Echoes of Memory

Volume 10

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Echoes of Memory Volume 10

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Foreword

Fourteen years ago, I wrote the foreword to the first volume of *Echoes of Memory*, the compilation of written remembrances made by Holocaust survivors who attend The Memory Project, a writing workshop at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. That foreward strikes me now as having a tone of bemusement to it. I think I wondered then what the work of writing in a group with other survivors meant for the survivor writers and what effect the work might have for a historical knowledge of the Holocaust. I'm sure I wondered what our group would come to mean for the writers and for their writing, moving forward.

In our monthly conversations, we had already begun to wonder what these written texts would mean for an understanding of the Holocaust, for a reader's connection to these writers' stories. We had discussions about what the written texts would be called. A few writers said they couldn't be called stories; they said they were testimony. At some point, I settled on referring to the texts that are sent to me each month, now by e-mail, as "pieces." But even now, 14 years after that first *Echoes* volume, we have not settled on one answer that satisfies every member of our group. Jacqueline Mendels Birn describes her written work as her "memoirs." Some group members simply say, "my writing," or "my text." The answers are personal and specific, contextual and complicated by considerations of the form, audience, and purpose that each writer imagines for his or her work.

I see this complexity, this defiance of definition or uniformity, as an example of what this work can do, what a compilation of this kind can mean for the writers and for their readers. The different writers featured here each survived the Holocaust. Each is, as Primo Levi wrote in 1986, "an exception" to the Nazi plan. Each of the varying ways these writers conceive of both the work they make and their reasons for making it are uniquely personal. Susan Warsinger's piece titled "Children Far Away," in which she describes wanting to make a connection to school children in

Costa Rica, shows us Susan's dedication to educating children about the Holocaust and her desire to translate her own story of being a Jewish child trapped in Nazi Germany into action against injustice. She sees her writing as an extension of her teaching. Her story is, in some ways, her statement about her own way of being a survivor of the Holocaust—both what she wrote, and that she writes.

Harry Markowitz's piece, "The Unspeakable," examines how the events of the Holocaust were not talked about in his family while the older generation of survivors—his mother, father, and aunt—were alive. His writing questions his own incomplete knowledge, as a child, of what had happened and how he deciphers that silence now. While other writers may be teaching or inspiring through their work, some, like Harry, are using writing as a mode of questioning.

The survivor writers of The Memory Project don't have one answer about what their work means to them, how it should be understood, or even what we should call it. They don't have one answer to the questions of past, present, or future. But, each page of their writing, through our group meetings, and compiled here, is a piece of the important and continuing conversation. Each piece brings relevant, even timely, questions to readers, while focusing their attention on listening carefully to the Holocaust's long and distinct echo, so we may learn more about how it sounds to each survivor and, in that way, remember.

Maggie Peterson, PhD, Writing Instructor, The Memory Project

How to Educate the Young Generation About the Atrocities of World War II

Jacqueline Mendels Birn

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.

On May 19, 2014, there was an op-ed piece in *The Washington Post* written by Michael Gerson titled, "Teaching the Holocaust." A boy who had his bar mitzvah was the grandson of four survivors. One of the grandfathers had said, when the boy was born, "Hitler, you bastard, I beat you."

That reminded me of a project I work with called "Remember Me," in which I interview Holocaust survivors. Most of them are orphans who tell me how they survived, but their father or mother or both were shot or rounded up and deported and never came back.

In the course of those interviews, I often ask my interviewee, who is usually about my age, if he or she married and has children and grandchildren. Whenever I hear that a survivor has grandchildren, I always say, "You see, Hitler did not win! We are alive, and we have young people in our families who prove that Hitler failed in his devilish attempt to murder us all."

Whenever I speak to groups of young people at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum or at schools or synagogues, I end my presentation saying, "You can touch me. I am alive; Hitler did not kill me. Even though Hitler tried to kill me and my parents and sister, he did not succeed. Every day was a miracle, and now it is a joy for me to have the most adorable granddaughter."

I remind young people to do good in their adult lives. I tell them that every good deed, however minuscule it is, will show that there are good people on the earth. I encourage them to choose a job, a profession in which they can help, in which they can prevent evil. I tell them that it is their responsibility to share the stories of their relatives and their friends. I tell them to remember what they have seen in the Permanent Exhibition here at the Museum, and I add that they should never, never forget what was done by a monster like Hitler.

Risks of Motherhood during World War II

In 1940, or thereabouts, my mother had to go to a hospital in Paris, close to where we lived. We were told, my sister and I, that she had an appendectomy. We later learned that, in fact, she had suffered a miscarriage. Thinking of it now, if she had had that baby, we would never have been able to escape, to cross the demarcation line illegally and hide as we did. The baby might have obliged us to stay in Paris. We would have been rounded up in August 1942—that was when the Gestapo came to get us, but we had escaped on July 31, 1942. The miscarriage was sad but also a blessing in disguise. My mother didn't talk about it until many years later.

So, we escaped—took the train illegally and crossed the demarcation line into the so-called "Free France." We were arrested, however, and my parents were interrogated. In what would be one of many miracles, the man in charge of Dordogne, from which we escaped, gave us permission to go, less than 100 kilometers from the headquarters where my parents were interrogated. We were told to go and hide in the countryside. My father found a small village, where we would not interfere with the farmers' lives and work.

Two months after we moved to the second floor of a primitive house with no water, no electricity, and no toilet, all of France was occupied. There were German troops everywhere. Some time after that, my mother told my sister and me not to worry; if the Germans came to get us, she would give us a little pill, and we would die right away and never suffer.

My mother became pregnant again in the spring of 1943. My parents took my sister and me on their knees and explained to us that there would not be birthday presents for us because they had no money, but they said that there would be a surprise that would stay with us forever. My sister guessed that it would be a baby.

My mother had a very difficult pregnancy. I have small letters that I wrote to her on scraps of paper, saying that I hoped she would feel better the next day. To this day, I don't know if my mother tried to have an abortion. She did not have a doctor. There was hardly any food for us and, of course, no vitamins or anything for a pregnant woman. My mother was 37 years old; my father was 38. My parents must have been desperate. Then came August 1943, and my mother was ready to give birth, but the baby was breech. My mother had to be transported to a hospital. The closest place was in another district, where she could not go with her false papers. The neighbor downstairs and my father transported her. Despite bleeding and suffering, she made it to the hospital, where the doctor treated German soldiers, people from the underground, and a Jewish woman about to give birth.

My brother was born, and my mother survived. My father found some Nestlé concentrated milk at a small general store when they came back to our hiding place, and my brother started to gain weight. My parents named him Franklin because Franklin Roosevelt was their only hope of survival. They also had him circumcised despite the danger for a boy, physically marking him as Jewish.

We survived and went back home in November 1944, after Paris was liberated. Little by little, my father found out that everyone in our family (we were Dutch) had been murdered, and his mother never found out that she had a grandson.

After everything we survived, my brother committed suicide at the age of 44. He had been a brilliant economic historian. He was bipolar and tried three times to put an end to his life. I think of him every day. He was married and had two daughters. My brother would be the grandfather of a five-year-old boy today.

Then and Now Migrants

The current stories of migrants around the world remind me of World War II and the millions of Jewish migrants, desperate to escape from Europe, with nowhere to go because no country was willing to accept them. We all know about the Kindertransport (my mother's cousins were on it in 1938, and I have distant cousins and their descendants who made a home in England).

My father talked of going to Curaçao, but it was too late: men were not allowed to leave France after 1940. In any case, who knows if that Dutch colony would have accepted us, a Jewish Dutch family. At that time, my father said, "We will all live together or die together."

After the war was over, my father was able to write to his cousin Sieg Mendels. Sieg was a strong Zionist. He had moved to Palestine, married a Dutch Zionist in a kibbutz, and settled down in Palestine. Sieg wanted us to migrate to Palestine. My father answered that he was thinking about it, but first, he wanted to rebuild his business in Paris.

While we were in hiding, my father gave us the names and addresses of his cousins in San Mateo, California. My sister and I learned their names and addresses, and we might have emigrated to California if we were alive and my parents were rounded up and deported.

The current migration situation reminds me very much of what we went through in the 1940s. Whole families are trying to escape wars, bombing, and destruction of their homes and villages and towns.

The refugees live in camps, and they have nowhere to go. The migrants cross the Mediterranean Sea and drown if the flimsy boats cannot carry them. They end up on the coast of Turkey, Sicily, and other shores.

Now, even with legitimate visas, the United States does not want them. They are considered enemy aliens even when they served as interpreters and translators for American and European officials. France and Germany are saturated with refugee camps and temporary housing. The migrants have to learn foreign languages and eat foods that they never had in their previous lives. It is true that there have been terrorist attacks and the vetting system is not perfect. It has accepted migrants who never should have been accepted. It seems to me that the planet Earth is in turmoil (again), and no government seems to be able to cope with the situation.

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A New Era

Ruth Cohen

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.

In 2011, I was surprised to get an e-mail from someone in Philadelphia asking me to get in contact with a Mr. Thomas Walther, an attorney in Germany. He was one of two main prosecutors of World War II criminals. When we finally talked, he asked me if I would be willing to join a group of Auschwitz survivors who were being asked to fill out testimonials that Oscar Groening had been the bookkeeper in Auschwitz during the time I was there. He did not promise a positive outcome of the trial, but he promised that they would put forth their best effort.

The next time I spoke with him, he asked that I come to Germany, all expenses paid, to testify at the trial. I declined, and he understood when I explained that I had not been able to return to Germany—or even go anywhere near its borders—since my liberation.

The prosecutors were trying to overturn a 1969 ruling that being a staff member at Auschwitz was not enough of a reason to secure a conviction. The ruling had been challenged in Lüneburg in 2011 with the landmark conviction of John Demjanjuk, a death camp guard, who was living in the United States and working in an automobile factory. Although he died in 2012, before his appeal could be heard, the Federal Court of Justice did not reverse his conviction. That case was not exactly the same as the case against Groening because Demjanjuk was a Nazi guard, not just a staff member.

Thus, when Groening was convicted and he was sentenced to five years in prison, depending on the state of his health, a new precedent was set. The conviction changed all previous convictions because the verdict by the lower court in Lüneburg is final, and the ruling is now a legal precedent in prosecuting former Nazis. When I received the e-mail in April 2015, alerting me of this news of the Groening trial, I felt as if a new era had arrived.

But maybe it's not quite here yet. Oscar Groening is now 95 years old, and he is still at home, waiting to hear about his jail time.

My Grandparents

My paternal grandfather was a tall, kind, handsome man with a sweet smile and a beautiful beard. I was about seven years old when he died, but my memory of his funeral is very clear. The whole street was full of people paying their respects to him. He was an ombudsman after he retired from his business career. My grandmother was not very tall. She was also always smiling, but she was a very strict woman who also had her own business. We spent all the holidays at my grandparents' table. The extended family was large, and so was the table.

I remember Purim most vividly. As we ate and sang, the door to the dining room would open, and a group of people or an individual would come in and present a Purim spiel, for which they were given some money *(gelt)*. As they left, the next group would come in. This went on for hours and was great fun, especially for us children.

After my grandfather died, my grandmother moved in with us. She was a special person. For a woman to own her own business was unusual at the time, and she was used to giving orders, but she let my parents run the house as they wished and let my mother be completely in charge. We had a special, warm, and good family. At age 83, my grandmother was sent to Auschwitz—at the same time we were—but because she was in a wheelchair, they put her in a different railcar (one with all disabled people).

Silence

When my dad and I arrived in the United States to be with our loving family on April 26, 1948, I was surprised—but not unhappy—that not one person asked me about our experience during the war. I understand that they were all mourning their six sisters, brothers, and other family lost in the Holocaust, but I presume that their silence was out of consideration for me.

They weren't the only ones who were silent. When I got married, my husband and his family and my American friends never asked anything about the Holocaust either. Even my European friends, who had experienced similar horrors, did not talk about that part of their lives. We lived in the present only. My father and sister also never talked about those things. In fact, I do not know anything about my father's experience in Auschwitz or Buchenwald.

So, when my children were old enough to understand or be aware of others, I also did not really talk about my experiences in the war. My arm does not have a tattoo, so nothing about my experience was obvious to them, but somehow things were communicated. They knew I would

not hide anything from them, and when they asked me questions, I answered truthfully. My sons claimed knowledge of my wartime history so quickly stopped asking me very much, and my daughter is still questioning.

My oldest and best friend's husband, who also was a survivor, never stopped talking about the war and his life back then. His wife, my friend, on the other hand, never told me or anyone, including her children, a single thing about her life before or during the war. Her children sometimes ask me about their mother, but we were not together in Auschwitz or anywhere else, so I have no answers for them.

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Trip to Drohobycz

Marcel Drimer

Born in Drohobycz, Poland, in 1934, Marcel Drimer survived the war first by hiding in secret bunkers in the town's ghetto, then in the home of a Ukrainian family.

My "pilgrimage" to Drohobycz started a few days after the Holocaust Days of Remembrance and my own First Person interview and after my talks to high schools and synagogues about the Holocaust. That work turned out to be a kind of preparation for the exhausting, moving, and emotional trip that awaited me. Ania and I left Washington, DC, on May 9 for the beautiful landscapes of the Italian lakes where we spent the following eight days with my sister, Irena, and her husband, Manes. The overwhelming feeling of peace and serenity I felt there did not bring back the dark memories of the Holocaust.

