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KEEPING VOICES OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS ALIVE

BY JILL GOLTZER

The American Society for Yad Vashem Annual Spring Luncheon took place on Thursday, May 30, at the Pierre Hotel in New York City. We are extremely grateful for our wonderful co-chairs (Michele Lee Fine, Goldie Hertz, Mireille Manocherian, Mary Peldman, Shirley Podolsky, Sarita Rausnitz, Lili Stawski, Elissa Tauber and Barbara Weichselbaum), honorary co-chairs (Danielle Karten, Abby Kaufthal, Jaci Paradis and Michelle Taragin) and esteemed honorees (Gabriela Shnay and her daughters Deborah, Vanessa and Rachel). Over 350 people were in attendance, including survivors, their children, grandchildren and friends.

Luncheon attendees explored the Yad Vashem exhibit “Stars Without a Heaven: Children in the Holocaust” before gathering in the ballroom for a meaningful program. The exhibit presents a collection of anecdotes, narratives and memories of Jewish children caught up in the crucible of the Holocaust. Despite their appalling situations and living conditions, children still engaged in imaginative play, sketching and writing, expressing their hopes, dreams and fears. In this exhibition, a selection of drawings, poems, letters and toys offers a moving and fascinating window into the lives of Jewish children during the Holocaust.

The program began with rousing renditions of “The Star Spangled Banner” and “Hatikvah” performed by YLA member Lizzy Savetsky and board member Abbi Halpern. Luncheon honoree Deborah Shnay

Rifkin welcomed our guests and introduced ASYV Chairman Leonard Wilf, who discussed the challenges we face in “an era where, paradoxically, both Holocaust denial and interest in the lessons and legacy of the Holocaust are at an all-time high.” It is because of individuals who are so deeply committed to Yad Vashem, like the members of the Shnay family, that we can be confident in the future of Holocaust remembrance. Our dedicated members recognize the unique

from Avner Shalev, chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate, Ron Meier shared some heartfelt thoughts with the room. He expressed how privileged he feels to have worked with passionate individuals, such as the Shnay women, this year’s honorees. Luncheon co-chair Elissa Tauber introduced our beloved honorees, who are Elissa’s cousins and dear friends. She was continuously inspired by the way Gabriela and Jack raised their daughters “in a home

ues and love for Israel to his daughters and grandchildren.

Rachel Shnay, luncheon honoree and YLA co-chair, gave a powerful and impactful speech that left everyone in the room energized and recommitted to the cause of Holocaust remembrance and education. Looking out into the crowd, Rachel asked that we not allow history to be rewritten: that we give our children a voice and the tools to fight anti-Semitism. Reflecting on today’s society, Rachel strongly stated, “We have the wave of hate rising up so high against us. Don’t wait for it to smack you down for you to wake up.” She encouraged everyone to visit Yad Vashem, even if they have been before. You learn something new every time you visit.

Luncheon co-chairs Lili Stawski and Barbara Weichselbaum introduced our keynote speaker, Mr. William Bernheim, a Holocaust survivor, author and artist. Mr. Bernheim was born in Lodz, Poland, in 1922, but considers April 11, 1945 — the day he was liberated from *Buchenwald* — to be his second birthday. Speaking about that very day, Mr. Bernheim explained how he pinched himself and realized he was still alive. It was then that the words of his parents came to him — that “a person

can be as weak as a fly, yet stronger than steel.” These words kept him going. After the war, he met his beloved wife Lucille, also a survivor, and together they have two children and four grandchildren. All four grandchildren attended the luncheon and proudly stood by their grandparents’ side.

In her closing remarks, luncheon co-chair Shirley Podolsky shared with everyone the vest her mother, Paula Reinfeld, z”l, was forced to wear in the camps. On it you can see the upside-down red triangle, her mother’s prisoner number and the faded yellow star that was meant to be worn as a badge of shame. It is personal stories and artifacts such as these that Yad Vashem works so hard to safeguard for future generations. As luncheon honoree Rachel Shnay so beautifully expressed, “it is because of Yad Vashem that their *neshamas* remain alive.”



Honorees Gabriela Shnay, Rachel Shnay and Deborah Shnay Rifkin with ASYV Chairman Leonard Wilf (left) and executive director of ASYV Ron Meier.

power of Yad Vashem. Recounting her experience on the 2018 Yad Vashem Mission, luncheon co-chair Michele Fine stated that we “came together to explore the darkest hour for the Jewish people, interwoven and redeemed with lessons of humanity and hope — through a lens that only Yad Vashem could provide.”

Following a video with greetings

filled with love, warmth, and Yiddishkeit and Zionism.” Attendees were able to learn more about the Shnay and Horowitz families in a moving video produced by Yeeshai Gross. Gabriela and Jack, both children of Holocaust survivors, made sure their daughters were educated about the Holocaust and raised them to be proud of their Jewish heritage.

In the video, Gabriela lovingly talks about her father, Symcha Horowitz, who attended the luncheon with his family. Gabriela says her father is “a true survivor in every sense of the word. A fighter.” Born in Lodz, Poland, Symcha survived Auschwitz and joined the Haganah following the war. He was a founder of the first elite squadron of airplanes in the Israeli Air Force and was later honored by the State of Israel with the Distinguished Service Award. Symcha clearly passed on his leadership, Jewish val-

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LOVE LETTERS OF THE SHOAH: MESSAGES THROWN FROM CATTLE CARS CONVEY FINAL WISHES, PRAYERS, BLESSINGS

BY DEBORAH FINEBLUM, JNS

Jews have long been known as the people of the book, but fresh evidence has emerged that they're also the people of the letter.

Of the millions of Jews who were taken to their deaths during the Holocaust on cattle cars, we will never know how many of them scribbled last words to loved ones, addressed them and tossed them out the train window, hoping against hope that someone would find them and send them on.

It's safe to assume that very few of these desperate attempts to communicate were ever found, and even fewer of them made it to their intended recipients. The miracle is the ones that were discovered alongside the train tracks and, against all odds, reached their destination.

"Last Letters from the Holocaust: 1944," an online exhibit from Yad Vashem, has arrived on its website just in time for *Yom Hashoah* on May 2.

With fewer survivors remaining who can testify to what they witnessed, this makes these final letters all the more precious. So says Orit Noiman, a project director at Yad Vashem.

Vashem), I know now they'll be preserved now, and people who see them in the future will know what this technically advanced modern civilization did to destroy an entire people."

Another motivation for Ventura, 89, was to demonstrate the suffering of Italian Jews, something many people are still unaware of.

The last time Ventura saw this mother was in December of 1943, when she ventured from the safety of their hiding place to procure medicine for her ailing mother. After she was captured, she was sent to *Fossoli*, an Italian work camp. Two months later, she was among the hundreds loaded onto a train bound for Auschwitz, where she was killed. (The horrors of that doomed journey were memorialized by fellow Italian inmate and chemist Primo Levi in his dual-story book *If This Is a Man* and *The Truce*.) As Ventura wrote on the train:

"To my very dear ones,

"My morale is very high. We will see each other soon. Lots of kisses to everyone. All my thoughts are of you."

they were being transported to work, but they weren't sure and wanted their loved ones to hear from them. There were also those who clearly didn't expect to survive this and wanted to collect evidence to tell their

But letters were not the only things thrown from trains. Often, people threw themselves. And though it's believed that most of those who flung themselves out of moving trains were either killed on impact or by



Rabbanit Esther Rivka Wagner with her daughter, Malky.

experience to generations to come."

"The hope that my mother included in each letter kept our hopes high that she was alive," says Ventura. Indeed, the family clung to those hopes even after moving to pre-state Israel in the spring of 1945, only later accepting that she had been murdered in Auschwitz. All made it out alive except their father, Luigi, and the youngest of the four children: 6-year-old Emanuel, who died of diphtheria at war's end.

What's amazing is that more than 75 years later, these important bits of evidence are still coming in, says Haim Gertner, director of the Yad Vashem Archives. The world's largest Holocaust collection, the archives hold more than 200 million documents and artifacts, with another 250,000 projected to arrive in the next few years.

"By donating these, the families know that they are helping preserve the memory of the Holocaust for the Jewish people and the world," says Gertner. "In today's digital era, we can tell the full story and connect in ways we never could before."

Gertner sees the collection as a "real continuation of the efforts of the Jews themselves during the *Shoah*. Even if they didn't know exactly where they were going, they knew it was no picnic, and they wanted their story told." Next up for Yad Vashem is a state-of-the-art underground repository for all this history: the Shoah Heritage Collection Center, projected to open in 2021.

sharpshooter Nazi guards, some lived to tell the tale.

Esther Rivka Willig was one of them. The Polish teen, the daughter of the rabbi of *Buczacz*, noticed that the cattle car had a small window covered with barbed wire and wooden slats, says her daughter, Malky Weisberg, who's a tour guide at Yad Vashem.

"My mother asked for her mother's blessing, saying it was the only way she would attempt to escape." Three hours of arguing later, after her mother reluctantly gave that blessing, young Willig stood on a barrel, yanked off the slats and, prying off the barbed wire with one of them, squeezed herself out for the jump.

"My grandmother must have understood that if her daughter was going to have a chance of surviving, this was it," says Weisberg. "She was very lucky to fall into a cornfield, where the high corn hid her. Many others who tried were shot."

The train's destination turned out to be *Belzec*, where more than 600,000 Galician Jews, including Willig's own mother, were destined to be murdered. The young girl, reunited with her first love Yisroel Wagner, married and moved to Beach Haven in Brooklyn, N.Y., where he would serve as community rabbi for nearly a half-century.

"My parents looked at the glass as half-full and were grateful for all they had," says Weisberg. "I always felt they were saved for a reason."

Her mother died three years ago at age 92. A few years earlier, when prepping for hip surgery, she was warned by her doctor of the discomfort she could expect. "She said to the surgeon, 'I jumped off a train. I think I can handle this.'"



A photograph of Anna Ventura with her four children that she sent to her husband, Luigi, when he was in Paris in 1940.

"This is why it's so important for us to collect every bit of evidence from the Holocaust; it's the only testimony we have of someone who cannot be with us."

That's the main reason Shaul Ventura decided to donate his mother Anna's last communication, scribbled in the hours before she arrived in Auschwitz in February of 1944.

"It's a very emotional thing for us," says Ventura, who was 14 when his mother was killed. "But, as precious as they are to our family (the postcard is one of 14 letters by their mother that the family donated to Yad

"Anna wrote on the front of the postcard: 'To the person who finds this, please send it to this address,' and it was almost like she was pleading with an unknown stranger to help her," says Noiman. "We will never know who discovered the postcard and decided to mail it."

"By throwing the letters — and most of them were from the Jews of Belgium, France and Italy — they were hoping that someone would be human enough to send them on to their family," says Naama Galil, a Yad Vashem project manager who's researching the written material. "Most Western Europeans assumed

YAD VASHEM EXHIBIT SHOWCASES HOLOCAUST ART AND STORIES FROM LIVING SURVIVORS

BY YAAKOV SCHWARTZ,
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

Ninety-one-year-old Mordechai Allouche smiles broadly as he stands next to four colorful, hand-painted postcards of British and German soldiers absorbed in 1940s daily life in his Nazi-occupied hometown of *Sfax*, Tunisia.

The illustrations, which hang alongside a photo and biography of Allouche, are part of the “New on Display” exhibit, a collection of 46 pieces by 13 artists unveiled at Yad Vashem’s Museum of Holocaust Art.

