

# MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE



Vol. 45-No. 4

ISSN 0892-1571

March/April 2019-Adar/Nissan 5779

## SURVIVAL, COURAGE AND RESILIENCE

The Education Department of the American Society for Yad Vashem and the Young Leadership Associates held our 21st Annual Professional Development Conference on Holocaust Education on March 24, 2019.

Our theme this year was Survival, Courage and Resilience: Lessons from Parkland. This year's program provided an opportunity for educators to consider the legacy of Holocaust education, pay tribute to the victims and lost communities, recognize the resilience and strength of Holocaust survivors, and transmit the lessons of this event to present and future generations. Included in these considerations are the question of the relevancy of this event and how to sustain this relevance to our students with substance and meaning.

The conference's impact continues to be effective and dramatic: over its 20-year history, the conference, through its thousands of participants, has touched more than 100,000 students. In 2019, over 180 educators attended the conference, which was organized by Dr. Marlene Warshawski Yahalom, director of education of the ASYV. The conference represents a collaborative effort between the ASYV, the Association of Teachers of Social Studies of the UFT, the Educators' Chapter of the UFT Jewish Heritage Committee, and the School of Education of Manhattanville College.

For the conference and its other educational works, the American Society received the 2015 President's Award for its contributions to social studies education nationally. The award commends the American Society for implementing best educational practices in using documents, inquiry, critical thinking and action for studying the Holocaust.

The Conference is named in memory of Barbara Gutfreund Arfa, z"l, a long-standing supporter of the American Society. It is generously sponsored by the Barbara Gutfreund Arfa Endowment Fund for Holocaust Education, which was created by Harvey Arfa and Caroline and Morris

educational methods so that students can better understand the complexities of the Holocaust.

Ms. Schamis is a Holocaust educator at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, and a survivor and witness to the events that took place at that school in

at Parkland and the Holocaust. She emphasized how we must learn from history and inspire our audiences to be proactive to ensure the lessons of the Holocaust are instilled in our lives.

Dr. Marlene W. Yahalom, director of education of the ASYV, opened the program and remarked how the charge before us in Holocaust education is to convey the impossible and the unimaginable events that took place. Our aim is to empower students and educators to draw meaningful lessons from these events and to think about various perspectives on the Holocaust that otherwise might go unnoticed. She briefly reviewed the educational strategy developed by Yad Vashem to study the Holocaust, and its connection to Yad Vashem as an institution, to lay the groundwork for today's speakers and workshop moderators.

The program also showcased the traveling exhibit, "No Child's Play." This exhibit was developed, curated and authenticated by Yad Vashem, and starkly portrays the experiences of children during the Holocaust — their coping, resilience, tragedies and survival during the Holocaust. The exhibit opens a window into the world of children during the Shoah. It focuses on toys, games, artwork, diaries and poems, highlighting some of the personal stories of the children and providing a glimpse into their lives during the Holocaust. The exhibition tells the story of survival — the struggle of these children to hold on to life.

Our annual conference aims to enrich educators with additional knowledge, resources and perspectives about the Holocaust and how to bring these important messages to the classroom. The legacy of the Holocaust is acutely relevant to understanding the resurgence of anti-Semitism and related issues that signal us to be aware and diligent to strongly address these matters and collectively work toward "putting out the flames" of hatred, bigotry and intolerance to differences.

In conclusion, it is not enough to learn from history or to simply remember an event. It is imperative to challenge, debate, discuss and teach so this event remains a contemporary issue.

(See photo highlights on page 8)



Eyal Kaminka, PhD, director of the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem; Marlene W. Yahalom, PhD, director of education, ASYV; Caroline Massel, Executive Board member, ASYV.

Massel as a tribute to Barbara Arfa's commitment to Holocaust education.

The keynote speakers at the 2019 Conference were Eyal Kaminka, PhD, and Ivy D. Schamis, MEd. Dr. Eyal Kaminka, director of the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem, strongly represented the work of Yad Vashem in education and its efforts to give the victims back a name, a face and a life story that was taken away from them. He illuminated the value of educating current and future generations using technology, and the need to reform existing edu-

February 2018. She shared her thoughts on connections between the Holocaust and the tragic events at Parkland in February 2018, and how our responsibility as educators includes teaching our students to become model citizens and advocates for social justice, and instilling values to emphasize their ultimate responsibilities as people.

Other speakers were Ron Meier, the executive director of the ASYV; Caroline Massel, Executive Board member of Yad Vashem; and Carolyn Herbst, the past president/chair of the ATSS/UFT. Ron Meier spoke about the Arfa Conference coming of age in its 21st year.

Caroline Arfa Massel shared touching and poignant remarks about her mother Barbara, z"l, and how the Conference has evolved to sustain Barbara's vision of Holocaust remembrance through education. Carolyn Herbst gave greetings on behalf of the ATSS/UFT, and presented a thoughtful discussion of her own connections between the events at Squirrel Hill in Pittsburgh, the events

### IN THIS ISSUE

French Jew risked her life spying against the Nazis in World War II.....	2
Jewish survivors in Poland and Israel remember homecoming.....	4
The final testimony.....	5
Stateless: when Germany deported thousands of Polish Jews.....	6
"Fear is a luxury I could not afford".....	7
Photo highlights from the ASYV YLA winter gala.....	9
In the shadow of death: the revival of the Jerusalem of Lithuania.....	10
Unlocking the mystery of Polish diplomats who rescued Jews.....	11
Why the U.S. bombed Auschwitz, but didn't save the Jews.....	12
Forgotten Holocaust history found in Dutch countryside home.....	14



# FRENCH JEW RISKED HER LIFE SPYING AGAINST THE NAZIS IN WORLD WAR II

BY JULIE WURTH,  
THE NEWS-GAZETTE

Marthe Cohn crouched in the bushes along the Swiss border with Nazi Germany, too terrified to move.

It was 1945, and the 24-year-old French nurse was just yards from the country road that marked German territory, watching as two armed guards marched back and forth along a huge field marking the only open stretch of border between the two countries.

Cohn, who is Jewish, wasn't trying to escape. Blond, blue-eyed and fluent in German, she had been recruited as a spy by the French army.

She and her Swiss guide had hid for hours in the nearby forest, waiting until evening when Cohn could crawl through the field to the bushes unseen while the guards' backs were turned.

Up until that point she hadn't had time to be afraid. She carried only a small suitcase with a few clothes, German money and a card with a forged identity — but no compass, map or radio.

Now, hiding in the bushes, waiting for the guards to separate again so she could cross into Germany, she was frozen with fear.

"I suddenly realized the immensity of what I was going to undertake," Cohn, 98, recalled in a recent interview.

She sat there for several hours until she summoned the courage to walk out onto the road. As one guard turned and saw her — just 4-foot-11 — she raised her right hand and said, "Heil Hitler." He asked for her identification as she held her breath.

"He gave it back to me without question. I was now in Germany," she said.

Cohn ended up providing crucial intelligence to Allied forces about German military operations, and later was honored as a hero by the French government with the *Croix de Guerre*, for distinguished service in the fight against the Axis, and the *Médaille militaire*, for bravery in action against an enemy force.

Marthe Cohn was born in 1920 in the French city of Metz in Alsace-Lorraine, near the German border. Her parents, Regine and Fischel Huffnung, had grown up speaking German, as the area was under Germany's control until World War I. Marthe spoke both French and German.

In her 2002 book *Behind Enemy Lines*, she describes a happy childhood growing up with two brothers and four sisters.

But there were disquieting signs. Her father was roughed up by police. As young as five, she heard the taunts of "dirty Jew" from neighborhood children.

As Hitler rose to power, and Jews began fleeing Germany, her family sheltered refugees as they made their way to Palestine, America or other countries.

Among them was a young boy named Jacquie, the son of her father's cousin in Germany. He was sent to live with them at age three after *Kristallnacht*, when his home was trashed by the Gestapo and his father narrowly escaped arrest.

In 1939, as the war heated up, the Huffnung family moved with other Jews to *Poitiers*, a university town about 400 miles from the German border.

But by the summer of 1940 the Germans had conquered much of France, including *Poitiers*, and life grew difficult for the town's Jews. First they had to register and carry papers identifying them as Jews. Their shops were marked as Jewish businesses. They were banned from most professions. Then their property and businesses were confiscated.

But the townspeople resisted in their own way.

Marthe and her sister, Stephanie, continued to help hundreds of Jews make their way to a nearby town that straddled the line between German-occupied France and the "free zone." Farmers there helped thousands of people escape by letting them cross into unoccupied France on their property.

The secret police had been watching one farmer in particular, and when they raided his house in July 1942, they found

a note from Stephanie meant for one of the refugees. They arrested her, hoping to get information on the farmer. But she refused to implicate him.

Stephanie, then 20, was sent to a prison for a month and then to a concentration camp on the edge of the city. She was a medical student and cared for children in the camp. The family made arrangements for her to escape with the help of two French guards. But Stephanie refused.

"When I reminded her that her mother needed her as much as the children, she answered me, 'If I escape, you are all going to be arrested,'" Marthe said. "She was right."

Marthe, who was the oldest child still at home, decided the family should leave *Poitiers* so that Stephanie could escape and they'd all be safe. But Stephanie died several years later in Auschwitz.

Marthe's co-worker had made identity cards for her family without the red stamp identifying them as Jews. She had initially declined, saying it would be too dangerous for him.

"He said, 'If I didn't help you, I could not live with myself,'" she recalled. "If I can save at least one family, I want to do it."

Marthe arranged for her family to go to the south of France, where her brothers were already living, with help from her nursing school classmates and her fiancé, medical student Jacques Delauney. A Resistance fighter, he was caught and executed by the Germans in October 1943.

The night before the family was to leave *Poitiers*, one of Marthe's classmates came to the house saying the Germans were arresting French Jews and insisted they come to her house. Marthe was reluctant, but "she started crying and told me she was not going to leave until we came to her house. I knew she saved our lives."

They made their way to a nearby town, where a friend had arranged for



Marthe Cohn in uniform in 1945.

a priest to help them get to unoccupied France. They had to walk past several French farms to the border, and Marthe worried that someone might turn them in, as the Germans offered enormous rewards for "denunciations."

"I approached the first farm. An old man got out of his chair and started praying for our safety. From farm to farm until the line where we had to cross into non-occupied France, all the people prayed for our safety. Nobody denounced us. It's the most beautiful story I know from the war," she said.