From Italy, we traveled to Israel where we met with relatives and old friends. Each time we visit Israel it seems more beautiful and more affluent, and this creates much worse traffic. During one horrific traffic jam on our trip back from Jerusalem to Holon, we got stuck in a taxi for over three hours. The driver happened to be a young Israeli Arab. Irena and the driver spent the time discussing, in Hebrew, the political situation in Israel. I loved this person-to-person encounter, each party stayed calm, listed their grievances, yet was able to come to an understanding. If only the politicians could be as enlightened. The conclusion of the discussion was that neither government really wants peace at this time and, as a result, peace seems unreachable.

After 13 days in Israel, it was time to begin what would be the most exciting part of our trip. In the late evening of May 31 we met at the Ben Gurion Airport with members of the Drohobycz-Boryslaw group to participate in a Roots trip to Drohobycz, Boryslaw, and Vicinity. The plane took off at midnight and landed in Lviv (Ukraine) airport at 2:30 a.m. Our wake-up time was 7 a.m. I could not sleep because I was so excited and anxious, wondering what the next few days would bring. I had left Drohobycz in December of 1945 as an 11-year-old child, and I was returning as an 82-year-old man.

Our group was not a typical tourist group, and the sightseeing was limited strictly to sights of Jewish suffering. In the group there were four Holocaust survivors, many children of survivors (second generation), and even some third generation. Milek, the oldest survivor at 87, showed

the group the still-existing house of his grandparents located near a forest where many Jews were murdered. Yael, the youngest survivor, was born during the war. She was saved by a Polish or Ukrainian woman and remembered only the woman's first name: Jadwiga. She hoped to find Jadwiga or some members of her family to thank for saving her, but was not successful. After the war, Yael was given to a Jewish couple for adoption and later to an uncle in Israel where she now lives. The other two survivors in our group were me and Irena.

It rained all day while we walked through the narrow streets of Drohobycz, which were vaguely familiar to me from memory and from reading Bruno Schultz's* stories of places connected with Jewish life before the war and the places of Jewish suffering and killing during the Holocaust. Unfortunately, the monuments to the victims did not identify the victims as Jews, though they were the largest group among the victims. The sky was crying that first day, and it matched our mood. Later, we participated in the opening of an exhibition, *The Holocaust in Drohobycz, Boryslaw, and Vicinity,* in a local synagogue. Photos of Ania and me were part of the exhibition. The synagogue was built in 1726 and is the biggest in Eastern Galicia. Its facade was recently renovated, but the inside requires a lot of renovation.

Marya Vurlovska
Courtesy of Marcel Drimer

At that synagogue, with great excitement, we greeted Marya, the great-great-granddaughter of Jan and Zofia Sawinski, who saved my family during the Holocaust by hiding us on their small farm. It was Marya who found my name on the Internet and invited all of us to Drohobycz. She and her younger brother waited to meet us at the entrance to the synagogue, bearing gifts. There was applause when the organizer of the exhibit introduced Marya, and she was given a bouquet of flowers. The reserved young lady appeared to be touched by the gesture.

The next day, we were invited to talk to Marya and her classmates, teachers, and some people from the town. The university from which Marya had recently graduated was located in a building originally erected in the 1920s as a Jewish orphanage. It was one of the best orphanages in Poland. The mother of one of the group members was brought up there. There is still a Star of David above the entrance. Irena and I offered to talk to the students in English or Polish. They chose Polish because the Ukrainian language is similar to Polish, especially in Western Ukraine, which used to be part of Poland until 1939.

Talking about the Holocaust where it actually took place seemed strange. When I talk in the United States it is about "there," thousands of kilometers from "here." In Drohobycz it was "here," the site of the ghetto was a few blocks away, the Sawinskis' farm and the house of my grandparents—where I was born—were just a few kilometers away. When I mentioned my grandparents' neighbor who picked up our family photos from the mud after they were scattered during the pogrom, I was told that the neighbor was Mrs. Sawinski's brother. A graduate student, present during the talk, showed me a document from before the war listing donors to a charitable organization with my father's name on it. Irena and I loved and admired our father; it was good to see that in addition to being a brave man, he had also been a generous and good hearted man.

Marya's professor mentioned that the history department would like to establish a Judaic Studies or Holocaust Studies program. The Museum has a contact and helps the Taras Shevchenko University in Kiev with this subject. I suggested the local university contact the Kiev university.

There is a great need to educate the Ukrainian public about their national heroes and their treatment of the Jews. A major hero in Ukraine's history is Bogdan Chmielnicki, a 17th-century leader of the Cossacks and a leader of a peasant uprising against Polish rulers. His goal was the eradication of all Jews. He and his followers murdered about 100,000 Jews. Another Ukrainian hero is Stepan Bandera, a Ukrainian nationalist and Nazi sympathizer, who helped the Germans fight the Russians and kill Jews and Poles during World War II. Monuments of these two men are in every city and town; there are streets and car washes named after them. Sometimes dishes in restaurants are named after them, too, like the Chmielnicki salad or Bandera sausage. In order for Ukraine to look objectively at the history of the Holocaust, the Ukrainians will have to find different heroes.

The grave of Mrs. Sawinski
Courtesy of Marcel Drimer

After the talk at Marya's university, we went with her extended family to the cemetery where Mrs. Sawinski is buried to lay flowers on her grave. I had waited for this moment for a very long time. It was a modest thank you to her for saving my life. The cemetery is located on a hill in Mlynki Szkolnikowe where I was born in my grandparents' house and where I was saved at the Sawinskis' farm. Marya's family sang a prayer. I had tears in my eyes and said a quiet kaddish for this brave woman who put her and her family's lives in danger to save mine. Visible from the cemetery are the remnants of the oil

refinery in Galicia where my grandfather was a foreman. Uncle Bumek Gruber also worked in Galicia as a butcher and smuggled food to the Sawinski farm where we and nine other Jews were in hiding. From the cemetery we were invited for lunch at Marya's parents' apartment. Extended family and friends attended; one of them was Marya's grandfather, who was the Sawinskis' grandson and remembered them. We looked at their family photos and listened to stories. We all exchanged gifts; they gave us books, albums about Drohobycz, chocolates, and vodka, and we gave them a generous amount of cash.

Bronica forest memorial
Courtesy of Marcel Drimer

The remaining time we spent with the group traveling by bus and walking on muddy roads to places of mass executions. At the Bronica forest, where 8,000 Jews were murdered, Irena and I talked about our uncle's wife, Blimka, and their little daughter, Liba, who had been murdered there. Someone said kaddish, we lit candles, placed an Israeli flag on the memorial, and sang the "Hatikva." It was heartbreaking. We repeated this ritual at several other places. We heard stories of mass murder and individuals' miraculous survival. One member told a story of her ten-year-old cousin who fell into the trench that was a mass grave. At night, this child was able to get out from under the dead bodies and survived. Another person eulogized his little sister while standing at the station from where, a long time ago, she was taken to the Belzec killing center. We all cried.

We also visited three cemeteries, one of which had became a bus station, another a housing development. Now, there are only small plaques indicating that the sites had been Jewish cemeteries. The third cemetery was overgrown with grass and wild bushes. The last burial there had been in 1970. Several former synagogues had been converted to churches, still with a Star of David above the entrance and mezuzahs on the door frames. I mourn the loss I saw of a rich Jewish cultural and religious community that will never come back.

It was an unforgettable trip; I will always remember the beauty of the Italian lakes, the loving reception of friends and family in Israel, the places of death and destruction of my family and fellow Jews in Drohobycz. But most of all, I will remember the emotional meeting with Marya whose great-great-grandparents allowed me to live this good life.

* Bruno Schulz (July 12, 1892–November 19, 1942) was a Polish writer, fine artist, literary critic, and art teacher born in Drohobycz to Jewish parents. He is regarded as one of the great Polish-language prose stylists of the 20th century. His prose has been translated into many languages. Both the Poles and the Ukrainians claim him as theirs.

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My Father in Aurigny (Alderney)

Albert Garih

Albert Garih 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.

In September 1943, Benjamin Garih, my father, received a summons. We didn't know where they were going to send him. But, my father has always made a point to comply with the rules, and besides, he would not want to put his family in danger. He decided to go to this ominous designated rendezvous. I was five years old, and despite the commotion around me, I didn't realize how threatening the situation was for my father, but also for us. When the day of his leaving came, he was ready. I remember that he was given a gas mask in a cylindrical metal box. As a child, it was like a toy for me that I would play with, putting it on. When he left, he had this box strap slung around his shoulder. I don't remember what other luggage he had. I only remember this gas mask, a frightening reminder of the first world war.

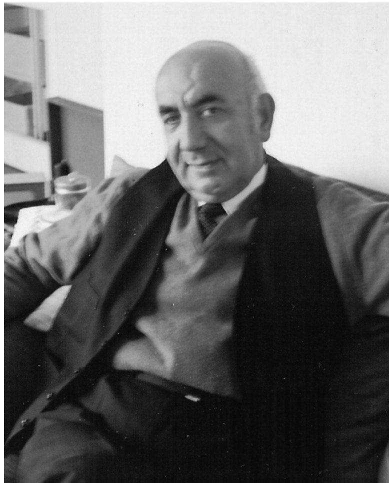
We lived in Montrouge, a close-in suburb of Paris, where the closest metro station was Porte d'Orléans, a 20-minute walk from our home. Usually to go to the station, we would take a bus, the 126 or the 194, but that night, in order to stay a little longer with my father, we decided to walk to the station. I remember my father saying goodbye to us, not knowing whether he would ever see us again. My mother and my sisters were in tears. I was intrigued, but not overwhelmed at seeing my father go; I did not realize that it might be the last time we saw him.

I had no idea where the metro was to take him. Now, in retrospect, I suppose he probably went to join his fellow deportees, perhaps at Saint-Lazare train station. From there, they must have been taken to Cherbourg and then, by boat, to the island of Alderney.

At the camp, my father was still able to write to us so that we could follow what happened to him through his mail. I still remember his letters, all bearing the infamous postmark with the eagle and the swastika. Mum would read us these letters, probably omitting scary details. But, I still remember hearing of some bad times he lived through and what he told us about his captivity after we were reunited.

I remember having heard this story. One day, he had concealed some money (I have no idea where he had it from) in his beret's lining. When a soldier searched him and discovered that money, he punched my father in the face, breaking his glasses. My father had lost an eye in an accident before the war, and he needed his glasses. He burst out crying. I had never seen my father cry, and hearing about that episode impressed me so deeply that it remained forever in my memory.

At the camp, their job was to build bunkers that were to be part of the Atlantic Wall that was supposed to stop an Allied invasion. One day, as he was carrying a trough of cement on a scaffold at the top of a cliff, he stepped on a loose board that tilted up to hit him in his head, and he fell down the cliff. He stayed there, losing a lot of blood, until he was picked up by the soup truck. They closed his wounds with some stitches, and he survived. My father was a strong man, but until his death, he had these deep scars on his bald head, so visible on the photograph below, and he suffered migraine headaches for the rest of his life. In his final years, he would pass out without warning, sometimes in the street, and finally he suffered a seizure that left him brain dead. He passed away two weeks after, in February 1993. This was three months short of his 90th birthday.



Albert Garih's father, Benjamin Garih
Courtesy of Albert Garih

My father did not talk much about his captivity. However, I remember that he talked about the cruelty and viciousness of the guards. He also told us about a German soldier who, one day, gave him a potato. It was not much, but that was enough to touch him, for him to remember it and to tell us about it.

I knew nothing about the transfer of the inmates from Alderney to Boulogne, but somehow, I remember that one day, my mother mentioned with concern, the bombardments over Boulogne. I suppose that she must have been aware that my father was there. I also remember that one day, during one of these bombardments, everyone had to lie flat on the ground under the bombs and the strafing by the Allied aircraft. My father told me that he was lying side by side next to a German soldier, and when the raid was over, he stood up, but the soldier did not.

Finally, at the end of August 1944, when Paris was liberated, our mother came to bring us home from hiding in Catholic boarding schools in Montfermeil. Shortly thereafter, we heard that my father and his fellow deportees had been loaded on a train bound for the East. What would

have happened to him if they had reached their destination? We'll never know, because his train was stopped in Belgium by the Belgian resistance fighters who had blown up the railroad or a bridge—I don't know exactly. There was some fighting, and in the confusion, the Germans released all of their prisoners. This is how my father was liberated, in Dixmude, in northern Belgium. After staying a few days with a Belgian family to regain some strength, he set out to walk home, covering some 200 miles.

He arrived home on the morning of Rosh Hashanah. For the first time since before the war, we were preparing to go to the synagogue. My mother was dressing me when she heard some steps in the corridor leading to our apartment and a knock at the door.

When she opened it, in the darkness of this long corridor, it took her a few seconds to realize that it was her husband standing there. He had changed so much, had lost so much weight; he was gaunt. He had not fully recovered from his fall off the cliff and still suffered from the bad treatment at the camp, but finally, our family was reunited.

We lost relatives in the war. First, my maternal grandmother, an uncle, an aunt, and cousins were killed in Orléans in June 1940 during the Exodus. Some cousins on my mother's side were deported to Auschwitz and didn't come back. But, our nuclear family was intact—my father, my mother, my sisters, and me—and life could begin to resume its normal course.

