

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATORS • A ROTHMAN FOUNDATION PUBLICATION

# PRISM

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# PRISM

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL  
FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATORS

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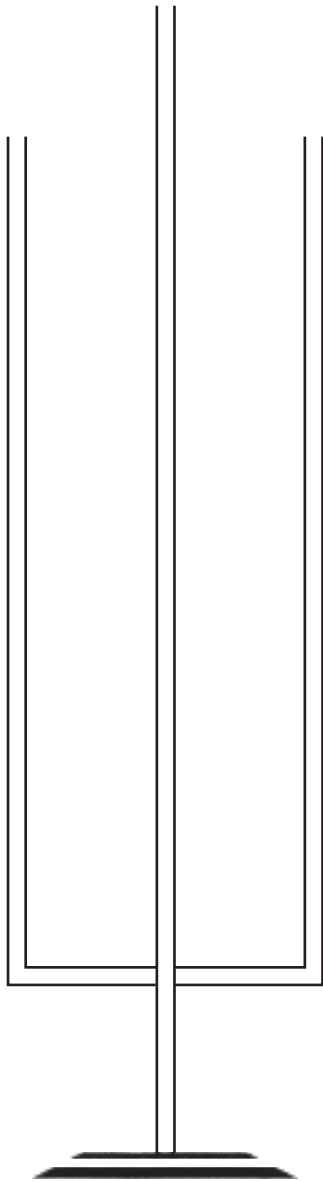
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Letters to the editors are welcomed.

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## Introduction

Our call for papers on the theme of family life during the Holocaust brought a larger response than we had anticipated, as did our call for responses to the theme of the Second Generation and beyond. As we reviewed the interdisciplinary submissions, we realized that it would be difficult and arbitrary to separate them into two issues; each study, narrative, essay, poem, and painting seemed connected inextricably to one another, with complex and interwoven implicit or explicit references to survivors, their children, and their grandchildren. Thus, we decided to combine the themes and produce one annual journal that would afford readers a broad but deep perspective on the issues that confront the multigenerational family, touched and shadowed by the events of the time.

One thread connecting generations and genres is the unremitting longing to undo history, to bring back lost family. This yearning is illustrated vividly by the Israeli artist and child of survivors Daniela Rosenhouse, whose painting graces our cover and whose body of work is explored by *PRISM* art editor Pnina Rosenberg. Author and teacher Lila Korn uses words to paint an intensely personal narrative that, with its accompanying photographs, brings her mother's murdered family to life. The poems of Irving Feldman, Heidemarie Pilc, Seymour Mayne, Marjorie Agosin, Janet R. Kirchheimer, and Stanley H. Barkan serve as a memorial to our collective losses and a monument to resilience, helping all of us recognize and participate in the process of mourning and mending.

Professors Nancy D. Kersell and Alison Dobrick and teacher Joshua Levy address current pedagogical concerns about teaching the third generation, those who are grandchildren of survivors and those simply born in the third generation after the Holocaust. Their work, as well as the related poetry of Kenneth Sherman, John Amen, and Mark Nepo, raises essential questions about our students' connections—from intimate to none—to this history and what that distinction might mean for the teaching goals, methodologies, and materials we bring to our classes.

Another integral thread is the anger that grows from the seeds of despair coupled with unstinting attempts to reflect, understand, repair, and forgive. Poets Giora Leshem, Judith Chalmer, Sarah Traister Moskovitz, Hilary Tham, Pessie Horowitz, and Gregg Shapiro bring us anguished childhood moments along with adult reflections on living in the aftermath of the devastation. *PRISM* poetry editor Charles Adès Fishman offers insight into the legacy of Anne Frank in his tribute to the writer Janet Brennan. We are especially grateful to Charles, who has made possible the publication of the



wealth of poetry in this issue and has provided calm and careful guidance during the many months we turned to him for advice.

Evidence of what Lawrence L. Langer has termed “choiceless choices” connects the works of scholars, writers, and poets. Israeli professors Keren Goldfrad and Chani Levene-Nachshon, with their scholarly and insightful analysis of the Yiddish writer Rachel Haring Korn's agonizing tale of an intolerable dilemma, help us to understand this little-known narrative of a trapped and

desperate Polish Jewish family and to feel more comfortable teaching it. Rachel Goldstein and Myra Sklarew, in heart-breaking poems that make us want to rend our clothing, make vivid the impossible quandaries that confronted Jews at that time.

The historical thread connects a painting by artist Herb Stern, who fled Germany with his family, to the work of a young researcher, Rachel Iskov, who proposes the term “familial resistance” as a lens through which to examine the distinct responses of family units fighting to survive intact. Historians Brana Gurewitsch and Carson Phillips, in parallel essays, use oral history, archival documents, and memoir to detail the experience of six Jewish families during and after the Holocaust. Poems by Marge Piercy, Israel I. Halpern, Irena Klepfisz, and Helen Degen Cohen recount historical yet luminous truths.

Psychologists Eva Fogelman and the research team of Marina Stolerman, Penina Dorfman, and Louise Bordeaux Silverstein provide the analytical and experimental underpinnings in reflective studies that grew out of their own work with Holocaust families, while the monograph by the Israeli printmaker Josh Freedman allows us to interpret his painting of a Holocaust family. In personal narratives, survivors Miriam Miasnik Brysk and Leo Goldberger share their own stories as children who survived with their families, Professor Brysk in hiding and then in the Lipiczany forest in Poland, and Professor Goldberger in Denmark during the October 1943 roundup. From his unique vantage point as the former director of Yad Vashem's Department of the Righteous, Mordecai Paldiel brings us into the chambers of Yad Vashem's Commission for the Righteous, which appraises the roles played by rescuers' family members whose deeds have been brought to their attention.

Our journal is now online and each issue is downloadable as a PDF from <http://www.yu.edu/azrieli/> (click on “*PRISM* journal for Holocaust Educators”) courtesy of doctoral fellow and colleague Judy Cahn. Thanks to the cooperation and encouragement of Dr. David Schnall, dean of the Azrieli

Graduate School, and the great generosity and support of Henry Rothman and the Henry, Bertha, and Edward Rothman Foundation, we are able to continue to produce the print version as well, with 2,500 appreciative subscribers around the world. We like the idea of an annual and will continue with one publication each spring. In a format change that makes more efficient use of our space, we have put contributors' biographies at the end of the journal rather than following their individual works.

"I'd missed the way people reach / inside, when even their faces are buried / in grime, to find something pretty, / something to shine," writes poet Chalmer. We consider this an apt metaphor for the works published in our journal. The subject is overwhelmingly bleak, yet each contributor has reached inside the grime to find a gem of knowledge, a spark of empathy, a pearl of wisdom that illuminates and clarifies, if just for a moment, the darkness. ■

—Karen Shawn

This issue of *PRISM* is especially moving for me. As the son of a Holocaust survivor, I want to share some very personal, albeit brief, thoughts in this introduction.

I recall an incident that took place when I was a child. In school, perhaps it was in third grade, we were asked to draw a family tree. The teacher explained what she meant, but I could not comprehend what she was talking about. I did not know who was in my family other than my parents, sister, and one or two very distant aunts and uncles; why did I need a whole tree to display their names? I can recall seeing other students working long and hard on their trees, adding numerous branches that sprouted from big limbs, and I wondered why our family was so small that I could put the names of my entire family on one slender twig.



Even at a tender age, I realized the importance of family. I recall staring in envy at the huge extended family gatherings of my friends and not understanding why ours were so small. Although today I have an intellectual appreciation of the value of the quality, if not the quantity, of our family get-togethers, I still fantasize about how different my childhood would have been if my grandparents, Bubbie Faiga Sima and Zaidi Yosef; my aunts and uncles, Chaya Golda, Channa, Esti, Tzvi, and Noach; their relatives, and all the offspring they could have produced had survived the Holocaust.

I am haunted by this family photo [Fig. 1] taken on Purim, 1939, in Tarnow, Poland. Before the year's end, most of the family at this *seuda* (festive meal) would be dead.

Seated at the far right is my father. Only he and one of





**FIG. 2:** The Glanz family today.

his brothers, Shmuel Lieb (second from the left), survived. Murdered were my Bubbie and Zaidi. They, along with my aunt (seated third from the left) were taken to the outskirts of Tarnow and shot at close range by the *Einsatzgruppen* (Special Action Groups or mobile killing squads). They fell into graves they themselves had been forced to help dig. My father's older brother, Tzvi Yakov, with his wife and two beautiful children (about the same age as two of my grandchildren today) were murdered in the Belzec death camp along with my uncle's wife (seated far left).

In New York City's Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, a sign reads, "The family is the whole life and spirit of a Jew." My wife and I still have a small family; the seeds, however, have been planted, so to speak, so that we might grow. Our parents had only two children each; my wife and I had four and, truth be told, we wanted several more. My children understand my loss and seem

to be doing their best to ensure that when their children's teachers ask for a family tree, theirs will be tall, strong, and in full blossom.

This is a photo of my family and me [Fig. 2] taken last summer in Gan Sacher in Yerushalayim. The names, values, and deeds of my Bubbie and Zaidi, my aunt and uncle, live on in the names and lives of my grandchildren.

Family is, indeed, our whole life. The work I do, however, is meant not only to teach and support them but also, more profoundly, to cherish and honor the memory of my lost family. I am proud of this issue of *PRISM*; it contains some of the most moving poetry I have ever read, along with outstanding scholarly essays about, and personal testimonies from, Holocaust families and the generations that carry their legacy. In a very meaningful way, this journal, and this issue, in particular, is a living testimony to my family, then and now. ■

—Jeffrey Glanz

**FIG. 1:** Elias David Glanz (far right) and his family. Except for one of his brothers (second from left), all the others were murdered.



Two main themes explored in this issue—the choiceless choices faced by Jewish families, and the mourning and longing for lost relatives that continue until today—are graphically illustrated in this poem by Rachel Goldstein. Reanimating those who were murdered, as Daniela Rosenhouse (pp. 83–89) attempts with her paintings and Seymour Mayne (p. 57) and Irving Feldman (pp. 90–92) attempt with their poetry, may bring survivors and their descendants some measure of comfort. Reliving the moments and actions surrounding those who were lost can also bring anguish, however, as Goldstein recounts in this tale of her grandmother, who left her son “to be safe with neighbors” and for whom, “from that day on, / each day will be that day.”

*Rachel Goldstein*

## *Prosciowiece, 1942*

*for Eliezer*

My grandmother left him. That was not the worst of it.

From that day on,  
nothing was impossible,  
even laughter. She left  
him to be safe with neighbors.  
Left him that day to be safe.  
He will always be standing  
behind a window, waving.  
She left. He will always be  
left with neighbors. Each day  
will be that day. Where is he?  
With neighbors. That was not  
the worst of it. From that day on,  
each day will be that day.  
She left him. ■

Like the mother in Rachel Goldstein's poem (p. 6) and the child in Myra Sklarew's poem (p. 18), the family in this short story by the Yiddish writer Rachel Haring Korn confronts one of the many impossible dilemmas forced on the Jews by the Nazis. In a voice "hoarse and muffled," the father of the Sokol family explains, "Every family must send one of its members within two hours. Do you realize what that means? Each family must choose its own victim. One of us must go, otherwise all of us will be taken." Keren Goldfrad and Chani Levene-Nachshon (pp. 12–17) provide an analysis that will help readers understand and reflect on the complexities of this narrative.

Rachel Haring Korn

## The Road of No Return

By morning the whole city had heard about the new edict, but in Hersh-Lazar Sokol's household everyone pretended they knew nothing. And just like on any other day, Beyle lit the stove and began to cook the family's ghetto portion of grits and half-rotten potatoes. And just like on any other day, she set the table with seven plates and seven spoons laid out in a double row. The double row was to ward off the evil spirits lurking outside.

Every few minutes she ran to the door, and with a corner of her apron wiped the steam from its glass windowpane and looked down to the street. On that autumn day of 1942 there wasn't a Jew to be seen in that Galician village, except for a Jewish policeman with a bundle of documents under his arm who would pass by and disappear in the street that led to the office of the *Yudenrat*.

"Father hasn't come back yet," Beyle muttered, more to herself than to the others. Her aged mother-in-law, who was sitting near the kitchen sorting plucked feathers into a patched bag, turned and asked, "What's that you're saying, Beyle?"

"Nothing, *Shviger*."

All at once there was a commotion in the corner where the two youngest children were playing. Dovidl was pulling a doll out of Sorke's hands and waving a stick at her. "When I order you to hand over the baby you must obey! Otherwise, I'll take you away too, and you'll be beaten into the bargain."

Beyle ran over to the children.

"What's all this uproar about—what's going on here?"

"Mother, he's hitting me!" Sorke burst out.

"Let go of her this minute!" Beyle ordered. But

eight-year-old Dovidl wouldn't let go, and kept on tugging at his sister's doll.

"We're playing the game of cursing, and in cursing, there's no mother around. In this game you must obey the police! If she won't hand over her baby then both she and the baby will have to go! See, here's my rifle," and he pointed to the stick.

"*Tfu*, may your game moulder and smoulder in some wretched wilderness! Throw away the stick this instant! And come here! Some game you've invented for yourselves!"

"But Mother, you saw what happened to our neighbour Malke, and to Shmerke-Yoysef's son? The police took her away along with her child—don't you remember?"

"In my house I won't allow such games, you hear? Such a big boy and he understands nothing! Go, go to your brother Lipe."

Whenever Beyle couldn't handle Dovidl she would turn him over to her oldest son. Lipe was the only one Dovidl would listen to.

Lipe was sitting at the table in the next room, writing. He neither fumed around nor uttered a single word. His mother came in and stood at his back waiting for him to help her rein in her unruly young one. Dovidl too was waiting. He had become suddenly quiet and was staring eagerly at his older brother. The pen in Lipe's hand moved quickly across the blank paper as if it were hurrying towards some inevitable goal where Lipe was only an accessory and the instrument of someone else's will.

Beyle's ears, always alert to the smallest sound, now heard an odd rustling like the swish of silk. Turning towards the sound she saw the open ward-

robe, and between its doors her daughter Mirl taking out her dresses and trying them on one by one in front of the mirror.

"What bleak holiday are you celebrating today?"

"Oh, Mother, I just felt like trying on my dresses."

Beyle gave her a searching glance as if she were some newly arrived stranger. For the last two years, living with constant anxiety and fear, she had begun to think of her children as a precious charge she must protect from all outside threat and danger. And in that same instant, she recognized that Mirl, her fourteen-year-old daughter, had suddenly grown up and ripened into a young woman. Mirl's thin childish shoulders were now softly curved as if waiting to take on the burden of new and mysterious longings. Her brown gazelle's eyes were filled with a womanly acceptance of fate.

And as if she owed this burgeoning daughter something she could never repay, Beyle, like a bankrupt debtor, sat down and gave herself up to a wail of grief. Her bottled-up fear and dread of the unavoidable future now found its way through some obscure channel inside her, releasing a storm of tears. Beyle began to rock to and fro, her head in her arms, sobbing all the while as if her breast were being torn to pieces inside her.

The two children tiptoed into the kitchen and began to nose around like two kittens among the pots and pans. Sorke returned and pulled Mirl away from the clothes cupboard, "Come, let's stick a fork into the potatoes and see if they're done."

Dovidl ran to the door. "I'm going outside to find out what's taking Father so long."

Beyle was startled out of her trance. "Don't dare step out of this house! Do you want to cause, God forbid, a catastrophe?"

The dragging sound of feet was now heard on the stairs, climbing each stair slowly one at a time. Lipe folded his writing in his breast pocket and ran to open the outside door, which had been kept locked and bolted since the arrival of the Germans.

Father and son confronted each other. The son's eyes were full of questions, demanding to know what the father had learned and what, for the time being, would have to be kept hidden from the others.

The father bowed his head as if he himself were guilty for what was now happening, guilty for having taken a wife and for having brought children into the world—a wife and children he could no longer protect.

It took only one look at her husband for Beyle to realize there was no point in asking him anything.

The lines in Hersh-Lazar's face had grown deeper. They were etched in greyness, as if they had absorbed all the dust and debris of the street. His nose seemed to have grown longer and was as sharp as that of a corpse, while his usually neat and tidy dark beard was unkempt and dishevelled.

"Will you wash your hands now, Hersh-Lazar?"

"Yes, at once, and we'll sit down to eat."

They ate in silence. No-one paid attention to what and how much each spoonful held. They swallowed their food half-chewed. Even the children, already used to uncertainty and fear, felt a disaster was about to happen but dared not ask what. Something ominous was in the air.

Whenever a spoon accidentally struck the edge of a plate and made it ring, they were all startled and looked reproachfully away. Of them all, only the grandmother concentrated on her food as she brought each spoonful to her toothless gums.

The first to rise from the table was Hersh-Lazar. Wiping his moustache with the back of his hand, he began to pace back and forth with maddening regularity. When Beyle started to clear the table he signalled her—"Don't bother, Beyle."

She let her hands fall; they had suddenly become too heavy and she stood in front of her husband blocking his way and trying to stop him from pacing the room.

"Have you heard anything more? Is it true what people are saying?"

"True, all true, Beyle." Her husband's voice sounded hoarse and muffled as if a thorn were stuck in his throat.

"Placards are posted everywhere—on all the buildings and fences. Every family must send one of its members within two hours. Do you realize what that means? Each family must choose its own victim. One of us must go, otherwise all of us will be taken. All of us, without exception! And," he added ironically, "the Germans are allowing us free choice!"

They were all stunned but no-one was surprised. You could expect anything from the Germans. Each one studied the others. Who, who would go? Go to the place from which there is no return?

Abruptly a wave of estrangement overwhelmed them. Each one could already see the victim in the other. Each one felt the enmity of the others. Who would be chosen and who would do the choos-

ing? With what measure should they be measured, on what scales should they be weighed in order to decide who must die now, and who deserved to stay alive, at least for now?

"In that case," Lipe spoke with unusual calm without looking at the bowed heads. "In that case ...," and he stopped in mid-sentence as if the weight of his just-now-uttered words were too heavy for their quaking limbs to bear.

"In that case ...," all of them sat down. They all tried to find the lowest, most insignificant chair as if they intended to sit *shive* for their own inner selves.

Beyle seized the two youngest as if she could hide them in her own two hands, or build walls around them which no enemy could breach.

The grown-ups had begun to calculate the years each had already lived and the years still promised. They added up the lines in every face and counted the gnarled veins on the back of every hand.

The father mustn't go, that was clear. He was the provider, the breadwinner. And the mother, definitely not. What would become of the children without her? As for Lipe, what had he tasted of life in his four-and-twenty years, the last two darkened by the German occupation? Let him consider carefully. Maybe he should quickly steal away and be done with it. His mother would wail and tear her hair, his father would agonize while saying *kadesh*, and Dovidl would miss him day and night without understanding why his Lipe had disappeared.

But at first they would all breathe easier because he would have released them from the need to mourn their own lost souls.

In his mind Lipe was already bidding them all adieu. Tomorrow he would be gone. Everything would remain just as it was except that he would no longer be among them. He would no longer see the sun, the sky, or the old clock on the bureau. He touched his breast pocket and removed his watch and the money he kept there, and unobserved, pushed them underneath the big clock, folding a few bank notes into the pages he had been writing. It was a letter to Elke; his last letter. He would have to find a Polish messenger since it was forbidden to receive letters from the ghetto. Elke was living on the other side as a Pole with false aryan papers, and she had recently let him know that she was preparing similar papers for him, complete with seals and signatures. Together they would go to one of the big cities where it would be easier to hide and lose

themselves in the Polish crowds.

Was there anyone who should go in his place? What about the grandmother, his old *bobe*? As Lipe's glance searched for the grandmother it met his parents' eyes. They had already added up her years, years that had fallen as gradually as leaves from a tree in autumn, leaving its trunk naked and vulnerable. But no-one dared utter such thoughts aloud, no-one dared to say "go" or to become the judge of her last few ragged years. As their eyes ate into her, the old lady began to droop and hunker down into her chair, as if she would have liked to dissolve and become part of the chair. She wanted to become so rooted in the bit of ground under her that no-one would ever be able to dig her out. In that moment the senses of the others became suddenly keener, and more sensitive. Each one's thoughts lay open to the others in these moments of heightened perception. Only the grandmother's thoughts remained closed to them, as closed as her half-blind extinguished eyes. She had sealed all the avenues to her inmost self in order to ward off this prelude to death. She suddenly felt isolated in the circle of her family—beside the son she had given birth to and cared for, beside her own flesh and blood. Even her son's eyes sought her out, and pointed to her. And because of it she would resist with all the strength of her being. There was no-one to take her part, no-one to give her a loving look across the wall of separation. When you know you will be missed, it is easier to die.

They imagine it's less difficult for old people to die. Maybe so. But only if death comes in its proper time and place, in your own bed. But to go forth and meet death willingly, carrying your bundle of worn-out bones! Quiet, hold everything, she's not ready yet—she still has to go back over her life, she still has to remember it once more from the beginning, starting with the time she was a child in her mother's house. She too had been a child just like her son and grandchildren. She too had sat on her mother's lap just like Sorke on Beyle's; "Mother, Mother," she murmured through blue lips as if she would call her back from the world of the dead. "Mother," she called, just as she used to do in her childhood when she was afraid of being spanked. She had almost forgotten what her mother looked like—her features had faded, and were rusted with time. Two big tears rolled from her closed eyes and fell into the net of wrinkles covering her face.

And later—she pictured herself as a bride.

She had only seen her bridegroom David once, at the time of the betrothal. Even then, all her dreams were centered on him. When they began preparing her wedding clothes she had insisted on the best of everything, on the most costly materials. She chose an iridescent blue silk shot through with roses woven into the cloth. She had wanted to please her bridegroom. Her wedding dress had hung in the cupboard until recently. She hadn't let anyone touch it. It was only during the last few months that she had let them make it over for Mirl, because Mirl looks like her. When she looks at Mirl she sees herself as a girl.

The clock struck once and then twice. Everyone suddenly came to life. Soon, soon. Until now they had all been waiting for something to happen. Some miracle. And now there was less than an hour left.

Mirl drew herself up to her full height. She whipped her coat off its hanger and stood in the middle of the room.

"I'm leaving."

All heads turned.

She stood there in the made-over iridescent silk dress she had forgotten to take off when her mother scolded her for trying it on. Or perhaps she just enjoyed wearing it. Whether the dress made her look older and more grown up, or whether it was the stubborn expression on her face, it seemed to everyone that Mirl had grown taller in the past few hours.

"Where—what kind of going?" This from her father with his red-rimmed bloodshot eyes.

"You know very well where. . . . Goodbye, everybody." And she was at the door.

With a single leap her father was beside her, holding her sleeve.

"Get back this minute. If you don't there'll be trouble! Do you hear?"

As Mirl struggled with her father there was a sharp whistling noise as the ancient silk of her sleeve split and tore.

Everyone looked on but no-one moved, neither to stop the father, nor to help Mirl. With one hand Hersh-Lazar was holding Mirl, and with the other he was undoing his belt.

No-one understood what was happening. Was their father intending to beat Mirl now of all times? His favourite child against whom he had never before raised a hand? The one for whom he always bought special gifts—for her rather than for the two youngest? It could only be due to the confusion and turmoil

they all felt, the kind they had suppressed with all their might. Now it had grown and festered in their father like a boil that ripens and finally bursts.

At last he had the belt in his hand and was twirling it above Mirl's head like a lasso. He lowered it over her shoulders then slid it down to her waist and tightened it as if she were a shock of wheat in a field. He tested the belt several times to see if it was tight enough. Only then did he grasp the loose end, and, dragging Mirl like a trussed-up calf, he led her to the table and fastened the belt to the table's leg post. Tying a knot at the other end he pulled the belt through the buckle with his teeth, then he wiped his forehead and sat down with his hands on his knees and drew a few harsh choppy breaths.

Mirl was on her knees leaning against the table leg where her father had left her. She was motionless, completely drained by the scene of the last few minutes. For the first time in her young life she had aspired to something brave—let it be death—so what? She had gone forth to meet it like a bride her bridegroom. From early morning she had been preparing for this gesture. And now she had been shamed and humiliated. And her father, her darling father, who knew her better than anyone else, including her mother—was the one who had shamed her. He wouldn't let her make her sacrifice. It was all very well, it seems, for Isaac to be sacrificed, but not for her. And his father, Abraham was himself the one who brought him—he had taken him by the hand knowing full well what God demanded. And here, all of them—yes, she saw it, she knew, all of them wanted the grandmother to go. Did grandmother have the strength to drag herself to far away places? And what was the sacrifice of an old person worth, since the old person would have to die soon anyway?

For the first time in her life Mirl felt a deep hatred for her father. She tried angrily to free herself so she could at least stand up, but she had forgotten about the belt which now cut more and more into her body. She fell back and lay stretched out across the threshold, her head buried in her arms.

A band of light from the window came to rest at her feet. As the light fell on her the iridescent blue silk interwoven with rose-colored flowers shone with new life. The room had grown silent again, except for the buzzing of a single fly as it searched for a quiet spot to have its last wintry sleep.

All heads were bowed. Let whatever was to

happen, happen. Let the parting be dictated by some external force, by fate. And if all of them had to go instead of just one, then so be it. If God above willed it, if he could let it happen, they would accept it gladly.

Only the ticking of the clock divided the silence as its hands moved inexorably towards the appointed hour.

Abruptly the father turned; all eyes followed the direction of his glance. The grandmother's chair was empty. Everyone was so absorbed in his own thoughts that no-one had noticed her going. Where had she gone? How did she leave the house so quietly that no-one had heard her? Not one of them had heard her. It must have happened only a few minutes ago.

Everyone's eyes now searched the corners of the room. Suddenly a shadow appeared on the glass pane of the door that led to the vestibule. As the shadow came closer it gradually filled the entire window. All eyes followed it—yes, it was the grandmother in her old black cape, the one she wore on holidays. Under one arm she carried a small pouch with her prayer book, while with the other arm she slowly unfastened the chain on the outer door. Soon the door closed and swung back on its hinges.

None of them left their places. Not one of them called her back. All remained seated, frozen into place. Only their heads moved and bowed lower and lower as if their rightful place lay there at their feet with the dirt and dust of the threshold. ■

"During the Holocaust," write Keren Goldfrad and Chani Levene-Nachshon, "the Jewish family faced unprecedented difficulties, dilemmas, and conflicts," never more painfully presented than in Rachel Haring Korn's searing tale "The Road of No Return" (pp. 7–11). Not knowing how to approach such a grim and complex story, educators may exclude it from their literary canon, but this careful analysis offers numerous entry points for a college audience as the authors connect the bitter truths of the narrative to a less-considered theme: "Though the potential for tragedy is ever present, one must never relinquish faith. There is always a return, or a 'beyond.'"

*Keren Goldfrad and Chani Levene-Nachshon*

## At the Crossroads: Between *der Letster Veg* and the Road of No Return

*Zog nit keynmol as du geyst dem letstn veg:*

Never say that you are going the last way,  
Though lead filled skies above blot out the blue of day.  
(The Partisans' Song)

The Jewish family has constituted a source of power and a place of sanctuary throughout the generations. Providing its members with identity, tradition, continuity, and a sense of safety, this social unit has been the bulwark of Jewish existence. During the Holocaust, however, the Jewish family faced unprecedented difficulties, dilemmas, and conflicts. In the course of the destruction of European Jewry between 1939 and 1945, families were torn asunder. Children were forcibly separated from their parents, and the parents were unable to protect them. In her article "Cohesion and Rupture: The Jewish Family in the East European Ghettos during the Holocaust," Dalia Ofer (1998) explains that in the prevailing conditions in the ghettos "the family was both a burden and a source of strength, hindering many persons' chances of survival while providing others with the motivation to endure despite all odds" (p. 143). The existential predicaments imposed on the Jewish family unit within the ghettos posed a constant external threat to the internal unity among family members. Fierce hunger, poor housing conditions, and the incessant danger of deportation were met with a strong desire "to retain some form of 'normal' family life" (p. 7).

Rachel (Rochl) Haring Korn's (1957) story "The Road of No Return" (pp. 7–11) describes a family in Galicia in an unnamed ghetto under the Nazi occupation struggling to preserve a normal life in the midst of disaster. In this short narrative, Korn describes normal household activities: the mother is making dinner, the grandmother is sitting and

sorting plucked feathers, the older son, Lipe, is writing a letter to his girlfriend, and the teenaged daughter, Mirl, is trying on her dresses in front of the mirror. In addition to these typical domestic activities, Korn manages to convey to the reader, in but a few words, the dynamics of the relationships that exist between family members, such as the childish fights between siblings, the younger brother who looks up to his older brother, and the complex relationship between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law.

Korn juxtaposes this seemingly normal family setting with the abnormal situation that exists beyond the threshold and focuses on the vigilant effort of the mother, Beyle, to prevent the evil that lurks outside from entering the house. In the beginning of the story, the two youngest children, Dovidl and Sorke, play a game in which the former orders his sister to hand over her baby doll. Beyle angrily scolds them for inventing such a wretched game, which threatens the fragile stability that she has struggled so hard to maintain, insisting that such games will not be allowed in her house. Indeed, "For the last two years, living with constant anxiety and fear, she had begun to think of her children as a precious charge she must protect from all outside threat and danger" (p. 8). So, when little Dovidl runs to the door and offers to go outside to check why it is taking his father so long to come back, his mother hurriedly stops him: "Don't dare step out of this house!" (p. 8). The outside door of the house, we are told, "had been kept locked and bolted since the arrival of the Germans" (p. 8).

This contrast between the external ghetto conditions and the internal household reality is precisely the type of situation conjured up by Dalia Ofer (1998) when she points out that “the quest for even a semblance of normalcy was what Jews desperately tried to achieve, knowing full well that everything in the ghetto defied and even negated normalcy” (p. 18).

A comparison between the original Yiddish text and the translated English version enforces this motif in the narrative. In the beginning of the story, we are told that Beyle “set the table with seven plates and seven spoons laid out in a double row” and offered an explanation for this daily routine: “The double row was to ward off the evil spirits lurking outside” (p. 7). The original Yiddish version—“זיבן טעלער און זיבן לעפל—אויסגעלייגט אין צווי רייען, ווי אן עירוב קעגן אלעס ביזן וואס ליערט פון “יענער זייט טיר”—uses the term *eiruv*. An *eiruv* is an enclosure around a home or a community that permits the carrying of objects outside of the house during the Sabbath. Here the purpose of the *eiruv* is to keep evil outside of the door. Beyle tries to protect her family by creating a virtual enclosure around them, as she does again later in the story when she seizes the two youngest children “as if she could hide them in her own two hands, or build walls around them which no enemy could breach” (p. 9). Despite her best intentions, though, “the dust and debris of the street” (p. 8) do manage to enter these frail boundaries and profoundly affect those inside.

### CHOICELESS CHOICES

Making choices is part of our daily human experience. We are forced to choose between diverse and sometimes difficult courses of action that may affect our lives directly or indirectly. In certain situations, these decisions pose difficult moral conflicts that are based on clashing beliefs or ideologies. Choosing one course of action over another may depend on a number of factors, such as personal considerations, moral values, or profitable outcomes. During the Holocaust, however, the foundations or frameworks that traditionally guide us in this process collapsed in the face of the dilemmas posed and the unbearable decisions required.

Lawrence L. Langer (1989) explores the ways in which “the Nazi mentality corrupted moral reality for the victims” (p. 224) and introduces us to a crucial concept of the Holocaust: a “choiceless choice,” when Jews were faced with decisions that “did not reflect options between life and death, but between one form of ‘abnormal’ response and another” (p. 224). In other words, for these people, there was “an absence of humanly significant alternatives” (p. 225), an “optionless anguish” (p. 226) where moral choice may have had no meaning at all.<sup>1</sup>

Korn’s story presents this quintessential dilemma. A German decree requires each family to “send one of its

members within two hours” (p. 8) to the Nazi death machine. Hersh-Lazar, the father, returns home to his family and delivers the terrible news of the deportation decree, which has been “posted everywhere—on all the buildings and fences” (p. 8) outside the house. He adds, bitterly:

“Do you realize what that means? Each family must choose its own victim. One of us must go, otherwise all of us will be taken. All of us, without exception! And,” he added ironically, “the Germans are allowing us free choice!” (p. 8)

With the posting of placards everywhere in the ghetto, the family members are made fully aware of what they had previously only sensed. The children’s game described at the onset of the story, where Dovidl orders his sister to hand over her doll, is both reflective and prescient. As Dovidl points out to his mother, “You saw what happened to our neighbour Malke, and to Shmerke-Yoysef’s son? The police took her away along with her child—don’t you remember?” (p. 7). Clearly, at this stage of their ghetto life, even the youngest members of the family are aware of the severity of the situation. Thus, when the father announces the fearsome new decree, they all know that if they do not make a choice, they will all be taken. Furthermore, by 1942, earlier illusions of relocation had been dispelled; for many of the ghetto inhabitants, deportation meant death.

The *eiruv* Beyle has erected no longer maintains the family as one unit separated from outside forces; now, each member of the family feels isolated and alone, withdrawing from one another, unable to discuss and share the emotional torment that each of them is experiencing, as “a wave of estrangement overwhelmed them” (p. 8). The characters’ inner selves are exposed, allowing the reader to observe the emotional turmoil they experience as each is forced to confront and weigh a “choiceless choice.”

When the decree to hand over one member of the family becomes a pressing, irreversible reality and each one begins to think about who should go, “the senses of the others became suddenly keener and more sensitive. ... Each one’s thoughts lay open to the others in these moments of heightened perception” (p. 9). The grandmother, though, remains apart: “Only the grandmother’s thoughts remained closed to them. ... She had sealed all the avenues to her inmost self” (p. 9). She feels that a barrier has been created between her and the rest of her family and “there was no-one to take her part, no-one to give her a loving look across the wall of separation” (p. 9). The family members in Korn’s story are faced with a choiceless choice of deciding “who must die now, and who deserved to stay alive” (p. 9); they are but one of the families in the ghetto confronted with the dilemma of either refusing the “free choice” given by the Germans, thereby sentencing all the family members



to death, or acceding to it and sending one member of the family as a “sacrifice to the altar.”

### THE BINDING OF ISAAC

Throughout history, a major moral dilemma in Jewish faith has been posed by the biblical story of *Akeidat Yitzchak*, the Binding of Isaac. On the one hand, the story portrays unprecedented devotion and faith in the Almighty. At the same time, though, this dramatic episode raises numerous ethical and moral issues: How can a father sacrifice his beloved son? How can G-d demand such an unjust request? Why doesn't Abraham argue with G-d in order to save his child, in the same way that he argued with G-d when he tried to save the people of Sodom? Jewish commentators have offered diverse explanations for these essential questions, and every generation learns the story of the *Akeida* and interprets it according to the events of its own time. The story of the Binding of Isaac is not viewed, therefore, as an ancient and isolated incident but rather as an integral part of Jewish tradition that functions as a key factor in understanding Jewish existence and fate.

Alan Dershowitz (2000), in his book *The Genesis of Justice*, offers an interesting explanation for the story of the *Akeida*, which connects it to our post-Holocaust perspective. Dershowitz explains that the wordless message or moral implication of this biblical story is that being Jewish often requires one to sacrifice his most precious possession. Accepting the divine covenant between G-d and His chosen people does not guarantee an ideal life. On the contrary, Jewish history proves this beyond doubt through the Christian Crusades, the Inquisition, and especially during the Holocaust. The moral perception of the *Akeida* implies that there are situations that require death in order to sanctify the name of G-d. Dershowitz explains that this perception is an intrinsic part of the tragic Jewish reality (pp. 103–131).

Chaim Gouri's (1981) Hebrew poem “Heritage” uses the story of the Binding of Isaac to illustrate the same historical perception described by Dershowitz. The poem does not end with Isaac's salvation but with the burdensome inheritance left to future Jewish generations:

Isaac, as the story goes, was not sacrificed.  
He lived many years,  
Saw what pleasure had to offer, till his eyesight dimmed.  
But he bequeathed, that hour, to his offspring,  
They are born,  
with a knife in their hearts (p. 565).

Hanna Yaoz (1980) explains that using images, codes, and archetypes from the Bible within Holocaust literature and poetry is a common phenomenon. These recognized archetypes and codes are so well known that, in many

cases, the writers create changes, additions, or distortions in the original biblical stories to draw attention to a specific aspect of the story. In Gouri's poem, for example, the last stanza adds a continuation that does not exist in the biblical version. In contrast to the positive connotation that one may have with the word *heritage*, which functions as the title of the poem, the added ending portrays the inescapable tragic heritage of the Jewish people who “are born with a knife in their hearts.” Isaac was spared, but every Jewish newborn will have to face this existential struggle.

The Binding of Isaac, therefore, is a relevant and natural metaphor to Holocaust literature in general and to the story at hand. Isaac and the *Akeida* are mentioned overtly in the text, but Korn's story—and, similarly, Gouri's poem—add a twist to the biblical version. First, instead of the potential sacrifice of Isaac, the father's favorite son, it is Mirl, the father's favorite daughter “against whom he had never before raised a hand. .... The one for whom he had always bought special gifts” (p. 10), who may be sacrificed. Second, while Isaac is a passive character, Mirl, with her “brown gazelle's eyes” (p. 8) is the active initiator of this binding; she offers herself as a noble sacrifice to save the rest of her family. Third, the father, Hersh-Lazar, literally binds his daughter in order to save her from the sacrifice, as opposed to Abraham, who binds his son on the altar as a sign of faith: “Abraham was himself the one who brought him—he had taken him by the hand knowing full well what G-d demanded” (p. 10).

However, the ultimate sacrifice in Korn's tragic narrative is not Mirl, who, like Isaac, is spared, but the grandmother, who, like the ram, takes the place of the original offering and walks the “road of no return.”

### DER LETSTER VEG (THE LAST WAY)

The story's ending haunts readers, and even the characters themselves, with the unasked, yet implicit, burning question: How could the family have let the grandmother leave the house without a word of protest from even one member? One cannot help but contrast the “single leap” (p. 10) to Mirl's side by her father when he realizes her intention to give herself up with the collective “paralysis of will” and inaction regarding the grandmother. This contrast is starker still when we are told that it took the grandmother time to get to the vestibule and unfasten “the chain on the outer door” (p. 11).

No one has even entertained the thought that the grandmother is considering handing herself over. Absorbed in their own thoughts, the others do not look in her direction or notice she is no longer sitting in her chair until she is almost out the door. They are stunned and, at the same time, relieved.

With her action, the grandmother has taken the choice—and even the necessity of making a “choiceless choice”—out of their hands, enabling them to passively accede to her sacrifice. Jewish law rules that in a situation that involves an

active choice among individuals over who should be killed or handed over to be killed, no individual shall be preferred over another individual, or even a group of individuals.<sup>2</sup>

Hence, the tacit decision has already been made to “let whatever was to happen, happen. Let the parting be dictated by some external force, by fate. And if all of them had to go instead of just one, then so be it” (p. 11). Stopping the grandmother would constitute a conscious and active decision that the entire family would die, a decision none of them could take. Once the grandmother has made her move toward the door, the family can summon no more response than to move their heads and bow “lower and lower as if their rightful place lay there at their feet with the dirt and dust of the threshold” (p. 11). Each member of the family is fully cognizant that there but for the grace of grandmother, goes he or she. Unlike the characters, we, the readers, are privy to the grandmother’s thoughts. Therefore, we understand that it is now easier for the grandmother to go, for as she contemplates earlier, “When you know you will be missed, it is easier to die” (p. 9). Through this noble act, the grandmother ensures that she will be missed and remembered, because the very existence of every member of the household is now irrevocably tied to her.

It was not always obvious that the grandmother’s death would be mourned; quite the contrary. “As Lipe’s glance searched for the grandmother, it met his parents’ eyes” (p. 9), not at some undefined point in the room as this suggests, but “over the grandmother’s head” as in the original text (Yiddish, p. 206). “They had already added up her years” (p. 9). Even the grandmother knew that “all of them wanted the grandmother to go” (p. 11). All she wants is “to be embraced with the *mekhitza* [in Jewish tradition, a partition enclosing one area to keep it separate from another] of a loving glance” (Yiddish, p. 207). The grandmother is not afraid of dying, but she wants to take the “road of no return” on her terms. Knowing she will be missed is one of those terms. Going back over her life is the other. “She’s not ready yet—she still has to go back over her life, she still has to remember it once more from the beginning” (p. 9). The original Yiddish text is much more forceful. It reads, “she has to go back over her life *one more time*” (Yiddish, p. 207, italics added), perhaps the final time; and she does go over her life from the time she was a child in her mother’s home to her betrothal and subsequent wedding.

The grandmother is now ready to claim her own space from where she will never again be moved. That is the final term. For, as we read earlier,

As their eyes ate into her, the old lady began to droop and hunker down into her chair, as if she would have liked to ... become part of the chair. She wanted to become so rooted in the bit of ground under her that no-one would ever be able to dig her out. (p. 9)

The original reads “so that no one would be able to *tear it* [the little piece of earth] *out from underfoot*” (Yiddish, p. 206). This version keeps the grandmother above ground where she can still act on behalf of her family, and not deep in or under the ground, as the English version suggests.

Toward the end of the story, we see a band of light from the window illuminating the grandmother’s blue bridal dress, now worn by Mirl, the granddaughter who looks so much like her. Suddenly, the “rose-colored flowers shone with new life” (p. 10). Silence pervades except for the “buzzing of a single fly as it searched for a quiet spot to have its last wintry sleep” (p. 11). It is not by chance that the original Yiddish text draws the fly in greater detail as, like the grandmother, “it searches for a corner where it could sit peacefully, whence no one could drive it away—the corner for its final winter sleep” (Yiddish, p. 210). Nor is it by chance that the flowers on the dress suddenly shine with *new* life just as the grandmother is about to become a shadow on the glass pane of the door, growing larger until it fills the entire window, and then disappearing altogether beyond the outer door.

With the disappearance of the grandmother, the story has come full circle. The departure of the grandmother reinforces the motif of disappearance at the beginning of the story, when Beyle wipes the steam from the same glass window-pane of the door to look down the road. The only one she sees outside is “a Jewish policeman with a bundle of documents under his arm who would pass by and disappear” (p. 7). This seems to be the fate that now awaits all those who venture outside the house.

While all the action of the story takes place within a house, a road—real or abstract—encircles the house and, indeed, the entire ghetto. This is reflected in the English and Yiddish titles of the story, respectively, “The Road of No Return” and “*Der Letster Veg*.” The road of no return is a dead end; it leads to “the place from which there is no return” (p. 8), just as choiceless choices, having been made, cannot be retracted. Those deciding “who must die now, and who deserved to stay alive, at least for now” (p. 9) must also bear the psychological burden of their decisions for the rest of their lives. The English version indicates the moral or mental consequences of choiceless choices, describing each of those faced with such choices as trying “to find the lowest chair as if they intended to sit *shive* [a seven-day mourning period] for their own *inner* selves (p. 9), while the Yiddish merely states “as if to sit *shive* for himself (or herself)” (p. 205). Moreover, when Lipe considers handing himself over, he imagines “they would all breathe easier because he would have released them from the need to mourn their own lost souls” (p. 9). Yet the Yiddish reads: “because it freed them from the necessity of becoming the hangmen of their own flesh and blood” (p. 206). The original version seems less concerned with a moral choice than with survival dependent

on making a painful choice. This reinforces Langer's (1989) idea that "moral luggage imposed fatal burdens" on those seeking to survive and was superfluous in such situations (p. 226). Indeed, survival became the moral imperative, as it signified the ultimate act of resistance to the abnormal and immoral world imposed by the Nazi perpetrators.

*Der letster veg*, literally, the final road or the last way, was a common metaphor for death long before the Holocaust, but to those who, like Rachel Korn, lived in Eastern Europe during the war, *Der Letster Veg* conjured up one of the best-known songs in the ghettos and concentration camps. Hirsh Glik's (1943) "Song of the Partisans" (*Zog nit keynmol as du geyst dem letstn veg*) adjured its listeners to never say you are going your last way or treading your final path. To many, this—and not a road of no return—is the message of the *Akeida*, for though the potential for tragedy is ever present, one must never relinquish faith. There is always a return or a "beyond."

This message is reinforced throughout the Bible, as in the story of Chizkiyahu, King of Judah. When the king fell ill, G-d commanded Isaiah the prophet to go to the king and tell him to put his house in order because he was about to die. In response to Isaiah's prophecy that "[a] decree of death has already been passed upon you," Chizkiyahu replied,

I have received the following teaching from the house of my father's father [some say this refers to King David, while others say it is Yehoshaphat]: *Even if a sharp sword rests upon a person's neck, he should not refrain from praying for mercy.* All hope is therefore not lost (Tractate *Berachos*, Schottenstein edition, 10a5).

Following in the tradition of King Chizkiyahu, the grandmother in our story carries with her only one small item as she departs from the safety of the house to an outside world rife with "sharp swords." That item is her prayer book, a symbol of her unflinching faith. Such a seemingly minor detail could easily elude one's attention; yet, it is attention to such detail that is characteristic of Korn's writing. In speaking about the purposes of her poetry in a 1967 interview, Korn said, "There are hidden things that people pass by without noticing. ... Then the poet comes along and reveals what no one else had noticed. He sees it, he feels it" (Levitani, 1982, p. 126). After the Holocaust, Korn abandoned many of the themes she had written about previously to fulfill her deeply felt obligation to speak for those who perished in the Holocaust, to reveal the details unnoticed by many of us, and to carry out the words of the "Song of the Partisans,"

*Zog nit keynmol as du geyst dem letstn veg*  
Never say that you are going the last way,

Though lead-filled skies above blot out the blue of day  
The hour for which we long will certainly appear,  
The earth shall thunder 'neath our tread that we are here!

Even should the dawn delay or sunrise wait too long,  
Then let all future generations sing this song. ■

#### NOTES

1. Although Langer focuses on the situation in the death camps and not on the ghetto life, we know that such abnormal dilemmas existed in many ghettos as well. In the Lachwa Ghetto, for example, the local Judenrat chairman, Berl Lopatin, responded to an offer to keep alive a few families, including those of the Judenrat members, as follows:  
"You won't murder us bit by bit—either we all remain alive or we shall all be killed." According to another version, Lopatin stated that "he was not master of life and death over anyone, and that no Jew, he included, was willing in this case to benefit from any special rights" (Gutman & Haft, 1979, p. 140).  
On March 2, 1942, in response to a German demand that 5,000 Jews from the Minsk Ghetto be handed over, the underground rejected a suggestion by a member of the Judenrat to hand over the handicapped and the lame by declaring that there would be "no trading in Jewish souls" (Gutman & Haft, 1979, p. 125). A similar Nazi demand that yielded a different response preceded the big *Aktion*, known as the *Sperre*, in the Łódź Ghetto in September 1942. On September 4, Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, the head of the Judenrat, addressed the public and told them, "The ghetto has been dealt a grievous blow. They demand that we give them that which is most precious to it—the children and old people." He continued, "Fathers and mothers, give me your children" (Zelkowitz, 2002, pp. 279–283). Following this shocking speech, parents and families had to decide whether they would comply with this horrendous request. This choiceless choice was followed by the deportation of more than 15,000 children, along with elderly and sick Jews, from the Łódź Ghetto.
2. The Talmud tells us that a man came to Rabbah and said to him, "The governor of my town told me, 'Go kill So-and-so, and if you do not kill him, I will kill you.' What shall I do?"  
"[Rabbah] said to him: 'Let him kill you, and do not kill anyone, for who says that your blood is redder than that of your victim? Perhaps the blood of that man whom they want you to kill is redder than yours! In other words ... it is forbidden to take one life in order to save another'" (Tractate *Sanhedrin*, Schottenstein, 74a5). Choosing one person to hand over to the Nazis was akin to being responsible for his/her death.

