

Echoes of  
Memory **Volume 9**



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## FOREWORD

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The work compiled here in this ninth volume of *Echoes of Memory* marks my 16th year facilitating the Memory Project writing workshop. This work with Holocaust survivors who craft their memories into testimony, memoir, and teaching text has been the most instructive of my career. What I have learned is related to my own long-held sense of what being engaged in writing can do for a writer, but for these survivors, the benefits go beyond a greater understanding of personal history.

The works compiled here chronicle the writers' unending curiosity. Each one uses his or her life story as a mode of questioning. They ask about the past. They interrogate the Holocaust and its reverberations through time and families. They query the experience of aging. They inquire into religious identity. They wonder at or indict governmental systems within their writing. They parse language and the ways it is used or misused, and we readers discover these questions through each text.

When Peter Gorog recounts traveling from Communist Hungary to a Poland still behind the Iron Curtain in order to memorialize his father, he writes, "My mission would have been perfect if I could have recited kaddish . . . but this was not an option because I had no Jewish upbringing." We hear, maybe phrased in story for the first time, an important question: what does it mean to have your family first persecuted for being Jewish during World War II and then denied religion altogether under communism? Without Peter's

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work, we might not have known to ask this complicated and important question. The work here in this *Echoes of Memory* volume is dialogic, a call and response for reader and writer, a further conversation about a historical event that can, too often now, seem distant, something known, static, and finished.

Ruth Cohen writes about a distant relative who knew little about his own family's experience during the Holocaust. He connected with Ruth to learn more about their shared history. She writes, "Everyone was happy to have found more people to call family," and in this way, the questioning done through the writing of this survivor brings the Holocaust most potently here and now, as it must be for a reader, if we are to turn remembrance into action. These writers, through their own willingness to continue writing—some for more than a decade—about events both past and present, disallows the Holocaust as being thought of as final. As they craft their life stories, they put the threat of genocide front and center, as question and warning.

I hope you will read each of the stories with an understanding that the questions asked are meant to illicit a response from you, the reader. I hope that you will feel as I have felt, an awareness that the significance of the Holocaust can be felt through these writers' works, that its presence is not diminished, its lessons not learned—as Louise Lawrence-Israëls describes, a moment where seventy years ago "seems like yesterday."

*Maggie Peterson, PhD, Writing Instructor, The Memory Project*



## The Violins of Hope

JACQUELINE MENDELS BIRN

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*Born in Paris, France, in 1935, Jacqueline Mendels Birn fled with her family to the Vichy-controlled southern region of France, where they lived together under surveillance for the remainder of the war.*

One of my best friends, Jeanne Rosenthal—the viola player in one of my quartets that performs on International Holocaust Remembrance Day—told me of an exhibit in Cleveland, her hometown, of violins that were found after World War II. Those violins had belonged to Jewish musicians whose lives ended in the gas chambers after the Germans stole their instruments.

One day, a violin repairman—a luthier named Amnon Weinstein—was given a violin case with a violin inside. That instrument had been burnt to ashes; he could not repair it. However, about 10 years later, he started looking for violins that he might be able to repair. By now, he has 50 instruments in his studio-workshop and has restored some of the instruments to produce a magnificent sound.

During a visit with my friend Jeanne to Cleveland, we stayed at her parents' home. After welcoming me with open arms, we all went together to the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage. There, we saw 17 of those beautifully restored violins exhibited, and we learned when, where, and how each violin that had belonged to a murdered musician was found. We heard a concert by the Cavani Quartet, which is in residence at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

The first violinist played one of the restored instruments—the “Auschwitz violin”—and the music that was performed that night made me shiver, because I was thinking of the original owner, who had been murdered in a gas chamber at Auschwitz. The quartet played a piece by Erwin Schulhoff, who himself was killed in 1942. Listening to this music composed by inmates in ghettos and concentration camps makes you cry while thinking of the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust.

The first violinist, who knew me, asked my permission to interview me as a Holocaust survivor and as a hidden child. I come from a family of musicians, some of whom survived, either through a Kindertransport or at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. This musical background in my family is probably why my mother introduced me to the cello.

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## Life Is Good

RUTH COHEN

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*Ruth Cohen, from Mukachevo, Czechoslovakia, was first imprisoned with her sister in Auschwitz in April 1944, then several other concentration and work camps beginning in October of the same year.*

A very exciting thing happened recently. I received an e-mail from the Museum asking me to get in touch with someone who had inquired about me. When I called the number I had been given, a young man answered and introduced himself as Grant. He asked whether I had known someone named Alex Schwartz. I was so surprised; of course I knew Alex Schwartz. He was my dear uncle who had come to this country in 1921. He was one of the people in my family who sent us affidavits; he had also partially financed our passage to the United States.

Grant, I soon found out, is his great-grandson, who—until the moment of our conversation—had been under the impression that the only relatives my uncle had were two brothers who had been murdered during the war by the Nazis. I informed him that, in fact, his great-grandfather had seven siblings: four brothers and three sisters, one of whom was my mother. Another of his sisters had lived in the United States since 1932 with her husband, their five children, and their families, while all the others were murdered during the war. Aside from my father, my sister, and me, only the wife of one of my uncles survived. Grant was stunned.

His great-grandfather had died before Grant was born, but his grandmother and mother never spoke to him about the family. Interested in learning more, he spent more than a year traveling through Europe researching his roots. In Medzilaborce, Slovakia—the birthplace of his great-grandfather—Grant went to the local government offices to get information about the family but was told that all the papers had been destroyed. His exploration did not end there.

As he was driving around, he noticed a sign directing him to the Jewish cemetery, but it took two and a half more hours of driving to find the cemetery gate. As he entered the well-kept cemetery, Grant's emotions gave way, and he wandered around for 30 minutes, crying. Unable to read Hebrew, he wasn't able to find his family's graves and turned to leave. Just then he heard voices approaching and realized that the language being spoken was Hebrew. Three people appeared: a Slovak man and an Israeli

couple visiting dead relatives. Surprised to find someone in the cemetery, they inquired about his visit and told him that the Slovak man, Jan, comes there every year, and the husband and wife come whenever they are in Slovakia.

Grant told Jan that he was looking for his family's graves and that their last name was Schwartz. Jan knew of the family and told Grant that their names were Yitzchak Aharon Schwartz and Reizel (Ruth) Kaufman. Jan also shared that Grant's great-great-grandparents had two sons that he knew of: a rabbi and a doctor. Though he never found their graves, Grant had found the beginnings of his family roots. What Grant still didn't know then was that along with his great-grandfather Alex, there were other children in the family.

Jan suggested that Grant might learn more about his family, especially about the rabbi, from a 91-year-old survivor who lived in New York City. Grant contacted and met this man upon his return to the United States. In fact, Grant did learn more from him and from other people who had known his grandfather's brother, the rabbi Moritz Schwartz.

To learn more, Grant communicated with Yad Vashem in Israel—using the family members' names that he now knew—to see if there was any more information available. Several years before, I had completed the information forms about all the members of my family who were murdered. When he saw those forms, he found my signature as the person who provided the information. Knowing that I had survived and that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum might have information about me as a survivor, he contacted the Museum to see if he could find out more about this growing family tree. Through Rachel Wimberley, the Museum's former program coordinator of Survivor Affairs, we found one another.

Grant, his mother, and his sister traveled from New York City to our house in Maryland and back in one day, just to meet my family and me. Grant wants to write a book about his great-grandfather's life and family. I was happy to share information about the whole family and stories about my Uncle Alex. We looked at family pictures and talked as he videotaped our conversation throughout the day.

It was an exciting, warm, loving, and wonderful day at our house. Our daughter and granddaughter joined us for most of the day, and everyone was happy to have found more people to call family.

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## True Faith

GIDEON FRIEDER

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*Gideon Frieder was born in Zvolen, Slovakia, in 1937. After his mother and sister were killed in a massacre in 1944, he was saved by a Jewish partisan and hidden by a Christian family.*

In October 1944, my mother and sister were killed in the Massacre of Stare Hory, in the mountains of Slovakia. I was wounded and left staring at my dead mother, who lay on her back with her eyes open. I could not understand why she was not getting up. A Jewish partisan, Henry (Adam) Herzog, took me away, promising that my mother would join me later. He took me to his unit, but quickly realized that a wounded child is a liability to a fighting unit. So, after seven days, he brought me to the village of Bully and left me in the house of Paulina and Jozef Striharzik, promising them a reward if they kept me or death if they did not. Given that choice, they kept me.

I was not aware of the circumstances under which Paulina and Jozef took me in—nor, by the way, do I have any recollection of being with Henry’s partisans. I only remembered that I was taken from Stare Hory to Bully. Nature has a wonderful way of treating trauma.

From the first instance of me being ushered from the cold night into the warm house, I felt nothing but care and love. They treated my wound; they washed me and fed me. Many things happened from the time that I was brought to Bully and the time that my father, who survived the war, sent emissaries to take me away—but for me, the war ended at the beginning of May 1945 when I went back to my father.

In December 1945, I wrote a message on a torn piece of paper to Jozef and Paulina, wishing them Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

In June 1946, my father died.

I was brought to Israel in June 1947, under circumstances and by a process that may deserve a tale of its own. I grew up, got an education, served Israel, and eventually came to the United States.

While in Israel and later in the United States, it was made clear to me that there could be no contact with anybody in Czechoslovakia, as it was now part of the Communist sphere, and thus aligned with the enemies of Israel. Being part of the Israeli defense establishment, that sphere was out of bounds for me, and I could not contact Jozef and Paulina.

Eventually, the Soviet Union collapsed, and after a while, there emerged a Slovak Republic, free of the Soviet yoke. I set up to go and find the people who saved me. It took time and effort, but eventually I was able to locate Anna, the daughter of Paulina and Josef—a daughter I did not even know existed, as she was born a couple of weeks after I left. Her parents had died in 1975, a long time before the collapse of the Communist regime.

My wife, children, and I decided to go to Slovakia to meet Anna and her two children. She lived in a large village not far from a major town where we stayed in a hotel. There is a long story of how we found her and what happened in our first meeting—a story to be told and described at some future time. It was emotional, it was beautiful, and it established a contact. One small part of the story, however, I want to tell you now.

Anna told us a lot about herself and her parents after the war. Among other things, she told us that her parents talked about me a lot and told her that if she ever met me, she should treat me like her brother, because they intended to keep me and raise me as their own child, as they loved me so very much. The skeptic in me wondered about it. Antisemitism in Slovakia, then and now, was so thick you could cut it with a knife. However, Anna told me that before her mother died, she gave her one of her most precious possessions and made her swear to keep it forever—it was the torn piece of paper that she got from me 30 years before she died and that she had kept all these years. Anna wanted to give it to me, but I refused, as it was clear that it had such great meaning for her and her family. I did make a copy for myself.

Several years later, Anna suffered a debilitating stroke, and I traveled to Slovakia to see her and her children. I found that they were in a stable but difficult position financially, so I offered to help, and Anna said, resolutely and clearly, “No way!!!”

I was flabbergasted. I told her that it was her parents, in particular her mother, who told her to treat me like a brother, and siblings *have* to help each other—that is the meaning of family! She looked at me and said, in a quiet and trembling voice, “If I take money from you, it may mean that my parents saved you for a reward, but they did not! They saved you because that is what Christian love means, they saved you because they followed God’s wishes, and I shall not violate it.”

I was almost in a state of shock. The deep faith and the impeccable logic of her reasoning kept me speechless.

I worked many years in the area of logic. I even have some publications that are still cited today, almost 40 years since they were first published. I told myself, “Gideon, if with all your knowledge of logic, you cannot convince Anna to accept your help, then all you know and all you achieved means ABSOLUTELY NOTHING! It is just a bunch of crap written on paper!”

I agonized, I reflected, I thought, and then said, “Anna, do you believe in God?” The question was tantamount to asking “Do you breathe?” so I immediately said, “Clearly you do!” I continued, “How do you know if it was not God’s doing to bring me to your parents, so that in the future, as a surrogate brother, I would be able to help you?”

Now was her turn to reflect—and she did the only thing that a woman of deep faith can do—she sent her daughter to the village priest to ask his opinion.

It did not take long for the daughter to return, although for me it seemed like a tormented eternity. The daughter said, “The priest told me that nobody knows how God operates, but what the man told you would be a typical divine foresight and intervention—take the help.” She did.

If you ever want to know what faith means, ask Anna. Except you first have to go to heaven, where you shall find her at the most coveted place under the everlasting wings of Eternal Grace.

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## Flory

ALBERT GARIH

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*Albert Garib was born in Paris, France. He survived the war in hiding with neighbors and in a Catholic boarding school for boys in the northeastern suburb of Montfermeil.*

I first met Flory Jagoda in 2001 when she founded our Ladino group, *Vijitas de Albad* (Sunday visits). I was one of the very first members of that group, and I was immediately seduced by her charm. She was an approximately 80-year-old lady, a native of Bosnia who moved to the States after marrying a young US Army officer in 1945. Flory was a young bride whose wedding gown was made from a parachute. A singer and composer, Flory wrote “Ocho Kandelikas” (Eight candles)—the famous song that celebrates Hanukkah. I started to attend our monthly visit assiduously, and it was like love at first sight.

The purpose of our group is to relive the experience of our youth, when we would meet at one of our relatives’ homes and spend some quality time together. I remember going to visit my uncle on Sundays where we would meet some friends. As a teenager, I hated that experience, but today, some 60 years later, I am glad we can enjoy it. We bring dishes we would enjoy on those Sundays—Turkish and Greek dishes like *borekas* and *filas*.

Our Sunday visits begin with a potluck lunch prepared by members and consisting of some of those same dishes. Then we sit down around Flory and sing her songs together. Sometimes, she is accompanied by her “apprentice,” Susan Gaeta, and sometimes by the *tias* (aunts) with whom she still performs today. After that, we read a page in Judeo-Spanish, and then we listen to speeches or news from our members. It is a very pleasant experience, surrounding ourselves with people who share our roots and can speak the language of our parents with varying degrees of success; some are quite fluent, while others struggle.

In 2003, we traveled together to Poland, where Flory had been invited to sing at the unveiling of a Judeo-Spanish plaque at Auschwitz. The scholar who initiated the campaign to add that plaque survived the killing center and later dedicated his life to the survival of our parents’ language. He wanted her to sing “Arvoles Yoran por Yuvias” (Trees are crying for rain)—a song that he credited for saving his life in Auschwitz, because he earned an extra ration of soup for singing it.

Flory also sang “La Bendision de la Mujer” (The blessing of the bride) at two of my daughters’ weddings.

Flory is now 92 years old and very frail but still full of life and humor. She still performs successfully. And our Sunday visits are getting stronger and stronger. We started with five or six members, but we are now more than 40. We are forced to turn down people because of the lack of space in our homes to accommodate such a crowd.

