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HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY: NEVER FORGET DEMAND AND DEFEND YOUR HUMAN RIGHTS

BY JILL GOLTZER

Every year, on January 27th, the international community marks International Holocaust Remembrance Day. This day, designated by the United Nations in 2005, marks the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp by the Red Army. The largest and perhaps most famous of the camps, Auschwitz-Birkenau was both a labor camp and a center for the rapid murder of Jews. Over 1.1 million Jews were murdered in this hell on earth.

Our Young Leadership Associates were honored to attend the official Holocaust remembrance ceremony at the United Nations headquarters on Monday, January 28th. Our members were welcomed as guests of the office of Ambassador Danny Danon, Israel's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. We had a delegation of eighteen members attend the ceremony, including three senior board members (Adina Burian, Barry Levine, and Mark Moskowitz) and YLA Co-Chair Rachel Shnay.

The ceremony was hosted by Ms. Alison Smale, UN Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications, and included remarks by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, H.E. Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés (president of the 73rd session of the General Assembly), H.E. Mr. Danny Danon, H.E. Mr. Jonathan R.

Cohen (Chargé d'Affaires, United Nations Mission to the UN), and Ambassador Sandro De Bernardin (Chair, International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance). The keynote speaker was Ms. Sara J. Bloomfield, director of the US Holocaust

Remembrance: Demand and Defend Your Human Rights." The theme highlights the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The UDHR

Nazi groups and the frightening rise in anti-Semitic incidents worldwide. "From a deadly assault on a synagogue in the United States to the desecration of Jewish cemeteries in Europe, this centuries-old hatred is not only still strong — it is getting worse." The "proliferation of neo-Nazi groups and attempts to rewrite history and distort the facts of the Holocaust" makes it ever more clear that we must continue to educate our youth and stand together in the continuous fight against hatred and discrimination. Everyone, not only Jews, should be wary of such trends. "Inevitably, where there is anti-Semitism, no one else is safe" (António Guterres).

Before the ceremony concluded, cantor Benny Rogosnitzky of the Park East Synagogue in NYC recited the memorial prayers, and the PS 22 Chorus, directed by Gregg Breinberg, performed two musical numbers. One of the songs the chorus performed was titled "Who Am I" and was written by Holocaust survivor Inge Auerbacher.

Following the ceremony, our delegation attended the opening of "Beyond Duty: Diplomats Recognized as Righteous Among the Nations," an exhibition curated by Yad Vashem and sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Israel, Peru, and Portugal to the United Nations. The exhibit highlights the unique stories of diplomats recognized by Yad Vashem for choosing to act according to their conscience rather than simply follow orders. Individuals such as Raoul Wallenberg from Sweden and Aristides de Sousa Mendes from Portugal risked their lives to help Jews by providing them with passports, visas and travel permits. Sousa Mendes famously stated, "I would rather stand with G-d against man than with man against G-d." Such courage and unwavering commitment to humanity is responsible for saving the lives of thousands of Jews.



Representatives of the American Society for Yad Vashem Jill Goltzer, Mark Moskowitz, Goldie Hertz, Adina Burian, Barry Levine and Rachel Shnay at the UN event dedicated to the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. New York, January 27.

Memorial Museum. In addition to the distinguished diplomats and figures mentioned, we had the privilege of hearing remarks from Holocaust survivors Marian Turski and Inge Auerbacher.

The theme of this year's Holocaust remembrance and education activities is "Holocaust

was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on December 10, 1948. Eleanor Roosevelt, widow of American President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was chair of the drafting committee. The Declaration was created in response to the world's outrage at the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust; its purpose was to prevent such atrocities from ever happening again. However, as UN Secretary-General António Guterres mentioned in his remarks, we have seen countless incidents of persecution against groups simply because of who they are. Numerous genocides have taken place since the adoption of the Declaration. It is clear that we not only can do more, but we also must do more.

In the UN Secretary-General's remarks, Mr. António Guterres focused on the proliferation of neo-

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THE ORIGIN OF EVIL

BY NICK GREEN, EXPRESS

Before the war, the *Ponar* forest had been a picnic destination for people from the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius. The story of the forest changed forever in 1939 when Stalin and Hitler's peace pact divided up the lands between Germany and Russia. Stalin took Lithuania and after the Russians took control of Vilnius, they began building an infrastructure with which to support their forces. The Red Army needed fuel dumps and they quickly singled out Ponar Forest as a suitable place.

A railway track connected city and forest and the vast density of woodland offered a place to hide the fuel. The Russians set about building large circular concrete fuel dumps. But by the time they were ready to enter service the war had swung in Germany's favour and they were abandoned.

In June 1941 Lithuania was swallowed up by Hitler's advancing troops when he invaded Russia. It didn't take long for the Nazis to turn on the local Jewish population. They forced them into ghettos and quickly sealed them off from the outside world.



Martin Weiss was in charge as thousands of Jewish men, women and children were herded to their death.

The Nazi official in charge of the Vilnius ghetto was Martin Weiss. This lightweight, bookish individual was responsible for selecting those to be dispatched to *Ponar*. He quickly revealed a talent for brutality. He once shot a man on the spot for trying to smuggle fish and potatoes into the Vilnius ghetto. His inhuman reputation earned him the nickname *Weiss das Schwartz* or White, the Black.

When the order came to begin the systematic murder of Jews the Nazis began to look for a place that would be functional yet isolated. They quickly found the perfect location: the abandoned Russian fuel pits in *Ponar Forest*. These huge holes were close enough to the city and yet hidden away. And they were deep enough to contain thousands of bodies. They began using the site as a place of execution almost immediately.

It was here that the SS stumbled on a *modus operandi*. The Jews were shot in groups: one victim, one shooter. It was a way of avoiding individual responsibility: there would only be collective guilt. It was psychologically better for the murderers.

The SS, as would become typical, logged the numbers, but not the experiences of those involved. But we do know what happened there. The most exposing testimony about the operation came from a Polish journalist, Kazimierz Sakawicz, whose diaries were published in 2005: "July 27, 1941: Shooting is carried on nearly every day. Will it go on for ever? The executioners began selling clothes of the killed. Other garments are crammed into sacks in a barn at the highway and taken to town."

Sakawicz witnessed how slapdash the operation could be: "July 30: About 150 persons shot. Most of them were elderly people. The executioners complained of being very tired of their "work", of having aching shoulders from shooting. That is the reason for not finishing the wounded off, so that they are buried half alive."

On August 2 Sakawicz witnessed how the executioners carried out their work: "they were all inebriated:

Shooting of big batches has started once again. Today about 4,000 people were driven up... shot by 80 executioners. All drunk."

Some of the most extraordinary stories to emerge from *Ponar's* shooting pits came from survivors and were described by Sakawicz. "Men, women and at least one child lived despite a shot to the back of the head."

Rachel Glicksman was only 15 when she was forced into the ghetto in Vilnius. She remembered naked escapees from *Ponar Forest* finding their way back into her city: "At night there was a curfew, so they approached houses and banged on the windows and asked to be thrown something to cover themselves. That's all — that was the only assistance they asked for."

The deaths at *Ponar* and other shooting pits around Eastern Europe

continued even as the Nazis looked to intensify their methods of killing. Following their work at *Ponar*, the Nazis experimented with gas vans and then finally the extermination camps.

As camps such as Auschwitz accelerated their ambitions for industrialized murder, the pace of killings at *Ponar* slowed. From 1942, as the Germans were getting bogged down in the East, Vilnius itself went into a period of relative calm and stabilization. The Germans needed many of the remaining Jews for slave labor.

But by 1943, it became obvious that Hitler's operations in the East had turned into an existential disaster. The Nazis might have been fastidious in logging their weekly kill totals but they had no desire for the world to understand the reality of their bureaucratic list keeping. Hitler's dreams were dying and there would be consequences. It didn't take much imagination for those in charge to realise that a hundred thousand decaying bodies buried only a few miles outside a European capital would be evidence enough to hang anyone associated with it.

And so the SS began the clear up of *Ponar*. Paul Blobel had been in charge of the murders at *Babi Yar* in Ukraine. In 1941 he had murdered 33,000 Jewish men, women and children. In 1942 he had been relieved of his duties because of his alcoholism. In 1943, however, Blobel was put in charge of destroying evidence of Nazi atrocities in Eastern Europe. His unit arrived in Vilnius and looked for any Jew still alive and healthy to help cover their tracks. They forcibly recruited young men into *Leichenkommando* ("corpse units"). Eighty prisoners were supervised by thirty Lithuanian and German guards.

They were forced to exhume the corpses, pile them high in the concrete fuel dumps and set them alight. It was a huge and terrible job. One of those from the corpse units, Szloma Gol, said: "We dug up altogether 68,000 corpses. I know this because two of the Jews in the pit with us were ordered by the Germans to keep count of the bodies — that was their sole job. The bodies were mixed, Jews, Polish priests, Russian prisoners-of-war."

Szloma Gol found his own brother. He had been dead for two years. He could only identify him because he still had identification papers with him. He had been shot in September 1941.

The corpse units worked chained together.

Gol described how they were allowed to go sick for no more than two days. On the third day, if they were still too ill to work, they would

be shot.

The Nazis may have been in retreat but they were capable of appalling sadism. As digging proceeded, the guards shot eleven prisoners. Their intention: to terrorize and cow the rest.

The Jews realized it would only be a matter of time before they too were murdered so they hatched an escape plan. They dug a tunnel from the bottom of one pit, under the wire.

On April 15, 1944, they made their escape.

Forty managed to get through before noise alerted the guards. In the ensuing chase twenty five were



One of the pits where corpses were burned.

But 15 escaped — including Szloma Gol. Five days after the escape the remaining prisoners were all shot. There were up to 235,000 Jews in Lithuania at the start of the war. By 1944, when the Russians pushed the Germans back across the border, it is thought that only 2,000 to 3,000 survived. The Nazis killed 97 percent of them.

The final solution for many is Auschwitz: the industrialised abattoir designed for mass murder with minimal impact on the butchers' mental health. They could kill without having "eyes on" their victims. This was a terror where the murderers operated safely insulated from the horror. Their victims expired on the other side of a concrete wall. But the viability of their plan was set in motion here in the quiet forest of *Ponar*.

Today the forest of *Ponar* is a reluctant memorial. The seven pits that reveal the narrative of the area form a heartbreaking trail. The first pit, close to the road and railway, would receive those about to die. It was here that the terrified victims would take their clothes off, leave them behind and then be led to the holding trench. Nature has now overtaken it; trees have spread roots where the bare feet of naked men, women and children once trod, waiting for death.

And when you talk to Lithuanians in Vilnius about the carnage a handful of miles outside their city, barely any know what the Germans and willing Lithuanians did. It's a forgotten blot on the collective memory.

Uncomfortable.

RESCUING THE JEWS OF DENMARK

BY RHONA LEWIS, JEWISH PRESS

It was 1943. Inge Sulzbacher and her twin sister were five years old. Members of the Danish resistance helped them escape the Nazi round-up in Copenhagen by huddling them under deck in a fishing boat crossing the choppy Øresund Strait to Sweden. Shulamit Kahn wasn't quite seven.

"Some memories are etched into your mind and you never forget them," says Shulamit.

The Danish resistance movement, along with many ordinary Danish citizens, managed to evacuate 7,220 of Denmark's 7,800 Jews. It was the largest action of collective resistance in the countries occupied by Nazi Germany. And we haven't forgotten it.

