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LENNY WILF: VISIONARY, LEADER, ROLE MODEL

Ten years would be considered an extensive tour of duty for any serviceman. And as we mark ten years of devoted service on the part of Lenny Wilf, who is stepping down from the chairmanship of the American Society for Yad Vashem (ASYV) this month, we acknowledge and salute Lenny for his passionate and tireless service on behalf of Yad Vashem and Holocaust remembrance.

Lenny was named chairman of the board of ASYV in 2011 following a 30-year tenure on the part of ASYV founder Eli Zborowski, z"l. Lenny acknowledged that it was a privilege and honor to have been given the trust to lead the organization after Eli's 30-year run. As Lenny put it, "they were big shoes to fill."

Avner Shalev, recently retired chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate, expressed his deep appreciation to Lenny for his leadership and friendship to Yad Vashem. Shalev acknowledged that during the period of Lenny's leadership, they partnered together to tackle many challenges and also got to plan for and witness the growth and development of Yad Vashem. According to

Shalev, Lenny was continuing in the legacy of his family by becoming involved in Yad Vashem, out of great appreciation and a sense of deep conviction that it was the right thing to do.

As a natural leader, Lenny knew that when the time came for his generation to take over, he would step up and take responsibility for running ASYV. Shaya ben Yehuda, recently retired managing director of the International Relations Division of Yad Vashem, shared that "Lenny's commitment to ASYV and its support for the work of Yad Vashem was rooted in his identity as a representative of the second-generation of survivors. Lenny led that second generation group, who for years stood along-

side their parents — the founders — long recognizing that when the day came, they would be ready to step up and take upon themselves the mantle of leadership and commit to continue running ASYV."



In one conversation that Shaya ben Yehuda had with Lenny, he asked him about the continuity of the organization when the day came that the late Eli Zborowski, z"l, would no longer be able to continue in his role. Lenny's response was "I am here, and when that day comes, I will come in and take on the job." According to ben Yehuda, Lenny showed up to lead out of his profound sense of commitment and responsibility, adding, "As was his way, he spoke little and did much, setting an example for all donors to ASYV and Yad Vashem."

Stanley Stone, current executive director of ASYV, noted that many experts on leadership note that true commitment inspires and at-

tracts people, and that this important quality expertly defined Lenny Wilf's tenure as chairman of ASYV. Said Stone, "Lenny, in a strong yet quiet and dignified manner, embodied that commitment, attracted like-minded supporters

and expertly led ASYV, seeking to always make the best decision in the best interest of Yad Vashem."

The hallmark of Lenny's service to ASYV was his extraordinary work ethic and expert management style. Stone noted that "the growth of ASYV both financially and programmatically can be attributed to Lenny's leadership style and guiding hand." He further pointed out that Lenny's visionary style made him an advocate and role model for the next generation and their inclusion in ASYV. "It is no accident that our Young Leadership Associates have flourished thanks to Lenny's commitment and encouragement of this important constituency," said Stone. "He is their best cheerleader and he urged them to take on their own unique structure and program."

Deciding to step down from the chairmanship at this time was a strategic decision designed to correspond with a change in leadership at Yad Vashem. When it was announced in 2020 that Avner Shalev would be retiring as chairman of the directorate of Yad Vashem, Lenny decided it was important for ASYV to appoint new leadership as well, so that they could forge a strong working relationship with the new chair of the directorate, and together build on past successes.

Lenny couldn't have been more pleased when Adina Burian and Mark Moskowitz agreed to step up and become co-chairs of ASYV, effective June 2021. Said Wilf, "They represent the next generation which is so important to our work. I look forward to working for them, and together, growing and expanding our presence and the work of Yad Vashem in the United States."

YLA VIRTUAL 6K: A WALK TO REMEMBER

On Sunday, June 6, the Young Leadership Associates hosted their first-ever Virtual 6K Walk/Run. They raised over \$108,000, surpassing their goal, and had nearly 400 supporters from nineteen states plus Israel. With events taking place virtually over the past sixteen months, the YLA wanted to plan something that could unite people around a single cause on a specific day, even when physically apart. Although social distancing has proven difficult, it has provided an opportunity for us to garner participation from people all around the country, who, under normal circumstances, would be unable to attend in-person events.

The YLA encouraged everyone to walk or run 6 kilometers on June 6 in memory of the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust, and to raise support for Yad Vashem’s sacred mission of Holocaust remembrance and education. Participants could start at any time on the designated day and move at their own pace. Whether at home, on a treadmill or in a local park, anyone could join. From coast to coast, people committed to walk the distance in California, Georgia, Nebraska, Maine and so many other parts of the country.

As individuals created their personal fundrais-

ing pages, they were encouraged to dedicate their 6K to someone, whether a survivor or a victim, and then share that person’s story. The Krakowski sisters (YLA Board members Rachel, Sarah, Sophie and Leah) dedicated their 6K in memory of their survivor grandparents and great-grandparents, Elli & Israel Krakowski and Sam & Sarah Krakowski. Sara Marks of Washington shared how the “Jewish people have always been close to [her] heart,” and that she and her daughter would be walking in memory of Holo-

caust survivor Irving Roth after hearing him speak several years ago.

At a time of rising anti-Semitism in the U.S. and around the world, it was extremely heartening to see so many people engage in this event and show their support for the work of Yad Vashem. Now, more than ever, it is necessary that we ensure the victims and survivors are never forgotten. Many of our young leaders have been experiencing an onslaught of hateful rhetoric on social media and a discouraging lack of support among their peers. For them, this event provided an opportunity not only to remember those who were murdered simply for being Jewish, but also to show that the Jewish people will never again find themselves in a deadly, hopeless situation: we have Israel, we have our pride, and we have the lessons of those who came before us.

BY JILL GOLTZER



Doreen, Oz and Ethan Tannenbaum (Laguna Beach, California).

REUNITED 75 YEARS LATER

On June 7, the American Society for Yad Vashem had the great honor of documenting the reunion between two survivors, Helga Stern (née Zauderer) and Georgette Heller (née Traksbetryger). This all started when Nancy Powell, ASYV Benefactor, told our office about the upcoming reunion between two Auschwitz survivors who met on the death march. One of those survivors, Georgette Heller, is the mother of Nancy’s brother-in-law, Harry Heller.

Georgette Heller was born and raised in Brussels, Belgium. She was only 15 years old when her family went into hiding with the Abbeloos, a non-Jewish family. For two years she remained inside. Finally, there came a point where Georgette couldn’t take it anymore, so she snuck out one night. Unfortunately, she was spotted, turned over to the Nazis, and immediately put on a train



Georgette Heller (left) and Helga reunited 75 years later.

to Auschwitz. While there, Georgette was forced to collect the clothes of those being taken into the gas chambers. Day in and day out, she sorted the clothes of innocent people being herded to their deaths. When the death marches began in January 1945, Georgette, along with tens of thousands of other prisoners, was forced to march for miles in the snow and bitter cold with no food, no water and no rest. Those who could not keep up were shot. About one in four died on the way.

Helga Stern was on that same march. Helga was born in *Magdeburg*, Germany, in 1930. After *Kristallnacht*, her family fled to Belgium before trying to escape to the free zone in France. However, they were caught by the SS, and Helga’s parents were sent to *Drancy*, followed by Auschwitz. They perished there along with Helga’s grandmother, uncle and cousin. After being separated from her family, Helga was sent to live in an orphanage, in hiding in Paris, and with an aunt before also being deported to Auschwitz. She remained in Auschwitz for two years until January 1945 when the camp was evacuated. Helga was forced to march from camp to camp until she was liberated by the Americans during her final march in April 1945.

On the last day of the march, Helga befriended a girl just a few years older than her. That girl was none other than Georgette Heller.

Following their liberation, Helga had no surviving family and nowhere to go, but Georgette was hopeful that some of her family had survived in hiding, so she offered to bring Helga home with her to Brussels. “She said, ‘Come home with me to my house.’ I said I have no place to go. I went with her. We went to the house together.” (Helga)

Helga lived with Georgette and her family until she was able to find distant relatives in London. The two teenagers stayed in touch and wrote to each other while they were still in Europe. In 1946, Georgette sent Helga a photo of herself with an inscription on the back. It was signed, “*ta grande soeur*” (your big sister). The two later lost touch, but Helga has held onto that photo all this time.

Decades later, Helga began to look for Georgette. She thought she might still be living in Belgium. But, as it turns out, Georgette was living in New York, a mere 40 minutes from Helga. So, on a warm sunny day in June 2021, two women, liberated together on a death march 76 years ago, reunited in the company of their families. As Helga entered Georgette’s son’s house, she held in her hand the photo that Georgette had sent to her beloved friend in 1946. She looked at Georgette and said, “You were so nice to me. You treated me like a sister.”

The Hellers and Sterns spent the day discussing memories, both good and bad, and shared photographs of loved ones lost and their families, which continue to grow. Seeing Helga and Georgette together reminds us of the profound impact a single act of kindness can have. We were so honored to be able to document this beautiful moment between these incredible survivors and their families.

BY JILL GOLTZER



“The Onset of Mass Murder: The Fate of Jewish Families in 1941” reveals a dozen never-before-published stories of those caught in the web of the Nazis’ “Operation Barbarossa,” an organized rout of the Jewish communities in Soviet-controlled countries.

In April the world marked *Yom Hashoah* — Holocaust Memorial Day — with particular attention on the 80th anniversary of a campaign against the Jews of Eastern Europe that was nothing short of mass murder. This deadly Nazi plot would put the close and loving Jewish family to the most painful of tests.



Fanny Knesbach (later Stang), Vienna, 1937.

The tensile and enduring strength of the Jewish family is on full view in the online exhibition from Yad Vashem called “The Onset of Mass Murder: The Fate of Jewish Families in 1941.”

The exhibition reveals a dozen never-before-published stories of Jewish families caught in the web of the Nazis’ “Operation Barbarossa,” an organized rout of the Jewish communities in Soviet-controlled countries beginning that summer. Carried out by *Einsatzgruppen* SS mobile killing units teamed up with local authorities and citizens, “Barbarossa” cut a bloody swath across the Soviet-controlled lands of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, eastern Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Romania and Yugoslavia.

Four years later, only the third of Europe’s Jewish population who survived were left to tell their story of a love stronger than hate, stronger even than death itself.