## My Mother

Of all the people to whom I owe for the fact that I am alive today, there is one I want to single out: my mother. She was no taller than five feet, and she was nothing but love. She also had more than her share of suffering. One of seven siblings (two of which died at a young age), she lost her father when she was only 11. This loss left her own mother to struggle with raising the children.

My grandfather had a small shop in Ortaköy, a neighborhood of Istanbul, and the family lived in the apartment above the shop, along a “dere”—which means canal in Turkish. In 1964, when I visited Istanbul with my parents, my mother took me there, and I took a picture of the house with the shop—a picture that I still have in my study at home. Today, the dere is covered with concrete, and the little house with the shop has been demolished and replaced by a small apartment building.

Despite the loss of her father, my mom managed to keep going to school. At the age of 18, she got her Brevet supérieur, which was more or less the equivalent of the French Baccalauréat. Thus, when she arrived in Paris in 1923, she had no trouble finding a job as a secretary, because her French was perfect and very pure, devoid of slang words, which were the only ones she could not understand. Once, she had to write a letter for her boss to someone on Boulevard Haussmann. The only such name she knew was Osman, which was the name of Ottoman sultans. So, she wrote Boulevard Osman, and her co-workers made fun of her. Her boss defended her, saying that when they could speak another language the way my mother spoke French, then they could laugh at her.

My mother and my father, who was also from Istanbul, met in Paris, where they got married in 1928. My sisters were born in 1930 and 1933, and my twin brother and I came along in 1938. At that time, my mother stopped working to raise her children, and life was very difficult, as my father did not make a lot of money—working as an accountant in a garment factory during the day and tearing tickets at night in a movie theater on the Grands Boulevards. The clouds were already accumulating in the skies over France, with Germany rearming and becoming more and more threatening for the Jews. In France, it became particularly dangerous for those without French citizenship like my parents. In January 1939, my twin brother died of pneumonia (I was also sick, but survived), adding more pain to my parents’ lives.

In June 1940, when German troops marched down the Champs Élysées, the people of Paris fled south in what came to be known as *l'Exode*. That was the first ordeal for my mother: she lost her mother, a brother, a sister, and two nephews when a bomb fell on their car on a bridge in Orléans.

Then, we stayed for a short while in a château along the River Loire, sleeping on the floor with nothing to eat. I was just two years old at that time, and my mother had no food to feed me, so I was crying nonstop and disturbing the other “guests.” After a while, having nowhere else to go, we went back home.

In 1942, under the new laws of the French collaborationist government, we had to vacate the janitor’s apartment that my father’s boss had put at our disposal and find a tiny apartment with very few of the amenities that we take for granted today. But the Vichy government had started doing the Germans’ dirty work, rounding up people and deporting them first to transit camps like Drancy, then on to Auschwitz. My parents were very concerned that we might end up being arrested and deported and decided to send us to a farm not far from Paris. They did not tell the lady we were Jewish, and justified their move with the hope that we would be better fed. Meanwhile, my parents stayed home, hoping that they would not be taken away. After I told the lady we were Jewish, she sent us right back to our parents.

In September 1943, my father was sent away to a slave labor camp, and my mother found herself alone with her three children, constantly terrified that at any moment, they could come to take us away. This is when she met a lady at a street market and somehow, she opened up to her, confessing about her fears. That lady, Madame Galop, told her husband, and the next day, he came to our place to bring us to live with them. The Galops, a Protestant family, had two little girls aged four and three, which means that, as a five-year-old, I had wonderful friends to play with, while my mother was constantly afraid of a denunciation by some neighbors.

Somehow, the six months we spent with the Galops brought some relief even to my mother, because the Galops were so nice and managed to bring some joy in the house, despite the circumstances. Unfortunately, that did not last, because a neighbor threatened to denounce us, which would have meant a certain death for us, and perhaps for the Galop family too. So, we had to go back home again, and a few weeks later, what my mother was dreading happened: two French police inspectors came to take us away.

Somehow—did they feel sorry for us, or were they concerned that the tide had begun to turn for them?—they did not take us away. But once again, we had to go into hiding, and after spending a few days sleeping at the Ménétriers, our neighbors, my mother ended up as a governess in a family with a lot of children—thanks to a social worker. Meanwhile, we were sent to Catholic boarding schools in Montfermeil, a suburb east of Paris made famous by an episode of Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*. That’s how we spent the hot summer of 1944, until Paris was liberated in late August. That summer, my mother took care of the many children of that family but was unable to communicate with her own.

As soon as Paris was liberated and trains were functioning again, my mother was on the first train to come to visit us. I remember my sisters coming to see me while we were playing in the school's playground. "Guess who came to see us?" they asked me. At the age of six, it is incredible how quickly we forget about our dear ones. I couldn't figure out who had come to visit us. My mother, who was very short, was hiding behind my sisters, but when I saw her, I remember how I jumped into her arms. She was so appalled at the way we looked—I was skinny and sick—that she took us right back home. With her food ration stamps, she bought a loaf of bread that we swallowed in no time.

During all these years, my mother was the one who suffered the most, living with the constant fear about what could happen to us. But she managed to get us through that terrible period, struggling like a lioness to keep her cubs alive. To this day, I wonder where she found all that strength and ingenuity to devise solutions to all the problems she had to face.

Later in life, I remember how my mother was so alien to new technology. She was not even comfortable with a telephone, but she found so much resourcefulness when our lives were at stake and was capable to brave the danger with so much calm. Several years later, she told me of one experience she had with me that I was too young to remember. She had to take the metro to run an errand, and she took me along—she was afraid to send me to school because children were sometimes taken away from schools, never to be seen again. At the station, there was an identity check, which meant that people who had a "J" on their identity cards and were not allowed on public transportation would be set aside and sent to a transit camp before being deported. Somehow, my mother took me in her arms, pretended to look for her papers in her purse and walked right past two policemen or militiamen without being stopped. How she managed to do that remains a mystery to me.

My mother was a real hero who kept me and my sisters alive throughout that dark period. After the war, she had a physical reaction to all this torment: she had to be hospitalized with a huge abscess in her shoulder, which was the result of all the anxiety she had to endure.

There were several heroes in our wartime experiences: the Galops, the Ménétriers, the social worker, and the headmistress in that Catholic boarding school who treated me as her protégé. But to me, one hero stands out to this day: my mom.

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## A Gravestone for Those Who Have None

PETER GOROG

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*Peter Gorog was born in Hungary in March 1941. After his father died in a forced labor battalion, Peter and his mother survived the Holocaust living in multiple apartments and in the ghetto in Budapest.*

In 1964, the Cold War was alive and well, and travel from Hungary to Western Europe was still the privilege of world-famous performing artists—musicians, singers, and ballet dancers—as well as world-class athletes. However, travel restrictions from Hungary to other Communist countries had eased a little bit. One could apply for a one-time exit permit, and if the local chapter of the Young Communist Organization and the Trade Union gave a glowing endorsement, one could visit such coveted travel destinations as Romania, Bulgaria, or Poland.

My friends and I were neither famous performing artists nor world-class athletes, just plain college students finishing our junior year at the Budapest University of Technology. After the spring semester was over, our plan was to spend a month in Poland, hitchhiking from the southernmost border of Poland to the Baltic seaport of Gdansk and the resort town of Sopot.

In the '60s, hitchhiking in Poland was very common and very safe and was the cheapest way to travel, especially if you used a Hungarian flag to flag down passing cars (pun intended). The love for Hungarians in Poland has deep historical roots, although I am not sure if this is still the case today. Anyway, in 1964, the Poles even had a saying: *Polak, Węgier, dwa bratanki, i do szabli, i do szklanki*, which means that Poles and Hungarians are two friends, they fight together and drink together.

We had a great time visiting the historical city of Krakow and hiking in the beautiful mountains around Zakopane before we got to the capital of Poland, Warsaw. I hope I do not hurt the feelings of my Polish friends when I say that Warsaw in the '60s was not a beautiful city.

After the ravages of World War II, there was not much left of the old city, and the Communist government that tried to rebuild the city had neither the money nor the taste to design and rebuild it. There wasn't much to see in Warsaw unless you count the monstrosity called the "Palace of Culture and Science"—built in the dominant style of the era called socialist realism, which was borrowed from the Soviet Union.



From the very beginning of our trip, I had a secret mission in mind. More than anything else I wanted to see a monument in Warsaw that had captured my imagination the moment I had seen a picture of it: a monument erected to commemorate the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. This was a major Jewish resistance event during the Holocaust in 1943. The uprising was doomed from the very beginning because the badly armed Jews of the Warsaw ghetto—weakened by starvation and disease—had no chance against the well-armed and well-fed German troops.

The monument stands at the site where the ghetto had been during the war. On one side of the monument is a beautiful rendering of the insurgents, of the men, women, and children, armed with guns and Molotov cocktails. The central figure is the leader of the uprising, Mordechai Anielewicz. The other side is a bas-relief sculpture that shows the persecuted Jews and their tormentors, the Nazis.

On our way from Krakow to Warsaw, we befriended two Polish brothers who shared the bed of a truck with us. They invited us to stay in their parents' apartment in Warsaw and we gladly accepted, saving us a lot of money not spent on a hotel. Fortunately the parents were out of town, so the seven of us had plenty of space to sleep on the floor of the two-bedroom apartment.

My plan was to sneak out one early morning before anyone woke up and visit the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Monument. Why was my plan secret? With hindsight, the only explanation I have is that I was afraid that my friends would not understand my motive, and I was not prepared to explain it. The word "Holocaust" was not in use at the time of our trip, and we knew hardly anything about the mass annihilation of the Jews during World War II. It was not taught in schools, at least not in Hungary, and we Jews only knew about our personal losses, but not about the six million. Our surviving parents and relatives were reluctant to talk about the fate of our perished relatives, and I did not learn my father's story until many years later, when my mother opened up gradually.

Why the reluctance to explain my motive? I saw the visiting of this monument as paying tribute to my father who perished in a forced labor battalion somewhere in Ukraine, and who had no marked grave anywhere. Although this memorial commemorates an event that had nothing to do with my father, in my mind it was a gravestone for those who had none. This was very personal, and I wanted to be alone.

Alone I was. I got there just as the sun was rising. I marveled at the very expressive sculptures, and I said an improvised prayer in Hungarian. My mission would have been perfect if I could have recited kaddish, the traditional Jewish mourning prayer. But this was not an option because I had no Jewish upbringing, so I improvised. Although I did not believe in G-d at that time, as part of the "enlightened

intelligentsia,” I am convinced that my prayer was heard. How do I know? Because by the time I left I felt the peace of the closing verse of the mourner’s kaddish:

He who creates peace in His celestial heights,  
May He create peace for us and for all Israel;  
And say, Amen.

## A Three-Year-Old Saves His Mother

After my mother was miraculously released from the infamous Mosonyi Street Jail, we could no longer stay with our Christian host family, whose apartment was not in a building that was assigned to Jews and marked with a yellow Star of David. We could not afford to have another “good neighbor” denounce us again to the police.

The Germans had marched into Hungary on March 19, but the government was still in Hungarian hands. Then came the summer of 1944. The deportation of the Jews, with the complete cooperation of Hungarian authorities, was fully in progress, first from the countryside; Budapest would not be far behind.

The Budapest ghetto had not yet been officially established, but the majority of the Jews of Budapest had traditionally lived in the area that later became the ghetto anyway. My grandparents and two of my aunts lived in Akácfa utca (street) in the heart of this Jewish district. My mother was reluctant to move in with my grandparents because she thought that once the mass deportation of the Jews started in Budapest, we would be easy targets.

The other alternative was to move into one of the so-called “protected houses.” These were apartment buildings that had been bought by Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg. They were considered to be “extraterritorial buildings” according to international laws, meaning that no Hungarians—including the police—could enter without the permission of the Swedish Embassy. Interestingly, the Hungarian government respected this one law, while violating dozens of others in order to complete the “Final Solution”—at least until October 1944 when the ultranationalist-fascist Hungarian Arrow Cross took over the government with German help.

One of my mother’s best friends already lived in one of the protected houses, in a three-bedroom apartment shared with another family on Pozsonyi út (street). One family per bedroom was the norm, so my mother’s friend thought we could stay in the third bedroom. By 1944, a Jewish family meant a mother

and her children, and occasionally the elderly grandparents. All Jewish males between the ages of 18 and 50 had been conscripted into the forced-labor battalions and many of them had already perished.

My mother later told me that we went just to visit her friend, but she decided on the spot that we would not go back to the Ormos family's apartment where we stayed before and where my mother was arrested. When she told the other woman in the apartment that we would stay there permanently, that woman was not too happy, and she was very verbal about it. She obviously did not know my mother, who told her in no uncertain terms and tone that after everything we had gone through, no one would tell her where she should or should not stay. This verbal exchange was a sad sign of the horrific time we lived in. Two Jewish women with a shared history and fate, both fighting for survival.

So there we were, three mothers and five children ages three to six, in one apartment. Being only three and a half, everything was a new "adventure" for me. I did not know anything of the horror outside of our apartment. I liked this new place where, for the first time I could remember, I had other children to play with. Another sign of the times was that we played *rabló-pandúr* (thief and police), where we pretended that spoons were revolvers and brooms were rifles. And we played with real weapons too, as it turned out later.

After the Arrow Cross came to power in Hungary in mid-October, our freedom to move in and out of the apartment building was curtailed. The entrance of every building was guarded by Arrow Cross members in their all-black uniforms who wore armbands featuring a cross where each arm ended in arrowheads. They made sure no one left the building, except during the couple of hours that the government allowed us to do our grocery shopping. By this time, groceries were rationed and many of the basic staples were almost never available.

These guards were young people, 16 and older, and they were surprisingly friendly to us children. They called us by our first names and let us play with their real guns, thankfully unloaded. With hindsight I think they were mocking us when they gave us their revolver and we put them to each other's temple and said "puff-puff"—the Hungarian sound for firing a handgun. Little boys with a yellow star on their coats shooting each other must have been very entertaining to the guards. Being young boys, we were fascinated by weapons, not knowing how they were used to eliminate our entire people!

Right after the government takeover, the Arrow Cross decided, to hell with the international law of "extraterritorial buildings" and started entering the protected houses. They rounded up the remaining Jews and marched them down to the Danube River, only a few blocks away. They lined up the Jews along the high banks of the river and shot them. Most of them fell into the river. The corpses that fell on the banks were thrown into the river, and the water washed them away.

My mother told me later that one day, there was knocking on our door, or maybe they just broke it down. Three or four of the Arrow Cross thugs, the ones I “played” with day after day, stood at the door. They were about to herd us out when one of them recognized my mother and said, “Let them stay, she is the mother of little Peter.” They left without us. A glimpse of humanity, but it did not save the people in the apartment next to us!

