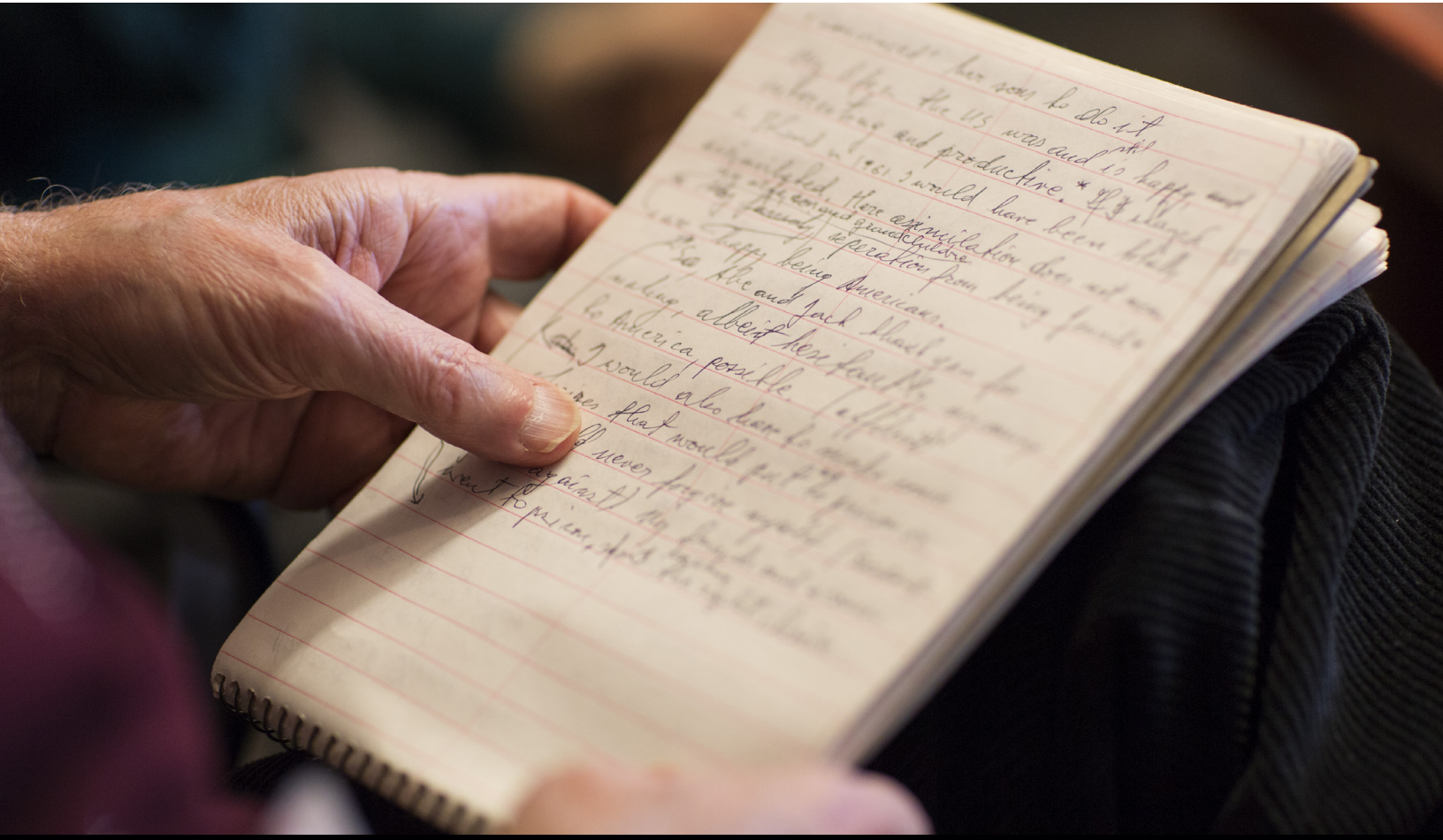
Echoes of Memory

Volume 13



UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

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Echoes of Memory

Volume I3

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Foreword

The writing compiled in this, the 13th volume of **Echoes of Memory**, is not only the new work created by the survivor writers of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: It also marks 20 years of their shared commitment to working together as a writing group.

This group is a community of survivor writers who provide feedback and support to one another in order to bring new essays to light. Amid a global pandemic, our group was confronted with a totally new question, brought on by the need to distance from one another. What would our work be if we could not be together as we have been each month at the Museum for nearly two decades? How could we continue to build the trust and community that is at the heart of our writers' group without our gathering, without sharing lunch in our familiar places at the table, together? What is the work of a writers' group, I wondered, that can't be in a group?

I could not have predicted—but should not have been surprised—that these writers would embrace and master new technologies to be able to be together. I should not have questioned, either, that the members of our group would be so committed to getting together via electronic platforms, no matter their level of familiarity with the logistical and technical aspects of this new gathering. I also should have been prepared for the level of commitment from the Office of Survivor Affairs, which provided ongoing technical and emotional support to all of the survivors who volunteer at the Museum.

The work compiled here illustrates the pressing importance the survivors of The Memory Project feel to remember and to memorialize. It also reflects the solidarity they feel in their commitment to keep communicating, no matter the impediment, their personal understandings of what unchecked hatred and bias can do to a world that needs these lessons.

In this volume, two writers describe the experience of new information coming to them after many years. In the piece "Time Moving in Reverse," Alfred Münzer recounts the experience of finding new information about his sisters who were murdered in Auschwitz. Ruth Cohen, in her piece titled "Reunited," describes a reunion with family whom she had not seen for more than 50 years, precipitated

by Ruth's decision to speak, for the first time, to a large group on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Both of these pieces reveal the echoes that still reverberate across time for survivors of the Holocaust; each show the importance the Museum community plays in the lives of these survivors and illustrate the important connections that feed both their writing and their speaking out.

Also in this volume are several pieces where the author traces experiences during the Holocaust to habits or feelings that have persisted after all this time. Louise Lawrence-Israëls describes how her father's use of **sachwerte**, bartering valuables for food, kept them alive during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. She follows this practice to her interest in collecting, first as a safeguard and later as a hobby. Peter Gorog wonders about his strong desire to always have a surplus of food on hand and connects this to growing up in Communist Hungary. In our group, it is integral that writers connect and share their own stories of having been hidden or of having had to flee, as sharing stories often spurs a new memory or reveals a pattern. This community allows survivors an opportunity to talk together about these long-lasting habits and creates important shared knowledge of the long-term effects of the Holocaust.

Finally, in this 13th volume of **Echoes of Memory**, several authors find new meaning in old, and sometimes previously unexamined, things. Considering two different bridges in two separate hometowns, one in Poland and one in Germany, writers Susan Warsinger and Halina Peabody recount their own stories through two landmark bridges. They become symbolic of the writers' experiences and changes over time and with history. And again, these symbols stand on common ground for the writers in our group, inspiring their sharing of diverse perspectives.

Readers will be heartened, I think, by this collection of writing from our enduring community. One can't help but observe the power inherent in these writers' long commitment to working in concert to bring forth these individual reflections.

Maggie Peterson, PhD, Writing Instructor, The Memory Project

Reunited

Ruth Cohen

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

I WAS ASKED TO SPEAK in the Hall of Remembrance at the Museum's International Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. After all these years of never wanting to speak in a large public setting, I was hesitant. Yet, one day as I was driving, I suddenly saw myself speaking at a lectern and knew that I had decided to say yes to the request.

The Museum prepared for the event weeks in advance. My bio and picture were posted on Facebook and in several other places online. I started getting notes from friends of old, and through the Museum, heard from people I had never met.

A few days after the commemoration was over, I got a letter that was sent to me through the Museum. The letter was from my first cousin's daughter, Margy, asking if indeed it was Ruth Cohen from Mukachevo, Czechoslovakia, who spoke. She included contact information for her mother, Edith, as well as Edith's sister, Ibi, and, of course, herself. I was so excited to hear from them that as soon as I got home, I called Margy. We had lost contact with the whole family 45–50 years ago, for no reason at all, but in an instant, our connection and love for each other came back. We exchanged the most important information and made plans to meet again soon. This cousin lives in Connecticut.

I then called Ibi with whom I had a very close relationship in years past until she moved to Florida. We both felt as if we had never lost contact. With plans to visit each other soon, we hung up. I was filled with joy.

I was incredibly excited to know that these two sisters were alive and well, even though their parents had died several years ago. From my town of 10,000–12,000 Jews, this family was one of the only two families that survived the camps intact. After surviving Auschwitz and other concentration camps, they were together in displaced persons camps in Germany. From there, they made their way to New York, through Israel and Canada. We—my father, sister, and I—reunited with their family in New York in 1950 and resumed our relationship.

Between my two cousins, they have seven children, a bunch of grandchildren, and also a bunch of great-grandchildren. My whole family is looking forward to meeting all of them some day soon, with great excitement. If only this coronavirus would leave already …

The Art and Angst of Translating

Ania Drimer

Ania Drimer was born in a forced labor camp in 1942 in Siberia, USSR, where Soviet officials had deported her Polish-born parents after their occupation of Poland in 1939. They were allowed to relocate to Ukraine in 1944 and returned to Poland after World War II.

BECAUSE I DON'T SPEAK PUBLICLY ABOUT MY EXPERIENCES during the Holocaust, I earn my so-called "keep" as a Museum volunteer by translating. Over the years, my husband, Marcel, and I have done many translations. Even though the texts given to us by the Museum for translating are varied, all of them show the horrors of the Holocaust but also people's resilience, love of family, hope, and resistance.

An example of the resistance is best shown in the 2014 book by Arthur Allen titled *The Fantastic Laboratory of Dr. Weigl: How Two Brave Scientists Battled Typhus and Sabotaged the Nazis*. The author of the book advertised for translators and chose us because of our survivor status. It is a story about two researchers developing the typhus vaccine—Polish physician Rudolf Weigl and Jewish physician Ludwik Fleck. Our job was to translate witnesses' accounts describing how they were hired to provide blood for body lice, a process required to develop the vaccine. In this way, Dr. Weigl saved several members of the doomed *intelligentsia*, among them my pharmacy professor. The resistance was in the fact that the attenuated (weakened) vaccine was sent to the eastern front, while the regular strength vaccine was shipped to the ghettos.

The next two texts I translated not only made me empathize with the writers but also ask myself how I would act in a similar situation, such as the one faced by Hanka Piterman Gorenstein. Her diary was donated to the Museum by John Caplan, her cousin, to be preserved as a part of the family history. Translating it, we "meet" Hanka as a young student from Luck, Ukraine, enjoying her studies and friends.

It is these Polish friends who saved her life, but the joy was gone after the war, leaving her a bitter woman, socializing only with people having similar experiences and not continuing her studies. She witnessed the deaths of her siblings and parents. I could only wonder about her upbringing that allowed her to be strong and resourceful enough to pretend she was a daughter of Polish aristocrats sent to Siberia. John Caplan left a substantial contribution to the Museum in our name and gifted us with a beautiful book.

Another translated text that was sad but had a happy ending was the story of Kaja Finkler. The little girl's story really tugged at my heart strings. As an eight-year-old, she was taken to the Ravensbrück concentration camp and two years later, to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, from which she was liberated by the British at the tender age of ten.

Her "old soul" and incredible presence of mind, well beyond her age, amazed me. I translated correspondence between Kaja and her mother, Golda, in which Kaja's mother, who had just returned from slave labor in Germany, finds out that her daughter is alive and living in Sweden. Golda's joy is boundless and evident in letters so full of love and longing for reunion. I think that only the Polish language with its numerous terms of endearment is capable of expressing such feelings.

As a mother, I understood her fervent wish to be together, to start a new life in the United States. To my great joy, Kaja is alive and well, a retired professor of anthropology. We established contact and talk often, discussing more details of her and her mother's story. This is our most cherished reward.

Another text, maybe most heartbreaking, was a diary from a concentration camp in which a group of women write to each other offering support and hope in the horrible conditions they find themselves. The quotes are painful, poignant, philosophical, but also hopeful. Here is one such quote:

> "In times of the worst desperation and resignation when you lost everything, keep your heart because its loss kills your humanity. For Frima in moments of misery–Fela."

It is impossible not to be moved in view of such suffering.

We also translated accounts of the witnesses for the Museum's special exhibition *Some Were Neighbors*. One of the witnesses, a train conductor, describes taking Jews to their final destination in the forest where they were summarily killed, how it affected him, and how he tried to help them escape.

Sometimes translation is educational, such as in the case of translating a small part of the Emanuel Ringelblum papers and a speech by Chaim Rumkowski, who was in charge of the Łódź ghetto. Ringelblum's papers were hidden in metal containers. He and other contributors exposed the tragic situation in the Warsaw ghetto by writing about it, hoping that future generations would have a firsthand account. This to me is a kind of resistance in a hopeless situation.

Rumkowski was a very controversial person in the Łódź ghetto. On the one hand, he organized the workers to make them indispensable for the German war effort, but on the other hand, he suggested giving in to Germans' demands by selecting old people and children for deportation. It is true they had the smallest chance to survive, but it is hard to imagine anybody willingly giving up their parents or children for a certain death. This must be one of the most difficult moral questions, and from an emotional point of view, unthinkable.

Even though sometimes we translate less intense texts, the majority of the texts inform us, move us to tears, and give us a sense of pride that we help families find their history or add to the Museum's resources.

Next diary please ...

Righteous Among the Nations

Marcel Drimer

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

A FEW WEEKS AGO, I RECEIVED A CALL from a man living in Canada who told me that he is a nephew of Zofia Sawinska, a person who saved me and my family during the Holocaust. He has a lot of documents about his family and how they saved the lives of many more Jews.

I promised to send him some of the documents that I have. The first is a list of people who were hidden and survived thanks to the family of Zofia and her husband, Jan Sawinski*. I sent this list to Yad Vashem in April 1987, asking to award the Sawinskis the title of Righteous Among the Nations, a high expression of gratitude.

Here is the list of those the Sawinskis saved:

1. Mr. Jakub Drimer
2. Mrs. Laura Drimer
3. Mr. Marcel Drimer
4. Mrs. Irena Drimer (married name Irena Wysoki)
5. Mr. Abraham Gruber (brother of Laura Drimer)
6. Tusia Szindler (who married Abraham Gruber after the war)
7. Felicja Szindler (married name Lidia Zawadzki)

8–10. Mr. Jozef Wajs with his wife and daughter

11–12. Brother of Mr. Josef Wajs with his son

Yad Vashem replied in February 1990 to Mrs. Paulina Muzyka, a daughter of Zofia Sawinska, stating: "The Special Commission of the Designations of the Righteous decided to confer upon you; your late parents, Jan and Zofia Sawinski; and your brothers, Tadeusz and Edward, its highest expression of gratitude: the title of Righteous Among Nations." At that time, Paulina was the only living member of the Sawinskis.

According to Yad Vashem, the criteria to be recognized as Righteous are "an attempt of a non-Jew to save a Jewish life, acknowledging mortal risk and using only humanitarian motives for rescues, this has to be followed by testimonial support."

I was happy to provide this testimonial support for the people who saved us.

All the people hiding at the Sawinskis went on to lead successful lives. My parents left Drohobycz and settled in Walbrzych, Lower Silesia, where there were good job opportunities. Father was an accountant at the meat factory, and mother stayed home and took care of the family.

After growing up under terrible conditions, I had to catch up with my education, which because of the Holocaust, was delayed. I graduated from the university as an engineer and was fortunate enough to come to the United States in 1961, where I had a good career working for the US Post Office Department and later for the Army Corps of Engineers. I have a small but loving family.

My sister, Irena, lives in Israel. She is a retired civil engineer and has two children and six wonderful grandchildren. She is active at the Yad Vashem Museum.

Abraham Gruber was instrumental to our survival, speaking on our behalf with the Sawinskis and supplementing our very meager food rations. After the war, he also moved to Walbrzych to be close to us and became a director of a meat processing plant because he was a butcher.

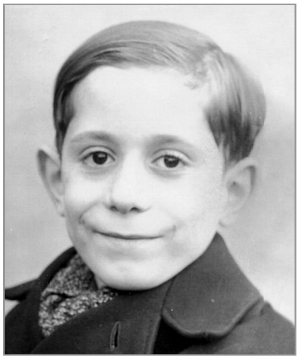
Tusia Szindler and Abraham Gruber married and had a son, Oded, who is a professor of astrophysics at the Technion University in Haifa, Israel.

Felicja Szindler (Lidia Zawadzki), Tusia's daughter, was a professor of art at the Bezalel Academy in Jerusalem and an internationally known pottery sculptor.

A few years ago, during a Yom Hashoah commemoration, a group of Polish Righteous was invited by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to meet the survivors who volunteer at the Museum. Several survivors, among them myself, gave them photos of our children and grandchildren. These photos were made into albums signed, "You saved not only us but our future generations for which we thank you."

It is said "he who saves one life, saves the world." The Sawinskis did that.

** Polish surnames can take masculine and feminine forms.*



My Rescuers

Albert Garih

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

I. THOIRY

During the fall of 1942, concerned about the danger that we might be rounded up and taken away, our parents sent my sisters and me to a farm in Thoiry, outside of Paris, where we stayed with two ladies, Madame Arthus and another lady, who I think was her sister. (I never saw a man there; the men had probably been taken prisoner with the French army during the Battle of France in the summer of 1940.) They were unaware that they were hosting Jewish children, because my parents had not told them, explaining only that we would be better fed on a farm than in a Paris suburb where food was rationed and scarce.

Our stay lasted only a few months. What I mainly remember is the pigs that they were raising. My room was upstairs, just above the pigpen, and I still remember being awakened in the morning by the noise they would make. The ladies were also raising rabbits, and I would spend hours in front of their hutch, watching them. I don't remember, however, ever being fed them in a stew. We were mostly eating potatoes that they cooked in the kitchen, which was also the main room in the house. They had a big dog, which would put its paws on the table where the ladies were cooking, upsetting my sisters about the lack of hygiene. On the side of the house was a small yard where the rabbits had their hutch. The whole compound was enclosed by a big, light gray wooden double door that opened to the street. That was basically the limits of my space. I did not venture out. I stayed with Madame Arthus and her companion, while my older sisters, Jacqueline and Gilberte, would go to school. Their school was a typical country school with a few classes attended by both boys and girls. That winter was very cold, with a lot of snow, and my sisters would come back singing songs they had learned in class. Whenever I hear the song that starts, *"Mon beau sapin, roi des forêts,"* the French version of the German song *"O Tannenbaum,"* a typical Christmas song, it brings me back there.

One day, while in conversation, I told the ladies that we were Jewish, and they sent us right back to our parents. After that, my father took me aside and told me to never ever say that I was Jewish, something easy to understand to everyone else, except for the little four year old that I was at that time.

2. THE GALOP FAMILY

In September 1943, when my father was deported to a forced labor camp on the island of Alderney, one of the Channel Islands, my mother found herself alone at home with her three children—my sisters, Jacqueline, 13, and Gilberte, 10, and myself, five years old. With nowhere to go and in imminent danger of being rounded up and sent to our deaths, she was terrified, desperate, and had no one to turn to. One day, at the street market in the suburb of Montrouge, where we lived, she met a lady whom she didn't know, but somehow felt she could open up to, and told her about our situation. This lady, Madame Galop, moved by my mother's story, went home to her husband and told him about this encounter. Her husband, Monsieur Galop (we didn't call them by their first names, Aimée and Gabriel, because that was not the tradition in France, particularly for people we had just met for the first time), came to us the next day with a cart, and we took whatever we could and went to live with the Galop family about one kilometer away from our home.

The Galops were a Protestant family from Béziers, in the south of France. They had two daughters, Jeanine, four, and Mireille, three. They lived in a small house in Montrouge on a small street where everyone knew everyone else. The people in the street were mostly artists, sculptors, or painters. Monsieur Galop was himself a sculptor who worked for the movie studios, and behind their house was a large warehouse where he kept the sets he had made for the French cinema. For Jeanine, Mireille, and me, it was a great place to play hide and seek. The Galops had this warm southern accent, and we soon became integrated into their family. My mother and Madame Galop did the cooking; my sisters, Jeanine, Mireille, and I stayed home. Gilberte told me that she and Jacqueline were afraid of bumping into one of their schoolmates, because we were not supposed to be there, and we might be denounced, or our names could just come up in the conversation and that would be enough for us to be discovered and deported. Jeanine and Mireille played in the street with the neighbors' children, and I would join them.

Having no work to do, my mom took advantage of that free time to teach me how to read and write, and I remember the first time I read a full page from a book. I had no idea what the book was about, but I was very proud of completing the full page of reading, which took me quite some time, by the way. For me, life was happy, as I didn't realize why we were staying there and the dangers we were facing, and I had two playmates.

Madame Galop and Mum had to cook with a scarcity of food. The food was most of the time garlic potatoes or pasta with onions. I remember mostly the evenings, after dinner, when Monsieur Galop would tell us stories that were supposed to scare us because of the frightening tone he would use to tell them, but which we found very funny instead. For Christmas, Monsieur Galop built piggy banks for Jeanine, Mireille, and me with some pieces of wood that he painted green. I still remember these piggy banks, which looked like safes, in which we would keep the few pierced French coins we had. These coins with a hole in the center were worth less than a penny and our only fortune that the Galops and Mum were able to save for us. Monsieur Galop had built a small bomb shelter in the yard where we would go when there was an alert. We were supposed to be terrified, but instead, Mireille, with her southern accent would crack a joke, saying, "Tomorrow, if I find a bomb in the yard, I'll pick it up," which would immediately trigger a laugh among everyone and dissipate the fear the grownups might have felt about the danger.