“Too often, the Holocaust is taught as one madman in Berlin while the cooperation of the

so-called ‘conquered’ nations of the Third Reich is ignored,” says Steven Katz, director emeritus of the Elie Wiesel Center for Jewish Studies at Boston University, who also holds the school’s Alvin J. and Shirley Slater Chair in Jewish Holocaust Studies. “These countries may have responded a little differently from each other, but one thing they all had in common: they all wanted to get rid of their Jews.”

One has only to look at pictures of German soldiers looking on while the locals did the killing to grasp the idea, points out Katz. “The Germans gave the locals the freedom to express their own anti-Semitism in the most deadly way.”

By the end of 1943, more than 1.5 million Jews from the region — representing one-quarter of the six million Jews who perished during the years of the Holocaust — had been murdered.

The grisly routine, repeated over and over around the region, consisted of rounding up a community’s Jews, taking them to a spot on the outskirts of town or the local Jewish cemetery, and forcing them to strip and surrender their valuables before gunning them down. They were then shoved into one of thousands of mass graves, many of which historians say have yet to be discovered. The most famous of these killing sprees was at *Babi Yar* near Kiev on Erev Yom Kippur of 1941, where 33,771 Jewish men, women and children were massacred.

“We want to show their faces, give their names, remember them as human beings, as part of our Jewish family,” says exhibition curator Yona Kobo. “To go back and trace the beginning of mass murder as Nazi policy, to see all the professors, teachers, doctors they killed — and so many babies — many of them murdered by their neighbors.

“Of all the exhibitions I’ve worked on, this had been the hardest,” she adds. “I kept seeing my own grandchildren who are so cute and thinking if they lived in those days people would look at them and think they were scum and had no right to live.”

GIVING THEM NAMES

In 1933, young Ida Bernstein’s family encouraged her to leave their home in *Ylakiai*, Lithuania, for the hardscrabble existence of pre-state Palestine. “My mother went with their full support,” says her son Yitzchak Lev. “She was so attached to her family, and she knew how much they worried about her being so

far away.”
Indeed, a postcard written on May 9, 1941 — one side in the Yiddish of her parents, Eta and Jacob, and the other in Hebrew by her sister, Hinda — echoes these feelings. “Dear Ida, we are very worried about you,” her father wrote. “For God’s sake, write often, we are waiting for good news from you. Mother doesn’t sleep and mentions you all the time.”

“My mother knew how much her family looked forward to joining her here in Israel as soon as the war was over,” says Lev. But two months after the postcard was sent, that dream died as her parents and four of their seven children were killed with *Ylakiai*’s other 300 Jews. By August 1941, not a single Jew was left in town. Since two more of her siblings were murdered elsewhere during the war, Lev’s mother was the only one of the family to survive.

The Bernsteins are among the dozen families featured in the exhibition — families whose stories and photos bring this terrible time and place to life. Those left to tell the tale typically fell into one of three groups, Kobo points out: Jews exiled to such far-flung Soviet outposts as Siberia or Kazakhstan, those who hid with groups of partisans in the forests, and others — many of them children — taken in by non-Jews.



Halina Tenenbaum of *Lvov* at the children’s home in *Zabrze*, Poland, after the war.

In such situations, untold thousands did the hardest thing any parent could ever do: giving over their beloved children to strangers, entrusting them to people who, though they might feed and care for them, would not raise them in the time-honored ways of their forbears.

Halina Tenenbaum of *Lvov*, Poland (now Ukraine), was an only child who was born into wealth; her father, Jonasz, was a lawyer and professional violinist. She was 13 in the summer of 1942 when her father dropped her off at the home of a Christian friend. Within the year, he’d been part of a roundup of *Lvov* Jews and taken to the notorious *Janowska* concentration camp, where he was killed. Her mother, Stephania, survived, hiding with other Jews in a movie theater until one month before liberation, when someone turned them in. They were among the last Jews of *Lvov* to be killed. But their sacrifice paid off: Their child survived. At war’s end, Halina emigrated to an Israeli kibbutz, where she lived out her years as Ilana.

(Continued on page 5)

A TAPESTRY OF WORDS

The building blocks upon which we strive to reconstruct and understand the historical past, including the Holocaust, are primarily words; words supplemented with personal images and artifacts, which, in turn, we explain with words.

It was with words — and images — that the Nazis and their adherents articulated their extreme anti-Semitic hatred and fanned its flames. With words they determined all Jews to be their archenemies and blamed them for all of the ills of society as they perceived them to be. Undoubtedly, without such hateful words, the brutal and murderous actions would not have followed; furthermore, it was with words that they justified perpetrating the crime of the Holocaust.

The documentation for the events of the Holocaust is vast; just in the Yad Vashem Archives, which gathers documents from around the world, there are well over 220 million pages. In addition to written sources, tens of thousands of oral testimonies, by survivors, direct perpetrators and others who took part in some way or witnessed the events, have assumed a central place in the historical record. Survivor testimonies are crucial for

any exploration of the Holocaust from a Jewish perspective, and they supplement the Jewish diaries, letters and scant official records that remained when the maelstrom had subsided. Yet we must remain acutely aware that at times, survivors found it nearly impossible to find any words at all to even begin to articulate their experiences.

Every word of documentation is part of the record of events, but words by themselves can tell only a fragment of the story. Fragments strung together are like threads in a tapestry, and to understand them more clearly, they must be placed with other threads that intersect with them. In order to imbue the interlacing threads with meaning, they must be seen in context. This is the work of the historian, to recover the strings of words and place them in context — both immediate and wider. When this happens, raw information yields knowledge, and that knowledge can then be passed on to others through education.

The words we use to teach about the Holocaust are often charged not only with meaning, but also with strong, underlying emotions. They can be brutal, evoking the worst in human behavior, or gentle, expressing the sparks of human kindness that

never completely disappeared in the Holocaust despite the omnipresent suffering and violence. The accuracy we must be careful to use when speaking about the Holocaust is essential to conveying underlying complexities and nuances in the tapestry we seek to construct and understand.

Much of the current distortion of the Holocaust in public discourse is facilitated by taking the words — the threads of the tapestry — out of their proper context and forcibly manipulating them into perspectives that have no real grounding in the historical record. It is our role as historians and educators to call this out whenever it happens, and to ensure that fake narratives do not take the place of legitimate accounts that are clearly derived from documentation.

To honor the memory of the victims, to try to understand the events they experienced and to teach the generations to come, we must harness all of our intellect, wisdom and thoughtfulness when using the words, ideas and concepts that we derive only from the documented historical record of the Holocaust.

BY DR. ROBERT ROZETT

VICHY FRANCE AND THE JEWS

Vichy France and the Jews.

By Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton. Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, 2019. 400 pp. softcover.

Masterfully researched and written, *Vichy France and the Jews* by Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton should be in the library of all students of the Holocaust. For it is chock-full of fascinating and thought-provoking evidence — some of it in archives but recently made available to researchers (and this second edition) — chronicling the sad story of the relationship Vichy France had with the Jews. In fact, because this volume tells this story so very clearly and well, it becomes exceptionally easy to understand just why and how Vichy was responsible for the death of approximately 80,000 Jews during World War II. Among the reasons we especially note are Vichy’s own homegrown anti-Semitism; greed; and, directed by the Vichy government, the eager collaboration of the French police with the Nazis.

Thus we learn that while the roots of Vichy anti-Semitism harken back to the Church’s teaching that the Jews killed Christ, the more immediate source of a “flourishing” 1930s anti-Semitism was the influx of foreign Jews — approximately “fifty-five thousand . . . of all nationalities,” according to Marrus and Paxton, “between 1933 and 1939” — setting off French fears of competition for jobs, the “weaken[ing] of French culture,” and French “decline” generally. Further increasing anti-Semitism during those years was the hatred many French nationals had for France’s first Jewish prime minister, Léon Blum, whom they viewed as a Communist. (After all, he was Jewish, and to these haters being Jewish meant he had to be a Communist!) Once the war in Europe began, many also came to believe that Jews were warmongers, anxious to get their country involved in the conflict to save their

coreligionists in countries already occupied by the Nazis. In sum, because of all the aforementioned and more beliefs like them, very soon after France was defeated by the Germans, Vichy promulgated its first anti-Semitic laws without at all being pressured or prompted by the Germans!

Not surprisingly then, when the Germans began “Aryanizing” Jewish property in France’s Occupied Zone, an area the Germans directly controlled, “Aryanization” of Jewish property quickly found “favor” in Vichy France too, considered the Unoccupied Zone, but in fact working hand in glove with the Germans. For that matter, from what we read in *Vichy France and the Jews* it appears Vichy wanted to show the Germans just how well they could do this “Aryanizing” so that they could do it in the Occupied Zone as well! (You might say they were in “competition.”) What did “Aryanization” actually mean? Put simply, it meant the “outright theft” of Jewish property, specifically businesses big and small. And the opportunity for Vichy to do it in Occupied France too would assure that everything to be had — all the spoils — ended up in French hands . . . and not booty for Germans and Germany. Interestingly, once the French realized Germany might very well lose the war, those who had greedily taken over Jewish property feared Jews would return to claim it.

Finally, where the Germans were short on manpower, having mustered all the troops they could to fight on the eastern front, the French gingerly stepped up to do the Germans’ “dirty

work.” In short, in 1942, when it came to the deportation of Jews to the east, it would be French policemen who would stage massive roundups and “guard” the cattle cars filled to capacity with Jews — naïve as to where they were headed — till they got to the German border. At that point Germans would take over, escorting these innocent Jewish captives to Auschwitz. And here the

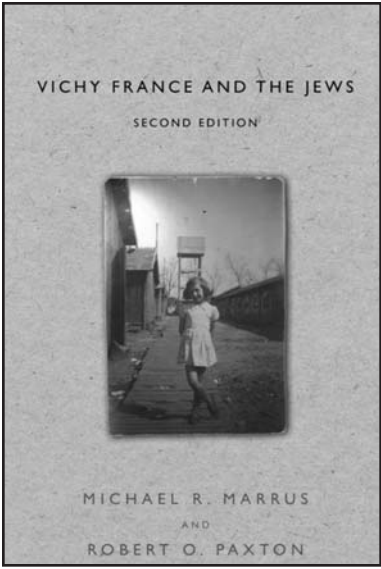
authors of *Vichy France and the Jews* particularly note that the use of the French police to round up Jews actually helped trap them. Why? It was harder for Jews to imagine that their own neighbors and countrymen were up to no good. Now, seeing a German uniformed soldier and hearing him shouting in German on the other side of the door, that was different!