A few months after Paris was liberated in August 1944, Marthe joined the French army. She was initially assigned to be a social worker for a regiment headquartered in Alsace, near the German border. There she met the commander, Col. Pierre Georges Fabien, who was famous for killing the first German soldier in France in 1943. Once he discovered she spoke German, he asked if she would consider working for the army's intelligence service.

"I did not hesitate at all," she said. "I

felt that if such an opportunity were given to me, I had no right to refuse it. So many French people had risked their lives to save ours during the five years of occupation, I felt that it was absolutely my duty to do as much as I could to help our country."

She had many close calls but was never captured. Initially, she worked with the French army, interrogating German prisoners of war, and was able to provide valuable information about the Nazis' plan of retreat from Alsace to Germany.

Her crossing at the Swiss border in 1945 was her first trip alone into Germany. She had two missions: to get information on the German military and find out how civilians were reacting to the war.

She posed as a German nurse named Marthe Ulrich seeking word of her fiancé, Hans, a German soldier being held as a prisoner of war in France. The real Hans had been coerced into writing love letters and signing a picture to "My Beloved Marthe," which she carried. He was kept in isolation while she was in Germany to ensure he could not escape or warn others about her mission.

She made her way to *Freiburg* and developed relationships with civilians and soldiers, learning about infantry numbers and the regiment's next moves. She regularly walked to a farm near the Swiss border to report to her handlers.

Because of the Allied bombardment, there was no public transportation in the daytime, so Germans walked everywhere in groups. One day she joined a group that included an SS soldier who had just come back from the eastern front. He said he'd been wounded and was now being assigned to the Siegfried line, an underground fortress along the German border between Switzerland and Belgium.

"He told us that he would smell a Jew a mile away. But that morning his smell was pretty bad," she said.

He also talked about all the atrocities the soldiers had committed. To keep her cover, she pretended to be impressed, like the other Germans.

At one point the man fainted and Cohn tended to him. He was so thankful he gave her his phone number and invited her to visit him at the Siegfried line.

Three weeks later, she heard on German radio that the Allied armies were closing in on *Freiburg*. She decided to go to the Siegfried line to find out what was happening there.

It was a 10-kilometer walk, and when she arrived the area was empty. She saw a few remaining German soldiers, who told her that section had been evacuated. She hurried back to *Freiburg* to alert the Allies.

(Continued on page 5)



**“The opposite of love is not hate,  
it’s indifference.”**

- Elie Wiesel



Photo by Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images. Used with permission.

**We implore all leaders and citizens to refrain from hateful discourse, and to reaffirm the common humanity that binds us together.**

**Divisive anti-Semitic language and distorted Holocaust references voiced by politicians and too many others are deeply troubling.**

**We have learned to be alert and responsive to indicators of anti-Semitism and racism, before they deteriorate from alarming hate speech into destructive action.**

**Tragically, the world has recently witnessed horrible results of unbridled hatred, from Pittsburgh to New Zealand.**

**We urge you to join us in this battle for humanity.**

[yadvashemusa.org](http://yadvashemusa.org)

FIRST PUBLISHED IN *THE NEW YORK TIMES* ON MARCH 25



## “WHAT! STILL ALIVE?!” JEWISH SURVIVORS IN POLAND AND ISRAEL REMEMBER HOMECOMING

“What! Still Alive?!” Jewish Survivors in Poland and Israel Remember Homecoming.

By Monika Rice. Syracuse University Press: Syracuse, New York, 2017. 254 pp. \$60 hardcover.

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN

First off, it is important to note that “What! Still Alive?!” *Jewish Survivors in Poland and Israel Remember Homecoming* by Monika Rice investigates a time period that till now has drawn little attention. Making it the focus of an entire book has, as far as this reviewer knows, never been done. Thankfully, Rice does so, conscientiously documenting that which surely needs to be part of the Holocaust record. For, indeed, all that occurred was a result of what the Holocaust fostered and emboldened.

At the same time, Rice, an exceptionally adept researcher, also highlights another aspect in this book, making her volume especially thought-provoking and interesting to students of the Holocaust and history generally. For she emphasizes the fact that the historian-researcher must see beyond what is written and even why something isn't. Thus, utilizing “two unique collections of [survivor] testimonies that have not yet been investigated” — “testimonies collected between the years 1944 and 1950” in Poland “and currently stored

in the archives of the *Żydowski Instytut Historyczny* (ŻIH, Jewish Historical Institute) in Warsaw,” and survivor testimonies “deposited between 1955 to 1970” in Israel, to be found in the archives of Yad Vashem, Jerusalem — she makes us realize that just where and when survivors submitted the narratives of their Holocaust experiences matters!

In sum, Rice learns and shares with us how about a few hundred thousand Polish Jews returned to Poland after the war. Some were survivors from camps, others returned from the forests where they had fought or hidden, some returned from the Soviet Union. While there were Jews who came and then quickly left Poland when they saw that there was no one and nothing to return to (referred to as the “cemetery syndrome”), there were returnees who seriously considered staying in Poland and recreating their lives there. But that idea was soon “quashed.” The “hostile” and “surprised” looks Jews got from a considerable number of Poles, the sarcasm that greeted them, the shocking and

unexpected difficulties encountered at every turn — all communicated that they weren't welcome. For that matter, even “friendly” Poles who had actually helped Jews during the war encouraged them to leave . . . and

were often forced to leave themselves, fearing retribution for their altruistic acts from their very own countrymen! Then came actual pogroms, like the one in *Kielce* on July 4, 1946. That frightening event convinced “approximately 100,000 to 120,000” survivors who had returned that Poland was no longer “home” to them. In sum, in 1951, “when Poland closed its borders to all emigration,” only “70,000 to 80,000 Jews remained in Poland.”

Along with discovering all this through her diligent work, Rice also came to understand, particularly in utilizing the aforementioned archives — the one in Poland and the other in Israel — that in most cases much more was usually said by the survivors about their return to Poland in testimonies offered up once they were in Israel. Why? The fact is that the collectors in Poland were more interested in finding out what hap-

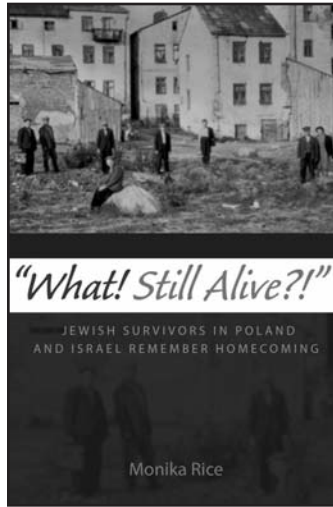
pened to Jews while Germany occupied Poland and what they had experienced during that time period. Few questions related to their return. Hence there was less talk about it by survivors, and little was volunteered. Another, and for the readers of *M&R* an even more telling, point is that many survivors still in Poland weren't comfortable talking about what had happened upon their return there. However, once in Israel, unafraid, most did — and in an “emotionally revealing way.” Interestingly, too, while in Poland, when Jews talked about being helped by Poles, most noted it but did not elaborate on the point.

Nor is the above all Rice could deduce with her close and fascinating investigation of these testimonies that, in fact, offer so much more than they initially appear to . . .

Needless to say, this volume is especially timely now, what with Poland offended by any hint of “sympathy” its people might have had with the Nazis!

On a more personal note, the Poles were not the only ones “disappointed” with Jews — few as they were— returning home after the war. Lithuanians felt very much the same.

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



## HUNTING THE TRUTH

Hunting the Truth: Memoirs of Beate and Serge Klarsfeld.

By Beate Klarsfeld and Serge Klarsfeld; translated by Sam Taylor. Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York, N.Y., 2018. 464 pp. \$15.50 hardcover.

REVIEWED BY PETER E. KORNBLUM,  
JEWISH BOOK COUNCIL

“Anti-Semitism,” Jean-Paul Sartre wrote, “is not an opinion. It is a crime.” Such a resolute view, quoted by Beate and Serge Klarsfeld, has spurred their fearless pursuit of Nazi war criminals for more than fifty years. Recently translated from the French by Sam Taylor, *Hunting the Truth* presents a riveting record of their dedicated research and action since the 1960s. Now grandparents at 79 and 82, Beate and Serge have continually sacrificed their own comfort and security to make sure that “former Nazis realize that they [are] not safe anymore.” The Klarsfelds admit to reservations about completing this extensive autobiographical project. Indeed, in 2012 they asked their editor to be released from the contract; they felt reluctant to revisit their past without possessing greater “talent for storytelling.” However, with the memoir accomplished, they have no regrets. Presented as alternating first-person

accounts, the resulting volume could benefit from further shaping and editing. However, it will surely allow their descendants and readers to know “if not who [the Klarsfelds] were, at least what [they] did.”

In fact, we do learn about the personal background of the Klarsfelds. Beate, raised in Berlin as an Evangelical Lutheran, had lost her faith in God by the time she emigrated to France in 1960 at the age of 21. Serge, whose father perished in Auschwitz in 1943, did not inherit a Jewish identity through religion or culture. In truth, he is not “a believer,” but his is a Jewish identity defined by the “Holocaust and an unswerving attachment to the Jewish state of Israel.” He says, “I do not want to pass on my Judaism, since I married a non-Jew.” As both look back on early formative influences, they give special mention to the White Rose movement led by the Catholic siblings Hans and Sophie Scholl. Arrested for distributing anti-Nazi leaflets at their university in Munich,

they and their associates were given show trials and then executed in 1943. As Beate says, the Scholls “were driven to act, to give their lives, [and] I saw myself in them.” For his part, Serge sees the Scholls’ public dissent as “doomed to failure, but it proved to be a fertile failure,” which

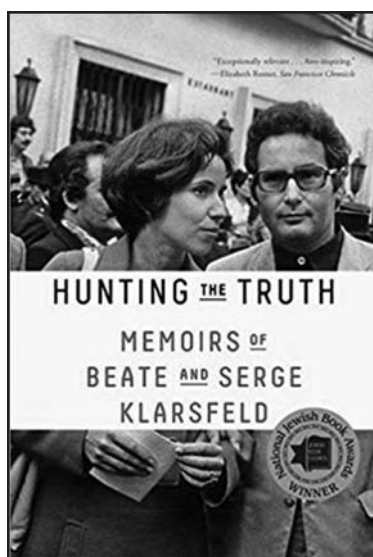
forged “the existence of another Germany.” To emulate the Scholls’ heroic example, Beate adds, one must recognize “before acting that success is not a certainty.” Instead, the essential point is to “try courageously to follow your conscience, with your eyes wide open.”