The same day when our allotted time came, we left the protected house for good; it was protected no more. We moved into my grandparents’ apartment in the ghetto where you could hear the guns of the approaching Soviet Army. Liberation was in hearing distance!

## The Death Certificate That Saved Our Lives

Recently I heard someone saying that the Holocaust Museum, among many other things, is a grave for those who do not have a grave. I could immediately identify with the sentiment, because my father does not have a known grave that I am obliged to visit on his *yahrzeit*, the anniversary of a parent’s death in Jewish custom. As a matter of fact, we cannot even observe a proper *yahrzeit* because we do not know the date of his death.

I was only three months old when my father, Árpád Grünwald, was taken to a forced labor camp in Hungary. Two years later, he was officially declared dead by the Hungarian Ministry of Defense. The place of death is marked as Ostrogorsk, Ukraine, and the only date given was the date of the certificate: June 1943. He got to Ukraine not of his own volition, but as part of a forced labor battalion whose members mostly died, but not in combat. They died because they were treated as slave laborers. They died of malnutrition, from not having proper clothes for the famously brutal Russian winters, or they were shot by Hungarian soldiers when they tried to escape. Those who could not walk anymore were left on the roadside, and we can only imagine their fate.

My father’s death certificate is not only a sad reminder of his too-short life. It later became a lifesaver for my mother and me.

Although Hungary was not invaded by Nazi Germany until March 1944, the Hungarian government “took care” of its own Jews without any outside “help.” This started in 1920 with Europe’s first anti-Jewish laws, which limited Jewish participation in higher education. By 1944, Hungary had as many anti-Jewish laws on the books as any other country, and then some. Jews were banned from government jobs, fired from private companies, and forced to leave their homes and move into designated houses first, then into ghettos. They had to turn in all of their valuables—jewelry, silverware, and paintings—and could not possess radios or telephones.

When the government forced my mother to turn over our apartment to an ethnic German family, we moved to the apartment of my mother's Christian friend. We were not hiding there, after all; my mother and I had to wear the yellow Star of David when we went shopping during the few hours allocated by the government. My mother later told me that one day, an officer of the Hungarian Army stopped her on the street. My mother was shaking, because these officers were not known to be friends of the Jews. This was one of the proverbial exceptions. He told my mother he was sorry that she had to wear the yellow star. Then he continued: "Madam, please regard the yellow star not as a sign of inhumane discrimination, but as a badge of honor." He saluted and went on his way.

Unfortunately this kind of attitude was found very rarely. More typical was the attitude of one of our "good neighbors" from the apartment building where we stayed. He reported us to the Hungarian gendarmerie for not living in the designated houses, as required by law.

I still remember the morning when two gendarmes, wearing their distinctive tall hats with cock-feathers, showed up at our apartment. We were having breakfast. I was sitting on two phone books placed on a chair because I was too small to reach the table. My mother was taken away, and she later told me the rest of the story.

She was taken to the infamous Mosonyi Street Jail. The next morning, she started to protest loudly that she had been arrested unlawfully, because she was a "war widow." She said she had a document to prove it. War widows enjoyed many benefits, among them pensions, medical care, and higher quotas for rationed groceries. Of course, in 1944 none of these applied to a widow of a Jewish forced labor battalion member.

She was taken to the jail superintendent, where she presented my father's death certificate. The certificate did not say anything about my mother being a widow of a Hungarian soldier, which she was not. It just stated the fact that her husband had disappeared during wartime activities. The ignorant officer had no idea what the document was; he just saw the big stamp of the Hungarian Ministry of Defense and panicked. He thought he could be in big trouble if he was asked why the widow of a man who was declared dead by the Secretary of Defense himself was in his custody. He immediately ordered my mother's release.

We now know that those who could not escape from Mosonyi Street Jail ultimately were shipped to one of the concentration camps and very few, if any, survived the Holocaust. It was my mother's bravery, chutzpah, resourcefulness, and determination to survive that saved me from being one of the one million Jewish child victims of the Holocaust.



## Did He Know I Was Jewish?

JULIE KEEFER

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*During the Holocaust, Julie Keefer and her family hid in a bunker in a forest, and later Julie posed as a family friend's niece at a home in Lvov, Poland, where she had been born.*

A gentle breeze rustles the leaves. It is sunny and warm. The sun hits my face with a warm glow. Babcia (“Grandma” in Polish) digs for a potato or carrot in a picked-over patch of land. I scamper after her. I catch up with her, pull at her skirt to get her to play with me. She sighs, wrinkles her forehead, but agrees to pick dandelions with me. We both pick dandelions. She sits with me and makes me a wreath of dandelions. I wear it proudly. The smell of violets, wet leaves, and damp earth fills the air. Babcia continues to look for food. I try to follow her but my eyelids start to droop, and I begin to feel heavy; my steps become more and more sluggish. I fall asleep. Babcia goes back to the house. She stands outside with Mrs. Schwarczinski.

Am I dreaming that someone is carrying me or is it real? A Nazi soldier is carrying me to the house. As he nears the house with me in his arms, Babcia opens her mouth to scream. She is sure that he has killed me and is bringing back my dead body. Mrs. Schwarczinski covers Babcia’s mouth to keep her from crying out. The soldier explains in German that he misses his children back home and that I remind him of them. He found me sleeping in the meadow and was bringing me to the nearest house.

I jerk awake. I am three years old, a wilted wreath on my head, my old coat half-buttoned, shoes that are too large on my feet. I am smiling. He takes my picture. Did he know I was Jewish? Or was he just oblivious? Did he see a happy child—any child—naïve and dreamy? This is how I choose to remember him. Somehow he developed the picture and got it to Babcia. She hid it until the end of the war. It is the earliest photograph of me that exists. I have it today.

# In Hiding

## Part 1: Getting to the Bunker

In the winter of 1943, Dziadziu learned that the Nazis were going to burn down the ghetto in Lvov where my mother, father, baby sister, and I were hiding.

“Who will go with me to get my daughter and her family out of the ghetto?” Dziadziu asked of his comrades in the bunker, a huge tunnel deep in the Borszczowice Forest.

All the men volunteered; Dziadziu chose five. The men dressed in stolen Nazi uniforms and drove at night in a commandeered Nazi truck to a place near the ghetto. Dziadziu decided to enter the ghetto alone. He crept into the ghetto and located our hiding place, a hidden compartment in his barn. Many years later, he reminisced that I alone recognized him. Even my mother, Sala (his daughter)—who had not seen him for a year—did not know him. He had lost more than 100 pounds. His brown hair had turned white in the Janowska concentration camp from which he had escaped earlier.

A glimmer of memory surfaces. I have a picture in my mind of me running up to him, grabbing his legs, hugging his knees, and yelling, “Dziadinu! Dziadinu!” (Grampy! Grampy!) I was ecstatic to see him.

He brought my mother, father, five-month-old sister, and two-and-a-half-year-old me out of the ghetto to the command car and to the home of a brave Polish farmer, Mr. Borecki. The farmer had volunteered to hide my mother, my baby sister, Tola, and me to save our lives. I have an olfactory memory of an acrid smell of ammonia. Was it from cow urine or the bleach used to turn my mother’s dark hair to blond so that she would look less Jewish? I had light hair and dark eyes, and Tola had blond hair and blue eyes. Neither Tola nor I looked particularly Jewish. My grandfather, father, and the other men were to return to the tunnel and continue raiding Ukrainian police outposts and Nazi convoys to obtain provisions and weapons.

“I won’t leave my husband,” insisted Sala. “If I die, I want to be with my husband and you, Father. I have already lost my mother. I don’t want to die without my husband and you.” She was adamant.

There was no choice. My father, my mother, my baby sister, and I all went to the bunker. Herman (my father), Sala, and Dziadziu trudged through the dense woods at dusk. Snow crunched under our feet. My father was carrying Tola, and Dziadziu was carrying me. I was clinging to his chest like a baby monkey. Everybody else in our rescue had already left in the Nazi truck. It was bitterly cold and snowing. I held out my tongue to taste the falling snowflakes. It was not far from Mr. Borecki’s

house to the bunker—about a quarter of a mile—but it must have seemed like forever to the two men carrying the two babies. The full moon helped them locate the snow-covered branches hiding the entrance to the bunker.

## Part 2: Inside the Bunker

I gripped my Dziadziu's hand as we descend a ladder that seems very tall to me but was probably only six feet high. The space before us was about 12 feet long and six feet wide. A dim light was flickering.

Now I am inside the bunker, which is empty at the moment except for Dziadziu and me. I step on the tamped-down dirt of the bunker floor. I smell burning wax. I touch the cold, wet wall as I make my way toward a round, splintery wooden table at the far end of the room with a big, fat candle squatting on top. The smell of candle wax, wet earth, and human sweat is overpowering. I feel the heat of the candle, which is the only source of light.

I continue exploring the damp walls with my hands until I feel an opening in the wall and see an arch in the middle. I enter a second room. This room is darker than the first. I continue exploring. To the right, I touch some cold metal and wooden things. Whack! "Julitchka, don't touch!" Dziadziu yells at me as he smacks my hand. This shocks me, as he has never raised his voice to me, much less his hand. Later I learn that I had touched rifles and other guns.

My grandfather told me about this tunnel many years later. It was in the woods near Lvov, in what was then Poland. He started digging it after escaping from the concentration camp at Janowska. Soon he was joined by two other escaped Jews from a mass *Aktion* (raid) on a small nearby town. One of them had a gun. They kept expanding the bunker as more and more escaped Jews joined them. At one point, it held 37 people. My grandfather, who had trained as a soldier during and after World War I, was the leader.

The men left the tunnel to get supplies. They shot out the tires of Nazi supply trucks; killed any drivers who did not run away; and grabbed clothing, food, equipment, and arms. They also attacked Nazi outposts manned by Ukrainian guards. At this time, the Banderovtsy, an underground Ukrainian resistance group, inhabited the same dense woods near Lvov. The Banderovtsy, a huge organization, hated the Nazis but did not care for Jews either and only "allowed" (forced) Jewish doctors to join them. But they left the Jews in the tunnel alone. The Banderovtsy kept raiding Nazi trains, trucks, and outposts. The Nazis did not know that Jews were conducting raids as well. The Nazis had a hard time infiltrating these woods, because the Banderovtsy were well trained and fully armed.



### Part 3: Leaving the Bunker

Spring is approaching. The adults are tense, agitated. It is cold and damp. The smell of unwashed bodies and human sweat hovers in the air. Lice are everywhere. I am constantly crying with fear, hunger, and cold. I sob as I scratch and poke at the scabs left by lice bites.

My father shouts, “Stop!” and I obey.

My mother asks, “Why did I bring my children here? Now everyone’s lives are in danger. My babies are sick with cold, eaten by lice, and may die here. My beloved father is angry with me. I am desperate and don’t know what to do.” Herman, my father, listens with tears in his eyes. He hugs her. She continues sobbing quietly. Tola is screaming. Mother slams her hand over Tola’s mouth to stop her from crying.

“Sala, you’ll smother her,” warns Dziadziu.

“I can’t let her make all that noise. The Nazis will hear her and find us,” Mother replies.

“I cannot let my two baby granddaughters endanger everyone; life is precious, and each person wants to live,” Dziadziu says to himself.

What should he do? After all, he is responsible for everyone, not just his own family. In his desperation, he decides to get Tola and me out of the bunker. He sighs, “Sala, you and Herman need to stay here with the others.” He borrows peasant clothing and a sheepskin jacket from Mr. Borecki. He dons this costume so that he will pass as a Polish peasant instead of as a Jew. He holds me in the crook of his right arm and cradles six-month-old Tola in his left against his chest.

He climbs up the ladder and walks to the central market in Lvov. He pushes his sheepskin jacket collar up to hide part of his face to prevent recognition. He continues to carry Tola, but I am his “big girl” so I walk beside him holding his hand. He must stoop a bit because he is six foot two, and I am almost three years old and small. He searches the market for Dr. Groer, who runs a Catholic orphanage. His plan is to change our names and to have Dr. Groer take us. He searches. No Dr. Groer. He panics.

“Maybe I’ll just abandon them here in the market. They are pretty children, the older one blond with black eyes, and the baby blond with blue eyes. Someone will find them and care for them, and I’ll come back after the war and get them,” he thinks, frantically.

Just as he is about to abandon us, he spies a Polish Catholic woman, Lucia Nowicka, who had been his neighbor and whom he had helped to run her business when her husband was missing. He shushes her with his index finger to his lips and motions for her to accompany him to a dark, hidden part of the market.

“Pan (Mr.) Eisen, I am so happy to see you, and these must be Sala’s babies. Thank G-d you are alive!” she whispers loudly.

“Panya (Mrs.) Nowicka, can you take the babies to save their lives?”

“Pan Eisen, I no longer have my own house. I had to sell it. Now I work as a live-in cook and housekeeper for a retired Polish couple, the Schwarczinskis.”

Dziadziu and Lucia begin to plot. They decide that Dziadziu will take Mrs. Nowicka’s dead husband’s identity papers and become Stanislaw Nowicki. Both men are tall and large-boned with hazel eyes. Dziadziu has grown a beard and mustache to camouflage some of his features. They will pretend to be a married couple. Tola and I are to be Lucia’s dead sister’s children.

Mrs. Schwarczinski agrees to allow Lucia to bring her “husband” and “nieces” to the small apartment Lucia occupies in her house. Of course, no one except Lucia is to know that Dziadziu, Tola, and I are Jewish.

According to Dziadziu’s diary, a prostitute lives nearby. To earn money and a bottle of vodka, she goes to the Gestapo. “Lucia, the Schwarczinskis’ maid, is harboring Jewish children.”

The Gestapo come and carry Lucia off for “questioning.” She is taken to a jail cell, beaten, and tortured to get her to admit that we are *not* her nieces but, in fact, Jewish children.

Meanwhile, Dziadziu, Lucia’s “husband,” works at neighboring farms to get extra food for the Schwarczinskis, Lucia, and us. Soon, he learns that Lucia was imprisoned by the Gestapo. He is afraid that she will be hurt, crack under the torture, and reveal everything—that we are Jewish and that more Jews are hiding in a bunker in the woods.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Schwarczinski cares for baby Tola and me. She is exhausted and cannot continue to care for a six month old. “I’m too old,” she sighs.

Mr. Schwarczinski is a friend of Dr. Groer. He writes a letter to Dr. Groer, asking that he take six-month-old Catholic “Antonina Nowicka.” (Dziadziu had given Tola a Christian name to save her life.)

