DESPITE ALL ODDS, THEY SURVIVED, PERSISTED — AND THRIVED
When the mass slaughter of Jews ended, the remnants’ sole desire was to go back to ‘normalcy.’ Children yearned for the return of their parents and their previous family life. For most child survivors, this wasn’t to be. As Eva Fogelman says, “Liberation was not an exhilarating moment. To learn that one is all alone in the world is to move from one nightmarish world to another.”

Anna Rabkin writes, “After years of living with fear and deprivation, what did I imagine peace would bring? Foremost, I hoped it would mean the end of hunger and a return to school. Although I clutched at the hope that our parents would return, the fatalistic person I had become knew deep down it was improbable.” Maren Friedman, a mischling who lived openly with her sister and Jewish mother in wartime Germany states, “My father, who had been captured by the Russians and been a prisoner of war in Siberia, returned to Kiel in 1949. I had yearned for his return and had the fantasy that now that the war was over and he was home, all would be well. That was not the way it turned out.”

Rebecca Birnbaum had both her parents by war’s end. She was able to return to school one month after the liberation of Brussels, and to this day, she considers herself among the luckiest of all hidden children. In Hungary, Eva Nathanson had both wartime and postwar struggles, yet she too considers herself blessed for having lived a “relatively successful and productive life.”

The least fortunate among us are those who have no prewar memory, and worse, no knowledge of identity. This is so for Dr. Wladyslaw Sidorowicz, whose daughter Izabella Nagle continues her father’s ongoing search for his parents.

Yet, despite all odds, all survivors featured here persisted, and thrived!

They had no choice!

Michel Jeruchim states in the prologue of his memoir, “I have lived much longer than those early tumultuous years, but their effects have never escaped me. They loom large in my rational and irrational thoughts, in my interpretation of events, and in my view of the world. Yet, they have not subdued me, or controlled every aspect of my life. After immigrating to the U.S, I adapted because I had to adapt.” We chose a photo of an exuberant young Michel for the cover of this issue because it exemplifies the positive transformation for most hidden children.

Eva Fogelman concludes, “The generation that survived the Holocaust as children has much to teach the mental-health profession about resilience. The lost childhood, the murder of one’s parents and siblings, can never be undone. The nightmares, post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms under conditions of stress, fear of abandonment, trust, anger at the persecutors and the passive bystanders will never fully disappear. But these emotions have not impeded most child survivors from leading productive, satisfying, meaningful lives at work and maintaining satisfying intimate relationships.”

Indeed, all our contributors have achieved a lifetime of fulfillment and success, and have most likely exceeded their postwar aspirations for ‘normalcy.’

Rachelle Goldstein, editor
FROM HUNTED ESCAPEE TO FEARFUL REFUGEE: POLAND, 1935-1946
By Anna Rabkin

I am one of the lucky few who survived World War II in the formerly Polish city of Lvov. Of the 200,000 Jews who lived there, only 1,000 escaped the Nazis’ ethnic cleansing. How did I escape death when so many others perished? Part of the answer, of course, is sheer luck; but also, the gut-wrenching choice my parents made to smuggle my brother and me out of the ghetto, and the death-defying courage of a Catholic couple who protected us.

After the war, committed organizations and kind people stepped up to help me build a future. They created the foundation I needed to adapt to my new circumstances, to strive for independence, and to dream of a stable life like the one I had before my world was filled with hate and violence.

Since September 1, 1939 until I settled in Berkeley, California in 1964, my life had been one of serial escapes. When I, a Polish child survivor of the Holocaust, arrived in England in 1946, I was warned not to think or speak about my past, but to focus on the present and the future. I took that advice seriously. It would take years for my story to come out of hiding.

When I started to write, it was for my family—I didn’t want them to lose the link to their past. Then, as Holocaust deniers became ever louder, I felt an obligation to add my testimony to counter the lies being spread. But it was the drumbeat of immigrant bashing and the stoking of hate against Muslims that induced me to go public. I realized that my early experiences of displacement, deprivation, discrimination and death were not that different to what so many refugees face today.

Slowly hidden memories sneaked out. Retrieving my buried memories has made me confront the destructive force of secrets, lies, and bigotry, and allowed me to celebrate the saving power of courage, altruism, and especially of love. Tackling writing about my past required looking at it more closely and, at the same time, from a greater distance. During that process I gained a new perspective on the struggle that I and all refugees and immigrants confront — adapting to new people and places, and trying to fit in. And eventually, I had to accept that in all countries, to a greater or lesser extent, there is always an unbridgeable difference between the native-born and the newcomers.

On September 1, 1939, my comfortable childhood ended. Hitler’s military machinery and hateful ideology rolled into Poland. Divided into Russian and German sectors, Poland ceased to exist. My family became refugees in their own country, and as has been for millions of displaced people before and since, the years that followed were marked by misery and serial escapes.

Like thousands of frenzied refugees from the west, especially Jews, we made our way east to Lvov, seeking sanctuary in the Russian sector. Accommodations were scarce. It was not easy for Mother, Father, my brother, Artek, and me, accustomed to living in a spacious and well-appointed apartment, to adjust to living in a single room. Mother cried frequently. Father shouted often. Artek’s spankings increased. I was berated for the smallest infraction.

We were uprooted several times. I didn’t understand at the time that we were escaping roundups of ‘undesirables.’ We had become ‘enemies of the people.’ Sometimes Father had to go into hiding outside the city. He was being hunted because he was a lawyer. At the age of four I had to keep Father’s profession a deep secret. The Russian secret service, NKVD, persecuted people for a variety of crimes: Father, because of his profession; others, because they were capitalists, intellectuals or Polish Communists, who didn’t tow the Stalinist line.

When Father wasn’t hiding, he looked for work. No work, no ration cards. No ration cards, no food. Our always-resourceful Father had parlayed his automotive knowledge to land a job as a mechanic. We could get our meager rations.

Once the Russians established control in Lvov, they polled the refugees who had come from the west to find out whether they wanted to stay in the Russian sector or return to the sector controlled by the Germans. Smelling a trap, Father chose to stay and begged Grandmother to do likewise. She, a committed anti-communist, could not believe that the civilized Germans would harass people as much as the Russian barbarians. She indicated she wanted to return to Kraków. My half-sister Liana was given no choice; she was told by the authorities that she had to leave. Later we learned that a ‘friend’ had denounced her to the Russian Secret Service as a Nazi sympathizer. Why? Accommodations were impossible to find, and her friend’s reward was the promise of Liana’s room.

The reason for the poll was to cleanse Lvov of potential subversives. Grandmother and my sister ended up in a camp near Omsk where they had to float logs down the river and do back-breaking, heavy labor. My sister succumbed to typhus. Against all odds, my grandmother survived.

Suddenly, in June 1941, Germany attacked Russia. The Germans took Lvov...
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without a fight and renamed the city, Lemberg. Portraits of Hitler and Nazi flags with the black eagle and the swastika appeared everywhere.

The pathetic remains of a normal life were immediately disrupted; humiliations, losses and terror cascaded over us. My all-powerful parents were rendered as powerless as children. I became increasingly fearful and lived in a fantasy world of evil kings, dragons and witches.

On the first day of the Nazi occupation, German soldiers knocked on every door in our neighborhood, and with military precision rounded up all the women, including Mother, who didn’t return that night. We were distraught. Where could she be? Finally, two days later, she came home dirty and disheveled, exhausted from two days of heavy labor. The commandeered women were put to work: scrubbing toilets, cleaning floors, washing windows in the filthy garbage-filled barracks that Russians had hastily abandoned.

A few days later a truck drove onto our street. A couple of soldiers sauntered over to some kids playing outside, “Are there any Jews living on this street?” The kids were only too happy to point out several houses, including the one where we lived. The soldiers barged into our room.

How much did I know about the violence and danger? Living in such close quarters with adults who daily were demeaned, hounded and intimidated, I absorbed their despair. My response to my world turned upside-down was to shroud myself in numbness.

The day we walked into the ghetto was the first time I entered a slum. I hated the small room we rented, and that another family lived in the kitchen. We had metal army cots topped by thin mattresses. The place was overrun by mice, rats, and cockroaches; as soon as the one light bulb in the room was turned off, the rustling started. The cockroach population reigned — the floor was alive with their quivering, black bodies. I hated the nighttime when the flimsy walls broadcast people’s coughs, screams and sobs. I hated being cold in the unheated room. Father had sealed the windows with newspapers and hung a blanket over the ill-fitting door to try to keep the cold out. It helped a little, but the air in the room turned stinky and humid.

Cooking, shopping, hygiene: everything became a struggle, nothing new to slum dwellers, but a revelation to a child brought up in comfort.

I developed boils all over my body and underwent the ‘cupping cure.’ Extremely rough glass cups, which created suction, were set on my body ‘to help blood flow and promote healing.’ When they were removed, I looked polka-dotted, but was only cured when Father spent a fortune persuading a ghetto doctor to sell him some medicine from his dwindling stash. Fleas and lice infested me, and I was covered with scabs from my constant scratching. Lice spread typhus, a dreaded disease which swept like wildfire through that overcrowded prison-like environment.

The Gestapo and their ferocious German Shepherds or Doberman Pinschers arrived regularly. As they yelled ‘Raus, Raus,’ (Out, Out) I would flatten myself against the wall to peek from our window as terrified people tried to vanish. But the Nazis had their quotas to fill; their roundups were unrelenting. The dogs bared their frightening teeth and strained on their leashes as their handlers prodded them to terrorize the screaming, crying people, pushing them toward the waiting Gestapo trucks. Desperate to evade the attack dogs, people would climb in; others were shoved in. The trucks drove off. No one knew the destination.

Some ‘fortunate’ people tooled in factories outside the ghetto. Still strong in his forties, Father was one of the slave laborers in the Kosmos factory, which produced fumigation candles for the German army. He left early in the morning and came back in the dark, tired and irritable. But his work permit allowed him some freedom of movement, which he used to keep in contact with a gentle friend, Mr. Krzysztopolski. Through their web of contacts, they heard that the ghetto, which was ‘open’ was about to become ‘closed.’

Imagine my astonishment, one day in the summer of 1942, when a German soldier came to our room carrying a large empty canvas sack.

‘Haneczka,’ Mother said quietly, ‘You have to get in. Don’t be afraid, it will be all right.’ Afraid that I might talk, my parents had told me nothing about what was going on. Mother gave me a hug, warned me to be silent, and whispered ‘Goodbye.’ Trained to ask no questions but simply to obey, I stepped into the sack.

I was slung over the man’s shoulder and moments later deposited in a truck. My brother, who had been sent out ahead, was hiding among a stack of bags. Scared, confused, I had no idea what was happening.

The truck drove out of the ghetto and some minutes later my brother and I were dropped off in the ‘Aryan’ part of town. To be in forbidden territory was so terrifying that I have no memory of our arrival or our reception. It wasn’t until many years later that I learned that Father and Mr. Krzysztopolski had planned my brother’s and my escape. To take us out of the ghetto, Father had bribed a German soldier, the driver of the truck.

The Krzysztopolski’s, an elderly, childless couple lived in a comfortable third-floor apartment in a middle-class neighborhood near a park — and next door to

MOTHER GAVE ME A HUG, WARNED ME TO BE SILENT, AND WHISPERED ‘GOODBYE.’ TRAINED TO ASK NO QUESTIONS BUT SIMPLY TO OBEY, I STEPPED INTO THE SACK.
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The Germans’ military defeat had bred swift and deadly vengeance against Jews. The ghettos were liquidated. People were sent to death camps, shot in the streets, or they died of starvation. By the time the war was over, of the 200,000 Jews in Lemberg, only one thousand survived. One thousand.

Our parents felt that the risks, after the liquidation of the Lemberg ghetto, were so grave that they gave Mrs. Krzyształowski permission to have us baptized. What a low moment that must have been for my parents. And what a joyous moment for her!

On a dark evening, the only time we left our hiding place, not a moment too soon, he found a chicken coop where she stayed while he searched for a more permanent place. Eventually both hid in a woman’s apartment where a small space was enclosed by a false wall. That’s where they hid, in a literal hole in the wall.

Once again, our building was searched by the Gestapo and Mrs. Krzyształowski burst into our room and told us to leave by the back stairs.

‘No,’ my brother decided, ‘it’s too dangerous; it would be safer for us to hide here.’

To my surprise my eleven-year-old brother prevailed, and Mrs. Krzyształowski ran off to the back of the apartment. Without losing a beat, Artek told me to lie down on the bed; he pulled several down comforters from storage and put them on top of me.

‘Lie right next to the wall. Don’t move and don’t make a sound.’

I had to stifle a fit of nervous giggles which threatened to explode and give us away.

Suddenly, I heard the door from the next room open. I knew that the smothering down, mounded like snow above us was our only safeguard against discovery and death for everyone in the house. I heard the muffled but unmistakable sounds of German. Authoritative boots struck the wooden floor. Sweating, my mind stifled by fear, I lay as still as if I were already dead. How long did we hover between life and death? How long did the Gestapo spend walking around our room? Most probably a very short time, but it felt as if, with one more second, I would surely die of suffocation.

I heard the door click. They were gone. We lay hot and drained until the shaken Mrs. Krzyształowski returned to tell us we could come out of hiding. It had been a close call; my brother had saved us.

Our parents felt that the risks, after the liquidation of the Lemberg ghetto, were so grave that they gave Mrs. Krzyształowski permission to have us baptized. What a low moment that must have been for my parents. And what a joyous moment for her!

On a dark evening, the only time we left our hiding place, we walked a short distance and slipped into a neighborhood church. I was awed by the vaulted ceiling that soared above us, the silence, the glowing candles and the smell of incense. A priest in embroidered robes met us. We were sprinkled with holy water. Surely the holy water made me a real Catholic? I felt virtuous. Maybe I would never be naughty again? Perhaps I would be saved?

But before that happened, Mrs. Krzyształowski came into our room one day and sat down. That was unusual. She was a

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sour woman, who brought our meals, and hardly ever spent time with us.

She said, ‘I have some sad news. The woman who hid your parents was a drunk. Apparently, one evening she visited a bar and said something that led a bounty hunter to tip off the Gestapo. They raided her apartment and found your parents. We heard that everyone was shot. I am very sorry.’

Had I been preparing myself for this news? Or by this time was I too traumatized to take it in? My immediate reaction was not grief for our parents. After two years apart, they had become phantoms in my mind. I could barely remember what they looked like and I could no longer imagine a normal life with them. No, it was the stunned realization that I was now as hapless as the fairy tale match girl with whom I had already identified. I was an orphan—that dreaded word.

Seventy years later, after reading my memoir, my brother disclosed what Mr. Krzyształowski had told him about our parents’ death: ‘The Gestapo arrested the drunk. They searched and sealed her apartment. Our parents were trapped in their hole in the wall.’ This was even more nightmarish than imagining them being shot. Was that why first Mrs. Krzyształowski, and then my brother kept it from me? My brother and I have lived all these years with contradictory accounts and conflicting memories about the most harrowing event of our young lives. Since we will never know the truth, I prefer to cling to Mrs. Krzyształowski’s story.

Finally, the long-awaited but nerve-shattering Russian bombing raids got closer. While the planes were still at some distance, Artek and I cowered in our room listening to the explosions. But one day Mrs. Krzyształowski came to get us. ‘Hurry, we have to go to the cellar.’ She cautioned us, ‘Don’t speak to anyone, don’t talk; look for a dark spot where you can hide.’

We left the apartment. Confronted by the staircase, I panicked. Between the terror brought on by the explosions, my feeble matchstick legs, and my lack of practice of walking down flights of stairs, I froze. Afraid of being left behind, I was about to slide down on my bottom when someone scooped me up and carried me.

The noise from the bombs was deafening. The cellar floor rocked back and forth. Abruptly, the one weak hanging light bulb went out. We were plunged into darkness. I could hear people and things falling, babies wailing, adults screaming or crying or praying at the top of their voices. Would I die in the crowded, dank, dark basement?

The anti-aircraft guns blasted non-stop. Fear made time move slowly. Had we spent a whole night in the cellar before we finally heard the ‘all clear?’ Eventually, with help from above, some of the men managed to push the cellar door open. Tons of rubble and broken glass lay outside, but though badly damaged, our building was standing.

To this day I empathize with the trepidation people feel facing an escalator for the first time. And to this day sudden loud sounds make me jump. Lemberg’s bombardment remains etched in my body’s memory.

A few days later, on July 26, 1944, we heard shooting, martial music and strains of the Polish national anthem, ‘Poland has not yet perished, so long as we still live.’ Only four months after my parents were murdered, Lemberg was liberated. Mrs. Krzyształowski told us that the Russian soldiers had entered Lemberg and were greeted by flag-waving, flower-throwing throngs. The Russians promptly renamed the city, Lvov. The war, at least in Lvov, was over.

After years of living with fear and deprivation, what did I imagine peace would bring? Foremost, I hoped it would mean the end of hunger and a return to school. Although I clutched at the hope that our parents would return, the fatalistic person I had become knew deep down it was improbable.

