

E C H O E S

of memory

VOLUME
4

WHAT IS JUSTICE?

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

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WHAT IS JUSTICE?
STORIES FROM THE MEMORY PROJECT

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM



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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Sara J. Bloomfield

In this year that commemorates the 60th anniversary of the historic, precedent-setting Nuremberg Trials, it is an appropriate time to reflect on the meaning of justice. We know that justice is a highly inadequate term in light of the crimes of the Holocaust. Indeed, there can be *no* justice in the aftermath of the systematic murder of Europe's Jews—certainly no justice as we understand the term.

Just as we struggle to speak about so much of the Holocaust, here too we lack the proper language. Nevertheless, it is important to examine issues of justice and to ask critical questions about justice. We also know that the power of memory has often provided a more meaningful kind of accountability or moral reckoning than acts of justice—and that memory *and* justice are both necessary, just as they are both insufficient.

Therefore, this fourth volume of *Echoes of Memory* created by our Museum survivor volunteers is so very important. It is, in a sense, a reflection of their own search for justice. These personal recollections reveal some of the many forms of injustice that they endured and their own thoughts about the meaning of justice—then, now, and for the future.

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

With remarkable eloquence and clarity, these survivors invite us into their world and share with us astonishing stories of suffering and loss, renewal and rebirth, and unique perspectives on the notion of justice. We are indebted to them for their courage and determination; we admire them for their compassion and inspiration; and we thank them for constantly challenging us to build a more humane and peaceful world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sara J. Bloomfield". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial 'S'.

Sara J. Bloomfield

Director

September 17, 2006

INTRODUCTION

Margaret Polyzos Peterson

In the fall of 2000, I was asked to be a part of a new project at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum—to facilitate a writing workshop for the Museum’s survivor volunteers. The workshop was intended to help enable Holocaust survivors to better craft the stories of their lives. Since the workshop’s inception, I have been asked over and over again how this process is any better or different than survivors giving testimony or having recordings made of their talks. My answer has to do with the theme of justice highlighted in this, our fourth publication to date.

In trying to write about justice, there were invariably many debates among the survivors in the workshop: What is justice? Is the punishment of perpetrators any sort of justice? How can there be justice when so many lives were taken during the Holocaust and so many others irrevocably altered? Discussions of related ideas ensued. We talked about recompense, retribution, closure, and balance. I have come to an understanding that the concept of justice is meant to bring a sort of comfort to victims. Humans, I think, desire justice—as we desire order, truth, and objectivity. Nesse Godin, one of the survivors who participates in the workshop, wrote this year about questions that she is asked after speaking in public about her experiences during the Holocaust. She tells her audiences about the loss of her father, her imprisonment in a concentration camp, and her survival of a death march. When she is finished, she

INTRODUCTION

is often asked if she has been able to achieve “closure.” This is, I believe, an honest well-wishing from audience members who want peace for Nesse. What is implied in their desire for closure is, I think, the idea that there can be comfort for Nesse, that there can be justice for her.

If there can be a kind of justice, a comfort of sorts, could it come from the truest telling of one’s own story? I believe the writer has the ability to make the story say exactly what he or she means. Through the process of trying to choose the exact right words, the writer grapples with language, with his or her own perceptions, with memory; the writer works toward telling his or her own story as only he or she can. Through the process of writing and revision, the creation of a memoir becomes not only a first-person account of the story of the writer’s experience; it becomes the writer’s story. If our understanding of justice is that we listen to hear the truth, then the memoirs collected here are the primary sources we must have in order to hear that whole truth.



Margaret Polizos Peterson
Memory Project Instructor

JANUARY, 1945

Erika Eckstut

ERIKA ECKSTUT, FROM ZNOJMO, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, SURVIVED THE WAR POSING AS A CHRISTIAN WITH FALSE IDENTIFICATION PAPERS.



In January of 1945, we came to Snina. We came from Kiev. The reason we came was because my friend Monica told me on the night of December 24 that the NKVD [Soviet secret police] would come and pick up my sister and the old lady, Ms. Diernfeld, whom we had met during our travels in Russia. She referred to my sister as a German spy because she had very blonde hair and I never referred to her as my sister. I never talked about my family or anything personal.

I left my friend's house as I always did. When I got home I told the old lady and my sister what Monica said. They both said that we had to leave right away. So we left. None of us had anything much to take along. As we were going through the forest, we heard a man's voice asking us if we knew the military word. Ms. Diernfeld said, "The three women are running." All of the sudden a flashlight shone on her face. Then the flashlight went to the soldier's face and it got very quiet. Then the old lady and the soldier embraced. It was the son of the lady. She had two sons and a husband. The husband was killed and she was hoping that her two sons had joined the Czech army which had been formed in 1942 in Russia. Now she saw that this son had joined the army, but she still did not know where the other son had gone.

This son told her that he would go to the officers and ask them for permission to take us along. He came back and told us that he couldn't take anyone who was not in army uniform. So we didn't know what to do, we only knew that we had to leave. Then the lady's son came back and told us that two soldiers would take my sister and me and he would take his mother. So we went and when we got to Poland they took us off the tank in which we were traveling and the lady's son took us to the first house he saw. He told the woman who opened the door that Ms. Diernfeld was the wife of an officer and my sister and I were her two daughters and that he would come tomorrow to pick us all up.

The woman who opened the door said that was okay and told us that she had a room upstairs and we should go there. So we went and it was very cold and we did not take our coats off. My sister moved around and came back and said that we had to leave by the window. Ms. Diernfeld tried to say that she couldn't run but my sister did not pay attention and opened the window and said to me, "Just throw her out the window." My sister jumped out the window first. I asked the old lady if she would go to the window. She said no, so I asked her if she wanted my fist in her mouth. As I looked out the window, my sister was standing there with her arms extended and she broke the lady's fall. When I looked again, no arms were held for me so I jumped down on my own.

We went to the street and got in some military trucks and we made it to Snina. Snina was the first town we made it to in Czechoslovakia and we found troops of Czech soldiers there. They took us in and the first thing they did was give us food and whatever they gave us we finished and we all got sick. Then they tried to figure out what to do with us. They took Ms. Diernfeld into the army. They would have taken my sister also but I was too young to get in the army. The second thing they wanted was for my sister to get married. We stayed with a peasant and the soldiers and officers came to look at us. Then came a nice officer and he looked at my sister and he said that he would marry her and take her sister—me—along. He was 15 years older than my sister. My sister told him that she did not know him, did not love him, could not cook, and did not want to get married, so he left. The next day the whole army left.

That first night a stone broke our window. When I woke up, my sister was paying the man whose house we were staying in with the one piece of jewelry she had, a charm in the shape of a four-leaf clover. I also had a little charm but my sister said not to give it, that it was already taken care of, and today my little charm in the shape of the sun is worn by my daughter. The man my sister gave her charm to led us to Humene and to a young woman who came out of her house with a baby in her arms and the man told her that we would do for her whatever needed to be done. She asked us if we would wash the floor and

take care of her baby because she had to go to her mother or her grandmother. So of course we said yes and she told us that when she returned she would have food for us but for now she had only enough for the baby.

She left and my sister told me to take care of the baby and she would wash the floor. I did not know what to do with the noodles so I asked my sister and she said to put them in water and cook them. I did and after a while I looked and the noodles were one big clump so I started to take some of it in my mouth and chew and then gave it to the baby. The baby must have been as hungry as I was because he ate everything I put in his mouth. All of the sudden I heard someone yelling in Russian "You German spy!" I opened the door and stepped in front of my sister with the baby in my arms and told the men that my sister was not a German spy but a Jewish girl and then I told my sister to disappear. When the men saw that my sister was gone they started to yell. I told them not to worry, that she was still there, and then I started to tell them that she basically knew nothing, that she was not a spy, and then I made up a story about how she was mentally unstable.

All of the sudden a Czech soldier came and I could not understand what he was doing there. He played along with the story I had made up about Beatrice and told them that she was not okay but he made the story so tragic that I started to cry myself and finally they had to leave. Then I asked the Czech soldier how he knew where we were and he said that they got a call from the town where we were and was told that there were 16 Jews and they were all killed, so the soldiers came back to make sure we were okay. Then my sister asked if he knew where the officer was who wanted to marry her. He said he didn't, that he was fighting somewhere but he did not know where. So we stayed there and my sister kept looking for that officer. In March she found him and she asked if he would marry her. He said, "Sure." So on March 31 he married her and took me along and that was a very good thing for us. 🌻



STONES OF MEMORY*

Frank Ephraim

FRANK EPHRAIM WAS BORN IN BERLIN, GERMANY, AND EMIGRATED WITH HIS PARENTS IN FEBRUARY 1939 TO THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS, WHERE HE LIVED UNDER JAPANESE OCCUPATION AND LATER IN A REFUGEE CAMP.



The teakwood-decked police launch bumped gently against the white sides of the luxury liner anchored off Aden in the Arabian Sea as bright moonlight danced on the black waters. Two Arab harbor policemen stood, straight as lamp poles, on the narrow rear deck of the launch, their white-gloved hands on a shiny chrome railing to steady themselves. They wore tall red fezzes, which, to the curious European passengers aboard the Italian liner, created an exotic atmosphere, if not the pomp of colonial British rule.

The year was 1939 and although no state of war existed in Europe, Nazi Germany had expanded its hegemony into Austria and Czechoslovakia the year before. Jews in Nazi-occupied countries did not need to wait for actual combat; they already felt the assaults of hate, arrest, and banishment since Hitler came to power in 1933—and many had emigrated. By 1939, only a few countries allowed Jews to enter and most of the Italian liner's passengers were refugees headed for the Orient to places like Shanghai.

The Lehrmanns were one of the refugee families and, at the moment, Manfred Lehrmann leaned over the wooden rail and observed the swaying police launch. His wife, Hilde, stood next to him. They knew the senior British police official had boarded the liner an hour ago and they hoped he would give his permission for them to go ashore—just for two hours. They had handed their passports to the ship's purser with the request that he approach the official. It was a tradition, they had said to the purser, and showed him the two small stones they had brought along.

