

MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE



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“TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE... AND A THREEFOLD CORD CANNOT QUICKLY BE BROKEN”

On Sunday, November 17, 2019, the American Society for Yad Vashem will be honoring three generations of one family at our Annual Tribute Dinner in New York City. The Gora-Sterling-Friedman family reflects the theme of this year's Tribute Dinner, which comes from Kohelet. “Two are better than one... and a threefold cord cannot quickly be broken” (4:9-12). All three generations are proud supporters of Yad Vashem and are deeply committed to the mission of Holocaust remembrance and education. Paula and Jack Gora will receive the ASYV Remembrance Award, Mona and David Sterling will receive the ASYV Achievement Award, and Samantha and Jonathan Friedman and Paz and Sam Friedman will receive the ASYV Young Leadership Award.

Jack Gora was born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1920 and lived with his parents and sister, Marilla, always surrounded by extended family. Jack had a zest for life and grew to be a mischievous child and a survivor with a remarkably vivacious spirit.

During the *Shoah*, Jack fled to *Lvov*, where he was arrested and sent to *Rybinsk*. He spent seven years in hard labor, enduring perilous conditions working in lumber camps in Siberia, and then in coal mines during his conscription in the Russian army.

After the war, Jack joined his mother, who had miraculously survived, unlike the rest of her family. His sister Marilla, a Polish and Jewish patriot, having been betrayed by her own housekeeper, took her own life, rather than allowing the Nazis to do so.

In New York City, Jack met and married Paula, also from Poland, whose family had been in Japan during the war years. Jack and Paula settled on Long Island, raising their daughters, Mona and Bonnie, in a home filled with love, family and Judaism.

Mona married David Sterling in 2006 at the Southern Wall of the Kotel in Jerusalem. They share a dedication to family and a deep commitment to Yad Vashem's mission of Holocaust remembrance and education, the strength of the Jewish people, and the State of Israel. David is a board member of the ASYV, and he and Mona

are leaders of numerous organizations, including AIPAC, WIZO, UJA, and American Friends of Rambam Hospital.

Jonathan and Sam Friedman have been deeply influenced by Mona, David and their extraordinary grandparents, Jack and Paula. Growing up, they both heard Jack tell his story of survival and resilience at the *Yom HaShoah* pro-

membrance for their grandparents, and to reinforce their commitment to Yad Vashem so that the world will never forget.

All three generations, including David's three children — Ian and his wife Laura, Jeremy and his wife Morgan, and Melissa — live in the greater New York City area. They gather often,



The Gora-Sterling-Friedman family.

gram at their Jewish day school. As an adult, Mona, too, listened and learned the details from which her father had shielded her as a child.

In 2018, Jonathan traveled on the Yad Vashem Generation to Generation Mission. Deeply inspired, Jonathan, Samantha, Paz and Sam became trustees of Yad Vashem. They are forever proud to carry the torch of Holocaust re-

joined by Sam and Paz's young children Abraham and Benjamin, Bonnie and her husband Tod, their daughters Rachel and Sofia, and the rest of the remarkable Gora-Sterling-Friedman family.

We hope you will join us in honoring this wonderful family and their commitment to Yad Vashem.

HOW POETRY SAVED THE LIFE OF A YIDDISH WRITER

When Yiddish poet Avraham Sutzkever said that poetry saved his life, he meant it more literally than many of his listeners realized.

In 1944, Sutzkever and his wife, Freydke, needed to walk through a minefield to reach the plane that would take them to freedom. And to do so, they stepped to the rhythm of poetic meter — short, short, long, and sometimes long, short, long.

His poems about the Holocaust in Vilnius and his role in saving priceless Jewish texts from the Nazis led the Soviet authorities — likely Joseph Stalin himself — to send not one but two rescue missions into Nazi-occupied Lithuania to fly the Sutzkevers to Moscow. Two years later he was tasked with testifying on behalf of the Soviet Union at the *Nuremberg* trials in Germany aiming to bring Nazi criminals to justice.

Jewish Rom Printing House in Vilnius because “Jewish bravery that lies in words must echo in the world in bullets,” as Sutzkever wrote.

And still another verse recounts how Bruno Kittel, the Nazi SS officer who oversaw the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto, executed a man while holding a pistol in one hand and playing a piano with the other.

Becoming a ghetto diarist — he began dating his poems and composing a new one nearly every day during his incarceration in 1941 — did not come naturally to Sutzkever. Before the war, his focus on nature’s beauty, as he recalled it from his childhood in Siberia, made him an outsider to Vilnius’ Yiddish literary scene, with its socialist and political themes.

In the ghetto, Sutzkever’s poems turned macabre, particular and personal. The most chilling example is his description of holding the lifeless body of his and Freydke’s first child. Born at

of running or begging for his life, he walked up to the German and told him, “I’m glad I met you. Do you know where I can go, where there are no Germans?” The sentry allowed him to escape, and a non-Jewish woman hid him in her potato cellar until he joined the partisans, Sutzkever said.

From the partisans, his poems and some rescued documents reached Moscow, providing early and chilling evidence of what was happening to the Jews of Lithuania. The texts reached key individuals in Moscow’s wartime literary scene, including the Jewish writer Ilya Ehrenburg, who was one of the few intellectuals that Stalin trusted.

In 1944, a Red Army plane was sent to retrieve the Sutzkevers from near the partisan camp, where Freydke acted as a nurse. But it was downed by German anti-aircraft fire. A second plane was sent two weeks later. The Sutzkevers had to traverse a minefield to reach it.

“Part of the time, I walked in anapests, some of the time I walked in amphibrachs,” Sutzkever told his friend and translator Dory Manor, referring to lines of poetic meter. With Freydke walking in his footprints, “I immersed myself within a rhythm of melody and to that rhythm we walked a kilometer through a minefield and came out on the other side,” Sutzkever later wrote.

He was carrying a suitcase made of metal salvaged from the wings of the first rescue airplane. It contained historical documents, including a program of a concert of the Vilna Ghetto Philharmonic orchestra. (Nearly all its players had been murdered already by the time Sutzkever brought the brochure to Moscow.)

Two years after his extraction, which was featured on the front page of the Communist Party daily *Pravda*, Sutzkever testified at the *Nuremberg* trials in Germany. He wanted to deliver his testimony in Yiddish, but Soviet authorities forced him to do it in Russian.

In 1947, the Soviets allowed Sutzkever to emigrate. New York, where he would have expected a warm embrace from that city’s Yiddish literary scene, would have been the obvious choice. Instead, the Sutzkevers chose war-torn, pre-state Israel, where Yiddish was marginalized by a government that reviled it as an ugly consequence of living in the Diaspora.

Nevertheless, Sutzkever established a highly regarded Yiddish-language weekly in Israel, *Di Goldene Keyt* (*The Golden Chain*), which remained active for 46 years until its closure in 1995.

In Israel, Sutzkever was recognized early on as one of the Yiddish language’s great poets — Dan Miron, the Yiddish scholar and literary critic, has crowned him “the king of Yiddish prose in the second half of the 20th century.” But at his death at the age of 96, Sutzkever remained largely unknown to consumers of mainstream literature in Israel despite having won the country’s highest literary distinction, the Israel Prize, in 1985.

Sutzkever didn’t lose his voice in his new country, and he composed one of the longest and most complex poems ever written about Israel’s War of Independence, *Spiritual Earth*.

All of a sudden, “he was able to renew himself and Yiddish poetry with unprecedented material,” said Benny Mer, a writer and Yiddish translator.

BY CNAAN LIPSHIZ, JTA



Avraham Sutzkever, right, before World War II in Vilnius, Lithuania.

Nearly a decade after his death in 2010 in Israel, Sutzkever’s astonishing life story is being told on film for the first time in an award-winning documentary co-produced by his granddaughter, Hadas Calderon-Sutzkever, with funding from the Claims Conference.

“You could take Sutzkever’s life from beginning to end and it would be the most astonishing guide to the most dramatic moments in Jewish history of the 20th century,” Yiddish scholar Ruth Wisse says in the film, which is titled *Black Honey: The Life and Poetry of Avraham Sutzkever*. It won the Yad Vashem award for movies about the Holocaust at last year’s Jerusalem Film Festival.

Sutzkever’s accounts from the Vilna ghetto in Lithuania, which he wrote and dated in descriptive poems, are among the most unusual and affecting testimonies from that hell on Earth. Only 1 percent of the approximately 40,000 prisoners survived.

One of the poems, “The Teacher Mira,” heartbreakingly chronicles how teacher Mira Bernstein cared for her dwindling flock of charges in the ghetto — orphans whose parents had been murdered. Sutzkever named one of his two daughters Mira for that teacher.

Another poem documents how partisans made weapons from the large lead plates of the

the ghetto hospital, the newborn was poisoned immediately after birth at the orders of the Nazis, who forbade births there.

“I wanted to swallow you whole my child / when I felt your little body cooling between my fingers / like a warm cup of tea,” he wrote.

Sutzkever’s mother also was murdered near the ghetto, and he wrote about that, too. His father had died in Siberia when he was 7, forcing the family to move to Vilnius.

In what seems like a trauma-induced delusion, Sutzkever said he believed that producing excellent poetry would make him indestructible to the Nazis. This could explain his extraordinary willingness to risk his own life.

As a writer in the ghetto, he was tasked in 1943 with sorting and cataloging select Jewish writings that the Nazis wanted to preserve for their archives about their annihilation of European Jewry. But Sutzkever and a handful of other members of the “paper brigade” risked their lives to smuggle and stash hundreds of priceless writings that are in Israel today thanks to their actions.

In 1943, Sutzkever and his wife escaped the ghetto.

During the escape, a German sentry spotted Sutzkever after curfew, the poet recalled. Instead

ISRAEL COLLECTS HOLOCAUST ITEMS AHEAD OF POST-SURVIVOR WORLD

Under a fluorescent light, an archivist from Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial snaps photos and scans into her mobile database the last remnant that a pair of elderly siblings have of their long-lost father — a 1943 postcard Samuel Akerman tossed in desperation out of the deportation train hurtling him toward his demise in the *Majdanek* death camp.

