AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATORS

PRISM

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ABOUT THE FRONT COVER

This photograph, (*Untitled*, 70 x 60 cm, oil on canvas), was taken on May 14, 2023, by the Polish artist Krzysztof (Chris) Pietka during one of his many walks in Birkenau. There he observed a group of young Jewish tourists standing and hugging just inside one of the barracks; outside, sitting, was one of their group, a boy overcome with grief.

Chris writes, "My home, where I have my painting studio, is located in the former Auschwitz Concentration Camp Interest Zone. Through my paintings, I tell the story of my complicated relationship with this place. On the one hand, it is where the darkest history in the world occurred; on the other, it is where I live and work. This strong contrast is present in my oil paintings, which have very intense colors. I use color to connect my emotions with what I see. The dots in the paintings have a meditative character and are a very important element of my work."

Chris's family's history is closely linked to the Oswiecim area. Before the war, his grandparents lived Babice and Brzezinka, near the town that became a symbol of the Holocaust. In 1941, his grandparents, along with thousands of others, were expelled from their homes, which were destroyed. Building materials from those homes were used to construct Birkenau.[1]

After the war, the family returned to rebuild and begin anew. Krzysztof was born in 1990 and lived in a multi-generational home with his siblings, parents, and grandparents, who did not discuss their wartime experiences.

"I was greatly influenced in my perception of reality by the specific area where I lived then and continue to live today. It is a floodplain located on the edge of Babice. On one side of the house is the Vistula River, and on the other is its old river bed. During floods, the area becomes an island. It's a beautiful but dangerous piece of land."

When Chris was seven years old, a dream began to haunt him. In it, he would leave his home and walk out onto a nearby levee.

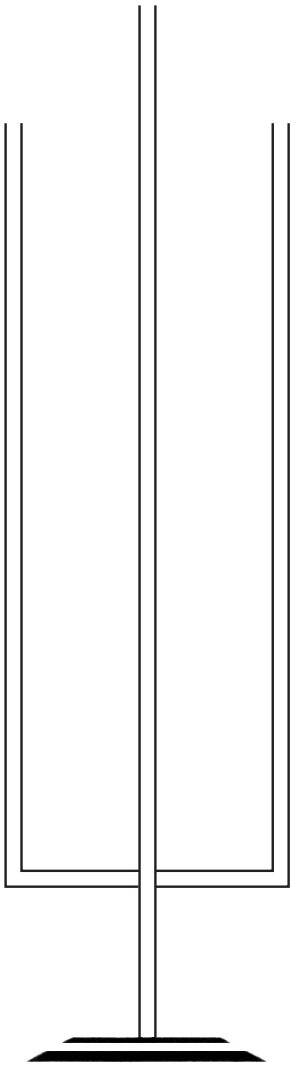
"In this dream, I made my way along the embankment to see where it ended. Moving away from the house, the landscape changed, becoming increasingly ominous. As I walked onward, the land seemed scorched, lifeless. Finally, my journey ended. In front of me I saw a gigantic black space spewing fire, burning everything around it. It was a terrifying sight."

He wanted to escape, he says, but the black space pulled him into its depths every time, until he awoke.

A dozen years later, as a grownup, he checked Google Maps and saw that this levee actually ends in a forest near the so-called "Little White House," a makeshift gas chamber at Birkenau. The end of this embankment is also near Birkenau's four largest gas chambers and crematoria (numbers II, III, IV, and V).

"I didn't understand the place I was living in. It wasn't until I turned 20 that I began regularly visiting the area of the former Birkenau. I explored the camp area based on Allied arial photographs taken in 1944. These images revealed the entire infrastructure of extermination, including my home. It was a tremendous shock for me."

[1] This information was gathered by Tomasz Kobylanski, a widely–published former faculty member of the Auschwitz–Birkenau State Museum who currently cooperates with numerous educational and cultural institutions dealing with historical and anti-discriminatory education, including the Jewish Museum in Oswiecim.



In loving memory of **Rena Zabielak**, A"H, a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto. Rena was a strong and courageous woman, full of personality and love. Her family, Vivien and Henry Arnold and Diane and Anthony Arnold, along with her many great grandchildren, sponsor this issue as an honor and tribute to her.

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AND

ANTHONY ARNOLD AND FAMILY

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PRISM: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Holocaust Educators is a peer-reviewed annual. This is its final issue.

The content of *PRISM* reflects the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of The Emil A. and Jenny Fish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies and Yeshiva University.

Contents

Introduction

When I first saw the photograph we've chosen for the cover, I thought, "Yes, that's exactly how so many of us feel these days. We simply want to put our head on our knees and cry, overcome and exhausted by October 7 and the aftermath, by the torturous facts that, until very recently, we still had hostages in Gaza, so many of them had been murdered, and bodies were still being held by terrorists in spite of the tenuous cease-fire. We worry that peace will be elusive, and we're outraged and alarmed by the rampant antisemitism that threatens Jews worldwide. I knew that picture would be the perfect cover if the artist would give us permission to use it, and it would be one of our best, even if it was not reflective of the Holocaust.

Krzysztof (Chris) Pietka, the photographer, graciously and generously gave us his work, along with additional photos that explained the context of the crying boy. Much to my surprise, this was a Holocaust image. The boy was not a young yeshiva student overwhelmed by current events, as I had imagined. Rather, he was grieving after his encounter with Holocaust history as he toured Auschwitz–Birkenau with his school group, seen just inside the Birkenau barracks.

I still feel a kinship with him, and perhaps you will as well as you reflect on both the Holocaust and the sad and troubling state of the world today.

We are especially pleased to share such a powerful cover for this edition because it is the final one for us. We have produced *PRISM* for 16 years now, and we have garnered awards and accolades from readers across America and in some 45 countries. We've learned that we have helped countless educators and their students find a way into this subject that they might not have found on their own. We are proud of this work and grateful to our many contributors: essayists, poets, historians, artists, psychologists, sociologists, educators, students, survivors, and children and grandchildren of survivors. We appreciate our readers as well, of course; they include educators, students, survivors, 2Gs, 3Gs, Holocaust and resource center directors, historians, psychologists, and lay people. We are grateful to all those who worked for months each year to put each issue together: the staff in Marketing and Communications, especially our senior art editor, Emily Scherer Steinberg; our poetry editor, Charles Adès Fishman; our art historian, Pnina Rosenberg; and our copy editor, David B. Greenberg.

We could not have published without our benefactors and supporters, including Henry Rothman and the Rothman Foundation, the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration, and Anthony Arnold, who has generously funded this issue in loving memory of his grandmother Rena Zabielak, A"H, a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto. We are grateful to Shay Pilnik, the director of the Emil A. and Jenny Fish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, for his commitment to this work and this publication, and his always wise and welcome advice. We thank retired Azrieli Graduate School deans David Schnall and Rona Novick for their years of encouragement, appreciation, and support. We thank Jeffrey Glanz, who served as coeditor in the first years of this publication, and we appreciate as well the members of our editorial board and our advisory board who served so graciously for these many years.

It was a difficult choice to decide what to include in this last issue. We wanted a variety of genres, as usual, but we had space limitations, so several excellent essays on education, history, and art and a number of haunting poems had to be put aside. We've always had to leave out many more submissions than we've included, and that is one of the challenging parts of editing a journal. Our superb peer reviewers gave of their time and expertise and helped tremendously as we had to make many difficult choices over the years, and we thank those many writers whose worthy efforts did not find a place here.

"Is there a danger of the Holocaust being overtold in literature?" asked survivor and internationally acclaimed novelist Aharon Appelfeld (Mitgang, 1986, para. 1) rhetorically. "The answer," he continued, "is no." We agree. As part of this new volume, therefore, we've gathered 11 short stories from previous editions, favorites of our readers around the globe, a small gift to all of the teachers who read *PRISM* and depend upon it each year in their classrooms. Readers have told us that our stories are what they turn to first when their copy arrives, and what they use most often in their classes. Now many of those stories are all in one place.

The narratives include three by Clara Asscher-Pinkhof;

one each by Rachel H. Korn and Chaver Paver (Gershon Einbinder); five by Jennifer Robertson, our most prolific short story contributor; and one by Zofia Nałkowska, translated by Jennifer Robertson. They are all highly effective and useful in a high school or college literature class, especially when the necessary historical contexts are included. For history students, the stories provide a name and a face, reminding readers of the individuality of Jewish experiences during the time of the Holocaust.

Fine poetry has long been featured here. In this issue, we offer selections by our poetry editor, Charles Adès Fishman, and by Dara Barnat, Mike Frenkel, Breindel Lieba Kasher, Nancy Lubarsky, Amos Neufeld, and Gail Newman, all cherished previous contributors. Barnat's poem, more current history than past, is a fitting conclusion to our poetry collection.

An essay on artists of the Holocaust by our art historian, Pnina Rosenberg, illustrates Jewish resistance and resilience, and educator Nancy D. Kersell explains the importance of teaching about the aftermath of the Holocaust in her essay on survivors' struggles and triumphs. Historian Rafael Medoff's discussion of the media's coverage of the Holocaust will prompt discussion of similar distortions and omissions today. A book review by Eugene Korn draws readers' attention to a thoughtful publication about Elie Wiesel by Alan L. Berger. Ending this issue is a reflection from Keren Goldfrad, a granddaughter of survivors, who explores the echoes of the Holocaust in the tragedy of October 7.

Additional words from Appelfeld reflect our understanding of our task these past 16 years: "The Holocaust is a central event in many people's lives, but it also has become a metaphor for our century," he wrote. "There cannot be an end to speaking and writing about it" (Mitgang, 1986, para. 1). We hope a similar publication will soon ensure this vital work continues.

— Karen Shawn, Ph.D.

REFERENCE

Mitgang, H. (1986, November 15). Writing Holocaust stories [Review of the book *To the Land of the Cattails*, by A. Appelfeld]. *The New York Times*. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/02/15/home/appelfeld-holocaust.html.

"This story was given to me exactly as I have described, narrated by a Polish woman named Danuta," writes Jennifer Robertson. "Everything is true: the location of her grandfather's house, the request, and the consequences."

Jennifer Robertson

Footsteps

A group of women sat together around the kitchen table in a Warsaw apartment, sharing coffee and memories. Danuta shared her father's story.

When my father was sixteen, the love of his life was a Jewish girl called Ciwia, Ciwia Hirsh. See, I even know her name! Ciwia lived in town and my father was a village boy, but they went to the same school.

Then the war began. Late one evening, someone knocked at the door of the cottage in the village where my father lived. It was actually the first house in the village, clearly visible from the open countryside around. The knocking wasn't loud, it was very gentle, but just the same, everyone just froze where they were. It could have been the police, come to take someone away. But in that case, the knock would have been different, loud and persistent. This knock was soft, beseeching. So after a moment's thought, my grandfather opened the door.

Mr. Hirsh, Ciwia's father, stood on the doorstep. Grandfather looked all around and invited him in. My father offered the stool on which he had been sitting and Mr. Hirsh told them that he had walked all the way from town, about 15 kilometers away. He had avoided main roads and even lanes. He was sure no one had seen him come to the door. After all, my father lived in the first house, so he hadn't had to walk right through the village.

He had come, he said, because of Ciwia. He wondered whether my grandfather would take Ciwia in, let her live with them, hide her. They were going to be sent away. They knew that trains went away full and came back empty. So he had walked all that way to my father's village.

Danuta paused. We waited, wondering what would happen next.

"My grandfather refused," Danuta said. "My father was sitting there, and he heard his father say 'no' to Ciwia's father. There were five younger children, you see, and my grandfather had to think of that. He had those five kids to look after. But it wasn't just the five kids. He reminded Mr. Hirsh that their house was the first in the village. That meant they would be the first to be searched. That's what the problem was, the location of the house. And so he said no.

"Grandmother gave Mr. Hirsh something to eat and then he went away."

Danuta paused. Darkness was falling and the kitchen window filled with cloudy twilight. In the silence, in the half-light, we heard a muffled sound. It was the father who had walked 15 kilometers, avoiding open roads. He had rested now. He must go. He stood up, a shadow among the shadows in the cottage. He hadn't wanted to cause any trouble. He had just come because . . . . And now he must go. He had a long walk ahead. He turned towards the door. His footsteps made just the slightest, muffled sound on the wooden floor.

One of us asked, "Did anyone survive? Did Ciwia . . .?"

"How could they survive? There was nowhere else to go. It was because it was the first house in the village, you see. It was too dangerous."

"Yes, if it had been the last one, right beside the forest . . ."

Our talk had shut out the sound of footsteps crossing the wooden floor, but now we listened again. A father was leaving a one-roomed home. A father who had no choice was shaking hands with a father who had made his choice. The father who has no choice steps out into the night. The door shuts behind him, the latch is dropped with barely a sound. But it should be alright. The doomed father doesn't have to linger in the village. The house is the first one, right at the very edge. Just a few meters to go and he will have left the village safely behind him. What does he think as he walks away?

Perhaps he had frowned upon his daughter's friendship with a Polish boy. Perhaps, though, as the noose pulled ever tighter, his wife had said, "But, Moshe, that's the very thing that could save her life. The boy loves her. Go and ask them to take her in."

So he went . . . and now he is returning. "The answer is no."

But Ciwia lived on in her young lover's helpless heart. That first love was never forgotten. His daughter actually knows her name, all these years later. And Danuta added, "My own mother wanted children so she took my father in. She made room in her house, her bed, her body for a man she didn't love, for the sake of the children she wanted to have. And if she hadn't, well, I wouldn't be here. But for the sake of the lost love, the girl his father would not save, my father never made room in his heart for anyone."

And now we hear them clearly, the footsteps retreating into the night. Those footsteps have been walking unceasingly for seven long decades. They walked into the room where we sat, a small group of women under the darkening sky. And when we parted, the footsteps followed us home.

Those footsteps walk across Poland, across Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine. Their muffled tread leads into the forests of Belarus, they traverse the byways of Europe. Other steps join them, and more, and more. Listen: They are walking into the darkness, those footsteps of a people for whom all roads were closed.

"This story was given to me," explains Jennifer Robertson, "by Joanna Branska, art historian, author of *Na Dobry Rok badzcie zapisani* (1997, Biblioteka Narodowa, Warsaw), a study of pre-war Jewish greetings cards. A member of the Polish-Israel Friendship Society, Dr. Branska also managed Café Eilat, where cultural events took place and where she often received artifacts from the time of the Holocaust, exactly as I have narrated. I simply created the characters and setting around this true story." Discuss with your students the ways in which artifacts help them understand the history and the people of the Holocaust.

Jennifer Robertson

Inside the Sewing Machine Drawer

Joanna ran a small café in Warsaw devoted to Jewish things: musical events, art exhibitions, poetry readings, and so on. She had set up a small display case.

"It's a memory store. I wanted to gather small, everyday objects from a vanished world, ordinary things that have become extraordinary because the people who owned them have vanished from the earth. Like this, for instance . . ."

She showed me a curved metal object, a container of some sort.

"It's a *mezuzah* case," Joanna explained. "It would have been fastened to the right side of the front door. Most Jewish homes in Poland had one and you can sometimes see the marks on the woodwork of pre-war buildings that show you that this house once belonged to a Jewish family."

So then she told me the story of the mezuzah.

She had received a letter from a small town in western Poland, a rambling letter with uncertain punctuation, from a woman called Maria Grabowska:

> I heard about you on the radio. Mother and I were repatriated from the east at the end of the war. We had to pack up in a hurry, but she managed to take her sewing machine. She put it in a handcart along with whatever food she could get hold of, bundles of bedding, pots and pans. She put my little brother on top. I walked alongside with a sack across my shoulders—I was almost seven. Mother trundled that cart along to the train. I'd never been in a train before, but I can tell you, it wasn't exactly luxury: We travelled in a cattle truck. Do you know how we survived? Some people in our truck had brought their cow. Every time we stopped, which we did quite a lot because the train kept getting checked—they pushed the cow out to graze, and we all got busy scraping out the evidence of the cow from our truck. But we had milk, straight from the cow.
>
> You may be wondering, what's all this got to do with the sewing machine? Well, inside the sewing machine drawer, Mother had put a small metal object. I don't know exactly what it is, but it's something Jewish. Mother felt that it must be important because the lady who gave it to her asked her to look after it carefully. So Mother tucked it away. She kept hoping the people it belonged to would come back and claim it, but no one ever came. When Mother passed away, I didn't want to throw it away, either. But now I'm getting on and my kids for sure will just chuck it away. "That old metal thing, there's no use keeping that," they'll say. They'll chuck the sewing machine out, too. "Old-fashioned," they'll say. "You can buy electric ones nowadays." But I don't want to break faith with something my mother promised so long ago. So I decided I would write to see if you could advise me what to do.

Joanna told me that she had written back and offered to travel across to western Poland to see Mrs. Grabowska. Then it turned out that Maria Grabowska had to visit her sister-in-law in Warsaw, so it was decided that she would come in herself with this souvenir from another time, another place.

She arrived, breathless with haste and apologies, a small, stout woman with patchy face powder, reddened lips, and greying hair escaping from a severe-looking hat. Joanna helped her hang up her coat and ushered her towards a table beside the display case. Maria took off her hat and pulled out a powder compact to survey her flattened hair.

"Oh, dear me, I'm so sorry I'm so late. I never thought it would take so long."

"Well, you've come a long way. Never mind, you're here now. Tea? Or coffee? Or perhaps something cold to drink?"

"Tea, please." She was rummaging in her bag and pulled out a crumpled plastic bag, which she unwound with much rustling. "Here it is, the thing my mother kept so carefully for so many, many years . . ."

She laid the small, oblong piece of metal on the white tablecloth.

"A mezuzah case!"

"Is it? Jewish families used to have them at the entrance to their homes, didn't they? I think I can remember them from the small town where I grew up, but I'm not sure. It was so long ago. Mother said some people touched it as they entered or left the home, but she didn't know why. Kind of like a holy water stoup, but of course it wouldn't be, would it, holy water, I mean . . .?"

"No," said Joanna, almost mechanically. "May I have a closer look?"

"Of course, of course, that's why I brought it. Here." Maria pushed the mezuzah container across the cloth and Joanna cradled it carefully in her hand.

"So," she said slowly. "This is what your mother kept in her sewing machine."

"That's right, tucked away inside the little drawer. I used to love that drawer when I was small. I'd always be pulling it in and out and peeking inside."

"Do you remember what happened? You said someone gave it to your mother?"

"That's right. It was Mrs. Goldfarb. She was the doctor's wife."

"And where was this? Where did you live?"

"Oh, you won't have heard of it. It was a small town near Lwów. Of course, that's in Ukraine now."

"But in those days . . ."

"Oh, a right mixture." Mrs. Grabowska stirred sugar into her tea. "Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, Armenians, two or three Czech families, too. The Goldfarbs were Jewish, of course. My mother used to do dressmaking for the family and sometimes I'd go along to the house with them. They had a nice, big house. Of course, I have only the vaguest memories. Sometimes, I seem to see a house with a feel of space and, oh, I don't know, comfort maybe, and sometimes I think it's just because Mother has told me about it and I can't really remember at all.

"But when the war began, the Russians came, and then, in 1941, the Germans. . . . I was only four but I remember it quite clearly. You know, they show films about the war nowadays, but I never watch. I remember soldiers with big boots and guns and harsh faces. And motorbikes. To this day the sound of a motorbike makes me feel as though I'm standing at the edge of a big black pit. . . . Horrible."

"Horrible indeed," Joanna agreed.

Maria Grabowska sipped her tea. "That's how it was for all the Jewish families. They wiped them out. Then, two or three years later, the Ukrainian nationalists came for us. They call it ethnic cleansing now. But by the time we were repatriated, as they called it, sent off in those cattle trucks to western Poland, the war was over and there were no Jews left in our little town. None at all. And there had been a synagogue and kosher shops and a school for the boys. A *cheder*, it was called. It was just one small room, which opened off the street. We used to go past the *cheder* on our way to market and see the boys, all with their caps on, crowded together, reciting long passages of the Scriptures by heart in Hebrew. Some were no bigger than I was then, three or four. Imagine killing little boys and their teachers just because they studied the Bible! It's the same God after all, isn't it? That's what they say now, when it's too late. When they've all disappeared. They didn't say it then, but my mother did and she brought me up like that, you know."

"Is that why Mrs. Goldfarb gave your mother the mezuzah case?'

"Perhaps. I've never really thought about it. She came and knocked at our door. Mother opened it, and it was Mrs. Goldfarb. She was in a big hurry. She said, 'I've come to say goodbye. We're going away, but we don't know where to, nor for how long. We have to be ready by noon.'"

Maria's blue eyes filled with tears. She searched in her bag for a handkerchief, blew her nose, and continued.

"You can imagine what a good person Mrs. Goldfarb was if she still found time to rush out and say goodbye to her neighbors."

"Yet she'd brought the mezuzah case with her, which must have meant she knew. . . ."

"She knew. And yet she didn't know. She told Mother something about going into the forests. 'Perhaps they want us to fell trees,' she said. But the elderly, the children? Perhaps, too, she brought Mother that case because she hadn't anything valuable left. The Russians had stripped their home, you know, because they were a bit better off than the others and lived in a bigger house. They made the Goldfarbs live in one room and quartered soldiers in the rest of the house, and when they went away, they took Mrs. Goldfarb's silver and nice table linen, my mother said. Then the Germans came and they took all the Jewish families away. And we were left with this . . ."

Her gaze went across to the mezuzah case, which Joanna had laid back down on the table. But the scene replayed across the old woman's inner eye had taken place a lifetime—a deathtime—ago. And Joanna saw it too: two women standing in a low-ceilinged room. Sunlight filtered through the leaves of yellowing lime and poplar trees and fell in patches on the earthen path outside the little wooden house. A slight breeze rustled the leaves. It was a golden autumn day with just a hint of chill, but Mrs. Goldfarb wore a felt hat, a thick coat with a warm jacket underneath, and several layers of clothes under that; and on her stockinged feet were sturdy shoes.