Jewish history in Denmark dates back to 1622, when King Christian IV sent a message to the leaders of the Sephardi community in Amsterdam and *Hamburg*, inviting Jews to settle in the township of *Glückstadt*. Jews who accepted this invitation began trading and manufacturing operations there. The king built the famous Round Tower, an astronomical observatory, on which the letters *yud keh vav keh* can be clearly seen, to show his recognition of their contributions. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jews from Eastern Europe continued arriving and settled in Copenhagen, where they enjoyed a warm welcome.

Gittel Davidson, whose father was a member of the *Machzikei Hadas shul*, founded in 1910, shares a memory: "During the First World War, when no *lulavim* were available, my grandfather paid the curators of the Copenhagen Botanical Gardens to be allowed to pick *lulavim* from the palms in the hothouse for tropical plants," she says.

This idyllic stability was rocked on April 9, 1940, when Nazi Germany invaded Denmark. With little choice, the Danish government surrendered, and Denmark became a "model protectorate." Model meant that some sort of quasi-cordial relationship was maintained. While Germany sent 22,000 officials to occupied France, a mere 89 officials were sent to Denmark. During the early years of the occupation, Danish officials repeatedly insisted to the German occupation authorities that there was no "Jewish problem" in Denmark.

The Germans looked the other way for several reasons. They recognized that further discussion was a possibly explosive issue, one that had the potential to destroy the "model" relationship. In addition, the Reich relied substantially on Danish agriculture, meat and butter. Despite this leeway, resistance to German rule bubbled strongly in Denmark. In the summer of 1943, when it seemed that the war was going against the Reich, members of the Danish resistance became bolder. The Germans hit back. In

August, they presented the Danish government with new demands to end resistance activities. The Danish government refused to meet the new demands and resigned. That same day, the Germans took direct control of administration and declared martial law. Plans for the arrest and deportation of Danish Jewry got underway... and were foiled from the inside.

German naval attaché Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz leaked word of the planned deportation to Hans Hedtoft, chairman of the Danish Social Democratic Party. Hedtoft contacted the Danish resistance movement and the head of the Jewish community, C.B. Henriques. Henriques alerted the acting chief rabbi, Dr. Marcus Melchior.

On September 29, erev Rosh Hashana, during Selichos, Jews were warned by Rabbi Melchior of the planned German action and urged to go into hiding immediately. The word spread. The Danish underground and regular citizens — intellectuals, priests, policemen, doctors, blue-collar workers — worked together to track down Jews and find ways to hide them. Some simply contacted friends and asked them to go through telephone books and warn those with Jewish-sounding names to go into hiding. It was a national refutation of Nazi Germany and a reaffirmation of democratic and humanistic values.

"My father and eleven-year-old brother had gone into hiding a few days earlier because we'd already

heard rumors of a deportation," recalls Shulamit. "On erev Rosh Hashana, when we became sure that the deportation was going to happen, my mother together with three children (my ten-year-old sister, myself, and my three-year-old brother) traveled by rail to the coast. There we were split up among the villagers because the Germans were on the lookout and it was too risky for anyone to hide four of us together."

The parents of Inge Sulzbacher faced a terrible choice. "My father didn't daven in Rabbi Melchior's *shul*, but the word about the round-up spread fast. Our table was laid for Rosh Hashana. Even the fish was ready," she recalls. "My parents were afraid

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SURVIVAL, COURAGE AND RESILIENCE: LESSONS FROM PARKLAND

THE CHALLENGE OF STAYING RELEVANT
IN HOLOCAUST EDUCATION
by Eyal Kaminka, PhD

LEARNING FROM PARKLAND:
A New Appreciation of Holocaust Education
by Ivy D. Schamis, MEd

Date: Sunday, March 24th, 2019
Time: 8:30 AM - 3:15 PM
8:30 AM Breakfast
9:00 AM Program Commences

Location: RAMAZ MIDDLE SCHOOL
114 East 85th Street
New York, New York 10028

REGISTRATION: Free of charge, registration required*

WORKSHOP TOPICS INCLUDE
Holocaust Education Through the Eyes of a Child
Kindertransport
The Youngest Voices: Child Survivors of the Holocaust
A Grandfather's Tale: How to Document History
Echoes and Reflections

In-Service credit available
All registered participants will receive COMPLIMENTARY educational resources
Kosher breakfast and lunch will be served

We welcome all superintendents, principals and educators with an interest in Holocaust studies

*To register for this conference, please contact:
Marlene W. Yahalom, PhD, Director of Education, American Society for Yad Vashem
RSVP Tel: 212.220.4304 / Fax: 212.220.4308 / MWY@yadvashemusa.org

This Professional Development Conference is being generously supported by
the Barbara Gutfreund Arfa Endowment Fund for Holocaust Education

A SURVIVOR'S DUTY

A Survivor's Duty: Surviving the Holocaust and Fighting for Israel — A Story of Father and Son.

By Gabriel Laufer. Academic Studies Press: Boston, Mass., 2018. 401 pp. \$16.06 softcover.

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN

As the title of Gabriel Laufer's volume plainly states, *A Survivor's Duty: Surviving the Holocaust and Fighting for Israel — A Story of Father and Son* is the tale of two men. It is the story of Laufer's Hungarian father, László Laufer, referred to as Laci, who was lucky enough to survive the Holocaust, emigrate to Israel and practice law there. At the same time, intertwined throughout is the author's own story, in which he recounts his experiences as a Technion student, a graduate in aeronautical engineering and then an officer in the Israeli Defense Force. The result of this juxtaposition? One can't help but think about what the six million and their children might have given the world: the scientists, the teachers, the doctors, etc. One also can't help but think about the difference just a few years made in the history of the Jews. For once upon a time, during World War II, Jews were completely powerless.... And there is even more that makes this work a unique and important addition to Holocaust study and Jewish history generally.

For example, little has been written about how the Hungarians, allied with the Germans, treated their Jews before 1944 and the Nazi takeover of

their country. Here Laufer writes about how his father, who like many other Hungarian Jews during those years, was drafted into a Hungarian slave labor battalion. Thus, Jews became the "property of the Hungarian Army" . . . which could then do with them as it pleased. Among other backbreaking jobs, Laci, alongside others like himself, was forced to make sure convoys carrying food and ammunition got to Hungarian frontline soldiers, regardless of the rain-soaked, impassable roads. This

meant "help[ing] the horses if they could not pull the wagons [with these supplies] and replac[ing] them [with themselves] if they [the horses] were injured or if they died. The convoy was to reach its destination at any cost." Indeed, starved and sleeping anywhere, Jews quickly realized that horses meant more than they did. Not surprisingly, many

died — from the cold, the rain, the snow and illnesses all left untreated.

In 1944, with the Nazi takeover of Hungary, Laci, again like many other Hungarian Jews, was turned over to them. The Nazis shipped him off to *Dachau* and, more specifically, to a work camp near *Mühldorf* where one of a few "massive" bunkers were

being built, measuring "between six hundred and eight hundred thousand square feet . . . , six to eight stories below ground, with only the top exposed." The bunker at the *Mühldorf* site was to hide the manufacture of parts for superweapons Hitler claimed would, in any "last ditch effort," win the war for Germany. "One of these potential superweapons was the Messerschmitt Me-262, the first operational jet-engine-powered fighter airplane." Again, little has been written about these bunkers and the thousands of Jews who slaved and died building them, much like the Jews who slaved and died under the Egyptians building their pyramids.

Meanwhile, the author's (Laci's son) story is of an Israeli citizen and soldier fighting for his own country, Israel. Actually, here Laufer not only tells us of his experiences serving during Israel's 1967 Six-Day War, but, interestingly, also gives

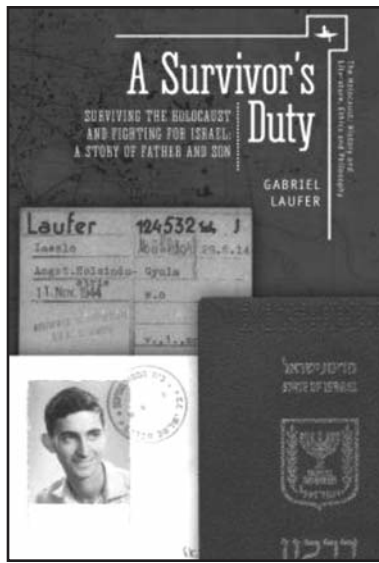
us an up-close picture of the war as it was experienced by Israelis generally. Particularly memorable is the author's description of the tiny country's "silent mobilization," in which everyone determinedly and actively pulled together as one. Since Laufer was stationed at a border kibbutz, the reader cannot help but be moved

reading of how brave kibbutz members, ready to fight the enemy at a moment's notice, accepted the fact that their children would have to sleep in bomb shelters. That was just what had to be done to save Israel! No less memorable is the author's description of the miraculous victory Israel realized in this war against the armies of five nations, and the joy all felt with the return of old city of Jerusalem into Jewish hands....

On the other hand, Laufer does not shy away from noting the painful human cost of the surprise 1973 Yom Kippur war, a war in which he also served. "Two days into the war," he writes, "our casualties were already in the hundreds." Indeed, the casualties in the Yom Kippur war ended up being "more than the casualties of the Six-Day War and the 1956 Sinai Campaign combined" . . . even as it eventually led to peace with Egypt and Jordan.

In summary, getting back to this volume's title, Laufer notes in the foreword of his book how it is a "duty" that "memories of our experiences [both of father and son] and their lessons" be communicated "to our children and the generations to follow" — just as Elie Wiesel felt. As far as this reviewer is concerned, the author of *A Survivor's Duty: Surviving the Holocaust and Fighting for Israel — A Story of Father and Son* has most definitely done his duty.

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



NEW BOOK LEAVES NORWAY'S "HEROIC ROLE" IN THE HOLOCAUST IN TATTERS

BY OFER ADERET, HAARETZ

"What did the resistance know?" This simple question has been the focus of fierce debate in Norway in recent weeks. The answer to this question, which is emblazoned on the cover of a new book by journalist Marte Michelet, threatens to shatter Norway's greatest myth: the heroism of the resistance that fought the Nazis and saved half the country's Jews during World War II.

At the center of the debate is a terrible event Norwegians would prefer to erase from the history books. On November 26, 1942, a cargo ship sailed from Oslo, carrying about 530 Norwegian Jews who had been arrested with the help of the local police. The ship headed for Poland; the Jews were then sent to Auschwitz. The vast majority did not survive the Holocaust.

According to Norway's received version of events, the Norwegian resistance did not find out about the deportation in time. The story goes that the deportation was a complete surprise,

though the resistance did help hundreds of Jews escape to Sweden.

But documents Michelet found over years of research reflect a more complex picture. It turns out that the resistance did know about the



Squadron Leader J. Macadam meets three Norwegian resistance fighters in Oslo following the arrival of British forces in Norway, May 11, 1945.

Germans' intention to deport Norway's Jews, months before the arrest order was issued. Still, the resistance did not try to save Jews but rather concentrated on the fight against the Germans.

In her Norwegian-language book, Michelet says Helmuth James von Moltke, the German military intelligence officer who opposed the Nazis and was executed by the Gestapo in 1945, gave information about the

deportation plans to the resistance and to the Norwegian government in exile in London. He did this after the January 1942 Wannsee Conference, where the Nazis discussed their plans to annihilate Europe's Jews.

Michelet also found a shelved interview that historian and Norwegian resistance fighter Ragnar Ulstein conducted with underground hero Gunnar Sonstebj, the most decorated Norwegian. In the interview, Sonstebj said he and his comrades knew about the deportation plan three months before it was carried out. "We knew with 100 percent certainty that the Jews would be deported from Norway," he said.

In the Norwegian media, it has been argued that the very fact the interview was mothballed at the Resistance Museum in Oslo could indicate that resistance historians and heroes worked together to blur a mixed past.

