

Hofor in class

love Paris
 me, and I decided to take the
 from London to Paris. We were planning
 first, to visit with my brother, he
 We chose Paris, because we
 both love it and June is always a good month.
 The train ride was so fast, we were talking and
 when we took our bags from one bag to start reading
 books, we were already at Gare du Nord.
 I walked outside to the taxi stand. I got a
 uncomfortable feeling, on one corner a lot
 of ^(from) African ^{origin} men were standing on one corner,
 and a lot of police on another corner. They
 were looking at each other with very mean faces.
 It reminded me of 1960, my brother and I arrived
 in Paris on our way to the Cevennes and Grenoble.
 We stayed in Paris for a few days, before we ever
 left Holland, my father had given us
 just in case. It was the time Algeria
~~was~~ country, without being a french

Echoes of Memory Volume 8

FOREWORD

The works compiled in this eighth volume of *Echoes of Memory* encompass the historical. Many of the pieces describe the personal and specific trauma that European Jews were subjected to during the Holocaust, told by those who witnessed and experienced these atrocities firsthand. In a text titled “The First Few Days,” Marcel Drimer recounts the experiences of his family after the Nazis took over his town and allowed the Ukrainians to attack and kill Jews and to loot Jewish homes. He describes his family photos being thrown out on to the ground. What he relates is, of course historical, but it is more than that as well.

I see, and have seen for 14 years, these writers engage in the making of testimony, a testimony that is unique and particular, and a testimony that is not the final word for the writer’s knowing of the past, or their sense of the future. In a text from Albert Garih, he traces the subject of how his Jewish identity was shaped through his experiences during and after the Holocaust. His writing is a questioning of what each of his experiences means to the life he now lives, the person he has become.

While the work compiled here is certainly historical and is intended as testimony, most importantly, I see the work done through this group’s writing as pedagogical. In every text compiled here, the writer seeks to teach, to impart a lesson, to change the heart, and possibly the actions, of a reader.

These texts are created through dialogue with others, written and rewritten, and understood as being in dialogue with history. These texts do the important work of teaching through the dialogues they are forged from and through, the conversations they prompt. They are written, as the participants have described, with the desire to translate experience, to tell about life, to tell about the Holocaust through narrating the particulars of an individual life story. We are meant to come away from these essays knowing more about the historical aspects of lives lived during the Holocaust and are meant to witness the personal testimonies told by the writers. But primarily, I believe, we are meant to come away from our reading here thinking more, as Susan Warsinger writes in her text “Memories and Defining Yourself,” about “our role in the community” and our responsibility to others.

Maggie Peterson, PhD Writing Instructor, The Memory Project

Echoes of Memory

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Coming to America

MARCEL DRIMER

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

Fifty years ago in May, I fulfilled my dream of coming to America.

For me at that time it was not a simple task, especially since I came from Communist Poland.

After the Holocaust, my father's aunt, Hannah Rothbaum, who lived in Washington, DC, contacted the Red Cross and to her joyous surprise, found out that my parents, sister, and I were alive. She started sending us food and clothing packages. In one of the packages there was a slightly used man's suit, which after some alteration, I used for my high school graduation in 1953. This was the very first suit I ever owned.

Corresponding with relatives in the United States was a complicated process. My sister and I were both straight-A students in a *gimnazjum* (high school) and planned to attend a university, but if the authorities had discovered that we had relatives abroad, especially in the US, we would not have been accepted. We had to correspond through my uncle living in another town.

I graduated from a Polytechnic Institute with a degree in mechanical engineering in 1957 and started working in a design office in Walbrzych, which specialized in designing coalmine machinery. Since I was Jewish and was not a member of the Communist party, my professional future did not look very promising. When Aunt Hannah suggested that her son, Abe Rothbaum, was willing to send me an affidavit to come and work in his watchmaking shop as an apprentice, I saw a chance to get out of Poland. I found it amusing that after being a designer of heavy machinery, I would be fixing watches. Abe's brother, Jack, came to Poland in 1959 to look me over. He approved me and convinced the rest of the family that I would not be a burden to them. I am sure that it was Aunt Hannah who pushed her sons to help me. My father was her favorite nephew who helped her family when they lived in Poland in the early 1930s while her husband was in America.

Abe sent the necessary documents and I started the process to get a passport. Unexpectedly, I got summoned to report to three months of military active duty. I was an ROTC graduate, and it was my turn to serve and to get a promotion. My problem was that after any term of active duty, one could not leave the country for three years. I requested a private meeting with the recruiting officer. I gave him some made-up excuses and bribed him with vodka and money and suggested that I would be happy to serve the following year. It was risky, but it worked.

I got a one-way ticket for May 4, 1961, on the M/S *Batory* from Gdynia to Montreal. The Polish ship was not allowed to dock in the US ports because it had given political asylum to an East German spy. I said goodbye to my family, friends, and a very special young lady, Ania. In the political climate of Poland at that time, it was unlikely that I would ever see them again. I don't think I was fully aware of the seriousness of my decision to leave the people I loved and travel to an uncertain future in a totally strange land where I didn't know anybody. My father and a Polish friend, Janek, accompanied me by train to the Gdynia port. Janek is still my friend.

My father's friend, Mr. Wolf, asked me to take a camera for his friend, who lived in Montreal. I could not fulfill this request because the Polish customs allowed only one camera. I was allowed to bring with me \$5 and personal luggage only.

At first, the voyage on the Baltic Sea was very pleasant. Food was plentiful and good. I worked out in the gym and had a great appetite. When asked if I would prefer steak or lobster for dinner, I requested both. I had never had either one and was curious to try. Unfortunately, the weather turned stormy as we entered the Atlantic. Most of the time I was seasick and could not hold down any food. I used a refreshing cologne "4711" aftershave on my face that helped me a little. A few weeks after arriving in the US, when I tried to use that cologne, I got seasick. Was this Pavlov's involuntary reflex?

The first port in the western hemisphere was Quebec. I got off the ship and admired the beauty of the town. People were well dressed and seemed happy and friendly. I noticed a stand with bananas, bought a kilo, and ate it all in a sitting. A couple days later, we arrived in Montreal, the ship's final destination. At the station, I showed the cashier my voucher for the train tickets to Washington, DC. Imagine my surprise and dismay when he told me that the voucher has expired some time ago. Here I was alone, with luggage, speaking about 300 words of English, and with \$2 in my pocket. The other \$3 had been spent on bananas.

I did not have the camera for Mr. Wolf's friend, but I had his telephone number, and I promptly called him. He seemed happy to hear from me. When I explained my predicament, he said, "I would gladly come to the port to pick you up, but I was in a car accident and both of my legs are in a cast, my wife does not drive, and my son is 12 years old. But when *Batory* is in the port, most of the taxi drivers speak Polish. Get one and ask him to bring you to my house. We will pay for the taxi." I followed his advice and was warmly welcomed.

From there I contacted Abe Rothbaum asking for the train money. It took three or four days to get the money, to buy the tickets, and then to arrive in Washington, DC. Jack Rothbaum waited for me at Union Station. I looked at my future with a mixture of hope and apprehension, since my knowledge of America was based on reading books by contemporary American writers and by trying to avoid being brainwashed by anti-American propaganda in Poland. So started my new life in America.

The First Few Days

Germany attacked Russia on June 22, 1941, even though the two countries signed a pact of nonaggression in August 1939. The attack was code named Operation Barbarossa; it was the largest invasion in the history of warfare. Many Russian generals did not trust Germany and tried to convince Stalin to prepare for an attack. Stalin did not believe the generals and in his paranoia, ended up "eliminating" most of these generals. So when Germany attacked, Russia's armed forces were not prepared. They retreated in disarray, while the loudspeakers continued to blare patriotic, heroic music and reported victories of the Red Army against the invaders.

The situation in German-occupied Poland was known, because some people managed to escape and tell about the Germans' cruel treatment of the Jews in Warsaw and other towns and villages, and also about ghettos, indiscriminate persecution, and killings. Some of the young Jews in Drohobycz decided to follow the retreating Red Army. Among them were my father's two sisters, Syma and Mirka, each with an infant child, my father's brother Abraham, and my mother's brother Josef, who was only 21 years old. The husbands of Syma, Mirka, and another of my father's sisters, Ryfka, were conscripted to the Red Army. Both the husbands of Syma and Ryfka were killed fighting the Germans. Ryfka and her two little boys were deported to the Belzec extermination camp in August 1942 and killed there with other members of my family. The others survived in Russia. Some Jews, considered "enemies of the state," were deported to Siberia; most of them also survived.

Before leaving Drohobycz, the Russians executed about a thousand Ukrainian and some Polish political prisoners and left their bodies in the center of town. The Germans entered Drohobycz on June 30. The Ukrainians started a rumor that the Jews had killed all the prisoners and convinced the Germans to let them take revenge on the Jews. On July 1, hordes of peasants from the nearby villages entered Jewish homes, robbing, beating, and killing the Jews. They killed about 80 Jews and wounded about 200. My maternal grandfather, Osjasz Gruber, was one of the wounded. My parents could not get any medical help for him, and he died about 10 days later.

The robbers took everything they could carry, including several photo albums. They shook out the photos into the muddy yard. After the war, father went to see what was left from my grandparents' house; there was nothing of any value there.

A Ukrainian neighbor, Mr. Kocko, came out to talk to my father. He was surprised and happy to see him alive and handed him a stack of about 50 photos that he had gathered after the pogrom of early July 1941. These photos are now in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. They are mostly of my sister Irena and me; some show my parents picnicking on the banks of the Tysmienica River with their siblings and friends. Happy, young, and full of life.



A studio portrait of Marcel Drimer's aunt Ryfcia and a photograph of them together in Poland. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Marcel and Ania Drimer*

In the beginning of 1941, Father was sent from his work to Lwow to attend some courses at the university. My mother's sister Ryfcia accompanied him to help with the housekeeping. After the Germans attacked Russia, Father asked the management to let him go back to Drohobycz to join the family. The answer he got was, "The fighting is near the Bug River, but life here goes on as usual. Our brave soldiers will not let the Germans come here. Workers work, students study, you and the other students stay put."

A few days later the German army reached Lwow. Like in Drohobycz, the Russians executed a few thousand Ukrainian and Polish prisoners; among the killed were also some downed German pilots. And here too, the Jews were made scapegoats and accused of killing them. Germans gave the Ukrainians impunity to attack, torture, and kill the Jews. They announced that they will gather the Jews and put them to work. Ryfcia, who was about 25 years old and single, convinced my father that he should hide and she should go to work. She covered him with a down comforter, and when the Ukrainians came she told them she was the only one in the apartment and left with them. About 5,000 Jews were brutally beaten, humiliated, and killed during the three days of June 30, July 1, and July 2. My aunt Ryfcia was one of the victims.

Father waited a few days, but she never came back. He walked about 60 kilometers (40 miles) from Lwow to Drohobycz. I can only imagine Mother's reaction to his arrival; the joy of seeing him alive and the terrible anguish of not seeing her sister. We all loved her and spent a lot of time with her. She played with us and helped Mother a lot. Perhaps at that time they hoped she was still alive.



These few days of early July 1941 were the beginning of the most traumatic three years in the lives of my family and the Jews of Galicja.

I am the oldest of my generation in my family; I feel responsible for keeping the memories of my family alive. But I don't remember aunt Rifka's married name, nor her children's given names, although I think that her older son was named Henius (a term of endearment for Henryk). He was my age and we played together before he was taken to Belzec. It pains me that nobody will ever know that they existed or mention their names during Yom ha-Shoah observance.

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How Did the Holocaust Shape Me as a Jew?

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.

I was born in Paris in 1938 to Jewish parents who had emigrated from Turkey in the 1920s, as they no longer felt secure in a new modern nationalist Turkey born from the ashes of the former Ottoman Empire. In Turkey, my parents had been educated in schools from the Alliance Israélite Universelle and were already perfectly fluent in French. At these schools they had received a Jewish education better than I ever received in France in the 1950s. There I only attended public schools. My Jewish education was reduced to bare minimum preparation for my bar mitzvah, which I quickly forgot, as we never went to synagogue afterwards.

Although secular, my parent had a strong sense of their Jewish identity, which was probably reinforced by their exposure to antisemitism for the first time in their lives. Indeed, in Turkey, although the Jews lived together with fellow Jews, in their dealings with the Turks, there never was animosity, and they were treated with respect. My father would recall that as an immigrant, when he first arrived in France he had to report periodically to the immigration office, and there, the lower ranking bureaucrats would treat them like cattle. My father was a very proud man, and he suffered from this humiliation. So, whatever the circumstances, my parents didn't have to be reminded that they were Jewish. The context was always there to remind them.

In 1942, when things became critical for the Jews in France, my parents sent my sisters and me to a farm, not too far from Paris, not telling the two ladies who were tending the farm that we were Jewish and arguing that we would be better fed in a farm than at home. So, we spent the winter of 1942–43 in that farm, and while my sisters were going to school, I stayed with these two ladies. Being very social, I would talk to them, and one day, I told them that we were Jewish. I was only four. The ladies sent us right back home, afraid of the danger of hiding Jewish kids. Needless to say that back home, my parents made sure that I would not tell anymore about our Jewishness.

During the war, we were exposed to different experiences with the French people. We didn't live in a Jewish area and were surrounded with non-Jews who treated us nicely, with respect. However, my father was sent to a slave labor camp after being turned in by one of his coworkers. On the other hand, when he was taken away from us, my mother was fortunate enough to meet this lady, Madame Galop, and tell her that she was living in constant terror of the Gestapo or even some French police coming to take us away. Madame Galop told her husband, and they invited us to come and live with them. The Galops had two little girls, age four and three, with whom I would play and forget about the war. The Galops were a Protestant family. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the French Protestants had been exposed to persecutions by the Catholic church, and also, they had a better knowledge of the Bible than the Catholics.

Therefore, they were almost naturally inclined to help us. One perfect example of this inclination was the episode of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, where a Protestant minister, Pasteur André Trocmé, with the help of the population of surrounding villages in the Cevennes region of France, hid and saved thousands of Jews and non-Jews. So, with the Galops, we never felt different. We were fellow human beings protected from the mortal dangers of deportation by other fellow human beings. So, that experience contributed a great deal to shape my outlook on the world. Later on, we had to go back home because it was getting too dangerous to stay with the Galops, as the people in the small street where they lived began suspecting them of hiding Jews, and one of them threatened to denounce the Galops.

So, home we went, and a few weeks later, two French police inspectors came to take us away. Once again, whatever their motivations might have been (human decency, the feeling that Germany was losing the war, as this episode coincided more or less with the D-Day landing of the allies in Normandy) these police inspectors let us go, after recommending to my mother to leave the apartment right away. Once again, we were helped, this time, by a Communist couple, Robert and Suzanne Ménétrier, who were our next-door neighbors. Robert had been summoned to Germany for mandatory labor service and had not reported for duty, and therefore, could have been arrested at any moment. That didn't stop them from taking us into their tiny apartment for a few days, until the social worker that my mother had gone to after the visit of the police inspectors found another hiding place for all of us (my mother as a governess for a family with 10 children near the Eiffel Tower, and my sisters and me in Catholic boarding schools in a suburb east of Paris).

So, if we are alive today, we owe it to people from all walks of life: a Protestant family, a Communist couple, and Catholic boarding schools. That went a long way in shaping my attitude toward the rest of the world. I know that we were particularly lucky to get such help from such diverse kinds of people, and that it was not the same for everyone else. Hence my ambivalence about the world today.

But all these experiences surely had a deep impact on my personal identity, particularly as a Jew. When the war was over for us, in August 1944 after the liberation of Paris, I was eager to go to school and resume a normal life. I was six, and it was time to go to elementary school. Of course, my parents, being secular and too poor to send me to a private school, that was never an option. Besides, we were strongly in favor of public school. Therefore, on October 1, back-to-school day, I remember I was very excited to start my education. I already knew how to read and write, having learned with my mom when we were with the Galop family. I had an edge over my classmates and soon found myself among the top three students of the class.

It was at school that I witnessed the first antisemitic incidents in my life, hearing some kids using antisemitic slurs against a Jewish kid. Having been instructed by my parents never to tell that I was Jewish, I was afraid to fight back and kept it for myself, but I soon began to realize that I was not one of them, that I was different. My close friends knew that I was Jewish, and that was never an issue with them, but the general environment was not helping me to fully integrate into the surrounding society. Somehow, I always felt a bit different. So, it was not only the Holocaust that shaped my Jewish identity, it was the society I was living in. In a way, I was a bit envious of those kids who were "real French" kids, something I never really felt personally. When I turned 10, I saw all these kids doing their first communion, wearing beautiful suits with a white bow on their arm, and I felt a little more like an outsider. And I was still hiding my Jewish identity. When I was 11, I had an appendectomy in a hospital where the nurses were nuns, and when one of the nuns asked me whether I was going to catechism, I didn't dare to tell her that I was Jewish.

