

# MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE



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## HOLOCAUST EDUCATION DURING CHALLENGING TIMES: DETERMINATION TO PREVAIL

A year ago, our projections about our educational outreach were a very different conversation. We spoke about our continued progress in expanding our work regionally and nationally through a variety of events, venues and resources developed by Yad Vashem's International School for Holocaust Studies. We continued to underscore the importance of enriching and encouraging Holocaust education and the presence and mission of Yad Vashem in this process.

As we are all well aware, these past few months, owing to the complicated circumstances and challenges we face with COVID-19, with school closures, the absence of face-to-face interaction, anxiety about this deadly virus, and uncertainty about the future in terms of a cure, we have had to rethink and recalibrate many aspects of our work that until now did not surface. Today, we collectively navigate uncharted waters to sustain our joint mission of Holocaust remembrance through education.

In the course of identifying opportunities to reach a broader audience, we have successfully pivoted to remote format and, thankfully, can continue our work during these unprecedented times. The fluidity of adapting also provides a glimpse into many learning and networking opportunities previously not considered. We can now connect with educators across the nation to broaden our reach and empower more teachers to share our mission of Holocaust remembrance with ease thanks to the variety of remote platforms available.

While these connections existed in the past, pivoting to remote format has proven to be beneficial for both the host and the participant. Ease of access through Zoom allows educators to participate in programs and seminars across the globe, providing them with a more comprehensive palette of professional development opportunities. It is not enough simply to possess the knowledge. We need to keep in mind what is done with the knowledge and how it is disseminated to be meaningful and relevant. Sustaining teacher training and professional development is essential.

It is important to recognize that there are many aspects of Holocaust education that have

not changed despite the multiple obstacles of pivoting to Zoom and remote format. We still face the same challenges: relevance of the Holocaust; shrinking population of Holocaust survivors; a future without Holocaust survivors; time



Artifacts from a Holocaust survivor family. These artifacts were used before the Holocaust, hidden during the Holocaust, and proudly used continuously during lives rebuilt.

constraints on educators for required subjects in their curricula; challenges of Holocaust denial; and rising tides of anti-Semitism — just to name a few.

More importantly, the issues remain the same and are increasingly important. The resources are still available, but also in additional formats — live and remote.

In times of unprecedented challenges due to the pandemic, we continue to carry the torch of remembrance through education and convey to the world the survival, resilience and strength of the Jews before, during and after the Holocaust. It is through education and the educational pedagogy developed by Yad Vashem that we sustain this mission and transmit the lessons of the Holocaust to present and future generations. We

want to highlight the best of humanity when the worst was there. By restoring a human face to the victim, we can underscore the resilience of the Jewish people and their ultimate survival.

We continue to consider what was lost and how Jews survived. The courage and resilience of Jews during the Holocaust must be acknowledged and promoted. This is also critical to address the rising tides of anti-Semitism and the efforts of Holocaust deniers to muffle these important messages and facts.

We have the additional obligation of transmitting the lessons from this event to present and future generations with a directive to educators in all educational settings. In *Teacher and Child* (1972), Dr. Haim Ginott, child psychologist and author, requests the following from teachers. His request is timely and relevant for Holocaust educators today:

**Dear Teacher,**

***I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness: Gas chambers built by learned engineers, Children poisoned by educated physicians, Infants killed by trained nurses, Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates. So, I am suspicious of education.***

***My request is: Help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more humane.***

Collectively, we will honor this request.

We remain optimistic about sustaining our educational responsibility to this important subject, despite the many challenges we face, with simultaneous learning platforms that we implement

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**American Society for Yad Vashem  
will hold a series of virtual events  
this fall and winter.**

See page 9 for details



# ROSH HASHANAHS OF THE HOLOCAUST

## RECALLED BY YAD VASHEM

Each year, Yad Vashem opens an on-line exhibition of Holocaust-era artifacts related to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, with stories drawn from its archives.

This year the stories range from the heart-breaking to the redemptive. *Jewish News* is highlighting two, both of which relate to the Netherlands.

Simon Dasberg and his wife Isabella lived in *Groningen*, in the Netherlands, where Simon served as the community rabbi. They had four children — Fanny (Zipporah), Dina, Samuel and Rafael.

In 1943, the Dasbergs were deported to *Westerbork* and from there to the “star camp” in *Bergen-Belsen*. Rabbi Dasberg took a *sefer Torah* with him, which briefly allowed him to read from it for services and even guide bar mitzvah boys in the camp.

In preparation for Rosh Hashanah 5705 (September 1944), the Dasberg children made “Shana Tova” cards in *Bergen-Belsen*.

They drew the symbols of the holiday — the shofar and the apple dipped in honey — decorated the cards with bright colors, and wished their parents a better year than the one they had just lived through.

Rafael, the youngest, aged eight, wrote (in Dutch): “This year I will be a very good boy, and I will never cry.”

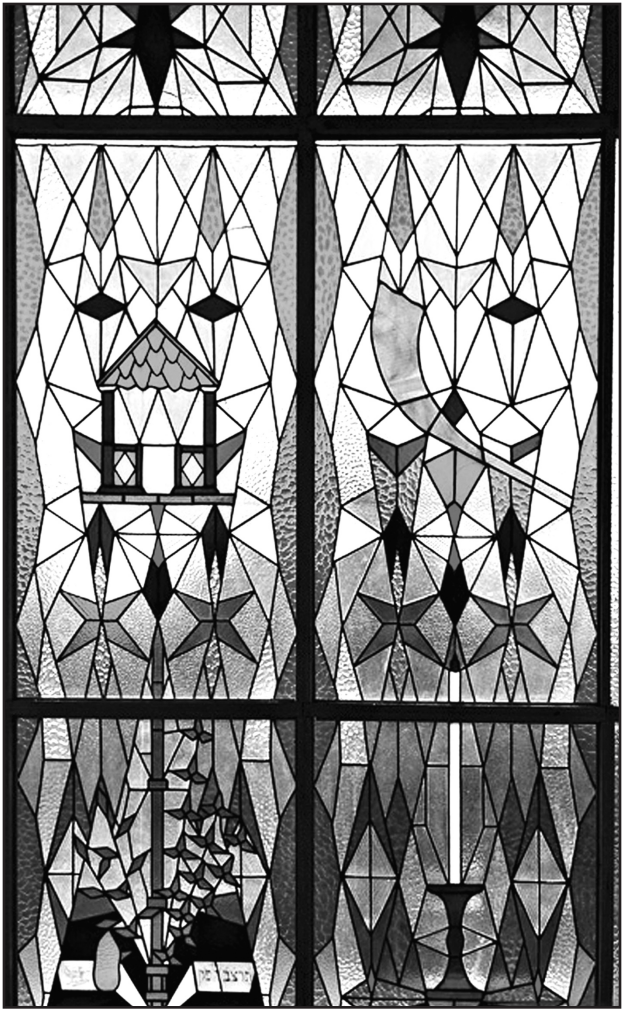
But that year Rabbi Dasberg, his wife Isabella, and Rafael were murdered in the camp.

The three elder children survived and emigrated to Israel after liberation. The Rosh Hashanah cards were brought to Yad Vashem by the eldest, Fanny Stahl, nee Dasberg, and photographed for the archives.

In contrast to the sadness of the Dasberg cards, Yad Vashem also features the story of the Van Oosten stained-glass windows.

The High Holy Days-themed windows were

designed by a talented Dutch Jewish architect, Abraham van Oosten, for the synagogue in *Assen*, in the northeastern Netherlands, where he and his family lived.



High Holy Day symbols on a *shul* window in *Assen*, Holland.

The windows were completed and installed in 1932. Five years later, van Oosten died, aged only 40. His widow, Heintje, and their three children, Gonda, Leo and Johanna, remained in the town.

In 1940, the Germans occupied Holland. Leo van Oosten was arrested and deported to Auschwitz, where he was murdered. In October

1942, the Jews of *Assen*, including Heintje and her daughters, Gonda and Johanna, were rounded up and deported to the *Westerbork* transit camp.

In *Westerbork*, Gonda married Asher Gerlich, a Zionist pioneer. In 1944, the couple was deported to the *Bergen Belsen* concentration camp. Gonda’s mother, Heintje, and younger sister, Johanna, were sent to Auschwitz, where they were murdered.

Gonda, the sole survivor of the van Oosten family, changed her first name to Tamar and in 1946, together with Asher, emigrated to Israel. The couple, now Tamar and Asher Ben Gera, joined a group of young Palmach pioneers and established kibbutz *Beit Keshet* in the lower Galilee. They had seven children.

Most of the Jews of *Assen* did not survive the Holocaust. A few returned, but they were not able to reestablish a Jewish community, and the synagogue was never reopened. The building was eventually purchased by the local Protestant community and converted into a church.

In 1974, Tamar learned that the former *Assen* synagogue was to be demolished. She decided to save the stained-glass windows her father had designed, and bring them to Israel. For a time they were installed in the renovated dining hall of kibbutz *Beit Keshet*; but as it became clear that the dining hall was no longer the central meeting place of the kibbutz, Tamar asked Yad Vashem for help in preserving the windows for posterity.

Today the van Oosten windows are part of Yad Vashem’s Artifacts Collection, a memorial to a Jewish community which no longer exists, but which celebrates the work of Abraham van Oosten and the High Holy Days.

BY JENNI FRAZER, *Jewish News*

## HOLOCAUST EDUCATION DURING CHALLENGING TIMES....

(Continued from page 1)

to navigate these difficult times. We keep in mind our commitment to effectively commemorate the Holocaust and sustain its relevancy through alternative learning platforms, despite the challenges these new arenas present. We look forward to sharing our robust array of programs, events and opportunities for the 2020–2021 academic year.

By way of example, we are pleased to offer you an opportunity to bring the museum to your classrooms, using artifacts to teach about documentation, primary sources, tradition, resilience and Holocaust denial. Each item in the photograph (see page 1) attests to the resilience and perseverance of one family who went through the war, survived and prevailed. Our workshop on *Survivors and Survival* brings these messages to the classroom.

Through our programs, we are sustaining and expanding professional development initiatives nationwide. We are developing and implementing remote learning and social media platforms for

outreach in addition to our “live” programs. While our complete calendar will be ready in our next issue of *Martyrdom and Resistance*, we are pleased to share with you the date for our upcoming **2021 Arfa Professional Development Conference on Holocaust Education** set for **March 7, 2021**. Details will follow in our next issue and on our website ([www.yadvashemusa.org](http://www.yadvashemusa.org)).

We must continue to ask ourselves — why is it important to remember the Holocaust? How can we ensure that future generations do not forget the Holocaust? What advocacy do we owe to Holocaust survivors? What lessons can we teach and learn from to ensure that manifest and latent forms of anti-Semitism are identified, and addressed before they develop and escalate to dangerous proportions?

As educators we are well aware that the Holocaust is not simply a contemporary issue. It stretches back past the parameters of the modern era — into the Middle Ages and beyond to the inception of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism, discrimi-

nation against Jews of all walks of life, was not a new concept in 1933. It was widespread and prevalent in many countries. The Nazi regime amplified and manipulated the latent prejudices of its citizens. It did not create these prejudices.

Teaching about the Holocaust and commemorating this event is ultimately a tribute to the victims and a responsibility incumbent upon generations following the Holocaust. We want to ensure that kind of event will never repeat itself. Had this awareness existed some 75 years ago, the name Auschwitz today would simply represent another city on the map of Europe.

Together we will move forward and bring the same determination, commitment and respect for this subject, that we have in the past while sharing the opportunities and possibilities in innovative learning that will benefit us during these challenging times.