Ironically, it was our regular attendance at church on Sundays that led to our sighting by a distant relative, another convert. She understood that our presence was part of the Catholic cover we had acquired, and she contacted a member of the Jewish Distribution Committee (JDC) who was searching for survivors. He got in touch with Mrs. Krzyształowski who reluctantly, agreed to let him visit us. I was amazed; I could barely believe that somebody “out there” cared about us. He asked whether he could take us back to Kraków because if any member of our family survived, they too would return there.

But Mrs. Krzyształowski promptly dashed our hopes.

Continued on next page
I cannot agree to that. I promised my parents I would keep them until a family member came to claim them. They are Catholics now and in our care until such time.

The JDC was making a valiant effort to find survivors, especially children, and try to reunite families. Some of the surviving children didn’t even know they were Jewish, having been brought up as Catholics since early childhood; others, like me, were confused.

Despite being rebuffed, the JDC didn’t give up. A Committee representative met my brother secretly and instructed him, ‘Put some clothes in your satchel every day and drop them off at my apartment.’

My brother did as he was told. Sur-reptitiously, we prepared for our next escape. We had to hurry because a group of children was going to leave on a train for Kraków in a few days. As the war still raged in the west, schedules were uncertain, travel was difficult. It might be a long time before another train made the trip.

On the appointed day, happy and agitated, we got ready for school, but at the front door Mr. Krzyształowski stopped us, he must have suspected something. After opening my brother’s satchel, he was livid.

‘You ungrateful little liars! Go back to your room. You are not going anywhere.’ Furious he escorted us back and banged the door shut.

I was shaking with fear. In our room, we sat in silence. While I was imagining dreadful punishments, my brother was thinking ahead. After a while we heard Mr. Krzyształowski leave the apartment. Artek leaned over and whispered instructions in my ear.

‘Though petrified, I willed myself to obey. I ran out of our room to the front door, but before I could open it, I was intercepted by Mrs. Krzyształowski who came storming out of the kitchen, a hot iron in her hand.

‘How dare you disobey my husband and where do you think you are going?’

Tears of fear helped me to justify my disobedience as between sobs I followed Artek’s directions.

‘I am sorry. I was brushing my hair – Mother’s silver hair brush – on the balcony – by accident I dropped it . . . I must run down – pick it up – quickly – I don’t want someone to steal it. Please, I have to hurry.’

She considered my story long enough for me to rush past her. I picked up the brush like a relay baton and ran. I ran faster and longer than ever before. My lungs were exploding, I had a stitch in my side, but I got to the JDC member’s apartment. Scared by my defiance of an adult’s order, in pain from the run, and terrified that I would never see my brother again, I wept. But Artek wasn’t far behind me. He had gotten past Mrs. Krzyształowski easily and assured me that now everything would be all right.

In the morning, we had to flee once more. The Committee was afraid that the Krzyształowski could have reported us as kidnapped. The apartment we were in would be the first place the police would search. We were sent to a safe house where the beautiful lady lawyer, a nudist, encouraged everyone to shed their clothes. My then teenage brother still remembers with glee his first sight of a female body. I, on the other hand, have no memory of that night. The next day we were moved to another safe house, outside Lvov, this time to the home of a surviving rabbi. One more move brought us to the final safe house where the last of the found children gathered to join our little group for the journey west.

The approach of a train was announced. We set off by twos or threes for the railroad station. Nervous, I imagined the police watching the station and returning us to the Krzyształowski’s. What would they do to us?

When the freight train finally arrived, our leader somehow managed to squeeze us into one of the already packed cattle cars. It had no windows, only vents high up on the wall. We sat on straw. The toilet was a bucket. In that fetid, rolling cage, we were putting Lvov and its horrors behind us.

After some hours, the train stopped. It was dark. I heard our leader’s voice. ‘We have to get off and board the train one track over. But hurry because it is about to leave and it’s the last train for Kraków for days.’

Somebody helped me to descend onto the station platform. To reach the parallel track, we had to crawl on our stomachs under the train. I was shivering with fear. I knew the train would start to move and cut me into shreds. ‘Don’t stand there, you’ll get left behind!’ Finally, I forced myself like a sacrificial offering under the smoke-belching monster. I prayed, “Dear Mother of God, protect me.” Miraculously, I scrambled out on the other side, unaimed.

Our slow escape west resumed. We travelled through a series of ghostly, bomb-ed-out towns and packed railroad stations, where masses of displaced people clutching their pathetic bundles beat on the doors of the crammed cars, begging to be let in. At last, a couple of days after V.E. Day, we arrived in the noisy, chaotic Kraków station.

More than five years had passed since we had left amid a similar pandemonium. I had departed a spunky, know-it-all, indulged four-year-old. I returned a timid, secretive and unnaturally fatalistic nine-year-old with no expectation of love or comfort. As I disembarked, stiff and dazed, I looked around and wondered, “What now?”

We were fortunate. An adult cousin had survived and was already looking after a teenage niece when she undertook to be our caretaker. Some months later, our grandmother returned from the horrors of a Siberian labor camp.

Since we were penniless, we were eligible for the free meals dispensed at the Jewish Committee headquarters. The assistance provided by the Committee was funded mainly by the US-based Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HAS). After the war these organizations were the lifeline that helped the hidden, the resistance fighters, the survivors of Nazi concentration camps and Russian labor camps — about 65,000 — all that was left of Poland’s prewar population of over three million Jews.

Once at the soup kitchen, I had to line up with my three-tiered tin food container and wait for the serving women, wielding big ladles, to fill them. Anxiety would set in on the way home with my valuable cargo. Choosing the shortest route along the main streets, I kept a lookout for potential problems. Some days the street kids called out ‘dirty Jew,’ or ‘kill the Jewess.’ Those I tried to ignore. The nastier, stone-throwing ones had to be dodged. No grown-up ever hampered them. But my biggest fear was that I would return home empty-handed. When I complained to my cousin, she told me the street urchins were not only hungry but homeless as well.

‘Don’t feel sorry for yourself. We are the lucky ones. We have friends. They don’t.’

Brought up on The Little Match Girl, I knew

Continued on next page
she was right, but I still couldn’t muster sympathy for those mean kids.

The Committee building was always a hub of activity and noise. In addition to distributing emergency food, it also supplied used clothing. Boxes of old shoes, coats, and dyed US Army uniforms were laid out on the ground in the courtyard, where they were constantly rummaged. Once, I found a sturdy pair of shoes. The pair I had been wearing had big holes in the soles; I had filled them with newspaper to make them fit and to keep my feet dry. I threw them away, happily.

The busy, noisy courtyard was also where people displaced by the war came to find or exchange information. On the periphery of the hubbub I saw some skeletal, zombie-like people who stood motionless, no expression on their faces. But when the names of those confirmed dead or of newly-discovered survivors were added to the large sheets of paper pinned on the wall, the atmosphere in the courtyard became electric. The rummagers stopped their scavenging. The zombies shuffled to join the wave of people that flowed across the courtyard. People jostled each other to peer at the new additions to the lists. Some cried, some turned away disappointed, some danced with joy, and then the everyday hullabaloo in Polish and Yiddish resumed. I longed to see my parents’ name on the wall.

Many of the women who ran the Committee had lost their own children. We, the surviving youngsters, were both the reminders and remainder of the million killed; we were their hope for the future. They made heroic efforts to help bring us back to health. Artek, who had been diagnosed with a spot on his lungs, had been sent to recuperate in Rabka. But the house where the Jewish children were staying were attacked at night by machine gun-wielding thugs. The war-hardened children knew to flatten themselves on the floor or crawl under their beds, but after a second attack, the Jewish Committee closed those houses down. Arrangements were made to use a defunct TB sanatorium in Zakopane instead.

Both my brother and I were sent there. The sanatorium sat in the middle of a meadow full of flowers and evergreens, bordered by an icy white-water stream. The staff in Zakopane had to shield us from the vicious Polish anti-Semites. All the doctors, except one, were so cowed by the fear of retaliation and overt violence that they refused to treat the summer camp children, many of whom suffered from serious illnesses.

The summer camp was guarded like a prison. A powerful searchlight and a siren had been installed on the roof. A machine gun was placed on one of the balconies. The director of the camp, Dr. Lena Kuchler, was given pistols for her staff and a flare gun to use in case of an attack. At first, six guards from the Polish militia, who worked in shifts, were assigned to the camp, but their commander was unsure of their loyalty since he could barely feed them. He was right to worry. They started stealing the scarce food supplies. Dr. Kuchler had to ask that they be removed. In their stead, the Committee sent Jewish guards who trained the older boys to use rifles and to throw hand grenades. These preparations proved to be prescient. One night the camp was attacked. Thanks to the guards, the teenagers, the director, and the eventual arrival of the Polish militia, the attack was repelled.

Many of the older campers wanted to leave, not only the camp, but Poland. They wanted to make their way to Palestine. But at that time, no different from now, the countries they had to pass through didn’t want anything to do with refugees. Yet Dr. Kuchler was determined to get the children away from the poisonous atmosphere that continued to stalk the few Jews left in Poland. With help from a Jewish organization, she personally smuggled one hundred children out of Zakopane to safety in France and eventually got them to Palestine.

I believed we would live in Kraków for the rest of our lives. After all, we had survived the war, made it back to our hometown, and were happily reunited with the few surviving members of our family. But shortly after I returned from Zakopane, I overheard my cousin talking about a boat trip. London was mentioned.

My cousin and the Jewish Committee had tried to create an ordinary childhood for me, but in the end, it was decided that life in a country that continued to revile Jews was too unpredictable and dangerous. Over forty Jews had been killed in the Kielce pogrom on July 4, 1946, while the police stood by, and many smaller attacks took place all over Poland. Now I can understand that Grandmother, after what she had suffered in Siberia, did not want us to live under a Communist government or in a place where the Catholic Church stoked hatred of Jews. But at the time, I didn’t think anything they said was important; I only knew that as a ten-year-old I had no choice but to obey, but I didn’t like it.

Our escape from Poland was arranged by a London rabbi, Solomon Schonfeld, who shepherded kindertransports both before and after the war. On embarkation day in Gdynia, I marveled at the size of the ship that would take us to Sweden. I couldn’t understand why it wouldn’t sink, especially after the cargo and luggage had been loaded and all of us had boarded. The dollars sewn into my coat made me tense. Thoughts of my impending death by drowning were mitigated only by images of sweet revenge. Grandmother and my cousin sobbing, sorry that they had sent me away to an untimely death. Suddenly the deck below my feet swayed, and we were sailing away. Soon we were out of sight of land, and still the boat glided serenely along the water. My mood shifted. The day was clear, the sea calm, I had a ship to explore. My fear of death floated away; curiosity prevailed. And I had no idea of what lay ahead.

Anna Rabkin was born into a comfortable Jewish household in Kraków, Poland. The outbreak of World War II forced her family to escape just ahead of the German army to the Russian sector where they were hunted by the Communists. They were considered “enemies of the people” because her father was a lawyer. After the war, an orphan kindertransport landed in England, allowing her to escape Polish antisemitism. She entered the bewildering world of English boarding schools before being adopted by relatives in New York. After marrying Marty Rabkin, the couple migrated to the political hotbed of Berkeley, California, where, eventually, she was elected to the office of City Auditor. The co-author of “Public Libraries: Travel Treasures of the American West,” she holds masters’ degrees in City Planning from the University of California, Berkeley, and in History from California State University, East Bay.

Anna wrote this article for The Hidden Child, but her complete memoir, From Krakow to Berkeley: Coming Out of Hiding was published by Valentine Mitchell in 2018 and is widely available at online bookstores.
When I meet someone new, the initial dialogue often goes something like this: “Where are you from?” I answer, “New Jersey.” “No, I mean where are you really from? I notice a slight accent. I mean where were you born?” My answer: “Germany.” “When did you come here?” Answer: 1951. “How old were you?” Answer: 12.

If the person is Jewish and is not sure if I am Jewish, what usually follows is, “Oh,” with a hesitation and a slight moving away. They become leery. I have come to recognize, to understand this distancing. In the Jewish community, Germany still has a history to deal with and so I have come to learn that I must use words and references that quickly identify me as being Jewish. It is very important to me to be identified as Jewish, and not German. This generally leads to the next question.

“Where were you during the war?” And then, always, “How did you survive?”

Sometimes the question is very casual and if I don’t know the person, I just answer, “We were very lucky.” Other times the question comes out of a genuine interest to understand, and with surprise that some Jews survived in Germany without being hidden or in concentration camps during the war.

So, when I was asked to speak about my experience tonight for Yom Hashoah, I said, “Sure.” After all, I have spoken to schools as part of Holocaust education programs. My friends certainly know my history. But each and every time, the telling is hard and my stomach gets tied into knots. Yet I know my story is unusual because I have never met anyone else who survived as I did.

I am a **mischling**. When my parents married in 1930, neither family was happy with the marriage. My father was Gentile, and his family was certainly not pleased. Even though this was before the Nazis were in power, anti-Semitism existed. My mother was Jewish, and her family certainly had their fears about her marrying a non-Jew.

Although some members of my mother’s family were observant, her own parents were assimilated Jews. My grandfather was a Zionist, and he and my grandmother immigrated to Israel in 1936. My grandfathers’ brothers felt that his fears of the Nazis were exaggerated, and held the mistaken belief that Jews would be safe in Germany. Ultimately, they were all murdered.

My mother often spoke of the difficulties that she, as a Jewish woman, encountered during the early years of the Hitler regime. She could not go to the movies or any other public places or events. She was limited to staying in the house and was only able to shop in stores that catered to Jewish customers. Most of all, she remembered fearing for her aunts and uncles who were being deported.

She always recalled that while she was in the hospital giving birth to me, no one came to visit. When she asked questions, she was reassured by the nurses and cautioned not to get upset lest it affect her or her baby. I was born on November 11, 1938, right after Kristallnacht. The Night of

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Broken Glass, November 9th to 10th, when Jewish homes and stores were ransacked and thousands of Jewish men arrested, signaled the beginning of the strongest anti-Jewish actions. By then, my grandparents and my mother’s brother had immigrated to Israel, and my mother’s sister had left for Sweden in 1937 on one of the last ships out of Germany.

My parents had their conflicts as a result of their mixed marriage. My father’s brothers and mother did not welcome my mother in their homes. Of course, my mother’s restrictions frustrated my father, and he often pursued his own friends and interests, leaving her with her children, feeling alone, angry, and scared. My sister, who is seven years older than I, remembers their frequent fights and my mother crying much of the time. After my father entered the military, my mother, sister and I were truly left to our own devices. Money was very tight and her limitations and fears increased constantly.

Kiel, where I was born, was a small town at the end of a canal that connects the Baltic and North Seas. It was, and still is, a shipbuilding town in Northern Germany. Mom grew up in Kiel, and according to her, everyone knew her. She recalled being called to the Gestapo for questioning. But since no one had brought any complaints against her, and she had not broken any rules, such as shopping in non-Jewish stores or going out beyond the curfew, she was released and told to go home.

My own memories really begin around 1943-1944. I had the usual bouts of childhood diseases. My father came home on furloughs. I remember not wanting him to leave and his losing patience and giving me a severe spanking on the railroad station platform. Parenting in those days was very different, and he was a typical German father who believed in ‘spare the rod and spoil the child.’

As the bombings increased, children in Kiel were being evacuated. My sister had been sent with her school into the safety of the countryside, but her headmistress called, saying that she could not stay because the Gestapo was visiting the school and her being Jewish was too dangerous.

We were bombed out in 1944, and I was hospitalized with a severe concussion. Here again my mother talked of telling the doctor that we were Jews, and that his response was, “She’s a child and I’m a doctor and that’s all that matters.” After we were released from the hospital we fled into the countryside and found shelter at a farm, but again only for a short while, until the farmer realized we were Jews and had to leave.

After our return to Kiel, my mother worked in a forced labor camp, a fish factory, but was able to come home at night. At that time one of my father’s brothers helped us replace blown out windows in an abandoned apartment where we were able to stay. My father also came home on furlough and helped gather the few remaining pieces of furniture from our bombed-out apartment.

While my mother worked, my sister took care of me during the day, and our lives in many ways were like that of our neighbors. There was no food, no clothing, no water, no heat, or sleep. I only remember wearing what we would call warmup suits all the time. Since the threat of air raids was constant, one never undressed because when the sirens signaled an attack, we had to be ready to run to the shelter. The shelter we used had just recently been extended with a new emergency exit and a children’s wing in the rear, near the door. This was to be used specifically for mothers and children.

One night a bomb fell outside the shelter and people were screaming to get in. When the door was opened, gas from the exploded bomb seeped into the shelter, asphyxiating everyone in the children’s wing. Since my sister and I had come to the shelter on our own, without mom, we had been told to go the new children’s wing. However, my sister, who whiled away the time making figures out of the clay dirt available at the emergency exit insisted that we stick to that end of the shelter. She also said that since our mother was used to us being by the emergency exit, that she would look for us there if she was let go from the fish factory. My sister’s love of modeling saved our lives in that we all escaped through the emergency exit which had only been completed the week before. I still remember the countless empty carriages parked before the entrance.