When I was about to turn 13, I asked my parents for a bar mitzva. By then, my parents were no longer going to synagogue. After returning from deportation, my father refused to set foot in a synagogue. Only on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur would I go with my mom. Therefore, my parents didn't feel the urge, and they were poor and could not afford a costly affair. So, I got a minimal preparation, and a luncheon limited to my family. Even my present, a beautiful watch, was paid in part from my own allowances. But I certainly was proud to have my own celebration. However, my parents were not encouraging me to pursue my Jewish education, and besides, in our neighborhood, we were surrounded by people from all walks of life and exposed to the most liberal ideas and therefore, anticlerical, even towards the Jewish faith. Furthermore, my parents had been stateless for 25 years after they immigrated to France (they got their French passports only in 1948), and they were eager for us to become real French citizens. For instance, at home, they would speak Judeo-Spanish among themselves, but not to us. They wanted us to focus on French, which didn't stop me from learning their language.

It took me about ten years to get “out of the closet” and say openly that I was Jewish. When I turned 19 and became a student at the Sorbonne, I remember sitting in a philosophy class next to a Catholic girl who wanted me to join her in the annual Chartres Pilgrimage. When I refused, she stopped sitting next to me.

When I turned 20, I even had a German girlfriend, whose father had been the right age to have belonged to the Hitler Youth. She never told her parents that I was Jewish. What motivated me to keep this relationship? The fact that I was in love? Also, the dream of an ideal world where everybody loved everybody else? I don't know. But I am not too proud of having put up with the fact that she concealed to her parents the fact that I was Jewish.

Anyhow, little by little, I came to terms with all these experiences that did nothing but strengthen my Jewish identity. In the early 1960s, Israel was very popular in France, and I was eager to go and visit. So, when I graduated from the school of translators and began my career, my first trip overseas was to Israel. The year was 1963. I have made many trips to Israel since.

History sometimes has strange twists. After having had several non-Jewish girlfriends, in 1967 I finally met a young religious Jewish woman whom I married. Today, our house is strictly kosher. We observe Shabbat and the Jewish holidays. My three daughters were raised religious Jews, and my ten grandchildren all have a rich Jewish education. Curiously enough, my parents also received a Jewish education in the schools of the Alliance Israélite in Istanbul, and mine is the only generation deprived of that education. But that doesn't stop me from being an outspoken advocate of Jews and Israel, and a fierce critic of antisemitism. One way of doing it is by being a volunteer at the Museum, where I have an opportunity to educate people about the dangers of hatred, racism, and antisemitism.

That has been my itinerary as a 20th-century Jew, and the Holocaust is more than certainly one of the reasons for my strong sense of my Jewish identity.

Letter to a World War II Veteran

Dear Veteran,

This is to express my gratitude for your sacrifice during World War II. I was a hidden child in Paris, France, pursued by Nazi invaders and their French collaborators who were doing the dirty job of rounding up people like me to send us to the gas chambers in Auschwitz. Were it not for people like you, who braved the enemy fire to liberate Europe from the tyranny of the Nazi regime, I might not be here today.

I remember that day, in late August 1944, as I was hiding in a Catholic boarding school in a Paris suburb, when one of the students came running to the school to announce: “The Allies are coming! The Allies are coming!” That was the day I was liberated; I had survived the constant threat of being taken away with my family.

I remember how we all went to the main street in that suburb to greet you, our liberators, with our hearts full of joy and love for these young soldiers who, for the first time, were not threatening us, but were smiling at us and giving us chocolate, chewing gum, even cigarettes. I still remember the smell of the Lucky Strike cigarettes that surrounded us. I was six years old, and the memory of that day will stay with me forever.

I am aware of the dangers that you were facing, with the enemy still around. I have seen the beaches in Normandy where you landed and where so many of your brothers in arms lost their lives. I have seen

the cemeteries with all these white crosses and Stars of David. I am aware of the ultimate price that so many of you paid so that Europe could live once again in freedom. I have not forgotten.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Some Were Neighbors...

When I saw this title of the upcoming exhibit at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, I felt that couldn't have thought of a more meaningful one, so true was it in our case. This is how we lived during World War II in occupied France. While most were indifferent or just struggling, trying to survive in difficult circumstances, some were fighting in the resistance, some were helping, and some were in the militia, doing the dirty jobs for the occupying forces.

In the spring of 1944, we had to go back to our apartment after a neighbor of the family with whom my mother, my two sisters, and I had been hiding for the past six months while my father was in captivity, threatened to denounce us. The neighbor asked our protectors, "When are you going to get rid of that scum?" But, it was not the end of our life with dangerous neighbors.

Adjacent to our own apartment, sharing a wall with us, was a couple of middle-aged people whom we first found to be rather friendly. Of course, they didn't know that we were Jewish. We also shared a balcony with them, with our section of the balcony separated from theirs by a small railing, and I remember that one day the lady, whose name I have forgotten, invited me over to her apartment. I was a cute little five-year-old boy and she helped my mother to lift me over the railing, and then she offered me something I had never seen before, a yellow tomato. I was immediately seduced by that friendly woman.

Once the war was over, we learned that that lovely lady's husband had been a big shot in the collaborationist militia, rounding up Jews to be sent to their death in the concentration camps. In 1945, a few days after the war ended, that man was found dead in a movie theater, gunned down by some resistance fighter in retribution for his actions during the war! Some neighbor!

However, if I talked only of our bad neighbors, I wouldn't be telling the whole story. We also had good neighbors, who definitely deserve to be mentioned here. First were our next-door neighbors, Robert and Suzanne Ménétrier, who lived on the same floor, one door up the corridor from our apartment. The Ménétriers were Communists. Robert had been summoned to Germany for mandatory labor service, but had not reported for duty and was therefore under the constant threat of being deported. They had a little girl, three months my junior. One morning in early June 1944, two police inspectors came knocking at our door, telling my mother that they had come to take us away. It was in the early morning, and I was still asleep, but I was awakened by the commotion. My mother started shaking, realizing that what she had dreaded all along had finally happened.

However, these inspectors, for whatever reason—maybe they realized that the war was being lost, or maybe they were just decent human beings—added that they would report that they had not found us, but that we could not stay in our apartment. As soon as they left, my mother dressed me up and took me and my sisters to a social worker who knew of our situation. She asked her to find hiding places for all of us. The social worker needed a few days to find places, but in the meantime, we had to hide the best we could. The Ménétriers had a small apartment, but they immediately offered to host my mother and me until we could find a more permanent place to stay. Both Robert and Suzanne worked night shifts, so at night, my mother and I would sleep in their bed, and when they returned from work in the morning, we would get up to let them sleep.

There was also Madame Papillon, our lodgekeeper, a mother of three whose husband was among the French soldiers taken prisoner when France was invaded. Madame Papillon hosted my sisters while my mother and I were staying with the Ménétriers. Finally, after a few days, the social worker found a hiding place for each one of us. My mother was placed as a governess with a family of many children near the Eiffel Tower, while my sisters and I were placed in Catholic boarding schools in Montfermeil, a suburb east of Paris where we stayed until we were liberated, at the end of August.

In other words, our apartment was sandwiched between an apartment housing a militia collaborator and one housing workers discreetly, but surely, fighting back against the German occupation of France. In 1992, I had the Ménétriers recognized as Righteous Among the Nations.

Shrapnel

In the summer of 1944 I was in hiding in a Catholic boarding school in Montfermeil, a Paris suburb made famous by the episode in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* where Jean Valjean meets Cosette, sent by the Thénardiens to fetch water in the woods. I was about the age of Cosette when I was there, hidden in that school. My sisters and I had been sent to Montfermeil after two police inspectors had come to our home to take us away. For a reason I am still pondering (it was just about D Day, so did they think that their side was losing the war, or were they just decent people?) they decided to let us go, but we had to leave our apartment and once again, we had to go into hiding.

This is how my sisters and I ended up in those schools, while my father was in a slave labor camp in the Channel Island of Alderney, and my mother was working as a governess with a family of eight or ten children near l'École militaire, opposite the Eiffel Tower. It was a hot summer, and we were not working very hard in that school, spending most of the time in the schoolyard playing. When there was an air raid, the sirens would go blasting to warn us, and we would go down to the shelters under the school. Once, we had such an alert while we were out in the woods—presumably the same woods where Jean Valjean met Cosette—and we had to go back quickly to our school, not too far away. The next day, we heard that a bomb had fallen in the clearing where we had been playing, making a deep hole in the ground.

After these raids, one of our favorite games was to go up into the yard and pick up the pieces of shrapnel that had fallen there. They were just lying there on the ground for us to pick up. I had a whole collection of them, which I brought back with me when my mother came to bring me home. I remember one piece in particular, a fragment of a shell jagged like one of those crinkled French fries, only a little bigger (about two inches long) and a lot heavier, as it was made out of heavy metal (cast iron?).

By chance, we were too young to realize what kind of injuries these metal fragments could have inflicted on us, had we been playing in the yard when they were falling. And we didn't think about the soldiers who were the targets of these projectiles. To us, and certainly to me, a six-year-old boy, they were just toys, and more than that, collector's items. And I kept them for a while, until my mother, without giving me advance notice, disposed of them by throwing them into the garbage.

Today, when I hear that soldiers have been injured by shrapnel, it brings me back to those days in the summer of 1944, when these pieces of shrapnel were one of my favorite toys.



The Selection

AGI GEVA

Agi Geva was born in Budapest, Hungary. She and her mother and sister together survived Auschwitz, Plaszow, forced labor, and a death march before being liberated by US troops in 1945.

I had never known what the word means. I had never dreamt that my life would depend on it. I had never imagined that one day someone would have the power, just by looking at me, to decide whether I would live or die—and that just by the movement of a hand pointing in the direction I was supposed to move, my fate would be decided.

It happened to me twice.

On March 19, 1944, the German army entered Hungary and occupied it. On that same day, my dad, Zoltan, passed away. He had already been very ill for a long time.

From that day on, nothing made sense to me. Impossible, unexplainable, horrible, and unimaginable events started to take place, as if we had been taking part in a horror movie. Nevertheless, we had the hope that it would eventually end. Every day was different, with bad surprises, new restrictions, and humiliations.

We ended up being deported from our hometown, Miskolcz, and from our homeland, Hungary, to Poland, to the concentration camp of Auschwitz. After a few miserable weeks, we were transported to Plaszow. We were sure that we were getting to a better place, as what could be worse than Auschwitz? There were no selections upon our arrival, which made it already better, and we had better bunks and more food.

At Plaszow we were treated exactly as if we had gone back thousands of years in time, as if we were the slaves in Egypt. There were many assignments of humiliating work. One of them was the one my mom, Rosalia, my sister, Shosha, and I were assigned to, together with many more inmates. We had to carry rocks up a hill. They were big rocks, of course. We put them down at the top of the hill and then the next day we had to carry them back to where we had picked them up originally. It was even more difficult to carry them downhill. Those of us who did not pick up a big enough rock were beaten, as we had seen in some drawings of biblical pictures. My sister, Shosha, who marked her 13th birthday in Plaszow, was one of those people who were beaten. She could hardly move those rocks, but she was forced to do so.

Our mom had repeatedly warned us not to tell our real age. When we were asked, we had to say we were 18 and 19 in order to stay together. We also were warned not to refer to one another as mom or sister. Rosalia saw the way families were separated when they had used the terms “mom,” “grandma,” or “daughter.”

And then one day, we heard cannon shots. Our hopes soared. “The Russians are nearing; they are going to liberate us,” we thought. But it did not happen. The Germans wanted all of us to leave the camp. We were herded into cattle cars and we left Plaszow. We always felt desperate when change occurred. Where now? Our mother consoled us: “This time it could not be worse,” she kept on telling us.

After a day’s journey the train stopped. The doors were opened. Those who recognized the place started to cry, to despair. Mom had no consoling words this time—we were back in Auschwitz.

We looked bad; we were very thin. Our skin was burned badly from working so many hours in the sun. Our mother had to make decisions quickly. She saw the German officer selecting already. She said: "I shall go first, Shosha will go second, and Agi will be last, as she looks the worse among us." She told us to try to follow her, to wherever she would be sent. She took the risk of all of us being killed together, instead of our going through unknown suffering without her looking after us. She also reminded us to ask, if possible, to go to a work camp, as workers were always needed.

She was shaking when she faced the selection officer. He made a move with his hand, sending her right. Shosha was sent to the right and I was to go to the left. I did not move. I remarked, "I would like to go there," showing the direction in which my family had gone. There I was so young, frail, and weak, standing opposite that huge SS German officer, not knowing at the time that I was actually negotiating for my life. All around there were German soldiers pointing guns at me. It seemed that everything froze. Everything came to a standstill until the end of the conversation. And then, as if in slow motion, the conversation continued.

"What? Why?"

"Because that is a work camp," I said in German.

"You do not look as if you could still work," he said, surprised.

"Let me prove it."

And at this point he realized that we were speaking German.

"This is a Hungarian transport, how come you speak German so well?" he asked.

I cannot remember my answer. He looked me over and said, "Go where you wish."

When I started to go after my mother, she did not see me. She had fainted already. She was so sure that if one of us was taken away, none of us could survive.

Soon after that, I fainted too for the first time in my life. The reason was the tattooing. After the selection, we all got tattoos, a series of numbers on our left arm that left me so humiliated and hurt mentally and physically. Only much later did we find out that the selecting SS officer was one of the most notorious doctors in Auschwitz, named Mengele. He does not deserve the title "Dr" or even to have his name written in capital letters. When I was asked, was I not afraid when I was facing the famous doctor, I always said, "No, I was more afraid of my mom" had I not asked to go to a work camp. Besides, at that time I really had no idea yet who he was and what he signified.

My dad also had a great part in saving our lives, since he had explained to us girls many years before the war that Shosha and I had to learn to speak multiple languages, as there might come a time that that knowledge would be the only thing that couldn't be taken away from us. He had made arrangements for us to study German and English, and he supervised our progress throughout the years of our childhood.

When I returned to Hungary after several decades, I could not find his grave.

In 1944 there was no time, no possibility to mark it with an engraved stone. His spirit and memory live in me all the time though. I wish to pay tribute to my parents for their foresight, their wisdom in succeeding in many different ways to save us, Shosha and me, and keep us alive, no matter what.

* * *

My mother remarried and lived in Israel on a kibbutz until she died at the age of almost 98. She had five grandchildren and 17 great-grand children. Shosha still lives on the same kibbutz, and her late husband also was a Holocaust survivor. Shosha has 13 grandchildren and 4 great-grand children, all who live in Israel.

Neither Mom, nor Shosha or her husband, wanted to talk about the Holocaust. Only last year did Shosha agree to give her testimony to Yad Vashem. I lived for 52 years in Israel, first in Haifa and the last 10 years in Tel Aviv. Seven years ago, my daughter and her family invited me to stay with them here, in the United States, and I have been living here ever since. My son lives in Tel Aviv with his family. I have visited Israel every year since then.

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Rwanda

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.

I work with a special teacher from Nebraska, my friend Mark. About 10 years ago I met Mark at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. I was asked to speak to his students when they came to Washington, DC, to visit the Museum. He came with 30 interested and well-prepared high school students and some chaperones. They came into the classroom at the Museum carrying backpacks, pillows, and even blankets. I jokingly asked them if they were planning to take a nap during my talk. That is when they told me that they had gotten up that morning at 2:30 to catch the plane for Washington. After the visit to the museum, they had a little time to visit the Washington monuments and then they would catch the plane home. The pillows and blankets were for the plane ride, they said.

The talk went fine; the best part was all the questions. All of the listeners had stayed awake, and if we could have had another hour there would have been more questions.

Since that first visit, Mark has brought students every year, sometimes twice a year. I have been with them every time. Mark and I became good friends, and I learned how passionate he is about teaching the Holocaust and about genocide education.

A few years ago, I heard that Mark and another teacher, Drew, had started an organization to teach teachers in Rwanda about the Holocaust, so that those teachers would teach their pupils, based on a similar format our Museum uses. “Why Rwanda?” I wondered.

Twenty years ago genocide happened in Rwanda. In only about 100 days, Hutus managed to kill up to one million Tutsis. As in the Holocaust, most of the world stood by and let it happen.