With the letter in his pocket and six-month-old Tola in his arms, he walks slowly to the orphanage, hugging and kissing the precious baby. Dziadziu delivers the letter to Dr. Groer, who orders the nuns to accept “Antonina” immediately. Dziadziu, his eyes moist and his hand trembling, pays for the first three months in advance.

As he is leaving, he keeps telling himself that at least Tola will be safe and that if he survives, he will come to reclaim her after the war.

He writes in his diary that when he returned to our apartment in the Schwarczinskis' house, I ran up to him and hugged and kissed him, but called him "Grandpa" and not "Uncle." He had to correct me many times and pointed to his "white hair" as the reason for my confusion. I keep asking for my "baby"—I miss Tola. But Dziadziu says she was sick and taken to a hospital to make her well. When she is all better, she will come back, and we will be together again.

Dziadziu knows that Mrs. Schwarczinski is a friend of the wife of the German commandant, who lives next door. He begs her to intervene to get Lucia out of prison and back home. Mrs. Schwarczinski approaches the commandant's wife, saying, "I beg you to help. My cook-housekeeper is gone. She has been taken away, and I cannot cope without her. She was accused of harboring Jewish children, which is nonsense. I am a good Catholic. My husband and I are Party members, and you know I would never hide or help Jews. The child, Julia, is Lucia's dead sister's child and certainly not a Jew. The baby is in Dr. Groer's Catholic orphanage. Lucia's husband has papers proving that he is Mr. Nowicki, a good Polish Catholic."

The commandant's wife pleads with her husband to correct this grievous error and return Lucia to the Schwarczinskis. He sends a special car. Lucia is told to clean up and not mention her treatment to anyone. She is returned to the Schwarczinskis without having betrayed any of us, keeping silent throughout her torture.

Ironies abound. In order to save the 32 or so other people in the bunker, Dziadziu took Tola and me out. While we three were gone, a Ukrainian peasant went to the Nazis and said, "I know a bunker where a lot of Jews are hiding. I'll take you to them."

The Nazis shot and killed everyone. When Dziadziu returned to check on them, he found all of them dead, including his daughter (my mother) and her husband. He buried them in a mass grave in the bunker. So my parents lie among many others somewhere in the Borszczowice Forest.

How ironic it was that my sister—who Dziadziu thought would have the best chance of survival—was lost, while he and I survived, right next door to the Nazi commandant.

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## Courage

LOUISE LAWRENCE-ISRAËLS

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*Louise Lawrence-Israëls was born in Haarlem, Netherlands, and survived the war by hiding on the fourth floor of a row house in Amsterdam.*

There are so many forms of courage in our lives. It starts when we are very young, for instance: taking that first step as a little child. Lifting one foot and standing on the other foot, putting the lifted foot forward and down to the floor, all the time trusting the foot and leg; will it hold me until the other foot helps support me again? Will I fall, or will it work out?

I would like to talk about a kind of courage I saw on our visit to Cambodia in February 2010. I had wanted to visit Cambodia for many years before going. After reading about it, I felt a connection, although I was not quite sure why. I had seen photographs of the temple complex at Angkor Wat. It happens sometimes that you feel attracted to something without a specific reason.

My dad had loved Khmer art and collected ancient pottery. He had many books about Khmer art and people. I used to see the books during every visit to my parents in Holland, and I was fascinated by my dad's stories, always illustrated by pictures in his books. I learned about the genocide in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge regime of Pol Pot in the late '70s. Not so much was published about that time; the United States was coping with the post-Vietnam era.

Making a trip to Southeast Asia took a lot of planning. We started by buying guidebooks. We read for many months and decided where to travel in the region. We needed many vaccinations, and the medications we had to take took a good part of our luggage space. We were not used to the insects, the water, or the climate.

I had heard about a young Cambodian woman who had translated *The Diary of Anne Frank* from Dutch into the Khmer language. Her name is Sayana. I contacted her and asked her why she had done this work. She explained that she uses the diary when she speaks to Khmer children. She teaches them to stand up against hatred and prejudice and to think before they act. Again I felt a connection because that is what survivors who volunteer at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum do. Sayana works at the Center for Accountability in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, and she travels all

over the country for her work. The institute promotes accountability for the abuses committed during the Cambodian genocide.

It is very courageous work, since so many perpetrators are still alive and living in freedom. Many have never been punished for the atrocities they committed. During the genocide years, three million of Cambodia's population of eight million people were brutally murdered. Professionals, teachers, professors, and everybody wearing eyeglasses were presumed educated and a threat to the regime. Every family misses relatives. Buildings, houses, books, and utensils were destroyed. It was even forbidden to own a spoon to eat with.

At the end of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, the Khmer people decided to rebuild. The country is so poor, and rebuilding will take a very long time. Children have to be educated; farmers need to be taught how to work the fields again. Tourism will, of course, be a great source of income for the country. It is so remarkable that the Khmer people are so friendly and seem so happy. They lived in fear for so many years but are so grateful to be free now, and they have the courage to start over.

I see clearly the parallels between "our" Holocaust and the holocaust of the Khmer people; they're very apparent to me.

## May 1945 and May 2015

### May 1945

The sun is warm and so bright. I can feel the warmth on my face. It feels good. The noises around me are different; I have not heard them before. I am a little afraid, but my brother is holding my hand and my parents are with us. We hear people talking. Some are singing. It sounds nice, but I do not understand what is going on around me. I do not hear the frightening noise of the alarm that always sounds before an airplane flies over. The airplanes make a noise that we do not like.

### May 2015

The sun is warm and bright. I have sunglasses on, and that helps. I am in a different country, sitting at the World War II Memorial in Washington, DC. I am waiting for the ceremony to start, to commemorate the end of the war in Europe 70 years ago. The sun is burning me; I put my bag on my feet to stop the burning. During the speeches, my mind wanders; 70 years seems like yesterday, and for the first time in many years, I really miss my parents. Their soothing and comforting words were always there to make us feel better. They shielded us and loved us.

When the ceremony is over, I help to place a red, white, and blue wreath on the memorial, together with a representative of the Dutch Embassy. We are in for a special treat. We are waiting for a flyover of vintage planes used during World War II. The setting is beautiful; the planes will appear above the Lincoln Memorial and fly over the monuments and the Mall. When the first planes arrive, I realize this was the noise that I had almost forgotten, that was so frightening to me. Seventy years ago, I was afraid that a bomb would fall from the plane. Now, I miss my brother's hand. Sidney, my husband, knows me so well, and there is his hand, warm and steady, and I feel safe.

After seeing some of the planes, we decide to walk to some trees to get shade. As we turn around, we see thousands of people, all around the Washington Monument. Everyone has come out to see the planes that took part in liberating me, 70 years before.

## *The Sinaasappel*

I was in hiding for the first years of my life. There were five of us in hiding: my brother and I, my parents, and our friend, Tante Selma. My parents and Selma took very good care of my brother and me and gave us a lot of love. Since the adults never talked about our exceptional circumstances, we only knew what they told us, and we saw only what they showed us.

There was never a lot of food, and we were happy with what we were given. Yes, we were hungry sometimes, but the children got something to eat every day—even if sometimes we had to share a cracker. There just was no more. Of course, the adults sometimes went without anything to eat for days.

Mom and Selma used to dream about delicious food and talked to each other about it. They often talked about strawberries with whipped cream. They would look so happy; we could only imagine how good that would taste. The only fresh fruit we had ever seen was an apple.

When the war was over in 1945, we still only had apples. Most fruit trees had been chopped down for firewood, and the importing of fruit or other foods did not start in Holland until many years later.

We moved to Sweden in 1946. By that time, we had a sister. It was a big change for us. There was so much available, since Sweden had been neutral during the war. The first December we were in Sweden was so special. There were candles in every house, all to celebrate Christmas, almost as though it was a national holiday. Candles were lit on the first Sunday of December for the first day of Advent. More candles were lit each evening until Christmas Eve, and then the Christmas trees were lit. During the whole month there was so much delicious food, and most people did a lot of baking.

We did not talk about religion, but we loved the festivities, and in our little flat we also lit candles. My mom had an old *chanukiab*, and she lit all the candles every night. On one of the nights, we each received an orange as a present. It was the first time I had ever seen one.

It felt good in my hands, and it smelled so good when I lifted it up to my face. We were told that it was a fruit and that we could eat it. I did not want to eat my orange; it was too beautiful.

I saw my Mom peel part of my sister's orange. We all had a piece. It was delicious, but my sister did not have her present anymore. I took my orange into bed with me and kept smelling it until I fell asleep. I found it the next morning, lying on the floor next to the mattress that was my bed. My mom had put it there so that I would not squash it by lying on it. I still did not want to eat it. I just held it and wanted to smell it.

After a few days my mom explained to me that if we didn't eat the orange soon, it would rot and it was better to have it in our tummies than in the garbage. Now every year when we celebrate Chanukah, I have oranges or clementines on the table—and I remember that first orange.

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## In Transit, Spain

MICHEL MARGOSIS

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*Born in Brussels, Belgium, Michel Margosis spent the war in hiding on a farm in France, and in Marseille, and eventually escaped over the Pyrenees into Spain.*

We had been heading downhill for what seemed an unending ordeal, and as dawn at last approached, we quietly entered a town that was most assuredly asleep. Our guides led us into a tavern in the middle of Puigcerdà—just barely inside Spain—actually only about six miles southeast from our starting point. We gathered several chairs together as a barricade, in the main dining room of the inn, and immediately fell asleep behind them. When we awoke, daylight penetrated the inn through the window shutters, but the shop was closed with most of the chairs stacked upside down on the tables.

It was November 30, 1942, and my mother, my sister, Anna, my brother, Willy, and I had made it to Spain. It must have been mid-afternoon when we awoke and rubbed the sleep from our eyes. The Spanish innkeeper then approached us and, in thickly accented French, inquired if we were intent on proceeding on our journey to Barcelona. After we paid for our first Spanish meal in French currency and ate our bread, we discussed our next plan of action. The two gendarmes had vanished by then and presumably returned to France to collect another fee for assisting another family in desperate need. At the start of our journey, my mother had paid our guide with some American paper money she kept in a hidden purse.

After resting much of the day from our night's hike, we proceeded again under cover of darkness. The terrain was more even as we hiked downhill through woods and grassy fields. We trekked without seeing a soul. As dawn appeared, we stumbled onto a railroad track and followed it for two or three hours, presumably heading to Barcelona, many more miles down the road.

That's when we were spotted by two uniformed men of the Guardia Civil, wearing the traditional tricorner hats that to me strangely resembled an old Corona typewriter. We became apprehensive because we had heard that those seeking refuge in Spain had generally been refused safe haven and were forcibly returned to France. It was subsequently related to me years later that many “*porteur*” guides—those aiding illegal immigrants to cross a border, as these guides were known—handed their clients over to the Nazis or their French militia partners after payment of their fees.



The Guardia Civil arrested and searched each of us and confiscated my mother's purse containing the American banknotes along with all our other possessions, including Willy's straight razor. Then they escorted us to a country tavern in the vicinity of Figueras—a town further east—where we were treated to dinner and were generously introduced to *paella valenciana*. We were cordially welcomed and advised by the innkeeper that *paella valenciana* is indeed a highly regarded national dish of Spain. We were then “invited” by the authorities to stay as their guests at the inn overnight.

The irony of Jewish refugees seeking asylum in a country where Jews had not been allowed to live openly for more than 450 years is, of course, noteworthy. Generalissimo Francisco Franco received substantial military backing from Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini and proved the power of modern weaponry during the Spanish Civil War. This support enabled the Generalissimo to become a dictator.

Celebrating victory in Madrid in 1939—when his bond with Hitler was at its peak—Franco declared that it was “the Jewish spirit which permitted the alliance of big capital with Marxists,” though he was not as rabid an antisemite as Hitler. Thus, after the defeat of France, Franco declared he was “ready under certain conditions to enter the war on the side of Germany and Italy.” Although Spain was too shattered economically and militarily after the civil war for another conflict, the Generalissimo was still itching to fight the Communists.

With the fall of France in the spring of 1940, thousands of refugees tried to escape to France's closest neighbors—Switzerland to the east or Spain to the south. But Spain and Portugal closed the borders to refugees unless they possessed transit visas to another country. Refugees who entered Spain without proper documentation were either returned to France by agreement with the Vichy government or interned at the Miranda de Ebro concentration camp in the province of Burgos.

In July 1942, Franco was really close to delivering a number of Jewish refugees to the Germans at the border. But later, with the Allies gradually gaining ground, especially after November 8, 1942—with the Allied invasion of North Africa and Germany's subsequent takeover of France—Franco must have seen the writing on the wall.

With pressure from Roosevelt and Churchill, Spain kept its frontiers open, stating its policy that all refugees without exception would be allowed to enter and remain. Jewish refugees accounted for about a fifth of all those who crossed the Pyrénées, whether they were refugees fleeing Hitler's persecution or Allied soldiers returning to fight. Hence, Spain became a major escape route and was practically forced to tolerate Jews again. Spain and Portugal maintained that refugees would be allowed to pass through only if they had proper passports and end visas.

## Gerona

The following morning, we were routed in separate directions: my brother, mother, and sister were incarcerated in Gerona—a city located about one-third the distance between the eastern French-Spanish border and Barcelona, about 23 miles south. I was taken to the Casa de Misericordia—the *hospicio* or local orphanage. Other refugee children were also moved there, and that’s where I met tall, spindly Georges Flasschoen, who was about a year older than I and well over two feet taller. When he told me that his father had served as consular attaché in the Belgian Congo where he was born, I expressed humorous astonishment that he was not black like all the Congolese people I had ever seen. We quickly became friends, as did the other French-speaking refugee children who had also been recently welcomed into Spain.

According to my mother’s passport which covered the four of us, we were citizens of the Persian Empire, which, at that time, was still considered a British protectorate. So as a Persian citizen, I requested assistance from the British Legation, and in due time a British representative showed up outside the solid fence surrounding the play yard of the hospicio. He insisted he could do absolutely nothing for me, but he kindly gave me several pesetas as pocket money so that I could buy a few things. Within a day, I had spent the money on roasted onions sold through the fence from a cart on the street. They were sweet and surprisingly good.

## Miranda de Ebro

After leaving the orphanage, I was told that my brother had been transferred to the concentration camp of Miranda de Ebro, just south of Bilbao in northeastern Burgos province. That camp—in use from 1937 to 1947—had originally been designed to deal with enemies of Franco and his acolytes in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War. The camp had been set up for a capacity of 1,400 internees, but at that time it was crowded with about 3,500 occupants. Initially, these were mostly French and Polish opponents of the regime and returning allied soldiers, but later its occupants were mainly Jews. The facilities were primitive in that they lacked much in terms of provisions and protection from the elements. Furthermore, the conditions were terrible.