Other memories are like all war memories. Fear, bombings, sounds of sirens, burned out buildings and rubble. And running. Running, running, always running. I

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remember just not wanting to run anymore. Our skin was covered with scabs and blisters from phosphate bombs.

As far as having a sense of Jewish identity, I remember that towards the end of the war, as my mother was getting dressed, I said to her, “When we win the war...” She stopped and stood absolutely still, held my face in her hands and said, “If the Germans win the war, we will all perish.” That was my first sense of being Jewish and that being Jewish was different and dangerous.

Besides being a ship- and submarine-building town, Kiel’s strategic location at the Baltic end of the canal, linking it to Hamburg, Bremen, the North Sea and, of course, England, France and the Atlantic Ocean, made it a primary target, and 80% of the town was destroyed. I recall at the end of the war that the munitions dump was blown up before the Allied Forces arrived. People were crying in the shelter when it was announced that Germany was defeated and Hitler was dead.

And then the soldiers came, American and English, bringing us candy, gum, chocolate, stockings, and cigarettes. Slowly, with the aid of the Red Cross and HIAS we were put in touch with my family in Israel and the US, who sent us not only mail, but also care packages with milk, flour, clothing and M&Ms.

After the war, many camp survivors came to Kiel. It was then that we learned firsthand of the horrors of Auschwitz, Bergen Belsen, and other camps. The survivors were emaciated. They needed help and time to heal. HIAS and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee attended to their care. It was from them that I also learned English from a girl who spoke Yiddish, and therefore understood German. She translated whole sentences for me, and I repeated what she said. I also learned that America and particularly the Jewish community was understandably afraid, angry, and rejecting of anything German. I had been the “Dirty Jew” in Germany and suddenly found myself in danger of being identified as German in New York.

Growing up without any knowledge or training in things Jewish, still leaves a void in me. It’s a lack of history. I am without memories of holidays, family, and tradition. They simply aren’t there.

There is also a sense of guilt. I know that according to Jewish Law I am a Jew because my mother was Jewish, but I also know that many in the Jewish community do not trust the Germans. I share that distrust. However, I am a little of both, and that isn’t always easy.

So, there is no clear answer as to how I survived. Perhaps it was because I am a mischling, a designation Germans use to describe a child of a mixed marriage. Or because my father was in the military and did not divorce my mother, or perhaps as my mother said, “The laws were carried out by people, and not all people are evil.”

Perhaps it was just plain mazel... I only know that I survived, and I have come to be okay with that.

I had wanted to marry someone who was a full-fledged Yankee with a large family. Instead, I married a wonderful man who is also a German Jew, who came to New York with his mother before the war. While we have different memories, there is a common thread that helps us to understand each other in a profound way.

We have two daughters, one of whom married a non-Jew, but all of our grandchildren were raised and identify as Jews, and that is very important to us. I only wish them a world that is different from the one I grew up in.

I wish everyone everywhere peace and freedom from persecution.
DESPITE ALL ODDS, THEY SURVIVED, PERSISTED — AND THRIVED

MY LIFE
By Rivka (Rebecca) Pardes Birnbaum

I was born in Berlin, Germany, on June 16, 1938, the second child to Radomsker Chassidim, who had run away from the poverty of Oswiecim, Poland, around the end of WWI. Along with other Chassidim from Poland, they settled in an area of Berlin, Berlin-Mitte, off Schoenhauser Allee. My parents owned a dry goods and clothing store, and they prospered until Hitler, yimakh shemo,1 took power and persecuted Jews. Our family had no other choice but to flee.

My father, a Polish citizen, left first in 1938 when I was a small baby. He was smuggled into Antwerp, Belgium, by the Radomsker Rebbe. My mother planned for us to join my father, in 1939, after preparing for the escape of her mother and youngest sister to London, where my grandmother’s sister and her family lived. Although we had the option to escape to London as well, my mother would not leave my father alone in Antwerp.

My mother had no valid papers to enter Belgium, but when she landed, with me in her arms, she pretended to faint. She was taken to a hospital in Antwerp, and the Belgian government allowed us to stay. By that time the fate of the Jews returning to Hitler’s Germany was known, and many Belgians were very helpful to Jews. They hated the ‘Boches’ and pitied the Jews under Nazi oppression.

In exchange for flour, sugar, and salt that they had stockpiled as the war neared, my parents rented an apartment in Brussels. At first, we lived a near-normal existence as a family. After the spring of 1942, when the Germans introduced the wearing of the Yellow Star and began the mass arrests and deportations of Jews, my brother and I were hidden with Gentile families.

One day, my 12-year-old brother, a big soccer fan, sneaked out to watch a game played by two top Belgian teams. He was very lucky not to have been found by the Gestapo, but the people who hid him no longer wanted to risk another such caper,

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faithfully.

As a 4-year-old girl, I was hidden with a Belgian widow, along with three younger Jewish children, the youngest of whom was a mere baby. With two teenagers of her own, the widow, Madame Villain, had her hands full. Although the teenagers quarreled often, the daughter, Claudine, helped every day when she came home from high school. We lived on rue de l’Or-
dre, a small side street where everyone knew that Madame Villain was caring for small Jewish children.

For a while nobody betrayed her. Then, a young neighbor fell in love with a German soldier and told him about us. But she made a mistake, indicating we lived at number 10, instead of number 8, just next door. Still, in this working-class neighborhood, where all the houses had joint walls, I, as the oldest, had to keep the other children quiet. Somehow, all, even the baby, sensed the fear and remained silent; and the Gestapo left.

The very next day, the young woman who betrayed us was shot by the Belgian underground while riding her bicycle. To this day I feel that I was saved for a purpose, and seek it. Memory is so protective that I had completely forgotten about this terrifying experience. I was reminded of it by Claudine Hugo, Madame Villain’s former teenage daughter, when she related this to me in a Brussels café in 1976. Even then, Claudine could not understand how I had managed to keep the three younger kids quiet.

Meanwhile, my mother was arrested, and spent two months in Mechelen (Malines), Belgium’s transit camp, where she withstood an awful blow from one of the Nazi guards for daring to put her hands in her pockets while forced to walk around the courtyard in the cold. But her fate would have been far worse had she not brave-
ly escaped deportation by jumping off the Twentieth Convoy, the sole transport train throughout Europe during WWII to be stopped.

On April 19, 1943, the Twentieth Transport left the Mechelen transit camp carrying 1,631 Jewish men, women and children. The convoy was guarded by one officer and fifteen men from the Sicherheitspolizei. Armed with one pistol and a hurricane lantern covered with red paper to create a makeshift stop signal, three young men — one Jew, Georges “Youra” Livchitz, and his Gentile friends, Robert Maistriau and Jean Franklemon — were able to stop the train between Mechelen and Leuven. Maistriau opened one wagon and liberated 17 people. Other prisoners, including my mother, escaped later when the conductor slowed down sufficiently between Tienen and Tongeren to allow people to jump off without killing themselves. In all, 233 people succeeded in escaping from the train; 89 were eventually recaptured

and that of the brave people who hid Jewish children, no one was allowed to know the whereabouts of their children.

But my dear mother was very daring! She was bringing me an egg and a piece of chocolate her landlady had managed to get on the black market. Her face was gaunt and her eyes bulged out. She looked scary, yet she seemed familiar as she opened her arms towards me. Madame Villain, whom I called Mémé, asked, “Don’t you recognize this lady?” Suddenly, it penetrated my brain and my heart. I called out “Maman!” and jumped into her arms. But I still remember the extreme trauma

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of that moment of uncertainty.

Another time, my parents’ landlady picked me up and brought me to the dank basement where my parents were hiding. The landlady, Madame Cobben, was holding me on her lap, facing a papered-over, glass-topped door. Suddenly, behind the obscured glass, I saw a shadow; and then a shining eye through the key-hole. I exclaimed to the landlady: “There is somebody there looking at me!” I cannot remember if I knew it was my mother and whether I said “Maman” or not. But the shadow disappeared immediately, and Madame Cobben said, “But no, there is nobody, look!” My poor mother had wanted to see me so badly that she had prearranged this visit.

We children hardly ever went to the front of our hiding place, but I remember playing pickup-stones with shrapnel in the backyard with Albert, who was about three years old. We also played in the attic with the lead soldiers and the Meccano train set belonging to Mémé’s teenage son. One day I convinced gentle little Albert to enlarge a scratch in the wall until we extracted the pulverized cement that I puffed onto my face, imitating Mémé as she powdered her face in her bedroom. As a result, Mémé gave poor Albert and me a good spanking!

I distinctly remember running to the basement for shelter as the sirens announced a bombing. Adults and kids were very frightened. There was an opening from the basement of all the houses onto our small street that, if needed, was meant to be used as an escape. That passage was also used as a getaway by the many neighbors who worked for the underground.

The war ended for us in September 1944. Even on rue de l’Ordre, there was delirious joy as the population held hands, sang and danced through the streets, as confetti showered over them.

I was extremely fortunate to be reunited with my dear parents after the war. Most hidden children (about 80%) lost their parents to the systemic murder of the Nazi Machine. I was able to go to school in October 1944, one month after Liberation, and remember learning how to write on a slate. I had a harder time than the other students in my class because my parents’ knowledge of French was still very weak. They spoke mostly Yiddish or German, because they had spent their married life before the war in the Chassidic quarter of Berlin.

After the Liberation, and until 1950, my parents rented an apartment on the second floor of a narrow house overlooking the railway in Schaerbeek, a division of Brussels. I remember seeing from our window the Allied soldiers, probably Americans or Canadians, with big triumphant smiles, waving their hands at us. We lived in only two large rooms: one kitchen-dining-room with one bed in a corner where my brother slept, and my parents’ bedroom with a crib in which I slept until I was 12. It was rather smelly, but I got used to it. We had no fridge; we kept food cool on our balcony. About three years after the war, as soon as my parents had managed to save enough money, we got a splendid black, shiny piano. My parents and my brother, who was 8 years older than I was, were all very musical. So, we had piano lessons as well. There was a sink with cold water in the staircase hall that separated the two rooms. Once a week, before Shabbat, we would go to a bathhouse that smelled strongly of bleach, and whose floors were covered with slats of wood.

In 1950 we moved to the ground-floor apartment of a larger house with a garden. Our next-door neighbor had a black and white cat, called ‘Trotinette’ (Scooter), which my dear Father lovingly fed outside. In its large kitchen we installed a bath, which we covered with a wood board and used as a counter. By then, we had the luxury of hot water, but still no refrigerator. To keep food cold, we used the marble floor of the hall and the cold cellar, which also kept the coal for our fantastic Flemish oven that baked a really crusty potato kugel for Shabbat.

I loved my high school to which I walked for 10 minutes every day. It started at 8:00 am, so in the winter I walked in the dark. My teachers were very knowledgeable. I was most interested in languages and history. My first Latin teacher happened to be a school friend of Claudine, Madame Villain’s daughter, so she took a special interest in me. For my first year’s last Latin exam, I got 100/100, not a single mistake! But then, what a fantastic teacher she was! We would play-act what we learned during our recesses, imagine two Roman girls, Marcella and Fabiola, writing their story in French which our teacher translated into Latin (we inscribed the new Latin words into our self-made, alphabetic vocabulary book). Dressed up in sheets, including our own grammar fiches, we visited Roman houses, walked to Roman funerals, made our own grammar fiches with different colors for all Latin ‘cases,’ conjugations, etc.

Although my dear father, a descendant of a dynasty of Rebbes, the Stasheve Rebbes, was not too happy about it, my Latin teacher convinced my mother that I had to go to university, and I did, choosing Germanic Languages, including Flemish, but specializing in English. I also graduated with a

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A few years ago, I went to Belgium to have Madame Villain and her daughter Claudine Hugo inscribed onto the Wall of the Just at Yad Vashem via the Israeli Embassy in Brussels. The ceremony was held at the Town Hall of Ixelles, the suburb of Brussels, where I and the former toddler hidden with me, Raymond Reichenbach, who now lives in Paris, were in attendance. It was Raymond who had organized my encounter with Claudine Hugo in a café in Brussels.

I was offered a job by one of my professors in one of the best high schools in Brussels, actually a Boys' school, but instead I chose a new burgeoning Jewish high school, where I taught English and Flemish, Belgium's second language. I also taught beginning piano lessons on the side to a couple of kids I knew.

In the summer of 1960, I went to a Youth Camp near Toulouse in the South of France, run by an organization of Jewish religious scouts, Les Eclaireurs Israélites. With the same group, one year later, I visited the East Coast of the U.S. and Canada, sleeping on blow-up mattresses in YWHA Community Centers. I then decided to stay in New York, actually in the Bronx where I had two uncles, brothers of my mother. I taught French and History at a Beth Jacob High School in Boro Park Brooklyn. At a Columbia University lecture, I was introduced to my husband, Eleazar Birnbaum, grandson of Nathan Birnbaum, the famous Baal Teshuva thinker and orator.

Eleazar was a frum intellectual, who captivated me with his knowledge while we visited the Jewish Museum in New York. He could decipher old Hebrew manuscripts and books with great ease. A few months later, on Chanukah, after giving an impromptu lecture on Chinese Jews, which I did not know about, my misgivings about his age (he was 8 years older) melted away, and we got engaged in New York, and married in Brussels on June 12, 1962.

For the first 2 years, my husband was hired as a Middle Eastern Bibliographer at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and we lived in Detroit, about an hour away from the University. I taught French at a Mercy College, a Catholic institution. I was offered a job at Wayne University, but their hours were not convenient for me, especially after our first boy, Nathan Joseph, was born in 1963.

Two years later, in September 1964, my husband was hired as Associate Professor of Turkish at the University of Toronto and we moved to Toronto. During the first two years my husband was assigned the duty of building the Turkish, Arabic and Persian collections of books in the University Library. In 1970, he became full Professor of Turkish, with tenure. He was a very kind and understanding Professor who loved his job, and was beloved by his students.

I taught French part-time in Toronto, at Etz Chaim, grades 7, 8 and 9, and I was a substitute in high schools of the Toronto District School Board as soon as our youngest daughter was in school full time. From 1981 onwards, I have taught English, French and History full-time at Don Mills Collegiate and at the French High School downtown.

In 1970, my husband's parents, Professor Solomon Asher Birnbaum and his wife, Irene, and his younger brother David and family settled in Toronto, as well, on our street. I had already given birth to four more children: two boys, Shmuel Menachem in 1966, Avrohom Uriel in 1967, and a daughter, Sarah Malka in 1968. Our youngest daughter, Miriam Devorah, was born in 1975. They are all married, all frum, schooled in frum schools and Yeshivos. This is our vengeance against Hitler, may he be 89 in November I’H, and I am 80.

Eli and I have much nachas from our children and grandchildren and we are zoche to have eight great-grandchildren. Eli will be 89 in November I’H, and I am 80. ■

Endnotes
1 May his name be obliterated is one of the strongest curses in the Hebrew language
2 Wounded in a later action, Georges Livchitz was arrested and executed by the Nazis in February, 1944, together with his brother Alexander. Robert Maistriaux obtained the title of Righteous Among the Nations in August 1994.
An ironic turn of events befell Jewish youngsters who survived the barbaric Nazi-German annihilation of European Jewry. A million and a half Jewish children were murdered, and of the thousands who survived, most were left homeless orphans, who did not know the fate of their parents or siblings. A few survived with a parent. Some were reunited with one or both parents, or with a relative. Many did not even know their given name, their birthday, or their family of origin.

Liberation was not an exhilarating moment. To learn that one is all alone in the world is to move from one nightmarish world to another. Jewish social services and relief organizations dispersed youngsters to existing orphanages, group homes, and chateaux. Some children lived with remnants of their families, or with strangers, in displaced persons camps in Germany, Austria, or Italy. Sometimes, they were removed from the safety of rescuers’ homes, whom they came to know as their mothers and fathers, by strangers from the Jewish Brigade, or by their own parents, who now felt like strangers to them. A few were smuggled by the Bricha (underground organization of Jews in Palestine) to Palestine.

During the German occupation many of the youngest Jewish victims had to change their identity to “Christian,” lie about their age, about their family constellation, sometimes about their gender. After liberation, those who had no memory of being Jewish were challenged with developing a new identity, often in conflict with their “Christian self.” Others struggled to recapture individual identities that were rooted in their early Jewish experiences. By belonging to a child survivor group burdened with similar upheavals, the process of reconfiguring an identity became more tolerable.