Now they waited, both standing on the promenade deck by the rail. They looked at one another, but their eyes did not meet. Manfred knew what was on Hilde's mind. Certainly the same thing that was on his.

*Work of fiction

“Yes, and imagine how he must have felt—his wife and small son left behind and the Gestapo on his tail.”

“It is too bad...” Hilde did not finish the sentence because out of the corner of her eye she caught sight of the purser in his white tropical uniform as he emerged from the door to the ship’s reading lounge behind him.



I am crouched low to the handlebars of my old BMW R-16 motorcycle. It is cold and dark on this stretch of road, the big oaks standing silent like sentinels as I speed by, the noise of the engine the only sound in my ears. Thank God I was able to quickly find my leather cap and the precious goggles. I dare not think what I would have done without them. I am still wearing a suit and tie under my old dark brown leather jacket which, with its lamb’s wool collar, keeps my upper body quite warm. But only the lower side shields of the motorcycle deflect the cold air from my legs.

There had been no time to search for the heavy canvas pants and the boots. And now the metal clamps that I hastily snapped around my ankles to secure my pants legs feel like bands of ice. But that cannot be helped and I better keep my eyes on the dark road. It is difficult because I have not slept in almost two days.

Something is racing across the road. I can see a streak of white. Ah, only a fox—and it disappears into the woods. The headlamps are not very strong but they must have frightened the animal. I know how the fox feels.

The road seems endless and I strain to look out for bumps and holes. But my thoughts meander.

Strangely, lines from Goethe’s “The Erlking” begin to scroll through my mind. They flash by in bright red, like a warning. *Who’s riding so late through th’ endless wild?* Then the next line follows quickly like the crack of a whip: *The father ’tis with his infant child.*

As I try to push the vision away, I see the image of my father laughing. He used to take mother and me for motorcycle rides on the dirt roads around Zellheim. We would ride in the sidecar.

Oh! There is black ice ahead. It glistens in the light of the half moon. Careful now, slow down. I must not slip.

The road is clear again and the poem forces its way back into my thoughts. I know it by heart. Herr Volker had drummed it into us boys as we sat in the bare classroom of the ancient stone schoolhouse. *My son, my son, no one’s in our way,/The willows are looking unusually gray.* The sixth stanza. It always made me anxious. I hold tight to the handlebars, my body tense, because I know what is coming.

My son. He is asleep, I hope, in our warm house in Zellheim. The little fellow does not know his father is racing to Berlin 200 kilometers away on this terror-struck night of November 9, 1938. No, the boy is not aware that a neighbor, a Storm Trooper no less, had whispered a warning: “The Gestapo will come to arrest you this evening.”

Me? A Jewish pharmacist with three generations of family born in Zellheim? But I am no fool. I know what will happen. They will search the house, harass Emily, my wife, and force the sale of my business for token change—just to be able to say they officially bought it.

Dear father, oh father, he seizes my arm!/ The Erlking, father, has done me harm. Father’s face appears before me again. The deep lines on his face portray a strong man, but the hazel eyes are weighed with sorrow. I swing my head rapidly from side to side to make the image go away. It does, but I can feel a line of cold sweat form on my brow.

There are lights ahead. A car approaches. Steady now, better slow down a bit, but not too much. The car passes, but there are more lights. I am hungry, but I cannot risk a stop. And I pray there is enough fuel to reach Manfred's house in the Charlottenburg district of Berlin. Perhaps I will be safe there, at least until Emily and our son can follow me.

Snowflakes suddenly sweep by with a roar of angry wind that bellows the last line of Goethe's tragic poem—*The infant son in his arms was dead.*



"Manfred," Hilde gasped in the grip of fright. She tried to shake Manfred awake.

"Manfred, wake up. There is a knock at the door." Her husband, roused from sleep, could feel his wife tremble. Even in the half light of the darkened bedroom in their apartment located *par terre*—on the ground floor—of the apartment house he could see the terror on Hilde's face.

"Yes? What?"

"There is a knock on the front door," Hilde repeated.

Manfred rolled out of bed and bent over the nightstand.

"A quarter to five," he said. "What...?" Then he too heard the knock. It was not loud, but the image of two Gestapo agents in black leather coats shot into his consciousness. Their usual tactic, he knew. Grab people before they could think. Arrest, interrogate, and torture them to admit to any trumped-up charge they invented.

Hilde's eyes pleaded, "What do we do?"

Recently, as Gestapo arrests had escalated, Manfred had occasionally slept at the home of his two maiden aunts in the hope that the Gestapo would not think to look for him there. But Hilde was so afraid of being alone.

There was the knock again. A light tap, tap. The Gestapo, he knew, banged on doors. But perhaps they were playing coy tonight.

“Put something on quickly Manfred and get out through the back door.”

The back door in the kitchen led to a common corridor, which opened on to a field behind the apartment house. When Manfred had slept away from home, he would come back that way and Hilde would turn the kitchen light on and off a couple of times to signal that no one had asked for him and that it was safe to come home.

“It is no use Hilde. If it is them, they will have a man in the back, too.” Hilde stood in her dressing gown. Neither had switched on the light.

“I will go and look to see who it is.” Her determination surprised Manfred and he slipped into a pair of pants, then reached for a shirt from the chest of drawers near the window.

With the shirt in hand Manfred tiptoed out of the bedroom. He heard Hilde fumble with the latch. The front door was solid wood and Manfred knew that the next second could determine his destiny. He clenched his jaw.

“Ludwig!” The tension drained instantly as Manfred heard Hilde’s whisper.

Manfred ran toward her to disengage the chain.

“Quickly, Hilde, let him in before the neighbors hear us.” He put his fingers to his lips.

“God! Ludwig. What are you doing here?”

Ludwig Wolfson, his cousin Emily’s husband, wore a leather jacket and held a leather motorcyclist’s cap in his hand as he staggered inside. His face red with cold, eyes glassy with fatigue, Ludwig nodded a few times as if trying to find his voice.

“You did not answer my knocks,” the hoarse voice struggled out of his throat.

“We thought it was the...” Hilde said, her eyes wide with anxiety, but Ludwig’s lips cracked into a faint smile.

“I know, I know,” he said. “I was not sure if I could make it here without being caught.”

Hilde walked into the kitchen and pulled down the shade before she switched the light on. She reached for the coffeepot as Manfred opened the metal breadbox.

The weary Ludwig sat down and in between bites he told Manfred and Hilde what had happened in Zellheim.

Hilde got up from the kitchen table and peeked out from behind the window blind.

“Dawn is fast approaching, but you must get some sleep Ludwig.”

“God! My motorcycle, it’s still outside, in front.”

“We have to hide it,” Manfred said as he looked from Hilde to Ludwig. “It must not be seen by anyone. The neighbors on both sides are Aryans. They will report us.” With that he got up and headed for the front door. “I will wheel it into the apartment. That’s our only choice.”

“You can sell it, Manfred,” Ludwig called after him wearily. “Once Emily gets here we will not stay

very long. I did manage to book passage on an Italian ship bound for Shanghai. It is our only chance to escape. I only hope nobody saw me come here.”

“Ludwig, please, everything will be all right. Now lie down on the couch in the living room. Manfred will bring the motorcycle in.”

Still dressed in his suit—he had taken off the tie—Ludwig stretched out and put his head on the beige velvet pillow at the foot of the couch.

As he fell asleep, the characters of Goethe’s poem appeared before him again, but the faces were blurred.



“I hope the British police official will allow us to land,” Hilde said to Manfred as the ship’s purser made his way toward them.

“Excuse me, Herr Lehrmann,” the purser said, affecting an official smile as he struggled with his German. “The English police major did not understand what you want. He wants to see you himself.” With that he handed the passports back to Manfred. “Come with me.”

“Well, Hilde, my English is very poor,” Manfred said. “But let us try.”

“We have to do it for Emily,” Hilde said.

“Yes, for Emily and the boy,” answered Manfred. They had been shocked by the news when the telegram, sent from Singapore, had arrived. Ludwig—a heart attack just as their ship had entered the Suez Canal on its way to Shanghai. The ship’s captain had ordered the body taken ashore at the next stop—Aden—for burial. And when the ship reached Singapore, a distant relative of Emily’s had arranged for her and the boy to remain there, pending further travel.

“No one will ever visit here again, Hilde. The least we can do is leave the small rocks to show that someone has visited the grave.”

“Perhaps we can even arrange for a headstone.”

Manfred nodded his head solemnly at Hilde’s suggestion, and as he turned to follow the purser, he whispered, “I hope so.” But he knew that would not be possible.

The British police officer sat stiffly behind a rosewood desk in his vestibule near the ship’s entry port. A tan tropical helmet sat on the desktop, its gold badge of service exuding authority. The man’s pale blue eyes squinted at the approaching couple, led by the purser.

“Yes? What do you want?” The clipped accent was meant to intimidate.

Manfred tried to explain, but the officer made no attempt to understand the German words that crept into the plea and demanded Manfred repeat himself.

Finally, Manfred thought, the man had understood.

The police major stretched out his hand in a gesture that indicated he wanted to see the passports.

He opened one, then the other.

With his right index finger he pointed at the large red letter J—which the Nazis had stamped into the passports of all Jews.

“Sorry, His Majesty’s government does not allow Jews without entry visas to debark on British territory.” 🌿

THE JUDGMENT, IN TWO PARTS

Manya Friedman

MANYA FRIEDMAN, FROM CHMIELNIK, POLAND, SURVIVED THE GOGOLIN TRANSIT CAMP; GLEIWITZ, RAVENSBRÜCK, AND RECHLIN CONCENTRATION CAMPS; AND A DEATH MARCH.



With disbelief we watched the young men, our soldiers, looking tired, in deplorable condition, many wounded, returning defeated from the frontline after only a few days of fighting.

It was most astonishing to us. For years we had been taught in school about the bravery of our fighting armies—how the Polish armies always bravely stood up against the enemy. They stood in the defense of Europe from the armies pouring in from Asia. They stopped the Tartars and defeated the Turks. Even the Polish national anthem attests to the bravery of its fighting soldiers—the song the soldiers sang in the Polish Legion marching in the armies of Napoleon, in Haller’s Army, as they marched with the French, English, and Americans in the First World War:

Poland still is not forgotten
while her sons remain
Honor out of shame begotten
Let our swords proclaim.

