The Hidden Child

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AS IF IT WERE YESTERDAY

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Ilona Winograd-Barkal.

Two young children, one wearing a yellow star, play on a street in the Lodz ghetto, 1943. The little girl is Ilona Winograd, born in January 1940.

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WHEN WE WERE YOUNG AND EXTRAORDINARILY GUTSY:

THE MAKING OF THE FILM COMME SI C'ÉTAIT HIER (AS IF IT WERE YESTERDAY) (1980)

By Nancy Lefenfeld

One summer day in 1976, while on a visit to Brussels, Myriam Abramowicz found herself sitting in a kitchen chair, staring at the back of the woman who had hidden her parents during the German Occupation. It was four in the afternoon—time for goûter—and Nana Ruyts was preparing a tray of sweets to serve to her guest. Describing the moment nearly forty years later, Myriam ran an index finger over the curve that lay at the base of her skull and spoke of the vulnerability of this part of the human anatomy. "I looked at the back of her neck, and I suddenly realized that, by the grace of this woman, I'm alive. Because she saved my parents. It was a moment of what they called in those years heightened consciousness." Although she did not realize it, it was then that an unlikely undertaking was launched, an undertaking that would completely change the course of Myriam's life and profoundly touch the lives of hundreds—and perhaps thousands—of child survivors of the Holocaust.

At the time of the summer visit, the thirty-year-old Abramowicz was a successful young professional living on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Employed at Pantheon Books, she served as an assistant to the publisher's formidable editor-in-chief, André Schriffrin. Although Myriam had made trips to Belgium on previous occasions, she had not made a point of looking in on Nana Ruyts. But this time was different: Nana's husband, Oskar, had died just a few months earlier. The loss weighed heavily on Myriam's mother, Léa; she asked her daughter to visit Mrs. Ruyts and extend the family's condolences.

Myriam had been born in Brussels shortly after the end of the war and had spent her early childhood there. When she was six years old and a student at the Lycée Carter, there was, in Myriam's words, "an incident." "In the courtyard during recess, a little girl by the name of Monique—her father was our butcher—called me a sale Juif, a dirty Jew, and I hit her, and then my parents were called to school." At home that evening, Myriam tried to make sense of what had happened:

I showed him my hands, and I said, 'Papa, why did she call me a dirty Jew? Look, my hands are clean!' My father called Georges [her brother] over, and, with each of us sitting on a knee, he told us about the Holocaust and how his sister Lena and her two children and his brother Henry were at first denounced and then deported and murdered in Auschwitz.

But the discussion did not end with the revelation of recent evils; her father went on to describe the goodness and courage of righteous individuals. He explained how Oskar and Nana Ruyts had, at the risk of their own lives, hidden him, their mother, and—for a short time—baby Georges. From that point on, the subject of the Holocaust and what family members had endured was not a secret in the Abramowicz household. Georges was reticent to

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ask questions about it; Myriam was not.

In 1955, after much effort and with the assistance of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), the Abramowicz family immigrated to the United States and settled in Borough Park, Brooklyn. For the first time, her mother revealed a trove of old family photos of her parents, grandparents, and other members of the Mesherowsky clan from Odessa, then part of Soviet Ukraine. "I would always ask her to bring down these bags within bags within other bags and to go over these pictures endlessly," Myriam recalls. And how was it that the photos had survived the war? Oskar and Nana Ruyts had safeguarded these and other cherished belongings.

On that summer afternoon in 1976, Myriam finally had the opportunity to hear Nana Ruyts speak of what had happened during the German Occupation. "A stereo moment" is the way that Myriam describes it today:

It was like one ear heard it all these years ago and now, all of a sudden, the other ear was getting the same information but from another side. I was aware that it was her take on it. I remember exactly what she was wearing. I took pictures of her that afternoon... She had a big menorah in the house that one of the Jewish families gave her. I have a picture of her near her menorah, and she was wearing a little flowered dress.

Prior to the outbreak of war, Mendel Abramowicz and Oskar Ruyts were well acquainted with one another, having worked together on the stock exchange. The Ruytses also owned a dry goods store, which Nana managed. Shortly after Belgium was occupied, in May 1940, they closed the business. Myriam attributes the decision to close to the fact that the couple did not want to serve the German military personnel and civilian administrators who were posted in the city and who were quickly becoming the store's main clientele.

In the early years of the Occupation, Belgium was home to an estimated 66,000 Jews, of whom the great majority lived in Brussels and Antwerp. Many were, like Léa and Mendel Abramowicz, recent immigrants from Eastern Europe; others were refugees from Germany and Austria. Despite the forms of discrimination they endured, most Jews living in Belgium were able to survive the first two years of the German Occupation. This changed in the summer of 1942, when massive roundups and deportations began.

Léa Abramowicz was pregnant with her second child during that terrible summer. Four years earlier, the couple had joyfully welcomed the arrival of a daughter, whom they named Jenny Ita. However, they lost the baby to pneumonia when she was only six weeks old. The Abramowiczes went into hiding shortly after the deportations began but, in October, Léa went to the hospital to deliver her baby. Doing so placed both herself and her baby at risk of being seized. Fortunately, the physician who attended her at the delivery, Docteur Snoock, was part of the fledgling resistance movement and sympathetic to Léa's plight. He saw to it that Georges was given a false Aryan identity and placed in the hands of a Christian family. For a second time, Léa was unable to mother the baby she had borne.

Nana Ruyts, in her home in Brussels, 1977.

For nearly two years, Léa and Mendel eluded arrest by moving from place to place. At some point, the Ruytses began using the dry goods store as a place to hide nearly two dozen Jews—a number that included, at times, Léa and Mendel. If discovered, Oskar and Nana would have faced arrest, deportation, and death along with those they sheltered. After Brussels was liberated, in September 1944, Léa and Mendel were able to come out of hiding and be reunited with Georges.

Returning home to New York at the end of that summer 1976 vacation, Myriam felt compelled to document the stories of Belgian rescuers like the Ruytses. She had worked with the Pulitzer Prize-winning author Studs Terkel on several of his books and was inspired by his ability to capture the voices and stories of people from many different walks of life. "Upon my return, I immediately call Studs and said, 'What do you think about my doing a book like something you've been doing but with people who risked their lives to save Jews?' He thought it was a great idea." Myriam told Schiffrin that she would like to have a year off in order to investigate the subject and interview rescuers. Perhaps it was not surprising that he granted her request. He had been born in Paris in 1935. Early in the Occupation, after the Germans issued ordinances barring Jews from most types of employment, André's father, Jacques, was dismissed from his position at the Gallimard publishing house. In 1941, the family managed to leave France and reach the United States.

Léa Abramowicz and Nana Ruyts, in the Ruyts home in Brussels, 1979.

By July 1977, Myriam had made the necessary arrangements for her departure. She had trained someone to fill in for her at Pantheon and had sublet her apartment to a friend. She left for Belgium with the equipment she believed to be essential—a still camera and a reel-to-reel tape recorder. She remembers that in the middle of August, when she learned of the death of Elvis Presley, she was living in temporary quarters in Brussels, struggling to locate people who had hidden Jews. She felt completely miserable, and asked herself, "What am I doing here?"

Myriam began contacting representatives of Jewish organizations and asking them to put her in touch with men and women who had been hidden during the Occupation. One such representative happened to be her father's sister, Golda Orbach, who was a leader of the Brussels chapter of WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organization). She began hearing the incredible stories of those who had

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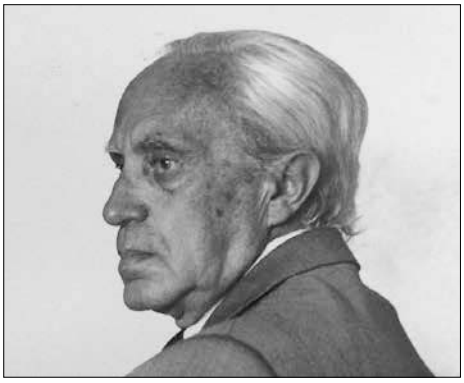
been saved but, at this stage, she had no idea to what extent—if any—individual stories were connected to one another. In the ensuing months, she would learn that, in fact, they were.

In Belgium, as in other countries, German occupation authorities had mandated the establishment of a *Judenrat*, a council they could point to as representing all Jews and that they could pressure to carry out their orders. The Association des Juifs en Belgique (AJB) was formed in late 1941; and, although all Jews were required to register with the organization, many chose not to do so. In June 1942, Jews living in Belgium were required to wear the yellow star. Shortly thereafter, Occupation authorities began their program of rounding up and deporting Jews. At first, they used the AJB as a tool to facilitate and cover up the true nature of the work. Acting on Nazi orders, the council sent out summonses that purported to call up Jews for forced labor. Within a short time, the deceptive nature of these summonses became apparent to some in the Jewish community. Word spread quickly, and compliance among those receiving a summons fell sharply. German authorities then ceased to rely on the AJB to prepare lists and call up individuals, and they launched a series of brutal roundups. The detailed card file developed by the AJB, which contained information on the names and addresses of Jews as well as other personal information, proved useful to the Germans in organizing and carrying out raids.

As soon as the requirement to wear the yellow star went into effect, members of the Front de l'Indépendance (FI), an important part of the Belgian Resistance, took the extraordinary step of establishing the Comité de Défense des Juifs (CDJ; Jewish Defense Committee). The group's name conveyed its two-fold purpose: to come to the defense of the embattled Jews and to give Jews an opportunity to defend themselves. Myriam came to learn about the important work of what she calls "this amazing underground network, diffuse and compartmentalized." Lucien Steinberg, a scholar who has written extensively on Jewish resistance in Belgium, emphasizes that "almost all Jewish organizations were represented on the committee."[1] From its founding in June 1942 until the country was liberated in the fall of 1944, the CDJ carried out various types of clandestine activities aimed at helping children and adults survive: fabricating and distributing forged documents, such as identity and food ration cards; placing children and adults in safe hiding places; securing and delivering funds to pay for the care of those in hiding; preparing and distributing information; and carrying out acts of sabotage.

Myriam located men and women who had played important roles in the CDJ and/or in the organizations that had provided essential support. One such individual was Maurice Heiber. Prior to June 1942, Maurice



Maurice Heiber, Brussels, 1979.

worked entirely legally and above ground: he was the member of the AJB who was responsible for overseeing the organization's child welfare activities, including the operation of its orphanages. After helping to organize the CDJ, he oversaw its child rescue operations. He continued playing this double role—working above ground as a part of the AJB while carrying out underground operations to keep Jewish children out of the hands of those who sought to deport them—until he and his wife, Esta, were arrested in May 1943. The couple was sent to Malines (also known as Mechelen), the infamous transit camp situated halfway between Brussels and Antwerp that served as the anteroom to Auschwitz. Through the intervention of the Queen Mother, Elisabeth of Bavaria, they managed to evade deportation, but Maurice contracted tuberculosis. (He would subsequently lose a lung because of the infection and suffer pulmonary problems throughout his life.) He was fortunate to be placed in a sanatorium outside of Brussels that was directed by Dr. Christine Hendrickx-Duchaine. During the last year of the Occupation, the physician would place herself and her medical facility at

Dr. Christine Hendrickx-Duchaine, in her office in Brussels, 1979.

the disposal of Maurice and the CDJ to facilitate the "disappearance" of Jewish children threatened with deportation. Like Maurice Heiber, this extraordinary woman welcomed the opportunity to speak with Myriam about what she had witnessed and the work she had done.

The CDJ is credited with saving approximately 2,500 Jewish children in Occupied Belgium, a feat that required great dedication and daring on the part of dozens of individuals.[2] The Jewish and Catholic resisters working under the auspices of the CDJ depended on critical linkages with other members of the Belgian Resistance, representatives of O.N.E. (Œuvre nationale de l'enfance; National Children's Fund), and Catholic nuns and priests. (It is worth noting that, while some Jewish children were placed with Christian families, the majority found themselves in Catholic orphanages, boarding schools, and convents.) The story of Andrée Geulen-Herscovici illustrates the dedication and daring exhibited by many. The twenty-one-year-old Andrée, Catholic by birth, was working in a boarding school in Brussels in 1942 when a Jewish member of the CDJ, Ida Sterno, recruited her to join the team of women responsible for escorting Jewish children from place to place. Being an escort was an especially difficult and dangerous form of resistance work—difficult because it entailed separating distraught and frightened children and parents, and dangerous because it required that the escort and her charge be under the watchful eyes of authorities who were on the lookout for Jewish children. For two years, Andrée carried out this work,

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taking responsibility for approximately 300 boys and girls. This meant not only accompanying a child to an institution or foster family but also making periodic visits to monitor the child's health and welfare and, at times, transferring her from one hiding place to another. Some of the children developed strong attachments to Andrée and maintained contact with her long after the end of the war. Andrée introduced Myriam to some of these men and women and also explained to her the complicated coding system used to keep track of essential information on hidden children without compromising their safety. Designed by Esta Heiber, the system relied on a set of five notebooks, each containing selected bits of information and each hidden in a different place. It was impossible to decipher information about a child without having all five notebooks in hand.

Myriam would spend her evenings listening to the taped testimonies of interviewees and looking at their faces captured in the tiny rectangles of contact sheets.

I start listening at night. I come back to the room, and I listen to the tape, and I look at the contact sheet of the pictures I've taken. I'm listening to the voice, and I'm looking at the picture. I'm looking at the picture, and I'm listening to the voice. And that's when I realize that other people have to see what I'm seeing and that I have to bring in some kind of a moving camera, and I'm thinking of video. I'm not even thinking of film right now. I'm thinking more of video because that was the thing right then and there, at the time.

Reaching out to those active in the local arts community, Myriam searched for a videographer. She was referred to a screenwriter/actor/filmmaker by the name of Samy Szlingerbaum. At the time, Szlingerbaum was also struggling to make sense—and art—out of the physical and psychological ordeal his family had endured. Originally from Poland, he and his parents had made their way to Belgium in 1947. His widely-acclaimed film *Brussels-Transit (Dakh-Brisel)* would make its appearance in the same year as *Comme Si C'Était Hier (1980)*. Narrated in Yiddish by Samy's mother, the film presents an unconventional story of assimilation that is at times funny and at times heartbreaking. Although Szlingerbaum was not able to collaborate with Myriam, he became a close friend and, quite possibly, an artistic influence.

In the early months of 1978, Myriam developed a true vision of the work she wished to create—not a video, but a professional, full-length documentary film that would consist almost entirely of interviews with rescuers and those who had been rescued. She had no models that would provide her with guidance; nothing like it yet existed. When asked if there were any films she had seen prior to the making of *Comme Si C'Était Hier* that may have inspired or influenced her, Myriam cited

Andrée Geulen-Herscovici, Brussels, 1979.

only one—*The 81st Blow*, which appeared in 1974. The film's director, Haim Gouri, explains that there is no narration in the film and that "the voices of the witnesses at the Jerusalem trial [of Adolf Eichmann] are heard over black-and-white newsreel and documentary footage of the rise of Nazism, the boycott, the persecution and humiliation, and, finally, the destruction, in all its manifestations."[3]

In the spring of 1978, Myriam moved out of the apartment she had occupied and into a rented room. Samy came by to help her paint the walls, and he brought along a friend from Paris, a student specializing in pottery at the prestigious architecture and visual arts school in Brussels known simply as La Cambre. Esther Hoffenberg was very interested in hearing about Myriam's work. A couple of weeks later, while visiting her parents, Esther spoke about this subject that had piqued her interest. The discussion had an unexpected consequence: her father revealed to her that he had escaped the Warsaw Ghetto and, thanks to the help of a courageous Polish woman, had survived the last two years of the war hiding in the woods. Upon her return to Brussels, Esther proposed to her new friend that they work together on the project. Myriam accepted.

Over the next year, Myriam and Esther laid the groundwork for the actual filming, which would take place in May and June 1979. The primary focus of the work continued to be the researching and interviewing of men and women who had played important roles in saving Jewish children. They were helped in this effort by virtue of the fact that, immediately after the end of the war, the Belgian government had required all individuals who were in the Resistance to present depositions. The filmmakers consulted these depositions, learned from them, and, at times, used them to verify and supplement statements made by interviewees. In carrying out the research phase of the project, they would conduct a great many interviews. They would then select a handful of individuals whose testimony they wished to incorporate in the film.

Also during that preparatory year, Myriam and Esther worked feverishly to raise the $70,000 needed to make the film. A large share of this shoestring budget would go towards payment of the film crew and professional editor. But they would also have to cover many other expenses—not just those of film purchase and development but also of transportation and meals for themselves and their crew. They received contributions from several donors who believed in the worthiness of their efforts. Esther's parents, Sam and Eva Hoffenberg, were generous in their support, as were the Belgian peace activists David and Simone Susskind and the Belgian art collector Renée Miesse. Of Ms. Miesse, Myriam recalls, "She leaves envelopes on the table for me to find, with cash inside—$1,000, $2,000."

Myriam and Esther pared down their own living expenses to the barest minimum to survive. They rented a small, dilapidated, walk-up apartment. There was no light in the stairwell, no lock on the front door, and no hot water or heat. A shared toilet was down the hall. Bathing was done in

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Esther Hoffenberg, La Cambre, Brussels, 1978.

the homes of friends. In the winter, they relied on a couple of guys to carry the heavy gas tank called a "bonbonne" up the stairs to their apartment. The tank would be attached to the radiator to furnish heat. However, in order to economize, they often worked in a nearby café in lieu of turning on the heat. When they needed to use a typewriter, they went to the Ministry of Culture. "It was just what had to be done," Myriam says matter-of-factly. And what about meals? On Friday night, they went to the CCLJ (Centre Communautaire Laic Juif), the Jewish community center, run by the Susskinds, where they would be provided with a hot Shabbos meal at no charge. "We just went to the counter, and they knew to give us a plate, but there was no discussion, no conversation." They were often invited to meals at the homes of friends and supporters.

In addition to severe financial constraints, Myriam faced a legal complication as well. Although she had been born in the country, she did not hold Belgian citizenship, and neither did her parents. (They had had the option of buying their citizenship, but it was very expensive and they had made the decision to emigrate.) Holding an American passport and a tourist visa, Myriam was not legally permitted to work. Every three months, the filmmakers would travel to Paris, spend the weekend at the Hoffenberg home, and return to Brussels. In the process, Myriam would have her passport stamped, and this would allow her to renew her visa.

The film was to be shot in black and white, and the head of the camera crew, Jean Noël Gobron, recommended the use of Eastman Kodak Double-X Negative Film 7222 because of its rich tonal qualities. In 1978, the product was being phased out. (Preferred by many cinematographers, it would later be brought back.) Jean Noël contacted Kodak in Rochester and located a dozen spools available for purchase, each of which had a capacity of eleven minutes. The crew used the Double-X film selectively and supplemented it with the use of 400 ASA film, which was readily available.

One day near the end of 1978, Myriam was walking with Renée Miesse through the glass-canopied pedestrian arcade known as the Galerie de la Reine when they came upon a street singer. Myriam had been searching for music for the film. She knew what she did not want—music that provoked tears—but she did not know what she *did* want. She found the street performer's music mesmerizing. It seemed to Myriam that her songs conveyed stories of children yearning for parents who were no longer there and children who woke to find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings. Myriam would come to find out that the singer's unhappy childhood was, in fact, the source of this haunting music. "She would sing this type of music to muffle the arguments of her parents in the other room. She put herself to sleep by singing to herself."

Myriam commissioned the young woman to write and perform the musical score for the film. They recorded the soundtrack in the stately synagogue located at number 32 on the rue de la Régence. (At that time it was known as the Great Synagogue of Brussels and is now called the Great Synagogue of Europe.) As she performed the songs she had written, she played three instruments—a ukulele, a set of bells fastened around her right ankle, and a tambourine strapped to her left thigh just above the knee. The woman's name was Neige, meaning "snow" in French. Myriam called her "Snowflake."

The actual filming was accomplished over a very short period of time—23 days in May and June 1979. The short timeframe was necessary because of the severe financial constraints, and made possible because Myriam and Esther had done meticulous preparatory work over many months. To shoot the film, Myriam and Esther traveled throughout the country with their crew of five packed into two vehicles, one of which was a van that also carried the bulky 16mm equipment. The filmmakers struggled to meet their daily needs of cash—for the crew's wages, their two meals and transportation costs. In these days, prior to digital cinematography, it was essential to find a laboratory that would process their film within twenty-four hours so that it could be viewed. Fortunately, they were able to establish a good working relationship with Cineco, in Hilversum, the Netherlands. The border between the two countries is situated approximately halfway between Hilversum and Brussels. An executive of Cineco, Herman Zwart, was supportive of the project: he saw to it that the filmmakers were extended credit, and he arranged for a company employee to travel to the border every few days to pick up unprocessed spools and drop off those ready for viewing. The two sides were able to exchange film canisters without anyone having to cross the border and clear customs.

The editing process began as soon as the shooting had been completed and lasted for about six months. The film editor, Dominique Loreau, was, like the filmmakers themselves, relatively young and inexperienced. One of her mentors was Henri Colpi, the editor of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *L'Année dernière à Marienbad (Last Year at Marienbad)*, directed by the highly acclaimed Alain Resnais. Myriam and Esther traveled to Paris with fifteen hours of film footage, which Henri Colpi

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...HER SONGS CONVEYED STORIES OF CHILDREN YEARNING FOR PARENTS WHO WERE NO LONGER THERE...

viewed twice during the course of an intensive weekend. And, from time to time over the ensuing months, as she edited the footage, Dominique would consult with her mentor.

Donning a white glove on the hand that came in contact with the film, Dominique did the editing on a Steenbeck flatbed table, a large, complicated piece of machinery with two screens and numerous knobs, switches and bobbins. Observing her closely, Myriam learned how to thread the film through the bobbins. Maurice Heiber and Dr. Christine Hendrickx-Duchaine both paid visits to the editing room to see the work in process. Maurice was able to view an early version of the film, a fact that would later give Myriam a bit of solace because he did not live to see the finished product. Hospitalized in December because of a lung infection, Maurice suffered a fatal reaction to a medication, and passed away on January 6, 1980. The editing process had been completed one week earlier, on the last day of the year.

On March 23, 1980, *Comme Si C'Était Hier* premiered before an audience of some 800 at the Passage 44 theater in Brussels. Many of those in attendance had been hidden in Belgium during the war. A representative of Belgium's royal couple was in the audience and, soon after the premiere, the filmmakers were asked to present a private screening at the palace. Myriam and Esther found themselves in the kitchen of the palace watching King Baudouin thread the film through his own 16 mm projector. Myriam vividly recalls the experience of watching the king and his wife, Queen Fabiola, watch the film:

Esther and I were sitting behind the couple and a little to the side. I could see that the king had tears in his eyes when the photo of his grandmother [Queen Elisabeth] appeared at the beginning of the film. They sat very quietly side by side, holding hands, and, from time to time, he leaned over and whispered into her ear.

The king and queen judged it to be worthy of support: in May, the Belgian government sent the film by diplomatic pouch to Cannes, where it was shown, and also made sure that the filmmakers could attend the event by covering all of their travel expenses. Within weeks of Cannes, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris purchased a copy of the film for $1,200. The money was immediately used to pay the cost of adding English subtitles.

On a Sunday afternoon in June, Myriam's luck in using the visa-renewal ruse in order to remain in Belgium ran out. Walking along the fashionable avenue Louise, she and Esther were abruptly pulled over by two policemen and ordered to show their papers. As it turned out, the policemen had stopped them simply because they were looking to pick up two girls. Nevertheless, the officers examined Myriam's passport and wrote on it that she was required to leave the country within two weeks. Myriam has often reflected on the timing of the event: "Had this same incident happened two years before—the same incident, the same Sunday, the same pretext of these two guys looking to pick up two girls—everything would have been different."

Myriam's return to New York in the summer brought with it a new set of challenges. In August 1980, *As If It Were Yesterday* made its American debut in a setting that was distinguished and exciting—the Flaherty Seminar in Aurora, New York. The event is named for Robert Flaherty, recognized by many as the father of documentary film. The following month, it had its Canadian premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival. As in Brussels, many of those who came to see the film had been hidden children during the war. Myriam was seeking to find a North American distributor for the film. "We did twelve screenings and, on the twelfth screening, a woman from Cinema 5 offered her card and said to call her in the morning, that she was willing to sign a contract immediately."

Cinema 5 was a very prestigious distributor: its catalog included such films as *The Sorrow and the Pity, Bread and Chocolate, Cousin, Cousine, Z, Stolen Kisses,* and the Academy-award winning *Harlen County.* By 1982, *As If It Were Yesterday* was included in the impressive Cinema 5 catalog. In June, it was shown at both the Carnegie Theater and the Bleeker Street Theater. Around that same time, however, Cinema 5 changed hands and promotional efforts fell off sharply. Myriam remained undaunted, however, and took it upon herself to promote the film. She traveled with it to conferences and seminars all over the United States, throughout Europe, and in Israel and Japan. During this period of peregrination, she kept notebooks that chronicle the film's screenings. During the Q&A session following each screening, she passed around a notebook so that audience members could record their comments. Many people included their names, phone numbers, and/or addresses. Myriam was not paid for her work promoting the film. Neither did she receive royalties from the film distributor. She paid her own travel expenses. Through grit and determination, she saw to it that

Neige, Brussels, 1979.

the film found its audiences, reached out to men and women who had been hidden children, and introduced the subject to those who had no personal knowledge of it. "Word got around," she recalled. "One was calling the other. One program. One university was calling another. I was traveling all over the place." Several of the screenings during the eighties remain foremost in her mind. She participated in a Women and War Workshop held on a January weekend in 1984 at the Center for European Studies at Harvard, where the showing of the film was the featured

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event Saturday evening. When the first of several weekend screenings were held at the Public Theater in May and June 1988, Myriam's dear friend, Grace Paley, delivered an introduction.

Many of those who saw the film were deeply affected, none more so than men and women who had been separated from their parents and hidden under Aryan identities during the war. What might it have felt like for a child survivor to see this film back in the eighties? Dori Katz begins her magnificent memoir, *Looking for Strangers*, with a moving account of what she experienced in 1982. In the first chapter, entitled "As if it Were Yesterday, 1982," she writes, "It all started with watching a movie about my own life playing at noon in a movie theater in midtown Manhattan."[4] Dori too was a hidden child from Belgium. She was quite young during the war; her memories of the period were indistinct and fragmentary, and she knew little of the actual circumstances pertaining to her hiding. She writes of the trepidation she experienced before entering the movie theater and of how her heart began to race when photos of hidden children appeared on the screen. "I walked out of the theater very shaken, suddenly overwhelmed by the need to find the people who had hidden me." Like many others, she contacted the filmmakers and met with them. In the wake of this experience, Dori, a poet and professor of modern languages and literature at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, embarked on a nearly thirty-year long quest—to learn about those who had hidden her, to understand the little girl she had been, and to come to terms with the difficulties she'd had with her mother.

As the decade of the eighties ended, the film had brought together survivors in various venues, and they had forged connections with one another. At some point, Myriam floated the idea of organizing a gathering of child survivors in New York City. Two prominent women with professional and personal connections to child survivors, Eva Fogelman and Judith Kestenberg, lent their considerable knowledge and skills to the endeavor. National Director of the Anti-Defamation League, Abraham Foxman—himself a hidden child from Poland—agreed to sponsor the event. The notebooks that Myriam had maintained during her years of traveling with the film formed the genesis of the list of individuals to be invited, yielding approximately 200 names and addresses.

In May 1991, at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in New York, an estimated 1,600 people from 28 countries met for the First International Gathering of Children Hidden during World War II. The gathering was a seminal event for many reasons, not the least of which because it led directly to the establishment of the Hidden Child Foundation.

THOSE WHO SAW THE FILM WERE DEEPLY AFFECTED, NONE MORE SO THAN MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAD BEEN SEPARATED FROM THEIR PARENTS AND HIDDEN UNDER ARYAN IDENTITIES.

The National Center for Jewish Film at Brandeis University eventually acquired the rights to *As If It Were Yesterday* in various formats. Now readily available for purchase and home viewing on DVD and also included in university library collections across the country, the film is reaching a new generation of viewers.[5]

With the perspective of 35 years, Myriam minimizes the nature of the obstacles she faced in making the film and in giving it a chance to find its rightful place among documentary films pertaining to the Shoah. She describes the process by which it was realized as "organic."

Once I accepted the assignment, then He [haShem] put all the elements I needed but nothing more [within my reach]. In terms of money, same thing. The amount I needed. Nothing more, nothing less. But I had to go and get it. But it was put in my way, who to go to. Everything. Every thing... When you're doing what you're to do, when you're at one—and the Talmud actually talks about this, it's part of the Kabbalistic aspect of the tradition—when you are at one with what you're actually meant to do while you're here, then everything falls into place.