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"For nine years, my cousin in Switzerland—who survived the Kovno Ghetto and Dachau concentration camp, as well as the poor treatment after liberation—and I talked every day, sometimes several times a day," writes poet Myra Sklarew. "In these conversations, he circled around the Holocaust and what he endured, coming closer to the core in the months before his death. This poem relates a horrific confession he made. I know others who were children then and there who barely survived. That he was made to hunt these children when he was himself a child is beyond speech."

*Myra Sklarew*

## *The Children*

When the parents go out  
to forced labor in the raw dawn  
of an anonymous day,

they leave the little ones  
in hiding—one in a suitcase  
under a bed, another

behind a wall, a third  
to wait out the day burrowed  
beneath the floor.

A boy, hardly more than a child  
himself, is chosen to root them out.  
By what means does he coerce

them beyond their fear?  
Seal them into that coffin  
on wheels? At the Ninth Fort

they have only to be given  
to the pit. At night,  
when their half-starved parents

return, at first a single cry  
bruises the air. Then another. Until  
it seems the whole earth

will fill with the cries  
for their lost children.  
Is he Abraham at Moriah

bringing Isaac to the fire?  
What has become of the angel  
to stay his hand? The ram

in Isaac's place? The knife goes  
of its own volition into the hearts  
of all his sons. Does the saying

of a thing let it go free?  
Or does it multiply like fire  
given its full dose of oxygen? ■

"My parents and siblings reappear / in millions of heartaches," Heidemarie Pilc writes in this memorial to a Czech artist who lost most of her relatives and friends during the Holocaust. "I want you back, brothers / and sisters; mother and father": the universal yearning for lost family. Pair with the poetry of Stanley H. Barkan (p. 58) and Irving Feldman (pp. 90–92) and with the art of Daniela Rosenhouse (pp. 83–89) for an interdisciplinary exploration of the theme.

*Heidemarie Pilc*

## *Somewhere in Poland . . . Survivor's Lament*

Lost in an alien forest  
I pray at my people's tomb.  
Lazy beams of sunlight  
drift through autumn leaves,  
vanish beneath darkening skies.

Murdered by thugs in uniform  
half a century ago,  
my parents and siblings reappear  
in millions of heartaches,

their names chiselled  
into a memorial stone—  
towering monument  
to a nation's shame.

I weep at my loved ones' grave,  
want them as desperately  
as the dark beneath the ground  
wants light, want to dig  
under the stone,

to stir their ashes alive,  
to hear the earth—so still  
these fifty-five years—turn  
their cries to shouts of hallelujah.

I want you back, brothers  
and sisters; mother and father,  
I want to be your child again.

Long delivered from your tormentors,  
one with the ancient walls and dust  
of shtetl streets, you lie in whispers  
of Kaddish and candle light. ■

Rachel Iskov proposes the term “familial resistance” as a lens through which to examine the distinct responses of family units fighting to survive intact. In the Łódź Ghetto, for example, there was no organized armed resistance, but Iskov argues for a broader view of the term to encompass the ghetto families’ actions, defining resistance as “survival itself . . . includ[ing] smuggling, evasion, hiding, and jumping from trains as examples of passive resistance, as well as countless acts ranging from contributing to underground cultural and educational activities to gathering for prayer and religious observance” to remaining as a family unit as long as possible. “Parents and children of all ages,” she explains, “as well as relatives outside the immediate family, engaged in risky behavior to protect their loved ones.”

*Rachel Iskov*

## Familial Resistance in the Łódź Ghetto

The historiographical meta-narrative of complicity in the Łódź Ghetto stands in our collective memory in contrast to the famous Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Indeed, there was no organized armed resistance in the Łódź Ghetto. Yet to state that there was no resistance overlooks the conscious acts of defiance that Jews carried out in the ghetto, such as clandestine radio listening, sabotage in the workshops, and worker strikes. Moreover, Jewish families engaged in risky behavior in their efforts to survive intact. Familial resistance was not armed, although occasionally a family member became physical, taking the offensive to defend loved ones. While Jews commonly resisted without violence, evading selections and deportation orders, for example, by hiding or escaping, the Gestapo’s armed response indicated the gravity of their defiant behavior. Familial resistance crossed gender, generational, and relational lines; men and women, and parents and children of all ages, as well as relatives outside the immediate family, engaged in risky behavior to protect their loved ones. Just as we commonly use the categories of individual or organized resistance in our academic discourse, I propose labeling these rescue attempts as familial resistance.

Familial resistance has several similarities to individual resistance in that it was unorganized and small in scale, aiding a few, rather than all or a large section of the population. While each family acted mutually exclusively from other families, together, their individual acts had a direct impact on others, as, for example, when familial resistance to the Jewish police provoked the German administration to send the Gestapo into the ghetto to complete the September 1942 *Aktion*.

Not every family was in a position to shield their loved ones from deportation; perhaps they did not have a physical space in or under which to hide someone or the means or wherewithal to create one. There is no implied judgment of those families who did not attempt to save their relatives.

They were not complicit nor can they be held accountable for their loved ones’ murders if they did not resist the order. They wanted to protect their family no less than those who tried to conceal their family members. Familial resistance refers to those Jewish families who were in a position to resist the German orders—and the Jewish Council’s appeal to follow German orders—and who hid, ran, pleaded, bribed, and fought to keep their loved ones together in the Łódź Ghetto.

### THE FIRST VICTIMS OF THE SEPTEMBER 1942 *AKTION*

On September 1, 1942, the Germans seized the first victims of the *Aktion* from their hospital beds even before the *Sperre*—the Nazi-imposed curfew—began. As Etele Czeigenberg, a nurse working in a ghetto hospital, recalled in her testimony,

I witnessed unimaginable cruelty. The Germans evacuated the sick patients with savage bestiality; they threw little children from the second and third floors. They collected infants and put them into sacks, tied the tops, and threw them directly onto the waiting trucks. . . . The brutality of the Germans was beyond description, and beyond my endurance (Eilenberg-Eibeshitz, 1998, p. 257).

Every family in the ghetto suffered a loss, as journalist and writer Josef Zelkowicz (2002) noted in his Łódź Ghetto diary, “Who of the ghetto inhabitants did not have someone in the hospital—a wife, a child, a father or mother, a relative, a benefactor?” (p. 253). In some cases, the victims had already recovered and remained in hospitals as a precautionary measure, which was the policy with children’s diseases, so children who were healthy were held “a little longer” to avoid spreading infections (Dobroszycki, 1984, p. 250).

Esther Hoffmitz’s mother, Chana Miriam, managed to have her son Moshe Meyer admitted to a hospital while he recuperated from pneumonia, having convinced a doctor to prescribe a few days’ hospital rest. She worried that

“he would not be able to endure the work that would soon be demanded of him without a period of rehabilitation and proper nourishment.” The family awoke on September 1 to news that Moshe Meyer had already been taken away. Yet “he had already gotten over his pneumonia!” Esther protested; “he wasn’t even sick!” (Woznica, 2008, pp. 83–86).

Other victims of the hospital *Aktion* included pregnant women and new mothers with their babies. Even ghetto inmates on the waiting lists to be accepted into the hospitals were seized from their homes (Dobroszycki, 1984, pp. 249–250).

Some people tried to hide in or to escape from the hospitals. Bronka Sztyldwach described in her testimony how she saved several children in the hospital she worked in by putting them, one at a time, in a basket full of dirty diapers, which she carried down to the laundry room. She then threw the children over the fence. She hid her little cousin Jureczek, whom she had arranged to have stay a bit longer in the hospital after his recovery from jaundice, and who could hardly walk. She feared he would not survive if she threw him over the fence, so she hid him in the laundry room, and then recovered him later (Eilenberg-Eibeshitz, 1998, p. 256).

However, the Jewish police knew who was missing, because the hospitals had lists of patients. On September 2, they rounded up the escapees from their homes, and when they could not find them, they took members of their family (Dobroszycki, 1984, p. 249; Sierakowiak, 1996, p. 214). The painful lesson Jews took from this first deportation *Aktion* of September 1942 was that they could not escape the decree and that their attempts to do so would be punished. Łódź Ghetto survivor Zenia Rybowski and her family learned this in a devastating manner. Her younger brother, Mulek, was in the hospital with typhus at that time. Her oldest sister, Luba, worked in the hospital and, as Zenia told me, she “couldn’t save him”:

Sister hid in the hospital, carrying him. A German came out, asked where she’s going with him. Out to the truck [she answered]. No [he said], just throw him out. Open the door and throw him out. She had to do it—he [the German] was standing there waiting. (Zenia Rybowski, personal communication, June 15, 2006)

As rumors swirled and fears mounted that children and the elderly would be deported next, Jews flocked to the labor office to obtain work cards for themselves or for relatives, only to discover to their great distress that the office was closed. They exploited every connection they had. Dawid Sierakowiak (1996) described in his diary the panicked scenes, observing that people were running to obtain work assignments for unemployed family members. While most were unsuccessful (and often, even papers that were granted

were later deemed invalid), a small number of people managed to acquire work papers for their loved ones. Sierakowiak, for example, found work for his mother, as he recorded in his September 4 entry: “Today, despite incredible difficulties, I managed as a clerk to get a work assignment for Mom in the furniture workshop. Even so, I am very worried about Mom because she’s terribly emaciated, shrunken, and weak” (pp. 215–216).

In another futile attempt to save their family members’ lives, Jews sought to change the population registry to make a child older or a parent younger. The Population Records Department, however, was sealed (Trunk, 2006, p. 241).

#### **“FATHERS AND MOTHERS, GIVE ME YOUR CHILDREN”**

The possibility of protecting their loved ones became slimmer still on September 4, 1942. On that day, the Jews of the Łódź Ghetto suffered a horrific, heart-wrenching blow when Jewish Council Chairman Chaim Rumkowski, together with Dawid Warszawski, a tailoring workshop manager, and Stanisław Jakobson, a chairman of the judicial court, confirmed that the German administration had ordered the deportation of children, the elderly, and the infirm. A distraught, terrified, and angry audience heard Warszawski explain,

The decree cannot be withdrawn; one may perhaps soften it by carrying it out quietly and peaceably. There was a decree such as this in Warsaw, too. We all know—it is no secret—how it was carried out. ... It happened there because neither the *kehilla* [community] nor the authorities carried it out. But we have decided to do it ourselves, because we do not want and are unable to transform it into a horrific, terrible disaster. (Zelkowitz, 2002, p. 277)

Continuing in this vein, Jakobson noted, “The curfew was imposed on the entire ghetto population to prevent disasters and to save the public” (Zelkowitz, 2002, p. 278). The ghetto population heard on that day that their loved ones were sentenced to deportation to the unknown, and they would have to wait in their apartments for the Jewish police to carry out the heinous decree. This was particularly painful news. Not only did it diminish people’s hopes that they could evade the decree, but it also meant families would not know the fate of their relatives and friends in other buildings and would not be able to obtain food rations until the curfew was lifted.

Finally, Rumkowski spoke, and he famously beseeched his captive citizens, “Fathers and mothers, give me your children.” He went on to explain his reasoning for the administrative cooperation with the German order.



The question was whether we should accept this odious task and do it ourselves or leave it to others. But since we were guided not by the thought “How many will perish” but “How many can be saved,” we—meaning I and those closest to me at work—came to the conclusion that as difficult as it will be, we must make ourselves responsible for implementing the decree. (Zelkowitz, 2002, pp. 280–281)

With this reasoning, he begged, “Give into my hands the victims, to protect the community of a hundred thousand ghetto people, to ensure the future of the others!” (Eilenberg-Eibeshitz, 1998, pp. 259–260).

Rumkowski and his Jewish Council made this choice and justified the decision to carry out the order rather than defy it. Reading these words and learning of the ensuing actions of the Jewish Council, the Jewish police, and the auxiliary units, historians have since written that the history of the Łódź Ghetto and its Jewish administration is one of cooperation, not resistance. Just as Warszawski contrasted the Łódź Ghetto with the Warsaw Ghetto, historians would contrast the two ghettos and conclude that there was no resistance in the Łódź Ghetto. Such arguments, however, reflect a narrow view of resistance, which highlights acts of sabotage and armed uprising intended to have an impact on Nazi power and control and to “thwart the Germans’ will” (Rohrlich, 2000, p. 1). Indeed, historians have taken pains to understand how circumstances in this ghetto did not allow for resistance. In an essay on “The Problem of Resistance,” historian Isaiah Trunk (2006) presented a list of reasons, including that the ghetto was surrounded by local ethnic Germans who were hostile to the Jews and were thus unwilling to aid them in smuggling, in escape, or in collecting weapons (pp. 394–395).

#### A BROADER VIEW OF RESISTANCE

Indeed, there was no armed resistance, no organized uprising as was seen in the Warsaw, Białystok, Vilna, or Bedzin ghettos. The aforementioned circumstances—the Jewish Council’s decision not only to discourage but also prevent resistance to the German order by sealing the records and labor offices and imposing a curfew—and the physical condition of the ghetto and its inhabitants, who were severely weakened by starvation that was intensified by more than a week without a food distribution, precluded this.

However, a broader view of resistance argues that resistance was survival itself, and includes smuggling, evasion, hiding, and jumping from trains as examples of passive resistance, as well as countless acts ranging from contributing to underground cultural and educational activities to gathering for prayer and religious observance to “staying with one’s family as long as possible” (Rohrlich, 2000, pp. 1–2).

I argue that the moment in the history of the Łódź Ghetto that best suggests complicity with German orders—this infamous deportation of children, the elderly, and the infirm in September 1942—can also be understood as one of rescue and resistance when viewed through the lens of familial responses to the deportation *Aktion*.

In the Łódź Ghetto, there were numerous examples of such unorganized resistance activities carried out by individuals and small groups. In new scholarship about the Łódź Ghetto, historian Gordon Horwitz (2008) argued in *Ghettostadt* that “desperate grabs for survival, as courageous as they were, were undertaken individually, in an unorganized way, without help from the Jewish authorities” (p. 225). Individuals also acted in defiance of the deportation order to “grab for the survival” of their family members. In examining familial responses to the September 1942 deportation *Aktion* from the Łódź Ghetto, I read not only about broken, devastated families but also of their attempts to defy the odds, to protect, shield, and save their loved ones.

#### FAMILIAL RESISTANCE DURING THE SPERRE: SEPTEMBER 1942

On the first day of the *Sperre*, the Jewish police carried out the *Aktion*, supported by the ghetto’s fire brigade and the so-called “White Guard” (Provisioning Department transport workers and porters). They emptied the orphanages and old-age homes with ease. They experienced resistance, however, in the ghetto’s dilapidated apartment blocks and shacks and had to use force to remove children from their parents. Jankel Brown described one such scene he witnessed during the *Sperre*:

Minutes later a Jewish policewoman came to the apartment with a list in her hand, and inquired about a young woman with a four-year-old boy who lived next door. She had come to take the boy away. When the mother resisted, the policewoman called over her two colleagues. ... The young mother fought like a lioness. She scratched the snatchers’ faces and kicked them in the legs, but the three of them overpowered her. They jerked the boy from her arms and ran with him to the wagon. (Eilenberg-Eibeshitz, 1998, p. 262)

As for his own family, Jankel hid his sister and her baby in the closet behind clothes before going to the selection. They were safe, but his brother-in-law was pushed onto the trucks, and Jankel went home without him (Eilenberg-Eibeshitz, 1998, p. 263).

Families attempted to protect their loved ones by hiding them in cellars, in attics, on roofs, under beds, in cabinets and closets, and in myriad other tiny spaces a desperate mind could imagine (Trunk, 2006, p. 245; Zelkowitz, 2002,

p. 303). They bribed, pleaded, and fought. Some stayed with relatives, hiding their young children and vulnerable loved ones, believing that they had a better chance of survival away from their homes. Dawid Sierakowiak (1996) noted in his September 4 diary entry that his

father's cousin, who has a three-year-old girl and wants to save her, came to us in the evening. We've agreed to let her stay with the child, and even to let her whole family come down. They were afraid to stay at their home, not to be taken as hostages for the child. (p. 217)

In these ways, families struggled to remain together, trying every imaginable tool, every conceivable idea, even the narrowest desperate possibility, in their defense against the Jewish police and their auxiliaries. Irena Liebman recalled in her post-war reconstruction of her lost ghetto diary that she overheard a conversation between a policeman and his wife. Despite his placating and exaggerated response to his wife's accusation that he had bloody hands—"You know perfectly well we're forced to do this. We never use force, we never search thoroughly. If someone is well hidden, good for him. But if the Germans do it, it will be a hundred times worse" (Adelson & Lapides, 1989, p. 350)—there is evidence, such as Brown's testimony, above, about the lioness mother and her child, that shows that the Jewish police sometimes did tear families apart by force. Yet, as Zerkowicz (2002) recorded, "Even when the Jewish police have to use force (as they almost always do), they do so mercifully. The Jewish police know they must beat beaten people and torture tortured people" (p. 316). As a result of their "leniency," families had a small possibility at least they could rescue their endangered children, parents, or ill loved ones.

This was unsatisfactory to the German ghetto administration; the number of people collected on the first day was too few. They decided the Gestapo would carry out the deportation from the second day of the *Sperre*. After the Gestapo entered the ghetto, the *Aktion* became bloodier, as Zerkowicz (2002) wrote in his diary,

When the Jewish police nab, they nab whoever they can, whoever they find at home. If someone is hiding and cannot be found, he is not taken. When the others nab, they nab anyone who is there or others in lieu of people who are hiding. When the person in hiding is found, he is not led away for deportation but must be carried. (p. 318)

Terrified mothers and fathers no longer fought the Jewish police, who accompanied the Gestapo officers as auxiliary police. Some still attempted to save themselves or their loved ones from deportation, but the stakes were higher. The Germans carried guns (while the Jewish police did not) and shot

Jews at any provocation or whim.

### FAMILIAL RESISTANCE IN MYRIAD WAYS

Resistance efforts now varied from subtle attempts to evade capture to hiding or escaping from the collection truck or assembly point. A common subtle effort was undertaken by older adults. Attempting to appear younger and healthier, men and women dyed their hair; women added color to their cheeks and lips. Children sometimes encouraged or helped their parents, who aged prematurely under ghetto conditions.

Łódź Ghetto survivor Sally Rosen, 13 years old at the time of the deportation, encouraged her mother to take some paprika, make a paste, and wipe it on her cheeks so she would "look good" (Sally Rosen, personal communication, August 1, 2006). Luba Drewnowsky accompanied her older sister to get hair dye for their mother, whose hair had gotten very gray. Luba and her three siblings put aside bread for a few days as payment, and Luba stood watch on the steps as Bronia furtively entered a basement room to trade their hard-sacrificed bread for a small bottle of dye (Luba Drewnowsky, personal communication, July 26, 2006). Such attempts to escape deportation were relatively without risk. Yet even such action could have a fatal ending: Trunk (2006) reports that the Germans shot a man who tried to cover his beard with an upturned collar to appear younger (p. 246).

Jews experiencing greater fear and desperation undertook more dangerous modes of resistance. Where families had the opportunity to hide a loved one, their creativity was boundless. People were hidden in furniture, cabinets, closets, and in cupboards; under beds and in bedding; in cellars and attics; on roofs and in chimneys; or, breaking the curfew, in fields and back alleys (Horwitz, 2008, p. 225; Trunk, 2006, p. 245; Zerkowicz, 2002, p. 353). Esther Hoffmitz reacted suddenly as the Germans approached her building, recognizing that her youngest brother, Yisroel, was endangered. Her mother, Chana Miriam, was readying herself for the selection, rubbing beet juice on her cheeks for color and getting dressed in her finest clothes in an effort to make herself look healthier and stronger than she felt. She knew she had a responsibility to survive to be a mother to her young son.

"Get going! Do something! You could lose them both!" Esther thought, an alarm screaming in her head. She announced, "I'll watch out for Yisroel!" as her mind raced through "not-so-possible" options. Suddenly, she recalled that two young women living in the apartment below them shared a large wooden double bed pushed against a wall. She ran downstairs and asked the women to let her hide her brother there. They said no, understandably, because if he was found there, their lives would be endangered, too. Esther returned to her mother anguished but determined to protect her little brother. With him, she watched at the top of the stairs, and as soon as the two women left the apartment,

Esther and Yisroel ran in. The boy dove under the bed and Esther instructed: "Srulek, push yourself up further, higher against the wall! ... Don't move! Make yourself like nothing. ... Don't move!" Esther then ran downstairs to face the selection.

During the selection, Germans scoured the apartments with trained dogs. Yisroel clung to the underside of the mattress, crushing himself higher and higher up the wall. He almost lost his balance on hearing sharp barks coming from the other side of the bed. A Nazi officer entered and swept under the bed first with his stick and then with a long broom handle. When he did not find anything, the Nazi signalled for the dog to stop barking and left for the next apartment (Woznica, 2008, pp. 90–91, 95–97, 108–109).

Some people built hiding places, such as Jerry Kapelus's father, Gerszon, who made a false wall behind which he hid his two sons, ages 11 and 13. Jerry's mother, Ester, also hid with the two boys, while his father and older sister went down to the courtyard (Jerry Kapelus, personal communication, July 6, 2006). Meyer Margulies built a hiding place to save his 1-year-old baby. He had waited 10 years to be blessed with a child, and she was born in the ghetto. He was "desperate not to give her up!" So, he built a hideout between the ceiling of his apartment and the roof and camouflaged a trap door. Whenever he, his wife, and their baby were hiding, he lifted the ladder to remove any sign of their hiding place. To prevent their baby from crying, he stuck a rag in her mouth. In this way, they survived the *Sperre* (Eilenberg-Eibeshitz, 1998, p. 270).

Avrom Berger's family was also desperate. His sister and brother-in-law had two small children, who were 3 and 4 years old. They had "no cellar, no attic, and no crevice to hide them in." Avrom "had no peace of mind" and "kept thinking: 'There must be a way out!'"

Then a thought flickered through my mind. I removed the bottoms of three drawers of the only bureau we still possessed, made a few holes in the back for air, and let the two children in. For three full days the children lay there without moving or crying. ... They instinctively felt that their lives depended on remaining unheard and invisible.

When we were called down for the selection, we left the door wide open so as not to arouse suspicion. If the Germans had made a thorough search, they would have found the children. Both survived the *Sperre*. (Eilenberg-Eibeshitz, 1998, p. 270)

### **FAILED ATTEMPTS**

Not every family was so fortunate; many failed in their attempts to protect their loved ones. The Gestapo thoroughly searched all buildings, ransacking apartments, stabbing beds,

ripping apart pillows and quilts, opening cupboards and cabinets, and throwing their contents everywhere. Sometimes those in hiding gave themselves away. Babies cried, people coughed or accidentally made other noise, or left their hiding places too early and were found. Luba Drewnowsky's sister Bronia had a little boy who was 7 years old in 1942. Bronia took her son, Elliot, out of the orphanage before the *Sperre* and prepared him to hide behind the shutters in their room. When the Germans reached her building, she hid him, closed the drape, and told him not to talk. Luba said Elliot understood: He was only 7, but he was a child of the ghetto. When the Germans came, they shot in the air, and Elliot, frightened, started to cry, "Mommy, Mommy!" She ran to get him and took him outside. They took him away. Luba recalled that her sister was never the same; she used to say, "If I ever meet my husband," who fled to Russia at the beginning of the war, "what will I tell him?" (Luba Drewnowsky, personal communication, August 31, 2006).

I do not wish to present an inflated view of familial resistance and rescue. Bronia's devastating story of loss was the prominent narrative of the familial experience of the September deportations. In total, 5,857 children, ages 15 years old and younger, were deported to Chełmno from September 5–12, 1942<sup>2</sup> (Rubin, 1988, p. 376). I found it remarkable that of the 14 survivors I interviewed who were in the Łódź Ghetto in September 1942, the families of six of them attempted to hide endangered loved ones, and five were successful. Such a small sample size cannot accurately represent the population of more than 105,000 ghetto inhabitants on September 1, 1942. Moreover, that these are testimonies of survivors may be a factor, raising questions about risk and chance in survival that are certainly not new and are outside of the purview of this paper.

Rather than highlight examples of Jewish agency, contemporary and post-war testimonies emphasize the failed attempts at resistance, such as when hidden children were found and shot by the Germans or when Jews tried to escape the courtyard or transport wagons and were fired upon (Horwitz, 2008, p. 222). Rochel Kinderlerer described her brother's attempt to rescue their mother from a hospital where the Nazis were gathering the Jews for deportation. He snuck in through the basement, found their mother, and hid her in a linen closet. Somehow, a German found out, searched for Rochel's brother, and beat him unconscious. Her brother never awoke, and their mother was deported to Chełmno (Eilenberg-Eibeshitz, 1998, pp. 266–267). Other families attempted to get their loved ones out of the collection points as well. Many tried to use their connections, begging, pleading, bribing, and promising in a frantic and usually futile effort to rescue a captive relative. Dawid Sierakowiak's mother was selected, and while she awaited deportation at the collection point, Dawid and his father struggled to have her freed. A friend's

sister who worked in the hospital where his mother was held tried to intervene to have her re-examined, but his mother was not allowed before the medical commission. Dawid's father ran to entreat two of his acquaintances for help but to no avail. He bitterly noted, "If one doesn't have connections outside the hospital, at least with a police commissioner, one can't do anything inside" (Sierakowiak, 1996, pp. 220–226). Moreover, his father's futile efforts to rescue his wife were taken at great risk: Going into the streets for help meant breaking curfew, a death sentence for anyone who was caught.

The testimonies also describe loss, despair, and anguish. They record mothers and fathers who shrieked, cried, and shouted. One "pounded her head against the pavement" (Zelkowitz, 2002, p. 336); another "ran about, an axe in his hands, shouting for the return of his children" (Horwitz, 2008, p. 224). Children suffered shock and cried, lost and scared, as the realization set in that their parents were not returning. As Trunk (2006) has explained,

The September Action was the greatest shock that the ghetto had endured until then. There was almost no family that did not have to mourn a child or parents. Entire families were torn out by the roots. For long months, people in the ghetto lived under the traumatic aftershock of that mass murder. (p. 248)

### CHALLENGES TO THE FAMILY

Understandably, after the *Sperre*, some people reacted with animosity towards families who managed to save their loved ones. Eva Fogel recounted that her mother hid her [Eva's] youngest sister underneath the roof, covered with old suitcases. In her building, many children were taken, and when her sister came out from hiding, "people didn't like it, they were against us because they knew that we had her" (Eva Fogel, personal communication, June 29, 2006). Irena Liebman, whose parents were taken on the last transport, recalled:

A terrible loneliness descended upon me ... and with it an uncontrollable hatred of all those who hid and were now coming out of their holes. It's because of them that my dearest were taken away! I go outside and rush to work. Suddenly I notice a macabre figure of a swollen woman, who literally crawls along the wall. I immediately recognize the terrifying mask of this semiconscious, half-alive creature. It's Roza, a close friend of my mother, a lonely spinster. A suffocating hatred tightens my throat. Why not her? She has only a few days left, anyway. Maybe they took my mother in her place? (Adelson & Lapidés, 1989, pp. 351–352)

Some families encountered challenges from others living in their building during the *Sperre* as well. Josef Zelkowitz (2002) related the story of a woman who wanted to hide her little boy in the loft, but her neighbors, terrified, warned her, "They are as smart as you; they know where the loft is. If they find you—perish the thought—the people in hiding will endanger not only their own lives but also those of everyone in the building." She then headed for the stairs to the cellar, but the neighbors stopped her again. Again she tried, saying she would hide with him in the storeroom, but the neighbors interfered once more. Finally, she went to the latrine, but the young child began to suffocate, and the defeated mother concluded that it would be better if he were taken from her "as long as he remains alive; may he only not suffocate" (pp. 351–353).

Familial resistance during the September 1942 deportation *Aktion* was not without challenge or lethal risk. Yet some people attempted to evade the deportation order, exploiting every opportunity to rescue vulnerable relatives. The numerous cases of individual families that attempted to save their loved ones provide evidence of defiance in the Łódź Ghetto. Significantly, examining such risky behavior complicates the historiography of the Łódź Ghetto and contributes to research into the concept of resistance during the Holocaust.

Examining the September deportation *Aktion* through the lens of familial experiences and responses evokes heart-wrenching stories of loss and anguish as well as of determination and defiance. When writing about the Łódź Ghetto, the words "determination" and "defiance" seem out of place in its historiographical meta-narrative. It is noteworthy, though, that while the Jewish Council's policy of cooperation precluded organized resistance, individuals and families attempted myriad actions with potentially fatal consequences to save themselves and their loved ones from deportation. ■

### NOTES

1. Rumkowski's speech has been published in English translation in A. Adelson and R. Lapidés (1989), Eds., *Łódź Ghetto: Inside a community under siege*, pp. 328–331. The monumental moment was also noted in the chronicle and in diaries. The Department of Archives of the Jewish Council kept a chronicle, excerpts of which have been published in English translation in L. Dobroszycki (1984), (Ed.), *The chronicle of the Łódź Ghetto, 1941–1944*. Another exceptional resource in English translation is Josef Zelkowitz's (2002) wartime monograph *In those terrible days: Notes from the Łódź Ghetto*, which records the September 1942 *Sperre* and deportation *Aktion* in painstaking detail. Original records are held in the YIVO archives in New York, NY, especially RG 241, The Nachman Zonabend Collection, as well as in archival holdings in the United States Holocaust Memorial

Museum's Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies in Washington, DC; the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, among numerous other archives.

2. According to Rubin, 3,535 children up to age 10, and 2,322 children 11–15 years old were deported; the total number deported was 15,682.

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Miriam Miasnik Brysk's recollection of the several weeks she lived with a "hiding family" provides the context for her accompanying art work. Pair it with Josh Freedman's monoprint (p. 29), poetry by Rachel Goldstein and Helen Degen Cohen (pp. 6 and 56), and Mordecai Paldiel's essay (pp. 123–128) for an interdisciplinary beginning to the study of the hiding experience. Brysk's childhood afterwards, in a partisan family camp, is detailed on pp. 31–36.

*Miriam Miasnik Brysk*

## Life in the Shadows

In the summer of 1942, a rumor began circulating throughout the Lida Ghetto, where we lived, that all Jewish children would be murdered while their parents were away at work. It was an unbearable event to contemplate. My parents grimly pondered our options. My mother was very direct.

"Mirele, the Germans may be coming to kill all the Jewish children in the ghetto," she told me. My body cramped in anticipation of the events that would follow. Now, even my parents were helpless to protect me. "Papa will be taking you to the hospital. When you get there, you must act sick."

The next day, I was admitted to the infectious ward, and my father, a surgeon, injected me with several shots that made me feel sick to my stomach.

"Lie still," he instructed me. "Sleep as much as you can. When you are awake, keep your eyes closed and pretend to be asleep."

I did feel sick, and I did sleep most of the time, but I did not have a fever. Several days later, the nurses began to ask Papa what was really ailing me. Their suspicions made Papa realize that it was not safe for me to remain on the ward, nor, of course, was it safe for me to be exposed to infectious diseases.

### **A NEW AND NECESSARY FAMILY**

In the meantime, Papa had contacted a Catholic peasant, a widow whose little daughter he had rescued from death. After explaining the situation to her, he convinced the woman to allow me to stay with her on her farm several kilometers from Lida in Belorussia. Papa told me of the arrangement he had made. What I had most dreaded was about to happen. I would be separated from my family, abandoned by my parents to die without them, all alone, in an unknown place. Before I could react, my parents took me to the side entrance of the hospital grounds. There, beside a stand of trees, a man waited for me. My parents handed me a small satchel of my clothing. I stared at them in disbelief. Seemingly unperturbed, my parents bombarded me with final instructions for my new way of life.

"Listen and be quiet."

"Do whatever you must to stay alive."

"Never speak Yiddish. From this day on, you are no longer a Jew."

"Pretend that you are an orphan and the woman's niece. Play with her little girl and help do chores."

"Stay vigilant and be careful not to reveal your real identity. God willing, we will reunite in the future."

The instructions went on and on, each word more painful than the one that preceded it. I shuddered in dread and fear. For me, separation was far worse than death. In the haste of the situation, I did not have the time to tell my parents how I felt, and I was too numb to speak. They each gave me a last hug and then let go. The stranger took my hand and tugged me along with him. As he dragged me, I thought of pulling free and running back, but he held me too tightly for that. I was completely distraught, but I held back my tears. I told myself that I had to be brave and do as I was told. I had been taught to follow orders, and now I was obeying them. I wondered whether this was the last time I would ever see my parents. I walked in total silence that sunny afternoon. The man tried to strike up a dialogue with me, but I was far too traumatized to speak, confused and angry at being abandoned.

By dusk, after several hours of walking, we came to the farmhouse. The woman told her little girl, who was a few years younger than I was, that I was her cousin and that I would be staying with them for a while. She told her that I was her new playmate and that my name was Mirka.

"Mirka is 7 years old," the woman said. "She will help care for you and play with you while I harvest the summer crop." So, this was to be my family now.

I was given a bed on which I promptly went to sleep after a trying and tiring day. The next morning I woke up with the roosters. As I opened my eyes, I realized that I was no longer with my parents, and I started to cry. I knew that I could not give myself away, so I washed my face and wiped away the



**FIG. 1:** The original small black-and-white photograph was enlarged on a Xerox copier. The toner from the copy was transferred with acetone onto hot-pressed watercolor paper, scanned, and overlaid with layers of color; the shadows of trees were added to the background.

tears. Trying to act cheerful, I began my new life. I was given a good breakfast from the abundant food on the farm. I tried to help the woman with her chores, and I also played with her little daughter. My biggest worry was my dark, Semitic features, contrasting those of my blue-eyed and blond-haired new family. I worried about the nearby farmers who might come by for a visit. I was always on guard, always vigilant, as my parents had instructed. Once, I remember, I was stung on the head by a bee. My first response was to be angry with myself for letting the bee sneak up on me. I was obviously not vigilant enough.

One day, the man who brought me to the farm returned with a small package from Mama. Inside were some ribbons for my hair and a letter from her. It began, "*Moja Najdrozsza Mireczka*" ("My Dearest Mireczka"). As I read the letter under candlelight, my mother's words penetrated my being. I could not stop crying for most of the night as I lay in my bed clutching the ribbons and repeating Mama's words, which I had by now memorized. I repeated to myself, over and over, "Mama, let's all die together. Don't leave me here alone." My pillow was drenched with tears, yet I could not stop crying. I carried on like that for days. I looked so tired in the mornings that everyone asked if I were sick.

Several neighboring farmers came by at times. I dreaded their visits, fearing that they suspected I was Jewish. I tried to hide when they came, but it was not always possible, espe-

cially when I was doing outside chores. Once, the woman tried to take me with her daughter to the local church. I copied everything they did. I crossed myself, I knelt, and I sat quietly pretending to be praying. I realized it was important that I be visible; otherwise, the others might think that I was a Jew in hiding. I could not understand why it was safe to be a Christian and deadly to be a Jew.

After several weeks, it became apparent that the rumored killing of ghetto children was only that, a rumor. My parents arranged for the man who took me to the farm to bring me back to Lida. I skipped with joy the entire trip back. Papa came to meet me at the hospital. Overwhelmed with emotion, I jumped into his arms and began to cry in big heaves. Soon, my nose was bleeding with excitement.

"Papa, Papa, we are together again!" I cried. "Papa, don't send me away again." We walked back to the ghetto. As soon as I saw my mother, I cried even more than I had at the hospital. My grasp was so tight that it was difficult to detach me from her.

The girl [Fig. 1] is my husband's cousin, name long forgotten, from Zamosc, Poland, who did not survive all attempts to save her; she was deported to the Belzec extermination camp, where she was murdered. Looking at her photograph (she was approximately my age then, 7) I am reminded of my own life in the Lida Ghetto and of all the trials that my parents went through trying to save my life. ■

"I can't begin to imagine what went on within a family during those times," artist Josh Freedman (2010) writes about this, his third contribution to *PRISM*. "For me," he continues, "one question frames the print: If one person is an entire world, then what is a family?"

*Pnina Rosenberg*

## A Contemporary Artist Presents the Family: Josh Freedman's *Mother, Father, Child*

"Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."—Thus, Russian author Leo Tolstoy opens his world-renowned novel *Anna Karenina*. The Holocaust, perhaps, modified this maxim. All "unhappy families" were united by one fundamental common denominator: Their essential nature was shattered, and parents, hunted, helpless, frail, and unable to provide adequate food, shelter, or the familial shield, could no longer protect their children. The family, the basic unit of society, was often violently torn apart and its members dispersed, forcing parents to witness and experience the saddest and most bitter scene of the sacrifice of their offspring.

This sense of a terrible, inverse world that breaks all human and social norms and habits is manifested in Josh Freedman's 2008 mono-print *Mother, Father, Child*. This relatively small work (12.5 cm × 17 cm) depicts an intimate gathering of the three family members. The father, in the foreground, holds his child in his arms; the child clings to him, while the mother, apprehensive and protecting, watches them from the background. This trinity, depicted in the black and white tones of an old photograph, creates an equilateral triangle. Yet it is an inverse one: the base, formed by the heads of the two adults, is on top, while the vertex is the child's hair, thus symbolizing the inverted world of the Holocaust. On the one hand, it is an intimate scene of love, affection,

and closeness. On the other hand, the family's isolation, the child's grip, and the adults' somber expressions evoke uneasiness and a sinister threat.

The heroic parental attempt to shelter the child is manifested in the artist's choice of colors. "I chose to work with black and red-orange, a bold and basic color combination, to underscore the strength of the parents," Freedman (2010) writes. Yet the red-orange background also suggests flames, as if the whole family is about to be consumed. Its warmth stands in sharp contrast to the black and white figures whose



Josh Freedman, *Mother, Father, Child* 12.5 cm × 17 cm. Mono-print on Arche paper, 2008.



strength may be ebbing, as is hinted at by the somewhat lighter, faded black and white of the mother.

The artist portrays the semblance of a normal, middle-class family, like hundreds of thousands of others at the time. The child's hair is thick and blond; the mother is still adorned with her pearls, a memento of and connection to the family's previous life. Nevertheless, the context is a far cry from the safety and stability of ordinary living. Might the child's golden hair save her life? Might the pearls be bartered for a haven for her? The innocence and hope suggested by the yellow hair and white pearls contrast with the dark vulnerability of the child and her mother.

The feeling that the mother is gradually being removed from everyday life, and perhaps from her husband and child, is enhanced by the composition, in which she is slightly distanced and pale, as if becoming detached. Life is changing—and for the worse. However, familial bonds are not easily disrupted. Parents and children cling to each other in their fear of the unknown. The tenderness and affection with which the father is holding his daughter is heartbreaking, especially in light of his demeanor, which reveals his sadness. This cruel tension is the core of Freedman's work of art.

Within the small dimensions of this print, the artist portrays the rich and multiple nuances of fear, anxiety, sadness, love, and tenderness that characterized the collective “unhappy family” during the Holocaust. ■

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"All my life I have been a stubborn individualist, following my own path to pursue my two big dreams in life," survivor Miriam Miasnik Brysk writes. "The first—to become a scientist—was a difficult quest, because I had no formal schooling when I came to America in 1947 at the age of 12, and the field of science was a man's world. I did obtain my Ph.D., but had to settle for years of fellowships; I was 44 when I got my first medical school appointment at the University of Texas. In record time, I became a full professor in three departments: dermatology, biochemistry, and microbiology. My other dream was to become an artist, but in that, too, I had no training. After I retired, I taught myself to become an artist. More than anything, I want to leave a legacy that documents the Holocaust, not by dwelling on the instruments of death, but rather by honoring the Jews who perished by returning to them their dignity as Jews, a dignity denied them by the Nazis. I have been fortunate to have lived my dreams."

*Miriam Miasnik Brysk*

## Jewish Family Life in the Lipiczany Forest

I was born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1935, to Bronka and Chaim Miasnik. In 1939, when I was 4 years old, Poland was occupied and partitioned; we fled to my father's hometown of Lida in Belorussia. Two years later, in June 1941, Lida came under Nazi rule; in December, the Lida Ghetto was established and my family was forced to move from our comfortable house in the city to a dilapidated old house in the ghetto.

My father, a prominent surgeon, was assigned to work in the hospital there. Whenever he operated on wounded German soldiers, two SS officers stood next to him, watching to ensure he did not harm his Nazi patients. My father later commented that it was the first time in his medical career that he actually enjoyed performing amputations.

In early May, rumors began circulating that a major German *aktion* was about to occur. On Friday, May 8, 1942, the great Jewish massacre of Lida took place. It was the crack of dawn of a very cold day. The ghetto was surrounded by Gestapo SD and SS storm troopers, together with their local collaborators and sympathizers. They came, screaming orders for the Jews to get out into the street. They beat us with metal rods. Many of us were not yet fully dressed; some of us were still barefoot. Children cried in their mothers' arms. Terror, panic, and fear consumed us. I remember Mama grabbing my coat and shoes and socks. Once in the street, she tried to help a woman cover her little baby. She was hit from behind and forced away. I clung to my parents for dear life [Figs. 1 & 2].



**FIG. 1:** Miriam's father, Dr. Chaim Miasnik.

We were ordered to assemble as families and march to an unknown destination. We exited the ghetto, with its adjacent Jewish cemetery, and walked past the outskirts of Lida. The old and the sick who could not keep up were shot on the spot. We walked in silence, knowing that something terrible awaited us at the end of the march. At midday, when the line stopped for a brief moment, we could hear rifles firing in the distance.



**FIG. 2:** Miriam's mother, Bronka Miasnik.

As we came to an intersection of two country roads, the *Gebietskommissar* (German district commissioner) and *Waffen SS* and *SD* storm troopers examined our papers and waved us on in one of two directions: To the left meant we were spared; to the right was a death sentence. At first, essential professionals were spared. However, after certain quotas had been met, most of the rest of the Jews were indiscriminately selected to die. My parents and I were sent to the right. The soldiers hit us with their gun butts and with metal rods to force us to run faster. The sound of gunfire was getting louder and closer. My parents each held my hands as we ran. My heart was pounding; in total fright, I looked up for a moment at their ashen and grim faces. We ran to what we were certain was our imminent death somewhere up ahead. Then, several soldiers along the way began yelling orders at us, and when one repeatedly shouted, "*Arzt zurueck!*" ("Doctor, go back!"), we made no sense of it. The soldier finally physically stopped us and ordered us to return. My father

wore an armband bearing a red cross to indicate he was a physician; his surgical skills were still apparently needed. For a moment, we thought that only my father was being called back and that my mother and I would be forcefully separated from him; but for some reason, they signaled that we were all to go back. By the narrowest of margins, we survived that day.

The Jews who were sent to the right, some 80% of Lida's Jewish population, were driven about 2 kilometers to the outskirts of the surrounding forest, where they were instructed to undress and assemble in groups of a hundred, and then they were shot. Children were torn from the arms of their parents, thrown into pits, and killed with hand grenades as their parents stood watching.

One Jew, Tzvi "Yuszka" Konopko, ran toward the forest after seeing the slaughter ahead of him. He was shot in the head as he ran but managed to get back to the ghetto. It was he who informed the survivors of what had happened that day. The next day, my father operated on Yuszka in the ghetto; he recovered and eventually joined the Bielski partisans.

After the May slaughter, the remaining Jews in Lida realized they were doomed. Nonetheless, most stood by, not knowing how to defend themselves. They had no tradition of arming themselves and fighting and were too fearful of reprisals to entertain thoughts of an uprising. However, the few young Jews left alive in the ghetto formed a clandestine group and managed to secure from outside the ghetto, at great risk, a small collection of rifles, grenades, and ammunition with which to fight. The group eventually escaped the ghetto and joined the Russian partisans in the two accessible major wilderness areas: the Lipiczany and Naliboki forests. Some 500 Lida Jews eventually made it to these forests, as did several thousand Jews from other ghettos in Belorussia.

### ENTERING THE LIPCZANY FOREST

The Lipiczany forest was a huge wilderness within a two- or three-days' walk of the Lida Ghetto. Overgrown and desolate, it consisted of loamy soil with vast stretches of islands surrounded by swamps, peat bogs, and marshlands. Little sunshine penetrated its vast canopies of trees. Thick fog often surrounded the heavy undergrowth and further reduced visibility. The trees stretched endlessly across the horizon, interspersed with streams and creeks that came to life during spring thaws. The impenetrability of this wilderness made it an ideal hiding place for partisans.

Initially, no Jews were among the Russian partisans of this forest, but as Jews became armed, they joined existing partisan groups. Eventually, all-Jewish fighting units were also established.

In early November 1942, two Jewish partisans came to the Lida Ghetto to bring my father to the forest because many



FIG. 3: In Miriam's artwork, she depicted herself in the Lipiczany forest.

of their comrades had been wounded in raids on the Germans and were in need of medical and surgical care. My parents and I, together with the partisans who came to rescue us and two other Jewish families from the ghetto, walked over different terrains, crossed the Niemen River, and entered the Lipiczany forest [Fig. 3]. In the evening, we arrived at a camp of Jewish partisans. I was amazed to see armed Jews who were not branded with yellow stars, and the fact that they were actively fighting against the Germans made me even prouder to be a Jew than I had been. I soon realized that I was the only child in the group, and I wondered, as I tried to occupy myself, why there were no others.

The partisans lived in forest houses called *ziemlankas*, most of which were dug out and built below ground like a cellar, lined with logs to insulate the floor from the frozen earth below. Wooden logs raised above the ground served as beds. The top of the *ziemlanka*, slightly above ground, was covered with branches and ground cover for camouflage. When we arrived that winter, it was covered with snow and was indistinguishable from the surrounding forest. A small fire, which vented to the outside like a fireplace, helped warm the inside. Our first *ziemlanka* had little room to spare. We hud-

dled together in our assigned sleeping spaces. The closeness of our bodies was a further source of warmth and made us feel more secure. We fell asleep that night with a new sense of freedom and hope in our hearts.