In each survivor’s recovery there comes a moment of realization—the creation of a new identity, or the loss of an old one. Elie Wiesel poignantly describes his arrival at a splendid Chateau in Ecousis, France, with other children from Buchenwald. Representatives of the O.S.E., a children’s social service agency, gave them tefillin (phylacteries), religious books, pencils, and paper. Wiesel remembered, “We held our first Minha (afternoon) service, and we all said Kaddish (the Jewish memorial prayer for the dead) together. Although we knew it well enough, that collective Kaddish reminded us that we were all orphans.” Belonging to that group of orphans, now a substitute family, was an initiation towards constructing an identity.

Forming an identity is the first step towards resilience: the ability to recover, adjust, be successful and happy after facing adversity such as massive psychic trauma. When one undergoes a state of “significant adversity,” resilience is the ability to adapt positively. Returning to function and to psychological well-being is measured on a continuum: from survival to adaptation, to competence, to healing, to hardiness, to robustness, to wellness.

Traumatized Jewish children in these post-Holocaust communities found encouragement for normal development through social relationships and in group activities. Here, they developed a professional self through educational opportunities; and they solidified a Jewish identity through exposure to Jewish culture, religious practices—celebrations of Jewish holidays and shabbat—and national beliefs, such as Zionism.

Despite the grave losses of traditional family and community life, these youngsters seized upon the opportunity to repair

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and to develop themselves. As these communities began to re-establish a continuity to a diverse Jewish life that had been destroyed, the children's confused, bereft, or amorphous Jewish identities were unsettling, and they began to contemplate a more life-affirming identity. The communal holiday celebrations, Jewish schools, the theatres, music, dance, newspapers, publication of books, and the creation of political and Zionist organizations in the displaced persons camps were links to the past and to the future. The celebration of life-cycle events amid the remnants of European Jewry indicated to the youngsters that life, not death, prevailed.

These transitional facilities enabled thousands of children (including some toddlers) to begin the process of integrating a fragmented self, strengthening the ego, re-adjusting a superego to an emancipated life, establishing an individual and group identity, improving interpersonal relationships, and developing intellectually.

An important social support system that enhanced the potential for resiliency was to have survived with a parent(s) and or to have reunited with a loving parent(s) who was not emotionally damaged by the persecution. A child reunited with a parent who was not psychologically capable of caring for him or her had to become the parental child. Such a dynamic interfered with the ability to feel resilient.

In addition to the social support that expediated resilience in Holocaust child survivors, other factors could increase or impede such propensity. Notably, resilience in one area of life was no indicator of resilience in all facets of functioning. Those who had the opportunity before the persecution to experience positive social dynamics, such as parent-child attachment, parental warmth, family cohesion, and close relationships with caring nonpunitive adults, were better able to form lasting loving relationships after the Holocaust. But inappropriate situations could hinder this: a forced wedding with the wrong partner, or a selected marriage for the need to survive. For instance, a young woman in her late teens marrying a father figure ten or twenty years older with whom she had nothing in common, except that he too was a Holocaust survivor; or relatives or parents who married off their children at a young age because they felt too burdened themselves to continue to care for them. Such circumstances decreased the likelihood of being in a satisfying, intimate relationship.

Resiliency was also enhanced for youngsters who had an opportunity to continue and complete an education, thereby increasing the likelihood of establishing a more satisfying professional life. A few became successful without an education, which also increased the inclination to be more satisfied with one's occupational identity. Thus, despite losing their childhood and education, child survivors who were able to self-actualize do not identify themselves as eternal victims.

Researchers have also studied personality characteristics that contributed to resilience and better adaptation. Sociologist William Helmreich, who wrote Against All Odds, (1992), proposed ten assets that supported survivors in adapting to their new lives after liberation: flexibility, assertiveness, tenacity, optimism, intelligence, distancing ability, group consciousness, assimilating the knowledge of survival, finding meaning in one's life, and courage.

While all these personal internal factors enhanced the inclination towards resilience, the external factors that child survivors confronted after the war's end cannot be dismissed as either enhancing or impeding one's resilience. A bad marriage, no marriage, an unsatisfying occupation, traumatic losses (losing a child who fought in one of Israel's wars), an inability to conceive, an emotionally or physically challenged offspring, poor physical health, prolonged illness or loss of a spouse, many displacements before settling on a permanent home—all these are external influences that contributed to a challenging adjustment and disequilibrium. Resilience is not a static state of being.

To complicate matters, nearly half of the survivors have sporadic episodes of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms. Those who have experienced more personal stresses and external threats in their post-Holocaust lives have had symptoms of PTSD erupt regularly. As in every population, approximately fifteen per cent of any group suffer from a psychiatric diagnosis, such as psychosis, obsessive-compulsive disorder, schizophrenia, depression, various forms of anxiety, manic-depression, addictions, and so on. What is statistically noteworthy among child survivors is that, despite the trauma they endured, they do not have more of these mental challenges than do other groups of people who did not suffer trauma.

While most researchers gravitate to the study of the pathology of traumatized populations, from Holocaust child survivors more can be learned from the resilience of the human spirit despite adversity. For example, the Israeli writer Aharon Megged followed approximately 100 of the 800 orphaned children who lived in a mansion in Selvino, Italy, after world War II, before immigrating to Israel. He concluded that these youngsters grew up to be adults, who were able to form intimate relationships and to marry. With the exception of one divorced man, who continued to wander between Israel and the United States, the others remained in stable relationships. There were no criminals in this group, and all were gainfully employed or were busy raising children.

I attribute the resilience of these orphans to the communal experience in Selvino that supported them to gain an “integrated self,” and not to identify with just a “victim self.” Many also had another group involvement in a kibbutz in Israel. Satisfying marriages also added to a meaningful existence in being able to bring to life the next generation and establish a sense of continuity. In this group, gainful employment added meaning and empowerment to their lives. This finding is also confirmed by a team of researchers at Ben Gurion University, reported by Norm O’Rourke, who explains that survivors integrated memories of horror and loss by having meaningful relationships and productive lives. (Out of 269 interviewees, only five were too uncomfortable to continue the interview.)

Defense mechanisms are other aspects to consider in examining dynamics that result in resilience of traumatized individuals. As mentioned, there is no doubt that surviving with a relative or a caretaker, or reuniting with a loving parent after the war, enhanced the potential to be resilient. But that may not have been enough without the defense mechanisms that helped the survivor to overcome losses, personal near-death experiences, and constant confrontation with killings. What emerges from interviews with child survivors is that denial was a common defense mechanism, which served an important function in the aftermath of trauma. Michael Bornstein, author of the Survivor's Club, was four years old when he was tattooed in Auschwitz along with his mother, father, grandmother, and younger brother. Born-

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stein’s father and brother were gassed, and Michael survived with his grandmother because his mother was deported to a labor camp. Michael was spared the death march because he was in the infirmary in Auschwitz a few days before the Russians liberated the camp. Bornstein was one of 52 children under the age of eight to survive Auschwitz.

Despite hardships along the way, Michael Bornstein’s life is one of resilience. His loving mother survived, and they reunited in their hometown of Zarki, Poland. After an unwelcome return to their home, Bornstein and his mother joined other displaced persons in a DP camp in Germany, and then moved to an apartment in the city. Bornstein was bullied by German children in school until he and his mother finally received visas to the United States when he was ten years old, in 1951.

Bornstein remained silent about his past for many years. He had limited recollection of his traumatic experiences, and some memories are mixed with stories told to him. And, like most children, he remembers the stench of bodies burning, the smoke rising from crematoria chimneys, the quickening clack of guards’ boots. But what plagues him is that he has no recall of the texture of his brother’s hair, or the sound of his father’s voice.

Michael grew up with a mother who promoted optimism. She would often say, “This too shall pass.” He succeeded professionally by building a successful career in pharmaceutical research. He married and went on to have four children, and a fun-filled life of sports, parties, and sheer enjoyment of the fruits of his labor.

Not until his children were adults, and asked questions, did Michael begin sharing bits and pieces of his horrific childhood in Auschwitz. When, for his bar mitzvah project, his grandson asked questions, Michael went from denial to confrontation, and began to talk about his past in earnest. Denial was no longer the adaptive defense mechanism that had served Michael in his childhood and adulthood.

In his mid-seventies, Michael had a “marker event.” This time he was shocked, and hence, more resolute to tell, not just his family, but the general public, about the persecution of the Jews during the German occupation in World War II. This transformation happened when he saw a picture of himself as a boy at Auschwitz on a website claiming that the Holocaust is a lie, that it never happened. He wrote in Survivors Club: The True Story of a Very Young Prisoner of Auschwitz, “I slammed my computer shut in disgust. I was horrified. My hands shook with anger.” Michael says he was “almost grateful for the sighting.”

He goes on to explain, “It made me realize that if we survivors remain silent—if we don’t gather the resolve to share our stories—then the only voices left to hear will be those of the liars and bigots.”

The search for meaning is the final stage of mourning in which an individual has a need to channel feelings in a constructive way. Michael’s ability to transform his anger into a positive outlet was another form of resilience. If one gets trapped in the emotional stage of mourning, resilience cannot flourish. Being a constant victim, or always feeling angry, depressed, helpless, or incapable of enjoying life because of survivor guilt, can exacerbate post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms and delay “posttraumatic growth.”

What is “posttraumatic growth?” It is a term coined by psychologists at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte to explain a “positive change experienced as a result of the struggle with a major life crisis or a traumatic event.” They go on to say that “posttraumatic growth “can take five different forms: New Opportunities as a result of surviving life and death; forming different relationships with others whether it be a closer connection or a strong bond with those who suffered like them; feeling more confident in their ability to survive—“If I lived through that, I can face anything;” more gratitude for life in general; deepening one’s spiritual life and religious practice.

One Holocaust child survivor who embodies “traumatic growth” because of gratitude is the “idealistic-driven” journalist, Bernard Krisher. Krisher was born 1931, in Frankfurt, to a Polish Jew who owned a fur store. In 1937, when his father could no longer support his family because the German authorities confiscated his store, the family fled to France, and hence to Spain and Portugal, before arriving in the United States in 1941. Krisher was already a budding journalist at age 12. In high-school and at Queens College, he was editor-in-chief of his school paper. During the Korean War, Krisher was drafted into the Army and he served two years in Germany working for the US Army’s press and information division, reporting for the Army newspaper, Stars and Stripes. When Krisher returned to the United States, he attended the Columbia School of Journalism and wrote for The New York World-Telegram and Sun. He also studied the field of Japanese area-and-language. Krisher continued to have an illustrious journalistic career when he moved to Japan in 1962 and became bureau chief of Newsweek and later Fortune magazine, and where he met his wife and had two children. He founded a magazine, FOCUS, which was read by two million people, and he served as chief editorial advisor for a Japanese publishing company. Krisher was the only one to interview the Japanese Emperor Hirohito “one-on-one.”

Krisher’s journalism career took him to Cambodia, where he founded a newspaper, The Daily, in 1993. It was a major challenge to have a newspaper that reported the truth under the regime of Prime Minister Hun Sen for 34 years. The print edition of The Daily was forced to close in 2018. Krisher believed in the power of journalism to fight power with truth.

What is most impressive about Krisher as a Holocaust child survivor is his heightened empathy for other children and adults who are suffering. Being very conscious of the extermination of two million Cambodians during the Khmer Rouge regime, Krisher became Chairman of the American Assistance to Cambodia. He was responsible for the building of 550 schools in Cambodia. He founded the Sihanouk Hospital Center for Hope, which is known for giving free medical care for the poor. Orphans and foster children from remote villages were given an opportunity to have an education, and to have rice when the World Food Program stopped its food distribution.

Although I never interviewed Krisher, one can surmise from his professional and philanthropic work that his survival as a child motivated him to work towards freedom for all people, and to help those who survived genocide. His meaningful life is obviously above the ordinary, but that does not mean that each Holocaust child survivor cannot find more mundane endeavors that can make a difference in someone’s life, and simultaneously enhance resilience.

While Michael Bornstein benefitted from his mother’s survival to become resilient, and Bernard Krisher was fortunate to have survived with both parents, Judith Mannheimer Alter Kallman, despite remain-

Continued on next page
ing an orphan after the war, was resilient. Kallman was born in Piestany, Czechoslovakia, famous for its spa. Her peaceful childhood ended one Sabbath evening when her parents and her five siblings were sitting down to a Sabbath Friday night dinner. A rock was thrown through the window; it shattered not only glass, but their idyllic way of life.

The family went into hiding, and one day Judith fell into a latrine. She could not scream because the Germans were everywhere, so she prayed, asking for a way to get out before she drowned. She climbed out one nail at a time, feeling as if the hand of God were lifting her. From that moment on she felt that God would protect her, and she had total faith in God.

While Judith was at school, her parents and two older siblings were put on a cattle car destined for Auschwitz. Coming out of school, she and her ten-year-old brother saw their parents on the train. Judith screamed and was silenced by a Hlinka guard. She, along with two brothers and a sister, were saved from deportation and sent to an aunt in Nitre, who was a major supporter of Vaad Hatzala, the Jewish Rescue Committee. Judith and her siblings were then sent to Budapest to join another aunt, who slammed the door when she saw them. The two older siblings were accepted by a Zionist group and immigrated to Palestine under the auspices of Aliyah Beit, the illegal immigration organization. She and her 10-year-old brother were taken to prison, then saved by Vaad Hatzala, and placed under the care of Stern, a well-known restaurant owner and rescuer.

When Germany invaded Budapest, Judith was hiding in the “Glass House,” a sheltered building under the protection of the Swiss legation. After liberation, Judith returned to the Stern family, but the new wife refused to have Judith board with them. Judith contracted a lung disease and was sent to a sanitorium administered by the Joint Distribution Committee. Her journey continued in a Christian orphanage; and her aunt then arranged for Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld of London to get her to England on the last boat. In England Judith was living in a group home for orphans. This transitional supportive community enhanced her resilience. When Eleanor Roosevelt came to England for an official United States government visit, Judith, the preteen girl, was chosen to present her with a bouquet of flowers. She later joined her siblings in Israel and lived in Kfar Batya, a Mizrahi boarding school. Because Judith knew how to speak English, she became the fund-raiser. She approached potential American donors while giving them tours around the facility. One of the American Jewish tourists whom she met through her work proposed marriage, and they married in Israel. She then immigrated to the United States.

Judith became a widow with three young children when her husband died of cancer. She had to take over his business for which she was not prepared. The lawyer for the business, Leon Charney, guided and supported her, and taught her how to manage her affairs. Eventually she started dating and met another satisfying life partner.

Because Judith had many supportive people along the way, this increased the potential for her resilience. Although she is not a religiously observant Jew, her unwavering faith in God, enhanced her resilience and added to the continuity of the self. Judith was an active leader in lobbying for Israel, she worked on the Clinton Campaign, and other political causes. Since her book A Candle in the Heart was published in 2011, Judith speaks in schools. Her message is to stop bullying, because bullying is a symptom of a failing democracy and a warning that genocide is possible.

Dasha Rittenberg, another Holocaust orphan, was born in Bedzin, Poland to a Gerer Hassidic family. The Sabbath was the highlight of every week, celebrated as if one were getting ready for a “celebration
DESPITE ALL ODDS, THEY SURVIVED, PERSISTED — AND THRIVED

Dasha’s job was to polish her three brothers’ shoes when they came home from school. She prided herself in being complimented as the best polisher.

When the Germans invaded Poland, eleven-year-old Dasha and her family were forced into a ghetto for two-and-a-half years. Her parents and three brothers were deported to Auschwitz and murdered. Dasha and her older sister were conscripted into the Schatzlar labor camp until liberation on May 8, 1945. What sustained Dasha during the years of slave labor was being among a few other girls who were cognizant of when the Sabbath arrived each week. Even though they had to work seven days a week, on the Sabbath, Dasha and her friends tried to do less work. During Passover, she traded her bread for a potato, and even though every day consisted of a starvation diet, she fasted on Yom Kippur. When one year she confused the date for Yom Kippur, she created another fast day.

Continuity of the religious self in the most extreme situation provides an emotional strength that is life-sustaining. Dasha also remained loyal to her parents and their values with whom she was hoping to be reunited. She felt that her keeping faith in tradition and religious observance meant that “this entire family remains whole and survives.”

Dasha’s sister survived, and together they immigrated to Palestine. An arranged marriage, which brought her to America, did not work out. Yet Dasha did not succumb to despair. She had a son to raise, and that strengthened her resolve to cope. Having to care for the well-being of another person is another form of resilience. Dasha’s earlier experience with loving parents and siblings imbued with Jewish spiritual and traditional values, enabled her to be a loving mother, and to establish a home that represented a continuity with her earlier life. In addition, being part of a supportive spiritual community, and not living an isolated life with few friends, enhances the potential for resilience.

