THE OBLIGATIONS, BURDENS AND GIFTS OF MEMORY:
TESTAMENT, ANGUISH, AND SOLACE
At a festive 25th anniversary luncheon, on December 14, 2016, the Hidden Child Foundation/ADL presented its Founder Award to its five most significant creators—Abraham Foxman, Myriam Abramowicz, Eva Fogelman, Ann Shore, and Nicole David. (The first three founders were handed their awards at the event; Ann and Nicole, who were unable to attend, received theirs at a later time.) The focus of the celebration was on the remarkable 1991 gathering that gave birth to our self-discovery and formation. Until then, most Hidden Children had spent decades in silence, never talking about what we had experienced in our childhood. That initial contact with others—just like us—proved to be life-altering, productive, and, thankfully, long-lasting.

We celebrated our endurance with joyful music, nostalgic reminiscences, and reflections on current and future paths. If there was a common thread among the three attending honorees’ speeches, it is that their own connection to the Shoah always called out to them, eventually influencing their professional lives. Revealing this human tragedy and its aftermath became a solemn obligation that each founder fulfilled with dedication, passion and grace. Hence, all Child Survivors and their descendants will forever be indebted to them.

We dedicate this issue to the obligations, burdens and gifts of memories that have impelled, tormented and comforted Child Survivors throughout the years. Despite the odds we have faced, we have triumphed beyond all expectations—from others and from ourselves. Let this victory be our lasting legacy!

Rachelle Goldstein, Editor
Of the Holocaust survivors remaining on this earth, I am among the youngest. I was born in Radom, Poland, in October 1942. My January 1942 conception coincided with the Wannsee Conference, where the Nazi high leadership signed off on the Final Solution. Seventy-five years ago, I came into a world primed for my destruction.

When my father died, shortly after I first moved to Israel in 1968, I found a small slip of paper among his possessions. It bore a single line of Yiddish, in the hand of the Belzer Rebbe, a man my father revered for his wisdom. It read: “Wait until the salvation — geulah — to circumcise him.” He had kept this note in his wallet for over a quarter century.

My father had regarded the words of the Belzer Rebbe, smuggled to him in 1942 from Krakow, as prophecy, nevuah. He had wanted to know, if my mother should give birth to a son, whether he needed to observe Jewish law and have him circumcised eight days after entering a world turned upside down. He had read the Rebbe’s response and what he had seen was the absence of qualifying words: he would have a son, and the salvation would come to him, my mother and me.

I have wondered all my life why Henryk and Sura Perl Werchaizer Griffel persisted in having a child in the midst of the Holocaust. Nazi soldiers targeted pregnant Jewish women. They stripped them bare and thrust bayonets into their wombs. There are stories of the Nazis hurling Jewish infants into the air and shooting them for target practice.

In an unimaginably dangerous time, pregnancy put my parents’ lives at even greater risk. For three years, they had been imprisoned in the Radom ghetto, which the Nazis had begun to liquidate, sending its denizens to concentration camps. Shortly before I was born, my mother saw the Gestapo drag her brothers and her father into the courtyard of the leather factory he owned and shoot each of them in the head.

The Nazis took over the factory, directing its output to the boots that were trampling Europe underfoot.

Just before her due date, my mother was approached on the street by two of her father’s employees. They told her to follow. Together, they walked the two miles from the ghetto to the factory, taking care not to be seen. Once there, they climbed a back staircase.

In the building’s attic, my mother found a midwife waiting. The midwife induced labor while my mother bit down on a piece of wood against the pain. Below and terrifyingly near, Gestapo guards watched over the factory’s workers; for my mother to cry out would have cost everyone in the room their lives. When I emerged, my first cries were also stifled, with a cloth to my mouth. And then, knowing this was the only way to save me, knowing she might never again lay eyes on the child for whom she had put her own life in jeopardy, she handed me, by previous arrangement, to a chemical engineer at the factory named Jan Szczepanski.

“Hidden children” is the term that has been given to those, like me, who were of tender years during the Holocaust, who managed to survive because good, brave people took us in. Sometimes the “hidden” part was literal, the child kept out of sight. In other cases, such as mine, identity was the hidden element. I was given a birth certificate with a new last name and taken in by a Polish Catholic family. For me, though, there has always been another dimension to the label — the experience itself is hidden from me, beyond the reach of memory. Whatever it feels like to be a Holocaust survivor, I’m not sure I’ve ever really felt it. Throughout the world there are gatherings of hidden children, all of us now long in years. I have never been able to identify with the label, never felt as if I belonged in such company.

What I did feel, as I grew up in the United States, was the pervasive sense that I should consider myself a victim. My parents instilled this in me directly and indirectly. What they had endured during the war had left them broken, and I was stranded on an uneasy bridge between two shores of Holocaust experiences, a first- and second-generation survivor alike. Their unspoken message was that I must in some way be broken too — that I was, at the least,
fragile and should be treated accordingly. I rebelled against this sense of self, much as I wrestled with the feeling that I did not fully belong in my own family. My parents had spent the remainder of the war, after my birth, hidden by another Polish Catholic family in Warsaw, some 65 miles north of Radom.

In 1945, when Russian tanks beat back the Germans, my parents returned to reclaim their then three-year-old child. In my mother’s version of our reunion, the one I heard growing up, I had run to my mother as if guided by instinct. It was not until I was 50 years old that Hela Spus, the woman who had hidden my parents, told me the truth: Alexandra Szczepanski, Jan’s wife, had to push me towards my birth mother, as I clung desperately to the only mother I had ever known. And so, in the midst of what was supposed to be a period of gradual re-acquaintance, my parents abruptly snatched me back. For them it was a blessed natural reunion; for me it was a rupture.

We fled through Czechoslovakia to a displaced persons camp established by the Allies in Stuttgart, Germany. We ended up, like so many immigrants before us, in New York’s Lower East Side. Though settled, the sense of being displaced never left me. In America, I felt at home; in my own family, less so.

One thing I did feel part of, however, was the special time in history when a Jewish homeland was at last a reality. In 1968, I traveled to Israel for a year of post-graduate study, knowing neither that my decision would be a fateful one, nor that this pilgrimage would mark the beginning of nearly sixty years of personal wandering — of never, definitively, calling one place home. Since then, I have lived a total of twenty-seven years in Israel. But these years have been interspersed, in more than 50 moves, with nearly equal time spent in New York and Washington, DC.

Despite this apparent inability to put down roots, in Israel I met Anita, who was also there to study. We fell in love. We married, returned to the States for two years to help my mother and sister relocate after my father died, and then, in 1971, we decided to make a life together in Israel. At the age of 35, I served in the Israeli Army and managed to put behind me some of the sense of victimhood that had hung over my childhood.

In 1979, Anita and I adopted a newborn baby whom we named Tali. Five years later, I moved back to Washington to take a job at a prestigious international economic consulting firm. This was a professional opportunity I could not pass up. I knew I had to leave Israel. Just as firmly, Anita knew she wanted to stay.

What we might call clarity has eluded me for the better part of my life. The long shadow cast by my earliest years, something I now struggle with consciously, was, until my fortieth, an unconscious fight played out in self-doubt, wavering commitments, and poorly defined goals. Clarity finally found me, minutes after midnight on my 43rd birthday, in the form of a phone call from Jerusalem that would change my life forever.

I write this, more than 31 years after that night, living once again in an Israel where peace remains elusive. In 1985, the tranquil Sinai beach resort of Ras Burka was under Egyptian sovereignty but accessible to Israeli tourists due to the 1978 Camp David Accords. In one of our regular phone calls, Anita had told me that she planned to camp there with Tali and a couple of other families over the Succoth holiday. One day, Anita and the other parents sipped Turkish coffee with the local detail of Egyptian soldiers, while their children played on the sand dunes; the next day, one of those soldiers opened fire on the group. Two boys escaped by running down the dune, back to the Israeli encampment. The only other survivor was six-year-old Tali. When the shooting started, Anita shielded our daughter beneath her body. Anita was hit and bleeding to death, but she found the strength to whisper words of comfort to Tali until she drew her last breath.

Less than 24 hours after that phone call, I was the first person off the plane when it landed at Ben Gurion airport, the first through customs and, running quickly, the first to get to the waiting area outside. There was Tali, in the arms of a close friend, a big smile radiating from her face when she saw me. When I saw her, something clicked deep inside me, a certainty that, somehow, I would find the emotional wherewithal to help my daughter deal with what she had just endured.

Tali’s physical wounds were minor — scratches and scrapes, really. Her psychological wounds, however, were unknowable and my primary concern. She had given clear and precise testimony to the Israeli police; she seemed to remember the incident in full.

From the moment I arrived back in Israel, I received well-meaning and often conflicting advice from psychologists and social workers. “Do not take Tali to the funeral,” said some. “Yes, take her to the funeral,” counseled others. “Do not send her back to school immediately; Yes, send her back to school. Keep her in Israel; Take her out of Israel.” The instincts I had felt when I first saw her at the airport — paternal, protective, loving — were clear and powerful, so I put my trust in them above all.

When I look back at that time, especially the first year after the shooting, I can’t fathom how I held it all together. Tali had witnessed the murder of her mother and six other people close to her, and had narrowly escaped death herself. I, meanwhile, was contending with the grief of losing my wife. Yet I faced our lives with a confidence felt in innumerable moments, both quiet and fraught, through decisions big and small. This was altogether new to me. It’s not that I always made the right decisions; I made mistakes, and plenty of them. But for the first time in my life, when it mattered most, I had the strength of conviction.

I had never felt such certainty before, a feeling that endured throughout Tali’s childhood and adolescence. From where did it come? I felt that I had somehow been prepared for this awesome responsibility. Perhaps my pain had prepared me, the accumulated residue of my own separations and displacements, and of having been raised by parents with their own emotional scars.

Where my parents had inculcated in me a sense of victimhood, I vowed to do the opposite with Tali. In contrast to the silence that had surrounded the source and subject of my family’s grief, I was determined to let Tali know, by word and example, that it was okay to let it all out. I

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wanted to spare her from what I had experienced in my own childhood — the sense that my emotions, however strong, had to be pushed deep down.

As it turned out, my efforts to help Tali bore unexpected fruit. During the years when my focus was squarely on her well-being, feelings that I had suppressed since childhood started to surface. Shortly after my 50th birthday, I resolved to try to find the part of my past that had been lost. And so, I made my first trip to Radom.

My grandfather’s factory complex was still standing, a majestic red brick facility four stories tall, with a huge chimney reaching high into the sky. I approached the place where I had been born in secret. My heart aching, I tried to imagine my mother’s feelings on that night a half century before.

The director of the factory, a mustachioed young Polish man, introduced me to a 68-year-old worker who had been a teenager in 1942. He had lived near the factory and remembered the events of that time vividly.

He had heard about the young woman who had been smuggled into the factory from the ghetto, who gave birth and then disappeared, her baby’s whereabouts also a mystery. The tale, for so long legendary, had been handed down through generations of workers at the factory. He couldn’t seem to believe that the baby, now a middle-aged man, was standing right in front of him, the story made flesh. He had to touch me, as if to verify that I was real.

How was it, he asked, that not one of the 100 or so Polish factory workers betrayed my mother to the Nazis? Why did they seem to believe that the baby, now a middle-aged man, was standing right in front of him, the story made flesh. He had to touch me, as if to verify that I was real.

He led me to where my grandfather’s house once stood, about 30 yards from the factory. It was a huge house, he said, big enough for my grandfather’s 13 children. He showed me where the stables once stood, stalls for eight horses. All these buildings had been burned down. He told me what he had witnessed as a teenager, watching through the factory gate as the Gestapo shot my grandfather and all his sons, including one who was confined to a wheelchair. With tears in his eyes, he told me that he would never forget.

My search for the first mother and father I had known began at the Radom city registry, where the young archivist had one word for my story: “Impossible.”

“You cannot be who you think you are,” he told me through my translator. “No Jewish baby born in Radom in October 1942 could have survived the liquidation of the ghetto. No Jewish baby could have lived undetected by the Nazis or their many Polish informers.”

He took out the old records that, to my amazement, had come through the war intact. Yes, there was a leather factory named Elgold owned by Israel Werchaizer and located at 9 Czarna Street. Yes, Israel Werchaizer and his wife Leah gave birth to Pola Sura Perl and 12 other children. No, there was no record of Sura Perl marrying Henryk Griffel, no record of the birth of a son.

I asked the archivist to look in the Radom phone directory for Jan and Alexandra Szczepanski. He chuckled as he told me that the name Szczepanski is one of the most common names in Poland — “Like Smith or Jones in America,” the translator added. He reluctantly agreed to go through the list of 22 Szczepanskis in the Radom directory and began calling. First on the list, no answer; second on the list, never heard of Elgold or Werchaizer — and so on through a dozen or so Szczepanskis. Then, on perhaps the thirteenth or fourteenth call, a woman answered. Her parents Jan and Alexandra had died five years ago, and she was living in their apartment. Yes, her father had been a chemical engineer in a leather factory — Elgold sounded familiar. Yes, her parents had taken in a newborn Jewish infant, born in secret at the factory, to the factory owner’s daughter. Helena had been 19 months old at the time. The infant’s name? Andrzej-Marek.

“What happened to him?”

“His biological parents came and took him away at the end of the war.”

Would she agree to meet this 50-year-old American man who claims he was born in secret in a leather factory in Radom in 1942 and was immediately handed over to a young man who worked there?

“Come now, quickly,” she told the archivist. “I have the child’s birth certificate. I have pictures.”

As I stood waiting for Helena Szczepanski to come to the door of her apartment, I reached into my coat pocket for a crumpled photograph my mother had given me long ago: me at three months. Helena opened the door with one hand; in her other hand was a picture of a baby boy.

We were holding the same picture!

I don’t know why it took me so long to return to Radom, to find the family that, at great risk to themselves, had taken me in as a newborn and saved my life. As it turned out, Helena had only been at home that day to answer the archivist’s call because she had forgotten documents she needed for a meeting later in the afternoon. It was, she told me, the only time she had come home from work in the middle of the day.

Now that I had finally made the trip, connected at last with this lost part of my history, I was stricken to learn that Jan and Alexandra were no longer alive and I would not meet them. Helena told me, through tears, of their grief when my biological parents had taken me away. Until she died, her mother held an abiding faith that I was still alive.

Helena had an envelope full of photographs to show me. There were pictures of me with her parents. There were also pictures of me with my birth parents, sent to the Szczepanskis after I had been taken away. She had my forged birth certificate, with the surname “Gawlowski” — chosen, presumably, for its distinctly non-Jewish character. Finally, there was a letter from my father. In a formal tone, he thanked the Szczepanskis for taking such good care of me. It was dated September 3, 1945, with a postmark from Krakow. My father had lived in the city before the war, and had attended law school there. After taking me back, my parents had made a brief stop-over there on our way to Czechoslovakia.

A wooden cross in the entryway of...
Helena’s apartment caught and held my attention. Helena confirmed it had hung in every apartment that we had lived in, during our years together as a family. We had, I learned, moved quite a bit during that time, as a precaution against questions that neighbors and acquaintances might have about my fitting into the family.

That cross is something I would have seen every day during my first years. A simple geometric form once perceived by newborn eyes, it spoke to the selfless nature of the Szczepanski’s actions. Jan and Alexandra were, Helena told me, as deeply observant in their Catholicism as Henryk and Sura were in their Judaism. Yet, even as they raised me as their own, with no assurance that my birth parents would return to reclaim me, they did not have me baptized.

What other memories might I have reclaimed had I returned to Radom while Jan and Alexandra were still alive? What hazy aspects of myself might have snapped into focus? I look back on my life and see, in Radom, the genesis of my long years of disassociation and detachment.

Jan and Alexandra had taken me in because it was the right thing to do. Jan’s affection for my grandfather, his employer, had prompted this heroic act. Alexandra had fed me from her own breast, as she had Helena. Helena considered this a bond as strong as blood; she thought of me as her “milk brother.” And so together, milk siblings, we made the short trip from her apartment to the graves of Jan and Alexandra. We lit candles for each of them and stood there silent in the summer afternoon, my arm wrapped around her shoulders.

Post-traumatic stress disorder — PTSD — can surface at any time in the life of a person subjected to trauma. Tali had, in Anita, a remarkable and loving mother for her first six years, which no doubt contributed to the amazing resilience she showed in the years after Ras Burk. The open communication that I worked so hard to foster between Tali and me meant that there were times when Tali vented her anger at me, openly blaming my absence for what had happened to her and her mother. It was hard to hear but I was glad that she did not keep those feelings bottled up. And as time went on I was relieved to see the accumulating signs that she was okay. We moved to New York, where she was admitted to the prestigious Dalton and Fieldston Schools. She excelled in academics and athletics, and graduated with honors. She was chosen by her peers to give one of the graduation speeches, before heading to Brown University for her freshman year.

Ten years after my first return to Radom, Tali and I visited Poland together. She surprised me with the trip for my 60th birthday. From the airport in Warsaw we drove to Radom. We visited the factory together. We looked for Helena, knocking on the door of the apartment where I had visited her before, but she was no longer there. To this day, I feel terrible for not staying in better touch with her after suddenly coming back into her life. It saddens me that my tendency to disconnect from those around me had extended to my long-lost “milk-sister” I had gone to such lengths to find.

I took Tali to the city registry where the young archivist had helped me find Helena the first time. He was still there, now the director and chief archivist. He remembered me, and extended an enthusiastic greeting. In halting English, he told Tali how, when I came to him ten years before, he refused to believe I had survived the Nazis’ purge of all the Jews in the city. “I am happy,” he said, “that your father convinced me I was wrong.”

Where does the story go from here? It is a question that has plagued me since I first attempted this account. During that return trip to Poland, I went for an early morning run in Krakow. As I passed through the city’s Jewish quarter I found myself spontaneously yelling out, “Fuck you, Hitler! You didn’t win!” On reflection, I was struck by how my uncharacteristic emotional outburst contrasted with my mother’s resigned and oft-expressed view that “Hitler won.” It seemed a fitting way to end this tale.

With time, however, I’ve come to see the emotional truth as existing between these poles of triumph and despair. There is, on the one hand, the enormous satisfaction and relief of having helped Tali overcome her trauma. I was able to be there for her in a way that my father and mother had not been for me. And there is the knowledge, tinged with gratitude, that through committing myself to raising my daughter, I was able to consciously confront what had been tormenting me unconsciously for years. I managed to reclaim some measure of what had been hidden from me.

But there is also so much that lies forever beyond my grasp, so much that can never be reclaimed no matter where I travel, or whom I find, or how much I may want it to be otherwise. When Tali came of age and my sole focus was no longer exclusively on her wellbeing, I was left with myself. That self is still incomplete, still wandering, still feeling too intensely the irony of not being able to consider any place a “homeland.”

Are these feelings distant echoes of a war that ended more than 70 years ago, or just several of the thousand natural shocks that all flesh is heir to? This question seems to me to get to the heart of what it means to be a hidden child, at least for those of us who carry around this experience without the substance of memory, like some phantom limb. Part of the essence of being a survivor is to remember; in that remembrance, true, resides much of the pain — the experiences one cannot forget, the sights one cannot un-see, the screams one cannot hear. But I, one of the youngest of those who remain, bear a pain nonetheless — one I cannot fully understand, the locus of which no map can reveal to me.

I am a survivor of the Holocaust; yet, I do not feel like a Holocaust survivor. It is the contradiction within, still unresolved.

Andrew Griffel has extensive experience as an international lawyer and economic consultant to multi-national corporations, and was the head of an international development agency working in Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Former Soviet Union. He currently advises companies on creating business-nonprofit partnerships, institution building and restructuring, board leadership training and corporate social responsibility.