"It's what we have left from him," said Rachel Zeiger, his now 91-year-old daughter. "But this is not for the family. It is for the next generations."

With the world's community of aging Holocaust survivors rapidly shrinking, and their live testimonies soon to be a thing of the past, efforts

against the growing tide of denial and minimization of the genocide around the world.

On May 2 Yad Vashem laid the cornerstone of its new campus for the Shoah Heritage Collections Center — the future permanent home for its 210 million documents, 500,000 photographs, 131,000 survivor testimonies, 32,400 artifacts and 11,500 works of art related to the Holocaust.

"The German Nazis were determined not only to annihilate the Jewish people, but also to obliterate their identity, memory, culture and heritage," said Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev. "By preserving these precious items ... and revealing them to the public, we make sure they will act as the voice of the victims and the sur-

ported, the rest — mother, grandmother and the two children — survived by assuming false, Christian identities.

Zeiger recalls several close encounters when their cover was nearly lost. Once, the Gestapo arrived in the early morning hours to seize a Jewish family hiding in the ground floor of their building. When the Nazis knocked on their third-floor door, a teenage Zeiger presented their fake papers in her fluent French to convince them they had nothing to look for there.

"I've never felt that way in my life," she recalled from her quaint house in *Ramat Gan*, just outside Tel Aviv. "I had to vomit after they left. My whole body clenched."

After the war, they returned to *Antwerp* to find their home ravaged. They waited there several years, in the faint hope that their father would somehow return, before giving up and moving to Israel.

The postcard remained stashed away as a vestige of their painful past for more than 75 years, until Moshe Akerman heard of the Yad Vashem campaign seeking personal effects of aging survivors.

"My kids are glad I did it so that this testimony will exist, because otherwise you don't talk about it," said Akerman, 84. "It's a small testimony to what happened, another drop in this sea of testimony. It doesn't uncover anything new. The facts are known. What happened happened, and this is another small proof of it."

Besides rounding up Jews and shipping them to death camps, the Nazis and their collaborators confiscated their possessions and stole their valuables, leaving little behind. Those who survived often had just a small item or two they managed to keep. Many have clung to the senti-

mental objects ever since.

But with the next generation often showing little interest in maintaining the items, and their means of properly preserving them limited, Yad Vashem launched "Gathering the Fragments" in 2011 to collect as many artifacts as possible before the survivors — and their stories — were gone forever. Rather than exhibit them in its flagship museum, Yad Vashem stores most of the items in a specialized facility and uploads replicas online for a far wider global reach.

"These items complement other material we have and help us complete the puzzle of the victims' stories," explained Orit Noiman, head of Yad Vashem's collection and registration center. "The personal item becomes part of the collective national memory. With the clock ticking and the survivors leaving us, this is what we can make accessible to the public."

BY ARON HELLER, Associated Press



Israeli Holocaust survivors Rachel Zeiger, 91, center, and her brother Moshe Akerman, 84, left, speak with Orit Noiman, head of Yad Vashem's collection and registration center, at their home at the city of *Ramat Gan*, Israel. With the world's community of aging Holocaust survivors rapidly shrinking, and their live testimonies soon to be a thing of the past, Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial is preparing for a world without them.

such as these have become the forefront of preparing for a world without them.

Through its "Gathering the Fragments" program, Yad Vashem has collected some 250,000 items from survivors and their families in recent years, to be stored for posterity and displayed online in hopes of preserving the memory of the 6 million Jews killed by the Nazis, even after the last of the survivors has passed away.

Copious video testimonies have been filmed, and even holograms have been produced, to try to recreate the powerful impact of a survivor's recollection, which has been the staple of Holocaust commemoration for decades. This year, an Instagram account was created based on the real-life journal of a teenage Jewish victim to make her story more accessible to a younger generation.

With the passing of time, any physical links to the Holocaust and its victims have become valuable means of remembrance and evidence

vivors and serve as an everlasting memory."

Samuel Akerman's jarring letter to his family will soon join the collected assortment.

"My heart is bitter. I unfortunately have to inform you that I, together with 950 other people, am headed toward an unknown destination," he scribbled in shaky handwriting to his two children on February 27, 1943, from inside the packed transport. "I may not be able to write you again ... pray to God that we will joyfully see each other again. Don't give up hope and I am sure God will help us."

Akerman, a diamond merchant who dreamed of moving to pre-state Israel, was never heard from again.

A bystander likely found the discarded postcard on the ground and mailed it to Zeiger and her younger brother, Moshe, in occupied France, where they had fled from their home in Belgium after the Nazis invaded. After the father was de-

HOLLYWOOD’S SPIES

Hollywood’s Spies: The Undercover Surveillance of Nazis in Los Angeles.
By Laura B. Rosenzweig. New York University Press: New York, N.Y., 2017. 320 pp. \$12.77 hardcover.

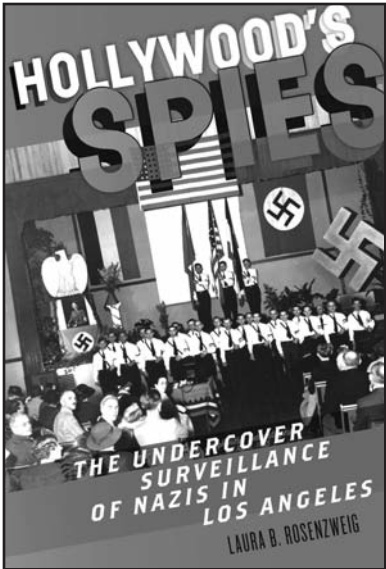
“Jews! Jews! Jews Everywhere!
OUT WITH THE JEWS!!
LET WHITE PEOPLE RUN
THIS COUNTRY AS THEY DID
BEFORE THE JEWISH INVASION!”

The above noted is the content of a flyer disseminated not in Hitler’s Germany nor in Nazi-occupied territories. It was distributed in the United States in 1938, along with other “literature” just as hateful — frequently arriving direct from Nazi Germany — supplementing various Fascist speakers and public rallies held here. Indeed, Nazism in the 1930s, cloaked in the misleading rhetoric of “patriotism,” tried very hard to gain a foothold in America. And, sadly, as polls taken during those years reveal, many Americans were open to its propaganda. Political, economic, and social uncertainty can do that to people . . .

In Laura B. Rosenzweig’s book, *Hollywood’s Spies: The Undercover Surveillance of Nazis in Los Angeles*, we read the unknown and fascinating story of the Los Angeles Jewish Community Committee, a local organization which, as best it could, fought this growing anti-Semitism in America. Moreover, in its own way, it would do this so well that it would come to play an important national role. At the same time, where most researchers of the period have “convicted” Hollywood movie moguls (most if not all of them Jews) of showing little concern as regards Nazism and its infectious evils, in *Hollywood’s Spies* we discover how that wasn’t quite the case.

Nazism itself was actually brought to America in the 1920s by Germans fleeing their country’s economic depression. Hitler’s 1933 ascent to

power and all it “promised” led them to see “themselves as the vanguard of the international National Socialist movement that would pave the



organization known as *Der Freunde des Neun Deutschland*, or Friends of the New Germany. Especially noteworthy here is the fact that the organization was almost immediately “blessed by Nazi Party chief Rudolph Hess as the official Nazi Party in the United States.” Meanwhile, one of the first things the leader of this new group, German-born Heinz Spanknoebel, did was create *gauleiters* or regional leaders . . . and an aggressive recruitment of members and followers began.

Luckily, in Los Angeles, a group called the Los Angeles Jewish Community Committee (LAJCC), led by two astute attorneys, Mendel Silberberg, and particularly, Leon Lewis, charged with the day-to-day affairs of the Committee, dedicated themselves to doing all they could to undermine the growing Fascism in their midst. The LAJCC’s primary technique? The Committee hired non-Jewish American veterans to infiltrate the Nazi organization, veterans who “believed that Nazis in Los Angeles were more

way for the new German Empire.” Soon after, with their goal of “tak[ing] back the [United States] government from Communists and Jews” and replacing it with a Fascist one, “disparate pro-Nazi cells across the United States” created the national or-

ganization known as *Der Freunde des Neun Deutschland*, or Friends of the New Germany. Especially noteworthy here is the fact that the organization was almost immediately “blessed by Nazi Party chief Rudolph Hess as the official Nazi Party in the United States.” Meanwhile, one of the first things the leader of this new group, German-born Heinz Spanknoebel, did was create *gauleiters* or regional leaders . . . and an aggressive recruitment of members and followers began.

than just a Jewish problem.” Ironically, Nazis in America thought American veterans, unhappy with their government benefits (like German World War I veterans with their government), would eagerly join them in their efforts to bring Nazism to the United States and “overthrow the Jewish rulership [*sic*] which now exists.” But, that was not the case at all!And who would come to bankroll these willing veterans become spies for the LAJCC? Hollywood movie moguls!

Interestingly, the substantial amount of invaluable information amassed by these undercover individuals would play a significant role in court cases and national congressional investigations — all of them shining a bright light on Fascism in the United States and, concomitantly, making sure all Americans were aware of this new and dangerous domestic enemy. Additionally, the LAJCC’s own press agency published a weekly intelligence report on Nazi activities in America called the *News Letter*, distributed to “national opinion makers” and those who could make a difference. This, too, helped expand the LAJCC’s influence and drive home the treasonous aims of these domestic Fascists. In fact, the LAJCC, a local group, would do as much for America’s Jews as other Jewish organizations considered national, if not more. Hence, the Committee is most definitely deserving of credit and historical acknowledgment.

In sum, Ms. Rosenzweig’s unique work easily earns its place in the library of all students of the Holocaust generally. Why? Beyond telling the story of a little-known Jewish organization, and the part Hollywood played in its efforts to protect America’s Jews, *Hollywood Spies* also clearly shows why these selfsame Jews didn’t do more for their coreligionists suffering in Europe. The answer: fear, and, more specifically, the fear that what was happening to Europe’s Jews could happen to America’s Jews.