BY MARLENE W. YAHALOM, PhD  
Director of Education at ASYV



# MAY THEIR MEMORIES FOREVER BE A BLESSING

**W**e are all aware that Holocaust survivors are among the most vulnerable to the coronavirus and that we have lost so many precious souls to this invisible foe over the past six months. Each and every one of these survivors has a name and a story. They survived the horrors of the Holocaust and persevered after suffering unimaginable tragedy. Now, with the spread of COVID-19, our beloved survivors are facing a new threat. 75 years after the end of the war, just 400,000 survivors are still alive, with about 189,500 of them living in Israel. In the New York area, there are an estimated 36,000 survivors. In 2019 alone, more than 15,000 survivors passed away. Tragically, the passing of the survivor generation has ac-



Aryeh Even.

celerated because of the 2020 pandemic. Back in March, Israel's first coronavirus fatality was Aryeh Even, a Holocaust survivor. Born in Budapest, Aryeh, together with his mother and brother, was forcibly evicted from the family's home after Germany invaded Hungary in 1944. The family was able to find refuge in one of the Swiss protected homes in Budapest. Under the auspices of the Swedish embassy, they moved to different shelters under the cover of night. Aryeh immigrated in 1949 to Israel where he built a family and worked as a civil servant. Rabbi Romi Cohn, a 91-year-old Holocaust survivor living in Staten Island, also passed away from the coronavirus in late March. Romi was born in 1929 in *Pressburg* (now Bratislava), Czechoslovakia. During the war, he worked with the resistance and helped rescue 56 Jewish families. Less than two months before his death, Rabbi Cohn delivered the opening prayer in the U.S. House of Representatives for the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Sally Horn (née Frajlich) passed away in April, two days before her 97th birthday. Born in

*Radom*, Poland, in 1923, Sally was forced to live in the town's large ghetto until it was liquidated. Her father was shipped to Auschwitz, where he was quickly murdered, while Sally, her mother, and two young sisters were sent to the small ghetto, where they performed slave labor. There they moved in with the family of Sally's future husband, Henry. But they were all shipped to Auschwitz, and Sally was the only member of her family to come out alive. Sally and Henry had promised to look after each other if they somehow survived. After the war, Sally went into a Czech orphanage and planned to go with the other girls who were being transported to London. Henry, who had been crisscrossing Europe, found Sally the evening before she was scheduled to leave for England. These stories represent just a few of so many survivors we have lost because of COVID-19. May each and every one of their memories forever be a blessing. As we enter the new year, let us reflect on the lives lost and remember to cherish the survivors still with us.

BY JILL GOLTZER



Romi Cohn in Budapest, 1944.

# BERNESE GROUP TRIED TO SAVE THOUSANDS OF JEWS IN HOLOCAUST

**New research suggests that Polish diplomats who worked during World War II to rescue Jews from Nazi-occupied Europe attempted to save several thousand Jews through their efforts.** The so-called Bernese Group of six Polish diplomats working out of the Swiss capital, Bern, sought to provide Jews in Poland with forged South American passports, mostly from Paraguay. The passport holders in some cases were allowed to live outside the Jewish ghettos or were sent to internment camps instead of Nazi death camps. Until recently, it was thought that the group helped save several hundred Jews. But research conducted by the Warsaw-based Pilecki Institute, the Jewish Historical Institute of Warsaw, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Museum and the Polish Institute of National Remembrance suggests that the Bernese Group produced thousands of forged passports that may have helped save 2,000 to 3,000 Jews. According to Polish Ambassador to Switzerland Jakub Kumoch, the editor of the study, between 26% and 46% of the 3,253 Jews who received the Polish-forged documents survived the Holocaust. "We estimate that the Ładoś Group con-

tributed to the rescue of between 2,000 and 3,000 people," he said. The Bernese Group is alternatively known as the Ładoś Group, named after then-Polish ambassador to Switzerland Aleksander Ładoś, who served in Switzerland from 1940 to 1945 and oversaw the effort to forge passports. Thousands more Jews are believed to have benefited from the forgery efforts, although their names remain undocumented, Kumoch said. According to Efraim Zuroff, a Holocaust historian and director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Israel, the initiative to provide Polish Jews with fake South American passports came largely from Juliusz Kühl, a Polish Jewish diplomat in Bern; Chaim Yisroel Eiss of the Agudat Yisrael organization, who lived in Zurich; and Abraham Silberschein. Bern-based Polish diplomat Konstanty Rokicki was responsible for obtaining the blank South American passports and filling them out, while Ładoś and Polish diplomat Stefan Ryniewicz gave the scheme diplomatic cover. Silberschein and Eiss dealt with smuggling the passports into Nazi-occupied Poland and into the ghettos. The Ładoś Group assisted Jews from all over Europe, though the majority of the passports identified and documented in the research were

used by Jews in occupied Poland, the Netherlands and to some extent Germany, according to Monika Maniewska, a Pilecki Institute archivist and co-author of *The Ładoś List* study. According to the study, the Polish government-in-exile gave its full support to the operation, pressuring Latin American states to recognize the forged documents for humanitarian reasons. The initiative ended in 1943 when the Swiss authorities became suspicious and demanded that it be shut down. The list of Jews who were saved by the Ładoś Group includes several fighters of the 1943 Warsaw ghetto uprising, including Zivia Lubetkin and Yitzchak Zuckerman, and leaders of the Jewish resistance from Slovakia, France and Italy. Among the thousands of survivors were Mirjam Finkelstein, mother of British politician and associate editor of *The Times* Lord Daniel Finkelstein; and the best friend of Anne Frank, Hannah "Hanneli" Goslar. The English version of *The Ładoś List* was presented under the patronage of the World Jewish Congress on February 27 at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City.

BY JEREMY SHARON, *The Jerusalem Post*

# LIVING LIVES FREE OF PERSECUTION

Over the past six months, our Young Leadership Associates (YLA) have been working hard to keep the community engaged in Holocaust education and remembrance, all from the safety of their own homes. From virtual book club meetings to film screenings, the YLA has been finding ways to stay connected. But more than that, this group has served as a resource and outlet for our young leaders during a time of great social upheaval and discontent.

In June, following the tragic murder of George Floyd and the ensuing unrest, YLA members met with Michael Miller, ASYV board member and executive vice president and CEO of JCRC-NY, to hear an overview of how the Jewish community was responding the situation. They wanted to know what we, not only as a Jewish community, but more specifically as a Holocaust remembrance community, can do to support the black community. We were founded

upon the pledge “Never Again,” and that does not just refer to the *Shoah*; it refers to all violent persecution of any group or people based simply on their religion, race or ethnicity. Yad Vashem is dedicated to educating the world about the devastating consequences of unbridled hatred. When it comes to being stripped of one’s humanity, the Jewish community certainly has the capacity to empathize with those who are struggling with injustice.

Following our discussion, Mr. Miller kindly put us in touch with the Reverend Jacques DeGraff. Rev. DeGraff is an active member of numerous social justice organizations and serves as co-chair of the New York State Office of the Attorney General’s Black and Jewish Clergy Roundtable. He is also the recipient of the State of Israel’s Martin Luther King Jr. Award for lifetime contributions in the struggle for social justice. The Reverend kindly met with a number of our YLA board members and engaged in a very open and can-

did dialogue on the troubling anti-Israel and anti-Zionist sentiments floating around many of the social justice causes that are highly visible in today’s media. He specifically addressed the question of how to navigate this tension and show support for these causes while remaining uncompromised in our dedication to Israel.

Furthermore, Rev. DeGraff emphasized the importance of simple acts of kindness. He reminded us that no matter how small a single act may feel, it can make a world of difference for one person. Anyone and everyone can have an impact. In other words, our actions should be about direct interpersonal relationships between individuals and communities. We want to forge bonds out of genuine empathy and our desire to understand. Ultimately, we share a common goal of living lives free of persecution, all while honoring our unique heritage and histories.

BY JILL GOLTZER

# THE THIRD REICH’S SUPPORTERS IN THE UNITED STATES

Hitler’s American Friends: The Third Reich’s Supporters in the United States.  
By Bradley W. Hart. St. Martin’s Press: New York, N.Y., 2018. 296 pp. \$17.69 hardcover.

In recent years, an increasing amount of research has focused on the state of America just prior to and during the Holocaust. The result has been the publication of numerous books and articles telling a history few know, but many should: the anti-Semitism very much a part of American society in the 1930s and 1940s, revealed in the workings of anti-Semitic organizations and a variety of “leaders” determined that America follow in Nazism’s footsteps. Thus we’ve learned about the German American Bund and its megalomaniac leader, Fritz Julius Kuhn, a fanatic “Hitlerist.” We’ve learned about The Silver Legion and its “Chief,” the “eccentric mystic,” William Dudley Pelley, another Hitler admirer who followed “spiritual sources.” We’ve read about the “America First Committee” of the 1940s and its “popularity” (or more like infamy), the result of Charles Lindbergh’s inflammatory speeches, born of his mistaken views of Hitler and Germany. We’ve learned about Father Charles E. Coughlin and the violence of his Christian Front, and more. In Bradley W. Hart’s conscientious compilation entitled *Hitler’s American Friends: The Third Reich’s Supporters in the United States*, we read additional fascinating details about all of the above noted; however, of even greater interest to the reader, we learn of Hitler’s American friends yet to be fully “recognized”!

For example, there is Hart’s chapter on the American senators who helped spread Nazi propaganda in the United States. Among the “more than two dozen US senators and representatives” who did so were Senator Ernest Lundeen of Minnesota, Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana and Senator Rush Holt of West Virginia. The “mastermind” paid by the German embassy to make this happen was George Sylvester Viereck, referred to by a New York tabloid as “Hitler’s No. 1 Benedict Arnold.”

Among other things, he was the ghostwriter for parts if not all of the speeches some of these politicians gave, because of his “contacts” he saw to it that certain “information” was placed in the *Congressional Record*, and he figured out how to use politician’s franking privileges in order to do mass propaganda mailings — all of it “to build American support for Nazi Germany and above all else, keep the United States out of Hitler’s war in Europe.”

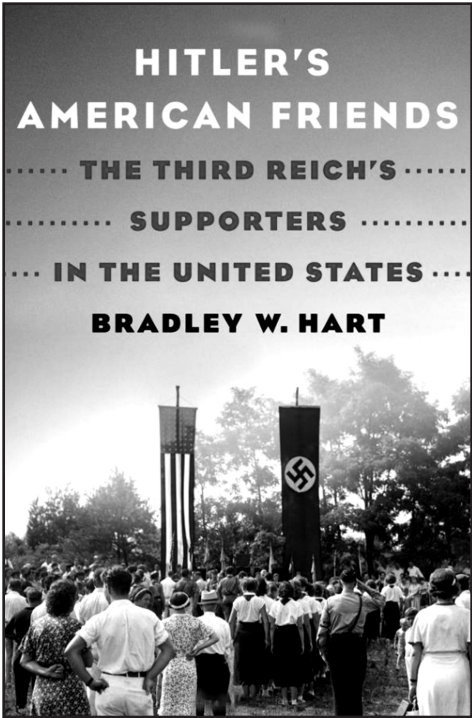
Another chapter full of lesser-known information is about student and university propaganda activity vis-à-vis Nazism in America. Here Hart notes how American students in study-abroad programs in Germany, even after “the anti-Semitic and violent nature of Nazism was clear,” came back corrupted by the indoctrination they experienced in “Nazified” universities — only to corrupt others. Additionally, he writes about how “pro-German voices were consistently given public platforms on American college campuses.” Moreover, we read that “universities based in

the New York area were particularly imbued with anti-Semitism and Nazi influence.” Which universities does Hart point a finger at, specifically in New York? Columbia and New York University. Outside of New York, he notes Yale University, the “birthplace of ‘America First,’” and UCLA, a “hotbed of pro-German sentiment.”

