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WIESEL AND IMBER SHARE SHOAH LESSONS

For the past 23 years, the American Society for Yad Vashem (ASYV) has sponsored a conference on Holocaust education. Named in memory of Barbara Gutfreund Arfa, z"l, a child of Holocaust survivors and an advocate for teaching future generations about the lessons of hope, courage and resilience from the Holocaust, the conference has addressed thousands of educators and through them no fewer than 100,000 stu-



Elisha Wiesel.

dents to date. This year's conference, entitled "History Repeats Itself: Making Sure Our Students Are Listening," took place virtually on Sunday, March 7, and hosted nearly 200 educators from the tri-state area, 17 states and seven countries.

In opening the conference, Stanley Stone, Teaneck resident, who serves as the executive director of the ASYV, welcomed the participants and praised the educators for keeping the teachings of the Holocaust alive for future generations.

Marlene Warshawski Yahalom, PhD, is the director of education for ASYV. In her introductory remarks, Yahalom posited, "The Final Solution — the master plan to destroy the Jews of Europe — was devised not only to destroy Jewish victims, but to annihilate every trace of their memory. We therefore have a responsibility to create Holocaust memory and document the event for posterity. We are obligated to provide

teachable moments for our students to meet the challenges imposed by Holocaust denial. In doing so, we safeguard the past to protect the future."

Sheryl Ochayon, educator at the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, presented a guided discussion of universally acclaimed Holocaust author and Nobel Prize laureate Elie Wiesel's *Night* for educators through multiple resources and lesson plans. Through interspersing excerpts from the memoir *Night* throughout the presentation, she incorporated the human experience into the teaching of the Holocaust so that students are engaged and "listening."

Featured in dialogue at the conference were Elisha Wiesel, son of Elie Wiesel, z"l, along with Shulamit Imber, director of pedagogy for the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem. Wiesel, former Goldman Sachs chief of information, describes himself as a recovering Wall Street executive. He has taken up the voice of his late, acclaimed father in serving as a voice of the Holocaust. He has undertaken to promote, along with his mother, Marion, the many humanitarian organizations that his parents supported over many decades in the U.S. and around the world. He speaks widely about his father's legacy and message in reaction to opportunities that arise to make a difference in this world.

In addition to her position at Yad Vashem's International School for Holocaust Studies, Imber serves as the Fred Hillman Chair in Memory of Dr. Janusz Korczak, heroic educator during the Holocaust. Imber has collaborated on numerous international conferences and prepared copious materials for Holocaust education. She is currently featured on a massive open online course (MOOC) on teaching about the Holocaust. Shulamit earned her master's from the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Imber began the dialogue by saying that over the course of her 30 years as a Holocaust educator at Yad Vashem, a mention or quote of Elie Wiesel has been offered daily by staff members or students. She believes that he was able to convey through his autobiography, *Night*, as well as through his subsequent 56 writings, the "human story."

Elisha Wiesel corroborated this belief by conveying his personal exposure to "the story" of his father. He shared that his father never "sat him down" and shared his memories. Instead he took him back to the places where his story took place. On their first trip to Poland, when Elisha was 21, they visited Wiesel's native *Sighet* before going on to Auschwitz. To the young Wiesel, the visit to *Sighet* was a more meaningful and indelible experience as he witnessed one of the rare emotional reactions of his father to the town of his youth, even more than to the site of his torture.



Shulamit Imber.

"My father was actually seeing the ghosts of his past. He saw his parents working side by side in their grocery store, his father caring for the well-being of the community, his carefree sisters, his beloved rebbes and his prophet Moshe the Beadle. In order to know what was lost, we must first know what existed," he said.

In response to Imber's question as to why it took 10 years after liberation for his father to pen his memoir, which he began on a boat in South America and took only two to three weeks to complete, Wiesel responded that in 1960, parents were still trying to shield their children from the gruesome tales of the Holocaust. Wiesel knew that his words had to be "just right" and "perfect" to convey the "human story" so that it would be universally felt and elicit the proper empathy and compassion.

Imber posed a question that readers of *Night* always bring up. "Was Elie Wiesel a believer throughout? Did he ever lose his faith in God?"

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A SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY TO REMEMBER

The Yad Vashem Twinning Program was developed in order to instill the memory of Holocaust victims among Jewish youth in Israel and around the world. The young adults take part in the program at the symbolic stage of leaving childhood behind and becoming an adult — when they celebrate their bar or bat mitzvah.

In June 2018, the Maskin and Stark families from Phoenix, Arizona, came to visit Yad Vashem to mark the bat mitzvah of Ava — a talented dancer, and Fourth Generation to Holocaust survivors. At the presentation of the certificate marking her “twinning” with Holocaust victim Eva Kotzover, z”l, from Germany, Ava Maskin chose to perform a special dance she created for the occasion together with choreographer Albert Blaise Katafi. Ava has since performed the dance in many places, winning awards in New York, Florida, Arizona and California.



The twinning ceremony at Yad Vashem marking Ariella Gross’s twinning with Ester Wurman z”l.

The Maskins and Starks represent hundreds of families that take part every year in the Yad Vashem bar/bat mitzvah Twinning Program. The young person and his/her family participate in a special tour of the Holocaust History Museum and the Yad Vashem campus, which focuses on children and youth during the Holocaust. The tour emphasizes in particular the challenges faced by the Jewish family unit during World War II, and the meaning of the bar/bat mitzvah in Judaism and during the Shoah. As part of the Twinning Program, a search is conducted in Yad Vashem’s On-line Database of Shoah Victims’ Names to find a

“twin” — a Jewish girl or boy murdered during the Holocaust, who shares a biographical element with the celebrant or his/her family, such as first name, last name, birthday or place of birth.

At the end of the tour at Yad Vashem, a respectful and sensitive ceremony is held, during which the celebrant is presented with a Twinning kit, which comprises a certificate confirming his/her participation in the program, historical materials connected to his/her “twin,” and a study pamphlet. The bar/bat mitzvah celebrants also take it upon themselves to remember their “twin” as they leave their childhood behind to become a fully-fledged member of the Jewish community.

The bar/bat mitzvah Twinning Program has been warmly received by the general public, and the demand for these special tours has risen yearly. Since 2017, Yad Vashem has also allowed families that cannot come to Israel to participate in the program. The kit is sent to wherever they are in the world, and the commemoration of Holocaust victims in the framework of bar/bat mitzvah celebrations is conducted within the local community.

This is especially true today, as the coronavirus pandemic continues to restrict international travel and Jewish parents the world over are seeking creative ways to celebrate their child’s coming of age. The Wells family, from London, UK, decided to mark Aron’s bar mitzvah with a Zoom-style venture, in which the young man was twinned with Aron Gotlib, z”l, who was born in Radom, Poland, in 1933, and was murdered with his mother at the age of nine. After the online ceremony, Adam Wells publicized the important occasion and Yad Vashem’s Twinning Program in a series of heartwarming tweets, calling it “A Tale of Two Arons.” “Aron Gotlib’s name and beautiful face do not deserve to be forgotten to history,” wrote Adam. “He deserved to have his bar mitzvah and to celebrate

with his family, like millions of others. On ‘my’ Aron’s bar mitzvah we will celebrate on his behalf, too.”

“Since 2014, over 1,000 young men and women have participated in the program, taking an active role in passing the torch of remembrance to the next generations,” says Inbal Kvity Ben-Dov, director of the Commemoration and Community Relations Division at Yad Vashem. “Over the years, Yad Vashem has received much correspondence from families that tell of the enormous influence the program has made on the bar/bat mitzvah celebrant, and about the special and poignant ways the children continue to remember their ‘twin.’”

During her bat mitzvah preparations in the summer of 2019, Ariella Gross from New York decided to take part in the Yad Vashem Twinning Program. Because of her great interest in the project, she investigated the history of her family during the Holocaust, and found out that her grandmother had a cousin, Ester Wurman, z”l, who was murdered during the Holocaust as a child. “That is her — she is my twin,” explained Ariella, “I want to give her the bat mitzvah she never had.” However, the commemoration of a “twin” who was related to her did not suffice, and, with the assistance of Yad Vashem’s International Relations Division and the American Society for Yad Vashem, Ariella decided to embark upon a fundraising campaign to support Yad Vashem’s efforts to teach children of her age group about the Shoah. “I wanted to raise money so that Yad Vashem can continue its amazing work teaching about the Holocaust around the world,” she said.

“It is plain to see the Yad Vashem Twinning Program allows participants to take an active part in the memory of Holocaust victims, and make that memory relevant to their own lives as they strengthen their own Jewish identity,” said Shaya Ben-Yehuda, at the time managing director of the International Relations Division. “The program also enables family members to be part of this collective memory, and to pass it on to other communities, as well as to deepen their own ties with Yad Vashem — which all contributes to continuation of the Jewish faith and culture.”

BY LUCILA GLEICHER

WIESEL AND IMBER SHARE SHOAH LESSONS

(Continued from page 1)

Wiesel responded that for a brief period after the Holocaust, his father rejected tradition, but he never fully abandoned his belief. He was always in conversation with God, wrestling with Him, but never rejecting Him. “In his daily life, he davened, put on tefillin, attended shul and kept the traditions. For over 40 years, he lectured at the 92nd Street Y about the Chasidic masters who burned with religious fervor. He believed it was these religious heroes who were advocating for us in heaven.”

In 2015, the American Society for Yad Vashem was awarded the President’s Award from the Association of Teachers of Social Studies of the United Federation of Teachers for implementing the best educational practices in using documents, inquiry, critical thinking and action for studying the Holocaust. The conference represents a collaborative effort among the American Society for Yad Vashem, the Association of Teachers of Social Studies of the United Federation of Teachers, United Federation of Teachers Jewish Heritage Commit-

tee/Educators Chapter of the Jewish Labor Committee and the School of Education of Manhattanville College.

Support materials from the Arfa Professional Development Conference on Holocaust Education are available on www.yadvashemusa.org/arfa-conference-2021. For more information on the educational programs of the American Society for Yad Vashem, please contact education@yadvashemusa.org.