The Klarsfelds met on the Paris Metro on May 11, 1960, the very day

that the Israelis kidnapped Adolph Eichmann in faraway Buenos Aires. The “epitome of the Nazi criminal,” Beate writes, is the one “who fled to the ends of the earth to avoid capture.” However, their eventual focus would mainly be on those Nazi criminals who had remained in Europe, especially those who had slyly reen-

tered German civil society after serving the Nazi cause in France. The Klarsfelds’ relentless pursuit of the “Butcher of Lyon,” Klaus Barbie, in remote Bolivia, was distinctive but atypical. Their usual targets were the former “desk killers”: ex-Nazi bureaucrats in occupied France, who had been living “normal” German lives since the war’s conclusion. Decades of methodical inquiry and pursuit emptied out a veritable barrel of hiding snakes, from Kurt Kiesinger to Herbert Hagen and Josef Schwammberger. In later years, they helped to unmask the Nazi past of former UN Secretary General and Austrian presidential candidate Kurt Waldheim. The couple’s way of “acting scandalously to make people see the real scandal” was vividly displayed in Beate’s public shaming of super-assimilated ex-Nazi and German Chancellor Kurt Kiesinger in 1968. Just minutes after this dramatic “slap,” Serge was “already firing off a press release” that clearly “contextualized the act.” Added to their bold actions and publicity skills, the memoir reflects the couple’s tireless dedication to detailed investigation and research. Serge, and later their son, Arno, both used their legal training in this phase of the Klarsfelds’ work.

(Continued on page 7)





## FRENCH JEW RISKED HER LIFE SPYING AGAINST THE NAZIS IN WORLD WAR II

(Continued from page 2)

The townspeople, terrified of the coming invasion, were locked in their houses. Cohn went to the empty main avenue and waited for the Allied tanks to roll in, wondering how to signal that she was a friend, not an enemy.

"I had no documents to prove who I was. So I went in the middle of the street and raised my right arm as high as I could and made the V sign, the victory sign of Winston Churchill," she said, "hoping that they would understand."

As usual, she was lucky. The tank stopped. She asked for the officer in charge. He was French.

"I told him that I had very important information and to take me to headquarters immediately," she said. "Had it been an English-speaking Army, I don't know how I would have communicated with them."

At headquarters, she gave the suspicious commander the phone number of the intelligence service and "they assured him he could trust me," she said.

After a patrol verified her report, she was treated to a VIP dinner at French headquarters. The commander asked if she wanted to return to France, but she declined, saying, "My mission ter-

minates the day of the armistice."

She asked for a bicycle and the next day pedaled into southern Germany, a mountainous area the Allied armies had not yet reached. Riding down a hill, she saw a group of German military ambulances on the side of the road.



Parisians on the first Bastille Day under Nazi occupation, in 1940.

She stopped to talk to them, and the colonel in charge, a doctor, said they were headed into Switzerland and then Austria to avoid becoming POWs. She told him she had left Freiburg that morning to escape the

French army and complained that the German army wasn't defending its citizens as it should. He reassured her that the war wasn't over.

"He told me exactly where the remnant of the German army was hidden in ambush in the Black Forest, waiting

intelligence was relayed to the French army.

After the war, Cohn worked as a nurse with the French army in Vietnam, moved back to Paris, then in 1953 went to Geneva to live with her sister, Cecile, who had married a Swiss violinist.

She planned to go to England to join the World Health Organization, so she started taking English lessons. Her tutor's roommate was an American medical student named Major L. Cohn. They soon began dating, and in 1956, he brought her back to America. They got married in 1958 in St. Louis, where he was a resident at Washington University and she was in anesthesiology school.

They eventually landed in Pittsburgh, where he earned a PhD in biochemistry, and they worked together for many years on anesthesia research at the University of Pittsburgh hospital. She retired at 70, and the couple now lives in the Los Angeles area.

They have two sons: Remy Benjamin, who lives in San Pedro, California, and anesthesiologist Stephan Jacques Cohn of Chicago, who is named for her sister, Stephanie, and her former fiancé.

## THE FINAL TESTIMONY: FILM TELLS STORIES OF LAST HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

BY HARRIET SHERWOOD,  
THE GUARDIAN

*The Last Survivors* features some of the last people still alive in the UK who can offer firsthand testimony of Holocaust horrors.

An old school photo slides from the printer into Frank Bright's hands. It is black and white because it dates from May 1942. But since it was taken, tiny red and blue stickers have been scattered over the image.

Red for dead; blue for survived. Most are red.

Bright, now 90, points to a younger version of himself, a tall lad in the back row. Some time after the photo was taken, he and his mother arrived at Auschwitz. She was immediately sent to the gas chambers; his father had already been killed at the camp.

Bright spent years researching the fate of his classmates, cataloguing them on a spreadsheet. Number 24: "She had ginger hair as far as I remember ... sent to Auschwitz in October 1944, did not survive." Number 9: "A very pretty girl — I think I had a crush on her but from a distance. Sent to Auschwitz, did not survive."

In the BBC documentary *The Last Survivors*, Bright says: "I can't really communicate with others properly, because they don't know what I'm

talking about. I mean how many people in England have their parents murdered, or see a gas chamber in action? It has affected me, yes."

He adds: "You've got to forget about it, you've got to wear blinkers." If one got too emotionally involved, "I'd be sitting here crying my eyes out."

*The Last Survivors* features a hand-



Frank Bright, 90, is one of the Holocaust survivors interviewed in the documentary *The Last Survivors*.

ful of people, now in their 80s and 90s, who were children when they experienced the horrors of the Holocaust and the Nazi death camps.

There is no central record of Holocaust survivors in the UK, and the exact number of those still alive is unknown. But these are among the

last people who can provide firsthand testimony of what happened.

Arthur Cary, the documentary's director, said: "It's a film that will be very difficult to make in five or 10 years from now, simply because there won't be many survivors left, and those that are still here may not be in a position to engage in the

same way.

"I think it was a comfort to these survivors to know that, after they were gone, the film would endure and there would be an opportunity for future generations to hear their testimonies."

Some of those featured in *The Last*

*Survivors* did not talk about their experiences for many decades, believing it was better for them and their children to move on.

Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, 93, who survived Auschwitz because she played the cello in the camp orchestra, says the Holocaust was "not family conversation.... It doesn't fit into normal life, and I wanted to have a normal life."

Ivor Perl, 86, who returns to the site of the Auschwitz camp for the first time in the documentary — a deeply painful visit, in the company of his daughter and granddaughter — said he had been reluctant to tell his children what had happened. "But running away from it wasn't the right thing either." He adds: "I'm crying in my heart every day."

Many survivors simply wanted to get on with their lives after the Holocaust, said Cary. "But now they are thinking of the past more than they ever did before. Knowing they may only have a few more years to live, they are in a more reflective space."

"It's very traumatic for them to go over the past, but they also feel a responsibility to do something with their status as survivors. And the world is looking to them more and more because we are conscious they won't be with us much longer."



# STATELESS: WHEN GERMANY DEPORTED THOUSANDS OF POLISH JEWS IN 1938

BY LAURA F. DEUTSCH, AISH.COM

My father's cousin, Stan, was born in Poland in the early 1900s. Although he escaped Poland during the war and survived the Holocaust, his family did not. Stan

ment deported only men because it believed women and children would find a way to join their husbands/fathers. Sometimes, entire families — including Avram's — were expelled. Along the way, people died from strain and illness; some commit-

The Polish government finally allowed the Jews to stay in several border towns in a bizarre "no man's land." Food and medical care were scarce. Thousands of displaced Jews sought shelter in stables and sheds. Avram and his family slept on the floor of an old mill amid flour sacks and bins. Jewish organizations in Poland set up refugee camps while the Polish government tried to get Germany to take the Jews back.

"No one wants us," Avram wrote Stan's mother in one of many letters. "We have nothing and don't know where to go." Avram considered emigration, but it was a difficult and expensive process. Perhaps he should stay by the border in case the situation in Germany improved. Stan remembered his parents discussing ways to convince Avram to live with them. "My

we are together."

Stan remembered Uncle Avram and his family as being distinctly foreign. The children spoke Yiddish and German and understood only a smattering of Polish. They dressed differently and seemed sophisticated. Cosmopolitan. Even Avram and his Polish-born wife were disconnected from local ways. Stan's mother encouraged Avram to adapt, move forward and rebuild a life in Poland. Inspired by her optimism, Avram believed he could start again.

All Polish Jews were gone from the border towns by August 1939. And on September 1, 1939, Germany attacked Poland.

Most of us are familiar with *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, which the Germans stated was retribution for the murder of a German



A Jewish soup kitchen in the border town of Zbaszyn.

rarely spoke of their deaths; it was too painful. But sometimes he shared, and there was one story which always made him cry. It was about his mother and her belief that family togetherness would keep them safe.

In the early 1900s thousands of Polish Jews moved to Germany and Austria. They hoped to escape the poverty and anti-Semitism in Poland and create a better life. Stan's maternal uncle, Avram, was one of the hopeful. He left for Germany around 1915. Stan's mother sometimes wept because she missed Avram so much. Even though she understood his reasons for moving away, she thought him foolish. "He should be here," she insisted. "How can he raise his children among strangers? People are safest when they stay close to home and family."

By 1938, approximately 50,000 Polish Jews had moved to Germany and 20,000 to Austria. Many of them had lived abroad for decades and considered themselves more German than Polish, but they did not hold German citizenship. After the annexation of Austria in 1938, the Polish government feared a mass return of Polish Jews living abroad. It passed a law which affected the passports of people who had lived outside Poland for over five years. These passports now needed a special endorsement stamp to stay valid. Failure to get the stamp by October 30th meant loss of citizenship and closed borders.

The German Reich began deporting these "stateless" Jews on October 27, 1938. During this "*Polenaktion*" (Polish Action), 17,000 Polish Jews were arrested, detained, loaded onto trains or marched to the Polish border. In many instances, the govern-

ted suicide. When they reached the border, the Germans made them turn over all money except for ten Reichsmarks.