Then there is the chapter on Nazi spies in America, in which we discover that according to “intelligence historian Ladislav Farago . . . by the late 1930s there were around fifty spies operating in the United States” — some even working in the defense industry! Doubtless, because of them, blueprints of the “sophisticated Norden bomb-sight,” an instrument that made it possible to drop bombs with greater precision, ended up in Germany, utilized by Hitler’s *Luftwaffe*. Still, more terrifying than all the rest — and much more dangerous had it come to fruition — was Germany’s Operation Pastorius, “a scheme to take the war directly to the United States through a series of violent terrorist attacks on dams, power stations, manufacturing facilities, train stations, and bridges.” Thankfully, Operation Pastorius and many other German intrigues came to naught thanks to the dedicated work of “local law enforcement and the FBI,” under the ever-watchful eyes of J. Edgar Hoover.

In summary, importantly, *Hitler’s American Friends* answers a lot of questions many have. Just one of those questions: Why didn’t American Jews do more for their coreligionists suffering in Europe? Sadly, the answer, clearly delivered in Hart’s work, is: fear, fear that what was happening in Europe could happen in America.

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





# NAZI HUNTER TEAMS UP WITH LITHUANIAN JOURNALIST TO INVESTIGATE HOLOCAUST CRIMES

For anyone seeking to understand why the Nazi crimes of the 1940s are still a source of controversy throughout post-Communist Eastern Europe, *Our People: Discovering Lithuania's Hidden Holocaust* is a shocking book — and essential reading.

Part road trip, part “buddy film” and part true-crime expose, *Our People* follows veteran Nazi hunter Efraim Zuroff and renowned Lithuanian journalist Ruta Vanagaite on a journey through the haunted house of Lithuania’s past.

Co-authored by the duo, the book caused a national sensation when it was first published in

have been implicated — directly or indirectly — in the murder of Lithuanian Jews and the seizure of their property. She wanted to know more about this largely unwritten chapter of her country’s past and started to organize Jewish-themed events and visits to the places where these unspoken horrors occurred.

Looking for guest speakers to spice up a Holocaust history discussion in Vilnius, she was warned not to invite Zuroff, who was said to be a bully and anti-Lithuanian provocateur, most likely in the pay of the country’s nemesis, Vladimir Putin. She was told he was aggressive and made schoolteachers cry. She decided to meet him, if only to see if he could be persuaded not to spark a fistfight at the event.

For his part, Zuroff agreed to have coffee with Vanagaite but with zero expectations. Zuroff, ever skeptical, wondered aloud whether Vanagaite’s sudden interest in her country’s Jewish past was motivated by the availability of generous European Union funding. But it was the tireless Nazi hunter and ruiner of reputations

ical presence. Vanagaite arrived with decades of reporting experience, a hunger for knowledge and an easy manner with the elderly interviewees. Together, they plucked the hitherto silent witnesses from the obscurity of their village lives. Many had never spoken before of the horrific crimes they had stumbled into as frightened children.

Standing on the doorsteps of village homes, in the forest clearings where the massacres had been carried out, and in the streets of small country towns, this odd couple of Holocaust chroniclers breathed new life into long-forgotten memories of events so shocking that the force of their retelling after decades of silence, overlaid with guilt and pain, seemed to change the very air.

“I never expected I would find any witnesses. I never expected they would talk,” Vanagaite says.

## GATHERING THE STORIES

In *Svemcionys*, a town where 8,000 Jews once lived, they saw an old woman leaving a grocery store who seemed about the right age. Her story tumbled out. She and her sister were very close to two Jewish sisters, the Bentski girls, aged 7 and 15. In October 1941, when nearly 4,000 Jews were rounded up to be shot dead at a local military base on Yom Kippur, the woman’s parents discussed whether they could adopt her friend and take her in. They decided it would be too risky.

“When they were marched by us, my mother and I cried because we couldn’t save the little girl,” the old woman told her visitors.

“You probably were very afraid of the Germans?” asked Efraim.

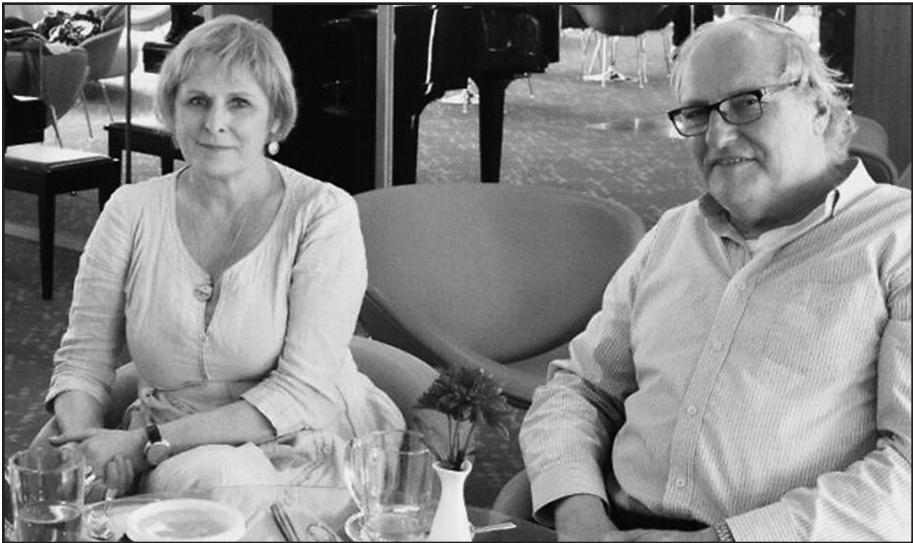
“No, we could have hidden her forever,” the old woman replied. “We were afraid of our neighbors.”

“She started crying,” Efraim says. “It broke my heart. It was obvious she had never told the story to anybody. She was walking around with this on her heart since 1941, more than 70 years, and she finally was able to tell someone. I think it was a relief for her, but it was heartbreaking, absolutely heartbreaking.”

As in so many of the mass murders of Jews and others throughout the country, the Special Unit squad in *Svemcionys* in October 1941 was made up largely of Lithuanians. Many of them escaped prosecution.

There were only about 800 Jews in *Butrimonys* in September 1941, when the local police chief ordered them rounded up in the local primary school so they could be killed the following day. The murders were planned to be carried out by the Third Platoon of the TDA, the National Labor Defense Battalion, born from the insurgents who had battled the Soviets as they retreated from Lithuania in 1941.

The Third Platoon were busy murdering the  
(Continued on page 7)



Nazi hunter Efraim Zuroff, right, and Lithuanian journalist Ruta Vanagaite in Jerusalem in this undated photo.

Lithuania in 2016. It became a bestseller, dividing families and sparking an establishment backlash so intense that the publishers withdrew all of Vanagaite’s books from sale, and she felt so threatened she fled the country. The book was published in English in March.

It will come as a shock to many to learn that the Holocaust in Lithuania — home to 220,000 Jews before the Nazi occupation, of whom perhaps five percent survived — is indeed “hidden.” The beautiful countryside is invisibly scarred by dozens of pits, some of them unmarked, where thousands of Jews were slaughtered, dumped, covered with lime and rubble and left to rot. Lithuania’s earth is soiled with the blood and stench of mass murder perpetrated in large part by Lithuanian citizens, many of whom have never been identified, let alone arrested and prosecuted for their terrible crimes.

Zuroff, the Nazi hunter, had been trying to bring Lithuanian Holocaust criminals to justice for years. The great-uncle for whom he was named, Efraim Zar, lived in Vilnius, Lithuania’s capital, where he was seized and killed in 1941.

“There’s no question in my mind that trials have a much stronger impact than history books,” Zuroff says. But the Lithuanians, flush from their liberation from Soviet rule, were in no mood to spoil the celebration of their newfound independence by arresting elderly citizens.

Zuroff had never met Vanagaite until she discovered that her grandfather and her uncle may

who was taken by surprise.

“No,” she replied. “I am doing it because I discovered that some of my relatives had most likely taken part in the Holocaust. And I feel that in remembering and honoring the Jews murdered, I will to some extent make amends for their crime.”

Her response rendered Zuroff speechless. “She was the first person I had ever met in Lithuania who admitted a thing like this,” he says.

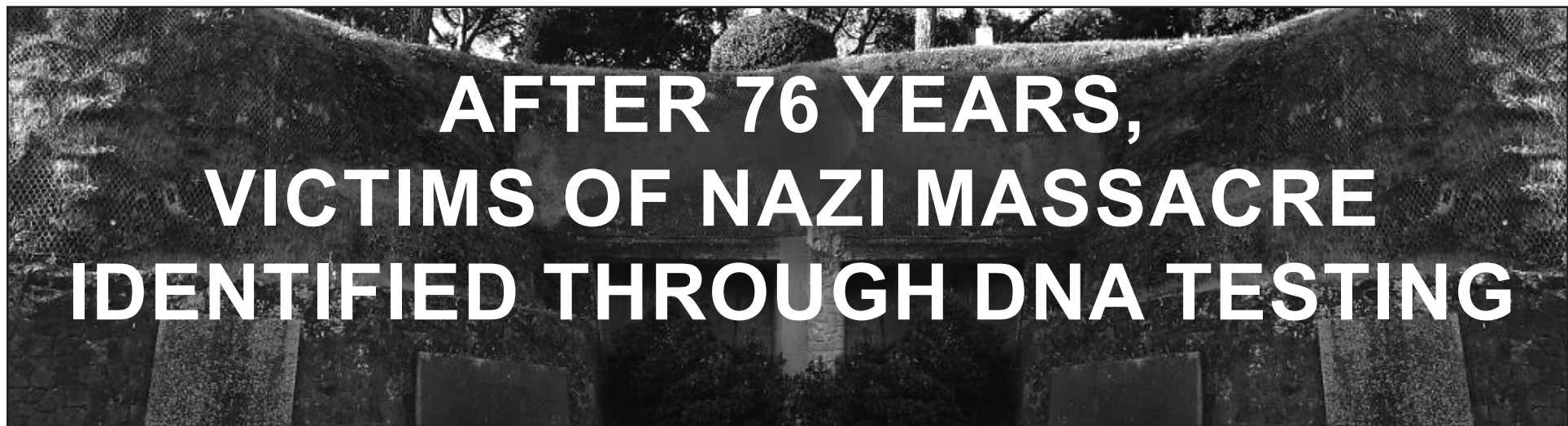
## AN UNLIKELY ROAD TRIP

Vanagaite began wondering what it would be like to travel with Zuroff to the sites of the mass murders and try to find the last living eyewitnesses to the terrible events that had taken place there in the 1940s. Zuroff was thinking along similar lines. Now that he had finally found a well-known, eloquent Lithuanian who admitted her family’s role in the Holocaust, perhaps her people would listen.

“I thought maybe if the message comes from an ethnic Lithuanian, Ruta Vanagaite, not Jewish, no connection — maybe this will finally convince them of the truth and the accuracy of the real narrative of the Holocaust,” Zuroff says.

They were perfectly matched for the task at hand. Zuroff carried in his head the details of the terrible events they were trying to uncover, but he would always be an outsider, a foreign Jew with an American accent and an imposing phys-





**W**hen David Reicher was three months old, his father left the house and never came back. Now, after 76 years, Reicher, an Israeli citizen born in Italy in 1943, has finally learned his father’s fate.

Marian Reicher, a Polish Jew, was among the 335 civilians murdered in the *Fosse Ardeatine* massacre on March 24, 1944. The indiscriminate mass killings, which targeted Jews and Gentiles of all ages, from all professions and socioeconomic groups, were carried out by the Nazis as a reprisal for a partisan bomb attack on an SS regiment the day before which killed 33 SS police.

Marian was among the eight victims of the massacre that until recently had still not been identified. But in April of this year, Reicher received a phone call from Alessandro Veltri, the army general in charge of the General Commissariat for Honors to the Fallen, an agency serving directly under the Defense Minister. Reicher’s DNA, it was revealed, matched that of one of the unidentified victims buried in the *Fosse Ardeatine* quarries, where the group had been shot point-blank, execution-style, to save ammunition.