BY PEARL MARKOVITZ, Jewish Link

AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM WELCOMES REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR THE SOUTHEAST

We are delighted to welcome the newest member of the American Society for Yad Vashem team, Denise Herschberg, who will be joining us as Regional Director for the Southeast beginning April 5. As the South Florida Jewish community has always been an important one for Yad Vashem and home to so many of our supporters, we are delighted to expand our footprint by adding a member to our team who will be both based in and focused on this region.

Denise is a seasoned Jewish communal professional, having spent over 20 years in this line of work. She began her career in the UJA Federation of New York and the Jewish Federation of Greater Metrowest, New Jersey. Denise is grateful to have begun her career that way, remarking, "Federation training for a Jewish fundraiser is the best training there is!" After additional professional experience at both the Ronald Lauder Foundation and AMIT, Denise and her husband set their sights southward and relocated to the Boca Raton area.

Denise was fortunate to find very rewarding work in Florida, spending nine years working for B'nai B'rith as its Southeast Major Gifts and Planned Giving Director, followed by six years working with both Yachad and the American Friends of Beit Issie Shapiro, two organizations focused on the special needs community. The best part about representing international organization like these, according to Denise, is that it's about building relationships and representing

larger organizations within smaller communities. As an insider, you can create ties with *shuls*, federations and all local sister organizations, on behalf of the larger international one.



Denise Herschberg.

While Denise considers herself fortunate not to have had any personal family ties to the Holocaust, she has always felt a strong connection to this critical era in our history. When she

taught in a Hebrew high school years ago, she taught Holocaust and Holocaust Literature, which touched her deeply from a young age. She's always felt strongly about keeping the memories and lessons of the Holocaust alive, and perhaps with even greater urgency today, both because we are losing more and more of our survivors and, sadly, because there's an urgency in the way that the world seems to be forgetting.

Having lived and worked in South Florida for the last 18 years, Denise knows the landscape quite well. She has been involved with and built relationships in all parts of the Jewish community. Given the universal nature of Yad Vashem's mission and the importance of Holocaust remembrance, Denise believes that it's a conversation she can have across the Jewish spectrum, as it truly touches all aspects of Jewish life and identity.

Denise believes that working on behalf of the Jewish community is a calling, and she has certainly heard that call. She becomes deeply invested in the organizations she works for and strives to do meaningful work. She believes in modeling for her children how to make a difference in the world and work on behalf of something greater than oneself. And when it comes to working with the American Society for Yad Vashem, Denise is passionate about the work ahead of her: to help Yad Vashem in its mission to keep the memories and lessons of the Holocaust alive.

THE WESTERN REGION OFFICE OF ASYV IS OFF TO A STRONG START

The year 2021 is off to a strong start in the Western region as the American Society for Yad Vashem has continued with its robust schedule of virtual events and meaningful community outreach. After a dedicated effort to reach out and personally thank all of our Western region donors for their 2020 support, our premiere event was held on January 27 in cooperation with the Jewish Federation of Greater Phoenix. Dr. Steven Ross, professor of history at the University of Southern California, spoke about his recent book *Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America*.

Our next event was a private lecture held on February 11 for the Orden family of Los Angeles in commemoration of the Yahrzeit of Hedy Orden, z"l, who passed away last year. Ted and Hedy Orden, z"l, were Holocaust survivors who survived Auschwitz and went on to build an extraordinary family and a successful business in Los Angeles. Professor Dina Porat, chief historian of Yad Vashem since 2011, was the featured presenter, who spoke on "The Corona-inspired

Anti-Semitism: Is It a Continuation of Former Tendencies or a New Phenomenon?"



Professor Dina Porat.

Shortly thereafter, ASYV's Western region participated in a Seattle Jewish community-wide program entitled "Endless Opportunities." Hosted by Temple De Hirsch Sinai of Seattle, this community-wide program is a product of a

partnership with the leading temples in the area (Temple De Hirsch Sinai, Temple B'nai Torah, Congregation Beth Shalom, Congregation Kol Ami & Jewish Family Service). Professor Yehuda Bauer, academic advisor at Yad Vashem, lectured on the topic of "Holocaust Denial and Distortion."

Concrete steps have also been taken to establish a Young Leadership group for the American Society for Yad Vashem in the greater Los Angeles area. An initial steering committee meeting took place on February 24, focused on event planning and group expansion.

In all, there is great excitement around the partnerships that are being formed in Phoenix, Los Angeles and Seattle, which are certain to bear fruit in the coming months and years. We look forward to providing these respective Jewish communities with meaningful programming as we continue to engage and strengthen our friendships with our ASYV donors in these areas, and to reporting on the growth and development of our new Young Leadership group in the months ahead.

IN THEIR OWN VOICE

In the fall of 1941, over 150,000 Jews from Bukovina, Bessarabia and northern Moldova in Romania were deported to Transnistria — the area between the southern Bug and Dniester Rivers, annexed to Romania in return for aid to the German army during its war with the USSR. They were concentrated there, under terrible conditions, in ghettos, camps and far-flung communities, and lived as refugees — with no source of income, exposed to persecution, abuse and exploitation by the Romanian army and the local population.

Under these circumstances, the orphanage in the *Djurin* ghetto, in the *Vinnytsia* county of Ukraine, was established. The institution, which was opened in October 1943, came to address — albeit partially — the plight of orphans in the ghetto. What did it mean to run an orphanage in Transnistria during World War II?

Life at the orphanage and the challenges of its management are revealed through a copy and translation of the papers of its director, Dov Harth, which were recently submitted to the Yad Vashem Archives through its national Gathering the Fragments campaign (the originals are in the Ghetto Fighters' House archives). The translator's comments provide the context for understanding the documents and reveal the sophisticated and creative way that Harth found to document his protégés' experiences as deportees — through a seemingly innocent writing exercise.

When the 34-year-old Harth, one of the deportees from *Rădăuți*, Bukovina, was asked to take over the management of the orphanage in the *Djurin* ghetto, he did not think twice. Though he was no educator, he ran the institution with great resourcefulness, and for no payment, for some six months, until May 1944. A lawyer by profession, Harth took responsibility for the needs — material, educational and mental — of dozens of young girls and boys entrusted to his care. Harth had to take care of discipline and hygiene — he even personally picked lice out of the heads of the children. The presence of family members (or one parent), in some of the cases, only added to the complexity of the situation for both Harth and his charges. He operated under dire budgetary constrictions, with a very limited personnel — and even then, was compelled to give up staff members, when requested, to forced labor.

Yet despite the difficult state of the student population, Harth insisted that the orphanage hold orderly classes — which, despite the inherent danger, included Hebrew and Jewish studies lessons. Yiddish became the language of instruction. Under Harth's direction, the institution even held events and activities for the general community, and managed to raise funds.

Harth was completely devoted to his charges: he accompanied some of the children home after they were permitted to return from Transnistria, and embarked on a rescue mission of two orphans, a brother and a sister, after receiving alarming information about the difficult conditions in the institution where they were living, carrying them on his back for miles.

Harth's diary — essentially an official report to the ghetto authorities on the conduct of the orphanage, and thus written in Romanian and then, after liberation of the area by the Red Army, in Ukrainian — is written in a matter-of-fact, task-oriented tone. Attached to the diary is a file used to keep track of the children's history, behavior and whereabouts. The file expresses Harth's devotion to the children, his perceptiveness and attention to the slightest aspects of their characters, and his rigor in relation to the circumstances of their lives.

In his official diary, Harth had to choose his words carefully, and his observations concerning the children's hardships thus could not be fully ex-



Jewish children in the orphanage in *Djurin*, Transnistria, 1943.

pressed. This is why, according to the translator, he initiated a writing project. In this way, Dov Harth allowed those in his care to describe what he himself could not officially record: the reality of life in Transnistria for the deportees. Harth's diary and the children's file, along with the children's essays, were preserved by Moshe Salomon, who conducted the orphanage choir and taught music at the institution. All of these materials were submitted to Yad Vashem by Salomon's heirs.

A small group of nine students participated in the writing project, in which they were encouraged to describe their lives before they had been admitted to the orphanage. The project was led by Dov Katz, a young medical student and an idealist, who, besides working in the orphanage, took part in assisting the ghetto hospital's medical staff as well as in the production of local underground newspapers circulating through the ghetto. (Katz survived the war, completed his studies and worked as a physician in Israel.) The essays, written in Yiddish in the format of short autobiographies, present the experience of deportation to Transnistria in all its severity and extremity, from the point of view of young girls. In shaky language and a variety of styles (depending on the background, abilities and writing skills of each girl), the authors share shocking and traumatic experiences: from their difficult living conditions as refugees to exposure to abuse, severe violence, death — and the loss of their loved ones.

Encouraging the students to express their experiences as testimony allowed their voices to

be heard and their personal stories told, and exemplifies the extraordinary humane and educational sensitivity of both Harth and Katz. Furthermore, it demonstrates their acute documentary and historical awareness, which are not be taken for granted considering the existential conditions to which the staff of the orphanage itself, and the ghetto community as a whole, were exposed.

Twelve-year-old Perl Postelnik from the *Chernivtsi* region of Bessarabia was one of the girls who took part in Harth's writing project. In her file, Harth characterized Perl as "intelligent, talented, with a distinct writing style." Her biography opens with a shocking dilemma of existence and rescue: "A farmer's wife kidnapped my five-year-old sister, and wanted to adopt her. We were almost starving back then. However, we did not agree."

Perl's short story — one page, condensed, and filled with intense and disturbing events — presents the very essence of a refugee family's fight for survival: the destruction of the fabric of family life and the reversal of roles between parents and children.

Of the orphans from Bukovina and Bessarabia staying in Harth's institution, Perl is the only one who chose to remain there, even after they were given permission, in February 1944, to return to their districts of origin. She probably did so in order to take care of her father, who had found shelter in a synagogue in *Djurin*. Perl's special connection to her father did not go unnoticed by Harth. "Deep affection for her father," he notes in her file. Indeed, Perl saved precious food to sustain her father. In her testimony to

Yad Vashem, she said, "I always took two slices of bread. And no one [from the orphanage] ever asked me, 'Where are you taking it?' Not once."