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I WAS AN INFANT SURVIVOR IN GREECE

By Esther Franco

Around 1990, I met Judith and Milton Kestenberg in my hometown, Thessaloniki, Greece. They were touring Europe, recording testimonies of child survivors. Dr. Judith Kestenberg, a child psychiatrist, worked with Holocaust survivors and founded the International Study of Organized Persecution of Children, an organization that coordinated the interviews of over 1,500 child survivors throughout the world. Her husband, Milton Kestenberg, a lawyer and real-estate manager had helped with reparations for victims of the Holocaust and had organized aid for the children who survived the war.

I spent two days with the Kestenbergs in their hotel room, telling them every detail about my family and me during those horrible years when evil conquered Europe. Before they left, they suggested I put everything down, which I did between 1994 and 1998. After many years of keeping old secrets deeply buried, I was ready to get it all off my chest, and “The Game of Roles and the Second Generation of the Holocaust,” a book of 253 pages (in Greek) poured out of me. It was well received by both critics and readers. I wrote about the beliefs and lies that for centuries had been well hidden in Greece, and I told about my childhood and my problems with my identity.

I was born in a hospital on April 1, 1944, in Thessaloniki, Greece. My mother, Rebecca Pissirilo-Franco, was 21 years old, and my father, Leon Franco, was 24. Both came from educated and prosperous Sephardi Jewish families who were in the textile business. They spoke many languages — Spanish, Ladino, Greek, Yugoslavian and some French. My mother had been born on March 16, 1923, in Kastoria, a small, beautiful town on a lake in the northern part of Greece that borders on Albania and Yugoslavia. Kastoria had a Jewish community of about 750 people, about one third of the total population. After the war, only 8-10 Jews were alive. My mother’s father, Pepo (Yiosef) Pissirilo, and her mother, Hannah Cohen-Pissirilo had both been born in the same town and the same year, in 1900.

My father was born in 1920 in Bitola, a town in Yugoslavia, as it was called in those days, located exactly on the border with Greece and very close to Kastoria, my mother’s hometown. Bitola, a much bigger town than Kastoria, had a larger Jewish community. My father and his younger brother, Dario, had fled Bitola when the Germans occupied the area. Their parents, my grandmother, Esther, and my grandfather, Yiosef, had stayed in Bitola when the Germans occupied the area. Their parents, my grandmother, Esther, and my grandfather, Yiosef, had stayed in Bitola with the rest of the family that comprised many aunts, uncles, and cousins. All gone.

The two brothers had hiked through the woods, going south across the borders, arriving in Kastoria, which in 1942 was still free of Germans. They had gone to stay with relatives in what they believed to be a safer place. In 1942, life in Kastoria under the Italians was still normal and free of fear. The Italians were rather friendly toward the Jews. Life was peaceful. On certain days, young people gathered for afternoon teas, or “après-midis” as they were known. They went to dances to have fun and to meet one another under adult supervision. That was how my parents met, fell in love, and married in 1943. There had been no fear of our Italian conquerors.

My parents were very young, good-looking, charming, and I’m told very much in love.
So big that I am incapable of compromising and accepting it as a real fact. There are no excuses for this massacre, none! It is too much to accept and beyond any logic.

When my parents arrived in Thessaloniki, the Red Cross asked the Germans to let my mother go to a hospital, because she was about to give birth to me. At the last minute before going into the trains, “we” were pulled out of the line. My father and my mother’s mother tried to go with my mother, but both were dragged back violently. My mother gave birth to me all alone on a Saturday morning, the 1st of April, 1944, in an unfamiliar town with strange people. Now we were two; and we only had each other. When my mother understood the impending danger, she begged a nurse to save me. The nurse kept her promise and brought me to her family.

My mother was hiding, under a false Greek name, trying to avoid arrest, but some said she was betrayed by a Greek woman, a collaborator. Or was it, as others thought, the director of the hospital, that gave her away?

I was only 3 months old when my mother was arrested and taken to prison. On the 8th of September, 1944, my mother was executed by Greek collaborators, along with seven other Jews. It was the last execution. What irony...

My father and his brother, my grandparents and my mother’s younger sister, children, aged 23, 20 and 15, were kind and compassionate. They loved me, and I loved them — yet, from early childhood, I was an unhappy, depressed child. I had numerous, difficult issues that are hard to describe here.

On my first day of high school, at the age of twelve, I was told my real name and about my real parents. They could not have picked a worse moment to tell me the truth! Twelve is a difficult age, even under the best of circumstances. For me, it was hell! It required too much growth and maturity for one day: first day of high school; first day with my real, but new, name; first day with my new-real parents and their new names — names I couldn’t even pronounce.

I went through all this without any kind of psychological help. Depression was inevitable. Although I experienced great difficulties, I felt somewhat relieved to finally learn “the truth.” In a way, I had been expecting such a day. Children sense what’s amiss. All through the years, I knew that something was wrong with our family. We were so different in every way, outside and inside. Silence and lies had not helped me. I had always felt tormented. Since then, the word “truth” has become a preoccupation in my life.

From that time on, I began a new journey, a search for my identity. I needed to know about my family, and most of all, about my parents. My foster family became distant and unwilling to help. In fact, they seemed annoyed, even hostile, when I expressed a wish to establish rela-

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tions with my family and with Jewish people. They hid as much as possible — my family photos, names of relatives, objects that had belonged to my parents. Some were sold, others destroyed. They were sensitive people ... Why such cruelty, I wondered.

Were they afraid? Afraid that I would stop loving them, or care for them? Were they feeling inadequate, not up to the task of raising a Jewish child? Surely, many complicated and difficult emotions were involved, and I can understand their fears. Still, I could not grasp how loving my real family would make me stop loving them. On the contrary, I felt obliged and emotionally moved by their kindness.

Yet I can’t excuse their behavior towards my family and my people. When I was between the ages of three and six, they refused to let me go to my blood relatives, family members living in New York who wanted me. They even hired a lawyer, and with the protection of the Greek court, they kept me away from my relatives. Why? Was it out of love, or something else? Was it for some financial support they were expecting to receive?

The Joint and the Jewish community of my home town all tried to take me away from my foster family. They wanted me to grow up as a Jew, living under better conditions, with my own people — to live the “truth” of my identity, name and ethnicity. But my foster family refused to give me up.

I remember very well the chasing and hiding I had to go through during this time. I was afraid of the “bad people” who were coming to take me away from my "mother and family." The “bad people” were the Jews, and the “good” were the Christians. What an irony for a victim of the Holocaust, a small child, to have to go through such lunacy.

It would have been much easier for me, and I would have been a happier adult, had I grown up with my own people since early childhood. Unfortunately, my foster family did not understand the wounds they were adding to my soul, or the problems they laid upon my shoulders. Was it ignorance?

Psychologically, my journey was a difficult one. It wasn’t until I was 25 years old that, for the first time, I had the help of psychotherapy.

I finished high school in 1962. I went to the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, where I studied literature and received my bachelor’s degree. I worked as a high school teacher for one year only. I was not interested. A year later I earned a full scholarship to study drama and I obtained my master’s degree. I worked as a theater actress for but a few years.

In 1977, I decided to go to Israel and learn Hebrew while working in a kibbutz. I stayed 10 months. I love Israel. It is the only country that feels like Home to me. It brings tears to my eyes for many reasons. I never felt that I belonged in Greece. It is a country where ninety-five percent of the Jewish population was killed in the Holocaust.

In the early 1980s I hoped to make my life’s dream come true. Since childhood, I hoped to make the U.S. my home. I applied for an audition at the drama department of UCLA because of its excellence in theater studies. I wanted to continue my studies and get a master’s degree so as to be able to teach drama in the U.S. I was accepted as a student after auditioning in Greek drama and Shakespeare, but the committee was not willing to give me the scholarship I had applied for.

I am afraid it was naïve of me to confess to them how much I wanted to immigrate to the U.S. It was a fatal mistake. I did not have the money to pay for tuition, board and expenses. So, with a lot of constant bitterness, I gave up my dream. Through the years, I was married twice and divorced twice. I did not want to have children. I was not qualified for motherhood.

Today, I live alone. I have no relatives. I’ve had a difficult life because of the Holocaust.
FOR A FEW CRUMBS OF MATZO
By Roland Teichholtz

Pessach is near... For the Jews in Nice, a real Seder, up to the Halachic standards of, and conformity to, age-old traditions is evidently out of the question. There is no way to get any kosher meat, and all other foodstuffs are strictly rationed. Though Nice is within spitting distance of the famous vineyards of the Bouches du Rhône, it is impossible to organize supervision for the pressing of kosher wine. And as far as Matzo is concerned, finding any would be sheer utopia. Nevertheless, the hosts of the Hôtel Rochambeau let their imagination go haywire from time to time as they think about Pessach.

Precisely when everybody has given up all dreams for a decent Seder, one of the hotel guests, David Rottenberg, receives a letter from his brother-in-law who has managed to cross over the Spanish border — in care of the American Joint — pending his receipt of a visa to immigrate to Argentina. In his letter, he tells Daniel — in covered terms — that he has heard about a clandestine bakery, located in a small village, deep in the wild country of the Ardèche, where enterprising young men work day and night to produce as many Matzos as is possible under the present conditions. The village's surroundings are infested with partisans and the Germans hesitate to venture in rough terrain that they're not well acquainted with, making it an ideal spot for clandestine activities.

That same evening, while a handful of Jews are sitting together, as they do almost every other evening, in Joe and Ruchamah's room to discuss current matters, David breaks to them the news about the Matzo bakery. A total silence. All heads turn instantly toward the young woman of twenty-five who has just spoken so resolutely.

“Yes, I can travel to the Ardèche, she repeats, that is...if Joe agrees to let me go?”

“You are out of your mind, Joe protests, you do not realize what dangers you would be getting into. Just imagine how many checkpoints you will have to go through before even reaching the Ardèche! Then, you will have to find the clandestine factory. You can't just walk up to people and ask them (here Joe imitates Ruchamah’s squeaky young voice), "Excuse me sir, where can I find a kosher Matzo bakery, you know, the unleavened bread the Jews eat for Passover?"

A few halfhearted laughs are heard.

“Then, Joe continues, if any Germans check your bags on the way back, what will you tell them you are carrying, dog food?... Anyway, by the time you come home, all you will be left with is a pack of unrecognizable matzo crumbs. Forget about it, this is a ridiculous idea!”

But Ruchamah has a mind of her own: “Now let us consider the positive aspect of the idea, she answers, I am French, look and speak like a French woman ... If I get dressed like the local peasants, nobody would ever suspect I am a Jewish woman trafficking Matzo!”

“You are completely crazy, Joe screams uncontrollably, you are not going... period!”

“Joe, Ruchamah insists, just think about it for a second, Matzo, the age-old symbol of Jewish freedom being eaten here in Nice, under the noses of the Boches. Who knows if this is not our last chance to ever perform such a Mitzvah. Who knows... where we will be next year?”

Someone shouts: “Next year in Jerusalem!”

Someone else laughs, but apologizes instantly upon receiving dirty looks from the rest of the group.

Upon the other's insistence, Joe finally agrees reluctantly to let Ruchamah go. She will leave next Sunday, to maximize her chances of being back home before Shabbos.

The next morning Ruchamah, who has previously studied the map of southern France, calls her sister Léah on the phone. The latter works for a clandestine printing shop, belonging to the Jewish branch of the Résistance, situated in Montélimar, where Ruchamah’s false identity card was printed.

Léah is overwhelmed with happiness when she recognizes the voice of her beloved elder sister, but she suddenly becomes serious when she hears about the purpose of the phone call. Indeed, Ruchamah tells her that she hopes to be on the Nice – Montpezet train next Sunday. The train will stop for one minute only in Montélimar, at eleven fifteen AM. Ruchamah insists that Léah should come to meet her at the station, if only for one minute. At first, Léah refuses: her work is too important to be neglected, even though it would take her only half an hour to make the round trip to the train station. “Every single identity card we print can potentially save one extra life, she argues, I cannot afford to leave work during office hours!”

Still, Ruchamah does not give up: “Léah, she says softly, this might be our last chance...
to ever meet again. If you don’t come I shall never forgive you!”

Who can resist such a powerful argument? Léah surrenders, she will be at the train station!

Sunday morning has arrived. As she suggested herself at the meeting in her hotel room, Ruchamah dresses like a peasant woman: a faded pleated skirt, an off-white blouse with worn out lace and, on her shoulders, she wears a multicolored shawl with long black fringes, held together at her waist with a rope belt, tied in her back.

Joe cannot refrain from smiling when he sees her in such attire. Ruchamah carries a carpet bag filled with rags that she will later dispose of, replacing them with the precious Matzos.

Her departure is a moving affair: no tender words are exchanged between the spouses, yet their eyes reveal eloquently what it means for them to part in such circumstances, even if it will probably only be for two or three days.

Walking out of the hotel, Ruchamah is welcomed into the street by a wonderful, glorious morning sunshine: the Riviera in all the splendor of an early Mediterranean spring. She stands still for a second to deeply inhale the crisp, fresh air of Provence. “Such irony, she thinks, to be in a world famous, classy vacation resort in the quality of a refugee having to hide in order to save one’s life!”

Walking away reluctantly, Ruchamah crosses the street towards the train station. Even though it is only six in the morning, the entrance hall is already crowded with people. There are mainly soldiers, but also peasants and some businessmen. Throwing a glance at a shop window, Ruchamah can barely recognize herself in the colorful reflection of a typical peasant woman of Provence.

“May G-d help me” she whispers to herself while climbing the flight of steps leading to the platforms. She picks out a half empty compartment and tucks her bag inside the overhead net. She has just seated herself, when the train starts rolling.

While the train threads through the luscious back country of Provence, Ruchamah, insensitive to its blissful beauty, turns her thoughts towards her Creator. “My G-d, she murmurs quietly, Your desires are our orders and Your orders are our desires. Who better than You, knows the importance of a piece of Matzo, Pes-sach for simple Jews like us. The mere taste of it could be a source of inspiration and renewed confidence for the men in our little fugitive community.”

Around eleven thirty, only a quarter of an hour late, the train penetrates the Montélimar station. The city is famous for its world-renowned nougat, but Ruchamah has other things on her mind. She is leaning out of the window, ignoring the dusty wind that makes her eyes blink. She scrutinizes the platform, looking for the familiar silhouette of her little sister.

There she is! In her dark colored two piece suit, she looks like a secretary, out on a coffee break. Ruchamah’s heart leaps with joy; it must be more than a year since she last saw Léah!

Leaning on the rusty latch and pushing the heavy door with her whole body, Ruchamah jumps down onto the platform and throws herself into her sister’s arms.

“Ah, Léah!” Ruchamah exclaims. “I never thought I would see you again! I was so afraid, I was afraid you’d never come!”

Henri and Shalom in French uniforms, the first as a foot soldier, the second as an Alpine Hunter.

After a long, tight hug, the sisters babble at the same time. Then, stopping for a moment, they burst into laughter. Finally, Léah informs Ruchamah about the situation of the rest of the family, in a low tone, since the platform is full of people and one never knows what evil ear is listening in.

“Our parents left Metz, Léah tells Ruchamah, and live now in Bordeaux, where nobody knows them. They call themselves Jules and Rose Legrand.

Henri, the youngest brother was made a prisoner of war on the very first day the Germans invaded France. Since nobody knows he is Jewish, he has not been transferred to a concentration camp. Instead, because he speaks a perfect German, he works on a dairy farm. I received a letter from him. The farmer who employs him sounds like a half decent guy. The oldest brother is hiding somewhere in France. We have no news of Shalom.” (The latter was in Auschwitz; he will come back alive and well.)

A whistle blows and Ruchamah barely manages to jump back onto the train before it starts off towards the high grounds of Ardèche, between the Cèvennes and the Massif Central. Ruchamah remains at the open window, waiving her hand while watching the elegant shape of her sister shrinking in the distance. Then she returns to her compartment and sits down with a sigh of satisfaction: “One good thing accomplished!”

A smile on her lips, she falls peacefully asleep, rocked by the rhythmic sway of the carriage.

When Léah leaves the train station to go back to work, she feels lighthearted. “Ruchamah was right, she thinks, it was a wonderful experience to meet her again after such a long separation!” She has no idea of what on earth is driving Ruchamah to go up north to the Ardèche, but who cares, she looks healthy and in good shape. Besides, she probably knows what she is doing.

Leaving the Avenue de la Gare, Léah turns left, into the rue Longchamp, and suddenly walks faster without knowing why. Some inexplicable foreboding causes her throat to tighten and her stomach to feel unsettled. At the next crossing, just before making a right into the rue Saint Hilaire, where the clandestine press’ cellar is located, she suddenly notices a German military truck. She sees how armed soldiers emerge from underneath the tarpaulin, jump onto the sidewalk and proceed swiftly towards the office she left barely an hour before.

Her heart skips a beat. She thinks about Rachel, Maurice, Jacques and the others... Alas, there is nothing she can do to help them. She crosses the square rapidly and jumps onto the first bus that passes by, without even knowing where it is heading to... she just wants to leave the premises as fast as possible. Luckily, the bus rides past the train station, where she gets off. Fearing arrest if she goes home to Bordeaux with the intention of hiding for some time at her parents’ home.

Meyer and Reizel Kaufmann, Léah’s par-
ents, live in Bordeaux in a nice little provincial villa surrounded by a wonderful garden, planted with fruit trees of all kinds. They lead a peaceful life under a false identity, as if no war raged around them. Before the war, they used to live in Metz, on the German border, where they owned one half of an ancient patrician mansion in the Bertrand de Goth Street.

Well before the German onslaught, the French police had rounded up all German nationals, keeping them in detention camps as potential collaborators with the enemy, which is perfectly ironical when one knows how the French police itself behaved only a few months later. Meyer Kaufmann, born in Lemberg, which belonged to Germany at the time (today it is called Lvov and is in Poland) was thus arrested as well.

When his son Shalom — who was at the time fulfilling his military duties — came home on a three-day pass and heard the news of his father’s arrest, he ran straight away, still in his uniform, to police headquarters. When the officer on duty refused to release his father, Shalom got angry at him and ransacked the office, shouting at the officer: “If you don’t release my Daddy right this minute, I’ll tear down the whole building!” He was indeed capable of doing just that. 

At first, the superintendent looked flabbergasted, yet he quickly composed himself, speaking quietly: “Young man, in other circumstances, I would have you arrested too, and court-martialed on top of it! Yet, I have myself a son your age, and I would like to think that he would do the same for me. Go home, you have my officer’s promise that your father will be back home before sundown.”

And so it was, Meyer came home the same day. Only people who have never met Shalom can be surprised when hearing this story.

Now, when the Germans conquered Metz, they found in the French police files that Meyer Kaufmann was arrested on suspicion of being a German sympathizer. Nothing could have pleased them more. So they left him, and his family, alone.

Nevertheless, Meyer was no fool, he knew that this situation would not last. So, locking up the house in Metz, he moved together with his wife and his little girl, Gittel, to Bordeaux, where nobody knew him and where they enjoyed a quiet life under the names of Jules, Rose and Germaine (a funny name, under the circumstances!) Legrand. In the eyes of the Bordelais, they were considered a “famille de vieille souche,” an old respectable French family. They spent the rest of the war without ever having been bothered by anyone.

While the Kaufmanns/Legrand’s were hiding in Bordeaux, their home in Metz, being one of the most luxurious buildings in town, was requisitioned by the Germans and turned into the home of the local commander of the German forces.

One anecdote, relative to this period, merits mention, since it is quite unusual. One evening, according to a neighbor who happened to be present at the time, the commanding officer noticed what looked like a white shoelace sticking out of the maid’s bag, as she was getting ready to leave. He called her, asking: “What is this?” “Oh... nothing, really!” The maid answered. “Still, insisted the officer, let us have a look!” Pulling at the lace, he took out a tiny pair of spotless white baby shoes.