Finally knowing what happened to his father was a great relief for Reicher.

“It was a very happy day for me,” Reicher told *The Times of Israel*. “I’m sorry that my mother and sister, who died years ago, could not know my father’s fate.”

The identification was made thanks to the forensic investigations unit of the Carabinieri military police. In 2009, the unit archived biological data from the unidentified victims’ remains to be later compared with samples from surviving family members.

“It’s very important for Holocaust survivors to know what happened to their relatives,” said Reicher. “Maybe some of them may still be alive, [and] every year on the day of a deceased relative’s death, Jews light a candle in their memory.

“Not knowing the date of my father’s death, I used to light a candle on Holocaust Remembrance Day. Now I know the exact date when I can honor him,” said Reicher.

For their massacre, the Nazis first selected Italian prisoners already slated for execution. When that wasn’t enough — they had decided on 10 reprisal murders for each SS man killed — they expanded their criteria to include others imprisoned for long sentences or serious crimes.

They finally filled the quota by adding Jews in Nazi custody who were waiting to be deported from Italy by way of the *Fossoli* concentration camp near *Modena*. In all, 76 Jews were killed; it was the largest massacre of Jews in Italy dur-

ing the Holocaust.

After the war, the *Fosse Ardeatine* — a group of unused ancient quarries located near the Via Ardeatina — were transformed into a shrine and national monument.

Reicher’s family had gone to great lengths to find out what happened to Marian. His wife’s cousin took a genealogy course and searched online, as well as in the archives of the Italian Red Cross and the International Tracing Service in *Bad Arolsen*, Germany. The family acquired other documents from Yad Vashem.

“My father was deported to a field near *Bassano del Grappa* in northern Italy on January 20, 1944,” Reicher said. “The *Santa Croce* detention camp was mentioned in another document dating back to November 1944. My name appears on that list next to the names of my mother and my sister Rosetta, but there is no reference to my father.”

Reicher had believed his father was killed in the *Fosse Ardeatine* massacre, but he hadn’t been sure. The DNA test confirmed his suspicions.

Marian Reicher was born in 1901 in the town of *Kolomyia*, which was then Poland but is now located in modern-day Ukraine.

He became a dentist and married Ethel Lachs. The two fled to Italy during World War II.

“My parents arrived at the *Enego* camp near *Vicenza* on November 25, 1941,” Reicher said. “My sister was born on January 8, 1942, in *Bassano del Grappa*. My mother was very young when she became a widow with two children to take care of. It was a trauma, she never wanted to talk about it.”

In 1945 the surviving family moved to Israel, settling in Tel Aviv. Reicher got married, had three children, and now has eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Reicher recently contacted the Mausoleum of the *Fosse Ardeatine* and spoke with Colonel Roberto Esposito, an officer of the General Commissariat for Honors to the Fallen.

“Some documents place Marian Reicher in Rome during the massacre period. We asked David to send us a swab with his DNA to compare it with victims’ DNA, and so we came to

the identification,” says Esposito.

Recently, science and technology have helped identify another victim of the *Fosse Ardeatine* massacre. Heinz-Erich Tuchmann was a Jew from *Magdebourg*, Germany, who moved to Yugoslavia in 1930 for business and then to Italy. In this case, too, DNA played a crucial role. Tuchmann’s nephew, Jeremy Tuckman, who currently lives in England, provided a biological sample for comparison.

In the late 1940s, Tuckman’s father Frederick heard that his brother had been killed in the *Fosse Ardeatine* massacre, but the DNA test that could corroborate that information hadn’t been invented yet.

Recently, Italian researcher Michela Mecocci traced Tuchmann, who was on the list



David Reicher with his wife, Rebecca, June 2020.

of victims yet to be officially identified, back to his living relatives while she was making a documentary on the massacre. Mecocci gave the General Commissariat the results of her research and put the officials in contact with Tuckman.

“I wasn’t sure that my uncle was one of the victims of the massacre,” says Tuckman. “I was very happy to receive this news, which represents the confirmation of what my father was looking for all his life. Identification through DNA testing has brought our family peace, happiness and relief for the conclusion of the quest. My uncle found dignity and recognition in death.”

When pandemic-related restrictions permit it, a public ceremony will be held, and attended by Reicher, Tuckman, their relatives and Italian Defense Minister Lorenzo Guerini.

BY GIOVANNI VIGNA, *The Times of Israel*



# NAZI HUNTER TEAMS UP WITH LITHUANIAN JOURNALIST TO INVESTIGATE HOLOCAUST CRIMES

(Continued from page 5)

Jews of *Alytus*, another town nearby. They hurried over. The Jews were stripped naked in the town square and marched off to a clearing in the nearby *Klidzionys* Forest.

“The pits in the forest had already been dug; everyone knew they would shoot the Jews, and were waiting for it to happen,” Antanas Kmieliauskas, one of Lithuania’s most famous artists, nine years old at the time of the massacre, told interviewers from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1998.

Kmieliauskas and his friends hid behind a house and watched as the Jews were led, naked, in groups of 10, to the edge of the pit and shot dead.

“After those shootings I had nightmares. About pits. Perhaps all the children had nightmares,” he said.

Before visiting the town, Vanagaite called on the artist, then 83, to see if there were any more details he remembered.

After the shootings, the children neared the scene to find “some people in the pit were still alive,” he recalled. One badly wounded man was trying to breathe through the blood blocking his nose. “The killers did not want to waste the bullets on the victim, so one of them went to the forest to get a stone.”

Kmieliauskas sketched the scene that had haunted him for so long and gave Vanagaite the drawings, but after telling her the final piece of the story, the artist was worried.

“Please, Ruta, don’t say that these people spoke Lithuanian. Don’t tell the story in the book,” he pleaded. “I love my country. I know it and you know it. Let’s not say it in public. Let’s not shit in our own nest.”

## TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT

The same reluctance to air this dirtiest of laundry in public also haunted Vanagaite’s family. Ruta Vanagaite never met her aunt’s husband, Antanas. They emigrated after the war to the US, from where he sent her jeans and other prized Western contraband while Lithuania was part of the Soviet bloc. It was only after he died that she realized he had been the police chief in *Ponevezh*, home of the famous yeshiva, where more than 8,000 Jews were massacred by late August 1941. She still doesn’t know if he played any part in carrying out the Nazi orders to murder the town’s Jews and steal their property, which was distributed among the rest of the population, including household goods and clothing.

“I am wondering whether my grandmother received anything? Did my mother, who was 14,

ever wear any of these clothes?” she asks.

Vanagaite’s doubts about her uncle hover over thousands more Lithuanian officials, including some of the country’s national heroes, lauded, as he was, for leading the insurgency against the Soviet occupiers as they fled before the Nazi invasion in 1941. Bitterness against the Soviet occupation framed Lithuanians’ sense of gratitude to the Nazis for liberating them from Stalin. When the Nazis began rounding up the Jews as the price of their occupation, many Lithuanians went along. Decades later, the sufferings of the Jews appeared to pale in comparison to the many years of Soviet tyranny.

“The Nazis were there for a very short time, a very long time ago, and they actually didn’t do



Adolf Hitler shown in what is today called *Klaipeda*, Lithuania, in March 1939.

anything so bad for Lithuanians,” says Vanagaite. “Of course we had to give our products to the army, but there was no crime that people would remember. And the Jews were not our people.”

“Lithuanians don’t equate them. The Soviets were much worse. They were attacking us and the Nazis were attacking the Jews,” she says.

Vanagaite’s grandfather was a national hero, Jonas Vanagas, a political prisoner convicted of anti-Soviet activities, who died six months after he was sent to a gulag in 1945 for helping to drive out the Soviet invaders in 1941. There is no evidence to suggest that Vanagas was implicated in crimes against the Jews, but records show that Balys Simke, arrested and imprisoned with Vanagaite’s grandfather, helped force-march the Jews through *Ukmerge* to the prison where they were shot in September 1941 by the *Rollkommando Hamann*, a special unit made up of eight to 10 Germans and 80 Lithuanians who carried out mass killings across the Lithuanian countryside.

Even more controversial are the prominent nationalist leaders with blood on their hands, like Jonas Noreika, a key figure in the Lithuanian resistance to the Soviet occupation after World War II, who was implicated in Holocaust crimes. The Genocide and Resistance Research Center of Lithuania, funded by the government, officially exonerated Noreika. The center also disputed a list of 23,000 suspected Lithuanian Holocaust

criminals compiled by the Association of Lithuanian Jews in Israel, whittling it down to 2,055, then deleting it altogether from its publications.

“Part of society thinks they were perpetrators and part of society thinks they are heroes. Both are true,” Vanagaite says. “Noreika didn’t shoot anybody himself. But the question is: Did he know that signing the orders for the ghettoization of the Jews and redistributing Jewish property was ultimately part of the process of sending people to their death?”

“We don’t know what was happening in his head. Hitler didn’t shoot anybody personally. For Lithuanians it’s much safer to think that if they didn’t shoot, they are innocent, especially if they were fighting the Soviets after the Holocaust,” she says.

## MYTH OF “DOUBLE GENOCIDE”

Zuroff says the attitude to the Holocaust of the modern Lithuanian state, and most of its citizens, is so warped by Soviet oppression that it has created a myth of “double genocide” in which the crimes of the Nazis and the Soviets are equated.

Even more dangerous, he says, are the efforts of Lithuania and other former Eastern Bloc states to try and export this double genocide doctrine to official Holocaust memorials and education in the rest of Europe.

“The Soviets were in Lithuania much longer and the Nazis were there relatively briefly, but if a country has a choice between being a country of perpetrators or a country of victims, it’s a no-brainer. Of course they want to be a country of victims,” Zuroff says. “I do not want to in any way minimize Communist crimes against the peoples of Eastern Europe, but the double genocide theory is very dangerous. It’s undermining. It’ll eventually change when people understand the truth.”

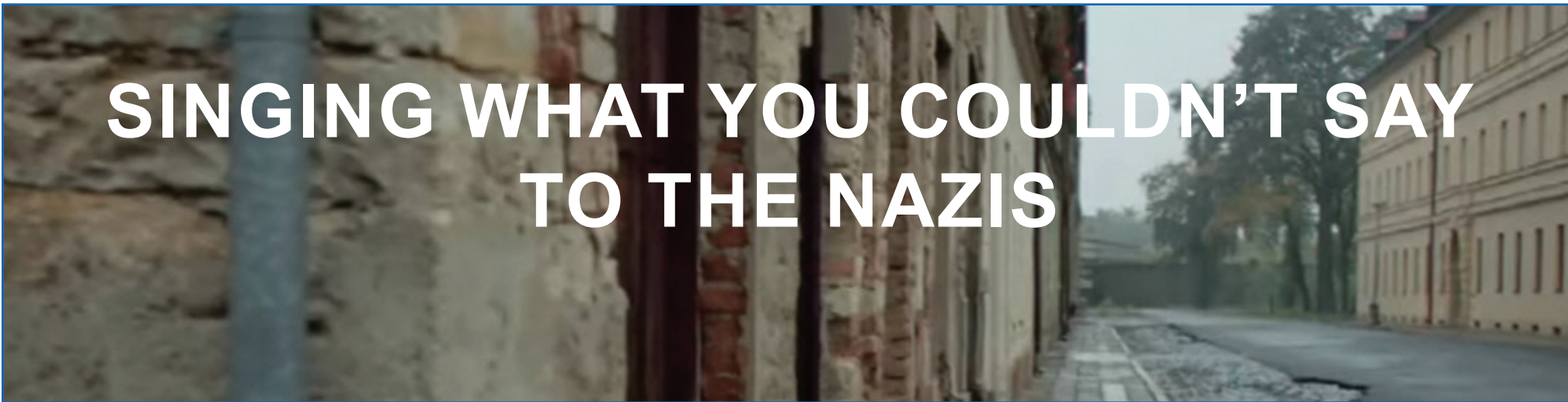
“But they also deserve to have their victims remembered and to get compensation from the Russians,” he says. “Part of the problem is that the Russians’ hands are not clean. They didn’t do anything to make up for it. They didn’t admit their guilt, they didn’t compensate the victims, they didn’t express regret for all the horrible things that the Soviet Union did — and it was horrible, absolutely horrible.”