Mark and his colleague made contact with schools and teachers in Rwanda with help from the Rwanda Genocide Center. That is how they started their first conference. They came home so full of enthusiasm about their project and shared their experience with the Museum. The Museum became involved the following year.

When I saw Mark again, he said, “I wish you could attend a conference; it would have such an impact on the teachers to talk with you and to ask you questions.” When I came home I talked to Sidney, my husband, who said, “You should go. I would like to join you.”

I called Mark and asked him if he had been serious when he said that he wished that I would join him. The answer was “absolutely.” I mentioned it to my friend, also a survivor volunteer, and she said that she and her husband would love to join us. We talked with Mark, who said he would be happy to have the four of us join him in Rwanda. I would do a talk, and my friend and I would do a question-and-answer session together. We made plans to see a little more of Africa before going to Rwanda. We decided also to go on a safari in Tanzania.

When we arrived at our hotel in Kigali, Mark and Drew were waiting for us with a present—a traditional Tutsi cone basket, so very beautiful. We asked some questions over dinner. We still had a few days until the conference and wanted to see some of the countryside. I was especially interested in seeing some of the genocide memorials. We had heard and learned about the genocide, but I felt that I did not know enough about it.

It was a very emotional experience. The places where mass killings had taken place had been left intact. We went to a church where the altar cloth was still blood stained and all the benches were covered with bloody clothes—they were the only things left of the murdered people, who thought that being in a church meant sanctuary. There was only a little plaque on the outside of the church, which mentioned the murder of the 300 people there.

The next day I had to work on my talk to the teachers, most of who were children during the genocide. I knew that I could not just do my usual talk as I do in the Museum. I wanted to try to incorporate both genocides, the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide. I could not get those bloody clothes out of my mind.

In our Museum, when I take groups through the Permanent Exhibition, I stop for a long time at the display of shoes. I ask people to pick out one shoe, and imagine that a person used to wear that shoe—now it is the only thing left of that person. I knew that was the link, the bloody clothes I had seen in Rwanda and the shoes from Europe.

When we arrived at the Genocide Center, where the conference was being held the next day, we were embraced and kissed by the students. We felt very welcome. We ate a meal together and talked a lot. Everybody wanted to learn, so that they could make a difference through teaching what happened, informing students, and coming up with a solution to prevent genocide in the future. There was so much positive energy. We felt it the whole week we were in Rwanda; people were rebuilding and working hard on a good future.

Rwanda is a mountainous country; it is known as “The Land of the Thousand Hills.” With waterfalls, lakes, many forests, and so much green, it is a beautiful country. The country is only as big as the state of Rhode Island. Just 20 years after the genocide, Rwanda is an energetic country; people talk about their experiences and work hard to make Rwanda a modern nation where people can live in peace.

I made the mistake of asking one of the teachers if he was Hutu or Tutsi, he smiled and told me politely that you do not ask that question. They are all Rwandans now. We are privileged to have visited Rwanda.

Summer

I just put my suitcase on my bed. I am so excited because I am going for three weeks to stay with my best friend, Selma. Mama has made some beautiful new clothes for me—skirts and blouses. I think I have everything ready to pack. I wish that I had some sandals this year; I only have brown shoes with shoelaces. Maybe we can find sandals next year. Since the war they have not been in the shoe stores, and even shoes are still rationed.

Some of my classmates walk around with shoes with the toes cut out. Their shoes had become too small, but their parents did not have a ration coupon for shoes for that month, or maybe used it for a brother or sister.

I look at my suitcase; I am using it for the first time. It was a birthday present from my grandparents. It is made from strong cloths in a Scottish plaid called “Black Watch.” I am wondering if I can fill the whole suitcase. Next to my clothes lie my flute and a book with sheet music. I have had flute lessons for one year and love them. Selma told me to bring my flute; she and her husband will have a surprise for me.

Everything fits nicely. Mama comes into my room to inspect my work, and she tells me that I am doing a good job. This is the first year the papa will take me by car. It is 1950. Last year papa and I took the train and a bus—it took almost half a day. This year it will take about two hours to reach Selma's house; the roads are getting better. I kiss mama and say goodbye to my brother and sister.

When we arrive at Selma's house, the table is set for lunch. One of Selma's special dishes for lunch is crispy fried potatoes. She always makes too many boiled potatoes for dinners, so we eat the leftovers for lunch and they are delicious. Papa leaves after lunch, and he says that he looks forward to picking me up in three weeks.

Selma takes me with my suitcase to my little room. We unpack, put everything on a bookshelf, and put the suitcase under my bed. Selma sees my flute, but she does not say anything, and I am too shy to ask about the surprise.

We go shopping for our evening meal; I can choose what kind of vegetable I would like that day. My choice is lettuce; I love salads. When we get home we start preparing the meal. Selma always lets me help and I feel very grown up.

Selma's husband comes home from work at six o'clock; he seems happy to see me. Soon after, we sit down for dinner. Dessert is a treat—strawberries with custard.

After we clean up, Selma tells me to get my flute and the sheet music of the pieces that I can play. We go to the study. I've only gone in there when invited, and there is a piano. Selma sits on the piano stool and puts up my music and plays some of it. Then she calls her husband, who comes in with his violin. I am so surprised—I had no idea that Selma played the piano and her husband the violin. They select a piece by Bach, *St. Matthew's Passion*, and Selma asks me to play it for them. After I finish, they repeat it and then the three of us play it together. We repeat it a few times and it sounds really good. This is the best surprise.

The next morning I ask Selma when she started playing the piano. She answers that she started taking lessons about a year after the war ended. She needed something to concentrate on to not always think about her lost family. She plays and practices many hours each day. Her husband had not played the violin since his youth, and even though one of his arms is semi-paralyzed, he started playing again, and they enjoy making music together. The three of us play many evenings during my stay, and my vacation is very special because of it.

When we do not play or practice, we shop for food, make meals, and have many talks. The three weeks pass by so quickly, and there is Papa again to take me home. When she says goodbye, Selma tells me that she is looking forward to my visit next year, as am I.

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On to Marseille

MICHEL MARGOSIS

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

Frustrated after many weeks on the farm vainly awaiting developments, my mother decided to take the family to Marseille, the largest French seaport metropolis on the Mediterranean in Provence. She had hopes of personally seeking out the Persian legation for assistance in securing an exit visa for the four of us shown on Mother's Persian passport. We arrived in the second largest city in France in mid-October 1941 with what little money Mother had managed to salvage. But upon arrival in Marseille my mother did obtain a transit permit stamped with "Pending Immigration," valid until the 15th of January 1942. When that day came and went, the thought of extending or renewing the permit came and went as well, because of safety reasons. That was the time that our status technically changed from refugees to illegal residents.

We rented a small two-room flat with a toilet located up or down half a flight of stairs. It was located just down seemingly hundreds of steps and a side street from the St. Charles rail station in a poor, run-down section of town among a daunting ethnic mix of Corsicans, Arabs, Armenians, and Chinese at 34 Rue des Petites Maries. We had been advised to keep good relations with all the ethnic groups in the area, as the people along the Mediterranean were perceived to be temperamental and mercurial. The Chinese in their den with blackened teeth, supposedly from smoking opium, were constantly indulging in their favorite pastime of mah-jongg and brooked no interference from us. We cooked on a small wood alcohol burner, as we had in fact no actual kitchen. Bed bugs and lice became our constant, though unfriendly companions, and had we been in the commerce of vermin, we could have made a fortune.

Possibly for security reasons, we moved just a couple of blocks away to 25 Rue Dominicaine sometime later in early 1942. The bug infestation did not improve. We were situated directly across from a bakery that regularly ran out of merchandise, but if and when bread became available, we would scamper over there to stand in the queue.

My brother Willy confided, years later, that shortly after our arrival in Marseille, he was arrested by the police while participating at a pro-Gaullist demonstration. Willy had been detained overnight at the Préfecture, but was released the following morning without being stripped, thus not revealing his Jewishness. Vichy had apparently not yet begun enforcing Nazi laws and luckily it was the police and not the Milice.

We bathed with a washbasin in cold weather, but as soon as the weather permitted and especially in the heat of summer, I went to the beach every single day. The only beach I really knew was the Catalans Baths, straight out on the Quai de la Rive Neuve just past the Pharo, a small promontory protruding into the sea. This landmark was a military bastion overlooking the Mediterranean and the Vieux Port, the Old Port. I have fond memories of two strength-training gymnastic apparatus available on the beach at the Catalans, a high bar and rings that I attempted to learn to maneuver by watching and emulating. I was especially impressed seeing over-muscled adolescents pulling their own selves up and around on the high bar and then revolving several times with body and toes straight, landing on their feet. Even more awe-inspiring was witnessing the 'iron cross' on the rings. A move that requires pulling one's body up to full and straight stature with the rings at hip level and then slowly lowering oneself by holding the rings firmly and out to the side at shoulder level. It requires an inordinate amount of strength. I tried and tried to execute this move, and managed to lower myself to barely hip level, but my friend Raphaël was able to snap a picture showing my beautiful abs. I am convinced that the little

gymnastics we dabbled with on the beach in Marseille helped me to gain more self-control that helped me cope better later in life.

Raphäel and I were always together and did absolutely everything together. He taught me to swim, albeit without grace or form, but he moved with both grace and form. He was able to dive from a high board into water three feet deep, looking almost like a dolphin. He used to sneak in and learn from the swim club that was perched high next to the Catalans, where I believe Jacques Cousteau researched and where the butterfly stroke was said to have been created.

On hot summer days, after an evening of delightful music appreciation, we would strip to the skin, run out of the house, and swan dive straight into the polluted waters of the Vieux Port, between small boats. We would occasionally get flippers and spring-loaded spears, and we would search the waters farther out to sea where the water was clean for a sizable target to make a good meal. Once in a great while we spotted an octopus, while frightening images from Victor Hugo's *Toilers of the Sea* frightened me enough to scamper away. But, Raphäel explained just how to handle the little octopi and the first time I tried I was a success. This experience somewhat allayed my fears.

We swam to small islands near the beach and hunted for sea urchins, starfish, mussels, clams, and crabs that were plentiful in the area; the less mobile targets were easier to capture. After bringing the catch home, Mother likely fought her revulsion of shellfish to cook them into a Jewish-style bouillabaisse that turned out to be succulent.

One time, Raphäel and I swam to the Chateau d'If on a small island 3.5 kilometers west of the Vieux Port. When we finally got there, tired and a bit winded, we noticed there were uniformed guards there. We kept away without seeking to step ashore. We rested for several minutes by floating until we felt sufficiently recovered and then we swam back. On occasions, we also borrowed our Algerian friend Mustafa's two-seat kayak to enjoy, observe, and survey the many sites along the Corniche shore away from the Vieux Port past the Catalans, especially towards the Joliette area.

I clearly remember partaking in a fistfight at the Catalans against an older and taller, but still ugly, Armenian who called me some choice names. I threw a punch that hit him in the stomach, but he came back with at least one on the jaw that knocked me cold to the ground for several seconds. Raphäel helped me up and pulled me away, telling my opponent a fabulous story to call a halt to the scuffle.

At about that time in early 1941, history tells that Hitler had signed an order that before the end of 1942 Germany was to be *Judenfrei*, or free of all Jews. This was followed by 15 high-ranking Nazi Party and German government officials gathering on January 20, 1942, at a villa in Wannsee near Berlin. The implementation of a program called the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" was discussed and coordinated. Over the years, the characterization of the "Jewish Problem" in the Nazi vocabulary evolved increasingly to presage ominous conclusions.

Various previous practices had included voluntary emigration, confinement to ghettos in urban centers, forced removal to concentration camps, and finally, extermination. The ultimate aim of the Nazis all along had been to remove Jews from every sector of German society and from German soil. They sought legal tactics initially by encouraging Jewish emigration by establishing The Reich Central Office for Jewish Emigration, but this proved to be totally inadequate for their purpose. A mid-day buffet luncheon was provided for these high-ranking Nazis to finalize the annihilation of the Jewish people in Europe.

I could not have comprehended these events, given the small world around me at that time. I still don't know for sure how my mother found longtime friends from Antwerp, the Ostreicher family. They were confectioners who were also hiding in Marseille. Those friends along with others became for Mother a major source of entertainment with friendly games of poker. They may also have been a major source

of commodities for her new trade in the black market. In order to survive without the possession of valid documents or identity cards and ration coupons, my mother enhanced her proficiency at dealing with essential but rare commodities by purchasing them at relatively low prices and reselling with a substantial profit margin. Her latent talent for black marketeering was painfully acquired and earned during the Bolshevik experiences of her younger days.

According to posters, the practice of black marketing was most hazardous to one's health: it was punishable by hanging. Still, we had to survive, and I noticed commodities like white sugar, black domestic or blond American cigarettes, and very highly prized chocolate confections and Belgian praline boxes and halvah hidden away and out of sight. French cigarettes like the Gauloise or Gitanes were made from black Middle East tobacco, but the rich and luxurious blond tobacco from Virginia was all but non-existent, except at a steep price. White sugar had been rationed, and I do not ever recall seeing any of it during my stay in Marseille, but a slightly crystalline and very soggy purplish grape sugar was commercially available. The ration books we were able to "secure" entitled each individual to 250 grams or a half-pound of bread daily, which we could purchase only when available at the bakery. This was painfully meager for a nation of bread eaters.

Certain rationed commodities—for instance white sugar, butter, and other dairy products, fats, meats such as beef, pork, and lamb, and shoes—were hardly ever available in the local commercial stores. Fortunately, because of its geographical location on the Mediterranean coast, all kinds of seafood were readily sold at the Vieux Port. As I walked along the quay towards the Catalans Baths, I would frequently stop to swoop down after locating some wooden barrels leaking under the hot sun, and I would furtively consume what I could of the thick, warm, and sweet grape sugar oozing out.

We were able to buy a liter of skim milk about once every other week and one pound of meat at most about every two or three weeks, and at times a small piece of horse meat. Rutabagas and topinambours (Jerusalem artichokes) were not rationed and were more or less available in the stores and became, of necessity, a major staple. They could be filling, but became symbols, as well as a subject of derision of the culinary plight of the city and likely the nation. I was also quite fortunate to befriend an Arab neighbor who was a seaman who sailed periodically to Djibouti and often brought back kilos of east African peanuts which I thoroughly enjoyed and found quite filling.

Through her poker playing Jewish friends, my mother met and conferred in Russian about problems with Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who apparently offered free advice. Anna, my sister, had been taking secretarial and accounting courses, but because of hearing problems that began to afflict her, she was counseled by the Rabbi to consider learning haute couture or high-fashion dressmaking at ORT (Organization for Rehabilitation through Training). She began the training in Marseille and persevered for another year in Barcelona where she became skillful in a vocation that served her well later on in Palestine and then in Israel. Anna recalls that when she accompanied my mother to pay a visit to Rabbi Schneerson, he had my sister on his lap and gave her a big kiss on the cheek. Rabbi Schneerson, whose advice was seemingly much sought after, had studied engineering in France and actually escaped via Marseille and Spain and came to America in June 1941 on the *Serpa Pinto*, the ship I would take two years hence. He subsequently became the venerated spiritual leader of the Chabad Lubavitchers movement in America.

In 1940, the EIF (Éclaireurs Israélites de France) was a liberally and religiously oriented but patriotic French Jewish Boy Scout group. It founded an agricultural training camp, Hachshara, in Moissac that became the epicenter of the EIF located in unoccupied France. Somehow, my mother had signed me up for a stay of two or three weeks in Moissac. But learning to till and work the land and plant small things with simple hand tools in preparation for aliyah, or immigration to the land of Israel, represented Hachshara to me. A little room served as a library where books were available, and I did take the time to read the history of the Jews during that time. We also celebrated the Shabbat every Friday evening. But

I remember from the Moissac experience the long solitary train ride on the SNCF, the French National Railway Company, and my increasing distaste and aversion for lentils in any shape or form. I later learned that soon after one Oneg Shabbat, the senior staff decided to curtail or even dispense of these activities, and most of the kids returned home. Likewise, the ORT programs that had been offered just tapered off, then ceased, and everything and everybody associated with it just vanished. In fact both ORT and the Jewish Boy Scouts were under the umbrella of the UGIF, a union of Jews in occupied France and many from the Jewish Boy Scouts went practically underground to form contacts with Zionist groups. I still do not know why my mother sent me to Moissac. After all, we were in the so-called unoccupied zone of France that had surrendered but under covert and severe German control.