Perl loved the orphanage. In her testimony she recalled, in tears, a song in Yiddish that she had studied there 55 years before, under the guidance of Moshe Salomon. "Here, I have been rescued from torture and dirt," she wrote at the end of her essay. "I am clothed. I receive instruction, food... [but] all this does not make me happy, since I know that Father is still suffering. It is unbearable to me, but I cannot save him." The fate of Avraham Postelnik, Perl's father, remains unknown. After the war, Perl studied medicine and worked in a Ukrainian hospital. In the early 1970s, she and her husband emigrated to Israel. In her testimony to Yad Vashem, Perl related how precious and significant her composition folder was to her, and how much she was moved and touched by writing about her life. "Since then, I always wanted to write, [although] life did not allow me to." That simple, spontaneous recollection reveals so much about the power of writing, even in the most difficult circumstances, for the human spirit.

Dov Harth, his wife and daughter survived the war and immigrated to Israel in 1948. He kept in touch with his former students for many years, and did much to preserve the memory of the *Rădăuți* community and to further document the complex, tragic story of the deportation to Transnistria.

BY OFER LIFSHITZ

“DO NO HARM: MEDICAL ETHICS AND THE HOLOCAUST”

Examples of Nazi Germany's sweeping disregard for human rights in the name of “medical research” were discussed at an on-line panel entitled “Do No Harm: Medical Ethics and the Holocaust.”

In 1937, a medical conference took place in the southwestern German town of *Tübingen*, for the German Society for Racial Research. Among the “eminent” physicians attending that conference were Prof. Eugen Fischer, Professor of Medicine and Director of the Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute (KWI) in Berlin, who had been appointed by Adolf Hitler as rector of the Frederick Wilhelm University of Berlin (today called Humboldt University) some four years earlier; and Prof. Otmar Freiherr v. Verschuer, a physician and biologist who headed the Institute for Genetic Biology and Racial Hygiene in KWI's Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics. At this gathering, the participants discussed meaningless racist theories, which would lead to some of the worst atrocities against humankind the modern world had ever witnessed. Also at that conference was a young Dr. Josef Mengele, Verschuer's protégé, who was exposed to so-called “scientific theories” on twins, dwarfism and other human phenomena — that would later earn him the infamous nickname “The Angel of Death.”

Recently, the *New York Times* published an article entitled “In Israel, Modern Medicine Grapples with Ghosts of the Third Reich,” telling how Arab surgeon Dr. Madi el-Haj obtained permission to use an anatomy atlas prepared by Austrian Nazi party member Dr. Eduard Pernkopf, using illustrations of the bodies of Nazi victims, to operate on the shattered leg of Dvir Musai, a Jewish teenager whose leg was shattered in an explosion.

These and other examples of Nazi Germany's sweeping disregard for human rights in the name of “medical research” were discussed at an on-line panel entitled “Do No Harm: Medical Ethics and the Holocaust.” Viewed by hundreds of scholars, medical professionals and other interested parties around the world on July 1, 2020, the panel comprised oncologist Dr. Benjamin Gesundheit, a physician who holds a doctorate in bioethics from the University of Toronto; and Prof. Dan Michman, head of Yad Vashem's International Institute for Holocaust Research and incumbent of the John Najmann Chair for Holocaust Studies. It was moderated by the Research Institute's Senior Historian Dr. David Silberklang.

Dr. Gesundheit has been lecturing for many years on the history of medical ethics during the Holocaust at medical training institutions throughout Israel and abroad. His response as to whether any use may morally be made from

Nazi experimentation on victims was that most of the experiments were useless and all were malicious — the appalling activities were never aimed at proper research (there were never “control groups,” for example), but rather solely at torturing and murdering innocent victims. However, if any good can be garnered from published findings, such as Pernkopf's atlas, he argued that perhaps they could be justified, although he stressed his absolute rejection of giving the authors any credit, be it on the cover of the book or as recognized medical professionals. His presentation focused on the bioethical messages that may be learned from medicine



The Nazi Doctors' Trial at an American military court, October 1946–August 1947.

under Nazi dictatorship, and he proposed the establishment of annual lectures on Holocaust memorial days presenting medical ethics, in collaboration with Yad Vashem and other experts and scholars.

As an historian and academic, Prof. Michman pointed out that although it lasted only 12 years and 98 days, the period of the Nazi regime was historically significant because the Holocaust was a watershed event in human history from many perspectives. The abominable crimes that took place during this period — and in such an extremely short time span — could only have happened, he argued, with the collaboration of a broad variety of enablers, among them lawyers, accountants, logistical experts and medical practitioners. Hitler's aim, to shape a new world order based on racial principles and eugenic methodology, was aided and abetted by professionals in all of these fields, who willingly kept Jews out of their domains, and enthusiastically took upon themselves Nazi racist laws as the new “legitimate norm,” thus justifying stepping out of the moral and ethical norm accepted the world over.

When asked whether the Holocaust and medical ethics should be made a compulsory course for student doctors and nurses, Prof. Michman pointed out that as Holocaust awareness is growing worldwide, this would be a useful topic

to include in a variety of Holocaust seminars, regardless of the audience. Although it was an extreme event, it could, he claimed, be used as a point of departure for critical thinking, and indeed, also used to examine the flip side — the incredible work performed by Jewish medical professionals for their fellow persecuted brethren during the *Shoah*. Examples of this can be seen in many publications, including in Miriam Offer's new book *White Coats in the Ghetto* (published by Yad Vashem in Hebrew and English). Many Jewish doctors did not abandon the sick for the sake of personal rescue, in spite of the danger they faced in contracting life-threatening diseases; heroic actions were even undertaken by those who were forcibly employed in selection and experimentation. Prof. Michman also mentioned the excellent courses on the topic currently being taught with the assistance of experts at Yad Vashem's International School for Holocaust Studies.

Dr. Gesundheit noted the importance of learning from history, and suggested that an “intelligent and meaningful” course could be taught, which would include a look at prewar medical history as well as anti-Semitism (as an example, Immanuel Kant's use of the term *Euthanasie des Judentums* — “Euthanasia of Jewishness”); Nazi ideology and its consequences; and the postwar *Nuremberg* doctors' trial, Helsinki Declaration, UN declarations and more. He emphasized that at such a

course he would encourage the reading of survivor testimony, and ask the students to reflect critically on how the experiences of those who lived through the *Shoah* may influence their own lives, both personally and professionally. The final question posed to the panelists was about using images of Nazi medical experiments in both the professional and the public domain. Dr. Gesundheit accepted that for medical students, perhaps some images and certain filmed testimonies could be carefully considered for use, but only as a tool to illustrate the meaningless and fake research they claimed to cover, and the weak claim by perpetrators of having no choice but to perform them. Prof. Michman argued that images should never be displayed just for the “shock factor,” which left audiences traumatized and perplexed, but rather only on a basis of carefully considered necessity.

A fascinating discussion followed, covering topics such as the culpability of bystanders and the distortion of the topic in the hands of nefarious groups and individuals. The suggestion of Dr. Gesundheit, to use the following quote as a preamble to the so-called “Hippocratic Oath,” resounded with all the participants: “I swear by the memory of the victims of the Holocaust and the victims of perverted medical science...”

BY LEAH GOLDSTEIN

HOLOCAUST MEMORY IN LITHUANIA

A Survivor Named Trauma: Holocaust Memory in Lithuania.

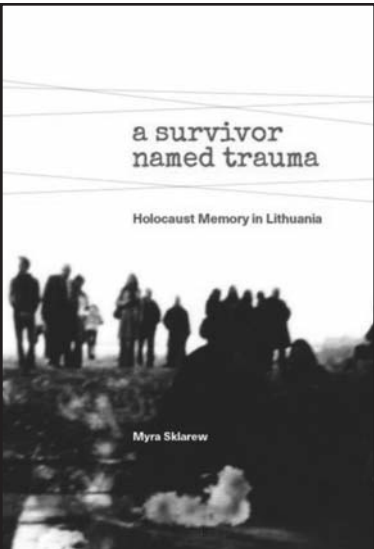
By Myra Sklarew. SUNY Press: Albany, New York, 2020. 212 pp. \$31.95 softcover.

Memory is most definitely a double-edged sword. On the one hand, memories of warm family gatherings and good times with friends cheer us all. In order to keep those joyous times “as fresh as possible” we take pictures to remember them even better! On the other hand, there are the other kinds of memories . . . of fear, of stark terror, that will not be forgotten and that Holocaust survivors lived and continue to live with, traumatic events that affect them all the rest of their lives. With family roots in Lithuania, Myra Sklarew, the author of *A Survivor Named Trauma: Holocaust Memory in Lithuania*, has for the past twenty-five years interviewed Jewish survivors, non-Jewish witnesses, rescuers, collaborators and more, specifically from or still in Lithuania, and often most especially from the *Kovno* (*Kaunas*) area, to see how memories of the Holocaust have affected them. The result is an absorbing and thought-provoking work.

Not surprisingly, the heart of Sklarew’s volume deals with the memories Jewish survivors have of the Holocaust, those related to her and those not, those from near and those from far. Thus we read about a teenager who saw his own father shot in front of him and survived only because he hid among the dead murdered at the same time. We read about a child who can’t forget watching how in the midst of gunfire “more than nine thousand inhabitants of the *Kovno* ghetto [were] made to walk up a diagonal hill to the Ninth Fort” and their deaths. We read about

another survivor who can’t forget overhearing the sound of Lithuanians taking Jews to be killed, caught in the room next to him. And then there is the woman who remembers being chased by a Fascist across a bridge and how, deathly afraid of capture, she then and there decided she’d rather jump into the river (and probable death) than be caught!

Since those years, all the above-noted individuals suffered and continue to suffer from these terror-filled experiences become traumas, even as the event that caused them is long past.



