

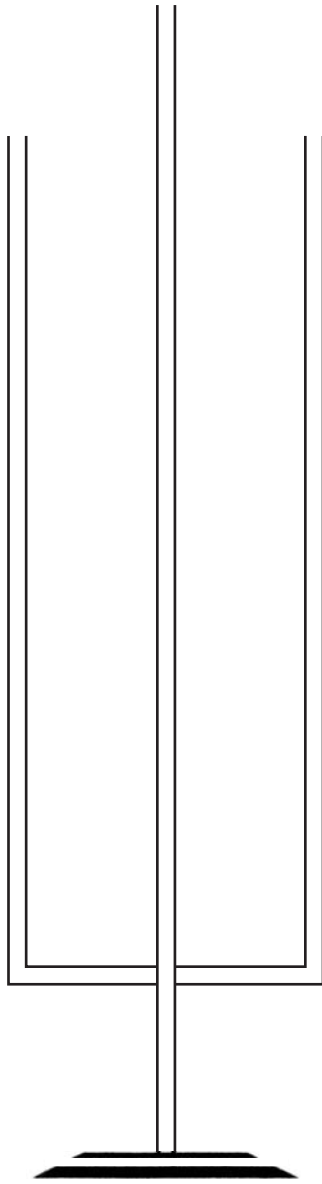
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATORS • A ROTHMAN FOUNDATION PUBLICATION

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YESHIVA UNIVERSITY • AZRIELI GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JEWISH EDUCATION AND ADMINISTRATION

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In memory of
Henry I. Rothman ז"ל
and
Bertha G. Rothman ע"ה
לחמו מלחמות ה'
*"who lived and fought
for Torah-true Judaism"*

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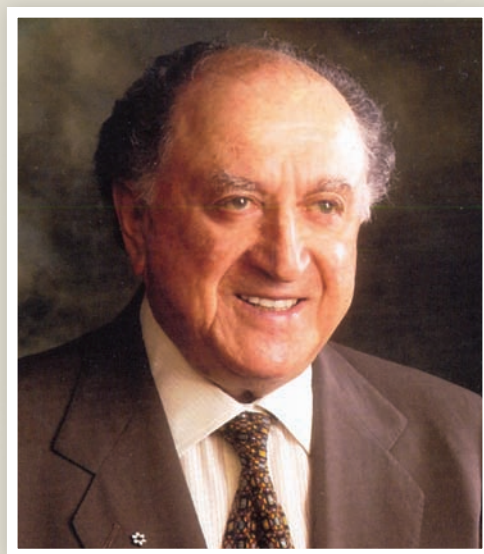
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PRISM: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Holocaust Educators
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to our deeply cherished friend and beloved Benefactor and Trustee of Yeshiva University



DR. DAVID J. AZRIELI ״

The eponym of our Azrieli Graduate School on the forthcoming occasion of his

90th Birthday on May 10, 2012

and in wishing him a happy, healthy and satisfying birthday anniversary
together with his loved ones until 120 years and beyond.

Born in Makow, Poland, in 1922, David J. Azrieli escaped the Nazis by going to the former USSR for three years, made his way across Europe and Central Asia, and landed in the pre-State of Israel in 1942. He served in Israel's Seventh Brigade in the War of Independence, studied architecture at the Technion, left Israel to come to NY where he attended Yeshiva University for a year, and went to Montreal, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Montreal's Thomas More Institute. He met and married his wonderful lifetime partner, Stephanie Lefcort, in 1957, and they raised a marvelous family of four children and seven grandchildren.

Today, David J. Azrieli is a world-renowned philanthropist whose reputation was built by the success of his two companies: Canpro Investments, Ltd., in Canada and the Azrieli Group, Ltd., in Israel. He is acknowledged for pioneering and revolutionizing retailing in Israel by building the first enclosed shopping center in 1985 and today has 14 malls in the country. He coined the name for a "mall" as "*canion*," which combines the Hebrew words for "shopping" and "parking." The Azrieli Center in Tel Aviv dominates the skyline and he views this 52-story magnificent center as his most important professional achievement. He earned a Masters degree in Architecture from Carlton University in 1997 at the age of 75.

At Yeshiva University, he is the eponym of the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration, the largest such post-graduate school of its kind in North America with some 250 students who are working towards Masters and Doctoral degrees (in its Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Doctoral Studies Division).

He has also established a School of Architecture in Tel Aviv University, a Chair in Architecture at the Technion, and a host of other important educational programs and funds in Israel. He recently established The Azrieli Institute for Israel Studies at Concordia University, Montreal.

His dedication to Holocaust remembrance is evidenced by his establishing the Azrieli Book and Resource Center at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem; the Azrieli Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program to collect, publish, and widely disseminate the written memoirs of Holocaust survivors, created by his daughter Dr. Naomi Azrieli, who is the Chair of the Azrieli Foundation; and the Azrieli Holocaust Collection at Concordia University Library, Montreal. He has served on the Yeshiva University Board of Trustees since 1987 and also holds Board membership at Tel Aviv University and the International Board of Governors of the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, where he was Vice Chairman. He was National President and Honorary President of the Canadian Zionist Federation, Past President of the Jerusalem Foundation of Canada, and a Vice President of the Canadian Jewish Congress, Quebec region.

His many noble endeavors earned him the Order of Canada (the country's highest civilian honor) in 1984; the L'Ordre Nationale du Quebec in 1999 (Quebec's highest civilian honor); and Honorary Trustee ("Neeman") of the City of Jerusalem. He holds honorary doctorates from Yeshiva University, Concordia University, Tel Aviv University, and the Technion.

We interpret what Judah ben Tema said: **בן תשעים לשוב**. When one reaches the age of ninety years he is ready to **לשוב** "discuss" new ideas as he "meditates" on the future (*Sayings of the Fathers*, Chapter 5, Verse 24), an apt hope and prayer on behalf of this Holocaust survivor, an internationally acclaimed philanthropist whose creative mind is always in search of new ideas and projects to ameliorate the human condition and enhance the eternal well-being of the Jewish people everywhere, especially in the State of Israel.

May David, Stephanie, and their children and grandchildren join Yeshiva University in looking forward to celebrating David's Centennial Anniversary with the blessings of the Almighty in the year 2022.

Call for Manuscripts



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KEEP IN MIND:

- All submissions must be sent as e-mailed attachments in Microsoft Word, using Times New Roman 12 font type.
- All text should be double spaced, justified, and paginated.
- Submissions accompanied by documentary photos and artwork are given special consideration.
- Photos and artwork must be attached as separate JPEG or TIF files and accompanied by permissions and captions.
- The American Psychological Association (APA) *Publication Manual* (6th Ed.) is Yeshiva University's required reference guide for publications.
- Length of manuscript may vary; we seek essays from 4 to 14 double-spaced pages.
- Each issue, including all photos, will be available as a PDF on our Web site, yu.edu/azrieli/research/prism-journal/, so permissions must include online as well as print version.

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Introduction

I am not a child of survivors. However, I count many survivors among my most cherished teachers, colleagues, and friends. They have shared with me concerns that the generations to come may never learn what happened during the Holocaust; or, if they do, they will learn about the murder of the Jews but not about the essential facts of the Jews' varied and active responses to the murderers.

This well-founded concern is the genesis for the theme of this issue, intended to promote the curricular inclusion of the history of Jewish resistance to the Nazis, of defiance in the face of death, of the altruism and the spiritual and religious defense against dehumanization manifested by so many Jews during the Holocaust. The oft-taught myth that Jews were murdered without resisting the Nazis implies that Jewish compliance made Jews partly responsible for their own deaths, and that resistance, especially violent resistance, would have saved more Jews. These implications are simplistic and simply wrong.

The first step toward understanding resistance is to understand how the Jews at that time perceived what was happening to them. For them, there was no "Holocaust"; that is our term. The Jews of Europe were not reacting to what we now know as the Holocaust but to a certain reality as they saw it at that time, with whatever information they had about the situation at that time and within the framework of their historical experience. So, as Hitler's armies invaded and occupied one country after another, and people in one town heard that 500 Jews in a neighboring town had been murdered, they called it a pogrom, because that's what Jews knew at that time. Jews had survived pogroms before, and thus their response to that news was different from what it would have been had they known that Hitler planned to annihilate every single Jew. However, they did not know, because the concept of "the Holocaust" was then unfathomable.

We cannot read history backwards, knowing as we do what happened at the end. We must try to understand it instead as if we are looking at a series of photographs, with each image illustrating a different but equally difficult situation in which the Jews found themselves. The essays, art, images, and poetry in this issue help readers to do precisely that.

However, even as we promote the necessity to teach what historian Yitzchak Mais calls in these pages "the Jewish narrative"—who the Jews were and how they responded to the onslaught—and what historians Mordecai Paldiel and Judith Cohen detail in their essays about Jews who



rescued Jews—and the many other specifics of Jewish agency—we also state without equivocation that we reject the trend towards the sentimentalism that moves some educators to teach resistance out of context. The works herein do not challenge the primary significance of the grim fact of the murder of six million Jews; they do not imply that all Jews resisted, or that defense and defiance were the primary responses of the majority of Jews in the Holocaust, no matter where they were; they are not presented as if the

"triumphant human spirit" can mitigate the murderous actions of the Nazis; and they do not serve as the "happy ending" to the Holocaust.

In his review of Alvin Rosenfeld's (2011) newest book, *The End of the Holocaust*, Ron Rosenbaum (October 10, 2011) bemoans the current trend: "The impulse to find the silver lining is relentless. . . . Suffering and grief must be transformed into affirmation, and the bleak irrecoverable fate of the victims must be given a redemptive aspect for those of us alive" (p. 1). He lauds Rosenfeld, who criticizes the "subtle shift" away from "the murdered victims to comparatively uplifting stories of survivors, of the 'righteous gentiles, of the scarce 'rescuers,' and the even scarcer 'avengers,' e.g., Quentin Tarantino's fake-glorious fictional crew." We agree with Rosenbaum's conclusion: "In fact, it's an insult to the dead to rob their graves to make ourselves feel better" (p. 1).

The truths presented here are offered not as a way to make ourselves feel better—although they might—or to minimize or mitigate the impotence, grief, rage, and despair students experience as they learn about this event. Rather, we have gathered them because they are a necessary component of the historical record, which details the facts of Jewish action as well as the acts of the Nazis. We all know how the Jews died; these pages provide interdisciplinary narratives to enhance your teaching of how they lived.

Memoirs from survivors Vera Schiff (Czechoslovakia) and the late Peretz László Révész (Hungary) provide vivid, eyewitness accounts of defiance in the face of overwhelming odds. Mrs. Schiff participated in a writers' workshop I conducted in Toronto recently, and Mr. Révész was the lecturer in a seminar series I attended at Haifa University years ago, and I am honored and pleased to be able to share their stories with our readers.

Art historian and *PRISM* art editor Pnina Rosenberg uses art from Terezin to explain the role of religious observance in defying the Nazis, and, in additional essays, she introduces us to the artist Ewa Gabanyi and her "camp

daughter” Sophie-Esther Manela; and to the fearless Mala Zimetbaum, also a subject of the poet and *PRISM* poetry editor Charles Adès Fishman. Sociologist Arthur Shostak focuses on a subset of resistance that he has termed “stealth altruism.” Historian Louis D. Levine separates myth and fact about Hannah Senesh, the young Jewish parachutist and poet; and historian Rafael Medoff brings to life the story of Hillel Kook (Peter Bergson), the leader of the Bergson Group. Bar-Ilan senior lecturer Chani Levene-Nachshon parallels the devotion and defiance of two remarkable teachers: the beloved Dr. Janusz Korczak and the little-known educator Mira Bernstein. Holocaust Studies professor Nancy Kersell discusses the ways in which Jewish writing in the ghettos served as spiritual and religious resistance. A most unusual memorial is described by historian Robert Jan Van Pelt, who happens upon a moment of emotional defiance as he explores a unique memorial in the city of Munich.

We continue to harness the power of narrative and offer five classroom-friendly short stories and 17 exquisite poems that will surely join your canon of required Holocaust literature. Four of the narratives are by the Dutch Jewish educator Clara Asscher-Pinkhof from her book *Star Children (Sterrekinderen)* (first published in 1946), a collection of writings begun when she worked as a prisoner-teacher in the Westerbork transit camp in Holland and completed immediately upon her liberation. Plaintive, simple, and very brief, each details one momentary act of defiance by young, imperiled Dutch Jews. These moments, unlike many others, may be shared with and understood by children as young as 12.

Generally, fiction about the Holocaust must be chosen, if at all, with caution; few who were not there can or should write as if they were. Yiddish writer Chaver Paver’s “The Boxing Match” transcends the label of fiction, depicting a truth of that time and place with exquisite sensitivity to the feelings and experience of both the Jewish boxer and the Jewish prisoners who watch his heroic battle. The work of Paver and the other writers and poets in this issue “carry both literal truthfulness and a larger Truth, told with a clear voice, with grace” (Gerard, 1996, p. 208). Eitan Novick offers a perceptive analysis of this unique tale and Emily Amie Witty provides pedagogic suggestions.

Our poetry includes interviews with survivors Batsheva Dagan, Dov Freiberg, and Israel Gutman, all recorded by Breindel Lieba Kasher; and more than a dozen additional reflections, tributes, and memorials to the defiant acts and

spirit of Jews who resisted with whatever means they had, by internationally acclaimed poets Susan Dambroff, Steven Herz, Oriana Ivy, Davi Walders, Charles Adès Fishman, Joan Campion, David Moolten, and Jennifer Robertson.

Poems by Emily Borenstein and Cyrus Cassells illustrate the power of music as resistance, and we call your attention to a new site from WORLD ORT called Music and the Holocaust (<http://holocaustmusic.ort.org>), which, in an option called “Resistance and Exile,” offers additional insights into the use of music as resistance. This site has teachers’ resources and is a companion site to <http://art.holocaust-education.net>, utilized in the essay “Reflections of Children in Holocaust Art,” by Pnina Rosenberg, in the fall 2009, vol. 1, issue of *PRISM*.

Additional perspectives on Jewish resistance were published in the spring 2011, vol. 3, issue of *PRISM*: “Familial Resistance in the Łódź Ghetto,” by Rachel Iskov (pp. 20–26), and “Jewish Family Life in the Lipiczany Forest,” by Miriam Miasnik Brysk (pp. 31–36). These issues, like the others, are available for download at: yu.edu/azrieli/research/prism-journal/.

The works in this journal are not presented as the definitive treatment of the subject at hand; they are offered, rather, as a *forshpeiz*, presented to whet readers’ appetites for knowledge and leave them wanting more.

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—Karen Shawn

In my work as the former Holocaust Center Director at New Jersey's Kean University, I had the opportunity to interview many survivors, including several Orthodox Jews. The accounts I present, below, are culled, in part, from those interviews and from an article I published on the subject (Glanz, 2000). In these accounts, representing only a small yet varied sampling of the Orthodox Jewish responses, the survivors, all of whom grew up Orthodox and remained so after the Holocaust, indicated that learning and study served as a means of their survival and, ultimately, as a way of resisting the Nazis.

David Weiss Halivni (1996), in his monumental memoir *The Book and the Sword: A Life of Learning in the Shadow of Destruction*, describes in detail how learning contributed greatly to his survival:

It was learning that made my life as a child bearable, insulated me from what was happening in the ghetto, . . . and it was learning that allowed me to resume my life after the Holocaust and to enter academia. (p. 167)

In an interview with me, Rabbi Gershon Weiss (1999), then dean of students at the Yeshiva of Staten Island, New York, and a child survivor, related:

Rabbi Shimon Bloxenhaim, my uncle, knew many *gemaras* [ancient texts] by heart. He would recite *blatt* [page] after *blatt* while standing at attention. After him, Rabbi Shimon Wachtel . . . would teach us *mishnayos* [ancient texts] in the same manner. All this was accomplished while standing at strict attention under the eyes of the Nazi guards. Learning under these conditions and with such *mesiras nefesh* [self-sacrifice] played an enormous part in keeping me spiritually alive.

One survivor asked me if I knew why the Talmud, the tome that applies hermeneutical rules to interpret Scriptures and other works upon which Jewish law is based, is written in such "excruciating" detail, stating every single opinion. Talmud study is indeed one of the most complicated and difficult intellectual pursuits in Jewish literature. Its study requires not only patience and skill but also the ability to analyze critically a plethora of seemingly contradictory positions in order to make sense of a particular aspect of the



law. "Why not just state the final legal ruling? Why go into so much detail?" he asked me, and then explained:

The Talmud includes all the detail to allow those who study it to struggle intellectually. Only through such struggle will a person ever achieve true understanding and satisfaction of Talmudic study. God knew that *Yidden* [Jews] would be placed under enormous challenges during the Holocaust. At a time during which the Nazis tried to obliterate the minds of *Yidden*, Talmudic study would not only help them endure but would also serve to demonstrate their spiritual superiority over their enemies. (Personal interview)

Other survivors interviewed indicated that study during the Holocaust served as a distraction, a way to sharpen their intellect, a means of spiritual support, and/or a way to maintain some semblance of normalcy. The devoutly religious survivors, in particular, noted that study became a way for them to resist Nazi oppression; while they may not have initially undertaken study for that express purpose, it became, eventually, a form of resistance. Other religious survivors maintained that study amidst "abysmal moments" was more than just a conditioned response from years of study and practice before the war. "We knew we couldn't physically fight back. Our learning, however, sustained us, proved that we were still human beings."

In *Breaking My Silence*, survivor Anna Eilenberg (1985) wrote that "the Jews didn't have an organized resistance movement, but it would be a mistake to think that they did not resist the Germans. They resisted on a spiritual level." She gives an example: "Benjamin was one of these. Uncompromising by nature, and always ready to fight for his convictions, he joined a group of young Talmudists. They studied Talmud from morning until late evening" (p. 72) despite the dreadful conditions they confronted.

Another survivor reported that "at a time when *Yiddishkeit* [Judaism] was being sadistically eradicated by the evil murderers, many Hassidim defied all the Nazi attempts to subdue them and to crush them." After describing several instances in which individual Jews in his hometown resisted through learning, this survivor related how a group of Hassidim "built an underground center of learning where they learned Torah all day, oblivious to what was going on around them."

From behind the blankets I could see their faces, their glowing eyes, and their flushed, hollow cheeks. To me they were as saints or heroes, divorced from the present, above it. They were in a spiritual realm, much closer to heaven than to earth. After the young men left, I realized that this gathering had actually been an act of rebellion. The young men had defied their enemy. Despite suffering, fear, pain, and hunger, they did not despair; they did not lose their faith in G-d or in the Torah. They were unique. (Personal interview)

To better understand the unique phenomenon of “resistance through learning,” one must examine two concepts essential to Jewish law and tradition: *Kiddush Hashem* (a sanctification of God’s name through martyrdom) and *Kiddush Hachayim* (a sanctification of God by continuing to live). Prior to the Holocaust, conversion to Christianity could save a Jew. Under Nazi racial policy and ideology, conversion was not a possibility. Rather than relying on the principle of *Kiddush Hashem* and sacrificing their lives rather than convert, Jews during the Holocaust intentionally instituted *Kiddush Hachayim*. Nathan Eck (1960) a historian and Warsaw Ghetto survivor, relates that he was present at a secret meeting of Warsaw’s Zionist leadership early in 1940 where the term *Kiddush Hachayim* was applied to describe how Jews should respond to the impending catastrophe. The leader of the group, Rabbi Isaac Nissenbaum (cited in Eck, 1960), told the gathering:

It is time for *Kiddush Hachayim*, the sanctification of life, and not *Kiddush Hashem*, the holiness of martyrdom. In the past, the enemies of the Jews sought the soul of the Jew, and so it was proper for the Jew to sanctify the name of God by sacrificing his body in martyrdom, in that manner preserving what the enemy sought to take from him. But now it is the body of the Jew that the oppressor demands. For this reason it is up to the Jew to defend his body, to preserve his life. (p. 244)

For Rabbi Nissenbaum and others during this period, *Kiddush Hachayim* was an authentic element in Jewish theology that reflected the Jewish will to live—indeed, to affirm life amidst unfathomable conditions. Survivors I interviewed testified that physical retaliation under most circumstances was impossible. Yet, studying and maintain-

ing one’s cultural heritage demonstrated spiritual resistance to the enemy and allowed them a sense of control over their destiny. “I certainly resisted the Nazis: I learned.”

Many of the survivors interviewed indicated that their hope was to preserve a traditional Jewish way of life in response to the attempt to obliterate the Jewish people. Survivor after survivor, using different phraseology, indicated that study served as a defense against the physically dominant Nazis. “They might break me physically but never spiritually” was a common refrain.

Historians and others who write about the Holocaust accentuate, and rightly so, the tragedies and horrors that befell its victims. Accounts of religious resistance, on the other hand, have been too often obscured. The reports from these survivors do not in any way diminish the enormity of the suffering others experienced but rather illustrate another dimension of Jewish survival, underscoring the life-affirming quality of education within the context of Judaism. I hope readers of this issue of *PRISM* include in their teaching the stories of these survivors, who pursued learning under one of the most brutal regimes in modern history.

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—Jeffrey Glanz

We begin with this poem by Susan Dambroff because it provides both an overview and specifics of the complex subject of Jewish agency—the defense, defiance, resistance, altruism, and other actions the Jews took to maintain their humanity and survive with dignity during the Holocaust. After your students read the introductory essays by Yitzchak Mais (pp. 10–16), Pnina Rosenberg (pp. 18–21), and Arthur Shostak (pp. 22–25), ask them to write a “found poem” based on one of them; then post and discuss the results.

Susan Dambroff

There Were Those

There were those
who escaped to the forests
who crawled through sewers
who jumped from the backs of trains

There were those
who smuggled messages
who smuggled dynamite
inside bread loaves
inside matchboxes
inside corpses

There were those
who were shoemakers
who put nails
into the boots
of German soldiers

There were those
who wrote poetry
who put on plays
who taught the children

There were those
who fed each other

"The widespread portrayal of Jews during the Holocaust as innocent but passive victims presents a fundamentally skewed picture of what was far more complex and nuanced," writes historian Yitzchak Mais. "Thus, educators need to present, along with the Nazi perspective that focuses on the German process of persecution, the often-ignored Jewish perspective of the Holocaust. A more complete study makes clear that Jews, in the main, were not passive victims but active agents who responded with a surprisingly wide range of resourceful behaviors." Such a presentation is the objective of both this introductory overview and the other essays and poems in this volume.

Yitzchak Mais

Understanding Jewish Life in the Shadow of Destruction: Teaching the Jewish Narrative

The current attention to the Holocaust stands in marked contrast to the "strange silence" on the subject—with some notable exceptions—in the decades following the war within both Jewish communities and the academic world (Marrus, 1996, pp. 272–273). Today the Holocaust is recognized as a watershed whose ramifications have critical significance for Jews and non-Jews alike. It has become an integral part of the curriculum in all manner of schools—public and private; Christian and Jewish—and universities throughout the world.

Unfortunately, popular and scholarly works, as well as didactic materials, routinely focus on the Nazi process of persecution and destruction while giving scant attention to Jewish life in Europe and North Africa before the Nazi assault. Thus, our students know the Jews primarily as victims rather than people who lived, worked, honored traditional values, and coped with their circumstances. Their world was a vibrant one, and they expressed their diverse views of that world and its future in their deeply rooted languages of Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) and Yiddish.

Jews under German domination are, regrettably, often depicted as faceless extras in the drama of their own destruction, "the perfect victims—weak, ineffectual, incapable of helping themselves" (Doneson, 2002, pp. 203–215). Books and films alike, including even the iconic *Schindler's List*, as Judith Doneson notes, teach students facts and methods of the murder of the Jews but not, generally, how Jews responded to the unimaginable assault on their families, communities, and lives. A disturbing consequence of this

depiction is that often, subtly, Jews themselves are blamed for being victims.¹ The questions pupils ask often imply culpability.² For example, when learning about the early stages of the Holocaust, students frequently ask, "Why didn't the Jews leave Germany?" Later, as teachers explain life in the ghettos, students ask, "Why didn't the Jews fight back?" Author and survivor Primo Levi (1989) observed:

Among the questions that are put to us [survivors,] there is one that is never absent: indeed, as the years go by, it is formulated with ever increasing persistence, and with an ever less hidden accent of accusation. More than a single question, it is a family of questions. Why did you not escape? Why did you not rebel? Why did you not avoid capture beforehand? (p. 122)

The presentation of the Jewish, as opposed to the Nazi, perspective requires us to suspend our historical hindsight. Although we know that the Nazis ultimately carried out a coordinated and systematic assault on the Jews that culminated in mass murder, Jews at the time did not know this. The unprecedented nature of the murderous anti-Jewish policies made it nearly impossible for the Jews to comprehend their impending destruction. Awareness of this pre-Holocaust mindset is therefore critical in understanding the context of Jewish responses.

While this essay purposely avoids a rigid definition of Jewish resistance, it presents four categories of responses that reflect both the intentions and, often, the results, of

the actions of a multitude of Jews who attempted to defy the Nazis. These four types of resistance—(1) symbolic and personal; (2) polemic; (3) defensive; and (4) offensive and armed—carried out by Jews in all areas of Nazi domination, are an adaptation of the categories suggested by the Swiss historian Werner Rings (1982) in his research on how European peoples responded to German occupation.

Symbolic and Personal Resistance: Attempts to preserve individual dignity, Jewish identity, and Jewish continuity [Fig. 1] included maintaining schools and orphanages; observing religious rituals; and engaging in cultural, often clandestine artistic endeavors, such as the children's opera *Brundibar* and other artwork by children and adults in Terezin and other ghettos. [See pp. 53–58 in this issue—Eds.]



FIG. 1: The wedding of Salomon Schrijver in the Jewish Quarter of Amsterdam, 1942. The couple was deported to Westerbork and from there to Sobibor, where they were killed on July 9, 1943. Permission United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Polemic Resistance: This type of resistance included attempts by women underground couriers to compile and spread the news of Nazi brutalities to Jews in occupied Europe as well as to the free world; attempts to document Nazi crimes by keeping diaries and publishing underground newspapers; and attempts to establish various clandestine archives, such as Emanuel Ringelblum's *Oyneg Shabbes* in the Warsaw Ghetto. [See pp. 47–52 in this issue—Eds.]

Defensive Resistance: This type of resistance included attempts to aid and protect Jews through organizing escapes, such as the French-Jewish Scouts' escape operations to neutral Spain or Switzerland; attempts to produce forged identity documents; and attempts to organize clandestine networks to hide Jews. [See pp. 84–88 in this issue—Eds.]

Offensive and Armed Resistance: Spontaneous acts of revenge, organized armed uprisings in the ghettos and camps, partisan activities, establishing family camps in the forests, such as that organized by the Bielski brothers; and sabotage activities against the Nazi war effort were all attempts to resist. [See pp. 71–75 in this issue—Eds.]

Our goal is to demonstrate that there was no single response to a given situation but rather a *multitude* of reactions intended to defy German plans to dehumanize Jews and destroy Judaism. This “typology of resistance” outlines the diverse Jewish responses but, importantly, without establishing a hierarchy of merit. Although most Jews fell victim to Nazi brutality, they did, not, as a rule, give in to demoralization or moral collapse, and countless Jews were more than passive victims, refuting the all too prevalent stereotype: True, the Jews were slaughtered, but clearly not like sheep! The tragic fate of the Jews requires both empathy and commemoration; the dignity and strength exhibited by victims and survivors in the face of unprecedented violence require recognition and demand respect.

For contemporary Jewish audiences, there is a critical need to understand the diversity of Jewish defiance. Yehuda Bauer (1973, 1979), the noted Israeli Holocaust historian, writes:

A Jew seeking to understand what his Jewishness means must take into account his people's greatest catastrophe. He must ask himself, for example: How did the values and attitudes to which I am heir stand up under the most terrible test in history? If Jews were able to face the Nazi terror in one way or another, is it because something in their tradition, culture, or history helped them, or did their particular tradition have nothing to do with it? Is there something that I as a Jew should remember and which I should warn Jews and others, lest a similar fate befall them? (pp. 55–56, & p. 26)

A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE OF THE HOLOCAUST

David Engel's (2007) thought-provoking essay “Resisting in Jewish Time” argues that a Jewish perspective will complement the traditional approach that divides the Holocaust into stages using milestones defined by the actions of the Nazi perpetrators,³ reinforcing the contention that there is a critical need to highlight Jewish agency as part of an integrated approach that synthesizes and makes symmetrical the traditional study of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. Clearly, no Holocaust narrative can be told without including the actions of the Nazis and the overall inactions of the bystanders; at the same time, it cannot be told without relating the Jewish responses. Educators need to ensure an appropriate balance so that our students come away know-

ing not only how and where Jews were persecuted and murdered but also learning who they were and how they responded to the onslaught.

A central theme in our Jewish-centered narrative is the evolution of Jewish responses to the various Nazi policies directed against them. To illustrate this evolution, we suggest the four thematic periods elaborated below: Responding to the Nazi Rise to Power, Resisting Occupation, Resisting Mass Deportations, Resisting Mass Murder

RESPONDING TO THE NAZI RISE TO POWER

In general, the initial individual and communal Jewish reaction to Nazi anti-Jewish measures was an attempt to lead normal lives. This striving for normalcy can be seen in numerous initiatives undertaken by leaders of the Jewish community, Jewish organizations, and individual Jews, all of whom responded to what they believed was a brutal—but temporary—situation. These diverse activities addressed the material and spiritual needs of the persecuted Jews, reflecting their resourcefulness, vitality, and desire to frustrate the aims of the Nazis and their collaborators.

This active opposition to an increasingly hostile environment began in Germany in 1933 shortly after Hitler's rise to power. It included creating alternative activities and organizations to replace those from which Jews were excluded. A major achievement was uniting the often-conflicting ideological groups under a single umbrella organization, *Reichsvertretung der deutschen Juden* (Reich Representation of German Jews). Led by Rabbi Leo Baeck, this official representative body was formally established in September 1933 and served both as a much-needed liaison with the hostile Nazi government and as a source of material aid, education, and emigration assistance for its Jewish constituents.

The creation of the *Kulturbund* (Cultural Union of German Jews) in 1933 allowed Jewish artists and audiences, excluded from public cultural life, to maintain cultural activities in theaters and orchestras newly organized throughout Germany. As a reaction to their exclusion from the general Winter Relief programs in 1935, Jews established their own Winter Relief (*Winterhilfe*), which aided and supported many impoverished Jews who, for the first time, needed to receive welfare. Finally, the Jewish community initiated practical alternatives for Jews banned from a variety of disciplines (medicine, law, education, sports), allowing them—at least for a time—to pursue their interests and professions after being “legally” excluded by the regime.

There were also attempts to confront and reduce Nazi persecution and discrimination. Jews undertook legal actions in the courts and attempted to sway public opinion. An extraordinary legal initiative was the Bernheim Petition,

which challenged the legality of Nazi anti-Jewish laws within the areas of former Poland that had been annexed to Germany. Backed by Jewish organizations, Franz Bernheim filed a complaint against the German government in the League of Nations in May 1933. Remarkably, the League, which supervised this area, upheld the grievance. Germany was forced to retract its laws and, until 1937, stop discriminating against Jews in Upper Silesia.

An unusually large number of Jewish activists belonged to clandestine political groups opposing the Nazi regime, including those in the Jewish-organized, Communist-affiliated Baum Group. Jewish political activity dramatically increased, especially among the various Zionist movements, which escalated their social, educational, and political activities, allowing desperate Jewish youth the opportunity for positive self-expression as well as the hope of emigration to Palestine.

Jewish religious institutions became the center of Jewish life, havens from the hostile outside world, as were the numerous expanded or newly established Jewish schools. In addition to serving its religious function, a synagogue might be used as a lecture or concert hall, theater, or training center. The law banning *shechitah* (kosher butchering) in April 1933 was successfully evaded by a few dedicated individuals, who continued to perform ritual slaughtering clandestinely throughout the 1930s despite the threat of severe punishment.⁴

Jews were forced to decide whether to stay and “ride out the storm” or to leave. However, options for those who wanted to leave were limited; Western countries such as the United States, Great Britain, and British-controlled Palestine refused to revise their strict quotas and immigration laws to admit more Jewish refugees. The fact that thousands escaped to Shanghai, the Dominican Republic, and other countries with unfamiliar cultures indicates their determination and courage as well as their desperation. Parents, faced with the choice of letting their children go on their own to Palestine via *Youth Aliyah* or, after *Kristallnacht*, on *Kindertransports* to England, had to struggle with their deepest fears of never seeing their children again, but they acted nevertheless. Noted researcher Avraham Barkai (1989) concluded that the manifold initiatives undertaken by the German Jewish community were “an important expression of its solidarity, cohesiveness, and the collective will to resist the ever more hostile environment” (p. 98).

RESISTING OCCUPATION

Individuals and communities often base their expectations for the future on their experiences of the past. In many lands occupied by the Nazis—Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine in particular—many Jews were influenced (and tragically misled) by memories of the benevolent German

occupation of World War I, which was viewed as a vast improvement over life under the brutal Czarist regime that it replaced. Although Jews in Western Europe feared a German invasion, they were confident that their generally successful integration into society would result in their protection by the local authorities. Moreover, they believed that their non-Jewish neighbors would not abandon them.

Between 1939 and 1944, occupation occurred in different countries at different times and had different effects. The attempt to isolate Jews was universal, but isolation could range from discriminatory laws to the requirement for Jews to wear the yellow star to forced concentration in sealed ghettos. On the whole, Jews recognized the occupation as a difficult but not unusual hardship of wartime. This resigned recognition was especially true among Jews who confronted hellish conditions in the ghettos of Eastern Europe. It is critical to understand life in the ghetto as imprisoned Jews experienced it, and crucial to consider it from their perspective and within the context of their understanding of the future. Because they were unaware of their impending fate, Jews approached life in the ghettos on its own terms and not simply—as is commonly perceived by our students—as a way station to the death camps. Overwhelmingly, Jews in sealed ghettos, as well as the various peoples living throughout occupied Europe, universally believed that the forces of good would ultimately triumph over the forces of evil, and that the Allies would eventually defeat Nazi Germany. Moreover, throughout their long history, Jews had repeatedly been saved from enemies who sought to destroy them; so, while they understood that many Jews would surely perish due to Nazi policies, they believed with conviction that many others, especially the productive, would hold out and survive their oppressors—a concept known in Yiddish as *iberleben* (to survive and to outlast).

Jews, therefore, viewed Nazi occupation as an existential challenge, requiring them to call on their long tradition of autonomous Jewish communal life and to engage in activities to confront and frustrate their tormentors. They provided services, normally supplied by municipal authorities and now administered by the Jewish Councils (*Judenräte*), such as housing allocations, food distribution, employment, sanitation, health services, refugee shelters, schools, and religious services. Other organizations, such as the numerous Courtyard Committees in Warsaw (which often operated in open opposition to the *Judenrat*),⁵ instituted a wide range of voluntary social service efforts to combat starvation, demoralization, and rampant epidemics.

A particular challenge was the need to maintain morale. Social and cultural activities were initiated by the various prewar political parties such as the Bund, the Zionists, and the Socialists. The various Zionist youth movements played

a critical role in sustaining and nurturing the ghetto youth, both physically, through their soup kitchens, and spiritually, through their educational and social initiatives⁶ [Fig. 2]. Many rabbis led clandestine religious activities, maintaining the spiritual fortitude of their followers. Theater productions, concerts, art exhibitions, and literary evenings were clear manifestations of an unbroken spirit and the desire to continue life in the fullest sense of the word.



FIG. 2: Children learning in a clandestine school in the Kovno Ghetto. This class was held in a stable at 101 Kriškaicio Street. Girls include Taiba Leibaite (far left) and Basia Leibaite (second from left). Photo by David Chaim Ratner. Courtesy of Yad Vashem, Photo Archive, Jerusalem.

Underground activities flourished, including the daring work of the couriers—almost always young “Aryan”-looking women, because Jewish men could easily be identified by their circumcision—who risked their lives exchanging information with isolated Jewish communities throughout Europe. Jews published and distributed illegal underground newspapers and established clandestine archives to document the events for posterity; even the youngest Jewish children participated in the extremely dangerous acts of smuggling food into the ghetto. Lucy Dawidowicz (1976), the historian, provides a moving summary of Jewish defiance in the ghettos:

Despite the attempts by the Germans to impose a state of barbarism upon them, the Jews persisted in maintaining or in re-creating their organized society and their culture. The milieu in which the Germans confined them was a state of war or condition of insecurity. . . . Nevertheless, in nearly all the ghettos, the Jews conspired against the Germans to provide themselves with arts, letters and society—above all, with the protection of the community against man's solitariness and brutishness. Never was human life suspended. (p. 327)

RESISTING MASS DEPORTATIONS

It is essential to distinguish between the earlier, widespread, forced deportations of Jews from their homes and communities in all areas under German occupation, which actually resulted in resettlement, not murder; and the later deportations of Jews to the death camps. The precedent of the earlier deportations made the Jews more susceptible to deceptive tactics later when the Final Solution was actually implemented. Most were taken in by Nazi deceptions and accepted the claim of “resettlement in the East” as “reasonable” and consistent with the Nazi policy of forced population transfers; many were tragically misled by the German use of deception (often accompanied by overwhelming force) as well as by their own inability to imagine what was, indeed, unimaginable.

Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, ghettos were established in some of the major Jewish population centers in the German-occupied Soviet territories including Vilna, Kovno, Riga, Minsk, and Lvov. In contrast to those established in Poland earlier, these ghettos were created in the wake of the mass shootings carried out by mobile killing units and local collaborators. Jewish responses in these new ghettos were similar to the acts of defiance, described above, that took place in the Polish ghettos. Life continued [Fig. 3], but under the heavy shadow cast by the mass shootings and accompanied by a growing sense of isolation. Menacing rumors of deportations added to the burden of a constantly deteriorating situation in which life was impossibly hard, fraught with hunger, disease, and the imminent prospect of death.

Some Jews, particularly those active in the Bundist and Zionist youth movements, began to perceive the possibility of a shift in anti-Jewish policies. The omens of a radical new reality—seen in random mass shootings and deportations—led to a deepening sense of vulnerability and uncertainty. New questions and dilemmas arose: How does one evaluate the Nazi occupation now compounded with random mass shootings? Is cooperation or defiance the best way to ensure survival of the community and individuals? Should Jews obey orders and report for “resettlement” or attempt to hide or escape to the forests? Is it better for Jews to work for the Nazis and try to survive by making themselves useful, or is it wrong to aid the enemy?

In the variety of responses taken by the desperate Jews, one finds no single answer or reaction, only “choiceless choices” (the concept first introduced by Lawrence L. Langer [1982] and now an indispensable part of Holocaust language). Jews everywhere confronted impossible dilemmas and obstacles, never certain that the action they chose would result in saving their lives. Yet, even in this context, they acted.

When couriers smuggled reports of massacres in the recently occupied former Soviet territories to various

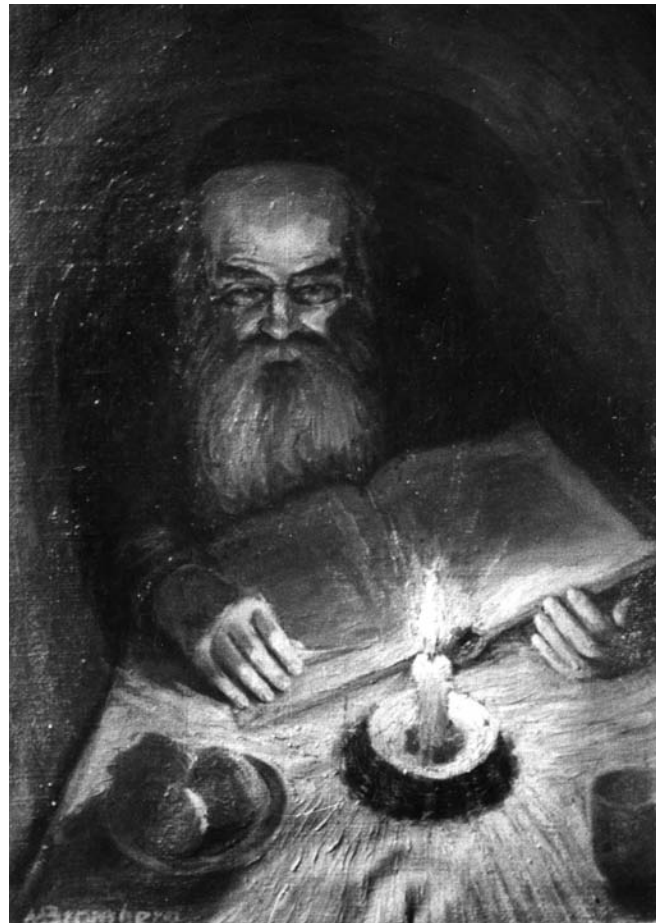


FIG. 3: *On a Page of Gemara in the Bunker*, painted by M. Brunburg. Courtesy of Yad Vashem, Photo Archive, Jerusalem.

political movements in the ghettos, the reports were disseminated via the underground press to the ghetto inhabitants. However, the overwhelming majority refused to believe that *all* Jews were slated to be killed. This continuing belief in the concept of *iberleben*, that rescue and survival were still possible for many Jews, prompted them to vehemently oppose the idea of armed resistance.