“Please, he ordered, put these right back exactly where you found them!”

Outraged, the maid answered back: “You don’t really think that the kikes who lived here will ever come back, do you? Everybody knows perfectly well what’s happening to them after you ship them to the East!”

“Madam, the officer replied in a controlled, even voice, if the Israelites who used to live here will ever come back is neither my business, nor yours. But if they do, and insomuch as I am in charge around here, they will find all things exactly as they left them...including these, he added, pointing at the shoes.”

Then, as the red-faced maid was reaching for the door, the officer said: “And you can start looking for a new job starting tomorrow!”

In Montpezat, Ruchamah left the train to board a bus that took her to the village, where she had no trouble at all finding the clandestine bakery. The place was swarming with partisans and no Germans could be spotted for miles around.

The way back too went smoothly, without any incidents.

Joe remembers: “I have never had a Pesach like that one! I don’t think I really got an olive worth of Matzo... but what Matzo! “Mayim Ledavid Hamelech” really! (Water for King David: an allusion to a story in Tal-mud Sanhedrin, in which David’s knights risk their lives to bring him water, under the nose of the Philistines.)

It is only after the war, that Ruchamah heard how her stubbornness had saved her sister’s life.

So, when my mother, Ruchamah, used to say every Seder night: “I don’t know why, really, but somehow, this is my favorite Yomtev,” we the kids, knew perfectly well what she meant!

Roland Teichholz is the third son of the late Joe and Ruchamah, the main protagonists of this short story, which is part of a serialization. Born after the war in Belgium, Mr. Teichholz now lives in Israel with his American wife, 15 children and many grandchildren. A translator, freelance writer and poet, he has published a book (in Hebrew) on Jewish thought, and many articles for French and English language magazines.
EXPLAINING THE SUCCESS OF MOST CHILD SURVIVORS OF THE SHOAH

By Jacqueline Silver, EdD

What explains the astounding fact that many child survivors of World War II’s chaos, trauma, and personal wounds managed to rebuild their lives quickly and successfully? What accounts for the personal and professional success of the majority of child survivors of the Shoah? These are such important and confusing questions that many decades later social scientists are still looking for answers. Referring to the resilience of Holocaust survivors in their 2009 article, Greene and Graham stated,

Although reports of severe and debilitating disorders, such as chronic anxiety and depression, must never be taken lightly, there is also clinical and empiric evidences that many survivors actually are ‘resilient, creating families, developing careers, and leading creative and productive lives despite the ordeal.’ However, there is insufficient research about what contributes to survivors’ ‘posttraumatic healing and mastery of intrapsychic injuries,’ including their ability to lead successful lives and contribute to society in the aftermath of trauma. (Greene & Graham)

The Nazis’ War Against the Jews had a particularly strong and lasting impact on children whose mental, emotional, cognitive, moral, social, spiritual development, and resilience were impacted, and, in many cases, these effects hindered their ability to form later attachments. Moroz (2005) stated that the physical result of childhood trauma even alters basic regulatory processes in the brain.

Although there was relief and joy at war’s end, many child survivors were again traumatized when they returned to their prewar homes and found themselves in hostile environments amid anti-Semitic former neighbors and, for some, under Soviet conquerors. Often, relatives and friends had been killed; homes and all belongings had been seized. Surviving children were frequently without family, friends, homes, or homelands. For many, the long-awaited liberation exacerbated the war’s traumas.

Many hidden children had formed strong attachments with their rescuers and faced confusion and loss when surviving parents returned to claim them. Such chronic trauma had a negative impact on child survivors into and throughout their adult lives.

Yet, despite dissimilarities in their backgrounds and in the Shoah’s negative consequences, many were able to rebuild their lives, become devoted spouses, parents, grandparents, and contributors to fields such as medicine, politics, religion, literature, art, music, and science (Suedfeld, 2001, p. 3). In fact, a large percentage of survivors completed their academic or trade educations, even achieving prominence in various professions: Roald Hoffman, the 1981 Nobel Prize laureate for chemistry, was hidden with his mother in a Polish school attic, and François Englert, the 2013 Nobel Prize laureate for physics, had been a hidden child in Belgium. (Gerstl, 2014)

It is interesting to note that many child survivors have spent their working lives in service professions, and a large number have dedicated their post-Shoah years to Tikkun Olam (healing the world) by lecturing about the Shoah and working for liberty, equality, and justice. Many wonder how such traumatized individuals have been able to live not only exemplary private lives but also lives dedicated to the prevention of the kinds of horror they had endured.

In assessing postwar success of survivors, some social scientists have noted that the ages and stages of development when children first encountered Nazi anti-Semitic policies influenced the children’s reactions, both short- and long-term. We know that varied conditions marked children in different ways, both during the war and long term.

The age at which children had their lives disrupted is relevant as well as their wartime and postwar circumstances. Where they were, which adults were with them, and their ages at the end of the war is

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critical when considering the long-term effects WWII had on children. Children were likely to respond according to their physical, emotional, social, and moral development at the time, or times, of the trauma they had endured. In Masten's view “children are capable of resilience and recovery from disaster if their basic needs are met but responses vary by the developmental level and personality of each child as well as the situation of the child.” (Masten, n.d.).

Child survivor accounts show that those who were provided a sense of safety with their biological families during childhood were capable of responding to nurturing adult care, routine and stability. They could talk and express themselves verbally, through play and drawings, and respond to educational activities. They would also be more capable of continuing their education and building healthy adult lives after liberation.

Many survivors have spoken or written about their parents’ last goodbyes before separation or deportation. Almost always, the last words terrified parents told their children was that they loved them; they bade them to take care of themselves, to try their best to survive, to remember that they were Jews and to live accordingly. In his memoir, George Lucius Salton recalled his final few minutes with his parents before they were deported. His mother’s last words to him were,

Goodbye, my dear child. I love you. I will miss you. I will keep you in my heart and think of you every day. Take care of yourself and live. And if it should happen that you grow without us, remember that we want you to grow up and become a good person, that we want you to be a mensch (2002, p. 67).

These last words were typical of many Jewish parents as they were separated from their children, knowing they would most likely never meet again. Many survivors have related the impact these last words had on them, not only after liberation but also through the rest of their lives. Viktor Frankl, himself a survivor of Auschwitz concentration camp, who lost his entire family except for a sister, found that survivors, who had been brutalized and lost everything, could often find the strength to survive and build new lives if they had meaning in their lives. For many survivors, that meaning and will to live and contribute to society had come from their pre-war childhood family recollections.

Moskovitz wrote about “the frequency with which survivors returned to the values held by their murdered parents and destroyed communities to serve as a framework for their lives…” She wrote that the need of child survivors to perpetuate their parents’ legacies “as an agent of continuity may be so strong that where no remembered legacy exists, it may even be fantasized and invented (in Krell, p 17)".

Before the trauma began, older children had already acquired education, culture, traditions and identity, plus close family ties and warm memories. They may have been exposed to and become proficient in more than one language (Levy, letter, 2016). These children had an easier time rebuilding their lives after the war and were generally able to complete education, form friendships, and establish families. Development had been set before the war for older child survivors and this accounted for some of their resilience. It is interest-...
while in hiding such as Elbaum (2010), Zandman (1995), and Harvitt (Con, 1985) related how their education in hiding aided their successful return to and completion of schooling as well as influencing their adult lives. People who survived incarceration in Terezin have stated how lessons learned in that Ghetto affected their post-war choices with some becoming musicians, artists, and, in one case, a ceramicist and interior designer.

Some child survivors have recalled how even negative wartime experiences were helpful after the war. One survivor recalled how being moved from one foster home to another in Holland taught her to quickly adapt to different people and their expectations. Her proficiency at “reading” people helped her become a successful therapist later in life.

Other possible factors explaining the successful lives of child survivors have to be considered also. Alexander Levy has suggested that survival of one or both parents often influenced a child’s adjustment and ability to regain normal life (Levy). Of course, the physical and emotional state of the parents would have been an important factor. Where surviving adults were still capable of healthy parenting, children received needed love and guidance. In cases where surviving parents needed help themselves, children had two difficult tasks: parenting their traumatized parents while trying to regain their own young lives.

Tedeschi and Calhoun’s theory of post-traumatic growth offers an important explanation for Shoah survivors working hard to rebuild their lives. PTG states that often after reflection on their trauma and on themselves during it, the individual’s self-perception changes to one as a survivor rather than one as a victim. In this way, survivors are able to create a more empowering future for themselves and others. The authors give examples of how “the frightening and confusing aftermath of trauma, where fundamental assumptions are severely challenged, can be fertile ground for unexpected outcomes that can be observed in survivors: post-traumatic growth” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

World War II’s tragedies remain etched in the minds and souls of child survivors and many have not been able to live fully healthy, happy lives. This fact is easily understood. What is less understandable is how so many child survivors have been able to deal with their memories and scars enough to construct happy, successful, and useful lives. This article has provided a few theories about the successes. Perhaps there is an indomitable spirit inherent in most people that wills them to survive and even to overcome some of the most difficult obstacles imaginable.

Reference

Jacqueline Silver is an American-Israeli educator, who taught for over thirty years in the United States, Honduras, and Israel. Throughout her professional career she has been interested in teaching children to believe in themselves and to fulfill their potential while learning the values and principles of a democratic society.

Jacqueline earned her EdD in 2015. Her dissertation was entitled, “Education of Jewish children in Nazi Occupied Areas Between 1933-1945.” She is the mother of two grown daughters, grandmother of two boys, and presently lives in Seattle, Washington.
I was born in Belgium in 1939. My parents, originally from Poland, had married in 1918 and moved to Berlin in 1922. My father, Moshe Offen, owned a printing shop in Berlin; my mother, Mina, née Dorf, was a housewife. While living in Berlin, my parents had five children. (One of them, Heini, died of an illness at young age.)

When the Nazis came to power, in 1933, my family left for Antwerp where they had family (my mother’s brothers), and in 1934 they obtained from the Jewish Agency certificates to go to Palestine. However, the clerk persuaded my father to give the certificates to six young bachelors because he maintained that life in Palestine would be too difficult for a family with four children, the youngest being only 2 years old. The clerk promised to provide new certificates whenever my father would decide to take the family to Palestine. Although at the time this proposition seemed logical to my father, it would prove to be disastrous.

The Nazis invaded Belgium in May 1940, and in August 1942 my father and my 15-year-old sister, Mali, were taken to the transit camp of Malines/Mechelen, and were deported to Auschwitz by transport number 2. They never returned.

My mother decided then that she and the children should go into hiding, and with the help of her brothers, she contacted the resistance. We — my mother and my two sisters, Paula and Esther, my brother, Isi and I — were taken to a convent in Namur, St. Jean de Dieu, where each of us received a different identity to avoid being recognized as one Jewish family.

I was then two and a half years old, residing with my mother and siblings, yet not permitted to make contact with them or to call them by their names. Worse, I was not allowed to speak German or Yiddish, our family’s spoken languages, and was forced to learn French. A few months later, it seemed more prudent for me to be brought to the Colin family in Fosses-la-Ville, where I was hidden until the end of the war.

The Colins were truly special. The father, Ferdinand, had been compelled into forced labor at the Atlantic Wall, but he had escaped and returned home, where he too had to hide from the Germans. The son, Alfonse, had also been ordered to hard labor but he disobeyed the command and also had to hide. The mother, Léonie, who had a young daughter, Madeleine, 10 years old, had decided to take in a Jewish child so as to save him from the Nazis.

The family received me as one of their own, and with time I forgot about my old family and identified myself as Jacky Colin. Life was not easy, Ferdinand and Alfonse had to flee each time the Germans came to search for them, but they usually got an early warning from the underground and ran off. Whenever this happened, Madeleine took me for a walk to avoid anyone questioning me.

My brother Isi and my sister Esther were hidden in the same village by other families, but I recognized them only as friends of my “sister” Madeleine. This displacement had an impact on me after the war when I returned to my biological mother.

One day we were visited by a woman, who was introduced to me by members

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of the underground as my mother. She had come to take me home. Now around five years old, and well-integrated into the Colin family, I refused to go. Ferdinand Colin promised to bring me home at a later time. About a week later, he took me “for a ride on his motorbike (with sidecar)” and brought me to my biological mother who lived at the time in Namur. There I found the “friends of Madeleine” who persuaded me that they were really my siblings, and they helped to reintegrate me into my real family.

Of course, in the beginning it was not easy. I went to school in Jambes, and completed first- and second-grade. In the meantime, my sister Paula, who during the war had been hidden in a convent, got married and left home, and my brother Isi immigrated to Palestine on the “Exodus.” Still hoping for their return, my mother was constantly searching for my father and her elder daughter, Mali, who had been deported.

By the end of 1947 we moved back to Antwerp, and I had to change identity again. I was registered in a religious Jewish School, Yesode Hatora, where I had to find new friends, and learn new languages — Flemish, Yiddish and Hebrew.

As a member and a counselor in a Zionist youth organization, Bne Akiva, I knew I would make Aliyah someday, but first I had to complete my military duties in Belgium. While in the Belgian army, I visited the Colin family in uniform and the reaction of Léonie Colin was astonishing. She turned to her husband and said proudly: “You see, it’s not a Jewish kid that we saved, it’s a Sergeant in the Belgian army!”

After completing my military duties in Belgium, I moved to Israel, in June 1959. I was employed in a number of different jobs, finally making a career as a civil servant for the Israeli administration until my retirement. While I worked, I completed my studies at Bar-Ilan University, and I obtained a Master’s degree in history.

I applied to Yad Vashem to have my rescuers recognized as “Righteous among the Nations” and I succeeded in 1994. Along the way, I wondered why the procedures were taking so long and was told that a lack of “referents” and the accumulation of files were the reason. After I retired from my professional activities, I was asked, as a historian, if I would be ready to volunteer as a referent. Of course, I agreed and after a short vetting process, I was accepted as a member of the Commission and am active mainly on files from Belgium, France and the Netherlands.

YAD VASHEM’S COMMISSION FOR THE RIGHTEOUS

Since its inception in 1953, one of Yad Vashem’s principal goals was to convey the gratitude of the State of Israel and the Jewish people to non-Jews who risked their lives to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. In 1963, the Remembrance Authority embarked upon a worldwide project to grant the title of “Righteous among the Nations” to the few who helped Jews during their history’s darkest time. To this end, Yad Vashem set up a public commission, headed by a Supreme Court Justice, to examine each case and to confer the title. The recognized persons receive a medal and a certificate of honor, and their names are commemorated on the Mount of Remembrance in Jerusalem (the site of Yad Vashem).

The commission is divided into three sub-commissions, one each in Jerusalem, Haifa and Tel-Aviv. Special cases or problems of principles are discussed occasionally by a plenary session, which consists of the members of the three commissions.

Membership in the commission for the designation of the “Righteous among the Nations” requires extensive research and knowledge on the history and geography of the applicant’s local area.

Since not all members of the commission are acquainted with all languages, one member, nominated as a “referent,” learns the case and submits it to the others in Hebrew. After the presentation, a discussion and, eventually, a vote follows. Then the case is brought to the judge for final approval. Once the title is accorded, a ceremony is organized in which the Righteous receives the medal and the certificate.
At school I was taught that the twists and turns of private lives lend their sheen to history. This story is certainly about a turn in fortune.

For decades, I had wanted to meet Maud Coudurier, the daughter of Marguerite Warren, the woman who saved my life under circumstances still largely unknown to me. Until now, I have never written about what I remember and what people have told me about it. My brother and I, fourteen and ten years old in 1943, were the only two remaining witnesses. The others only partially lifted the veil on the secrets and ambiguities of the tragic night of December 22-23, 1943, and they carried the truth into their graves.

Following the death of my father in 1934, my mother, her father, her two brothers, her sisters-in-law and the children shared two dwellings in the Paris region from 1935 to 1941. My uncles joined the French army campaign from 1939 to 1940, but was it bad luck they were not made prisoners? (To my knowledge, the Jewish prisoners of war, nationals of Western countries, who had fallen into the hands of the Germans between 1940 and 1945, were sometimes victims of discrimination in comparison with their non-Jewish fellow prisoners, but were not included in the “final solution.”)

From 1941 to 1943, we were on a journey that was typical of some Jews in France: Aryanization of businesses, flight toward the non-occupied zone, first crossing of the line of demarcation (at Chéry-Lury), pillage of the deserted household, regrouping in a town in the southwest (Luchon), renewed flight toward the Italian occupied zone at the end of 1942, and transformation of the refuge into a mousetrap, after Italy changed sides in September 1943. That month, the Nazis and Alois Bruner’s men took control of the eight départements of the southeast, which made up the former Italian occupied zone.

These events found our clan (7 adults, 9 children) occupying a farm called the Hermitage, 500 meters away from the thermal baths of Aix-les-Bains. The adults were aware of the increasing threat. Every day we heard of new arrests of Jews in the département of Savoie. There was not a minute to lose. Mother, Uncle André, his wife Leah, and their three children found a new hiding place in Mont Dore. “Florent,” himself a Jew, had prepared the false papers. To their misfortune, Mother and André return to Aix-les-Bains to fetch the rest of the family, but Leah and her children remain in Mont Dore. The plan was to depart in separate groups at the end of December, when, in the early hours of December 23, the trap brutally closed.

Informants were rampant at the time. A denunciation was the likely cause for the arrival of the Gestapo, accompanied by a Frenchman, at the door of the Hermitage shortly after midnight on the 23rd of December. It seems that several dozen Jews were arrested in the Savoy département in November and December of 1943 in contrast to 1,819 arrests in the Nice region, where the team of Alois Bruner was active. This further supports my belief that we were the victims of an individual denunciation.

I will never know the reasons the Nazi team left six children and two adults behind. The five others, Aaron (“Henri”), age 44, my mother Marguerite (“Denise”), age 37, Isaac (“André”), age 36, Estreia (“Estelle”), age 33, and my brother Philippe (“David”), age 14, were taken to Chambéry, and then detained for a few weeks in Drancy. From there they were transported to Auschwitz by Convoy No. 66 on January 20, 1944. The four youngest survived.

My aunt Sonia, then six months pregnant was allowed to remain free. She told me, “They ordered me to stay put. I feared the worst. We had to leave within 48 hours.” Suddenly, we were being treated like lepers: no one, neither Jew nor Gentile, was willing to speak to us, and even less willing to risk their lives to take in a pregnant woman, an old man, and six children who had already been recorded on the Germans’ list.

Salvation came to us with the appearance of Marguerite Warren, the future mother of Maud. Marguerite was a friend and a former employee. It was decided that we would separate: my Aunt Sonia and her three children and her sister-in-law’s par-

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ents would go to meet Leah in Mont Dore, in Auvergne. Marguerite would take my grandfather (69 years old), my sister (12 years old) and me (10 years old) to her mother at Maisons-Laffitte to hide us there.

By bringing us to Maisons-Laffitte to hide us with her mother under a false identity, Marguerite was assuming enormous and multiple risks. Her father, a British citizen and trainer of race horses (Maisons-Laffitte is the French capital for trotters) was being detained in Drancy as an “enemy alien,” which already rendered him suspect. Yet here she was preparing to assist three Jews to cross the line of demarcation in violation of a 1940 German order. This would expose her to heavy sanctions that could lead as far as deportation to Buchenwald. But, aware of this danger, she made the trip from Aix and entered the gates of the Hermitage on December 26. That same day, Marguerite, my grandfather, and the parents of Aunt Leah, altogether four adults and six children, set off for the Aix-les-Bains train station for what would be a significant journey.