And sadly, they are far from alone. Sometimes these traumas manifest immediately, sometimes in later years. Sometimes the individuals may know their source; sometimes, after many years, they don’t. Problems just appear, as if from nowhere.... Especially troubling, according to Sklarew, is the developmental affects the Holocaust experience had on children, torn from a warm world they knew and suddenly thrust into a cold and frightening one.... Worse still are the stories of Jewish children given away, never to

see their parents again, “left to piece together who they actually are.... “

Meanwhile, most Lithuanians, we read, don’t particularly want to remember what happened during the Holocaust at all — except, she found, in the villages. (Perhaps these Lithuanian villagers somehow didn’t feel as threatened as those in the city. Perhaps it was the result of “self-selection” on the part of Lithuanians. In other words, those who didn’t want to answer Sklarew’s questions simply walked away — something that happened to this reviewer’s cousin.) Particularly “telling,” however, is the author’s interview with one Lithuanian villager who

hurriedly showed the author the deed of sale for the house they were in. Why? Historians have already written about how quick Lithuanians were to appropriate all Jewish property. Then, too, there are the varied versions Sklarew heard from Lithuanians themselves as regards one of the most brutal acts Lithuanians perpetrated on their Jewish neighbors just as the Russians left and the Germans were but arriving. Some won’t even confirm that it was Jews that were tortured to death while an audience of Lithuanians, including young children, watched, clapping, singing, and dancing!

Of course, it is good to learn from Sklarew that there were Lithuanian rescuers. Of special note among them was Dr. Petra Baublys, a physician at the Lopšelis Children’s Home in Viliampolė (near to the *Kovno* ghetto), who helped save 120 Jewish infants and children. There was Ona Šimaitė, who “saved children and adults, and rescued valuable documents and manuscripts as well.” Indeed, “as of January 1, 2018, some 893 Lithuanians have been awarded the Yad Vashem Medal of the Righteous Among the Nations.” At the same time, however, “not a single person who collaborated with the Nazis has been convicted in independent Lithuania.” Instead, as was noted in the newspapers a few years ago, it has been left to descendants to discover the truth. This reviewer is specifically referring here to the case of Jonas Noreika, considered a Lithuanian national hero.

All in all, Sklarew has written a work of importance not only to students of the Holocaust, but psychologists and psychiatrists hoping to better understand trauma, whatever its cause.

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

ALARMING NEW SURVEY ON HOLOCAUST

Almost two-thirds of millennials and Gen Zers don’t know that six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust, and almost half can’t name a single concentration camp, an alarming new survey on Holocaust knowledge has found.

The survey demonstrated wide gaps in younger Americans’ knowledge of the genocide while also showing that a concerning 15% of millennials and Gen Zers thought holding neo-Nazi views was acceptable.

“How much of that is based on genuine understanding of neo-Nazis’ principles and how much is based on ignorance is hard to tell. Either of them is very disturbing,” said Gideon Taylor, president of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, which commissioned the survey.

“If people can’t name Auschwitz ... that’s something that’s deeply concerning. I don’t think there is any greater symbol of man’s depravity in recent history than Auschwitz,” he added.

The survey is the fifth in a series that looks at people’s knowledge of Holocaust history worldwide as well as education around the genocide.

The survey of 1,000 18- to 39-year-olds in all 50 states also provided the first state-by-state breakdown of Holocaust knowledge in the U.S. In New York, for example, which ranked among the bottom 10 states in an analysis of Holocaust knowledge, nearly 20% of millennials and Gen Zers incorrectly believe that Jews caused the Holocaust.

The results come amid a rise in anti-Semitic incidents around the U.S. in recent years. The Anti-Defamation League said in May that it had recorded an all-time high of anti-Semitic incidents in 2019 since its tracking of such events began in 1979.

Another concerning finding in the Claims Conference survey: almost half of respondents had seen social media posts denying or distorting facts about the Holocaust, and more than half said they had seen Nazi symbols in their community or online.

Taylor said these results demonstrate how the internet “has given a voice to and amplified Holocaust denial in a way that was unimaginable just a few years ago.”

According to the Southern Poverty Law Cen-

ter, neo-Nazi groups in the U.S. today share an affinity for Hitler and the Nazis’ Fascist political ideology while also focusing on hatred toward Jews and minority groups.

Past surveys found similar gaps in knowledge around the Holocaust from Americans of all ages.

In a 2018 survey, almost a third of Americans incorrectly believed two million or fewer Jewish people died in the Holocaust. More than 40% of respondents in that survey also could not identify Auschwitz.

Taylor said that the state-by-state data in this year’s survey will prove valuable for individual states where there can be more targeted changes to how educators teach Holocaust history.

The survey found that 8 in 10 respondents believe continued Holocaust education is important to prevent it from happening again. That education becomes all the more important, Taylor noted, as fewer Holocaust survivors are still living.

“On the one hand, you have this very worrying lack of knowledge, but on the other hand, you see this hunger to learn,” Taylor said.

BY RYAN W. MILLER, *USA Today*

ASSERTING THEIR JEWISH IDENTITY

By the time British troops liberated the Nazi concentration camp of *Bergen-Belsen* in Germany on April 15, 1945, more than 50,000 men, women and children, the overwhelming majority of them Jews, had died there of typhus, starvation, dysentery and a host of other diseases, most of them in the winter and early spring of 1945. *Bergen-Belsen*, often referred to simply as *Belsen*, epitomized the final stage of the Holocaust.

Bergen-Belsen was initially intended to be a “residence” or transit camp for Jewish inmates whom the Germans wanted to exchange for prisoners of war held by the Allies. Its population increased dramatically as the Red Army moved rapidly westward in the latter part of 1944 and the Germans evacuated Jewish prisoners from camps in Nazi-occupied Poland to camps in Germany, often on forced death marches. The number of prisoners at *Bergen-Belsen* grew from around 7,300 in July 1944 to 15,000 in December of that year, 22,000 in February 1945, and 60,000 when the British entered the camp in April 1945.

Many of both the dead and the surviving inmates of *Belsen* had been brought there from the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, where approximately one million Jews were murdered. A substantial number of the SS officers and guards taken into custody by the British after the liberation of *Belsen* had also been transferred there from Auschwitz-Birkenau.

And yet, when the *Belsen* trial, the first Nazi war crimes trial, began before a British military tribunal in the German city of *Lüneburg* more than 75 years ago on September 17, 1945, to try the camp’s SS officers and personnel, the pros-

ecutor, Colonel T.M. Backhouse, essentially ignored or glossed over the victims’ identity as Jews in his opening statement. Instead, he euphemistically referred to “the persons interned both at Auschwitz and *Belsen*” as “persons who had been deported from [Nazi German-] occupied countries . . . either because of their religion, because of their nationality, because of their refusal to work for the enemy, or merely because



Josef Kramer and Irma Grese after their arrest.

they were prisoners of war who it was thought might conveniently be used in such places or exterminated in such places.”

Backhouse similarly deJudaized the killings at Auschwitz by speaking generally of the “mass murder of every person unfit to serve the Reich.” He never told the tribunal that the transports that arrived there were made up predominantly of Jews, or that the “persons” who were “gassed deliberately and killed” there were almost exclusively Jewish. He likewise made no mention of the fact that “the old, children, pregnant women,

weak, or sick, or those showing signs of unfitness” who were “loaded on lorries and taken straight to the gas chambers where they were scientifically murdered” were Jews who were murdered only and exclusively because they were Jews.

Backhouse’s only mention of Jews on the first day of the trial was a reference to “45,000 Greek Jews” who were taken to Auschwitz. On the second day of the trial, the first prosecution witness, Brigadier H.L. Glyn-Hughes, testified that upon arrival at *Belsen*, the British had found undelivered Red Cross parcels “sent by Jewish societies for the Jews in the camp.” Otherwise, there was nothing throughout the first four days of the trial to indicate that the crimes committed by the defendants at Auschwitz and *Belsen* were in fact an integral element of Nazi Germany’s “Final Solution of the Jewish Question.”

Alexander L. Easterman, the political secretary of the World Jewish Congress who attended the *Belsen* trial as an observer, wrote in his report dated September 17, 1945, that, “From the Jewish viewpoint, it is a grievous disappointment in that there is a complete absence in the indictment of the slightest suggestion of the colossal crime against the Jews resulting in the annihilation of six million souls. The word ‘Jew’ is not mentioned once in the preliminary formal proceedings.”

But on September 21, the fifth day of the trial, this state of affairs changed dramatically. That was when my mother, Dr. Ada Bimko (who would go on to marry my father in 1946), took the stand. She was a 33-year-old dentist who had been an inmate at both Auschwitz-Birkenau and *Belsen*. When asked if she was of Polish nation-

(Continued on page 12)



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“MY LOST CHILDHOOD”

New online exhibition on children's homes for Holocaust survivors

“I emerged from the death camps after enduring the most terrible experience ever recorded in history, damaged in body and spirit. After indescribable losses — my family, my childhood and my friends — I was overwhelmed with emotional and physical pain. The ‘Kinderheim’ [children’s home] in Blankenese restored part of my lost childhood to me. It became my home. My teachers and the other girls I met became my friends and my family.”

So stated Renee Kochman (née Renia Baaf), who lived at a children’s home established by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Joint) in a formerly Jewish-owned estate on the banks of the River Elba in *Blankenese*, a suburb of *Hamburg*, Germany.

The estate in *Blankenese* was one of many children’s homes established to take care of tens of thousands of Jewish children who had sur-

suffering. The smiling faces in photographs displayed in the exhibition inspire joy and hope, but mask profound depths of pain, trauma and grief. Some one and a half million Jewish children and teenagers were murdered during the Holocaust. Like the adults, children experienced the Holocaust in all its brutality: in ghettos, in camps, in hiding, wandering from place to place, and on the death marches. They were the victims of abuse, humiliation, forced labor, starvation, neglect and, in some cases, even medical experimentation.

Most of them lost their loved ones and were robbed of their childhood. Now, once again, those who had miraculously survived suffered the anguish of parting and separation. They were literally torn between their new Polish families and their biological parents, distant relatives or Jewish organizations, all of them claiming rights over the child.

The *Ilania* children’s village was situated on the site of a former Jewish psychiatric hospital in *Apeldoorn*, the Netherlands. Children from across Romania were brought there — most of them orphans. The idea to bring the children there was the initiative of the Jewish Agency’s “Youth Aliyah” project in partnership with the Joint and Dutch Jewish public organizations, and with the consent of the Dutch government.

