the "medical experiments" performed on Jewish women prisoners without anesthetic by German doctors. With great courage, she

in April, 1945 she continued to treat the patients who were too ill to be moved.

Adélaïde was repatriated only in June 1945, with the last French patients. Because she was not part of a resistance organization or network, she had difficulty obtaining a resistance deportee card.

After the war, although her health was impaired by her bout with typhus and malnutrition, Adélaïde resumed her medical practice in France. She was awarded the Legion of Honor in December 1945 for her dedication to her fellow inmates in the brutality of the concentration camps.



Dr. Hautval with naval cadets and high school students at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, 1965.

defied the criminal experimenters, refusing to enter the operating room or to assist the surgeons. Sent back to *Birkenau*, she wondered what had saved her from execution, since the SS was known for its brutality.

When she finally discovered that an order had in fact been given for her execution, she was tormented by the idea that another inmate might have been substituted for her.

In August 1944, she was transferred to *Ravensbrück*, and later sent as a doctor to the *Watenstett* camp, an ammunition factory.

After the liberation of *Ravensbrück*

In 1946 she wrote a short book called *Medicine and Crime Against Humanity*, which was finally published 44 years later.

Then in May 1964, a libel suit was filed in London against American novelist Leon Uris by Dr. Vladislav Dering, a Polish gynecologist then living in Britain. He accused the author of *Exodus* of defamation. Leon Uris claimed that the doctor had participated in Block 10 in criminal experiments with Jewish prisoners.

Dr. Adélaïde Hautval was called as a witness. On the witness stand, she declared: "Yes, Dr. Dering did experi-

ments on at least 400 Jews."

Asked questions from the defense, Adélaïde explained how she reacted during her incarceration in Block 10: "I had to serve as an assistant to Dr. Wirths, a German with gray-blue eyes. He told me that I would also have to assist Professor Clauberg, a civilian, bald little man, wearing a Tyrolean hat and boots. I was troubled because that is something I did not want to participate in. Having probably noticed my reluctance, he questioned me about my opinion of sterilization. The opportunity was unique. I think a direct question deserves a direct answer. I said, 'I am absolutely opposed to it.'"

"Do not you see that these people (the Jews) are very different from you?" I was asked again. 'I do not, and don't stop me from saying that in this camp many people are different from me.'"

Following this testimony, one of the English judges proclaimed, "Here is one the most impressive, brave women who has ever appeared before a court in this country, a woman of strong character and an extraordinary personality."

In 1965, Dr. Adélaïde Hautval was awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem and traveled to Israel to receive her medal. Her positive attitude toward the Jewish people remained as strong as ever:

"The return of the people of Israel to their own country is an accomplishment concerning not only itself but the world at large.... Israel has always played a gestative, fermentative role, due to which it was hated or respected. Its mission in the world continues. May Israel remain faithful to it. The entire history of the Jewish people demonstrates the primacy of spiritual forces. Hence, its undertaking cannot but be successful," she stated.

In October, 1988, after discovering the signs of Parkinson's disease, Dr. Hautval sadly chose to end her life. The hospital where she worked was renamed Adélaïde Hautval Villiers-le-Bel in her honor.



# TO AUSCHWITZ AND BACK

BY TAKIS WÜRGER,  
SPIEGEL ONLINE

One morning in June, with the smell of an approaching thunderstorm in the air, an elderly man, his hair carefully parted to one side and wearing a freshly ironed, collared shirt, rings the doorbell of a farmhouse in the Bohemian Forest, a low mountain range in the Czech Republic. He has a long journey behind him, across two international borders and hundreds of kilometers, the last few hundred meters of which lead down an alley lined with pear trees. The man knows this farmhouse and the dark brown, weathered barn at the end of the gravel road. He has been here before, here in the Czech village of *Brnírov*. He has returned because he wants to fulfill his promise.

A wrinkled woman in a cotton dress covered by an apron peers out of the open door with her narrowed, blue eyes. She sees the man and immediately envelops him in a warm embrace, her smile so broad that you can see where the molars are missing from her dentures. The two launch into a breathless conversation in Czech.

"There you are. I've baked a cherry cake," the woman says. "There you are."

She has been expecting him. She knew that he would return. She knows his story — and has known it for longer than she has known him.

The man is Josef Salomonovic, the little Jew from the barn.

He presents the farmer's wife, whom he calls "Frau Anna," with two bars of chocolate, a bottle of Australian wine from the supermarket and a package of *Merci* pralines. He eats a piece of cherry cake, praising its moistness — and Frau Anna is so overcome with nervous excitement that she spoons cocoa powder into the cups instead of instant coffee. Salomonovic smiles and nods, joining the woman's grandson for a tour of the chicken coop and the new outbuilding. Then he asks: "Is the crooked tree still standing?"

Before Josef Salomonovic packed his two suitcases and embarked on this journey shortly before his 80th birthday, he told me his life story in Vienna. We had met in Auschwitz.

## "ONLY SAD STORIES"

Several months later, at the kitchen table of his apartment in Vienna's 10th District, he is gazing at the bits of memorabilia with which he wants to illustrate his story: a spoon, a miniature airplane and a letter with Adolf Hitler's profile on the stamp.

He speaks for three straight days. At the beginning of his story, he says he wants to try to avoid making it too sad. And at one point during the three days, when we go to a nearby restaurant and Salomonovic orders venison

kidney ragout, he says: "I just thought of something. I'm going to tell you a funny story." He listens to himself talking, pauses for a moment, and then says: "Actually, I have only sad stories."

He speaks of the years during which the Germans murdered 1.5 million Jewish children. He speaks of the ghetto, of lethal injections and of Auschwitz. Over and over again — or perhaps the entire time — he also speaks about Dora Salomonovic, his mother.

Dora Salomonovic was from *Mährisch Ostrau*, a town that is now called *Ostrava* and lies in present-day Czech Republic. Her native language was German, but she grew up as a Czech Jew in the Austrian Empire. Dora went to trade school and fell in love with a black-haired engineer named Erich, who was an accomplished chess player and could repair anything. She married him, and they had two sons, Michal and Josef, whose nickname was *Pepek*. He was born in 1938, the same year that 1,406 synagogues and temples were burned down in Germany.

Josef's first memory is of his mother coming to him when he was three to tell him that the family was taking a trip to Poland.

It was 1941, two years after the Germans had occupied Bohemia and Moravia. Dora and Erich Salomonovic had been ordered by the occupiers to come to the *Bubny* train station in Prague. Prior to receiving the order, the family had requested permission to leave the country for Shanghai, but the Germans refused the request without explanation.

A friend who visited the family before their departure would later write in her memoirs: "It wasn't possible to speak to Dora. She lay on the couch sobbing uncontrollably. I tried to give her a farewell kiss, but she didn't seem to know what was going on. Erich was the only one who seemed outwardly composed. I can still clearly see the place in my mind where I told Jean, as we headed home through the vineyard: 'If one of them doesn't hold up, it will be Dora.'"

## NO MILK

On the day of their departure, Josef wore two shirts, one on top of the other, along with a sweater and a winter coat. On his back, he carried a backpack with his chamber pot. His mother had carefully considered which of their possessions to bring along, and decided among other things to bring along a small strainer with which she would scoop skin from the milk after boiling it. She couldn't have known that there would be no milk in their future.

Josef and his family traveled with Transport E Number 815, a train packed with thousands of other Czech Jews. Their destination? *Litzmannstadt*, the *Lodz* ghetto. Had Josef been able to read, he would have seen the signs on the fence reading: "Jewish residential area — entry forbidden."

The four of them were forced to share a bed. Erich worked in a German metal factory and Dora in a paper factory. Michal, who was 10 years old at the time, was made to straighten out bent needles at a workshop, while three-year-old Josef spent the day alone, from morning to evening.



Recently Josef Salomonovic traveled to the Bohemian Forest to visit the farmhouse where he was saved from a Nazi death march at the end of World War II. He still doesn't know why he was chosen to survive.

"Here," Mr. Salomonovic says in Vienna, and points to a spot on a map of the ghetto. "This is where we lived." He has gathered up books, maps and files in preparation for my visit, almost as though he were presenting evidence to a court.

Many in the ghetto died of typhoid fever or froze to death. Some were beat to death by the Germans and others starved. The Jews trapped in the ghetto received too little bread, too few vegetables, hardly any flour and no butter or meat. After a few months, Josef's baby teeth all fell out, but nothing grew in to replace them.

Josef's father traded his watch with its glowing hands for a loaf of bread.

Before long, the ghetto was all Josef knew. He had his parents, whom he loved, and his brother, who teased him but whom he loved anyway. He didn't, however, know that there was a word that struck fear into the hearts of everyone around him. The word

was *Sperre*.

During a *Sperre*, the Germans would herd together all of the Jews living in one building and would take those whom they deemed to be "parasites" — those who couldn't work, those who suffered from typhoid fever, the elderly and the children — load them into trucks, plug all the gaps, start the motor and pump the exhaust inside.

## "YOU CAN'T CRY"

Josef's father knew a lot of people in the ghetto because he would repair their valuables. On one occasion, he managed to piece back together a Chinese vase belonging to an SS guard, and thus learned of an approaching *Sperre*. He then managed to convince a fireman he knew to come with a ladder and pry open a hole in the ceiling, into which Josef and his mother crawled. He clearly remembers the wide gaps between the ladder's rungs.

"You can't cry, no noise at all," his mother told him. He didn't understand what the difference was between a Jew and a non-Jew, but he did understand the fear in his mother's voice, and he stayed quiet.

The Germans in the *Lodz* ghetto combed through the apartments, searching for children that had been hidden. Lying behind the hole in the ceiling, Josef could hear the screams as the Germans found them one by one.

In the middle of 1944, Josef found himself sitting on the bed in their ghetto apartment and watching as his parents packed their things. Once again, they would be taking a trip at the behest of the Germans. The journey was short and they had reached their destination after just a few hours: Auschwitz. Josef could hear people banging on the outside of the cattle car he was in, and when he got out, he saw emaciated figures in blue-and-white striped suits who yelled: "Leave everything in the cars. Men to the right, women to the left." It was the arrival platform at *Birkenau*.

Josef's father took his brother Michal by the hand, bent down and said something that Josef can no longer remember, and gave him a kiss. Then he left. Josef never saw him again. His mother took him into a low building.

"Take everything off," a female guard yelled.

Josef didn't see any other children, just women. He watched as a prisoner shaved off all the hair on their bodies. His mother held his hand tightly; someone was constantly crying and screaming. And then Josef let go of his mother's hand, took a couple of steps and saw people beating other people, and then he only saw naked women with no hair. He had lost his mother.

A guard stopped in front of him, a *kapo*, a prisoner working for the SS.  
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# VEIT HARLAN: THE LIFE AND WORK OF A NAZI FILMMAKER

Veit Harlan: The Life and Work of a Nazi Filmmaker.

By Frank Noack. University Press of Kentucky: Lexington, Kentucky, 2016.452 pp. \$50.00 hardcover.

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN

“The claim persists that because of Riefenstahl and especially Harlan, a medium [film] lost its innocence and, in the case of *Jud Süß*, became a weapon of mass murder.”