Ulstein, who is now 98, has criticized Michelet's conclusions. "Every decade someone crops up and thinks he knows more than what we knew," he told the newspaper *Dagsavisen*. "And with hindsight they ask why the resistance didn't do this or that. I'm tired of this. It's a pointless discussion."

He said "Michelet doesn't understand the nature of the war," adding
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RESCUING THE JEWS OF DENMARK

(Continued from page 3)

that my sister and I would cry out and endanger the others who were fleeing. At the urging of our upstairs neighbor, whose husband was part of the Danish police force, my parents decided to flee with my two older brothers and leave us with the neighbor. The following morning, the neighbor, afraid for our safety, biked away to find us a more secure hiding place. When the Nazis arrived to follow up on the rumor that two children were being hidden, we were no longer there," Inge says.

Most Jews hid for several days and even weeks, uncertain of their fate. "The villagers I stayed with spent much of the day in the fields," says Shulamit. "When we finally sat down to a meal at the oval table, I was too afraid of the dog under the table to eat much. I didn't cry, though, because I already had the wisdom of adults and knew that crying wouldn't help me."

On October 2, the Swedish government announced in an official statement that Sweden was prepared to accept all Danish Jews. Some historians credit Danish physicist Niels Bohr, whose mother was Jewish, for Sweden's willingness to help. Two days before the announcement, Bohr had been spirited to Sweden on his way to the US to work on the then top-secret Manhattan Project. He refused to continue his journey until he had persuaded King Gustav V of Sweden to provide asylum. On October 3, a statement read in all Danish churches said: "We shall, if occasion should arise, plainly acknowledge our obligation to obey God more than man." The Danish people kept their word.

"After a few days, my mother arrived to take me to the fishing boat," says Shulamit, who had been separated from her mother. "A large coal truck arrived, and we were packed in like

sardines. Something was thrown over us. My brother was put to sleep because we couldn't risk a sound," she says.

The trip over the choppy winter Øresund Strait lasted about an hour. Some Jews were transported in large fishing boats of up to 20 tons, but others were carried to freedom in rowboats or kayaks. Seventy-five years have passed, but the voices of those who made the passage can't hide the fear that they felt. "I remember begging Hashem in Danish to help us

says Inge.

At a time when the average monthly wage was less than 500 Danish kroner, most fishermen charged on average 1,000 Danish kroner per person for the transport. Some cashed in and charged up to 50,000 kroner. The Danish resistance provided much of the financing, in large part from wealthy Danes who donated large sums of money; the Jews themselves provided the rest. In total, the rescue is estimated to have cost around 20 million kroner.



The memorial at the shul.

across. I'd have liked to pray in Hebrew, but I comforted myself by telling myself that Hashem could understand all languages," says Shulamit. Inge, together with her twin sister, made the night crossing lying on the packing shelves under deck surrounded by the smell of fish.

"When we docked, a soldier in a black uniform picked me up to carry me off the boat. I was terrified, as I thought he was a Nazi," she says. Luckily, Inge's father, who came down to the landing spot every night in search of his daughters, found the girls. "My mother later said that my father never cried... except for the time that he was reunited with us,"

The Nazis, unaware that their prey had slipped away, began their hunt. In Copenhagen the deportation order was carried out on Rosh Hashana, the night of October 1, when the Germans assumed that all Jews would be gathered at home. The SS organized themselves into five-man teams, each with a Dane, a vehicle and a list of addresses to check. Most of the teams found no one. Although tens of Jews managed to escape detection and remained in hiding, the Germans captured 483 Jews and deported them to *Theresienstadt*. Denmark did not remain silent. Danish civil servants persuaded the Germans to accept

packages of food and medicine for the prisoners and also persuaded the Germans not to deport the Danish Jews to extermination camps. As a result, although fifty-three Jews died in the camp, the survival rate was high.

In Sweden, Shulamit and her family spent the following 20 months in a resort hotel converted into a refugee camp. Inge and her family remained in a small house on the outskirts of Stockholm. At the end of the war, the Danish Jews returned to their homes in Denmark. "Our nanny had taken care of our apartment in our absence," says Shulamit. "All that was missing was the matzah. Because of the years-long war, my father had stored some matzah on the top of a cupboard, as he wasn't sure that the following year we'd have access to matzah. Our nanny had given this matzah to an elderly Jewish woman who refused to go into hiding so that she could eat matzah on Pesach," says Shulamit.

Ninety-nine percent of Denmark's Jewish population survived the Holocaust. The incredible rescue is commemorated in several places worldwide. In Copenhagen, a stone memorial stands in the courtyard of the Machzikei Hadas shul. In the US Holocaust Museum and at Yad Vashem, authentic fishing boats used in the rescue bear witness. As does a stop on the Jerusalem Light Rail. As you pass through Beit HaKerem, you'll hear the stop at Kikar Denya being called out. At the stop, you'll find eateries, shops, a bank and a monument shaped like a boat. An inscription on the monument reads: "Danish courage and Swedish generosity gave indelible proof of human values in times of barbarism. Israel and Jews everywhere will never forget."

CHILD OF THE HOLOCAUST, SURVIVING EVERY DAY

BY JUDY SIMON,
ISRAEL NATIONAL NEWS

Rabbi Joseph Polak was three years old when the Holocaust ended. His survival story is still unfolding.

We have heard, read and watched many stories of people's experiences in the Holocaust. We have encountered detailed descriptions of the persecution these adult survivors endured. But what we often forget is the stories of the children born during the *Shoah*. These children never had a normal childhood, never experienced a normal family life. These small ones had to deal with returning to the world after their terrible ordeal, a world in which their own parents were horribly changed in every way. The child survivors tell a different story.

Rabbi Joseph Polak, born in 1942, saved his family in utero, by delaying their deportation to *Westerbork* by a year. In *Westerbork*, there was a surreal experience of normalcy, of good food, of excellent health care. But it was the gateway to almost certain death, as every Tuesday morning, a train was filled with Jews who were taken east.

Rabbi Polak's family ended up in *Bergen-Belsen*, where the small boy played hide-and-seek among the piles of corpses. In 1945, when he was three, his family was aboard the "Lost Transport," which journeyed to *Troebitz*, where Rabbi Polak's father succumbed to his illness and was buried. At this point, the child was adopted by a Dutch family, as his mother was too sick to care for him.

Rabbi Polak's first vivid memory was of the meeting with his mother in a hospital in the Hague. "I remem-

ber that everything in the room was white. I saw a woman in the bed. They must not have told me that I was going to meet my mother," Rabbi Polak recalls. "Hello madam," he greeted the strange lady. "Don't say 'hello madam,' say 'hello Mother!'" he was told. Mrs. Polak first had to prove that the child was her son. And then she gave him a small red *siddur* (prayer book) and a pair of *tzitzit* (ritual fringed garment). She told her young son, "You are a Jewish boy. These are things a Jew needs every day."

Rabbi Polak describes his entry into school in Montreal as a six-year-old who didn't even know how to play, let alone make friends. He asked his mother to stop speaking to him in Dutch. It was only many years later that he discovered that fully two thirds of the boys in his seventh grade class were child sur-

vivors like himself. They had worked so hard on fitting in, on silencing the pain of their past, that they didn't even realize that they were in the majority.

In meetings with older Holocaust survivors, Rabbi Polak describes the painful negation of who the child survivors are. Many adult survivors told the children, "You don't really understand. You were just a kid. You know nothing about what happened there." This denial of their experiences made the younger survivors feel like fakes, like liars. Now that virtually all Holocaust survivors alive today were children at the time of the horrors, they talk about their experiences with one another. "We feel a need to tell, to share our stories. We are the last witnesses to what happened. We were there," he explains.

NEW BOOK LEAVES NORWAY'S "HEROIC ROLE" IN THE HOLOCAUST IN TATTERS

(Continued from page 4)

that the resistance didn't have concrete intelligence about the deportation, while the atmosphere was one of rumor under "the fog of occupation."

A BUSINESS IN EVERY RESPECT

Still, Michelet discovered documents and testimonies about anti-Semitism that was common in the resistance. She also learned that despite the resistance's decision not to help the Jews, some activists realized the economic potential in rescuing them.

Thus, groups in the resistance that needed money to finance their operations against the Germans helped smuggle Jews to Sweden simply for large sums of money. The rescue operation emerges in her book as a business in every respect, one that left the surviving Jews impoverished. Wealthy people who could pay were saved, and those without means were sent to Auschwitz.

Norwegian historians are confirming the findings and are revealing equally damning details about groups within the resistance that competed to save Jews for money. Archival documents show that in a number of cases people in the resistance informed on their colleagues to the Germans, jealous of their profits. The price was paid, of course, also by any Jews who were being hid by the group that was informed on.

Michelet faces criticism from establishment historians, especially those of the Jewish Museum in Oslo and the Resistance Museum in Oslo, who have cast doubt on her findings and

attacked her professional integrity. But a former president of the Jewish community in the Norwegian capital, Ervin Kohn, has defended her, noting that most of her revelations were known to the Jewish community,

Germany. Half of Norway's Jews, about 800 people, were sent to the death camps, with the help of the Norwegian authorities. Most of them were deported on a ship that left Oslo in the fall of 1942.

in the resistance.

In 1996, discussion began on the Jewish property that was stolen and nationalized by the authorities during the war. Amid public pressure, a government commission was set up to examine the issue; a majority in the commission ruled that the government was not responsible for the Nazis' crimes, and the compensation could be symbolic. But the government adopted the minority opinion and paid reparations to the Jewish community.

Later it emerged that it was the Norwegian police who carried out the mass arrests of the Jews, not German soldiers, and many Norwegians helped the police or turned a blind eye. In 2012, Norway's prime minister officially apologized for the role Norwegians played in the arrest and deportation of Jews. A few months later the Norwegian police also apologized, followed by the national rail company in 2015.

In 2014, Michelet published her debut book, whose title translates as *The Ultimate Crime: Victims and Perpetrators in the Norwegian Holocaust*. It immediately sparked a controversy. Michelet said she began to research the topic when she moved into an apartment in Oslo once owned by Jews who were deported from Norway and murdered at Auschwitz.

Yet the national narrative continued to glorify the resistance's role in saving Jews. Michelet's new book *What Did the Resistance Know?* is threatening to take even that credit away. The Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet* has called it "the most important book of the year."



Anti-Semitic graffiti on a Jewish store in Norway during the Holocaust.

adding that the Norwegian "heroism narrative" began to crack years ago.

A TREE AT YAD VASHEM

At the center of this narrative was the notion that the Norwegian nation was a victim of the Nazis. Collaborators with the Germans were depicted as a treacherous minority and punished. Most people were depicted as having resisted the Germans, with resistance members depicted as national heroes.

After the Nazi invasion in April 1940, the king and the government fled to London, while in Norway a puppet government was established that operated at the behest of Nazi

But the resistance smuggled hundreds of Jews — half the community — across the border to safety in Sweden. A tree has been planted in the underground's honor at Yad Vashem.

Most of the resistance's glory stems from the daring operation to blow up the heavy water production plant the Nazis used as part of their nuclear weapons program. The commander of that operation, Joachim Ronneberg, who died in last October at 99, was a national hero.

But over the years it turned out that the number of Norwegians who volunteered for the German army was far greater than the number who fought

"WE'LL GO ON FOREVER"

BY DOVID EFUNE,
THE ALGEMEINER

I have long known that my grandmother witnessed *Kristallnacht*. But it is only recently that I have come to learn the details of her harrowing experience.

Now Esti Kalms, my grandmother grew up as Esther Weinstock on Lilienbrunnngasse, a small street in Vienna's 2nd district, just south of the River Danube. In March 1938, nine months before the pogrom, Austria was incorporated into Nazi Germany through the infamous *Anschluss*, and Adolf Hitler was greeted by adoring crowds on the Heldenplatz when he triumphantly arrived in Vienna.