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN
Professor of Media, Communication, and Visual Arts at Pace University

FRANCE’S WAITING ROOM FOR AUSCHWITZ

Simon Gutman will spend this weekend sitting quietly inside his Paris apartment, contemplating the many friends and family he has lost.

Late August is a time when the city marks its liberation from Nazi occupation, and this year, three-quarters of a century since the start of the six-day battle that finally forced the German garrison to its knees, the celebrations are special.

But 95-year-old Mr. Gutman is in a more somber mood. He prefers to dwell on another commemoration just a few days earlier, one which recalls the persecution of Parisian Jews such as him.

Recently, a dwindling band of survivors gathered in the Paris suburbs to mark the liberation of the *Drancy* internment camp, where Simon’s torment first began, a place known for good reason as “the gateway to Auschwitz.”

Thanks to astonishing good luck and no small amount of *chutzpah*, Simon survived one of the bleakest episodes in human history, and he did

it by pretending to be a five-star chef for SS officers. He could barely boil an egg. But, as a fellow prisoner warned him, it was a case of “cook or die.”

Built in the 1930s, *Drancy* was once a modernist housing estate in the northeast Paris suburbs before the occupying Germans decided to turn it into a holding pen for Jews and a small number of political prisoners.

Its five-story apartment blocks were converted into dormitory-style cells, and barbed-wire fences and watchtowers were erected around the perimeter.

Letters from prisoners in the early days show a sense of baffled naivety. Fathers told their Parisian children they were “not far away” and “would be home soon.” This was before Hitler had settled on his plan to eliminate European Jewry in its entirety.

There was an official capacity of 5,000 at the main center, and five subcamps were used for “overflow” prisoners. These subcamps also

served as warehouses for property stolen from the Jews of Paris.

While so much is known about Eastern European extermination camps, the true extent of Gallic collaboration is less understood, in part because of shameful attempts at covering it up.

Finally, the French have admitted culpability for the part they played in the Holocaust, but it was only as recently as July 2012 that then-president François Hollande publicly admitted that the deportation of Parisian Jews such as Gutman had been “a crime committed in France by France.”

Earlier this year, 49 survivors received the equivalent of £310,000 each in reparations for France’s trains being used to deport them.

The Nazis chose *Drancy* because it was next to *Bourget-Drancy* railway station, from which more than 70 deportation convoys of Jews would head across Europe to concentration camps and, for the most part, to their deaths.

(Continued on page 13)

Opposite the Dutch national bank in Amsterdam lies one of Europe's least conspicuous monuments to a war hero.

Titled "Fallen Tree," the metal statue for resistance fighter Walraven van Hall looks so realistic that for months after its unveiling in 2010, the municipality would receive calls reporting the artwork, whose brown-painted branches are strewn over a small square, as storm debris in need of removal.

A departure from the bombastic reliefs commemorating other European World War II heroes, it's a fitting tribute to van Hall. For decades he had gone unrecognized even in his own country, despite the fact that he used cunning and courage to save hundreds of Jews from the Holocaust while inflicting painful damage on the Nazi war machine before his execution by German soldiers in 1945.

Van Hall's bravery for the first time has moved from obscurity to the mainstream thanks to the production of a multimillion-dollar feature film titled *The Resistance Banker*, which won the Netherlands' national award for best film in 2018 and is the country's submission to the Oscars.

The film, in which the persecution of Jews plays a central role, is the first treatment of its kind about the actions of van Hall and his brother, Gijsbert — members of a prominent banking family who for three years bankrolled the Dutch resistance, supplying it with the equivalent of \$500 million.

It's a surprisingly long delay considering the scale of van Hall's actions, which historians say helped make

the Dutch resistance one of Europe's fiercest and most effective. There are also powerful dramatic elements in the van Hall story, a tale full of valor, betrayal, death, devotion — and even a bank robbery of unprecedented proportions.

"When people think of the resistance ... they rarely think of the enormous amounts of money that it cost to keep this organization — the resistance — running," the film's director, Joram Lürsen, told JTA.

But resistance leaders knew this all too well when they were joined in 1942 by van Hall, an ex-marine with banking connections, whom Israel recognized in 1978 as a Righteous Among the Nations — a non-Jew who risked his life to save Jews during the Holocaust.

He and his brother stole the equivalent of \$250 million from Nazi-controlled coffers and borrowed an additional \$250 million from other bankers to carry out attacks, smuggle Allied pilots to safety and provide financial support to at least 8,000 Jews in hiding during World War II.

They did all this "through an incredibly complicated web of front companies, falsifications and bureaucratic sleight of hand that is tricky to pack into a two-hour feature film," or even a biographical novel, Lürsen said. An attempt to "truly explain the genius of their actions" would lose most filmgoers within the first 20 minutes,

he said.

To tackle this storytelling challenge, Lürsen focused on the most daring action undertaken by the brothers: The theft and cashing in of central-bank bonds, which at that point was the largest-scale bank robbery in European history.

"This one element of the story contains everything you need in a Hollywood action film," Lürsen said. "It's as easy to follow and full of suspense as a casino heist."

Not everyone is pleased with the shortcuts and artistic license that Lürsen and his team have taken.

Harm Ede Botje, a senior analyst for the *Vrij Nederland* magazine and an expert in World War II history, accused the filmmakers of gratuitous melodrama and disregard for historical detail in a withering critique of the film in March.

He noted a powerful scene in which an exhausted van Hall, nicknamed Wallie, draws resolve from seeing from the window of his train a transport of Jews in cattle wagons zooming past

in retaliation for a Nazi officer's assassination. Historians to this day do not know why the Germans arrested van Hall.

The relative obscurity of the van Halls' story — despite its significance, it has been the subject of only one dryly written book, in the 1990s — owes to more than just its complexity.

"For many decades there was a reluctance in the banking industry of this country to go into the details of the van Halls' actions, because doing so would expose many of the system's weak points," Lürsen said. "No one wanted to publish a manual for mass bank fraud."

But the industry changed over time, and the unofficial veil of silence that bedeviled historians' attempts to get to the bottom of the van Halls' operation was lifted.

Gijsbert van Hall, the elder brother, who later became mayor of Amsterdam, kept a meticulous record of each and every cent dispensed by his

A FILM ON A FORGOTTEN HOLOCAUST RESISTANCE FIGHTER



This Amsterdam monument commemorates Walraven van Hall.

as fellow passengers look away in embarrassment. But Ede Botje says that Jews were never transported in the daytime in occupied Holland.

In the film, the trigger for van Hall's decision to enter the resistance is the suicide of a Jewish family of former clients in *Zaandam*. But there is no evidence to suggest this is true — and no record of such a suicide in that suburb of Amsterdam, according to Ede Botje.

"It's true," Lürsen said of how persecution of the Jews is highlighted and perhaps amplified in his film. "I made a film about two courageous brothers, their lives, their love. Of course I had to make cinematographic and dramaturgical decisions, but it was important to include in a digestible way the background. Should I have spent less attention to the worst genocide in Dutch history because I have no evidence of Wallie ever witnessing it? I don't think so."

Another departure from the historical record diminishes the van Halls' incredible ability to evade Nazi detection, Botje writes. In the film, van Hall is executed two months before the war's end after the Germans and collaborators identify him as van Tuyl and the "oil man" — one of the many false identities he wore.

But in reality, the Germans had no idea who van Hall was to the bitter end. He was shot along with several other suspected resistance fighters

operation. Auditors after the war found no discrepancies in the bookkeeping after studying it for months.

The Netherlands had many collaborators with the Nazis, who helped murder 75 percent of the country's Jewish population — the highest death rate in Nazi-occupied Western Europe.

But for the size of its population and Jewish minority, it also had a vastly disproportionate number of Righteous Among the Nations — 5,669 of them, the second-highest number in the world, trailing Poland's 6,863. Many of the rescuers' efforts were facilitated by the support extended to them by the van Halls.

Holland also saw the first major show of public disobedience over the fate of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe in the so-called February Strike of 1942.

For a small, flat country with few natural hiding places like woods, marshes or mountains, resistance to the Nazis was in some respects "fierce," and in no small part thanks to the actions of the van Halls, according to Johannes Houwink ten Cate, a historian who is one of the world's leading experts on the Holocaust in Holland.

BY CNAAN LIPSHIZ, JTA

In the capital of Lithuania, an institution formerly known as the Museum of Genocide Victims barely mentions the murder of nearly all the country's Jews by Nazis and locals, focusing instead on the years of abusive Soviet rule.

In *Kaunas*, Lithuania's second-largest city, another so-called museum hosts festivals and summer camps on the grounds of a former concentration camp for Jews known as the Seventh Fort, where the victims are not commemorated.

In the Ukrainian city of *Dnipro*, a Holocaust museum called Tkuma features a controversial exhibition on Jews complicit in Soviet policies that led to a mass famine, known as the *Holodomor*, a whole decade before the Nazis began implementing their Final Solution.

a bank in the city center, failed to get the proposal approved. Opponents of the plan wanted the museum moved to the city's outskirts. After protests by two groups — the government institution charged with running the museum, the Elie Wiesel National Institute for Studying the Holocaust in Romania, and the MCA Romania watchdog group on anti-Semitism — Badulescu announced his plan to honor Antonescu.

Badulescu also wrote to Maximilian Marco Katz, a Romanian Jewish citizen who was born in Bucharest and who heads MCA, a letter telling him to “go back where you came from.” The Bucharest museum's future is currently uncertain.

Meanwhile in Budapest, the House of Fates museum, located at a former train station where Hungarian Jews were shipped off to be killed,

published a comprehensive essay on the subject.

Katz writes of a “drive to equalize Nazi and Soviet crimes [that's] part of a larger effort to cleanse ‘the lands between’ (in Eastern Europe) of their historical record of wartime collaboration.”

In museums in Eastern Europe, some of that effort takes place through omission. A municipal museum in *Ukmergė* near Vilnius, for example, relays accurately the slaying of thousands of Jews there without once stating who killed them (it was local collaborators).