Small groups of young people began planning for armed activities against the Nazis, but the majority of the ghetto Jews continued their patterns of confronting Nazi persecution. In Warsaw, only towards the end of the mass deportations and the near decimation of the ghetto in the fall of 1942 did the remaining Jews accept the option of armed revolt and support the young activists. In Vilna, on the other hand, those in the underground, as noted by their leader Abba Kovner (2002), never received the support of the population and were forced to escape to the forests to carry out armed resistance.

In the spring and summer of 1942, the onset of deportations from Western Europe to the “East” raised deep concerns about the appropriate response. Options for survival were urgently identified: Some Jews, like the family

of Anne Frank, went into hiding; some were smuggled from France by the Jewish Scouts into neutral countries. Only limited numbers of Jews, however, had the contacts and financial means to either hide or escape.

In Eastern and Western Europe, the option of armed resistance was often dependent on the ability of Jews to receive material support from established national underground movements. Members of these movements, though, operated from a totally different perspective and timetable. Non-Jewish resisters wanted to delay their armed uprisings until the German forces were seriously weakened; Jews, however, did not have the luxury of waiting while their communities were threatened with imminent annihilation. In Belgium, the circumstances demanded independent Jewish armed action: On July 31, 1942, an underground Jewish group destroyed files from the Belgian Jewish Council in order to sabotage deportations, and on April 19, 1943, resistance fighters in Tirlemont attacked a deportation train headed for Auschwitz and freed 200 Jews. In Eastern Europe, ghetto underground groups were determined to fight with arms despite the lack of material support from national underground movements.

Daunting new choices and challenges presented themselves as the uncertain threat of mass deportations grew. The German policy of collective punishment caused constant tension surrounding decisions to engage in acts of sabotage, escape, or armed resistance. The decision to escape to the forest often pitted individual against family survival, since partisan units would accept armed individuals but not entire families. Finally, there were individual vs. communal choices: the decision to be part of a distinctly Jewish resistance, to remain to fight and die in the ghetto as a Jew among Jews or to increase the slim chance to survive by escaping to the forest to join the universal struggle to defeat the Fascist Nazis. Individuals interpreted events differently, saw different consequences, and argued with great intensity about which path of action was more likely to save lives and communities.

RESISTING MASS MURDER

By the time most Jews had begun to comprehend and internalize the reality of Nazi mass murder—often only after their arrival at a death camp—they had long been cut off from the outside world and were in a dreadfully weakened physical and mental condition with few, if any, resources remaining. It seems, however, that humans, by nature, resist acknowledging absolute helplessness, a major factor in understanding how Jews responded during the Holocaust: It explains why those who eventually took up arms or supported armed resistance did so only after finally losing hope of a better outcome or realizing that no amount of productive work, cooperation, or negotiations could save them.

They knew that their actions would pose no threat to the survival of the already doomed—or destroyed—community.

It is remarkable that, in the face of these grim truths, so many Jews still had the will and fortitude to attempt to keep control of their lives. Many held fast to their beliefs and identity, trying to preserve their values and faith; others were determined to die with dignity; still others decided to die fighting. In addition to the heroic revolt of the Warsaw Ghetto in April 1943, armed underground groups operated in more than 90 other ghettos throughout Eastern Europe, and armed uprisings broke out in the ghettos of Bialystok, Bedzin, Czestochwa, Lachwa, and Tyczyn.⁷

Large numbers of Jews also participated in partisan and underground movements throughout Europe, in countries such as Belgium, France, Greece, Holland, Italy, Slovakia, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia. Jews fought as an integral part of the Yugoslav Partisan Movement, with Moshé Pijade serving as Tito's deputy commander. Some 1,500 Jewish partisans died fighting to liberate Yugoslavia, including a 22-year-old Sephardic woman, Estreya Ovdia, of Macedonia, one of 10 Jews decorated as "Yugoslav National Heroes."

Remarkable manifestations of Jewish resistance were the unprecedented armed revolts in three of the six death camps. Fully realizing that few would survive the revolt or the ensuing escape to the forests, Jewish prisoners planned and carried out uprisings in Treblinka (August 1943), Sobibor (October 1943), and Auschwitz-Birkenau (October 1944).

Other forms of resistance in death camps included escapes to inform the outside world of the system of industrialized mass murder; the struggles by many to preserve their political ideals, communal values, and humanity through religious observances and mutual aid; and finally, the awe-inspiring examples of those Jews, who, upon realizing that death was imminent and unavoidable, chose to defy the Nazis by the manner in which they would go to their death. Some left ethical wills, imploring their families to remember the tragedy, avenge their deaths, and continue to live as good Jews. Some chanted prayers or sang national or Zionist anthems as they were led into the gas chambers.⁸ These desperate but heroic last acts were a clear defiance against the Nazi goal of dehumanization and are an absolute expression of symbolic resistance.

UNDERSTANDING THE HOLOCAUST FROM A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

Including the Jewish perspective in the study of the Holocaust allows students to acquire an awareness of the obstacles and dilemmas that Jews confronted and promotes a respect for the various manifestations of Jewish defiance. The question is not, as some would pose it, why Jews failed

to mount cohesive and effective resistance to the Nazis, but rather how it was possible that so many Jews resisted at all.

NOTES

1. See Marion A. Kaplan (1998) *Between dignity and despair: Jewish life in Nazi Germany*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 16. See also Isaiah Trunk (1982), *Jewish responses to Nazi persecution*, (New York: Stein and Day), pp. ix–xi, and Eva Fogelman (2007), On blaming the victim. In Y. Mais, et al. (Eds.), *Daring to resist: Jewish defiance in the Holocaust*. (New York, Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, 2007), pp. 134–137.

2. For a discussion of Holocaust exhibitions and the issue of survivor culpability, see Yitzchak Mais (1998), Institutionalizing the Holocaust: Issues related to the Establishment of Holocaust memorial centers. In Y. Bauer, et al. (Eds.) *Remembering for the future: Papers of the international scholars' conference, Oxford, U.K.*, vol. 2. (Oxford: Pergamon Press, pp. 1778–1789). A revised version of this essay appeared as "Institutionalizing the Holocaust" in *Midstream*, 34(9) December 1988, pp. 16–20.

3. The commonly used perpetrator-driven periodization divides the Holocaust as per the evolving anti-Jewish policies: 1933–1939, legal exclusion; 1939–1941, isolation and ghettoization; 1941–1945, mass murder.

4. Kaplan (1998), *Between dignity and despair*, p. 33.

5. Michel Mazor, The House committees in the Warsaw Ghetto. In Y. Bauer & N. Rotenstreich (Eds.), *The Holocaust as historical experience*. (New York, Holmes and Meier, 1981), pp. 95–108.

6. See excerpts of Mordechai Tenenbaum's moving account of the activities of the Zionist *Hechalutz (Pioneer)* Youth Movements during the Holocaust. We are responsible for our youth's future. In Y. Mais, et al., (Eds.). (2007), *Daring to resist: Jewish defiance in the Holocaust* (New York, Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust), pp. 80–85.

7. Shalom Cholawsky (1982) notes that there were more than 60 ghettos in the Belarus area with armed undergrounds, in *Al naharot Haniemen Vehadnieper* (On the banks of the Niemen and the Dnieper). (Tel Aviv: Moreshet), pp. 333–337. Regarding the nearly 20 ghettos with armed undergrounds in Poland, see Shmuel Krakowski, (1984), *The war of the doomed: Jewish armed resistance in Poland, 1942–1944*, (New York: Holmes and Meier), pp. 161–234; and for Lithuania, see Dov Levin. (1985), *Fighting back: Lithuanian Jewry's armed resistance to the Nazis, 1941–1945*, (New York: Holmes and Meir).

8. See Filip Mueller (1984), *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three years in the gas chamber*. (New York: Stein and Day), pp. 70, 110–111. (Also published in the UK, as, *Auschwitz inferno: The testimony of a Sonderkommando*).

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Breindel Lieba Kasher has interviewed and filmed survivors throughout Europe, "purely my soul's work," she says, gathering their truths and weaving their testimonies "like portrait paintings, a sacred bridge, oral Torahs from the survivors to the next generation." About the interview below, she writes, "Batsheva Degan was born in Radom, Poland. She is a psychologist, but we met as two poets in an understanding of each other that transcended language. When I interviewed her in her Tel Aviv apartment, she told me, 'You know, there were angels in Auschwitz.' She showed me two little slippers, a birthday gift that had been made for her by her girlfriend in Auschwitz. The slippers are made from threads of blue and white stripes pulled from her friend's camp uniform. The slippers survived; her friend did not."

Breindel Lieba Kasher

Batsheva Degan: Wings

I love languages.
Even in Auschwitz
I learned
(especially insults)
in every language.

I learned poetry and songs
written by prisoners
and transferred from one camp to another.
Even there, I kept my soul on spiritual things.
Poems were a source of inspiration, elation.
This was something that was always mine
and it stayed in my heart.
I learned in Latin
"Omnia mea mecum porto."
(All that is mine,
I carry with me.)
It was a source of hope.

Inmates in Auschwitz mocked me.
"You study French?
They will burn you with your French!"
But I did not listen.
I loved languages.
Languages are wings.

The paintings described by Pnina Rosenberg in this essay on two artists of Terezin offer graphic testimony to the power of religious resistance. These art works illustrate “a unified group of inmates who, despite everything, continue to cling to their faith, tradition, and identity as Jews and as human beings.” Pair this reflection with Vera Schiff’s memoir (pp. 53–58) and the poetry by Emily Borenstein (pp. 59–63) and Stephen Herz (pp. 64–65) for an interdisciplinary view of spiritual resistance in Terezin.

Pnina Rosenberg

Prayer and Observance as Jewish Resistance

If a prisoner felt that he could no longer endure the realities of camp life, he found a way out in his mental life—an invaluable opportunity to dwell in the spiritual domain, the one that the SS were unable to destroy. Spiritual life strengthened the prisoner, helped him adapt, and thereby improved his chances of survival.

—Viktor Frankl, 2000, p. 123

TEREZIN: ART AND ATROCITY

From December 1941 until May 1945, the 18th-century fortified city of Terezin (in Czech; Theresienstadt in German), in northwestern Czechoslovakia, became a huge Jewish ghetto-camp. Primarily, it housed Czech, German, and Austrian Jews, but gradually it became a place of internment for Jews of other European countries as well. Although the Nazi propaganda machine cunningly called Terezin a “Paradise Ghetto” (Green, 1969, p. 20), a designation to deceive the outside world and to hide its true sinister purpose—to serve as a link in the chain that inevitably led to the gas chambers—approximately 35,000 inmates died there. Of the additional 87,000 Jews deported to the death camps in the East, about 3,800 survived (Blodig, 2001, p. 179).

As part of the Nazi hoax, the camp guards tolerated the cultural and artistic activities that flourished in Terezin, cynically using the skills of the artists, who “were themselves pawns and victims of the Nazis” (Milton, 2001, p. 20). The guards exploited talented and gifted artists-inmates, such as Bedrich Fritta, Leo Haas, Otto Ungar, Ferdinand Bloch, and František Moric Nágl, by employing them in the ghetto’s Technical Department, which produced charts, diagrams, and maps and outlined new roads that enabled them access to various parts of the ghetto. Yet, the artists were able to utilize material available to carry out those official assignments to produce clandestine works depicting

life and death in Terezin. Some of the inmates, such as Charlotte Buršová, Otto Ungar, and František Moric Nágl, had brought art supplies with them from their homes when they were deported, a remarkable effort, as reported by Sybil Milton (2001), inasmuch as “official limitation of the quantity of personal belongings meant that for every sketch pad packed into one small suitcase, something of vital importance had to be left behind” (p. 24).

RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES AS SPIRITUAL RESISTANCE

Any and all individual or collective endeavors to maintain humanity, integrity, and Jewish identity and thus oppose the Nazi attempts to dehumanize and degrade can be regarded as manifestations of spiritual resistance. Observance of Jewish religious traditions in the midst of the bestial world served as consolation in the merciless place and was a manifestation of communal solidarity and faith. Thus, it is not surprising that depictions of clandestine religious observance are not uncommon in the art of the Holocaust. Various works done in different camps depict the High Holiday prayers: *Rosh Hashanah* (the Jewish New Year), *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement), and *Sukkot* (the Feast of the Tabernacles), as well as Shabbat observances and various other collective prayers. Artists documented those ceremonies, which were held either in provisionally arranged spaces or in designated barracks.



FIG. 1: *Men Praying in an Improvised Prayer Room, Theresienstadt, 1943*, by František Moric Nágl (1898–1944), gouache on cardboard, 35.2 × 25.2 cm. Signed and dated lower right: Nágl 1943. ©Art collection, Jewish Museum in Prague.

In either case, they reflect a unified group of inmates who, despite everything, continue to cling to their faith. František Moric Nágl's *Men Praying in an Improvised Prayer Room, Theresienstadt, 1943* [cover and Fig. 1] and Ferdinand Bloch's [Fig. 2] *Sukkot Festival Prayer in an Improvised Prayer Room in the Attics of L319, Theresienstadt*, dated: October 21, 1943, follow this tradition.

PRAYERS IN TEREZIN

František Moric Nágl (b. 1898, Kostelni Myslová, Czech Republic; d. 1944, Auschwitz) a highly skilled Jewish-Czech

artist, was deported to Terezin with his wife and two children in May 1942. One of those who brought his painting equipment with him, he was employed by the Nazi administration to produce propaganda paintings. Secretly, he also produced numerous authentic indoor and outdoor ghetto scenes until his deportation from Terezin in the last transport to Auschwitz (October 28, 1944), where he perished in the gas chambers (Blodig & Kotouč, 2002, p. 136).

Nágl's colorful gouache painting [Fig. 1], an opaque watercolor mixed with a preparation of gum, depicts a prayer minyan—a group of 10 or more men, the required number for the reading of the Torah and the recitation of certain prayers in public.

The men are wearing their *tallitot* (prayer shawls); holding *siddurim* (prayer books); and facing the *parochet* (curtain) that covers the Holy Ark where the Torah is kept when it is not being read. To its left is the velvet-robed mantel, which covers the *Sefer Torah* (Torah Scroll) when it is not in use.

The painting, reflecting a solemn ambiance and a meticulous “construction” of the synagogue-like environment, is intriguing. The elegant and graceful two-branch, unlit candelabra in front of the ark indicates that this was either Shabbat morning or a *yom tov* (Jewish holiday, literally “a good day”) morning prayer, an uplifting and life-affirming time that accentuates the stricken, skeleton-like face of the only person facing the viewers. The mantel of the red velvet Torah Scroll is contrasted with the white *parochet*, a curtain traditionally

made of the finest material and often enhanced with an intricate design; in Nágl's painting it is, of necessity, nothing but an ordinary white sheet, covering the barracks' wooden bed.

In spite of the inmates' heroic attempt to simulate the environment of past tradition, the current reality of the cruel ghettoized setting cannot be concealed. The inmates' two-storied wooden bunk, “crowning” the scene, confers an atmosphere of unsteadiness and insecurity, contrary to the stability and comfort usually associated with strict adherence to the ancient tradition. The whiteness of the

men's prayer shawls and the curtain are contrasted with the grayish brown mud-like color of the surroundings—the barracks' floor, ceiling, and walls. The blue-striped pillow on top of the upper bunk resembles and opposes the stripes of the *tallitot*. On one hand, the blue stripes could be an allusion to the *ptil techelet* (blue fringe) that is affixed to the shawl's corners, according to the biblical instructions:

Speak to the Children of Israel and bid them that they make fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of each corner a thread of blue [*techelet*]. And it shall be for you as a fringe, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of G-d, and do them. (Numbers 15:38–39)

On the other hand, the blue stripes on the pillow are, first and foremost, a constant reminder of the ghetto atmosphere. Its vertical, “static” stripes are opposed to those of the *tallitot*, which are mostly diagonal, thus creating a vigorous and energetic atmosphere. Hence, despite the stillness of the event and the serenity of the prayers, they convey a dynamic impression that can be interpreted as their continuous struggle against the obvious intention to “still” them, a resistance fortified by their faith.

The painting's dual spheres—present reality and past revered tradition—representing holiness in the midst of the profane ordinariness of the barracks, create a constant tension, thus constructing a multilayered work, one opposing the other, similar to the inmates' mood and condition of life that constantly shift from despair to hope.

Nágl left this moving memento of a subtle resistance through Jewish tradition that overcame, at least momentarily, the diabolic Nazi scheme. Amidst the grayness and the ugliness of Terezin life that the artist is trying neither to conceal nor embellish, a traditional Jewish prayer service shines.

FERDINAND BLOCH

The Jewish artist Ferdinand Bloch (b. 1898, Kynzvalt, Czech Republic; d. 1944, Terezin) pursued a career as a graphic

designer in Vienna and in Prague until his deportation to Terezin in July 1942, where he, too, was assigned to the drafting room in the Technical Office. Like his colleagues Haas, Fritta, and Ungar, Bloch made clandestine drawings depicting the sinister aspects of Terezin. He was caught, however, and, for his “crime,” he was held in Terezin's Gestapo prison, The Small Fortress, along with the other subversive artists, for an alleged “propaganda of horror.” After ruthless torture, he was murdered there in October 1944 (Blodig & Kotou, 2002, p. 88).

Bloch's *Sukkot Festival Prayer in an Improvised Prayer Room in the Attics of L319* drawing [Fig. 2] was done in the ghetto on October 21, 1943, depicting *in situ* Tabernacles,



FIG. 2: *Sukkot Festival Prayer in an Improvised Prayer Room in the Attics of L319*, Theresienstadt, October 21, 1943 by Ferdinand Bloch (1889–1944), is a washed pen-and-ink drawing on paper: 25.2 × 22.1 cm. Inscription lower left: L319 Tempel Sukkoth 1943 (21. X.). Signature lower right: feb. ©Art collection, Jewish Museum in Prague.

one of the three biblically mandated festivals in which Jews were commanded to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. During the holiday, the Jews eat and often sleep in a *sukkah* (booth/tabernacle, a temporary walled structure with a roof of plant material, such as tree branches, as a reminder of the type of fragile dwellings in which the Israelites lived during their 40 years of wandering in the desert after the Exodus from slavery in Egypt).

It is quite obvious that the *Sukkot* emblems and symbols—the wooden dwelling, a commemoration of the liberation from Pharaoh's slavery—were literal for the Terezin inmates, and thus the historical-biblical event became a present cruel reality and a lively metaphorical hope for salvation. Bloch's black-grey-white small drawing (25.2 × 22.1 cm) depicts a clandestine gathering in a barrack attic, lacking most of the formal and ornamental objects that appear in Nág's work. Only two men are wearing prayer shawls, probably the rabbi and the *chazan* (cantor), who conduct the ceremony. The inmates—men and women—seen from behind, depicted either from their backs or in profile, are hunched in their coats. Despite the small, crowded space, the drawing does not convey a claustrophobic feeling, nor does its monochromatic scale, which stands in sharp contrast to the white areas, express a feeling of distress. The three highlighted areas: the front of the wooden Torah ark, decorated by a Star of David (perhaps an ironic allusion to the yellow badge); the Torah Scroll, and the rabbi or the cantor, are particularly meaningful when understood in light of the date of the drawing: 21 October 1943. This date in the Hebrew calendar is 22 *Tishrei*. It is *Simchat Torah* ("Rejoicing of the Torah"), a celebration on the last day of *Sukkot*, marking the conclusion of the annual cycle of public Torah reading and the beginning of a new cycle. The commencement, which, under normal circumstances, is a joyful and festive day for the entire Jewish community, might represent in the Terezin context the hope for a new cycle that will be free of slavery and torture, and with the freedom to worship without fear of retribution.

Tragically, neither of these artists lived to see the day of liberation. Both perished only a year after depicting this aspect of their Jewish identity and heritage, leaving behind works of art that helped to sustain the inmates' morale, providing them with spiritual comfort and reaffirming their cultural and religious identity. Today, they serve as vivid testimony to the role religion played in helping Jews defy their enemy.

NOTE

I extend our sincere and deep gratitude to Dr. Michaela Sidenberg, Curator of Visual Arts, Jewish Museum in Prague, and Jakub Hauser, head of the Museum's photo archive, for their invaluable cooperation, not only for so generously enabling us to reproduce two of their archive's works of art, but also for their amiable and efficient support. I am immensely indebted to Dr. Vojtech Blodig, Deputy Director, the Terezin Ghetto Memorial, Terezin, and to Martina Siknerova, head of its Collection Department, for their continuous assistance, kind support, and constant readiness to share their immense wealth of knowledge with me.

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“Help students understand that attention paid to acts of caring and nurturing among the Jews does not distract from the enormity of the crimes of the Nazis,” urges Arthur Shostak. “Teaching about these acts of quiet defiance is compatible with profound and far-reaching condemnation of unforgivable and unforgettable Nazi crimes.” This short overview highlights the form of Jewish resistance that Shostak calls “stealth altruism.” Pair it with the story of Mala Zimetbaum, pp. 66–69.

Arthur Shostak

Teaching About Stealth Altruism *in Extremis*: Implications for Holocaust Education

In 1968, at a major conference conducted by Yad Vashem, a scholar-survivor of nine camps urged overdue recognition of “how the anonymous masses held on to their humanity . . . their manifestations of solidarity, mutual help, self-sacrifice, and that whole constellation subsumed under the heading ‘good works’” (Dworzecki, 1968, in Kohn, p. 174). In the years since, others have agreed: “In innumerable small groups or ‘camp families,’ Jewish [women inmates in] Ravensbrück . . . developed forms of mutual help, support, and responsibility that should be considered heroic” (Agassi, 2007, p. 13) [Fig. 1]. Women often became “camp sisters”; they cared for each other, nursed each other, and shared stories, recipes, prayers, and plans for a future they were determined to have (Ofer & Weitzman, 1998; Rittner & Roth, 1998).

Even the earliest testimonies affirmed this defiant nurturing. In 1945, for example, the year the last camp (Stutthof) was liberated, a Jewish survivor of six such hellish prisons wrote that “a measure of comradeship was experienced and given by everyone. . . . aid and support was received and given” (Cohen, 1953, p. 182).

The Jewish prisoners who risked life and limb to help others “represented a triumph for humanity,” writes survivor Arnost Lustig (1994, p. 17). “But,” he maintains, “nobody knows about them.”

Thanks to the recent proliferation of narratives detailing such aid, Lustig’s concern that students do not know about the care that Jews provided for one another is less valid today. Still, memorialization and classroom attention commonly goes to what I call the “Nazi story,” that is, the unrestrained infliction of unforgivable harm. Yet, as Pierre Sauvage (1988) counsels,

If we remember solely the horror of the Holocaust, we will pass on no perspective from which meaningfully to confront and learn from that horror. . . . If the hard and fast evidence of the possibility of good on Earth is allowed to slip through our fingers and turn to dust, then future generations will have only dust to build on. (p. 118)

Thus, we seek moments of nurture, aid, and care to add to the other truths of the Holocaust. As teachers, we can help students ponder essential questions drawn not only from the actions of the Nazis but also from what I call “stealth altruism” or the “nurture story”: inspiring accounts of help daringly shared by victims under extreme duress, actions of resistance and defiance, less well known than the militant struggle of Jewish fighters in ghettos, forests, and camps but equally significant.

Altruism is “unselfish regard for or devotion to the welfare of others” (Mish, 1983, p. 76). Synonyms include decency, self-sacrifice, humanity, and morality. According to Samuel P. Oliner (2001), altruism is “devotion to the welfare of others, based on selflessness. . . . a behavior . . . directed towards helping another; that involves some effort, energy, and sacrifice to the actor; that is accompanied by no external reward; and that is voluntary” (p. 1). It draws on our capacity for empathy (“fellow-feeling”), on our sense of our own well-being, on feeling guilt in the presence of unrelieved human need, and on our ability to act autonomously (Sayer, 2011). Much research has been done on altruism during the Holocaust, in the main examining the motivations of non-Jews who risked their lives to help Jews (Tec, 1986; Oliner & Oliner, 1988; Fogelman, 1994;



FIG. 1: "She Who Carries" is a bronze sculpture designed by Will Lammert, executed by his student, Fritz Cremer, and dedicated on September 12, 1959, at the inauguration ceremony of the Memorial Site Ravensbrück in East Germany. The statue honors Olga Benario Prestes, a Jewish communist prisoner, who, during a roll call, dared to pick up and carry a collapsed female prisoner back to her barrack, although such caring behavior was strictly forbidden by the SS. Well known for working to better the conditions of other prisoners and for organizing solidarity and resistance activities, Olga was gassed, along with 1,600 other women, in 1942. Sometimes called the "Pietà von Ravensbrück," the statue has since become the symbol of this post-war education and commemorative site. Information was provided by Dr. Sabine Arend, Projekt Hauptausstellung Mahn-und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück. Photo: Lynn Seng. (<http://www.ravensbrueck.de/mgr/neu/english/index.htm>)

Paldiel, 2007); less focus has been on the altruism of Jews who helped Jews, but it has been well documented in texts and photographs (Engel, 2007); in numerous survivor testimonies, and most recently in this entire issue of *PRISM*. However, in part because altruism in the ghettos and camps is a small subset of the topic of Jewish resistance, which itself is a subset of Holocaust history, and in part because of teachers' time constraints, these findings are not typically included in units on Holocaust education. "Stealth" altruism is yet a subset of altruism, and thus is even less likely to be a classroom focus. Yet I urge its inclusion because survivors have maintained that, thanks to "innumerable small acts of humanness, most of them covert but everywhere in evidence, [we] were able to maintain societal structures workable enough to keep [ourselves] alive and morally sane" (Des Pres, 1976, p. 142).

Stealth altruism in the concentration camps and in the death camps includes, at one end of the altruism

scale, low-key, hidden, and forbidden gestures, such as nods and smiles among prisoners, which helped buoy morale, though their detection by the SS could result in a crippling beating. Whispering one another's given name was another morale aid, because the Nazis insisted that prisoners could be known publicly only by their humiliating camp-assigned number, and "man as a number is one of the horrors of dehumanization" (Appelfeld & Lang, 1989, p. 83). Stealth altruism could also involve calculated physical acts:

At each roll call, a few of us would be disposed of [selected to die that day in the gas chamber] for as little as a skin rash. So every morning before roll call, we [women] pinched our cheeks or slapped each other to look healthier . . . the filthy air rattled with slaps. (Popescu, 2001, p. 22)

At the other end of the altruism scale are acts of greater public exposure, which carried an even greater risk. For instance, a 14-year-old, unable due to illness to stand erect, relied on her 17-year-old sister to stand behind her and discreetly prop her up, a gesture they knew could cost them both their lives but for the forbidden whistled warnings from fellow prisoners about approaching SS guards (Lazar, 1984). Another survivor recalls a time when, as a 17-year-old, he began to freeze to death in an open area of Auschwitz. To his utter surprise, a small group of older prisoners he did not know called him over. Despite SS prohibitions against any such supportive behavior, they put him in the middle and

pressed me for five minutes with their own bodies because they didn't have anything else. They warmed me up. . . . It was a human touch you can dream about. Once you get such a lesson about friendship and solidarity you know that friendship and solidarity exist." (Lustig, 1994, p. 3)

The list of such "innumerable small acts of humanness" (Des Pres, 1976, p. 142) in the camps is long and includes the sharing of a day's single slice of bread, the forbidden provision of abortions (because newborns and their mothers were otherwise sent to the gas chambers), the trading of contraband for extra food for starving friends, and so on [Fig. 2]. An Auschwitz survivor attributes his survival "to the solidarity of fellow prisoners who made him get up from his sickbed when he felt like dying so that he would not be listed as incapable of working and sent to the gas chambers" (Laqueur, 1980, p. 62). Eva Brown (Brown & Fields-Meyer, 2007), a teenaged prisoner, now credits much of her survival to having violated a strict ban against close friendships:

Most people were truly alone in Auschwitz. That was by design. The Germans had separated us from our loved ones. . . . But God blessed me in that dark place with a companion, Klari. She and I looked out for each other. . . . [and] it made a huge difference having someone to care for. (p. 87)

TEACHING THE OVERLOOKED GOOD

What percentage of Jewish ghetto and camp prisoners or Jews in hiding or on the run were ever caregivers? Care recipients? There is no way of knowing, but research can be done to cull examples from text and film. Students can be encouraged to search in age-appropriate memoirs and oral histories for examples of stealth altruism and then computer-archive their findings for ongoing research. Using popular films or filmed survivor testimony, students can develop a composite DVD of sequences that illustrate stealth altruism, enriching viewers' grasp of the subject. The reciprocal ghetto aid between 11-year old Alex and the partisans in the film *The Island on Bird Street* (1997); the concentration camp tutoring scenes in the film *Fateless* (2004); and the care that was tendered to the new mother by female forest partisans in the film *Defiance* (2008), for example, are vivid additions to this study. Students may seek to apply the arts to the challenge of teaching stealth altruism; the artwork and poetry in issues of *PRISM* can serve as a model.

Finally, students might interview their community's survivors to elicit memories of stealth altruism and produce a videotape or a publication; others might focus on examining the extent of this phenomenon in pairs or in groups of people in hiding, on the run, or in partisan family camps. Some might wish to work with museum curators and archivists to uncover additional examples of care sharing and to discover why more isn't said about it in museum exhibits. Students can examine how this quiet help differed according to gender, age, ideology, nationality, and social class; and, ultimately, what we can learn from it, both about the Jews during the Holocaust and about us, good, bad, and otherwise.

A CAUTION TO EDUCATORS

There are at least five hazards posed by the inclusion of a curriculum unit on the quiet heroics described here, but they are readily countered, especially because most experienced Holocaust educators are already well aware of them.

First, emphasize realism and avoid romanticism. Nothing about stealth altruism was adventurous or gallant. The role of caregiver, while quietly heroic, was fraught with stress and uncertainty. Those who helped in secret did not court danger with a cheerful and high spirit. Setbacks and failure haunted daily life. Students should not turn a nuanced and gritty black-and-white story into a melodramatic



FIG. 2: This "Mother and Child" sculpture was designed and created by John Blakeley of Stockport, England, in 1973, and was installed at the Memorial Site Ravensbrück in East Germany, on May, 4, 1975, a gift from the Friendship Committee of the towns of Prenzlau and Stockport. Information was provided by Dr. Sabine Arend, Projekt Hauptausstellung Mahn-und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück. Photo: Lynn Seng. (<http://www.ravensbrueck.de/mgr/neu/english/index.htm>)

Technicolor distortion.

Second, counter the temptation of some students to (mistakenly) think stealth altruism is unique to this watershed. While the Holocaust was unique, altruism is part of the record of incarcerated people across history, of all faiths and persuasions.

There is, though, a unique aspect to the stealth altruism employed in the Holocaust; the third caution, therefore, is to help students learn about and take warranted pride in distinctive Jewish practices and rituals that fostered and encouraged this behavior. Relevant here are such traditions as *tzedakah*, giving charity (there was no money in the camps, so Jews often gave portions of their bread to the most needy); *gemilut chasadim*, acts of personal kindness beyond charity, such as visiting the sick and comforting the mourner; *tikkun olam*, efforts to help "heal the world"; and most vitally, *kiddush hachaim*, the sanctification of God's name by striving to survive, both spiritually and physically (Rudavsky, 1997).

Fourth, because some survivors focus on the horrors they experienced to the exclusion of any nurturing they may have gotten, you might suggest to those who speak to your students that they also mention, if applicable, the help they received from other prisoners. Your students can

learn about these helping behaviors most effectively from survivors themselves.

Finally, prepare for devaluation by some; scholars may argue that the help among the Jews imprisoned or on the run is such a minimal fraction of the Holocaust narrative that it hardly bears repeating. Encourage your students to have this conversation using relevant resources from local Holocaust museums as well as from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and Yad Vashem. You can use the exchanges among students and utilize the research on this subject gleaned from texts and archives to cultivate students' appreciation for alternative opinions.

Teaching about stealth altruism addresses three major components of Holocaust education: First, the subject imparts factual history well worth knowing. Second, it broadens the students' understanding of varied aspects of Jewish resistance and defiance. Third, it provides moral education of the highest order. While sporadic, limited by circumstance, and uncertain of outcome, stealth altruism provided victims—and can now provide your students—with hints of “evidence of transcendence over evil and faceless dehumanization” (Davidson, 2008, p. 571). It can foster development of a “heroic imagination,” the notion that each of us is a hero-in-waiting, capable of doing the right thing (Zimbardo, 2007, pp. 444, 488).

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Clara Asscher-Pinkhof [Fig. 1] 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 began to write narratives based on the children she cared for until she was deported to Bergen-Belsen. Freed in 1944 in a German 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 four stories included in this issue, below, 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 story, "Must," 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



FIG 1: Clara Asscher-Pinkhof poses with a young child in the Westerbork [The Netherlands] transit camp circa 1942–1944. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Sonni Schey Birnbaum.

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 fur-

ther 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."

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.

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 house 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?"

Clara Asscher-Pinkhof notes that the Commandant “is letting his enemy keep the strongest weapons” as she details the activities of the Jewish children who build a sukkah according to the letter of *halacha* (Jewish law), celebrating and commemorating the divine protection their ancestors enjoyed. Two months later, when the miracle of the Chanukah lights takes an unexpected turn, she muses, “How difficult it is to defend yourself against intangible power.” The photograph [Fig. 1] of children celebrating Chanukah in the Westerbork transit camp was not taken on this evening but can elicit essential questions about the concepts of intangible power and symbolic resistance.

Celebrations

Does the Commandant know that these Jews not only carry their Judaism in their hearts throughout the world but that, either openly or in secret, they live it in this camp as they never did in times of freedom? Even if the commandant already knows it, then he still has no suspicion of how unassailable it makes them. He is letting his enemy keep the strongest weapons and is taking only the unimportant things away: a bit of freedom, a few possessions, some outward dignity, a bit of health, and well, a bit of life.

The atmosphere in the children's barrack is busy and industrious; a sukkah is being built. A sukkah is being built farther up in the camp, too, by children who live in the big barracks with their fathers and mothers. But the sukkah of the children's barrack must be the prettiest.

Only one wall is needed; the other three are formed by the bay in the barrack's outside wall. The roof consists of bunches of straw, which could easily be saved from the supply of straw that is intended for the mattresses for the whole camp. Through the straw you see the sky, and it has to be that way, too, for otherwise it is not a sukkah; otherwise this hut is not a reminder of how the forefathers of these children left slavery in Egypt behind them and gave themselves over to the protection of God Who would lead them through the barrenness in the desert.

The sukkah is even more open, even more unprotected than the barracks and yet meal-times in this narrow sukkah are a feast.

The preparation, the work accomplished by

big hands and little ones, is even more beautiful than the celebration itself. The children's barrack is glittering in gold and silver. Strips, snips, and sheets have found their way to the children's barrack from the paper foil industry in the camp, an industry that creates a quiet, sedentary type of slave labor for the elderly who cannot do any heavy work. The sukkah must be beautiful, decorated in their own taste, with their own touch. Didn't their forefathers live in their portable homes for forty years, and didn't the tents at that time have the personal household goods of those who dwelled in them? But their homes remained portable; the forefathers went from the one camp to the other. Perhaps the train that rides into the camp on Monday is an even more obvious reminder of the wandering through the desert than this decorated sukkah is. But you cannot see the sky through the roof of the cattle train. . .

Winter has come, and the holiday of Hanukah is near. The menorah in the mess hall is made ready with lights to celebrate the miracle of the deliverance from an oppression like this one. It now seems that the commandant is beginning to understand how weak lights can radiate power. You defend yourself against intangible power with a ban; against tangible power you defend yourself with barbed wire and bullets and whatever makes life flow out of mortal bodies. A ban can be transgressed when the intangible power makes the fear for the preservation of this bit of mortal life vanish. Does the commandant know how much more difficult it is to fight against intangible power than against the tangible?

On the first night of Hanukkah the ban comes: no celebrating of any holiday, in any form, either Jewish or Christian. This menorah is already burning when it is evident that the ban is not a rumor but an official order that has been spread around the camp. This first evening has already been a festival of lights—that cannot be undone. But tomorrow evening, when the menorah is supposed to hold two candles—and this whole week, when the number of lights is increased until there are eight in a row . . .

The little children cannot think about anything beyond today. The bigger children go to bed with sulking thoughts about the celebration that was taken away from them.

And then it happens—a small technical thing that can happen anywhere and on any day. On

the second day there is a power failure in the whole camp and far beyond it—even in the villa of the commandant.

Everything is in the dark. But that cannot be, where adults and children walk in confusion through the big barracks by the hundreds, where masses of children are stacked up in the high beds of the dormitories. A light must be kept on.

Then two warm, wavering lights shine, more clearly than when they were overpowered by the electric light. The little lights shine through the darkness of the full room and lay a festive gleam on sound young faces. For it is the second evening of Hanukkah.

How difficult it is to defend yourself against intangible power, which radiates from a bit of candlelight . . .



Fig. 1: Chanukah in the Westerbork Transit Camp, Holland, 1943. Courtesy Yad Vashem Photo Archives.

"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 graphic and melodramatic confrontation, although fictitious, illustrates a truth: Sometimes the only resistance possible was choosing one's response to the inevitable.

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 states-

men 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 two thousand 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 bare foot 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 sack-cloth 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. . . .

Eitan Novick's analysis of Chaver Paver's "The Boxing Match" (pp. 32–35) frames a discussion of the complex issues raised by the subject of spiritual resistance itself. Pair with Emily Amie Witty's suggestions for teaching this story (pp. 39–40) and then ask your students to read the essay on Hannah Senesh (pp. 120–126) and reflect on her poem "Ashrei Hagafur" ("Happy Is the Match"). Do the sentiments of Senesh reflect the beliefs of the protagonist Moishe in Paver's story? Does her poem support Paver's assertion that "even with the setting sun, he [Moishe] was once again in the light"?

Eitan Novick

Unwilling Blows: Resisting Controlled Action in "The Boxing Match"

Chaver Paver was born Gershon Einbinder in 1901 in Bershad, Bessarabia, a small city in Ukraine. He immigrated to the United States in 1924, living first in New York and then in Los Angeles, where he died in 1964. While he is best known for his works of fiction for adults, he began as a writer of Yiddish children's stories. Much of that work was never published, but it survives in hints within his work and in his chosen pen name, which was taken from the first words of a Yiddish children's song. In Henry Goodman's (1974) introduction to his translation of Paver's collection of stories, *Clinton Street*, he describes the "sing-song rhythm" and "soft whimsical laughter of his work"; traces of playfulness are scattered throughout. All this points to Paver's desire, as Goodman describes it, to "bring them [his people] solace in bleak moments" (p. x). "The Boxing Match" (pp. 32–35), despite its brutal theme and setting in an unnamed death camp, reflects these characteristics.

The image conjured up by some Holocaust narratives is one of enforced inaction, imprisonment, and passive death. The description of Jews going "like sheep to the slaughter" is a portrayal of individuals swept along in the maelstrom, unable or unwilling to act. In the death camp headed by Paver's Commandant in "The Boxing Match," however, the Nazis do not restrain the Jews from action; rather, they encourage it. It is through the controlled actions of the Jews, not through their passivity, that the Commandant seeks to bring them to submission and highlight his own superior traits.

The story opens with a flurry of activity on the part of the Nazis. The Commandant is depicted as a man of action, not one who relies on his inferiors. He wore his "parade uniform, with the many medals proudly displayed on his

chest" (p. 32), alluding to his successful exploits outside the bounds of the story. All around him, his guards "flanked," "swarmed," and swung bludgeons. The slightest "motion of his white-gloved hand" meant life or death, showing the extreme power and impact of even his most minor movements. A former boxer, he was "bored by the monotonous daily routine" and arranged for evenings of music performances and afternoons of boxing matches, events that utilized the Jewish prisoners for his own entertainment and sport. The Jews participated as performers and spectators, active in both roles at these events, but neither the motivation nor the decision to do so was theirs. The "guards saw to it they should laugh and put feeling into their laughter"; "dry, hollow laughter" was forced out of them. They "had to play"; they "swung unwilling blows"; they responded, acted, performed, and boxed according to the will of the Nazis. These Jews have muscles; however, they are described not while in use but during inspection, as the Commandant felt them to choose "the strongest of the strong" to fight. Paver's Jews have strength, but it is there "to be taken," utilized not by themselves for their own purposes but by the Nazis, for theirs. The terminology the narrator uses to address the Jews, calling them slaves rather than prisoners, suggests their forced, restricted, and highly controlled activity.