"My husband's father built our home," she said. "I came here as a bride. My children were born here. And now it's time to leave."

"Your husband delivered my babies, little Janek and darling Maria."

"She's a credit to you. We love it when she comes round. Came, I should say."

And then there was silence. Maria said she had never forgotten the way that the golden autumn day had become anxious, tense. A dog barked, a deep-throated bark from the jowls of a brute trained to kill. A motorcycle roared through the sleepy square of a little town and Mrs. Goldfarb bit her lip, half turning towards the door.

"I must go . . ."

Perhaps the Polish seamstress said warmly, "Go well, dear Mrs. Goldfarb, you and your family. I'll keep this safe for you until we meet again."

Whatever she said, she had kept faith, and so had her daughter after her. They had kept the mezuzah case. It lay on the white tablecloth, a small piece of decorated metal from another time, another place, and yet now for all time and for every place.

Joanna looked at it again. "Thank you for bringing this to us, Mrs. Grabowska, and thank you for sharing the story. I shall be proud to display this for you—and for Mrs. Goldfarb and her family."

"Oh, yes, please. I'm glad I brought it to you. It would have been terrible to have thrown it away. It's a little act of memory, isn't it, that means the dear Goldfarb family hasn't been forgotten."

"That's what it's all about."

She helped Maria with her coat and saw her out.

"So that's the story of the mezuzah case," Joanna told me, and she gave it to me to hold.

How many other hands had touched this metal after it had been nailed in place on the doorframe of the Goldfarb home? And what had Mrs. Goldfarb done with the precious parchment when she unscrewed its container?

"So many unanswered questions!" Joanna sighed, putting the mezuzah case back into her display cabinet. "The rabbi of Kobryn said, *Only when you possess knowledge do you know what you were lacking.*"

She smiled and left me to think this through. Maria Grabowska and her mother had known neither the name nor the purpose of the object they had kept so carefully. Nor had the Goldfarbs known what awaited them in the forest from which they never returned.

The mezuzah case, emptied of the scroll with its eternal commands but preserved in a Polish woman's sewing-machine drawer, had kept faith beyond the mass grave and the slow drift of leaves falling from thickly clustered trees. Now it rested behind glass, mute witness of the time when the noise of shooting had ceased, the last motorcyclist had roared away, and the little town had been pronounced racially clean.

"After I became involved with the Polish–Israel Friendship Society, its president, art historian Dr. Joanna Branska, told me this story," writes Jennifer Robertson. "Dr. Branska had been told it by an elderly lady, who could hardly speak, as the memory distressed her so much. I have written it very much as I heard it from her."

Jennifer Robertson

The Apple

She was in the autumn of her life, but her skin had a sheen that hinted at youthful good looks. Old Karol, watching from his ground-floor window, was reminded (and he was quite a connoisseur) of an apple a little past its sell-by date, but crisp around the core.

Karol lived on Hay Street, right beside the one remaining fragment of the wall that had surrounded the Warsaw Ghetto. As a youngster, Karol had watched the red brick wall rise ever higher. He had seen Jewish boys his age, or younger, carry bricks for their own prison. When the war and destruction were over, new buildings rose on rubble and bones; the ghetto wall became a silent ghost. Karol decided to commemorate those thousands turned to ash.

He fixed a map of the whole ghetto area to the wall. He put up a plaque, explaining what had happened there, and then he created a little garden, shut off by a low swinging gate. As the years went on, Karol, self-appointed guardian of memory, planted flowers and bushes in the little garden and kept an eye open for visitors to his shrine.

The woman had hesitated outside the gate, pushed it open, and walked slowly up the path towards the wall. She pulled off her gloves and unfastened her coat. It was warm in the shelter of the wall. Karol opened his back door and crossed his garden with remarkable agility. "Good morning, madam."

She swung around, startled. His blue eyes were friendly and his open manner invited confidences. She let him seat her on a wooden bench with her back to the red brick edifice. They chatted of this and that while traffic roared by the other side of the wall and the city got on with its normal business of living.

Their talk turned to her girlhood. There was something she wanted to say, but she found it hard to begin. She shifted position on the wooden bench, crossed and uncrossed her legs—nicely shaped, Karol noted with approval. She lifted her crinkled hand to her mouth. Her nails were painted faintly pink.

"I'll never forget it," she began.

Karol waited.

"A little girl, you know, sent away to Granny in the country to be safe. It was autumn, so sunny and warm. Granny sent me to the farm for milk. She gave me an apple in case I felt thirsty on the way."

She paused. Again her hand went up to her mouth, covering her thin lips.

"I had to cross the railway line. A train had stopped just ahead of me, a long line of closed-goods trucks, and all along the wagons little things fluttered like flags. But they weren't flags. They were hands, lots and lots of little hands, fingers jerking up and down like puppets dancing. Children's hands. And voices crying: 'Mummy! Let us out! . . . Help! . . . Water!' That's what they shouted most: Water. Only it wasn't really shouting, just a kind of animal howling from inside those sealed trucks."

She paused. Her faded eyes misted, looked deeply within.

"I pulled my apple out of my pocket. It was so red and shiny, so good to eat. I ran up to the train, right close up. I had to stretch up really high. I pressed the apple into one of the hands. It was probably a boy's hand. The boys would be the strong ones, wouldn't they? They'd be the ones who would force their way through the crush to get close to the cracks to get air. The boy took the apple, his fingers curled round it just as the train jerked and started to move away.

"But he couldn't pull the apple inside. The crack was too narrow, large enough for his hand to go through, but not wide enough for the apple. I hadn't thought about that, hadn't thought that the apple would be too big, but then the train started up again. It gave a big jerk and pulled away. I watched it go with all those little hands waving like flags and one of them holding my apple and struggling, struggling to get it through the crack."

She fell silent and Karol waited. They had plenty of time. It was pleasant here, sheltered by the wall.

"I'll never forget it. It haunts me, the child's hand holding the apple, his very last apple, and me standing there, so helpless. I suppose he dropped it, just opened his fingers and let it fall. It would have been better not to have given the apple at all. It just made it worse for him. I shouldn't have done it. It wasn't right . . ."

Karol pressed her hand. "Dear lady, when everything is wrong, can anything be right? Would you like to take a closer look at the wall?"

She looked around her as if she'd only just noticed the wall, the garden, and Karol himself. "The wall? Oh, yes."

They stood up. Karol led her closer to the wall.

"This is all that's left of the Warsaw Ghetto wall," he explained.

She pointed to the map. "And you did this . . . and made the garden, too?"

"It is necessary to remember," Karol said.

She nodded. "Do many people visit the wall?"

"Very many. Some take pictures, others light candles or lay stones or formal wreaths—but you, madam, have brought your story."

He bent over her hand, raised it to his lips, and kissed it. The red brick wall towered above them, while beyond the wall, trams rattled over their tracks like departing trains.

Clara Asscher-Pinkhof was incarcerated in the Dutch transit camp Westerbork and found solace as a teacher in the girls' dormitory and in the nursery of the children's barrack. She wrote narratives based on the children for whom she cared until she was deported to Bergen-Belsen. Freed in 1944 in a prisoner exchange, she went to Palestine, where she continued her writing, and in 1946 her book, *Star Children*, a collection of 68 short stories, was published. The three stories included here are brief, indelible moments of defensive and defiant action by the most vulnerable of Jews. The condensed form and focus of these tales make them ideal for literature circles or paired learning.

In this first story, a grandfather has voluntarily chosen to be deported to Westerbork along with his daughter and granddaughter. The granddaughter struggles to understand the term "voluntary," as she and her mother had no choice. We, though, understand the courage of his decision.

Clara Asscher-Pinkhof

Must

Among all the adults and children streaming in there is only one with gray hair. That is Grandfather. *Her* Grandfather. The three of them have come together, Mother and Grandfather, and she, and nothing bad can happen to her now.

She does not see that Grandfather is the only one with gray hair. She does not know about age limits and about the older people who are still free to walk about. She knows only that they packed their rucksacks and took everything out of their house that Mother thought was necessary and that they then closed the door behind them. They left nothing and no one behind. They brought the cat to the non-Jewish neighbors, who will certainly be as nice to it as they have been to it themselves. Those neighbors had wept bitterly when the three of them came to say goodbye. The man shook his fist; she knows very well at whom he did that, even though he did not say and she will not say, either, because you must not say anything out loud anymore. The woman picked her up as if she were still very small and kissed her. Oh, yes, she knows for sure that the neighbors will take good care of the cat.

After their rucksacks have been taken from them in the Star House, she walks further inside, safely between Mother and Grandfather. Now and again there is someone who points the way further to the places they will have until they go on their journey. It is very crowded and not as nice as she had thought it would be, but in between Mother and Grandfather it does not matter to her.

Each person who talks to them or points the way looks at Grandfather a bit surprised. They are surely not used to such nice Grandfathers. *She* is; she does not know how it would be without him. She is really a bit proud that they look at him so.

Then one who has also looked at him in surprise says, "But you don't have to be here! You are over the age limit!"

Grandfather shakes his head.

"I'm going voluntarily. I'm not letting my daughter and little granddaughter go alone."

The other nods and understands, better than she herself understands. Yes—that he is not letting Mother and her go alone, that is not much to understand! That is a matter of course! But voluntarily . . . what is "voluntarily"?

As the three of them sit on three nice seats, with hers in the middle, she lays her little hand on Grandfather's sleeve. He has just begun to look around at all those people and that bustle, but now he bows his white head to her.

"What is it, child?"

"Grandfather, what is 'voluntarily'?"

He thinks about it a little.

"'Voluntarily' that is, when you don't have to do something and you do it anyway."

She is quiet. Not have to? Did he not have to go and did he go anyway?

"But we had to, didn't we? Otherwise we wouldn't have gone, would we?"

"I didn't have to. Therefore I have gone voluntarily."

She really cannot understand it very well. But she is still a little girl.

"But you *had* to, Grandfather! Otherwise you would have remained at home alone—and we couldn't have gone alone, could we?"

Grandfather takes her head between his hands and kisses her on her hair.

"That's why—that's why I had to go," he says. "That's why I had to go voluntarily."

Then she does not try anymore at all to understand what "voluntarily" means.

Empathetic, strong-willed, deeply principled, and courageous, an unnamed young woman is moved to direct action during a deportation, despite the consequences she anticipates, when she sees a German "giving a small, heavily laden Jew a shove in order to hurry him along."

Clara Asscher-Pinkhof

Unloading

Ever since Father and Mother had been sent away together with the other children, she has been longing to be taken herself, really. She, the eldest, was allowed to stay behind because she belonged to a group of students who did not have to go. But she had wanted to go with the others, even then. Father and Mother did not want it, however; they said that you should not go a minute sooner than you had to. Obediently she remained behind and lived with strangers. Now that she has been taken, she has the feeling that finally she is being allowed to follow the others.

Being in the theater is merely a wait for her departure. She is not impatient—oh, no, she will undergo the series of events just as the others have already done. She faces her own lot blankly, since she had to give up the only arbitrary interference—to go with the others. For herself she is calm.

But in the course of the long day an uneasiness grows in her, oppressing, dominating. She is uneasy because of what she sees around her and for what she sees through the eyes of Father and Mother. They were here and were worried about the younger children; they were hurt by the violence around them; they were fearful about what further would happen, especially to the children; they felt great sorrow about what they had left behind, Mother's family, Father's work that he had built up himself. Her parents left this place, but their dark thoughts are still wandering around here, and they oppress this child, who did not have to have any dark thoughts about herself.

In this oppressiveness she is open, too open, to what the people around her are undergoing; she is more sensitive to the older people than to those her own age. By evening, when the people are gathering their possessions and are excited and hurried, or dull and defeated, a rebelliousness against this humiliation and injustice is growing in her such as she never knew before in those months of increased oppression. She herself has few possessions to collect; she has taken only a few things with her because she did not want to be heavily laden and because she can get along with very little. But she sees the loads that the Mothers of large families have to look after, and again she thinks about what Father and Mother had to pack and what they had left behind.

Then the exodus begins. The men in green are shouting and driving the people on; they are in such a hurry, as if something horrible is persecuting them, and yet *they* are the ones who are persecuting. Perhaps they do not know that they are persecuting, perhaps they believe that they are being persecuted.

She is standing upright with her light load, and she sees the bent backs of the others that seem to be folded double under whatever is left of their previous possessions. The rebelliousness has not been softened now that the end of the wait has come. Perhaps if all those bent backs were not going out in front of her, she could have felt a sense of liberation.

Then she sees a man in green uniform, big and coarse, who is giving a small, heavily laden Jew a shove in order to hurry him along. The man can hardly keep his balance. And then a whirlwind goes through her that prevents her from thinking clearly.

"Leave him alone!" she shouts to him in German. "Leave him alone!"

The giant turns toward her. His face is so distorted from anger that it no longer appears human. He raises his fist to hit her and without a sound he hisses, "What! *What?*"

In this one very clear moment she knows that this is the end. When the fist falls, then everything is over. She does not care. She stands very straight and looks at him.

And then, strangely and unexpectedly, it is not yet all over. The fist is lowered, without hitting. She breaks loose from the spell of waiting for the end, turns her gaze away from that face that is no longer a face, and walks further to the exit. But the man in green pushes through the stream of those being driven out and goes after her, raging.

"One more word and you'll see what happens!" he shouts.

She knows that she should keep walking, but she cannot. She no longer has any feeling for safety and danger; she must turn around and look at him and say the one word

about which he warned her; the one word in which she unconsciously discloses what she expected when she called to him to leave the man alone; the one word of a disillusioned child who today has ceased to be a child: "I thought that you were a human being."

Then others seize her and push her to the exit to safety.

In the dark crowd surrounding the tram she realizes that her cry, her useless cry at what was no longer a human being, has liberated her.

She breathes deeply and lets herself be pushed into the tram.

In this brief moment of anguish, a mother and father thwart the Nazis' intentions by sending their daughter into hiding, an act of courage that was among the most wrenching "choiceless choices" the Jews had to confront. Ask your students: Was this decision, too, an act of resilience?

Clara Asscher-Pinkhof

Transfer

The young mother has waited until it is dark outside; that was the agreement, for you may not do such a thing as this in the daylight.

She has dressed the dancing little girl in many clothes. Her daughter has never been out in the dark, and furthermore she does not have to put so much in the suitcase if the child has on a lot of clothes.

"We're going to a puppet show, aren't we?" the little girl cheers in a high voice, again and again.

How has the child come upon the words "puppet show"? The mother has not said so to the little girl; she has not wanted to tell a lie. Perhaps because going out in the evening is festive and because a puppet show sounds festive...

"Ready," she says. "Now say goodbye to Father and give him a kiss, because we're going out."

As the child stands on her toes by Father and puckers her lips for a kiss, the man looks helplessly at his young wife, who nods at him with a tight smile. Her smile says, "No farewells. Haven't we decided that she must leave us joyously?"

"Goodbye, little one," he says. "Have a good time."

"We're going to a puppet show!" is the last thing that he hears from her.

On the way, in the darkened streets, the little voice prattles without stop.

"Why is it so dark in the street?"

"Because the moon is still sleeping."

"But it's light at the puppet show, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes."

Amid the answers the mother's thoughts are brooding.

"She is blond and she is a girl. Otherwise it would not have been possible. I must be glad that she is blond and a girl. I must be glad that she is leaving me."

"And I don't have to go to bed for a long time, do I?"

"Oh, not for a long, long, long time!"

"Because I've been so good, haven't I?"

"Because you've been so good."

And in her thoughts she asks, "Will you remain good, even when you're with the strangers whom I am not allowed to know because that would be dangerous? Will you still be good when I get you back? Or will I never get you back?"

"Is the puppet show far?"

"I don't know. I'm bringing you to another aunt, and she will take you further."

"Is that other aunt far?"

"No, we'll be there soon."

"Why aren't you going with me to the puppet show?"

"I don't have time."

"Will you come another time?"

"Yes, another time."

"Liars, liars that we are," she thinks, and the suitcase weighs heavily in her hand. With her other hand she is grasping her daughter's little hand tightly.

They arrive at the house of the transfer. A girl will be waiting for her there, a girl who has already transferred many star children and who has kept the secret of the new home to herself. She is the one who asked for a blond child, a girl.

While she goes up the steps with the child, the mother wants to think about the puppet show. The child has thrown the festive thought to her, light as a bouncing ball; now she must catch it. Above on the steps she can actually laugh.

The young girl waiting for her is serious and dedicated to her dangerous work. She must get used to the laughing mother who has a child to give away, perhaps for life. Then the girl continues the game, the game of the puppet show illusion; she will take it upon herself to make the illusion come true as soon as the child has arrived at her new home.

"Are you going with me now?" asks the child, impatient to enjoy the end of the happy adventure.

"Yes," says the girl. "You must say goodbye to Mother now."

She is used to pulling and tearing children away while her own heart is threatening to break in the process. It will be different here: this mother dares to laugh.

The child gives her mother a hurried kiss.

"Goodbye! I don't have to go to bed for a long time?"

"No," says the mother, and the puppet show illusion is now inadequate. "Goodbye—goodbye, little one—have a good time."

The child now watches attentively.

"Are you sad because you can't come with me?"

The mother only nods and looks up helplessly at the young girl as if to tell her that she must take her daughter away now and end this torment.

The child speaks up with a second kiss and with emphasis on each word.

"If you don't cry then you may come with me next time. All right?"

"They stood facing each other, the powerful Jew and the mighty blond beast, on the platform amidst the fearful silence of the 2,000 slaves." The Yiddish writer Chaver Paver (Gershon Einbinder) weaves the gripping tale of the Jew Moishe and the Nazi Commandant Zibler, who face each other in a grim parody of a boxing match in an unnamed death camp. This story may prompt a fruitful conversation on the concept of resilience and the many ways it was exhibited by the Jews at each stage of the Holocaust.

Chaver Paver

The Boxing Match

The Commandant himself made the selection from the fresh transports of Jews brought in daily to the death camp. Flanked by a swarm of guards swinging bludgeons, in his parade uniform, with the many medals proudly displayed on his chest, he walked leisurely in front of the long rows of anguished, broken Jews, and with a quick experienced glance appraised each victim—the weaker ones for the gas chamber, the stronger ones for slave labor. A motion of his white-gloved hand to the right meant death in the gas chamber, a motion to the left, a few weeks of life yet for hard labor in the camp.

Through with this routine, he made a second selection, a more careful one now. Those that had been sent to the left were again lined up, and the Commandant halted before each one he considered a good possibility, inspected him closely, felt his muscles, and picked out the strongest of the strong to be taken to a special barracks. These were used as material for the "boxing matches."

Commandant Friedrich Zibler before the war had been a professional boxer in his native Hamburg, and a good Nazi party comrade from the old days when they had to beat up Communists and Marxists at street demonstrations. For his good services to the cause he had been assigned the responsible post of head of a death camp.

But here in the death camp, the poor man was bored by the monotonous daily routine of exterminating people and the "boxing matches" were lifesavers for him. Without them, God forbid, he would have gone crazy. He staged these matches not only for entertainment but also for educational purposes. He secured experienced cameramen who took films of the matches and those films were mailed to the propaganda ministry in Berlin, which distributed them to moving-picture theaters all over Germany to show how a subhuman race behaved in sports.

The truth must be said about our Commandant that he was quite fair to his victims. He gave them boxing gloves and ordered them to resist, to dodge his blows and even to hit him back. The trouble with the Jews though was that they tried to cheat him. They collapsed after the first few blows and pretended they were knocked out. But Zibler was no fool either; he always had the camp doctor at these fights to see that there should be no cheating.

In the latest transport, the commandant's experienced eye spotted among the new arrivals a highly prized victim—a very tall, broad-shouldered young fellow with a fiery black beard and thick curly forelocks who held himself very proudly and defiantly. His fiery almond-shaped black eyes looked at him threateningly as if they were saying, "Wait, you beast, the hour of reckoning will come yet."

Those proud and defiant Jews in the transports always puzzled our Commandant. He knew very well the whole process they had to undergo before reaching his death camp, a process which had begun two years back when the German army invaded Poland, a process planned by the best brains among German scientists and statesmen systematically to break the Jew physically and mentally so that when he reached the death camp, not a shred of resistance and human dignity was left in him. But the odd thing was, our Commandant noticed, almost in every fresh transport there were quite a few who looked hardly touched by the process. Such people were usually those the Commandant picked for his boxing matches. For such people our Commandant had a passion. He wanted to prove to himself that what the planned process couldn't accomplish with them in two years, he, Friedrich Zibler, in his death camp could accomplish in a few short days.

Friedrich Zibler felt very good that day. This bearded, insolent young fellow would be a worthwhile target for his skill. He would prolong the fight for many, many rounds and order the cameramen to make a real feature of this show and take shots of each move the Jew made in the ring, showing how step by step under the impact of his

powerful blows, the bearded fellow lost his false pride and stupid defiance and became frightened, forlorn and despairing like any other slave in his death camp.

It was near sunset. The orchestra of slaves made up of former professional musicians was playing Zibler's favorite selection, Beethoven's *Turkish March*. All the 2,000 slaves of the camp, men and women, with closely shaven heads, in dirty grey and yellow striped jackets and trousers and with wooden sandals on their bare feet, were lined up around the ring in rigidly straight lines, watched by heavily armed guards. On the roof of the Commandant's headquarters stood the cameramen taking shots of the preliminaries.

Always before the Commandant himself made his appearance in the ring, short preliminary matches of a grotesque nature took place. Very short Jews were picked out from among the slaves and matched against the tallest of the camp guards. The very tall, husky, well-fed guards didn't hasten to finish off their bewildered, half-starved victims. They prolonged the fun.