Being young and patriotic, we were very proud to know this. Therefore the shocking revelation we were witnessing was unbelievable.

Some time later, in my hometown in central Poland, a handsome young man, who happened to be Jewish, also returned wounded from the front, a bullet lodged in his knee. He was kept secretly at home, hidden from several deportations. It was obvious what his destiny would be if deported. His family was temporarily spared from the deportations because they owned a large machine shop and were therefore

useful to the Germans because they could do all kinds of repairs for them. But the Jewish population in town kept diminishing and the family was concerned that soon their turn would come.

They had a close acquaintance, a Pole, who lived in a neighboring hamlet, and he agreed to provide a hiding place for the young man. The family was relieved. The Pole also agreed to hide the young man's sweetheart—I can still recall what a handsome couple they made. A hasty wedding was arranged, and the couple went into hiding. The families of the young man and his wife were both well-off and the acquaintance was well compensated. The young man's family also buried many valuable items on the Pole's property.

Finally, the young man's family was deported to the camps with the rest of the Jewish population in town. The young man's mother was sent to Auschwitz and the other members of the family were sent to different camps in Germany. Miraculously, the mother managed to avoid evacuation and the death march when the Soviet army was approaching, by hiding under a staircase. She was soon liberated by the Soviet army and was the first one to return to their hometown, hoping to find her hidden son and his wife.

She could not find them, nor the acquaintance that was hiding them. Eventually, the acquaintance's neighbor told her that the young couple had been killed. With help, the mother searched the wooded area and found the burial place. When they unearthed the grave they found two decapitated bodies. The heartbroken mother had them removed and buried in the Jewish cemetery. There is now no trace of that Jewish cemetery.

The acquaintance and his family vanished and were never brought to justice.



The adjustment to life in this new country was quite challenging. I had not only to master the language but also adopt to an entirely new way of life. There were new manners, behaviors, ways of addressing people. I was uncomfortable addressing everybody as “you”—I was used to calling people Mr., Mrs., and Miss. I was teased for using a fork and knife without switching from one hand to the other. At first I was embarrassed, until I started watching movies and noticed that the actors did it my way. Even ironing the clothing (before perma-press) became an item of ridicule. Adjusting to a new job, bus schedules, and routes was another challenge.

Then it became time to furnish a new apartment. I recall my husband’s aunt promised us a set of dinner dishes, but in the meantime I just bought two settings for us. I also tried to acquire culinary skills, attempting to please my husband by cooking dishes his mother used to cook. One day my husband was visiting some of his relatives and brought them all back for dinner. (He was very sociable.) We had to eat in shifts. The stacks of books on the floor served as chairs, in addition to the two lone kitchen chairs.

Amid all that turmoil my husband received a letter from friends in a displaced persons camp in Germany reporting that they had received their visas to come to the States. My husband was very pleased with the news, but I was somewhat concerned about how we would accommodate them. Luckily upon their arrival, a Jewish organization arranged a place for them to stay and jobs for both husband and wife. The jobs were not exactly what they were trained to do, but with limited knowledge of English they were glad to have some employment. The newcomers were also friends of some other members of my husband’s family. After some time they all got together to help the newcomers find a place in a better neighborhood and better jobs.

One of my cousins who had also arrived from a displaced persons camp some time before had a very responsible job at a large factory, and because of his skills was made foreman. My husband approached him and asked if he could provide employment for his newly arrived friend. The man was hired, and my

cousin seemed pleased with the new employee's performance. They could communicate in their native language. Things went well, everybody was happy, until one day my cousin found out that my husband's friend was a "goy" (a Christian, a Pole). This news brought back the bitterness and the agonizing memories of his brother and sister-in-law who had been decapitated by another Pole.

He was furious with us, he would not listen to any explanation or reason. It took some time till my husband managed to sit down with my cousin. He told him that he fully understood how he felt, but that he could not blame all Poles for what was done to his brother and sister-in-law, and he succeeded in telling him the story about the Pole whom he had hired.

When Germany invaded Poland, this young man, a Pole, was engaged to a young Jewish lady. They resided in Warsaw. When the deportation of Warsaw's Jews started, he married this young woman and decided to take care of her two sisters and her mother. His family was very much against this, fearing that if they were discovered they would all pay the consequences—maybe even with their lives. But he went ahead with his plan and became estranged from his own family. He got false papers for his wife's family, and they moved away from Warsaw. The wife's mother had to go into hiding because of her Semitic features. They all survived. The mother and the two sisters went to Palestine after the war, and the young couple left Poland and went to a displaced persons camp in Germany, where my husband and some of his relatives met them.

At last my husband convinced my cousin that it was not just to blame his friend for the crimes another Pole had committed. 🌿

A HEADSTONE IN THE AIR

Manya Friedman

The Bonaventure Cemetery in Savannah, Georgia—acres of land located on the Wilmington River—is visited every year by thousands of tourists. It is a unique burial place dating back to the 18th century. In addition to the famous Georgians that are interred there, there is an unusual collection of statues telling the story of the people whose graves they adorn as well as an assortment of mausoleums and headstones. The most touching are the statuettes on the graves of young children. One reads: “Papa’s Sweetheart.” The moss-draped mighty old oaks stand erect protecting the elegant statuary and headstones. The cemetery is on the National Registry of Historic Places.

At the beginning of the 20th century, one of Savannah’s Jewish congregations purchased land in the cemetery and established a Jewish burial section. They also erected a burial preparation chapel, which was recently renovated. There is a place for services, benches for mourners, and marble plaques with some names and dates of the deceased. According to Jewish law, the Jewish section is less ornate. However, this section is easy to recognize by the many pebbles covering the headstones and graves, an indication that they have been visited by relatives and friends.

After walking through the rows of graves, reading the names and dates of several generations buried there, I came across a seemingly insignificant headstone. What caught my attention was the number of pebbles on the headstone and on the ground around it. The inscription read: “Here lieth a third of the ashes of 344 cremated sacred souls. Victims of the Nazis, including the remains of Schmul, son of Y’Cheel Szcerkowski who was killed on the third of Nison 5705—March 17, 1945 and brought here from Alem, Hanover, Germany.” The father of one of the victims brought the ashes to the United States.

I kept lingering at that grave, reading and rereading the inscription while envious thoughts started to circle in my mind. Here was a group of people killed by the murderous Nazis, but at least their ashes are

buried where one can come to pray for their souls, meditate...My thoughts went back to my own parents and my two younger brothers. How I wished that there was somewhere a marker indicating their place of burial. Instead, I can only envision the smoke from the chimney rising toward the sky and a handful of ashes from the ovens of Auschwitz scattered around in the fields and blown away by the wind.

How can I place a pebble, a sign of visitation, on this headstone in the air? 🍀

SPIRITUAL RESISTANCE— THE HANGING

Nesse Godin

NESSE GODIN, FROM SIAULIAI, LITHUANIA, ENDURED A CONCENTRATION CAMP, FOUR LABOR CAMPS, AND A DEATH MARCH. SHE SPENT FIVE YEARS IN A DISPLACED PERSONS CAMP IN FELDAFING, GERMANY, BEFORE IMMIGRATING TO THE UNITED STATES.



Nineteen forty-three was a very cold winter. Life in the ghetto was very difficult. People did not have wood to heat their rooms; they burned every piece of wooden furniture to keep warm. The hunger was great—the small ration that was given to us could not keep us alive.

When you worked outside of the ghetto you had contact with Lithuanian people who tried to help by sharing some food with you. Some people bartered some of their belongings for food so they could bring back some for their family, especially for their children or elderly parents who did not go to work.

To bring food into the ghetto was forbidden. The order by the Nazis was no smuggling food into the ghetto. When people came back from work, they were searched at the gate. Some of the Lithuanian policeman were bribed and they searched you but let you in with a few potatoes or a piece of bread.

Every so often, German SS officers came to the gate as groups of Jews were coming back from work. Many people were caught with food and taken to the Gestapo jail, where they were tortured and beaten.

Sometimes the Jewish Council intervened and the people were let out from jail. Records show that at the end of May, the Jewish Council was called to the Gestapo, where they were told that the Gestapo was holding a man by the name of Bezalel Mazavecki, who broke the law and was caught with some potatoes and bread as he was trying to smuggle them into the ghetto. Mazavecki was just trying to bring a little food for his wife and little girl.

The Jewish Council tried very hard to convince the head of the Gestapo—I believe his name was Bub—to let the man free but they did not succeed. The Gestapo ordered that a gallows be made in the Kaukazus ghetto—where my family lived—in the center of the large space, near the gate, where people assembled to go out to work. Two Jewish men were to be appointed to be the henchmen.

On Black Sunday, the beginning of June, all the Jews from the two ghettos were to assemble at that place near the gate. The Lithuanian police were running through the ghetto, checking every place to make sure that everyone obeyed the order.

When my family and I got to that place, there were already many people there. What I saw was a table in the middle of the area. On top of the table was a chair and a wooden pole with a cord hanging down. The two Jewish men that were to do the hanging stood near the table. I do not know how they were picked.

There was a silence, as though the angel of death was right there. All of a sudden we heard motorcycles and trucks coming. We saw many SS men and the head of the Gestapo, Bub, coming through the gate. Behind them Bezalel Mazavecki was led in by the police. He was taken directly to the gallows.

We were hoping that at the last minute the death sentence would be called off. When we saw Bub all our hope was gone. When Mazavecki reached the table, he asked to untie his hands and legs and then he hopped on the table, put the cord over his head, and with a loud voice he said to the Jewish men that were supposed to hang him that he forgave them and to the SS murderers and Lithuanian police he said, “You are not going to win the war by hanging me.” Then he kicked the chair from under his feet and his body fell limp.

The cry of the Jewish people was so loud, with people saying the kaddish, the prayer for the dead. Then dead silence. Bub, the commander of the Gestapo, made a speech. “This will be the punishment for anyone who tries to bring food into the ghetto,” he said. Then he turned around, walked through the gate, got on his motorcycle, and left.