Shortly after we settled into our forest home, we learned that a large contingent of German troops had entered our wilderness in an effort to capture and kill Jews and partisans. My mother and I quickly realized that here, too, we would have to struggle to survive [Fig. 4].

At the time, my father was on a mission tending to some wounded partisans, and we were left to face the danger alone. Frightened at our precarious situation, I asked my mother why the partisans could not defend us. Weren't they, after all, armed? She had no answers, but the partisans did. Some told us bluntly that they would not take a child. That meant me, inasmuch as I was the only child around.

"What if she cries out and gives away our whereabouts?" they objected. "We can't take the chance of taking a child along with us. Any such behavior could alert the enemy and doom everyone."

Soon the partisans reassembled into small groups and scattered away from the campsite into the forest wilderness. We ran toward several of the groups to join them, but they ran in different directions so fast that we could not keep up the chase. I finally understood why there were no other children among the partisans. Any thoughts I had that these men would be my new family disappeared as they ran.

Soon my mother and I found ourselves with a small group of unarmed partisans. As we headed further into the depths of the forest, our group became hopelessly lost. We were now without protection, food, or water; all there was to eat or drink was snow. At dusk, as the temperatures plummeted, we embraced each other tightly in an attempt to stay warm. We rubbed each other's feet to avert frostbite, expecting to freeze to death. The only way to ensure that the blood would continue to pump through our bodies was to keep moving, so we trudged through the dense underbrush, not knowing where we were headed. We felt abandoned and

panic-stricken.

I remember one specific night, lying with these people in a pit under the large branches of an evergreen tree that helped protect us from the wind and cold. Suddenly, we heard footsteps and men speaking German. Trembling with fright, I could feel my heart pounding. Mama held me tightly, my head buried in her chest. Was this the end? Did we come this far only to be captured now? Fortunately, the soldiers brought no dogs to sniff us out. They passed only yards away from us. Had they come during daylight, they would have seen our footsteps in the snow. We stayed put all night, listening to the howling of wolves, our bodies shivering in the numbing winter cold.

The next night, we came upon several armed Russian partisans, and we gathered with them in an old abandoned *ziemlanka*. It was too dangerous to light a fire, so we lay down sideways like packed sardines, one against the other, trying to preserve what little warmth our bodies could generate, and fell asleep. We had not slept this soundly for many nights. It was too dangerous to fall asleep in the open forest; those who did so froze to death. The next morning, we separated into smaller groups and again scattered into the thickest parts of the forest.

I ran to the front of the line, while my mother walked further back. Unbeknownst to either of us, our group had split in two. When I glanced back, my mother was nowhere in sight; she had obviously gone with a different group. I found myself alone with four armed partisans. When they saw me tagging along, they picked up their pace in order to lose me. I ran as fast as my legs would go. Panting and out of breath, I begged them to please slow down and let me go with them.

"My mother is in the other group!" I told them, thinking if they understood that, they would slow down. "My father is Dr. Miasnik, the forest surgeon!" I yelled; surely that would make them take me along. They ignored me. I quickly realized I had better save my energy by not speaking. I had to run after them, or else I would find myself alone in the middle of the vast wilderness. Without protection, shelter, or food, my worst fears would be realized: I would freeze to death alone. Finally, at dusk, my mother and I reunited in the old *ziemlanka*. Breathless and in tears, I fell into her arms. I felt I could survive anything as long as I had my parents. The joy of our reunion fed our empty stomachs, because there was no real food to eat; we had been eating nothing but snow for about a week. I slept in Mama's embrace, secure for the night.

#### LIFE IN A JEWISH FAMILY CAMP

Eventually, my father returned and we were reunited. He placed us in a Jewish family camp, knowing he would be away much of the time tending to the sick and wounded. Because women, children, and older Jews were not admitted into partisan fighting units, they sought safety by form-



FIG. 4: Miriam and her mother, Bronka Miasnik.

ing their own family camps in scattered parts of the forest to elude detection and capture. The Lipiczany wilderness, because of its inaccessibility and isolation, served as a haven for Jewish families who had escaped the surrounding ghettos. The Jews in our family camp were mostly escapees from the Polish town of Zhetel.

Because the Jews in family camps were generally unarmed, they could not protect themselves from German raids, attacks by antisemitic partisans, or capture by roving groups of local Nazi sympathizers. Jews in family camps were often unprepared for the primitiveness of forest life. Their occupants suffered from malnutrition and froze for lack of warm clothing. With little or no medical care, many died from diseases such as typhus, gangrenous frozen extremities, and occasional bullet wounds.

However, being in a family camp provided us with shelter and the warmth of a fire. We shared all available food; when less food was available, we ate thinner soups. Most importantly, we had other Jews around us to help each other. In many ways, though, it was less safe to be in a family camp than with a group of armed partisans; but they did not want children, so my mother had no choice but to keep us where we were.

Because the Jews living in family camps were not armed or protected by partisans, they had no way to secure their own food supply. Some brought enough money or valuables from the ghettos to buy items from local peasants; at times, they were robbed during such attempts. We lived one day at a time, never knowing the source of our next meal and uncertain as to when the enemy would strike again. Our *ziemlanka* was poorly built and not insulated, and at times, it was too dangerous to light fires for fear of detection. Many of the defenseless Jews living in family camps died before liberation.

Family groups were eager to obtain weapons from the armed Jewish partisans that they could then use to steal their own food. Many depended on the good nature of some Jewish partisans to supply them with limited amounts of food, usually flour and potatoes. However, such groups could not rely on these sporadic efforts. Some partisans, especially those who came to the forest with families, parked their children and parents in camps that were intentionally located near the *otriads* (fighting detachments). The proximity to partisans assured them of obtaining food and of being warned of imminent Nazi attacks. However, most Jewish partisan leaders in the Lipiczany wilderness were occupied fighting the Germans and did relatively little to help feed Jews living in family camps.

In the winter of 1943, my mother fell sick with typhus. She became progressively weaker as her fever climbed. A member of our group, a young woman named Shulamit, helped care for her, laying cold compresses on her feverish body. As her condition deteriorated, I realized that she

would soon die. My mother, my family, companion, and only friend in life, was about to be taken from me. I wondered who would want me, care for me, love me as she did. Who would be crazy enough to care for a 7-year-old child during a war meant to annihilate all Jews?

Working in another part of the forest, my father was told of Mama's illness. He immediately secured several sacks of potatoes and rushed to see us. He arrived to find my mother critically ill. I looked into his moist eyes and I knew what would happen. She lay there on her bed of wooden logs, pale and drawn. She had been drifting in and out of consciousness for nearly a week and was now in a coma. A raging fever consumed her strength and energy. Even as he attended to her, he was helpless; there was little he could do. In order not to alarm me, he left the *ziemlanka* and wandered out alone. I saw him, from a distance, crying. Mama was on the verge of death. Again, I was terrified of being left alone. I knew that Papa would be called upon to attend sick and wounded partisans elsewhere, and I would be at the mercy of strangers. I cried alone, as Papa cried alone. The night dragged on in anticipation of her death. With lumps in our throats, we tried to sleep. As dawn approached, to our disbelief, she was awake and smiling at us. Her fever was down, and she spoke to us. "Mirele, my Mirele!" was all that she could say. Slowly she regained her strength, and my father reluctantly returned to his medical duties.

### MY FATHER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

My father's medical responsibilities to the partisans were extremely difficult to carry out. The toughest aspect of his work was reaching wounded partisans in remote areas of the forest on his horse. Those who were too ill to be moved had to be tended to on the spot. He had neither an attendant staff to help him nor a sterile ambient environment in which to operate. He had no medications to ease the pain and prevent infection. All he could offer the injured men was some vodka.

He carried with him a small satchel of boiled surgical instruments and cloths, hoping they would suffice. After the surgery, the treated partisan had to fend for himself during his painful recovery; my father would leave to attend to another wounded partisan, never knowing the outcome of his efforts.

Traveling alone and thus unsupervised, my father was often able to stop to treat sick Jews in scattered family camps. These Jews had no access to medical care and might otherwise have died. Clearly, a better way had to be devised to care for the sick. In response, the Russian high command proposed the establishment of a central forest hospital to serve the entire Lipiczany wilderness, with my father as chief of staff.

## **BUILDING A HOSPITAL**

Building a hospital in the wilderness seemed preposterous at first. It was difficult even to imagine such an endeavor. Where would it be established? Eventually, a small island completely surrounded by vast swamps was chosen because of its remoteness and difficult access. Such a site would be difficult to find and capture in the event of German raids. For additional security, it was crucial that the hospital's location be kept secret from anyone not directly involved in its operation.

The challenges in implementing such a facility were enormous. The most difficult challenge was gaining access to the island. Building a real bridge with the limited equipment and supplies on hand was impossible. Finally, it was decided to float logs over the swamp to serve as a makeshift, albeit unsteady, bridge. The wounded were carried on stretchers, or on someone's back, over the logs. Sometimes, however, the carriers slipped and fell into the swamp, and great effort was required to fish them out. Living quarters were built to house patients and staff. As soon as an adequate *ziemlanka* was built, my mother and I joined my father in the hospital, where we were finally reunited. Provisions had to be made for beds, surgical instruments, sterilization equipment, medications, anesthetics, and numerous other items essential for administering proper care. Partisan raiders executed missions to secure the needed supplies from municipal hospitals in surrounding towns. A supply of doctors and nurses had to be assembled; the best source of such trained professionals were Jewish doctors and nurses who had been rescued from the ghettos. In addition, the hospital had to procure its own food supplies by raiding hostile farmers who collaborated with the Germans. These needs necessitated the recruitment of a cadre of armed partisans who would also live in the hospital. Jewish women from family camps, who were not partisans, performed the daily household chores. This work was a gift of life for them; they might otherwise have had no protection. Approximately 40 Jews were recruited to run the hospital. My mother and I helped do various chores, as needed.

Two Jewish doctors and several Jewish nurses were among the earliest staff members. In the absence of other children in the family compound, I became the object of their fond attentions. Most of their families had been killed in ghetto slaughters. I became the "generic" child, doted on by them as though I were their own. They became my new extended family. In time, we all learned each other's life histories before and during the war.

There were more peaceful times when there was a lull in the fighting and less activity in the hospital. On those quiet evenings, we lit a campfire and sang Yiddish songs from childhood, Russian patriotic songs, and prewar Polish ones, as well. My father, a former member of Hashomer Hatzair, sang the Hebrew songs of Palestine. Some people had tears

in their eyes as they remembered their beloved families who had been shot in ghetto slaughters.

I felt safe in the hospital knowing that I was living in a specially designated area guarded by the partisan high command. The swamps surrounding the island afforded extra protection from discovery and capture by the enemy. By now, I was experienced, well adapted to forest life. For my safety, especially to protect me from rape by Russian partisans, my father shaved off my hair, and I wore boys' clothing that my mother had sewn for me. Dressed in military pants and sweater, I felt safer and more powerful pretending I was a boy. I tried to act the part by working hard, helping the posted guards on the other side of the swamp, gathering wood, and camouflaging trails. I had a knack for finding my way and never got lost because I remembered such details as the formation and bark colors of specific trees and unusually spaced bushes.

I celebrated my eighth birthday in the hospital compound with my parents and my forest family. The gift from my father made this day particularly special for me: He gave me a real pistol. It had been confiscated from a captured German officer who, according to the partisans, planned to give the small and dainty gun to his girlfriend as a present. I proudly wore it at my side in a special holster. In my boyish military uniform, with the pistol on the side, I felt like a real partisan.

## **LIFE IN THE HOSPITAL COMPOUND**

Life in the hospital compound was not easy. The partisan high command had appointed a Russian to be the non-medical chief of the hospital; an ignorant man, he cursed the Jews when he was drunk and lusted for the Jewish women around him. As chief of the medical staff, my father protected the Jews, but at considerable risk to himself. Acts of antisemitism occurred on a daily basis as Jews were singled out by the Russian partisans as objects of suspicion and hatred.

It once happened that most of the wounded in the hospital were Jews. Among them was a young woman who had developed gas gangrene. My father worked on her around the clock for several days in an effort to save her legs. The Russian commander accused my father of giving better medical care to the Jews than to the Russians. A screaming brawl followed. Because this contentious situation threatened the hospital's ability to function, the commander was eventually replaced.

An unwritten but accepted law governed the safety of women. A "forest wife," a woman who lived permanently with a man (husband, lover, or boyfriend) was free from overt advances or rape by other men. On the other hand, an unattached woman was fair game for every man and was thus extremely vulnerable. This reality led to many pairings of women with single men, in order to keep the women safe. Many remained as couples after the war.

An unusual girl in her late teens was part of the hospital staff. She was a devout Jew who did not eat meat except when a cow was slaughtered according to the rules of *kashrut*. She cooked potatoes, beans, and dairy products in her own small metal pot. As is the custom of religious Jews, she would not work on the Sabbath. The Russians liked to bait her and assign special chores for her to do on Saturdays. I remember my mother and the other Jewish women secretly doing her tasks to spare her from punishment for disobeying orders. All sorts of arrangements were made with Jewish men in order to protect her from the Russians. That she survived innocent and pure is amazing. Many years later, I attended her wedding to a rabbi in Brooklyn; our extended family-camp ties remained strong.

We were not able to maintain many family traditions, but I do recall Yom Kippur in 1943. My parents did not eat or drink on that day. I heard my father sing the *Kol Nidre*, a haunting prayer with a melody that symbolized to me the very mystery of being Jewish. My parents spoke quietly of their lives as children with their own parents. They cried for their lost families who were probably all dead by now.

Every day was fraught with danger and fear. The most dangerous jobs involved raids on nearby farms to obtain food. The men who carried out these missions returned with animal carcasses, flour, potatoes, onions, bread, and dairy foods. Because the hospital was staffed mainly by Jews, my father convinced the raiders to conveniently “lose” some of the food along the way back. The “lost” food went to the unarmed Jewish family camp groups of women, children, and elderly Jews. Without this sustenance, many would have starved. Such tasks were undertaken in great secrecy in order not to run afoul of the Russians in charge.

Throughout the war, we heard news of the life-and-death struggle between the Russian and German armies on the eastern front and of the slow German retreat from Moscow, Stalingrad, and Leningrad. I had no idea where these places were located; they were mere names to me, remote and far away. I could not envision the concept of being free and unafraid. Occupied with staying alive, I no longer thought back to my life as a child, when I was part of a normal family. This war had consumed five long years of my young life, and for most of it, I had lived in fear of losing my parents. My life as a “boy” partisan, with my head shaved and a pistol on my side, now felt more natural to me than did wearing dresses. My life, like that of other Jews, had been such a persistent struggle to survive that I found it hard to believe we would still be alive to celebrate liberation.

In early 1944, just after I turned nine and the cold winter gave way to spring, we heard the rumble of planes overhead. To our great surprise and delight, Russian soldiers parachuted into the forest, a sign that we would soon be liberated! One soldier had been wounded and was treated in our hospital. He told us that the soldiers had been instructed in

Moscow that in case of injury they should seek treatment in Dr. Miasnik's forest hospital.

## LIBERATION

In July 1944, Russian tanks entered the forest. As the soldiers advanced, they left behind them groups of defeated Germans who now sought shelter in our forest. The swamps and woods that had protected us as partisans were becoming havens for the enemy and extremely dangerous for us. Fortunately, just as the Nazis started infiltrating our hiding places, we were liberated.

News traveled fast within our forest wilderness: Partisans from near and far converged to meet our liberators. We greeted the Russian soldiers ecstatically. Tears in our eyes, we hugged and kissed them as our saviors. Together with my father, my mother, and the rest of my extended forest family, I saluted the soldiers. I kissed one in gratitude. As he embraced me, he complimented my father on his brave “son.” I didn't react; the feeling of being liberated superseded all other emotions. I was relieved that Nazis no longer threatened us, yet I was apprehensive. What would “normal” life be like? What new obstacles awaited me? It was a time of ambivalence, when the bitterness of war gave way to the sweetness of liberation, and yet the bitterness continued to haunt us in memories and nightmares. It was a time of joy but also a time of mourning all those who had perished.

## THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH

My father had saved the lives of hundreds of Russian partisans and numerous Jews in the Lipiczany forest. After liberation, he was awarded the *Orden Lenina* (Order of Lenin), the highest medal for a civilian in the USSR, for his medical contributions in the resistance to the Nazis, making him the most decorated Jewish doctor of the war.

For a Jew to have survived the war was amazing; for a Jewish family to have survived intact was nothing short of a miracle. My father was recognized for his efforts and was rewarded. This world still had a place for us. We became drunk with the spirit of life. ■

## NOTE

I did not know until years later just how lucky I had been. Yitzhak Arad's (2009) text *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* discusses that December invasion of the Lipiczany forest, called “Operation Hamburg,” in which some 3,000 Jews were killed (most by the Germans, others by antisemitic partisans), including three major Jewish partisan leaders: Hirsz Kaplinski, Alter Dworecki, and Dr. Icheskel Atlas (p. 509).

## REFERENCE

Arad, Y. (2009). *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, and Jerusalem: Yad Vashem.

For educators seeking research strands, poet Seymour Mayne's "Last Photo: February 23, 1942" portrays a double suicide, a tragic and under-researched result of the Nazi assault on the Jews. The poem was written in memory of Stefan Zweig, who, with his wife, Charlotte Elisabeth Altmann, took their own lives in Petrópolis, Brazil, in 1942. Overwhelmed by a sense of impending disaster and unable to live any longer in exile, the couple took an overdose of the sedative Veronal and were discovered in their bed, holding hands. The poem that follows, "Sephardi Great-Grandfather," may encourage research on the little-known experience of the Sephardic community in the Holocaust.

*Seymour Mayne*

## *Last Photo: February 23, 1942*

*in memory of Stefan Zweig*

Europe nearly overrun  
by the swastika  
you fled westward and south,  
finding temporary haven in Rio  
where you could not stay

the desperate move.  
Dispatched by your own hand—  
yet you wore your tie  
even to the end,  
correct and knotted perfectly  
in the Viennese fashion.

Your mouth open, your devoted  
wife leaning on your shoulder—  
together on the bed  
they found you.  
Here in this final photo  
you lie side by side,

prepared to hold  
each other in the longest  
lasting embrace.

You float suspended there  
as if in flight from history,  
a doubly dark omen  
of Jewish fidelity  
and fear. ■



*Seymour Mayne*

## *Sephardi Great-Grandfather*

*for Mrs. M. Negri*

He saved his ardour  
not for his youthful wife  
or offspring young enough  
to be his grandchildren  
but for his holy books.  
Psalms he collected,  
English editions, Italian—  
each page with Hebrew opposite,  
aged, letterpressed  
with the fine script  
of Rashi and the choric  
aramaic of Onkelos.

To praise the Lord—  
this was his way  
gathering the celebrations  
to bequeath them.  
So a century later  
they are handled reverently  
by a granddaughter  
saved as well from the Gestapo  
and living still between  
the grey shadows of the Acropolis  
and Wolves' Hill.

*Athens, Pesach, 5740 ■*

Psychologist Leo Goldberger notes that “the terrible fate that finally also befell the 7,800 Jews living in Denmark in the early days of October 1943 was traumatic for everyone—whether adult, child, or family unit—who experienced these now historic events. . . . albeit on a limited time scale and intensity.” He uses his personal history to help us understand that “the anxiety and confusion took its toll and challenged even the most resilient families.” Events and reflections in his narrative are echoed in poems by Rachel Goldstein (p. 6), Seymour Mayne (p. 37), and Marjorie Agosín (pp. 105–107).

*Leo Goldberger*

## The Lives of Jewish Families in Flight From the Nazi Roundup: Denmark, October 1943

The literature on the Holocaust is replete with testimonies and systematic studies dealing with numerous aspects of this shameful chapter of human history. While it is a history that will always defy our full comprehension of its diabolical and tragic dimensions, it behooves us, nevertheless, to try to understand what life was like in those dark days of the Nazi scourge, which began in 1933 and lasted until 1945 in much of Europe. Here I will focus mainly on my personal experiences and knowledge of what transpired in the lives of many other Jewish families in Denmark, the country where my immediate family and I lived [Fig. 1] before and during the German occupation—and from which we were lucky enough to escape in 1943 to the safe haven of Sweden.

My goal is to shed some light on the traumatic effects of the escape on families. A few caveats: First, the study of the family, including its formal structure, its cohesion, and its rupture, belongs within the rubric of sociology, which lies outside my professional ken. However, as a psychologist, I am quite familiar with the topics of stress and trauma and the impact such emotional states may have on individuals and the family. Second, it is clearly beyond the scope of this essay to approach the broader question



**FIG. 1:** It had been my father's habit to send our extended family a professional photo along with an update of how everyone was doing. This photo (1935 or 1936) in wonderful Copenhagen shows (from left to right) my brother Milan; my mother, Helene; my brother Gustav; me (Leo); and my father, Eugene.

of Jewish family life during the Holocaust. Such an undertaking would require a discussion of many themes, such as the unique values and importance embodied in the Jewish family in its varied historical, cultural, and socio-economic

contexts, and the special circumstances that Jews found themselves in during the Holocaust, whether they were living in ghettos; serving in labor camps, transit camps, or death camps; or in hiding.

The persecution of Jews by the Nazis, the terrible fate that finally also befell the 7,800 Jews living in Denmark in the early days of October 1943, was traumatic for everyone—whether adult, child, or family unit—who experienced these now historic events. By far, the greatest trauma and long-term stress were endured by those 472 Danish Jews who tragically were deported to Theresienstadt, the large Nazi concentration (Kz) camp in Czechoslovakia. Their ordeal requires a unique perspective. The horror of deportation and confinement in a far-off land, facing deprivations including near-starvation and an uncertain fate, cannot be conveyed in the few sentences allotted here; it requires a separate chapter. From all accounts by the Danish Jews who survived, it was an unspeakable hell on earth, especially for those separated from their families at the time they were caught,<sup>1</sup> but for the 7,200 Jews who successfully escaped to Sweden, there was trauma as well, albeit on a limited time scale and intensity.

### THE FAMILY UNDER PRESSURE

The trauma we all experienced during the days of the intended roundup in Denmark consisted, in the main, of having to confront an unexpected and potentially life-threatening situation. Added to this was the suddenness with which one had to take quick and decisive action, namely, to hide somewhere and ultimately to flee somewhere—but how? Where? These were, of course, the burning questions. At this juncture, the family unit was under severe pressure. The family was often simply broken up; separate hiding places for individual members of the nuclear family were thought to be the only solution. For some intermarried couples, husbands and wives made the decision to separate, with the Gentile husband or wife remaining in Denmark while the Jewish spouse fled. Concern about how the extended family was faring, whether living in Denmark or elsewhere in Nazi Europe, was yet another element in the traumatic upheaval faced by many of us. The “why” question—why the sudden agitation in the family and the dramatic shift in the daily routine—was more on the minds of the children. Their capacity to comprehend the reasons for all the tumult and the worry and the despair of their parents was limited at best. In their later testimony, even 4-year-olds recall these frightening moments of concern while they clung to their dolls or security blankets (Enoch, 2010). Why are the Germans after us? What have we ever done to those soldiers in their strange green uniforms? Watching one’s parents reduced to fear and helplessness was not an easy thing to process. Even more disturbing, at least for the many children who were left behind, were the questions: Why am I being sent away to live with complete

strangers? For how long will I be alone?

The fact that many children were left behind has, strangely enough, only surfaced in the past five years of archival research (conducted by historian Sofie Lene Bak [2009] of the Danish Jewish Museum in Copenhagen). The estimate is that more than 100 children, ranging from babies to teenagers, were left behind with non-Jewish friends, acquaintances, or complete strangers. Fearing the uncertain future as they were on the run from the German roundup, parents felt it safer for their children to remain behind, despite the anguish and pain of separation. One can imagine the plight of parents as they made these heartrending decisions. In some instances, their decisions were influenced by an unfortunate false rumor that crying or noisy children might be dumped overboard during the dangerous crossing to Sweden! These parents were apparently unaware of the common practice advised by physicians on hand of sedating younger children as they waited to board fishing boats (Sofie Lene Bak, 2009).

Our apartment was located in a rundown building in the center of old Copenhagen within a short walk to the Great Synagogue, where my father was the cantor. From the time Denmark became occupied, the future and safety of Jewish families, as well as those of the Danes, were unclear. Like all other buildings, ours also had its own makeshift air-raid shelter in the basement, where we were to spend many an uncomfortable and anxious night, listening to the thud of bombs and anti-aircraft shelling, followed by the “bah-boos” of ambulances, the rumble of fire trucks and, at last, the welcome wail of the “all-clear” siren.

At about 3:30 in the morning on August 29, 1943, the fateful date martial law was declared in Denmark and a month prior to the general roundup of the Jews, the Germans took some 150 hostages, mostly prominent Danes, including a dozen or so Jews. Unlike the other Jewish functionaries on the arrest list, such as Chief Rabbi Friediger, the rabbi of the Great Synagogue, my father had a sixth sense not to respond to the incessant and loud banging on our front door. Fortunately, an upstairs neighbor came to our aid by yelling down to the Gestapo that the Goldbergers were not at home, and the Gestapo left. Thus, my father was saved from internment in a local transit camp and subsequent transport to Theresienstadt, the fate of the other Jews apprehended that night.

Right after the urgent warning sounded in the synagogue in the early hours of September 29, a few days before Rosh Hashana in 1943, word quickly spread throughout most of the Jewish community that there would be only a few days to engage in planning before the dreaded roundup that was about to occur during the High Holy Days. What household belongings to take—clothes, valuables, the Sabbath candlesticks (often a treasured family heirloom), the family photo album, important documents—required quick thinking and

decision making. Other questions worried us: Do we pay the rent for our apartment or place of business? To whom should we turn over our home or business for safekeeping? The unanswerable question plagued us all—for how long?

The anxiety and confusion took its toll and challenged even the most resilient families. Some coped quite well under the circumstances. Within a couple of days, they made all the necessary arrangements. Many others, though, were at a loss to know what to do and where to turn, especially when family members were very old or indigent. With the anxiety level increasing by the hour, in some instances sheer paralysis ensued, mingled with a desperate attempt to find one's way to some sort of suitable hiding place. Some families were rent by members who despaired to the point of suicide (at least 13 followed through—in one case an entire family, including children). Others simply waited passively for some sort of deliverance. Many Jews without families were caught in the Jewish Old Age Home, situated in the courtyard of the hurriedly abandoned synagogue, and were brutally rounded up and tossed into covered “prairie wagons” in the early morning hours while Copenhagen slept. These people were unloaded and marched up the gangplank of a huge German transport boat anchored along the harbor on their first leg to the cattle cars that would transport them to the Czech city of Theresienstadt, where they would be among the 50 or so Danish Jews who succumbed to death in the camp.

### **A SAFE HIDING PLACE—AND A BOAT**

The most urgent need of the Jews of Denmark was to find a safe hiding place and a reliable connection to someone with a boat (or whatever could float—even a rowboat was used by some). A great deal of help was needed, and it came from an empathic non-Jewish population: old friends, neighbors, and even total strangers, although in the latter case there was a chance—and the fear—that the stranger might turn out to be an informer. In a very general sense, the degree to which any Jewish family was integrated into the Danish community, spoke the language, and had a social network of non-Jewish friends increased the chances of getting the needed help. It must be noted that many Danes perceived Jews as fellow countrymen rather than some alien species; once they became aware of the persecution of the Jews, they volunteered to locate and help as many as they could. The mainstream Jewish families could readily be identified in the phonebook by their Jewish names. It was more difficult to locate the marginalized refugee families (totaling approximately 1,000 individuals) who sought asylum in Denmark in the late 1930s; because of poverty, they often lived as boarders in other people's homes. An even more daunting task was tracking down some 480 young Jewish women and men, separated from and out of touch with their families languishing elsewhere in Nazi Europe. These young people had been

allowed into Denmark at the beginning of WW II as agricultural trainees and lived scattered throughout rural Denmark in preparation for their ultimate Zionist dream destination, Palestine. Yet within days, the so-called rescuers included spontaneously formed enclaves of university students, teachers, doctors, police, and a host of other quite ordinary men and women who searched for Jews to save.

Once Jews on the run were in hiding places, the question loomed large of how to obtain transportation for our voyage across to Sweden. While everyone knew that Sweden was “neutral,” few were sure whether the Swedes would welcome a large contingent of Jewish refugees. Would the fishermen be interned and their boats seized? Would we be placed in refugee camps, or worse, sent back? Would our family unit remain intact? The coast guard was reputed to be on constant vigilance along the coast, and boats other than commercial fishing vessels had been confiscated long ago. In fact, it was not until the fortuitous intervention of the Swedish government by the famous atomic physicist Niels Bohr, whose mother was Jewish and who himself had been whisked off to Sweden on September 29, that the Swedes broadcasted their willingness over the radio to offer refuge for the Jews fleeing Denmark (Yahil, 1969).

The idea of a successful crossing seemed an impossibility, not only because of the difficulty in making the necessary contacts but also because of the often exorbitant amount of money needed to pay for the passage. This additional obstacle was worrisome and at times difficult to overcome. However, with the increased leadership by members of the preexisting Danish Resistance movement in organizing the rescue process, which spanned some two or three weeks in total, the cost was scaled down and funds were provided for those in need. More significantly, members of the resistance secured safe hiding places and reliable boat connections and, with their pistols at the ready, guided the nightly stream of Jewish families. Often wearing several layers of clothing, we escaping Jews would be brought from our various hiding places to the beaches along the coastline from where we would depart, often having to wade some 10 or 15 feet to reach the boat, parents carrying young children while desperately clutching their few belongings in a suitcase about to drop into the water and sink. A sad and somber image, indeed!

For all of us who went through the experience in those dark wintry days, it was certainly not an easy time, despite the current argument that the success of the mass exodus was in large measure due to the lack of an aggressive pursuit by the Germans. Twenty-one people perished by drowning; others had the misfortune of being caught on land while in the process of escaping, or were captured on the high seas, betrayed by a Danish pro-Nazi traitor and sent to Theresienstadt. As we learned from official archival docu-

ments only many years after the events: *yes*, the Germans did deliberately “look the other way”; and *yes*, the consequences for those who were caught in the act of helping the Jews to escape were mostly rather mild; and *yes*, the German need for Danish goods and services made them want to avoid a major upset among the general populace (Yahil, 1969). Needless to say, though, this knowledge was unavailable to us at the time. All we have in our recollections and testimonies are our own subjective experiences, perhaps somewhat embellished by extraneous knowledge with time and repeated telling.

What stands out most in the collective narrative of the events is the uncertainty of what was to happen to our families and to us, the anxiety and whereabouts of our loved ones, and the concern for what the future might hold for us as refugees. The idea of being a refugee was such a foreign notion to most of us that it was difficult even to imagine. Then there are the vivid memories of how miserable it was to find oneself in the hull of a fishing boat, crowded like the proverbial canned sardines, covered with canvas, suffocating with the smell of rotting fish, and falling ill with seasickness. The journey was not always smooth sailing. Frequently, it was fraught with unexpected terror, such as searching midstream for a passing Swedish boat willing to take us aboard inasmuch as the Danish fisherman feared internment in a Swedish harbor. The transfer from one boat to another in the choppy sea was fraught with mishaps as well.

### FAMILIES RESETTLED IN SWEDEN

Once in Sweden, all was well. There was relief and joy, though the nightmare lived on in the deeper recesses of our memory. In Sweden, we had the common experience of any group of refugees throughout the world: adapting to new circumstances, language, and culture, which for most of us was not too difficult considering the close historical ties within Scandinavia. The question of where to live and work was another matter, not that easily solved, but, by and large, a comfortable solution was found by most of us.

My family settled in Gothenburg, where my father had located a small synagogue that needed a cantor. My brother Gustav, four years my junior, attended the Danish Refugee School, which was quickly established there and was supplied, with the help of the Danish Resistance movement, with all the relevant textbooks and exams required by the national Danish curriculum. My brother Milan, 18 months my senior, with whom I had been very close as a youngster, did not continue his schooling in Sweden. Though Milan was only 15, my father had made the fateful decision that he should go to work to help improve our family’s meager income—at least for the duration of our refugee stay in Sweden. So, while in Gothenburg, Milan worked as an apprentice in a furrier workshop—and our paths began to diverge, intellectually and socially. As I kept pace with my educational program, making progress towards gymnasium matriculation, enjoying the friendship of my fellow Danish classmates and Boy Scout comrades [Fig. 2], he was drifting into the life and company of Swedish blue-collar workers.

The divergent paths taken by the two of us in those formative years led to a strain that has never quite healed.

However, in the majority of cases, the family rose to the challenge and remained cohesive. Depending on specific circumstances, life continued its normal course. We were helped by the initiatives of the collective Danish contingent and the establishment of an efficient Danish refugee organization in the major cities and fine refugee schools in Lund and Gothenburg, which had even arranged to smuggle in all the required Danish textbooks and exams via an underground network. Quite memorable was the fact that we all tended to stick together in solidarity both as a family and as Danes, living day by day in the fervent hope that we might soon return home. In some sense, sharing our traumatic experience and living with a common hope for a quick end to the war and safe return to our beloved Denmark, we, as refugees, became one closely knit, extended family. We never considered Sweden as more than a temporary residence.

### AT HOME: A FEAST OF WELCOME

In June 1945, shortly after the war’s end, we finally were allowed to return home to a universal feast of welcome, and our family and the others joyfully returned to life in Den-



**FIG. 2:** While I was active in the Boy Scouts in Sweden, my brother Milan went to work to help our family financially.



**FIG. 3:** Seen in the foreground is the Chief Rabbi of Denmark, Dr. Max Friediger, who, just a few months earlier, had been released from Theresienstadt along with the other 425 Danish Jews there in the unique exchange arranged by Count Folke Bernadotte of the Swedish Red Cross. Dr. Friediger's confinement in Theresienstadt had taken its toll and, sad to say, he died just two years later at age 63.

mark. Through the diligence and care of wonderful people and official agencies, our homes, workplaces, and friendships remained mostly intact, awaiting our return.

We found our apartment in good shape, faithfully cared for in our absence by our live-in housekeeper, who greeted us with flowers, freshly brewed coffee, and the proverbial "Danish" pastry. Already by June of 1945 the Great Synagogue of Copenhagen was cleaned up (the Nazis had used it as a horse stall!) and ready for the official rededication ceremony. I recall it as a most solemn and moving event. Among the many dignitaries in attendance were representatives of the government, the leading bishop, and other church officials, notably the minister from the nearby Trinitatis Church, which had safeguarded the Torah scrolls during our almost two-year refuge in Sweden. My entire family was present. My brothers, Milan, Gus, and Erik, sat proudly

**FIG. 4:** This photo was taken within that joyful, initial period of our family's return home to Copenhagen in 1945. From left to right: Gustav; my father, Eugene; Milan; me (Leo); my mother, Helene; and Erik.



in our family row, near the front, and my mother, in her center seat in the upstairs gallery as we heard our father's emotion-infused voice intoning the traditional prayer of thanks [Fig. 3].

It was a thrill to be back home [Fig. 4]. The war had ended. Jubilation spilled onto the streets of Copenhagen, with the liberation soldiers everywhere—American, English, Russian, Canadian—milling about in town squares. Improvised bands played, people danced and exchanged words and souvenirs with the soldiers. It was still summer and vacation time, so the work and discipline of the school year had not yet set in. It was an exciting few months for us all.

In the fall, we returned to school; my father enrolled Milan in a yeshiva, where he would excel. However, as the months went by, I sensed a melancholy thread that seemed to especially affect my father, who steadfastly pursued

the whereabouts of our extended families in Czechoslovakia and Austria-Hungary. Almost weekly notifications from the Red Cross resulted in one bad tidings after the other for many families, including ours. Almost all of my father's brothers and sisters and their immediate families had perished. My father became increasingly morose and, with his growing awareness of the Soviet menace, a desire to move away from Europe took root. My mother's parents and two of her siblings miraculously survived, living in hiding on a farm near Bratislava. (Three of her siblings had succeeded in getting to

Palestine in the late 1930s via Cyprus.) Some years later, after our own immigration to Canada, my maternal grandparents and two of my mother's siblings were able to join us in Montreal, which became our family's new geographic center. After just a few years in Montreal, though, my grandparents revealed that, with the establishment of Israel, they were now more eager than ever to settle in the Promised Land. They did just that, joining their sons and daughters there, living out their lives in the city of B'nei B'rak.

### THE MEMORIES LINGER

The memories will linger and, like the Passover story, will become part of our cultural heritage. Over these past 68 years, I have heard and read hundreds of stories of our rescue. I remain consistently impressed by how amply it demonstrates the nature of ordinary people's reconstructions of their life histories, with the attendant internal silences, mythologies, and often quite fragmentary memory. Among those of us who were quite young at the time, I can discern the theme of the loss of a happy and carefree childhood and the persistent mourning for the rupture in one's extended family—the uncles, aunts, cousins, and grandparents one never got to know, and, of course, the millions of our fellow Jews who were not as fortunate as we were in Denmark, the millions who, tragically, did not escape the ultimate horrors of the Holocaust. ■

### NOTES

1. To the lasting credit of Danish officialdom, arrangements were made for regular food and clothing packages and even for an unheard-of "inspection visit" by the Danish Red Cross to Theresienstadt. Despite the obvious sham performances put on by the Germans to proudly show off their "model camp," these arrangements provided a morale boost for the Danish Jews. They were not forgotten! However, undoubtedly the greatest humanitarian achievement by the Danish officials was their insistence on monitoring the fate of the Danish-Jewish inmates, extracting an assurance from the German Headquarters in Copenhagen that their fellow countrymen would not be further transported to other camps, such as the dreaded Auschwitz, which was the case for so many Jews of other nationalities in Theresienstadt.

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*Israel I. Halpern*

## *Love in a Death Camp*

*for my Aunt Feigel*

"My father had 11 brothers and sisters," writes poet Israel I. Halpern. "Three (Dora, Hershel, and Leo) managed to escape and survive; I knew them and loved them. They told me of my Tante [Aunt] Feigel and her travails and martyrdom." Halpern shares this improbable true love story set in the midst of "smoke, ashes, and darkness."

Swept along to the train in her pinafore,  
Feigel braided her hair for the cattle car.

She found a space on the unwashed corner planks,  
listened to the steam engine as everyone swayed.

Last last stop, Ravensbrück, arrived with a lurch.  
An old woman from her village gave Feigel a wrinkled carrot.

There was smoke, ashes, and darkness.  
Guards slammed truncheons into her back.

On her way to the showers, she saw a young man  
staring at her, looking away, then looking again.

She smiled at him and lifted her still-delicate left hand  
so her fingers seemed to wave at him.

He bowed and returned the gesture of three fingers,  
he pantomimed his name and his admiration of her.

She pointed to an imaginary wristwatch, winked one eye,  
then grimaced her mute-show of hunger and helplessness.

He indicated on his right hand an imaginary wedding ring,  
fluttered his hands over his heart and pointed to her, then to himself.

They moved closer together whenever they could, until, in the soup  
line, they spotted, among the doomed, a toothless tubercular rabbi.

For the swain's socks, they hired the Maggid to marry them,  
as they trembled in line for the honeymoon chamber. ■



In this excerpt from a much longer work, child survivor Irena Klepfisz introduces us to her mother, who “is walking down a road. Somewhere in Poland.” She “has suddenly, bizarrely, met . . . a family friend. Another Jew.” The meeting is fortuitous; Irena and her mother, both ill, isolated, and starving, “begin to bridge the gap towards life.” Examine with your students some necessities of survival detailed here—false papers, ingenuity, family, friendship and kindness, food, haven, stamina and commitment, and great luck—and consider the role that each played in this poem and in essays by Rachel Iskov (pp. 20–26), Miriam Brysk (pp. 31–36), Leo Goldberger (pp. 39–44), Brana Gurewitsch (pp. 48–55), and Carson Phillips (pp. 59–64).

*Irena Klepfisz*

From *Bashert*:

*“Poland, 1944: My mother is walking down a road.”*

My mother is walking down a road. Somewhere in Poland. Walking towards an unnamed town for some kind of permit. She is carrying her Aryan identity papers. She has left me with an old peasant who is willing to say she is my grandmother.

She is walking down a road. Her terror in leaving me behind, in risking the separation, is swallowed now, like all other feelings. But as she walks, she pictures me waving from the dusty yard, imagines herself suddenly picked up, the identity papers challenged. And even if she were to survive that, would she ever find me later? She tastes the terror in her mouth again. She swallows.

I am over three years old, corn silk blond and blue eyed like any Polish child. There is terrible suffering among the peasants. Starvation. And like so many others, I am ill. Perhaps dying. I have bad lungs. Fever. An ugly ear infection that oozes pus. None of these symptoms are disappearing.

The night before, my mother feeds me watery soup and then sits and listens while I say my prayers to the Holy Mother, Mother of God. I ask her, just as the nuns taught me, to help us all: me, my mother, the old woman. And then catching myself, learning to use memory, I ask the Mother of God to help my father. The Polish words slip easily from my lips. My mother is satisfied. The peasant has perhaps heard and is reassured. My mother has found her to be kind, but knows that she is suspicious of strangers.

My mother is sick. Goiter. Malnutrition. Vitamin deficiencies. She has skin sores which she cannot cure. For months now she has been living in complete isolation, with no point of reference outside of herself. She has been her own sole advisor, companion, comforter. Almost everyone of her world is dead: three sisters, nephews, and nieces, her mother, her husband, her in-laws. All gone. Even the remnants of the resistance, those few left after the uprising, have dispersed into the Polish countryside. She is more alone than she could have ever imagined. Only she knows her real name and she is perhaps dying. She is thirty years old.

I am over three years old. I have no consciousness of our danger, our separateness from the others. I have no awareness that we are playing a part. I only know that I have a special name, that I have been named for the Goddess of Peace. And each night, I sleep secure in that knowledge. And when I wet my bed, my mother places me on her belly and lies on the stain. She fears the old woman and hopes her body's warmth will dry the sheet before dawn.

My mother is walking down a road. Another woman joins her. My mother sees through the deception, but she has promised herself that never, under any circumstances, will she take that risk. So she swallows her hunger for contact and trust and instead talks about the sick child left behind and lies about the husband in the labor camp.

Someone is walking towards them. A large, strange woman with wild red hair. They try not to look at her too closely, to seem overly curious. But as they pass her, my mother feels something move inside her. The movement grows and grows till it is an explosion of yearning that she cannot contain. She stops, orders her companion to continue without her. And then she turns.

The woman with the red hair has also stopped and turned. She is grotesque, bloated with hunger, almost savage in her rags. She and my mother move towards each other. Cautiously, deliberately, they probe past the hunger, the swollen flesh, the infected skin, the rags. Slowly, they begin to pierce five years of encrusted history. And slowly, there is perception and recognition.

In this wilderness of occupied Poland, in this vast emptiness where no one can be trusted, my mother has suddenly, bizarrely, met one of my father's teachers. A family friend. Another Jew.

They do not cry, but weep as they chronicle the dead and count the living. Then they rush to me. To the woman I am a familiar sight. She calculates that I will not live out the week, but comments only on my striking resemblance to my father. She says she has contacts. She leaves. One night a package of food is delivered anonymously. We eat. We begin to bridge the gap towards life. We survive. ■

*Bashert (Yid). Destiny.*

*pp. 48–55 intentionally omitted*

Due to a copyright issue, the essay “Struggling to Survive: Jewish Families in the Holocaust,” by Brana Gurewitsch, cannot be viewed on line.

A hard copy of this journal, including the Gurewitsch essay, is available on request. E-mail [prism@yu.edu](mailto:prism@yu.edu) and include your full mailing address.

"I was born in Grojec, a shtetl about 40 kilometers south of Warsaw," writes Helen Degen Cohen (Halina Degenfisiz). "Shortly after the Nazis invaded the shtetl, my parents and I fled to Lida, White Russia. When the Nazis invaded, my family was put into the Lida Ghetto [and later] rounded up. [As] my family stood among the crowd waiting to board the train, my mother gave me a cup and told me to pretend I was going for water at the water pump and to keep on walking until I found the house of the prison cook my parents had befriended, which I did. I was then not quite 8 years old. The cook, who had three children of her own, took me in and, within a few days, found Maria Szumska, a devout Catholic woman, who agreed to hide me. Szumska sold her belongings and, with the money, rented a cabin in the country in which she hid me for the last year of the war. Meanwhile, my parents had boarded the train—my father always said that after my mother got on the train she "tore her hair"—but, within hours, my father helped to organize an escape party, and he and my mother were among the 11 people (out of approximately 500) who jumped. After the war, after many efforts, they found me in the cabin among the farm fields—in a long dress and with long braids, looking "like a nun."

*Helen Degen Cohen*

## *How You Saved My Life*

*for the Hidden Child group—Chicago*

You were frightened,  
    your eyes like murder.  
And you, cemented down  
    to your bowels  
And it was all about tomorrow  
    and what death looked like,  
would it take your child—  
    who was a little strange  
    but a wonder—  
the evening darker than a field of  
    cabbages  
    and memory gone  
beneath the squeeze of fear—  
    tomorrow—  
You were frightened,  
    your face on the floor.  
And you, thrashing, thrashing,  
    you could have plowed a thousand  
    fields  
    with such wildness,  
But you were my parents, and you let me go. ■

*Seymour Mayne*

## *Zalman*

Naming a child is of profound importance in survivor families; in the new life, the hopes, the dreams, the very essence of one who was murdered may come to life. Seymour Mayne's "Zalman" captures this precisely: "Enough, we begin again, the father said, name him. / She will live."

The name was curiously given.

Both families agreed the firstborn's would be chosen from the mother's side.

Her father's name? No, he may still be alive—  
May '44—if the Nazis hadn't killed him yet.

Who knew of his end then?

But the mother's mother,  
Zlateh—she who had married twice  
and amassed money and means—  
a boy named after a woman? Was it a forbidden thing?  
And the name rooted from the Marranos  
and hidden observance: Zalman;  
Suleiman—did they know of the Turkish origins?  
Not drawn from the Pentateuch,  
no, a name of the orient, the eastern Diaspora  
and linked in the beginning, the first consonant,  
with a grandmother whose only lasting image:  
the block of stone carved with Hebrew  
in Bialystock's cemetery and her youngest son,  
the uncle, standing there in the photo  
just weeks before Poland fell—  
the rest of her brood caught in a burning synagogue  
before they could buy passage to New Jersey or Montreal.  
She was dead then, her ears stopped  
with that terrible silence marking its way  
from the din of outrage—the flames licked the night  
and the polish and german murderers  
prepared for a Saturday night off, the air incensed  
with smoke of scrolls and flesh.  
Enough, we begin again, the father said, name him.  
She will live.

—on their lips and in my face ■

Mourning and praying for a family, for an entire shtetl, Blumke Katz describes it to Stanley H. Barkan, who details the enormity of the loss.