Why I Feel that We Must Move On with the German People

Like many Jewish children who were victimized during World War II, I grew up hating the entire German people for the Holocaust. How could a nation commit such crimes as killing men, women, children, and elderly people and still look at other people in the eyes without being ashamed of themselves? How could they round up millions of Jews, Roma (Gypsies), slaves, homosexuals, and handicapped children and send them to gas chambers or perform experiments on twins, among others?

I am myself a twin, although my twin brother died before the war. What is it that enabled ordinary men to perform such atrocities on innocent victims? Indoctrination through propaganda is not reason enough for me to understand how a human being can become so dehumanized as to commit such crimes. For very good reasons, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum does not try to answer that question because if there is an answer to that question, it must be given by God himself—no one else.

When Elie Wiesel was asked what question he would ask when facing his creator, he replied that it would be, “Why?” What the Museum tries to do is explain how the Holocaust happened. How is hatred ingrained in the minds of an entire people from infancy? How can a child turn from an innocent being into a fanatic young man so dehumanized as to kill a baby, an old woman, or another young man in cold blood with a bullet to the back of the head? How can a doctor who took the Hippocratic oath perform experiments on men, women, and children, thereby inflicting unbearable pain just for the sake of making them suffer?

Are such a people redeemable at all? That’s a question I have been asking myself ever since I was old enough to fathom the enormity of the Holocaust.

I don’t think I could ever forgive the perpetrators for what they did or allowed to be done. But, if forgiving the perpetrators is out of the question, must we extend the blame to their whole generation when they claim they did not know about or did not participate in the crimes? My answer is yes, because it is hard to believe that all those horrors could be committed without people living near the camps being aware of what was going on. It is true that some Germans stood up against the regime—people such as Sophie Scholl and the White Rose, and Claus von Stauffenberg and his co-conspirators. But, that is not enough to absolve a whole generation of its crimes.

So much for the generation of the perpetrators. But, what about generations that came after? Must we blame the children of those monsters for the atrocities committed by their parents? I know that in the Bible, people must be punished up to the seventh generation. Should we be as intransigent? Maybe not, but perhaps we could expect some modesty on their part, an attitude of shame, for what their parents did.

I first encountered children of the perpetrators in the late 1950s while trying to perfect my English by going to international student farm camps in England—the only way I could afford to spend some time there. Those camps were full of students from all over Europe, including Swedes, Norwegians, Spaniards, and Germans.

As a French student, I was naturally more attracted to my Spanish counterparts than to the Northern Europeans, but one thing that struck me was the self-assurance of the Germans. They did not seem to be the least bit ashamed of what their parents had done only some 15 years earlier—they revealed not a speck of guilt or bad conscience but rather some arrogance and a feeling of superiority that made me feel quite uncomfortable, even angry.

A few years later, in the early 1960s—while I was still a student and still too poor to afford vacations abroad—I applied for a job as a tour guide based on my knowledge of English and Spanish (I had been a tour guide before, in Paris). But, the only offer I got was to accompany French tourists to Austria. There, I met and rubbed elbows with Austrians of all generations. When I would take my tourists in the evening to a *weinstube* (tavern), where we were drinking beer and singing, I could not help but wonder where all those people in their 40s and 50s had been 20 years earlier, and what they had been doing. I remember one big guy, about 40 years old, half drunk, singing next to me and calling me "mein Freund" [my friend]. I wondered how he would have treated me back then if he had known that I was Jewish. To this day, I feel only disgust and contempt for those people.

In 1978, after I had settled in the United States with my family, an American miniseries titled *Holocaust* aired on TV. It was later broadcast in Germany, and like the miniseries *Roots*—which dealt with slavery and which, one year earlier, had a profound impact on American viewers—*Holocaust* shocked young Germans. I also remember the 1990 movie titled *The Nasty Girl*, which was based on a true story about a young girl investigating her town's Nazi past. Things were changing in Germany.

Twenty-five years ago, when Germany was still divided, skinheads killed a Turkish immigrant. Upset by the lack of response from the government, about 300,000 people staged a protest march in Bonn. This was definitely a new development in Germany: people showing solidarity for a foreign worker killed by young neo-Nazis.

Should we keep ostracizing this new generation that showed feelings for its fellow human beings? Are those people the same as their grandparents? Should we treat them with the same contempt as we feel for the perpetrators? Personally, I can't.

A few months ago, as I was doing my tour of duty with the Museum's Visitor Services, a German girl approached me and asked to talk to me. As usual, I was wearing my "Holocaust survivor" button. After following me to the donors desk, the girl explained that she had just completed her visit to the Museum and wanted to apologize to me for what her people had done to mine.

I was a little surprised and didn't know what to say. So, I told her that while I appreciated her sympathy and feelings about what she had apparently just discovered at the Museum, I could not absolve the entire German people with her apology; I had no right to do that. But, that young German moved me, and I was once again convinced that if there is a collective guilt on the part of one people, it cannot be passed from one generation to the next—particularly if a new generation shows sincere shame and sorrow for what their grandparents had done.

That was what I wrote earlier this year. I have since done some thinking on this subject.

First, about collective guilt: I have a very dear friend, an Auschwitz survivor who is now more than 90 years old. He once wrote that he didn't believe in collective guilt. He even married a German woman who has supported his efforts to educate people about the Holocaust. I thought a lot about his comment but came up with a different conclusion. I find it difficult to absolve anyone who belongs to the generation of the perpetrators or to believe they didn't know what was going on in their own backyard. It is enough to look at photos in the Museum's Permanent Exhibition to see the indifference of bystanders. Of course, there are always exceptions—such as Sophie Scholl and Claus von Stauffenberg—but they were too few to redeem a whole generation. Abraham begged God to spare Sodom and Gomorra if just ten righteous people could be found there, yet Abraham could not save those cities.

Two generations after the Holocaust, when the perpetrators' grandchildren react to what they learned about their grandparents, should we feel toward them the way we felt toward the perpetrators? In the summer of 2013, I traveled to Berlin to find out how today's Germans feel about the Holocaust, and I was quite impressed by what I saw. First of all, today's Germany is a real democracy that doesn't hesitate to denounce the excesses of totalitarian regimes wherever they are. The Germans keep fragments of the Berlin Wall with graffiti from other "walls" that must fall: Ahmadinejad, Kim Jong-un, Robert Mugabe, and other dictators.

But, they don't stop at other dictatorships. A museum exhibition there—*Topography of Terror*—describes in great detail the rise of the Nazis, the anti-Jewish laws, and World War II and the "Final Solution." All around the city, you can see columns with photos of people who opposed the regime or were persecuted by it and chose to flee—people such as Fritz Lang, Bertolt Brecht, philosophers Hannah Arendt and Ernst Bloch, Marlene Dietrich, and others. A museum is dedicated to the late chancellor of Germany Willy Brandt, who, during the Nazi regime, fled to Norway and later to Sweden. The country had definitely changed and is today one of the world's most vibrant democracies. So, although we should remain vigilant about the possibility that that dangerous period in German history might be resurrected, I think today's Germany deserves some respect.

Correspondence between Albert Garih and Huberta von Voss-Wittig, wife of the German ambassador to the United States.

Reply from the German ambassador's wife:

Tuesday, November 18, 2014

Dear Mr. Garih,

Thank you very much for coming to our home for lunch on November 9th. It meant a lot to us that you were there.

I just wanted to thank you for sharing your thoughts with us. I have read your article and thought it was very moving to read about your understandable feeling of hatred towards the German people and your big-hearted approval of the changes that have fortunately occurred in our country. It remains an important and defining task for many of us to remember and to assure that crimes against humanity will not be committed under Germany's name again. I would hope that the growing time and distance [from the Holocaust] will not change that.

We are immensely grateful that the Jewish community is growing again, and I hope that Germans understand better that we did not only brutally destroy the lives of so many millions of human beings but also part of our very own German-Jewish identity—a rich history of 500 years with many good moments for which we should be grateful. Germany's position would not have been thinkable without the crucial achievements of our Jewish citizens. I am glad that the Jewish Museum in Berlin is showcasing that so successfully, with millions of visitors since its opening.

I very much hope to see you again and send my husband's and my warm regards.

Sincerely,

Huberta von Voss-Wittig

My reply (November 19, 2014):

Dear Mrs. von Voss-Wittig,

Thank you so much for your kind reply to the paper I handed to the Ambassador on the occasion of our visit to your residence on November 9. As it came out [in] that paper, my feelings have deeply changed over time, going from deep hatred for the perpetrators, to contempt for the indifference of their children, and to appreciation for the change that appeared with the third generation, the generation of the grandchildren, who started to question the action or inaction of their grandparents. This is exactly what I experienced over the years as I traveled to Germany or otherwise met German people of these three generations.

Your invitation to meet with us was a wonderful opportunity for us to appreciate the deep changes that Germany has gone through, and I wish to thank you for acknowledging the contribution of German Jews to the history of your great country. I visited last year the Jewish Museum in Berlin, as well as the Jewish Memorial, the exhibit at *Topography of Terror*, and the Wannsee Conference museum. I could witness firsthand these changes, and this is why I took the liberty to hand my article to the Ambassador.

Please accept and convey to the Ambassador my warmest regards and deepest respect.

Albert Garih

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Thank You, Father

Peter Gorog

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.

How can you say "thank you" to someone who gave you the most precious thing anyone can have: your own life? And, what if you never had a chance to get to know him? This is a question I face a few times every year, when our Jewish traditions compel us to remember those loved ones who are not with us anymore.

I was only three months old when my father last saw me, before he was taken to a forced labor camp. Two years later, he died somewhere in Ukraine, where he had been taken by the Hungarian army. He had never had an opportunity to be personally involved in my upbringing; I never heard his encouraging voice when I needed it the most. He could never share laughter with me, he could not express his joy about my accomplishments, and he never shared my sorrows. Although I have his DNA, there is something beyond the physical realm that made me what I am today that kept me going when I was about to give up. It was my mother's heroic fight for survival during the Holocaust and the subsequent Communist regime, her unceasing love for me, and the loving memory of my father she implanted in me that helped me through the darkest moments of my life.

As far back as I can remember, every time I was in a difficult situation, in physical pain or emotional distress, in seemingly hopeless situations, I conjured up an image. It was an image I had never seen, but it was more real than anything you can imagine implemented in a high-definition, 3-D movie. In this scene, I see my father walking in knee-high snow in the endless Ukrainian steppe, in his worn-out civilian shoes, wearing clothes that were not meant for the brutal Russian winter, hungry and fearful that he would be shot if he stopped for a little rest. At that moment, all of my pains dissipate, my hopelessness turns into vision, and my disappointments become negligible. I realize the sad truth—that he never had a chance to pursue his dreams, that he was half my age when he was robbed of the opportunity to see me growing up and to have fun with his grandchildren.

This imaginary scene gives me hope and strength when all else fails. In spite of the tragedy that robbed me of a normal childhood and took my father away, I am thankful for the memory of my father's unfinished life.

To Convert or Not to Convert? That Was the Question

My mother came from a very observant Orthodox Jewish family. Her grandfather was an Orthodox rabbi in a small town in Austria-Hungary (today Prešov, Slovakia). Her father graduated from a yeshiva in Pressburg (today Bratislava, Slovakia), but he never became a rabbi. Her family kept kosher—meaning they observed the very strict Jewish dietary laws—and she had a strong Jewish education.

My mother continued the family traditions after she started her married life, but according to her own account, she became less observant. She called herself the "black sheep" of the family. In reality, this title belonged to her brother Bubi, who was a member of the Communist Party in the 1930s, when it was outright dangerous.

Either my mother was not familiar with the intricate details of Jewish customs, or she just forgot the one that almost ruined her wedding. The day before her wedding, she went to the hairdresser, who, according to the wedding pictures, did a fabulous job with her very thick hair. Actually, the photos show the second attempt of her hairstylist because the first one was the victim of the Jewish ritual of mikvah. This is a water immersion ceremony before a wedding or some other life-cycle event. When she came home from the hair salon, the whole family admired her beautiful hairdo. It was her father who reminded her that it was time to go to the mikvah ceremony and completely immerse herself. One can only imagine my mother's horror, but she dutifully went, ruined her coiffure, and returned to the hair salon to repair the damage.

Her adherence to Judaism and its customs became a much larger issue a few years later. The year was 1943, and the very strict anti-Jewish laws of Hungary, very similar to the infamous Nazi Nuremberg Laws, endangered the life of every Jew in Hungary. By that time, my father was already among the 40,000 Jewish victims who were part of the Hungarian labor battalions, and the rumor spread in Budapest that Jews who converted to Catholicism could avoid persecution.

Although the anti-Jewish law was very explicit that anyone who converted to Christianity after 1919 would still be considered Jewish, many hoped against hope that it might save their lives. The Catholic Church was opportunistic and used the desperation of many Jews to win converts. It

started conversion classes, and a Jewish friend of my mother's convinced her that they should take the class, saying they had nothing to lose even if the rumors were not true.