Polish border guards allowed the first group of Jews to come into Poland. Thereafter, they refused admittance. When Avram, his wife and three children were hustled off a train and marched to the Polish border, the guards denied them entry. Avram and his family — along with the other Jews from his train — hurried away from the border on foot, bewildered and frightened. German police forced them to turn around.

And so it went, back and forth, Jews treated like tennis balls in a macabre game. Polish guards screamed and brandished weapons;



Polish Jews being deported from Germany.

German police fired shots in the air and laughed; barking dogs strained against their leashes.



In the no man's land.

mother was heartbroken to imagine her brother homeless and vulnerable."

In November 1938, Poland agreed the Jews could stay as Polish residents. Avram and his family moved in with Stan's parents. Stan's mother was not blind to the existing dangers

diplomat in Paris. (Herschel Grynszpan, the young man responsible, claimed he acted to protest the *Polenaktion* and his parents' deportation to a Polish border town.) But for Stan, the October *Polenaktion* was more significant than the bombs and burnings of November. Although the German government had victimized Jews for years, the *Polenaktion* was a precursor to sudden arrests, roundups, deportations, violence, seizure of property and countries making clear Jews were not welcome.

Stan was forcibly separated from his family during the war. He escaped Poland and later discovered that his parents, Uncle Avram, and his wife and children had been rounded up on a single day, shot and thrown into a pit. What made Stan weep the most was remembering his mother's optimism and joy in Avram's return. She didn't understand that "no man's land" was not confined to the border and would soon come to their front door. She didn't realize the strength of family bonds was not enough to repel the evil.

Stan's mother prayed for the family to be together. And at the end — except for Stan — they were.

in Poland and the rising threat in Germany. But she told Avram: "Now you will be safe. We are safe when



## “FEAR IS A LUXURY I COULD NOT AFFORD”

BY RACHELLE BERGSTEIN,  
NEW YORK POST

Hanni Weissenberg sat alone, stone still, as the Gestapo pounded on the door.

On that cold morning in 1943, the German police had all but emptied the building of Jews while 18-year-old Hanni was at the doctor's with a badly injured finger. By the time she returned, the family she'd been living with — friends of her late parents, who had been sickly — were gone.

Now the Gestapo was back. Hanni held her breath, gripped the edge of the table and tried to block out the noise.



Hanni Levy as a young woman.

“Open up, open up,” they persisted. But Hanni — “a rather shy, obedient young girl,” she tells *The Post* with the help of a German translator — refused. “It was very difficult not to follow that order,” she remembers. “One has to really hold on, in order not to be obedient when such a strong demand comes.”

Eventually, the officers left. Hanni realized there was only one way to avoid getting captured and deported: she had to run.

But she didn't go far. In fact, she never left Berlin. As shown in *The Invisibles*, she and 1,500 other German Jews survived the Nazis' annihilation without leaving Berlin.

Hanni — now Hanni Levy, a 94-year-old great-grandmother living in Paris — is one of four former Berliners who share their extraordinary stories in this 2017 German film, which cuts between traditional documentary-style interviews and dramatized scenes of their lives.

After the Gestapo stopped their door-pounding and moved on, Levy cowered in the building's stairwell. Then — with nothing but her purse in hand and with the mandatory yellow Star of David sewn to her coat — she ran to the nearest subway stop, and showed up quivering at the doorstep of some non-Jewish friends.

It was the lady of the house, who'd

known Levy's mother, who gave her the simple idea that ultimately saved her life.

“She made me an appointment with a hairdresser,” says Levy. After a labor-intensive, three-day process, the once dark-haired Levy looked in the mirror and saw herself as a stylish, corn silk blonde.

To disguise her identity even further, she renamed herself Hannelore Winkler. “I said to myself, ‘I really have to change now,’” Levy says, during a visit to New York. “I'm a different person. I'm not a little girl anymore.”

Part of that transformation, she says, was deliberately letting go of her fear.

“Fear is a luxury I could not afford,” the auburn-haired Levy says today, her eyes vivid behind her glasses. “Of course, I was worried that someone would still recognize me. But if you are scared, you become insecure, and that is really more dangerous than anything.”

Over the next year, Levy stayed with a few families in the neighborhood, helping out with their children and doing whatever odd jobs she could handle with her worsening finger (“I wouldn't go to a doctor because they would take down your personal data,” she says, gesturing with the missing tip of the pointer of her right hand). She let people believe that she, like many German civilians at the time, had lost her home in a bombing.

When she wasn't working, she loved going to the movies, “because it was dark, it felt protected.” There, she met a handsome young man named Oscar Kolzer, who'd just been drafted into the army. Before he left, he asked Levy for a favor: Would she please keep visiting his mom, who sold tickets at the theater?

Levy said she would, and their relationship eventually became much like that of mother-and-daughter.

After the Allies took Berlin, she and Levy, then 22, moved to Paris together.

“It took me a long time to feel safe,” says Levy, admitting she found it challenging to adjust to her new home. She didn't speak French at first, and German was treated as the hostile language of the occupiers. She was also surprisingly naïve for her age, she says: “I hadn't lived. I had only survived.”

But in time, she moved on, married a Frenchman, had two children and returned to Berlin — “home” — whenever she could.

Levy says she's happy that *The Invisibles* pays homage to those whom she calls the “quiet heroes”: the Germans who risked their lives to help out desperate Jews with food, money, jobs and shelter.

“It was very difficult,” she says of her remarkable journey. “But the will to live is stronger than anything else.”

## GERMANY TO COMPENSATE KINDERTRANSPORT REFUGEES

HANAN GREENWOOD, AP

Germany has agreed to one-time payments for survivors, primarily Jews, who were evacuated from Nazi Germany as children, many of whom never saw their parents again, according to the organization that negotiates compensation with the German government.

The New York-based Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany said the government had agreed to payments of 2,500 euros (\$2,800) to those still alive from among the 10,000 people who fled on the so-called *Kindertransport*.



A commemorative statue in memory of the *Kindertransport* near Berlin's *Friedrichstrasse* train station.

About 1,000 survivors are thought to be alive today, with about half living in Britain, and the payment is seen as a “symbolic recognition of their suffering,” Claims Conference negotiator Greg Schneider said.

“In almost all the cases the parents who remained were killed in concentration camps in the Holocaust, and they have tremendous psychological issues,” Schneider told *The Associated Press*.

Following the Nazis' anti-Jewish pogrom in November 1938 known as *Kristallnacht*, the British government agreed to allow an unspecified number of Jewish children as refugees from Nazi Germany or territories it had annexed.

Jewish groups inside Nazi Germany planned the transports, and the first

arrived in *Harwich* on December 2, 1938. The last transport from Germany left September 1, 1939 — the day World War II broke out with the Nazi invasion of Poland — and the final transport from continental Europe left the Netherlands on May 14, 1940, the same day Dutch forces surrendered to the Nazis.

In all, about 10,000 children from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland were taken to Britain, about 7,500 of whom were Jewish, according to the museum. About half were placed with foster families, while the others stayed in hostels, schools or farms.

In addition to those who remained in Britain, many resettled in the U.S., Israel, Canada, Australia and elsewhere, Schneider said.

Today, survivors are at least in their 80s, and most continue to look back on their escape as the defining moment of their lives, as they were put alone onto trains into the unknown, saying goodbye to parents and siblings often for the last time, Schneider said.

“This money is acknowledgment that this was a traumatic, horrible thing that happened to them,” he said.

Some survivors already received small payments in the 1950s, but that will not bar them from receiving the new benefit, the Claims Conference said.

The Claims Conference carries out continuous negotiations with Germany to expand the number of people eligible for compensation.

Since 1952, the German government has paid more than \$80 billion to individuals for suffering and losses resulting from persecution by the Nazis.

In 2019, the Claims Conference will distribute approximately \$350 million in direct compensation to more than 60,000 survivors in 83 countries, the organization says. In addition, it will provide some \$550 million in grants to social service agencies that provide home care, food, medicine and other services for Holocaust survivors.

## HUNTING THE TRUTH

(Continued from page 4)

Well before the advent of digital media, the Klarsfelds were “poring over the microfiche every night” and compiling “precise dossiers” to document the crimes of their Nazi targets.

The creation of the FFDJF, the Association of Sons and Daughters of Jews Deported from France, has been the foundation for the Klarsfelds' life work. For Serge, the 1978 publication of their book, *Memorial to the Jews Deported from France*, is perhaps their most important act. Citing their rigor in documenting the identities of the 80,000 Jews deported from France, one French commentator honored the Klarsfelds as the “knights

of benign memory.” This book also helped them secure a lifetime annuity for the orphans of the Jewish-French deportees. Their later work aided in the conviction of the Holocaust denier Robert Faurisson, and the recent defeat of the far-right presidential contender and National Front leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen. In appreciation of their effective support, French President Emmanuel Macron responded with a personal letter of gratitude. Anti-Semitic hatred, in Sartre's formulation, “is first of all a passion.” By presenting their many years of struggle for a “great, just cause,” the Klarsfelds' memoir affirms a far higher and more enduring passion.



# PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 21ST ANNUAL BARBARA GUTFREUND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE ON HOLOCAUST EDUCATION



Eyal Kaminka, Ph.D, Director of the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem; Ivy Schamis, educator from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School; Marlene W. Yahalom, PhD, director of education, ASYV; Harvey Arfa; Caroline Herbst, ATSS/UFT; Caroline Massel, Executive board member, ASYV; Ronald Meier, PhD, executive director of ASYV.



Learning in progress.



Marlene W. Yahalom, PhD, director of education, ASYV; Eyal Kaminka, PhD, director of the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem, holding the ATSS/UFT President's Award for contributions to social studies education.



Captivated audience.



**REMEMBERING  
THE PAST:  
THE CHALLENGES  
OF THE FUTURE**

2019 Benefit Gala

Monday, May 20, 2019 • 6 pm

The Beverly Wilshire Hotel  
9500 Wilshire Boulevard, Beverly Hills

**GALA CHAIR**  
MEYER GOTTLIEB

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**  
ELAN CARR  
United States Department of State  
Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism

COCKTAIL ATTIRE | DIETARY LAWS OBSERVED  
YADVASHEMUSA.ORG



*The Hall of Names* at Yad Vashem is the Jewish People's memorial to each Jew murdered in the Holocaust – a place where they are commemorated for generations to come.