According to author Frank Noack in his well-researched and thought-provoking volume entitled *Veit Harlan: The Life and Work of a Nazi Filmmaker*, Joseph Goebbels, “appointed minister of popular enlightenment and propaganda on March 13, 1933, six weeks after Hitler became the nation’s leader, had . . . plans for the film industry.” First off, he intended to “purge it of all Jews.” Then, no less important to Goebbels, was the need to find “artists . . . who, instead of just appearing in propaganda plays and films, were also ready to show their colors more explicitly by committing to Nazi Germany.” Veit Harlan was just such an artist — or at least appeared to be. The evidence: In May 1933, an interview with Harlan published in the *Völkischer Beobachter* presented him as supportive of the new regime. Then, most especially, there was his film, *Jud Süß*, an exceptionally well-made picture whose central motif was anti-Semitism. Indeed, the film was so “good” that Heninrich Himmler would “order” “the entire SS and police force” to watch it. Himmler was convinced that the film would vividly

clarify to his men just what they were fighting . . . the cunning Jew, ready to take everything from them, including their women! For that matter, “in 1963 former *Waffen Schutzstaffel* (SS) member Stefan Baretzki [would] insist” at his trial “that he had abused and killed Jewish concentration camp inmates only after watching *Jud Süß* ....”

So the question is, Was Veit Harlan really an early supporter of the Nazis? Or did the interviewer from the *Völkischer Beobachter* “twist his words,” as Harlan would later claim? Was he “ordered” by Goebbels to film *Jud Süß* and make it as anti-Semitic as possible? Or was he just an opportunist eager to work and support his family? Should Harlan be blamed for *Jud Süß* being a well-crafted film? Or are we simply dealing here with an “enthusiastic” artist who couldn’t help but harness all his artistic abilities for the production of any film he did? Finally, the reader can’t help but wonder if a film really has the power to motivate people to murder.

Interestingly the author of this volume, doesn’t give us his verdict. Instead, Noack, labeling himself a “curious investigator,” simply presents Harlan’s entire story, letting the reader judge the man. Thus we learn about Harlan, the ambitious German stage actor and director, characterized by reviewers in both arenas as

“provocative,” “daring” and always “lively.” We learn about his work in German film as an actor, and later, because of Goebbels’s “purges” in the cinema world, his debut as a surprisingly fine film director and screenwriter. We read about the many comedies, melodramas and more he directed. And then we read, too, about Goebbels’s growing interest in him, especially with the release of his 1937 film *Der Herrscher* (*The Ruler*), where Harlan “for the first time” “combined melodrama with [Nazi] propaganda.”

According to Noack, Goebbels “approach[ed]” Harlan regarding the direction of *Jud Süß* “around November 10, 1939.” Once he “decided to accept the offer (or order) to direct this film, Harlan did his best,” as regards “improving” the script and filming it. For example, while many writers had already worked on creating the

anti-Semitic script, Harlan’s additions “enhanced” this aspect, making it impossible to sympathize with the lead character, Süß. In fact, as Noack notes, Harlan would create an “economic,” taut script “driven by a purpose” — proving the Jew evil incarnate. Since Harlan was concerned with making the film “authentic,” he went to *Lublin*, Poland, to do “research” on the Jewish community. He watched Yiddish films like Joseph Green’s *Yidl mitn Fidl* (1936) and

Michal Waszynski’s *Dybuk* (1937). He went to Prague to shoot the synagogue sequences in the film using “real” Jews. In sum, as regards the entire filming process, he brought all his accumulated and, at this point, substantial talents to the production. (Noack frequently compares Harlan’s work to Alfred Hitchcock’s.) The result: Goebbels would write that *Jud Süß* was “a very great work of genius. An anti-Semitic film of the kind we had wished for.” For that matter, German audiences loved the film too!

Not surprisingly then, Harlan become Goebbels’s “favorite director,” and was given even more work. He received awards from the German government. The Italian government presented him with the “Mussolini Cup” for Best Foreign Picture. Yes, things were very good for him . . . till the war ended. At that point, however, he was faced with “denazification” issues alongside increasing questions about his work and support of the Nazi regime. And that would lead to a number of trials . . . and even more questions.

Needless to say, Noack’s volume leaves one thinking . . . There is no doubt that students of the Holocaust and cinema alike will find this book unique and fascinating!

**P.S.:** Regarding a film’s capacity to incite violence, that, to this day, remains a debatable point . . . but Harlan’s *Jud Süß* most certainly made matters worse for Europe’s persecuted Jews!

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

# SEEKING THE TRUTH ABOUT A NAZI WAR CRIMINAL

BY ROBERT PHILPOT,  
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

“There’s a lot going on in *Lemberg*,” Otto von Wächter wrote breezily to his wife, Charlotte, in the spring of 1942.

For the recently installed Nazi governor of Galicia, they were indeed busy times.

His promotion to oversee the newly conquered territory — then part of Poland, now part of Ukraine — came in the same month the Wannsee Conference approved the greatest crime in human history, the attempted annihilation of European Jewry.

Over the next 18 months, on Wächter’s watch, the Nazis deported and murdered almost every Jew in *Lemberg* — modern-day *Lviv* — and the surrounding countryside. In total, an estimated 500,000 Jews were slaughtered in Galicia.

Wächter’s responsibility is of special interest to the British attorney, academic and international law expert Philippe Sands, whose grandfather’s family — some 80 men, women and children — perished in the city.

The author of the acclaimed 2016 book *East West Street*, Sands returns with a new project. “The Ratline” — a BBC-backed podcast — goes in search of Wächter’s story. A follow-up book entitled *A Death in the Vatican* is set to follow in 2020.



Lawyer, humanitarian and writer Philippe Sands.

But this is no ordinary investigation of the atrocious acts of a man who, as Sands concedes in the first of 10 gripping episodes, many people have never heard of. Instead, much of the drama turns on the extraordinary rela-

tionship between Sands and his accomplice, Wächter’s 79-year-old son.

Living alone in Schloss Hagenberg, a 17th-century baroque castle one hour’s drive from Vienna, Horst Wächter is surrounded by

books, letters, documents and recordings which, he believes, will prove that his father was a good and decent man who did his best in tragic and difficult circumstances.

He is also convinced that Wächter’s

death in 1949 — indicted for war crimes in 1946, he hid for three years high in the Alps, and then escaped to Rome, where he was assisted by a highly placed Catholic bishop — was no accident, but took place on the orders of Josef Stalin.

As the programs unfold, Horst clings grimly to the hope that he can convince Sands that Otto von Wächter is not the man which the evidence overwhelmingly shows him to be.

“The Ratline,” described by one newspaper as “the hunt for the monstrous Nazi that’s got the nation hooked,” has proven to be something of a hit. After the podcast was launched, it swiftly soared to No. 1 in Britain’s daily iTunes chart and then remained in the top five. One critic deemed it “scholarly, revelatory, dramatic and intriguing.”

Its popularity is unsurprising. Aside from the UK’s seemingly insatiable appetite for stories related to World War II, Wächter’s tale is one of love, betrayal, unspeakable crimes and denial. It takes listeners on a journey from Austrian castles to Alpine hide-

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# TO AUSCHWITZ AND BACK

(Continued from page 3)

She was a big woman in a skirt and jacket. Josef looked at her long, blond hair, and the woman kneeled in front of him. She took him by the hand and led him back to the pile of clothes.

## CHOCOLATE OR DEATH

“Get your things,” the woman told him. He heard someone call her “Katya.” Josef saw hundreds of pairs of shoes, but he found his pair of white shoes with laces and his coat with the spoon still in the pocket.

“This is it,” Salomonovic says in Vienna, opening a worn-out perfume package to reveal a small, steel spoon. “It saved my life, but we’ll get to that.”

The *kapo* woman in Auschwitz hugged him after he had gotten dressed and put something in his mouth. It was sweet and melted on his tongue. It was the first time Josef had ever tasted chocolate. The woman took him by the hand and led him into the barracks, where the shivering women were waiting. His shoelaces were untied. In the ghetto, his mother had tied them for him every morning.

Six-year-old Josef had arrived at a place where the guards would lead some of the children into the gas chambers and give chocolate to others. There was an orchestra that played Chopin and a doctor who had an eye collection. In the commandant’s garden, there were two turtles named Dilla and Jumbo and a river that was black with ash on some days.

In talking about Auschwitz, Josef Salomonovic pauses and says: “It’s beyond comprehension.”

The guard led him into the barrack with the naked women, but he still couldn’t see his mother. All the women were shaved and they were all thin. But then a woman stepped forward, kneeled down on the wooden floor, grabbed his shoelaces and tied them. Josef had found his mother again.

Together, they traveled in a group the Germans called a “closed transport.” They had been chosen for labor — Auschwitz had just been a stop on the journey. A couple of days later, their train rolled into the *Stutthof* concentration camp near *Danzig*, today the Polish city of *Gdansk*. Josef’s brother and father were also there, in the men’s camp.

## SOCKS FOR JOSEPH

The nights grew colder. When the SS called the prisoners into the yard every morning at 5 a.m. to be counted, Josef would shiver from the cold. He was so small that he would stand between his mother’s legs because it was warmer. He doesn’t know why the Germans let him live — they murdered almost all the other children in the concentration camps.

After a couple of weeks, Josef’s mother learned that his father had

been killed on a concrete table with an injection of phenol in his heart. His mother went to the guard in her barrack and asked that Michal be brought to her. And she requested socks for Josef.

Salomonovic interrupts his story, looks up briefly and laughs as though there is something humorous in the vignette. “She was so brave,” he says.

A concentration camp was a place where people would be beat to death for merely looking at a *kapo*. It was not the kind of place where prisoners could make demands.

Still, the day after Josef’s mother



Josef Salomonovic with “Frau Anna,” the granddaughter of the man and woman who offered him shelter seven decades ago. He promised Frau Anna’s mother that he would regularly come back to the farmhouse to check on a crooked apple tree in the yard.

made her request, Michal came into the barrack. He was shivering and said: “Father is dead.” She took Michal into her arms and then went to the guard. “And the socks?” she asked.

As punishment for the question, the guard forced her to do knee bends. A rather absurd punishment when you recall that people in *Stutthof* were routinely killed for much less.

At night, as the others slept, Josef’s mother would take him by the hand and sneak into the guards’ bathroom. She would scoop water out of the toilet bowl and have Josef drink out of her hands. It was a risky thing to do. But a prisoner who obeyed all the rules would almost certainly die, since the rules ensured that prisoners got too little to eat and no clean water to drink.

In November, Michal, Josef and their mother were sent by train to *Dresden*, where they assembled bullets in a factory. His mother managed to convince the SS guards to tolerate Josef’s presence and got a Dutch slave laborer to write a letter to Aunt Berta in *Mähren* to ask for food. Aunt Berta was Jewish but had found refuge with a farmer. One night, Josef’s mother woke him up and whispered in his ear to be quiet. She then gave him a piece of bread thickly spread with butter and sprinkled with sugar.

In 2018, during his trip to the Bohemian Forest, Salomonovic stops off in northern Bavaria for a visit to the

*Flossenbürg* Concentration Camp Memorial, whose network of satellite camps included the forced labor factory in *Dresden*. He heads into the chapel, even though he has decided that there can be no God, and also goes into the small brick building located at the entrance to an area labeled on the map as the “Valley of Death.” Inside the structure is an oven about as tall as a person.