From my mother's diary, it is clear that at this time she had not lost her faith in the G-d of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and she followed the Jewish religious practices. She wrote at various dates in 1943 the following paragraphs in her diary, addressed to my father:

> "I hope and believe that the good Lord will help us to see each other again and soon."
>
> "Every Friday night at the candle lighting, I pray for you and of course every night when I go to bed."
>
> "Your little girl is strong, the good Lord listens to my everyday prayers that we will be united soon."

In the 1990s, my mother told me about her conversion attempt. After the first class, she could not recall the topic, but she remembered the strong feelings she had about going through with the conversion. As she phrased it, she could not bring herself to betray her family and her people. She could not see herself kneeling in the pews as the statues of the Catholic saints in a historic baroque church peered down at her. She could not bring her hand to make the sign of the cross.

Her first conversion class was her last one, too. She remained faithful to her "good Lord" who heard her prayers and gave her the courage, the bravery, and the perseverance to survive and protect me during those difficult times.

Were They Crazy?

"Are you crazy?" was the most frequently heard question by my parents from those who learned that my mother was pregnant with me. Under normal circumstances, no one should pose this question when a new child is about to be born. But, those were not normal circumstances, and neither was the time nor the place. The time was fall 1940; the place was Budapest, Hungary; and my parents were Jewish. In defense of those who questioned the sanity of my parents, here are some reasons why this question was not completely out of place.

By the fall of 1940, World War II was already under way, more than half of Europe was under German occupation, and the remaining countries—with very few exceptions—were allies of Nazi Germany. The deportation and systematic extermination of European Jewry had already started, first in Germany and later in the countries occupied by Nazi Germany.

Among Germany's staunchest allies was Hungary, where the first anti-Jewish law was enacted in 1920, way before Germany's Nuremberg Laws. This was the infamous "Numerus Clausus" law restricting Jewish enrollment at universities to 5 percent or less in order to reflect the percentage of Jews in the population. My father was one of the many victims of this law; his series of applications were all rejected because of the Numerus Clausus.

Starting in 1938, Hungary passed a series of anti-Jewish measures similar to Germany's Nuremberg Laws. The first was passed on May 29, 1938, and it restricted the number of Jews in commercial enterprises, in the press, and among stockbrokers, physicians, engineers, and lawyers to 20 percent. The devastating effect of this law cannot be fathomed, given that Jewish participation in these professions was anywhere between 40 and 85 percent.

The second anti-Jewish law—enacted May 5, 1939—defined Jews racially: people with two or more Jewish-born grandparents were declared Jewish, even if those grandparents converted to Christianity and their children and grandchildren were baptized. Their employment in government was forbidden, they could not be editors at newspapers, and their numbers were restricted among actors, physicians, lawyers, and engineers. No more than 12 percent of the workforce at private companies could be Jewish.

The third anti-Jewish law, passed August 8, 1941, prohibited intermarriage and penalized sexual intercourse between Jews and non-Jews.

If these "laws" were not enough to deter a young Jewish couple from even dreaming about conceiving a child, there was yet another Hungarian institution to make them think twice. It was the so-called Labor Service (*munkaszolgálat* in Hungarian), which required the "politically unreliable" (i.e., Communists or labor union activists) and all Jewish men of a certain age to serve in labor battalions. These were an alternative to military service, but in reality it was slave labor, plain and simple.

The forced labor camps where my father had to serve, even before I was born, were not killing centers like Auschwitz, but members of the labor battalions were treated with extreme cruelty, abuse, and brutality. The badly fed and poorly clothed units were initially assigned to perform heavy construction work within Hungary. After Germany's attack on the Soviet Union (today Russia), Hungarian officials sent most of these units to Ukraine to do the menial work for the fighting troops. They were subjected to atrocities such as marching into minefields to clear the area so that the regular troops could advance, and officers tortured them to death. Some units were entirely wiped out; others had as few as 5 percent of their members survive the war. My father was not among the "lucky" 5 percent!

Under these circumstances, was it reasonable for two young Jewish people even to contemplate starting a family? Fortunately for me, my parents did not ask this question—or if they did, they answered it with a resounding yes! They were married in 1936, and I was born March 10, 1941. Were my parents crazy? Yes, they were crazy about each other, and they were born optimists. How do I know? I know it because my mother said so, and I have her diary and a video interview with her to prove it. I know it because my mother saved all the postcards my father sent from the various labor camps he was taken to. Once you read the diary and the postcards or see the video, you, too, might agree with my parents that they made the most rational decision—as did all Jewish parents in Europe whose children were born during the Holocaust.

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Betrayed

Julie Keefer

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 Lwów, Poland, where she had been born.

It is 1948. I am seven years old. The sun is shining, violets perfume the air, tall grasses sway in the breeze, and the sun warms my face. I am holding hands with Dziadzio and Babcia. I'm skipping. I am alternately smiling and giggling when I hold up my arms and force Dziadzio and Babcia to carry me. Dziadzio is home from the hospital in the Alps. I am happy. I feel safe. Suddenly, my eyes are drawn toward a high, metal fence like the ones used in prisons but without the studded, rolled wire on top.

Forcing their noses into the holes in the fence, children about my age with large, misty eyes stare longingly at us. They look like caged animals yearning to be free. A sign identifies the building as a Catholic orphanage. I stop, grab Dziadzio's huge hand, stand on tiptoe, and stare into his hazel eyes. "Dziadzio, promise me that you'll never put me into that place."

"Yes, Julitchka, I promise." My huge, strong, loving grandfather has been the pillar of my life during World War II in Poland and later through our last displaced persons camp in Austria.

The following week, Dziadzio and Babcia take me to the Catholic orphanage we had seen before and leave me there. I am being sent to America—the youngest of a group of orphans. Suddenly, my world is turned on its head. The person I love and trust most in the world has deceived me. He promised that he would not leave me, but he has. He's broken his word. I cannot understand what terrible things I've done to make him abandon me. I cry constantly until no tears are left. I stop eating. I want to stop living. No one wants me. My parents are dead. My baby sister is lost. And, even my Dziadziu doesn't want me. Why live? I become weak and frail.

One day I hear a nun murmur to another in German, "We had better contact her grandfather. She's fading away and might die."

I loved and trusted my grandfather, but he has sent me away. He betrayed me. Now I am all alone. I feel worthless, unloved, abandoned—a bad person who should not be alive. I am seven years old. I am being sent to America.

My Dziadzio's Legs. Lager, Late 1947

In late 1947, my grandpa (dziadzio), step-grandmother (babcia), and six-and-a-half-year-old I (Jula) lived in Tyler Displaced Persons camp (DP camp) in Wegscheid, near Linz, Austria. Tyler DP camp, also known as Wegscheid I DP camp, was the largest and most primitive DP camp in Austria. It was considered temporary shelter for people emigrating to other places. Each family was assigned one room in the camp *(lager)* composed of weathered, splintery, wooden barracks. On the right side of the lager and a bit away from the barracks were outdoor wooden shacks with toilets all attached in a row. Water was available from two outside spigots. We lived in barrack 13, near one of the spigots. I do not remember our room number nor the total number of rooms in our barrack.

Our room measured 12 by 14 feet, with one window. Across from the window, against the wall, was a huge king-size bed on which lay three pillows, filled with contraband sugar. We sold the sugar on the black market to get enough money to buy food and some coal or wood for cooking and heat. My job was to lie in the bed and pretend to be asleep when police come to check for illegal goods. In front of the window squatted a rough wooden table and three wooden chairs. To the right of the middle chair was a round galvanized tub, one third filled with cold water from the outdoor spigot. Babcia brought several kettles of water to heat on the stove. She poured their contents to warm the water in the tub. Dziadzio sat in the middle chair, his back to the table, the tub in front of him. After moving the right-hand chair out of the way, I knelt on the floor to the right of the tub. I grabbed one of Dziadzio's swollen legs. I placed one and then the other into the tub, using all my strength to lift each one. He helped by lifting each leg in turn but pretended that I had done it all myself. "You're so strong, Julitchka."

Dziadzio was a large man. He was 6 feet 2 inches, about 250 pounds. His hair had returned to its original, light brown color after turning white while he endured the horrors of the Janowska concentration camp. He was the largest, strongest, and most loving man I knew.

I proceeded to wash his legs, one at a time, with a fat bar of caustic lye soap that was so big that I needed two hands to hold it. Those were the legs of a man who outlived all three of his brothers, his parents, his wife, his son and daughter-in-law and their two sons, as well as his daughter and son-in-law. Those legs had survived not only physical torture but also the emotional torture of burying his dearly beloved daughter and her husband, my mother and father. Those legs survived

trekking through Lwów cradling his six-month-old granddaughter (my sister) to Dr. Groer's Catholic orphanage. He changed her name from Tola Weinstock (a Jewish name) to Antonina Nowicka (a Catholic name) to save her life.

Those legs were swollen and weakened from brutal beatings and starvation. Those legs helped him to escape from the hard-labor camp (Jaktarow) and later to run away from Janowska. Those legs helped him run through the gates of Janowska just as the sentries were opening them to let in new prisoners. He was barefoot and clad in a thin, striped, flimsy cotton concentration camp uniform, complete with two yellow stars. The sentries shot at him but only managed to hit his right thumb as he jumped, hands raised. At that moment, he noted a Nazi supply train approaching. His legs, now strengthened by desperation, raced across the tracks, narrowly missing being hit by the train. He ran alongside the train, which served as a barrier, as the Nazis did not dare shoot and blow up any armaments it carried. It was late November, snowing and cold.

Those legs brought Dziadzio to the home of Stanislaw Borecki, a Polish peasant, who bandaged his bloody hand, put mercurochrome on it, and provided him with warm clothes and a jacket as well as thick rags to cover his feet. He also gave him three large loaves of bread and a shovel to dig a trench to avoid detection and to protect himself from the cold. Those legs carried Dziadzio deep into the Borszczowice Forest, where he started digging a bunker, which he covered with branches to conceal its existence. Soon, he met two other survivors. When other survivors joined them, they enlarged the bunker. Thus, the owner of those legs became the leader of a group of 30-some Jews. The owner of those legs led charges to shoot the tires of Nazi munitions trucks, kill the drivers if they chose not to run away, and steal supplies, clothes, and arms.

Much later, in his third and final DP camp, his legs in the basin filled with tepid water, he looked back on all that he had suffered. He shook himself slightly, glanced at me with a smile, and closed his eyes. "Ahhh," he sighed as I blotted the top of each leg with a clean towel, again using two hands to take each leg out of the water. I continued to pat dry each elephantine leg using both hands and gently placed each leg on the clean rag on the wooden floor, where I dried each swollen leg thoroughly.

"You are so good, Julitchka! You know just what to do! My Julitchka, you make my legs feel so good. Nobody else can make my legs feel so good." There was silence. Then my dziadzio murmured, "You're all I have left, Julitchka. You are my heart."

Refugees

It is 1946 in the Robert Taylor Displaced Persons camp (DP camp, later known also as Delayed Pilgrims camp). I am five years old. I share one room in a wooden barracks with my Dziadzio and Babcia. It is winter. Snowflakes float gently to land on icy-cold mud. Babcia has bundled me in every warm garment she can locate, whether it fits or not. I wear two pairs of Dziadzio's socks on my hands. They cover my arms to the shoulders as well as my fingers. I sport a pair of someone's leggings rolled up several times. My feet are bundled in rags. A knitted wool cap kept in place by a heavy *babushka* completes this outfit.

With my multiple layers of clothing, I resemble a *matryoshka* doll. Like the doll, I have one layer of clothing nestled into another layer of clothing and so on, until finally there is tiny me. I trudge along like a fat duck, barely keeping my balance. My destination is a huge hole in the ground, about 75 feet in diameter. This is where we kids go sledding in winter, usually without sleds.

For me, this vast expanse is where G-d is. I picture G-d as a huge, old man with a long beard. He cannot be seen, but one can talk to him at this site. To me, G-d is a puppeteer, and deaths happen because G-d accidentally tangles the strings of his marionettes. I often come to walk around this hole to talk with G-d and escape the fights between my grandparents. "Please, G-d, send me my Mommy and Daddy. I miss them. Other kids have a mommy and daddy. Where are mine?"

One day, while walking with Dziadzio—my small hand swallowed up in his huge, bear-like one—I stop, rise to my tippy-toes, and peer up into Dziadzio's face.

"Dziadzio, where are my Mommy and Daddy?"

Dziadzio takes a deep breath, pauses, then finally replies, "Julitschka, they are away on a long trip."

"They are never coming back, are they?" I murmur.

Tears glisten at the corners of Dziadzio's eyes. I know not to bring up this subject again.

Where Are You, Tola?

I last held you when you were six months old and I was almost three. It was March 1943, a time of war, Nazis, and unthinkable persecution of our people. To give you, my sister, a chance to live, Dziadzio changed your name from "Tola Weinstock," a Jew, to "Antonina Nowicka," a Catholic. You were fair-haired, with our father's blue eyes, so you could easily pass as a Catholic Polish child. He took you to Dr. Groer's Catholic orphanage and paid them to keep you safe.

At the end of the war, in 1945, Dziadzio went back to the orphanage for you. He discovered that in the spring of 1944, the orphanage was damaged in an air raid, so the 80 children and accompanying nuns were moved 100 kilometers from L'viv to Korczyn, near Skole.

In January 1945, when Dziadzio went to Korczyn to find you, he was told that all the children had been taken to Lawoczne, toward Munkács in Hungary. He could not obtain papers from the Russians to enter this zone.