Note from the author: The above account is based on an interview I conducted with Myriam on February 28, 2014, as well as subsequent phone conversations and email communication. My thanks to Myriam for sharing her story with me and for allowing me to use her photos in this article. I also wish to thank Dr. Anne Griffin, Professor of Political Science at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, for helping to broaden my knowledge of the situation in Belgium under the German Occupation and of the work of the Belgian resistance. Dr. Griffin is presently completing a book on the subject of the Belgian Resistance. NL ■

Nancy Lefenfeld is an independent scholar whose area of concentration is Jewish humanitarian resistance in France during the Shoah. Her book, The Fate of Others: Rescuing Jewish Children on the French-Swiss Border, *published by Timbrel Press in 2013, chronicles the work of Jewish resisters belonging to the MJS (Mouvement de jeunesse sioniste). The group smuggled 24 convoys of children from France into Switzerland in the fall of 1943. Nan also authored the chapter on Jewish humanitarian resistance in France that appears in Jewish Resistance to the Nazis, edited by Dr. Patrick Henry and published by Catholic University of America Press in May 2014.*

1. Lucien Steinberg, "Jewish Rescue Activities in Belgium and France," in Rescue Attempts during the Holocaust: *Proceedings of the Second Yad Vashem International Historical Conference – April 1974* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1977), 604.

2. Suzanne Vromen, *Hidden Children of the Holocaust: Belgian Nuns and their Daring Rescue of Young Jews from the Nazis* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2008), 87.

3. Houri, Haim, *Facing the Glass Booth: The Jerusalem Trial of Adolf Eichmann*, trans. Michael Swirsky (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 326.

4. Katz, Dori. *Looking for Strangers: The True Story of my Hidden Wartime Childhood* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 4. The subsequent quotation is from the same source, page 6.

5. The film can also be viewed, by appointment, at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center, at Lincoln Center (call 212.870.1741 or email toft@nypl.org.

A JEWISH CHILD IN CHRISTIAN DISGUISE

By Jack Kuper

At my mother's urging, my father escaped to Russia soon after the German army rolled into Pulawy, our town. As a Jew and a known communist, his life had been doubly imperiled. Now the sole earner, my mother baked apple strudel and sold it on the street to passing German soldiers. She worked tirelessly to feed us, but ultimately there was little profit in street vending. So she bundled us up and spent her remaining few coins for the ferry that crossed the Vistula River to Warsaw where her family resided. There, she became a vendor of sundries at the old market.

In 1940, in the Warsaw Ghetto, at age eight I would accompany my uncle Moishe, only three or four years older than I, to the Jewish cemetery on Okopowa Street. Under cover of darkness, we would gather fallen branches to feed the stove in my grandparents' basement apartment at 25 Pawia Street.

Uncle Moishe was fearless. Neither the spooky sounds of night, nor the possibility of being caught, worried him. Tiptoeing around the looming gravestones in search of twigs buried beneath the snow, I was petrified of stirring and angering the dead for disturbing their peace.

In 1941, my mother, Etta-Liba, known as Edzia, carried my four year old brother, Josel, in one arm, and a bag, laden with eggs and packets of tobacco in the other; and with me at her side we trudged along muddy village roads. After a miraculous escape from the Warsaw Ghetto, we arrived in Lublin, where my father's parents and siblings resided.

We evaded a roundup, and fled again, ending up in a remote shtetl, where we spent months going from village to village, door to door, trading pinches of tobacco, wrapped in paper, for eggs, later to be bartered with German soldiers for more tobacco. And from this carousel we managed to exist.

At one such farm a young childless couple proposed I stay with them for the summer to tend to their two cows. My mother wouldn't hear of it but they kept pressing, offering inducements of produce on a regular basis. Weakened, she reluctantly agreed, parting with tears in her eyes.

I was treated with love and affection, hugged and kissed, and encouraged to eat my fill. A week later when Mother showed up, she insisted I accompany her home, saying, "They love you too much! I don't want to lose you."

By the end of that year my Warsaw Zaidy, a shoemaker, and his two younger sons, Uncle Shepsel, about fifteen, and Uncle Moishe joined us. They had managed to flee, hitchhiking with shovels over their shoulders, pretending to be road workers. It was a marvel that the miniscule room we occupied accommodated three more souls.

In the ensuing months, my grandfather dragged about the nearby villages, mending shoes in exchange for chunks of bread, a few potatoes, a sack of flour, a pocketful of kasha. Once, he even returned with a live chicken under his arm. Since we couldn't afford to pay the *shoychet,* another hungry family licked its fingers that Shabbat.

One late winter morning, Zaidy said his morning prayers, put on his overcoat, pinned a freshly washed Star of David armband onto one sleeve, flipped the burlap bag holding his tools over his shoulder, and departed on a fresh day's venture. That evening, as always, we awaited his return with anticipation and hunger, staring out the tiny window until the street emptied and the sky darkened. In the morning, Uncle Moishe left to retrace Zaidy's footsteps and came across a peasant burying a corpse by the roadside in the village of Dobromysl. When later in the day we saw Moishe approaching with Zaidy's sack over his shoulder, my mother covered her face and wailed, "No! Don't tell me. I don't want to know," and sobbed uncontrollably. It seems that three Germans on horseback had come across a wandering beggar and had decided to have some fun with him.

It turned out that Zaidy had been begging, not repairing footwear. There were no shoes to be repaired. It was a common belief among the peasantry that Jesus visited people disguised as a beggar to test

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their generosity. And so, they mistook Jehoshua Chuen of Warsaw for Jehoshua of Nazareth and filled his bag.

Left without a provider, my young uncles found work on separate farms, until one market day, Mrs. Peizak, Uncle Shepsel's employer, brought him home with an injured back and looked to me as his replacement.

So, in the spring of 1942, as I was about to turn ten, I went to work for Mrs. Peizak. I shared the barn with several pigs, a horse and two cows. Early in the morning I'd lead the cows to pasture and I'd come in contact with village boys. Now I was introduced to what being Jewish meant. Until then, I had learned everything in cheder, when I was six, and later at the Tarbut Hebrew School, where I first heard of a place called Palestine. Friday evenings, I attended synagogue to partake in a sip of sweet wine passed around the worshippers.

What a shock to find out that Jews killed Christian infants and drained their blood for the baking of matzo! When I protested, they asked me to explain the brown spots in the matzo. Jews had killed their Jesus and nailed him to a cross, and because of all these horrible sins, God had sent Hitler to avenge the murder of His only son.

Even Mrs. Peizak's daughter, Genia, held these beliefs, which she'd heard the priest tell at church. To console me, her mother said, though true, no one was blaming me. I was a good boy; it was just the Jewish elders who were behind these evildoings.

Several weeks after my arrival, as agreed, I accompanied Mrs. Peizak to town on market day to visit my mother and deliver my earnings in the form of farm produce. The town was deserted, save for a few looters smashing down doors and lugging out household contents. The night before, May 18th, 1942, the Germans and their henchmen had emptied the town of all Jews, deporting them to Sobibor.

On the way back, Mrs. Peizak changed my name from Jacob to Kubus, saying it was more fitting. I resumed my chores and as the summer wore on I came in contact with wandering Russian POWs who had escaped from nearby Chelm. Somehow, they had acquired rifles and munitions to sabotage German interests and had befriended Mrs. Peizak whose home became their headquarters. On Sundays they would gather to devour mounds of *pierogi* and liters of vodka, entertaining us with Russian songs to the accompaniment of an accordion. One Russian in particular, Vania, was very kind to me, offering hope that the war would soon end and I would be reunited with my father.

In time the Germans retaliated against these insurgents, surrounding the area and ordering all the inhabitants to assemble in the village center. They went from house to house in search of fugitives. It was too risky for me to show my face in the midst of the villagers and so I stayed behind and hid in the root cellar where potatoes were stored for the winter. I stayed there for hours, listening to the sounds of two Germans searching the premises. I held my breath and prayed, admonishing God for making me a Jew. Why not a cow, a horse? I even envied the insects crawling all about.

Many of our comrades perished that day. We came across Vania's bullet-riddled body and buried him. Those found protecting Jews and POWs were tortured and murdered in brutal fashion.

To shelter a Jew or POW meant death to the family and ten surrounding neighbors. After that, fear invaded the village, resulting in the departure of the surviving fugitives.

Shortly thereafter, Mrs. Peizak's eighteen year old son, Stashek, returned from forced labor in Germany, espousing his admiration for Hitler and the miraculous things he was doing, especially ridding the planet of the Yids. When he caught me not crossing myself at mealtime, he began to suspect that his mother had lied about my identity and he argued to get rid of me.

Around that time, Uncle Moishe surprised me. How happy I was to see him! At sunset when it was time to leave the pasture, he detained me, slowly revealing he had nowhere to go. Luckily, Mrs. Peizak agreed he could help out with the harvest. But by the time the wheat was in the barn, she caved into her fascist son's pressure.

And so, armed with a loaf of bread and a bottle of milk, we faced a vast frozen landscape with no plans, no destination. Fearing that, if caught, we would implicate her, our benefactress advised us to give ourselves up, adding that we had no chance of surviving anyway.

We walked as far as the haystack in the back field and remained there until one night when we were attacked by the local vigilantes. Stabbing pitchforks into the hay, they pulled us out easily, and demanded our gold, diamonds and money, which according to them, all Jews possessed. Moishe, laughing, invited them to search us. I cried and begged them to let us go. Finally, they agreed on condition that we leave their village for good, lest they deliver us to the Gestapo. Reason dictated that we not only move on, but also split up to try our luck separately and rendezvous back at the haystack in a few days.

In an adjoining village, I entered a house and introduced myself as an experienced caretaker of cows. When I gave Mrs. Peizak as a reference, I received a warm reception. I made sure to cross myself before eating; and at bedtime, I kneeled beside my straw mattress on the floor, holding my palms together and moving my lips. It all went smoothly until my employer returned from church on Sunday and disclosed that he had spoken to Mrs. Peizak and knew all about me.

Moishe arrived at the haystack a day late. His experience had not been positive and he proposed we go to the Chelm Ghetto where we could at least die among our own people. I could not imagine death and when I objected, Moishe conceded that perhaps with my looks, I might have a chance. "When they see me," he said, "they set the dogs loose." After much debating, we parted, Moishe going one way and I the other. I feared abandonment but at all cost, I was determined to survive and to save him as well. I walked on, hoping he would come running after me. But when I didn't hear his call or his footsteps, I looked back. He had disappeared, and I never saw my Uncle Moishe again.

By nightfall I had found lodging, but when it was evident I didn't know the Lord's Prayer, I was slapped across the face and escorted to the door.

I gave myself a new name, pilfered a prayer book and cross, and presented myself as a Christian orphan, my father on forced labor in Germany, and due to a cruel stepmother, which I modelled after the witch in Hansel and Gretel, I took to the road.

The first villager I encountered took one look at me and broke into peals of laughter, pointing to the large cross

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around my neck, and the prayer book on display in my hand and said "A Jew boy!"

My dark hair and eyes, which mirrored a thousand years of terror, were not in my favor, neither was my poor, accented Polish. A dead giveaway was my guttural Yiddish enunciation of the letter 'R.'

To blend in and be rid of the lice, I sheared off my hair, and carefully deleted words with the letter 'R' from my vocabulary. It was not so much the way one looked, but the way one acted, sounded, behaved. It was important not to appear fearful and not to run from danger.

Though petrified, I dared riding bareback an untamed stallion. When assigned to drown two diseased kittens, I performed the dreaded deed with seeming relish. Another time, I joined in chasing a runaway Jew. On occasion I played hide-and-seek. In this version, the one hiding was a Jew. My playmates begged to be the Jew, but when it was my turn, and they couldn't find me, they complained that I made a lousy Jew.

My greatest nightmare was my circumcision. How much easier it would have been had I been born a girl. I contemplated replacing what the mohel had removed with chicken skin.

On the whole, the peasants were kind. Their lives were hard, with little to show for their labor, but they would offer a homeless urchin a piece of bread or a night's lodging in the barn or by the stove. One night here and another there, I made myself useful by feeding animals, chopping wood, fetching water from the well and entertaining children with card tricks, stories, songs and drawings. Some would cry when I was shooed out the next morning

One devout peasant, suspecting me, advised, "It's never too late. Believe in Jesus and you'll be saved."

Although my father was a nonbeliever, my mother had instilled the fear of God in me. I remembered her blessing the Shabbat candles, the sips of the sweet wine in the synagogue, sitting in my Zaidy's Sukkah, asking the four questions at the Seder table at our last Pesach in the Warsaw Ghetto.

I looked to the Almighty for guidance and protection, but as time wore on, my faith weakened and I began to wonder whether He was still alive or had died of old age. How else could my childish mind explain his indifference to our sealed fate?

Jack Kuper, age 8, with little brother, Josele, in Warsaw Ghetto.

By the spring of 1943, I found full time employment with a boorish farmer. When I was there almost a year, he questioned, "How come you never write to your father?

"I don't have his address, sir."

"Why not get it from your stepmother?"

I sat down to write when my employer peeked over my shoulder saying, "You write like a Jew."

Early the next morning, I fled some distance and under a new name, spent the next year working for Adam Kozak in the village of Gielczew near the town of Piaski, not far from Lublin.

In summer of 1944, I found myself with my herd between the retreating Germans and advancing Red Army. The battle was so terrifying that I feared my demise. How ironic, I thought, to have outwitted Hitler, only to perish when I could almost taste freedom! And so, as I had done so many times before, I turned to Jesus, promising that if He saved me, I would believe in him forever. I had made similar deals with Him many times before. This time I really meant it.

Since my arrival at the Kozaks, I had attended church on Sundays and I continued doing so after the liberation even though I understood little of what went on. When others knelt, I knelt; when others stood, I stood; when the lady next to me turned a page in her prayer book, so did I; and when someone in front crossed himself, I followed. I wanted to stop this charade and found myself going to church instinctively. My daily prayers were no longer aimed at fooling people; I was saying them with conviction and sincerity.

Such discoveries upset me, for now I realized how far removed I had become from Jankele Kuperblum. There seemed to be two of me: one Jankele Kuperblum, the other Franek Zielinski. I could visualize the latter, but Jankele Kuperblum was almost a blur in my eyes. I feared forgetting my real name and repeated it often to myself in the dark of night.

Terrible guilt beset me and my inner voice rebuked me. Shame Jankele! Shame! You're free and yet you make no attempt to return to the fold. I had survived, I thought, but for what? Where are the others?

In the village, stories circulated of returning Jews reclaiming their properties and being found floating in the river. "Mr. Kozak!" I addressed my employer. He puffed on his pipe and kept turning the wheel of the chaff-cutting machine. "Mr. Kozak," I blurted out with a trembling voice, "Mr. Kozak, I'm a Jew! I think it would be better if I left."

His eyes bulged with anger. "Never!" he shouted. "I saved your life, boy! All of us could have been killed and everything we own could have been burned to the ground! You'll stay right here, and work for me the rest of your life!"

Nevertheless, I made plans to leave, but when I prepared to gather my few possessions, my clothes were missing.

The next day I recanted. "The truth is I have nowhere to go." My clothes were returned.

Another week went by. Although it was a warm day, I put on my two pairs of underwear, two shirts and both of my trousers. As usual Mr. Kozak hitched the horses and everyone, dressed in their Sunday best, mounted the wagon for the journey to the Piaski church.

"Franiu, we're waiting," I heard.

"I overslept." I shouted back from the barn.

"Vio," I heard the familiar command and click of the tongue, followed by the horse's rhythmic trot, the screeching of the wheels and then silence.

I entered the house and found Cesia, Kozak's fifteen year old daughter. "I'm going to late mass," I said.

The village was deserted and unusu-

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ally quiet. A black dog stared at me but did not bark. At any moment I expected a pointing gun from behind a curtain or barn door, and then, the shot.

I was terrified, and would have turned back had I not been almost at the other end of the village. Step by step, I moved on, whistling and faking a smile.

Eight more properties and I'll be out; I comforted myself… seven more, six. I took another step. I looked to the left, to the right… five more… four more… three more… two.

The road led downhill. The silence was broken by chanting coming from the church. I moved on, staring at my feet as they trotted quickly over the cobbled road, leading to the highway out of town.

The chanting came to a dead stop. I hesitated. The church loomed before me, and there, sitting erect in the driver's seat of his wagon, was Mr. Kozak. We stared at each other. I took a step backwards. Mr. Kozak didn't flinch. I took another step, then another, but he remained frozen to his seat, staring. I galloped toward the highway.

"You're a sneaky Jew," accused one of my voices. "The poor man saves your life and the first opportunity you have, you run out on him. How ungrateful and typical of your tribe!"

"I'm grateful," I defended myself. "I wish I could tell him how much he has taught me, and how I truly love him."

I returned to the Shtetl where I had last seen my mother. No one was waiting for me. At a time when Jewish boys have their bar mitzvahs, I entered a church and asked to be baptized. The priest suggested I come back when I turn twenty-one, and advised I go to Lublin where I would find other survivors.

On the train I met a boy returning home to Lublin and asked him if it's true that the Germans had left and the Yids are back. "They're crawling like bedbugs out of a mattress," he replied.

I spent the night on the station floor and early the next morning faced the city covered in mist. I started to walk, seeing only a few meters in front of me. I saw no one, but heard footsteps and motor vehicles coming from all directions. I was hesitant, uncertain and fearful.

Soon a glowing sun made its appearance and a full street came into view. I stopped, looked about, feeling like a forest animal lured out into the open. If I could, I would have gladly returned to the safety of the Kozak farm.

In a store window I caught the image of a young boy with cropped hair, torn trousers, and bare feet caked in dirt.

"THIS *SHAGITZ* SAYS HE'S A JEW," HE ADDRESSED A PASSING NEIGHBOR. BOTH ROCKED WITH LAUGHTER.

Is it really me? Would my family recognize me? Where shall I go? I approached a stranger, but quickly turned from him. If I ask him about Jews, he might suspect and…

In the end I chose an individual walking in my direction and casually asked, as if the question carried no importance: "I hear the Jews are back?"

"You're a Jew!" and he grabbed me by the sleeve.

"No!" I protested, and loosened his grip.

"Wait!" he called after me. We turned a corner. "Look," he pointed to a droshky with a mustached driver with two well-dressed passengers reclining in comfort. "Yours!"

My heart pounded. I studied the passengers. Instantly, I transformed them into shifty speculators with long hooked noses. I had nothing in common with these herring merchants, usurers and garlic eaters. I wanted to farm the soil and live by the labor of my own hands.

"Come! Come!" called my guide, and I followed.

I wonder what Mr. Kozak is doing at this moment? Perhaps I should make my way to the highway and hitch a ride to Piaski?

"There!" said he, pointing to a short stocky man leaning against a courtyard gate. "One of yours," he pushed me and disappeared into the crowd.

The stocky man took a puff on a cigarette, eyeing me with suspicion. "Are you a Jew?" I asked, with a mixture of repulsion and kinship. He turned from me and proceeded toward the courtyard. "I'm a Jew, from Pulawy," I ran after him.

"Be on your way, boy!" he barked angrily over his shoulder, and opened a door, about to enter, but I held onto his jacket.

"Please believe me!" I pleaded.

He responded in a language I did not understand. It may have been Yiddish.

"This *shagitz* says he's a Jew," he addressed a passing neighbor. Both rocked with laughter. Before I knew it, the two vanished into a building, bolting the door. I pounded on it. "If you don't go away, I'll call the police," I heard the threatening voice.

"Please," I begged, "I'll pull down my pants to prove it."

The door slowly opened. "Come," he said, and led me down a dark hallway and into a dimly lit room.

A bear of a man with curly red hair laid on an iron bed as a brood of children jumped on him. Finally focusing on me, he asked in a hoarse voice, "What have we here?"

"He claims he's from Pulawy"

The bear motioned to come closer. "Who's your father?" he snapped.

"Zelik Kuperblum," I answered somewhat afraid.

"Zelik's son? You're Zelik's son? The baker Chaya-Yeta's grandson then!" I nodded. "A relative of yours lives down the street," he said. A chill raced through my veins, wondering who it might be. "Follow me," said the man who had brought me there and, after a short walk, led me into a courtyard and there, in a shop, introduced me to a barber busily shaving a customer.

After hearing me out, the barber bolted from the shop shouting toward a window above! "Sarah!" A young woman stuck her head out. "Come down quickly!" Panting, she flew down the rickety stairs. "Who do you think this is? Take a guess," urged her husband.

"What's to guess? A peasant."

They both shot questions at me. How had I survived? What happened to my parents? They in turn explained how we were related.

The connection was nebulous, but I

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was pleased to be attached to someone… anyone.

The apartment consisted of two tiny rooms. The freshly scrubbed floors were covered with newspaper. Cousin Sarah began to chop fish, and the staccato sound conjured up so many images as did the aromas emanating from the stove, which brought back memories of my childhood in Pulawy.

At dinner, Sarah covered her head with a white shawl and, closing her eyes, she blessed the candles with circling hand motions. I looked at her face and was reminded of my mother.

First we ate gefilte fish with horseradish and chalah, followed by chicken soup with noodles and lima beans. The taste was so familiar and yet so very foreign. Mesmerized by the flickering candles, I stopped eating. When I glanced up, I caught my hosts studying me.

"What's the matter, Jankele, don't you like it?" asked Cousin Sarah.

My tears dropped into the soup. I lowered my head, spooning the soup with the tears.

For the first time since leaving home, I rested my head on a real pillow and covered my body with soft feather bedding.

Sleep came easily. When I woke up the next morning, I lay in a puddle of urine. If only I had wings, I thought, I would fly out the window. I don't know how I managed to leave the bed and get dressed without waking them. I made my way down the stairs on tiptoes and walked onto the street.

It is the winter of 1941. Lublin is covered with snow. My mother carries Josele in one arm; our meager possessions are bundled in a bed sheet over her shoulder. My mother keeps repeating, "Hold on to me, Jankele."

At the intersection German soldiers are pointing their machine guns at us.

"Move on!" they order us, indicating the direction to the assembly point.

"Hold on to me, Jankele," pleads my mother and her voice fades from my memory.

The glaring sun brought me back to the present. Buildings swayed, the street spun. **"Mama!"** I called out, **"Where are you?"** A crowd gathered around me. I wanted to escape, but a paralyzing pain in my knees prevented me. I couldn't walk. A fever rushed through my body and I vomited, splattering the sidewalk with remnants of the gefilte fish and the once sweet chicken soup.

After several more wet nights, Cousin Sarah accompanied me to an orphanage, where she assured me I would be better off.

"How come you can't speak Yiddish?" asked some of the orphans after I had been there for a while.

"I forgot."

"Maybe you never knew it, eh? You call yourself Jankele, but you don't look or act like a Jankele. And what's this?" asked one, displaying the Saint Francis medallion I had hidden under the mattress upon my arrival. I felt like a shadow, a ghost, or even less than that.

One night, I was awakened by a whisper, "He's a Jew!"

I opened my eyes and was blinded by a flashlight. My bedcover was on the floor and faces were staring at my nakedness. Jumping out of bed I began swinging my arms. The gang quickly scattered. I followed and stumbled. The lights were switched on. Eyes peeked out from under blankets. Others feigned sleep. I pulled at their covers and smashed whatever was in my path.

"You jerks! You cowardly bastards! Bloody Christ killers! Hitler should have made soap out of all of you," I screamed.

They stared in silent disbelief. Then I felt a blow in my stomach, another in my head, and I fell hitting the floor. I was picked up and slugged, kicked and punched, accompanied by infuriating shouts.

The next morning when I awoke, my pillow was drenched in blood. My face was bruised, my right eye was half closed and I was swollen everywhere.

A recent arrival to the orphanage who had witnessed the scuffle, befriended me. His survival was similar to mine, and like me, he still prayed to Jesus and surprisingly even managed to secretly attend church on Sundays. One day he divulged he had arranged for his priest to baptize and send us to a place no one could find.

On the appointed day when we reached the church, he scaled the stairs to the open, welcoming heavy door and entered into the darkness, while I watched from below. "What if my mother survived and came looking for me? And Moishe, surely he's alive! And my father is probably in the Russian army and he'll be searching for his Jankele." And with that, I ran to the Registry office where, with the hope of connecting with lost ones, Jews left depositions of their survival on a message wall. Picking up a pencil hanging from a string and locating a blank spot, I scribbled: **Jankele Kuperblum is alive!** ■

At the age of 15, Jankele Kuperblum, now Jack Kuper, went to Canada as one of a thousand war orphans sponsored by the Canadian Jewish community. He was placed in a foster home in Toronto, and sent to the local public school. After a six-month English crash course, he enrolled at Central Tech to study commercial art. Upon graduation, in 1952, Jack was offered a job at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. He designed graphics, animated show openings, acted, wrote and directed. By the time he left, thirteen years later, he was head of three departments: Graphics, Animation and Still Photography.

Among the many plays he wrote for Canadian television in the early sixties, Sun in my Eyes, *dealt with the Holocaust, and was broadcast around the English-speaking world. His memoir,* Child of the Holocaust, *was published in 1967 and has been translated into eight languages. The sequel,* After the Smoke Cleared, *winner of the Jewish Book Award for Holocaust Literature, appeared in 1994.*

In 1966 Jack was named Canadian Art Director of the Year. Other awards include: Graphica, The American TV Commercial Awards, The Canadian Radio Festival, The Hollywood Radio and TV Festival, The Dominion Drama Festival, The Venice Film Festival and two Geminis from The Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television. His graphic work has been featured in several prestigious publications such as Graphis Annual, Switzerland and Idea Magazine, Japan. Most recently, the Ontario Art Gallery acquired thirty-two of his graphics for its permanent collection. In 1971, Jack established a film company: Kuper Productions Ltd., and produced and directed TV commercials and documentary films. His film, RUN! *represented Canada at several international film festivals. His documentary,* A Day in the Warsaw Ghetto – A Birthday Trip in Hell, *was seen on TV the world over. Later productions include the critically acclaimed:* Who Was Jerzy Kosinski?, Shtetl, Children of the Storm, and The Fear of Felix Nussbaum.

Jack is married to the former ballet dancer, Terrye Lee Swadron. They have four children and thirteen grandchildren. They all live in Toronto. The Boston University Archives is home to Jack's professional and personal files.

THE SEARCH FOR PRISONER 1002: RICHARD BRAHMER

By Geoffrey Brahmer, M.Div

My search for Prisoner 1002 began in 2011. As a Non-Jew who has been researching the Shoah for several years, I decided one day to go to the Yad Vashem Victims Data Base, write in my surname, and see if anyone came up. To my great surprise, someone did: Richard Brahmer, from Vienna, Austria!

The Yad Vashem Data Base had only the most basic information concerning Brahmer.

Source:	**Documentation Centre for Austrian Resistance, Wien.**
Last Name:	**Brahmer**
First Name:	**Richard**
Gender:	**Male**
Date of Birth:	**29/01/1893**
Place of Birth:	**Wien, Vienna, Austria.**

Details of Transport:
Transport from Wien, Vienna, Austria to Nisko, Poland on 26/10/1939.

Transport 2 from Wien, Vienna, Austria to Kielce, Poland on 19/02/1941.

Prisoner Nr in Transport:	**1002.**
Status in the Source	**Murdered**
Type of material:	**List of murdered Jews from Austria**
Item ID:	**4930152.**

I contacted the Documentation Centre for Austrian Resistance, and was given some additional information. Richard's last known address was Wien, District 2, Glockengasse 9. I found Glockengasse 9 on the Web. It is now a gallery for two Austrian artists: Franz Riedl and Jochen Höller. Previous to their obtaining it, the gallery had been a butcher shop.

During this initial period, I also met Rachelle Goldstein, Co-Director of the Hidden Child Foundation. When I told Rachelle about my search, she exclaimed that her husband, Jack, and his family had once resided on the same street, at Glockengasse 6. The principle of *Six Degrees of Separation* was now starting to play a role in my search.

After speaking with Jack, who left Viena at the age of three and was later hidden in Belgium, I learned that his grandparents, Israel and Sophie Goldstein, were deported to Opole, Poland, in the same month that Richard had been sent to Kielce—February, 1941. Their numbers were 3/356 and 3/357. Israel and Sophie also did not survive the Shoah.

Prior to visiting Vienna, I prepared background materials. I wanted to know as much as possible about Richard Brahmer, born in Vienna on January 29, 1893, and last seen entering a transport to Kielce, Poland, on February 19, 1941. Prisoner 1002, Richard Brahmer, would have been 48 years old.

When Richard was born, Vienna was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a multi-ethnic state ruled by the Habsburgs, then under the leadership of Emperor Franz Joseph. At the time, the Austro-Hungarian Constitution provided equal rights to its diverse populations, including the Jews. Vienna was basically a good place for Jews to live and work. This is supported by a comparison of Vienna's population statistics: In 1857, there were 2,700 Jews, and by 1900, the city's Jewish residents numbered 147,000. Tens of thousands of Jews had come to Vienna for better jobs, social status, and opportunities. Most had come from the *shtetls* as a result of the discrimination and pogroms within the Russian Empire—the Pale of Settlement. Others came from small towns throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

It is likely that Richard Brahmer's family was part of the large influx of the Jewish population that immigrated to Vienna in the 19th century. This experience was also shared by some well-known people, such as Sigmund Freud and Gustav Mahler. Many Jews settled in Leopoldstadt, Vienna's District 2, a working class neighborhood of the new immigrant class.

Yet, though conditions were relatively good for Jews in Vienna, anti-Semitism still figured in everyday life. For instance, Gustav Mahler, a Jewish composer and conductor, converted to Christianity because Jews could not be appointed director of the Vienna Opera House. By converting, Mahler succeeded in attaining this position. Other Jews also converted, or changed their names, because assimila-

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tion might lead to a better job or a higher status in Austrian society.