“Crematorium. No explanation needed,” says Salomonovic.

When he leaves the memorial, strands of hair are stuck to his face and he has dark shadows under his eyes. Salomonovic says that he is

understand, Pepek? Only when I’m gone.” When his mother crawled into the basement, Josef waited above, looking at the smoking city and thinking about how sweet the sugar would be. He rubbed his fingers so often on the matchbox that its label had been rubbed away by the time he pulled it out of his pocket. His mother survived the day, and Josef, his mother and his brother ate the sugar together.

The SS sent them to a camp in *Pirna* and then back to *Dresden* before shipping them to *Zwodau*, another subcamp in the *Flossenbürg* network. Josef was hungry. His mother showed him how to rasp a raw potato with a spoon so that he could eat it even without teeth.

## WINTER

Josef began getting cysts on his body as big as strawberries and filled with blood and pus. They hurt, particularly when he was lying down. There were no beds for the prisoners, and the cysts would burst and leak on the wood. His mother, though, put her son on her belly so he had something softer to lie on.

She spoke quietly to him and told him the day would come when he would have a bed with a real mattress. She promised him that he wouldn’t suffer from hunger any longer and nobody would beat him anymore.

One night, Josef started crying because his cysts were bleeding and the other inmates were saying that the child should leave the barrack. Outside, it was winter. Josef’s mother laid him on her belly, but he kept crying.

“Get him out,” said the other prisoners.

His mother took Josef out the door, filled a crate with wood shavings that she found somewhere, tore strips off her shirt to bandage the burst cysts, wrapped her child in a blanket and laid him in the crate.

Salomonovic still clearly remembers that night. He stretches his hands over his head toward the ceiling as he talks about it. He lay there, a small child, the pain keeping him awake. He got up and stared up at the heavens.

“Dear God,” he said. “Please let me die.”

He waited until dawn, and in the morning, his mother came out of the barrack with the other prisoners, and it was time to move on. A couple of SS men rigged up two horses to a cart and they all marched off to the south. Every now and then, a prisoner would collapse from exhaustion. On one occasion, a woman was walking next to Josef in a turnip field. The Germans shot her in the back.

## I BEG YOU

“I can’t go on, mother,” said Josef. So she picked him up and carried him. And when she couldn’t carry him any longer, she went over to the

(Continued on page 7)



# SEEKING THE TRUTH ABOUT A NAZI WAR CRIMINAL

(Continued from page 4)  
outs, from the bloodlands of Eastern Europe to the beautiful piazzas of Rome.

Moreover, thanks to Horst’s willingness to open his family’s archives to Sands, listeners get to eavesdrop on the relationship between Wächter and his wife. Their huge cache of letters provides a shocking insight into the mentality of a cold-blooded killer who signed documents consigning hundreds of thousands of people to their deaths — and who never appeared to evince any sign of doubt, regret or contrition for his terrible actions.

Sands first met Horst when he was researching the origins of international criminal law. That interest was both academic and personal: *Lemberg* was not only the home of Sands’s grandfather, but also of two of the lawyers who played a critical role at the *Nuremberg* trials. Hersch



Otto Wächter.

Lauterpacht introduced the notion of “crimes against humanity” into the *Nuremberg* Charter, while Rafael Lemkin invented the term “genocide.”

Sands was also interested in another lawyer — Hans Frank, the governor-general of occupied Poland who was tried, convicted and executed at *Nuremberg* for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Through Frank’s son, Niklas, who in 1987 published an excoriating biography of his father, Sands was introduced to Horst.

“Horst takes a rather different attitude to mine,” Frank warned the barrister. Sands, Niklas and Horst later joined together for the 2015 BBC documentary, *My Nazi Legacy*.

The charge sheet against Horst’s father is a long one. Wächter was born in Vienna, the son of a decorated World War I military hero, and an early recruit to the Nazi cause, joining the party in 1923. A lawyer, he was involved in the coup and assassination of the Austrian chancellor, Engelbert Dollfuss, in 1934.

Narrowly escaping arrest — he fled on a coal freighter bound for Budapest — Wächter spent time in Berlin before returning to his home city in 1938. When Hitler addressed the crowds in the *Heldenplatz* after

the *Anschluss* — “the most wonderful moment of my life,” his wife recalled 40 years later — Wächter was on the balcony just behind the *Führer*. Wächter then took a post overseeing the removal of 16,000 Austrian Jews from their jobs in public service.

When Arthur Seyss-Inquart, Horst’s godfather and the Austrian Nazi leader, became Frank’s deputy in Poland in 1939, he invited his old comrade to join him. Wächter became the governor of *Krakow*. While he was signing orders expelling Jews from the city and establishing the ghetto which incarcerated and entrapped those who remained, Charlotte plundered *Krakow*’s national museum for Gothic and Renaissance art and furniture, which German soldiers hauled back to the family’s palatial residence. Horst later returned some of his mother’s stolen booty.

In 1942, news of the first of two indictments against Wächter broke. *The New York Times* reported that the Polish government-in-exile had named 10 Nazis — including Frank and Wächter — collectively responsible for the death of 400,000 of its citizens. Wächter was, according to the paper, “especially infamous for the extermination of the Polish intelligentsia.”

Four years later, a second indictment, issued by the Central Registry for War Criminals, followed. Wächter, it charged, was “responsible for mass murder, shooting and executions under his command as governor of the district of Galicia.”

## THE NOOSE TIGHTENS

At the Department of Justice in Washington, Sands uncovered three documents which directly implicated Wächter in the terrible events which unfolded soon after he took up his post in Galicia.

The first — a memorandum issued just days before he arrived in the city — set in motion the deportation of economically unproductive Jews from *Lemberg*. The noose was tightened by the second document, signed by Wächter on March 13, 1942, which placed strict limits on the work Jews in Galicia could undertake. Two days later, Operation Reinhardt — the secret plan to exterminate Poland’s Jews — commenced in Wächter’s territory with the transportation to *Belzec* of thousands of *Lemberg*’s Jews.

But it was the third of the three documents which is perhaps the most damning. It is a letter signed by Heinrich Himmler after he traveled to *Lemberg* in August 1942. The visit took place at the height of the month’s *Great Aktion* against *Lemberg*’s Jews, in which 40,000 were murdered after the Ukrainian police systematically swept through the city arresting and transporting Jews to *Belzec*.

In it, Himmler writes: “I recently was in *Lemberg* and had a very plain talk with the governor, SS-Brigadeführer Dr. Wächter. I openly asked him

whether he wants to go to Vienna, because I would have considered it a mistake, while there, not to have asked this question that I am well aware of. Wächter does not want to go to Vienna.”

As the Department of Justice’s Eli Rosenbaum, a 30-year veteran of US government efforts to prosecute Nazi war criminals, tells Sands: “The Wächter case is the only one I’ve seen where someone was actually offered an opportunity to go somewhere else, to cease involvement in Nazi crimes, and actually turned it down.”

Himmler certainly seemed to approve of Wächter’s dedication. The governor remained in *Lemberg* for another two years, and, on his 43rd birthday in 1944, received a greeting card signed by Himmler. It is one of the family mementos — which also include an inscribed copy of *Mein Kampf* given to his godson by Seyss-Inquart — that clutter Horst’s home.

For Sands, there is “no real ambiguity about the responsibility of Otto von Wächter for these actions.” The evidence, he believes, is “incontrovertible” and, had he been caught, he would have suffered the same fate as Frank and Seyss-Inquart at *Nuremberg*.

Horst, however, is apparently unwilling to accept this assessment. He believes that there were two governments under the Nazi regime: a civil administration running day-to-day life, for which his troubled father worked, and an SS government, which bears ultimate responsibility for the murder of the Jews. He takes refuge in the apparent absence of any signed documents in which Wächter directly orders the murder of Jews — an argument which, it is pointed out by the Department of Justice prosecutors, Adolf Hitler’s family could similarly deploy.

“He acted humanely as far as he could,” Horst tells Sands at one point. “The thing with the Jews, he was not responsible. There were other people who took care of them. He tried, you know,” he says as his voice trails off.

## THE LOVING FATHER WAS A COLD-BLOODED KILLER

There is a surprising warmth — even, at times, joviality — in their relationship. Sands describes Horst as “warm and generous” and comforts him as the elderly man chokes up when reading for the first time a letter sent by Charlotte to the Catholic bishop who was with Wächter when he died.

But underneath there crackles an inevitable tension. As Sands bluntly puts it in the program’s opening episode: “I believe his father bears a significant degree of responsibility for the murder of my grandfather’s family. He thinks I’m wrong.”

Sands is an astute and empathetic enough interlocutor to recognize that beneath Horst’s belief that it was

“never quite Otto’s fault,” there lies a much more complex picture.

“His views on his father — a man he never really knew — are filtered through the mother he loved and, I think it can fairly be said, worshiped. For Charlotte, Otto was a shining light, a man misrepresented by history, a man who didn’t necessarily believe in what was going on around him but was powerless to stop it,” says Sands.

And yet, Sands admits that it is “immensely frustrating to talk to someone who is intelligent, curious and ... also open to knowing all about his parents’ past, yet at the same time cannot accept what seems to me to be so clearly true.”

Maybe, he speculates, “there’s some unconscious part of Horst that does want to get to the real truth, and that’s perhaps why he maintains his relationship with me.”

But what of the other relationship which dominates “The Ratline” — that between Wächter and his adoring



Hans Frank.

wife, a woman who shared, and never repudiated, his Nazi beliefs?

Thanks to Horst’s willingness to open his treasure trove of letters and documents to Sands and his small team, it is brought back to life in the program.

The letters are bone-chilling. In one from December 1939, Wächter moves seamlessly from telling his wife about the “lovely” concert he staged in *Krakow* to telling her about “not such nice things” which had occurred. “Sabotage. Nasty business .... Tomorrow I have to have another 50 Poles shot.”

Ever helpful, Horst jumps in with an explanation: “He writes ‘I have to’ ... Every army did reprisal killings. He didn’t decide to kill them. It was some judge from the Gestapo.”

In another, from August 1942, Wächter apologizes for his failure to write so often. “There’s been a lot to do in *Lemberg* since you’ve been away with registering the harvest, providing workers for the Reich ... and the great Jewish actions which are currently taking place,” he writes, signing off cheerily, “Much love to the

(Continued on page 10)



# TO AUSCHWITZ AND BACK

(Continued from page 5)

Germans’ horse cart and set her son on the back when she hoped no one would turn around.

After several kilometers, Josef heard a thunderous noise in the air, and a German yelled: “In the ditches! Air attack!” His mother covered the heads of both Josef and Michal with a blanket and said: “Stay down. Don’t get up. Don’t say anything.”

The SS men and the prisoners continued once the airplanes had gone, but Dora, Michal and Josef kept lying there. They waited and then jumped up and ran into a forest. Michal was crying out of fear. The three made their way over a ridge and saw a railway crossing in the valley below them — and a man standing there in a railway uniform.

“You have to help us,” Josef’s mother said to him once they had walked down to him. “I beg you.”