I stood there wishing it was a bad dream, or that the earth under my feet would swallow me so I would not have had to witness that crime against an innocent person.

Yes, the Nazis killed Bezalel Mazavecki, but even in the last minutes of his life he resisted them spiritually. Every day of the Holocaust, Jewish people resisted the Nazis—some by fighting with guns and many of us just by not losing hope and surviving day by day. 🌻

SEARCHING FOR MY FATHER'S ASHES

Nesse Godin

For many years I have been sharing memories about my life as a prisoner under Nazi occupation during the time we call the Holocaust. I do so with the hope that humanity will learn the truth of what happened and, most of all, so they will not allow it to happen again to any human beings regardless of how they pray or how they look or where they came from. People always ask questions. They ask if I am still Jewish or if I believe in G-d. People also like to know if I went back home to Siauliai, Lithuania.

My answer to them is always the same: Why would I not be Jewish or believe in G-d? It was the Nazis that did these killings; we the Jews were the victims. We the people have a free will to do good or bad. I always say I was born in a Jewish family. I suffered as a Jew and I will die as a Jew. I'd rather be the victim than the murderer.

To the other question my answer is: There was no reason for me to go back to Lithuania. There was no more home or family waiting for me. The people in the audience always say that it would be a good idea to go back to find something they call "closure."

I did not know what this thing called closure was or is and I did not bother to look it up in the dictionary. There were reasons that I could not go to Lithuania. It was occupied by the Soviet Union and they would not let you visit. I believe it was 1992 when Lithuania became independent; by that time I had already given up my paying job and was volunteering for the United States Holocaust Memorial Council and then for the Museum when it opened in 1993, and so I could not afford such a trip.

One day when I spoke to a group of Council members, the question about going to find closure came up. And when I gave my usual answer, the chairman of the Council, Mr. Meyerhoff, offered to give me his frequent-flyer points so I could go to find this thing called closure.

I took this opportunity and decided to make the trip. My family could not go with me, so a dear friend offered to be my companion. We traveled to all the places that I lived before the occupation and also to all the camps I was imprisoned in and we looked and looked but we could not find this thing called closure.

For many years I wondered what happened to my father's remains. I knew that Papa was taken in a selection from the ghetto on November 5, 1943, and sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp. That was a big selection where the Nazis took a thousand children and many elderly and sick and many healthy and strong. After the war, records showed that they were all killed there in gas chambers and their bodies were burned in crematoria.

So we decided to go to Auschwitz to look for my father's remains, his ashes. A guide took us to Auschwitz—now it is called Birkenau—and we walked through the buildings that are now offices and some small museums. We found the gas chambers—they were all scrubbed clean. I stood in one of them and wondered how my Papa died. Did he suffer or did G-d take him quickly? Then we went looking for the crematoria. There used to be many of them; now they are just piles of rubble. There were signs with numbers on them.

I tried to find information so I would know where to look but no one knew where the victims of the Siauliai ghetto were burned. There was no specific information, no records. So I walked among the rubble of those crematoria looking on the ground searching for the ashes of my Papa. There were ashes among the many stones and sand, ashes of millions of Jewish men, women, and children.

The sky was gray and it was a cold and windy day. I just decided to pick a spot and light the memorial candle that I brought with me from home. I closed my eyes, put the candle on the ground, and tried to light it but the wind would not let me do it—it kept blowing the candle out. So I gathered some stones and

some pebbles and made a small little circular tower just big enough to hold the candle and then I lit it. I said the prayer of kaddish, the memorial prayer, and then I stood up and took a picture so at least I would have something to remember that moment with and to show my family.

I did not notice that a crowd had gathered around me. It was a teacher with students from England. Everyone shook my hand and many people said that they will never forget that day and neither will I. I came home to the United States with no closure. I feel good that at least I lit a candle among the ashes of millions of our brethren who were gassed and burned in the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz-Birkenau—among them the ashes of my Papa, Pinchas Galperin. 🕯️

S E L M A

Louise Lawrence-Israëls

LOUISE LAWRENCE-ISRAËLS WAS BORN IN HAARLEM, NETHERLANDS, AND SURVIVED THE WAR BY HIDING ON THE FOURTH FLOOR OF A ROWHOUSE IN AMSTERDAM.



Just after the war started in the Netherlands in 1940, my parents moved to a house on a quiet tree-lined street in the town of Haarlem, about 15 miles to the west of Amsterdam. Life was as normal as you could expect under the circumstances: wartime, occupation, the persecution of Jews.

A large Jewish family lived across the street from us. The father was the president of the Jewish community in Haarlem. The family consisted of the parents, their seven adult children, and one set of grandparents. The house was nicknamed "The House with Elastic Walls." On Shabbat, they sometimes had 20 people staying over, and even more people for Shabbat dinner. Our family was always invited, and we became very good friends.

When I was born in 1942, one of their daughters, Selma, often walked across the street to give my mom a hand whenever needed. One day, when I was about five months old, Selma was standing with me in her arms, looking out of the window facing her house. She saw a truck stop in front of her house and watched her whole family get rounded up, pushed on to the truck, and driven away. One of her brothers later escaped. From that time on, Selma stayed with my family. My family and Selma went into hiding soon after that horrible incident.

Selma took care of me, taught me how to walk and talk, and made the most beautiful doll as a present for my second birthday. From our days in hiding, I always remember her sweet smiling face and all the attention she gave me.

After we were liberated in 1945, Selma found out that her whole family, except the brother who had escaped, had been murdered in Auschwitz. Selma got married and adopted a brother and sister, two Jewish war orphans. Selma and her husband decided not to have children of their own so that they could give all of their attention to those children who had suffered such great losses.

I spent most of my summers with Selma and her family and loved it. My parents had decided not to talk about the war. They did not want to burden their children. I always had a lot of questions but I saved them until it was summer again because Selma was always willing to answer and explain. I realized much later how careful she was with her answers, in order not to step on my parents' toes.

Selma dreamed for many years of making *aliya* to Israel. After her husband passed away, she did just that at the age of 82. Before she left Holland, I visited her with my whole family to say good-bye. My husband and daughters had met Selma, but we now had two sons-in-law and a granddaughter, Miriam—the same name as Selma's mother. It was so important for me that my family know Selma and my special feelings for her.

Selma loved living in Israel and she was very close to her son and his children, who had moved there a few years before. My husband and I visited her every other year and it was always like we had seen her just the day before. We spoke often on the telephone and shared our lives in that way. In the independent living apartment building where she lived, she was a ray of sunshine for the other elderly people.

Selma passed away in 2003, but her warmth and love will always stay with me. I was so lucky to have had her friendship, and I consider her my best friend. 🌸

H U N G E R W I N T E R

Louise Lawrence-Israëls

It was cold, bitter cold. I was only two and a half years old. My feet itched and hurt and then itched again—the result of chronic cold feet. The attic where my family was hiding had no heating, only a very small camping-like stove that was only used to heat water or some food, if we had it. It was the coldest winter in a long time. The southern part of the Netherlands was already liberated. We were in Amsterdam, the northern part. We were isolated and it was very difficult to get food, oil, or wood to heat. Trees were chopped down clandestinely in the night. Punishment for that action would be fierce.

We were always hungry. My mother would ask our friend Selma, who was hiding with us, “Are you hungry?” and she would reply, “Oh no, not yet,” and vice versa, and that after a day without food. If there was anything to eat it was always for the children first. We could not get to a pharmacy to get a cream or other medication for my feet.

Before going to bed my brother and I had to go on a potty, and then put our feet in our urine. That made the pain better.

We had no idea that this was dirty or bad; we were just told that the pain would go away and that we would be able to sleep. Children do believe what parents or people with authority tell them. They do not argue or contradict them if they have never seen others do that. Our blankets were threadbare, but the children went to bed well wrapped.

Nobody complained and we were always told that things would get better. 🍀

T E A R S

Louise Lawrence-Israëls

My brother and I heard shouting and loud noises all around us. He was five years old and I was three. We had lived a very quiet life for two and a half years between our safe walls.

For the first time, we saw our father climb on a chair and open the window, and we heard what the shouting was all about: "Peace, there is peace." It was May 5, 1945. We had to ask what the word "peace" meant. The explanation did not sink in.

While in hiding, my father had baked some very nutritious cookies with lots of butter and sugar and he had sealed them in tins. The cookies were for times when there was no food, or in case we would have to flee from our hiding place. Sometimes half a cookie had to do for an entire day for the children. I am sure the adults did without very often.

When peace came, my parents had managed to save one whole tin. My father got the last tin and opened it and we were allowed to take as much as we could eat. After two cookies, we felt full.

My parents waited one day and on May 6 they took us outside to the park that we had lived across from for two and a half years. It was very frightening for my brother and me, and we held each other's hands tightly. Our parents put us on a grassy field and told us to play.

We looked at each other and started to cry. We wanted to go back inside, where it was safe. We liked our four walls. We were afraid to be without the walls.

It must have been devastating for our parents when, after dreaming for years of showing us the outside world, my brother and I stood and cried.

It was the first time I saw my mother cry. 🌸

THE TRAIN STATION

Louise Lawrence-Israëls

After liberation in 1945, we started a new daily routine. We had regular mealtimes, but food was still scarce. My brother and I did not realize that it was normal to eat three times a day. For us, every time we sat down to eat was a surprise.

Daily we got a bowl of oatmeal and that was the one food I did not like. My mom found a way to make me finish my bowl though: If I finished I could go out and play. When I first came out of hiding, I was afraid to be outside. That did not last long; I loved to be with my brother.

With ration coupons, my mom was also able to buy biscuits. Sometimes they were too hard for the children to eat, so my mom picked out the softer ones and put them aside for us. One biscuit at teatime for each.

Our friend Selma, who had been in hiding with us, also got into a new routine. As soon as trains were running again, she went to the station every day. She had not given up hope that one of the trains would bring at least one relative back. One day after being outside with my brother, we went inside and saw a stranger in our apartment. He was talking to our parents.