The preliminaries also included the fight of naked slaves. They matched a young one against an elderly one, stripped them entirely naked, and ordered them to pound at each other with all the vigor left in their bodies. Instead of clown's hats, the naked boxers were decorated with streimlich, traditional rabbinical fur hats made of animals' tails. The slave orchestra had to play Jewish wedding songs while the naked boxers, lashed on by the hilarious guards with their long smarting whips, swung unwilling blows at each other.

The Nazis reeled with laughter. The 2,000 slaves reeled with laughter too. The guards saw to it they should laugh and put feeling into their laughter.

Then at a signal from the Commandant, the hilarious roaring of the Nazis and the dry, hollow laughter of the slaves ceased. The blaring of the orchestra stopped abruptly. The two naked slaves were dragged out of the ring. The slaves stood at attention amid a foreboding silence.

The Commandant, a mighty athlete, leaped up on the platform and clasping his gloved hands, condescendingly and conceitedly waved them to the crowd as it greeted him with noisy applause. The slaves applauded him too; the guards saw to it they should applaud and put some feeling into their applause.

The bearded young Jew leaped up on the platform too. With a menacing agility he leaped upon the platform. The hearts of the 2,000 slaves sank, for they detected wrath and stubbornness in that menacing agility. The 2,000 slaves were very much worried about today's spectacle. They had learned that this tall, broad-shouldered young man was famous for his strength in his native town of Sosnowice and that he knew boxing too. The son of a rabbi, he had gone contrary to his father's wishes to study for a rabbinical career. The rebellious son was fired, as were many of his generation, by the dream of Palestine—to settle the country with strong, hardy men. To make himself fit for the hard life of a pioneer, he had steeled his body by heavy labor on peasant farms, by sleeping outdoors, by walking barefoot a whole summer and part of fall, by satisfying his hunger with a minimum of food and also by athletics—swimming, horseback riding, and boxing.

The inmates of this camp had sought vainly a whole day to come in contact with him and ask him not to resist the Commandant too energetically in the boxing match. If he hit Zibler with too powerful a blow, the guards would afterwards massacre them. They succeeded only in smuggling to him in the special barracks, where he was kept well guarded, a note from his aunt, who was the only survivor of their large family. "Moishe, for the sake of all the Jews in this camp, don't hit him back too hard. Allow yourself to be beaten," said the note.

Two thousand pairs of eyes now looked toward that black-bearded young man and silently cautioned him. His aunt, tall, bony, with a sackcloth shawl over her shaven head, with weeping lips, stood among the crowd too and talked to him with her tortured black eyes. Her eyes seemed to say: "Only we two have remained alive of all our kin. Let us cling to life, no matter how. Maybe with the help of God, we will survive this gruesome nightmare—we, the last two remaining members of our large family. . . . So don't lose your head."

A guard removed the Commandant's brown swastika-besprinkled silken robe and he remained standing before the crowd in his bronze nakedness, a very compact muscular blond giant.

Another guard took off Moishe's robe, a blue and white striped robe besprinkled with many stars of David, and he remained standing before the crowd in his pale nakedness, a tortured brunet giant. All the ribs on his lean body could be counted—broad massive ribs. In the broad massive ribs of that tortured lean body lay a mighty power, a lightning swiftness. He looked proud and handsome in his tallness, in the slenderness of his hips, in the towering height of his shoulders.

They stood facing each other, the powerful Jew and the mighty blond beast, on the platform amidst the fearful silence of the 2,000 slaves. Zibler, in all his boxing matches at his camp, had never fought his adversaries with hatred in his heart. He didn't hate these inferior people, he despised them. But toward this thick-bearded giant, he felt a burning hatred. That Jew looked at him as if he, the Commandant, were the contemptible being, one of an inferior race, not he, the slave.

With the other victims, he usually played around at first, exhibiting the fine points of his art and only in the last round would he start to deliver his deadly blows. This fellow he wanted to hurt right away. . . . He aimed at his eyes—those detestable, insolent Jewish eyes. . . . He let go

his right fist with all his force and fury. But quicker than lightning, the other dodged—and the Commandant's intended blow hit the air.

The eyes of the Jew were blazing now with the most expressive contempt. They looked at him as upon a repulsive rodent. The Nazi aimed again at those accursed, haughty, mocking eyes—and again his furious blow hit the emptiness. Zibler threw a swift glance at the crowd and it seemed to him the 4,000 eyes of the slaves were mocking him too.

The sun was setting. . . . The walls of the barracks and the gas chambers were a glowing red. . . .

For a fraction of a second, Moishe took his eyes off the Nazi. They wandered, Moishe's eyes, to his unfortunate brethren who stood rigid and frozen, looking with the fear of death toward the ring. Moishe's eyes also wandered away in that fraction of a second to the western sky. . . . Was this the last time in his life he'd see how the sun was setting?

In that fraction of a second, the Commandant got him with the impact of a thunderbolt right on the chin. Moishe collapsed on the boards of the platform. His limbs fainted. Only his mind remained conscious. His tortured limbs wanted to lie where they were and never rise again, to dissolve and live no more in that vicious world. But a voice from somewhere spoke to him. It commanded him to rise, to mobilize all his strength, to stand against the murderer and laugh again straight in his face.

Moishe was again on his feet and his eyes had regained supreme strength, the strength to disdain death. He now looked at the Nazi with an entirely different look—not the look of mocking, but of deadly hatred.

The boundless hatred shooting from that Jew's eyes burned the Commandant as if his flesh had been seared by hot coals. He threw himself upon Moishe, no longer the carefully calculating boxer, but a desperate murderer. . . . He was met by a lightning blow on the ear.

The hearts of the 2,000 slaves rose when Moishe landed that lightning blow on the Nazi's ear. Moishe's heart too rose. He felt in his body the strength not only of his own self but of all his tortured people.

The Jew Moishe became a whirlwind of wrath. Every cell in his starved giant body yearned to take part in the act of vengeance and dispatched into his very broad shoulders, into his massive ribs and into his swift hands every last bit of energy and strength still in reserve.

The 2,000 slaves, seeing the unresisted blows Moishe rained on the murderer of their whole people, too rose above death. They cared no longer about the terrible tortures they would undergo at the hands of the maddened guards. They didn't shout exultantly but breathed deeply and Moishe felt in their deep breathing that they were blessing him. He felt in their deep breathing waves of love flowing toward him.

The guards were uneasy. Friedrich Zibler was bleeding from both ears, his mouth and his nose. They didn't know how to act without a command. The cameramen had stopped shooting; they had to stop, for the shots wouldn't have been any credit to the Third Reich. . . .

In the western sky, the last bit of light was fading. . . . Dark was closing.

Before the guards collected themselves and started firing at him, Moishe must deliver the last blow of reckoning. He leaped, the very tall, tortured Moishe, with his pale nakedness and his steely broad ribs—he leaped, in his body the collective strength of all his brethren, and loosed the last blow. . . .

The Nazi reeled and fell to the floor, not knowing what had hit him. . . .

He would never know what had hit him. . . .

And then? Then it became very dark—and also very light. . . .

The guards were firing at Moishe from all sides. . . .

Jennifer Robertson, a frequent contributor, crafts literary narratives from moments in Holocaust history. She explains the historical facts undergirding "Landscape With Haystacks": "Before the war and throughout the occupation, Polish farmers Marian Mankowski (1900–1988), his wife, Józefa, their son, Marian, and their daughter, Halina, were close friends with a Jewish family, Moshe and Szprinca Kominiarz and their 15-year-old daughter, Frinka. The men had served in the Polish army together in 1920–1922. In 1941, when Jews in the area were being forced into ghettos, Moshe asked Marian for help. Marian hesitated to agree because of the serious risk to his family, but the two daughters were such good friends that the Mankowskis, in a moment of grace, decided to offer shelter. Marian fashioned a hiding place for the desperate family in a haystack; it would be entered through the dog kennel next to it. Each night when Marian brought food to the family, it looked to neighbors as though he were bringing it to his dog, so no one suspected that he was hiding Jews. In these difficult conditions, the Kominiarz family survived the Holocaust."[1]

Jennifer Robertson

Landscape With Haystacks

When nowhere on earth is safe—where do people hide? When you mustn't be seen by prying eyes, mustn't be heard . . . where do children go? They find it so hard to sit still, to stay in the dark, curled up without moving, because there's no space, curled up without sound because the slightest noise would bring death.

No matter how small you make yourself for days and weeks and months on end, things happen to your body. You need food and water, you need to empty bowels and bladder—and there is nowhere. You can't help it, you must. And in spite of everything, even when you never have enough to eat, you grow. Shoes that you had when you went into hiding are now too small, clothing too, but you have no mother to buy you new clothes. Other things happen: Lice infest your head and crawl into sores in your feet; bedbugs bite you, fleas, and if you hide outside in the forests or fields, mosquitoes eat you alive.

Your life is always in danger, and not just from enemy occupiers. No, you have to be careful of kids who can spot *one of you* a mile away—and would hand you over to the police for a laugh, as well as gangsters who would do it for money, or villagers and townspeople who betray because, in these hungry times, those who turn you in will get extra rations—while those who hide you would be executed on the spot.

So those adults and children who have found a place to hide stay there day in, day out without movement or sound: under beds; behind wardrobes; wedged in planks behind a privy; in lofts and attics; curled up in a drawer; shut away in holes or other hiding places underground; in beehives, barns, or pigsties; in kennels; even in silent graves beneath broken tombstones: The dead can't kill or betray.

In the village of Crooked Willow, Franek and Moshe had always been best of friends. They had gone to school together, and together had fought in the war that had put their country back on the map of Europe. They had fathered children in Crooked Willow and their families were great friends. So when Moshe, his wife, Regina, and their teenage daughter were scheduled to be wiped off the map of the living, Moshe turned to Franek for help.

Franek hesitated. He had a wife and two children. Could he afford to risk all their lives for his friend?

"Help them," begged teenage Halina. She and Sara were best friends.

It was the dog kennel that made it possible, and it was the positioning of the haystack right there behind the kennel that made Franek decide to take the risk. He cut an opening in the back of the kennel, just big enough for someone to crawl through, and concealed it carefully with the sawn-off wood, so when he or one of the children went to the garden every day with covered bowls that they put into the kennel—well, they were obviously just bringing the dog its dinner.

Moshe, Regina, and Sara spent winter and summer, day and night, hidden in the haystack that backed on to the kennel. They could crawl into the kennel to collect those precious bowls of food, and at night, under cover of darkness, they could leave their hiding place to stretch their cramped muscles and tiptoe around the garden to

empty the bucket that served as a toilet.

Halina would slip outside too, pretending to need "to go behind the barn" and she would talk to her friend in whispers, telling her the latest news. Moshe and Franek often met in the darkness, while the mothers talked about domestic arrangements—for even in a haystack clothing needs to be laundered and elementary hygiene observed.

The conspiracy, cramped conditions, deprivation, and daily risk lasted for three years of the Holocaust while the dog kennel, the haystack, and a trusted and trusting friendship helped this innocent Jewish family to survive.

END NOTE

[1] The source for "Landscape With Haystacks" comes from Michał Grynberg's Ksiega Sprawiedliwych (The Book of the Just) (1993), Warsaw, PWN. Grynberg drew most of his material from the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. AZIH, SOYV, sign 630.

Jennifer Robertson writes that she cannot recall the historical evidence for this story, based on an account found "in a book I'd borrowed or given back in Poland. I certainly didn't make it up; it's morally impossible for me to make up Holocaust stories. Besides, who could fabricate this?: The vicious dog who terrified the Nazis, protecting and even nourishing the child; its uncaring owner, adding food to the dog's bowl but never attempting to help the little runaway. Who could contrive a child dying in the haystack, the farmer prodding the grieving, surviving brother, warning him to make no noise while never asking the reason for the boy's distress? Who could invent a tale of a boy digging a grave in hard, dry, summer soil with a flattened drinking tin? Such incidents beggar belief; but they are true, and reading them proved to be turning points in my understanding about the agony and the courage of those who endured this time." She adds, "From now on I shall make notes about my sources, I promise!"

Jennifer Robertson

Jakub and Shmuel

A dog kennel also saved Jakub's life: a dog kennel, yes, but firstly, his mother. Jakub and Shmuel ran through the streets of their home town. Mama couldn't keep up; she was thin and weak.

"Run," she gasped, *"Antlojft und bleibt leben!* Stay alive, my little ones, live!" She stood still and turned to face the soldiers.

Shots battered like hail on a tin roof. Jakub grabbed Shmuel's arm.

"Don't look! Just run, like Mamele said."

Shmuel raced towards the woods. Jakub dived into Mr. Demski's dog kennel. The German shepherd inside growled, but she allowed the child to creep in and curl sobbing at her side. The hunt drew close around the kennel. The dog, in a rage of barking, flew out at the soldiers. They scattered. Let the brat escape, he wasn't worth being bitten to bits . . . .

That night, Mr. Demski—a man Jakub knew because it was only a small town, after all, brought food for the dog, who nuzzled Jakub towards her bowl. Dog and child shared the portion.

Jakub spent all winter in the kennel, scavenging for food by day and curling up beside the dog each night, sharing warmth and food and fleas. Demski must have guessed a child was hiding there because he brought out extra food each evening—but he never brought clothes or covering and he never invited the child into his home.

One day in early spring, when Jakub was skulking in the frozen woods, he heard hoarse coughing, and found another child, as desperate as himself. It was Shmuel. He too had survived.

After that, the two brothers stuck together, half starved, ridden with lice and scabies—but alive. They couldn't go back to the kennel; Jakub couldn't be sure how the dog would react to another child, there was no room for them both, and he couldn't trust the dog's owner.

A farmer called Mr. Lech let the boys shelter in his barn from March through to May but his wife told him not to be so soft-hearted, so the boys had to shift for themselves once again.

The hot summer sun ripened the grain. Whole families worked together to cut the corn, bind the sheaves, and gather the harvest into barns. Stray children helped too—but only if they could recite their Paternosters and Ave Marias, remember their new Christian names and laugh when villagers joked about the latest round ups, how the Gestapo had strung *those others* up like hares or shot them like wild ducks, *paff, paff* and that was another one down!

Hey, and when old Farmer Stork and his half-wit son Harry got their sickles into the corn, out they all ran, scurrying for their lives from the middle of the crop like so many harvest mice. Half-wit Harry got free vodkas for the tale, but the laugh was against him because someone would say, 'How many did you say there was, Harry?' And Harry wouldn't know because he couldn't add.

Jakub knew that five people had been startled out of their hiding place that August day. He knew because he and Shmuel had hidden in the cornfield too, and as they had crawled through the ripe crop, they'd seen three pairs of eyes glitter between the bearded barley. They'd started to back out on all fours, but someone had called out, *"Bleibt!* Stay!" They found a girl a bit older than themselves, hiding

in the middle of the barely field with her mother and a man—her uncle, they learned.

"We thought we were safe," this uncle said. "A villager made us a dug-out under his barn. We've been hiding there since last November, but yesterday an informer brought the police to the next village. They found 16 of our people hiding. They shot them all and hanged the father of the family who'd hid them, so our farmer told us we'd have to find somewhere else for a bit and then, perhaps he'd have us back, only he wasn't sure, his wife had a bad dream last night."

"We haven't seen daylight for months," the mother said. "I can't believe the feel of fresh air—it's too much, like a feast. What about you boys? Where are you hiding?"

"Just wherever we can," said Jakub. "A man sometimes gives us food. He let us sleep beside his cow in the barn all spring." He did not mention the dog kennel or Mr. Lech's name; he had learned to be wary. "We're going to stay here till after dark," the uncle said, "then head for the forest."

Jakub nodded. The sight of the girl with her mother made him angry and sad, but he shed no tears. He could see that Shmuel felt the same way, but he didn't cry either. His eyes were too hot and his body too fevered for tears.

"I'm thirsty," he whispered, and Jakub saw the girl's mother look searchingly at him. "We've had nothing to drink today," he explained quickly, in case she thought Shmuel was infectious or something.

She nodded, preoccupied. "You really don't think they'll cut this field today, do you?"

They cowered closer to the ground, trying not to flatten the barley. Bearded barley: It was luckier than our people, thought Jakub. The Gestapo didn't shave the barley. They had plucked his grandfather's beard out in handfuls. His *zeyde* had come home with his face bleeding between tufts of hair. But that was only the beginning. . . .

Voices! They stiffened. There was the rasp of a blade on leather, the swish of a blade through corn. They ran, ran without looking behind them, heading they didn't know where. There were shouts; they'd been spotted. The girl and her mother started to flag; months of hiding underground would make it hard for them to run. Jakub and Shmuel didn't wait to see what happened next. The main thing was to keep on running and put as big a distance as they could between themselves and the barley field. Shmuel coughed, but kept on running.

"We'll go back to Mr. Lech," Jakub panted. "His wife doesn't want us back but we'll ask if we can hide in his haystack. Maybe his wife will give us some milk like she did until she got scared. Milk will be good, Shmuel. It will cool you down all right."

Shmuel nodded and coughed, his shoulders hunched. He cupped his hand round his mouth. They slowed their pace. Shmuel stooped and surreptitiously smeared his hand over the grass at the side of the pathway. Jakub pretended he hadn't noticed, but his heart gave a lurch that tore him more than the running.

"He doesn't want me to see, so I won't let him know that I know," he told himself.

The village lay ahead, a cluster of wooden houses, crouched low to the ground beneath drooping eaves of thatch. Not a prosperous place, but the brothers felt it was almost like home because Mr. Lech had let them sleep in the byre with his cow as long as they sneaked out before dawn and came back only in the dark.

Now it was broad daylight, so they headed instead towards the river, its banks shaded by alders and willows. A kingfisher skimmed across the fast-flowing water. The boys paddled out into the river and drank the water, splashing it over their faces and itching heads. Jakub had a dented flask of chipped aluminium, his only possession. He filled it with river water for later, in case Shmuel needed a drink.

The long summer day seemed endless. Shmuel shivered and moaned. His body was burning, but Jakub had nothing to give him except brown river water.

At nightfall, when the village children brought the cows and geese home from the pastures, Jakub and Shmuel followed at a safe distance.

"We must look as though we're not hiding, as though we live here," he told Shmuel, and his younger brother nodded. "We've got to stay alive," Jakub added. "Remember what Mamele told us: Run away, boys, and stay alive. Come on, it's not far to Mr. Lech's cottage and a drink of milk."

When Lech opened the back door, though, Jakub saw that the man was scared.

"They shot three more of your lot today. They'd been hiding in the barley fields. It was a gang of armed bandits that did it. They set a whole village on fire last week, the people got away with whatever they could carry, but the chickens and geese roasted inside the burning homes."

Jakub trembled, but stood his ground.

"My brother is sick, Mr. Lech. Please give us something to eat and maybe we could hide in your haystack, so if the patrols or bandits come, you needn't know that we're here," he pleaded.

"In beside Daisy last winter, and now it's into the hay with you, is it?" said Lech, and Jakub watched his blue eyes soften in his sunburnt face. He pushed his cap back on his forehead, revealing pale skin beneath a shock of hair as yellow as his haystack. "Well, well, into the haystack you go. I'll bring you something to eat once it's dark."

So he did, but Shmuel didn't want anything to eat, no matter how much Jakub coaxed him.

If an artist had come from war-torn Warsaw that summer, she might have delighted to paint quaint country cottages, covered with thatch and visited by storks who came back year after year to the same large, untidy nests.

She might have added clouds casting low shadows over the landscape, to give a hint of the rumble of gunfire, of the Front coming closer, of the swastika in retreat but, too used to ruin and destruction, she would probably have chosen instead to sketch sunflowers, cornflowers, poppies; trees whitened with lime whose gnarled boughs bore ripening apples; barefoot, sunburnt children; stubble fields and haystacks like small, squat cottages.

However, she would not have painted the correct story. She would not have painted the two hidden brothers.

Jakub cradled Shmuel in his arms and moistened his cracked lips with river water, but Shmuel's tongue was swollen and his eyes were glazed. He died in his brother's arms and Jakub, who hadn't cried since . . . shuddered with grief.

We went through it all together; he was all I had left. Mama was shot to bits and Daddy was murdered, Granny Chaja and Granny Fela too, and Dora, who was so pretty . . . . and Uncle Marek and Auntie Pola and. . . and . . . and . . . . Too, too many, all his family. He'd seen them rounded up with too many others, beaten and shot at, loaded into trucks. The townspeople had watched in silence; no one had stretched out a helping hand.

But the boys had gotten away. They'd done what Mama had told them. Run away and stay alive. And now Shmuel . . . .

Crouched inside Mr. Lech's haystack, Jakub howled out his pain and his grief, howled and howled for hours so that Mr. Lech came out and thrust his pronged pitchfork inside the haystack.

"Stop your bawling, brat," he growled. "You'll start people talking, you will." Jakub flung himself down beside his dead brother and writhed and wept without sound.

Later that night, he stamped on his flask to flatten it into a makeshift spade. He buried his brother. When daylight dawned, he went away. He never returned to the squat haystack or the tranquil village that had no place in it for a boy with no right to be seen, a boy alone in the world, who would stay alive because that was the only thing he could still do for his mother, because he was the only one left.

The family in this short story by the Yiddish writer Rachel H. Korn confronts one of the many impossible dilemmas forced on the Jews by the Nazis. In a voice "hoarse and muffled," the father of the Sokol family explains, "Every family must send one of its members within two hours. Do you realize what that means? Each family must choose its own victim. One of us must go, otherwise all of us will be taken." This complex narrative will prompt powerful classroom discussion in a high school or college classroom.

Rachel H. Korn

The Road of No Return

By morning the whole city had heard about the new edict, but in Hersh-Lazar Sokol's household everyone pretended they knew nothing. And just like on any other day, Beyle lit the stove and began to cook the family's ghetto portion of grits and half-rotten potatoes. And just like on any other day, she set the table with seven plates and seven spoons laid out in a double row. The double row was to ward of the evil spirits lurking outside.