In no time, I lost my *Brusseleer* accent and readily acquired the one from the local Southern region, and indeed I became a typical Marseillais teenager. I had met Raphaël Bernet at the Catalans Baths, and we soon became fast friends and constant companions for the rest of my stay in Marseille. He described himself as *Café au Lait*, born from a white Danish mother and a Negro father who was born in Cameroon when it was a German colony. He was bilingual, and spoke English at home and French with everyone else. He was quite handsome, with a light brown skin that darkened very quickly in the summer sun, with soft features and beautiful wavy jet black hair, and a lean but well-muscled body like a great many of us at the time. He could not explain why his two attractive younger sisters were darker skinned and crowned with kinky hair, but neither of us knew anything about genetics and frankly we did not care. As I climbed the stairs up to their flat at the Quai du Port, the western side of the Vieux Port, I could hear the youngest, Lisette, gently and lovingly call out my name. She had been permanently confined to a special type of high chair because of a serious incapacitating muscular disease and could only extend her hands to me while her head bobbed slightly. Raphaël would play records while I would occasionally read stories to her or hold her hand. I became particularly taken with the music played in that home, particularly the aria “Lucevan l’Estelle” from Puccini’s *Tosca* sung by Beniamino Gigli, considered the premier opera performer of the day. This became a momentous experience as I discovered the great beauty the human voice could achieve. We also listened frequently to the *Emperor Waltz* of Johann Strauss that became for me a door opener to great classical music. The family would speak at times in a foreign unfamiliar tongue, apparently English, although the parents could speak French rather well even with a pronounced accent. I liked that family and Lisette, who did not survive long, but her short life had been sweetened with much love. The older attractive sister went her own way and would have nothing to do with her brother or with me. Raphaël played the harmonica, and I took it up also well enough to play simple tunes like “Frère Jacques,” “Yankee Doodle,” and “Donkey Serenade” that I picked up from the movies. I never did learn to read music, but I was proud to be able to play a simple few tunes on that harmonica.

The flat I normally slept in was even more confining and morose than the one we left in Cazères, our first dwelling in France, so that I sought to escape more. In the cooler season I learned to shoot billiards, and I became quite good at calling each shot. I would also ride the trolley through Rue de Rome and the Préfecture to a roller skating rink near the hippodrome by the Corniche where I got to skate to the point when I could almost spin and twirl, but I did do figures eights forwards and backwards. We loved to talk about and chase girls, or preferably women, on the beach or in the rink. Obviously, it was in Marseille that I experienced my first sexual encounter, and it was indescribable. On the other hand, chasing trucks was far easier, but when we caught one and jumped onto it when it slowed down to turn, we gobbled what we could of the juicy cantaloupes or watermelons, and frankly we were not really aware of where we were heading, nor did we really care. We also borrowed bicycles from Mustafa and headed out onto the lower Corniche to the many picturesque towns hugging the inside of the coast. One such trip to Nice, a couple of hundred kilometers away, took days, with many stops such as the interesting hiding alcoves and beautiful little fishing village of Martigues where I marveled at the size of the tuna that was caught and hanging on a hook. That was the first time I tasted fresh Mediterranean tuna fish, although the famed bouillabaisse of Marseille contained all

the strange and exotic sea beasts mentioned before. That thick fish soup became a frequent staple in Marseille, because it was easy to cook up left over marine life with a couple of potatoes and onions when available, and flavoring it with garlic and southern herbs. I also befriended Armand, the sole offspring of a master pastry chef, but because of the shortages, the patisserie could not be stocked as fully and as frequently as desired. Nevertheless, I was able to get more than my share of sweet pickings when I volunteered my services with Armand. I had some luck with René who occasionally assisted his older sister to work their parents' restaurant and café. I became acquainted with the famed southern Ricard, known as the Pastis, akin to the other more popular licorice Pernod liqueur; I could practically guarantee that it was the most popular French drink in those days. I began smoking by sneaking one or two from the packs of cigarettes concealed for selling on the black market. When cigarettes were not openly available, a very common occurrence, I found an herbal leaf whose name escaped me as a substitute; it was more plentiful, but also more malodorous. I even rolled and smoked corn silk, but with less enthusiasm.

I adored the movies and easily became an aficionado when I had the money to go, and when I didn't, I would sneak in. Thus, I became most familiar with movie pictures and American superstars of the day. I can still visualize old movies that have become classics. I was particularly awed when I heard a *Boys Town* resident reciting the kiddush blessing before a meal, and another awed moment when I saw the magnificent and awesome statue of President Lincoln in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Similarly, of course, I could not forget some great French movies.

One main used book store near Raphaël's house allowed me many hours of pleasurable surreptitious reading of westerns and detective stories and even classics like Gogol's *Tarass Bulba*, and Cervantes's *Don Quichotte de la Manche* which I read again later as *Don Quixote de la Mancha* in Spanish. My time was totally my own because I had no school to attend, and I even found time to start a philatelic collection. I was ever so proud to possess the new series of stamps celebrating Maréchal Pétain and the Blue Legion of French volunteers fighting on the Russian front with their German patrons.

The safest source for getting some spending money was by shining shoes. We'd set up a little wooden box with the tools of the trade and locate a spot on the street in the local casbah. I felt safer and more secure there where I could attract customers with leather shoes. Many of the North African Arabs preferred wearing espadrilles, corded summer sandals, rather than leather shoes. When I needed more cash than I could make by legitimate and honest work, I would on rare occasions *borrow* a few cigarettes from the packs my mother safely kept under the bed, and sell them one at a time at a substantial net profit.

Fortunately, some buildings in certain sections of the city were connected by passageways, making it easier for someone to hide and slip away when necessary. With practice, Raphaël taught me to become more adept at moving about stealthily in the greater neighborhood. We sought mainly to seek extra food, such as *äoli*, a popular regional oily garlic type spread, sandwiches that we could most often liberate. But more than once, we came upon weapons such as woodsmen's knives, gunpowder, and pistols by our surreptitious entry into some of the better tents and wooden shacks of the temporary outdoor festivals behind the stock exchange. These tents faced the Cours Belzunce, a favorite hangout, parade, and meeting site for many homosexuals of the area. Two gendarmes very nearly discovered us hours after closing time, possibly around two o'clock in the morning, after I made a faint sound when I accidentally bumped lightly into a chair. But the gods had apparently been propitiated on our behalf that night, because I sighted a rat, which I thankfully was able to nudge with my foot to convince it to squeal. The cops walked away with some loud unflattering expletives cast at the rats while I sighed with relief.

These occasional outdoor festivals and rides on the square by the Cours Belzunce provided days of great entertainment, especially rides on the whirling seats, high and fast. There were wrestlers with beautiful physiques and rippling muscles who challenged any comer onto a wrestling ring for prize

money. One of the men was African with glistening bulging muscles who displayed his biceps and deltoids under the strains of an American march, which I finally recognized as “The Stars and Stripes Forever.” The music presumably indicated the performer’s origins. Also during fair days there were all kinds of wares hawked. I remember mostly standing by a middle-age caricaturist, at least 25 years old, sporting an elegant but trim narrow beard and mustache from ear to ear. I was particularly entranced when the artist placed little smiles on the faces he sketched in charcoal or colored crayons.

I slept out many a night, which allowed me the freedom for illicit activities. Raphaël conceded that his father, Mr. Bernet, was relatively secure because he was employed as an interpreter by the German authorities secreted in the unoccupied French zone in Marseille. We did secure some explosives from a booth at the fair with nefarious intents towards German offices near the Corniche, past the hippodrome. Raphaël may have found, through his father’s employ, where some of these were located. That part of town was not as familiar to us as the Algerian Arab section we called the casbah, thus we studied it in greater detail so that we could evade whatever predicament might ensue. The seashore was just rocks with an occasional alcove here and there, but Raphaël was an excellent swimmer and was able to check out some of these points from a short distance out. The streets nearby were not patrolled any more than any others, presumably so as not to attract attention. We just wanted to do something nasty to the *Boche*. I suppose the planning we pursued was haphazard at best. We had decided to steer clear of some parts of that area so as to minimize danger to Mr. Bernet, because we believed he worked there. My mind remains somewhat fuzzy about what we did or the escape routes. I do remember hearing some kind of boom and later on hesitatingly getting off a bus near the Préfecture, the headquarters of the Département of the Bouche du Rhône. We just strolled diffidently around a bit to see if there was any undue commotion, and then hastened on to the protection of the local casbah.

One bit of news came through in the spring of 1942 when we heard that there was an Allied raid on the beaches of Dieppe, apparently a probing assessment of German defenses of the western French coast. Evidently, this raid was decisively repulsed and soundly thrashed. This incident was discouraging, but did not deter our own activities. We preferred to ignore this setback. Listening to the BBC in occupied France was indubitably most insalubrious, for if one was caught by the authorities, one would most assuredly be taken away to disappear permanently. Needless to say, there were hosts of other inauspicious activities for which the Germans authorities would mandate a death penalty via the Vichy cohorts.

A researcher at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in DC, the late Robert Kesting, delved into and published some papers on the subject of the black experience in the Holocaust. I usually mention that when I address various groups because of my relationship with Raphaël.

In retrospect, my days in Marseille were not as carefree as I seem to indicate in these notes. When I visited Marseille in 1972, I could find no trace of Raphaël or his family. I even searched the German archives and wrote to the Préfecture in Marseille. The father was an interpreter of English, French, and German and quite likely worked for the Germans, and I suspect the family disappeared totally, especially with a badly handicapped sister. However, there does not appear to be any citation of the Gabovitch family, the farmer with whom we stayed before Marseille, nor of Raphaël Bernet in the Bad Arolsen Archives. To my immense relief, this indicates that they were not apprehended by the Nazis.

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On Reassuming My Identity

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.

My earliest memory dates to the German invasion of Belgium in May 1940; I wasn't quite three years old yet. My sister, Rosi, and my brother, Mani, being quite a few years older than I, had memories that reached back to our lives in Berlin before the war. They remembered also being smuggled into Belgium on September 26, 1938, at the exact time Hitler was giving a history-making speech on the radio. He asserted that the three and a half million Germans living in the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, a state created artificially by the Allies in 1918, were being expelled and exterminated by the Czechoslovakian government. He stated that his patience had run out, and he was demanding the return of that territory to Germany. One might even conclude that Der Führer's fiery nationalistic speech facilitated our escape from Germany by distracting the border guards.

Once Belgium was occupied, the German authorities gradually introduced anti-Jewish laws, which became harsher as time went by. Jews had to turn in their radios, register where they lived, shop for food only at certain hours, and observe a more restricted curfew than the rest of the population. Also, their businesses were confiscated, doctors and other professionals were not allowed to work, and able-bodied men were selected to perform forced labor in construction and factories.

Starting in May 1942, Jews older than the age of six were required to wear the yellow star on their outer garments. Then, in August of the same year, the German occupiers started rounding up entire Jewish families, including women, the elderly, the sick, and children of all ages. They were transported to transit camps and deported from there to the East. As a result, a few weeks after my fifth birthday, my immediate family split up. We went into hiding separately with the assistance of a Jewish and Belgian underground organization set up in part to secure hiding places for Jews, especially children, in hospitals, convents, orphanages, and private homes. Many Belgians took tremendous personal risks to help Jews hide from the Germans and their collaborators.

I was hidden for two years, but unlike other Jewish children who were hidden out of sight in attics, basements, armoires, root cellars, sewers, and other unsanitary and dreary places, I was, for most of that time, out in the open. I lived with Belgian families, and for a short time together with my sister in a children's home out in the countryside.

My first three hiding places were of short duration, at most a few weeks or maybe a couple of months. From time to time, when my living situation became too dangerous, I stayed with my parents in their secret hiding place. During those times I was literally hidden from the outside world. My final hiding place, the one where I stayed the longest, was with the Vanderlindens, a working-class Belgian family. My name became Henry Vanderlinden and I assumed a completely new identity, different from my own in every respect—name, origin, family, language, religion, customs—in order to enable me to pass for their son.

Brussels was liberated by the Allied armies in early September 1944. Soon afterward, our lives started to return to normal. We came out of hiding and after a two-year separation, Rosi, Mani, and I were reunited with our parents. I had memories of living together with my family in Brussels earlier in the war, but a great deal had happened in the meantime, most of which I couldn't understand.

Once liberated, I readily gave up my *nom de guerre*, Henry Vanderlinden, and reclaimed the name given to me at my birth, Harry Markowicz, except for my parents who usually called me by the diminutive 'Harrichen.' In a long-distance phone conversation with my father two days before he died at age 93, he still called me by that name. Reassuming my original identity occurred more gradually and not without some mixed feelings, although I wasn't aware of it at the time.

I no longer had to pretend that the Vanderlindens were my parents and that Florence, their daughter, was my older sister. However, the emotional ties that I had formed while living with them for approximately a year and a half were difficult for me to give up. I had become very close to Mrs. Vanderlinden, Mami as I called her, although I was aware she was not my mother. In all respects, she treated me as if I were her son. In appearance, we didn't stand out from any other working-class Belgian family.

Following a brief reunion with my own family after the liberation, I returned to live with the Vanderlindens for more than four months, although I am not aware of any reason for it, other than I wanted to stay with them. I wouldn't have remembered that except I know I was still living with the Vanderlindens during the Battle of the Bulge, which took place in December and January 1944-45. I have a clear memory of Mami telling me that the reason all the Allied flags had been taken down from the houses on the street was that the Germans might come back. Although she assured me that everything would be alright, I detected fear in her voice.

While no longer necessary for the purpose of survival, making myself 'invisible' to avoid attracting attention has remained a lifelong habit except when I feel I'm in a very secure situation. When I was with my parents, I was embarrassed because they were obviously foreigners; I felt insecure because we were outsiders. Furthermore, I was ashamed that we were Jewish. I also felt guilt associated with being Jewish. If so many people felt the need to kill us, I reasoned, there must have been something wrong with us. That feeling remained with me for a long time, and I avoided telling anyone that I was Jewish.

From a young age, I learned the important role of language for survival and it has remained an issue for me. During the occupation, passing required perfect fluency without a trace of a foreign accent. Even a slight accent or a grammatical error could have been a deadly giveaway. One time before the wearing of the yellow star was required, my father and brother were walking on a street. A German car with four SS officers pulled up next to them and one of them speaking in German asked for directions to a specific location. My father replied in French, "Je ne parle pas l'allemand." (I don't speak German.) The Germans drove off. By his quick thinking, using the few French words he knew, my father had saved both my brother and himself.

After the liberation, I spoke German with my parents, but I had lost some of my fluency—I had forgotten some words and my vocabulary had not kept up with my age so that I often had to substitute a French word or expression for a German one. Also, I didn't always understand everything my parents were saying. If Mani or Rosi were around, they helped me communicate with my parents in German. I remember one occasion when I created my own German word for the word 'ladder.' I don't recall the word I had coined, but I have a clear picture of my whole family laughing hysterically at my invention.

I was embarrassed when my friends heard my parents speak in broken French; it marked my parents as foreign. Children acculturate easily and French had become my best language—my maternal tongue. It didn't feel normal to speak German. On the outside, we continued to speak German only in whispers. The Germans were gone, but speaking in German in Belgium at that time resulted in hostile looks in public spaces.

Although my parents spoke fluent German, occasionally a Yiddish word or expression would be slipped in the conversation. Later in life when I had occasion to speak German with non-Jewish German speakers, I hesitated to do it, lest I let slip out a Yiddish word unintentionally, thereby 'exposing' myself.

Several months after we were free, we moved into a house in another neighborhood in Brussels where we were the only Jewish family. I don't know whether my parents planned that or they just happened to find a house they liked in that area. In the local public school, I was the only Jewish child. It wasn't until middle school that there was another Jewish boy in my class—Claude K.

Claude's parents were friends of my parents and they socialized with each other. Once we even went on a vacation in Spa, a resort town in the Ardennes Mountains famous for its healing mineral waters. We drove with them in their car. Claude's father was a reckless driver and drove the car into a ditch. Fortunately, no one was hurt.

Claude was not a very good student and tended to get into trouble from time to time. Sometimes our classmates made fun of him. As far as I know, they didn't express any overt antisemitism but still I felt somewhat ashamed because we were both Jewish; I didn't want to be associated with him so I didn't seek his friendship.

My parents didn't encourage me to join any Jewish youth organizations, such as Hashomer Hatzair, so I joined a secular cub scout troupe and later the boy scouts where again I was the only Jewish member. Despite my efforts to pass, obviously, some people knew that I was Jewish.

One day, soon after I joined the first grade class in the neighborhood school, a little boy my age came up to me during recess. His angry face close to mine, he yelled, "*Sale juif!*" (dirty Jew). I had never heard that French expression, even during the Nazi occupation. Although I wasn't sure what he meant, from his aggressive manner, I realized that he wasn't just informing me that my hands or knees were dirty from playing in the courtyard. Later, at home I asked why that boy would say that to me, and also, "What does it mean to be Jewish?" I don't remember the reply; I was probably too young for it to make sense to me.