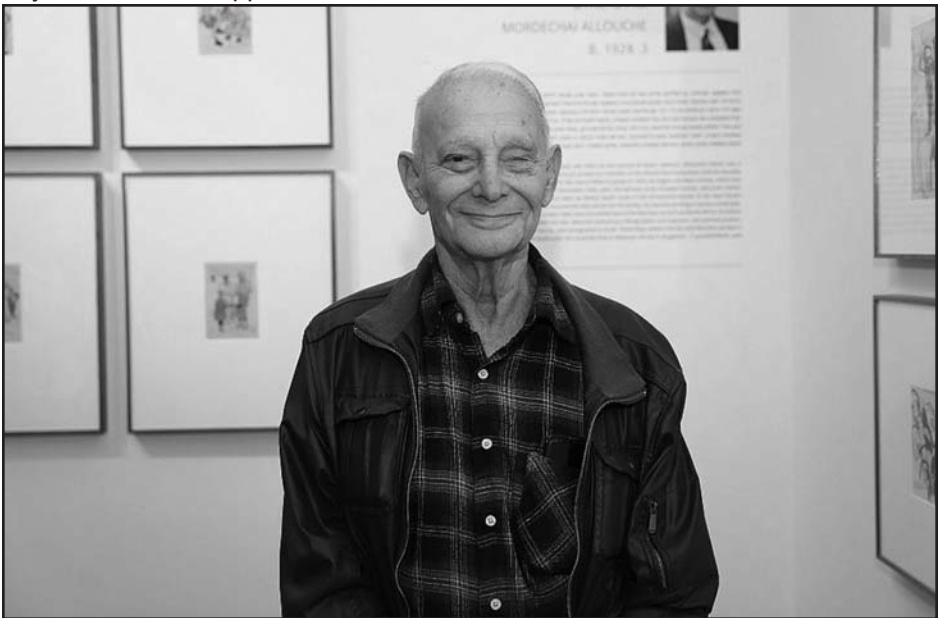
Between 1942 and 1943, those postcards were a key source of income for Allouche. Then just 15, the boy was the sole supporter of his fam-

to the awareness that these are the last moments when we can still find works from the time of the Holocaust when there are still the last survivors among us,” Moreh-Rosenberg tells *The Times of Israel*. She adds that properly preserving the art is also a top priority.

“We decided not just to wait. In the past we were receiving wonderful artworks, but people would come to us with them. Here, we decided to be active, and we took the initiative, and we contacted people, and we received sometimes whole collections,” she says. “People are not necessarily aware of what they have, because for them it might be a very precious, sentimental piece, but they don’t understand the impact it can

Holocaust. The exhibit includes artworks created prior to, during and after World War II, including one

Deutsch’s inevitably tragic story is further told in a series of 99 biblical illustrations, on permanent display at



Mordechai Allouche, a Holocaust survivor whose art is exhibited at “New on Display,” at the Yad Vashem Museum of Holocaust Art.

ily after his father, a Jewish anti-Nazi dissident, was arrested and sent to a forced labor camp immediately following Germany’s invasion of Tunisia in November 1942. Between working odd jobs and peddling the postcards, Allouche was able to scrape up enough for the family to live on.

Though the artist was a victim of some of the soldiers he painted, he didn’t make them out to be villains. The figures Allouche portrayed are handsome and strapping, captured enjoying wonderfully human moments. This was to his benefit — these same soldiers were Allouche’s best customers.

“We did what we could in order to eat,” the energetic Allouche tells *The Times of Israel*, gesturing to the postcards, which he donated to Yad Vashem two years ago. He is the only surviving artist to make it to the exhibit’s opening.

It is exactly this sort of firsthand, personal testimony that makes the exhibit special, says the museum’s curator, and director of Yad Vashem’s art department, Eliad Moreh-Rosenberg.

“Over the last few years, we’ve made tremendous efforts to enrich our collection with new artworks, due

have as a national treasure.” This underestimation of the value of his art was once true for Allouche. “I’ve got lots of these things,” Allouche beams. “Different poses, different locations. I never thought that this stuff would ever interest anybody. But when they came to me to collect



Vivian Uria, the director of Yad Vashem’s museum division, speaks at the opening of “New on Display.”

these materials, I was more than happy to contribute.”

Not all of the artists whose works are on display were forged during the

extensively restored 1934 cityscape by the artist Carol Deutsch.

“When I saw this painting the first time, it came to Yad Vashem in such bad condition. And the restoration process here was just phenomenal — seeing it this way takes my breath away,” says Debbie Deutsch-Berman, the artist’s great-niece, who also works in Yad Vashem’s marketing division.

Moreh-Rosenberg says that Yad Vashem received the painting from the cousin of Deutsch’s wife, who now lives in *Herzliya*. The work is typical of prewar Deutsch, Moreh-Rosenberg says, “before he came back through his art to his Jewish roots.”

The painting is not dissimilar from many European works from that era, and uses muted tones to illustrate a dreary landscape of the Belgian city of *Ostend*, where Deutsch lived at the time.

“You’d never guess that he was Jewish just by looking at it,” says Moreh-Rosenberg.

Vivian Uria, the director of Yad Vashem’s museum division, says that Israel’s national Holocaust museum is unique in the depth of research it is able to conduct into the history of its artifacts.

“As opposed to the artifacts they have at Auschwitz, where they are so numerous

and impossible to identify with any one person, here we are able to tell a specific story with each piece,” Uria says.



Biblical illustrations along with a wooden box crafted by artist Carol Deutsch, who was killed at *Buchenwald*. The paintings and box were created by Deutsch as a gift for his three-year-old daughter while the family was in hiding from the Nazis in Belgium.

the museum along with the ornate wooden box they were originally stored in.

He created the pieces as a gift to his three-year-old daughter Ingrid while the family was in hiding after the Nazis implemented the Final Solution in Belgium.

“Obviously it’s not a standard three-year-old’s birthday gift,” says Deutsch-Berman. “He’s basically saying through these paintings, ‘This is my legacy, this is what I want to leave you with.’ And I think the fact that this is what he’s doing, that this is his final testament, he’s saying, ‘I may not survive this, but the lessons, the images that illustrate the roots that we come from, will survive the Holocaust.’”

Deutsch and his wife were eventually informed upon by a neighbor and sent to Auschwitz. Deutsch was sent on a forced death march in December 1944 to *Buchenwald*, where he died on arrival. His wife, Fela, was sent to *Birkenau*’s medical experimentation block, after which her fate is unknown.

Ingrid and her grandmother survived the war in hiding with a Catholic family, and found the box containing the paintings intact when they returned home after the war’s conclusion.

“The Nazis tried to dehumanize their victims — to erase their humanity in every way they could. In Auschwitz, they even went so far as to strip people of their names, and branded them with numbers,” says Uria.

“These works are evidence that in times of suffering, the artists went to great lengths, often even endangering their lives, in order to express themselves. And this shows the strength of the human spirit, how it’s impossible to completely extinguish someone’s humanity,” says Uria.

ANTI-SEMITISM AND THE HOLOCAUST: LANGUAGE, RHETORIC AND THE TRADITIONS OF HATRED

Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust: Language, Rhetoric and the Traditions of Hatred.
By Beth A. Griech-Polelle.
Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.: New York, N.Y., 2017. 284 pp. \$88.00 hardcover.

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN

"The threatening imagery of the Jew . . . was built up over the course of centuries. Destructive legends, myths, and stereotypes all contributed to a type of acceptable language about Jews which enabled Hitler to play upon well-established tropes."

The above is the argument the author, Beth A. Griech-Polelle, poses in her book, entitled *Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust: Language, Rhetoric and the Traditions of Hatred*. Does it prove valid? Unfortunately, yes. In her close, conscientious and absorbing examination of Jewish life from the time of Jesus onward, Griech-Polelle makes it easy for us to see this development. Over the years, "language and rhetoric influenced the construction of 'the Jew' as eternal enemy"... and Hitler utilized this "given," building on it and encouraging "the violence and annihilation of European Jewry in the Holocaust."

For example, we learn that the deadliest epithet ever directed at Jews, "long-lasting" and fundamental

to religiously based anti-Semitism, dates from the crucifixion. From then on, all Jews were seen as sharing in the guilt of Jesus's death and would frequently be referred to as "Christ-killers." Interestingly, St. Augustine, bishop of Hippo in the fourth century, would say that Jews shouldn't be killed — but "that good Christians could humiliate, debase, and persecute [them] . . . in order to reaffirm the triumph of Christianity over Judaism." Indeed, this "became the official position of the Roman Catholic Church for hundreds of years" — till the Crusades in 1096. At that point, Christians, "whipped" up by the Pope into traveling to the far-off Holy Land to kill Muslim "infidels" who had taken control of it, suddenly realized that they had "infidels" right in their midst, "infidels" that also, according to them, deserved death — the Jews, "Christ-killers" all! Thus, many Jewish communities, especially "along the Rhine River were attacked mercilessly" by the Crusader hordes.

We read how the medieval world introduced what would become "popular anti-Semitic myths and legends." Jews were rumored to be poisoning wells, causing all kinds of natural disasters, murdering Christian children

in order to use their blood for rituals (blood libel), and "desecrating the sacred Host." And when Jews turned to money-lending because of being "locked out of the medieval Christian economic structure," they were labeled "shysters." Moreover, if rumor wasn't enough, the written literature of the day helped spread this calumny, "churning out stories of Jewish perfidy." The final results included "Jews being required to wear special clothing and markers" identifying them as Jews, attacks on them, expulsions, and, in the midst of all this, the first Jewish ghetto, created in 1516. Meanwhile, though, expulsions from various Western European countries saw an increasing number of Jews moving to Poland. In fact, they were invited by King Kasimir to build up the country economically through "leasing land, taxation farming, [building up] trade, and manufacture." Ironically, however, it appears they did it too well. In 1648 the Ukrainian Cossack leader Bogdan Chmielnicki and his followers felt "the Jews had acquired too much power in Poland" — hence the murderous attacks on them remembered to this day.

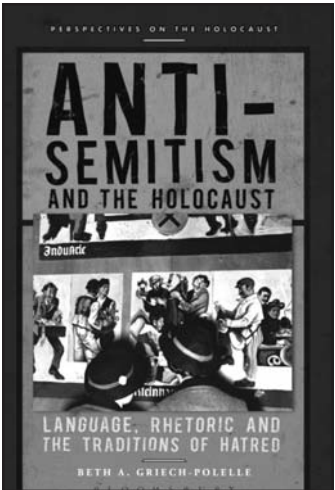
In the nineteenth century, however, things got much more dangerous.

For that was when "German thinkers" began to "legitimize" anti-Semitism, identifying it as more than just a religious issue. In short, Charles Darwin, through no fault of his own, would soon have his theories of the "survival of the fittest" hijacked to prove that anti-Semitism had scientific reasoning behind it! The result: Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927), "a leading racial theorist," using the "language of science," would "pronounce Germans as the truly superior Aryan race," while Jews were "like the Devil" and "associated with all things evil." And he wasn't alone . . .

When Hitler finally appeared on the scene in Germany, the language, the rhetoric, the hatred of the Jew were already a part of the culture. For that matter, one might easily say that Hitler simply "organized" and "industrialized" its results! Persecution of the Jew in Germany would no longer be haphazard, but backed by law. Murder would be sanctioned, premeditated and exceptionally orderly!

In sum, *Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust* deserves a place in any Holocaust student's library, since it makes crystal clear just how and why the Holocaust happened. This volume would also make a marvelous textbook for any course on anti-Semitism or Jewish history.

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



GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY AT YAD VASHEM

On May 2, during Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day, Yad Vashem broke ground for its new Shoah Heritage Campus. The emotional ceremony was attended by former head of the Jewish Agency Natan Sharansky, The ambassadors of Germany and Austria to Israel, donors, representatives of Yad Vashem Societies worldwide and Holocaust survivors.