After arriving at Lyon-Perrache station, the group was split into two. The Paris-bound sub-group was still waiting there when a thief ran off with one of the suitcases and lept onto a moving train. My grandfather ran after him, screaming for help at the top of his lungs. Marguerite, mortified, was able to calm down my grandfather, and the four of us got onto the train.

A few moments later, I lived through the longest five minutes of my life: the train stopped at the line of demarcation and a German in uniform, an unteroffizier, I believe, stepped into the compartment and demanded, “papieren.” Marguerite handed him the forged papers. I do not recall any exchange of words. He examined them and his eyes met mine for an instant, which felt like an eternity. Then he handed the documents back, turned around, and left. We had all escaped deportation and death. I will never know if he knew the papers were forged. Any response from us to the most trivial of questions, such as, “What is your name?” or “Where are your parents?” would have given us away. And I will always wonder if the unteroffizier of Lyon-Perrache chose to overlook our forgeries.

I have no memory of my arrival at Maisons-Laffitte, but I have some vivid recollections of my stay of four or five months, which, with time, has split into a series of unrelated snapshots: the senior Mrs. Warren, the school, a letter from Drancy, the evening prayer in my grandfather’s bedroom, walks along the edge of the Seine with Marguerite’s son Guy and with Mrs. Warren’s little dog; Thursdays spent in Paris with Gaby Ancelot and her nieces, at the movies, and the news reports filled with lies and the German propaganda films. Mrs. Warren’s fear when Grandfather, eccentric as always, went to read the palms of the Germans in the neighboring barracks. No recollection remains of my departure from Maisons-Laffitte. Gaby Robin accompanied Grandfather, my sister Dora and me to meet my aunts in Mont Dore, where I spent the last months of the war in a small apartment with Grandfather, my sister and Gaby. Of the third and last crossing of the cursed line of demarcation there is no story to tell.

The Gestapo was not very active in Mont Dore. There were arrests of Jews in 1943, but not in 1944, even though there were relatively many of them who had taken refuge in this spa town of 10,000 inhabitants. The police superintendent would later tell Leah that he maintained two records bearing the names of the refugees. He would show the Germans the one where the names of Jews (all fake) did not appear. At Mont Dore I was a Cub Scout and a Catholic, going to church devotedly. As absent-minded then as I am today, I lost my wallet, and Grandfather, ever unconventional and oblivious, returned it to the police!

A very special memory marks the Liberation: when classes were back in session for the 1944/45 school year, I believe in October 1944, the instructor announced to the class that I had lived under an assumed name. My fellow students began to snicker and the instructor said, “Don’t make fun of him. He can’t help it if he’s Jewish. It’s not his fault he had to conceal his identity.” We returned to the Paris region around February 1945. My mother, back from deportation, maintained contact with Marguerite, whom I saw only rarely after my departure for the United States in 1951. I went back to Maisons-Laffitte only once, for the funeral of the senior Mrs. Warren. Marguerite remarried and had two daughters, Maud, born in 1948, and Rita, born in 1954. Mother always had me read the letters from Marguerite, and in later years, from Maud, who enjoys corresponding in the finest French letter-writing tradition. Around 1980, Mother’s health deteriorated, and she passed away in 1986.

At that time, I took up the flame. Maud

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and I first contacted each other directly in 1988, at the time of an exchange of New Year wishes for 1989. “I hope to have my mother for as long as possible, but on the day when she goes away, even if logically I may no longer hear from you, I want to tell you that my own children shall know of the high esteem which I have for you, not in the banalities of history books, but as the living proof of human generosity.”

In 1989 my wife Susan and I visited Yad Vashem for the first time. While going down the Way of the Righteous, I thought about Marguerite and had the idea to nominate her as a “Righteous Among the Nations.” I wrote to the administration and obtained the necessary forms to apply for such a request. When I tried to contact Marguerite, I learned she had left Maisons-Laffitte to move in with Maud at Saint Laurent du Pont (Isère), situated 40 km away from Chambéry and just under an hour from Aix-les-Bains by car.

I wrote to Marguerite and she replied in a moving letter, declining the honor: “When I came to look for you and your sister Dora and your grandfather at Aix-les-Bains to take you to Maisons-Laffitte, I did so with all my heart, without thinking for a single moment that my act might one day become the object of such an honor.”

Three years later, a new occasion presented itself to honor Marguerite, or rather, her memory, since she passed away at the age of 83 in 1992, “the international day of the woman,” as Maud remarked. Our temple was involved in a fundraising campaign to modernize the building that houses the community center. My wife and I made a contribution, and asked that a classroom be dedicated to the memory of Marguerite. Our request having been granted, I invited Maud to attend the inauguration of the new room. She preferred, I Invited Maud to attend the inauguration of the new room. She preferred, I, instead, to send her son David, 17 years old, sister Dora and your grandfather at Aix-les-Bains to take you to Maisons-Laffitte, I did so with all my heart, without thinking for a single moment that my act might one day become the object of such an honor.”

The view of Lac du Bourget, of the Dent du Chat and Mont Revard in profile on the horizon brought back memories. More recollections surged when I stood in an altered square facing the old thermal treatment center. I remembered the first time I saw German soldiers and women in uniform. The French dubbed the latter “les souris grises” (the gray mice). Turning right, we found ourselves nose to nose with the Hermitage, on the road with the same name.

The gateway that I last crossed as a young boy, suffering from the flu and in flight from the Gestapo, is still there. Suddenly, I was seized by an emotion so deep that it is still difficult to explain its intensity. I visualized once more the scene of the arrest — Mother on her knees: “Sir, I beg you, leave my little son, who is sick.” The words kept ringing in my ears. What must my family have been thinking when they got into the car, surrounded by the Gestapo, headed for an unknown destination?

The main body of the Hermitage building has been redone but its dimensions remain the same. Maud points out a man standing in the courtyard beside a black vehicle. Curiosity overwhelms my unease, and we draw near to a man of about 40 years of age. I explain who we are and what led us to come visit the Hermitage on that day. He responds politely and appears very interested: “I bought this house two years ago,” he tells us, “I had tried, without success, to get some information on the history of the Hermitage. Before that, I had been living in Lyon in a house that had served as a hiding place to Jean Moulin. I have been decidedly drawn to the dramas of the Occupation ever since.”

I point to the changes: the former chicken coop is now a garage; the pig pen (I have not forgotten the cries of the pig whose throat would be cut a few days before Christmas 1943) has been destroyed, but

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tions. I muse over what finally pushed me to carry through my planned trip to Saint-Laurent. Patrick supplies the answer: “When I saw that Marguerite had written, ‘I do not regret not knowing you,’ I knew that you would come!” The little phrase again. I spent an agitated night, as did Maud, from what she told me the next morning. On Sunday, we run some errands in brilliant sunshine, and have a good family meal before leaving by car for Lyon-Satolas, the airport. I comment that when our families’ fates cross, they pass through Lyon. “That’s right,” says Maud, “but if the trip of 1943 had ended in Lyon, you and I would not be here to talk about it.”

How should I end my story? I have allowed the incarnation of a ten-year-old boy to speak of this journey, but from the perspective of a life that is now long, I can attempt to extract some lessons. I have learned that luck is very important in life. Napoleon recognized this when he said: “I don’t need a good general, I need a lucky general!” Having been deprived of the support and guardianship of my father from my birth, luck was sometimes lacking in my life, but fortune has also compensated me in ways that have allowed me to overcome many obstacles. How else to explain that out of five of my close relatives sent to death by Convoy No. 66, with 1,139 other men, women and children, four of them, including my mother, were among its 47 survivors in 1945? After the war, my mother’s love and protection were so precious to me during my adolescent years.

I believe that the greatest human qualities, generosity and courage in particular, are taught to us by our parents. When a threat is inflicted upon an ethnic or social group, but for the exception, one can no longer count on one’s friends and relations. And, the more friends one has, the better the chances to meet that exception. In occupied France, the France of racist nationalism and denunciation, but also of self-sacrifice and courage, there are both white and black marks, but above all, a lot of gray.

With age, the past becomes an obsession: one fears that one will disappear without having paid one’s debts. To know Marguerite, Maud and their family has done much to build in me a more positive moral appraisal of the human race. In man there exists both the best and the worst, but those who look for the best will be able to extricate themselves from difficult situations better than those who expect the worst. There is also a problem of perception: crimes and atrocities fill the history books and make the front pages of the newspapers. Generous acts are often anonymous, as are those who give them unstintingly.

In my own case, I have not kept an unpleasant memory of the years of occupation. I vaguely perceived the dangers and risks, but I was always surrounded by people who were well-disposed towards me. Optimism was never lacking in me, and I lived more or less normally the tribulations of a 10-year-old child in occupied France, despite being deprived of my only living parent. The contrast with my older brother, deported to Auschwitz at 14 years of age, who came back alive but profoundly marked, created in me a feeling of guilt that still haunts me.

Lastly, in attempting to reconstruct these events of the past, my thoughts keep turning to the goddess of Greek mythology Memosyne (Memory), mother of the Muses. We remain so much in the trance of this most elusive and sly of the many forces touching the fate of man. Memory is malleable like modeling clay, and that is why it cannot be trusted. The cult of this goddess should not be pushed too far. Capricious and selective, she retains nothing of what is gray or ordinary — only liking to accentuate the contrasts and to present us with unfinished flashes of memories.

But what happened to all the rest? How else to explain why I remember nothing of my third crossing of the line of demarcation in 1944, while I have so many vivid memories of my crossings in 1941 and 1943? Memory suppresses or distorts whatever is troublesome, succumbing not just to “political correctness” and outside influences, but also to the unknown boundaries each person has set within themselves.

This mysterious process strikes me when I watch certain programs on television that feature old people relating stories involving themselves fifty years after the events they experienced. Why, I wonder, didn’t they speak up before? Have their stories changed over the years, depending on whether they told them five, ten, or twenty-five years after the events?

One film, more than any other testimony, perfectly illustrates my sentiments. It is “The Sorrow and the Pity” by Marcel Ophuls. This work, completed in 1969, is superior to other testimonies about the Occupation, because it was realized before time and Memory transformed reality. It is a film that grants nothing to myth and holds first place in the genre. Here, the witnesses speak with a freshness and spontaneity that is often lacking in later documentaries. And so, I wonder, would my story have been different had I written it fifty or sixty years earlier? I am sure it would have, and that raises endless questions.

Born and raised in France, Daniel Vock graduated from Dartmouth College (B.A. 1954) and from Harvard Law School (J.D. 1957, cum laude) and was admitted to the New York bar the following year. Following three years with the Judge Advocate General Corps, United States Army, and a similar period with Shearman & Sterling, New York, Daniel embarked on a 26-year career with Mobil Oil Corporation. His positions included General Counsel in Tokyo and London (with responsibility for the North Sea countries), Manager of Negotiations, U.S. and Canada, and finally Assistant General Counsel, Exploration and Producing.

In 1989 he became an independent consultant. He has advised governments in Africa and the Americas, and negotiated mineral development agreements and multiparty agreements for corporate clients in some thirty countries on six continents, with special emphasis on Africa. He has also consulted and lectured for several departments of the United Nations and for institutions of higher learning in Europe and Africa.

A father and grandfather, he now lives with his wife, Susan, and his golden retriever Clio in the New York metropolitan area.
I WOULD RATHER HAVE THE PAIN OF MEMORY THAN TO FORGET
By Dasha Rittenberg, née Werdygier

I dedicate my story of survival to the blessed memory of my family members who were killed during the Holocaust: my parents, Telca and Mosze Werdygier; my brothers and their wives, Srul Shmil and Rifka; Leibl Arie and Chana, and their children, Tzipi, Leah, Yossi; Feigele, Glikele, and Sarahleh; and my brother Shlomo and his wife, Regina, and their child, Yossi; and to my youngest sister, Yocheved. They were all murdered in Auschwitz. My sister Chana and I were the only survivors. Chana died two years ago.

In My Parents’ Home
I was born in 1928 in Bendzin, Poland, into a tightly knit, happy family consisting of parents, three sons and three daughters, of whom I was the middle daughter. It was a real Jewish home where, in the end, peace always prevailed.

Our Sages tell us that the greatest gift G-d gave to the Jewish people is the Shabbos. My father was a great Chasid and scholar, and in my parents’ home the Shabbos was a major event. We all took that gift very seriously, literally to the last letter of observance.

In my parents’ home, preparation for Shabbos started as soon as the previous Shabbos was over. For us, Friday was like Erev Yom Kippur. There was the joy and fear to be ready for that moment when Shabbos would begin.

On Fridays, my three brothers would come home earlier from their place of learning to prepare themselves. My job, among others, was to shine their shoes until I could see my face in them. My brothers used to tell me I was the best polisher.

Of course, the kitchen was the busiest place in the house — with cooking and baking, scrubbing the floor, washing hair, boiling water, and ironing. There was so much anticipation, it could have been as a celebration to receive a bride. I remember that I was allowed to eat the cakes that had been baked just for Shabbos.

In our home, there was an enormous distinction between weekdays and the Sabbath. My entire way of thinking was the distinction between weekdays and the Shabbos.

The End of Our Idyllic Life

Life as we knew it came crashing down on us in 1939 when Hitler’s army invaded Poland. Our family, now including my married brothers’ spouses and their children, were all forced to spend the next two and a half years in the ghetto of Bendzin.

When I was thirteen years old, in 1942, even this came to an end. I remember vividly a cold winter evening that year, with biting frost outside and not that much more warmth inside. The Gestapo had already confiscated warm clothing from all Jewish homes and sent it to Germany for their women and children. Wood or coal for heating was unobtainable. So, we had nothing to heat our home and insufficient clothing to warm our bodies.

On that day, placards had been posted all over town ordering all Jewish men to register for work brigades the next morning. Anyone failing to register would be severely punished. We all knew that punishment would be, and we also knew from other towns that anyone taken to a work brigade was never seen again. The crying and mourning in every Jewish home that evening is indescribable. Our house was no exception.

Because of the blackout rules, we could not have any light, and our home was dark. My father was pacing back and forth like a shadow. From time to time he would stop by the window, lift his arms, as if to the sky, and moan deeply.

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My mother, sitting in the corner of the room, was deep in her own thoughts. Every now and then she would look at either my father or my brothers and would quietly cry within herself.

My two sisters and I sat stunned. We understood that a terrible misfortune had befallen our family even though we could not absorb all of its implications. Tears were choking us but we controlled ourselves. In this way, we sat for many hours until sleep finally overcame us.

At about one o’clock in the morning, a terrible banging on the door awakened us. We surmised that the Gestapo had come, and we three sisters hugged one another closely. On her way to open the door, my mother yelled for us to hide. My two sisters climbed into a big box of clothes and covered themselves with the clothes. I, however, did not hide. I was curious to know what these brutes wanted so late at night. I did not have to wait very long to find out.

They had come for my twenty-year-old sister, Chana. One of the Gestapo men took out a list and yelled at me, “Where are

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your two sisters?” Of course, I said I did not know. Pushing my mother aside, they searched the house for them. Luckily, it did not occur to them to look in the box of old clothes. After they had ransacked the house, they shouted at me to “Come with us.” My mother then arose like a giant between the Gestapo and myself and screamed out, “She will not go with you. Take me in her place.”

When he met such firm opposition from my mother, the leader of the group seemed confused and he explained to her that he had an order to gather all the Jewish girls of working age so they could be sent away to work. My mother answered him that she could carry out the work better than I, a thirteen-year-old, could. Then the leader shoved my mother aside, grabbed my hand and pulled me after him. My mother fainted from the blow she had received, and I, half asleep, with glaring eyes and chattering teeth, witnessed this man’s brutality against my mother. Everything in me cried out to pounce upon the beast and crush him like a spider, but his firm grip upon my hand made me realize my helplessness. All I could express was my contempt. One phrase tore itself out of my throat, “Why did you strike my mother?” The bloody hand of the guard closed my mouth.

My father looked as if he’d been strucken. Tears were streaming from his eyes. It was the first time in my life that I had ever seen my father cry. As we were going out of the house, the leader of the Gestapo thugs called to my father that he should not forget to come early in the morning with his sons to register for work. This seemed to rouse my father from his shock. He jumped up, ran to the bookcase, grabbed a little ‘Siddur,’ and taking off his coat, he ran after me on the stairs. He put the coat over me, kissed me, and said to me, “Put it on my child. You shouldn’t catch cold, G-d forbid.” In the pocket, you will find a little “Siddur. Let it guard you against all evil.”

It is difficult for me to relate what happened to me after I left my dear home — a real Jewish home where every Sabbath was dedicated to G-d and to home, where my father and brothers sang “Shalom Aleichem,” and we girls helped with the other “Zmiros” (Sabbath songs), and where every holiday was welcomed with joy. Instead, a volcano of hate erupted in our midst and gradually destroyed us, taking me one day, another the next. I wondered if we could ever be united again, if our broken Jewish home would ever become whole again.

I will not relate the trials and tribulations of being separated from my family, most of whom were killed in Auschwitz, and of traveling on foot or in carts from one camp to another.

The crematoria at Auschwitz were not fast enough to incinerate all of us Jews, so some of us were dispersed to be worked to death in other camps. I was first sent to a “Durchgangslager” in Sosnowiec, then to Blechammer, a horrific concentration camp for men, (women were there only in transit). Finally, I arrived at Schatzlarn, a concentration camp in a little town in the Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia. I remained there, working in a textile mill, along with 120 other Jewish girls of different ages.

We worked fourteen hours a day on a hungry stomach, washing tremendous floors or soldiers’ laundry. Until then, I had never even washed a handkerchief for myself. I lost my name and acquired a number, 22944.

A respite from my tragic existence is the love and devotion that five girls and I felt for one another. Whenever we had a chance, we were together. We tried to help each other, and keep up our spirits. If one of us was sick, we did her work and helped her with whatever we could. Together, we also dreamed of a time when our suffering would end, and we would be free. This friendship made our unbearable life more tolerable.

It is hard for me to describe the two and a half years I spent in that gloomy camp where everything had to be carried out under a strict disciplinarian. The outside world was mostly closed to us. Each day was infinite. We wondered how long it could last. Still, our young minds imagined that someday soon we would be reunited with our dear ones, and be free to enjoy the world in freedom. The cruel reality of our lives depressed us and robbed us of our dreams and destroyed our spirits until we lost all semblance of normal human beings. All we girls could feel was the existing moment. That was our past and our future.

One girl, Rifka, was a Hungarian from a religious home. I bonded with her. She was desperate not to do hard labor on Shabbos. I also wanted to lead an observant life and tried with all my will to do so in the camp. I didn’t let our oppressors touch my soul.

Above all, truly above all, I did not make this decision alone. Nor could I have done this alone. My story is also the story of others, observant and not, who dedicated themselves to Jewish Laws.

And there was another girl, who spoke French but knew no German or Polish. Her bunk was next to mine; she was a poet. She wrote lines of hope. She was the only one who could read French. In the village, French POWs would sometimes throw rocks, with notes attached, to encourage us. We would hide the notes until the night and then gather around to hear them read. The notes would have news: the Germans were losing the war. There is no calculating how such news renewed my spirits to celebrate Shabbos.

Our method of supporting one another sounds simple, but in a place where one day was made to bleed into another without

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difference, where routines were repeated endlessly, it was not simple. It’s impossible to remember every detail. There were certain repetitions that helped us mark the time. For example, on Saturdays, the toilets were to be cleaned in the camp; on Sundays, we would be sent to clean the Germans’ barracks and houses.

We counted the days to Shabbos. And we counted, or tried to count, the days to the holidays. On Passover, we would trade bread for potatoes, so as not to eat leavened bread. Once on Yom Kippur we fasted on the wrong day, so we created another fast day. But we few girls who tried to be observant were not alone. The older girls, twenty and above, were not observant, but they helped us. They would trade workdays with us (at great risk to themselves). They would work on Saturdays so that we could work on Sundays. And if it were unavoidable, if we were found out or forced to work, we would work the minimum of what was demanded.