I felt incomplete without you, Tola. Dziadzio always insisted that I had a baby sister and that we'd be reunited with you soon. When he sent me to America for a "better future" in 1948, his search for you continued. He and Babcia remained in a displaced persons camp. He kept on looking for you. Even when he and Babcia came to America in 1950, he continued his quest. He had contacted the Red Cross, and in 1952—when I was 10 or 11—the Red Cross mailed me a black-and-white photo of a girl about nine years old, with the large, dreamy, light eyes of our father. She had a huge bow on top of her chin-length, lightish hair.

I was ecstatic! I carried that one-and-a-half- by three-inch photo everywhere. I kept taking it out of my pocket and staring at it. My sister! My sister was alive, and I would meet her soon! The photo became tattered and the corners crinkled from constant handling.

One day, a taxi showed up, and my social worker told me I was going to University Hospital in Cleveland, Ohio, to get a blood test. I don't remember getting jabbed or anything about that hospital experience. I just remember that my social worker called me into her office two weeks later.

"I'm sorry, Julia. This girl is not your sister," she said. "The Red Cross said that her blood did not match."

There was a huge hole in my belly. I doubled over. How was this possible? Who was the girl in my photo? I had prayed and prayed to be reunited with my sister, but G-d did not hear me. G-d had let me down.

It was too painful to continue believing that I'd find you, so I packed my thoughts about you into a tiny package and stored it in my heart. I did not want to be disappointed anymore. I did not want to ache anymore. I have kept that memory tucked away in my heart.

For the next 60-plus years—through adoption, marriage, motherhood, and grandmotherhood—I have tried not to think about you, rationalizing, how does one trace a six-month-old baby whose name and religion were changed in the chaos of war and the confusion afterward? But, my rationalization does not help to heal the throbbing hole in my heart.

Where are you, my baby sister? Where are you, Tola?

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Bosnia 2016

Louise Lawrence-Israëls

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

In the summer of 2016, I went to Bosnia. I have been interested in Sarajevo for a long time.

I am honored to be part of an organization called the Educators' Institute for Human Rights, or EIHR for short. EIHR is an organization of mostly teachers who are interested in human rights and are trying to make a difference in countries where genocide took place. They do it by working with teachers in those countries, showing them how to teach about genocide, mainly the Holocaust. If we make children aware of what genocide is, that awareness might prevent it from happening again.

Twice my husband and I traveled to Kigali, Rwanda. I participated in the EIHR conference there and did presentations. I also spent a couple of days with the participating teachers; we did a lot of talking. Most teachers had experienced the genocide in Rwanda. When they heard that I was a Holocaust survivor, they talked more openly.

When I heard that EIHR was going to Bosnia to organize conferences similar to the ones they hold in Rwanda, I was interested. I signed up to participate last year.

Before flying to Bosnia, we went to Northern Italy and Croatia for vacation. We also spent a full day in Albania, with a guide who showed us around as much of the country as one can see in just one day.

The weather during the first leg of the trip had been so hot; then, it was time to fly to Bosnia. No surprise—when we landed in Sarajevo, it was even warmer.

The conference was going to take place in the mountains above Sarajevo, but we had decided to spend the first five days in the city and visit different sites.

One wish we fulfilled was to visit the town of Mostar, with the famous rebuilt Ottoman bridge; the original dated from the 16th century.

We walked around Sarajevo's old town a lot, which was filled with delicious smells of grilled meats and spices, outdoor restaurants and cafés, and many shops. When we approached Cathedral Square, we heard some very loud voices and saw large crowds. I am always a little afraid of crowds and voices through loudspeakers, probably caused by my background. We do not speak Bosnian and did not understand what the gathering was all about until we got closer.

What was happening was the reading of names of the murdered Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims). Family members read the names, just as we read names at the Museum in Washington, DC, during Days of Remembrance. I participate and read the names of family members and Dutch children who were murdered during the Holocaust.

I realized then that it was July 12, the day of remembrance in Bosnia. People were selling crocheted flowers as pins, and there were a lot of photographs of the murdered Bosniaks on display.

I had requested an excursion to Srebrenica, the site of the killing of 8,000 Muslim men and boys during the genocide. It is now a memorial and has an open-air mosque and cemetery. It rained on the day that we visited, which was very appropriate. It took about two-and-a-half hours to get to Srebrenica from Sarajevo.

The memorial is a graveyard with tombstones, a very large marble monument with names, and an open-air mosque. We saw some fresh graves, and I found out why: the 8,000 bodies were bulldozed all over the area and buried in a mass grave. Today, when a bone is found, DNA testing is done, and Srebrenicans find out the name of the person the bone belonged to and give that person a Muslim burial on the following July 12. This year, they buried 123 people.

For so many people, there is still no closure. That visit was so emotional for me; I put a stone on the memorial, as is our Jewish tradition. I had needed that sober experience to make my presentation during the conference more meaningful.

When we arrived in the mountains, so much cooler, I spent an afternoon writing my presentation. I tried to make a link between the Holocaust and the Bosnian genocide. I did it through the memorials and the only thing left of people who were so brutally murdered, just the way I had done in Rwanda. This time, I had a hard time getting the words out. All the teachers listened, and some even cried.

There is peace in Bosnia, but it is hanging by a thread; the different groups still do not get along. But, there is hope. The teachers we worked with are from the three ethnic groups in Bosnia, and they are working very hard to make their country a better country for all, especially the children.

Money

I was about 14 years old, and my mom still made all my clothes. The war had been over for 11 years, but the stores still did not have a good selection, and money was very tight. I was not upset because Mom always asked what I wanted. She designed and made the clothes; they were always pretty and made me happy. Mom found remnant pieces of good fabric in nice colors. I loved the color blue.

Shoes were a very different story. We all had one pair of shoes, which were very sturdy with rubber soles and laces. We were lucky in that as soon as the shoes became too small, we did get new ones—the same kind, tough, but never hand-me-downs.

Shoes were that important to my parents. If you could afford only one pair, it had to be a pair that you could walk in for a long distance and that would last for a long time. In the back of their minds was always the idea that we might have to leave in a hurry. They were always thinking what the best way would be to keep their children safe.

How I hated my sturdy shoes. I always looked at my friend's shoes which were so pretty, and I compared them with my clunky shoes.

We used to have six weeks of summer vacation from school, and when I was 14, I was ready to look for a summer job. At that time, we still had a lot of health sanitaria for people with tuberculosis but also for people with polio, especially children. I always knew that I wanted to work in health care, and I was lucky to find a job as an aide in a children's rehabilitation center.

Every morning, I left my house at five-thirty for the half-hour bicycle ride. My work started at six in the morning, six days a week. Because it was only a summer job for me, I had Sundays off. The day started with washing and dressing the children, who were four to 14 years old. Then came the tedious job of putting on their braces, made of leather and steel and laces. The laces had to be tightened just right or the brace would hurt and cause blisters or open the skin. After that, the children went for breakfast—sometimes we had to help them with that—and then they went for therapy. Some of the regular help were not always patient, and the children were happy to see me.

While the children were in physiotherapy, we had to clean the wards. Everything had to be wiped down, every day, with a disinfecting soap and water. By the second day of cleaning, my hands were bleeding. We had no rubber gloves.

After lunch, the children took a nap, then came tea time—tea with one biscuit for each child. That was followed by my favorite time, when we were allowed to take the children for a walk, with their walkers or wheelchairs, and sometimes we wheeled their beds outside. We read them stories or just talked.

After the time spent outside, everything started all over again in reverse. They had dinner, then the taking off of the braces, then undressing the children and putting on their pajamas, then putting them back to bed.

I used to get home about seven o'clock every night, very tired. Mom had dinner ready for me, and I used to fall into bed not long after.

After four weeks of hard work, I made about 15 guilders that first year. What I made was mine to do with what I wanted, and I bought my first pair of fancy shoes. They were dark blue and had a tiny heel.

I worked for three summers at the rehabilitation hospital and even got promoted, and they doubled my salary. I bought a pair of fancy shoes every summer and saved the rest of the money in the bank. The work inspired me; I became a physiotherapist and decided to specialize in children with cerebral palsy; among them were also polio patients.

I learned from my mom and dad how important it is to have a pair of shoes that you can walk in. Today, those are sneakers, which you can now get in such beautiful colors.

You never know when you'll have to leave a country in a hurry . . .

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Decamping France

Michel Margosis

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.

During the invasion of Morocco and Algeria in Operation Torch, undertaken by the Allied Forces on the eighth of November 1942, German troops overran the unoccupied zone of France directly. The Nazi military finally and openly occupied the whole of metropolitan France in 1942 because of this new threat from the Allied invasion of North Africa. I found the sound of the Nazi boots marching on the Canebière terrifying, perhaps because the footwear worn by the German infantry were probably *Knobelbecher*, what are sometimes called jackboots. The standard version of the Knobelbecher in World War II had a leather sole with hobnails and a horseshoe heel.

After the French fleet scuttled itself days later in the naval base of Toulon rather than turning the fleet over to the Nazis, my mother knew that staying on in Marseille—or anywhere in France—would be most hazardous to our safety and our health. Although we were all aware of the frequent small roundups, we could not have even dared to suspect that by that time, 40,000 Jews from France had been deported to Auschwitz via Drancy.

In most German-occupied countries, Jews were herded together into ghettos; but in France and Belgium, they had roundups called *rafles*. Rafles were, in fact, police operations to gather and arrest people en masse. They basically consisted of sealing both ends of a street so they could identify each individual caught in the net. Those individuals who failed to pass that control were arrested and most likely deported. Because the Germans did not have the necessary manpower to conduct massive rafles by themselves, they used the complicit cooperation of the French police and militia to arrest Jews and other "undesirables."

Several attacks on the German troops followed their occupation of Marseille that November, and they, in turn, demanded reprisal operations, with the willing participation of the French police force, which executed the arrests and deportation of about 100,000 people to Germany, and the destruction of the "criminal neighborhood." A few short weeks after we departed from Marseille, a little hell broke loose in the old historic sector where my friend Raphäel lived. The streets of the *Vieux Port* (Old Port), especially the sector north of *Quai du Port* called *Le Panier* (the Basket), were

considered most unsafe by the German authorities, so they intended to reshape the whole area. Mandated by Laval, the prefecture of the Bouches-du-Rhône issued a public statement on January 24, 1943, stating, for reasons of military order and to guarantee the safety of the population, the German military authorities officially ordered the French administration to proceed immediately with the evacuation of the north end of the Old Port. For its part, the French administration decided on the grounds of internal security to carry out a vast police operation to rid Marseille of certain elements whose activities posed great risks to the population.

According to instructions from Himmler, the population would be rounded up and evacuated to concentration camps in the northern zone (particularly in Compiègne), while the district would be torn down by German police with the aid of their French counterparts, then the buildings would be blown up. The Vieux Port was completely sealed and the area was searched house by house. The Germans, accompanied by the French National Police, then organized a roundup of 4,000 Jews and the expulsion of an entire neighborhood: 30,000 people living in older neighborhoods were expelled before the buildings were dynamited; 1,500 buildings were destroyed; 40,000 identities were verified; more than 6,000 individuals were arrested, including several hundred Jews, who were sent to the French internment camps; 782 Jews were deported and exterminated at Sobibor; and 600 "suspects" were deported to Sachsenhausen.

Two hundred inspectors from Paris and elsewhere, 15 companies of *Garde Mobiles Réserve* (GMR), and squadrons of gendarmes and riot police descended on Marseille to assist the German police, although *Le Petit Marseillais* on January 30, 1943, said, "Note that the evacuations of the northern district of the Vieux Port were made exclusively by French police . . . " Those forces dynamited much of the historic old town and the great ferry, or *pont transbordeur*, transporter bridge. That engineering tour de force, which had become a major landmark of Marseille comparable to the Eiffel Tower in Paris, was destroyed in 1944. Marseille had become the Germans' main port in the Mediterranean Sea, and they wanted to fortify the city but believed that the French resistance had its stronghold there because of its dark corners and alleys, which were a superior refuge.

The obliteration of Le Panier was accompanied by a big roundup that was, in fact, a device to secure a major source of cheap manpower for the German labor camp, but it also became the beginning of the journey to the death camps for those deemed undesirable.

My mother knew that friends were slowly disappearing even before the arrival of German troops. The Ostreicher family—with two girls, Rose and Mireille, and a boy, Léon, who was elsewhere at the time—just disappeared one day. Historical documents also show that around my birthday of September 1940, a roundup picked most of the Jews in my old neighborhood in Brussels. Another common approach used by the *Boches* (German soldiers), which was more direct, was for two civilian Gestapo types to knock on the door and ask for papers. If they were not totally

satisfied, every occupant of the residence would be removed to their headquarters. The Germans had quietly initiated a program of recruiting young French anti-Communists to fight with them against the Russians and were getting a surprising number of recruits. Many of them had fought with the same Germans and the Italian Fascisti along with Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War just a few years earlier.

My mother immediately and unhesitatingly undertook to leave the area as soon as possible. The cash she had accumulated from the black market paid for forged *laisser-passer* for the four of us, which allowed us to go to a mountain resort in the Pyrenees for "health reasons," citing that my sister Anna had been afflicted with polio. Later information indicated that between the autumn of 1940 and summer of 1944, the Pyrenees provided major escape routes for thousands of Jews, downed pilots, and many of the Allied military—Belgian, British, Polish, members of the French Resistance, and Gaullist volunteers.

