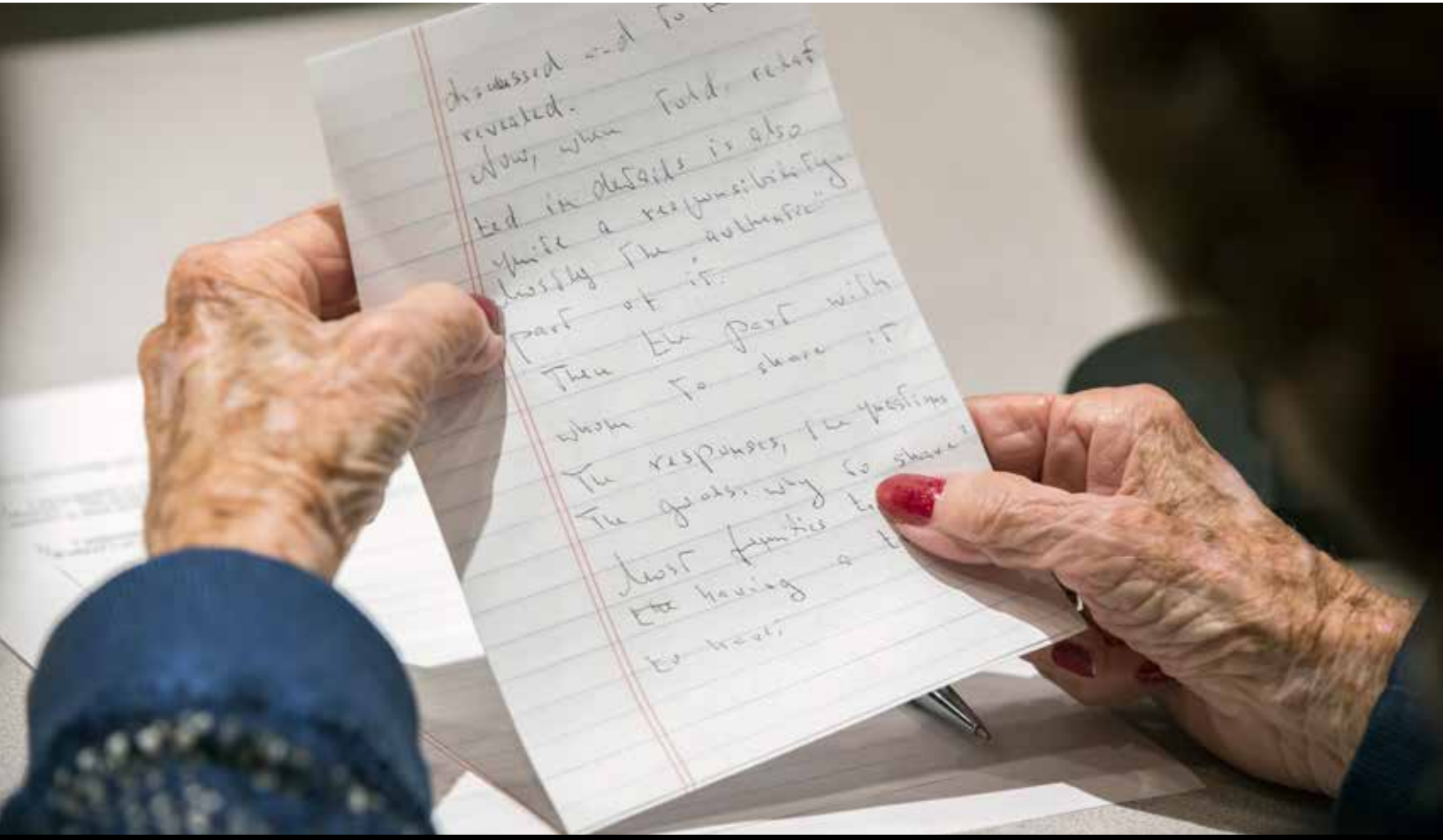
Echoes of Memory

Volume 14



UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

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Contents

Foreword

Compiled in the texts of this 14th volume of **Echoes of Memory,** readers will be able to learn through stories of the long lives of this last generation of survivors and witnesses of Nazi atrocities during World War II. This community of writers provides insight into the ongoing experience of surviving, still lives the edict of **zachor** (to remember), and shares, for the future, the unique and deeply personal experiences of surviving the Holocaust.

I would be remiss in my discussion of remembrance if I did not mention here the recent passing of the Museum's former director of Survivor Affairs, Martin Goldman, who truly lived the edict of zachor. Without Martin's commitment to survivors, and his belief in the importance of their individual stories as important texts for learning, we would not have the Echoes of Memory group. Without his leadership, his continuing support, and his belief in the vision of what this work could become, this group of survivors would not have generated the pages and pages of written reflection and remembrance of surviving the Holocaust. On a personal note, I am thankful for Martin's belief in the power of story and his belief that I could be the person to help to nurture these stories in their formation. It has been the blessing of my life to get to know these survivor writers and to help in the shaping of their writing. For this, those who support the remembrance of Holocaust survivors and who hope for their voices to echo long after they are gone, owe a debt of gratitude for Martin, who with deep love and respect, spent his life in this important work.

Since the beginning of this writers' workshop, the survivors have worked to make history come alive so that the context of our present world audibly echoes their not-so-distant and unquiet past. Today, the survivors' continuing story is framed by the struggles and turmoil of the first quarter of the 21st century, as they work to make their experiences as children knowable to the generations that came of age in a world that is vastly different from the one into which they were born.

The story of this group is also one of refusing to be silent. Faced with a global pandemic—meaning a switch to meeting online, without the community of being together in the Museum—these writers have turned to explore histories of lives spanning many continents and decades. They work to consider, through their writing, what their lives as survivors have meant to themselves, their families, their communities, and to the world. These writers have toiled for years to build a body of work to be shared as a first-person message to the future.

The work compiled here illustrates the pressing importance the survivors of the Echoes of Memory writing group continue to feel to remember, to memorialize, and to build connections for readers to a potent past. Their work reminds us what their experiences mean to the world today and what their past continues to mean as we see old fault lines sever and as we see a rise in dangerous antisemitism and authoritarianism, worldwide.

Having completed our 21st year together as a group, the writers anthologized here continue to explore new aspects of their lives as well as fresh looks back into stories they have told before. Agi Geva, in her piece "Sisterhood," writes about her experience of surviving and immigrating to Israel with her younger sister, as well as their relationship over the years. Ania Drimer writes about her parents and of their survival in a Russian gulag, as well as their subsequent immigration to the United States in her story called "My Parents." Ruth Cohen writes of the ever-present reminders of loved ones she has lost in "My Nonexistent Secret Places." Each of these works asks a reader to consider the power of relationships and how these relationships shape us and are shaped over the course of a lifetime, alongside the history of the world.

In this volume, several writers describe the experience of the return of their authentic identities, a renewal of relationships with family and traditions after being in hiding as young children. In Halina Peabody's "Jaraslow, Living as Catholics," she describes the necessity of learning to pretend to be Catholic as a young girl, the responsibility she felt to learn the catechism and to engage in other rites, as a means of protecting her mother and baby sister after they had obtained false papers. She also reflects on how her own Jewish identity was developed later in her childhood. Al Münzer describes the return to his true identity in "They Called Me by My Name," as he recalls using an adopted name while in hiding with a Dutch Indonesian family in the Hague, and the importance of the return of his given name as he was returned to his mother's care after she survived multiple concentration camps. Each of these pieces provide an example for readers of the echoes that still reverberate across time for survivors of

the Holocaust; each shows the complex experience of surviving as a young child, the more subtle but nonetheless dehumanizing and disorienting losses that surviving the Holocaust required for so many.

Also included in Volume 14 are essays by two writers who have recently joined the Echoes of Memory group. Sharing his first work published here, Peter Stein recalls life in war-torn Prague and his memory of the final time he would see his grandmother, Sofie, before she was killed in Terezin. His story, "Sofie's Memorial" is a strong testament to the power of writing, in community. New members want to join writers who share a common geography and sometimes similar experiences and who have the common mission of writing their memories to be shared with future generations of readers.

Included here for the first time also is the writing of Joan Da Silva, who writes poetically about being in hiding as a young child and her knowledge of the role she must play, as well as the burden of that role, to keep herself and her family safe. These new writers show the power of writing to help to reveal the depth and complexity of survivors' stories and teach us about the ways in which experiences during the Holocaust as young children have influenced the entire scope of survivors' lives.

Each of these pieces and the writers themselves, as well as the community of survivor writers working together, underscore the importance of the Museum's mission, as well as modeling a way of "doing" history. This work to foreground the individual voices of survivors of Nazism, to continually engage the unique experiences and understandings of the people who were there, help us to see history as a verb—constantly and newly meaningful. Beyond that, this work shows the power of a community, the shared vision of cooperation and collaboration to fight extremism and hate through the telling of individual stories, in concert with other survivors.

This collection of writing from the past year of the Echoes of Memory writing group is not the final draft for these survivors, some of whom are in their 90s; they continue to write; they continue to meet; they continue to plan, speak, share and to reshape the stories of their lives. They do this work now to both continue recording their personal history of the Holocaust as well as to renew historical understanding of their past. They continue this work to connect with one another and with others, most of whom they will never know. Their writing will ensure that new audiences will have an opportunity to hear their forceful voices and their powerful stories, to learn about their lives, forever.

Maggie Peterson, PhD, Writing Instructor, The Memory Project

Mukačevo: My Hometown

A Story for My Grandchildren and Their Children

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 IMAGINE THAT MY GRANDCHILDREN'S GENERATION, and certainly that of my great-grandchildren, will not be able to picture a life without even the simplest of the luxuries we have now. I am certain that when people I meet hear that I was raised in Mukačevo, they imagine it to be a shtetl, with little huts or little houses, without running water or electricity, and with mud-filled streets, with people pushing carts or horses pulling small or large carriages. Mukačevo doesn't look like this now, nor did it look like this in the 1930s.

When I was growing up, Mukačevo was a city with a population of about 45,000 people. Streets and sidewalks were concrete or cobblestone and were lined with colorful concrete (stucco) buildings. A wide street, called the Corso, was in the center of the city and was a place where people gathered and promenaded at a leisurely pace. On one side of the Corso was City Hall, a very tall building with a clock at the top, on a steeple. There were government offices on the top floors, and several stores on the street level between arches. It was, and still is, very pretty.

The Hotel Chillag (Star) in Mukačevo, 2017.
Courtesy of Ruth Cohen

The Hotel Chillag (Star) was on the corner across from City Hall. It had many hotel rooms on the upper floors, and doctors' and dentists' offices on the floors below. Both our female pediatrician and male dentist had offices there. Across the street from the hotel, on the other side of the Corso, was the movie house. Around the corner from the movie house was a large, elegant, yellow building with long steps going up to the entrance. Depending on the season, this building served as the theater, opera house, or concert hall. The wide streets near the hotel and movie house had very expensive stores of all kinds.

The Hebrew Gymnasium in Mukačevo, 1941. *Courtesy of Ruth Cohen*

Education in Mukačevo was offered in many different languages. There were schools where the primary language was Czech (then Hungarian, as the government changed), Hebrew, German, French, and Russian. There were many *cheders* throughout the city where Jewish boys went to get their religious education after school and Bet Yaakov programs were held for Jewish girls. I attended the Hebrew Gymnasium, one of the top schools in the area and, for my Jewish education, I went to a Bet Yaakov program that took place at our synagogue on Saturday afternoons. I recall that most of our time was spent singing Hebrew songs and we might have read some prayers.

Mukačevo had many churches and synagogues, as well as many *shtiebels* (small houses or rooms that served as more casual places where Jews gathered for prayer). There was also a country club with a swimming pool and tennis courts. Nearby was a soccer stadium. My family never took advantage of those wonderful places, probably because we were so religious. But we did go swimming in the Latorica, a river that was a short walk from our house. There was a huge marketplace in town. The local farmers and some merchants brought their produce and wares to the market on most days, coming into town with horse and buggy, and not many cars. The market was always a fun and bustling place.

My recollection of Mukačevo has always been as a lovely city, and when I went back to visit with some of my family members, it lived up to my memories. It is still a bustling and elegant city. Aside from seeing my house, my grandparents' house and store, and our synagogue, we visited the building that used to house my school and walked around my neighborhood and near the river. While things had changed to some degree, the city and its buildings looked the same as they did when I was a child. It is a hometown I always was, and will always be, fond of.

My Nonexistent Secret Places

THERE IS NO PLACE IN THIS WORLD that I find myself where I would not be reminded of the dear, wonderful people who

filled my near and distant life with
so much love and so many good things.

Traveling the world, being at home in
our house, in the kitchen, the basement, walking streets in cities, and being in the cemetery visiting with my Dad, who is the only one who has a monument I can touch.

What I Am Best At

I KNOW THAT I AM VERY GOOD AT MANY, MANY THINGS. I am a good wife, mother, friend, worker, and was very good at sports, mostly tennis. But ...

When I came to the States, my mother's wonderful, soft-mannered sister, Aunt Fanny, showed me all the pictures my parents had sent them through the years. As we looked at them, some letters from my mom popped up. They were all about their siblings, their families, and of course, our family. One of the letters was written around the time when I must have been two or three years old. In it she wrote something special about me. It said (and I clearly remember reading it), "She is so adorable, so very smart, and so very naughty, only the dogs are bad for not taking her away." I must have aggravated her a lot that day and she let her frustration out to my aunt. I also always knew that she loved me without her telling me so. We had a wonderfully close relationship. Too bad it did not last long enough.

So, if you want to know what I am best at, I would say that I excel at aggravating some people. But truly, I like myself a lot.

An Alternate View of the Sad Longing

Joan Da Silva

In German-occupied Poland, Joan Da Silva spent her early years living in a ghetto, then posing as a Catholic and hiding in multiple locations. After liberation, she and her parents left Poland and lived in two displaced persons camps before immigrating to the United States.

WHEN, AT THE AGE OF FIVE-AND-A-HALF, I was left to survive by my own wits, I was well-equipped with some essential information. I knew by heart many prayers of the rosary. I had a new identity—a Catholic child whose parents had been taken to Siberia. My real mother was to be referred to as my aunt and my father as her friend.

All this I found exciting and I was very glad to leave my former identity and enter the "Aryan" world. The excitement wore off quickly, as life without my mother, at such an early age, became a grueling struggle to maintain some semblance of self.

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I come from someone. Unlike isolated atoms, a living being bore me. At birth I am wanted and loved. I am cherished and made of miraculous substances carefully detailed to resemble that being. I am bonded and meant to belong to continuity. Generations inhabit my being. Everything that I embody follows an even, successive flow.

What happens when there is a break in the continuity and the connection is severed? What happens when that carefully designed and balanced path is disrupted? Havoc ensues. Where the bond had been, a fathomless abyss remains. Without my connection, I exist in an unnatural state. I must nevertheless follow my ordained path. The loss of my attachment creates a sad longing in me, which becomes my life's constant and oppressive companion.

Nature, that elusive and massive power, now calls on its vast forces in an effort to restore an order. Millions of forces arrive, hovering on the edge of the bond's precipice. With her enormous capacities to adjust to calamities, nature succeeds in keeping me on my path, although many substitutions are made to help me continue on life's journey and supply the needed elements of survival. But nature cannot adjust for that sad, ever-present, and oppressive longing.

I believe that sad longing is the bond itself in its severed state. This bond, which was meant to continue forever, is now in eternal mourning for itself. Its mourning was not satisfied with my anguish but spread and stained, like a drop of dye in clear water, those closest to me. Such are the scars sustained and bequeathed by a life thwarted.

It is possible that this sad longing seeking an attachment it can never find, is outside of the power of nature and resides in the realm of the soul.

How I Fooled the Gestapo

I AM VERY BLOND AND BLUE-EYED, and the Nazi soldiers love my looks. Of course they don't know I am Jewish.

The summer air is full of our chatter and the village grass high and unkempt when I see black leather boots. Three Gestapo officers are looking down at us with amused expressions.

An agreeable warm feeling spreads through me, a fullness in my chest and throat almost like love. I have no tail to wag, but I feel as if I am wagging. My hair feels alive as if it is shining and glistening. A glow radiates from my head and chest. My shoulders feel caressed.

I am especially conscious of my shoulders. I move them in their soft resilient sockets as if they have already been patted. "Good girl," I say to myself, "sweet and tired, maybe cranky and pouty, but understandably so. Lovable nonetheless—Look, soldier, how lovable!" I always look soldiers straight in the eye when the moment demands it. I don't stare at them unguardedly, no. When I know they are near, I bristle with inspiration. My eyes shine with respect and cooperation. I wag and wag my invisible tail and emanate from every pore my desire for a pat.

And very often it comes. A hand reaches out to me. It is white with delicately pinkish palms. It pats me someplace on the cheek or head. It is soft and warm and the man belonging to it is a nice man. He is smiling at me and the knowledge that he is a man of power and fear for others only fills me with more love and appreciation.

Nothing exists besides this moment. All else is a boring matter. In this glow everything is softened. I am never questioned by these harsh-voiced men with their guns and shining black boots, their fashionable uniforms and leather-tipped hats. I never expect that they will question me.

To each his role in life, and mine is settled at age five. Everything is in its place, and I am there complete for each moment. Nothing else exists, only my full concentration of myself into the moment. I must, with all my being, ward off all danger from myself. I can only do that through distraction. I must, through enormous concentrated will, pull out the energy to involve each man with my portrayal: I am the light, and I am sweet; I am the glow of your little girl at home; I am the rippling laughter of your little love; I am the response that touches you now and makes you remember how homesick you are.

How My Father's Force of Spirit Willed Us to Live: His Puzzling Dream and Bravery

DEAR READER, DID YOU SEE MY FATHER'S EYES DARTING FIRE? It is here in this book, a photograph of him with a mustache. He was the one who saved us. He turned desperation into defiance. He carried us over the inescapable and he did it from a distance. His will to live drove us. My mother listened to his words, and I sensed him in my spirit. He actually willed us to live. His eyes never regained that mellow look, not until the war was over. He was polite with people, passing as my mother's caring friend. He never gave himself away in any manner, except that his eyes burned. But people didn't know his eyes were burning because he spoke so well and eloquently. He was an educated man. He drove himself for years to attain some standing in the world. He studied late into the night, after his chores were done and his meager living made. And then he obtained his law degree, and he was the only one from that small village to attain a profession. He gained much admiration from his peers, and the very few who survived spoke of him with great respect.

Our survival pursued a hero's path. Where others walked inattentive, we trod with stealth and let vigilance make peril our prey. So my father walked among dangers in the streets of Warsaw.

According to my father's story, which I knew nothing of during the war but heard repeatedly thereafter, my father was walking on a street in Warsaw, which he had visited many times before, except that this time the stalker approached him. He said to my father outright, "I know who you are and if you don't pay me, I will report you to the Gestapo."

The stranger's threat released an instant response from my father so not a second was lost to hesitation. My father's fierceness was always on the edge and it shot forth with lightning speed as he grabbed the accuser by the lapels of his coat. The accuser was sure he had hit his mark and the immediate retaliation shook his certainty and made him quake.

"So you know who I am," my father hissed into his face. "Well, I will now show you who I really am. You see that Gestapo station over there? You will go there with me and you will see who I really am."

In his hands now, as my father described it, was a shadow of a man, so terrified had he become of his own audacity. In an instant the tables had turned as he pleaded for his life.

"Please sir," the stalker pleaded. "I made a terrible mistake, please forgive me sir and let me go." And my father let him go. This was the first and last time my father was ever threatened in this manner.

My father devised a very practical plan concerning his lodgings. He rented a room and made it known that he would be working during the day, then he rented another room in another part of Warsaw, and let it be known that he would be working at night.

The story he told about his background was that before the German occupation, he had been a Polish officer. I imagine that such credentials would have been very favorably viewed by the Polish civilians, if not downright admired. My father had the stance and gait of an officer. He was 40 years old, straight and robustly built. He always held his head high and had impeccable manners. He also emanated an air of force and self-assurance. His nose, though aquiline, did not seem to present any problem. Such noses are seen among the "Aryans." It was hooked like an eagle's beak and then proceeded downward in a very narrow straight line. He grew a thick mustache to balance it and with his blue-green eyes and light brown hair; his did not bear a resemblance to the stereotype of a Jewish face.

My father took dangerous chances. His passion for my mother, as well as his natural needs, drove him to the limit. He would induce her to meet him in some part of Warsaw, where he would lead her to the men's public toilet and, positioning her in such a way that her feet could not be seen, connected with her in longing and loneliness, and for a few brief moments absorbed the love that would keep him steadfast for another lengthy interval.

This was told to me by my mother during our reminiscing talks after the war and long after my father had gone from this world. When my mother told me this, she did not say it calmly. She said it as a distraught confession, of the ends he had her go to. She herself, who all of her married life was attracted to his passionate nature, was too reserved to ever admit her own needs. Her needs revealed themselves in the pleased way she accepted his affection.

My father was a practical man. He did not delve into his inner self. He dealt with issues at hand, and his analytical abilities of people revolved around a shrewd, matter-of-fact attempt at obtaining his goal. He was therefore totally at a loss and bewildered when one night he had a very vivid dream. He dreamt, as he related it to us, always with the same fearful dismay, that he was watching out of the window of his room when he saw a man from his building being escorted by two Gestapo men to a waiting car. The man appeared to have been taken into custody.

The concreteness of this dream was disturbing enough, but what happened next truly shocked him. One day, not too long after, while he was observing the ongoing events outside his window, he saw this very man, whose face he recognized from his dream, being escorted in the same fashion by two Gestapo men.

Whenever in the future we or his friends heard this story, we shook our perplexed heads at the frightening mystery of it all.

How do people endure such imminent terrors? How do you fall asleep without the aid of a drug, dreading the potential knock on the door? I had my fantasy world, but what did my father have? An answer immediately presents itself: he had his battle-ready guard, his quick, shrewd, articulate tongue, and his well-mannered charm. I believe my father created an aura around himself so that people respected and admired him for that glow.

Incident at the Brook

THIS WAS YET ANOTHER HOME in which my father left me. The caretakers had accepted the payment and believed my father's story. I was not worried about them. It was the neighbors and friends who posed a danger. The community was small, and seeing a new child in their midst created curiosity and suspicion.

The suspicion would spread from ear to ear until the gossip reached a conclusive possibility. The whisper of a "Jewish child" would roll off their tongues in wonderment, shock, and malice. They would be the bearers of this news to the Gestapo, who periodically visited the area and who were the extended arm of death for the savagery resonating in the hearts of the friends and neighbors.

This was Poland 1942, when the summer breezes in the villages should have lulled the hearts to love and goodwill, where the Sunday chimes rang out in churches, calling all worshipers to come and receive the blessing of their Savior.

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The following episode occurred on the outskirts of a village where my patrons and their friends were enjoying a picnic outing near the shore of a brook on just such a balmy summer's day.

The rolling grains of sand spread out across the narrow beach. Beyond the sand, the land rose into a gentle hill. Tufts of grass joined to form a large grassy patch at the top of the hill. That is where I sat with a group whose identity I cannot recall. Although their conversation was cheerful, I felt afraid. They were totally immersed in each other, but what if their focus should change and center on me. What if they began to question me and wonder who I was?

I was now five years old and the understanding was growing within me. The assaulting words "Jewish child" had prompted my father, in the past, to relocate me to another home, for however much time destiny allowed, paid fully with one of the many jewels my mother had sewn into a garment; no one would have kept me for even a great many more jewels had they known my true identity.

I was wearing a bathing suit and was sitting on the grass beside my patrons and their company. Being a small child, I was not expected to participate in the conversation. I did not want to make eye contact, feeling it would bring me more to their attention and I therefore sat slightly apart. Not wanting to turn my back on them and appear rude, I sat sideways, holding my legs against my chest and pretending to be absorbed by the scenery at the brook. The conversation behind me continued to generate a fear which I finally could not withstand. I stood up and made my way toward the brook.

Intimate voices of children and parents connected across the sounds of summer. I stepped into the clear, cold, and swift water. The polished stones beneath my feet shone like a lustrous mosaic and the reflected sun made spotlights on the smooth and glossy bedrock. For a few moments I stood as if transfixed in a glass cage, the rushing brook streaming over my ankles.

With the next step the ground suddenly sloped and the water reached my calves. In attempting to turn back I lost my balance and fell. The current surged over my head and water filled my mouth and nostrils. For a moment everything was dark and silent. Pulling my head out I tried to raise myself but the undertow slipped beneath my feet and twisted me around to a sitting position, the water up to my chest.