Boxing itself is a model of controlled action, literally enclosed in a ring. Within that space, a level of violence that may be illegal or shunned outside is permitted. Rules must be followed; if they are broken, a referee will separate the fighters, stopping the aggression until it can once again be controlled. It seems appropriate, therefore, that the Commandant of Paver's story, a boxer by trade, would choose this medium to control the actions of his prisoners. The

narrator creates an association between the Commandant's sanctioned violence in the ring and that which he carried out as a "good Nazi party comrade . . . when they had to beat up communists and Marxists at street demonstrations" (p. 32), activities controlled and permitted within a certain framework. Just as brutality is encouraged and celebrated in the ring, so, too, it is in the Nazi party, as long as it is in accordance with certain rules and inflicted upon specific people.

There is an imposed fairness to boxing. Fighters are matched by weight; rules ensure the sport produces "a clean fight," itself an expression connoting controlled violence. The boxing matches of this story, however, are by no means fair. It is not the mere ferocity of the preliminary matches, which pit Jew against Jew or Jew against guard, that earn them the title "grotesque" from the narrator, because boxing is inherently fierce. They are categorized as such because they are designed specifically to create an uneven playing field. The fighters are not matched; short Jews are pitted against the "tallest of the camp guards," naked old Jews against young Jews, to be mocked and disgraced. The participants are not boxers; rather they are "used as material" for the matches. The Jews brought into the camp are described as "fresh transports," raw material utilized by the Nazis to produce something, whether for entertainment or educational purposes. The matches are grotesque in their bizarre deviation from the sport after which they are modeled. In the Commandant's version, an assailant meets a victim. Perhaps for this reason the narrator places the term "boxing matches" in quotation marks, as if to say this is the Commandant's terminology, not reflective of what is universally identified as boxing.

As the oppression of the Jews here takes the form of enforced action, initial attempts by the Jews to resist take the form of inaction and passivity. These attempts, however, are unsuccessful. The narrator depicts sarcastically how some Jews "tried to cheat" the Commandant by "collapsing after the first few blows and pretending they were knocked out" (p. 32), but the Commandant required that the camp doctor be present to "see that there should be no cheating" so the forced brutality can continue. Until Moishe arrived, this was the encouraged approach; this was how they could "cling to life." Yet the boxers' intentional collapse was a clear demonstration of the success of the Commandant who, while he wished for them to fight, also wanted to crush their will. Only by complying with his demand to fight back, then, can the Jews show their unbroken will and effectively resist. By acting—for themselves and not the Commandant—the Jews can resist his tyrannical attempts to control their actions. Such resistance, although manifested physically, is, at its core, an act of spiritual defiance.

Moishe is a new arrival, described as a "prized victim"

a characterization mocking the common expression of a skilled boxer being a "prize fighter," and chosen by the Commandant to box against him specifically because of the strength and unbroken will of the young Jew. The Commandant is not looking for a fighter but for a "worthwhile target for his skill." While he searches for the "strongest of the strong" to fight, it is only to exhibit his own strength and ingenuity. The "best brains among German scientists and statesmen" had devised a process to break down Jews, but the Commandant was confident that "what they couldn't accomplish with them in two years, he . . . could accomplish in a few short days" (p. 33). He needed those "few who looked hardly touched by the process," those who were still strong and alert, to show that he was the only one whose efforts mattered.

Even in such an unbalanced match, there is action required of boxers to guarantee some level of entertainment. The Commandant understands that and requires footwork, feints, and punches on the part of his "victims," ordering them "to resist, to dodge his blows and even to hit him back," controlling their movements until the fight is over.

The actions of the Jews chosen to box in the preliminaries or against the Commandant are controlled in another way. Captured on film by Nazi cameramen, the matches forever exist, perpetually portraying the fighters as a "sub-human race . . . in sports" (p. 32). The films are perhaps the strongest example of controlled action; they can be edited and framed to depict the Jews however it pleases the "propaganda ministry in Berlin." Even Moishe's final resistance is somewhat limited: The cameramen "stopped shooting . . . for the shots wouldn't have been any credit to the Third Reich." In the realm of these films, which served as the eyes into the camps for moviegoers "all over Germany," Moishe's actions, however brave and resilient, never occurred.

As the Commandant controls the actions of his slaves, so Paver restricts the core action of his story to one afternoon. This day of "boxing matches" is the one space where real-time action, as opposed to flashbacks and background information, is provided by Paver; it is the only opportunity wherein Moishe can act. Before and after this scheduled fight, it would be unthinkable that Moishe would have the chance to strike the Commandant. Within that day, though, as the chosen "prized victim," his actions, though controlled, are encouraged from the moment Moishe and the Commandant "leaped" into the boxing ring.

When the Commandant hits Moishe "with the impact of a thunderbolt," Moishe's "limbs fainted," but "his mind remained conscious" (p. 34). Even as the Commandant continues to attempt to control and restrain Moishe's actions, he is unable to affect his determination or resilience. Moishe's rebellion is not in his actions but in wresting control of that action for himself. He boxes as he was com-

manded, but he does not do so because of that order; rather, he answers only to his unbroken will. Moishe was an ideal leader of this subtle form of resistance, exhibiting not only the physical in his background in heavy labor and sports but also the mental and spiritual in his upbringing in the house of a rabbi and his training, for a time, for that career. The resistance, ironically, comes not through outright defiance but through Moishe's performance of the very boxing he was forced to do. The difference is one of will, more a resistance of the spirit than the body.

While those Jews who resisted through inaction, choosing not to fight back against the Commandant, were a mere "trouble" to him, Moishe's aggression and insolence, taking form initially in his "blazing" eyes, has a powerful effect on the Commandant, who felt "burned" by the "Jew's eyes . . . as if his flesh had been seared by hot coals," and "threw himself upon Moishe, no longer the careful calculating boxer" (p. 34). As Moishe takes control of his actions, the Commandant loses control of his own.

The hushed crowd of spectators had initially begged mutely for inaction from Moishe, hoping to keep him alive and to stay their own likely massacre if he were to win the match, but upon witnessing his defense and defiance, "the hearts of the 2,000 slaves rose." Their sudden support was palpable, as Moishe "felt in his body the strength . . . of all his tormented people." With their spirits newly revived, his resistance is theirs; it reinvigorates the crushed spirit of the enslaved Jews.

Moishe's skill and strength of will in the ring frees him from the Commandant's restricting hands as well as from the oppressive framing of the camera. Despite the cameramen's control over his actions, Moishe's surprising vigor and his disdain of death, which forced the cameras to be turned off, represents a refusal on his part to be used by the Nazis. This is the most powerful resistance that can be enacted by "material," the refusal to be made into a usable product.

The repeated mention of the setting sun serves as a temporal reminder that as the day comes to an end and darkness falls on the camp, so Moishe's final chance for resistance will pass. Understanding this finality and what "success" in the ring will mean for him, Moishe wonders if this would be "the last time in his life he'd see how the sun was setting." As that "last bit of light was fading" on his opportunity for victory, Moishe delivers his "last blow of reckoning." While the Commandant "would never know what had hit him," for Moishe and all the Jews of the camp, "it became very dark—and also very light." The night, literally and metaphorically, had come, but Moishe's actions had broken free from the containment of that one day of action allotted him in Paver's narration; even with the setting sun, he was once again in the light. His final act

of resistance occurs when he knows he has no chance of surviving; he can choose only how he will die. His defiance is a direct affront to the Commandant's desire to crush the resolve of the Jews. Too late to protect the Commandant, the guards fire at Moishe.

Despite Moishe's violent end, and the brutal wrath the Jewish spectators will undoubtedly incur, the Commandant fails to control Moishe's actions and defeat him in the boxing ring; he fails to break the spirit and resolve of the Jews of his camp, who have understood that there is little difference between the physical death in the gas chamber and the slow, spiritual death of their rigidly controlled existence in the barracks, for they see "the walls of the barracks and the gas chambers" literally in the same light, the red glow of the setting sun. With that realization, they "rose above death" with Moishe, not because they were spectators to his rebellion but because they themselves took part in it. They did not overcome literal death but rather their own inaction, their surrender, and the death of their will. When they stopped caring "about the terrible tortures they would undergo," they could no longer be controlled.

Asked in an interview to describe his motivations for writing, Paver pointed to his wish to tell stories that "remove us from the sadness and the drabness of life. But if the subject matter forces me to describe sadness and drabness, I try to infuse . . . the joy of living." Like Moishe, Paver does not allow his storytelling to be controlled by the grimness of reality. Even in depicting the horrors of the Holocaust, he remains true to his style. Just as Moishe's resistance allows some light to enter through the darkness, Paver's writing is his own resistance, his answer to the Nazis' attempt to shroud us forever in darkness. Just as Moishe realized it was not enough to simply "cling to life," so, too, Paver understands there is more to life than mere survival. His writing, like Moishe's boxing, was designed to communicate that message to his people.

REFERENCE

Goodman, H. (1974). Introduction. *Clinton street, and other stories*. (C. Paver, Trans.). New York: YKUF.

Emily Amie Witty suggests specific directions for class discussion of “The Boxing Match” (pp. 32–35), discovering in that brief narrative both contemporary and biblical allusions to the complex subject of Jewish resistance. Read the story along with Eitan Novick’s literary analysis (pp. 36–38) and Clara Asscher-Pinkof’s stories (pp. 26–31) for a unit rich in essential questions and differentiated learning opportunities.

Emily Amie Witty

With a Strong Hand and an Outstretched Arm: “The Boxing Match”

Like the true story of Jewish Greek boxer Salamo Arouch,¹ “The Boxing Match” (pp. 32–33), by the Yiddish writer Chaver Paver, tells the haunting and brutal tale of Jewish prisoners who, upon their arrival at a death camp, are selected by the Nazi Commandant, Friedrich Zibler, to box each other, the guards, and, on special occasions, the Commandant himself, in a distorted and sadistic parody of a traditional boxing match. As the narrator relates, Commandant Zibler was a boxer himself in his hometown of Hamburg. In an effort to stay entertained as he runs the camp and its 2,000 Jewish prisoner-workers, he arranges these matches and has them filmed for use by the Ministry of Propaganda, which distributes them to movie theaters around the country to “show how a subhuman race behaved in sports” (p. 32).

While the story centers around the match between one particular Jew, Moishe, “a very tall, broad-shouldered young fellow with a fiery black beard and thick curly forelocks” (p. 32) and the Nazi Commandant Zibler, “the mighty blond beast” (p. 34), the presence of other characters is felt quite strongly in the story—most notably, the 2,000 Jewish prisoners, whom Zibler calls slaves and who are forced to act as the audience for these grim contests.

Violent and melodramatic, in stark contrast to the delicate and reserved strokes of the four additional resistance narratives included in this issue (pp. 26–31), Paver’s piece will resonate with those students who seek action, who yearn to see a Jew literally fight back with his bare hands; there are moments when readers will want to stand up and cheer for him and the slaves he represents. Yet, “The Boxing Match” speaks, ironically and essentially, to the power of spiritual resistance, the physical action secondary to the triumph of the spirit displayed by Moishe as he alone deter-

mines how he will meet his inevitable death, how he will respond to the man who will be his murderer.

RESISTANCE: DISCUSSING THE COMPLEXITIES

The story, multi-layered and engaging, and will help students think critically about the meaning and the many variations of Jewish resistance. What were the opportunities for physical resistance in this context? Was it practical or possible for Jews to fight back in the ring? If they did or did not, what were the consequences? Was “cheating death” by pretending to be knocked out early in the match a form of resistance? Is doing what the Nazis demand a form of resistance if that action prolonged the Jews’ lives, or is resistance defying the Nazis, even if those who defied were murdered? As spectators, what were the options and opportunities for, and consequences of, any form of resistance? Did Moishe have a choice once he was in the ring? Did Moishe “win” the fight? If so, what was the prize? If not, did the Commandant win? In what way? What does “winning” mean in the context of resistance in the camps? Are the words “winning” and “resisting” synonymous?

Historian Roger Gottlieb argues, “An act is more fully an act of resistance the more fully the agent understands it as such” (Marrus, 1995, p. 91). Thus, it is intentionality that determines whether the act may be classified as resistance. What are your views on this statement? Can the term “resistance” be defined subjectively, dependent on interpretation? Do you define resistance as certain specific acts but not others? If so, what grounds your definition?

BIBLICAL THEMES

On yet another level, embedded within this story lie hints of biblical themes and teachings that deepen discussions

of the meanings and possibilities of Jewish resistance. It is no accident, for example, that the author has chosen 2,000 as the total number of Jews forced to laugh and applaud during these “sporting events”; that is the number of years that Jews had spent without sovereignty in a homeland of their own. In fact, the closing lines of the Israeli national anthem, “*HaTikvah*” (“The Hope”), are “With eyes turned toward the East, looking toward Zion, then our hope—the two-thousand-year-old hope [italics mine]—will not be lost: To be a free people in our land, the land of Zion and Jerusalem” (see www.stateofisrael.com/anthem/).

Furthermore, the Jew Moishe is named, not coincidentally, after Moses, God’s servant, who led the Jews out of Egyptian bondage and freed them from the cruel oppression of Pharaoh.² Moishe, who challenges his own Pharaoh in the form of Commandant Zibler, is described as “the son of a rabbi [who] had gone contrary to his father’s wishes to study for a rabbinical career” to follow “the dream of Palestine—to settle the country with strong, hardy men. To make himself fit for the hard life of a pioneer” (p. 33). Ironically, Moishe’s years of building his strength allow him to succeed, not in the Land of Israel, but in the camp boxing ring, where he leaves the Commandant “bleeding from both ears, his mouth, and his nose” (p. 35), something that no other Jewish prisoner had been able to do. In one sense, Moishe is a pioneer; he is the first Jewish prisoner to fight back and ultimately kill the camp Commandant.

In Exodus 2:11-12, Moses smites an Egyptian who had been beating one of his Jewish brethren, taking this action despite great risk to himself. Moses saw the affliction and suffering of his fellow Jews and stood up against the tyranny; he fought back. Moishe follows in the footsteps of his biblical namesake.

The Book of Samuel I, chapter 17, highlights the battle between David and Goliath. Readers surely will see similarities between Moishe and David—whose son, Solomon, was, and whose descendants will be, king of Israel—and between the Nazi giant Zibler and the Philistine Goliath. In the biblical story, David defeats Goliath; in Paver’s telling, Moishe defeats Zibler, achieving both physical and emotional victories. Moishe brings a sense of hope to the Jews in the camp, as “4,000 eyes of the slaves” (p. 34) watch him fight back, literally, against the Nazi brutality and persecution. As they observed Moishe in the ring, they “cared no longer about the terrible tortures they would undergo at the hands of the maddened guards” (p. 35). Moishe is murdered by the camp guards, but not before he has defied the Nazis: He will not be controlled by those who would control him.

In the values manifested in his actions, Moishe represents both the leader Moses and the monarch David. “The Boxing Match” tells of a particular Jew named Moishe at a

unique moment in Jewish history, even as it recapitulates the universal story of the Jewish people, foretelling the ultimate redemption from tyranny.

NOTES

1. Students will be interested in researching the life of the boxer Salamo Arouch and his experiences in Auschwitz, graphically detailed in the R-rated film *Triumph of the Spirit* (1989).
2. Encourage students to go to the source for biblical quote in the title of the essay (Deuteronomy 26:8) and discuss its relevance to the themes of the story.

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"My primary aim in this paper," explains Chani Levene-Nachshon, "is to inspire educators to explore with their students the extraordinary contribution to morale and courage made during the Holocaust by members of an oft-considered 'ordinary' profession. Although teachers and other members of the intelligentsia were among the first to be deported, there were still those who continued their work, despite the desperate conditions, to provide—for the children, for parents, and for themselves—a semblance of normalcy in a world gone crazy. The story of these Jewish educators is not of lambs going passively to the slaughter but of a daily defiant struggle to thwart their enemy's attempts to deprive them of their *tzelem enosh* (humanity) and to rise to the call of Hillel the Elder, one of Judaism's greatest leaders, who lived in the time of King Herod: 'In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man' (Ethics of the Fathers 2:6)."

Chani Levene-Nachshon

Lighting the Way for Others: Educators in the Warsaw and Vilna Ghettos

The image of Janusz Korczak together with his orphaned charges—the ultimate symbol of an educator's defiant devotion in the face of the Nazi onslaught—has been immortalized in countless pictures and films and in works of art such as the impressive cenotaph in Warsaw's Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery and the sculpture by Boris Saksier, which stands in Janusz Korczak Square at Yad Vashem [Fig. 1]. So powerful and inspirational is the legacy of this man that, year after year, the anniversary of his August 1942 deportation to Treblinka, along with Stefa Wilczynska and the children of their Warsaw Ghetto orphanage, is commemorated. Yet, although many are familiar with the image of Korczak marching with his orphans on their last way, their knowledge of his tireless and defiant efforts and self-sacrifice on behalf of the children remains scant.

Mira Bernstein and her efforts are even less known. Most people are acquainted with her through Avraham Sutzkever's Yiddish poem "*Di Lerern Mira*" ("The Teacher Mira"), written in the Vilna Ghetto on May 10, 1943, but know few details of her life and have no idea what she looked like. Mira entered the consciousness of Hebrew speakers through the translations of Binyamin Tene and Shimshon Meltzer; now, English speakers are being afforded a similar opportunity through the relatively recent translations of Barbara and Benjamin Harshav and Barnett Zumoff.

These two extraordinary persons, Korczak and Bernstein¹, provide us with a glimpse of the daily heroic acts performed by them and many other exceptional teachers in their dedication to continue the education of the children in the ghettos, even when such activity was subject



FIG 1: Janusz Korczak and his orphaned charges. Courtesy Yad Vashem photo Archives, Jerusalem.

to severe punishment. The courage, love, and devotion of these educators, their defiant refusal to surrender the desire to live, and their stalwart resistance to the Nazis' attempt to dehumanize their victims deserve wider recognition.

JANUSZ KORCZAK, "FATHER OF ORPHANS"

Janusz Korczak, physician, author, educator, radio personality, army officer, and more, was born to a prosperous Jewish family in Warsaw in 1878. Named Hersh Goldszmit after his grandfather, a medical doctor and follower of the *Haskala* (Enlightenment) Movement, he took the name Henryk,

more suitable to his surroundings, his wholly Polish education, and his assimilated upbringing. Henryk Goldszmit “became” Janusz Korczak in 1898, when his four-act play *Ktoredy?* (*Which Way?*) won honorable mention in a literary competition. He submitted his entry under the pen name of Janasz Korczak, hero of a novel by fellow countryman Joseph Ignatius Kraszewski (1812–1887). The name was misspelled and misprinted as Janusz, and from that moment on, he was known by no other name.

Always sensitive to the plight of others, Korczak became a pediatric physician and devoted his life to children, although he remained unmarried with no biological children of his own. In a prose poem entitled “The Last Walk of Janusz Korczak,” Aaron Zeitlin (in Korczak, 1978) describes a conversation, perhaps imaginary, between Korczak and Stefania Wilczynska, who was to become his indispensable assistant.

I do want to have children, but not just two, or three. I want hundreds of them! Hundreds! . . . I will finish my studies in pediatrics. I will work at children’s hospitals, and then I will build up a model institution. I will be a father of orphans. (p. 14)

Korczak was instrumental in establishing Dom Sierot, a four-story new and spacious Jewish orphanage in Warsaw at 92 Krochmalna Street, which, under his directorship, opened its doors to its first 88 children in 1912. The orphanage remained there [Fig. 2] until November 30, 1940, when it was transferred to 33 Chlodna Street, and on October 26, 1941, to its final location at 16 Sienna/9 Sliska Street, both within the confines of the Warsaw Ghetto. In June 1940, more than nine months after the occupation of Warsaw by the Germans, but five months before the Jews were sealed in the ghetto, Korczak somehow managed to take the children of his orphanage and other institutions from a ravaged Warsaw to the village of Rozyczka where, for one last summer, they could “run around in the woods, to breathe fresh country air, and pick flowers” (Korczak, 1978, p. 32).

During the Nazi occupation, Korczak put on his old Polish military uniform, defiantly refusing to wear the “Jewish Star” on his clothing, and roamed the streets in search of food and money for his orphans. He would go to the ghetto post office and take parcels (even those consisting of half-spoiled food) stamped undeliverable, either because the addresses were unreadable or the addressees were untraceable or no longer alive. When the orphanage was transferred to Chlodna Street in November 1940, Korczak oversaw the transfer himself. The Gestapo confiscated the truck that was carrying potatoes, essential to the children’s

survival. Vehemently contesting this confiscation, Korczak was taken to Gestapo headquarters. Although the order was rescinded and the potatoes reached their destination, Korczak was transferred to the infamous Pawiak prison and incarcerated there until the end of winter 1941.

It was the love and duty he felt to protect his charges that gave him the strength to carry on after his release, despite his worsening health. On the rare occasions when the children were granted permission to leave the orphanage together, Korczak led the group, followed by a child carrying the Dom Sierot flag he had personally designed, with the blossom of a chestnut tree on one side and the Star of David on the other. In an online English adaptation of Monika Pelz’s 1985 Polish biography of Korczak, author Jane Pejsa (1997) writes, So curious was the spectacle

that the German authorities often stood aside even though no child wore the required “Jewish star.” The non-Jewish Poles as well took note of the steadfastness of the eccentric Doctor who lived only for his children. To ensure the cultural enrichment of the children, Korczak arranged concerts and other activities at the orphanage [Fig. 3]. He found actors, singers, and musicians on the streets of the ghetto and brought them to the orphanage to perform for the children and invited guests. Readings of the works of Sholem Aleichem and Mordechai Gebirtig, concerts featuring both light and classical music, a marionette theater, meetings with various professionals and

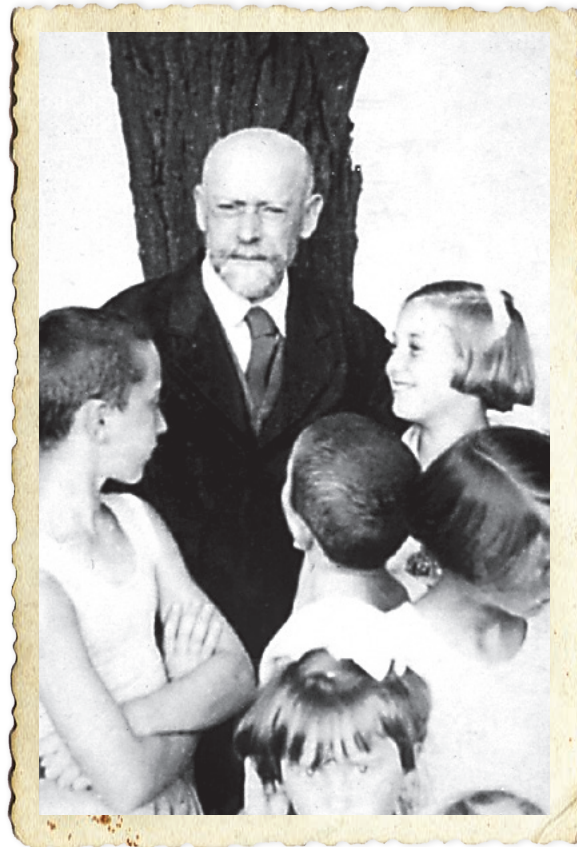


FIG 2: Janusz Korczak and his charges at Dom Sierot Orphans’ Home, 1935. Courtesy Yad Vashem photo Archives, Jerusalem.

tradesmen, study circles, and lectures by distinguished persons on philosophy, Jewish history, education, literature, and other subjects enhanced the bleak lives of the children. Testimony in the Korczak file at Israel's Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz describes a spring 1941 concert given by a well-known singer, pianist, and violinist.

The children were dressed in their holiday clothes . . . full of expectation and excitement . . . [listening] with unusual intentness . . . The general excitement and the hundred pairs of eyes turned in our direction were an unforgettable experience. It is difficult to explain just what effect such a concert could have in those days on both the artists and the children. (Korczak, 1978, p. 55)

The picture of such a normal scene in the midst of the tragic reality of the ghetto is inconceivable to us, but it is a measure of the Jews' determination to remain in control of their own lives and to live in the best way possible under the circumstances.

In September 1941, Korczak held High Holiday services at the orphanage. "The hall was cleared of all the beds and the floor was covered with carpets. Benches were brought in and the Holy Ark containing two Torah scrolls were put in place" (p. 62). Korczak's aim was primarily pragmatic: to raise money for the orphanage by selling tickets for the services. However, he also recognized the need to fill the spiritual void that existed among many in the ghetto and in the orphanage itself. Although he himself was not a religious man and forced no religious orientation upon his children, "Korczak was seen standing at some distance from the East wall, deeply immersed in prayer, holding a festival prayer book with a Polish translation" (p. 62).

On Lag B'Omer (a Jewish holiday often linked to the Bar Kochba revolt against the Romans [132-135 CE] and celebrated as a symbol for the fighting Jewish spirit), May 5, 1942, a Jewish Children's Day "featuring stage performances, singing, instrumental music and dancing" was organized by CENTOS (Center of Organizations for Orphans' Aid) in the largest hall in the ghetto, and children of most

of the orphanages and schools participated. "This spectacular sight deeply stirred the community, giving them stamina and increasing their hopes" (pp. 84-85).

On July 17, 1942, a few days before the final deportations were announced, the children of the orphanage performed *The Post Office* by Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore (n.d.). Korczak knew for certain what the children did not yet know: this was to be their last performance. Therefore, he chose this particular play and a lead character with whom the children could identify to prepare them for what was to come.

The main character, a little bedridden orphan called Amal, sits by the window of his room by the roadside and calls out to passersby. He "wishes to fly to that land of which no one knows anything" and the watchman making his rounds promises him, "One day the doctor himself may take you there by the hand" and, if he doesn't, "One

greater than he comes and lets us free." Towards the end of the play, the boy tells his uncle (his legal guardian) and the doctor, "I've been feeling a sort of darkness coming over my eyes since the morning. Everything seems like a dream. . . . All pain seems to have left me" (Tagore). Until the very end, Korczak tried to protect his children and spare them pain by maintaining a semblance of normalcy and instilling within them faith, optimism, and a belief in a better world beyond the one they knew.



FIG 3: Janusz Korczak with the orphanage orchestra. Courtesy of Yad Vashem, photo archives, Jerusalem.

Korczak received offers that might have saved him but rejected them all, just as he had dismissed his thoughts of settling in Palestine before the war: He would not leave his children. On August 5-6, 1942, Korczak, his assistants, and 192 children marched to the *Umschlagplatz* and on to the deportation trains that would take them to Treblinka. Nahum Remba, chairman of the union of officials employed by the *Judenrat*, described the unforgettable scene he witnessed:

Heading the procession was Korczak. No, I shall never forget this scene as long as I live. Indeed, this was no march to the carriages, but rather a mute protest organized against this murderous regime . . . it was a procession the like of which no human eye has ever witnessed. The children were arranged in fours;

Korczak marched at the head with raised eyes, holding the hands of two children. The second group was led by Stefa Wilczynska, the third by Broniatowska. . . . Seeing Korczak, the ghetto policemen jumped to attention and saluted him. The Germans asked: "Who is this man?" (Korczak, pp. 97–98)

Hundreds of educators followed Korczak's example that day, refusing to abandon their 4,000 charges from various ghetto institutions, and together they marched to their tragic fate. About two and a half weeks later, in Miedzeszyn, a rural area about 7 miles east of Warsaw, the children and personnel of the Medem Sanitarium (1926–1942) for Polish-Jewish children, which received ongoing aid and assistance from the Warsaw Ghetto whenever possible, also marched side by side on their final journey. Their story, too long to be included here, is certainly worth reading as further testimony to the courage and humanity of teachers and pupils in an inhuman world.

THE SPIRIT OF VILNA

Mira Bernstein, legendary Vilna teacher, and the events described below were immortalized in the poem "*Di Lerern Mira*," one of a collection entitled *Written in Vilna Ghetto* (1941–1943), by Avraham Sutzkever (1948), renowned poet, author, and "preserver" of the Yiddish language.

Mira was born in 1908 to a family with strong socialist and pedagogical leanings. Her father, Meir, and her maternal grandfather, Aaron Shmuel Liebermann, often called the "first Jewish Socialist," were both at the forefront of the new socialist-labor culture movement and were instrumental in founding Jewish Socialist organizations, including a Yiddish Socialist school. Mira taught in the Vilna Real Gymnasium until it was shut down. On September 6–7, 1941, Mira Bernstein marched into the ghetto alongside her pupils, and that same evening she gathered her children together and read them a story by Sholem Aleichem.

Among them walks a woman, Teacher Mira / A child in her arms—a golden lyre. / She clasps another child by his frail hand, / The students walk around her—trusting band. (Sutzkever, 1991)

She found a *kloise* (prayer house) in the *SCHULHOF* (the complex of the Great Synagogue of Vilna which, with more than 20 synagogues, was a great center of Torah learning before the war), and there she opened her ghetto school. Shortly after, she was joined by Malka Haimson, who taught literature; and Yaakov Gerstein (Gershteyn), who taught music. The pupils liked the teachers and looked upon them as the parents they had lost: "With no sister, mother, now Teacher Mira is one and the other." At first there were 130 pupils,

whom she divided into groups. One group studied while the other cooked food or mended clothing. Every morning Mira would count the children, her "treasures," and every morning there were fewer children than the previous day. Every night children were torn away by murderous hands; yet the lessons continued.

They chase us over ruins, no bread, no light / Bread is a book, a pencil shines so bright. / She gathers all her children on the floor, / Teacher Mira goes on teaching as before.

Avraham Sutzkever (1948), himself a survivor of the Vilna Ghetto, recalled how, in October 1941, Mira invited him to a student production at her school.

The old synagogue was unrecognizable. The holy ark was bestrewn with greenery; the window sills were adorned with flower pots; the walls were covered with quotations from Yiddish writers. The children—now numbering only 40 of the original 130—were all dressed in holiday attire, complete with red boutonniere. (translation mine, p. 99)

Noises were heard outside during the program, which continued as if nothing had happened. However, when a shot was fired through the window, Mira went outside and saw the *hapunes* (Lithuanian snatchers) running through the streets rounding up people and shoving them into trucks. Mira returned to her pupils and told them to remain calm and quietly crawl under the *bima* (pulpit). She remained by the door the entire night, hoping that anyone who entered the building would think she was on her own. Fortunately for her and the children, the *hapunes* never entered the building; they had filled their quota elsewhere.

However, by the time the second, smaller ghetto² was liquidated, only seven pupils remained: "The enemy's sending our children to Heaven—/ morning reveals Mira's group is now seven" (Sutzkever, 1991). These seven were not abandoned; they accompanied Mira to the larger ghetto, where, according to Sutzkever, the child population now numbered 2,712. The teachers immediately took charge and registered all the children, providing them with clothing, food, books, and paper brought into the ghetto by those who worked outside. Teachers and children worked side by side to create a school amidst the ruins. In the winter of 1942, 1,500 children were learning in schools throughout the ghetto. In his Yiddish memoir of the Vilna Ghetto, Mark Dworzecki (1948) wrote that Vilna was known throughout Poland for its fine, devoted teachers "who looked upon teaching not as profession, but rather as a mission to which one is dedicated heart and soul" (pp. 226–227). During his

many years as a school physician in a number of district schools in Vilna, he was consistently impressed by the devotion of the teachers to their pupils; yet never did he witness such enthusiastic, self-sacrificing devotion to the establishment of a school and to its pupils as in the ghetto.

In their joint desire to set up a school, teachers and pupils became one family. Together they carried out grass, stones, and rubble . . . together they combed the ruins to find building materials for their school. From one ruin they carried a door, from another a board, from a third, a broken piece of window, in order to create the semblance of a house. Teachers and female pupils, side-by-side, scrubbed the cobbled floors . . . chopped wood to warm the cold houses where they sat and froze during the severe ghetto winter. (translation mine, pp. 226–227)

The children were given “free writing” exercises on themes related to ghetto reality. Dworzecki recalled the titles of some of the children’s essays: “How I Survived Ponar,” “The First Day in the Ghetto,” “My Parents Are Being Led to their Death,” “Hide in a *Maline*” (hiding place). The youngsters were also encouraged to let their imagination carry them to another world—one where there were no ghettos, no *actions* [mass killing sprees]—to strong Jews like the Hasmonians and the heroes of Masada.

Elsewhere in his memoirs, Dworzecki described Mira as “humble, sociable, caring, filled with a vibrant energy and unbounding love for the children,” one of the most well-known pedagogic figures in Vilna who was “instrumental in setting up the ghetto schools and creating a heartfelt bond between teachers and pupils in the ghetto. . . . She was loved and idealized by the children” (p. 206).

In his article on the Vilna Ghetto school system in *Bleter Vegen Vilne (Vilna Journal)*, published in Łódź in 1947, Jakub Mowszowicz, professor at the University of Łódź, wrote, “Even in the worst periods of ghetto life, when the entire Jewish Vilna population was confined to seven small streets, the spirit of Vilna did not succumb” (p. 19). The schools, the youth groups, even the cultural activities would prove to be a bulwark against despair. “Almost until the last day of the liquidation, the *folkshule* [public schools] and the gymnasium carried on. . . . Though the teachers were hungry and ragged, they were determined not to leave Jewish children on the streets” (p. 19). Mowszowicz recollects,

When mother, father, older brothers and sisters were sent to hard labor outside the ghetto, the children remaining in the ghetto found in the schools healthy, moral surroundings, as well as material sustenance in the form of a small piece of bread and a bowl of warm

soup . . . the children would laugh and play and jump. When there was a quiet hour in the ghetto (there was no such thing as a quiet day), the children would sing and dance, and forget, for a while, the harsh ghetto life and the cruel fate which awaited them. The teachers would kindle in them the belief that tomorrow would be better, the enemies would suffer defeat, and they would be free. (p. 20)

Mowszowicz described Mira as “soft spoken and refined” and noted that her charges listened raptly to her. Mira “did not dispel their childish optimism with the dark realities of ghetto life. But the Mira Bernstein of the teachers’ room was totally different. There, she and her fellow teachers would face the reality of the indescribable tragedy” (p. 20, translation mine).

Like Korczak, Mira was a model for other educators. In testimony given to Yad Vashem regarding the administration of an orphanage in the Vilna Ghetto, Zvia Wildstein (n.d.) recounted,

We were in the ghetto about a month when I met the children from the first ghetto whose parents were murdered in Ponar. . . . Dressed in tatters, they were hungry and miserable. They themselves had escaped Ponar and other mass graves. . . . We founded a girls’ orphanage in one of the synagogues and a boys’ orphanage elsewhere.

Wildstein recounts that she pleaded with friends to help her set up lessons while she attempted to make the synagogue space “a homey atmosphere for the children.” She continues,

We were able to organize some teachers with whom I had worked previously. . . . the children learned Hebrew. We held evenings with famous Yiddish writers like Peretz Markish and David Bergelson. . . . At first there were a hundred and some pupils; afterwards, there were more.

The influence of these teachers and their contribution to the morale of the children cannot be overestimated. As Dworzecki (1948) wrote of classes in the ghetto, which he often attended,

I recall one lecture in which the legendary teacher Moshe Olitzki regaled the pupils with stories of the Jewish struggle during the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. . . . They would not let him stop. “Teacher,” they urged him with burning eyes, “tell us more of the Jewish struggle! Tell us more.” (translation mine, p. 227)

However, in July 1943, the *Judenrate* ordered the closing of all ghetto schools; two months later, the ghetto was liquidated. Mira, like Korczak, chose to remain with her children and other fellow Jews and give them courage and strength. She rejected a partisan leader's offer of a hiding place and escape from the ghetto via the sewers for yet another reason; she feared her weak constitution would impede her comrades. Considerate of others until the end, Mira's choice was to be her last. On September 23, 1943, the remnants of the ghetto were marched to Rossa Square, where a selection took place. Many of the women, children, elderly, and infirm were taken to Ponar and shot; Mira was among those who were sent to Majdanek, where she perished.

"A SACRED TRUST"

In his preface to Korczak's (1980) *The Ghetto Years*, Yitzhak Perlis describes *The Three Journeys of Hershko*, a story written by Korczak in early 1939:

One of the characters, a demented Rabbi, tells Hershko that there was once a war and the enemy burnt down the Temple. All the parchment scrolls of the Torah were burnt to ashes. Only the letters remained which soared to Heaven. God had pronounced a verdict upon His people: They were to be burnt, uprooted, and totally annihilated. Those very letters, however, did not allow the fate of the entire Jewish people to be sealed. (p. 101)

As the years pass and fewer eyewitnesses remain, it is incumbent upon us to retrieve the *Yizkor* books and retell the testimonies, the stories, the accounts: "Those very letters" forged in fire and blood have been scattered over the four corners of the earth, and the task of keeping their memory alive as *meylitsei yosher* (interceders) on behalf of the Jewish people has been entrusted to us.

NOTES

1. In discussing these two personalities, I focus on their actions rather than their biographies, *Weltanschauung*, and/or educational philosophy, and I offer background material and testimony pertinent to schools and education in the ghettos where these two worked so students will understand their courage in context. In certain instances, I have chosen material written in Yiddish with the aim of making it accessible to the English-speaking audience.

2. On September 6–7, 1941, the Nazis evicted the Jews of Vilna from their homes and herded them into an area that was soon split into a larger ghetto (first) and a smaller ghetto (second) with a non-ghetto corridor between them. On September 9, 1941, ghetto police ordered those without work permits to move to the smaller ghetto. Only 600 out of 3,550 arrived; the rest were murdered in Ponar. By the end of October 1941, the Nazis had murdered all the inhabitants of this smaller second ghetto. They declared that

henceforth only 12,000 Jews would remain in the larger ghetto to serve the needs of the German military and economy. In reality, 20,000 remained together, the majority of whom were murdered in *Aktionen* carried out by the Germans on a regular basis until January 1942. Following a period of relative stability, the Germans resumed their deportations and murders in August 1943 until they finally liquidated the ghetto a few weeks later on September 23–24. Those who were not killed in Ponar were sent to camps in Estonia or German-occupied Poland.

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"Classroom discussions of Jewish heroism during the Holocaust usually focus on resistance groups involved in sabotage or on partisans conducting guerrilla warfare against the Nazi military," Nancy D. Kersell reminds us. "In recent American cinema, dramas such as *Defiance* (Zwick, 2008), loosely based on the Bielski brothers, or *Inglorious Basterds* (Tarantino, 2009) feature a renegade band of Jews exacting revenge in episodes reminiscent of American westerns. Although these interpretations of Jewish heroism are popular, teachers can provide students with an authentic literature of Jewish resistance, defense, and defiance that needs no embellishment: Jewish wartime writing in the ghettos."

Nancy D. Kersell

Resistance to the Last Breath: Jewish Wartime Writing Within the Ghetto

The songs, poems, diaries, memoirs, and *divrei Torah* (sermons) written during the Holocaust offer a compelling chorus of voices of those who resisted Nazi persecution with the only weapon they had—a profound desire to survive and bear witness. Sources such as *Scream the Truth at the World* (Marwell, 2001), featuring artifacts preserved by Emanuel Ringelblum in the hidden archive of the Warsaw Ghetto;¹ *The Diary of David Sierakowiak* (1996), about conditions in the Łódź Ghetto; diary excerpts from Alexandra Zapruder's (2002) *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust*; the anthology *Words to Outlive Us: Eyewitness Accounts from the Warsaw Ghetto*, edited by Michal Grynberg (2003); and poetry by Abraham Sutzkever (1988) and Yitzhak Katzenelson (1988) not only expose students to contemporaneous accounts about the harsh conditions of ghetto life but also clarify and illustrate how survival itself became a form of resistance.

THE UNDERGROUND ARCHIVE IN THE WARSAW GHETTO

For Warsaw historian Emanuel Ringelblum and other Jewish intellectuals in the *Oyneg Shabbes* group², confinement in the ghetto motivated them to collect documentation about their lives to share with future generations. They first envisioned their mission of preserving artifacts as a form of spiritual resistance, but as Nazi persecution intensified, they became more determined, according to Dr. Feliks Tych (2001) of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, to "document how the community fought to survive" when it became apparent that the ghetto would be liquidated. Before the ghetto was destroyed, the resisters buried three canisters containing these artifacts, and two were recovered after the war³.

Collecting the armbands, photographs, ration cards, artwork, Nazi bulletins, journal entries, and other documentation was an act of considerable courage and foresight. This group of secular and religious Jews wanted to "illustrate the immense diversity and vitality of Jewish life in the Ghetto" (p. vi), an ironic reminder that they still had the opportunity to practice their religious and cultural traditions in some fashion. For students in social studies and language arts classes accustomed to reading secondary sources about the ghettos, such tangible primary source material shows how the ghetto inhabitants lived and felt under Nazi occupation.