The generation that survived the Holocaust as children has much to teach the mental-health profession about resilience. The lost childhood, the murder of one’s parents and siblings, can never be undone. The nightmares, post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms under conditions of stress, fear of abandonment, trust, anger at the persecutors and the passive bystanders will never fully disappear. But these emotions have not impeded most child survivors from leading productive, satisfying, meaningful lives at work and maintaining satisfying intimate relationships. Although, at times, these goals have been more challenging than for those who did not experience massive psychic trauma, aging child survivors have more gratifying lives when they find ways to transmit their life story to the next generation. Feeling that one’s trauma is validated, and its essence has value, adds to the search for meaning. Knowing that someone cares about what a survivor learned from his or her traumatic experience, does not diminish the victimhood, but one feels more empowered about making a difference.

Over the years Holocaust child survivors were told that they did not suffer because they do not remember details of their ordeals. In more recent years, this misconception has been discredited. It may seem exaggerated to suggest that telling one’s life story is healing and enhances resilience. If you throw a stone into the water you notice the ripple effects, so too with a story of survival.

* Dasha Rittenberg’s story appeared in the 2017 issue of The Hidden Child.

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WORLD FEDERATION CONFERENCE 2019
VANCOUVER, NOVEMBER 1-4

The World Federation of Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust and Descendants (WFJCSh&D) will hold its 31st Annual Conference in Vancouver, BC, November 1 – 4, 2019, at the Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre Hotel.

The Kindertransport Association (KTA) will join the conference once again as will members of Generations of the Shoah International (GSI).

Vancouver is one of the most beautiful cities in the world, surrounded by rivers, the Pacific Ocean, mountain ranges and parkland. It has a thriving Jewish community with an active Holocaust education center which reaches over 20,000 high school students annually. The community and the Vancouver Holocaust Education Center look forward to welcoming you.

The hotel is located in the heart of downtown Vancouver, close to many interesting venues. It is within walking distance to the world-renowned library designed by Moshe Safdie, the Vancouver Art Gallery, Granville Island and Robson Street shopping districts, Gastown and Yaletown as well as Stanley Park and the Seawall. The specially negotiated rates for the conference are available three days ahead of the conference, as well as three days following it.

The conference will be hosted by the Vancouver Holocaust Education Center (VHEC) and the local Holocaust Survivor community. Please plan to come early and stay late. There is much to do and see in Vancouver! Check it out at: https://www.tourismvancouver.com/plan-your-trip/. Watch for updates at www.holocaustchild.org.
DESPITE ALL ODDS, THEY SURVIVED, PERSISTED — AND THRIVED

Before the Holocaust reached Hungary, my maternal grandfather, Adolf Kohn, participated in the ‘Underground Railroad’ that saved Jewish refugees from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia and Poland. Grandfather, a widower and father of six adult children, owned land, a manor house and a kosher dairy farm near the Czechoslovakian border. He had his own shul in the manor house, and all neighboring Jews were welcomed. Each Shabbat, he opened his home to stranded travelers and Jewish soldiers. In 1939, my father, a friend of my mother’s brother Miklos, was one of those soldiers. My parents, Magdolna Kohn and Mozes Adam, married shortly thereafter. I was born in Budapest, on January 28, 1941.

While Grandfather’s sons and sons-in-law served in the army, his daughters and their children lived with him. Although my mother spent weekdays in Budapest, running my father’s furniture factory, I stayed with the family. Mother would arrive each Thursday evening, and return to Budapest on Monday morning.

Grandfather had progressive views: he believed in equal rights and responsibilities for his two sons and four daughters. All had been equally educated and instructed in the management of the land and the farm. He did not permit child labor, insisting that every child on his land attend school, and he treated his employees fairly. Grandfather was respected and admired by everyone.

One night in a local bar, in early 1943, Grandfather was unwittingly denounced by a farmer who had too much to drink. The man bragged that his employer Baron Kohn was not only fair to everyone who worked for him, but that he also rescued Jews from Nazi-occupied countries. The Hungarian Nyilas set out to make an example of Grandfather and our family. All were arrested and immediately deported.

My earliest memory begins at this point. I was playing with my favorite doll upstairs in the children’s quarters with my governess. My aunts, cousins, grandfather, and great-grandmother were downstairs in the day room. We heard trucks pulling into the courtyard. This was followed by piercing shouts, screams and the firing of bullets. My governess ran down to see what was going on. She returned, pale, trembling, and said in a terrified voice, “We are going to play hide-and-seek.” Placing her index finger over her lips, she whispered, “Not a word, not a sound! If we run into anyone you do not know, pretend you cannot understand or speak.” She took my hand into hers and led me through the rear corridors, out the back entrance, then onto the small path from the house to the service quarters. As we turned, I saw uniformed men shove my family onto the trucks. I turned to my governess for an explanation. Visibly shaken, she replied, “They are also playing a game.”

As I followed her into her parents’ house, I felt frightened and confused. She dressed me in peasant clothes belonging to one of her sisters. It was to be part of the game, a game I could not understand.

On this fateful day I escaped the horrific fate of my mother’s three sisters, their children, my grandfather, and my great-grandmother. None were ever heard from again.

The next day, my governess took me to my mother in Budapest. Shortly thereafter, a family friend, Laszlo (Laci) Hantos, who was working with the underground, came and said to my mother, “Pack what you can carry; you and Eva have to leave immediately. They’re coming for you both. I will try to get some of your valuables later. The underground and I are taking responsibility to make sure you two will be safe.

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A SURVIVOR’S AFFIRMATION OF LIFE

By Eva Paula (Adam Rosenberg Rozgonyi) Nathanson

Eva at first birthday, holding doll given by birth father.

Recent photo of Eva Nathanson.
We owe that to your father.”

Sometime later, Laci found a little girl, crying by herself on the street. Vali was younger than I was. He brought her to my mother and said, “She seems to be all alone. I could not leave her; she needs to stay and hide with you.” I was pleased to have a companion.

The three of us were hidden by righteous Christians and the underground, wherever and whenever some good people were willing to take us in. Hiding two small children was a major risk, and each place proved to be temporary. We were hidden in pantries, attics, basements, closets, cellars, and in a hole dug under the floor of a room. In the end, we hid in empty, bombed-out buildings all over Budapest until April 1945.

Throughout our hiding period, we were petrified, confused, traumatized, afraid, hungry. We followed orders without question: we wanted to survive. I can still smell the mildew emanating from sacks of rotted vegetables that covered one hiding place. I still see the eyes of rodents that shared our spaces. We lived in discomfort, fear, dirt, hunger and silence. When we had any normal day-to-day activities, such as eating, speaking, crying, walking, moving about, washing, or using the bathroom, we felt grateful. Vali and I had to learn to cry in silence, speak in whispers, and be still most of the time. I shared our only toy, my doll, with Vali. Mother tried to keep us clean with a washcloth, but most of the time, we felt grimy.

The money and valuables we escaped with did not last, and our rescuers needed cash to feed us. Mother, an amazing knitter, worked day and night to produce saleable or barterable items. I can still hear the muted sound of the knitting needles as we went to sleep and as we awakened. Our job was to roll the yarn into balls, and unwind it for her as she knitted.

We stayed in windowless, confined places, and when we had to be moved, it was always at night. I became used to dark, airless spaces, and could no longer remember the feeling of fresh air and sunshine, or the feeling of being among people.

Childhood remembrances have marked my life and haunted my dreams for years. Perhaps because I have a form of dyslexia, I have instinctively learned to visually etch these events into my mind. Once, as we were transferred from one hiding place to another, we were discovered. Vali and I were separated from my mother, and brutally shoved onto a truck. I pulled Vali into a corner next to me. Through a tiny gap, I saw four men in dark uniforms and red arm bands following us on horseback. Two climbed onto the truck as the others held the reins of their horses. I held my breath, petrified. Men in uniform scared me. They threw us into the arms of the other two men on horseback. I was so terrified that I threw up and soiled myself. I remember the shame, disgust, the paralyzing fear I felt as the man held me. Without a word, they brought us to the cellar of a building where we were reunited with my mother. Those men in the SS uniform were actually part of the underground.

I was immersed into a small wooden tub of warm water, and the filth was washed away. This was the first bath I’d had for a very long time. I stopped crying, and a sense of calm and safety came over me. That feeling of warmth and coziness had to last for a long time. Vali too was bathed, and we both got some hot milk. That is one of the few good memories I have from those years.

Cellar living was hard on our health. I was malnourished, and I contracted an infection that led to a constant low-grade fever. My mother had to hide my ailments from our rescuers. She was worried that if they found out I was sick, they would make us leave.

One time, as we were cramped together in a storage area, flat on a wooden shelf, with our faces nearly touching the shelf above, our building was hit by a bomb. This must have been toward the end of the war, when Budapest was under attack. Vali and I were soundlessly crying, choking back our tears as everything rocked from the impact. My mother covered us with her body to save us from the falling jars, cans and debris being displaced by the jolting. I asked my mom, “Are we going to be all right?” Her response was, “Shush, just one more bomb and we’ll never have to be afraid again.” By this time, Mother had lost hope, was depressed, and felt weak. In her despair, she no longer believed in a future.

Someone from the underground had sent her a message from a man who had witnessed the murder of my father and my uncle Miklos. It seemed that my father and uncle were punished with hard labor and regular beatings because they had tried to escape. My uncle was tied to a tree and cold water was poured on him until he froze to death. The Nazis had ordered my father to dig his own grave; they shot him, and buried him alive. The news of my father’s and uncle’s murders had shaken my mother’s resolve. She was 22 years old and a widow. She told me later that the only reason she fought to live was to save us.

By then, the Hungarian Arrow Cross militiamen were doing all they could to dispose of those Jews who so far had escaped deportation. They dragged the remaining Jews to the bank of the Danube, where they were tied together, shot, and tossed into the current.

We too were discovered. I recall it as if it were yesterday. It was in the late afternoon of a dark, cold day in early 1945. I was too weak to walk, so my mother carried me in one arm while holding Vali’s hand with the other. We got to the Danube and stood at the end of the line. I heard crying, begging, screaming, praying; then shots, followed by a splash, a thud, and gurgling. The river was red with blood and full of floating bodies. We were shacking from the cold and the fear. Mother said to us, “Close your eyes and ears, you will feel warmer.” By the time our turn came, only two Hungarian Arrow Cross men were left. One wrapped a cord around us; the other told me to follow. We were tied up, shot, and tossed into the current.

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despite all odds, they survived, persisted — and thrived

and whose arms were tattooed with num-

bers. She was crying violently, beating
her bald head against the wall as people
tried to comfort her. Much later I found
out that she had just returned from the
concentration camps, and that she was the
sole survivor of her family. She was only 16.
My mother sort of adopted her. She
ended up marrying my mother’s only liv-
ing brother Jozsef, and became my aunt.
She was very damaged by her experiences
in the concentration camps, but she was
a loving aunt.

I am not surprised that she was so
injured. I did not spend any time in con-
centration camps, I did not see my parents
murdered, yet I’ve been emotionally and
physically harmed. I still carry the scars

of those nightmarish years. After 20 years
of working on and off with a psychologist
specializing in trauma therapy, I am a rela-
tively functioning human being, most of
the time. I have managed to achieve the
majority of my life goals, but whenever a new
trauma appears in my life, I experience a
relapse. And I still have major issues and
phobias to deal with on a daily basis.

Though I may feel myself choking on
unexpressed emotions, I still can’t make
a sound when I cry. When eating, I have to
remind myself not to devour each morsel,
but to chew and swallow slowly. And, of
course, nothing goes to waste. I still recoil
from uniforms and guns. I fear any large
body of water. I work out in a swimming
pool at my club several times a week, but
I can’t dunk my face in the water. I feel
claustrophobic in elevators, small hallways,
or any enclosure. I do not go in a subway
alone, no matter how far I must travel, even
if it means walking a long distance. I always
look for the exit signs. I never sit with my
back to a door or a window.

In the little guesthouse where I live, the
doors and windows are always kept open
except when I go to sleep. I do not feel
comfortable in crowds, I cannot handle any
violent anywhere, not even in movies.
After all the years of feeling dirty, I need
to take two showers most days and wash
my clothes after one wearing. And I can’t
relax. Because I survived while most of my
family did not, I feel I must always be pro-
ductive. I am always multitasking. While I
am a multi-medium artist and silversmith,
I could never learn to knit. My mother was
so impaired by her losses that we did not
talk about my childhood until years later
when I needed explanations for my recur-
ing nightmares and memories. I do not
make Holocaust art. My art is to help me
to heal. Before we escaped from Budapest
in 1956, I could not return to the spot on
the bank of the Danube that would have
been our doom.

AFTER THE WAR

Laci Hantos wanted to take revenge
against the Hungarian Nazis, the Nyilasok. He
joined the Communist party and Secret
Service, and became chief of the Budapest
Secret Police. Laci and his wife adopted Vali,
and she had a very privileged life. I spent
many weekends and vacations with them,
because Vali and I were very close.

Laci was able to document that most
of our family was murdered by the Nazis.
Only one of my mother’s siblings survived,
Jozsef Kohn, as well as one of my mother’s
aunts and two uncles. However, my moth-
er could not accept that. Hoping that
someone would come back, she poured
over every posted list. Our former apart-
ment had been confiscated by the Hun-
garian Nyilasok, and was now occupied.
We went back to my grandfather’s manor
house, knowing that if anyone was alive,
they’d go back there. The main house was
taken over by the Soviet forces for their
headquarters. We ended up staying with
the family of my governess, the last place
I knew before the sky fell in became the
first place to stay when the storm seemed
over.

I had nightmares. I was feverish and
weak. I could only consume broth or soup.
I was taken to a hospital where the doctor
told my mother, “Save the food, let her die.”
But Mother wasn’t going to give up! It took
a year, but she nursed me back to health.

Mother received a letter that would

Continued on next page
change my life forever. She told me that she had to leave me with my governess for a couple of days, but she would return with a big surprise.

Years later I found out that the letter had been from my father’s best friend, Jozsef Rosenberg. The two men had made a pact: whoever survives will take care of the other’s family. Jozsef Rosenberg was ready to fulfill his commitment. He offered to marry my mother and to adopt me. He was a master craftsman in furniture. My mother was 25 years old, a widow, alone with a child, and almost everyone she loved was dead. This very good man offered security and love for both of us. My birth father’s only surviving sibling, a psychologist, believed I was too traumatized and ill to be told about my family, and I was not told the truth for many years.

Mother came back with a short, handsome man with black hair. She told me, “This is your father; he came back.” We went to Budapest to start a new life together. Father was very good to me; I felt safe in his arms. He carried me when I was too weak to walk. He took me to doctor after doctor, hospital after hospital, trying to find a cure for me. I remember fondly that at the dinner table, when he found something “extra special delicious on his plate,” he would ask me to close my eyes, open my mouth, and give me that exceptional morsel. Then he would ask me to describe the taste. This became our game until I got my strength back. He too had lost almost everyone in his family, 10 siblings, his parents and lots of cousins. He found a bomb-wrecked property in Ujpset, a suburb of Budapest. The livable area was very small, but we made it work. We moved in with his two surviving sisters, Julcsa and Olga. Olga, my favorite, was bedridden, because of multiple injuries she incurred in the camps. We shared a bed and alcove together. We became very close, but she died a few months later. My father’s only living brother Miklos never came back to Hungary. He ended up in the US.

We few survivors were fortunate to be alive, but we felt displaced, scattered, very much alone, and we clung together for a sense of belonging and security. Father built a workshop, and slowly, he added rooms, eventually ending up with a three-bedroom home with a very strange floor plan.

During the Stalin era, life was difficult in Hungary. The borders were closed, and people felt oppressed and starved. Living in fear of deportation, many of the surviving Jews changed their last names to Hungarian ones. The war had ended, but not the anti-Semitism. Our name became “Rozgonyi.” My father was against communism, and never joined the party. Now we had two things against us, and became undesirable enemies of the state. We were blacklisted and subjected to house searches and penalties on a regular basis.

I didn’t fit in at school. Scrawny, small and sickly, I did not look or act like the other kids. I was singled out and ridiculed because my parents wouldn’t let me participate in any communist youth activities. I was an excellent student except for a writing disability that was diagnosed many years later as dyslexia. It took much creativity, effort and ingenuity to hide it and compensate for it.

When I was 10 ½ years old, I got my period and overnight I ceased being the scrawny girl I had been. But my parents still treated me and dressed me as the 10-year-old I was. Again, I felt ridiculous and miserable, not fitting in with my classmates. Father, an old-fashioned man, thought it was no longer proper for me to sit on his lap. I felt rejected, especially since my two little sisters enjoyed his cuddles. Aunt Julcsa chose that awkward time to tell me about my real father. I felt devastated, betrayed and rejected. Although I know my parents acted out of love and a belief that it was best for me, the trust in my parents was damaged for years to come. To cope with this new reality, I immersed myself into reading, theater and music, and lived in the fairy tale world of my imagination.

In our communist world, my parents were in constant fear for my safety. When I was 12, they betrothed me to the son of a Jewish family friend in the hope that if something happened to them, or if they were deported, I’d be cared for and have a place to stay. I am convinced that the only reason we were not deported during this era was because of Laszlo Hantos. When the revolution broke out in October 1956, my father repaid his debt to Hantos for saving us during the Holocaust by hiding him and some of his colleagues from the angry mob for three months until the Russian Army arrived and defeated the revolution.