**2019 HONOREES**

**CORPORATE SERVICE AWARD**  
GIBSON DUNN  
JESSE SHARF, Partner

**COURAGE IN PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD**  
MICHAEL SIGNER  
Former Mayor of Charlottesville,  
Founder and Chair of Communities Overcoming Extremism:  
The After Charlottesville Project

**CREATIVE JUSTICE AWARD**  
GUY NATTIV  
2019 Academy Award Winner,  
Best Action Short - *Skin*



# PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ASYV YOUNG LEADERSHIP ASSOCIATES WINTER GALA

Nearly 400 young professionals came together for the Young Leadership Associates 2019 Winter Gala on February 21st at the Prince George Ballroom in New York City. The event was chaired by Jonathan Fine, Rachel Krakowski and Elizabeth Savetsky. The YLA is committed to spreading awareness and educating about the horrors of the Holocaust while working to ensure that the memories of both

the victims and the survivors are not forgotten. But Yad Vashem is not only about the past, but also shaping the future. So at this year's YLA Gala, we celebrated the lives the survivors rebuilt as well as the generations that will continue their legacy. We reaffirmed our commitment to stand up to hate and anti-Semitism and proudly let the world know that #WeAreStillHere.



ASYV Chairman Lenny Wilf with the 2019 YLA Gala team.



Barry Levine (ASYV board member), Jacqueline Bloom (YLA board member), and Erica & Mike Distenfeld (YLA board members).



Shaya Ben Yehuda (director of International Relations Division, Yad Vashem) with Jonathan Friedman and Sam Friedman (YLA board members).



Siggy Flicker (second from left) with representatives from Israel's Mission to the United Nations.

AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM

SAVE THE DATE

Spring Luncheon

Thursday, May 30, 2019

Honoring  
Gabriela Shnay and daughters  
Deborah, Rachel and Vanessa

Leonard Wilf, Chair  
Ron Meier, Executive Director  
Eillene Leistner, Chief Development Officer

For more information contact Rachele Grossman, Event Manager: 212-220-4304  
rgrossman@yadvashemusa.org | www.yadvashemusa.org

Invitation to Follow



## IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH: THE REVIVAL OF THE JERUSALEM OF LITHUANIA

BY GIL WEISSBLEI,  
THE LIBRARIANS

The wanderings of the Jewish people, especially during the last century, have brought some incredible life stories to the National Library in Jerusalem, packaged in very unusual ways. One example is this suitcase, donated to the National Library of Israel in May 1994, by the famous Yiddish poet, Avraham Sutzkever.

A closer look at this suitcase reveals that it is not a typical piece of luggage. It was not manufactured in a factory or even a proper workshop and it certainly wasn't purchased in a fancy department store. The suitcase has a rather crude appearance, but the story behind it makes up for it all.

This suitcase was made in the *Naroch* forest in Belarus, not far from the border of Lithuania, exactly 50 years before it was deposited in the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem. It was made of tin fragments from the wings of a crashed airplane and contained, among other archival materials, a small but astonishing collection of photographs saved from the Vilna ghetto.

The failure of the German *Blitzkrieg* against the Soviet Union and the creation of a permanent state of war created a serious problem for the Nazi economy, including a deficit in manpower. The thousands of Jews who lived in the Vilna ghetto, and in other

ghettos in Lithuania, were an important source of labor for the German occupiers. The Nazi regime elected not to murder the remaining Jews in the area and to instead use them as slaves to bolster the dwindling work force. This is how the Jews of the Vilna ghetto gained some semblance

organization of the ghetto became very developed as cultural, educational, health and welfare institutions were established.

Avraham Sutzkever, then a 28-year-old poet, had an important role in the cultural activity of the ghetto. "As long as I live a poet's life in this

ular reading evenings which took place there. Cultural activity flourished among the residents of the Vilna ghetto, with the establishment of schools, a theater, Yiddish and Hebrew choirs, an orchestra, opera, ballet, a children's puppet theatre, an active library, a newspaper, and even sports competitions. Lectures and literary events were also a common occurrence. "The Jerusalem of Lithuania," one of the most important Jewish communities in Europe, was revived under the shadow of death.

Sutzkever wasn't just creating culture in the ghetto; he was actively saving significant cultural treasures from the Nazis. Along with his close friend, the poet Shmerke Kaczerginski, he joined the "Paper Brigade," headed by Zelig Kalmanowitz, Dr. Hermann Kruk and the famous librarian Chaikel Lunski. The story of this group dedicated to the preservation of local Jewish culture was wonderfully described by David Fishman in his research, *The Book Smugglers*.

Within the various materials Sutzkever managed to gather, the photographs are especially interesting. Only a few dozen survived and reached us at the Library, but they all wonderfully reflect the spirit of the Jews in the Vilna ghetto during that time. Surprisingly, some of the residents of the Vilna ghetto managed to dabble in photography. Based on the  
(Continued on page 13)



Wolf Durmashkin with the ghetto symphonic orchestra, Vilna ghetto, September 5th, 1942.

of stability and peace from the start of 1942 into the spring of 1943. During this time there were no mass killings, though numerous murders did take place. Most of the Jews worked in various factories and workshops in and around the ghetto. The internal

valley of death," he wrote later, "I shall be redeemed from my misery."

Sutzkever became the artistic director of the ghetto theater, translating and adapting various pieces for the stage, and his poetry, written in the ghetto, was a central part of the pop-

## HOW A US TV SERIES CHANGED GERMANY

BY DAMIEN MCGUINNESS,  
BBC NEWS

It was big-budget, American TV starring Meryl Streep. And in 1979 the miniseries *Holocaust* transformed how Germans saw their own history.

It brought the horrors of Nazi crimes into people's living rooms and turned the word "Holocaust" into a commonly used term in the German language.

In March the drama was shown again on German TV — and it is as relevant as ever.

A third of West Germany's population, some 20 million people, watched at least some of the four-part series in 1979.

*Holocaust* tells the story of a fictional Jewish family — Josef Weiss, a successful Berlin doctor, and his wife and children — charting their tragic journey from bourgeois affluence to the gas chambers.

A parallel story focuses on Erik Dorf, an unemployed lawyer, who is initially apolitical, but gets a job with Hitler's SS and becomes part of the Nazi killing machine.

The series sparked a national debate. Surveys show that 86% of

viewers discussed the Holocaust with friends or family after watching the program.

Ten thousand Germans called the broadcaster WDR afterwards, many in tears, to express their shock and

had dealt with facts and figures, and during the 1960s the debate focused primarily on perpetrators — sparked in part by the Auschwitz trials, held in *Frankfurt* between 1963 and 1965.

"Survivors came to the Auschwitz

transformed the world. He believes this TV drama is one of them, alongside the Iranian Revolution and the election of Margaret Thatcher.

The *Holocaust* miniseries tells emotional, personal stories of everyday people — easy for viewers to identify with and accessible to mainstream society.

Unusually, perpetrators are not demonized as freakishly diabolical sadists, but appear as ordinary Germans, cogs in the Nazi machine, who contributed to the Holocaust through small everyday acts of cruelty or cowardice.

The series was controversial and almost never came to Germany. It was made by the American TV station NBC and in 1978 watched by 120 million Americans.

But German commentators slammed the series, calling it a kitsch, melodramatic soap opera that trivialized the *Shoah* (Holocaust).

Left-wingers accused US broadcasters of cynically exploiting Nazi crimes for the sake of TV ratings. Right-wing nationalists complained that German war victims were being forgotten.

(Continued on page 13)



Actor James Woods (r.) played Jewish artist Karl Weiss, married to Inga.

shame. In some cases former soldiers got in touch to confirm the details of Nazi crimes.

This was the first time that a major mainstream drama had portrayed the lives of Hitler's victims.

Until then, serious documentaries

trials, and journalists didn't even interview them. No one cared about the victims. That changed with (the TV series) *Holocaust*," says historian Professor Frank Bösch.

He has written a book (*Zeitenwende* 1979) about key events of 1979 that



## YAD VASHEM BROKE GROUND ON NEW ARTIFACTS CENTER ON HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

*Enlarged Shoah Heritage Campus to include millions of documents and artifacts, from a toddler's shoe marked with the day she died to a portrait of a Nazi painted on a Torah scroll.*

BY AMANDA BORSCHER-DAN,  
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

During a behind-the-scenes tour of Yad Vashem's new curatorial center this winter, the Israel Holocaust museum's Sarah Shor held up a petite child's shoe and pointed to a pair of knitted gloves. Shor told the group of Jewish journalists seated in the glass-walled room that they had once belonged to two-year-old Hinda Cohen, who was born to Tziporah and Dov Cohen in the *Kovno* ghetto in Lithuania on January 18, 1942.

The table was littered with dozens of artifacts, from a portrait of a Nazi sol-

chilling than seeing the physical remnants of a life cut too short: blue gloves with a purple design worked in by the hands of a loving mother, and well-polished minuscule shoes.

Shor turned the shoe over and showed the journalists the date etched on its sole: March 27, 1944. That morning, while her parents were slaving at the *Aleksotas* forced labor camp, the Nazi guards enacted a "Children's *Aktion*" at the ghetto and took Hinda, along with all the children they could find.

Father Dov etched the date into the shoe, found under her bed with scant few other items, and vowed to keep it until his death, a promise he kept.

On Holocaust Remembrance Day, the day commemorating the loss of six million Jews in the Holocaust, Israel's Yad Vashem broke ground on a new state-of-the-art sub-

artifacts and 11,500 works of art in Yad Vashem's collections to date bear witness to the lives of those lost to the Nazis' genocide, not only their deaths.

"The German Nazis were determined not only to annihilate the Jewish people, but also to obliterate their identity, memory, culture and heritage," said Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev in a press release.

"For many, all that remains is a treasured work of art, a personal artifact that survived with them, a photograph kept close to their person, a diary or a note. By preserving these precious items — that are of great importance not only to the Jewish people, but also to humanity as a whole — and revealing them to the public, they will act as the voice of the victims and the survivors, and serve as an everlasting memory."

Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, was founded in 1953 and immediately began gathering such artifacts. Today, its store-rooms are overflowing, and conservationist Shor told the journalists that her team does not have the resources to properly treat items on site.