Willy tended to be quiet, but he did relate that at one time he witnessed a violent disturbance he called a pogrom in that camp, where drunken Polish Catholic refugees whacked Jews with knives and chased them with hatchets. Nonetheless, the camp of Miranda de Ebro was still considered an excellent refuge—albeit a temporary asylum—for all the detainees fleeing the Nazis and their French partners.

## Caldas de Malavella

My mother, sister, and I were transferred to a hotel in Caldas de Malavella, a small town with natural thermal waters that dates back to Roman times, located within the same geographical area about 23 miles from Gerona and 56 miles northeast of Barcelona. The town had recently been converted to a “forced residence” where women and children refugees were confined and lodged in several hotels retained by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. We simply called it “the Joint,” but now is better known as the JDC. This organization was founded in 1914 to help Jews during World War I, and it came to be the foremost source of sustenance and assistance for Jews to emigrate and resettle during World War II. The JDC was entrusted at that time with the care of refugees who were pouring into Spain.

It was Christmas 1942, and the hotel staff prepared a most pleasurable feast of Spanish fare, including *arroz con pollo*, *paella valenciana*, and *turrónes*, a superb nougat akin to what we call *halvab*—a confection originating in the Middle East made from crushed almonds or other nuts or sesame seeds, with honey and various flavorings such as chocolate. The hotels were clean, we were well treated, and we had relative freedom to move around. The accommodations had no private bath facilities, though a simpler alternative was available. This new experience turned out to be fun for me as a kid—a garden hose against the wall of a very large white-tiled room. I did complain of a toothache at one time, and the local dentist gave me a shot of anesthesia and without further ado forcibly removed the ache together with the tooth.

Georges kneaded a chess set from the soft doughy part of some extra bread and allowed a few days for it to harden into solid playable pieces. White bread was not readily obtainable, but the dark variety was handy for the purpose. He taught me to play the game, and as we had nothing but time, I spent much of it playing with anybody I could challenge. But it was not until I could devote more science to the game as I did several years later in high school that I learned to play competently.

Father Navarro, the chaplain of the orphanage in Gerona, visited from time to time to engage us in various activities. He introduced us to, and educated us on, the richness of the local lore and the Roman baths built centuries ago, as well as the countryside where Napoleon overran the locals. The *padre* was most engaging, friendly, tolerant, and gentle with all the children, and apparently he was well learned too, as he strove to speak a little Hebrew to one of the kids. He taught us to climb pine trees to gather cones for the delicious piñones nuts within. The padre treated all the children with utmost decency and respect, Jew and non-Jew alike. We always looked forward to an outing with him, for it was always a pleasure and an education to attend his talks.

## Barcelona

After several weeks of replenishment in the spa town of Caldas de Malavella, the JDC arranged with the Spanish authorities to finance our relocation on January 28, 1943, to Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia (Cataluña) and the second largest city in Spain. It is the largest metropolis on the northeast coast of the Iberian Peninsula, with a rich history dating back more than 2,000 years. Even as Spain was devastated by the civil war, Franco abolished the autonomous institutions of Catalonia and suppressed the use of the Catalan language in public life. I have heard from a Catalan friend that the province had been called “the reluctant bride of Spain”—and has fostered a strong sense of nationalism with the revival of local folklore such as dancing the *sardana*.

We were initially lodged at a *pensión* on Via Layetana, where we had two furnished clean bedrooms with linens. Meals were served regularly at fixed times in the dining room, where we would convene with other guests. We would soon become acquainted with even more delightful and tasty Spanish and Catalan gastronomic fare, even though the country was itself still in its fourth year of slow recovery from a most devastating, traumatic, and cruel civil war.

During her stay in the jail of Gerona, Anna befriended a young local woman with the lovely name of Carmen who had also been confined for a month for not rendering the raised-arm fascist salute of “*Viva Franco!*” at an athletic competition. After her release, Carmen introduced Anna to several other young adults, and these new friends soon took Anna under their wings and became her new guides.

Once in a while, I would benefit from her friendships by accompanying them to a local dairy bar to taste *tapas* and *nata* (a Spanish cream) and other local delicacies, or attending the Barcelona Symphony’s concerts, which I enjoyed so very much. We soon learned some of the local Spanish traditions such as clapping your hands when you got to your building’s front door late in the evening to hail the *sereno*, a night watchman, holding a clanging bunch of keys to unlock the door. This eliminated the need for tenants to carry house keys.

In time, the JDC provided us with an allowance to find more private and reasonable boarding accommodations. We relocated to Calle Paris with a Catalan family of three: an artist, his wife, and a tall nice-looking blond teenage girl.

That setting triggered in me a new interest in art and got me to sketch in pencil or charcoal, learning from the painter—who had a particular penchant for Rubens. He gave me a new appreciation for Flemish paintings. I also learned Spanish from the whole family. One tradition in Barcelona was to leisurely stroll after dinner, late in the evening, on the *Ramblas* toward the statue of Columbus standing tall by the port and gazing outward to the seas.

Willy was released from Miranda de Ebro on March 17, 1943, and joined us at 126 Calle de Londres in Barcelona. He was thinner and even more reserved from the miserable treatment he received in that concentration camp. No doubt his release happened through the valiant efforts of Dr. Samuel Sequerra, who was director of Jewish aid with the JDC in Lisbon and who worked principally and openly in ill-disposed Barcelona.

One picture permanently etched in my mind that moved me immensely was the gentle fluttering of the glorious Stars and Stripes from the balcony of the American consulate on Plaza de Cataluña, a large square generally considered to be both Barcelona's city center and the crossroads of its old and new town. In nasty contrast, a menacing swastika flag hung from the German consulate just yards away as an apparent challenge. I had no desire to visit the American Consulate then, but I visited the British Consulate many times and was taken by the many posters of Churchill with their greatly optimistic messages. I knew that Persia was a British protectorate, and I actually believed that it gave me license to avail myself of its services and protection, but I eventually realized that the Brits would not be helpful.

I often visited another *pensión* where many more refugees were housed, so that I could practice and improve my chess game.

While I was indulging in that new culture, Dr. Sequerra had been organizing programs to save children under 16 years of age and sponsored special groups as Corporate Affidavit Children to send to the United States. This, of course, meant that my siblings could not qualify, and I would have to go solo, leaving my family behind.

My mother enrolled me in one group under the United States Committee for the Care of European Children. She had me fitted for a new suit with golf knicker-style pants by a local Jewish tailor who had settled in Spain in 1933. This became a special occasion, because until then I had always worn short pants. It was a transition to adulthood. I was soon on my way, and the farewells went off with feelings of unrestrained optimism—but not without shedding a few tears. I found myself on the way to the railroad station to board a train for Lisbon along with a group of children; they numbered probably two or three dozen and ranged from toddlers to adolescents. Families wiped tears as they said their good-byes, not knowing whether or when they would ever see one another again.

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## A Letter to the Late Mademoiselle Jeanne

HARRY MARKOWICZ

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*Born in Berlin in 1937, Harry Markowicz survived the majority of the war in hiding with a Belgian family until the liberation of Brussels in September 1944.*

*In the Permanent Exhibition at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, there is a plaque indicating that Jeanne Daman-Scaglione has been recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations. The plaque reads: “A Roman Catholic, Daman became a teacher, and later headmistress, of the Jewish kindergarten ‘Nos Petits’ in Brussels. When arrests and deportations of Jews began in 1942, she worked with Belgian and Jewish resistance units, helping to find hiding places for 2,000 children throughout Belgium. Daman also helped rescue many Jewish men about to be deported as slave laborers by obtaining false papers for them.”*

Chère Madame Jeanne Daman-Scaglione:

Our paths crossed, at least figuratively if not in fact, when you were in your early 20s and already risking your life by helping to save hundreds of Jewish children and adults in your native Belgium during the German occupation. The danger was obvious: your own cousin was imprisoned at Ravensbrueck concentration camp and your uncle was murdered at Mauthausen for their participation in the underground. Half a century passed before I learned how your humanitarian actions touched my own life and that of my sister, Rosi, and brother, Mani.

In the summer of 1942, when the Germans started deporting Jews to Eastern Europe, my family went into hiding. My siblings and I were placed mostly in the homes of sympathetic gentile Belgian families. When our hiding places were deemed too dangerous, we were moved elsewhere. Rosi and I were both moved four times; at the first three locations, she and I were together because I was only five years old and too young to be placed with strangers by myself. Mani was with us in the first setting, which didn't last very long. After that, he was moved six or seven more times on his own. For reasons I can't remember, on several occasions I also stayed with my parents in their hiding place.

My memories of the first three places are vague, because I spent at most a few weeks or maybe one or two months in each one. My last hiding place was with the Vanderlinden family: Adolph and Adèle and their teenage daughter, Florence. It lasted until the liberation of Brussels—around a year and a half—but in my mind it seems much longer. I have many fond memories of the time I spent with them,

as well as some not-so-pleasant ones resulting from the Nazi occupation and the need to hide the real me. Passing for their son required that I take on a new identity, including a different name, a different religion, and a different personal history.

What I don't remember at all—and neither does Mani who is eight years older than me—is how we traveled from one location to another and who accompanied us. From my reading about the actions of the Belgian underground, I learned that Jewish children were usually taken to their hiding places in all regions of Belgium by young gentile Belgian women who were less likely to attract attention traveling with young children and babies.

Sometime in 1995, Rosi learned that she was in an advanced stage of liver cancer. Because she lived in New York City and I in Maryland, she arranged for the two of us to spend a long weekend at a condo in Atlantic City. It was off-season, and we spent most of our time together walking on the boardwalk and reminiscing about events and people from our past.

Rosi told me about an article published years earlier in the *New York Post* praising your heroism as a member of the Belgian resistance during World War II and your role in helping to save 2,000 Jewish children. She also told me a story I had never heard, because in my family we never spoke about our experiences living in pre-war Nazi Germany and subsequently in German-occupied Belgium.

While our mother was trying to find hiding places for us, she heard from another Jewish woman she barely knew about underground organizations that helped Jews. One of the main activities of these organizations, she was told, was finding hiding places for Jewish children, often in Catholic institutions such as convents, orphanages, and boarding schools, as well as in private homes of non-Jewish Belgian families. This woman gave our mother an address where she could make contact with one of these organizations. Our mother asked Rosi, who was merely 14 years old then, to interpret for her, because our mother's knowledge of French—the language most commonly spoken in Brussels—was limited.

Rosi and our mother went to the address and rang the doorbell, terrified that it might be a trap. In those days, almost anyone could be a collaborator or an informant. They were told to wait in a nearly empty apartment, which only added to their fears. Finally, a young woman in her early 20s joined them in the apartment. Presumably, members of the organization took their own precautions against Gestapo informants. She referred to herself by a first name only: Mademoiselle Jeanne.

According to what Rosi learned about you in the *New York Post*, she was convinced that Mademoiselle Jeanne and you were the same person. Also, Rosi saw a strong resemblance between her memory of the young woman she met at a very stressful time in her life and the picture of you that accompanied the *Post* article.

Rosi then suggested that I write to you. The article provided no address but did state that you were living in Chapel Hill where your husband, Aldo Scaglione, was a renowned professor of European literature at the University of North Carolina. So we decided I would write the letter to you, but mail it to his department at the university.

Some time later, while visiting the Permanent Exhibition at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, I came across the plaque honoring you on the wall of rescuers who Yad Vashem has recognized as Righteous Among the Nations. The plaque included your date of birth only, so I assumed you were still alive.

I started writing this letter at that time. My intent was to express our profound and heartfelt gratitude for your humanitarian deeds. Indeed, my sister, my brother, and I are among the hundreds of Jewish children who owe our lives to you. During my first attempt to write to you, I had great difficulty composing the letter and tears kept running down my cheeks onto the paper. Unfortunately, even if I find all the right words to finish this letter now, it is too late for you to read it. In the meantime, Rosi, too, has passed away.

The only thing left for me to do is to pay tribute to your humanitarian actions, your compassion for the Jewish people, and your fearless courage in the face of extreme danger.

## Sunday Lunch at Charlotte's House

As a result of World War II, my few surviving relatives and their descendants ended up living in different parts of the world—some in Sweden; some in Venezuela; and others in Israel, England, Australia, and Canada. My parents, sister, brother, and I settled in the United States after the war. An exception to this pattern of leaving Europe to start a new life elsewhere was my cousin Charlotte, who spent part of the war in hiding, but returned afterward to her parents' home in Noisy-le-Grand—a distant eastern suburb of Paris—and lived there nearly to the present day.

In the summer of 2004, after flying from Washington to Paris to attend a conference in honor of a French sociologist with whom I had worked for many years, I contacted Charlotte by telephone. She invited me to lunch at her house the following Sunday. Charlotte was retired. She had been a Parisian taxi driver for many years, just like her husband until he passed away. She lived by herself in a big house on Avenue Emile Cossonneau. The front of the house where her dining room was located had once been a grocery store. It had been converted into a dining room, but the large store windows on either side of the glass door had been left as they were.



In France, lunch is generally the main meal of the day, and especially on Sundays it is consumed at a leisurely pace. At some point during the meal, I mentioned to Charlotte that I had gone to the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York where I had seen a photograph of her sister Mina.

Charlotte asked, “Why is Mina’s picture in this museum?” I explained that it is part of the exhibit on the Holocaust and that the picture was an enlargement from Serge and Beata Klarsfeld’s memorial book for the more than 11,000 Jewish children who had been deported from France during World War II, never to return.

Charlotte said, “I have that book. It’s in the garage. Would you like to see it?”

“Of course,” I replied, wondering at the same time why she kept this precious book in the garage. Charlotte stepped through a door into the garage located alongside the dining room. I was reminded that at one time the dining room had been a grocery store. The merchandise had probably been stored in the garage and brought into the store as needed.

Charlotte reappeared with the book and opened it to the page with Mina’s picture. It was the same photo I had seen at the museum. The black-and-white picture of a teenager shows just her upper body. She is looking over her left shoulder in the direction of the camera belonging most likely to a street photographer. Looking more closely at the photo and imagining its own historical context, I think possibly Mina turned her body away from the camera to prevent it from capturing the yellow star on her coat.

Slowly, and without apparent emotion, Charlotte began to tell me a story I had never heard before about her family. Her parents had left Poland in the 1920s and settled first in Belgium where Charlotte and Mina were born. Some years later the family moved to Paris. Her father, Leon, was a chemist who owned a prosperous business manufacturing and selling liqueurs from his store there. They lived in a large and comfortable apartment above the store. Paula, her mother, stayed home to look after their two girls. At some point, they bought two houses in Noisy-le-Grand as investments. A sleepy village along the Marne River in the early 20th century, Noisy-le-Grand had started to develop into a small town.