A more sophisticated technique is what Katz calls “double genocide” — the lumping together of the Holocaust and Soviet occupation, often with the latter eclipsing the former, as in Vilnius' genocide museum.

IN EASTERN EUROPE, HOLOCAUST MUSEUMS ARE MISSING FROM KEY HISTORICAL SITES



In 2011, the museum directors added a small plaque to its cellar referencing the killing of Jews, following years of complaints that their fate was ignored. Still, the museum is almost entirely devoted to Soviet rule and to defending the position of Lithuania as the only country in the world that formally considers the country's domination by the Soviet Union as a form of genocide.

(The museum changed its name to the “Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fighters” last year amid pressure on this point, but its website still contains the word “genocide.”)

The logic behind the “double genocide” effort is rooted in the popular perception across Eastern Europe and beyond that Jews were responsible for hostilities directed against them during the Holocaust.

According to this theory, writes Katz, Jews are blamed for allegedly spearheading Communist atrocities in Eastern Europe before the Nazis took control from the Soviet Union.

Zsolt Bayer, a co-founder of Hungary's ruling Fidesz party, provided a salient demonstration of this in a 2016 op-ed in which he used the role of Jews in Communism to justify the Holocaust.

“Why are we surprised that the simple peasant whose determinant experience was that the Jews broke into his village, beat his priest to death, threatened to convert his church into a movie theater — why do we find it shocking that twenty years later he watched without pity as the gendarmes dragged the Jews away from his village?” Bayer wrote.

Collaboration between locals and the Nazis occurred on a massive scale in Western Europe as well. But that part of the continent was liberated after World War II, beginning a long and ongoing process of reckoning in France, the Netherlands, Belgium and other Western countries.

Eastern Europe, meanwhile, was taken over by a brutal and anti-Semitic regime that, for its own interests, would only allow Holocaust victims to be commemorated as “Soviet citizens,” Felicia Waldman, an expert in Jewish studies and Holocaust education at the University of

(Continued on page 15)

And in the capitals of Romania and Ukraine, where Nazis and collaborators organized the murder of more than 1.5 million Jews, there are no national Holocaust museums at all. Infighting and debates about history and complicity have prevented their opening.

These are just a few examples of a broader trend in Eastern Europe where institutions whose stated goal is to educate the public about the Holocaust end up trivializing, inverting or ignoring it altogether. Commemoration activists from the region blame a varying mix of factors, including nationalist revisionism, anti-Semitism, a lack of funds, personal animosities and incompetence.

All these elements are on display today in the ongoing sagas of the National Museum of Jewish History and the Holocaust in Romania, which does not yet exist, and the House of Fates museum in Budapest, Hungary, which exists but remains closed five years after its scheduled opening.

In Bucharest, disagreements over what began as a generous municipal plan in 2016 to finally establish a Holocaust museum this year deteriorated. The city's Deputy Mayor Aurelian Badulescu threatened to unveil in Bucharest a bust of Ion Antonescu, the wartime leader who collaborated with Hitler. His threat was seen as a measure to spite local Jews.

The municipality, which designated for the project a magnificent building that was formerly

has been standing empty for about five years because of a dispute between the Mazsihisz federation of Jewish communities and the government. It involves the government's appointment of Maria Schmidt, a historian accused of minimizing the Holocaust by equating it to Soviet domination, to head the museum.

To break the stalemate, the government this year tasked EMIH, a Chabad-affiliated group, to head the museum. EMIH has said Schmidt is out. The Jewish infighting has further stalled the project, in a country where critics say a right-wing government seeks to whitewash Holocaust-era collaboration.

An acclaimed Holocaust museum, the Holocaust Memorial Center, opened in 2004 on Budapest's Páva Street with government funding. But it has suffered from internal fights, cutbacks and a decline in visitors that have raised doubts about its long-term viability, historian Ferencz Laczó noted in a 2016 essay.

Intercommunal rivalries have also figured in the seemingly interminable effort to build a Holocaust museum in Kiev, Ukraine. It began in 2001 and is ongoing.

But alleged attempts to whitewash Holocaust-era complicity in Nazi-occupied territories are at the heart of much of the dysfunctionality surrounding Holocaust commemoration in Eastern Europe, according to Dovid Katz, the American-born, Vilnius-based Yiddish scholar who in 2016

“THE LAST STAGE”

Seventy years ago, in the summer of 1949, a distinguished group gathered at a Tel Aviv cinema for a preview showing of a pioneering Polish film. The event was attended by members of the diplomatic corps, government figures and notables from literature and art.

The movie was *The Last Stage* — the first full-length feature film about the Holocaust, the first to be filmed at Auschwitz, and the first to show all the stages of killing at the camp. The director, screenwriter and many cast members, all of them women, had been prisoners there.

“This film offers a terrifying documentary-like depiction of episodes of the ‘life’ of the women prisoners in the camp, including many Jewish women, and the inner spirit of rebellion, which was headed by a Jewish woman,” *Haaretz* wrote at the time. Whether in Israel or the wider world, not many people at the time knew much about the

script for *The Last Stage* with Gerda Schneider, a political prisoner from Germany, also a Communist, whom she met at Auschwitz.

Before Jakubowska’s film, scenes from Auschwitz were filmed by the Red Army. In some cases, these were reenactments made after the camp’s liberation, using former prisoners or Polish extras. But Jakubowska was the first to use the camp as the setting for a feature film.

Polish actresses and extras, including former prisoners and residents of the adjacent town of *Oświęcim*, were cast for the film. The production crew noted later that there was a certain advantage — not just because the cast already knew the site well, but because they acted like prisoners on the set “and did everything automatically, because they knew it all from their own experience, as returning prisoners. It was frightening.”

The production crew also spoke later of odd incidents during the filming of the “half-documen-

cinematic representation of the Holocaust were shaped by Jakubowska, Asaf Tal wrote on the Yad Vashem website. “*The Last Stage* can be characterized as a paradigmatic and influential work on Holocaust cinema,” Tal writes, citing similar imagery in films like *Sophie’s Choice* (1982) and *Schindler’s List* (1993).

Later Holocaust films inserted scenes from Jakubowska’s film as if they were documentary footage. Scenes that have been borrowed from her film — sometimes without approval and credit — include the arrival of transports, the curling of crematoria smoke, the hard labor of female prisoners and the barbed-wire fences.

The film centers around a Jewish heroine, Marta Weiss, who is deported to the camp with her family. During the selection, she translates the commander’s instructions for the other prisoners and is chosen to serve as an official interpreter. Later she exploits her position to help her fellow inmates smuggle supplies and information, and eventually escapes with a friend, Tadek, in order to tell the world about the plan to liquidate the camp. But the two are caught and executed in a humiliating show parade.

At her death, she is revered as a heroine when the prisoner-hangman gives her a knife with which she slits her wrists and shouts to the watching crowd: “Don’t be afraid! They can’t hurt us. Hold on. The Red Army is near.” As the furious camp commander approaches her, she says: “You will soon be so small.” Then she slaps him and says, “You will not hang me.” At that dramatic moment, Allied planes appear in the sky and the Germans flee. “Don’t let Auschwitz rise again” are her last words, as she dies in the arms of another prisoner.

The Marta Weiss character is based on a true story — the story of Mala (Malka) Zimetbaum, a Polish Jew who moved to Belgium with her family as a child and was deported to Auschwitz in 1942. Fluent in several languages, she was chosen to serve as an interpreter at the camp and used her job to help other prisoners. In the camp, she met Edward (Edek) Galinski, a Polish political prisoner, and a romance developed.

They decided to escape together, in the hope of bringing news about the camp to the free world. On June 24, 1944, they escaped from Auschwitz-Birkenau. Galinski disguised himself as an SS officer and pretended to be escorting a Jewish prisoner to work outside the camp. They were caught two weeks later. One account says Zimetbaum went into a shop to buy bread and was spotted by a German patrol that happened to be passing by. The two were returned to Auschwitz and were executed together in September 1944.

The story of Zimetbaum’s execution is just as dramatic as that of her escape. Naama Shik described it in an article on the Yad Vashem website in which she examined Zimetbaum’s story from the perspective of gender studies.

“When the verdict was read, she slit her wrists and slapped the SS man in the face with her bloody hand when he tried to stop her. The execution was interrupted,” Shik writes. “I will die as a hero and you will die as a dog,” Zimetbaum said to the SS man, according to eyewitness testimony. She was taken in a wagon to the camp hospital to stop the bleeding — so the execution

(Continued on page 14)



A scene from Wanda Jakubowska’s 1947 film *The Last Stage*.

scope of the atrocities at Auschwitz. In this respect, too, *The Last Stage* was ahead of its time.

Director Wanda Jakubowska, sometimes called “the grandmother of Polish cinema” and “the mother of Holocaust movies,” was born in Warsaw in 1907. As a child, she moved with her parents to Russia, but they returned to Poland in 1922.

A keen (non-Jewish) Communist activist, Jakubowska was arrested by the Gestapo and was sent to Warsaw’s notorious Pawiak Prison, where she spent six months. Through the windows of her cell she saw the ghetto go up in flames during the Warsaw ghetto uprising in the spring of 1943. In April that year, she was sent to Auschwitz. When she heard the gates slam shut, she told a friend that she had to record that sound. “At that moment, I realized that I had decided to make a film about Auschwitz,” she said years later.

The Soviet Novosti news agency wrote in 1965: “Jakubowska swore that if she lived, she would make a film about the horrors of Auschwitz, and thus arose the terrifying truth of the film *The Last Stage*.” Jakubowska later said she survived Auschwitz because of her burning desire to make a film about it. She survived even though, as the Red Army advanced on Auschwitz, she was sent on a death march to the *Ravensbrück* women’s camp in Germany.

Right after the war, she began writing the

tary,” as the director called it. One example was the encounter between a female cast member, still dressed in an SS uniform during a break in filming, with genuine German prisoners – POWs. Another time, Jewish visitors touring the camp were stunned to be greeted by SS troops with attack dogs — actually actors attired for their roles.