I did, however, know the equivalent expression in German: "*Verfluchte Juden,*" (damn Jews).

Our Poor Shtetl is Burning!

After the Allied armies liberated Belgium and it was safe once again for us to go out in public, my parents started attending social events here and there in Brussels. Perhaps because they didn't want to leave me home alone—I was around eight or nine years old—I often went with them to cafés where American musicians played jazz, balls where my parents danced, nightclubs where comedians told slightly off-color jokes in Yiddish, a movie theatre where we saw the movie *The Dybbuk*, and other social events attended by Jews who, like us, had lived through the war in hiding and who had not seen each other in years. Also in attendance were some of the very few Jews who had survived deportation to the Nazi camps. At the time, the word Holocaust hadn't yet been coined. In Yiddish, people said: "*Wir boben dus mit gemacht*" (We went through that).

Sometimes these outings left me with troubling memories. For instance, *The Dybbuk*, filmed in Poland in 1937, is a kind of Jewish exorcist story mixing reality with the supernatural. The dialogue spoken in Yiddish, is accompanied from time to time by ghostly music. In some scenes, the acting is stilted and spooky with the actors moving in slow motion. It was scary at my age, but no one bothered to explain it to me beyond a few words: "It's a movie about a ghost; it's not real, so don't worry about it!" Of course, I worried about it for a long time afterwards.

Other events left pleasant memories. I remember being in the Metropole, a fancy café-restaurant-hotel that had entertainment and was located on Place de Brouckère, a large commercial square in downtown Brussels. My mother ordered a plate with potato salad and two wieners for me; it was

accompanied by a glass of grenadine, a sweet red-colored drink. It all tasted delicious. Many years later, when Arlene, my wife, and I traveled to Brussels from Paris where we were living at the time, I showed her some of the places that I remembered from my childhood. We had coffee at the Metropole. When I mentioned that it seemed to lack the grandeur that I remembered, the waiter volunteered that the café-restaurant had once been twice the size and it used to have entertainment.

On one occasion, my parents and I went to a nightclub above a restaurant. We were sitting near the entrance at the top of the stairs. Suddenly several men started shouting above the din of the music and the many voices emanating from around the room. The angry yelling was going on out of my sight on the landing but it made me feel uncomfortable. My father went to inquire what was going on. The worst I could imagine was that someone refused to pay the cover charge that was collected at the door. My father reported, “Some people recognized a man they knew in a concentration camp. They say he did something bad there and they are refusing to let him enter. It’s not important...” I wondered what he had done. Maybe in his drive to survive he had stolen a piece of bread from another inmate who was saving it for later. Or could he have been a *kapo* (barracks overseer)? My Aunt Gutcha, who had survived Auschwitz, had told us that many kapos were brutal German criminal prisoners, but a few were Jewish and they were often as heartless as the others. I’m still wondering about the cause of the raucous scene all these years later!

I have memories of being in a cabaret once. Many people in the audience seemed more interested in talking with each other than paying attention to the performers. After years of hiding and deprivation of normal human contact, they probably felt the need for social interaction and this is where they could find it among others who shared their language, culture, religion, and above all, their wartime experience. An older performer stepped out on the small stage and he was introduced; he had been a renowned singer before the war. The orchestra began playing a Jewish melody, and he started singing a plaintive song in Yiddish. He had a powerful cantorial voice such as I had heard in the Great Synagogue of Brussels on a few occasions during the high holidays.

S'brent, briderlekh, s'brent (It is burning, brothers, it is burning.)
Oy, undzer orem sbtetl nebekh brent. (Our poor village, brothers, burns!)

Listening to the lyrics I realized the song was an appeal to Jews not to idly stand by and to come help put out the fire that was burning down their small town. I couldn't understand some of the words, but in my mind, the song referred to the recent destruction of hundreds of Jewish communities everywhere in Nazi occupied Europe, along with the deportation and extermination of the people who had lived in them.

Sbteyt nisht brider ot azoy zikh (Don't stand there, brothers, looking on)
Mit farleygte bent. (With futile, folded arms)
Sbteyt nisht brider, lesht dos fayer (Don't stand there, brothers, douse the fire!)
Undzer sbtetl brent! (Our poor village burns!)

He sang with such passion, with so much pathos in his voice, that tears welled up in my eyes and rolled down my cheeks. I tried to hide the tears with my napkin. Perhaps preferring socializing to sorrow, no one around me seemed to pay attention to the singer. Being the only one to react the way I did felt strange.

“Es Brent” was composed in 1938 by Mordechai Gebirtig in response to a pogrom that had taken place in a Polish town in 1936. Gebirtig intended the song to inspire Jews—his Jewish brothers as he called them—to defend their towns and themselves, a prophetic warning, I believe, of European Jewry’s impending conflagration. Gebirtig died in the Krakow ghetto in 1942. This song, along with the Jewish Partisans’ song, “Wir sinnen du,” are often included in Holocaust memorial ceremonies.

The Impostors

Every Tuesday, I look forward to going to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to perform a few hours of volunteer work for the Visitors Services department. During the nation's capital tourist season—March through August—dealing with the sheer volume of visitors is quite challenging. Fortunately, the Tuesday volunteers form a supportive team; we help each other carry the load. I suppose it's the same on other days. The rest of the year is very different because the relatively smaller number of visitors doesn't require our constant attention. To make the time go by and also to create a more welcoming environment, we talk with some of the visitors. For example, we inquire where they are from, or whether it's their first visit to the Museum. We also speak with each other—the other volunteers, staff members, and interns—so we get to know each other better.

On the occasional Tuesdays when one of the two survivor volunteers who work at the Donor and Membership Desk cannot be there, I substitute for the absent one. They showed me how to handle the money, checks, and credit card donations, and also how to fill out the required paper work. The more difficult part of the job is how to respond to the visitors, often school groups who come over to the desk to “talk with a survivor.” I am still learning by observing my colleagues, Louise and Susan, and I am very grateful to them for that. They have years of experience responding to visitors and engaging them in a dialogue, which often leads to an important lesson to be learned, in particular by the young visitors going through the Museum.

I started volunteering in the Museum's Visitors Services almost five years ago. During that time I have never had an unpleasant encounter with Museum visitors. . . until recently, that is. I was substituting for Susan that day so I was sitting at the Donor and Membership Desk with Louise. Both of us were hidden children: she in Amsterdam, Holland, and I in Brussels, Belgium. The fact that these are adjacent, small western European countries, gives us the opportunity to contrast our personal experiences with what happened in Eastern European countries, as well as pointing out how the Nazi occupation differed between these two similar countries, with extremely distinctive results: close to 60 percent of the Jewish inhabitants of Belgium survived the war, while in Holland it was only around 10 percent, the latter usually thought of as being the more tolerant country.

On that particular Tuesday, we were very busy at the Museum with a steady stream of visitors—especially school groups. Quite a few came over to our desk to talk with us or ask us questions about our experiences during the Holocaust. On a few occasions, we were approached by more than one group so that Louise and I each engaged in dialogue with our own audience of eighth graders. I was focused on my exchange with the students standing closer to me on my right when suddenly I realized that Louise had raised her voice. I turned in her direction to see what was happening just in time to hear a man standing in the back of Louise's group of young girls stating that we were impostors, pretending to be Holocaust survivors. Addressing the students he said something like: “Are you going to listen to these liars sitting here? They are not old enough to be survivors. They are just pretending....”

Responding to this claim, Louise said, “In this Museum, nobody lies.” The man next pointed at me with his index finger and stated: “This man is not 80 years old.” He then turned around and walked away. The students seemed as stunned as we were. Louise asked them whether he was their teacher; they replied that he was the local guide for their group's visit in Washington, DC.

Later, after the students had left our desk, Louise and I talked about what had occurred. We agreed that although the situation didn't feel personally threatening, it made us both very angry. Louise mentioned the possibility that the man was trying to be funny, but that kind of humor is obviously inappropriate in these circumstances.

Two weeks have gone by since this stranger called us impostors. I have been thinking how I could have responded to his accusation, but I have not yet come up with a good response. In fact, for most of my life I did not consider myself a Holocaust survivor, and I still have some reservations about being labeled that way. For many years following the war, a ‘survivor’ was someone who had been in a concentration camp. Like many others I know who survived in hiding as children, I identify more readily as a hidden child.

The Reading of Names

Kristallnacht, the nationwide pogrom against the Jewish community in Germany, Austria, and the occupied part of Czechoslovakia, occurred during the night of November 9-10, 1938, and was organized by the SA paramilitary troops who were joined by civilians. By then, the borders were closed; in any case, almost no country accepted Jews who wanted to leave the Third Reich. A short time before that event took place, a policeman who was a friend of the family (years earlier his fiancée had been our family’s maid) warned my father that the persecution of Jews in Germany was going to become much worse and that we should leave the country as soon as possible.

Like many others, until that time my father had assumed that the Nazi regime would not last much longer: “the ‘World’ would not let it go on.” The policeman’s warning changed his mind. On September 26, 1938, my parents, my siblings Rosi and Mani (a nickname for Manfred), and I, managed to escape from Germany and to enter Belgium illegally. Our getaway was made under difficult and dangerous circumstances that included the temporary jailing of my father in Aachen, a spa town on the German side of the border with Belgium.

An estimated 60,000 Jews lived in Belgium immediately before World War II. Compared to countries like Poland, Hungary, Romania, and the Soviet Union, the number of Jews in Belgium was small and only 6,000 were Belgian citizens. Many, like my family, had entered the country illegally from Germany or Austria in the years immediately preceding the World War II. Others, mostly Polish Jews, had immigrated to Belgium following the World War I. Most Jews in Belgium lived in either Antwerp or Brussels, often in close proximity, creating predominantly Jewish neighborhoods. We lived in one such neighborhood in Antwerp.

When Germany occupied Belgium in 1940, the invaders didn’t set up ghettos there largely because they were concerned about Belgian public opinion. Presumably for the same reason, it wasn’t until May 1942—two years after the German occupation began—that Jews were required to wear the yellow Star of David to set them apart from the general population. This policy contrasted with the Germans’ attitude towards local populations of the countries they occupied in Eastern Europe, which they considered racially inferior. In Belgium, like in the other occupied countries, the German Authorities issued anti-Jewish measures in incremental steps to avoid alarming the Jewish population. Among the first demands, Jews were required to register with the *Judenrat* (Jewish Council) set up by the German authorities to convey and carry out their anti-Jewish decrees. Under the threat of punishment for non-compliance, my father registered our family.

Early in 1941, my father was summoned by the *Judenrat* and ordered to report at the railway station on a specified date with one bag. Those selected were told they would be working in German factories or farms to replace the German men who were serving in their military services. A plausible explanation, especially since the Germans were recruiting Belgian gentiles to work voluntarily in Germany. (Later, when they couldn’t get any more volunteers, they forced Belgians to work for them.) Despite that, many Jews who had come from Germany and Austria where they had been persecuted did not trust

the Germans. While we were still living in Berlin, a family friend whose only crime was being Jewish had been sent to a camp, and after a few months his wife was given an urn with his ashes. My father suspected that the Jews who were going to work in Germany would not be coming back.

Although Jews who didn't report for work were threatened with severe punishment, for themselves and their families, my father chose to ignore the summons from the Judenrat. My parents decided instead to move secretly to Brussels where they did not register us with the Judenrat. My mother's brother Abraham, his wife Gutcha, and their children, Manfred and Lotti, who had escaped from Germany before us were already settled in Brussels.

At that time, it was still thought that Jewish women and children didn't need to fear the Germans because the latter were only interested in the labor of able-bodied men. So my mother traveled to Brussels by herself to find an apartment. Her blond hair and blue eyes allowed her to pass for gentile. However, while she was fluent in German, Polish, Yiddish, and somewhat in Russian, she didn't know either French or Flemish—the two national languages of Belgium. She took the train to Brussels and with her brother's help, she rented an apartment on the first floor of 44 rue de Suede, in a neighborhood where many Jewish families lived. We resumed our lives in Brussels: my father traded foreign currency on the black market (US dollars and British pounds), as well as gold coins and ingots, which was forbidden by the German authorities. My brother and sister went to school, while I stayed at home with my mother since I was too young to go to school.

During the spring of 1942, German commanders received orders from their superiors in Berlin to deport 10,000 Jews from Belgium. The leaders of the Judenrat were told by the German authorities that they must get that number of Jews to volunteer for deportation to the east. The Judenrat informed the Jewish community that if they agreed to be relocated to the east, families would be kept together and work would be provided to the able-bodied. Only 4,000 Jews reported of their own accord at the Caserne Dossin, former military barracks located in Malines (Mechelen in Flemish), a small town between Brussels and Antwerp, from which railroad tracks led to Germany and pointed east. They were imprisoned there in crowded and primitive conditions before being deported to Auschwitz in sealed railroad cattle cars. This we didn't find out until much later.

When the Germans' plan failed to entice much more than 4,000 Jews to report to Malines they came up with another plan. During the night of September 3, 1942, they surrounded our neighborhood in Brussels, taking away entire Jewish families, including children, the old, and the sick. They were loaded on trucks and taken to Malines.

Before that roundup, word had reached Brussels just days earlier: the Germans had carried out two or three nighttime raids in Jewish neighborhoods in Antwerp. Starting at that time, we no longer slept in our apartment—we spent the nights with my mother's brother and his family whose apartment was nearby, but located outside of the Jewish neighborhood. This precaution and the fact that we were not registered with the Judenrat in Brussels, as well as luck, saved us from being deported with those Jewish families who were rounded up by the Germans that night. Immediately after this, our family separated and we went into hiding.

We didn't return to our apartment except for my mother who went back to retrieve a few of our belongings. As my mother was walking in our street towards our house, a man riding a bicycle caught up to her. She recognized him as a Jew but she became frightened when he started asking her where her family was currently living. Giving out such information could turn out to be dangerous. Some Jews worked for the Gestapo identifying Jews in an attempt to save themselves and their families. Fortunately, my mother was able to get away from him.

The Comité de Défense des Juifs or CDJ (Committee for the Protection of Jews), a Jewish and Belgian under-ground organization set up to assist Jews, in particular Jewish children, urged Jewish families to give up their children to orphanages, convents, sanatoriums, as well as gentile families to give them a better chance of avoiding being captured by the Germans. Essentially, the CDJ worked to counter the actions of the official Judenrat. With the assistance of the CDJ, my sister Rosi, my brother Mani, and I were placed with different families. We were also moved around when particular situations became too risky. In the meantime, our parents lived in what appeared from the outside to be an uninhabited four-story apartment building. Their landlord knew that they were Jewish; a neighbor across the street did their grocery shopping using false ration coupons provided by the CDJ.

Uncle Abraham and Aunt Gutchka stayed in the apartment building they had been living in since their arrival in Brussels. The CDJ found hiding places for their children, Manfred and Lotti. My cousin Manfred and my brother, Mani, were born within a year of each other and were close friends. In Berlin, we lived a block from each other and they frequently played together. While in hiding, from time to time 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 Ardennes Mountains where generally there was no German presence. It consisted of a former sanatorium, probably for patients with tuberculosis, which had become a temporary home for boys who were convalescent.

At one point when Mani needed a safer hiding place, he asked our mother to find out from Mademoiselle Jeanne—the young woman who was our contact with the CDJ—whether it was possible for him to be placed in the boy's home where Manfred was hiding. Soon thereafter, Mani and eight other boys were taken separately and brought to Eprave where they joined ten other Jewish boys who were already there among the ninety or so boys. It was run like a Boy Scout camp; every morning the Belgian flag was raised, and it was lowered every evening accompanied by the sound of a bugle. The Boy Scout movement and the raising of the Belgian flag were forbidden by the German occupiers; for all the boys and their caretakers, participation in these illegal activities represented a form of passive resistance. Several of the caretakers who looked after the boys were in hiding as well; they were Belgian young men wanted by the Germans for not reporting to work in Germany. One of the counselors was a young American also in hiding; his parents and siblings lived in the village. He taught English to the Jewish boys who were interested.

One day, German soldiers came to Eprave, probably to look for partisans in the forests and the many caves in the area. All 19 Jewish boys quickly left Eprave and were directed to the parish house of Abbé Joseph André in Namur. This humble priest helped to save 300 Jewish children by finding hiding places for them. He has been recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations. Finding safe hiding places for the boys who came from Eprave was a very slow process, and Manfred decided he would rather wait at his parents' apartment in Brussels. The parish house was directly across the street from the Gestapo headquarters in Namur and Abbé André was being watched by the Gestapo who suspected he was working with the underground. That may have contributed to Manfred's decision. Mani stayed on in Namur with Abbé André. It was almost three months before he was taken to Huy to stay with friends of the couple with whom my sister Rosi was staying in a small nearby village called Bas-Oha.