This overflow is in part due to a wildly successful eight-year campaign, "Gathering the Fragments," which urges the public to deposit Holocaust-related artifacts with the museum. The granddaughter of Tziporah and Dov hearkened to the call and brought the etched shoe and pair of gloves to the museum as part of this campaign.

According to a Yad Vashem press release, the new structure will cover an area of 5,880 square meters and "allow for optimal control and supervision of the conservation climate required for preservation of the artifacts."

Other benefits of the planned center include the ability to "streamline

the process of receiving, preserving and cataloguing items collected by Yad Vashem, with the express goal of making them accessible to the public."



Yad Vashem's Sarah Shor shows a group of journalists the "canvas" for the portrait of a Nazi soldier — a Torah scroll — at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

According to a Yad Vashem spokesman, there are other upgrades planned for the Mount of Remembrance, including a renovation of its auditorium and a new gallery for families and children.

The campus-wide construction and facelift is meant to be completed by the summer of 2021. According to Yad Vashem, funding has been secured already for much of the project. The institute is confident it will find the rest of the needed money.

"The Holocaust is a very particular story with a deep universal meaning," remarked Shalev to the group of journalists this winter.

There are few symbols more universal than the little shoe that once belonged to Hinda Cohen.



A shoe belonging to two-year-old Hinda Cohen, who was killed at Auschwitz on March 27, 1944. Her father Dov etched the date on the sole upon discovering his daughter was taken during a "Children's *Aktion*."

dier painted on a Torah scroll to the striped pajamas of a camp intern. Every item had a story behind it, attesting to the life of the former owner. But there are few things more

terranean center to house and conserve millions of artifacts such as these. The more than 210 million documents, 500,000 photographs, 131,000 survivor testimonies, 32,400

## A RARE MOMENT OF PURIM SWEETNESS IN THE WARSAW GHETTO

BY ITAMAR EICHNER, YNETNEWS

After 77 years, the discovery of a small note attached to a Purim basket from the Warsaw ghetto in 1942 illustrates the sacrifice made by Jews who chose to observe the religious holidays, even as their loved ones were starving to death in front of their eyes.

A Polish man stumbled upon the note by mistake, but did not fully understand its significance. Nearly 80 years later, his son contacted the Shem Olam Faith & the Holocaust Institute, where it was recognized for its importance as a glimpse of Jewish life under the Nazis.

The note attached to the Purim basket — a holiday in which gift-giving is traditional — is also evidence of the unimaginable reality of life in the ghetto. The envelope bears the

stamp of "the company that supplies the Jewish quarter in Warsaw" and a Star of David, and underneath in Hebrew is printed "Purim 1942."

The envelope also includes an instruction to "check the weight" of the small 100g parcel of ginger cookies within, implying that it was not to exceed the daily limit of calories that the Nazis allowed each Jew in the ghetto.

The Jews in the ghettos did tough physical labor under extreme conditions on 500 calories per a day; every loaf of bread or bowl of soup



The note attached to the Purim basket.

was essential to their physical survival. (According to British government guidelines, men should have an intake of around 2,500 calories

per day, while women should consume around 2,000 calories daily.)

Shem Olam chief Rabbi Avraham Krieger calls the discovery unique, as it "reflects a willingness by the Jews in the ghetto to observe their traditions despite the chaos and hunger that were a part of their everyday life, and despite the risk of dying for observing a holiday tradition."

Krieger added: "The Purim holiday had a strong meaning for the Jews in the ghetto because they saw Hitler as the "Haman" of their time, and prayed for his defeat.

"The amount of cookies was small, but it was so much more. had a much bigger spiritual meaning. It was a symbol of the Jews' battle to preserve their spirituality and their faith, as well as a human, social framework to keep their lives together."



# WHY THE U.S. BOMBED AUSCHWITZ, BUT DIDN'T SAVE THE JEWS

BY RAFAEL MEDOFF, HNN

Seventy-five years ago — on March 19, 1944 — German troops marched into Hungary. The country's 800,000 Jews, the last major Jewish community to have eluded the raging Holocaust, now lay within Hitler's grasp.

The railway lines and bridges across which Hungary's Jews would be deported to the Auschwitz death camp in Poland were within range of American bombers. So were the gas chambers and crematoria in the camp itself. The refusal of the Roosevelt administration to drop bombs on those targets is one of the most well-known and troubling chapters in the history of international responses to the Holocaust.

What few realize today is that U.S. planes actually did bomb part of Auschwitz — but they left the mass-murder machinery, and the railways leading to it, untouched. Why?

The same week that the Germans occupied Hungary, two Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz were in the final stages of plotting to escape, something that only a tiny handful of inmates had ever accomplished. Their goal was to alert the free world that the gas chambers of Auschwitz were being readied for the Jews of Hungary. They hoped these revelations would prompt the Allies to intervene.

On April 7, 1944, Rudolf Vrba, 19, and Alfred Wetzler, 25, slipped away from their slave labor battalion and hid in a hollowed-out woodpile near the edge of the camp. On the advice of a Soviet POW, the fugitives sprinkled the area with tobacco and gasoline, which confused the German dogs that were used to search for them.

After three days, Vrba and Wetzler emerged from their hiding place and began an eleven-day, 80-mile trek to neighboring Slovakia. There they met with Jewish leaders and dictated a 30-page report that came to be known as the "Auschwitz Protocols." It included details of the mass-murder process, maps that pinpointed the location of the gas chambers and crematoria, and warnings of the impending slaughter of Hungary's Jews. "One million Hungarian [Jews] are going to die," Vrba told them. "Auschwitz is ready for them. But if you tell them now, they will rebel. They will never go to the ovens."

## WHAT FDR KNEW, AND WHEN

The fate of Hungarian Jewry unfolded before the eyes of the world. Unlike previous phases of the Holocaust, which the Germans partially succeeded in hiding from the international community, what happened in Hungary was no secret.

A common refrain among defenders of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's response to the Holocaust is the claim that he and his administration learned about the deportations from Hungary too late to do much about it. For example, a recent essay in *The Daily Beast*, by journalist Jack Schwartz, claimed that "The Allies learned of the Hungarian deportations and their lethal destination in late June" — that is, not until five weeks after the deportations commenced.

But in fact, Washington knew what was coming. At a March 24, 1944, press conference, FDR, after first discussing Philippine independence, farm machinery shipments, and war crimes in Asia, acknowledged that

"late June" is preposterous.

## APPEALS FOR BOMBING

Meanwhile, copies of the Auschwitz escapees' report reached rescue activists in Slovakia and Switzerland. Those activists then authored an appeal to the Roosevelt administration to bomb "vital sections of these [railway] lines, especially bridges" between Hungary and Auschwitz, "as the only possible means of slowing down or stopping future deportations." The plea reached Washington in June.

Numerous similar appeals for bombing the gas chambers, or the rail lines and bridges leading to them, were sent to U.S. officials by



Arrival of a transport of prisoners from the Carpathians at the main ramp at Auschwitz.

Hungary's Jews "are now threatened with annihilation" because the Germans were planning "the deportation of Jews to their death in Poland." The president blurred the issue by coupling it with a remark about the danger that "Norwegians and French" might be deported "to their death in Germany," but the key point is clear: If we wonder "what did they know, and when did they know it," the answer with regard to Hungary is that the Roosevelt administration knew plenty, and knew it early.

The Holocaust in Hungary was widely reported, and often in timely fashion, by the American news media (although it was not given the prominence it deserved). For example, on May 10, nine days before the deportations to Auschwitz began, the *New York Times* quoted a European diplomat warning that the Germans were preparing "huge gas chambers in which the one million Hungarian Jews are to be exterminated in the same fashion as were the Jews of Poland."

Likewise, on May 18, the *Times* reported that "a program of mass extermination of Jews in Hungary" was under way, with the first 80,000 "sent to murder camps in Poland." The notion that the Roosevelt administration only learned about all this in

American Jewish organizations throughout the spring, summer and fall of 1944.

Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy was designated to reply to the requests. He wrote that the bombing idea was "impracticable" because it would require "diversion of considerable air support essential to the success of our forces now engaged in decisive operations." He also claimed the War Department's position was based on "a study" of the issue. But no evidence of such a study has ever been found by researchers.

In reality, McCloy's position was based on the Roosevelt administration's standing policy that military resources should not be used for "rescuing victims of enemy oppression."

The aforementioned *Daily Beast* article claimed that the administration's rejection of the bombing requests "reflected military reality as perceived by a defense establishment with stretched resources trying to meet the diverse demands of an all-encompassing war."

That's nonsense. The "military reality" was that at the same time McCloy was saying Auschwitz could not be bombed, Auschwitz was being bombed. Not the part of Auschwitz where the gas chambers and crema-

torias were situated, but rather the part where slave laborers were working in German oil factories.

On August 20, a squadron of 127 U.S. bombers, accompanied by 100 Mustangs piloted by the all-African-American unit known as the Tuskegee Airmen, struck the factories, less than five miles from the part of the camp where the mass-murder machinery was located.

## WHAT ELIE WIESEL SAW

Future Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, then age 16, was a slave laborer in that section of the huge Auschwitz complex. He was an eyewitness to the August 20 bombing raid. Many years later, in his best-selling book *Night*, Wiesel wrote: "If a bomb had fallen on the blocks [the prisoners' barracks], it alone would have claimed hundreds of victims on the spot. But we were no longer afraid of death; at any rate, not of that death. Every bomb that exploded filled us with joy and gave us new confidence in life. The raid lasted over an hour. If it could only have lasted ten times ten hours!"

There were additional Allied bombing raids on the Auschwitz oil factories throughout the autumn. American and British planes also flew over Auschwitz in August and September, when they air-dropped supplies to the Polish Home Army forces that were fighting the Germans in Warsaw. They flew that route twenty-two times, yet not once were they given the order to drop a few bombs on the death camp or its transportation routes.

Adding insult to inaccuracy, Jack Schwartz claimed (in *The Daily Beast*) that "in Palestine, the Jewish Agency [the Jewish community's self-governing body] overwhelmingly opposed the bombing [of Auschwitz] on the grounds that it would likely take Jewish lives," and "American Jewish leaders were equally divided over the issue, which led to recriminations during and after the war."