Soviet soldiers also took part as extras. “I had the entire Red Army in Poland at my disposal; it was very easy for me to make the movie. They were very disciplined and trained,” Jakubowska said. The clothes and other objects in the film — suitcases, shoes, pots — were authentic. The atmosphere was so similar to the situation during the war that the crew had to stop shooting sometimes when they were overcome with tears.

The movie was filmed two and a half years after the camp’s liberation, between July and September 1947. It was at this time that Poland’s parliament decided to turn the camp into a memorial that would emphasize the sacrifice and suffering of Poles and other prisoners.

Certain aspects of the horror were censored. “The reality of the camp was emaciated prisoners, piles of corpses, lice, rats and all kinds of horrible diseases,” Jakubowska said. “On screen, this reality would cause terror and revulsion. We had to forgo these aspects despite their authenticity, because they were too unbearable for the postwar viewer.”

A number of the iconic visual images in the

PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ASYV SEATTLE GALA

The American Society for Yad Vashem — Western Region hosted its first-ever Seattle Gala on September 16, 2019 at the Columbia Tower Club. Friends and supporters gathered to honor ASYV Executive Committee Board Member and Yad Vashem benefactor Steven Baral with the Philanthropic Achievement Award. Steven's father, Martin Baral, z"l, escaped from the *Krakow* ghetto one day before it was liquidated, while his grandfather, Samuel Baral, z"l, was one of the 1,098

Jews saved by Oskar Schindler. Steven is committed to the mission of Yad Vashem and he is wholly committed to the mission of Holocaust education. We were also very fortunate to have Israeli filmmaker Shaul Shtrichman's *Skin* win the 2019 Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Film by his grandparents, who are Holocaust survivors.



Bill Bernstein, West Coast director of institutional advancement, American Society for Yad Vashem; and Steven Baral, honoree and board member.



Shaya Ben Yehuda, Managing Director of International Relations, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.



Paul Kirschner, Nancy Powell and Steven Baral.



Guest speaker Guy Nattiv, 2019 Academy Award Winner.



Stanley Stone, executive director, American Society for Yad Vashem; Steven Baral; and Bill Bernstein.



Steven Baral and Hannah Rubinstein, Yad Vashem Builder.

SEATTLE GALA

tted to ensuring that his family's stories are not forgotten
ocaust education.
mmaker Guy Nattiv as our guest speaker. Nattiv's film
ive Action Short Film. Nattiv's work is greatly influenced
s.



ions, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem; and Jeremy Weiss, director of US Desk,



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A large graphic of a tree with a brown trunk and branches, and a canopy made of many small yellow squares. The tree is positioned on the right side of the poster.

HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR OWES HER LIFE TO A NAZI OFFICER'S GREAT DANE

Nina Dinar from *Kiryat Ono* recently fulfilled a dream, a strange-sounding one to anyone not familiar with her amazing story. Dinar, who is 94, wished to hug a Great Dane, “like the one that saved me during the Holocaust.” For two hours she stroked, hugged and patted the backs of two dogs that were brought especially to her house.

The moving encounter was orchestrated by Tammy Bar-Yosef, who in recent years has been investigating an unusual branch of history: dogs in the Holocaust. Along with many testimonies of Nazis using dogs to attack Jews, she is documenting less-known stories having to do with Nazi-owned dogs saving Jews. This is how she reached Dinar, hearing for the first time her rescue story.

Dinar was born in Warsaw in 1926. Ever since she was a child, she loved and raised dogs. “Even though it was said that Jews don’t have dogs, I grew up with some,” says Dinar. “Even my grandmother had dogs.”

Her first memories are from when she was three, sitting happily on a sofa with a German shepherd at her side. Eighty years ago, when World War II broke out and Warsaw was bombed, her dog “went crazy with fear,” she recalls. Her mother asked some soldiers in their yard to shoot it, thinking the dog would be dangerous to the public. “I buried it with a neighbor in a bomb crater on Jerosolimskie (Jerusalem) Street,” she says.

Even later, when her family was deported to the ghetto, she continued raising dogs. “I took a dog from a neighbor who had two. It was really hard to raise them,” she says. She doesn’t know what happened to it in the end.

Her father was murdered in April 1942. A year later, when the ghetto uprising began, Nina and her mother moved from cellar to cellar, “thanks to our Jewish underground,” she says.

Later, when the Germans attacked the bunker they were in, Nina and her mother were caught and deported to the *Majdanek* death camp. They took with them a suitcase full of photos, jewels and whatever else they could, but the Germans later stole these. They were in the camp for four months, lifting heavy rocks. One day Nina was injured by gunfire while working. From there, the two were taken to the *Skarzysko-Kamienna* labor camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, in which Jews worked as slave laborers in a German armaments factory.

Here is where her remarkable story begins. When Nina and her mother arrived at the camp, they were sent to the parade ground, presided over by a Nazi officer, Dr. Artur Rost. “He stood there with his dog, a white Great Dane with black spots. I loved dogs, so I called it. I didn’t even whistle, I only did like this (she demonstrates a lip-smacking sound). What a great

dog,” she says.

And then, in contrast to numerous stories about vicious attack dogs used by the Nazis, the dog left its owner and turned to Nina, “the wounded, barefoot, pathetic Jewess standing in the ranks,” she says. For a few minutes she stroked it and it licked her. The women around her told her she was mad since the dog was probably trained to attack Jews. The officer was also surprised by what he saw.



Holocaust survivor Nina Dinar and a Great Dane that was brought to her *Kiryat Ono* home.

Over the following months Nina had to do hard labor. There too, “the dog would always find me wherever I was,” she says. When it came close, she petted it. The special tie between her and the dog, whose name she didn’t know, caught the attention of its owner, the Nazi officer. Nina says he gave her some of the dog’s food as a supplement. Perhaps that is how she survived there despite the inhuman conditions, while her mother died of hunger.

In August 1944, as the Russians were approaching, the Germans decided to evacuate the camp and kill the weakened workers. Nina was sent to a group marked for death. Weighing only 32 kilograms, she was swollen from hunger, hairless and suffering from several maladies.

And then, as if in a fairy tale, the Nazi officer arrived with his dog. Rost checked to see if there were enough people in the group marked for death. He didn’t identify Nina. “It was impossible to recognize me,” she says. However, the dog recognized her immediately and went to her. Rost took her out of the condemned group and put her in another one, of those destined to live. “Come here, you’re going this way,” he ordered.

Thus, because of a Nazi officer’s dog, Nina survived. She was later sent to *Buchenwald* camp in Germany, subsequently escaping a death march. In 1948 she came to Israel. After

marrying and having two children, she returned to raising dogs. “I never feared dogs; they sense it when someone loves them,” she says.

Dinar had never told her story before outside her family. Bar-Yosef, who met her as part of her historical research, posted the main parts of the story on Facebook. Bar-Yosef, a dog lover herself, turned her love of canines into the subject of a unique academic study: dogs in the Holocaust.

“The Nazis used 200,000 dogs during the war, for policing, deterrence and guarding, but also as attack dogs, tormenting and killing Jews,” Bar-Yosef says. “Many survivors have described how Nazi dogs were present at many way stations of the Holocaust, as well as describing the traumas inflicted on them by Nazi dogs.”

These testimonies, backed by photographs, films and terrifying drawings, enlarged the image of the vicious dog during the Holocaust. Among the more “famous” ones were Rolf, the dog belonging to Amon Goeth, commander of the *Plas-*

zow concentration camp, memorialized in *Schindler’s List*, and Barry, a dog belonging to Kurt Franz, commander of *Treblinka*, which was also trained to attack inmates.

Nevertheless, by analyzing and documenting memories of survivors, Bar-Yosef has found that there are other stories as well. “These describe dogs that helped Jews, sharing their kennels or food, or even protecting them and saving them,” she says. Nina’s story, in this context, “allows us to move beyond the standard image of Nazi dogs and relate to dogs as man’s loyal friend.”

This is a rare story, but not unique. Bar-Yosef found 10 more cases of dogs saving Jews. “All the children who were saved by dogs were dog lovers who raised dogs before and after the Holocaust, and their ability to relate to dogs helped them communicate with Nazi-owned dogs, helping the dogs save them and survive.”

Another story Bar-Yosef discovered was of Roman Schwartz, also a survivor. Amon Goeth set his dog on Schwartz, who was caught stealing potato peels. Schwartz, a dog lover, ordered the dog to halt and sit. Goeth was impressed and spared his life. “These stories are another facet of survival stories,” she says, “affording a different kind of memory, stretching the boundaries of the more established and known memories.”

BY OFER ADERET, *Haaretz*

A SHOFAR THAT DEFIED THE NAZIS

For years there have been fragmentary reports of almost unbelievable acts of faith at the Nazi death camps during World War II: the sounding of shofars, the ram's horn trumpets traditionally blown by Jews to welcome the High Holy Days.

These stories of the persistence of hope even in mankind's darkest moments have been passed down despite limited evidence and eyewitness detail.

But could camp prisoners have found ways to sound these horns, piercing the heavens with sob-like wails and staccato blasts, without putting themselves in immediate mortal danger?

Now a new account that addresses that question, and is embraced by several historians as reliable, has emerged from the daughter of an Auschwitz survivor, along with one of the secreted shofars itself.

Dr. Judith Tydor Schwartz, an expert on the Holocaust, says her father, Chaskel Tydor, a longtime prisoner entrusted as work dispatcher at one of the more than 40 Auschwitz subcamps, contrived on Rosh Hashana 1944 to send fellow prisoners on a distant detail where they might safely, and privately, pray. He did not know that they carried something with them. But when they returned, she said, one confided to her father that a shofar had been produced and blown.

What is more, according to the account of Dr. Schwartz, who directs Holocaust research at Bar-Ilan University in *Ramat Gan*, Israel, her father was given the shofar for safekeeping in 1945 by a fellow prisoner as the Nazis emptied the camp and fled the advancing Russians.