The specter of the Final Solution also emerges in such artifacts as the postcards sent from Auschwitz. Teachers can explain that while traveling in the cattle cars to the East, some Jews were encouraged to write to loved ones as evidence they were still alive. Many complied because they were eager to reassure their families and to provide even scant information about which direction they were headed. In most cases, the writers were dead long before their brief messages arrived, but this cruel tactic of evoking false hope in those left behind enabled the Nazis and their collaborators to locate families still in hiding or not yet taken in an *aktion*. Through these and other artifacts depicting every aspect of life—depleted rations, excerpts of student homework, a summons for deportation—the archive reconstructed in words and pictures the occupants' desperation and misery.

Scream the Truth at the World also contains brief biographical profiles of those involved in this clandestine ghetto resistance, a detailed timeline of events involving the Ghetto, and a diagram of the Ghetto's location in Warsaw. Students not only can observe and interpret the significance of each artifact in context as a symbol of resistance

but also appreciate that “there was no separation of years between the artifact, the event, and the telling” (p. vi).

The archive's primary source material clearly illustrates a collective awareness among Ghetto inhabitants that recording their life through testimony was an active form of resistance, a way of preserving not only what they experienced but also who they were. Kassow (2007) mentions that buried among the documents in one of the tin cans was 18-year-old Nahum Grzywacz's last testament, written during the Ghetto Uprising as he “suddenly heard that the Germans had blockaded his parents' building. ‘I am going to run to my parents and see if they are all right. I don't know what is going to happen to me. *Remember, my name is Nahum Grzywacz*’” (emphasis in the original) (p. 4). Kassow points out that part of the mission of the *Oyneg Shabbes* group was “to remind future generations that they were individuals. Understanding and memory had to focus not only on the collective catastrophe but also on the individual lives that the Germans were about to destroy” (p. 4).

In discussing the poems of Wladyslaw Szlengel, Kassow shows how literature collected in the archive offers further insight into the “moods, hopes, and fears of those left in the ghetto” (p. 317). When news of the armed resistance in the ghetto reached Szlengel, “he quickly wrote his best-known poem, ‘Counterattack.’ The poem passed from hand to hand in the ghetto, and survivors knew it by heart” (p. 322). In one stanza, Szlengel, after repeating the stereotypical imagery of the Jews depicted as “cattle” now fighting back, declares:

We ask of you God a bloody battle,
We implore you, a violent death—
May our eyes before they flicker
Not see our tracks stretch out
But give our palms true aim, Lord,
To bloody the coats of blue. (p. 322)

He later glorifies the Jewish fighter seeking revenge:

Block numbers flutter on breasts,
Our medal in the Jewish War
The shriek of six letters flashes with red,
Like a battering ram it beats REVOLT! (p. 323)

Szlengel died in the Ghetto Uprising in April 1943, still encouraging, according to one eyewitness, the Jews to fight back (p. 324). Students can easily grasp how his poem's battle imagery and vehement tone inspired the community. Szlengel's words would have helped ghetto residents envision themselves not as animals compliantly herded toward the killing center slaughterhouses but as courageous soldiers, without reluctance or fear, defying the Nazis.

THE NOTEBOOKS OF DAVID SIERAKOWIAK AND OTHER CHILDREN'S DIARIES

Through a different form of intimate disclosure, the diaries of ghetto residents depicted the daily physical and emotional hardships that often prevented political or armed resistance. Students, who frequently wonder why more people did not physically defy the Nazis, learn that just surviving on a daily basis absorbed every moment, as Sierakowiak (1996) explained: “We are in such a state of exhaustion that now I understand what it means not even to have enough strength to complain, let alone protest” (p. 164). As a teenager gradually comprehending the erosion of hope within the ghetto, Sierakowiak described the slow, insidious Nazi system to destroy the population in the Łódź Ghetto while exploiting it for slave labor. His 1939–1943 notebook entries meticulously recorded how food rations got smaller and deportations increased as starvation and disease relentlessly decimated the population. In an early entry, September 14, 1939, he declared, “To take away from a man his only consolation, his faith, to forbid his beloved, life-affirming religion, is the most horrendous crime. Jews won't let Hitler get away with it. Our revenge will be terrible” (p. 38). After years of suffering, however, he observed how the population no longer could pursue their desire for revenge as his entry for July 10, 1942, clearly reveals:

Most people are just cadavers, walking shadows of their former selves. The hope for the end of the war . . . so alive at the beginning of the summer, has now completely disappeared. The prospect of our liberation moves farther and farther off, becoming more and more unattainable. (p. 195)

His despair was soon compounded as first his mother, then his father, died; four months after his final entry in April 1943, Sierakowiak succumbed to tuberculosis, starvation, and exhaustion (p. 268).

As an informal history of the Łódź Ghetto, Sierakowiak's notebooks document the deteriorating conditions with exceptional vividness. Teachers can use his entries to show students how one person courageously chose to resist his oppressors by composing intimate descriptions of the people and places immersed in calamity, an exhausting task both physically and emotionally. If, as William Zinsser (2004) claims, “writers are the custodians of history, and memories have a way of dying with their owner,” then Sierakowiak defied his captors and the destruction of the Ghetto to leave for posterity his reconstruction of life and death in Łódź, and his words still haunt us decades after his death.

Despite such grim conditions, many adults encouraged children in the ghettos to continue studying, writing, and ob-

serving religious holidays. Alexandra Zapruder's (2000) *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust* contains excerpts clearly revealing how these activities helped the children participate in preserving their heritage as a form of resistance. In the Vilna Ghetto in Lithuania, Yitskhok Rudashevki joined a literary group guided by the distinguished poet Abraham Sutzkever, and as they discussed the significance of ghetto folklore and Yiddish poetry, Rudashevski (2006) explains in his entry of November 2, 1942, how this work empowered him:

In the ghetto dozens of sayings. Ghetto curses and ghetto blessings are created before our eyes; terms like "vasheven," "smuggling into the ghetto," even songs, jokes, and stories that already sound like legends. I feel that I shall participate zealously in this little circle, because the ghetto folklore, which is amazingly cultivated in blood, and which is scattered over the little streets, must be collected and cherished as a treasure for the future. (p. 212)

Ilya Gerber (in Zapruder, 2000) in the Kovno Ghetto felt a similar fascination and pride in describing the observance of Chanukah in his December 4, 1942, diary entry:

The people [sic] creates, bit by bit, writes down and expresses the pain of Jewish life in song. Here they tell, recite, and sing about the life of the Jewish ghetto dweller at work. Every song is a piece of life that embraces a very special period of our times. A ghetto song mostly starts with the pain and misfortune of the Jewish people and ends with the hope of better things, for a bright and happy future. (pp. 355–356)

These frequent references to the future, which partly explain the children's desire to preserve a record of what happened to them, also underscore a fatalism that required considerable courage to overcome. Alice Ehrmann (2002) in the Terezin Ghetto composed a letter to her mother full of reassurances that she remained a defiant witness:

I will try to bear witness as best I can. . . . That is what occupies my thoughts—not to have the world take notice of me—not to say: there was one who was beautiful and smart and open to the world, and she was seventeen and was snuffed out before her life could even start. No, say to the world and time what was accomplished here; to read to them a chapter out of the *Golah* dated 1944—above all, I want to call out to the young Jews all over the world and tell them: This was the form that our *galut* [exile] took—the form. The essence is within you, in your Jewishness; what do you want to hear? If you

want to hear it? Deliverance has not been granted to us. . . . I beseech you in the name of our children who have been denied us—arise and go to Zion. . . . Away, away from here—do not believe in a "finality"; create a beginning. (p. 406)

Students can appreciate such a resolute affirmation of Jewish agency and pride, especially from a teenager like themselves, as her brief manifesto embodies a rhetorical form of resistance many shared in the Ghetto. Alice Ehrmann was fortunate enough to survive the war; in fulfillment of her wishes expressed during her incarceration in the Ghetto, she and her husband emigrated from Prague to Israel in 1948.

EYEWITNESS AND PERSONAL ACCOUNTS

Eyewitness testimony defining the boundaries of passive and active resistance can be found in *Words to Outlive Us: Eyewitness Accounts from the Warsaw Ghetto* (2004), a remarkable collection of 29 personal accounts stored in the Jewish Historical House in Warsaw. In his introduction, Philip Boehm (2004) points out that

only a fraction of the authors actually delivered their manuscripts to the Jewish Historical Institute after the war. Some papers were found in the rubble of [the] ruined city, in attics or basements; many passed from hand to hand before finally reaching the archives. (p. 3)

Invaluable insights emerge from such narratives retrieved shortly after the war ended, and Boehm observes that "beyond their value as factual sources, the documents confront the reader with personal and emotional realities often lost in scholarly presentations" (p. 12). For instance, in testimony that Samuel Puterman (in Grynberg, 2004) delivered in person to the Jewish Historical Institute, he reveals that not all of the Jewish police (SP), of which he was a member, were the willing accomplices who were often accused of cooperating with the Nazi authorities:

The general opinion is that without the help of the SP the Germans wouldn't have been able to catch so many Jews. If the SP had refused to assist in the *Aktion*, the Germans wouldn't have managed. Nonsense. The SP in Minsk [led by] Mazowierski decided to be heroes. . . . Four hundred policemen with the administration in the lead refused to assist. That same day within the space of one hour the Germans shot all their families, nearly one thousand people. (p. 212)

This incident does not exonerate the Jewish police from complicity with the Nazis, but it does indicate that some

of these police were willing to resist even when the consequences were collective reprisals or death. As a slave laborer working in the Opiel plant, a factory used for the repair and assembly of armaments, Puterman (in Grynberg, 2004) observed other forms of sabotage:

At first we carried out small acts, such as destroying ball bearings, precision automotive parts, work tools. We also slowed our pace. . . . Some cars . . . were stored on the grounds; they were filled with Frostschutz—antifreeze—to protect them from bursting in the cold. During the night we drained the Frostschutz and poured in regular water, which caused the cylinder to crack. (p. 216)

Much later, Puterman was forced to confiscate property left behind after deportations for shipment to the Reich. Despite being under constant supervision, he documented how members of the work crew would toss furniture out into the courtyard to render it useless.

We broke down doors, smashed mirrors, gouged polished surfaces . . . spilled ink onto carpets. . . . Of course such sabotage was an open invitation for a bullet to the head, but we felt emboldened by our first success and pursued our actions even further. (p. 223)

Although Puterman doesn't explain in any detail what motivated him to take such risks, he does reveal that destroying equipment and possessions the Germans coveted was a satisfactory form of revenge:

During the four months I spent working under the SS, and later in the camps, I never met a single honest German. You could always figure out how to reach them by the way they looked at certain objects, the rapacity that would show in their faces. They were all thieves and burglars and would break into other people's houses and steal whatever was worth taking. (p. 225)

Puterman emigrated to France after the war, where he died in 1955. His narrative helps teachers illustrate how ghetto residents made difficult choices often based on complex motives. Some people decided to cooperate with authorities to prevent family members from immediate deportation or to acquire power or better rations, while Puterman, like others who had the opportunity, actually used his position in the Jewish police to subvert the Nazi appropriation of Jewish property.

For the several hundred primarily young people of the ZOB (Jewish Fighting Organization) and the Jewish Military

Alliance involved in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April 1943, active resistance gave them an often deadly outlet to avenge their fallen comrades. Their sacrifices did not prevent the liquidation of the ghetto, but the defiant messages they transmitted and their willingness to die fighting stirred the conscience of the western world. Samuel Zydlersztein (in Grynberg, 2004), who eventually was captured and sent to several labor camps before being liberated, provides an apocalyptic vision of this unprecedented revolt within the ghettos:

The bodies of my comrades were lying in their blood. Over the city I saw a sea of fire. The Jewish ghetto was burning, and with it the heroes of my nation. I felt as if my blood were flowing straight into that fire. O twentieth century! Behold your disgrace. (p. 269)

An equally personal, compelling source of testimony is provided in the letter of resistance fighter and factory worker Karl Rotgeber, written on April 19, 1943, to Adam Sapieha, the Catholic Archbishop of Poland. Rotgeber's fate is unknown, but his words will show students that some Polish Jews still hoped Protestant and Catholic leaders, who in Rotgeber's words (in Grynberg, 2004) "represent the church of the nation of which I consider myself an eternal son" (p. 291), would speak out on behalf of the Jews and were active in their attempts to make this happen. In his appeal, Rotgeber reminded the Archbishop of the Christian obligation to extend compassion to the persecuted:

Thus I turn to you, Reverend Father—I, one of the gray masses whose soul is suffering beyond measure. All around is forsaken, there is no voice of comfort, no salvation for us unfortunate brothers of those who have been murdered, tortured, gassed by the latest scientific methods, cremated. . . . And what about you, Reverend Father? Are we indeed surrounded by wilderness? Do you not hear their voices, their moans? Forgive me, Reverend Father, but did not the Savior charge you with raising a mighty voice to testify to these unheard-of, infamous crimes? . . . Do you not think it is time, Reverend Father, to speak out, to harbor and defend the survivors of our oppressed people, loyal citizens who have shed their blood for Poland now and in the past? . . . Know, Reverend Father, that mine is not an isolated voice of protest. Even now my brothers are engaged in a fierce battle. They are struggling in silence, with utter disregard for death. (p. 293)

With a raw power born of desperation and shattered faith, Rotgeber's words reverberate with fury. Editor Michael

Grynberg does not indicate that the archbishop or any member of his staff ever replied to Rotgeber's letter, and this situation highlights another form of Jewish resistance—appealing for justice through letters to religious leaders (and the frequently passive Christian response). History has taught us that such emotional and spiritual quests for solidarity remained unfulfilled, a lesson students will comprehend more concretely through Rotgeber's eloquent and devastating accusations.

THE POETRY OF PAIN

From the Vilna Ghetto, Abraham Sutzkever (1989) emerged as one of the most prolific writers and activists in a vibrant literary community. His poetry often focused on a specific image or symbol to convey the continual sense of loss Jews in the ghetto experienced, and his poetry inspired these inhabitants to resist the Nazi campaign of annihilation by expressing their feelings. In his poem "Charred Pearls," included in David Roskies's (1989) anthology *The Literature of Destruction*, the opening stanza evokes the literally searing discovery of finding jewelry (and its owner) consumed by fire: "My words tremble so violently they moan, / Like broken hands they plead, entreat. / Helplessly hone / their edges like fangs lusting for meat" (p. 500). The speaker discovers that "charred pearls like empty vowels / Gaze blankly at me from their pyre." As a symbol of civility and glamour, the pearls represent the destruction of personal property, wealth, and beauty.

In the final stanza, the speaker declares that "not even I . . . / Can recognize this woman in flame / Of all her pleasures, body, being, breath / Charred pearls are left, not even a name" (p. 500). This poem exposes students to undercurrents of grief triggered by the smallest of items; mass murder can be comprehended in the details. The final two verses, resonating with alliteration, summarize the woman's entire life apparently reduced not just to ashes but to anonymity—the ultimate obliteration of a victim. However, the poem also represents a literary form of resistance because it serves to memorialize her life and her absence; his words prevent her from disappearing entirely. One of the most renowned poets to survive the Holocaust, Sutzkever moved to Israel, where he died in 2010.

Students who have seen photographs of beggars on the streets will relate to the father's lament in Yitzhak Katzenelson's (1989) poem "Song of Hunger" (p. 472). He asks his wife to bring their children out of their house, "a living grave," to the "hard sidewalk" where they can die surrounded by other people. He reassures her that such deaths are common and nothing to be ashamed of, and he reminds her that the ghetto inhabitants, "a whole legion . . . are dying wholesale, wholesale." This bitter allusion to the stereotype of the Jews as unscrupulous and greedy merchants

is quickly followed by a resigned but resolute desire to die with dignity: "We too, we'll lie down on the sidewalk / . . . Heart to heart / And die, / Die with the rest" (p. 472). This last act of resistance humanizes a moment all too often obscured by statistics and piles of corpses. Helpless to overcome the fearful hardships of ghetto life, this family will stay together until the end, still part of a community and spared the heartbreak of the camps. Katzenelson died in Auschwitz in 1944.

WORDS AS WEAPONS

Incorporating Jewish wartime writing in the ghettos into the curriculum for reading and analysis will help teachers provide a moral as well as historical context for understanding how Jewish resistance asserted itself. From a pedagogical perspective, all the extant literary forms—from liturgical discourse and cabaret parodies to poems and diary entries—illuminate how the persecuted Jews in the ghetto refused to be vanquished. These works also can expand students' awareness of what constituted Jewish defiance and activism in the ghettos and why the familiar depiction of passive ghetto inhabitants lining up for imminent deportation and destruction is simplistic and misleading. They show how many Jews refused to be silent victims, choosing instead to disclose their suffering and the inhumane conduct of their captors at great personal risk, and this act of Jewish agency deserves more attention in the curriculum. Studying this literature will remind students that ghetto inhabitants without the access or inclination to use weapons, or instigate an uprising, still found ways to reclaim their thoughts, their dignity, their self-respect.

Manifestations of Jewish literary protest crossed all social classes, countries, and genres, but they shared a need to focus on the individuals who defied oppression in valiant, often invisible, ways. Expressing love in a poem, composing a song for partisans, keeping a journal documenting atrocities—these acts provided a repertoire of meaning the Nazis could not destroy. Resistance for the occupants of the ghettos, who doubted they would survive, meant preserving whatever remnants of Jewish identity, language, and culture could be salvaged. This type of heroism remains a relevant topic for classroom discovery and discussion, sustaining the mission of those who risked everything to keep their voices alive.

NOTES

1. This annotated catalogue was created for the special exhibition using part of the collection of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, Poland, *Scream the Truth at the World: Emanuel Ringelblum and the Hidden Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto*, at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City, November 7, 2001–February 18, 2002.

2. According to Ruta Sakowska (p. 4) in the exhibition catalogue, Emanuel Ringelblum (1900–1944) was the founder and director of the research program known as *Oyneg Shabbes*, which was launched in November 1940. This underground archive collected materials such as official documents, personal papers, artifacts from cultural events and civil disobedience, and the Ghetto's clandestine press. Kassow's text provides extensive details about the group and ghetto life.

3. Editor Alan Adelson explains that five of Sierakowiak's notebooks were discovered by a Gentile, Waclaw Szkudlarek, when he returned to his former home where Sierakowiak had been living in the ghetto district (p. 4). According to Edelson, at least two of the composition books may have been burned to heat the apartment during the bitter winter of 1945.

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Award-winning author and survivor Vera Schiff was 16 years old when she and her family were incarcerated in Terezin and she was put to work as a nurse in the Vrchlabi Hospital. With few supplies and under desperate conditions, the doctors and nurses tried to uphold professional standards while caring for the suffering inmates. In this way, they sought to retain their own dignity and defend the value of Jewish lives, thus defying the Nazis. During her three-year imprisonment, Vera's position as a member of the medical staff allowed her access to all parts of the camp [Fig. 1], making these firsthand recollections of spiritual resistance and defiance of particular value. In this short excerpt from Schiff's current work in progress, which was edited by Cheryl Fury, Schiff offers her eyewitness account of the cultural and intellectual activities of the youngest prisoners of Terezin and the courageous actions of their teachers, who risked their lives to educate the children for a future they would never have.

Vera Schiff with Cheryl Fury

Refusing to Give in to Despair: The Children and Teachers of Terezin

The story of the children-prisoners is heartrending. Of the 15,000 children who were imprisoned, fewer than 100 lived to see freedom. In the end, the biggest loser was humankind, for it lost their originality, talents, and contribution. Before I discuss the legacy of the youngsters, let me pay tribute to those who functioned as teachers in this bleakest place on earth, where schooling children was deemed a crime.

SS Commandant *Obersturmführer* Dr. Siegfried Seidl and his successors, Anton Burger and Karl Rahm,¹ forbade educating the young prisoners in no uncertain terms. The Nazis saved their most virulent hatred for Jewish children, for they represented a potential Jewish future, one they planned to deracinate.

Theresienstadt boasted many devoted teachers who not only loved youth but also wished to make their time in detention meaningful; they also felt compelled to apply themselves in their chosen fields to defy the Nazi prohibition of educating Jews. If you are a downtrodden, powerless victim of fierce hatred, the desire to redeem your life virtually compels resistance or sabotage in one form or other. To subvert the Nazi commands was one of the few means we had to assert our own will and feel less humiliated. Moreover, it was—for decent people—a moral imperative to try to help the weakest among us.

The imprisoned children arrived mostly with

their families or from Jewish orphanages to an unknown, intimidating place. They were terrified. Most had never heard of concentration camps but they saw their frightened parents and the stern demeanor of the menacing Nazi officers, armed to the teeth. They had not, at least in the beginning, an inkling of what lay in store for them. Theresienstadt would become the penultimate, and for some, the last, station of their short lives. From the newborns onwards, they were torn from their parents, shoved into large halls, separated by age, sex, and language (Czech or German). Robbed of love and warmth, removed from their familiar environment, deprived of all the toys, pets, books, and games, locked inside dreary, gray buildings, they suffered a powerful shock. However, instructors quickly came to help, saving their sinking spirits.

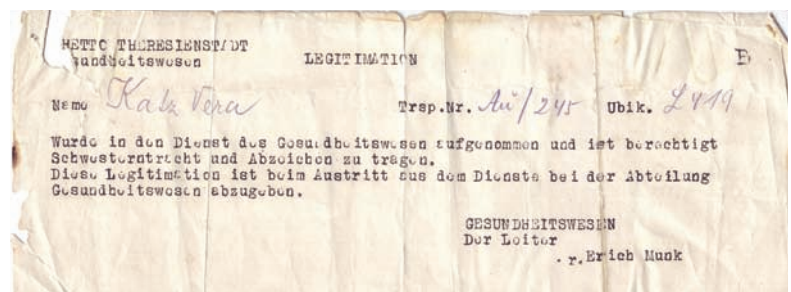


FIG. 1: Vera's documentation, granting her status as a member of the medical staff. Courtesy of Vera Schiff.

Initially, all girls up to 12 years old lived in the barracks with their mothers, and the boys lived with their fathers. When the local population was evacuated in 1942, the Judenrat, the Council of the Elders (Jewish appointees charged with the duty to administer orders of the Nazis), assigned special places for children of different ages. The youth were subdivided into smaller collectives, housed in rooms supervised by pedagogues.



FIG. 2: Vera Schiff. Courtesy of Vera Schiff.

There was a home for the infants and for the preschoolers, and the older children were separated according to age and sex. Usually 20 to 30 youngsters lived in one home (*Heim*). The youth care department, assisted by the Council of the Elders, did everything possible for the management, equipment, and education of the children.

EDUCATION AS RESISTANCE

Valiant efforts were made to provide books and organize recitals and discussions, to normalize—as much as possible—this abnormal experience. Some textbooks were re-created from memory. The “school” day mostly unfolded in the same way as had most of the village schools from which these children had come: There was one class for all children and all subjects. Of course, here the circumstances were quite different: Whenever and wherever some teaching session was organized—sometimes even in a small broom closet—one child was left as a lookout; he or she would whistle as soon as an SS man came into sight. The teaching session would be instantly converted into a game that the SS allowed, for education was punishable by death.

Some cultural activities were allowed, however, and the inmates took full advantage. [See Borenstein, pp. 59–63—Eds.]. Groups of older children occasionally prepared theater performances; others wrote diaries. One group of older boys published a paper called *Vedem (We Lead)*. It appeared every Friday evening, and it offered stories written by different youngsters. Children often assisted the teachers in preparing programs that were informative, entertaining, and always upbeat, emphasizing optimism and courage. Sports competitions were organized; great emphasis was placed on physical fitness, taking into consideration the meager, inadequate nutrition.

The young inmates clung to each other for comfort and warmth, huddling in the dank, disconsolate enclosures in the *Heims*. Their days would have been bleak if not for the educators who took it upon themselves to provide their daily

care and never tired of ensuring that the children knew that the entire population of the camp loved them. They had the undivided attention of men such as Alfred (Freddy) Hirsch,² Willy Groag,³ Egon “Gonda” Redlich,⁴ and others, who put their hearts and souls into protection and guardianship of their wards.

These devoted teachers, themselves at death's door, could not change reality or alter their destiny, but they lightened the tragic fate of these young inmates, at least for a time. The instructors knew that only within the walls of the garrison town were their charges relatively safe: once sent to the East, they faced death.

Among these devoted young adults, Hirsch, a member of a Zionist Youth group, was a monumental figure in the education and formation of Jewish youth. I first met Freddy during the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939 [Figs. 2 and 3].



FIG. 3: Freddy Hirsch, defender of children, was imprisoned in Terezin and died in Auschwitz in 1944. Courtesy of Yad Vashem.

Freddy had great empathy for the fate of the young Jews, who had been expelled from all schools, banned from the use of public facilities such as parks, swimming pools, skating rinks, streetcars, and buses, and were living under a curfew; their days and nights were bleak indeed.

The one spot where the youth could meet was the meadow in north Prague called *Hagibor* (which means “strong” in Hebrew). It was our good luck that Freddy became the organizer of *Hagibor's* programs and activities, and it was there that we forgot, if only for a short while, what was happening to us. In *Hagibor*, we were allowed to be young; we could run, play, and engage in gymnastics. Freddy accepted and identified with the Zionist philosophy of individual responsibility and high moral standards. He was determined to prepare the youth for emigration from Europe to *Eretz Yisrael*, where they would become pioneers in reclaiming the barren land.

Freddy was a born leader who demanded much of his charges, inspiring them by his own example. His discipline was ironclad; he stressed the need for physical fitness, relentless exercise, and impeccable hygiene. We all loved him and tried to emulate him.

When Freddy was deported to Terezin, where I met him again, he applied himself with all his prodigious energies, organizing prohibited teaching and trying to balance it with physical activities. In short order, he created the impossible: affording the youth imprisoned in the camp some meaning-

ful experiences in their bleak, day-to-day lives.

Freddy's exemplary behavior was a part of the philosophy devised by the *Judenrat* of Terezin. The Council, supported by the many brilliant inmates, knew that armed resistance was not possible. The only way we could defend against the Nazi barbarity was to maintain our dignity and defy the brutal onslaught of Nazi dehumanization as best we could, despite the misery, fear, and endless work.

We were forced to live a frenzied kind of life in Theresienstadt, filled with hectic speed, eluding the ever-present dangers. Under such circumstances, reflections were luxuries in which few indulged. The rarely easing rush of transports dispatched to the East, the rapidly spreading epidemics, and the debilitating conditions forced inmates to live one hour at a time. There were many who envied the dead, for they were liberated from such suffering. Yet the indefatigable youth instructors resisted giving in to despair. They found the most suitable jobs possible for children 14 years and older, who were obliged to work tirelessly. They devised learning plans for all of the unfortunate young prisoners. Well aware that their own days were numbered, they shared the misery of deprivation and were cold, hungry, and often ill, but they invested all their remaining strength into helping the imprisoned youngsters. In no small measure, these efforts put their own anxieties on the back burner and diverted their minds from personal dread to the task at hand.

The challenge began with the search for paper and pencils. The teachers cajoled and bribed those who worked outside the walls, and by hook and by crook, they found ways to provide their charges with the materials needed for writing, painting, and drawing. Some supplies came from the Council of the Elders, which had a department in which graphic artists were forced to produce propaganda posters for the Nazis [See Rosenberg, pp. 18–21—Eds.]. The members of the *Judenrat* understood the need of the imprisoned youngsters, their sadness, loneliness, and despair, and they did their best to help. They allotted larger food rations and better housing to the young people at the expense of the adult inmates. On occasion, the children even received some milk and other dribs and drabs of better food, which lessened their misery somewhat.

MUSIC AS DEFIANCE

The children were taught many subjects, but the main emphasis was placed on creative projects that would uplift their spirits. One of the many activities in which they were involved was the production of the children's opera *Brundibar* (bumblebee). This opera was composed in 1938 by Hans Krasa (1899–1944) to the libretto of playwright Adolf Hofmeister, but it was never publicly presented until its production in Theresienstadt. The play caught the imagination of

an exceptional musician, the conductor Rafael Schachter (1905–1944), who suggested it as a fitting project because it was readily understood and interpreted by the youths. Its message was that the battle between good and evil may be long and hard, but in the end, evil always will be defeated and life will be restored to its sweet, kind harmony.

That significant message was embedded in a simple plot featuring two siblings who need money desperately to buy milk for their ailing mother. Their valiant efforts are opposed and almost thwarted by an evil organ-grinder, Brundibar. In the end, all falls into place: Brundibar is foiled and the siblings succeed. Amidst great joy, the children gather and sing in victorious unison: Brundibar is defeated; we won!

The play, under the guise of the plot, spelled out that the Jews would overcome the Nazi menace and emerge victorious. Almost every prisoner soon became familiar with the melodies of *Brundibar*; it was the most whistled tune in the camp, and most inmates drew strength from it. *Brundibar* was presented time and again to the prisoners who, with tears in their eyes, watched their children singing in unison, hoping for better days.

Another project was the inspiring production of a Czech fairy tale *Fireflies*. Under the direction of Viennese artist Friedl Dicker-Brandeis,⁵ the involved children made their own colorful costumes using all kinds of scrap material. This performance also provided a precious few hours of distraction to the little inmates.

ART AS DEFIANCE

Many artists were imprisoned in Terezin, and the children had the benefit of their teaching. The drawings of the children represent another emotional enterprise. They sketched and drew on scraps of paper few would consider fit canvasses [Figs. 4 and 5].



FIG. 4: This colorful depiction of a Chanukah celebration was among the artwork created by prisoner-children at Terezin. Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.



FIG. 5: The Czech inscription reads: "Ghetto Terezin 18/12/43. 'Measure twice—cut once' [Czech proverb]. In memory for home 'Nesarim' and your buddy Majoska Martina."

The homesick children, guided by their dedicated instructors, found an outlet for their suppressed memories and emotions. They drew pictures of flowers, butterflies, bees, and gardens in bloom. Mainly, though, they chose to remember the good days when they had a home, family, and food, so they sketched mothers ladling soup and lighting Friday night candles for Shabbat. They drew much loved pets they left behind, large flowers, modest homes—all that was long gone but lived in the hearts of the youngest prisoners.

Above all else, the penned-in youngsters yearned for freedom. Although the Council of the Elders did its very best to ease their anguish, their surroundings were a far cry from even the starkest and poorest home from their prewar days. The instructors helped them to decorate the dormitories with sketches, but that could not still the longing for the homes and families they lost. So they drew pictures of them to comfort and soothe the homesickness and pain, and they wrote poems and short stories about what they could not have, resisting the temptation to succumb to the fear and despair that hovered always.

The poems were mostly sweet, gentle, and heartbreaking. In one, written by Pavel Friedman (1921–1944) and titled "The Butterfly,"⁶ the short simple verses express all the sadness of a child who never saw a butterfly in a concentration camp. He reflects on the bright, dazzling yellow butterfly, the last one he saw. "Butterflies do not live in a ghetto" is the sad conclusion of the young poet.

Another boy, Franta Bass (1930–1944), poured his heart out, writing about illness, a frequent affliction of the malnourished prisoners. Yet in the follow-up verses, he reaffirms his faithful resolve to remain a Jew, irrespective of the many threats. He expressed his pride in being a descendant of dignified people, pledging on his honor never to submit to those who wish to destroy Jews.

Miroslav Kosek (1932–1944), in a poem titled "It All Depends How You Look at It," muses about the one true and inevitable justice: Death, the great equalizer, catches up with everyone, the humble and the powerful, the rich and the poor. Miroslav had a strange preoccupation with death considering his age, but the children knew and understood the threat that loomed on their skewered horizon.

Eva Pickova (1929–1943) did not have Franta's courage or decisiveness. She was panic-stricken, fearful of illness, frozen in horror by the widespread typhus epidemic that claimed so many of her peers. She wondered if perhaps those who were being sent away to other camps were not better off. Yet she eventually plucked up her courage and proclaimed her love for life and desire to carry on.

Alena Synkova, a child poet I did not have the pleasure of meeting, left behind an untitled poem in which she questioned her purpose in life. Like Eva, Alena's contemplation ends by her rallying and steadfastly retaining hope to live on. The young martyrs foresaw their own deaths but, encouraged by their instructors, they fought to survive. She was one of the few children who did. As the rest of the world found out after the war, the literary works of the children of Terezin expressed the youngsters' sorrows, homesickness, and feelings of injustice, but some of them illustrate as well a sense of hope, a commitment to survival, a belief in a better future.

THE ORPHANS OF BIALYSTOK: CARING AS DEFIANCE

As we were to discover later, the Nazis planned to liquidate the Jews in the Polish ghetto of Bialystok in August 1943. Although the inhabitants fought back against their oppressors, the insurrection was brutally suppressed; all adults were murdered and some 1,260 newly orphaned children were transferred to Theresienstadt. It all happened in great secrecy, amidst whispered, persistent rumors of some new, nefarious action of the Nazis. Nobody understood the purpose of the transfer of children from the East to the West. The flow of inmates never before deviated from a firmly es-

tablished pattern of dispatching prisoners to the East, never the other way around.

All of us had been curious about the fast-progressing construction of some huts outside the perimeter of the camp. Then, one day, we were ordered to stay indoors in an action called *Kasernensperre* (complete closure of the barracks). This order was issued usually when some inmates were to be executed or someone escaped. We took grave chances peeking out at the happenings outside, but from some distance we saw them coming, a long file of the "enemies of the Third Reich."

It was a sorry sight. A seemingly endless procession of children trudged towards the camp's disinfection station. Bedraggled, tired, and frightened, they slowly trekked ahead. They held hands, the older ones protectively helping the younger ones. In spite of the mild August warmth, they shivered in fear of things to come. The unfolding spectacle left us speechless.

When the procession reached the disinfection station clearly labeled "shower rooms," we heard the youngsters begin to scream, fighting with the attendants who tried, gently, to nudge them in. Panic-stricken, they screamed, "Gas, gas, help us!" The Nazis on guard ordered the attendants to use force and push the children into the shower station. After their ablutions, the children, somewhat calmer, were brought to the new barracks, ending our speculation as to the purpose of the mysterious, quickly cobbled-together cabins.

For some weeks thereafter, the children enjoyed privileged treatment, far better than ours inside the camp. They were relatively better fed and clothed, but they were not allowed contact with anyone but the attendants assigned exclusively to their care. The gentle ministrations of the adults in charge relaxed them; they began to recover and on occasion they would flash diffident smiles. Did the Nazis come down with a sudden case of compassion? What was so special about these children that warranted such exceptional handling?

Then the Council of the Elders requested volunteers: physicians, nurses, and caregivers who wished to care for these Bialystok children, who were all to leave Theresienstadt for neutral Switzerland. That was another thunderbolt: nothing of that sort was ever heard or officially uttered in Theresienstadt. Since when did the Nazis send Jews anywhere but to the East, where they were put to death?

Several people applied but others were more skeptical of the Nazis' ultimate intentions. My mother, then seriously ill, wanted me to volunteer. Because I was a nurse, she saw in it a chance for me to escape the Nazi scourge and survive the war. I refused. I could not bear the thought of leaving my ailing mom in the camp alone, and I did not have faith that the children would ever reach Switzerland. To me, it was obvious that I had to stay with my last living relative

and help the best I could.

One morning we woke up to a surprise: the new barracks were empty, and the children were gone. Although we had had no official contact with the secluded huts, still we heard from those who had brought the cauldrons of food and had been assigned to cleaning jobs there. All fell silent and life returned to its dreary normality. We hoped the Bialystok children and their caregivers were safely ensconced in Switzerland.

No matter how hard the Nazis tried to keep the truth hidden, the grapevine of all concentration camps worked furiously and efficiently, and we learned that the children of Bialystok had never reached Switzerland. The Nazis wanted to use the hostage-children as bargaining chips, negotiating their freedom in return for German POWs. The initial arbitration went well, but something went awry and the deal fell through. The Nazis ordered the train diverted for Birkenau, where all were summarily murdered in Birkenau's gas chambers. The 53 staff members who volunteered to care for the children went to their deaths with their young charges.⁷ Poor youngsters! I remembered their petrified screams in front of the disinfection station; in the end they did not escape the gas chambers they so dreaded; the Zyklon B snuffed out their last breaths. Those of us who still had faith left said *Kaddish* (Jewish prayer for the dead) for the young victims.

There was yet another indirect victim. Freddy Hirsch had tried to visit the segregated children to assess their needs and see what he could do to help, despite the ban on such contact. Rumor had it that he had friends among the SS, and he may have thought this would protect him. Unfortunately, he was caught and punished, sent on a transport to Auschwitz-Birkenau in September 1943. There, we later learned, he continued his work in the "family camp." In the shadows of the gas chambers and belching chimneys, he cared for and led the children until the last day of his life in March 1944.

ON ALTERNATE PLATEAUS WITH UNORTHODOX MEANS— WE RESISTED

The common bond among the inmates of Theresienstadt was that we resisted, even though we had to fight on alternate plateaus and with unorthodox means. Many inmates rose above their personal misery, resisting their fate and actively encouraging others to do the same. Such was the case with the heroic struggle of the teachers and instructors who selflessly and valiantly tried to improve the existence of their young charges. We should never forget them or their students, who sought to maintain their humanity, to study and learn, and to express their pain and hope through art, literature, theater, music, and poetry in the most dire and dangerous of circumstances.

We can only wonder what kind of people imprisoned schoolchildren for no other reason but the fact that they were born Jews. The children of Theresienstadt were sorry hostages to Nazi madness, but they turned the table on their murderers. Though they were no match for the Nazi military machine, they towered over them by their moral strength, intrepid nature, and valor, facing overwhelming threats with decency under duress, firmness of character, and unshakable resolve. They delivered a lesson to humanity, for they showed integrity and bravery second to none.

Today, almost 70 years later, the simple, pathetic, but inspired poems and drawings the children left behind when they were transported to their death have a home in the Jewish Museum in Prague. They pull powerfully on the heartstrings of all who visit the exhibition; the snuffed-out lives of the youngsters open a wound in visitors' emotions and conscience. These humble drawings speak loudly and clearly to the human spirit; they not only commemorate the tragedy, they also transcend it.

NOTES

1. After the war, Seidl, the commandant from November 1941–July 1943, and Rahm, commandant from February 1944 until May 1945, were executed for war crimes against humanity. Burger, the commandant from July 1943–February 1944, was sentenced to death in absentia and lived in Germany under an assumed name until his death in 1991.

2. Alfred Hirsch (1916–1944) was dedicated to the education of Jewish children in Theresienstadt and, later, in Auschwitz.

3. Willy Groag was a rare survivor and moved his family to Israel after the war.

4. Redlich headed the Youth Services Department (*Jugendfürsorge*) until he and his family were deported and murdered in Auschwitz in 1944. His diary, discovered in an attic in Theresienstadt in 1967, was subsequently published.

5. Frederika "Friedl" Dicker-Brandeis (1898–1944) was a Viennese artist of the Bauhaus school. Under her direction, the children produced many works; about 5,000 of these works survived the war. She was gassed in Auschwitz with some of her students. Many of her own works were discovered in the 1980s and have attracted great interest.

6. Friedman's (1921–1944) poem "Butterfly" was first published in 1959.

7. There is some indication the Nazis did intend for the children to go to Britain, but the group of 1,200 children and 53 caregivers was sent to Auschwitz on October 5, 1943 when the plan failed. One of the volunteers was Otlila Kafka, sister of author Franz Kafka.

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Emily Borenstein

Verdi's Requiem Played and Sung by Jews in Terezin Concentration Camp | Summer, 1944

Emily Borenstein's poem helps us understand the power of music as defiance. Pair with Pnina Rosenberg's analysis of two Terezin paintings (pp. 18–21), Vera Schiff's personal narrative (pp. 53–58), and Stephen Herz's poem (pp. 64–65) for a deeper understanding of spiritual resistance in the "Paradise Ghetto."

First there is the embryo of an orchestra
and a small choir.
Instruments are brought into the ghetto.
Some of them are smuggled in
under loads of hay.
A battered piano is already there.
A double bass is spirited in by an SS man.
Everything finally comes together —
sheet music, instruments and a rehearsal room.
The work grows in stature with the large roster of
professional Jewish musicians.
For many days the musicians rehearse the score
under Rafael Schächter, the orchestra's
conductor.

How was the Camp Commandant able to set up
a concert hall for the presentation
of Verdi's *Requiem*?

It came into being through a military order
of the SS.

The order stated: "Evacuate the Jewish Hospital."

Sick Jews are evacuated,
loaded into carts and carriages.

The bodies of the dead are carried to the
crematorium.

In front of the hospital there is confusion
and uproar

mingled with the cries of the dying.

The sick are dumped in attics

with no water, lights, beds or blankets.
The hospital is transformed into a theater
to provide entertainment
for the SS and the Nazi brass.

Eichmann is impressed that the Jews
want to put on a performance of Verdi's *Requiem*
and that it will take place in a theater
with a full stage and gleaming footlights.
He tries to keep a straight face.
He doubles up with laughter
at the thought of the Jews ringing their own death knell
in the *Requiem* with its ancient Catholic prayers
about sin, damnation and hell
but the Jewish prisoners know for whom the bell
really tolls.
They were alerted by reliable information from
outside sources.