While Manfred was staying with his parents, they went to a public shelter during one of the frequent Allied air raids. Somebody, maybe someone who didn't live in their apartment building, denounced them to the authorities. They were arrested by the Gestapo and taken to the Malines holding camp. Together with his parents, Manfred was sent to Auschwitz on the last transport from Belgium. Around 25,000 thousand Jews were deported from Belgium; only 1,200 survived. Manfred and my Uncle Abraham were not among them.

We learned what had happened when my Aunt Gutcha returned to Brussels after she was liberated from a concentration camp in Germany, having survived Auschwitz and a death march to Germany. Lotti survived living with a farmer, and after the liberation of Belgium she stayed with us until her mother came back. For some unexplained reason, I never saw my parents grieve for my cousin Manfred and my mother's brother Abraham, nor my grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins who were killed during the war. It was like a taboo subject; we didn't speak about what happened to our extended family, although we knew their ultimate fate. Possibly, it was too painful for my parents or they wanted to protect us children by not bringing up the subject.

Sadly, other than my Uncle Abraham and my cousin Manfred, I never met any of these close relatives while they were alive; they lived in Poland while we resided in Germany and later Belgium. Despite severe food shortages, at the beginning of the occupation my mother was able to send food packages purchased on the black market to her mother and siblings in the Lodz ghetto. In return, my mother received plain manila postcards from her mother with the address on one side and a brief message on the other. They were stamped with the Nazi eagle from the censorship office of the Judenrat, and I believe they were written in Polish. On the last postcard sent by my grandmother, she wrote: "Thank you for the sausage and the rest. Do not send any more packages. The other family members have left already and we will leave soon also." The message was not explicit, but the meaning was ominous.

Since I started volunteering at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum several years ago, during the Days of Remembrance I participate in the public reading of names of the victims of the Holocaust. I always include the names of a few of my family members who perished.

Abraham Horowicz—Born in Widawa, Poland, in 1900. Died in Auschwitz in 1944.

Manfred Horowicz—Born in Berlin, Germany, in 1928. Died in Auschwitz in 1944.

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Learning about the Holocaust

HALINA YASHAROFF PEABODY

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

It took many years before I learned about the enormity of the Holocaust, even though I had lived through it. I only knew my own story, which started when I was not yet seven years old. My first memory is losing my father when the war started in September 1939. The most prevalent feeling throughout my ordeal was fear, which increased as time went by and as I understood more clearly what was happening to us because we were Jews. My family was not observant, so my religion did not give me any comfort.

My mother was struggling to take care of my two-month-old sister and me. My father had escaped to Romania before the Russians occupied our part of Poland, but when he tried to return, he was caught and sentenced to 20 years of hard labor for being a “spy.” He was a dentist. The Russians threw us out of our house as “punishment” for being the family of a criminal.

When the Germans occupied the rest of Poland, we went back to our house only to be thrown out again after surviving two *Aktions*. It was the first Aktion that remains in my young memory so vividly. Under the guise of wrapping trees for the winter, 600 young people from our community were marched out of town and killed. Only one survived. He had been shot in the arm and dropped into the grave but did not die and managed to escape. He returned home and described what happened. I have never been able to erase this memory. A group of survivors from our town, including my sister and our children, went back in 2011 and placed a monument on this grave, which had remained unnamed until then because these kind of graves were not allowed to be marked.

What was left of the Jewish community in our small town was then thrown out to another town where we were joined by remnants of other Jews from the surrounding area. This then became a ghetto. My mother told me that there was no hope for us if we stayed there. She explained that she had bought papers from a Catholic priest with false names and religion, and we would take a chance and escape from the ghetto and go to another town where nobody knew us. She taught me my new name, the names of my grandparents, my place of birth, and gave me a very basic idea of how to behave in church.

That is how we survived the rest of the war with many close calls and miracles until the Russians occupied Poland once again and “saved” the few Jews who had managed to survive. My mother was able to locate my father who arranged to get us out of Poland and to settle in England. I spent a few years in Israel and came to the United States in 1968. Until I retired and started volunteering at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, I rarely spoke or was asked about the Holocaust experience.

I learned some details about it from programs like *The World at War* and other documentaries, and the Eichmann trial in Israel, but it wasn't until I started volunteering at the Museum and met other survivors and heard their stories that I realized the scale of the tragedy that the Holocaust represented.

My mother is long gone, and after all these years I am still piecing together the whole story and learning how brave she was and how lucky my sister and I are to be here today. The Holocaust is with me always, and my hope is that our children and grandchildren will not ever have to live through such horrors as I did.

My Last Vacation

Every visit we made to the country of our birth, Poland, ended the same way. We always said, “We will probably not be coming back again.” There seemed no reason for another visit since whatever remnants of my family that survived the Holocaust did not live in Poland any more.

But we seemed to always have unfinished “business” and found ourselves returning from time to time. The last two trips were very meaningful. Two years ago my sister and I took all of our children to our hometown of Zaleszczyki (now Ukraine) to attend a ceremony to place a monument on an unmarked grave. There were 600 people murdered and buried there during the first Aktion the Germans carried out in that town. It gave us solace that at a kaddish was recited by a Rabbi for their souls and the town learned the sad story of what happened to the Jewish community that existed there before World War II.

The last trip that my sister and I undertook was for our mother. She managed to save both of us from Hitler’s jaws with heroism and guts. She would explain this by telling us that “sports develop courage.” Her main sport was swimming, which brought her fame as a very young girl. She became the champion of Poland in 1925, breaking a string of records in Poland and Europe. She also loved to ski in Zakopane and skated and rode horses. In fact, there was no sport she didn’t like or do well.

We survived the Holocaust posing as Catholics, having bought false papers from a priest and managed to escape from the ghetto in Tluste. Of course we couldn’t keep any of our belongings that could give us away. The beautiful gold figurine and the four-leaf clover on a gold chain were my favorite items from mother’s career in sports, but we had to leave behind everything we possessed in order not to give ourselves away. So all we had were memories of her stories of the wonderful time in her life during her teen years.

We settled in England after the war, but Mother was not well and she succumbed to cancer when she was only 47 years old. That was in 1956. Since then, we dreamed of finding out more about her exploits and honoring her, but we did not discover any information until a few months ago. Suddenly her records were discovered in Poland, and then we found out that there was going to be an exhibit on Jewish athletes in Poland and our mother would be prominently displayed. There was just one photograph of her team from those early years, but the organizers had no information about her family. So we provided the details we knew and decided to visit the exhibit that summer. We were welcomed by the director and had a chance to speak to a group of Polish teenagers with whom we toured the exhibit. We were impressed by how many Jewish athletes there had been in the twenties. Quite a few won Olympic medals.

It took many years to find our wonderful, brave mother’s story, and we are proud that she will not be forgotten. We feel that we achieved our goal of “bringing her back to life” in the only way we could.

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One Good Day

ESTHER ROSENFELD STAROBIN

Esther Rosenfeld Starobin was born in Adelsheim, Germany, and survived the war in England where she was sent by her parents on the Kindertransport in June 1939.

By train and boat, and other means, I arrived in Thorpe, Norwich, England, in June 1939 to live with the Harrisons. Mr. Harrison, Uncle Harry, read a sign on the bulletin board at the shoe factory where he worked, asking for families willing to take refugee children from Germany. I was just past my second birthday and had been brought from Germany by an organization called the *Kindertransport*. While I had three sisters, each living in separate places in England, I arrived by myself.

It was now 1964, and I was a married woman with two daughters. We decided to bring my foster parents to the United States for a visit. Our youngest daughter, Judy, was just past her own second birthday. We were at an airport waiting anxiously for the plane to land. It seemed a miracle. Auntie Dot and Uncle Harry were coming to visit us in the United States. I spent eight years as part of their family, and when my sisters came to visit, they too became part of their family. Since coming to the United States in 1947, I had kept up a sporadic correspondence with the Harrisons. After I graduated from college in 1957, I spent several weeks in London with my aunt. During that time I had gone to Norwich for a short visit to the Harrisons, Dorothy, Harry, and Alan.

Now we were waiting for my foster family to exit the plane. Their visit coincided with the end of their son, Alan's, year as a Fulbright exchange teacher in New Jersey. Once the Harrisons were settled into our home, we introduced them to our extended family. Our girls, who were two and four at the time, enjoyed their "new relatives." We loved showing the Harrisons what our life was like and helping them become part of it. We went to the park, to the stores, and to the museums.

In true American fashion we had decided to spend a week with my three sisters and their families, Alan, and the Harrisons at the shore. Since Alan was in New Jersey, we figured he could find a suitable vacation spot for us in New Jersey. We relied on him, and he located a large enough house for all of us in Toms River. We all descended on this place from our various homes. It was fine, at first, but as the day wore on we discovered we were in mosquito paradise. They were everywhere and made life unpleasant. Alan was sleeping on the porch since all the bedrooms were taken. Many of us were gathered inside when we heard a truck approaching. After some investigation we realized it was a truck that sprayed the area on a regular basis in an attempt to destroy the mosquitoes. We were so mean; we didn't warn Alan before the truck reached the porch. In spite of the mosquitoes, we had a pleasant week together. This event became part of the folklore that tied our two families together.

Our life in America was very different than life in Norwich. With two young daughters and a large extended family in the area, our home was often busy. Phone calls, people popping in and out were part of each day. Traveling by car to the grocery store, park, or to visit was a sharp contrast to the ability to walk or take the local bus in Norwich. I was amazed at how accepting the Harrisons were of our ways. However, they seemed to enjoy all of it. I think it was probably as strange to them as life in Thorpe had been to me when I first arrived there.

My daughters considered the Harrisons grandparents. Deborah and Judy knew I had lived with them and understood that made them family. Of course the girls didn't understand the reason I had had to leave my home in Germany. They were too young as I had been too young to understand and question in 1939.

I wonder if the Harrisons had ever envisioned such a trip and extended family when they agreed to take a little Jewish refugee child from Germany into their home and family in June of 1939. Our extended family trip to the beach reminded me of the time we had spent when my sisters visited Norwich and we went boating on the river. In 1964 it was our turn to repay the kindness and love that had been extended to us. It was indeed a good day to be all together with our second family.

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American Friends Service Committee Refugee Case Files 7219 and 7321

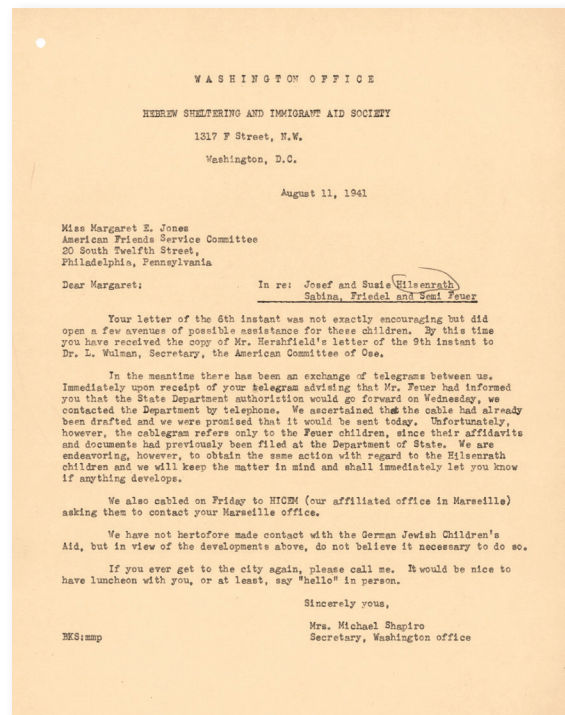
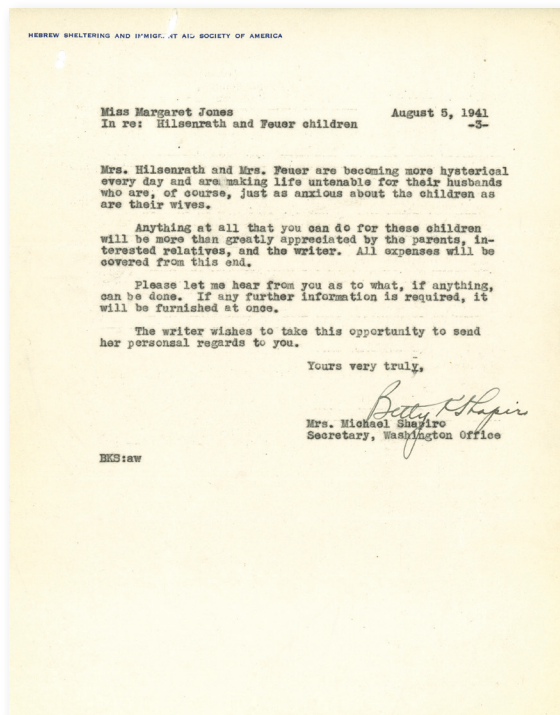
SUSAN WARSINGER

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

When the director of the OSE's Chateau des Morelles children's home in France called me to her office to tell me that our parents had found us and that my brother and I would be going to the United States, I was overjoyed and my entire being shook with anticipation of seeing my mother and father again. I had no idea when or how my parents had gotten to the United States from Germany.

My brother and I had been separated from them for two years, and our dreams of being reunited were finally coming true. It was August 1941. I have lived almost my entire life since then not knowing the details of how my parents were able to get my brother and me out of France during this time when the Germans had occupied most of the country. Even though we lived in the unoccupied zone of France, it was still dangerous because the puppet government of France, headed by Pétain, obeyed the orders of the Nazis. The quotas for new refugees to the United States had also not been lifted. It was most difficult to travel to America.

A few weeks ago, I received an e-mail from Rachel at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, who informed me that Ron Coleman in the Collections department had found some papers that I probably had never known about and asked if it was alright if he got in touch with me. Of course, I immediately replied, and this is what I learned from him.



Images on pages 35–38: Correspondence between Susan Warsinger's family and the American Friends Service Committee. US Holocaust Memorial Museum

AUG 28 1941
 August 27 1941
 1931 AS. Fic
 1231 1941 Recd
 1231 1941 Recd
 M. Man
 American Friends Service Committee
 20 South 12th Street,
 Phila. Pa. 7219 out
 M J
 Gentlemen:
 I am pleased to advise you
 that the State Dept. has
 cabled to the Consul at
 Marseille today, to obtain visas
 for my two children, Susie
 and Joseph Hilsenrath.
 Under these circumstances,
 I would indeed very grateful
 to you, if you would kindly
 telegraph your Marseille office

The files are called AFSC with a number next to them and are the original working files of the American Friends Service Committee. (My brother and I had always known that committee as the Quakers.) The AFSC created 22,000 files about the people who requested assistance from their Refugee Division. Twenty thousand still remain concerning people they thought they could help. The AFSC held on to these files until 1970, when they were turned over to a research institute in Philadelphia called the Balch Institute. The files were held there, under heavy restrictions, until the Institute closed in 2000. Our Museum negotiated to have these files transferred here to Washington in 2002 and they were made available to researchers. Ron told me that it was difficult to use these files because there was no master list of the cases. He is now working with these files to create a case list and see what can be learned about the AFSC on behalf of individuals during the Holocaust.