Later, after Germany invaded France and the systematic roundup of Jews began, Leon and Paula had moved to one of the houses they owned in Noisy-le-Grand—a safer location than Paris, because German soldiers were not stationed there. To further improve their chances of avoiding being caught, Charlotte, 13, and Mina, 16, were hidden with non-Jewish families in the area.

One day, Leon and Paula asked their two daughters to join them for Sunday lunch at their house. According to Charlotte, her father was confident that nothing would happen to them. Mina had pointed out that another Jewish family, residents of Noisy-le-Grand, had just recently been arrested by the French police and transported to Drancy. Leon, however, counted on the local police chief to keep them safe because on several occasions he had played chess with him.

Suddenly, while they were having lunch, there was loud knocking at the front door of the dining room. Through the lace curtain that hung on the glass front door, they could clearly see the silhouettes of two French policemen. Leon opened the door. The policemen entered the room and asked for their identification papers. In France, everyone over the age of 16 was required to carry an identity card. Although Charlotte was too young for an ID card, she knew that her parents' cards and also Mina's were stamped with a large letter J for *Juif* (Jew). Leon said that his ID card was in his suit jacket upstairs in their bedroom. The policeman who appeared to be in charge told him to get it and followed him up the stairs. Obviously, they had come to arrest the family.

Charlotte was aware that her father had a revolver in the bedroom. Frightened and still in shock from the arrival of the policemen, she wondered what her father might do. About this time, her mother, who had gotten up from the dinner table when the policemen banged on the door, slowly took a step, then a second, toward the open front door.

As Charlotte described this scene to me, she pointed to the door less than two meters from where she and I were sitting at the table. "Then, unexpectedly," Charlotte continued, "Mother shouted at Mina and me in Yiddish, '*Laufaweg!*' (Run away!) At the same time, she bolted out the door and started running down the sidewalk."

Charlotte added softly, "I can still hear the clip-clop of her heels on the sidewalk." The second policeman chased after her. Unbeknown to the family, a third policeman had been posted near the gate leading to the back yard from where he could monitor the rear of the house. He, too, took off after Paula. They quickly caught up to her and tussled with her to prevent her from fleeing. Paula must have known that she could not outrun the policeman standing near her in the dining room, let alone the one standing outside the house. Her intention was probably to create a diversion to give Charlotte and Mina the opportunity to escape.

Charlotte and Mina hesitated. Some neighbors who had been watching what was going on from across the street, yelled at the girls, "*Par ici!*" (This way!) The girls ran across the street and escaped through the neighbors' gardens. This was the last time they saw their parents.

When they were sure they had not been followed, they returned to their hiding places. One of them was staying with a Polish priest, the other with a Catholic Polish family.

Six months later, Mina was arrested on the street and deported as her parents had been. Of the 76,000 Jews deported from France, only around 2,000 came back from the camps. Paula, Leon, and Mina were not among the returnees. They existed for me only as three more phantom relatives whom I barely knew through a few old black-and-white photographs. Six decades later, I learned about their tragic fate while sharing Sunday lunch with my cousin Charlotte in the very same room where she and her family had eaten their final meal together.

Charlotte remained quiet for a time, apparently lost in her thoughts about that fateful day. Then, as if an afterthought, she added, "Our neighbors denounced us."

Surprised, I asked, "What happened to them?"

"Nothing," she said. "The family still lives next door."

The irony did not escape me and I'm assuming it was also the case with Charlotte. We didn't talk for a while, and then she suggested we get into her former cab and take a sightseeing tour of Noisy-le-Grand, an offer that I gladly accepted.

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## Days of Remembrance in Rymanow

ALFRED MÜNZER

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*Alfred Münzer was born in November 1941, in The Hague, Netherlands. He survived the Holocaust because an Indonesian family living in the Netherlands rescued him.*

In August 2008, I took an unexpected journey into my family's past. It began with an e-mail forwarded to me by the hospital where I worked. It was labeled "possible spam" and came from a Michal Lorenc of Rymanow, Galicia, Poland, and it read as follows: "I have very urgent information for Dr. Alfred Münzer. In his mother's hometown Rymanow in Poland is organized the special celebration to honor the people who died in Holocaust. Could you give my e-mail to Mr. Münzer? I'll send him more information. Sincerely, Michal Lorenc."

Rymanow was indeed my mother's hometown. Sometimes she'd mockingly call it "Grimanisch." At other times she'd tell me about the mountain landscapes and the small streams she'd wade across on an errand to bring food to a frightful, ungrateful, maiden aunt, Mima Chavele, who referred to her nieces and nephews as *machsbas*, something I took to mean rabble. Or she'd tell me about the town's lone policeman—nicknamed Bamboulla—or about the town's well, dug in a way reminiscent of the wise men of Chelm, on top of a hill, thus ensuring that it would always be dry and serve only as an apocryphal final resting place for all the town's dead cats.

She told me about the Christian hilltop cemetery called Kalvaria, which became a favorite meeting place for young Jewish lovers on Shabbat afternoons. She told me about the *cheder* (Jewish elementary school) that lacked enough seats. She'd be asked to sit on a trunk, which caused her to walk out in a huff. That led to a confrontation with her father and her teacher. The teacher was so poor that his Hebrew language exercises always dealt with requests for money or forgiveness of debt. This teacher was also the subject of one of my mother's first watercolors, which—to her lasting regret—showed him picking his nose.

Rymanow was also the home of the Hassidic dynasty of Menachem Mendel and his chosen successor, the orphaned tailor's apprentice Zvi Hirsch of Rymanow. My mother told me of her friendship with the great-granddaughter of Rabbi Hirsch, who, late on Shabbat as the lights were out, told stories of lost souls that still haunted the rabbi's house.

But Rymanow was also the home of a Jewish theater and the birthplace of Isidor Isaac Rabi, who won the Nobel Prize in physics. Rymanow was a gentle and tough little town where, unlike New York, according to my mother, no amount of snow would ever stop the trains. A prosperous little town where Christians and Jews had lived mostly in harmony for centuries, Rymanow was the place my mother left in 1925, but where her parents, brothers, and sisters remained as disaster struck in 1939.

Poland was not high on my list of places to visit. And my partner, Joel, whose own family came from a town about 40 miles from Rymanow, had vowed never to set foot in Poland. But after a few more e-mails I wrote: “Dear Michal Lorenc, I plan to attend the commemoration in Rymanow with my friend Joel Wind. Our plan is to arrive in Rymanow the afternoon of 11 August and leave early 14 August. I would appreciate it if you could let me know about bus schedules from Krakow to Rymanow. Warm regards, Alfred Münzer.”

Joel and I flew to Krakow, a lively, beautifully preserved medieval city only an hour’s drive from Auschwitz-Birkenau. We spent two days in the Kazimierz—the Jewish quarter of Krakow—where the signs on the buildings are once again in Hebrew and Yiddish, and where a dozen synagogues, including the High, the Isaac, the Old, the New, and the Popper, have mostly been converted into art galleries or museums where you can buy wood-carved Hassidic figures or CDs of klezmer music.

Rymanow is about four hours by bus from Krakow. It sits in the lush green foothills of the Carpathians and is every bit the fairy tale little town my mother had told me about. The Rynek, or main square, sits high on a hill with the village streets and houses tumbling down below. In the distance is a patchwork of fields, farmhouses, and other little towns or *shtetls* just like Rymanow. The infamous well has been covered; in its place is now a kiosk selling newspapers and soft drinks. But Kalvaria, the site of those Jewish dalliances, is still there, about half a mile from town, just up the hill and across from the Jewish cemetery.

Michal Lorenz had picked the August 13 date for what he, in his fluent but imperfect English, called a “celebration” instead of a “commemoration”—because that was the day in 1942 when the last of the town’s Jews were deported from Rymanow. Together with hundreds of Poles who had never been inside a Jewish house of worship, we visited the once-magnificent 17th-century synagogue that had been a ruin a few years before but that was now being restored. It was here that Hassidim who are followers of Menachem Mendel and Zvi Hirsch gather on the *yahrzeits* of the two great rabbis.

We said kaddish (the mourner’s prayer) at an ecumenical memorial service in the Jewish cemetery where 500 disabled or elderly Jews had been shot early that same day in 1942. We attended a rally in the town square where the remaining 800 Jews—my aunts and uncles among them—had been told to report with all their belongings. And together with about a hundred others, we then followed in their footsteps for a five-kilometer march to the railway station in Wroblík.

Rymanow, you see, did not have its own railway station, because when the rails were laid early in the 20th century, its citizens objected on environmental grounds, fearing that the trains would frighten their cows or cause forest fires. At the Wroblik station, we watched as local, national, American, and Israeli dignitaries laid wreaths in a cattle car of the same vintage as the ones used for deportation.

And we listened as a young violinist from the local high school led the crowd in the Polish national anthem. And we then joined in as Malka Oren, an Israeli woman who at age four had last seen her mother in Rymanow that day in 1942, performed “Hatikvah”—Israel’s national anthem—on a violin borrowed from the town’s mayor.

All of us have moments when we seek to remember and rediscover our roots, moments when we want to bring the images of old faded photographs and stories told by parents or grandparents back to life. For most Americans, those moments translate into nostalgic tours of the old country, but for others whose ancestors arrived as slaves, or for those of us whose family came here to escape persecution or genocide, heritage tours have poignancy and a complex mix of emotions that cannot be put into words. They often leave us with more questions than answers.

The urge to discover links to the past can, of course, become an unending, obsessive search for physical links to our ancestry. Countless genealogy websites promise to find our coat of arms. And now there is a fascination with genetic testing. Soon, no doubt, we will all be able to trace ourselves way back to the great apes.

I found some distant family links with others who had traveled to Rymanow to attend the ceremony. But I did not find the names of any of my forebears on the gravestones. The rabbi’s house—with all the ghosts that had frightened my mother—has been demolished. But what I longed for, I realize now, wasn’t to discover a physical or a genealogical connection to a bygone era, but to satisfy a far deeper emotional and spiritual need, a thirst for some sign of redemption from the horrors of that day in August 1942.

The answer came in surprising ways. It did not come in the “Eyl moley rachamim” prayer movingly chanted by the rabbi or in the sincere words of the parish priest. It came in the conviction and persistence of Michal Lorenc and his many cohorts who are doing all they can to awaken the conscience of their town, Rymanow, and their country, Poland, to the horrific fate of their Jewish brothers and sisters. It came in the form of the high school students who spent part of their vacation cleaning the Jewish cemetery. And it came, above all, in the form of an elderly, somewhat frightened Polish woman standing with bowed head at the foot of the ancient grave of Menachem Mendel. She seemed to hesitate, then closed her eyes in prayer and crossed herself. She used a gesture sacred to her Catholic faith to pay homage to a sainted Jewish figure. Is there a more profound act of contrition and appeal for reconciliation?

## Reunion in Ebensee

It has been 15 years since I last visited the little town called Ebensee that is nestled high in the Austrian Alps and since I stood at the grave of my father and wept. I never knew my father because he, like my mother and two sisters, was taken from our home in Holland and deported when I was only nine months old. My mother survived, but my sisters and father did not. My sisters were killed in Auschwitz. And my father went from The Hague to Westerbork, to Vught, to Auschwitz, to Mauthausen, to Gusen, to Steyr, and finally to Ebensee. He survived the hardships of the camp but died two months later of what we were told was tuberculosis.

This was not an easy journey. I had visited Ebensee with my mother before we immigrated to the United States. But when I called the Austrian Tourist Office for information about Ebensee, I was told that there had been no concentration camp in Ebensee and that there was no concentration camp cemetery.

For months I had nightmares that the cemetery had been bulldozed and my father's memory erased. And yet on a map of Ebensee I did find a little cross with the telltale letters KZ next to it. I had vivid memories from my previous visit 35 years earlier, traveling by train to Ebensee through the French and Swiss Alps. It's a journey I had always wanted to share with someone special. And so my partner, Joel, and I flew into Zurich and took the Transalpine Express through Salzburg, to Bad Ischl, a town near Ebensee.

As we looked out the window of the dining car, the mountains seemed to grow ever more awe-inspiring as we approached Bad Ischl. And wherever we looked, there were campers and hikers partaking of the beauty of creation. How was it possible, I asked myself, for the horrors of the Holocaust to have coexisted with such splendor? I saw some cows grazing peacefully in a pasture, and I wondered whether we humans, instead of being at the pinnacle of creation, weren't actually some deadly error in the story of creation.

When Joel and I arrived in Bad Ischl, the young woman who was one of the owners of the inn where we were staying told us apologetically that there had been an error in our reservation and that we would have to change rooms the following day. I then told her that we'd have to leave early the next morning to go to Ebensee to visit my father's grave at the former concentration camp.

At that, the woman broke out in tears. "Ebensee is my hometown. And I am so ashamed," she said. We hugged, and suddenly I felt as if an enormous burden had been lifted, as if the acknowledgment of responsibility contained in those simple words—"I am so ashamed"—had restored my faith in humanity.

The following morning we went on to Ebensee. It's a quaint little town with a beautiful old church on a hill. It sits on the edge of the Traunsee, among some of the tallest peaks of Austria. And less than

a mile from the heart of town—in the middle of a subdivision that occupies the site of the former concentration camp and where among the houses you can still see the gates to the camp—we found the cemetery. Thousands of victims are buried in this cemetery, most in mass graves, and others who—like my father—died in the weeks and months after liberation and are buried in individual graves.

I had been prepared to find a cemetery that had been forgotten, neglected, or even bulldozed. But what we found was a peaceful spot surrounded by trees that had been merely shrubs when I had been there last, and by monuments that bore inscriptions in French, Italian, German, Polish, Spanish, Hebrew, and Dutch. We met the caretaker, who obviously took a lot of pride in the appearance of the cemetery and who pointed out the exact spot where my father was buried.

Again I felt some real sense of kinship with this man who, in his care for the dead, seemed to be carrying out an act of atonement—if not on his own behalf, then on behalf of this little town that had allowed a concentration camp to exist in its midst, and on behalf of a country that had yet to come to terms with its own complicity in the Holocaust.

I felt at peace as we left Ebensee. But Joel, despite having no immediate connection to Ebensee, could not rid himself of the anger he felt toward anything Austrian. From Ebensee, we retraced my father's steps and went to Mauthausen—a grim fortress on the outskirts of the city of Linz. It sits high on a bluff overlooking the beautiful, fertile valley of the Danube.

Mauthausen is Austria's national monument to the Holocaust. Established in 1938, the camp holds a special place in the infamy of the Holocaust because of its stone quarry, where thousands met their death struggling up the 148 steps carrying boulders of more than 100 pounds each. The German guards took delight in tripping prisoners who were at the head of the line going up or down the steps, so that all who followed would trip and fall as well.