The new campus, to be built at Yad Vashem on Jerusalem's Mount of Remembrance, will include the Joseph Wilf Curatorial Center; the Heritage Gallery for display of artifacts from its collections; and an auditorium, including a main hall and a Family and Children's Exhibition Gallery.

The central component of the new Campus is the Shoah Heritage Collections Center, with state-of-the-art intake, conservation and storage facilities for Yad Vashem's unrivaled collections of Holocaust-era artworks, artifacts and archival materials. Situated in a strategically prominent, highly visible location — opposite the Hall of Remembrance, one of the most frequently visited sites of Yad Vashem — the Shoah Heritage Collections Center will comprise four subterranean levels covering a total

area of 5,880 square meters (63,300 square feet).

During the ceremony, Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev called the items in Yad Vashem's collections — including 210 million pages of documentation, 34,000 personal artifacts and close to 12,000 original artworks

and "refusenik" Natan Sharansky cited Viktor Frankl's seminal work *Man's Search for Meaning*, and the importance of giving significance to one's life even as one faces certain death. The experiences of people under such regimes as Nazi Europe and the Communist Soviet Union, as



Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev being presented with the Shoah Heritage Campus Scroll of Dedication by donors.

— "the building blocks of truthful Shoah remembrance and the human memories that allow us to pass on the stories of their creators and owners for future generations."

Former Jewish Agency Chairman

he himself recalled, are vital not only for those living their lives at the time, but also for those living in the future, in order to learn how best to advance humanity. "The State of Israel, Yad Vashem and Yad Vashem's friends

guarantee that the memory of the Shoah will live on for generations to come," he said.

Speaking on behalf of the Wilf family and other donors of the Shoah Heritage Campus, Jane Wilf said "Yad Vashem is the epicenter for Holocaust remembrance, for the Jewish people, Israel and all of humanity. The Shoah Heritage Campus and all of its components, including the Joseph Wilf Curatorial Center, the renovated Auditorium and the Family and Children's Exhibition Gallery, constitute an integral thread in the fabric of Yad Vashem's vital work. Through these very components, we are faced with the profound challenge of ensuring the preservation of Yad Vashem's collections for posterity, their accessibility to the public, and the transmission of the memory of the victims and survivors of the Shoah to future generations."

Following the moving ceremony — which included a performance by the Ethiopian children's choir Sheba — stakeholders signed two copies of a Scroll of Dedication. One was presented to Chairman Shalev by donors, and another was then buried in the ground under the spot where the Shoah Heritage Campus will be built.

A SURVIVOR’S STORY IN LIVING COLOR

BY LUKE TRESS,
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

At 93, artist Eva Deutsch Costabel still has one friend from her hometown, Zagreb. The Italian military imprisoned them in the same concentration camp in World War II. They survived, parted ways, and found each other seven years ago in New York City, where they both live today.



Eva Deutsch Costabel.

Her friend, also named Eva, was seven years old when she arrived at the camp, and remembers 17-year-old Costabel being famous among the children confined in the camp on the picturesque island of Rab in the Adriatic Sea. The children would gather to watch Costabel at work, her friend said.

“You couldn’t buy anything, so I became very popular because I designed all the greeting cards for everybody,” Costabel said. “Everybody knew me in the camp, because when they needed a card for the holiday, they came to me.

“People from the camp, the Jews, they always said, ‘I’ll never forget your greeting cards,’” Costabel said.

Today, Costabel’s Manhattan apartment is crammed with colorful abstract paintings, self-portraits depicting her struggle with PTSD, children’s books she wrote and illustrated, and textiles she patterned during her design career in New York.

Her art skills helped her survive in mountain villages controlled by Yugoslav partisans and as a young immigrant alone in the US. She studied in the classical art world of Rome and with abstract expressionists in Manhattan. Today, the nonagenarian still paints and hopes to find a home for her work before she passes on.

Costabel grew up in Zagreb, then part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, now the capital of Croatia. Her father worked in the chemical industry and her mother ran a fashion boutique. Her mother groomed her to design children’s clothes, she said, which is how she began to draw.

The Nazis invaded Yugoslavia and occupied Zagreb in April 1941. Much of the population welcomed the

Germans as liberators. The Nazis set up a puppet state, called the Independent State of Croatia, run by the Ustaše, a Fascist, racist and violent Croatian nationalist group.

Yugoslavia was ethnically diverse, largely split between the Croatian and Serbian ethnic groups, but also including Albanians, Macedonians, Slovenes, Muslims and Jews. The Serbs and Croats harbored long-standing animosity towards each other, and when the Croatian Ustaše came to power, they began persecuting Serbs, Jews and Roma, in an attempt to create an ethnically pure Croatian state. The Nazis and their collaborators controlled the region’s roads and urban centers, but resistance groups sprang up in more remote mountain areas.

Saboteurs blew up a Nazi train in Costabel’s area, and her father was accused of involvement because of his ties to the chemical industry.

“I never saw him again. I was 16 years old. He was murdered in the *Treblinka* gas chamber. The Ustaše, they were never punished for it,” Costabel said.

The notoriously violent Ustaše slaughtered Jews, Serbs and other minorities throughout the war.

It is estimated that the Ustaše killed between 77,000 and 99,000 people, including up to 20,000 Jews, at *Jasenovac*, a death camp the group ran itself. The camp was brutal even by the standards of the time, with guards killing prisoners by slitting their throats, smashing their skulls with sledgehammers and hanging them from trees, often throwing bodies into a nearby river. Croatian authorities helped ship thousands more Jews to Nazi death camps in Eastern Europe.

Yad Vashem estimates that 66,000 Yugoslav Jews died in the war, out of a prewar population of 80,000.

Ustaše militants forced 16-year-old Costabel, her mother and her sister from their apartment at gunpoint.

Costabel’s parents were born in Vienna, and retained their Austrian citizenship and Germanic last name (she took the name Costabel from her former husband). Their Austrian passports allowed the family to get into territory occupied by the Italian military on the Adriatic Sea. The Italians were Nazi allies, but more lenient towards Jews.

“If you were Jewish, you were dead. It didn’t matter, you were dead. The Croatian Ustaše would have killed us, or the Nazis,” Costabel said. “The only place we could go was to the Yugoslav Adriatic coast, because it was occupied by the Italian military during the war. A few of our friends who went there, they said, ‘The Italians don’t kill Jews.’ That’s why I’m alive.”

The Italians did, however, imprison Costabel and her family in a concentration camp on the island of Rab, off the coast of present-day Croatia.

For the rest of the war, Costabel and Yugoslavia’s surviving Jews were caught between the Italians, Nazis, Croats, partisans and Allies in the power struggle for control of the Balkans.

ITALIAN DETAINMENT CAMPS: FOR REPRESSION, OR PROTECTION?

The Italian military set up camps during the war both for repression and for protection, according to historian James Walston. The repressive camps were intended to quell partisan resistance to Italian rule by removing potentially dangerous civilians and their supporters from the population. The inmates could also be used as hostages and executed in retaliation for partisan attacks.

In addition to the repressive camps,



“Jewish Tragedy 1949,” a self-portrait.

the Italians set up “protective” camps for Jews inside Italy and in areas occupied by their military. In Italian-occupied parts of Croatia, the camps included *Rab*, also known by its Italian name, *Arbe*, which kept the Jews out of the hands of the Nazis and Croats. The military knew what was happening to Jews in Eastern Europe, and wanted to keep Yugoslav Jews alive for both political and humanitarian reasons, Walston wrote.

Historian Davide Rodogno, author of a book on the Italian occupation of the Mediterranean in the war, told *The Times of Israel* that the military’s motives were purely political, however. The Italians in Yugoslavia, who were staunch believers in Fascist ideology, were struggling for power with their German and Croatian allies in the region.

The Jews were a small, peaceful group, and the Italians did not want to waste resources going after them. The Ustaše, whom the Italians saw as “maniacs and idiots,” Rodogno said, were disrupting law and order in the area by hunting Jews and ignoring legitimate threats, so the Italians wanted to remove them from the Ustaše’s sights.

Keeping the Jews from the Nazis was an act of defiance against the Germans, meant to show Italy was not a satellite state of the Germans,

Rodogno said.

“The military doesn’t operate and set up safe havens. If they decided to have concentration camps, it was to maintain law and order and make sure these people were under their control,” Rodogno said.

The Italians saw the Jews as a commodity that belonged to them, “and nobody, not even the Nazis, had any right to decide what to do with them. That was the point they were trying to make. This has nothing to do with humanity. The unintended consequence was a rescue,” Rodogno said.

Regardless of the Italian military’s motives, Costabel is grateful to her Italian captors to this day.

“Everybody was starving, nobody had anything to eat. We couldn’t get out, of course, it was a concentration camp,” Costabel said. “But the Italians gave us our own administration. There were a few Jewish leaders. It made it a livable place. Everybody gave their books, and we had a library. We had very intelligent people in this group, and singers and musicians, and they made it bearable,” she said.

As Allied forces routed the Germans and Italians in North Africa in late 1942, the Italians thought the Jews in Yugoslavia could be used as leverage in a peace agreement, Rodogno said, so they kept them alive and under their control until the end of the war.

MASTERS OF THEIR OWN FATES

Italy capitulated on September 8, 1943.

“It was utter chaos. Everyone was on his own. Italian soldiers wanted to just go back home,” Rodogno said. “They just didn’t care” what happened to the Jews, he said.

Liberation meant danger for the Jews in the *Rab* camp. When Italy fell, Yugoslavia was divided between the Germans and Croats, who both wanted to kill the Jews there.

“For the Jewish internees in the *Arbe* [*Rab*] camp, the day of liberation was one of great danger. It was, however, the day on which, for the first time since the beginning of the war, they were given an opportunity to cease being powerless and persecuted refugees and to become the masters of their own fate. For the first time, they were free to organize, to make their way to the areas which had already been liberated by the partisans, and to participate in the struggle,” Walston wrote.

When Italy capitulated, of the 2,661 Jews in *Rab*, 204 decided to remain in the camp, mostly elderly or infirm. They were captured by the Germans and deported to Auschwitz, where none survived. Of the “liberated” Jews who joined the partisans, 277 were killed in the war, Walston wrote.

Some of the Jews in *Rab* had connections to Yugoslavia’s Communist party before their confinement, and formed a small cell in the camp, wrote

(Continued on page 7)

THE LAST SEDER IN THE WARSAW GHETTO

BY ADAM ROSS, AISH.COM

Survivors testify about an epic Seder held in underground bunkers as the Nazis sought to liquidate the last Jews of the Warsaw ghetto.

In April 1943, at the height of the Final Solution, with the sounds of tank rounds and gunfire around them, the last remaining Jews of Warsaw huddled together in bunkers under their besieged ghetto to live their final hours as proud Jews, reading the Passover Haggadah. In the hours that followed, they would rise up in one of history’s most iconic feats of resistance.



Matzah being distributed in the Warsaw ghetto.

The handful of Jews who survived the Nazis’ final onslaught on Warsaw, once a major center of Jewish life, have this Seder night more than any other etched in their memories as a testament to Passover’s powerful calling to connect to family, history, tradition and hope.

THE JEWISH CAPITAL OF EUROPE

Every Passover during the Nazi occupation of Warsaw, which began in October 1939, the Jewish community did its best to celebrate the holiday. Even after being forced into a ghetto measuring just 2.5% of the city, subject to terrible starvation and disease, the Jews smuggled additional nonleavened foods into the ghetto in the weeks before Passover. Several matzah factories were set up, ensuring that the community, at its height numbering almost half a million, could eat the bread of freedom on Seder night. Despite the hunger, typhus and dysentery, Jewish life in the ghetto continued.