A week before Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year 5780, and 75 Rosh Hashanas since that clandestine act of faith, that ceremonial ram's horn was installed at the Museum of Jewish Heritage near Battery Park in Manhattan. It is part of "Auschwitz. Not Long Ago. Not Far Away," a traveling exhibition from Poland.

While it may never be possible to fully corroborate the story of the museum's shofar, Holocaust historians say it is credible, and resembles other witness accounts of concentration camp shofars and is more detailed.

Dr. Schwartz said she was loaning the shofar as additional evidence of the lengths to which imprisoned Jews went to practice their religion in the face of their German tormentors.

Their efforts included the mouthing of blessings during beatings and the trading away of bread rations during Passover when leavened products are forbidden. Abandoned oil drums at Auschwitz were used in place of traditional huts for contemplation during the harvest festival of Sukkot. Rabbis in the camp decreed that even one minute spent inside was a sufficient mitzvah, or good deed.

And then there were the shofars whose bleats are meant to variously evoke Abraham's sacrifice of a ram in place of his son Isaac, the summoning of the Israelites to Sinai for Moses's giving of the law, and the most fervent expression of Jewish hope — "next year in Jerusalem."

An installation that opened last summer, "Through the Lens of Faith," at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in *Oswiecim*, Poland,

cites a 14-year-old prisoner, Wolf Greenbaum, who saw a rabbi visiting a doomed barracks at *Birkenau* on Rosh Hashana 1944 and blowing a smuggled shofar there.

Yad Vashem in Jerusalem displays a shofar fabricated in 1943 in the Nazi labor camp of *Skarzysko-Kamienna*. In Auschwitz, said Robert Jan van Pelt, a Holocaust scholar and chief curator of the Museum of Jewish Heritage's exhibition, "We know from a number of eyewitness testimonies that shofars were blown."

But where and how were they hidden? How did they make their way into the camps? And how did their sounding go unpunished? Accounts say guards were bribed and distracted by prisoners.

Some shofars likely arrived in Auschwitz in mid-1944 with the 440,000 deported Hungarian Jews. Their belongings, left at the camp's railway platform known as the ramp, where arrivals were selected to live or die, were stockpiled at *Birkenau* in an immense goods warehouse dubbed "Canada" whose loot was often smuggled out. Schemes were hatched in the repulsive latrines, where guards disdained to enter.

Jack Kliger, the president and chief executive officer of the Museum of Jewish Heritage and the child of Holocaust survivors, said he remembers hearing from a friend of his parents that a shofar had sounded at Auschwitz.

"If there's an artifact that symbolizes the Jewish soul," Mr. Kliger said, "you'd be hard-pressed to find something more indicative than a shofar."

Dr. Schwartz's father, a modest man, never revealed much in interviews she conducted with him before he died in 1993 at 89. But until the end of his life, she said, "the Auschwitz shofar accompanied his wanderings." He ran a travel agency in Manhattan; married his secretary, Shirley Kraus, who became the mother of Dr. Schwartz; managed uranium mines in Montana and South Dakota; and eventually moved back to Israel.

Born in 1903 in *Bochnia*, Poland, near *Krakow*, her father and his Hasidic family fled to Germany during World War I. Living in *Frankfurt* as Hitler rose to power and war loomed in 1939, he and his wife, Bertha, sent their young son and daughter to safety on a *Kindertransport* to Belgium. Mr. Tydor was arrested later that year and imprisoned in *Buchenwald*, one of the first and largest concentration camps, near *Weimar* in central Germany. From there, in October 1942, he was transported to Auschwitz III, the forced labor camp also known as *Monowitz/Buna* where the authors Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel were also held. Within several miles stood the gas chambers and crematories of Auschwitz II, *Birkenau*.

In the camp he learned that Bertha, fleeing Germany for Poland, had been caught and murdered in Auschwitz, along with other family members. In despair, he was restrained from killing

himself on the camp's electrified wire. He was initially assigned to a construction detail carrying large sacks of cement, leaving him with a permanently disabled

shoulder. But as an older prisoner with experience in the camps, he was designated a block secretary, responsible for assigning work details. By attaching names of the dead to some assignments, he was able to afford others relief in the sick bay, "enabling him to save hundreds of Jewish prisoners," Dr. Schwartz said.

Around Rosh Hashana 1944, she said, he arranged to send some religious prisoners out where they might constitute a minyan, or quorum of 10 adults to conduct a prayer service. When they returned, he learned about the shofar's sounding.

"I was told of the person who had it, but when asked he denied, maybe from fear," Mr. Tydor told his daughter in a recollection quoted in one of her books.

In January 1945, the Germans hurriedly began dynamiting Auschwitz and emptying the camp as the Russians approached. Mr. Tydor and some 60,000 other survivors were herded on a 30-mile march to another sub-



Chaskel Tydor, a survivor of Auschwitz, described for his family how, despite the danger, this shofar was blown at the camp during prayers.

camp. But the night before they left, she said, another prisoner came up to him — "my father never said who it was" — and pressed on him a rag-wrapped object: the shofar.

Her father told her the man had said: "I'm going to die on this march. If you live, take this shofar. Tell them we blew the shofar at Auschwitz."

Mr. Tydor survived the march and ended up back in *Buchenwald*, where he was liberated by the American army on April 11, 1945. Later that year, he joined a group of former concentration camp prisoners and other freed Jews aboard the steamship *Mataroa* to Palestine, then under British mandate, and soon to become Israel.

Off the coast of *Haifa* on Rosh Hashana 1945, he blew the shofar.

BY RALPH BLUMENTHAL, *The New York Times*

MAJA HRABOWSKA: “MY LIFE IN HIDING”

In 2013, Frontline released *Never Forget to Lie*, an autobiographical film from Emmy award-winning director and Holocaust survivor Marian Marzynski. In the documentary, Marzynski returned to Poland to probe his feelings about his homeland, the Catholic church and an identity fractured by the traumas of the Warsaw ghetto. At its peak, more than 400,000 Jews were crammed into the ghetto — no more than 20,000 of them survived the Holocaust. Marzynski was one of them.

In the film, Marzynski offers heart-wrenching observations about how the Holocaust has shaped his life. But he also spoke to other survivors, children at the time of the Holocaust, many of whom lived in the Warsaw ghetto. Below is one of the testimonies.

The past is always with me. It has long, cold fingers, and catches me unprepared, at night mostly, when I wake up in sweat. I'm part of the generation that survived the Holocaust — the total war on Jews, and particularly on Jewish children. We were hated, the first to suffer, the first to perish. I blamed myself. What did I do to deserve it?

At that time we didn't understand the extent of horror of this, the most hideous crime in history. We were looking at this as an isolated drama, which for some unknown reason befell us. For years we tried to retain sanity by silencing the scream, by hiding our memories deep in subconsciousness, and for some time it worked. We knew something that others didn't, and this secret was with us only; we carried this burden alone. The war was over, but we were different from other young people, quieter, more careful whom we talk to, feeling still unsafe.

Many years passed, and now unexpectedly I found that there are others with similar pasts, and hidden memories. It was a shock; it was as if I found the family I missed so much. It doesn't matter that not everybody is pretty and speaking nicely — the family can have its differences.

Thanks to this group I finally found the courage to speak of my past, which was a shock by itself, because up to now I was enveloped in silence. I decided that it would be selfish not to speak; that my family, which disappeared by Hitler's bloody hands, deserves some legacy, and I am the only one left to remember. I can't afford to stay silent, the time is pressing.

One of my most terrible wartime experiences was our short stay in the Umschlagplatz — the assembly point in the Warsaw ghetto for people waiting to be sent to the *Treblinka 2* death camp. Under the German occupation there were two types of camps: concentration camps, such as Auschwitz, where not everybody died, and by miracle one could survive the hardship, and the other type — death camps, where nobody was meant to survive. Gas chambers were the only facilities there. People from the Warsaw ghetto were destined to this type of camp.

It was during that hot summer of 1942. The *Aktion* in the Warsaw ghetto was proceeding/in progress. *Aktion* — this word will haunt me forever; it has a special meaning for those who

were there. I remember thinking with envy of H.G. Wells' "Invisible Man" and fantasizing of remaining invisible, and not just hidden in the cellar, a hole in the ground, under the bed, in the closet, or behind the furniture.

From the beginning of the *Aktion* my family worked hard to find the shelter, even while not knowing at first the final destination of cattle trains leaving daily from the Umschlagplatz on Stawki Street. Day after day the Germans were carrying out the brutal, human hunting, combing block after block for the whole month. The *Aktion* was proceeding



with a lot of shouting, screaming, beating the helpless, firing at them and using all kind of abuse by the uniformed German troops. Even surviving the first wave, it left us frightened and terrorized.

For simplicity, I am using the term "Germans" because any other name doesn't sound adequate, even if I know that there were not only Nazis there. Latvians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians and representatives of other nations participated enthusiastically in the ghetto liquidation, and behaved even more brutally during the mass killing. There were many nations which collaborated with Nazis, and even more, who refused to help, and remained unmoved in view of this tragedy.

From the start of the *Aktion* our small family group — mama and I, my grandparents, and my aunt Ania Szlajfsztajn with 6-year-old Lenka — moved several times, because our first temporary home at 26 Zamenhoff Street was searched a couple of times, and left deserted. Those who were not successfully hidden were taken to the Umschlagplatz and perished.

My immediate family was then still intact. In the apartment on the Zamenhoff Street, where we spent the previous two years, there were many more people; the ghetto was crowded, and the average was 13 persons per room. We didn't know them, and they disappeared at the beginning of the *Aktion*.

I don't remember any of them. In each house we moved into, the first thing to do was to find the hiding place, an attic, or cellar, or some wall closet, which we could disguise. The ghetto — so crowded not a long time ago — was almost empty; houses were abandoned, apartment doors wide open. In succeeding rooms we entered there was still food on the table, clothing and toys around, unmade beds. Tenants disappeared, probably already gassed in *Treblinka*. We slept in crumpled beds, hugging each other. But this time our luck ran out. Shortly after we moved in, the next roundup began, and our hiding place in the attic was discovered.