Last month Ron came across a file called "Joseph and Susie Hilsenrath" of the Chateau des Morelles in Brout Vernet, France (AFSC case 7219). The reference to the Chateau caught his eye because the Museum has photographs and collections from some of the children's homes, and he is always looking for connections between the AFSC files and other Museum holdings. He searched on Google for "Joseph and Susie Hilsenrath Chateau des Morelles" and the first result was for a page

³
 transport leaves Marseille
 and Lisbon.
 I am indeed sorry for
 the inconvenience caused
 in this instance, but due
 to my wife's health which
 is being greatly impaired
 by the absence of our children,
 I am forced to cause you
 this inconvenience.
 Again thanking you for
 all your efforts exercised
 in my behalf, I remain
 Sincerely,
 Max Hilsenrath

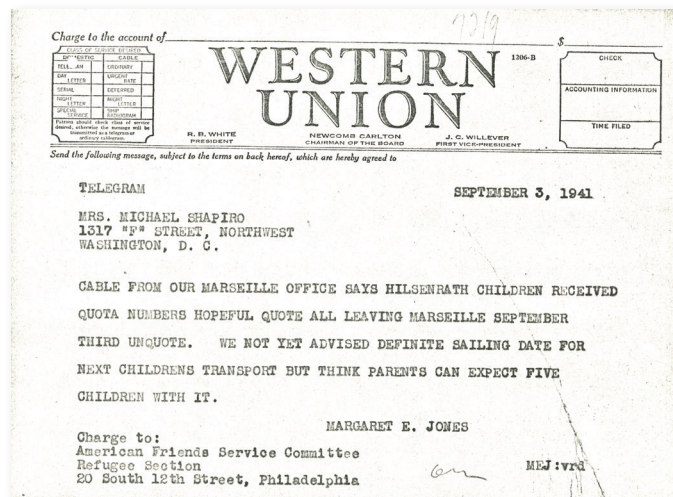
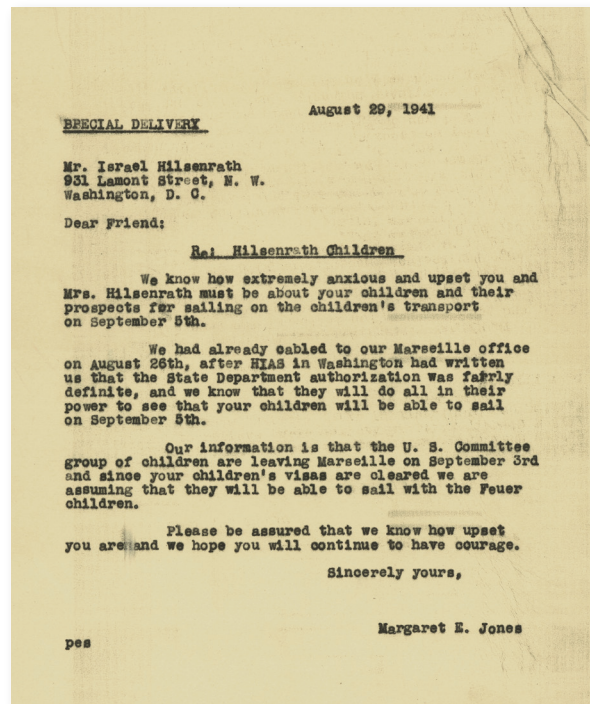
²
 to do everything humanly
 possible to see that my
 children leave Lisbon
 on the transport either
 on the 3rd or 5th of
 September.
 If it is at all possible
 for your office in Marseille
 to cable your office or me
 just when my children
 leave France or Lisbon,
 I would greatly appreciate
 it.
 In the event my children
 do not leave either on the
 3rd or 5th, kindly advise
 me when the next

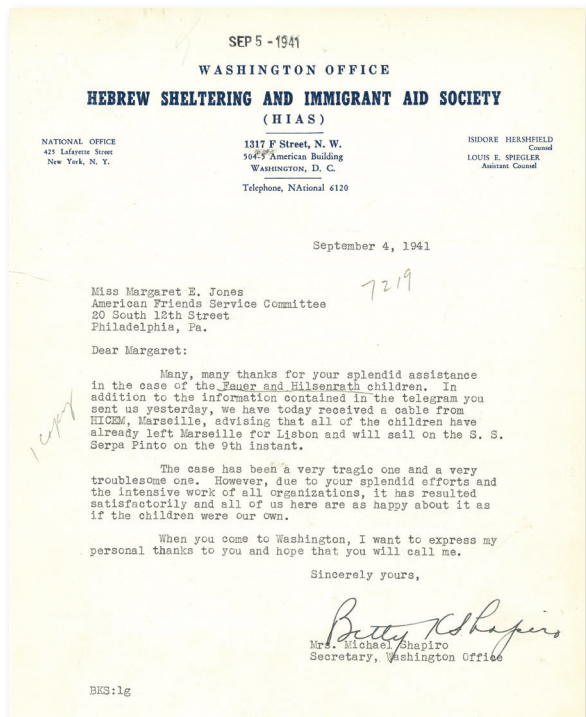
on the Museum website. I can imagine how excited he must have been when he realized that Susie Hilsenrath was me, a regular and long-time volunteer at our Museum. Before contacting me, he wanted to make sure that the file existed and that there was something in it. He requested that file to be delivered to the Reference Desk from the Museum's offsite storage facility. He later found another file (AFSC case 7321). He emailed them both to me.

Each file consists of almost 50 pages, mostly of correspondence between Mrs. Michael Shapiro (Betty), the secretary of the Washington office of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society known as HIAS and Margaret Jones of the American Friends Service Committee, AFSC in Philadelphia. Both of these ladies wrote letters to the State Department and the Consul in Marseille begging them to expedite our departure from Brout Vernet, in early September of 1941. There are also earlier letters. My father must have hired a lawyer as early as July 1940 to write to the AFSC begging them to help find his children in France. My father had said that the last communication he had was that we were in Orsay, which is southwest of Paris. In the formal reply to this letter, the AFSC stated, "Unfortunately we have not heard anything definite... we hesitate to send names of persons into France. We are afraid to call the attention of the German authorities to individuals who otherwise may have remained unmolested." There is not much more correspondence until August 1941. My parents must have been devastated.

The first letter, dated August 5, 1941, is from the HIAS by Betty Shapiro, writing to AFSC, Margaret Jones. Evidently someone had contacted HIAS to find out if they had any information about my brother and me. HIAS had a lot of information about us. They knew that we were in Brout Vernet. My parents must have been overjoyed to know that we were safe. I found out that my father arrived in New York, September 21, 1939, and that my mother and little brother, Ernest, arrived on February 21, 1940. The letter says, "They applied for and obtained their first papers."

It also describes how industrious and hard working my father was and how he paid for a passage for his children on the Pan American Clipper just in case they were found and received their visas. "However, for some reason, the children have been unable to secure their visas. This last advice from HICEM, Marseille, was to the effect that visas would not be granted to the children because of an uncle residing in Paris."





This I still do not understand. Yes, we did have a relative in Paris who housed and took care of us when we first arrived in Paris. He was the uncle Herman of my second cousins Sabina, Friedel, and Semi Feur, who were also born and lived in Bad Krauznach, Germany. We were reunited with these children in the Chateau des Morelles. It seems inexplicable that we could not get our visas because of uncle Herman. I recently learned from my cousin Sabina that he was murdered in Riga. My parents and the Feuers were told that they needed to apply for new affidavits and submit them to the State Department.

After many letters from my father, Mr. Feuer, the State Department, the wonderful Betty Shapiro, and the magnificent Margaret Jones, we were finally granted our visas. Our trip started by train to Marseille, then through the Pyrenees to Spain, and finally to Lisbon where on September 9, 1941, Sabina, Friedel, Semi, my brother Joe and I boarded a ship called the *Serpa Pinto* with 50 other USCOM children.

It is all there in the letters. The file also includes some letters from after we arrived in the United States. There is a beautiful letter from my father thanking the AFSC. He wrote, "There are absolutely no words that we can think of that could possibly express our appreciation for your kind work."

Sometime soon I want to write to HIAS and the AFSC and tell them about the superb effort of the two women who worked for them in 1941. I would like to know if they have children or grandchildren. If so, I would like to get in touch with them and tell them how good their mothers and grandmothers were to us.

Ron printed three copies of both files for me. I also have a copy in my documents and saved online. The letters brought back many memories, and I learned a lot that I did not know. I made a special trip to the Reference section in our Museum so that I could view and touch the original letters in the files. They united me with my father, and I felt so close to him.

The Berlin Conference

When I heard that the World Federation of Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust and Descendants Conference was going to be held in Berlin, Germany, I felt very ambivalent about going. I was hesitant because my memories as a child born in Bad Kreuznach, Germany, were still painful because of the atrocities that the Nazis committed there. I felt uncomfortable listening to the German language and was suspicious about Germans my age and older. When new acquaintances asked me where I was born, I usually responded that I had been living in Washington, DC, for a long time. Only if they pushed me and asked where I was born did I reluctantly tell them. I did not want them to think that Germany was my "homeland," because I never thought that it was. On the other hand, I was enthusiastic about going to Berlin, because I wanted to confront these feelings and finally get over them.

In my long lifetime I have been almost everywhere in the world, but never to Berlin. This conference was my opportunity. My friends Katie, Dora, Tamar, and I planned the trip together and after many e-mails and phone calls, we set out on our journey six days prior to the conference so that we could explore Berlin together. The first thing we planned was to visit the Holocaust museum, Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (*Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas*). This visit was a most moving experience. This stunning place of remembrance consists of a grid of more than 2,700 concrete pillars reaching out to the sky, planted into undulating ground. The abstract field can be entered from all sides and offers no prescribed path. We spent a lot of time there and took many pictures that we sent home to our families. There are a lot of museums and memorials in Berlin dedicated to the Holocaust. The Neue Synagogue, which was built in the mid 1800s, has a bulbous gilded cupola, and stands out in the skyline. It was not destroyed during *Kristallnacht* because a policeman stood in front of it and prevented the crowd from burning it down. However, most of it was bombed by our Allies in 1943. What is left now is a museum. We also visited The Jewish Museum devoted to Jewish history and cultural heritage. The architecture of the building is very modern and the form of the building is strangely based on the Star of David. The long narrow galleries with slanting floors and sharp zigzagging turns are designed to evoke the feeling of loss and dislocation. I was pleased that the Museum demonstrated the enormous intellectual, economic, and cultural contributions made by the Jewish citizens of Berlin before the Holocaust. However, most of all, it physically and spiritually integrated the meaning of the Holocaust into the “consciousness and memory of the city of Berlin.” I was happy that visitors from all over the world could see, from the Germans themselves, the horrors the Nazis executed.

There are many plaques, *stolpersteine* (stumbling blocks), imbedded into sidewalks in front of pre-Holocaust homes of Berlin Jews commemorating former residents simply with names and dates. We stopped at the Bebelplatz, where on May 19, 1933, Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi minister of propaganda, organized one of the nation-wide book burnings. I understood they were not just burning paper, but that they were burning ideas.

We noticed that the new opera house is going to be built on the perimeter of the Bebelplatz. It is going to be a grand building, and I know many beautiful operas are going to be performed there. Then we strolled over to the other end of the square to Humboldt University where many students gathered even though it was vacation time. Because we were tired of walking, we took a velo taxi, which is an open-air coach on the back of a bike, to the Jewish quarter where many Jews were arrested and sent to the concentration camps in Poland. The people who pedal these taxis are very knowledgeable and are anxious to teach the tourists about the roundups of the Jews that occurred there.

We took the U-Bahn (subway) and train to the town of Wannsee. I wanted to see the villa at the lakeside setting where the “Final Solution” was decided. This elegant mansion hosted the fateful conference held in January 1942 at which Nazi leaders, under SS official Reinhard Heydrich, planned the systematic deportation and mass murder of Europe’s Jewish population. Now the villa is filled with a chilling exhibition that documents the conference and the escalation of persecution against Jews and the Holocaust itself. In one of the rooms, Israeli students were being taught about the “Final Solution,” in Hebrew, by a German teacher. I was impressed that this German woman was teaching the Holocaust in Hebrew. To me, a former teacher, it meant that Israel and the Hebrew language were accepted in the German school system and that both were a part of their curriculum. I also talked to the students’ Israeli teacher who accompanied them. She told me that she took her twelfth grade class to Wannsee every year to learn about how the Nazis planned the “Final Solution.” I also met a retired German high school teacher on our walk to the Max Liebermann Art Gallery in Wannsee. She told me that the students in every class in Berlin, starting with the third grade, are taught about the Holocaust. She also said that she accompanied her twelfth-grade students to the Wannsee Museum every year.

Max Liebermann, had a villa about two blocks from the Wannsee mansion. He was a German-Jewish painter and a leading proponent of impressionism in Germany. There were 200 paintings of the villa and gardens. He was head of the Prussian Academy of Arts but was dismissed by the Nazis in 1933 and banned. He died in 1935. His widow had to sell the villa for almost nothing. She committed suicide before she was to be deported to Theresienstadt concentration camp. The next day we went to the Altes Museum in Berlin, which contained the work of many German painters, and there in at least four rooms was Liebermann exhibited in all his glory.

We took the train to Potsdam to visit the sprawling Sanssouci Park, which was the summer residence of the Prussian royals. Katie and I spent the entire day walking around the numerous palaces, the landscaped gardens, and the art gallery. Many people call it the Versailles of Potsdam. On our way home we stopped to eat delicious beef and chicken sausages at the Bahnhof. We were happy to get back to the Hilton Hotel and sleep in our comfortable beds.

The Berliner and French doms (cathedrals) were located near our hotel on a most elegant square called the Gendarmenmarkt. The magnificent concert hall was between them. Since it was summer, no concerts were performed in the concert hall. However, Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* was performed in the Berliner Dom. We attended this beautiful recital with great pleasure.

We also went to the Berlin Wall, the Brandenburg Gate, Checkpoint Charlie, Potsdammer Platz, Museum of German History, Bauhaus Museum, and the Pergamon Museum. When we got too tired, we hired a velo taxi to get us back to our hotel. We took a boat ride on the Spree River and sat in outdoor cafes watching the young German people walk by. We ate the renowned chicken sausages covered in curry tomato sauce and savored plum and apple cakes. As we were leaving the U-Bahn station on our way to the famous KaDeWe department store, we saw an iron slab that contained the engraved names of all the concentration camps in Europe. I was very moved by sight of the slab in the middle of a busy downtown intersection.

On the eve of the first day of our conference, the mayor of Berlin was one of our speakers. He told us that it was illegal in Berlin for anyone to make antisemitic speeches. Even though they have freedom of speech, it is still not allowed. The special envoy in Germany for special relations told us, "Germany stands by your side, antisemitism has no place in Berlin." The Israeli ambassador said, "We have a special relationship with Germany... We know that they are committed to the existence of Israel." The German ambassador to the United States was also there. I found out that there are 100,000 Jews in Germany, 12,000 in Berlin, and that there are 105 Jewish communities in the country.

The next day, after a scrumptious buffet breakfast, the workshops began. I chose the one "How Do I Feel About Being in Germany—What Does It Bring Up for Me?" I was excited to hear how other people felt. Our facilitator, Dr. Robert Krell, a psychiatry professor, did his best to keep to this topic. However, whenever anybody got the microphone to speak, they talked about their life during the Holocaust. I was very disappointed that we did not talk about the way people felt about being in Germany.

I attended my friend, Tamar's workshop, "Reflecting Memory through Art." I made an abstract painting because I had just been to the Bauhaus Museum and learned some of the skills that were being taught in the 1920s to the architectural students there. My abstract painting was intended to represent my life before, during, and after the Holocaust.

The other workshop that I attended was called "Dialogue between the Generations." Our facilitator told us that trauma is not transmitted by words, but that physical and emotional feelings transmit trauma. She said that this trauma might take seven generations to go away. We need to be mindful to how we share our experiences with our children. I made a mental note to ask my children how I affect them with non-verbal cues. I also plan to ask them if I should change my interaction with them and what I have transmitted to them. I am not sure how they will respond to this.

The 350 survivors from 19 different countries had wonderful dinners in the evening, had musical entertainment and danced the hora around the grand ballroom of the hotel with great enthusiasm.

I am more comfortable with the German language now. I understand that the German people know about what happened during the Holocaust. I understand that there is hate speech on the Internet, but there is no more physical antisemitism. Berlin is a wonderful city to visit. There are so many exciting sights to see. The people were kind, courteous, and friendly. Some told me that they were happy to see me, a survivor, returning to Berlin. This trip to Berlin made me aware how most of the German people have addressed the Holocaust and made me appreciate how many have changed their attitude toward Jewish people and the actions they have initiated to try to rectify their past. I feel less ambivalent about Germany now than before my trip to Berlin. However, there is this deep feeling inside of me that I cannot get rid of, and I still feel that Germany cannot be my homeland. I am so happy to be an American.

Hulda and Tante Anna

I sometimes think about why I never met any of my grandparents. They lived in a small town in Poland called Kolomaya, which is now part of the Ukraine. My father told me that he left his family when he was 16 and immigrated to Germany because he did not want to join the Polish army. He acquired a job in a shoe store in Dusseldorf and made a life for himself. My mother also lived in Poland with her large family of seven brothers and sisters. She revealed to me when I was an adult, that since her family was poor and had many children, her mother gave her away to her well-off sister who lived in Viersen, Germany. This was my mother's aunt and my great-aunt, Tante Anna. I was really astonished and had much compassion for my mother, because I had experienced this kind of separation from her during the Holocaust and I knew exactly what it felt like.

My mother explained that Tante Anna had married well, had a husband who was wealthy. They had two sons, and she had always wanted a girl so that she could spoil her with riches and love. When my mother was 19, Tante Anna and her husband, Onkel Heinrich, found a suitable young man for her to marry. This was my father. I hope that my father and mother kept in touch with their parents in Poland.