The man took her by the hand. They ran up a ditch to the nearest farmhouse. The farmer took one look at the emaciated trio and rushed them to the barn. He climbed up into the hayloft and hid Josef, Michal and Dora in the straw. Later, he brought them bread and milk. Josef couldn’t believe how good the milk tasted.

After three nights, the barn door opened and light flooded in. The farmer said: “The Americans are here.”

Josef went to the pond in the middle of the village, where an American soldier gave him a miniature airplane. “Keep it,” he said.

During Salomonovic’s return to this village this summer, he drives along the pear tree-lined alley and is quiet. “The Germans stole my childhood from me,” he says at one point. “I want to try to find it.”

**AN EXTRA LOAF OF BREAD**

It is a sentence that sounds a bit like a Steven Spielberg film, a sentence that seems completely implausible in reality. Just as implausible, perhaps, as a place where 1.3 million people were murdered simply because they were Jews.

When Salomonovic asks at the barn if the crooked tree is still standing, the farm woman’s grandson nods and leads him into the garden. It is an apple tree, perhaps the most crooked tree in all of the Bohemian Forest, with the trunk winding close to the ground a couple of times before heading upward.

When Salomonovic returned to the barn for the first time, shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the daughter of the farmer who had hidden him at the end of the war was still alive. She was an old woman, but she remembered those days. She said that her father had come to her and told her to bake an extra loaf of bread. She didn’t want to, but he insisted. Later, she said, the loaf disappeared — and that is when she realized that they were also feeding someone in hiding.

Salomonovic visited the woman on several occasions. Frau Anna, the woman in the blue apron who opened the door to Salomonovic, is her daughter. There is a bond between this family and Salomonovic that you can likely only understand if you have saved someone’s life — or been saved. When the old woman lay on her deathbed a few years ago, he went there and sat with her.

“The crooked tree in the garden,” the woman said, and Salomonovic didn’t know at first what she was talking about. “The apple tree. They want

to cut it down. When I’m gone, look out for that tree for me.”

“Of course I’ll keep an eye on the tree,” Salomonovic answered.

On the night table next to the bed was a small box with four eggs in it along with an apple from the tree. “For the journey,” the old woman said. Salomonovic kissed her on the cheek when he left.

Since then, he has been coming back regularly, even if the trip is becoming more difficult for him and he suffers from atrial fibrillation. He is taking care of the tree.

Before he heads back home, Josef Salomonovic once again goes through the door to the barn and climbs the ladder to the hayloft. The floorboards squeak under his weight. Salomonovic bends down, lifts up a handful of hay and then lets it fall again.

“Seventy-three years,” he says.

The Germans stole his childhood from him. It is nowhere to be found — and isn’t in the hayloft either.

After the war, Josef, Michal and their mother moved back to *Ostrava*. Josef learned what a peach tastes like and what a football is. Within just a few months, his teeth grew in. But for quite some time, he continued hiding a hunk of bread under his bed.

Even now, he still eats standing up when he is alone. Because, he says, nobody was allowed to sit down during the death march.

In his early 30s, Josef Salomonovic fell in love with Elisabeth from Vienna, a slight woman with black hair and a twinkle in her eyes. He told his mother that he was getting married. She went into the kitchen, turned on the gas oven and stuck her head into it, but Salomonovic saved her before anything happened. He got married,

moved to Vienna and took a job with an engineering manufacturer.

**TALKING WITH MOTHER**

At the end of her life, Dora Salomonovic was blind and lived in a care home. It turned out that the woman who had done so much to save her sons had been right. They had enough to eat, their mattresses were soft and nobody beat them anymore. In the care home, Josef helped her up and hooked his arm into hers. On this final day, they walked together one last time. It was in the hallway outside the rooms and they only walked a few slow, careful steps. But they walked. Dora Salomonovic died at the age of 88 on March 28, 1992.

Michal Salomonovic still lives in *Ostrava*. Fully 10,000 Jews lived there before Hitler came along. Today, it is home to only 40.

Of the thousand people shipped to *Lodz* with the Salomonovic family in Transport E Number 815, 46 survived the Holocaust. Today, three are still alive: Michal and Josef Salomonovic and a woman in Munich.

After Josef Salomonovic checks on the crooked tree, he drinks a Pilsner Urquell (“fantastic,” he says) and heads back to Vienna. Elisabeth is expecting him with stuffed peppers, his favorite dish. He then calls his grown daughter on the phone to tell her that he is fine. He named her Katya after the woman in Auschwitz who saved his life.

Salomonovic will eat his dinner, unpack his suitcase and go into his room. There, on the wall to the right of his bed, hangs a picture of his mother. He says he speaks with her in his thoughts every day in a language that only he knows.

## RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS HONORED IN VANCOUVER

BY MATTHEW GINDIN,  
PACIFIC CORRESPONDENT

The Consulate General of Israel in Toronto and the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem held a special ceremony to honor some of the Righteous Among the Nations.

The evening was full of inspiring and timely statements on the courage and moral clarity of those who stand against anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobic violence.

The honor was given to Dirk Kalkman and Klassje Kalkman and was received on their behalf by Peter Kalkman, Dirk and Klassje’s grandson, and Matthew Kalkman, their great-grandson. It was handed out by Consul General Galit Baram on behalf of the State of Israel and Josh Hacker on behalf of the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem.

Dirk Kalkman was a Dutch Reformed pastor who, together with his wife Klassje, hid a Jewish woman in their family’s household from 1943-1945, at great personal risk to them-

selves and their children. At the request of a fellow reverend who was the brother of the famous Dutch resistance worker Johannes Post, the couple protected and concealed Catharina Six tot Oeterleek-Kuijper at their home in *Moordrecht*, Netherlands.

Oeterleek-Kuijper was a Jewish widow whose husband had been a member of a noble family in Holland. She lived with the Kalkman family for the duration of the war, until the Netherlands was liberated in May 1945. The family created a false identity for her, calling her Tanta Ina from *Den Haag*, and as a result, she was able to play a role in the Kalkman’s family life and the community.

She died in her 90s in the city of *Soest*, Netherlands, in 1978.

Many members of the Kalkman family were present at the emotional ceremony, where Peter and Matthew

Kalkkam told the rapt crowd the story of their righteous grandparents. Peter Kalkman’s father, Wim (Dirk’s son), had long wished that his parent’s heroism be recognized, but he died in 2013, before he could see his dream come true. Matthew Kalkman under-



Matthew Kalkman, left, and Peter Kalkman.

took the task after Wim died. Together with researchers in the Netherlands, he was able to find evidence of what had happened.

Peter Kalkman told the audience a harrowing tale that was recorded by his father, Wim, who recounted the night that the Nazis surrounded their

neighborhood and searched house by house for hidden Jews and members of the resistance. Dirk Kalkman was hiding Tanta Ina, as well as two resisters, who were squirreled away beneath the floorboards, through a trapdoor underneath a large carpet.

Wim Kalkman remembered being questioned by Nazis about anyone being hidden in the house, while they stood directly above the hidden men and in front of Tanta Ina, who was seated with the rest of the family on the couch. Wim Kalkman’s sister, who was also in the room, had diphtheria, which frightened the soldiers, making them rushed and sloppy. They left without finding anyone and, as a result, the Kalkman family and their endangered friends survived.

“The State of Israel, the homeland of the Jewish people, sees honoring these courageous individuals and their acts of human decency and mercy as an almost sacred duty,” said Baram. “The people of Israel and Jews the world over will forever be grateful to them for bringing light and hope during mankind’s darkest hour.”



PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ANNUAL TRIBUTE DINNER



Robert A. Book, Chairman of the ASYV Leonard Wilf, Israeli ambassador to the UN Danny Danon, and Mark Wilf.



Dinner Chair Mark Moskowitz.



Honorees Celina and Marvin Zborowski.



Honorees Adina and Lawrence Burian.



Jack and Paula Gora with grandsons Sam (l) and Jonathan (r).



Celebrating life.



# INNER OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM



Yityish “Titi” Aynaw, Miss Israel 2013.



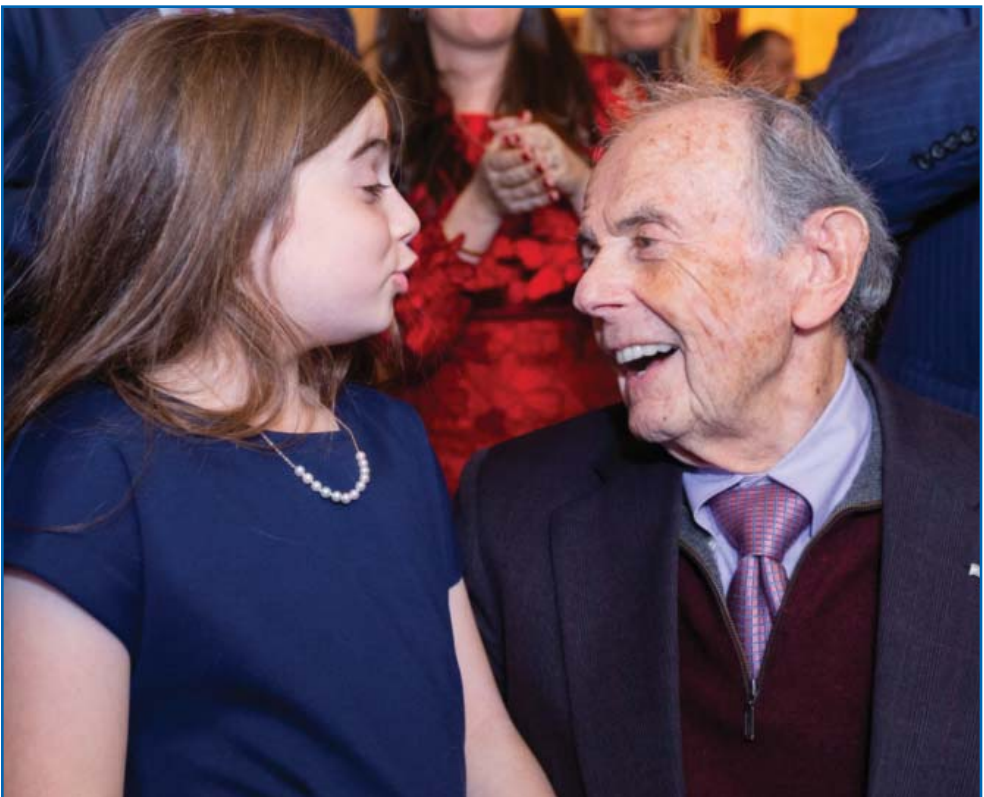
Arianna Afsar.



Master of Ceremonies Jill Martin.



Executive director of ASYV Ron Meier; Steven Baral, ASYV board member; honoree Adina Burian; Director of Institutional Advancement — Western Region ASYV William S. Bernstein.



Andrew Burian with granddaughter Erin.



Marvin Zborowski with grandsons Michael (l) and Jeremy (r).



ASYV board members and past YLA co-chairs Abbi Halpern and Barry Levine.