Vanagaite says she understands the reluctance of Lithuanians to confront their complex past, but hopes that their book has started to thaw long-held convictions, especially as the people involved fade into history.

“Losing your hero or losing your image of the past or the history of your country is losing part of yourself,” she says. “All the people who are sensitive about the fathers and grandfathers — my generation — are dying away. So the ice will melt. Unfortunately, I don’t think it will melt in my lifetime.”

BY MATTHEW KALMAN, *The Times of Israel*





# SINGING WHAT YOU COULDN'T SAY TO THE NAZIS

**H**ow did the Jews of Terezin concentration camp perform Verdi's *Requiem* Mass? How did the hungry, sick and dying Jews of Terezin manage to learn Verdi's *Requiem* in the midst of such horrid conditions? How did the Jews of Terezin summon the strength to perform this difficult *Requiem* Mass not once or twice but fully 16 times? And how did the Jews of Terezin deliver their final performance — on June 23, 1944 — for an audience of Nazi captors and members of the International Red Cross?

More than seven decades later, answers still elude us, and the scope and bravery of these Jewish heroes surpass any explanation. But you definitely feel their notes, their abilities and their achievements vibrating through the screen. And you are moved to participate in this astonishing, amazing documentary film called *Defiant Requiem: Verdi at Terezin*, a concert-drama narrated by Bebe Neuwirth.



Rafael Schächter.

Obviously, there are endless touching, painful and tear-jerking stories of inconceivable horrors and heroics in every aspect of the gruesome actualities of the Holocaust. *Defiant Requiem* shares one of these amazing stories. The film, directed by Doug Shultz, is anchored by two amazing concerts, both of Verdi's *Requiem* Mass.

The *Messa da Requiem* is a musical setting of the Catholic funeral mass (*Requiem*) for four soloists, double choir and orchestra by Giuseppe Verdi. It was composed in memory of Alessandro Manzoni, an Italian poet and novelist whom Verdi admired. According to Wikipedia, the work was at one time referred to as the *Manzoni Requiem*.

The original concert took place in the spring of 1944, led by conductor Raphael Schächter, a prom-

ising young Czech pianist and conductor who was deported to *Terezin* concentration camp in 1941. While there, he formed a choral group of fellow prisoners and organized musical performances. Ultimately, he came up with the idea of training 150 concentration camp singers to perform Verdi's *Requiem* Mass.

Murry Sidlin, a current professor of conducting at the Catholic University of America, was in disbelief when he learned the story of what Schächter had done. Sidlin says, "I have conducted the *Requiem* all over the world. There are passages that are treacherously difficult. It is a significant achievement even in optimum conditions — where the singers are experienced, well rested and healthy. The *Requiem* demands all your concentration and energy. To come to rehearsals after a cup of gruel and a day of slave labor — I don't know how they did it."

*Terezin* was a ghetto and transit camp in German-occupied Czechoslovakia. It usually housed around 60,000 inmates, most of whom would be deported to extermination camps such as *Treblinka* and *Auschwitz*. Of the more than 150,000 Jews sent to *Terezin*, only about 17,000 survived the war.

*Terezin* also became a transit hub for Jewish intellectual titans of politics, music and academia. A vibrant subcultural scene flourished at the camp amid the desperation, disease and death. Wikipedia tell us that lectures, concerts and plays were performed late into the evenings, all done in secret, within the *Terezin* barracks.

In the spring of 1943, Schächter formed and led the camp's choir, "choosing to teach his choral students Verdi's *Requiem*." The Verdi Mass music was taught and learned by all 150 prisoners by rote, note by note from a single score sheet, smuggled into the camp originally by Schächter. After weeks and weeks of hard labor during the day along with constant starvation every evening, these dedicated singers tackled Verdi's most demanding choral composition.

Marianka May, a *Terezin* survivor, said, "At one rehearsal, Schächter made an announcement. He said, 'I have a dream to put on some very special music by Verdi, that has never been sung in such a place as this before.'"

Several singers who survived the camp recall in the documentary those late-night practice sessions; "how Schächter's demand for excellence and the music itself made the unbearable days in the camp more tolerable."

Schächter told his choir that "we would sing to the Nazis what we couldn't say to them," according to May, "The Latin words of the *Requiem* reminded them that there is an ultimate judge, and one day they (the Nazis) will all answer to that judge."

It was no easy task for Schächter to keep the choir going; every day the Nazis would make "a new

selection" of Jews who would be deported to *Auschwitz* from the camp. In September 1943, the selection process wiped out nearly all 150 members of the choir. Schächter being so dedicated to the mission of conducting his choir and the meaning behind Verdi's Mass, he forced himself to start over with an all-new group of singers.

In one notorious incident in June 1944, the Germans invited the International Red Cross to inspect the *Terezin* camp, which they retrofitted and dressed up for the occasion. This was despite the fact that just days before, and after the choir had sung the Ver-



Still from the film *Defiant Requiem*.

Mass, the Nazis had dispatched many of the same choir members and thousands of other inmates off to the *Auschwitz* concentration camp.

What was witnessed at the *Terezin* concentration camp provides not only a public documentation and accounting of how the Nazis wanted to deceive the world regarding the treatment of the Jews in their captivity. The archived footage and survivor accounts in the film prove this point.

The modern Verdi *Requiem* concert was performed in December 2010, when conductor Murry Sidlin realized his long-held dream of bringing the choral masterpiece back to *Terezin* for a fitting acknowledgement, tribute and reenactment of Schächter's original choral concert.

The film documentary *Defiant Requiem* chronicles these two choral concert events through the use of archived photos, animation, accounts and descriptions from survivors, and the historical background of the *Terezin* concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. The film brings to light the mar-



efforts of the prisoners who were trying to defy their Nazi captors. Singing the Verdi's *Requiem* while utilizing the present orchestra and choir confirmed just how motivated the *Terezin* prisoners were to relay their defiant story behind Schächter's choral work.

May reflected, "Being in the choir gave us the wonderful ability to think about the next rehearsal, the next performance — it reminded us that we come from a normal world. It was soul-saving. I survived the war and I still have my soul."

Schächter's choir gave 16 performances between September 1943 and June 1944. On October 17, 1944, a transport took almost the entire choir, including Schächter, to Auschwitz. Ms. Fantlova, another *Terezin* choir survivor, sat opposite Schächter on the way to Auschwitz. "There were about 130 of us locked in the same truck," she says. "The doors were bolted, there was no air. The journey took three days, and no one knew where we were going."

She recalls Schächter pulling a tin of sardines from his sock and asking her to mix it up. "This will be my last supper," he told her. "I thought he was being a bit of a pessimist," says Ms. Fantlova. "After all, we didn't know what was going to happen — it might not be so bad."

Unfortunately, Schächter perished on a death march in the spring of 1945 — only one month before the liberation of Czechoslovakia. For the choirs of *Terezin*, singing the "*Requiem*" was an act of moral resistance. The condemned sang in defiance of their captors and the fate that awaited them. "We rehearsed without sufficient food, clothing or sleep," says Ms. May. "But those in the choir had a reason to sing the music and to stay alive."

Eventually Sidlin teamed up with director Doug Shultz to film the memorial 2010 concert in *Terezin* with a renowned group of international singers and musicians.

The film uses elegantly animated sequences to evoke the horrific world of *Terezin* without relying on grisly newsreel footage. The interviews are well filmed, and the concert sequences build genuine intensity. The film pays a moving tribute to Schächter, a forgotten figure who failed to survive the war but embodied absolute courage and undeniable commitment to defy his Nazi captors that will continue to inspire for generations to come.

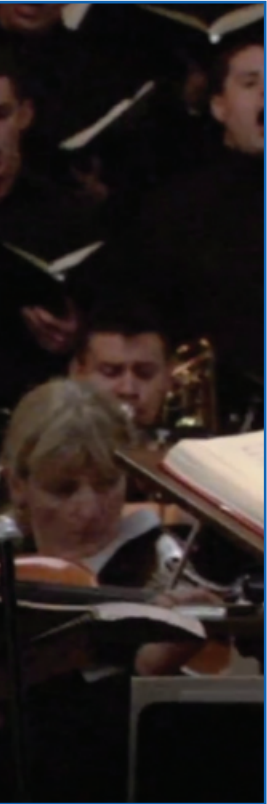
The sheer force of so many musicians delivering Verdi's Mass in the basement of today's *Terezin* emotionally engulfs the listener, as it was intended to do.

But add to this powerful music the imagery: the sight of *Terezin* survivors on screen watching the 2010 concert and recalling what it was like to perform Verdi *Requiem* is simply nothing but inspiring.

Survivors didn't know if they would live to see another day, yet believed in the power of music as a means of survival.

It's a proud statement of faith in the face of gross atrocities and a profound remembrance of those who were murdered just for being Jewish.

BY JEFFERY GIESENER, San Diego Jewish World



SAVE THE DATE

*Sunday* **October 25 2020, 4pm**  
**Seattle Virtual Gala**

Honoring **Nancy E. Powell** American Society for  
Yad Vashem Benefactor and Advocate of  
Holocaust Education and Teacher Training

*Sunday* **November 8 2020, 4pm**  
**National Virtual Gala, New York, New York**

Honoring **Avner Shalev** Chairman of the  
Yad Vashem Directorate  
**Shaya Ben Yehuda** Managing Director  
of the International Relations Division at  
Yad Vashem

*Wednesday* **December 2 2020, 6pm**  
**Los Angeles Virtual Gala**

Honoring **Susanne Czucker** Founding Benefactor  
of Yad Vashem and American Society for  
Yad Vashem National Board Member  
**Todd Morgan** Chairman and CEO of  
Bel Air Investment Advisors and Founder  
of The Morgan Aging with Dignity Fund  
**Thomas M. Priselac** President and CEO  
of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center

For further information about NY events, please contact  
Rachelle Grossman, Event Manager  
**rgrossman@yadvashemusa.org | 212-220-4304 ext. 206**

For further information about Seattle or LA events,  
please contact Zohar Nir, Event Coordinator  
**znir@yadvashemusa.org | 424-273-4460 ext.2**

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



# FROM PALESTINE TO JAIL IN MAURITIUS

On December 5, 1940, 1,580 Jewish men, women and children were taken from the *Atlit* detention center near *Haifa*, transferred onto two ships, and deported to the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean.

On their arrival in the small British colony 17 days later, the refugees — who had fled Nazi-occupied Europe three months prior — were taken to the *Beau Bassin* central prison, where they were held behind bars for nearly five years.

The deportation was the first and only occasion during the war on which Jewish refugees who had reached the coastline of Palestine were forcibly removed from the country. The decision of the British Mandate authorities reflected both a determination to deter illegal immigration to Palestine and a fear that Nazi spies might lurk among the ranks of the refugees. At the same, however, the Haganah, the paramilitary organization representing the Jews in Mandatory Palestine, was equally resolved to prevent the deportation — a desire which was to have tragic and bloody consequences.

As the 75th anniversary of their release was recently marked in a virtual commemoration event, the refugees’ largely forgotten story is being pieced together by Israeli academic Dr. Roni Mikel-Arieli from both colonial records and the memoirs, letters and oral histories of the detainees, as well as the testimonies of local Mauritians.

“It’s very much a marginalized story in Israel,” Mikel-Arieli told *The Times of Israel* from Washington, D.C., where she has been conducting her research on the refugees. “Not a lot of people know about it. When I talked to friends, my mother and father, and grandmother, they had never heard about it. I was born and raised in Israel, I’ve always been very much interested in the history of my country, and I am a Holocaust researcher, but I didn’t hear about this until I went to South Africa for my PhD research in 2014.”