*Stanley H. Barkan*

## *The Mothertree*

*for Blumke Katz*

Prostrated  
before the tree  
in the middle  
of the cemetery,  
she prayed  
for her mother,  
buried somewhere  
in that mass grave:  
for her  
and for so many other  
mothers & fathers,  
sisters & brothers,  
grandparents  
and grandchildren,  
there in the middle of  
Svintsyán, Lithuania,  
lost shtetl  
in the middle  
of Eastern Europe  
where Jews  
bought & sold,  
cooked & ate,  
studied & prayed,  
worked & dreamed.  
Once.

*Mama, where are you?  
All those long years  
alone,  
far away in cold,  
oh so cold, Siberia,  
each night I spoke  
with you  
in my sleep.  
You were just a dream.  
Now—at last—  
after the Germans  
with their brownshirts left,  
and the Russians  
with their redshirts left,  
I have returned,  
I have awakened,  
I am here—  
but where are you?*

*Dear Tree,*

*Dear Mother,*

Yisgadal

v'yiskadash ... ■

Carson Phillips suggests the use of archival documents, memoir, and recorded testimony to engage students in learning. Use the three survivor testimonies below, from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Croatia, in conjunction with those in the Gurewitsch essay (pp. 48–55) for a rich and varied look at the fraught experiences of Jewish families struggling to survive and, ultimately, rebuild their lives.

Carson Phillips

## Using Archival Documents, Memoir, and Testimony to Teach About Jewish Families During and After the Holocaust

My darling Verusko, I do not know the outcome of my illness, but in any case, please do remain an honorable, fair, and hardworking girl and the Almighty will bless and protect you. Your beginnings will be hard and tough. ... Claim our life insurances. ... It will be your dowry; set it aside; no one can foresee the future.

—*Letters to Veruska* (Schiff, 2008, p. 31)

In the 1930s and 1940s, when National Socialism, deeply rooted in ideological concepts of *Lebensraum* and an *Aryan Herrenvolk*, swept across Europe, it unleashed an unprecedented assault on Jewish communities and families. When Nazi perpetrators humiliated, beat, or otherwise terrorized Jews in the streets, they sent a clear message that traditional norms would no longer prevail. Until this time, Jewish men and women in Western and Central Europe had adapted themselves to the prevailing bourgeois model that conferred responsibility for the physical survival of the family on men but placed its psychological and spiritual well-being in the hands of women (Hyman, 1998, p. 27). Now, Jewish men could not guarantee the security of their families; Jewish children were not safe. National Socialism, then, overturned conventional norms and thrust Jewish families into situations they were seemingly ill prepared to meet.

The end goal of National Socialism was nothing less than the destruction of the Jewish people, religion, and culture. While it is true that all Jews were targeted, the responses of men, women, and children to unprecedented acts of terror differed; understanding the depth and breadth of both gendered and familial responses is a central component of Holocaust education. The following three examples illustrate the paradigm of how Jewish individuals shifted and adapted their familial roles and responsibilities when faced with persecution and devastation.

### **PRESERVING FAMILY THROUGH A TZAVA'AH (ETHICAL WILL)**

As autumn 1945 turned to winter, 19-year-old Veruska (Vera) Schiff (née Katz) [Fig. 1] came to the stark realization that



**FIG. 1:** Vera in Prague circa 1939–1940 (from the collection of Vera Schiff).

none of her relatives would be returning to Prague. Her entire extended family had been murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau and Maly Trostinec, killed in the collective revenge exacted upon the communities of Lidice and Lezaky, or had perished in Theresienstadt. For Schiff, coming to terms with the enormity of loss was one of the first challenges to be confronted after the euphoria that followed liberation waned. Indeed, the only reminders she had of her family and of their previous life in the comfortable Letna district of Prague were a few photographs that had been returned to her by a former domestic who had been in her family's employ. In rebuilding her life after liberation and starting her own family, these photographs would assume an intrinsic significance far outweighing their material worth. In the absence of surviving family members, the pictures proved that a loving family had indeed existed, even while a cemetery plot or tombstone did not.

Building a new life on the ruins of her former existence was daunting, but pivotal to her success was her relationship with Artur Schiff, a man she met in Theresienstadt. Her mother had already succumbed to illness, but 60 days before the liberation of the camp by Soviet troops, she and

Artur arranged a traditional Jewish wedding ceremony in Theresienstadt. A *ketubah*, a Jewish marriage contract [Fig. 2], bearing the date the 21st of Adar 5705 (March 6, 1945) attested to the enduring belief in Jewish religious tradition and a commitment to Jewish life and family, even in the darkest of hours of history. Written illegally in the camp, it bears the signature of Dr. Friediger, Chief Rabbi of Denmark and one of the few Danish Jews deported to the camp.

After liberation, when Czechoslovakian authorities officially nullified concentration camp weddings, the couple repeated their vows in a civil ceremony in Prague. However, they kept their original *ketubah*. Schiff writes, "The ceremony under the torn *chuppah* [canopy] in Theresienstadt felt more spiritual and reverential, appropriate to celebrate the dignity of the union" (Schiff, 1998, p. 201). The reconfirmation of her wedding was an integral component of integrating the past with the present, enabling her to build a future with her husband.

Another component that assisted Schiff in rebuilding her post-Holocaust life was the tiny secret diary [Fig. 3] that had been kept in Theresienstadt by her dying mother, Else Katz. The repeated loss of family members exacted a heavy emotional toll on the elder Katz, but her diary enabled her to record aspirations for her sole surviving daughter. Perhaps most importantly, it allowed her to leave behind a written life lesson for Vera. The last entry in the diary, a letter addressed to Vera using the dative declination "Verusko," was a *tzava'ah*, an ethical will containing instructions on how to live a good life and how to rebuild when Nazism would finally be defeated. Although soaked in sadness, the text provides hope that the suffering will end and that life will return to normal. At the beginning of the letter, Else Katz writes, "I hope and have faith that your broken heart will not crush you; trust the strength of your will! Do not give in to your sorrow and anguish; you have to look after your health, my child!" We can only imagine that, in the midst of suffering and death, this written expression of such love and hope, the tender words of a dying mother to her only surviving child, must have been offered as a source of inspiration to Vera to carry on after her mother's certain death.

The letter offers a series of instructions on how to begin her new life alone after liberation. Else Katz writes, "At first you will have to entrust our financial affairs to a decent and honest lawyer. You have to claim our life insurances, on the name Zigfried Katz at Viktoria Company." After identifying a long list of belongings that have been stored at various homes of non-Jewish friends in Prague, she concludes, "It will be your dowry; set it aside; no one can foresee the future." Her dying concern is for the well-being of her daughter, that she be equipped to begin a new life, and that justice will ensure that the material goods taken from them during the war years will be returned when the war is over.

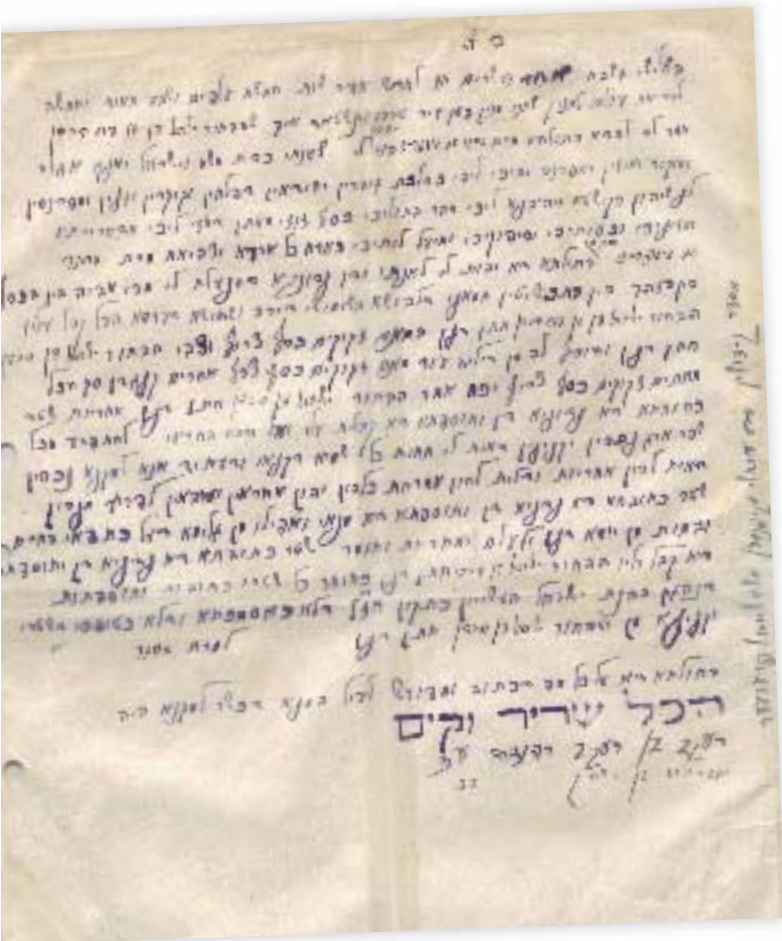


FIG. 2: *Ketubah* (from the collection of Vera Schiff).



The tiny diary of Else Katz, found in her bedding by Vera after her mother's death in August 1944, testifies to her belief that Nazism would be defeated and that the Jewish future and family would be rebuilt. The bonds of family and motherhood triumphing over adversity can be felt in these simple yet eloquent lines, evidence of the caring of a parent for her child and the critical role that familial love plays in solidifying one's future.

These reminders of family would travel with Schiff throughout her life. When she, her husband, and young son made *aliyah* in 1949, the *ketubah*, tiny diary, and family photographs were among the few possessions she was permitted to take from Czechoslovakia. Twelve years later when the family immigrated to Canada, the documents, too, continued their journey, a link between past and present, a symbol of Jewish identity and continuity.



**FIG. 3:** Else Katz's diary from Theresienstadt (from the collection of Vera Schiff).

### **PRESERVING FAMILY BY DEVELOPING SURVIVAL STRATEGIES**

For Alex (Alexander Sandor) Eisen, a sheltered childhood in Vienna was shattered by the *Anschluss*, the German annexation of Austria in March 1938. The *Anschluss* was accompanied by the persecution and roundup of Jewish men and the introduction of racist laws. These new living conditions brought a harsh reality to the religiously observant Eisen family. Nazi persecution threatened the very nature of their family structure, as well as their lives, challenging them as individuals and as a family to develop survival strategies outside of their normative experiences.

As conditions in Vienna worsened, Eisen's parents, Abraham and Roszi Eisen, decided to take their family to Hungary. Seeking sanctuary in the parental motherland held the promise of safer living conditions away from the overt antisemitism ubiquitous in Austria. Still, 1938 was a perilous time, and at the border crossing, Abraham Eisen was refused entry into Hungary, although he possessed valid papers. The family continued on, while Abraham returned to Vienna to get additional paperwork, including further evidence of his Hungarian origins. In Vienna, he was rounded up by local Nazis and forced to kneel and lick the cobblestones of the street (Eisen, 2010, p. 356). Eventually, he was released, and this time he successfully made his way into Hungary and joined his family in Budapest. One can only imagine the emotional scarring that the acts of Nazi degradation had

wreaked upon his confidence as family provider and patriarch. Such humiliations were as much an attack on the Jewish family and Jewish masculinity as they were upon the person.

Abraham Eisen was arrested a second time by Hungarian border police. Sentenced to three months in prison, he feared the ramifications of remaining in Hungary. As Alexander Eisen (2010) recounts in his memoir, "My father was desolate. For a religious Jew to be incarcerated among common criminals, especially antisemitic criminals, was totally unacceptable and very dangerous. He thought, probably very justifiably, that he might not make it out alive" (p. 37). No doubt the fear was compounded by the regular round-ups of Jewish men for slave labor and military work, from which many never returned. Abraham Eisen made the precipitous decision to flee to Palestine rather than report to jail. The family, its very nature and structure altered,

would not know of each member's well-being until the end of the war.

As Lawrence L. Langer (1982) posits, such "choiceless choices" have an intrinsic irresolvable quality to the decision-making process. As such, they are not even a case of negotiating between a greater or lesser evil; they are "crucial decisions [that] did not reflect options between life and death, but between one form of abnormal response and another, both imposed by a situation that was in no way of the victim's own choosing" (p. 72). The moral dilemmas that Jews faced provide valuable teaching moments.

In his memoir, Eisen (2010) is clear that this was not an abandonment of the family but a conscious decision to preserve it. Had the elder Eisen accepted the prison sentence, he would have faced almost certain death. Leaving Hungary increased his chances for survival, but it came with the enormous consequence of leaving his family. His decision to leave his family and flee was made in a time of great peril, and as such, it is not one that can be judged according to societal norms. As educators, we must ensure that students do not view through contemporary perspectives such situations that often arise in memoir and testimony.

With the patriarch gone, the Eisen family relied upon an extended network of relatives, friends, and contacts to assist them. The responsibilities of adulthood were thrust upon youth, often inverting traditional familial roles. In 1943, when Eisen turned 13, he took charge of his bar mitzvah



**FIG. 4:** Alexander (Sandor) Eisen as a young man in Hungary when he was living under false papers (from the collection of Alexander Eisen).

preparations himself. Eisen describes the toll the Holocaust had exerted upon his extended family. “Most of my uncles, who would have helped me arrange a bar mitzvah, were in labor camps by then” (Eisen, p. 57). In the absence of male family members, Eisen entry’s into adulthood was an almost solitary event.

This newfound inner fortitude and independence would serve him well in his struggle for survival. Eisen, like the other members of this family, spent the remaining war years hiding in the open using false identity papers [Fig. 4]. Assuming a false Hungarian identity provided Eisen with protection, albeit limited. A ubiquitous sense of fear permeated daily life, but most members of the family living in Budapest with false papers survived.

Upon liberation, Alex Eisen embraced Zionism. Having survived in a perilous environment that demanded he hide his Jewish identity, Eisen was determined to live openly as

a Jew and in the modern Jewish State of Israel. He left with his family’s blessing, knowing that it would be easier to leave individually rather than as a family group. He writes, “Oddly, my mother and sisters were not sad to see me go. All of us wanted to reach Palestine as quickly as possible” (Eisen, p. 109). Uniting in their determination to reach Palestine provided a support system that made *aliyah* possible as individuals. The devastation and destruction of the Holocaust had erased any interest Eisen might have had in remaining in Europe. Like many survivors, he had a compelling need to start over in a new land, free from the dark memories of the Holocaust. Zionism was the foundation on which his new family and life would be built.

### **PRESERVING FAMILY THROUGH CHANGING FAMILIAL ROLES**

Esther (née Schwabenitz) Bem, the youngest of three daughters, grew up in a traditional Jewish home in Zagreb, Croatia. The difference in the siblings’ ages—her sister Jelka was 11 years older and her sister Vera 9 years older—contributed to a nurturing and protected childhood. With the German occupation of Croatia in 1941, the family encountered dramatic new obstacles that challenged their continued existence and forced them to negotiate new familial roles and responsibilities.

As conditions worsened for Zagreb’s Jews, the family made a series of decisions in May 1941 that would dramatically alter the nature of their family unit. Jelka, 21, left home to join the partisans. Vera, 19, was sent to Belgrade where haven was arranged with relatives. For Esther and her parents, an extraordinary secretive journey out of German-occupied Zagreb to Italian-controlled Ljubljana was arranged. Her father had discovered that for a large fee they would be escorted out of Zagreb and across the border. In her recorded oral testimony, Bem (1987) says,

My father came home one day and said, “I found a connection. We are leaving. We are going to Italy. We are going to try and cross the border. I paid the money, I gave all our jewellery. We’re leaving in a few days,” ... so we left. We boarded a train; a German officer was accompanying us. ... He was like our watchdog. (1987, *Oral Testimony Project*, Holocaust Centre of Toronto, Disk 16, Retrieved March 23, 2010)

Then under Italian jurisdiction, Ljubljana offered hope of sanctuary. The family was classified as “Civil Prisoners of War,” which afforded them basic necessities and allowed them to live openly as Jews. After a month, the family was

transferred by train with other Jewish refugees to the town of Possagno in the Provincia di Treviso in northern Italy. Even as refugees, the family had a measure of security not possible in German-occupied Croatia.

During this period, from 1941–1943, Esther Bem became fluent in Italian, a skill that would prove paramount to the family's survival. She also learned a pragmatic skill, weaving shopping bags of various sizes from the leaves of young corn plants, providing her with a valued commodity that could be sold or exchanged for foodstuffs. As a result, Bem, at 12, was able to supplement the meager rations her family received and gradually assumed a greater role in the well-being of her parents. She comments,

I was quite enterprising. My parents were older and I was, in a way, in charge of their lives. They were not as flexible as the others; the others were much younger than them. They just couldn't adapt. It was much harder for them than for the rest to adapt to this new life. ... I learned that this [weaving corn leaves] was a skill. I started doing it and selling and exchanging for bread or for butter or for fruit, and I felt very good about it. I felt very secure learning that, and I had more and more orders. (1987, *Oral Testimony Project*, Holocaust Centre of Toronto, Disk 16, Retrieved March 23, 2010)

Familial roles continually shifted and were transformed as each of the family members responded to the demands of their precarious new environment.

The German occupation of Italy in September 1943 necessitated the family's flight from Possagno to the town of San Zenone. They now had to conceal their Jewish identity. Increasingly, Esther became the family's spokesperson. Her fluent Italian offered a measure of protection as the family tried to blend in with the local population. Living under false papers and aided by a sympathetic parish priest, the family posed as an ordinary Italian family who had lost everything in the bombings. To conceal her father's imperfect Italian, the family concocted a story that he suffered a great shock from the bombings and was unable to speak.

This role as spokesperson was put to the ultimate test when Esther appeared before the German officer in charge of the town to request ration cards for her family. Legitimate ration cards would solidify their new identity in the eyes of the townspeople. Esther and her father went to the German headquarters. She describes the episode:

Beside the German was standing a young Italian ... interpreter, and he says, in German, "*Wie heist Sie?*" (What is your name?) I understood every word, but I faked that I didn't. So the Italian ... asks me: "*Come si chiama?*" So I answer. I wait for the question in Italian,

and I answer. ... I told him the whole story, how we lost everything, and our coupons were in the train with our clothing, and we lost all our clothing, all we have on [us] is our identification cards, and we are here, we cannot even buy food, and it is very difficult for us, please, if he could issue us those cards. He looked at us ... and then he said ... "Do you speak German?" I said no and that was it. He believed us. ... and they issued us those cards and we walked out. (1987, *Oral Testimony Project*, Holocaust Centre of Toronto, Disk 16, Retrieved March 23, 2010)

Later, in the same recording, Esther says, "This moment and this time, standing in front of him, made out of me a grown-up. I finished with childhood." Standing before the German officer and successfully acting as the family spokesperson was the culmination of the transitioning role from protected daughter to protector. The family survived the remainder of the war. After liberation, they returned to Zagreb in search of family members and were reunited with their middle daughter, Vera. Later, they discovered that Jelka was killed while on a partisan mission. In 1950, to escape the continued presence of antisemitism in Yugoslavia, the family made *aliyah*.

In each of these three cases, family was an integral component to both survival and the rebuilding of Jewish life; in each case, vulnerable children adapted or assumed new roles and responsibilities equated with maturity and adulthood. Each of these narratives provides powerful teaching examples of individuals and families struggling to respond to the onslaught of Nazism and illustrates the fact that for those who survived, rebuilding was often an arduous journey filled with pain. Yet, these survivors did not seek revenge on Nazi perpetrators and their collaborators; rather, they embarked upon courses of study and careers, formed new relationships, found love, and rebuilt families. Indeed, after an era that sought to annihilate Jewry, life became the best expression of revenge.

#### **CLASSROOM STRATEGIES: PROMOTING CRITICAL-THINKING SKILLS USING ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS, MEMOIRS, AND RECORDED TESTIMONIES**

The survivors presented here have written memoirs or recorded their experiences digitally. Using selected passages from the memoirs or testimonies allows students to engage directly with the human experience during and in the immediate post-Holocaust periods; the individual becomes vivid when we are able to see the person and hear her voice. Recorded testimonies, such as those available through the Shoah Foundation ([www.college.usc.edu/vhi/](http://www.college.usc.edu/vhi/)) or the 1939 Club ([www.1939club.com/VideoTestimonyList.htm](http://www.1939club.com/VideoTestimonyList.htm)) will often include segments on family life, identity, and rebuild-

ing. One compelling segment that often resonates with students from diverse backgrounds is Esther Bem's testimony; it can be accessed at <http://college.usc.edu/vhi/otv/otv.php>. In this section, Bem discusses the challenges that accompanied her liberation. Having been hiding in the open in an Italian village under the false identity of Else Tamino, she struggled to resume her own individuality and Jewish identity.

### QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Questions for students to consider include:

- What are some reasons that survivors chose to write memoirs or record their testimony?
- Some survivors did manage to keep or retrieve photographs of their pre-Holocaust lives. What is the significance of such photographs for survivors? For us? What do they represent to the survivor? To you?
- What are some ways in which the value of photographs and documents exceeds their material worth?
- When Czech authorities cancelled the legitimacy of their Theresienstadt wedding, why do you think Vera and Artur Schiff had a civil ceremony but not a second Jewish ceremony?
- Why do you think survivors focused on acquiring an education and rebuilding family life rather than on revenge or retribution?
- Vera Schiff, like many survivors, was never able to reclaim the personal property or assets her family possessed before the Holocaust. Research the restitution programs in Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Croatia. What is the symbolism of restitution or, alternatively, of failing to provide restitution? Visit the Web sites of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany ([www.claimscon.org](http://www.claimscon.org)) and the National Fund of the Republic of Austria ([www.en.nationalfonds.org](http://www.en.nationalfonds.org)) to learn how some countries grappled with their responsibility to make restitution toward their victims.
- Each of the survivors presented here cited education, love of life, and personal relationships as central components of their integration into post-Holocaust society. What might have been some other factors? ■

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"When I started developing this print," the artist explains, "I had no clear idea of its evolution, only a certainty that it was time to explore a self-portrait. The two pictures of myself bracket the years from youth to adult, from the fourth son to the grandfather of five." Pair with the art of Josh Freedman (p. 29) and Daniela Rosenhouse (pp. 83–89) to begin a discussion of the role of art in learning about the Holocaust.

*Herb Stern*

## The Fourth Son

I was 8 years old when my mother packed up our family to leave Germany three weeks after Kristallnacht. That boy is still present in the person looking back on his history 70 years later. Our father had been arrested, along with most of Frankfurt's Jewish men, the day after the synagogues went up in flames; but he was soon released because he had been chosen—for no reason he understood—to accompany home a blind prisoner who was being released. He knew his luck would not hold, so he left for England ahead of us to avoid another arrest. He met us in London and we sailed for the United States in early December.

At our *Pesach* family *sedarim*, whenever we come to the page that focuses on the narrative of the Four Sons, I am reminded of the fact that I am one of four brothers, of whom I am the youngest; I am the one who does not yet know how—or what—to ask. Should I have asked about what was happening at the time of the Holocaust? Should I ask now why we were able to escape when so many others were not? Should I ask which of the sons I am now: The Wicked Son? The Wise Son? The Simple Son? Weren't we all of them then and aren't we all of them during the course of a lifetime? The questions linger in the mind and find their way into the face.

The red "J," a later addition to mark the danger we escaped, connotes the Nazi finger pointed at the Jews, an identification that consumed most of our families in the Holocaust.

The print consists of several etching plates printed consecutively, with the smaller "portrait" plates printed first, then the large background plate that is inked in black and top-rolled with a grey tint. The passport page is lithographed on a grey stock, the "J" relief-printed in red, and the paper adhered to the print. ■



Multimedia print • (etching, lithograph, relief) • 24" × 20" on Arches cover.

"As a child of survivors and as a psychologist who has worked with survivors and their families for 34 years, I am fascinated in particular by the varied dynamics of adaptation that these families manifest," writes Eva Fogelman. This essay presents Fogelman's original identification and classification paradigms of the family relationships she has observed in her clinical practice. Pair it with the research of Nancy D. Kersell (pp. 74–77) and Marina Stolerman, et al. (pp. 109–114); the poetry of Judith Chalmer (p. 72–73), Sarah Traister Moskowitz (p. 78–79), Marge Piercy (p. 80), and Hilary Tham (p. 102); and the personal narrative of Lila M. Korn (pp. 93–101) for a multidimensional exploration of Holocaust families.

*Eva Fogelman*

## Holocaust Survivor Families: The Dynamics of Adaptation

**H**olocaust survivor families are created out of a traumatic history that is ever present, directly or indirectly. After liberation, the Jews of Europe were all but overwhelmed by the grim recognition of the horrendous losses they had suffered. It is impossible to mourn family members in any way that brings comfort and healing when there is no concrete evidence of their deaths; this, for many men and women, was the inhibition that prevented them from establishing new lives. Yet the depth of their losses in some way provoked in most survivors a profound need to connect to others again, to love, to regenerate, to build new families even as they searched for and mourned the ones they had lost. In the aftermath of the German campaign of persecution, dehumanization, and murder, miraculously, most families, including those that had survived partially intact and those that were created after the war, adapted and found different coping strategies that facilitated interactions between and among themselves and with the outside world.

### REUNITED FAMILIES

How is one able to reconstitute a sense of self and connect with another in a loving relationship after everything—and perhaps everyone—in one's life has been destroyed? This was the major challenge for survivors after liberation. The first hurdle was to attempt to restore pre-Holocaust families. Husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, siblings, cousins, and extended family members searched endlessly and everywhere for their children and for one another. Sometimes two or three family members found each other; almost never was an entire immediate family reunited intact. In rare instances, a bereft survivor remarried only to discover that his or her pre-Holocaust spouse had survived. (This scenario is portrayed in Isaac Bashevis Singer's [1972] novel, *Enemies, A Love Story*.) Even today, survivors search

for missing family members and, on very rare occasions, still find one.

Jewish couples who had hidden their young children with nannies, friends, strangers, or in an institutional setting, such as a monastery or convent, sometimes had to face legal battles to get their children back (Verhy, 2001). Some children did not recognize their parents when they came to retrieve them; they saw them as total strangers and so did not want to leave their foster families. The atmosphere in these "reunited families," as I have termed them, was often tense. When such children were forced to start new lives with their biological parents or with a relative they did not know or remember, they suffered greatly from the trauma of losing the people they had grown to love and call "mother," "father," "sister," or "brother." They also faced the loss of their Christian identity, taken on while in hiding. Children who were raised by Christian families or in Christian institutions often felt that they were betraying their loved ones and their God (Fogelman, 2001, p. 92). The biological parents, overjoyed to find their children alive, often expected more than the children could give them; they felt their children were being disloyal by wanting to remain with or even maintain contact with the rescuing mother and father. In some reunited families, only one parent, and not necessarily all the children, survived. Some of these families remained broken vessels, and their vain attempts to restore their pre-Holocaust families continue to this day. In others, the young widow or widower decided to remarry.

In reunited families, both those in which the original spouses reunited and those in which only one parent survived and then remarried, some survivors opted to have additional children after the war, while others did not. The challenge for children born after liberation was to overcome a feeling of not belonging to the family unit that had sur-

vived the Holocaust. The survivors had their own language, secrets, coping strategies, and grief, which the children born to them after liberation did not share and could not fathom. Yet, as I saw so often in my practice, they wished to undo their survivor-parents' and -siblings' pain, feeling that they had to make them happy and wanting to take care of them. Although they did not suffer like their parents and siblings, at times they, too, experienced survivor guilt.

Sibling rivalry, which happens in most families, takes on a particular Holocaust theme in reunited families. For example, Esther,<sup>1</sup> a woman I saw in my practice, always thought that her parents liked her sister, Chaya, more than her because Chaya had survived the Holocaust, while Esther was born in the United States. Esther felt her sister was the special one, and her role in the family was not only to serve as a link to the external world but also to help Americanize her older sister.

Today, when many of the parents in the reunited families are deceased, the American sibling often is more reluctant to want to continue the role of caretaker of the Holocaust survivor sibling. Some post-Holocaust children choose to live far away from their survivor-sibling or to convey to the next generation that it is now their responsibility to care for an aunt or uncle.

### REUNITED FAMILIES AND SECRET-KEEPING

The clinical data I have collected indicate that reunited families engage in the practice of keeping secrets; this often proves to be detrimental to other family members. A parent whose pre-Holocaust offspring or spouse was killed, for example, often kept this fact—or at least the details surrounding it—a secret from post-Holocaust-born children. A child who survived the Holocaust might be warned not to tell his or her sibling, born after the war, that he or she was not from the same father. The haunting theme of secrets, replete with tragedy, keeps a child of survivors in the dark about what was *really* hidden. In the Katz family saga of Thane Rosenbaum's (1999) *Second Hand Smoke*, the author, himself a child of survivors, ingeniously depicts how secrets seep into the everyday life in a survivor family:

Among strangers they spoke in an almost flawless code. And since most people were regarded as strangers, the code was commonly slipped in between sentences like a necessary pause or a deliberate stutter. ...

Often they alternated and recycled the code.

"Keep them guessing," Mila [the mother] always said.

"About what?" Duncan [the son] often wondered. "What secrets do we have that anyone would want to know? The sale items at Publix are already listed in the *Herald*." (pp. 7–8)

For years, the parents would discreetly say the word *keller* (basement) whenever a member of the family strayed too far and revealed too much. When Duncan was on the phone, telling a friend that his mother couldn't pick him up from the park until she got Duncan's father from the bank, his mother said, "*Keller*," and Duncan knew that he should say, "No, I forgot, my father isn't at the bank. He's waiting at the corner by the drugstore" (p. 7). After this episode, Duncan's mother went to change their bank. "Banking was a desperately private affair. But then again, what wasn't?" (p. 7).

Upon his mother's death, Duncan finds out the real secret, which she revealed on her deathbed to her nurses. After the war, Mila abandoned her first infant son in Poland before she crossed the border into Germany, rationalizing that there was no way to escape with a screaming baby in her arms. With this knowledge, Duncan shifts from an insular world of secrecy to a quest for his true family past.

A particularly thorny issue for survivors was if and how to tell their children of the "choiceless choices" that they had often been forced to make. How is an offspring of survivors to respond to the knowledge that a parent abandoned, passively witnessed the death of, or even killed his or her own infant to protect himself or other Jews in hiding? Intellectually, we all understand that infants' cries were not controllable and could endanger Jews in cellars, attics, closets, ditches in the woods, or while running in the woods; we know that to be faced with such a dilemma is paralyzing and no real choice is possible. Yet when a second-generation child learns of such a moral dilemma and his parent's desperate action, it becomes an indelible image and sometimes changes the relationship between survivor and child forever.

Another difficult issue that, in the judgment of some survivors, necessitated family secrets arose when the survivor-parent had served as a *kapo*, a police officer in the ghettos or the concentration camp who collaborated with the Nazis in the hope of receiving better treatment for himself or herself and family, or had done things to survive that he or she would never dream of doing in normal times. Such truths, when kept silent, can generate anxiety, shame, silence, and isolation in the next generation.

A secret that has a more direct impact on the essence of a second-generation self is when survivor parents hide, for a variety of reasons, their Jewish identity. Helen Fremont (1999), an attorney in Boston, writes about how, after more than 30 years of living as a Christian, she discovered that her parents were Polish Jewish survivors. One survived a concentration camp; the other had escaped to Russia. She and her sister were raised as Christians and were taken to church every Sunday, but her parents left before Communion with an excuse that it was an American custom.

Exposing such a secret causes a loss of equilibrium for a second-generation child and creates havoc in the parent-

child relationship. If the parents are deceased when the adult child discovers their true identities, the mourning process becomes more challenging and convoluted.

Today, though, many of these family secrets have surfaced one way or another. In my practice, for example, a story emerged that a daughter born during the war as a result of her mother's rape had never known that she was not from the same father as her brother, who was born before the war. The brother did not know that his sister was not from the same father because she was separated from her mother during the war. The daughter preceded her mother to the grave. The survivor-mother, in mourning her daughter, revealed to her son the circumstances of the pregnancy. The son, who had been told not to reveal that he was not from the same father as his post-Holocaust sibling, told others the story after both parents died.

### **NEWLY CREATED SURVIVOR FAMILIES**

A different model of the survivor family is what I have termed "newly created," in which survivors, either widowed or not previously married, met and married after liberation. Two people who were from the same town and knew each other before the war (or did not) sometimes bonded only because they discovered this common link to the past. Other survivors became couples when they met while searching for a way to get to Palestine or the United States. Some girls in their late teens were looking for a replacement for the father they lost in an older man who might provide shelter and safety.

Many survivors' intense feelings of being completely alone in the world were almost irreparably devastating. Their tragic losses had impaired their ability to trust and to give of themselves in a loving relationship; healing would take years. For other survivors, however, the priority was to marry to avoid being alone; they ignored their prewar assumption of the necessity for a spouse to have a certain social class, education level, religious belief, and political outlook when a marriage prospect appeared. Such unions, however, characterized as "marriages of convenience," were more the exception than the norm. Generally, a survivor's desire to bond and marry was a healthy coping mechanism that facilitated the return to normalcy. After years of suffering intense demoralization and dehumanization, the ability to connect to another person in a loving way restored a feeling of humanity. Despite the fact that courting and dating usually were not drawn-out practices, and marriage proposals were offered in haste, sometimes before real love had been established, many couples developed deep and loving relationships over time (Fogelman, 2001, p. 93).

### **REPLACEMENT CHILDREN**

The highest birthrates in the world resulted from these early marriages in the displaced persons camps in Germany, Aus-

tria, and Italy (Norich, 2001, p. 53). Into both reunited and newly created families, "replacement children" were born. They felt the burden of living not only their lives but also the lives of those whom they were replacing. Other children were compelled to act as mother or father to a parent who was unable to live a fully actualized life after the Holocaust. This role-reversal placed enormous responsibility on such offspring and deprived them of being children themselves.

Most newly created post-liberation families started out being stateless, often in transition, saddled with infants, and with no idea about where to establish new roots. Some families were forced to undergo several transitions before settling down; others lacked the physical or psychological strength to start anew and settled in whatever European country accepted them. A few started to prosper in Europe and hesitated to give up their success. Most stateless survivors, though, opted to leave Europe, and they spread all over the world with the majority—a quarter of a million survivors—immigrating to Israel, while approximately 150,000, according to Dinnerstein (1982), arrived in the United States.

A shared historical trauma, replete with multiple losses and dislocation, tested the limits of individual human resilience. The very act of creating new families resulted in a supportive environment for some and in an oppressive experience for a relative few, who felt too emotionally wounded to raise children. Therapists and others working with family members would ask themselves: Is this a family that is still in hiding? Is it in denial, or is it openly connected to its Holocaust past? Is the family focusing only on internal matters, or is there ongoing interaction with the outside world? Is a Holocaust-like dynamic being played out among the members of the family?

### **DYNAMICS OF ADAPTATION IN HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR FAMILIES**

Psychological forces that drive the lives within a survivor family can best be described as a continuum from isolation to integration into the broader society. Family dynamics can be classified for the purposes of study and research into categories such as "isolated vs. integrated," "externally vs. internally oriented," "secretive vs. communicative," "victim-oppressor vs. nurturing-loving," and "denial vs. affirmation and memorialization." My research shows that most families fall somewhere between each of these extremes and share some of the characteristics of several of these classifications. Also, families have not been static over the past 66 years. For example, a family might have been isolated at first but became more externally oriented as their children and grandchildren became integrated into the larger society.

In the years following liberation, most survivor families were not fully embraced by the Jewish communities in the cities to which they moved. The immediate family alone can-



not fully nurture a child's identity development. Over the years, survivor families who remained isolated faced the challenge of providing their children with a sense of belonging outside the immediate family. Survivor families who continued to feel unwanted usually transmitted a feeling of victimization and low self-esteem to their offspring (Danieli, 1980). Other families, however, facing the lack of inclusion or interest in them were prompted to befriend other survivors for emotional support. Friends were called "aunt," "uncle," "cousin," or "my Holocaust family," and served as surrogate families to one another.

Despite a history of persecution, most survivor families were able to develop "nurturing-loving" interactions among their members. Children in these families often felt very loved and wanted, and they felt the joy their parents experienced from being able to have a sense of personal continuity. In rare cases, though, the challenge of coping failed, and what I have come to call a "victim-oppressor" dynamic was re-created in the day-to-day life of family members and their contact with the external environment. An "identification with the aggressor," to use Anna Freud's (1966) term, occurred among a minority of Holocaust survivors. This most painful remnant of years of abuse often became another family secret and also isolated members of the family. In a few Holocaust families, a victim-oppressor dynamic pervaded day-to-day life. The family atmosphere was a reenactment of the relationships in a concentration camp. Usually, the persecutor was one of the parents; however, in rare cases, it was a child who constantly threatened the safety of the parents and siblings. Victim-oppressor families tend to be more inwardly oriented; most of their energy is consumed by survival.

A distinctive attribute that differentiates Holocaust survivor families from one another is their "denial or affirmation" (Fogelman, 2008, b) of the past. Families that tend toward denial are often silent about their survival and are marked by secretiveness and sometimes a false identity. Children in these families feel less of a sense of rootedness and more of a fragmented self, one less capable of intimacy. Survivors who actively work at denial sometimes take on identities that are very different from their original ones. For example, they may ignore their Jewish roots and become active in the Buddhist community (Fogelman, 1998, p. 546). This can lead to identity confusion for the next generation.

Religious identification plays a part in the denial vs. affirmation continuum as well. The Jewishness of some survivor families was characterized by a new lack of faith, ambivalence towards God, or holding on to religious dogma with or without faith. Some continued the Jewish identification of their pre-Holocaust life, while others could not justify leading a double life of not believing and practicing anyway. Whether the survivor was accepted into the local com-

munity or shunned also influenced one's outer expression of Jewishness. "Integrated" survivor families felt a greater sense of belonging to some community. This broadened their worldview and distanced them from just feeling as victims. Also, integrated families were able to live more in the present than the past. Integrated survivors and their families often were also able to assume leadership roles in their community. When others began to perceive a survivor as more than a victim, that person's self-image was enhanced.

Despite beliefs and religious behavior, the joyousness of a spiritual Jewish observance of holidays was often marred by grief as survivors, privately or openly, mourned those family members who were not there to celebrate. My theory is that an integrated family, however, affirms its true self when its members openly mourn family members who were killed, participate in communal Holocaust commemorations, are actively involved in Holocaust museums and resource centers, return to their hometowns, mass graves, and places of persecution, are involved in Holocaust education, and provide oral histories or written memoirs.

Sixty-six years after liberation, the Holocaust survivor family life cycle is in a different stage than it was when either newly created or reunited families were formed. The majority of Holocaust survivors are now grandparents and great-grandparents. Most are "empty-nesters" and retired or on a reduced work schedule. The second-generation adult children are, unfortunately, often involved in mourning their parents or caring for those who are elderly, sick, and dying. What is most striking is that now, the parents' traumatic past takes on greater significance, particularly with families with secrets, where grown children know very little about their parents' past, or there are many missing pieces to the puzzle. In these cases, my research (Fogelman, 1984) shows, there is a greater urgency to returning to, rather than escaping from, the past, a more pressing need for affirmation rather than denial, for integration rather than isolation.

When survivors die, the second generation mourns not only their own parents but also all those family members they did not know who were killed during the Holocaust. At times it is one family member who becomes a "memorial candle" (Vardi, 1992, p. 29) in the family.

### **THE THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATIONS AFTER THE HOLOCAUST**

Third-generation adult grandchildren of survivors are now marrying and establishing new families; at the same time, they, too, want to learn their family history and connect to the roots that were severed from their grandparents. The third generation, for the most part, did not grow up in a family atmosphere that was saturated with loss, survivor guilt, shame, and fear of the external world. Rather, they were raised in a post-1979 world where President Carter had announced

plans for the building of a Holocaust museum in Washington, the Gerald Green (1978) mini-series *Holocaust* was seen in millions of homes in the United States and abroad, and Holocaust commemorations were held at the White House and the Capitol Rotunda. Holocaust education became mandatory in several states and suggested or recommended in others, and survivors gathered by the thousands for reunions in Israel and the United States. President Reagan publicly acknowledged the major contributions Holocaust survivors made to American society and proclaimed their belonging to America. Holocaust survivors who were ignored in the post-liberation era were now being praised and sought after to speak publicly, to give testimony. Some also became subjects of Hollywood movies and novels. This societal embracing of survivors seemed to reverberate among the members of the third generation, who, in the main, grew up being proud of their survivor grandparents. A paradigm shift has occurred from shame to pride in one's survivor family heritage (Yaslow, 2007).

The third generation is in a position to introduce a different dynamic into Holocaust survivor families, as is a son or daughter-in-law who has married into a survivor family. The communication in the family changes when new members arrive. Both survivors and their children are able to be freer, to open up communication about the past in families that started out silent or spoke only in bits and pieces without presenting a narrative that had a beginning, middle, and end (Fogelman, 2008).

The third and fourth generations of children grew up in an era when, in elementary school, they had an assignment to learn about family roots and to interview a family member, beginning a crucial intergenerational dialogue. The children of these generations have significantly revised the image of shunned and silent survivors.

#### FAMILIES BEYOND THE FOURTH GENERATION

For the fifth generation after the Holocaust, the genocide that their ancestors experienced will be history. Just as with children in every generation, in each family of the generations to come there will be those who will embrace and those who will reject their past. However, there will always be those who continue to remember by learning about the history of the Holocaust and their family's stories of it, actively helping other oppressed groups, raising Holocaust and genocide consciousness, connecting to the traditions and culture of the destroyed communities of European Jewry, working towards a vibrant continuity of Jewish life and peoplehood, and by lighting—or becoming—memorial candles. ■

#### NOTES

1. Names have been changed.

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Giora Leshem urges us to consider: What does it mean to know that your mother's native language will never be yours, not because it is the language of the immigrant, but because "in the / country of the sea . . . the strange words / with syllables of blood and guilt are buried"?

*Giora Leshem*

## *My Mother's Tongue Is Not My Mother Tongue*

*Translated from the Hebrew by Karen Alkalay-Gut*

My mother's tongue is not my mother tongue. And never  
will be. My youth did not hear a voice trembling with age tell,  
in Hungarian or Slovak, of her bitter youth,  
nor her songs of forest streams or the wind in the chestnut tree.

Only the scent of the woods burning and the smoke.  
In this warm land, snow words rest on her hair.

Woe to the land that has no sea, whose dictator  
is an admiral—a complete exile brought my mother  
by dry land through the sea: words and letters  
adrift. Tried by water and fire, like an ember,  
my grandfather's tongue was extinguished as well,  
like my mother's, with gaping mouth on the trench's edge,  
and who hears? The orphan kaddish  
is not my mother's tongue.

My mother's tongue is not my mother's tongue  
neither in the city on the Yarkon's bank,  
nor in another river city nor in the  
country of the sea, where the strange words  
with syllables of blood and guilt are buried.  
And my mother's tongue falls from my lips—  
another tongue, a beautiful tongue  
in a gaping mouth. ■

As children of survivors try to understand the suffering that shaped their parents' lives, many make pilgrimages to see for themselves the dreadful sites "where shame like a voracious tongue / flapped open beneath" their parents' "ragged stripes / as [they] begged for a morsel more." Understanding may come, but even then, for most, Judith Chalmer contends, "Grief doesn't die, it endlessly labors."

*Judith Chalmer*

## *At Dachau*

Forgive me, I had to see you  
here, where shame like a voracious tongue  
flapped open beneath your ragged stripes  
as you begged for a morsel more  
from your new sick friend.  
I know, it wasn't so bad then.

It got worse, *Tatteh*, when you were well  
fed and returned in the uniform  
of the victor's army. It was then  
your Private's voice went weak,  
your face sunk into its own soiled cloth,  
guardians of decay laughing up  
through the mud, splashing the stained pocket  
between slack jaws. You saw

what you had missed and couldn't allow  
Mama even to speak then, of the baby  
who died while you were gone.  
Sweet release, you thought, to die so easily.  
The same way I couldn't see pain  
submerged in circles around the eyes  
you brought back home, but only counted  
pictures that weren't yours, the pile  
of ribs and hips cleaned out from putrid gullies,  
the grins eaten open in relief on faces  
of the lucky ones set free.

But grief doesn't die; it endlessly labors.  
When I pictured, here in Dachau,  
just the empty bowl of your shoulders  
bent into the snow, doubled up in a harness,  
the boot at your back, it was then,  
fifty years later, I could forgive you  
the blood of those who remained  
here, their arms and naked  
bones lashed together, embraced  
in the bitter flames.

Now that I've walked here, *Tatteh*, now  
that I see you at last and death  
has released you to hold your infant son  
in your arms, where is the break in the silent line,  
the one where you stand, the other side  
of the fence, still not allowed to look back? ■

Many memoirs written by children of survivors describe how the Holocaust affected their family life. The majority of these testimonies, though, have been supplied by women, who confront a troubling dilemma: frequently shielded by a protective silence from learning about the atrocities their mothers and fathers suffered, these women are still expected to be nurturing and sensitive to their parents' pain. As daughters deeply affected by this complicated emotional bond, such second-generation writers as Helen Fremont, Helen Epstein, and Eva Hoffman, among others, provide insightful, detailed accounts of their journeys to uncover the secrets shaping their parents' lives. These stories can prompt a classroom conversation about the role and responsibilities of survivors' daughters, in particular, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, and what Kersell calls "its melancholy reverberations."

Nancy D. Kersell

## Lingering Wounds: Daughters of Holocaust Survivors Confront Secrecy and Silence

As works by American writers Helen Fremont, Helen Epstein, Eva Hoffman, Aaron Hass, Art Spiegelman, and Joseph Berger clearly and poignantly disclose, daughters and sons of Holocaust survivors find their lives shaped by the moral, psychological, and historical implications of their second-generation experience. My focus here, though, is on survivors' daughters as they struggled to find their own identity and purpose as women growing up in the shadow of the Holocaust. To fully understand themselves, Eva Hoffman (2004) has noted that these women have had to "excavate our generational story from under its [the Holocaust's] weight and shadow (p. xi)," and this demanding process can be a terrible burden of its own. As inheritors of an immediate as well as continuing legacy of the Holocaust, these daughters are often torn between searching for healing and trying to fully comprehend their parents' horrible past, wishing they could lessen their parents' suffering, and trying to construct lives no longer "possessed by a history they never lived." Their testimonies also reveal the prolonged struggle children of Holocaust survivors have endured in trying to penetrate their parents' secrecy and silence.