Nonetheless, we learn, it was that last, the rounding up of Jews, that didn’t particularly sit well with French public opinion and dramatically changed things. In other words, actually seeing Jews rounded up in the

streets, actually seeing parents torn from their children, actually hearing the cries of children pleading to be returned to their parents’ arms, and hearing parents begging for one last look at their children — that the French public couldn’t bear. It wasn’t dignified. It didn’t fit their view of French culture and all it supposedly stood for. True, they wanted to be rid of Jews, but this wasn’t the way they wanted it to happen. The result: More French nationals began to help Jews. At the same time, the Resistance grew . . . Too bad this didn’t happen earlier.

Yes, indeed, *Vichy France and the Jews* is truly a fine work, worth having and studying.

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN



YAD VASHEM ONLINE EXHIBIT EMPHASIZES THE POWER OF FAMILY

(Continued from page 3)

And, in the case of the Knesbach family of Vienna, there was a poignant moment in 1939 when Fanny's parents Osias and Jetty, in an effort to get her out of harm's way, sent her to Eng-

"Where did their hope and strength come from in such a horrible place? How did they do it?" she asks. By keeping their traditions as best they could, she says — by lighting threads on Friday nights and saying the candle-lighting

In fact, more than anything, since the destruction of the Second Temple — when we had no temple and no state anymore — the rabbis knew the Jewish home would be the key to our survival."

Tragically, there were times when family love and loyalty actually cost lives. The exhibition features the invitation and group photo for the wedding of Zalman Jershov and Luba Pilschik on December 26, 1937. Four years later, all the Jews of their hometown of *Zilupe*, Latvia, including many in the photo, were ordered into the market square. From there, they were taken out of town and shot by members of the local home-guard militia.

On the way to the killing fields, Zalman, with his wife and two small sons, was recognized by a local policeman with whom he'd served in the Latvian army, who offered to pull him out of line and save his life. A member of the militia reported that Zalman refused, saying he would remain with his family and the others, including his brother Yisrael and his family. Within minutes of that fateful decision, they were all dead.

"‘Stay together,’ my mother said. We wanted to stay together, like everyone else," Nobel Prize-winning author and human-rights advocate Elie Wiesel wrote in *All Rivers Run to the Sea*. "Family unity is one of our important traditions ... and this was the essential thing — families would remain together. And we believed it. So it was that the strength of our family tie, which had contributed to the survival of our people for centuries, became a tool in the exterminator's hands."



Six of the Bernstein siblings taken in *Ylakai*, Lithuania, February 1933. Top row, from left: Arye-Leib, Ida and Benzion; bottom row, from left: Rivka, Menachem and Hinda. They were all murdered in the Holocaust except for Ida, who emigrated to Eretz Israel (Mandatory Palestine) on February 5, 1933, taking this photo with her.

land after she'd finished her medical studies. Seeing them receding into the distance as the train took her away from home — and toward safety — she wrote, "I stuck my head out ... I wanted to keep the imprint of my parents' faces. For a few yards, they kept up with my window while the train was still moving at a walking pace. 'Don't cry, Fannerle, we rejoice that you are leaving!' and tears were streaming down Mama's cheeks. 'B'shanah haba'ah b'Yerushalayim!' Papa shouted above the hissing steam. 'Next year in Jerusalem!' The train was gaining on them. ... I held my handkerchief out of the window at arm's length and caught a last glimpse of them. Two tiny figures. Then tears blinded me completely. ... I may never see them again! 'Never, Never' went the mocking rhythm of the train."

Sadly, Fanny's fears proved to be well founded. Her parents, trying to escape to Israel with other Jews, were murdered by the Germans when their ship was stranded in Yugoslavia.

THE JEWISH WOMAN TAKES CHARGE

With so many men taken to work in forced labor camps, much of the family life-and-death decision-making fell squarely on the women.

"It was a time when the job of the women became enlarged: they had to be the ones to keep their families alive and ensure that Judaism would continue," says Rebbetzin Esther Farbstein, an Israeli historian who founded and directs the Center for Holocaust Studies at Michlalah-Jerusalem College and is author of *Hidden in Thunder: Perspectives on Faith, Halachah and Leadership during the Holocaust*.

and going home together when all this was over." It was a trial by fire that forged strong women, enriching those who survived with knowledge well beyond that of the generations of Jewish women before them, empowering them to teach and transmit Jewish tradition to their children and communities.

This doesn't surprise historian Katz. "All the jokes made about Jewish mothers don't recognize the truth," he says. "The Jewish mother has made the survival of the Jewish people possible."



The Pilschik family in *Zilupe*, Latvia, in the 1930s

But 80 years later, the Jewish family lives on.

"When I think of the power of family," says curator Kobo, "I can't help but remember my mother, who survived the Holocaust and told me before she died that the proudest moment of her life had been when I joined the Israel Defense Forces. 'Now we're not powerless anymore,' she said. 'And my daughter is one of the soldiers protecting us.'"

BY DEBORAH FINEBLUM, JNS

THE SPLIT-SECOND DECISION THAT SAVED BERTHE BADEHI'S LIFE

After 14 months of being cooped up in her apartment in Jerusalem, Berthe Badehi returned to work, and was thrilled to be able to do so. Asked why she returned, her initial reply was “Because they need me,” but if truth be told, it’s a mutual need.

Badehi, 89, is a French Holocaust survivor, who tells her story in French or English to local and visiting groups that come to Yad Vashem, and to whom meeting an actual survivor is a very meaningful experience.

“Going back to Yad Vashem was going back to life, meeting people,” she said. “It has been a very special part of my life.”

For Badehi it is particularly important to tell of good Christians who risked their freedom and even their lives to provide a haven for a little Jewish girl, where she recalls spending the happiest period of her childhood.

Don’t talk to her about age, because the only place it matters, she says, is on her ID card. She hopes she inherited the genes of her mother, who died a decade ago at age 104. The strikingly independent Badehi, who lives in a walk-up apartment in Jerusalem’s Old Katamon neighborhood, continues to drive her car, attend lectures and other events, keep up with the news via her television set and the laptop open on her coffee table, and remain in contact with the Christian family to which she feels she owes her life. In fact, the relationship is so close that she regards its members as part of her extended family. They have been to Israel, and before the pandemic she used to visit them in France at least once a year — and made sure to attend all their weddings.

As she talks about the late matriarch of the family, Madame Massonnat, she says, “Her name is in Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations — but her place is really in my heart.”

Before the pandemic that forced her to sit at home, Badehi worked at Yad Vashem on a daily basis for 25 years. Now she’s limited to three days a week, because there are still not enough group visits to necessitate a more frequent presence on her part.

Despite several tragedies in her biological family, Badehi — with her lacquered fingernails and toenails, her striking mane of hair reminiscent of an eagle, with white framing the top of her face and pitch black from the crown to the nape of her neck — remains upbeat. She smiles easily, her back is straight, and despite recent surgery on one of her legs, she moves with speed and doesn’t remain seated for very long, getting up in the course of the interview to bring cold drinks, then rising again to bring us homemade cookies that she quips her grandchildren call “petit Berthe” (as distinct from the actual name of “petit beurre”).

One of her nine grandchildren, a soldier, was killed in 2002 near *Ramallah* during the First Intifada. His photograph is prominently displayed, as are those of two daughters-in-law who each died of cancer while in their 50s. In the course of our interview, three of Badehi’s grandchildren

call — one from abroad — to ensure all is well with her. It is obviously a very loving and supportive family. Badehi was born in *Lyon* in 1932. Her Polish-born parents had come to France as teenagers and had joined the French Jewish Communists. She had a fairly ordinary childhood but for the fact that her parents were busy working or engaging in politics, and didn’t seem to have enough time for her.

Hitler invaded France on May 10, 1940. Realizing, as fighting intensified, that cities in France were not safe for children, the French Jewish Communist movement, whose members were all resistance fighters in one way or another, instructed them to send their children to villages in the country.

When Badehi’s mother packed a suitcase for her in September 1941, the little girl was under

In order to eat, her parents worked illegally in hand-to-mouth jobs. French people were not supposed to employ Jews. From time to time, money came in from HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society founded in America in 1881. The funds were funneled from Switzerland and distributed among needy Jews.

For much of the time she spent with the Massonnats, Badehi was not afraid. The people in the village did not really know what a Jew looked like, so even if there were some individuals with anti-Semitic tendencies, they would not have known this particular child was Jewish.

But then the Nazis came to *Aix-les-Bains* in the southeast of France where the Massonnat home was located. The Gestapo raided all area villages, in search of young Frenchmen. A few months earlier Pétain had sent young Frenchmen to work in Germany and take the places of men who had been drafted into the German

army. After they had worked for a certain period of time, they were permitted a home visit to see their families. Many did not return to Germany, but instead joined the resistance.

It was for these young men the Gestapo was on the hunt.

The carefree little Jewish girl became frightened by the Nazi presence in the village, walking always with her head down and looking at her shoes, for fear someone might recognize her Jewish facial features.

But then in May 1944 came the true test. Badehi’s mother wanted to be sure her daughter was all right, and even though riding on a train could have had dire consequences, she took the risk and arrived in the village, staying for a few days with Mme. Massonnat.

One day the two women were in the kitchen when they saw a vehicle approaching. In those days only the police and the Gestapo had cars or vans. The vehicle belonged to the Gestapo, and as its passengers alighted, Mme. Massonnat, in an extraordinary display of courage, went out to meet them. They were looking for a young French deserter with the same surname. Somehow she persuaded them it was not her son but someone else, and in the final analysis, they went away without crossing the courtyard into the house.

Had they entered, they most certainly would have arrested Badehi’s mother — who looked very Jewish and spoke French “with an atrocious Polish-Yiddish accent.”

In retrospect, Badehi commented that while looks can be disguised, a bad accent cannot and is a certain giveaway.

Had the Gestapo arrested her mother, she said, they would have surely taken her as well “and I would not be here to talk to you.”

(Continued on page 7)



Berthe Badehi at Yad Vashem.

the impression she was going on vacation. She soon learned this was not the case. She was strictly instructed not to tell anyone she was Jewish and was sent to the home of an elderly widow, who presumably knew she was Jewish, but never mentioned this to the child nor to her own children. She was treated as part of the family, and no one ever questioned this.

It was quite common in France at the time for urbanites to send their children to board with rural families, so none of the Massonnat neighbors found it unusual for Badehi to be there.