The area where my grandmother lived was home to a significant Orthodox Jewish community, alongside non-Jewish neighbors. The street was relatively narrow for Vienna, lined with fairly large apartment blocks, all four stories high. "From your window you could look

into the windows of the houses opposite," my grandmother told me. There were a few stores on the block and a synagogue that was housed directly below her apartment.

It was the family's proximity to the synagogue that made her a front-row observer to the events of that brutal night, when more than one hundred Jews were murdered, thousands deported to concentration camps, and hundreds of synagogues and Jewish-owned stores were destroyed in the anti-Semitic frenzy.

My grandmother was nine years old at the time. She recalls huddling silently at the window of their apartment with her siblings, her mother, who sold knitted goods for a living, and her father, a kabbalist and local rabbi, and "hearing a lot of noise outside in the street."

The road below was dimly lit, and in their apartment all lights were switched off. "We were told to stand well back from the window, so as not to be seen from the street," she said. "We thought we would be next."

Down below she saw a group of soldiers and "a lot of the contents of the *shul* that was one flat below us in the middle of the street."

"We were obviously quite scared," she added.

And then a vivid recollection: "In the middle of it all there was one SS man holding up a *Sefer Torah* (Torah scroll) and kicking downwards with his boot to try and tear it, to destroy it."

"How stupid is he," she remembers thinking. "He thinks it's made out of paper and I know it's made out of parchment, why doesn't he realize he's not going to tear it."

The scroll didn't tear, and shortly afterward the family moved away from the window.

The following day she walked alone to her mother's shop. On her way there she passed by a large synagogue that they had often attended growing up. "I saw the destruction of that *shul* and I had to walk into the middle of the road to get past because of the destruction and the rubble," she said. "You could

see the inside of the *shul* right outside in the street. That made a big impression on me."

"I was extremely puzzled," she said. "I didn't know that this had gone on all over the place, and whatever else had gone on that night. It took time to seep through."

Shortly afterward she told her parents that she wanted to leave the country, and a month or so later she left for England on the *Kindertransport* with two of her sisters and one of her brothers. Both of her parents, my great-grandparents Dovid and Chaye Ides Weinstock, perished at the hands of the Nazis.

Reflecting back on that fateful night, I asked why she felt the memory of the Nazi with the Torah scroll had remained so lucid all these years.

"It was in fact a microcosm," she said. "It symbolizes how we are indestructible, really. Just as the written word on the *Sefer Torah*, on the parchment, couldn't be destroyed in the way he wanted to destroy it, we'll go on forever."

OPENING ITALY'S "CLOSET OF SHAME"

BY SAVIONA MANE, HAARETZ

Hidden in the guts of Stazione Centrale, Milan's impressive train station, which was inaugurated during the Fascist era and now serves 120 million railway passengers per year, is the point where Fascist Italy converges with Nazi Germany: Platform 21. This is the platform where postal items were loaded onto freight trains, heading to their destinations around Europe. This is also where Jews, and non-Jewish dissidents, were loaded onto cattle cars heading to their destinations around Europe: the camps of Fossoli, Bolzano, Mauthausen, Bergen-Belsen, Ravensbrück, Flossenbürg and Auschwitz-Birkenau. Twenty such transports left for the concentration and death camps, from December 1943 to January 1945, while on the upper floor, passenger trains continued to rush toward European cities.



Italian Holocaust survivor Liliana Segre is seen as a little girl with her dad in August 1937.

Platform 21 was transformed into a Holocaust memorial in 2013. In its heart, a few of the original cars are standing along a short track, which ends in an exposed space, from which the train cars with their human cargo were brought up to the station level — out of sight. At the entrance to the memorial — above which the rumbling of trains coming in and out makes one shiver — a huge inscription reading "Indifference" greets visitors.

"Indifference is worse than violence," says Liliana Segre, an 88-year-old Holocaust survivor and a newly appointed senator, who insisted on inscribing that word on the huge stone.

Segre was one of 25 Jewish children under the age of 14, out of a total of 776 deported children, who were deported from Italy to Auschwitz and survived. She was 13 when she boarded a train that departed from Platform 21 for Auschwitz on January 30, 1944, with her father. But for her

and over 7,500 other Italian Jews deported to the death camps, the journey to hell had begun many years before, on November 17, 1938, when Benito Mussolini's Racial Laws against Jews went into effect.

The racist laws had been preceded by publication of the "Manifesto of Race," which was signed by 10 senior scientists in July 1938, purporting to give it a scientific basis. Signed without hesitation by King Vittorio Emanuele III, the statutes were meant to ban Jews from society and humiliated them. They included a series of prohibitions that became increasingly rigid, up through the spring of 1945. They ranged from bans on intermarriage, schooling in public institutions, working in state entities, membership in the Fascist Party and participation in the "free" professions, to prohibitions on ownership of real estate above a certain value, renting out rooms to non-Jews, peddling and trading in wool, to forbidding involvement in the realms of music, theater, acrobatics, management of dance studios, along with owning radios, being listed in the phone books, publishing death notices and raising carrier pigeons.

The sky fell on about 50,000 Italian Jews, the oldest Jewish community in Europe, about 10 percent of whom were registered in 1933 with the Fascist Party. All of a sudden, well-established, patriotic families with deep roots in the country, who saw themselves as Italian in every respect — some of whom had even lived there for hundreds of years, like Segre's forebears — were stripped of all civil rights. In the fall of 1943, along with the invasion of German forces and the establishment of the Italian Socialist Republic of Salò, came the physical persecution as well.

Segre, who was born in Milan in September 1930, was eight years old when the Laws were enacted. "A very happy, serene, slightly naughty little girl, upon whom my father and grandparents heaped endless love," says Segre, who lost her mother at a tender age.

"I grew up in a secular, you could say atheist family, in which there were no religious symbols and which did not celebrate (Jewish) holidays," she recently told *Haaretz* during an interview in her Milan home, where a Hanukkah menorah stands out today, adding, "I wasn't even aware that I was Jewish."

The revelation of her Jewish identity caught her by surprise. It was the day her father informed her that she had been expelled from school — the very

same school that her children and grandchildren would later attend.

"This word, 'expelled,' was a terrible word in my eyes," says Segre, a tall, elegant woman who speaks gently, with restrained intensity, devoid of pathos. "I didn't understand why. I didn't understand what I'd done wrong."

For the first time in her life, the mischievous and happy girl felt "different" from her friends, most of whom faded

increased gradually. Six years before the Racial Laws, Il Duce claimed in an interview with a Swiss Jewish journalist, Emil Ludwig, that there was no anti-Semitism in Italy, and even praised the Jews. "As citizens, Italian Jews have always behaved properly, and as soldiers they fought bravely," he said.

Until the establishment of Mussolini's Salò Republic and the Nazi invasion, in autumn 1943, the



A visual representation of Racial Laws targeting Jews from Italy's Fascist period: heading reads "Jews cannot..."

slowly out of her life. Even her beloved teacher did not seek to comfort or embrace her when Segre was expelled, and made do with a comment about not having been the one that legislated the racist laws. A pervasive feeling of abandonment and loneliness grew in her family, which could not find comfort in the local Jewish community, with whom they did not have ties.

"Some Jews understood what was happening and left Italy, some understood but lacked the means to leave, and others, like my family, didn't want to leave because they didn't believe what had happened could ever happen, and stayed until it was too late," Segre recalls.

Indeed, when she and her father Alberto tried to escape to Switzerland in December 1943 — after believing they had secured the grandparents' safety — it was already too late. Swiss border police sent them back to Italy, whereupon they were arrested and sent to San Vittore prison in Milan, and were then, after 40 days, loaded onto a cattle car destined for Auschwitz. Alberto and his own parents, who were subsequently arrested, were murdered in the death camp. Liliana, who looked older than her 13 years, was sent to forced labor in a weapons factory nearby, and survived.

"You only survive by chance in Auschwitz, by luck, not because you are clever or smarter," she says. "But you can never escape from Auschwitz, as Primo Levi said."

The persecution of Italian Jews

Fascist racist laws did not threaten the lives of Italy's Jews.

"Mussolini was an anti-Semite 'inside,' but not an unbridled one like Hitler," says Michele Sarfatti, an Italian historian who specializes in Jewish history under Fascist rule.

"He was a pragmatic leader. On the one hand, he could write articles tinged with anti-Semitism and attack the 'racist fraternity between Bolshevik Jews in Russia, liberal Jews in London and capitalist Jews in New York' — a classic anti-Semitic speech. On the other hand, he had no problem conducting close relations with Jews like [journalist and socialist politician] Claudio Treves or Margherita Sarfatti," Mussolini's lover of 20 years, who shared his Fascist ideology and wrote his first official biography, *Dux*.

"It is true that until his regime was solidly established, Mussolini was not reluctant to use violence or to allow Fascist bullies' attacks on the streets, but after 1925 he wasn't interested in street violence as was prevalent in Germany. With few exceptions, there was no burning books or *Kristallnacht* in Italy," says Sarfatti. "Under the new Fascist order, oppressing Jews and opponents of the regime was supposed to be done by the police, without killing, without establishing violent camps like *Dachau*."

The situation changed drastically on September 8, 1943, a month and a half after Mussolini was deposed and incarcerated, on the very day the new

(Continued on page 11)

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE

WORLD PAYS TRIBUTE TO THE

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu led a plethora of world leaders observing International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27.

Netanyahu marked the occasion by welcoming three Holocaust survivors to

the death march. Malka lost her five sisters in the crematoria and has a number burned onto her arm. Motka, whose brother fell at *Latrun*, interrupted an SS officer who whipped his back. The penalty for such an offense was immediate death, but he somehow survived.

“At the same time,” the prime minister concluded, “we honor the memory of the righteous among the nations. Today in Jerusalem a plaque was unveiled in memory of Japanese Consul [Chiune-Sempo] Sugihara, who saved thousands of European Jews during the Holocaust. We bow our heads in his memory.”

Netanyahu was joined by US President Donald Trump, who pledged, “We remain committed to the post-Holocaust imperative, ‘Never Again.’

“‘Never Again’ means not only remembering — in a profound and lasting way — the evils of the Holocaust,” he elaborated, “but it also means remembering the individual men and women in this nation, and throughout the world, who have devoted their lives to the preservation and security of the Jewish people and to the betterment

people. Six million Jews were systematically slaughtered in the Holocaust. Nazis also enslaved Slavs, Roma, gays, and other minorities, religious leaders, and courageously opposed the Nazi regime. The brutality



Survivors of Auschwitz walk to place candles at the International Monument to the Victims of Fascism at the former Nazi German concentration and extermination camp KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau in Oswiecim, Poland, on International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

his office, recounting their stories and warning against the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe today.

“Anti-Semitism from the right is not a new phenomenon there,” he said. “What is new in Europe is the combination of Islamic anti-Semitism and the anti-Semitism of the extreme left, which includes anti-Zionism, such as has recently occurred in Great Britain and in Ireland. What a disgrace. We condemn all forms of anti-Semitism as such.”

“During the Holocaust, the Jewish people were completely helpless,” noted the prime minister. “Today the state of the Jews is among the strongest and most advanced in the world. First and foremost, we have restored to our people the strength to resist that we lost in exile. In contrast to the terrible helplessness of our people then, today we strike at those who seek our lives and hurt all those who try to hurt us. At the same time, we do not forget our dead, our enemies and our rescuers.”

Detailing the experiences of his survivor guests, Moshe Haelyon, Mordecai (Motka) Weisel and Malka Steinmetz, Netanyahu said, “We are honored with the presence of Moshe, Malka and Motka, Holocaust survivors that I just met before the meeting.