However, we were no longer safe in Hungary, and so on December 20th, 1956, my parents, my two sisters and I escaped to Austria through snow-covered ditches while Russian flares lit up the sky. The ordeal took over 6 hours on foot. We had nothing but the clothes on our backs and food for one day. We arrived at an Austrian border town in the middle of the night. The Red Cross gave us some hot drinks, food, and let us rest on cots. In the morning they brought us to Vienna. We registered with HIAS, and spent 9 months in Austria in a Jewish displaced persons camp. I was 15 when we arrived and I spent my 16th birthday there. Ironically, it was the first time I felt happy. The young people in the camp organized and started a school. We were teachers to the young ones, and students to some of the older ones. I was accepted and for the first time in my young life I felt popular and attractive. I belonged! I had hope in a new start, and was eager to leave and forget all my unhappiness.

**AMERICA**

We arrived in the U.S. on September 11, 1957, and with the help of HIAS, we went to Los Angeles, where our sponsor, my father’s brother, Miki, lived. I was ecstatic. But it was not the end of our difficulties. We ended up in East LA, where most of our neighbors spoke Spanish and were in similar situations as we were.

We had to find our way and earn our keep. My father got a job with a mealy pay. My mother slaved, taking care of old women; my two little sisters were in elementary school. At 16 ½, I realized I could no longer be a “kid.” I needed to help out. Still, while I spoke three languages, English...
was not one of them. I was enrolled in an ESL program at Belmont High. Five months later, I took a test that enabled me to start working. My parents were against it; they wanted me to finish my education. I felt I needed to contribute, and promised them I would eventually get an education.

My first job was as a shipping clerk at $40 a week. My parents wanted to marry me off, preferably to some established Jewish European man, who would take care of me. I was not at all ready to be the wife of an older man. I was 17 and naive. My dream was to become a real American. In 1959, I got a job at Mount Sinai Hospital’s Department of Cardiology that lasted until 1994.

I met a UCLA psychology student. He was 21, and just as innocent as I was. We had an immediate connection. He became my mentor, my tutor, my best friend, and it grew into love. We were married in December 1960. I was 19, he was 23. He was working on his PhD, I was supporting us. We were happy, we had freedom, independence, and we travelled. He had helped me to become the American I always wanted to be. We played house and taught and learned from each other. My first child, a boy, was born in 1963. My second child, a girl, was born in 1966. I had everything I wanted and dreamed of: an American professional husband, two beautiful, healthy children and I was contributing to society as an American.

In 1968, my beloved father died of a massive stroke at age 56. We were devastated. My mother, who became legally blind, was left with two teenagers and no insurance. My husband and I divorced in 1970. We were young, naive and inexperienced.

Being a single mother with two small children in the 70s was challenging. At first, I worked where I could be near my children. My husband and I divorced in 1970. We left with two teenagers and no insurance. My mother, who became legally blind, was left with two teenagers and no insurance. My husband and I divorced in 1970. We were young, naive and inexperienced.

In 1985 we were told that my mother had 6 months to live. I moved into the guest house to be near her. At that time, my employer offered to pay for my MBA. I had to grab that! I worked during the day and went to university in the evening, all while taking care of my mother at night. The schedule was grueling. My remarkable mother died in October 1987. She was only 67, but after such a journey, it was her time to rest. I was looking for a liberal-progressive congregation to say Kaddish for my mother. I was introduced to B’nai Horing, where I’ve been a member and taken on the responsibility of event coordinator. After my mother died, I purchased the property from my mother’s estate, I have been living in the guest house, and renting out the main house.

In 1989 I graduated with a double Masters from Antioch University. I kept my promise to my beloved parents, I felt proud and fulfilled.

Between 1990 and the present, my life took on many spins and turns. It seems that destiny wanted me to prove that I had been worth saving. In 1994, I was a passenger in a car that was pushed into an embankment as we returned from the Sierras Mountains. My injuries were very serious. That I am alive, and walking, is a miracle. The injuries have affected my spine and my shoulders for the rest of my life.

In 2001 I was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer. I underwent chemotherapy and radiation for over a year, and survived it. I was not going to let cancer kill me after what I went through in life. I retired from the medical field in 2005.

I do not think retirement means you stop being productive, it means one has to concentrate and focus on other areas. The past 10 years, I have been a “survival witness speaker” for the Los Angeles Holocaust museum. I am sent to communities and schools to advocate against prejudice and bigotry. I volunteer in theaters, playhouses, film and art festivals, and other cultural events. I am still functioning as the event coordinator for my Jewish-renewal community. I work and create with fellow artists on a regular basis. I try to travel at least twice a year. I read, I enjoy life. To take care of my health and spine, I work out in the health club several times a week, and I have physical therapy every week. I have family and friends with whom I share the pleasures and responsibilities of life.

I’ve been blessed this year with my lovely 22-year-old granddaughter living with me while she is applying to graduate schools and working part-time. Although I know it is only until she gets her own life together, I enjoy her presence in my life and the gift to get to know each other.

At 78, I feel I have lived a relatively successful and productive life. I feel blessed. I am comfortable. I have all I need, and when I’ll leave this earth, I will be able to leave something for my children and grandchildren. I still have hopes and aspirations to fulfill: places to see, art to create. I am content and feel truly blessed. I have two remarkable, established, productive, healthy children, two fabulous grandchildren, loving family and friends, and a supportive community. I feel loved and respected.

I have lived a good life.
As long as I can remember my Dad has searched for the true identity of his father. At any family function, as conversations around the table drifted from memories to stories, funny or sad, he would quietly slip away, pick up a book and either read or thumb through pictures of people long gone, swept away by the ravages of war. He had so little to go on at first. Silence from his mother, but a certainty that because of his blood type, he was not a relative to the man that raised him as his own. We would talk and guess at possibilities: was he the result of love or violence? Russian or German soldier? He went through dates and movements of different armies, researched possibilities and reached a number of conclusions that would change when a new variable would pop up from a new book. All this changed in the Fall of 2006 with a DNA test that came back with a description of Dad’s genes as “Semitic.”

The day we received his test, we were shocked. How was this possible? How could Grandma get pregnant in the middle of the war with some man whose people were being actively sought out for destruction? Who? How? Where? We talked about different possibilities. My father spoke about this to anyone who would listen, especially his elderly Jewish patients, survivors of the war who spent their summers in the Catskills. As it turned out, one of his patients, Bluma Z., came from the same town (Brody, then Poland, now Ukraine) and was familiar with my grandmother’s name. She recalled her uncle, Dr. Zygmunt Barak, who was a dentist with a practice in Brody. As it turned out, my father knew this name. This was the dentist that employed my Grandma as a cleaning woman. My father was overjoyed. Finally, here was someone who either knew or could confirm some of the pieces of information that we had!

Bluma shared a picture of her uncle with his wife and another couple, smiling into the camera, also in front of that office. As they spoke, a story emerged about a hiding spot that was built under the pigsty on my great-grandfather’s farm. Bluma told us that, yes, that was where her uncle hid, but decided to leave it after the Germans left Brody and the Soviet Army was rumored to be within weeks of entering. Dr. Barak decided to move his hiding spot to a convent in the area, but he was killed when the Ukrainians, sympathetic to and armed by the Nazis, heard that there were Jews and Poles being hidden by the nuns.

Bluma said that the monastery was leveled and everyone inside, including her uncle, was killed. As my father and Bluma sorted through the details and dates they knew, my father began to wonder if it was possible that Dr. Barak had fathered him.
my grandfather was sent to Siberia by the Soviets at the beginning of the war and was presumed dead, and Dr. Barak’s wife and children reportedly perished in the ghetto. Would it be possible that something kindled between my grandmother and the man she was hiding? Bluma seemed to realize where my father’s thoughts were heading. She became very uncomfortable and agitated when he suggested that maybe she could also be tested by Family Tree DNA. She said “That’s not possible and why do you want to be Jewish?! It is not good or easy to be a Jew. You don’t even realize how much anti-Semitism is out there. You should stay what you are!” She left the office unhappy but not before she gave him her phone number in Israel with instructions to call her if he found anything new.

At this point the incessant cycle of hopes raised and then dashed again began to wear on my father, and his health became compromised. So much time had passed since all these things took place that we found ourselves with many plausible theories but very little actual information that could be confirmed. We did, however, learn enough to realize that our next step had to be to question whether my grandmother was in fact my father’s mother. We tested the only close family member still alive (my father’s niece). When the results came back, we were once again completely shocked: there was 0% DNA relationship between my father and his niece. This meant that neither of the parents who raised him were biologically related to him. It was now official: he was not a “bastard child,” but a Jewish “hidden child.”

We were at a complete loss. In my free time I would pursue leads. I looked at Polish files for “Zegota,” the organization that hid and placed children, and asked the researchers at Yad Vashem to point me to where I could find any records of children being placed with families in the region of Brody. We had no name for my father, but we knew that he was a baby when he was given to Grandma, because he is around 6-9 months in the first picture he appears in, in Brody, in the spring of 1944. How many infant boys could there be on such a list, in that time frame? If we could only find such a document, then we would have some definite answers, we thought.

Yad Vashem was overwhelmed by the scope of the research involved and the uncertainty that it would yield any fruit, and so they declined to help. Once again, just as we were beginning to run out of steam, help came from one of my father’s patients, who was moved by his story. She suggested that her daughter, Melody, had extremely good research skills and would be willing to help. She was right! Melody’s skill and intuition led us right back to ... Dr. Zygmunt Barak. We still didn’t have a DNA sample, but technology has moved at an incredible pace and we discovered that we had other options now. Specifically, it was now possible to submit pictures for a service that uses a computer algorithm to compare facial features in a process known as “DNA Facial Recognition.” We submitted a close-up of Dr. Barak’s face and a close-up of my father’s face from a picture where we judged them to be of similar age.

The report findings were that there was a 100% match for head pattern and chin pattern, and nearly 90% match for eye and eyebrow patterns — all in all, 82.26% total match in a test where anything over 50% is considered “significant”!

Did we find our family? Is it possible that 75 years after these events took place, we found my father’s people? We are cautiously optimistic. This technology is relatively new and until we have a DNA sample, we cannot be 100 percent sure. I have called the number in Israel that Bluma left for my phone number in Israel that Bluma left for my phone number in Israel that Bluma left for my phone number in Israel that Bluma left for my phone number in Israel that Bluma left for my phone number in Israel that Bluma left for my phone number in Israel that Bluma left for my phone number in Israel that Bluma left for my phone number in Israel.

We stayed in shelters
Afraid from the Daylight
I was One year old
I hardly knew Him

But I loved Him
He was my Daddy

A certain day, He did not return
Desperately I kept waiting
As a prayer, before sleeping
I whispered His name

Anxiously we waited for the liberation
The day will soon come that I will not whisper His name any more

Our liberators were amongst us
Amidst general joy

We had overcome
The ruthless SS terror

Day after day
Holding Mummy’s hand

We went to the train station
Waiting for survivors

Holding His picture in my hand
I searched through the masses

There came fewer and fewer trains
I kept whispering His name

Did He forsake me
I loved Him so much

After all these years
I still wait for Him

My Daddy
Various questions have been asked about what motivated the Saviors, and what differentiated these few special people from their neighbors. For example, Arieh L. Bauminger, asked the following in his study of *The Righteous Among the Nations*:

“Who, then, were our Righteous People, what were their promptings—in town and village, peasants and workers, writers and teachers, physicians and professors, clerics and agnostics, soldiers and diplomats, rich and poor alike, and of many nationalities—Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Austrians, Danes and Dutch, and not entirely absent in Nazi Germany itself? What inspired them?”

Here is his answer: “Some had Jewish friends before the war and clung to them fearlessly. Some had perhaps never known a Jew before, but were men and women of integrity and a sense of justice that fortified them to champion the persecuted. Quite a number were progressives, people of liberal views, Socialists, themselves under Gestapo suspicion or torment. There were many believers in racial equality. There were priests and monks and nuns under impulsion of faith and mercy …. But, in the main it was the common folk that Jewish parents were ready to entrust their children for safekeeping, and even when duress or death stopped the payments pledged for that charge, the quick affection of the foster parents was still a guarantee of ultimate salvation …. Modesty and humility were the common virtues of all these Righteous People.”

Nechama Tec, herself a survivor from Poland, revisited Poland in 1978 with the purpose of interviewing rescuers, and managed to find seventeen who were willing to be interviewed. On the basis of these and additional published accounts and archive material of Jews and Poles, she draws her conclusions. The following excerpts are from her book, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*:

“I found that lower class individuals show no special propensity for Jewish rescue. Fewer peasants became rescuers than their numbers in the general population should have warranted. As expected, the intellectuals were more prone to Jewish rescue than any other segment of the population. Proportionately, there were as many middle-class persons among rescuers as in the population at large. Class affiliation, then, was only weakly related to Jewish protection.

Political involvement per se does not seem to be related to Jewish rescue. The traditionally anti-Semitic Polish Catholic Church had no uniform wartime policy regarding Jewish extermination. Absence of an official posture left much latitude for clergy and the lay public. As a result, the clergy responded in a variety of ways, ranging from denouncements to self-sacrifice. Only a minority of the Poles I interviewed directly were deeply religious; these few credited their religious convictions with prompting them to initiate and sustain Jewish rescue. Some members of the clergy were known to urge their parishioners to support Nazi policies of Jewish extermination. 

*Contined on next page*
tion. Some Jews turned away by friends received aid from total strangers. 3

Dr. Tec says that the Polish rescuers in her study did not fit into their milieu, and were therefore less constrained and influenced by their neighbors’ views. She found that those who were prepared to hide only for the money were unreliable.

My analysis also shows that the individualist, whose main motive was humanitarian, was more often reliable and kind.

It is difficult to define the characteristics and attributes of any group of people and even more so to attribute a motive for their actions. In the case of heroes (here defined as people who risk their own lives and the wellbeing of their family, for another’s sake) their categorization is impossible and even obscene.

The temptation to make generalizations is great. Exceptional cases stay in the mind, and tend to dominate one’s thinking. For instance, an unusual trade such as pig-slaughterer, prostitute, smuggler, street-sweeper or sculptor will be remembered, and so will exceptional characteristics such as extortion, religious fanaticism, brutality, etc.

To maintain the facts and to enable both the reader and the researcher to obtain a true picture of the rescuers and their background, their personal details have been assembled and arranged in tabular form. For statistical reasons, personal details and attributes have been assembled and shown in diagrams.

Scrutiny of these tables and diagrams, based on sixty witnesses’ reports and comprising over eighty hidings, should help to dispel some preconceived ideas. The tables are based on the witnesses’ accounts. Their reference number heads each column of Savior characteristics. (Some Survivors were hidden by more than one person ...) The numerical diagrams have been classified according to the country of domicile of the majority of the Saviors listed: Poland 35; Czechoslovakia 13; The Netherlands 25. (The Saviors in the tables pertaining to the other countries were too few to classify in a diagram.)

Some simplifications had to be made in the terminology of the tables: under the heading for ‘Motive’ is the term ‘Humanitarian,’ which includes sundry depositions. For example:

“‘She was just a good person.”

“‘It was all part of his resistance to the occupation.”

“Hatred of the Nazis.”

“Loyalty.”

The definition ‘Religious Humanitarian’ may refer to the Savior’s own beliefs or to the advice of the local priest.

RELEVANCE OF NATIONALITY – RELIGION:

After World War One, the distribution of ethnic minorities underwent radical change within the borders of eastern European states; these countries contained areas of mixed population. For instance, in Poland there were areas where the Ukrainians were in the majority. In Czechoslovakia there were regions where most of the citizens spoke Hungarian.

To check Nechama Tec’s above-mentioned theory that most hidders did not entirely fit into their local community, I listed all those belonging to an ethnic minority, or of mixed ethnic or Christian marriages.

SOCI-O-ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES:

Whether or not there was a predominance of one class of people prepared to hide a fugitive seemed a relevant point. ‘Socio-Economic’ is divided into: ‘Above Average’ in social standing, economic or even academic level. ‘Average’ means that the Savior was of the same social and economic level as the majority of his neighbors. ‘Poor’ – mostly peasants, could, in Poland, have been designated as ‘Average,’ since all peasants lived in a state of poverty difficult for someone from a Western society to imagine. For instance, a second-hand suit was considered grand compensation for the risks they incurred, and provided food for the family for one month.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE PRE-WAR CONTACT BETWEEN THE SAVIOR AND THE SAVED:

‘Friend’ means that there had been a previous interchange of help and hospitality.

‘Acquaintance’ means that a family member had had prior contact with the Savior, usually related to his work, and had formed a favorable impression of the person. ‘Stranger’ applies to a previously completely unknown person.

PAYMENT:

Most of the hosts were not in a position to feed additional mouths for any length of time, so it was important for survival to be able to pay at least an adequate amount for board.