She went to school where there were two other Jewish girls, who likewise had been instructed not to divulge their true identities. She knew they were Jewish and she suspects they knew she was as well, but none of them gave any indication of such knowledge, as it would have proved dangerous for all of them.

In the three years Badehi lived with the Massonnats, she wrote letters to her mother and received letters in return, but in 1942, when the Pétain government decided to confiscate Jewish businesses, Badehi’s parents had to go into hiding, staying a few days here, a few days there, just a step or two ahead of the Gestapo. Badehi then addressed her letters to the home of a former neighbor, who passed them on to her mother.

RESCUE AT A PRICE

DILEMMAS OF JEWS TRYING TO RESCUE FELLOW JEWS

As the Germans set about liquidating the Vilna ghetto in September 1943, Abba Kovner and his United Partisan Organization fighters were escaping to the forest through tunnels and sewers. Suddenly, Kovner’s mother chanced upon him. “What should I do?” she asked him in desperation. Sworn to secrecy for fear of exposing the escapees, Kovner gave no reply. She returned to her hiding place and was caught and killed; he reached the forest, led a partisan unit fighting the Germans, and is remembered as a Holocaust hero. But the encounter never stopped haunting him. He wondered if he should not rather be remembered as someone who abandoned his own mother to her catastrophic fate.

Jewish rescue during the Holocaust is a complex topic with unfathomable dilemmas in the unprecedented circumstances into which the Germans thrust the Jews. From the difficulty to grasp the Nazis’ intentions amidst constant German deception, to the “choiceless choices” they faced, such as whom to try to save and whom to abandon, to the fear of the oft-implemented threat of collective punishment for the actions of any individual and the uncertainty regarding the attitudes of their neighbors and countrymen, rescue by Jews remains a fraught subject. The story of one family — the Bielous family in *Zhetl* (*Zdzięcioł*; *Dyatlava*) in today’s Belarus — can serve as an illustration. *Zhetl* is located near vast, dense forests that became centers of activity for Soviet partisans and to which tens of thousands of Jews fled in 1942–1943. When the Germans occupied *Zhetl* on June 30, 1941, 3,500 people, some two-thirds of the population, were Jewish. The Germans murdered 120 communal leaders on July 23, imposed numerous harsh decrees on the Jews, created a ghetto in February 1942, and shot

1,000 Jews on April 30. During the spring and summer, Jews were constantly escaping to the forests, and many prepared hideouts in anticipation of further murder operations. Yisrael and Hana Frieda Bielous (in their early 60s) and three of their grown children lived in the



The “Lenin” Partisan Brigade, active in the *Zhetl* region, Poland, during World War II.

town — Chaim, a bachelor mechanic; Pesia, married to Zisl Kalbstein, with a four-year-old girl and a toddler boy; and Nehama, married to Mote Zakroiski, also with a toddler son. When German and Lithuanian troops surrounded the ghetto early in the morning of August 6 in anticipation of its liquidation, most of the Bielous family ran to their attic hideout, where several neighbors joined them. Chaim reported to the town square and was sent to the forced labor camp in *Nowogródek*. In the attic, Pesia’s and Nehama’s toddlers began to cry, endangering everyone. Unable to calm them, the adults made the excruciating decision to suffocate the children in order to save the others. Nonetheless, they were discovered: Yisrael, Hana Frieda, Pesia and her daughter were shot, while Zisl, Nehama and Mote all managed to flee to the Lipiczanska Forest and join partisan units.

Nehama was killed in action, while Mote was

murdered a few days before liberation by a small band of Germans while guarding ailing fellow partisans hiding in a bunker. Zisl joined a different unit, fought Germans, rescued Jews, was drafted into the Red Army after liberation, and fell in battle on August 19, 1944.

And Chaim? He was one of 1,000 Jews incarcerated in *Nowogródek*, and among the 250 still alive in the summer of 1943. Hearing about the Warsaw ghetto uprising on their clandestine radio in a barrack basement, they were inspired to action. Unlike Warsaw, where rescue was impossible in the spring of 1943 and hence was not the main goal of the uprising, the last Jews in *Nowogródek* sought collective rescue in the forests. They dug a 200-meter escape tunnel that extended beyond the perimeter fence; Chaim was one of the planners. On September 26, 1943, on an almost moonless night, they fled through the tunnel. More than half survived, but Chaim was killed as he ran from the exit.

The tragic story of the Bielous family includes multi-layered rescue attempts — preparing hideouts; hiding others; organizing escapes; helping Jews who reached the forests; protecting the wounded and ill, and tragic “choiceless choices.” Yet the circumstances created and controlled by the Germans and their partners dictated that rescue would be extremely limited at best. Still, some of these rescue efforts yielded tangible results: half the 800 Jews who fled *Zhetl* survived, as did more than half the *Nowogródek* tunnel escapees. Most owed their survival to the initiative, courage and dedication of other Jews. Their determination in the overwhelming maelstrom was remarkable, and in their grappling with inhuman and impossible choices they were, indeed, heroes.

BY DR. DAVID SILBERKLANG

BERTHE BADEHI’S SPLIT-SECOND DECISION...

(Continued from page 6)

By way of example, she said that before the war there had been a yeshiva in *Aix-les-Bains* with a number of Jewish families. When the Germans came, the Jewish families moved to a rural area, but the Germans discovered them and killed them all.

After the Americans liberated *Lyon* in September 1944, Badehi returned to live with her parents and finish high school.

When she was about 20, she met a young Israeli student by the name of Benzion Badehi at a dance. Later they went for coffee and a movie, and one thing led to another and they fell in love and got married.

He wanted to return to Israel, and her father wanted them to remain in France. Israel won out, and Benzion went back ahead of her in 1956.

When she arrived a few weeks later with their infant son Avner, the customs official looking at her documents snorted that Badehi was a Yemenite name. She had never heard of Yemenites; she just knew that her husband was Israeli. It pained her that people of Yemenite background were regarded as inferior by the Ashkenazi hierarchy.

Aware of the economic hardship and security situation, her father did not expect Badehi to stay long in the Jewish state, “but I instantly fell in love with the place,” and it did not bother her that the *Kiryat Hayovel* apartment the young couple received from the Jewish Agency covered an area of only 500 square feet and was sorely lacking in amenities.

“It was small, but it was enough. We didn’t have a refrigerator or a stove, but neither did anyone else. We were all the same, and we didn’t lock our doors at night.”

Only one person — who was the head of Israel Radio’s English News department — had a phone, and if anyone needed to make a call, they used his.

“No one had anything, but we were all good friends. The milkman used to come and leave a bottle of milk on the doorstep every morning, and every week we paid him by leaving money on the doorstep. Unfortunately, things did not stay that way.”

When everyone was poor, there was no envy, no greed — since everyone was in the same boat. The postwar economy, with its blessings, also brought with it many negative elements. “After 1967, everything changed.”

Yet Badehi persisted.

BY GREER FAY CASHMAN,
The Jerusalem Post

In March 1965, the West German Bundestag overwhelmingly defeated a proposal to bring to an end the hunt for Nazi war criminals and introduce a statute of limitations for their crimes.

The months leading up to the debate had seen a wave of opposition to the plans across the world. Thousands took to the streets from Tel Aviv to Toronto and from Los Angeles to London. Nobel Prize winners, politicians, playwrights and the future Pope Benedict XVI raised their voices in



“Butcher of Riga” Herberts Cukurs (left); Yaakov “Mio” Meidad during his time with the Mossad.

protest. And in Germany, a bitter and divisive national debate broke out about how the country should atone for its sins and how widespread the responsibility for them truly lay.

But in those months another effort had also been launched to derail the German proposals. Hatched in secret by Israel’s intelligence chiefs and approved by Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, it was one that was nonetheless designed to focus the world’s attention on the hundreds, if not thousands, of perpetrators who had never seen the inside of a courtroom or prison cell — and likely never would if the Bundestag approved the statute.

It was also an effort in which Israel itself would act as judge, jury and executioner. Israel’s foreign intelligence agency the Mossad, it was decided, would hunt down and kill Herberts Cukurs — the “Butcher of Riga” — who was accused of being personally responsible for the deaths of at least 30,000 Latvian Jews.

Cukurs’s assassination, for which Israel would claim no responsibility, would publicize and punish his terrible crimes. It would serve, too, as a warning of the kind of rough justice that would be meted out to others if Germany provided an amnesty to war criminals.

The story of the mission to kill Cukurs is told in journalist and author Stephan Talty’s new book, *The Good Assassin: Mossad’s Hunt for the Butcher of Latvia*. At the center of Talty’s retelling lie two men: Cukurs and the undercover agent dispatched by Mossad to ensnare him, Yaakov “Mio” Meidad.

Known in the agency as “the man with the hundred identities,” Meidad was a German-born Jew whose parents had perished in the death camps. He had helped abduct Adolf Eichmann and bring him to Israel for trial.

Cukurs was, as one survivor later wrote, “full of tremendous contradictions.” Known as “the Latvian

Lindbergh,” the aviator had become a household name and national hero in the prewar Baltic state, renowned for his dash and daring.

“I actually found myself admiring the prewar Cukurs,” admits Talty. “He was very much the kind of adventurer who not only built his own planes but dreamed up these kinds of bizarre trips and odysseys.” Those trips had famously seen him fly in 1933 from Latvia to the British African colony of the Gambia in an open-cockpit aircraft he had cobbled together from cast-off and salvaged parts.

Six years later, in December 1939, he returned from another expedition — a 2,900-mile (4,667-kilometer) flight to Palestine — to enthrall Riga’s Jewish Club with a talk, complete with photographs, describing the sights, sounds and smells of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Bethlehem,

Petah Tikva and Rishon LeZion.

“I remember Cukurs speaking with wonderment, amazement, even enthusiasm, of the Zionist enterprise in Israel,” a young Jewish man who was there that night later remembered.

Talty’s interest in Cukurs was, in part, sparked by this background. “I wanted to know,” he remarks, “what had changed him into what would seem to be a beast, a monster.”

That description is entirely apt. As Yosef Yariv, the head of the Mossad’s special operations arm, told Meidad when he outlined the mission to him, Cukurs was not “a desk murderer like Eichmann.” Among those who knew his reputation, the mere mention of Cukurs’s name could provoke a physical reaction. When Israel’s intelligence chiefs gathered to discuss potential targets, a list of names was read out. Maj. Gen. Aharon Yariv, head of the Military Intelligence Directorate, collapsed on hearing that of the man who had murdered several of his family and friends.