In 1924, Richard Brahmer also changed his name. I discovered this through Mag. Wolf-Erich Eckstein, the now retired archivist of the Jewish Synagogue in Vienna. Looking at Brahmer's record, we learned that Richard's surname was **Abraham**, not Brahmer. The record also noted that he married Olga Wilheim a year later. Olga would die of breast cancer in October, 1936, in Vienna. The Brahmers had a daughter, Liselotte Gerda Brahmer, born on November 28, 1929 in Vienna.

We do not know why Richard changed his surname. Name changes could occur for conversion, work opportunities, social advancement, or simply the loss of Jewish identity or the perceived need for assimilation. Richard worked as a *prokurist*—an educated, mid-level manager or administrator, often with the power of attorney—who might have been employed at an insurance company, a large business, or in government. Still, it soon became clear that the Nazis did not differentiate between assimilated and non-assimilated Jews. In their view, "race" trumped over conversion or assimilation; all Jews, no matter their status or religion, were considered "threats" to Aryan purity and to German nationhood

Throughout Richard's life, anti-Semitism had been on the rise in Western Europe. The Dreyfus trial had taken place in Paris in 1894-95. This trial, only a year after Brahmer's birth, was observed by Theodor Herzl, an assimilated Jewish journalist, from Vienna at the time, who in 1896 founded the World Zionist Organization. Herzl had determined that assimilation was not possible in Europe. The only viable option for Jews was to leave and establish their own homeland.

During Brahmer's childhood, anti-Semitism intensified in Vienna. Karl Lueger, a leader of the Austrian Christian Socialist Party, used anti-Semitic slogans and policies to be elected Mayor of Vienna from 1895 to his death in 1910. One aspiring Bohemian, who particularly admired Lueger's anti-Semitic politics, was Adolf Hitler, who moved to Vienna in 1905, seeking to become an architect. Hitler would later discuss the strengths and weaknesses of Lueger's political anti-Semitism in his book, *Mein Kampf*.

The rise of Nazism in Germany in the 1930s, and the *Anschluss* (Annexation) of Austria in March, 1938, are the catalytic movements that will shape Brahmer's life, and the lives of all Jews in Europe. The *Anschluss* helped establish the organizing means for forced (conveyor belt) emigration, the role of the Nazi appointed Jewish Councils, and finally, the first European deportation systems leading to the Final Solution. In Austria, the elite, state-sponsored SS/Gestapo network also begins to coalesce and develop its own police powers and methods against Jews.

Hilda Jedlinsky

Josef Jedlinsky

We have no known record of Richard Brahmer's own experience of the *Anschluss*. As a Jew, he probably suffered the lot of all Jews on the streets of Vienna: the initial pogroms of humiliation and terror. Such brutality was soon followed by state-sponsored discrimination, segregation, theft, incarcerations, and the loss of income, employment, possessions and free movement. The anti-Jewish laws that took five years to establish in Germany were mandated in Austria within the first two months.

Once the Nazis occupied Austria, their intent was not to simply annex Austria to the Reich but to also terrorize, humiliate, strip, and render the country free of Jews. Initially, this took place through forced emigration, utilizing the tactics of both individual and institutional terror. In the establishment of "conveyor belt" emigration, the Nazis developed the institutional bureaucracy and means used later for extermination. When the doors to emigration closed, the mechanisms for deportation "to death" were already in place.

Under the organizational machinations of Adolf Eichmann, and working closely with the Nazi appointed Jewish Council in Vienna, which was forced to comply, emigration and slave-labor quotas were developed to systematically identify Jews, to dispossess them, and to process them efficiently out of the country. Increasingly, the choice for emigration or imprisonment became the only options for most Jewish men and households. Eichmann worked under the umbrella of the Central Office for Jewish Emigration, headed by the SS/Gestapo. In Austria, the SS/Gestapo, not the state department, was placed in charge of Jewish emigration. This Austrian model was so successful that it later became the organizing template used for Jews in Czechoslovakia, Germany, and other occupied countries in Western Europe. At the time of the *Anschluss* (March, 1938), there were approximately 180,000 Jews in Austria (165,000 in Vienna). By July, 1939, only 72,000 Jews remained in Vienna. Richard Brahmer was one of the 72,000 Jews who did not, or could not, emigrate out of the country.

Deportations start to take the place of emigration shortly after the beginning of World War II. War itself becomes an opportunity for the Nazis to further radicalize their relationship toward Jews and other populations (the disabled and the Gypsies). As early as September 9-11, 1939, Polish Jews in Vienna are arrested and deported to Buchenwald. At about the same time, disabled persons (primarily non-Jewish) are selected as "unworthy of life," and are secretly deported to Euthanasia Centers in Germany and Austria.

In October, 1939, further deportations,

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now of Austrian and Czech Jews, also begin. One of these deportees is Richard Brahmer whose first expulsion is from Vienna, Austria, to Nisko, Lwow, Poland, on October 26, 1939.

The Nisko deportations are the first attempts to deport Jews to Eastern Europe after WWII begins. The transports left from Vienna, Czechoslovakia, as well as from a few areas in Western Poland. Organized by Adolf Eichmann and the SS/Gestapo, the Nazis sought to establish a *Jewish Reservation* in Poland. Nisko, located on the San River near Lublin, was close to the annexation line between Russia's and Germany's political division of Poland. The area was a no man's land. Located between two armed camps, it was an area of swamps, marshes and mud. No plan had been devised for the *reservation*. It had no housing, no markets, no hospitals, and no infrastructure to sustain life. Guarded by German soldiers, Jews were expected to exist without resources.

Above, Sophie and Israel Goldstein on their wedding day in Vienna.

Right, Israel and Sophie Goldstein in Opole, Poland.

The first Nisko deportation from Vienna took place on October 20, 1939. One deportee on that first transport of 912 men was Josef Jedlinsky, the father of Holocaust survivor Edith (Ditta) Jedlinsky (now Lowy). Ditta, a teenager at the time, remembers telling her mother, Hilda, in the Vienna train station, "We will never see him again."

According to Ditta, her father was sent a notice by the Vienna Jewish Council to report for a transport. The Council had been ordered by Adolf Eichmann to deport poor Jews to the *reservation*. The Jewish Council did not want to comply. They were troubled by the injustice that only deportees from the lower classes were being selected. From the Nazi perspective, poor Jews were more difficult to process for emigration. They had no resources and were a burden to the State. Nisko was a way to get them out of Austria and to literally "wash their hands of them." It could also be a way to help solve the "Jewish problem" in Germany. To resolve their own conflict, the Jewish Council asked for volunteers, hoping that the numbers would reach the quota of 1000 for Transport 1. Although some men volunteered, thinking that a deportation to "the East" might be better than staying in Vienna, the quota was not reached.

Richard Brahmer was on the second Nisko transport, consisting of 672 men. The transport left Vienna on October 26. Word had already begun to filter back to Vienna that the conditions in Nisko were harsh and inhumane. Thus, fewer men volunteered. To compensate, the Nazis suggested that Jewish prisoners be selected. It is highly likely that Richard Brahmer was poor. It is also possible that he was a prisoner.

Jewish prisoners had fewer options than people in the general population. Ditta Jedlinsky (Lowy) remembers her uncle, Hugo Kempler, when he returned home from Dachau or Buchenwald. Ditta notes, "*He had a scar on his leg, which he never talked about. I had never seen anyone so haunted and afraid. He was like a chased and haunted animal and I was frightened to look at him*" Kempler was later deported and probably murdered at Treblinka.

The Nisko experiment in Poland failed. Due to war demands and competing interests of the SS/Gestapo, the German Army and the Nazi Civil Administration in the General Government, the Nisko reservation was shut down in the spring of 1940. However, the Nazi organizers learned from it. Two years after Nisko, structured labor and extermination camps awaited the transports. And the problems of leadership, which impeded the deportation process, were settled at the Wannsee Conference, in January 1942. With Adolf Eichmann writing the minutes, these once competing sectors were coordinated by the SS/Gestapo for the Final Solution across Europe.

With machine guns pointing at them, most Nisko deportees were forced into the Soviet sector; others were shot by the Nazis, or they died of hunger and disease. A few survived after first being shipped to the Soviet Gulags as "laborers for the Soviet state." Josef Jedlinsky was one of the men forced into the Soviet Union. From a town close to the German-Soviet border, he wrote several letters to his family in Vienna. When Germany attacked the Soviet Union, in June 1941, the letters stopped. Joseph was never heard from again.

Somehow, in the spring of 1940, 198 men returned to Vienna. Richard Brahmer was among them. Upon his arrival, he was likely poorer than he had been upon his departure, and perhaps even homeless. Was he a welfare case of the Vienna Jewish Council? Increasingly, this was the plight of many Austrian Jews who no longer had any resources. Was he thrown in prison or sent to a labor camp? I don't know. But it is likely that, with each passing day, Richard and the other remaining Viennese Jews were stripped even more of life's options and resources.

Brahmer's second deportation to Poland took place on February 19, 1941. He was prisoner 1002 in a transport of 1004 to Kielce, Poland. In the spring of 1941, approximately 5,000 Viennese Jews were deported to various rural communities in Poland (Kielce, Opole, Modliborzyce and Lagow).

The Nazi Central Office for Jewish Emi-

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gration in Vienna drew up the deportation quotas (about 1,000 people per transport). The Vienna Jewish Council was also ordered to make selections to reach the quotas. The Council bargained for the lives of some Jews, attempting to exempt indispensable Council workers from being "resettled." The Nazis agreed, but only if the quotas for each transport were met. That is, for each exempted person, the Council had to find another to take his/her place. People sent on these transports—such as Richard Brahmer, Israel and Sophie Goldstein—were considered dispensable. Because they were deported, someone else remained, for a short time at least. Each selected deportee could take two suitcases or bundles up to 50 kg. The collection points for deportees were several schools in District 2.

Today's Glockengasse No. 9

These deportations, in the spring of 1941, took place before the Final Solution had yet been planned or implemented. However, they foreshadowed what would come. At the time, Vienna was experiencing a housing shortage. Deporting Jews made housing available for non-Jews. In occupied Poland, Germany was preparing its invasion of the Soviet Union. Jews became slave laborers for the invasion buildup. The deportations also served as another "road map" for the Final Solution. In each deportation, the organizing means, methods and systems were more finely crafted and tuned.

Richard Brahmer's trail ends in Kielce, which was also a transit center. Therefore, he could have been sent to another German labor camp upon arrival. I contacted a Polish archivist, but he had no record of Richard in Kielce, which was not uncommon for Austrian Jews transported to Poland. So there is also the possibility that he became a resident of the Kielce Ghetto, established on March 31, 1941, and consisting of 27,000 people.

As in other ghettos, the Kielce Ghetto had a Jewish Council and a Jewish police, both under great pressure to care for the Jewish community, to negotiate for Jewish welfare and resources, but also to comply with German orders for slave labor and, later, for selections. Here too, there were tensions between the "Western" and the Polish Jews, and between the "haves" and the "have-nots." Jews in the Kielce ghetto experienced extreme hunger, ravaging diseases and finally murder. The Kielce Ghetto was "liquidated" on August 20-24, 1942. Most of the ghetto residents were sent to Treblinka; others were shot, a few remained as slave laborers. Only about 200 people survived the war. It is highly improbable that Richard Brahmer was among them.

In 1959, Richard's daughter, Liselotte Gerda, whose last known address (about 1958) was 363 Broadway, in New York City, petitioned the Court to declare him dead. About a year later, the Vienna Court made it official. He had not survived May 8, 1945 (the end of the war).

My search for prisoner 1002 ended with my learning only the barest essentials of Richard's life. Yet, in the acts of researching, hearing, praying, and struggling with his life in the Holocaust, I remember him. Every act of remembrance (no matter how little, or great) is a sanctification of the "holy." It is a sanctification of the millions of individuals, like Richard, who suffered and died. It is also a memorial to their humanity (and to ours), as well as a commemoration for the future of mankind. Moreover, our remembrance is a "healing of the world," a *Tikkun Haolam.*

As a non-Jew, I am often asked why I study the Shoah. I answer:

If I were the only remaining person in the world, I would still reflect upon, and struggle with, the Holocaust. I would argue with the Creator, asking, "Why?" And if there was no Creator, I would argue, even rage, both with the universe and with myself. In my struggles and reflections, even as the last person on earth, the lives and memories of the martyred victims would live!

Richard Brahmer lives! As do Josef Jedlinsky, Hugo Kempler, and Israel and Sophie Goldstein! *We now walk together in our humanity. We are one. May their spirits and names, and the spirits of their loved ones, ever be blessed!* ■

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mag. Wolf-Erich Eckstein, *retired archivist, who lives in Vienna, Austria. Without Mr. Mag. Eckstein's help, it would have been almost impossible to find the Brahmer record, and discover its meaning. He was most informative, helpful, and gracious in this search.*

Edith (Ditta) Jedlinsky Lowy, *a deportee and Holocaust survivor, number 4-10-730, from Vienna to Terezin, and later Auschwitz, as well as other German labor camps. Ditta was married to the late Louis Lowy, PhD, also a survivor, and a professor of Social Work at Boston University. Their experiences are described in* The Life and Thought of Louis Lowy: Social Work Through the Holocaust, *by Lorrie Greenhouse Gardella, and published by Syracuse University Press, 2011. Ditta Lives in Massachusetts. She has 2 children and two grandchildren.*

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Geoffrey G. Brahmer, a graduate of Harvard Divinity School and a Fine Arts photographer, is the Educational Coordinator for Plastic Surgery and Hand Surgery, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston. For many years, Geoffrey has been researching the Holocaust and lecturing in the US and abroad. He has come to recognize that the murdered victims of the Holocaust want their faces shown, their stories told, and their words heard by every person, society and generation. His photographs have been sold in fine art galleries, and his publications include, Casebook on Bioethics and the Holocaust. *Brahmer G, Chelouche T, Editors. Benedict S, Assistant Editor. Haifa: Israel: UNESCO Chair in Bioethics, and Israel National Commission for UNESCO, International Center for Health, Law and Ethics, University of Haifa, In Press (2013).*

AVRUMELE'S WARTIME MEMOIR

By Albert Hepner

"ÇA COMMENCE," IT'S STARTING...

Although I cannot pinpoint the exact time and day, one of my earliest and most vivid memories takes place in May 1940 when I am nearly five years old. My father is setting up a card game in the dining room, which also serves as my bedroom. While he lays out the decks of cards, clean ashtrays and glasses, my mother orders me to go to bed. With a warm smile, my father assures me that I don't have to go to sleep just yet. Leaning on one elbow, I smile back. I can't see much from my bed, but if I stretch high enough, I can see his conspiratorial smile. It is his way of telling me that our collusion makes me a partner in his game. I smile back as I doze off. Suddenly, I'm awakened by the din of sirens. My father and his three friends are standing by the window, speculating in hushed tones about the reason for the alert. When we hear the thunderous explosions, my father says, *"Ça commence;* I think the Germans are attacking Brussels."

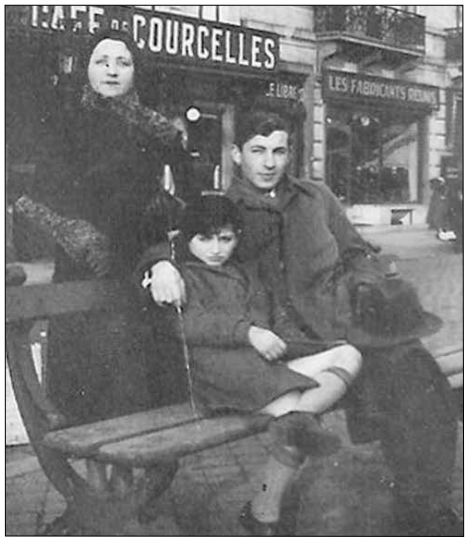
The following year, my father dies of cancer. I'm told he isn't coming home anymore, but no one says why. At the cemetery, I clutch the hand of Mlotek, the family friend who has stayed behind to shield me, a six-year-old, from the interment of my father. I ask Mlotek to lift me so I can see beyond the many mourners, but instead I'm surprised by the warmth of his cheek.

Back in the apartment, my tear-drenched mother is so encumbered by well-wishers that I can't get near her. I seek solace from my older brother, Max, but he cannot soothe my distress. Eventually, the people file out, all patting me on the head—except Lunec, one of my father's fellow card-players. He takes my hand in his and makes me promise that I will take care of my mother now that I am the man of the house.

As soon as my mother and I are alone in the apartment, she wonders out loud what we will do without my father. Through her tears, she speaks to no one in particular, but I am sure she is addressing me. Feeling totally inadequate, I can only respond, "I don't know."

MAX AND THE GESTAPO

Max sat impassively reading Le Soir while quietly sipping the soup our mother had heated up moments earlier. The bell rang several times. We knew our landlord, a Nazi-sympathizer, would not wait much longer. We also knew all the other Jewish tenants had already been taken away. The steps coming from the fourth floor told us the landlord had yielded.



Mirla Hepner, the author's mother, with her older son, Max, and nephew, Dr. Motl Globerson. Pre-war Brussels.

Even a six-year-old can distinguish boots from shoes. We guessed there were two of them. We could hear one questioning the landlord as they neared our apartment door on the third floor. I wanted to scream, "Max, do something." But his quiet turning of the pages disarmed me. Everything he did and said indicated I was not to be nervous.

Our mother was lying in bed, ostensibly sick, moaning as if in severe pain. Our cousin, Motl, a medical doctor, had supplied us with all the necessary certificates to confirm her illness. The knocks on the door evoked loud groans. She might as well have been ill for all the screaming she was contriving for our visitors. Why isn't Max answering the door? After a while, the Germans just barged in.

Paralyzed with fear, I could not look up. One of the two men screamed at us in German, "Why didn't you answer the door?" Max simply shrugged his shoulders to indicate he didn't understand. They asked in French how many people were in the apartment. Max raised three fingers. They asked who else was there. Max replied, "Our mother." They shrieked, "Where is she?" He pointed down the corridor in the direction of the bedrooms. My heart stopped as they approached my mother's room.

My mother had always been dramatic, but earlier that day she had appeared so believable that I had asked my 16-year-old brother if she was really sick. The bedcover exposed only her face and bonnet-clad head. I'd never seen her in a bonnet before. Both night tables were littered with medicine bottles prescribed by Motl. By the time the Gestapo reached her room, her screams had come to a crescendo that scared us so that even Max signaled for me to remain quiet.

We could hear them ask her what was wrong. She pretended not to understand; she just wailed and beat her chest to indicate the source of the pain. Suddenly, the Germans did an about face, stopped in the doorway of the kitchen, and asked Max what was wrong with her. This time he looked them in the eyes and said, "She is sick, I have to take care of her." Inexplicably, they walked out. Later, our mother explained why they'd left so abruptly: in her absolute fright and panic she had broken wind. We laughed uncontrollably with tears of relief. Two days later, Max ran away to Switzerland.

THE RECTORY OF NOTRE DAME IMMACULÉE, THE CHURCH ON RUE DE MEERSMAN

Motl rushed over to tell my mother he had found a hiding place for me. She screamed with horror, no doubt because the last family member was about to be taken from her. My father had died only a few months earlier; and we didn't know if Max had made it to Switzerland. Had she not clutched me so forcefully, I would not have known to be afraid.

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We had to leave right away, "before curfew and the German patrols," Motl said. He grabbed a handful of clothes and, tugging gently at my arm, insisted my mother let go.

We all loved and respected my first cousin, Motl. He'd come from Pinsk, Belarus, to complete his medical degree, and during his student days he had often depended on the hospitality of his aunt, my mother. He'd graduated from medical school in 1938 and by wartime, he'd gotten his own place. Still, he often had dinner with us and in many ways he had become a substitute father to my brother and me.

By then Motl was working with the underground, and he knew that the *abbé*[1] at the church on rue de Meersman was hiding Jewish children. As a medical doctor, he had some latitude to roam the streets, but he did not want to press his luck. Before long, he lifted me in his arms so we could move faster.

Motl knocked on the rectory door, and almost immediately Father Bruylandts, a tall, lean man, greeted us warmly. His smile, though kind, told me I would be left there, alone. Until that moment I had thought Motl and I were to remain together. But Motl hurriedly kissed my cheek, told me to listen to the father, and was out the door as quickly as we'd gone in.

Father Bruylandts took my hand and guided me through a hidden door, down a few steps to another door that opened into a small room where several children were sleeping on cots. We squeezed between six cots to the bed that was to be mine. I felt empty and cold with fear. This must have been obvious to Father Bruylandts because he covered me with care before shutting off the only light bulb and walking out.

I kept trembling until I fell asleep. Sometime later I was awakened by a warm, wet feeling. It took me a while to realize I had wet the bed. I'd never done that before. It didn't scare me as much as it surprised and relaxed me. I fell asleep again, somewhat content, but not knowing what to make of this situation. By morning, the pleasant warmth had turned icy cold. The other children, appearing bigger and older, were up, looking at me, which made me feel all the more embarrassed. They must have sensed something was wrong when I could barely tell them my name. "Too loud," they said. We were to be quiet because no one was to know we were there. This dungeon could barely hold the seven cots, and this limited what we could and could not do: we could only stand in place or sit on one another's cots. I did not want to be discovered and made sure no one sat on mine. During the course of the day, Father Bruylandts brought us food and led each boy to the bathroom and back. I never found out how he knew I had wet the bed, but he had placed a fresh sheet on my cot. He did not speak about it, but from then on he took me to the bathroom before lights out.

Unfortunately, the first night was the precursor to every other night I spent in this basement. In exasperation, Father Bruylandts said to me, "You must stop wetting the bed because I can't explain to the laundress why I need so many clean sheets." I felt my cheeks burn with shame, but I could not stop this from happening. One time, kind, benevolent Father Bruylandts ordered me to stop. This was so unlike him, not only to say it with anger, but also loud enough to be heard by the other boys. They smiled but didn't snicker. I thought they might have had the same problem but had discovered a way to hide it. So I became determined to do so as well. One cold night, I woke up as usual, but this time I got dressed, removed the wet sheet and bundled it under my arm. I left the room and walked out of the rectory the way I had first come in. I made my way along rue de la Clinique, then Place Communale. I crossed rue de Fiennes, and turned left at rue Rossini where we lived. Trembling and crying in the cold, I stood across the street from our apartment and began calling my mother in a whisper, which achieved nothing. So each time I raised the sound until my voice reached her bedroom window. Although no light came on, I could see my mother parting the curtains.

Her horrified look was accompanied by frantic gestures, clearly telling me to go back. I begged for her to open the window, wailing as quietly as I could, but she continued to wave me away. I can't remember how many times I pleaded with her, or how many times she exhorted me to return to the church, but for the rest of my life I've never felt quite as defeated. With the still damp sheet under my arm, I returned to the church in total dread of what Father Bruylandts would say in the morning.

THE WEAVERS

Warned that he had just been denounced to the Germans, Father Bruylandts immediately called the underground, and Motl barely beat the Gestapo to my hiding place. In what seemed to be the middle of the night, Motl dressed me faster than I had ever dressed before, and hoisting me into his arms, we ran out. The reason became clear when I saw cars and trucks, lights flashing, racing toward the church. I was certain we were heading back to rue Rossini, to our apartment and my mother. But we turned into a doorway on rue de Fiennes. Frantically and repeatedly, Motl rang the doorbell, while leaning hard against the door so as to be less visible on the steps.

We could hear plodding footsteps descending slowly. An old man opened the door without asking who was calling and smiled at Motl. Barely looking at me, the man took my hand as Motl thanked him profusely. Motl uttered, "Listen to Monsieur," kissed my cheek and sped out.

Climbing the stairs with this stranger who didn't say anything instilled some calm in me. The noise of the sirens outside rendered the corridor and staircase all the quieter. I had been hushed since I'd left my mother, and I felt some excitement about what lay ahead. We walked into a very large room, with many pieces of "straw" furniture. In the corner, away from the two large windows, a woman sat silently, holding on to what I subsequently discovered were strands of wicker. She took one very long look at me, and finally smiled a deep, warm smile that made me feel comfortable. She summoned me with her free index finger and when I got close to her, she held out a warm hand to shake mine. That might have been the first time I'd greeted someone with a handshake. Monsieur went into the kitchen and came back with a cookie and a small glass of milk.

Despite a stay of several weeks with these kind people, I don't remember any exchanges of words between us. They communicated by signing to each other and eventually to me. Without ever using a word, they quickly taught me how to weave the wicker. The calm I felt from being industrious at this craft overwhelmed me. Whenever anyone came to pick up their wares, Monsieur and Madame would gently lead me into the next room where I'd stand at the window—the place I wanted

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most to be. Crying quiet tears of envy, each weekday I'd watch schoolboys playing on the street below.

The peace and serenity I experienced with this couple never returned. Almost as quickly and as terrifyingly as I had gotten to this haven is how I left.

MORE QUICK DEPARTURES

It was the first time anyone had ever explained anything, or perhaps the first time I'd asked why. Motl said that Monsieur had been asked by one of his neighbors about the little boy at the window, making funny faces at the schoolboys across the street. My protectors had told their neighbor I was the son of distant cousins living in Malines, but they became worried that the neighbor would become more curious and suspicious. So a few days later Motl came to get me.

This time we walked to Avenue du Midi, an area I did not recognize. We entered a house with overwhelmingly large rooms and glistening furniture. No wicker here. Motl spoke softly and less hurriedly to a tall man he seemed to know. Then he hugged me, adding that he'd see me soon, and, of course, pressed me to listen to the man, a colleague from the hospital. My new hosts weren't particularly nice, nor were they mean. I had my own room and busied myself with crayons and other simple games. But even a young child knows when he's a burden to someone. Fortunately, my stay here was very short.

Less than a week later I was taken in by a woman and her mother. The two played games with me, but it was to be another temporary stay. In the end, they simply didn't want me.

Motl brought me to the next encampment, only a few houses away. Here, a very pleasant couple greeted us ever so kindly. Either they knew, or sensed, that I had been shuffled from one problematic place to another. By then I had learned to hide my feelings of despair and isolation. Often I'd just look idly at my hosts without feeling anything. Somehow, this couple felt different. When Motl left, he didn't tell me to listen to the man. He just said, "Have a good time." The couple put me to bed in my own room, and told me they'd have a surprise for me in the morning. It was the first time in a long time that I fell asleep feeling really safe. As calm as I had felt with the weavers, I had never really trusted that all would always go well. Now I did. The next morning, three smiling children walked in, saying it was time for breakfast. They were the most wonderful present I'd ever had! Nevertheless, this haven didn't last very long either.

A month after landing in this hidden child's nirvana, I woke up unable to open my eyes. At first I rubbed them, but that didn't help. I started to panic but didn't want to call out because I was afraid of what my caretakers would say. I hid under the covers, wishing over and over again for my eyes to open. When Madame came in, I cried through closed eyelids and asked her to forgive me. Monsieur tried a warm washcloth, but that did nothing. For the first time in a long time I cried for my mother. Then I wanted Motl. I was in bed all day before he arrived with eye drops. When that didn't help, Motl seemed angry. He left without hugging or kissing me. It didn't matter how in trouble I was, I couldn't open my eyes. I knew he'd come back but thought he'd never love me again. My only connection to my old world seemed to be closing the way my eyes had. I was petrified.

Two days later, Motl came to get me. My wonderful hosts had been too afraid to call another doctor for fear of being discovered, and they hadn't allowed their children near me because they were afraid I might be contagious. Once more, I was unwanted. Motl took me to the only place that would have me, his apartment.

MARIE-LOUISE

As we walked into Motl's home, a woman's voice called out from the bedroom. Motl had told me we were going to his place, so thinking he had lied, I began to cry—the only person I had left in my world could not be trusted! Motl then told me that Marie-Louise was his special friend and that she would help us. She approached me gingerly, and picked me up in her arms. She held me close, as if she knew something about me I didn't know. It seemed odd how I felt immediately comfortable with this stranger. I could see Motl's face over her shoulder; I think it was the first time I saw him smile since before the Germans had come to Brussels. She put me down on the couch that was to be my bed for the duration. When she rose to hug Motl, I fantasized I was back in a family.

The following morning, Motl was out. Marie-Louise helped me wash, fed me breakfast and helped me get dressed. She suggested I put my socks and shoes on. I left my shoelaces undone because I'd never learned how to tie them. Marie-Louise spent the whole morning patiently teaching me how to knot my shoe laces. I think I fell in love with her at that moment: I'd been so lonely for something real. I've never forgotten how we practiced and laughed as she repeatedly told me to concentrate on the laces, not her face.

Marie-Louise explained that she and I would be spending a lot of time together because Motl was very busy at the hospital and with other work. It was only after the war that I discovered Motl's involvement with the underground. Because he treated Germans as well as Belgians, he had a special identity card that allowed him to evade any detention, even when stopped during a *rafle* (raid).

By this time, I was seven and would sometimes roam about the busy neighborhood by myself. I'd wander off as I accompanied Marie-Louise on her errands. German soldiers walking along the wide avenues would pat me on the head and greet me in German. I am blue-eyed and was then very blond. Though extremely frightened, the first time a soldier put his hand on my shoulder and then on my head, telling me what a good little boy I was, I knew enough to smile and say *danke.* Feeling more gregarious and confident as a result, I explained to Motl that he didn't have to worry about me because the Germans found me so appealing. After that Motl had me deliver envelopes buried under my clothes to a man who lived several blocks away. I didn't exactly know what I was doing, but I knew enough to feel proud. These feelings of pride didn't last long. The Germans were raiding more and more apartments, looking for Jews. So Motl enlisted the help of a family friend, also very active in the underground. Vinnik,[2] a diminutive man with a magnanimous heart and sharp mind, found a farmhouse outside of Brussels where my mother and I could stay.