For me, that was the happiest time in this whole period. The Galops were adorable people, we always felt that we were part of their family, and they helped make up for my father's absence.

We might have spent the rest of the war with them, but we were still in danger of being reported. The people on the street were friendly, but there was a lady, Madame Perron, the wife of one of the painters, who was a great admirer of the Nazis and raved about the editorials she heard on the radio from Jean Herold-Paquis, one of the spokesmen of the collaborationist government. Therefore, we had to be extra cautious not to raise any suspicion. Since we were difficult to hide, the Galops had told their neighbors that we were relatives from the countryside, which was hardly credible, since when people had family in the countryside, they would rather have moved with them—where they had a chance of being better fed—than bring them to a Paris suburb where food was so scarce.

So, one day, Madame Perron said to Madame Galop: "When are you going to get rid of that scum?" This was surprising, because until then, she had been rather nice to us, complimenting me particularly for my articulate speaking for a five-year-old child. At that point, Madame Galop and Mum thought it might be safer for us to go back to our apartment, which we did. That was the end of our time with the Galops, a wonderful experience which, to this day, still amazes me for the courage of these people who, six months earlier, we hadn't even known.

3. THE MÉNÉTRIERS

Back on our own, we were exposed to the danger of a visit from the French police or the Gestapo and from people spotting us and denouncing us. Our apartment was very small, so I had to go downstairs to play with the other kids. Mum was always nervous about that; she was afraid that someone might spot me and report us to the police. So she lived in constant fear of the police coming to take us away. And one day, that's exactly what happened. One morning, my sisters and I were still in bed when there was a knock on the door. Two French Police inspectors told my mother, "we have come to take you away." Mum started shaking, but the inspectors told her, "Calm down, we are going to report that we didn't find you at home. But you must leave your apartment immediately because when we give our report, the police or the Gestapo will come to check, and if they find you, they will take you away." To this day, I still wonder about the motivation of these police inspectors. Was it out of sympathy for us? Was it that they thought that the war was lost for them because that incident happened just around the landing of Allied troops in Normandy, or maybe, they belonged to an underground network? I was never able to find out about these inspectors, who like the Galops, saved our lives.

Mum had been given contact information for a social worker who might be able to find a hiding place for us, so she dressed me very quickly, and with my sisters, we went to see that social worker and explained the situation. The social worker, Mademoiselle Déjeubert, told Mum that she needed a few days to find a place for each one of us, and in the meantime, we should try to stay with some neighbors, which we did. Mum and I stayed with our next-door neighbors, Suzanne and Robert Ménétrier, a Communist couple who had a daughter, Monique, who was a couple of months younger than me. Robert had been summoned to Germany to work under the mandatory labor service, but had not reported for duty and was also wanted by the police. Suzanne worked in a print shop. Both worked on night shifts, which was very convenient, because at night, Mother and I would sleep in their bed, and in the morning, when they would come back from work, we would give them the bed and stay in the apartment. Meanwhile, my sisters would stay with Madame Papillon, in the lodgekeeper's apartment. Madame Papillon had three children, two boys, Raymond and Guy, 14 and 12, and a girl, Colette, five. Her husband had been taken prisoner with the French army in the summer of 1940, during the Battle of France. Other neighbors generously offered to shelter us too, which gave us a good feeling about these French people, who were eager to help us in any way they could, as a way to resist the invaders.

We stayed that way for a few days, until the social worker came to tell Mum that she had found a hiding place for each one of us. My mother was placed as a governess with a family with eight or ten children near the Eiffel Tower, from where she witnessed the fighting between the French Resistance and the Germans during the liberation of Paris. Meanwhile, my sisters and I were placed in Catholic boarding schools in Montfermeil, a suburb east of Paris.

4. MONTFERMEIL

In Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Montfermeil is where Jean Valjean found Cosette while she was getting a pail for water for the Thénardiers' guests at their inn. In the 1940s, it was still a quiet place, perfect for hiding—not too many German soldiers, almost out of the tumult of the war. My sisters were placed in a Catholic boarding school for girls while I was sent to one for boys. I don't remember much about my schoolmates. The only people I remember are the headmistress, who was taking care of me, and the priest, l'Abbé Guy. I don't think I ever knew the name of the headmistress. All I remember is that she was the one who taught us classes. (I tried recently to find her identity, in order to have her recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations, but without success.) I was just six years old, the youngest child in the school. The other kids ranged in age from seven to 14, and nobody bothered me. They probably didn't suspect why I was there, hidden from the danger of being arrested and sent to a camp, and after the experience that I had one year earlier, I kept my mouth shut! This boarding school was the kind where children are sent after being kicked out of public school. Everybody was nice though. I didn't have any fights with the other kids, who were older than I was and didn't bother me. But my favorite person was the headmistress, who was always looking after me. She treated me as her protégé, which was a good feeling, considering that I was alone at six years of age, entirely cut off from my family. (I would only see my sisters on Sundays at church, and we didn't have any contact with my mother, who was in Paris, taking care of a bunch of kids and unable to get news about her own.) The headmistress was probably the one who took it upon herself to keep me in hiding in that school.

It was the summer of 1944, a very hot summer, and we spent most of our time in the playground because school was over in mid-July, and some of the children had gone home for the summer vacation. We had some classes though, and as the youngest in the school, I was placed in the row for the young children (in those days, in small villages, each class was divided in four rows, each row corresponding to a grade). Although I already could read and write, I was placed with the youngest ones who couldn't read and write, and all I had to do was to write letter strokes.

Montfermeil was where I experienced our liberation. One day, one of the kids from the school, who had left, came back telling us that the Allies were coming! I remember that day as if it were yesterday. We all went to the main street and saw the jeeps, the tanks, and the trucks with soldiers with different helmets and smiles on their faces—they were our liberators! The headmistress didn't let go of my hand. She was always protecting me. The soldiers were giving out chocolate, chewing gum (which we called semsem gum), and even cigarettes. They were Americans. It was the first time that I heard of Americans. I had heard of the Germans, of course, the British, the Russians, the Italians, but who were these boys who came from I didn't know where to rescue us? Without them, it is very likely that I wouldn't be here today.

The Invitation Back to Germany and the Apology to Make It Right

Agi Geva

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

A BARN WAS SOLD SOME 30 YEARS AFTER THE WAR, not far from Calw, near Stuttgart, Germany. The buyer wanted it empty. When the last bunch of straw was moved from the back of the barn, suddenly an engraving became visible: a name, address, and a telephone number. The buyer needed an explanation. He wanted to know what it meant. The local school teacher was asked to come over and have a look. He was dumbfounded. All these years he had been sure that there had been no prisoners in his town during the war. There were no Jews, no forced laborers. He called the history professor of the nearby university. Together with the town mayor, they decided to phone the number engraved on the far wall of the barn and find out more about the barn's Holocaust era-history. A lady from Budapest answered, invited them to visit, and agreed to be interviewed. The interview took three days.

When they got home, they discussed what had been learned during the interview. The woman in Budapest had been one of 200 women—20 Polish and 180 Hungarian, actually 179 Hungarians as one woman had died of typhus before the group arrived at the barn. They were forced to work in an airplane spare parts factory near Leipzig and later forced on a death march during which they stayed in that barn one night. The barn was over 300 miles away from the factory.

The mayor and the teachers became determined to find those 179 women, invite them to visit, hear them out, listen to their stories, and even tell them that the inhabitants of the small town never knew of what took place in the factory where the women were forced to work or the barn where they were forced to stay. They wanted to try to compensate and apologize.

The invitations were sent out to the 179 women, including my mother, Rosalia, my sister, Shosha, and myself, but only seven responded and were willing to visit. Their spouses were invited too. I was alone as I was already divorced by then and Shosha, despite being married, only received one ticket. Our mother was invited but we decided it would be too much for her.

Neither my mother nor my sister spoke about the Holocaust all these years later. They didn't like to be asked questions and they didn't mention anything about that year.

In Frankfurt we were greeted by newspaper and television reporters and our story appeared on the front page. After we arrived in Calw, I confronted the organizers as to why my brother-in-law did not receive an invitation. They said that Shosha and I were to be each other's support and therefore they had not invited Shosha's husband. I gathered that it would be very hard for her to be back in Germany, to meet people with whom she had gone through such an ordeal, and hear about the Holocaust all the time while being without her husband. So I convinced the organizers how important it was for her to have her husband, Shlomo, with her. At last they agreed and said, "We pay, but you make all the arrangements." And I did.

There was no possibility to send someone with Shosha to meet Shlomo in Frankfurt so I volunteered to accompany her. We were scared. On the train we saw elderly people and we kept wondering if they had been one of the SS or Wehrmacht during those days. Were they serving in Auschwitz or were they on duty in Hungary when we were rounded up and put on those wagons? In short, we were scared to be on a train in Germany. On the way back Shlomo was with us and he made us feel safe.

We were looked after in every possible way. We were appreciated and pampered. We were asked where we would like to visit. We all wanted to be taken down the roads of the death march. We also wanted to return to Rochlitz where we were taught to make the spare screws for airplanes. But we did not get there for various reasons. Though, we did visit the factory where we had spent 12 hours working every night. Shosha took part in every discussion. She spoke constantly of all that she remembered.

We were asked to speak to teenagers from the local school about our experiences of those days. Shosha had someone accompany her and translate, but as I spoke German well, I went alone. When I faced the class of some 30 teenagers, I got a panicked feeling, as if I was facing the *Hitler-Jugend* of those years. There was silence in the classroom, and I did not know how to get over my feelings and begin talking.

Suddenly I got an idea. I lifted my left arm and asked them if they had ever seen a tattooed number that was done to the Jews in Auschwitz. So I got off the podium, and approached the teenagers and showed every single one of them my tattoo. They became very curious about my experiences even accompanying me back to the hotel where I spent hours answering all of their questions.

Mini Sabotage

FEBRUARY 1945 FOUND ME, Agi Laszlo (Geva), age 14, at a huge airplane spare parts factory in Calw, Germany, which was not far from Stuttgart. Together with my mother, Rosalia, and my sister, Shosha, I was transported from Auschwitz three months earlier in a group of 200 women, 180 of whom were Hungarian and 20 were Polish. As far as I knew, the war was still raging as I had not heard nor seen any signs of change.

Prior to our arrival in Calw, we spent a few weeks in a training camp in Rochlitz, near Leipzig, where we learned to perform work on a *Revolver-Drehbank* machine making airplane spare parts. It was a big change to be in a factory, where we were seated at tables. When I was given a pencil, I felt human once again, as I treasured it more than if I had received a slice of bread.

When we arrived at Calw, we were disappointed to work 12-hour night shifts. I stood with aching legs, in improperly fitted shoes, working from 7 in the evening to 7 in the morning. I found it barely possible to remain awake at the wee hours of the mornings, as I heard the monotonous murmur of the machines in the factory. The guards were watching us closely at all times. As I look back, that was the hardest period for me so far.

The factory received raw aluminum materials for the spare parts, and the materials were distributed to the appropriate machines for making a variety of screws and other airplane parts. The finished screws were packed in crates to be sent to the German warplanes.

I was given a design plan and a piece of aluminum. I was to place the aluminum into one side of the *Revolver-Drehbank* machine, which I had to adjust according to the plan, and a completed screw was released from the other side.

My sister worked with a device that controlled the size of the screws. Her job was to divide the finished screws by size, and when one was too large, it was removed and sent to the filing machine that then trimmed it down to size. The filing machine had a huge revolving stone that rotated and had water streaming down to cool and lubricate it. My mother worked at that machine, filing the oversized screws down to the correct size.

One day as I was working there was a big explosion. I heard rumors that my mother had fainted and that she was being attended to. I was not allowed to leave my post. After my shift ended, I saw my mother. She told me how frightened she had become after the large stone exploded, causing

her to faint. The engineers explained to her how fragile the stone was and how difficult and time consuming it had been to order a new stone. Work came to a standstill until the new stone arrived and was installed.

Soon after work resumed, we again heard a loud explosion, and again my mother fainted. Again, she was told not to press the screw so hard against the stone. She acted as though she did not understand the instruction. This scene repeated itself again and again, as she concluded that these incidents delayed the manufacturing and delivery of screws that were needed by the Germans. She thought that her efforts might delay the process until the end of the war.

My sister and I did not find out until after the war that our mother's action at Calw had been intentional. It was then that our mother told us the truth about the risk she took, calling the incident "Mini Sabotage."

The Joy of the Outdoors

Peter Gorog

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

I LOVE WATER AND EVERY FORM OF IT that gives me an opportunity to engage in outdoor activities. I love to swim in a pool, a lake, a river, or the ocean. I like sailing, kayaking, and rowing. I used to ice skate until a few years ago when I had spine surgery. I still like skiing, and I am proud that I can keep up with my grown daughters, at my advanced age.

My love of outdoor activities is probably in my DNA and something I inherited from my parents. The few family pictures that survived the Holocaust show them hiking, camping, skiing, and kayaking. Unfortunately, they could not instill these skills in me when I grew up. My father perished during the Holocaust. My mom and I barely survived, and the postwar years were not very conducive for skiing or kayaking.

My love for water did not manifest itself until my teenage years. There is a note in my mother's diary she kept during the Holocaust saying, "Peter screams every time when we are at the pool and I try to get him in the water." I was about two years old at that time. After the Nazi occupation of Hungary in 1944, there were no swimming opportunities for Jews. They were forbidden from using public pools.

After the war was over, I remember I was frightened for a long time to cross the bridge over the Danube River, connecting Pest and Buda. It was before I learned to swim and with hindsight, I was scared as much of the bridge as I was of the water. This bridge was a temporary one because the retreating Nazi army blew up all the permanent ones. This was a pontoon bridge moving in every direction depending on the weather and the level of the river. Even later on when the bridges were rebuilt, I was scared to death when the streetcar traveled on a bridge.

After the war was over in 1945, the swimming pools remained bombed out and for many years, we could only swim during the summer in natural waters, e.g. Lake Balaton or the Danube River. I had not learned to swim until age 11. It did not happen at a pool but at Lake Balaton in western

Hungary. It was my stepfather, a survivor of Auschwitz, who gave me my first swimming lesson. I still owe him a much belated "thank you" for this and the many other outdoor skills he taught me, among them kayaking, canoeing, and rowing.

What I liked about swimming when I first started was the feeling of being free in the water. I liked to float on my back and watch the birds fly over me. My fear of water completely disappeared when I started competitive kayaking at age 13. I really got into swimming in high school when I started playing water polo, which was and still is as popular in Hungary as baseball is in the United States.

When I defected to the United States in 1980, outdoor activities helped me to keep busy on weekends. I bought my very first bicycle at age 40, and I ventured out every weekend, weather permitting, on my bike to discover my new country. Well, not the whole country, but at least Baltimore, its suburbs, and later DC and the Eastern Shore.

After only one month in the United States, I got a free pass to the Baltimore Jewish Community Center where I used the pool regularly. At the beginning of my first winter in the United States, I bought my skis and boots at a garage sale very cheaply. Unfortunately, DC is not ideal for skiing but later I skied in West Virginia, Vermont, the Rockies, and British Columbia. After a few years I bought my first kayak and I used it mostly on the Potomac. I was a member of the NASA sailing club and I even owned a 28-foot sailboat for a couple of years.

With hindsight I believe that these outdoor activities helped me to settle in the United States and ultimately were instrumental in my assimilation into my adopted country. During these activities, I came into contact with many people and some of them became my lifelong friends. It just happened that my best man at my wedding was someone with whom I bonded with during a canoe trip to Boundary Waters in Minnesota.

I started swimming regularly when my advanced arthritis prevented me from jogging. Bicycle riding and swimming took over my regular physical exercises. My cardiologist told me they are good for my heart and lungs, and I also discovered that they are good for my mind and soul.

The moment I jump into the pool, I forget all of the troubles of this world, as if the pool water could flush out all the dark thoughts and disturbing world events. Swimming is always a good time for making life and travel plans and dreaming about projects. During swimming, I frequently think about my next topic for the Echoes of Memory writing class and practice in my head my next presentation at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

I love being alone as it is just the water and me. It is like having the world shut out completely, and it is the rhythm of each stroke that makes me feel elated. My body wants to give up after ten minutes, but my mind tells me that I must not give up. My father's postcards from the forced labor battalion are the living testament that he never gave up, even under the most horrific circumstances. I am here today because my mom was determined to survive the horror. I swim for them, too.

Recently, the Museum started a new project called *Next Chapter*. The idea behind the project is to inform the public that the survivors have a life beyond their Holocaust experience and that we have passions, hobbies, and experiences that show a more complete view of who we are as people, as individuals. I had listed many outdoor activities as my passions and the project organizers selected swimming. I assume it was for practical reasons; filming skiing or kayaking would have been technically quite complicated.

I am grateful that I had an opportunity to share my passion for swimming. Until now, the only thing the public could hear or see about the life of the survivors were the horrors we and our families experienced during the Holocaust and only a little bit about how our life turned out after we came to the United States. It is good that now we have an opportunity to share what makes our life enjoyable today, 75 years after the horrors ended. We were robbed of our childhood, but we never gave up. We will live out our remaining years surrounded by loving family and friends and doing what gives us pleasure and satisfaction.

Passover Memories

I NEVER HAD A CHANCE TO ASK THE FOUR QUESTIONS that are traditionally asked by the youngest person at the Passover Seder table. Neither have I had a chance to earn a dollar by being the first to find the Afikoman. I was already 40 years old when I first attended a family Seder in Baltimore with my aunt, uncle, and cousins.

I was four when the Holocaust ended in Hungary. Although the war was over, many Jewish families were decimated and many Jewish survivors turned away from religion. Among them was my mother, a previously Orthodox woman, who could no longer believe in a benevolent G-d who allowed the death of six million Jews, among them my father.

While I grew up in communist Hungary, we did not observe the Shabbat customs. We did not follow the Jewish dietary laws, but we still fasted on Yom Kippur and ate matzah for eight days during Passover. I have learned from my mom that the best way to enjoy the otherwise dry matzah is to break it into small pieces, put the pieces in a big mug, fill the mug with half coffee, half milk, and sweeten it with plenty of sugar.

One typically can't remember much from before age three. The only Passover Seder I can remember while I was still living in Hungary was organized by the Jewish community at the Great Synagogue of Budapest. I was about ten or 11, and I remember the beautifully decorated tables with the Seder plates, the reading of the Haggadah, and the melodies of the traditional songs. Unfortunately for me the reading was in Hebrew, which I hadn't had an opportunity to learn in the strictly atheistic Communist system.

For this reason, it took some 30 years until I came to America that I understood the real meaning of Passover. It was a revelation in 1981 in Baltimore. The story of the Jews fleeing from slavery in Egypt, is my personal story too, as the Haggadah teaches us. I crossed the Atlantic, not the Red Sea, to escape from an oppressive regime and since then I have celebrated my freedom with my family every year.

Although I never asked the four questions and never searched for the Afikoman, this year, as in the past 34 years, I will answer those questions and I will hide the Afikoman. I will also pay the lucky finder five dollars as the current finder's fee.

It is our family tradition that everyone at the Seder table tells a personal story that illustrates either being free of some kind of bondage (e.g. addiction to electronic gadgets, internet, TV, etc.) or a story of what freedom meant to us in that particular year. My stories are somehow always related to our family's lack of freedom during the Holocaust and then the Communist dictatorship, the freedom I am enjoying in America, or stories of my experiences as a volunteer at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. This year, the year of the coronavirus, our stories will be different. Our freedom today is constrained in many ways so we can slow down the spread of the virus. My grown-up children, for the first time in their lives, are experiencing that their freedom is limited and some of them have difficulties in accepting government regulations. I can hardly wait to hear their stories.

Home Sweet Home

I AM AN OLD MAN. I just turned 79. During my life I have lived in many places but only a few of them would I call home.

Currently my wife and I are in a self-imposed quarantine, living with my daughter Laura's family while this crazy coronavirus is bringing the whole world to a complete standstill. I gave up my cozy home of the past 36 years, so another one of my daughters, Ilana, who came back from Israel a couple of days ago can live in temporary post-travel isolation.

Laura offered my wife and me their nice guest room on the second floor, but I chose the basement room with a much better bed. The room does not have windows, and in order to take a bath, I have to climb to the second floor. I don't have a private office space. Their pantry and refrigerator are not as well-stocked as our own. On top of everything, I have to watch *Sesame Street* day in and day out with my granddaughter who is 18 months old. I don't have anything against Elmo and Cookie Monster. I love them even after I had to watch them endlessly when my own girls grew up. In spite of all this, their house is among the very few I would call home.

My first home was the apartment my parents rented when they got married. They had been married for four years when I was born. By that time my father had already been called up for service in the labor battalions for Jewish slave labor during the Holocaust. I have no memories of my mom, my dad, and me together in that apartment because my father perished in the Holocaust. My mom and I were forced to leave our home when I was three, and we lived in various places for almost a year. I would never call any of those places home. When World War II was over, we moved back to my parents' apartment without my father. Nevertheless it was my favorite home for the next 23 years until I got married.