It was Selma's fiancé, from before the war. He had been in hiding in the southern part of the Netherlands, but Selma did not know that. He had walked from the south all the way to Amsterdam. It took him weeks. He was not in very good shape and also not so young.

My mom left our place to look for Selma and found her at the train station, where Selma had had another disappointing day. Mom told her to go home with her, where a surprise would be waiting for her.

In the meantime Jo, her fiancé, had been so nervous he ate all the soft biscuits. My brother and I were shocked. It was a happy reunion for Selma and Jo. They were married as soon as possible.

Selma did not give up her daily trek to the train station.

They lived with us until Jo got a job with the government in The Hague. After a few months, when they moved from Amsterdam to The Hague, Selma started to realize that her chances of seeing her family again were very slim.

Years later she found out that they all had perished in Auschwitz. Selma and Jo were happy together, and decided to adopt two war orphans, a brother and a sister.

Jo passed away in 1990 and Selma made *aliya* to Israel in 1992. That had been her dream since the end of the war. She passed away in Israel in 2003. 🕊️

HOUSE CALL*

Pete Philipps



PETE PHILIPPS WAS BORN IN ESSEN, GERMANY. IN 1936 HE AND HIS PARENTS FLED TO PRAGUE, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, THEN TO GENOA, ITALY, AND IN 1939 TO QUITO, ECUADOR. THE FAMILY ARRIVED IN THE UNITED STATES IN MAY 1941.

After two days of intermittent April rain, the wind turned, bearing Arctic cold and heavy wet snow; it rapidly covered the patchwork of fields that stretched from the barn to the line of pines along the river—his horizon since the day he had gone into hiding. From his tiny unglazed window, the view brought back memories of family winter vacations in Berchtesgaden and Kitzbühel. By the time he entered high school, Blumenfeld was already a first-rate Alpine skier, with dreams of a berth on the German Olympic team. Now snow, even at its most pristine, held no appeal; instead, it only added to his isolation. But for the wretched condition of his shoes, he would have attempted a short walk under cover of the approaching darkness. Maybe the weather will keep the RAF home so I can get a full night's sleep, he thought. Unless the pain again kept him awake.

Punctual as always, Frau Zapf's head appeared above the trapdoor as the church bell in the village tolled five o'clock. What would it be tonight? Mashed turnips or cabbage soup and bread? It hardly mattered. Everything tasted the same. Nothing stilled his gnawing hunger. Soon he would have to punch another hole in his belt to keep his pants from falling. Good thing he had no mirror to corroborate the apparition he imagined.

"Guten Abend, Herr Blumenfeld." After nearly two years, they still addressed one another formally. "What a miserable night." She blew one end of her scarf away from her face, a face that reminded Blumenfeld of a yellow, overripe apple.

He nodded, distracted by the savory aroma of something unfamiliar.

*Work of fiction

"I've brought you a special treat." She set two kettles on the floor, one with his supper, the other the hot water he'd asked for.

"May I ask what it is?"

"Something different for a change. I hope you will like it."

"Is it a surprise?"

She nodded and gave him a rare smile. "I am so proud of my husband, that a man in his condition can still hunt."

"I can hardly wait."

"Are you feeling any better, Herr Blumenfeld?"

It had been a week since he first asked for hot water. Reluctant to be an even greater burden, he had not revealed its purpose; neither had Frau Zapf or her husband asked. "Unfortunately not," he said. Lately, in fact, the pain had become more intense, and earlier that day he had noticed an ugly discharge. Quickly changing the subject, he asked if there were any new developments.

"Goebbels is claiming another major victory in the east."

He grimaced. "Anything else?"

"Rations of certain foodstuffs are being reduced again." She looked away as she said this.

"We can only hope Goebbels is lying again." He paused, not certain whether to go on. "Surely another cut in rations is not a good sign."

"Somehow we will manage," Frau Zapf said, turning to face him again. She took a deep breath. "You needn't be concerned."

“How can I ever repay you and your husband for what you are doing? And at such risk to yourselves.”

“You know it makes me uncomfortable when you say such things.” She had seated herself on the milking stool, the only piece of furniture in the loft. “We are not...” She pulled a handkerchief from her apron. “We are God-fearing Christians. More than that I cannot say.”

Blumenfeld thought about his wife. Ever defiant, Bianca had refused to go into hiding. Instead she had opted to risk living out the war in Berlin by posing as their landlady’s gentile aunt. Unable to communicate, neither knew whether the other was still alive. He had mentioned Bianca to the Zapfs only once, the day they agreed to shelter him. But then, fearing arrest and interrogation, he had destroyed the one snapshot of his wife that he used to carry in his billfold.

“Perhaps we should get our doctor,” Frau Zapf was saying. “I can see that you are in great pain.”

He lifted himself to a sitting position and waved the suggestion aside. “No, no. You cannot take the risk. Besides, I feel confident that after I eat some of your wonderful surprise I will feel much better.”

The compliment made no impression. “I assure you Doktor Klammer is a good man, someone we can trust.” She got up and approached the ladder. “I will talk to my husband.” Before he could reply, Frau Zapf had already reached the bottom of the ladder.

As soon as the outer door slammed shut, Blumenfeld pulled down his pants and applied hot compresses to his groin. For a time the pain and throbbing abated. Supper could wait; it didn’t matter if it got cold. Only when the water became tepid did he dig into Frau Zapf’s rabbit fricassee, finishing every last morsel. Then he lit the half-smoked cigarette he’d been saving.

About nine o’clock he was awakened by the first wave of bombers droning above the clouds—music to his ears after all. Moments later came the din of distant flak. In the morning he would ask Herr Zapf what had been targeted and how much damage the Allies had inflicted this time.

The next few days hung heavily. The snow continued unabated. For some reason he could not explain, he sank into an ever deeper gloom each time he looked outside. He was running a temperature. The oozing lesion made him queasy. The hot compresses gave him only minimal relief. At times the pain seemed unbearable and he covered his mouth to keep from crying out. The Zapfs lived alone, but the nearest house was only 30 meters distant and they had warned him about the neighbors' four teenage sons.

A day or two later when Herr Zapf brought him the customary thermos of soup that was both breakfast and lunch, Blumenfeld was asleep, his pants around his ankles. Herr Zapf waited a few moments and cleared his throat.

Blumenfeld awoke with a start. "Thank God it's you and not your wife," he said, tugging at his pants.

Herr Zapf peered down at him with pursed lips. "My dear Blumenfeld, I'm afraid we have to call Doktor Klammer."

"It's nothing. It will heal by itself."

"You can't afford to wait any longer. I assure you Doktor Klammer is a fine man, a man from the old school. He has been our family doctor for many years."

"I am afraid of what will happen if..." Racked by a stab of pain, Blumenfeld fell back on his straw pallet.

"I understand your apprehension, but you need medical attention urgently."

Blumenfeld opened his mouth to speak but emitted only a groan.

Herr Zapf winced. “My father survived the last war a hero, winner of the Iron Cross, only to die from a carbuncle like yours. In his case it was on his upper lip.” He moved a step forward and took a closer look at Blumenfeld. “Take my word. That looks serious.”

“I will die either way.”

“You mustn’t give up hope, Herr Blumenfeld. One day this madness will be over. It cannot go on much longer.”

Blumenfeld shook his head. “The news you bring me every day is not encouraging.”

“There’s no telling what to believe.” Herr Zapf unscrewed Blumenfeld’s lantern and peered inside. “One day soon the British and Americans will invade and bring Hitler to his knees.”

“With God’s help and a cup of chamomile tea, as my mother used to say.”

Herr Zapf gave him a mirthless smile. “Now, to get back to your...your condition. Believe me when I tell you that Doktor Klammer is a decent human being, a small man with a big heart.” He used his good left hand to indicate that the doctor came only up to his shoulders. “You will be in good hands.”

Blumenfeld made no answer.

“Would you like some soup now?”

Again he said nothing and turned his face to the wall. Herr Zapf covered his shivering body with the heavy horse-blanket and started down the ladder. “I will come back later when I’ve refilled your lantern. Try to rest.”

Blumenfeld had no idea how long he had been dozing when he heard voices. One was Herr Zapf's, who was standing over him holding the lantern. The other belonged to a bald man with dark, horn-rimmed glasses who was bending over him and unbuttoning his shirt. Thinking at first he was in a dream, he tried to close his eyes again until he felt something cold move along his chest. A stethoscope.

"I am Doktor Klammer. I have come to examine you at the request of Herr Zapf." In his mind's eye, Blumenfeld saw himself throw off the blanket, scurry down the ladder, and head for the line of trees along the river.

"Where does it hurt?"

Blumenthal sat upright like a marionette and pointed.

"Can you lower your pants, or do you need help?" The doctor stuffed the stethoscope into a worn leather bag.

Blumenfeld clutched for the blanket and tried to pull it over his head.

"Very well, then. I will help you."

He tried with the little strength he could summon to hold on to his pants by the belt, but to no avail. "I see," said the doctor in a matter-of-fact tone, crouching lower. Blumenfeld tried to roll over on his side.

"You have nothing to fear," said the doctor. "To me you are just another patient. Your secret is safe."

"What will you do?" Blumenfeld heard himself ask in a quavering voice. He suddenly felt faint.

The doctor straightened and seated himself on the stool. He explained that he would make a small incision to drain the lesion. "I promise you will not feel any pain other than the jab of the hypodermic needle. After that you must continue to apply hot compresses. Just as you have been. In two weeks you will have recovered."

Blumenfeld for the first time looked the doctor fully in the face. "I am quite unable to pay you," he said, fighting back tears.

The doctor accepted Blumenfeld's outstretched hand and held it in both of his. "Pay?" he said. "I can hardly send a bill to someone of whose existence I am completely ignorant."

Blumenfeld started to say something but the doctor motioned him to be still. In a tone that brooked no further discussion, he told Blumenfeld to get dressed. "Time is of the essence." He picked up his bag and turned to leave. "Herr Zapf and I will go ahead and get everything ready. I will meet you in the kitchen in five minutes."

Herr Zapf, silent until now, said, "Please be careful. It's very slippery outside," and followed the doctor down the ladder.