ARE YOU JEWISH?

The bus brought us to Waterloo, and from there we took another bus to Odegien. It was my first time in a place with woods and open farmland. The stone farmhouse looked old but solid. A narrow walkway led to the back door where we'd

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been told to go and where an elderly woman, Madame Lebecq, greeted us with an ambiguous smile, clearly indicating her reluctance. I learned after the war that the underground paid our rent, which no doubt kept her from denouncing us to the Germans or the Belgian gendarmes. Her husband, Philippe, an invalid, had a hideous look on his face. His lips were so distorted that I couldn't understand him. When we got to our room, my mother said she'd been warned that Philippe hated Jews. The Lebecqs could barely eke out a living on their small farm; they had to hire a young farmhand and rent their upstairs rooms.

My lot seemed hopeless until I stepped out just before dusk and discovered the rabbit hutch. I found some lettuce leaves in the barn and fed them to the rabbits just to watch the rapid movements of their lips. That evening the adults laughed as I mimicked my new charges. Madame Lebecq and I had come to an agreement: I was given the job of feeding the rabbits. Another diversion came through Pierre, the teen-aged farmhand. One day, as I saw him hitching a large Belgian horse to a plow, I ventured a shy hello that brought on such a welcoming, wide smile that I thought I'd made a new friend. Pierre asked my name and what I was doing there. That's when I realized I wasn't supposed to talk to him. I told him we were renting a room, but answered his other questions with, "I don't remember." Still, he invited me to walk along the row he was about to hoe, and then to ride the horse. I was already in big trouble for speaking to Pierre; now I would have to explain being out so long. But after my first few rides on the horse, my fearful frown turned into an exhilarated smile.

Soon after our arrival, a family of three—the Finkelsteins and their daughter, Michelle, about my age—moved into the room across the hall from us. Michelle and I became friends immediately and played together while our parents spoke in somber, quiet tones about the war.

Some weeks later, Mr. Vinnik came to tell us he'd been able to enroll Michelle and me at the one-room schoolhouse. Odegien had the sweetest teacher in the whole world. She treated us so well that we could not wait to run to school every day. Mademoiselle Viviane made learning fun and easy, a far cry from what had been my previous experience with my teacher in Anderlecht. With a callous, wry smile, Mr. Roggemans, my first grade teacher, had consented to my being marched out of class, along with two other Jewish boys, as requested by a school administrator and a German official.

Michelle and I loved school. Those were the only times we thought things might become normal. Before, the other boys had ridiculed me for not going to school and for not knowing where I came from. Though they still teased me, now that we got to know one another, I risked going to their gathering place, a nearby lake past the rows of corn. While the boys engaged in horseplay, I—a non-swimmer—would sit around the edge. One day, I fell in. In a panic, I thrashed my arms about, but this pulled me away from the edge. I sank twice, each time coming up even farther away. I could see some boys laughing. After sinking a third time, I rose close enough to the edge to be pulled out of the water by Pierre. Some of the boys seemed as scared as I was as I coughed up and spat out the water. Others kept laughing until Pierre cursed them out in Walloon, and they ran away. I never went back to the lake, not even to take the short cut to town.

Something must have been said to my mother, for out of the blue, she said, "If anybody asks if you're Jewish, say no." Later that day, Michelle and I had a conversation about being Jewish. She said her father had also told her she was to deny it. Neither one of us understood why. This became even more important when, either by coincidence or because our parents knew something, Pierre asked me flat out, "Are you Jewish?" "NO," I nearly screamed. My rescuer asked, "Really?" as though he knew more. I'm sure what happened then was an epiphany. I was seven, in unfamiliar territory, among strangers, and I had to lie to the one person, besides my mother, who seemed to be a true friend! Until my mother had told me to say I wasn't a Jew, I only vaguely knew I was. Six months earlier I had walked the streets of Brussels with a yellow star covering the entire pocket of my jacket. Now I felt either naked or ignorant. That episode may explain why for the rest of my life I've often insisted, unnecessarily, on revealing the Jewish part of my identity, while hiding the rest of me.

"ARE YOU JEWISH?" "NO," I NEARLY SCREAMED. MY RESCUER ASKED, "REALLY?" AS THOUGH HE KNEW MORE.

THE HIDDEN ATTIC ON THE FARM IN WATERLOO

The next time Vinnik visited, he told my mother and the Finkelsteins that we all had to leave that evening because the Gestapo had started raiding homes and farms in Waterloo, and the underground suspected the Germans would be approaching Odegien soon. Michelle and I were warned not to tell the Lebecqs anything.

Vinnik was waiting for us, and we left silently. My mother squeezed me so tight that I knew she wasn't coming with me. Vinnik and I rushed to catch the last bus to Waterloo, and got off before the city itself. We didn't walk very far and he didn't say much more than what Motl had said to me, "Listen to everything the man tells you to do." I was scared because my mother wasn't with us, I was scared because it seemed so dark despite the moon, I was scared because Vinnik had said enough to let me know I was either going to be alone or with no one I knew.

We reached the front door of an enormous farm. A heavy, burly man with light hair and a big belly opened the door. Vinnik said something about seeing him soon and handed me over with my bundle of clothes as if I were another bundle. Vinnik must have known how frightened I was for he gave me a peck on the head as he left.

The burly man and I climbed the stairs until we reached the third floor. He went

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into a storeroom, the only room on that floor, and brought out a ladder that he set against the wall. I looked up and couldn't understand why we were heading together into the ceiling. Then he pushed a concealed trap door and we entered a hidden attic. He pointed out all the things that had been placed there for me: a mattress, a *pisspot*, toilet paper, food in open cans, water, bread, jam and comic books. He told me someone would come each day to empty the chamber pot and replenish my provisions. He gave me stern warnings: not to talk to anyone, no matter whom; not to open the trap door under any circumstances; not to answer anyone calling out to me as if they knew I was there. He told me to speak to him only when I saw him open the trap door, never through the closed trap door even if I knew it was he. He told me not to make any noise no matter how I felt.

The man left, lantern in hand. I didn't dare cry although that's all I wanted to do. The only light came from a skylight out of my reach; I was left with just enough moonlight to see my shadow on the attic floor.

Every noise felt threatening: animals, people, the rustling of the trees. The strain of listening for familiar sounds and aimlessly staring into my small quarters must have tired me because I remember sleeping a lot—until the day the Gestapo arrived. The tones were distinctly different from anything else I'd heard before. The voices were loud. Then I heard my host answering questions as he and others climbed the stairs. I trembled uncontrollably as they reached the floor below. The Gestapo asked about the storeroom and spent some time rifling through it. I felt the blood drain out of my head as they left. I had escaped, but Vinnik was back the next day to get me.

DOMINUS VOBISCUM!

As soon as we got on the bus, Vinnik asked me about my experience in the attic and how I was feeling. He seemed to take responsibility for what had happened there. He had been one of my father's card playing friends, so being with him felt reassuring. When I asked him yet again where we were going, he hesitated. So I asked him about my mother. He told me she was in a safe house in the woods where he and others brought her all she needed. I didn't know then that a house in the woods was a euphemism for a shack that no one, including the Gestapo, would bother looking into. He did explain that it would be too dangerous for two of us to stay where she was and that I was too young. I didn't understand nor ask why. It's possible that my recent oasis was a clue as to what too dangerous and too young meant.

We went to Gare du Midi in Brussels to meet a woman, who would take me to an orphanage in Namur. Père André[3] met us as soon as we got off the train. His face was not as warm as Father Bruylandts' but his voice was comforting. I was led out of the station and across the street. Père André said we'd have something to drink at the café while we waited for the streetcar that would take us to the orphanage.[4] This was one of the rare times that I went from one hiding place to another in daylight. It didn't feel as mysterious, but I couldn't stop shaking inside. I didn't know what an orphanage was, but he did say I'd like it because there would be a lot of other boys there.

There was a long wall of cobblestones, too high to climb over; we walked alongside until we reached a gate. In the courtyard, boys were kicking a ball. Père André took me through some hallways and introduced me to several adults, who welcomed me. I was shown a bed and went to sleep for perhaps an hour when a fracas ensued. Someone shook me awake and told me to get dressed quickly and get my things. I had barely gathered my bundle of clothes when Père André appeared. He grabbed me, practically yanking my arm out of its socket and told me to hold on to him. We ran out of the orphanage and, not more than one street away, entered another courtyard and building[5] also surrounded by a cobble stone wall. Père André brought me into a dormitory of many boys and told me to stay quiet and sleep in my clothes. He promised to explain everything in the morning.

A woman in a black tunic with a white scapular woke me up. She said we were late and I had to see Mother Superior. I had no idea what she meant. Mother Superior was sitting behind a large desk. Her face was so serious I thought she was angry with me. She told my escort to leave us alone. Then her face softened; she smiled and bade me to come closer. She asked if I knew where I was. When I started to cry and could barely say no, she came around and sat next to me. She took my hand and explained what had happened.

Someone had told Père André that the Germans were about to raid the orphanage. (It wasn't until exactly fifty years later that I discovered how it was that the priest knew this, or for that matter everything else that the Germans were about to do in Namur. A nineteen-year-old Belgian mail clerk, working for the German office in Namur, spoke French, Walloon and German, unbeknownst to the Germans. With a steam kettle, he opened every official letter coming from German headquarters and transmitted any relevant information to the priest, who then contacted the underground.) That was why he had to suddenly rush me and several other boys out of the orphanage and bring us where we were. She explained that because of the war and the difficult conditions for many young people, there was an overflow of boys at the orphanage. She told me that under no circumstances should any of the other boys know that I was Jewish. Perhaps because it was the second time that I'd been told to deny I was Jewish or because it was a stranger telling me so, this time seemed less painful.

From then on I was to be Albert Nova, and I had to learn to pray. I vaguely remembered from the few times my mother had taken me to a synagogue that men prayed there, but I had not. Before she instructed me to go back to my dormitory, she became stern again and warned me not to tell anyone, including the nuns, that I was Jewish, but to listen to and do whatever the nuns said. She said I'd see Père André every morning because he'd lead us in our morning prayers.

My secret religious identity lasted no more than a few minutes. I was in the bathroom when one of the older boys burst out laughing and yelled out that I must be a Jew. He was pointing in the direction of my penis as I screamed that he was wrong. I was embarrassed because I'd been discovered and because people could tell I was a Jew. I thought Mother Superior would throw me out of the convent on the spot. As devastating as that moment had been, I found some relief a few hours later. While the denouncer and his friends continued to make remarks about my status, a handful of other boys were sympathetic. Miracle of miracles, there were other Jewish children there, and though we were discovered so easily by those

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who would taunt us, we concurrently recognized one another. I wasn't sure how to act towards the other Jews but realized I was not to congregate with them. We'd smile a smile of relief every time we met.

This period was very likely the time I discovered filial connections based on religion. Those who didn't like me because I was Jewish brought me closer to other Jews. When I played a game well, I was tentatively accepted. The moment we'd have to pray, my Christian playmates ridiculed me. It wasn't long before I realized that pretending to be Christian to Christian boys was not sufficient. They harassed me by hiding my clothes at night so I'd be late for morning prayers. They'd hit me on the head after they'd finished their bedside prayers much faster than I could. They made fun of the way I crossed myself. Somehow it all mattered to me, simply because I wanted to be accepted.

Prewar photo of Dr. Motl Globerson, hero of the Resistance and this story.

At seventeen, Jean was the oldest orphan in the convent. He often said he hated to get up at five in the morning to go to the sacristy to prepare the vestments and the sacred vessels for the priest. I told him I was always up early and, if he wanted, I'd do his shift. Although I hadn't yet learned all that an altar boy is supposed to do, he taught me quickly. Before long, I learned to be a reliable altar boy and took Jean's place. No one called me Jew-boy again; no one slapped me on the head anymore. Everyone knew that Jean would not tolerate it. I was trained to say all the right prayers when Père André baptized me, and although I was nearly eight, I was given my first communion. I guess I had attained what I wanted, to be accepted. Not only did Père André and the nuns rejoice in my presence, the boys took me as one of their own.

When I got sick with scabies, an infectious skin disease, all the progress I had made with my peers disappeared suddenly. To treat it, my entire body was covered with an ointment of white sulfur that smelled of rotten eggs. The cots near mine were moved back as far as possible. The boys now held their noses and laughed at me, saying I smelled like a dirty Jew. Jean, whose job I couldn't fill during this period seemed to have disappeared. Only one nurse ventured near me to replenish the foul salve. I felt the most isolated since my stint in the attic in Waterloo.

Life in the convent returned to what it had been before this infection: I did my turns at the altar as well as Jean's. We all repeatedly ran to the bunkers for safety because by now either the Allies or the Germans were bombing Namur. One morning when the all-clear siren sounded, one of the caretakers screamed and pointed at the two adjoining church steeples across the yard; there was an undetonated bomb stuck between them. We lived with the bomb in the bosom of the steeples until the war was over.

Several days later there was a ruckus about the yard. We could hear gun fire coming from the streets. The Belgian Maquis, resistance fighters, had pushed back the German soldiers right there in the streets of Namur and the Maquis had won. We were hoarse from screaming encouragement and jumping up and down. It was the first time I had ever experienced such a large collective embrace. The calls of freedom and liberty were sufficient for this naïve nine-year-old to understand that things were about to change dramatically. Yet a desperate sadness came over me as I clung to the gate that had kept me safe for two years.

AINSI SOIT-IL

A few days later I was called in by Mother Superior. I hadn't spoken more than a few words with her since she had christened me Albert Nova. I was sure I was in big trouble. I walked the long hallway toward her office with great trepidation. What could she want with me, I thought? As soon as I walked into her office, she told me not to worry, but to get my clothes together because someone was coming to get me the next morning to take me to my mother. MOTHER? At first I couldn't understand and felt panicked without knowing why. Before I could think about what it all meant, she began to speak to me in earnest about my religious obligations. I was to do my due-diligence: pray each day, go to church every Sunday, and be thankful for everything I received. I wanted to get out of her office fast because I wanted to think about what "leaving" would mean. She insisted we pray together and gave me rosaries to keep and use daily; then she blessed me.

Walking out of her office was one of the weirdest moments in my life. I went along the corridor as if in a dream, thinking there must be something terribly wrong with me. I knew I was supposed to be really happy that I was going to see my mother, but I couldn't conjure up her image. I could no longer visualize her or anyone else I had been connected to. I trembled the entire way back to the dorm. I sat on my cot and tried to guess what she looked like. Try as I might, I couldn't imagine her. I must have known there was something wrong with not remembering one's mother, for I only told Jean who was nearby. He told me his parents had been dead just a few years, but he too couldn't remember what either one looked like. And he was at least eighteen by then. I was frightened because I hadn't even thought I had a mother. Somewhere along my two-year stay at the convent, I had slowly forgotten everyone I hadn't seen. I remembered I had a cousin named Motl and thought right then I would ask him what my mother looked like. Then Max came to my mind although I couldn't picture him either.

The next morning, after a sleepless night, I didn't have to go to chapel. Mid-morning, Père André came to take me to the train station. There, we met a woman I thought Père André would say was my mother because she looked familiar, but it was my previous escort to Namur, who was to take me back to Brussels where Vinnik would meet us. She said she was glad that, even though the war wasn't over yet, so many people were getting back together with their families. She gave me a sense of the reality that existed outside the convent and a clearer idea of what my life had been before it was locked in

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one place among boys who never really trusted me.

Gare du Midi in Brussels was very crowded. I recognized Vinnik out of a crowd of people even before he grabbed and hugged me with all his might, almost taking my breath away. I was surprised that he merely shook hands with my escort, who then hugged me and departed toward the train platforms, no doubt to go collect another hidden child. Vinnik joyfully grabbed my hand and said "we're going to my apartment where you'll see my wife, my boy and girl, and guess who else." I ventured, "My mother." "Your mother doesn't know you're coming," he said. It was to be a big surprise for her. I asked him if she was living with his family. He explained that many issues had still not been settled in Belgium. The war was still on; the V-1s were still a threat, and many German soldiers were still fighting in the north and east of Belgium, trying to hold the allies back. So although my mother had been able to come out of the shack she'd hidden in and move back to the farm in Odegien where we'd been hidden, they had not been able to find an apartment in Brussels for her.

I barely remember the walk to his apartment, only a few blocks away from the train station. Place Jamar seemed vaguely familiar as did the main avenue. I tried to keep up with him as he sprang up the steps, no doubt in anticipation of the extraordinary event about to unfold.

We waited a moment before he opened the door to his apartment. He walked in and urged me to follow and stand in front of a woman who was sitting in an armchair. Vinnik and the rest of his family were nearly breathless as this woman and I looked at each other blankly. After what seemed an eternity, Vinnik broke the hollow silence and loudly asked her, "You don't recognize him?" She said, "What! What!" He asked her again, "You don't recognize him?" She had had no reason to look at me closely until then, nor did I have any reason to think she was my mother as long as she hadn't jumped up to greet me. Impatient, Vinnik yelled, "C'est Albert!" "It's Albert!" The strange, yet somewhat familiar woman jumped out of the chair shrieking, ALBERT? She didn't hug me. She gently but firmly grabbed both my shoulders and started to cry uncontrollably. I'm not sure if that's when I started to recognize her, but in the course of that afternoon, through the shrieks, the lamentations, the admonitions, the incessant tears and condemnations of the Germans who had destroyed her Albert, I went from a reluctant sense of denial to a warm feeling of belonging and total recognition. All I did during that entire episode is shake my head yes, no, or raise my shoulders in ignorance. The conversations which eventually included Vinnik's wife and children centered on what had happened to me, which also served as an explanation for why she hadn't recognized me. It seems les boches (pejorative for the Germans) had starved me, had never washed me, had never changed my clothes and had certainly kept me in a cave for two years. It took quite a while before the group calmed down enough to realize that I had been in a convent the entire time and not really near les boches. The next day, my mother and I went back to Odegien.

"C'EST ALBERT!" "IT'S ALBERT!" THE STRANGE, YET SOMEWHAT FAMILIAR WOMAN JUMPED OUT OF THE CHAIR SHRIEKING, ALBERT?

THE AFTERMATH IN BRUSSELS (1945-1947)

We moved to a two-room apartment on rue Brognier, a few blocks from rue Rossini, where we had lived before the war. My mother constantly worried about what had happened to my brother, who had not been heard from in three years. I didn't have to ask her why she whimpered a few times each day. She only knew that he had hoped to run away to Switzerland with the two friends who got picked up by the Gestapo before he arrived late at Gare du Midi. And, of course, she cried for her nephew, Motl, who had been sent to a concentration camp. The more news she heard about others, who had been killed, the less she felt the chances of their return.

We were relieved when my brother Max suddenly appeared. The Traxpotreggers, family friends, had been able to return to their pre-war house, and Max had found them. So few Jews were left in Brussels after the war that each knew where the others lived. After years of hiding from everyone, we were relieved to be able to say where they were. Everyone spoke about who survived and who was where, so when Max got to our family friends, they were delighted to tell him where we were.

Max had spent the war as a lumber jack in a Swiss labor camp and came back much taller and stronger. I was immediately proud of him, not only for how he looked but also for how adventurous he'd been. He told us that when he'd discovered his companions had been picked up by the Gestapo, he'd debated whether to turn back, but then decided to proceed toward Switzerland on his own. He smuggled himself into France by taking a taxi at the Belgian border. The driver would take a dirt road through the woods to avoid all barricades and he'd drop off his passengers at the next station on the French side. Max left the train when he felt he was close to the Swiss border and made his way on foot, eventually reaching a work camp for lumberjacks where he worked for the duration of the war. He discovered after the war that the Swiss government had not only gotten free labor from many escapees but had charged the Belgian government for his room and board. Shortly after Max's return, he met and married the woman who would be his life's companion.

At first, my mother and I felt abandoned rather than happy at the start of the young couple's life together. Each in our own way experienced it as another loss. Nevertheless, within a short time, we found a larger apartment, I returned to school and my mother went back to work. Before the war she had worked in the assembly of leather goods and now found

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a job sewing military hats. She had always been a good worker, and once again she became the fastest seamstress in a factory of several hundred women. The managers were pushing the other women to produce more, using her as the exemplar. One day my mother had to fight off other employees, who attacked her because her excellent performance made them seem inept. Though the managers had tried to help her, she came home bloodied and unsure she'd be able to go back to work at that plant. Yet the next day she was overjoyed by a letter she received from the Belgian government that instructed her to go to a downtown warehouse to retrieve furniture that the Germans had confiscated, if she could prove it was ours.

That day, as I was returning home from school, my buddy André from down the street, yelled out his window that he'd seen in Le Soir that my mother had tried to commit suicide by throwing herself under a tram in front of La Bourse (the stock exchange). He said she had not succeeded. I ran home crying, hoping it wasn't true. When I found our apartment empty, I headed toward my brother's apartment but found him running toward me. He explained that she had not found any furniture. The one hope that something of our past would help us go on, had come crashing down on her. My father's death, five years of insecurity and precariousness fed by the war, two years of hiding in a cabin in the woods, getting beaten up by other piece-workers in a hat factory, and having to take care of an eleven-year-old by herself, without even a semblance of comfort from our old apartment had been too much.

At that time, Belgian law required that anyone who attempted suicide be committed to an "insane" asylum. My brother, who didn't feel equipped to take care of me, found an orphanage in Antwerp. Its mission was to teach the orphans not only Hebrew so they could form a religious kibbutz in Israel, but to have the children learn all that was expected of religious boys. My convent experience had served me well: I was able to fulfill all expectations without believing in any of the rites. I had been assured by my brother that my mother would likely be out of the asylum way before we'd be moved to Israel. Hence, it felt all the more temporary. The uncertainty and tenuousness I'd experienced at the convent resurfaced. The entire experience seemed false. By the time I was eleven I had learned to question the purpose of religion.

When my mother returned from the asylum, my brother brought me back to our little apartment. I'm not sure that life returned exactly to where it had been. After some initial educational difficulties in 5th grade, my mother got me a tutor, a British woman, who was paying for the rent of our attic by teaching me. I resisted reading anything about history, but she was so enthusiastic about making learning fun that she helped me enter 6th grade with a great deal of confidence.

Mr. Roggemans, the teacher who had not concealed his pleasure when the Germans had pulled me out of first grade, was also my 5th and 6th grade teacher. In those days, teachers advanced each year with their charges. Despite hating Mr. Roggemans, in 1947, I graduated second in my class. Two other Jewish boys (numbers one and three) and I walked with great pride up to the dais outside of the Anderlecht Municipal Hall on Place Communale, only two blocks from where I had been hidden by Father Bruylandts and the weavers. In full view of the entire community and stern-faced Roggemans, the three Jewish hidden children received their grade's awards from the burgermeister of Anderlecht.

POSTSCRIPT

• After his mother brought him to the US, Avrumele, or Albert, worked for his uncles. He joined the US Army and was honorably discharged after serving in a guided missile unit in N.J. He married and had three daughters. Eventually, he built his own tool distribution business. After many years of commerce, he sold his business and became an instructor of English to second language learners, which is what he still does today. It wasn't until 1991 that he realized how many of his actions were those of a suspicious, hidden person, one who rarely opens himself up to anyone. He felt safer when people didn't know much about him. Ten years of therapy and a very supportive family helped him turn that around. A desire for the rootedness he missed as a boy clearly lies at the heart of his living in the same community in New Jersey for more than fifty years.

• Mirla, Albert's mother, struggled to provide for her son and herself until she and Albert moved to the United States and received help from her sisters' families. Mirla died of natural causes at the age of 84.

• Dr. Motl Globerson (also: Mordekhai Globerzon) was arrested and sent to a concentration camp where he was forced to tend to German guards and officers. He acquiesced with the understanding that he'd have the chance to help some of the camp's prisoners. Two days before the liberation of the camp, he committed suicide. Fellow doctors reported that he had become despondent about having to tend to the Germans without being allowed to care for the inmates. (An account of Dr. Motl Globerson's last day is recorded in the annals of the Eichmann Trial. (See: http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-069-04.html, where he appears as Dr. Globersohn.)

"Two days later Dr. Globersohn, who had been a doctor in Belgium, a native of Pinsk, who had studied and had his practice in Belgium, was brought to us, poisoned and unconscious. We knew that he had taken an overdose of sleeping-pills and he bore signs of having received blows, terrible signs of hemorrhages and wounds. When they brought him to the camp he was dying - there was no need to strike him - he would have died anyhow. Moll came there and beat him to death saying: 'You want to avoid your duties and to die, you Jewish swine (Saujude)?' That was how Globersohn died."

• For most of his life Max worked alongside his wife, first in the manufacture of ladies' handbags, later in a shoe store. Their son became an auditor for a renowned auditing firm; he married his childhood sweetheart with whom he has three children and three grandchildren. They stayed in Brussels.

• Mr. Abraham Winnik, Albert's father's friend, had first helped Albert's father immigrate to Belgium from Poland. During WWII, he saved many lives by finding hiding places and participating in many underground activities. He died in his eighties of natural causes. ■

ENDNOTES:

1. Abbé Jan Bruylandts of Notre Dame Immaculée, Cureghem, Anderlecht, Belgium. He was recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations in 1978.

2. Actually, Abraham Winnik.

3. Abbé Joseph André of Namur, Belgium, saved dozens of Jewish children. He was recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations in 1967.

4. Orphelinat St. Jean de Dieu, 39 rue Louis Loiseaux, Namur, Belgium.

5. Couvent Notre Dame de Sacré Coeur, Namur, Belgium.

TRAUMA IN THE YOUNGEST HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

By Aliza Erber

I was born at the peak of the war, in April 1943, in Almelo, Holland. My family consisted of my maternal grandparents, my two very young aunts—small children themselves—my mother and me. We were fortunate to obtain hiding places, though none knew where the others were. My grandfather and father had joined the Dutch underground: my grandfather survived, my father did not. He was caught while smug-

Baby Aliza about 5 or 6 months old with her mother, Helga Steiner Levy, before their separation. Almelo, Holland, 1943

gling a family to safety. My father, Richard Levy, endured five concentration camps only to succumb to typhus at Auschwitz.

My parents, who knew each other before the war, had been sent to Westerbork, a camp that the Dutch had created in 1939 to intern Jews who had entered Holland illegally. Later, it became a transient camp from which Jews were to be transported to the death camps. My parents married in Westerbork. While pregnant with me, my mother managed to escape through the aid of the underground. I never knew my father. He died at the age of thirty-four, just before the war ended. To this day, knowing what my father had to endure is a deep nidus in my chest, a source of pain that breeds panic and inexplicable anxieties that have been a frequent staple throughout my life. It rarely lifts.

In 2000, I went to Budapest and Prague. Part of this trip included a bus excursion to Theresienstadt. On our way there, on a beautiful cloudless day, I started to feel ill. When the bus developed engine problems and we were enveloped by smoke, I got off and vomited. I told my fellow passengers I had become ill from the smoke.

As we entered the camp, the weather changed. Clouds covered the sky and it began to drizzle. "Perfect," I thought. Before starting the grim tour I went to the administration office where a young woman pulled out a ledger, and there, between Levy Regina and Levy Stefan Ferdinand, was my father, Levy Richard, brought to Theresienstadt on May 18, 1944, and transported to Auschwitz in August, 1944. Our guide eventually led us to Barrack Number 4 where my father had stayed. This long room had the wooden bunks we have come to recognize. The ceiling pitched upwards, and the top part was made of glass. A long, thin wooden table was in the center. We were told that the barrack had been designed to hold roughly 40 to 60 men. At the time that Richard Levy was there, it housed 600 inmates. Most of these men suffered from dysentery. The two small toilets at one end of the room overflowed, and condensation reached the ceiling with droplets drizzling onto the prisoners. In this foul miasma, they sat, ate and slept. When Richard was transported to Auschwitz, he had already contracted the typhus that would kill him there.

I was eight months old when I was taken away from my mother, so young that I do not have any conscious memories, and in that, I am not your typical Holocaust survivor. I have actually been told by a well-meaning but ignorant person that I really could not call myself a "survivor." After all, I had not been in a concentration camp. I thanked him for his insight and mentally wished him to live but one moment with my emotional fragility. Years later, when I asked my mother if she knew where I was hidden during the war,

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her answer was, "I knew you were hidden in the woods somewhere, but I did not know where. It was better not to know. What you do not know, you cannot tell."

A righteous physician and two nuns, together with underground forces, had built an underground bunker where other Jewish babies and I remained for almost two years. Knowing that sheltering Jewish babies meant death, they did this at great risk, and it cost them their lives. Our underground bunker was discovered and most of the babies were murdered along with our caregivers. Obviously, I survived. I do not consciously remember the mayhem that occurred—the yelling, the noise and the beatings with intent to murder. Yet it is there. Although I do not know their names, my rescuers gave their lives to save mine. They are now with me, as is my father, Richard Levy, every day of my life.

My mother had been taken in by a farmer who had nine children, and she simply became daughter number ten. When she spoke of this period, she'd recall the many times the Germans searched the farm, poking their bayonets deep into the hayloft in which she'd been concealed. To stop herself from crying out, she'd bite her fingers.