Four years after I came to the United States, I fulfilled the American dream—I became the owner of a five-bedroom house. Actually only a co-owner with a bank until I paid off my mortgage. My friends thought I had lost my mind buying a house with five bedrooms when I was over 40 and still single. Yes, it was just a house and not a home until I got married again, and we populated the house with five girls in addition to the daughter I had from my first marriage.

Last year we had a chance to reclaim my childhood home in Budapest. My wife and I spent a lovely summer vacation there. The apartment is sparsely furnished with my parents' old furniture, and though my mom and our children were not there, it felt like a home for just the two of us.

So, what makes a place of residence a home? It is certainly not the "location, location, location" as your friendly real estate agent tries to convince you. A nice piece of furniture, a state-of-the-art bathroom, and an ultramodern kitchen can make you feel cozy and comfortable in a house, but they would not make me call that house a home. For me, it is the people who inhabit the space that transforms a house into a home. I would rather live in a hut with my family than in a palace with strangers.

Bicycle Memories

TODAY I TOOK THE METRO TO THE MUSEUM. As I walked from the parking lot to the station, I passed by the bicycle storage area where shiny, expensive bicycles were chained to the rack. First I was amazed at how many people trust that their bicycle will be there when they return from work. My first crime experience in the United States taught me otherwise.

I had been in the United States for only six weeks, and it happened only a few days after I "missed" my return flight to Hungary. In other words, this was my first week in the United States as a political asylum seeker. In order to escape the 100-degree summer heat in my uncle's Baltimore house, which had no air conditioning, I decided to go to the library. Unfortunately, I was still about a month away from getting my first job and with it an opportunity to buy my first car. Public transportation was nonexistent in northwest Baltimore in the early 1980s, so I asked my uncle if I could use my cousin's bike. She had already moved out of the house many years before and had left the bike in the garage. My uncle gladly agreed and I was on my way to the library.

There was no bicycle rack at the library to secure my bike, but there was a rail in front of the building ostensibly to hold back young people from running down the steps right into the traffic. It seemed like a good place to leave my bike with a very sturdy bicycle lock. After a few hours in the pleasantly cooled library, I was ready to leave for the pool. The only problem was that my cousin's bike was not where I left it. Actually it was not found anywhere; it had been stolen.

In my heavily accented and very rudimentary English, I tried to explain to the librarian what happened and asked her help in calling the police. I do not remember if she laughed or just smiled when she said, "Forget about it," telling me "the police are too busy catching murderers and drug dealers" and would have no time for me. Even if they would take my report, the chances of finding it were nil. When I naively asked her how they could take my bike when I had a heavy-duty lock

on it, she definitely laughed. She tried to explain to me about a common tool that was used. When she realized that I was hopeless in understanding her English she took a picture encyclopedia of tools from the shelf and showed me the tool. I then understood that the thief's tool was an industrial strength heavy-duty bolt cutter with long handles.

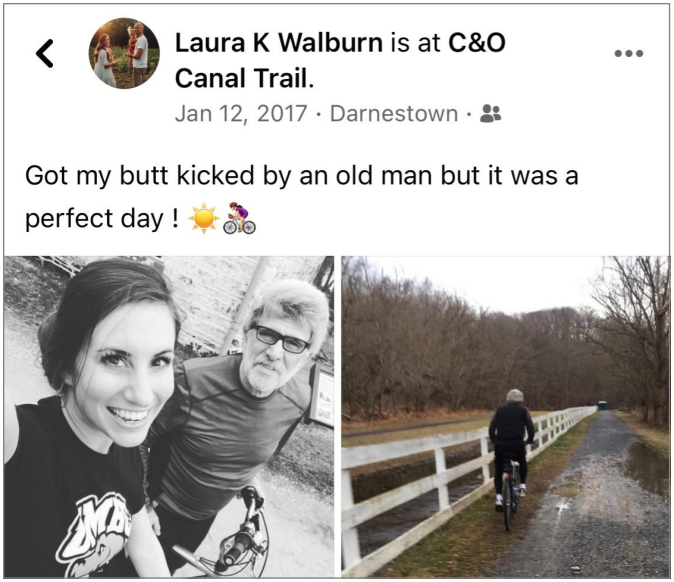
It took me a good half an hour to walk home in the still stifling heat. Lesson learned, although even my bad luck did not make me reevaluate my defection from Hungary.

Unless you know the date and place of my birth and the country I grew up in, you would not believe that I was 21 years old when I learned to ride a bike and more than 40 when I owned my very first bike. During the Holocaust in Hungary, survival was a more important skill than riding a bicycle. After the war was over, my mom had to sell her remaining jewelry, except for her wedding ring, to buy food, so bicycle shopping was postponed. It was postponed for a very long time because even if you had the money, no bicycle was available for sale as they were the primary means of transportation for everyone.

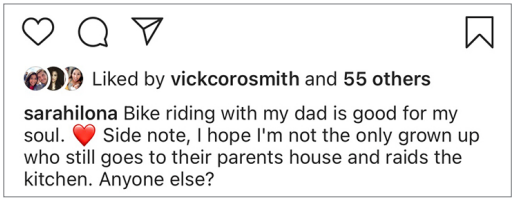
I was in my second semester in college when my friends decided that we should go for a bicycle tour to a lake resort 30 miles from Budapest. There were two small problems: I neither had a bike nor did I know how to ride one. A friend loaned me her brother's bike from the prewar era, one speed and beat up, but at least it had working tires that were hard to come by in the early 1960s in Hungary. I had an expedited riding lesson and off we went. I am glad to report that I survived my first bike trip.

It was almost 20 years later when I bought my first bike when my colleagues at my first job in the United States invited me for a bike trip to the Eastern Shore of Maryland. What a wonderful bonding experience it was as we rode from Easton to St. Michaels and back in a loop that even included my very first ferry trip.

One of my most cherished biking memories is when my daughter Laura, the silly one, called me on a beautiful sunny January day and wanted to go for a bike ride along the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. We went and had a great time.



Here is what she posted afterwards on Facebook. *Courtesy of Peter Gorog*



Here is another posting that makes up for my missing childhood bicycle memories. This one is from my daughter Shari, the soulful one. *Courtesy of Peter Gorog*

I Could Have Been One of Them

A COUPLE OF WEEKS AGO I shared my and my family's Holocaust experience with a group of high school students in the Helena Rubinstein Auditorium of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. I caught myself using the adjective "lucky" one too many times.

I have spoken and written about our family's Holocaust history many times, in many places, and I have just compiled a list of our "lucky" moments during those perilous times.

We lived in Budapest during the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, which meant that we were **not** among the more than 430,000 Jews who lived outside the city and were targeted for deportation to Auschwitz.

My mom and I had an opportunity to hide at the apartment of my mother's childhood friend, which was a rare occurrence under the Nazi occupation.

After we had been denounced to the police, my mother was arrested, but she was released two days later because she claimed that she was a war widow, which she was not.

My mother and I were among the few thousand Jews who got another chance to survive by moving into one of the apartments protected by the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg. Approximately 200,000 Jews lived in Budapest before World War II.

When the Hungarian Nazis, the Arrow Cross, began indiscriminately arresting, deporting, or killing Jews in Budapest, in October 1944, my mother and I were left behind in our apartment.

When we were ordered to move to the Budapest ghetto, we lived mostly in the basement of an apartment building. Our building escaped the relentless bombing of the Allied forces while others in the same block were demolished.

After the liberation of the ghetto, we reclaimed our apartment that survived the bombing and found everything intact, while others had lost everything.

When I realized that I overused the word "lucky," I digressed from my story and I tried to explain to the audience that there are so many ways to interpret why so many perished during the Holocaust while others in seemingly identical situations survived.

The list above is far from being complete but it illustrates some decisions that my mother made that were relevant to our survival. I know from my mother's diary and her personal testimony that she was determined to survive. She had specific goals for the aftermath, she was brave to risk her life just to make sure that we had something to eat, she had the *chutzpah* to defy authority, and she had faith in G-d. Many who perished during the Holocaust had the same or a similar story with different endings, so I assume that's where "luck" played a role.

There is a collage of pictures in the Museum on the third floor across from the cattle car. It shows Hungarian Jews disembarking from the train, consisting of freight wagons, at the infamous Auschwitz-Birkenau train station platform. In many of the pictures one can see children who were about my age in 1944. Only a few hours after these pictures were taken, those children perished in the gas chambers and were burned in the crematoria. They were among the more than one million Jewish children who were killed for one and only one reason—they were Jewish. They never had a chance to grow up—to become doctors, engineers, musicians, teachers, and nurses. They never had an opportunity to start a family, raise children, and find joy in their grandchildren. I could have been one of them, and I do not have an explanation for why I survived.

One thing I am certain of is that I am here now to preserve the memory of the six million victims, among them my father and my two uncles. This is why I share my family's Holocaust experience as a volunteer at the Museum. I survived to be a witness for the victims, making sure that another Holocaust never happens again.

How Much Food Is Too Much?

MY WIFE KEEPS COMPLAINING THAT WE HAVE TOO MUCH FOOD in our oversized refrigerator (26 cubic feet) and in the freezer in the basement. As in most cases, she is right. After coming home from food shopping it's like solving a 3D puzzle when we try to store the new grocery items.

I haven't always had such a huge refrigerator. The first one I remember from the late '40s in Budapest, Hungary, was an icebox no more than three cubic feet. The ice man came twice a week with a horse-drawn cart; we waited in a long line until it was our turn. Using his pickax he cut a chunk from a long ice block that would fit in our ice box. We happily returned to our apartment knowing that the precious few perishable items that were available at that time would be safe for another few days. Truth be told, we did not need a big fridge, due to the food shortages and

rationing and also because our friendly neighborhood grocery store was only one city block away. So when my mom tried to make my favorite crêpe (filled with apricot jam or farmer's cheese), it took me only a few minutes to get fresh eggs if my mom realized that we were out of them.

I remember when we got our first electric refrigerator in the early '60s. The Saratov model, made in the Soviet Union, was a significant improvement in convenience and size too. By this time we could fill up all 120 liters (4.23 cubic feet) with stuff. This was the dawn of the Hungarian "Goulash Communism," when more and more food became available and there was no longer any rationing.

I don't know why, but even a half-empty fridge gives me anxiety. I am not making this one up; once I broke up with a girlfriend when I first visited her apartment and saw that all she had in her refrigerator was a carton of milk, butter, and some fruit.

My problem is not only that I buy too much food, but also, as the designated cook in the family, I cook too much at a time. We always have plenty of leftovers competing for precious shelf space. The situation is even worse since we became empty-nesters, and I still have difficulty scaling down the recipes.

Some time ago I heard there are studies showing that current-day food attitudes of Holocaust survivors were influenced by their Holocaust experiences. As a citizen of the information age, I immediately searched the internet for any evidence proving that my overstocked refrigerator is the consequence of my being a child survivor of the Holocaust.

Good old Google did not disappoint me. A survey was conducted in 2004 of a sample of 25 Holocaust survivors (see source 1). As a result of this survey five major themes emerged:

1. **Difficulty throwing away food even when spoiled.** In our home, a surprise guest/visitor would always find three or more leftovers from our dinners at home or "doggie bags" from our nights out. Yes, sometimes one can also find what we call "science experiments," a.k.a leftovers, with some white coatings. We do not eat those.
2. **Storing excess food.**
3. **Craving certain foods.** This is not specific to Holocaust survivors, but in my case I could apply it to anything sweet. During the war and many years after in Hungary, sugar was rationed and hardly available, so I did not grow up having cookies for snacks. Now I have an insatiable craving for pastries, pies, and Sacher torte. If you never had the latter one, you don't know what you are missing. Don't Google it: go to Budapest or Vienna, Austria.

4. **Difficulty standing in line for food.** This might explain why I am impatient when the service is slow at the food court at Montgomery Mall in Maryland.
5. **Experiencing anxiety when food is not readily available.** Empathy for those currently suffering from hunger was also reported. My volunteering and support for a food pantry that serves an underprivileged population might fall in this category.

As one can see, although I was not part of this study, I can relate to all of these behaviors. In an article in the internet magazine *Times of Israel*, Eva Deutsch Costabel, a 91-year-old who survived two concentration camps is quoted, "My friends always tease me because my refrigerator is always full. They say, 'You could feed ten people.' I think this is definitely from starving for many years …" (See source 2)

My family and friends do not tease me about my refrigerator, they actually take advantage of it. When they come to visit us they dart to the fridge to see if there are some leftovers from their favorite meal, or something new I just discovered at Trader Joe's or Aldi. These two stores are my favorite sources for food staples—many of them from Europe. To my detriment, another European discount food chain (Lidl) recently opened its first store in the Washington, DC, area. Fortunately for my wife, it's in Virginia, more than an hour's drive from our house using a toll road. I visited only once, when my wife was in Israel.

Dear reader of my ramblings, please come visit us. When you enter the kitchen, the fridge is on your immediate left. I am confident you will find something you will like, so I can go out and buy more food.

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Paris Mon Amour

I AM A SECRET FRANCOPHILE. It must be a secret when even my closest friends are surprised when I show my affection for all things French. I love everything French except the attitude French people have towards anyone who does not speak their language or those who speak it even with the slightest hint of an accent. I do not speak French at all. I know only a few words and expressions; nevertheless, of all the languages I like the sound of French the most.

I don't know how it started but probably in the early 1960s when I was a freshman at the Budapest University of Technology. French New Wave movies were in *vogue* (one French word I know!). In Communist-era Hungary, movies from the capitalist West were not available for the public, but some were shown at university film clubs where only faculty and students could watch them. I am sure that some of the attraction was that they were "forbidden fruits" but I really loved those black and white movies by famous directors like Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut. The movies I liked the most were *Breathless*, *The 400 Blows*, and *Jules and Jim*.

Now that I think of it, my Francophilia must have started even earlier than my college years because my three favorite childhood books were *The Three Musketeers, The Count of Monte Cristo*, and *Around the World in Eighty Days*. I read them when I was ten or 12 and they were written by French authors Alexandre Dumas and Jules Verne, respectively. It just happens that one of my most favorite contemporary novels is *All the Light We Cannot See*. Although it is written by an American author, Anthony Doerr, the story is about a young blind French girl and a German boy whose World War II stories intersect at one point and the scenery is mostly Paris and Normandy.

The first time I was allowed, by the Hungarian government, to travel to Western Europe was in 1970 and it was a business trip to France. I will never forget the first dinner at an authentic French restaurant. Duh, we were in Paris. It must have been authentic. It was there where I first tasted and fell in love with ratatouille soup. The cheese platter at the end of our delicious meal was also unforgettable. I still remember the face of the waiter when I asked for a bite from every cheese on the traditional cheese platter, and there were plenty of them. Who knew that you were not supposed to have more than two or three varieties?

Since that first trip, I have traveled to France a few more times and saw most of the tourist attractions in Paris, even the famous Les Halles that was Paris's central fresh food market before it was demolished in 1971. My wife and I spent one July 14 (Bastille Day, the French version of America's July 4) in Paris. We still have some stems of roses that my wife got from a friendly stranger in *Jardin du Luxembourg*. The rose is dried, colorless, and has no fragrance by now, but every time I look at it, it brings back the memory of that sunny day in Paris.

I have toured many of the castles in the Loire Valley and was enchanted by many rustic towns in Normandy. I had breakfast in an authentic French *boulangerie* in the *Quartier Latin* and visited, more than once, the Notre Dame cathedral before it caught fire in 2019. In spite of seeing and experiencing so much of France, I still must go back for more.

I have to go back to Paris because I promised my daughter Laura eight years ago that as a graduation present I would take her to Paris. Yes, you might think it was kind of selfish on my part, and you are not too far from the truth. However, it seemed to be mutually beneficial because she majored in hospitality, which meant getting experience by visiting famous French restaurants and wineries. If this sounds contorted, please remember that my original calling was to be a lawyer.

Unfortunately we never made the trip. Her life got very busy after graduation as a restaurant manager, she got married, the first baby came, and now she is expecting her second baby any day. But we are still planning to go. Once we are in Paris we must go to Provence, which is famous for its colorful countryside, wine, food, and it includes the French Riviera and the French Alps. This region is the home of the *bouillabaisse* (warning, it's not kosher!), *ratatouille*, and *salade Niçoise*. Isn't it a magical place for a hospitality major?

I also have to go back to Paris because there are still many things I haven't seen yet. The book I am reading now, *The Missing Sister*, is a story of twin sisters whose lives get complicated. Guess where? Of course in Paris, and the story line is connected to the catacombs of Paris. They are underground ossuaries, which hold the remains of more than six million people. A fascinating place, I must see.

While I am dreaming about my next trip to France at the end of April 2020, the coronavirus is still ravaging the world. Borders are closed, the streets of Paris are desolate, and tourist attractions are empty. As I looked up the *Jardin du Luxembourg* on Google Maps today there was a note in red over the park, "Temporarily closed." Sign of our times! I survived the Holocaust, I lived through the worst years of communism in Hungary, and I am not going to give up my dreams. This too shall pass.

The Kilt and the Love of My Mom

Louise Lawrence-Israëls

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

FABRIC WAS SCARCE IN THE NETHERLANDS AFTER THE WAR WAS OVER. The stores were mostly empty. Factories did not have the machines to make fabric or clothing. The machines were either beyond repair or had been stolen by the Nazis and sent to Germany.

I was growing and my clothes did not fit me anymore. My mom tried everything, from mending and cutting up old clothes, mostly hers, to make new clothes for me. Since she had been a fashion designer and also knew how to make patterns, she managed to make beautiful clothes for me. It was important to her that I looked good.

I was happy. I did not spend a lot of time in front of the mirror, so when my mom said that it looked good, I never questioned it.

About seven years after the war, it became easier for Mom to get new fabric. Through my dad's business, she was able to obtain imported fabrics in beautiful colors. She would always show the fabrics to me and tell me her ideas for what she could make with the fabric.

When I went to high school with girls who did not live in my town, a commute of ten kilometers by bicycle, I realized for the first time that all my clothes were made by my mom. The other girls had store-bought clothes.

One winter I told Mom about a wool skirt from Scotland one of my classmates was wearing. My mom could see that I was dreaming about having a skirt like that.

From 1952, my mom often accompanied my dad on business trips to Paris and London. With her sense for fashion, she was my dad's best advisor for what to import or what styles to manufacture in his business. She often came home with a skirt or suit, they would copy it, and when they were finished, the piece would be hers.

After one of the trips to London, they brought back a surprise for me—this time nothing for my mom. I wanted to dance when I opened the package. There was a beautiful Scottish kilt in the Black Watch colors—navy blue and dark green. Scottish kilts are traditionally pleated in the back, wrap around, and fastened with a belt and special kilt pin.

I wanted to wear my new kilt to school the next day. On that first day, I ripped the kilt on my way to school on my bicycle, I had fastened the pin too tight. I was devastated. How would I tell my Mom that I had ripped my new skirt the first day that I was wearing it?

When I came home, I went upstairs, changed clothes, and hung the kilt in the back of my closet. I said nothing, but I was very sad. Mom just looked at me, and she also said nothing.

About a week later, I looked for something to wear to school. When I opened my closet, the kilt was hanging in the front. I took it out, and there was nothing wrong with it. I put it on and there seemed to be more room for the kilt pin. Mom smiled when I came downstairs, but again said nothing.

When I came home from school, I had to talk to her about the skirt. First, I cried and said that I was so sorry that I had ripped my beautiful skirt, the first piece of clothing that was bought for me and not made by mom. Of course, mom had figured it all out when first I had changed clothes and then I did not wear my skirt anymore. She spent a week, every night, repairing the skirt, and by taking one of the pleats out, gave the skirt enough room so that it would not rip anymore.

Mom knew that I was sad. Without saying anything, she just fixed the problem.

Sachwerte

THE GERMAN TERM SACHWERTE MEANS "NON-CASH VALUE." The term was often used in Germany and countries around Germany after World War I. The economic depression made cash lose its value soon after it was printed.

How could families buy food? Every day you needed more cash for the same loaf of bread. So the old idea came back to life to use cash to buy other assets. You could invest in land, houses, a business, or "things." "Things" meaning jewelry, silver, gold, art, or antiques to use as cash.

Growing up after World War II, I heard the term sachwerte a lot. My father used to come home with "things" and said one word "sachwerte." When I got older, I understood that it had been sachwerte that kept us from starving to death during the Nazi occupation of my country, the Netherlands. We were in hiding, and there was no income. All the beautiful things my family had collected before the war were being used to barter for food, medicine, or other necessities. After five years of occupation, there were only a few collectables left, including some small silver serving pieces.

When you have experienced conflicts, you will never forget it and you will always fear that it will happen again. Having learned the lessons of surviving from my family, it was important to start collecting again. First it was to be safe, but it was also a hobby.

Of course, it took some years after the war before my father was able to buy "things" again—feeding the family and buying warm clothing for all came first and collectables could only be bought with specially saved money. As children, my father took us to antique stores. We heard him discussing certain objects with the shopkeepers, and then bargaining about the price, and sometimes making a purchase. We loved going, and it put a seed in our minds for later.