According to Anna, a priest my mother had met during her "business ventures" gave her the name of a colleague to contact on arrival in Toulouse. We planned and decided to ride by rail to Toulouse, with transfer toward the Pyrenees Mountains. And so, on November 11, 1942, we trudged to the Gare St. Charles, each with a light suitcase. I also toted a huge unabridged Larousse dictionary.

As we climbed aboard the train, we noted with apprehension that German soldiers had also boarded, but we guardedly ignored them as we sat down in one of the third-class coach compartments. My siblings and I chatted to one another in our natural voices, which were in the local Southern French dialect; but Mother could not speak French at all except for a few words spoken with a pronounced Russian accent. A short time later, probably to allay suspicion, she began gesturing, pretending to use sign language, and we, of course, carried on with that strategy. At one railroad station, a pair of presumably French civilian secret agents slowly examined our papers and luggage, while cold sweat was trickling down my armpits.

Sometime later, as we still felt quite uneasy, we got off in Toulouse to contact the priest previously recommended to us. He suggested another contact at the southern border village. We received clearance to check in with the Axelrods, and after a splendid roast goose dinner, we uneasily went to sleep until sunup. We scrambled to move on as quietly as possible. We returned to the railroad station, boarded another train, and arrived, without further incident, at the mountain town of Latour-de-Carol, in the department of Pyrénées Orientales, province of Languedoc-Roussillon, near the eastern slope of Andorra.

We stayed at an inn on the outskirts of town and savored the new luxury of quality and quantity of food served there. On the second day of our stay, though, as we had finished our evening meal and stepped out for the refreshing mountain air, two gendarmes approached us and demanded to see our identity papers. As they were handed over and examined, one of the gendarmes turned to my mother and asked softly if we intended to steal over the border. Of course, we denied that was our intention and stated simply that we had accompanied Anna so that she could benefit from the health cures for polio available in the region. As we continued to protest, one gendarme was somehow identified as the contact man named by the priest in Toulouse, and after a quick glance around, he offered to guide us with his partner through the wilderness of the mountains into Spain for the small fee of $10,000 in American currency per individual or $40,000 for the family. I do not know if there was any haggling, but with hope and shaky confidence—and seeing no better alternative—Mother accepted the offer.

We returned to the room at the inn to pack the few effects we still possessed and met with the guides about an hour after dusk that same evening. We were advised to dress warmly, as we were to trek through wintry weather in snow and woods. I was still witlessly toting that prized heavy unabridged Larousse dictionary that I had acquired in Marseille strapped to my belt. We also pocketed chocolate and grape sugar to provide quick energy if and when needed during the trek in the mountains.

At about ten o'clock on the evening of November 26, the six of us met about 100 yards behind the dimly lit hotel, and Mother turned the money over to the gendarmes. It was really cold, but we then launched what I thought might turn out to be an adventurous and perilous journey toward the safer haven of Spain. One of the gendarmes took the lead by stepping into the dark and striding toward the woods as we followed, one by one, barely able to see what we were plodding on. The other gendarme closed the line at first, but after an hour or so, he joined the leader, and they both cleared the path ahead. We trod and climbed on dirt, snow, and damp leaves through the woods and occasionally found and briefly followed a path and even a blacktop road at one point.

After several hours, as we kept climbing into deeper snow, we heard distinct barking and a German's voice tossing invectives and commands to dogs. Apparently, either the new French establishment wanted to prevent illicit border crossings or the Spanish had reinforced their border guards to better safeguard their military noninvolvement. We froze in our tracks, and after a brief dialogue, our guides turned about 90 degrees and began a steeper climb. The noises of civilization grew fainter and finally died as we furtively moved at a fair pace. We were one step closer to freedom.

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On Becoming an American

Harry Markowicz

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.

One bright spring day in 1956, my parents and I nervously faced a federal judge sitting in his private office in downtown Seattle, Washington. We were seated across from him at his desk. During the previous several months, the three of us had spent many hours studying a booklet in preparation for this day. The booklet contained questions and answers about the Constitution of the United States, the structure of the federal government, and some of the major historical events of this country. After asking us each several questions, easier ones for my parents, harder ones for me, the judge informed us with a very large smile that we had passed the test; he was ready to swear us in as naturalized citizens of the United States of America.

I was delighted at the prospect of becoming an American. I was born stateless and had remained without a country for my first 18 years. This was an important day in my life; I had been looking forward to it since we arrived in America as immigrants five years earlier. I don't remember every detail about the swearing-in ceremony, but I do recall that the judge asked my parents to renounce allegiance to Poland, where they were born. They did. Then, turning toward me, he asked me to do the same with my so-called allegiance to Germany.

It had been only a little more than a decade since the Allies had liberated Belgium from the occupying German troops. That was too short a time to even consider that I might have had any loyalty toward Germany—the country that had deprived me of my civil rights even before I was born in Berlin in 1937, then forced me to emigrate with my family by age one, and during the occupation of Belgium caused me to live with strangers under an assumed identity (while separated from my parents and siblings, from age five to age seven).

With only the briefest hesitation, I renounced my allegiance to Germany, a country to which I didn't feel the least commitment or loyalty.

I kept my thoughts to myself and became an American citizen.

The Unspeakable

At first, the Nazi occupation of Belgium did not seem so troubling to us because the German authorities didn't start persecuting Jews until October 1940, almost six months after the invasion began on May 10, 1940. In addition, anti-Jewish laws were introduced gradually to avoid alarming the Jewish population, which might have provoked disobedience among Jews and opposition from Belgian authorities. The German leaders also wanted to avoid raising Belgian public opinion against them as happened during World War I.

One of the earliest demands required Jews to register with the *Judenrat* (Jewish councils established by the German authorities throughout occupied Europe to facilitate control of the Jews). The Jewish councils were charged with conveying orders to the Jewish population and for enforcing the implementation of anti-Jewish measures. Being law-abiding, my father registered our family: himself, my mother, my siblings Rosi and Mani (nicknames for Rosa and Manfred), and me.

During the early months of the occupation, my mother still corresponded with her own mother who lived in the small Polish town of Widawa, located near Łódź. My mother's father had died young, but not until my grandmother had given birth to 11 children. By the time Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, my aunts and uncles had reached adulthood and all had their own families. Most lived in or near Widawa. My grandmother's correspondence consisted of brief messages in Polish on plain manila postcards bearing the stamps of the Judenrat and of the unmistakable Nazi eagle, indicating that the mail was strictly censored. I remember my mother translating the last postcard she received. It said simply, "Thank you for the food parcel. Don't send any more parcels. Other family members are already gone and we are next."

Early in 1941 my father received a summons from the Judenrat ordering him to report at the railway station in Antwerp, where we were living, on a specified date with one bag. Those selected were told they would be working in German factories or construction sites to replace the German men who were serving in their military forces. It was a credible explanation, especially because the Germans were also recruiting young Belgian gentiles to work voluntarily in Germany.

Nonetheless, many of the Jews who had sought refuge from Germany and Austria did not trust the Germans. Eighteen months earlier, my family had narrowly escaped from Germany under difficult circumstances, including the temporary jailing of my father. While we were still living in Berlin, a family friend whose only crime was being Jewish had been sent to a concentration camp, and after a few months, his wife was given an urn containing his ashes.

Although the first groups of Jewish men selected to work for the Germans sent postcards home stating they were fine, my father suspected they would not be coming back. He decided to ignore the summons from the Judenrat in spite of the severe threats from the German authorities. Instead, we moved secretly to Brussels but did not register our new residence with the Judenrat as required. My mother's brother, Abraham; his wife, Gutsha; and their children, Manfred and Lotti, had escaped from Germany before us and were already settled in Brussels when we got there.

At that time, the Germans selected only able-bodied Jewish men for forced labor. Consequently, it was generally assumed that Jewish women and children didn't need to fear arrest and deportation. So, my mother took the train to Brussels to find an apartment. Although she was fluent in German, Polish, Yiddish, and somewhat in Russian, she didn't speak either French or Flemish—the two national languages of Belgium. With her brother Abraham's help, she rented an apartment on the first floor of 44 rue de Suède, near the Gare du Midi (the central train station), in what happened to be a Jewish neighborhood.

We resumed our lives in Brussels. My father traded US dollars and British pounds, as well as gold coins and gold bars, on the black market. My brother and sister went to school while I stayed at home with my mother, because I was too young to go to school.

One night early in September 1942, the Germans surrounded our neighborhood in Brussels and rounded up all the Jewish families, including children, the old, and the sick. The families were loaded onto trucks and taken to Malines, a small town between Brussels and Antwerp where they were imprisoned in the Caserne Dossin, a former military barracks, conveniently located next to railroad tracks that carried trains toward Germany and eastward. They were kept in this transit camp in deplorable conditions before being deported to Auschwitz in sealed railroad cattle cars.

But, this we did not find out until much later.

Before that raid, word had reached Brussels that just days earlier, the Germans had carried out two or three nighttime raids in Jewish neighborhoods in Antwerp. Having heard these rumors, my family started spending nights with Abraham and his family, as well as with friends of my parents whose apartments were not located in Jewish neighborhoods. This precaution and the fact that we were not registered with the Judenrat in Brussels contributed to our avoiding being deported. Immediately after the raid in Brussels, our family separated and we went into hiding.

The Committee for the Defense of Jews (CDJ), consisting of Jews and Belgian non-Jews, was one of several underground organizations that was set up to assist Jews by providing false identity papers, fake ration coupons, and money. Perhaps their most important objective was finding

hiding places for children. Members of those organizations urged Jewish parents to let them place their children in orphanages, convents, sanatoriums, or with sympathetic gentile families to give them a better chance of avoiding capture by the Germans or denunciation by Belgian collaborators.

Parents had to make heartbreaking decisions to give up their children to strangers. To assure the security of all involved, the underground organizations did not tell the parents where their children were hidden so that they could not visit them. My sister Rosi, my brother Mani, and I were placed with various families. We were moved around periodically when specific situations became too risky. In between hiding places, I would rejoin my parents.

During that same two-year period, my parents lived in what appeared to be an uninhabited three-story apartment house. The landlord who rented the apartment to them was taking a chance because they were Jewish. Taking even greater risks, the Dierickx family who lived across the street from my parents bought food for them using false ration coupons provided by the underground and carried it to their apartment along with the mail.

The mail served an essential function; it was practically the only way the family could keep in contact. Because mail was subject to censorship, Rosi and Mani (I was too young to write) addressed their letters to the Dierickx family who then brought them to our parents along with news from the outside world. I said earlier that the underground organizations that placed Jewish children in hiding places generally didn't tell the parents where their children were hidden, but for some unexplained reason my parents knew where we were. My mother, who did not appear Jewish with her blond hair and blue eyes, visited me on several occasions.

Uncle Abraham and Aunt Gutsha remained in the apartment house they had been living in since before the German occupation. The underground found hiding places for their children, Manfred and Lotti. In Berlin before the war, they had lived a block away from us. Manfred and my brother, Mani, were close in age and were best friends. During the occupation, they corresponded with each other from their respective hiding places. In one of his letters, Manfred described the place where he was staying in Eprave, a village in the Belgian Ardennes, where generally there was no German presence. It consisted of a former sanatorium that had become a temporary home for boys who were convalescent.

At one point, Mani needed to move to a safer hiding place. My mother asked one of the young women, whose work for the underground included escorting Jewish children to their hiding places all over Belgium, whether Mani could join his cousin Manfred. Soon thereafter, Mani and

eight other Jewish boys were brought to Eprave where ten Jewish boys were already living among 90 non-Jewish boys.

The home was run like a Boy Scouts camp; the Belgian flag was raised each morning and lowered every evening, accompanied by the sound of a bugle. These activities were forbidden by the German occupiers, but were practiced as passive acts of resistance. Several of the caretakers who looked after the boys were in hiding themselves; some were wanted by the Germans for not reporting for forced labor in Germany. One of the counselors was a young American who was also in hiding; his parents and siblings lived in the village. He taught English to the Jewish boys.

One day, German troops came to Eprave, probably to look for partisans in the forests and the many caves in the area. The 19 Jewish boys were immediately escorted by one of the counselors to the parish house of Abbé André in Namur, a nearby city. Abbé André was among a group of Belgian priests and nuns who helped to save hundreds of Jewish children.

Finding hiding places for the boys who came from Eprave required time, and after several weeks, Manfred decided to wait with his parents in their apartment in Brussels. Perhaps the fact that the parish house was located directly across the street from the Gestapo headquarters in Namur contributed to his making that decision. Mani chose to stay on in Namur with Abbé André. Almost three months later, he was taken to the municipality of Huy to stay with friends of the couple with whom my sister Rosi was staying in Bas-Oha, a village near Huy.

While Manfred was staying with his parents, they went to a shelter during one of the frequent Allies air raids. They were denounced by someone who perhaps didn't live in their building. Arrested by the Gestapo, they were taken to the Malines transit camp. From there they were sent to Auschwitz on the 26th, the last transport from Belgium. Among the 25 thousand Jews deported from Belgium, only around 1,200 survived. Cousin Manfred and Uncle Abraham were not among them.