Every few minutes she ran to the door, and with a corner of her apron wiped the steam from its glass windowpane and looked down to the street. On that autumn day of 1942 there wasn't a Jew to be seen in that Galician village, except for a Jewish policeman with a bundle of documents under his arm who would pass by and disappear in the street that led to the office of the Yuden*rat*.

"Father hasn't come back yet," Beyle muttered, more to herself than to the others. Her aged mother-in-law, who was sitting near the kitchen sorting plucked feathers into a patched bag, turned and asked, "What's that you're saying, Beyle?"

"Nothing, *Shviger*."

All at once there was a commotion in the corner where the two youngest children were playing. Dovidl was pulling a doll out of Sorke's hands and waving a stick at her. "When I order you to hand over the baby you must obey! Otherwise, I'll take you away too, and you'll be beaten into the bargain."

Beyle ran over to the children. "What's all this uproar about—what's going on here?"

"Mother, he's hitting me!" Sorke burst out.

"Let go of her this minute!" Beyle ordered. But eight year old Dovidl wouldn't let go, and kept on tugging at his sister's doll.

"We're playing the game of cursing, and in cursing, there's no mother around. In this game you must obey the police! If she won't hand over her baby then both she and the baby will have to go! See, here's my rifle," and he pointed to the stick.

"*Tfu*, may your game moulder and smoulder in some wretched wilderness! Throw away the stick this instant! And come here! Some game you've invented for yourselves!"

"But Mother, you saw what happened to our neighbour Malke, and to Shmerke-Yoysef's son? The police took her away along with her child—don't you remember?"

"In my house I won't allow such games, you hear? Such a big boy and he understands nothing! Go, go to your brother Lipe."

Whenever Beyle couldn't handle Dovidl she would turn him over to her oldest son. Lipe was the only one Dovidl would listen to.

Lipe was sitting at the table in the next room, writing. He neither fumed around nor uttered a single word. His mother came in and stood at his back waiting for him to help her rein in her unruly young one. Dovidl too was waiting. He had become suddenly quiet and was staring eagerly at his older brother. The pen in Lipe's hand moved quickly across the blank paper as if it were hurrying towards some inevitable goal where Lipe was only an accessory and the instrument of someone else's will.

Beyle's ears, always alert to the smallest sound, now heard an odd rustling like the swish of silk. Turning towards the sound she saw the open wardrobe, and between its doors her daughter Mirl taking out her dresses and trying them on one by one in front of the mirror.

"What bleak holiday are you celebrating today?"

"Oh, Mother, I just felt like trying on my dresses."

Beyle gave her a searching glance as if she was some newly arrived stranger. For the last two years, living with constant anxiety and fear, she had begun to think of her children as a precious charge she must protect from all outside threat and danger. And in that same instant, she recognized that Mirl, her fourteen-year-old daughter, had

suddenly grown up and ripened into a young woman. Mirl's thin childish shoulders were now softly curved as if waiting to take on the burden of new and mysterious longings. Her brown gazelle's eyes were filled with a womanly acceptance of fate.

And as if she owed this burgeoning daughter something she could never repay, Beyle, like a bankrupt debtor, sat down and gave herself up to a wail of grief. Her bottled-up fear and dread of the unavoidable future now found its way through some obscure channel inside her, releasing a storm of tears. Beyle began to rock to and fro, her head and her arms, sobbing all the while as if her breast were being torn to pieces inside her.

The two children tiptoed into the kitchen and began to nose around like two kittens among the pots and pans. Sorke returned and pulled Mirl away from the clothes cupboard, "Come, let's stick a fork into the potatoes and see if they're done."

Dovidl ran to the door. "I'm going outside to find out what's taking Father so long."

Beyle was startled out of her trance. "Don't dare step out of this house! Do you want to cause, God forbid, a catastrophe?"

The dragging sound of feet was now heard on the stairs, climbing each stair slowly one at a time. Lipe folded his writing in his breast pocket and ran to open the outside door, which had been kept locked and bolted since the arrival of the Germans.

Father and son confronted each other. The son's eyes were full of questions, demanding to know what the father had learned and what, for the time being, would have to been kept hidden from the others.

The father bowed his head as if he himself were guilty for what was now happening, guilty for having taken a wife and for having brought children into the world—a wife and children he could no longer protect.

It took only one look at her husband for Beyle to realize there was no point in asking him anything.

The lines in Hersh-Lazar's face had grown deeper. They were etched in greyness, as if they had absorbed all the dust and debris of the street. His nose seemed to have grown longer and was as sharp as that of a corpse, while his usually neat and tidy dark beard was unkempt and dishevelled.

"Will you wash your hands now, Hersh-Lazar?"

"Yes, at once, and we'll sit down to eat."

They ate in silence. No-one paid attention to what and how much each spoonful held. They swallowed their food half-chewed. Even the children, already used to uncertainty and fear, felt a disaster was about to happen but dared not ask what. Something ominous was in the air.

Whenever a spoon accidentally struck the edge of plate and made it ring, they were all startled and looked reproachfully away. Of them all, only the grandmother concentrated on her food as she brought each spoonful to her toothless gums.

The first to rise from the table was Hersh-Lazar. Wiping his moustache with the back of his hand, he began to pace back and forth with maddening regularity. When Beyle started to clear the table he signalled her—"Don't bother, Beyle."

She let her hands fall; they had suddenly become too heavy and she stood in front of her husband blocking his way and trying to stop him pacing the room.

"Have you heard anything more? Is it true what people are saying?"

"True, all true, Beyle." Her husband's voice sounded hoarse and muffled as if a thorn were stuck in his throat.

"Placards are posted everywhere—on all the buildings and fences. Every family must send one of its members within two hours. Do you realize what that means? Each family must choose its own victim. One of us must go, otherwise all of us will be taken. All of us, without exception! And," he added ironically, "the Germans are allowing us free choice!"

They were all stunned but no-one was surprised. You could expect anything from the Germans. Each one studied the others. Who, who would go? Go to the place from which there is no return?

Abruptly a wave of estrangement overwhelmed them. Each one could already see the victim in the other. Each one felt the enmity of the others. Who would be chosen and who would do the choosing? With what measure should they be measured, on what scales should they be weighed in order to decide who must die now, and who deserved to stay alive, at least for now?

"In that case," Lipe spoke with unusual calm without looking at the bowed heads. "In that case . . .", and he stopped in mid-sentence as if the weight of his just-now-uttered words were too heavy for their quaking limbs to bear.

"In that case . . .", all of them sat down. They all tried to find the lowest, most insignificant chair as if they intended to sit *shive* for their own inner selves.

Beyle seized the two youngest as if she could hide them in her own two hands, or build walls around them which no enemy could breach.

The grown-ups had begun to calculate the years each had already lived and the years still promised. They added up the lines in every face and counted the gnarled veins on the back of every hand.

The father mustn't go, that was clear. He was the provider, the breadwinner. And the mother, definitely not. What would become of the children without her? As for Lipe, what had he tasted of life in his four-and-twenty years, the last two darkened by the German occupation? Let him consider carefully. Maybe he should quickly steal

away and be done with it. His mother would wail and tear her hair, his father would agonize while saying *kadesh*, and Dovidl would miss him day and night without understanding why his Lipe had disappeared.

But at first they would all breathe easier because he would have released them from the need to mourn their own lost souls.

In his mind Lipe was already bidding them all adieu. Tomorrow he would be gone. Everything would remain just as it was except that he would no longer be among them. He would no longer see the sun, the sky, or the old clock on the bureau. He touched his breast pocket and removed his watch and the money he kept there, and unobserved, pushed them underneath the big clock, folding a few bank notes into the pages he had been writing. It was a letter to Elke; his last letter. He would have to find a Polish messenger since it was forbidden to receive letters from the ghetto. Elke was living on the other side as a Pole with false Aryan papers, and she had recently let him know that she was preparing similar papers for him, complete with seals and signatures. Together they would go to one of the big cities where it would be easier to hide and lose themselves in the Polish crowds.

Was there anyone who should go in his place? What about the grandmother, his old *bobe*? As Lipe's glance searched for the grandmother it met his parents' eyes. They had already added up her years, years that had fallen as gradually as leaves from a tree in autumn, leaving its trunk naked and vulnerable. But no-one dared utter such thoughts aloud, no-one dared to say "go" or to become the judge of her last few ragged years. As their eyes ate into her, the old lady began to droop and hunker down into her chair, as if she would have liked to dissolve and become part of the chair. She wanted to become so rooted in the bit of ground under her that no-one would ever be able to dig her out. In that moment the senses of the others became suddenly keener, and more sensitive. Each one's thoughts lay open to the others in these moments of heightened perception. Only the grandmother's thoughts remained closed to them, as closed as her half-blind extinguished eyes. She had sealed all the avenues to her inmost self in order to ward off this prelude to death. She suddenly felt isolated in the circle of her family—beside the son she had given birth to and cared for, beside her own flesh and blood. Even her son's eyes sought her out, and pointed to her. And because of it she would resist with all the strength of her being. There was no-one to take her part, no-one to give her a loving look across the wall of separation. When you know you will be missed, it is easier to die.

They imagine it's less difficult for old people to die. Maybe so. But only if death comes in its proper time and place, in your own bed. But to go forth and meet death willingly, carrying your bundle of worn-out bones! Quiet, hold everything, she's not ready yet—she still has to go back over her life, she still has remember it once more from the beginning, starting with the time she was a child in her mother's house. She too had been a child just like her son and grandchildren. She too had sat on her mother's lap just like Sorke on Beyle's; "Mother, Mother," she murmured through blue lips as if she would call her back from the world of the dead. "Mother," she called, just as she used to do in her childhood when she was afraid of being spanked. She had almost forgotten what her mother looked like—her features had faded, and were rusted with time. Two big tears rolled from her closed eyes and fell into the net of wrinkles covering her face.

And later—she pictured herself as a bride. She had only seen her bridegroom David once, at the time of the betrothal. Even then, all her dreams were centered on him. When they began preparing her wedding clothes she had insisted on the best of everything, on the most costly materials. She chose an iridescent blue silk shot through with roses woven into the cloth. She had wanted to please her bridegroom. Her wedding dress had hung in the cupboard until recently. She hadn't let anyone touch it. It was only during the last few months that she had let them make it over for Mirl, because Mirl looks like her. When she looks at Mirl she sees herself as a girl.

The clock struck once and then twice. Everyone suddenly came to life. Soon, soon. Until now they had all been waiting for something to happen. Some miracle. And now there was less than an hour left.

Mirl drew herself up to her full height. She whipped her coat off its hanger and stood in the middle of the room.

"I'm leaving."

All heads turned.

She stood there in the made-over iridescent silk dress she had forgotten to take off when her mother scolded her for trying it on. Or perhaps she just enjoyed wearing it. Whether the dress made her look older and more grown up, or whether it was the stubborn expression on her face, it seemed to everyone that Mirl had grown taller in the past few hours.

"Where—what kind of going?" This from her father with his red-rimmed bloodshot eyes.

"You know very well where. . . . Goodbye, everybody." And she was at the door.

With a single leap her father was beside her, holding her sleeve.

"Get back this minute. If you don't there'll be trouble! Do you hear?"

As Mirl struggled with her father there was a sharp whistling noise as the ancient silk of her sleeve split and tore.

Everyone looked on but no-one moved, neither to stop the father, nor to help Mirl. With one hand Hersh-Lazar was holding Mirl, and with the other he was undoing his belt.

No-one understood what was happening. Was their father intending to beat Mirl now of all times? His favourite child against whom he had never before raised a hand? The one for whom he always bought special gifts—for her rather than for the two youngest? It could only be due to the confusion and turmoil they all felt, the kind they had suppressed with all their might. Now it had grown and festered in their father like a boil that ripens and finally bursts.

At last he had the belt in his hand and was twirling it above Mirl's head like a lasso. He lowered it over her shoulders then slid it down to her waist and tightened it as if she were a stalk of wheat in a field. He tested the belt several times to see if it was tight enough. Only then did he grasp the loose end, and, dragging Mirl like a trussed-up calf, he led her to the table and fastened the belt to the table's leg post. Tying a knot at the other end he pulled the belt through the buckle with his teeth, then he wiped his forehead and sat down with his hands on his knees and drew a few harsh choppy breaths.

Mirl was on her knees leaning against the table leg where her father had left her. She was motionless, completely drained by the scene of the last few minutes. For the first time in her young life she had aspired to something brave—let it be death—so what? She had gone forth to meet it like a bride her bridegroom. From early morning she had been preparing for this gesture. And now she had been shamed and humiliated. And her father, her darling father, who knew her better than anyone else, including her mother—was the one who had shamed her. He wouldn't let her make her sacrifice. It was all very well, it seems, for Isaac to be sacrificed, but not for her. And his father, Abraham was himself the one who brought him—he had taken him by the hand knowing full well what God demanded. And here, all of them—yes, she saw it, she knew, all of them wanted the grandmother to go. Did grandmother have the strength to drag herself to far away places? And what was the sacrifice of an old person worth, since the old person would have to die soon anyway?

For the first time in her life Mirl felt a deep hatred for her father. She tried angrily to free herself so she could at least stand up, but she had forgotten about the belt which now cut more and more into her body. She fell back and lay stretched out across the threshold, her head buried in her arms.

A band of light from the window came to rest at her feet. As the light fell on her the iridescent blue silk interwoven with rose-colored flowers shone with new life. The room had grown silent again, except for the buzzing of a single fly as it searched for a quiet spot to have its last wintry sleep.

All heads were bowed. Let whatever was to happen, happen. Let the parting be dictated by some external force, by fate. And if all of them had to go instead of just one, then so be it. If God above willed it, if he could let it happen, they would accept it gladly.

Only the ticking of the clock divided the silence as its hands moved inexorably towards the appointed hour.

Abruptly the father turned; all eyes followed the direction of his glance. The grandmother's chair was empty. Everyone was so absorbed in his own thoughts that no-one had noticed her going. Where had she gone? How did she leave the house so quietly that no-one had heard her? Not one of them had heard her. It must have happened only a few minutes ago.

Everyone's eyes now searched the corners of the room. Suddenly a shadow appeared on the glass pane of the door that led to the vestibule. As the shadow came closer it gradually filled the entire window. All eyes followed it—yes, it was the grandmother in her old black cape, the one she wore on holidays. Under one arm she carried a small pouch with her prayer book, while with the other arm she slowly unfastened the chain on the outer door. Soon the door closed and swung back on its hinges.

None of them left their places. Not one of them called her back. All remained seated, frozen into place. Only their heads moved and bowed lower and lower as if their rightful place lay there at their feet with the dirt and dust of the threshold.

"Hilda Frenkel, my mother, 21 years old with dreams of becoming a doctor, was transported with her parents and brother from Romania to the Bershad Ghetto in Transnistria in 1941 along with 25,000 other Jews," says Mike Frenkel. "They were left there to die from hunger and disease. She watched helplessly as her parents and then her younger brother died of typhus. Hilda was one of 3,500 Jews who survived that brutal winter of 1941–1942."

Mike Frenkel

The Will to Live

Two families had shared an abandoned room.
The younger Shotner brother
had thought of war
as a great adventure.
Then he watched as
one by one
his parents and then
her parents and younger brother died.
They fought off the typhus,
the hunger and the cold
by recounting the dinners their mothers
had once prepared.

When the elder Shotner brother
shopped shaking
and the lice marched away
from his black wool coat
the younger one
rifled through his brother's pockets
for the hand-rolled cigarette
worth its weight in gold
that he had found weeks ago
behind the ear of a dead man
on a side road.
The dream was to trade it for meat and fresh vegetables
when spring arrived.

He walked to the wood stove,
lit the cigarette,
and inhaled deeply,
each puff his ebbing passion,
until his thumb and forefinger were singed.
He then dropped onto the splintered door
propped up by cinder blocks,
that was his bed,
covered himself in his brother's coat,
stared at the ceiling
and closed his eyes.

When he died,
my mother retrieved the black wool coat
and the boys' weathered boots.
She calculated the food and dried wood
this inheritance might purchase
and imagined the smell of meat and potatoes
and the warmth of burning embers
that might fill the room.

When a horse-drawn cart arrived
at her door,
two men silently
dragged the brothers out
like rolled-up rugs
and hoisted them
onto the cart.

Soon after, a young girl, maybe thirteen
and newly orphaned,
appeared in the doorway
and asked my mother if she could
use one of the now-abandoned beds.
A light gust of snow followed her in.

Jennifer Robertson, the translator of "In the Darkness," recounts, "When this story appeared in print in 1952 in the Polish journal Nowa *Kultura* (no. 22), Zofia Nałkowska (1884–1954) prefaced it with a short introduction: *'I offer this little note, found among my papers, written long ago during the fearful time of the Occupation, as a small contribution to knowledge about the fate that war prepares for children.'* This last phrase, a deliberate echo of Nałkowska's classic work *Medallions*, shows that responsibility for evil is borne by war, not by the women in the story, who are its victims." This grim tale is appropriate for older students only.

Zofia Nałkowska

In the Darkness

It's true that it was completely dark, and that the darkness lasted many long days, which were no different from night. Darkness and complete silence. It is difficult today to say for certain but it may be that the thing that happened was possible only in the darkness. Perhaps it happened only because it was dark and the women couldn't endure any more.

The room had no window and that was just right. Once it would have been called an alcove, but not now. Food had to be taken in the dark, seeing nothing. The women had to feel with their fingers for small pieces of cut bread, scraps of cooked meat spread out on a paper on a crate beside the wall, and they had to be careful that the paper didn't rustle. They drank water from a single pitcher. They sat on the only two chairs, on another, smaller crate, and on the floor. They had to keep completely quiet.

The point was that since morning, no-one had opened the door on the other side of which was the closet. An unknown person was in the apartment, someone unknown or someone who couldn't be trusted. Perhaps even THEM. They all listened for the agreed sign, and they kept quiet.

The same thing had already happened twice during those days, but it had never lasted so long. It was hot and stuffy. The bucket covered with a suitcase was full and stank.

There were seven of them, eight with that one little girl who didn't understand. She was scared, too, but she didn't want to keep quiet. Her mother whispered in her ear that she would be the death of them, that she should be good and clever, that she would be the death of herself and Mommy and these ladies, that she would be the death of those people on the other side of the door who had given them this shelter.

At first the child obeyed, coaxed by a piece of sugar. Then the sugar was finished, and there wasn't even any more water in the pitcher. At some point, the little girl began to scream.

At first it was just a normal child's cry. Later, it became a moaning from fear or pain. Later there was just nothing to be done about it: The little girl screamed.

Her mother covered her mouth; she wrapped her head in someone's coat but it was no good. She screamed even more loudly. In the total darkness they could only see a little strip of light from under the door behind which stood the closet. Something was happening there. They heard the sounds of rustling and knocking and couldn't work out what was happening. There were some voices but they had died down as if they had moved away. No one understood the words.

The child had stopped screaming and was crying very quietly. Her mother stroked her and rubbed her hand over her little thin neck. She no longer said "be good and clever." The enclosed women did not allow themselves even to whisper. They listened hard to hear what was happening behind the door and the closet. Were they still there? Was anyone there at all?

The thing happened not in this nearest room beyond the closet but further away in the apartment. Chairs were being moved, footsteps, enemy voices.

The little girl was too small to understand. She screamed again. This wasn't weeping, but a cry of horror. This time the other women covered her mouth; later, they even pressed her throat a little. When she fell silent, her mother still held her hands on the child's little neck, stroking her lightly. It was quiet. In the room next door they clearly heard slow footsteps. Then silence fell once more. The little girl was too small to understand. She screamed again.

The little girl screamed. They stroked her head and her arms, cuddled her close, and covered her mouth. But it didn't help. The mother felt someone's hands on her child's

neck. She understood. Hands, invisible in the darkness, pressed strongly together. The mother said nothing. Did she herself help in the thing that happened?

There was no other way out. Already several hands with curved fingers pressed on the small throat. The child quietened, snorted, but she still held out, defending herself with her little hands. They held her hard but she kept moving, struggling. There was no other way out. They pressed on her throat with all their strength and held on. The child weakened; she fell on to someone's lap. Silence fell. Nothing more was heard behind the door.

They were saved.

POSTSCRIPT FROM JENNIFER ROBERTSONT: "IN THE DARKNESS"—A PORTRAIT OBSCURED

The author paints on a dark canvas a scene that we cannot see. Her precise prose locates exactly the room with no windows, the scraps of food spread on paper that must not rustle, the pitcher, the two chairs, and the stinking bucket covered with a suitcase.

In this darkness we see no faces. We hear sounds outside the room where these invisible people are enclosed. Inside the room, we hear the crying of a little girl who is too small to understand. We are told that there are eight people in the unlit alcove, seven women and the child. These nameless women grow ever larger on that dark canvas, but remain featureless—except for their hands, which at first try vainly to hush the crying child, then press ever more closely about her little neck.

This portrait whose figures are invisible is a portrait of a crime. Yet as tension mounts, as the child continues to scream and those hands press more strongly, we know that the real crime, which has forced these women to hide in a windowless alcove with a small child, is the Holocaust. The real perpetrators are the unseen THEM, present to us by the search they make. It is a crime too monstrous and vast for one small canvas—and yet the very smallness of the portrait, its precision, and its darkness reveal the enormity of that crime.

PRISM art historian Pnina Rosenberg explains and illustrates how art in its various forms served as a survival strategy during the Holocaust. "The artists found refuge in the act of creation," she writes, "to escape from the realm where destruction was the law and dehumanization was a step in the process of annihilation." Discuss with your students: In what ways is this artistic expression a form of resilience and resistance?