“Moshe survived the death camps and

By this unbelievable act of heroism, he served as an example to thousands. The story spread among thousands,

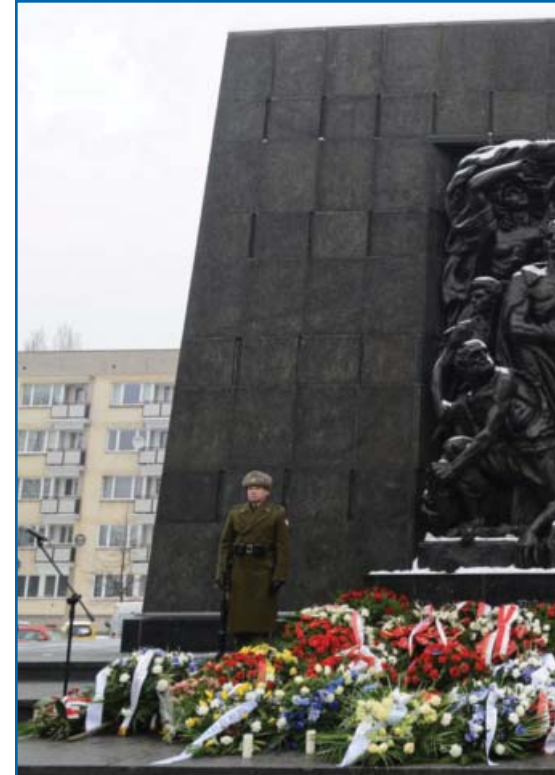


A man places a stone at the Emanuel Memorial Tree, which is a weeping willow tree with the names of Hungarian Jews killed during the Holocaust, in the garden of Dohany Street Synagogue during a commemoration marking the International Holocaust Remembrance Day in Budapest.

and he served as an example to thousands, and to us. The moving stories of the revival of Moshe, Malka and Motka are the story of our revival.”

of all mankind.”

Trump continued, “The Third Reich, and its collaborators, pursued the complete elimination of the entire Jewish



The monument for the Warsaw Ghetto Heroes during the International Holocaust Remembrance Day in Warsaw.

was a crime against children. It was a crime against humanity. It was a crime against

“On International Holocaust Remembrance Day, we honor the hearts the memory of every woman and child who was tortured or murdered in the Holocaust,” the prime minister said. “We remember these men and women, those who perished and those who survived — is to strive to prevent suffering from happening again, and to show respect and indifference to the victims. It is a chapter in the history of humankind that affects all men and women. It invites repetition of the same.”

Trump’s statement on the story of the first American president in the aftermath of the Holocaust. “On April 27, 1945,” said a soldier of the 12th Army, “the United States was astonished by the words of the United States: ‘Although I will never forget the words of Aaron A. Eiferman’s statement on going to a new position. They came across as a historic account, like descriptions, lacked

ANCE DAY: NEVER FORGET THE VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST

Jews were systemat-
ed in horrific ways. The
ed and murdered
people with disabil-
ers and others who
posed their cruel
ty of the Holocaust

quately convey the horror and the suffer-
ing that occurred at *Dachau* and in
the other concentration and death
camps of the Holocaust.”

British Prime Minister Theresa May
issued on Twitter a picture of a hand-
written statement that read, “In a world
where hatred of others is becoming
increasingly commonplace, we can
choose to stand as one against those
who peddle it.”

May also pointed to
contemporary anti-
Semitism, asserting,
“At a time where
Jews are being tar-
geted simply
because of who they
are, all of us of any
faith can come
together in their
defense.”

“And as the *Shoah*
begins to drift to the
edge of living memo-
ry, we can once
again commit our-
selves to remember-

“On this day, we repeat the vow, ‘Never
Again’ — not as a phrase, but as a prom-
ise to remain vigilant against the threat of
genocide,” he pledged. “We must pre-
serve the memories of those who lived

camps, including hundreds of Jewish
refugees aboard the *MS St. Louis*. No
words will ever erase this tragedy — but
it is our sincere hope that this apology
will help ensure the lessons we have



The ceremony on the occasion of the International Day of
Law.

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ime against human-
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id Trump, “a young
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Army wrote these
to his wife in the
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ve witnessed today,
what I have seen.’
s division was mov-
n near *Dachau* when
a prison camp. His
ike all subsequent
the words to ade-

ing those who were murdered, and to
ensuring that such a human catastro-
phe is never permitted to happen
again,” she added.



Former prisoners place candles and flowers at the Death Wall to mark the 74th anniversary of the liberation of
Auschwitz-Birkenau.

In his own statement, Canadian
Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called
the Holocaust “a stark reminder of the
dangers of hatred and discrimination,
and the irreversible consequences of
inaction and indifference.

through the horrors of the *Shoah*, so that
our generation — and those to come —
will never forget their stories.”

Turning to his own country, Trudeau
admonished, “We must also acknowl-
edge Canada’s own history of anti-
Semitism, and its devastating results. In



Italian Foreign Minister Enzo Moavero Milanese lays a wreath during a ceremony at the Hall of Remembrance at the
Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, January 27, 2019.

learned are never forgotten.

“We are not immune to the effects of
ignorance and hate,” the prime minister
added. “The threats of violence, xeno-
phobia and anti-Semitism still exist
today. The murder of eleven Jews at the
Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh —
one of the deadliest attacks against
Jews in North American history — is
fresh in our minds. The Government will
continue to stand with the Jewish com-
munity in Canada and around the world,
and call out the anti-Semitism, hatred
and racism that incites such despicable
acts.”

French President Emmanuel
Macron simply tweeted a picture of
a memorial candle with the words “light
of remembrance” in French.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro
Sánchez also took to Twitter in honor of
the occasion, saying, “We shall not for-
get the barbarism of anti-Semitism,
racism and intolerance.”

In Germany, Foreign Minister Heiko
Maas warned in an opinion column that
Germany’s “culture of remembrance is
crumbling” owing to “pressure from the
extreme right.” On Saturday, Chancellor
Angela Merkel had declared “zero toler-
ance” for anti-Semitism and remarked,
“People growing up today must know
what people were capable of in the past,
and we must work proactively to ensure
that it is never repeated.”

A TOY MONKEY THAT ESCAPED NAZI GERMANY AND REUNITED A FAMILY

BY URI BERLINER, NPR

The monkey's fur is worn away. It's nearly a century old. A well-loved toy, it is barely four inches tall. It was packed away for long voyages, on an escape from Nazi Germany, to Sweden and America. And now, it's the key to a discovery that transformed my family.

The monkey belonged to my father, Gert Berliner, who as a boy in Berlin in the 1930s rode his bicycle around the city. Clipped to the handlebars was the toy monkey.

"I liked him," recalls my dad, who is now 94. "He was like a good luck piece."



Gert Berliner packed this toy monkey in a suitcase when he fled for his life nearly 80 years ago. It's now part of the collection at the Jewish Museum Berlin.

In pictures from his young days in Berlin, my father looks confident, a tad rebellious with a wry smile. But his life was about to be eviscerated. The Gestapo would steadily crush every aspect of Jewish life in the city.

It exploded in a wave of violence — in November 1938 — on *Kristallnacht*. Jewish shops, schools and homes were smashed and burned by German civilians and Nazi storm troopers. Thousands of innocent Jewish men were rounded up.

"I do remember," my father recalls. "I went out on the street ... a lot of glass; you heard fire sirens; synagogues were set on fire."

Escape routes from Germany vanished. One that existed was for children, the *Kindertransport*. Jewish and Quaker organizations led a rescue effort, a kind of Underground Railroad, to help save children from the Nazis. Thousands of children were sent on trains, often placed with foster families. But there were no takers for their parents. The children had to go by themselves, alone. Most went to England. My father's destination: Sweden.

In 1939, at the age of 14, he had to say goodbye to his parents, Paul and Sophie Berliner. He boarded the train in Berlin, bound for the city of *Kalmar*, on the Baltic Coast. He had a small bag and there wasn't much he could

bring. But stashed away in his suitcase was the toy monkey, his talisman.

The monkey wasn't useful. But he took it with him anyway. He was worried, fearful about his parents. But he had reached shelter, taken in by a generous, kind family. My dad's first impression of Sweden was the air. Free from the violence of Berlin, he could exhale. "Suddenly you could breathe," he recalled. "It was like the air was different."

But his parents' fate remained uncertain. Eventually their letters stopped coming. Paul and Sophie Berliner were captured by the Gestapo and sent to Auschwitz on a train, Transport 38, on May 17, 1943. They were murdered there.

After the war, my father moved to the United States. He left Sweden for New York as a young man of 22. He was an orphan. He had no siblings and he was alone. Again, he picked the toy monkey to come with him. But by now it was something different: the most tangible connection to his childhood, to a fleeting moment of innocence.

My dad has lived mostly in New York, working as a photographer and artist, with stints in New Mexico and Italy. And for more than half a century, his toy monkey went with him. But it lived in drawers, existing only in a private

space, so private that I never even knew about his childhood toy, and all that it symbolized.

It was just one of the many things I didn't know about my father's past.

Throughout my childhood and well into my adult years, we rarely discussed what he'd been through, the murder of his parents, how alone he must have felt as a young refugee. How it affected his life, our relationship. He was a distant father. And I was a distant son, much of our time together beset by halting, uncomfortable silences.

What I did know is that our family — on the Berliner side — was very small. There were just three Berliners: my dad, me and my son, Ben. At least that's what we thought.

And then two things happened — with the toy monkey at the center of both events.

In 2003, an archivist from the Jewish Museum Berlin named Aubrey Pomerance visited my dad at his apartment in Manhattan. My dad had met Aubrey before and liked him. This time, Aubrey was there to ask a favor. Did my father have something from when he was a Jewish child living in Nazi Germany? Something that visitors to the museum could relate to personally?

My dad was torn. His wife, Frances,

didn't want him to part with the monkey. She had a good point. It was the most intimate object he had left from his childhood. But eventually he decided that the toy monkey should go back out into the world where it would do more good as a little ambassador to history.

And so the monkey returned to Berlin, this time living in a museum, not on a young boy's bicycle. Aubrey said it is likely that millions of visitors have seen the nameless monkey in various exhibits at the museum over the years and been exposed to my father's story.

One of those visitors was Erika Pettersson. In 2015, she was at the museum with her boyfriend, Joachim. At one point Erika wandered to an exhibit with images about the lives of Jewish children during the Nazi years. It had some wooden boxes with lids you could lift to learn about the kids.

She opened one of them. It was the only one she opened. "And there was this toy monkey and a picture of a small kid, a Jewish kid named Gert Berliner," she recalled. "And I thought,



In 1939, at the age of 14, Gert had to say goodbye to his parents, Paul and Sophie Berliner.

that's a coincidence. My mom's name is Berliner."

Erika didn't think that much about it. But her mother, Agneta Berliner, did. Erika and Agneta are Swedish. And they had a family connection to Germany and Berlin. Agneta couldn't get it out of her mind. She went online and found that my father has a website with his photography.

"And there was an email address," she said. "I was hesitating a bit because I thought maybe this is just a stranger. But then I was so curious. I sent an email and said, 'Could it be that we are relatives?'"

My dad read the message and it led to a call. "Suddenly because of the monkey, I have a phone call, somebody in Sweden of all places, saying, well I think you're my cousin."

Agneta Berliner and her sister, Suzanne Berliner, and Suzanne's son Daniel arranged to meet my dad when he was in Berlin at an opening exhibit of his photography.

And so it all came together.