We learned what had happened when my Aunt Gutsha made her way back to Brussels after the war ended. She had survived both Auschwitz and a death march from Auschwitz to a camp in Germany.

After the liberation of Brussels, my parents learned that Abraham, Gutsha, and Manfred had been deported, and not knowing their fate, they brought my cousin Lotti to live with us. Several months later, Aunt Gutsha unexpectedly showed up at our house. Through the International Red Cross she had been able to find out that Lotti had survived and that she was living with my family.

After dinner that evening, Aunt Gutsha started describing in great detail what she had gone through after they were arrested. She spoke for hours while the whole family sat quietly at the dining room table. She had found an audience to whom she could relate. She spoke of the long dehumanizing journey in cattle cars, the arrival at Auschwitz and the selection process, the shaving of the inmates' hair, and the striped dresses. She pulled up her sleeve and showed us the number tattooed on her forearm. We all leaned forward to look at this unexpected sight.

Aunt Gutsha continued by describing the horrible living conditions: the constant hunger and how eating "stolen" potato peels would result in a beating or worse. She described the dreadful working conditions and how they slept in bunks crowded together like sardines in a can with other inmates. The worst part, according to Aunt Gutsha, were the *Appels*—the roll calls every morning and evening when they returned from work: the inmates were counted over and over until they were all accounted for; a process which often required them to stand for hours, sometimes in snow or in hot sunshine.

That was the first time we heard firsthand what life and death had been like in the concentration camps. It was a lot for a seven year old to assimilate. When I was a little older I started fantasizing about being in a concentration camp, knowing that children were not allowed to survive.

For some unknown reason, I never saw my parents grieve Manfred and Abraham, nor their own parents and siblings (my grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins) who lived mostly in Poland and were also murdered in Auschwitz. Looking back, it was like a taboo; we never spoke about what happened to our extended family. No one ever brought up the subject in my family. In fact, we never even shared with one another our own experiences during the Holocaust.

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Brothers

Alfred Münzer

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.

Three years ago, I had a life-changing experience: I met a brother I never knew I had. His name is Arn Chorn Pond.

It began with an invitation to speak at an International Holocaust Commemoration event in Scotland. I had shared the story of my rescue during the Holocaust by an Indonesian family and their Muslim nanny living in Holland countless times and was reluctant to go to Glasgow, Scotland, at the end of January. But finally, through the bullying of a good friend who is a Holocaust educator and who had suggested my name to the event organizers, Interfaith Scotland, I agreed to go. What set the event apart from all the others I had participated in was that I, a child survivor of the Holocaust in the Netherlands, would be paired with a child survivor of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

Arn was ten years old when he was captured by the Khmer Rouge and marched to a prison camp housed in a Buddhist pagoda, Wat Eick, about ten miles from the town he grew up in, Battambang. On the plane from Washington, DC, to Glasgow, I read the book *Never Fall Down* by Patricia McCormick*, a historical novel based on Arn's story, and conveyed in his voice.

> "We walk three day, one long line of kid, all in black, one black snake with five hundred eye . . . After all that walking we come to a temple. A big temple in the country with red roof like wing and many building all around. Long wood building for monk to live, for the nun, all empty now. Also big tamarind tree. And a pond with morning glory and whisker fish. And a mango grove. Very beautiful and quiet, very quiet, with Buddha eyes on top of the temple, watching everything . . . We get up before the sun, have only a little rice soup, then work in the rice field all day, hot, hot sun burning our skin, mud coming up to our knee . . . One time I hear kid ask where is his sister. The Khmer Rouge laugh and say she is still working in the field, 'only now she is fertilizer.'"

Arn survived the hunger and hardship of three years in the camp by volunteering to play in a band. "Another meeting. This time high-ranking Khmer Rouge says, 'Who can play music?' No one, not one kid make a move . . . I think maybe this is test, new way to find out who has education

Alfred Münzer and Arn Chorn Pond. *Courtesy of Alfred Münzer*

and music lesson." But then Arn raises his hand. "Just give me one bowl of rice," he thinks, "then you can kill me." Arn and five boys are given five days with an old music teacher to learn a number of instruments, Arn a hammered stringed instrument called a khim and later a flute, the khloy. And, when the five days are up, the music teacher, having done what the Khmer Rouge needed him for, is killed. The music played by the kids is amplified throughout the camp to cover the sounds of skulls being cracked "like coconuts," is how I hear Arn describe it. It is, the Khmer Rouge's preferred way of killing their perceived enemies—the educated, those whose skin was deemed too light, those who wore glasses.

Arn and I told our stories at 12 different venues over three days—elementary schools, high schools, universities, and fancy government buildings. And gradually, our stories melded into each other's. Arn spoke with tears in his eyes about the death of my sisters killed in Auschwitz and played the flute as the picture of Mima Saina, the Indonesian woman who became my mother through the years I was hidden with the Madna family, was shown on the screen. And, I talked about Mek, Arn's second music teacher, to whom he ascribes his ultimate survival and whose life he, in turn, was to save many years later.

> "That night we go to building where the new music teacher sleep. This guy not really asleep, just looking far away into the air. I shake him, say, 'Wake up. They gonna kill you if you don't teach us to play good.' He says he doesn't care. He says already he's dead in his heart. His children, all dead; his wife, he doesn't know where she is . . . ' So they can kill me,' he says. 'It's okay.' I hit this guy with my fist. 'Okay if you die!' I say. 'But what about us? You don't teach us to play, we die too. Us kid. Like your kid die, we will die also.' Now he wake up. First time any light in his eye."

Many, many years later, after Arn had returned to Cambodia from the United States, where he had been adopted, he found Mek reduced to a skeleton, sitting along the roadside. Arn brought him back to life and made him one of the first masters to fulfill his mission of bringing renewal, healing, and reconciliation through music to the people of Cambodia.

We talked about the challenge of erasing hate in the world—I about the man in post-war Holland who, upon seeing the Auschwitz tattoo on my mother's arm, said, "There is one they didn't get," and he about the American kids who called him "monkey" and told him, "Go back to where you came from." And, that is how we came to realize we were brothers—brothers linked through human cruelty, but brothers linked also through human kindness and heroism. As my half-Indonesian foster brother Rob Madna, a man who really could pass for Arn's brother, used to say

in response to the puzzled looks of his friends when he introduced me as his brother, “Different fathers . . . and yes, different mothers, but brothers.”

* McCormick, Patricia. *Never Fall Down.* New York: HarperCollins, 2012.

Echoes in the National Museum of African American History and Culture

I was among the fortunate few with tickets to the recently inaugurated National Museum of African American History and Culture. I had witnessed the slow rise of this basket-like architectural marvel on the National Mall, and a few weeks before the visit I had watched the dedication of the museum on television, an event deeply reminiscent of the dedication, 23 years earlier, of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Then, it was the words of Elie Wiesel and President Clinton that brought tears to my eyes. This time, I fully expected to be equally inspired by Congressman John Lewis and President Obama, and I was not disappointed. I was touched by the less soaring, but heartfelt words of President George W. Bush. The most eloquent and most moving statement at the ceremony, however, may simply have been the embrace of the two presidents, men from opposite ends of the political spectrum and with very different life histories, providing an antidote, perhaps, to an election season filled with venom and hate.

Still, nothing prepared me for the emotional jolt I’d feel upon actually entering the building. I was barely through the glass revolving door and hadn’t seen any artifacts when I felt tears well up in my eyes. To be there, a white man, among hundreds of people, almost all African Americans, some young, some old, some too frail to walk and in wheelchairs pushed by their grandchildren. Some in their traditional Sunday best, and others in dashikis or jeans and T-shirts emblazoned with the names of black heroes and political slogans. All there together, to memorialize ancestors and celebrate the history of their people. The experience awakened feelings that I had not experienced since the dedication of the place that holds my memories and honors those responsible for my survival, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

I am often asked and have often wondered myself, how it is that I can speak of the murder of my sisters and the death of my father at the hands of Nazis, without betraying any emotion. Why is it that the only time I actually shed tears for the loss of my father was when I stood at the foot of his grave in the Ebensee concentration camp? Was it because as a child growing up among the ruins of the Holocaust, the Holocaust had somehow been imprinted in my DNA? Was it that long before Elie Wiesel gave us permission to speak of and mourn our losses, long before there was a Yom

ha-Shoah, long before there was a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, had I been immunized against the horrors of the Holocaust? And why was it, that now, walking along with people of a different color and in a museum that on the surface had nothing to do with me, my immunity finally was giving way to the pain of my own life story?

Yes, three floors down in the museum exhibition, I saw not only African men and women cruelly captured, dehumanized, and turned into commodities, but felt also a father I never knew and my own mother, deported, robbed of their identities, turned into numbers, enslaved, and leased to German industry. And yes, the indescribably cruel child-sized manacles on exhibit brought me face-to-face with the cruel fate of my two sisters killed in Auschwitz, when they were six and eight, in ways that even a visit to Auschwitz had not.

Visitors to the Permanent Exhibition of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum are taken on a voyage that gradually descends from normal everyday life to the horrors of the "Final Solution." In contrast, the National Museum of African American History and Culture takes visitors on a hopeful path that slowly rises from the horrors of slavery, to freedom and achievement. Tragically, however, the global disavowal of slavery in the 19th century did not prevent the reinstitution of state-sponsored persecution, enslavement, and murder in the 20th and 21st centuries.

I now look at African American people in a different way than I had before visiting the new museum. Those old people and those kids in dashikis and T-shirts, I now feel are my kin. We are all descendants of people who were enslaved, and we all have a lesson to teach the world, a lesson contained in the simple words, both "Never Again" and "We shall overcome."

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A Small Loss

Halina Yasharoff Peabody

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.

In 1939, when World War II started, my first loss was my father, who was caught by the Russian occupying forces as he was trying to return home. He was sent to Siberia for 20 years' hard labor. That was only the beginning, but it was a very big loss.

As the war continued, my family was thrown out of our house, first under the Russians and then under the Nazis. We lost almost everything but our lives. I was very young, but I remember my toys. I lost a Shirley Temple doll, a bicycle, a tricycle, and a scooter, which was very special because it had rubber wheels—an innovation in Poland at that time. I also had skates, on which I had learned how to skate when I was five. My mother, who had been a champion swimmer, believed in playing sports early in life. She also loved other sports, such as skiing, skating, tennis, and any sport that required courage.

Now, when I recount my war experiences and describe how we managed to survive because of my mother's Herculean efforts, I always talk about the loss of my favorite doll—an authentic Shirley Temple. She has a special meaning for me because my mother used to sit with me and knit her little outfits. The one I remember best was a red cardigan. The wool had little white specs in it, and my mother did a beautiful job of knitting a cardigan with sleeves, a collar, and real buttonholes. She knitted everything I wore, as well. I don't know when the doll disappeared, but she is a part of my lost childhood.

By the time I was free and living in England, I was no longer a child, and I was dealing with a new life, a new language, and growing up—but I never forgot my Shirley Temple doll.

Recently, I celebrated my 84th birthday and got the biggest surprise. But, I will let my son Joe tell the story as he posted it on Facebook. He wrote:

> "Forgive the long post, but I hope you'll find it worth your time. For my mom's 84th birthday, we gave her a doll. Not just any doll. A Shirley Temple doll. A vintage one that's 80 years old just like the one she used to

have when she was a little girl in Poland. It was her favorite possession. My mom and her family used to go see Shirley Temple movies in the 1930s when she was Hollywood's no. 1 box office star. My mom actually bore a striking resemblance to Temple . . . My mom's mom (my grandmother who I sadly never got to meet) would knit clothes for the doll. Life was good.

Then in 1939, the Nazis invaded Poland. Nazi tanks and motorcycles literally barreled down my mom's street right in front of her family's house. Can you imagine the horror? My mom will never forget that sight. And then everything changed. Family members disappeared, and lives were profoundly changed. Forever. The doll along with almost every other prized possession became distant memories.

A few years ago, my mom started talking about her precious doll. It symbolized so many things, but mostly it represented the happy days of life in Poland before the Nazis ripped everything away. My amazing wife started plotting how she could get a Shirley Temple doll for my mom. Not just any doll, but a vintage doll that was in good shape. That was not an easy task, but a few weeks ago Nancy found a woman in Kansas who had the perfect Shirley Temple doll. YES!

Tonight, we surprised my mom with the doll, wrapping it in a blanket. And boy was she surprised. She said things like, 'I'm so overwhelmed' and 'This is the best birthday I've ever had.' All I can say is tonight my mom got her Shirley Temple doll back, and my heart is full."

It is difficult to describe what went on in my mind when I opened this gift and saw the doll. A lot of memories floated back, and I was very moved. I have been sharing my wartime experiences with many audiences over the years, and each time something new creeps back into my memory. So, now I have a new piece to add to my recollections and another way to remember my mother who never gave up the fight to save her two daughters.

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Halina Yasharoff Peabody sits with her family as she opens the Shirley Temple doll. *Courtesy of Halina Yasharoff Peabody*

Ashburn Colored School

Susan Warsinger

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 Diane Saltzman, the Museum's director of Survivor and Council Stewardship, sent me an e-mail to ask me to speak at a program in Ashburn, Virginia, at a schoolhouse that had been defaced with graffiti, I had already heard and read about the historic one-room Ashburn Colored School. The phrase "white power," swastikas, profanities, and crude drawings were spray painted in black, blue, and red on the outside of the wooden walls and windows. Diane informed me that I was to speak for only a short time with other invited presenters. I accepted the invitation because I wanted to be part of that historic occasion, and I wanted to do something to confront hatred. I did not know where the school was located and what was being or would be done with it.