Pnina Rosenberg

On Imagination as a Survival Strategy During the Holocaust

Today is the eighth day of the week,
The day of imagination
When we realize all our dreams
The day when we will soon come alive
(from an inmate's dairy; Spira, 1940)

The encounter between SS guards and new prisoners in Roberto Benigni's film *Life is Beautiful* (1997) offers viewers a powerful insight into the imaginative strategies employed by camp inmates. When a guard begins to explain the camp rules and asks if anyone understands German, Guido, the protagonist, volunteers to "translate," despite not knowing the language. He transforms the harsh Nazi regulations into playful instructions that align with the escapist game he has invented to shield his five-year-old son from the grim reality of the camp. Thus, the following decree:

> *Three basic rules you should never forget:*
> *First: Never try to escape.*
> *Second: Obey each order without questioning.*
> *Third: Every attempt of revolt will be punished with the penalty of death by hanging.*

is rendered by Guido as:

> *Points are lost in three cases:*
> *First, the one who starts crying*
> *Second, he who asks to see his mother*
> *Thirdly, those who are hungry and want a snack.*
> *Forget about it.* (Benigni, 1997, 01:05:01 – 01:05:29)

In this way, Guido seeks to soften the camp experience by constructing a virtual world in which he mediates reality through imagination. This pendulum swing between brutal reality and an imaginary alternative is a recurring survival strategy among camp inmates—one also powerfully expressed in visual art.

THE FUNCTION OF THE ARTISTIC WORK

Artistic activity fulfilled many functions for the incarcerated artists: It was a manifestation of their past identity as skilled artists and a way of reaffirming themselves as human beings after being discarded from society and deprived of their most basic rights, as attested by Peter Lipman-Wulf (1993), who was interned in a French transit camp.

"I was frantically drawing . . . partly to practice my skills but also to forget, at least momentarily, my imprisonment . . . My art, therefore, became my consolation" (Lipman–Wulf, p. 29). In a letter sent from Pithiviers camp, Isaac Schœnberg (1995) meditated about this phenomenon:

> Here I draw more than I did in Paris, despite the appalling conditions. I think it is . . . a kind of longing and impatience that has turned into a creative impulse, even though I am cut off from the outside world like an outcast. (p. 105)

Thus, it was through art that the artists could gain some control, if not of their lives, at least of their creativity.

PORTRAITURE

Portraits comprise one quarter of all paintings and drawings produced in ghettos and camps. The prevalence of portraiture is not surprising for, as Holocaust art researcher

Sybil Milton (1990) states, portraiture had almost magical powers: It granted the subjects a feeling of permanency, in contrast to the extreme fragility of their actual existence (p. 148). The portrait's mystical power is reflected in a letter written by Schœnberg while painting his beloved's image from a photograph: "It is impossible to paint or draw in this weather (22° C below zero). Nonetheless, when I was working on your picture, the heat of my inner passion for you overcame the devastating cold outside and kept me warm" (1995, p. 105).

SELF PORTRAITS

Alongside the portraits commissioned, either by inmates or the ghettos' and camps' hierarchy as means of barter (mainly for food), artists also drew their own likenesses. Amalie Seckbach, an artist and art collector who had focused mainly on Far Eastern art, had been able to continue her comfortable lifestyle in Frankfurt–am–Main even after the rise of the Nazis. However, in September 1942, the 72–year–old artist was deported to Terezin where, in a state

FIG. 1: Amalie Seckbach, *Self-Portrait With a Crown*, Terezin, 15.11.1943. Courtesy of the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum Art Collection. Inv. no. 2282.

of poor health and fatigue, she painted landscapes and self–portraits [Fig. 1] that at first glance seem to have no connection with the reality around her. Her fantastic and surrealistic portraits include motifs derived from Japanese art that made a liaison with her previous life and maintained her identity as a cultured and creative person. The self-portrait depicts her as a young woman with large darkened eyes, and a crown on her elegantly gathered wavy hair. Stems of flowers frame her face on both sides. On her neck, where one might expect to see a necklace, Seckbach has written in large, bold, red digits the date of the painting—*15.11.43*—and at the bottom, at an imaginary point connecting the flower stems, her current whereabouts—*Theresienstadt*, fusing her past and present worlds.

On one hand, she alludes to her past artistic inspiration, as can be seen in her initialized vertical signatures: *AS* and *AMSE*—according to Japanese practice. By doing this and by portraying a regal oriental figure, she endeavors to escape to other worlds. On the other hand, the lower part of the picture grounds her firmly in reality by accurately recording the date—15 November 1943—and the place—Theresienstadt—that turns the fantastic image into historical documentation. The tension between these two elements—transcendence and reality—produced the dualism of Seckbach's existence, in which the imagination, despite its infinite possibilities, cannot completely erase present reality.

FIG. 2. Amalie Seckbach, *Self-Portrait with a Sunflower*, Terezin, 1943. Courtesy of the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum Art Collection. Inv. no. 2288.

The composition of another self-portrait [Fig. 2] is its complete opposite. It is not a vertical one, as is customary in this genre, but horizontal, and depicts an elder, resigned woman (though both were done in 1943) who is no longer lifting herself upwards. The use of similar colors—yellow, brown, green—in the portrait and the sunflower suggests that she identifies herself with the plant, whose head is tilted downwards in the absence of the sun. On the lower right, Seckbach indicates her current location,

Theresienstadt 1943, and on left she signs *Amalie Seckbach, Frankfurt–am–Main*—her name and her previous hometown. The sense of desolation that emerges from the portrait alongside the concise information—defining her biography between these two places (as well as marking the date, a year before her death)—recalls inscriptions on tombstones. It seems that this artist, who died in Terezin in 1944 and has no grave marker, predicted her impending end and immortalized herself in the subtle and moving self-portrait. (Rosenberg, 2002, pp. 105–106).

RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Despite the virulent antisemitism of the Third Reich's regime, in several Nazi-occupied territories and camps, religious activities prevailed, as can be seen in Dinner of October 1st, 1941 [10 Tishrei 5702] [Fig. 3], the date of the

FIG. 3. Isis Kischka, *Dinner*, October 1, 1941, Compiègne camp. Courtesy of the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, Art Collection. Inv. no. 1726.

most important day in the Jewish calendar, the Day of Atonement. The dinner marks the breaking of the fast following the day spent in prayer. The menu separates the painting into two different realms: The right, upper part depicts a group of praying Jews, facing a menorah with seven lighted candles and a blue Star of David, while the lower left depicts a guard standing in front of a camp's barbed-wired fence. The prayers, depicted in light blue and white, seem to be floating in a spiritual sphere, as opposed to the earthiness of the camp, symbolized by the green–uniformed guard who stands rigidly by the fence. The group of worshipers, who seem almost weightless, are soaring upwards, into a spiritual sphere, while the guard and the wire fence constitute a counterweight, a gravitational force, that drags them down to reality. The menu, written on the same white and light blue as the Jewish religious ritual, consists of jellied chicken and rabbit, a variety of cheeses, and a fine selection of wine, is completely imaginative; not only are the food and beverage a far cry from the inmates' daily food, but it is antithetical to the strict requirements of the Jewish food laws, *kashrut*. Thus, the spiritual and virtual world, which makes up the lion's share of the composition, tries to gain ascendancy over the brown–green realm of the camp.

The same dualism can be traced in the *Concert Program* [Fig. 4] that was held in the same camp. The title for the event and the list of organizers are written in the upper

FIG. 4. David Brainin, *Concert Program*, Compiègne camp, May 17, 1942. Courtesy of the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum Art Collection. Inv. no. 84.

part of the page, at a distance from the camp's fence and the watchtower in the lower part. The artist depicts the barbed wire in the foreground, where it serves as the means for writing the camp's name, *Compiègne*, as well as in the background, where the barbed wire swirls upwards towards the open horizon, as if dancing to the concert's music. The composition of the *Concert Program* follows the pattern of presenting two poles: The spiritual escapist ascending vs. grounding and descent to reality, reflecting the Holocaust artist–inmate's dualism (Rosenberg, 2003, pp. 107–114).

FIG. 5. Anonymous artist. *Painting by the Barbed Wire Fences*, Compiègne, July 1942 inscription: *To Kischka, my barbed wire souvenir, a landscape painter in Front Stalag 122, Compiègne.* Courtesy of the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, Art Collection. Inv. no. 1710.

ART EXHIBITIONS

"This is the only exhibition of Jewish art taking place at this time in France" (Diamant, 1977, p. 133). These words appear in the visitors' book of an exhibition held at Pithiviers camp (France) in October 1941. This exhibition, similar to others held in various camps in the Nazi-occupied territories, displayed art done by Jewish inmates; ironically, camps were the only space where these outcast artists were able to exhibit, since Nazi authorities defined Jewish art as "degenerate" and, as such, it was banned. The artist Isis Kischka, a Compiègne inmate, was the leading spirit in the field of art in the camp. Kischka organized workshops and an art exhibition, lauded by his co-inmates, as can be seen in a painting depicting an artist painting by the camp's wire fence, dedicated *to Kischka, my barbed wire souvenir . . . a landscape painter in Front Stalag 122, Compiègne* [Fig. 5].

Additional homage was paid by the Jewish–Russian artist Savely Schleifer, who depicted Kischka as a cavalryman on horseback, holding the *Exposition—Front Stalag 122* banner, dedicated to "Kischka, my dear friend" [Fig. 6].

FIG. 6. Savely Schleifer. *Exhibition – Stalag Front 122*. Compiègne 1942 inscription: *To Kischka, my dear friend*. Courtesy of the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, Art Collection. Inv. no. 1705.

The painting not only acclaims the activist inmate but also epitomizes the duality of the escapist role of the camps' art. In Schleifer's painting, the blue horse rears upward, galloping toward an open, imagined space of freedom, while the barbed wire and watchtower in the background anchor the scene in the brutal reality of camp life. This tension reflects the dual role of art in the camps as a form of escapism and as a response to harsh conditions. Although artistic talent enables one to soar on the wings of creative imagination, the feet remain tethered, firmly planted in the soil of Front Stalag 122. The imaginative ascent stands in stark contrast to the grim misery within the confines of barbed wire (Rosenberg, 2003, pp. 124–128).

Not in vain does Schleifer identify Kischka as a rider on a blue horse, an image that allows him to create an ironic nod to the Nazi erasure of "undesirable" art. The figure of the artist–rider serves as an allusion to the early twentieth–century avant–garde group *Der Blaue Reiter*

(The Blue Rider), which laid the foundations of German Expressionism, an art movement later branded as "degenerate" and banned by the Nazi regime. The ban extended to works by Jewish artists as well. In this light, the painting acquires a layered meaning: Even the loftiest flights of artistic imagination are ultimately brought crashing down when confronted with earthy reality.

A REFUGE IN THE ACT OF CREATION

In the midst of havoc, the artists found refuge in the act of creation. It was a strategy to escape from the realm where destruction was the law and dehumanization was a step in the process of annihilation. This was poetically summed up by Karel Fleischmann, a physician and gifted artist, interned in Terezin, where he served as assistant director of the health department and was in charge of welfare for the elderly inmates. Amidst the never-ending, painful routine, he picked up a pencil and pad to sketch.

> We all feel the sensation of sliding downhill: day by day, night by night, sliding down into the abyss . . . everything is like a black wall that threatens more and more and squeezes the little confidence and strength . . . then I took a pencil and a brush and used them as a springboard into an imaginary world, into another world . . . a world that stands above time. (Fleischmann, n.d., p. 1)

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As Nancy D. Kersell points out, "Students may assume that in 1945, once Allied troops had opened the camp gates, once hidden children had emerged from the shadows, the Holocaust was over." Of course, this is not the case. In her essay, Kersell provides an overview of key issues and pertinent texts depicting struggles and triumphs that Jewish survivors experienced in the aftermath of the Holocaust. If time permits, consider including a discussion of the aftermath in your Holocaust unit.

Nancy D. Kersell

Understanding the Aftermath Through Literature: Suggestions for Teaching

Fiction, memoirs, and poetry written by and about survivors are familiar to teachers and students. These texts form an established canon of literature that blends facts and feelings to confront the unimaginable—industrialized mass murder. However, the opening of the camps and the grueling aftermath of liberation often receive much less attention. Many reasons can account for this, the primary one being the limited time allocated in the curriculum for focusing on the Holocaust. As a result, students may assume that in 1945, once Allied troops had opened the camp gates, once hidden children had emerged from the shadows, the Holocaust was over.

As Charlotte Delbo (1995) discloses in her memoir *Auschwitz and After*, life for survivors after the Holocaust was often agonizing, depressing, and disorienting. Survivors had to confront numerous difficulties simultaneously: physical exhaustion and illness; emotional detachment and despair; arduous searches to locate relatives—often without success; confinement in crowded, chaotic displaced persons camps; delayed grief and anguish to be processed for decades to follow. There also were other preoccupations for survivors—a desire for revenge, if not justice, to compensate for all their losses, and certainly overcoming the rootlessness of being a refugee. Literature about the aftermath at least partially conveys how survivors coped with the horrors they suffered, even though it is impossible to grasp fully either the enormity of their loss or the strength, resilience, and courage they exhibited as they tried to rebuild.

Helping students envision survivors' external and internal struggles to re-enter life provides an invaluable window into the often profound, painful, and lasting transformation that survivors experienced. As Delbo (1995) so hauntingly explains:

> People believe memories grow vague, are erased by time, since nothing endures against the passage of time. That's the difference; time does not pass over me, over us. It doesn't erase anything, doesn't undo it. I'm not alive. I died in Auschwitz. (p. 267)

In this context, the stereotypical celebratory images of liberation are not authentic, because they gloss over these circumstances. Delbo writes:

> To start life over again, what an expression. . . . If there is such a thing, you can't do it over again, it is your life. You could erase and begin anew . . . erase and cover with writing the words that were there before. . . . How did they do it, those who did it? Graft a new heart upon a bloodless one. (p. 348)

As they slowly crawled out of the abyss, how did these survivors create space for hope? Indeed, though many did, others could not. Postwar Europe was a mass graveyard, with many communities destroyed. Terrence Des Pres (1976), in his landmark study *The Survivor*, points out that "starting 'from scratch' is in fact the survivor's permanent condition" (p. 216). Des Pres astutely reminds us that "in civilized circumstances, life unfolds in accord with a fate largely inward, and as it does, the past grows in reality and significance" (p. 216). Survivors often cannot look back without revisiting the atrocities and deprivations, and "no personal agony can equal the war's massive pain. A past of this kind is the basis of the survivor's identity as a survivor, and becomes manifest in the act of bearing witness" (p. 217). As a coping mechanism, giving testimony through memoirs, journals, lectures, and videotaped interviews has enabled some survivors to find an outlet for their feelings

and warn this generation of the devastating consequences of indifference and racism. Another aspect of the aftermath that survivors want us to understand before their voices vanish into distant memory is that they gradually discovered that their relatives had been murdered, their possessions and homes taken or destroyed, and in many countries, they were not welcome to return. Describing their experiences can be a path to catharsis and can help them live more fully in the present.

KEY ISSUES TO EXPLORE IN THE CLASSROOM

Even before reading any first-person narratives about the aftermath, students can discuss external hardships survivors confronted and the attempts to overcome them. Among these hardships were:

- recovering from malnutrition, disease, and physical abuse;
- lack of basic necessities: privacy, money, employment, and education;
- postwar chaos, including hazardous travel through Allied occupation zones, destroyed cities, and overcrowded and limited transportation;
- searching for family members and confronting staggering losses;
- lingering antisemitism; and
- confinement in crowded DP camps.

This list is not exhaustive, but suggests the harsh reality survivors faced from the moment the Nazis were defeated. Even those who were relatively healthy still confronted difficulties while trying to meet their basic needs and, as refugees, many stateless, these survivors had to rely on organizations such as the Red Cross and Jewish relief agencies for help. Many ended up in displaced persons camps, because no one was prepared to handle thousands of emigrants with no means of support attempting to cross borders and different zones of occupation.

Compounding these harsh conditions were the survivors' internal wounds, characterized in Aaron Haas's (1996) study *The Aftermath: Living With the Holocaust*. In that text, the psychiatrist William Niederland discusses what he calls "survivor syndrome," listing numerous symptoms such as chronic anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and a profound alteration of personal identity (p. 2). Although not all survivors showed such symptoms, and many who did in the early years overcame them, students can understand how the experience of the Holocaust could have caused these and other psychological ills as well, including intrusive memories of prewar life and atrocities during the war; survivor guilt and shame; a desire for retribution or justice; loss, lessening, or questioning of religious faith; postponed or suppressed grief and mourning; and loss of innocence in children.

LITERARY REVELATIONS

Many literary sources disclose the inner torment manifest in these reactions after the war. Des Pres (1976) observes that survivors had been "uprooted from their former life, stripped of connection with it, and forced, finally, to adjust their sense of reality to conditions drastically different from those of that other world" (p. 217). In the biography Number 176520, teenage survivor Paul Argiewicz (2008) starts the long walk from Buchenwald to Bielsko, Poland:

> The world looked different from the outside, but a lingering sense of the camps governed his spirit. The more he attempted to rid himself of the morbid sensations and impressions, the more they gnawed at him. He moved forward with other frail but determined prisoners, still clothed in striped uniforms as they trudged slowly along the sides of the busy highway toward their distant homes. (p. 77)

Paul does manage to return home, but is warned not to stay because local residents may kill him. Eventually, he is reunited with one of his sisters and decides to live in America. His adjustment takes time, but he represents many whose strength and resilience enabled them to outlast "a world hostile to life" (Des Pres, 1976, p. 13) and find new reasons to believe that "the spirit can find a home" (p. 246).

For some survivors, the happiness and relief of returning to their former towns dissipated as news reached them of all who were not coming back. As she explains in her memoir *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing Up in the Holocaust*, Livia Bitton-Jackson (1999) grapples with learning she is one of the few still alive from her community in Slovakia:

> Each piece of news adds to a deepening sense of isolation. We are the only survivors. . . . There are no Jewish children here, no older people. The children I saw marching toward the smoke in Auschwitz, the little boy with the yellow clown, they were the last ones. When I see those children, I see little Tommi, Susie, and Frumet in the cattle car heading for Auschwitz, and my insides turn numb with the pain of emptiness. Can anyone understand the pain of the uprooted? This was my home once, my town, my country. . . . Without it, I am not whole. Yet, it is no longer mine. It is not my home anymore. (pp. 211–213)

This displacement does not completely disappear. Bitton-Jackson gradually realizes that "the future lies far from our birthplace, the motherland that had brutally expelled us from her womb. Every one of us nurtures a fond dream of a distant land" (p. 216)—but which land? When Bitton-Jackson's family eventually leaves Europe

for America and first sees the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor, she turns to her mother and says, "Mommy, Eretz Israel is our only home. New York will never be home. We can make it in New York but it will never be home. Never. We will be foreigners forever" (p. 221).

This awareness of her separation from her former life and who she was before the Holocaust shows how, even with the chance to start over, the young Bitton-Jackson cannot escape feeling alien and incomplete, no matter how hard she tries to adapt to her new surroundings. (She did adapt, however, marrying, having children, earning a Ph.D., becoming a professor of history and a writer, and eventually moving with her family to Israel.)

Agate Nesaule's (1995) memoir *A Woman in Amber* describes her struggle to rebuild her life in America with a hopeful if unrealistic expectation of discarding the trauma of war quickly and completely:

> I thought the war was over, the camps were behind me and that life in America would be an entirely new beginning. I believed that the past could no longer affect me. The instant I arrived in America, I would forget everything bad that had happened. The grey film over everything would lift. I would be happy, I would be free. (p. 139)

Of course, she soon discovers the impossibility of separating from her past. She confronts its indelible imprint on her relationships and self-awareness, sifting through painful memories and a few artifacts from her early life in Latvia to create a powerful portrayal of growth and reconciliation. In composing her memoir, she realizes that

> gradually the silent oppressive images inside me have become words. The past takes on meaning and shape, loses its power to paralyze, silence, and shame. I am startled by the parallels between my mother and me, I wish to shield the girl she was, I understand why she could not give me more than she did. . . . We were both outsiders, both scarred. We both inflicted our sadness on our children. (p. 277)

This insight enables her to look forward with less apprehension and worry, because, like so many other survivors, she still has the capacity for hope: "We have to believe that dreams are meaningful, we have to believe that even the briefest of human connections can heal. Otherwise life is unbearable" (p. 280).

SECOND-GENERATION REACTIONS: "CHILDREN OF THE NIGHTMARE"

The potential for the perpetuation of the psychological duress experienced during the aftermath is frequently captured in the literature written by descendants of survivors. The compilation of stories in *Nothing Makes You Free*, edited by Melvin Bukiet (2002), contains excerpts from works by Carl Friedman, Thane Rosenbaum, Art Spiegelman, Eva Hoffman, and Gila Lustiger, among others. In his introduction, Bukiet asks a question central to the second-generation experience: "How do you cope when the most important events of your life occurred before you were born? . . . All you know is that you've received a tainted inheritance, secondhand knowledge of the worst event in history" (p. 18). Grappling with such a heavy burden, these writers focus on how the Holocaust continues to impact survivors and their families during childhoods affected by bad dreams, eating disorders, shame, panic attacks, and a heart-rending desire on the part of children to protect their parents from further anguish. As a relatively recent extension of Holocaust literature, such texts expand our understanding of why the Holocaust remains embedded in our collective memory.

These literary depictions surely do not represent what every child of survivors has felt or experienced, but they convey a shared trauma that has affected many survivor families for years. In *Nightfather* by Carl Friedman (1995), the child narrator explains that

> you don't get camp from drinking muddy water. You don't get camp from playing outside without your coat on or from never washing your hands. I don't know how or why my father got camp. Maybe he got it because he's different from most of the people I know. Because he's different, my mother is different, too. And because the two of them are different, Max, Simon, and I are different from ordinary children. (p. 5)

This otherness the child perceives has slowly pierced her innocence. As she witnesses her father's anger when he talks about the prison guards, his insistence that she eat everything at meals, his narration of grotesque versions of fairy tales, and his bizarre nighttime behavior, she realizes that something awful wounded her father permanently. The father does not intentionally try to share his pain, but it emerges nonetheless, and his children are not immune to its toxic effects.