If I could only get a hand, I thought, somebody's hand, and I felt the pain of not being able to ask. To my left I saw a little child about three years old, his hand in the firm grip of a large woman whose appearance, due to my sitting position and her proximity, I could discern only up to her waist. My eyes followed the receding child and my whole being felt the abandonment, envy, and yearning for the mother who held his hand.

This momentary distraction loosened my grip and I slid forward, the water now up to my shoulders. The rushing waves collided across my neck sending sharp sprays darting into my face. My inability to breathe brought on a fierce panic, but my urge to scream for help was strangled by the stronger dread of discovery. Terror unleashed in me a surge of strength, and I pushed against the slippery stones with my hands and feet, heaving myself backwards towards the shore.

As I emerged from the depth and the sharp current, I was able to open my eyes. To my surprise I saw that everything was as it had been. People were walking, laughing, and frolicking. Not a single person had noticed my predicament. For everyone it was a peaceful, enjoyable afternoon, only for me had it been a furious, silent battle.

The stones were slippery as I raised myself on all fours to a standing position. Trembling uncontrollably, I attempted to calm myself to avoid notice. Going up the hill was an effort because my knees had become weak from fear. When I reached the top, I sat down in the same position as before. No notice had been taken of me and I sat still for a long time, my heart pounding wildly as if my little chest had become a battleground.

The German Soldier Who Had to Die

THE GERMAN SOLDIER DESCRIBED HERE portrays my feelings toward him and all the German soldiers I met, who never recognized me as a Jew.

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How are you there my friend? Do you remember how many times we crossed each other's path but in the end, you didn't recognize me? No, you didn't recognize me. We sat so close looking into the same mirror, but you never knew. You had blue eyes, and you were young, and so fair. Your face was lean and angular and your jaw so taut and firm. You were shaving, and I leaned over your shoulder and watched as you lifted the light brown foamy bristle from around your mouth and chin. Your eyes were so soft and your lips thin, but gentle. You were telling me such lovely stories

about a little girl you had at home who was like me. And I watched in wonder, and I let my eyes fall all over your wavy brown hair and your white shirt and then settle again on your face. Yes, now I remember you had packed your clean white shirt and put it on for the occasion. Your hands, too, were lean and young like the rest of you, and you held a razor in such a manly fashion, I thought. My mother later told me you knew you were going to die. That's why you took your time and spoke to me with that transplanted affection, as if through me, you could say goodbye to those you loved. But you were a wonder to me.

And of course I knew how well I looked my part. And it didn't matter anymore. You knew this was the end. The Russians were close at hand. We all knew that. We could forget about our roles, and we could speak from our hearts. In the end, it is like that. That is the wonderful part of the end, that if we recognize it, we can speak from our hearts. You prepared yourself so beautifully. You washed and changed your linen and combed your hair, and your shirt sparkled, and you looked so handsome, of course. And you left with your friend, but I don't remember him, so intent was I on observing you. But you know, I was a little tired after you left. It was as if I held my breath all the time you were there.

We found out the next day that you were riddled with holes within a mile or so of our house. It is hard to believe that you could become so humble and die in the end. What a strange sight it was to have you own up to defeat, to be in the same room with you and know that this time, it was you who was afraid. It all happened so suddenly, you know. There was a kind of waiting joy in our hearts to be released from your grip. With what astonishment we beheld you entering our humble hut. We had never seen you so worn and hunted. But you are still with me all the time, and I still hold my breath and get tired from doing so. I see your face and hear your voice in all its different shifts and I readjust myself accordingly. I adjust myself to maintain my poise. It is a great strain.

My Unforgettable Theatrical Experience

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.

ON THE NIGHT OF DECEMBER 15, 2015, the Theater J, at the Jewish Community Center of Washington, was filled to capacity. As a sign of the times, for security reasons, everyone attending this play had to be screened to enter. This theater caters mostly, but not exclusively, to Jewish audiences, performing plays on Jewish themes: some controversial, about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and some humorous and endearing, like *Calling Dr. Ruth*. So it was not a surprise that in this particular theater, we saw the Polish play *Nasza Klasa*, or, in English, *Our Class*. In addition to watching the play, we were invited to be translators for the playwright and director, Mr. Słobodzianek, and had the honor of discussing the play with him. Our taste in plays runs the gamut, but we prefer dramas that leave us touched and eager to discuss what we have seen with friends. *Our Class* fits the bill perfectly, especially because we are well-versed in Polish-Jewish relations in Poland before and during the war.

The play is set in the time frame from 1925 to 1950, and it is inspired by a true event, a pogrom in the town of Jedwabne, where 1,600 Jews were murdered not by the Nazis, but by their neighbors. The play follows the fortune, or rather misfortune, of ten members of a school class, equally divided into Poles and Jews. The action takes place during the Soviet occupation, the Holocaust, and after the war. In the beginning, the students seem to be good friends, interacting with and teasing each other. The play shows that, because of rising antisemitism and hate, the action of the Polish students leads to rape, beatings, torture, and finally rounding up their Jewish classmates, taking them to a barn, and burning it to the ground. Two of the Polish students hide their Jewish friends and save their lives, but insist on their conversion to Christianity. I found their quick descent into hate and madness, depicted in the play, heartbreaking.

The second, much less dramatic act, set after the war, shows the destinies of the survivors of the class: some of the few remaining Jewish students went to Israel, some to America, and two of the Polish students were arrested but never served a sentence. Only one Jewish student wanted revenge. He joined the Communist party and, as a high official of the security department, similar to the KGB, terrorized the population.

Personally, growing up in Poland, I did not experience antisemitism among my classmates, but I knew other Jews who were victims of it. I can't say I enjoyed this play in the usual sense of the word. I was very moved by it, and happy that a play on this controversial subject was even written and enjoyed high popularity in Poland. I was hopeful that Poland (my home before coming to the United States) was ready to account and atone for its devastating role in the Holocaust, much as Germany did. The present has proved me wrong. The new government of Poland is only interested in publicizing the role of their so-called "righteous," while whitewashing the deeds of the rest of the population.

As one of the characters in the play says, "you can never bury the truth." I am glad that Słobodzianek wrote the play to expose the truth about the tragic events of one small class in one small town.

My Parents

THE YEAR IS 1958.

The photo portrays my mother and father looking content with life, standing on the side of the road. He is embracing her lovingly, as he will for the rest of his life. She is his rock, his friend, the person who takes care of the practical side of his life. Their personalities are different but they mesh together beautifully. My parents, brother, and I live in Wałbrzych, a medium-size city in Lower Silesia, Poland, where we settled after leaving the Soviet Gulag.

My father, a quiet, unassuming man, was always studying to improve his knowledge. He loved classical music and even performed in the movie theaters, playing the piano before the start of silent movies. He was a loving husband and father to me and my younger brother. He was highly educated in spite of not being allowed to study in Poland due to "numerus clausus" (a quota for Jewish students). For this reason he was forced to go to Lausanne, Switzerland, to obtain his medical degree.

My father was the main breadwinner in our family, a well-known physician, and a specialist in lung diseases, allowing us a relatively high standard of living. Since our hometown, Wałbrzych, had six active coal mines, he never lacked work. He also was known to have a great ability for languages, speaking many languages, even Esperanto.

Ania Drimer's parents, Mrs. Ernestine Sadowski and Dr. Adam Sadowski, circa 1958. *Courtesy of Ania Drimer*

The short, pretty blue-eyed blonde standing next to my father in the photo is my mom. Her sweet looks belie the strength of her character. She was a practical, sociable woman in charge of the good running of our household and did most of the child rearing. Her only sister was murdered in Belzec and she is greatly missed. Like my father, my mother was also known for her successes in education. I will always be proud that she was a recipient of a law degree from the prestigious Jagiellonian University, the only woman that year to receive that degree. Unfortunately, she never worked in her profession in postwar Communist Poland, as it would require putting her moral and ethical principles aside.

Our small family was changed after I left Poland to come to the United States to marry Marcel. Long letters followed, words of love and longing to be together. Only after I became a mother myself, I would better understand the depth of my parents' sadness, mitigated by the news of my happiness. Fortunately, the separation would not last forever and my parents decided to join me in the US. In preparation, my father learned English all on his own. He needed an excellent knowledge of the language to be able to pass the tests necessary to practice medicine in the US. This test required listening to patients' histories that were presented in all kinds of accents. Especially difficult for him were the Southern accents. Some diseases, not known in Europe, like Rocky Mountain spotted fever, were difficult for him to diagnose. My 62-year-old father, with a strong will and hard work overcame all difficulties and passed this test. Even though he had a contract for a job in the US, the Polish Communist government would not release the family by refusing to issue them passports. It was the time of the Vietnam War raging, and the Polish government did not wish for my father to replace American doctors going to war. At this point, my mother's bravery came into play. She bribed an official in the passport office and, after a clandestine meeting at a church in Kraków, she obtained the precious passports. The danger of this mission was enormous.

But life in the US was not easy for my parents due to different lifestyles, different culture, and missing old friends. However, being together, seeing their son thrive and watching their grandson grow, compensated for the changes. My father passed a New York license exam and got a job in the Hebrew Home for the Aged. My mom helped out by taking care of small children and getting a job as an X-ray technician. They were finally able to joyfully celebrate birthdays and anniversaries and to travel together. Unfortunately, my father passed away from a heart attack when he was 73 years old. My mom continued living in New York City, enjoyed reading the *New York Times* from cover to cover, and was interested in politics, especially adoring President Clinton. She visited us often until the ripe age of 93.

My parents will always be remembered by us as intelligent, hard-working, and loving people who overcame the hardships of the Soviet Gulag and fashioned a life of decency, empathy, and built a closely knit family. I miss them every day.

Lives well lived.

Torte of Many Memories

I AM NOT GOOD AT CHANGING TIRES, ICE SKATING, OR MENDING SOCKS. What I am good at is baking, especially my signature dish, which is a walnut torte. Since I was a young girl, I was helping my mother with the torte: chopping the walnuts, watching how she mixed the eggs with sugar until they became almost white, and marveling at the egg whites when they became white and frothy and almost doubled in size. Then we would mix everything together, bake it, and after an hour, a beautiful, wonderfully smelling cake would come out from the oven. I felt a great closeness with my mother at that moment and appreciated that she introduced me to a wonderful world of baking.

My mom was a "no-nonsense" type of a cook. She provided us with good, healthy food, but her motto was: "we eat to live, not live to eat." She did like to bake, though, and the walnut torte was her favorite. It was usually baked for special occasions like birthdays, holidays, and getting together with friends. The cake was especially fitting for Passover because it did not call for flour. The connection between the holidays and the cake added to its appeal for me.

The basic torte, the recipe for which I will include below, was made with just walnuts, eggs, sugar, and a little matzo meal. For adults it included frosting made of whipping cream with coffee.

Fifty-six years ago I came to America and was a newly married, inexperienced cook. Since my English was almost nonexistent, I had to rely on my clueless, in this respect, husband. This led to many funny situations like exchanging the words "seasoning" for "shortening," which resulted in using two tablespoons of salt and pepper in a recipe for pancakes, rendering them inedible. To repair my reputation, I started baking the walnut torte.

Every time I baked it, I remembered my dear mother who finally joined me in the United States in 1968. By then I had new members of the family, good friends, and many special occasions to bake this cake. There were high school and college graduations, our birthdays, and anniversary milestones. My mom passed away 12 years ago, but I continue to bake this walnut cake to express my love, to honor her, and maintain the tradition.

WALNUT TORTE

8 large eggs, separated
6 oz. sugar
2 tbsp. orange or lemon juice
8 oz. finely chopped walnuts
3 tbsp. matzo meal or bread crumbs, not flavored

FROSTING

12 oz. heavy whipping cream
3 tbsp. instant coffee
3 tbsp. sugar

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 325 degrees.
2. Use a 9-inch springform pan that has been well greased and lightly dusted with matzo meal or bread crumbs.
3. In a large bowl, beat egg yolks, adding sugar and juice until almost white.
4. In a second bowl, combine nuts and matzo meal. Add to egg yolk mixture.
5. Beat egg whites until stiff and shiny.
6. Gently fold egg whites into the egg and nut mixture.
7. Pour the batter into a springform pan.
8. Bake for about 50 minutes to an hour, or until an inserted toothpick comes out dry.
9. Cool on a rack.
10. Remove sides of the form, cut horizontally, and fill with half of the frosting made by whipping the cream with coffee and sugar.
11. Frost the top of the cake, decorate with whole walnuts.

Serves 12

ENJOY!

Vacation and Politics

ONE OF MY MORE MEMORABLE VACATIONS WAS IN BETHANY BEACH, Delaware. Bethany Beach, you ask? Not hiking in the Swiss Alps, swimming in the Pacific Ocean in Hawaii, not tasting red wine in Provence, all of which I experienced.

It was September 1978. Every year at this time we spent the long weekend after Labor Day in Bethany Beach in the company of two other couples. These were not casual friends: one couple included my best friend and her husband whom we brought from Poland to the United States, and the other, Russian immigrants, whom we helped in many ways to adjust to living in America. Together we rented an apartment overlooking the ocean and spent time enjoying, listening, and singing along to Polish, Russian, and Yiddish songs, as well as listening to classical music.

I would get up early and, in the stillness of the morning, watch the sun paint the ocean silver. During the day I lounged on the beach and swam in the ocean, warm after the summer season. What a difference from the cold Baltic sea where I learned how to swim!

In the evening, warmed by the sun, face glowing with heat, health, and pleasure, I gathered with our friends for some wine and appetizers. Life was good! Often we would go to have crabs in a restaurant on the boardwalk. There, on the table covered with newspapers, cooled by the breaths from the ocean, we consumed large plates of crabs. Eating crabs is not for the fainthearted. There is little reward for a big effort, but it tastes great, especially with a glass of ice cold beer.

Even in this relaxed atmosphere, feeling detached from the cares of the world, as a news junkie, I had to have a dose of the daily news, which, at the time, was very exciting. The reason for all the excitement was a meeting at Camp David arranged by President Jimmy Carter between two long-time adversaries: Anwar Sadat, president of Egypt, and Menachem Begin, prime minister of Israel. As a result of this meeting and talks, a historic agreement was finally signed at the White House on September 17, 1978.

After 30 years of hate and war, it formalized the framework for peace in the Middle East by recognizing Israel's right to exist, allowing Israel to take control of the Sinai, and establishing the right of the Palestinians to statehood. There was the sincere handshake of all three parties. Watching this handshake was emotional to all of us because we cared deeply about the existence and future of Israel, and at that moment, a hopeful and even euphoric atmosphere prevailed. I left Bethany Beach right after the speeches ended, very content with our stay: the strengthening of our friendship, the relaxation for body and mind, and finally the hope for the Israeli people and our family who lives there.

"Concert of Death," a painting by Bringing the Lessons Home Ambassadors Alexandra C., Eric C., Cristopher C., Nautica G., Ashton J., Le'ah M., Brittney M., and Lloyd W. portraying an episode from Holocaust survivor and Museum volunteer Marcel Drimer's personal Holocaust experience. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum*

The Painting of a Holocaust Experience

THE PHOTO I'LL DESCRIBE IS OF A PAINTING, realistically depicting a moment in my husband, Marcel's, Holocaust experience. It was painted by the Bringing the Lessons Home ambassadors, a group of Washington, DC, students studying the Holocaust and expressing what they learn through art.

At first glance, we see a large area painted in brown and orange smudges, resembling a wheat field. It has the feel of a post-impressionist painting, slightly reminiscent of Van Gogh. In contrast to Van Gogh's golden wheat fields projecting light and joy, these fields look much darker and jarring. This field comprises a big part of the painting, symbolizing its importance. In this field, where many Jews hid on a quiet, warm August afternoon, near dusk, an *Aktion* took place, which shattered the silence. The Nazi shots were followed by begging for mercy, screams of pain, and prayers for mercy. It was a concert of death. Finally, after a few hours, the Aktion ended, and Marcel, his mother, and sister who heard the massacre were able to leave the field.

Eric C., Ashton J., Le'ah M., Alexandra C., Ania Drimer, Nautica G., Marcel Drimer, Brittney M., and Christopher C. during the Bringing the Lessons Home Art and Memory summer program, 2011. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum*

We see them in the painting, standing ready to cross the narrow pass on which stands, barely visible, a Nazi soldier with a dog. The faces of the people are blank, inscrutable. We can only imagine their fear. Mother is wearing a bright yellow coat with orange piping and a kerchief on her head. She is keeping her children very close to her body, finding safety in that stance. Marcel is wearing dark colored shorts and suspenders, the usual boy's attire of the time. His blond sister is wearing a blue dress.

Standing nearby, surrounded by green, is Jancia's house, the home of Marcel's dear nanny. It is small, simple, and boxy. It has a red roof. This is where the family went after the horrific experience in the wheat field and surviving the very scary incident with the German soldier who walked away without hurting them. The house symbolizes safety.

The sky is dark blue, foreboding, and menacing, similar to Van Gogh's sky in the famous painting "Wheatfield with Crows." It contrasts with the orange brown field of wheat, while the red path is intensified by the green band of grass. This painting is, of course, not a masterpiece, but a faithful rendition of a very dramatic time when Marcel's and his family's lives were in great danger.

My Sister Irena

Marcel Drimer

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

MY SISTER, IRENA, WAS BORN ON THE 4TH OF JULY 1936. As a child she was blond and blue-eyed. Her nickname is Mila, which in Polish means nice. Mila and I had an idyllic childhood, playing together at the grounds of the lumber factory where my father worked.

In August of 1942 Mila and I, and our parents, lived in an apartment in Drohobycz. After a pogrom, many relatives came to live with us. Because of this overcrowding, my nanny, named Jancia, took me to her house. Mila missed me and mother agreed to take her to Jancia's house to join me. While we were there, a pogrom started. Jancia's husband thought that our presence there was too dangerous and asked us to hide in the neighboring wheat fields. We left the house and lay down on the wet ground.

We heard Germans shouting and people praying for mercy and crying. As an adult, Mila called that the "concert of death."

When the pogrom ended, we started back to Jancia's house. While crossing the country road, a German soldier with a dog came toward us. He looked at us but kept going. The blond hair and blue eyes of my mother and Mila saved us.

When we returned to our apartment the door was open and all the relatives were gone. They were taken to Belzec killing center and murdered there. It seems that Mila's desire to be with me saved our lives.

After the liquidation of the ghetto, Father decided that Mila and my mother would have the best chance of survival by hiding because of their "Aryan" looks. He contacted Mrs. Sawinska, who knew our family, and she agreed to hide Mila and my mother. As a circumcised boy, I was supposed to stay with my father. Luckily, after hearing my pleas and cries, she decided to take me in as well, and we spent the rest of the time at the Sawinskis' farm.

Marcel playing with his sister, Irena (Mila), on the grounds of the lumber mill, where his father was an accountant.
US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Marcel and Ania Drimer

Our stay at the farm was dangerous, and the conditions were terrible, especially the lack of food. When Mila looked outside from the attic seeing chickens she said: "How I would like to be a chicken to be able to run freely." She was often bleeding from her nose, and at such times we were worried if she was going to survive and where we would bury her.

The Sawinskis saved our family and nine other Jews and were recognized as "Righteous Among the Nations."

After the war our family moved to Wałbrzych, Lower Silesia, in Poland, and after graduating with honors from the local high school, Mila followed me to the Wrocław Polytechnic. As one of a few women, she graduated with a master's degree in civil engineering.

After marrying a fellow student, a specialist in entomology, Mila emigrated to Israel, where they both had very successful careers. They have two children and six grandchildren who are benefitting from Mila's wisdom. Now retired, Mila spends a lot of time educating young Israelis about the Holocaust, based on her experiences. She's a strong, caring woman, beloved by all who know her. Even though we live in different countries we keep in touch every week by Zoom. I love and respect her very much.

Marcel's home in Wałbrzych, Poland, taken in 2012. *Courtesy of Marcel Drimer*

My Street

AFTER THE WAR, COMING FROM DROHOBYCZ IN DECEMBER 1945, I lived on Fredry 18 Street in Wałbrzych, Poland.

Aleksander Fredro had been a Polish playwright. At that time, the street was located between Chopin Place and Gen. Świerczewski Street. General Świerczewski was a Pole who had served in the Red Army in charge of the attack on Poland in September 1939. The street was quiet and quite steep. There was a movie theater very close by, and my high school was within walking distance. The house we lived in was a three-story apartment house. We lived on the first floor in a two-bedroom apartment.

People living on my street, like my family, had come mostly from the territories that became Ukraine. In the beginning, living there was a bit like a "wild west." My father slept with a gun under his pillow but did not have to use it. Some people who were taken to the Russian Army in 1941 came back with Russian wives. First, we received a very nice apartment on Chopin Place, but it was given to a Russian officer with a family, who had priority, so we had to move. Soon, after the

war, my father opened a small grocery store on Swierczewski Street. He bought food from farmers, and Mother baked bread at four o'clock in the morning to sell every day. Cooperatives came and private businesses were liquidated, so this small store had to close.

The people who lived on my street were very nice. One lady, the director of a movie house, was Jewish and needed kosher food. Since there was one kosher store in Wrocław where I was studying at the Polytechnic, I was able to bring it to her. The lady offered me tickets to any movie for free. A dentist living on my street asked me to help prepare her daughter for entrance exams to the university by tutoring her in math and physics, and she bartered her services by putting a "bridge" in my mouth. At another neighbor's house I met Ania, whom I charmed by giving scooter rides and eventually married. We live happily ever after.

After a few years, my father brought one of the Sawinskis' sons, Edward, from Drohobycz to Wałbrzych and gave him a job in a meat factory because he felt so thankful to his family for having saved our family. Since Edward needed a place to live, my uncle gave him his apartment and moved into our apartment with his big dog. It was very crowded until my uncle left to live in Wrocław.

I left for the United States in 1961, and my parents and sister went to Israel in 1963. They left Fredry 18 to Edward Sawinski, who needed a bigger place. I was happy to live in just one place for such a long time, without hiding and without fear.

Racism

Albert Garih

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

I WAS AFFECTED BY RACISM FROM MY BIRTH. When I was two years old, my native France was invaded by her neighbor, Germany, who immediately started to implement anti-Jewish laws that affected me before I was old enough to know it. First, we were expelled from our home, which was the janitor's house of the garment factory where my father worked as an accountant. We had to find an apartment overnight, in the middle of the war and in the midst of a terrible housing crisis. I was four years old.

That same year, due to the anti-Jewish laws adopted by the collaborationist government of Pierre Laval, the French police started rounding up Jews to deport them to the East. We had no idea for what reason, and my parents were scared about what would happen to those deported. They decided to send us to a farm, not far from Paris, arguing that we would be better fed than in Paris where everything was rationed or simply not available, but more importantly, they were afraid of us being deported.

We spent the winter of 1942–43 on that farm in Thoiry. My parents had not told the ladies who were tending the farm that we were Jewish, but one day, in the conversation with these ladies, the four-year-old boy I was disclosed this secret, and they sent us right back home. That was my first brush with antisemitism: we were persona non grata, pariahs to these people. When we came back home, my father took me aside and told me *never, NEVER,* to say that we were Jewish again. That was my first lesson on antisemitism.

Later, after the war, when things went back to normal, I would go to public school, where I witnessed kids using antisemitic slurs. I was still traumatized by my experience of two years earlier and still afraid to say that I was Jewish. When I was 11, I was hospitalized for an appendectomy, in a hospital where the nurses were nuns. The nun who was taking care of me was very nice, but always questioned me about whether I was studying the catechism to prepare for my First Communion and I would lie to her, because I was still afraid, or ashamed, to tell her that

I was Jewish. It took me a few more years, until I was 15 or 16, to come out openly and talk back when I would hear some insults made toward the Jews. And since then, I have never stopped being vocal about my Jewishness.

This attitude was not only about Jews. In the mid-'50s, when we were in the middle of the Algerian war in France, the country was divided, split between supporters of an independent Algeria and those who wanted Algeria to remain French. I could not stand hearing the anti-Muslim slurs used against Algerians. When I was in college, I got a job as an assistant teacher in a secondary school and, there again, people were divided. Of course, I was with the group who were in favor of an independent Algeria and the other group, mostly Corsicans, wanted to keep Algeria French, against the will of the majority of the Algerian population who wanted their independence. Supporters of a French Algeria planted bombs everywhere, including one in the school where I was working. Thankfully, the bomb exploded at night and no one was hurt.

In the '60s in France, I followed closely the unrest in the United States, and of course, I was once again on the side of the people who were fighting for justice and equality for Black people. In 1965, the MRAP (*Mouvement contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et pour la paix*), which supported that fight, sponsored a gala where the guest of honor was none other than Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., with a concert by Harry Belafonte, of whom I already was a big fan. Of course, I went to that gala, and it remains to this day one of the great moments of my life. Unfortunately, three years later, Dr. King was assassinated, which came as a shock, like the death of John F. Kennedy in 1963, and Bobby Kennedy in 1968, the same year as King.