Cukurs’s crimes had been committed just under 25 years previously.

Under the secret terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviets had snuffed out Latvia’s independence and brutally occupied it in the summer of 1940.

A year later, a second tragedy befell the Baltic states, with the German invasion of the Soviet Union seeing Latvia come under Nazi rule. Some of Cukurs’s countrymen viewed the Nazis as liberators, a view not shared by their terrified Jewish neighbors.

Within hours, the now German-controlled press began to pump out the vicious lie that Latvia’s Jews were the “enemy within” who had betrayed their country to the Soviets and participated in the atrocities the Red Army had committed. “No pity and no

compromise must be shown. No Jewish tribe of adders must be allowed to rise again,” wrote one newspaper.

No pity was, indeed, shown. “Riga became a pen where Jews were hunted for sport and profit, and Herberts Cukurs was an enthusiastic player in the game,” writes Talty.

Cukurs was no bit player — instead, he became second-in-command of the notorious Arājs Kommando, a 300-strong Latvian paramilitary group which enthusiastically participated in the murder of the country’s Jews.

Eyewitnesses later testified to Cukurs’s brutality. One remembered him in the ghetto to which Riga’s Jews were herded, “laughing devilishly... shooting the people like a hunter in the forest.” Another recorded him at the notorious villa at 19 Waldemars Street where the Arājs Kommando held wild drunken parties as they tortured and murdered Jews.

Max Tukacier, a young Jew who had known Cukurs for over a decade and was taken to the house, saw the aviator “beat to death 10 to 15 people.” And Cukurs was recorded giving orders to his commandos at the scenes of the *Aktions* during the *Rumbula* massacre on November 30 and December 8, 1941, when roughly 25,000 Jews were murdered in or near the *Rumbula* forest.

After participating in the bloodletting of Riga’s killing fields, Cukurs and his men traveled around Latvia’s villages, towns and small cities, helping round up and murder Jews. Within five months, 60,000 Latvian Jews had perished. As Talty writes, the slim file the Mossad held on Cukurs was so thin, and the eyewitness accounts so few, precisely because of the thoroughness with which he and the Arājs Kommando had assisted the Nazis in their work.

But the most extraordinary — perhaps unique — aspect of Cukurs’s story was what happened next. Like many other war criminals, the Latvian joined the “ratline” and escaped to South America after the war. But, unlike his fellow killers, Cukurs arrived in Brazil under his own name — and then almost immediately began seeking out members of the country’s Jewish community. Cukurs portrayed himself as both a political exile who had been targeted by the Communists and a man who had rescued Jews during the *Shoah*.

While Cukurs assiduously wooed Rio’s Jews, however, his past started to catch up with him. Back in Europe, fledgling Jewish committees devoted to tracking down escaped war criminals compiled a dossier on the prominent prewar aviator who had become a mass murderer. Within weeks of his arrival, reports of the first possible sightings of Cukurs in Rio found their way back to London. The slow and painstaking process of confirming these reports commenced.

All the while, Cukurs continued to prosper and promote himself. He even gave an interview to Brazil’s highest-selling magazine — which appeared under the title “From the Baltics to Brazil” — in which he was described as “the epitome of humanity.” By 1950, though, the shocking truth — that Cukurs was nothing of the sort — began to dawn on some of his newfound friends in Rio.

HOW THE MOSSAD HUNTED THE “BUTCHER OF RIGA”

UNITED RIGA”

Although the Jewish community’s efforts to have him extradited and brought to justice faltered in the face of official indifference, protests led to the collapse of Cukurs’s thriving business, and the family was forced to leave the city. By the time the Mossad set its sights on him a decade later, Cukurs was a much-diminished figure, quietly running a small boat rental and air taxi business near São Paulo.

Cukurs’s overweening ambition was the source of both his rise and eventual fall. It was not simply his heinous crimes that made him a target in 1965, but the fact that he had left a trail that was so easy for the Mossad to follow.

“He could have had a very good life in Rio had he just not stuck his head up in the way that he did,” says Talty. “I think his narcissism just was so central to his character that he couldn’t resist it.”

While others like Adolf Eichmann and Josef Mengele were “very particular about leading very mundane lives,” the author continues, “he just felt that Herberts Cukurs was born for the world and that he needed some kind of heroic story around his life to make it meaningful for him.”

This “curse,” Talty believes, led to Cukurs’s downfall.

While Cukurs’s actions in Rio may have been foolhardy, he was no fool. As Talty explains, the Mossad mission is “not an action story” but more akin to a tense psychological thriller which pits

Highly unusually, Meidad, at his own insistence, worked in Brazil without any reinforcements or a Plan B. The decision, writes Talty, “deviated wildly from his precise, very Germanic methodology; it was as if he’d thrown away 20 years of spycraft in order to go after Cukurs.”

Meidad’s family and former colleagues emphasized to Talty that the mission was “personal” for him.

“I think he really relished this one-on-one confrontation with a perpetrator of the Holocaust,” Talty says. “He saw it really as a test of everything he had been as a secret agent and... he wanted to outwit Cukurs and bring him down himself.”

And then there was Cukurs himself. “He was a very difficult target in that not only [was he]... paranoid, but he was intelligent and he could anticipate what an Israeli agent would be doing,” says Talty. “It was very much a psychological battle, and I think Cukurs very much was almost his equal in that.”

On one side of the battle lines stood Cukurs, who constantly sought to test whether Kuenzle truly was who he said he was. Those tests included staging a shooting contest between the two men on a remote plantation in the middle of the Brazilian outback to ascertain whether Kuenzle’s claim to have served on the Eastern Front during World War II rang true.

On the other side stood Meidad, who needed not merely to allay Cukurs’s suspicions but also to figure out the bait which would best reel him in. In this he excelled, says Talty.

“He had a certain empathy toward Cukurs and his journey, and his bedraggled state when he met him, [when he was] not obviously living up to his

own dream of himself,” Talty says.

The prospect Meidad dangled before Cukurs of regaining his lost wealth and respect through a business partnership eventually led to the mission’s bloody denouement in a house in Montevideo where a small Mossad team awaited.

It was, however, a close call. A combination of Cukurs’s ever-vigilant paranoia, bad luck, and a reluctance on the part of some of the Mossad squad to believe that killing a lone 65-year-old man would really prove that hard nearly led to disaster.

“It was Mio’s nightmare,” says Talty. “There was kind of a schism between him and the Sabras [in

the Mossad team] in that they believed they could handle any situation that missions threw at them, and he was very particular in saying this man is a formidable physical opponent.”

Not until the Mossad men finally came face to face with Cukurs — when, as Meidad later said, “he fought like a wild and wounded animal” — did they realize how prescient those warnings had been.

It is perhaps fitting that the answer to the question which first drew Talty to Cukurs’s story — what had led the adventuresome aviator down the path of mass murder? — was provided by a survivor.

Zelma Shepshelovich, a magnificent figure whose story Talty’s book also tells, was relentless in her attempts after the war to attain justice for her own murdered family and the thousands of other Latvian Jews who died alongside them.

In 1979, she appeared as a prosecution witness in the *Hamburg* trial of Viktor Arājs, the commander of the paramilitary battalion of which Cukurs had been such an eager member. During his time on the stand, Arājs revealed that Cukurs had collaborated with the Soviets during their short occupation of the country before the Nazi invasion. Terrified of exposure, and the bloody consequences that would follow, Cukurs sought to cover his tracks by joining Arājs’ band of killers.

As Talty writes: “It wasn’t, after all, a deeply rooted anti-Semitism that drove the former aviator. He betrayed the Jews because if he didn’t, he would likely have been murdered alongside them. The sacrifice of those men, women and children was necessary for him to go on living.”

Cukurs was not unique. But in Latvia, a country with no history of pogroms that some had viewed as a sanctuary in the 1930s, he came to symbolize what Talty terms “the double cross that had snared the Jews.” For its imperiled Jews, the speed and viciousness with which many of their friends, neighbors and countrymen suddenly turned upon them was palpable.

It is, as Talty readily acknowledges, impossible to prove whether the news of Cukurs’s death changed any minds when the Bundestag came to reject the amnesty proposal in the spring of 1965.

“I want to believe that it played a psychological part in giving the Holocaust a face, but really I can’t substantiate that with sources,” Talty says. “But it was certainly part of a movement reevaluating what had happened during the *Shoah* in Germany, and I think it was important for that reason.”

Talty recognizes too that the Mossad’s decision to kill Cukurs and not bring him to trial had one unintended consequence. The effort in recent years by Latvian nationalists to rehabilitate the former national hero has exploited the fact that no jury ever convicted him of war crimes.

There is, however, a glimmer of light in Talty’s retelling of this dark story. It is represented by Jānis Alexander Vabulis, a young civil servant who fell in love with Shepshelovich and — at great personal risk — sheltered her throughout the war.

“I think he represents a certain percentage of Latvians that went out of their way [to help Jews],” Talty suggests. “I found a lot of testimonies about Jews finding farm houses and families who were very religious and very Christian and immediately brought them in.”

BY ROBERT PHILPOT, *The Times of Israel*



Latvian auxiliary police assisting the roundup of Jews in Latvia in 1941.

Cukurs against the man the agency dispatches to trap its quarry.

Meidad himself, Talty says, was very much “the anti-James Bond,” and “seemed to be only fully alive” when he went undercover.

“When he was in character as someone else he was much more confident, much more assertive... than he was in real life,” says Talty.

The guise of Anton Kuenzle, a successful but buttoned-down Austrian businessman who would befriend Cukurs and lure him to his death, was one the Israeli played to perfection. The perfection was necessary, however, as the mission contained no room for error.

FDR'S JEWISH REFUGEE SHELTER

Seventy-seven years ago, a ship sailed into the New York harbor, carrying more than 900 European Jewish refugees. Unlike similar ships that had approached America's shores in the 1930s, the *S.S. Henry Gibbins* was not turned back. Instead, the passengers were taken to an abandoned army camp in upstate New York, where they spent the rest of the war in safety, far from Hitler's clutches.

Why did President Franklin D. Roosevelt permit this group of Jewish refugees to enter the United States? What had changed since the years when other ships were turned away?

By the autumn of 1943, news of the mass murder of Europe's Jews had been verified by the Allies and widely publicized in the United States, although major newspapers often buried it in the back pages. There could be no doubt that at least several million Jews had been slaughtered by the Germans and their collaborators, and many more were still in danger.