### HELEN FREMONT

Helen Fremont's (1999) memoir *After Long Silence* described her parents' resolute intention to conceal their Jewish ancestry from Helen and her sister, Lara, as she tried to discover not only what had been hidden about the past, but why. Raised as a Catholic, Fremont had always felt that "something didn't make sense" about her family's background. She

described herself as "living my life with flawed vision ... each time I walked into my parents' house, I fell over something, or dropped into something, a cavernous silence, an unspoken, invisible danger" (p. 28). When she and her sister, Lara, learned that their mother's Jewish parents had been murdered in the Belzec death camp, they attempted to share this family history with their parents. Lara tells them, "I wrote away for information and I got back documentation about our family. We know what happened to your parents. We know what happened to Dad's mother."

'What happened?' my mother suddenly cried. Her hands started trembling with a terrible urgency, while her face remained frozen—a wide-eyed mask of incomprehension. 'Then you know more than I do!' she exclaimed. ... 'Tell me,' my mother cried. 'What happened? I don't even know what happened to my parents!' She turned desperately from Lara to me and back again, her hands shaking. ...

I hadn't been prepared for this. I had expected my mother to refuse to talk about it; I had been prepared for her to deny it, to get angry, to scoff at me and dismiss it, but I did not expect her to beg us to tell her how her parents were killed. (p. 38)

During this painful process of exposing the truth, Fremont realized she was "consumed by an excruciating sense of guilt that I had just shattered my mother's world" (p. 39). Although faced with their parents' intractable desire to forget

about the past, Helen and her sister decided to visit Poland to reconstruct their parents' lives before the Holocaust. When Helen expressed doubts about whether they had the right to uncover the family secrets, Lara retorted, "It's not just about them! ... It's about us! About who we are!" (p. 148).

This shared acknowledgement that being the daughters of survivors was an integral part of their identities renewed Helen and Lara's curiosity to understand their parents' suffering, but what they found did not necessarily offer comfort or reconciliation. Fremont realized that during the war her mother had relied on a separate personality to avoid detection and arrest in the Aryan sector, and this "breezy exterior" became a significant—and then necessary—defense mechanism. She also saw the consequences of this "armor" when she perceived that her mother believed she could not live without it; whatever was inside had long ago died.

Only the armor remained, and she would clank with it down the streets of America 50 years later, into grocery stores and bridge parties, but inside she knew she was hollow. Her soul had slid out of her and was lying somewhere on the pavement, mixed with the shattered teeth and blood ... of a dozen boys, on a dozen streets, in a dozen countries. ... But it [her armor] props her up and helps her forget everything she lost of the young woman she once was, Batya, who slid out through the cracks and never made it back. (p. 167)

Fremont's admission that "no one had the right to his own life; the family was the smallest unit of identity" (p. 319) confronted a common dilemma for many children of survivors: how to penetrate their parents' "armor" of denial, secrecy, or silence without feeling selfish or guilty for resuscitating traumas from the war.

### HELEN EPSTEIN

Helen Epstein (1979), although not completely comfortable with psychiatrists' clinical assessments of the Holocaust "survivor syndrome," found that some of its characteristics accurately described her own parents' behavior, including repressed mourning, survivor guilt, and psychic closing off—"an inability to feel or project emotions. ... Many seemed to remain closed off or emotionally constricted for the rest of their lives" (pp. 106–107). Epstein interviewed numerous daughters of survivors for her book *Children of the Holocaust*, and as a child of survivors herself, she wanted to find out how others like her handled the pressure of knowing that "my parents had crossed over a chasm, and that each of them had crossed it alone" (p. 13).

Trying to grasp the significance of that chasm has proved difficult for many daughters of survivors. One of Epstein's interviewees, Ruth Alexander, declared,

My father was very quiet. He never told any specific stories. I feel that my father's family was obliterated. Erased. I felt very nervous asking him about his family; I do even now. I knew it was horrible, very upsetting to them. It was also upsetting to me. It was my responsibility not to ask. I knew that they didn't want me to know but I did know. So I pretended not to. (p. 193)

This imposed—almost sanctified—silence imprisoned many of the survivors' children in what Epstein described as her "iron box," and the effect is often profound:

As I talked to more and more of my contemporaries, I began to feel that they were all carrying around a version of my iron box, the contents of which they had left unexamined and untouched, for fear it might explode. ... Our parents' past had been, whether we admitted it or not, a dominant influence on the basic choices we had made in our lives. (p. 220)

To learn more about the impact of the Holocaust, Epstein became involved in one of the early (1974) oral history projects recording the life stories of Holocaust survivors, but her parents were not pleased by her efforts. Her mother remarked, "This is all very nice, but a little late. ... Nobody was interested in us when we were in camp and nobody is interested in us now. Hurry up and get it done, will you?" (p. 335). Epstein gradually understood the source of this resistance:

My parents did not understand what I was doing. ... Like most survivors they neither imagined how, over the years, I had stored their remarks, their glances, their silences, inside of me, how I had deposited them in my iron box like pennies in a piggy bank. They were unconscious of how much a child gleans from the absence of explanation. ... By the time I wrote up the official report, ... I was saturated with the past. ... For the first time, I saw my parents' lives in the context of others. I could put them in perspective and measure them against a community. I had never known any family to place them in. (pp. 335–336)

For these women, their parents' secrecy and silence constructed a barrier that not only postponed or prevented intimacy but also shielded them from knowledge difficult to absorb. In one study of child survivors as parents, researchers Krell and Sherman (1997) have noted that

from the parental viewpoint, withholding detailed information about the Holocaust seemed crucial to the child's normal development by freeing the child from having

to face the burdens of the past. From the child's point of view, the parents and their past lives were enveloped in awesome mystery, which prevented the child from understanding ... the Holocaust background of the parent. ... Parental silence, rather than protecting the child, exacerbated the other troubling aspects of family life. This ... paradox, unique to Holocaust survivor families, is perhaps the most pervasive of all. (p. 507)

### **EVA HOFFMAN**

In households where the Holocaust has remained a forbidden topic, its impact has infiltrated the lives of second-generation daughters in subtle ways. Many of these women have continued to struggle with their daunting responsibility as part of what Eva Hoffman (2004) has described as "the hinge generation in which received, transferred knowledge of events is transmuted into myth" (p. xv). According to Hoffman, the weight and duration of this consciousness has manifested itself on several levels. The mysterious past initially resembled a fable, with an

implicit morality within which the good was closely equated with suffering. ... The presence of suffering was powerful enough so that it had to be absorbed; but there was also an imperative to remain loyal to it, to make up for it, to provide solace. (p. 13)

Hoffman also has identified the other side of this ethic as the "equation of evil with brutal power, and a choked, breathless hatred of 'the Germans' ... the demonic force in the universe" (p. 14).

Hoffman has described her gradually expanding recognition of the pervasive sensations in her life, connected with the Holocaust and embedded since childhood, that she experienced: psychic numbing, panic attacks, burning rage, corrosive guilt, inadmissible shame, and endless mourning (p. 53). In the aftermath of continually escalating violence, Holocaust survivors often suppressed their memories to focus instead on beginning a new life, relinquishing their former names and all connection to families that no longer existed. Within this silent emptiness, which Hoffman has called "emotional anesthesia" (p. 67), however, their children have acquired "a helpless, automatic identification with parental feelings and their burden of intense despondency" (p. 63). In response, these children have sought vindication for their parents, wanting to rescue them from the nightmares and trauma, yearning to fulfill their parents' expectations of happy, fulfilled lives untainted by old wounds and memories.

Ironically, this process has permeated the daughters' lives and memories. Hoffman has observed that

the Holocaust for me, as for every child of survivors, is, if not an embodied internal presence, then at least a deeply embedded one. ... The imprint of family speech—or silence—was, for better or worse, and with whatever reactions followed, potent and profound." (p. 181)

In such an atmosphere, where Hoffman has found that "what happened to my parents and their Jewish friends was ... the kind of secret one wraps in a cocoon of silence, or protects as one protects an injury" (p. 25), the children's uncertainties and quests for understanding have culminated in inescapable feelings of fear, guilt, depression, and grief.

### **MELANCHOLY REVERBERATIONS**

Researchers during the past 30 years have conducted clinical studies in the United States and Israel focusing on the transgenerational effects of the Holocaust on children of survivors, and the results have documented in scientific terms how the Shoah has continued to affect the families still hoping for recovery. What these investigations cannot fully measure, however, has been the intangible loss of faith, trust, and emotional receptivity experienced by survivors and their descendants. When these conditions have been allowed to remain latent, hidden beneath secrecy and silence, the survivor parents have acted out of what they believed were good intentions. In their desire to focus on the future, survivors have tried to conceal the past because children born after the Holocaust have represented the healing of the traumatic events in their life. According to researchers H. and C. Barocas (1973), "Children are perceived as a source of new hope and meaning for a parent for whom all meaning was so brutally shattered" (p. 820). However, as R. E. Phillips (1978) has explained, the memoirs of second-generation daughters reveal that this situation "creates a burden of unrealistic expectations on a growing child, who may feel that the parents' psychological survival is dependent" (p. 372) on fulfilling their dreams.

What has emerged from these memoirs is evidence of more wounds threatening to demolish already fragile family connections. The initial tragedy of the Holocaust has been compounded by its melancholy reverberations. According to Suedfeld (2000), an entire generation of children has struggled with the aftermath of a genocide characterized by "groundless hatred, pitiless persecution, pointless degradation, and endless killing" (p. 7). What these daughters of survivors have forced us to confront is whether it is possible to move beyond knowledge of what Hoffman has called "the negative extremes of human possibility" (p. 278), and she has acknowledged that to "separate the past from the present—to see the past as the past is a difficult but necessary achievement" (p. 279).



This separation from the past may not strengthen the connection between the generations, but it can emancipate the children of survivors from feeling responsible for their parents' anguish. Mary Rothschild (2000), another daughter of a survivor, has written

I have learned that I cannot save my mother from Auschwitz and that giving up my life will not restore hers. ... Yet in the telling of my story, I learned how to create meaning out of the ashes of my murdered relatives, my mother's traumatized life, and my own years lost to the task of healing. I learned to separate my story from that of my mother. (p. 51)

This willingness to create meaning out of silence, to extract and express their own identity beyond the shadow of the Holocaust, has emerged as a final legacy borne by the daughters of survivors. In sharing their stories with each other and the world, these writers have shed new light on the psychological traumas still shaping their parents' lives. More importantly, in this spirit of open disclosure, perhaps these women can receive at last the "emotional reparations" they deserve in order to construct for themselves a newly restored life. ■

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Sarah Traister Moskovitz grew up shadowed by the Holocaust and writes in Yiddish as a means to “resurrect the dead.” Pair “The Dress” with Lila Korn’s personal narrative (pp. 93–101); Korn, too, lived “in a house inhabited by spirits of people who may be dead / and may not be dead.” For an interdisciplinary unit on this powerful theme, add the poems of Irving Feldman (pp. 90–92), Seymour Mayne (p. 57), and Janet Kirchheimer (p. 104); and Pnina Rosenberg’s essay on the art of Daniela Rosenhouse (pp. 83–89).

*Sarah Traister Moskovitz*

## *The Dress*

I am sewing a dress for my high school graduation.  
I’ve taken down my bedroom curtains—  
floral seersucker on white background.  
My parents come home.  
They look shocked.  
“What are you doing?”  
“I want to go to my graduation.”  
It doesn’t matter to them;  
they don’t understand why it matters to me.  
They look frustrated and disapproving.  
Too late for me to hang the curtains back—  
I’ve cut them dress-length.

It is spring 1944 and they are trapped in a fog  
of worry for their families in Poland,  
Warsaw and Biala Podlaska.

I live in a house inhabited by spirits of people who may be dead  
and may not be dead:  
my aunts, uncles and many cousins,  
some my age.  
Dead or alive, they come up  
out of dark pits in the hall;  
they are in the living room crying  
where Yiddish newspapers with pictures

of concentration camp corpses are stacked.  
They come up from under the kitchen table  
where my parents sigh and talk softly:  
*"Nisht kayn vort shoin azoi lang."*  
(Not a word, so long already.)  
Their anxiety is a jagged black wall of broken glass  
I cannot touch, let alone cross.

I go to the graduation myself in the dress I made.  
I am not really good with the sewing machine  
and have basted most of the dress by hand.  
I pray the seams will hold.  
After the ceremony, I watch the others meet  
with parents, families. In cozy animated circles  
they stand, talking, smiling, celebrating something.

White dogwoods and purple lilacs are in bloom.  
The scent of fresh green around the auditorium is strong  
Inside my blossoming young girl's body—  
a bare tree charred by fire in autumn.

I walk home slowly down Chestnut Street  
to the quiet in our apartment.  
Little brother having his afternoon nap.  
Father sitting at his desk reading the newspaper.  
Mother in the kitchen ironing.

It's a long time before she asks  
*Nu*, how was it?  
I can find no words. ■

Silences after the Holocaust haunted many families. Pair this poem by Marge Piercy with those by John Amen (p. 81) and Gregg Shapiro (p. 82) and with essays by Eva Fogelman (pp. 66–70) and Nancy D. Kersell (pp. 74–77) for a study of one aspect of the Holocaust legacy.

Marge Piercy

## *How She Learned*

A friend was an only child, she thought  
until she sorted through her mother's things  
after the frail old woman died. Her mother  
had borne Anna late in life, a miracle,  
a blessing, she was always told. Then

Anna found a greying photograph.  
Her aunt who escaped Poland  
in '37 had saved and given it  
to her younger sister who barely  
survived Nordhausen working inside

the mountain, skinny almost-ghost.  
Anna recognized her mother, decades  
younger, but against her side was  
pressed a girl not Anna. Scrawled  
on the back, *Feygelah und Perl*.

Who was Feygelah? Her aunt bore  
only sons. This girl was four or five  
with long light braids, her legs  
locked together in a shy fit. Who?  
There were letters back and forth

Boston to Krakow. She sat reading  
them, puzzling out the handwriting,  
the Yiddish. She had a dictionary  
but even then, it took her late into  
the evening. Anna had a sister.

A sister vanished into smoke.  
A sister torn from her mother,  
murdered, burnt. Anna sat numb.  
She was the replacement for  
a girl whose name her mother

could not speak. The weight  
of history pressed on Anna's chest  
that night and finally she wept—  
mourning the sister never known  
and her mother's decades of silence. ■

"Some questions," the grandfather of John Amen says, "should not be asked." What questions about this event do your students have that they think should not be asked? Encourage them, as Amen does: "Still, I asked them; and I'm still asking."

*John Amen*

## *Verboten*

We are in Paris, my grandparents and I, visiting his sister, the one who failed to get out of Europe in 1938. I am seven years old. My great-aunt's arms remind me of spaghetti strands, and she speaks in a high, labored voice, as if a little pump inside her is not working right. They are drinking wine and speaking of French-U.S. relations when the long sleeve on her arm falls down. Before she can clutch it, I see the faded blue tattoo on her flesh. "What are those numbers?" I ask. A silence explodes through the room like spores. My aunt picks up a tray of empty glasses and retreats into the kitchen. "Some questions," my grandfather says, rubbing his own unblemished arm, "should not be asked." As life went on, I learned that most of the questions I wanted answers to fell into that category. Still, I asked them; and I'm still asking. ■

Nancy D. Kersell (pp. 74–77), Marge Piercy (p. 80), Lila M. Korn (pp. 93–101), and Hilary Tham (p. 102) are among our writers who offer daughters' perspectives on their experiences as children of survivors; Gregg Shapiro offers a son's point of view. He sees the "stories in the lines on his face," but his father "won't talk about the numbers."

*Gregg Shapiro*

## *Tattoo*

My father won't talk about the numbers  
3-7-8-2-5 between the wrist and elbow  
blue as blood on his left forearm  
Instead, he spreads himself over me  
spilling his protection, like acid, until it burns  
I wear him like a cloak, sweat under the weight

There were stories in the lines on his face  
the nervous blue flash in his eyes  
his bone-crushing hugs  
I am drowning in his silence  
trying to stay afloat on curiosity  
Questions choke me and I swallow hard

We don't breathe the same air  
speak the same language  
live in the same universe  
We are continents, worlds apart  
I am sorry my life has remained unscathed  
His scars still bleed, his bruises don't fade

If I could trade places with him  
I would pad the rest of his days  
wrap him in gauze and velvet  
absorb the shocks and treat his wounds  
I would scrub the numbers from his flesh  
extinguish the fire and give him back his life ■

*PRISM* art editor Pnina Rosenberg explores the growing—and intriguing—use of archival photographs in Holocaust art. Focusing on the work of Haifa artist Daniela Rosenhouse, Rosenberg writes, “The series *In the Name of the Father* is characterized by the artist’s minute examination of the past and an attempt to mend it. She is an archeologist of memory, digging through her personal past and, through the tiny shards and finds, recreating a *tableau vivant* of her family.” Pair this art with the works of Irving Feldman (pp. 90–92) and Lila M. Korn (pp. 93–101) for an interdisciplinary view of a major theme of this issue: mourning and mending.

Pnina Rosenberg

## Portrait of a Family Album: Re-Collection: The Paintings of Daniela Rosenhouse

The attempts by a growing number of contemporary artists to (re)shape the memory/history of the Holocaust have resulted in an intriguing and captivating dialogue whose source is archival photographs. These photographic images, which have largely survived their subjects, are being transformed, modified, and embedded in a new context, thus giving an individual interpretation to the void, the absence, and the feeling of loss. The images serve the artists while seeking to trace and reconstruct the lost past.

French artist Christian Boltanski (b. 1944, Paris), of paternal Jewish origin, has created various installations using pictorial images based on photographs, which create a “Holocaust Effect,” a term coined by Ernst Van Alphen (1999, p. 38), in order to trace its victims. In one installation in his series *Lessons of Darkness*, he built an “Altar to the Chases High School” (*Autel Chases*) (1987), based on a photograph of the 1931 graduation class of a Jewish high school in Vienna (see reproductions in Van Alphen, 1997, p. 97). Van Alphen notes that Boltanski intensifies the effect of absence by enlarging the photos so much that “most [of the] details disappear. The eyes, noses, and mouths become dark holes, the faces, white sheets. These blow-ups produce ... a ‘Holocaust Effect.’ They remind us of pictures of survivors of the Holocaust, just after they were released” (p. 38). There is no certain knowledge about the fate of these students, yet one can assume that most did not escape the Nazi terror.

When the American artist Shimon Attie (b. 1957) visited the Berliner Scheunenviertel quarter in 1991, which was once populated by Jews, he was intrigued by the lack of any remembrance by the people he met of the quarter’s past inhabitants. After searching in the city’s archives, he managed to trace photographs portraying some of the inhabitants, their houses and shops, and other evidence of Jewish community life during the 1920s–1930s. In his installation *Writing on the Wall*, these photographs were enlarged and projected onto the walls of the very houses where the pictures had been taken some 60 or 70 years earlier. This juxtaposition created layers of memory and, by blending the past with the present, he erected a living memorial to this persecuted population, bringing them out of oblivion (Young, 2000, pp. 62–73).

Israeli Haim Maor (b. 1951), one of the pioneering Second Generation artists, dug through his own personal archive to create his 1988 installation *The Faces of Race and Memory*. Part of it, a table covered with glass, titled *Shulchan Aruch*, meaning both a written manual of the Jewish law as well a

set table [Fig. 1], is described thus:

A heavy transparent glass plate lies on the wooden surface of my desk. As through a transparent tombstone, one clearly sees who lies underneath. Under the glass I place photos, reproductions, postcards and notes, as was done at my father’s house. Nowadays, one layer of memories covers its predecessors, conceals and obstructs



**FIG. 1: Shulchan Aruch**

Haim Maor, *Shulchan Aruch*, 1988–2009, mixed media, 120 × 120 cm, detail from the installation *The Faces of Race and Memory*, courtesy of the artist; courtesy of Massuah, Institute for Holocaust Studies, Kibbutz Tel Itzhak, Israel.



**FIG. 2: The Painter and the Hassid**

Ruth Kestenbaum Ben-Dov, *The Painter and the Hassid*, 2008, oil on canvas, diptych, 80 × 60 cm. From the artist's collection. [www.ruthkxbd.com](http://www.ruthkxbd.com)

it. ... The memories become ghosts. The photos on the desk make a partial, broken mosaic, an incomplete jigsaw puzzle that hardly manages to join together to form a story, due to the black holes between the islands of memory. (Maor, 2005, p. 52)

The installation is linked to his previous works, which represent ongoing and continuing research into his family's history and relate a story that cannot be fully traced and reconstructed due to lacunae—"the black holes between the islands of memory." The fragments of the past, the broken memories, are laid beneath glass that, although transparent and visibly accessible, also creates a barrier—we can no longer touch the photos and other mementos. The intimate and familiar memorabilia have become detached icons and tombstones. Due to the multiplicity of the layers of the memory, the translucent becomes opaque, obscure, and enigmatic.

In the drawings and paintings that comprise the series *The Painter and the Hassid* (2007–2010), artist Ruth Kestenbaum Ben-Dov (b. 1961, Washington, DC) formed an imaginary encounter between Rabbi Kalonymus Shapira, the Grand Rabbi of Piaseczno (1889–1943), the Czech Jewish painter Malva Schaleck (1882–1944), and herself. She was deeply moved and impressed by the spiritual resistance of Rabbi Shapira and the artist Schaleck during the Holocaust. Rabbi Shapira, who was murdered in Trawniki, was a spiritual leader of Hassidic Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto. His weekly sermons, hidden in milk bottles, were discovered after the war and published under the title *Sacred Fire* (*Esh Kodesh*). Schaleck, who perished in Auschwitz, was interned in Terezin, where she immortalized her co-inmates in her

drawings and depicted the daily life of the camp. Kestenbaum Ben-Dov based her series on an archival photograph of Rabbi Shapira and a self-portrait done by Schaleck in Terezin; both protagonists are depicted, either by themselves or together, with a self-portrait of Kestenbaum Ben-Dov. She culminates her series with an imagined, virtual encounter between the rabbi and the Czech artist, taking place while both are immersed in their respective activities: The rabbi is writing a sermon while the painter works on a portrait [Fig. 2] (R. Kestenbaum Ben-Dov, personal communication, 2008).

Although each of the artists makes different use of the photographs and embeds them in different media, they all share a common denominator: The photographs serve as a bridge to the past and provide a tool for "postmemory" of the past.

Postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. (Hirsch, 1997, p. 22)

#### **IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER: THE PAINTINGS OF DANIELA ROSENHOUSE, 2007–2008**

No artist is more imaginative in her attempt to bridge the past and the present than Daniela Rosenhouse (b. 1953), a gifted artist and a graduate of Bezalel Art Academy, Jerusalem, whose works have been exhibited in both individual and group shows. Her series *In the Name of the Father* comprises 10 oil paintings and represents an aesthetic attempt to fulfill the last wish of her father, David Rosenhouse. David (b. 1914) emigrated from Lithuania to Palestine in 1933 to study civil engineering at the Technion in Haifa. None of his family members survived the Holocaust.

On his deathbed in 2005, in Haifa, David, whose memory had failed, asked his daughter the whereabouts of his murdered family. When told that they had all passed away long ago, he cried from the depths of his soul. Suddenly, the barriers of life and time were released and the past, which had been sealed away, was unlocked.

After her father's burial, on the eve of Rosh Hashanah 5766 (the Jewish New Year, 2005, the very same date on which his wife, Dvora Domb Rosenhouse, had passed away 24 years earlier), Daniela determined to re-create the family through her art. To summon her paternal and maternal family members, whose death preceded her birth, she had to use her imaginative powers and evoke their presence through the only memorabilia left to her: a box of old, black-and-white family photographs.

In her studio at home, "between the kitchen and the



**FIG. 3: Daniel**

Daniela Rosenhouse, *Daniel*, oil on canvas, 120 × 100 cm, from the series *In the Name of the Father* (2007–2008), from the artist's collection.

living room,” she says, she scattered the photographs on the table and, after meditating, modifying, and transforming the pictures as though they were parts of a puzzle, she reassembled the whole family. In this reunion, alongside the images of the dead, members of the second and third generations appear: Daniela, her sister, and their children. As the process took place, it inevitably involved all the members of her family, transforming the whole household into a laboratory of memory. Thus, the ordinary space of a household was gradually converted into a space of commemoration.

Daniela Rosenhouse is not haunted by her family's past, and those who perished are not presented as ghostlike phantoms. They cohabit, literally and metaphorically; the pictures of the reunited, reconstructed family are produced in the familial space and displayed in her living room. The room is neither mausoleum nor shrine but rather an enlarged, lifelike photograph album.

Rosenhouse's domestic studio creates a constant and lively dialogue between art and life, frequently merging both realms; the very same table that serves as her studio turns into a family dining table during mealtimes. The photographs, palette, and paintings are put aside, and the whole current family eats together with their reconstructed ancestors.

The artist's children take an active part in the re-creation process, serving both as models for her paintings and as constant, active spectators. They accompany the development of their mother's work—her doubts, her hesitations, her modifications; they perceive the way their own large contemporary images in color are combined with ones derived from the old, small, black-and-white photographs. Thus, the second and third generations are familiar and intimate eyewitnesses to the way they became part of their past, continuously linked to it, as the artist attests:

I assembled together on the canvas family members who were murdered and those who are alive; thus the fictive encounters slipped into real life. My children and I became intimately familiar with our family. The past ghosts became part of my daily life. Painting them was



a sensual and tactile experience—I had to touch them, move them, add parts of their bodies. I created and re-created them constantly, till the moment I felt they are fully integrated with my present family. (D. Rosenhouse, personal communication, March 18, 2010)

As Daniela explained, the series is not a “heroic” commemoration. Rather, she depicted the family members in their daily activities and at leisure in an ordinary bourgeois routine, up to the time when it was brutally and abruptly destroyed. “I edit and direct events in my artistic reality to express authentic and intimate aspects of my life,” the artist stated. “Fiction and fabrication, once put on canvas, become true and are my new history.”

**THE ROSENHOUSE FAMILY**

The father of the Rosenhouse dynasty, Daniel, after whom Daniela is named, is the central figure in a painting bearing his name [Fig. 3]. Daniel Rosenhouse headed an architectural firm in Vilnius, his hometown, where he built several public edifices, including a synagogue that still exists. As depicted, this elegant man is seated and two of his children stand behind him: his pregnant daughter, Asia, who worked with him, and her easygoing, handsome brother, Alexander-Shura, who returns her good-natured gaze with affection.

The portrait of this threesome seems quite idyllic, yet



**FIG. 4: Roundabout**

Daniela Rosenhouse, *Roundabout*, oil on canvas, 120 × 100 cm, from the series *In the Name of the Father* (2007–2008), from the artist's collection.

there are clues that suggest that the appearance is misleading. The composition of Daniel, Asia, and Alexander creates a triangle, usually a symbol of stability and firmness, but the vertex of this triangle is Daniel's hands, and it is, therefore, inverse. Thus, instead of creating a sense of solidity and permanence, the composition produces a feeling of lack of balance and insecurity. Is it a hint that this fine, solid world is about to be turned upside down?

The artist, Daniela, is seated on a bench to her grandfather's right, wearing jeans and a casual sweater, in contrast to his elegant attire. Her arms are crossed, with one hand almost touching her grandfather's arm. Her appearance is somewhat ambiguous; she belongs—yet does not belong—to the threesome. She is not an intruder, but she is remote and, in contrast to the smiling young adults who would have been her aunt and uncle, seems unhappy. A frustrated, passive, and impotent witness, she is the only one to know, in retrospect, the sad fate awaiting the others, and she remains forever unable to warn them or prevent it.

Daniela set Alexander-Shura, the son, behind his father, giving a feeling of continuity emphasized by the white shirt and tie they are both wearing. However, the semblance of the normal sequence of generations, of continuity, which is

enhanced by Asia's pregnancy, was illusionary in the realm of the Holocaust. The chain of life was brutally ruptured and restored only through the patchwork of a family album.

This duality of depicting a genealogical sequence with the consciousness that it would not last is also manifested in *Roundabout* [Fig. 4]. Asia has given birth and is here depicted with her son, Alesie, in a pleasant, almost banal mother and child scene, based on a photograph dated "Vilnius 18/VII/1937." The smiling, elegant woman is seated on a roundabout, holding her mischievous Alesie in her arms, while Itamar, Daniela's youngest son, is sitting in the background, dressed in contemporary jeans and sweatshirt and facing forward. The painting captures Asia's cheerful mood. A well-to-do young woman who led a comfortable, sheltered life, she could hardly have thought that soon it would be cruelly shattered. Yet, as in the previous painting, there are ominous clues. The dark, sinister background and the spiral, vortex-like form of the roundabout stand in a sharp contrast to her carefree attitude. Itamar, like his mother in *Daniel*, is the only one who knows what has already happened; hence his concerned and anxious look.

#### THE DOMB FAMILY

Dvora Rosenhouse, née Domb, the artist's mother, was born in Wyszkwow, Poland (1917), to a scholarly family. Her father, Abraham, was a headmaster; Bela, her mother, was a teacher; and their younger daughter, Eva, was a student. Dvora, their elder daughter, left Poland in 1936 and went to Haifa to study engineering at the Technion. There she met her future husband, David, whom she married in 1941. In that very year, Dvora's parents and their younger daughter tried to run away from their hometown to find refuge elsewhere. Tragically, they were refused haven and, on their way back, the three of them were murdered.

*Hedge* [Fig. 5] is set in the territory of Daniela's maternal family. The upper part of the painting depicts an industrious family leaving home for their daily routine. The mother, Bela (left), wearing a light trench coat, is smiling and affably holding her daughter's hand. Eva, smiling as well and elegantly dressed in a light brown coat, is ready to pursue her studies. The father, Abraham, wears a brown suit and a striped tie and holds his briefcase. It is a portrait of a united, hardworking, and happy family.

Daniela inserts herself into her maternal family by "pasting" a self-portrait into the lower part of the painting. She is visibly separated from and relatively larger than the Dombs. Contrary to the previous picture with her paternal family, here there is no contact between herself and her relatives. She does not watch them or touch them, as if not wishing to interfere in this harmonious scene. Unlike her smiling grandparents and aunt, she seems serious and preoccupied, as are all the second- and third-generation family members

incorporated in this reconstructed album. The portrait of the Dombs reflects intimacy, warmth, and concern. They are depicted as unpretentious, loving, and devoted to each other, which serves only to intensify the sense of loss.

The feeling of unity is also reflected in the painting *Eva* [Fig. 6, p. 88]. In this picture, the artist's aunt, the central figure in this feminine triplet, is seated on a sofa. Dvora, her sister, is seated to the left, while Ariela, the artist's daughter, sits on the right, looking at her, as if checking their remarkable resemblance.

Although the sisters Dvora and Eva are of the same generation, Dvora looks older and could be thought to be Eva's mother, while Eva looks as if she is Ariela's older sister. This genealogical distortion can be explained thus: Tragically and ironically, Eva, the only one in this picture who was murdered, remained young forever, while Dvora, her sister, grew up, grew older, and became a mother and subsequently a grandmother.

The "three graces," placed in an unidentified interior, are static and solid, as if representing a stable world. Their heads are at the same height and their legs reach the same line on the floor. Their realistic, almost sculptured depiction emphasizes their immobility. The sitters' stillness is intriguing, because the painting does not evoke tranquility or peacefulness. The immobility is tense and gives an impression that the women are sitting on the top of a volcano that is about to erupt—a false calm before the storm.

### A HYPOTHETICAL REUNION

While the previous paintings depicted a reunion that supposedly takes place "here," in *Rummikub* [Fig. 7, p. 88], Rosenhouse transfers herself and her elder sister, Nurith, to "there," to European territory. The painting depicts Daniela; her elder sister, Nurith; and their maternal and paternal grandmothers, Bela Domb and Feige Rosenhouse, seated by a table playing rummy. The younger ones, in the foreground, are seen from the back, while the older ones are in the back plane of the picture, facing their granddaughters. As in the other pictures, there is a time distortion. The generation gap is not visually evident: Daniela and Nurith do not look as if two generations separate them and the other two players.

In this imaginary situation, the artist transports herself and her sister to 1930s Europe, crossing the borders of time and space and placing the quartet in a hypothetical situation, answering the artist's question: "What would have happened if we had been there?" The reply is a very intimate gathering of four women passing the time in a conventional, central European, bourgeois manner. Rosenhouse does not depict a dramatic event; she prefers the banality of daily life with its humanity and petit joys. She stages Feige, the prominent architect's wife, properly dressed in an elegant hat and coat, alongside the more modest teacher, Bela, smiling warmly at her granddaughters. Unlike the other paintings, in this feminine get-together there are no concerned and anxious witnesses. They are all there, absorbed in the game, but only in this artistic *oeuvre*, which comes tragically alive thanks to the imagination and skill of its artistic creator, who attests: "I am a realistic painter who paints a fictitious reality."

### KADDISH

Daniela had been preparing the festive Rosh Hashanah meal when her father passed away. The actual dinner was cancelled, but the family gathering that would have happened that night took place later, in the painting *Kaddish*, here meant to refer to the Aramaic "Mourner's Prayer" in which God's Name is sanctified [Fig. 8, p. 89]. The joy of a family



**FIG. 5: Hedge**

Daniela Rosenhouse, *Hedge*, oil on canvas, 120 × 100 cm, from the series *In the Name of the Father* (2007–2008), from the artist's collection.



**FIG. 6: Eva**

Daniela Rosenhouse, *Eva*, oil on canvas, 120 × 100 cm, from the series *In the Name of the Father* (2007–2008), from the artist's collection.

gathered in celebration of the holiday is juxtaposed with the mournful lament inherent in the figure's title.

Eighteen members of my family are invited to the traditional Rosh Hashanah dinner on the date my parents passed away. The number 18 in *gematria* [a system of Hebrew numerology that discloses the hidden meaning of Hebrew texts] is "*chai*," meaning life, in Hebrew. *Kaddish* was created from a collection of old family photographs and imaginary memories with which I build a new biography. [In this painting] photos of my family who perished in the Holocaust join photos of my family today. I did not try to falsify or beautify my memories; rather, I have developed memory substitutes where time was erased. Thus, the dead and the living come together to form a whole. (Rosenhouse, 2009)

This extremely detailed painting, reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*, underwent a significant modification. When it was painted in 2007, the individual figures were not outlined in white, as they are in the final version shown here (p. 89), and the painting created an impression of union. Rosenhouse, not satisfied with the outcome, decided to

add the white outlines, thus turning the imaginative reunion into a semblance of a huge jigsaw puzzle. She also added the Hebrew date: Monday, 29 Elul 5700 (September 1940), and the inscription *Holy of Holies* (the most sacred part of the Temple in Jerusalem in which the Ark of the Covenant was stored). The final version shatters the illusion of a festive family reunion; the smooth wholeness is transformed into its original fragmentary components. The artist writes:

In this puzzle, the portraits are set in fixed places. Time, as opposed to the portraits, flows back and forth, thus a multi-level consciousness exists. The reality is uncertain in an uncertain world. The concept of happiness or security is but an illusion. In this dimension, there is no absolute truth but [rather] only a desire to make a repair. By combining reality and fiction, past and present, I am trying to fill the void, trying to mend the broken parts and bring these people forth from oblivion. I am their "Kaddish" [meant here to refer to the mourner who is left behind to recite the prayer]. (Rosenhouse, 2009)

The artist, with her meticulous research, does the impossible: Her seamless integration of the present and the past, the living and the dead, produces a dialogue between reality



**FIG. 7: Rummikub**

Daniela Rosenhouse, *Rummikub*, oil on canvas, 120 × 100 cm, from the series *In the Name of the Father* (2007–2008), from the artist's collection.



**FIG. 8: Kaddish**

Daniela Rosenhouse, *Kaddish*, oil on canvas, 90 × 150 cm, from the series *In the Name of the Father* (2007–2008), dated (in Hebrew): Monday, 29 Elul 5700 (September 1940), inscription (in Hebrew): Holy of Holies, from the artist's collection.

and imagination and reanimates her murdered family members, merging forever life and memory. ■

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I am immensely grateful to Daniela Rosenhouse for welcoming me into her home/studio, giving me access to her artistic work, and sharing with me her remarkable process of the reconstruction of her “family album.” I thank her for allowing me to publish reproductions of her works.

I express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Haim Maor for permitting me to use a reproduction of “*Shulchan Aruch*,” a detail from his installation *The Faces of Race and Memory*, and for clarifying certain aspects of the installation.

I thank Aiala Wengrowicz Feller from the Visual Archive at Massuah and the Institute for Holocaust Studies, Kibbutz Tel Itzhak, Israel, for her invaluable assistance and cooperation in furnishing me with Haim Maor's reproduction.

My deepest gratitude to Ruth Kestenbaum Ben-Dov ([www.ruthkbd.com](http://www.ruthkbd.com)) for enabling me to include a reproduction from her series “*The Painter and the Hassid*.”

Irving Feldman shares with our cover artist Daniela Rosenhouse (pp. 83–89) and poet Seymour Mayne (p. 57) the determination to reanimate beloved friends and relatives murdered in the Holocaust. Daniela paints them alive; Mayne names them alive; Feldman thinks them alive and, in his writing, brings them back “to the shtetlach and ghettos, / and set[s] them walking the streets, visiting, praying in shul, feasting and dancing. ...”

*Irving Feldman*

## *The Pripet Marshes*

Often I think of my Jewish friends and seize them as they are and transport them in my mind to the shtetlach and ghettos,

And set them walking the streets, visiting, praying in shul, feasting and dancing. The men I set to arguing, because I love dialectic and song—my ears tingle when I hear their voices—and the girls and women I set to promenading or to cooking in the kitchens, for the sake of their tiny feet and clever hands.

And put kerchiefs and long dresses on them, and some of the men I dress in black and reward with beards. And all of them I set among the mists of the Pripet Marshes, which I have never seen, among wooden buildings that loom up suddenly one at a time, because I have only heard of them in stories, and that long ago.

It is the moment before the Germans will arrive.

Maury is there, uncomfortable, and pigeon-toed, his voice is rapid and slurred, and he is brilliant; And Frank who is good-hearted and has the hair and yellow skin of a Tartar and is like a flame turned low;

And blond Lottie who is coarse and miserable, her full mouth is turning down with a self-contempt she can never hide, while the steamroller of her voice flattens every delicacy; And Marian, her long body, her face pale under her bewildered black hair and of the purest oval of those Greek signets she loves; her head tilts now like the heads of the birds she draws; And Adele who is sullen and an orphan and so like a beaten creature she trusts no one, and who doesn't know what to do with herself, lurching with her magnificent body like a despoiled tigress;

And Munji, moping melancholy clown, arms too short for his barrel chest, his penny-whistle nose, and mocking nearsighted eyes that want to be straightforward and good;

And Abbie who, when I listen closely, is speaking to me, beautiful with her large nose and witty mouth, her coloring that always wants lavender, her vitality that body and mind can't quite master;

And my mother whose gray eyes are touched with yellow, and who is as merry as a young girl; And my brown-eyed son who is glowing like a messenger impatient to be gone and who may stand for me.

I cannot breathe when I think of him there.

And my red-haired sisters, and all my family, our embarrassed love bantering our tenderness away.

Others, others, in crowds filling the town on a day I have made sunny for them; the streets are warm and they are at their ease.

How clearly I see them all now, how miraculously we are linked! And sometimes I make them speak Yiddish in timbres whose unfamiliarity thrills me.

But in a moment the Germans will come.

What, will Maury die? Will Marian die?

Not a one of them who is not transfigured then!

The brilliant in mind have bodies that glimmer with a total dialectic;

The stupid suffer an inward illumination; their stupidity is a subtle tenderness that glows in and around them;

The sullen are surrounded with great tortured shadows raging with pain, against whom they struggle like titans;

In Frank's low flame I discover an enormous perspectiveless depth;

The gray of my mother's eyes dazzles me with our love;

No one is more beautiful than my red-haired sisters.

And always I imagine the least among them last, one I did not love, who was almost a stranger to me.

I can barely see her blond hair under the kerchief; her cheeks are large and faintly pitted, her raucous laugh is tinged with shame as it subsides; her bravado forces her into still another lie;

But her vulgarity is touched with a humanity I cannot exhaust, her wretched self-hatred is as radiant as the faith of Abraham, or indistinguishable from that faith.

I can never believe my eyes when this happens, and I want to kiss her hand, to exchange a blessing

In the moment when the Germans are beginning to enter the town.

But there isn't a second to lose, I snatch them all back,

For, when I want to, I can be a God.

No, the Germans won't have one of them!

This is my people, they are mine!

And I flee with them, crowd out with them: I hide myself in a pillowcase stuffed with clothing,  
in a woman's knotted handkerchief, in a shoebox.

And one by one I cover them in mist, I take them out.

The German motorcycles zoom through the town,

They break their fists on the hollow doors.

But I can't hold out any longer. My mind clouds over.

I sink down as though drugged or beaten. ■



"Today, the Czech Republic and Slovakia are independent states, but in my mother's time," explains author Lila M. Korn, "they were one country created by the League of Nations after World War I with the hope that satisfying the demand of Eastern European nationalities for self-determination would bring an era of peace. Czechoslovakia was the only truly functioning democracy among the League's successor states, but after President Masaryk's death in 1937, hostility burst forth in the Slovak region between ethnic Hungarians and Slovaks. Christian antisemitism ran high among both groups. Jews in towns such as Zborov had a choice: hope that democracy would succeed or believe that fascist nationalism would triumph. For too long, my mother's family chose hope." Read this narrative and study the work of Daniela Rosenhouse (pp. 83–89); encourage your students to examine the ways in which these two children of survivors have attempted to come to terms with their respective families' past.

Lila M. Korn

## Leaving Zborov

When my sister, Shula, phoned from Europe in the winter of 1979 proposing a springtime trip "home" with our mother, a thousand muddled memories compelled me to agree, recollections that had often confused me about just whose childhood I remembered, my mother's seeming so much more action-filled, pungent, and populated than my own. She'd outdone herself creating a secure if humble home for my sister and me; yet when she spoke of *home*, she usually meant Zborov, a Czechoslovakian mountain town whose chatty ghosts visited regularly, benign phantoms grinning out knowingly from a cache of little gray-toned photographs that were my mother's most treasured possession. Her people filled the lonely moments of my childhood, visiting at bedtime or when I lay fevered between fresh-smelling sheets, or when her excitement was greatest and her longing deepest, on the eves of Sabbaths and festivals. At those times, she would step away briefly from her stove or sewing machine, pat a place beside her on the sofa, and with a gentle, "Come see," regale us with tales of group hikes up the great mountain to the *schloss* and of young people picnicking, skiing, dancing, and singing—together. Always together. She would speak of them in an oddly altered, girlish voice—weightless and carefree. Sometimes she hummed a melody or lifted her feet to dance a step or two, and I glimpsed a different person from the stolid mother I knew, a girl with sparkling eyes, aware that her very presence could light up a room [Fig. 1].

In the mid-1950s when I was 7 years old and my sister was 4, our father, who'd fled virulent Polish antisemitism as a teen in the 1920s, succumbed to mental illness triggered by long service as an American G. I. in World War II, which culminated in the cleanup of concentration camps. Left to raise two small daughters alone, my mother naturally turned for



FIG. 1: A vibrant Liba, biking on the road out of Zborov.

help to her family and wide circle of friends. Yet, what should have been a bonding suffused with warmth was instead an eerie thing, for none of them existed in any sense that a child could comprehend family—or existence. I knew them only through her tales, and in the listening learned unspoken things as well: that a situation could embody its own contradiction, that there is presence in absence and absence in presence. I grew to adulthood craving simplicity, deter-

mined to lead a life in which people and events would be only what they seemed, never anything more—or less. I was well on my way to willing this foolish notion into existence when my sister phoned.

*Did I want to go home with Mom?* I had learned early not to question the absence of all those people from my life, for fear of treading on the edge of an awful awfulness looming in the answer. If as a child I grew uneasy about Zborov, I did not then understand why. It was as familiar as my mother's scent, yet I feared it—for its invisibility, its foreignness, its stifling provinciality—and most of all for its hold on her. I was not even sure there had ever been a real Zborov, considering it at least possible that the town was a figment of her imagination, a place to which she escaped when her loneliness was too much to bear. I suppose the real trouble with Zborov was that I had never been able to go there with her. Then, one day, I did.

### IN MY MIND'S EYE

Most of the year steep snows cover Zborov. A late spring thaws the mountainous landscape slowly; it rains a lot, and you have to wear tall rubber boots or sink almost to your knees in mud. A stream slices through the town, tripping down evergreen slopes from the nearby Polish border into the forest below. In springtime long ago, before there were coins to spare for the gypsy washerwoman, my mother's mother, Leia, bent over the spring's rushing waters to rinse her family's linens and hang them out to dry in the crisp mountain air. That way, when they all lay down at night in that deceptively serene, transitional time between the two world wars, the fragrance of herb grass and cherry blossoms caught in sun-bleached sheets lulled them to a sound country sleep. To this day, my mother hangs sheets in the bright sun to dry. That way they smell like home.

I have long known the sites of the town—the stream; the steep-roofed cottages lining the streets where the Jews lived, worked, and prayed; the clubhouse the young people rented for themselves, where they joked, bickered over all varieties of Zion-



FIG. 2: Leia Juda Grossmann, my mother's mother.

ism, planned Purim *spiels*, and read Europe's great novels in Yiddish translation. A footpath plunges down the mountainside to Bartfeld (Bardejov) and its mineral baths, where Hassidic *rebbe*s sojourned in summer. Just outside of Zborov, a mountain looms, its forested crest crowned by a decaying Austro-Hungarian fortress, “the *schloss*,” which looks down upon Zborov and was often the destination of boisterous, Yiddish-chattering hikers, among them my mother, her brothers, and their friends.

In my mind's eye I have seen my mother's placid Hassidic father, whom the shtetl's children called *Feter Shulem* (Uncle Sholom), bent over his holy books; and I have encountered my mother's assertive mother, Leia, midwife and provider for the sick, modestly bewigged and garbed in dark clothing [Fig. 2].

I have watched their fair-haired, change-of-life child, Brandl, grow from toddler to adolescent, and I have seen Liba, my mother, as a young girl, later as a teen, still later as a fresh-faced young woman. I have almost touched the four beloved brothers who tweaked the nose of Hassidic tradition but would not abandon it. They argued politics into the night and regularly smuggled Palestine-bound Jewish refugees across the nearby border with Poland, driving them, bent low in the back seat of Berl's car, to their next way station.

In my mind's eye I have seen all the precious ones from that faraway time when none but the discontented, odd-lot offspring of Zborov fought the town's insularity to strike out on his own—and so, perhaps, live to tell tales. Liba was anything but a restless youth. Though adept at every sort of needlecraft, she lived contentedly with her family until it was almost too late. The threat of invasion was already a stink in the air, and their neighbors were already turning on them, when a single U.S. visa arrived (the boys had applied for eight) and a single affidavit was managed. The family forced Liba of the “golden hands” to go, for she was the one with the most marketable skills for America [Fig. 3].

They assured her they would follow—from America she might, in fact, help them. She acquiesced reluctantly, her weeping on departure day [Fig. 4]



FIG. 3: Liba was talented at all sorts of needlecraft; her “golden hands” provided her with a marketable skill in America.