My parents settled in Bad Kreuznach, Germany, and when my brother Joe and I were very young we often took the train to visit Tante Anna in Viersen. We always looked forward to this excursion because we had so many delightful sights and experiences in store for us. Tante Anna was a very large person. Her hugs were warm and soft, and we felt enveloped in her flesh as she embraced and welcomed us to her home, which was a wonderful place for exploration. The house was on a busy street, and the front door opened to a long staircase that we had to climb in order to get to her living quarters. When we finally reached the parlor, I remember the warmth that came from the radiators hissing their welcome to us. Our objective always was to run quickly through this parlor in order to get to the short narrow steps down to the tremendous kitchen. In the corner was a black iron stove, and we knew that our great-grandmother would be sitting beside it.

She was tiny and spindly and dressed in black, the oldest person we had ever seen in our lives. She was probably in her seventies and much younger than I am now. We called her "die Hexe" because she had such a witch-like appearance. Her grey hair spiked out from a strange dark cloth that was bound around her head. I think her nails were very long. She was a quiet witch and allowed us to stare at her in amazement. She never reprimanded or scolded us for such behavior. She was Tante Anna's mother and my grandmother's mother. Her name was Hulda. She was always there in the morning when we got up for breakfast and still there when we went to bed. We never knew if, or when, she went to bed.

My great-grandmother's place at the stove was important on the days that Tante Anna and the helpers in her house prepared the delicious tasting *bulbenick*. I remember the preparing and baking lasted all day. Huge piles of potatoes had to be peeled and grated and placed into immense bowls. Eggs, yeast, oil, and flour would be mixed into this batch, which had to rest for some time before it was ready to be placed on the prepared oiled trays that were about four times the size of cookie trays that I use in my home now. When the mixture had risen, everyone helped pour it onto the trays because the thickness had to be just right. If I remember correctly, I think it was about one-half of an inch. Then it was carried to the oven where our great-grandmother was in charge of opening the doors and allowing the precious load to be inserted and baked at just the correct temperature. During the baking process, there emerged such an aroma that it made our mouths water. The anticipation for eating this delicious feast was overwhelming.

When "die Hexe" finally gave the signal that it was ready to come out of the oven, we saw how browned and crispy it appeared, and all we wanted to do was partake of it immediately. The short time we had to wait for it to cool down seemed endless. The trays were laid out onto the tables in the kitchen and fresh butter was spread all over the repast. Then Tante Anna took out a huge knife and cut the *bulbenick* into square portions. My brother Joe and I were always the first ones to gorge ourselves in heavenly delight.

Next to the stove was a door that opened to a stairway that went down to a storeroom and then out to the yard. We loved chasing and frightening the chickens that were browsing and pecking and looking for food. My great aunt warned us that in order to have abundant and delicious eggs for the *bulbenick*, it was unwise to terrify the hens. The rooster that woke us up in the morning seemed very indifferent to our provocations and just strutted around the yard looking grand.

On rainy days we were allowed to play in the parlor. Onkel Heinrich gave us a box that contained a lot of money. In fact, the box contained so many German marks that we could not count them. We were told that we could play with these papiermarks as much as we wanted because this money had become worthless after World War I. All it was good for now was for children to play with.

Tanta Anna's bedroom was on the other side of the parlor. Sometimes she allowed me to get into her bed with her while Onkel Heinrich was snoring in his bed on the other side of the night table that separated them. The room was narrow and Rubens-like pictures were hanging on the two long walls. I wondered why Tante Anna was not embarrassed by these pink, naked, plump, and curvaceous ladies all around her. The bed was soft, with square feather pillows, and a comforter the size of a mountain covered us to keep us warm and cozy. Sometimes I asked her about my grandparents, but I cannot remember what she told me about them. Before the Holocaust, Tante Anna and Onkel Heinrich were superb substitutes for the grandparents I did not know. She made me feel loved.

I never saw my paternal grandparents. However, I do remember that my father's parents sent us packages containing kosher beef sausages and sweets before the Germans invaded Poland. I tried to find out what happened to them. There is no record anywhere about them. From Father Patrick Desbois, who did much research on what happened to the Jews who lived in the part of Poland that is now the Ukraine, I have been able to guess that they were shot and buried in mass graves.

When the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened, I checked the records and found the names of Hulda Drimmer, Anna Knoll, and Heinrich Knoll. They died in the Riga concentration camp.

My daughter Terese's middle name is after my great-grandmother, Hulda. My brother Ernest named his daughter after our mother and my granddaughter, Lyla honored Tante Anna when she became a Bat Mitzvah. My daughter Lisa's middle name and the middle name of my brother's son Craig are after my father's parents. My brother Joe and I are named after my mother's parents. They are all remembered.

Memories and Defining Yourself

In an interview at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum a few weeks ago I was asked, “Do your experiences in the Holocaust define you as a person?” Before writing about my answer to this question I would like to review some of my thoughts and questions about this matter. Do memories make us the person we are? Sometimes I have wondered if I would be a different person if I had not been born in Germany when the Nazis and Hitler came to power and when they immediately set out to implement anti-Jewish policies.


I was there when they boycotted my father’s store. I was there when we were not allowed to walk through parks without being accosted. I was there when we were not allowed to go to public schools. I was there during Kristallnacht when our neighbors broke down our glass front door. It was ordinary German people who were complicit with the Nazis and who created havoc in every Jewish community in Germany. Because of this hatred, our parents sent my brother and me away to France to be safe, and we were separated from them for two years.

I was just a little girl when I left France and came to the United States. When the war was raging against the Jews in Germany and then in the other countries of Europe, I was here in the United States, safe from the horrors and atrocities. My parents did not talk about their experiences and their hardships before emigrating from Germany. When they arrived here, they did what they could to help the needy Jews in Europe. We had a ping-pong table in our basement of our rented house, and once a week Jews from our community in Washington, DC, gathered in the basement, which had been loaded with very used secondhand clothing. They came to make packages to send to the Jews in Europe. Perhaps some of them felt as guilty as I because we were here safe, eating, sleeping, and going on with our lives while our fellow Jews were suffering some kind of hell. So we boxed and wrapped all the items that had been donated.

It has been so many years since then. I put my young experiences in the back of my mind and tried to obliterate them. I did all my physical, emotional, and intellectual growing up here in Washington, DC, and was determined to become a normal happy American girl. What environment and what memories have made me the individual person I am now? I am grateful to my father who showed me much love, encouraged me, and helped me attend the University of Maryland. My great marriage to Irving, which lasted 56 years, was filled with new experiences and adventures. Our three wonderful daughters gave us much pleasure as we watched them grow into beautiful, intelligent, and independent women and who are important contributors to our society now. They gave us nine brilliant grandchildren with whom I have such fantastic rapport.

My experiences in the Holocaust so long ago do not define me as a person. It is the loving relationships that I have had during my life with the people I deeply and sincerely love and loved and who loved me. It is the tender and devoted friendships that I established over the years. It is the countless and diverse students that I taught in the public school system. My passion for classical music developed because of my contact with a good friend. It is my companions in my travels all over the world and my yoga, swimming, dancing, biking, birding adventures that have given me many pleasures and wonderful memories. It is the books that I have read, the post graduate degrees and courses I have taken, the lectures that that I have chosen to attend, and my appetite for art, that are all part of me. When, at times, adversity occurred, I faced it and turned negative events into learning experiences. I am mostly the person that experienced relationships and the environment as an adult. After all, they have been the happiest.

I read somewhere that memory is a phenomenon that is related directly to our perception of the past and is always influenced by the present; therefore, it is always changing. I feel compelled to renew my memories of the Holocaust so long ago. They are important to me now, because it is essential to



me to teach the visitors to our Museum that we cannot be onlookers when we see injustice taking place. I want our visitors to understand what prejudice and hatred can do to people. When I give tours of our Permanent Exhibit to law enforcement officers, I want them to realize their role in the community when encountering atrocities. I want people to know that we need to be sensitive to each other and that we need to take care of one another. I feel that this is part of my contribution to future generations.

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A Horse Named Fritz

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 1945.

This is a story about a beautiful horse called Fritz. It probably was sometime in 1944; our area was under Hungarian occupation. We lived in the village of Polana and life was very difficult for the Jews under the Hungarian regime. Mendel and Isaac, my two oldest brothers, were inducted into slave labor battalions, as were all Jews of military age. They referred to us as “striking Jews,” referring to beating us.

Jacob, my father, was a proud man with a large family. He had to be very inventive and try to do business legally and sometimes illegally right under the nose of the Hungarian police. We owned farmland, so we were able to produce all the food we needed, but with my two oldest brothers gone the burden of farming landed on Moshe. He was about 20 years old at the time. Moshe took on all the responsibility of running the business and working the farm, and I was his helper. We plowed the fields from early morning into late evening. Moshe would hold the plow while I led the horses. I remember that at the time, the top of my head was the height of the horse’s nose. It was a good thing that Moshe was a tall, strong man. He was a hard worker and was able to tackle anything, which was another good thing since our father had high standards and was very demanding.

Our family always had horses. My father took pride in having nice horses, but since nice horses were expensive, we often had plain-looking workhorses. They were used for transportation, plowing the fields and pulling freight. Then one day our father bought Fritz. Fritz was this beautiful tall, brown horse from a large estate. Fritz was one of a kind in the area—he was three years old and gorgeous. From the moment he was born, he was groomed to be a racehorse. He was fed plenty of oats and was allowed to roam the fields of the finest clover and tall grass. When he was three, he was ready to begin training for the racetrack, but his previous owners discovered he had a defective hind leg. When my father heard this, he bought Fritz at once even though it was a financial hardship. When we brought Fritz home, we discovered that one could hardly go near him. If you so much as put your hand on him, he would kick and be unruly.

Our father, who had experience working with animals, tried to break him in gently, but Fritz was so spoiled and full of energy that it did not work too well. One day when father was not at home, my brother Moshe used some cajoling and a whip and showed Fritz who was the boss. He put the harness on Fritz, in spite of the horse’s objection. When Father returned, he took him on the road. As soon as he took off, Fritz galloped through town at such a high speed that we thought he’d run someone over. Father had to restrain Fritz with all his strength.

For a while, my father was the only one to use him for transportation, hitched to either a carriage or a wagon. I remember one incident. A young man of 18 who prided himself on his ability to handle any horse came over and tried to show how it’s done. He also was known to be cruel to animals. As he approached Fritz and tried to show him who was boss, Fritz just grabbed the guy with his teeth and tossed him aside.

Slowly, we tried to harness Fritz for work by pairing him with another horse so he would learn to pull a load. Finally one day, Moshe mounted him and Fritz took off like lightning, but Moshe stayed on. We rode bareback and most of the time without a bridle or a bit in the horse’s mouth. Moshe, who was

seven years older than I, was fearless and could handle almost anything. I looked up to him and I tried to copy him in many ways.

We owned a large parcel of wooded land on top of a huge mountain and on it was a large grazing area. On the weekend we would take the horses and leave them there over Shabbat so they could graze. One Sunday, my brother could not go to fetch the horses so I had to do it. I left the house around six in the morning and hiked up the mountain. When I reached the top I recall being scared out of my wits because there was fog. The fog was so thick that when I saw a bush from a distance I thought it was a wolf. (Wolves were prevalent in that area then.) When the sun broke through the fog and cleared the grassy area, I was able to find Fritz. He was out there free and enjoying his freedom. As soon as he saw me, he lifted his tail and ran wild, away from me.

I became so frustrated trying to catch him that I was ready to cry. Then I got an idea. I had a small burlap bag and called the horse's name while shaking the bag, as though I had oats in it. Finally, I caught him and led him to a tree stump. I climbed up on his back and he took off like lightning, and I had no way to slow him down. Horses like to run home since they usually get oats when they get there. Somehow, I stayed on Fritz's back.

When we reached our neighborhood, he had to make a sharp left and I was sure I would fall off, but somehow I stayed on. As Fritz came into the backyard he was running at top speed, straight for the stable. The problem was that the stable door was very low and there was just enough clearance for him, but not me. Instinctively, I bent over toward his head and slid my hand over his face to his nose and squeezed, while jumping off just in time before he reached the door. After this experience, I remember being very proud.

Moshe and I were very close and it was from him that I had learned how to overcome my fears. Moshe will always be my hero. Moshe survived the war, but disappeared, never to be seen again, after liberation. About 30 years after the war, his girlfriend from back home found out what may have happened to him.

My brother Moshe was in a camp with a fellow from our town named Wolf. Wolf had been a "Kapo" during the war and it turned out he was a mean and nasty Kapo. So, after liberation, Moshe threatened to expose his past, so that no one would want to associate with him. One day Moshe and Wolf went out looking for food. Three days later Wolf returned by himself. When he was asked where Moshe was, he said they had separated and that he did not know. The people in the camp assumed that Wolf killed Moshe.

Years later, Wolf was at a wedding in Baltimore. While there, some men recognized him. They were about to take some kind of action against him and he found out, so he left the wedding abruptly and went back to New York, where he lived. However, soon after, he got sick with cancer and died. After all these years I still can't believe that I survived and Moshe did not. I still miss him.

Theodor Herzl: One Man's Dream

I recently attended the third annual gala of the Friends of the Israeli Defense Forces (FIDF), Washington, DC, chapter. It gave me great pride to see hundreds of people gathered there with the purpose of raising money for the IDF. I could not help thinking back to my childhood in the 1930s in Polana, Czechoslovakia. As Jews, we were content living in a democracy that gave us hope for a bright future. Most Jews living in the Carpathian part of Czechoslovakia were observant and Orthodox. We took our religion seriously. Life was simple; most people were optimistic about the future.

As Jews, we were always conscious that we were in exile and on the high holidays we prayed “next year in Jerusalem.” That hope had helped us endure centuries of antisemitism and oppression.

In 1936 or 1937, when I was seven or eight years old, Zionism was rising in popularity among many young men and women. My two older brothers lived in the city, so they joined the Zionist movement and sometimes wore uniforms similar to those worn by Boy Scouts. They tried to emulate the style of modern times. I remember being excited about it because our parents raised us to be proud and walk with our heads held high and not to be intimidated by antisemites.

On Friday nights, my brothers’ organization would host barn fires, which was against our Orthodox upbringing. They sang Hebrew songs, mixed with girls, and danced the hora. I remember being proud of my brothers for being in the Zionist movement. The reason it may have made an impression on me is that our rabbi, who was a Hasid, was very much opposed to Zionism and their modern behavior. He felt that they would stray from orthodoxy. The rabbis believed that when the Messiah came, the Jews would be returned to the promised land.

Hearing about the Zionist movement happening in the cities, my friends and I started counting in Hebrew and singing Hebrew songs. The Rabbis felt that Hebrew was a sacred language and should only be used for prayer. However, many of us discovered our own pride and self-esteem, and emulated what we heard about Zionism. Moreover, we did not want to live as victims as our people had lived in the past.

I can see that the generations of today would have trouble understanding that feeling I try to describe here, especially in the United States. After the war, in 1945, most of the people who survived the concentration camps were tired, exhausted, and had nowhere to go. We did not have any hope. Simply put, we were homeless and felt we had no future—we felt beaten. A miracle occurred when young Zionist men and women appeared from Palestine. Many of the downtrodden people with broken hearts, who grieved for the families they had lost, saw the miracle of Zionism as coming to their rescue.

Young men and women who emigrated from all parts of Europe to Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s reappeared and took charge of helping Jews who wanted to emigrate. They showed them that Jews, too, can stand up for themselves and that waiting for the Messiah is a fool’s dream. All of this came about because of one man by the name of Theodore Herzl. He saw the murder of Jews in his own time, and he said, “No more!” He believed that the Jews had to take charge of their own destiny.

My wife, Joan, and I visited Israel in 1973. That visit was very meaningful to me. As someone who experienced the Holocaust and our history, here I was visiting Israel—a Jewish state where the citizens are confident and proud.

One incident stands out in my memory: Joan and I were near the Knesset building. A couple of busses arrived with schoolchildren. As they came off the buses, I saw that the children were full of life and comfortable in their environment. They were not German or Czech—they were Jews, and proud of it. I remember snapping pictures of them for several minutes and my wife asked me why I was doing it. She pointed out that they were not even family. I tried to explain to her my feelings, how for 2,000 years the Jews had prayed “next year in Jerusalem” and that it had happened in my lifetime.

All this happened because of the ideas of one man, Theodore Herzl. When I speak to students, especially in areas where there seems to be little hope for a bright future, I point out how important each person is and how any person can rise to the occasion and contribute to mankind.