Together with hundreds of other people from this and neighboring buildings, we were assembled on the street. Some people carried their possessions in valises or bundles, but most of us (like our family) had lost everything during previous escapes, and were clinging together. Mothers carried children; our hope for survival was dim. The long procession was formed, and with accompanying shouts and screams of the Germans we were led to the Umschlagplatz, a couple of streets ahead. Of course we heard about this place, but curiously, didn't know what to expect.

We entered the hell. If the ghetto during the *Aktion* was the vestibule of hell — this place was the hell itself. When our group entered, the loading of cattle wagons was in full swing. The long lines were formed in the yard, with the Germans running around.

Hundreds of people were pushed into the railcars, and those who were not fast enough were beaten, or shot. Screams of mothers who lost their children in the melee, wailing/moaning of injured or dying, shouting, and sounds of rifles firing blindly into the crowd by black-uniformed guards, filled the court with inhuman noises. Jewish policemen participated in this *Aktion*, under German guidance, pushing people and creating the incessant terror.

It was already the late afternoon, and the last train was full; the Germans exceeded their daily quota for this day. We were the last in the long line waiting for our turn. But the train could not accommodate more people, even with all those pushing. At last some guard came to our group and told us to enter the nearby building (I believe that it was originally a hospital), and wait overnight for tomorrow's train.

The last train left, leaving on the platform dead and dying people. I heard horrifying screams. Blood was flowing so profusely, that it was pouring into the building. The corpses were brought in, to be later removed for sanitary reasons. The German guards were laughing, obviously excited by so fine an attraction. Some of them went looking for food, some started to escort the remaining group to the building.

We entered the big, empty hall, and sat in the corner. There were some rags on the floor, and Granny and my mom hid the children, Lenka and me, under the rags in the corner.

After the scenes we had just witnessed, we were desperate and terribly frightened. We expected some period of quiet, but the group of Germans entered the building looking for more fun. In one of the corners there was a group of about 20 people, mostly women with small children. The Germans approached them, and picked out the children from their mothers' arms. They pushed the screaming children against the wall, and began shooting randomly at them. Women went hysterical, screaming and shouting, and trying to reach their children. They were brutally pushed back by Jewish policemen. Several children were lying in the pool of blood, others were screaming shrilly. We looked at this scene with horror. At last the laughing guards left, leaving behind this terrible scene on the floor: blood, parts of the flesh, dead children and screaming mothers.

Everything went quiet; it was late, and we ex-
(Continued on page 14)

FRANCE'S WAITING ROOM FOR AUSCHWITZ

(Continued from page 4)

Between August 1941 and August 1944, some 70,000 passed through.

Simon was one of the first. He spent eight months in the camp before he was herded on to the infamous Convoy Number 1 to Auschwitz. Today, he weeps as he describes the “barbarous days that seemed to last a lifetime” and which continue to dominate his waking hours and his nightmares. Almost all of his family were interned at *Drancy* before they, too, were sent 1,000 miles away to Eastern Europe. Only Simon and his father survived.

The Gutmans had originally been from Warsaw, but with anti-Semitism on the rise in the 1930s, the family fled to France and settled in a tiny studio flat in the 10th Arrondissement, both parents working 15 hours a day as tailors. Simon was six.

Yet Paris was no safer than Warsaw. Following the German occupation of 1940, all French Jews were listed as enemies by Theodor Dannecker, the German SS officer responsible for “roundups” in the city.

As a *Judenberater* (translated as “Jewish adviser” — Nazi SS officials who supervised the deportation of European Jews), Dannecker worked with French officials and the collaborating Vichy government in the south to rid France of its Jews.

Simon was an 18-year-old student when police officers first summoned him and his family to their local station in Paris on August 21, 1941.

They were told it was a “situation review,” but for Simon the result of the “review” was a rat-infested cell in *Drancy*, deprived of food and water.

At that time, the camp was controlled by French police.

Time passed painfully slowly for Simon. He was locked up for long hours in a cramped cell with other inmates of all ages and, even when he was allowed into the courtyard, this was often a form of punishment, with the guards forcing prisoners out whatever the weather.

“It felt like time stopped still. Every day felt like a century,” he says.

Then, after eight months’ imprisonment, he was ordered on to the first convoy heading east. He can remember the day vividly. The weather was unseasonably warm and, huddled together with thousands of other prisoners, he listened nervously as a guard barked out 565 names who were told to “be ready in a quarter of an hour” for a 5 pm departure.

“We remained silent, and strangely optimistic about at least getting out of *Drancy*,” Simon says pensively. “We had no idea what was to come.”

More prisoners were collected from the *Royallieu-Compiègne* internment camp, 60 miles north of Paris, making a total of 1,112 men.

Simon had no idea of the real horror that lay ahead and, as he boarded the first convoy alongside various friends, he believed they might be on the way to cut timber in the *Ardennes*.

Cattle cars were not yet used for deportations — this would start a few months later when women and children arrived at *Drancy* — but the

conditions aboard were already unspeakable. “We were piled on top of each other, and were unable to move during a trip that lasted three days and three nights,” Simon recalls. “Not even



Simon Gutman, pictured sitting left, and his friends managed to escape while on a death march in 1945.

the Red Cross workers gave us a drink of water.”

“In *Reims*, the French gendarmes were replaced by SS guards, and we then understood that the situation was very serious because we knew we were going east.” He was right. The ultimate destination of Convoy 1 was a then-unheard-of place near *Krakow* in occupied Poland — the death camp now infamous as Auschwitz-Birkenau. “The killing started as soon as we got there,” he continues. “We were stripped, and given a prison uniform and a number that was tattooed on our arms in blue.

“If we forgot this number, we were immediately beaten or killed. We were given wooden shoes that didn’t fit and walked to the *Birkenau* camp, around three kilometers away. The road was muddy, and anyone who fell was shot.”

Simon’s number was 27815 — it remains clearly visible on his right underarm to this day. His brother Maurice was on Convoy 4, leaving in June 1942, while his sister Hélène and other brothers Serge and Isidor were on Convoys 15 and 23. David, Simon’s father, was on Convoy 12 that departed in July 1942. His mother, Cyma, was sent east with her sister, Bella, in March 1943.

After just a few weeks came the stroke of good fortune that would save Simon’s life: a fellow prisoner helped him get a job in the kitchen feeding German officers. This man was not Jewish but a so-called “Red Triangle” — a German in prison for opposing the Nazi regime (the triangle refers to an identification badge). “He told me that my only chance to live was cooking — to cook or die,” recalls Simon. “He then told the other German prisoners that I was an impeccable cook who had worked in the best hotels in Paris.”

Oberscharführer (senior squad leader) Hendler, the chief cook, was impressed, and appointed Simon as his only Jewish assistant. “Nobody knew that I had no idea how to cook,” says Simon with a wry smile.

The kitchen role also meant that he could care for his father when he arrived at Auschwitz, handing him scraps of food. He says that it was common at Auschwitz for fathers to be ordered to kill their sons, and vice versa, with refusal leading to both being shot dead. But they were spared this fate.

Toward the end of the war, Simon contracted typhus and “was left for dead under a pile of bodies” rather than being rounded up and sent to a gas chamber.

In February 1945, he finally escaped with four other friends during one of the notorious death marches organized by the retreating SS. They eventually met up with elements of France’s Second Armored Division — the one that had helped liberate central Paris, and *Drancy* just a few days earlier — in August 1944. “There was great emotion,” he says. “The soldiers stood in front of us and saluted.”

The five Jews were still in their striped concentration camp uniforms which, with typical black humor, Simon referred to as “our tuxedos.” They briefly stayed near *Altshausen* in southern Germany, and it was there that the five posed for a remarkable photograph.

Simon sits on the left of the group, which includes a 12-year-old boy who had escaped with him. “I often said I was born in April 1945 — the time I escaped from imprisonment,” Simon says reflectively.

He finally returned to Paris in April 1945, where he learned that the only other member of his family to survive was his father David, then 46. When they were reunited at the five-star *Lutétia* hotel — which had been transformed into a regrouping center after years of use by the Nazis, Simon was distressed by the skeletal man in front of him.

So ill was his father, he was at first unable to recognize Simon. But the pair were soon united in an “indescribable grief” that would never leave them. They discovered that other family members had been caught in the *Vel d’Hiv* roundup of July 16, 1942, when more than 13,000 Jews, including 4,000 children, had been taken to Paris’s Winter Velodrome (*Vélodrome d’Hiver*) before most were deported to their deaths.

Today Simon sits at home in the Marais, once a Jewish quarter and now one of the most sought-after locations in Paris. It is less than ten miles from *Drancy*, which is once again a housing estate, albeit one with a monument, a museum and an original railway wagon marking its terrifying past.

Simon was one of only 19 men out of 1,112 from Convoy Number 1 who ever saw Paris again. Staying alive, he says, has been his way of defying the “sadists” who took so much from him and his people. He has since been determined to lead as successful a life as possible, building up the tailoring business started by his father — and raising a family of his own.

“This was all so important to me — to carry on with my life, and to show that survivors would not be defeated,” he says defiantly.

BY PETER ALLEN, *Daily Mail*

(Continued from page 4)

could then continue as planned.

Several prisoners reported that she died on the way to the crematorium. Others say she was shot to death. Edek, her beloved, who is said to

still alive. Tales of her heroism were recounted right after the war. One of the earliest testimonies, also cited in Shik's article, was given by Bila Bender in November 1945. In her testimony, provided in Yiddish, Bender called Zimetbaum

“THE LAST STAGE”



have etched her name into the walls of his prison block, shouted “Long live Poland” as he was being hanged. Zimetbaum became a legend after her death. In the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* edited by Prof. Israel Gutman, she is listed as the first woman to escape from Auschwitz.

The choice to put the Mala Zimetbaum character at the center of a feature film as early as 1947 is interesting. She had become a heroine among the other women prisoners while she was

“the martyr Mala” and said she deserved a place of honor in the history of heroism, and as a Jewish martyr.