We grew up with books; my parents always said if you collect, you have to know what you collect. Also by studying certain objects, you would recognize them in stores; not all objects are obvious. For example, a miniature domino set comes in a certain little box, like a big domino set. You might see it and think what a cute box. If you have studied it, you might know that there actually is a miniature domino set inside that cute box. When my father came home with a new treasure, he always asked what we thought about it.

The first time I visited London, I could not get enough of all the old silver at the London Silver Vaults and the outdoor antique markets. I could only afford small objects like salt spoons, mustard jars, and small cups. To find an object that interests you, then bargain about the price, and realize that you can just afford it, it gives you a magical feeling. Once you know that special feeling, you want to look for more finds. On my birthday after my visit to London, my parents gave me a book about old silver and a book about hallmarks. When you study the hallmarks on the silver, you learn who made the piece, and in what year, and where it was made.

When I met Sidney, my husband, collecting antiques was a new concept for him, but he learned quickly. I gave him an old brass English weight for his birthday and he got interested in old weights and scales. It did not take long before we started antiquing together, and he, too, loves it.

For more than 50 years, we have collected beautiful things. We have an eclectic collection, but in the last few years we have focused on smaller pieces, since we live in an apartment now. We enjoy going to antique fairs, and antiquing in Europe, especially in London and Denmark. We love Danish silver and porcelain. To find a special piece now gives both of us that magical feeling. Danish friends visited us a couple of weeks ago. I served cheese and crackers and used our beautiful handmade Danish silver knives.

A week later we received a small package from our friends in the mail. When we opened it, there was a small silver lemon fork the same pattern as the silver knives we had used for cheese. We felt the same magic when we saw that thoughtful gift. When times are not so secure, it is comforting to have sachwerte—to know that you have "things" to barter with, so that your family can eat.

The Matchmaker

Harry Markowicz

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

IT'S WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON. As usual, Albert and I are sitting at the Donor and Membership Desk at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. As volunteers, we help visitors fill out membership applications, and we accept donations to the Museum. As survivors, our main responsibility is to hand out copies of our brief biographies and answer questions related to our Holocaust experiences.

An elegantly dressed young woman comes up the stairs from the lower level, and without a glance in our direction, walks determinedly past the desk, perhaps heading toward the cloak room or the exit. She stands out from the crowd, because the typical visitor to the Museum is a casually dressed tourist.

She must have changed her mind because suddenly, she is facing us across the desk. She smiles shyly and says, "I am Israeli. I could not leave without paying my respects to you."

Albert invites her to sit down. I ask her what she is doing in the United States. She replies in fluent English, with only a trace of an Israeli accent, "I am at Virginia Tech, where I am an Israel Fellow at the Hillel."

I tell her that every fall since I started volunteering, several Israeli students have had internships at the Museum: "All of them are of Ethiopian origin and several are currently Israel Fellows at other universities." I am not at all surprised when she says, "I know them."

We talk about national service in Israel, and she tells us she served in the navy.

Shortly after our Israeli visitor has taken a seat at the desk, a young man sits down on the other chair. He doesn't say anything but follows our conversation closely.

After a while I ask, "Are you two together?"

"No," both reply simultaneously. They then proceed to introduce themselves to each other.

His name is Ben. Hers is Leah.

Ben's grandparents left Poland long before World War II and were pioneers in Palestine. His parents still live in Israel, but he lives in England, which accounts for his British accent.

For Passover, while Ben will be in Israel with his family, Leah will be far away in Blacksburg, Virginia.

Ben tells us that he came to Washington, DC, to attend the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) conference. Leah turns toward Ben and says, "I also attended AIPAC."

Our lengthy conversation covers several topics, including a comparison of Yad Vashem with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum where we were having our conversation. Both Ben and Leah point out that in other Holocaust museums, there aren't any survivors with whom visitors can talk. Leah says she is embarrassed by the way Holocaust survivors are treated in Israel: "Many live in poverty."

I share an event that I didn't witness but heard about from someone who was there. One day, a young Israeli walked up to an elderly volunteer who was on duty at the Museum's Information Desk. He asked her, "Are you a survivor?" to which she replied in the affirmative. In an arrogant tone he then asked her, "Why didn't you fight back?"

Albert states that Jews fought back against all odds in ghettos, concentration camps, in the forests, and wherever else they were. I add, "With the exception of the Soviet Union, almost all European countries with their armies, navies, and air forces were defeated by the Germans in a matter of days or weeks. Jews fought back in every way they could, including crossing borders illegally, hiding in the worst possible conditions, even giving away their children to strangers to increase their chances of survival, as Albert's mother and my parents did, and so on."

At some point, Albert leaves to give a talk to a school group in one of the theaters. Leah, Ben, and I continue our conversation. Our visitors are still there when Albert returns after his presentation.

Leah announces that she has to leave. Ben suggests that they keep in touch, at the very least on Facebook. She agrees and they exchange contact information.

Before she leaves, Leah offers her apologies for her ignorant young countryman. On a few occasions, young Germans have apologized to me for their forebears who were responsible for

horrendous crimes against Jewish people all over Nazi-occupied Europe. This heartfelt apology from a young Israeli is completely unexpected.

After Leah and Albert are gone, Ben and I continue our conversation. At one point he asks me whether I have any advice for him. I'm not sure what kind of advice he is seeking. I tell him he seems well-grounded and doesn't need any guidance from me.

Ben decides he should take a look around the Museum. He is flying back to England that evening. He missed his flight the day before, and he doesn't want that to happen again. He asks me for my email address.

As we are bidding each other good-bye, Ben says he will let me know if I had made a successful *shidduch*. He didn't promise to invite me to the wedding, but it's not too late!

And You, Where Are You From?

IN AUGUST 1972, I moved from British Columbia to Washington, DC, to pursue my graduate studies in linguistics at Georgetown University. It was a last-minute decision following a phone call from the chairman of the Georgetown French department offering me a position as a lecturer. However, classes were starting just six days later, and I had 24 hours to decide whether to accept or turn down the position. It was one of the most difficult decisions I have had to make. It started my life on a new course, one I could not have imagined back then.

At the time, I knew only one person in the DC area, Donna. She and I had met at a linguistics conference in Buffalo, New York, the previous summer. She started her graduate studies in linguistics at Georgetown University that fall. Following my decision to make the move, I called Donna, who kindly offered to let me stay with her until I could find a place of my own.

A short time later, in a seminar in which we were both enrolled, Donna pointed to an elegantly dressed woman. Donna thought that, like me, this student was a native speaker of French. During a break I walked up to the Francophone woman and asked her where she was from. Like me and most students in the program, she was in her mid-thirties, and like me, she spoke English fluently, without an accent, yet with a difficult-to-identify foreign intonation. Her response was somewhat tentative: "France … Switzerland …" After a long pause she added, "Israel." She followed this with her own question: "And you, where are you from?"

I was unprepared for her inquiry: I had guessed she was French, based on her attire and bearing, but I had not anticipated the possibility she might be Jewish, like me. In those days when I was asked where I was from, I would reply, "Seattle" to avoid having to give complicated and embarrassing lengthy explanations. By the age of 13, I had lived in three different countries and three more by the time of this encounter, so my answers were always guarded and really depended on the circumstances and who was asking the question.

I hesitated before replying while processing what this stranger had just told me. I was afraid of making a mistake based on a misunderstanding. Should I mention my childhood in Antwerp, then Brussels, or that I was born in Berlin? Before I could respond, her next statement caught me off guard and still makes my eyes well up with tears: "You don't have to say anything … I understand."

No further questions or explanations followed, or were necessary, for us to know that both our lives had been marked by living as children under Nazi occupation.

Uncle Abram

I WAS BORN IN BERLIN IN 1937. The following year, shortly before Kristallnacht, my father arranged for my family to be smuggled across the border into Belgium. We were very close to Uncle Abram—my mother's brother—and his family. Their apartment was around the corner from ours in Berlin, and they also crossed the border illegally into Belgium around the same time.

In August 1942, when the Germans began nighttime raids in Jewish neighborhoods in Antwerp, my parents decided that sleeping in our apartment had become too dangerous, because it was located in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood in Brussels. Our family split up, and for several nights, my sister, Rosi, and I slept at my Uncle Abram's apartment, which was not located in a Jewish area. That was the last time I saw Uncle Abram and my cousin, Manfred.

Two years later, while taking refuge in a public bomb shelter during the frequent air raids, Uncle Abram, Aunt Gutsha, and their son, Manfred, were denounced by an anonymous person. After spending a few days in a transit camp, they were deported on the last transport from Belgium to Auschwitz on August 1, 1944. Their daughter, Lotti, who was hiding with the mayor's family in a small village in the Belgian countryside, avoided capture. Brussels was liberated barely a month later on September 4, 1944.

Although I have no real memory of Uncle Abram—without looking at his picture I wouldn't even know what he looked like—I have the feeling that I know him and that he has always been a presence in my life, probably due to a number of connections I'm about to describe.

After the liberation of Belgium in September 1944, Lotti lived with us while we were waiting for news about her parents and Manfred. Aunt Gutsha survived Auschwitz and a death march to a concentration camp in Germany, where she was liberated by black American soldiers from a segregated US Army unit. It wasn't until years later, after we had moved to the United States, when I met one of these World War II veterans, that I became aware of the discrimination they faced from their own countrymen.

Following a period of convalescence, Aunt Gutsha eventually made her way to our house in Brussels. I remember that every day she would go somewhere to look for news of her husband and son. I was told lists of names of survivors were posted by the International Red Cross, but it was hard for me to visualize this mysterious process. After it was determined conclusively that Uncle Abram and Manfred would not return, Aunt Gutsha and Lotti immigrated to Israel.

My mother had ten siblings and only two survived the Holocaust: one in Ireland and the other in Palestine. She had left her mother and her other siblings in Poland in 1926 to move to Berlin and marry my father. Although she hardly ever mentioned them, I had the feeling that Uncle Abram was the one she missed the most. From letters that Manfred wrote to my brother, we know that despite the great danger, while living in hiding our mother frequently visited her brother Abram.

In the dining room of our post-war house in Brussels, there hung a large oil painting in a heavy golden frame depicting a bowl overflowing with a variety of fruit on top of a table. I remember looking at it often as a young boy and wondering why the grapes spilled over the edge of the table. My mother told me Uncle Abram had painted this "*nature morte*," so its presence too made me feel like I knew him. It didn't surprise me when I learned many years later that Orna, one of Lotti's two daughters who live in Israel, was also an amateur painter whose house was decorated by her own paintings.

More recently, Orna sent me a letter Uncle Abram wrote to Lotti in June 1944. This letter confirmed my impression that he was sensitive and very intelligent. The letter was a response to a question posed indirectly by Lotti: Mother Superior at her school had suggested that if 13-year-old Lotti converted to Catholicism, she would be safer. Instead of telling Lotti outright not to convert, he left it up to her, but very wisely, he gave her several concrete examples of why she shouldn't do it starting with the simplest one: "If you buy a dress and the following week you decide you don't like it, that's not a big problem." By implication, changing religions was a more complicated matter.

He writes further, "Mother Superior, as you wrote to us, is interested only in your welfare, ... We believe that is not a sufficient reason to change religion. Besides, you have not had sufficient time to learn and understand what is a religion." In concluding, Uncle Abram says that he wrote the letter in French so Lotti could show it to the family that was hiding her and also to Mother Superior so they could all explain it to her further. In effect, he was appealing to their good judgment to make the case against conversion.

Last year, Orna wrote to ask me to get some information from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum where I do volunteer work. Orna and her sister, Rachel, had made arrangements to have memorial markers, called *Stolpersteine*, set into the sidewalk in front of the Berlin house where their grandfather Abram and their uncle Manfred once resided.

The dates of deportation and of their deaths will be inscribed on the brass memorial markers. The ceremony will take place at a future date due to the coronavirus pandemic. This too brings me closer to my Uncle Abram, as well as to his granddaughters, Orna and Rachel.

"The Jewish Problem"

DURING THE SUMMER OF 1970, I moved into a group house on the main street of Port Moody, British Columbia, Canada. The stylish house overlooked the end of a Pacific inlet from the side of a small hill. It had been designed and built for the wealthy owner of a nearby sawmill. Based on appearance, some of our neighbors might have thought of us as hippies; however, the six residents were graduate students and teaching assistants at Simon Fraser University, located nearby on top of Mt. Burnaby.

One night in August, a carelessly discarded cigarette started a fire on a living room couch. The flames spread rapidly to the curtains and from there to the beautiful pine wood paneling on the ground-floor rooms and the stairway leading to the upstairs bedrooms. By the time the Port Moody volunteer fire department put out the fire, most of the house had burned down to the ground. The next day, the fire chief showed me where the fire had started, and he told me the cigarette had smoldered for several hours before starting the blaze.

Just days earlier, I had handed in my thesis to my department to complete my MA degree in Psycholinguistics. My former wife, Tilda, whom I had met in Israel, was visiting me from Los Angeles, where she had moved after we separated amicably.

Two dogs died in the fire. One of the human residents, Dieter, a German graduate student, suffered burns on his hands and cuts on his face when he dove headfirst through a closed window on the second floor. Another housemate, Dorothy, twisted her ankle when she jumped from a different, second-floor window.

Awakened by cries of "fire, fire" and seeing smoke in the stairway, Tilda and I retreated from my second-floor room into an adjacent storage room located in the rear of the house. There, a short door gave access to an outside platform from which trunks and suitcases could be hoisted by a pulley into the luggage room. We were sitting on the edge of the platform waiting for help, when a powerful blast of hot air caused Tilda to lose her balance and drop down from our perch. Unfortunately, she also inhaled some of the hot air. The other housemates escaped without injuries.

Our next-door neighbors, William and Peter, Simon Fraser graduate students from Britain, joined by Richard, a graduate student from New York who had just arrived in town a day earlier, came to our rescue before the volunteer firemen arrived. Richard broke Tilda's fall by partially catching her mid-air, softening her landing on the ground. He then propped up a short ladder on top of a picnic table that he and others had dragged close to the house, allowing me to climb down.

Dieter, Dorothy, and Tilda were taken by ambulance to the local hospital where their injuries were treated. A few days later, Tilda flew back to Los Angeles on a flight arranged by Pan Am, her employer.

For the next few days after the fire, my housemates and I stayed with the next-door neighbors who had come to our rescue during the fire. Several members of our original household soon found lodging elsewhere, their move facilitated by the sad fact that practically all their possessions had been destroyed. In the end, only Richard, Rosalie (also a native New Yorker), and I remained with William and Peter. Despite the close quarters—it was a modestly sized house—we all got along well, sharing in the cooking, food shopping, and whatever domestic cleaning was deemed essential.

Richard, whose assimilated Jewish family had left Vienna before the Second World War, and I became close friends. Several months later, Richard's girlfriend and future wife, Amy, came to visit him during her winter break at the University of Wisconsin. Amy—a native of Brooklyn where her father owned a delicatessen—and I discovered that we shared a Jewish sense of humor. In our conversations with each other, we enjoyed throwing in a Yiddish word or two, and the same kinds of things made us laugh.

One day as he was leaving the house, Peter told Amy and me we would be having a house meeting that evening. We had never had a meeting before, so I inquired why we needed one. He hesitated

slightly before saying, "We need to discuss something." I asked him, "Who is the 'we' and what did 'we' want to talk about?" Peter replied that he, William, and Rosalie, wanted the meeting so we could talk about a problem. He hesitated again before blurting out, "the Jewish problem," as he drove off in his car.

Peter and William, leaders in the radical student movement of the late 1960s, were used to debating and giving stirring speeches in front of large crowds of protesters. I was puzzled by the subject of the upcoming meeting and Peter's reticence to describe what he meant by "the Jewish problem." What was to follow gave me a unique insight that I had never experienced before.

That evening after supper, we all met in the living room. Peter and William exposed what they considered to be "the Jewish problem." In brief, until Amy appeared, they had considered me to be someone to whom they could easily relate to, but in her presence, I had metamorphosed into a different person, apparently one with whom they found it difficult to have a rapport.

According to them, the problem was that Amy and I were being exclusive. When we used a Yiddish word or expression, they felt excluded. I pointed out that Amy and Richard, and also Rosalie and William who had developed a romantic relationship, were also being exclusive. They argued that it was not the same.

I admitted it was impolite for Amy and me to use Yiddish words and expressions, or laugh at a joke that they didn't understand in their company, but our object was not to exclude them. We were just being ourselves. All along I suspected their objections went beyond a lack of politeness. Since Peter had labeled it "the Jewish problem," their concern had to be related to our Jewishness.

I confronted them with the idea that as long as I appeared "culturally" assimilated, my being Jewish was not an issue for them. They strongly objected to my suggestion that they were rejecting my Jewish identity, which manifested itself in Amy's presence. They objected, declaring that they were not antisemitic—a prejudice that was incompatible with their left-wing and liberal worldview. [How the world has changed in the last 50 years!]

The intense discussion went on unresolved late into the night, and we were exhausted; we decided to adjourn until the next evening.

The next evening we took up where we had left off and continued for several more hours. The more I thought about their attitude, the more my feelings were in accord with my thinking. I felt powerful and ready to challenge these experienced debaters.

I don't remember all that was said, but at some point, William, Peter, and Rosalie each made unexpected and remarkable confessions that confirmed what I had been thinking and feeling.

It started when William, a product of an upper-class British family and education, stated that he had never met a Jew before attending university. In his family, he said they spoke of Jews and dogs in the same breath. After William finished telling us about his background, Peter spoke about his own experience growing up. He came from a blue-collar family, and the students in the schools he attended shared similar working-class backgrounds; however, the top students in all his courses tended to be the Jewish kids.

Rosalie spoke next. Like Richard, she had attended the Bronx High School of Science, one of the New York elite public schools, where the large majority of students were Jewish. Through her tears, Rosalie admitted that attending Bronx Science had been a painful experience for her, in part because she was resentful of the Jewish girls who could afford to wear different color cashmere sweaters every day.

Following these disclosures of past negative experiences with Jews, there was a long period of silence. Exhausted, we all agreed that it was time to go to bed. I imagine that those of us who participated in these emotionally charged discussions recognized, probably for the first time, that antisemitism may be present in an unconscious or latent form.

"The Jewish problem" never came up again in our household. However, by a strange coincidence, it wasn't the last time antisemitism made an appearance among us! One afternoon early that fall, one of us called the gas company after noticing the smell of gas in the house. Not long afterwards, a gas company inspector arrived to check for leaks while we were having dinner in the large eat-in kitchen. After testing the gas cooking stove, he checked the gas furnace and the clothes dryer in the basement. He returned to the kitchen to report that there was no evidence of a gas leak in the house.

By this time, we had finished our dinner, and we were sitting around the table chatting. Without regard to our conversation, the inspector then launched into a monologue in which he kept referring to "these men in New York." None of us seemed to understand the point he was trying to make until, to our surprise, he asserted that: "This group of men with long beards in New York control the banking system everywhere." His meaning was now perfectly obvious!

We thanked the gas company inspector for making sure that we were safe while showing him the door. Afterwards, I wondered why none of us challenged his claim. Perhaps mindful of our recent painful discussion, we chose to avoid the topic?

Tommy Guns and Other War Toys

FOLLOWING THE LIBERATION OF BELGIUM IN SEPTEMBER 1944, my parents, siblings, and I came out of hiding and our lives started returning to normal. As a child born shortly before the start of World War II, my memory of a "normal" life was very limited. We got back together as a family and soon after moved into a row house at 33 rue Paul Leduc, in a quiet neighborhood of Brussels where we knew no other Jews. Whether that was a choice or happenstance, I don't know.

I started school in the middle of the year as a first grader. I had turned seven the previous August, so I should have been in the second grade, but my schooling had been interrupted by several moves while we were in hiding. For a short time, I had even attended a Catholic school in an area of Brussels where Flemish was spoken, a language I didn't know, which set me back further.

Now that I was living with my parents in a different neighborhood, the closest elementary school was just one and a half blocks from our house on a street called avenue Frans Courtens. It was a very small school with few children; it was eventually torn down to make room for a new highway. Most of the children in the neighborhood attended a larger school farther away. All the children in the neighborhood played together, regardless of the school they attended. One day during recess, soon after I started going to this school, a boy my age approached me and shouted, *"Sale Juif!"* ("Dirty Jew!"). I was really startled! During the occupation, I had never heard the expression, and I didn't know what he meant. His tone and the expression on his face made him appear angry to me. I am still surprised by my own reaction—I thrust my hands out to his chest and pushed him away from me. In my mind's eye, I see him sulking off, maybe even crying.

I have fonder memories of another incident during recess around that time. Two slightly older girls—maybe eight or nine years old—each grabbed me by an arm and pulled me backwards into the bushes that surrounded the courtyard where we played. When we were out of sight, they simultaneously kissed me on my cheeks and then let me go. They were gone before I realized who they were and what had happened.

In my school, the fourth through sixth grades—about 12 students altogether—were all taught in one classroom by the school principal. With so few children, I had the opportunity to be the lead in the annual school play. In addition, with limited competition, it was easy for me to be among the top students in subjects like French and math; I received several of the prizes handed out at the end of the year. Generally, the prizes consisted of books, but one time I received a bank savings booklet inscribed with my name and the sum of 50 Belgian francs—about one dollar. (I still have the bank booklet, so if the bank is still in business, I may be the owner of a small fortune in euros.)