Passover in April 1943 would be the last for the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto, although by then the community was already unrecognizable. Almost a year earlier Adam Czierniakow, the head of the *Judenrat*, the Jewish council appointed by the Nazis, had committed suicide after hearing of the Nazis’ plans, leaving a note to his wife that he “would not be the hangman of Israel’s children.” The Nazis had since begun a terrifying program of “liquidation,” deporting between 5,000

and 6,000 Jews daily to the *Treblinka* death camp, where they were murdered within an hour of their arrival.

On January 18, 1943, the Nazis attempted to take another 8,000 Jews but this time members of a newly formed Jewish resistance fired shots at the SS guards, and the Nazis rethought their plans. They bolstered their military presence, delaying the final liquidation of the ghetto to Passover, which would fall in three months’ time.

“THAT’S WHAT WE FELT IN OUR HEARTS”

On the 18th of April 1943, when news arrived that the Germans

had stationed an army in Warsaw ready to empty the ghetto, members of the underground resistance movements went into high alert. While the rooftops were stationed with Jews keeping track of the enemy’s every move, below the ghetto, Jews were busy embracing the story of the exodus from Egypt as a symbol of their own fight for dignity, pride and hope.

Roma Frey was 24 that Passover. She recalls how she and her family tried their best to make the basement as nice as possible for the holiday, “We tried to put the candles on the table, and a white tablecloth.” She adds, “The table was made of a wooden board resting on a few things underneath.”

She survived the Holocaust and moved to Melbourne, Australia, after the war. She adds, “We acknowledged to ourselves and to God and to ourselves that we want to keep the traditions. That’s what we felt in our hearts, we remembered our grandfathers, the hard times, slavery and our slavery, and here we have hardly a hope to survive even just one day or night.”

SEDER NIGHT WITH RABBI MEISEL

With families decimated by the deportations, the remnant

Jews came together, relying on those who knew the Haggadah by heart to lead them. Many flocked to the home of the 60-year-old venerated Rabbi Eliezer Yitzchak Meisel, who had left his hometown of *Lodz* along with his followers years earlier when the Nazis invaded. In Warsaw he had become immediately involved in maintaining religious life amid the hardships; it was in his basement that many of the Jews active in the resistance joined for the Passover Seder.

Tuvia Borzykowski was 29 at the time. “No one slept that night,” he recalled. “The moon was full and the night was unusually bright.” Along with the other fighters, he joined Rabbi Meisel for the Seder.

“Amidst this destruction, the table in the center of the room looked incongruous, with glasses filled with wine, with the family seated around, the rabbi reading the Haggadah.” Throughout the night, despite the increasing sounds of enemy fire, Tuvia and the other fighters held fast, engrossed in the retelling of the Jewish people’s redemption from Egypt. He recalled, “The rabbi’s reading was punctuated by explosions and the rattling of machine guns; the faces of the family around the table were lit by the red light from the burning buildings nearby.”

“Now is a good time to die,” Rabbi Meisel said, buoyed by the feeling of pride, courage and faith, as he blessed one of the fighters who came to deliver a report. He died later that



A hidden matzah factory.

night in the flames of the ghetto. Tuvia Borzykowski survived the war and helped establish the Kibbutz of the Ghetto Fighters near Akko. He is one of several fighters who testified about the Passover Seder they took part in as the uprising began.

“I HAD NEVER MISSED A SEDER”

Born in Warsaw, Itzchak Milchberg was the leader of a group of Jewish boys posing as non-Jews outside the ghetto walls, selling cigarettes on the black market to survive. On the eve of Passover in 1943, he was just 12 years old but wise beyond his years. He had seen his father shot before his eyes, his mother and two sisters had already been deported, and the only family he had

left was an uncle named Feivel who was still in the ghetto.

When rumors spread that the Nazis were planning their final deportations, he returned to the ghetto to be with



Tuvia Borzykowski.

his uncle for Passover. “I had never missed a Seder,” he said. “It was in my blood.”

With the sound of shooting around him, he entered his uncle’s candlelit bunker, where 60 people were crowded. “The building was shaking,” he said, “People were crying.” His uncle Feivel embraced him in Yiddish, “*Ir vet firm di seder mit mir* — You’ll perform the Seder with me.” However, some were too distressed to think about running a Seder. He recalls people crying, “God led us out of Egypt. Nobody killed us. Here, they are murdering us.”

Pulling him close, whispering into his ear, Feivel told his nephew, “You may die, but if you die, you’ll die as a Jew. If we live, we live as Jews.” He added, “If you live, you’ll tell your children and grandchildren about this.”

The Seder began. Feivel Milchberg had managed to organize matzah. “I don’t know how he got it,” Itzchak recalls, although he remembers there were no bitter herbs. “There was plenty of bitterness already,” he says.

Together with his uncle, he read the Haggadah from memory, and soon most of the bunker joined in. “We did most of the prayers by heart,” he says. “The Seder went very, very late.”

He left the ghetto in the early hours of the morning through the sewer system, risking his life as he had done to be there in the first place. In the days that followed he worked as a runner, smuggling arms through the sewers to the Jewish fighters until he was caught on the sixth day of the uprising. He would later jump from a train taking him to *Treblinka* and survive the Holocaust thanks to a Catholic family in Warsaw. After the war, he moved to Canada, raised a family of his own and made good on his promise to his uncle to tell his children and grandchildren about that Seder night he had led with his uncle in 1943.

A SURVIVOR’S STORY IN LIVING COLOR

(Continued from page 5)
Emil Kerenji, a historian from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. They had some contact with Communists outside the camp, including in the town of *Rab* itself.

Prior to Italy’s capitulation, the Jewish Communists in the camp had prepared to join the partisans, and smuggled a report to the mainland late in the summer of 1943, Kerenji wrote. When Italy yielded to the Nazis, this cell, along with Slovenian prisoners in the camp, disarmed the Italian guards and took weapons from the camp’s caches.

Partisan representatives arrived from the mainland and invited the Jews to join their ranks. They began organizing their evacuation to remote areas in the forests and mountains of Yugoslavia under partisan control. The complex rescue operation included ferrying the former inmates to the mainland on boats, sometimes under German aerial bombardment, transporting the sick and elderly in trucks, and providing supplies to the hundreds joining their ranks.

EQUALS AMONG VICTIMS

The ideologically driven Communist partisans, led by Josip Broz Tito, were a multi-ethnic force that included Jews, Serbs and Muslims. Their Socialist, inclusive ethos proved to be an advantage in the struggle against the Germans, as they attracted fighters from different segments of the population.

Tito proclaimed the group’s goals as “brotherhood and unity of the peoples

(at least for the time being), the Communists preferred to emphasize the formal act of joining the resistance movement and then endow it with ideological meaning: the brotherly peoples of Yugoslavia joining, of their own free will, the struggle for national liberation led by Tito and the partisans,” Kerenji wrote.

The liberation of *Rab*’s Jews was one of the largest single rescue operations of the Holocaust. For context, Oskar Schindler is credited with saving 1,200 Jews, while the partisans saved over 2,000 from *Rab* alone.

Most of the Jews who left the camp who could not fight with the partisans found refuge with civilians, including most of the 500 liberated children. Some made their way to internment camps on the Italian mainland. Most of the rest, including Costabel, who had been in the camp for 18 months, joined the partisan ranks.

“We had no place to go, so the partisans, the resistance of Yugoslavia, they waited for us. There were soldiers, and they walked hundreds of miles to an area in Croatia which was occupied by the partisans, and I joined the army,” Costabel said.

THE PARTISAN PROPAGANDA UNIT

The partisans stationed Costabel in a small mountain village populated by Serbian peasants. She began working as a nurse.

“There were all these peasant houses. We used to sleep 30 people on the floor. They were all very primitive,” Costabel said. “We never took off our

unit.

“They called it the propaganda office. When they saw that I could draw, they put me there. I was doing the lettering and drawing. They had a little press,” she said.

The partisans remained committed to their multi-ethnic ideology throughout the war, and continued to welcome Jewish fighters and protect Jewish civilians in their territory. There

refugees across the Adriatic Sea to *Bari*, in southern Italy, which was controlled by the Allies. Costabel spent the remainder of the war in a refugee camp in *Bari*.

After the war ended, Costabel moved to Rome with her mother and sister. She wanted to pursue her interest in art, but had lost five years of education because of the war. Rome was a city in disarray, without accu-



Right, Captain Baruch, a Jewish officer in the partisans. Left, a peasant woman combing hemp.

were some tensions between the Jews and the local rural population, however. The Jews mostly came from urban areas, and were in better physical shape than the locals, who had suffered during a recent Nazi offensive, leading to some distrust between the groups. There were some incidents of anti-Semitism, or that were perceived as anti-Semitic by the Jews, according to Kerenji.

Costabel noticed this, and resisted formally joining the Communist party, she said.

“I didn’t want to join the Communist party. You’re 19, you’re an idealist, but I said I don’t like what they’re doing. I mean, they’re fighting the Nazis, but otherwise they’re very anti-Semitic, so I didn’t want to join. So my friend said, ‘You better join, they’ll kill you,’” Costabel said.

ON THE ROAD, AGAIN

Costabel fled for the coast. She met a group of Austrian and Hungarian Jews who had made contact with Winston Churchill’s son, Randolph, who was in the Adriatic as part of the British military’s effort to assist the partisans with medical supplies and military equipment. The group appealed to Churchill, as foreign citizens, for his help in fleeing war-torn Yugoslavia.

“We are the reminders of the persecuted foreign Jewish refugees. The other fell in Hands of the enemy and it is sure that they are not more alive,” the group wrote, in broken English, in their appeal to Churchill in a letter dated September 1, 1944. “Therefore we beg to realise our demand as soon as possible and to transfer us to Italy,” the refugees wrote.

Again, Costabel’s Austrian passport allowed her to leave as a foreign citizen. A British warship ferried the

rate phone books, so Costabel wandered the streets looking for an art school that would take her. Someone pointed her in the direction of the Academy of Fine Arts, an imposing classical arts school dating back to the 16th century. She explained her situation to an employee dressed in overalls she met outside the school whom she took to be a porter.

“I told him my whole story and it turned out that he wasn’t a porter, he was the director of the school, and he said, ‘I’ll get you in this school.’ You needed eight years of high school or two years of college. I had four years of high school. They took me anyway,” Costabel said.

“I didn’t have a cent to my name, nothing, and I went free to this. Everything I know today is from two years of this academy,” she said.

NEW LIFE IN THE NEW WORLD

She received a US visa while at the academy, and moved to New York City in 1949. She did not speak English and had no connections or job training beyond her two years of art education. After a few days in the city, she found a job painting roses on compacts for powdered makeup for one cent apiece, which put her below the poverty line, even then. A chance meeting led to a job in store window displays, which were elaborate advertisements at the time. She painted papier-mâché sculptures for stores in Manhattan, then began designing commercial packaging. Package design would provide her with steady income for most of her career.

Her first job was on 57th Street in Manhattan. She struggled to acclimate to the new city, but found refuge in art galleries and museums. At the

(Continued on page 11)



The *Rab* concentration camp.

in Yugoslavia” in the “struggle for national liberation.” The rescue of the Jews in *Rab* fit into this framework.

The region was rife with sectarian violence perpetrated against Serbians, Croats and Muslims, and Jews were considered another, equal victim by the partisans, who provided refuge for the other minority groups as well. Tito himself ordered his fighters to assist Jews escaping from the Germans, according to Yad Vashem. The rescue of the Jews of *Rab* was therefore motivated by a political vision, not ethical or humanitarian concerns, like most well-known Holocaust rescues in Europe, according to Kerenji.