Zehava Hellman (née Goldie Kaufman) was thirteen years old when she came to *Ilania*. “After the hell of the camps in Ukraine and the institutions in Romania, the Netherlands was like paradise for me,” Hellman recalled. “We were not regular children, but rather Holocaust refugees, plagued by fears and nightmares. At night, the children would cry and scream in their sleep.... How comforting it was to know that a night nurse was sleeping at the end of the corridor. As soon as she heard cries or screams — she would materialize like an angel and soothe us, even without speaking our language.... I blossomed there, and I think my sadness abated.”

The majority of the caregivers and teachers in these impromptu homes were young adults aged 17 to 25, sometimes only a year or two older than their protégés, and most had little or no experience caring for children — though many were former counselors and members of Jewish youth movements. At their own initiative, they found and collected the children, estab-

lished the homes and gave their charges hope for a new life.

What they lacked in experience they made up for in empathy. As survivors themselves, they could identify with the children’s pain, comprehend what they had endured, and restore their faith in humanity.

Shmuel Rat, a Gordonia youth movement counselor at *Ilania*, recalled the challenges of looking after the 6- to 16-year-olds: “It wasn’t clear to me if we were really equipped to shoulder the educational responsibility for children who had been separated from their families

and relatives, orphans who had personally experienced the horrors of the Holocaust. My fellow counselors and I had experience in organization and guidance within the youth movement, but now a different kind of work was expected of us — to be entrusted with the children’s day-to-day problems, and to be their only address, replacing their parents or relatives.”

Through a range of photographs, documents and video testimonies, almost all from Yad Vashem’s collections, “My Lost Childhood” tells the story of a total of seven children’s homes established after the war for child Holocaust survivors in Poland, Hungary, the Netherlands, Germany and France. Some operated for just a



“Next Year in Eretz-Israel, *Bergen-Belsen* DP Camp, 1945”



Renia Baaf (later Renee Kochman) next to the entrance gate of the children’s home in *Blankenese*, 1946.

lived the Holocaust, against all the odds. It is featured in “My Lost Childhood: Children’s Homes for Holocaust Survivors” — a new online exhibition uploaded recently to Yad Vashem’s website.

The children’s home in *Zabrze*, Poland, which housed children who had been removed from Christian homes and monasteries, is also included in the exhibition. Yishayahu Drucker, a chaplain in the Polish army, was charged with “redeeming” the children and bringing them to *Zabrze*. Drucker encountered many obstacles, including sometimes removing the children by force against their wishes and those of the Poles who had sheltered them at great personal risk during the war. “In most cases, child survivors living with Poles didn’t want to part from these Polish families,” testified Drucker many years later. “It was extremely rare for a child to agree to leave.... Even when they had been badly treated, they didn’t want to go.”

Like many other Jewish refugee children, Drucker’s charges were no strangers to extreme



Children at the “*Ilania*” children’s village playing chess with one of the counselors. *Apeldoorn*, the Netherlands, 1948.

few months, others for several years. The children were placed there in an endeavor to rehabilitate them, return them to their people and religion, and restore their childhood and youth after the horrors they had endured. The homes were established both at the initiative of individuals, and by youth movements and childcare organizations seeking to provide them with warmth, love and education until the time came to continue their journey — either to Eretz Israel or to be reunited with relatives in the United States, Latin America, Canada and other destinations.

BY YONA KOBO



“For a Jew hiding out on the ‘Aryan side,’ the front line runs along the city’s streets and squares, although they are a long way from bullets and bombs.... The front line accompanies an escapee every step of the way, whether he stops in a store to buy some bread, or before a stall to buy a book, or in a gateway to tie up a loose shoelace, or finally on the stairs in front of a stranger’s door before he manages to run to the apartment which will swallow him up and which will give him shelter that day.” — Szymon Gliksman

In her publication *Such a Beautiful Sunny Day: Jews Seeking Refuge in the Polish Countryside 1942–1945* (Yad Vashem Publications, 2017), Prof. Barbara Engelking, an eminent scholar of the Holocaust in Poland, tells a story of Jewish struggle for survival in a complex landscape of fear, betrayal and death. In the latest volume (48: 1-2) of *Yad Vashem Studies*, which is now under the new editorial di-



Marit Avron while she lived with a Christian family on the “Aryan side” of Warsaw.

rectorship of Dr. Sharon Kangisser Cohen, Professor Engelking looks at the lesser known phenomenon of Jews helping other Jews hide out on the “Aryan side” in Warsaw.

“After the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, a total of around 20,000 Jews were in hiding, for longer or shorter periods, on the city’s so-called ‘Aryan side,’” explains Professor Engelking. “Some of them had never moved into the ghetto; some had escaped by one way or another; and others had come to the capital counting on the fact that a large city would provide them with greater anonymity and thus increase their chances of survival. Survival was possible if you had a number of resources — and not just material ones, such as money and possessions to sell. Non-material resources included courage, determination, an awareness of danger and quick reactions; biological assets (a ‘good ap-

pearance’); cultural basics, such as a very good command of Polish, and a knowledge of customs and the Catholic religion; and a social network, such as family, friends and contacts. Survival did not depend on having all of these resources, or even most of them, but survivors’ accounts usually relate to a combination of some of them.”

In her article, Professor Engelking presents several stories of survival in Warsaw that focus on one of these resources; namely, social ties among Jews in hiding. The examples she brings are of Jews helping one another within the framework of spontaneous networks, unconnected with any institution or organization, and are based on ties linking family members, friends, or neighbors from one small town. They present self-sufficient Jewish help, which operated more or less without any Polish involvement — or, to be more precise, without any conscious Polish involvement. Poles may have played a passive role in Jewish activities — they rented out apartments, offered employment and sold documents — yet they were often unaware that they were dealing with Jews. The Jews were the active ones seeking help, while the Poles were the passive ones who had access to resources needed for survival, which were often bought from them.

Many Jews in hiding assumed additional danger by helping their families, friends and complete strangers, taking far greater risks than Poles who were helping Jews, since they were not being hunted on the streets by the *shmaltsovniks* (wartime extortionists). Prof. Engelking’s article shows how Jews hiding out in Warsaw handled a great many problems on their own, how much they helped one another, and just how little they fit the stereotype of passive victims.

In her testimony, for example, Madzia Teichner recalls a Jew from *Krosno*, Mosze Haftel, who, as Jan Krupiński, took advantage of his “Aryan” appearance and did not go into hiding. He was thus able to do a great deal of good for his fellow Jews, producing forged papers for them. It was that much easier for him, since he was also a printer by trade. Haftel not only made her forged documents, but then stayed in touch with Madzia, supporting and helping her at critical moments. After the outbreak of the Warsaw uprising in 1944, he took Madzia, her young son Gabriel and her friend Wanda Rozenberg to *Kraków* and then to *Zakopane*, where they sat out the occupation. One of the more well-known illustrations of survival thanks to Jewish solidarity and mutual assistance is a group of over a dozen orphans aged between eight and sixteen who sold cigarettes on Trzech Krzyży Square. “Most of these children had been involved in smuggling into the ghetto beforehand, and they knew all the hiding and crossing places; they were independent, plucky, and knew how to run away fast,” ex-

plains Prof. Engelking. “They got by in various ways, singing on the streetcars and on the street, buying and selling, peddling newspapers, vodka, moonshine and anything they could to German soldiers going on leave.”

The children met on the streets, recognized one another, and helped each other through difficult patches; they shared information about friendly people and safe houses. Over time, Józef Zysman, who worked for the Jewish National Committee (ŻKN), became interested in them and, after breaking down their initial mistrust, began helping the children, supporting them financially, finding them somewhere to stay for the night, and getting them false identity papers. “We were very excited about the papers,” recalls Peretz Hochman. “We would walk around the square and at every opportunity we would let our papers drop on the ground so that young Poles could see that we were not just any old ragamuffins or Jews.”



A girl from *Krakow* who was hidden on the “Aryan side” of Warsaw.

Most of the “cigarette kids” survived thanks to mutual assistance, intuition and acquired experience. The camaraderie of fate, reciprocal trust and solidarity were the group’s key resource in helping them to survive.

Aid was extended not only to family, friends or prewar neighbors, but also to complete strangers. This solidarity is even more astonishing given that it took place under circumstances of enormous risk, as contact with other Jews increased the danger considerably. Irena Meizel, who lived on the “Aryan side” as Janina Lewandowska, testified that Jews in the area had to behave as if they did not know one another at all. “If you bumped into your best friends and acquaintances on the street, you looked the other way and did not make eye contact, so as to avoid the suspicion that you knew each other.”

Nevertheless, Janina Pańska, a Jew who helped a great many in hiding, had “a truly ‘Aryan’ appearance and name, thanks to which she hardly needed forged papers, since all that had to be changed was her religion from Jewish to Roman Catholic.” She worked as a courier for

(Continued on page 11)

THEY WERE ESCAPING A TOXIC CONTINENT

One summer's night in 1946, over 1,300 European Jews waited silently on an Italian beach to board a secret ship, the *Josiah Wedgwood*. The plan was to try and smash through the Royal Navy blockade of the Palestine coast and leave Europe behind once and for all.

It is a story that was forgotten until I stumbled across a newspaper cutting while updating my Bradt travel guide to Liguria in northwestern Italy.

I went to the small workaday port of *Vado*, nestled between *Genoa* and *San Remo* on the Italian Riviera, from which the *Wedgwood* had sailed. On the beach I met 84-year-old fisherman Domenico Farro, who had seen the ship set sail more than 70 years ago.

"They were like this," he said sucking his cheeks in and pulling his thumb and fingers down his face, indicating that they were sorrowful looking.

I drove away assuming I could buy a book with one click on Amazon that would tell me who these Holocaust survivors on the beach were, where and what they had come from, how they had survived and what had led them to the Italian Riviera.

No such book existed. To answer my questions, I had to write it. It turned me into a detective as I tracked down the people on the beach and traveled to Lithuania, to Ukraine and to Poland to discover why they abandoned the homes they had lived in for generations and what had happened to them during the war and its immediate aftermath.

The *Wedgwood* was not the only ship that tried to break through the British blockade of Palestine. In all, 56 such ships sailed from Italy alone.

The story of the *Wedgwood* eventually led me to the small hilltop Israeli village of *Karmeit Yosef*, where one of the youngest survivors who travelled on the former Canadian corvette, Dani Chanoch, now lives. He sailed to *Haifa* with his older brother, Uri.