It turns out that my father's dad, Paul Berliner, had a brother named Carl. Carl Berliner had two sons, and Carl sent them to Sweden for safety, too. But they didn't get out of Germany on the *Kindertransport*. They were sent to work on isolated farms deep in the Swedish countryside. Those boys were my dad's cousins. But they had lost touch with each other.

Now, some 80 years later, a bond has been reestablished with the help of a tattered toy monkey. In the summer, I traveled to Sweden to meet my newfound relatives and to retrace my father's steps. I met Agneta and her family on Sweden's solstice holiday, Midsummer Eve, and we celebrated together with a traditional Swedish feast lasting well into the evening. There were the famous meatballs, salmon, toasts with schnapps and a beautiful cake with more strawberries than I'd ever seen in my life. Even though we had just met, it felt good to be around my newfound relatives. To be part of a larger



family — a family that hasn't just survived, but has grown and thrived.

My dad didn't make the trip. So we called him in New York — Erika, Agneta and me all on speaker, filling him on our visit. It was a bittersweet call. At 94, my dad doesn't get out much. He's alone a lot in the apartment with time to reflect.

"You get old," he says. "I walk around with a cane, shaky. You have time. You sit in a chair, an easy chair, and start thinking about your past, what happened."

What happened to his parents, to him and to our family is still hard to absorb. But one little thing from the past also delivered a big surprise. My father packed that monkey in a suitcase when he fled for his life nearly 80 years ago.

It turned out he had to give up that treasured piece of his history to discover something new about the past. "It's a gift," he says. "In my old age, I have discovered I have a family."

OPENING ITALY'S "CLOSET OF SHAME"

(Continued from page 7)

government announced the signing of an armistice between Italy and the Allies, and the very day the Italians found out that their king and prime minister had deserted them and fled to territories held under Allied control. Within days, Nazi forces entered the beleaguered country, released Mussolini from jail, installed him as the head of a puppet state in north-

loved me, and I loved them, but I wanted to live with Susanna, the maid who had lived in our home 47 years and loved all of us deeply. She had saved the family pictures and my grandmother's jewelry for me. Upon her death, she left her money to a priest to pray for us for 10 years."

Slowly, Segre began to readjust to daily life, studies and love. In 1951 she married Alfredo Belli Paci, a

Germany was Nazi. The people were deeply in love with these theories."

After the liberation of Italy in April 1945 by Allied troops and the subsequent introduction of a general amnesty, "the state acted like racism and anti-Semitism had never been here," says historian Sarfatti. "Everything was forgotten."

"Besides a few senior leaders who were tried and executed, no one was forced to do soul-searching or to answer for his part in the Fascist regime. Everyone returned to the fold, sometimes to the exact same role," he adds.

Under such conditions, he adds, "Italy was incapable of, nor did it want to engage in any profound reckoning. Even today, from a distance of 80 years, it remains very hard."

But it seems that in recent years something has started to change. In 2000 the parliament declared the date of the liberation of Auschwitz, January 27, as Holocaust Memorial Day. In 2003, it unanimously approved a law to establish a National Museum of Italian Judaism and the Shoah in Ferrara; it opened in 2017. In 2013, Platform 21, which was for years consigned to oblivion in the national consciousness together with the Racial Laws, was converted into a Holocaust memorial. In 2014, the City of Rome gave the green light to build a Holocaust museum in Il Duce's official residence, Villa Torlonia.

doesn't discuss these subject, that don't seek an interview with Senator Segre or one of the few remaining survivors.

"I've already heard some complaints of an 'overdose,'" Segre says. "People tell me, 'Enough with the 80 years.' On the one hand, it's positive. On the other, many are sick of it by now. We are indeed a tiny minority. People think we are a million, or a million and a half, but we're barely 40,000" out of a total population of more than 60 million.

Besides the widespread media coverage, 90 universities around Italy issued a first-ever apology for their part in expelling thousands of Jewish students, lecturers and employees from their institutions in order to comply with the Racial Laws. Sarfatti does not applaud this initiative.

"Apology creates pathos in society, and that's okay, but it must be accompanied by practical steps, with research grants, relevant school curricula [studying the Racial Laws isn't mandatory], restoration of Jewish names that were replaced by Fascist names," he says. "In the medical department of the University of Bari, for example, there is an auditorium named for Nicola Pende, one of the 10 signatories on the scientists' manifesto. Let them remove his name before they apologize."

Despite the racist laws, despite the murder of her family, despite Auschwitz, Liliana Segre, who lives



Italian Holocaust survivor Liliana Segre in her house in Milan, Italy, October 2018.

ern Italy — the Socialist Republic of Salo — and embarked on implementing the Final Solution.

According to Sarfatti, nearly 7,500 Jews out of some 50,000 were deported to death camps between September 1943 and Italy's liberation in April 1945. Over 5,900 of them were exterminated, over 800 survived, and another 300 were murdered on Italian territory.

"He exchanged the lives of Italy's Jews for Nazi support for his regime. After his release from jail, he could have said 'enough, I'm old and tired' — without the Nazis executing him — but his hunger for power was so strong that he was ready to sacrifice not only Italy's Jews, but also the regions of Trento and Trieste for it," says Sarfatti.

The historian adds that Mussolini "had known since 1942, perhaps without all the details, about the camps, about the acts of mass slaughter in the Soviet Union, about the use of gas. As one who used gas himself in the conquest of Ethiopia, he knew very well what the use of gas meant."

In the fall of 1945, at age 15, Segre returned home to Milano — after almost a year in Auschwitz, the death march to Germany, and four months in a DP camp where, she recalls, she ate "day and night" and gained 10 kilos every month. Upon her return, her maternal grandparents, who had found refuge in a convent in Rome, were granted custody of her.

"They saw a fat, clumsy, ugly, difficult, wounded, grumbling girl," she says. "It was hard for them, and I wanted them to accept me as I was They were good people, they

Catholic who was sent, along with some 600,000 other Italians, to a concentration camp for refusing to serve the Republic of Salo.

"He understood me when he saw the tattoo on my arm," she once said in an interview. "He wasn't shocked. He didn't flee."

With him she raised their three children, and she was by his side until he died 10 years ago.

"We met on the beach. We fell in love within days. It was a beautiful I

Like many Holocaust survivors, Segre kept silent for many years. "There were no words, it was too powerful, too tragic. We didn't want to talk, and they didn't want to listen."

At 60, after the birth of her grandchildren, she felt that she had to pass her personal testimony on to the next generations. Since then, she has visited schools across Italy telling her story and the story of Italian Jewry.

"None of us will be left in 10 years, and the Holocaust will become a line in history books, and later not even that," she says.

Segre's appointment by President Sergio Mattarella as senator for life ("I am aware of age limitations," she says, smiling) gave her immediate media exposure, and essentially turned her into a living, breathing symbol of a period that Italy has repressed for 80 years — a repression historian Anna Foa has called "collective amnesia."

"Italy never opened its closet of shame," says Segre. "After the war, suddenly there were no fascists. Everyone suddenly became Christian Democrats, Communists ... but Italy was Fascist, just like



Italian dictator Benito Mussolini performing a fascist salute as he reviews German Nazi Youth visiting Rome in October 1936.

Recently, the laws were among the subjects included, for the first time, in matriculation exams. In 2018, which marked the 80th anniversary of the enactment of the anti-Semitic legislation, the media had been addressing the topic nonstop, drawing a direct correlation between the laws and the Holocaust. There is almost no newspaper or current events program that

not far from Platform 21 and the jail where she was held for 40 days at age 13, says today that she doesn't feel betrayed by Italy and the Italians.

"Were the French (Jews) betrayed by France? The Germans by Germany? The Poles by Poland?" she says. "Who can we exonerate of this inborn anti-Semitism?"

HOW TINY ECUADOR HAD A HUGE IMPACT ON JEWS ESCAPING THE HOLOCAUST

BY RICH TENORIO,
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

While many countries did less than their all when Jews sought refuge from the Holocaust, the tiny South American nation of Ecuador made an outsize impact.

Named for the equator, the former Spanish colony became an unlikely haven for an estimated 3,200 to 4,000 Jews from 1933 to 1945.



Jewish immigrants on a farm 30 kilometers south of Quito.

Few of these refugees knew Spanish upon arrival, and many could not quite locate their new home on the map. Yet some émigrés achieved success in diverse fields, from science to medicine to the arts, helping Ecuador modernize along the way.

Last summer, Ecuador-based academic and author Daniel Kersffeld published a book in Spanish about this little-known story, *La migración judía en Ecuador: Ciencia, cultura y exilio 1933-1945*. (It translates to *Jewish Immigration in Ecuador: Science, Culture and Exile 1933-1945*.) Kersffeld calls it the first academic study of Jewish immigration to Ecuador in over two decades.

The author surveyed 100 biographical accounts in writing the book. In an email interview, Kersffeld said that around 20 of the individuals he profiled hold significant importance for Ecuador's economic, scientific, artistic and cultural development.

They include Austrian refugee Paul Engel, who became a pioneer of endocrinology in his new homeland, while maintaining a separate literary career under a pseudonym; concentration camp survivor Trude Sojka, who endured the loss of nearly all of her family and became a successful artist in Ecuador; and three Italian Jews — Alberto di Capua, Carlos Alberto Ottolenghi and Aldo Muggia — who founded a precedent-setting pharmaceutical company, Laboratorios Industriales Farmaceuticos Ecuatorianos, or LIFE.

Kersffeld's book began as a smaller project in which Ecuador's Academia Nacional de Historia (National Academy of History) asked him to research the origins of the LIFE laboratories.

Kersffeld learned that LIFE's co-founders had been expelled from Italy in 1938 after the passage of dictator Benito Mussolini's anti-Semitic Racial Laws. He found they represented a wider story in Ecuador from

1933 to 1945 — “a larger amount of Jewish immigrants who were scientists, artists, intellectuals or in distinct ways linked to the high culture of Europe.”

The growing menace of Hitler and Mussolini spurred Jewish immigration to Ecuador, supported by the small local Jewish community. President Jose Maria Velasco Ibarra promoted the country as a destination for German Jewish scientists and technicians suddenly unemployed because of Nazi anti-Semitism.

But, Kersffeld writes, “the fact is that until the mid-1930s, few emigrants had chosen Ecuador as their destination country,” with most coming after 1938. Ecuador views 1938 as the beginning of its Jewish community.

Marked by the Amazon and the Andes, Ecuador could not have seemed a less likely destination. That changed after the *Kristallnacht* pogrom in Germany and Austria in 1938, the Racial Laws in Italy the same year, the occupation of much of Czechoslovakia in 1939 and the fall of France in 1940.

Ecuador became “one of the last American countries to keep open the possibility of immigration in its various consulates in Europe,” Kersffeld writes. “One of the last alternatives when all the other ports of entry to American nations were already closed.”

The consul in Stockholm, Manuel Antonio Muñoz Borrero, issued 200 passports to Jews and was posthu-

mously inducted in 2011 as his country's first Righteous Among the Nations at Yad Vashem.

Another consul, José I. Burbano Rosales in *Bremen*, saved 40 Jewish families from 1937 to 1940.

But Muñoz Borrero and Burbano were both relieved from their duties after the Ecuadorian government learned they were helping Jews. Burbano was transferred to the US, while Muñoz Borrero stayed in Sweden and unofficially continued his efforts.

Recently, the Ecuadorian government honored Muñoz Borrero when it restored the late diplomat as a member of its foreign service.

According to Kersffeld, in the period covered by the book, there was anti-Semitism in Ecuadorian embassies and consulates in Europe, and in Ecuador's Ministry of Foreign Relations. Jews had to pay fees to enter the country — although these decreased with time — and conform to an occupational profile. And another president, Alberto Enríquez Gallo, issued a decree of expulsion for Jews who did not comply with immigration requirements, although it never took effect.