Eichmann wonders how the *Requiem*
with its Christian beliefs and motifs
can be played and sung by Jewish prisoners
in Terezín.
"Don't the Jews know," he says, "that in the *Requiem*
they'll be singing for themselves in hell?"
Eichmann laughs again.
Schächter tells his musicians in a final
rehearsal before the performance
to remember those who were tortured
and murdered by the Nazis.
"Sing directly to the murderers," he tells them.

The performance begins.
The kettle drums thunder
"The day of wrath has come!"
Orchestra, chorus and soloists unite
as one.
"A final day will loose fire on the world

and leave it in ashes."

The Jews already know the terror that shakes
each heart when God, the Judge, sits
in judgment.

He will hold the Nazis accountable.

The *Tuba mirum* rings loud and clear.

Verses flame in the abyss of fate
for men who enslave, rob, murder and
humiliate.

Eichmann listens, transfixed.

The *basso profundo* thunders across
the room

"Confutatis maledictis,"

the verse Mozart whispered as he lay
dying.

The choir sings with passion

"Libera me"

reaching out to life.

Instead of conducting the music
quietly as a solo

the conductor raises his baton and brings
it down *fortissimo*

with full orchestra, choir and kettle drums.

The room is crowded with Jewish prisoners
who are seated in front of Eichmann
and the SS.

Schächter stands erect at the podium.

From the *Confutatis maledictis*

he moves to the *Recordare*.

A renowned Jewish opera singer,
a magnificent tenor, steps forward for his
grand aria.

"Groaning 'neath my sins,

I languish, Lord. Have mercy"

the singer prays.

He pleads and prays with desperate
groaning.
The music pierces every heart.

"Confutatis maledictis"
the singers thunder.
The kettle drums roll.
The baton draws lightning from
the score.

"Lacrymosa!"
Schächter can barely contain himself.
Under his breath he cries out:
Listen, you Nazi bastards,
you will not break us.
"Libera, Domine, de morte aeterna."

The choir is quiet. The soprano sings
"Tremens factus sum."
She repeats the words in a deep,
chilling recitative
as though an impartial judge were
pronouncing a death sentence
on the Nazis.
The cello joins in, taking up the melody.
The conductor lets his baton fall
and raises his hand clenched into a fist.
He shouts the last words of the
Dies irae.

Eichmann doesn't hear Schächter's
curses.
The conductor mutters to himself:
The day of wrath will come.
The German armies will be torn
to pieces.
Streams of blood will gush from
their wounds.

The whole world will witness the
downfall of Nazi Germany.
Justice will prevail.

The choir is singing fervently.
It stops singing.
The soprano's voice rings clear as
a great reverberating bell
"Libera me!"
Bells ring out in the orchestra.
Altos and tenors sing from all sides.

"Libera nos!
Libera nos!"
The huge choir thunders one last time.
The kettle drums boom —
three short strokes, one long.
Eichmann is visibly moved.
"Interesting. Very interesting"
he comments
as he applauds the musicians.

In early fall the train to Auschwitz stops
at the station in Terezín.
Schächter and his musicians are loaded
into the first cars of the first transport
to Auschwitz.

"We fight back with Chocolate Strudel," writes the narrator in Stephen Herz's evocative poem, which is dedicated to "Mina Pächter and the women of Terezín." No unit on spiritual resistance is complete without a detailed depiction of the ways in which women relied on one another and shared their memories—here, of their recipes—to defy the Nazis.

Stephen Herz

*Fried Noodles Topped
with Raisins Cinnamon
and Vanilla Cream*

For Mina Pächter and the women of Terezín

*Make a noodle dough from ½ kilogram flour,
2 eggs, 2-3 tablespoons white wine,
2-3 tablespoons thick sour cream . . .*

We dig through the garbage heaps
rotting in the courtyard,
eat our watery pea powder soup,
our gray bread and potato peels.
But here in Terezín
we feed our minds with favorite recipes,
getting each ingredient just right, even arguing,
"cooking with the mouth."

*Next, roll out the dough medium thick.
Cut short noodles and fry them in hot fat . . .*
No eggs. No butter, cream, noodles.
But our recipes have them.
And we, the women of Terezín, have them as weapons
against a constant hunger. We write them
on scraps of paper, one of them across a picture
of Hitler.

Remove the noodles and put them into a soufflé dish. Sprinkle them with sugar, cinnamon and many raisins . . .

We fight back with Chocolate Strudel, with Chicken Galantine garnished with aspic and caviar, with Goose Neck stuffed with Farina, Goulash with Noodles, Potato Herring, Nut Braid topped with sugar icing, Liver Dumplings, Apple Dumplings, Farina Dumplings, Cherry-Plum Dumplings, and Mrs. Weil's Viennese Dumplings you can serve plain or with roasts. Rye Schnapps, Macaroons, Linzer Torte, Ice Cream à la Melba, Bean Cake, Czech Cake, Butter Kindelin, and Cheap Real Jewish Bobe.

Now make a delicate vanilla cream, add a little raw cream and pour over fried noodles. Bake a little. Bring to table in dish.

The hardship and suffering of daily life in Auschwitz and the unequivocal prohibition against the development of any personal relationships among the camp inmates could not extinguish the spirit, courage, or defiance of Mala Zimetbaum. Mala's altruism and bravery, her forbidden liaison with a fellow prisoner, Edward (Edek) Galinski, and the couple's daring escape were sources of inspiration and hope to the camp's inmates. Follow this narrative by reading the poem "A Translator in Auschwitz" by Charles Adès Fishman (p. 70). Ask students to research Mala's life and then ponder the obligations of the historian, the poet, the teacher, and the student when reality and myth intersect.

Pnina Rosenberg

Mala Zimetbaum: "A Symbol for All Courageous Hearts"

A crayon painting depicts an attractive woman: her curled brown hair is done in a fashionable coiffure; her meticulously pencilled eyebrows accentuate her almond-shaped grey eyes; a delicate rose tint highlights her full lips, and the blue scarf, gracefully tied around her neck, gives the final touch to a chic, elegant young woman [Fig. 1].

Yet, this portrait is far from ordinary; two horizontal creases and a long vertical one, which run from top to bottom and cross the picture, bear evidence to its intriguing history and reveal more than meets the eye. Behind the portrait and its marring folds is the brave and tragic story of Mala Zimetbaum, a Jewish Auschwitz inmate, whose singular personality and free, courageous spirit, turned her, in the eyes of her fellow inmates, into a symbol of solidarity, hope, and resistance.

MALA'S STORY—IN SEARCH OF HAVEN

Mala (Malka) Zimetbaum, born in 1918 in the Jewish community of Brzesko, Poland, to Pinkas Zimetbaum, a salesman, and his wife, Chaja, was the youngest of their five children. The family moved to Germany and eventually settled in Antwerp, Belgium (1928), when Mala was 10 years old. At school, Mala excelled in mathematics and languages, having a good command of Flemish,

French, German, English, and Polish. Tragically, her father became blind, and Mala had to cut short her studies in order to assist her family. She worked as a seamstress and later as a linguistic secretary (Sichelschmidt, 1998; Huber, 2006, pp. 49–75).

The Nazi invasion of neutral Belgium (May 1940),

followed by increasing antisemitic decrees, internment, and deportation of its Jewry, turned this supposed haven into a trap. The deterioration of the situation during the spring of 1942 compelled Mala to seek a hiding place for her family in Brussels. On her return she was caught, on July 22, 1942, in a massive arrest of Jews—easily identified by the yellow badge they had to wear—in railway stations in Antwerp, Brussels, and Malines. Interned in the Malines (Mechelen) transit camp for two months, she was then deported to Auschwitz, where she was imprisoned in the women's camp at Birkenau (Huber, 2006, pp. 91–106).



FIG. 1: Zofia Stepien-Bator, Portrait of Mala Zimetbaum, Crayon on cardboard, 35 x 25 cm., KL Auschwitz 1943. Archive of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

MALA IN AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU: A RAY OF LIGHT IN "HELL'S OFFICE"

Thanks to her good looks and her command of languages, Mala was assigned to the *Kommando* of women workers for the SS and became a *Laeuferin*—a messenger between blocks and a liaison among the *Blockfuehrerstube* (office of

the block leaders), the *Kapos*, and the prisoners. This privileged position enabled her to enjoy better conditions than most of the inmates. She shared two bunks in a corner of her block with three fellow messengers, dressed passably well, and had adequate hygienic and sanitation facilities. "She had a pretty good life in the camp; she managed rather well . . . she lived in a clean place and could get anything she wanted" (Kagan, 1947, p. 208). Usually, such "high-ranking" prisoners were despised by the other inmates, but Mala "was very decent," according to Kagan. She helped everyone in the camp, so she was well known, and she never exploited the advantages she had except in the service of others.

Mala's assignments allowed her access to various sub-camps, and thus she had an accurate knowledge of the daily murders of the Jews. She used both her mobility and her inside information to assist fellow prisoners. Putting herself at great risk, she regularly brought the prisoners food, medicine, letters, and news (Sichelschmidt, 1998). Many testimonies, dating from 1945 on, praise Mala for her courageous commitment to save other inmates' lives by taking great personal risks, acts that served as subtle yet effective resistance. Giza Weisblum, Mala's relative and an Auschwitz survivor herself, recalls that "Mala was known as a person ready to help. She used to act in the way she regarded as appropriate, and, regardless of nationality or political affiliation, helped everyone as best as she could" (Weisblum, quoted in Sichelschmidt, 1998, note 28).

The Parisian Yiddish newspaper *Neue Presse* (New Press) published "Our Heroes: Mala," in its edition of August 28, 1945, praising the woman's outstanding personality as well as her tragic, heroic end. Suzanne Birnbaum (2003), an Auschwitz survivor, wrote: "Mala, through her intelligence and courage, coupled with clever deceit of the Germans, saved many French and Belgians from certain death" (p. 57).

Henja Frydman records examples of Mala's resourcefulness and courage. When Mala found out that Frydman was on the list of those to be sent to the gas chambers, she approached the head of the women's camp, with whom she had a good professional relationship, and informed her that Frydman was her cousin; if Frydman were sent to the gas chambers, she insisted, then she, Mala, wanted to follow her. The German authorities needed Mala's skills, so they erased Frydman's name from the list (Boder, 1950, chap. 8, quoted in Huber, 2006, pp. 13–14). Numerous other survivors attested that they owed their lives to the young Mala (Alcan, 1980, pp. 47–48; Huber, 2006, pp. 160, 167–170).

One of her functions was to assign inmates who had been released from the camp hospital to work details, so she was able to place the weaker inmates with more humane guards or on details doing lighter work. When she was informed about selections to be made among infirmary

inmates, she urged the hospitalized prisoners to leave and the other inmates to avoid being hospitalized.

My sister-in-law and I caught typhus, so we decided to report sick. Somebody told Mala we were about to be transferred into the camp hospital, and in front of the SS guards she shouted at us: "You lazy bitches, you are absolutely fit. Go to work! Forward!" When we came back from work in the evening, we learned why Mala had done everything to keep us from entering the ward. That day, all the people in the camp hospital had been gassed. (Rabinowicz, quoted in Sichelschmidt, 1998, note 24)

By saving lives, Mala gained the eternal admiration and love of her fellow inmates.

MALA AND EDEK: A LOVE STORY IN THE SHADOW OF THE GAS CHAMBER

It is not surprising that the 20-year-old, beautiful, free-spirited Mala defied the authorities and followed her heart when she began a clandestine romantic liaison with fellow inmate Edward (Edek) Galinski. Edek worked as a mechanic, which took him into various sub-camps, including the women's camp at Birkenau, where he met Mala. They fell in love, thus putting themselves at great risk, because personal relationships among the inmates were forbidden. Under such circumstances, a romance was extremely difficult to pursue. Yet, with the cooperation of fellow inmates, they managed to keep it secret. Their love was more than a private affair—it was a symbol of hope in a place with no tomorrow; of beauty, in a place of physical and moral ugliness; and of love, in a camp and under a regime that was the manifestation of evil.

The amorous young woman wanted to present her beloved with her portrait, so she approached Zofia Stepien-Bator, an artist-inmate whom she had met earlier, to draw it. Stepien-Bator, a political prisoner arrested for being a member of the underground organization Grey Ranks (*Szare Walki*), debuted her secret artistic "career" while hospitalized with typhus. Sick with despair over the murder of her husband and unable to learn any news of her daughter, she lost all will to live. Then Mala came to visit her and showed her, surreptitiously, a photograph of her daughter that someone had sent, hoping it would reach the prisoner; inmates could get letters after the guards checked them, but all photographs were banned. Mala had access to the uncensored post, found the photo, smuggled it out, and brought it, despite the risk, to the suffering woman.

Once I saw my child, I recovered my will to live. . . . I asked Mala to leave me the photograph, but she said

she could not because she had secretly smuggled it in. Attentive to my pleadings . . . she substituted another photograph and left me with my daughter's. (Stepien-Bator, quoted in Huber, 2006, pp. 162–163)

After Stepien-Bator recovered, she continued her art, usually drawings of fellow inmates, although it was forbidden (Rosenberg, 2003, pp. 89–90).

I drew portraits of fellow prisoners that showed them in a favorable light since I attempted to make everything more pleasant. I did this because everything was so ugly, gray, and dirty, and I wanted to show something pretty in my drawings. In my portraits, the women were prettier, livelier, and had more hair; there were no tragic expressions in their eyes. (Stepien-Bator, 1999, personal interview)

In the portrait drawn in 1943, Mala is pictured as an attractive woman. The artist had no need to embellish, because Mala managed to keep her good looks, a quite reasonable result of her better conditions as a privileged prisoner. Her fine appearance did not cause resentment among the other inmates; on the contrary, it served as a source of optimism, a living reminder “that it was possible to be dressed correctly in Auschwitz, in civilian dress, to be pretty. . . . she raised our hopes that it was possible, that it was not the end” (Stepien-Bator, quoted in Huber, 2006, p. 163). Her elegance not only served as a model but also reflected her dignified, noble character, as attested to by her fellow inmates. “Mala was always a *lady*; she was always polite and spoke in a gentle voice” (Palarczyk, quoted in Huber, 2006, p. 165).

Still, because the commissioned portrait was to be given to Edek, Stepien-Bator probably emphasized Mala's best aspects. Embellishing the “model” was a common practice in portrait paintings during the Holocaust, in as much as pictures meant to be sent or given to friends or relatives showed that the inmate was alive and well (Rosenberg, 2002, p. 102).

For the commissioned likeness, Mala repaid the artist with “fancy sandwiches, as fancy as one could make at the camp” (Stepien-Bator, 1999), because paintings, and especially portraits, were a precious commodity and served as a means of barter in the camp world (Rosenberg, 2002, p. 104). Stepien-Bator records her memories from the “sittings”:

I was seated by the table and drew Mala. She arranged for there to be colored pencils, from where I do not know . . . and I drew her. This was my happiest moment . . . with no prisoners around me. . . . After I finished Mala told me that she really liked the portrait. She was so thankful . . . she prepared sandwiches with

margarine. It was Royal. . . . The eyes I had painted I considered as the happiest eyes in the world: they were full of life. (Stepien-Bator, quoted in Huber, 2006, p. 192)

In spite of Stepien-Bator's best efforts, “the happiest eyes in the world” seem sad and remote. Could it be that despite this air of “luxury” and liveliness, Mala, who missed freedom and did all she could to obtain it, could not conceal her longing for it?

THE ESCAPE

Edek, despite the grave risks, planned to escape with a friend, Wiesław Kielar. Mala asked to join them, but Kielar, who feared that the presence of the woman would be too risky, objected. It was Mala and Edek, therefore, who escaped together on June 24, 1944, during a weekend, when there was a reduced number of camp guards. Mala was disguised as a male prisoner and Edek as the prisoner's SS guard. The escape was revealed during the evening's roll call, and the inmates hoped desperately that the lovers' flight would succeed (Sichelschmidt, 1998; Kielar, 1980, pp. 244–247).

Raya Kagan (1947), an Auschwitz survivor who had also worked in the camp administration, recorded her memoirs of this period shortly after her liberation and tells what impact the escape and capture had on the prisoners:

Mala ran away . . . the escape became legendary. It was said she did it not because she wanted to liberate herself but because of a strong desire to let the world know what was happening in Auschwitz and Birkenau. (p. 208)

According to various inmates' testimonies, Mala smuggled out documents incriminating the Nazis and documenting atrocities in Auschwitz (Sichelschmidt, 1998). Kagan (1961) also notes that this was a possibility.

Mala had access to documents. And it was said that she stole documents from the *Blockfuehrerstube* (office of the block leaders) . . . and that she wanted to publish them abroad. . . . Her courage was well known, but there was also a myth about Mala, and I am not sure whether it is correct that she managed to steal the documents, but it was said she was capable of doing so. (n. p.)

On July 6, 1944, Mala and Edek were caught by a patrol as they tried to cross the Czech border (Kagan, 1947, 1961). A day later, they were identified as fugitives and returned to Auschwitz, where they were interrogated, tortured, and sentenced to death (Kielar, 1980, pp. 252–253; 255). When

the inmates learned of the couple's capture, they were grief-stricken. Their open admiration for the couple's courageous attempt outraged the camp administration; hence, the punishment had to set a spectacular example. Edek was hanged in public in the men's section of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Mala, according to Kagan's testimony, manifested her spirit of resistance until the very last moment.

Mala had succeeded in hiding a razor blade in her sleeve and, during the roll call, she cut open her veins. The SS man went up to her and began mocking and cursing her. Then, with a hand covered in blood, she slapped his cheek and—again, this may be a myth—she said to him: “I shall die as a heroine, and you will die like a dog.” After that, she was taken, in this very terrible state, to the *Revier* (a barrack for sick inmates), and in the evening she was put on a cart and taken to the crematorium. (n. p.)

As Kagan (1947) implies, Mala became a legend, and there are various versions of her death (Sichelschmidt, 1998). Yet her life-saving actions and the impact of her resistance, solidarity, and courage were undeniable. “Her brave spirit spread throughout Birkenau and became a symbol for all courageous hearts” (Kagan, 1947, p. 210).

Following Edek's execution, his friend Wiesław Kielar received Edek's last words on a note; on it Edek had written his and Mala's names and their camp numbers and had enclosed locks of their hair. Those mementos became part of Kielar's treasured possessions, which also included Mala's portrait (Kielar, 1980, pp. 254–255, 262). He eventually donated the portrait to the Auschwitz Museum, the very place it was created, leaving a vivid, tragic symbol of freedom, love, and resistance for posterity.

Louise Alcan, a woman imprisoned with Mala, wrote, in 1947,

I hope one day someone will tell everything that Mala did in Birkenau. Her life in the camp, like her death, should be exemplary. She did as much good as she could, she risked everything, and she died cursing her killers. We will never forget her. (p. 54)

The drawing of Mala, which Edek had folded in three places and carried on him during the last year of his life, is a lasting reminder of the young and beautiful Jewish woman whose humanitarian acts and defiance are engraved forever in the hearts of and souls of her fellow prisoners.

NOTE

Wiesław Kielar donated Mala Zimetbaum's portrait to the Auschwitz Museum in 1969. Information was provided to the author

by Dr Agnieszka Sieradzka, art curator of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, to whom I am indebted for her continuous and invaluable cooperation.

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Neither Charles Adès Fishman nor Pnina Rosenberg knew that the other was writing about Mala Zimetbaum; how fortunate we are to have the story of this courageous young woman in two genres and illustrated by her portrait! Zimetbaum's heroism became legendary, much like that of Hannah Senesh (pp. 120–126); compare the two women and their larger-than-life portraits of courage and altruism.

Charles Adès Fishman

A Translator in Auschwitz

in Memory of Mala Zimetbaum (1918–1944)

You were twenty-four, Mala, when the Nazis came for you in Antwerp, Belgium, on the street of yellow stars. It was then your old life ended and you were swept downward by history's darkest whorl.

In the women's camp at Birkenau, your command of German helped you name the unspoken, and you could sometimes intercede between fellow prisoners and the immense power that held them.

And soon, from fire and ash, from blood and darkness, you drew a stunned few whose pain could not be quieted and moved them to temporary refuge: those broken twigs those scorched leaves who only recently had been people.

All your life, Mala, you were first to question, first to fight injustice, and you were the first woman to escape Auschwitz. That you were captured at the Slovak border and brought back to death's embrace — death that had been promised to every Jew —

was not revelation, but destiny. How fitting it was that you slashed your wrists on the path to the gallows and lashed out at the guard who'd cursed you. Your blood on his face, a translation that defies understanding.

Breindel Lieba Kasher has interviewed many survivors of the Sobibor Rebellion; each person with whom she spoke led her to another. She writes, "I met Dov Freiberg during Chanukah at his home in Ramlah [Israel]. Dov was only 11 and living in Warsaw when, on the first day of the War, September 1, 1939, his father was murdered." Breindel recounts the difficulty of that interview for Dov, who "sat at the table with his wife. She was like a mother bird, watching over him as he told his story. Every time it got too hard for Dov to continue, his wife refilled the glass of water that sat on the table between them and pushed it over for him to take a drink."

Breindel Lieba Kasher

Dov Freiberg: Revolt in Sobibor

It was the end of summer,
'43. The Germans took Russian prisoners
and killed them at Sobibor.

I made a connection
with one of the officers, Sasha Pechersky.

I also made a friend, Libel.

He was kind, and good to speak to.

He gave me advice.

He was the son of a rabbi. I was lonely,
but after time, all the survivors
in Sobibor became friends.

We organized a revolt.

Even in our greatest despair,
we began believing
this revolt could be possible.

I was working for the Ukrainians.

Libel and Sasha asked me to hide rifles.

I agreed. I was ready to slip two rifles
inside an empty pipe.

On the day of the revolt, Commandant Wagner
did not like the way I was working.
He beat me, until my head split open.
He said, "For too long you have had a good life,"
and sent me to the sorting barracks.
I could not get the rifles.

The reason the revolt was successful
was that no one prisoner knew too much.
The leaders told me I would be a runner.
I would report to the sorting block,
Camp 2. That is all I knew.

On the 14th of October, 1943,
at 4 in the afternoon,
the revolt began.
Why 4?
Because at 5 it gets dark,
and at 5 we had to line up.
At 4, the tailors asked Untershtorm Neiman
to come for a fitting,
to see if his suit was ready.
When he sat down,
he put his gun down,
and they cut him with an axe,
they took off his ear. He shouted,
"Everyone will know
it is you who are killing me!"
He thought he was the only one
we were attacking.
The next blow killed him.

At the very same time,
all the Germans working near prisoners
were killed. Someone called me over.
"Berele, run, tell the leaders,
this one is finished!"

I was running.
I saw another prisoner
running with pipes.
I knew rifles were inside.
We were smiling.

Neiman was killed.
Graishus was killed
and other Germans. It was fantastic.
These murderers, who killed thousands,
were finally dead.

I went back to Camp 1.
One of the Germans noticed
something wasn't normal.
He ran to the office.
Some of our people ran after
and killed him.

We returned to Camp 1.
It was exciting.
Sasha Pechersky made sure
everyone would be escaping,
all of us together.
He sent a boy to the line-up
to give the message:
it was time.
Then Sasha shouted,
"Let's go!"
People were running, shooting.
I ran with the first group, to the main gate.
We opened the ammunition closet.
Prisoners took rifles.
I saw a lot of people run
straight into the mined gates.

"I have had the honor of being able to interview for a decade the esteemed Professor Israel Gutman, chief researcher at Yad Vashem and prolific author of books on Polish Jewry during the war," writes Breindel Kasher. "As a boy in the Warsaw Ghetto, he was a member of *HaShomer HaTza'ir* Youth Movement and fought in the Uprising; in Auschwitz, he continued his resistance as part of the Underground. At the war's end, he was part of *Aliya Bet*, smuggling Jews out of Europe into Palestine, where he became a member of a kibbutz."

Breindel Lieba Kasher

Professor Israel Gutman: The Underground in Auschwitz

I was part of an underground in Auschwitz.
We were a small group of Jews.
Yehuda Laufer, a Slovak Jew, was like a brother.
In Auschwitz, he was an old prisoner, I a new one,
but our friendship was close,
until the last days of his life in Israel.
Our group, mostly Polish Jews,
was responsible, in some way,
for the *sonderkommandos*
blowing up the crematorium.

It started with this *pulver*,
gunpowder, we smuggled into camp.
We worked at the Union Factory in Auschwitz.
A few women worked with this *pulver*,
making grenades. Little by little, they delivered
small amounts of this powder to us
and to the crematorium in Birkenau.

We did not know exactly
what would happen with the powder.
Then we received a message from the underground.
Our instructions, to smuggle this powder into camp,
and prepare for an uprising.
Soon after the powder was delivered,
the *sonderkommandos* blew up a crematorium.

Those last days, we heard the Soviets were close.
We believed there would be an uprising,
a battle in Auschwitz —
we, meaning the prisoners
who belonged to this underground,
a group of leftists, including Zionists.
We hoped for an uprising,
but it never happened.

This group went out together
on the Auschwitz Death March.
It was winter. We went
mostly on foot.
Some days we rode
on open freight wagons,
all crowded together, without food,
without anything. We went
in the direction of Austria,
to Vienna, to Mauthausen.

We marched on the back roads.
When we began the march,
we were, more or less, in a better condition,
because in Auschwitz, those last days,
we had more to eat. We were a bit freer.
We began to feel optimistic;
perhaps there was still a chance
we could survive.

It is difficult to convey
how we arrived at Mauthausen.
We were no longer the same people.
We had been together, helping one another.
Help meant holding someone up
who could no longer take a step.
Those who could not march were shot.
The whole way was strewn with the dead.

A little-known, successful escape from Auschwitz is part of the history of two courageous Jewish inmates, Sophie-Esther Manela and Ewa Gabanyi. Even though their story is unique and private, it also represents a collective narrative to be read against the background of Jewish women's nurturing agency during the Holocaust, an illustration of a type of resistance called "stealth altruism" in the essay by Arthur Shostak (pp. 22–25).

Pnina Rosenberg

Camaraderie as a Form of Resistance in Auschwitz: Sophie-Esther Manela and Ewa Gabanyi

"I still like dandelions. They saved my life as well. I respect these bright yellow flowers; I blow their winged seeds away so they will multiply" (Tichauer, 2000, p. 58).

This elegy to the common and modest dandelion plant was written by Eva Tichauer, an Auschwitz survivor, who, in her autobiography, narrates her experience as an inmate assigned to the Plant-Growing Unit of Rajsko, a Nazi research laboratory for *kok-sagyz*, a rubber plant. Rajsko, situated in a village some three kilometers from Oswiecim, was a sub-camp of Auschwitz (Heim, 2001; 2009, pp. 173–199).

A similar homage to this unpretentious plant is illustrated by a drawing done in Auschwitz by the inmate-artist Ewa Gabanyi, who, as a gifted painter, was assigned to the same plant laboratory (Kagan, 1947, pp. 66–67; Rosenberg, 2003, p. 91). Gabanyi, who did the plant drawings, used the official painting materials she was given for her work for private *oeuvres* as well. In a small booklet of 22 pages (18 × 10 cm.) that she called *Almanac of Memories, Auschwitz-Rajsko Concentration Camp*, 1944, the entry dated 1 January 1944 (1 *zycznia* 1944) [Fig. 1] presents a painting titled *Ball in Rajsko* (*Bal w Rajsku*), in which the two dancers are nothing more than two dandelions whose "bright yellow flowers" are feminine heads.

This is, undoubtedly, not only a reference to Ewa's official occupation in the camp but also a very special homage to the bond created between the artist and her sister-in-mate Sophie-Esther Manela, commonly called Esther. This minute and delicate drawing stands as mute testament to the courageous (hi)story of these two Jewish women inmates who came from different backgrounds and met in the



FIG. 1: Ewa Gabanyi, *Ball in Rajsko*, from *Almanac of Memories, Auschwitz-Rajsko Concentration Camp*, 1944, p. 7. KL Auschwitz-Rajsko, 1944, ink and watercolor on paper, 13 x 10 cm. Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

concentration camp melting pot, where they were united not only by a cruel, common fate but also by their strong desire to oppose it.

Esther Pur, born Sophie-Esther Manela in 1925 in Kasselbach, Germany, was 18 years old when she was incarcerated in Auschwitz and then transferred to Rajsko. There she met the Jewish-Slovakian artist Ewa Gabanyi, born in 1913 in Gelinca and interned in Auschwitz in April 1942 (Pur, 2006).

Despite her young age, Esther had already known hardship. The untimely death of her father, Yaakov Manela, a printer and bookbinder, and the subsequent inability of her mother, Chaja to support her six children, had led to severe economic hardship for the family. Eight-year-old Esther was sent to a Jewish orphanage to be cared for. When she was 14, the building housing the orphanage was destroyed during the pogroms of Kristallnacht (November 1938), and Esther decided to join the Berlin chapter of the Zionist youth movement, *Hachshara*, where she was trained in agriculture. This experience, ironically, later qualified her to work at the Rajsko greenhouse (Pur, 2006).

Ewa, 12 years her senior, took the young inmate under her aegis; she, as attested to by Esther, was like a mother to her. Esther writes that Ewa “had an enormous influence on me. I felt very good with her. Ewa, my friend, arranged that I could work near her, and in the hut, our beds were one next to the other” (Pur, 2006, p. 53). This relationship, characterized by amiable protectiveness [or the “stealth altruism” described by Arthur Shostak, pp. 22–25—Eds.], is manifested in the *Ball in Rajsko* drawing. The taller personified plant is not only holding and guiding the smaller one, sketched with “childish” features, but is also depicted as looking at its younger partner with tenderness and caring, reflecting their comradeship and their special undeniable bond.

This kind of dependent relationship was more common among female inmates during the Holocaust than among male inmates. Sybil Milton (1990), the Holocaust researcher, pointed out that despite the fact that men and women shared the same fate during the Holocaust and their daily routine in the camps was more or less similar, gender differences did exist. “Women artists in the camps tended to paint more collective scenes . . . of small groups of women helping each other” (p. 151). She also notes that women tended to set up relationships in small “family” units based on mutual assistance, which greatly increased their chances of survival.

A most telling account of the significance of companionship and solidarity in this “concentration sphere” is also attested to by Raya Kagan (1947), an Auschwitz survivor, whose report on camp life was written just after her liberation, when her memories were still very fresh in her mind.

Slowly the women prisoners organized themselves into pairs or small groups. . . . Mutual trust, readiness for sacrifice, a sense of justice—these are the advantages of a “family.” . . . Friendship linked people from all corners of Europe, erasing differences of nationality and age. It relieved the weight of our burden, let light into our lives and became a beacon in that wasteland of scarcity and grief. Friendship linked us in small groups and circles which pursued one aim—to forget, to forget the camp, the hunger, torture and death! It nurtured the brain and the soul and absorbed all our energy, saving us from the black depths of bitterness and despair. (pp. 115–116)

ESCAPISM AND REALITY

One of the leitmotifs in camp art was the “hope and the desire for freedom . . . such expressions . . . not only helped the artists to preserve their humanity but also gave them the courage to continue to live, despite everything that was happening to them and around them” (Amishai-Maisels, 1993, pp. 5, 6).

This desire, sometimes illustrated in imaginative, fictive images, can be seen in a series of drawings Ewa produced in her *Almanac*. This small folio of drawings in ink and watercolor depict mainly various fancy dress balls set in imaginary, fantastic scenes. Some take place in different historical periods, such as one called *Pharaoh's Ball (Bal u Faraona)* or *Party in Caesar's Mansion Court (Uctza na dworza Cezara w Rzymie)*, which is probably an allusion to the head of the plant unit, SA Major General Joachim Caesar, and the lavish life the camp administration led (Tichauer, 2002, p. 67). In these festive scenes, the human figures are presented against various corresponding backgrounds such as pyramids and palm trees. In contrast, Ewa presents the *Ball in Rajsko*.

Most of the *Almanac* pages bear signs of escapism, evoking an imaginary atmosphere enhanced by the mixture of different periods and motifs—fantastic oriental animals, plants, and architecture alongside contemporary figures. Ewa inserts only two pages among these dazzling images with direct reference to life in the camp: *The Ball in Rajsko* and *The First Camp Soup (Zjada Persza Zupke Lagrowa)*, dated 27 April (27 Kwiecniem) [Fig. 2].

Here the artist portrays herself, dressed in the striped prisoners' uniform, against the background of the barbed-wire fence, eating the first soup she received after being in the camp for over three weeks. It is an important event whose exact date she remembers; therefore, it deserves to be included in her *Memories Almanac*. Ewa uses humor in her works, which is also manifested here: She gives the dreary soup the special name of *Zoupke Lagrowa*—using the



FIG. 2: Eva Gabanyi, *The First Camp Soup*, from *Almanac of Memories, Auschwitz-Rajsko Concentration Camp, 1944*, p. 9. KL Auschwitz-Rajsko, 1944, ink and watercolor on paper, 13 x 10 cm. Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

German noun *Lager* (camp) and tempering it with a gourmet-like suffix, thus making it appropriate to be included in an almanac inhabited by kings, a Caesar, knights, and other members of the nobility.

In reflecting on the *Almanac* and its significance, Agnieszka Sieradzka (2009), the art curator at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, concludes:

At first glance, the drawings from the *Almanac* resemble the illustrations to some fairy tale. However, the dates and captions, as well as two pages alluding to the situation in which the women found themselves, indicate that they had a much deeper meaning. They would seem to reflect the memories and conversation of the women in the sub-camp, and probably their dreams, as well. Ewa Gabanyi's *Almanac* is one of the few illustrated diaries written inside a concentration camp. It features only rare scenes from the camp. Works of this sort represented an escape from the tragic everyday

reality. They express, above all, the longing for freedom and the sense of a wasted life, but they are not devoid of hope. The story that Gabanyi tells over the more than 20 pages of the diary has a happy ending. (p. 15)

The “happy ending” refers to the heroic escape of Esther Manela and Ewa Gabanyi.

FROM ESCAPISM TO ESCAPE

The constant reminders of inhuman torture and ruthless death at Auschwitz, which seemed even more brutal against the background of the plants and the beautiful flowers surrounding the Rajsko inmates, motivated the two women to try to run away. Once the idea was conceived, they went to consult an inmate who was known as a fortune teller. She told them, “You will run away from here and you will succeed” (Pur, 2002, p. 56). Encouraged by those words, they started to draw up their plan, using a great deal of resourcefulness and inventiveness.

Rajsko . . . is surrounded by barbed wire and we are under constant surveillance. . . . When I am asked about the possibility to escape, the word “impossible” springs to mind. Yes, there were attempts. Those women generally ended hanged in the roll-call areas. (Tichauer, 2000, p. 67)

In light of this testimony, Esther and Ewa's courageous and well-crafted plan to escape gains more power and singularity.

Because they could not wear camp uniforms once they escaped, they needed to find a way to secure new clothes. Esther had become friendly with a young Jewish man named Adi Lindbaum, an Auschwitz prisoner who was assigned occasionally to fetch bouquets of flowers from Rajsko's greenhouse. Esther and Adi spoke frequently during those errands, and she soon felt she could trust him. Because he also acted as a “nurse” in Auschwitz, a position that enabled him to move around in the camp, he seemed to be the most suitable person to help Esther and Ewa. Esther revealed their plan to him and asked if he could secure sewing materials and the needed clothes. Indeed, after several days, Adi managed to smuggle them a woolen blanket, two pairs of trousers, and two shirts.

While waiting for their hair to grow, Esther and Ewa studied the camp routine carefully. They discovered that during bombardments, which came frequently during the summer of 1944, the guards always hid. They also paid attention to the coal train that passed by nightly, at regular hours, near the camp's barbed-wired fence. Furnished with this information, Ewa, daringly, approached a Slovenian SS guard who had been her classmate back home. He, appar-

ently touched by their courage, promised to turn a blind eye to them. He even asked the engineer, another Slovenian, to slow the train down to enable the two inmates a better chance to board it. When everything was arranged, the time to escape had arrived.

ESCAPE FROM RAJSKO

The night before the train was scheduled to pass by, the two women managed to make an opening in the fence large enough to allow them to creep out of the camp. A night later, the train, as promised, slowed down, and the two waiting inmates jumped onto one of coal cars and hid there. There is no doubt that both the guard and the train driver took great risks in assisting the two Jewish fugitives.

The train, which was going towards the Czech city of Olomouc, slowed again while entering the Czech territory (which might have been a result of an earlier arrangement with the train driver). Ewa and Esther took advantage of the slow speed, jumped off, and started walking. They walked at night and hid in the day, not knowing where they were. Esther, who had excellent eyesight, served as a guide to nearsighted Ewa and warned her whenever she spotted a suspicious-looking person.

After several nights and days of wandering, they reached a village and met an old woman, who, when seeing the two escapees, made the sign of the cross and mumbled "Oh, my God!" in Polish. Ewa, who spoke several European languages including Polish, somehow reassured the woman and asked her for shelter for the night. The woman hid the fugitives in her house and offered them food. They were both starving, but Esther, hungry as she was, could not eat, because she detected the smell of the pork in the dish. This was characteristic of her; she always tried to keep both her human dignity and her strong Jewish identity. Even in Auschwitz, during Passover, despite her inconceivable hunger, she had refused to eat the meager portions of the bread (Pur, 2006, p. 51).

The next day they left the temporary shelter and, without knowing where they were, went from one village to another. Once, utterly exhausted, they took the enormous risk of relying again on unfamiliar people.

We arrived at a house in one of the villages. We knocked on the door and asked for shelter for the night. The family agreed to hide us. The head of the family was a pharmacist. When he saw the tattooed number on our arms, he brought a special ointment from his room that removes tattoos. "If you are caught, it will be better if nobody knows that you ran away from a camp." We stayed there several weeks, till the landlady said that it was too dangerous and we must leave. (Pur, 2006, p. 58)

They continued their nightly wandering. Occasionally, they encountered good and decent people who gave them shelter for a while, but usually they hid on side roads. One night, they stumbled upon a group of soldiers headed by an officer mounted on a horse who blocked their way. Ewa, motionless, gazed straight into his eyes. He asked whether she was Hungarian, and when Ewa answered him in his mother tongue, he calmed the two women, informing them that they were not German soldiers but Hungarians and that they should not be afraid. However, this encounter raised an unexpected problem, which eventually separated the two women. The Hungarian officer fell in love with Ewa and followed them everywhere, which put Esther in an awkward situation:

Wherever we went, he came with us. Not knowing any Hungarian, Czech, or Polish, I decided that I'd better be silent, so I pretended to be a deaf-mute. But after a while, I felt I could not go on like this any longer. It was in Gross-Rosen (Lower Silesia) that we decided to separate. (Pur, 2006, p. 58)

We do not know what feelings were evoked by this painful and unexpected choice, or the promises the women exchanged when they parted, but, as Esther recounts without elaboration, "The officer gave me some money. I went away and Ewa stayed with him." (p. 58).

Much hardship awaited each woman until each arrived in her respective haven. Eventually, Ewa settled in Hamburg and pursued her artistic career, while Esther realized her dream of immigrating to the Land of Israel. She became a member of Kibbutz Netzer Sireni, where she was employed in the kibbutz gardens.

REUNITED

In September 1945, Ewa had overheard two Czech officers speaking about a young German woman who spoke no Polish or Czech and said that she was a Jewish prisoner from Auschwitz who had escaped with a friend. To prove her identity, the prisoner had revealed the unhealed scar that remained after the chemical removal of her tattooed camp number. However, one of the Czech officers said it was not convincing enough, so she was considered to be a German and, consequently, was shot. Ewa, sure that this young woman was her dear companion Esther, lost hope and did not look for her friend. For 20 years, the two women lost all trace of each other, each believing that the other had not survived.

Two decades later, however, an encounter with an ex-Auschwitz inmate let Ewa know that her overheard information had been false. Excited and overwhelmed, she sent Esther a letter, hoping it would reach the right person. The

letter evokes not only her longing for Esther but also their special relationship, echoing the motherly compassion and concern she always felt for her “protégé.”

Was it you, my child, my dear Sophie? Was it your story or someone else's? And if I write to you, is it you I am writing to?! And here, after 20 years, I heard from Inga that you, my child, are living in Israel. My breath stopped, I am happy. . . . how could I doubt it? (Pur, 2006, p. 63)

The two friends joyfully reunited and resumed their bond, which lasted until Ewa's death in 1973. Esther, who passed away in 2008, cherished her friend, whom she memorialized in her biography.

THE SPIRIT OF RESISTANCE

It is evident that Ewa's and Esther's friendship, which was forged in the camp, reinforced and nourished their spirit of resistance. This spirit, coupled with the women's striving for freedom, resulted in their escape, which saved their lives. Their successful flight was due, in part, to the trusted Adi, to the kindness of a few brave and sympathetic Slovenians, Slovaks, and Hungarians, and a great deal of luck. It was also, though, quite clearly the fruit of meticulous planning, cooperation, and their combined resourcefulness, ingenuity, determination, and creativity. Their heroic escape proves that spiritual resistance, as manifested in the (almost) imaginary *oeuvres* of the *Almanac*, may also lead to action. The fortified soul nourished the stricken body; the strength derived from reliable and trusted camaraderie overcame obstacles that otherwise seemed impossible to defeat.