The refugees who were deported to Mauritius were part of a larger group of 3,500 Jews who left Bratislava, the capital of the pro-Nazi Slovak Republic, on September 5, 1940, aboard two ships: the *Uranus* and *Helios*. A week later, the refugees arrived at *Tulcea*, Romania, where they were transferred onto three ships: the *Pacific*, *Milos* and *Atlantic*. The group — which included Jews from Vienna, Prague, *Brno*, Berlin, *Munich* and *Danzig* — was highly diverse. Most of the Viennese men had been rounded up and sent to *Dachau* after *Kristallnacht*; their release had been conditional on their leaving Europe immediately.

But escape from the Nazis came at a high price.

“It was a physically and mentally hard journey,” says Mikel-Arieli. “It was very traumatic.” Although conditions were poor on all three ships,

those aboard the *Atlantic* were particularly dire. The boat trailed behind the *Milos* and *Pacific* by two weeks; when it ran out of coal, parts of the actual ship were burned in order to fuel its journey. Some passengers died aboard the boat and their bodies thrown overboard.

**“A GREAT DEAL OF TROUBLE”**

Nor did arrival in Palestine bring relief. The refugees had sung “Hatikva,” Israel’s future national anthem, as they finally caught sight of Mount Carmel, but their reception was a cold one.

“They were received not only by the British authorities but by the Jewish Yishuv authorities

with indifference and cynicism. This comes across very strongly in the refugees’ testimony,” says Mikel-Arieli.

The British had, in fact, been planning for the refugees’ arrival almost from the moment they set sail from Bratislava. In October 1940, the Colonial Secretary, George Lloyd, requested the governor of Mauritius to accommodate 4,000 Jewish refugees he believed were heading for Palestine. In some respects, Lloyd’s attitude was unsurprising: just a year before, the British government’s White Paper had set strict limits on the number of Jewish migrants who would be allowed into Palestine.

But enforcement of the quota wasn’t his only concern. The refugees, Lloyd warned the Mauritius governor, should be held in a camp, behind barbed wire and kept under constant guard.

“The problem of illegal immigration into Palestine which has caused a good deal of trouble in the past, has once more become acute. [...] All these immigrants now come from enemy or enemy occupied countries. We have no check whatever over them,” the Colonial Office suggested in a confidential telegram in November 1940 which Mikel-Arieli has uncovered.

The telegram, she believes, provides “a window into the British Mandate authorities’ perception of the Jewish refugees not merely as illegal immigrants but as a possible threat.”

The commander of British military forces in the Middle East similarly warned that it was unlikely that the Nazis would not attempt to plant agents among the refugees. Such fears were not confined to Palestine: in June 1940, as the danger of a German invasion loomed large, the British government had ordered the temporary

internment of all “enemy aliens” in the UK, including German and Austrian Jewish refugees (although the process of releasing those, including Jews, who were not considered a danger was underway by this point).

The role of the Nazis in the refugees’ story is still shrouded in mystery. The three ships were chartered in September 1940 by the Central Office for Jewish Emigration under its head, Berthold Storfer. Storfer, an Austrian Jewish financier, is a controversial figure who worked closely with Adolf Eichmann and has been accused of walking “a thin line between assistance and collaboration.” (He was later murdered at Auschwitz.)

“We know that the Nazis were involved, and we know that if they weren’t, the departure of the Jews wouldn’t have been possible at that point,” argues Mikel-Arieli.

The attitude of the British authorities toward the refugees affected that of the Yishuv, or Jewish establishment in Mandatory Palestine. It did not want to break British law by encouraging illegal immigration nor to be considered as in any way collaborating with the Nazis. “For the Yishuv, it was a headache,” Mikel-Arieli believes.

**CHURCHILL’S RESERVATIONS**

The British government was, however, not entirely at one in its approach, and there was an undercurrent of disquiet. The prime minister, Winston Churchill, attempted to soften Lloyd’s orders that the refugees be held behind barbed wire, warning him: “We cannot have a British *Dachau*.”

But Churchill’s request — that the Jews be treated as refugees and not criminals — was effectively ignored.

The Cabinet also raised concerns when Lloyd raised the prospect of deporting the refugees to the British colony of Trinidad in the Caribbean. Mauritius, unlike Trinidad, was not on America’s doorstep and was considered a rather more discreet location to lock up refugees.

But, as the British planned the deportation, the Haganah readied to stop them. Refugees from the *Milos* and *Pacific* had already been transferred to another ship, the *Patria*, which, it was planned, would deport all 3,500 Jews to Mauritius.

As the *Atlantic* neared *Haifa*, the Haganah decided to attempt to scuttle the *Patria* by setting off explosives on board. Although it had attempted to pass word to the refugees already aboard the *Patria* that they should jump from the ship at a designated time, the attempted sabotage went horribly wrong. Some 260 refugees, and a number of British officers, died in the explosion.

“I think the perception was that we have to stop the deportation at any cost,” says Mikel-Arieli.

The explosion on board the *Patria* did have an impact, however. In compliance with international law, the British decided to allow those refugees who had survived the blast — some 1,700 in total — to remain in Palestine.

The *Atlantic* passengers were not so lucky, however. While they were initially taken with their

(Continued on page 12)



A sewing workshop in the men's section in the *Beau Bassin* prison, Mauritius.



# NAZIS BOASTED ABOUT SIX MILLION HOLOCAUST VICTIMS: BUT IT WAS A JEW WHO FIRST CITED THAT FIGURE

On January 21, 1944, about a year and a half before the end of World War II, a dramatic item was published on the front page of *Haaretz*. Under the headline “Six million Jewish victims,” it brought unusual testimony for the time about the number of Jews murdered in the Holocaust. “Six million — that’s the calculation made by two young men in a meeting with members of their party organizations in Palestine,” the report said. “With pencil in hand they counted the number of victims in each country and reached an astonishing number — six million Jews were murdered and killed and died in Nazi-occupied countries in death camps, concentration camps, labor camps and the various ghettos,” the article said.

Despite its importance, the piece was published in a marginal spot on the page, between other items and adjacent to congratulatory messages and an ad for a hotel.

The item was discovered last year by historian Joel Rappel of Bar-Ilan University’s Institute of Holocaust Research. Rappel embarked on a pioneering archival journey in an attempt to discover the first time that someone used the number six million in regard to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, “the horrifying and familiar number that has long since become an icon,” he said. “Like every Israeli who grew up in this country, I knew from a young age that the number six million is always mentioned in connection to the extermination of Jews in the Holocaust,” says Rappel, 73, who lives in Yavne. After reading hundreds of books and articles about the Holocaust, and even perusing many documents that have never been published as part of his work as the director of the Elie Wiesel Archive at Boston University, Rappel realized that despite the research controversy regarding the precise number of victims, “in our consciousness the number remains six million.”

The website of the Yad Vashem states that “all the serious research confirms that the number of victims ranges between five and six million.” Various studies cited by Yad Vashem indicate different numbers based on population censuses from before and after the war, and on Nazi documents containing data about expulsions and extermination.

In the Yad Vashem database there are about 6.5 million listings of victims, but they include double entries — people who appear on more than one list. According to Yad Vashem’s estimates, once the double listings are removed, the database contains about 4.8 million names. The rest of the names have yet to be discovered, and may never be known.

Yet the question remained: Who was the first to mention the number six million, even before the historical studies were conducted and before the

Pages of Testimony were collected by Yad Vashem? According to the remembrance center, the number was etched in people’s consciousness because of a statement by Adolf Eichmann, who served as an “expert” on Jewish affairs in the Nazi regime. In August 1944 he boasted about it to his colleagues, estimating the number of Jews murdered in the camps at four million, with two million others murdered by other methods. This testimony was revealed at the *Nuremberg Trials*, held in Germany immediately after the war.

Rappel, who refuses to accept facts without checking their source, looked into it and found a different answer. It turns out that Eichmann was



The front page of *Haaretz* from January 21, 1944. The “Six million” article is in the left column, above the announcements in outlined boxes.

preceded by a Jewish Holocaust survivor, who early in 1944 reported the number six million. The man’s name, Eliezer Unger, is not familiar to the general public. Unger was a prominent activist in the Hashomer Hadati religious Zionist youth movement in Poland. At the height of the war, after the Warsaw ghetto uprising, he crossed the border to Slovakia and then through Hungary on his way to Palestine. When he left Europe he vowed “to shock the entire world, all of humanity and our brothers the Children of Israel in particular.”

A few months ago, Rappel found a formative document connected to Unger in the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem. As he puts it, it was “a single document that brought about a major change in direction in the research.” It is the minutes of a meeting, under the headline “A statement by Eliezer Unger at a meeting of all the pioneering organizations, on January 19, 1944.”

It turns out that two days after arriving in Palestine, when the Holocaust was still raging on European soil, Unger had difficult and painful things to say in the presence of the country’s Zionist leadership.

“Polish Jewry is extinct and no longer exists. Polish soil is a sacred grave of Polish and European Jewry. I could have brought you a sacred gift: a clod of earth from Polish soil suffused with the blood of a nation, which has died a martyr’s death,” was how Unger began. Later he mentioned the specific number, noting that other reports say that the number of murdered Jews was “only” two million.

“In early April 1943, on the clandestine radio, we heard about the outcry of Rabbi Stephen Wise [one of the leaders of U.S. Jewry] about two million Jews who were exterminated in Poland. We heard and were surprised: Didn’t the world know as yet that the number of the nation’s dead has already reached six million?” he said.

Several hours after his first speech, Unger also spoke at the convention of *Hakibbutz Hameuhad* kibbutz movement, which convened at Kibbutz *Givat Brenner*. There he cried out that “Six million martyrs are gone.” Two days later, his words made it to the front page of *Haaretz*.

Yes, a year and a half before the end of World War II — and before hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews were murdered — it was a Jewish Zionist and not a Nazi officer who mentioned the number of Jews murdered in the Holocaust, which later became a symbol.

But his words did not make much of an impression. Rappel’s father, who knew Unger personally, told his son how Unger “went from one synagogue to another, mounted the dais, with and without permission, and cried out on behalf of the Jews who still remained alive in Europe.” In most of them, unfortunately, they didn’t want to hear his words and “threw him out of the synagogue — literally and physically,” says Rappel.

How did Unger know about the outcome of the Holocaust in real time, before the killing had ended? “At the time the number six million was the accepted number of European Jews,” says Rappel. He found reinforcement for his claim in other newspapers, where they warned of the fate of “six million Jews,” even after Unger had spoken.

About 15 years later, during Eichmann’s trial, chief prosecutor Gideon Hausner said that “In the consciousness of the nation the number six million has become sanctified.” But he added: “It’s not so simple to prove that. We did not use this number in any official document, but it became sanctified.” Now, thanks to Rappel, historical research have added another layer for understanding the context for the number.

BY OFER ADERET, *Haaretz*



# FROM PALESTINE TO JAIL IN MAURITIUS

(Continued from page 10)

fellow refugees to *Atlit*, 10 days later, on December 5, the British carried out their threat to deport them. They had been warned the previous evening to be packed and ready to leave the following morning.

The refugees decided not to go without a fight: They refused to pack and many did not dress, believing that the British soldiers would be embarrassed by naked women refusing to leave the detention center. The authorities were not deterred, though, and the refugees, many of them still undressed, were taken to the ships which waited to deport them to Mauritius.

“It was a very violent deportation and a lot of the refugees resisted,” says Mikel-Arieli.

## HARSH CONDITIONS

In Mauritius itself, the ground had been prepared. Detainees at the Central Prison of *Beau Bassin* were removed to free up space for the refugees. When they arrived, the men were separated from the women and children, who were taken to a newly installed camp adjoining the prison. Meanwhile, new regulations were passed to prevent the refugees from challenging their detention in the local courts and barring local people from directly contacting them.