Since lodgings in Eastern Europe were mostly barns, stables, ditches etc., family members or other lodgers were not displaced by the hidden, so rent was not required.

In Western countries, such as Holland, Belgium and France, board includes rent. The money was often supplied by an underground movement. Also, in these countries, the survivors could sometimes live relatively openly, the girls working for their keep (more than their keep, according to some testimonies) in household duties, and the few hidden boys worked on the land. Therefore ‘Work’ equates with ‘Board’.

‘Large’ refers to a payment that was a real incentive, if not an outright bribe.

MARITAL STATUS:

Initially I believed that women, not under the influence of men, were more disposed to mercy and pity, and that those without children would be more likely to take a risk which could involve the whole family. ‘Male Married’ means that no mention of children was made.

TREATMENT:

Most witnesses, thankful that their Savior had enabled them to stay alive, considered their treatment as ‘Good.’ Not too surprisingly, those whose only motive was money usually mistreated the victims they were hiding.

MOTIVE:

The underlying reason for the Savior’s action as assumed by the hidden person.

Atypical: Anything that I could find to substantiate the premise, and Dr. Tec’s conclusion, that the Savior was an outsider, a non-conformist in his community.

ATTRIBUTES OF SAVIOURS

The full testimonies as shown in the tables and diagrams affirm many of the findings and comments that appear in the research of Bauminger and Tec. However, the emphasis is somewhat different.

These testimonies do not support Dr. Tec’s theory that the majority belonged to the ‘marginal’ peripheral community, causing them to be independent thinkers, uninfluenced by peer pressure. The diagrams, which sum up the tables, show that out of the thirty-five Polish Saviors, twenty belonged to the majority, religious and ethnic groups. Nor was there a predominance of intellectuals, as Dr. Tec supposed.

The diagrams show that of the thir-
ty-five Polish Saviors, only six were in the ‘Above Average’ socio-economic class, ten were considered ’Average,’ and the eighteen ‘Poor’ were peasants, living similarly to their neighbors, in dire poverty, on dirt floors, and for whom a secondhand garment was a valuable gift. The diagrams also show that most of the decision makers who hid Jews were married men, and family men, again not alone. But in Poland, where both the antisemitism and the risks were greatest, 15 out of 35 Saviors were women. This is out of proportion when one considers the comparative rarity of male-less households.

These statistics agree with the findings of Dr. Tec in that most of the Saviors and their saved were initially strangers to each other. Of the thirty-five Saviors from Poland, twenty-two were complete strangers, six are defined as acquaintances, only seven were friends. A comment is in order here, most of those Jews living within the Pale of Settlement of Poland had no non-Jewish friends.

A study of the diagrams for The Netherlands and for Czechoslovakia will reveal similar figures for the various attributes.

In order to verify Nechama Tec’s theory of non-conformity, that there must have been something atypical about these Saviors, the witnesses were specifically asked for any unusual attributes. They remembered a dissimilarity in forty-six of the seventy-three hiders (Poland: 24 out of 35; Czechoslovakia 8 out of 13; Netherlands 14 out of 25).

The conclusion is that the majority were average, ordinary citizens. However, as can be seen by the number of atypical notations in the tables, over half of the Saviors possessed one exceptional feature. If one takes into consideration the homogeneity of society as a whole, and the farming communities in particular, the figures for atypical Saviors are extremely high.

There was a disproportionally high number of nonconformists, whether due to their having a different nationality, religion, political view, profession or social standing from their neighbors, they had one attribute that set them apart from their neighborhood community.

The Saviors of one country should not be compared to another, nor should there be any comparisons regarding their courage. The circumstances and the risks were of wide range. In Poland, in some districts, the whole hider’s family risked instant death if discovered. In Holland, the more frequent risk was internment and deportation to a concentration camp for the head of the family. More Polish people knew the ultimate fate of the Jews and they knew this earlier than the average Dutch citizen. In some outlying districts of Czechoslovakia, there were neither radios nor newspapers, and the hiders did not realize the gravity of their situation. There were parts of all these three countries where the Germans had not penetrated, where Jews were not known or recognized. Districts occupied by antifascist partisans were safer than those physically occupied by the Germans. There were areas where harboring a pig or a radio was as dangerous as hiding a Jew.

The Saviors listed in these tables hid their protégés for differing lengths of time, under incomparable circumstances, some sharing their own starvation level provisions, some risking little in the chaotic times of troop and population movement. With living quarters usually larger, and unannounced neighbors rarer, most Dutch hiders were able to accommodate their ‘guest’ within their home. This ‘guest’ could often work, whereas the Polish Jews were only rarely able to do so.

The social and economic level of the Saviors has been defined as Above Average, Average and Poor, assessments which are applicable and relevant only in their own country, rather than in a general sense. In Poland, the disparity is much larger than in Holland.

The so-called intellectual or academic of Poland is far removed, not only in wealth, but also in formal and informal education, from the rest of the population. The dire poverty of a Polish peasant in 1944 cannot be compared to the poor of Holland.

The latest 2018 statistics from Yad VaShem show the number of Righteous Gentiles, i.e. Saviors, as approximately 27,000. It should be noted that these numbers do not reflect the full extent of help given by non-Jews to Jews during the Holocaust; they are based on the documentation provided to Yad Vashem. The total number of people who hid a Jew can only be estimated. Some of the hidden did not survive the Holocaust, others have since passed away, and many have never related their experiences.

The Saviors were a small minority in a welter of enmity and indifference, who by their actions saved not only Jewish lives, but to quote Kadish Luz, a former Speaker of Israel’s Parliament, “These few saved the honor of Man.”

Ingrid Kellerman-Kluger and her family fled Berlin in 1937 and resettled in England. In 1949, she immigrated to Israel, where she has lived ever since. After three survivor friends died, Ingrid realized that they, and others, had never talked about their Holocaust experiences: for many years, relatives and friends did not want to hear, and later most survivors did not want to speak about their past. Then, Ingrid found out about Yad Vashem’s interviews, and discovered Sheffield University’s department for oral history. In 1991, she attended the First International Gathering of Hidden Children in New York, where she interviewed over 200 survivors, mostly for Yad Vashem; and in 1995, she wrote her master’s thesis from which this article was adapted. When arranging for interviews days ahead, she would not leave her phone number, because many survivors would tell her, “I couldn’t sleep at night and wanted to cancel.”

2 Ibid, pp. 11-12

Correction: In the 2018 issue, Salomon Fachler mistakenly identified the Jewish camp in Italy that cared for him and other child survivors of the Holocaust as being in the town of Cervino. The actual name of the town is Selvino. We regret this error.
**BOOKS**

**BURIED RIVERS: A Spiritual Journey into the Holocaust**

By Ellen Korman Mains


In 2005, Ellen Korman Mains — a Jew, a Buddhist, and the daughter of Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust — travels to Poland to reconnect with her family’s tragic history. On a train in Germany, she feels the presence of spirits who died in the Holocaust. After this strange experience, and over the span of a dozen more visits to Poland, Korman Mains attempts to learn her family history in Poland and the fate of family members in the Lodz ghetto, Auschwitz, and other killing fields. “Buried Rivers,” the title of this memoir, refers to the underground canal system in the city of Lodz, where her mother was born and survived the Holocaust. But the rivers represent the submerged currents of life and meaning that were damaged in the wake of that history, and the tides of the author’s own deeply personal journey as the child of survivors.

Early in this venture, she observes the irony that she, schooled by Buddhism to live in the present, should make it her life’s work to grapple with demons of the past. It is one of many contradictions she resolves during her investigations into Poland’s past and present, including her own genealogy, and her family members’ wartime experiences. The author’s decades of meditation practice yield a potent introspection on this historical and genealogical research, leading to groundbreaking insights into the nature of forgiveness, family dynamics, and the forces of history.

Guided by pages of Holocaust testimony dictated by her uncle before his death, each repeated journey to Poland unravels more details of her family’s story and opens new ideas for further inquiry. She also travels back through the personal history that led her to this quest: her Montreal Jewish childhood, her rebellion as a young woman, her relations with her two parents and uncle, and then the deaths of these three founding influences in her life.

While honoring the special history and significance of the Holocaust, at a deeper level this book addresses universal questions of personal and collective destiny. As the author assembles the puzzle pieces of her family’s past, in Polish cities and remote villages, she deepens her understanding of basic goodness, forgiveness and letting go, and of the mysterious interrelationship of the living and the dead.

While outwardly painting a colorful and revealing picture of contemporary life in post-Communist Poland, she conveys an inner life of yearning, pursuit, and fearlessness — an intimate diary of the road we are all on. She encounters unexpected feelings of love, joy and support from her ancestors, as well as profound sadness, and connects deeply with the land, eventually reclaiming her Polish citizenship.

This book has relevance beyond the Holocaust. Everyone has a family story: for whatever we missed or endured throughout our lifetime, this memoir offers a template for finding meaning in the lost or undiscovered.

**HOW YOUNG HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS REBUILT THEIR LIVES: France, the United States, and Israel**

Françoise S. Ouzan


Françoise Ouzan of Tel-Aviv University has created a tapestry of the lives of Holocaust survivors in France, the United States, and Israel. Ouzan conducted numerous oral histories over many years. These, as well as other interview projects and historical records, form the core data of her book and reveal to readers the lives of some well-known survivors. One notable example is Aharon Appelfeld, the prolific Israeli novelist from Czernowitz, who was incarcerated in a ghetto, then deported with his father on a forced march to a labor camp. After escaping the labor camp in Ukraine, Appelfeld lived in the forest, posing as a Christian child; later, he worked in the Russian army field kitchens. Other prominent survivors are Rabbi Meir Lau, who became the chief Rabbi in Israel, along with his brother Nahshon Lau (Lavi), who became the Israeli Consul General in New York in 1981. Both brothers were liberated from Buchenwald. Also profiled is Hungarian-born Tom Lantos who attained prominence as a United States Congressman from California. In 1947 Lantos was on the SS Marine Falcon, crossing the Atlantic to the United States. His testimony of a child who survived on very little food on the ship moves one to tears.

I was dreaming about food ... at the end of the line there was a huge wicker basket of oranges, and a huge wicker basket of bananas. My mother had always taught me to do the right thing, and I did not know what the right thing was, so I asked this enormous sailor. “Sir, do I take a banana, or do I take an orange?” And he said, “Man, you can eat all the damn bananas and all the damn oranges you want.” And then I knew I was in heaven. And I loaded up on bananas and oranges, and I got very sick, but I loved every minute of it.”

Among the noted French child survivors, we learn about the Nazi hunter Serge Klarsfeld, and the international lawyer Samuel Pisar. It is noteworthy that Ouzan included American psychoanalysts Henri Frenkel and Anna Orenstein, and sociologist Nechama Tec; each wrote a memoir. How Young Holocaust Survivors Rebuilt Their Lives is an important contribution to the historical record because it focuses not only on individual heart-wrenching narratives in the different countries, but it also documents the contributions of child survivors to each of their societies. For example, the American Jewish community benefited from a revitalization of the Orthodoxo and Jewish education. The young “she’erit hapleita” (remnants of European Jewry) were instrumental in fighting for Israel’s War of Independence, in creating the State of Israel in 1948, and in building the current state. While Jews did have to justify their survival in Israel, child survivors felt an incomparable sense of belonging, derived from being with others who shared their plight and mourned their losses.

In France and in the United States, they experienced social uneasiness in the early Contined on next page
years after liberation. In France, these youngsters became some of France’s leading intellectuals and professionals. Lawyer and politician Simone Veil, philosopher André Glucksman, historian and lawyer Serge Klarsfeld, psychiatrist Boris Cyrulnik, and writer Georges Perec are among those whose lives are examined by Ouzan.

What is inspiring about Ouzan’s *How Young Survivors Rebuilt Their Lives* is that she does not whitewash, nor does she diminish the suffering of the child survivors, many of whom became orphans, during and after the Holocaust. Rather, Ouzan explores with the reader the process of rehabilitation from massive psychic trauma.

Eva Fogelman, PhD

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**GIRL IN HIDING: REMEMBRANCES OF A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR**

by Ellen-Ruth Karpowitz Song

Published in 2017

Available at Amazon in paperback and Kindle versions

In this remarkable memoir, Ellen-Ruth Karpowitz Song recounts with astonishing clarity and a touch of humor her harrowing experiences as a child hiding from the Nazis in German-occupied Holland during World War II. Shuffled from family to family over an event-filled three-year period, Ellen-Ruth recalls how her saviors repeatedly risked their own lives to shield hers from the atrocities of the time. Ellen-Ruth’s grown children also provide their thoughts on their mother’s early history, and share insights into how this knowledge has affected their own lives. An extensive Appendix includes documentation of the ordeal and a photo gallery of lives lost and those left to carry on. Featured in Steven Spielberg’s SHOAH project, Ellen-Ruth’s amazing story is a memorable testimony of the strength of the human spirit.

Here, Ellen Ruth recalls one of her narrow escapes: “While I was up in the attic one morning, I suddenly heard unusual noises from down below. I was locked in the attic and only the older daughter, Len, was at home. I heard her say that she did not have a key to the attic door since her mother always carried the key, and I knew trouble had come. I moved over into a large box that was pushed under the eaves that was our agreed-upon hiding spot. I closed the top as best I could and soon heard the sounds of the attic door being broken down. In came a man to search the attic. More than once I saw the shadow of the searcher over me.”

May we never forget...

**COMBATTANTS JUIFS DANS LES ARMÉES DE LIBÉRATION**

(Jewish Fighters in the armies of Liberation)

By Georges Brandstatter

Published by Ouest France, 2015, 352 pp.

During WW II Georges Brandstatter was a child hidden with a Christian family in the village of Andoins. It took him 6 years to research and deliver a little-known part of history—from 1939 to 1948—about the Jewish men who fought against the Nazis, and later for the formation of the Jewish State of Israel. The testimonies of about fifty people are divided into sections—Jewish fighters from France, Belgium, Eastern Europe, the Jewish Brigade of Palestine, South Africa—and the book includes the moving testimonies of the Mahal men, a group of foreign volunteers, mostly Jewish veterans from US and British Armed Forces, but also non-Jews.

There are interviews with Jacques Perlman, a veteran of FFL (French Free Forces) and vice-president of the Association of French Veterans in Israel, an organization representing about 4,000 volunteers from 38 countries, and with Serge Ravanel, chief of the FFI (French Forces of the Interior) of the Toulouse region, who joined the Resistance in March 1941. Serge Ravanel integrated the various resistance movements on the advice of Jacques Brunswig. Arrested in March 1943, he was imprisoned with twenty other resistance fighters and shared his cell with Raymond Aubrac and Maurice Criogel. We hear also about Robert Gamzon, the founder of the Jewish scout movement in France, who in the summer of 1942 instituted “The Sixth,” a secret rescue network, and in May 1943 went to Paris to help organize underground actions. And there are many testimonials from the Maghreb in the “France” section.

That there were many Jews in the Resistance movements is not well-know. This book is an attempt to set the record straight and to prove that Jews were not just victims during the war.

**CHILDREN IN THE HOLOCAUST AND ITS AFTERMATH:**

**Historical and Psychological Studies of the Kestenberg Archive**

Edited by Sharon Kangisser Cohen, Eva Fogelman, and Dalia Ofer

New York, Oxford, Berghan Books, 2017 (now in paperback)

Exploring children’s experiences in the Holocaust poses a major challenge for historians and psychologists alike. Writings and drawings by children from the war years are rare. With several important exceptions, testimony projects in the immediate post-war period focused on surviving adults, not children. Psychologists and historians began writing on children’s experiences in the Holocaust in the early 1980s, proving that one could indeed tackle the source problem. Nonetheless, scholars must contend with the fact that research on children in the Holocaust relies heavily on oral testimonies, which now far outnumber written sources. To what extent are such testimonies shaped by the intentions and outlook of the interviewers/repositories? How does testimony change over time, and what does this say about memory? To question the experiences of children during the Holocaust is to engage, therefore, in a larger epistemological debate on how we construct historical narrative. This is why this edited volume, *Children in the Holocaust and its Aftermath, Historical and Psychological studies of the Kestenberg Archive*, represents a welcome addition to the field. The editors, an interdisciplinary group, directly confront the questions inherent in research on children. Their focus is the Kestenberg archive, a collection of 1,500 testimonies of Jewish and non-Jewish children, collected...

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from 1981 onwards by psychologist Judith Kestenberg and others to assess the impact of childhood trauma in the lives of adult survivors. Placing this source at the center of their inquiry, the editors invited contributors to explore its depths and its limits. The result is a 12-chapter volume, divided into five parts. The book will interest advanced students and scholars in psychology and history interested in children’s experiences during the Holocaust and testimony in general.