“Although joining the partisans thus de facto also meant saving one’s life

clothes, never, because of the Nazis: you had to always run.”

She began sketching the people around her in the village — children orphaned by war and typhoid, her landlord and his wife, a Jewish army officer named Baruch — on whatever pieces of paper she could find, using pencils, ink and watercolors.

“It was during the war, so I had to draw on the back of some old letters. There was no paper, and I always carried a knapsack, that was my whole possession, but I always had paint and ink or whatever I needed,” she said. “I’m very proud of them because I didn’t study art at all. I couldn’t go to school for years.”

Partisan leaders noticed her skills and assigned her to their propaganda

PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE AMERICAN SOCIETY



Honorees Deborah Shnay Rifkin, Rachel Shnay and Gabriela Shnay and luncheon co-chair Sarita Rausnitz with family patriarch Symcha Horowitz.



Ron Meier, executive director of ASYV; Jack Shnay; Rachel Shnay; and ASYV Chairman Leonard Wilf.



Judi Burnstein, Dara Rubenstein, Merry Cohen, Leslie Adler, Marilyn Rubenstein, Helene Dorfman, Rebecca Altman and Judy Bloom.



Standing: Barry Levine and Abbi Halpern, board members; Sharon Halpern; Jaci Paradis, honorary co-chair; seated: Gladys Halpern.



Tova Friedman and Felice Z. Stokes, longtime friends and survivors.



Susan Lerner, Rose Koren, Sally Pomeranc and Deborah Pomeranc.

TY FOR YAD VASHEM ANNUAL SPRING LUNCHEON



David Bernheim, Taylor Bernheim, William Bernheim (guest speaker), Lucille Bernheim, Harrison Abramow and Jeremy Bernheim.



Susie Peyser, Deborah Shnay Rifkin and Leah Rifkin.



Barbara Sobel, Carol Buchwald, Stephanie Abramow, Eillene Leistner, Ruth Katz, Hillary Katz, Rori Denholtz and Marsha Fiske.



Shevi Peters, Marina Hirsch, Shara Levy and Goldie Hertz, luncheon co-chair.



Adina Burian, Lili Stawski, Rachel Shnay and Mark Moskowitz.



Anne Addison, survivor; Eillene Leistner; Geri Roper; and Sephora Stein, survivor.

THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF HOLOCAUST MONEY

BY SANTI ELIJAH HOLLEY, TOPIC

In September of 1942, an Austrian Jewish doctor named Viktor Frankl was deported, along with his wife and parents, to the Nazi-controlled *Theresienstadt* ghetto in what is now the Czech Republic. Two years later, after he and his wife were processed at Auschwitz, Frankl was sent alone to the notoriously deadly *Kaufering* concentration camp in southern Germany, part of the larger *Dachau* complex. In his 1946 memoir, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Frankl reflects on a particular pecuniary feature of

been investigated in studies of the era. It is a history blotted out of the public conversation. In fact, for some seventy years after the defeat of the Third Reich, the specifics of Holocaust currency were known mostly to a small community of collectors, scholars, survivors, and curators at Holocaust museums such as those in Houston and Washington, DC, and at Yad Vashem in Israel. Then, in the spring of 2015, a collection of bills and coins found their way to the Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, having been donated by Robert Messing, a

separating them from the larger local population — Nazi commanders would often issue coupons, or tokens, which were a fraction of the value of their country’s currency and only redeemable within the ghettos in which they were issued, precluding the Jewish population from participating in the German economy. Jews could be assigned various jobs inside the ghetto, but wages were pitiable and workers were compensated almost exclusively in ghetto coupons, which could be traded for food, clothing, cigarettes and other goods, marked up at exorbitant rates.

By stripping only certain citizens of a country of their national currency and replacing it with a virtually worthless one, the Nazis gripped the reins of control tighter and tighter, until an entire population was both destabilized and dependent — exiles in their own country. Money — what Jews were for hundreds of years accused of manipulating and controlling — was now being used as a means to manipulate and control them.

Lodz, in occupied Poland, was the first ghetto where Nazis designed, printed and distributed money to be used exclusively by the occupants. The pfennig notes that circulated among *Lodz’s* 160,000 predominantly Jewish residents between 1940 and the shuttering of the ghetto in 1944

features like a hooked nose, curly hair, and excessively long and slender fingers. (Heydrich also ordered that Moses’s fingers be positioned on the tablets so as to obscure the phrase “Thou shalt not kill.”) The design was approved, and the notes were distributed throughout *Theresienstadt*.

Heydrich had established the *Theresienstadt* ghetto in November 1941 in a walled fortress town thirty miles north of Prague. With a peak population of 150,000 Jews, of thirty-five different nationalities, including locals from Bohemia and Moravia, it was the largest Jewish ghetto outside of Poland and functioned both as a holding area for elderly and “prominent” Jews and as a transit camp, or way station, for those who would later be sent to extermination camps.

Theresienstadt also served as a deceptive display of life in the ghettos, hosting Jewish cultural events like concerts and plays. By March 1943, Nazi officers in *Theresienstadt* had already begun circulating the ghetto’s own currency, to aid in presenting an illusion of normalcy to both Jews and outside observers. (On June 23, 1944, drawn by concerns about suspected genocide and humanitarian offenses against European Jews, two delegates from the International Committee of the Red Cross and one



A 100 kronen note, the currency of the *Theresienstadt* ghetto.

the camp, where he and others were subjected to forced physical labor, including the digging of trenches and tunnels:

“At one time, my job was to dig a tunnel, without help, for a water main under a road,” he writes. “This feat did not go unrewarded; just before Christmas 1944, I was presented with a gift of so-called ‘premium coupons.’ These were issued by the construction firm to which we were practically sold as slaves: the firm paid the camp authorities a fixed price per day, per prisoner. The coupons cost the firm fifty pfennigs each and could be exchanged for six cigarettes, often weeks later, although they sometimes lost their validity.”

In his 1947 memoir, *Survival in Auschwitz*, Italian Jewish chemist Primo Levi makes a similar reference to what he calls “prize-coupons,” which he and other prisoners would exchange for cheap tobacco or bread. Levi describes how the coupons, distributed by Nazi camp officials, “circulate on the market in the form of money, and their value changes in strict obedience to the laws of classical economics.” Levi goes on to relate how the value of these coupons would fluctuate at random, and how some days “the prize-coupon was worth one ration of bread, then one and a quarter, even one and a third; one day it was quoted at one and a half ration.”

The very existence of Holocaust currencies — from the notes printed by Nazi authorities and distributed in Jewish ghettos to the “coupons” or “camp money” used by prisoners in concentration camps — has seldom

Clark alumnus and an amateur numismatist — one who studies coins and currencies. By making this material available to students, Messing and the Strassler Center have helped to ensure that future generations can continue to analyze this largely overlooked piece of world history.

In his 1925 autobiography, *Mein Kampf*, as well as during his rise to power in the early 1930s, Adolf Hitler endorsed the ancient stereotype of the miserly Jew, exploiting the growing conviction among Germans that Jews had obtained their wealth by stealing from Aryans. With the passage of the Nuremberg Race Laws in September of 1935, the regime formally stripped German Jews of their rights, disenfranchising them, denying them citizenship in the Reich, and criminalizing marriage or sexual relations between Jews and non-Jewish Germans. On April 26, 1938, the Decree for Reporting of Jewish-Owned Property required all German and Austrian Jews to disclose and surrender assets valued at more than 5,000 reichsmarks.

The Third Reich’s confiscation of property and seizure of assets and other goods not only served to help fund the Nazi war effort but created economic marginalization, leaving Jewish communities increasingly isolated and vulnerable and thus more easily controlled. When the large-scale deportation of Jews from German-occupied territories to Nazi ghettos commenced at the beginning of the 1940s, Jewish families often arrived empty-handed, with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

When Jews entered the ghettos — walled or otherwise confined areas

depicted a seven-branch menorah atop a chain of Stars of David, linked so as to resemble barbed wire.

The Third Reich was soon printing and distributing unique currencies throughout most of the ghettos in its occupied territories. These coins and coupons included the name of the ghetto, a monetary value and, usually, the Star of David. The Nazis who controlled each ghetto were responsible for choosing an artist — often this was an occupant of the ghetto — and approving the final design.

The *Theresienstadt* ghetto kronen (ghetto crowns) were designed by an artist, playwright and ghetto occupant named Peter Kien, originally from the Czech border town of *Varnsdorf* but educated in *Brno* and at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, as well as the graphic-design school *Officina Pragensis*. Ordered by Reinhard Heydrich, the high-ranking Nazi official Hitler had placed in charge of the ghettos, to include an illustration of Moses and the Ten Commandments in his design, Kien had his original effort rejected; Heydrich felt that Moses was too Aryan in appearance. Under Heydrich’s command, Kien redesigned the notes, giving Moses stereotypically exaggerated Semitic



Warsaw ghetto money.

delegate from the Danish Red Cross visited *Theresienstadt*, accompanied by SS officials. After a brief tour — the ghetto had begun a “beautification” campaign ahead of the visit, and, to alleviate overcrowded conditions, seven transports, carrying over 7,500 Jews, had been sent to Auschwitz — the Red Cross, satisfied, departed.)

As historian and numismatist Zvi Stahl writes in his 1990 study of Holocaust currency, *Jewish Ghettos’ and Concentration Camps’ Money*:

“*Theresienstadt’s* monetary system was a grand facade, geared towards impressing the Red Cross and other foreign visitors frequenting the ghetto. The existence of Jewish theater and concerts, sport events and an ordered monetary system were all part of an

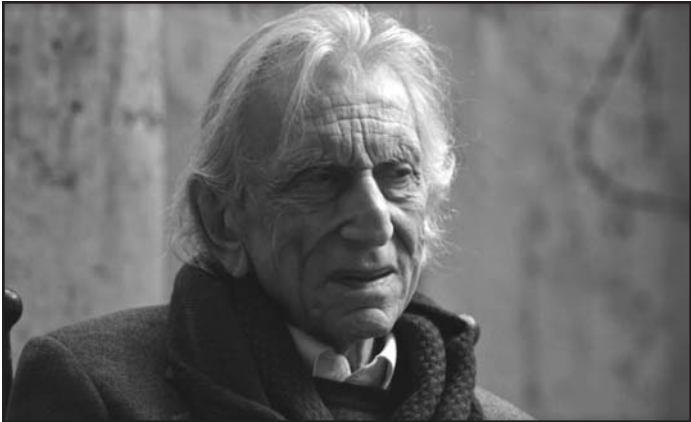
(Continued on page 13)

DOCUMENTARY CHARTS THE PERSECUTION OF ITALIAN JEWS

BY SHELDON KIRSHNER,
THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

Giorgio Treves’ sobering documentary, *1938—Different*, which was screened at the Toronto Jewish Film Festival in May, lays bare the devastating impact of Fascism on the Jewish community in Italy.

In 1938, Benito Mussolini’s Fascist regime enacted anti-Semitic laws that rendered 45,000 Italian Jews second-class citizens. The German invasion of Italy, four years into World War II brought a new and far more terrible dimension of anti-Semitism into the mix. On Germany’s initiative, thou-



The Italian Jewish actor and Holocaust survivor Roberto Herlitzka in 1938 — *Different*.

sands of Italian Jews were deported to Nazi extermination camps in Poland.

As Treves’ film opens, the Italian Jewish actor Roberto Herlitzka, a survivor of the Holocaust, muses, “I had a world, a family, a companion and a city that were taken away by the vile Fascist and greedy German.”