## SEEKING THE TRUTH ABOUT A NAZI WAR CRIMINAL

(Continued from page 6)

children. Lots of love.” Two weeks later, the Jews are in Wächter’s thoughts again. “Things are going very slowly in the garden, unfortunately,” he tells Charlotte. “There’s not much labor around. The Jews are being deported in increasing

Hudal was at the heart of the ratlines — the effort to assist Nazi war criminals in escaping capture and ferret them to safe havens such as Argentina. Wächter was soon sheltered at Vigna Pia, a monastery and orphanage. Flicking through its guest book, Sands easily identifies the



Horst Wächter talks about his father SS officer Otto Gustav von Wächter’s actions during the Holocaust in *What Our Fathers Did: A Nazi Legacy*.

numbers and it’s hard to get hold of powder for the tennis court.”

In the last years of her life, Charlotte began a great effort — taken up on her death by Horst — to redeem her husband’s reputation.

She recorded hours of tapes about the couple’s lives, interviewed friends, and sat down with a German journalist who was interested in Wächter’s mysterious death in Rome.

Never revealed before, the tapes show how Charlotte aided and abetted Wächter as he evaded justice by hiding high in the Austrian Alps along with a young SS officer he hooked up with when the two men found themselves in Italy at the war’s end.

Emboldened, the couple and some of their children spent an idyllic month together in the summer of 1948 in a rented hut. Wächter even rejoined the family in *Salzburg* that Christmas, although fear of exposure led him to leave for Italy in the new year.

In April 1949, Wächter arrived in Rome. He traveled under a new identity: Alfredo Reinhardt, the surname eerily — but maybe deliberately — echoing the operation against the Polish Jews.

### THE HEART OF THE RATLINES

Wächter’s letters reveal that, among others, he had the assistance of “a religious gentleman” who told him that his “case was well-known to him.” That man was Bishop Alois Hudal, a Nazi sympathizer, anti-Semite and fanatical anti-Communist who ran a German seminary in Rome and was close to the late Pope, Pius XI.

names of other notorious murderers — such as Walter Rauff, the inventor of the mobile gas chamber — who stayed there.

By July 1949, Wächter’s fortunes had taken a turn for the better. He had, somewhat bizarrely, managed to find occasional work as a film extra — he appeared in the dramatization of the Verdi opera *La Forza del Destino* — and planning for his escape from Europe was under way.

But, hours after enjoying lunch and a swim in Lake Albano with a man he identified to Charlotte as “an old comrade,” Wächter fell desperately ill. He died in the arms of Hudal days later, telling the bishop he had been poisoned. Charlotte arrived in Rome to find her dead husband’s blackened body, “all burnt inside, he was like a Negro.”

Sands unmasks the “old comrade” as Karl Hass, one of the ringleaders of the notorious 1944 Ardeatine massacre. With the help of declassified CIA files, he further reveals that Hass was, by 1949, the chief source for an American spy ring — Project Los Angeles — which used former Nazis, Vatican officials and neo-Fascists to gather information on the then-growing Communist threat in Italy. Another of its sources was Hudal.

Hass apparently made an offer at their lunch which Wächter refused. It seems unlikely that Wächter — a virulent anti-Communist — would have turned down an offer to work for the Americans. CIA files offer a tantalizing clue: Hass was also suspected by some “close acquaintances” of

being a Soviet double agent.

The tapes underline Charlotte’s desperate but futile attempt to cast Wächter’s actions in a more heroic light. “He always took pleasure in doing what he thought was the right thing to do,” she attests. “Until the very end he refused to compromise his conscience but sometimes he just couldn’t do what he thought was right.”

“Everyone has light and dark sides,” Wächter’s wife suggests at another point. “We should only see the good things in everyone.”

These words might carry an ounce more weight if Charlotte’s diaries did not expose her as an unrepentant Nazi. After watching TV coverage of the 40th anniversary of the *Anschluss* in March 1978, she writes: “I’m glad and thankful to God that I was able to live through this time.”

Central to Charlotte’s effort is the notion that Wächter was murdered. It is this to which, perhaps more than anything else, Horst hangs on doggedly throughout the programs.

It is possible, as Horst appears to believe, that Hass poisoned Wächter, perhaps after he turned down an approach to join him in working for the Soviets. It is also possible, the thriller writer John le Carré tells Sands, that Jewish “vengeance teams” tracked down and murdered Wächter. Le Carré, who was a British intelligence officer in Austria after the war, admits that he “admired” such efforts to exact the justice so many had escaped.

A further explanation offered by a UK-based liver specialist, that Wächter succumbed to a fatal bout of Weil’s disease after swimming in the filthy waters of the Tiber, does not meet Horst’s desire for his father to have met a rather more meaningful and heroic end.

But this detective story pales beside the great mystery: What kind of man does Horst really believe his father was?

Buried — probably unintentionally — among the family papers he allows Sands to riffle through, there is a 2007 email from Horst to his new nephew: “Attached are the two letters from your grandfather that I’ve compared with Himmler’s diary. They incriminate him more than any other documents I have encountered. It’s no use. He knew everything. Saw everything. And agreed in principle. A sad uncle Horst.”

Confronted by Sands, Horst clams up and mutters, “I wouldn’t say that my father killed 800,000 Jews or something like that.”

All of which leaves his English friend, whose grandfather’s family was murdered seven decades ago in *Lemberg*, to wonder: How many is too many?

## DUTCH DIPLOMAT WAS PUNISHED FOR SAVING JEWS IN THE HOLOCAUST

The Dutch Foreign Ministry reprimanded a diplomat who overstepped his authority to save thousands of Jews from the Holocaust and deprived him of royal honors, new research shows.

The research into the treatment of Jan Zwartendijk, who was honorary consul of the Netherlands in what today is Lithuania, is part of a Dutch-language book published recently on his actions, titled *The Righteous*, by biographer Jan Brokken.

Zwartendijk served in *Kaunas* as consul at the same time that Chiune Sugihara was there to represent Imperial Japan.

Largely eclipsed by Sugihara, Zwartendijk was the initiator and chief facilitator of the rescue of more than 2,000 Jews by the two diplomats. Sugihara gave the refugees, who were fleeing German occupation, transit visas that enabled them to enter the Soviet Union. But they would have been unusable had Zwartendijk not given them destination visas to Curaçao, then a Caribbean island colony of the Netherlands. Some of those rescued by Zwartendijk nicknamed him “the angel of Curaçao.”

Both men acted without approval from their superiors. Unlike Sugihara, Zwartendijk risked his own life, as well as those of his wife and their three small children, who were all living under Nazi occupation.

Yet Zwartendijk, who died in 1976, was “given a dressing down” after his actions became known by a top Foreign Ministry official, Joseph Luns, who later became the head of NATO. Zwartendijk’s children said their father was deeply offended by how he had been treated.

Sjoerd Sjoerdsma, a Dutch lawmaker, said in a statement that the Foreign Ministry should apologize for how it had treated Zwartendijk, whom Israel in 1997 recognized as a Righteous Among the Nations.

“Jan Zwartendijk deserved a statue, not a reprimand,” the ANP news agency quoted Sjoerdsma as saying. “High time for an exoneration and apology to his descendants. I hope Foreign Minister Stef Blok does it.”

The ministry declined to comment on whether it is considering an apology. A spokesperson told the news agency that Zwartendijk’s actions “are without blemish” and added that the Dutch state co-funded a monument celebrating his actions in Lithuania.

The book also suggests that an unnamed ministry official intervened with the Dutch royal house to prevent Zwartendijk from being knighted for reasons unrelated to the war — he was a senior executive at the Dutch Philips electronics firm — for his stepping out of line during World War II.



# HOW AN ASTONISHING HOLOCAUST DIARY RESURFACED IN AMERICA

*Hidden for 70 years, a new invaluable contribution to Holocaust literature — the diary of Renia Spiegel — was rediscovered inside a desk in New York.*

BY ROBIN SHULMAN,  
SMITHSONIAN.COM

On January 31, 1939, a 15-year-old Jewish girl sat down with a school notebook in a cramped apartment in a provincial town in Poland and began writing about her life. She missed her mother, who lived far away in Warsaw. She missed her father, who was ensconced on the farm where her family once lived. She missed that home, where she had spent the happiest days of her life.

The girl's name was Renia Spiegel, and she and her sister, Ariana, were staying with their grandparents that August when the Germans and the Russians divided Poland. Their mother was stranded on the Nazi side; her daughters were stuck across the border, under Soviet control. During the next few years, their father, Bernard, disappeared and, later, was eventually presumed killed in the war.

Over the course of more than 700 pages, between the ages of 15 and 18, Renia wrote funny stories about her friends, charming descriptions of the natural world, lonely appeals to her absent parents, passionate confidences about her boyfriend, and chilling observations of the machinery of nations engaged in cataclysmic violence. The notebook pages, blue-lined and torn at the edges, are as finely wrinkled as the face of the old woman the girl might have become.



Renia during harvest time with Ariana and their mother in Zaleszczyki, 1936.

Her script is delicate, with loops at the feet of the capital letters and sweetly curving lines to cross the T's.

Readers will naturally contrast Renia's diary with Anne Frank's. Renia was a little older and more sophisticated, writing frequently in poetry as well as in prose. She was also living out in the world instead of in seclusion. Reading such different firsthand accounts reminds us that each of the Holocaust's millions of victims had a unique and dramatic experience. At a time when the

Holocaust has receded so far into the past that even the youngest survivors are elderly, it's especially powerful to discover a youthful voice like Renia's, describing the events in real time.

A diary is an especially potent form in an age of digital information. It's a "human-paced experience of how someone's mind works and how their ideas unfold," says Sherry Turkle, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who studies the role of technology in our lives. Throughout many continuous pages, she says, diary authors "pause, they hesitate, they backtrack, they don't know what they think." For the reader, she says, this prolonged engagement in another person's thinking produces empathy.

The history we learn in school proceeds with linear logic — each chain of events seems obvious and inexorable. Reading the diary of a person muddling through that history is jarringly different, more like the confusing experience of actually living it. In real time, people are slow to recognize events taking place around them, because they have other priorities; because these events happen invisibly; and because changes are incremental and people keep on recalibrating. The shock of Renia's diary is watching a teenage girl with the standard preoccupations — friends, family, schoolwork, boyfriend — come to an inescapable awareness of the violence that is engulfing her.

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Renia began her diary feeling alone. Her gregarious, saucy 8-year-old sister Ariana was an aspiring film star who had moved to Warsaw with their mother so she could pursue her acting career. Renia had been sent to live with her grandmother, who owned a stationery store, and her grandfather, a construction contractor, in sleepy *Przemysl*, a small city in southern Poland about 150 miles east of *Krakow*. Ariana was visiting her at the end of that

summer when war broke out. The sisters fled the bombardment of *Przemysl* on foot. When they returned, the town was under Soviet occupation.

Two years later, just as the Germans were preparing to invade the Soviet Union, Renia had her first kiss with a green-eyed Jewish boy named Zygmunt Schwarzer, son of a doctor and a concert pianist. Renia, Zygmunt and Maciek Tuchman, a friend of Zygmunt's (who now goes by

the name Marcel), became a kind of trio. "We were tied to one another and living each other's lives," Tuchman recalled in a recent interview at his home in New York City.