At that time, I was already looking at possibilities to get a job overseas, and my first job as an expatriate was in Cameroon in 1969, where I also experienced racism, or more precisely resentment against the French. We were resented as the new generation of colonizers, although I was sent there under the French technical assistance to coach some junior Cameroonian translators at the Office of the President. The country had become bilingual with its union with a former province of Anglophone Nigeria which had separated from that country in the early '60s. I couldn't help feeling the hostility of the local population. However, this was for me an enriching experience, and for four years, with my wife and my eldest daughter, Judith, who was only three months old when we emigrated, we lived in a totally different setting. We had some advantages, an easier life, but also with difficulties in adjusting to a population that was more resentful than appreciative of our presence there. Anyhow, that experience lasted four years for which I am grateful, because it broadened my vision of the world.

From there, in 1973, we moved once again, not back to France, but this time to Montreal, Canada, where I got a job with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), a UN agency. In

Canada, we witnessed some antisemitism from the locals, but we also made some good friends, particularly our neighbors who didn't know much about Jews, except what they had heard from the general French Canadian population, but soon discovered we were "not so bad" as we looked in their imagination. We stayed three years in Canada, and that is where our two younger daughters were born. I was already looking for a position at the World Bank. We have very fond memories of the country, where we keep going back to visit our daughter Judith, who married a Canadian and lives there.

After three years in Montreal, we moved again, this time to the States, where we have been living for the past 45 years, after I was offered the job I was looking for at the World Bank. Here, we also have witnessed many cases of racist incidents, including the murder of Stephen Tyrone Johns, a guard at the Museum, by James von Brunn, a white supremacist, Holocaust denier, and neo-Nazi, in 2009, and the killing of Heather Heyer by James Alex Fields, in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017. These are only two of the hate crimes that were committed in recent years, but there are many more, and the list would be too long for me to recall here. I mention them here only to illustrate my point.

France, Cameroon, Canada, and the United States: these are the countries where I lived and witnessed, at various degrees, racism.

My First Theatrical Experience

WHEN I WAS 11 YEARS OLD, MY SISTERS TOOK ME TO THE COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE to see *Cyrano de Bergerac.* It was the first time I went to a theater, and I had no idea what the play was about. I was immediately sold on the theater and on Cyrano, a man with a long nose, not handsome, not so particular about how he dressed, but, as he says to this vain interlocutor who has the nerve to provoke him by telling him that he has a long nose, "Me, it is morally that I have my elegance." The whole play is about how he is morally elegant, almost heroic when Roxane, his cousin, the lady with whom he is so deeply in love, tells him that she is in love with someone else. Instead of behaving like a jealous, dismissed lover, he pairs with his rival and, together, they work towards making Roxane fall in love with "their" eloquence. That night at the theater, Cyrano became my hero, a role model I would try to emulate all my life, trying to make the best of a disillusion.

One or two years later, at a Boy Scout summer camp, I staged the scene of the duel with another guy and, of course, I was Cyrano. This character has followed me my whole life as a role model. I

have seen the play countless times, even at the Kennedy Center with Derek Jacobi in the role of Cyrano, and of course, the movie with José Ferrer, of which I have a cassette. I also have the book that I take out of my bookcase every once in a while.

That was my first theatrical experience, and to this day, although I have seen some of the greatest actors on stage—Sir Laurence Olivier in *Rhinoceros* by Ionesco, Sir Alec Guinness as Lawrence of Arabia a couple of years before the movie came out, and others including the duo of Burton and Taylor at the Kennedy Center, that first performance of *Cyrano* at the Comédie-Française remains unmatched for me.

Things I Should Not Have Done

I GUESS WE ALL HAVE THINGS WE WOULD RATHER HAVE DONE OR NOT DONE, said or not said, things we are proud of or not so proud of in our lives. I am going to tell about a time I am not too proud of. This happened when I was 13 or 14 years old. I hope that by telling about it, I will clear my conscience once and for all of that stain that still haunts me almost 70 years later.

I was in a Boy Scout group, and it was winter. It had been snowing, and logically, we were playing with snowballs. We were in the street, and a car came by. We did not notice that it was a police car so, as mischievous as we were, we started throwing snowballs at it. My snowball landed right on top of the hood of the car which braked suddenly, and the police officers came out running after us. I was able to escape their grip, but another boy could not. Obviously, they were after the one who had thrown that snowball at their car. But they caught the boy and they took him to the police station. I didn't hear anything about it, until the next week, when we got together again, I noticed that the boy who had been caught was missing. We figured out that he had been expelled from our Boy Scout pack, but I was ashamed and afraid and kept my mouth shut.

To this day, I am not proud of my cowardice. I could have inquired about that boy and revealed I was the one who had thrown that snowball at the police car, but I didn't. Perhaps, he would have been reinstated into our group, but I stayed silent, and he was not. Seventy years later, I am still thinking of that act and, although it didn't have grave consequences, except that the boy had been expelled from our group, I am still not too proud of my behavior in that situation.

Mireille

IT WAS IN THE SPRING OF 1944 during the time after my father had been taken to a slave labor camp, where he was assigned to building the Atlantic Wall to stop the Allies' invasion. My mother, my sisters, and I were staying with the Galop family who had offered to take us into hiding so we wouldn't be arrested and deported by the Gestapo, the French police, or the French militia. Monsieur Galop, who was a very talented builder—his job was to build sets for the movie studios—had erected a small shelter in their yard for our protection against the bombardments. I don't think that flimsy construction would have saved us if a bomb had fallen in their yard, but it gave us comfort in case of danger.

I have a fond memory of that shelter where we would go whenever the sirens blasted to announce a raid. Mireille, the Galop's younger daughter, was only three or four years old, and she had her way of cutting the tension whenever we were in the shelter, terrified by the explosions. One night, as we were sitting in the shelter and the bombs were falling nearby, she said in the most natural way, "Tomorrow, if I find a bomb in the yard, I'll pick it up." That's all it took to relax the tense atmosphere, and we all burst out laughing. There's nothing like a child to turn a dramatic situation into a laughing moment!

What Makes a Good Relationship

MY WIFE AND I HAVE BEEN LIVING TOGETHER FOR MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY, 54 years to be precise. I would not say that the sky has always been blue, or without clouds, or we have always been living in perfect harmony, but we are still together after all these years, and that is some accomplishment.

How did we do this? Let's see. First, she has her own beliefs and I have mine, but as much as I try not to stand against hers, she does not try to impose hers on me. We have essentially the same values, and we don't trample each other's personal principles; in fact, we share them, even with some differences. We respect each other, and we love each other. It's not like the first day, but now is with wisdom. We know each other better, more deeply than ever before, and we understand and support each other. She shows her concern about my health and is the one who pushes me to go to the doctor when I don't feel the urge to do so. Now when I am sometimes neglectful about my health obligations, she makes sure that I don't forget my doctor's appointments.

About our three daughters, we also have had our disagreements, but since my wife and I share the same values, sometimes we are united against them, about ideas or political opinions. We feel the clash of two generations. In my own life, having been through what I experienced, sometimes I feel misunderstood by my children about my positions on some issues. I don't have that problem with my wife. We stand together, and that helps.

Today, with our daughters, 11 grandchildren, and even one great-grandchild, we have been able to share our lives together all these years.

Home

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.

THE PLACES I AM LONGING TO SEE AGAIN. There is a different longing for a place you know—to be able to visit any time you decide to. The longing is even greater when you know for sure you're not to see that place again. The reason is the danger of flying while having three stents in my heart with instructions not to get on a plane again.

I would not allow myself to let my fantasy roam and/or dream to revisit … . What I should do is remember and write about it, without the longing. The question is, how?

I would like to see the city Haifa again, where I spent more than 40 years. The first time I saw Haifa was from a boat coming from Marseille. It was breathtaking!

Then the city Tel Aviv, where I spent 12 years, became my city in every way. I adopted it and it adopted me! I have mostly good memories. I was always on the move. Every minute not spent out of the house was a wasted minute. There was so much to see, to attend, and to do! Mostly every place was within walking distance: the center of the city, the seashore, the parks, the theater.

Most of all, I liked the time spent with my grandchildren, Moran and Oren. I was there because of them, for them. They visited a lot; we did a lot. All the years I had spent in Haifa, I saw them only for short periods. Now at last we could spend endless time together! And we did.

Haifa is very different. It has a lot of things that Tel Aviv does not. It has a view that no other city has. That view is breathtaking from everywhere you look at it. The higher you climb, the more you see of the sea and of the city beneath: the bay and the opposite shore and the suburbs.

Downtown you can smell fresh pita bread, fish, and herbs. You sense the taste of the Middle East.

The exciting sounds are in Tel Aviv—the noise of a big city. Loud voices in different languages. Plus cars and buses. The whole day people keep on yelling: "Taxi!"

When you see almost everyone carrying at least three newspapers under one arm, a huge watermelon under the other one, and sunflower seeds in their hand, you know for sure that it is Friday!

There is a saying in Israel: "In Haifa you work, in Jerusalem you study, and in Tel Aviv you have fun!"

Well, these are facts. Not longing.

Daydreaming in the Forest

HAVING BEEN ON LONG TRIPS IN THE FORESTS MYSELF, taking in the sights, the smells, the breeze, experiencing the entire picture as a whole, I could dwell on it for quite a while.

Although it is not unique, you feel that it is yours for the moment. At a short distance it would be dark, I could hardly make out and see the objects and then suddenly after a few steps, everything was quite light and bright. I sense the nests with eggs, I sense the preparations, comings and goings, and wish to stay on and become a part of it.

To stay the night … to lie on my back, watch the stars, listen to the NIGHT, differentiate among the sounds of birds, bugs, and bigger animals. To enjoy the fresh cool air …

The sunset and sunrise play a big part in being in the forest during the night. The early morning hours are the most interesting: everything comes to life, all the animals are awake moving or flying around. They all seem to have a plan. So do I. Time to leave the abstract world, time to get back to reality.

What I meant by "getting back to reality" was being on a death march, miserable, and returning to the present. Realizing the situation mentally and physically. Being aware of the urgency to move and think at the same time, to do the right thing for that moment. No daydreaming anymore. Be in the present and maybe save my life by cooperating.

Sisterhood

I HAVE A SISTER, 14 MONTHS YOUNGER THAN ME, NAMED ZSUZSI. Her name was changed to Shosha in Israel. She was a beautiful, sweet little girl loved by everyone. Our relationship changed when we got older and she realized that she did not have to do everything I asked her to. As the older sister, it seemed to me natural that whatever I was asked to do I should forward it to her. She used to comply in order to please me, but this came to an end when she realized that all those requests were my jobs and my responsibilities.

As we got even older she developed her own opinions and her own likes that were very different from mine. Because logic and a quiet argument had no effect on me, she threw books, chairs, and different objects in my direction. There were lots of arguments about various unimportant things, all the time.

On our last normal day, the big argument was about me being late for school. We were supposed to walk together to school, so if I was not ready, she would be late too. Actually, that was our very last argument. From the next day on, everything changed. It was the 18th of March, 1944.

The next day became the most fateful day in our lives. Our beloved father died after a long illness. That same day, Nazi Germany occupied Hungary. Never, ever was anything the same. New words and expressions we had never heard before told it all: occupation, yellow star, ghetto, brick factory, cattle wagons, death camp, selections, bunks, forced labor, tattoo, aluminum spare parts, night work, death march … . All that year was dominated with love, concern, and the ability to sacrifice for each other, clinging together at all possible times, watching out, defending … being there, trying to make it easier for the others, more deep love again … not letting each other out of our sight even for a minute through all that took place, with our mother as the motivation.

After returning to our former home, trying to pick up the pieces, we had a bond, a mutual responsibility, a deep concern that continues today. Our misunderstandings were dealt with in a civilized way, solved and carried out. We had a lot of respect and enough love left for a lifetime. We were so thankful just to have each other.

In Memoriam: Harry Markowicz 1937–2020

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.

EVEN IF ENGLISH WERE MY MOTHER TONGUE, I would not be able to express the sadness I felt when I got the news that Harry Markowicz is not with us anymore. I knew that his health was deteriorating, I knew about his time in home hospice care in the last few weeks, but the news was still devastating.

I identify people in my life as one who belongs to one or another group depending on what role they play. Family is self explanatory. Friends are those I maintain regular two-way communications, emphasis on "regular" and "two-way." Maybe it's my age, maybe it's the culture I spent the first half of my life in, but I always cringe when someone is bragging about their 1,000+ Facebook "friends." I myself have 1,000+ acquaintances: the people I have met in the course of my 79 years on this planet. Finally, I have the people in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum survivor volunteer group who are dear to me for reasons words cannot describe. If you read these musings of mine, I hope you know where you belong too.

Although my relationship with the members in our survivor group is different from one person to the next, I love each of them without reservation. They are all special to me for one reason or another, and there is not one reason that is better than the other. Harry is special for reasons that tell as much about him as they do about me. I always admired his mild manner. Even when he disagreed with someone, he framed it in a way that the person never felt attacked or brought down. The soft tone of his voice was so soothing, I often wondered how he would sound when he was angry. Probably he had never been.

His eloquence when he talked and that of his writings made him unique and loved by many. During Echoes classes he gave the most thoughtful comments and suggestions. His encouraging words helped me to overcome my initial reluctance to attend the class and later even submit my own writings. We had been a kind of mutual admiration society when it came to our essays, but his writings were far superior to mine. Not to mention that I bet Arlene, his wife, did not have to correct his grammar and typos like mine does. I love Harry's writings and, in my last email to him, I encouraged him to submit something even if he cannot personally/virtually attend the class.

My respect for Harry only grew when I learned that he was a professor of English at Gallaudet University. I have been struggling with English as a second language and he mastered it as his third one, all the way to being a professor of it. This is just mind-boggling for me, knowing that he also became a world-renowned expert in American and French sign language. One of my most cherished memories of Harry is when he approached me with trepidation to practice the Kaddish with him. Last year he was asked to recite the traditional Jewish mourner's prayer at the Holocaust commemoration at the Museum. I guess he asked me because the year before I said the Kaddish in the Capitol. Rabbi or cantor I am not, but I was flattered by his trust. He did it perfectly on the first try!

The special connection I felt with Harry might have been the result of what some people jokingly said: that Harry was my long-lost twin brother. Maybe it was the hair, or the beard, maybe the glasses, it does not matter. I certainly will miss him like the brother I never had.

I first experienced Harry's gentle spirit when, early on, I kept calling him Henry and he corrected me almost whispering "Harry." It was hardly audible, so I kept calling him Henry for a while because it was more French-sounding and relevant to his years hiding in war-torn Bruxelles. This came to a full circle when I read one of his best essays submitted to the survivors' *Echoes of Memory* class. Actually I had the privilege of hearing him read the piece, titled "The War Is Over (Or Is It Ever?)," in which he wrote, "As a child between the ages of five and seven, I had a secret identity; my survival depended on passing for someone else. Was my name Harry or Henry?" Maybe this was the special connection between us, not that we looked alike.

If you have never met Harry Markowicz, it is too late now. But if you really want to understand who he was, watch his *First Person* interviews on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website and read this paragraph from his essay.

"So many difficult decisions for a boy my age about what to do or not to do, what to say or not to say, without knowing the consequences of these choices except that the wrong choice could lead to some unimaginable punishment for all those who were closest to me. The safest thing was to do or say nothing. More than 70 years later, I can still hear a voice whispering in my head:

'Keep your eyes down; don't attract attention.'

Yes, the war was over; however, inside I was still that child in hiding."

May Harry's memory forever be a blessing and an inspiration for his family, his friends, and for everyone who knew him, and for all who will get to know him through the powerful words that he left behind.

What I Learned from My Father

FATHER'S DAY IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER and I am looking forward to celebrating it. Being the father of six daughters and the grandfather of four fills me with joy, not to mention the expectations of surprise presents. Presents or no presents, the love of children and grandchildren is the best thing that any papa anywhere can get. And I get a lot. Unfortunately my father never had a chance to receive the same love from me. He died during the Holocaust when I, his only child, was not even two years old.

The precious little I know about my father is from my mom's wartime diary and her reminiscences of him, as well as my father's diary of a ski trip to Austria, the very few pictures that survived World War II and, most importantly, the postcards he sent from the Hungarian labor battalion where he perished as a Jewish slave laborer. These cards are not only the records of all the suffering my father had to endure during the Holocaust, but they are also a living testimony of how much he loved his family.

If my father could see our family today, he would be very proud to see how we engage together in outdoor activities. My father never had a chance to teach me to ski or take me kayaking on the Danube. His love for anything outdoors was handed down to me by the pictures of him and my mom at a ski resort, or paddling on the river, or the one showing them in the company of friends in front of a camping tent. These pictures are not only inspirational for me, but also for my children. My oldest daughter was not even three when she was on her skis. My second oldest was only a few weeks old when we took her for a short canoe trip on the C&O Canal on a warm, sunny, late February weekend. Not everyone agreed with that decision. As my girls grew up, we frequently went camping, and all of my daughters are very good skiers. I occasionally go cycling with one or more of them, and I hope that my grandchildren will join us before I have to give it up. We just started a new family tradition as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Every Sunday our family goes on a three- or four-mile hike in a close-by park.

If I can claim only one thing as my paternal legacy, it is my father's love for his parents, my mom, and me. I have tried to pass it on to my family and only time will tell how well I have succeeded. I believe we are a tight-knit bunch; we wear our hearts on our sleeves, and we never fail to say goodbye without a "luv ya!" And we mean it! My girls are like the three musketeers; "one for all, all for one." We lost our Juli at a very early age, but she is always included in the "all."

It might be presumptuous, but I firmly believe that 50 years from now, when my children have spent all of our 401k retirement leftovers and sold the house they grew up in, they will still fondly remember the family love that helped them through even the toughest of times.

All I Really Need to Know I Learned from My Mother

SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES WERE THE SECOND-MOST COMMON FAMILY STRUCTURE in 2016 in the US, with just over 20 million children living with a single mother or father. Today the term "single-parent families" has a negative connotation, implying that one parent abandoned the family. The sad truth is that the missing parents are mostly the fathers who abandoned the mother of their children.

I was raised by a single mother. So were thousands of Jewish children whose fathers were taken to the Hungarian forced labor battalions between 1940 and 1945. Most of those fathers never returned. My father never abandoned us; he was taken away from us and perished during the Holocaust.

According to psychologists, sociologists, and other experts, there are myriad disadvantages to growing up without a father, especially when you are a boy. At age 79, do I show any of the adverse effects of a boy growing up without a father? You have to ask my family and friends. The one thing I do know is that everything I am today is the result of my mother's self-sacrificial love, determination, and compassion. Paraphrasing the title of a popular book, all I really need to know I learned, not in kindergarten, but from my mother.

The list of values we learn from our parents is endless. Can we pick only one or a few that are more important than others? I certainly cannot value integrity over loyalty, kindness over sincerity, patience over being adventurous. I have seen all these traits in my mother, and more, but I think the one I used most and with the best results is perseverance. She never gave up. This is the one trait I cherish from her, and it helped me through the most difficult times of my life. I am here today because my mother was determined to survive the horrors of the Holocaust, the miserable conditions during the years following World War II, and the depravity of the Communist system in Hungary. During her 90 years she was robbed of the joy of experiencing the love of her family members and her best friend, lover, and husband, Arpad. In spite of all of her losses, she not only persevered, but had the satisfaction of seeing her son succeed and experienced the joy of her six grandchildren.

How did she teach me the virtue of perseverance? It was definitely not by lecturing, admonitions, or even through allegorical fairy tales. It was by her conducting her life with dignity. When she could not get food in Budapest after we were liberated from the ghetto, she went to the countryside and bartered her jewelry for food. When she lost her small millinery business, she worked two shifts as a seamstress for a co-op, for a meager salary, just to make sure that we would have a roof over our heads, clothes to wear, and food on our table. When I started school and had an opportunity to meet with classmates who were better off, I never complained because I didn't remember her ever complaining about her circumstances. When I was twice rejected from college admission because my parents were not part of the so-called "preferred classes" (blue collar, peasant, Communists), she was disappointed but did not dwell on it. She advised me to go to vocational school and try it again as a blue collar applicant. It worked! When I defected to the US, my mother was very disappointed and she might even have felt betrayed. But I only heard words of encouragement from her and that everything would work out for the better. She was right. Again.

I would love to know how many of my mother's character traits I passed on to my children and what they would pick as the most important ones I taught them. I know children do not always listen to their parents, but I hope one day they would ask for my advice for what they should value in order to have a successful life. I am ready with the answer. I was just reminded today by the 101-year-old Ben Ferencz who is the last living prosecutor of Nazis at the Nuremberg Trials. When he was asked during a Q&A session what advice he would give to the young people today he actually gave three: "Never give up, never give up, never give up!" His life story is the living example that it works.

I Have Hope

IF YOU TURN ON THE TV TODAY, if you look at the headlines in the newspapers, or visit your favorite media on the internet, you will find nothing but bad news. From the death toll of the COVID-19 virus to the riots in major US cities, from the rising antisemitism to the blatant racism, it could drive anyone to depression and even desperation.

For me though, one of the most disturbing trends in the US is highlighted by a new Cato Institute national survey that finds that self-censorship is on the rise. Nearly two-thirds—62%—of Americans say the political climate these days prevents them from saying things they believe because others might take offense.

Many times I find myself in a very delicate place within the current "cancel culture," and I myself resigned to self-censorship a few times. I learned to keep my mouth shut while living in then-Communist Hungary, and hoped that I would never have to do it again when I defected 40 years ago.

As a child survivor of the Holocaust, and one who lived half of my life under Communist dictatorship, I have seen and experienced it all. When I defected to the US, I chose freedom and democracy over oppression and tyranny. I opted for freedom of speech over censorship. Here I am 40 years later and the past is haunting me. Nevertheless, in spite of the never-before-seen division and seemingly irreconcilable animosity among various groups, I still believe in our country's motto: "E pluribus unum," Latin for "out of many, one."

I believe that common sense will prevail over hatred. I trust that our Democratic institutions will not only survive but flourish. We are not a perfect country but we came out from the Great Depression and World War II and created one of the most prosperous societies ever. We overcame slavery and Jim Crow, though not all racism. We were not the first to send man to space but we landed on the moon first and still have an unparalleled space program. We fought polio and AIDS, and we will conquer COVID-19, too.

One United States Holocaust Memorial Museum visitor recognized that, out of the ashes of the Holocaust, the Jewish people emerged just as the phoenix in ancient Greek mythology. He came to the conclusion that our country has a hopeful future. We also can be better, stronger, and healthier than ever. After his visit to the Museum, he posted this on his Facebook page:

> What we do matters. And we do have the ability to bring people joy, to bring a little light into this ever darkening world. We are not insignificant, we are great. We are still a great country. It is not too late for us. We can turn the tide. We can correct our mistakes.

From this visitor's Facebook post to everybody's ears!

Requiem for Hugging?

WE ARE IN THE FOURTH MONTH OF THE COVID-19 QUARANTINE and government-imposed restrictions. Of all the safety-related recommendations, the hardest to follow for me is the social distancing in general, and the rule of no hugging and kissing.

I come from a long line of huggers, and my children inherited my hugging gene, if there is one. From day one they were cuddled, hugged, and kissed from the moment they woke up until they went to sleep in the evening. It has changed slightly only in frequency and intensity as they grew older but it never stopped, not even now. The reason I think that it is in their DNA is that even during their teenage years they did not frown when I hugged them. Those of you who have daughters know what I am talking about, and those of you who don't, you would not understand even if I tried to explain it.

Behavioral scientists and sociologists now predict that all forms of social contact will fundamentally change after our life returns to normal, if ever. According to some of them, hugging and kissing indiscriminately will be the first to go away. I dearly hope that they will be proven wrong. The centuries-old European and Middle Eastern customs of hugging and kissing when you meet or depart from your loved ones has survived wars, plagues, famine, and the turbulent history of the regions. This custom has not been restricted to family members or close acquaintances only. In many cultures it is practiced when one meets someone for the first time. Even heads of states sometimes smooched when they came together to negotiate.

If you believe in all the research done in many countries, the health benefits of hugging are endless. Hugging a loved one not only helps you bond with them, it also lowers your blood pressure, improves your memory, softens your personality, and makes you become more empathetic over time. Practicing hugging also can reduce stress and lower your risk of anxiety, depression, and illness, and it is the oldest and finest method of building trust. According to these studies, a hug triggers the release of oxytocin, which is a powerful hormone that plays a vital role in the human body. It is also thought to be involved in broader social cognition and behavior, potentially ranging from mother-infant bonding and romantic connection to group-related attitudes and prejudice.