Herlitzka’s bitter comment is indicative of the shock and disappointment

that still linger in the hearts of Italian Jews who went through the trauma of being demonized, marginalized and persecuted by a nation that had emancipated its Jewish population a century before.

Herlitzka is just one of the interviewees who appears in Treves’ movie. He talks to historians and Jewish survivors, and they have plenty to say. In the main, they discuss the events that culminated with the passage of the anti-Jewish laws.

Mussolini sought to create a “new Italian” on the basis of race. This objective loomed large in the 1930s because he was obsessed by the “purity” of the Italian race. Italy passed its first racial law in 1936, aimed at mixed-race Italians of partial African descent. It would be only a matter of time before Mussolini’s ethnocentric regime targeted Jews.

During medieval times, Italian Jews were subjected to a myriad of restrictions. Free to leave the ghettos after their emancipation in the 19th century, they integrated themselves into society at large, gaining widespread acceptance.

Mussolini did not start off as an anti-Semite. Two hundred Jewish members of the Fascist party participated in the iconic 1922 March on Rome, and the so-called Jewish question was not a factor in Italian politics until

Nazi Party leader Adolf Hitler was appointed Germany’s chancellor in 1933.

Around 1936, Mussolini began to toy with the idea of removing Jews from their positions in culture and politics. Mussolini, portrayed by an actor, clearly disliked Jews. Reading from his diary, he says, “These disgusting Jews. I must destroy them.”

In the following year, he launched a media campaign against Jews and instructed Guido Landra, a scientist, to produce a manifesto proving that Jews did not belong to the Italian Aryan race and should be excluded from it.

Calling for “strict racial consciousness,” Mussolini announced in 1938 that anti-Semitic legislation was imminent. In November of that fateful year, the first anti-Jewish laws were passed by a compliant parliament. The edicts were signed by King Victor Emmanuel III, a descendant of King Carlo Alberto, who had rescinded anti-Semitic restrictions 90 years earlier.

Interestingly enough, the Vatican condemned the racially based laws.

In short order, Jews were summarily expelled from the Fascist party, the army and the civil service. Jewish students were thrown out of schools and universities.

“They despised us,” says a Jewish woman, looking back with disgust at that horrible era. “We were deeply disheartened.”

Italian Jews were shocked and

appalled by the new order. One distraught Jewish man committed suicide, jumping from the leaning tower in Pisa.

It would appear that Italian Christians were generally indifferent to the plight of Jews. Some took



Giorgio Treves.

advantage of the situation by buying Aryanized Jewish property cheaply.

Jews who had the means emigrated. Those who could not afford to leave suffered the consequences following Italy’s entry into the war in the summer of 1940 and Germany’s invasion of Italy a few years later. Jews were ghettoized, physically assaulted, declared enemies of the state and sent to forced labor camps.

Deportations, resulting in the murder of almost 8,000 Jews, followed.

In documenting the concerted assault on Jews by Mussolini and Germany, Treves cites facts and figures to make his case against the tyranny of Fascism in Italy.

A SURVIVOR’S STORY IN LIVING COLOR

(Continued from page 7)
time, many of New York’s galleries were located in midtown, so Costabel would explore during her lunch breaks.

“I didn’t speak English. I had no friends. I just bought a book and I saw every museum in New York the first year, and I still do that. I love New York,” Costabel said. “I don’t like to be bored, and you cannot be bored in New York.”

It was a hard time for her, though. Most survivors she met preferred spending time with other survivors from their own country, she said, and she did not know many Jews from Yugoslavia. She was also grappling with PTSD from the war, which she eventually recovered from, through art and therapy.

“Every survivor should have gone to a psychiatrist. You cannot live with this. This is something you cannot deal with if you don’t get it out of your system,” she said.

Costabel began studying painting at

the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn under the renowned abstract expressionist Franz Kline. The post-World War II movement, based in New York and



“Stars over Jerusalem.”

made famous by Jackson Pollock, William de Kooning and Mark Rothko, focused on action, emotion and spontaneous creation. It would help Costabel deal with the turmoil in her life.

“What helps me tremendously is

that I’m an artist. People think my paintings are very cheerful, but actually what I did is I put all my emotion, all my frustration in my paintings, so even though they look happy, they came from unhappiness, from pain.”

Outside of her design career, she has taught workshops on abstract art to those suffering from chronic diseases, and written and illustrated children’s books on Jewish and American history, including *The Jews of New Amsterdam*, on the first Jews to move to the Dutch colony which would become New York City.

She refuses to return to Croatia, despite invitations. Streets in her hometown are named after war criminals, she said, and the country never truly reckoned with the crimes of the Ustaše and other Nazi collaborators.

Today, Costabel lives alone in midtown Manhattan. Dressed in a wardrobe that matches her bright, bold paintings, she keeps busy with social engagements, doctor visits and trips to museums. Her marriage was unhappy and she never had children. Now she is trying to find a home for her paintings in New York or Israel, but has so far been unsuccessful.

In her small apartment, her shelves overflow with books on art, Israel and Jewish history and her walls are lined with decades of artwork. A photograph of her father stands on a bookcase next to her bed, and at her window overlooking 8th Avenue are her easel, brushes and tubes of paint.

“I have a very good life, considering everything. I’m not a greedy person. People make themselves unhappy because they want a car, they want this, they want that, and I’m not that way,” said Costabel. “I’m not greedy, so I’m satisfied with what I have. That’s all.”

RISKING TORTURE AND DEATH TO SAVE JEWS DURING THE HOLOCAUST

BY JONATHAN BLAUSTEIN,
THE NEW YORK TIMES

In 1986, Rabbi Harold Schulweis recruited Malka Drucker, a children’s book author, and Gay Block, a fine art portrait photographer, to embark on a project documenting rescuers, non-Jewish Europeans who risked torture and death to save Jews during the Holocaust. There were ceremonies for these brave souls at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, where they were honored and trees were planted.

But their accomplishments were little known.

The writer and photographer began interviewing some of the rescuers who had relocated to southern California, but they eventually traveled to Canada and Europe for 100 interviews. They worked on the project from 1986 to 1988, and in 1992 Ms. Block had a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. A separate traveling show was produced by Curatorial Assistance, and traveled to 50 venues over 11 years.

Ms. Drucker wrote the original text, Ms. Block made the portraits and edited the interviews, and Cynthia Ozick contributed an introduction to the resulting book, *Rescuers: Portraits of Moral Courage in the Holocaust*.

Maria, Countess von Maltzan, was a veterinarian living in East Berlin at the time of her interview. She told of being raised on an 18,000-acre estate in the Silesia region of Germany, to fabulous wealth, a doting father and a cruel and unforgiving mother.



Maria, Countess von Maltzan. “It was easy for me to resist Nazi authority because I had always resisted my mother’s authority,” she said.

Familial rebelliousness first drove her to become a member of the underground in Berlin during the war. “It was easy for me to resist Nazi authority because I had always resisted my mother’s authority,” she said.

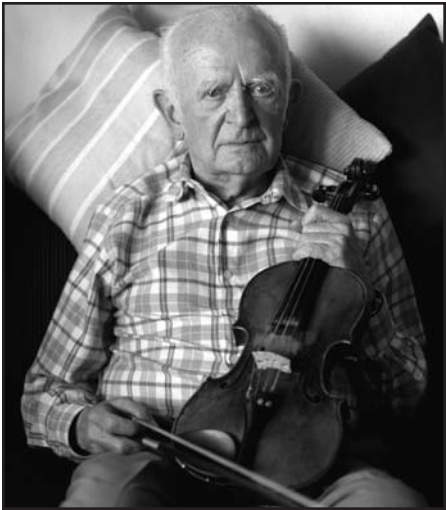
The countess hid Jews in a secret compartment in her sofa (among other places) and once dared an SS officer to shoot at it while her future husband, Hans, was still inside. (He failed to call her bluff, thankfully.)

“I was a queen on the black market

all during the war,” she recalled, “but I had to be good at it because I had so many extra people to feed. I always said, no matter what came along, ‘I prefer to be in a tough situation than to go to bed with a bad conscience.’”

Gustav Mikulai was raised in a Social Democrat family in Budapest and grew up with Jewish friends and neighbors. As a budding musician, he was impressed by the Jewish students he encountered in school.

“The Jews were capable and everyone was envious,” he said. “I understood that from the beginning. I couldn’t be anti-Semitic, first because I thought it would be immoral, and second because I thought well enough of myself that I didn’t need to be envious of them.”



Gustav Mikulai.

Mr. Mikulai eventually married a Jewish musician and then hid her and her parents when the Germans invaded in March 1944. From that point on, he dedicated himself to saving as many Jews as possible.

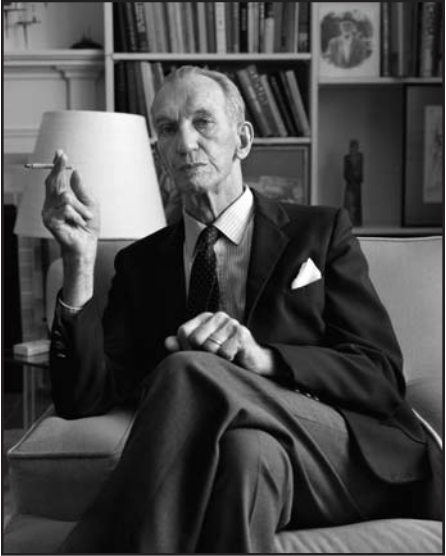
Being a resistance fighter required huge sacrifice, because, as he said, “I found during this time of the Holocaust that I could kill anyone who was suspicious of me. It was a terrible time for humanity.”

Mr. Mikulai was able to look back, knowing that he was no bystander, watching while the world was subsumed by chaos. Reflecting from his perch in *Bonn*, Germany, he knew he had made a difference.

“I think in all I was able to save at least 50 people, and maybe 80 or a hundred,” he said. “I’m happy about the times I was able to rescue children who are now married and with children of their own, who’ll not have had such a life without my help.”

Jan Karski was a Polish spy who eventually became a professor at Georgetown University in Washington. Like a real-life James Bond, he once skied across Slovakia into Hungary on a mission, and he was eventually caught by the Germans before being rescued by the Polish resistance.

Shortly thereafter, he was recruited by the Jewish underground to take news of the Warsaw ghetto, and the



Jan Karski.

annihilation of the Jews, directly to Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt. But first, he had to visit the ghetto to see for himself.

“The ghetto was macabre,” he said in his interview. “It was not a world. It was not a part of humanity. I did not belong there. I vomited blood that night. I saw horrible, horrible things I will never forget. So I agreed to do what they asked of me.”

Mr. Karski managed to meet with both leaders, but was disappointed to hear they were unwilling to put resources directly to stopping the Holocaust, as their focus was on the war. (“Helping Jews was no advantage to the Allied war strategy,” he said.)

When he asked the president what message he should take back to Poland, Roosevelt replied: “You will tell them we shall win the war and the enemy will be punished for their crimes. Justice will prevail. Tell your nation that they have a friend in this house. This is what you will tell them.”

Zofia Baniecka, from Warsaw, was visiting her friend Ruth in Staten Island when she was interviewed for the “Rescuers” project. She and her mother had been integral to the Polish resistance after her father was killed by a Russian bomb in 1941.

Unlike some other rescuers, she and her mother evaded detection the entire time they fought the Nazis. “I was never interrogated or nearly caught, though I don’t know why,” she said. “I was just lucky. Luck, it was only luck, because I kept people and guns in my house from the winter of 1941 until the Polish uprising in August 1944.”

She was consistent with many of her fellow rescuers, however, in stating her desire that these stories be shared well into the future.