Ashburn is about a 50-minute drive from my house in Chevy Chase, Maryland. As soon as we exited the highway, we drove through a modern suburban neighborhood with single-family homes and well-kept lawns. It was easy to find the school because on this Sunday morning, there were so many people standing on ladders, painting over the graffiti on the little building that was sitting isolated on a small hill. I found out later that the Loudoun County School for the Gifted had purchased the 123-year-old schoolhouse, a segregated school for black children, and all the land around it. The plan is to use the property to build a state-of-the-art school for middle and high school students and to restore the schoolhouse, which had been built in 1892 and closed in 1957, and convert it into a museum.

The school founder and teachers of the Loudoun School for the Gifted were responsible for this "Community Restoration Celebration—A Testament to Ashburn's True Spirit, October 9, 2016." Local businesses donated food, dumpsters, paint, and other supplies. Volunteers shoveled rocks and spread them around the foundation. Many people came to give their muscle power, and many came to support their community by being there. They came with their young children and their teenagers, people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds. The act of vandalism against the schoolhouse was hideous. The Loudoun County police identified five teenagers who had vandalized the schoolhouse. To my great happiness, here were hundreds of people to undo their act of prejudice.

Susan Warsinger presents a Nazi propaganda book aimed at children during her presentation in Ashburn, Virginia. *Courtesy of Susan Warsinger*

A stage had been set up near the schoolhouse, and most of the people there became our audience. Deep Sran, the founder of the Loudoun School for the Gifted, spoke eloquently about the students of his school and all their efforts to restore the old wooden schoolhouse, which had been standing on a slope and had chipped paint and boarded windows. The students had been working on it for two years. The windows had already been replaced. Phyllis Randall, chair of the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors, the first African American to hold that title, talked about how the community will rise above this incident. When it was my turn to speak, I was surprised to be introduced as the "distinguished guest speaker." Diane had explained that I needed to speak for only 10 to 15 minutes, like all the other speakers had.

I told the mixed audience of all ages some of my experiences as a child in Germany, when the Nazis first came into power. I conveyed how distressed I was about the awful images painted on the historic schoolhouse, because those swastikas brought back many disturbing childhood memories. I told the audience that there were swastikas everywhere in Germany. I spoke about my experience in first grade, when the teacher read the picture storybook of *Der Giftpilz*, which taught the young children that Jews were poisonous mushrooms. I held up a poster of the cover of the book, which our Museum had made for me some time ago (before we had PowerPoint). The audience understood that Nazi propaganda was also aimed at young children. I also told about my experiences in the park, where the gatekeeper called me names and threw rocks at me because I was Jewish. His young daughter saw her father in this act of antisemitism and learned from him about discrimination. I told them about my experiences during Kristallnacht and was happy to learn that some people in the audience had learned about the Night of Broken Glass, which owes its name to the shards of shattered glass that lined German streets from windows of synagogues, homes, and Jewish-owned businesses plundered during the violence.

I was so proud of the audience because they seemed to understand what hatred and prejudice can do to people. We remembered the dark chapters in our history and learned from them. Besides remembering, we were taking action to confront hate. All of us were standing there together to counter the intolerable images and words that were written on the schoolhouse.

After the speeches, many of us took pictures of the schoolhouse and the workers who had almost completed painting it. By the time I went home, the schoolhouse stood there, freshly painted and shiny, glowing in the afternoon sun.

Children Far Away

Last week I had a wonderful opportunity to peer back deep into my memory when Emily Potter asked me to engage in a videoconference with 35 eighth- and tenth-grade students at Costa Rica's La Paz School. I felt sure that I was going to be an interesting object in the eyes of those students while recording the conference, sitting in the room where our artistically boundless writers of *Echoes of Memory* meetings take place, at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The international school in Costa Rica, where everyone speaks English, had a split screen between my PowerPoints and me as I gave a presentation about my life as a child in Europe during the Holocaust. I feel more at ease now about sharing those memories because I have delivered this presentation so many times; however, this was a new experience for me because these children were far away, in a country near the Pacific Ocean. I was delighted when the camera person who worked with me showed me online pictures of Costa Rica's landscape and then slowly zoomed in on the rural area, dotted with verdant trees, where the one-story brick school stood. It felt as if I were there with the students.

While making eye contact with school personnel, I saw the students file into the classroom. To my bewilderment, they sat sideways to the camera, so I could not see their faces; however, I was assured they could see me and my PowerPoints. I was worried that I would not be able to interact with the students, as is my custom when I talk; therefore, I asked them to raise their hands to acknowledge that they had understood the idea I was presenting.

At first, very few hands went up. But, as I continued my talk, more and more children raised their hands. I also invited them to shout out the answers to the questions I asked so that I would be sure they heard and understood me. I received the answers faintly because the microphone was evidently near where their camera was located. I did not know who replied. I wish I had been able to see the child who answered. This personal interaction is important to me in my presentations. I like the closeness of being in the same room with my audience, looking at people and feeling the electricity among us. It's a kind of connection that computer-generated technology cannot replicate.

As usual, we reserved 15 minutes for the question-and-answer period. To my great pleasure, many students came individually to the camera, where I could distinctly see their faces, and asked their questions. We engaged in the beautiful ballet of good questions with me trying my very best to answer them.

Most questions had to do with what happened to my family as a result of the Holocaust, how I handled the prejudice and hatred against me, and how I adjusted coming to the United States as a child. One question I had never received before was from a girl who spoke beautiful English. She asked me whether I spoke Hebrew. I think she wanted to tell me that she had something in common with me and wanted me to know that she was Jewish.

I hope that, through this conversation, I have helped the children understand more fully what bigotry and hatred are and what terrible wrongs they can produce. I hope the students remember that none of us are intrinsically superior to our fellow beings and that they were instilled with the values of equality, justice, and respect.

Pocahontas, Arkansas

It had been a long time since the Speakers Bureau of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum requested that I give a presentation in a far-off place, so when I received an e-mail asking me to go to Pocahontas, Arkansas, I was delighted. The trip was sponsored by Black River Technical College, and I was scheduled to give three lectures to 800 people at each session. It was to be a four-day trip: two days to get there and back, and two days for the speeches themselves. Museum staff member Emily Potter accompanied me on the trip.

Traveling from Washington, DC, to Pocahontas was an adventure. We flew from Reagan National Airport to St. Louis, then changed to a local airline for the flight to Jonesboro, because there is no airport in Pocahontas. We waited quite awhile for our connection, and when we saw the aircraft coming to our gate, we were amazed. Could such a tiny plane take us to our destination? The pilot, who sat in front of me, told his five passengers not to worry. We soared below the clouds, glimpsing the fertile fields of Arkansas and the colorful autumn foliage sprinkled among the farmers' squares of green and brown. After landing at Jonesboro Municipal Airport on a narrow strip, the plane taxied to the terminal where Jessica, the college's representative, was waiting for us.

The 90-minute ride to our hotel was most enjoyable because the day was bright and washed with lush colors. I observed rice fields just like I had seen in China and vegetable crops just like the ones I passed so many times while riding my bicycle in rural Maryland and Virginia. I also spotted a few red-tailed hawks flying overhead and perching on trees, waiting patiently for their prey. Unadorned farmhouses were scattered on the flat land.

Because the population of Pocahontas is only 6,617, I could not figure out where the 2,400 people would come from to hear my talks the next morning, again in the evening, and then again the day after. Jessica explained that high school, middle school, and some older elementary school students and their teachers from all over Randolph County would arrive by bus; also invited were the college's faculty, staff, and students, as well as the community.

The morning of my first PowerPoint presentation, I wanted my first slide—a map of Europe in 1933—to be on the screen so that the students could study it while they waited. When giving such talks, my goal is not only to tell my own personal Holocaust story, but also to help the audience understand how the Nazis were able to conquer almost all of Europe.

I want them to visualize what Europe looked like and where Bad Kreuznach, Germany—the town of my birth—fits into this geography. Of course, I mainly want them to see what prejudice and hatred can do to people, why we need to be sensitive to each other, and how important it is that we take care of one another.

Before beginning my talk, I spoke with some teachers to try to find out how much their students knew about the Holocaust. I learned that some students were reading *Night* by Elie Wiesel, as well as *The Diary of Anne Frank*. This information was most helpful to me so that I could adjust the talk to meet their needs.

The audience was wonderful! They responded to my questions beautifully, and I was very happy. After my talk, microphones were placed in two aisles, and many members of the audience lined up behind them for a question-and-answer period. I was very pleased because everyone asked very thoughtful questions.

The last item on the agenda was group photos. I am not sure how many groups there were, but they lined up all around the auditorium so that they could come on stage to have their pictures taken with me. Because the stage was too small to accommodate the large crowd, I was asked to go to the bleachers to be in the photograph with the students who were sitting there. When I went back to the stage, more groups came to be photographed. By then it was a most festive occasion. I enjoyed the opportunity to interact with them. After the picture taking, I must have signed a large number of programs because they all wanted my autograph. Someone said that I was a "rock star." This, of course, was the ultimate compliment for me.

The evening program attracted mostly adults. When it was over, one lady came up to me and told me that her sister-in-law was also born in my native Bad Kreuznach, although she had been born in Pocahontas and had never been out of Arkansas.

By the following morning, I had become an old hand at having my picture taken and signing autographs. Because I had a lot of free time between presentations, Jessica volunteered to give Emily and me a tour to local points of interest, including the Randolph County Heritage Museum and a meteorite that fell in 1858. Jessica also took us to the Black River Beads and Pottery Gallery located in the town's Depression-era City Hall, as well as to the Birdsong Peanuts building. The college gave me a $50 gift certificate to use in the gift shop, which contained hand-thrown pottery, blown glass, and glass beads. It was most generous of them, and I appreciated their thoughtfulness. Jessica also took us to the Birdsong Peanuts peanut-processing factory. We discovered that the peanuts in Snickers, my favorite candy bar, are grown and bought at this factory.

The next day, before our flight home, Jessica took us to the Eddie Mae Herron Center, church, and school, built in 1919, that today serves as a religious and educational hub for the African American community in Pocahontas and surrounding communities.

This trip made me realize even more the importance of the Survivors Speakers Bureau. We have the ability to reach thousands of people outside of Washington, DC, who may not have the opportunity to learn about and understand the horrors of the Holocaust. Survivors like me can teach people to take action—not simply look the other way—when we see injustice taking place. We can 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.

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Escaping from Evil

Martin Weiss

Martin Weiss was born in Polana, Czechoslovakia, and survived Auschwitz-Birkenau and Mauthausen. He was liberated by US troops at the Gunskirchen camp in Austria in 1945.

Growing up in a rural area where many people were uneducated, I always thought that in the cities, especially in Western Europe, where people had access to higher education and city life, they would behave in a more civilized way than people where I lived. Growing up in a democratic country like Czechoslovakia, even as a seven- or eight-year-old kid, I felt very proud of our country, because we were treated as citizens. That does not mean that our neighbors who were "Russ" were not antisemitic; they were. However, we did coexist and got along.

In 1939, when World War II started, I was ten years old. Stories of what was happening in Germany to fellow Jews were unbelievable. It was so hard to understand because we thought the German Jews were well integrated and that they were proud German citizens. I remember my father discussing this with his friends. He had a hard time understanding that one of the leading countries in Europe was violating the rules of a modern and civilized world. After all, the Germans were leaders in science, music, and philosophy. No one could imagine that a modern society in the 20th century would be capable of committing the atrocities that we were hearing about. What I could never understand is that the population supported it.

In 1945, after I was liberated by American troops from the Gunskirchen camp in Austria, I eventually reconnected with my older sister, Cilia, in Karlovy Vary, Czechoslovakia. She had found her boyfriend, Fred, from home and gotten married immediately. I moved in with them. We had a nice, modern apartment with an elevator and a modern kitchen. However, most of us were very angry at the Germans; in fact, we hated them.

The Sudeten Germans had been very successful in Czechoslovakia; they switched their allegiance to Germany and sided with the Nazis. After the war, the Czech government decided to confiscate their businesses—just as the Germans had done to us Jews—and deported them to Germany. We all felt this was justified. The Hungarians had drafted all Jewish men between the ages of 20 and 50 into labor battalions, which were used as slave labor under army oversight. So, thousands of these Jewish men had ended up on the eastern front, including my two older brothers, Mendel

and Izsak. Some of their jobs were burying the dead, clearing minefields, etc. However, many of them escaped or were captured by Soviet forces. Once they were in Soviet territory, some joined the Czechoslovak Legion and returned as liberators.

After the Czechs deported the Sudeten Germans, the government turned over their businesses to the liberators. Fred got an auto parts store, where I worked with him. However, we soon realized that the Soviet Union would have a big influence in the country. Fred felt we should emigrate to the United States as soon as possible. He had a brother in New York, and we had a sister who had gone to the United States two weeks before the Hungarian occupation. After much effort, we were able to locate addresses and get in touch with these relatives. They sent us affidavits, so we could get visas for travel to the United States.

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