The first readers of my musing about hugging will be my friends at the *Echoes of Memory* class at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. We are all Holocaust survivors, we all came from Old World countries, we all experienced the love of our families and friends, even under the most horrific times in our life. Hugging is in our DNA. Until our last meeting in person

on February 20, 2020, many of us gave a few hearty hugs not only to each other, but also to our beloved teacher and mentor, Maggie, and to the Museum staff too. Since then we have lived in a virtual world and conducted our business on the internet: our computers are connected but we are not. We have our classes and meetings in cyberspace; we use special applications on our computers and smartphones so we can see and hear each other, and give virtual hugs to our friends. It is a very poor substitute for the real thing.

I am not a professional prognosticator, but I am convinced that hugging will never go out of fashion. In my humble opinion there is no replacement for the physical interaction humans desperately need. It may be first just for close family, as we in our family never stopped hugging our loved ones. Later we will include our closest trusted friends, but sooner or later hugging will take its rightful place among the socially acceptable forms of contact.

Selma Is Going to Make Aliyah

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.

AFTER MY HUSBAND SIDNEY CAME HOME FROM THE GULF WAR, we decided that we wanted to be together with our family as much as possible. This would not be an easy task, as we lived at West Point in New York, Jordana was in school in Boston, and Judith and Naomi lived in Germany, where their respective husbands were stationed. We decided to meet in Holland, during Jordana's winter break, in February of 1992.

We had a special reason for the trip: my friend Selma was going to make Aliyah (immigrate to Israel) in the spring of 1992. Selma's husband had died the year before, and she was going to do what she had dreamed of since the State of Israel was created in 1948. Selma had met our daughters, but not their husbands or our granddaughter, Miriam. We wanted her to meet our family and wish her Godspeed on her big adventure.

We arrived in Scheveningen earlier than the time we were supposed to visit her. I had visited Selma every summer in Scheveningen when I was young. The weather was brisk, but it was a sunny day, and we decided to take a walk on the beach, until it was time for our visit.

We all had rosy cheeks when we arrived. The doorbell chimed the same tune as always, and there was Selma; she was so happy to see us. It was just before her big move, but most of her living room was as it had always been. The red leather couch, the marble coffee table, her beautiful mahogany desk with all the photographs of her loved ones: they were all murdered in the camps. During my summer stays I was allowed to dust the desk and the photo frames—I always considered it such an honor.

We all found a place to sit. Miriam walked over to the table and looked at the sweets that Selma had prepared to serve us with tea. The silver basket with chocolates had Miriam's special attention. Selma saw it and said to all of us: "I will not offer you a sweet, you can take what you like." She had always done this, and I follow it now in our own house with our children and grandchildren.

Two early 19th-century Dutch snuffboxes and one (middle) *besamim* (or Havdalah) spice box, which is used during the end of Shabbat at sundown on Saturday. *Courtesy of Louise Lawrence-Israëls*

Selma served tea and spoke to everyone, in English. She was interested in everybody's story. Our family was at ease with her. Sidney and I missed Selma's husband, Jo. I told Selma that we missed him, and she answered that he was there with all of us.

Jo had collected about 5,000 books on all different subjects. Selma took the whole family to the top floor of the house, and everybody was allowed to find a book to take home. I took a book about Venice, the city that we loved so much. Selma wrote in each chosen book; "From Jo and Selma with love."

After one more cup of tea, Selma had another special treat for me. She gave me a Dutch silver snuffbox that had belonged to her mom. It was the second snuffbox that I received from her; she gave me the first one when she visited me at the hospital when Judith was born in 1967 in Amsterdam.

Just after the war, Selma had given my mom a filigree silver box that was used by her family every Saturday during the Havdalah (the end of Shabbat) ceremony. My mom gave it to me on my wedding day.

We all gave Selma big hugs and wished her a wonderful new life in the country of her dreams. We could see her wave to us until we turned the corner.

Traits

WHEN I GIVE A PRESENTATION, I almost always start by saying I am here because I was lucky.

Why was I lucky? Because there were people around us who risked their lives to help us and to save us, and because of the love and courage of my parents.

My parents were truly together, they loved each other, they respected each other, and they shared everything.

They gave their five children the same love and respect they had for one another. My parents were very strict, but fair. We all received special time and attention when needed.

In the years after the war, it was mostly my mom who spent time with us, as my dad worked hard and used to come home after we were already asleep. If we came with an important question after school, we had to wait for the answer until the next day: my parents had to discuss it first at night. Of course, we were impatient, but we knew the rules.

When we came home from school, before we started with our homework, we always sat around the table and had tea and what we called "frillies"(plain biscuits). Mom was always mending or knitting—I never saw her just sitting—as we discussed our day in school and our friends. Saying something about somebody that was not nice was not tolerated. We used to ask Mom when she would finally be finished with the pile of clothes that had to be mended. We could see the pile on a shelf and it never seemed to get smaller. Mom promised us that when there were no more clothes to be mended, she would buy us an ice cream cone. It was a special promise since ice cream was a treat that we almost never got.

We looked at the mending pile every day, and we saw no change.

We always had Wednesday afternoon off, and one day we came home for lunch and my mom gave my brother some money and told him to take my sister and me to the ice cream cart, five blocks away, where we were allowed to buy a cone. We were so happy that we danced all the way. Ice cream has never tasted the same again, that little cone with a small scoop of vanilla ice cream was the best.

I asked my mom, much later, why she had treated us as there were still so many clothes left to mend. She answered that she would never be finished as long as we all were growing. We had waited long

enough and we never asked, so we deserved the treat, she said. These acts of kindness and fairness stayed with me, and I have tried to incorporate them in my life with Sidney and our children.

I am lucky again; I see that our grown children treat their children with the same kindness and fairness.

Having time for each other and listening to each other makes us a happy family.

The Uilenburgersjoel

THE UILENBURGERSJOEL (UILENBURGER SYNAGOGUE) WAS BUILT in Amsterdam in 1735, in the center of the Jewish quarter. Regular services were held there from 1735 until 1942. The Jewish quarter was a lively area in the center of Amsterdam where people spoke Dutch with some Yiddish and Hebrew woven into the language. Next to the *sjoel* was a large square, het Waterlooplein. A market was held at the square every day but Saturday. The women got together to share their family news; they gossiped and bought their food for the day. The sjoel was in the center of it all.

Services were halted abruptly during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, when most of the Jews who lived in the quarter were deported to concentration camps, where most of them were murdered. Miraculously, bombs missed the old sjoel. The Ark, Torahs, and other religious objects and books disappeared, and the building started to deteriorate.

Apartment buildings around the synagogue where Jewish families had lived were demolished after the war. Later a metro was built, and under the water, a tunnel was made to connect the center with the northern part of Amsterdam, and land was used for the entry of the tunnel. The Jewish quarter is now no more. The market is still there, but much smaller, and there are no more Jewish men selling their wares with loud voices.

Some years ago, the municipality of Amsterdam decided to restore the old synagogue. Now you can lease it for concerts, weddings, etc.

Twenty years ago, three young Jewish people started a new congregation and called it Beit Ha'Chidush, House of Renewal, an unaffiliated community. Although Amsterdam has a few orthodox and one liberal community, they wanted a more open and lively community where everybody would be welcome. They met at people's houses and grew to be a congregation of a few hundred members. Without a rabbi, the services were led by lay people.

A view of the Uilenburger Synagogue in 2008.
Marion Golsteijn, Wikimedia

After Beit Ha'Chidush was in existence for nine and a half years, the congregation hired a rabbi. She was the first female rabbi in the Netherlands. The congregation decided to rent the Uilenburgersjoel for services. Since it is costly to rent the building, services are only held at the sjoel three times a month.

On one of my usual visits to Holland, my sister and I decided to check out the Friday night service there. We parked the car close to the sjoel and found a café to have dinner. We enjoyed smoked salmon on toast with a glass of white wine. Then we walked to the sjoel. It was a cold winter night; we entered the building with a lot of people, everybody dressed in heavy, black winter coats. Everybody wishing each other Shabbat Shalom.

We climbed the stairs to the sanctuary. Offices and classrooms are on the lower level. Folding chairs, five rows deep, were arranged in a circle, just a small opening was kept for the portable Ark. The rabbi and two young, female cantors were part of the circle. The prayer books were just photocopies, but the service was wonderful. People of all ages were there, many of them students, and everybody participated. So many child survivors attended the service. We talked afterwards and treated each other as old friends. I felt so at home. It was extra special for me to see this new congregation enjoy a great service in the old sjoel.

Jewish life was destroyed in this area 80 years ago. Thanks to the vision of some young people however, they have an enthusiastic congregation that attracts people of all ages and backgrounds, and they use the old Uilenburgersjoel again.

On my next visit I will return to services, and I will bring my family.

Aix-les-Bains

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.

AIX-LES-BAINS IS AN IDYLLIC THERMAL BATH RESORT located in a basin formed by the French Alps to one side and the Jura mountains to the other, and is a place frequented by such luminaries as Queen Victoria and the Aga Khan. But to me Aix stands for a way of living that has guided me since I was 15.

After my bar mitzvah in November 1954, my mother suggested I might enjoy a summer camp experience that would deepen my understanding of Jewish life. I agreed, and that is how I came to spend the summer of 1955 at Yeshiva Etz Chaim in Kapellenbos, a small town near Antwerp and close to the Dutch border. I have very few memories of my stay at the yeshiva, except that I rode my bicycle across the border to Holland to buy Calvé Dutch peanut butter which was infinitely tastier than the salty American import sold in Belgium. But the immersion in an Orthodox Jewish atmosphere must have agreed with me. When my mother came to take me home, the head of the yeshiva, Rabbi Blau, suggested I consider attending a yeshiva full-time, and mentioned the one in Aix-les-Bains, France, as a good fit.

I continued my studies at the Athénée Royal de Saint-Gilles for the next academic year. But then my mother and I heeded Rabbi Blau's advice and she enrolled me at the yeshiva in Aix-les-Bains, properly called *Yeshivat Chochmey Tsorphat,* Yeshiva of the Sages of France, probably referring to such medieval luminaries as Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes, better known by the acronym Rashi. The French name of the yeshiva was more descriptive, *École Supérieure d'Etudes Talmudique et de Science,* emphasizing that the curriculum included both religious and secular subjects; les profanes, as I quickly learned, was the generally used shorthand. I have previously described the magical adventure of traveling by train from Brussels to Aix-les-Bains, especially my first view of a mountain landscape as we followed the Rhone from Lyon to Aix-les-Bains. The yeshiva was located in Tresserve, a village on a hill overlooking Aix-les-Bains to one side, and *Le lac du Bourget,* made famous by the French poet Lamartine, on the other.

Rav Chajkin, standing between Claude Muller (seated left) and Alfred Münzer (seated right).
Courtesy of Yeshivat Chochmey Tsorphat

On arrival at the yeshiva, my mother and I were welcomed in the *beit midrash,* the main study hall, by the head of the yeshiva, Rav Chaim Chajkin, a short, somewhat rotund man with a gray beard and a friendly twinkle in his eyes. He wore a black suit and a homburg. My mother would often remind me of the Rav's reassuring words as he took my hand, and gently addressed my mother in his Lithuanian-accented Yiddish, "*Ir hot mir gebracht a gitte schoyre,*" or "you have brought me a good piece of fabric." I soon learned that the allusion to fabric, which could carefully be fashioned into a garment, was often used in the parables of Rav Chajkin's own rabbinic master, the world-renowned sage, Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan, whose portrait graced the wall behind Rav Chajkin's seat. He is commonly known as the *Chofets Chaim,* a name derived from the title of the ethical treatise he authored, "Desirer of Life." The Rav's gentle tone and the concern he conveyed as he encouraged my mother to tell him her life story and mine, reassured my mother that she was doing the right thing in leaving this "good piece of fabric" in his care.

Rav Chaim Chajkin was the most humble, honest, and caring human being I have ever met. Although I have not followed all the precepts that he conveyed or drilled into us, he has always served as my moral and ethical guidepost. After meeting with Rav Chajkin, we met the director

of the yeshiva, Rav Cohen. He came from Alsace and was able to converse with my mother in German. He, too, assured her I would be well taken care of. As I said goodbye and embraced my teary-eyed mother, we both realized that this was our first separation since she reclaimed me from Papa Madna, my rescuer while in hiding during the Holocaust. But I felt myself ready and excited to start an altogether new chapter in my life.

I quickly learned some of the rules of the yeshiva, like wearing dark pants and a white shirt on Shabbat and a *blouse grise,* a gray smock, at other times, as well as the schedule of classes, Torah, as Jewish studies were referred to, in the morning and secular classes in the afternoon. I almost instantly became bosom friends with Claude Muller, Maxime Munk, and Baruch Meyrowitz. They gave me a tour of the property.

The main building of the yeshiva consisted of three connected, but quite different, sections. To the left a very modern wing, then still under construction; in the middle a two-story, yellow brick, farmhouse-like villa that my friends proudly told me had been the summer home of Queen Victoria; and to the right a medieval, roughly hewn stone tower with a cellar where, I was told, Rav Eljowitz, who was to be my Talmud teacher, made and stored his wine. A fourth building in the woods was simply called the barracks. It was a wooden structure that housed several classrooms used for both Talmudic and secular studies.

What made the two years at Aix-les-Bains special, however, wasn't that I could boast of having slept in Queen Victoria's bedroom or bathed in her tub, the little of the Talmud that I absorbed, or even learning the intricacies of Orthodox observance and prayers. It was the experience of living in a community and taking on responsibilities for the common good of the community and learning what it means to live the "good" life. While all yeshivot stress the study of the Talmud, it was the emphasis on the study of *Musar* or ethics that set Aix-les-Bains apart.

After a morning devoted to the Talmud, and an afternoon to the whole array of secular subjects, we were encouraged to spend time after dinner on such texts as *Sefer Hamidot,* a 19th-century enumeration of character traits by Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, or *Mesilat Yesharim*, The Way of the Righteous, written in the 18th century by Rabbi Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto. With the little Hebrew I knew, study of these texts required help from more senior students, always generously offered. That generosity extended to all aspects of life at the yeshiva and was a more important lesson than any of the ancient erudite texts. Everything at the yeshiva depended on volunteer service. Sometimes it meant getting up at the crack of dawn to hike up the hill to Madame Blanc's farm to observe the milking of her cows to assure the milk was strictly kosher. At other times it was soaking and salting huge cuts of beef in preparation for our meals. For some like Daniel Bensimon, it was taking Rav Chajkin on the back of his motorcycle to a doctor's appointment. Why take a

taxi when someone could earn the merit of a good deed? Was there a better way to teach respect for employees than to make sure we always assisted the Italian women who tended to our laundry? Chores were not looked upon as burdens, but as honors.

What better way to teach about the insignificance of material goods than to take dinner up to the modest apartment adjoining our dormitory on the second floor of the main building, which Rav Chajkin shared with his wife and three children? Was there a better way to learn about the richness of human diversity than to share the dinner table with students who came from Algeria or Morocco? Their lives had not been shaped by the destruction wrought by the Nazis, but by being hated as would-be accomplices of French colonizers. One benefit of the various backgrounds at the dinner table was the exchange of some choice Arabic curses for some Yiddish equivalents. Gilbert Breisacher taught us German and English as part of our secular studies but schooled me in hospitality when I was a Shabbat eve dinner guest at his home.

When I told Rav Cohen of my ambition to become a doctor, he invited me to take charge of the yeshiva's infirmary which I did with relish. The infirmary was located on the lower floor of the castle tower and it became my undisputed domain. There were textbooks and manuals to guide me in my new responsibility. I learned how to give intramuscular injections. The French, I learned, loved their *piqures,* or shots, to prevent a host of diseases and improve bodily functions. If a student needed to see a doctor in town, I would go along and be invited to listen to heart and breath sounds. When I visited a student who had to be hospitalized, I was invited to witness my first operation, the repair of a hip fracture. But I really earned my keep during an outbreak of *grippe,* or flu, that I learned later was part of the 1957 influenza pandemic. It affected a large segment of the yeshiva since we slept in dormitories where viral transmission was inevitable. The infirmary only had two beds, which meant reorganizing the dormitories to isolate those who were ill. I negotiated a change in diet with the kitchen, borrowing some ideas from the way my mother had treated me when I had the flu, and others from the long list of *tisanes,* herbal teas, and other remedies favored by the French to treat virtually any ailment. Ten days after the start of the outbreak, everyone was healthy, and we recited a communal *Birkat Hagomel,* the prayer of thanksgiving after a major illness.

I remained at the yeshiva until July 1958 when my mother and I set out on our voyage to the United States. When I bid farewell to Rav Chajkin, he did not call me a *Ba'al Torah,* the title he conferred on those who had mastered the intricacies of the Talmud, or *Ba'al Teshuva,* given to those who had given up their worldly endeavors to devote themselves full-time to the yeshiva, but he called me a *Ba'al Chesed,* a Master of Benevolence. I accepted those words, not as a reward, but as an admonition and a guide to life after Aix-les-Bains.

Gathering of the Münzer family and friends at Alfred's bris, November 1941.
US Holocaust Memorial Museum, gift of Alfred Münzer

Putting a Name to a Hidden Face

TWO OF THE MOST PRECIOUS PHOTOGRAPHS I HAVE OF MY FAMILY were taken at my *brit milah,* the ritual circumcision ceremony performed on all male Jewish babies when they are eight days old. Because I was born a year and a half into the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, my parents' friends counseled against a circumcision. "It will identify him as being Jewish," they said. My parents' dilemma was solved when a pediatrician who examined me shortly after I was born told my father that I needed "a minor operation, called a circumcision." My father then reminded him of our Jewish tradition and that I would be ritually circumcised. That is how family and friends came to gather in our home on December 1, 1941, to observe this first milestone of a Jewish life.

The two photographs taken that day are small, only one by one-and-a-half inches in size, but they have gained mythic significance because my mother kept them with her through her eventual stay in 12 concentration camps. She developed a superstition that if ever she lost those photographs, it

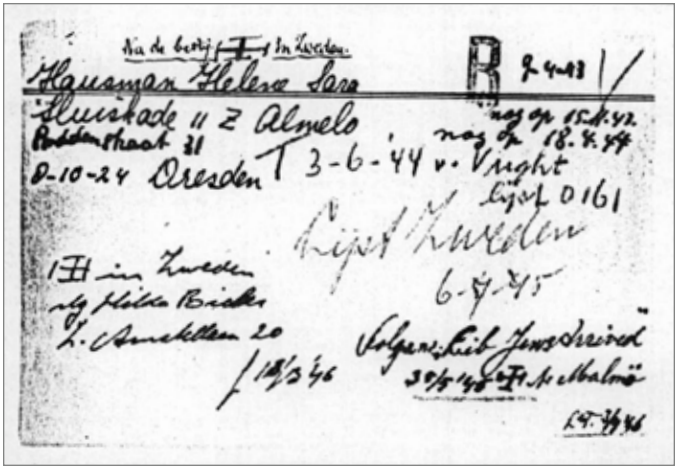
would mean that I had died or been killed. My mother survived, the photographs survived, and thanks to the Dutch-Indonesian Madna family and their Indonesian Muslim nanny, Mima Saïna, who sheltered me from the Nazis for over three years, so did I. The photographs are now part of the collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

One photograph shows the *mohel,* dressed in a *tallit,* and a nurse, and me on a pillow. The other shows a large, solemn gathering in the dining room of our home on Zoutmanstraat. I am able to recognize the faces of my father, my sisters, Eva and Leah, my Uncle Emil, and his girlfriend, Ellie, gathered around the table graced by the five-arm candelabra that, thanks to caring neighbors, escaped plunder by the Nazis. My mother continued to light it on Jewish Holy Days throughout the years, and I own it now. A few of the faces in the photographs looked like people I met after the war. My foster sister, Dewie Madna, told me the face on the far left belonged to her mother, Annie Madna, the woman who first agreed to hide me from the Nazis before I was transferred to her former husband, Tolé Madna. Dewie told me that her mother was terribly upset when I cried out during the circumcision. "What are they doing to that poor baby?" was how she put it to her daughter afterwards.

Until recently, I was never able to identify any of the other guests around the table. But then I received an email from Ron van Hasselt, the man who helped in my search for the fate of my sisters. He is writing a book that includes their story, and he asked me whether the name Helene Hausmann was one my mother might have mentioned to me. Helene Hausmann, he explained, was born in Dresden, Germany, and on January 4, 1939, when she was 14, came to the Netherlands as part of a group of children sent from Germany to escape Nazi persecution. While most children like her eventually were sent on to Great Britain or the United States, some, like Helene, remained in the Netherlands. Initially her group was housed at a children's home in Smitoord, then a similar facility in Rotterdam, and finally in a villa in Scheveningen, the beach resort adjoining The Hague. After Germany invaded the Netherlands on May 14, 1940, a group home was no longer felt to be safe, and the young refugees were placed with families instead. Helene, according to records found by Ron van Hasselt, was placed as a *kindermeisje,* a nanny, with "the Münzer family which lived at Zoutmanstraat 98 in Den Haag."

Leah Münzer, Helene Hausmann, Simcha Münzer, and Eva Münzer at a gathering for Alfred's bris, November 1941.
US Holocaust Memorial Museum, gift of Alfred Münzer

Ron asked whether I might have a photograph of Helene. After a search of all the photographs in my possession, I decided to look closely at the group picture taken at my Brit Milah. And that is how I was able to put a face with the name Helene Hausmann.



Document describing Helene Hausmann's places of incarceration during the Holocaust. *Arolsen Archives*

Between and above my sisters and to the right of my father, there is the unmistakable face of a young woman. Isn't that the exact place where a nanny would be expected at a traumatic event like the circumcision of their baby brother?

In mid-1942 my family was forced to go into hiding. My sisters were hidden with two devout Catholic women. My parents took refuge in a psychiatric hospital, and I was placed with Annie Madna and then with Tolé Madna. Helene, according to Ron, spent time in Almelo and was then arrested by the SS and deported. Documents from the archives of the International Tracing Service tell the tragic story of Helene Hausmann: April 9, 1943, arrival in the Vught concentration camp, where she worked as a seamstress for Philips Electronics; June 3, 1944, departure from Vught; then, a gap in the record; next, evacuated to Sweden after liberation; and then, finally, April 30, 1945, death at age 20 in Malmö, Sweden. According to a JewishGen burial record of victims of the Holocaust, Helene was buried in the *Gamla Judiska Begravingsplatsen,* the Old Jewish Cemetery of Malmö.

The path taken by Helene Hausmann was remarkably like my mother's. They worked at Philips Electronics at the same time, departed Vught on the same day, and were both liberated in Germany and evacuated to Sweden. It is not unlikely that Helene followed the same path as my mother from Vught. But as fate would have it, my mother survived, Helene Hausmann did not.

Reinkenstraat 67

REINKENSTRAAT 67 IS THE ADDRESS IN DEN HAAG of an ordinary two-story home next to a fish market. It is an ordinary house on an ordinary street lined with ordinary small businesses and cafés. The address is less than a mile from the house where I was born and that my family called home until October 1942 when our family was torn apart, and we were forced to go into hiding. Reinkenstraat 67 is an address that Hannah Arendt might have called "banal," an ordinary address where evil and mass murder assumed a personal dimension. A house I needed to see with my own two eyes, not to achieve closure, but to feel and bear witness to the depths to which the human soul can descend.

Reinkenstraat 67 was a small guesthouse called *Rust en Vrede,* "Serenity and Peace," which Roza Mazurowski had inherited from her husband Gerardus Kuyper whom she married in 1934. He died in 1940 and Roza remarried in 1942 and continued to operate the guesthouse with her second husband, Johannes Schermel. Sometime in October 1943 Roza and Johannes agreed to a request from their pastor, Father Lodders, to hide my sisters, Eva and Leah, from the Nazis. Four months later, February 3, 1944, a Dutch policeman, Dirk Vas, turned the lock at Rust en Vrede and arrested Eva, seven, and Leah, five, for the crime of being Jewish, and Roza Mazurowski, for the crime of hiding Jewish children. All three had been betrayed by Roza's husband, Johannes Schermel. He compounded the severity of Roza's crime by calling her out as a Polish Jew. He thus sealed the fate of my sisters who were murdered at Auschwitz on February 11, 1944, and the fate of his wife who was imprisoned in a hellhole called Bergen-Belsen where she barely survived typhus. Johannes Schermel's likely motive? Ownership of Rust en Vrede.