FIG. 4: Liba on board the ship to America in August 1938.

reaching such a state that her mother ran inside the house, grabbed a pile of photographs, thrust them into her daughter's hands and said, "Here. Take these [Figs. 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9]. When you miss us too much, look at them."

Inevitably, I stored the little gray images and the tales that went with them, one after another, until the ghosts of Zborov were living with me, visiting in the night, hovering at my wedding, waiting patiently to possess my children. But what could my mother have known of this longing for the undead she bequeathed me? And had she known, could she have raised me differently? Could she have let them slip away as though they had never lived?

#### HOMeward BOUND

Four months after my sister's phone call and 40 years after my mother fled the land of her birth, a Czechoslovakian Aerolinie flight carried me eastward over Germany to a rendezvous with my mother and sister. As the flight wore on, I felt sucked inexorably into a vortex, cut off from the life and lives behind me, destined to be swallowed whole by the world of the faded photographs. The thought of never again seeing my husband and two small children inspired less fear than fatalistic numbness, as though the die had been cast. I

wondered whether even this other pale world awaited me, whether my mother and sister would be at our Prague rendezvous, or whether I might remain trapped in the terrible isolation of a time warp, belonging neither to the present, nor the past, nor the future.

I cringed as I swallowed, my head doddering feverishly from an ever-worsening throat infection. I thought of how perfect the timing of my illness was. My mother, you see, had gotten an ear infection on her long-ago escape from Czechoslovakia. Sitting in a sealed train as it click-clacked through Nazi Germany, burning with fever and unable to seek medical help, she would hit her head against the cool glass window of the carriage to be sure something could hurt worse than her ear. She lost most of the hearing in that ear, but no matter when you consider what could have become of her had she gotten off the train for help—a lone, foreign Jewess adrift and ill in the Third Reich. With little effort I convinced myself that it had been forgivable, after all, for me not to seek help during my eight-hour layover in Brussels.

The plane set down in a sallow spring sunset. The only other passengers, a group of exhilarated young athletes, disembarked merrily as I slugged down two more aspirin and emerged, sweaty and shivering, into the evening air to catch sight of my sister on the terminal's observation deck, just above the large "R" in PRAHA (the Czech word for Prague) determinedly crossing and uncrossing her upraised arms. Such a broad gesture. Thank God for her instincts.

The following day we three toured Prague: the Altneu synagogue, the old ghetto and cemetery, children's drawings from Terezin concentration camp. My fever worsened. In the evening, we paid the chambermaid to draw me a bath. My mother waited in the hall as I soaked in a massive tub. When I opened the door, she threw an extra blanket over my robed shoulders and told me, as we walked back to our room, that she had been very sick on the train ride out, and there had been no one. I said, gently, "Yes, Mom, I know."

In the morning we left stunning, sad Prague, a jewel greatly dimmed by the oppressive presence of Soviet troops, and continued by plane via Bratislava to gray, timeworn Kosice, erstwhile metropolis of the Slovak east, its bourgeois glory past, surrounded on its tattered edges by Soviet-inspired housing projects, squatting in the mud in various stages of incompletion. Our destination, the boxy Hotel Slovan, spread its cement bulk beside a magnificently paved, 19th-century square, whose gray and white cobblestone mosaic was edged in red, hammer-and-sickle imprinted flags in honor of May Day, the international workers' holiday. On their common western front, the old square and hotel were bounded by Franklin D. Roosevelt Ulice (Boulevard). We entered the lobby, bags in hand, and registered. My mother found a pay phone, and with the clinking of many coins, reached her contact, a roly-poly elderly man, an eager Yid-



FIG. 5: From left, Liba (knitting), sister Brandl, brother Nisn-Isak, cousin Frieda at a picnic just outside of town.



FIG. 6: Four siblings pose while balancing on bikes, while a fifth takes the snapshot. From left: Berl, Liba, Yidl, and Brandl.



FIG. 7: Liba on the bike, with a friend, name unknown.



FIG. 8: Liba, seated, with 3 siblings and a cousin, in the doorway of her brother Yidl's bicycle shop in Zborov. (Yidl's secular name was Eugen; note the sign.) All perished except Liba.

dish speaker who arrived with a second man, as withdrawn as his companion was expansive. The second man, slight of build, would be our driver the entire next day. Though silver-haired, his delicately handsome face appeared strangely young beneath his tweed worker's cap, as though adolescence had been unnaturally arrested on his features. In the dimly lit lobby, he sat collapsed into himself, chin to chest, cap brim pulled low, trying by habit or design to be no one. His friend described him as a secret Jew, a good man who understood what we wanted and would drive us anywhere.

The secret Jew watched without watching. In Soviet-controlled Czechoslovakia 10 years after the failed Prague Spring, evidence was everywhere of people stealing furtive glances, cautious of being watched themselves. So I, too, sat in the hotel lobby, stealthily observing our driver, turning from him to my mother and the Yiddish speaker, then

glancing down at the passport case in my lap, its precious documents standing between me and oblivion, an uncomprehending stranger in a land not my own. The Yiddish speaker reassured us, "Whatever you want, he understands," and I thought, *This silent driver understands what we want here? Would that he would tell me!*

The morning dawned gray and drizzling. Klima—for that was the driver's name, or more correctly, the generic Slovak name he'd chosen to go by since the war—met us in the breakfast room and slipped a white cloth napkin into his pocket before bringing us to his car, seating my mother up front, my sister and me in back. In no time, he guided his dented brown Skoda sedan past a factory district and drab workers' quarters to Kosice's northern edge, where the car lurched onto a two-lane highway. Soon we were climbing up, up into misty foothills past ruined castles on faraway crests,

past gray-brown villages with storks nesting royally in stone chimneys, and slow-paced, black-booted men tending newly planted vegetable gardens in the rain. Now and again along the roadside, small religious shrines flashed by, way stations for the stocky, broad-cheeked peasants who still made trips from village to village on foot. Garish red plastic Communist Party signposts zipped by, intruding among the statuary every so often, their fiery slogans rudely misplaced in the heather gray landscape. I gazed through rain-spattered windows at the slow serenity of the land and heard my sister murmur in disbelief, "My God ... it's beautiful here." Indeed, it was.

Up front, my mother conversed in Hungarian (or was it Slovakish?) with Klima. Now and again, she turned around to inquire about my health or to translate bits of their conversation, until the moment came when she remarked with unconscious humor of a passing village, "a one-Jew town." The men had to walk—one from here, one from there—to someplace in the middle where they could *daven* with a *minyán* on *Shabbos*." It was her first reference to the vanished humanity that had once peopled this landscape, the black-garbed ones whose footfalls had not sounded in these hills for decades, their Sabbath prayers long ago gone up in smoke. We had been searching for them, and often it seemed they were but a hairsbreadth away from revealing themselves. We willed mightily for them to appear until the looking became painful, their absence a weight so heavy it seemed too much of an effort to speak.

The smooth asphalt road disoriented my mother, who recalled the sound of crushed pebbles beneath the wheels of



**FIG. 9:** Nearby, others dance, their hora, forever arrested in mid-step. Of all these smiling hora dancers, only two survived, including my mother, Liba, fourth from left.

her brother Berl's car as it strained uphill on the return to Zborov from shopping excursions in Bartfeld or a wedding in Presov or Kosice. "Such a nerve, that Berl," she would say. "The only one in town who ran a car service and drove a motorcycle, too! [Fig. 10]."

We stopped briefly in the city of Presov to stand before a once handsome synagogue, now crumbling in stony isolation. As my mother wandered about the building embraced by reverie, I whispered prayers to a God at once familiar and unknown. A decaying courtyard lay beside the synagogue, edged by empty dwellings, a place where a righteous community had lived, and where, chances were, they had been rounded up to die. Atop the synagogue, a metal Star of David pierced the leaden sky—challenging heaven and earth, a rusted relic of a lost dimension in time and space. As we moved around the weed-strewn grounds, Klima leaned on his car, head down. Clearly, he could not understand why we had come to linger in his ghostly land, where the hiding, the shame of Jewish identity had not ended since the day he marched, numb, through the gates of Auschwitz.

When Klima lost his bearings as we left Presov, my mother's ability to point the way came as a rude awakening. *Her other life was becoming real*. There surged in me an all-but-forgotten urge to drag her back, make her—them—understand: She belongs to me!

On the road, signposts with fairy-tale names flew by, sparking recollections of picnics I've never been on, hikes I've never made, up the great green mountain to the *schloss*, and illicit border crossings ("*Smile, whiskey bottle for the guard*") to rendezvous with Polish Jewish refugees making their way to Eretz Yisrael, or to visit family separated by borders drawn after World War I. Smiling faces in tones of gray floated up from childhood memory. Here were the hills, the streets, the turns of their lives—but *where were they?* Did they not yearn for us as we yearned for them?



**FIG. 10:** Berl on his motorcycle on the road out of Zborov.



**FIG. 11:** With the *schloss* [fortress] in the background, Brandl sits among the wildflowers.

We stopped in Bartfeld, saw the mineral baths where Hassidic *rebbe*s came in summer, and the railway station where Berl drove my mother on the day she left home, Tisha B'Av, a solemn fast day, the day the Holy Temple, God's earthly abode, was destroyed.

The Skoda climbed a winding grade past a lumber mill. Atop a mountain, a ruined fortress peaked through the foliage. My mother spoke, barely above a whisper. "There ... that's the *schloss*," she said [Fig. 11].

I broke into a cold sweat, drew the lap blanket tighter around me, and saw that we'd come to a road sign: ZBOROV. *My God, my God. Home.*

## HOME

We turned onto a country road—isolated farmhouses shrouded in mist, fields on either side, then the town proper. "Is this it?" my mother asked. "It can't be! I don't recognize a thing." I had a momentary concern. Perhaps the town had been razed after the war and a new one built? Had we come all this way to visit an ersatz Zborov? Before we knew it, we'd driven clear through town to a point where the road turned to gravel.

"Turn around," my mother told Klima. "Go down *that* side of the stream." Her eyes searched hungrily while the familiar vein in her neck pulsed. She could not recognize the place for the changes that 40 years had wrought. Suddenly she exclaimed, "Stop. I know her," and gestured toward a heavy-set, kerchiefed woman emerging from a cottage. As my sister and I waited on the rain-slicked street, my mother pursued halting conversation with the woman, who cast a suspicious eye on Mom and, beyond her, at us. Her rubber boots evoked images of my mother's stocky brothers, booted against the mud, vibrant, kidding, *alive*, striding down this very street. I turned, eyes sweeping up the street and back, but there was no one.

My reverie was pierced by the woman's cool acknowl-

edgement of recognition. "Ah, Grossmanova." Yes, she remembered the Grossmanns. Why had my mother come? Mom did not answer, instead asking the woman to point the way to the area of town where she had lived.

After a last short exchange, my mother returned to the car, head bowed. She spoke hesitantly, in her little girl's voice. "She asked me where my brothers are."

"Yes," we said. *Careful, now.* "What did you say, Mom?"

"I told her they are alive, and they live in Israel."

The stone within me grew heavier. My sister and I exchanged haggard glances. We spoke at once, quietly, urgently. "Oh, Ma, why did you tell her *that*?"

She looked at us wide-eyed, beseeching us for approval, as she had once turned to her brothers. When she answered, it was in her timid little girl's voice. "I don't know. ... I didn't want to give her the satisfaction."

"Mom," I asked. "Are you afraid to tell the truth?"

Silence.

"Don't be afraid to tell the truth."

"Do you think so?" she asked, her tone decidedly lacking in conviction. After a long pause, she sighed, "All right. Next time."

I took her arm on the way back to the car and spoke softly, urgently, into the good ear. It was all right, I told her, to believe they are all in Eretz Yisrael. They *must* all be there, I told her. Would it not be too cruel otherwise? This, though, is not what we came for. Let these others of Zborov know for certain, from your mouth, what their complicity brought about.

"*And Ma,*" I thought, "*after 40 years, know it yourself. God, please let us all know it.*"

"All right," she said again. "Next time."

We rode on in silence, and she began to recognize where she was. "Oh, this is Moishe Galanty's house, and that is where Doris Goldfischer grew up!—*Stop the car. I want to walk!*"

We came to a halt in an older part of town and walked down a street lined with thick-walled cottages, their deep-silled windows curtained in white lace. An apron-clad woman stepped carefully down to the stream bank, a handful of wash under one arm. Soon we came to a little yard with a gnarled but blossoming cherry tree.

The yard before us, with its cherry tree, was bounded on either side by cottages, while its far end sloped down to the stream. There was something about it. My mother could not take her eyes away from it. Across the road, several concrete drainage pipes lay on a weed-strewn lot where a house had once stood. My mother looked from one side of the road to the other. Pointing to the lot she said, "There. That is where we lived." Of the gnarled tree she said, "Even though it is across the street, it was my mother's. We planted it in Aunt Dina's yard."

We stood numb and solemn at the site of her family's demolished house. I realized I must be standing on the street of the faded photographs, on the very spot where Berl's car had been parked, my mother and her siblings posed around it for a snapshot [Fig. 12].

### ON THE STREET OF THE FADED PHOTOGRAPHS

An old woman emerged from Aunt Dina's cottage, kerchief covering snow-white hair [Fig. 13]. She wore a blue work dress and boots.

Recognizing her, my mother softly challenged the woman's memory. Though she tried, she could not place my mother's face.

"Do you remember Berchu?" my mother asked, using the Slovak diminutive of her brother Berl's name. "He used to live there (pointing to the pipe-strewn lot). He drove the car, the bus, a motorcycle. He used to sleep in that room." She pointed to a window in the old woman's home, which



**FIG. 13:** On our trip, my mother, Liba (left), with her neighbor (whose name is unknown now) from long ago.

mother. She was possibly the only person in Zborov who had viewed the roundup of the Jews with regret.

The two women talked intently. My sister and I could not understand a word of it. The woman looked from my mother's face toward my sister and me, huddled together in the drizzle. She urged us inside to see pictures of her family, greet her husband, grown old and senile. My mother remembered him as a boy.

You enter Aunt Dina's house through a small vestibule, turning right into a main room that functions as kitchen-sitting room. A massive wood-burning stove is covered entirely in gleaming blue and white porcelain tiles. My mother turned to us. "You see? My mother had just such a stove." To the right, through a door, there is a small bedroom, crisp white linens on the bed. My mother urged us in. "This is where Berl slept." She explained, as she had many times before; but now we could see and understand. "We didn't have enough sleeping space, so they often slept here. Simcha, Yidl, Berl, each slept here at one time or another. I slept home with Brandl and Nisn and my parents."

Isn't it curious how a mundane detail like the bed they'd slept in so soundly confirmed their existence? They must have been real—they needed to sleep! Here is the bed they slept in. Again as I had earlier, I felt they were close by, watching us; as though, if I turned quickly I could catch them at it—but they weren't where I looked.

The four of us emerged into the drizzle. A little way down the street, Klima leaned against his car, arms folded, head down. The old woman, still amazed by her visitors, asked my mother many questions. My gaze began to wander when mention of Berl's name alerted me. "*Berchu?*" the woman called him.



**FIG. 12:** My mother, Liba (far right), with her siblings (L-R) Berl, Nisn, Yidl, and Brandl.

had been Aunt Dina's house, where the brothers slept when the family got too large for their house across the street to hold them.

"Yes," the old woman said, she remembered Berchu. "Of course, but who are you?"

"I am the sister," my mother answered. "Do you remember? Liba, Libchu?"

Slowly, recognition spread across the old woman's lined features. A veined hand rose to the edge of her lip as she murmured wondrously, "Libchu, Libchu." The hand reached out to touch my mother's cheek.

As a girl, this Catholic woman had been in and out of my mother's house. The modest income she'd earned tending Jewish fires on the Sabbath had stood between her and abject penury, enabling her to support herself and her elderly



I looked up to witness a nearly silent exchange, the heart of my mother's pilgrimage finally come. She was not speaking, only looking intently into the woman's eyes, turning her head slowly from side to side, her hands uplifted in a gesture of resignation. "No."

"Yidl?" asked the woman.

Silent turning of the head. "No."

"Nisn? Brandl?"

"No . . . no"

The woman looked into my mother's eyes. Adopting my mother's gesture, she, too, raised her hands palms up, wordlessly. *No one?*

Without a word, my mother turned her heavy head from side to side, one last time.

*No one. Only me.*

For the first time on this agonizing journey, my tears came. Sobbing, I pivoted quickly to hide the pain. My sister, her composure shattered as well, hurried off beside me. The woman, too, began to cry. Only my mother stood nearly dry-eyed, a single tear rolling down her cheek. The woman drew my mother close, embracing and kissing her. Quietly, she told my mother how it had been the day the trucks came, how she had lifted the edge of a curtain and watched my grandmother

Leia and my grandfather Shulem climb on board. Leia, crying into a white handkerchief, saw her at the window.

"Behind the curtain, I, too, was crying. Leia extended her hand and waved good-bye." The old woman recalled how her handkerchief fluttered. That was the last Zborov saw of them.

I searched my mother's face for signs of strain, but she only listened intently. She had spent the war years a world away from Zborov, in a series of rented rooms in Brooklyn, earning her keep as a seamstress, putting aside a portion of her wages for a family reunion that would never come. In solitude, sobbing and heaving, she thrust her family away from her as best she could. Amid bouts of despair and migraine headaches, her first life drifted away. I cannot now recall when I first knew she wished she had died with them.

#### LEAVING ZBOROV

The visit was over. My sister and I approached our mother and locked arms with her. She bid the old woman farewell. Klima the driver, now neither suspicious nor impassive, strode toward us, concern etched on his features. He took our hands and helped us into the car, started the engine, and rolled slowly out of Zborov, down the street where the Jews had lived, past the synagogue, the *kollel*, past the garage





where Berl kept his car and motorcycle, slowly, downhill and away [Fig. 14].

The visit was over and they had not come. I understood, as I never had before, that they had lived *and* that they were dead. As they had not come to dance at my wedding, so they would not come to lift my mother out of her grief ... or to take her from me. In Zborov I had searched for a living sign from them but found none. The surrounding mountains bid me leave. There was nothing for me in this place.

My mother and Klima conferred up front, not about Zborov but about me, the "*krankeh*," the sick one in the backseat. They brought me to an austere clinic in Kosice and hovered nearby as my throat was examined. They absorbed the nurse's scolding—it was strep; the patient was stupid to have waited so long to be treated. Klima helped to get a prescription filled and then brought us to his home for a meal and a chance to meet his family. As we prepared to return to the hotel, he retired to a bedroom, shut the door, and soon emerged, stuffing a white cloth into his pocket.

As we pulled up to the entrance of the Hotel Slovan and reached to open the car door, Klima asked us to wait. From his pocket, he pulled a white cloth napkin and passed it to my sister and me. We opened it gingerly, unfolding it like

the petals of a rose. Nestled in its center were five tiny black boxes: *tefillin*, smaller than any I had ever seen. They awed us. They seemed capable of suspending time. We bid my mother to translate slowly, every word he said.

"I got them in Auschwitz," he said, "when I was a boy. I have kept them all these years. A Jew passed them to me, asked me not to let the guards get them. He told me they are Marrano *tefillin*. Precious. He held them in his palm when he prayed." He went on, "They are kosher. In Pressburg after the war I had them checked. Now you take them away from here. Many times I could have sold them, but I would not do it." Again, "Now you take them away from here."

We were speechless, crushed by the weight of them. I thought, *What? To me? The tefillin of a Jew who could pray in Auschwitz? Handed to us by the next Jew in line, he who assumed the risk of possessing them when the first was taken to the gas chamber?*

At night my sister and I huddled in the washroom, turning on the tap as we had seen it done in spy movies, so the rushing water would conceal our voices from listening devices in the walls. We whispered intensely about the risk involved in bringing smuggled goods out of Czechoslovakia. It was decided *I* should take them because I was leaving ahead of my mother and sister, and more to the point, I had the means to hide them.

Late at night I stared into the darkness, striving to make sense of the offering. I wept abruptly, then shook it off. Soon, in the quiet of the night, I found myself smiling. *So, they had, after all, reached out*, and not without their characteristic, gently ego-deflating humor. That I, a believer who attended synagogue regularly but struggled with prayer, had not prayed, not *really*, since the awful truth of what happened to them became known to me, that I should become keeper of the *tefillin* of someone who could pray in Auschwitz. Such a gesture could only have come from those who knew me, my smiling, gray-toned childhood companions. In the darkness I smiled back at them, rolled over, and slept. ■

Hilary Tham

## *Daughter of Survivors*

*For Elaine, Helen, Myra*

Our students can be guided into the world of survivors and their children only by the hand of poets such as Hilary Tham, who lets us hear her mother “screaming again”; see her parents in the kitchen (“When you peer in, they are huddled together”); and empathize: “You are afraid of this trembling woman / who replaces your mother each night / you want the daylight woman / who bakes honeycake and brushes your hair.” Extend the learning by pairing this with works by Eva Fogelman (pp. 66–70), Judith Chalmer (pp. 72–73), Nancy D. Kersell (pp. 74–77), and Sarah Traister Moskovitz (pp. 78–79).

She is screaming again.  
You stand at your bedroom door,  
shivering; you will her to stop, will it  
to go away. Your father’s voice rises  
and falls with the burden of her name.

She is awake. You hear her voice cling  
to his. You hear the creak of bedsprings  
as they rise.

Soon, the kettle whistles in the kitchen.  
When you peer in, they are huddled together  
over the table. Her pale hands clenched  
around the teacup, she whispers her dream.

He has heard it six million times,  
but he listens, his arm clamped around her.  
He, too, has bad dreams.

You are afraid of this trembling woman  
who replaces your mother each night—  
you want the daylight woman  
who bakes honeycake and brushes your hair,  
smiling, as if you are her good dream.

Your father does not change at night,  
but he, too, fears the knock on the door.  
He makes you learn street maps  
by heart, sends you out alone  
on the New York subway

so that if you should come home from school  
and find them missing, you would know  
how and where to run. ■

A child of survivors, Janet R. Kirchheimer shares memories made vivid through her parents' reminiscences that will remain in her home—"the voices still / there, rising over the hiss of steam heat"—even when her parents are no longer there.

Janet R. Kirchheimer

## *Home Is Home*

I imagine myself home sometime soon.  
The key sticks a bit in the lock.  
My parents are gone.  
The clock on the fireplace mantel  
clicks away the seconds.  
The refrigerator hums in the kitchen.  
I hear voices in the bedroom, and I go in,  
expecting to find my parents talking,  
about how Onkel Wolf went to visit his son  
after he married and moved to another town,  
and how he wrote a thank you note saying  
he'd had a wonderful time, but  
*das heim ist das heim*, home is home,  
and how my father loved to be home  
or in his garden, and how he carried  
stories of home with him  
all the time, and how they weighed  
him down, pulled against his skin—  
Kristallnacht, Dachau, and *das heim  
ist das heim*, and that home in that  
small village in southern Germany  
isn't there anymore, and neither  
are his father, mother, sister, brother,  
and I pull up the shades and begin  
to clean out drawers, closets, and  
*das heim ist das heim*, the voices still  
there, rising over the hiss of steam heat. ■

Janet R. Kirchheimer

## *Tell Me, Josef*

Kirchheimer explains, "‘Tell Me, Josef’ was one of the most difficult poems for me to write." It tells a complex story "full of twists and turns. My grandfather Simon and his daughter, my Aunt Ruth, received visas to America. They left Germany and were to sail on May 11, 1940, from Rotterdam, Holland. The Nazis invaded on May 10, the ship was bombed, and Simon and Ruth went to Maastricht, Holland. My grandmother Jenny and her son, my Uncle Josef, were granted permission to leave Germany in 1941 and were reunited with Simon and Ruth in Maastricht. The family tried to get to America, but in August, 1942, they were deported to Westerbork and then to Auschwitz, where they were killed. Josef was 11. In Maastricht, Josef had made friends with a Catholic boy, Paul Lardinois. In Westerbork, Josef was allowed to send four postcards, and he sent them all to Paul, who kept them, hoping Josef would return after the war. In 2007, Paul donated them to the Jewish Museum in Amsterdam, which posted the cards on their Web site, where I found them. As a child, I used to think that Josef was still alive but couldn't find us. As I came to grips with the truth, I knew he was gone. After finding the postcards, though, it was as if Josef were alive and with us for just a moment, and then died, again."

Do you know that the clouds of summer still  
give way to the clear skies of fall, that at sunset

the horizon seems to tumble from blue,  
pink, and orange to black ink that spills

across the sky, and do you know that I dream  
you were liberated from Auschwitz, that you

returned to Maastricht and visited your friend Paul,  
and he returned the leather schoolbag you gave him

the night before you were deported,  
and he gave you the four postcards you sent him

from Westerbork before you were sent to Auschwitz,  
and do you know that the postcards you wrote

were given by Paul to the Joods Historisch Museum in Amsterdam,  
and I found copies on the Internet, and do you know

I will travel to the museum this January to meet Paul  
and see the words you wrote as an eleven-year-old,

the words that are here now in place of you,  
and tell me, Josef, do you know that sometimes

in the middle of the night, I look out the window  
and watch the sky,

and I see rain begin to fall and watch  
more fall down? ■

"I will mend the sacred book of Helena Broder / so that a new generation can find it on the table." Marjorie Agosín writes about her great-grandmother, explaining, "My grandfather, Joseph, arrived in Valparaiso, Chile, in 1925, and was able to bring his mother, Helena Broder, and her brother, Mauricio, to Chile in 1939. The rest of the family perished in the Holocaust, some in Terezín and others in Auschwitz." Mourning and mending, losing and finding are themes throughout this issue; connect them to the personal narratives by Leo Goldberger (pp. 39–44) and Lila M. Korn (pp. 93–101), and to the paintings by Herb Stern (p. 65) and Danielle Rosenhouse (pp. 83–89) to evoke profound and relevant classroom discussion.

*Marjorie Agosín*

## *Around the Table of Questions*

*Translated from the Spanish by Laura Nakazawa*

Around the table of questions,  
a book like a frail ship,  
with scattered, worn out pages, with notations in various languages,  
as if many languages, or perhaps none, were contained in it.  
A book on the table on the day of questions  
that when touched resembles an angel or a wounded child.

I have been asked to restore it like someone restoring a world  
of forgotten loves,  
around the table and on the day of questions.

When spring barely makes its appearance on the earth,  
the book of Exodus of Helena Broder, the great grandmother from Vienna,  
the audacious traveler,  
arrives at our table.

More than 200 years of readings,  
more than 200 Passovers in cities dismembered by geography,  
in villages unnamed by the perversity of history.  
The book of Exodus of Helena Broder went from table to table,  
country to country, from one language to another,  
from one camp to another camp,  
recounting the flight from Egypt, or Poland, or Terezín,  
the cities of the dead, retelling their stories,  
always among the dead,  
always on the table of questions like an open memory,

like a wound filled with more questions,  
like a buried garden.

The book whose pages resemble a dead angel,  
today at our table  
remembering a traveling people,  
uncertain in their journeys,  
walking to the threshold of death,  
hoping for the door of life.

The arrival of Helena Broder to the coast of Chile,  
to the southernmost port of the world,  
to Valparaiso, port city of life, port city I hold in my dreams  
every single night.

The sacred book of Exodus in her hand  
when she arrived without language,  
without passport,  
only her memories inside the book of Exodus,  
only shredded addresses,  
only cartographies of loss.

And on this night, different yet similar to every other night,  
I open its pages, I protect them as if they are the gift of a fallen angel,  
I see names, addresses,  
letters undone like life itself,  
pages the color of matzah that fly away with a sigh,  
like ashes,  
like mouths, like unimaginable pain with or without words.

I read from this book.  
This is how I repair a life, and this is how we always have repaired lives:  
sitting at the Seder table with the book of questions,  
singing the questions  
and never knowing how to answer them,  
only asking without remorse, without sorrow.  
Asking is a way of loving and singing,  
the breath of life,  
a song,  
a prayer.

It is early spring; my garden, buried in the stillness of winter,  
awakens, as we do at this festive table,  
with books of pages like the wings of angels,  
in the month where we celebrate the flight from Egypt,  
when the Pharaoh's heart became increasingly harder,  
when faith fell like manna from heaven,  
when the soldiers' whips lacerated even their own hearts.

I will mend the sacred book of Helena Broder  
so that a new generation can find it on the table  
with white china,  
the day of Passover,  
when angels float in the sky,  
when memory demands that the heart open up.

I will imagine her descending from a ship,  
delicate and safe,  
her dark skirt moved by the southern seas,  
the holy book pressed against her chest,  
innocent and fearful,  
remaking life after death,  
unable to part with her faith or her hope.

The book of Exodus  
on our table,  
as if an angel was visiting  
with wings the color of matzah,  
striking our backs,  
making us hesitate,  
believing in the miracle  
this day and every day  
where the book of Exodus, sewn with the most delicate threads,  
celebrates the day of questions. ■

Charles Adès Fishman

## *The Writer*

for Janet Brennan

Anne Frank will never know the role she has played in the lives of so many young poets who, through her story, have found their voice. *PRISM* poetry editor Charles Adès Fishman writes about the poet Janet Brennan, for whom this poem was written: "In her parents' attic, she practiced / being Anne: she would speak Anne's words . . . and then / fall silent."

She began writing on small pieces of paper—  
just a few words. The words were magical  
and held her attention as nothing else could.  
At nine years old, she knew words held power.

The battered desk she worked at gave her a place  
to dream. One day, her father had lifted it from his car  
with such tenderness, it seemed he was carrying  
her future.

\* \*

A few years later, she sat with her father  
watching *The Diary of Anne Frank* in the dark glow  
of a New Hampshire playhouse. On stage,  
a young girl spoke as if from the unlocked pages

of her own life, and she could not turn away  
from that startling voice. She had a diary, too,  
but kept it hidden. In those secret pages,  
she had taught herself to write.

\* \*

That summer, in her parents' attic, she practiced  
being Anne: she would speak Anne's words . . . and then  
fall silent. Decades later, she went with her husband  
to Dachau. In the town, window boxes were mute

with red geraniums, but she saw that those who wished  
to erase memory would not succeed. She knew that Dachau  
wasn't where Anne had died, but she could not go to Belsen.  
In Belsen, her words would die too. ■



The Yeshiva University Holocaust Project studies grandchildren of survivors. This essay describes the findings of a qualitative study of 28 grandchildren and presents examples of their differing experiences in how their families' stories have been communicated to them and what effects, both positive and negative, they think the Holocaust has had on their lives. The researchers report mixed findings, "reflecting both anxiety and resilience in the grandchildren. These findings support a shift in the research literature toward a 'complexity paradigm' that now sees Holocaust families as transmitting resilience as well as stress or trauma." The essay considers specific lessons this theoretical framework can teach students, about both the Holocaust and the ways in which they can become more sophisticated consumers of research on human behavior in general.

*Marina Stolerman*  
*Penina Dorfman*  
*Louise Bordeaux Silverstein*

## Rethinking Holocaust Families

The possibility that traumatic reactions can be transmitted across generations is one that has interested clinicians, researchers, and educators for decades. The consensus of the early research, which began in the 1970s and continued through the 1990s, on children (the Second Generation or 2Gs) of Holocaust survivors suggested that the parents' experiences of traumatic events could be transmitted across generations. This body of research pointed to significant psychiatric symptoms among the children of survivors and hypothesized that these symptoms reflected the intergenerational transmission of trauma (e.g., Brom, Kfir, & Dasberg, 2001; Rubenstein, Cutter, & Templer, 1989; Yehuda, Schmeidler, Giller, Siever, & Binder-Bynes, 1998).

Many theories have been put forth as to how this might have occurred. Some authors suggested that the emotional numbness that was necessary to survive the horrors of the war made it difficult for some survivors to be affectionate and loving towards their children (Niederland, 1963; Rakoff, Sigal, & Epstein, 1966; Amir, & Lev-Wiesel, 2003). Others speculated that the anxiety felt by survivors was directly communicated. Children reported the "overt messages conveyed by Holocaust survivor parents such as 'Be careful' and 'Don't trust anybody!'" (Kellerman, 2001, p. 261). Therapists working with these clients speculated that these admonitions transmitted the idea that the world is a dangerous place, generating anxiety and fear in the next generation. Thus, for more than four decades, Holocaust families were often seen as negatively affecting the development of their children.

More recently, scholars have realized that the earlier research consensus suffered from selection bias because the studies included primarily those 2Gs who had sought

help from mental health providers. Thus, the 2Gs informing the theory of intergenerational transmission of trauma were most likely to be clinical samples. Van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, and Sagi-Schwartz (2003) have been influential in leading a shift away from this focus on pathology. These authors conducted a meta-analysis of 32 nonclinical samples involving 4,418 participants. They found no evidence of the influence of the parents' traumatic Holocaust experiences on their children. These authors reported evidence of secondary traumatization only in studies of clinical participants who had also experienced other life stressors. They concluded that, in general, children of Holocaust survivors displayed adaptive functioning. Thus, the research community no longer characterizes Holocaust families as routinely transmitting trauma to the second generation. Rather, the majority of 2Gs are now understood to be within the normal range of family functioning (Van IJzendoorn et al.). Moreover, some studies found aspects of resilience in the second generation, such as altruism and high achievement (Russel, Plotkin, & Heapy, 1985).

Given this shift away from an emphasis on the inevitability of traumatic stress in Holocaust families to the possibility of resilience, we became interested in learning about the experiences of survivors' grandchildren, the third generation (3Gs).

### **CURRENT RESEARCH ON 3GS**

Research studies of 3Gs have begun to emerge in significant numbers only during the last decade. In contrast to the research on 2Gs, this body of research on 3Gs has used both clinical and nonclinical samples. In general, research that

used clinical samples tended to report more negative psychological symptoms (e.g., Sigal & Weinfeld, 1989), whereas studies using individuals who have not sought mental health services have reported more mixed results, including both resilience or simply no differences between 3Gs and comparison groups (Litvak-Hirsch & Bar-On, 2006; Bachar, Cale, Eisenberg, & Dasberg, 1994; Liebnau, 1992). Interestingly, Liebnau assessed 36 nonclinical 3Gs and 26 of their peers. Results showed that the 3G sample had higher self-esteem and were more religiously and culturally oriented. In fact, Liebnau's findings indicated that some 3Gs may have been faring better psychologically than peers whose families did not experience the Holocaust.

These positive results have been supported by a meta-analysis of third-generation research using 13 nonclinical samples involving 1,012 participants. This study found no evidence of tertiary traumatization (Sagi-Schwartz, Van IJzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2008). Therefore, the most recent trend in the literature on 3Gs, like the shift in the research on 2Gs, is rethinking the conceptualization of Holocaust families from a context that always reflects trauma transmission to seeing these families as an ecological context that has the potential to be a protective resource as well.

### THE SPECIAL ROLE OF GRANDCHILDREN IN FAMILIES

Several authors (Fossion, Rejas, Servais, Pelc, & Hirsch, 2003; Glassman, 2000) have pointed to the special role of grandchildren as mediators between the first and second generations. For example, in a family with three generations of survivors, Fossion et al. observed that 3Gs felt comfortable "breaking the silence" by initiating conversations with their grandparents about the Holocaust. The authors referred to this as a "privileged position" (p. 523) in contrast to many 2Gs who, worried about causing their parents pain, had not initiated these kinds of conversations.

A changing sociocultural milieu may also have contributed to this shift in family communication patterns. Unlike their parents and grandparents, 3Gs in the United States and Israel grew up in cultures that permitted and even encouraged conversations about the Holocaust. In the last two decades, Holocaust movies, plays, commemoration ceremonies, youth trips, such as the March of the Living, and Holocaust memorial museums have proliferated. Similarly, the study of the Holocaust has been added to public school curricula. Students are frequently assigned to research their family histories. In Holocaust families, these projects initiate conversations about survivors' experiences. Finally, many survivors have come to terms with the fact that if they do not talk about their experiences now, their stories will die with them. Thus, the special position of grandchildren, the sociocultural context, and the impending death of survivors have combined to increase the likelihood that 3Gs will hear

their grandparents' stories in some families.

### OUR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

To explore the experiences of members of the third generation, we interviewed 28 grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, all currently living in the metropolitan New York area. We defined "survivors" broadly as anyone who had been imprisoned in concentration and/or labor camps, spent the war in hiding, fled to other parts of Europe, fought for a national army, or was captured as a prisoner of war.

We recruited participants via an e-mail letter to Yeshiva University's Ferkauf School of Psychology alumni and to a New York-based group for grandchildren of Holocaust survivors called 3GNY and then supplemented this number by convenience and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling refers to asking friends and acquaintances if they are interested in being interviewed. Snowball sampling refers to asking those individuals who had agreed to participate to reach out to friends and family members who might also be interested.

Twenty of the participants were women. The participants' ages ranged from 24 to 33. These 28 participants represented 74 Holocaust survivor grandparents. The majority of participants had more than one grandparent who had survived the Holocaust. About one third of the sample had four grandparents who were Holocaust survivors. The majority (48) of the grandparents came from Poland.

We used a semi-structured interview that consisted of the following eight open-ended questions.

### Interview Questions

1. Can you tell us the story of your family's experience in the Holocaust?
2. When did you first learn about your grandparents' experiences during the Holocaust?
3. Did your family speak of these experiences regularly or was it a "taboo" subject?
4. Have you studied the Holocaust on your own?
5. Do you think your grandparents' experiences have affected you, and if so, how?
6. Can you describe your relationship with your grandparent(s)?
7. Is there anything that you think is important to talk about or is there anything you would like to share that we haven't covered?
8. How has this interview experience been for you?

The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, depending on the participant. The interviews were audiotaped with the consent of the participants and then transcribed. We used a grounded theory method (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003), common to qualitative research, to track common ideas and themes throughout the interviews.

After the transcripts of the tapes were analyzed, the participants were invited to attend a session in which the researchers presented the themes from the transcripts and received feedback from the participants as to the accuracy of the data analysis. The feedback meeting also provided a platform for participants to share their experiences with each other.

## RESULTS

The most consistent result of the present study was the wide diversity of experiences the 3G participants reported. For example, some families talked extensively about the Holocaust, while others maintained silence. A small number of 3Gs did report feeling “haunted” by their grandparents’ stories of suffering and trauma. Other grandchildren were inspired by the stories and felt stronger for being a part of a family that had survived. Thus, the results reflected both positive and negative experiences in this group of third-generation individuals. Below, we present some of the participants’ insights.

### FAMILY STORIES: IN THE AIR AND AROUND THE TABLE

One female participant’s interview served as a poignant, albeit extreme, example of families who “never talk about it.” This woman was a working professional in her late 20s, similar in many ways to the other participants in the study. Although she readily volunteered to be interviewed, she warned that she did not have much to tell. Indeed, her interview lasted just under 30 minutes, whereas the average length was more than one hour. This woman was not certain about the details of her grandparents’ stories, including the dates of their occupation and internment. Her answers were brief, with minimal elaboration. She reported that she did not consider the Holocaust to be “part of my life or their [her grandparents’] lives. ... When someone rarely talks about it, it’s hard to be interested.”

In contrast, some participants reported that their grandparents never stopped talking. With a mix of humor and resentment, one young woman listed all of the occasions on which her grandmother would bring up the Holocaust: a trip to the doctor, a good report card, the birth of a great-granddaughter, all Jewish holidays, and any other time when the table was laden with food. She reported that she would often become overwhelmed and ask her grandmother to stop: “Turn it off, Bubbe! It’s enough!” As the participant told her story, with her toddler, the miraculous great-granddaughter, on her lap, she expressed her desire to pass on her family’s stories, but emphasized that she would temper the narratives. She explained that she does not want to be “too suffocating” like her grandmother.

However, others stated that they wanted to hear more stories. “Once I got interested in it, I would sit down [with him]

every Sunday for many months and listen to his stories. This went on for many months.” Many of the participants expressed interest in learning and preserving family stories with the goal of passing them on to the next generation. They referred to their families’ stories as “our history” and “our legacy.”

## STRESS AND RESILIENCE

In the current study, approximately one half of the participants reported feelings of guilt, anxiety, and preoccupation with food; the other half discussed the pride they felt in their family, experiencing a sense of family cohesion, and a greater awareness of social justice concerns; yet, a great deal of overlap between these two groups exists.

One participant said: “I have a lot of anxieties around food. I feel like I never know where my next meal is coming from.” Her mother packed so much food for her lunch when she was a child that she resorted to feeding the other kids on her school bus. She connected her mother’s “hoarding” to her maternal survivor grandfather, who thought one could never have enough “practical” things in the house. She recalled that on one of her birthdays, her grandfather presented her with a large box of bandages in lieu of a toy.

Two participants stated that they felt guilty that it was their grandparents who had endured the horrors of the Holocaust, while they enjoyed a privileged life. “Why me, now, in this amazing time, to live in a free world, and why my grandparents then?” For one granddaughter, her guilt extended to feeling upset when something in her life went wrong. “I don’t have the right to feel bad about anything because it wasn’t the Holocaust.” She acknowledged that she rarely feels free of the specter of the Holocaust.

In distinct contrast to this morbid preoccupation with the Holocaust, resilience also emerged as a dominant theme in the interviews. “I think that sense of resiliency was something that was sort of instilled by my family through their experiences. What [her grandfather] went through makes me such a strong person. I mean, I can fend for myself.” Some of the participants attributed their interest in social justice, such as protesting modern genocide, to their own family’s survival. For example, one woman said she tries to be “more aware of issues like immigration and Darfur” because of what her grandparents had gone through. Unlike the participant mentioned above, this woman seemed able to separate the traumatic details of the Holocaust from other troubling material concerns in her work, and she was able to maintain a positive sense of connection to her family and to Jewish life. A few months after the interview, she went on to start her own Jewish volunteer network that serves the underprivileged in her community and beyond. Another woman advocated for a more complex understanding of non-Jews. “Why would I think that all Poles are evil?” she wondered. “It’s too simplistic and I need to get beyond all the things that I heard growing up.”

At times, the same participants voiced sentiments suggestive of both stress and resilience. One participant came from a family where both sets of grandparents and her father, as a young boy, had survived the Holocaust. This family had a unique multigenerational perspective. She recalled her father's telling her graphic stories of his family's experience during the war as "bedtime stories," and she reported that she suffered elevated levels of anxiety. However, she also discussed her own and her family's resilience, saying, "You can be resilient. ... People survived the war. ... And they also survived the post-war time. I think that's really important, too. That life does go on and people move on."

Another participant reflected on the balanced way that her mother had raised her. "I think she did a pretty good job with us, being open, acknowledging that this was part of our family, but not letting a lot of that more mentally unhealthy stuff trickle down." Several participants expressed this both/and perspective, drawing both anxiety and strength from their respective families' stories.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS**

The findings of the present study of a nonclinical sample of 3Gs reported a range of reactions to hearing their grandparents' stories. Several participants described complex reactions that included both upset and inspiration. This diversity of reactions supports the conceptual shift away from an exclusive emphasis on traumatic transmission to include the possibility that Holocaust families also can transmit strength and resilience (Van IJzendoorn et al., 2003; Sagi-Schwartz et al., 2008).

Most recently, this reconceptualization has extended to Holocaust survivors as well. Van IJzendoorn and colleagues (Barel, Van IJzendoorn, Sagi-Schwartz, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010) completed a meta-analysis of 71 samples involving 12,746 participants in which Holocaust survivors were compared to individuals with no Holocaust background. The survivors exhibited substantially more post-traumatic symptoms but were comparable to the comparison group in terms of physical health, stress-related physical symptoms, and cognitive functioning. Thus, like many of the 3Gs in the current sample, the majority of the survivors exhibited both stress and resilience. This reconceptualization of Holocaust families yields a more balanced view, one that acknowledges the potential for "traumatic growth" as well as "traumatic stress."

### **USING FAMILY STORIES TO TEACH THE HOLOCAUST**

As the findings of the present study and the meta-analyses of large numbers of other Holocaust studies illustrate, there is no single way that families dealt with the Holocaust. As is true of any human behavior, responses to traumatic events in one's family always reflect a continuum and cannot be

treated as monolithic. In the current study, participants described families that communicated with each other in varying degrees of frequency of interaction and specificity.

Similarly, in his work on bereavement, Bonanno (2008) challenged the notion that every bereaved individual requires "grief work," that is, a period of time during which to work through his or her loss, often with the help of psychological counseling. He asserted that some people do go through a process during which they may demonstrate some symptoms and generally work toward recovering pre-event functioning. However, among other people, healthy functioning does not decline. Bonanno bemoaned the tendency among researchers and clinicians to ignore these two trajectories, treating all bereaved individuals as one entity. Moreover, in his extensive review of the literature, he suggested that there are several paths to resilience. Focusing on resilience may be one way to teach about the Holocaust when more traumatic material may be developmentally inappropriate. We speculate that it may be easier for younger students to process information about the Holocaust when it is framed in terms of survival and rebuilding rather than victimization and trauma.

### **TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST AS PERSONAL AND RELEVANT**

In her report on best practices in Holocaust education, Shira Hecht (2009) discussed the importance of helping [students] identify with the personal nature of events. The findings of the present study suggest that incorporating personal family stories, with their emotional intensity and wide range of experiences, into a standard curriculum will help educators and students to move beyond historical facts and achieve the personal connection desired. In a recent study of 3Gs, many of whom had studied at *yeshivot*, participants reported that informal, emotionally evocative experiences, such as family stories and museum visits, were the educational events that had the most impact on their understanding of the Holocaust (Peled, 2010).

Weinstock (2010), in the Yad Vashem e-newsletter for Holocaust educators, advocated for including family stories in Holocaust school curricula, examining the ways in which the families tried to stay together, how they made decisions in the face of life-threatening events, and how they preserved and passed on their traditions. [Ed. Note: see Gurewitsch, pp. 48–55, and Phillips, pp. 59–64 in this issue]. These suggestions may be extended to include family life after the Holocaust, focusing not only on how families coped together during the war but also on how they were able, as one of our participants stated, to "rebuild such amazing lives" in the wake of destruction. As the number of Holocaust survivors dwindles, educators must increasingly rely on other sources of information, ones that may not be as factually accurate or as emotionally evocative as firsthand testimony. Personal

family stories may be an alternate resource for providing emotionally engaging educational experiences.

This sense of the power of family narratives is reflected in a new educational initiative by 3GNY (an organization of 3Gs in the New York area) called We Educate (<http://3gnewyork.org/wordpress/wedu/>). With help from Yad Vashem and Facing History and Ourselves, 3GNY is preparing to go into the public schools of New York City. Describing themselves as a “living link to our grandparents’ stories,” the 3Gs see it as their responsibility to make sure that the stories do not die with their grandparents. They have framed their efforts in the context of social justice, oriented to helping students confront prejudice and intolerance of all kinds. Because of their personal connection to the Holocaust, they believe that they can effectively link individual experience to more collective issues.