Just two weeks before her 18th birthday in June 1942, Renia described understanding "ecstasy" for the first time with Zygmunt. But as her romance intensified, so did the war. "Wherever I look there is bloodshed," she wrote. "There is killing, murder." The Nazis forced Renia and her Jewish friends and relatives to wear white armbands with a blue Star of David. In July, they were ordered into a closed ghetto, behind barbed wire, under watch of guards, with more than 20,000 other Jews. "Today at 8 o'clock we have been shut away in the ghetto," Renia writes. "I live here now; the world is separated from me, and I'm separated from the world."

Zygmunt had begun working with the local resistance, and he managed a few days later to spirit Renia and Ariana out of the ghetto before an *Aktion* when the Nazis deported Jews to the death camps. Zygmunt installed Renia, along with his parents, in the attic of a tenement house where his uncle lived. The following day, Zygmunt took 12-year-old Ariana to the father of her Christian friend.

On July 30, German soldiers discovered Zygmunt's parents and Renia hiding in the attic and executed them.

An anguished Zygmunt, who had held onto the diary during Renia's brief time in hiding, wrote the last entry in his own jagged script: "Three shots! Three lives lost! All I can hear are shots, shots." Unlike in most other journals of war children, Renia's death was written onto the page.

Ariana escaped. Her friend's father, a member of the resistance, traveled with Ariana to Warsaw, telling Gestapo officials inspecting the train with their dogs that she was his own daughter. Soon Ariana was back in her mother's custody.

Her mother, Roza, was one of those astonishingly resourceful people who was marshaling every skill and connection to survive the war. She'd gotten fake papers with a Catholic name, Maria Leszczynska, and parlayed her German fluency into a job as assistant manager of Warsaw's grandest hotel, Hotel Europejski, which had become a headquarters for *Wehrmacht* officers. She'd managed to see her children at least twice during the war, but those visits had been brief and clandestine. The woman now going by the name Maria was fearful of drawing attention to herself.

When Ariana was spirited out of the ghetto and back to Warsaw in 1942, Maria turned in desperation to a close friend with connections to the archbishop of Poland. Soon the girl was baptized with her own fake name, Elzbieta, and dispatched to a convent



This photograph of Renia, at age 17, was taken in the winter of 1941 in *Przemysl*.

school. Taking catechism, praying the rosary, attending classes with the Ursuline sisters — never breathing a word about her true identity — the child actress played the most demanding role of her life.

By the end of the war, through a series of bold and fantastical moves — including a romance with a *Wehrmacht* officer — Maria found herself working for the Americans in Austria. Almost every Jew she knew was dead: Renia, her parents, her husband, her friends and neighbors. One of her sole surviving relatives was a brother who had settled in France and married a socialite. He invited Maria and Elzbieta to join him there — and even sent a car to fetch them. Instead, Maria procured visas for herself and her child to have a fresh start in the United States.

After burying so much of their identities, it was difficult to know which pieces to resurrect. Maria felt Catholicism had saved her life, and she clung to it. "They don't like Jews too much here either," their sponsor told them when they landed in New York. Ariana-cum-Elzbieta, now known as Elizabeth, enrolled in a Polish convent boarding school in Pennsylvania, where she told none of her many friends that she was born a Jew. Maria remarried, to an American, a man who was prone to making anti-Semitic comments, and she never told her new husband about her true identity, her daughter later recalled. When she died, she was buried in a Catholic cemetery in upstate New York.

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# NAZI COLLABORATOR OR NATIONAL HERO?

## A TEST FOR LITHUANIA

BY ANDREW HIGGINS,  
THE NEW YORK TIMES

For the tiny village of *Sukioniai* in western Lithuania, the exploits of General Storm, a local anti-Communist hero executed by the Soviet secret police in 1947, have long been a source of pride. The village school is named after him, and his struggles against the Soviet Union are also honored with a memorial carved from stone next to the farm where he was born.

All along, though, there have been persistent whispers that General Storm, whose real name was Jonas Noreika, also helped the Nazis kill

into a public national shame.

"We have all heard things about what Noreika did during the war," Ms. Tamosiuniene said. "He obviously took the wrong path. But his granddaughter should have kept quiet. Every family has its ugly things, but they don't talk about them. It is better to stay silent."

Keeping things in the family might be a natural self-defense mechanism in a small, traumatized country that, since it first gained independence from Russia in 1918, has been occupied once by Nazi Germany and twice by the Soviet Union.

But the silence has only played into Russian claims of a cover-up and cast a long and sometimes unfairly dark

managed, despite repeated protests, to stay secure on his pedestal.

Appeals that he be toppled have met resistance from nationalists and the many Lithuanians whose relatives were deported to remote Soviet regions by Stalin or tortured by the K.G.B. intelligence service, crimes that blur the far greater crime of the Holocaust and often make them loath to condemn the actions of those who resisted Soviet power.

"They have built up a whole national narrative around fighting Communism that they cannot dismantle," said Grant Gochin, a South African of Lithuanian descent who has calculated that he lost 100 family members to the Holocaust in Lithuania, dozens of them in territory under Mr. Noreika's control during the Nazi occupation.

For many citizens of Lithuania and the two other Baltic countries, Estonia and Latvia, the all-important memory of the war and its aftermath is of the 200,000 people deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan from 1941 to 1949 and of the tens of thousands who took to the forests at the end of World War II in a doomed fight against rule from Moscow.

For others, particularly those with family memories of the Holocaust, this is an undeniable calamity but one far less horrendous than the systematic extermination of more than 200,000 Jews in Lithuania alone from 1941 to 1945.

"Every nation has to have its heroes. I understand Lithuanians on this. But how can we have heroes like

they are heroes," Mr. Fridberg said.

When a group of prominent public figures in Lithuania signed a petition in 2015 demanding the removal of the plaque honoring Mr. Noreika on the library in Vilnius, the Genocide and Resistance Research Center protested that "the contempt being shown for Lithuanian patriots is organized by neighbors from the East." In other words, Russians.

Portraying opponents of Moscow as Fascists has been a feature of Russian propaganda for decades. After the end of World War II in 1945, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians and Ukrainians who resisted their incorporation into the Soviet Union were invariably tarred by Moscow as Nazi collaborators or their ideological heirs, no matter their record or views.

President Vladimir Putin has further stoked this narrative, repeatedly smearing Russia's opponents at home and abroad as Fascists as he establishes reverence for Russia's huge role in defeating Hitler at the center of his campaign to revive national pride and his country's status as a great power.

Dovid Katz, an American authority on Yiddish who lives in Vilnius, said the best response to Russian propaganda would be for countries like Lithuania and Ukraine to draw a clear line between heroes and criminals in their accounts of the war. Instead, he said, they have often gone into a self-defeating defensive crouch.

"Just because Russia says something for the wrong reasons does not mean it is automatically wrong," said



A monument for Jonas Noreika in *Sukioniai*, Lithuania, the town where he was born.

Jews. But these were largely discounted as the work of ill-willed outsiders serving a well-orchestrated campaign by Moscow to tar its foes as Fascists.

Blaming Russian propaganda, however, has suddenly become a lot more difficult thanks to Mr. Noreika's own granddaughter, Silvia Foti, a Lithuanian-American from Chicago who has spent years researching a biography of her revered relative and went public in July with her shocking conclusion: Her grandfather was a fierce anti-Semite and Nazi collaborator.

Her unequivocal verdict has stirred emotional debate inside Lithuania and prompted a flood of "told you so" reports by state-controlled news media outlets in Russia.

"It was terribly shocking," Ms. Foti said in a telephone interview of her finding that her grandfather was a killer, not a hero. "I had never heard about any of this Nazi stuff."

It was also shocking for Jolanda Tamosiuniene, a teacher and librarian at the J. Noreika Basic School in *Sukioniai*, where Mr. Noreika was born at the end of the hamlet's only street in 1910.

What shocked her, however, was not Ms. Foti's discovery that her grandfather was complicit in the Holocaust — that was not really news to locals — but that a member of a patriotic émigré family had gone public and turned a private family matter

shadow on a country justifiably proud of its success in building a tolerant, democratic nation on the ruins left by the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991.

Virtually nobody in Lithuania is denying the Holocaust or the role in it of local people. Its horrors are taught in schools and denounced by officials. And lately there have been growing calls, at least from a younger generation less scarred than its elders by memories of Soviet oppression, for an honest accounting of the role played by some national heroes like Mr. Noreika.

Indeed, on a recent visit to Vilnius, the capital, Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, praised the country for taking "great steps to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust" and for its "commitment to fighting anti-Semitism wherever it rears its ugly head."

Ms. Foti's research into her grandfather helped prod the mayor of Vilnius into asking the country's guardian of official history, the Genocide and Resistance Research Center, to take a fresh look at whether Mr. Noreika merited his status as a national hero — and whether a plaque in his honor at the library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in Vilnius should be taken down.

But at a time of rising nationalism across Europe and heightened tensions with Russia, Mr. Noreika has



A carved log depicting Moses with the Ten Commandments on a hill in *Plateliai*, Lithuania, that was the site of the mass murder of Jewish men during World War II.

Noreika?" said Pinchos Fridberg, 80, a retired professor and the only Jew left in Vilnius who was born in the city before the Nazis invaded in 1941.

Clouding Lithuanians' judgment, Mr. Fridberg said, has been a deep fear of Russia and a widespread assumption that anything that puts their country in a bad light must be Russian disinformation, or at least worthy of skepticism because it comforts the Kremlin.

"Whatever someone says or does, so long as they are against Russia

Mr. Katz, who runs a website focused on the Holocaust.

Mr. Noreika spent the last months of the war in Nazi detention, a fact that his defenders cite as evidence that he was never really pro-Nazi. But his principal claim to hero status is that the Soviet Union convicted him of treason and executed him for his role in organizing anti-Communist resistance while working as a lawyer in Vilnius at the Academy of Sciences following the war.

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# HOW AN ASTONISHING HOLOCAUST DIARY RESURFACED IN AMERICA

(Continued from page 10)

Elizabeth grew up to become a schoolteacher. She met her husband-to-be, George Bellak, at a teachers' union party, and she was drawn to him partly because he too was a Jew who had fled the Nazi takeover of Europe — in his case, Austria. But for a long time, Elizabeth didn't tell George what they had in common. The fear of exposure was a part of her now. She baptized her two children and didn't tell even them her secret. She began to forget some of the details herself.

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But her past was not finished with her yet. In the 1950s, when Elizabeth and her mother were living in a studio apartment on Manhattan's West 90th Street, Zygmunt Schwarzer tromped up the stairs, Elizabeth recalls. He had also survived the war and also resettled in New York City, and he was as handsome and charming as ever, calling Elizabeth by her childhood nickname — "Arianka!" He carried with him something precious: Renia's diary. There it was, the pale blue-lined notebook, containing her sister's words, her intelligence and sensitivity, and her growing understanding of love and violence — delivered to this new life in America. Elizabeth could not bring herself to read it.