President Roosevelt and his administration insisted that nothing could be done to help the Jews except to win the war. Others disagreed. In October 1943, U.S. Senator Warren Barbour, Republican of New Jersey, introduced a resolution calling on the president to admit 100,000 Jewish refugees "for the duration of the war and six months thereafter." The resolution was endorsed by both the National Democratic Club and the National Republican Club.

Granting temporary refuge was a way of addressing the life-and-death crisis that Europe's Jews faced, without incurring the wrath of those who opposed permanent immigration. The Jews who were saved would go back to Europe, or elsewhere, when the war ended.

Senator Barbour tragically passed away just a few weeks later, but the idea of temporary refuge gained traction. In early 1944, a proposal for temporary havens was presented to President Roosevelt by the U.S. government's War Refugee Board (a small, underfunded agency recently created by FDR under strong pressure from Jewish groups and the Treasury Department).

"It is essential that we and our allies convince the world of our sincerity and our willingness to bear our share of the burden," wrote Josiah E. DuBois, Jr., a senior official of the War Refugee Board, in a memo to Roosevelt. The United States could not reasonably ask countries bordering Nazi-occupied territory to take in refugees if America itself would not take any, DuBois argued.

The president was reluctant to embrace the plan; he had previously confided to his aides that he preferred "spreading the Jews thin" around the world, rather than admitting them to the United States.

Secretary of War Henry Stimson, for his part, vigorously opposed the temporary havens proposal. In his view, Jewish refugees were "unassimilable" and would undermine the purity of America's "racial stock."

Public pressure pushed the plan forward. Syndicated columnist Samuel Grafton played a key role in this effort, by authoring three widely published columns advocating what he called

"Free Ports for Refugees."

"A 'free port' is a small bit of land... into which foreign goods may be brought without paying customs duties... for temporary storage," Grafton explained. "Why couldn't we have a system of free ports for refugees fleeing the Hitler terror?... We do it for cases of beans... it should not be impossible to do it for people."

The activists known as the Bergson Group took out full-page advertisements in the *Washington Post* and other newspapers to promote the plan. Jewish organizations helped secure endorsements of "free ports" from religious, civic and labor organizations, including the Federal



Cartoon by Stan MacGovern in the *New York Post*, June 1, 1944.

Council of Churches and the American Federation of Labor. U.S. Senator Guy Gillette (D-Iowa) introduced a resolution calling for free ports; eight similar resolutions were introduced in the House of Representatives.

Support for the havens plan could be found across the political spectrum. The liberal *New York Times* endorsed it; so did the conservative Hearst chain of newspapers. Temporary refuge was fast becoming a consensus issue.

With public pressure mounting, the White House commissioned a private Gallup poll to measure public sentiment. It found that 70 percent of the public supported giving "temporary protection and refuge" in the United States to "those people in Europe who have been persecuted by the Nazis."

That was quite a change from the anti-immigration sentiment of earlier years. But circumstances had changed, and public opinion had, too. By 1944, the Great Depression was over and the tide of the war had turned. The public's fear of refugees had diminished significantly, and its willingness to make humanitarian gestures increased.

Despite this overwhelming support for temporary refuge, President Roosevelt agreed to admit just one token group of 982 refugees. And he did not want them to be all Jews; FDR instructed the officials making the selection to "include a rea-

sonable proportion of the [various] categories of persecuted minorities." (In the end, 89% were Jewish.)

Ironically, the group was so small that they all could have been admitted within the existing immigration quotas. There was no need for a special presidential order to admit them, since the regular quotas for citizens of Germany and German-occupied countries were far from filled in 1944. In fact, they were unfilled in eleven of FDR's twelve years in the White House, because his administration piled on extra requirements and bureaucratic obstacles to discourage and disqualify refugee applicants.

Of the 982 refugees whom the president admitted in August 1944, 215 were from Germany or Austria. Yet the German-Austrian quota was less than 5% filled that year. The second largest nationality group was from Yugoslavia; there were 151 Yugoslavs in the group. That quota was less than 3% filled in 1944. There were also 77 Polish citizens and 56 Czechs; those quotas were only 20% and 11% filled, respectively. Put another way, a combined total of 39,400 quota places from those particular countries sat unused in 1944, because of the Roosevelt administration's policy of suppressing refugee immigration far below the limits that the law allowed.

The *S.S. Henry Gibbins* arrived in New York harbor on August 4, 1944. Ivo Lederer, one of the passengers, recalled how they cheered when the ship approached the Statue of Liberty. "If you're coming from wartime, war-damaged Europe to see this enormous sight, lower Manhattan and the Statue of Liberty — I don't think there was a dry eye on deck."

The refugees were taken to Fort Ontario, an abandoned army camp in the upstate New York town of Oswego. It would be the only "free port" in America. By contrast, Sweden, which was one-twentieth the size of the United States, took in 8,000 Jews fleeing from Nazi-occupied Denmark.

According to conventional wisdom, most Americans in the 1940s were against admitting Jewish refugees. It is also widely assumed that members of Congress — especially the Republicans — were overwhelmingly anti-refugee, too. America's immigration system supposedly made it impossible for President Roosevelt to allow any more Jewish refugees to enter. And American Jews allegedly were too weak to do anything about it.

Yet 75 years ago this summer, those myths were shattered when a coalition of Jewish activists, rescue advocates, and congressmen from both parties, backed by a large majority of public opinion, successfully pressured FDR to admit a group of European Jewish refugees outside the quota system.

Refugee advocates had hoped the United States would take in hundreds of thousands of Jews. Sadly, President Roosevelt was interested in nothing more than an election-year gesture that would deflect potential criticism. Famed investigative journalist I.F. Stone was not off the mark when he called the admission of the Oswego group "a token payment to decency, a bargain-counter flourish in humanitarianism."

BY RAFAEL MEDOFF, HNN

A STORY OF RESCUE IN THE NETHERLANDS

Soon after the German invasion of Holland in May 1940, the Nazis began enacting anti-Jewish legislation. In order to avoid deportation to Germany for forced labor, Andries-Asher Hoffman decided to marry his fiancée Helene (Leni) in an expedited civil ceremony. They wed in a hospital in Amsterdam where Leni had been staying for many months owing to a severe intestinal illness. In February 1943, doctors advised Leni to leave, fearing that the patients in the hospital would be evacuated and sent to the *Westerbork* transit camp. However, shortly after returning home, Leni was arrested anyway, and deported along with her parents to *Westerbork*.

While at *Westerbork*, Leni stayed in the infirmary, where there were no supplies and conditions were harsh. From time to time, Leni's brother and Andries sent care packages to Leni and her parents with much needed food and supplies. Leni's parents wrote this in a letter they sent from *Westerbork*:

"You would not believe how happy we were to receive the four packages. We kept only the bread and four boxes of salmon. The rest we gave to Leni. The hospital is so full, and they have nothing there."

Against all odds, Leni was released from *Westerbork* along with a group of Jews whose spouses' deportation certificates had been de-

ferred. Not long after Leni was set free, her parents were deported eastward to *Sobibor*, where they were murdered — as was the fate of a great proportion of Dutch Jewry.

Despite avoiding deportation, great danger still hovered over the heads of the young couple, and Andries and Leni both frantically searched for a hiding place. Aided by Reverend van der Weg, a member of the Dutch underground, they found refuge in the home of Cornelis and Amanda Petronella (van der Linden) Vissers in *Bussum*, some 25 kilometers southeast of Amsterdam, arriving there in October 1943. As the Vissers had agreed to hide one Jewish woman in their home, they were initially taken aback when both Leni and Andries arrived, but quickly they agreed to hide both husband and wife, despite the enormous risk involved.

Cornelis had prepared two hiding places — one under the floor where the piano stood, and the other under a shelving unit. Inside the house, the Jewish couple roamed freely, but when searches were conducted in the area, they used the hiding places. The Germans came three times to search the house: one time Andries hid in the area under the piano and the other two times under the unit.

Amanda shopped for all the members of the household in different stores so as not to arouse suspicion. During more difficult times,

she and her husband traveled long distances to get food. Cornelis even worked for a local farmer in order to increase supplies for everyone in his house.

In early 1944, Leni became pregnant. The Dutch underground was able to obtain false identification papers so that she could give birth at a local hospital. After the birth, she returned to the Vissers with her baby daughter, whom she named Miah-Amanda, in honor of her rescuers.

The Hoffmans stayed with the Vissers until the end of the war, and for several more months afterwards. In 1948, they emigrated to the newly established State of Israel. Over the years, they continued to maintain close contact with their rescuers. In 1966, Cornelis and Amanda Vissers were recognized as Righteous Among the Nations.

Years later, Leni and Andries' son, Jonah, visited the town where his parents were hidden. While there, he was shown by the family of the Vissers the unit that had disguised the hiding place in the Vissers' home. Realizing the great value of this item as a way to tell his family's rescue story, he sought to ship the furniture piece to Israel.

In 2020 the Hoffman family donated the shelving unit to Yad Vashem for safekeeping, and in order that their story would continue to be told.

HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR ROMAN KENT DIES AT 92

Roman Kent, a *Lodz* ghetto and Auschwitz survivor who would negotiate with the postwar German government for billions of dollars in compensation for Jewish Holocaust survivors, died at his home in New York City. He was 92.

Kent, who emigrated to the United States in 1946, was a longtime board member of the Claims Conference, where he served variously as treasurer, co-chair of its negotiating committee and special adviser to its president.

In those roles, said Greg Schneider, executive vice president of the Claims Conference, Kent negotiated billions of dollars in pensions and compensation for Jewish survivors from the German government and championed survivor interests with insurance companies, German industry and Eastern European governments.

Just last year, Kent recorded a video as part of a campaign to demand that Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg remove Holocaust denial content from his entire social media network.

"Roman made himself available for every cause that we put in front of him, tirelessly giving of his time and energy," said Gideon Taylor, the Claims Conference president, in a statement. "He will be remembered as an unwavering force of good will and an undeniable advocate for the global Jewish community."

Kent also served as the chairman of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and Their Descendants; as president of the International Auschwitz Committee; and

also as president of the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, which assists non-Jews who saved Jews during the Holocaust.

Born in *Lodz*, Poland, in 1929, Roman Kniker survived its ghetto and several camps, including *Merzbachtal*, *Dornau*, *Flossenburg* and Auschwitz. His father died of malnutrition



in the *Lodz* ghetto and his mother was murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Kent and his brother Leon were liberated by the US Army in 1945 while on a death march to *Dachau*. The brothers were reunited with their two sisters, Dasza and Renia, in Sweden following their liberation.