### USING THE HOLOCAUST TO TEACH ABOUT HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Students must be prepared to think critically as they absorb and evaluate new information on emotionally loaded topics such as the Holocaust. The new focus on resilience in the research literature is redefining the role of the family, not only in Holocaust studies, but also in the trauma field in general (e.g., see Bussey & Wise, 2007). This more balanced viewpoint can help students understand that there is more than one way to respond to a traumatic family past. Teaching the variability and complexity of family adjustment can educate students to become more sophisticated consumers of information, not just about the Holocaust, but about human behavior in general. Focusing on families as part of Holocaust education may be one way in which to communicate this complexity. Finally, just as our participants presented myriad reactions, educators should be prepared to hear a diversity of reactions from their students and to foster a safe environment where divergent opinions are used as a means of cultivating an appreciation for complex topics.

Taken as a whole, current research is shifting the conceptualization of Holocaust families from primarily a source of trauma and stress to a potential source of strength and resilience as well. This shift points to the complexity of human reactions and coping strategies. The findings of the current study support this trend of understanding Holocaust families within the framework of a “complexity paradigm.” ■

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Pessie (Sherry) Horowitz

## Braid

In these poems, Pessie (Sherry) Horowitz writes of her survivor grandmother, who braids her hair and kisses her eyes "like gems" even as she tells the young Pessie, "We didn't even have toilet paper. We had no shoes." She writes of her Zaidy (grandfather), an Auschwitz survivor, who taught her the prayer of *Ashrei* and "rattled the bars" of his memories but would not share them. Horowitz explains, "That is how I learned to live / a delicate balance through bars of shadow. / I grew in that cage of unasked questions." Read with the poem by John Amen (p. 81) and discuss the essential questions that must be raised in discussing this event and its ramifications.

Before we light the Shabbat candles, she puts my hair up into a braid.  
As if weaving willow leaves, she pulls the chestnut sections tight,  
tugs the young strands out. Wise to the root, her fingers  
tend to the seed. She scrubs the corner of my mouth,  
and I am anointed, crowned in plait and blue ribbon.  
I am her eyes and she kisses them like gems. She welcomes  
our day of rest like dew. She draws her fire.

\* \*

We peel potatoes and submerge them in ice water.  
Bubby leans over the bowl, rubbing her memories to a pulp.  
Her arms are ropes, a life-line immune to cold.  
I cough a little, weep a little, from the sting of onion  
and from comments that spring from her like coils.  
"We didn't even have toilet paper. We had no shoes."  
She strokes my face with promise, her wrinkled palms  
rubbing their maps to my cheek.  
My mouth fills like water. I want the golden crust—  
like Bubby, a good kugel trembles, butter on the inside.

\* \*

We punch at the huge flesh of dough,  
inhaling sweetness, and she deflates with a sigh,  
for the small piece she remembers to set aside and burn.  
Pliable, the dough yields under the rolling of our palms.  
We stretch logs, like memory; they become branches  
that lean toward the future.

She teaches me to look backward, to brush a wash of yolk.  
She molds the challah with tenderness, pinches it closed.  
Moves it closer to the warm oven to rise. It will bake high  
to our whispered prayer. This is our leavening—  
We bless it when we bear it. It is our manna,  
sealed hard with gloss and golden sheen. ■

*Pessie (Sherry) Horowitz*

## *From Auschwitz*

*for my Zaidy, Mordechai Davidovich, who survived*

I remember the light years—  
I on your lap or under the table.  
You pressed your lips to my head,  
my finger to the word, placed a cookie in my mouth.  
We swayed and prayed. You hummed.

From the rumble of bitter love, doubt became a fuel—  
it simmered in the belly untouched. You lived.  
You kissed its heat, like you kissed the strings of *tzitzit*  
and the black leather straps binding your arm.

I remember I felt a prisoner too.  
You rattled the bars of your memories  
but put your finger on my mouth. We dared  
not ask ourselves—  
We didn't ask. We praised:  
*He opens His hand and satisfies every living thing.*

I remember the light-years  
between us.  
How light broke through the window  
and struck you while you studied.  
That is how I learned to live—  
a delicate balance through bars of shadow.  
I grew in that cage of unasked questions.



That was the dark distance between us. More than death,  
we feared the question roiling our hearts. You fed me  
the unasked, drew gossamer light out of that crack of doubt:  
*How happy, how happy, Ashrei!* you hit the table.

I remember a light  
watching you.  
You seared my finger to every word:  
*Song of David, Song of Love, Song of Loss—*  
I learned to pray, and prayed to learn.  
I burned to kiss something  
with such fervor. ■

*Ashrei* (Heb. אֲשֵׁרֵי) is a prayer that observant Jews recite three times daily. According to Jewish tradition, the Sages praised anyone who recited Psalms every day. The prayer begins with two verses (Psalms 84:5 and 144:15), both of which begin with the word "Ashrei," meaning "praiseworthy." The *Ashrei* prayer continues with Psalm 145 in its entirety. It concludes with verse 18 from Psalm 115.

## Open

*for the survivors and their children*

My grandparents left me *Emunah*.  
Beyond their rheumy gazes  
And their nightmarish dreams  
Was a stillness—  
A quiet in the center of whorl, like the silence  
After the train tears through.

Faith was a feather settling into wing,  
A crystal in the palm that catches light,  
A crushed diamond for safekeeping.  
They blew the dust into my hair and asked  
*Du veist ver du bist?*

My *Bubbahs* and *Zaidehs* knew  
The dark side of the turned cheek.  
Yet they waved their arms at candles—  
“*Vus vilst du?*” they begged, and waved  
At me like blades that shaved  
Wood into form. They fed me dreams of butter  
And honey. “*Vus vilst du?*” they asked me.

They kissed me, each kiss a tragedy.  
They gave me a treasure chest of tragedies—  
I was born to it—  
And when they called my name  
*Pesseleh, Pesseleh*, they were calling  
their mothers, their sisters ...

Into the folds  
Of *taleisim*, of pillows, into the folds  
Of my neck they called,  
From the opening of a wound,  
Flora of their open hearts, their hearts  
Brimming like black holes,  
Never full enough, never emptied. ■

*Eemunah* (Heb.). Generally understood as “faith in G-d.”  
The word also connotes faithfulness and/or trustworthiness of  
character, as in “children without trust in them” (Deut. 32:20).  
The universally famous word “*amen*” shares the same Hebrew  
root. “*Du veist ver du bist?*” (Yid.) “Do you know who you are?”  
“*Vus vilst du?*” (Yid.) “What do you want?”  
*Taleisim*. Plural of “*talis*,” the Hebrew word for “prayer shawl.”

Learning about the lives of Jewish families before the Holocaust is too often neglected. Carson Phillips introduces us to an unusual teaching opportunity that existed, briefly, in Toronto, Canada, an “experiential memorial” that allowed visitors to glimpse the past “through the presence of one Jewish family’s living room, complete with historically accurate furnishings, books, and décor. The result is the vivid experience of witnessing a lost cultural milieu.” The exhibit raises essential questions about the nature of memory and of “temporary memorials.” Phillips asks, “Is all memory ‘a vanishing record,’ doomed to ‘be buried again’?”

Carson Phillips

## Auguststrasse 25, An Experiential Memorial: Teaching About Jewish Family Life in Pre-Holocaust Germany



**FIG. 1:** Eric Woodley's *Auguststrasse 25* (detail), 2010. Photo: Isaac Applebaum.

Situated in the sanctuary of the Kiever Synagogue, one of Toronto's oldest Orthodox *shuls*, viewers of *Auguststrasse 25*, created by E. C. Woodley (2010), encounter the recreated living room of an unnamed Jewish family of 1928 Berlin. *Auguststrasse 25* is an imaginary address, referencing a real street that once ran through Berlin's most dynamic prewar Jewish neighborhood. At first glance, the installation appears simplistic. A closer assessment, however, reveals the thoughtful and sophisticated complexity that engages viewers directly with the concept of the “presence of absence”: the world destroyed by the annihilative ideology of National Socialism. In this period re-creation, destruction and loss are not characterized by empty space or a void, an often-used technique in contemporary memorials. Instead, they have been formalized and illuminated through the presence of a family's living room, complete with historically accurate furnishings, books, and décor [Fig. 1]. The result is the vivid experience of witnessing a lost cultural milieu, however brief, within the vibrancy of an Orthodox *shul* that itself was built in 1927.

Each component of the staging has been carefully chosen to reflect the bourgeois lifestyle characteristic of Weimar Berlin's established Jewish families, where middle-class Jews adopted the vision of bourgeois domesticity that conferred upon men the public world of business and politics and upon women the domain of the home (Hyman, 1998, p. 25). The components of *Auguststrasse 25*, representative of this bourgeois lifestyle, offer a variety of valuable entry points for students to engage with the Holocaust. The family's collec-

tion of books, which includes titles by Thomas Mann, Alfred Kubin, Walter Benjamin, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, speaks of a family fully absorbed in the German cultural traditions. Knowledgeable viewers will recognize that some of these works ended up in the flames of the Nazi-orchestrated book burnings of 1933. *Auguststrasse 25* brilliantly conveys the temporal fragility of Jewish life in Weimar-era Berlin. The viewers' own awareness of the National Socialist period solidifies this poignancy as the presence of absence is tangibly conveyed.

The refined ambience of the family's living room is juxtaposed with the often turbulent atmosphere that characterized Berlin. Bauhaus furniture contributes to the sense of Weimar modernism in homey surroundings. Combined with the more traditional elements of the family's living room, such as the oriental carpet and classical German texts, one envisions an upwardly mobile, middle-class family that honors its Jewish traditions while embracing the German *Bildung* ideal. This is the family hearth, a safe and protected environment removed from the travails of politics and economics. Using the timeline (p. 121), students can discover the multitude of political, economic, and social challenges that persisted outside the walls of *Auguststrasse 25*. This correlation between Jewish family life and the everyday political life of the Weimar Republic contributes to a nuanced understanding of the pre-Holocaust Berlin Jewish community.

In creating the distinctive familial and cultural milieu, designer Woodley integrated period sound recordings. These include radio plays and broadcasts that invoke the world outside the family home. Indeed, the presence of the radio reflects the bourgeois nature of the home. Because radios and their fees were not inexpensive, it was usually middle-class families or workers associations (*Arbeiteradiobund*) that owned them during this period. In 1926, there were 1 million radio owners; by 1928, 2 million; by 1930, 3 million (Saldern, 2004, p. 315). Radios became purveyors of culture, entertainment, and information, an integral component of the home. Periodically, visitors to the exhibit can hear a broadcast on the radio of a play or of the musical performances of Hugo Wolf and Gustav Mahler, as well as the musical renderings of an imagined neighbor practicing Schubert or Beethoven on a piano. These combinations of auditory recordings provide a sensorial experience evoking both the high and popular culture of the period.

This auditory dimension not only contributes to the aural authenticity of the recreation but also provides a setting and opportunity for response for the one living component of the memorial—a young Jewish woman in her twenties. The actress animating the character has named her Lottie and was inspired by the memoirs and letters of young Jewish women of the period. Lottie does not interact with visitors nor does she perform. Rather, viewers are given the opportu-

nity to witness, watch, and discover for themselves the day in the life of one member of a Jewish family in pre-Holocaust Berlin. As such, the exhibit becomes a hybrid space enveloping the inanimate past with the imagined living past, presented within the context of a vibrant Orthodox synagogue.

Indeed, this theatrical aspect, the presence of one unnamed family member of *Auguststrasse 25*, provides a humanistic and fluid aspect and is integral to the overall functioning and success of this experiential memorial. Seeing the actress-resident interact with her surroundings, reading, listening to the radio, or writing a letter, reminds us of the both the normalcy and the uniqueness of the period [Fig. 2]. This human dimension reinforces the understanding that history is more than a series of dramatic events or actions; it is how men, women, children, and families lived in and responded to their environment. It provides a context and an example of "history from below" as visitors imagine how one family, unnamed, yet typical of the established Berlin Jewish community of the era, experienced daily life.

The unique location of this memorial, the Kiever *shul*, is in itself an important element of the exhibit. The *shul* is located in the Kensington Market district of Toronto, a region founded primarily by Eastern European Jewish immigrants in the early 20th century. During the 1920s and 1930s, it was home to approximately 60,000 Jews and boasted more than 30 synagogues. Prosperity gradually caused a decline in the Jewish population in this area, and the Kensington Market demographics have shifted with subsequent waves of immigrants to the city. Additionally, the *shul* is situated close to Augusta Street, connecting the Berlin Jewish address to a local one. Viewers are again reminded of the interconnectedness of events, history, locale, and the Diaspora communities.

With sophisticated simplicity, the visual, auditory, and performance components of *Auguststrasse 25* create a fluid moment in time. Although the installation is temporary, the permanence comes from the numerous teachable moments it provides educators. The photographs offer a look at the books and furnishings that have come to characterize Jewish families in pre-Holocaust Berlin. The auditory recordings provide interdisciplinary entry points into the cultural influences of the period. We learn more about the societal roles Jewish families adopted during this period and how they would be forever altered by the Holocaust.

## TEACHING ACTIVITIES

*Auguststrasse 25* is not a permanent exhibition. Mona Filip (2010), the curator of the Koffler Gallery installation, writes that when the memorial exhibit is closed, it will remain "only a vanishing record in the minds of those who have seen it. Far from being set in stone, it is an image as transient as a photograph fading in time. Gradually, the memory will be buried again."



**FIG. 2:** Eric Woodley's *Auguststrasse 25* (detail), 2010.  
Photo: Isaac Applebaum.

**Questions for discussion may include:**

- What, then, is the point of such projects?
- Is a temporary memorial a contradiction?
- Does the function of a short-term installation cease at its close?
- Are we, as visitors to many such exhibitions, obligated to share what we have seen with those for whom it is no longer available?
- Is all memory “a vanishing record,” doomed to “be buried again”?
- If so, what does this say about our obligation and ability to keep the memory of the Holocaust and its victims alive?
- In what ways do memorials differ from memoirs?

Memoir, which lasts longer, can also provide insight into Jewish life in Weimar- and Nazi-era Berlin. Sebastian Haffner, born in 1907, began to write his personal memoir, *Defying Hitler*, in 1939, in London, England. He had immigrated there in 1938, disillusioned with the changes he witnessed in Germany. Excerpts from Haffner's published work (2002) provide students with a unique perspective on life during this turbulent period:

Berlin became quite an international city. Admittedly, the sinister Nazi types already lurked in the wings, as “we” could not fail to notice with deep disgust. They spoke of “Eastern vermin” with murder in their eyes and sneeringly of “Americanization.” Whereas “we,” a segment of the younger generation difficult to define but instantly and mutually recognizable, were not only friendly toward foreigners, but enthusiastic about them. (pp. 78–79)

Haffner's description is a stark contrast to the seeming security portrayed by *Auguststrasse 25*. Using the timeline, have students examine the dates of the activities of the National Socialist party and consider the following questions.

- *Auguststrasse 25* demonstrates the role that radio had in conveying culture and information to the Germans. How did the National Socialists harness the influence of radio to convey their propaganda? Consult the Web site

[www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org) and its current exhibition “State of Deception—The Power of Nazi Propaganda” for further information.

- While radios were utilized to convey Nazi propaganda effectively to the masses, they were also one of the first items confiscated from Jewish homes. How did the removal of radios contribute to the social and informational isolation of Jews within Germany?
- An excerpt from the memoir *A Drastic Turn of Destiny* by Fred (Manfred) Mann (2009), describes Mann's family's first encounter with the National Socialists:

I was only 6 years old ... on January 30, 1933 ... the infamous day that Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, president of Germany, appointed Adolf Hitler chancellor. A few days later my father received news that the *Sturmabteilung*, the SA Brown Shirts, were looking for him. One of his old school friends, who had been very active in the Nazi party since the late 1920s ... telephoned my father to tell him that his name was prominently featured on the pickup list for a manual labor assignment. He was to ... carry coal from the basement to the top floor of the building [of the Brownshirts]. They were going to teach this chauffeur-driven, fur-coated Jew a lesson. ... My father immediately drove ... to Berlin, where he stayed until his old schoolmate could get the order rescinded. (pp. 1–2)

- Why do you think that during the early period of National Socialism, some Jews were able to receive assistance from colleagues who were connected to the National Socialist party?
- What was the purpose of the National Socialist actions to humiliate Germany's Jewish citizens?
- What is your response to the fact that Mann's father maintained a friendship with a former schoolmate active in the National Socialist party?

**TIMELINE OF EVENTS IN WEIMAR GERMANY**

For a more detailed account of events during this period, refer to [www.ushmm.org/propaganda/timeline/1918-1932](http://www.ushmm.org/propaganda/timeline/1918-1932) and [www.colby.edu/personal/r/rmscheck/GermanyD4.html](http://www.colby.edu/personal/r/rmscheck/GermanyD4.html).

## 1924

- Trial of Adolf Hitler takes place from February–April 1924. Hitler receives a five-year prison term, of which he serves one year. In prison, Hitler writes the first volume of his autobiography/political program, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle).

## 1925

- Hitler is released early from the prison and reorganizes and expands his party. In all elections until 1929, however, the NSDAP remains a splinter party.

## 1926

- Germany enters League of Nations.

## 1927

- Unemployment rises but reaches no dramatic levels. A quiet year in Weimar politics.
- Goebbels founds *Der Angriff* (The Attack), the Berlin newspaper for the dissemination of Nazi propaganda.

## 1928

- Germany participates in summer Olympics in Amsterdam, Netherlands, and places second in overall medal standings.
- Bauhaus enjoys international reputation for innovation and design.
- Reichstag elections in May 1928 seem to confirm the trend toward stability and democratic government. National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) has 12 seats in the Reichstag, having received less than 3% of the vote.
- On December 10, 1928, Goebbels attacks Jews in an article in *Der Angriff*.

## 1929

- The crash of the New York Stock Exchange in October 1929 leads to a worldwide depression with dramatic effects on Germany. Unemployment rises sharply by the end of the year and reaches unprecedented heights in the following years.

## 1929–1930

- Beginning of the breakdown of the Weimar Republic.

## 1931

- Adolf Hitler leads an SA unit in a Nazi Party parade in Weimar, 1931.

## 1932

- Unemployment reaches 5 million.
- In July, the Nazi Party wins 230 seats in German parliamentary elections, becoming the largest party represented.
- By August 1932, the Nazi Party has more than 1 million members.

## 1933

- Hitler named Chancellor of the Weimar Republic, at the head of a coalition government of “National Renewal.” The Nazis and the German Nationalist People’s Party (*Deutschnationale Volkspartei*; DNVP) are members of the coalition.
- February 27, 1933: The *Reichstag* building (German parliament) is set on fire.
- March 13, 1933: Creation of Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda under Joseph Goebbels.
- May 10, 1933: Public book burnings organized by Goebbels.
- June 7, 1933: New regulations give major tax advantages to films exemplifying the Nazi spirit.
- July 14, 1933: Germany declared a one-party state under Nazi rule; Weimar Republic is shattered. ■

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Mordecai Paldiel discusses the family members of rescuers who, occasionally, in addition to the main rescuer, are also nominated for the title *Hasidei Umot Haolam*: Righteous Among the Nations. “In these cases,” Paldiel explains, “the Commission must discuss the precise role of these various family members who participated in different ways and to different degrees in the rescue undertaking, and the debate at times centers on factors that go beyond the historically documented facts of the cases.” This essay and its unusual perspective may encourage your students to do further research on the families of rescuers.

*Mordecai Paldiel*

## Appraising the Roles of Rescuers’ Families: A Sensitive Issue from Yad Vashem’s Commission for the Righteous

Since 1962, Jerusalem’s Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Museum has honored non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust with the title *Hasidei Umot Haolam*: Righteous Among the Nations. Every case brought before the Yad Vashem Commission for the Righteous (henceforth, the Commission) requires investigation, documentation, and support, and engenders lively and sometimes heated debate among the more than 30 Commission members. When a rescuer is nominated for the title, the Commission invests a great deal of time, sometimes many months, in substantiating the documentation that will allow them to come to the correct conclusion. Occasionally, however, family members of the main rescuer are nominated as well. In these cases, the Commission must discuss the precise role of these various family members who participated in different ways and to different degrees in the rescue undertaking, and the debate at times centers on factors that go beyond the historically documented facts of the cases. Such factors include the extent of the help of the members of the rescuing family, the age of the children in the rescuing family, the relationship of the family members to the rescued, and the rationale for the family members’ help. As the former Director of the Department of the Righteous for 24 years, I participated in the discussions when many of these fascinating cases were brought before the Commission for its decision. What follows are brief accounts of some of these cases highlighted by excerpts from the transcripts of the Commission debates.

### **ACTIVE VERSUS PASSIVE HELP**

When the Commission examined the role of the spouse and children in a rescue family, an effort was made to distinguish between those who initiated the rescue operation and those

who played a more passive role. Generally, the “Righteous” title was accorded to the heads of the family—to husbands and wives—on the assumption that both either initiated or at least agreed to harbor one or more fleeing Jews in their home, with all the attendant risks to themselves. (There were exceptions, when it was shown that one of the spouses was not only opposed to the offer of shelter extended by the other spouse but actually went beyond words to try to harm those sheltered in his/her home.)

One of the issues raised in the Commission debates was how to determine the merits of the children of rescuing families, who may have shared and participated in the rescue efforts of their parents. Especially controversial was the age factor of the children. Could a child under the age of 12 at the time earn the prestigious Righteous title? Could such young children, even if they shared in the rescue operation, have understood the implications of their behavior, and was such understanding necessary to earn the title? As expressed by some child educators and by the public at large, and reflected in the Commission sessions, the age of understanding was generally assumed to begin at the age of 12 or 13, but not all Commission members agree on this. Especially in countries such as Poland, where the danger facing rescuers and their families was generally much harsher than in Western European countries, such as France and Belgium, *all* children in rescuing families were endangered and understood this fact at an early age. Should they, too, then be accorded the Righteous title based on the help they gave their parents in sheltering Jews, even if that help was only that they did not voice opposition and remained silent about the Jews their parents were hiding? In Poland, the Germans did not hesitate in making publicly known that the death penalty would

be imposed on anyone who gave haven to Jews, and they had no moral compunction against carrying out this threat in many instances when Poles were apprehended for this offense; at times, this included the children of rescuer families. Still, recognition for children, even of Polish rescuers, did not always go smoothly in our Commission meetings, as the following few selected cases illustrate.

### **CAN MINORS RECEIVE THE RIGHTEOUS TITLE?**

Moshe Kershenbaum and his friend Israel Szwarcwort escaped from a Nazi killing raid in 1942 in Kazimierz Dolny, near Lublin, Poland, and were sheltered by the Andzelm<sup>1</sup> family, who hid them in their cowshed. For two years the Andzelm children, Stanislaw, 12; Jan, 7; and Maria, 13, would secretly bring them food. In August 1944, Kershenbaum and Szwarcwort were liberated by the Russians. On the day of liberation, the head of the family, Stefan Andzelm, was killed by a stray Russian shell that landed near his home.

After the war, Moshe married Stefan's daughter, Maria, and both moved to the United States. In 1983, the Andzelm parents, Stefan and Waleria, were recognized posthumously by the Commission as Righteous, and in 1992, the Commission recommended adding Maria and Stanislaw to their parents' recognition.

The Commission Chair objected to this recommendation, stating that the children, because they were minors, could not be recipients of the Righteous title. "We have to stop this trend of automatically adding the children's names to the recognition unless absolutely justified," he thundered, and the Commission declined to honor them. Maria Andzelm Kershenbaum responded by explaining, in additional testimony, that as a 13-year-old girl, her duty was to remove the cows' excrement that covered the boards under which the two young men were hidden, and then remove the boards and bring them their food while the parents were out in the field working. Stanislaw, she explained, stood watch for approaching visitors. "We could not sleep at night for fear of denunciation," Maria added. "I suffer from this to this day. I had several mental breakdowns, including one in 1949 that necessitated my hospitalization for six months. I am crippled as a result of this illness." Moved by this grim revelation, the Chair relented, and the Commission voted to add Maria to the Righteous honor roll, but not her two brothers.

In 1973, another couple, Stanislaw and Janina Skowronek,<sup>2</sup> were awarded the Righteous title for sheltering Zysla Kuperszmid and her daughter Hanka in Warsaw. The rescuers' daughter, the then-10- or 11-year-old Hanna, had removed a ladder from an attic where Hanka was hiding at a time when the Germans came to inspect downstairs. She was also recognized, because what she had done was clearly an act of her own conscious volition.<sup>2</sup>

Jozef and Karolina Toniak<sup>3</sup> sheltered Jozef Honig in their

village home in the Lublin region. Their daughter Janina, then 14 or 15 years old, laundered Honig's clothes and helped him with shaving gear in his garret hideout. In one incident, she was beaten by a group of men who suspected the family was hiding Jews, but Janina and her parents stood firm in denying any involvement. The Toniaks and daughter Janina were recognized, but not the rescuers' younger son, Eduard, whose involvement was not documented.

The Slavin family of four escaped from a mass execution in November 1942 and were hidden by Celina Anishkiewicz,<sup>4</sup> a widow with three children: Wanda, 19; Boleslawa, 14; and Jozef, 36. Celina's two daughters brought food to the rescued family's hiding place in the barn several times daily. In addition, they helped out with digging an underground shelter under Celina's bedroom, dragged sacks of wheat on their backs to the mill and returned with flour, and did some knitting to subsidize the additional expenses of flour for the extra bread they now needed to make. They also stood guard at the window, alert for approaching strangers. The son, Jozef, who was already married, visited the family regularly and brought potatoes, which he stored in the field over the winter, taking care that all of them had sufficient food. He also prepared hot water so that the hidden family could wash themselves. Based on this information, the Commission added these three children to their mother's recognition.

### **THE DEBATES CONTINUE: DOES AGE MATTER?**

Decisions in these cases are not always based on the criteria for the Righteous title, which do not strictly specify the boundaries of the ages of rescuer children, but rather on the carefully considered opinions of the members of the Commission. Some excerpts of the transcripts will illustrate the considerations as well as the facts of each case.

Franciszek and Stanislawa Wrobel<sup>5</sup> hid Stanislaw Sendler in their village home in the Tarnow region. Later, Franciszek helped Sendler dig a hole in a nearby forest, where the Wrobels' 11-year-old son, Eduard, would bring him food. Once again, the age of the child was the concern. One Commission member, in favor of the boy's recognition, justified it as follows:

The decision should be according to [famed Polish Jewish child educator] Janusz Korczak, who stated that a child has a distinct personality. To denounce 100 Jews, one needs just one person. But to save one Jew, one needs many rescuers. Here we have a young boy who goes every day and checks whether they're coming to arrest [the Jew in hiding] and feeds him.

Opinions were divided, and the vote in favor of Eduard was a close one, but he was added to the list of the Righteous together with his parents.



The case of the Kulczycki<sup>6</sup> children, however, necessitated several Commission sessions and was accompanied with long and spirited debates. It began in 1994, when Franciszek and Katarzyna Kulczycki were honored with the Righteous title for sheltering 14 Jews for a time in the basement of their home in Brody (today in Ukraine) before moving them into the home of their friends in a nearby village. A tragic incident occurred during the hiding period, in March 1944, when the parents were away. A Ukrainian policeman arrived with the Gestapo in search of the hidden Jews and asked to be allowed in. The Kulczykis' two sons, Marian, 12, and Boleslaw, 7, blocked their entrance. Shots were fired, and one bullet hit Marian's head and killed him. Boleslaw was wounded in his shoulder. The raiding men searched for the Jews (there were then only three Jews in hiding) but did not find them and left.

The discussion in the Commission was with regard to Boleslaw, who recuperated from his wound and was living in the United States. Following are some of the opinions that were expressed during this lengthy Commission debate.

**Commission Chair:** The question is to what degree one can ascribe noble intentions to a boy of 7 years. I am prepared to accept that in those days they matured faster. I am prepared to accept that at age 12, it is a boy who already understands, but a boy of 7?

**Member A:** One can say that a child is perhaps less conscious of the danger of harm, of the danger of death, but he knows that he is risking himself.

**Member B:** We think that children are stupid. [However,] a 7-year-old [child] is not a simpleton.

**Member C:** We are talking about the most important award by the Jewish people. I must warn against trivializing this title. I cannot imagine that the [French] *Legion d'Honneur* would be given to a 7-year-old [child]. This title is for exceptional people, courageous people who knew what they were doing. The boy definitely deserves a nice letter. But to award him this highest title—I suggest that we do not surrender to emotional manipulations.

**Member D:** A 7-year-old [child] can sometimes be more mature than a 13-year-old [child].

The final decision was to include Marian, but not the much younger Boleslaw; for him, only a letter of thanks and appreciation was awarded.

## THE EMOTIONAL FACTOR

Our next story attests to the emotional factor that in many

instances swayed the opinions, one way or another, of Commission members, most of whom are Holocaust survivors. This is shown in the case below, when a survivor appealed to the Commission Chair to add the recognition of two children to that of their parents. The Chair objected to the proliferation of honors to children during his tenure; yet, in some instances, he was not beyond bending the rules, and especially so when he was personally involved as a case rapporteur (the Commission member appointed to study and present the case to the Commission with his recommendations for debate and decision), as in the story of Efraim Reich.

As the Chair related, Mr. Reich came to see him in 1989 with a request to add the names of the two young sons to the recognition of parents Aleksander and Leokadia Mikolajkow,<sup>7</sup> who had been honored in 1964. Their sons, 9-year-old Leszek and 6-year-old Andrzej, had initially been sent by their parents into the ghetto to bring food to the Reich family and later to warn them of an approaching raid and invite them to come and hide with them until the raid was over. The Reichs, a large Jewish family of 12, were able to do so and ended up being sheltered by the Mikolajkows for two full years, first in their warehouse attic, and then in an underground bunker in the rescuers' home in Debica, Poland. The Chair reported to the Commission that he had explained to Mr. Reich about the difficulty posed by his request, namely, that one must assume that the children did not act out of an understanding of the dangers faced by the Jews nor were they aware of the risks to their own lives; rather, they carried out the wishes of their parents. He further explained to the Commission,

In light of Mr. Reich's intense demand and his insistence that without the help of these two children, his family's situation would have been much worse, I promised to bring this matter to [the] discussion and judgment of the Commission. I do this without adding any specific recommendation; the Commission will decide.

However, it was clear from his presentation of the case where his heart lay, and that he wished the Commission's approval for the two boys' recognition; and the vote was in favor—the first (and probably last) time that such young children would be recognized as Righteous, especially the very young Andrzej.

Understandably, as a person who carried the physical and mental scars of the Nazi inferno, the Commission Chair could not be expected always to adopt a strictly cool, intellectual, and rational approach to Holocaust-related issues. Members of the Commission, after all, are at times no less prone than others to be overwhelmed by the emotional side of their thinking processes, especially when the situation under discussion reflects the events of the Holocaust that had a harrowing and permanent impact on their lives.

## CAN A RELATIVE BE AWARDED THE TITLE OF RIGHTEOUS?

Another issue was whether to accord the Righteous title to non-Jewish persons who saved close family relatives who happened to be Jews. In general, this honor is meant for persons who had no family obligations towards those they rescued, no kinship or blood affinity between the two sides, such as might exist within the family circle. In practice, due to the many cases of intermarriage in various parts of Europe, many requests were received to honor rescuers who saved their kin: spouses, brothers- and sisters-in-law, nephews, nieces, and even grandchildren. Were such rescuers to be honored with the Righteous title, or, as some claimed, did they have a moral obligation to save their nearest relatives and thus should not be considered Righteous for doing so? Should the title and honor of Righteous Among the Nations remain the privilege of only those who were not bound by any such elementary blood-tie obligations?

No hard and set rules were adopted, and the debate at Yad Vashem is still ongoing. In general, though, the rule is to deny recognition to persons saving their Jewish spouses but to be more lenient when dealing with the rescue of further-removed Jewish family members. Special lenience is accorded to those rescuers from countries such as Ukraine, Belorussia, and Lithuania, where rescuers faced dangers not only from the Germans but also from their own kinsmen, many of whom participated in the killing of Jews and the harming of their rescuers. It still remains a divisive issue in the minds of Commission members, as the following several stories will illustrate.

In the fall of 1942, the police came to arrest Liza Tetera (born Sigal) in Konotop, Ukraine, and shot her. Liza was married to a non-Jew who was serving in the Russian army. Her two sons, Georgyi, 12, and Yevegenyi, 6, were not at home at the time and thus escaped arrest. They were immediately taken in by their non-Jewish aunt, Melanya Tetera,<sup>8</sup> the father's sister, who lived close by. She decided to keep the two boys and hide them. She dug a hole in the garden, covered it with twigs and grass, and there the two children stayed during daylight hours. At night, they were taken in for feeding and washing. This care continued until the area's liberation.

When the nomination of Melanya Tetera came before the Commission, one argument went as follows.

**Member A:** A [Gentile] woman saves the [Jewish] children of her brother who is fighting in the army. Did she have the choice to say no? Moreover, the children's mother is taken out and shot. Can one say that Melanya had the choice to throw the children out? Really! These are the two children of her brother—of the same flesh. True, it was dangerous; true, she was in danger of [losing] her life. No one denies this. But the issue is when we say Righteous Among the Nations—

the highest honor of the Jewish people, behind which stands the State of Israel—it is really meant for persons who were not under any obligation to save and extend help, because of the danger—and nevertheless did it. Here it is the rescue of her brother's children; not her sister-in-law, but her brother, when the mother is killed. Does such a person, for whom we have the highest regard, merit the highest award of the Jewish people, with the backing of the State of Israel?

**Member B:** Certainly, there is a moral obligation inside a family. But let us remember that there is a moral obligation to save every person. ... From the moral standpoint, every persecuted [Jew] who faced death—one had a moral obligation to save him. I would not automatically disqualify the rescue within the family. This is a classical example of a woman who risked her life. Is this not heroic? If not, I don't know what heroism is at all.

The vote in this case—11 to 7 in favor of Melanya Terera's recognition—demonstrated that while the majority felt that non-Jewish rescuers who saved their nearest Jewish relatives merit recognition under the Righteous program, a significant minority opinion questioned such a positive evaluation.

In another story from the Ukraine, in Cherkassy, Ivan Osmolovski's<sup>9</sup> brother Onufrij was married to the Jewess Haya, and they had two daughters: Alla, born in 1934, and Valentina, born in 1938. In April 1942, when Haya was arrested and taken for interrogation, her brother-in-law Ivan and his wife, Maria, hid Haya's two daughters, then 8 and 4 years old, until liberation. Here, another element troubled the Commission: the mysterious inactivity of Onufrij, the children's non-Jewish father.

**Member A:** One must take into consideration that the girls' father did not raise a finger to help his wife and daughters. There is no mention that he was drafted in the army or was with the partisans. He was simply not at home. Against this setting, the brother's help is especially significant, as is that of his wife, who was very ill, and especially of the [ir] daughter Zinaida [19 years old] who devoted herself to the two girls.

**Member B:** If this is not a case of help within the family from start to finish, then what constitutes help within the family? The man is saving his brother's family. This is help within the family. I think we are degrading the significance of the Righteous title.

**Member C:** Morally speaking, it was the brother's obligation. Are we to recognize a person who did what he was morally obliged to do? ... If they had come to you, would you not have helped the children?



The Yad Vashem medal, honoring the Righteous Among the Nations.



**Member D:** If you had a Gentile relative, would you have risked the lives of your children and yourself to save the Gentile?

**Member A:** [First,] I think we should differentiate between [types of] help, [such as that of a] husband to his wife or children. This, according to *halacha* [Jewish law] is considered a close family. Uncle, aunt, cousins—these are different kinds of relatives. Second, it is important whether they lived together or not. If they did, then it's really a close family. Here, they lived separately. Ivan risked his life and that of his family, and they devoted themselves selflessly to the children's care. We have to remember what awaited a Gentile who rescued Jews.

**Member E:** What is morally obligatory—we will have to define this. I claim that every person during that period was morally obliged to save Jews, and those that did not save did not act according to their moral obligation. I am for recognition, including for the daughter.

The Commission awarded all three the Righteous title.

### THE DEBATE CONTINUES

The debate resumed in yet another story that took place in the Ostrog, Volyn, region of Ukraine. Binyamin Petrushka, a Jew, was married to the non-Jewish Yekaterina Sirik, and in December 1942, a daughter, Anna, was born to them. Shortly after, Binyamin had to go into hiding and was sheltered by Yekaterina's father and sister. Interrogated by the Germans and Ukrainians to reveal her husband's whereabouts, Yekaterina refused and died under torture. Her father, Straton Sirik,<sup>10</sup> was also questioned, but he denied having any information. Binyamin continued to be hidden by the Sirik fam-

ily, and, as a result, he survived. Here, too, the two opposing viewpoints in the Commission were pitted against each other.

**Against:** It is help within the family; the Sirik family had a moral obligation to save, for Binyamin was a family member. If they had turned him in, how would they have explained it to his daughter [Anna, their granddaughter] after the war?

**For:** By marrying a Jewish man during the war, Yekaterina was consciously aware of the danger to herself, and she still married him.

**Against:** But she married him out of love and not out of a wish to save a Jew.

**For:** Even if she did it out of love, she paid for it with her life; besides, her personal feelings did not have to influence her relatives after her death. Yekaterina not only risked her life, but actually paid with her life, after undergoing torture, and all this in order to save her Jewish husband. Who can say with certainty that this constitutes a self-evident natural and normal behavior that every living being, married or not, would have faced? As for her father and sister, Valentina, they both risked their lives [by] sheltering Binyamin, even after [witnessing] the bitter fate of their beloved Yekaterina, after seeing with their own eyes how the Germans punish those that shelter Jews. In light of the intense hatred of Jews surrounding them, it would have been easy for them to decide not to add risks to themselves for the sake of this Jewish man. If, in spite of this, they continued to shelter him, they, too, merit recognition.

**Against:** Whoever does not collaborate with the Nazis to expose a family relative, does that merit him a prize? This is morally and intellectually unacceptable—to reward someone for not exposing one’s relative. If the Siriks had been Jewish, they would not have deserved anything. [Because] they’re Gentiles, are they to be awarded an honor for simply abiding by an elementary moral obligation?

**For:** All three are worthy. Certainly, with regard to Yekaterina, she’s a hero. But also her father and sister, who hid this Jewish man for one and half to two years.

The vote was 12 to 5 in favor, and the three Siriks were recognized.

### THE MERIT OF THE RIGHTEOUS

One may say that the jury is still out on the issue of rescue within the family and on adding children to their parents’ recognition, and the decision can go either way, depending on the merits of the case and the thoughtful and forceful arguments within the Commission for the Righteous. This, of course, does not detract from the merit of all those rescuers of all ages, within the family or related to the fugitive Jews, who acted to save them from a deadly fate.

At the same time, one must remember that the prestigious title of Righteous Among the Nations, the highest honorific given by the Jewish people to non-Jews—a title originating in rabbinic lore of two millennia ago—was given a new interpretation by Yad Vashem in the wake of the Holocaust. It was meant to honor those who had a choice either to respond favorably to the appeal for aid and succor from one or more Jews on the run, or to decline such help. In other words, the Righteous title is meant to be awarded to those not constrained by any obligations to help, to those who had the option to decline and, yet, freely elected to place themselves at considerable risk by extending a helping hand to Jews fleeing from Nazi terror.

Thus, the debate continues within the Commission for the Righteous about the age of reason and the level of understanding in young children of rescuers, and whether non-Jews who aided Jewish relatives were bound by an elementary moral obligation to aid and thus should not be accorded the Righteous title. Opinions are divided on this issue, not merely within the debating room of the Commission but outside, within the public at large, as well. This ongoing and heartfelt debate is testimony to the Commission’s dedication to honoring all those deserving of such honor and, at the same time, preserving the unique status of this prestigious accolade. ■

### NOTES

1. Righteous Among the Nations Archives (RATNA) at Yad Vashem, File 2475: Andzelm (1994).
2. RATNA, File 784: Skowronek (2001).
3. RATNA, File 5289: Toniak (1992).
4. RATNA, File 4675: Anishkiewicz (1993).
5. RATNA, File 9725: Wrobel (2002).
6. RATNA, File 6067: Kulczycki (2002).
7. RATNA, File 90: Mikolajkow (1989).
8. RATNA, File 8555: Tetera (2000).
9. RATNA, File 9307: Osmolovsky (2003).
10. RATNA, File 8946: Sirik (2000).

"Unlike Holocaust fiction or historical texts," Nancy D. Kersell explains, "the memoir as autobiographical writing enables many readers who have perceived the Holocaust only as a tragic but remote story or historical event to acknowledge its profound emotional significance and personal impact." This essay examines the difficulties and benefits of teaching the non-fiction Holocaust memoir to today's students. Pair with Brana Gurewitsch's and Carson Phillips's essays (pp. 48–55 and 59–64) to provide your students with a meta-analysis of the memoirs and testimonies they read.

Nancy D. Kersell

## A Literary Search for Truth: Teaching the Holocaust Memoir to the Generations After the Holocaust

Several critical issues emerge in teaching the Holocaust survivor memoir to today's students. As the number of these memoirs published since 1995 has drastically increased, considerable attention has been focused on the merits and limitations of using the memoir as a primary source. Questions of authenticity, authority, and interpretation can strongly influence not only which memoirs belong in the middle school, high school, college, and university curricula but also how they should be taught. Given the complexity of the material and the frequently limited historical knowledge that the third and fourth generations after the Holocaust bring to the classroom, such issues require educators to reevaluate common and perhaps facile assumptions about memoirs as a source of "truth."

By definition, Holocaust memoirs, classified as nonfiction, are perceived as authentic depictions of circumstances connected to the Shoah. Occasionally, however, reputable historians, and even other survivors, have contested the claims and information in some memoirs as exaggerated or fabricated. These criticisms are certainly not intended to disparage the author's suffering nor give credibility to Holocaust deniers' allegations. Yet, in the absence of supporting documentation or additional eyewitness confirmation, charges of inaccuracy or faulty recollection in a memoir can become difficult to refute. Primo Levi (1989) also clarifies the ambiguous role the witnesses themselves recognize that they occupy when he declares in *The Drowned and the Saved* that

I must repeat: we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses. ... We survivors are ... those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon,

have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are ... the complete witnesses. We who were favored by fate tried ... to recount not only our fate but also that of the others, indeed of the drowned; but this was a discourse "on behalf of third parties," the story of things seen at close hand, not experienced personally. The destruction brought to an end, the job completed, was not told by anyone, just as no one ever returned to describe his own death. (pp. 83-84)

This disclaimer offers no assurances that the factual "truth" can ever be known completely. However, it also does not discredit the memoir's literary value. As Geoffrey Hartman (1995) explains, "Because 'history' is written by one person, however well informed, does not mean it has a truth-value transcending the heterogeneous chorus of voices ... that is so present and alive in literary memoirs or oral documentation" (p. 194). For the survivors themselves, such distinctions detract from their role and significance as human witnesses. They are fully aware that once their generation is gone, only their testimonies will preserve their voices and constitute an invaluable archive of the Jews' tragic and prolonged suffering.

### WHAT CONSTITUTES AUTHENTICITY?

Because the Holocaust memoir incorporates both historical fact and personal experience, students—whether in history, literature, or humanities classes—must be familiar with the chronology and key phases of the Nazi Final Solution. Beyond providing this background, should teachers of literature and humanities be concerned about verifying that what the narrative describes happened exactly as it has been

reconstructed in the text? Unlike historians, teachers of English do not invalidate recollections in a memoir if they lack external documentation. The full dimensions of human experience—emotions, perceptions, relationships, circumstances—divulged in a memoir expose students on an intimate level to the complexity and impact of persecution and genocide. If this outcome, made clear to the students at the outset, is the central purpose of teaching the memoir, then whether every incident or conversation is literally “true” may be of little consequence. In assessing the significance of whether a survivor’s memory can be considered reliable, Lawrence L. Langer (1991) observed: “Since testimonies are human documents rather than merely historical ones, the troubled interaction between past and present achieves a gravity that surpasses the concern with accuracy” (p. xv).

However, because the survivor memoir’s purpose is to make the past more personal and therefore accessible to the reader, each writer has to portray his or her version of events within the framework of historical fact to be fully convincing. Elie Wiesel’s (1982) memoir *Night*, often required reading in the high school curriculum, is frequently described by students as a “novel,” and their confusion is understandable. His compelling, impassioned narrative resembles a work of fiction in both construction and content. It contains dialogue, fully developed characters, a detailed plot that begins in his home town of Sighet and ends in Auschwitz, as well as a depiction of his loss of innocence and religious faith. Such characteristics are more familiar to students as conventions of fiction, and until students fully comprehend that what he describes *actually occurred*, they struggle to accept his memoir as nonfiction.

Olga Lengyel’s (1995) searing memoir *Five Chimneys* is easier for students to perceive as historically convincing, partially because of her clinical tone and also because she includes horrifying statistics compiled by the Nazis of prisoner death rates, graphic eyewitness accounts of medical experiments, and a structure that is thematic rather than linear. Unlike other memoirs or testimony that either avoids or glosses over the barbaric conditions in Auschwitz, her narrative immerses readers in the concrete realities, both mundane and brutal. Lengyel’s approach quickly establishes a credibility difficult to dispute, and her concrete prose style reinforces the impact of her experiences with piercing clarity. In the chapter “The Methods and Their Madness,” she explains the irony of patients inflicted with more suffering when they were admitted to the camp hospital: “This dreadful place certainly offered a rich field for observation of the pathology of malnutrition. ... We also had contagious cases of diphtheria, scarlet fever, and typhus, which was propagated by the myriad lice” (pp. 134–135).

While she succinctly conveys the prisoners’ constant fear and fatalism that life in the death camp could end at

any moment, she also offers insight into how they tried to preserve some vestige of humanity and dignity despite their suffering:

No spectacle was more comforting than that provided by the women when they undertook to cleanse themselves thoroughly in the evening. They passed the single scrubbing brush to one another with a firm determination to resist the dirt and the lice. That was our only way of waging war against our jailers, and against every force that made us victims. (p. 135)

In Lengyel’s narrative, this simple, ordinary incident, as with each recollection, represents another form of documentation.

Teachers must not assume that every Holocaust memoir available today accurately represents the author’s experiences. Recent disclosures reveal extensive falsified information in two Holocaust memoirs designed for younger readers—Herman Rosenblat’s (2008) *Angel at the Fence* and Misha Defonseca’s (1999) *Misha: A Memoire of the Holocaust Years*—that prompted publishers to issue disclaimers and cancel publication. Rosenblat, a survivor of a sub-camp of Buchenwald, claimed his tale of meeting his future wife while he was confined at the camp, where she would bring him apples and bread, was not meant to deceive anyone. He said, “I wanted to bring happiness to people. ... My motivation was to make good in this world” (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com>). Defonseca’s autobiography claimed that she was a Jewish orphan during the Holocaust who roamed the forests with a pack of wolves. Her popular memoir has been translated into numerous languages, although she has admitted that it was not based on actual experience; nor is she even Jewish (<http://www.boston.com>). These circumstances are complicated when publishers and celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey endorse the memoirs, which obviously appear convincing and credible, and when they are discussed on blogs and social networks, which heightens their appeal to our students.