But what I remember most of that dreary day in the camp was meeting a man called Fyodor Stepanovich Solodovnik. He, too, was there on a pilgrimage, a return to a place sanctified by the blood of 100,000 victims. He was the son of a Russian partisan and had been taken prisoner when he was only 16 years old and sold as a servant to a woman in Breslau for 20 marks. He ran away and was captured and sent to Mauthausen.

He told us many things that day. But the thing I remember most was how he shook his head while we were looking at the list of nationalities and various types of "offenders" represented in Mauthausen. "There were no Spaniards, no Italians, no French, no Jews, no homosexuals, no Russians in Mauthausen," he said. "We were all the same." How tragic, I thought, that it takes the horror of a concentration camp to make people realize that we are "all the same."



But the saddest part of our visit to Mauthausen may not have been anything we saw while we were there. It wasn't walking on the wooden floors of the barracks that had born the last steps of tens of thousands of our fellow human beings. It wasn't the huge Star of David honoring Jews from Amsterdam who had committed suicide by jumping down the precipice into the quarry and whom the Germans called "the parachutists." It wasn't the flickering memorial candles burning in the ovens of the crematorium. It wasn't even the shock of finding my father's name on a monument erected by the Dutch government.

The saddest part of the visit was to come home and to realize that even before the events of the Holocaust had begun to fade into history, the world seemed already to have forgotten its terrible lesson. No, the Holocaust did not spell an end to prejudice, persecution, cruelty, or mass murder. One year it was Cambodians persecuted by the Khmer Rouge, another it was Muslims in Bosnia, or Tutsis in Rwanda. And now, as I write, it is Rohingya in Burma and Yazidis in Iraq.

Human thirst for blood seems unquenchable. And let's not be smug and think of atrocities and murder and torture as only occurring "over there." Atrocities, murder, and torture happen "over here" as well—little murders, little atrocities, little everyday bits of torture and barbarism that occur in our own country, in our own city, in our own community.

One of the recurring questions asked about Ebensee, Mauthausen, and all the other camps is this: how was it possible for people to ignore such terror so close to their homes? But how much attention do I pay to the terror that goes on close to my home? Philosophers, psychiatrists, and sociologists have come to the unsettling conclusion that the Holocaust's perpetrators were ordinary people—not psychotics, not sociopaths, but ordinary people unbelievably just like me.

When I turn away from the injustice suffered by people around the globe, am I at risk of being at least a little like the Germans and Austrians and Poles and others who turned away from those who were shot at Babi Yar, gassed in Auschwitz, or worked to death in Mauthausen or Ebensee? When I ignore those who go hungry in our city, am I not at least a little like those who continued to feast as others starved? When I fail to speak out when our "leaders" engage in demagoguery, am I not at least a little like the Germans who were silent in the face of Hitler?

There is a prayer on a monument in Ebensee that reads: "To the faithful companions, the heroes and the comrades of a thousand dead who rest here, and countless others of all nationalities and every faith, brothers and sisters in a common tragic destiny, dedicated by an Italian woman who prays that such an incredible sacrifice might turn the human heart to good." The answer to that woman's prayer is not to be found in heaven, but in me and you.



## Lying

HALINA YASHAROFF PEABODY

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*Halina (Litman) Yasharoff Peabody, born in Krakow, Poland, survived the war with her mother and sister by posing as Catholics using false papers bought from a priest.*

I am not a good liar; my face gives me away. The best I can do is stay silent.

But there was a time, more than 70 years ago, when lying was a necessity if I wanted to live. When Germany invaded eastern Poland, where my family lived in 1941—the Russians came first in 1939—the Jews were being murdered. There was nowhere to run. All doors were closed to us and my mother was left with my little sister and me, ages two and eight and a half, with no hope of staying alive.

What could a mother do? She tried to send us to Romania, but it was too late. We had good friends who were very supportive of us, especially because my father had been sent to Siberia during the Russian occupation, and they decided that perhaps we could pass for Catholics. So they helped my mother purchase false identity papers from a priest.

At eight and a half, I was old enough to understand the hopeless situation we were in. I fully cooperated in learning the details of my new identity, which included a new name, birthplace, grandparents, and—of course—a new religion.

The three of us left the ghetto and boarded a train to another town, which was *judenfrei*, meaning that it had no Jews anymore. My mother chose a town where she hoped we could get help from an acquaintance who was also living under an assumed name. It was going to be a four-day trip. Our only possessions were two suitcases and a little money collected for us by our kind friends.

Another passenger joined us as we started on our trip. He was very friendly and started chatting with my mother. He was curious about us and asked many questions about my sister and me. The questions became more and more probing, and before long, he pushed so hard that my mother finally admitted that we were Jewish.

She explained to me carefully that he was a *folksdeutch* (meaning he had German blood), and so he had certain privileges and obligations, which included delivering Jews to the Nazis. He said that he was going to the same town as we were headed and he would accompany us until we reached our destination, and then would hand us over to the Gestapo.

We traveled for four days and nights, and all my mother could think of during these days was if she could find a way for us to survive. The situation was seemingly impossible. My mother knew that the children would be taken away and killed even if she might be used for used as slave labor. She decided that the only thing she could hope for was a quick “resolution,” so she made him a proposal: she would give him the tickets for the suitcases and all the money she had—and even the coats we were wearing—if he would promise to have us shot immediately upon arrival. She explained to me that this way, our suffering would be short.

We finally arrived at our destination, exhausted and full of lice, and we began descending the stairs to the platform. At that point, I suddenly “woke up” and realized that I was about to die. I pulled at my mother’s coat and said, “Mom, I don’t want to die.”

Again, what could she do? She asked the man if he would let me go, explaining to him that I was blonde and green-eyed and did not look Jewish and that perhaps I could survive. Before he said anything, I said that I would not go without her and my sister. So we continued to walk toward the Gestapo.

Then my mother asked the man whether he had children. He replied that he did, so then she said, “Look, I gave you everything I had. Keep it. Just let us go and try our luck. Why do you want to have us on your conscience?” He shrugged and said that we did not have a chance, but he then walked away.

We found ourselves standing in the main street, homeless and lost. There was a little café, and we entered. My mother asked for some milk for my sister and if anyone knew of a place where we could find lodging. It was important for us to be inside so we would not be questioned by the Germans. A young man brought us to a washer lady who took in lodgers and, in spite of her three strapping sons’ objections, she insisted on taking us in and giving us a bed. She told them that “this is a mother with two children, and I have to take her in.”

And so my life as a Catholic began. Mother found different jobs and paid whatever she earned to this good lady. As a Polish child, I could go to school for two hours a day. Sundays we attended church. We lived a strange new life, watching every single step. It was a challenge not to give ourselves away.

We lived in the most primitive conditions—no plumbing, no electricity, and a carbide lamp for light. Going to church was scary because I knew nothing about how to behave as a Catholic, so I had to figure it out and hope for the best. Going to confession was most difficult. What kind of sins did I commit? Well, I was lying but I certainly would not have told the priest that!

It took many close calls and a lot of luck to stay alive, but my mother was always there—and we would talk secretly between ourselves so nobody would hear. Newspapers and radios were forbidden; possession of a radio was punishable by death, as was helping Jews. Food was very scarce, and we kids used to run after carts with farm produce, stealing potatoes and any other products being brought in for the Germans. Sometimes we had only barley for days, which still gives me nightmares even today.

We received one letter from the people we left behind, which was a big risk. But it was so important that our friends felt it had to be sent, since it contained news about my father. The Red Cross had informed us that he was “safe with his sister in Palestine.” This meant that he was out of Russia and free. We knew that there was family in Palestine, and we were overjoyed, but as long as the Germans occupied Poland we could not attempt to contact him.

Mother was naturally most concerned about security, and eventually she took a risky step and applied for a job with the German military camp so she could have identification in case we were stopped. She worked in the kitchen peeling potatoes for the troops, and the ID did help when our place was raided and we were the only ones not taken to the Gestapo station to be checked out. As long as you worked for the Germans, they left you alone.

Living as a “Catholic” became a routine, and during our little secret talks, my mother spoke to me about religion. She wanted to make sure that I did not forget who I was. She told me, “We all pray to the same God but through different religions—and you are Jewish.” This saved me from having any conflicts for the rest of my life. I bless her for being so intuitive.

When the war ended, the Russians came back to “save” us and then just stayed. But at least they let the few of us who survived leave the country.

It was ironic that when we finally were able to join the few survivors who were being taken out of Poland, they did not believe we were Jews. They thought we were Catholics pretending to be Jewish in order to leave Poland!

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## The S.S. *Zion*

ALFRED TRAUM

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*Alfred (Freddie) Traum was born in Vienna, Austria, in 1929. In June 1939, he and his older sister were sent to England on the Kindertransport. Their parents were murdered in the Holocaust.*

So this was it! I was finally on the way to realizing my dream. It had been six long years—army, merchant navy, college, assignments at sea, and more schooling—and all the time working toward a single goal. Those were the thoughts that echoed through my mind as we drove to the Manchester Airport. My whole family came to see me off—my sister, her husband, and the two boys all excited and wishing me well—as I embarked on my new adventure. It wasn't a sad farewell. We all knew that we would see each other fairly soon.

Manchester to Hamburg, generally a short, uneventful two-hour flight, proved to be very different on that particular occasion. The aircraft's heating system malfunctioned, and we all suffered two hours in a frigid aircraft watching small clouds of vapor being released from the lips of the passengers and crew. Flight attendants handed out all the available blankets. Passengers grabbed as many as they could and wrapped themselves from head to toe while huddled in their seats. It helped a little, but not enough to ward off the outside cold at an altitude of 30,000 feet.

After a little while, the captain's voice came crackling over the intercom. He was deeply apologetic for the inconvenience caused by the lack of heating. However, the flight wasn't long enough for him to return to Manchester. Instead he offered free drinks to those who could use some inner warmth. For most of the passengers, coffee and tea just didn't do the trick, and they enthusiastically reached for the free liquor bottles as the flight attendants passed by.

I downed my two miniature bottles of Johnny Walker and immediately felt the warmth spread throughout my body and thaw out the extremities down to my toes. There was magic in those bottles. That double Scotch did the trick for me. Several passengers that needed additional defrosting disembarked from the plane in a slightly inebriated state with an unsteady gait, but a seemingly happy state of mind. It was in that manner that we entered the arrivals lounge to the awaiting crowd that had assembled there, and some viewed our entrance with astonishment.

A young man, tall with closely cropped blond hair, held a sign that bore my name. Just a glance was all I needed, and I had him pegged. I could picture him in his younger years strutting around in his Hitler Youth uniform giving the Nazi salute. He just looked typical, and I could pick them a mile off! Those were my thoughts as I walked toward him. When he caught sight of me approaching, I was easy to detect as the only one getting off the plane in a merchant navy uniform. He lowered the sign, and his face cracked into a broad grin as he extended his hand to clasp mine. “Shalom, nice to meet you. Hope you had a good flight. I’m Buxi,” he said.

You could have floored me. And I had thought that with the two years I had spent in the army in Germany, I was all-knowing. From that moment on, I made a vow to myself that I would never again prejudice people. Naturally, I never kept that promise entirely, but it was a lesson well learned.

So that’s my new boss, I mused to myself. He looked about my own age. That would be unheard of in the British Merchant Navy. There, by the time someone reached that position, he was generally a crusty old man, whose single enjoyment in life seemed to be derived from making life miserable for his junior subordinates.

Responding to Buxi’s comment about my flight, I explained the lack of heating and the unlimited supply of hard liquor and resultant intoxication—and wondered if he noticed it as we came through the gate.

“No, can’t say I did,” he replied. “I was too busy looking out for you.”

Although Buxi’s English was fluent, he possessed a marked accent, one that I couldn’t place at the time; later, I learned it was Hungarian. He hailed a cab, and in clear and precise German, he gave directions to the driver to our berth at the Deutsche Werft, the shipyard where the *Zion* was docked. The airport was a considerable distance from the Hamburg docks. The long ride gave us an ideal opportunity to chat in a relaxed manner and get to know one another.

Buxi had been with Zim Lines for several years and for the past year had served as second radio officer aboard the S.S. *Israel*. That proved to be a good learning experience for him, as he was undoubtedly being groomed for promotion to this new assignment. Like me, he was excited about his new role. Buxi told me there would be three radio officers to provide round-the-clock coverage. The third one had yet to arrive.

Eventually, we neared our destination. The taxi entered a narrow, long, and dimly lit tunnel. Dark-brown glazed bricks lined the walls. Water trickled down the surfaces, entering through countless cracks in the walls and also dripping from the curved ceiling, splashing onto the windshield of our taxi. I was keenly aware that we were under the harbor and didn’t much care for those leaking walls, which looked as though they were about to cave in at any moment. It was a welcome sight when daylight pierced through the end of the tunnel.

A few more detailed instructions to the driver, and we entered the shipyard. Suddenly, lo and behold, there she was, majestically sitting high in the water, freshly painted in gleaming white, with contrasting blue stripes on the funnel marking. Those sky-blue stripes had seven gold stars evenly arranged between them, the stars representing the seven seas. The ship's railings and doors were all of highly varnished mahogany, a nice contrast against the white. The shining brass of the rectangular window frames glistened, and it reminded me of how much work someone had to do to maintain it in that condition. I thanked my lucky stars it wasn't me.

The ship was an expression of elegance and streamlining. Its masts and forward superstructure—all the way up to and including the bridge—all tilted slightly backward several degrees, giving the illusion that the ship was in motion. Gazing at that beautiful ship, which was to be my home for at least a short while, was a thrilling and electrifying moment for me. I would have been quite content to tarry a while longer on the dock and just take in the sight, but Buxi raced up the companion ladder and motioned for me to follow.

"Why don't we drop off your bags in your cabin, then we can go up to the mess and have something to eat," he said. "There are bound to be others there. I'll introduce you around."

I followed like an obedient puppy as Buxi led the way, turning this way and that down several long corridors and stairways, and finally arriving at the officers' mess. I hoped I would be able to find my own way back to the cabin. As predicted, several fellows were seated, eating and engaged in deep discussions. The conversation came to an abrupt halt as Buxi introduced me.

Kletzky, the lanky third engineer, as I soon learned, had served in the Royal Navy during the latter part of the war. In his best-accentuated phony English accent, he welcomed me to the *Zion*. "So tell me," he said. "How are things in old Blighty? The queen is well, I trust?"

Answering in kind, I said, "Oh, yes, super. In fact, she made me promise to give you her regards. Consider them delivered."

Even though I was hired on as an Israeli, I was the only one there from England, and I could see that I was going to get some ribbing, especially from Kletzky and others like him who had served in the British armed forces. But it was all good clean fun, and I could handle it. Seated across from Kletzky was Max, the second mate, with a more serious demeanor, but equally friendly. The steward wanted to know what he could bring me.