In June 1946, the brothers emigrated to the United States as part of a government program to admit 5,000 orphans. Kent lived in Atlanta with foster parents and attended Emory

University in that Georgia city, going on to start a successful international trade company.

In 1988, he joined the board of the Claims Conference, which had been tasked with securing the restitution that Germany has paid through direct assistance to survivors and for educational and memorial programs.

Diplomat Stuart Eizenstat, who worked with Kent as the Claims Conference's special negotiator, said his co-chair on the negotiating committee "made it his personal mission to advocate for his fellow survivors to the very end, participating on negotiation calls very recently. His strength and fortitude were unmatched, and his drive and determination to see justice served knew no bounds."

In 2016, in an interview marking UNESCO's Holocaust Remembrance Day event, Kent warned about the abuse of language to deny the past.

"I have noticed over the years that in relation to the Holocaust in the media, there is a tendency to sanitize the past," he said. "People say that six million people were 'lost' or 'perished.' They were not lost. They were not misplaced. They were imprisoned, starved, tortured, murdered and burned. It is hard to hear, but that is the truth that we must preserve to prevent the Holocaust happening again."

Kent married Hannah Starkman, a *Lodz* native and fellow survivor, in 1957. Hannah Kent died in 2017. They are survived by their two children, Jeffrey and Susan, as well as three grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

NO BALM FOR THEIR WOUNDS: ELDERLY SURVIVORS IN THE WAKE OF THE HOLOCAUST

When one speaks of survivors today, the image that comes to mind is of the very old, in their twilight years, the majority struggling with physical and/or cognitive challenges. However, at the end of the war, most survivors of the Holocaust were in the 18-to-40-year age bracket, given the unprecedented life-threatening hardships they were forced to endure.

Yet, liberation also revealed certain groups of older survivors who had managed to survive in hiding — for example, as spouses of non-Jewish citizens, or passing as “Aryans” in Germany. Some also remained alive after fleeing to the Soviet interior, or as inmates of the *Theresienstadt* ghetto, where they were allowed to work until the age of 65. As in many other survival stories, luck played a major part in being able to live out the war years.

What happened to this group of refugees after the war? Did they encounter different challenges than their younger peers? How did Jewish and other support organizations relate to them? And which paths were open to them for the next stages in their lives?

As part of the “Zoom into Research” an online lecture series presented by Yad Vashem’s International Institute for Holocaust Research, Professor Dan Stone of Royal Holloway, University of London, gave a fascinating presentation of a topic relatively underinvestigated in Holocaust historiography: “Elderly Survivors in the Wake of the Holocaust.”

Professor Stone’s interest in the topic stemmed from research he has undertaken for many years on the International Tracing Service (ITS — now Arolsen Archives), and he was invited by the Research Institute’s Diana and Eli Zborowski Center for the Study of the Aftermath of the *Shoah* to speak about his findings.

Professor Stone began by outlining what he defined as “the elderly” after the Holocaust. Based on life expectancy at that time, as well as recorded testimonies, photographs and self-descriptions, he arrived at the figure of 55 years or older. Interestingly, many of the photographs captioned “elderly man/woman” in a DP camp, for example, may not have actually indicated precise age, but rather the shocking appearance of younger adults who had undergone extreme physical deprivation. As one survivor described himself: “I am a homeless old man, without a roof over my head, without a family, without any next of kin. Do I look like a human being? No, definitely not. Disheveled, untidy, destroyed.” Nevertheless, records kept by refugee organizations do indicate that there were a number of refugees, in particular from Germany, with dates of birth between 1870 and the 1880s.

As with the documentation on children after the war, it is relatively easy to find material concerning the care of elderly survivors, but rarer to

read how they themselves viewed their survival, and their future. One of the best sources in this regard is the Rose Henriques Archive at London’s Wiener Holocaust Library. Hailing from an eminent London Jewish family, Henriques volunteered for the Jewish Relief Unit (JRU), part of the Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad (JCRA), which carried out vital relief work among the surviving remnant of Jewry in Germany after the war. Traveling to Germany at the

Gemeinde will need the help and encouragement of their more fortunate Jewish brethren abroad.” In another missive, she delivered a stern caution: “These pitiful remnants of thriving communities are quite unable, for the most part, to make both ends meet, and our work in Germany cannot conclude until they are properly cared for.”

Holocaust survivor Rabbi Richard Feder, who would later become chief rabbi of Bohemia and



83-year-old Simon Trampetter cutting off the yellow Star of David from the jacket of his 84-year old friend and fellow survivor Joseph Keller on January 27, 1945, *Kerkrade [Limburg]*, The Netherlands.

war’s end, she wrote of the appalling lack of care for the elderly survivors: while varying psychological and physical rehabilitation therapies for survivor children were debated, and young adults took advantage of visas to the land of Israel and the West to begin their new lives, the older-aged group of survivors engendered very little interest or funding.

Many elderly survivors had neither the inclination nor the energy to begin life anew abroad, and for lack of an alternative were institutionalized in nursing homes that struggled to provide even the most basic necessities. By the early 1950s, care for them became even more urgent, as DP camps began to close. The refugee issue now became one more concerned with *Gemeinde* — the communities of so-called “free livers,” endeavoring to settle down in Germany.

“Unless there is a miraculous change in their composition and disposition,” Henriques warned, “they are not fated for a very long life... For all their days, I am afraid, the

Moravia, recorded some of the saddest testimonies as to the emotional state of the elderly survivors after the Holocaust. “We old people are completely desolate,” he wrote in his book *Jewish Tragedy: The Last Act*, published in Czech in 1947. “We have lost our brothers and sisters, children, grandchildren — everything that was dear to us, everything that made life beautiful.... There is no balm that could heal these wounds.”

Desolation and loneliness, concluded Professor Stone, are what comes through the most when investigating this group, despite efforts like those of the JRU to care for them. They may not have been the largest section of the survivor population, but they did exist and deserved the most devoted attention and support after the war — which all too often they did not receive.

This event was held as part of the activity of the Diana and Eli Zborowski Center for the Study of the Aftermath of the Shoah.

BY LEAH GOLDSTEIN

YAD VASHEM MOURNS THE PASSING OF RENOWNED HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR, HISTORIAN AND FORMER YAD VASHEM CHAIRMAN DR. YITZHAK ARAD



tentially happen again, to any people, at any time. Be very clear about this: Do not count yourselves among the murderers, and may you never find yourselves among the victims."

Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, chairman of the Yad Vashem Council:

"A noble and honest man has left us, a Jewish partisan hailing from the Warsaw ghetto who headed Yad Vashem for 21 years. In this context, he worked diligently to commemorate the Holocaust and established the Valley of the Communities. Only last month, we met at the IDF General Staff forum held at Yad Vashem for Holocaust Remembrance Day, where he delivered a lecture. I had the great pleasure of seeing a 95-year-old Jew speak fluently, with a clear mind. It is sad that such figures are leaving the world."

Former Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev:

"Yitzhak (Tolka) Arad reflected many historical aspects the Jewish people endured: a life that began in Poland; fighting with the partisans during the Holocaust; and then emigrating to Eretz Israel, where he fought in the War of Independence. Through his work at Yad Vashem and his words, Tolka personified the force of life and power of memory, which was also reflected in his private life and the fate of his people. The way he behaved, and the person he was, are an example of the generation that believed — and continues to believe — in the development of the State of Israel and its influence. Today, I lost a close friend, a person who taught me so much and with whom I wove many dreams."

Ronen Plot, acting chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate:

"We know that it is the nature of the world that a day comes and a person leaves us, but this fact does not ease the sadness when a hero like Yitzhak (Tolka) Arad departs. Arad belongs to a vanishing generation, a generation of survivors, partisans, IDF fighters, memorial fighters. Every farewell to a Holocaust survivor is a reminder to us that now the work of remembrance rests on our shoulders even more."

Yad Vashem extends its deepest condolences to his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. May his memory be blessed.

Dr. Arad was born Yitzhak Rudnicki in *Święciany*, Poland (now *Svencionys*, Lithuania) in November 1926. In his youth, he belonged to a Zionist youth movement and was educated in Hebrew schools. At the outbreak of World War II, he lived with his family in Warsaw. After three months of German occupation of the city, he fled with his sister back to *Święciany*. His parents were murdered during the *Shoah*. During the war, he managed to escape a murderous German *aktion* and sneak back into the town ghetto, where he was put to work in a munitions warehouse. He began to smuggle weaponry and help form a ghetto underground movement. In February 1943, at the age of sixteen, he escaped to the nearby forest, where he joined the Soviet partisans. Apart from a foray infiltrating the Vilna ghetto in April of that year to meet with underground leader Abba Kovner, Yitzhak stayed with the partisans until the end of the war, fighting the Germans and their collaborators in the Narocz Forest of Belarus and in eastern Lithuania, for which he received the highest partisan award.

In December 1945, Dr. Arad emigrated to Eretz Israel on the illegal immigrant ship *Hannah Szenes*. He served in the Israel Defense Forces, most of the time in the armored brigade. His last appointment as IDF chief education officer; he retired in 1972 as brigadier general. In his academic career, Arad lectured on Jewish history at Tel Aviv University and was a guest professor at

Yeshiva University, New York. Dr. Arad served as the chairman of the Directorate of Yad Vashem for 21 years (1972–1993), and he remained associated with Yad Vashem until his last days, serving as deputy chairman of the Yad Vashem Council. He researched World War II and the Holocaust, and was published extensively as an author and editor, primarily in Hebrew, English and Russian. In 2004, he was awarded Yad Vashem’s annual Buchman Memorial Prize for his book, *The History of the Holocaust: Soviet Union and the Annexed Territories*. In 2009, Nebraska University Press and Yad Vashem published Arad’s *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, a book that earned the Jewish Book Council’s National Jewish Book Award. In recent years, Arad published several important works reflecting updated research and documentation about the Holocaust. In 2010 he published *In the Shadow of the Red Banner: Soviet Jews in the War Against Nazi Germany* and a revised and expanded work entitled *The Operation Reinhard Camps: Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka*, published by Yad Vashem and Indiana University Press in 2018. Most of the books published in English were also published in Hebrew.