We girls in Schatzler wanted the world to know there were such people. Not I alone, but I am the one to write this. Others never forgot their responsibility to retain their Jewish identity. This effort took place in many other camps.

Why did I do it? The obvious answer is that observance was a part of who I was, and to preserve my identity I had no choice. But I often wonder, would I have taken the risks and made the sacrifices if, for a moment, I had known I no longer had my parents or my brothers and sister, if I had known the truth, that they had all been murdered, that I would not be reunited with them and be able to assure them that I had not been touched — that I had remained a Jew and that they would be proud of me, proud to say this child is my child, who kept the wishes of her mother and her father. At the end of the war there was no mother, no father, no brothers.

I tell this story not as an act of arrogance or pride. On the contrary, my choice to practice my religion against all odds was made for many reasons: none was particularly noble or individually heroic, not at all. Maybe my reasons were the very opposite of such melodrama. But the choice was made and I want my fellow survivors and especially those who survive us to know something about how and why that choice was made and, if when, G-d forbid, there should ever come a time when such a choice must be made again, Jews will have an example to follow.

I mention this not only to affirm that Judaism is a religion of laws and observance, but also to affirm that Judaism is a Family, one’s own and others’. As I look back, it was my mother who was concerned with my observance, my father only wanted me to survive and come home. If bonds of loyalty and of steadfast faith are not broken, this Jewish family survives.

Dasha with her son, Moshe.

The Beginning of the End

During the last six months, we began to notice certain changes in the camp. The SS guards started putting us on long marches from our camp to another camp called Bernsdorf, which was several kilometers away. This was in the winter of 1944 and the weather in the mountains of the Sudetenland was very severe. I remember marching in deep snow, wearing wooden shoes that made it impossible to walk without tripping and falling. If any prisoners fell out of line, the SS dogs attacked viciously. One of the dogs lunged at me and ripped at my foot. I do not remember the pain of the actual bite. What I do remember is the beautiful white snow turning red as I hurried forward, trying not to be left behind.

That March brought a change in the weather and a marked change in the camp’s atmosphere. The SS, once so imperious, began behaving nervously. The French POWs’ notes, thrown over the fence, spread the word that the war would soon be over. One of the notes also passed on the news that President Roosevelt had died.

We slept in our clothing and someone watched at the window. Near dawn on May 6th, the guards of the camp forced us out of the bunks into a nearby forest where they lined us up. The woods were alive with the sounds of horses and shouting men. Through the trees, we could glimpse German soldiers on horseback racing furiously in all directions. Smoke poured into the forest and we thought we would all be burned to death. (Later we found out that the director of the factory in which we had labored, knowing that the end was near, had shot his wife, his two small children, set his villa in flames, and then shot himself. I remember how pretty his wife was and how blond and Aryan-looking the children were.)

We stood in line in the forest, not knowing how the day would end. We did not know that the Russians were encircling the village and that this was the reason the SS guards were panicking.

Finally, the SS guards decided to herd us all back into the bunks. We were all shivering and praying. I still had my Siddur and read a lot of Psalms. We kept hearing shots but we didn’t know if it would be our end or theirs.

Some days before our liberation, we had felt its coming. As it grew nearer, our fear grew greater. Day by day, camp discipline became stricter. The nervousness of the guards became very noticeable. Their shouts, and very often blows, became a common occurrence. Wild rumors travelled throughout the camp that some girls who showed a smile disappeared and were not seen again. We were not allowed to show we understood our liberation was near. Still, depression hung over us: we were on the threshold of liberation, yet we wondered if we would live long enough to see that day or would we also be among the disappeared.

One day, at dawn, when we got up for line-up as usual to get our daily work assignments, we found that the guards had disappeared. The firing of artillery sounded very close, a sign that our liberators were close by. Now, we were restricted to our barracks, and we remained full of fear.

The day of liberation was Tuesday, May 8, 1945. Toward evening we heard tanks driving into the camp’s valley. Finally, we knew these were not Germans but our liberators.

Suddenly the gate opened and a few

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tired looking Russian soldiers, with dust and dirt all over their faces, entered. With much energy, they screamed, “My vas vysvobodil.” “We are here to liberate you!” We were free to go wherever we wanted. But now that freedom had come, we were stunned. Where should we go? One of the Russian officers identified himself as a Jewish partisan (an underground fighter) from Poland. He understood our dilemma and spoke to us in Yiddish. He told us we were free, that the enemy had been beaten, and that we could travel wherever we wanted to. Then he asked us to sit down; he had something to tell us. We sat around him, and in a firm voice he said:

“Dear sisters, your liberation has come. Each one of you surely plans now to go back home to be reunited with your parents and brothers and sisters. Well, I have just come from Poland. I also went to look for my dear ones. Instead, I found rain and desolation. The cities are destroyed. The Jewish population has been annihilated. No Jewish family can be found. Polish Jewry does not exist anymore. I have wandered in dozens of Jewish towns and cities and have found nothing but desolation. No doubt your dear ones met the same fate. The only thing we have to do now is to start life anew and the only place you can do it is in the Land of Israel. Don’t depend upon the justice of the world. After such destruction of our people, they will feed you with high-sounding phrases. But nothing can compensate us for the sacrifices we made in this war. Take fate into your own hands. Join underground movements with the purpose of going to Palestine and start to build a new life.”

The words of the Jewish Russian officer were like a thunderclap upon us. The moment when we should have celebrated and danced for joy had turned to mourning. We cried bitterly on one another’s shoulders, calling to our mothers and fathers, when we realized that liberation was not the end of our suffering. It was only the start of facing the reality of the tragedies and the lonelines.

I remember that the Jewish officer stayed up all night with us to make sure that no harm would be done to us by the young soldiers. He told us we were free to go into the village the next day and see that the SS women had their heads shaved and they were put in open windows where they could be spit upon and beaten before they were taken away. Even though we had suffered a lot from their sadistic behavior, we didn’t go there to seek revenge.

Slowly the bitterness of liberation fell upon us. In spite of the words of the Russian officer, we all decided to go back to our hometowns. Perhaps we would be the lucky ones and meet a relative or a friend.

Right after the war, survivors ran from one local concentration camp to another, looking for family members. Out of my whole family, I found just my older sister, Chana, who had been in a nearby camp. We fell into each other’s arms and remained together for about another week. Then we began preparation for a different journey. After two and a half years it was time to say goodbye to the other girls. We hoped that what the Russian officer had told us was not true. Maybe some of our loved ones would be waiting for us.

The village had a train station and soldiers were being transported east. They took Chana and me with them. We traveled in open cattle trains for four weeks, with no shelter from the rain and dirt. We didn’t know where the trains were going; we just stayed on. At last, we reached our hometown, Bendzin.

No one was waiting there; they had all perished — my parents, my three brothers and their families, and my sister — that is how the liberation from tyranny began.

When Chana and I arrived, we headed for our apartment, where we had lived before going to the ghetto. The present tenant didn’t allow us to enter, even to take a mere look.

Due to severe malnutrition during all those war years, I became gravely ill. My body was covered with boils and I required a lot of medical care. When I began to recover, I would run to the train station every day, forever looking, forever waiting … maybe they would come back on this train … or maybe on the next one … maybe tomorrow. Eventually, I realized that nobody would be coming back … nobody!

After many struggles and trepidations, I wound up in a DP camp in Innsbruck, a beautiful Austrian town. I was still sick and dejected, physically and emotionally. One day, while taking a stroll, I passed an old monastery. The gates were wide open and I glimpsed inside. It was a quiet and serene island of tranquility. At that very moment a thought struck me, that the best thing for me would be to become a nun. It would have been a life away from the cruel world, a solitude I craved for, and peace for the rest of my existence. However, soon after I was moved from the DP camp and onto the road that took me to Palestine and then to the USA.

My sister and I joined an underground movement that took people illegally to Palestine and, after wandering through many countries — Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Italy — we finally boarded a ship, the Dov Hos, that sailed towards the shores of Palestine. But the British caught us, and sent us back to Italy. A few weeks later, after a 72-hour fast, we were allowed to board the Eliahu Golomb, this time as legal passengers.

It is difficult to describe the reception the Yishuv gave us. An ambulance was waiting to take me to Rambam Hospital. (During the voyage, I had caught diphtheria, a contagious disease.) We started life anew in our land, a life that gave us back human dignity and Jewish worthiness. This life slowly healed our wounds, though the scars have remained with us always. I felt I had come back home — not the home of graves but the home of Jewish life and its upbuilding — the home my parents had envisioned for themselves, for their children and for their children’s children.

Dasha Rittenberg is a self-taught, very warm and personable woman with many friends in all walks of life. She is definitely young in spirit, wise in life, and she has a great sense of humor. She has one son, Moshe, who lives in Jerusalem with his wife, nine children, and grandchildren. He is a very observant Jew and a Talmudic scholar. Dasha is a proud great-grandmother who visits her family in Israel twice a year.

She has held the same job in customer service for twenty-five years, working four days a week. During her free time Dasha likes to read and is passionate about ballet and classical music. She used to take ballet classes and had a natural talent for dance. She finds peace and relaxation in nature, lakes, and mountains. Dasha is always seeking truth and justice. Her life’s motto is “Do not do unto others what you do not want them to do to you.” (Hillel).
THE OBLIGATIONS, BURDENS AND GIFTS OF MEMORY

There’s no doubt the period I spent in the Terezin Ghetto provided the basis of my future development. One might say it shaped me. I learned to be independent and responsible, and I was given the chance to appear onstage in the children’s play “Fireflies.” What’s more, in the children’s quarters I received an education in hygiene, respect and manners. The tutors looked after us in the room where I was given a place on a three-tiered bunk. I was eight years old.

It was only later, in Israel, that Willy, who had been my tutor over there, told me how much effort he had put into persuading my mother to place my twelve-year-old sister and me in his care. That is how we came to be in Children’s House L410. It had been our good fortune to have been placed in this structured setting that kept us busy and attended to our education.

I had met Nava Shanova at Theresienstadt House at one of the annual meetings held on the first Saturday in May, the day we had been liberated in 1945 from the Nazi yoke. Nava had been the director of the ghetto performances of Fireflies. I only recently learned that the play had been staged before my time in the ghetto and that I had replaced a girl who had been sent to Auschwitz, in October 1944, in one of the last transports. I had arrived that year on the 23rd of December.

I have forgotten many things, but I remembered my director! I approached her and she was so happy! Both of us were happy! It turned out that I was one of the first of her girls that she had met after the war.

The intellectuals concentrated in Terezin ghetto were among Europe’s finest. Thanks to the theater people and the composer Karel Svenk, I was chosen to appear in the ‘musical,’ Fireflies, which was based on the book by Jan Karafiat. Nava read extracts from the book during the performance of Fireflies in March 1945. When we entered the hall, I became an eight-year-old child again! My grandchildren danced with me, and this time, I was in heaven.

DANCING AFRAID

By Vera Meisels

Last June, for my 80th birthday, my daughter, Yael, and her children Naomi, age 14, Assaf, age 10, and my son, Ofer, and his children, Roy, age 23, and Maya, age 12, held a celebration at Hotel Paris-Prague. The seven of us had been very interested in visiting my past in the Terezin Ghetto. I ordered a private tour with Pavel Batel, a researcher and expert in the history of this ghetto. Thanks to Pavel, we had an extraordinary tour. He took us to my Kinder Heim L410, where, for the first time since the end of the war, I was able to touch the original gate that I had not found in my previous visits.

But the most exciting moment came when Pavel brought the Mayor of the city to open the hall-room, where I had danced during the performance of Fireflies in March 1945. When we entered the hall, I became an eight-year-old child again! My grandchildren danced with me, and this time, I was in heaven.
characters such as fireflies and a ladybird. I was the ladybird. The many rehearsals kept us busy and filled with the joy of creativity. We knew it was actually going to happen when we were measured for our costumes. These are childhood experiences one does not forget.

Everything I had missed by force of circumstances over the two preceding years, when my mind had been blocked, was able to emerge and be fulfilled in the children’s house, where a world full of culture opened before me. I had thirsted for attention and knowledge, and all I had to do was to absorb and process. Not only had my mind been blocked, but all that had been expected of me before I arrived at the ghetto was silence — I had kept the questions choked in my heart. In any case, no one had answers, and so I didn’t persist.

Memories and associations have diverted me from the subject of my singing and dancing role on the stage of the Terezin ghetto. I can vividly remember my part as Ladybird. On my back, I had a red canvas with black dots and transparent wings. On my head, I wore a tight black hat with antennae. I think I was parent wings. On my head, I wore a tight red canvas with black dots and transparent wings. On my head, I wore a tight black hat with antennae. I think I was parent wings.

Although the words are rather optimistic, we didn’t know exactly when the war would end. The play was performed a number of times in the months before the Liberation. The tune is delightful and the composer’s name appeared on the original announcement. An entire chapter should be devoted to the great Karel Svenk, but it is beyond the scope of this writing. My excitement during rehearsals and before the performance on the 20th of March, 1945 gave me butterflies in my stomach and a dreamlike floating sensation.

We performed in a big hall, the children on the brightly lit stage and the large audience in darkness. There was much enthusiasm and, from the tremendous applause, I assume it was an outstanding performance. Like professionals, we came onstage again and again to take our bows. Then the lights came on, and what did I see? The front rows were filled with German soldiers and officers in black uniforms, with white skulls on the officers’ caps.

Here it comes! End of the performance. They’ve come to take us. After all, children aren’t productive. This was the end of us — we were going to die. This is what I had learned at the Selection. It was all a ruse! I was trembling all over. There were no parents to lean on. It was as if they had invested in us for their own amusement. Now it was over. Finished! I didn’t even get a chance to say goodbye to my mother and sister. How cold it was. Maybe it was just the fear.

I looked around to see how they would encircle us and herd us to destruction. I knew that a German in a black uniform meant disaster. A skull meant death!

My eyes were almost bursting out of their sockets as I watched the audience rising and walking out of the hall. Nava and some others came over with hugs and kisses, to praise, caress and encourage us. Everything seemed as before. It took me a long time to calm down. Until that moment, I had been poisoned for three years with the pessimism that characterizes me to this day. By that time, I had already heard it said that I was ‘going to the slaughter.’ Standing in line at the Selection, I had already heard that children, old people and mothers with small children were destined for Auschwitz — for the gas chambers.

Thus equipped, I had seen the end of the performance as a trap laid for me. The pessimism, the tension of every moment’s potential for disaster, took root in me, never to leave.

But I must not forget — the fireflies, even if only by their weak light, illuminated a path for me, for us, and gave us many moments of hope and happiness. The month of May really did come, the prophecy was fulfilled and on its eighth day the gates of the ghetto opened on freedom.

Spring! Spring in the lives of the very few children who survived.

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Vera Meisels, writer, poet and sculptor, was born in Czechoslovakia on June 11, 1936. At the age of eight, she was taken to the Theresienstadt – Terezin Ghetto. In 1949 she immigrated to Israel. Vera Studied sculpture, and has a BA from the Avni Institute. She lives in Tel-Aviv. Vera gives testimonies and lectures about her childhood during the Holocaust to the college students.

World Federation of Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust & Descendants

2017 Conference Registration

The 29th Annual World Federation of Jewish Child Survivors and Descendants will be at the Dan Hotel on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem, Israel, November 5-8, 2017. Once again, the WFJCSHD will team with GSI (Generations of the Shoah International) and KTA (Kindertransport Association) as well as the Israeli group YESH (Children and Orphan Holocaust Survivors in Israel).

This conference will include trips to the Knesset, Yad Vashem, and an optional opportunity to have a Bar or Bat Mitzvah at the Kotel. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony will take place on Wednesday, November 8, at 11 AM, after the close of the conference. It is only open to the first 100 people who register.

For further information, contact Susandubin48@gmail.com, or check the following website: http://www.holocaustchild.org.
Twenty-five years! Thank G-d we are still here! It is heartwarming to be with you today, at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Hidden Child Foundation at the Anti-Defamation League, to mourn the destruction of European Jewry. The only thing that would make today more special would be if my mother of blessed memory were here. Her family fled Poland by horse and buggy and by foot and they spent the war years homeless, hungry and cold in the northern reaches of Russia. Like many of you, she didn’t believe herself to be a survivor, but of course, she was.

The Hidden Child Foundation, and the ADL, have truly special personal connections for me. First, the ADL was my home away from home for several years when I founded and directed the Jewish Foundation for Christian Rescuers. When Rabbi Harold Schulweis — whose vision the foundation was — and I searched for a home for our foundation, we knocked on doors of several Jewish organizations. Abe Foxman not only gave us an office but he provided us with seed money, which mushroomed into being able to support 1,600 rescuers in 26 different countries. When filmmaker and activist Miriam Abramowicz’s vision to hold a gathering of hidden children in New York got too big for us at the Kestenberg International Study of Organized Persecution of Children, I once again approached Abe to afford us access to ADL’s conference personnel. He eagerly agreed. One thousand six hundred hidden children worldwide showed up on that Memorial Day, 1991.

I have been asked to address why, with so many commemorations in the twenty-first century, do Holocaust child survivors, and hidden children in particular, need their own commemoration? Do we gain anything by having this subgroup?

Are we ghettoizing ourselves by not being part of the larger communal commemoration? In order to respond to these questions some background is in order.

Most of the world did not view children as being survivors of the Holocaust. The image that most have is that of Jews spilling out of the cattle cars, selected to go either “left or right,” and the children — all of the children — selected for death. The world expected that Jewish children would not be among the wretched, skeletal, survivors.

It is estimated that only six to seven percent of the Jewish children of Europe lived through the Holocaust and experienced liberation. It is impossible to calculate how many survived. Some are still hidden. Although Jewish children had witnessed everything and lost so much before they matured, this cohort of Holocaust survivors — the children who survived — was largely ignored by their surrounding societies. Despite the huge focus on Anne Frank — the quintessential hidden child of the Holocaust — and her diary, the world did not seem to realize that there were children and teenagers who, improbably, survived genocide. They remained anonymous in the culture, and fell under the radar of the Jewish community as well.

Scholars and social workers did not pay much attention to child survivors either. Orphaned child survivors were placed in institutions. What was worse than neglect was the continued persecution of the German reparation authorities who rejected applications of child survivors because youngsters did not remember the date they were deported to a ghetto or other details. Therefore, if they did not remember, they couldn’t possibly be affected. Those who were hidden clandestinely or openly with false identifications or on the run were ineligible because they were not in a ghetto or concentration camp for 18 months.

The neglect that most of these children experienced when they were liberated resulted in complicated consequences to their identity formation and their ability to heal. The validation from others of pain and suffering enhances the potential for restoring the self. In order to heal, individuals undergo the process of mourning, which ultimately results in the channeling of feelings into a search for meaning in one’s life. For child survivors, this necessary step came very late; nonetheless, even at this late date, seventy-one years after the war, such recognition of suffering is making a difference in waning years.

Older survivors wrongly believed that those who were young during the German occupation did not remember what happened to them. But the children, even if they had not yet learned to speak, remembered very well being forced out of their houses into ghettos, or escaping in the middle of the night to hide with neighbors or total strangers. They remember changing their names and their family narratives to take on new identities, or living with other children in orphanages, convents, or Christian boarding schools; and there are those who remember deportations. When adult survivors got together with other adult survivors, the child survivors, sitting at the same table or eavesdropping on the conversation about the war, were excluded.