Kersffeld writes that Ecuador's government maintained relations, “sometimes hidden,” with Nazi Germany. (Burbano's granddaughter, Ecuadorian anthropologist Maria Amelia Viteri, provided a biographical

ries “truly unique,” noting that di Capua, Ottolenghi and Muggia made LIFE into “one of the most outstanding businesses in Ecuador,” able to export medications to much of Latin America while performing advanced scientific research that discovered new bacteria and viruses.

Other immigrants also made an impact in medicine. Austrian native Engel led the first endocrinological studies in Ecuador while pursuing literary fame under the pseudonym Diego Viga, while German-born Julius Zanders — who had been imprisoned at *Dachau* after *Kristallnacht* — did pioneering work as a veterinarian and involved himself in Jewish community life.

Kersffeld credited Jewish immigrant doctors with introducing developments to Ecuador such as radiology and Freudian psychoanalysis.

Journalist Benno Weiser used his investigative skills to denounce his new country's relations with Nazi Germany and inform fellow citizens about World War II. Later in life, he became a citizen of Israel, where he reported on the trial of infamous Nazi Adolf Eichmann and served as an ambassador to the Dominican Republic and Paraguay. His brother, Max Weiser, became the first honorary consul of Israel in Ecuador.

In arts and culture, Kersffeld said, Jewish immigrants brought educational training from Europe and con-



Jewish immigrant Al Horvath brought radio transmitter technology to the Amazon jungle in Ecuador while helping Shell Oil look for petroleum there in the 1940s.

statement about her grandfather, according to which Nazi Germany offered military aid to Ecuador during a war with neighboring Peru in 1941.) Kersffeld also writes that cells and other groups linked to the German far right operated in Ecuador.

But overall, Kersffeld called Ecuador's immigration policy “less restrictive than that which developed in other countries of the region in the same era.”

Given a new chance, Jewish immigrants would write South American success stories.

Kersffeld called the LIFE laborato-

nections to luminaries such as Thomas Mann and Marc Chagall.

Hungarian refugee Olga Fisch became a celebrated collector of Ecuadorian indigenous handicrafts; her own acclaimed works are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Smithsonian and the UN. Fellow artist Sojka “brought a personal testimony of the horror of the Nazi genocide to her artistic works,” Kersffeld writes, noting that virtually all of her family, including two daughters born six years apart, died in the Holocaust.

(Continued on page 15)

JEWISH WOMAN RECALLS THE DAY SHE GAVE HITLER FLOWERS

BY MAYA OPPENHEIM,
INDEPENDENT

Hanna Oppenheim's parents would have kept her at home if they had known she would spend the day surrounded by Adolf Hitler and his SA Brownshirts.

Her teacher would also have been highly unlikely to choose the nine-year-old girl to present the Nazi leader with a gargantuan bouquet of flowers in front of a piazza full of people in *Munich*.



A photo of 10-year-old Hanna in 1934 — the year she and her family fled Germany for Jerusalem.

"I do not think my teacher would have chosen me, because she would have been aware of the fact I was Jewish and she would not have wanted to expose me," the 94-year-old tells *The Independent*.

"My classmates chose me. I remember being very pleased to be picked. It seemed a tremendous honor. It never occurred to me that I ought not to present the flowers."

It was November 9, 1933 and my grandma, who was forced to leave Hitler's Germany soon after the flower saga, was about nine and a half.

"Hitler had been in power for 11 months and he had decided to return to *Munich* — the home of the Nazi movement — for a special ceremony to commemorate the 10th anniversary of 1923 [the *Munich Putsch*]."

All of the state elementary schools in *Munich* had gathered at *Feldhermhalle* — a building that is still standing to this very day.

"The piazza was full of kids and I remember being pushed forward by the crowds," the nonagenarian, who was known as Hannelore back then, says. "As a little girl, the bouquet of flowers felt far bigger than me. I remember walking up the steps in front of a massive crowd, feeling a strange combination of terror and excitement."

"Of course, he didn't know I was Jewish; nobody in the crowd did apart from my teacher and the other children. I distinctly remember a soldier on the left of Hitler taking the bouquet off me. All this time, the Führer just stood there and didn't shake my hand. I remember a stern face and uniform. I then stepped back into the warmth of my classmates."

Her parents were more than a little

surprised when she got home and they asked about her day. After all, they had already started making preparations to leave Germany.

"They were very taken aback, to say the least; it was a total shock to them," she says. "By this time, they knew we were leaving Germany and they were closing down the business, preparing their various documents and saying their goodbyes. My parents had noticed lots of changes since Hitler's rise to power. Having read *Mein Kampf*, they were fully aware of Hitler's intentions."

Otto Frank, her father, was a timber merchant, and he had noticed trade getting steadily worse since the Nazi Party's rise to power.

"His orders became few and far between, as applications for building contracts were rejected from companies he had done business with for years," she tells me. "My father also noticed that business letters were not signed as in the old days — 'yours faithfully' — but as 'mit deutschem Gruß [with German greeting], Heil Hitler.'"

Dr. Max Meyer, her uncle, had been writing the family weekly letters from Jerusalem, where he had already emigrated. The letters warned the family to get out of the country.

"At the time, Max was regarded as a terrible pessimist, like a prophet who prophesizes the end of the world," she says. "While my father was probably not as much of a pessimist, he was also a great realist and could also see that it was time to leave. Although it was still only the beginning."

But she herself remained oblivious to what was happening to the country and had no idea she would soon be leaving or that the Nazi Party would go on to mass-murder six million Jews.

She was too young to read the daily paper her parents had delivered to the flat and did not listen to the radio. Her parents also chose not to discuss the political situation in front of her.

"There was a feeling that if I'd heard it was a vile system at home, I might have felt resentful or rebellious in school," she says. "So while they prepared their exit, I continued to read Hans Christian Andersen and Grimm's Fairy Tales, none the wiser."

Her only encounters with Hitler came through school and in the form of indoctrination. There was a pro-Hitler brainwashing session once a week called *Heimatkunde* ("Study of

Your Home Country"), and she still has an exercise book which contains evidence of it.

The notebook is replete with stuck-in pictures of Hitler and his storm troopers and sketches she did of German flags, eagles and even swastikas. An essay inside the book talks about the huge cost of reparations that had to be paid after the First World War and issues of inflation and vast unemployment. "Out of this dreadful crisis, one man will liberate us — Adolf Hitler," it concludes.

"At the end of the war, Adolf Hitler returned to *Munich*," it continues. "He said: 'I want a decent government, I want every German to be able to work: out of farmers, city dwellers, laborers we will make a German people. Germany needs to be powerful again.'"

"I thought, I'm just doing my school work. Hitler's greatness was instilled in us," she says.

But Ms. Oppenheim does remember one day at school called the *Hitler Feier* (celebration) that her parents did not allow her to go to. She says she remembers a small boy whom she walked to school with every day coming to fetch her, but her not being allowed to go with him.

"He rang the bell as usual," she recalls. "I went down and I said 'I'm not coming today' and he said 'Why?' and I said 'Because I'm Jewish.' I do remember the ensuing silence. He said, 'Well, it's not your fault that you are Jewish.' The following day he

left my drawing up on the blackboard, choosing not to wipe it off because I was leaving.

"I'm not sure how I passed a whole month with no school, but I don't think I was lonely; I had several friends. Although there was one particular girl who was no longer allowed to play with me. Her name was Inge and we lived in the same block; she was very pretty with blue eyes and blonde hair that was plaited on the top of her head. After Inge joined the League of German Girls and her brothers became part of Hitler Youth, she no longer came to play with me."

Meanwhile, her parents packed up their possessions, and removal men came to put the belongings in containers to travel by ship. To say their goodbyes, her parents threw a huge party with all of their friends, Jews and Germans alike. Before long, she was boarding a train and traveling east out of Germany.

"The minute we crossed the German border, my father sat me down on his knee," she says. "He explained why we were going to Jerusalem. He said Germany was no longer safe and Jews would no longer be able to lead a normal life. Despite the fact that we had lived in Germany for generations, he said we had to leave while we still could. As a young girl, it was only then that I grasped all of the things which had been hidden from me."

They took the train through the Balkan countries, passing through Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece before getting a boat from Athens to *Jaffa* and finally arriving in Jerusalem.

"Days after we moved in, I started school, and within weeks I could speak Hebrew fluently," she says. "I made friends quickly and settled into the Mediterranean climate. From then on, a totally different life began."

"When the war broke out, I was 15 and old enough to realize how bad the situation was. Things had been getting progressively uglier since the day I met Hitler. People had disappeared and been dragged into camps. All the things my father had thought would happen, happened. But they were infinitely worse than anybody could have imagined, with thousands and millions of people being gassed."

From Jerusalem, they followed the news closely. "We had Jewish friends and relatives in Germany and learned that the Oppenheimer side of the family had been taken to *Bergen-Belsen*," she remembers. "The parents, the three children and two sets of grandparents were all taken away. In the end, the parents and two sets of grandparents died and the three children survived, Eve, Rutzi and Paul. You feel sad about the ones you knew and the millions you did not know."



A one-million-mark note alongside an essay about Hitler.

came to pick me up. He was a nice boy."

Soon after the day of the flowers, at the beginning of December 1933, her mother took her out of school. There was an epidemic of measles and she didn't want her to get ill because they were due to leave at the beginning of January.

"I spent a lot of that month ice-skating, and I had the whole lake to myself because all the other kids were at school," she recalls. "One day on the way back from the ice rink, I ran into some children, who asked why I hadn't been at school. They told me that the teacher, Frau Gruber, had

NELLY BEN-OR RISKED ALL TO PLAY THE PIANO

BY CNAAN LIPSHIZ, JTA

Like countless world-class pianists, Nelly Ben-Or began playing piano at the age of five and never stopped.

That discipline helped Ben-Or, 86, become an international concert pianist and the person most widely recognized for adapting the Alexander technique for posture and movement improvement for musicians.

But unlike for most of her peers, much of Ben-Or's musical training in her native Poland took place while her family was hiding in Nazi-occupied Warsaw, where her mother, Antonina Podhoretz, time and again risked everything to afford her daughter access to the then scarce instrument.

Ben-Or, who now lives in London and still teaches master classes in piano and the Alexander technique, unfolds the story of her unlikely survival in an English-language autobiography that was published last year, titled *Ashes to Light: A Holocaust Childhood to a Life in Music*.

The frank and short account tackles personal issues like the author's bouts of depression and her unprovoked cruelty toward one of her music teachers after the war. It was celebrated as a "brilliant and deeply moving personal account" by Jonathan Vaughan, a director of the prestigious Guildhall School of Music & Drama.

Rabbi Andrew Goldstein, the president of Britain's Liberal Judaism movement, called it "an inspiring story, beautifully written" in a foreword he penned for the book.

The strength of Ben-Or's story stems partly from the author bearing witness to momentous wartime events, including the Warsaw ghetto uprising. But its uniqueness lies in how it marries opposites, such as betrayal and heroism, hunger and artistic creativity, and survival and self-sacrifice.

Throughout the packed 180-page narrative, one character — the piano — makes repeated and unlikely appearances.

The instrument features in Ben-Or's earliest memories, from her childhood home in *Lwow*, which was part of

Poland before World War II, now *Lviv* in Ukraine. She recalls that when she was six, German soldiers carried off the piano on which she had practiced in her family's living room.

"I shivered in fear and despair, huddled against my mother's body as I watched them taking away the instrument which had become for me such a wonderful source of magic," Ben-Or writes.

Her family was about to lose much more than their prized possessions.

Ben-Or's father, Leon, was taken away and, she later learned, killed at the *Janowska* concentration camp.