RENEWAL AND RECOVERY

Rather than focusing only on the horrors they endured, finding significance and purpose in life after the Holocaust enabled many survivors to look forward with hope, and this, too, must be a part of our teaching about the aftermath. Des Pres (1976) received a letter from one anonymous survivor who stated, "I feel no guilt in being a survivor, but I feel I have a task to fulfill" (p. 42). For some, describing what Des Pres characterizes as "scenes that

they can never forget and that, sometimes in hatred, sometimes with amazing tenderness, they feel compelled to record" (p. 46) can help others understand the past and appreciate what was lost. Giving testimony becomes not only a catharsis or means of remembering those who died, but also a source of spiritual survival.

Viktor Frankl (1984), in his landmark text *Man's Search for Meaning*, acknowledges that

> when we spoke about attempts to give a man in camp mental courage, we said that he had to be shown something to look forward to in the future. He had to be reminded that life still waited for him, that a human being waited for him. But after liberation? There were some men who found that no one awaited them. . . . We all said to each other in camp that there could be no earthly happiness that could compensate for all we had suffered. We were not hoping for happiness—it was not that which gave us courage and gave meaning to our suffering, our sacrifices, and our dying. And yet we were not prepared for unhappiness. (p. 99)

To salvage some enjoyment in freedom, Frankl wrote, meant that a survivor had to find a way to accept that "there is nothing he need fear anymore—except his God" (p. 100).

For survivor and psychiatrist Emanuel Tanay (2004), a survivor is a person "whose love of life triumphed over the forces of hate" (p. 273). In his book *Passport to Life*, Tanay explains that after talking with numerous survivors, he found that

> Holocaust survivors did not let their past kill their future. The optimism that sustained us in times of horror inspired us in the post-war hardship in Germany . . . . The DP camps of 1945 were places of misery transformed by survivors into thriving communities. . . . The survivors, through their own efforts, became productive citizens of various countries. . . . This is the untold story of the Holocaust. (p. 274)

Knowing the atrocities of the Holocaust were well documented, he chose to publish his thoughts, significant events in his life, and conversations with other child survivors revealing the underlying strength and resiliency of Jews trapped in ghettos, camps, and the postwar chaos. As educators, we can ensure that the many stories of resilient survivors who live productive and joyful lives, who contribute greatly to their communities, are an integral part of our study of the aftermath.

Sometimes, however, even accomplishments could not blot out the past, and optimism in starting over was tempered by memories of places and people that no longer existed. In a second memoir coauthored with her husband Kurt, *The Hours After*, Gerda Weissmann Klein (2000) explains that

> none of my closest friends survived the cataclysm. I therefore cannot claim to know how they would have reacted to the new postwar realities. In our minds we had associated survival with the restoration of the world we had known before, so it was especially difficult to realize that that world was gone forever. (p. 222)

However, Klein did not dwell on what she left behind. She became renowned for eloquently describing her wartime experiences in her memoir *All but My Life* and the Academy Award-winning documentary *One Survivor Remembers*. She spent decades speaking to schoolchildren, creating a foundation to put books and films about the Holocaust into schools, and encouraging others to pursue humanitarian causes. Moving beyond the shadow of the Holocaust, she and thousands of other survivors extracted from their pain important understandings to impart, and this mission has offered comfort and inspiration to people around the world.

By introducing students to the aftermath of the Holocaust through literature, teachers enable them to comprehend more fully its long-term impact upon each survivor. For many, building a new life took years or was only partially successful. Haas (1995) reminds us of how daunting moving forward was and how strong survivors had to be:

> For the most part, survivors look back and feel at peace with their behavior during the Holocaust. And while they often primarily attribute their survival to luck, they also convince themselves that survival required a particular inner strength. Look what I made it through while millions did not or could not, they reflect. Any feelings of inferiority engendered during their dehumanization are buried by an assertion of superiority. And even after all I experienced, I was able to successfully reestablish a life, have a family, be a productive member of society, they point out. Dignity has been restored. (p. 40)

Through studying the various forms of Holocaust literature depicting the aftermath, we become witnesses to a daunting journey. Those who suffered and survived had a momentous task before them: to come back from a world of unimaginable horror and somehow find something for which to live. Members of the second generation followed with their own recollections, and today, literature of the third generation documents a search for detailed information that was not passed down. The resulting record of defying and surmounting the cataclysm is a lasting tribute to the survivors and their heirs.

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In "Budapest and Beyond," Breindel Lieba Kasher writes about traveling to her mother's pre-Holocaust home, in a Ukrainian town where "all but one" of the Jews are gone. This sole survivor lives in her mother's house. In "A Tree in Brooklyn," Kasher tells us that her grandmother Baba Feiga was "our center," making a life despite the fact that "her whole world, father, mother, sister, brothers / everyone was murdered."

Breindel Lieba Kasher

Budapest and Beyond

Mr. Feldman, my driver, and his wife are survivors
4 in the morning Mrs. Feldman boils milk for our coffee
In her kosher kitchen, she worries over her husband
like a mother of children she could not have
Our papers in order, at the Ukrainian border
police detain us, as if we are criminals
Mr. Feldman warns me:
Don't ask questions, give simple answers, don't look them in the eye

Mother's *Ungvar* (home):
Lilac flowers, chestnut trees, horses and wagons, Gypsies
shriveled ladies, black kerchiefs, white hens, wooden houses, dirt roads
Everything as it was, except the Jews are gone, all but one
She opens the door slowly and pulls me in quickly
as if still in hiding. Her basement memories
resurface in Yiddish; she has not spoken since the war
The war took all:
Family, friends, neighbors, streets, smells, shadows, songs
her mother's tongue, echoes, dead and gone. Only she lives
with her husband, the man who hid her in the basement

Afternoon turns evening; we hold each other, weeping
It is hard leaving, back to Budapest
The border police break our thermos full of coffee
Mrs. Feldman made that morning

A Tree in Brooklyn

Baba Feiga and her five children
sailed from Hungary to America

Baba Feiga was our center
she wore heavy shoes and thick stockings

She felt ancient, rooted
but she wasn't

Her whole world, father, mother, sister, brothers
everyone was murdered

She stood, a lone tree, in a long apron
in her little kitchen in Williamsburg, Brooklyn

Emanuel Ringelblum, a Jewish historian, was the founder of Oneg Shabbat (Oyneg Shabes), a clandestine group comprised of 60 individuals who chronicled life in the Warsaw Ghetto. The group, which included writers, artists, diarists, and social workers, wrote and collected a massive cache of documents detailing daily ghetto life that would "scream the truth to the world," as 19-year-old David Graber wrote in his last will. As conditions worsened, knowing they were doomed, members buried their archive in metal milk cans and boxes. Tragically, only three of the group survived. One knew the locations of the buried documents and, after the war, helped retrieve most of the them from under the rubble of the destroyed ghetto.

Amos Neufeld

Who Will Hear Our Screams?

for Emanuel Ringelblum and the other members of Oneg Shabbat:
The Warsaw Ghetto Chroniclers

Even our death-screams can't capture the horror
we've suffered: random shootings, roundups, lives-riven, death-
shrouded—at the mercy of murderers.
We've chronicled the truth — cries etched in the earth,

in our eyes, not wanting to give murderers
the last word — drown out the truth of our screams.
Recorded our lives ravaged in the ghetto
though the world outside remains deaf to our pleas —

has turned its back as our loved ones are taken.
An infinite grief from which no one's recovered.
Yet we continue to write and bury our archive
so you will know the dying hells we've suffered —

brutal truths that may live beyond our time,
beyond this world that refused to hear our screams.

Amos Neufeld dedicated this poem to Janusz Korczak (Henryk Goldszmit), a Polish Jewish pediatrician, writer, popular radio host, and children's rights advocate who promoted the concept of a "just community" and a children's bill of rights. He cofounded progressive orphanages for both Jewish and Christian children in Warsaw. When the Nazis invaded, he was ordered to move the Jewish orphanage into the ghetto, and, with Stefa Wilczynska, he cared for some 200 children there. In August 1942, when the children were to be deported, he refused offers to escape. He could not abandon his children. Instead, he chose to accompany his beloved charges to their deaths in Treblinka.

Amos Neufeld

You Would Have Brought Heaven to Earth

(for Janusz Korczak)

How could the blood-drunk earth ever understand you?
refusing offers to escape sure death
you held your orphans till their last gasps of breath.
When the world turned its back, how could you

have abandoned your children to face death alone?
Not shelter them under a mere mortal's wings
safe in the heaven of an open heart,
form a children's republic there, bring heaven

to earth—a haven the closed hardened earth
wouldn't have. How could you've lived in their eternal shadow
on a death star encircled by the gas rings of Treblinka?
A guardian angel is not made for that.

On that last march with the children's flag flying above,
holding hands, death-bound, you showed us how to live.

Amos Neufeld introduces us to his mother, who "was 24 years old in May 1944 when she and her family were deported from Beregszasz, Czechoslovakia. She was taken in a cattle car with some 90 others, including two of her sisters, Irenka and Berta, and Berta's 4-year-old daughter. She arrived at Auschwitz–Birkenau 3 days later. Most of her family, including her parents, her married sisters, and their children, were murdered in the gas chambers. This poem is part of a series of sonnets based on a wartime journal my mother began keeping at Sommerda, a munitions factory and subcamp of Buchenwald, where she was sent to work after Birkenau.

Amos Neufeld

Perhaps Even a Woman

To gulp fresh air, leave that soul-crushing hell —
locked three days packed in an airless cattle car.
Fainting again, Berta had said: *at least I'll*
die sooner. Death-bound, we lived in constant terror

of being sent to the crematory —
a kapo screamed that there was still room for us.
At times I wouldn't have minded: to be free
of the blood-soaked earth, an insatiable mass

grave, a gas-filled chamber of gasped breath.
We'd walked through all hell's fires. Seen everything
unimaginable.Marched through realms of endless death.
Somehow we still hoped to flower like that spring.

Bloom free. Even blossom into women —
and twirl in happiness in a dress again.

Charles Adès Fishman writes of the silent anguish of a French survivor whose trauma made her unable to explain what it was like during her four years of torment "under the heel / of the matador." Ask your students their thoughts on the intriguing title of this poem.

Charles Adès Fishman

Corrida

For the generation after

You could not tell from the photographs
the French police had come to arrest her,
that France her native country had danced
flamenco *con brio* with the bull of death

All these years, a question has turned
in the wound—*What was it like?*
She could not tell you

Back from four years under the heel
of the matador, she could give you only
the pledge of continued silence a prayer
that her pain would not gore you
with equal fierceness

Deeper than the sword-thrusts of words,
her smile is a sign: her love her undying
love is the truth she could not tell you

Gail Newman's poems, about her parents' experiences during and after the Holocaust, allow us to visualize and almost feel moments of their traumatic times through spare, vivid language. Cousins survived "pressed close on a wooden plank . . . / one's breath on the other's face." In response, students may choose to paint or draw an image corresponding to or reflecting what they have read. They may delve into the setting and the events described, prompted to learn the historical context of these works. They may choose to stay with the music and movement of the narratives, rereading them until they become links in the students' personal chain of remembrance. Such poetry, along with the other poems in this issue, helps us achieve a crucial teaching goal: to have our students leave our classrooms wanting to learn more about those who endured the singular event we call the Holocaust.

Gail Newman

Cousins in Auschwitz

After the lines parted —
my grandmother sent to the left,
my mother and Malka sent to the right —

their heads shaven,
clothes taken away,
my mother was given shoes,

one black, one brown,
while Malka disappeared
in a dress that fell to the floor.

In the camp, my mother and Malka kept close.
They shared crumbs, stood together
at roll call. When the kapo slapped my mother
and her glasses fell to the ground,
Malka picked them up
out of the dust, settled them back
over my mother's eyes.

They kept alive,
pressed close on a wooden plank,
strangers above and below,
one's breath on the other's face.

When your students wonder, "How did the Jews survive?" remind them that each person had a different experience; circumstances and their own resilience dictated their actions each day they survived. Here Gail Newman writes that her father feigned "death. For three days / unmoving in the snow."

Gail Newman

Still Life, 1945

War. The man face-down in the snow is my father.
Chest, legs, body as if asleep in snow. He hears the silent
woods, the slight shiver of ice forming on branches,
the cry of a crow, crunch of boots, artillery fire,
moans. Allied planes overhead, crush of metal, shouts.
He imagines his mother lies down beside him,
smooths his hair, breathes with him.
Something in the world must love him.
must want him alive — his hands, the soles of his feet,
the veins in his neck, the roots of his hair.
He feigns death. For three days
unmoving in the snow, his bones
so cold they could break.

"No. No, and again, no." This line from Gail Newman's "Homecoming" epitomizes the reactions of all those who took the homes and all the belongings of the deported Jews and then, when the few survivors returned, refused to give anything back. Discuss with your students the particular lines detailing objects that resonate most with them.

Gail Newman

Homecoming

My mother came to a dead end called Poland.
The shops gone, the house no longer home.
She knocked at the door. A man answered.
She could see over his shoulder into the living room,
her mother's lamp, her father's chair.
She could hear music swinging from the radio,
post-war American bands. She asked to come in,
just for a minute to take a breath of the air
that might still carry her father's cigarette smoke,
the scent of her mother's soup,
the pencils she sharpened at the desk.
No. No, and again, no.
Words she would carry with her
wherever she went — away from Łodz,
Krakow, Bialystok, away
from the street that was not her street,
the city that was not her city,
a coat that was no longer her mother's coat —
someone else's arms in the sleeves —
a stranger who came to the door,
wearing her father's shoes.

Mike Frenkel shares moments from childhood, a time when his Jewish identity isolated him both physically and emotionally. While this is not exactly a Holocaust poem, it reflects his understanding, as a child of survivors, of how to stay safe when he senses danger.

Mike Frenkel

Growing Up Jewish in a Catholic Neighborhood

Leaning against the schoolyard fence
during recess.
Two older guys, fifth graders I think,
confront me.
"You a Jew, or what?"
"Protestant," I reply as rehearsed.
They stare,
nod
and walk away.

"Ya get yer Christmas tree yet?"
"Not yet."

Walking home from school
with Joey Rodriguez and his mom.
She wants to stop at her church
and light a candle.
She dips her fingers in holy water
and makes the sign.
Joey does the same.
They turn and wait
as I follow.
I flick the water off my fingers
just before it burns.

When my classmates file out
for "religious instruction"
every Wednesday afternoon,
Laura and I are left alone.
She remains in her assigned seat
on the other side of the room.
Our teacher ignores us.
What did we do wrong?

When the class stands to sing
Christmas carols,
I mouth the words.

"The study of the US news media's reporting on the Holocaust has emerged as an important subfield of scholarship on America's response to the Nazi genocide," writes Rafael Medoff in this overview. "While a number of books, essays, and documentary films have examined important aspects of the topic, many gaps in the research remain." Perhaps your students will want to research their city's newspapers to see how the Holocaust was reported during the years 1933–1945.

Rafael Medoff

Unfit to Print: What We Know, and What We Don't Know, About Media Coverage of the Holocaust

The study of American responses to the Holocaust began at the top, with the publication of several major books, beginning in the late 1960s, concerning the policies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his administration. Subsequently, other historians focused on more specialized aspects of the story, including the responses of American Jewry, the Hollywood film industry, individual American rescuers in Europe, and the news media.

THE GENERAL PRESS VERSUS THE JEWISH PRESS

As the first studies of the news media's Holocaust coverage appeared, a pattern quickly became clear. The general American press tended to ignore the news or bury it in the back pages, while the Jewish press published it prominently and frequently. Unfortunately, the large-circulation dailies, which typically failed to adequately cover Holocaust news, were the ones in the best position to influence public opinion and government officials. The Jewish weeklies, which did what the general press should have been doing, seldom attracted serious attention outside the small American Jewish community.

Margaret K. Norden, writing in the *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* in 1970, reviewed unsigned editorials in the *New York Times, Los Angeles Times*, and *St. Louis Post–Dispatch*, "chosen for their regional prominence," from 1930 to 1939. She found that they "were slow to respond to the urgent menace of Hitler" and tended to sidestep the plight of Germany's Jews (p. 300). Arlene Rossen Cardozo, in *Journalism Quarterly* in 1983, examined 64 articles concerning the plight of European Jewry that were published in US magazines from late 1941 to late 1944. She found that opinion magazines were much more likely to print such articles than were news or feature magazines. Of the opinion periodicals, *The Nation* and *The New Republic* [Fig. 1] exhibited the greatest interest (pp. 717–718). While far from scientific or comprehensive, Cardozo's study nonetheless provided a snapshot that was useful in pointing the way for subsequent researchers.

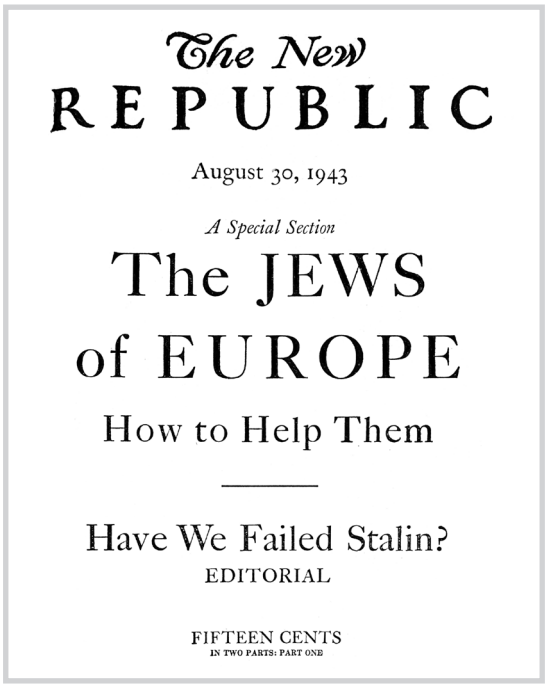

The New
REPUBLIC
August 30, 1943
A Special Section
The JEWS of EUROPE
How to Help Them
Have We Failed Stalin?
EDITORIAL
FIFTEEN CENTS
IN TWO PARTS: PART ONE

FIG. 1. *The New Republic* was one of the few American magazines to pay serious attention to the mass murder of the Jews. Photo courtesy of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

The first systematic studies of the American Jewish press and the Holocaust were undertaken by Alex Grobman. In the *Wiener Library Bulletin*, he reported that US Jewish newspapers published "a steady stream of accurate information about the deteriorating plight of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto" prior to the revolt there in 1943. He found that the revolt itself was well covered, especially by the Yiddish-language press (Grobman, 1976, p. 61).

Three years later, in *American Jewish History*, Grobman (1979) concluded that during the period from the outbreak of World War II until the Allies' confirmation of the mass murder in late 1942, the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily Bulletin* and the American Yiddish press "provided almost daily accounts of Jewish suffering," and the Jews' plight was amply covered in English-language Jewish weeklies as well. While some of the earliest reports of Nazi atrocities "were exaggerated and fragmentary," enough reliable information was published "to form a general idea of the tragedy occurring to the Jewish people." He also noted that editorials in the Jewish press "continually admonished American Jewry for failing to adopt a more aggressive response" (pp. 351–352), a phenomenon that other scholars would revisit. Subsequent studies of two individual English-language Jewish weeklies not examined by Grobman, the Minneapolis–St. Paul *American Jewish World* and the *Southern Israelite*, reached similar conclusions (Cohen, 1985, p. 110).

Although the US Yiddish-language press declined precipitously as the immigrant generation came of age during the interwar period, there were still four Yiddish dailies based in New York City during the Hitler years: the Orthodox *Morgen Zhurnal*, the Socialist *Forverts*, the Communist *Morgen Freiheit*, and the non-ideological *Der Tog*. They served as important sources of information for the Jewish public about the situation in Europe. The Yiddish–language publications consistently and prominently published news of the massacres, no doubt because the editors, reporters, and readers of the Yiddish press were more closely tied to the world of European Jewry than were the more Americanized segments of the Jewish community. Although no comprehensive study of the Yiddish press and the Holocaust has yet been published, the beginnings of such research may be found in *Why Didn't the Press Shout?* (2003), a collection of papers from a 1995 conference on Holocaust-era press coverage in various countries, and in Yosef Gorny's 2009 book, published in English in 2012 as *The Jewish Press and the Holocaust, 1939–1945: Palestine, Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union*.

Haskel Lookstein utilized American Jewish press coverage of the Holocaust in a different way in his 1985 book, *Were We Our Brothers' Keepers?* Rather than systematically review what the various newspapers published, he used highlights from the news coverage to chronicle how American Jews and their organizations responded to the news. The final result revealed more about the Jewish community than about the media coverage. Lookstein concluded that even if most of the Holocaust was "unstoppable" by American Jews, "it should have been unbearable for them. And it wasn't" (p. 216). Lookstein documented the surprising extent to which gala dinners, summer vacations, and various forms of public entertainment, as covered in the Jewish press, continued in the community even at the peak of the Shoah. In effect, he confirmed and illustrated the complaints by Jewish editorial writers to which Grobman alluded in 1979.