Alone again, Blumenfeld felt as though his spindly bare legs had become detached. He looked around for the thermos, then realized Herr Zapf had come without it. After a while he drew on his clothes and draped the blanket around his shoulders. A trickle of cold perspiration ran down his back. He imagined Bianca urging him to hurry, to do as the doctor had directed. Rising unsteadily to his feet, he remembered her last words to him: "Although we will be separated, we are in this together." Using one hand to hold the lantern and the other to support himself, he slowly made his way down the ladder, each step more painful than the last.

At last he stepped over the threshold, his breathing heavy. The scent of pine hung in the air. He leaned shakily against the side of the barn and estimated the distance to the house. It seemed longer than the last time he had ventured outdoors. Somewhere off in the distance a dog barked, followed soon by the forlorn howling of another. A lantern had been left burning by the side door. The only other light came from the kitchen. He took one step, then another, each time sinking ankle-deep into snow. Only after he had gone the first few yards did he realize that the snow had stopped. The wind, now only a light breeze, had changed direction. ❄️

PAPA'S MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION

Charlene Schiff

CHARLENE SCHIFF, FROM HOROCHOW, POLAND, SURVIVED THE HOLOCAUST BY HIDING ALONE IN THE FORESTS NEAR HER HOME.



Next to his family, Papa loved his books best. He collected first editions and rare books. These books were precious to him. Often when dinner conversation centered around our forthcoming emigration from Poland, Papa would state categorically, “The books go with us.” Mama never objected—I think she was just as proud of this collection as Papa was.

No one had asked my opinion but, frankly, I had no idea why these books were so important to my parents. Papa had tried to explain but it was beyond my comprehension.

There were many rules connected with the books. Our house was comfortable and quite large. Several rooms had never been finished because of our planned immigration to America. Consequently, I shared a bedroom with my older sister. I’m sure she was not thrilled with this arrangement, but to her credit she never expressed her frustration to me.

Papa had two rooms to himself—his office and the library. The office was a lovely, sunny room. A big desk was situated catty-cornered, with several chairs and some bookshelves. I remember a screen with colored panels of the world’s continents in a bas-relief, presented to Papa by students from the university on some special occasion.

On the walls hung several pictures, but two of them stood out above the rest—one a portrait of Theodore Herzl, the father of Zionism, and another one of Zev Jabotinsky, the leader of revisionism, which was also a form of Zionism. Papa tried to teach me about the importance of these two distinguished men. Mostly, the door was open and I could enter at will. Of course, when the door was closed, I would not disturb Papa.

The library—that was another story. The door to the library was mostly closed, and even when it was open no one was permitted inside except Papa and Mama.

Somehow, Papa regulated the temperature; it was always very cold in that room. Some shelves were glassed-in, others open. Heavy curtains covered the large window so that little sunshine ever entered the room. On rare occasions when I had been permitted to enter this mysterious room, I had to wash my hands with soap and water and then Papa put white cotton gloves on my hands and on his hands as well. He would show me different sections. It was interesting, but I still didn't understand the importance of Papa's collection.

I asked Papa if he would read to me some stories from his books. Papa hesitated for a moment, and then he said, "Sure, why not?" During that week, Papa mentioned casually that he could make time on Sunday to read a story or two. I asked if I could invite a few of my friends. Papa agreed, and I couldn't contain my excitement.

Mama baked cookies and an apple strudel for the occasion. My parents allowed me to invite ten friends. It was difficult to select only ten friends, but I promised to invite others later on. The readings became a popular event. Papa read in Yiddish, Polish, Hebrew, French, Russian, and German. He would translate as he read. My friends and I were fascinated and delighted. We all looked forward to these events with great anticipation.

The readings went on for almost a year. Our imaginations were filled with magnificent fairy tales, and our stomachs were filled with treats Mama never failed to prepare. The readings ended the summer when unrest and uncertainty became a daily occurrence—just before World War II started.

Little did I know then that Papa did not collect children's books, and the stories he told us must have come from books he got from school libraries in the Horochow and Lvov areas. I believe Papa kept up the myth because he realized how much excitement it brought into my young life.

When the Nazis occupied our town of Horochow, Papa was among the 300 leaders they rounded up at the very beginning. Later they came back with a truck and took Papa's beloved books away. 🕯️

Charlene Schiff

It was midwinter of 1943. I was on top of a mound of hay inside a barn, trying to stay warm, when a hand removed the hay covering my upper body. I found myself staring at a young woman with a look of surprise on her face.

Only the day before I had been in the forest. It was brutally cold. The little pit where I usually hid didn't give me much protection from the elements. I realized then I would not survive another day in the forest.

I made my way to a nearby village. It was difficult—my outer clothing was threadbare, the top of one of my shoes was separated from the sole. I tied the shoe together with pieces of my underwear and walked toward the village. I was hampered by the shoes, which were falling apart, and so the relatively short distance took almost all night.

Several farms were close by. I picked one which looked substantial and proceeded toward the large barn. The snow made everything quite visible. I walked gingerly toward the main doors and opened them. No dogs—great, I thought. I climbed up to the top of a pile of hay. It was almost dawn. I was exhausted. The last few nights I hadn't slept for fear I would not wake up. Shivering from the cold, and half of me wet from walking in the snow, I fell asleep.

It couldn't have been much later when I found myself facing the young woman. She put her finger to her mouth indicating for me to be quiet, and then she disappeared.

I wasn't tired anymore. Would this woman denounce me? I wondered. Would she bring the authorities here, or would she come back and drag me to them? It was broad daylight, and I was in no shape to escape. My shoes were almost disintegrated—I couldn't run barefoot. Was this going to be the end? I was cornered. All the fight had gone out of me.

There was a lot of activity below. I heard voices and I felt like shouting, “Hey, I’m here, and I’m a human also.” I heard dogs barking, and wondered where they had been when I arrived.

Later in the afternoon the young woman returned. Again she had her finger to her lips, and I kept quiet. She was quite young. She wore a flowered babushka, tied under her chin and pulled around the back of her neck. She had high cheekbones, a full mouth, and her eyes were a sliver of the bluest sky. Her complexion was pale, and the visible wisps of her hair light brown. She was pretty, and didn’t look threatening. She brought a pail with her and took out some warm soup and bread. She spread a small towel in front of me and motioned for me to eat. I didn’t believe my eyes. The soup was warm and delicious and the bread heavenly. She whispered her name—*Paranka*—and said she’d be back the next day. It took a long time to sink in. I had been treated like a human being, with kindness and generosity. I had forgotten how that felt.

Early next morning, Paranka came and brought me more food—bread, milk, and dried fruit. She also brought a set of flannel pajamas. She told me to put them on, which I did. When she saw my bare feet, she asked where my shoes were. When I showed them to her, she had tears in her blue eyes, but I didn’t say anything.

The next day when she came up, she had a pair of slightly used boots in her pail, along with more food and a shawl. The boots were a bit large, but inside them she had two pairs of heavy socks. She didn’t ask many questions but she was fully aware of what I needed. Every day at different times she would come up and bring food and more warm clothing. Once, she made a quiet remark: “The dogs sleep indoors, and you are here. Where is justice?” She said she had been working there for over two years. Apparently, she had a large responsibility on the farm—all day I heard people calling Paranka this, Paranka that.

This went on for almost two unbelievable weeks. I was still hungry but was ashamed to admit it to Paranka. She was so generous, and so very thoughtful. She outfitted me with warm clothes and more good food than I had had in the longest time.

One day, at mid-morning, two policemen arrived on a horse-drawn sled. They asked for the farmer, who was not home at the time. The farmer's wife came out. The policemen said they wanted to see Paranka. The farmer's wife became agitated and asked them why. They didn't bother to explain. Paranka came out of the main house. Everything was loud and I heard it all. They asked for her papers. She went back to the house to get them. All of the farmhands were outside watching Paranka come out with the papers. I could see it all through the slots in the roof. After a short while, I couldn't hear what transpired but I certainly heard two shots. The farmer's wife screamed, "My beautiful Paranka, she was not a Jew."

"Shut up, or we'll burn down the farm," one of the policemen warned her.

The sun came out for a while, and then hid in shame behind the dark clouds. It was snowing heavily, and the pure white snow tried in vain to cover up the evidence of that murder. ❄️

SMUGGLING

Flora M. Singer



FLORA SINGER, FROM BERCHEM, BELGIUM, SURVIVED THE WAR BY HIDING WITH HER TWO SISTERS IN CATHOLIC CONVENTS.

By 1941, Jewish people in Belgium no longer received food ration stamps. The only way to obtain food was to buy it on the black market. Mama started to smuggle food across the border from northern France, where food was still more easily obtained and less expensive. Part of the food Mama bought was sold and some of it kept for the four of us—Mama, my two younger sisters, and me. Also, with the proceeds, we were able to buy perishables like milk and eggs, as well as some vegetables and fruit. During Mama's trips, I stayed home to care for my two younger sisters, Charlotte and Betty, which was quite a responsibility for one not quite 11 years old.

Occasionally, when one of our neighbors, Magda, a single woman, was able to watch my two sisters, I would miss school and accompany Mama to France and help with the smuggling. According to Mama, children were not as easily suspected, or as carefully scrutinized, as were adults. Also, having me along enabled her to bring back more merchandise than when she went alone. When there was no school, I accompanied Mama more often while Magda, who looked forward to receiving her payment in food from Mama, would watch my younger sisters.

We usually took the train to the last stop before the Belgian–French border where we had to cross into France. We left the train on the Belgian side and stayed there until night fell. As soon as it was dark, we crossed the border into France; we usually chose a part of the border that was not heavily guarded on the Belgian side. Once on the French side, we rested behind some bushes and waited for daylight. After the sun made its appearance, we walked nonchalantly to the nearest bus stop and boarded the bus to the center of the city of Lille.