I learned the fate of my sisters shortly after I was reunited with my mother, when I was only four or five. People would shake their heads and tell me that my sisters "*zijn jammer niet teruggekomen*"—sadly, did not come back. Tante Jo, the very devout, Catholic, white-haired teacher, who with her sister Tante Ko, had been my parents' neighbors, consoled me by telling me that Eefje and Lia, as they were called in Dutch, were now "with God," like the little angels she pointed to in a children's catechism, a book, she added, that Eefje had been able to read when she was only five. That colorful little book with angels and devils whispering in a child's ear and the small black and white photograph of my sisters participating in a Catholic procession told me that my sisters had been given a new Catholic identity as a way of hiding from the Nazis.

My mother regaled me with stories about my sisters throughout my childhood. But the only time she hinted at the specifics of how they had been hidden and betrayed was when she took me on a visit to thank a woman who, she said, had tried to save my sisters from the Nazis. My mother

wanted to comfort the woman by showing her that at least one of her three children had survived. All I recall of that visit was that my mother was unusually quiet as we rode the tram to her house, and that I felt terribly sad. It would not be until 70 years later that I learned that woman's name, Roza Mazurowski. That is when two researchers of the Netherlands National Archives, Ron van Hasselt and Erik Mul, and Trees Krans, a volunteer archivist at the Elandstraatkerk, the church where Father Lodders had served as pastor, helped me uncover the sordid story of Reinkenstraat 67 and the details of the betrayal of my sisters.

I discovered the archivist, Trees Krans, when I did an internet search of Pater Lodders and found an article that she had written for the church bulletin of the Elandstraatkerk about his efforts to save Jewish children from the Nazis. She pointed me to the *Gedenkboek van het Oranje Hotel,* the memorial book of the Nazi prison in Scheveningen dubbed by the Dutch "the Orange Hotel," Orange after the Netherlands' Royal House of Orange. The book listed Father Lodders as having been imprisoned for baptizing Jewish children, and the sisters Jo and Ko van Leeuwen for hiding Jewish children. Through a diligent search of the church records, Trees provided me with details about my sisters' baptism and the marriages of Roza Mazurowski. Trees and I became close friends over a two-year exchange of emails. Not all of our emails related to her sleuthing for records about my sisters and for the fate after the war of Roza Mazurowski, whose efforts I desperately wanted to find a way to honor. Trees confided in me about a medical problem she was experiencing, which required surgery, and she taught me something about her persona when she told me that although she was in her mid-eighties, she absolutely refused to stay in the hospital overnight, and instead relied on the care provided by her nieces.

My spouse, Joel, and I visited Trees on our first full day in Den Haag, immediately after a talk to students at the American School of The Hague about my family's story during the Holocaust. Trees had provided me with her address, Prins Hendrikstraat 114, a street in the *Zeehelden kewartier,* the quarter where the streets bear the names of seafaring heroes. That quarter also included Zoutmanstraat where I was born, and van Kinsbergentraat where I was hidden with my own rescuers, the Madna family. Trees issued more specific instructions during our very first telephone conversation. "It's a store converted into an apartment," she said, and then added "look for the brass umbrella over the door." We walked from our hotel close to the Binnenhof, the seat of the Dutch parliament, along the street facing the Royal Palace where 70 years earlier I had watched the annual parade of the Golden Coach taking the queen to the opening of parliament. We had no problem finding the brass umbrella identifying Trees's home. I rang the bell, and we were immediately embraced by an elderly, slightly stooped woman with sparkling eyes, reddish-blond hair, and wearing red horn-rimmed glasses and a brightly colored flowery dress. I knew then and there that our visit to Reinkenstraat would not be the somber lone pilgrimage I had expected and feared, but a shared experience.

After introductions and a brief tour of her apartment, Trees suggested we proceed immediately to the Elandstraatkerk, the church where Father Lodders had served as pastor. "There is music in the church Wednesday afternoons," she said, implying that it would enhance our visit. She put on a quilted blue jacket and a scarf, and we were off on our walk tracing the story of my sisters. I smiled as we passed by the eye clinic on Tasmanstraat that held painful memories of my mother chasing me around the rooms we were renting on Laan van Meedervoort immediately after we had been reunited, as she tried to instill drops to dilate my pupils for an eye exam.

I was familiar with the exterior of the large neo-Gothic Elandstraatkerk, clearly modeled after Notre Dame in Paris, but I had never been inside. Now, as I walked up the steps, opened the massive doors and saw the imposing interior, I pictured my sisters doing the same on a cold January day almost 68 years ago. Trees introduced Joel and me to some other volunteers whose names I do not recall, and then pointed right to a large, brass baptismal font, saying, "This is where Father Lodders baptized your sisters." As I touched the font and closed my eyes, I could see two little girls, the older, six and self-assured, and the younger, four and more timid, holding hands and gently urged on by two white-haired women, Tante Jo and Tante Ko, who had prepared them for this event. Trees gently broke the trance; "This font is no longer in use," she said with some audible regret. "There is a new one on the opposite side. I wasn't baptized here, but my brother was."

Walking on, Trees pointed out Father Lodders's confessional. "Before Easter there would be a long line of people waiting their turn," she said, "and he would come out and encourage them to be heard by one of his colleagues in the adjoining confessionals." "But no one would move," she added, "that is how much people loved him." Even as a youngster, I had felt Father Lodders's charisma from his visits on a motorcycle to my mother's cosmetics store. Guiding us to the altar, Trees said, "Ignore the warning," as she pointed to a sign forbidding people to mount the steps, "you are very special guests." She then opened a door behind the altar into the sacristy. "This is where Father Lodders prepared for Mass." She then led us to two enormous old books laid out on a table, one a record of baptisms, the other a record of marriages performed in the church. Trees had sent me photographs of the books and significant entries, but as she opened one volume to a page she had marked, I read beneath headings in Latin, the slightly faded, handwritten entries of the baptism of my sisters including their newly assigned baptismal middle names. Eva Maria Münzer, baptized 18 January 1943, born July 10, 1936, and Lia Anna Münzer, baptized 18 January 1943, born November 11, 1938, followed by the names of their *Patrinorum,* their sponsors or godparents, Jacoba Cath, Maria van Leeuwen, and Johanna Maria van Leeuwen—Tante Jo and Tante Ko. In addition to the slanting signature of Father Lodders, there was another entry on the far right, *de licentia parentum,* "with permission of the parents." I wondered whether that permission had been granted on Christmas Day 1942, when my sisters were taken on a visit to

my parents at the Remaerkliniek where they were hiding, just days before they were deported. Trees had marked two pages in another register, the marriage of Roza Mazurowski to Gerardus Kuyper on November 5, 1934, and her ill-fated marriage to Johannes Schermel on September 14, 1942, just as Jewish men like my father were being called to "labor duty," setting in motion the search for a place of refuge from the Nazis.

We returned to Trees's apartment, where she had prepared an array of Dutch treats. She had lived in the house since birth, she told us. The apartment she now lived in had been her parents' umbrella store. "In my family we prayed for rain," she said, "there was nothing worse for business than a season without rain." The family lived on the two floors above the store and one brother, she said, still lived there. When her parents died, Trees inherited the lower floor where the store had been. She turned it into an apartment, leaving the large former store window in place, to give a nice view of the goings-on on the street. Trees told us about her career as a teacher in a girls' middle school and about her many travels around the world. She never married, but had had many opportunities to do so, she added, always preferring her independence.

After filling our stomachs with sweets, we set out for what had been my primary goal, to see Reinkenstraat 67. Along the way, however, Trees insisted that we stop at Zoutmanstraat 98, the two-story home above my father's store where I was born. The sign *Siegfried Münzer, Schneider aus Wien,* which Joel and I had seen on previous visits was still there, quiet testimony to what had been, and what was lost. I discerned my mother's hand in the art deco design, just like she had picked the latest Bauhaus furniture for his business, some of which I was fortunate to enjoy after the war when we lived behind my mother's cosmetics store. They were a link to the father I never knew, just like his Parker pen and his typewriter. Trees pointed out that her beauty parlor was next door to what had been my father's store, immediately beneath the apartment of Tante Jo and Tante Ko.

There was a cold wind, and I worried that our walk might be too hard on Trees. But she waved away any concerns and quickened her steps, dodging traffic and leading the way along Obrechtstraat, until we made a right turn on the busy corner of Reinkenstraat. Halfway down the block, I saw the number 67. As I stood in front of a plain, harsh green door, all I felt was anger, an urge to cry out at the hapless passerby, "You are walking on blood-soaked ground." A deep-seated anger would not dissipate when I read the post-war criminal proceedings for treason against Dirk Vas, the policeman who had arrested my sisters, and the 20-year prison sentence levied against him. Trees and Joel understood my feelings and did not offer meaningless words of comfort. Words like "They are now with God," or "May their memories be for a blessing," would have been nothing more to me than an empty nostrum.

A few days after we stood at Reinkenstraat 67, Joel and I visited the National Holocaust Names Monument in Amsterdam, which had been inaugurated two weeks earlier. It consists of 72 concrete walls, which when viewed from the air form four Hebrew letters, spelling "*l'zecher,*" (in memory of). The walls are covered with golden-yellow bricks, each brick bearing the name, date of birth, and age at the time of death of a Jewish or of a Romani victim of Nazis from the Netherlands. There are 102,000 bricks bearing the names of Jewish victims and 220 bricks dedicated to Romani victims. It was there and not at Reinkenstraat 67, that tears welled up in my eyes as I touched the bricks bearing the names of my father and sisters. That was where anger gave way to regret, and to the duty to remind the world of the thousands of addresses like Reinkenstraat 67, that had served as entryways to Auschwitz and Sobibor. Shortly after our return to the United States, I read of former Queen—now Princess—Beatrix's visit to children of collaborators like Dirk Vas, in recognition of the humiliation they suffered because of the actions of their parents and grandparents. I hope she also reminded them that they too have the power and responsibility to bear witness and help prevent future tragedies like the Holocaust.

After our visit to Reinkenstraat 67, Trees insisted that we have dinner, not in any of the many neighborhood restaurants, but at her favorite restaurant in Scheveningen. Did she sense a need to get me as far away as possible from Reinkenstraat 67? I couldn't help but smile and gain heart, as this woman in her mid-80s led us to the right tram, then, after we got off, sped us through wind and rain to the fishing port on the far edges of the beach resort, and to what was indeed a terrific Greek restaurant. We ordered wine, and clinked our glasses to a friendship and a bond grown out of reliving together one of the saddest chapters of humankind.

The Most Difficult Decision of My Life

THE HOLOCAUST DEPRIVED ME OF A FATHER, SISTERS, GRANDPARENTS, AUNTS, AND UNCLES. I was fortunate, however, to be reunited with my mother when I was three and a half. She was one of 110,000 Jews deported from the Netherlands, and one of only 5,000 who returned. It was not until I was five or six that I became fully aware of the many missing members of my family. I boasted that I would make up for the loss and have 12 kids of my own, and I conjured up a whole loud brood around the dinner table. But that was before I learned the facts of life and that it takes more than the wish of one person to make a family. Slowly, throughout my childhood and teens, I came to understand that I was different and that marriage and having a family of my own wasn't likely to be. It would take many more years and many more turns in my life to finally come to terms with the reality that I was gay. It was a burden shared by many others in my generation, but all the heavier a load

for those who, like me, were among the privileged to have survived the Holocaust. Like them, I felt that my survival was conditioned on avenging and restoring the lives of the millions of our people who had been killed by the Nazis. It is a thought that I pondered for many years and that sometimes still haunts me. Have I failed in what is a sacred obligation?

Even during childhood and certainly during adolescence, I was more attracted to boys than to girls but did not ascribe that to anything beyond the norm. While I attended Brooklyn College, most of my friends, except for Warren, were young women. It was two women who took me to a baseball game to teach me the intricacies of that American pastime. The only thing that stuck with me was the eighth—or is it the seventh-inning stretch? Another friend, Joan, introduced me to the joy of horseback riding Sunday mornings in Prospect Park and along Eastern Parkway. We shared a bond because we both came from families who had survived the Holocaust. Her aunt went all out with food and drink to try and foster an ongoing relationship, but neither one of us took the bait. It wasn't until I found out that two other women whom I had befriended had a fight over who was my exclusive romantic interest, that I learned that I had violated American ground rules for dating. Over the years, I did have several long-term romantic relationships with women but whenever the idea of a permanent relationship and marriage came up, I panicked. Eventually these relationships turned into friendships. All the while I fought the attraction to members of my sex. I even briefly sought psychotherapy, hoping I might yet find a way to what I still felt was my obligation to restore life that had been lost during the Holocaust, clinging still to that family of 12.

It was my mother who finally gave me permission, in truth encouraged me, to take the path that brought me to a loving 41-year relationship with Joel. After she moved to Washington, I would often take my mother on a ride to some of the sights around the city, like the National Arboretum or the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens. At least once every summer we would spend a day in Annapolis, typically taking one of the boat rides around the bay. This one time, however, my mother demurred and instead pointed to an outdoor café, "Why not relax and just sit and schmooze and have some coffee and cake." We found a nice, comfortably shaded table and placed our order, black coffee for her, milk and sugar for me. We talked about this and that, and then she looked me in the eye and took both my hands and said, "This is not a good world to bring children into, do not feel any pressure to provide me with grandchildren." This was the same mother who, two years earlier, connived with another woman to set up a match for me with the woman's granddaughter, a match that went as far as a visit to the rabbi who would perform the marriage, but that ended abruptly and painfully on some flimsy excuse about the phrasing of the wedding invitation. This was also the same mother who clearly loved children. When she moved into a senior living facility, the Ring House, she quickly set out for the window and was delighted that it overlooked the playground of the Jewish Community Center; "I have a view of the future," she said with a broad smile on her face.

One year after the conversation in Annapolis, I sat in a Friday evening Shabbat service at Bet Mishpachah, when a friend I sat next to turned to me, pointed to the man at his other side, and said, "Alfred, have you met Joel?" And then, turning to the other side, "Joel, have you met Alfred?" Two weeks later I introduced Joel to my mother at a Shabbat dinner at her home. By the end of the dinner, they had become fast friends even to the point that my mother felt free to warn Joel of some of my shortcomings. "He has two left hands," she said, using the Dutch expression for "all thumbs." Our family of two had grown to three. From then on, my mother would introduce us as "my two sons." The three-way bond strengthened as we traveled together to Alaska, especially when Joel and I held my mother, I taking one arm, he the other, to keep the fierce wind in Ketchikan from blowing her off the unexpectedly steep gangplank of our cruise ship.

Joel and his parents, in turn, adopted me as a member of their family. There would be no grandchildren, but there would be plenty of love. I will never forget Joel's mother anxiously waiting for us at the front door, whenever we came for a visit to Manchester, Connecticut. Joel's father had escaped the Holocaust in his native Poland by gaining a scholarship to the Jewish Theological Seminary and becoming a rabbi. He now became my mentor as I prepared to deliver sermons at Bet Mishpachah. There are surprising, intimate moments deeply implanted in my memory, like the visit to the Jewish cemetery of Manchester, where Joel's father, in a way reminiscent of *Our Town,* lovingly shared anecdotes about his congregants who were buried there.

Just as I had become a member of Joel's family, he now became an integral member of the Dutch Indonesian Madna family who rescued me. Letters were no longer addressed to "Bobby," the name I was given while in hiding, but to "Bobby and Joel." Just as Joel had walked me through memory lane in Manchester, I took him to all the places in Den Haag that played a part in my childhood. When the US Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage, Joel's sister-in-law was the first to call and ask, "So, when is the wedding?" Even times of sadness spoke to the love for each other's families by the support we gave each other during the slow decline of my mother and then Joel's father and mother. It was at my mother's funeral that I came to understand the depth of Joel's attachment to her. As we walked away from the grave after the service, it was Joel who burst into tears, and it was Joel who needed my embrace and comfort. The number of children I dreamed of having—12—has long become absorbed in the hundreds of kids who have been touched by the story of my family during the Holocaust and who surely will keep the lessons alive for generations to come. But now, the most important number in my life is two. Also now, it's the number one that I fear.

They Called Me by My Name!

BEFORE MY MOTHER AND I IMMIGRATED TO THE UNITED STATES, she had told me precious little about the town in Poland where she was born. Even the name of the town was somewhat of a mystery. It was "Rymaroc, Czechoslovakia" in her newly minted Dutch passport, a spelling error which moved the town several hundred miles north. When she was asked where she was born, she would say "Austria," which was technically correct because the town was located in Galicia, which had been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the end of World War I when the Treaty of Vienna ceded it to Poland. Her mother, she told me, had even personally petitioned Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz Joseph to spare one of her sons from military duty. And of course, there was our family name, Münzer, with an umlaut, she would always fiercely remind me. My parents were cousins, so I was fortunate to be Münzer all around.

Shortly after our arrival in New York and while we were still staying with Hella and Max Vander Pool, who had preceded us to America by ten years, Hella summoned my mother to the phone, "It's your *tante,*" she said. My mother was taken aback, after all she did not know of any aunts living in America; she picked up the receiver and audibly gasped and shook her head as she started a long, feverish conversation in Yiddish. She finally hung up with a sigh and told me the woman on the other end was her Ciocia Feige. When my mother first heard her aunt identify herself, she told me she had trouble keeping herself from shouting, "*Du lebst!?*" (You are alive!?) My mother had had an inkling of a substantial number of landsmen who had immigrated to the United States before World War II. She had proudly shared the name of Nobel laureate Isidor Rabi with me, as one from Rymanów who had done well in the United States. But the survival of Ciocia Feige and her son, Schrul, and daughters Gittel, Barbara, Bashia, and Daniela was a complete surprise. They had survived the terror of the Nazis by crossing into the Soviet Union and spending several years in Siberia, then a displaced persons camp, and finally were able to get refugee visas to the United States for the entire family. All except for Bashia, who remained in Germany, we learned later, because she had a mentally ill son, which barred them from immigrating to the United States.

My mother readily accepted an invitation to visit Ciocia Feige and her family the following Sunday. This trip entailed complex travel instructions because they lived in the Bronx, while we were in Brooklyn. We were told to take the Brighton line to Times Square, then change to the D train and get off at Tremont Avenue. To make it easier to find her apartment, Ciocia Feige offered to meet us on the platform of the subway. But the best and most memorable instruction she gave us was to look out for "the light." "Look for the light," she said, "Tremont Avenue is two stops after the train emerges from the dark tunnel into the sunshine." What I remember especially of that

long subway ride was seeing a large number of young Black girls and their mothers all dressed in their Sunday finery, so different from the shocking lack of a dress code among the Jewish population of Brooklyn we had met earlier.

Ciocia Feige was true to her word. There she was, a wrinkled, gray-haired woman wearing a kerchief and a flowery cotton dress, embracing her niece, my mother, 35 years after they had last seen each other and after a painful catastrophe that had robbed them of countless family members. All that, however, remained unsaid as Ciocia Feige and my mother walked arm in arm the few blocks to Ciocia's first-floor apartment. That is when the long conversation started, in Yiddish of course, which I, at that time, could not understand. My mother did tell me that Ciocia Feige's son and daughters would join us and that even with the little English I spoke, I would enjoy meeting our American family. I may have betrayed some boredom or impatience, so I was told I could explore the immediate neighborhood or spend some time in the lobby while waiting for their arrival.

Ciocia Feige's apartment building was big, and there was steady traffic in the lobby. But then I saw a group of six or seven people coming through the entrance, and heard a voice calling out in my direction, "that is a Münzer, for sure!" The voice was my mother's cousin and namesake Gittel. She and then all the others hugged and kissed me without any further verification of my identity. I was stunned and suddenly overcome with a joy I had never experienced before. Not only because it was my first encounter with actual relatives, but especially because they recognized me as a "Münzer," and called me by that name and opened a whole new world where I, a "Münzer," was suddenly the center of attention. I had been a member of the Madna family, who rescued me from the Nazis, and I am the son of a father and the brother of two sisters whom I only knew through photographs in a box and the stories my mother told me about them. I had been an adopted member of the Schumer family when my mother married Aaron Schumer in Brussels, but now I had living, breathing, hugging, laughing blood relatives.

The Rymanów circle of family, none, sadly, closer than cousins, expanded over the next few weeks and led us to trek to yet another New York City borough, Queens. There was even a *Rymanower Landsmannschaft* or benevolent association that my mother decided to join, only to be told it was only open to men. My mother set aside her scruples about the rejection, and at her behest, I, Alfred Münzer, was inducted as a proper son of Rymanów. Ciocia Feige, my mother would confess, had not been her favorite aunt, "just by marriage," she would say somewhat derisively, "butchers, not tailors," but she never forgot and always reminded me of the iconic image of Ciocia Feige waiting for us on the platform of the Tremont Avenue subway station.

My Story

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.

I WAS BORN IN KRAKÓW, POLAND, AND WE LIVED IN ZALESZCZYKI. My mother was an all-around athlete: a champion swimmer, skier, ice skater, and horse rider. She made sure that I would follow in her footsteps and she taught me to skate and ski when I was five. She also taught me to knit, crochet, and embroider, all skills she excelled at.

When I was six years old, I was being prepared for kindergarten and I was told that I would be attending Sunday school to learn Hebrew! Someone actually showed me how to sign my name in Hebrew, and to this day I remember how to do it. We were not observant and being Jewish only meant that I would be learning another language.

My sister, Ewa, was born on June 30, 1939. The war broke out in September 1939. The Soviets occupied our part of Poland and everything changed. My father escaped to Romania without us because he was afraid he would be conscripted into the Soviet army. He didn't think that women and children would be in danger. Later he tried to sneak back over the frozen river to come home, but the Soviets had sealed the border, caught him, accused him of being a spy, put him on trial, and sentenced him to 20 years of hard labor in Siberia. As the family of a "criminal," we were thrown out of our house and sent to the small town of Tłuste. When the Germans occupied the rest of Poland we went back home to Zaleszczyki.

The Germans instituted many new laws, the worst ones for the Jews. We had to put the Jewish Star of David on the house and our clothing so that we could be easily identified. There was no school for Jewish children and every Jewish person had to work for the Germans. My mother's job was knitting sweaters for the German mayor's children, even though she had two children of her own to take care of.

They started taking groups of young Jewish men for various jobs every day. Then the demand came for a very large group to cover the trunks of young trees with burlap for the winter so they would not freeze. More than 600 men reported for duty. Only one wounded man managed to

escape and tell us what happened. There was no job, only an open grave. They were all shot and buried. The remaining Jewish community in Zaleszczyki were thrown out and sent to Tłuste, the same town we were in during the Soviet occupation. The first thing we did when we arrived was to look for a hiding place because we knew there would be other demands for "workers" for Germany, which nobody believed by then.

We were prepared when the demand came, and everybody hid wherever they could. Since we had been in Tłuste before, mother knew some people and she decided to split us up, placing me with one woman who put me in the attic whilst she went to another woman, whom she had paid in advance for hiding her and my sister.

I spent a terrifying time waiting, not knowing if my mom and sister would ever come back. During the whole day, as I waited, my host would give me reports as to who was caught. She knew because they were put on the main square waiting to be taken away by a train, to where we didn't know, but we were sure it was to death. Some of those in the square were from our building, including Mother's good friend who had a young baby, but there was no sign of my mother. At the end of the day, the group was loaded on a train and taken away.

Finally my mother and sister came to get me. My mother and I were both traumatized thinking the other had been caught. Mother told me then that from now on we shall never part and, whatever awaits us, we shall go together.

Then she told me how close she was to being caught. The woman who was supposed to hide her and my sister got scared that, if she got caught helping Jews, she would be punished by the Germans, so she threw them out in the middle of the day. They spent the rest of the day on a grassy knoll, crouching under a single bush. My mother said that the Germans were all over looking for stragglers, and airplanes were flying over the area looking for escapees, but by some miracle they never saw her.

Our situation became hopeless, and we were losing hope when some good friends came up with an idea that eventually saved our lives. For a start, we three were all females and couldn't be physically checked. I was blond with green eyes, and our accents were pure Polish. We did not speak Yiddish, which could be detected and would have given us away. So our friends thought we might have a chance to pass as Catholic. They helped my mother purchase false identities from a priest and it was decided that we would travel to Jarosław where there were no longer any Jews. They took us to the railway station and bid us goodbye.

Before we left for Jarosław, Mother sat me down and taught me my new name, birthplace, grandparents, and explained that we would try to pass as Catholic. Apparently the Germans only killed Jews. The only thing I learned about my new religion was that I had to cross myself entering and leaving church.

During our trip, a friendly young man chatted with Mother. I didn't pay much attention, but, when he wasn't around, she told me that he suspected us of being Jewish and had pushed her very hard. She said she had no choice and admitted that we were Jewish. He said that he, too, was going to Jarosław and would accompany us and, upon arrival, would hand us over to the Gestapo. We had no escape. Mother told me that she made a "deal" with him to have all three of us shot immediately to lessen the pain of being separated. She knew that the children would not survive and she didn't want to live without her children.