Another advantage of attending such a small school: I was able to learn the material students were studying in the classes above mine. When I finished the fifth grade, the principal told me that I had already learned the sixth grade material. So I was able to join my cohort in the seventh grade at the Athénée de Schaerbeek, an all-boys secondary school.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

At one end, avenue Frans Courtens ended in a gigantic field that extended for many miles. Plans had been made before the war to construct a major highway on this land to link Brussels to its airport. It was several more years before this roadway was built. In the meantime, the barren land provided the neighborhood children with a wonderful natural playground. We spent many hours in this giant sandlot letting our imaginations run wild. We often played war games: sometimes cowboys and Indians, but usually partisans fighting the *Boches*—the Germans. Everyone wanted to be a partisan, so we had to take turns playing the German soldiers.

Although the field had very limited vegetation, the chalky land consisted of rises and depressions, providing ample places to plan attacks and hide from the enemy. One day, we found a British "Tommy gun" partially buried in the ground and we dug it out. It lacked its stock and was somewhat rusty, but it immediately became part of our weapons inventory. In fact, it was our only weapon, so we took turns using it. Only partisans got to carry it, since it was an Allied weapon. Everyone else had imaginary guns. But soon we were able to vastly increase our arsenal when we made a new discovery.

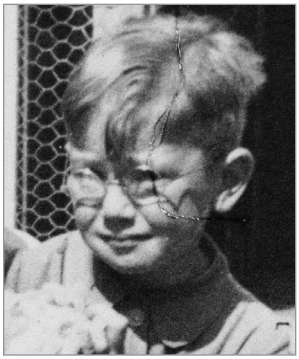
At the far end of rue Paul Leduc, maybe 500 or 600 yards from our house, there was a solarium consisting of an open-air, Olympic-size swimming pool in the middle of a very large grassy field, itself surrounded by a tall cement wall. During the summer we spent many hours swimming and playing there. Somehow, we found out that on the other side of the back wall of the solarium, a veritable treasure was waiting to be discovered by us: a whole field of broken-down Allied tanks.

They were not guarded, and no fence surrounded them. After all, who could walk off with a tank, especially a damaged one? We didn't waste any time before exploring our new acquisitions. No need to pretend anymore; we now had the real thing. Some of the tanks had lost their turret or tracks, but others were still in relatively good condition. We climbed all over the tanks; soon some of the more fearless among us found ways to open the hatches on the turrets and also the driver's compartment, so we climbed inside. Being claustrophobic, I was afraid someone would close the hatch from outside, so I didn't spend too much time inside the tanks. They were stripped of their weapons, but that hardly mattered to us. One boy discovered that we could make the turret on one of the tanks turn; it still had a working battery. This tank graveyard was awesome, and for a while, it became our favorite playground.

One boy refused to join us inside the tanks. Standing back, sounding like a lecturing parent, he would say, "You are going to get hurt." We just pooh-poohed him, but in retrospect, we should have listened to his warnings.

One day we were going home for lunch from school, walking as usual two-by-two accompanied by our teachers to the next corner. At one point, the lines broke up when some of us turned left at rue Paul Leduc while others turned right. An apartment building was located at that intersection. When we reached the corner, someone started yelling down at us from a third-floor window. We all looked up. It was Louis, one of our gang who liked to bully the rest of us. He was smiling and proudly showing off his arm, which was in a sling, his hand completely wrapped up in a large white bandage. While playing in one of the tanks, he told us, the hatch closed down on his hand, and the end of his middle finger was cut off.

This incident persuaded us to give up our armored weaponry in favor of rejoining the infantry, which required only lighter or imaginary weapons. In any case, shortly after that event, the tanks disappeared from the field, maybe to be recycled for another war.



America under Attack

Alfred Münzer

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

ABOUT 60 YEARS AGO my mother and I arrived in the United States. As we ate breakfast on the SS *Rijndam*, tears welled up as we had our first long-anticipated view of the Statue of Liberty. To us, America was "The New World," a country where everyone had the opportunity to thrive, a country that welcomed the stranger, a country with none of the narrow-mindedness and antisemitism that persisted in Europe even after the Holocaust. As we stood at the railing waiting for our turn with the immigration officer, we marveled at the heavy protective gloves worn by dockworkers as they unloaded huge crates, and at the cups of coffee they were served on the loading platforms when it came time for a break. Surely this was the real workers' paradise!

But shortly after our arrival, we acquired our first television set—we hadn't planned on getting a TV, though it was the first piece of furniture in our apartment—and as we watched the news and saw the images of Black children being jeered at and cursed, blocked from attending school, we learned that America was not free of hatred and prejudice. Over the years, as we witnessed the civil rights movement and the power of nonviolent protest, we concluded that America still had the potential of being the "*Goldene Medineh*," the "golden land."

But repeated shootings targeting predominantly African American churches, marches by white nationalists in Charlottesville, Virginia, the massacre in the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, and, now, the resurgence of ancient antisemitic tropes in light of the COVID-19 pandemic have made me wonder whether there is any place of refuge from prejudice, bigotry, and hatred. I fear that the idea of America, the America of our Declaration of Independence, is under attack, under attack by words, venomous words that target the stranger, words that we have learned can have lethal consequences. A survey found that most people think that Adolf Hitler gained power through violent means. But it was words in the form of propaganda that brought him to power. It was words that destroyed the pre-Nazi German government's Weimar constitution. It was words that led to the Holocaust.

In July 2012, I heard a speech at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that now seems sadly prophetic: "Those in power begin to dehumanize particular groups or scapegoat them for their country's problems. Hatred not only becomes acceptable; it is even encouraged. It's like stacking dry firewood before striking the match. Then there is a moment of ignition. The permission to hate becomes permission to kill."

My mother passed away 18 years ago. What would she say if she were alive today? I think I know. Because she loved the change in seasons, every fall I would take her to Shenandoah National Park to admire myriad shades of gold as far as the eye could see. She would remind me how witnessing the emergence of spring through the cracks of a cattle car transporting her from one concentration camp to another had kindled her imagination and given her the hope of a better world. No human power, she said, can keep the sun from shining or undo the beauty of creation. She truly believed that just as spring erases the gloom of winter, goodness ultimately will prevail over evil. It falls to all of us, she would say, to find the good, to embrace it, and to spread it.

Yahrzeit

YAHRZEIT IS THE JEWISH YEARLY OBSERVANCE OF A LOVED ONE'S DEATH. Traditionally, we light a candle at home and recite the kaddish in the synagogue in their memory. I learned the words of the kaddish sometime in 1950 when I was eight or nine, shortly after my mother found out the precise date of my father's death—July 25, 1945, which translated to the Hebrew date 15 Av—in what had been the Ebensee concentration camp. I have observed the ritual ever since. The kaddish makes no reference to mourning but is a reaffirmation of our faith in the Almighty despite our loss.

My sisters, Eva, seven, and Leah, five, were killed at Auschwitz-Birkenau on February 11, 1944. Like me, they had been entrusted to a Christian family by my parents to safeguard them from the Nazis and their Dutch collaborators. But while I was kept safe by the Indonesian Dutch Madna family and their Muslim nanny, Mima Saïna, who adopted me and loved me like one of their own, my sisters were denounced to the Nazis, imprisoned in Scheveningen in The Hague, Netherlands, deported to Westerbork, and then sent to their death at Auschwitz—a fate they shared with 1.5 million other children killed by the Nazis.

US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Alfred Münzer

It took a long time as a child growing up in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust to fully understand the terrible toll the Holocaust had taken on my family, to comprehend what people meant when they embraced me and told me how lucky I was because my mother had "come back," or when they shook their heads and said how sad it was that my sisters "had not come back." They tried to shield me with euphemisms from the horrors of concentration camps and gas chambers, just like the Madna family had sheltered me from the always looming Nazi threat with love and joy.

For many years after the war, I continued to scan newspaper photographs for my sisters and held out the secret hope that they too had miraculously survived, a fantasy I never shared with my mother or anyone else for fear, I suppose, that it might be shattered. I did this whenever there were stories of sudden unexpected reunions of people who had been separated and assumed to have died during the Holocaust, and even after my mother had received a letter from the Red Cross confirming their deaths at Auschwitz. And yet, my mother confided in me that she went so far as to attend a session with a medium shortly after the war in the desperate and irrational hope of communicating with my father. The medium, my mother told me, found her too skeptical and dismissed her for being a "disruptive influence."

While my mother told me many stories about my sisters and held them out as examples of good behavior when I was little, she never lit candles or encouraged me when I was older to observe their Yahrzeit by reciting the kaddish. I now wonder whether she had ever come to terms with their deaths and whether she too harbored an illusion that somehow, somewhere, they might yet be alive. My mother made a point of visiting my father's grave as soon as she found out that there indeed was a grave in Ebensee. When she returned from her trip to Austria, she showed me photos

of the concentration camp that was now a cemetery and of her standing at my father's grave, thus burying any thought that he might have survived. But for Eva and Leah there were only the Red Cross form letters with a red rubber stamp bearing the disclaimer "time of death not available and administratively determined." My mother never visited Auschwitz-Birkenau, but I did. Even there, however, I found it impossible to envision and mourn the death of my sisters.

Perhaps imagination is the purview of the young and like other more tangible faculties diminishes as we get older. I cannot pinpoint the time when the undeniable reality of the death of my sisters extinguished the last glimmer of hope of seeing them alive. But for the past 20 years I have been lighting memorial candles on the Hebrew date corresponding to February 11, 1944. Reciting the kaddish was more difficult. By glorifying God's name was I absolving the Almighty of responsibility in the murder of my sisters? It was fortunate that when I did recite the kaddish for the first time in memory of my sisters, Cantor Deborah Togut at Congregation B'nai Israel in Rockville, Maryland, offered to chant the mournful, hauntingly beautiful prayer "*El Moley Rachamim*," "God Full of Compassion," which unlike the kaddish does not focus on affirming the power and majesty of the Almighty, but on asking the Almighty to embrace and shelter the soul of the deceased, imagery that lessened my anger and gave me a measure of comfort. On rare occasions, I have allowed myself to believe in an afterlife, a time when I might finally embrace my dad and my sisters. But like my mother, I am too anchored in reality to allow such musings for long.

As the years have gone by, Yahrzeit after Yahrzeit, the feeling of loss when I think of my sisters has not diminished but has increased. I imagine them older and married and with my nieces and nephews, and family occasions, and the contributions they might have made to the world. A few days after the 75th Yahrzeit of my sisters, I spoke with Dewie Madna, my foster or adoptive sister, daughter of Annie Madna and Tolé Madna, the family that sheltered me during the Holocaust. She was then 90 years old and the last living link to my sisters. She and her older sister, Wil, and younger brother, Rob, lived across the street from the house where I was born and where my family continued to live until we were forced to go into hiding, and they were frequent visitors in our home. Rob, who must have been six or seven at the time, told me of a vivid memory of watching my mom prepare a salad dressing and being amazed that she added sugar to the oil and vinegar, an absurdly trivial memory, made all the more real by being so inconsequential. Rob and Wil had passed away a few years ago, and now there was only Dewie left of the original Madna family. I told Dewie that it was 75 years since my sisters were deported and killed. "*Maar ik zie se toch zo voor mijn ogen*," "but I see them now, as if it were yesterday," she responded. Sadly, Dewie died eight months after that conversation.

I was too young to know my sisters and Dewie was my last witness to the reality of their having been, and of my loss. Now I am the last living link to the story of my family during the Holocaust and, more importantly, the last witness to the lessons that story holds for the world, just like the stories of a million other families, so alike and so different, the sad legacy of a world given over to prejudice, hate, and murder, stories that need to be told if Never Again is ever to be more than a hope, but a promise kept.

Arthur and Helga

ALL I KNOW ABOUT MY EARLY LIFE comes from photographs and the stories my mother told me. Yesterday, I received a photograph I had never seen before. It opened a whole new chapter, and it left me stunned and speechless. It is the earliest picture I have of me together with my mother. The photo was one of many I received in an email from an unremembered friend, Arthur Friederizi.

I recognized the last name Friederizi from an inscription on the back of another photograph, which was taken while I was in hiding from the Nazis with the Madna family. I always share that photograph when I tell the story of my family during the Holocaust and of being hidden as a nine-month-old Jewish baby with the Indonesian Dutch Madna family and their Indonesian nanny, Mima Saïna. It shows me as a beaming three-year-old on a tricycle while my foster brother Rob Madna lovingly watches over me. To my right there is a smiling young girl wearing a sweater and a plaid skirt holding my hand, and to my left there is a very erect-standing boy, younger than the girl, squinting in the sunlight and dressed in what might be a scout's uniform. These kids, I tell the audience, were the only ones trusted to come and play with me while I was in hiding from the Nazis and confined to the house.

In the photo I just received, and which completely took me by surprise, I am on the same tricycle but look a bit older, my bangs are shorter, and my smile is more restrained, bordering on shy. Behind me, there is the same girl, now in a summery short-sleeved dress, and, unmistakably, to the right of the girl, in front of a door with peeling paint, is my mother. She bears a faint, wistful, melancholic smile, the kind of smile that I learned over many ensuing years signified a mix of joy and regret. My mother's hair is shorter, and the flowery dress drapes a body that is much leaner than in all the prewar photos, or than at any time in later life. The photo must have been taken in August 1945, shortly after she was repatriated to the Netherlands from Sweden, where she had been sent to recuperate after she was liberated from the concentration camps. It had to have been within days of when she and I were reunited and when I had refused to sit in her lap, pushing her away because to me she was a complete stranger. Is that why the girl—and not my mother—has a hand on my shoulder?

US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Alfred Münzer

The girl is also in earlier photos of that time. In one, I struggle as she tries to keep me in her lap. In another, she is coaxing me as I sit on a swing with a serious-looking Mima next to us. Until a few days ago, I never knew the girl's name. Now I know it is Helga. I was too young when the photos were taken to have any memory of the Friederizi kids. But the young boy was twice my age at the time, old enough to remember. Some 75 years later, he recognized a picture of me while reading a feature article in a Dutch newspaper, the *Algemeen Dagblad*, about a book written by Herman Keppy, *Zijn Jullie Kerels of Lafaards?*, or *Are You Guys or Cowards?* The book is about the Indonesian Dutch resistance movement during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. He saw a photograph of Mima holding me, and immediately recognized *het joodse jongetje Bobby* (the little Jewish boy called Bobby) he played with during the war years. Bobby was the name I was given while I was in hiding. He quickly got in touch with Herman Keppy, who put him in touch with me. That is how I learned that the boy squinting in the sunlight is Arthur and that the girl in the plaid skirt is his older sister Helga. The photograph, like many others, Arthur told me, was taken by his father, Carl, to whom I am grateful for allowing me to see and learn, even this many years later, details about my life while in hiding from the Nazis.

For the last few weeks, Arthur and I have feverishly exchanged emails and photographs. I had always been told that the Friederizi kids were trusted because their parents, although German, were Communists and therefore staunchly anti-Nazi and sure not to betray me to the German occupiers or their Dutch collaborators. I still do not know whether they were Communists, but there is no doubt about the anti-Nazi bona fides of Carl and Fanny Friederizi. Whenever there was a "*razzia*," a round-up of Jews, Arthur told me, they provided a hiding place under the floorboards of their home for two Jewish men, Alex Borisky and Eric Baruch. Both men survived the Nazi occupation.

The life story of Arthur's parents does suggest they were rebels. Carl Friederizi was born in 1886 in Warstein, Germany. When he was 18 in 1904 and war seemed imminent, he left Germany, first for Charleroi in Belgium. There he met his first wife and worked building derricks for a coalmine. Two children were born in short order. When Germany invaded France, marching through Belgium, the family was placed in an internment camp, and Carl received a call-up to the German Army and was sent to the front in Verdun. The trauma of the war led to the dissolution of his marriage. In 1926, Carl moved to the Netherlands where he met his second wife, Fanny. She was born in Bavaria in 1899, but in 1927, at age 28, wanted to leave Germany for Mexico. To get the necessary papers and funds to get to Mexico, she first settled in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Her life took on a different course when she met Carl. They were married in The Hague in 1930. Helga was born in 1936 and Arthur in 1938, the same years as my sisters, Eva and Leah, who sadly did not share my good fortune and were denounced to the Nazis and killed at Auschwitz.

US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Alfred Münzer

Sometime in the 1930s, Arthur's parents befriended the Madna family. Arthur and his parents were frequent visitors to the Madna home at van Kinsbergenstraat 40. Arthur remembers how much he enjoyed getting his first taste of the Indonesian noodle dish Bami. Mima, the nanny in whose bed I slept and who kept a knife under her pillow vowing to kill any Nazi who might try to get me, was a fabulous cook, he said. It was Mima, I told Arthur, who taught my mother how to make Bami, Nasi Goreng, and Tumis to accommodate my own Indonesian palate.

Arthur's father, Carl, was an avid photographer and took many pictures of the Madna family, only some of which I had in my collection. Many of the ones Arthur sent me were of a much younger Tolé Madna and of Tolé's son, Rob. There is one photo of a large all-Indo-Dutch gathering with Arthur's parents as the sole exception. Arthur does not know when or where this picture was taken, but it illustrates the affinity between the Friederizis and Tolé's Indo-Dutch community. The intimate friendship between the Madna and Friederizi families is also shown by the name Arthur's father chose for an herbal remedy he developed and marketed, Toco-Tholin, Toco because the oils have their origin in Asia and Tholin as a tribute to his close friend Tolé, who was born in the former Netherlands East Indies, now Indonesia.

Another photograph that I regularly include in my talks shows Papa Madna with me in his arms, Mima, a slightly younger Arthur, and a woman with a faint smile in the upper left corner to whom I never paid much attention. Arthur confirmed she is his mother, Fanny. Tragically, Arthur's mother died of dysentery on her birthday, January 28, 1945, a victim of the famine

that struck the Netherlands during that winter; six months before my father succumbed in the Ebensee concentration camp on July 25, 1945. She died three months before liberation, and my father died three months after. The Friederizi home barely escaped the accidental bombing by the Allies of the Bezuidenhout neighborhood of The Hague on March 25, 1945, an event that deeply scarred Carl Friederizi.

I was surprised to learn that the more impromptu pictures of me and Helga were taken in the backyard of the Friederizi home. As proof, Arthur sent me an earlier picture of himself on the same swing, and like me, being coaxed by Helga. I always assumed the Friederizis lived next door to the Madnas, but they lived in an altogether different neighborhood. Arthur assumes I was taken to their home by tram. If true, it disproves my assumption that I never left the house on van Kinsbergenstraat. But it fits with the recollection of my foster sister, Dewie Madna, that at least in the first year or two when I was hidden with them and when the Nazis were too preoccupied with deporting adults to pay attention to babies, her father enjoyed taking me out in a stroller. He would respond to the queries from people about the blond and blue-eyed baby he was tending to by simply telling them I was his son. "They would shake their heads and think," he used to say, "poor Indonesian man, doesn't realize his wife has been sleeping around." Papa Madna was able to make light of the darkness of that anxiety-filled time. It was in that same spirit that he allowed six-year-old Arthur and eight-year-old Helga to befriend a little Jewish boy called Bobby, putting a smile on that little boy's face, a smile and a friendship renewed 75 years later.

Time Moving in Reverse

THE HOLOCAUST SHOULD BE RECEDING INTO HISTORY, the purview of scholars, books, museums, and memorials. After all, the Nazi regime that gave rise to the Holocaust gained power 87 years ago and was defeated 75 years ago. But for me, in these last few weeks, time seems to have been moving in reverse. The resurgence of antisemitism and xenophobia in the United States and Europe may have played a part, but the sudden, unexpected discovery of new information about the fate of my sisters has hurled me back to a time when I was less than a year old, a time when I was too young to comprehend the breakup forced on our family by the Nazi occupation. It is as if the immunity conferred by the slow piecemeal exposure to the Holocaust as a youngster growing up in its immediate aftermath had worn off, and I now fully felt the pain of the loss of my sisters and the anger at the perpetrators and collaborators responsible for the murder of two bright and beautiful young girls, only five and seven, in a man-made hell called Auschwitz.

This sudden turn began with an email from Ron van Hasselt, a man in the Netherlands who received a membership newsletter from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum that described a special tour of the Museum's Permanent Exhibition that I led for a group of victims of religious persecution from around the world. The newsletter included a link to my personal story on the Museum's website. Ron van Hasselt told me that it seemed likely that my sisters were deported on the same transport to Auschwitz as his two nieces, about whom he was writing a book. Shortly after hearing from him, I received a call from Suzy Snyder, the curator of the Museum's 2003–04 special exhibition *Life in Shadows* that dealt with the stories of children who were forced to hide from the Nazis, and which had brought me into the Museum's family. The exhibition included a photograph of my sisters, Eva and Leah, when they were flower girls at a wedding. It also featured small photographs of my *brit mila*, the circumcision ceremony that marks the first milestone in a Jewish life, which my mother had kept with her through her stay in 12 concentration camps. Suzy asked whether I might be willing to speak to a fellow in the Museum's Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, Lilly Maier, who was writing her doctoral thesis on women who tried to save Jewish children during the Holocaust and who had come upon the story of my sisters. I was surprised by the request because I knew so little about the woman who had agreed to hide my sisters or about the circumstances of the betrayal to the Nazis that led to their murder in Auschwitz. Lilly told me that an inquiry with the Netherlands Central Archive for Special Jurisdiction (CASJ), the highly secretive repository of the records of the prosecution immediately after World War II of Nazi perpetrators and collaborators, had yielded a reference to my sisters in the file of a man called Dirk Vas. The file, she told me, was protected by privacy laws and could only be viewed by appointment and could not be copied. I shared her findings with Mr. van Hasselt who readily volunteered to file a request for an appointment at the CASJ.