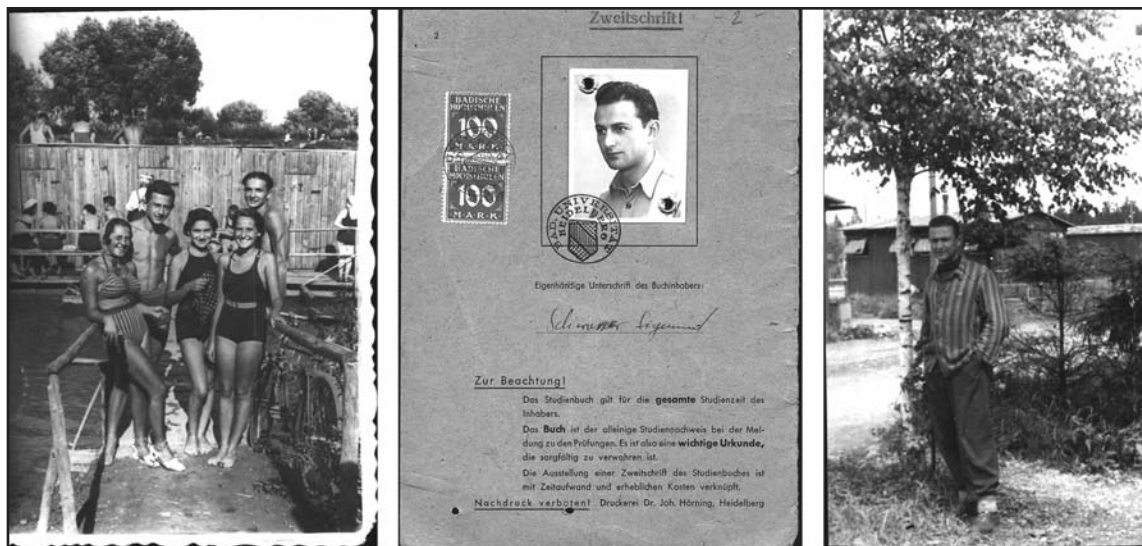
No one alive today seems to be able to explain the mystery of how, precisely, Renia's diary had made its way from Poland to Schwarzer's hands in New York—not Elizabeth, Tuchman or Schwarzer's son, Mitchell. Perhaps Zygmunt Schwarzer had given it to a non-Jewish neighbor for safekeeping back in Poland; perhaps someone discovered it in a hiding spot and sent it to the International Red Cross for routing to the owner. After the war, photos, personal items and documents reached survivors in all sorts of circuitous ways.

What's known is that by the time Schwarzer appeared with the diary, he'd survived Auschwitz-Birkenau, Landsberg and other camps. In a testimony recorded in 1986, now on file at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Schwarzer said that Josef Mengele, the famous death camp doctor, personally examined him — and decided to let him live. Another time, he said, he was to be put to death for stealing clothes when a girlfriend showed up to pay a diamond for his release.

His camp was liberated in the spring of 1945. By the autumn of that year, his son says, he was studying medicine in Germany under former Nazi professors. He married a Jewish

woman from Poland. After he finished school, they emigrated to America under the newly created Displaced Persons Act, the country's first piece of refugee legislation. After a stint in the U.S. Army, he had a happy career as a pediatrician in Queens and on Long Island. His two children remember him as gregarious, brilliant, funny and kind, the sort of person who wanted to taste every food, see every sight and strike up conversation with every passerby, as if surviving the war had only amplified his zest for life.

But as he gained more distance from the past, his internal life grew darker. By the 1980s, he often wondered aloud why Mengele had allowed him to live. "What did he see in me?" he asked Mitchell. "Why did this man save my life?"



Left to right: Zygmunt Schwarzer with friends and cousins on the San River in Przemysl in the summer of 1940; Zygmunt's medical school ID photo from Heidelberg; Zygmunt after his liberation from Lager Buchberg in Bavaria in the spring of 1945. Later in life, his son says, he obscured the tattooed numbers on his arm.

He had made a copy of the diary, and his basement office became a shrine to Renia. Her photograph hung on his wall. He would lay out photocopied pages of her diary on brown leather medical examination tables and spend hours poring over them. "He was apparently falling in love with this diary," his son recalls. "He would tell me about Renia. She was this spiritual presence."

Zygmunt Schwarzer's wife, Jean Schwarzer, had little interest in her husband's heartache — she reacted to the long-dead girl like a living rival. "My mother would say, 'Ach, he's with the diary downstairs,'" said Mitchell. "She wasn't interested in all of what she would call his 'meshugas,' his crazy crap."

But Tuchman, Schwarzer's childhood friend, understood the need to reconnect with the past later in life. "We were clamoring for some attachment and the desire to see a common thread," he explained recently. Survivors often sought out artifacts as a kind of anchor, he said, to feel that "we were not just floating in the atmosphere."

Zygmunt's son Mitchell took up the mantle of investigating that lost world. He traveled to his parents' home-

towns in Poland and the camps and hiding places where they survived the war, and spoke publicly about their stories. He became a professor of architectural history, publishing *Building After Auschwitz* and other articles about the Holocaust and architecture.

Zygmunt Schwarzer died from a stroke in 1992. Before his death, he had made a last contribution to Renia's diary. On April 23, 1989, while visiting Elizabeth, he wrote one of two additional entries. "I'm with Renia's sister," he wrote. "This blood link is all I have left. It's been 41 years since I have lost Renia.... Thanks to Renia I fell in love for the first time in my life, deeply and sincerely. And I was loved back by her in an extraordinary, unearthly, incredibly passionate way."

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After Maria died in 1969, Elizabeth retrieved her sister's journal and stashed it away, eventually in a safe deposit box at the Chase bank downstairs from her airy apartment near Union Square in Manhattan. It was both her dearest possession and unopenable, like the closely guarded secret of her Jewishness. Her French uncle had always told her: "Forget the past."

One day, when her youngest child, Alexandra, was about 12 years old, she said something casually derogatory toward Jews. Elizabeth decided it was time Alexandra and her brother, Andrew, knew the truth.

"I told them I was born Jewish," Elizabeth said.

By the time Alexandra grew up, she wanted to know more about the diary. "I had to know what it said," said Alexandra. In 2012, she scanned the pages and emailed them, 20 at a time, to a student in Poland for translation. When they came back, she was finally able to read her dead aunt's words. "It was heart-wrenching," she said.

In early 2014, Alexandra and Elizabeth went to the Polish consulate

in New York to see a documentary about a Polish Jewish animator who had survived the Holocaust. Elizabeth asked the filmmaker, Tomasz Magierski, if he wanted to read her sister's wartime diary.

Out of politeness, Magierski said yes. "Then I read this book — and I could not stop reading it," he said. "I read it over three or four nights. It was so powerful."

Magierski was born 15 years after the war's end, in southern Poland, in a town, like most every other Polish town, that had been emptied of Jews. Poland had been the country where most of Europe's Jews lived, and it was also the site of all the major Nazi death camps. At school, Magierski had learned about the Holocaust, but no one seemed to talk about the miss-

ing people, whether because of grief or culpability, official suppression or a reluctance to dredge up the miserable past. It seemed wrong to Magierski that not only the people were gone, but so were their stories.

"I fell in love with Renia," he says, in his gentle voice, explaining why he decided to make a film about her. "There are hundreds of thousands of young people and children who disappeared and were killed, and their stories will never be told." This one felt like his responsibility: "I have to bring this thing to life." He began visiting town archives, old cemeteries, newspaper records and the people of Przemysl, turning up information even Elizabeth had not known or remembered.

He also created a poetry competition in Renia's name and wrote a play based on Renia's diary. Actors from Przemysl performed it in Przemysl and Warsaw in 2016. The lead actress, 18-year-old Ola Bernatek, had never before heard stories of the Jews of her town. Now, she said, "I see her house every day when I go to school."

For Renia's family, though, the goal was publishing her journal. The book was published in Polish in 2016. It was not widely reviewed in Poland — where the topic of Jewish Holocaust experience is still a kind of taboo — but readers acknowledged its power and rarity. "She was clearly a talented writer," Eva Hoffman, a London-based Polish Jewish writer and academic, said of Renia. "Like Anne Frank, she had a gift for transposing herself onto the page and for bringing great emotional intensity as well as wit to her writing."

The night her diary was printed, Magierski stayed in the print shop the whole night, watching. "There was a moment where I became cold," he said. "She's going to exist. She's back."



# THE TRAGEDY OF THE JEWS OF RHODES

**According to tradition, Jews lived on Rhodes even before the destruction of the Second Temple. The community survived blood libels, poverty and a world war, but in 1944 the Nazis sent the remaining Jews of Rhodes to Auschwitz, killing all but 200.**

BY ARIEL BOLSTEIN,  
ISRAEL HAYOM

It was a quiet evening in the old city of Rhodes as I strolled through the crooked alleyways, which were empty and looked as if they hadn't changed since the Middle Ages. Suddenly, I heard scraps of a conversation that bounced off the stones. It wasn't in Greek or in any other language spoken by the tourists that visit this Greek island. When I got closer to the speakers, I saw two elderly people sitting on a low step leading to a courtyard. Now I could hear the words clearly, and there was no doubt — they were speaking Ladino.

When I approached them, I saw in the moonlight that one of them had a number tattooed on his arm. The numerals were faded. That is how I made the acquaintance of Samuel Modiano. When he was 13 and a half, Samuel (Sami) and his family were caught and sent to Auschwitz. He was lucky enough to be tall, and he was chosen for hard labor rather than the gas chamber. Sami survived, and after the war he found himself in Italy. Like all the Jews of Rhodes who survived the war (other than one woman, one of his cousins), Sami didn't move back to the island. But some inexplicable force keeps drawing him back to where his family lived for generations.

Many descendants of Rhodian Jews, who are known among themselves as "Rhodeslis," visit the island every summer. Maybe it's the illusion that time has stood still in the ancient streets that tempts them back. You don't need an overactive imagination to picture how it would have been hundreds of years ago. Isaak Habib, who was born to Jewish parents from Rhodes after the war, travels here from his home in South Africa for at least five months of the year. Habib is a driving force behind the preservation of the legacy of Jews of Rhodes and the rebuilding of the Kahal Shalom synagogue. He oversees the maintenance of it and directs research into the community's impressive history, with its ups and downs. Isaak's own family history reflects what befell the island's Jews over the past century.

This is the oldest extant synagogue in modern-day Greece, although it should be noted that the Jews of the island do not characterize themselves as Greek Jews. They differentiate between Rhodes and mainland Greece, which annexed Rhodes only after World War II.

Rhodes was home to Jews prior to Spain's expulsion of its Jewish citizens in the 15th century, but little is

known about their way of life. Oral tradition holds that Roman-era Jews settled on the island following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., and some say even before that.

About 100 years ago, the Jewish community on Rhodes numbered about 6,000. The widespread poverty on the island prompted mass migration to the U.S., South America, and European colonies in Africa. By the end of the 1930s, about two-thirds of the island's Jews had left. It soon became apparent that they had saved themselves from the hell that was looming.



The Kahal Shalom synagogue in Rhodes.

The Germans occupied Rhodes and the rest of the Aegean Islands in September 1943 after Italy stopped fighting alongside Hitler. For months, the Germans did nothing to the local Jews. There were no public humiliations, they weren't forced to wear yellow Stars of David on their clothing, and they weren't shepherd-ed into a ghetto, as the Jews of *Thessaloniki* were. The relative quiet, which wasn't disturbed until the British began bombing the island (killing some of the Jews who remained), kept the local community ignorant of the fate that awaited them.