Upon arrival in Jarosław, I realized that death was close and I didn't want to die. But I also didn't want to leave my mother and sister, so when she asked him to let me go (which he didn't) I said that I wouldn't go without her and my sister anyway. As we began walking toward the Gestapo, Mother tried again, saying, "I gave you everything I have, tickets for the luggage, money I had, why don't you take it all and let us go and try our luck?" And then she added, "Why do you want us on your conscience?" At that point he stopped, turned around, gave Mother back a few *zlotys* and said, "*Z deszczu pod rynne,*" which in Polish approximately means "from bad to worse," and then walked away leaving us in the middle of the town.

Jarosław, Living as Catholics

WHEN OUR CAPTOR LEFT US, the three of us found ourselves standing on a sidewalk of a strange city. We had no luggage, little money, only the few *zlotys* that he returned. Mother spotted a little café and decided to walk in. She requested some milk for my sister and then started asking customers if anybody knew of a place where we could find lodging. A young man got up and said he knew a washerwoman who took lodgers and offered to take us there.

We followed him and he introduced us to a small lady, explaining that we were looking for a place to stay. Mother told her that we have no money but she would look for work immediately to pay her for hosting us. The lady looked us up and down and I thought she might not take us, but she said she would. Then a couple of her sons appeared and, seeing us, urged her not to take us. (You can't blame them, we had spent four days and nights on the train and must have looked it!)

But I'll never forget what she said to them, and I am quoting: "Oh no, no, this is a mother and two children, I have to take her!" And she did. She gave us one bed, just perfect to keep warm with me sleeping at their feet. The next morning, Mother went out and found one of many odd jobs, which paid for our keep, and we slowly and gingerly started our new life as Catholics. I went to school and our kind landlady looked after my sister.

There were many pitfalls for me. Going to school, I had the advantage of knowing how to read but had zero knowledge of the religion. Of course one of the subjects was religion. I was saved by a book, which the priest gave to every student, it was called *the catechism* and contained questions and answers for us to study. It took me no time to swallow that book, which saved me from being caught with wrong answers. I eventually received Communion and managed not to make any fatal mistakes! Of course I understood that this was role-playing, and I hoped not to offend the Catholic religion by pretending to belong, but I did so want to live and being Jewish was a death sentence, so I couldn't afford not to continue in my role as a Catholic.

We were on very thin ice and anything could give us away, so we were always alert and very careful. Mother knew that our papers may not be real and so was worried about being stopped in the street and asked for documents. In order to find some security she tried to sign us up to go to Germany, where they always needed workers. She explained to me that the Germans were not as good as the Poles in recognizing Jews, so it would be safer. However, they would have taken her and me, but not my little sister, so of course we didn't go. In a bold and brave move, she marched into the German military camp and applied for a job! She knew that they would ask for papers, and they did, and we lived in dread during the time that they were checking them, but she did get the job and the *Ausweiss* (ID card), which proved that she was working for the Germans.

Indeed, on one occasion when the Germans swooped into our home and took everybody to the Gestapo station to check them out, we three were the only ones left because Mother showed them the Ausweiss! The other people who lived with us were taken away to the Gestapo station, were checked out and came back the next morning, but we were spared that trip!

We didn't know what was going on at the front. Radio and newspapers were strictly forbidden and being caught with them was punishable by death. With great trepidation, Mother exchanged a couple of letters with the people we left behind and one of these letters brought us the news about my father. He had sent a letter through the Red Cross that he was free and safe with his sister in Palestine! Great and welcome news but we couldn't do anything about it as long as we were occupied.

One morning we woke up very early and were surprised that there were no carts and horses on the street as usual. The silence was deafening. We were discussing whether Mother should go to work.

Suddenly there was a tremendous blast, a bomb had exploded over the house. I started screaming "my hand, my hand." Mother grabbed my sister and me and we walked into the street and started walking toward the hospital. My hand was bleeding badly, and when we finally got to the hospital, they picked me up and put me in a doctor's office to patch me up. Unfortunately they had to take my left thumb off altogether and I had lost half of my little finger. The palm was an open wound. They patched me up and put my hand on a rail to keep it straight. They then told my mother that if it got infected, they would have to amputate my hand altogether.

My mother and sister spent that night with me at the hospital. When they got back to our lodgings they discovered that the building was in shambles, the bomb destroyed it. Unfortunately, it also caused the ceiling in the kitchen to fall down and kill our landlady. A kind neighbor took Mother and Ewa in and we lived there until we left Poland.

I spent two months in the hospital and owe a debt to my nurses; the Catholic nuns kept me from getting an infection and my hand finally healed. Mother did knitting jobs and was able to pay for our keep and for notices she sent to Palestine to find Father. But our troubles were not over because Mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and had to have an operation immediately. When we finally found Father, he sent his sister's son, Arye, to help us get out of Poland.

New Life

THE WAR WAS OVER. The Germans were gone, the Soviets were still with us and didn't give any sign of leaving Poland, but our lives were no longer in danger.

I was in the hospital recovering from the bomb shrapnel that wounded my hand. When Mother found Father in Tel Aviv, we expected him to come and get us, but he sent my cousin Arye instead to navigate our trip out of Poland.

When Arye arrived, we learned that Father was serving in the Anders Army, a Polish military unit that was initially created in the Soviet Union under the command of Polish General Anders. General Anders had also been a prisoner like my father. The unit was made up of Polish citizens, including a number of Jewish Poles, who had been deported and imprisoned by Stalin when the Soviet Union occupied eastern Poland in 1939. The unit fought in the Middle East and in the Italian campaign in the famous battle of Monte Cassino. Father had been imprisoned by the

Soviets in Archangielsk with many others, including my aunt Gucia, her husband, Bolek, and my cousin George. Father was now stationed in Egypt, which was right next to Palestine.

Arye signed us up with the Jewish Agency in Kraków, which dealt with Jewish refugees. We moved from Jarosław to Kraków to be ready for transportation out of Poland. We had to travel, by way of Germany, to Italy, where we stayed in a temporary transit camp in Trani near Bari, which was for refugees waiting to leave for permanent settlement in various countries. Father met us there and my parents decided that we would settle in England, which was one of the options available to us; the other option was to go to Palestine. Father had to return to his unit in Egypt but would later join us in England.

The three of us, my mother, my sister, and I, arrived at the White Cliffs of Dover by ship on July 31, 1946. Strangely, I cannot recall the sea trip at all until we reached England. From Dover, we were transferred to a train, which took us to Maghull in the north of England, where we were housed in barracks in a camp. Maghull is a small town close to Liverpool. We were nicely welcomed and got the same slim rations and coupons as the British, which seemed very generous to us.

When Father rejoined us, we moved to London and bought a house in London on the "never, never," which means we had a mortgage! Mother had never bought anything on credit before, so this was her description of credit. The house had three floors, only one bathroom, and we lived on the ground floor and rented out the four rooms upstairs, which covered the "never never," I think.

I struggled in school while I learned English, but soon caught up and as soon as I graduated, I went to work. Jobs were very easy to find, and I could pick and choose. For community and entertainment, I found the Maccabi Youth Club, which was within walking distance of my house. Regretfully, I had to give up my dreams of playing tennis and played table tennis instead because there were no facilities for tennis. But I don't regret learning to play table tennis because it eventually took me to Israel. My club chose me to represent England in the Maccabiah Games, equivalent to the Olympics for Jewish youth from all over the world. The Games still continue today in Israel.

In 1953, back in England, I decided to look for a job with connections to Israel. I found one with Rabbi Unterman, who had an office in Berkeley Square no less—a very posh area in London. He later became Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv.

In September 1953 I set out for the land of Israel.

My Community

THERE ARE MANY PLACES I HAVE LIVED IN SINCE 1939, when I was thrown out of my house and first had to relocate. This was in Poland and my mother, sister, and I were trying desperately to survive under the Soviet, and then German occupation. My community at that time were the other frightened people who were also trying to find a safe place. After the Germans occupied us, being Jewish, we had only one destination and that was a concentration camp and death.

A few of us did survive to tell the tale, and my mother managed to save my sister and me, which she did by getting false papers identifying us as Catholics. We lived day to day, hoping not to give ourselves away. At the end of the war, we were able to leave Poland and immigrate to England, where we started our new lives. I was 13 and the most important thing for us was to get into school and try to learn the language and get used to the new culture.

It was not an easy proposition, but I found a way to ease my difficulties. It was the game of table tennis. Tennis was what I really wanted, but England had been ravaged during the war and it was not available to me. Table tennis was everywhere: in school, in places of work, and, it turned out, within a very short distance of my house there was a Maccabi Youth Club, which gave me a nice community. In those days, table tennis was not yet an Olympic sport, but it was very popular among young people and I took to it very happily.

The boys were much better than the girls and they taught me a lot. We had ladies' and men's teams and played other clubs all around England. My life was work during the day and table tennis in the evenings. I credit table tennis with helping me to acclimate to the English culture, improve my English, and have a community.

And then there was another bonus, perhaps the most important one in my life. In 1948, Israel was created. I knew that we had family there because my father's sister immigrated to Israel, then called Palestine, in the 1930s. So I was doubly excited when I learned that they created the Maccabiah Games in Israel, which included table tennis. Our team in London was very good and, in 1953, I was invited with two male athletes to take part in representing England in Israel. I couldn't have hoped for a better gift than visiting Israel, meeting my family and some friends who had settled there after the war. My whole life changed then, even though I returned to England after that visit. I also went to the next Maccabiah Games in 1957, and that time decided to settle in Israel.

Thank You to the Holocaust Museum

THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK TODAY TO YOU, my colleagues, teachers, leaders, historians, and all who work here. When I was asked to speak, I didn't think I had anything to say, but then I realized that this is my golden opportunity to thank you all here at the Museum, who educated me, befriended me, and helped me to face the terrible experience I went through during World War II and learn how to remember and honor those millions we lost.

Over 20 years ago, I met another Holocaust survivor in Washington and then joined a whole group of survivors, and we gathered once a month and shared our stories. Martin Goldman, who was then in charge of the survivors who volunteer at the United States Holocaust Museum, visited our group and suggested we should join the Museum, attend the monthly meetings, and volunteer to work here. He also suggested that, if we had any items connected with our war experiences, the Museum would be a good place to donate them. I think all of us joined and still work here.

I worked in Martin's office and also attended monthly meetings. During the lunch hour one of us usually spoke to the public and shared our story. But not everybody did, and I certainly didn't because I had never spoken in public before. But I would sneak in to hear other peoples' stories, and that was the beginning of my starting to learn more about what had happened to other survivors.

In my case, friends helped my mother purchase false identity papers for my sister and me and the three of us escaped from the ghetto in Tłuste, Poland, under new identities as Catholics. I was ten years oId and became my mother's lieutenant and helper. My sister was four years old. First, I had to learn my new identity details: my new name was Alina Litynska, new place of birth, new grandparents, etc. After we arrived in Jarosław, my mother had to find jobs to pay for our keep and I had to figure out how to behave in church and school. We were completely cut off from anybody who knew who we were for the rest of the war.

I didn't have much preparation for that new life as a Catholic but I knew it was very important to attend church on Sundays, and cross myself after dipping my fingers in "holy" water when entering and leaving. In school, the priest handed us a book called the catechism, to help with studying Catholicism, which helped me a lot. I had an advantage because my father had taught me to read before the war in preparation for attending kindergarten, so I was able to read the whole book quickly to learn as much as I could. I knew I was Jewish, though we were not observant, and before World War II I was told that I would also be attending Sunday school to learn Hebrew.

When I joined the Museum my story was recorded and I was asked a few times to speak publicly, but I didn't think I could. But, finally, with great kindness and help from everyone, I did. I was very anxious and scared and I think interviewer Bill Benson was the one who managed to get me through it. I have since become more relaxed and learned so much more. My teachers are all here and I am taking this opportunity to acknowledge and thank you all from the bottom of my heart!

The Clean Desk

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.

THE POET WROTE, "YOU SHOULD HAVE THE CLEANEST DESK OF ALL
To have bright thoughts, or you will not have them at all."

Against this idea I absolutely vote,
Quoting Einstein—his famous quote:

"If a cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind,
Of what, then, is an empty desk a sign?"

My desk is messy a *little,* I admit
But contrary to some, I find everything I need.

My wife does not think my desk is really fine
She disagrees with Einstein's theory, and mine.

But I'll make a statement if you do not mind:
The desk has nothing to do with somebody's mind.

Holocaust Denial, Antisemitism, COVID-19: Revisiting Antisemitism

WHEN GENERAL EISENHOWER VISITED A CONCENTRATION CAMP, he had the US Army document everything because he foresaw that, in the future, there would be people who deny what happened there. I admire his foresight. Since then countries, groups, and individuals have been denying the Holocaust. They say that the Holocaust has not happened, or the whole thing is exaggerated. They say that the Jews came up with the whole idea to get money. However, if the Holocaust has not happened, why has Germany paid? Germany paid because the Germans knew that the Holocaust happened, and they are responsible for the death of millions and the unimaginable suffering they caused.

Antisemites only talk about Jews as individuals if they accuse them of something. But if they want to say something bad about Jewish people, they say, "the Jews." The antisemites operate with two tools: generalization and stereotypes. They talk about Jews as a homogenous mass, a group, a race, but not as individuals. There is no such thing as "the Jews." Jews are individuals who happened to be born to parents who inherited being Jewish. Some of them are very religious, some are observant, some only keep traditions, and some do not observe at all. They have different professions, they are employers and employees. They argue with each other because they have their individual opinions. So how can they be labeled as Jews who all do the same thing and are all responsible for the same thing?

Antisemites say the Jews are rich. Not that anything would be wrong with it, but the truth is that there are rich Jews, poor Jews, and most of them are in between. Besides, there are many very rich Christians and Muslims.

Some antisemites say they hate Jews because they are communists. Others say they hate Jews because they are capitalists. How can they be both? Some Jews are communists, some are capitalists, and most of them are neither. But, because of the numbers, there are many more Christians who are communists and capitalists.

An antisemite might like a doctor, an attorney, an agent, an entertainer, a comic, or an athlete who happens to be Jewish. He might not even know that some of those people he likes are Jewish. Henry Ford, who was famously antisemitic, had a favorite baseball player who was Jewish, Hank Greenberg. Hitler's mother had a Jewish physician. Obviously she liked him because nothing happened to him during the Holocaust. Hitler also had high-ranking Jewish officers, even a general, because he needed them. He signed a declaration that they were of German blood.

The Jews were always the scapegoats. They were easy targets because they were different, often isolated, and small in numbers. They were blamed for every disaster. There was a great movie, *The Ship of Fools,* many years ago. It took place on a German ship in the 1930s. A German antisemite said, "The Jews cause all the troubles." Another man added, "And the cyclists." The German asked, "Why the cyclists?" and the man answered, "Why the Jews?"

Many antisemites say they hate the Jews because they killed Jesus. Jesus was a Jew. So was his mother, as were most of his disciples, friends, and followers. They did not kill Jesus. Then how can they say that the Jews killed Jesus? Besides, the Jews did not kill Jesus—the Romans did. Jews never crucified people, the Romans did. And we even cannot say that all the Romans killed Jesus, because only a few soldiers did, according to the order of the Roman governor Pilate. There is a controversy. An antisemite might say, "I hate Jews." But then he prays to Jews: Jesus, his mother, and the saints.

It took 2,000 years for the Catholic Church to take some responsibility for the teachings that lead to hate, injustice, and persecution of the Jews. Two thousand years is a long time. But nobody says, "I hate Italians" because their predecessors, the Romans, killed Jesus, the saints, and many Christians. Nobody said, "I hate Christians" because of the killings done by the inquisition, the crusades, and the witch trials.

The Jews were blamed for many disasters in history. The black plague is an example during the Middle Ages, and COVID-19 is now. They do not talk about the thousands of doctors and nurses who are Jewish and fight the epidemic while risking their life.

Antisemitism is personal to me, because that was the basis Hitler and the Nazis could build on. That was the tool that made them able to get so many allies and collaborators in Germany and all over Europe. That was the reason I lost my father, grandfather, and other relatives. My close family and I had to hide.

When antisemites say, "I hate Jews," I have some questions. Do they hate the Jews who discovered the vaccines (shot or by mouth) against the horrible disease polio, who saved their children from paralysis and death? If they like this country, do they hate the 500,000 Jews who fought against Nazi Germany in the Allied armies during World War II? Some of them paid the ultimate price. I have seen it in the cemetery on the beach of Normandy, in France. Or do they hate the Jewish composer who wrote the patriotic song that became second to the national anthem? He also wrote one of their favorite Christmas songs. Do they hate the Jews who started the movie industry in Hollywood and made their favorite movies? Do they hate the Jews who wrote musicals, creating

a new artistic genre? Or do they hate the Jewish singer-songwriter who became an American sensation? These are just a few examples of Jewish contributions to this country.

Antisemitism is growing in our days and comes from the very right and now from the very left, too, which is a new phenomenon. There is Muslim antisemitism directed against Israel and the Jews. These are different times than when the Ottoman Empire was a safe haven for Jews, particularly during the rule of Suleiman the Magnificent. Today, with the help of social media, accusations and lies spread faster than fire. Therefore, it would be important that social media police itself to screen out hate speech and instigations of violence.

Winter and Solstice

THINKING OF A WINTER AND SOLSTICE NOW,
I see pictures projected on the wall.
I see the skiers coming down the slope,
Their colorful clothes—look, someone will fall.

I see a lake fully covered with snow;
There's snow on the ground, trees covered with snow.
Everything is quiet, everything slow,
The most beautiful picture that I know.

I saw a passage tomb from the Stone Age
In Ireland. I was in awe.
What engineering was done in that cave,
There is no word for it; I was amazed.

The winter solstice sun breaks up the night
And fills the chamber and all sites with light.

A Trip

WE PLANNED A THREE-DAY TRIP,
A father, two friends, and I.
We divided the distance and divided the time.
But when should we go? Let's go in the fall.
The heat is gone and there is no snow.
We walked and walked like getting a prize—
No prize, but fresh air and good exercise.
At the end of the trip it started to rain
But we were lucky and got on the train.
We arrived, here our trip will end—
To our surprise we could not stand.
Our brain gave the order to our legs to go
But the answer of our legs was, "No."
We all agreed that the trip was great;
Still, we had trouble walking to the gate.

Taharah

Nat Shaffir

When Nat Shaffir was six in 1942, Romanian authorities seized his family's dairy farm where he lived with his parents and two sisters. They were forced to move to the city of of Iași, where they were subjected to a number of anti-Jewish restrictions.

TAHARAH: **WHAT IS IT, WHY DO WE DO IT, AND WHO DOES IT?** We translate the Hebrew word taharah as the purification of a dead body. According to our Bible, every person who enters this world arrives pure and clean; they are pure of sins and clean of misdeeds. When a person passes away and leaves this world, he should also leave pure. But, since no one knows in advance when one will pass away, how can you purify yourself before leaving this world? The answer is, you can't. But, there is a way to purify a person who passed away by performing a taharah.

Now that we know what a taharah is and why we do it, it's important to know who does it. The people who perform a taharah are called the *Chevra Kadisha* which, in Aramaic, means Holy Group. This is a volunteer-based society that carries out the ritual preparation of the Jewish dead for burial. These people are on call, around the clock, six days a week. Their duty includes ritual washing, dressing the body in a shroud, and wrapping it in a *tallit* before the coffin is closed. They do this while reciting specific verses and prayers for the dead. The group consists of one leader and three to four additional people, all of them equal in importance. I am a member of our local Chevra Kadisha that performs this ritual.

Due to COVID-19, the Chevra Kadisha cannot perform this religious ritual today. Some of the dead who are arriving at the funeral homes died from COVID-19. To protect ourselves, we do not perform any taharah during this time. We have not been able to perform this ritual since the pandemic started in February 2020. This reminds me of the wartime period when taharah was not performed either.

The reason I decided to write about a taharah is because I see a similarity between now and the time I spent in the ghetto where taharah was not performed.

I have been performing taharah for over 20 years. When we perform the ritual, we come across various individuals who died in a hospital of old age, heart attacks, or various other ways. We get

bodies with limbs missing or feeding tubes still attached to them. So, we see bodies of various stages of suffering and we have to wash them and purify them for burial.

The worst time I had with a taharah was right after 9/11/2001 when two Jewish bodies came in from the Pentagon attack. I, and the entire group, *lost it.* Those were the most difficult taharot we had to perform. These two individuals' bodies were burned, half of their heads were missing. One had no limbs. When we saw the two bodies, we all threw up and started to weep. We did the taharah for each person the best we could. We were so traumatized that, for the next six months, none of us were able to do another taharah.

It's important to note that performing a taharah is the utmost thankless job, because the person for whom we perform the taharah *cannot* thank us for that service. That is why this is considered to be one of the most righteous things to do. The only reward one gets from it is the *extra points* one receives when you reach heaven. I hope I earned some of these extra points, as I plan to retire from this work by the end of the year. It's getting harder and harder to do it at my age. Just for the record, I am the oldest person who is still doing taharah in the Washington area. I never speak about it. Those who know, know.

When my youngest daughter found out five years ago that I was doing taharah, she decided to take on this work, and she has been doing it on a steady basis. I am very proud of her.

Adapting

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.

HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO IDENTIFY ONE THING I LEARNED from all the different people who raised me. My parents, of course, were the first people I must think about. My instinct tells me they took advantage of an opportunity, and trusted family and strangers. I think this trust was really learning to adapt to new situations.

Next I think of the Harrisons. They certainly took a chance by adding a child to their family in difficult times. I wonder if they believed they were doing God's work as they were very devout Christians. I trusted them completely as I adapted to life in a new family situation. The Harrisons had to learn to help a homesick child while changing their way of life as the war started.

Adapting to life in the USA was much more difficult. Living in a large, loud household in a city, while experiencing a new religion, a different type of school, and new expectations for my behavior took a while to get used to. Of course, I did adapt because there was no choice. I believe, though, that while I did adapt to the difficult situation, I lost much of the trust I had in people. I became more of an onlooker than a participant in that household.

Living with my sisters was much better than living in my uncle's house. I was part of their life but not completely. It was difficult for them to raise and support a teenager while trying to make a new life in this country. I did not know other students at the schools I went to who did not have parents to take care of them. It made me a little different, at least in my mind.

By the time I went on to college and had a career, I was quite good at adapting to whatever situation I found myself in. I think, though, I often have not totally felt a part of any group to which I belong.

Now the benefit of being good at learning to adapt to new situations is that when we needed to take our daughter to the University of Iowa hospital for surgery, I quickly learned how to live in

a hospital day in and day out. I learned the rhythms of the doctors' visits and how to make the experience interesting and not too frightening for our daughter.

For the most part, the trait of adaptability has been useful to me. I do think it keeps me from becoming fully involved in some activities and groups. Moving on to something new, I tend to drop previous associations. This may not be a good way to be. Somehow in adapting to the new event, I cannot seem to hold on to previous ones. It makes life a little disconnected.

It has been the many changes I have experienced in my life that have made this trait a part of me. No one explicitly tried to teach me to adapt. I believe watching the people around me and making the necessary changes to live comfortably has taught me this.

Yom Kippur Afternoon Services

I BELONG TO A REFORM SYNAGOGUE. On Yom Kippur, I always go to the afternoon service, which is led by laypeople. When my sister, Edith, was alive, she often came with me because we didn't need tickets, as we did for the morning service. Over the years, I have become a member of the Religious Practices Committee. Several years ago, the Reform movement published new prayer books for Shabbat and then the high holidays. Our congregation has been using them ever since except for the afternoon Yom Kippur service.

One of the reasons I loved this service is because we used the earlier prayer book originally published in 1978. The person who planned and led this service was a very revered, longtime member of our congregation. As he got older, a couple helped him. This prayer book related the history of the experiences and suffering of Jews throughout the ages. I felt such a connection to this history—especially the details of the history of the Holocaust. To me, it is important for our congregation to remember these events.

Our new Yom Kippur *Machzor* (High Holy Days prayer book) was published in 2015. It is very, very different from the last one. The basic service is of course the same, but there are alternative readings, pages for reflection, questions to ask oneself. While I do like this format for most services, I never wanted to change the Yom Kippur afternoon service. For the past three years there has been a heated discussion about the change at our Religious Practices Committee meetings. The man who led the services died three years ago. I have always argued against change.