When the *Kovno* ghetto in Lithuania was liquidated in July 1944, the Chanoch family were deported. In *Stutthof* in Poland, where there was a concentration camp, the boys' mother and sister were taken off the train. They were never seen again.

"This is the point our family ended. I did not say goodbye to my mother," Chanoch told me. "But if you want to survive, if you want to stay alive, there is no time for pain and suffering."

It is a reason why so many survivors, like Chanoch, did not talk publicly about their experiences until recently, or until they felt that they knew for certain they had really survived, when they retired and their children were grown — when they had lived their life to the full.

The brothers were taken with their father, who did not survive, to the *Kaufing* subcamp of *Dachau*. It was a labor camp and, after a month, Chanoch was among 131 boys considered too young to work and transferred to Auschwitz.

At the age of 11, he was put to work on the

ramp emptying the trains of the belongings that the people had been told to leave behind.

At first I think his story illustrates the randomness of survival, but I am soon corrected as I sit in his elegant whitewashed sitting room.

As we eat Lithuanian *krantz* cake and drink coffee, he relates a shocking tale. Chanoch escaped two selections in 1944 on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

"The High Holy Days were the selection season. Once they came in with a stick and, if you were shorter than the stick, that was it," he says matter-of-factly.

When Chanoch met me outside his house, I had been struck how tall he was, but there is more to his story.

"We tried to hide those who were shorter than the stick. We were all friends and we had solidarity. There is no one who survived without support, without help." It is a lesson that survivors tell me again and again. Friendship was a key to survival.

Chanoch was eventually reunited with his brother in Italy, and the boys were taken to a children's home in *Fiesole*, above *Florence*, where they spent the months before they were selected by the Jewish underground to sail on the *Wedgwood*.

But the stories that unfold show that it was not simply the Nazis that put an end to Jewish life in Europe.

Rivne (*Rowne* in Polish) is now a Ukrainian town in a region that was once part of Poland. Here the story of the *Shoah* is still raw.

When I arrived at the memorial to 23,500 Jews shot by the SS in the Sosenki Forest in 1941, I was greeted by a dead dog lying on a mound of melting snow. It was, perhaps, a reminder that there are some in *Rivne* who find the memory of the dead a threat.

Yitzak Kaplan was just 16 when he sailed on the *Wedgwood*. He was born in a village of *Babyn*, 15 kilometers from *Rivne* — and his sister and her two young children lie in the *Sosenki* death pits. When the family fled eastward into the Soviet Union after the German invasion of Russia in 1941, she stayed behind, in the hope her husband who had been called up into the Polish army in 1939 would return home.

We meet in his home in *Haifa*. High up behind the Baha'i Gardens, it has a splendid view south across the coast towards *Atlit*, the British detention center where the people who sailed on the *Wedgwood* were held after they arrived in Palestine.

Dressed in a smart blue shirt and jeans, Kaplan looks much younger than his 88 years. He is keen to offer me coffee and Polish biscuits as he tells me that he survived the war with his mother and elder sister in the Soviet Union.

After the liberation, the family returned to *Babyn*. They intended to get on with their lives but they risked being lynched by their neighbors, so they decided to settle in *Rivne*, where survivors were making a new home.

But as the months passed, and conflict between Ukrainian nationalists and the Red Army wore on, it became clear that it was simply too dangerous for the Kaplan family to stay. The nationalists were murdering Jews and Poles in their bid to ethnically cleanse the area.

Thousands of Jews like the Kaplans left eastern Europe and flooded into the American-occupied zones of Austria and Germany.

It was here that I discovered a story that shocked me and challenged the assumption that many of us hold that the soldiers who liberated the Nazi camps were the heroes.



Dani Chanoch with his brother Uri after their liberation.

The survivors who found themselves in the displaced persons camps were treated with disdain. Nothing illustrates this better than the story of the first Yom Kippur after the liberation.

In the *Feldafing* displaced persons camp, on the eve of Yom Kippur, 5,000 survivors crowded into a makeshift wooden synagogue for *Kol Nidre*. A number of them would eventually sail on the *Wedgwood*.

The atmosphere was charged with emotion as they realized that they had no parents to bless them or no children left alive to bless.

The next day, Generals Patton and Eisenhower paid a visit to the camp. Patton had already written in his diary that he regarded displaced people as not human beings "and this applies particularly to the Jews."

After the visit to *Feldafing*, Patton wrote in his diary that the congregation in the synagogue was "the greatest stinking bunch of humanity I have ever seen."

The journey across Europe made me realize that we make far too many assumptions about the Holocaust.

The danger is that if we ignore its complexities, we misunderstand why thousands of desperate survivors came to believe that the only future they could envisage was in Palestine.

BY ROSIE WHITEHOUSE, *The JC*

FLYING TO REMEMBER

Seventy-five years after the end of World War II, the Israeli Air Force (IAF), under the leadership of Major General Amikam Norkin, participated in a joint commemorative flypast mission together with the German Air Force over the skies of the notorious *Dachau* concentration camp. The flypast was part of a larger joint exercise between the German and Israeli air forces.

The IAF pilots took more than the memory of the six million Jewish men, women and children murdered during the Holocaust on the mission. Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, agreed to lend an original artifact from its collections to make this historic journey back to Germany: a belt once worn by Holocaust survivor and former *Dachau* prisoner Peisach Smilg. Smilg was born in October 1896 to Eliezer and Sara Rivka Smilg in *Kédainiai*, Lithuania. An astute youngster, he studied in *cheder* and spoke several languages, including Hebrew, English, German, French, Russian and Lithuanian.

Prior to World War I, Eliezer ran a family farm in the city of *Šiauliai*.

With the outbreak of the war, Peisach's plans to study pharmacy changed, and he began working on the farm. He proved to be a successful businessman, expanding the family's business by ordering better-quality seeds from Germany. Later, he opened a small lemon-juicing factory. Nevertheless, the majority of his time was devoted to volunteering in community affairs. He was an active member and leader of the Maccabi youth movement in *Šiauliai*, as well as a member of the Hapoel Hamizrachi Zionist political movement.

In 1941, when the Germans invaded the country, the Jews of *Šiauliai* were relocated to the ghetto erected in the city. In July 1944, Peisach and his brother Jacob were deported to *Stutthoff* concentration camp, and around a

month later, on August 18 — 76 years to the day before the historic flypast — they were transferred to *Dachau*. The only item Peisach had with him from his life before the war was a belt, which he managed to hold on to until liberation. At that point, the two brothers were the sole survivors of their extended family.

In 1948, Peisach and Jacob Smilg emigrated to the newly established State of Israel together with their wives, Sarah and Paula. Peisach Smilg passed away in 1992. His daughter, Esther, donated her father's belt to Yad Vashem for posterity, in order that future generations might learn about her father's personal story and about the Holocaust.

Ahead of the flypast, Esther Smilg and several other Holocaust survivors and Second Generation members met with Yad Vashem



Hellmut Bachrach-Barée (1898–1969), *Death March: Dachau to Tölz*, April 1945.

Chairman Avner Shalev and IAF Commander Norkin in Tel Aviv. Among them were Holocaust survivor and former *Dachau* prisoner Abba Naor; and Aviva Plash, whose husband was a prisoner in *Dachau* and whose grandson was one of the pilots participating in the flypast.

In addition to passing over *Dachau*, the IAF flew above the *Fürstenfeldbruck* airport near *Munich*, where nine Israeli athletes were brutally massacred by Palestinian terrorists during the 1972 Summer Olympic Games. In light of this, Yad Vashem also provided the IAF with a replica of a drawing created by *Munich*-born Holocaust survivor Hellmut Bachrach-Barée, *Death March: Dachau to Tölz*, which is displayed in Yad Vashem's Holocaust History Museum.

With the ascent of the Nazis to power, both Hellmut and his father Emanuel were barred from working as artists. In November 1944, Hellmut was arrested, and deported to two sub-camps of the *Buchenwald* concentration camp at *Stassfurt*. With the liquidation of the camps in early April 1945, he was sent to *Buchenwald*, where he joined the death march of some 4,500 prisoners to *Dachau*. In May, the prisoners arrived at *Bad Tölz*. Throughout the death marches, Bachrach-Barée recorded his experiences in drawings, including the one taken on the flypast. Created in May 1945, the artwork depicts several Jewish prisoners being led on a death march by a Nazi guard. Following the Allied victory, he was liberated and returned to *Munich*, where he continued to draw, concentrating mainly on horses, landscapes and portraits. He died in *Munich* in 1969.

"The stories of Peisach Smilg, Hellmut Bachrach-Barée and thousands of others, all told through the numerous letters, documents, photographs, artifacts and artworks housed on the Mount of Remembrance, serve as everlasting witnesses to the horrors of the Holocaust," said Avner Shalev. "Even as Holocaust denial and distortion continue to plague global society both in the physical and digital worlds, Yad Vashem's mission is un-

changed — to ensure that the *Shoah* is never relegated to the annals of history, and continues to remain relevant today and for generations to come."

BY SIMMY ALLEN

RESCUE BY JEWS IN WARSAW

(Continued from page 9)

over a dozen Jews who never came out of hiding, selling off their belongings hidden in a number of places, and supplying them with food, money, medicine and books.

"The realization of the potential peril arising from contact between Jews in hiding imposed a need to take even greater care," comments Professor Engelking. "Thus, the courage of those Jews who risked their lives providing aid not only to those close to them, but also to complete strangers, deserves great respect. There were those who even did it with panache and on a large scale." One spectacular example of such aid was the actions of Wilhelm Bachner, an engineer from *Bielsko*. Speaking fluent German and with a "favorable appearance" and an engineering degree from the University of Brno, he was hired immedi-

ately by a fast-growing architectural and building firm in *Dresden*, which was seeking lucrative military contracts. Bachner convinced his boss that materials from demolished buildings could be bought cheaply in the ghetto, and with the appropriate pass he shuttled between the ghetto and the "Aryan side," delivering false identity papers and work permits, and bringing out trapped Jews. As the firm began to need additional construction workers and office staff, Bachner subsequently employed a great many Jews at its offices. Surviving a number of close calls and unforeseen threats, he displayed courage, daring, steely nerves and self-control.