The book’s thorough introduction is well written, providing a history of children’s Holocaust testimony and situating the specific context of the Kestenberg archive. The first section of the book, on methodology, includes one chapter by psychologists Gila Sandler Saban et al. on the influence of age, maternal and postwar adjustment in the lives of adult survivors. Part two, on the immediate postwar period, includes an excellent chapter by Sharon Kangisser Cohen on the issues raised by the testimonies collected in Poland. Kangisser Cohen asks how children interpreted their reality, showing how their testimonies reveal their relational and emotional worlds. Chapter 4, by Rita Horváth and Katalin Zana, provides an extremely stimulating look at the interviews collected in Hungary at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s. This chapter questions the context in which the testimonies were generated and the place of the interviewer in the testimony process.

Part three, on memory, coping mechanisms and adjustment, includes a thought-provoking chapter by Stephanie Young, who argues that public demand has shaped an aestheticized narrative of Holocaust testimony. In chapter 8, Helene Bass-Wichelhaus provides insight on why certain children did well after the Holocaust, while others did not through the analysis of two sisters who experienced the Holocaust under different conditions. Their contrasting postwar lives suggest a positive connection between the experience of living among one’s peers and resilience.

Part four, on Non-Jewish victims of war and Nazism highlights the interviews conducted with individuals who witnessed the Holocaust as children. Katarzyna Person addresses the Polish language testimonies to ask how non-Jewish Poles remembered the persecution of their Jewish neighbors. Chapter 10, “War Children in Nazi Germany and World War II,” deals with the suffering of German children during World War II as a result of authoritarian Nationalist-Socialist upbringings. Its strength is derived from its long discussion of the morally unacceptable “German as victim” discourse in contemporary German society, and the parallel need to address the childhood war trauma of this now elderly generation.

The final section of the book is comprised of a personal essay by a child survivor. This moving piece closes this multi-faceted volume on a personal note, giving the last word to a survivor. While I understand this ideological position, a general conclusion would help to make sense of the diversity of experiences expressed in the book. This critique does not detract from the overall contribution of this volume, which promises to enrich a growing body of scholarship.

Laura Hobson Faure
Sorbonne Nouvelle University

THE SECRET OF THE VILLAGE FOOL
Written by Rebecca Upjohn, Illustrated by Renné Benoit
Second Story Press, Third printing, 2014
Includes a special section of family photographs Available at Amazon.com

This picture book tells the true story of an unexpected hero, Anton Suchinski, and is a good introduction to the Holocaust for young children. Munio and his younger brother Milek live in the sleepy village of Zborów, then in Poland (now Ukraine), where nothing exciting seems to happen. Anton, their neighbor, is a poor man, so gentle that he won’t eat meat or harm a fly. While the rest of the town makes fun of Anton, the boys’ mother is kind to him, often sending her reluctant sons with soup and clothing for the “fool” no one respects.

When war comes, everything changes. The Nazi soldiers march into the town and begin to round up Jewish boys like Milek and Munio. Anton worries about them and their parents, and comes up with a plan to hide them in an underground root cellar.

Anton’s courage and kindness shine through, proving that fierce bravery can come from very gentle people.

After the war, Milek, Munio and their parents, the Zeigers, immigrate to the US. The Zeigers try to persuade Anton to move with them, but he refuses to leave, saying that he “wants to die where he was born.” For years, Mrs. Zeiger sends him packages of food and clothing. Because Anton could not read or write, he dictated his replies to a neighbor. On each letter he drew a flower, so that the Zeigers would know the letter was from him. Then, for many years, their letters to Anton remain unanswered and they assume the worst. In 1988, the Zeigers discover that Anton is living in extreme poverty. They have a new house built for him, and arrange to have people care for him for the rest of his life. The villagers of Zborów then celebrate Anton as the village hero. In 1992, Anton Suchinski was recognized as Righteous among the Nations by Yad Vashem.

This book is a lovely tribute to a true hero.

CHILD SURVIVORS OF THE HOLOCAUST:
The Youngest Remnant and the American Experience
By Beth B. Cohen

For many years, historian and psychologist Beth B. Cohen has wondered about the restoration of lives in America after the cataclysmic rupture of the Holocaust. From all the newspaper and magazine accounts of the late 1940s and early 1950s, one could easily conclude that the lives of survivors were simply resumed anew, much as they had been for prior waves of immigrants.

Beth’s first book, Case Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America, reviewed in our 2012 issue, challenged such “happy endings” depicted in the media’s glossy photos of smiling refugees. In this book, Beth

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addresses assumptions and distortions of history once again, this time in the lives of child Holocaust survivors. It took many decades for the children to speak, and to come to the realization that they too are survivors. Here she brings these now elderly voices “front and center” to the post-Holocaust narrative.

The questions that propelled this important work were, “How did the unique political and social context of mid-twentieth-century America affect child survivors of the Holocaust? And how did the children’s wartime years affect their adjustment? How did they come to claim a unique identity as ‘child survivors’?” Using oral histories and testimonies, plus her own interviews, Beth sets out to find many answers.

First, why were there so many years of silence? The marginalization and trivialization of the children’s experience by everyone — including family members and older survivors — was the main cause for children keeping quiet after the war and for decades thereafter. They were told to forget the past and go on with their lives. And most did everything they could to assimilate—even as disturbing memories lurked just below the surface. After years of struggling with their past and attempting to assimilate, at least externally, it wasn’t until the 1980s that they began to organize themselves and form their own identity.

Beth B. Cohen is on the faculty at California State University, Northridge. This is an outstanding, scholarly work — well annotated, indexed, and full of statistics — yet, the stories predominate and are told with great sensitivity. Each testimony stands out, making it clear that for the youngest survivors, as for the older population, “the war never goes away.”

BEATE & SERGE KLARSFELD MEMOIRES

Fayard/Flammarion,Paris 2015, 992 pp.+ index+illustrations

In March 1960, Beate Kuenzel, a young German woman, leaves her West Berlin home in defiance of her prejudiced parents to travel to Paris, where she works as an au pair girl while learning French at the Alliance Française. One day, while waiting for her regular train at a Metro station, she draws the attention of a handsome young Jewish man, who introduces himself as Serge Klarsfeld, a graduate student in political science and history. Mutual attraction soon leads to a budding friendship. The lively conversations that animate their rambles about Paris stimulate Beate’s thirst for learning. Upon discovering how ignorant this daughter of a former Wehrmacht soldier was of the still recent ignominious history of Germany, Serge proceeds to enlighten her. Along with his mother and sister, he had barely escaped the fate of his father who perished in a gas chamber at Auschwitz.

Separated during the summer vacations, they enter into a correspondence that is sustained even during Serge’s two-year military service, mostly in Algeria. “Poeticize your life,” writes Serge in one of his letters: “raise it to the level of an exalting experience.” In November 1963, Serge and Beate marry before a mayor, who urges them to become an exemplary French-German couple. As fate would have it, the day of their first encounter, May 11th, 1960, was the very same day that agents of Israel’s Mossad kidnapped Adolf Eichmann in Buenos Aires! This coincidence seems to have driven their joint professional lives.

Disclosed over nearly 1000 pages, Beate and Serge Klarsfeld’s memoirs are arranged in alternate chapters, beginning with Beate’s childhood in wartime and postwar Berlin, and continuing with Serge’s traumatized childhood: a nightmare of persecution and hiding with his parents and little sister in Nice during the German occupation. The bulk of the volume is devoted to rich accounts of a life of intense activity in the cause of justice. Rather than severing herself from Germany, Beate resolves to become the conscience of the country that lost its integrity, and force it to confront its recent past. Postwar Germany’s justice system showed no intent to pass judgment on Nazi criminals, not all of whom had vanished to South America. Indeed, well into the 1980s, many Nazi criminals lived comfortably in West Germany, exercising professions, and even occupying high level posts in the government and the judiciary.

Not content with just authoring a pamphlet on Chancellor Kiesinger’s Nazi past, in April 1968, Beate managed to corner him in the Bundestag, denouncing him as a Nazi, and slapping him before a large audience. The act came she says, “from a younger generation to an older one. I love Germany. I did it as a German non-Jew, born in 1939, who wasn’t guilty but felt responsible.” This audacious act nearly earned her a one-year prison sentence. She was dismissed from her secretarial post at the French-German Office for Youth in Paris. But Kiesinger, having suffered public humiliation in Bonn and in Brussels, lost the legislative elections of September 1969.

To end the outrage against the Jewish victims of Nazi barbarity by allowing their murderers to live in peace became the mission to which Beate and Serge devoted their lives. Even their family life was set aside in the name of justice. To organize their activities, they founded the association Sons and Daughters of the Jewish Deportees from France. From the denunciation of Kiesinger, they began hunting the enforcers of the Final Solution in France, the German perpetrators and their French accomplices. Their primary targets became Paris SIPO and Gestapo managers Kurt Lischka and Herbert Hagen, Vichy national police chief René Bousquet and his representative in the Occupied Zone, Jean Leguay. Their crimes included the ordering of torture and execution of hostages, and the deportation to Auschwitz of 75,000 Jews from the French transit camp of Drancy. Serge and Beate boldly confronted Lischka and Hagen in front of their residences in Cologne, along with death camp survivors in striped uniforms. They even attempted to kidnap Lischka. Beate was briefly imprisoned in Cologne and even in Dachau; but as a result of her defiant action, Lischka and Hagen were finally tried in Cologne and given long prison sentences.

From then on, Beate in particular, spent

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years crisscrossing not only Germany, but all over the world, not only to discover leading Nazi criminals, but also to explain the goal of her mission to governments and Jewish communities. She won a small degree of assistance from the East German government. The list of countries she visited is simply amazing. However, to my personal surprise, that impressive list did not include Vancouver, where I was given the honor of introducing her at one of the largest synagogues in the city.

Beate repeatedly flew to South America to obtain the extradition of well-known Nazi criminals, among them the sinister Dr. Mengele, who performed medical experiments on twins, Walter Rauff, the inventor of the poison gas trucks, hidden in Chile, Alois Brunner, the SS director of Drancy, who organized the death convoys out of France to Auschwitz and perpetrated mass murders in Nice. The East German government offered to try Brunner in East Berlin, but Beate did not succeed in compelling the Syrian dictator Hafez el-Assad to expel him. Her most arduous and perhaps dangerous endeavors were her trips to Peru and Bolivia, where she succeeded in having Klaus Barbie, ‘the Butcher of Lyon,’ extradited to France. In 1987 Barbie was tried in Lyon, the city where he perpetrated most of his crimes, including the dispatching, in August 1944, of the last transport from France to Auschwitz, in which one of the doomed passengers was my father. Her travels were costly to her health: one trip during her third month of pregnancy caused the death of the expected child.

Klarsfeld mission embraced other objectives: Beate vigorously fought antisemitism and stood in defense of Israel. She intervened at a conference of Arab states held in Morocco with a plea that they let Israel live in peace. When in 1968 a fascist clique within the ruling communist party forced the majority of the Jews still living in Poland out of the country, Beate protested against this glaring antisemitic act. In Prague she was rouged up by police for distributing leaflets, calling on the Czech people to disavow the contamination of the regime’s antisemitism. She next condemned a Stalinist trial in Leningrad that imposed the death sentence on a Jew. Decades after the collapse of Communism she continued her struggle for human rights, standing up for the Roma in the former East Germany, and in defense of the Serbian population of Sarajevo during the Balkan war. Calling Beate “a woman of valor,” Golda Meir wrote: “Courage, conviction, compassion, decency, justice, and self-sacrifice to the point of endangering her life, those are the words that come to mind when one hears the name of Beate Klarsfeld.”

Meanwhile, Serge completed his law studies, gained the reputation of a formidable lawyer and indefatigably researched through archives and other relevant materials to document the guilt of the Vichy regime, which collaborated so zealously with the Nazi murderers, and to prevent attempts at its rehabilitation. He published numerous volumes on the “final Solution” in France. Chief among these is his colossal Memorial of the Deportation of the Jews of France, which lists by convoy numbers and supporting official correspondence, names and data of the 75,000 Jews transported and murdered at Auschwitz. There is also a Memorial of the Jewish Children of France that were deported.

Serge fought deniers of the Holocaust, like Faurisson, a would-be professor at a university in Lyon, at the same time as he strenuously gathered materials to have pillars of Vichy — Bousquet, Leguay, Darquier, Papon, the prefect of Bordeaux who had his policemen wrest even toddlers from families who hid them — tried for crimes against humanity. Darquier literally got away with murder, as Franco would not allow for his extradition from Spain. Bousquet was mysteriously assassinated before his trial was to begin. Regrettably, in the end, those murderers all got off lightly. Serge and Beate’s son Arno, so named after his grandfather, grew into a formidable prosecution lawyer in the course of these trials, where he partnered with his father. Serge nourished a utopian dream that an international legion would be attached to the penal court of the Hague, ready to intervene wherever civilian populations were threatened.

Amazingly, Beate still found time to involve herself in the politics of her native country. She participated in the electoral campaign for the Bundestag as the candidate of a seemingly insignificant party destined to gain just enough votes to prevent the neo-Nazi NPD from obtaining the required minimum of 5% to be represented. She ensured that her friend Willy Brandt became chancellor instead of Kiesinger.

In the final chapter of this monumental volume, Serge Klarsfeld offers his reflections on the theme of Memory. Memory is sacred: it is not to allow our Six Million Martyrs to be forgotten, or reduced to a “detail” of World War II history. Reading Serge’s conclusions, “Shraib un farshraib,” the plea uttered by the great historian Simon Dubnov, murdered by the Nazis in the ghetto of Kaunas, comes to mind. With the assistance of Simone Veil, the movement of remembrance of the Shoah produced some sixty volumes of witness accounts, besides a variety of projects such as museums, memorials, and other “lieux de mémoire” (places of memory). The voices of at least some of our Martyrs are thus being heard as Serge concludes: “These thousands of voices that rustle in my memory call on me to pursue my work as best as I can, so that they will be heard after they have passed and I have passed.”

René Goldman, PhD

René Goldman, a graduate of Columbia University and a retired professor of Chinese history at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, is a native of Luxembourg and a child-survivor of the Shoah in Belgium and France.
In 2008, my wife, Joan, and I received the gift of our first grandchild. Perhaps motivated by this arrival, I embarked upon writing an account of my life. I hesitate to call my narrative a memoir, at least for the first dozen years or so, and especially the first five. Memoir comes from the French mémoire, meaning ‘memory,’ a central tenet of Jewish culture and practice. Yet, essentially, I have no recollection of the most traumatic and dramatic episodes of my life, in my first five years and in the immediate postwar period. So, how could I write a memoir without a memory? Fortunately, my brother, Simon, seven years older, and my sister, Alice, nine years older, have a sharp recollection of many of the events from that time: they are my memory about the early years. Aside from Simon’s memoir, Alice has also supplemented this information with written notes and many conversations. I prefer to think of my writing as a conversation with the reader, and like all good conversations, the topics meander, triggered by a word, an unspoken or hypothetical question, or a random thought.

At the age of five, I saw my parents for the last time. I was separated from my older siblings, dislocated from everything that was familiar to me, and thrust into the hands of strangers. In the summer of 1989 Joan and I traveled to France to try to find the French Catholic family that had sheltered me during World War II. Joan, a psychologist, insisted that we take this trip. She understood the necessity of opening a crack in the wall of self-protection that I had built around myself for decades.

Two years later, in the spring of 1991, in New York, I attended the First International Gathering of Jewish Children Hidden during WWII. Throughout that conference, and immediately after, the crack grew into a major fissure that allowed me to confront my early experience and talk about it. Since that time I have tried, little by little, to grasp a tangible sense of my lost childhood. This goal took a step forward when my brother published a memoir in 2001, Hidden in France: A boy’s journey under the Nazi occupation. Strange as it may seem, prior to the 1991 conference, my siblings and I had not talked much, if at all, about many of the details of our family life, or of the circumstances surrounding our dispersal in 1942. It would have been too painful.

I have lived much longer than those early tumultuous years, but their effects have never escaped me. They loom large in my rational and irrational thoughts, in my interpretation of events, and in my view of the world. Yet, they have not subdued me, or controlled every aspect of my life. After immigrating to the U.S., I adapted, because I had to adapt. Slowly, I became an American, and a Brooklyn Dodgers fan. I went to elementary school, high school, college, graduate school, and I built a career. I married and had children and grandchildren. I lead a good life, but it’s colored by a past that’s been my constant companion.

How often have we heard people say how much they regret not having interviewed their parents or grandparents about their family’s history while they were alive? Through my book, I tried to visualize that interview. But the real incentive for my writing was an attempt to reconstruct my lost childhood, one that was shattered by the Nazis, and that I’ve yearned to touch ever since. This reconstruction was not only to find myself as a child, but to ‘find’ my parents, whom I think about almost on a daily basis — not compulsively, not in a maudlin way, but with thoughts of what they and I have missed. I do not aim to write history; I only wish to make a small and incomplete documentary on myself.

Michel Jeruchim wrote this prologue for his upcoming book, tentatively titled: Out of the Shadows: A Child’s Journey from Nazi-Occupied France to Life in America. The anticipated publication date is fall 2019.