But as we all know this year is different. We have a new rabbi, and services will be online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is the custom at our congregation to buy our own high holiday prayer books. Our synagogue collected the old prayer books and these were always put on a cart for the afternoon service. This year congregants need to have prayer books at home and many people already own the newer books. This week at our Zoom committee meeting, I said I guess we really need to change and offered to work with others to see what needs to be done. This morning, I began reading the new Machzor to see exactly how different it really is. Because, of course, before I had been arguing from emotion, not information.

One of the first alternative readings in the new prayer book is a statement based on the opening line of a prayer by Rabbi Leo Baeck "for all Jewish communities in Germany" on the eve of Yom Kippur, October 6, 1935.

This is that prayer:

> At this hour the whole House of Israel stands before its God, the God of Justice and the God of Mercy. We shall examine our ways before Him. We shall examine what we have done and what we have failed to do; we shall examine where we have gone and where we have failed to go. Wherever we have sinned we will confess it: We will say "we have sinned" and will pray with the will to repentance before the Lord and we will pray: "Lord forgive us!"
>
> We stand before our God and with the same courage with which we have acknowledged our sins, the sins of the individual and the sins of the community, shall we express our abhorrence of the lie directed against us, and the slander of our faith and its expressions: this slander is far below us. We believe in our faith and our future. Who brought the world the secret of the Lord Everlasting, of the Lord Who is One? Who brought the world understanding for a life of purity, for the purity of the family? Who brought the world respect for Man made in the image of God? Who brought the world the commandment of justice, of social thought? In all these the spirit of the Prophets of Israel, the Revelation of God to the Jewish People had a part. It sprang from our Judaism, and continues to grow in it. All the slander drops away when it is cast against these facts.
>
> We stand before our God: Our strength is in Him. In Him is the truth and the dignity of our history. In Him is the source of our survival through every change, our firm stand in all our trials. Our history is the history of spiritual greatness, spiritual dignity. We turn to it when attack and insult are directed against us, when need and suffering press in upon us. The Lord led our fathers from generation to generation. He will continue to lead us and our children through our days.

We stand before our God; we draw strength from His Commandments, which we obey. We bow down before Him, and we stand upright before Men. Him we serve, and remain steadfast in all the changes around us. We put our faith in Him in humility and our way ahead is clear, we see our future.

The whole House of Israel stands before its God at this hour. Our prayer, our faith, and our belief is that of all the Jews on earth. We look upon each other and know ourselves, we raise our eyes to the Lord and know what is eternal.

"Behold, He that guardeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

"He who maketh peace in His high places, may He make peace for us and for all Israel and say ye, Amen."

We are filled with sorrow and pain. In silence will we give expression to all that which is in our hearts, in moments of silence before our God. This silent worship will be more emphatic than any words could be.
Source: The Attorney-General of the Government of Israel v. Adolf Eichmann, Minutes of Session No. 14, Jerusalem, 1961.

* The reading of this prayer was banned by order of the Gestapo, and Rabbi Leo Baeck and Otto Hirsch were arrested for a short period by the Germans. Source: Yad Vashem

Reading this prayer made me think of all the terrible times that were ahead for the Jews of Germany and in many parts of the world. I learned that the reading of it was banned, but I wonder if smuggled copies were shared. Did my parents know of this prayer?

In *Mishkan Hanefest,* our new Yom Kippur prayer book, the opening lines of this alternative reading begin:

"We stand before God who calls forth our strength.
The nobility and truth of our history is in God;
in God—the source of our survival,
our firm stand through trial and change."

The theme is the same as in Rabbi Baeck's prayer he gave on October 6, 1935, and is more reflective of the feel of the prayers in the old prayer book. Reading the prayer and the alternative reading has led me to wonder why I loved the old service and why the need to move on to a new version. I discussed this with a fellow congregant who pointed out to me that the old service showed us, Jews, as victims. I never thought about it that way. We do not need to consider ourselves that way.

I really have no idea what will happen to the service this year. It is a work in progress. This process has made me realize how I consider so much of life through the lens of a Holocaust survivor without realizing it. There are many other ways to relate my personal story and the history of the Holocaust without including it in this service.

The Shadow

THE SUN IS BRIGHT,
Birds flutter to and fro
Ever-present but I was unaware:
In the shadows lurks
The Holocaust.

Why does the tour guide select me
To tell that Germans settled here
At the beginning of World War II?
Why?

Different than any other place I have been,
Quito, Ecuador!
The bus delivers us to a
Suburban Jewish Center
Surrounded by beautiful scenery.

Checked in by guards
We join the Seder celebration.
In line to eat after
The Seder rituals,
The heavily accented elderly man
Spoke to me.
Of course, a Holocaust Survivor.

Will this shadow follow me
Forever?

Goodbye, Bicycle

WITH AN INWARD SIGH OF RELIEF, I handed the bike over to Cristina. It was a beautiful bike, hardly used, with ten gears. I really had tried to master the gears, but I walked it to the top of my street because I couldn't make it up the hill peddling. I was assured by my daughter and son-in-law that if I changed gears, I would be able to. Well, maybe they could but I just couldn't remember how to change the gears or what direction to change them. It had been my retirement gift from them. Very thoughtful, I supposed.

I had ridden bikes most of my earlier life. In England it was our most frequent mode of transportation. We would ride into Norwich to shop or visit. When Alan worked on farms in the summer, Aunty Dot and I would ride out into the country to bring Alan lunch and to visit awhile. Of course, these were good solid old-fashioned bikes without a bunch of gears.

When I first arrived in the USA, I didn't have a bike; but when I went to college, I acquired one. Again it was a good sturdy bike with a large basket. I used the bike to ride to my classes on the campus. At the time, I lived with my sister and brother-in-law and their young son, Aaron. I often popped Aaron into the basket and took him for a ride. I remember one time we went to the farm and saw a mother pig with her babies. She took an instant dislike to us and started toward us. I never peddled so fast in my life to get us to safety. Eventually, I rode my bike to the school where I was student teaching. I often had a large pile of books and papers to fill the basket.

So, you can see I was truly a very competent bike rider for most of my life. I'm not the most mechanically adept person and this new bike really confused me. I wanted to be able to use it to ride in the lovely park not far from our home. The more I tried to master the bike, the more frustrated I became.

Relief came, but in a strange way. Timm Lochmann, son of the historian from Adelsheim, came to the University of Maryland as a postdoc. His wife, Cristina, accompanied him. We spent a lot of time together during this time. One day, Timm mentioned he was looking for a bike for Cristina. I almost jumped for joy. I told the two they could have my bike. They accepted immediately but insisted on paying for it. My bike, lock and all, went to live with someone who could really appreciate it. I haven't been on a bike since.

A Memoir

TELL IT ALL—

Share my story

But I remember.

Did I remember it years ago?

What brings the memory to me now?

A flash, a hidden thought surfaces:

My memoir is truly only mine.

Food Desired and Food Denied

Peter Stein

Peter Stein was born in Prague to a Jewish father and a Catholic mother. During the Nazi occupation, Peter encountered antisemitism from both classmates and strangers. His father was deported to Theresienstadt, and his mother was forced to work in a factory.

I WAS SEVEN YEARS OLD IN 1943 WHEN MY FATHER DISAPPEARED. It was the fourth year of the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, and he was not at home. I kept asking my mother about my father, and her standard reply became, "Don't worry—he is on a business trip and will be back as soon as he can." At first, I believed her, but I wanted a fuller explanation. I missed my father terribly, but my mother never told me that he was assigned to a hard labor battalion or, later in 1944, that he was sent to Theresienstadt. She could not tell me the truth.

We were a small family of three and shared much, including family meals every evening. As the occupation dragged on, I also saw less and less of my mother. She was assigned to work in a German-controlled textile factory on the outskirts of Prague. At first, I would still see her in the evening and we'd eat together, but when she was transferred to the evening shift, I would not see her when I came home from school.

The availability of food also changed dramatically. During the German occupation, ration cards were issued for everything—meat, fat, milk, sugar, and other foods. As the war dragged on, there was less food and fewer ration cards. Each time my mother bought an item in a store, her card was punched. And there were strict rules about the use of these cards.

Often on Sundays my mother and I had lunch together. Because there was a coal shortage, we ate in the kitchen, the warmest room in the apartment. It was easier for my mother, as she could just dish food from the stove. She was tired from working five nights a week. One Sunday she presented a medley of cooked carrots, turnips, Brussels sprouts (which I did not like), and a mound of mashed potatoes topped with mushroom gravy (which I always enjoyed).

Mother hardly ever scolded me, but she was angry that day. As we sat down, she explained that for a while we would have no meat, only vegetables, because the butcher had no meat either. He told her that the Germans were inspecting all of his sales receipts and limiting deliveries. There was not enough food for German soldiers, and according to Nazi authorities, feeding German

soldiers was more important than feeding the inferior Czechs. Because my mother was a longtime customer, the neighborhood butcher would sometimes sell her meat even when he said he had none, if she promised to bring in the government coupons.

But I was the main reason we had no meat that Sunday. After a hockey game on the frozen Vltava River, some boys stopped at a street cart to get steaming hot dogs with an irresistible aroma. A portly, mustachioed man—bundled up and wearing gloves—greeted us. Each of us ordered a hot dog, which is called a parky in Czech. He took off one glove and poked a long fork into an open vat of boiling water. He speared two big, juicy parkies, placed them on a scale, weighed them, and sliced each one in half. He then sliced four pieces from a large round loaf of rye bread, smeared each piece with yellow mustard, and placed a piece of parky into each slice. His face lit up with pride, like a sidewalk artist who has just finished a quick portrait. Then he asked for four meat coupons and 20 Czech korunas.

That's when the problem started. Each of us had a five-koruna coin, but no one seemed to have coupons for meat. Jan kept searching the pockets of his trousers, while Tomáš was searching his jacket, and Edvard admitted that his mother never gave him a ration card. I was taking everything out of my knapsack. The parky smelled great, but things looked bleak.

After a hectic search I finally found ours. My mother, anticipating my needs, put the card in my knapsack. But that card was meant just for me, not for three other hungry boys. I knew it was a bad idea when I handed the street vendor my card, which he took, punched four times, and returned to me, saying thank you.

I told the boys they had to pay me back soon. But I felt uneasy. When I got home my mother asked about the hockey game and whether I'd had a snack. When I told her the parky story, she crossed her arms and rolled her eyes. Whenever my mother rolled her eyes, I knew I was in trouble. She was upset with what I had done and reminded me of the food shortages. I defended myself by saying the boys promised to pay me back, but mother said the boys could not give me their meat cards, and no butcher would take them anyway.

For a week or more after the parky feast, I was reduced to eating bread and mustard without any meat. While I learned to tolerate mustard sandwiches, even trying different mustards, I missed those succulent, steaming hot dogs. My mother, ever the pragmatist, became a vegetarian.

Manufactured Reality

MASHA GESSEN, A RUSSIAN AMERICAN JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR, has been an outspoken critic of Vladimir Putin. Gessen has called what passes as news in Russia as "manufactured reality," which refers to the daily stories covered by state-controlled media. Among Putin's distortions are his argument that Ukraine is not a nation, that Ukrainians are not a people, and that the invasion and killing of civilians is not a war but a "special military operation." The stated aim of Putin's action was to "demilitarize and denazify" a country of 40 million people, which is led by a Jewish president who was elected democratically by 70 percent of the population. The ousted head of the leading Russian public opinion research organization states that current Russian propaganda is full of "lies and hatred on the fantastical scale."

I was first exposed to manufactured reality during the German occupation of Czechoslovakia from March 1939 to May 1945. I did not realize it at the time, but much of what I heard on the radio, read in the newspapers, and what was told to me by my teachers was the Nazi version of reality. My mother reassured me that my Czech teachers were ordered by their Nazi supervisors to tell us about German military victories, even if they did not believe these lies.

On many Sundays during the war my mother and I, her sister Olga, and my cousins Gerti and Robert would get together at my Catholic grandparents' apartment in downtown Prague. Both husbands were missing—my dad, Victor, was in Theresienstadt, and my Uncle Leo was sent to Auschwitz. Miraculously, my father survived, but tragically, my uncle was killed.

Sunday afternoons were special—it was fun to see everyone, especially my cousins. The major highlight was my grandmother's cooking, particularly her baking. Despite increasing food shortages as the war progressed, she would prepare tasty meals and bake cakes for her family.

Another highlight of these weekends would occur after the meal—the BBC news broadcast from London. Grandfather Antonin, Robert, and I would move into the study, where we would listen to it on his German Blaupunkt shortwave radio. Grandfather would spread a large map of Europe on his desk and use black checkers to show territory controlled by the Germans and red checkers to show territory attacked and liberated by the Allies.

The BBC broadcasts always started with London's Big Ben striking five times to indicate the hour, followed by the opening bars of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, and then the announcer's English accent and deep voice saying, "Good evening. It is seventeen hundred hours and this is the BBC news coming to you from London." After the "Bulletin of Main News," a new announcer

would come on and speak in Czech about the progress of the fighting. Grandfather told us that interspersed in the broadcast were secret messages for Czech resistance groups about supply drops, sabotage actions against the Germans, and other code words.

I still remember a day in June of 1944 when Grandfather ushered everyone into his study. Uncharacteristically, he was very excited. He reported that recently he had heard a BBC broadcast revealing the landing of Allied forces on the beaches of Normandy. He placed red checkers on five beach areas: American troops had landed on Utah and Omaha beaches; British troops had landed on Gold and Sword beaches; and Canadian troops had landed on Juno Beach. Omaha was the bloodiest landing surrounded by steep cliffs and heavily defended German positions. Many American infantrymen were gunned down by German machine gun fire before the rest finally made it across the beach to the foot of the bluffs, then up the bluffs. Robert and I marveled at the bravery of American soldiers. We were swept up in the excitement of the good news, and we both started to imagine having our fathers back. It was time with my grandfather that I'll never forget. As I was leaving his study, he whispered into my ear: "Don't worry. Your father will be alright."

At a young age, I experienced what psychologists call cognitive dissonance. What I heard from Grandfather and the BBC contradicted everything I was told in school, or heard on the radio, and saw in newsreels in the local movie house. As to my question of which side was really winning, I decided that Grandfather told the truth, not the Germans.

Ukraine-Czech Exodus

MY DAD AND I MOVED BRISKLY TOWARD THE SUDBAHNHOF RAILROAD STATION IN VIENNA. We entered the large concourse with its five platforms, large bow windows, and very high ceiling of wooden beams. It was also the home of countless pigeons flying at will throughout the building.

Platform 2 was rapidly filling with adults and children also waiting for relatives and friends. We were headed for one area to welcome a set of Czech relatives, the Novaks. We found an emptier spot about halfway down the platform. I was to look to the right while dad scanned leftward. A Czech man standing near us complained, "Where is that train? Those Communists can't even make a train run on time."

When my father telephoned his cousin Vera Markus Novak in Prague the evening before, she said we would see Vera, Josef, Hanna, and Tomas today. Now he wondered whether the train was

delayed by Russian soldiers checking everyone's documents. "You know, Peter, before the Soviet invasion, the afternoon train from Prague was mostly empty. You can see how that's changed."

My dad was serving in his second year as the director of the American Fund for Czech Refugees (AFCR) in Vienna. His office processed Czech refugees. The year before, he had helped about ten refugees per week; now he saw about ten refugees each hour. He and his staff greeted the often scared and shocked newcomers. They offered coffee, rolls, and food coupons for local stores; helped with housing; identified temporary jobs; and answered tons of questions. And they had a few toys for kids.

Many refugees were trying to cope with a very confusing situation that had turned their lives into a nightmare. Most needed help in finding countries that would accept them, and Dad spent a lot of time trying to match the skills of the refugees with the needs of the host country. He was especially pleased when he was able to persuade Sweden to accept a group of Czech lumbermen and Germany to accept medical technicians and a few doctors.

I was a graduate student at Princeton working on my sociology thesis at the time. I decided it would be more fun to join my dad for a ten-day vacation in Eastern Europe than spend more time plowing through data from a sample of 15,000 American college students. Anyway, my thesis advisor was away.

A few days before I was to fly, I learned the tragic news of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. On August 20, 1968, four Warsaw Pact nations—the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Poland, and Hungary—invaded Prague. I expected the invasion would change our vacation plans.

The 3 p.m. train finally arrived about an hour late. The train was full and as the doors opened, I saw a sea of women, children, and men pouring out. They carried their limited possessions—suitcases, knapsacks, plastic bags, strollers, and packages wrapped in paper. They were warned by Czech authorities to carry only one valise—everything else would be confiscated. It seemed like an order left over from Nazi times—I wondered why today's Czechs were following this Nazi playbook?

As people exited the train a roll call of Czech names filled the platform with many greetings of Ahoj—for Jan, Martina, Vaclav, Gerti, Frantisek, and others. I tried scanning faces, but I wasn't sure whom I was looking for. I had met Vera Novak more than 20 years before when she was a young nursing student in Prague and had lived with us for a few months. Suddenly my dad shouted, "Tomas, Tomas," and a young man with dark hair, wearing horn rimmed glasses, about my height, and carrying one full knapsack, spotted us.

We embraced and chatted busily in Czech. "So where are your parents and your sister?" my father asked. It seems that Tomas's parents were warned by a neighbor that families seeking to leave together were being harassed and even arrested at the train station. Tomas said his parents would come in a few days, and his older sister, Hana, was to come a few days after that.

In the next few days, I got to know, for the first time, my cousin Tomas—we developed a strong friendship that has lasted more than 50 years. We toasted our families regularly at Café Hawelka at #6 Dorotheergasse Street, often joined by one of Tomas's Prague friends who had just arrived in town. Tomas playfully introduced me as his "rich American cousin," and so I mostly wound up picking up the evening's beer tab. And in the next ten days, we returned to Vienna's railroad station several times to welcome his father, Josef, a medical doctor, his mom, Vera, a nurse, and Hanna, his sister, a nursing student. Years later, Tomas also became a doctor and still practices emergency medicine at the Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto.

Our reunions were lively, but the Soviet bullying was unconscionable. In the spring of 1968, Alexander Dubček, the Czech Communist leader, announced a reformist political program he called "socialism with a human face," in which the Communist system would be reformed from within. The landmark reforms included the abolishment of press censorship, restoration of civic freedoms, freedom to exercise one's religious traditions, and the slow liberalization of the political system. This period of Communist liberalization became known as the Prague Spring. However, the leadership of the Soviet Union had decided that "socialism with a human face" was too dangerous and might provoke a wave of democratization across the Soviet-controlled eastern bloc.

The harsh Soviet response changed the nation and the lives of men, women, and children. Any hope for reform was snuffed out. The invasion was followed by a wave of emigration estimated at 70,000 people immediately and about 300,000 in total. Almost all of these highly qualified refugees settled in Western countries. What were the costs endured by the Czechs and Slovaks and their country as refugees fled their homeland to seek safe havens elsewhere?

Volunteering in my father's office gave me a chance to speak with a number of men and women. I met experienced professionals and skilled workers—politicians, clergy, business owners, professors, doctors and nurses, artists, skilled craftsmen, auto mechanics, writers, and poets. Most held pro-democratic values and refused to live under a totalitarian regime. The country lost a lot of productive talent; a major brain-drain occurred.

I was also impressed with their educational accomplishments and general optimism about their futures. Most men and women I spoke with were married and most also had children. Some, like

my relatives, were in their 50s and 60s, but a clear majority of refugees were in their 30s and 40s. Many wanted to settle in the United States, seeking their desire for political freedom, economic opportunities, and the optimism they saw in American films, music, and art. But the US government in 1968 was much slower in processing applicants than the Scandinavian countries, or Germany and Canada. Three different families we knew chose Canada because of the shorter wait. Other relatives, including several Holocaust survivors, chose Germany, partly because they could return to Prague more easily should things change. However, after the Soviet occupation, Czechoslovakia became one of the most brutal, authoritarian, and isolationist regimes of the Communist bloc.

It seems to me that many of the Czechs who left due to the events of 1968 were similar in many ways to the Czechs, including my parents and relatives, who fled the Communist coup in February 1948.

What have we really learned? Can past migrations help us understand what's happening in Ukraine today? Ukrainians continue to leave their homeland as long as the war continues. By August 2022, at least five million men, women, and children have left for Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Moldova, Germany, Finland, and other destinations. Will they settle in any of these countries, or do most want to return to their homeland? We don't yet know who they are, but certainly there is a substantial group of professionals and well-educated persons who strongly prefer democracy to a dictatorship. The country is already experiencing a "brain-drain"—we don't know now how extensive it will become.

In each historical case—Czechoslovakia in 1948 and 1968 and Ukraine in 2022—a much larger and militarily strong country invaded the territory of a smaller democratic nation. The citizens of the attacked country suffered the most and they had to flee their homes. Their nation lost the skills and the contributions of several generations.

Sofie's Memorial

IN AUGUST 2008, MY SON MIKE AND I TRAVELED TO PRAGUE to see my birthplace, explore the city, and pay our respects to Sofie, my grandmother. First, we explored the world of Bohemian beer. Mike wondered whether Josef Stein, Mike's great-grandfather, played a role in selling hops, yeast, and barley to brewers in Eastern Europe? Mike often recreated historic beers, and he was eager to learn if Josef had any beer-brewing experiences.

But today was different—we were visiting Theresienstadt (Terezín), a ghetto and transit camp northwest of Prague. Almost 90 percent of Czech Jews were killed during the Holocaust. Most men, women, and children were at first sent to Theresienstadt before being packed into "Trains Going East" to their deaths in places such as Auschwitz in German-occupied Poland and Maly Trostenets near German-occupied Minsk. Approximately 35,000 Jews were killed in Theresienstadt itself—worked to death, succumbed to various illnesses, or starved.

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Josef and Sofie disappeared from my life before my sixth birthday. Josef died in 1938, before the Nazi occupation, and I have no memories of him. He was a successful grain merchant who sold hops, malt, and barley to farmers and to breweries in Bohemia-Moravia and Austria. His business was both wholesale and retail, including a store with Catholic and Jewish employees. The Stein family lived in the town of Kolín, where a Jewish community was established in the 14th century. The Steins were members of a local synagogue, where my grandfather was one of the leaders of the congregation. They lived a comfortable life, and after Josef retired, he and Sofie moved to Prague. Then the German army invaded the Czech lands in March 1939 and changed everyone's lives.

During the occupation, many Jews were ordered to move, and families who lived in the better sections of Prague were forced to move so Nazi officials and high-ranking Czech collaborators could become the new occupants. Sofie had to move into a small apartment in a poorer district of Prague. She lived with her longtime maid, Anushka, whom she likely needed to administer insulin shots, help her dress, shop, cook, and take her to medical appointments. Anushka, a Christian, was so loyal to my grandmother that she wanted to get on the deportation train with her but was pushed away by Czech guards.

***

I have one vivid memory of Grandmother Sofie. I was six years old when she visited our apartment in June 1942. She wore a dark gray coat with a small black ribbon denoting the death of her husband. She carried a chicken liver casserole, which she placed carefully on the kitchen table. When she lifted the lid, there was an inviting aroma. It was my father's favorite snack—he loved to spread a little of the liver paste on a small cracker. Sofie gave me a taste of her delicacy. It had an interesting flavor, memorable because I did not know whether I liked it or not. After a while she, my father, and my mother settled into our living room and closed the doors behind them. I stayed in the kitchen reading a book, had another taste of chicken liver, and wondered what was taking them so long. When Sofie finally returned to the kitchen, she and my parents were weeping. She gave me a big hug and whispered what would be her last words to me: "I love you." It was the last time my father saw his mother. A short time later she was on a train to Theresienstadt.

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Mike and I approached the gates of the camp cautiously. "Arbeit Macht Frei," blared the sign to all who entered. It was read by my father, Victor, in 1944 when he first arrived in Theresienstadt. It might have been read by his 77-year-old mother, Sofie Marcus Stein, two years earlier in July 1942. She would have been forced to walk, with great difficulty, from the railroad station to the camp. It was likely read by her other adult children and their families in September and October of 1942.

My grandmother was frail and suffered from Type I diabetes. She needed insulin injections regularly, but the Nazi guards at the camp confiscated all medications. Sofie must have suffered terribly without any insulin and without any care. She died 21 days later.

We were guided around the camp by Martina who had escaped the Nazis by going to London and was now a tour guide in Prague. She was knowledgeable and energetic, and we appreciated her guidance. When I spoke about my grandmother, Martina showed us the crematorium where Sofie was cremated. I remember four gray and dusty ovens that had "processed" thousands of innocent souls.

We found the crematorium building very sad and emotionally draining. As I stood there, I could imagine Sofie being placed on the narrow tracks that pushed her body into the oven and exiting as a pile of ashes—how ghastly, I thought. A lively, loving, intelligent woman killed for no reason but because she was Jewish.