NOTE

Ewa Gabanyi, *An Almanac of Memories, Auschwitz-Rajsko Concentration Camp, 1944 (Kalendarz wspomnień, KL Auschwitz-Rajsko 1944)*. The almanac is in the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, PMO 1-1-492-1-22. It was kept by Józefa Kiwała (1926–1985), Gabanyi's friend and co-inmate in Rajsko, who donated the diary to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum in 1980. Information has been furnished to the author by Dr. Agnieszka Sieradzka, art curator of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to her for her amiable assistance.

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Cyrus Cassells's homage to Elie Wiesel brings us "the illicit sounds / of Beethoven's concerto," an illustration, like Emily Borenstein's poem on Verdi's *Requiem* (pp. 59–63), of the power of music to help maintain the humanity of the imprisoned Jews who persevered, "insisting / winter cannot reign forever."

Cyrus Cassells

Juliek's Violin

For Elie Wiesel

Even here?
In this snow-bound barracks?

Suddenly, the illicit sounds
of Beethoven's concerto

erupt from Juliek's smuggled violin,
suffusing this doomsday shed

teeming with the trampled
and the barely alive,

realm of frostbite and squalor,
clawing panic and suffocation —

Insane, God of Abraham,
insanely beautiful:

a boy insisting
winter cannot reign forever,

a boy conveying his brief,
barbed-wired life

with a psalmist's or a cantor's
arrow-sure ecstasy:

One prison-striped friend
endures to record

the spellbinding strings,
the woebegone,

and the other,
the impossible Polish fiddler,

is motionless by morning,
his renegade instrument

mangled
under the haggard weight

of winterkilled, unraveling men.
Music at the brink of the grave,

eloquent in the pitch dark,
tell-true, indelible,

as never before,
as never after —

*Abundance,
emending beauty,*

*linger in the listening,
the truth-carrying soul of Elie,*

*soul become slalom-swift,
camp-shrewd, un-crushable;*

*abundance, be here, always here,
in this not-yet-shattered violin.*

Oriana Ivy writes with pride of her grandmother, who prays and laughs and sings, whose "voice does not quiver," despite the setting: Auschwitz.

Oriana Ivy

God's Hearing

One evening in Auschwitz
the women in her barracks began to pray.

Their prayer grows and grows,
a chant, a hymn, a howl —
it carries far

into the searchlight-blinded,
electric wire-razored night.
The Kapo rushes in and shouts,

Not so loud!
God is not hard of hearing!

And my grandmother laughs.
Then she begins to sing:
Many have fallen

in the sleep of death,
but we have still awakened
to praise Thee,

she sings to the God of Auschwitz.
Her voice does not quiver.

"While some 23,000 non-Jewish rescuers of Jews have been, justifiably, honored by Yad Vashem with the title of *Hasidei Ha'Umot Ha'Olam*, the Righteous Among the Nations, no comparable honorific has yet been devised for Jewish rescuers of Jews," writes Mordecai Paldiel. Circumstances made such rescue exceedingly difficult and rare, but "dozens of individual Jews, with the clandestine assistance of many others, initiated actions to save great numbers of their Jewish brethren from destruction, risking their own lives in that process."

Mordecai Paldiel

Jews Who Rescued Jews: A Little-Known Aspect of Jewish Defiance

Marion Pritchard-van Binsbergen (1997), a much-celebrated non-Jewish rescuer in Holland and a recipient of Yad Vashem's Righteous Among the Nations title, stated,

Not recognizing the moral courage, the heroism of the Jewish rescuers, who, if caught, were at much higher risk of the most punitive measures than the gentiles, is a distortion of history. It also contributes to the widespread fallacious impression that the Jews were cowards, who allowed themselves to be led like "lambs to the slaughter." Nothing is farther from the truth.¹

While resistance is most commonly thought of as armed combat, such as occurred during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and was evident in the actions of the partisans, another form of resistance took place simultaneously—that of thwarting the goal of the Nazi regime by keeping as many Jews alive as possible. The actions of the Jewish rescuers who sabotaged the murderous intent of Nazi policy by saving Jewish lives represent resistance and defiance.

Dozens of individual Jews, with the clandestine assistance of many others, initiated actions to save great numbers of their Jewish brethren from destruction, risking their own lives to do so. Rabbi Dov Weissmandl and Gisi Fleischmann, in Slovakia [see p. 109—Eds.]; the Bielski brothers, in Belarus; Alexander Pechersky, inside the Sobibor extermination camp [see pp. 71–73—Eds.]; the Zionist youth leadership in Hungary [see pp. 103–108—Eds.]; Joseph Ithai, in Italy; Yvonne Jospa, in Belgium;

Vladka Meed, in Poland; and Georges Garel and Marianne Cohn in France [see pp. 100–102—Eds.] were just a few.² This essay focuses on the courageous and little-known acts of only three: Walter Süskind, in the Netherlands; and Moussa and Odette Abadi, in France.

WALTER SÜSKIND: "THE HEART AND SOUL OF 'OPERATION KIDNAP'"

For our first story, we turn to the Netherlands, a country that, like Poland, was under direct military and civilian occupation by Nazi Germany from 1940–1945. In the Netherlands, as in Poland, the Nazis were determined to rid the country of its estimated 140,000 Jews, and they succeeded in destroying close to 80% of the Jewish population by deportation to the death camps. To facilitate the concentration of the doomed victims, the Germans converted a theater in the heart of Amsterdam, known as the *Hollandse Schouwburg* (Dutch Theater), to serve as a makeshift prison for at least 50,000 Jews before moving them to Westerbork, a Dutch transit camp in the northeastern part of the country, a way station for deportation trains that left at regular intervals for the killing sites.

Inside the theater, the SS team in charge refused to deal directly with their victims but passed on orders through Nazi-appointed Jewish intermediaries, the Jewish Council (*Joodse Raad*), created by the Germans as a go-between for the Nazi overlords vis-à-vis the Jewish masses under their control. The council's representatives at the theater were Jewish Council member E. Slutzker and his aide, Walter Süskind, who, in practice, was the man who dealt directly

with the Germans, and who used his position to smuggle out hundreds of Jews (some say close to a thousand) before their deportation to the camps.

Born in 1906, in Ludenscheid, Germany, Walter Süskind left his home after the Nazis came to power, moving in 1935 to Holland with his wife, Hanna; his mother, and his mother-in-law. In Holland, he worked for the Unilever Company, which manufactured soap. Unilever had an affiliate in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Süskind looked forward to moving there with his wife and new baby daughter. In late 1941, the Germans clamped down on further Jewish emigration from Holland and targeted all Jews for deportation, but Süskind had all his papers in order and thought that he might still get out. However, the U.S. entry into the war with Germany, in December 1941, derailed any such hopes.

At the Dutch Theater, Süskind was appointed by the Jewish Council to be one of its representatives to the Germans, thanks to his language and organizational skills. That was the occasion for him to save as many Jews as possible.

He developed a good rapport with the SS guards and their commander, which he used to his advantage. He doctored the list of internees behind the backs of the unsuspecting SS guards, changing and deleting the names of those for whom Süskind and his aides had arranged an escape so they could go into hiding. To this day, no one is exactly sure how he managed this. Some speculate that the list was written on individual cards kept in a file cabinet, and that Süskind simply threw away the cards of those whose escape he arranged. Those fortunate enough to be chosen by Süskind were generally spirited out of the theater's windows or back entrance, at times in connivance with one or several SS guards, who were paid handsomely in money or goods to look the other way. As the man responsible for the administrative side of the operation, Süskind made sure that the paperwork was kept in a disorderly, even chaotic, condition, the better to be able to tamper with the names when the time seemed ripe.

In the words of Dutch World War II historian Johannes ten Cate, Süskind "was clever and secretive. He knew how to bend the rules in his favor."³ One witness describes him as a terrific organizer with a big mouth, who, as a German himself, knew exactly how to deal with his German overlords.

One of Süskind's acts in defiance of Nazi orders involved the release of persons already sitting on trains, waiting to be taken to Westerbork. This happened after his network had discovered that the keys to the lockers in an Amsterdam bathhouse fit the locks of some transport railcars used in deporting Jews. If he had been caught, it is certain that Süskind would—at the very least—have faced immediate deportation, if he weren't shot on the spot on the grounds of sabotaging the deportation of Jews.⁴

In another brave exploit, Süskind, who—like the other Jewish Council officials—wore a particular yellow armband that signified that he was exempt from deportation, boarded trolleys traveling to the train station with Jewish prisoners, distributed these special armbands to them, and persuaded the conductor to release them, saying that this category of persons had been mistakenly arrested and were, in fact, temporarily exempt from deportation.



Fig 1: Six young Dutch-Jewish children brought from the *Creche* to a children's home by the Dutch Underground. Circa 1941–1943. Courtesy United States Holocaust Memorial Museum photo archive.

Süskind's greatest effort was expended in saving children. When families arrived at the theater, children were forcibly separated from their frantic parents and taken across the street to a building called the *Creche* (Children's Daycare Center),⁵ where they were kept and cared for by Jewish nurses until they were sent to rejoin their parents when the family was to be deported [Fig. 1]. Süskind worked clandestinely and closely with the Jewish head of the *Creche*, Henriette Henriques Pimentel (who was eventually deported and perished), to find escape routes for as many of the children as possible. Whenever parents could supply a safe address for their child, Süskind's accomplices on the outside would verify if the people were indeed ready to conceal him or her. In the words of Lisette Lamon (1986), one of Süskind's aides in the theater:

Walter—the heart and soul of Operation Kidnap—would only allow a child to be smuggled out if it had a verified home. Children were smuggled out of the nursery in rucksacks, laundry bags, crates, bread baskets, burlap bags, or held under a coat. One infant passed through a cordon of SS men in a cake box.⁶

The lowest estimate of the number of children saved through Süskind's operation is 600; the highest is one thousand. In light of the estimated *total* of some 4,500 Jewish children saved in the Netherlands, Süskind's achievement is quite amazing. The rescue of these children was, in the words of eyewitness Lisette Lamon, "all masterminded by Walter, like an intricate battle plan carefully organized; nothing was done haphazardly. Each step was well thought out and prepared."

Eventually, Süskind's family was arrested and taken to Westerbork. When, in September 1944, Walter learned that his family was about to be deported to Theresienstadt, he decided to voluntarily join them. His non-Jewish, clandestine associate, Piet Meerburg, stated that he and others

tried with all our might to convince Süskind not to go . . . but he went to his wife in Westerbork. Over there, he wanted to do what he did in the theater: to play around with the index cards and allow people to escape. However, those in charge there did not dare.⁷

The following month, he was deported to Theresienstadt; thence, to Auschwitz. His wife, daughter, mother, and his wife's mother died there. It is believed that Walter died on the Death March during January 1945, when the camp was evacuated and the remaining inmates taken on a forced march westward in subzero weather. Lisette Lamon, who was eventually deported to Bergen-Belsen but survived, notes that Süskind never asked for or accepted any reward. He was unable to save himself or his family, but "well over a thousand are living today because of him and those who were his accomplices."⁸ Saving so many lives, almost single-handedly, constitutes an act of open defiance to the persistent and obsessive determination by the Nazis to rid Holland of its Jewish population.

MOUSSA AND ODETTE ABADI: SAVING JEWISH CHILDREN

For this story of Jewish resistance, we turn to France. A Syrian Jew, Moussa Abadi [Fig. 2], and a French Jewess, Yvette Rosenstock [Fig. 3] (the two married after the war), headed a clandestine network in the Nice region dedicated to finding hiding places for Jewish children whose parents had been deported by French and German police units.⁹

Born in Damascus, Syria, in 1910, Moussa Abadi studied at the local French-speaking Jewish Alliance school, where he earned a scholarship for further studies in France. With the French defeat in 1940, Abadi fled to Nice, in the Vichy non-occupied zone, where he met Odette Rosenstock, a pediatrician and medical school inspector. Abadi also met the Catholic bishop, Monsignor Paul Rémond, who, upon learning of Abadi's language skills, hired him to give French grammar and diction lessons to seminarians.



FIG 2: Moussa Abadi, Co-founder of the Abadi (Marcel) network. Post-war portrait circa 1945–1949. Courtesy USHMM photo archive.

In late 1942, Abadi spent time with a military chaplain with the Italian army (allied to Nazi Germany; the Italians then also controlled the Nice/Cannes region); and the chaplain chose to tell Abadi the frightful things he had witnessed while with the army in the Russian sector.

"What I am about to tell," the bearded priest, dressed in a white robe,

told the attentive Abadi, "you will not believe. But I have to speak out before I die, so that others may know." He related the atrocities by the SS against Jewish children. At that, Abadi decided to dedicate himself to fight the Nazis by saving lives—of Jewish children, in particular. He asked for an audience with Monsignor Rémond, who, as the leading Catholic prelate in Nice, might be of great help if he could be persuaded to use his influence and office in the rescue of

Jews. Abadi was cordially received. Facing the bishop, he spoke:

I am Jewish, and I come from one of the oldest ghettos in the world. I have come to ask you to take risks . . . You may take me to the door and throw me out. But without your help, I cannot save children.¹⁰



FIG 3: Post-war portrait, circa 1945–1949, of Odette Rosenstock, Co-founder of the Abadi (Marcel) network. Courtesy USHMM photo archive.

Rémond responded that he needed time to think and asked Abadi to return in a few days. When he did, Abadi was startled by the words of the priest: "You have convinced me.

You have converted me."¹¹ Abadi was assigned a room at the diocese for use in planning the rescue of as many children as possible should the opportunity arise.

Upon the Italian capitulation in September 1943, the Nazis, headed by the notorious SS commander Alois Brunner, swept into Nice and Cannes and began to hunt the Jews. With the help of local informers, who were promised 300 to 500 francs for every Jew they betrayed, the Germans

succeeded in rounding up some 1,850 Jews during an initial three-month period. Now Moussa Abadi and Odette Rosenstock acted. They picked up abandoned Jewish children whose parents had been suddenly arrested or were in hiding and found secure hiding places for the youngsters. In the room that Bishop Rémond placed at their disposal, Moussa and Odette created false credentials, such as new identity cards, baptismal certificates, and ration cards for the hidden Jewish children. Rémond also handed Abadi a personal letter of introduction, which opened many doors of Catholic institutions to him.

To cover their tracks outside of their network, Moussa and Odette made false documents for themselves as well, assuming new identities as Monsieur Marcel and Sylvie Delatre respectively, ostensibly educational aides and medical assistants for the Catholic diocese of Nice. Odette made house calls at homes of prospective host families to interview them, placed the children where she thought they would be safe, paid for their upkeep, and, on return visits, took note of their health and treatment. Financial aid to the couple came secretly through the U.S.-based Joint Distribution Committee (JDC); the Jewish child welfare organization, *Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants* (OSE); and the American-based Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). During the one-year rescue period from September 1943 to August 1944 (when France was liberated), the Abadi network, known under the code word Marcel, secured safe places for 527 Jewish children in various children's and private homes in the Nice/Cannes region.

Children were first gathered and brought to a secret place, where they were "deprogrammed," trained to forget their birth names and biographies and to learn new ones, before being escorted to their hiding destinations armed with new, false credentials. French-sounding names were substituted for too-conspicuously-sounding Jewish ones, such as Arthieu instead of Artsztein, Bernier for Bernstein, and Montel for Mandel. Children were hidden in various religious institutions of the Nice diocese: convents, orphanages, religious schools, and vacation camps, as well as in carefully chosen private homes. To keep track of all children under their care and ensure their safe return to their families after the war, Moussa and Odette established three separate card indexes, one for the Red Cross, to be stored in Geneva for safekeeping; another for day-to-day work; and a third to



Fig 4: French-Jewish rescuers Moussa Abadi and his wife Odette Rosenstock walk along a street in Nice after the war. Courtesy United States Holocaust Memorial Museum photo archive.

serve as a reserve index, in case the others were misplaced.

Odette Rosenstock, sought by Brunner himself, was eventually betrayed and arrested in April 1944, and, after undergoing a brutal interrogation, during which she did not divulge information on the scope of the rescue operation, was deported to Auschwitz, then to Bergen-Belsen, which she miraculously survived.¹²

Back in Nice, with the police frantically looking for him, Moussa Abadi, also long on Brunner's "most wanted" list, stayed hidden by passing nights in a school, which he vacated early each morning, and days attending masses, one after the other, in the city's Catholic churches and chapels. "No practicing Catholic attended so many masses in such a short time as I did," Abadi facetiously recalls. With danger his constant companion, Abadi continued his rescue operation almost single-handedly until the liberation of Nice in August 1944. Immediately after the war, he turned over the children's list to Jewish organizations, including information on the whereabouts of the 527 children, so they could be fetched and reunited with their families and loved ones. After marrying Odette [Fig. 4] upon her miraculous survival, he returned to an old interest, the theater, this time as a dramatic art critic on French radio, where he hosted a program for 22 years.

Abadi's spectacular rescue operation was all but forgotten until recent years, when his name cropped up in stories

of French rescuers awarded the Yad Vashem Righteous title. The Abadis believed that their rescue of more than 500 children did not merit them any honors, for, as Jews, they had simply carried out an elementary humanitarian duty. As Abadi said in 1995, two years before his death, during a gathering of a group of his former wards: "There is no need for you to thank us, for you owe us nothing. It is we who are in debt to you"; in other words, he was apologizing for having naively believed that an event such as the Holocaust could not happen and, therefore, neglecting to take preventive measures in time. While the Abadis were eventually recognized by their wards during their lifetime, sadly, they were overlooked by the Jewish community at large, for reasons still unclear.

These two stories are but a handful of many more rescue accounts by Jewish heroes of the Holocaust that wait to be told and learned. They help us understand that resistance was carried out in many guises and contexts. The Nazis wanted to murder every Jewish man, woman, and child; when Jews acted without regard for their own safety to rescue other Jews, therefore, they were acting in defiance of the Nazis. These bold and courageous acts deserve to be acknowledged, honored, and taught.

NOTES

1. From a private lecture Mrs. Pritchard sent to the author. For more on Marion Pritchard-van Binsbergen's rescue of Jews see "Pritchard-van Binsbergen, Marion," in Mordecai Paldiel's *The Righteous Among the Nations: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust* (Jerusalem & New York: Yad Vashem & Harper Collins, 2007), pp. 345–349.

2. For Weissmandl, see: Abraham Fuchs, *The Unheeded Cry* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1998); for Fleischmann: see Joan Campion's *In the Lion's Mouth* (San Jose, CA: toExcell, 2000); for Bielski Brothers: see Nechama Tec's *Defiance* (NY: Oxford University Press 2009); for Pechersky: see Yitzhak Arad's *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1999), see Index; Zionist Youth: see Asher Cohen's *The Halutz Resistance in Hungary: 1942–1944* (NY: Columbia University, 1986); for Ithai: see Joseph Ithai's *Yalde Vilah Emah* (Moreshet: Sifriyat Poalim, 1983); for Jospa: see Dan Michman's *Belgium and the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1998), see Index; for Meed: see Vladka Meed's *On Both Sides of the Wall* (Ghetto Fighters House & Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1972); for Garel & M. Cohn: see Lucien Lazare's *Rescue as Resistance* (New York: Columbia University 1996), see Index.

3. Johann ten Cate and Bert Jan Flim (who made a study of the rescue of Jewish children), in a private communication to the author, 1998.

4. See David Arnold's "Quiet Hero of the Holocaust." *The Boston Globe*, October 21, 1990, magazine section, pp. 20–38.

5. See Anita van Ommeren & Ageeth Scherphuis, "De Creche, 1942–1943," in *Vrij Nederland*, January 18, 1986, p. 2.

6. Testimony of Lisette Lamon, in file of Walter Süskind, Dept. for the Righteous, Yad Vashem. See also Anita van Ommeren & Ageeth Scherphuis, "De Creche, 1942–1943," in *Vrij Nederland*, January 18, 1986, pp. 9–10.

7. Vri, *Nederland*, p. 18. See also Pieter A. Meerburg, Yad Vashem, Righteous Among the Nations, file 862.

8. See Lisette Lamon's statement in Walter Süskind's file.

9. The Abadi story is based on material in the Moussa Abadi file, Yad Vashem Archives. See also Anny Latour's *The Jewish Resistance in France (1940–1944)*. New York: Holocaust Library, 1970; 70–72.

10. See Jacqueline Sigaar's *Le Réseau Marcel* (Paris: Les Productrices, N.D.), p. 22.

11. *Le Réseau Marcel*, p. 25. See Paul Rémond, Yad Vashem Righteous Among the Nations, file 5061, for more on his rescue activity.

12. The harrowing story of her oppressive mistreatment at the hands of the Nazis appears in a book that she published after the war, titled *Terre de Détresse: Birkenau–Bergen–Belsen*. Paris: Harmattan, 1995.

Davi Walders writes: "Baroness Germaine Halphen de Rothschild (1884–1975), a member of the French branch of the illustrious Rothschild family, rescued 130 children after *Kristallnacht*. She brought them to her home in France and then paid for their passage out of Europe to America and elsewhere." Pair this poem with the essays by Mordecai Paldiel (pp. 84–88) and Judith Cohen (pp. 93–99) to enrich a unit on Jews who rescued Jews.

Davi Walders

The Call of Shattered Glass

The whole world heard it — Kristallnacht's
shattered cities, stores, lives. For most,
deafness and paralysis. Yet one petite
woman with dark eyes, her own Lalique
and Baccarat still untouched, gazed beyond

her beveled windows, imagined each
orphaned face, heard each small voice
calling. Paying any price to bring them
out of Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria —
each child a jewel added to the Rothschild

collections. Mme gathered them into her
own Chateau de la Guette until Paris fell,
buying a hotel in the south, moving them,
feeding and schooling them in La Bourboule.
Leaving money for them when she, herself,

had to flee for her life, enough to bring
them out over the Pyrenees to Spain,
to fishing boats that would take them
to America. Tiny charges implored to say
only *oui* or *non* and smile when questioned,

only smile. After the war, Madame
would return to ransacked homes, crushed
chandeliers, stolen paintings. She would
search freight cars filled with her
belongings marked "Goering for Hitler."

Some canvases could never be restored,
some heirlooms were never found —
precious possessions smelted for
the Reich. Yet one hundred thirty children
settled in other countries, learned new

languages, began again. Sixty years later,
they would return to Chateau de la Guette
from Boston, Miami, Cincinnati, Canada,
Israel, Australia. Strangers linked
by dim, grim details, coming together

to place a plaque for the Baroness
Germaine Halphen de Rothschild
who heard the call of shattered glass
and added to the Rothschild collection
irreplaceable, terrified treasures.

Charles Adès Fishman introduces us to “Francesca – Fannie – that strong and beautiful woman” and weaves a story of courage and love that leads to mercy, a thoroughly uncommon outcome during the Holocaust.

Charles Adès Fishman

A German Official Listened to Her Words

For Jean Hollander

I.

You were living with your family when Hitler invaded Austria. It was a good life until that moment, but then everyone you loved became vulnerable, everything that had been certain was placed in doubt. A day after the *Anschluss*, your father was arrested and the sun burned out.

Your parents had chosen to live on the outskirts of Vienna where it was still possible to be affluent and Jewish.

Then the Reich's troops came and your devoted father was locked in Vienna's jail. He was taken to Buchenwald, then to Dachau, where, for nine brutal months, this man who loved his family, his country, and his life was treated

worse than a criminal. But your mother — Francesca — wouldn't have it that way and raced to Berlin to free him and besieged officials, who seemed incapable of listening. She pleaded and importuned and refused to return to Vienna until your father was let go. Still they wouldn't listen,

until one who wore the uniform of Nazi Germany vowed to put an end to her insolence. Yet she couldn't remain silent. “If you were in prison,” she said, “wouldn't you want your wife to do all she could to free you?” He looked at her then. “Lady,” he said, “go home to your children. Your husband will be released.”

II.

After the Germans came, they went building to building,
rounding up Jews. Fear descended on your family
and held it close. One could be recognized while walking home
from shul, and a daytrip to the zoo or an evening at the opera
became impossible. Even shopping for fruit was terrifying.

True, neighbors were given the family's silver to hold,
and many other treasures, but those precious things
would never be returned.

III.

They came on the Sabbath, in the chill of March daylight:
they came for him and not yet for you, but already life
had changed. No more would *schlag* sweeten a bitter day
or Mozart and Strauss weigh on your ears in waves
of joyous sound. What is it like to be locked in the sphere

of your own being — no free play of memory or dream,
no fountain of laughter or song, but favorite lullabies fading
from the earth? There was no sacred dirge when he was taken,
only the screams of his wife and children. What matters
when the smallest things are made meaningless?

IV.

Where was love in all this? In your mother, Francesca —
Fannie — that strong and beautiful woman, in her wisdom,
in her loyal heart, in her persistence. And where was mercy?
In a German official who listened to her words and was shamed
by them: in him, however briefly, words took on the glow
of meaning: words your mother drew from her life, and spoke.

After Hungarian survivor Enrico Mantello found a suitcase belonging to his father that contained more than a thousand Central American citizenship certificates issued to Jews during the Holocaust, he donated them to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Archivist Judith Cohen shares the unfolding of the analysis of these remarkable documents and their role in helping us understand that Jewish agency took many forms.

Judith Cohen

The Mantello Rescue Mission

One of the most common pedagogic methods in document-based learning is to ask students to extrapolate as much information as possible from a given document. If a class is considering a photograph, for example, a teacher might ask, “Who do you think took this photograph? For what purpose was it taken? From whose point of view is it? Who is the intended audience? What evidence in the picture helps us to know when and where it was taken?” If the document is a text, a teacher might ask, “What seems to be the purpose of the document? What information is included in the text? What is the tone of the language and who was the intended recipient?” Archivists and researchers at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) employ these same tools to better understand the materials in our collection. It’s a time-consuming, fascinating, and crucial part of our work and sometimes uncovers previously unexplored facets of Holocaust history.

Documents come to the Holocaust Museum in various ways. Some are copied from other archives throughout the world; others are donated by survivors and their families. About five years ago, a survivor named Enrico Mantello found a suitcase belonging to his father, Gyorgy Mandel, also known as George Mandel-Mantello. Inside the case were letters, telegrams, and more than a thousand Salvadoran citizenship certificates issued to Jews under Nazi occupation between 1942 and 1944 and signed by Mantello. Enrico, knowing their historic importance, donated them to the museum.

We were familiar with the name of George Mantello; much of his story has been known for some time, largely because of David Kranzler’s (2000) important work *The Man Who Stopped the Trains to Auschwitz*. Kranzler, though, focuses primarily on Mantello’s actions in publicizing, through the Swiss clergy and press, the Vrba-Wexler report (known as the “Auschwitz Protocol”), unleashing forces that

many credit for persuading Admiral Miklos Horthy, the Hungarian regent, to cease the deportations to Auschwitz in July 1944.¹ Mordechai Paldiel (2007) writes in *Diplomat Heroes of the Holocaust*, “Mantello . . . decided to break the silence. . . . World leaders, including the pope, intervened, warning Hungary of the consequences if the deportations did not stop. . . . On July 7, Horthy bowed to world pressure and stopped the deportations.”² For this reason, to the extent that Mantello’s name is cited in Holocaust history texts, it is usually in relation to these efforts on behalf of Hungarian Jews. However, the new documents proved that Mantello began his rescue work a year and a half prior to the German occupation of Hungary.

The survival of this large cache of documents provided a unique opportunity to analyze previously unknown information about the scope and success of the courageous actions of Mantello and the larger context in which he worked. By studying the names, places, and dates on these certificates, we could discover, for the first time, who received them, where and when they were sent, and whether the recipient survived. With this information, we could begin to research the larger questions about what people in neutral countries knew about what was happening under Nazi occupation, what they could and could not do to stem the onslaught of Nazi genocide, and which countries provided the best opportunities for rescue. (You can replicate this research with your students by selecting a small group of these certificates, now easily downloaded from the USHMM website [www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/mantello/], together with information about the people who received them.)

RESCUE AS RESISTANCE

No curriculum on the Holocaust is complete without the study of rescue. Only through such study can students

learn not only what was and was not done to stop the Holocaust but also what more could and could not have been done to save others. Rescuers include not only those individuals who risked their lives to shelter Jews but also foreign diplomats who, risking their reputations, careers, and livelihoods, used their personal initiative and unique status to fight the Nazi bureaucracy. In this light, rescue can be considered a form of resistance.

Until recently, historians of the Holocaust have paid little attention to the actions of Jewish rescuers; the Jews, after all, were being hunted by the Nazis and their sympathizers and, in the main, lacked the ability or opportunity to rescue other Jews. Despite these limitations, however, Jews did act to save other Jews.³ One such person was George Mandel-Mantello [Fig. 1].



FIG. 1: Portrait of George Mandel-Mantello. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, gift of Enrico Mantello.

In the history of rescue, Mantello stands out. First, he was a European Jew who escaped being swept up in the net of Nazi persecution only by unusual circumstances. Second, whereas most rescuers operated only in one specific locale, Mantello's mission spanned all of Europe, reaching almost every country under Nazi occupation.

Mantello grew up in Bistrita, a small town in Roma-

nia, and later moved with his wife and son to Budapest. In the mid-1930s, his business connections resulted in his friendship with a Salvadoran colonel and diplomat, José Arturo Castellanos, who later asked him to serve as honorary attaché of El Salvador in Romania, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. This was not unusual; smaller countries often appointed businessmen to serve as honorary consuls in countries where there were not enough foreign contacts to warrant the appointment of a professional consul or ambassador. Mandel agreed and changed his name to Mantello to sound more Latino.

When Castellanos became El Salvador's Consul General in Geneva, Switzerland, he created a new title of "First Secretary" expressly for Mantello and brought him to the neutral country of Switzerland in August 1942, saving him from future Nazi terrors. The following year, Castellanos also helped Mantello's son, Enrico, come to Switzerland, saving his life as well.⁴

Within months of this appointment, George Mandel-Mantello used his diplomatic position to resist the Nazi assault on his people by launching a major rescue effort. When leaders of the Swiss office of the *Agudat Yisrael* (the *Aguda*, Association of Israel), an international organization of religious Jews, approached Mantello with a request for money in order to purchase South American passports for their relatives and friends, he became offended that countries charged for the life-saving certificates. He then offered to provide similar papers free of charge. Consul-General Castellanos approved the plan and, over the next two and a half years, the Consulate produced and distributed thousands of Salvadoran citizenship papers, sending them to more than a dozen different countries; some were even sent to concentration camps.

Though Mantello himself was not a religious Jew, he continued his cooperation with the Orthodox Jewish *Aguda*. He provided Mathieu Mueller, a Jewish lawyer and former president of the *Aguda* in France, with office space and permission to help manufacture certificates for anyone who needed them. He also hired a small group of college students to type up the certificates and assist in carrying out the operation. After printing each "official" certificate of citizenship, Mantello made a notarized Photostat, which he sent back to occupied Europe by underground Jewish courier, regular Swiss mail, or diplomatic pouch. The originals remained with him in Switzerland; these would be the documents that would reveal this story some 65 years later.

WHO RECEIVED THE CERTIFICATES?

Mantello clearly did not personally know the thousands of people who received the certificates, much less their dates of birth and current addresses. Furthermore, most recipients had no idea who he was and never contacted

him directly. Mueller and others from the *Aguda* continued to request certificates, and as more Swiss Jews learned of the rescue, they requested certificates for their families in occupied countries as well.

Circumstantial evidence points to the fact that other Jewish organizations also might also have heard about the rescue mission and requested certificates for their members. For example, Mantello created certificates for much of the top leadership of the OSE (*Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants*), the Jewish social service network responsible for educating, hiding, and rescuing thousands of Jewish children in France.⁵ We hypothesize that they were requested in the hope that they would provide a safety net so that the OSE could continue to resist the Nazis by pursuing its own dangerous rescue activities [Fig. 2].

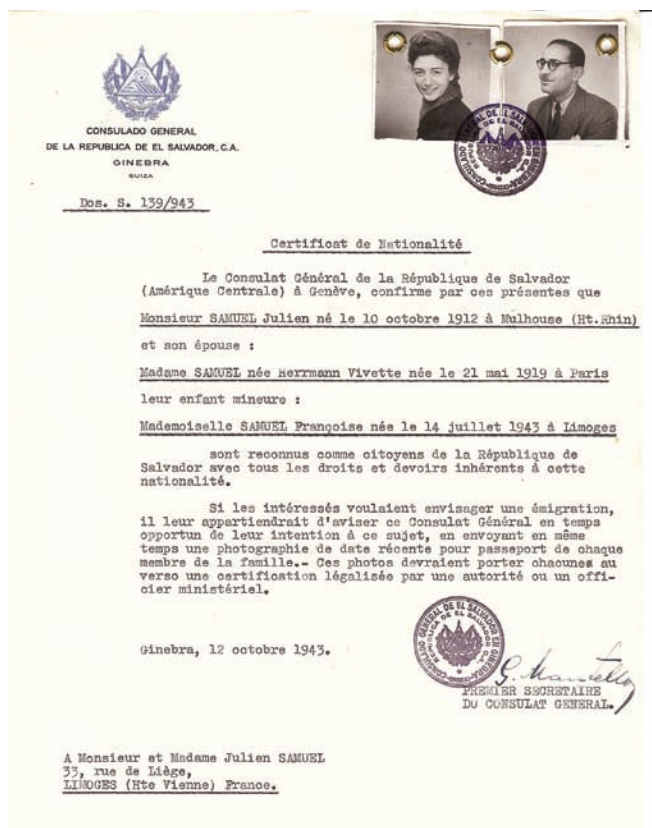


FIG. 2: Certificate issued to Julien and Yvette Samuel, leaders of the Jewish aid group the OSE. The Samuels had married and moved to the listed address only months before this certificate was issued in both their names. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, gift of Enrico Mantello.

Mantello continued to produce a steady stream of certificates for desperate Jews for the next year and a half; when, in March 1944, the Germans invaded Hungary, he accelerated the production. His wife had remained in Budapest; she had, understandably, been unwilling to leave her par-

ents. Furthermore, his own parents and huge extended family lived in Hungarian-occupied Transylvania. Until the invasion, Hungarian Jews had been spared the worst of the Holocaust. Practically overnight, though, this changed when the Nazis almost immediately imposed the ghettoization and deportation of Hungarian Jews. Now Mantello had a personal reason for resisting the Nazis.

At this time, he received support from other diplomats, particularly from the Swiss Consul Carl Lutz (later recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations), who agreed to represent official Salvadoran interests from his office in Budapest. Individual Swiss Jews continued to request certificates on behalf of their relatives and friends, but now the majority of requests came from either Budapest's Swiss Consul Lutz, or from Wilhelm (Theodore) Fischer, the head of the Jewish World Congress (JWC) in Romania. Each requested certificates for hundreds, if not thousands, of individuals. In one example, Lutz, in a letter to Mantello dated November 8, 1944, wrote:

I also take the liberty of advising that, in the near future, a request is to be made to your consulate for the delivery of Salvadorian citizenship certificates concerning a family by the name of Kalman Radecza and Szemere Istvan. The photographs are included with the request. I would be most grateful if you were good enough to exceptionally prepare such certificates as it pertains to a very worthy family that finds itself in utmost danger. It would be desirable if you were to send subject certificates here by the next courier as the situation has worsened dramatically. Subject documents may be addressed either to me or to the Mission.⁶

The JWC's Fischer also sent hundreds of telegrams requesting certificates. He stated, in a post-war deposition:

I had been giving to Mantello continuously, by telegraph, the addresses of my Budapest acquaintances and friends, and the ones in question could save themselves thanks to the Salvadorian passes, which had been sent to them. We had published appeals in the Bucharest Jewish papers for the Romanian Jews to give also the addresses of their relatives and friends. This way we assembled several thousand names.⁷

WHO WAS ACTUALLY SAVED BY THE CERTIFICATES?

Though we can document the scope of Mantello's efforts, we still do not know precisely how many recipients of the certificates survived. Many recipients wrote to Mantello after the war, thanking him for his efforts,⁸ but because almost all recipients have since passed away, I was able to interview only a handful of survivors who remembered hav-

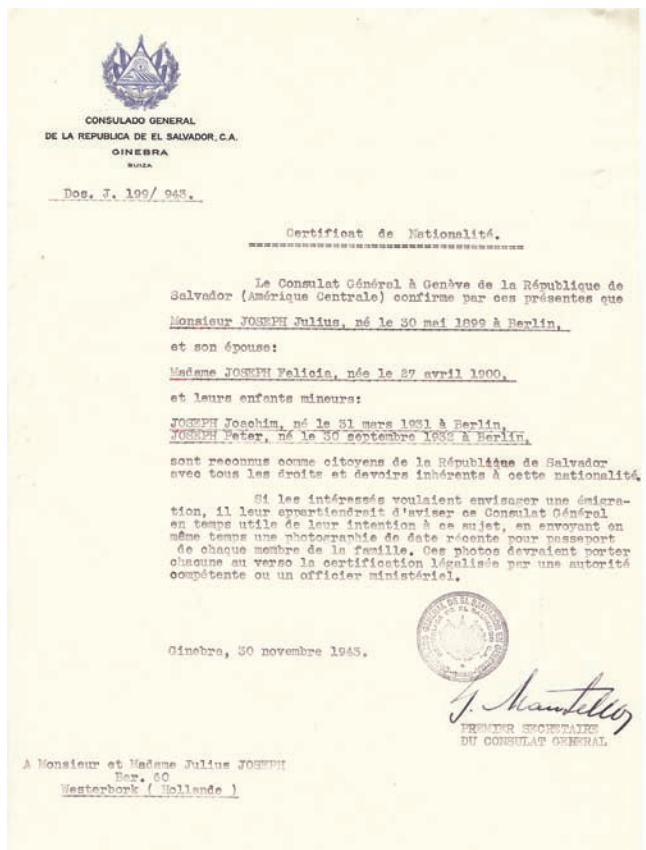


FIG. 3: Certificate of Nationality issued by the Salvadoran Consulate and sent to the Joseph family in westerbork. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, gift of Enrico Mantello.

ing received the documents.⁹ However, by cross-checking deportation records and the International Tracing Service (ITS) database against the names of Mantello's recipients, we began to understand the effectiveness of the rescue effort.

The efficacy of the papers varied greatly country by country. In some countries, particularly Belgium, Hungary, and the Netherlands, the certificates saved significant numbers of people. Tragically, in other countries, such as Poland and Lithuania, Germans ignored them and treated the bearers as they would any other Jew.

Cross-checking the names of certificate holders in Belgium against concentration camp, deportation, and death records reveals that, in fact, whereas 60% of all Belgian Jews perished in the Holocaust, 90% of those who received Salvadoran papers survived. Of the 137 Belgian Jews who received certificates, only 12 were deported from Belgium. Of those, two survived, one escaped, and the fate of a fourth is unclear. This enormous success rate was corroborated after the war by Jonas Tiefenbrunner, who had served as the head of the Jewish orphanage in Belgium and had himself received a certificate, as had many of the children in his home. He wrote to Mueller after the war on June 27, 1945, vouching for the importance of these papers:

These papers were very useful because the holders of these papers were covered and could not officially be deported. If they were taken in a round-up while holding Salvadoran papers, they could only be interned as enemy aliens. . . . Anyone who was still in Belgium when they received the papers was saved.¹⁰

The survival rate in the Netherlands is similarly astounding. More than 70% of Dutch Jews perished during the Holocaust, whereas only 28% of those with Salvadoran papers were killed.¹¹ Furthermore, ITS records reveal that while most Dutch Jews were deported to either Auschwitz or Sobibor, several Mantello-certificate recipients were sent instead to a special camp for foreign nationals within Bergen-Belsen, where they were registered as Salvadoran citizens. Furthermore, in 1944, Germany negotiated a prisoner exchange with the United States and included Jews holding papers from Latin American countries [Fig. 3].

On January 19, 1945, the Germans released approximately 300 foreign nationals and "Latin Americans" from Bergen-Belsen to participate in this exchange. Of this group, 186 were allowed to enter Switzerland on January 25, 1945, and 90 were transferred to an UNRRA camp in Philipeville, Algeria. The group included several Salvadorans, among them Julius and Felicia Joseph and their two sons [Fig. 4].

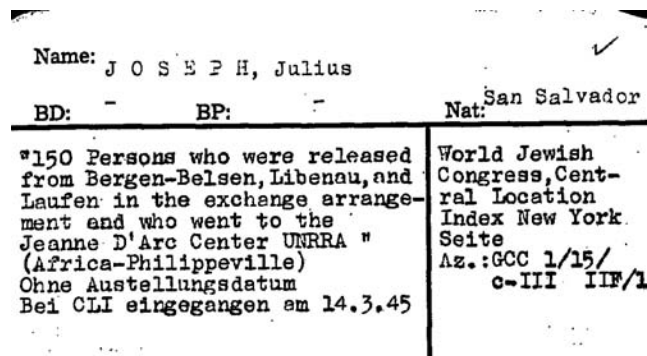


Fig. 4: World Jewish Congress document attesting to the release of the Joseph family from Bergen-Belsen and transfer to an UNRRA camp as Salvadoran nationals. International Tracing Service Archive.