The first 18 months of the refugees’ time in Mauritius were particularly harsh. They could not leave the camp and there was little by way of family life. Indeed, their detention, combined with the authorities’ insistence that the refugees would never be allowed to enter Palestine, proved devastating for some. Although unrecorded on any official documents, a number of refugees died by suicide. In total, 128 refugees did not survive their time on Mauritius, and are buried at the St. Martin Jewish cemetery on the island. One particularly tragic case concerned an artist, Fritz Haendel, who hanged himself in his cell; his body was discovered by his wife when she came to tell him that she had just been told by the camp’s doctor that she was pregnant.

At the outset of the detention, the British divided the refugees into groups according to their nationality and asked them to elect a represen-

tative. Over time, a degree of trust was built between the detainees and the commanders of the camp and local authorities. This reflected both the refugees’ cooperative attitude and the authorities’ realization that there were no enemy agents in the detainees’ ranks.

Thus in 1942, conditions were significantly relaxed, with some of the detainees permitted to work outside the camp and separated husbands and wives able to meet for a couple of hours each week. The refugees developed a rich cultural, political and social life. They established workshops, a Zionist association, schools and two synagogues.

During the last year of their detention, the authorities permitted groups of refugees to leave the prison and vacation at a summer camp on the island.

The refugees were, moreover, not without friends and supporters. South Africa’s Jewish community established a special committee, sent supplies, including religious items and books, and bought products made by the refugees in their workshops. An attempt by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies to send a delegation in January 1941 to visit the prison was rebuffed by the British authorities. Attempts to negotiate the refugees’ release were similarly unsuccessful. The detainees, the British insisted, were illegal immigrants interned for committing a crime.

The refugees also later testified to the help they received from the local Mauritian population. Made aware of their imminent arrival, local people rented boats, waved at the dockside and lined the roads to welcome the refugees. They also collected donations and clothes for the detainees. When conditions were relaxed and refugee artists staged an exhibition of their works, local people purchased some of their artwork.

The refugees’ arrival was “a very unusual event for this small island,” says Mikel-Arieli, adding that they were “received with open arms.”

Back in Palestine, however, Jewish institutions ignored telegrams from the detainees asking them to intervene on their behalf. When Moshe Sharett (then Shertok), the head of the political department at the Jewish Agency, was questioned by the refugees’ families at public meetings, his response was that while the detainees were imprisoned, they were at least safe.

“Of course, the refugees in Mauritius were safer than those still in Europe,” says Mikel-Arieli. “That’s a fact and something that the detainees themselves [acknowledged].... Mauritius was not *Dachau* and it was not Auschwitz. It was something else.” Nonetheless, she continues, it ignores the fact that the refugees were detained



A group of men praying at one of the synagogues set up in the prison in *Beau Bassin*.

for nearly five years.

As the war drew to a close, on February 21, 1945, the governor of Mauritius informed the detainees’ leadership that the British authorities had decided to allow the refugees to enter Palestine. Six months later, the refugees left the island. Most took up the offer to go to Palestine, although some went to the US and Canada or returned to Europe.

BY ROBERT PHILPOT, *The Times of Israel*

## AUSCHWITZ MUSEUM FINDS SIX-YEAR-OLD VICTIM’S NAME INSCRIBED IN SHOES

On October 4, 1944, Ida Steinberg and her six-year-old son Amos arrived at Auschwitz. They had come to the extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland on a rail transport from *Theresienstadt*, the concentration camp in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia.

Following the *selektion* — the sorting of arrivals at Auschwitz into those who were to be immediately murdered and those who would be worked to death instead — both were sent to the gas chambers and killed. Ludwig, Ida’s husband and Amos’s father, arrived at Auschwitz on another transport. He survived the camp, started a new family and moved to Israel, where he now goes by Yehuda.

Three-quarters of a century have passed

since his wife and son were murdered. Last week, his family received unexpected news when the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum reported that it had discovered the name of Amos Steinberg, Yehuda’s son, inscribed inside the shoe of a victim that had been removed from exhibition for preservation work in a lab. The museum said it had likely been put there by his mother.

After the war, Yehuda married another Holocaust survivor and began raising a family with her in Prague. They moved to Israel in 1949, changing their last name to Shinan. They have two children: Leah Shinan is an urban planner and professor Avigdor Shinan is a scholar of Judaism.

Upon receiving the news, they opened the family photo albums to find three pictures of the family their father had before they were born. In

one, Amos is wearing a kippa, the traditional Jewish skullcap. In another, the father cradles his son with an affectionate gaze. In the third picture, the whole family is present, with Amos holding a doll.

Amos would have turned 82 this year. His half-sister Leah, hoping that he had somehow survived, searched for him for years. His father has filled a Page of Testimony at the Yad Vashem memorial museum in Jerusalem, a form the museum uses to document Holocaust victims. In the line asking the relationship with the victims, Yehuda wrote, “husband and father.” In the line for place and cause of death: “Auschwitz, gas chambers.”

BY OFER ADERET, *Haaretz*



# THE CONFERENCE THAT PAVED THE WAY TO THE MURDER OF MILLIONS

Two conferences can be considered most crucial to the development of the Holocaust scheme. The first one was the *Evian* Conference, convened in France in July 1938 to discuss the plight of the increasing numbers of Jewish refugees fleeing persecution by Nazi Germany.

The second was the *Wannsee* Conference, a one-day event that took place on January 20, 1942 — three and a half years later — on Hermann Göring's order issued to Reinhard Heydrich: "I hereby charge you with making all necessary preparations with regard to organizational and financial matters for bringing about a complete solution of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe."

As head of the Gestapo, Heydrich called together 15 heads of departments in *Wannsee* to outline to them the Final Solution of the Jewish question. What was at stake was the total elimination of European Jewry, from deportation to liquidation. With the complete cooperation of the department heads, the fate of the Jewish people was resolved in a few hours and the participants could sit down to a quiet and comfortable lunch.

The *Evian* Conference was meant to preclude the fateful *Wannsee* Conference. It was called at the unwilling initiative of US President Franklin Roosevelt shortly after the German *Anschluss* (Annexation) of Austria in March 1938. The march of the German troops from the border to Vienna was hailed by the delirious Austrians like a veritable victory march; they showered the German troops with flowers, embraces and kisses, while the bells of the Viennese St. Stephen Cathedral pealed hymns of victory to the accompaniment of a half-crazed crowd drunk with happiness. By the next day, March 16, the *New York Times* already reported that the Viennese Jewish quarter, *Leopoldstadt*, was invaded by triumphant crowds who chased the Jews out of their homes in their elegant dress, forcing them on their knees to scrub the sidewalks clean with their toothbrushes. The proceedings were supervised by stormtroopers wearing swastika armbands.

In one fateful day, 200,000 Austrian Jews were caught in the jaws of the power-hungry, Jew-hating monsters to whom nothing was sweeter than Jewish blood. Reports by the world press show that suicides by desperate Jews increased to 200 daily. Jewish physicians and other professionals were taken from their jobs to concentration camps without allowing them to part from their loved ones. Since events in Austria dominated the news, President Roosevelt and his American administration were forced to display some humanitarian consideration. In the light of newspaper headlines they were incapable of claiming any longer that the Western world was ignorant of Nazi designs vis-à-vis the Jews.

Shortly after the Anschluss, on March 22, President Roosevelt invited 33 states to work out a plan of aiding the political refugees of Germany and Austria within the limits of the countries' "existing legislation." From the outset, the president made it clear that the conference would not result in "an increase or revision of US immigration quotas," which stood at an annual figure of 27,370 for Germany and Austria combined — effectively less than a drop in the bucket. Some 3,000 Jews waited daily at the American consulate in Vienna, in vain; more than 10,000 requests lay on the desk of the Australian consul, unanswered. In the light of the US government's obdurate stand not to increase immigration quotas, numerous groups petitioned the White House that unused quotas from any country be made available for refugees of other countries. Although more than half a million petitions

ate human beings around our consulates in Vienna and other cities waiting in suspense for what happens in *Evian*."

The *Evian* Conference opened on July 6, 1938, and adjourned on July 15, 1938 — ten days of endless speeches. Here are some of the comments:

- Australia: "As we have no real racial problem, we are not desirous of importing one."
  - Peru: "The United States has given my country an example of caution and wisdom by its own immigration restrictions."
  - Canada: "We will welcome agricultural workers and none other."
  - France: Had reached its "saturation point" of refugees.
  - South American states: Could not accept "traders and intellectuals."
- And so on.



The English representative Lord Winterton delivering a speech at the *Evian* Conference in 1938.

reached the White House, no favorable reply was forthcoming.

No wonder Hitler arrogantly challenged the democratic nations in a memorable speech at *Königsberg* prior to the gathering in *Evian*: "I can only hope and expect that the other world, which has such deep sympathy for these criminals, will at least be generous enough to convert this sympathy into practical aid. We, on our part, are ready to put all these criminals at the disposal of these countries, for all I care, even on luxury ships."

Two weeks before the *Evian* Conference began, the *London Times* Vienna correspondent wrote, "Demoralization is pursued by constant arrest of the Jewish population. No specific charge is made, but men and women, young and old, are taken each day and each night from their homes or in the streets and carried off, the more fortunate to Austrian prisons, and the rest to *Dachau*.... There is a state of hopelessness and panic."

Two days before the conference, Anne McCormick wrote in the *New York Times*, "It is heartbreaking to think of the queues of desper-

Only the Dominican Republic expressed willingness to take in a few thousand Jews. Otherwise, the conference was not only a total, unmitigated failure; it was an outspoken disaster by pointing out to the Nazis that by their actions they were actually doing a favor to humanity. They were eliminating a segment of humanity that nobody wanted.

The German *Danziger Vorposten* stated triumphantly: "We see that one likes to pity the Jews as long as one can use this pity for wicked agitation against Germany, but that no state is prepared to fight the cultural disgrace of Europe by accepting a few thousand Jews. Thus the conference serves to justify Germany's policy against Jewry."

*Evian* was a direct stepping-stone to *Kristallnacht*, the Night of Broken Glass, three months later, when throughout Germany hundreds of synagogues and thousands of Jewish-owned stores were smashed to pieces — and to all that was forthcoming till the next conference of doom at *Wannsee* and beyond, to the ultimate liquidation of the six million.

BY ERVIN BIRNBAUM, *The Jerusalem Post*





# THE HOLLYWOOD MOGUL WHO SAVED JEWS FROM HITLER

**W**hy would a Hollywood mogul who produced films such as *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* become involved in bringing German Jewish refugees to the United States in the 1930s?

Because Carl Laemmle understood, earlier and more clearly than most Americans, that Adolf Hitler and the Nazis were preparing to carry out an all-out war against the Jews.

Laemmle emigrated to the United States from the German town of *Laupheim* in 1884. He was the founder, in 1912, of Universal Pictures, the studio responsible for such blockbuster films as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and the aforementioned horror classics.

Laemmle experienced the Nazi menace even before Adolf Hitler rose to power. The Berlin premiere of *All Quiet on the Western Front* in December 1930 was violently disrupted by a Nazi mob led by future propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels. They claimed the film's account of World War I made Germany look bad.

Laemmle repeatedly sought to raise the alarm about the dangers of Nazism. In January 1932 — more than a year before Hitler became chancellor of Germany — Laemmle outlined his fears in a letter to newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst, who had published occasional columns by Hitler.

"I am almost certain that Hitler's rise to power, because of his obvious militant attitude toward the Jews, would be the signal for a general physical onslaught on many thousands of defenseless Jewish men, women, and children in Germany, and possibly in Central Europe as well," Laemmle warned.

Soon after the Nazis came to power, a street which had been named after Laemmle in his hometown of *Laupheim* was renamed Hitler Street. Soon after that, Universal closed its offices in Germany.