Nelly Ben-Or sitting by one of her two pianos in her London home.

Her mother and older sister were able to obtain false "Aryan" identities, but they became homeless, exchanging one hiding place for another. Her sister was left to hide on her own. Ben-Or and her mother scrambled to leave *Lwow* for Warsaw, where they had a better chance of surviving.

Through one of many twists of fate, the pair missed the last train to Warsaw. They ended up leaving as hitchhikers aboard a military train full of Nazi SS officers. One SS man even tucked in Ben-Or with his green army coat when she feigned sleep on the long journey, she recalls in the book.

That civilian train they missed ended up being searched. Several Jews traveling under false identities were caught and sent to be murdered, Ben-Or's mother later learned.

In Warsaw, mother and daughter became subtenants of a Polish working-class family, the Topolskis. Their hosts quickly caught on that Ben-Or and her mother were Jewish but, at

great personal risk, did not report them. Still, neighbors became suspicious, forcing the two Jews to seek a new hiding place. Ben-Or's mother found employment as a maid with a wealthier non-Jewish Polish family, the Kowalskis.

That's where Nelly, then seven or eight, again saw a piano.

"My desire to get to that instrument and play it made me nag my mother" to ask the Kowalskis for permission to play, Ben-Or writes. But doing so would have blown their cover as a working-class maid and her daughter, her mother feared.

"Musical gifts were so often associated with the Jewish people," Ben-Or writes.

But "a part of my mother wanted me to keep playing," Ben-Or told JTA in an interview at her home near London, where she keeps two pianos in a study full of books and orchid plants. Antonina relented, but only on the condition that Nelly pretend not to know how to play, recalled Ben-Or, a frail-looking woman with lively eyes.

At the height of World War II, when the Nazis were hunting and executing people on the streets just below her home, Ben-Or was playing music on a grand piano that brought her brief hope of normalcy.

Noticing her talent, the Kowalskis suggested that Ben-Or join their granddaughter's weekly piano lessons, to which her mother reluctantly agreed. The teacher suggested that Ben-Or attend a music school, but Antonina vetoed it.

"The fewer people who noticed me, or you, the safer we were," Ben-Or's mother told her.

As a little girl, "playing the piano for chosen periods in the day became moments of paradise on Earth," Ben-Or recalls. The teacher insisted that Nelly play at a students' concert, and she was allowed to play, becoming the talk of the block for a while.

But her mother's fears turned out to be justified. Soon after the concert, rumors that Antonina and Nelly were

"not who they pretended to be" started circulating among the neighbors, forcing the two to leave yet another hiding place, Ben-Or writes.

They were rounded up in German army operations targeting Warsaw citizens who had joined a massive resistance operation that followed the doomed uprising of Jews inside the Warsaw ghetto.

In yet another narrow escape, Nelly and Antonina eventually were released in the countryside because the concentration camp where the Germans had planned to place them was full. Penniless and hungry for food, the two found shelter in a pig sty that locals had made livable for refugees like them from Warsaw.

But even there, "my ear caught the sound of piano from a neighboring house," Ben-Or writes in her book. It was the home of the piano teacher in the town of *Pruszkow*, and again Ben-Or's mother reluctantly allowed her daughter to play. The teacher allotted the girl half an hour each day.

"I went on eagerly from one piece of music to the next, playing anything that was available," including Johann Strauss waltzes considered too demanding for eight-year-old piano pupils, Ben-Or writes.

"Yet today, as a concert pianist, I am convinced that I owe to that unorthodox but invaluable experience of piano playing," she writes. It helped her hold on to her humanity and hopefulness in hours of despair and panic, she says.

After the war, Ben-Or was enrolled in a school for gifted musicians. She and her mother emigrated from Poland to Israel in 1950. A decade later, Ben-Or went to study in England and stayed. She married in 1964. She and her husband have a daughter who lives in London.

The book describes her development as an artist and her experiences as a survivor in three countries.

"It seems as if my voracious appetite for academic and musical progress was partly a reaction to the years of repression," Ben-Or writes. "It was as if the darkness of the war years had been lifted, and the bright light and fresh air of freedom filled my whole being with the need to receive as much as possible of all that I had missed before."

THE HOLOCAUST'S DEADLIEST MONTHS

The killing only stopped when there was no one left to murder.

From August to October 1942, 1.2 million Jews were slain in the Nazi death camps, an almost inconceivable 15,000 people per day, a new study suggests.

This is more than previously calculated, and is a rate that surpasses recent genocides such as the one that occurred in Rwanda in 1994. In fact, roughly 25 percent of all Holocaust victims were murdered from August to October 1942, which

were quite likely the deadliest three months in human history as the German killing machine was at its most lethal.

Study lead author Lewi Stone, a mathematical biologist from Tel Aviv University and Australia's RMIT University, used railway transportation records to reach his conclusions. The "special trains" that transported the victims were kept on strict time schedules, on which the Germans had detailed records of each trip.

Overall, some 480 train trips were

made from 393 separate Polish towns, destined for death camps such as *Belzec*, *Sobibor* and *Treblinka*. The purpose of those three was strictly mass murder, unlike camps such as Auschwitz, which also served as forced labor camps.

"Apart from very few exceptions, victims who were transported to the death camps were rapidly murdered upon arrival in the gas chambers, thus giving the system perfected by the Nazis all the characteristics of an automated assembly line," Stone told *Newsweek*.

Stone estimates that the Nazis' murder campaign could have continued at this pace had there been more victims still living in German-occupied Poland. Instead, the murder rate tapered off in November 1942 as a result of there being essentially "no one left to kill," Stone said.

He also said the numbers show "the Nazis' focused genocide with the goal of obliterating the entire Jewish people of occupied Poland in as short a time as possible, mostly within three months."

THE JEWISH WOMEN WHO FLED TYRANNY TO BECOME ANGELS OF THE NHS

BY STEPHEN ORYSZCZUK,
JEWISH NEWS

In a room at the Royal College of Nursing's historic Cavendish Square head office, I sit quietly waiting for a talk to begin. In front of me is a 98-year-old Vienna-born Jewish woman, just back from visiting her daughter in Brighton.

Her name is Margaret, still sharp as a pin despite her years. She came to the UK just before the war and became a nurse. She is here to listen to Dr. Jane Brooks from the University of Manchester, who is researching the contribution of the 914 young Jewish women like Margaret who fled Nazi Europe to become trained nurses, midwives and probationers here.

Of these, 130 were Czech and 784 German or Austrian. Brooks says they were incredible — and underappreciated.

"Much has been written about male refugees who were doctors, lawyers, scientists and businessmen, and there is a growing body of research on women who entered Britain on domestic service visas," Brooks says.

"But little has been written about this small but arguably significant cohort of women." Margaret nods in agreement.

The late Walter Laquer, Holocaust historian and former director of the Wiener Library, called this "a remarkable generation" who made their mark in the countries they made their homes, but also internationally.

Brooks says the European Jewish women who came to nurse were no different.

Annie Altschul, studying math and physics in Austria to prepare for a teaching career, fled to the UK when war broke out, becoming a nanny before entering nursing.

She later pioneered psychiatric nursing research and became the UK's first professor of mental health

entered the London Hospital as a student in 1938, later becoming the country's first director of nursing research.

"I'd wanted to be a doctor and tried to get into medicine here, but there was no way because I was a woman," she recalls in her oral history, now archived at the RCN.

such as Marion Ferguson, first director of nursing studies at Bedford College; Charlotte Kratz, an early pioneer of the department of nursing at the University of Manchester; and Ingelore Czarlinski, who arrived on the *Kindertransport* in July 1939 and later supported the birth of Prince Charles.

"These and countless others supported the newly formed NHS and created vital spaces for themselves in hospitals and in public health work," says Brooks.

Progress was not easy. The Jewish Refugee Committee, established in 1933 in London, set up a nursing and midwifery subcommittee to help Jewish refugees become nurses, but in 1940 the national mood changed.

Amid fears of fifth columnists and enemy invasion, nurses, including Altschul and Hockey, were dismissed as "enemy aliens." The nurses from Dalston Hospital, known as The German Hospital, were interned.

Pressured by matrons, the Home Office allowed some to return to their jobs, but for some Jewish refugees the snub could not be forgotten. Among them was nurse Kitty Schafer, dismissed from her beloved job at East Croydon General Hospital, because it was close to the airport. "I took everything personally and was extremely upset," she recalls.

Brooks says: "Paradoxically, it was those refugees least wedded to nursing who sought new positions when restrictions were lifted, whereas those who felt a real love for the work were too saddened by the actions of the government."



Left: Annie Altschul, born in Vienna in 1919, trained as a mental health nurse in Mill Hill and pioneered psychiatric research. Her reports are widely cited. Right: Lisbeth Hockey, expelled from Vienna, became the UK's first director of nursing research in Edinburgh.

nursing and a staunch advocate of voluntary euthanasia. Her reports are still among the most globally cited.

Lisbeth Hockey, daughter of a government architect in Vienna, was training as a doctor when — as a non-Aryan — she was forced to leave university.

She was brought to the UK by the Quakers, worked as a governess for the Wedgwood family, and then

"In those days, it was very rare for women to get into medicine. I also wasn't a British subject and had no money, so there were three conditions which just made it totally impossible." The Wedgwoods advised her to try nursing instead. "I would never advise a person who wanted to be a doctor to go into nursing.... However, I did follow that advice," she says.

There are many other examples

HOW TINY ECUADOR HAD A HUGE IMPACT ON JEWS ESCAPING THE HOLOCAUST

(Continued from page 12)

Kersfeld said that all of the biographical accounts he researched "represent distinct variations about how the tragedy of the Holocaust had an impact on the history of Ecuador. In each case, I was interested to see how the Holocaust was reflected in these biographies, as well as the tragedy marked by European anti-Semitism, persecution, exile."

In each case, he said, he was also interested in examining "the imprint left by European totalitarianisms on an important group of scientists, artists and intellectuals who had to leave behind their families and communities of origin to begin a new life in a country as different as Ecuador."

The subject of Holocaust-era Jewish immigration to Ecuador has been experiencing increased attention in recent years.

In 2015, Brooklyn-based filmmaker Eva Zelig released a documentary about the subject, *An Unknown Country*. An Ecuadorian-born daughter

of Holocaust refugees, Zelig interviewed survivors and their descendants for the film, including Engel's

Jewish immigrants to Ecuador "created a modern climate that moved the country forward."



Ecuador's Jewish-exile community in the 1940s at the Equatorial monument in Quito, Ecuador.

daughter and Muggia's son (who is now an oncologist at NYU). She traveled back to the country of her birth while working on the film.

Zelig has not read Kersfeld's book. However, she said that Holocaust-era

"Those who succeeded did spectacularly well," Zelig said. But she noted that while some succeeded, others failed because "they did not understand the country, the economy of the country, what they should do and not

do to move forward."

After World War II, Zelig said, many Jews left Ecuador, "especially after quotas became available from the US." Today, she said, the Ecuadorian Jewish community numbers only about 800.

"I think most [Jews] who went to Ecuador saw it as a stepping-stone," she said. "Nobody knew where it was on maps."

But, she said, "I feel tremendous gratitude. A lot of exiles felt very grateful to Ecuador having opened its doors."

"People [who watch the film] are saying, 'Oh, I didn't know, amazing, I didn't know about this,' whether they're Jewish or non-Jewish," Zelig said.

Kersfeld himself said that there has not been much scholarship on Jewish immigration to Ecuador, contrasting this with what he calls successful studies in other Latin American countries. He said that his investigation has sparked interest in the subject across the globe — from Latin America to the US to Israel.



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

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

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

Yefim Krasnyanskiy, M.A.,
 Editor

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