Wrong, and wrong again. The minutes of Jewish Agency leadership meetings show they opposed bombing for a period of barely two weeks, and even then only because they mistakenly thought Auschwitz was a labor camp. Then they received the Vrba-Wetzler "Auschwitz Protocols," revealing the true nature of the camp. At that point, Jewish Agency representatives in Washington, London, Cairo, Geneva, Budapest and Jerusalem repeatedly lobbied U.S., British and Soviet officials to bomb Auschwitz and the routes leading to it.

As for American Jewish leaders, a grand total of one of them urged the Allies to use ground troops against Auschwitz instead of air raids. By contrast, pleas in support of bombing

(Continued on page 15)



## IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH: THE REVIVAL OF THE JERUSALEM OF LITHUANIA

(Continued from page 10)

photographs, we can assume that none of them were professional photographers and that these images were likely developed in difficult conditions.

There are not many known photographs of the Vilna ghetto. Holding a camera or dealing with photography was, of course, strictly forbidden by the Nazis. The photographs from the Sutzkever collection are, therefore, a rare documentation of everyday life in the ghetto as shown by some of its inmates, who were likely amateur photographers. Most of these pictures are anonymous. We have found Sutzkever's inscription, with the photographer's name — B. Kaczerginsky — on the back of only one of the photos. The inscription likely referred to Berl Kaczerginsky, one of the Jewish policemen of the ghetto, who owned a camera. Many of the pictures were likely taken by the same policemen, as a relatively large number of photos feature the ghetto police and the head of the ghetto, Jacob Gens.

Some of those photographs were staged, and it is quite clear that the subjects of the photos were very much aware of the camera in front of them. In some pictures, they even look directly into the camera lens. A parade of the ghetto gate guard, a group photograph of the guards and photographs of their commander, Moishe Levas, give us a glimpse of one of the most hated institutions among the ghetto inmates. On the other hand, the ghetto guards were those who enabled Sutzkever and his colleagues in the Paper Brigade to

smuggle books, archival materials and various works of art into the ghetto. Moishe Levas was very much aware of the activity of Sutzkever and his friends, and he assisted them in smuggling those materials into the ghetto in various ways.

Sutzkever managed to collect photographs which reflected the daily life in the ghetto from various aspects: simple street scenes, various advertisements on the walls, and pictures



Avraham Sutzkever (right) and Shmerke Kaczerginski in the Vilna ghetto. Berl Kaczerginsky photographed the two friends on the balcony of their apartment on Strashun Street, on July 20, 1943. They look as if they were just a group of friends, not inmates of the ghetto, starving laborers under a cruel regime, condemned to death.

of cultural and educational institutions.

Without knowing the circumstances in which the photographs were taken, one could think they were created in a typical European city during peaceful, normal times. The clock on the ghetto's main street, the morning advertisements hung up on the ghetto walls,

and of course, the cultural activities of the Jewish community, all stir up a feeling of amazement at the simplicity and banality of the images, considering all that is happening around them.

The most incredible photograph in the bunch is that of the ghetto orchestra with its conductor, Wolf Durmashkin. This renowned musician, who before the war was the conductor of the Vilna symphonic orchestra, is seen standing strong and dignified

wearing tuxedo tails, as the other musicians around him smile for the camera. The shining shoes of the first violinist leave no doubt as to the mood these people were in. This photograph proves the strength of the human spirit, even in the most difficult times. The orchestra's piano, though not included in the photographs, was smuggled into the ghetto piece by piece and then rebuilt by a specialist. It is important to recognize that, just as Sutzkever never stopped writing poetry, Durmashkin and his musicians always continued playing and creating music, dedicated to preserving their art and their human dignity.

To paraphrase Hanna Arendt's con-

troversial concept, "the banality of evil," these photographs reflect how the ghetto inmates desperately tried to hold on to the banality of life under evil, and to pretend they could keep living normally despite the death and misery that surrounded them. The photographers were full partners in creating this illusion. Since there was a need for cooperation between the photographer and the subjects, it can be assumed that the maker of the images also sought to transmit a banal and normal picture of life, by creating a visual image using the most ordinary of methods.

Unlike in photographs from other ghettos, and even from ghettos in Lithuania itself, none of the true horrors that were experienced are captured in the photographs in the Sutzkever collection from Vilna. There are no photographs of children dying in the streets, starving people or the many other miseries faced by the ghetto inmates. The terrible reality of the ghetto, as Sutzkever described in detail in his testimonial book, was not reflected at all in the photographs he had collected during his stay there. It seems that, in real time, the ghetto inmates wanted to stay as far as possible from the abnormal circumstances in which they lived, and tried to reflect a stabilized, ordinary way of life, which was, of course, just an illusion. Sutzkever's photographs, therefore, do not document the life of the ghetto as it really was, but rather life as its inmates wanted it to be. By the power of their spirit, these Lithuanian Jews miraculously escaped from reality and created an alternate universe for themselves.

## HOW A US TV SERIES CHANGED GERMANY

(Continued from page 10)

Neo-Nazis even bombed two television transmitters in an attempt to stop the broadcasts in Germany.



Meryl Streep played a Christian woman, Inga, married to one of the Weiss sons.

The series still has its critics today: some Holocaust survivors have said the drama is sanitized and simplistic.

But it has transformed how Germany deals with its Nazi past.

Initially some German officials feared the series would spark anti-German sentiment abroad, says Professor Bösch. But the national soul-searching provoked by the drama has led to respect for how Germany faces up to its past crimes.

A few months after the series was broadcast, Germany scrapped the statute of limitations for murder, to enable Nazis to be tried for their participation in the Holocaust.

And the nationwide debate led to a thirst for more knowledge. During the 1980s, schools demanded more teaching material, German historians started focusing more on the Holocaust, and concentration camps opened the

first major exhibitions and memorials.

Now, as the miniseries comes to an end on TV, Germany has been reassessing how the drama changed the country 40 years ago.

Remembrance of the Holocaust and the words "never again" have become key principles of modern Germany's political identity.

But the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) says Germans should now move on and draw a line under that culture of commemoration.

Last year AfD leader Alexander Gauland described Nazi rule as "mere bird droppings in over 1,000 years of successful German history."

And less than half of German 14- to 16-year-olds know what Auschwitz

was, according to a survey by the Körber Foundation.

Forty years after *Holocaust* was first



Karl Weiss suffers Nazi brutality in Buchenwald concentration camp.

broadcast in Germany, accessible dramas that highlight Nazi crimes are still needed.



## A DUTCH COUPLE FIND FORGOTTEN HOLOCAUST HISTORY IN THEIR COUNTRYSIDE HOME

BY CNAAN LIPSHIZ, JTA

Despite its rustic charms, the dream home that Roxane van Iperen and her partner bought nearly ruined their marriage.

Van Iperen, a 42-year-old novelist, underestimated the amount of renovating needed on the countryside estate east of Amsterdam. She bought the place in 2012 with Joris Lenglet as a home for the couple and their three children.

"We almost separated by the time it was done," she recalled in an interview on the NPO 1 television channel.

But amid "the arguing, misery and work," as she described it, the couple made discoveries whose significance they realized only months later: during the Holocaust, their new home had been the center for one of Holland's most daring rescue operations conducted by Jews for Jews.

Recounted in a best-selling book that van Iperen published last year, the story generated strong media interest amid a wave of introspection about the Dutch society's checkered Holocaust-era record.

"Many Jews resisted, but of most of them we know very little," said the Jewish filmmaker Willy Lindwer, who has produced several documentaries on the Holocaust in his native Netherlands. He said the *High Nest* story "shows not all Dutch Jews went like lambs to the slaughter, and that's very important."

But to general readers, part of the book's appeal lies in the strong characters of the people who did the rescuing at van Iperen's home: sisters Janny and Lien Brilleslijper and their families.

Daring anti-Fascist activists — Janny fought as a volunteer combatant in the Spanish Civil War — they used connections to hide from the Germans in the house in *Naarden*, situated 10 miles east of Amsterdam. But at great personal risk, they then opened their safe house to Jews and

others in need.

Van Iperen found evidence of the sisters' ingenuity as soon as the renovations began, discovering double walls, secret doors and walled-off annexes that had been concealed so well that they were left undetected for decades. In one secret space, van Iperen even found wartime resistance newspapers.

Dozens of Jews passed through the safe house, which is "perfectly located near Amsterdam but in the middle of nowhere," van Iperen said. The nine-room estate is mostly hidden



Lien Brilleslijper with her daughter Jalda in Berlin in the 1970s.

from view by large trees that afforded privacy to the tenants.

The operation's secrecy kept it out of the history books even though it was a rare case in which Dutch Jews not only escaped the genocide but helped others avoid capture.

The sisters, intellectuals from a Liberal Jewish family, arrived at the estate near *Naarden* in 1943, amid deportations to death camps and growing awareness of the annihilation of Europe's Jews by Hitler.

By that time, the Nazis had killed 75 percent of the Netherlands' prewar Jewish population of about 140,000 — the highest death rate in Nazi-occupied Western Europe.

"Everyone who could was in a panic

to find a hiding place," van Iperen said.

And yet at the Brilleslijpers' house, "there was actually a lot of music and lust for life during that time, which makes it different to the typical survival-in-hiding story we know in this country," van Iperen said.

She found sheet music that the sisters — Lien was a well-known singer — and their guests composed and performed on musical evenings. There were worldly debates and garden dinners — several of the people in hiding were artists — amid the

laughter of children.

One of the rug rats was Robert Brandes, the 5-year-old son of Janny and her husband, Bob Brandes. Robert Brandes, now 79 and an artist, gave van Iperen, who tracked him down, a yellowing photograph taken at her home in 1943. He is seen splashing in a metal tub on a sunny day in the backyard, flanked by his cousin, Kathinka Rebling, (Lien's daughter), and another child.

Around the corner from the Jews in hiding lived the lover of Anton Mussert, the head of the pro-Nazi NSB party and the top collaborator with the Nazis. He would often stay over, van Iperen also discovered.

But in June 1944, Eddy Musbergen,

one of the hundreds of Dutch gentiles who betrayed or hunted Jews in hiding, reported his suspicions about the estate to the authorities.

It was an eventuality for which the sisters had planned, according to Rebling, Lien's daughter. During the Gestapo raid, her mother removed a vase from a window sill overlooking the access path — a secret sign for other tenants that the house had been compromised.