“There are many people who have saved my belief in humanity, and that is why it is important for people to

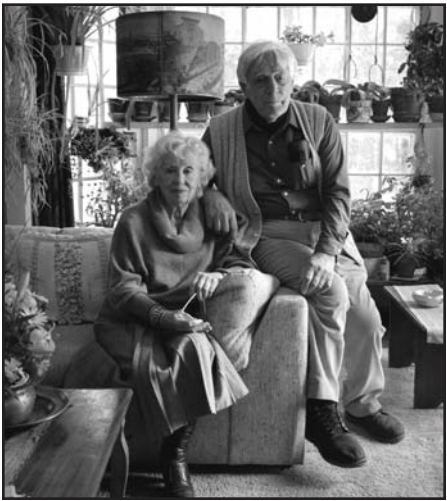


Zofia Baniecka.

know about this time, of Poland during the war, and that there were those of us who did try to save Jews,” she said. “It is necessary for the children to know that there were such people.”

Aart and Johtje Vos lived in an artist colony called *Laren*, near Amsterdam, and their home became a reliable stop on the underground. (So much so that they once had 36 people hiding there.)

“More and more people came to hide in our house,” Johtje said. “We had mattresses all over the floor, and they had to be camouflaged in case the Germans came.”



Johtje and Aart Vos.

The couple’s bravery ruffled feathers within the home, with one of their own children questioning the risks they were taking. It was never a question for them, though, as they couldn’t stand idly by while the Germans picked off their fellow countrymen.

“Holland was like a family and part of that family was in danger,” Aart said. “In this case, the Jewish part. The Germans were threatening our family. We weren’t thinking, ‘What shall we do?’ We just did.”

Helene Jacobs, who was born in Berlin, worked with a group called Confessing Church to provide false papers and identification to German Jews. Eventually, her counterfeit ring was tracked down by the Gestapo, and she was arrested in 1943.

(Continued on page 15)

A HOLOCAUST VICTIM'S DIARY DEPICTING LIFE IN THE KOVNO GHETTO

"The urge to deny the horrific reality — or alternatively to adapt to it and concentrate on the here and now and cling to a seemingly ordinary life — was characteristic of life in the ghettos."

BY LEA PRAIS,
THE JERUSALEM POST

"We — the youth — meet up almost every evening to enjoy ourselves just like kids. For us, the ghetto is not a ghetto: we don't feel it amongst ourselves; we don't want to feel like we are living behind barbed wire, isolated from the rest of the world and the rest of humanity."

18-year-old Ilya Gerber wrote these words in his 1942 diary describing life in the Kovno ghetto. His writings and drawings portray the image of a young, vibrant, intelligent and sensitive young man attempting to sustain a sense of normalcy within a complex reality in which the future was shrouded in ambiguity. In July 1944, the Kovno ghetto was liquidated and Ilya was deported to *Dachau*. On April 28, 1945, on the verge of liberation, Gerber was shot and killed while marching forcibly from *Dachau* to *Wolfsratshausen*, Germany. He was not yet 21 years old.

Since its liquidation, various materials have been gathered from the ruins of the Kovno ghetto in an effort to discover what took place there, and to remember the people who lived — and died — within its walls. The remains of Gerber's diary were taken from place to place, finally ending up in the archives of the Jewish Museum in Vilna. The precise date Gerber began to keep his diary is unknown, but his passion and talent for both writing and illustration is evident, and

clearly held an important place in his life. From the diary entries, it appears this diary was the third notebook: it starts with an entry of August 26, 1942, and ends on January 23, 1943.

In his diaries, the young Gerber deals with a variety of topics: from the culture of rumor-mongering and fears of being abducted into forced labor to songs written in the ghetto. He was clearly an aficionado of poet-

illuminate the more subversive and lesser-known aspects of life in the Kovno ghetto, as well as the feelings and reactions of its residents. The diary introduces its readers to the day-to-day atmosphere of the ghetto and presents its Jewish leadership from a contemporary perspective. As a young man, Gerber did not succumb to the fear of death in the ghetto. He maintained social ties and met

do not mourn anyone else, and do not want anyone to mourn me. Just leave me alone."

The urge to deny the horrific reality — or alternatively to adapt to it and concentrate on the here and now and cling to a seemingly ordinary life — was characteristic of life in the ghettos. This was especially true among the youth. Gerber portrays in his diary a faithful reflection of the world of 16- to 21-year-olds, who endeavored to live a normal life in abnormal circumstances — a life of friendships, love and entertainment.

"That evening I wanted to be happy, I had to be happy, because I wanted to forget.... The red light and the simple gaiety affected me.... I was dancing with everyone.... The night was beautiful and full of stars.... I remembered Henny again — she should have been there today. But on the other hand, in fact, I do not want her to come in to the group. Why? I do not know (maybe because she, too, does not want to)?" Henny Spitz (who survived the war) was Gerber's great love for a period, and the diary accompanies the short and unfulfilled love affair from its inception to its demise.

In his diary, Gerber also refers to songs that he collected in the ghetto. He brought examples and even tried to characterize them.

"The ghetto creates many songs, but unfortunately, there are very few melodies — in fact, almost none, even though my father is a musician of the best kind and he once composed many melodies... now, the song of the ghetto usually begins with the pain and sorrow of the Jewish people and ends with hope for a better, easier and more welcoming future."



A barbed-wire fence along Panrow Street, separating the two parts of the Kovno ghetto in Lithuania.

ry and music. Thanks to his command of the German language, he also incorporated into his diary German press bulletins, mainly regarding events at the front. A review of the diary indicates that Gerber was a critical reader who realized the true meaning of the rhetoric of various German leaders. His analysis shows, for example, that despite Hitler's convoluted speeches, his words embodied his racist and murderous ideology aimed at the total annihilation of the Jewish people.

The pages of Gerber's diary also

with his friends on a daily basis. Despite the enormity of the catastrophe in the ghetto, they sang, danced and rejoiced at every opportunity, especially during celebrations of their birthdays, although the fear that they could be next always lingered.

"Each one of them mourns his tragedy and is not interested in the disaster of others. As long as the trouble does not know me, and I do not know him [the victim]... and if I identify with him, what does it help him... Would it make it easier — no, the opposite — it could also hurt me... I

THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF HOLOCAUST MONEY

(Continued from page 10)

effort to woo world opinion by displaying a civilized daily routine in the Jewish ghettos."

Ghetto currency, also known as scrip, not only provided a false sense of security — or, at least, normality — to occupants of and visitors to Jewish ghettos; it served as a deterrent for those wishing to escape. "It kept people in their place," says Carol Manley, chief curator at the Holocaust Museum Houston, which has about 500 pieces of currency from Jewish ghettos and concentration camps in its permanent collection. "It made them think, 'Even if we escape, we have no money, we have no property.' They knew that this scrip was not good anywhere else except the camp or ghetto they were in. It was a way to discourage resistance and keep them interned."

Theresienstadt was one of the Reich's larger and more elaborate facades when it came to managing foreign expectations of ghetto life,

and its currency is more common to find among collectors today than that from concentration camps, because thousands more of these notes were printed and distributed. Steve Feller, a professor of physics at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is a longtime amateur numismatist and co-author of the 2007 book *Silent Witnesses: Civilian Camp Money of World War II*.

In general, Nazi-issued money was, in Feller's words, "farcical" — it provided little of actual worth to its holder. Indeed, some forms appear to have been used far less often, in particular currencies from concentration camps like Auschwitz, since prisoners were commonly sent there only as a last stop before they were executed. Such notes were so scarce that Feller says he's spoken with many survivors who were unaware of their existence.

At least twenty concentration camps across Europe, including Auschwitz, *Dachau*, *Westerbork* and *Buchenwald*, were responsible for creating their own monetary systems.

As it did in the ghettos, currency here served to create an illusion of normalcy. When prisoners arrived, they often had no remaining goods, assets or possessions, and the promise of earning any money at all, even if illusory, could provide the prisoners enough incentive to work.

While tens of thousands of young Germans were off fighting, the Reich became increasingly dependent on forced labor to support its war effort. Concentration camp commandants would contract out their prisoners to state-owned corporations and compensate them with meaningless scrip, which they could trade inside the camp for clothes, food or cigarettes.

Of the 144,000 Jews held in *Theresienstadt* between 1941 and 1945, 88,000 were eventually deported to extermination camps, while 33,000 died inside the ghetto, typically of famine or disease. Between the first arrival of prisoners to Auschwitz in 1940 and the end of the war in 1945, the Nazis sent at

least 1.3 million people to the camp. It's estimated that over 1.1 million died or were killed there, the overwhelming majority of whom were Jews. What remains of the currency from ghettos and concentration camps serves as material proof that these people had once lived, and had maintained their daily routines even in the face of madness. And even when the last survivor has passed on, these notes will remain.

During a speech at an event in the Great Synagogue of *Turin* on May 31, 1967, Primo Levi offered his support and endorsement for the still-young state of Israel, peopled by fellow survivors of the Holocaust, but he warned against confusing land for freedom, or mistaking wealth for compassion. "With money alone one can do any number of things," Levi told the crowd. "One can corrupt, one can build cannons, one can waste rivers of it, as is the case elsewhere, but one cannot build anything good if goodwill is missing."

SAVED BY THE NEIGHBORS

BY SUZANNE HIRT,
DAILY COMMERCIAL

For her birthday, her father brought her a sewing basket. Inside, he scratched a note in their native French: “To my daughter, Claire, for her sixth birthday, May 22, 1941. Your father, Nathan.”

Her mother, Sara Mytnowiecka, filled the basket with family photos — happy memories they made together before Germany’s occupation of Belgium forced Jews into hiding.

Claire spent her childhood frolicking with her aunt in the seaside sand at *Blankenberge* on Belgium’s northern coast, playing in the wooded Bois de la Cambre park on the outskirts of Brussels, rambling with cousins around a goldfish-filled lake at the lush Jardin Botanique near the Royal Palace and toying with buttons on her father’s tailor shop floor.

Less than a year after Nazis invaded in 1940, that came to an end.

Claire was sent to live with an elderly Catholic couple who could pass her off as their granddaughter, and her close-knit relatives split up among several non-Jewish households.

“By dividing themselves, they felt they gave the children a better chance to survive,” said Claire, 83, of Palm Coast, Florida, whose surname is now Soria.

They visited her in secret at first. But one by one, the loved ones in her photos disappeared, snatched up by the Gestapo and shipped to Auschwitz. All she had left was her sewing basket.

Claire watched the Nazi troops and tanks parading through the streets of Brussels a few days after her fifth birthday.

Soldiers removed Belgian flags and hoisted the red, white and black Nazi banner in their place. Signs decrying Jews appeared soon after.

“We could never imagine (back) then what was on the horizon,” said Claire. “From one day to the next, everything changed.”

Her parents had to stop going to work, were forbidden from some public places and could only shop during certain hours. Though her youth shielded her from much of the discrimination adults experienced, she sensed a shift.

Her kindergarten friends were afraid to be seen playing with a girl wearing a yellow star, but Claire didn’t understand the correlation.

“I even sewed one on my clothing and didn’t see anything wrong with that,” she said — until her parents realized the stars made it easier for people to report any Jews they knew to the authorities.

“I don’t think in the beginning people had any idea of what was going on,” Claire said. But her parents, fearing arrest, asked their Catholic neighbors to shelter her.

Lambert and Lea Sabaux (pro-

nounced Sa-bow) agreed to take her in and acted as if she were a visiting granddaughter. They loved her like one, too.

Claire’s parents, aunt and cousin Nina visited when they could. They sent her letters and postcards. She stowed them all in her sewing basket.

“That basket has always been paramount to my story,” Claire said. “It’s the one thing I’ve saved my whole life.”