We exited the grim crematorium to view rows of unmarked graves. We saw a huge mass grave holding perhaps thousands of victims. Historians of the Holocaust estimate that as many as 35,000 Jews were killed in Theresienstadt. Each row of the grave had about 12 victims, followed by another row of another 12 cremated victims. We started to count the number of rows but stopped, realizing there were rows upon rows as far as our eyes carried all the way to the forest of trees bordering the camp. I found the scene very impersonal with the victims abandoned and not recognized. We found the location of Sofie's remains just outside the crematorium in the mass grave holding a number of victims. Were there hundreds, or thousands, or tens of thousands of men, women, and children? I held onto the memory of one.

Much later Mike and I were able to get a copy of the drawings of this area made in 1942 by the Germans. The maps were housed in the Jewish Museum in Prague. Sofie's small grave was marked as 25742 indicating the day she was cremated—July 25, 1942.

Mike and I were overwhelmed by the experience, and yet we were gratified to witness such an important part of our family history.

Tuskegee Airman Colonel McGee

I FINISHED REVIEWING THE WASHINGTON POST'S FRONT PAGE and the sports section when a headline in the obituaries on January 17, 2022, caught my interest.

"Barrier-breaking Tuskegee Airman flew combat missions in three wars." The story was about retired Air Force Colonel Charles McGee, who lived until the age of 102. After retirement, he was promoted to Brigadier General.

The armed forces of the United States—the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines—were segregated before and during World War II. The Tuskegee Airmen served in an all-Black unit where they had to overcome the opposition to allowing Black pilots to fly combat missions. A number of white officers questioned whether African Americans had the skill, intelligence, and courage to become military pilots, the article said.

Colonel McGee in a 1989 interview with the newspaper identified the racism. "Once we proved that we could fly, they said we didn't have the guts to fight in combat. But our record speaks for itself." After the war, the fighter group was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation for the longest bomber escort to Berlin in 1945.

My interest peaked when I read that the Tuskegee pilots destroyed three German Messerschmitt 262 jet fighters and damaged five additional planes. Colonel McGee himself downed one of those German planes while escorting B-17s over Czechoslovakia, according to his obituary.

I suddenly realized that while McGee was piloting his plane over my country, I was a young boy living in Nazi-occupied Prague. Between 1944 and 1945, we regularly heard air raid sirens announcing the arrival of American, Canadian, and British planes.

Most of these planes unloaded their bombs on targets in Germany but a few times, they bombed military and industrial targets in and around Prague. I was in a school downtown on a day in February 1945 when the wails of the alarm scared all of us. Although we periodically rehearsed the alarm drills, that day seemed different—our teachers looked worried. "Leave your books in your desk; take your coats and hats. Quickly, quickly."

Explosions had already started and they were getting louder, one crash followed another. Prague was being bombed. The youngest students started to cry while I, a third grader, clenched my fists,

bit my lips, trying not to cry. I was scared. Suddenly there was an eerie silence, followed by sounds of fire engines and ambulance sirens.

In the basement I sat with friends Tomas and Jiri wondering how close the bombs had landed. Did they hit military targets, civilian targets, our homes? We wondered why the Americans bombed downtown Prague, where there were no obvious military targets.

We did agree that the bombing showed that the end of the war was closer than the Nazi authorities were telling us. And for me it meant the hope that my father would return from a Nazi concentration camp.

Years later, I learned that Prague was bombed accidentally. It happened the same day that Dresden in Germany was devastated. Three waves of 1,300 Allied bombers attacked Dresden, mostly British Lancaster bombers and American B-17 Flying Fortresses.

Tragically, due to a "navigation error," a squadron of American planes assumed they were over Dresden, perhaps because the topography of Dresden is similar to that of Prague.

That day 40 American B-17 bombers dropped 152 tons of bombs on central Prague, killing more than 700 civilians and destroying over 300 houses and historical sites.

Was Colonel McGee flying over Prague that day or on his way to Dresden? Or was he at the Tuskegee Italian airbase resting?

I don't know, but still I thank him for his bravery in liberating my homeland.

Gratefulness

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.

I AM GRATEFUL TO THE MUSEUM'S STAFF FOR PROVIDING ME OPPORTUNITIES to share and participate in our various programs. These programs make me feel that my message is important enough to pass on to people all over the world. I am grateful that I am healthy in mind and body and can meet the challenges that are asked of me. I feel vital and significant because I can contribute to the Museum's mission, which is "working to keep Holocaust memory alive while inspiring citizens and leaders to confront hatred, prevent genocide, and promote human dignity in our constantly changing world."

I am grateful to the staff of our Museum for diligently continuing its work, virtually, even though we are experiencing a global pandemic of COVID-19. I continue to participate in Zoom meetings with my fellow docents of the main exhibition and the *Americans and the Holocaust* exhibition. We have well-planned meetings every month where we learn new ways of viewing and presenting the exhibits. Rebecca Dupas, manager of the Initiative on the Holocaust and Civic Responsibility, sends us informative emails called "Helpful Hints," which include documentaries, videos, books, and articles that significantly enhance my knowledge at stops in the main exhibition. Just today we received an email that deals with "rescue efforts that ranged from isolated actions of individuals to organized networks both large and small." Rebecca explains how the information in these videos could be used to broaden our knowledge about "rescue." Rebecca also lets us know about new optional lectures. I am confident that when I resume conducting tours, I will definitely be ready to resume our tours that we conduct for our visitors because of all the help we received from Rebecca and her team.

I have attended nearly all the survivor meetings that take place every Friday morning at 10:30 a.m. I am grateful to Diane Saltzman, director of the Office of Constituency Engagement, for keeping us all together and keeping us informed and engaged. She is such a warm, understanding, and uplifting host. I derive so much pleasure from seeing her and all the survivors on Zoom in their homes and in their own little Zoom frames. These meetings also provide opportunities to listen

to a large variety of guest speakers. I am grateful for all the time and effort that Diane devotes to keeping us informed and happy. I know that she is always there for us.

I have learned a lot about Google Docs from Emily Potter Tien, senior program coordinator in Survivor Affairs. She gave the *Echoes of Memory* writers a very helpful tutorial. She also devised a program where we can find our stories easily in each Echoes publication. I think it is a masterpiece. I also appreciate all the effort Emily executed in making my Facebook Live program with Edna Friedberg a reality for the world to see and hear. I see that this program is still streaming on the Museum's Facebook page. I value Emily's help in keeping me in touch with Hansjoerg Rehbein, a journalist whose hometown of Bad Kreuznach is the same as mine. He reported on my family's story to commemorate this year's Kristallnacht events in Bad Kreuznach. It was published in the local newspapers. The mayor, Dr. Heike Kaster-Meurer, sent me a letter to thank the Museum and me for our commitment to make the world aware of the Holocaust. I am happy that Emily is always there at our Echoes meetings.

What would I have accomplished without Keri Bannister, program coordinator in Survivor Affairs? How would I have learned about Zoom? At the beginning of the pandemic, I learned from her everything I needed to know about virtual conferencing. She was always there, patient, explaining, sometimes over and over again, issues that were so difficult at the time. I was so worried about speaking for the Museum's first official video conference with the Bringing the Lessons Home youth ambassadors. I discussed with Keri my concerns with sitting in front of my computer for 45 minutes and just talking about myself. She was calm and assured me that everything would be fine. Subsequently, I presented another video conference to the students of Hiroo Gakuen High School in Japan, where Keri was the facilitator. At that time I thought that I was an expert. I am grateful to her for all the Zoom tutorials. I am grateful for all the reminders she sends us about meetings, programs, Facebook events, and speakers. I appreciated her help when she arranged the slide show for each survivor. I thought that the presentation at the survivor meeting was highly successful.

I cannot believe that in the digitized Museum collection sent to me by Leah Zinker, the Survivor Affairs and Oral History intern, I found my birth certificate that was documented in Bad Kreuznach, Germany. I did not remember owning it and certainly did not remember donating it to the Museum. It is exciting to know that at this stage of my life I have a copy of this birth certificate. I am still studying some of the papers that Leah found and reliving events in my past. I am grateful to Leah for also sending me links and attachments for photographs of me and my family.

To my great pleasure, I have the opportunity to see and listen to Maggie Peterson, the wonderful facilitator of our Echoes writers' workshop twice a month in our virtual class. She has been my

inspiration for so many years and has encouraged me and all the Echoes writers to compose pieces of remembrances of our past, hopes for the future, feelings about our surroundings, and love for our families. Maggie has made very positive comments and suggestions about our writing for many years. Her prompts have always been helpful. The best part of composing these pieces is when we read them in class, out loud to the people in our class. However, after the reading, the delight continues because Maggie makes observations that inspire other members of our group to make comments. Maggie has the ability to help us understand and appreciate one another's views. I always look forward to our meetings. I am grateful to Maggie for helping me become a better writer and for filling my life with the joy of writing.

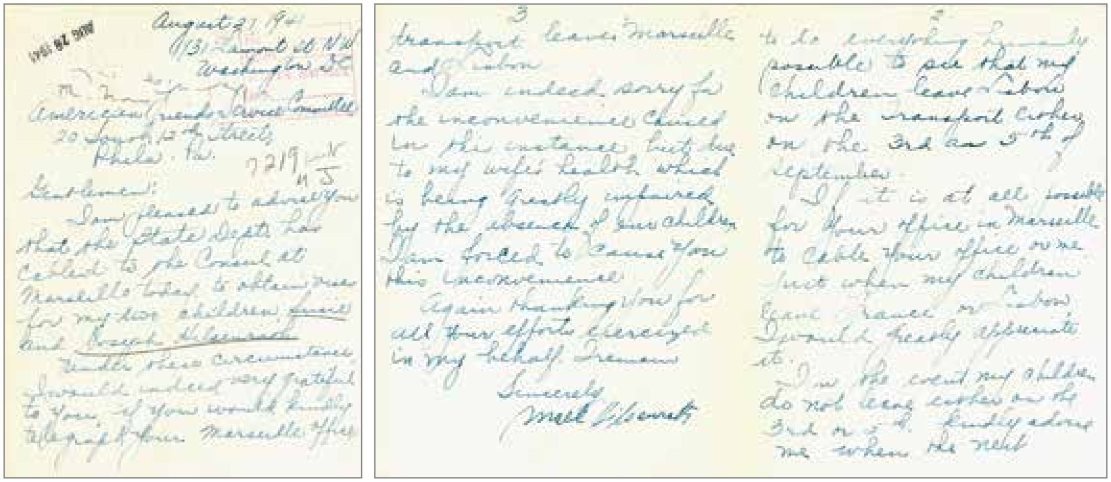
My Father

THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM OWNS THE ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPH that I donated to the collection when the Museum first opened. It is a picture of me when I was around three years old. My father and I are walking across the bridge over the Nahe River in Bad Kreuznach, the town where I was born in Germany. The time is probably just before the Nazis and Hitler came into power. My father is young and handsome, wearing a double breasted pinstripe suit with a white handkerchief in his breast pocket. It looks like he has a newspaper casually folded in his jacket pocket. He is smiling and his head is slightly bent towards me. He seems to be proud walking with his little daughter garbed in her beautiful white dress, embroidered with vibrant flowers. What makes me happy now, looking at this picture, is that he is holding my hand, and that I am walking confidently into whatever is going to happen to me in the future.

When the Nazis boycotted my father's linen store he had to find other means to support our family. Since it was difficult for Jews to find employment, he focused on selling baskets of berries to the Jewish people of our town. When he returned home in the late afternoon, my father and I had private signals with our fingers to establish how many baskets of blackberries, strawberries, or gooseberries he had sold that day. He made me feel that I was an important person in his life.

After Kristallnacht, November 10, 1938, many Jewish people in Bad Kreuznach wanted to leave Germany and go to the United States. By that time it had become very difficult to emigrate. By 1939, my father found a French lady who was willing to smuggle my brother and me into France. My father and mother had to make a most difficult choice. I think about how painful it must have been for them to send two of their children away not knowing whether they would ever see

Susan and her father, Israel Hilsenrath, 1931. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Susan Warsinger*



AUG 28 1941

August 27 1941
1131 [illegible] St N.W.
Washington D.C.

[illegible]
American Friends Service Committee
20 South 12th Street
Phila. Pa.

7219

Gentlemen:
I am pleased to advise you that the State Dept. has cabled to the Consul at Marseille today to obtain visas for my two children, [illegible] and Joseph Hilsenrath.
Under these circumstances I would indeed very grateful to you, if you would kindly telegraph your Marseille office

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

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

Sincerely
[signature]

Letter written by Israel Hilsenrath to the American Friends Service Committee in 1941. *Courtesy of the American Friends Service Committee Refugee Assistance, US Holocaust Memorial Museum*

them again. My father was brave and wanted to do the right thing. He had the foresight to get my brother, Joseph, and me out of Germany so that we would be safe from the Nazis.

After the German army invaded France, my brother and I lost contact with our parents. They had been able to immigrate, along with our baby brother, Ernest, to the United States in 1940. My father wrote pleading letters to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers), and the US State Department, asking for their help to find us and send us all the necessary papers so that we could be reunited. My father was relentless in his attempts to send us the necessary visas.

Once we were in Washington, DC, my father always encouraged me to study vigorously. When I graduated from Central High School, he inspired me to attend the University of Maryland. Because we could not afford the cost of my living on campus, he drove me there for all my classes.

My father was happy for me when I married. He enjoyed having three granddaughters. He also drove them to their after-school events. He was particularly excited to drive them to Hebrew school because he wanted to make sure that they studied the Torah and learned about their Jewish tradition. He also drove them to the orthodontist and was always there to help when they needed him. On one occasion, when they were teenagers, my husband and I left them alone in the house, knowing that they could call on my father if there should be an emergency. When we returned home, there had been an incident: a bat in the house. My daughters were certain that this bat would get entangled in their long hair. Of course they were distressed and called my father who arrived quickly and very calmly captured the bat in the bathroom and carried it out of the house. He was somebody whom they could depend on and who told them that he loved and liked them.

My father would have been so proud of my grandchildren—his great-grandchildren. My first grandchild was Matthew and was named after him. These grandchildren are all adults now and have children of their own. He would be amazed at the magnificent, loving, caring, and large family that he created after the Holocaust.

Grandchildren

SIX MILLION JEWS WERE KILLED DURING THE HOLOCAUST. The immensity of this number does not reveal who these people were and does not give meaning to the lives they lived. The number will never tell the full story of what has been lost. All those people who were killed, including most of my relatives, were important. They had all been busy living lives and contributing to society. Any number of their children and grandchildren could have become great scientists, doctors, lawyers, chefs, actors, poets, writers, dancers, engineers, athletes, teachers, and so much more. The loss to humanity is incomprehensible.

I feel so fortunate that my immediate family survived and was able to immigrate to the United States by 1941, just before the worst atrocities occurred everywhere in Europe. I am so grateful that I had a wonderful husband who together with me raised three beautiful, loving, and intelligent daughters, who, in turn, each presented us with three grandchildren. We have nine grandchildren to love and watch over.

To the right is a photo taken of all nine of them, when they were between the ages of seven months and nine years old. Four of them were born within one school year. Joshua and David are twins and are sitting next to Julian, who is at the far right. Erica is holding the baby, Lyla. The photo was taken on August 7, 1994. They will all grow and be healthy and choose the kind of people they want to become. I will briefly convey what each grandchild will be doing on February 2, 2022. My description will start with Brian, on the left, who is wearing red shorts, and wander across, stopping at each grandchild, until I end with Julian, who has his knee on the couch.

Brian will attend Duke University and the University of Southern California and receive a PhD in Biomedical Engineering. He will become a research scientist at Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory. His research will include computational neuroscience, as well as brain computer interface technology. He will wed his talented fiancée, Sarah, a civil engineer, and have two exquisite children, a little boy called Elijah and a baby girl called Faye.

Matthew, during medical school at Northwestern held an internship at New York University and an infectious disease fellowship at Johns Hopkins's medical school, will work at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention in Beijing, China, and serve as a clinician educator in internal medicine in Gulu, Uganda, and an infectious disease research fellow in Pune, India. He will also do clinical work in Rwanda and do research in Peru. He will become Assistant Professor of Medicine in the Division of Infectious Diseases at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and serve on the Advisory Team for Johns Hopkins Precision Medicine Center of Excellence for

Susan's grandchildren (from left to right): Brian Robinson, Matthew Robinson, Erica Robinson, Lyla Shapiro, Sabrina Shapiro, Rebecca Martin, Joshua Martin, David Martin Warsinger, and Julian Shapiro. *Photo courtesy of Susan Warsinger*

COVID-19. Some of his research will focus on the diagnosis of acute febrile illness. He will marry the gracious Sehar, a development director at Campaign Legal Center, and they will have two delightful sons called Rami and Sabih.

Erica will graduate from Northwestern University and move to Beijing to begin her consulting career in cable and media. She will learn to speak Chinese fluently. She will return to the United States and continue consulting in the same space. Later she will join Mediakind, a software and solutions company, as vice president of technology and strategy. There she will help Mediakind navigate an ever-changing industry. During this period she will marry good-looking Mike, a history professor, and they will give me my first great-grandchild, Maya, and then another sweet girl called Noa.

Lyla will join the Peace Corps in Paraguay for two years and serve as a community health educator before receiving a master's degree in public health at Emory University, graduating in May 2022.

She will be working with research teams that focus on local and global food insecurity initiatives. She will also be a COVID-19 responder with the Georgia Department of Public Health, where she will educate people on how to remain safe during the pandemic. She will continue to work in public health outreach and communications with a focus on the social determinants of health and climate action for global public health.

Sabrina will receive a degree in dance and biology at Marymount in Manhattan and dance professionally in New York, Washington, DC, and Israel for a number of years. She will also teach Pilates, other exercises, and dance before receiving her doctorate in physical therapy from George Washington University. She will be a physical therapist in Washington, DC, and marry Daniel, a dedicated teacher in the Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland.

Rebecca will attend the University of Maryland and receive a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree from the University of Michigan in public health. She will work in the Office of Autism Research Coordination at the National Institute of Mental Health. She will focus on outreach activities including creating website content and increasing engagement with the autism community.

Joshua will graduate from Harvard University and Tufts University School of Medicine, and do his residency at Northwestern and Shirley Ryan AbilityLab. He will be a sports medicine physician at the group of Regenerative Orthopedics and Sports Medicine in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. He will focus on non-surgical treatments for various musculoskeletal conditions and incorporate diagnostic, ultrasound-guided procedures. He will write several book chapters and papers on cutting-edge regenerative treatments to treat common orthopedic conditions. He will marry the lovely Alyssa, a senior editor for Home Chef.

David will receive his doctorate from MIT and will be a professor of mechanical engineering at Purdue. At Purdue, he will run a lab focused on water treatment technologies, where he will use nanoengineering and thermal sciences to make processes such as desalination more energy efficient and sustainable. His research will be supported by a mix of government agencies, companies, foundations, and startups, which he also advises. Meanwhile, David's teaching will focus on heat and mass transfer and design courses. He will seek to shape a better world through sustainable and energy efficient science and engineering. He will be engaged to the delightful Tobi who will be doing her residency to become a radiologist.

Julian will become a teacher of ice skating, rock climbing, paddle boarding, and basketball. He will become the director of a program that works with children with special needs that uses adaptive athletics including American Ninja Warrior and other sports. He will give therapy services to help children improve social skills and become athletes.

I am so proud of all my grandchildren's achievements and what they are contributing to our country and to the world. I am delighted that I am an important part in their lives. I know that they will have a positive impact on our civilization. Their energy is boundless. I also know that they are rejoicing in the fact that they live in a democratic society and that they will be resolute in making sure that no dictatorship will ever usurp our liberties. I am so happy that I had the opportunity to come to the United States and that my grandchildren will be part of the future.

Step into a Photo

THE SMILING CHILDREN SITTING ON THE WELL-WORN STEP are my brother Joe and me. We look happy because our mother is in the house about to have our baby brother. We know nothing about her not being able to go to the hospital because we are Jewish. The battered wooden door behind us is dense and solid, so we cannot hear any noises coming from the inside. When new, this door must have been especially elegant because of the intricate paneling that is embossed on its lower part. The photo was taken 84 years ago.

The photo is in sepia and, therefore, it is difficult to describe colors. However, I do remember that my dress was a mellow pink. Since I am only eight years old, I am not sitting in a very lady-like position on the step. The dress is pulled up over my knees. The strings that hold the dress together at my neck are carelessly tied. I am wearing knee socks that are rolled up at the top because they must have been too long for me. My shoes look like they have been walked and played in with great pleasure. My brown hair is combed neatly and has highlights in it because the sun must have been shimmering on me. The hairstyle that I am wearing was very popular among young girls in Germany at the time. There are two hair parts on each side on top of my head. The hair in the middle of these parts is rolled lightly together and looks like one portly tube. It is called a *tolle* in German. The sides of my hair are not braided, but are tied together on each side loosely, like a spool, to make a soft frame about my face. I am looking straight into the camera, and I am smiling and my front teeth seem to say that I am very satisfied. My smile looks like it is coming from my heart. I have my arm around my brother and we are sitting close together.

My brother Joe, who is 14 months younger than I, shows his contentment from ear to ear. His eyes are lowered as if something very amusing is taking place on the sidewalk where our feet are resting. He is wearing suspenders that hold up his short pants and is also wearing knee-high socks like mine. However, these seem to fit him better than mine, probably because they are held up by a string and the tassels on the side. His ankle-high laced boots are dusty as though he has been trudging through some powdered white cement. His arms are folded crosswise above his knees. I am sure that I have forgiven him for shattering my porcelain doll when he took it for a ride on my mother's dresser bench. In his enthusiasm to entertain this beautiful doll, she fell to the floor and her entire head broke into many pieces. On this day we have forgotten about this incident and it looks like we enjoy each other. I wish that I could remember the person who took the photo.

We are both waiting to be called back into our home. It is the home we had to rent after our father lost his linen store that was boycotted by the Germans. We did not care that our residence was somewhat shabby and threadbare. We were elated when we found out that we had a new baby brother called Ernest.

Joseph Hilsenrath and
Susan "Susi" Warsinger, née Hilsenrath.
Courtesy of Susan Warsinger

This photo has been reproduced in many forms and places. I use it in my talks to visitors at the Museum and now virtually on Zoom. My brother has it in his den in an apartment that overlooks both the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. These were the sites that greeted us when we arrived in the United States to escape the Holocaust. I have it framed, on a table in my living room where my brother and I, from our step, survey pictures of my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, looking at a future that we cannot imagine.

Democracy, A Poem

THE OCEAN CARRIES MY BOAT TO A NEW LAND.
I stand at the railing to see the symbol
of freedom and democracy.
A fog is thick until the early sun kisses it away.
The mist rises like a curtain, slowly and carefully
and all that I suffered between 1933 and 1941
fades away with the fog.
Survival and freedom washes over me
like a gentle warm wave that will keep me safe.

I found freedom is not for everyone.
Democracy is not perfect.
A government of people makes mistakes.
Some are still being resolved.
We have to keep striving
to improve our changing society.
It is difficult to maintain perfect democracy.

Many years have passed since I
disembarked in New York City
after sailing by the Statue of Liberty,
the beacon of hope for a better world.

What happens now is temporary.
There is much hope for the future.
The people and the government will unite
by working our differences out together
in a humanitarian way,
enhancing human dignity and equality,
and committing to the sanctity of all human life.

Simple Things in Life

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.

NINETEEN FORTY-SIX IS WHEN I CAME TO THE UNITED STATES at 17 years old. I was lucky to have my sister Ellen living in the Bronx. She immigrated to the United States in 1939 just before World War II started. In fact, she couldn't go to the city of Mukačevo to catch a train to Prague; it was already occupied by the Hungarians, who were allied with Nazi Germany. So, she had to go through mountain roads by horse and wagon to Slovakia, where she caught a train to Prague and picked up her visa for America. Two weeks later, Germany occupied the Czech lands, including Prague. She made it to Sweden and caught a ship to the United States.

After my sister Cilia and I were liberated from the camps, Cilia got in touch with Ellen and she, in turn, looked up our father's distant cousin who was in a position to sponsor us to be admitted to the United States. As a result, a year after liberation, we were in the United States of America. Ellen's husband, Willie, got me a nice room within a one-family house. After I was there for a while, they came out with a new system for playing records, referred to as a "stereo," so I purchased one and enjoyed it immensely. On Sunday when no one was home, I turned on the volume very loud. One could hear the vibration of the classical music I played.

Years later, after I was married and lived in my own house, I treated myself to a Bang & Olufsen system, which had a beautiful design, and I enjoyed it for many years. I found that sometimes simple things in life are very satisfying and worth having.

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