The certificates clearly saved the greatest number of people in Budapest. Mantello not only sent papers to Hungary from Switzerland but also gave Lutz a thousand blank certificates to fill out at the Swiss Consulate in Budapest. Furthermore, Zionist youth, after discovering that Mantello recipients were exempt from deportation, manufactured their own counterfeit Salvadoran documents. Several testimonies from the 1940s vouch for the success of the operation. In a letter to Mantello dated October 1944, Lutz wrote:

At any rate, you can be assured that, through the putting-in-place of the Salvadoran Interest Section (in my opinion), you rendered a valuable service that will get you the thanks—as soon as normal conditions again prevail in this world—of thousands of human beings whose lives you saved. It is noteworthy that San Salvador is the only state that came out of its passivity and undertook an active rescue operation.¹²

One recipient, Liselotte Neufeld, later testified that she survived because of the cooperation between Salvador and Switzerland. She wrote:

When Hungary was occupied by the Germans in March 1944, we . . . went to the Swiss Consulate when we heard that it had taken over El Salvador's interests. The consulate gave us a letter of protection with which we could go to the Hungarian Alien Police. The letter stated that Switzerland had taken charge of the representation of Salvadoran interests. It also confirmed the fact that we were citizens of El Salvador and were exempt from all laws relating to Hungarian Jews.¹³

In a tragic irony, in the Hungarian countryside, where deportations to Auschwitz had begun as early as May 1944, the certificates generally arrived too late to be of use, including those sent to Mantello's own parents. Mantello, wanting to be certain that his parents received their certificates, had asked Florian Manoliu, an anti-Fascist Romanian diplomat in Switzerland, to personally hand-deliver papers to his family.¹⁴ Manoliu agreed but missed them, arriving only days after the entire Jewish community in the town had been liquidated and sent to Auschwitz. Almost none of Mantello's extended family survived.

Further complicating the process of determining exactly how many people survived because of the certificates is the fact that, at times, the documents were transferred to third parties. Shortly after the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum announced the collection of the Mantello certificates, I received a call from a survivor from a small town in the Hungarian countryside. He told me that his uncle in Switzerland had requested and sent certificates for his entire family in care of another uncle in Budapest. They arrived, but only after he, his parents, and his siblings had already been deported. The Budapest uncle, not wanting the certificate to go to waste, gave it to another family. Some years after the war, my caller said, he met a man in New York who told him that he had survived thanks to this man's unused certificate.

WHAT DID NEUTRAL COUNTRIES KNOW?

A careful study of the certificates Mantello issued sheds

light on precisely how much other information leaked from Nazi-occupied Europe to the Free World and proves that there was more knowledge about the Holocaust and communication with the West than one might believe. During most of the war, correspondence continued between Switzerland and most of the rest of Europe. The mere fact that certificates at times were made out to wartime addresses, including places of hiding and internment camps, points to the fact that contemporary information was somehow conveyed to Switzerland. There are many examples of this; consider, as a research project, asking your students to find them.

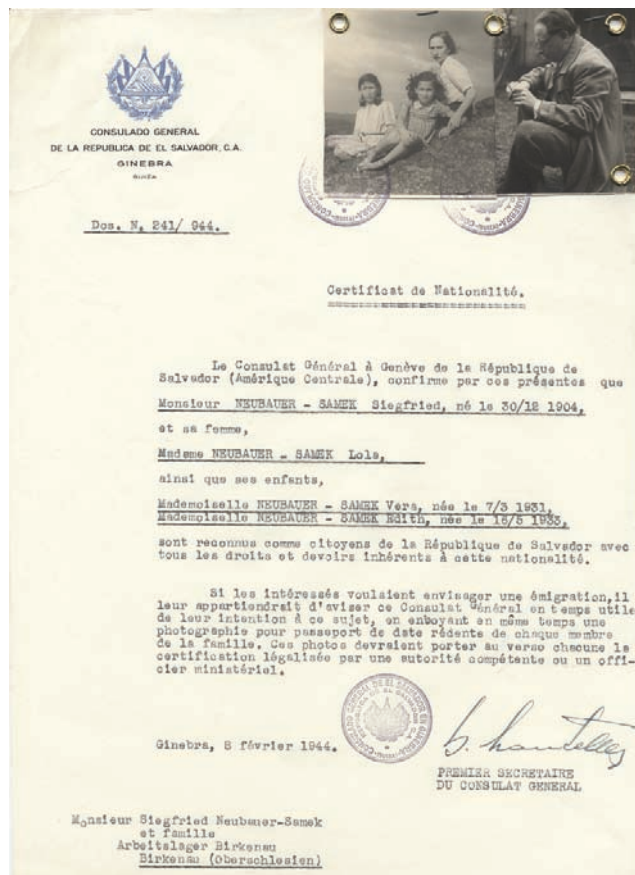


FIG. 5: Salvadoran certificate issued to the Neubauer-Samek family in Birkenau. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, gift of Enrico Mantello.

We can trace the degree of knowledge about the deportations to Auschwitz by examining the case of the Neubauer-Samek family from Czechoslovakia, whose deportation was known but whose fate remained a secret. Mantello issued the family a certificate on February 8, 1944, addressed to Birkenau [Fig. 5]. Instead of an identification photo, an idyllic prewar photo of a family sitting in a field is attached to the certificate. The family was deported to Theresienstadt on December 5, 1942, and then sent to Aus-

chwitz-Birkenau on September 6, 1943. In the intervening five months between their deportation to Auschwitz and certificate issuance, someone in Theresienstadt must have received a postcard informing him/her that the Neubauer-Samek family had been sent to Birkenau.¹⁵ That person must then have contacted someone else in Switzerland requesting help. Either the friend or relative in Theresienstadt or the other person in Switzerland must have owned the prewar photograph that was then affixed to the certificate. It is almost certain that the Neubauer-Samek family never received the certificate. They were gassed on either March 7 or 8, 1944.

Studying the certificates, therefore, teaches us not only what was known, but also what was unknown during the Holocaust. Certificates from Lithuania, for instance, point out the paucity of information from the Baltic countries. Mantello issued certificates to many of the leading rabbis of Lithuania dated a full two years after the intended recipient had already been murdered. For example, Rabbi Abraham Bloch, one of the administrators of the Telz Yeshiva, a rabbinic seminary, was shot by Lithuanian collaborators on July 15, 1941. His certificate was dated December 16, 1943.¹⁶

CONCLUSIONS: HOW THE SALVADORAN CERTIFICATES DISPEL HOLOCAUST MYTHS

There is still much that we don't know about the certificates, including the exact number that were issued and precisely how many people survived as a result. However, based on what we do know, the Salvadoran certificates dispel many common myths about the Holocaust. It is untrue, for example, that Nazi policy was uniformly implemented throughout occupied Europe. Differences between survival rates of certificate holders in different countries point to differences in how the policy was implemented by various occupied regimes. It is untrue that the West had no idea what was happening under Nazi occupation. Though much remained unknown, vital information continued to leak out, and Jews under Nazi occupation communicated with their compatriots in Switzerland throughout the war. It is untrue that rescuers were exclusively non-Jewish. Many Jews deserve the title as well. It is untrue that there was little Jewish resistance. Jews resisted in every way open to them. Finally, and most importantly, efforts of Mantello and his associates disprove the assertion that nothing could have been done to stop the Nazi terror.

Through the careful examination of individual documents, we continue to expand our knowledge of the Holocaust. Students, as well as professional historians, can contribute to this process because much of what can be learned is contained in the documents themselves. As new collections come to light, our understanding of the complexities of Holocaust history grows, including the extent

to which Jews such as George Mandel-Mantello labored to save other Jews.

NOTES

1. In addition to Kranzler, this conclusion is also supported by G. Reitlinger (1987), who writes in his book *The Final Solution*: "The publication of portions of the Vrba-Wetzler report in the Swiss press in the last days of June, and by the Western Allies shortly afterwards, produced a spontaneous international denunciation, which led to protests from the Pope, the US Secretary of State Cordell Hull, the British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden, the International Red Cross and the King of Sweden, amounting to a 'bombardment of Horthy's conscience.' They indubitably influenced the Regent to order the cessation of the deportations from Hungary on July 7." Finally, Tamas Stark, from the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, writes in a review published in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (16/3, 2010): "Mandel-Mantello unleashed in neutral and western countries an unprecedented press campaign that contributed greatly to the halt of deportations" (p. 456).
2. Mordecai Paldiel, *Diplomatic Heroes of the Holocaust*, Rabbi Arthur Schneier Center for International Affairs of Yeshiva University, New York, 2007, p. 115.
3. Much of the credit goes to The Jews Rescued Jews Committee headed by Haim Roet, Ilana Drukker, and Chana Arnon for raising public consciousness of the issue.
4. In recognition of his collaboration in the rescue efforts, Yad Vashem honored Col. Castellanos as Righteous Among the Nations in May 2010, the first Central American to receive this award.
5. Among the OSE leadership to receive Mantello certificates were Julien and Yvette Samuel, Andree Salomon, Fanny Schwab, Felix Goldschmidt, and Jacques Salon.
6. Letter from Carl Lutz to Consulate General of San Salvador [sic], November 8, 1944, Collection USHMM, gift of Enrico Mantello.
7. Quoted from Jenö Levai's 1968 book, *Abscheu und Grauen von dem Genocid in aller Welt (The abomination and horror of the genocide in the world)*. (Toronto: Diplomatic Press and Living Books).
8. For example, Rabbi Akiva Glasner dedicated his 1946 book, *Königin Sabbat und die Erlösung Israels* (Zurich: Buchdruckerei J. Neumann), to George Mantello in gratitude to his work on behalf of "the community of believers and . . . selfless and altruistic actions, saved the lives of untold numbers of Jewish brothers."
9. Those include Robert Fisch, Chmouel Goldschmidt, and Ina Soep Polak.
10. Quoted from a letter written by Jonas Tiefenbrunner on June 27, 1945, to Mathieu and Alice Muller, in their self-published memoir, *Memoires et Temoignages*.

11. This research on Belgian and the Netherlands was conducted by USHMM volunteer Peter Lande. In an e-mail dated February 2010, he warns, "There is no way to determine how many of these persons actually received the certificates, much less whether they made use of them. Nevertheless, it is remarkable, and seems more than a coincidence."

12. Letter from Carl Lutz to Consulate General of San Salvador [sic], October 28, 1944, Collection USHMM, gift of Enrico Mantello.

13. Quoted from David Kranzler's 2000 book, *The Man Who Stopped the Trains to Auschwitz* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press), pp. 209–210.

14. For his efforts, Florian Manoliu was recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations in 2001.

15. In September 1943 Jewish deportees from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz were sent to a special section of the camp known as Czech family camp. The Germans gave them postcards postmarked Birkenau to mail to their friends and relatives still in Theresienstadt to convince them that everything was fine. Six months later, almost everyone still in the family camp was killed.

16. Based on material in Rabbi Ephraim Oshry's 1995 book, *Annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry* (Brooklyn, NY: Judaica Press), pp. 23–26, 264.

Davi Walders introduces us to Marianne Cohn (1922–1944), “a French resister who led hundreds of children over the Alps to safety in Switzerland before being arrested and tortured to death by the Nazis three weeks before the liberation of Annemasse near the Swiss border in 1944.” For extended study on women who resisted, pair this with the poems by Charles Adés Fishman (pp. 70, 91–92) Oriana Ivy (p. 83), Davi Walders (p. 90), and Joan Campion (p. 109), and the essays by Pnina Rosenberg (pp. 66–69 and 76–80), and Louis D. Levine (pp. 120–126).

Davi Walders

from A Late Kaddish for Marianne Cohn

(excerpt from Part III, “Her Poem”)

*‘Not today will I betray . . .’ from “Je trahirai demain,”
the poem found in Marianne Cohn’s pocket, France, August 23, 1944.*



Marianne Cohn, a French-Jewish heroine of the Resistance during the Holocaust. Courtesy of the Ghetto Fighters Museum.

III. Her poem (translation)

Je trahirai demain

Tomorrow I will betray, not today.
Tear out my nails today. I will not betray.
You don't know how long I can hold out,
But I know.

You are five rough hands with rings.
You have hob-nailed boots on your feet.
Tomorrow I will betray, not today.
Tomorrow.

I need the right to decide,
I need at least one night, to renounce, to abjure, to betray.
To betray my friends, to foreswear bread and wine,
To betray life.
To die.
Tomorrow I will betray, not today.

The file is under the floor,
The file not for the window bars,
The file not for the torturer,
The file for my wrist

Today I have nothing to say,
Tomorrow, I will betray.

—Marianne Cohn, 1944

• • • • •

IV. *Souvenez-vous*

Someone gave me a copy of her
poem, found somewhere. No one
remembers exactly where.
The poem she scratched out
in dark nights, tucked in a pocket
the murderers didn't bother
to search. Found by the liberators
who wrapped and sat with her body,
unfolded the words, read silently
and aloud, over and over
in the charnel grove and wept.

I, too, received it, read it,
held it, taped it to my door,
reading as I entered, again
upon leaving, until echo knit
silence into bone. "*Souvenez-vous*,"
the plaques say. I began to follow
the command. Her words walk with me,
rise in the dust of shoes stacked
in museums, rustle at long tables
in libraries, whisper in synagogues
and streets. Slivers that pierce,
cinders born on wind and air.
I wander and search. My door
stands ajar. Her poem waits there.

Souvenez-vous: remember

Peretz László Révész was born in Slovakia in 1916. In 1942, following the German occupation of Slovakia, Peretz and his wife, Nónika, fled from Slovakia to Budapest, Hungary, where they became actively involved with the Zionist underground movement. The following is the first appearance in English of an excerpt from Révész's riveting memoirs, *Standing Up to Evil: The Story of a Zionist Activist During World War II* (translated from the Hebrew by Jacques Mouyal and Katalin Mouyal, 2007), a vivid illustration of Jewish defiance and resistance.

Peretz László Révész

Resistance? By All Means!

A short time after I arrived in Budapest from my home in Slovakia, I was given the task of providing members of the Zionist underground movement—who had entered Hungary illegally and had no papers—with the certificates they needed to lead their new life here. We did not use forged documents; instead we took real ones from Hungarian citizens, which lessened the possibility that our people would be discovered when their documents were checked. Because money was scarce, we looked for ways to acquire these documents without having to pay very much for them. We thought of several possibilities, including the following, which we used with great success: We would send one of our members to the Citizens Registry Office. Once inside, he would approach one of the older clerks, known to be less meticulous than others, and, on some kind of pretext, would ask for a copy of a birth certificate using one of the most common names in Hungary, such as Szabó or Kovács. The clerk would answer, "Good heavens. We have hundreds of Szabós and Kovácses. Take the book and look for yourself." Of course, our member would not search among the Kovácses listed but would look instead for a man or a woman of about our age, memorize the details, and return the book to the clerk, saying, "Thank you very much. I did not find the person I was looking for. He must be from a different town."

Later, using the memorized details, another member of the group would go the same office, hand in an application form containing the precise information, and, the next day, would receive the requested certificate for a small fee. The system worked very well until the day one of our members, a young woman by the name of Joli, went to the Registry Office to claim a birth certificate using a name that had been selected in the usual manner. The clerk asked her,

"Who is this certificate for?"

"For me, of course," she responded.

"It says here you are deceased," said the clerk, consulting the book. Joli, who was brave and resourceful, did not lose her composure.

Instead, she laughed and said, "Me, dead? What are you talking about? As you can see, I'm right here in front of you."

The clerk insisted: "Look, I've been working here for dozens of years, and I've never encountered a case like this one. As far as I know, there has never been a registration mistake since the establishment of the state. Perhaps you could show me a document?"

Joli replied, "I don't have any documents on me, but I live nearby. I'll go home and be back within 15 minutes." Naturally, she never returned.

Upon our arrival in Budapest, we stayed in a cramped apartment with my wife's cousin for a week until a room in the apartment of another Jewish family was found for us. We registered with the concierge there under the name of Mr. and Mrs. Jenó Hoffman, the name on the document I had obtained. One Saturday, we ran into fellow Slovaks, Yaakov Rosenberg and his girlfriend, Ruth Lorand, whose acquaintance I had made previously in Bratislava. It was around noon and they asked us where we were planning to have lunch. We usually ate in cheap places, small restaurants with only a few tables. That day, though, my wife, Nónika, and I [Fig. 1] had decided to eat at home, and Nónika graciously invited them to join us. I later found out that when one lives in the underground, one should never reveal one's address, not even to friends.

During lunch, Ruth mentioned that she was having difficulty obtaining false papers for members of her group,

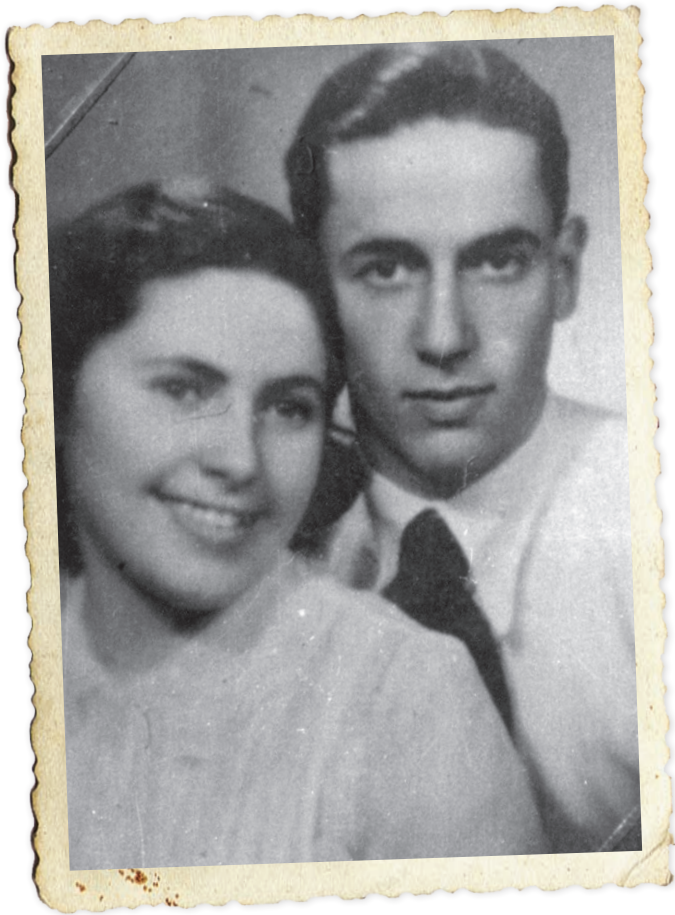


FIG. 1: Nónika and Peretz's wedding picture, January 21, 1941.

Hashomer Ha Tsa'ir (the Young Guardians; several different underground groups were operating at the same time to serve the needs of the many Jews who were either in hiding or on the run). She asked for my help, and I readily agreed. I had previously purchased a stack of documents from an acquaintance of mine who was in the business of buying and selling Hungarian certificates. I had hidden these certificates in our room, inside a big stove lined with china tiles. I gave Ruth what she needed, and when she returned two or three times, I provided her with more documents from this supply. Later, I agreed to put her in touch with my acquaintance directly, on condition that she purchase papers only for the members of her group and not for people she did not know.

As it turned out, though, her group was also in the habit of selling false papers to complete strangers who needed them for double the price in order to finance the purchase of more documents for their own members. I did not believe that this was a good system. I warned Ruth that people who paid money for certificates would talk under interrogation; they would not protect their source if caught and questioned. That, unfortunately, is exactly what happened. A woman to whom Ruth had sold false papers was caught and informed on her. Ruth was arrested. I do not

know if she was tortured or beaten, but, at any rate, she appeared at our apartment one morning accompanied by two detectives.

PAINFUL BETRAYAL

Nónika was at home when the detectives arrived. They told her they were looking for a Jenő Hoffman, my "borrowed" name, and asked if she was Mrs. Hoffman. Nónika coolly replied that Mrs. Hoffman had left to do some shopping. While the detectives were inspecting the closets, the landlady returned and the detectives inquired, "Are you Mrs. Hoffman?" "No, I'm Mrs. Schwartz. This is Mrs. Hoffman," she said, indicating my wife.

Furious, the detectives demanded to know why Nónika had lied to them. Unruffled, she said the first thing that came to her mind: "I thought you were asking for the landlady. I didn't realize that you were looking for me."

"Where is your husband?" they demanded. As she and I had agreed previously, Nónika answered, "He works at the Jewish hospital nearby." The detectives took our wedding picture and hurried to the hospital to arrest me. I, of course, was not there.

Nónika quickly gathered some of our belongings and went to the meeting place of our movement. There she met a few of the members, organized a vigil around the house in order to warn me not to enter it, and left to meet me in a safe house. When I got off the subway at Hero's Square, my friend Miki Fleischman intercepted me and took me to the place where Nónika was waiting—a small rooming house, full of bugs, but more or less safe.

In the morning, my first thought was to save all the documents I had hidden in our stove in the now-abandoned room. I went to the place where the apartment owner's son worked and asked him to arrange a meeting with a man named Vándor, who also rented a room in the apartment. I assumed that because he was a fellow Slovakian refugee, I could rely on his help.

I arrived at the appointed meeting place and stationed myself where I could observe what was happening and flee in case Vándor did not show up alone. As I was waiting there, Dan Zimmerman, a member of Ruth's organization, spotted me. He was very angry that Ruth had denounced us to the police and wanted to know the details. My attention distracted, I did not notice Vándor approaching until it was too late. He was not alone. With him was a tall man who, I was certain, was a detective. The man grabbed my arm and demanded, "Are you Jenő Hoffman?"

"No!" I cried and punched him with my free hand, pulling loose and running away as fast as I could.

The detective pursued me, screaming in Hungarian, "Catch him! Catch him!" After some minutes, I ducked into a side street and could not see him anymore. I was sure

I had managed to evade him. Heart pounding, I entered one of the nearby buildings and climbed the stairs until I reached an iron door that led to the roof. There I rested. Before entering the building, I had looked around to make sure I was not being followed. Only later did I remember a boy on a bicycle, dressed in the uniform of the Hitler Youth, who had entered the street behind me and seemed to be following me. He must have heard the detective's screams and chosen to play the sleuth himself.



FIG. 2: Members of the Aid and Rescue Committee and representatives of the underground, June 1944. From left to right: Peretz Révész, Hansi Brand, Israel Rezzo Kasztner, Nathan Komoly, Zvi Goldfarb.

After catching my breath, I decided to call my friend Joel Brand, a leading member of the underground Aid and Rescue Committee [Fig. 2] and tell him what had happened. I rang the doorbell of one of the top floor apartments and asked if I could make a phone call. The elderly tenant assented, but the next moment I realized that I should not use the phone lest I endanger Joel and his wife, Hansi [Figs. 3 and 4]. I made up an excuse, claiming that I could not remember the phone number, and left the apartment.

Once outside in the hallway, I tore up every piece of paper in my possession and scattered the scraps so that nothing could be identified. After about 10 minutes, I felt much calmer. I had regained my strength and now felt able to leave the building. I went downstairs, found the concierge, who guarded the gate, and informed him that I wished to go out.

"Sorry, but the police have closed the gate," he apologized. Next to the gate there now stood a policeman, and I realized that I was trapped. With nothing to lose, I decided to try my luck and threw myself on the mercy of the concierge, telling him, "I'm not a criminal, a thief, or a mur-

derer. I am only a refugee from Slovakia, and that is why I cannot be caught here." Addressing him in Slovakian, I added, "Please help me escape from the police."

"I, myself, am from Slovakia," he replied, "and would gladly try to help you, but there is no way to escape from here." At that moment, I realized that I, too, had been caught in the net the Nazis had cast over the Jews of Europe in order to annihilate them. However, the next moment, despite my seemingly hopeless situation, I remembered my resolution to do everything in my power to escape and began to search for a gap in the net.

In the block of apartments that is typical of the large cities of central Europe, you find an entrance through a large gate leading to both a staircase and a spacious yard shared by all the apartments on the ground floor. Opposite the gate, there is generally an apartment whose exterior wall is attached to the back wall of an identical building located on a parallel street. Between the two apartments there is usually a spacious airshaft, the purpose of which is to ventilate the bathrooms of the apartments on both sides. It occurred to me that if I could enter the apartment located opposite the gate, I could go to the washroom and climb through the window into the airshaft, climb up the sewage pipes to the roof, and escape into the street. Taking advantage of

a moment when the concierge was out of sight, I walked unnoticed to the ground floor apartment and rang the bell. It was already evening, and the sky had grown quite dark. A woman opened the door, through which I could see her family seated at the dinner table. I gently pushed the woman aside and said firmly in Hungarian: "We are looking for someone!" Apparently, they knew that the police had sealed off the building, so they calmly continued eating their dinner while I walked quickly to the door leading to the bathroom.

NO WAY OUT

Up to this point, the scenario had played out just as I had envisioned it. It all went horribly wrong, though, the moment I stepped onto the toilet seat and looked through the small window into the ventilation shaft. The walls were smooth. There were no pipes, no ladder I could use to gain access to the roof. Retracing my steps, I assured the family that everything was all right and left the apartment. They must have thought I was a member of the secret police, because they had not moved from their seats and calmly continued eating their dinner. The whole incident had lasted no more than a few minutes in reality, but for me, time stood still when I realized I could not escape.

The courtyard gate was still locked and the yard quiet.



FIGS. 3 and 4: Joel and Hansi Brand, among the founding members of the Aid and Rescue Committee, took Peretz and Nónika under their wing as newly arrived refugees in Budapest.

I climbed back up the stairs to the iron door on the roof. I tried to force it open, to no avail; it was securely locked. Dispirited and defeated, I sat there thinking of poor Nónika, who must be anxiously awaiting my return. What would happen to her? How would she manage without me? I walked back down to the yard, upset that I had not been able to let her know of my predicament or to warn her. As I waited resignedly for whatever would happen, I thought about the story I would tell the investigators in order not to incriminate the others. I had ample time to ponder. The detective who had chased me had left to call for reinforcements and only returned an hour later, in the company of a scary-looking giant of a man. I remember his name to this day—Detective Barabás. When they handcuffed me, I did not resist.

AT POLICE HEADQUARTERS

When we arrived at police headquarters, I was immediately kicked in the legs as a sign of welcome. I was then taken to the interrogation room, where I was beaten all over my body. The detective who had pursued me entered the room and asked how I had managed to run so fast. When I told him that I was the Slovakian champion sprinter [in 1938, Peretz beat the Yugoslavian champion in the 100-meter dash at the University of Bratislava with a time of 11 seconds], his attitude toward me changed [Fig. 5].

He proudly boasted to the other officers that he had succeeded in catching the Slovakian champion runner. Word spread quickly throughout the department, and everyone came to have a look at me.

The detectives who had administered the beating let go of me, and I was left there bleeding, in a most precarious

state. Sometime later, Barabás, the giant who had arrested me, came in and said, “You would be better off if you told us the truth. There is no reason for us to beat you.” Much to my surprise, Barabás turned out to be the nicer of the detectives. He brought me coffee and offered me a cigarette. All the while, I kept thinking about the story I would tell them, one that they would accept but that would not incriminate the others. Finally, I told Barabás the truth: that I was a refugee who had fled from Slovakia, where they were hunting and expelling Jews, and where Jews were under the constant threat of death. I emphasized that we were not criminals and did not intend to undermine the Hungarian government. As I spoke, Barabás sat at an old-fashioned typewriter, tapping out his report with one finger. We both sighed with relief when the report was completed and I had signed it.

I was placed in a room where they had assembled all the people they had caught that day. It was a tiny room and very crowded. The only place left to sit was on the floor. My whole body ached from the beating I had received, but what hurt the most was the loss of my freedom. I had been caught. How would I ever get free?

The next day, I was taken for interrogation again, this time with the supervisor of the Criminal Department, a man named Balázs. One of the ruffians stood behind me. After each answer, he would slap me sharply on the ear, to remind me that I was a liar, I suppose. Suddenly, the supervisor changed the direction of his questions and asked where my wife and I had spent the night. I told him I had been afraid to go back to the apartment and had slept in the park, among the bushes. I didn’t know where Nónika had slept. Again a series of slaps fell on my head, and Balázs continued his interrogation. “I do not believe you. Where is your wife?” he demanded. Suddenly, I had an idea. I would pretend that I was giving up, take them to a fictitious meeting place and seize the opportunity to escape. In an agonized voice, I told them that my wife and I were supposed to meet at the back entrance to the city zoo at 8:00 that evening. The supervisor swallowed my story and sent me back to my cell.

At 7:30, he appeared with a policeman and led me to a waiting car. The instant I settled into the back seat, I was handcuffed to the policeman, who was sitting next to me. My hopes of escape were immediately dashed. Comforting myself with the thought that at least I was being given a last chance to view the outside world, I tried to absorb each detail of the lovely city park through the car windows. Just before 8:00, the car stopped opposite the back entrance to the zoo. In the light of the long summer day, dozens of people walked by. On the way there, the supervisor had asked me about my wife’s clothing, and I had told him that she was probably wearing a red polka-dot dress. He care-

fully scrutinized each woman who passed by. After about 10 minutes, a woman wearing a dress identical to the one I had described walked toward us, and Balázs asked if she was my wife. I realized he had our wedding picture in his hand, the one that had been seized during the visit to our apartment, and would know at once if I were lying. A few times, he inquired nervously if my wife was a punctual person. I assured him that she was and added in a worried tone that something might have prevented her from coming.

We waited another 15 minutes before returning to police headquarters. On the way, the supervisor uttered curses and threats and promised that I would pay dearly for the “expedition.” However, that evening, nothing came of the threats. It had probably never occurred to him that the whole trip had been an attempt on my part to escape. Despite my failure to do so, I felt a certain satisfaction in knowing that I had succeeded in tricking my captors. I slept well that night, unaware of what awaited me the following day.

The next morning, I was again interrogated about the distribution of forged certificates and their source. This time, the detectives tied my hands behind my back with a thin leather strap and twisted the knot with a ruler until I was unable to move at all. When my hands started to swell and turn blue, they became concerned that the damage could be irreversible, so they untied the knot to allow the blood to circulate again. Then they took me to the legal adviser of the Criminal Department, a distinguished-looking older man. Addressing me in a fatherly tone, he said, “It’s a shame that you are causing yourself so much suffering. Tell me the truth.” He seemed kind, and I was exhausted; I told

him everything about my past. I told him that my real name was László Révész, that I was a refugee from Slovakia trying to evade deportation, and that I was a medical student. The legal adviser spoke good German, and we conversed in that language. It turned out that he and my father had studied law at the same university. I could tell that he believed me when I told him I was not a criminal. He remarked that he had dealt with similar situations before and had tried to help.

I was turned over to the interrogators once again. This time, Balázs tried a new trick on me. He threatened me by saying that document forgery was an extremely serious crime and that if I did not tell him everything, he would have me transferred to the military jail—a most infamous institution. Nevertheless, I told him that I could not add a word to what I had already said.

“We have another method that is effective on everyone,” he continued. “We hang people up by their hands with a rope that is tied behind their back. The pain is horrible; no one can withstand it. When they faint, as they always do, we pour water over them. When they come to, we start over again. Soon the pain is so unbearable that they start confessing.” I told him that even if they were to hang me, I could not add another word, because I had already told them everything I knew.

Balázs took me to the top floor and opened the door to the attic. There on a beam hung a pulley. “You have a few more seconds to decide if you wish to tell the whole truth,” he announced. “Otherwise, we will activate the pulley.” Up to that moment, as much as I had been physically and emotionally abused, I had been able to withstand the pressures placed on me thanks to my determination to protect those who were dear to me: Nónika, of course, and the wonderful Brand family who had placed themselves in danger for the sake of the refugees and the members of the underground movement. Would I be able to withstand the vicious torture that awaited me? My only choice, it seemed, was to surrender, to break down and become a traitor.

REBELLING AGAINST INJUSTICE

Suddenly, I was overcome by an enormous, seething rage at the injustice being perpetrated on all of us—on the Jewish people and on me, as an individual. My soul rebelled against this injustice, and I felt inspired to rise to the situation. I would choose the road of agony. If the suffering became unendurable, and if I were forced to betray, I would at least know that I had paid the price, and this would make it easier to live with myself later as a traitor.

I did not want to provoke Balázs’s wrath by behaving like a hero, so I answered timidly, yet confidently, “Sir, I did tell you the truth.” He reacted with fury.

“Suppose I believe that everything you have told me about yourself is true—I still don’t believe that you don’t



FIG. 5: Peretz (center) finishes first in the 100-m dash with a time of 11:00 seconds. On the right is Katilinic, the Yugoslavian champion, 1938.

know where to find your wife, who deceived my people. I'm sure that if I released you, you could be at her place in less than half an hour. Therefore, I am going to give you one last chance. I'm asking you again: Where is your wife?"

I instinctively appealed to him man to man and asked, "Sir, would you have turned your wife in and endangered her life?"

My response had the intended effect on him. Inspector Balázs, it turned out, was human after all. After letting out a stream of curses, the high point of which were the words "stinking Jews," he suddenly announced, "We are going down!" I could not believe my ears.

When we reached his office, Balázs asked, "Why were you so terrified? This is the first time you've been caught for a crime. So, you would have sat in jail for a year, a year and a half. So what? Why were you willing to endure torture?"

"Sir," I replied, "I will tell you why." I told him the story of Josef Kornianski² from Warsaw; I told him about the annihilation of the Jews in Poland; I told him about the deportation of Slovakian Jews to concentration camps that led to their massacre in Poland. Balázs was stunned. He was quiet for a moment and then said, "This will not happen to you." I did not take his words seriously, thinking them only a gesture to impress me, to convince me that he was basically a good person. It wasn't until a month later that I found out he had written in my file in red ink: "Should be kept in Hungary for further interrogation," a good-will gesture intended to prevent my deportation to the death camps in Poland.

Later that afternoon, half a dozen policemen came in and led all the prisoners to the station yard. We were to be transferred to other prisons. They herded us into a waiting blue police van and we set off. Filled with nostalgia for my lost freedom, I gazed longingly through the bars at the beautiful streets of Budapest that I knew so well. Would I ever see them again?

NOTES

1. Joel Brand (1906–1964) was born in Hungarian-ruled Transylvania and eventually settled in Budapest. After the outbreak of World War II in September 1933, he and his wife, Hansi, became involved in refugee causes, helping to organize rescue and relief operations. In January 1943, the Aid and Rescue Committee was established to assist refugees seeking to escape from Slovakia and Poland. Brand was put in charge of smuggling Jews out of these countries and into (the relative safety of) Hungary. With the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, the Committee's main concern became the rescue of Jews within Hungary itself (adapted from the Holocaust Education and Archive Research Team: www.HolocaustResearchProject.org).

2. Josef Kornianski was the leader of the Youth Aliyah organization in Warsaw. In the spring of 1941, he met with the young Zionists in Budapest and informed them of the annihilation of the Jews in Poland. He recounted how the Germans had secretly gathered thousands of Jews from rural areas, ordered them to dig their own graves, and shot them. Despite the secrecy surrounding these atrocities, reliable testimony had reached members of He'Halutz, the Zionist training movement for young adults.

A note from translator Katalin Mouyal:

The as-yet-unpublished English edition of this book is dedicated to the memory of my dear parents, Rózsa Fischer (Rachel) and Péter Fischer, two of the brave young people who participated in the resistance movement in Budapest and were among those who saved the lives of many thousands of Jewish children between the winter of 1944 and the spring of 1945, when the Jews of Budapest were deported to concentration camps. My parents were good friends with Peretz Révész. I am among those children who survived thanks to the exceptional courage of these young men and women. You can contact me by e-mail at katalinmouyal@gmail.com.

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IN MEMORIAM

Secure in the devotion of his wife, children, and grandchildren, Peretz László Révész passed away on 4 Tevet, 5772 (December 30, 2011), in Sefat, Israel. May his memory be for a blessing, and may his memoir touch, teach, and inspire our readers around the world.



Joan Campion

To Gisi Fleischmann: Rescuer of Her People

Joan Campion's "To Gisi Fleischmann" can be paired with Mordecai Paldiel's essay (pp. 84–88) on Jews who rescued Jews. The description of Fleischmann as one "who never would bow down / To [her] tormentors" brings to mind other heroic women detailed in this issue, including Batsheva Degan (p. 17), the unnamed heroine immortalized by Clara Asscher-Pinkhof (pp. 27–28), Mala Zimetbaum (pp. 66–69 and 70), the Baroness Germaine Halphen de Rothschild (pp. 89–90), and Marianne Cohn (pp. 100–102).

Courage in battle is an easy thing,
Compared to your gift —
You, who never would bow down
To your tormentors, and whose hand
Was always quick to save,
Though surely you endured
A million secret deaths
Before your own turn came
And you died with those you could not help.

When I imagine you, I do not dwell
Upon your end, so common to the times,
Yet so wretched in its loneliness.
Instead, I see your spirit
Burning as faithful as a candle
Whose flame is buffeted
But never quite put out.
For long and blood-drenched years
That candle gleamed:
For multitudes, the only light there was.

Those who will not bend
End by being broken;
And you were. Yet they could do no more
Than murder you. The radiance that was yours
Will glow forever in the hearts
Of those who search for righteousness.
And even if your very name should fade,
Wherever there is love, there you will live.

"Auschwitz attracted large flocks of crows," writes Oriana Ivy, "so that is what gave me the idea for the phrase 'crow sky.' It is metaphorical as well: black, sinister, deathly." Yet, despite the setting, "a man and a woman / help each other up."

Oriana Ivy

Eyeglasses

Before my grandparents left Auschwitz,
they went to the mountain of eyeglasses,
thinking that by a miracle
they might find their own.
But it was hopeless to sift
through thousands of tangled pairs.

They tried one pair after another.
They had nothing to read, so they traced
the wrinkles on their hands.
They'd bring the hand up close,
follow the orbits of knuckles,

the map of fate in the palm.
If one eye saw right,
the other was blurred;
haze stammered the line of life.
They took several pairs.

My mother is embarrassed
telling me the story,
embarrassed her parents
took anything at all
from the piles of looted belongings.

But I would have been like them.
Those stripped to nothing end up
with too much, except nothing fits

after reading your hands
through the glasses of the dead —
your hands no longer yours,
but the hands of those
whose ashes glowed as they rose
into the crow sky.

Here is how beauty looks
through those eyeglasses:
blurred, skeletal,
a man and a woman
help each other up,
walk out through the gate, walk on.

David Moolten

Yellow Star

Beauty, young love, and the memory of both as resilience and defense are the themes in David Moolten's poem about a memento of a survivor's "first / lost life, infernal and exquisite, a flared match / his hand could tolerate just a moment."

He saved it like a captured butterfly,
A medal decorating a box of yellowed black
And white snapshots, a souvenir of his first
Lost life, infernal and exquisite, a flared match
His hand could tolerate just a moment.
Up close it looked imperfect, homespun, fringed
With strands from the coat off which he'd torn it
The day the war ended, the long discarded coat
On which she slowly, carefully sewed
What she'd cut from cloth. Posted on walls
The edict said everyone must make their own,
Arbitrary and specific as any
In Leviticus, in the Torah that made him
Who he was, a noxious star, a hexagram,
Petaled like a sunflower, a saffron dahlia,
A bloom she might have pinned to his lapel
Were they going out to waltz. Maybe that's why
He kept it, as a mnemonic of her
Ordinary, singular soul, which imbued
Whatever her fingers touched, made it
Less horrific, less contemptible
Like the apple had Eve grown the tree herself
And the two of them stood before it scared
And hungry. Despite his teaching, her shift
In a shoe factory, they'd little to eat
With the rationing in Zagreb, no garden,
Not even a window box for their apartment,
Just bricks and dust, a candle in the glass
And the kiss it betokened, not much but savored
In a way that anywhere before became paradise
And this the flower he left with.

"The British sought to arrest him," historian Rafael Medoff writes. "The State Department wanted to draft or deport him. The FBI spied on him. Yet Hillel Kook, better known as Peter Bergson, a young Jewish activist from Jerusalem, managed to overcome these obstacles and lead a protest campaign that ultimately forced the Roosevelt administration to change its policy toward European Jewish refugees during the Holocaust. The story of the Bergson Group, although arguably central in helping students to understand America's response to the Nazi genocide, has garnered serious scholarly attention only in recent years and is just beginning to receive recognition from Holocaust museums and similar institutions."