By fighting the Nazi enemy on this front through helping other Jews, Bachner, Pańska, Haftel and countless others displayed exceptional bravery, determination and a will to resist.

They often found unexpected reserves of courage within themselves. Not the passive recipients of aid by Poles, they were active, resourceful people, brave and full of initiative, who saved not just themselves, but also members of their own families and others — even strangers — all linked by a common fate. Although the threat of death lay at every step, they risked their own lives in order to save other Jews, and their stories serve as an inspiration to all.

The publication of this volume of *Yad Vashem Studies* was made possible through the generous support of Mrs. Johanna (Hannie) Catherina Kiprono Biwott in memory of the members of her community in Amsterdam who did not survive the Holocaust.

BY LEAH GOLDSTEIN

ASSERTING THEIR JEWISH IDENTITY

(Continued from page 7)

ality, she replied, according to transcripts, “I am a Jewess from Poland.” Asked why she was arrested, she said, “During that week, all of the Jews of the town where I was living were arrested, and because of my being a Jewess, I was sent to Auschwitz camp.”

My mother told the tribunal that upon leaving the train when they arrived at Auschwitz, they were lined up, men on one side, women on the other; that an SS man pointed at them, saying “Right” and “Left”; that all but about 250 women and 250 men were loaded onto trucks and taken away; that “later on I was told that they were sent to the crematorium and gassed”; and that among those taken to the gas chamber were her parents, her first husband and her six-year-old son.

In light of her medical training, my mother was assigned to work in the infirmary of the Auschwitz subcamp of *Birkenau*, also referred to as Auschwitz II. She has been

credited with saving the lives of women inmates there by performing rudimentary surgeries and sending them out of the infirmary in advance of selections for the gas chambers. In November 1944, she was sent to *Bergen-Belsen*, where she and a group of other prisoners kept 149 Jewish children alive through the brutal winter of 1945. Immediately following the liberation, the British appointed her to organize and head a team of doctors and volunteers from among the healthier inmates to work alongside the British military medical team in an effort to try to save as many of the critically ill survivors as possible.

At the trial, my mother testified that there were “three methods of selection” at Auschwitz: “The first one immediately at the arrival of the prisoners; the second in the camp among the healthy prisoners; and the third in the hospital amongst the sick.”

She said that a camp doctor was always present and described the selections she had seen at the hospital: “All the sick Jews were ordered to parade quite naked in front of the doctor, and they had to pass this sort of commission. The seemingly weak people were put aside at once, but other times the doctor looked also at the hands or the arms and any small sort of thing which caught his attention.” She added that other SS men and women were present, and that “Sometimes they pointed with a finger to one or the other, pointing out that those may join those people who were condemned to death.”

Asked what usually happened to those who had been selected, my mother said that “they had to go quite naked to a very ill-famed block, No. 25, where they were waiting often for days without food or drink, naked, until the trucks arrived to take them away to the crematorium.”

December 1, 1943, she recalled, “was a day of very large selections. Typhus was rampant through the camp and there were in the hospital 4,124 sick Jewish women. Out of this number

4,000 were selected for the crematorium and only 124 remained.”

On cross-examination, my mother said that during her 15 months at Auschwitz-Birkenau, “only Jews were sent to the gas chamber,” adding that “I was told that there was a camp for Gypsies [that is, Roma], and they were also sent to the gas chamber.”

Subsequent witnesses made a point of emphasizing their Jewish identity, and that they had been arrested only because they were Jews. They were neither criminals nor, with one exception, active opponents of the German occupation of their respective homelands.

Asked to state their nationality, Estera Guterman, Paula Synger and Ester Wolgruch replied, like my mother, “A Jewess from Poland”; Anni Jonas said, “I am a Jewess from Germany”; Helen Hammermasch said, “I am a Jewess born in Poland”; Hanka Rozenwayg said, “A Polish

one of the British defense counsel created a furor. Major Thomas C. Winwood represented Josef Kramer, the commandant of *Bergen-Belsen*, and other senior members of the camp’s SS personnel. In his opening address, Winwood denigrated the Jewish inmates of the Nazi death and concentration camps as “undesirable,” that is to say, inferior. “The object of the German concentration camp was to segregate the undesirable elements,” he said, “and the most undesirable element, from the German point of view, was the Jew.”

Had he stopped there, his words might well have gone unnoticed outside the *Lüneburg* courtroom, but Winwood went on to add: “By the time we got to Auschwitz and *Belsen*, the vast majority of the inhabitants of the concentration camps were the dregs of the ghettos of middle Europe. These were the people who had very little idea of how to behave in their ordinary life, and they had little idea of doing what they were

told, and the control of these internees was a great problem.” This blatant disparagement of European Jewry as a whole caused an uproar.

Whether influenced by the testimony of Ada Bimko and the other witnesses, or by the controversy over Winwood’s ill-chosen disparagement of the Jewish inmates of Auschwitz and *Belsen*, or for other reasons, Colonel Backhouse’s approach underwent a dramatic transformation by the time he delivered his closing address. There, in sharp contrast with his opening statement, Backhouse emphasized that one of the reasons for the internment of people by the Nazis was “the deliberate destruction of the Jewish race.” He told the tribunal that the men, women and children murdered at Auschwitz “were gassed for no other reason than they were Jews.” The selections at Auschwitz, he argued, constituted “an attempt to

murder an entire race — an attempt to murder the whole Jewish race . . . That martyrdom of the Jews . . . insofar as it was employed on these persons who came into the power of the Germans and into the power of the personnel at Auschwitz, was a war crime which has never been equaled.”

The *Belsen* trial did achieve a modicum of justice. The tribunal found 30 of the defendants guilty, with Kramer and 10 others sentenced to death and executed. In retrospect, however, the way the trial was conducted — with the prosecution’s initial attempt to downplay the genocidal nature of the crimes at issue — highlights the difficulty inherent in reconciling the principles of justice with its far too often brutal realities. As one of the witnesses at *Lüneburg*, Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, wrote in her memoirs, “Is it possible to apply law in the conventional sense to crimes so far removed from the law as the massacre of millions of people, which were perpetrated in the cause of ‘purifying the human race’?”

BY MENACHEM Z. ROSENSAFT,
Just Security



German camp guards at the *Belsen* trial.

Jewess”; Ewa Gryka said, “I am a Polish Jew”; and Ruchla Koppel and Genia Zylberdukaten answered simply, “Jewish,” as did Roman Sompolinski, who also declared that he was arrested “Because I am a Jew.” Asked why they were arrested, Sofia Litwinska, Anni Jonas, Dora Szafran, Ilona Stein and Lidia Sunschein all said, “Because I am a Jewess.”

Dora Szafran testified that “People were sent to the gas chamber for being Jews,” and Anni Jonas told the tribunal that she had attended selections which were “for the purpose of gassing the people.” Asked who were picked for gassing, Jonas answered, “Jews.”

It would appear that these prosecution witnesses and erstwhile concentration camp inmates were determined to do what the prosecution itself was not willing to do: make their Jewish identities and the fact that they had been persecuted and their families murdered only because they were Jews a matter of record.

The prosecution’s reticence to highlight the anti-Semitic essence of the crimes with which the defendants were charged was derailed when

WHEN THE MOVIE CAMERAS CAME TO THE DEATH CAMPS

Although Allied governments from Moscow to Washington had reliable information about the wholesale slaughter of Jews going on in the death camps, as well as on the infamous “death marches,” the liberation of the camps was not a strategic objective of the Allies, but a consequence of their military campaign.

Between August 1944 and April 1945, Allied soldiers, together with camera teams, discovered Nazi German extermination camps in Poland and concentration camps in Germany. Contrary to common thought, the first films shot in the concentration camps did not document the atrocities committed there in real time. Rather, the Allied information films about the discovery of the camps were created by seasoned professionals, and, despite the limitations of their scope and their distribution, with time these films became historical documents, determining the world’s collective memory by means of their iconographic images.

Majdanek in Poland was the first camp to be discovered. Red Army troops reached the camp in July 1944, accompanied by the finest war correspondents and filmmakers, most notably Roman Karmen, a Soviet Russian photojournalist, and Alexander Ford, one of the fathers of Polish cinema in the twentieth century. Ford and Karmen were faced with the challenge of making a film of a site of mass murder on an unprecedented scale.

The film *Extermination Camp Majdanek: Cemetery of Europe* (Alexander Ford, 1944) created a new cinematic language, which determined, to a great extent, the filmic representation of the concentration camp. Depth-of-field shots of massive rows of electrified barbed-wire fences

generate an image of horror. In another sequence, a traveling shot reveals a row of people standing behind a barbed-wire fence. Though the people in the frame were actual prisoners at *Majdanek*, the sequence is staged to represent the point of view of the soldiers who burst into the camp. The dramatic tension in the shot, as well as its content, defines a narrative of “liberation.”

Liberation films belong to the genre of crime-scene documentation, since they present the viewer with the traces left by the murderers who perpetrated atrocities. There are scenes of corpses, in the process of being buried or in a state of advanced decomposition, and images of objects related to wholesale annihilation, including interior shots of crematoria still exuding smoke, used Zyklon B capsules and mass graves. All of these shots were intended to make tangible the fact that an unprecedented crime had been revealed. Especially horrifying are the frames of piles of shoes, images that combine long shots of piles with close-ups of individual items: every suitcase, sandal and toy once belonged to a real person.

Aside from the fact that none of the liberation films actually documents mass murder in real time, the former prisoners in the camps are also voiceless and objectified — they never speak to the camera. Additionally, there is no reference to the unique fate of the Jews during the Holocaust, although the great majority of the surviving prisoners as well as the murdered victims in the films were, of course, Jewish.

The Cold War negatively affected the distribution of liberation films. Various versions in different languages were hastily edited, and excerpts were screened as evidence at the *Nuremberg* and

Eichmann trials. Although most of the films saw public viewing shortly after the end of the war, almost all were subsequently returned to the shelves, or were reedited only many years later. A prime example is the British film *German Concentration Camps: A Factual Survey* (Sidney Bernstein, UK), the production of which was halted abruptly in 1945, among other reasons, as a result of British anti-Zionist policies at the time.