Harvard Sitkoff (2003) later did with the African-American press what Lookstein did with the Jewish press. Sitkoff's book chapter surveying Black Americans' responses to the Holocaust was not a comprehensive analysis of African-American newspapers, but instead used representative news articles and editorials from them to illustrate that community's reaction to the persecution of the Jews. Summing up his overall impression of the editorials and opinion columns he reviewed, Sitkoff wrote:

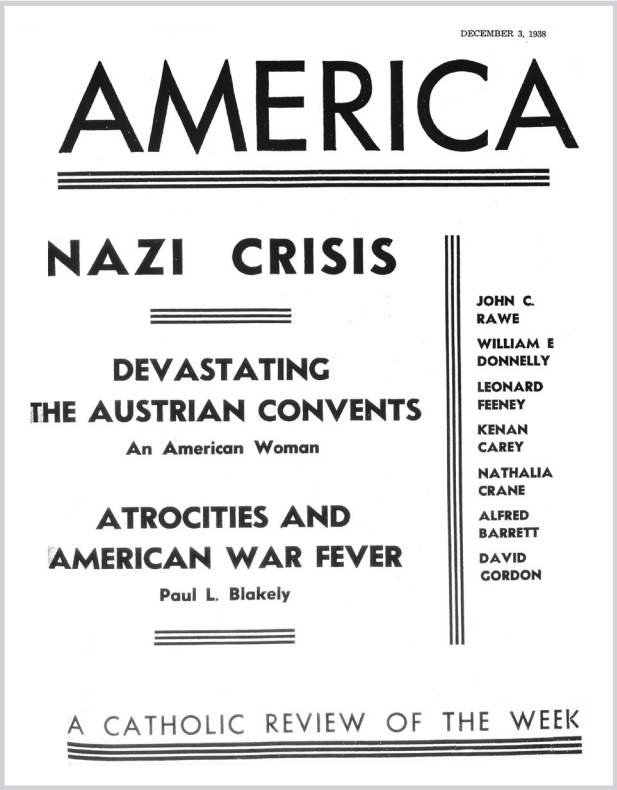
> Much of the Black press initially put the onus of Nazism on the Jews themselves, claimed that German Jewry suffered less than African Americans, argued against aiding Hitler's victims since Jews did not assist Blacks, and, most emphatically, emphasized the hypocrisy of those denouncing Germany's treatment of Jews but not the oppression of Blacks in the United States. (p. 184)

FIG. 2. This cartoon in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a leading African-American newspaper, saw hypocrisy in the American response to Hitler's oppression (although the cartoonist erred in believing that the Roosevelt administration was opening the nation's doors to Jewish refugees, here labeled "white aliens"). Photo courtesy of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

He also noted some exceptions, particularly the NAACP's magazine, *The Crisis*. [Fig. 2] How the press in other American ethnic communities handled news about the Holocaust remains to be studied.

THE CHRISTIAN PRESS

Robert W. Ross, a historian at the University of Minnesota, broke new ground with his 1980 book, *So It Was True*, a study of how 52 American Protestant newspapers and magazines reported the Nazi genocide. It was not only the first study of the US Christian press and the Holocaust; it was also the first scholarly book–length study of American Christian responses to the Nazi genocide. [Fig. 3]


DECEMBER 3, 1938

AMERICA

NAZI CRISIS

DEVASTATING
THE AUSTRIAN CONVENTS
An American Woman

ATROCITIES AND
AMERICAN WAR FEVER
Paul L. Blakely

JOHN C. RAWE
WILLIAM E DONNELLY
LEONARD FEENEY
KENAN CAREY
NATHALIA CRANE
ALFRED BARRETT
DAVID GORDON

A CATHOLIC REVIEW OF THE WEEK

FIG. 3. The Catholic weekly *America* responded to *Kristallnacht* by focusing on the mistreatment of nuns in Austria and the dangers of "war fever." Photo courtesy of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

Ross's research was thorough, and the information he presented was important. The book's only serious flaw was its overstated conclusion that "the whole story" of the Holocaust was published "extensively, continuously, and often comprehensively in the American Protestant press" (Ross, 1980, p. 258). David S. Wyman (1984) pointed out that Ross's conclusion did not take into account the relative size and significance of the individual Protestant periodicals that he studied. According to the evidence Ross presented in the book, the Protestant publications that published by far the most Holocaust news were two tiny–circulation newspapers that were focused on converting Jews to Christianity. Only a handful of mainstream Protestant periodicals published even occasional reports about the plight of the Jews, and some of them were no more than news briefs. Twenty-five other Protestant newspapers printed little or nothing about the subject (Wyman, 1984, pp. 412–413).

While Ross focused on the Protestants, much could be learned from a study of how the American Catholic press covered the Holocaust. The brief references in Wyman's *The Abandonment of the Jews* (1984) and Deborah Lipstadt's *Beyond Belief* (1986) suggest that it left much to be desired.

THEY SPOKE OUT

In contrast to other books concerning President Roosevelt's response to the Holocaust, Wyman's 1984 best seller, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, wove extensive analysis of press coverage into the larger story. Wyman concluded that "the press's failure to arouse public interest and indignation handicapped efforts to build pressure for government action to aid the Jews" (p. 62). There was, however, another side to this story. Wyman also pointed to the fact that there were significant exceptions to the news media's meager coverage, particularly the political affairs weeklies *The Nation* and *The New Republic*, and the New York City daily newspaper *PM*.

PM was the smallest of New York City's seven daily newspapers; its circulation never exceeded 200,000. Yet in the complex interplay between politics and the media, circulation is not always the same as influence. *PM* published numerous hard-hitting exposés of the Roosevelt administration's harsh refugee policy, often authored by the indomitable I. F. Stone, who was just then hitting his early stride as an investigative reporter. The articles were noticed by groups and individuals in a position to do something about it. What *PM*, *The Nation*, and *The New Republic* published sometimes galvanized members of Congress and Jewish leaders to speak out and to raise issues that the administration would have preferred to avoid.

More than that, the press was in a position to directly influence government policy. Presidents "are political creatures and as such are sensitive to the pressure of public opinion," Lipstadt (1986) has pointed out. This was "particularly true during the Roosevelt administration," she emphasizes, characterizing FDR's concern about press coverage of his policies as "almost obsessional" (pp. 2, 4). Moreover, *PM*, *The Nation*, and *The New Republic* were on the political left; they were staunch supporters of Roosevelt, the Democrats, and the New Deal, which is no doubt part of the reason the administration took their criticism seriously. When Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long, a leading opponent of rescue, complained in his diary about "the attacks in the newspapers" and "the radical press" by "wild-eyed elements," he was not referring to the *New York*

Times (Israel, 1966, pp. 158–159, 334). Officials of the War Refugee Board in 1944 showed FDR an album of press clippings favoring temporary entry of refugees; that was a key factor in convincing him to admit 982 refugees outside the immigration quota system (Wyman, 1984, p. 264).

WHY IT WAS BEYOND BELIEF

Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933–1945, by Deborah Lipstadt, published in 1986, was the first book-length study of media coverage of the Nazi genocide. Lipstadt found that most major US newspapers and news services downplayed news about the mass murder and often obscured the Jewish identity of the victims.

Lipstadt pinpointed three main reasons for the media's misconduct. First, many editors and reporters remembered how some World War I atrocity stories turned out to be false, and were consequently skeptical about the allegations of Nazi atrocities, especially because they were unprecedented in their scope and nature. The fact that this skepticism was applied even when the Germans themselves were the source of the information points to the irresponsible extremes to which some journalists carried their doubts.

Second, editors and reporters tended to follow along unquestioningly when President Roosevelt and his administration disguised the victims' Jewishness by calling them "political refugees" or omitting the Jews from lists of minorities targeted by the Nazis. The president and his aides feared that giving attention to the specific plight of the Jews would increase pressure for American intervention to help them. Many journalists allowed themselves to be co-opted in furtherance of FDR's policy.

A third factor affecting US media coverage was Germany's longstanding status as one of the world's centers of science and culture. Lipstadt noted that "among the editors and reporters of the nation's newspapers and magazines were many Americans who had studied in Germany, were of German ancestry, had toured Germany, or had been prisoners of the Germans during the previous war" (p. 268). They were still influenced by memories from an earlier Germany.

Finally, there was the factor of antisemitism. Lipstadt did not actually use that word, but, in a statement that is notable given the title of her book, she wrote in her conclusion that "there is a problem with explaining or excusing the press treatment of this news by relying on the fact that this was a story that was 'beyond belief.'" The problem, she explained, is that even as the Holocaust raged, so much verified information about the mass murder had reached the West that no reasonable editor or reporter had a basis for disbelieving it. Therefore, "it must be acknowledged that many government officials, members of the press, and leaders of other religions behaved as if Jewish lives were a cheap commodity."

> They reacted much more forcefully when non-Jewish lives were threatened. . . . A real antipathy toward Jews certainly affected the Allied response. While no one among the Allies or in the press wanted to see Jews killed, virtually no one was willing to advocate that steps be taken to try to stop the carnage. (p. 274)

All of which led Lipstadt to her devastating conclusion: The Allies tried

> to ignore the tragedy and make sure that those whose responsibility it was to disseminate information did the same. And the press, having convinced itself that there was nothing that could be done and having inured itself to the moral considerations of what was happening, followed suit. It was a cumulative and collective failure. The press was ultimately as culpable as the government. (pp. 276–277)

THE *COLUMBUS DISPATCH* PROJECT

While teaching at Ohio State University in 1991, I found an unexpected opportunity to test Lipstadt's thesis. The fact that only a small number of students enrolled in my Holocaust course turned out to be a blessing in disguise: It allowed us to research, as a team, how the local daily newspaper, the *Columbus Dispatch*, covered some of the major events of the Holocaust years.

Under my close supervision, the students spent many hours in the campus library, poring over old microfilms to view news coverage, editorials, political cartoons, and letters to the editor concerning events such as Hitler's rise to power (1933) and the Allies' confirmation of the mass murder (1942). The experience was an eye-opener for the students, and their findings were a microcosm of Lipstadt's.

Prior to the war, they found, the *Dispatch* provided ample coverage of aspects of the plight of the Jews, such as the *Kristallnacht* pogrom and the ill-fated journey of the refugee ship *St. Louis*. However, the newspaper also published several editorials asserting that Hitler's treatment of the Jews was "dictated by sheer economic and political necessity." During the Holocaust itself, the *Dispatch* often buried news of the mass murder. One 1942 news report announcing that 250,000 European Jews had been massacred, and millions more were slated for death, was relegated to six paragraphs on page 13, next to the city news briefs. The students examined more than 400 letters to the editor that were published during the relevant periods without finding a single one referring to the mass killings. This suggested that readers of the *Dispatch* were as uninterested in the plight of the Jews as were the editors (Medoff, 1992, p. 6). While it is conceivable that letters concerning the Jews were received by the editors but not published, the overwhelmingly lopsided tally seems to suggest otherwise.

In a final bit of irony, the *Dispatch* declined to publish our findings. Our report about our study appeared only in several Ohio Jewish weekly newspapers—a tragic echo of what happened during the Holocaust era itself, when the *Dispatch* buried the news and it was left to the limited-circulation Jewish weeklies to try to alert the public.

Two other localized studies, both involving the Southern press, offer additional food for thought. Dan Puckett (2014) found that the Alabama press generally gave adequate coverage to news of the mass killings, although "not on a regular basis" (p. 125). That would point to competition for news space in wartime, not bias, as the overarching explanation for the coverage. Robert Drake's 2010 essay regarding North Carolina press coverage of *Kristallnacht* is of more limited value, because publication of multiple front-page stories about that pogrom was typical of newspapers throughout the country. As Lipstadt (1986) showed, *Kristallnacht* was a major international news story, and almost all of the press treated it that way. The "unanimity" in the response of the press was "striking" (p. 104).

Both Puckett and Drake argued, not very convincingly, that the explanation for the ample coverage of both *Kristallnacht* and later events is that Jews in Alabama and North Carolina were few in number and deeply acculturated, leading to close relationships with local non-Jews, including newspaper editors; in their view, that is what generated sympathetic press coverage of Jewish concerns. However, there is no way to confirm that theory without locating correspondence between the editors and members of the local Jewish community that would bear it out. Future research on the Southern press and the Holocaust would benefit from a closer look at factors such as the sentiments of local Christian fundamentalists, whose theology encouraged an ongoing fascination with Jews. Puckett offers some interesting tidbits about the Alabama religious press in the 1930s—including some antisemitic leanings—but not about the years of the mass murder.

For the purpose of comparison, Drake also looked at the *Kristallnacht* coverage in a handful of newspapers in northern California, New Mexico, New York, and Wisconsin. The first three yielded no surprises. Wisconsin, however, "diverged dramatically from the norm," Drake discovered. The four Wisconsin newspapers that he examined printed far fewer articles about *Kristallnacht* than the press in the other states, and ended their coverage "nearly two weeks sooner" than the others. The Wisconsin newspapers emphasized the damage to property rather than the murder of Jews; highlighted the voices of those who opposed admitting more Jewish refugees to the United States; and, in editorials, raised doubts about the veracity of the pogrom reports and argued that the US should "not interfere in any foreign country's affairs." Drake connected this slant to the presence of a large German-American population in Wisconsin. If he was correct in his analysis, then while the four Wisconsin newspapers he examined were not German-American publications per se, they may have functioned as something akin to ethnic newspapers and therefore should invite scrutiny in future studies of the German– American press and the Holocaust (Drake, 2010, pp. 102, 108–110).

THE *TIMES* BURIED THE STORY

The turning point in the study of American news media coverage of the Holocaust was the publication in 2005 of Laurel Leff's *Buried by* The Times: *The Holocaust and America's Most Important Newspaper* [Fig. 4].

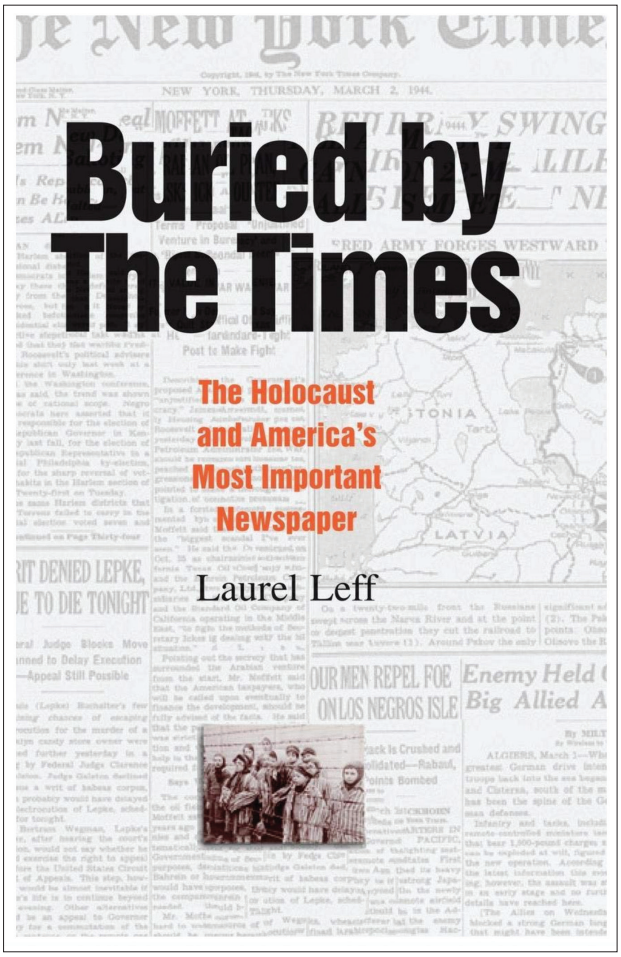


FIG. 4. Laurel Leff's book *Buried by* The Times (2005). Photo courtesy of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

A reporter for the *Wall Street Journal* and editor of the *Hartford Courant* before entering the academic world, Leff brought her insights from the world of journalism to her historical analysis. Beyond her exhaustive review of the daily coverage, Leff mined the internal files of the *New York Times* itself. This set her work head and shoulders above that of her predecessors and made possible the important leap from "what" to "why."

The central feature of the *Times*' coverage, Leff's (2005) research determined, was not that it ignored the Holocaust, but that it buried the story. From September 1939 through May 1945, the *Times* published 1,186 news articles concerning the plight of the Jews in Europe, an average of 17 per month. "But the story never received the continuous attention or prominent play that a story about the unprecedented attempt to wipe out an entire people deserved," she wrote. It made the front page of the *Times* only 26 times in those five and a half years, and in 20 of the 26 articles, the victims' Jewish identity was obscured. The page 1 stories about the annihilation of the Jews never appeared on consecutive days, never appeared within even a few days of each other, and never made the top right-hand column of page 1. Moreover, the subject was almost never mentioned in the Sunday magazine or the Week in Review section (pp. 2–3).

To a minor extent, the *Times*' coverage was affected by the same factors that earlier researchers noted with regard to newspapers' reporting on the Holocaust: skepticism about atrocity tales, competition for space with war news, and the tendency to follow the lead of the White House. The major reason that the *Times* buried the Holocaust, however, was unique to that newspaper. Arthur Hays Sulzberger, the newspaper's publisher, was a deeply assimilated Jew who feared that giving prominence to news of the Jews' plight would lead antisemites to accuse him of favoring his coreligionists. [Fig. 5]

FIG. 5. Arthur Hays Sulzberger, publisher of the *New York Times* from 1935 to 1961. Photo courtesy of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

Sulzberger, a founder of the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism, passionately opposed the notion that Jews constitute a separate nation or ethnic group. He therefore insisted that his editors and reporters "hammer the theme that however awful the Jews' fate, it was similar to that of the [other] oppressed peoples under the Nazi yoke" (Leff, 2005, p. 201) and therefore did not merit any particular attention. In addition, Sulzberger opposed any special US government action to aid Jewish refugees; the *Times* therefore ignored or downplayed the proposals made by rescue advocates, while giving prominent, sympathetic coverage to claims by the Roosevelt administration that rescue was impossible. The tragedy was only deepened by the fact that the *Times* had its own large staff of foreign correspondents, while most other newspapers relied primarily on wire services; in other words, the *Times* had the resources to pursue such stories, if it had wanted to.

Would it have made any difference if the *Times* had treated the issue according to accepted journalistic standards, rather than in accordance with the publisher's personal and philosophical predilections? Longtime *Times* reporter, editor, and columnist A. M. Rosenthal certainly thought so. In the opening sequence of Colette Fox's Emmy-nominated 2001 History Channel documentary, *Holocaust: The Untold Story*, Rosenthal declared that the *Times*' coverage of the Nazi genocide not only was "morally and journalistically wrong," but had potentially deadly consequences: "If the *Times* had come out big on this, that would have brought a lot more attention in the country."

That was Leff's (2005) conclusion, too. "The American government, American Jewish groups, and the rest of the American press, took cues from the *New York Times*," she wrote. "Among major American newspapers, the *Times* was unique in the information it received, how it disseminated the news, and to whom." Appropriate dissemination of the news by the *Times* could have influenced Roosevelt administration policymakers and would have informed and galvanized the public to press for US action. Instead, "the full story of European Jewry's destruction remained below the surface, only emerging now and then in a diluted and fractured form. . . . The *Times* helped to drown out the last cry from the abyss" (pp. 357–358).

"UNFOLDING" HISTORY

A new dimension was added to the study of media coverage of the Holocaust with the unveiling by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, in the spring of 2016, of *History Unfolded: US Newspapers and the Holocaust*. The "nationwide crowdsourcing project," as the museum characterized it, was intended to explore how newspapers throughout the United States covered select aspects of the Holocaust. Instead of assigning historians to study the topic, the museum decided to issue a call to the general public to

undertake the research. Daren C. Brabham, author of the book *Crowdsourcing*, defined the concept as a "distributed problem-solving and production model" (Brabham, 2008, p. 75). Production has not been an issue for *History Unfolded*. Not surprisingly, the public responded to the crowdsourcing call with enthusiasm. Press accounts hailed the project's innovative, inclusive approach, and it has already produced thousands of clippings. But has the museum's unusual research method advanced our understanding of the American news media's handling of the Holocaust?

The museum's press release announcing the project quoted a high school teacher in Illinois saying, "I am thrilled that the . . . Museum is allowing everyday people to become historians." Teachers understandably appreciate the opportunity for students to become actively involved in such a project, but the complication is that historians are not created by a museum "allowing" teenagers to "become historians"; attaining that level of expertise requires a process involving years of high-level graduate study in an accredited institution. Looking at microfilms of old newspapers, no matter how diligently, does not make one a historian. The museum refers to the participants in its project as "citizen historians," a designation that elevates high school students to a position they have not yet earned. The term "citizen historian" is roughly on par with "citizen dentist" or "citizen quarterback." Skilled professions require demonstrated expertise. My students at Ohio State University learned a lot from our survey of the *Columbus Dispatch*, but that experience did not make them historians.

In early 2020, four years after it was launched, *History Unfolded* was for the first time subjected to scholarly analysis. The verdict was sobering. Reviewing *History Unfolded* in the leading scholarly journal in the field, *The Journal of American History*, Laurel Leff acknowledged the importance of engaging high school students, and noted the accessibility of the website created by the museum for the project. Participants are instructed on what to look for in their local newspaper and how to upload it to the website. "Crowdsourcing leads to obvious problems," however, "when the crowd does not, or cannot, follow instructions," Leff pointed out (2020, p. 1147) Thus, for example, the site includes entries for numerous articles that are not accompanied by the actual text. Searching Hartford-area coverage, Leff found that 133 of the 177 articles listed had not been uploaded.

Part of the problem is with the instructions themselves. The amateur historical researchers are told to look for articles regarding key "Holocaust-era events," but more than one fourth of the events selected by the museum have nothing to do with the Holocaust. Leff noted,

> What newspaper coverage of the introduction of the selective service in 1940, the enactment of the Lend–Lease Act (1941), or Marian Anderson's 1939 concert at the Lincoln Memorial adds to an understanding of Americans' Holocaust knowledge is not at all clear. (p. 1148)

At the same time, the museum's list of events to be researched did not include such important episodes as the Bermuda Conference of 1943, or the first liberation of a death camp, Majdanek, in 1944.

The methodology of *History Unfolded* creates additional distortions. The citizen historians submit published articles concerning a specific event but do not address the matter of coverage in subsequent days. Thus the appearance of an article or two could give the impression that a particular newspaper amply covered the topic, even if the topic was not mentioned again in its pages for weeks to follow. In addition, "not including an article's length tends to overstate the coverage," Leff argued, pointing out that the 53 front-page articles about the Allies' 1942 confirmation of the genocide create the impression of substantial coverage—but there is no acknowledgment that "many of those stories were just one or two paragraphs in length and appeared in roundups, making them less likely to be read and absorbed." Such criticism deserves to be taken seriously.