Kletzky chirped up, “Oh, bring him some fish and chips. Make him feel at home, and don’t forget the vinegar!” The mess steward, ignoring Kletzky’s remarks, in quick order brought us a most satisfying meal. Neither fish and chips nor bangers and mash were served, but a menu fit for most passenger liners. It was the first of many such meals aboard my new ship. I took that as a good omen.

The conversation flowed easily and frequently flitted back and forth between Hebrew and English. I had already heard Buxi speak German to the taxi driver, and on the way to the mess he conversed briefly with one of the cabin stewards in his native Hungarian. Because I spoke a passable German, I was considered somewhat of a linguist within my tank squadron while stationed in Germany. But I was just kidding myself. Far from being a linguist, I was more like a one-eyed man among the blind, for none of my army mates could muster more than a word or two of German. Buxi, however, was a true linguist. Later on, I discovered that he had three more languages tucked away under his belt that emerged only when the occasion warranted it.

## Vienna, Chanukah 1938

The first day of Chanukah fell on December 23, just 42 days after the infamous Kristallnacht. That night, most of Vienna’s synagogues were torched, Jewish stores looted and decimated, many homes broken into and men beaten, and in some cases men arrested and taken to concentration camps. That night was still fresh in our memories when the decision was made, nevertheless, to go ahead with the Chanukah celebration and pageant for which so many of us had rehearsed.

Kristallnacht only made it clear that the secular world would be denied to us. It appeared to galvanize the Jewish community to look inward, and in some ways to enhance Jewish life.

I used to sing in our synagogue’s choir but that was no longer possible. However, a new and much larger choir was organized, for which I auditioned and was accepted. It was the Jewish answer to the well-known Vienna Boys’ Choir. We were called the *Yudishe singer knaben* (Jewish boys’ choir). We rehearsed twice a week at a place in Vienna’s second district with a large Jewish population.

Because I lived quite a long way from there, I was given travel vouchers for my commute. It made me feel quite important. The choir organizers had us all measured for sailor suits. We even gave several concerts and made two recordings. The choirmaster had big plans. Although life went along as normally as could be expected, in each family separate and desperate plans were being made with the hope of leaving Vienna for some safe haven. For my sister and me, it was the Kindertransport for safety in England.



Meanwhile, the Chanukah celebration, conducted in a large hall, went on as planned. My sister and some of her friends were dressed as Maccabee soldiers and performed a dance. I, dressed all in white and wearing a bandana on my forehead with a large paper candle and a glowing, colored flame, stood on the stage with seven of my similarly clad friends. I still remember the first of my lines—*Ich bin das erste licht* (I am the first light), followed by more words that I do not remember. As each of us said our lines, an adult standing at the foot of the stage lit the appropriate candle on a large Chanukah menorah. When all eight candles had been lit and the blessing made, the choir began to sing the Hebrew melody *Maoz tsur yeshuati* (Rock of ages). My mother was sitting in the first row, *kvelling* over our performance. All those present joined in the song, and we forgot about the harsh world outside. Naturally, as on all such occasions, this was followed with festive food and drink. We all went home with hope in our hearts.

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## Bringing the Lessons Home

SUSAN WARSINGER

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*Susan (Hilsenrath) Warsinger was born in Bad Kreuznach, Germany. She escaped with her brother and was smuggled into France before leaving for the United States in 1941.*

When the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum first opened in 1993, there were no tours of the Permanent Exhibition. After my fellow survivor, Susan Berlin, and I came to volunteer at the Museum we wanted to conduct tours for the many high school students who visited the Permanent Exhibition. We met with three staff people in the education department, and they gave workshops on how to conduct educational tours of the Permanent Exhibition for a few volunteers and some staff. This was a significant beginning for many tours to follow.

After I had given a few tours, a tall, thoughtful young man joined our tours. His name was James Fleming, and he was 17 years old, a senior in high school. He seemed to me very serious and wanted to learn everything he could about the Holocaust. The Museum was starting a new program called Bringing the Lessons Home, which would introduce high school students in the Washington, DC, area to Holocaust history. He was the first high school ambassador for our Museum to graduate from that program. Then he went off to college.

I was happy to see James when he decided to come back to our Museum after graduating from college. He turned out to be well read and cultured, and he earned the position on our staff as the program coordinator of Youth and Community Initiatives. Now he brings hundreds of high school students to the Museum for guided tours and discussions. He says that he is “making it his calling to make the lessons of the Holocaust resonate with the next generation.”

Now, the Bringing the Lessons Home program introduces thousands of Washington, DC, area high school students to Holocaust history each year. The program also enables the most inspired of those students to become tour guides and ambassadors through their high school years and beyond. These ambassadors then share the history and its relevance with their families, friends, and communities. More than 700 of them have gone on to be program ambassadors, giving tours of the Museum and sharing what they learned about the Holocaust. Their ages range from 16 to 38 years old.

I was excited to be invited to their first reunion, marking the 20th anniversary of the program. It took place in the Meyerhoff Theater. There, the past two decades were recalled and honored by our Museum director, the director of the Leadership Programs, and James Fleming, the program coordinator of Youth and Community Initiatives. I was so proud of James, just the way I feel about my grandchildren. I could not stop smiling as I was sitting in my chair in the theater. I know that my old friend, Susan Berlin, who had passed away, would have been proud. In the audience were many of James's ambassadors who follow in his footsteps. Perhaps some of them will work for the Museum at some future time. Our first teachers, as well as many who are on the staff in the education department of the Museum, were there also. The donors of the program sat in the front and we applauded them loudly.

After the wonderful program, which included not only fine speeches, but also numerous films of the ambassadors in action, there was a marvelous reception in the Hall of Witness where many of us reminisced about times past.

Like the Holocaust survivors of the Museum's Speaker's Bureau, these ambassadors will have the opportunity to teach people to be proactive and not simply onlookers when they see injustice taking place. When entire classrooms come to the Museum, I have seen these ambassadors connect and establish a special relationship with their peers so that everybody listens and cares. The ambassadors work as witnesses and want to testify. They are moved by what the Museum is trying to teach and want everyone to understand what prejudice can do to people. This experience at the Museum has changed them. They have become articulate and can speak in public. They are our torchbearers and will be able to draw people's attention to the importance of the past and the lessons we can learn from it to better understand the present and, therefore, make better decisions about the future. They and the Museum will be here when the survivors are all gone. I thank them for being our ambassadors.

## Feeling Good

Another year of observing the Days of Remembrance at our United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has just passed. The revered event that took place was not much different from other years except that I was there with my two brothers most of the time. On the morning of the first day of the DOR, my brother Joe and I attended a program on our Museum's collection as well as the dedication of a display about the Shapell Collections, Conservation, and Research Center that is currently under

construction. It was held in the Hall of Witness of the Museum. Other Holocaust survivors and I joined the Shapell family in a ribbon-cutting ceremony for this new center to be built. I was feeling good because my brother was in the audience and sharing this experience with me.

After the event, we were invited to a luncheon in one of the classrooms where we usually have our survivor meetings. I was delighted to see this classroom converted into an elegant dining room, with lovely linen and satin tablecloths, shining silverware, long-stemmed wine glasses, and beautiful china dishes. The centerpiece on each table was different; a marvelously decorated cake resembling a top hat without a brim. All the cakes looked to me like different colored time capsules. We were served by well-dressed and professional attendants. It felt as if we were in a four-star restaurant in Washington.

In the afternoon, my brother Joe and I met our younger brother, Ernest, at the Wardman Park Hotel where we shared memories of our childhood, talked about our continually growing families, envisaged our future, and expressed our divergent views on politics. It felt wonderful being with them. We continued our heart-to-heart conversation during the delectable cocktail hour where we drank red wine and ate tasty appetizers. I was delighted to introduce my brothers to my Museum friends.

The 2016 National Tribute Dinner began with a speech about the Shapell Collections, Conservation, and Research Center time capsule followed by a panel discussion led by our director, Sara Bloomfield. It was called “The Battle for Ideas,” and the panel included representatives from Turkey, Syria, and Canada. They each talked about how the people in their own country perceived the Holocaust. A panel discussion for communicating ideas seemed to me a very successful format. I thought that the hundreds of people attending this dinner were all paying close attention.

The keynote speaker was Representative John Lewis, one of the few surviving leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. He talked about safeguarding democracy, promoting human dignity, and creating a more just world. The dinner was delicious and one of our companions at the table was Jessica C. Abrahams, the chair of the Washington Lawyers Committee, which promotes and provides support for Museum initiatives that explore the legal dimensions of the Holocaust and their continuing relevance to national and international law. The discussions around our table were pleasant, informative, and valuable. I was in my glory sitting between my two brothers who expressed their joy of being with me. I think they were proud of me because they knew that I was an important part of the Museum and that I had donated much of my time to it. We had been young children together during the Holocaust and were together at this significant event.

The next morning we had breakfast at the hotel and were rushed off on a bus to the Emancipation Hall of the Capitol. The covering letter for the program was from the White House, signed by President Obama. The United States Army Band played, the chairman of the Museum spoke, the 3rd United States Infantry marched and presented the colors, the ambassador from Israel to the United States greeted us, Sara Bloomfield made remarks, and Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker presented

the keynote address. I took many pictures of my friend Dora Klayman, because she was one of the candle lighters during the ceremony. I also took a picture of Hazzan Henrique Ozur Bass, who sang the “Hymn of the Partisans.” He is the cantor at my daughter’s synagogue who helped my twin grandsons with the preparation of their bar mitzvahs. Before the program ended, it gave me great pleasure to see my friend, Gideon Frieder, come to the podium and recite the mourner’s kaddish. He has such a resonant, mellow, and melodious voice. It reverberated with passion and devoutness throughout the Emancipation Hall. I was thrilled to hear him and so very proud of him.

We returned to the Wardman Park Hotel and again had a wonderful lunch. I had a chance to socialize with many survivors who volunteer at the Museum. We know each other well because we have been together for such a long time and have become friends over the years. We were there at this two-day event for the same reason President Obama explained in his letter to the National Commemoration of the Days of Remembrance “. . . we pay tribute to those who lost their lives in the Holocaust and whose horrific experiences continue to mobilize us to stand up and speak out. We recommit to fighting against hatred in all its forms and guarding against passivity and silence. We reaffirm our shared responsibility to teach our children and our grandchildren the lessons of the past. Together, we can defend the rights and freedoms that are the birthright of all human kind.”

It was a memorable experience that I shared with my fellow survivors and my much-loved brothers. I was feeling good.

## Sense of Being Jewish

From my earliest memories, I have always had a sense of being Jewish. My father, who had grown up as an Orthodox Jew, made sure we observed all the Jewish traditions. My mother, who wanted to please him, kept a kosher home. She prepared all the traditional dishes for the Sabbath, and we celebrated all the Jewish holidays with great enthusiasm. My brother and I accompanied my father to the synagogue almost every Saturday. It was there that I learned that it was important to pray to God and that God liked it when the Jewish men worshipped him.

Because I was just a little girl, it was more important to be in the synagogue, but it was not mandatory for me to learn all the prayers. My brother and I also studied the Bible with our town’s rabbi. From him, I learned that God was the creator of the universe, that he talked to Adam and Eve before sending them out of the Garden of Eden, that he asked Abraham to sacrifice his son to him, and that Job suffered tremendous disasters that took away everything that he held dear. I was never sure what God wanted from me. I was afraid of him, and I understood that I had to be good.

During the rise of Hitler, I was intrigued by the glamour of the Nazi Party, which was exhibited all over Germany. However, I realized that I was, above all, a Jewish girl, belonging to a very important people. It was not until later that I learned the Nazi plan for the Jewish people.

Even when my brother and I were smuggled into France so that we would be safe from the Nazi atrocities, my Orthodox Jewish identity never left me. Saturday was an official school day in France. The French children were off on Thursdays and Sundays. We went to school on Saturday—the day of rest—but we did not write anything down, and we contributed only orally in the classroom so that we would honor the Sabbath tradition of not doing any work. We also ate only kosher food. After the Germans invaded France, we were put in an Orthodox Jewish children’s home and kept up all the traditions. It felt good to be with our own people. Again we prayed to God that we would be reunited with our parents.

What made me change when I arrived in the United States as a teenager? I think it was because I so desperately wanted to forget my childhood in Europe. I desired to become a real American girl. In high school and at the university, I wanted to be like all the other young adults.

I remember two incidents very clearly that changed my Orthodox practices. At 17, I had a Saturday night date with a classmate who would eventually become my future husband. My father asked us to wait until the Sabbath was over. We had to linger on our porch until we could see three stars in the sky, which was the signal that the new work week had begun. I was always eager to leave and really did not care about these stars or when the Sabbath was over; I waited only to please my father.

The second incident happened at a Hot Shoppe. It was the practice of teenagers, after an evening at the movies or going to a dance, to get something to eat before going home. Most everyone always ordered a Coke and a hamburger. Of course, I could not order that because it was not kosher. However, I saw something on the menu called a cheeseburger, and I thought that it must be like a hamburger, but only with cheese.

To my chagrin, when the waitress brought our order, there was meat *and* cheese on the roll. I knew that I had to make a big decision in my life. So I did; I ate that cheeseburger. I felt guilty for a while because I had mixed meat and milk at the same meal, which had been forbidden to me since I could remember. However, at the time I considered myself someone who was open to new experiences, and that I was still a good person.

During my marriage to my wonderful husband, we led a rather secular life. However, I taught my three daughters all the Jewish traditions my parents taught me. When I was working, my father took his grandchildren to Hebrew school twice a week after their public school day was over. Later, they were all married in the synagogue where they had taken their Hebrew lessons.

It was with great pleasure that I attended all nine of my grandchildren's bar and bat mitzvahs. They were wonderful and joyous occasions with family and friends. My oldest grandchild, Matthew, spent one of his years in medical school in China. During the high holidays, he took a three-hour train to Shanghai so that he could attend synagogue services at the local Chabad. He met a group of Jews who befriended him, and on Chanukah, they sent him candles that he lit to commemorate the holiday.

This year Matthew was in Gulu, a small village in Uganda, teaching Ugandan physicians about infectious diseases. He was the only Jew in the village, and it was Passover. Matthew, who can tackle anything, made his own matzos. He looked up the rules on how to make them and found out that he had only 18 minutes in which to prepare and bake them. He sent me a picture; the matzos looked very authentic. He also prepared the entire Seder meal and invited the physicians to the meal. He used goat meat to make brisket. I am sure that the meal was probably more like what our ancestors had eaten than any he had known before.

I feel that my children and grandchildren will pass on their Jewish identity to their descendants. My own sense of being Jewish has been strengthened since volunteering for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, because I know that I am part of a community that must make sure the Jewish people survive.

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