Bernstein, who traveled to *Bergen-Belsen* shortly after its liberation by British forces, was devastated by the experience, and decided to make a film documenting the discovery of the camps. For this purpose, he obtained Soviet footage shot at *Majdanek* and Auschwitz, as well as British footage from *Bergen-Belsen*.

But the British Ministry of Information stopped production in 1945, and it was only in 1984 that a partial version of the film was screened as part of a *Frontline* program on PBS. The restored version released in 2014 was produced by the Imperial War Museum. At the time of the latter film’s release, the documentary *Night Will Fall* (Andre Singer, 2014, UK) hit the screens, telling the story of Bernstein’s trials and tribulations attempting to make his film seventy years earlier.

The original intention of the Allies who made the liberation films with the finest of filmmakers was to document the atrocities committed in the camps, and to tell the story of their liberation. Yet after the Allies themselves decided to shelve the films not long after the war, excerpts from them appeared in documentary films, and provided thematic and visual inspiration for feature films, as representations of the atrocities themselves.

BY MIMI ASH

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DETAILS TO FOLLOW

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN LIGHT AND DARKNESS

JEWISH FESTIVALS DURING THE HOLOCAUST

Marking the festivals in prayer and song and performing customs as much as conditions, time and place would allow, in the ghettos and the camps and in hiding, gave Jews something to hold onto, a feeling of continuity and hope for the future, as part of the ancient tradition and as a link in the chain of generations past.



A boy playing with a dreidel on Hanukkah, Berlin, Germany, 1930s.

"It was the eve of Hanukkah, and we took a potato, cut it in half and made a hole in the middle. We stole some oil from the machines we worked on, we pulled thread out from the sheets and made it into a wick — and that is how we lit the Hanukkiah [Hanukkah menorah], in the window overlooking the river, where there were no houses or anything, no possibility of being seen... we sang "Maoz Tsur" [O Rock of Ages — a traditional Hanukkah song]. We knew the blessings off by heart... and then what did we get? A tiny saucer of real potato soup... we treated it like ice-cream, we licked it to make it last."

So describes Edith Rotschild (née Weiss) the lighting of Hanukkah candles in the slave labor camp of *Oberhohenelbe* in the Sudetenland. Rotschild, who was born in *Balassagyarmat*, northern Hungary, in 1923, had been sent to *Oberhohenelbe* from Auschwitz, where the women were forced to make radio components, light bulbs and weapons. Rotschild's testimony is one of many about the festival of Hanukkah during the Holocaust that may be

viewed in the online exhibition "Hanukkah — The Festival of Lights" on Yad Vashem's website. Hanukkah, which symbolizes the struggle between light and darkness, the battle of the few against the many, and the Jewish victory over the Greek conquerors, held an even greater meaning during the Holocaust. The poem "Maoz Tsur" that Rotschild and her friends sang in the camp illustrated the historical struggle of the Jewish people throughout the generations, and their ultimate salvation — which echoed within the hearts of the prisoners as a longed-for miracle that would save them too from their suffering.

Celebrating the Jewish festivals during the Holocaust was a significant challenge for the persecuted Jews. The decision to take charge of their own time, often without knowing the date, in order to remember the upcoming festivals, allowed them to preserve their spiritual essence and act as human beings.

"Hanukkah — The Festival of Lights" is one of a series of online exhibitions that present the many ways in which Jewish festivals were marked in Europe and North Africa before, during and after the Holocaust — the last in DP camps and children's homes that were established after the war. The exhibitions are based on Holocaust-era items housed in the Yad Vashem Archives and Collections: photographs, artifacts, testimonies, documents and works of art.



Jewish New Year's greeting card from the ghetto, Łódź, Poland, 1940.

The online exhibition "And You Shall Tell Your Children," for example, includes stories of Jews who wished to mark Passover during the

Holocaust. It presents Passover *Haggadot* (texts for the order of the seder celebrated on the eve of Passover), among them one that was copied and illustrated by Ephraim-Ze'ev Yacqont while in hiding in Belgium.



Hanukkah menorah in Kiel, Germany, in a window of a prewar Jewish home with the Nazi banner visible in the background.

"Marking the New Year" illustrates episodes from the High Holy Days — days of atonement, forgiveness and renewal of hope for a better future. The exhibition, which was recently updated with ten new stories, features greeting cards and wishes for the Jewish New Year — Rosh Hashanah. Each message carries with it the fate of those who sent or received it. One of the greeting cards was written and illustrated by Mojsze Treschtschanski for his caregiver, Emilie Reinwald, in September 1943 in the *Theresienstadt* ghetto. "Redemption and happiness for the New Year," he wrote, a short while before they were both transported to their deaths in Auschwitz.

The unique way of keeping Jewish tradition during the Holocaust is perhaps best expressed by 13-year-old Fanny (Zipporah) Dasburg in the greeting card that she wrote to her parents in the *Bergen-Belsen* concentration camp in September 1944. "We will have a happy and sweet New Year even without apple and honey [the traditional food for Rosh Hashanah]," she wrote, and concluded with a prayer: "May peace come quickly in our days, and may we speedily return home with all the family. May you be inscribed for a good year."

BY YONA KOBO

SECOND GENERATION SURVIVOR: “I HAD VISIONS HAUNTING ME FOR DAYS”

It took Avital Baruch until she was in her twenties to realize she had grown up in the shadow of her mother's anxieties, brought about by her horrific experiences in the Holocaust. Another 30 years would pass before Israeli-born Baruch realized just how much being a second-generation child of Holocaust survivors had impacted on her life.



Avital Baruch's great-grandmother Gitté with her daughters, Rivka and Chaya, and Chaya's daughters, Sophica and Tonie, in 1938.

Her own journey of self-discovery, as well as the wartime experiences of her mother, Sophica, and father, Herman, is laid bare in Baruch's recently published memoir, *Frozen Mud and Red Ribbons*.

"There were issues to do with my mother that have always bothered me, and I waited for the right time to research them," Baruch says, explaining why she embarked on the six-year project to research her family history. "There were too many question marks in my mind, both about the family and the fate of Romanian Jews."

In narrative form and with lively descriptions of Jewish-Romanian culture and traditions, *Frozen Mud and Red Ribbons* traces the family's journey from the good — if fairly humble — times to the most horrific, incomprehensible evil, and onward to an exciting future in Israel.

Sophica's recollections are interspersed with those of Herman, who, having grown up in *Botoșani*, a city in northeastern Romania, escaped the deportations. Their daughter's memory of her childhood plays alongside these, casting a light on her own trauma as a member of the Second Generation.

Romania was not occupied by Nazi Germany, but allied with it, and, as Baruch details in the book, about 156,000 Jews were exiled from Romania to Transnistria, where half perished.

As she writes: "They were shot, burnt alive, drowned, they contracted typhus, they starved and they became exhausted mentally and physically. But half survived it, and Sophica knew she is one of them, she knew that she is strong."

Like many other victims of Nazi terror, Baruch's mother was extremely reluctant to speak about her experiences, but gradually started opening up.

Baruch's original aim was to write down her family's story for her children. "Soon I was propelled by an inner desire to know more and to understand the full picture," she explains.

"I felt very strongly that knowing more about my mother's, and even my grandmother's, generation would help me understand the way I was brought up."

Sophica was born in 1935 in *Iași*, where her father was later killed in a pogrom, together with about 14,000 people. Sophica didn't see her father from the age of two, when she moved with her mother and sister to *Mihaileni*, a small town on the border between Bessarabia and Bukovina.

Living in poverty after the death of her grandfather, six-year-old Sophica was excited to follow her older sister, Tonie, and start school. But her dream was cut short when, in June 1941, *Mihaileni's* Jews were deported. Three years later, half of them were dead.

Baruch lays bare the horrific experiences her family endured: "Chaya [Sophica's mother], Rivka and Esther [Sophica's aunts] carried their packages on their backs... moving with them there were gendarmes on horses, with whips in hand... every now and then they hit one of the slow walkers, including Chaya."

"Sophica, who was running ahead, turned back every so often and pulled her by the hand. But Sophica was only six and her mother 32, so the pulling wasn't so effective."

She details how they were forced to sleep on icy fields and walk for days at a time, eventually reaching Transnistria — which was annexed to Romania from Ukraine in 1941 — and the horrors of the labor camps there.

Tragically, Sophica's sister, Tonie, contracted typhus — along with countless others — and was buried in a mass grave. She was just 10 when Sophica lay beside her and couldn't understand why Tonie did not open her eyes any more.

Upon finding work in the village of *Capusterna*, in 1943, Chaya considered herself "lucky" — and Sophica helped out, too, making

bricks out of cow dung and straw.

While Baruch, 59, maintains that she is not a historian, she did conduct detailed research, interviewing people, visiting museums and reading books and testimonies. But her research also impacted on her.

"At the start of interviewing, and especially while reading other testimonies of survivors from Transnistria, I had visions haunting me for days," she says, but adds that her father's story contributed "playfulness, happiness, light and humor, and especially hope."

The Romanian Holocaust is not as well known as that of other countries, something Baruch suggests can partly be explained by Romania becoming Communist after the war.

"There was not much chance to receive any reparations from Romanian authorities for atrocities during the war," explains Baruch, a former chartered accountant turned teacher, who now lives in London.

"Unlike in Germany after the war, there was no access for western researchers to documents and proof of the events that took place and for evidence of [Romania's wartime ruler] Antonescu's crimes. It was only in 2004 that the Romanian government admitted its active involvement in the killing of more than 405,000 Jews [including 135,000 Transylvanian Jews taken to Auschwitz]. "Overall, the majority of



Sophica with her husband, Herman, in 1952.

Romanian survivors opted to keep their stories quiet, bury it in the past, and work to build the country and their new families."

Baruch's story, while detailing unimaginable horrors, is also one of hope. Her parents met in Israel after the war, married and had Baruch and her younger brother, Uri.

"My parents both found their move to Israel one of hope and the beginning of a new life," she says. "They were very proud to be part of the building of the new state."

BY ALEX GALBINSKI, *Jewish News Online*



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

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

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