Students and other non-historian assistants can, of course, play a role in historical research, but they need to have an actual historian looking over their shoulders. There is just too much that the untrained eye can miss. At Ohio State, I sat alongside my students as they viewed the microfilms. A book such as *Beyond Belief* could not have been written if Deborah Lipstadt had simply turned her research assistants loose in some library and hoped for the best. *History Unfolded* puts the students in charge of the classroom, which may work well for some subjects. This topic, though, is much more than a curious historical episode. It is simply too important a job to be assigned to amateurs.

Recent events remind us of the significance of the interplay between the news media and US government policymaking. Media coverage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (2022) and the Hamas invasion of Israel (2023) influenced American public opinion about those conflicts, which in turn impacted US policy. Historians will one day be in a position to assess whether or not contemporary editors and reporters learned from the mistakes made by their predecessors in covering the Holocaust.

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In this review of *Elie Wiesel: Humanist Messenger for Peace*, by Alan L. Berger (Routledge, 2021). Eugene Korn posits that "Wiesel was the Job of Auschwitz" and "the most famous survivor of the great *churban*." Judging the work an important contribution to the continuing task of educating the next generations about the Shoah's critical message, Korn identifies Berger's book as particularly valuable for educators.

Eugene Korn

The Job of Auschwitz

According to Jewish tradition, Job is an enigma: Is he a real person or merely a literary character? A Jew or Gentile? Does his existential torment reflect the unique Jewish experience, or is he Everyman?

However we see Job, the biblical character has become the symbol of unbearable suffering, the human quest for explanation, and our refusal to pronounce life as godless and irredeemable. Life, Job insisted, must be more than endless, arbitrary tragedy.

There was a time when our traditional belief in a caring God created a sacred canopy that ensured protection, meaning, and order in our lives. But the Holocaust tore this sacred canopy asunder. No person has given more eloquent witness to this violent rupture than did Elie Wiesel:

> Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live.
> Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes.
> Never shall I forget those things, even were I condemned to live as long as God Himself.
> Never. (2006, p. 34)

Wiesel was the Job of Auschwitz. He was also the most famous survivor of the great churban: Nobel laureate, recipient of more than 100 honorary doctorates, advisor to American presidents and heads of state, prolific author, raconteur of nostalgic yet philosophical tales, world traveler, and international media personality.

Alan L. Berger's book *Elie Wiesel: Humanistic Messenger of Peace* is an elegantly written and exceedingly informative paeon to Wiesel's life and work. Berger is a respected professor of Holocaust literature who frequently invited Wiesel to be a guest lecturer in his classes at Florida Atlantic University. Berger has managed to deftly weave biography and literary interpretation with an analysis of Wiesel's enormous impact on how educators, writers, politicians, and laypersons understand the Holocaust today. He has crafted a sophisticated, pensive, yet thoroughly readable book. Part of the Routledge Historical Americans series, which was designed to show the impact that individuals can have on the course of history, the volume is particularly valuable for educators—indeed for any person pondering contemporary Jewish experience or Western culture's moral crises since the Shoah.

The chapter themes reveal the book's broad scope: Wiesel's interactions with Christian thinkers that influenced both his worldview and contemporary Christian theology, his journey of hope against despair, the insistence that the Second Generation must celebrate memory, Wiesel's Hasidic roots and Neo-Hasidism, his refusal to acquiesce to the death of God, his moral clarity, and his ability to speak truth to power.

Berger escapes the dilemma posed by the eminent Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer: If we universalize the Holocaust, we lose the essential character of the Nazis' demonic Jew-hatred and their maniacal genocide of the Jewish people. Yet if we restrict our understanding to the anti-Jewish character of the Shoah, it holds little relevance for humanity. Wiesel was masterful at telling the tale of the Shoah as both a Jew and a human being, and Berger's treatment echoes Wiesel's ability to embrace both dimensions naturally, without struggle. Wiesel's universal commitment stemmed from his Jewish identity. Berger claims that it was through his Jewishness that the Nobel laureate found universality (2021, p. 123). Elie insisted that when he spoke and wrote from his own particularity, he was also talking about all humanity.

Wiesel's strong advocacy for human rights in Argentina, Biafra, Bosnia, Cambodia, and South Africa was but a continuation of his fight to free Soviet Jewry and of his vocal defense of the security of Israel. This is important

for today's teachers, students, and many Jews, who feel torn between their particularist Jewish identity and a commitment to the larger human family. One need only consider the popular new dogma of intersectionality, which imposes on Jews the false choice between identifying with Israel and supporting international human rights, or conversely, fervently Orthodox education that so often focuses narrowly on Jewish identity to the exclusion of any concern for Gentiles. As Berger explains, "Wiesel maintained that the more Jewish he was, the more relevant his message was to humanity" (2021, p. 7).

A good deal of Berger's book is devoted to Wiesel's concern for the Second and Third Generations and the urgent imperative for effective education. Memory is not limited to recalling the past: It also imposes on us the responsibility to do battle against today's evil and to bequeath the past's messages to future generations. Correct education is not just cognition, but must be a spur to commitment and activism. Wiesel stressed that future generations must be eternally vigilant, ready to sound a loud warning about the appearance of new genocides. Today the children and grandchildren of survivors need to bear witness around the world, where antisemitism is rising and the Holocaust is often denied, distorted, and trivialized.

Wiesel's Second-Generation novels (*The Oath, The Testament, The Fifth Son, The Forgotten*) are historical moments signaling his movement from despair toward hope. Those works represent a transition from remembering the dead to bearing witness on behalf of the living. As Berger explains, "He who listens to a witness becomes a witness, and [assumes] the ethical obligations that this entails" (2021, p. 88).

While Berger skillfully explains Wiesel's most famous works (*Night, A Beggar in Jerusalem, The Town Beyond the Wall, The Gates of the Forest*) as modern commentaries on divine justice and other existential questions, he makes clear that understanding Wiesel means, above all, appreciating his call for human rights everywhere, his belief in dialogue, and his tireless search for world peace. In the end, Wiesel proved morally superior to Job, who failed to turn his private agony into moral activism. In contrast, Wiesel gave meaning to his suffering through his commitment to fighting evil and the suffering of others. He taught that "memory means a call for action in the world" (2021, p. 83). Wiesel thus more closely resembled Isaiah and Jeremiah than Job. Indeed, he was a modern prophet in addition to being a nuanced maggid to humanity.

Elie Wiesel's life, passion, and talent were blessings for the world. They invite us to transform our memory of the Shoah into moral responsibility for the Jewish people and for humanity. Alan Berger's *Elie Wiesel: Humanistic Messenger of Peace* is an important contribution to the continuing task of educating the next generations about the Shoah's critical message. It inspires us to hold Wiesel's extraordinary life uppermost in our thoughts as we confront our troubling present and move into the unknown future.

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"My first apartment after college was in a small town in New Jersey," writes Nancy Lubarsky. "There were at least three active synagogues there, and the one down the street from my apartment became mine. Many years later, after marriage, children, and a career, I returned to the town only to find that my synagogue had become an optometry office. I began to wonder, as I saw other Jewish institutions abandoned or repurposed, how the absence of Jewish life in these buildings affects one's faith."

Nancy Lubarsky

If the Synagogue's Now an Eye Care Center, Can You Still Pray There?

When you are my witnesses, I am God, but when you are not my witnesses, it is as if I am not God. —Isaiah 43:12

I drive by my old neighborhood and pass a
vinyl sign. It covers the carved relief of a
familiar structure. I recognize Hebrew letters,
the word, *temple*, edges out. Stained glass
windows depict the ancient tribes amid

a façade of archways and columns. This
building—another casualty of Jews who've
left their homeland. Most of these are now
churches, mosques, museums, which makes
sense. But this one—could I ask forgiveness

in a sanctuary that is now a series of small
rooms—sit in a cushioned chair, squint at the
lettered chart, eyes dilated, and wonder, *Is God
a place?* Jews have too much unstable history,
too little fixed geography. Much time, but little

space. I was born in a small garden apartment
in New Jersey, but what if it had been on a crowded
train headed to a camp? Jewish days begin at
nightfall. Darkness drives away those who
question how to pray to a God who isn't there.

"Sometimes poems insist on coming into being and there's little you can do to stop them," notes Dara Barnat. "The lines echo in your mind until you put them on the page. That was the case with 'One Kaddish.' As I reread it less than a year after I wrote it, tragically, the war has continued to worsen, and the world seems ever more filled with suffering. I understand the poem to be an offering of peace through the lens of a personal Kaddish prayer, albeit an insufficient one."

Dara Barnat

One Kaddish for the World

— Tel Aviv, November—December 2024

I.
Where even to start? Maybe
at five in the morning after the US election.
I take out Lily, the dog. In the dark we walk,
and I listen to podcasts about the end
of the world. It wasn't supposed
to be this way. Right?
I have a class to teach at eight-fifteen.
The students look at me like I am supposed
to know something, which always
surprises me. I would start with a poem, a prayer,
or an apology, but this class is not about poetry, religion,
or politics, so we talk about styles of citation.
On the way to campus, I drop off
our son, who in his seven years has lived
with too much darkness. His Hebrew is far better
than mine, so there is no language
to speak to protect him. He understands
when I'm upset — it's hard to be a parent
in a country in a war, which is also a country
that is only partly my own.
He is allergic to mosquito bites, and once,
during an allergy test, said to me,
You can be brave too, Mama. Yes, my son.
I will try. I do try. Sometimes,

I feel like I succeed, but too often
I let the world weigh too heavily on me,
which lets the world weigh
too heavily on him. Forgive me.
I will try to be stronger.

II.
Breakfast has to be made. Lunch, dinner.
With the US election, exactly
what I feared has happened. What great hope
so many of us had held. My list of griefs
grows ever longer. My father, my grandmother.
In this country. In that country. In the kitchen,
the Mourner's Kaddish comes to mind —
Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba b'alma di v'ra chir'utei.
The list grows ever longer, since the election is far
from the worst this year.
If only I could rewind
to before the 7th of October.
Before before before. Rewind
the government, rewind whoever wasn't paying
enough attention. I would rewind
all the bombing, every death, every moment
of suffering. But the days, they refuse
to go backwards. We are at hundreds of them
in this war, and so, so many before that.
It's impossible to count them.
Our son has math homework, he needs a new backpack
and shoes. Go shopping.
Keep the house organized for war, so
just in case, buy flashlights.
I know full well that in this
we are the lucky ones.

III.
Sometimes I read poems
that offer brief solace.
But even poems, for the first time
in my own life, are not enough.
Even Walt Whitman, my Walt Whitman,
is not quite enough, even the poem
that Ed read that time from afar:
In the freshness the forenoon air, in the far-stretching circuits and vistas again to peace restored.
Such a beautiful line from "To the Leaven'd Soil They Trod,"
and yet peace is so far from restored.
The faces of the hostages are up, always up
near the supermarkets. The war
keeps getting worse. Every time you think
it can't, it does. About that everyone
seems to agree. Hersh, Ori, Eden, Almog, Alexander, Carmel —
you have no idea how hard I prayed
for you to come home. The day we heard
it was the height of summer. Remember
how it rained as if the sky, too, was suffering? The sky
must know that we are all suffering.
Suffering only leads to suffering. War
only leads to war. I know this. I continue
with the Kaddish — *v'yamlich malchutei b'chayeichon uvyomeichon uvchayei d'chol beit yisrael.*
Every chance I get, I vote against
the government. In the two countries
in which I am allowed, I vote and vote.

IV.
My life: split
down the middle between
here and there, somehow never
anywhere. I vote.
I protest, as do many. Thousands. Hundreds
of thousands, flooding the streets.
There seem to be too many others who want
war. My son — I try to reassure him.
We will be okay. Put your seatbelt on.
We're driving to school. I drive
and continue to say the Kaddish in my mind, like
when I was a little girl in synagogue,
in a Friday night service in that small temple,
next to my father before
he too left the world —
ba'agala uvizman kariv,
v'imru amen. May this one Kaddish
evoke a hopeless peace.

"As we stand at the intersection of historical consciousness and contemporary reality," writes Keren Goldfrad, "the echoes of the Holocaust and reverberations of October 7 remind us that our journey as a people encompasses both sorrow and strength." Consider asking your students to share echoes they might find between this essay and the photograph on the cover.

Keren Goldfrad

Wounds Reopened: Reflections on October 7 Through the Lens of Holocaust Memory

The stories my grandparents recounted about the Holocaust were more than just memories of a distant past. They functioned as warnings, lessons, and the foundation of my identity as a Jew living in Israel. While I was growing up, their narratives of unimaginable suffering and survival served as a constant reminder of the fragility of life and the depths of human cruelty. Yet they also instilled in me a deep appreciation for the strength of our people and the importance of having a place we can call home—a place where we are responsible for our own defense. During the morning hours of October 7 and in the aftermath of that Simchat Torah, as we were running for shelter and as the horrific reality of the massacre unfolded, I felt those Holocaust memories collide violently with the present. It was as though the ghosts of the past had resurfaced, their presence casting a long shadow over a new, dreadful catastrophe in our history.

The Holocaust is a defining period in Jewish history, not just for those who experienced it directly but also for every generation that has followed. My grandparents survived the concentration camps, yet they carried the psychological burden of their experiences throughout their lives, and in turn passed on and transmitted that weight to me. Their narratives were not just tales of tragedy. They were a part of me, shaping my understanding of who I am and what it means to be a Jew living in Israel. Growing up in Israel as members of the Third Generation gave my peers and me a sense of responsibility to carry the torch of Jewish survival and ensure its flame continues to burn.

This sense was further reinforced by my parents, who served as *shlichim* (emissaries) of the Israeli Ministry of Education. Their mission was to teach Hebrew, Jewish studies, and Israeli history to Jewish students outside of Israel, thus strengthening the connection between the State of Israel and Jewish communities around the world. As both my parents were born in displaced persons camps in Europe after the war, their educational mission was deeply intertwined with the Holocaust's historical shadow. Growing up in such a household, I too felt that this mission was partially my own, especially during our years abroad—first in Brazil in my early childhood and later in Australia as a teenager. These experiences of living outside Israel not only deepened my understanding of Jewish and Israeli identity but also made me aware of the complex challenges faced by Jews in the Diaspora. Unlike those who live solely within Israel, Diaspora Jews must navigate questions of belonging, identity, and continuity in environments where their Jewishness cannot be taken for granted. This highlighted for me the critical importance of ensuring that our history, language, and culture are meaningfully transmitted across generations, regardless of where Jews may live. It was this awareness that ultimately motivated my choice to serve during my first year of national service as the youth movement coordinator of Bnei Akiva in Strasbourg, France, where I worked with Jewish youth to strengthen their connection to Israel and their heritage.

The weight of this educational responsibility and the ever-present shadow of the Holocaust accompanied me into adulthood, especially in my role as a mother. During the years of the Intifada, while Israeli civilians were targeted by frequent terror attacks on buses, restaurants, and even private homes, I often found myself lying awake at night, planning how I would save my children if a terrorist were

to break into our home. The scenarios played out in my mind repeatedly, fueled by fear transmitted through Jewish mothers who, across history, were compelled to safeguard their families in times of danger. This constant state of vigilance, this primal instinct to shield my children from harm, is something that Holocaust survivors understood all too well. They lived in a world where danger, potential threats, and cruelty were inseparable from their reality day after day, week after week, month after month.

These conflicting feelings—pride in my Israeli identity, the daughter of *shlichim* whose father fought as a paratrooper in the Six Day War, juxtaposed with the fear of vulnerability, the pain of loss, and the persistent sense of an existential threat—are inscribed not only in my personal identity but also within the broader collective psyche. When the massacre of October 7 occurred, it felt as if those buried narratives from the Holocaust had been unearthed. The images of bloodied bodies, the cries of the wounded, and the reports of horrendous acts committed against innocent civilians brought back nightmares of a time when Jews were systematically hunted, tortured, and murdered. It felt as if history was repeating itself, but we reminded ourselves that this time, there was a crucial difference—in the contemporary context, we are not defenseless.

THE CONTINUUM OF TRAUMA: BRIDGING THE HOLOCAUST AND CONTEMPORARY JEWISH EXPERIENCE

Jewish historical experience comprises a continuum of trauma. From the pogroms of Eastern Europe to the Holocaust, and now to contemporary attacks on Israel and global antisemitic incidents, each event adds another layer to our collective memory. The Holocaust, however, remains the most profound wound, a trauma that continues to influence our identity and our response to the tragedies we face today. The massacre of October 7 was a nightmare, a horrific event that left deep scars on our national consciousness. However, despite its severity, it cannot be equated with the Holocaust. During the Holocaust, massacres, sexual violence, and atrocities of many other kinds were not isolated incidents. They were daily occurrences that continued and persisted for years. Millions of Jews were rounded up, dehumanized, and slaughtered through an industrialized process of murder. There was no escape, no safe haven, and no Jewish army to defend them. Jews were entirely dependent on the goodwill of other nations, but the world was tragically too late and too unwilling to save 6 million lives.

Today, the situation is different. As Jews living in Israel, we are no longer defenseless. We have an army, and our sons and daughters serve in it with pride and a deep sense of duty. While the burden they bear is heavy, their service is a source of immense pride. They are the protectors of our nation, the guardians of a people that has vowed "never again."

October 7 will be remembered as a dark day in our history, one that changed us forever. It shook our sense of security and reminded us that the threat to our existence is still very real. Nevertheless, it also reinforced the importance of our independence and our ability to defend ourselves, ensuring that our response is characterized not by helplessness but by determination. Unlike the time of the Holocaust, today we can stand up for ourselves. Holocaust memory drives us to remain alert, ensuring we never again find ourselves in a position of vulnerability. We have established a state and a military capable of defending our people, unlike the constraints faced during the Shoah by our grandparents, who could only dream of fighting in an Israeli army.

As we move forward, we carry the memories of both the Holocaust and the massacre of October 7. These events, though different in scale and historical context, are connected by threads of suffering and survival that run through our historical narrative. We must honor the memory of those murdered in the Holocaust by ensuring we are never again vulnerable. We must honor the memory of those murdered on October 7 by continuing to stand strong, defending our nation, and remembering that while history may echo, it does not have to repeat itself. The legacy of suffering we inherited must be transformed into a legacy of resilience and strength, allowing future generations to live without being haunted by the ghosts of the past.

BUILDING RESILIENCE: STRENGTHENING HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN AN EVER-CHANGING LANDSCAPE

In the aftermath of October 7, comparisons to the Holocaust have become both prevalent and problematic. While there are symptomatic parallels, particularly regarding the ripple effect these events had on Jewish communities worldwide, the Holocaust remains a singular, unparalleled historical catastrophe. To make Holocaust education relevant to teenagers without diminishing its uniqueness, educators can use pedagogical methodologies that connect contemporary experiences with antisemitism to historical understanding.

One effective approach is to encourage students to reflect on their encounters with antisemitism following October 7, using those experiences as cognitive bridges to engage with Holocaust testimonies. It is essential not only to address historical facts and the unimaginable scale of suffering, but also to connect Holocaust education to present-day experiences faced by Jewish communities worldwide. This approach can enhance the relevance of Holocaust education for younger generations who may feel a psychological distance from long-past events, while maintaining a clear distinction between the past and the present. By

emphasizing the importance of self-reliance, the dangers of complacency, and the necessity of vigilance, we can cultivate in students a deeper understanding of why "never again" is not merely a slogan, but a guiding principle.

Teaching the Holocaust through the lens of present-day challenges and ongoing existential threats enables students to comprehend how historical events inform present circumstances and prepare us for the future. Such a focus emphasizes the function of memory as a crucial tool for ensuring our survival and maintaining our identity in an often-hostile world. This method encourages students to look to the past and draw lessons that may be immediately applicable to their personal experiences, fostering a sense of responsibility and commitment to safeguarding the future of the Jewish people.

The events of October 7, followed by the broader conflict involving Iran, Hezbollah, and the Houthis, underscore Israel's role as a vital source of protection and security for the Jewish people. This stands in stark contrast to the Holocaust, when Jews had no sovereign state, no army, and few means of organized defense against annihilation. Acknowledging this difference reinforces the uniqueness of the Holocaust and helps students critically analyze historical patterns without blurring the lines between historically situated tragedies. The Holocaust will always remain singular in our history, unparalleled in its horror and impact. Teaching the Holocaust within the context of present-day challenges honors those who suffered unimaginable horrors and prepares students to safeguard the Jewish people's future.

As we stand at the intersection of historical consciousness and contemporary reality, the echoes of the Holocaust and reverberations of October 7 remind us that our journey as a people encompasses both sorrow and strength. The wounds reopened by recent events exposed the raw nerves of our collective memory, but they also revealed the unbreakable spirit that has sustained us through millennia. Our responsibility now extends beyond remembrance. It calls for actions that transform the pain of our past into a force of courage and endurance. Facing today's and tomorrow's challenges, we draw upon our ancestors' courage, survivors' wisdom, and the determination of the Israeli soldiers fighting today. In doing so, we honor those we have lost, by building a world where Jewish life thrives, our heritage is celebrated, and the lessons of history serve as a source of resilience and inspiration for the future.

> "No history is mute. No matter how much they own it, break it, and lie about it, human history refuses to shut its mouth. Despite deafness and ignorance, the time that was continues to tick inside the time that is."
>
> — **Eduardo Galeano**
> *Upside Down: A Primer for the Looking-Glass World*

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Clara Asscher-Pinkhof was a teacher and writer. Sent to Westerbork, she taught the children there and documented her observations. She was then sent to Bergen-Belsen, where a prisoner exchange in 1944 brought her to Palestine. There she completed her manuscript, *Star Children*, which was published in 1946 and translated in 1960 by Terese Edelstein and Inez Smidt.

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