When school was back in session in fall 1941, Jewish children were forbidden to attend.

Grandma and Grandpa, as Claire called her caretakers, thought she’d be safer with a French name. She chose Yvette in honor of one of her lost friends.

The Sabauxes took “Yvette” to a different school to enroll in first grade.

“If this child happens to be Jewish, the Gestapo will come and pick her up,” Claire recalled the principal’s warning. “So we left, and by noon (the Sabauxes) called the school and gave a phony excuse (for me dropping out).”

They found a tutor who would come to their home, but that, too, soon fell through. A teacher visiting each day could attract unwanted Gestapo attention.



Claire Soria with the sewing basket given to her by her father for Claire’s sixth birthday.

A music education was the only option. Lea Sabaux, a former concert pianist, trained Claire to play, and Lambert Sabaux took her along when he played drums at a corner cafe on their street.

Claire was a homebody by nature, so she didn’t mind staying inside. She learned solitaire and spent hours playing card games to pass the time.

Her family’s visits became fewer and eventually stopped altogether.

In March 1943, the Gestapo barged into the home where her mother, aunt and uncle were hiding. The three of them were among 1,638 Jews deported on the 20th transport train from *Malines*, Belgium, to Auschwitz.

Her father was arrested on a streetcar, and shipped out on the 21st train from *Malines*. Her beloved cousin Nina, then 17, was turned in by a neighbor. She, too, was sent to Auschwitz.

“I could not stop crying,” Claire said. “(I wondered), ‘Who’s next? How much more can I take?’”

Word of an imminent Gestapo raid

typically traveled through the Belgian underground resistance network in time for the Sabauxes to whisk Claire to safety in the countryside.

One time the Nazis caught them by surprise.

Claire was asleep upstairs, and her cousins, two sisters ages 7 and 9, had just turned up on the Sabauxes’ doorstep seeking shelter.

Knowing they couldn’t care for three children, the Sabauxes took them in anyway. That’s when the Gestapo came knocking.

Lea Sabaux made a show of fumbling with her keys. She knew the cost of collaborating with Jews — they risked being shot or shipped to Auschwitz to join the rest of Claire’s family.

“I can’t open the door,” she called.

The officers moved on to the next house with a warning: “We’ll be back.”

They never returned, and the Sabauxes found Claire’s cousins a new safe house. Both girls survived the war.

Some of the Sabauxes’ neighbors were not so lucky.

“There were times I actually did see the Gestapo going from house to house and pulling people out of their homes and forcing them into trucks,” Claire said. “And if they did not do as they were told, they were shot. I remember that vividly.”

Claire’s story shares notable similarities with that of Anne Frank, with one distinct difference — Claire survived. But as the war went on, the odds of doing so seemed to diminish.

The Sabauxes lived near a railroad bridge frequently targeted in German air strikes early in the war and by the Allies near the end of it.

And then there were the “Vengeance” missiles — the low-flying V-1 and the longer-range, deadlier V-2 — that Germany launched toward sites in England and Belgium.

Neither weapon was very accurate, and air raid sirens alerted civilians of incoming missiles that fell short of their targets. Claire learned to distinguish the difference by their sounds.

“Are they going to hit our area or not? You never knew for sure,” Claire said. They huddled in the basement until a second siren signaled it was safe.

Food was rationed, and there wasn’t much.

One night at dinner, Claire’s place at the table was the only one set with food. She realized her caretakers had given her the last of their store, and she refused to eat alone.

“They said, ‘OK, go to bed, you’ll have it in the morning.’ And I did,” she said. “They were so caring. They just wanted what was best for me.”

The Allies eradicated Nazi forces from Belgium in early 1945, but Belgian towns continued to be a target for Vengeance missiles.

Claire doesn’t have a specific memory associated with the war’s end, but she recalled the trickle of Jews returning to town. “It always gave me hope that next would be my mom and dad,” she said.

But when her cousin Nina was released from Auschwitz, she brought bad news. Claire’s father had been tortured to death and her mother, aunt and uncle all were killed in the camp.

“I remember the day that Nina sat down with me and not only told me that my mom and dad were not coming back, but explained to me the fact that I am Jewish,” Claire said. “That was the beginning of the change in my life.”

Claire spent more than four years with the Sabauxes — and by then was much closer to them than to her surviving family — but the law gave custody of war orphans to adult relatives. Claire had to move in with an aunt.

“I was so upset,” she said. “(Grandma and Grandpa) were so nice to me. They risked their lives to save mine.”

She was permitted to visit them at first, but she would always come home crying. Her aunt stopped letting her see them.

“She did not realize that (my tears were) love,” Claire said.

Her aunt sent her away to summer camp to spend time with children her age, and then, at age 13, to the U.S. She didn’t speak English and was several years behind in school. Those were some of her darkest days, she said.

Claire eventually married and had three children. She has six grandkids and two great-grandchildren.

Grandma’s piano lessons paid off. Claire followed in her footsteps and became a piano teacher. She still has 14 students.

A year after Claire arrived in the U.S., she received correspondence from Lambert Sabaux.

“My dearest Yvette, these few lines are to let you know that it’s been terrible for us since you left. It’s sad to say but Grandma has suddenly gotten very ill,” the letter begins.

Lea Sabaux, hospitalized a few months after Claire’s departure, did not live much longer. Lambert Sabaux passed away soon after that.

“I could almost swear that it’s from a broken heart,” Claire said. She still cries every time she reads the letter.

It continues: “You wrote in your letter that you missed us very much. I know it. But that’s life. The only thing I wish for you now is for you to be happy,” Lambert Sabaux wrote. “I must end my letter because I can’t stop crying.”

Claire saved the letter in her sewing basket.

RISKING TORTURE AND DEATH TO SAVE JEWS DURING THE HOLOCAUST

(Continued from page 12)

In her interview, she said: “From childhood I believed that each of us who is given the gift of life is responsible for our own life and for what and whom we decide to surround ourselves. This is why I fought Nazism.”



Helene Jacobs.

Ms. Jacobs spent 20 months in prison for her “crimes,” and when she was released, discovered that her home had been burned. As a German who battled the Nazis, she felt it was her duty to fight.

“I always knew how dangerous it was, but I did it for humanity, and because I was a patriot,” she said. “I was ashamed of what the German people were doing.”

Agnieszka Budna-Widerschal was interviewed in Israel, where she lived with her second Jewish husband, Shimon. She sheltered her first Jewish husband, Motl, in Poland during the war and also saved his brothers.



Agnieszka Budna-Widerschal.

She described her brazen plan to sneak her brothers-in-law through the ghetto to safety: “I pretended to be drunk while the two brothers walked on either side of me, each of them holding me under my arm. There were Nazis all over the street. I knew

we would surely run into one of them, and when we did he just took one look at me and said with disgust, ‘Ach, that’s just like a Pole!’ And he walked his way and we went ours!”

Though her family came through World War II intact, Motl died soon after from diabetes. Worse yet, in 1954, during a period of rising anti-Semitism, Agnieszka’s daughter Bella was murdered by a gang of Polish teenagers.

Agnieszka and Shimon moved to Israel a few years later.

Semmy Riekerk worked with her husband, Joop Woortman, to save Jews for the Dutch resistance. “My sister helped, too, but I didn’t know it at the time,” she said in her interview. “You never told anyone anything they didn’t have to know. My husband used anyone he could trust.”

Beginning in 1942, they organized efforts to steal and forge papers to help Jews escape, but later focused



Semmy Riekerk.

their energies on saving children. (Ms. Riekerk adopted a refugee during the war.)

When Joop Woortman was captured, and later killed in *Bergen-Belsen* in 1944, Ms. Riekerk took up his mantle and did the work herself.

“I had to carry on his work until the end of the war,” she said. “They gave me the book that listed 300 names and said: ‘These are the people who are hiding children. You have to take them ration cards and money every month.’ The banks provided money from the Dutch government-in-exile, and our organization provided the ration cards.”

Johannes de Vries, a coal miner, and his wife, Janke, took two Jewish children — a brother and sister named Salomon and Eva Haringman — into their home in southern Holland in 1942. They raised them alongside their own two children, and were also foster parents for other refugees, short term, as a

part of an underground railroad.

Eventually, the Jewish children were reunited with their mother in Amsterdam after the war and then



Johannes de Vries.

moved to Israel when she died in 1947.

By the time Gay Block and Malka Drucker interviewed Mr. de Vries, he was living in Ontario and going by the nickname Joe.

Recalling Mrs. Haringman’s original predicament, he said, “What it must have been like for that mother to give up her children to someone she didn’t know.”

Stefania Podgorska Burzminski, born in a small village in Poland, was interviewed above her husband Joe’s dentist office in Massachusetts. She had saved him, and two of his brothers, by hiding a cohort of 13 Jews in a cottage she procured during the war.

Joe’s parents and two of his other brothers had been taken by the Nazis, but he escaped by jumping from a



Stefania Podgorska Burzminski and her husband, Joe.

train and soon showed up at Stefania’s house.

“Poor Joe, he was filthy and his clothes were rags,” she recounted. “I gave him my nightgown to wear. Joe cried all night, and my sister laughed

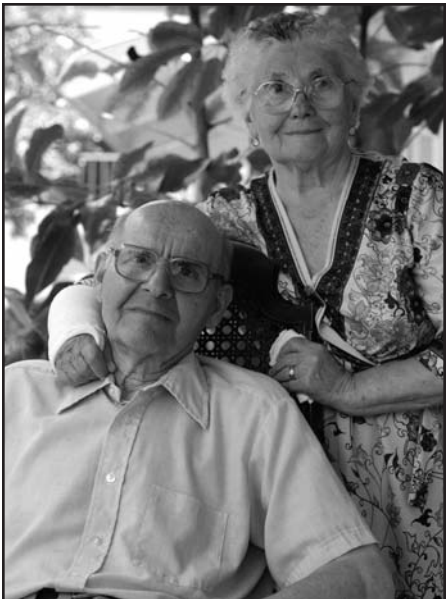
at him in my nightgown. I explained to my sister who Joe was, that he was a Jew, that Germans wanted to kill him, and that we had to help him.”

Ultimately, they survived the war, and Joe converted to Catholicism in order to marry Stefania. It was very difficult for her to discuss the past, and Ms. Block returned a year later for a second interview to better understand the story.

“I work hard all day now, helping Joe in his dentist’s practice,” she told her. “Every time I have to do an interview like this, it brings back all the memories and I can’t sleep for some nights.”

Alex and Mela Roslan were living in Clearwater, Florida, when *Rescuers* was shot. They were originally from Poland and lived near *Bialystok* during the war.

Alex had a textile business and noticed his Jewish clientele were disappearing, so he put on a star and entered the ghetto. “I saw so many children, hungry and starving,” he said. “They were so skinny. The par-



Alex and Mela Roslan.

ents had been taken to ‘farms,’ but we knew what that meant. I came home and told Mela we had to do something. We decided to go to Warsaw.”

The young couple took an apartment and eventually hid three young, wealthy brothers: Jacob, Sholom and David Gutgelt. Though they were never discovered, tragedy struck regardless, as Sholom died of illness, and the Roslans’ son Yurek was killed by a Nazi sniper.

But Jacob and David survived the war and were eventually reunited with their father in Israel. Alex and Mela moved to America, and they all lost contact for years.

In 1980, though, David moved to America to study at the UC Berkeley, and was reunited with the family that saved his life. “At first, I didn’t recognize him,” Alex said. “I hadn’t seen him in so long, and he had a beard. But then he threw his arms around me. David is a mathematician, and Jacob is a nuclear scientist.”



ELI ZBOROWSKI LEGACY CIRCLE



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

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

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

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

The Talmud

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

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