While trying to imagine what he might uncover in the CASJ, I did an internet search of some of the names of those who I knew had been responsible for the placement of my sisters. I searched for the two Catholic priests, Fathers Schulling and Lodders, and for the van Leeuwen sisters who had been neighbors of my parents and who, to me, became Tante Jo and Tante Ko after I was reunited with my mother. At first, I found nothing. But then when I added the name of the church, Elandstraat Kerk, to the search, I found an article by Trees Krans in the December 2016 issue of a church bulletin called Ignatius News. It mentioned the role Father Lodders had played in saving Jewish children, which led to his incarceration at a prison established by the Nazi government in Scheveningen, near The Hague, the so-called Oranje Hotel.

To my surprise, the Museum's library had a copy of the *Gedenkboek van het Oranje Hotel*, a memorial book published in 1946 to preserve the inscriptions on the walls of the cells left by prisoners. It also listed many of the inmates confined in the prison by the Nazi regime, including names, dates of

birth, nature of their offense, and their ultimate fate. There I found not only the listing of Father Lodders, P.F. Lodders, imprisoned January 29, 1944– February 26, 1944 for baptizing Jewish children and distributing ration coupons, but also, the names of the two sisters I called Tante Jo and Tante Ko: J.C.M. and J.M. van Leeuwen imprisoned February 2, 1944–February 17, 1944 for providing help to Jewish children.

P. F. Lodders, Den Haag	R.K. geestelijke 8.2.1890	Doopen Jodenkinderen, verspr. van bonnen	29.1.44—26.2.44 Geen	Vrijheid

Scan taken from page 369 in *Memorial Book of the Oranjehotel* found at www.oranjehotel.org.

Mej. J. C. M. v. Leeuwen, Den Haag	19.3.1893	Hulp aan Joodsche kinderen	2.2.44—17.2.44	Vrijheid
Mej. J. M. v. Leeuwen Den Haag	10.4.1895	Hulp aan Joodsche kinderen	2.2.44—17.2.44	Vrijheid

Scan taken from page 368 in *Memorial Book of the Oranjehotel* found at www.oranjehotel.org.

I remembered 30 years ago, when I first began sharing the story of my family during the Holocaust, that a man who worked at the Library of Congress sent me an advertisement placed in the September 14, 1945, issue of the weekly Jewish newspaper, *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, inquiring about the whereabouts of my sisters. It gave their names in hiding as Maria Jansen for Eva and as Anny Jansen for Leah, names which my mother did not recognize. But in the *Gedenkboek* there was a Mrs. Jansen-de Gelder imprisoned January 20, 1944–May 2, 1945 in the Oranje Hotel for helping Jews in The Hague:

Inlichtingen gevraagd omtrent:
EVA MüNZER, geb. 10-7-'36 (schuilnaam Maria Jansen)
en
LIA MüNZER, geb. 12-11-'38. (schuilnaam Anny Jansen).
Weggehaald in Den Haag 31-1-'44.
Daarna half Februari 1944 waarschijnlijk getransporteerd naar Westerbork.
Ieder, die enige inlichtingen over deze kinderen kan geven, wordt verzocht deze te sturen aan Th. H. v. Leeuwen, Stadhouderskade 60, Amsterdam-Z.
Onkosten worden gaarne vergoed. 619

Newspaper clipping from the weekly Jewish newspaper, *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, from September 14, 1945. *Library of Congress*

Mevr. G. Jansen-de Gelder, Den Haag	20.2.1906	Jodenhulp	20.1.44—5.2.45	Vrijheid

Scan taken from page 363 in *Memorial Book of the Oranjehotel* found at www.oranjehotel.org.

Photo of Dirk Vas (second from left), reading *Mein Kampf. Central Archive of Special Justice, Netherlands National Archives*

Still waiting anxiously for what Ron van Hasselt might find in the CASJ, I found another book, *Jodenjacht*, (Jew-Hunt) edited by A.D. Van Liempt and Jan H. Kompagnie. In it, Dirk Vas is described as a devout Dutch Nazi, who joined the Waffen SS as soon as the Netherlands was invaded and who was sent to the Eastern front. There he was injured and sent back to The Hague, where he became a particularly committed and sadistic member of the police force focused on pursuing Jews, especially children. Dirk Vas, second from left in this photo, is shown reading *Mein Kampf*.

Then just this past week, I received the report from Ron van Hasselt about his visit to CASJ. The file on Dirk Vas, he told me, runs 1,000 pages, of which about four pertained to my sisters. It contains testimony offered by Father Lodders and, to my surprise, testimony from my mother who only days earlier had been repatriated from Sweden where she had been sent to recuperate after the trauma of experiencing many concentration camps and death marches. When she was asked about the whereabouts of my sisters, her reply was, "*nog niet terug*" ("not back, as of now"). But the most heartbreaking testimony was from a woman called Roza Marie Schermel-Mazurowski. Roza Marie, sometimes called Rosalia, had inherited a boarding house at Reinkenstraat 67 in The Hague from her husband. She was remarried to a J.J. Schermel, but discovered—too late for my sisters—that he was abusive and untrustworthy. Father Lodders arranged for my sisters to be placed with Roza Marie in September of 1943. On January 31, 1944, Dirk Vas took my sisters into custody. Roza Marie believed that they were betrayed by her husband since the police did not announce themselves and did not knock or force the door, but simply used a key to enter the house. They then questioned her and some of the boarders, but, significantly, not her husband who stood by, unperturbed. Eva and Leah, she said, were taken to a police station on Laan van Copes Cattenburg, then to the prison in Scheveningen on Alkemadelaan, the prison which

became popularly known as the Oranje Hotel. Their names like those of the many Jews rounded up by the Nazis are not listed in the *Gedenkboek*. On February 6, they were taken to Westerbork, and from there on February 8, to Auschwitz where they were killed on February 11, 1944. Their transport on February 8 included 1,015 people, 251 of them children without their parents. Among the children were Ron van Halsselt's nieces, Els and Karla, and two little boys Bernard Ari Cohen and Bernard Elberg whom Ron never knew, but who were brothers of his childhood playmates.

Dirk Vas denied any involvement in the arrest of my sisters but was convicted and sent to prison for 20 years. So many questions remain. Where were my sisters before they were placed with Roza Marie and her husband? According to the CASJ records, my mother indicated that my sisters were initially left with the van Leeuwen sisters with the hope that Father Lodders might find a safer, more permanent place. Could it have been with Mrs. G. Jansen-de Gelder who was mentioned in the records of the Oranje Hotel? Was it she who shared her last name "Jansen" with my sisters? My hope is that there may be records in the Oranje Hotel that explain the reason for her lengthy detention there. Or did my sisters remain with Tante Jo and Tante Ko until they were taken to Roza Marie? The van Leuwen sisters were both teachers, and Tante Jo often showed me a notebook with Eva's beautiful handwriting and children's catechism books with angels in one column and devils in another that she proudly told me Eva was able to read when she was just five!

An online search of the archives of the city of The Hague and a search by Trees Krans, the woman who wrote the article in the church bulletin about Father Lodders and who is the volunteer archivist of the Elandstraat Kerk, of the marriage records of the church provided me with additional information about Roza Marie. She was of Polish nationality, born in 1894 in Calbe an der Saale, Germany. She married Gerardus Cornelis Kuyper in 1934, who died in 1940. In 1942, she married Jacobus Johannes Schermel, the man who would denounce her and my sisters less than two years later to the Nazis and their Dutch collaborators. Ron van Hassel recalls from his review of the criminal proceedings against Dirk Vas, that Schermel called Roza Marie a "*Poolse Jodin*" ("a Polish Jewess"). Both her weddings, however, were performed in the Elandstraat Kerk. An annotation in the Elendstraat Kerk documents shows that Roza Marie's first husband was not Catholic and received the needed dispensation for a church-sanctioned wedding, but that Roza Marie had been baptized shortly after her birth in Calbe. It is likely that by calling his wife a Polish Jew her husband all but assured the most severe sentence, deportation to a concentration camp.

I was shocked when Trees Krans sent me records signed by Father Lodders that my sisters were baptized by Father Lodders with Jo and Ko van Leeuwen as witnesses January 18, 1943, two weeks after my parents were deported. My mother told me that she last saw my sisters on Christmas day

1942 when they were brought for a last visit to the Oud Rozenburg clinic where she and my father were hiding. I wonder, but will never know, whether the baptism was discussed at that time.

For many years after the Holocaust, I refused to fully accept that my sisters had been killed, despite documents provided by the International Tracing Service. Yes, I included the story of their betrayal and their murder in Auschwitz in the narrative of my family during the Holocaust, but it is only now as I learn details about their final days, that my soul cries out for them and cries out for the unspeakable cruelty that the human race is capable of, cruelty that sadly has not been erased by the memory of the Holocaust. The 1.5 million children killed in the Holocaust, including my sisters, cry out for a world free of hate and cruelty. Will the world ever listen?

There are a few people who did stand up to the evil of the Holocaust and whose example also calls out to the world. There is the Madna family and their nanny, Mima Saina, who risked their lives to rescue a nine-month-old baby so that he could write these words, and now there is Roza Marie Schermel-Mazurowski who tried to save the lives of that baby's older sisters. Roza Marie paid dearly for her altruism. Records discovered by Suzy Snyder show that she was deported to a concentration camp in Amersfoort, then to Vught, and finally to Ravensbrück where she developed typhus, but survived and from where she was liberated.

As I think back to the time shortly after I was reunited with my mother, I remember my mother took me to visit the woman who she said had tried to save my sisters. That woman probably was Roza Marie Mazurowski. Further research by Trees Krans told me that Roza Marie lived in The Hague until 1955, then moved to Boskoop where she passed away August 26, 1971. How much do I wish I had been in touch with her! My search continues for anyone who might have known her and with whom she might have shared the story of her desperate efforts to save my sisters. Roza Marie Mazurowski's name deserves to be added to those of Tolé Madna and Mima Saïna as the Righteous Among the Nations at Israel's Holocaust memorial, Yad Vashem.

Photo of Emil Münzer, 1939. *Alfred Münzer*

Uncle Emil

MY PARENTS CAME FROM LARGE FAMILIES. I do not know the exact number of their siblings, but each had at least six. There was only one known survivor of the Holocaust among my mother's brothers and sisters—her oldest brother, my uncle Adolf or Abraham. He managed to leave Germany and get to Bolivia with his wife, my aunt Helen, and their son, Norbert, my only cousin who survived the Holocaust, who sadly is now deceased. And I do not know of any survivors among my father's brothers and sisters.

My mother occasionally spoke about her oldest sister, Fanny or Feige, who, like Adolf, had left their hometown of Rymanow, Poland, and moved to Berlin, where she married Jonas Zehngut. Until I gave it to Emma Zehngut, a niece of Jonas and Fanny living in Los Angeles, we had a set of silverware engraved with "JZ" that had been entrusted to my mother when Fanny and Jonas felt threatened in Germany. There is an adorable photo of their son, my cousin Yossie, arm in arm with cousin Norbert. They were the apple of my mother's eye when she too left Rymanow and joined Adolf and Fanny in Berlin before marrying my father in The Hague. Sadly, Fanny, Jonas, and Yossie, like my grandparents and virtually all my aunts, uncles, and cousins, were deported and killed.

When my mother and I immigrated to the United States in 1958, we were surprised by a phone call from my mother's aunt, *Ciocia* Feige. She and her son and three daughters had miraculously survived by fleeing Rymanow to Siberia. Aunt Feige told my mother that my mother's youngest brother, Jacob —whom I knew from a photograph that had especially caught my attention because it pictured him, like I dreamt of doing, riding a horse bareback—had crossed the San River, which adjoins Rymanow, and joined the Soviet Army. Another rumor was that another brother of my mother, Aaron, had made his way to South Africa. But all attempts to verify these rumors were never to any avail. My mother rarely spoke about her other brothers and sisters. I only know them from inscriptions on the back of small photos—Heina, Ruth, and Bunia—that they gave her as a remembrance when she left home.

Then there was my father's younger brother, my Uncle Emil, he with the confident, carefree, and almost defiant smile in the pictures in my mother's box of family photographs, so unlike the always serious, almost worried look of my father in his photos. I was flattered when people many, many years later would say that I looked like Uncle Emil. He, like my parents, had left his hometown, Kanczuga, Poland, and gone to Berlin, and then, shortly after Kristallnacht, had joined our family in the Netherlands. Uncle Emil, my mother said, brought an unending array of girlfriends to dinner. But as we looked at a photo taken in a park where my mother sits between Uncle Emil holding my sister Leah and my father holding my sister Eva, she would shake her head and laugh and say that he was not the type to ever find a suitable mate and marry. I would differ with her because there was also a picture of Ellie, his last girlfriend, a pretty, confident-looking young woman with wavy hair and darkish complexion, brown eyes, and a small beauty mark on her right cheek. Anyone, I thought, who earned a place in my mother's box of photos, must have been very special.

Emil, my mother told me, loved his nieces, my sisters, Eva and Leah, and when I was born 18 months into the Nazi occupation of Holland, doted on me as well. He is there next to Ellie and along with my father and my sisters and friends of the family in a photo taken at my *bris* or circumcision ceremony, one of the last such milestones in a Jewish life able to be celebrated in the Netherlands during the Nazi era. The silver teething ring and the napkin ring bearing my name that accompanied me when I was placed in hiding with the Madna family were gifts from Uncle Emil. They and the photographs of my circumcision ceremony that my mother kept on her body through 12 concentration camps are now in the collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

I have often wondered what happened to Uncle Emil. I remember that his name came up in many conversations in Rijnsburg, Netherlands, the town near Leiden where my mother and I spent many weekends with her close friends, perhaps her closest friends in Holland, Truus and Piet Ravensbergen. I never asked my mother why they had become such close friends, but I believe that Uncle Emil may well have been the link. *Oom* Piet was born in Rijnsburg and had lived there

all his life. But his wife, *Tante* Truus, was born in Hungary and had come to Holland as an orphan and had been adopted by two people who became known to me as Tante Cor and Oom Jan. My mother and I regularly accompanied Tante Truus and Oom Piet to Sunday church services. And afterward, we always visited Tante Cor and Oom Jan. Tante Cor was a devout lay preacher and led her own church service at home. She always wore an ankle-length black dress that made her look even taller than she was and combed her grey hair into a tight bun. Almost always when I greeted her, Tante Cor would take my hands, look at me with her grey eyes through her black metal-rimmed glasses and nod and softly say, "*net als Emiel*," "just like Emil," words that gave me, then seven or eight, an inexplicable warm feeling.

Emil, I can only surmise, may have been hiding from the Nazis in Rijnsburg, perhaps on Tante Cor and Oom Jan's farm devoted to the cultivation of flowers. Rijnsburg was also the home, I learned recently, of a prominent Dutch resistance fighter, Marinus Post. He, along with an amazing 25 residents of Rijnsburg, were honored by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations. They sheltered Jewish men, women, and children out of their deeply held Christian belief that they were obligated to protect God's Chosen People from the Nazi hordes. Likewise, after the war, Rijnsburg must have felt like a refuge for my mother, a peaceful place in the midst of fields of tulips and hyacinths, far removed from the noisy, unsavory neighborhood in The Hague where we lived behind her store, a place of empathy and understanding that restored her faith in the human family, and a place with people whom she trusted to care for me because they had sheltered my uncle Emil.

I remember tears welling up in Tante Cor's eyes whenever Emil's name came up in a conversation. It was always "*arme Emiel*," "poor Emil." He had been "*gepakt*," she would say. *Gepakt*, Dutch for discovered, caught, taken, arrested, is a word that was part of my earliest childhood vocabulary—"*gepakt*," just like my sisters and parents. I was lucky, Tante Cor and others always added, that my mother "*was terug gekomen*," "had come back." And I understood, even without being told, that my father and sisters and Uncle Emil "*waren niet treruggekomen*," "did not come back." We learned of the fate of my sisters through letters provided by the Netherlands Red Cross. The letters certified that they had "died" in Auschwitz, February 11, 1944, with a disclaimer in the form of a red stamp stating, "precise time of death unavailable and administratively determined." My mother was also able to obtain similar documents about the fate of my father, including a death certificate issued by the municipality of Ebensee, site of the concentration camp where he succumbed two months after liberation by the 80th Division of the US Army. But nothing about Uncle Emil.

It wasn't until about 60 years later when, through a search of documents from the Arolsen Archives, formerly the International Tracing Service archive (ITS), at the Museum, that I found Uncle Emil's name along with those of my sisters on page 137 of a typewritten list of deportees

from the Westerbork transit camp in Holland to Auschwitz and other concentration camps and killing centers. Among the ITS documents, I also found the elaborate Auschwitz registration of my father and even a slip of paper bearing his prisoner number specifying that he warranted a "premium" payment to the SS from the I. G. Farben synthetic rubber factory where he was enslaved. But nothing like it for Uncle Emil.

Uncle Emil was young and healthy, and like my father and mother, should have been "selected" and registered on arrival in Auschwitz for forced labor, not immediate death. When I broached this assumption with one of the ITS researchers, he suggested that Emil, like so many others he was familiar with, had in all likelihood tried to protect his nieces, my sisters, Eva and Leah, and refused to let go of them and therefore had gone with them to the gas chamber immediately on arrival in Auschwitz.

I had always taken what may seem like a strange and small measure of comfort from the fact that my sisters had not gone to their deaths alone, but in a crowd of perhaps a thousand people. But now there may be some real comfort in knowing my uncle Emil remained there with them. And next year when I say Kaddish on the anniversary of my sisters' deaths, I will also remember my uncle Emil. Like the heroism of the Indonesian Dutch Madna family and their Muslim nanny, Mima Saïna, who rescued me from the Nazis, and like the heroism of the 25 citizens of Rijnsburg honored by Yad Vashem, Uncle Emil's action brings to mind the motto of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "What You Do Matters," and the ensuing challenge, "What Will I Do?"

The Bridge

Halina Yasharoff Peabody

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

THE PRETTIEST BRIDGE I HAVE EVER SEEN is the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco.

The most meaningful bridge I remember is the one from my hometown in Zaleszczyki, Poland, which crossed the river Dniester to Romania. Zaleszczyki was a famous resort town in the 1930s. Dniester encircled Zaleszczyki almost completely and my mother, who was a swimmer, loved to water ski there. She also used to take me with her, and we kayaked between the shady beach and the sunny beach. I had a special small paddle that was made for my five-year-old self.

The bridge spanned from one country to the other. Officially one needed a permit to cross into Romania, but it was easy to obtain since it was a friendly neighbor. We used to go there to get fruit and vegetables, even though the wonderful climate was just as good on our side, allowing us to grow grapes, cherries, and apricots in our garden.

The weather in our part of the world had four distinct seasons, and winters were extremely cold, so the river would freeze and we used to skate on it. My mother, who could do any sport and who danced on ice skates, taught me to skate when I was five. We, of course, had lots of snow, and so I was learning to ski as well. I don't remember skiing, but when I visited Zaleszczyki after the war, I found people who remembered my mother teaching me and watching us.

I also remember that I was promised a piano by my grandparents who lived in Krakow. It was my grandfather's wish that his four children would play a musical instrument, and my mother played the piano, even though she told me that she was tone deaf. They probably hoped I would do better. But the piano never arrived, because on September 1, 1939, World War II started and the bridge became the focal point in our lives. I was six and a half years old, and my sister was two months old.

There was panic in our town. Russia and Germany had made a pact to split Poland between them, and Russia was going to occupy our part of the country. The men were afraid of being involuntarily conscripted into the Russian army, which had been a common practice during

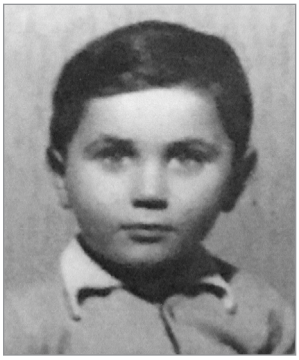
Halina Peabody playing on the beach near the bridge in Zaleszczyki, Poland, 1935.
US Holocaust Memorial Museum, gift of Halina Peabody

World War I. The gates on the bridge were open, and whoever decided to escape could cross to Romania, which was not going to be occupied. My father went alone because he was concerned that there would not be enough facilities for the baby. They did not suspect then that the women and children would be in danger. This is how the bridge became an escape hatch, and a lot of people in our town took this opportunity to escape.

My mother coped as well as she could without my father. Nobody knew what would happen next, except that the Russian army would march in, and we were all afraid of what they would do. There was a lot of fear. I know that there was a lot of looting and arrests, but mother kept us at home and, thankfully, I didn't see any of it.