In 1979, when the Holocaust survivor movement came alive in the United States, it was a child survivor, Yaffa Eliach, a history professor at Brooklyn College (along with Stella Wieseltier) who started interviewing others like herself. Two years later, in 1981, Judith and Milton Kestenberg...
berg started their own interviews under the auspices of the International Study of Organized Persecution of Children, a project of Child Development Research, which today is part of the Oral History Division of the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry at Hebrew University and the National Archives of Israel, with more than 1,500 interviews worldwide. For the first time, empathetic listeners provided opportunities to help child survivors do the inner work of integration. This integration starts the process of incorporating the past into one’s identity and provides ways to mourn. This validation of pain, suffering, loss, and adaptation makes child survivors feel understood, often for the first time.

Most of the child survivors who were interviewed early on were ghetto and concentration camp survivors. Many children who were hidden did not consider themselves survivors. It is as if there was an unwritten hierarchy of suffering. Hidden children had to be convinced that they too are Holocaust survivors and that their persecution and losses are not to be undermined.

Permit me to do a bit of history.

At the World Gathering of Holocaust Survivors in Jerusalem in 1981, the second generation organized a day for the purpose of gathering and announcing a manifesto to continue Holocaust commemoration and education. At the time, the child survivors were yet an invisible group, and did not have the same collective mourning experience and catharsis. Nor did they have a voice at the American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors in Washington, DC, in 1983. In 1984 at the American Gathering in Philadelphia, Judith Kestenberg set up a table to recruit child survivors to be interviewed, and she convened a meeting for child survivors who attended the Gathering. Child survivors in California started meeting regularly, and together the east coast and west coast held a mini-conference in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, highlighted by a pajama party to make up for a lost childhood. Local groups formed nationwide as child survivors started to give oral testimonies.

Instead of remaining in a state of psychic numbness and social withdrawal, child survivors began to search for others with similar backgrounds with whom they could mourn and share, and their collective voice began to be heard. After years of being told they were too young to remember, child survivors admit there is what the psychologists would call some narcissistic gratification in telling their stories their own way, and this has happened more often in recent years. As the older survivors become incapacitated and curtail public appearances, child survivors are sought out and asked to share their stories with the world.

In the late 1970s, Myriam Abramowicz and Esther Hoffenberg directed and produced As If It Were Yesterday, a film about hidden children in Belgium. After showing her film worldwide and meeting many hidden children, Abramowicz’s mother said, “Why don’t you bring all the hidden children to my home and I’ll prepare a dinner for them?” The living room was too small for the hundreds that Myriam had shared her film with worldwide, and she continued her mother’s vision of bringing hidden child survivors together. She approached Jean Bloch-Rosensaft and me to turn her vision into a reality. With the help of Judith and Milton Kestenberg of Child Development Research, we started advertising the gathering of hidden children, and they began to meet weekly. New hidden children joined and reporters started to write about this upcoming event in New York Magazine, Newsweek, and local papers.

Hidden children sitting in dentists’ offices and hearing interviews on the radio started to come out of hiding. As had been the case with the World Gathering, this event also provided a major opportunity for communal mourning, something that is vital for survivors recuperating from historical trauma. The First International Gathering of Hidden Children gave the “children” an opportunity to mourn together in a collective voice. But first they had to accept that those they mourned were gone forever.

In each survivor’s recovery, there comes a moment of realization that loved ones are indeed dead. Elie Wiesel poignantly describes his arrival at a splendid chateau in Ecous, France, with other children from Buchenwald. Representatives of the OSE, a children’s service agency, gave them tefillin, religious books, pencils and paper. Said Wiesel, “We held our first Minha (afternoon service), and we all said Kaddish together. Though we knew it well enough, that collective Kaddish reminded us that we were all orphans.”

For all survivors of the Holocaust, mourning is complex because of multiple deaths and the chaotic, life-altering circumstances surrounding the experience. Adult survivors have their own, specific mourning process, which is often somewhat different than that of child survivors. Every child survivor has to mourn a multitude of relatives he or she knew and did not know, or knew and did not remember, in addition to foster parents and foster siblings, whom they may or may not have loved but lost, as well as the loss of priests, nuns and Christian identity that saved them and sustained them, and which they still felt very loyal to.

The Hidden Child Foundation in New York receives numerous telephone calls that ask for help in the search for lost family members. For example, a man named Wlasky called because, as a doctor, he’d looked at his father’s medical records and the blood type didn’t match his. He real
nizations had to track them down; there were numerous lawsuits in Poland and Holland as families fought to keep children who were not their own. In addition to mourning their own biological parents, many child survivors also had to mourn their foster parents. This became very complicated for those who had a surviving biological parent, or both parents, who wanted loyalty and love expressed to them and not to a stranger. They had no understanding that as a result of their pressure, their child had experienced a loss.

And now back to our question, why have a separate Holocaust commemoration for hidden children and other child survivors? It has taken many years for child survivors to obtain the validation for their losses and persecution. Being with others from a similar background during a memorial service reduces the emotional trauma of not being understood. It reduces the sense of isolation that one experienced an entire lifetime. Mourning is a very personal experience. And a historical trauma cannot be mourned alone. Those who don’t understand may ask, how can you mourn someone you did not even know? Or, how can you mourn someone you are not even certain died? Therefore, one wishes to be with others who are remembering similar tragic losses, who would understand what it means to mourn a mother or father one never knew.

A collective tragedy, the annihilation of an entire group of people is personal as well as communal, and cannot be mourned in isolation. Furthermore, it necessitates an experience of belonging — after all these years, of being told you are a survivor. It is reassuring to know that there are others who understand what you endured, not just during the Holocaust, but in subsequent years. Being with others, who share your past, means being with people who do not find you strange for hiding your ancestry, for still hoping your parents are alive, for searching in vain for clues about your identity, for still hoping your parents are alive, for searching in vain for clues about your ancestry, for using defense mechanisms that worked in time of survival but cannot be translated to peace times — for feeling rootless.

The specificity has its emotional usefulness. Not feeling legitimate for so many years has taken its toll on many child survivors, particularly the hidden children. Even with all the attention child survivors have received in recent years, there is always a possibility of being dismissed as a legitimate survivor. It should not be a competitive game. To Hitler, all Jews were the same, destined for annihilation. To trivialize one’s pain would be detrimental to the well-being of any child survivor.

For three generations, sixty years, adult Holocaust survivors were the bulk of the survivor community. Today, the demographics have changed. Child survivors outnumber adult survivors. Given the demographic reality that most living survivors are those who were children under the age of thirteen at the start of persecution, the tables have turned. Hidden children and other child survivors will be taking over the communal commemoration, and will have the opportunity to be inclusive — inclusive, that is, not just for Holocaust survivor families and their families but also for the larger Jewish community.

I believe that having a separate commemoration for adult and child survivors has become a moot point. Rather, the idea now is to include the second, third and fourth generation survivors, to insure the continuity of commemorations. The oral histories, begun so many years ago, are invaluable going forward for subsequent Jewish generations, including descendants of survivors.

After the 25th anniversary of the genesis of the Hidden Child Foundation, child survivors are now carrying the torch for themselves and for adult survivors. And it’s a reminder for them to pass the torch to all future generations of Jews, worldwide.

Passover has just ended. I thought about the passage in the Haggadah when we are asked to recall that we were once slaves in Egypt. Though we really weren’t slaves, we are asked to pretend that we were. Is this taking identification a bit too far? No. What I am asking is something just as revolutionary. To allow others to act as if they were survivors of the Holocaust. And by that, I mean that future Jewish generations, whether descendants of survivors or not, need to take on the responsibility of our collective past — just as we were all slaves in Egypt, we were all persecuted as Jews during the Nazi era.

So, in answer to the original question: there’s no need any more for demarcations between adult and child survivors. Nor between survivors and future generations. We are all one. And we need to find a way to pass this message l’dor l’dor, Just as it was controversial 25 years ago to institute a separate group for child survivors, I am suggesting another controversial group going forward — one of inclusivity of the past, present and future, just as the Jewish people have always been.

My mother Leah was a child survivor who made the best blintzes for Shavuot. My son Adam combines a profound sense of traditional Judaism with a deep commitment to social and political activism. From the coldness of Tashkent to my son’s activism on behalf of Israel and other causes, what has remained consistent from generation to generation is not what my mother suffered but the Jewish values, culture, history and faith that has sustained us, and all of you, past and present, throughout the ages. It’s very hard to hold onto faith in the face of adversity. I salute you for triumphing despite the odds, and let us continue, as a unified group, to embrace the complicated, and often crazy shared past, but one which has provided us with so much spiritual sustenance.

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Eva Fogelman is a founder of the Hidden Child Foundation/ADL, a psychologist, filmmaker and author who pioneered groups for generations of the Holocaust. She is co-director of Child Development Research, founding director of Psychotherapy with Generations of the Holocaust and Related Traumas, TIMH and Jewish Foundation for Christian Rescuers, ADL (originally Jewish Foundation for the Righteous). She is the author of the Pulitzer Prize nominee: Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust; co-editor of the newly published Children in the Holocaust and its Aftermath; and numerous other publications. She is the writer and co-producer of Breaking the Silence: The Generation After the Holocaust and an advisor to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.
"What men do today and at every moment, what they think and expect, at once becomes an origin of the future, which is in their hands. The only hope is for horror to become conscious. Nothing but the most lucid consciousness can help us. Dread of such a future may perhaps prevent it. The terrible forgetting must not be allowed to take place. [...] That which has happened is a warning. To forget it is guilt. It must be continually remembered. It was possible for this to happen, and it remains possible for it to happen again at any minute. Only in knowledge can it be prevented."

Karl Jaspers

These days it is generally accepted that the Holocaust constitutes a key event in human history. For me the Holocaust is not only part of the past, but also of the present. Here, I will deal with the memories and testimonies of the last generation of survivors in Ukraine. I turn to this issue not merely because I am a historian, and not just because I survived the Holocaust, but because the memories of this tragedy have remained with me for a lifetime. I survived in a ghetto in the Ukrainian town of Šargorod in the Vinnytsia region. Many innocent men, women and children suffered and lost far more than I did, and I wish to settle the debt I owe each one by preserving their memory according to all my powers and opportunities.

We, child survivors, could not save our families and loved ones from the flames that engulfed them. But our human duty and historic mission is to commemorate the Holocaust and its victims — to prevent the martyrs from being forgotten, to keep history from being distorted, or truth denied, and to pass on the bitter experience and the lessons of the Holocaust to new generations. This is what we, who survived the hell of the Holocaust can do, and should do, as long as we live. The freedom that was brought to us in 1945 can only be defended by recording the Nazis’ terrible crimes and by honoring the victims.

In the bloody slaughter, the Jewish people lost one third of their worldwide population, two-thirds of European Jewry, including one and a half million children. Apart from Jews, members of other groups were exposed to systematic extinction too — Slavs, Gypsies, disabled persons, homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, political opponents. Some of the worst disasters of the Holocaust occurred in Ukraine.

When Germany invaded the USSR in June 1941, about 2.7 million Jews lived in the territory of Soviet Ukraine (within the borders defined by the Molotov-Ribbentrop-Pact). In terms of the number of Jews, Ukraine stood first in Europe and second worldwide in mid-1941. During the war of extermination, which lasted three years, the National Socialists and their collaborators murdered 1.5 million Jewish men, women and children in the territory of Ukraine. It was here that the highest numbers of Jews, nearly half of all Holocaust victims — all citizens of the USSR at the outbreak of war — were extinguished; more than a quarter of all European Holocaust victims, that is, more than in all European countries, except Poland, and the rest of the territory of the USSR combined.

According to recent information by the Ukrainian historian Aleksandr Kruglov, 509,190 Jews were killed in the second half of 1941, which is about a third of all victims. In 1942, 773,700 people were killed, constituting about half of the total number of victims. In 1943, 150,000 lives were taken away. In the first half of 1944, 185,000-190,000 died. The overwhelming majority of them were murdered in the territory of Ukraine, more than 22 percent (about 340,000 people) were brought to Polish territory and murdered there — in the camps of Belzec, Auschwitz, Sobibor, and Majdanek. In Eastern Galicia, Jews were exterminated within two years; in Volyn, Podolia and right bank Ukraine, within one and a half years; in South and left-bank Ukraine, within nearly half a year.¹

The annihilation of the Jews in Ukraine was carried out mostly through mass shootings; and within one to three days, tens of thousands of people fell victim to such executions. Thus, in Kamianets-Podilskyi, from August 27 to 29, 1941, members of the "spe-
cial action force” of the Higher Chief of SS and Police in South Russia, SS senior group leader (Obergruppenführer) Friedrich Jeckeln, assisted by the Police Battalion 320, Ukrainian police and a Hungarian platoon, killed 23,600 Jews in the course of three days. Among them were 14,000 refugees who had been expelled from Hungarian-administered Carpatho-Ukraine. This was the first massacre of such dimension. As German historian Dieter Pohl points out, the massacre of Kamianets-Podilskyi occurring at the end of August 1941 was “a turning point in the Holocaust, the break with killing targetted groups of mostly Jewish males to the indiscriminate murder of entire Jewish communities.”

In Berdichev, a “major operation” was carried out on August 15, 1941, during the course of which between 12,000 and 16,000 people were shot in five trenches close to the airport. In Vinnytsia more than 10,000 Jews were shot on September 19; in Nikolaev, 6,000 Jews were murdered within three days (21st to 23rd of September); In Kherson, 8,000 people died on September 24 and 25. In Kiev, in just two days, on September 29 and 30, the Nazis shot 33,771 Jews at Babi Yar. This was the largest mass shooting on Soviet soil (neither earlier nor later, not even in Auschwitz or Treblinka have the Nazis extinguished that many Jews in one day). Practically every German-occupied area of the Ukraine has its own “Babi Yar.”

From this point on, the total annihilation of the Jewish communities in the big cities of the country began. In Dnepropetrovsk, 10,000 to 12,000 Jews (according to other sources 15,000), either shot dead or alive, were thrown into a 13 to 20-meter-deep gorge on the terrain of the Botanical Institute from October 13 to 15. “On 6 and 7 November 1941, the Judenaktion which had been planned for some time, was conducted in Rivne,” announces event message no. 143 from December 8, 1941, “where approximately 15,000 Jews were managed to be shot.”

These are some figures for massacres in the big cities and towns, all of which took place in the second half of 1941. This terrible list could be continued. It is in these months of a planned expansion of mass murders in Ukraine, that the Nazis made the decision to exterminate all European Jews.

The genocide of the Jews in Ukraine took on truly horrendous forms. They were bestially murdered in pogroms provoked by the Nazis and perpetrated by Ukrainian collaborators and anti-Semites, whose cruelty and senselessness are incomparable even in the context of the Holocaust. In Western Ukraine, 25,000 to 30,000 Jews fell victim to these pogroms. They were drowned in the Dniester and Southern Bug, burned in houses, synagogues, barracks and pigsties (as in Odessa, where, from October 23 to 25, 1941, the Rumanian occupants shot or burned alive about 35,000 Jews, or in Bogdanovka in Nikolaev region, where, 4,000 to 5,000 sick Jews were burned in two horse stables and 43,000 were shot); they were confined in Odessa’s quarries or in alabaster mines (such as in Artemovsk in Donets region), thrown alive into the coal pits of the Donbass and into wells (as in the villages of Kherson and Nikolaev regions). They died a painful death from hunger, cold, disease, torture and forced labor beyond their strength in the ghettos. Killing by means of exhaust emissions in cars were tested on Ukrainian Jews.

Hundreds of thousands of innocent people were murdered and have no graves. They turned into smoke and ashes. In Ukraine, there is not one Jewish family unafflicted by the Holocaust. The American historian Timothy Snyder emphasizes that it is our task as humanists to “turn the numbers back into people. If we cannot do that, then Hitler and Stalin have shaped not only our world but our humanity.” And if we actually imagine the tragedy of these numbers, of 1.5 million murdered in Ukraine and 6 million in Europe, and want to empathize with it, then we should remember that this was a total elimination, the extermination of an entire people.

Few could survive the strain of this hell on earth. Their sense of relief at the moment with the inescapable knowledge of the terrible fate that had befallen the huge numbers who could not be saved. The joy felt about the newly-won freedom mingled with a painful sense of shame, as described impressively by Auschwitz prisoner Primo Levi in his reflections on the Holocaust.

More than 70 years have now passed. And throughout the decades we’ve tried to understand: How did this unprecedented tragedy happen? Why couldn’t the world prevent this atrocity and the others that ensued? How can we preserve the memory of the Holocaust to prevent future genocides? Have people learned lessons that are relevant today?

The search for answers to these difficult questions has been left to us — we, who by miracle survived the horrors of ghettos and concentration camps; we, who were doomed yet defended ourselves; we, who fought for our existence; we, who retained our human face and defeated death.

Could all survivors who preserved the memory of the Holocaust overcome the horrors they had witnessed? Many could not, and in their despair to break their silence and rid themselves of their burden, they may have paid for it with their lives. Jean Amery, Tadeusz Borowski, Bruno Bettelheim, Primo Levi, Paul Celan could neither live with their memories nor speak about them.

Others have remained silent until the end, living among people who never learned about the burden that robbed them of speech. One can understand them. But to remain silent also means to doom a crime against humankind and an entire generation. Concealment is also murder, a murder of remembrance. And a murder of remembrance brings with it the risk of new disasters, as stressed by Simon Wiesenthal: “The murderers of remembrance prepare the conditions for tomorrow’s murderers.”

Yes, it is difficult to accept the challenge presented to survivors by the Holocaust. The answer of the late writer, philosopher and Nobel Peace Prize winner, former Auschwitz inmate Elie Wiesel was: “It is impossible to talk about the genocide, but one must also not conceal it.” And an opinion from Germany: “We are not assisted in this task if we or others spare our feelings,” German president Richard von Weizsäcker said on May 8, 1985 in his speech on the 40th anniversary of the end of the war.

For a long time, the inaccessibility to archival documents and the anti-Semitism of the Soviet era inhibited the confrontation with the Holocaust. In Ukraine, survivors were silent for long, not because they could not endure speaking about their past, but because the state that had left them alone with the National Socialists did not want to hear their truths. Frankly, for many years, other countries also did not show interest in exploring the history and lessons of the Holocaust. After the war, winners and losers turned away from the past and set their eyes on the future. Nobody wanted these former inmates with their histories and problems. Everyone strove to
conceal the memories.

For a long time, the Jewish world kept silent, too. The horrors of the past were too hard to grasp. There could be no rational conceptualization or explanation. “The shed blood was too fresh than for one to have been able to think over it calmly.”

No testimonies were collected from those who had survived the catastrophe. And no memories were gathered from rescuers. There was no interest in the accounts of those who had been there, seen things — in short, of anyone who knew the truth about the terrible years of occupation and genocide. Sadly, the victims of the Holocaust were not given a voice of their own until many were no longer able to make use of it.

With much delay, we have only recently turned to preserving testimonies. In Ukraine, the collection started in 1993 on the initiative of the Russian department of the Israeli Museum Beit Lohamei ha Geta’ot (“House of the Ghetto Fighters”), led by Dr. Pinchas Agmon, a former prisoner of the Warsaw Ghetto. The selection criteria for Holocaust witnesses held that they originate from places that had belonged to Ukraine after 1939. It was assumed that many of those Jews who had formerly lived in the territories of Western Ukraine (until 1939, Poland), Ukraine, Bessarabia and Bukovina (until 1939, Rumania), had immigrated to Israel and other countries.

It was our goal to collect testimonies on the Nazi genocide of Jews in those regions that very little, or nothing, was known about, and that had only recently become available for research. The project involved the cities of Kiev and Kharkov, located on the eastern border of Ukraine with Russia, Cherkasy on Dnieper, Zhitomir, Berdichev, Vinnytsia, and Tulchin as well as the regions of historic Podolia up to Shargorod, which for many generations had been the center of vital Judaism.