At the end of the war, at the age of two and a half, I was reunited with the stranger who called herself my mother. She was but twenty-one years old, a widow plagued by post-traumatic stress disorder, who had to care for a small child. Since my diet had consisted primarily of boiled grass, I suffered from malnutrition, I was unable to stand, and I craved salt. My body was so deprived of sodium and calcium that I would devour handfuls of salt and paint that I scraped from the walls for their calcium content. I was told that the area of Holland where my mother had been hidden had been liberated before my region was. My mother and members of the underground risked their lives and managed to get me out. That was how my mother met Bert, an ardent Zionist and the father who would raise me.

Helga Steiner and Richard Levy.

I grew up in Israel, a country that was at war during most of my learning years. My stepfather was in the military and often away for days at a time. I remember lying huddled under the blankets at night, praying that he would return home, promising God that I would be a good girl. When sirens would signal imminent bombings, a huge, steel helmet would be placed on my head, and I'd be shoved under a bed and told not to move. I was alone and petrified.

"Traumatic experiences often involve a threat to life or safety, but any situation that leaves you feeling overwhelmed and alone can be traumatic, even if it doesn't involve physical harm."[1] Often it is not even the actual physical trauma but how we perceive it that determines the input of the trauma into one's psyche. It is our emotional experience of an event or possibly a sustained event that truly determines its effect on our lives. As the APA tells us, *"The more frightened and helpless you feel, the more likely you are to be traumatized."*[2]

There are different kinds of traumas: the discernible kind resulting from physical injuries, and the invisible kind, the monster that lives within the subconscious. Even when the cause is not consciously remembered, emotional and psychological traumas shatter one's sense of security, making one feel helpless and vulnerable. Sometimes, we don't even sense the beast's painful grip; it clutches barely developed neuronal pathways in infancy or early childhood and afflicts us as we grow into adulthood. In my case, it has enveloped me in a continual cloak of anxiety, and has prevented me from reaching for my goals.

Yet, our brain protects us by blocking out painful memories. Much of my childhood is still a washout. Scientists have shown us that brain development is an experience-dependent social process that can absolutely **override** our genetic makeup. Now, we understand and know the central role of early life experiences in triggering stress disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, learning disabilities and chronic physical health problems. Today's brain technology helps us to understand the difference between a normal stress response and a **traumatic** stress response that affects the brain and will not normalize. It also gives us reason to believe that neurological change from illness and disability to ***well-being*** is possible throughout life.

This may explain why so many Holocaust survivors were able to establish new, productive lives. As one survivor I spoke with recently said, "I am happy." So we know that childhood trauma affects us throughout our lives, that the painful memories of these events are often blocked, and that they may, or may never, surface. We also know that it **is** possible to heal.

I NO LONGER CHOOSE TO BE DEFINED BY THE SHADOWS OF THE HOLOCAUST. TRAUMA AND LOSS ARE PART OF EVERYONE'S LIFE.

I no longer choose to be defined by the shadows of the Holocaust. Trauma and loss are a part of everyone's life. It is not always 'the what' that happens to us but how we experience and react to it that determines whether or not a life-threatening experience or a series of less intense experiences will, in fact, be traumatizing.[3] Emotionally traumatizing events contain three common elements: it was unexpected; the person was unprepared; and there was nothing the person could do to prevent it from happening. Feelings of helplessness top the list of traumatic

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intensity. Certainly, a child being taken away from a parent, starved and hidden away with her mouth taped shut, covers all three of the common elements.

While working at a hospital during my chaplaincy internship, I was especially affected by two rotations. The first was working with mothers who had lost their unborn babies. Most kept saying they'd done everything right: they'd followed everything their obstetrician had told them, yet they'd lost their babies. During the Nazi Era, many women lost their babies. All grieved for their lost children for the rest of their lives, despite establishing new lives and having other children. At the time, there was nothing they could have done to save these unborn babies or reverse their circumstances.

Richard Levy who perished in Auschwitz in 1944.

The second rotation, which challenged my own ability to create appropriate boundaries, was the oncology department. I sat with the cancer patients as they received their chemotherapy, and my heart ached for them. I watched their bald heads, their sunken eyes, their pain and their nausea, knowing that many would not live out the year, yet there was not another thing they could do at that moment, despite the emotional whirlwind they were in.

I am one of the really lucky ones. I've survived two different types of cancer: breast and uterine, fifteen years apart, and a cancerous nodule on my chin. Although I survived the cancer itself, I did think the surgery, chemo and radiation would kill me. It was tough.

I firmly believe that the early stressors of my life contributed to my deficient immune system, to my susceptibility to the disease, and to my present stress disorders. After all, I was separated from my mother for almost two years. She had lost her husband, my biological father, as well as most of her family, and although she remarried, she found it difficult to form emotional attachments. I remember when, as a child, I would try to hug her, she would stiffen and avert her face. I thought it was because of me. I thought I was a BAD child.

I have tried to maintain a distance from these locked-away memories, though they've always resurfaced—as fragments—in my childhood, in my dreams, and now as I write this. Pain, itself, is often not remembered. And that can be a good thing. By putting up a barrier, our brain shields us from acute emotional pain that is at times too much to bear. The memories of the traumas are tucked away in our subconscious until they become less dangerous for us to access. This is good, but it is also bad. Not having access to a large part of our lives causes gaps in "who we are," and prevents us from becoming whole. We often blot out painful memories until something triggers them. Sometimes only a fragment surfaces, and you know, deep inside, that there is more, but you cannot access it. For me, these fragments are as sharp as the edge of broken glass.

MY MOTHER'S MEMORIES

For as long as I can remember, I was not allowed to experience my own pain. I learned that very early in life. I was the happy, bubbly, talented and pretty child I was expected to be. My mother deserved no less. When I woke up from my nightmares I was told that these frightening images were nothing compared to the pain that "she," my mother, suffered during the war. If I ever became emotional about one thing or another, I was told, again, that my emotional trigger was nothing. After all, "she" had suffered so much… and remembered it. I learned to submerge my own feelings and not express emotions except for 'happy' ones. I did not want to add to my mother's distress in any way. I became the "good child," and my mother's memories became my own.

Aunts, Betty and Eddy Steiner, reunited with baby Aliza in 1945. All three were hidden children. Betty and Eddy remained in Holland.

Because of feelings of inadequacy, helplessness and vulnerability, we sometimes sabotage our own successes. We may not remember much of our childhood, but those feelings are here today. It is now so clear to me that I sabotaged my personal relationships because, subconsciously, I felt unworthy of being loved. How blind I was!

Is it possible to forget childhood trauma? Well, you have to remember it first, don't you? People forget names, dates, faces, and even entire events all the time. But is it possible to forget terrible experiences such as being ripped away from one's mother? The answer is, yes—under certain circumstances. For more than a hundred years, doctors, scientists, and other observers have reported the connection between trauma and forgetting. But only in the past few years have scientific studies demonstrated a connection between childhood trauma and amnesia. Most scientists agree that memories from infancy and early childhood, under the age of two or three, are unlikely to be remembered.

So what makes people remember a traumatic event after such a long delay? At the time of a traumatic event, the mind makes many associations with the *feelings, sights, sounds, smells, taste, and touch connected with the trauma.* Later, similar sensations may trigger a memory of the event. While some people first remember past traumatic events during therapy, most people begin having traumatic memories outside therapy. A variety of experiences can trigger the recall: reading stories

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about other people's trauma, watching television programs that depict traumatic events similar to the viewer's past experience, experiencing a present disturbing event, or reminiscing with family about a terrible shared episode. For some people, these kinds of experiences can open the floodgates of frightful and horrible memories.

Are recovered memories always accurate? Scientists believe that recovered memories, including recovered memories of childhood trauma, are **not** always accurate. When people remember childhood trauma, but later say their memory was wrong, there is no way to know which memory was accurate, the one that claims the trauma happened or the one that claims it did not.

Usually, we hear about PTSD primarily in relation to soldiers who return from war, deeply and disturbingly affected by what they have gone through. More recently we have begun to hear about PTSD in connection with other traumatic events.

One can suffer from PTSD without even knowing it. Then suddenly something happens, even something that may appear to be benign, and suddenly an avalanche of emotions rise up and the reaction is huge. The response may be way out of proportion to the incident, and with it comes a spark of a memory.

As I write this, I keep taking long breaks. The more I write, the more it sucks me into a hole, and the harder it is for me to climb out. I find myself going back in time, reliving some of the more difficult moments of my life—or rather, bringing up moments that were buried deep within my unconscious psyche.

I have always had a strong and fearful reaction to sudden loud noises or sounds. I have a terrible sensitivity to loud noise in general. I simply do not tolerate it well. That caused me to be an intolerant mother. I couldn't stand it when my children made a lot of noise. Previously I have not spent much time thinking about that. Of course I regretted the environment that I had created for my three children as they were growing up. It helped when I was accepted to podiatry medical school, for now, or so I thought, I had a legitimate reason for telling them to be quiet. I had to study, didn't I? I accepted my need for quiet around me and thought no more about it. Today I understand what was lurking in the deep recesses of my mind and wish I had understood the 'why' behind this behavior.

The fuzziness of my early childhood and the inaccuracy of my memories are what they are. Almost everyone is gone now. My mother's two little sisters, who were only four and five years old themselves when they were taken in by Dutch families, cannot add to my story. The continual struggle to become whole also remains what it is.

I do not consciously remember being in an underground bunker as an infant. And I do not remember having my mouth taped shut so I couldn't cry. But I know the woods were patrolled by Nazi troops and the slightest sound could give away our hiding place. THIS IS TRAUMA! That silence was safe and noise meant danger stayed in my unconscious infant mind.

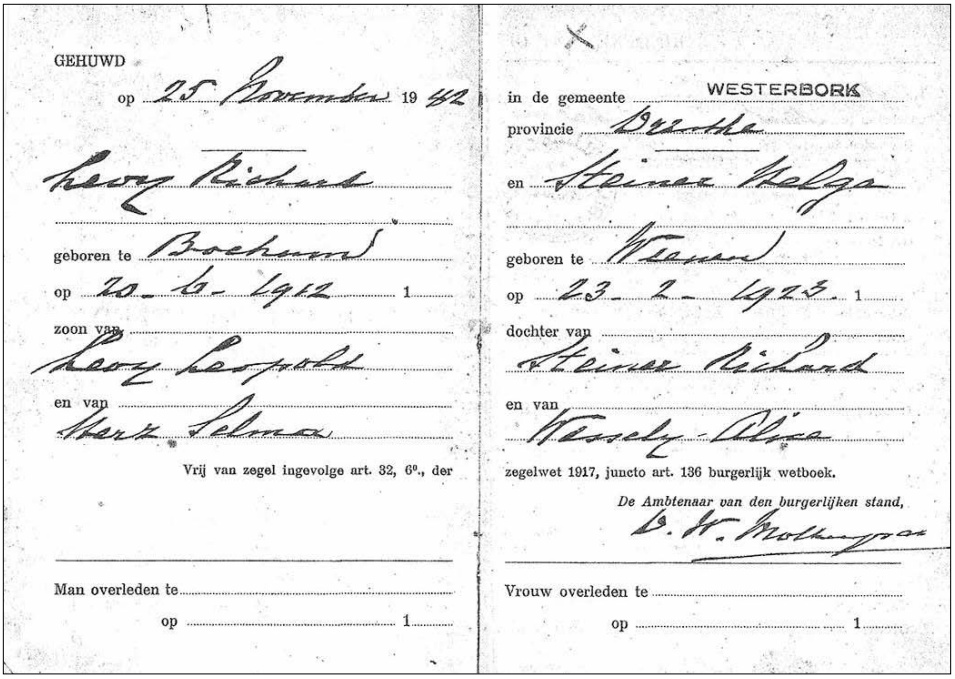
The track had been laid.

Later, when I had to hide under a bed when the sirens went off and the bombs exploded nearby, the noise was terrifying.

The track had been laid.

I get it now! ■

Rabbi Aliza Erber today.



GEHUWD

op 25 November 19 42

in de gemeente WESTERBORK

provincie Drenthe

Richard

en Heinz Helga

geboren te Bochum

op 20-6-1912 1

geboren te Wien

op 23-2-1923 1

zoon van Leon Leopold

dochter van Heinz Richard

en van Sara Selma

en van Wesely-Aliza

Vrij van zegel ingevolge art. 32, 6°., der zegelwet 1917, juncto art. 136 burgerlijk wetboek.

De Ambtenaar van den burgerlijken stand,

D. H. Molenaar

Man overleden te

op 1

Vrouw overleden te

op 1

Richard and Helga's wedding certificate. Westerbork 1942.

Aliza Erber, an Adjunct Professor at SUNY Purchase, holds a Masters' degree in Hebrew and Judaic Studies from New York University, and a Masters' degree in Public Health Administration, with a core concentration in Bio-Medical Ethics, from Long Island University. As a specialist in Bio-Medical Ethics, she sat on the Ethics' Committee at The Hebrew Home and Hospital for the aged in Manhattan. She is also a hospital Chaplain, a Podiatric Medical physician, a Hebrew school teacher and a Rabbinic Pastor at the Westchester Community for Humanistic Judaism. A woman of many talents, she is also a playwright, a short story writer and an actor. Her last play, Holocaust Syndrome, *was presented at the Herbert Mark Newman Theatre and other theaters in the Tri-State area. In 1999, she performed in Budapest at the International Jewish Arts Festival.*

1. APA, 'American Psychological Association' Web Page definition of Trauma. 1/12/14

2. Ibid

3. Ibid

LA CASA DI SCIESOPOLI: 'THE HOUSE'

By Sidney (Yehoshua) Zoltak

Jewish youth gather outside the entrance to the Selvino Youth Aliyah children's home. June 11, 1946, Italy.

CREDIT: UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM AMERICAN JEWISH JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE, COURTESY OF DAVID B. ZUGMAN.

At the end of September 1945, in a DP transit camp in the city of Padua, my friend Yitzhak ran to tell me the great news. He had heard from some Jewish Agency personnel that a new Jewish children's home was being established in the village of Selvino, just 70 kilometers northeast of Milan. The home was to house Jewish refugee children aged six to sixteen and prepare them for life in *Eretz Israel*. It was to be an educational facility, a place to reintegrate children who had survived the war and who had been left without proper adult supervision. Yitzhak was very excited about Selvino because it would bring him closer to his dream of living in Israel. He had made up his mind to go, and wanted me to join him.

It took me a few days to find the courage to approach my parents. I pleaded, cried and emphasized the educational component. My parents were realists. They agreed that a children's home would be a better environment for me than a DP camp. However, after seeing their only child come out alive from hell, separation was unthinkable. My mother, who respected the value of education above all else and who knew that my formal schooling for the past four years had been practically nil, finally relented.

At the beginning of October, Yitzhak and I completed the application forms and were told to report to the Diaspora Center at 5 Via Unione in Milan. We hitched a ride with one of the Jewish soldiers and waited at the center for someone to bring us to Selvino.

Diaspora Centers, an initiative of The Jewish Agency in Palestine, aimed to organize and prepare post-war refugees for immigration to *Eretz Israel*. Under the guidance of shlichim (emissaries) from Palestine, the center in Milan opened its doors in May 1945. Located a short walk from Milan's famous Il D'uomo Cathedral, it was housed in a building formerly used as militia quarters by the Fascist regime. After liberation, the provincial administrators in Milan handed over this large facility to Jewish rescue organizations. There were also some offices for the ruling military.

Given the constant influx of Jewish refugees, the building was abuzz with activity, both day and night. The upper floors served as dormitories, dining halls and meeting rooms. Refugees knew that here they could find a free meal and a place to sleep for the night; they could receive medical attention, food rations, clothing and even pocket money. Here, they could fill out forms that might help them find relatives in Palestine, America or elsewhere, and they could make inquiries about relatives who might have survived the war.

The emissaries who worked at the center had their hands full. Not only did they have to provide for the refugees, they also had to deal with the occupation forces and the local authorities—all this while trying to acquire ships for illegal immigration to Palestine, obtain supplies and equipment, and organize southward escape routes from central Europe.

Yitzhak and I waited for what seemed like hours before our escort to Selvino finally arrived. He was a Jewish soldier, driving a small army truck. He greeted us with a broad smile and spoke to us in Yiddish. He told us his name was Moshe, but everyone in Selvino called him Fetter Moishe (Uncle Moses). His real name was Moshe Engert, and he was a driver for the Solel Boneh Construction Company.

Solel Boneh had been set up by the Histadrut (the labor federation) to build roads and buildings in Palestine. In 1942, Solel Boneh began to recruit men with construction skills to help in the war effort. There were engineers, electricians, builders, master craftsmen and tradesmen. In addition, they attracted well-known public figures, teachers, artists and activists in the underground defense forces (The Haganah) and political parties, all of whom volunteered to fight the forces of the Third Reich. The Jews in Palestine called them the 'Solel Boneh Company.' This group of men first worked in military construction in Egypt and in March 1944 they landed in Naples, Italy. Like the other Jewish fighting units in the British Army, the 'Solel Boneh Company' had dual roles, in combat and in making contact with the Jewish communities. Wherever they went, they provided moral support and brought news of the Jewish Settlement (The *Yishuv*) in Palestine.

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In early May 1945, Moshe Engert's company reached Milan. Upon arrival, he was assigned to work with children who had survived the Holocaust. Radiating warmth, kindheartedness, sincerity and enthusiasm, he was deeply motivated to help people, especially children. At his instigation, the Jewish military units in Italy set aside 15 percent of their rations to supplement the food that was allotted to the children by the other social agencies. On his frequent visits to Selvino, he would be greeted with love by the many children waiting at the gate, for they knew that Fetter Moishe had—as usual—lots of chocolate, candy, small toys and trinkets.

Fetter Moishe's most important job was to bring new children to Selvino. They came from many outposts and countries, and they'd be organized into small groups before crossing into Italy. He often traveled to the Swiss or Austrian border and to DP camps to pick them up. Sometimes, he'd simply find them wandering on their own. One of the frequent stops on his route was at number 5 Via Unione.

On this particular day, Yitzhak and I were very happy to be greeted by this friendly soldier, who was going to take us by truck to the children's home. Fetter Moishe explained that the drive from Milan to the foot of the mountain would be quick but that the climb on a mountainous road to 'The House' at Selvino would be slow but safe, adding that we had made the right decision and would be very happy there. And so we began our journey.

The road was indeed smooth until we reached the villages of Albino. Then we began our climb to the village of Selvino, one kilometer above sea level. The narrow road snaked through wooded, mountainous terrain. There were some frightening moments when I was forced to look up from the edge of a precipice onto a steep incline. There were times when the small truck, an American Dodge, had difficulty making the 180-degree turns without backing up.

We arrived at our destination, the gate of a large complex of structures. As we drove into the yard, Fetter Moishe fixed his gaze on us as we gaped at the magnificent building standing against a mountain backdrop. The center of the building, four stories tall, was flanked on both sides by two-story structures. The inscription indicated: SCIESOPOLI.

Beneath a large balcony on the second floor of the center core, there was a massive semi-circular staircase leading to a marble-tiled lobby. Inside, there were many rooms and facilities, indicating a previous usage. During the reign of Benito Mussolini, this luxurious compound had served as a rest-home, boarding school or vacation lodge for elite Fascist youth. From the balcony of the building, Fascist party leaders reviewed parades of select youths. Its walls were covered with fascist slogans and pictures of Mussolini. On a marble plaque in the entrance hall, at the head of a list of contributors to the building of the House of Sciesopoli, the name of Benito Mussolini was inscribed. His contribution had been 5,000 Lire.

Sidney Zoltak poses with his cousin, Chana Lisogurski, next to an UNRRA truck in the Cremona DP Camp.
CREDIT: U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM, COURTESY OF SIDNEY ZOLTAK.

There was a dining hall with long tables and benches. Next to it was a spacious kitchen. There were a few dormitories with beds and dressers in neat rows, a gym, a theater, an indoor swimming pool, offices, an infirmary, bathrooms, storage rooms, classrooms and workshops. In front of 'The House' there was a plaza for assemblies and special events. Here the daily ritual of *anafat hadeghel*, the ceremonial raising of the blue and white flag, took place. That ceremony brought tears to the eyes of many children. There was also another yard where the children did their morning calisthenics. On a lower level, there was a very busy soccer field.

My first reaction to 'The House' of Sciesopoli was amazement but it was nothing compared to my feelings as we were led through the rest of the building. As I entered each room, I was moved to tears. After living and sleeping in army barracks, army tents and traveling in cattle cars, seeing my new home-to-be felt like a dream.

A young man, a *madrich*, a counsellor, assigned each of us a bed and a dresser in the large dormitory for boys. We were also shown the location of the showers, and told, and retold, to report to the dining room at a specific time. The importance of discipline was emphasized immediately.

In the dining room, we were greeted by a few more counsellors who spoke to us in Yiddish. Noting our nervousness, they said, "This is your new home; you will be very happy here." Yitzhak and I were introduced to Moshe Ze'iri, the Director of 'The House,' who welcomed us partly in Yiddish and partly in Hebrew. Appearing relaxed and confident, some of the older 'residents' greeted us. The atmosphere was friendly. We had all gone through a similar hell and had come out alive.

All eyes were focused toward the kitchen. Finally the food was brought to the tables by a few children, who had been assigned this duty for that evening. Everyone was served equal portions, including a small roll (a pannini). Perhaps because I was feeling so emotional, I ate the whole roll but only half of the food on my plate. When I put down my knife and fork, a few children asked me, almost in unison, if I had finished eating. When my answer was yes, they asked if they could have my leftovers. I was glad to oblige and they thanked me sincerely. I immediately had friends. I didn't realize it at the time and only found out later that our food supply was limited. The fresh air and the physical activity produced appetites greater than the food rations. It did not take too long before I behaved the same way with new arrivals to 'The House.'

The primary provider of the limited food supply was UNRRA, with the rest coming from the Jewish soldiers in various British Army units. No money was being sent from Palestine to support this children's home. The American Joint Distribution Committee's help came much later. Rolls, vegetables and fruit came from the village of Selvino in exchange for cash and other army supplies. Every child who came to Selvino had to give up all of his or her valuables. Everything became communal property.

That first evening, Yitzhak and I were told about the leisure activities in which the children were encouraged to participate after dinner. Separate rooms were set up for Israeli folk dancing, for playing chess or checkers, and for ping-pong. Although

I was invited by a few of the children to join in, I remained an observer. I had been away from my parents for less than a day, and despite the pleasant and dynamic environment, I missed them and felt lonely. I was thinking about my mother, who was so protective, and my gentle, ailing father, who was so quiet. I kept wondering how they were and when they would come to visit me.

The culture of the House of Sciesopoli was structured according to the ideals of the pioneer youth movements in *Eretz Israel*. It was under the direction and administration of Youth Aliya and was known in Palestine and in Italy as *Beth Aliyat Ha'Noar, Selvino* (The Youth Aliya House, Selvino). The rules and regulations applied to everyone.

The children were expected to study half a day and work at various tasks the other half of the day. The chores were divided by department. For example, the dining room detail meant that the children assigned for that week did everything relating to preparing and serving food. The sanitation unit had the responsibility of cleaning bathrooms and showers. Children had to take on every task, including maintenance. Serious repair jobs were left to the adults and, if necessary, to tradesmen.

Besides the counsellors, teachers, the director Moshe Ze'iri and our devoted and compassionate doctor, Pessia Kissin, the other adults I remember were the chief cook, the gardener and Angelo, the caretaker, who was also responsible for cleaning the swimming pool and maintaining the heating system. With rare exception, the rest of the work was done by the children who quickly learned their assigned tasks. There were even some children who so perfected their skills in certain departments that they remained in their jobs permanently.

The educational component of 'The House' was designed to prepare every child to settle in *Eretz Israel*. The classes were divided not by age but by level of knowledge. None of us had any papers or report cards from other schools. Most of us only knew what we had picked up during our wanderings.

When Yitzhak and I arrived in Selvino at the beginning of October, 1945, there were fewer than fifty children in 'The House.' As most of them were orphans, I was always very reluctant to reveal to the others that my parents were alive. I felt uncomfortable talking about it. When we children talked to each other about our individual wartime experiences, I also felt that I didn't measure up to many of them. My story of survival paled in comparison to theirs. I had my parents to protect me. Most did not.

Most children had arrived from concentration camps, from forests where some fought with the partisans, from villages where they hid and roamed, and from convents and monasteries. Some had survived Siberia and other underdeveloped areas of the Soviet Union. They had a general mistrust of adults. The children who came from Christian religious institutions had a particularly difficult time adjusting to Jewish customs and traditions. Although 'The House' did not follow Jewish Orthodox rituals, Jewish holidays and festivals were celebrated in traditional style. Many of the children who had lived as Christians during the war were more comfortable with Christian rituals. We were told that in the girls' dormitory, as soon as the lights were out for the night, a number of girls could be seen on their knees, praying near their beds. That scene was less common among the boys.

My studies were stimulating. I was put into a group with some knowledge of Hebrew. Some of the older children who before the war had attended schools that taught Hebrew or Yiddish, and sometimes both, were asked to help the ones who did not recognize the Hebrew alphabet. Because of my neat handwriting, I was also recruited to teach the young ones how to write and pronounce the Hebrew alphabet. That special status heightened my enthusiasm for the study portion of the day. I was eager to learn, and the teachers were happy to teach. Occasionally, I compared this experience to my post-liberation school days in Siemiatycz. I appreciated the difference and was grateful.

A group of teenagers poses on the steps of the Selvino children's home with an Israeli flag.
CREDIT: U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM, COURTESY OF RUTH GOLDSTEIN.

A lot of enthusiasm and love was poured into the teaching of the history and the geography of the Jewish settlements. The settlemets were built by the dedicated, idealistic pioneers who had left the comfort of their parents' homes in Europe and elsewhere for the hard manual labor needed to build a Jewish homeland.

It was exciting to be an active participant in the social activities of 'The House.' I still did a lot of things with Yitzhak but I also joined the other kids. I loved dancing and became good at it. I played ping-pong and chess. In my free-time, during daylight hours, I played soccer. I was not talented enough to be included in the elite team that competed against other teams, but I managed to get into the pick-up games. I would get up early every morning to do calisthenics, followed by the daily assem-

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bly of raising the flag, breakfast and then either work or study. The activities were long and tiring, and the days were full.

In the middle of October, my mother came for a visit. She and a few others came by army truck from the DP camp of Cremona, about 85 kilometers from Selvino, to visit their children or other relatives. She told me that she and my father had been moved from Padua to Cremona but that my aunt, uncle and my cousin Chanale remained in Padua. She commented that the ride up the mountain was difficult and because of the altitude, my father was advised not to travel. She also told me that his health remained stable and that he was functioning well. She hugged me and kissed me and brought me lots of goodies. When she left, I shared the food and snacks with my friends. I noticed that a few of them were envious. Many years later, a boy who later became one of my best friends and whose parents were murdered in the Shoah, confessed to me, that when my mother came to visit, he hated me.

Every day there were new arrivals and we, now the old residents, were asked to make a special effort to make them feel welcome. I integrated very well into the 'The House.' I worked hard but was having fun, as were the other children. We all felt the love and respect of the counsellors and were looking forward to a promising new life in *Eretz Israel*. There was, however, one restriction that bothered many of us. For the children who survived alone, without their parents and without an adult relative, that restriction was difficult to understand.

The children who came to *Beit Aliyat Ha'Noar* were discouraged from talking about their personal stories of survival. The order given to counsellors by the Director himself was not to listen to personal stories. The emphasis was on aliya and *Eretz Israel.*

Four decades later, in 1985, there was a very emotional gathering in Israel of former Selvino graduates, their children and grandchildren. It took place in Kibbutz Tel Yitzhak, in the amphitheatre of Massua, the museum and educational center dedicated to the memory of the children murdered in the *Shoah*. There was also a special ceremony to fete the Selvino Director Moshe Ze'Iri's 70th birthday. After many speeches and presentations, Moshe sang us his favorite Yiddish song, *Oyfn Veg Shteyt a Boym*, a song he used to sing to us in Selvino. He then made a passionate speech in which he apologized to the former Selvino children for not allowing them to speak about their horrifying experiences and their stories of survival. He realized much later that it was not the right way to deal with the children's healing process. At this poignant event one could not find many dry eyes.

At the same festive reunion, the well known Israeli author, Aharon Megged, celebrated the launching of his book—in Hebrew—*Journey to the Promised Land: the Story of the Selvino Children*. An English translation was later published in 2002. It is a beautiful story of wonderful people with exceptional humanitarian values.

During our stay in Selvino, we found out some historical facts about the Selvino project. In the spring of 1945, after the German army was driven out of Italy, two Italian Jewish community leaders, Raffaele Cantoni and his assistant Mathilda Cassin returned to Italy from a two-year exile in Switzerland. Cantoni was an Italian patriot, a socialist and also an active Zionist. Mathilda Cassin was the daughter of a Florentine Jewish jurist and was active in local community and Zionist causes. Both worked together in the underground during the war in Fascist Italy. Their task had been to hide Jewish children in convents and monasteries. In 1943 they escaped to Switzerland. At 5 Via Unione in Milan, they began their urgent task of finding the hidden Jewish children and bringing them back to their roots.