As soon as we arrived in Lille, we made our way to a small café where we were acquainted with the owner, Josef. Here we were able to meet some local people who sold food supplies. Also, Josef had a few rooms available where travelers could spend the night for a modest fee. On this particular trip, we bought five kilos of sugar, planning to sell four and a half and keep the remaining half for our personal use. I had also taken along an empty box which had held the new doll Mama had bought me just prior to the German invasion of Belgium. We filled this box with the sugar. Mama also bought a few meters of wool fabric, which she wrapped around her body under her clothes. We were ready for our return trip home.

Most of the time we were able to obtain the help of a kind German soldier—after Mama explained that her husband, a Belgian soldier, was a prisoner of war and she was the sole caretaker of her three children—to take our groceries across the border (soldiers' luggage was not checked). However, this time we were unable to find anyone to help us, so we had to risk crossing the border and pass customs ourselves.

As we were attempting to go through the open gate of the border, a customs agent approached us. I was the one carrying the box of sugar. Mama was carrying a bag filled with several breads, which were promptly confiscated. But the breads were a ploy. After they took them away from Mama, they did not search her any further. The customs agent turned to me and his hands reached for the doll's box. I started to scream: "Mama, Mama, the man wants to take away my box! He wants to take my doll!" I held the box close to my chest, trying to turn away from the customs agent just as he was reaching for the box. "Mama, don't let him take my doll, he'll break it, he'll break my new doll!" He tried again, being surprisingly gentle. "I only want to look at her, little one," he said. "I won't hurt her, I promise." I did not cease screaming until he finally said, in a voice that sounded more tired than annoyed, "Okay, okay. Don't be afraid. Keep your doll, I won't touch it." And with that, he waved us on. 🍀

LOOKING FOR MY FATHER

Esther Rosenfeld Starobin

ESTHER STAROBIN WAS BORN IN ADELSHEIM, GERMANY, AND SURVIVED THE WAR IN ENGLAND WHERE SHE WAS SENT BY HER PARENTS ON THE KINDERTRANSPORT IN JUNE 1939.



I know my father, Adolf Rosenfeld, was born in 1898 in Korb, Germany. Korb is a very small place. He apprenticed as a baker when he was a young teenager. During World War I he was in the army. During his service in the war he lost a leg. Consequently, when he returned to Korb after the war, he could not work as a baker.

After his return to Korb he continued to live with his parents in what was considered a big house. This house in Korb also contained the synagogue. My father's father died first. After the death of his mother, my father married in 1924. My older sister Bertl believes the marriage was arranged since she can't think how he could have met our mother who came from Rexingen.

Our parents moved to Adelsheim, a place not far from Korb, soon after the birth of their first child, Bertl, in 1925. Our father had a business supplying grain for animals to the local farmers. Bertl believes that Uncle Sali, my father's youngest brother, worked with him for some of the time.

According to Bertl's memory, our father was very strict, which she believes was a result of his only having one leg. The children were not allowed to ride bikes or sled down the hill on which my family lived. I guess he was afraid one of his children would have an accident. Our father could tolerate any behavior except lying. My sister Ruth remembers that if you put food on your plate or asked for a serving of food and didn't eat it, it was kept for the next meal. If the kids did something our father didn't approve of, they received a spanking on their bottoms. However, according to Bertl, our father was very good with children. She said he sometimes took them in the horse and buggy when he went on business. Other times the family went by train to visit relatives in Heilbron. The children in the neighborhood all

came to our house. If my siblings were playing away from the house, our father would stand in the front and whistle for them to come home. The entire neighborhood knew that whistle.

In preparation for the Sabbath, my sisters and brother and I had to line up so our father could inspect our fingernails, toenails, and hair. After that, we received the Sabbath blessing. On Saturday, my siblings accompanied our father to *shul* (synagogue). On Saturday afternoons, our father, Uncle Sali, and others played cards at a place called Die Linde.

Bread-baking was done by our father. He prepared the dough, which then had to be taken to the communal oven to be baked. Ruth remembers having individual small challah made by our father. He also made sausages and prepared sauerbraten. We kept kosher in the house, which was more of a concern for our mother than our father. Herr Bloch, who also taught Hebrew to children, was the *shochet* who did the kosher slaughtering of the animals. When Herr Bloch was forbidden to do this after the rise of Hitler, our family sent for kosher meat. One time it arrived and was bad; that was the end of our family maintaining a kosher home. We also had one of the first telephones in Adelsheim. The telephone was kept in the front parlor. One time when it rang at an inopportune moment our father tore it out of the wall.

Writing this piece has provided an occasion for my sisters to try to remember things about Adolf Rosenfeld, our father. I have to depend on their memories because I was just two years old when I was separated from my parents. I never saw them again after I went to England on the *Kindertransport*. Bertl spoke to a cousin in Florida to ask her some questions. I have e-mailed Reinhart Lochmann, the man who has been collecting information about the Jews of Adelsheim and the surrounding area, to ask if he can find answers to some of the questions that have arisen in my writing this piece. I don't think I have found my lost father yet. 🍀

MY MOTHER'S BIRTHDAY

Susan Warsinger

SUSAN WARSINGER WAS BORN IN BAD KREUZNACH, GERMANY. SHE ESCAPED WITH HER BROTHER AND WAS SMUGGLED INTO FRANCE BEFORE LEAVING FOR AMERICA IN 1941.



My brother has always been braver than I. On a night when we were little children (he was eight and I was nine), when the rocks and bricks came crashing through our bedroom windows, it was he who looked out to see what was happening. I stayed under the cover, hiding my face in the dark shadowy room because I was afraid. He did, however, give me a full report of what was happening outside while he was leaning on the low windowsill. It was our neighbors, adults and their children, who were hurling the missiles while the civil policeman was watching at the edge of the crowd doing nothing to stop the bombardment.

We got the courage to run to our parents' bedroom across the hall. On our way there, we had to pass the front door which was made out of stained glass, and we saw more rocks being pitched through its lovely panes. We finally reached our mother and father, hoping to get relief from our anxiety. Our parents had always tried to protect us from the Nazi propaganda and the antisemitism that was raging in Germany. They had explained to us why we could not go to the public schools anymore, why we could not walk through a park, and why certain shopkeepers would not sell us any goods. But this was something new. It was November 10, 1938, my mother's birthday.

Our innocent baby brother Ernst, who was named after the serious times in which we were living, was sleeping in his little crib in our parents' bedroom when a new barrage of rocks was flung through the window, hitting his tiny hand. While all five of us were huddled together waiting for the assault to subside, we heard a tremendous noise coming from our glass front door which was laced with steel frames. People had uprooted a lamppost from outside of our house and were using it as a ram to batter

down the door. After they had successfully completed their mission, we heard men and women trampling through our hallway, shouting at the top of their voices. Then all was quiet; they were on their way to the rabbi's living quarters.

The house we lived in had three floors: we lived on the first floor, the rabbi of our town on the floor above us, and a non-Jewish family on the third floor. There was an attic above us all in which we had stored piles of red apples ready to be eaten during the winter months. It was to this attic that our father suggested we go and hide until things got back to normal. My father also asked me to safeguard, in my underwear, an envelope containing all his life's savings. I felt extremely important to carry such a family treasure.

My mother, brothers, and I went to the attic while my father remained downstairs. In the attic we observed that even though the rabbi was missing, his family—his wife and four children—were there. Joe and I were enormously happy because we had playmates to keep us company during the fretful night. We made up games with those red apples all through the night. We polished the apples, we made abacuses with them, we made personalities out of them, and we ate them. However, during all that play we knew the rabbi was not with us. Much later we learned that the rabbi was arrested, his beard cut off on his balcony for all the people to see, and he was hauled off to jail with most of the adult Jewish males of our town. I do not remember how my father joined us up in the attic. I do know that he was jailed for only one day and then released and we were not sure whether it was because he had played chess with the chief of police for many years or because his birth certificate established that he was a Polish citizen (at that time the Nazis had not yet declared war on Poland).

We remained in that attic for three days, being nourished by the apples and sleeping on rough burlap sacks. Our bathroom facility was on the landing between the second and third floors of the building. We had to stealthily tiptoe down the staircase, holding tightly to the banister, in order not to

be heard. At times we used a lookout to make sure we were guarded from anyone finding out that we were hiding there. Some of my father's money, which he had given me for safekeeping, became rather damp.

On our return to the apartment, we found broken glass over everything and many of our belongings were demolished. We also discovered that all the Jewish families in our town had had similar experiences and that the Jewish shops were looted. Our one precious synagogue was completely destroyed. Bad Kreuznach, our town, was not singled out—this ghastly event had occurred everywhere in Germany. It was the night of broken glass, known as *Kristallnacht*. 🕯️

S E P A R A T I O N

Susan Warsinger

After the night of broken glass, when the Nazis organized and carried out a pogrom of anti-Jewish violence, my parents—like most Jews in Germany—wanted to leave. There was no more waiting to find out if events such as *Kristallnacht* would cease, or if life would ever be normal again for all of us. Our first choice was to come to the United States, where we had cousins living in New York. They were most anxious to assist us by sending us tickets for the voyage and helping us settle in this new land. However, like most countries, the United States had a quota which had been established many years before and, therefore, we found it impossible to immigrate.

Uppermost in our parents' minds was the safety of their children and when they heard of a lady (I do not know if we ever knew her real name) who was smuggling children across the border into France, they immediately explored the possibility. The lady was French and married, with children who lived in France. Her scheme was to take Jewish children across the German-French border pretending that they were her own. She did this for a large fee. My father had taken all his life's savings out of the bank and it remained safe with me during *Kristallnacht*. Now he was willing to give the lady a major portion of it so that my brother and I could get out of Germany.

The problem became what would become of us once we were safely smuggled into France. Where were we going to go and with whom were we going to stay? We did have a bachelor cousin thrice-removed who was living in a very small apartment in Paris near the Place de la République. He agreed to keep my brother and me for a while. All arrangements were made, and we were very excited about our trip. My mother grew more and more quiet as the time for our departure neared. We were not allowed to take much luggage because, according to the story we were to tell later to the border police, we were only visiting Germany for a short while and were then going back to our home in France. Our clothes would get shipped later in a trunk. We were also told that we must pretend to be fast asleep when the border

police came through the train to check the passports. Since Joseph and I did not speak any French, it was of utmost importance not to give the plot away. My brother remembers rehearsing how to pronounce his forged name and address just in case the police woke us up while we were crossing the border. We were also to pretend that the lady was our mother.