Another criterion was the age of the witness during the Holocaust. It was decided to record the testimonies of persons who were at least twelve years old at the time of war. Information on the life of the family before and after the war was included in their narrations. The main focus lay on the exact description of all events in the life of the witness during the Holocaust, his personal experiences and feelings. Over the course of two years, 130 audio recordings were collected from Jews who had survived the Holocaust in Ukraine.

The successful implementation of the project attracted the attention of the scientific community and the general public, and the Center for Documentation of Yale University and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington approached the organizers of the project, proposing a joint program aimed at collecting video testimonies in Ukraine. This project, carried out in summer 1994, took the organizers on a trip of more than 3,500 kilometers through the Ukraine, recording 43 video testimonies.

The results of the collection of audio and video testimonies of Jews, who had survived the Holocaust in the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine from 1941 to 1944, were presented at the IV International Conference on “Jewish History and Culture in the Ukraine” in Kiev, in September 1996, as well as published in anthologies.

We were sincerely grateful for the preservation of the memory of the catastrophe. But it was shameful and unfortunate that this task — important, necessary and timely both in scientific and human respect — had not been initiated by us, Ukrainians (Jews or non-Jews, Holocaust survivors or born after the war), but by representatives of other countries (Israel, Germany, France, USA, etc.).

Unfortunately, we were hugely delayed in adopting the task of preserving the memory of the Holocaust until the first generation of witnesses had already died. It is bitter to admit that much has been missed forever. Not all human fates or circumstances of the catastrophe can be reconstructed, nor can “the kaleidoscope of Jewish life” (Saul Friedlander) be recaptured in our country and in other European countries.

Many who were young during the war

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kind will be uttered, there will be discussions and research, but all these will be merely assumptions, because the evidence will disappear together with us. And even if something remains, if any of you survive, people will say that what you narrate is too horrible to be believed, that all this is an exaggeration of the Allied propaganda; they will not believe you, but us, and we will deny everything.”

Until the Holocaust, many could not imagine such a possibility, either during or after it happened. Many still do not believe it occurred or that it can repeat itself. In order to disperse skepticism of the Holocaust and its excesses — self-deception, indifference and injustice — strong evidence is needed, especially testimonies and memories of eyewitnesses and participants. Elena Shcherbova, who survived the hell of the ghetto and a massacre in Drobickij Jar, remarks: “That which really happened, only eyewitnesses can know and tell.”

If we preserve and pass on the duty of remembrance today, we are left with the duty of education, which will be even more relevant in the future. We know, of course, that the number of historians who want to preserve our terrible history on paper is growing. They are certainly guided by good intentions. But they will never be able to reproduce our feelings and describe the events for which we ourselves often fail to find words.

Those who found themselves in Nazi captivity, dreamed of surviving, as Primo Levi testifies, not only because they had the instinct of self-preservation, but because they also sensed the need to report on what they had suffered. They wanted to prevent a similar, future occurrence; but, mostly, they did not want their tragic history to be forgotten.

This is what the surviving witnesses who speak out in our books say, too. Through memory, they all want to hold onto every bit of their lives, as unbearable and as painful as this memory may be. Yuliya Penzyur-Veksler, who spent her childhood in the small village of Tyrlovka in Vinnytsia region, says she roamed “in attics, in trenches and pits, in the abandoned chapel behind the village, between bushes and graves of the village cemetery” after her whole family had been shot. She recalls:

“The past froze in me. I’m not going to say goodbye to it, because I have my own Babi Yar. It was in my childhood, it remains with me until the day I die. I bequeath it to my children, so that they will remember [...] All I can do to preserve the memory of my perished relatives, is to tell about them, to let their names be repeated by my children and grandchildren. My family, my relatives – this is the biography of the entire Jewish people. It is all very tragic, since it has experienced war, genocide and anti-Semitism. It has to be remembered, this is ‘our common biography’.”

The efforts of Holocaust survivors to preserve the memory of the past is also an act of resistance against Nazism. For those who were to be annihilated, who survived the madness of the catastrophe, it is an act of resistance against today’s neo-Nazis and Holocaust revisionists. It is our moral duty towards those who perished, to testify about the Holocaust. By telling about it, we convey, even if only in our small ways, the last will of the innocents who were killed.

Our books assemble authentic documents, memories of periods of life mainly associated with persecution and genocide, of times when death was the norm and life was a miracle. These people are passing on living history, the way they have experienced it and as it is imprinted on their memory. Here, undoubtedly, truth is preserved, a terrible truth that one cannot think up, that one can not even devise in fantasy.

They give the readers an understanding of something absolutely indispensable that would not be accessible by other means. Their words make the numbers of victims of the large and small cities, the towns and villages of our country come alive in flesh and blood, give them a human face. They stimulate our memory, knock on our hearts. Not to evoke hate in us, but to show how terrible hatred can be in practice. So that the human mind can recognize evil as evil and reject it. Such information is of particular importance in view of ever-proliferating neo-Nazi anti-Semitic literature, aiming at trivializing or even total denial of the disaster.

That the dark years of war and occupation still attract our attention so intensely, even after 75 years, is justified not solely by the fear of repetition (in many regions of the world there have been and still take place genocidal acts, anti-Semitism and its horrors and perversions, racism and its stupidity, religious and ethnic hatred and its dangers have not disappeared from our lives), but by the fact that many of us were affected precisely in childhood and adolescence, in the time of the formation of our character. Memories from our youth are known to carry a special emotional significance, because the experiences associated with them often determine the future life of a human being. Therefore, memories and the unforgettable feelings associated with them are so important for these people.

However, one must take into account as children and adolescents with only little experience in life, and that therefore persecution and imprisonment were regarded and processed differently in their memories from those of older survivors. Also, it is not impossible that a witness added to his life story (be it unconsciously) testimonies and episodes that do not stem from his own experience but other sources, for example, narrations of family members and other people, documentary and artistic films.

We also know that the human memory is an imperfect instrument: Arbitrarily, it saves some facts, events and moments, then suppresses others, which are often no less important. Further, special features of historical witnesses’ testimonies also include the tendency to see the past through the eyes of the present, thus not to picture the events of the past as they were perceived at the time of their occurrence, but as they are perceived today, decades later. Thereby, today’s testimonies offer not only a look at the past, but also a view from the vantage of the present, and this can prove to be a surprisingly profound and unexpected immersion into the difficulties of the relationship between history and the present.

Holocaust victims have gone through suffering and terror, the loss of relatives and loved ones, shootings, hunger, cold, diseases and a constant fear that has not disappeared even to this day. Such inhuman and super-human shock and mental anguish that impacts on their emotions would not fail to appear. Their view of the truth is subjective in any case. An involuntary distortion of the truth, which is not less harmful than a deliberate falsification, cannot be excluded. Not all details are accurate. Some are vague, and decades of silence

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years have left or are leaving rapidly. They could have told us the precise particulars and details of people, places and events, of the life and death of Jews in ghettos and camps. They could have spoken, not only of cruelties and suffering, but also of the various forms and methods of everyday resistance to German plans of a “final solution to the Jewish question.”

We have missed the time, and we have robbed ourselves. All this can repeat itself if we forget the Holocaust, if we do not speak out the whole truth about every human being, be it the executioner or the victim, the passive observer or the treacherous collaborator or the “Righteous Among the Nations.”

One has to face the historical truth as a whole, and in doing so, we must not omit the difficult, painful questions regarding the cooperation of a certain part of Ukrainian society with the National Socialists, the collaboration and anti-Jewish actions of Ukrainian nationalists, who, as Ukrainian historian Jaroslav Hrycak notes, wanted to see the future of Ukraine as “free of Jews.”

Equally, one must not omit the bright side of history, which official historiography has concealed: the role played by Ukrainians in helping and rescuing Jews. Their actions were probably suppressed, because the courage of these people was also an accusation against the local pogrom makers, executioners and police, as well as against the passive, indifferent spectators. It proved that even in the darkness of the Holocaust one could make a choice other than wordlessly obeying or cooperating with a criminal regime — one could also remain a decent person.

The first Ukrainian book containing declarations and reminiscences of the victims of the catastrophe, “We are the only survivors: Testimonies and Documents,” was published in 1999, when the Ukrainian people commemorated the 55th anniversary of the country’s liberation from fascist invaders. In 2005, the book was translated into English. Already one year earlier a German translation had been published and been met with great interest. Together with my friends and colleagues, Margret and Werner Müller from Cologne, who published the book in Germany, we presented it in many cities in Germany and Switzerland.

Scientific research has continued: between 2006 and 2008 we published the memories of Jews who survived in ghettos, labor or concentration camps in the territories of Ukraine occupied from 1941-1944, in the three-part work “Życi w smierci w okucho Cholostok” [Life and Death in the Era of the Holocaust].

The President of the European Jewish Congress and President of the Committee of the World Holocaust Forum (Forum “Let my people live”), Vyacheslav Kantor, who supported the publication of the book, wrote: “Unlike other peoples in the occupied territories, Jews had not the slightest chance to survive. There were for them no rules that one would have been able to keep in order to survive. The testimonies and memories that have been collected in the three-volume work are for us of great value not only from the scientific and historical point of view. They serve the current and future generations as a reminder of the crimes of National Socialism. We all should remember that silence might be dangerous. The tragedy of the Holocaust has shown the catastrophic consequences which the unresponsiveness of the population towards hostilities against people with respect to their nationalism, race or religion can have.”

Together with Werner Müller, we have prepared a German edition of these books, which hopefully can be presented to the public soon. Finally, the first volume of a new, presumably last two-part work of memories was printed in December 2012 in Kiev.

With each passing day, the significance of this material grows because soon we will no longer have the opportunity to speak to living witnesses. Only their knowledge can contribute to closing the still-existing gaps in recent history. Where there are blanks rather than facts, the doors are wide open to distortions and falsifications. Unfortunately, one can clearly observe that the more the witnesses and victims of the Holocaust vanish, the more the deniers of the Holocaust proliferate.

Memories of Nazi victims present an irreplaceable source in a situation where the traces of the crime and the witnesses have been destroyed, credible documentary material is missing and many archives linked to the catastrophe are blocked. No historical archive, movie or book can reflect the agonizing experiences of survivors as vividly as their personal accounts. As Israeli President Shimon Peres stressed, “It is precisely their heart-rending memories and stories, which are a guarantee that no one can distort history or deny the truth of the Holocaust. The survivors’ voices retain the living memory of the victims of the Holocaust and do not allow for the dark sides of the past to be erased from history. The voices of those who emerged alive from the Holocaust unite our collective consciousness. It is thanks to them we remember the innocent victims. Their stories help us remember. And never to forget. Neither today nor in the future.”

Beside the recording of deaths, the documentation of life during the Holocaust has only recently also become accessible to us, primarily due to survivors’ testimonies. We now know that not all Jews were murdered during the first months of the war in Ukraine. Tens of thousands of them survived under Nazi occupation for a year, in some cases for up to two years, and a small number in Transnistria and some other places even escaped death. This requires an examination of their biographies and survival strategies.

Recently, discussions in scientific and social circles have become the object of political speculations of Nazi and anti-Semitic forces. Those who deny the Holocaust as a historical fact (calling themselves “revisionists,” a scientific-sounding designation) refuse to allow any validity to the memories of the victims.

Incidentally, information about the Holocaust had elicited disbelief among contemporaries as the events took place. Representative of American Jewry, member of the Supreme Court of the United States and personal friend of the President, Felix Frankfurter, reacted to Jan Karski’s account of how the Germans put their plan for the total extermination of Jews into practice in Poland as: “I am unable to believe you.” The truth seemed to be too horrible.

This is exactly the reaction the Nazis had expected from the beginning. Many who managed to survive remember the cynical pleasure that SS members employed while reminding prisoners of the disbelievers their narrations would meet: “However this war may end — we have already defeated you in any case; you will all be exterminated, so that there will be no witnesses left, and if one does survive, then nobody will believe him anyway. Perhaps suspicions of any
have washed details from the “banks of memory” like waves. Everything that has reached the surface of the memory, has been unconsciously wrapped into a veil of fantasy. Myths and stereotypes that have prevailed in society for a long time, emerge and solidify, become something unchangeable.

It is not surprising that the witnesses do not always remember the experiences of the past the way new historical research describes them. In connection with this Pierre Nora’s observation is interesting:

“Even if memory could not guarantee the truth, it has guaranteed accuracy. What is new and connected to the greatest disaster of the era — the extension of the life span, of the living presence of the past — is the pursuit of an even ‘truer’ truth than is the historical truth: the truth of a living commemoration of what was suffered through.”

All these circumstances have to be taken into account when looking at the past that has not yet lapsed, that still aches, and around which so many discussions, fights, conflicts and battles revolve.

We have assembled in our books the memories of different people who now live far away from each other (in different cities, countries and continents), but who during the war were at the same place at the same time. Each of them reports the same events, but in very different ways. Usually, facts are not distorted in the process, but the account of details, the event logic, the focus and the numbers vary, depending on the personality of the respective narrator, his education, his value system, his intellect and the nature of his world view. Each of them has his own history. Nevertheless, it always amazes us that the similarities come to the fore to form the collective memory.

It is time to pause and reflect, what and how we commemorate today, whether we fulfill our responsibility for history. As German President Richard von Weizsäcker said in his speech on the 40th anniversary of the end of war: “Remembering means recalling an occurrence honestly and undisputedly so that it becomes a part of our very beings. This places high demands on our truthfulness.”

Memory and history resemble each other and yet are different. But although individual recollection and memory do not equal the level of historical interpretation, of a scientific reconstruction of the past, but merely lead to the threshold of an understanding of history, it is still impossible to understand the past and the present without them. They do not allow to delete the past, adding new information and expanding the historical horizon.

The problem is to check the information received from witnesses in such a way that the assessments made on their basis come as close to the truth as possible, that is, to take into account the totality of all circumstances (causal relationships), under which one or the other event has happened. This purpose requires other sources of information that allow a thorough and objective comparative analysis.

Honoring the memory of Holocaust survivors means not only to preserve it, but also to assess, analyze, contextualize it, to bring to mind the whole problem of the accompanying circumstances, and, using historical-scientific research, to reconstruct that world from which they were torn by force and which has mostly ceased to exist together with them. In this way, it is necessary to anchor memory in the collective memory.

This is our duty. And we should fulfill it because “without memory every people will lose its roots, its experience and its chance to continue living” as Jewish historian Simon Dubnov, who was murdered on December 8, 1941 in Riga by the Germans, wrote.

But we want to continue living. ■

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Zabarko is a university professor with a post-graduate degree from the History Institute of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. He is a senior researcher at the History Institute and the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, head of the social department and coordinator of the Joint Distribution Committee’s Holocaust programme, director of the Kyiv Institute of Social and Community Workers, chairman of the All-Ukrainian Association of Jews and former ghetto and Nazi death camp prisoners, head of the scientific and educational centre Memory of the Catastrophe, vice president of the International Union of Jewish community associations and former Nazi death camp prisoners, and a member of the Supervisory Board of the International fund Mutual Understanding and Tolerance.

Boris Zabarko is an honored worker of science and technology of Ukraine. He has received the prize of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and the European Brain-Brith award of recognition for immortalizing the tragic memory of the Holocaust. Dr. Zabarko is the author of more than 230 books and articles published in Austria, the UK, Hungary, Germany, Israel, Russia, USA, and Ukraine.

2. R. Right bank Ukraine (Ukrainskij Pravoberežny Ukraina, Polish: Ukraina Prawobrzezhna, Russian: Pravoberežnaja Ukraina) is the historic name of the part of Ukraine situated on the right hand (western) side of the Dnieper, which remained with Poland-Lithuania until 1793 after the truce with Russian tsardom in 1667, as opposed to left bank Ukraine.

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During the winter of my first school year in La Hulpe, I required the care of a dentist in Brussels who specialized in orthodontics. On rare occasions, either Madeleine or Sarah, my cousins living in hiding with their parents and mine, came to visit me in La Hulpe — always on a Sunday, of course. An appointment was made with Dr. Biot. My instructions were to take the train from La Hulpe at 4:30 PM on the day preceding the actual visit: I was to go to the house at the Chaussée d’Alsemberg, where I would spend the night. My appointment with the dentist was at 10 AM on the following day, after which I would return to La Hulpe.

I had neither seen nor spoken with my parents for six months. Even the anticipation of painful dental work did not lessen my excitement: being with my mother and father after such a long separation meant everything to me.

La Hulpe to Brussels was a mere thirty-minute train trip. The train was to reach Brussels at 5 PM, which would allow me to arrive at my parents’ hiding place by 6 PM, if not before. We would have the entire evening and night to be with each other.

Curfew for Jews was 8 PM; 10 PM for the general public. At 10, all public transportation stopped, meaning curfew violators would have to travel on foot, easily spotted by German patrols. My trip was arranged so that I would arrive in Uccle long before either curfew.

On the train, I sat next to a little girl who appeared to be two or three years younger than me. Her parents, seated across from us, talked with their daughter. I remained silent.

Suddenly, a message blared from the train loudspeaker. The train was coming to a stop because of an air raid alert and would not move until the alert was lifted. I looked at my watch as the train slowed to a halt. It was 4:45 PM. We were just 15 minutes away from Brussels.

The train remained motionless for hours. We could hear the sounds of airplanes overhead and the distant thud of bombs exploding. I kept looking at my watch. Time crawled. We passed the 8 PM Jewish curfew. In spite of being seated in a well-heated train I suddenly felt very cold and very scared. Was I going to be able to reach my parents before the final 10 PM curfew? What would I do if we were still in this train at 10 PM?

I knew there was a permit to allow people with reasons the Germans found appropriate to be out after curfew so they could reach their respective destinations — work or home — in Brussels or its outskirts. The Germans would ask to see an identity card before issuing such a permit. We would be taken from the train to a German police station to obtain that necessary permit.

Finally, at about 9 PM, we heard the all-clear alert siren and the train started. It slowly made its way to Gare de Luxembourg, arriving about 9:30 PM. Everyone stood up to get off the train. I simply could not move. I knew my life was over. I didn’t have an identity card of my own. When

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asked for my name, which name should I use? I could not divulge my parents’ address for obvious reasons. I could not give out any of my parents’ Christian friends’ addresses even though I knew what those addresses were. I could not risk having them arrested for helping a Jewish child.

I just sat there. A wave of nausea hit me. In spite of my wool gloves, my hands were ice cold. Like any school child, I had been looking forward to summer — and my twelfth birthday in July. Now I was certain there would be no birthday celebration for me, ever again. I closed my eyes and remained seated.

I suddenly felt the hand of the little girl’s father on my shoulder. Then he lifted me off my seat, offered me his other hand and said, “Tonight I have two daughters. Just join us and say nothing. I will do all the talking.” I obeyed blindly. I could not think, agree or disagree. I just did what he had told me to do, to “join us.” I did not say one single word.

After we got off the train, the mother of the little girl took my hand as she held her daughter. We followed the father, who was going to file whatever was needed to obtain a permit to be out after curfew and then stood in line with other passengers from the train outside the building where those permits were issued. When we got inside the father showed his papers to an official who didn’t even look at them before issuing the permit we needed.

There was a line of cars — taxis — awaiting the arrival of permit holders coming out of the building. Had I been holding my breath the entire time? I walked out with my “new family,” feeling like a rigid robot. We got into one of the taxis, which took us to the family’s home.

We entered their house and went to their kitchen. We sat at a small round table and the mother served a long-delayed supper, needed after so many hours in the train. I do not recall what it was, because I was absolutely unable to eat. I just sat, numb, in total silence. Somehow, I assumed that my silence would ensure my safety and the safety of my hosts. The mother and father did not force me to eat, or speak.