When Cantoni asked the Diaspora Center for help, they referred him to Moshe Ze'iri, an educator sent by the Jewish Agency in Palestine to help Jewish children who survived the Holocaust. Moshe Ze'iri accepted the task without hesitation. Ze'iri was a member of Kvutzat Schiller, an agricultural collective in Palestine. The *Solel Boneh* Company had recruited him to go to Europe because of his excellent skills as an educator and organizer. He was therefore well suited to work with the children.

The House of Sciesopoli was under the supervision of Professor Luigi Gorini,* who had been active in the resistance movement during the Mussolini regime and was the head of the Socialist Party in the district of Milan. His assistant, Anna-Maria Toriani, who later became his wife, was also active in the Resistance movement. As a member of the Socialist Party, Professor Gorini was their representative on the *Committee for the Liberation of Italy*. Having encountered some survivors and especially children, he and Anna-Maria provided them with food and clothing. At the beginning of September 1945, Professor Gorini was approached by Cantoni and Ze'Iri to use The House of Sciesopoli as a children's home and educational center, which would prepare the children to go to Palestine. His response was: "Yes, for the children, everything." In that delegation was Tedy Be'eri, another member of the Solel Boneh Company. Tedy Be'eri had lived in Italy during the Fascist Regime and later immigrated to Israel.

Professor Gorini then began the process of finalizing the arrangements in order to obtain the legal rights to the House of Sciesopoli. The process, we later learned, faced a lot of opposition. It was claimed that "Sciesopoli" was promised to the Catholic Church as a seminary for training priests. In the end, Professor Gorini persevered and 'The House' became a home to hundreds of Jewish children who luckily had been saved.

Eight hundred children between the ages of six and sixteen passed through this house. Here we gained an extended family and for some, their only family.

On March 14th, 1976, at a ceremony at *Yad Vashem*, The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem, Professor Luigi Gorini was awarded the medal of "The Righteous among the Nations." This honor is given to gentiles who demonstrated extraordinary courage in helping to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. A few of these medals were also given to individuals who helped Holocaust survivors after liberation. At that ceremony in Yad Vashem, Anna-Maria, who was by then Professor Gorini's wife, accepted the medal. Professor Gorini had fallen ill and been taken to the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. On August 13th of the same year, he died at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston. ■

Sidney Zoltak survived the Shoah in a Ghetto and in 21 months of hiding. This article is adapted from a chapter in his memoir, "My Silent Pledge," written in conjunction with the scheduled 70th anniversary reunion in Selvino at the end of September 2015, and dedicated to the 800 Jewish Child Survivors, who were warmly welcomed into 'The House.'

*Additional information based on *The Story of the Selvino Children: Journey to a Promised Land* by Aharon Meged, Translated by: Vivian Eden: Vallentine Mitchell 2002

A BOY'S REVENGE

Charles Ota Heller

First family portrait of the Heller family following their reunion at the end of the war (Rudolf is still in the uniform of the British army).

I was born on January 25, 1936, in Prague—three years before our country was occupied by the Germans. I was christened Ota Karel Heller in the Roman Catholic Church, across the street from our home in the small town of Kojetice, a short distance from the capital. Ours was the wealthiest family in the region, and I grew up in a luxurious, happy, loving household.

To someone looking at us from the outside, ours may have seemed a peculiar clan: five males and one female. To add to the oddity, four were Jews and two were Catholics. How did all this come about? The patriarch of our family was my maternal great grandfather, Gustav Neumann, a Jewish entrepreneur who had built a tiny general store into the largest manufacturer of men's work clothes and women's dresses in Central Europe. Dêdecek, as I called him, had two sons, Artur and Ota. Artur had a daughter out of wedlock with a Christian woman. The mother had the child baptized, and Artur adopted and brought baby Ilona home to Kojetice. Eighteen years later, a young man named Rudolf Heller, a Jew, came to work for Dêdecek's company.

Rudolf fell in love with the boss' granddaughter, Ilona. They were married in 1934 and, two years later, they had me as their only child. My mother and I were devout Catholics, attending Mass each Sunday morning. The other four members of our household, all Jews, were totally secular. Religion was never discussed at the dinner table, the men did not attend synagogue, and neither did they speak Yiddish or Hebrew. They were fierce Czechoslovak patriots. And I, the little Catholic boy, did not even know what a Jew was.

Soon after the Germans came, uncles, aunts, cousins, and my paternal grandmother stopped visiting. For reasons unknown to me, they began to disappear. Then my father escaped to join the British army. My grandfather and great uncle followed him, only to be captured by the Germans and murdered in Yugoslavia. Eventually, only my mother, Dêdecek, and I were left. A Nazi, named Hollmann, took over our factory and threw us out of our home. We were taken in by friends, a family of farmers named Tuma. A year later, Dêdecek too, departed. He was taken by transport to Terezín, and later to Treblinka, where he was murdered upon arrival, at the age of 82.

I was nearly five years old and failed to understand why my family had been reduced to two, why I wasn't allowed to start school, why I had to remain within the walls of the farm. When I asked for an explanation, Mother and Mr. and Mrs. Tuma would always tell me, "Because your father is fighting against the Germans." I took this as a point of pride, and the pain subsided. Of course, I knew nothing about the Nurnberg Laws, which established the Nazi definitions of who is a Jew. According to one of the laws, anyone with three Jewish grandparents was a Jew. Ota Heller, that little Catholic boy, was a Jew—and did not know it.

Eventually, my mother was taken away to a slave labor camp for Christian wives of Jewish men. She entrusted me to the Tumas, whose farm by now had been taken away. They were working as farmhands for a large estate, living in a place the local citizens called Zámek (Castle), now a dormitory for farmhands. I lived with them for the remainder of the war, with Mrs. Tuma hiding me in a closet whenever the Gestapo or Czech collaborators came looking for me.

Finally, it was the first week of May 1945. Retreating German occupiers—soldiers and civilians, men, women, and children—filled every north- and westbound road out of Prague, hoping to be captured by civilized Americans, rather than by the brutal Soviets. Although our village of Kojetice was two kilometers from the highway, between Prague and the city of Mêlník, German soldiers and workers had been passing through for several days on their way north. A few found temporary lodging before continuing; injured soldiers fleeing the front were treated in a makeshift infirmary in the elementary school. Two boys I met when I ventured out of the dark corner room in which I had been hiding told me that some Wehrmacht deserters had taken refuge in the outbuildings of the estate where we were living.

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Like most Czechs, I found it difficult to believe that our hated oppressors were really running away. Now, my new friends and I decided to observe the exodus. We exited the estate surrounding the castle through a rear gate and walked out to the highway. The Nazis were gone by the time we arrived. But wanting to be unarmed when captured, the soldiers had been throwing away their military equipment along the way. In the ditch by the road, we found a treasure trove. There were gas masks, bayonets, helmets, binoculars, clips with bullets—and guns! I picked up a black Walther pistol. It was heavy and cold, but it gave me an unexpected jolt of power.

"I'm going to shoot a German," I announced to my companions matter-of-factly as I stuck the loaded pistol inside my belt. I remembered the boys' comment about Germans hiding inside the estate courtyard and thus, in a flight of fancy and without consideration of the consequences, I knew my target. We headed back to the village, each of us with his favorite piece of loot. Along the way, the boys laughed at my bravado and teased me about having read too many Karl May cowboy and Indian novels.

We returned to the castle by climbing over a wall surrounding the large estate. Once inside, we sneaked into the woods and to the edge of the courtyard. We crawled through thick brush to watch several men and women load boxes onto two gray trucks. A short distance away from us, a tall, blond man—an ideal Aryan depiction for a Nazi propaganda billboard—was carrying a small table toward a truck. He was dressed in dark trousers and leather boots; he was hatless, and wore a white undershirt under dark green suspenders. The boy named Pepík pulled his newly-obtained gas mask away from his face.

"Well, are you gonna do it?" he whispered.

I stared at him for a long moment, taking his dare as a signal that the man was one of the escaping Germans, and wondering if I had the courage to back up my boast. Finally, I swallowed hard and carefully drew the Walther from my belt. Getting on my feet, cocking the pistol, and assuming a two-handed pose I had seen in American cowboy movies before the war, I aimed at the blond-haired man's chest. I squeezed the trigger. Bam! The noise was ear-shattering. The pistol recoiled and flew out of my hands; and I was propelled into the bushes.

Great-grandfather Gustav Neumann standing in front of the factory's retail store in Kojetice (c. 1930).

"You got him!" screamed Pepík.

I crawled out of the brush and looked. The man was lying on the ground, while a woman was screaming in German from the doorway. Leaving the gun behind, I took off, running as fast as I could toward the castle, while my two companions scattered in different directions. I hid behind the brick building which had been my hideaway and, with my heart pounding wildly, waited for what seemed like hours. Amazingly, no one had followed. After an initial crush of fear, I experienced an adrenaline rush unlike any I had ever felt before—or since.

"*I killed a German*," I screamed silently. "*I killed a German!*"

I did not know if I had really killed the man, but I hoped I had. In that splendid moment, I felt as if I had helped my father win the war. For most of my young life, I had been running and hiding. Now, finally, I had struck back. I had taken revenge for everything the Nazis had done—for taking my family from me, for stealing our home and all our possessions, for forcing me to hide like an animal, for desecrating my beloved Czechoslovakia. I was nine years old.

My mother returned from the slave labor camp after the German guards got drunk and drove away. A few days later, my father returned. He had been assigned to General Patton's U.S. 3rd Army, following more than five years of combat in North Africa and Europe. To this day, our joyous reunion—along with my marriage and birth of our son—stands out as the greatest moment of my life. Sadly, no one else from the Heller and Neumann families came back. All twenty-five perished in the Holocaust.

My parents and I escaped from Czechoslovakia two weeks after the communist takeover. Following fifteen months in refugee camps, we arrived in America. During our first week in the New World, my father ordered me to forget everything that had happened on the other side of the Atlantic and to become a 100% assimilated American. I changed my name to Charles Ota Heller and went about chasing the proverbial American Dream. It would be many years later, following trips to the Czech Republic after the Velvet Revolution and an emotional visit to Yad Vashem in Israel, that I would finally stop hiding from my background and ethnicity, and begin to celebrate my parents' heroism and my family's history. ■

Rudolf Heller returns to Prague a war hero (in center of photo), along with other members of the Czechoslovak Division of the British army, May 1945.

[Adapted from Prague: My Long Journey Home *by Charles Ota Heller, Abbott Press, 2011. More about the book, its author, and his blog can be found on www.charlesoheller.com]*

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE HOLOCAUST & BEYOND

By Ed Lichtman

Prewar photo of a very young Ed Lichtman.

LVOV, POLAND – EARLY 1942

I was born into a large and prosperous family on July 20, 1935, in Dobromil, Poland. The Lichtmanns owned a lumber mill where all the sons worked in various capacities; my father was the general manager and the "engineer." I do not know why or when, but between 1939 and 1941, my parents moved to the city of Lvov. The reason may well be that, after the 1939 Hitler/Stalin Pact, the Russian occupiers of our part of Poland did not want to see our mill in the hands of "capitalists."

By early 1942, after the German takeover, we lived in that city's ghetto, but we were still able to go in and out freely. Because of rumors of its impending closing, my father decided it was time for us to go into hiding. I was almost seven years old. My mother and I were planning to live in a village with a Catholic lady and pose as Edmund and Mathilda Trzebinski, presumably relations of that lady. My father, who looked too Jewish to pass for a Catholic was to remain in Lvov, hiding with a Catholic family.

Before out departure, my mother and I went to visit my aunt to say our goodbyes. My aunt and her three-year-old daughter lived outside the ghetto, and somehow they had managed to obtain Costa Rican passports. I remember a sunny, multi-room apartment on the second floor of a large building, with stairs leading to an inner, circular balcony that accessed all the apartments.

My mind and feelings began to freeze that day when my mother asked the German officer **"Herr Kapitän, kann mein sohn nach hause gehen, seinem vater zu erklären daß sie mich wegnehmen?"** (Captain, may my son go home to tell his father that you are taking me away?)

The German officer wanted my aunt's apartment for himself, and he deemed it necessary to arrest us to accomplish his goal—we just happened to be there at the most inopportune time. When the German agreed to let me go, my mother took me aside and said, "Eduszku, kohanie, (Eddie, my love) go home, tell Tatushku (Father) what happened here and please, please remember to tell him that I dropped our false documents behind the trunk in Cioci's (Aunt's) bedroom." That was the last time I saw my mother.

With time, I lost the ability to visualize her features, and my memory of her became limited. I recall only three earlier incidents; all are devoid of color, emotion and sounds. In the first, Mother and I are walking arm-in-arm, each carefully shielding the other's Star of David armband. I am very aware that it is past the curfew. In the second, Mother and I are standing in a long line, waiting to purchase sugar. In the third, I am in a playground. I have sprained or broken my arm falling off a slide. My mother soothes my pain.

But it is as though these recollections surface from a book that has nothing to do with me. I truly envy people who have vivid, wonderful memories of their childhood. What I know about my mother I learned years later from my surviving aunts. My mother was an attorney, a most unusual occupation for a woman in those days, and she was remembered for her softness and love. I shall forever be grateful to her for saving my life, and for all the love she instilled in me.

Somehow, I made it to our apartment and told my father what had happened, but I remember being completely unaware of the danger my mother was in. I simply thought that this was the way life is.

A POLISH VILLAGE, 1942 -1945

I can't even name that village. I have but blurred images of it, some clearer, though most are mere impressions, none that I would want to revisit. Oddly, I do not recall my rescuer's name, though I lived with her for over three years. I shall call her Helena here. She was tall and older, an ex-school teacher, I think, because she taught me arithmetic, reading and writing. I was passing as her nephew.

I remember a very cold Sunday. I'm wearing a hat as we enter the church. My hat is still on as we sit in the pew. With eyes full of fear and disapproval, Helena pulls off my hat. For harboring me, a Jew, she could be denounced to the Germans, and executed.

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On my first Christmas Eve in the village, Aunt Helena and I are visiting the family next door and as we stand before the Christmas tree I tell everyone that in **my** house we never celebrated Christmas. The next day we are on the train back to Lvov. Fortunately, Helena cannot find my father, and we return to the village.

Towards the end of the war our village became a battleground. The Russians repelled the Germans one day, and the next day the Germans came back. In 1945, with the war raging to the west, the village is occupied by the Russians. I'm still guarding my secret, but I begin to feel safe. The soldiers smile at me, and they let me ride in the back of their motorcycle. I quickly learn to speak Russian. I wait to hear from my parents… and wait... and wait.

The war is over, yet there's no news. I can wait no longer. I leave the village in the hope of finding my parents. I can't have gotten far, because my next recollection is of looking out Helena's window and seeing a stranger approach our door. She is a short lady, about 35 years old, with a bandage on her nose. I do not recognize her, but I know she is coming for me.

Indeed, my father had sent my cousin Dela to bring me to him. He was now in Krakow, sharing an apartment with Dela and her daughter Ruth. I asked her about my mother. She said I would have to ask my father. Although happy to see me, Dela was not in a good mood: she had just hurt her nose (permanent scar) on the train ride from Krakow.

I remember neither the ride to Krakow, nor my goodbyes to Helena. To this day I do not understand why I felt no warmth or gratitude towards Helena. She was definitely not mean to me, and she had risked her life to save mine. I was still guarding my feelings. My actions spoke clearly when, a few weeks later, my father asked me to do something nice for Helena. I replied "Nie" (no). I do not remember what he asked me to do, but I do remember resisting it.

The Lichtmann Family before 1935. I am not in this photo. Of the 15 people in this picture only 4 survived the Holocaust: Grandmother Sara, my father (Joseph), Aunt Bronia, and Aunt Mania.

KRAKOW, 1945-1946

Dela brings me to my new home, an apartment in Krakow. As she opens the door, I see my father. He hugs me warmly and I am happy to see him. "Where is Mamusia (Mother)?" I immediately inquire. "Mamusia did not survive the war, and this is the last time we will speak about her." And it was. Someone in the family later told me that she was killed by the Germans. How or when, I never found out. I am not sure if my father ever knew.

In Krakow a new "normal" begins. At first there are four us: Father, Dela, Ruth, who is my age, and me. Later Ron (then "Romek," Aunt Bronia's son), who is one year younger, joins us.

My father is busy trying to earn a living. He deals in the "black market," selling cartons of cigarettes. I know because those cartons are stored under the couch that serves as my bed. I was told that he was quite resourceful when it came to making money. Of course I did not hear that from him, nor does he talk to me about his experiences in hiding. I do not remember what we talked about, if anything. All I remember is that he is very strict and hardly ever at home.

However, I look forward to Sundays. That is the day we walk, hand-in-hand, around the big square in Krakow, and we have "caste," a multi-color, multi-flavor ice cream, while he talks to friends about business.

These are basically happy days. I am attending school, collecting and drying leaves, and storing them in a special book. Ruth, Ron and I walk with Dela, while each "fights" for one of her two hands. In retrospect I was not conscious of my surroundings. Our lives, our furnished apartment, our town—everything was temporary. I certainly was not conscious of a future onset of World War III, but to my father, it was inevitable. With that in mind, one day we packed, and took the train out of Poland. (At this point Ron had joined his mother in Germany where she was operating a deli.)

We stopped a few days in Prague, Czechoslovakia, where we celebrated the marriage of Dela to Henri Barash, a prior employee of the Lichtmann Lumber Mill. Next stop, Paris. On the way, as the train stopped in a few German towns, I was intrigued by the onrush of people, grabbing cigarette butts being flung out the train's windows.

WAITING FOR WORLD WAR III – PARIS, BRUSSELS, 1946 – 1951

In Paris, we live in a hotel for a while. My father's first priority is to find a job. Not so easy in a country that requires a new language and a work permit, a near impossibility for a foreigner to obtain. The Barash family somehow also settles in Paris. I am whisked away to a Jewish boarding school outside of Paris. Again, I have very vague memories, except for the deep feelings of lonesomeness and of not belonging, perhaps because I do not speak French. I do not recall ever seeing my father, just an occasional visit with Dela.

Within a few months of arriving in Paris, we were out of there and in Brussels, Belgium. My father somehow managed to befriend two Jewish, Belgian citizens

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(Baumgarten and Liebermann) and they formed a partnership. Yiddish was their common language. As Belgian citizens, they were allowed to work; my father had no work permit. They opened an army surplus store. I remember their most popular item, a green "Churchill" jacket, with multiple pockets in front. Within a year or so, the "surplus" dried up, so they started manufacturing garments and selling them to other stores. It became a big enterprise with a subsidiary in France.

The store was located one block away from our apartment, so I was there quite often, "helping." One time when my father had been ill for several weeks, I decided to "help" even more to compensate for his absence. It was a Sunday, with no one in the facility. I went upstairs where they cut the cloth for shipment to outside facilities. There, covering the length of the 30-foot table was material, all neatly chalked to represent the various parts and sizes of trench coats. I knew the next step was cutting with an electric garment cutter. The battery powered successor to the cutter I used. I proudly and meticulously cut out the numerous pieces, being careful to follow the chalk marks. The next day I was told that I had cut the **pattern!**

Most nights, my father did not sleep at home. It turned out he was in Antwerp, courting my future stepmother, Lucia. During his absences I think the landlady, who lived in the same building, was in charge of me—another unclear memory. The solution was yet another boarding school. I remember having a great math teacher. He gave me a good foundation and liking for math. I might even credit him for giving me the tools necessary for my acceptance to a good college 16 years later.

One day, Father tells me he plans to marry. He introduces me to Lucia, who is also from Poland, and has her own survival story that still weighs heavily on her. She lost her husband and her two daughters in the Holocaust. At our very first meeting, she tells me not to expect her to be a mother to me. She no longer has it in her after the loss of her daughters. She certainly kept her promise or warning. I never felt "mothered," or loved, by Lucia.

After the wedding, the three of us moved into a furnished apartment where I had my own room. The fact that it was furnished was consistent with my father's conviction that World War III was just around the corner. Why invest in furniture? He also applied for immigration visas to the United States, to be as far away from this new war as possible. (Eventually, this would turn out to be the greatest gift he could have given me.)

Life in this new environment took on a different rhythm. I attended school where I made a friend, "Bobby," who was the smartest boy at school. I had a bicycle. I took tennis lessons. I joined the boy scouts. I was sent to a summer camp by the sea. Lucia and father took frequent vacations to neighboring countries, without me.

After a few unsuccessful attempts at learning Hebrew for my Bar Mitzvah, Father—who was not religious—agreed, to my great relief, for me to skip this rite of passage. We did observe some traditions, such as eating gefilte fish or carp for Friday nights' dinners. I remember my father teaching me how to eat carp without biting into to the bones.

Whenever I misbehaved and needed punishment, Father would make me stand in the corner of my room, facing the wall. It seems that I faced that wall many a time, though, occasionally, I thought I detected a softening in the corners of Father's mouth, as if to say "I hate to do this …"

I must have been acting out my emotions. It was not until 25 years later that I discovered I had feelings, and that they did not have to be rational. During this period I felt very lonely, unloved and neglected, and I did things that seemed senseless to my father, such as bicycling 70 miles to the seaside resort of Knokke, where he and Lucia were vacationing without me. Another time I was on vacation at a children's home by the sea when I decided to go home. I took the train back to Brussels without telling anyone. This may have been one of the times I was placed in the corner. Once, coming home, tired and hungry, from a week of camping with the boy scouts, my father and Lucia tell me to help myself to lunch. They stand in the doorway, watching me go to the window sill where the food was usually kept. Inside, I am fuming. I want to cry out, "I am tired. Why can you not, for once, feed me?" But I say nothing. I approach the window sill; it is empty. I turn around and see both of them smiling, and while pointing to the refrigerator, they cry out, "Surprise!" This was our first refrigerator. I did not smile, and I did not feel any better. I just felt even more powerless.

Perhaps the most irrational feelings I had were those of rejection and anger when my one-and-only friend, Bobby, informed me that he and his family were moving to Australia. How dare he leave me alone!

The Samuel Lichtmann Lumber mill in 2007. The house in the front is where Grandpa Samuel and Grandma Sara raised 9 children, 6 sons and 3 daughters. Now it is a furniture factory

PHOTO BY JONATHAN S. LICHTMAN, MY SON.

My father was often sick with what was diagnosed at the time as indigestion. Each time he would recover and move on. This time was different. He was bed-ridden with a very serious heart problem. The doctor, a relative of Lucia, moved in with us to care for him. He, of course, took my room which I (silently) resented immensely. My dad's face was looking thinner and thinner, and the energy seemed to have been sucked out of him. One night I was told to sleep in his bed so that I could help if he needed something. I did. The next morning I woke up and saw that, although he was breathing and his eyes were open, there was something terribly wrong. He was in a coma. The end was inevitable. I was transferred to the Baumgarten's home to

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This is the only prewar picture of both my parents and me.

avoid experiencing his death. Indeed, it came within a day or so. I remember wanting to cry, but I could not. I did love my father. We buried him at the closest Jewish cemetery available, in Putte, Holland.

I wondered what would become of me. I was 15 years old and in charge of shaping my future. Lucia, my stepmother, was out of the picture. Within a short time after burying her husband, she tried to commit suicide. Her emotions could not take one more death in her life. After her attempted suicide, I do not remember if she removed herself as caretaker, or if I crossed her off my list.

So I moved in with the Baumgartens, who were very kind to me. And I enjoyed being with them, as well as playing with and babysitting their one and two year olds. I also experienced my first crush: Suzy, Mrs. Baumgarten's younger sister. We held hands in the back of the car while the Baumgartens snickered in the front.

I continued to attend high school in an old building in the medieval section of town, up the street from the famous statue of "Manneken Pis." My hardest subjects were Flemish, English and gymnastics. It seems that I was physically inadequate, unable to lift myself up a rope or to mount a "horse." I also remember being bullied by a classmate. As to Flemish, I was able to get special dispensation when I told the administrator I was going to the US. English remained a big problem.

By now, Aunt Bronia had remarried and was living in New York with Ron and Adam, her new husband. She sent me an invitation to live with them. I knew she was my father's favorite, so I accepted with joy. Two other events happened around the same time: I visited Israel as a potential place to live, and my immigration visa to the US was approved (thanks to the foresight of my father).

In June 1951, I flew to Israel, where I visited all the tourist places: Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Safed, Haifa, Tiberias, the Dead Sea, Masada, and Bethlehem. I got around alone, by bus, and sometimes by joining tours. I visited Lucia who was vacationing in Tel Aviv and she took me to a Dobromil survivors' luncheon. I was the youngest there, and to my great disappointment, no one paid any attention to me! In Haifa I met my aunt Gina, a lovely lady who greeted me with love and affection. I even visited a couple of kibbutzim and stayed overnight in one of them where I was fortunate to get a personal tour by a young lady (my age), a relative of a friend. This was very enlightening; it helped me to bury any thought I had of living in a kibbutz. I realized I was not meant to be controlled by others. As to the rest of Israel, everywhere I went I saw men and women in uniform, with their weapons ready for the next war.

I had enough of war!

I returned to Brussels to prepare my departure for New York. First, I went to Paris to say goodbye to Dela, Henri and Ruth. They were very special to me and I always felt loved by them.

Mr. Brandes, a relative of Lucia, secured my finances. He negotiated with my father's partners and arranged for a sum of money and a payment schedule of my father's share of the business. Lucia and I would each get half. Half of what? I had no idea. It turned out to be just enough to get me through college. Thank you, Dad.

In December 1951, after saying goodbye to the few people I knew, I boarded one of the last DP (Displaced Persons) boats to leave for the United States. It was a troop carrier that was now ferrying DPs from every corner of Europe to the shores of America. I enjoyed the crossing, especially the notoriety I earned after beating the second best player in a chess tournament. But the best moment came when we reached New York, and Aunt Bronia greeted me with open arms. I felt safe at last. It was the end of my fearing World War III.

The next few years Aunt Bronia, Uncle Adam and Ron gave me a home and the love I did not know I had been craving so much.

POSTSCRIPT

A few years after my father died, Lucia remarried and lived in London. I really liked her husband whom I met during a summer vacation. Again, her marriage did not last long. He died. Lucia was institutionalized, and eventually she died a very sad and bitter woman.

Today, at the age of 79, I am the oldest surviving Lichtman. I am living a very happy life with my loving wife Vibeke in our home in Alamo, CA. I've visited Poland recently and felt not the slightest attachment to it. The United States has become my adopted homeland.

Since coming to the US, I have worked hard, played hard and learned a lot. Armed with a couple of degrees (BME from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and MBA from New York University) I pursued several careers (Engineer, Contract Administrator, Financial Planner and Real Estate Broker) and retired at the age of 48 to manage my own rental units and to pursue my hobby, programming. I publish accounting software.

Life in the US was not always smooth. My first trauma came in 1971, when my first marriage to Marian, the mother of my son Jonathan, broke up. I was devastated. It turned out to be my wake-up call to learn about feelings, about me, and about how to listen and interact with others. I attended many courses and seminars. I was reborn. I even lead "encounter" groups to help others become more aware.

Four year after the divorce, I became aware that I was not meant to work for companies and I charted a course to be financially independent through real estate investments. My timing was perfect. California real estate continually appreciated and within a few short years I was able to achieve my goal.

Still, my awareness was not sufficiently developed when I married my second wife. That marriage lasted 2 years. But it turned out for the best. I finally found Vibeke (Vibs), my perfect wife. Vibs and I are friends with Marian and her husband Dave, and together often celebrate Jonathan's birthday. ■

HIDING FROM THE HOLOCAUST

A talk by Richard Dean Rosen, author of Such Good Girls: *The Journey of the Holocaust's Hidden Child Survivors. Hidden Child Foundation, New York City, November 19, 2014*

I'm very honored and really quite humbled to be asked to speak to you today. I may have written a book about the Holocaust, but I still don't feel I quite belong here. I feel a bit like an impostor in this roomful of those who actually survived under the Nazis.

My book could've been written about any of you. Certainly, one thing I've learned in the past few years is that the story of every one of the roughly 10 percent of Europe's Jewish children who survived the so-called Final Solution is by definition a remarkable tale of luck, circumstance, courage, the astonishing sacrifices of strangers, and ultimately triumph over evil. I've sat in the audience here and heard some of those stories from Judith Sherman, Miriam Schecter, and others. That I ended up writing about Carla Lessing and her husband Ed, Sophie Turner-Zaretsky, and Flora Hogman is the result of serendipity, and I meant for their stories to symbolize the traumas of your entire generation.

Obviously, you don't need me to tell you about surviving the Holocaust. Instead, I will tell you a story you don't know: how I came to write this book centered on three little girls from three different countries who beat some very bad odds. It's the story of how a Jewish kid who grew up in one of the safest places to be a Jew in the history of the world ended up writing about children who grew up in the worst places to be a Jew.

I would like to tell you that I had always wanted to write about three girls who beat the odds only to discover that they then had to survive their survival, try to recover from their losses, try to understand history's abandonment of them and their families, figure out whether they were the Jews they were born as, the Christians they had had to become, or the atheists that the unimaginable trauma of the Holocaust begged them to be, or some undecipherable mix—It would be nice to say that I was put on earth to write this book, that I had been preparing for this book my whole life. I would like to tell you that I had been thinking seriously about the Holocaust for years.