Seventy years after its premiere in Israel, the film has returned as part of the Polish ZOOM events, a project of the Polish Institute in Tel Aviv and the Adam Mickiewicz Institute in Poland.

Reexamination of the film all these years later clearly reveals its historical weaknesses; after all,

it's a Communist propaganda film. Praise for Russia, Stalin and the Red Army is woven in. They are depicted as the prisoners' only saviors — without any mention, of course, of Stalin's cooperation with Hitler at the start of the war or of the war crimes committed by the Russians. In the film, all resistance to the Nazis is led by Communist women. There is no trace of any resistance by other groups. The prisoners' social solidarity in the face of evil is portrayed in the spirit of “The Internationale.”

The internal rivalries and acts of cruelty among the prisoners receive no place in the film. Nor is there anything on how Jewish prisoners were harshly discriminated against by prisoners of other nationalities; this wouldn't serve the message.

Also, in the film one hears Polish, Russian, German and French, but no Yiddish. This is no coincidence. Produced under the auspices of the Soviet Union, the film deliberately avoids any mention of the uniqueness of the Holocaust and instead emphasizes the universality of the war's victims. In this, the film betrays the truth. Most of the 1.1 million victims at Auschwitz were Jews.

But unlike with other works produced under the Communist regime, the Jews aren't completely absent from this one, thanks to Jakubowska's stubborn insistence. Describing it years later, she said she was pressured to alter the plot and remove any mention of Jews. Seventy years ago, *Haaretz* lauded her for not paying heed.

BY OFER ADERET, *Haaretz*

MAJA HRABOWSKA: “MY LIFE IN HIDING”

(Continued from page 12)

pected it to be our last night. Suddenly aunt Ania shouted: “Max, Max!” She saw her estranged husband Max Szlajfsztajn, whom she divorced in *Wloclawek* just before the war because of his cruelty. We hadn't seen him in years. Now he was moving freely around, dressed in a police uniform, obviously serving in the Umschlagplatz unit.

Six-year-old little Lenka was his daughter. Max saw us, and realized immediately the danger we were in. He told us not to move, and stay there, and he went away to find the way out. Deep into the night he came again, and ordered us to follow him. We went through the cellar/basement to the back door and Max took out the key.

We almost made it when, suddenly, another Jewish policeman of higher position appeared. He started to shout at Max trying to push us back into the main floor. I don't exactly remember what happened next. The other policeman threatened Max, that he would remove him from the force for insubordination, and would send him with the next transport.

I believe that my grandmother, or maybe Max, bribed this policeman with some money, or the ring, and he finally left. Max quietly opened the back door leading to the deserted street and let us out. The ordeal was over.

We were completely exhausted and half conscious after the scenes we witnessed. Our problem was not finished, and we could be shot at any time on the ghetto streets during curfew at night. Somehow we were not afraid. Quick and possibly painless death looked good. Anyway, after a short

walk we found an abandoned house, where we spent the rest of the night. I don't remember how we survived the next couple of days.

The *Aktion* in the ghetto was suspended shortly after our miraculous escape. However, this time we knew what was awaiting us/planned for us, and we just lived from day to day. We started to work in the factory Shopa Shultza on Leszno Street, where we sewed German uniforms. We were hoping for some documents which could exclude us from deportation. We all were working there, even Lenka. During control visits we were hidden in the cellar under the stock of fabrics. It was a dark room; I don't remember much more.

The ghetto was sealed tight, but obviously some contact with the outside world existed. One day we got a letter from my father, who was living in hiding on the “Aryan” side of the wall. Before the war he was active in the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), and his friends from these circles helped him to hide. Father found out that we were still alive, and started organizing for us a place to stay with his Polish friends. Mama didn't want to leave her mother and sister in the ghetto, but she realized that it could be our only chance for survival. She planned that with the help of the Polish friends she could later organize an escape for the rest of the family.

The big problem was how to cross the over-six-foot-tall brick wall surrounding the ghetto. All the gates were guarded, and we were trapped inside. We tried our escape three times, but we were spotted and turned back. During the third try I lost my mother, who was shot by a black-

uniformed guard. I lost the rest of my family too, because without my mother I was unable to organize the escape for them. They all died during the ghetto's final liquidation, at the ghetto uprising, in April 1943.

After my mother was shot I came back to my family and I told what happened. My Granny was devastated. She had already learned about the fate of her son Benek Berglau, who was killed in *Wloclawek* around the same time. His wife Mania and two of his daughters (Judyta and Stella) were sent to *Treblinka*. His older daughter Niunia tried to escape to Russia, but later was caught near the east border and shot in the forest.

My dearest aunt Ania told me that from now on she would be my mother. We never recovered my mother's body. The next day my grandma contacted the truck driver commuting between the ghetto and the Aryan side, and organized my transfer with me hidden under some rags at the back of the truck.

I don't remember the last/hasty farewell. I felt suffocated with all the stuff over me, then I heard the German guards' voices, and at last I was standing in the entrance of the apartment house. There were people on the street, walking, talking; everything looked strange. The woman was waiting for me, and we entered the apartment, where my father was waiting. He asked about mama. It was the only time in my life when I saw him crying, after I told him what happened. I was placed with some worker's family, where I spent the next couple of months. My life in hiding began.

IN EASTERN EUROPE, HOLOCAUST MUSEUMS ARE MISSING FROM KEY HISTORICAL SITES

(Continued from page 6)

Bucharest, noted in an interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Because of this, “it’s only in the past 20 years that you have local scholars in Eastern Europe who have become experts on the Holocaust,” she said. Beyond that, “the legacy of the Communist regime makes it hard for some people to admit what happened, because they understand their own nation’s role as a victim, not a perpetrator.” And it’s of course “an issue of national pride” to deny Holocaust-era complicity.

Indeed, throughout much of Eastern Europe, and especially in Ukraine and Lithuania, collaborators who were responsible for killing Jews while fighting alongside the Nazis are celebrated as national heroes because they fought against the Soviet Union.

One way of sweetening the bitter pill of complicity has been to elevate in museums the role of Holocaust-era rescuers.



Part of an exhibition about Communist Jews who killed non-Jewish Ukrainians at the Tkuma museum in Dnipro, Ukraine.

In recent years, a number of museums for rescuers have opened in countries where a significant part of the population collaborated with the Nazis, including the Jānis Lipke Museum in Riga, Latvia, which opened in 2012. In Lithuania, where

thousands of Jews were murdered by locals, the museum at the *Ponar* killing site near Vilnius features, curiously, a display about the Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara, who worked in *Kaunas* and saved mostly Polish Jews.

In March, Lithuania’s Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum began a mobile exhibition about the country’s Righteous Among the Nations — non-Jews who have been recognized by Israel as having risked their lives to save Jews.

In 2016, Poland, amid a polarizing international debate about Polish Holocaust complicity, opened a museum about its rescuers. Another such museum is planned for Auschwitz. Polish officials have claimed that there were about 70,000 Righteous in Poland, although Israel’s Yad Vashem Holocaust museum has recognized fewer than 7,000.

With rescuers who have been recognized by Yad Vashem, their elevation in Eastern European museums is “in itself a worthy cause,” Efraim Zuroff, the Eastern Europe director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, told JTA. “But not when it comes instead of the recognition of local complicity in Nazi crimes, that is so sorely missing in the post-Communist countries today.”

BY CNAAN LIPHSHIZ, JTA

END-OF-YEAR TAX PLANNING FOR DONORS

IRA ROLLOVER

If you are now over the age of 70½, you can take a qualified charitable Distribution (QCD) of up to \$100,000 annually from your individual IRA (traditional or Roth) to the American Society for Yad Vashem before the end of the calendar year. This type of gift is also commonly called the IRA charitable rollover. Many charities are recommending this option for donors over the age of 70½, especially toward the end of the calendar year.

DETAILS

A donor older than 70½ can individually distribute up to \$100,000 each year from his or her IRA (through its administrator) to the American Society for Yad Vashem without having to recognize the distribution as income to the donor. This distribution can be used to satisfy the RMD (Required Minimum Distribution) for the year the distribution has been made. Please note that the gift must be completed by December 31 (check cashed by ASYV) in order to qualify and no benefit may be received by the donor from the charity.

As the American Society for Yad Vashem is a public charity, it falls within the permitted char-

itable recipients of an IRA charitable rollover. The donor must notify the administrator of the IRA to make a direct distribution to the charitable beneficiary in order to qualify.

This giving opportunity was made permanent by the passing of the PATH (Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes) Act in December of 2015 by Congress.

TAX CUTS AND JOBS ACT OF 2017

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 made a number of significant changes regarding income taxes for individuals and families; most important among them is that there are now a total of seven income tax brackets, lowering taxes for some and raising taxes for others. We are living with the impact of the 2017 law, as it has simplified tax preparation for many, but significantly increased taxes for individuals living in states where there are high state income taxes.

DETAILS

This coming tax season will again produce much angst for individuals and families domiciled in states that have state income taxes, as the final version of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 maintained the deductibility of state and local taxes, but limited the total deductible

amount to \$10,000, which includes income, sales and property taxes. The effect of this limitation on deductibility has been quite significant for most upper-income individuals and families. There was an expectation that this limitation might be eliminated in 2019 by Congress, but that has not come to pass.

In addition, the standard deduction for individuals will be \$12,200 in 2019, for heads of household will be \$18,350 in 2019, and for married couples filing jointly and widows will be \$24,400 in 2019. Some additional consequential income tax deductions were eliminated by Congress as a part of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, a few of which are listed here: most insurance casualty and theft losses; tax preparation charges; moving expenses; and employee expenses not reimbursed by the employer. Many more individuals and families utilized the standard deduction in 2018 than in past years.

Remember, it is always wise to check with your accountant or tax advisor as part of your review process.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by telephone at **212-220-4304 extension 213**, or by e-mail at **cmorton@yad-vashemusa.org**.

BY ROBERT CHRISTOPHER MORTON
Director of Planned Giving
American Society for Yad Vashem



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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