In the meantime, the weather got very cold and the river froze. Some of the escapees, including my father, decided that perhaps they could cross back quietly over the frozen river and rejoin their families without anyone being any the wiser. Unfortunately, the Russians had sealed the borders, and they all got caught and put in jail. My father was accused of being a spy—he was a dentist—and sentenced to 20 years hard labor and was promptly sent to Siberia. His remaining family—my mother, sister, and I—were also to be punished as "the family of a criminal" and to be sent to Russia. For some reason this didn't happen, but we were thrown out of our house and sent to a place close by—a little town called Tluste—where we lived in one room until the Germans decided to occupy the rest of Poland. We then went back to our house and awaited the next occupier. We did have some communication with my father after the first year of incarceration but that ceased as soon as the Germans occupied our area.

I remember the bridge and during one of my trips back to Zaleszczyki many years after the war, I found that while our house had been destroyed, the bridge was still there and still quite imposing. And, it is now in Ukraine!



Jews against the Nazis

George Salamon

George Salamon was born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1942. In order to avoid deportation, he and his mother moved between houses protected by the Swiss government until they were liberated.

I WAS ALWAYS SHOCKED AND DISTURBED when I heard that there were millions killed during the Holocaust without a fight.

I learned that the Jews did not know for a long time what was happening. The Nazis were very good at lying and misleading people. Jews were told they were being sent somewhere to work and were instructed to bring a certain amount of luggage. No wonder those poor people had no idea that many of them could be dead very soon, and many of them were.

Later, when Jews learned about these crimes, they did not believe it. How could they? How could they think that people can do such horrific things?

In the same way, how could Jewish men know that when they were taken out of Hungary in forced labor battalions to help the army, some leaders of the battalions had the idea not only to make them work, but to kill them? Unfortunately, my father was among those who were killed. I learned from my mother's notes that he wanted to escape but got sick and had no opportunity. Of the 100 people in the battalion, only eight came back alive. The two leaders of the battalion were hanged after the war as war criminals.

When I visited Auschwitz, I was shocked not just by what I saw, but by how easy it was to kill millions of people with rather simple methods.

It is well known that the Jews were victims of Nazi Germany during the Holocaust, but it is less known that there were a substantial number of Jews who fought the Germans. Here are some examples. According to Yad Vashem's website, approximately 1.5 million Jews fought in the Allied forces. About 500,000 Jews served in the Soviet Red Army and 550,000 in the US Armed Forces. Many of them received military awards from these armies. The commander of the Soviet battalion that liberated Auschwitz was a Jew. Many Jews also served in the Canadian and Polish armies.

When I visited Normandy, France, I saw many tombstones with the Star of David along with the crosses in the military cemetery.

There was a Jewish brigade from Palestine in the British army. It fought the Germans on different fronts of Europe. Later they played a key role in the establishment and protection of Israel. There were Jewish partisans in Eastern Europe and also in such countries as France, Belgium, Greece, Italy, and Yugoslavia. The movie *Defiance* took place in the forest of Belarus. It was based on the Jewish Bielski brothers who established a partisan brigade. They fought the Germans and saved many lives.

Jews were actively participating in the French resistance. Some were in London with the head of the resistance General De Gaulle. Jews also established resistance newspapers.

There was armed resistance in at least 50 ghettos and two killing centers. The most famous was the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. The Jewish fighters were no match for the German army, but in spite of their small numbers and limited weaponry, they kept the Germans at bay for nearly a month.

I am proud of those heroes who made an impact on the war and helped to defeat Nazi Germany.

Sitting at the Survivors' Desk

ON WEDNESDAY MORNINGS at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, I sit at a desk where other Holocaust survivors and I meet Museum visitors. I tell my story, and the story of my family's survival.

Most people are very attentive and some people are visibly moved. Sometimes I see tears in a lady's eyes. I often hear, "I am happy you are here." People shake my hand. Some do not come to the desk to hear my story but only to shake my hand and say a few kind words. I have met so many nice people.

A few people ask questions and some tell me a little about their family and their connection to World War II and the Holocaust. Many times they have great questions that make me think. Their stories are interesting and meaningful. I heard about a father who lived in Poland, who was a Christian, but was taken to a concentration camp because of his views. He survived. I heard from a German visitor that her father was a Socialist, and was taken to a camp. He also survived. I heard

from a woman, who is a nurse, that her daughter's in-laws are survivors. They lived in Poland, and when the German troops arrived, they went to the forest. They became partisans. They had contact with the Russians and went to Russia. They were given two choices. They could either get Russian citizenship and the man would be enlisted in the army and sent to the front, or they go to Siberia to a camp. They chose Siberia. Later they ended up in a displaced person's camp. Their son was born there. I asked her how they ended up there from Russia, but she did not know the answer.

Once I got two interesting questions. A lady asked me, "Is it hard for you to talk about these things or not?" I told her that it is not easy. Though I heard some stories about the Holocaust growing up, my mother did not talk about it. She looked only to the future, not to the past. She effectively sheltered me from it. Later, I was always too busy to even think about it.

Since I began volunteering at the Museum, I think about it more. I remember that we were waiting for my father to come home for many years after the war was over, but unfortunately that did not happen. My mother got a notification from the Red Cross that my father was deceased. Later she learned that the Hungarian Nazis killed him. The second part of my answer was I know how important it is to talk about the Holocaust in the age of Holocaust denial and it makes it easier for me to do so.

The second question that made me think was from another woman. "Do you worry about the increasing antisemitism?" I told her that I am worried, particularly since people on the internet can spread antisemitic lies within minutes, all over the world.

I have mixed feelings about my "celebrity status" as a survivor. It is true that I am a survivor. I could have been killed any minute of that horrible 11 months when the Germans occupied Hungary and with their help, the Hungarian Nazis (their movement was called the Arrow Cross) ruled the country. But I was very young, just two to two and a half years old, so I had nothing to do with my own survival. Once, I even endangered my family. According to my mother, I started to speak very early. My mother, grandmother, aunt, and I went to a grocery store. Someone sneezed in the store and I told her, "Bless you." The only problem was that I said it in Yiddish. People asked, "What did the child say?" and my mother answered "Nothing." After that we did not spend too much time in that store.

The heroes of my survival were my mother and my two uncles. I learned from my mother's notes that she stood in a long line to get protective papers issued by the Swiss embassy and a permit to move to a so-called safe house, protected by the Swiss (arranged by Carl Lutz, Swiss diplomat). She was harassed by Hungarian Nazis and caught by the police for staying on the street longer than the two hours allowed for Jews, but she got papers for the whole family. I am sure she was

wearing the yellow star then, but she usually did not. Once she was on the tramway and met an acquaintance. He asked her how come she does not wear the yellow star. She did not answer and got off at the next station.

One of my uncles, Herman, escaped from forced labor and came to the safe house where we were living. He became the representative of the house and worked with the Swiss Embassy. When the embassy notified him that he was in danger, he and his wife moved to the so-called "glass house," which belonged to the embassy. It was more protected than the safe house because it had guards. When he learned that we were still in the safe house, he made arrangements for us to move to the glass house too.

My other uncle Sanyi, who also escaped from forced labor and stayed in the glass house, came for us one night and took us to the glass house. Naturally, he also risked his life by doing this. When we arrived at the glass house, the guard let me in but he kept my mother out, saying that the place was too crowded already. Then my uncle pushed my mother through, moving the guard to the side. Since she was already in Swiss territory, she could not be removed.

My Mothers

Esther Rosenfeld Starobin

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

I HAVE BEEN AN ORPHAN SINCE AUGUST 14, 1942, but I have never thought of myself that way. At the May 14, 2019, meeting for Echoes of Memory, the survivor memoir writing group, I listened to two people read their writings. Both writers talked about their mothers and specific actions their mothers had taken. One person spoke of all the actions his mother took to save him and the family. The other writer spoke of the ways his mother had made his childhood a time of happiness and encouragement. Both writings made me feel very sad. It has made me think of my mother, but I cannot remember her at all.

Of course I know my mother was Kathi Lemberger Rosenfeld, who with my father saved me. I spent two years and two months with her before I was sent to England on the Kindertransport. Then there is my foster mother, Dorothy Harrison. I spent eight years and five months with her. Lastly, my sisters finished raising me to adulthood. Thinking of these people has led me to look for a definition of mother. I like this one: "Mother," when used as a verb, is defined as "to bring up (a child) with care and affection."

I have been lucky that so many different people took on this role. So many of my characteristics and habits can be traced back to these different people. As I read through the letters from my mother, written while she was in the concentration camp, I appreciate and continue her belief in God and family. My birth mother truly believed family takes care of one another, and she also believed in the goodness of others. I know throughout my life, I have followed her beliefs in helping my family in times of difficulty as they have helped me. I must say, my belief in God comes not only from my birth mother but also from my foster mother. Through Dorothy, I came to appreciate the value of being part of a congregation and the community that comes with it. My love of gardening also comes from Dorothy. Though as a part owner of an animal feed distributor, I would imagine she had a different view of gardening and plants. Through both of these mothers, I came to understand family is not only made up of the people born into it, but also of others who serve as family.

Lastly, of course, were my three sisters, Bertl, Edith, and Ruth. Many lessons were learned from them. The fact that we all had responsibilities toward each other, even when it wasn't convenient, was the main lesson I learned from their mothering. It certainly would have been much easier for my sisters, as young immigrants making a new life, if they hadn't been responsible for me. The value of education was another important item that I learned from them and from my foster mother. And then there were other skills they taught that seem maybe trifling but are necessary to learn, such as cooking, cleaning, handicrafts, mothering, and celebrating holidays. These last skills my birth mother didn't have the chance to teach me, so I'm lucky that others could fill in the gaps.

Of course, there are things I would like to know that no one can fill in for me. Through research that I and others have done, I have learned a lot about my birth family. What I can't learn this way is medical history, family traditions and background, and expectations and hopes my parents had for their children.

Somehow, I go back and amend my initial statement. I do feel like an orphan now that all my siblings have died.

Interconnections

I DON'T REMEMBER WHEN I FIRST MET MY COUSIN SUSE. Suse was the daughter of my Aunt Rosa, one of my father's sisters. Once I was an adult, I visited Suse whenever I was in London. It was always fun and very English, these visits. She and her husband, Frank Underwood, lived in a lovely section of London on the third floor of an apartment building. No elevator here, just a lot of stairs. Making tea was a definite ritual in their home but somehow very relaxing. The teapot had to be warmed as well as the cups. Suse was very exacting in all she did. When Suse developed diabetes, she carefully adapted her favorite cake recipes so that she could still eat them. The Underwoods loved to walk all over London and take walking trips in other parts of England. When my husband, Fred, and I visited, we often spent time with them walking in a nearby park.

As the years went by, her son Simon spent a summer in New England as a camp counselor, which provided the opportunity for him to visit us. Later, when Simon married, he settled in the Norwich, England, area where my foster brother, Alan, still lives. Alan had gotten to know Suse when he was a student in London. Once the Underwoods started visiting Simon, Alan would often pick them up at the train and take them to Simon's or vice-versa. I visited the Underwoods when they were in Norwich at the same time that I visited Alan. On one of these occasions, we took a trip to the seaside. This picture shows us (Frank, Suse, Alan, me, and Fred) enjoying the sea air, but protected from the wind.

Courtesy of Esther R. Starobin

Suse and Frank came to the United States to visit after Simon had come for a summer to work as a camp counselor. We had a lovely time introducing them to all the children in the family. Suse remembered two of our uncles who also lived in the Washington, DC, area. In true Suse fashion, she came with carefully picked gifts truly representative of British culture. I received a beautiful pair of silver earrings with a traditional Irish design.

With the advent of email, it became very easy to stay in contact with Suse. I would write a short email, and she would send a very long response. Suse, unlike my sisters and me, had very strong memories of life in Germany even though she left on a Kindertransport when she was 13. Suse was in between my two older sisters in age. Bertl and Edith only talked about Germany when they were asked questions. One of the few things I heard about Germany was that Suse's mother died when she was young. After that, she was sent to live with different aunts, which made her childhood difficult. Suse was in contact with distant family in Freudental, Germany, and also a historian, Steffen Pross, who wrote about the Nazi period. She traveled to Freudental several times and was there when Steffen Pross's book was published.

Our Irish cousin, Peter Bruck, became part of our family after he contacted Reinhart Lochmann in Adelsheim, Germany, while tracing his family history. Reinhart, a high school teacher in Adelsheim, has done research that has helped my family and many other Jewish families learn more about their relatives. Peter's grandfather and our great-grandfather were brothers if I have the relationship correct. Peter then contacted Bertl. Peter visited us in Maryland, and we visited

him in Ireland. I'm not sure how Suse became aware of Peter, but she soon included him in her lively correspondence. Peter and Suse also visited each other.

Suse continued all her activities after Frank died. She had a bout with pancreatic cancer but miraculously survived. She started to decline a few years ago but would not let that slow her down. When I was in London a few years ago on a theater tour, she took several trains to visit with me. Two Aprils ago I went to see Alan in Norwich. We took a day trip on the train to visit Suse. It was lovely and yet sad to visit with her. Clearly her memory was failing her.

Suse died July 22, 2019. In true Underwood fashion, she had a green funeral with burial under a tree, just as Frank had. Suse is buried next to Frank. Steffen Pross gave one of the eulogies. Peter went to the funeral and sent me the order of the service.

The readings were beautiful. I quote the Words of Committal:

> Into the darkness and warmth of the earth
> We lay you down
> Into the sadness and the smiles of our memories
> We lay you down
> Into the cycle of living and dying and rising again
> We lay you down
> May you rest in peace, in fulfilment, in loving
> May you remain forever in our thoughts

Suse was a unique individual who followed her own path. I will miss her. Now I'm the only family member left who was born in Germany.

The Night Watchman

Alfred Traum

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

AS CHIEF RADIO OFFICER ON THE SS ZION, I had the 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. watch, which provided me with the whole evening free to enjoy dinner with guests in the dining room plus partake in activities of a social nature. However, my watch was also in the wee hours of the morning from 4 a.m. to 8 a.m. Generally, activities in the radio room were slack during those hours, and I had plenty of free time to chat with the night watchman who used to stop by. He held one of those clocks that registered at different stations aboard the ship and time stamped at each location. However, it still provided ample time for me to hear his story.

He began by telling me of the time during the war when he worked as a sailor aboard British cargo vessels. On one of his voyages, the ship was docked in an Indian port. He didn't recall which port. But he and several members of the crew went out scouting in the neighborhood, when he came across a fortune teller/astrologist. This lady read the stars and needed to know the date, time, and place where he was born. He was told that the more exacting his information, the more exacting his fortune.

He thought it to be a good joke and played along with her. She went on to tell him that he would spend some time in prison, but later would go on to become a writer. Well that sounded a little better than the prison bit. He paid her and went on his way, completely forgetting the encounter until many years later when he became involved with The National Military Organization in the Land of Israel (IRGUN) and was captured by British forces in Palestine. They shipped him off to a prison camp in east Africa. He remained there for some time and started to write to pass the time. Eventually, he was released from jail and returned to Palestine, soon to be declared the State of Israel. Having spent some time at sea during the war years, he was drawn to Israel's new merchant fleet and secured a position as night watchman aboard the SS *Jerusalem*, a fine and new passenger ship.

In passing during our conversation, he told me that the second mate Oded would not be continuing on the cruises. And true enough, when we arrived in New York, Oded received news that his mother was seriously ill and he was to return home as soon as possible. I asked the watchman how he knew that? He had read Oded's astrological chart and that's how he knew.

I was intrigued by that and spent much time trying to understand this phenomenon. He gave me the name of a woman in London who he considered an expert in this field. Further, he told me that if I was interested in getting a reading, I should send her a letter providing the exact time, date and place of birth of my children and enclose a certain amount of money and mail it to her. My wife, Josie, and I discussed it and then decided to go ahead. We mailed a letter to this lady and in due course received a reply with a detailed analysis of our two children. You can say what you like. This woman did not know us, yet gave such accurate prognoses of our two children that it brought goose bumps to our skin. My son, the older of the two, has multiple neurological issues. He suffers from "fragile x syndrome," not even diagnosed at that time. This lady described him accurately in many ways. While at the same time, she gave a glowing report of our daughter, who is bright in every respect. Even now, after more than 50 years I am still amazed at the reading we received.

British Army

THE VOLUNTEER OFFICE PROVIDED ME A TICKET TO AMSTERDAM, and from there I made my way by train and ferry back to England. As I approached the immigration booth, I wondered how it would go. I had been technically AWOL (absent without leave) from the British Army for 18 months.* The agent took my passport, shuffled some papers, and said, "Well, well, lookie here. Did you know you are wanted by the army?" I answered, "Yes, that's why I am here." "Well good, mind you report to your local police station when you get home." With that, he stamped my passport, returning it to me and cheerfully said, "Welcome home, son." That sounded good to my ears. I thought, one hurdle gone, but several still lay ahead.

I spent a wonderful weekend at home with family and friends, but first thing Monday morning, I went to the local police station. I was not surprised that they had a file on me. After all, they had been to my home three times looking for me and finally ceased coming after my sister told them that I was in Israel. Once again, I was told to go home, and in due course I would be notified as to where and when to report.

About two weeks later I received my orders—a travel voucher with detailed instruction for my travel plan. I was to report to Catterrick Garrison in Yorkshire. At the appointed time, I arrived at Darlington rail station. I was not alone. There must have been at least 100 other guys like myself there. A motley looking group. An army sergeant approached us informing us that we are at intake, we were being processed into the service, and told us to climb aboard the bus that will take us to Catterick Camp. Once within the campsite, we were ushered into a large warehouse. The sergeant began, "You will see tables with all of your pay books arranged in alphabetical order. I want you to remember, your pay book is the most important document you will have during your entire army service, so take good care of it. Once you have your pay book, go to the far end of the warehouse. You will notice a row of kiosks spreading all the way across the length of the warehouse. As you move from left to right you will receive all your army issue uniforms and other items to fill your kitbag." I walked along to where I thought my pay book should be, but instead there was a note with my name on it saying "see Adjutant." I took the note and showed it to the sergeant: "Oh, so you decided to come home, eh!" He spoke loud enough for heads to turn in my direction, wondering what this might be about. Then addressing me he said, "Since you haven't got your pay book, I had better go with you so you can draw your kit." I wondered just how much he knew about me and followed him in silence.

After we had drawn our kits, we were taken to our barracks. Very primitive quarters. I was told they had been condemned after the first world war, but they were still in use. There was just one small pot bellied stove to provide heat for the whole barrack. Those getting there first grabbed the beds closest to the stove. Since I was delayed in drawing my kit, I was one of the last to enter and found a bed at the far end of the barrack. A small group of fellows welcomed me. They were all public school boys from the upper crust of society. Not the ones I normally associated with, but they were friendly and anxious to hear what prompted the sergeant's words to me. So as quickly as I could, I told about my whole escapade.

The following morning right after breakfast, the sergeant came to collect me. I must have looked a mess, dressed in a badly fitting uniform, new stiff army boots making it almost impossible to walk. The sergeant knocked and entered, saluting, smartly stamping and announcing "Trooper Traum reporting SAHH." The adjutant, a captain, thanked the sergeant and asked him to wait outside. The captain motioned for me to sit down while he rose and began to slowly pace in front of me. He began in an icy voice, "If I thought for a minute that you were attempting to evade your service, I'd throw the book at you and you would do two years at Colchester [military prison] and then complete your national service. But you are here now, and I know this is not the case with you. I respect what you did, so I'm going to wipe the slate clean and you will just do your normal

service along with your intake." He then sat down and in a normal conversational voice began, "I don't know if you are aware that this regiment, the 17th/21st Lancers, was one of the last regiments to leave Palestine, er Israel, before returning to the UK." He then asked me if I had been to Haifa. I told him that I had. He then asked me if the refinery appears to have been damaged in war. I told him that from my observation, it did not look to have suffered any damage. He then raised his head and called the sergeant saying, "Please have trooper Traum rejoin his intake and that will be all." We saluted, made an about turn, and headed back to my barrack. I thought to myself that it had gone pretty well. Not a bad start. My newly found friends were glad that I would remain with them.

Several nights later when we were all resting, there was a noise outside our barrack. In a voice that had become quite familiar to us, it was our drill sergeant calling for me to come out. I thought he was going to knock my head off; however, he didn't even touch me. He vented his anger and then left. He had apparently lost one of his close friends to a Jewish terror group.

In truth there were several paramilitary groups, most notably the Irgun and the Stern group, that had conducted actions against the British troops when attempting to rescue some new arrivals off various vessels. The vessels had been beached attempting to bring in those having fortunately survived Nazi concentration camps and displaced persons camps. They were finally in sight of Israel and freedom only to be transferred onto a British ship that would ferry them to be detained. That was a hard pill to swallow and led to confrontations between the British army and the Jewish paramilitary groups. I could well understand our drill sergeant's feelings who had the unpleasant task of carrying out British policy.

Several days later, as we were marched to breakfast, our sergeant came alongside me and told me that he had heard about my encounter with the drill sergeant and asked whether I wanted to report the incident. I laughed and said, "I would sooner forget about it." He replied, "I'll let it pass this time." Several moments later he was at my side again, saying, "if this occurs again, whether you want it or not, I will report this unacceptable behavior in the British Army." I was quite amazed and felt proud that such a high moral code was practiced.