After they finished their meal, the mother took her daughter and me to her daughter’s bedroom, where there were two single beds. She gave me a very large pair of pajamas and put us both to bed. She turned off the light, wished us happy dreams and left the room.

I could not sleep. I just lay in bed, thinking of my parents’ worries. All they knew was that I had simply disappeared. There was no way for me to contact them, since there wasn’t a phone in the house. Even if they had attempted to call the Sisters from the public phone across the street before the general curfew, it would have been useless. The Sisters would not have given out any type of information to any

My mother opened the door, followed by my father and my uncle and aunt, all rushing down the staircase. My joy at seeing my parents was intense. We hugged each other, laughed and cried a bit. Everyone was talking at the same time but, eventually, they listened to my story about what had happened to me during the last 20 hours.

We all agreed that we would personally and thankfully recognize such fearless intervention on that family’s part at some later date, during better times. Then I went to the dentist.

Editor’s note – After Liberation Day in September, 1944, Simone went back to the street where she had spent that night, but could not identify the house. Simone immigrated to America, married, and as Simone Berman, put the war into the attic of her memories. Her husband died, and in 1996 Simone went to Brussels to visit relatives. She found the order of nuns who had since ceased operating the school, and over tea learned that she had not been the only Jewish child being hidden, but was one of 40. Moreover, the nuns had constructed a safe room where they could hide their Jewish students in the event of a German inspection, a room which they “routinely” used for Under
ground operatives and as a way-station for Allied flyers who had been shot down and were making their way back to safety. Simone reported all of this to Yad Vashem, which conducted a 15-year inquiry and in 2011 honored the Mother Superior and the order of nuns as Righteous Among Nations.
“schooling” that gave them a semblance of normality and contributed to their lives in other ways.

The lessons learned from this research can certainly be applied to many contemporary conditions of war and adversity.

CHILDREN IN THE HOLOCAUST AND ITS AFTERMATH: Historical and Psychological Studies of the Kestenberg Archive
Edited by Sharon Kangissser Cohen, Eva Fogelman, and Dalia Ofer
Bergahn, New York, Oxford, March 2017

The testimonies of individuals who survived the Holocaust as children pose distinct emotional and intellectual challenges for researchers: as now-adult interviewees recall profound childhood experiences of suffering and persecution, they also invoke their own historical awareness and memories of their postwar lives, requiring readers to follow simultaneous, disparate narratives. This interdisciplinary volume brings together historians, psychologists, and other scholars to explore child survivors’ accounts. With a central focus on the Kestenberg Holocaust Child Survivor Archive’s over 1,500 testimonies, it not only enlarges our understanding of the Holocaust empirically but illuminates the methodological, theoretical, and institutional dimensions of this unique form of historical record.

Sharon Kangissser Cohen is the Director of the Central Archive of the Jewish People at the National Library of Israel and the Director of the Diane and Eli Zborowski Centre for the Study of the Holocaust and Its Aftermath at Yad Vashem. She is, in addition, a lecturer at the Rothberg School for international students at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her most recent book, Testimony and Time: Survivors of the Holocaust Remember, was published in 2015 by Yad Vashem.

Eva Fogelman is the co-director of the International Study of Organized Persecution of Children and the founding co-director of Generations of the Holocaust and Related Traumas. She is the author of the Pulitzer Prize–nominated Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust and writer and co-producer of the award-winning documentary Breaking the Silence: The Generation after the Holocaust.

Dalia Ofer is the Max and Rita Haber Professor Emerita of Holocaust and East European Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her book Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel (Oxford, 1992) received the Ben Zvi award and the National Jewish Book Award. She is the co-editor of Holocaust Survivors: Resettlement, Memories, Identities (Bergahn, 2012) and the editor of Israel in the Eyes of the Survivors (Yad Vashem, 2014). Her most recent work is The Clandestine History of the Kovno Jewish Ghetto Police (Yad Vahsem, 2016).
the harmonious compounding of these two extremes that got them through the turbulence of American life and the difficulties of making aliyah to Israel. The Austerns had a pioneer spirit: they were one of the first Orthodox families to settle in Monsey, NY, and the first Orthodox family of the Anglo community of Savoyon–Israel.

The Austerns had six children and more than a hundred grand-and great-grandchildren. They finally moved to Modiin Illit, where Samuel Ezra Austern za’al, the family’s patriarch, passed away in 2015.

This book is an amazing and epic collection of trials and tribulations experienced by the author and her family — in concentration camp and in the States. Told with zest and humor, Esther also describes her journeys through American life. Her ups and downs will make you cry and laugh with her. But be reassured, thanks to the Almighty, all ends well.

Reviewed by Roland Teichholz, Israel (for bio, see For a Few Crumbs of Matzo on page 12.)

**A BOOK BY ME PROJECT**

*By Deb Bowen*

A Book By Me began as my dream to preserve stories of Jewish survivors. I thought of having students interview them, then write, edit and illustrate books about their lives. This idea resulted in an educational tool teachers say their students love — books written by children for children.

Today, there are three series: Holocaust, Human Rights and Heroes. Since its conception in 2003, hundreds of students have participated in the writing process. Dozens of the books in our series are now available on Amazon. We invite young authors (18 and younger) to find an important story to tell. Writers’ guidelines are available at www.abookbyme.com. Each project requires a writing coach to guide the student(s) and their instructions are online as well.

Our first book was about three women, each named Esther, who lived in the Quad Cities. A Walk With Esther reads much like a Chicken Soup for the Soul book with different stories in each chapter. I am proud of my young authors and artists, and those who have bravely told their stories so that children in the next generations can learn about history, compassion, tolerance and more.

*Edwarda Opatowska Saved My Life*

is the story of Esther Stiller who was a Jewish teenager when the Nazis invaded her village in Poland. A few days before, Esther received a package from America containing a store-bought dress. After her mother altered it for her, she went to show it off to her girlfriends. A Christian friend invited her to spend the night, and when Esther walked home the next morning, she saw the Jews being rounded up. She instinctively knew not to go home. Instead, she joined a line of young Poles preparing to travel by train to be slave laborers in Germany. Her quick thinking saved her life. Esther told the Nazis that her papers had been destroyed and gave them the fake name Edwarda Opatowska. Esther spent the rest of the war hiding in plain sight, but in constant fear of discovery. After the war, she immigrated to America with her American soldier husband, who had been a witness to the liberation of Dachau. Esther shared her story with young readers. A German foreign exchange student named Laura Kase provided the artwork that brought Esther’s story to life.

*A Nazi Loved Me* is the story of Marguerite Mishkin who was a small child in Belgium during the war. Her mother arranged for her and her sister to live with a Catholic family who owned a café frequented by Nazi soldiers. Not knowing she was Jewish, the soldiers were always kind to Marguerite. One soldier brought her gifts and held her on his lap while eating his lunch. One day he remarked that he “could smell a Jew ten miles away” while holding her on his lap. Marguerite and her sister survived the war, but her parents did not. Both girls were adopted by a rabbi and his wife who lived in Chicago. They had a good life and Marguerite became a successful teacher. Today she speaks frequently about her experiences during the war. One of Marguerite’s greatest hopes is that “young people will feel good about themselves so that they won’t pick on other people.”

**French Books**

Reviewed by René Goldman

**MAMAN GRÈTE**

*Une éducatrice venue d’Allemagne pour des orphelins de la déportation en France et autres portraits de famille*

*By Michel Stermann*

Edilivre, Saint-Denis, 190 pages, 32,50 euros

The subtitle of the book reveals its content, which is the story of a young German educator, who came to France after the war to care for orphans of the Shoah. In addition, the book contains photographic and descriptive portraits of the families of both parents of the author.

Michel Stermann’s mother: Grète (Margrethe) Meitmann was born in 1923 in the northern German port city of Kiel, where a sailors’ mutiny in 1918 sparked the revolution, which ended the reign of the Kaiser and inaugurated the Weimar Republic. Grète’s father, a police officer, was the regional leader of the German Social-Democratic Party. Both parents and grandparents were devoted Socialists.

In 1927 the family moved to Hamburg and, eventually, to Berlin. In 1946 the young and eager pedagogue Grète took part in an international seminary in Switzerland, where she met and fell in love with Remy Stermann, a young Polish Jewish survivor of Auschwitz. The two settled in France, where they devoted themselves to caring for orphans of the

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Shoah raised in children’s homes of two Jewish organizations: first, the OSE, and then for several years the UJRE’s Commission Centrale de l’Enfance (CCE). The principal homes of the CCE in which Remy and Grète served were Andresy and Livry-Gargan. I was raised in these two homes and, even though I did not happen to live in them at the same time as Remy and Grète, I felt particularly excited to read about their lives and activities there. Michel Stermann intended “Maman Grète” to be “a monument to the memory of my mother,” as he put it. The book is penned in the form of a long, affectionate letter of a son to a beloved mother he has scarcely known, since he was little more than one year old when she died at age 29, probably by her own hand, as she was bipolar, prone to depressions, although an accident was not ruled out.

Remy married again, a woman who bore the same name, albeit in its Provençal form, Magali. She became Maman Magali, a good mother whom Michel accepted, but his sister Catia, several years older, did not. A rebellious child, resentful of her father, she grew into a troubled adult who committed suicide at the age of 35. Nevertheless, the absence of Maman Grète always troubled Michel: he had been denied the knowledge of why and how his natural mother died, and he had to abide the heavy silence that the family had clamped down on the subject. She was never mentioned in conversations, and Michel did not dare to pain his father who had suffered so much by questioning him. As an adult, he eventually pieced together the story of his mother’s life by lengthy and laborious research in family archives, diaries, and Grète’s letters, art work and personal papers.

In the process, he reconstructed the history of his grandparents, great-grandparents, uncles and aunts. This captivating and deeply moving book is one illustration among many of the ways in which the Shoah forever impacted not only its survivors, but also the generation that followed, sons and daughters born years after the war.

NOUS ÉTIIONS DES BÉBES CACHÉS
(We Were Hidden Babies)

Récits à l’ombre de la Shoah

By Adeline Fohn & Henriette Englander
Préface par Serge Tisseron

The 25th anniversary issue of The Hidden Child, published last year, bore the title “Infant Survivors of the Holocaust: The Last Survivors.” This book deals with the same category of survivors. At the time of liberation, few — if any — had yet emerged from the age that a child retains consistent memories. Nevertheless, they bear all the consequences of trauma.

Fohn and Englander, two Belgian clinical psychologists, were themselves hidden babies during the Shoah. Their study of a dozen cases of babies hidden in Belgium includes accounts of their own fates and that of their parents, and exposes the infants’ troubled paths through life. Their scientific research powerfully refutes the notions that, since babies have no memories, they could not suffer, could not remember being separated from their parents, and in many cases, mistook their caregivers for their parents.

The authors contend that a baby is no passive being; he is definitely affected by disturbing events. Even before he acquires language, he becomes an actor, bonding with his mother, recognizing other adults, particularly his father. Brutal separation and sudden change of environment are detrimental to his learning ability and shatters his sense of security.

Children that were passed from hand to hand in a succession of hiding places and through changes of identity were particularly traumatized, developing anti-social attitudes as they developed, and suffering as adults because of an inability to attach themselves.

Anxiety and distress experienced by parents was borne by fetuses in their mothers’ wombs. Merely imagining what their parents suffered when they were forced to give them up to strangers or institutions was troubling enough for these “last witnesses.” Infant amnesia did not preclude pain: what they sensed impacted their future development. As adults, they became vulnerable to depression. Infants whose parents did not survive the Shoah were often registered after the war under the names of their caregivers, never learning their true identity, or discovering it late in life.

The consequences of their trauma are at times reflected within their children, born long after the end of the Shoah. While child-survivors asserted in the 1990s that their distinctiveness from adult survivors, those who were babies during the Shoah felt themselves completely excluded, because they were unable to verbalize or concretize their traumas.

The authors conclude that “hidden babies” can overcome their emotional difficulties and construct their selves through encounters with good persons, notably sensible professional psychologists, intellectual and artistic activities, and identification with Jewish culture.

CORRECTIONS

In René Goldman’s review of Face au miroir sans reflet by Charles Zelwer in the 2016 issue, Vol. XXIV, page 40. Prof. Goldman erroneously stated that Mr. Zelwer’s younger son committed suicide. In fact, the attending physician concluded that the young man’s death had been caused by a severe epileptic seizure. Also, though Mr. Zelwer’s elder son is afflicted by schizophrenia, Mr. Zelwer, himself, never had this ailment. Mr. Zelwer acknowledges only a condition of neurosis, now cured, due to earlier problems of identity resulting from his wartime experiences as a “hidden child.” Finally, Charles Zelwer emphasizes his daughter is resoundingly normal — hence no need for modifying italics.
CEUX QUI RESTENT
(Those Who Remain)
By David Lescot
Entretiens avec Wlodka Blit-Robertson et Paul Felenbok
NRF Gallimard, Paris, 2015, 122 pages

As the subtitle indicates, the book is a record of dialogues held by David Lescot (prolific French playwright and musician, laureate of the Grand Prix de Littérature Dramatique 2008) with a woman and a man. The woman: Wlodka Robertson, lives in London; the man, Paul Felenbok, lives in Paris. The two are cousins, who as children were miraculously extracted from the Warsaw Ghetto: Wlodka was pulled over the walls, Paul was smuggled out through the sewers.

The inspiration to write this book came to David Lescot during the course of a conversation on a public bench, in Lille, with the daughter of Paul Felenbok, Veronique. Thereafter, Lescot met Paul and Wlodka and interviewed them, recording their stories as they narrated them in response to his questions. He made no attempt to compose a work of literature and characterizes his text as “subjective and objective at the same time” – subjective, because the interviewees narrated their stories in the first person, and objective in the sense that Lescot recorded facts and events in a factual, almost unemotional, manner.

The families of Paul and his brother, and of Wlodka and her twin sister, were related, and they lived in the same building on Warsaw’s Leszno Street. Paul’s father was a jeweller, Wlodka’s father was one of the leaders of the Bund (Jewish Social-Democratic Party). In their homes, they spoke Polish, rather than Yiddish. Forced out of their fairly comfortable homes into the slums of the ghetto, the two families experienced gnawing poverty, distressing living conditions, and the terrors of the round-ups for the Treblinka-bound transports. After their rescue from the ghetto Paul and his brother were hidden for a while, amazingly in the house that concealed the broadcasting station of the Polish underground resistance. Wlodka and her sister were sheltered by a succession of Polish families, beginning with one that lived across the street from the Warsaw Ghetto.

After the Liberation Paul lived in a Jewish children’s home in Lodz. In 1946 he was brought to France, where he and I were companions in the same CCE children’s homes, beginning with the Denouval Manor in Andrésy. Stimulated by the ambitions that his elder brother nurtured in him, Paul made a remarkable ascent to professional distinction: his engineering and scientific studies in Paris and Berkeley were crowned by promotions to astrophysicist at the Paris observatory, and member of the scientific team in charge of the Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope atop Hawaii’s highest volcano, Mauna Loa. It is worth noting that the current president of the Observatoire de Paris is one of Paul’s former graduate students.

Throughout his life, Paul refused to speak in public about what he had endured as a child in the Warsaw Ghetto. But as the 70th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising approached, along with his 79th birthday, Paul Felenbok accepted the opportunity offered him by David Lescot to break his lifelong silence.

Lescot’s play CEUX QUI RESTENT met with considerable acclaim not only on the Paris theater scene, but also when it was performed, with English subtitles, at Princeton University and New York University in September 2016.

FILM

REMEMBER US: THE HUNGARIAN HIDDEN CHILDREN
A documentary about the hidden children of The Holocaust, 2017, 2h 29min

Director: Rudy Vegliante
Writers: Holly Vogler (adaptation), John T. Wright (adaptation)

“Remember Us,” a documentary filmed by Green Leaf Productions, is about four Jewish children who were hidden in Hungary during the Nazi occupation. Their experiences show the various ways in which their lives were saved, often with the help of some Righteous Christians, or even in one case, by the Nazis themselves. Evi Blaikie revisits her hiding place in the countryside with her granddaughter. Marika Barnett, Susan Bendor and Gabor Vermes, who had remained in Budapest, recall their harrowing experiences and narrow escapes during that terrible time. All four met in New York City at the first International Gathering of the Hidden Child in 1991, and later formed a group known as The Hungarian Hidden Children of New York. The film is based on their book, “Remember Us,” published in 2010. The film received an Emmy Award and various other prizes.

René Goldman is a graduate of Columbia University and a retired professor of Chinese history at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. He is a native of Luxembourg and a child-survivor of the Shoah in Belgium and France. René has published his own biography, A Child on the Move: Memoirs of a Child-Survivor of the Holocaust.
I was born Jeanne Brodmann in Belgium in 1940 to immigrant parents, who had arrived from Germany, though they were originally from Poland. They first settled in Antwerp and then moved to Schaerbeek, from where they were sent to the transit camp of Malines and deported to Auschwitz in January 1944.

From the little I know, my parents left me with Gentiles before being deported. When I became old enough to understand, I felt very alone and always believed I was the sole survivor on my father’s side of the family. In 1946, an uncle on my mother’s side, who had gone to the U.S. in 1939, found me listed as a survivor and brought me to live with his family in New York. Because I did not speak English, I first stayed for half a year with a very kind family named Levkowitch, who spoke French with me. When I had learned sufficient English, I moved back across the street to live with my aunt and uncle.

In 1960 I came to Israel to a Kibbutz to study Hebrew. Here I met some girls my own age with whom I became close friends. During this time, we toured Israel and spent Shabbat in Meron, where I met my husband. We settled in Meron and had three children, but tragically my husband was killed in the Six Day War. I struggled to run our farm, yet I was able to raise a lovely family. Today I have many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

On Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Memorial Day), May 10, 2016, I was watching the Yad Vashem commemoration on television. The major speaker for the Lighting of the Six Candles was a woman by the name of Zehava Roth, (a sole survivor on her father’s side) who mentioned that she was born to Moshe and Chana Brodmann. After the program, I called a close friend who had also heard the name Brodmann, and she said she was acquainted with Zehava.

The following day my daughter Ita called Zehava and explained who she was, adding that her mother’s maiden name was also Brodmann. It was revealed that both fathers had been born in the village of Vishnitz in southern Poland. No other details were available, and no connection had yet been made. However, Zehava told Ita that in Jerusalem there was a Yeshiva called the Galicana Collel, which, before September 1939 had been supported by the Brodmann brothers.

Ita paid a visit to this collel in Meir Shar’im in the hope of finding a connection between my father’s family and Zehava’s. Ita did not find any connection here either but did notice that large donations had once been sent every month from the Brodmann brothers.

It was then suggested that I contact the International Tracing service of the Red Cross to perhaps find more information from their archives. This was done with the help of an MDA representative in Israel, Susan Edel, and within 4 weeks, on June 10, a reply was received from the Belgian Red Cross. Now I was in possession of my grandparents’ names — Avner and Leah. This same friend, who knows Zehava Roth, offered to call her to ask if she knew the names of her grandparents.

Imagine, Zehava gave her grandparents’ names as Avner and Leah — the same as my grandparents, confirming that the two fathers H’YD were brothers! Zehava didn’t even know that her father had had an older brother, whose name was Hirsch, since he had left Vishnitz before Zehava was born. All of a sudden, Zehava and I became real first cousins!

The first telephone call between us was very exciting and we arranged to meet on June 21, 2016, with her children and mine. The Red Cross representative from MDA, Susan Edel, also came. At this meeting, old photos were brought to compare fathers and other family members. An atmosphere of deep emotion prevailed.

Now we have coffee together and call each other before Shabbat each week. After more than 70 years we found each other!