But I can't say that because it's not true. Every author faces obstacles in the writing of a book, and the fact is that my first obstacle was my tremendous resistance to writing it at all. To write *Such Good Girls: The Journey of the Holocaust's Hidden Child Survivors*, I had to cross my own little desert of apathy and denial. Until 2010, it had never consciously crossed my mind to write about hidden child survivors, or any aspect of the Holocaust, even though my own family had lost many Polish, Latvian, and Lithuanian relatives to the Final Solution. But my own grandparents had all come to this country 30 years before the first deportations and murders under the Nazis, so those relatives were shadowy, unknown people to me. My father used to talk constantly about the role of mazel in our lives, and surely this was the greatest instance of it.

I was raised in a very Jewish suburb of Chicago, where the only anti-Semitism I can remember was my Catholic neighbor calling me a "Christ killer" when I was seven. And so unaware of religious differences and conflicts was I that I had no idea what he was talking about. I barely knew who this Christ was. When I asked my mother, the granddaughter of two very religious men, to explain, she didn't have an answer. Today, Johnny, the boy who called me that name, is one of my oldest friends, even though he still refers to gefilte fish as "jeff-lite fish."

Furthermore, I was a child during the 1950s, a decade during which America was only slowly wakening to the reality of what had happened. For most Americans, it wasn't until 1961, when the Hollywood movie *Judgment at Nuremburg* showed documentary footage of the liberation of the camps that the murder of six million Jews broke through into public consciousness. And, then, and despite the Holocaust Remembrance Days that materialized in the aftermath, I, like countless others, filed the horror of it away in a special folder named "Let's Not Look Too Closely At This Again." I never bothered to learn more—to feel more—than your average teenage Reform Jewish-American kid busy playing baseball, getting up the nerve to ask girls out, which for those of us with mazel was as close as we came as children to experiencing real fear.

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For decades, my lack of connection to the nearly successful extermination of my people in Europe tugged at my conscience, like a high school paper I had once failed to turn in, like that regrettable period of shoplifting that I was never arrested for. I was as troubled by my own historical good fortune as I was by what I knew of the Holocaust. A great chasm opened up between the privileged world I lived in and the world of Holocaust victims and survivors. But did I, a writer by profession, author of mystery novels and humor books and a more serious book here and there, a Jew by religious and cultural identity, ever think to write about the Holocaust?

No. Not until 2010, when friends invited me to a Passover Seder in Manhattan, where I was seated across a blond-haired woman in her 70s who had a slight accent, and who, ironically, was the only person at that Seder who didn't quite look Jewish.

We introduced ourselves and when I asked Sophie Turner-Zaretsky about the accent, she said she was born in Poland. "I'm half-Polish!" I said, happy to have common ground. Then I quickly did some math and realized that she must have been a child during World War II. I asked her what she was doing during the war, and her one-word answer to that question changed my life for the next three years, and probably forever. Sophie said, "Hiding."

So did I immediately recognize, at long last, my chance to rectify my ignorance of the Holocaust by writing a serious book about it? Once again, the answer is No. Our host, overhearing Sophie and me talking, told her to tell me about the bear. And so she told me that one of the two toys she had as a child in Poland was a little Steiff bear, which she kept all these years and which now resided in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. I got really excited again because I had the exact same make and model of the Steiff bear as a child. Really, you'll have to excuse my stupidity.

My response to Sophie's story was to think what a great children's book it would make. There were only two things wrong with the children's book plan: one, I don't write children's books, and two, after interviewing Sophie a few times, I realized that her story was far too big for a children's book, that I had no choice but to connect to the Holocaust at last.

Actually, that's not true. I didn't come to the realization entirely on my own. Around that time, my friend Merrill was visiting New York and I told her at dinner about the book I was writing, how Sophie and her mother had walked out of the Lvov ghetto, how they had hidden in plain sight in a small Polish resort town for the rest of the war, how her mother had worked for a Nazi while Sophie, whom her mother had thoroughly schooled in how to pass as a Catholic, actually believed she was an anti-Semitic schoolgirl, how she had this bear… and then I looked at Merrill and actually said, "And here's the best part: the bear is telling the story!"

And Merrill's face just fell and she said, "I'd be interested in reading that book, Richard, as long as a bear isn't telling me the story."

The next morning, I woke up, went to my laptop, and got rid of the bear narrator, and announced to Sophie, much to her dismay, because she was not exactly enjoying my curiosity about her life, that I was now going to write a book about her for grownups that would require longer and more in-depth invasions of her privacy.

Had I not met Sophie, would I have written this book, would I ever have written a book about the Holocaust at all? My guess is probably not. But who knows?

Like many authors, I carry within me unspoken ambitions, unexplored territories, unexpressed desires as a writer, unknown even to me, and perhaps there was another Sophie waiting for me down the road.

There was another factor at work. When I met Sophie, both my parents were failing after long lives. In the moment of my impending loss of the people who connected me most directly to my past and my Judaism, as I write in the book, "Whom should fate seat across from me at a Seder but a combination of surrogate parent and history tutor?"

But, from the earliest phases of writing this book, I was nagged by a new feeling of unease, a new doubt: Who was I, who grew up so far from the Holocaust geographically, psychologically, spiritually, who was I, an outsider, to tell others' stories—and not just tell their stories, but pry out of these once hidden children stories that they themselves were hiding from, and didn't necessarily want to tell?

I must tell you that, in differing degrees, all three women in my book were asking themselves the same question.

If I had known in advance how painful the process was going to be for them, and how difficult for me, I might not have started. I imagined I was excavating memories, but I was playing with fire and didn't realize it. I don't have to tell you that one of the legacies of the Holocaust is that the majority of those who survived it were silenced by it. They could not, would not, talk about it to others, even or particularly within their families, and so the children and grandchildren have had to live with the inarticulate ghosts of the disaster. There were times and periods during the three years I worked on *Such Good Girls* when I thought the book was simply not going to happen.

Without being quite aware of it, I had decided to tell the stories of some people who didn't particularly want to tell them, which wouldn't have been so daunting, except that the people themselves were my only sources.

Sophie Turner-Zaretsky once disappeared from my radar screen for months, leaving me to wonder whether being interrogated by me was just too much. I knew that our sessions left her depressed for days afterwards, and who could blame her for now deciding, if it wasn't too late, to return the rest of her memories to the vault where she had kept them for so long. Another issue I had to contend with was the slippery, devious nature of memory itself and the challenge of getting the stories right. Here's an email from Flora Hogman after I had interviewed her initially and then sent her the draft I had put together about her shattered childhood in France:

Hi Richard:

I have started to read the manuscript over and over again. I hesitated to answer as I am in many regards somewhat dismayed by the writing. There are parts of it which are fine, but others are quite troubling and make it difficult for me to feel that you really concentrated on understanding the person you are talking about and about what happened to her and within her…. Sorry, but I must be honest. It is very important to make come across the power of forgetting and silence, it is not so easy. I hope you feel up to it. All the best, Flora

My response was to throw myself at the mercy of Flora's faulty memory—where else could I turn, but to she who had lived it? As I write in the book, "Getting one's hands on a vanished reality is no easy matter, especially when there's just one

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living witness. At times our sessions felt a little like hand-to-hand combat—with memory itself." My book could only be as good as Flora's and Carla's and Sophie's memories. And I haven't heard too many complaints…yet.

On top of my subjects' reluctance, while writing this book, I asked myself on a very regular basis, "Does the world really need another Holocaust book?" After all, every survivor's story is by definition incredible, and there is no shortage of survivors' memoirs to go along with works of history, literature, and academic research.

And after many fearful moments in which the answer to that question appeared to be a resounding no, the world does NOT need you and your book—after all, my bookshelves were beginning to bulge with just a fraction of writings on the Holocaust, I would take refuge in a thought, however self-justifying, about why there was a place for this book. Not being a survivor conferred a certain advantage; I could write, from a slightly dispassionate remove, about the converging stories of more than a single survivor, follow them into their adulthood, and in the process tell the story of an entire generation of hidden child survivors, the last generation of witnesses to the catastrophe that, even now, many people deny, a generation that had remained hidden as adults, in many cases hidden even from themselves, a generation who could perhaps use someone like me to help tell the larger story. I could tell the story of three Anne Franks who did survive, and who are still alive and well in New York.

Recently, in the *New York Times*, I read an essay called "The Right to Write" by a novelist and biographer named Roxana Robinson that contained the simplest and most beautiful explanation of what it is that we writers sometimes do, and I think what I'm about to read you may help explain why the women in my book did stick with me:

"Writers are trying to reach some understanding of the world, and we do this by setting down stories. We draw on our own experience, but, since that includes everything we encounter, this means drawing on others' stories as well.

"A writer is like a tuning fork: We respond when we're struck by something. The thing is to pay attention, to be ready for radical empathy. If we empty ourselves of ourselves we'll be able to vibrate in synchrony with something deep and powerful. If we're lucky we'll transmit a strong pure note, one that isn't ours, but that passes through us. If we're lucky, it will be a note that reverberates and expands, one that other people will hear and understand."

As Nadezhda Mandelstam wrote in *Hope Against Hope*, and I'm paraphrasing from memory: We are morally obliged to witness the suffering of others. If we as members of the human community do not participate in this essential mandate, then we choose to inhabit a meaningless universe.

But let's not get too lofty here; there's a certain vanity at the core of this project. When I began this project, I thought in that intellectually ambitious way, that it would be great to cross the Holocaust off that list of subjects that I hadn't studied, and didn't understand. There's just one problem: the more you read about the Holocaust, the more you talk to Holocaust survivors, the more you seem to know about it, the less you can comprehend it.

My daily exposure to accounts of German atrocities began to color ordinary life with a gray hopelessness, which is nothing compared to what survivors endure, but I was surprised by its tenacity. When I shared my distress with friends, it turned out that this was a common occupational hazard for people who tackled the subject with any seriousness. I felt I had unwittingly joined a club whose members had struggled, and failed, to understand the most concentrated, organized, industrialized, large-scale, and international act of inhumanity in history.

When a close friend of mine—a brilliantly well-informed, ravenously curious, and very competitive man—read the galleys for my book, he set out to see for himself about the Holocaust. He's a man accustomed to mastering new subject matter with ease. After a week of reading, he called me in frustration, already defeated by the enormity of it, the scale of the inhumanity. That the Final Solution mocks one's efforts to understand it became, for me, no longer just a clever intellectual observation, but a deeply felt emotional reality.

Despite the deniers, the Holocaust will never be forgotten. It is, unfortunately, an incurable disease lodged in the world's bloodstream. While writing the book, as if by virtue of some cosmic force, I suddenly ran into it everywhere. Two years ago, I attended the annual meeting of the World Federation of Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust and their Descendants, which is normally not open to outsiders. All I can say is thank God I already had my subject, but if I didn't I wouldn't have known where to begin. Every story I heard that weekend could've been a book.

Here's the weird part: because Hurricane Sandy was closing the airports, I jumped on an Amtrak train to get back to New York and was seated in the dining car next to a non-Jewish woman who, when I mentioned the conference I'd just attended, told me that when she was a child in Florida, her parents had adopted a Jewish refugee who had been one of Mengele's experimental subjects. Then I discovered that Carla Lessing's husband, who hid in the Dutch Resistance during the war, has a brother who lives a few blocks from where I grew up in Highland Park, Illinois. How strange to go home, where I had grown up in a state of such obliviousness to the Holocaust, to interview Ed Lessing's brother. Then I heard from a high school classmate of mine, whose parents had been child survivors, and she told me about another classmate of mine, whose parents were survivors, and no one had ever said anything about it! And then, just the other weekend, I was visiting my sister, walking the dog with her, and she introduced me to a man my age whose parents were on Schindler's list. And he told me that his family was one of the rare ones where the Holocaust and the camps were talked about openly. So openly that when his parents told this man at the age of seven that they were sending him to summer camp, he assumed it was a concentration camp, that this was just something of a family tradition.

Survivors, their descendants, and their stories surround us. And sadly, they always will, although we must be grateful at the same time that what happened will never be forgotten.

Silence has long since stopped being an option. Around the time *Such Good Girls* was being published, I called Sophie to let her know that *The New York Post* was planning to run an excerpt of the book the following Sunday, an excerpt that concerned Sophie and her mother, and I wanted to make sure she was okay with it.

There was a short pause and then I heard Sophie say, "Well, I guess it's too late to go back into hiding." ■

R. D. Rosen's Such Good Girls *(HarperCollins) is available in bookstores, online, and as an ebook.*

"NAMES, NOT NUMBERS"

By Shira Michaeli

On the morning of April 16, 2015, Shira Michaeli, a student at SAR Academy in Riverdale, NY, delivered the following address at her school's Yom Hashoah assembly. Approximately 800 students, from grades one to eight, were in attendance. Shira has been participating in SAR Academy's program, NAMES, NOT NUMBERS©, an oral history film project, created by educator Tova Rosenberg, which presents a segment of World War II and its aftermath. Under the supervision of Stefa Hasson, the project coordinator and instructor, the students have documented the stories of 43 survivors (7 films over 7 years). Mrs. Hasson, a Hidden Child from Poland, has been running this most popular elective course since her "retirement" 7 years ago after a 30-year career teaching social studies at SAR. The class, which involves specialty trips, training by filmmakers, and expert advice from leading journalists in the art of interviewing, has proven to be a much sought after elective. The students learn valuable lessons and are proud to pass on the legacy of the survivors to future generations. The documentaries have been accepted by Yad Vashem, the Jewish National & University Library in Jerusalem, and the Yeshiva University Library for providing valuable information to researchers and scholars of the Shoah.

Project's culminating event: the showing of this year's film to students, teachers, survivors and their families.

Standing, left to right: Shira Michaeli, Yoni Perla, Hannah Merczynski-Hait, Stefa Hasson (teacher) and Jonathan Feuerstein. Seated, Helena Rezer Boral, a Hidden Child.

They say our generation will be the last to see polar bears, and we can possibly avoid that by taking care of our environment and decreasing global warming. However, we will also be the final generation to meet Holocaust survivors in person, and there is nothing we can do to change that but to preserve their memories and stories as best we can. For the past seven years, SAR has been a part of an amazing program called "Names, not Numbers." Each year, a select group of eighth grade students are enriched with survivor stories of the Holocaust. This year, we interviewed six amazing survivors with a variety of touching stories, finally summarizing our video interviews into a full-fledged documentary. It was so inspirational to learn from these survivors, but what I enjoyed the most was hearing their messages to our generation. They taught us to remain optimistic, to never lose faith, and to appreciate all we have. These survivors were the lucky ones, and their strength through times of peril was indeed an inspiration. For me, preserving their thoughts and memories will be an honor. Telling their stories and reliving their past was for them no easy feat. The process opened old wounds of emotional pain but allowed us to record the terrors of the Holocaust.These survivors were strong enough to help us extract the dehumanization of the Holocaust and turn a number on an arm into a name with a story. And for this, I thank them wholeheartedly.

A VOICE VERY MUCH FROM THE MARGINS:

The Hidden Child Narrative in Adam Thorpe's The Rules of Perspective

By Nigel Rodenhurst, PhD

Having completed my PhD in 2012 on 'dis/simulation' (hiding and disguising) in Jewish American fiction, I was intrigued to come across Adam Thorpe's *The Rules of Perspective* (2005). This was a set text on a course I was asked to teach by Aberystwyth University – 'Re-imagining the World Wars: Contemporary Historical Fiction.' The course features novels written by a generation of authors whose parents lived through the war – the 'postmemory' generation.

The novel is based on a moment in time during World War II. A fictional city in Germany (Lohenfelde) is being bombed. A human tragedy is occurring – civilians are hiding in buildings while missiles fall from the sky. In many ways it reads as a reworking of stories of the fall of Dresden. Some of the main characters of the novel work in an art gallery. Herr Hoffer, the acting director, and his blandly anti-Semitic colleagues are fully aware of the fate that awaits them, and Hoffer regrets deeply that he has not stayed at home with his wife and daughters. He has staged a covert campaign to save some paintings, in particular a convincing forgery, from Nazi appropriation as part of the 'degenerate art' program. This is his 'heroism.' The reader knows that the entire narrative constitutes these protagonists' last days on this earth, which in some respect is a device that encourages the reader to view them as leniently as possible.

In the meantime, a combat haunted American soldier, Parry, having recently witnessed the brutal death of a close comrade who at the time was attempting to sexually exploit a German girl, is walking through the rubble, trying to assist civilians. He finds the painting that Hoffer had fought to save, and being a would-be artist thinks to take it home as 'salvage.' In this respect the novel is set up as a debate concerning the redemptive power or value of art in the face of human atrocity. On the one hand, we have Hoffer's generally lamentable and cowardly nature, mitigated only by his love of art. On the other hand, we have Parry's generally good nature that is blighted only by his vague blurring of art with commercial value.

Several theorists have published book-length investigations into the ethical issues that surround imagining, representing and fictionalizing the Holocaust. Daniel R. Schwarz questioned whether 'the concept of a "fictive construct" [is] disrespectful to the Holocaust, the events of which are all too true.' These questions seem more urgent when an author appears to use traumatic events as a framework through which to discuss wider, philosophical concerns. Accusations of self-absorption occasionally arise.

Where the novel intersects with 'Hidden Child' concerns is through a strange sub-plot that is present in the form of short, italicised passages that as the narrative progresses reveal themselves to be the diary entries of a small child in hiding, afraid and separated from her/his family. At the novel's conclusion there is a note that explains that at the museum a diary belonging to 'an unknown Jewish' girl was found that is a testimony 'to courage in the face of the Fascist horror.'

The way in which Thorpe marginalizes the unknown Jewish girl's diary before, finally placing these words at the very end, mirrors the plight of the Hidden Child and attempts over the last twenty years or more to bring Hidden Child experience to the fore. The revelation concerning the identity of the diary's author and the plight of the child (alongside the strong hint that some of Hoffer's stereotypically anti-Semitic German colleagues may have hidden her) would, for some, be the novel's lasting impression. However, one may question whether this is the author's intention and, even if it was, whether it is effective. The lion's share of the discussion of the novel in reviews seems to be focussed on the two main protagonists. This was mostly true of the seminar discussions on the course.

Of the eight reviews that were surveyed on the course, five of them did not mention the Jewish girl. A reader trying to get a sense of the novel through a review would not know about the hidden child at all. Adam Begley described this aspect of the novel as 'tenuous and a touch confusing.' Stephanie Merritt states that it 'adds little and complicates an already unevenly weighted structure.' The experience of the girl in itself seems bizarrely inconsistent, especially in the early stages. My own hand-written notes on the novel recall that I wondered if there was more than one person speaking in the italicized sections. At one point there are personal, touching, family based recollections. Shortly after this I am noting, 'impersonal philosophy.' Thorpe was praised by reviewers for the research that went into the novel, but this seems to relate to the 'degenerate art' program. I suspect that there was little or no research conducted on Hidden Child experiences.

Looking at Thorpe's oeuvre as a whole, the content and subject matter of the novel raise more questions than they answer. Thorpe's novels are generally investigations of continuities in history that have a strong focus on England and Englishness. There is mention of a Jewish father-in-law in writing on his poetry, but this link does not appear to inform his highly regarded fiction in any significant way. In the light of this it would appear that the text itself and other external factors are the best places to look for explanations of why Thorpe represents certain events in certain ways.

The choice of an American protagonist (for whose speech and general characterization Thorpe was roundly slated in reviews) holds the key to Thorpe's underlying concerns in the novel, which represents events that a British soldier would have been equally likely to have experienced and witnessed. It is in my judgment a post-9/11 love song to America; a scenario revolving around people trapped in a building about to collapse, showing all of their human

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BUILDING A FUTURE FOR RESCUED JEWISH CHILDREN

Celebrating the Accomplishments of the OSE During and After the Shoah

By René Goldman

As noted in previous issues of this publication, the OSE (Organisation de Secours à l'Enfance) observed its centennial in 2012. Founded in St. Petersburg to bring relief to victims of the Russian pogroms, the organization was transferred from Russia's imperial capital to Berlin after the Bolsheviks seized power. Then, in 1933, it moved to Paris, and finally, in 1940, it moved again to Montpellier in the Non-Occupied Zone of France. The OSE is credited with having saved the lives of 5000 Jewish children in France during the Shoah.

The accomplishments of this remarkable organization have appeared in a number of recent publications. Most important among them are the richly documented and artistically produced works of Katy Hazan, the historian of the OSE whose dissertation on the Jewish children after the war earned her a doctorate. Her first book, based on her dissertation, is entitled "Les Orphelins de la Shoah: les Maisons de l'Espoir, 1944-1960 » (Belles Lettres, Paris, 2000). It is a voluminous analytical account of how the several Jewish organizations of France raised orphans of the Shoah in the homes they created for them. That book had two editions.

In 2014, Katy Hazan published "Rire le jour, pleurer la nuit: Les enfants juifs cachés dans la Creuse pendant la guerre, 1939-1944" (Laughing during the day, crying at night), a volume focussed on one of the children's homes established by the OSE in the Creuse, a laid-back and traditional land of refuge in the rural region of central France, the Chateau de Chabannes. At the onset of the war and the occupation of the North, the OSE, concerned with the pauperization of Jewish immigrant families whose men had volunteered to defend France, and with the refugees fleeing southward, decided to take charge of the children. At the initiative of its secretary-general, Félix Chevrier, who was a non-Jew and a native of the Creuse, the OSE leased several abandoned and dilapidated castles in that region. With the assistance of sympathetic local authorities, it hired workmen to repair and equip these castles. The one in the village of Chabannes housed over 300 children, some sent down from Paris by their parents, some released from internment camps on temporary permits. A majority of the children were natives of Germany and Austria.

Repairing the castles and making them liveable was not the only task confronting the highly devoted educators of the OSE homes. An even more daunting challenge was to create in them a home-like atmosphere in which the children who had endured traumas could develop normally. They had to cope with chaos: children who did not discern the difference between freedom and license were wild and destructive. Acting like a loving, yet firm, grandfather, Félix Chevrier expended much effort to rein them in, make them accept discipline and show respect for their educators. The children became involved in cultural activities and physical education. They were taught manual labor, notably gardening. The older ones helped the local peasants in the fields and were apprenticed under the direction of ORT instructor Joseph Koenig, who raised them in a spirit of respect for labor and professional consciousness. The children who attended the school in the village, some of whom had hardly spoken French upon arrival, soon outperformed the peasant children academically, occupying the first classification places in all subjects, a fact which did not fail to create a certain amount of tension in the village.

A particularly captivating section of Dr. Hazan's book is the "Transcription of the Journal of Chabannes," a collection of entries, some authored by Félix Chevrier, most by the children. These are narratives of evacuation from Paris, exodus from Germany, the outbreak of war, separation from parents, daily happenings in the castle and the village, and thoughts about the future. A further section entitled "Annexes" features biographies of some of the children and entries dealing with the internment camps and the situation of the Jews in France.

The next two books by Katy Hazan about the OSE and its work with children warrant particular attention: these are two magnificent albums, artistic in design and appearance, richly illustrated with photographs and photocopies of letters and other documents. The first album, compiled by Dr.Hazan with the participation of Serge Klarsfeld, is entitled "Rescuing Jewish Children during the Nazi occupation: OSE children's homes 1938-1945" and is bilingual: French text on the left side of each page, English text on the right. Its parts detail matters such as the historical mission of the OSE, the children's homes (one chapter on each of the 25 homes), the sheltering of Jewish children from Germany and Austria, the flight from Paris, the extraction of children from French internment camps, the homes in the Italian occupation zone, biographies, memoirs, letters, of individual children, etc. — truly, a cornucopia of documents.

In passing, the author analyzes the backgrounds of the mostly young educators and the pedagogical methods adopted by the OSE in regard to children of different family origins, secular or religiously orthodox. Dr.Hazan discerns two main groups among the pedagogical staff: those of Russian background who were secular, socialist, even communist, and those from Alsace who were religious and observant. Leading figures among the former were Luba Pludermacher and her husband Boris who followed the teaching of Janusz Korczak by establishing at the Chateau du Masgelier a children's republic based primarily on the idea of working the soil (after the war Luba transferred to the communist CCE). Like their peers at Chabannes, the older children of the Masgelier worked in the nearby village. Until November 1942, only the children who did not have French citizenship, particu-

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A Voice Very Much from the Margins

frailty, matching in many respects Frederic Beigbeder's 2003 novel *Windows on the World*. This novel relies on a fictional narrative of Americans trapped at the top of the Twin Towers, facing their last moments, and finds a number of echoes in Thorpe's novel.

Following 9/11 there were a number of acclaimed novels that chose to address those traumatic events from the perspective of previous historical tragedies, the trauma from which was 're-awakened' by the events of September 11th 2001. The post-traumatic symbolic significance of smoke billowing from towers and spreading the smell of burning bodies for miles around requires no further elucidation. Jonathan Safran Foer, a Jewish author, produced *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, a novel in which the main protagonist is a German whose trauma from Dresden is re-awakened by 9/11.

Many of these novels seemed to defend America, representing its consumerist culture and other imperfections in a forgiving way that is opposed to other 'evil' regimes and cultures. I believe that Thorpe's novel makes similar, simplistic conflations. For just one example, the casually racist and anti-Semitic attitudes of the German characters would have been just as likely to have been expressed by a non-Jewish American from West Virginia. Parry, however, is a symbol of American pluralism and diversity, fondly recalling the Jewish residents of his hometown. One may wish to contrast this to the experiences of Jewish GI's, as researched, for instance, by Deborah Dash Moore. Like the firefighters who perished when the twin towers collapsed, Parry loses his life in a building explosion trying to save others who are trapped. He is the best of everything that America stands for as a nation and as a people.

In the light of this I would concur with the critical assessments of the positioning of the hidden child within the novel mentioned above. The experience of this character is marginal in the narrative, and if it serves any purpose at all, it is as a simplistic symbol of 'complete innocence' against which other characters are to be measured. For those who would like to see Hidden Child narratives receive the same level of attention and representation in art and history as other victims, this novel can only disappoint. Figuratively buried beneath effete and self-absorbed philosophical propositions concerning art and literally buried under the rubble of history, this narrative is too thinly imagined and poorly researched to leave anything other than a distinct impression of the character's 'secondariness' to this British novelist's agendas. It is simply not clear where this character 'fits in.'

The critic John de Falbe outlined that 'spliced into the counterpoint of the German/American narrative are diary entries from a Jew hiding in the attic. This may satisfy Thorpe's need for completeness, but it detracts from the book's formal elegance without, I think, contributing very much.' John de Falbe makes clear what his interests are as far as the novel is concerned. It seems that the marginalization and un-researched representation of the Hidden Child in fiction are sadly of secondary importance to some literary critics, as well some novelists.

A previous article by Nigel Rodenhurst, Enduring Trauma: Hidden Child Narratives in Jewish-American Fiction, appeared in the 2014 issue of The Hidden child (Vol.XXII, page 29).

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Building a Future for Rescued Jewish Children

larly those who had been spirited out of internment camps, were in danger of being arrested, but after the occupation of most of the Southern Zone, all Jews faced danger, except for those who lived in the Italian occupation zone until August 1943. The directors of the OSE decided to close the homes after shelters were found for all the children, an ambitious objective that could, alas, only be partially realized. By February 1944 all the homes had been closed.

In addition to the several castles of the Creuse, the OSE also established centers for children with special health or religious needs: among them the Solarium Marin of Palavats-les-Flots, where children spirited out of the internment camp of Rivesaltes were restored to health before being sent to Chabannes or the Masgelier; the Chateau de Morelles operated by Rabbi Zalman Schneerson (see Vol. XIX, 2011 issue of *The Hidden Child*) for children from strictly observant families, an ORT boarding school in Limoges.

The second album follows up on the first and is entitled "Les Enfants de l'Après-Guerre dans les Maisons de l'OSE" (The Post-War Children in the OSE homes). It celebrates the return to life of the children who escaped death at the price of so much suffering, and renders homage to a generation of pedagogues and leaders of the OSE who labored so hard to protect, save, shelter and raise Jewish orphans. Katy Hazan's introduction, entitled "The difficult happiness of being Jewish," is followed by chapters entitled "Reconstruction," "Return to life," "Learning," "Growing up," "Living a Jewish life," and "Exit from exile." Like the first album, it is a stunning production: beautiful photos and photocopies of documents illustrate the highly informative texts about the different homes and those who lived in them.

As was the case with the wartime shelters, some of the post-war OSE homes were secular, others religious, but both held as their ultimate objective the raising of children, conscious and proud of their Jewish heritage, equipped for life, devoted to tikkun olam: the betterment of society and the world. Though mainly intended for orphans, the OSE homes also welcomed children whose parents lived in precarious conditions. An especially well known group were the 426 boys who survived the death camp of Buchenwald, most of whom were for a time housed in the Chateau de Vaucelles in Taverny, the most religious of the homes. Most famous among these boys is the future great writer Elie Wiesel, who departed for the United States in 1947. A difficult challenge confronted the OSE in 1948 when the JOINT decided that it would no longer finance the care of children who had one surviving parent or were 18 years old.

Katy Hazan deserves recognition for her outstanding achievement and her devotion to the perpetuation of the memory of the extraordinary and amazingly meritorious organization that was the OSE.

René Goldman is a graduate of Columbia University and a retired professor of Chinese history at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. He is a native of Luxembourg and a child-survivor of the Shoah in Belgium and France. René has just published his own biography, A Childhood on the Move: Memoirs of a Child-Survivor of the Holocaust.