The three months of basic training went by quickly and a passing out parade was conducted. The colonel reviewed us and that was the last activity at this camp. Back in the barrack our sergeant held up some papers and announced, "These are your evaluation papers, as I call your name, come and get it. I want you to read it, sign it, and place it here on my desk. This is not a question if you agree with it or not, it simply states that you had the opportunity to see it." I was pleased that mine was quite complimentary and did not mention a word of my 18 month AWOL.

Most of us were to be transferred to regiments stationed in Germany. One of my friends, who was more familiar with my personal history asked, "how do you feel about going to Germany?" I had the answer ready for him, "I have no problem with that, as long as I am there in the capacity of the VICTOR and not a VICTIM."

** For background on Alfred Traum and the time he was "AWOL," read "Britain's Response" (https://www.ushmm.org/remember/holocaust-reflections-testimonies/echoes-of-memory/britains-response). In 1948, he left Great Britain to volunteer for Israel's War of Independence.*

Vienna Revisited

SEVERAL YEARS AGO I RECEIVED AN INVITATION to visit Vienna, Austria, a good will gesture organized by the Austrian Government. The purpose was to reach out to Holocaust survivors who had left their homes in Vienna during the second World War. We were a group of about 60, of which half were born in Vienna. I was the only one who had left Vienna on the Kindertransport. Josie, my wife, came along as my guest. We all stayed at the Hotel Stefanie in the second district, Leopoldstatte, once the center of Jewish life in Vienna. The hotel was comfortable, the food excellent, but smiles and cheerful conversations were not on the menu. However, the housekeeping staff greeted us in a very friendly manner; they were all Turkish immigrants.

A bus arrived to take us on a city tour with lunch arranged at a beautiful site in a suburb with a grand view of the city. Our tour guide, who was fairly young, engaged us all in good conversation. It became only too evident in the difference of attitude towards our group expressed by the older and younger generation.

The tour bus was too large to make a U turn in the street and had to go down a side street to accomplish the turn. As we turned onto the side street, I was shocked to notice that it was Tundelmarktstrasse, the street where my uncle and his family lived. I was a frequent visitor there. My uncle owned the apartment building where they lived. Three of my cousins had immigrated to Palestine, my sister and I were in England, and, as a result, my parents moved in with my uncle to make life a little easier.

As a volunteer at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, I conducted research using the International Tracing Service (ITS) archive. On one occasion, I was reviewing deportation lists. One of the lists was of deportations from Vienna. I scanned down to the "T's" and there was

my entire family: Mother, Father, uncle, aunt, and one cousin. Each name had their then current address, date, and place of birth followed by the place, Minsk, to where they were being deported. All neatly arranged. All those listed were being sent to their deaths. My boss at the Museum, who is a wealth of information, told me at an earlier time that those earmarked going to Minsk would face the firing squad and dumped into large prepared ditches.

When we got back to the hotel I took a walk over to Tandelmarktgasse, the place I once loved to visit. I knew that trucks would have come and taken all the Jews to the train station and then taken to cattle rail cars for a two-day journey to Minsk. My mind flew back to better times: whenever we went anywhere as a whole family, we took a taxi. There was a taxi station at the top of the street. I was proud to select a taxi that had a whole low step into the cab to make it easier for my father as he was crippled from his service in the Austrian army during World War I.

I shuddered to think how the current Austria treats its injured veterans. Also, I had learned that in places like Minsk large ditches were prepared, and as soon as the trucks arrived, the prisoners, no matter if they were young or old, were lined up against the ditch and the Einsatzgruppen, mobile killing troops, carried out their dastardly task of shooting all so they fell into the pits. Worse still, were those who were wounded falling into the pit in great pain from their wounds and then crushed by others falling on top of them. I made a short prayer that my parents would have died swiftly. That the murderer's bullet made their ending swift. A strange prayer to make. With those thoughts still in my head, I returned to the hotel. Josie was in the lobby and said, "Freddie where have you been? You look gastly, as if you had seen a ghost." I replied, "Yes, but not one, more like 40!"

Bridges

Susan Warsinger

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

THE CABINET IN MY DINING ROOM was filled with tchotchkes. All those trinkets were scattered on four shelves in no particular order and, therefore, it was exceptionally difficult to find anything. In order to retrieve a particular dish that I wanted to use, I needed to take out numerous items that all ended up cluttered on the floor. On one occasion, I decided it was a perfect time to throw out some of these objects that had been slumbering there for many years. It was a momentous task, because I had to make decisions about what to keep and what was dispensable. When I came to a little, square china ashtray, no more than two inches long on each side, with gold trim and two spaces to place a lit cigarette, old memories came rushing into my mind. In the middle of this little ashtray was a painting of the *Alte Nahebrücke* in the town of Bad Kreuznach, Germany, the town where I was born. It brought back memories from my life there as a little girl when my father took me across this bridge to visit his friend so they could play chess together.

The Alte Nahebrücke is a medieval stone arch bridge first built around 1300. It had eight arches. However, the more important architectural landmarks of Bad Kreuznach are the bridge houses that were built starting in 1480. The bridge had two arms and originally spanned the Nahe River and a neighboring canal called the *Muelenteich* (Mill Pond). The bridge has withstood many wars since it was built; the city of Bad Kreuznach was bombed by the Americans during World War II, and it survived. On March 16, 1945, German troops blew up the arm of the bridge spanning the Nahe in order to hinder the approach of American forces. American tanks arrived in Bad Kreuznach on March 18, 1945, unimpeded by the damage to the bridge. Only the section spanning the canal remains intact now. With four houses on its piers, it is one of the few remaining bridges in the world that has buildings on it. Artists from all over Germany come to this spa town just to paint the bridge.

I left Bad Kreuznach when I was a young child after Kristallnacht, the "Night of the Broken Glass." However, I returned two times after. The first time was to show my husband and three daughters the town where I was born. That was in the 1970s. I did not know anybody left there. All the Jewish people had been murdered or escaped, as I had. It was a time when no one spoke about the Holocaust. The bridge was there, and we crossed it. However, I felt unmoved by it. The

Courtesy of Susan Warsinger

second time I visited with my brother, Ernest. The bridge was there doing its work of transporting automobiles and pedestrians across the canal. However, on both ends of the bridge, the town had added memorials to remember the Jewish community of Bad Kreuznach, which no longer existed. We realized that there was deep remorse by the citizens of Bad Kreuznach when they realized that their parents and grandparents had been complicit with the Nazi regime and had helped the Nazis commit their atrocities, even if they were simply bystanders.

I must have purchased the ashtray in one of the souvenir shops on one of these visits. Probably during a time when smoking was still fashionable. My first thought was to throw this ashtray away because no one I know smokes anymore. I didn't discard it then, because it still reminds me of my past and of all the grand bridges I have crossed during my life.

Zooming

WE GO ON WITH OUR LIVES EVEN THOUGH EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED because of the coronavirus. It has affected our physical connection with the outside world. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, like all the other museums in Washington, DC, has been closed since March. I miss riding on the metro and taking an Uber to give my talks to our visitors, giving tours, going to my Echoes of Memory writing workshops, and attending the survivor meetings. However, in the middle of this dark time in the world, it did not stop the Museum from sending out its message.

The COVID-19 virus, with all its difficulties, has started a new chapter in my life. I stay home most of the time except for taking some walking excursions so that I can bond with the springtime of 2020 and celebrate the splendor of the natural environment. I have had a lot of time to work at home on my computer, my iPhone, and my new laptop. I practiced "Zooming" with my family to celebrate my great-granddaughter's first birthday. I was pretty naïve when it came to using this virtual tool. However, by now, I feel almost like an expert when I join the virtual meetings of my survivors' group, my docent meetings, and my Echoes writers' workshop. I have learned some Zooming tips from the Museum's video producer and the program coordinator for Survivor Affairs.

When I am ready to be "on camera," I wear solid, dark colors with no patterns and minimal jewelry. I sit during the meeting and position the camera a little above my eye level by placing five large books under my laptop. That way the camera does not look under my chin, and I can easily look into the lens of the camera. I face a window and do not let the light come in behind me. My house contains many windows, and my walls are filled with photographs of my children and grandchildren. Because the glass on my photographs reflects the light, I explored options and found a good spot to sit where the light is not behind me and not reflected in the camera. I want the background to be open and spacious. For my Echoes meeting, I also found a spot where I can use both my desktop computer to read the stories of my colleagues and, at the same time, use my laptop for joining the meeting. For now, I think I have two suitable spots. I silence my cell phone and other electronic devices and close the windows to reduce background noise.

When I enter the virtual meeting, I make sure that I "Unmute" myself and "Start the Video." I also decide whether I want "Speaker View" or the "Gallery View" at the top, right-hand corner of the screen. At the bottom of the screen are numerous icons that I am slowly using more as I get more experience. I used the "Chat" icon a few times and learned that I can also read comments of other participants. I also know how easy it is to exit the meeting by just pushing the "Leaving" button.

With all this knowledge, I was invited to share my Holocaust experiences and connect via Zoom with the Museum's Bringing the Lessons Home ambassadors. It is a program that introduces students to Holocaust history and then enables them to bring the lessons of this history to their families, friends, and community. The students take a 14-week training course in the spring and learn to serve as tour guides for the Permanent Exhibition of our Museum. The Zoom virtual program was planned on Saturday, May 16, 2020, at 10 a.m.

The idea of sitting and talking in front of my laptop for one hour concerned me. I have given so many talks at our Museum and walked around the stage, used gestures for emphasis, and created an intimate rapport with the audience. I wondered how I was going to see the reaction of the students. I thought about how I would communicate when it was time to change my PowerPoint slides. I had to find a way to handle the question-and-answer period.

When I joined the virtual meeting at 9:30, I was happy to see some of the staff from the Museum. Before the formal meeting began, the students, under the leadership of staff, discussed the topic about what kind of eggs they liked best for breakfast. While this discussion was happening, I took the opportunity to write down the names of some of the students just in case I wanted to communicate with them. Among the students, I was delighted to see James Fleming, the Museum's program coordinator of Youth and Community Programs. We have been friends since he came to the Museum when he was just 17. He calls me his grandma. I was becoming more at ease, and when I was introduced at the appointed time for the meeting to begin, I was at ease.

While I was talking, I could see on the laptop screen, my PowerPoint slides and individual students. The students listened attentively to my talk. I could not believe how quickly the 45 minutes went by before the question-and-answer period began. The audience asked many fine questions that were not much different from when I give a live talk.

I was happy to join the Museum on this journey into the digital world. At this unbelievably fragile moment for all humanity, when the coronavirus is still at its peak, the internet with all its aspects, including "zooming," has proved to be remarkably resilient. It has allowed me to keep communicating, reaching out, and staying connected. I am able to keep doing my work, volunteering for the Museum, and connecting with students so that they can learn about my experience as a survivor of the Holocaust.

Letter to Tansi

WE, THE SURVIVORS WHO VOLUNTEER AT THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM, often receive letters from students who wish to engage with a Holocaust survivor as part of a school project. Tansi is a 15-year-old sophomore in high school in California. She must have researched our survivor biographies and been moved by my experience and wanted to learn more. Her sensitive letter prompted me to reply to her and praise her for her perceptive questions.

Dear Tansi,

I was very happy to read your letter in which you describe your hobbies of dancing and swimming. I am so proud of you for doing Bollywood dancing for ten years and being part of the Bollywood dance team at your high school. I am also happy to hear that you have been jazz dancing for three years and like to swim for fun. However, most of all, I am greatly impressed with the depth of your thinking about what happened during the Holocaust and your question about how it affected my life. I take pleasure in providing the following responses to your well thought-out questions.

Why didn't my entire family escape after Kristallnacht instead of just my brother Joe and me? It is an important question that you ask. My family, all five of us, my father, mother, and two brothers, wanted to immigrate to the United States. However, as most countries did, the United States had very strict, biased quotas. Hundreds of thousands of Jews in Germany tried to immigrate to the United States. To enter, each person needed a visa. It was difficult to get the many necessary papers to leave Germany, and visas were difficult to obtain. The process could take years. If you wanted to present your paperwork to the United States consulate in the hope of getting a visa, you needed to register and get on the waiting list. My mother and father understood all of this. So while they were on the waiting list, they saw the urgency to save their children. They had heard of a French lady who was smuggling children across the border from Germany into France for a fee. My father gave this lady all the money he had saved so that my brother and I would be safe. I know it must have been very difficult for my parents to send us away.

You asked about the incident in front of the Palace of Versailles where I translated for the mayor of Versailles who spoke only French and the German officer who spoke only German. Yes, I was terrified because I thought if the German officer realized that I was a Jewish child, I would be sent back to Germany to face everything that was happening

there. That is why I told him that I learned to speak German in the French schools. You might be interested in reading my essay that I wrote about this incident for *Echoes of Memory* (Volume 5, page 43) here at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. It is called "The Interpreter." You can find it on the Museum's website (ushmm.org).

After my parents sent my brother and me to France so that we would be safe, I prayed to God every day that I would be reunited with my parents and that nothing would happen to them or to the rest of the Jews in the world. I knew that it was not God who was committing the atrocities. It was the Nazis who were perpetrating the cruelties against innocent people. Yes, I prayed that eventually everything would turn out ok. I was so lucky that my parents sent us to France and that we never had to go to a concentration camp. No, I never wanted to commit suicide. I wanted to live and be part of the future.

Of course I was happy when I learned that I would be reunited with my parents here in the United States. They were able to come here because my father had a cousin who owned a pickle factory in New York. She filled out many papers stating her income, her taxes, status of her health, and promised the US government that my father would never be a burden to the United States. Therefore, my parents were able to immigrate to America. As soon as they arrived, they searched for us in France with the help of many fine organizations such as the Quakers and the HIAS. They found us, and we came to New York on a Portuguese ship called the *Serpa Pinto*. I remember how wonderful it was to see the Statue of Liberty, because it meant that we would be reunited with our parents and that we would live in a democratic society where there would be no killing of Jewish people because of their religion.

Does talking about the Holocaust bring back sad memories, is another critical question that you asked. The memories are always there. However, I want to tell my story to my children, my grandchildren, my brothers and their families, my friends, and the visitors here at the Museum so that they can rejoice in the fact that we are living in a democratic society, and that all of us should make sure that no dictatorship will ever usurp our liberties. We need to remember the atrocities that happened to families during the Holocaust and pass this information on to our descendants. We need to learn from this horror in our history. We cannot undo the atrocities of the past. Besides remembering, we have to take action to confront hate. When we see injustice taking place, we have to do something about it. We cannot be onlookers. We have to be sensitive to each other and take care of each other. By talking about my experiences, I hope that people learn what harm hatred and prejudice can do. We cannot be bystanders and definitely cannot be collaborators.

I want to praise you, a 15-year-old girl, for writing such a sensitive letter with such perceptive questions. I hope that you get a chance to discuss the Holocaust with your family and friends. Please give them my regards. I also wish you a successful tenth-grade learning experience and that you continue to enjoy your hobbies of dancing and swimming.

Sincerely yours,
Susan Warsinger

A Moment of Great Joy

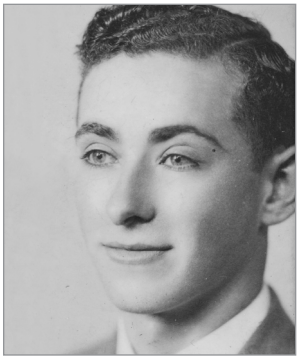
AFTER TWO WEEKS OF SAILING ON THE ATLANTIC OCEAN, the *Serpa Pinto* moved deliberately towards the shore of our new destination, the United States of America. The 50 immigrant children, including my brother Joe and me, were informed that early the next morning we would be cruising past the Statue of Liberty. The instructions were that we should be at the bow of the ship, on the port side, before 6 a.m. in order to obtain a good view. We understood that this statue was the universal symbol of freedom and represented the United States itself.

On the morning of September 24, 1941, every one of the children who embarked the ship in Portugal stood at the railing waiting with anticipation to view the grand lady. To our immense disappointment, the dawn was covered with a heavy fog, so dense that we could not glimpse our hands in front of our eyes. However, at the exact time that we were scheduled to pass the statue, the rising sun must have kissed the fog, because the mist rose like a theater curtain, slowly and carefully. It seemed like everything that we suffered between 1933 and 1941 suddenly faded away with the fog. The feeling of surviving and freedom washed over us like a gentle warm wave that would keep us safe. Joe still remembers it now as a feeling of total ecstasy that is deeply ingrained in his nervous system. We sailed into the harbor on 42nd Street and saw our father on the pier, and we knew that we were safe.

I was so happy to be in the United States with my parents and my younger brother Ernest, far away from the persecution of the Jewish people in Germany. I felt safe while I was learning how to be an American girl. However, I witnessed that freedom was not granted to everyone at that time. I saw that our democracy was not perfect. I observed the mistakes our government and our citizens were making. Many of these mistakes were eventually resolved. Some of them are still being resolved. We have to continually keep striving to improve the needs of our ever-changing

society. It is difficult to maintain a perfect democracy. I feel what is happening now is temporary, and I am optimistic that a new norm is coming. We have to unite our country by working together at the government level and with the lay people. We have to handle our differences in a humanitarian way and be open to differing opinions. We have to recognize human dignity and equality and commit to the sanctity of all human life. I have a good feeling about us, and I will never give up on this country that helped my family members become thoughtful, valuable, and positive members of society who have contributed so much of their talents to the United States.

Many years have passed since my brother and I first glimpsed the Statue of Liberty, which is meant to be a beacon of hope for a better world. We disembarked in New York at the beginning of a Jewish New Year. On this Jewish New Year, 2020, we will again eat apples for healing and honey for a sweet year, as has been the custom for Jews all over the world for hundreds of years. Let us wish that the coronavirus, which has been plaguing us for many months, will soon vanish from our entire globe. Let us have a sweet year and have moments of great joy with each other.



Polana, Czechoslovakia

Martin Weiss

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

MY GRANDFATHER, MAYER WEISS, LIVED IN POLANA BEFORE WORLD WAR I, when the village was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After World War I, Czechoslovakia was established and included the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Karpatska Russ (Carpathian Russ), where we lived.

When Czechoslovakia was established, Thomas Masaryk became the first president and no wonder. He was a professor who had lived in the United States when Woodrow Wilson was president and had lectured at the University of Chicago. Therefore, he was familiar with democracy. So when the Czechs declared independence, he became the first president whom everybody loved. From the very beginning the country flourished because it was a democracy. Neighboring countries were not as progressive. My father, Jacob Weiss, and four of his siblings were in business and all of them owned farmland and acres of forests that produced firewood. Our family consisted of nine children, four boys and five girls; I was number seven. All of us attended Czech school; the schools were similar to the United States. My brothers helped with the business and farming. When I was about ten, my two older brothers left for the city to find jobs so they could earn a wage. My sister Cilia departed for college in the city.

In 1939, Hitler occupied Czechoslovakia. Slovakia broke away, declared independence, and joined the Nazis. Hungary supported the Nazi takeover of the Czech lands and their prize for doing so was to be given Carpathian-Russ, our state. As soon as the Hungarians came, they behaved just like the Nazis. Our world changed forever. The majority of people in our state were Ukrainian, but we got along living with each other. Just like the Germans, the Hungarians looked at the Ukrainians as inferior because they were Slavs.

My oldest sister, Ellen, wanted to immigrate to the United States, but she couldn't get to the railroad station in the city of Munkács, because it was already occupied by the Hungarians. However, there was a back road to Slovakia, and the only way to travel it was with horse and wagon. Somehow she

figured it out, and she got to Prague, picked up her visa, made her way to Sweden, boarded the ship the *Drottningholm*, and sailed for the United States. To this day, I don't know how she managed to pull this off. I regret that I never asked her or found out the details.

My two older brothers returned home and soon after were inducted, not into the army, but into slave labor battalions because they were Jewish. They were under army jurisdiction and were forced to cut down all the trees in the forests so the partisans wouldn't have places to hide. This was done from the Carpathians all the way to Ukraine and Russia. My brother Isaac was on the Russian front from the very beginning. He was clearing minefields and burying the dead. Eventually, he escaped to the Russian side and they accused him of being a "German spy," so he was placed with the German POWs who were working in the coal mines in the Ural mountains. After the war, we heard nothing from him. We assumed that he did not survive. In 1947, when the Russians released the POWs, he returned to our hometown, where he found out that most people who survived escaped to the west. One man knew that my oldest brother, Mendel, was living in the Czech Republic and with this information, Isaac escaped, intending to go to the Czech Republic. The Russian secret police were very active there at the time, so one had to be very careful. He managed to escape as far as Slovakia. He got in touch with Mendel, who sent his young sister-in-law with clothing for Isaac that would allow him to blend, as his clothes were in very poor condition. He also needed identity papers, so a friend from our hometown was able to get some using my name, as it was on file with the authorities, even though Isaac was 11 years older than me. From there, he immigrated to Israel, and after living there for a few years and raising a family, my sister Ellen and I brought his family to the United States. My brother Moshe, who was tall, strong, and capable of hard work, did not return home, although we learned that he was still alive at liberation. He simply vanished, never to be seen again. This still bothers me.

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