In 2020, Arad participated in a joint commemorative photography project between Yad Vashem and world-renowned photographer Martin Schoeller, entitled “Survivors: Faces of Life after the Holocaust.” As part of this project, Dr. Arad stated:

"What happened in the past could po-

FAYE SCHULMAN CAPTURED LIVES OF THE PARTISAN RESISTANCE

Faye Schulman, for decades an outsize presence in Holocaust education whose survival as a partisan photographer in the forests of Poland was the stuff of Hollywood, died in Toronto on April 24. She was 101.

Faigel “Faye” Lazebnik was born into a family of seven children on November 28, 1919, in the eastern Polish town of *Lenin* (not named for the Bolshevik revolutionary but for Lena, the daughter of a wealthy aristocrat). The town was on the shore of the Sluch River; the Soviet Union was on the other side.

She learned technical skills and how to operate a camera from her older brother, Moishe, who opened a photo studio in the family home to make ends meet. “I remember spending hours in the darkroom as a young girl, developing negatives,” she wrote in her book, *A Partisan’s Memoir: Woman of the Holocaust*, published in 1995.

In August 1942, Nazi troops killed 1,850 Jews from the *Lenin* ghetto, including Faye’s parents, two sisters and two younger brothers. They spared only 26 people that day — “useful” Jews, like a carpenter and a tailor. Among them was Faye, for her photographic abilities.

“The Germans ordered Faye to develop their photographs of the massacre,” says a biography at the Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation. “Secretly, she also made copies for herself.”

One day, she developed a photograph of a mass grave of Jews who had just been murdered. Peering closely at the print, she recognized members of her own family. She hid the negative in a box of photo paper to assure it would remain safe and unseen.

Schulman fled to the dense forests that surrounded the town, where she joined the Molotava Brigade, a partisan group comprising mostly escaped Soviet Red Army POWs, almost all men and non-Jews, who carried out frequent guerrilla missions. Faye was deputized as a nurse.

“She knew nothing of medicine, but quickly got over her squeamishness” — to the point where she performed open-air surgeries on an operating table made of tree branches and using vodka to numb pain, even lancing her own infected flesh, says the recently published *The Light of Days: The Untold Story of Women Resistance Fighters in Hitler’s Ghettos* by Montreal-born author Judy Batalion.

She was barely into her 20s. “I had lost my youth in a painful way,” Faye reflected, as Batalion relates.

She was able to retrieve her old photography equipment during a raid on her hometown in which she happily participated, and over the next two years she used her clunky German camera,

a Photo-Porst Nurnberg Compur, to take dozens of pictures that captured a rare side of partisan activity — of camaraderie and a sense of purpose.

She developed the photos by creating a makeshift darkroom with blankets, and while on missions, she buried the camera and tripod for safekeeping, said the American Society for Yad Vashem in a tribute.



Faye Schulman with her camera; one of her famous photos.



jects, she added.

“They speak to the conscious efforts of partisan resisters to create a record and communicate their message. Why else would a young photographer with no military training be a valued member of a partisan unit? Schulman’s photos show partisans as they wanted to be seen.”

For example, one photograph in Schulman’s memoirs shows four bodies in open caskets, surrounded by a group of

mourners all facing the camera. The caption reads, “Harmony in death. Jewish and gentile partisans buried in one grave, 1943.”

“Arranging, taking, developing, preserving and showing this image demonstrated, or at least imagined, solidarity between Jews and non-Jews against a common enemy,” Bergen noted.

Another shows Schulman resplendent in a leopard-print coat and matching cap, aiming a rifle — expertly, it appears — with a splendid winter forest behind her. “This is my ‘new’ automatic rifle,” reads her caption. “I really had to practice how to shoot this one.”

Schulman’s partisan photos live on in books, exhibits, commemorative events and websites, “where they illuminate the existence and vitality of Jewish resistance to the Holocaust.”

After liberation, Faye married Morris Schulman, also a Jewish partisan. The couple “enjoyed a prosperous life as decorated Soviet partisans,” according to the Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation, but wanted to leave Poland. They lived in the *Landsberg* displaced persons camp in Germany for the next three years and emigrated to Canada in 1948.

Following the war, Schulman didn’t allow herself to experience the joy she felt before the Holocaust, out of a sense of guilt, said Tward. “She decided it was not fair for her to enjoy music. She cried herself to sleep every night.”

Only toward the end of her life did she reconnect with that old joy, singing Russian and Polish songs, he said.

Schulman spoke publicly about her war experience for decades. “Sometimes (the) bygone world feels almost more real to me than the present,” she wrote, as Batalion’s book relates.

“I want people to know that there was resistance,” she once said. “Jews did not go like sheep to the slaughter. I was a photographer. I have pictures. I have proof.”

She never parted with her rugged camera. “It has so many memories and so many stories and so many things happened,” she said once. “This camera has seen everything.”

BY RON CSILLAG, CJN

RESCUE BY JEWS IN BUDAPEST

At the end of World War II, approximately half of the Jewish population of Budapest had survived the onslaught of Nazi occupation and the fierce fighting surrounding the Soviet conquest of the city — the largest rescue of a Jewish community in all of Europe. All this had taken place in just under a year — from March 1944 to February 1945 — and while much of the credit for Jewish survival is given to the courageous efforts of neutral diplomats who used their prestigious positions to protect Jewish citizens, none of their efforts could have succeeded without the dedicated work of Jewish rescuers on the streets of Hungary’s capital.

One important figure in this praiseworthy group was Peretz Revesz, a refugee from Slovakia and a leader of the Maccabi Hazair Zionist youth group. Revesz’s story, *Standing Up to Evil: A Zionist’s Underground Rescue Activities in Hungary*, was recently released by Yad Vashem Publications.

When deportations from Slovakia began in March 1942, Zionist youth leaders decided to foster flight to Hungary. Forced to flee for his role in this, Revesz and his new wife Nonika escaped to Budapest in April. There, he joined forces with local activists to help thousands of incoming Jewish refugees, becoming a member of the Vaada L’Ezra Vehatsalah (the Relief and Rescue Committee), led by Otto Komoly and Israel Kasztner. Among other activities, Revesz became responsible for providing false documents to Jewish refugees. Revesz also aided Joel Brand, who led the “Tiyul Committee” to help Jews reach Hungary from Poland, aiding up to 2,000 refugees before the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944.

Between March and July 1944, in coordination with the Germans, Hungarians marked, robbed, concentrated and then deported the Jews of provincial Hungary. Some 437,000 were brutally expelled, primarily to Auschwitz, where most were murdered. Owing to outside pressure, the course of the war and fear of air attacks, on July 7, Hungarian leader Miklós Horthy halted the deportations. He also decreed that several thousand

Jews would be able to go to Mandatory Palestine. Several months of quiet ensued for the Jews of Budapest, but after October 15, when the Germans brought the Fascist Arrow Cross Party to power, deportations were renewed, this time to the Austrian border. In Budapest, murder by the Danube and ferocious warfare transformed rescue into a desperate struggle to preserve Jewish lives for a matter of months, until the successful Soviet takeover of the city.



Photo from the memoirs of Peretz Revesz, *Standing Up to Evil*.

With the German occupation, Revesz and the Zionist youth underground began smuggling Zionist youth out of Hungary, primarily to Romania, with the intent to travel on to the land of Israel. Several thousand Jews made their way to Romania until August 1944, when Romania severed its alliance with Germany and the border

shut down. At the same time, protection granted by neutral diplomats to Jews gained momentum and force, especially after Horthy’s offer of emigration to the land of Israel. Since the Swiss represented British interests and immigrants needed British “Certificates of Aliyah,” potential immigrants came under Swiss protection. Other neutral diplomats like Raoul Wallenberg also granted protective papers, and in the fall, special houses

were established for Jews with international protection. Revesz and his comrades forged tens of thousands of protective documents and handed them out. Genuine and false papers alike helped safeguard many Jews. In addition, the International Red Cross established over 50 children’s homes under their protection, headed by Otto Komoly. In October, Revesz became responsible for one of these homes. International protection was not fool-proof, but it remained a central cog in the machinery of rescue.

After the Soviet conquest, Revesz took over the Department of Child Protection and the Youth Aliyah Office, and then led the Bricha movement guiding Jews out of Hungary toward Israel. He and his family reached Israel in May 1949, and moved to kibbutz *Kfar HaMaccabi*, where he remained until his death in 2011.

The story of Peretz Revesz and other members of Zionist youth movements who risked their lives to help fellow Jews has gone down in history as a supreme expression of Jewish solidarity under unprecedented persecution. The details of these courageous activities

are coming more and more to light, and undoubtedly, additional accounts of Jewish rescuers throughout the areas under Nazi domination will continue to receive public attention through future research and publications.

BY DR. ROBERT ROZETT



THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM MOURNS THE PASSING OF CELINA ZBOROWSKI

The American Society for Yad Vashem mourns the passing of Celina Zborowski (née Sternlicht), wife of founding board member of the American Society for Yad Vashem Marvin Zborowski.

Celina was born in 1934 in *Krakow*, Poland, to Lola and Jacob Sternlicht, z”l. Celina spent the war years in hiding together with her mother. After liberation, she was reunited with her brother Mark, who had fought with the partisans, and with her father, who had miraculously survived a Russian labor camp. Celina and her family emigrated to the United States in 1951, and shortly thereafter she met and



married Marvin. Celina and Marvin settled in Jamaica Estates, where they raised their two sons, Mark and Ziggy. A warm, kind and gracious woman, Celina selflessly devoted her life to supporting her husband and raising their two sons. Together, Celina and Marvin dedicated themselves tirelessly to Holocaust remembrance and education, supporting Yad Vashem and its mission from its earliest days. ASYV extends its heartfelt condolences to her husband Marvin, her children Mark (Judy) and Ziggy (Galit), and her six grandchildren. May Celina’s memory be for a blessing.



ZBOROWSKI Legacy Circle


The Legacy Circle, named in memory of Eli Zborowski, is open to anyone who includes ASYV/Yad Vashem in their estate plans.

This includes:

- Bequest by will
- Making ASYV/Yad Vashem a beneficiary of a Charitable Remainder Trust or Charitable Gift Annuity
- Donating a paid-up life insurance policy
- Contributing the proceeds of an IRA or retirement plan

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

With your support, ASYV can strengthen the efforts of Yad Vashem as together we remember the past and shape the future.



The American Society for Yad Vashem, founded in 1981 by a group of visionary Holocaust survivors, was led by Eli Zborowski, z"l, until his passing in 2012.

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