Government-sponsored anti-Semitism became the norm in Hitler's Germany. German Jews looked desperately for countries that would admit them. But most doors were closed.

America's immigration system had operated since the 1920s according to restrictive quotas. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his administration took that harsh system and made it worse, by adding layers of bureaucracy and burdensome extra requirements in order to discourage and disqualify potential immigrants. Professor David S. Wyman called them "paper walls."

As a result, America's quota for immigrants

from Germany — approximately 26,000 yearly during the 1930s — was almost never filled. Some 190,000 quota places from Germany (and, later, Axis-occupied countries) sat unused during FDR's 12 years in office. And in most of those years, the German quota was less than one-fourth filled.

One of the devices the Roosevelt administration used to obstruct immigration involved financial guarantees. The law required a would-be immigrant to find an American citizen who would pledge to financially support him in the event he could not support himself.

The law did not specify how much money the guarantor needed to have in the bank, nor any

his estate as the guarantee. But the administration was determined to suppress Jewish refugee immigration below the quotas, and this was one more way to do it. Secretary Hull ignored Laemmle's appeal.

**L**aemmle's efforts were not limited to Jews from his hometown. He corralled numerous friends and colleagues in Hollywood into becoming financial guarantors for German Jewish immigrants, whatever their cities of origin.

"I predict right now that thousands of German and Austrian Jews will be forced to commit suicide if they cannot get affidavits to come to America or some other foreign country," Laemmle



Carl Laemmle holding an Oscar trophy in 1930.

other details about the guarantor. So US officials made up those rules as they went along — which is what happened to Laemmle.

Laemmle served as the financial guarantor for more than 300 Jews, many from *Laupheim*, to come to the United States. Some of them were his relatives; most were not.

By the spring of 1938, US officials stepped in to block Laemmle's rescue initiative. The American consul general in *Stuttgart* informed Laemmle that his guarantees would no longer be accepted. In an appeal to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Laemmle reported the reason that was given for preventing his further involvement: "I am past 71 years of age and I might not live much longer."

There was nothing in the law which specified such an age limit. Moreover, the officials could have asked younger members of Laemmle's family to cosign, or had him pledge a portion of

presciently warned. There were waves of suicides by Jews in Vienna after Germany annexed Austria in 1938. In one case, 22 members of a single family took their own lives.

When the refugee ship *St. Louis*, carrying some 900 German Jewish refugees, approached America's shore in June 1939, Laemmle sent a telegram to President Roosevelt, begging him to intervene on their behalf. FDR didn't respond. The ship was forced to return to Europe and many of its passengers were later murdered by the Nazis.

The history of America's response to the Holocaust is largely one of abandonment and indifference. But there were also individuals with a conscience, such as Carl Laemmle, who refused to abandon the Jews. Their efforts deserve recognition.

BY RAFAEL MEDOFF, SANDY C. EINSTEIN,  
*Israel Hayom*



# THE FATE OF JEWISH SPORTING HEROES IN THE HOLOCAUST

Whether they were Jewish soldiers who fought for their country during World War I, or Jewish Olympians who found glory for their country, I have often wondered how many erroneously assumed their medals would protect them in the *Shoah*.

The fact that they had proudly risked their lives fighting for their homeland or had achieved sporting greatness was irrelevant when the *Nuremberg Laws* were enforced.

Not for the first time in writing my book, *Who Betrayed the Jews?*, I found myself shocked by discovering the fate of more than 30 Jewish Olympic medalists and sportsmen who had won medals for their country, but were exterminated without a thought when the Nazi juggernaut ploughed on with the Final Solution.

Gerrit Kleerekoper (1897–1943) was the Jewish coach of the Dutch gymnastics team at the 1928 Amsterdam games, where they won gold. On July 2, 1943, Gerrit Kleerekoper, along with his wife, Kaatje, and his 14-year-old daughter, Elisabeth, were murdered by the Nazis at the *Sobibor* extermination camp in Poland. Twenty-nine days later, his 18-year-old son, Leendert, was murdered at Auschwitz.

Helena “Lea” Nordheim (1903–1943) was a Dutch gymnast born in Amsterdam. She won the gold medal with the rest of the Dutch gymnastics team at the 1928 Summer Olympics in Amster-

killed at Auschwitz in 1944.

Judikje “Jud” Simons (1904–1943) was a third Jewish member of the 1928 Dutch women’s gymnastics team and an Olympic gold medalist. After her Olympics career Simons married and, with her husband, ran an orphanage in *Utrecht*, housing and caring for more than 80 needy children. As the Nazis rounded up Dutch Jews and sent them to concentration camps, Jud and her husband refused to abandon the orphans who depended on them. The Nazis captured her and her family, all of whom were shipped to the *Sobibor* extermination camp and gassed on March 3, 1943.

Lilli Henoch (1899–1942) developed a passion for sport, particularly track, field and team sports, which was rare for a woman in the 1920s. She was captain of the Berlin Sports Club’s women’s handball team. In addition, she was a member of the club’s hockey team, which won the Berlin championship in 1925. In shot put and discus, she was not only the best performer in Germany, but among the best in the world. In 1924 she also became the German long-jump champion, and in 1926 she and her teammates achieved a world record in the 4 x 100m relay race. On September 5, 1942, Lilli, her brother and her 66-year-old mother were deported. She and her mother are believed to have been taken from the Riga ghetto and machine-gunned to death by an *Einsatzgruppen* mobile killing unit

referred to him as “the Jew” and told his subordinates to give him a bad time. Another Olympian, Karoly Karpate, a Hungarian wrestler, said that one day, when he was digging in temperatures below zero, the guards told Attila to take off his clothes and climb a tree and crow like a rooster. They sprayed him with cold water, which froze, and eventually he fell off the tree.



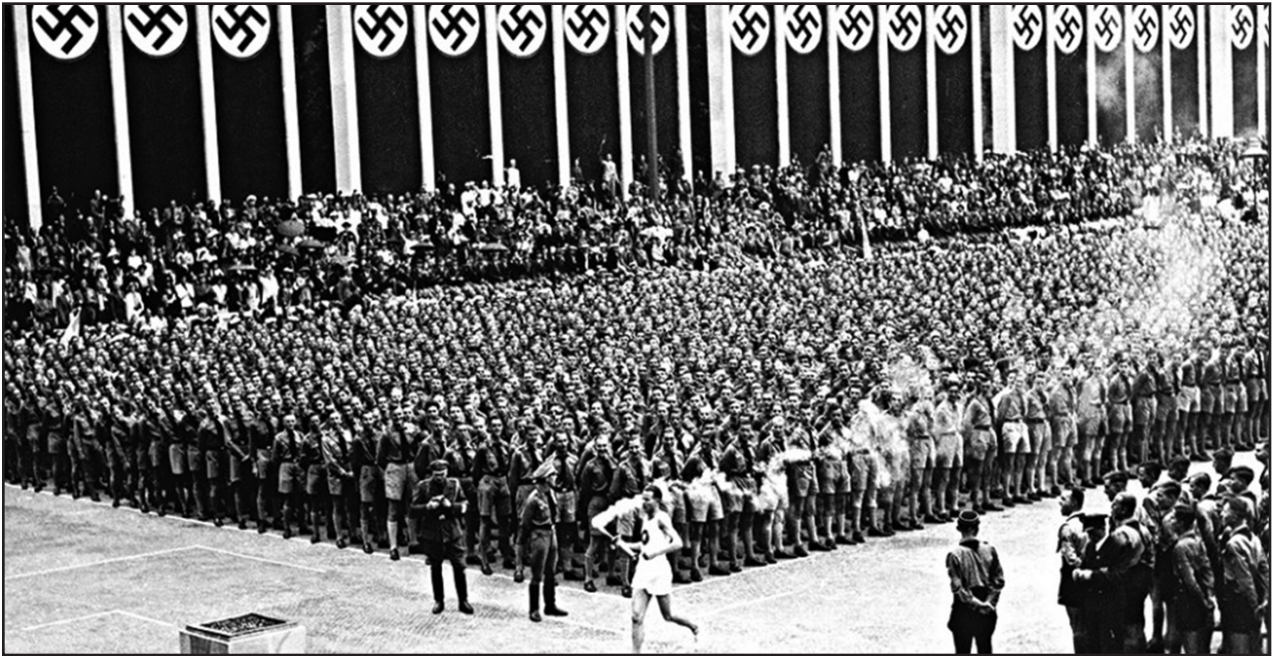
Attila Petschauer.

They took him back to the barracks, but he died a few hours later on January 20, 1943, aged 39.

Eddy Hamel (1902–1943) was born in New York to immigrant Dutch Jewish parents, and returned to Holland as a child. He played for the “Men from the Meer” from 1922 until 1930, appearing in 125 matches and scoring eight goals as a right winger. He was the first Jewish player to serve in Ajax’s squad, which has had only three more to this day. Local Fascist groups assisted in rounding up “undesirables” after Germany invaded the Netherlands in May 1940. Despite his American citizenship, Eddy was detained as a Jew in late 1942. He spent four months doing hard labor at *Birkenau* and was sent to the gas chambers on April 30, 1943, after a swollen mouth abscess was found during a Nazi inspection.

Victor Perez (1911–1944) was a boxer who was born in 1911 in the French colony of Tunisia. In 1930, he won the French championship in the flyweight class, defeating Kid Oliva from *Marseille*. On October 24, 1931, he won against the American, Frankie Genaro, to become the flyweight world champion and the youngest world champion in boxing history. Despite the growing anti-Semitism in Paris he thought he was safe, but on September 21, 1943, he was arrested and sent to *Drancy*. He was sent to Auschwitz on Transport 60, on October 10, 1943, and then put in *Buna/Monowitz* concentration camp as a slave laborer. He was forced to participate in boxing matches for the amusement of the Nazis. By 1945, Victor had survived 140 bouts in 15 months and won 139. Perez was one of the prisoners on the death march that left the camp on January 18, 1945. He died on the march on January 22, 1945, aged 33.

BY AGNES GRUNWALD-SPIER, JNO



The Olympic torch bearer runs through the stadium at the 1936 Berlin games.

dam. She was sent to camp *Westerbork* in June 1943, and shortly after was deported to *Sobibor*, where she was murdered with her husband, Abraham, and their 10-year-old daughter, Rebecca, on July 2, 1943.

Anna “Ans” Dresden-Polak (1906–1943) was also on the team. At the 1928 Olympics, about half of the Dutch women’s gymnastics team was Jewish, but only one member, Elka de Levie, survived the Holocaust. Dresden-Polak was killed at *Sobibor* with her six-year-old daughter, Eva, on July 23, 1943. Her husband, Barend, was

later the same year, along with a large number of other Jews. They were all buried in a mass grave in the woods outside Riga.

Attila Petschauer (1904–1943), another Hungarian, won silver in Amsterdam in 1928 and gold in Los Angeles in 1932. During a routine check in 1943, he realized he had left some of his ID papers at home and was soon deported to the *Davidovka* labor camp in Ukraine. One of the people responsible, Kalman Cseh, a Hungarian Army colonel, was a fellow member of the Hungarian delegation to the 1928 games. Cseh





## 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. Our Legacy Circle is 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 anyone who includes Yad Vashem in their estate plans. This includes a bequest by will, funding a

Charitable Remainder Trust or Charitable Gift Annuity, donating a paid-up life insurance policy or contributing an IRA or retirement plan.\*

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 Holocaust denial, distortion, hate and indifference.

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

The Talmud

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

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

\*ASYV now has nearly 100 individuals and families who have joined the Zborowski Legacy Circle.

American Society for Yad Vashem  
**MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE**  
500 FIFTH AVENUE, 42nd FLOOR  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10110-4299  
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Stanely H. Stone  
Editor-in-Chief

Yefim Krasnyanskiy, M.A.,  
Editor

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