A year ago, Habib discovered that in April 1944, the Italian police on Rhodes handed lists of the Jewish population over to the Germans. The lists themselves were discovered in the synagogue two years ago. Habib's workers did not see them as important, and only when they were carefully reviewed did they turn out to be a detailed registry prepared in 1938 — including heads of households "belonging to the Jewish race," along with the families' addresses and the number of people living in each home.

On July 18, 1944, the local newspaper reported that all Jewish men aged 16 and over would be required to appear the next day at a building used as the headquarters of the Italian air force. The paper reported that they would be assigned work duties. The men obeyed. A day later,

women were instructed to appear to "receive instructions." The women who arrived at the building were given bitter news — if they did not return the next day with their children and valuables, their male relatives would be executed. Habib's mother wrote that they were not given a choice: "We were only women and girls, and we went directly in to our deaths." The women and children joined the men, and everyone was held in the air force HQ for three days.

At 2 p.m. on July 23, the Germans set off the island's air raid sirens. The residents, as expected, ran for shelter, leaving no witnesses. The Germans led the Jews to the port of

42 Jews, claiming that they were Turkish citizens. Ulkumen did not hesitate to approach the Gestapo and used Turkey's neutrality to demand that they be let out of the air force building where they were being held. The Germans complied. One of the lucky 42, a year-old baby at the time, continues to visit Rhodes from his home in the U.S. every year.

A commemorative plaque in the Rhodes synagogue courtyard tells another kind of story and lists all the local Jewish families who were murdered in the Holocaust. Among the many Spanish names (Alhadeff, Soncino, Capeluto, Ventura, Benbenisti), I find the name of a single Ashkenazi family. How could that be, if Rhodes was never home to any Jews of Ashkenazi origin? Habib tells me the story of the *Pentcho*, one of the ships that carried illegal Jewish immigrants into Mandate Palestine in violation of the British embargo. In May 1940, about 500 Jews, mostly members of the Betar Zionist movement, tried to escape Europe on board the *Pentcho*, which sailed from *Thessaloniki*.

After three months at sea, the ship's heater exploded, and it wrecked on the boulders offshore of the small Aegean island of Chamili. Some 10 days after the wreck, and an Italian patrol plane spotted the survivors, whose food and water was nearly gone, and carried them out to Rhodes. The Jewish refugees from Europe were put up in tents erected on a soccer field. Some perished because of the cold and the harsh conditions. Two others died while trying to reach Palestine, and the rest were eventually transferred to a concentration camp in southern Italy.

The possibility of being sent to Italy, which was Germany's ally, seemed a death sentence. So when the Pann family, whose father had a profession deemed vital on the island, was given a chance to remain on Rhodes, they were seen as fortunate. The family was happy to accept the invitation to stay. Sadly, the Europeans deported to Italy were unharmed, but the Pann family was sent to Auschwitz with the rest of the island's Jews and were killed there. A miraculous rescue wound up leading to their destruction.

Jewish communities with roots on Rhodes exist throughout the world, and in some surprising places — including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where Habib was born and raised. At its height, that community numbered some 2,000, but as the years went by, nearly all the Jews left.

Bit by bit, most Jews of Rhodian descent seem to be making their way to Israel. Habib sees his future here.

"Rhodes holds so much Jewish history," he says, gazing at the ancient synagogue.

"That's the past, happy and sad. But the past is gone ... and now all that remains is to be happy that we've started to control the fate of the Jews. In Israel, of course."



# THE DAY THE RABBIS MARCHED

BY RAFAEL MEDOFF,  
THE ALGEMEINER

In an era that has seen more than 400,000 people take part in a Women’s March on Washington, it may not sound very impressive that 400 rabbis marched in the nation’s capital in 1943. But numbers alone don’t always tell the whole story.

The rabbis’ march took place three days before Yom Kippur in 1943. The ten days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are among the most hectic periods for a pulpit rabbi, who has major sermons to prepare and countless logistics to arrange for the most well-attended services of the year.

So there was no small inconvenience involved for the rabbis who answered the call of the political action committee known as the Bergson Group and the Orthodox rescue advocates of the *Va’ad ha-Hatzala* to come to Washington to plead for the rescue of Europe’s Jews.

And their journey was likely made more than a little jittery by the fact that, just one month earlier, a new high-speed train on its way from New York City to Washington had derailed and killed 79 passengers.

Nevertheless, more than 400 rabbis put down their books, left their communities and congregations, and headed for Washington. Most came from the New York City area, but others traveled from as far away as Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh and Worcester, Massachusetts.

As the station master shouted, “Clear the way for those rabbis!” the protesters emerged from Washington Union Station and made their way toward the cluster of buildings known as the Capitol.

It was not only their numbers, but also their stature, that was noteworthy. The marchers were led by Rabbis Eliezer Silver and Yisroel Rosenberg, co-presidents of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis. There were notable Hasidic rebbes, such as the Boyaner Rebbe, Rabbi Shlomo Friedman, and

the Melitzer Rebbe, Rabbi Yitzchok Horowitz. And there were a number of younger rabbis who would soon become leaders of their generation, in particular Moshe Feinstein and Joseph B. Soloveitchik.

A columnist for the Yiddish-language newspaper *Der Tog* (*The Day*) was impressed by the reaction of passersby. As the rabbis in their “long silk and gabardines and round plush hats, moved along Pennsylvania Avenue ... there [were] absolutely no snickers, no smirks on the faces of the onlookers,” he wrote. “They did not gape or guffaw as almost any crowd in a Central or East European land most decidedly would have. They watched in wonderment and in respect. The traffic stopped, and here and there a burgher removed his hat. I myself saw many a soldier snap in salute.”



Fear of East European-style anti-Semitic mockery was actually a large part of the reason that the rabbis’ march was so unusual. It was, in fact, the only march in Washington for the rescue of the Jews during the Holocaust years. Many American Jews, as immigrants or the children of immigrants, were extremely anxious to be seen as fitting in. They worried that noisy Jewish protests might be perceived as un-American.

In fact, one Jewish member of Congress, Representative Sol Bloom (D-New York), reportedly sought to persuade the rabbis to cancel the march on the grounds that “it would

be very undignified for a group of such un-American looking people to appear in Washington.” The Jewish communal leader Cyrus Adler once referred to that attitude as “the ghetto crouch” — the phenomenon of Jews walking with their heads bowed so as not to draw the attention of non-Jews.

The rabbis were greeted on the steps of the Capitol by Vice President Henry Wallace and members of Congress. After brief remarks, the rabbis proceeded to the Lincoln Memorial to recite prayers and sing the national anthem.

Then they marched to the White House. While most of the rabbis waited across the street in Lafayette Park, their leaders approached the gates of the White House to ask if President Roosevelt could “accord a few minutes of his most precious time.” They wanted to present him with a petition calling for the creation of “a special agency to rescue the remainder of the Jewish nation in Europe.”

A White House staffer informed the rabbis that the president was unavailable “because of the pressure of other business.” Actually, FDR’s schedule was clear that afternoon. But a presidential meeting would have conferred legitimacy on the protesters’ pleas for US action. And Roosevelt’s policy was that there was nothing that could be done to help the Jews, except to win the war.

That move backfired. “Rabbis Report ‘Cold Welcome’ at the White House,” declared a

*Washington Times-Herald* headline the next morning. A leading Jewish newspaper columnist angrily asked: “Would a similar delegation of 500 Catholic priests have been thus treated?” The editors of the Jewish daily *Forverts* (*Forward*) reported signs of a new mood among some American Jews: “In open comment it is voiced that Roosevelt has betrayed the Jews” — a shocking sentiment in a community that repeatedly cast 90% of its ballots for FDR.

The publicity from the march helped galvanize a Congressional resolution urging the creation of a rescue agency. A Roosevelt administration official gave wildly misleading testimony at the hearings on the resolution. The embarrassing publicity that followed, combined with behind-the-scenes pressure from Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr., and his aides, convinced President Roosevelt to establish the War Refugee Board.

Although handicapped by the small size of its staff and the measly level of funding it received from the Roosevelt administration (private Jewish groups supplied 90% of its budget), the War Refugee Board accomplished near-miracles in its brief existence. It provided funds to hide Jewish refugees, bribe Nazi officials and move tens of thousands of Jews out of the way of the retreating German armies. It also recruited Raoul Wallenberg to go to Nazi-occupied Budapest and financed his rescue missions there. Historians calculate that the Board played a crucial role in saving the lives of some 200,000 Jews in Europe during the final 15 months of the war.

There is no straight line from the rabbis’ march to Raoul Wallenberg pulling Jews off trains bound for Auschwitz. But the march was an important part of the series of events that eventually led to that outcome. Seventy-five years ago, the rabbis proved that you don’t always need 400,000 people in the streets of Washington to have an impact — sometimes 400 will do the trick.

## NAZI COLLABORATOR OR NATIONAL HERO? A TEST FOR LITHUANIA

(Continued from page 12)

After regaining its independence with the breakup of the Soviet Union, Lithuania canceled the conviction and declared Mr. Noreika a heroic martyr, ignoring his role as an official under Nazi occupation, which resulted in the slaughter of about 95 percent of the more than 200,000 Jews living in Lithuania when Hitler invaded.

Today the country is dotted with Holocaust grave sites and memorials. One of the biggest stands in a forest outside the western town of *Plunge*, where Mr. Noreika served as commander of the Lithuanian Activist Front, an openly anti-Semitic group that was fiercely hostile to an initial Soviet occupation in 1940 and

cheered the Nazis as liberators the following year.

*Plunge’s* entire Jewish population of more than 1,800 was murdered within days of the invasion, mostly by local people.

Eugenijus Bunka, the son of a pre-war Jewish resident who survived because he fled to the Soviet Union, said Mr. Noreika probably didn’t kill Jews himself but still bore responsibility as an administrator who signed orders seizing their property and ordering their “isolation.”

“I hear all these people shouting about defending our patriots, but the people who have another view are all silent,” he said, pointing to one of the pits where *Plunge’s* Jewish residents

were buried after being shot or beaten to death by their neighbors.

When Ms. Foti started researching her book on her grandfather 18 years ago, she expected to produce a glowing tribute.

“My grandfather was going to be the white knight in shining armor, a pure hero from beginning to end,” she said. “I had always heard how he had done so much for Lithuania and had died at the early age of 36 at the hands of the K.G.B.”

Instead, after digging up wartime documents with her grandfather’s signature relating to the treatment of Jews and talking to relatives and others during research trips to Lithuania, she realized that he had been an

accomplice in mass murder. Mr. Noreika, she said, did not pull the trigger himself but was a “desk killer.”

She said he oversaw the slaughter in *Plunge*, where his family moved into a handsome home seized from its Jewish owners, and also in the nearby town of *Siauliai*, where he served as county chief under the Nazis starting in late 1941 — and where the main government building now has a plaque in his honor.

“Lithuanians have been raped three times — by the Communists twice and by the Nazis once,” Ms. Foti said. “All they know is that they were raped, that they are the victims. They have no more room in their psyche for any other victims.”





## 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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