The raid occurred when Janny and her son were out. Janny saw the vase as they returned and attempted to catch up to Robert, who was skipping along ahead of her. But the Germans saw them and they were arrested.

The sisters and their families were sent to the *Westerbork* concentration camp, *Auschwitz* and *Bergen-Belsen*.

At *Bergen-Belsen*, Janny met the family of Anne Frank.

"She was concealed in a blanket," Janny, who died in 2003, recalled in a 1988 documentary by Lindwer. "She had no more tears to cry. They had run out a long time before."

Janny went to check on Anne a few days later and saw Anne's sister, Margot, lying dead on the floor. Anne died shortly thereafter, Janny said.

Both Brilleslijper sisters survived the Holocaust — partly because they were persons of interest to the Nazis because of their anti-Fascist credentials, van Iperen discovered. This prevented them from being sent directly to the gas chambers at *Auschwitz*, allowing them to survive.

Robert Brandes was spared deportation because after his detention, he was deemed by the Nazis to be only half Jewish. Rebling, who was three and whose parents were both Jewish, was spirited away from a detention facility by a resistance fighter and survived the war in hiding.

"That we are still alive," Rebling said during the November interview with NPO 1, "can only be explained by an unbroken chain of miracles."

## PAINTING A SELF-PORTRAIT OF DEATH IN THE HOLOCAUST

BY RO ORANIM, THE LIBRARIANS

Felix Nussbaum painted multiple self-portraits during the Holocaust, giving us a unique artistic insight into the experience of one man, among the millions that were murdered.

Imagine witnessing your fate unfolding before your eyes. Imagine having the ability to know what the future holds, to know how death will come and to know that there is no way for you to change that. What would you do with that knowledge in hand? For Felix Nussbaum the answer was obvious. He had dedicated his life to his art, and spent his final years illustrating life as a Jew under the Nazi

regime through his paintings, sharing his own journey and experiences as a target of persecution and the horrors that came along with being a Jew in the Holocaust, in the best way he knew how.

Felix Nussbaum was born on December 11, 1904, in *Osnabrück*, Germany, into a well-respected and well-off Jewish family. His parents, Phillip and Rahel, recognized their son's budding artistic talents at a young age. Phillip was also an amateur artist himself, in addition to owning an ironworks firm. Felix's parents decided to encourage their son to develop his natural skill, and supported him as he attended different art schools across the country from

*Hamburg* to *Berlin*. In 1927, Felix held his own art show, and later he participated in group shows and designed a series of covers for a Berlin-based art magazine.

In 1932, Felix applied for and was accepted to the Berlin Academy's Villa Massimo in Rome. In October of the same year, Felix left Berlin and moved to Rome together with his partner, Felka Platek, who was also a budding Jewish artist. Little did he know that he would never return to his home country.

In December of 1932, Felix received news that a fire had started in his Berlin studio, a space he had rented out to fellow artists for the duration of his absence. He lost over 150 pieces

to the flames and was understandably devastated. Just a few months later, in the first half of 1933, the Nazi party rose to power and the political and cultural atmosphere took a sharp turn. Dr. Joseph Goebbels visited Rome and made a stop at the German academy to meet the students. Goebbels gave a lecture on Nazi art doctrine and explained that the Aryan race and heroism were the main themes that the Nazi artist should develop. Felix quickly understood that his time in the academy was limited, as there was no space for him within the world of National Socialist art.

The Nazi regime, however, did have an immediate impact on Felix's art as

(Continued on page 15)



## PAINTING A SELF-PORTRAIT OF DEATH IN THE HOLOCAUST

(Continued from page 14)

he began painting what he saw as the fall of civilization. His painting "Destruction" reflects his feeling of impending doom, showing a couple standing among the architectural ruins and destroyed artworks. Forced to leave Rome and the academy but unable to return to Germany, Nussbaum and Platek moved to *Alassio*, Italy, where they lived comfortably with the support of Felix's parents.

In 1935, Felix and Felka left Italy and moved to Belgium via Paris, in what became a nomadic existence of exile from their home country. Felix continued his painting at each destination, taking comfort in his work, through his art from this period clearly reflects the growing discomfort and anxiety he felt

at the ever-increasing danger to the Jewish community.

In 1940, German troops marched on Belgium. Felix Nussbaum was arrested,

went into hiding with the help of a friend, an art dealer. Felix, ever the artist, drew the horrors of life in the internment camp. His painting "Self-Portrait in the Camp" reflects the inhumane and humiliating conditions he experienced while in the camp.

Throughout his time in hiding, while living in constant fear for his life, he continued to express himself through his art, persistently chronicling the ever-worsening conditions and the perpetual dread that their hiding spot would be discovered by the authorities.

Felix recognized the inevitable, and he resigned himself to his predestined fate as a consequence of his Jewish identity. He painted his people, the poor and damned. He did not reflect

hope or survival in his works, choosing instead to paint from reality. In one of the works he painted himself backed into a corner with the knowledge that there would be no escape.

His final major work, "The Skeletons Playing for the Dance," reflected the hopelessness of the situation from his perspective. Skeletons play musical instruments from the ruins of modern society — a cultured society of science, technology, art and music. Among the skeletons, behind the organ, sits one figure who, while gaunt and malnourished, appears to be alive, suggesting that Felix held some hope that he would count himself among the survivors — a hope that would never be realized.

In July 1944, the Gestapo discovered Felix Nussbaum and Felka Platek's hiding place. The couple was arrested and sent to the *Malines* transit camp, where they were put on the very last transport to Auschwitz on July 31, 1944. They met their untimely deaths on August 4 of that year.



"Death Triumphant (The Skeletons Playing for the Dance)," Felix Nussbaum, 1944.

ed, along with 7,000 others, and sent in a wagon to the internment camp at *St.-Cyprian*. He managed to escape and returned to Brussels, where he

## WHY THE U.S. BOMBED AUSCHWITZ, BUT DIDN'T SAVE THE JEWS

(Continued from page 12)

were made in Washington by multiple representatives of the World Jewish Congress, Agudath Israel, the Labor Zionists of America, and the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe (the Bergson Group). Calls for bombing also appeared in the columns of a number of American Jewish newspapers and magazines at the time.

### MOTIVES FOR REJECTION

Now we come to the vexing question of why the Roosevelt administration rejected the bombing requests.

The explanation that the administration gave at the time — that bombing Auschwitz or the railways would require diverting bombers from battle zones — was clearly false, since we know that U.S. bombers did bomb other targets within the Auschwitz complex (the oil factories).

A second argument has been made by some FDR apologists: that bombing was a bad idea because some of the Auschwitz inmates would have been killed. But that does not hold up, either — first, because that was not the reason given for the rejections at the time; and second, because it fails to explain why the administration refused to bomb the railway lines and bridges, which would not have involved any risk to civilians.

So what, then, was the real reason for the administration's rejection?

In all likelihood, it was the result of several factors. One was old-fashioned anti-Semitism. The anti-Semitic sentiments rife among senior officials of the State Department and War Department have been amply documented. What about the White House? Jack Schwartz, in *The Daily*

Beast, mocked any suggestion that President Roosevelt harbored anti-Semitic feelings, pointing out that he "surrounded himself with Jewish advisers" and "staffed the New Deal...with Jewish activists." In other words, some of FDR's best friends were Jewish.

A more informed perspective would consider Roosevelt's actual statements on the subject. For example,

1940s. He complained to his cabinet in 1941 that there were "too many Jews among federal employees in Oregon" (which he had recently visited). In 1942, he used the slur "kikes" in reference to Jewish Communists. At the Casablanca Conference in 1943, he said strict limits should be imposed on North African Jews entering professions, in order to "eliminate the specific and understandable com-

Another factor in the decision not to bomb Auschwitz was a practical consideration: rescuing Jews meant the Allies would be stuck with a lot of Jewish refugees on their hands. At one point during the war, a senior State Department official warned his colleagues that any U.S. action to rescue Jewish refugees was "likely to bring about new pressure for an asylum in the Western hemisphere." Another official characterized Jewish refugees as a "burden and curse," and he worried about the "danger" that the Germans "might agree to turn over to the United States and to Great Britain a large number of Jewish refugees."

This is not to say that anti-Semitism and the fear of pressure to admit refugees were the decisive factors. More likely they served to buttress or reinforce the main factor, which was the overall mindset in the administration that America had no national interest nor moral obligation to pursue humanitarian objectives abroad.

This attitude was articulated, most notably, in the War Department's internal decision, in early 1944, that it would not utilize any military resources "for the purpose of rescuing victims of enemy oppression unless such rescues are the direct result of military operations conducted with the objective of defeating the armed forces of the enemy."

Bombing bridges and railway lines over which both deported Jews and German troops were transported could have qualified as necessary for military purposes. But not when the prevailing attitude in the White House and other government agencies was one of hardheartedness when it came to the Jews, reinforced by anti-Semitism and nativism.



President Roosevelt reviewing troops at Rabat, Morocco, while at the Casablanca Conference in 1943.

as a member of the Harvard board of governors, he helped impose a quota on admitting Jewish students so they would not be "disproportionate," as he put it. He called a questionable tax maneuver by the owners of the *New York Times* in 1937 "a dirty Jewish trick." He said in 1938 that the behavior of "the Jewish grain dealer and the Jewish shoe dealer" was to blame for anti-Semitism in Poland.

FDR continued to make such remarks (behind closed doors) in the

plaints which the Germans bore towards the Jews in Germany, namely, that while they represented a small part of the population, over fifty percent of the lawyers, doctors, school teachers, college professors, etc., in Germany, were Jews."

Do such statements reflect anti-Semitism? Or when it comes to assessing anti-Semitism, should there be one standard for revered former presidents and a different standard for everyone else?





## 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

Robert Christopher Morton,  
Director of Planned Giving at ASYV, who can be reached at:  
212-220-4304; [cmorton@YadVashemUSA.org](mailto:cmorton@YadVashemUSA.org)

American Society for Yad Vashem  
**MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE**  
500 FIFTH AVENUE, 42ND FLOOR  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10110-4299  
Web site: [www.yadvashemusa.org](http://www.yadvashemusa.org)

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

### Martyrdom & Resistance

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

Yefim Krasnyanskiy, M.A.,  
Editor

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

### EDITORIAL BOARD

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

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