When I was nine, this seemed to me like a very exciting adventure; now I realize how difficult this must have been for our parents. It must have been devastating for them not knowing whether they were ever going to see their children again. Preparations for our departure were made, our fake passports were readied, our good-byes to our friends were said, our suitcases were packed, and our tickets for the train to Paris were purchased.

I cannot understand why I remember all the details prior to the departure but have absolutely no memory of going to the station and saying good-bye to my parents. I have discussed this with my brother over and over, and he does not remember either. He thinks that we might have been drugged so that we would sleep through our journey and would not have to deal with the police. I think we probably have pushed this separation so far back into our minds so that we cannot recall it ever. 🌸



LEAVING GERMANY FOREVER

Rabbi Jacob G. Wiener

RABBI JACOB WIENER WAS BORN AND RAISED IN BREMEN, GERMANY, WHERE HE SURVIVED *KRISTALLNACHT* AND NEGOTIATED WITH THE GESTAPO TO SET UP A SCHOOL FOR JEWISH CHILDREN BEFORE HE IMMIGRATED TO CANADA IN 1939.



My father and we four children had our permits in hand to immigrate to Canada. Now it seemed easy to “sign us out.” That’s what the Germans wanted at that time, 1939: “Jews leave, get out.” Several years later, when no country showed any interest in saving refugees, Hitler said, “No one wants them; we are correct in excluding them from our land. They are in our power. And our goal to make Germany *Judenrein* will go on in force now until the last Jew is dead.”

The man at the police station where I went to register our emigration was half asleep. “Fill out this paper, every question,” he said. I did so and returned it to him. “You did not write down the address of your destination,” he said. “I don’t know the exact place yet where we will be staying,” I explained. Showing his German superiority complex, he appeared amused, nodding his head. “Well, never mind,” he said. “We Germans will find you anywhere you go.”

This was the first step. But we needed to inform the Gestapo that all taxes imposed by the Nazis had been paid and to give them the day we would be packing our valises. We were told to provide a list of all our property; to obtain the name, date, and amount of taxes paid; and to show receipts for items we had bought to take abroad. This was a tedious and time-consuming task.

In February, immediately upon receiving the “landing cards” (Canadian visas), my father went to the two German shipping companies in Bremen: the North German Lloyd and the Hansa-American Line. They were booked for two years in advance. Not wanting to wait that long, my father traveled to Hamburg searching for an earlier departure.

By sheer coincidence, he met an English gentleman who happened to represent the British Cunard White Star Line. Canada, at that time, was still a British dominion, and this man offered to help us. He arranged a ferry that would bring us to England. From there, we would continue on a larger ship from Southampton to Montreal.

But we had no liquid cash. We still had our house and thought of selling it, which we had to do anyhow. The Nazis told us, "Here in Germany you are no longer the official owner of your property. We appoint someone to buy it from you." The next day, a woman came in and told us, "I am the trustee of your house. We give you 1,200 marks." This very low amount was called in German a *Schleuderpreis*, a dirt cheap, ruinous price. It was exactly the amount of the ship fare. Then the Nazis put a number of senseless taxes on emigrating Jews. Normally the buyer would have to pay an "acquisition tax," but now the Jewish "seller" had to pay it. Accusing Jews leaving Germany of secretly exporting their money to other countries, the Nazis imposed a *Juden Vermögens Abgabe* (a Jewish capital levy), a *Reichsfluchtsteuer* (a tax for fleeing the Reich), and a *Diskonto Taxe* (a tax for being allowed to take certain personal items along). Finally, a limit was set on how much money a person was allowed to carry in his pockets leaving Germany. This limit was ten marks, the equivalent then of about four dollars, and each amount had to be duly entered in the passport.

On the day we packed our belongings, a Nazi-appointed man watched us to prevent us from taking any "contraband" along. Finally our trunk was ready to be shipped.

Wednesday, May 31, 1939, was a sunny day when we left our hometown of Bremen. We traveled by train to Hamburg to say a last good-bye to my mother's relatives. The taxi that took us to the port had to make a detour because on that day Hermann Goering made it public for the first time that Germany was in collusion with General Francisco Franco of Spain. Germany was helping Franco win his civil war there. Goering was one of Hitler's closest cronies, a leader of the four-year economic plan, an air craft commander, and eventually Hitler's successor.

It was a sad farewell. Some of our relatives had been lucky enough to depart from Germany earlier. But the others begged us to help them in their attempt to leave Germany as soon as possible. Of course, we showed our willingness to do so, but at that moment we were not even sure of our own future.

By 6 p.m., our ferry was supposed to leave. We arrived an hour early. Our big trunk had already been shipped. Now we each carried only a small valise. Then we were searched and stepped onto the ferry. They took my father aside for a more thorough search. The ferry then left on time with perhaps a dozen passengers, most of them refugees like us.

For the first time in years we felt free, free of Nazi pressure, free of the ever increasing fear of being arrested and sent to concentration camps, free to look forward to a new future. The sun was slowly setting as we glided along the Weser River. By night we reached the open sea, the North Sea, and passed the Isle of Helgoland, the last German territory. Our hearts started to beat easier. 🌿

HELPERS AT THE GATE

Rabbi Jacob G. Wiener

Finally, we had arrived in Montreal, Canada. Our goal had been to move to the home of my father's cousin—our sponsor, Louis Wolinsky, who lived in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, Canada. It had been a long and difficult procedure to find any person to help us leave Germany.

For many years my mother had written to numerous relatives, friends, and acquaintances in all parts of the world. The answers were always disappointing. Even one month before the *Pogrom Nacht* in 1938, Wolinsky wrote, "Do not despair; have hope; have patience."

The events of the *Pogrom Nacht* changed the minds of many who before did not seriously believe that the Nazis would execute their plan to kill all Jews. This horrible action showed the world Hitler's and his henchmen's "handwriting on the wall." This attack against a defenseless people was unthinkable. It made the world come closer to understanding that the Nazi's unchangeable goal was to exterminate all Jews wherever they could reach them. Thirty thousand Jewish men were dragged in nightgowns out of their homes and sent to concentration camps. About 400 synagogues were set afire and burned down. But the German press did not write about this. In my hometown of Bremen alone, five Jews were brutally murdered. My mother, Selma Zwienicki, was one of those victims.

Again, we wrote to Wolinsky. This time our plea struck a nerve. He contacted local government officials and succeeded in obtaining "landing cards"—permission for my father and us four children to immigrate to Canada. After much negotiation and luck, we finally were permitted to leave Germany. Our voyage was quite eventful. We had left the German port of Hamburg on May 31, 1939, and arrived in Montreal on June 15, 1939. We thought we would continue on our journey to meet and perhaps live with our sponsor and his family. When our ship entered Canada, the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society (JIAS) came onboard and informed us that they had government orders to send all immigrants (refugees) immediately to their destinations.

But that was not to be. Our boat had arrived on a Thursday night, and all other refugees found their relatives, who met them and took them to their homes. We were the only ones left. Since the Canadian law permitted passengers arriving after nine p.m. to stay on board overnight, we did so. In the morning—it was a Friday—the JIAS officer came again. He gave us a very disappointing report. They had received a telegram from Wolinsky stating that he was glad we had come, but, he wrote, “Unfortunately, we had a drought and cannot bring you here.” The “landing card” he had obtained for us had been just a proviso to get us out. The Jewish agency, nevertheless, was intent to ship us west. They took us to a small cafeteria for breakfast. Then they brought us and our baggage to a small Canadian railroad station. “At noon your train [a freight train with one passenger car] will come for the five-day trip to Yorkton, Saskatchewan, your destination. Have a good trip.”

It was a very hot day, and the place was stuffy. My father tried to find a way to stay in Montreal. It was not only the approaching *Shabbat*, but he also remembered a letter from another cousin, a friend of his by the name of Kaplan, who had moved to Montreal 12 years earlier. Among the letters we had written for help getting us out, the one to that cousin had been returned to us marked “unknown, not found.”

The time passed. It was now 10:30 a.m. Just then the door opened and two nuns entered. They went behind a small desk in the waiting room and put on a light: Travelers Aid. My father said, “I am so sure, my cousin, Kaplan, still lives here, and if he knows we are here, he will let us stay with him. I’ll go over to the nuns; perhaps they can help us find him.”

He approached the desk. The nuns did not understand him. My father did not speak English well enough and did not speak French at all, the two official languages of Canada. On a whim, he tried his native tongue, Russian. To his great surprise, one of the nuns also understood Russian. He explained our dilemma and asked if perhaps they could help us. He told them that this particular cousin had been a playmate in Russia. He had been living in Yekaterinoslav. His name was Baruch Kaplan and his wife was

named Bebe. He was a tailor by profession. The nuns quickly started their search with address books and by telephone. There were many Kaplans listed, some beginning with a "K," some with a "C." After they had contacted about 18 people unsuccessfully, they reached one family where a young boy answered. "I will call my mother to the phone," he said. We waited anxiously.

"There are some refugees here who came from Germany," the one nun explained. "They say you are their cousin."

"Please let me talk to them," the woman on the other end of the line replied.

My father took the phone. He seemed like he was talking to an old friend. "Yes, I am Jossel [as he was called by close family]. I am here with my children and the Canadian government wants to ship us off to Louis's by noon today."

"No, no," Bebe interrupted and shouted back. "You will all stay with us. My son will pick you up within less than half an hour and bring you to us. Baruch, my husband, is still in the shop. He'll be home later in the afternoon. We heard all about Selma, your wife, and what's going on in Germany. We feel for you; you'll stay with us."

In less than 20 minutes we were picked up by their son. We were received with joy and tears, an unforgettable reunion. A miracle had occurred! Yes, changes can sometimes happen unexpectedly. We were sure it would not be possible, and certainly not in our power, to remain in Montreal. We felt relieved. The endless tunnel, we saw, had suddenly opened up to a light at the end. 🌸

C R E D I T S

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