THE TAILORS OF TOMASZOW: A MEMOIR OF POLISH JEWS

By Rena Margulies Chernoff and Allan Chernoff
Texas Tech University Press, 2014, Lubbock, TX, 182 pp.

In 1935 the Joint Distribution Committee commissioned the Russian born photographer Roman Vishniac to document Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. A selection of those photographs, made between 1935 and 1939, would later be published as ***A Vanished World***.[1] Like works in an exhibition, Vishniac's pictures offer multiple glimpses into European Jewry in the years before its destruction. One can hardly look at these images without feeling the immense distance of time and fate that separates us from the faces and scenes preserved in these pages. Within the space of just a few years nearly everyone who looked into Vishniac's lens would be murdered. Part of the force of Vishniac's visual record, compiled from all over Eastern Europe, lies in what we will never know. Who these people were, how their lives might have been fulfilled, and what they might have contributed—these questions are evoked but never answered. It scarcely needs a narrative to add to its power.

A different approach is taken in the *Tailors of Tomaszow*, by Rena Margulies Chernoff and Allan Chernoff. Through a meticulously reconstructed narrative that represents a small Polish city, Tomaszow-Mazowiecki, and its large Jewish community as it existed before, during and after Nazi occupation, the Chernoffs open a door, inviting us into that world. In its richness and precision, their account achingly demonstrates how ephemeral a geographical space can be. The Chernoffs' account joins memory and forgetting within what the anthropologist Jonathan Boyarin calls "a geography of common reference," in which "forgetting and memory are so intermingled as to become almost one."[2] Reading their words, we cannot help but realize how much of their narrative would never have been known, but for their retelling, or consider the infinite number of narratives that will remain untold.

What distinguishes this narrative is the way in which it combines the perspectives of two generations. Rena Margulies Chernoff's recollections, and those that she gathered from others, display all the immediacy of first hand description. Her narrative includes tales of family disputes, misbehaving employees and practical jokes, before moving on to the horrors of Auschwitz and the martyrdom of her younger brother, Romek. The phenomenological challenges of reconstructing and representing, nearly eight decades later, a community that has been irrevocably destroyed, fell to Rena's son, American-born journalist Allan Chernoff. The dual vision that results from their collaboration produces an almost stereoscopic view of their community. Homes, factories, the synagogue, and streets stand out in such high relief that we feel as if we could navigate the pre-war city blindfolded. We learn that the main sections of Tomazow were called, in Yiddish, *in der gas* and *iber der brick*, and that the three major textile factories, "the backbone of the town's economy," as well as the public bathhouse, were located *iber der brik*, across the Wilborka river.[3] The Margulies family's apartment and tailor shop, at Antoniego 21,were *in der gas*, ("in the street"), or in town. We learn that most buildings did not have running water, and instead relied on the services of a *wassen trager*, or water carrier. The Margulies family was fortunate to have a pump in the backyard, though it took some skill to operate it. Five year-old Rena started kindergarten on Pilsudskiego Street in *der gas*. We learn of the brick fences she would pass on the way, and of the glass of milk she couldn't finish on the day the class buried a small bird. The town's biggest synagogue, the Groys Shul, stood on Handlova Street. The changing seasons of family as well as community life—births, marriages, deaths, and their associated and other rituals—take place against settings such as these. Despite the economic troubles of the thirties and the rise of an increasingly virulent anti-Semitism in the years before the war, Tomaszow appears as a place fixed in time, immutable.

Rena Margulies was six years old when the war began and only eleven when she arrived at Auschwitz on July 30, 1944, after a period in the labor camp Blizyn. She is thus one of the youngest survivors—and one of the last direct witnesses—of the Shoah. Rena's own voice is clearer at times than at others. When we learn, for example, how Tomaszow became a center for the tailoring industry, due to the presence of the nearby mills, and the waterpower supplied by the three rivers that traverse the city, it is not hard to hear Allan's voice-over. When we hear her tell how her father and his brother, after a stay in France, set up a "Parisian" tailoring shop, we feel as though we are eavesdropping on a family conversation. And when she relates her most painful memories, she is in full command of the narrative.

As war and occupation intrude; as a murderous new regime forces the Jewish population into a ghetto and then into sub-ghettos, time speeds up, and space becomes part of the narrative in a new way: as events. Internal displacement is followed by external displacement. Stripped of its relational and even physical spaces, Tomaszow continues to exist, but only in memory. For those who survive it remains

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HOUSTON 2015 JOINT CONFERENCE

WORLD FEDERATION OF JEWISH CHILD SURVIVORS OF THE HOLOCAUST AND DESCENDANTS

GENERATIONS OF THE SHOAH INTERNATIONAL (GSI)

The Westin Galleria, Houston, Texas, USA
October 9-12, 2015

Conference Registration in link below:
www.hmh.org/World_Federation_Conference.shtml

Hotel link: https://www.starwoodmeeting.com/StarGroupsWeb/booking/reservation?id=1405083073&key=18C16D8C

"a geography of common reference." As a mnemonic device, Tomaszow evokes the "memory palaces" of the classical world: those imaginary structures with well-defined spaces that served as a basis for remembering and retrieving information. Reconstructed in memory, it invites recall and keeps the past alive. For Rena and her mother, that past, and the certainties attached to it, provide a small degree of stability during their time at Auschwitz.

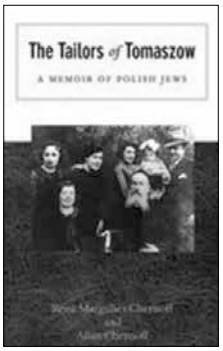
Imbedded in the book's title is a suggestion of why some of the residents of Tomaszow, particularly the younger ones were able to survive the camps. At first officers with the occupying German forces sought out the services of tailors for their custom suits and leather coats. One grateful German officer offered to fly Rena's family to Switzerland in his plane, a proposition her father refused, not wanting to abandon other family members. But by the end of 1940, the Nazis had seized Jewish businesses, herded Tomaszow's Jews into progressively smaller ghettos, and established a series of slave labor workshops. Rena tells us,

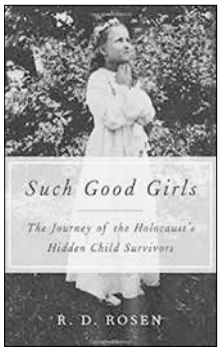
"One day the Germans came to confiscate my sewing machine," remembered Uncle Jozef. "My wife complained, 'How will we make a living?' The German said, "You'll be thankful to me that you're working for the Germans."[4]

Working on the second floor of a converted textile mill, six days a week, the tailors, now slave laborers, numbered about 100 men and women. There they produced both uniforms and nonmilitary clothing. Carpenters, shoemakers and dressmakers occupied the other floors, producing goods for both the Germans and the local *Volkdeutschen*, ethnic Germans who lived in Poland. Officially, the Germans paid the tailors with "a half-loaf of round, dark bread every Saturday, some margarine, and a potato."[5] Sometimes clients would supplement these meager rations with additional food. The invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, and the need for additional clothing for the Eastern front, required the continued services of tailors. Although the majority of Tomaszow's Jews were deported to Treblinka in two actions in late 1942, Rena, her parents and her brother remained in Tomaszow until May 30, 1943, when they were sent to the labor camp at Bilzyn. From there, the family was deported to Auschwitz on July 30, 1944. The liberation of the camp by the Soviets, less than six months later, would be too late to save the life of Rena's father or her brother Romek.

After their liberation mother and daughter try to resettle in Tomaszow. Few traces of the city they knew remain. Cognitive dissonance, a lack of understanding, the prevailing anti-Semitism and an unabated sense of loss compel them to leave for America.

Much more than a simple memoir, *The Tailors of Tomaszow* is a significant contribution to the literature of collective memory. This slim volume demonstrates the intimate linkages between space and the reconstruction of the past, recalling not only events but also the geography against





which they were played out.

Just as physical destruction does, the destruction of memory inevitably deforms what remains. Without detailed descriptions of Jewish life before the war, it is easy to overlook the dense and complex culture that existed in Eastern Europe or to draw erroneous conclusions. In its reconstruction of Tomaszow-Mazowiecki's Jewish community, The Tailors of Tomaszow goes a long way toward reversing this destruction.

The importance of this book for the history of the Shoah and the society that it destroyed should be evident. As well, its treatment of the interaction of space and time strongly recommends it as a reading at the upper secondary or university level. For courses on collective memory, its accessibility, precision, and relative brevity would make it an excellent complement to more theoretical works such as Boyarin, Halbwachs or Benjamin.

Reviewed by Anne Griffin, Professor of Sociology at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art.

1. Roman Vishniac, *A Vanished World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983).

2. Jonathan Boyarin, "The Lower East Side: A Place of Forgetting," in *Storm from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 4-5.

3.Chernoff and Chernoff, pp. 18-19.

4. Chernoff and Chernoff, p. 66.

5. P. 66.

SUCH GOOD GIRLS

The Journey of the Holocaust's Hidden Child Survivors

By R. D. Rosen
Harper, 2014, pp 257

During his three-year struggle with the topic, with the "excavation" of his subjects' distressing memories and the difficulties of writing this book (see Hiding from the Holocaust in this issue, page 40), Richard Rosen often asked himself: "Does the world really need another Holocaust book?" Richard was not alone in his avoidance of and struggle with the Holocaust. For decades, survivors and non-survivors have danced around the subject with discomfort. Why recall painful memories? Why ask hurtful questions? So it became a decades-long habit: we didn't tell, and nobody asked.

The floodgates to the history of the Hidden Children opened after the first international gathering, organized by the Hidden Child Foundation/ADL, in 1991, when we were exhorted to "tell our stories." With the spate of books that ensued, Richard was justified in asking himself that question. And when he finally concludes, "Not being a survivor conferred a certain advantage; I could write, from a slightly dispassionate remove, about the converging stories of more than a single survivor, follow them into their adulthood, and in the process tell the story of an entire generation of hidden child survivors," I am in total agreement.

This book, which focuses mostly (but not entirely) on the lives of three women—Sophie, Flora and Carla—does speak for most Hidden Children: we've lived a lifetime with the memories of war and persecution, and, on the whole, we've had productive, successful lives. Richard presents a full picture: all three women are strong, accomplished and resolute, yet he lays bare their (and our) insecurities, foibles, nightmares and fears. He addresses

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our feelings of "otherness," "loneliness," in short, of not belonging anywhere—not even among survivors—with sensitivity, intelligence and understanding.

It is also an honest and courageous appraisal of the deafening silence we, survivors, encountered in America, particularly from the Jewish community. Surely, at one time or another, all Jews have contemplated the tragedy of the Holocaust, but in the rapid unfolding of postwar events, such thoughts became increasingly distant. As Richard says, "I, like countless others, filed the horror of it away in a special folder named 'Let's Not Look Too Closely at This Again.'" Richard's uncomfortable realization of his own "apathy" is a necessary part of the complete story of Hidden Children in America.

So, should anyone ask me to produce a shortlist of best books on the Hidden Child experience, this one would rank near the top!

Reviewed by Rachelle Goldstein, Editor.

A CHILDHOOD ON THE MOVE

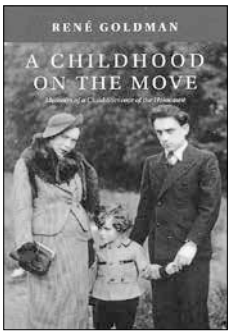
Memoirs of a Child-Survivor of the Holocaust

By René Goldman
British Columbia, Canada, 2014, 312 pp
Available from the author. $20
email: t.dekur@shaw.ca

Our readers may recognize the name René Goldman from his reviews of French books, including *A La Bonne Adresse* and the works of Katy Hazan in this issue, and the many articles—some personal, some historical—that he has previously written for *The Hidden Child*. Now, after a successful career at the University of British Columbia, this retired professor of Chinese history has taken up the challenge of narrating the story of his childhood and young adulthood. What René has produced is a most remarkable memoir—remarkable for its attention to detail and history, for its total recall and observations, and for his clear articulation of the agonizing emotions of the times. His wartime peregrinations begin when, at age 6, he and his parents leave the country of his birth, Luxembourg, for Belgium; this is followed by their flight to Vichy France at a most inauspicious time for Jews, particularly Jewish refugees. "Our family had found 'refuge' in the Free Zone precisely at the time when it became the scene of… 'rafles.'"

The most painful passage occurs when he is violently separated from his mother: "… I was too dumbfounded to run… He [The French police commissar] violently seized me by the hair and the seat of my trousers. Thus holding me kicking and screaming, that brute ran inside the station and towards the awaiting train on the first platform; past Mama who I saw being dragged over the station floor struggling and crying. The entire station was a scene of bedlam, with men, women and children being pulled, shoved, and hurled into the train."

Moving from place to place, from Jewish institutions to convents, he expresses



his sorrow and confusion: "What a good little Catholic I had become! I found in religion a balm for my emotional distress. As if praying when required… was not enough to soothe my soul, I also used idle moments to pace along the corridors, rosary in hand, reciting at each bead the Ave Maria… Mademoiselle Marie-Renée smiled benignly when I once told her that… I hoped to become a saint and ascend to Heaven to be reunited with my parents, as if in some dark recesses of my heart an inaudible voice sadly whispered that I might never see them again."

René barely escaped the tragic fate of his parents, but as he says about the orphans of the Shoah, "… we were compelled to silence the trauma which we endured and prompted to look to the future. In the course of the past thirty odd years, as our generation advanced into that age which inclines one to look more backward than forward, we emerged from our shells to bear our own testimonies."

This book covers the postwar years with equal intensity and introspection, starting with the recounting of living in a string of Jewish homes in France, then moving to Poland, where he completes his secondary education, and on to China where he begins his higher education. This memoir offers a very sensitive and descriptive look into the lot of one Jewish child, but the experience is an enriching one. René's coming of age and his political and intellectual maturity take many interesting turns, making this memoir a thoroughly enjoyable experience.

Reviewed by Rachelle Goldstein, Editor.

THE JEWISH GHETTO OF PIOTRKOW TRYBUNALSKI

A History of the Life and Extermination of a Jewish Shtetl during the Holocaust

By Anna Rzedowska and Dina Feldman
Biblioteka Piotrkow 800 Press (in Polish), 2014, 383 pp.

This remarkable book, published in Poland by Anna Rzedowska, a Polish writer and historian from Piotrkow Trybunalski, and Dina Feldman, an Israeli psychologist and researcher from Jerusalem, is a heart-wrenching, meticulously documented book about the life and the extermination of a Jewish community. (For now, it is only accessible in Polish.)

For eight hundred years, Piotrkow Trybunalski had been a site steeped in history. Here, kings, knights, noblemen and clergy gathered and established the law of the land, the Polish Parliament and the Crown Tribunal. At the beginning of World War II, the town had about 60,000 inhabitants, of whom about 15,000 were Jews.

The Piotrkow Trybunalski ghetto, created on October 8, 1939, was the first ghetto to be established by the Nazis in occupied Europe. Due to the influx of refugees from a number of smaller shtetls in the area, its Jewish population almost doubled. In October 1942, most of Piotrkow's Jews were sent to their death in the Treblinka and Majdanek gas chambers.

The book presents a broad picture of the hardships imposed by the iron-fisted Germans. Even before the ghetto was liquidated, conditions were such that many Jews had died of starvation, disease, executions and "resettlements." Other factors affecting their wellbeing were over-

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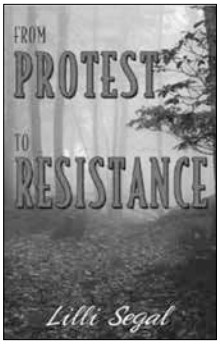
crowding, slave labor, general pauperization and strict limitations on all human interactions and activities.

On the other hand, the authors also show a convincing picture of a Jewish community fighting for survival—for saving, especially, the children; for maintaining their humanity by cultural activity—in other words, for keeping a semblance of life under increasingly hopeless conditions.

The book contains a wealth of material: statistics, references (from German and Judenrat documents), lists of people sent to hard labor or murdered; published and unpublished testimonies and memoirs recorded by survivors. All are derived from sources in Polish, Yiddish, Hebrew, German and English. By quoting numerous testimonies and conveying each person's feelings of doom, entrapment and defenselessness, the authors manage to remove the anonymity of all those who perished.

The degrading and deadly living conditions of Jews in ghettos and their ultimate extermination are generally well known. The psychological aspect is much more difficult to convey. I believe that only those who "have been there" can actually read the despair, horror, hopelessness and mental torture behind the presentations of statistics, historical data and, particularly, photographs. I was there. At barely four years of age, I became an inmate of Piotrkow Trybunalski ghetto. My mother and I escaped from the ghetto just before its liquidation, in October 1942, when I was seven. We survived the rest of the war in hiding. Some people doubt that a child of this age can remember life as it was. However, I believe that my memory reflects more than observations only. In other words, I did not "know," I felt what it was like to be a child in the ghetto. That is why I wrote this review.

I remember always being hungry and scared, and having painful sores caused by malnutrition. I remember my grandmother saying, after seeing a funeral, "That's a fortunate woman; she died in her own bed!" I remember grown-ups talking with envy about the death of our relatives poisoned in their sleep by carbon monoxide; I remember the whispering adults, the feeling of crowding and tension. I remember Yom Kippur of 1942: instead of the usual prayers, there was the wailing and the begging for mercy. Two young girls, the lone survivors of their entire family, will always remain in my memory. Hair shaven, skinny as corpses, with gray eyes taking up half their faces, these girls came to our house daily to receive one boiled potato each. They'd grab their potato, and, without a word, run away. As I read the book, I felt the place, the people. I could see myself there, especially in the chapter titled, "Childhood in the ghetto." I can easily sense a child being given away to a Christian family (but it is still beyond me to imagine the feelings of the parents).



Another chapter that moved me to tears is titled, "Clandestine Education." It is about children, 10 to 15-16 years old, coming for classes taught by my mother, Bajla-Ruda Ejchner, in our cramped, little room, in which lived four adults and two younger kids. They were happy they could go to school, and they always showed up with their homework completed. After the war, my mother told me that only 3 of her 35 pupils survived. Only these 3 had full lives. The others could only forget for but a few hours that they were in a ghetto…

Reviewed by Krysia Ejchner Plochocki.

FROM PROTEST TO RESISTANCE

By Lilli Segal
Translated from German to English by Margo R. Kaufman
Dog Ear Publishing, Indianapolis, IN
Paperback or Kindle version at Amazon.com

This tale of an extraordinary woman was first published in Germany in 1986. Born into a well-to-do Jewish family in Berlin, Lilli Segal (1913-1999) left Germany for Paris when the Nazis came to power in 1933. In 1940, she and her husband, Jascha, a physicist, fled Paris on bicycles, dodging German bombers, only to return and join the French Resistance. In 1943, Lilli was arrested and deported to Auschwitz. In 1944, she escaped and made a perilous journey across war-torn Germany to Switzerland. Lilli and Jascha were reunited after the war. The book recounts Lilli's courageous life journey, growing up during the buildup of fascism and anti-Jewish sentiment in Germany, her work with the French Resistance, her escape from Auschwitz and her path towards becoming a prominent biochemist after the war. It is a detailed narrative of people and events, whose purpose was, as Lilli's writes, "to assure that the Holocaust would not be repeated."

A LA BONNE ADRESSE

By Bert Kok
Original title: Aan het Goede Adres
French translation by Micheline Weinstein
Editions le Temps du Non, Paris 1992, 218 pages

In today's alarming times, when violent anti-Semitism surges anew in a perplexed Europe, it is particularly important to remember and publicize the deeds of righteous gentiles, who in the darkness of the Shoah mobilized themselves to rescue our tormented people. Among several such groups, the *Naamloze Vernootschap* (NV), or Anonymous Society in Holland, is characterized by the very young age of its members, some mere teenagers, others in their early twenties. Their courageous acts are related by Bert Kok, author of books for children and adolescents, born after the war, in 1949. Kok was told the story of the NV by one of the children it saved, the writer Max Arian, who wrote the afterword to this book. Here, Arian recounts his own story and comments on the fate of the young heroes of the Dutch resistance.

The guiding principle of the NV was that because children constitute the future of a nation, everything must be done— all risks taken—to rescue Jewish children by identifying families willing to hide them. This was no easy feat in a small crowded country, where many citizens feigned ignorance to what was happening to their Jewish compatriots, or worse, collaborated in their persecution. Of the 4,500 children who survived in hiding in Holland,

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250 were saved by the NV. Most were sheltered by farming families in the provinces of Limburg and Overijsel. Only one of these children died, and it was of illness. On occasions, the NV assisted adults by helping them change their names and procure false identity papers. While the names of the children are fictitious, the stories of their rescue are authentic, as are the names of the NV heroes cited in the story, notably the 23-year-old leader of the group Dick Groenewegen van Wijk, the brothers Gerard and Jaap Musch and Annemarie van Verschuer. Arrested in 1944, Dick and Gerard survived terrible suffering in concentration camps, while Jaap died under torture without revealing where he had hidden the children who had been under his care.

A particularly captivating example of the work of the NV is the story of how two girls who had witnessed the arrest of their parents had to be moved from one host family to another amid mounting danger while their brother Lowie Hartog took part in resistance activities.

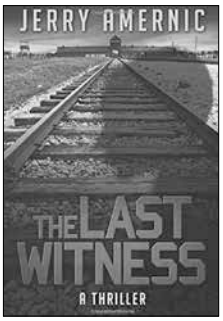
Such was the modesty of the young heroes of the NV that it took every effort on the part of the child-survivors to convince them that their story should be written up and publicized as a lesson that no one should remain passive in the face of persecution and extermination of a minority group. In 1982 Yad VaShem recognized the heroes of the NV as "Righteous Among the Nations."

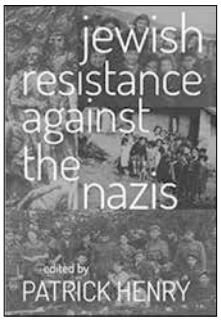
Review by René Goldman; see his bio on page 46

THE LAST WITNESS

By Jerry Amernic
Story Merchant Books, 2014
Available in Kindle Books

Jack Fisher, who lives in a retirement home in New York City, is 100 years old and is celebrating his birthday. He has family—children and grandchildren—yet all is not right in Jack Fisher's world. Fisher is the central figure in Jerry Amernic's new book, *The Last Witness*. History also plays a central role in this engrossing narrative—the history of the Holocaust, of Jack Fisher's survival in Auschwitz as a five-year-old child, and of what happens when society forgets the bitter lessons of the past. *The Last Witness*, set partly in the near future and partly in the past, unfolds as a powerful and multi-layered narrative. Its cast of characters includes an array of unforgettable characters, each driven by their own irresistible needs. Jack Fisher is working on his "second hundred years." Fisher's great-granddaughter, Christine, a school teacher in a midsized Ontario city, is trying to understand why her school board teaches a version of history which has no place for the Holocaust. Lt. Jack Hodgson of the NY Police Department finds himself investigating mysterious deaths. Amernic skilfully combines flashbacks, suspenseful episodic treatment, lively personality profiling and dramatic scene-setting in a book that keeps the reader involved to the last page. But it is more than spine-tingling storytelling that makes The Last Witness a memorable book. Amernic's theory that society will one day soon forget the Holocaust ever happened may at first seem an unlikely prospect. Considered against today's rise in anti-Semitism and the furor of extremist Islamic groups warring on Jews and Christians alike, The Last Witness poses both a challenge and a warning.





Review by Ray Argyle, author of The Paris Game: Charles de Gaulle, the Liberation of Paris, and the Gamble that Won France.

JEWISH RESISTANCE AGAINST THE NAZIS

Edited by Patrick Henry
The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2014, 630 pp

In his introduction to this book, Patrick Henry says: "Although the myth of Jewish passivity during the Holocaust has been thoroughly discredited in the scholarly world, it lives on in the popular mentality and is often expressed in such phrases as 'the Jews were led to the slaughter like sheep.'" He goes on to cite examples of the propagation of such myths through the media, and states that Nazis have played a role in disseminating this myth, because "this blaming of the victim somehow exculpates the killers from their crimes." And he adds, "This myth also served to justify the bystanders. If the Jews did nothing to save themselves, why should others have risked their lives to help them?"

The sad reality is that much has been written on the subject of Jewish resistance, yet little is generally known. Perhaps the only image that has caught the public's imagination is that of the Warsaw Ghetto Fighter.

This long-awaited, stirring and detailed collection of essays sets out to remedy all prior misconceptions. The book explores the myths of passivity, the old questions, such as, "Why didn't they resist more?" and the omissions and distortions of facts of Jewish Resistance.

All forms of Jewish resistance, in each of the occupied countries, are explored—with and without arms, through Jewish organizations, through mutual aid, through cooperative efforts with political and humanitarian groups, and even resistance in the camps.

In assembling this most impressive collection of essays, Editor Patrick Henry has produced the most complete account of Jewish resistance anywhere. Whether for student, scholar or general reader, this tome is imperative in any Holocaust library.

Patrick Henry is the Cushing Eells Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Literature and Foreign Languages at Whitman College.

Reviewed by Rachelle Goldstein, Editor.

ALDO FINZI: A SON'S REMEMBRANCE

By Bruno Finzi

I belong to an old Jewish family, originally from Mantua, with a traditional love for music. My father, Aldo Finzi, born in Milan in February 1897, was a gifted musician/composer. His father's sister, Giuseppina Finzi Magrini, was a celebrated soprano. After completing his classic studies at the Liceo Parini in Milan, my father obtained a degree in law at the University of Pavia. At the same time, he dedicated himself to the music he loved and received his Diploma in Composition as a private student at the Conservatory of Santa Cecilia in Rome.

Aldo Finzi as a young man.

Soon, he attained success and celebrity among the young Italian composers. By the age of twenty-four, his works were published by Ricordi, and before this by Fantuzzi and Sonzogno. Ricordi's catalogue of 1931 mentions among his compositions, "Il Chiostro" for female voices and orchestra, the symphonic poems "Cirano di Bergerac," specially mentioned in a competition whose board included Toscanini and Pizzetti as judges, and "Inni alla note" (Hymns to the night), a "Sonata" for violin and piano, a Quartet for string instruments, and various lyrics ("Barque d'or," and "Serenata"). He was intensely active in the 1930s. Among his more important works were "L'Infinito" in 1933, "Interludio" in 1934, and "Nunquam" in 1937.

In 1937, "La Serenata al Vento," ("The Serenade to the Wind"), a comic opera based on a libretto by Carlo Veneziani, had been entered into a competition for a new production to be played at the legendary La Scala the following season (1938).

It seems like yesterday that I was walking with my father in the famous Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, when the master of La Scala, Riccardo Pick-Mangiagalli, who was sitting on the jury of this competition, approached us. "I should not say anything," he told my father, "but I wanted to offer you my congratulations. The Serenata won. You can start thinking about the production, the cast, the staging." My father was overjoyed! But the racial laws had already been established, and he was denied this opportunity to perform his music.

Dark times were approaching fast, and he could no longer earn a living. But that didn't stop him from composing, sometimes anonymously or under an assumed name. In 1939, he wrote a symphonic poem. (After the war, his sister gave it a title, "Come all'ultimo suo ciascun artista," taken from a verse in Dante's "Divina Commedia.") In 1940 he wrote "Danza," a concerto for two pianos, saxophones and orchestra; and in 1942, he worked on "Shylock," a dramatic work based on the libretto by Rossato, which focuses on Shylock's "complaint" on the persecution of his people. In 1944, while hiding in my grandmother's house in Turin, my father wrote "Preludio and Fugue" for organ.

During the German occupation of Northern Italy, I was sheltered in the high valleys of Lanzo Torinese, but as the German and fascist troops began raiding the area, I was compelled to take refuge in my grandmother's vacated office in Turin. Since my grandmother's evacuation from the city, it had been kept empty and dark. Still, my grandmother brought me all that was needed to sustain me. My parents and my 8-year-old sister were hiding nearby in my grandmother's house that had also been emptied.

During one of my grandmother's visits to my hiding place, the bell rang unexpectedly. Four men were at the gate, asking for Maestro Aldo Finzi and exhibiting a

Aldo Finzi's false I.D. card, dated August 17, 1943.

stamped warrant of arrest from the German command. When my grandmother replied that Aldo Finzi was not there, they said that, in this case, they would search the office. Fearing they would find me, she offered to telephone my father. At the other end of the line, my father immediately understood the situation and assured her he would deliver himself into their hands at once.

Both my parents appeared, and after my mother's desperate pleas, the men, who fortunately were Italian, asked for a bribe for my father's liberty. There was an exchange of some money—not really much—plus two Persian carpets and my mother's wedding ring, and the men left, promising to return for more money. I remained quiet and hidden for the entire episode.

After this close call, we all escaped in different directions: my father, my mother and my sister found refuge in a boarding-house, and there, without the aid of a piano, my father wrote the "Salmo per coro e orchestra," (Psalm for Choir and Orchestra) to thank the Lord for having saved his son, and to express his firm belief in Divine Providence.

Many people helped in our rescue, most particularly Sister Francesca Naso, a Sicilian Waldensian nun, who obtained, for my mother and me forged, but perfect, identity cards, bearing her family name so that she could guarantee our safety.

However, my father was both physically and morally exhausted by the blows he had suffered in these last years, and he died a few months later, on February 7, 1945, before the war had ended. His last words to us in the dreary room of the bleak boarding-house where he died were, "fate eseguire la mia musica" (let my music be performed).