Such romanticized depictions satisfy a common desire to find a “happy ending” for the victims’ suffering, although, as Ken Waltzer (2008), director of Jewish Studies at Michigan State University, points out,

Holocaust experience is not heartwarming, it is heart-rending. All this shows something about the broad unwillingness in our culture to confront the difficult knowledge of the Holocaust. All the more important then to have real memoirs that tell of real experience in the camps. (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com>)

As a counterpoint, one authentic memoir that eloquently describes for students the hardships of surviving real and

devastating losses—and ending with the remarkable marriage of a survivor and her liberator—is Gerda Weissmann Klein's (1997) *All But My Life*. Her story is unusual and memorable for students, but it cannot be considered representative of what most survivors encountered.

Unfortunately, the notoriety surrounding Rosenblat's and Defonseca's discredited books and an earlier one, Benjamin Wilkomirski's (1996) fraudulent memoir, *Fragments*, has made historians wary of accepting "unsignposted memories and impressions ... unanchored by historical fact" (Kurzem, 2005, p. 174). Teachers, too, may prefer the security of a history text to a newly released memoir. Survivors themselves, having witnessed their families, their possessions, and their culture nearly annihilated, still must overcome skepticism as they attempt to reconstruct and preserve their past.

### THE MOTIVATION TO WITNESS

Another significant and controversial issue involves impulses some survivors follow to compare suffering or insist that conditions in the camp where they were imprisoned were particularly brutal. Although such behavior is more indicative of trauma than a desire to dissemble about what happened, the credibility of the memoirist becomes suspect when descriptions of atrocity and life in extremity within the death camps appear too surreal to be true.

For those who have lost everything, however, sharing their recollections is significant because these memories represent the last vestiges of a lost world that can only partially be excavated in words and pictures from the ruins of World War II. However, any revisiting of this landscape involves certain risks. As time passes, recollections may change because, according to Levi (1989),

many survivors of wars or other traumatic experiences tend unconsciously to filter their memory: summoning them up among themselves, or telling them to third persons, they prefer to dwell on moments of respite ... and to skim over the most painful episodes, which are not called up willingly from the reservoir of memory and therefore with time ... lose their contours. (p. 32)

Such revision can help the survivor manage the resurgence of pain associated with the trauma as well as prevent readers from only focusing on—or avoiding entirely—images of brutality. Especially when the initial audience are their own children, many survivors willing to share their memories still feel apprehensive, even guilty, about the effect such knowledge will have. This type of self-disclosure may lead to healing, or it may reveal the black chasm that will always separate Holocaust survivors from all others.

There also may be a tendency for readers to seek out heroic meanings or, according to Geoffrey Hartman (1995), to

"launder" the behavior of people under stress. ... By such laundering, by such defensively ennobling content, we are expressing an anxiety that the survivor may be tainted. Primo Levi again speaks truly when he writes of the "awful privilege" of his generation that they have grasped the incurable nature of the offense imposed like a contagion on the human spirit. ... To take away this kind of honesty from the witnesses is to treat them as patients rather than as agents. But in telling their stories survivors are indeed agents: not heroic, perhaps even allowing the worst to remain unsaid, yet the strength required to face a past like that radiates ... and becomes a vital fact. (p. 200)

Levi acknowledges that memoirs are useful in "the reconstruction of truth about the camps" (p. 16), but he offers the caveat that

beyond the indignation and pity these recollections provoke, they should also be read with a critical eye. For knowledge of the Lagers, the Lagers themselves were not always a good observation post: in the inhuman conditions to which they were subjected, the prisoners could barely acquire an overall vision of their universe. (pp. 16–17)

In analyzing any memoir, students still may struggle with the need for critical distance, and they often wonder if criticism of survivor narratives can be considered disrespectful. Antony Rowland (2008) found that "students are often loathe to critique ... testimonies since it seems tantamount to trivializing lives," and they also "perceive that there might be different ways in which to read this genre in contrast with fiction and poetry" (p. 83).

### THE HOLOCAUST MEMOIR AS AN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

Of course, unlike Holocaust fiction or historical texts, the memoir as autobiographical writing enables many readers who have perceived the Holocaust only as a tragic but remote story or historical event to acknowledge its profound emotional significance and personal impact. To prevent misinterpretation, Jared Stark (2004) proposes that

one can usefully ask students to compare back-cover claims about a memoir's meaning with the memoir itself. ... Stylistic or dramatic effects—ranging from the representation of verbatim dialogue ... to the arrangement of events in a suspenseful sequence to the use of imagery that suggests allegorical or philosophical meaning—may also strain factual accuracy. Written memoirs thus come under suspicion from one direction because

they lack the verifiability demanded of historical evidence and from the other direction because they may lack the spontaneity of oral testimony, which seems to prevent the witness from crafting the past into a desirable image. (p. 199)

This approach offers a useful rubric for literary analysis in Holocaust texts, and teachers must carefully investigate the circumstances described in the memoir to ensure that their students are given accurate information. These efforts, although necessary, do not diminish the powerful revelations accessible only through survivor memoirs, which possess their own inherent truth as works of literature. Without such testimony, a primary intention of the Nazi Final Solution may have succeeded if “the entire history of the brief ‘millennial Reich’ can be reread as a war against memory, an Orwellian falsification of memory, falsification of reality, negation of reality” (Levi, 1989, p. 310). For this reason alone, written survivor recollections validate their importance despite the possibility of historical inaccuracies.

In all likelihood, educators will go beyond offering only a literary approach for connecting individual lives to the factual details of genocide, and what this generation of students ultimately extracts from a tragedy of such magnitude—which ended a half century before their childhood began—may be too intangible to be defined in concrete pedagogical terms. However, as students read about a world where familiar and familial comforts were no longer a possibility, and as they confront a bleak landscape of betrayal, mass murder, and trauma, many will respond with empathy and compassion. That translation of facts into feeling can overcome, to some extent, what many survivors fear most—that soon their experiences will be of interest to historians and scholars only. What this generation of students quickly comprehends is that the memoir is more than an artifact depicting one person’s life; its repository of images and insights captures not only our capacity for goodness or evil but also the essence of what it means to be human. ■

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This lamentation from Mark Nepo can be paired with Kenneth Sherman's poem (p. 141) and with the essays by Alison Dobrick (pp. 135–140) and Joshua Levy (pp. 142–146) for an essential discussion of distinctions you may find between learners who are directly descended from these events and those who were simply born in the third generation after they occurred.

*Mark Nepo*

## *I Wake from a Dream of Killing Hitler*

I.

I have no numbers on my forearm.  
I have only watched Grandma  
with her thick tongue  
sob in her Brooklyn apartment  
while staring off.

I have watched her whisper  
to her older brother, Louis,  
buted off into a boxcar  
no time for a wave or even a glance  
just butt, butt, hop  
the heavy door sliding  
the padlocks fastened.

I only know of Grandma's  
sister, Rifkah, who sent  
back the steamship tickets  
in 1933 because  
Rumania was where she was born.  
I only know of Grandma  
ending the story there  
sitting quietly  
rocking inside  
a sad flutter in her lip  
mezuzah in her fallen hand.

I've thought too much.

II.

There can be no revenge  
only relief  
from a tension wound  
across an era;  
a tension strung  
like an imperceptible copper leash  
through the corner of every Jewish soul.

Who can say Kaddish for six million  
without ever mentioning the dead?  
Yahrzeit marks every calendar I know,  
anniversaries of death outnumber the constellations,  
the very planet marred  
by a continent of scars  
and only if the tissue  
of every conscience  
is seared;  
only if for a century  
we rub our lids with light;  
only then might we not bleed in thought.

The sacred veils  
behind which we walk this earth  
are irretrievable.  
Some gashes breach like canyons.

All my fathers' hands are broken  
old prayers like knuckles broken  
old prayers like bone resin. ■

"It is difficult to make generalizations about the educational experiences and needs of the third generation," writes Alison Dobrick, because 3Gs range in age from young children to adults in their 40s and live throughout the world. This essay focuses on American public schools that educate 3Gs and their peers, who currently confront an emphasis on standardized learning and testing that may preclude the inclusion of Holocaust education. Dobrick believes that 3Gs eager to share their grandparents' experiences can offer their peers, pressured teachers, and beleaguered school systems new methods of incorporating and improving Holocaust education through the utilization of the Internet and social networking.

*Alison Dobrick*

## "Of All Those Acts": Learning From and Teaching the Third Generation

"Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation."

—*Senator Robert F. Kennedy (NY), 1966*

Grandchildren of Holocaust survivors—the second generation of survivors' descendants, or 3Gs—are using the Internet, social networking, and other modern means of communication in innovative and effective ways to tell their grandparents' stories and learn the history of the Holocaust. These 3Gs epitomize Robert Kennedy's inspirational words that "each of us can work to change a small portion of events" in modest, yet crucial ways. For example, Elyse Bodenheimer, at 12, created a Web site and blog (<http://www.myjewishlegacy.com/>) to tell the stories of her survivor grandparents and to encourage 3Gs to do the same. "I wanted kids to have a place to document the experiences their family members endured," she writes on her blog; "I wanted to learn more about what it was like to be a child living during the Holocaust, and to also document what happened to my own family." Her goal is to help educate her peers and the world about the Holocaust. Ken Garfield (2010), who interviewed her for the *Huffington Post*, writes, "As Elyse shares, when she talks to school groups or meets Holocaust survivors for lunch and conversation, myjewishlegacy.com has been viewed 4,000 times since the site went live last year" ([http://huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/20/third-generation-jews-fig\\_n\\_545114.html](http://huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/20/third-generation-jews-fig_n_545114.html)).

Aaron Biterman, 27, is a 3G who, early on, used online communication to educate the public about the Holocaust. In 2006, Aaron created a Facebook group called "Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors" (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Grandchildren-of-Holocaust-Survivors/117499674939502>).

Facebook members join groups and are then updated on the group's news. They can communicate with other members and engage in research on the group's page. Today, the group has almost 2,000 members, who have joined Aaron in his stated goals: "To preserve our grandparents' memories, to memorialize all of our family members who perished in the Holocaust, and to educate our neighbors about the history so nothing like the Holocaust occurs in the future" (personal communication, July 27, 2010). Biterman recently recounted: "A letter from someone in Europe inquiring about the possibility that we were related, my natural curiosity, and my grandmother's stories all prompted me to try to use social media to connect 3Gs across the globe" (Biterman, 2010). Through Biterman's Facebook page, 3Gs have connected to local groups, which are now "in Washington DC, New York, Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco. Additionally, we have encouraged people to form their own 3G groups in other cities ... as well as [in] countries such as Canada and Israel."

A newer site designed for grandchildren of survivors is 3GNY, described on their Web page "as a living link to survivors ... dedicated to keeping alive the history and stories of the Holocaust" (<http://3gnewyork.org/wordpress/>). This NYC-based group offers in-person social activities in addition to their Facebook page (<http://facebook.com/group.php?gid+2263438015&v=wall>), Twitter feed (<http://twitter.com/3GNY>), and blog, where family histories are posted (<http://3gnewyork.org/wordpress/family-histories/>).

The Student Holocaust Education Movement (SHEM)

(<http://www.facebook.com/torchofmemory>), founded by Yeshiva University student Simon Goldberg in August 2009, is a student-based and entirely student-run organization. Its goal, according to Goldberg (personal communication, 2010), is “to provide young people the tools to become defenders of Holocaust memory through an innovative, dynamic approach to Holocaust education that engages the younger generation.” Goldberg, who embraces the concept of memorialization as education, explains that SHEM is, “ultimately, concerned with genocide prevention.” Its members see, “in an ever more globalized world heavily reliant on social media and the power of the Internet,” both the need and the immediate possibilities for “a change in the paradigm of moral education and the approach to teaching.” Goldberg writes,

Today, SHEM has one of the largest online constituencies in the world of Holocaust education. On our Facebook page, articles, video testimonies, and discussion questions are posted daily. Our work engages young voices the world over to discuss the most central issues confronting the preservation of memory and the defense of goodness. Write to us: [torchofmemory@gmail.com](mailto:torchofmemory@gmail.com). (2010)

For Elyse, Aaron, Simon, and other 3Gs, using such online communication tools as social networks, blogs, Twitter, and Web sites provides the most effective means to communicate with today’s students about the Holocaust. However, teaching this history to the third generation and their peers is not, of course, a task designated only for the descendants of survivors. Today’s classroom teachers—who, depending on their age, can be peers of either the second or the third generation—play crucial roles in keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive. Their students may have begun this revolution in extracurricular education, but teachers are now active participants as they bring these tools—and this subject—into their classrooms. This is a revolution in which students’ goals, as expressed by Goldberg, echo long-held goals of teachers, who have always recognized the necessity of teaching empathy and tolerance and who recognize the strength and potential of “young people when they are empowered and encouraged to become agents of decency and change in a world largely indifferent to suffering” (Goldberg, 2010).

Holocaust education has a history that begins with the event itself, but the process through which states began to mandate Holocaust education began in the 1970s. In New Jersey, for example, efforts to coordinate Holocaust education in grades K-12 began in 1974. Before that time,

some teachers, a few Jewish Federations, a small number of college professors, survivors, and others were educating students and the public in their own area of expertise and within their scope of responsibility and

geographic area. There was no coordination, and this level of activity was similar to much that was happening nationally and internationally. The International Gathering of Holocaust Survivors and the inception of a coordinated effort in New Jersey occurred at about the same time (1973/74). (New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education, 2000)

New Jersey’s inclusion of Holocaust education as a mandated part of the curriculum led national trends. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (2010) reports that today three states (Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey) mandate Holocaust education; three states (California, Massachusetts, and New York) embed a required component of Holocaust education into a human rights and genocide curriculum; five states (Connecticut, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Washington) recommend or encourage Holocaust education; and 11 states have established commissions on Holocaust education. States continue to join this list: In 2009, Kentucky formed a work group to create an official Holocaust curriculum and Virginia required the distribution of a curriculum manual to all teachers. In all, a total of 23 states have taken action to include the Holocaust in their curriculum in a manner that goes beyond simple adherence to state standards.

This action for inclusion, however, often goes unfulfilled in the classroom. My research on Holocaust education in the public schools of Florida (Dobrick, 2008) demonstrated that less than half of teachers were aware of the Florida mandate’s existence, and about 20% of fifth-grade teachers did not teach about the Holocaust at all. It is, therefore, not enough to pass legislation ensuring Holocaust instruction; we must, in addition, ask the following questions and address the answers:

- How many public school teachers teach or plan to teach about the Holocaust?
- What barriers might prevent these teachers from teaching about the Holocaust?
- What can be done to ensure and increase quality instruction about the Holocaust in today’s public schools?

#### **NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND**

The most influential trend in United States education today stems from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. As Rothstein and Jacobsen (2009) explain, NCLB has led to an increased focus on high-stakes tested subjects (reading and mathematics) and a decreased focus on other content areas, such as social studies and science. School leadership often responds to test-score-related pressure by “increasing the number of mandated hours in math and reading, decreasing time in other areas, and pulling low-performing students out of non-tested subjects so that they can receive further mathematics and reading instruction and drill” (p. 23). While the

No Child Left Behind Act represents the dominant paradigm in today's thinking about educational reform, it also reflects the values of an earlier trend, exemplified by the *Nation at Risk* report of 1983, which emphasized teacher accountability through test scores and the need for a "back to basics" approach centered on mathematics and reading skills.

The educational landscape inhabited by school-aged 3Gs and their peers is heavily influenced by an emphasis on standardized tests. Today's Race to the Top program encourages such test-based measures as tying student test performance to school ratings, teachers' salaries, and the hiring or firing of school administrators (Ravitch, 2010; Winerip, 2010). One recent study examined the relationship between today's high school students' "social studies content gaps" and the fact that "social studies instruction has been marginalized in elementary and middle schools" (Guidry, Cuthrell, O'Connor, and Good, 2010).

Diane Ravitch (2010), formerly a prominent supporter of accountability through high-stakes tests and now an outspoken advocate for lessening their importance in favor of a more well-rounded, liberal arts education, states the case:

Many schools suspend instruction for months before the state tests, in hopes of boosting scores. Students are drilled on how to answer the precise types of questions that are likely to appear on the state tests. Testing experts suggest that this intense emphasis on test preparation is wasted, because students tend to learn test-taking techniques rather than the subject tested, and they are not likely to do well on a different test of the same subject for which they were not prepared. (Ravitch, 2010, p. 1)

In addition to the ongoing pressure to raise test scores, today's public school teachers must address the needs of students with language differences, learning disabilities, emotional and psychological issues, and difficult socioeconomic realities, while confronting the fact that

our students have changed radically. Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach. ... Digital Natives accustomed to the twitch-speed, multitasking, random-access, graphics-first, active, connected, fun, fantasy, quick-payoff world of their video games, MTV, and Internet are *bored* by most of today's education, well meaning as it may be. (Prensky, 2001, p. 2)

Beyond the challenges described above, teachers are often reluctant or unable to implement mandates that require them to teach difficult subjects such as the Holocaust, which may be marginalized in the curriculum because it tends to raise controversial and unsettling issues and to require

background knowledge that most teachers do not have. Some teachers may feel that their local community may object to the inclusion of such content, or that the community their school serves does not need Holocaust or anti-racist education (Carlson, 1995; Pang, 2005; Short, 1999). Teachers may avoid implementing the mandate for other, practical reasons such as a lack of time and/or desire to add content to their already full curricula (Banks, 2003). Funding for Holocaust education, which may pay for teacher training, texts, videos, field trips, and speakers' honoraria, has suffered dramatically in recent years (Janell & Clay, 2009), reflecting both the recession and the general trends and predominant values described above.

A recent survey of beginning and pre-service teachers in elementary, middle school, and high school public school classrooms in New Jersey ( $n=39$ ) demonstrates the troubling fact that certain trends in American public education seem to work against the inclusion of Holocaust education. Only 8% of teachers responding had ever taught about the Holocaust, although 79% reported that they *wanted* to teach, and 61% reported that they felt an *obligation* to teach about the Holocaust. A large majority of teachers were aware that they were mandated to teach about the Holocaust (74%), yet they reported that barriers such as standardized test preparation (66% of teachers), students' lack of background knowledge (21%), and their own lack of background knowledge (24%) stood in the way of their perceived ability to teach about the Holocaust.

Findings of my earlier study (Dobrick, 2008) of Holocaust education practices among fifth-grade teachers in public schools throughout a large, diverse county in Florida ( $n=128$ ) also demonstrate that formidable, though not insurmountable, barriers can block the way of even those teachers inclined to teach about the Holocaust. The overall amount of Holocaust education in that county offered a more hopeful picture than the previously mentioned New Jersey survey; 78% of teachers surveyed indicated that they had taught about the Holocaust. However, as in the New Jersey study, a large percentage of those who did teach about the Holocaust (75%) agreed or strongly agreed that preparation for standardized tests was often the focus of the classroom time that they would have otherwise used for Holocaust instruction. Also, wide gaps are apparent in teachers' choices of topics to include in units of study about the Holocaust; for example, while 93% of the teachers who taught about the Holocaust included instruction on concentration camps, only 52% of teachers taught about earlier forms of persecution such as the April 1933 boycott in Germany, and only 8% of teachers included information on the post-war trials of Nazi perpetrators.

The complex realities of today's public school classrooms help to explain the fact that, while teachers might want to and even feel personally obligated to teach about the Holo-

caust, they often leave it out of their curriculum. A combination of approaches that include both the new and the core values of earlier educational reform movements is suggested if we are to bolster the implementation of Holocaust education in American public schools.

### **LEARNING FROM THE THIRD GENERATION: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL NETWORKS**

All instructional decisions made by public school teachers today and all content they provide must be within the framework of state standards and mandates. These standards are not only content-based but include as well the general, skill-centered instruction in effective research, reading, and writing skills that is necessary for success on standardized tests. In New Jersey, for example, the Core Curriculum Content Standards (2009) include “21st-Century Life and Career Skills,” “Communication and Media Fluency,” and “Technological Citizenship, Ethics, and Society.” Using online tools, therefore, can help today’s students connect more easily and fully to all standards-based learning.

Prensky (2001) claims that Digital Natives need educational experiences that mirror the realities and satisfactions of their digitally connected lives. The skillful, personally engaging activities led by 3Gs on the Internet and on social networking sites illustrate for teachers the myriad opportunities to utilize these tools to create new and relevant best practices for Holocaust education.

- Use social networking sites such as Facebook, Ning, and ePals or Web sites created to tell relatives’ stories to connect with members of the second and third generations and their peers. Students can comment individually or as a class, mediated by the teacher’s participation. Engaging in such activities helps students to make personal connections to the content. As survivors grow older and fewer, teachers must integrate the growing, online presence of the third generation into the middle and high school curriculum.
- Create a blog or Google Doc about social issues that students in the class might face. This would be an excellent culminating activity after a unit of study on anti-bias themes. Students could pose and respond to scenarios, for example, involving their actions in the face of bullying. They might analyze the themes common to and different from the earliest anti-Jewish taunts and actions against Jewish students in German schools in the 30s and bullying today. [Ed. Note: See Daniel Kroll’s essay in *PRISM*, 2010, Vol. 1, Issue 2, pp. 78–82.] These kinds of communicative, written activities may allow students to respond in more thoughtful, reflective, and engaged ways than in-person classroom discussions alone. Crucial literacy skills such as distinguishing fact from fiction, writ-

ing persuasively, and summarizing would be enhanced through this activity.

- Focus on online media literacy to ensure that students develop skills such as questioning and determining the validity of all information found online. Through reading, responding to, and writing about the authentic voices of the 3Gs on these sites, and by comparing them to the international conversation on the Holocaust that, especially online, can include Holocaust deniers as well as experts, students can achieve a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how to infer, how to identify tone and mood, and how to distinguish facts from speculation, opinion, and falsehoods when engaged in online study and research.
- Encourage students to screen, examine, blog about, create, and/or respond to short Holocaust films or images, music videos, and testimony available on YouTube and other reputable sites. Carefully chosen, such films or excerpts can be invaluable classroom aids, in part because they are often very short (Michael Franzini’s 2008 “Subway” and “Family Room” are powerful 30-second thought-provoking clips on THINKMTV (<http://think.mtv.com>) and can, as film educator Eric A. Goldman (2010) writes, “pique interest in historical context and setting of the film as well as in the essential questions the film raises” (p. 113). Goldman notes, “A student who learns to notice, describe, react, deduce, predict, and make connections in film can transfer these skills to the written text and all other elements of study” (p. 113). Performances by 3Gs or their peers may inspire other students to express themselves creatively in ways that traditional classroom learning may not inspire. In the music video “*Adon Olam Ad Matai*” (“God Almighty, When Will It End”) ([http://www.metacafe.com/watch/1063657/subliminal\\_miri\\_ben\\_ari\\_god\\_almighty\\_when\\_will\\_it\\_end/](http://www.metacafe.com/watch/1063657/subliminal_miri_ben_ari_god_almighty_when_will_it_end/)), the 30-year old Israeli singer Ya’akov “Kobi” Shimoni, known as “Subliminal,” raps about the Holocaust with words set to the music of his accompanist, the classically trained, Grammy-winning, 3G hip-hop violinist Miri Ben-Ari. Images of a vivid and graphic modern dance performance add strong visual impact to the words and music.

### **TEACHING THE THIRD GENERATION: WHAT ARE THE BASICS?**

Teachers of today’s third generation and their peers work within an educational landscape that can negatively affect the implementation of appropriate Holocaust education. Best practices in Holocaust education, such as reading, viewing, and analyzing primary source material, including testimony; reading and responding to Holocaust narratives and poetry; viewing and discussing age-appropriate Holocaust

films; meeting and interacting with survivors; and engaging in open-ended discussions that “complicate students’ thinking” (Totten, 2002), are largely missing from a test-centered curriculum. Critical thinking skills, key to any true understanding of history and current events in general and Holocaust history in particular, are built through engaging in a liberal arts and humanities content-based education that uses text, visuals, and the Internet.

Whether the urgent call from thinkers such as Ravitch (2010) will be heeded by policymakers remains to be seen. However, individual teachers and schools can and do still make a commitment to teaching about the Holocaust, even within the constraints created by today’s high-stakes testing environment and limited budgets. It is, therefore, crucial that Holocaust commissions, organizations, museums, and universities offer high-quality professional development for K-12 teachers, especially workshops that focus on building teachers’ content background and knowledge of effective Holocaust pedagogy.

Lindquist (2007) demonstrated the success of developing a course at the university level to address the fact that “planning a unit of study on the subject must involve a highly developed understanding of the complexities that are central to both the history and the pedagogy of the event” (p. 22). Professional development for teachers can take the form of university courses like Lindquist’s, but it can also take place at schools, museums, or other sites, including online opportunities such as those offered by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM.org), Yad Vashem (yadvashem.org), the Mofet Institute’s Jewish Portal of Teacher Education (<http://jtec.macam.ac.il/portal/>), the Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation (jewishpartisans.org), Centropa, an interactive database of 25,000 digitized images (centropa.org), the Wisconsin Historical Society (<http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/holocaustsurvivors/>), and a handful of universities, including Pennsylvania’s National Catholic Center for Holocaust Education (<http://blogs.setonhill.edu/ncche/>) at Seton Hill University, which offers an online certificate program in Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

Professional development activities, in person and online, must remain central to efforts to improve the quality and increase the quantity of Holocaust education in public schools. Providing these activities to schools at little or no cost can ensure that the lesson learned by earlier generations—that a good education must include, but also go beyond, “basic skills” to include meaningful content in history, current events, science, and the arts (and, today, the wise and careful use of online social communities and other Internet options)—will not go unlearned by the present generation.

## USE THE TOOLS OF THE PRESENT TO TEACH ABOUT THE PAST

Considering the inventiveness and successes as well as the learning experiences and needs of the wired third generation helps us to see more clearly the necessity for American public education to shift its narrow focus from high-stakes test preparation to a more meaningful and broader emphasis on critical content such as the Holocaust through media that includes the Internet. We can look to the third generation and the learning tools they take for granted to teach them—and to help them teach us—about the experiences of their grandparents. ■

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Kenneth Sherman's poem prompts a dialogue between those who are direct descendants of the Jews who endured the Holocaust and those who, like most of our students today, are the third generation to be born after the event. Sherman visits his grandfather's village "two hours from Cracow" seeking "closeness to history." If one of our teaching goals is to instill an understanding of, and empathy for, the victims, should we teach to ensure that all of our students, whatever their connections to this event, feel "this to be a place / I might have been"? Is it possible to teach such a degree of empathy? Is it wise? Is it the best—the only—method to ensure remembrance in the next generation of learners? Pair with Mark Nepo's lamentation (pp. 133–134) and with essays by Alison Dobrick (pp. 135–140) and Joshua Levy (pp. 142–146) to examine more fully these essential questions.

*Kenneth Sherman*

## *The Village*

I visited the village my grandfather left  
before the war. It was two hours  
from Cracow  
by car.

On the street the men, unshaven.  
Some were too loud for midday  
and tottered  
when they walked.

Women peered out from doorways.  
Scarves. Silver-capped teeth.  
Inside the church,  
candles burning,

a smear of gold and velvet  
and the portrait of a blond, Slavic Jesus  
while at the other end of the square—  
the synagogue

untouched from the day the war ended,  
its windows boarded,  
its bricks resembled  
discoloured salt.

Its presence was an absence  
that settled inside of me.  
I wanted to touch that community  
once relegated to a ghetto

even if it were a community of ghosts  
but when I ran my hand along the brick  
what I felt  
was lifeless, cold.

They say closeness to history  
gives meaning  
but I wondered if it isn't proximity  
to death

feeling the absence  
swell inside me,  
knowing this to be a place  
I might have been. ■

—Chmielnick, Poland, 1988

Joshua Levy explores the ramifications of the startling and often overlooked fact that “the vast majority of American Jews have little or no immediate familial connection to the Holocaust whatsoever.” We teach this history to all of our students, whether grandchildren of survivors or simply those born in the third generation since the war. Should we attempt to differentiate our pedagogic goals and our mandate to remember, distinguishing between direct descendants and their peers, or should we instead teach both groups of students with the same methods and materials and have as a goal the expansion of the “responsibility of memorialization from the few to the many”?

*Joshua Levy*

## An Expanded Legacy: Educational Challenges of the Holocaust for the Next Generation of Jewish Students

The large, fabric-covered sewing box—the one with the pink and red peonies embroidered into the casing—has rested on the same shelf in my childhood home for as long as I can remember. I’ve not had a great many reasons to enter my mother’s walk-in closet over the years, but I’ve been in there from time to time and would barely give the box a passing thought.

I can’t say what led me to open it on the relatively recent occasion that I did. My mother had asked me to replace the light bulb in the closet and, for whatever reason, the box caught my eye. For the very first time, I took the liberty of unclasping the rusted buckles holding the lid shut, deciding it was high time I surveyed the bundles of needles and spools of thread contained inside. There were no needles, though, and there was no thread, and, based on the negligible number of times anything in my house has ever been sewn, I should have assumed this all along.

Sentimentalist that I am, my discovery instantly transformed the erstwhile sewing box into a priceless treasure chest of letters, black-and-white photos, birthday cards, and jewelry. It was my mother’s memory storehouse: her version of the tattered Nike shoebox that I keep tucked away in my own closet, bursting with mementos from my own, albeit shorter, life. I wasn’t about to invade her privacy by examining the items without her knowledge, and after a brief, superficial glance over the contents of the box, I set myself to closing it. It was then, however, that I noticed something resting at the bottom of the case: two small books, each no larger than average-sized paperbacks, identical, save for the

torn binding and loose pages of the one on top. I pulled them out from the clutter they had been hiding beneath and could hardly believe what I had found. My immediate incredulity, however, was hardly a result of the rather unremarkable appearance of the books; it was not their tired, brown leather casing that caught my eye, nor the fading picture of palm trees printed on the center of the covers, nor even the enigmatic inscription “Lest We Forget,” embossed above the trees. No, it was the faded name and year written at the very top of the more tattered volume: “Hannah Deutsch, 1945.”

I had found my grandmother’s diaries. [Fig. 1]

A quick flip through the pages revealed that they contained a full five years of musings from the woman I had known only until I was three years old.

Instantly, I calculated. I knew how old Hannah had been when she passed on and in what year that occurred, which made her slightly younger than 14 years old when she began to write in these books and slightly younger than 19 when she finished. The student of history that I am was bursting with excitement. I couldn’t wait to read what my own adolescent grandmother had to say about World War II, the Holocaust, Israeli independence, and the state of the world at that time. After securing the requisite permission from my mother, I sat down to read.

Yet, just as the sewing box revealed itself to be something I had not, but should have, expected, so, too, the journals turned out to be far from the personalized historical narrative I anticipated. My grandmother did not chronicle the great events of her day. She did chronicle, instead, her

flirtations, her going to the movies, studying for exams, and attending dinner and dance parties.

FDR died, and she noted it by tangentially mentioning the last-minute assembly called by her school. The Japanese surrendered unconditionally, and Hannah described the celebratory block party her Long Island neighborhood enjoyed: Her immigrant father barbecued on the grill. While Jews across the Atlantic suffered unimaginably and fought for survival, Hannah's relationship to the Jewish people consisted of the occasional bar mitzvah or bake sale at the local synagogue.

I explain this not to paint my grandmother as cold, uncaring, or frivolous. On the contrary, despite the weight placed on the Holocaust in contemporary Jewish-American homes and schools, it is more the experience of those such as Hannah Deutsch, removed and distant, that shaped our communities then and continue to underlie our efforts now to universalize the memory—that is, to expand that responsibility of memorialization from the few to the many—an event that, in its time, was far from universal.

#### AMERICAN JEWS AND THE HOLOCAUST

The incorporation of the Holocaust into the Jewish-American identity was hardly guaranteed in the decades immediately following the destruction of European Jewry. The ubiquity of the Holocaust in today's cultural and religious landscape belies the fact that today's Jewish-Americans overwhelmingly descend from those who knew nothing of Nuremberg Laws, forced relocations, or gas chambers. By 1937, more than 4.7 million Jews were already living within the borders of the United States (Linfield, 1945, p. 491); and in the years since, as that number has waxed and waned, heading toward today's population of approximately 5.2 million (Sarna, 2004, p. 357), a relatively small percentage of that negligible growth can be attributed to the immigrant victims of the Nazis' genocidal campaign.

The Claims Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, which released a statistical review of the state of American Holocaust survivors in 2003, put their number at 122,000, compared to the 1.6 million American Jews of the same over-55 age bracket. Admittedly, many in that former group did marry those in the latter, leading some of those in the third and fourth generations to trace themselves back to one, maybe two, survivors. Even this, though, can only account for a fraction of today's population. Regardless, the numbers themselves are tangential, presented simply to sharpen the picture of what strikes many as an unexpected demographic reality: The vast majority of American Jews have little or no immediate familial connection to the Holocaust whatsoever.



FIG.1 Hannah Deutsch's Diary, 1945.

Did our grandparents and great-grandparents fight alongside fellow Americans in World War II? Yes. Did they wrestle with language and cultural barriers at a time when racism and bigotry were prevalent even on these shores? Yes. Were many forced to abandon *Shabbat* and *kashrut* to be able to provide for their families? Yes. The fight to maintain Judaism in their homes and in their hearts, though, was a far less dramatic struggle than that of their European brethren. Indeed, this dichotomy reflects an ongoing pattern in our history. "Central themes of Jewish history in Europe," writes Jonathan D. Sarna (2004) in his introduction to *American Judaism*,

have also been far less central to the history of Jews in the United States. Expulsions, concentration camps, and extermination, of course, have never been part of American Jewish history. By contrast, in America, as nowhere else to the same degree, Judaism has had to adapt to a religious environment shaped by the denominational character of American Protestantism, the canons of free market competition, the ideals of freedom, and the reality of diversity. (p. xvi)

That legacy, for better or for worse, has today been vastly overshadowed by the unimaginable nightmare that overtook Europe during the first half of the 20th century. Subsequently, Jewish-American history became inexorably linked with the Holocaust, making the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) on the National Mall in Washington, DC, just one prominent example of that linkage.

Moreover, just as the Holocaust has taken on an expanded role in the story of American Judaism, its messages and lessons have been universalized far beyond our ranks. Quoted often is Michael Berenbaum (1990), former director of research for the USHMM, who writes, regarding the museum's mission, that the story of the Holocaust

had to be told in such a way that it would resonate not only with the survivor in New York and his children in San Francisco, but with a black leader from Atlanta, a midwestern farmer, or a northeastern industrialist. (p. 20)

Surely, the fact that a memorial to a largely Jewish persecution that took place on a continent resting fully across the Atlantic even exists within view of the Washington Monument and down the street from the Smithsonian speaks volumes about the success of that mission.

However, as the Holocaust grows in importance in more and varied cultural circles, distinct educational challenges emerge for the Jewish community. As the legacy of the Holocaust is carried on an ever-greater number of shoulders, these challenges become even more acute.

### TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST TO THE THIRD GENERATION

In any given Holocaust education classroom in a yeshiva, Jewish day school, or supplementary school, there will doubtlessly be a number of students who are either unaware of or indifferent to the existence of the division between them. That the grandson of a non-victim is sitting next to the granddaughter of a victim, both being taught about the necessity of Holocaust remembrance on equal footing, is, for whatever reason, irrelevant to them. These students either care, or they don't, and that distinction is altogether separate from their line of descent or that of their peers. (Though I believe many of these observations are also true for the heterogeneous public school demographic, I am restricting my discussion to the Jewish school classroom.)

The aforementioned challenges, then, arise from those students to whom descent does matter. Some, namely those who are especially cognizant of their lack of Holocaust-survivor ancestry, question the relevance of focusing on Holocaust study. Why, as their teachers may insist, do they have more of a responsibility than anyone else to perpetuate the memory and lessons of that terrible time? These students, like the majority of those learning next to them, have never heard stories of unlikely survival while sitting on a grandparent's knee. For them, faded blue numbers etched into arms of the elderly are images from textbooks, not memory.

To varying degrees, these students viscerally react to the universalized Holocaust by rejecting the expanded role it now plays in their history. If no one in their family ever experienced what we, as Jewish educators, are touting as a shared, extended-family experience—and now as a shared heritage—what, indeed, separates them from the black leader from Atlanta, the Midwestern farmer, or the northeastern industrialist?

The second group of students, in almost diametric oppo-

sition to the first, is made up of those who are rightfully aware that their grandparents, in contrast with the grandparents of most of those around them, actually lived through the history their teachers are describing. Their issue, then, is not apathy but indignation. They look around at the class filled with students discussing all aspects of the Holocaust and feel somehow cheated out of their status as grandchildren of survivors. What right does the boy sitting next to me have to write a poem about his emotions regarding the Holocaust, when his most significant exposure to its horrors is this very classroom? How can this girl properly comment about that story of the frightened Jewish family hidden in forests of Poland when her family, at the time, needed to hide only from their Lower East Side landlord on the 15th of the month?

The dynamics of a classroom centered around Holocaust study are always fraught with complexity; and these two groups, each having valid thoughts and concerns deserving of our attention, are clear examples of that reality. Therefore, the remainder of this essay will focus on five potential solutions to the challenges at hand. Each solution presented will briefly attempt to tackle the issues raised by the above-mentioned students. Additionally, as these issues are, essentially, two sides of the same coin, each solution will also be framed, in some respect, to answer *all* the students at once.

### FIVE POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

**The Historical Response:** Especially in a Jewish context, there is something incredibly familiar about universalized suffering. That students more readily engage in debate concerning the universalized Holocaust is, on some level, more due to its relatively recent place in history than to its distinctiveness. However, conceptually, the notion of world Jewry subsuming responsibility for a particular event or conflict is inherent in the very fabric of what it means to be Jewish. Surely, not all of our ancestors died at the hands of overzealous Crusaders at the turn of the 11th century, yet entire pages are dedicated to its memory in the lamentations of *Tisha b'Av*. Certainly, only discrete ethnic segments of our medieval coreligionists endured the Inquisition and expulsion at the hands of 15th-century Spain and Portugal, but modern understandings of Jewish suffering point to that place and time as an example that informs all of our identities. Indeed, even in an American context, how many people today can actually trace their lineage back to the early colonialists (let alone fleeing English Puritans)? Still, across this country, on the fourth Thursday in November, families gather to appreciate their fortunes in keeping with the traditional themes of Thanksgiving. Our students, then, on both sides of our debate, may take comfort in knowing that the Holocaust was neither the first nor (probably) will it be the last time experiences of the few have been expanded into the lives of the many. Just as with the Crusades, the Inquisition,

and Thanksgiving, when it comes to the Holocaust, there are universal understandings and ideas relevant to us all.

**The Empathetic Response:** Unlike the historical response, this method is less of an explanation than an experience. It is often employed in Holocaust education classes, though without being framed as a solution to the challenges of universalization. Encouraging students to attempt to understand and to feel for those about whom we are learning—though literature, testimony, and film—is a valuable tool in a teacher's quest to make the history relevant. On what is the quintessential night of Jewish remembrance, the *seder*, we read, "In every generation one must look upon himself as if he had personally left Egypt" (*Pesachim* 9:5). There is even a Sephardic custom where those gathered around the *seder* table drape cloth bags filled with matzah over their shoulders as they walk, burdened, around the room.

In the same vein, I witnessed a group of young public school children on a tour through the Museum of Jewish Heritage in downtown Manhattan, experiencing something similar. The guide, wanting to impress the point of how cramped the living conditions were in a ghetto, asked the students to group close together. "Closer," she said, when the children were still not invading the private space of those around them. "Closer," she said again, as they now stood squished up against each other. "No, closer," she said for the last time, and the students were struggling to stand still in an area that once held a third of the group. "That," the guide said, "is *something* like how it must have felt *all the time*." Over the faces of these fourth graders, a dawning of realization passed. Cries of "Oh!" and "That's terrible!" were heard from just about everyone. They *understood* a fragment of the concept of crowding. They placed themselves, as best they could, into the scene they were hearing about, and when a whole class is being made to feel a part of the event they're learning about, there is no difference between the grandson of the survivor and the granddaughter of the non-survivor. We are all on the same playing field, because in this limited context, we are *all* trying to understand.

That said, I want to reiterate the limited place this approach should have in our classrooms, both in time spent and degree. Fear, such as the kind experienced by those who suffer tragedies, has no place in school or in museum visits. Attempts to replicate the conditions of the Holocaust should not be made. When they are made, they fail; no one today can experience what being in a ghetto or a camp was actually like through a simulation. Teachers should be conscious of the delicate balance between, on the one hand, helping the students *understand* the dark place that was the Holocaust and, on the other, trying not to bring them to a dark place themselves.

**The Sympathetic Response:** This, too, asks the students to

relate to the Jews of the Holocaust, but here the students internalize their connection via stories, journals, art, pictures, and other such material. These serve to depict the inherent similarities between the students and the children living through the Holocaust. The sympathetic response is utilized every time we read *The Diary of a Young Girl*, show pictures of Holocaust-era students the same age as our own, or have the class read a story about a life far removed from theirs yet somehow close to it. In this way, the gap that students feel either between themselves or others and the Holocaust can, at least in some degree, be bridged.

**The Social Justice Response:** This idea approaches the issue of universalization by dealing with it specifically. Entire lessons can use the Holocaust as a springboard for learning and teaching about other genocides. The crucial aspect of this response, then, is the involvement of the students in the discussion. If there are those who feel the Holocaust is somehow foreign to their identities, examine the reasons for those feelings. Consider the benefits and drawbacks in attempting to make the Holocaust inform the lives of those removed from it. Look at the students' expressed indifference not as a problem but as a trigger for a conversation about the importance of caring about our world and its inhabitants, despite our differences. The same is true for those who view the intense interest in or claiming of the Holocaust by those who are not grandchildren of survivors as disproportionate, irrational, or offensive: Shouldn't these students especially want the suffering of their relatives to be as meaningful as possible? Aren't their grandparents honored by lessons and morals all students can garner from their experiences? Cannot purpose be somehow found in what is otherwise an altogether purposeless and shameful event in human history? It can be quite appropriate to discuss the differences and similarities between the Holocaust and the genocides of the Ottoman Empire during World War I, Bosnia during the 1990s, or Sudan and Darfur today. The word "holocaust" may have become embedded in the lexicon of World War II, but "genocide" is a word that, so unfortunately, remains the property of conflicts the world over. As students of the Holocaust, ancestry aside, what is our responsibility to those suffering and dying on parts of this planet in which we have no connection whatsoever?

**The Collective Jewish Response:** Last, this approach, perhaps the most traditional of all, is also often the most difficult to impart. It is the idea born out of our understanding that "all of Israel is responsible for one another" (*Shavuot* 39a). It is the notion that, as members of the Jewish community, as family, as it were, despite our ethnic, geographical, and theological differences, we are somehow joined in a common mission. We are all stewards of a constantly imper-

iled people, and we are all charged with perpetuating not only our numbers but also our ideas and ideals. It is in this context that demographic charts and accompanying explanations may be appropriate. It may be eye-opening for the students to learn that we still have not—and may never—recover from the population loss inflicted on us during the Holocaust. It may be here that assimilation, affiliation, and intermarriage rates can be broached, not intending to imply doom or hopelessness but rather to insist on activism and more widespread communal education. The loss endured during the Holocaust is horrible and unacceptable but can, perhaps, inspire those who remain to memorialize the losses as strongly, powerfully, and personally as we can. It is to this task that all Jews must be committed, Holocaust-survivor ancestry or not.

### CAUGHT UP IN HOLOCAUST MEMORY

“Getting caught up in Holocaust memory,” writes Laura Levitt (2007), director of Temple University’s Jewish Studies Program,

is tied to the contradiction at the heart of what it means to identify with other Jews. Through identification we make a connection to all Jews, but we also acknowledge the differences that separate those of us whose families were not affected by the Shoah from those of us whose families were profoundly altered by it. (p. 16)

This statement, I feel, is an apt conclusion. The responses considered in the previous section share one characteristic. They each serve, in their own way, to equalize the experiences, emotions, and motivations of the students, to create a classroom of singular purpose, whatever that purpose may be. In many respects, this singularity is useful and necessary; stressing our similarities is commendable. However, teachers should not and must not stress those similarities at the *expense* of our differences. The central reason for examining our students’ common ground is to work toward the goal of an enthused and respectful Holocaust-study classroom. Once there, differences cannot be ignored. Part of the class is unique in their legacy of Holocaust survival. They should be encouraged to share their experiences and reflections on this heritage. Much of this class is somehow removed from the Holocaust. They, too, should be vocal and proud of their own heritage as they come to understand how their grandparents and great-grandparents fit into the larger narrative of Jewish history.

More than half a century after my grandmother first picked up her pen to write her thoughts in those small leather books, I believe I know more and feel more about the Holocaust than she ever knew or felt. I am still proud of her. I am proud *because* of her. I realize what connects me to those

who share or do not share my background: While I take pride in a shared and expanded heritage, I still revel in that which is specifically and singularly mine, and that is exactly how it should be. ■

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Mishnah, Tractate *Pesachim*, 9:5

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Shavuot*, 39a

"I'd missed the way people reach / inside, when even their faces are buried / in grime, to find something pretty, / something to shine." In this poem about her grandmother, Judith Chalmer reminds us that part of the legacy of the generations that follow the Holocaust is the knowledge of the quiet dignity of those who managed to overlay "the stubble and smear" with the beauty and pride they brought to the tasks they completed, even under Nazi orders.

*Judith Chalmer*

## *The Archivist*

I didn't expect it to be so  
pretty. I didn't want it to be  
so clean. It wasn't the Nazis  
who fingered the needle,  
stitched a neat cotton backing  
to the coarse-grained star.  
"It was my grandmother  
who lined it," I told the archivist  
when I dropped it on her table.

Slowly, as if lifting a thin yellow baby  
from her bath, the archivist raised  
the tired cloth to the light,  
ran her finger over the little scars,  
the tracks where my grandma pulled  
a heavy thread around all six points  
of the star. Look! She nodded  
to where the window framed wild iris,  
orchids banked in the yard, and the star  
translucent against the light.

I'd missed the way people reach  
inside, when even their faces are buried  
in grime, to find something pretty,  
something to shine—Beautiful! in the dirt,  
in the stubble and smear, Bright! in the blade  
of the knife. My eyes followed hers  
in the late gray light to the curled free end  
of the plain cotton thread my grandma hid  
fifty years ago, tucked way inside, so in hands  
like mine, it wouldn't come unraveled. ■

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