Rafael Medoff

The Bergson Group's Race Against Death

As a child in the Ukraine around the time of World War I, Hillel Kook repeatedly witnessed brutal anti-Jewish pogroms. Two of his brothers were wounded in such attacks, and at the age of 4, he once spent hours hiding in a cellar, his mother's hand over his mouth to prevent him from crying out and alerting the attackers prowling nearby. Such memories helped shape Kook's lifelong awareness of the dangers of Jewish statelessness. The Kook family settled in British Mandatory Palestine in 1925, and as a teenager, Hillel joined the *Irgun Zvai Leumi*, a Jewish underground militia associated with Revisionist Zionist leader Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky. In 1937, the *Irgun* sent a number of its most promising activists to Europe to organize unauthorized Jewish immigration (Aliyah Bet) to Palestine. Chief among them were Kook; Yitshaq Ben-Ami, 24, an activist in the *Irgun* and in the Revisionist youth movement, *Betar*; Alex Rafaeli, 27, who had earned a Ph.D. in political science in Germany before settling in Palestine; and Jabotinsky's son, Eri. During the three years to follow, they succeeded in bringing an estimated 20,000 refugees to Palestine, in defiance of British immigration restrictions.¹

As the clouds of war gathered over Europe, both Ze'ev Jabotinsky and the *Irgun* High Command increasingly came to believe that Washington would replace London as the center of the political struggles that would determine the fate of Palestine. For that reason, the *Irgun* in 1939 dispatched Ben-Ami to the United States to seek political and financial support for Aliyah Bet. He established an organization called American Friends of a Jewish Palestine (AFJP), with a small office in New York City.

THE RIGHT TO FIGHT

The outbreak of World War II made further Aliyah Bet transports almost impossible. Jabotinsky now turned his attention to a different issue. In March 1940, he traveled

to the United States to launch a campaign for creation of a Jewish army to fight alongside the Allies against the Nazis. This was a reincarnation of the successful campaign during World War I by Jabotinsky and other Zionist leaders for the establishment of a Jewish Legion within the British army. The Legion assisted in the British conquest of Palestine from the Turks and helped solidify British support for Zionism. Jabotinsky likewise hoped that the contributions of a Jewish army in World War II would strengthen the case for Jewish statehood, in addition to providing the core of the armed forces of the future state. Kook, Rafaeli, Eri Jabotinsky, and other *Irgun* emissaries joined Jabotinsky and Ben-Ami in the United States and helped organize Jewish army rallies in the spring and summer of 1940.²

After Ze'ev Jabotinsky's death that August, Kook and his comrades intensified the Jewish army campaign, creating the Committee for a Jewish Army of Stateless and Palestinian Jews. Kook, a dynamic public speaker, became its leader. To shield his family in Palestine, including his uncle, Chief Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook, from the glare of public controversy, he used the pseudonym Peter Bergson [Fig. 1].

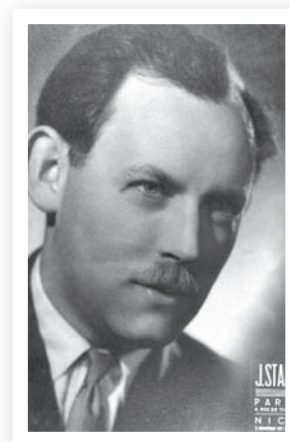


FIG. 1: Hillel Kook, best known as Peter Bergson, the founder of the Bergson Group, led a protest campaign that forced the Roosevelt administration to change its policy toward the rescue of European Jews during the Holocaust. Photo courtesy of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

The committee employed tactics that were unorthodox for that era, including mass rallies, lobbying Congress, and full-page newspaper ads with headlines such as “Jews Fight for the Right to Fight.” The ads featured long lists of political figures, labor leaders, intellectuals, and entertainers endorsing the Jewish army cause. Many of the ads [Fig. 2] were illustrated by the famous artist Arthur Szyk and authored by Ben Hecht, an Academy Award-winning screenwriter (*Gone with the Wind*, *The Front Page*, *Scarface*). Hecht “could make a breakfast egg seem theatrical,” as Max Lerner, one of his colleagues, put it (Wyman and Medoff, 2002, p. 91).

FIG. 2: This Bergson Group ad, written by playwright Ben Hecht, appeared in *The New York Times* on February 16, 1943. Courtesy of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

Hecht recruited numerous Hollywood and Broadway figures, including Stella Adler [Fig. 3], the actress and acting coach; actors Burgess Meredith and Melvyn Douglas, singer Eddie Cantor, and composer Kurt Weill. Their involvement attracted public attention and gave the Bergson activists added credibility.

The British Foreign Office and the State Department initially opposed the Jewish army proposal on the grounds that it might anger the Arab world. British and American

sensitivity to Arab opinion was honed by their desire for access to Arab oil and their hope of keeping the Arabs from actively supporting the Nazi war effort. The British also feared that the very existence of a Jewish army would intensify the pressure for establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Some U.S. officials, however, including Secretary of War Henry Stimson, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, and Knox's deputy, Adlai Stevenson (later a Democratic nominee for president), expressed support for the Jewish army campaign. Lord Halifax, the British ambassador in Washington, noted with dismay

the large collection of eminent Americans whom [the Bergson group] has managed to persuade to sign its proclamations . . . misguided humanitarians of every stripe and colour [are responding to its] simple and moving plea that many thousands of Jews [are] anxious to fight and die in the war against Hitler. (Medoff, 2002, pp. 77–78)

Irritated by the involvement of so many “Congressmen, bishops, generals and serving officials [of the U.S. government],” the ambassador at one point asked the administration to penalize government employees who signed Bergson's ads.³

Nevertheless, the Bergson Group's public pressure campaign, together with behind-the-scenes lobbying by Zionist leaders, eventually persuaded the British government to establish a Jewish Brigade. The 5,000-man force, assembled in late 1944, fought with distinction against the Germans in the waning months of the war, and Brigade veterans later helped smuggle Holocaust survivors to Palestine. As Jabotinsky had hoped, many of these Jewish soldiers later joined the ranks of the nascent Israeli army and took part in the 1948 War of Independence (Beckman, 1998).

THE RESCUE CAMPAIGN

Starting in the late summer of 1941, reports from German-occupied western Russia told of massacres of thousands, sometimes tens of thousands, of Jewish civilians by the Nazis. The Allied leadership at first regarded the killings as the kind of random atrocities often associated with major international wars. In December 1942, however, the Allies publicly confirmed that what was underway was the systematic extermination of millions of European Jews. At the same time, the Roosevelt administration insisted the only practical means of aiding Hitler's victims was to defeat the Germans on the battlefield. “Nothing can be done to save these helpless unfortunates except through the invasion of Europe, the defeat of the German army, and the breaking of the German power,” Assistant Secretary of State Adolph Berle told an American Jewish audience in 1943. “There



FIG. 3: Stella Adler. Photo courtesy of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

is no other way." The administration characterized this approach as "rescue through victory" (Penkower, 1983, p. 330 n 37).

The Bergson Group responded to the news by setting aside its Jewish army campaign and focusing its attention completely on the plight of European Jewry. Moreover, Bergson and his colleagues rejected the administration's claim that rescue was not feasible. Mainstream American Jewish leaders, however, hesitated to take issue with President Roosevelt. Strongly supportive of the president's New Deal policies and grateful for his prewar stance against the isolationists, most Jews instinctively trusted FDR's judgment. In addition, some feared that taking issue with a popular president in the midst of a world war could provoke antisemitism.⁴ The difficulty of absorbing the shocking news from Europe further slowed the community's response. As a result, there were few visible signs of American Jewish protest activity in the months following the Allied confirmation of the mass murder. This created a vacuum that the Bergson Group was determined to fill.

SHATTERING THE SILENCE

In early 1943, a Gallup poll asked Americans: "It is said that two million Jews have been killed in Europe since the war began. Do you think this is true or just a rumor?" Despite the fact that the Allied leadership had publicly confirmed that two million Jews had been murdered, the poll found

only 47% believed it was true, while 29% dismissed it as a rumor. The remaining 24% expressed no opinion (Wyman, 1984, p. 79).

A major part of the reason for the public's skepticism was the failure of most of the American news media to treat the Nazi genocide as a serious issue. The Bergson activists realized that shattering this silence was the first step necessary to bringing about the rescue of Europe's Jews. In early 1943, Hecht authored a dramatic pageant that he called *We Will Never Die* (the title, derived from a biblical verse, affirms Jewish national survival). It surveyed Jewish contributions to civilization, described the Nazi slaughter of the Jews in painful detail, and appealed for rescue. Edward G. Robinson, Paul Muni, Sylvia Sydney, and Luther Adler starred; Moss Hart served as director; Billy Rose produced the event; and Kurt Weill composed an original score. Local stars took part when the pageant was staged in various cities. In those days, it was unusual for Hollywood and Broadway celebrities to become involved in political causes. Hecht's ability to attract such prominent figures from the entertainment industry gave an important boost to the Bergson campaign. *We Will Never Die* played to audiences of more than 40,000 in two shows at Madison Square Garden on March 9, 1943. The event received substantial media coverage, thus carrying its message to audiences well beyond those who actually attended the pageant.

We Will Never Die was subsequently performed in Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Washington, DC's Constitution Hall, where the audience included First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, six justices of the Supreme Court, more than 200 members of Congress, and numerous members of the international diplomatic corps. Mrs. Roosevelt was so moved by the performance that she devoted part of her next syndicated column to the pageant and the plight of Europe's Jews. For millions of American newspaper readers, it was the first time they heard about the Nazi mass murders.

MOCKERY IN BERMUDA

To head off mounting public criticism of the Allies' abandonment of European Jewry, the American and British governments announced that their representatives would meet in Bermuda, in late April and early May 1943, to discuss the Jewish refugee problem. Despite 12 days of discussions, the conference produced no concrete plans for rescue. The U.S. delegates reaffirmed the Roosevelt administration's refusal to take in more refugees, while the British delegates would not even discuss the possibility of opening Palestine to Jews fleeing Hitler.

The Bermuda fiasco aroused outrage throughout the American Jewish community. The Bergson group placed a large advertisement in *The New York Times*, headlined "To 5,000,000 Jews in the Nazi Death-Trap, Bermuda Was

a Cruel Mockery” (May 4, 1943, p. 17). While mainstream Jewish organizations were not always comfortable with Bergson’s outspoken approach, they were on the same side as Bergson in denouncing Bermuda. Dr. Israel Goldstein, president of the Synagogue Council of America, blasted the conference as “not only a failure, but a mockery,” and bluntly added that “the victims are not being rescued because the democracies do not want them” (Medoff & Golinkin, 2010, pp. 73–74). On Capitol Hill, too, angry voices were heard. New York Congressman Emanuel Celler denounced the Bermuda conference as “diplomatic tight-rope walking.” His colleague Samuel Dickstein, chairman of the House Immigration and Naturalization Committee, declared: “Not even the pessimists among us expected such sterility” (Medoff, 2009, p. 87; Wyman, 1984, p. 121).

The “Cruel Mockery” advertisement was just one of many such fusillades fired by the Bergsonites. During 1943–1944, they placed more than 200 advertisements in newspapers around the country, to force the rescue issue on to the public agenda. With headlines such as “How Well Are You Sleeping? Is There Something You Could Have Done to Save Millions of Innocent People from Torture and Death?” [Fig. 4] (*The New York Times*, Nov. 24, 1943, p. 13), and “Time Races Death: What Are We Waiting For?” (Dec. 17, 1943, p. 31), the ads were soon being discussed on op-ed pages, in the halls of Congress, and in the White House.

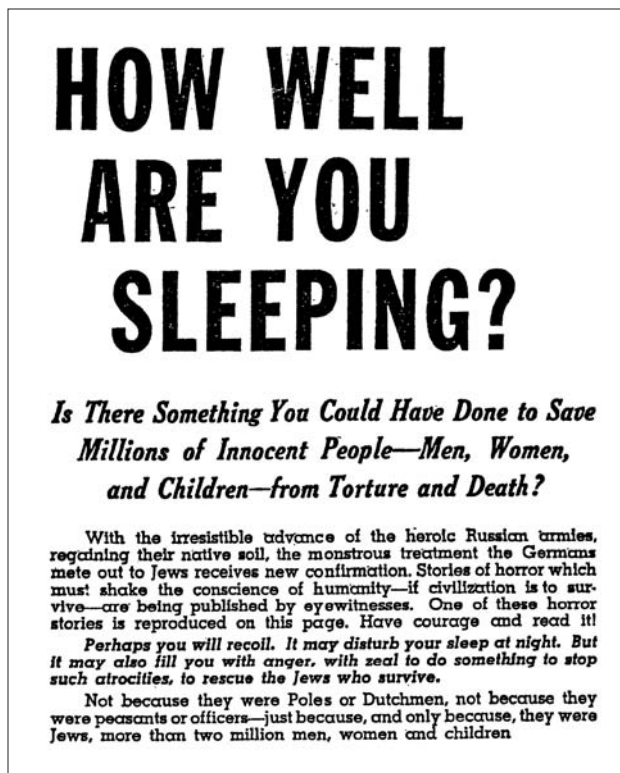


FIG. 4: This ad is one of more than 200 that appeared in the Bergson Group’s advertisement campaign in 1943–1944. Photo courtesy of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

On one occasion, the First Lady told Bergson that President Roosevelt complained that one of the ads was “hitting below the belt.” Bergson replied that he was “very happy to hear that he is reading it and that it affects him” (Wyman & Medoff, 2002, p. 139).

In the summer of 1943, the Bergson Group launched an all-out assault on the “rescue through victory” argument by holding a weeklong Emergency Conference to Save the Jewish People of Europe, in New York City. More than 1,500 delegates participated. Panels of experts outlined ways to save Jews from Hitler. A panel on transportation focused on specific routes that could be used to take Jews out of Axis territory. Experts on relief outlined ways to organize food shipments to the Jews. The panel on international relations urged U.S. pressure on non-belligerent countries to give temporary shelter to Jewish refugees. Military experts drew up a list of steps that could be taken without impairing the war effort, such as Allied warnings of immediate military reprisals for atrocities against the Jews. A panel of rabbis and Christian clergymen focused on the need for protests by the Vatican and other religious leaders. The panel of journalists, editors, and authors discussed ways to rouse American public opinion.

The conference received widespread coverage in the national press and on radio. This was important, because news of the Holocaust was still often relegated to the back pages and Allied statements referring to the victims of oppression frequently failed to acknowledge that the Jews were the Nazis’ primary victims. As the artist Arthur Szyk put it: “They treat us as a pornographical subject. You cannot discuss it in polite society” (Wyman, 1984, p. 337).

In addition to gaining wide publicity for the idea that rescue was feasible, Bergson’s conference demonstrated the breadth of support for rescue. The 19 co-chairs of the conference included conservatives, such as former President Herbert Hoover (who addressed the assembly by radio), and liberals, such as American Labor Party leader Dean Alfange; Republican Senator Arthur Capper and Democratic Senator Edwin Johnson; Roosevelt cabinet member Harold Ickes and Roosevelt’s arch critic, William Randolph Hearst. Likewise, the speakers on the panels represented a broad cross-section of American society, among them prominent journalists, labor leaders, military personnel, members of Congress, the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, and the executive secretary of the NAACP. Rescue was becoming a consensus issue. A coalition this broad could not be easily ignored by the White House, especially on the eve of an election year.

The conference concluded by transforming itself into the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, and the committee was launched with a new goal: creation of a U.S. government agency devoted to rescue.

Convinced that the State Department, if left in charge of refugee matters, would never undertake serious rescue steps, the Bergson Group decided to focus its attention on the demand to establish a government department or task force whose only job would be to facilitate rescue.

THE DAY THE RABBIS MARCHED

The first step in this new Bergson campaign was a march to the White House by 400 rabbis [Fig. 5]. It would be the only rally for rescue held in the nation's capitol during the entire Holocaust period.

On October 6, 1943, three days before Yom Kippur, rabbis from around the country converged on Washington and marched from Union Station to the Capitol, where they were met by Vice President Henry Wallace and prominent members of Congress. Two of the protesters read aloud the group's petition to the president:

Children, infants, and elderly men and women are crying to us, "Help!" Millions have already fallen dead, sentenced to fire and sword, and tens of thousands have died of starvation. . . . And we, how can we stand up to pray on the holy day of Yom Kippur, knowing that we haven't fulfilled our responsibility? So we have come, brokenhearted, on the eve of our holiest day, to ask you, our honorable President Franklin Roosevelt . . . to form a special agency to rescue the remainder of the Jewish nation in Europe. (Zuroff, 2003, pp. 454–455)

The protesters proceeded to the Lincoln Memorial, where they offered prayers for the welfare of the president, America's soldiers abroad, and the Jews in Hitler's Europe, and then sang the national anthem. Then they marched to the gates of the White House, where they had expected a small delegation would be granted a meeting with President Roosevelt. Instead, to their surprise and disappointment, they were met by presidential secretary Marvin McIntyre, who told them the president was unavailable "because of the pressure of other business." In fact, the president had nothing on his schedule that afternoon, but he had been urged to avoid the rabbis by his speechwriter Samuel Rosenman, who was embarrassed by the rabbis and feared the march might provoke antisemitism. Roosevelt decided to leave the White House through a rear exit.

If FDR thought he could avoid this controversy by



FIG. 5: On October 6, 1943, just three days before Yom Kippur, 400 rabbis marched to White House, pleading with President Roosevelt to rescue the Jews of Europe. FDR declined to speak to them, claiming other pressing commitments. Photo courtesy of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

avoiding the rabbis, he was mistaken. The next day's newspapers told the story. "Rabbis Report 'Cold Welcome' at the White House," declared the headline of a report in the *Washington Times-Herald*. A columnist for one Jewish newspaper angrily asked: "Would a similar delegation of 500 Catholic priests have been thus treated?" The editors of another Jewish newspaper, *Forverts (Forward)*, reported that the episode had affected the president's previously high level of support in the Jewish community: "In open comment it is voiced that Roosevelt has betrayed the Jews" (Medoff & Golinkin, 2010, pp. 101–102).

THE RESCUE BATTLE MOVES TO CAPITOL HILL

Utilizing the drama of the rabbinical march to garner publicity and congressional sympathy for rescue, Bergson then persuaded leading members of Congress to introduce a resolution urging the creation of a U.S. rescue agency. The Roosevelt administration opposed the resolution, fearing the rescue campaign would increase pressure to let refugees come to the United States. Representative Sol Bloom, chairman of the House International Affairs Committee and a staunch supporter of the administration's refugee policy, tried to block the resolution by insisting on full hearings and inviting a wide range of witnesses. Bloom's initiative backfired, however, when one of the witnesses he called, State Department official Breckinridge Long, gave wildly misleading testimony about the number of refugees who had already been admitted into the United States. Long's misrepresentations sparked widespread media coverage and denunciations from Jewish organizations and members of

Congress. The resolution gained additional momentum in December when it was unanimously approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Meanwhile, just as the refugee controversy was making headlines, a group of senior aides to Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. were uncovering a pattern of attempts by the State Department to obstruct rescue opportunities and block the flow of Holocaust information to the United States. Treasury official Josiah E. DuBois, Jr., drafted a report titled "Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of the Jews" (Medoff, 2009, p. 34).

Armed with the DuBois report and with congressional action hanging over their heads like the sword of Damocles, Morgenthau went to the president in January 1944 to warn him that the refugee issue had become "a boiling pot on [Capitol] Hill" (Medoff, 2009, p. 63) and that Congress was likely to pass the rescue resolution unless the White House acted. This was not merely a plea for mercy for his harried people, but a humanitarian appeal coupled with political self-interest. Ten months before election day, the last thing FDR needed was a public scandal over the refugee issue. Roosevelt pre-empted Congress by establishing the new agency that the resolution had sought—the War Refugee Board.

Morgenthau acknowledged that it was the Bergson Group's work that had created that "boiling pot." At a Treasury Department staff meeting not long after the creation of the War Refugee Board, discussing the factors that made its creation possible, he remarked:

The tide was running with me. . . . The thing that made it possible to get the President really to act on this thing [was] the [rescue] Resolution [that] at least had passed the Senate to form this kind of a War Refugee Committee, hadn't it? I think that six months before [the rescue resolution] I couldn't have done it. (Medoff, 2009, pp. 64–65)

Major newspapers saw it similarly. An editorial in the *Christian Science Monitor* noted that the establishment of the Board "is the outcome of pressure brought to bear by the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, a group made up of both Jews and non-Jews that has been active in the capital in recent months" (Medoff, 2009, p. 64). A *Washington Post* editorial commented that in view of Bergson's "industrious spadework" on behalf of rescue, the Emergency Committee was "entitled to credit for the President's forehanded move."⁵

BERGSON'S OPPONENTS

Despite the Bergson Group's achievements—or, in some cases, because of them—there was opposition to its activity

from three sources: mainstream Jewish organizations, the British government, and the Roosevelt administration.

Some Jewish leaders feared that Bergson's growing prominence was usurping their position in the Jewish community and in the eyes of government officials. They also worried that the group's public criticism of America's refugee policy could provoke antisemitism, and that U.S. Jews might be accused of undermining the government during wartime. Several of the major Jewish organizations undertook a systematic, but generally unsuccessful, effort to persuade figures of prominence to cut their ties with the Bergson Group. They pressed some publications to refuse Bergson's advertisements, and even urged the Roosevelt administration to draft or deport him.⁶

The British, who dubbed Bergson "a Semitic Himmler,"⁷ likewise urged U.S. officials to draft or deport Bergson. Deporting Bergson to Palestine would make it possible for the British to arrest him for belonging to the *Irgun* (this and the other Jewish militia groups were considered illegal by the British ruling authorities). However, London thought the chances of that happening were unlikely "in view of the influential friends who seem to be able to protect him."⁸ Counterpressure from Bergson's allies in Congress, combined with the State Department's fear that such action would "make a martyr out of Bergson," did indeed stymie consideration of drafting or deporting him.⁹

There were other avenues of action, however, and the Roosevelt administration did not need much prodding from Jewish leaders or British officials to go after Bergson. State Department officials in particular deeply resented Bergson's activities. Breckinridge Long in 1943 complained that the group's newspaper ads "made it very difficult for the department," while Robert Alexander insisted that the slogan used in one Bergson ad, "Action—Not Pity," had actually been invented by the Nazis to embarrass the Allies. Hitler himself was the one "behind the [pro-refugee] pressure groups," Alexander claimed, because opening the United States or Palestine to refugee immigration would "take the burden and curse off Hitler!"¹⁰ Irritated by Bergson's campaigns, the Roosevelt administration sent the FBI and the Internal Revenue Service to squash him. Although they were ostensibly pursuing evidence of criminal wrongdoing, it is clear that political motives were the impetus. "This man has been in the hair of Cordell Hull," an internal FBI memo bluntly noted in 1944, in its explanation of the reasons for U.S. government action against Bergson.¹¹

THE WAR REFUGEE BOARD: A TURNING POINT

The War Refugee Board marked a profound reversal in U.S. policy regarding European Jewry. Its creation was virtually an admission that the "rescue through victory" claim had been mistaken, and that rescue was possible after all.

The Board never lived up to rescue advocates' expectations, in part because it was given minimal government funding. However, with funds contributed primarily by Jewish groups and with a staff composed largely of the same Treasury Department officials who helped lobby for the board's creation, it energetically employed unorthodox means of rescue. It moved Jews out of dangerous zones, pressured the Hungarian authorities to end deportations to Auschwitz, and sheltered Jews in places such as Budapest, where Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg saved lives with the funds and assistance of the Board. The Bergson Group tried to assist these efforts by sending Eri Jabotinsky (son of the late Revisionist Zionist leader) to Turkey in the spring of 1944 to work with War Refugee Board emissaries there. Through frenetic lobbying of Turkish government officials, the young Jabotinsky helped open escape routes for Jews to get out of Greece and Rumania and built relationships with the array of boat owners, black marketeers, and assorted seedy characters willing to undertake what the author and Bergson Group activist John Gunther in a 1939 radio broadcast called "Jew-running" (Ben-Ami, 1996, p. 256). By early 1945, however, Jabotinsky was forced to flee Turkey just ahead of a British arrest warrant for his ties to the *Irgun*. Historians estimate that altogether, the efforts of the War Refugee Board played a major role in saving about 200,000 Jews and 20,000 non-Jews.^{12, 13}

THE BERGSON GROUP: AGENTS OF RESCUE

As young Aliyah Bet activists in the late 1930s, the men who would become the leaders of the Bergson Group were able to play a direct role in organizing the rescue of tens of thousands of Jewish refugees and their transportation to safety in Palestine. During the Holocaust, however, the Bergson Group, as a U.S.-based political action committee, was not in a position to participate directly in rescue efforts. Instead, it used creative protest methods—marches, newspaper advertisements, theater productions, and lobbying—to bring about the creation of a government agency to carry out rescue efforts. Its accomplishments were remarkable, especially in view of the many obstacles the group faced.

During the decades following the Holocaust, the Bergson Group's efforts were often omitted from history books, museum exhibits, and other accounts of the period, in some cases because of lingering political bias against the Bergsonites. In recent years, however, younger scholars have published extensive research on the group, and prominent institutions, most notably the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, now give the Bergson Group appropriate credit.

NOTES

1. For an insider's view of Aliyah Bet, see William R. Perl (1978): *The Four-Front War*. New York: Crown.
2. For details of the Jewish army campaign, see Rafael Medoff (2002), *Militant Zionism in America: The Rise and Impact of the Jabotinsky Movement in the United States, 1926–1948*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, pp. 46–83.
3. Halifax to Eden, 13 January 1943 and 15 January, 371/35031, Records of the British Foreign Office, Public Record Office [hereafter PRO], London.
4. Antisemitism in the United States reached record high levels during the 1940s, as explained in Wyman and Medoff, 2002, pp. 4–6. However, Jewish leaders' claims that the Bergson Group's activities might provoke pogroms in the United States (Medoff, 2002, p. 188; Hecht, p. 565; Medoff & Golinkin, 2010, p. 82) were never borne out.
5. The events leading to the creation of the War Refugee Board are described in detail in Medoff, 2009.
6. Shultz to Weisgal, 16 August 1944, Z5/868, CZA. Goldman to Klotz, 19 May 1944, Z5/395, CZA; Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation, 19 May 1944, p.1, 867N.01/2347/PS/LC, National Archives; Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation, 10 January 1944, p.5, 3:67, PSGP; Alden to Ladd, 24 March 1945, FBI Files (in the possession of the author).
7. A. H. Tandy, British Embassy, 10 September 1945, "Memorandum on Jewish Affairs in the United States at the Termination of the World War," Records of the British Colonial Office, PRO. Halifax to Foreign Office, 24 May 1944, FO 371/40131, PRO.
8. Halifax to Foreign Office, 24 May 1944, FO 371/40131, PRO.
9. Chancery to Eastern Department, Foreign Office, 6 August 1945, FO 371/45599, PRO.
10. Long to Rosenman, Rosenman Papers, Refugees File, 15 October 1943, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library; Alexander to Long, 7 May 1943, Breckinridge Long Papers 203; cited in Wyman (1990), (Ed.), *America and the Holocaust* [13 vols.] (New York: Garland).
11. Ladd to Tamm, 23 May 1944, FBI Files. The FBI's investigation of Bergson proceeded along two tracks simultaneously—to find evidence that the Bergson group was assisting the Irgun, and to determine if the Bergsonites were Communists. The IRS launched its own inquiry, searching for financial irregularities that would enable the administration to revoke Bergson's tax-exempt status. IRS agents repeatedly visited the group's office, once for a stretch where they stayed there from morning until night for more than two weeks.

More than 1,000 pages of internal FBI documents, which I obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, detail the administration's campaign of eavesdropping on the telephone conversations of Bergson activists, opening their mail, sifting through their trash, and using informants to gather information and steal documents from Bergson's office (Ladd to Tamm, 23 May 1944, FBI Files, Washington. Report on Hebrew Committee of National Liberation, 1 May 1947, 30, 44, FBI Files. Report by NY FBI Office, 24 October 1945, "Hebrew Committee on National Liberation-Registration Act," Internal Security, FBI Files). Ultimately, despite an exhaustive, years-long investigation, however, the FBI was unable to document its suspicions about Bergson. The IRS agents likewise found nothing; in fact, as they were departing Bergson's headquarters on the final day of their inquiry, the agents each made a cash contribution to the group (Buckley to Ladd, 23 May 1944, FBI Files; Memo from J. Edgar Hoover, "Hebrew Committee of National Liberation," 18 February 1946, FBI Files; Ladd to Tamm, 23 May 1944, FBI Files; Internal Security Report, "Hebrew Committee of National Liberation," 25 January 1945, FBI Files).

12. A comprehensive history of the War Refugee Board has yet to be written. The best account so far of its work may be found in Wyman, 1984, pp. 209–287. "By the end of the war, the [WRB] had played a crucial role in saving approximately 200,000 Jews. About 15,000 were evacuated from Axis territory (as were more than 20,000 non-Jews). At least 10,000, and probably thousands more, were protected within Axis Europe by WRB-financed underground activities and by the Board's steps to safeguard holders of Latin American passports. WRB diplomatic pressures, backed by its program of psychological warfare, were instrumental in seeing the 48,000 Jews in Transnistria moved to safe areas of Rumania. Similar pressures helped end the Hungarian deportations. Ultimately, 120,000 Jews survived in Budapest" (p. 285).

13. Two of the War Refugee Board's most important initiatives, however, fell short. One was the idea of bombing the death camps or the railway lines leading to them, over which hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews were deported in the spring and summer of 1944. Two escapees from Auschwitz in the late spring provided the Allies with details of the camp's layout. Having recently attained control of the skies over Europe, the Allies were in a position to use air power to interfere with the Nazi genocide. A number of Jewish groups and rescue advocates, including the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, appealed to the administration to undertake such air strikes. The War Department dismissed all such requests on the grounds that they were "impracticable" since they would require "considerable diversion" of planes that were needed for the war effort. In fact, U.S. and British planes were already bombing German oil factories just a few miles from the gas chambers; no "diversion" of forces from elsewhere was necessary. The real problem was the mindset in the administration that not even the most minimal military resources should be used for humanitarian objectives.

The second important proposal that failed to gain traction was DuBois's proposal to create "temporary havens of refuge" in the United States for Jews who were fleeing Hitler, comparable to the "free ports" where goods were permitted to be temporarily stored, tax free. Because the refugees' status would be similar to that of prisoners of war, they could be admitted outside America's tight immigration quotas, and the refugees would agree to leave the United States after the war ended, thus countering fears that America would be flooded with Europe's downtrodden. The Bergson Group helped galvanize public opinion in favor of the idea by taking out numerous full-page newspaper ads. When FDR's private polls convinced him there was sufficient public support, he agreed to admit one token group of 982 refugees outside the quota system—but no others. The journalist (and Bergson Group supporter) I. F. Stone called Roosevelt's gesture "a bargain-counter flourish in humanitarianism" (Medoff & Golinkin, 2010, p. 106).

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Well over a million Jews served in the armies that opposed Hitler. Tens of thousands died, and thousands were decorated for gallantry. For the most part, they are now forgotten. Yet some 35 Jewish parachutists from Palestine who participated in missions during World War II, including Hannah (Szenes) Senesh¹ and six others who died carrying them out, are still remembered. Why? In this fascinating essay, which examines the myths and truths surrounding Hannah's heroic mission, Louis D. Levine posits a response: The Jewish soldiers of the Allied armies were permitted to fight only in the Second World War. Hannah and the parachutists, however, were the one group allowed to fight in the war within the war, what historian Lucy Dawidowicz has called the War Against the Jews.

Louis D. Levine

The Two Missions of Hannah Senesh

The story of Hannah Senesh—her birth into a Jewish, upper-middle-class Budapest family in 1921; her immigration to Palestine, where she joined a kibbutz; her poetry; her tragic mission as a parachutist—became the stuff of legend almost immediately upon news of her execution at the age of 23 at the hands of the fascist Hungarian authorities. Told and retold, the story has taken on mythic dimensions over the years. According to the highlights of the myth, Hannah was sent on a mission, perhaps suicidal, to save Jews. Just before her dangerous crossing into Hungary, she composed a final poem, “*Ashrei Hagafurur*” (“Happy Is the Match”),² that was to become her literary epitaph. Betrayed by those who helped her cross the border, Hannah was immediately captured by the Nazi authorities, imprisoned, and brutally tortured. Despite her captors' best efforts to isolate her, she arranged clandestine meetings with her mother, who had been placed in the same prison. On trial, Hannah mounted her own defense, warning her prosecutors that they would soon stand trial for their crimes. Sentenced to death, she refused to ask for mercy. She died a martyr's death before a firing squad on November 7, 1944.

When one considers that her mission was clandestine, and the war in Europe did not end until May 8, 1945, it is remarkable how rapidly several different narrative versions of Hannah's story became public and took root (Baumel-Schwartz, 2010, p. 53).³ Her poetry, excerpts from her diary, and short articles about her began to appear in the Hebrew press in the summer of 1945. Two of the poems were set to music and quickly became popular songs. Months later, her kibbutz movement published the first of many editions of her writings, which also included accounts of the mission by two of Hannah's comrades-in-arms. This work

has not been out of print in the 65 years since it appeared. Hannah's was a story with “legs.”

However, by many measures, the mission to save Jews that she and the other parachutists attempted was a failure, and the myth of Hannah Senesh, like many myths, diverged in essential ways from what actually had occurred. What, then, was Hannah's mission? Why was she sent, what happened to her, and why did her story become so important for the *Yishuv* (the Jewish settlement in Palestine), remaining central in the mythology of the emerging State of Israel?

By September 19, 1939, the two wars that were to consume Europe over the next five and a half years had already begun. Two years later, in December 1941, the first of those wars—the Second World War—had engulfed the entire globe. As President Roosevelt understood and made clear in his January 1942 State of the Union address, “the gargantuan aspirations of Hitler and his Nazis” who sought world conquest were at the heart of the conflict. What Roosevelt did not understand at that time, and perhaps never truly understood, was that Germany had simultaneously launched a second, parallel war when it invaded Poland, what the historian Lucy Dawidowicz has aptly called the War Against the Jews.

None of this was yet apparent when 18-year-old Hannah Senesh arrived in Palestine from Budapest on that mid-September day. Poland was about to fall, but the Western democracies still posed a powerful counterweight to German aspirations in Europe. Now, with the war begun, Britain needed to secure its access routes to the strategically critical Persian Gulf oil supplies and to India, and in this calculation, the Arabs of Palestine were far more important potential adversaries than the Jews. One consideration was that the Arabs might well side with Hitler, while the Jews had no

choice but to throw in their lot with the United Kingdom. British Prime Minister Chamberlain put it succinctly on April 20, 1939: "If we must offend one side, let us offend the Jews rather than the Arabs" (Morris, 1999, p. 158).⁴

The result was the White Paper of May 17, 1939. It represented Britain's political response to its strategic imperative of keeping a lid on Palestine. The terms of the White Paper indicated that Britain would, 10 years hence, create an independent Palestinian state with an Arab majority; it would severely restrict Jewish immigration to Palestine; and it would place draconian restrictions on where Jews could purchase land, completely forbidding it in most districts.

The combination of the German invasion of Poland and the British White Paper presented the Jewish Agency executive board, the leadership body of the *Yishuv*, with a crisis. The invasion of Poland placed the most important reservoir of Jewish immigration to Palestine at risk, and the threat of a wider war in Europe compounded that threat. Even absent the outbreak of war, the White Paper itself would severely restrict immigration. Limited immigration, together with the other provisions of the White Paper, would place the creation of a future Jewish homeland in doubt. Palestine and the *Yishuv* were now integral parts of the conflict.

The *Yishuv* responded as the British had predicted. The Jewish Agency executive board declared:

At this fateful moment, the Jewish community [in Palestine] has a threefold concern: the protection of the Jewish homeland, the welfare of the Jewish people, [and] the victory of the British Empire. . . . The war . . . is our war, and all of the assistance that we shall be able and permitted to give to the British Army and to the British people we shall render wholeheartedly. (Morris, 1999, p. 161)

The *Yishuv* would soon learn how hard it would be to accomplish these three goals. It was at the intersection of the last two—the sense of corporate responsibility for world Jewry felt by Palestine's Jewish community and the need to help Britain defeat Germany—that Hannah's narrative became part of the larger story.

Hannah spent her first two years in Palestine at the Agricultural School for Young Women at Nahalal. During these years, a number of themes repeatedly surface in her diary. One is her awareness of the calamitous unfolding of the war for the Western democracies. This reaches a crescendo in her diary entry for July 9, 1941, where she writes, "About two weeks ago Germany attacked Russia. Everyone knows that the outcome will determine the fate of the entire world" (Senesh, n.d., 3:182). She was also concerned for the safety of her mother, Kató Senesh, still in Budapest; and her brother, Gyuri, who was studying in Lyons, France.

This impinged on her overall happiness at being in Palestine and her infatuation with the adventure of becoming a *halutzah* (pioneer). She had been at the Agricultural School for two years; now she was ready for new challenges. She continues the diary entry just quoted, "I feel I have to do something that is difficult . . . to justify myself. I absolutely hate school now and can't wait to get out of here (Senesh, n.d., 3:183).

On September 7, 1941, Hannah left Nahalal, ending her "chapter of learning and preparations" to "begin a life" (Senesh, n.d., 4:10). In December, after spending some time considering her options, she presented herself as a candidate for membership at Kibbutz Sedot Yam. The year that followed, though, was a difficult one for Hannah. She found life at Sedot Yam isolating and much of the work assigned to her of little consequence [Fig. 1].



FIG. 1: Hannah in her role as *economit* [the person in charge of the kitchen] at Sedot Yam, circa 1943. Collection of the Senesh family.

She had no close friends and yearned for companionship; the spread of the war in Europe now made correspondence with her mother and family in Hungary and her brother in France almost impossible, increasing her sense of isolation.

Most of 1942 was calamitous for the Allies. In Europe, Germany continued to advance into the Soviet Union, and Rommel's campaign in North Africa put Egypt and Palestine under threat as well. The war against the Jews was reaching a climax, as *Einsatzgruppen*, mobile killing squads, slaughtered Jews in the Soviet lands, while Jews from other parts of Europe were deported by the trainload to the killing centers of Poland.

In the war against Germany, it was only the end of 1942 and the early months of 1943 that brought good news to the Allies, when the British defeated Rommel at El Alamein and the Russians surrounded and destroyed an entire



FIG. 2: The only known photograph of the parachutists training in the fields of Kibbutz Kfar Hahoresh. Collection of the Senesh family.

German army at Stalingrad. With these victories, the immediate threat to the safety of the Jews in Palestine passed.

However, the tragic extent of the slaughter of Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe was confirmed by the *Yishuv* in late November 1942. The leaders of the Jewish settlement responded to this terrifying news by proposing, among other initiatives, one that would have the entire *Palmach* (the commando unit of the *Haganah*, the underground defense force of the *Yishuv*) penetrating behind enemy lines to assist Jews in resistance and rescue activities (Friling, 2005, 1:285). While this idea never found much support among British military and diplomatic circles, a branch of the British intelligence service and *Yishuv* representatives did broker a secret cooperative agreement in January 1943. The *Palmach* would supply British intelligence with Jewish agents from the *Yishuv*. These agents would penetrate occupied Europe and extricate escaped Allied prisoners of war, together with Jews, from behind enemy lines, bringing both to safety. Here was an opportunity, however modest, to address two of the goals announced at the outbreak of the war—the welfare of the Jewish people and the victory of the British Empire.

During this same period, unaware of the secret agreement being negotiated, Hannah fantasized about leaving Sedot Yam and returning to Budapest, “to assist in organizing Youth Aliyah and also to bring mother [to Palestine]” (Senesh, 1972, p. 167). In 1943, the war against the Jews had not yet come to Hungary, save for Jewish refugees who were seeking haven there from Nazi-occupied countries. Although the Hungarian government had passed restrictive antisemitic laws, and although many Jewish men of military age had been drafted into the Hungarian Army’s so-called Labor Battalions, where they were often mistreated,

assigned exceedingly dangerous tasks, or even murdered, most of the community continued to live relatively normal lives. Returning to assist the Jews of Hungary was, at least theoretically, feasible.

At the end of February 1943, Hannah’s fantasy became less fantastic. Yonah Rosenfeld, a member of the *Palmach* from Kibbutz Ma’agan, sought out Hannah and invited her to join the unit training for the secret mission (Senesh, 1972, p. 169);⁵ she would be trained by and work for the *Haganah* and the British. Hannah immediately accepted the invitation, but it was early June before the Secretariat of the United Kibbutz Movement issued her draft orders.⁶

Hannah’s training did not actually begin for another six months. By then, much had changed in the European theater of operations. The Soviets had decisively defeated the Germans yet again at the Battle of Kursk, and the Americans and British had secured southern Italy, placing the strategic oil-production facilities at Ploesti, Romania, in range of Allied bombers. Lacking, however, were Allied intelligence networks in the Balkan states. The secret agreement now took on specificity. The *Yishuv* would supply agents who had grown up in Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Yugoslavia. These agents would carry out two tasks. One group, the unit to which Hannah was assigned, would set up networks to smuggle Jews and downed Allied airmen out of occupied Europe; the other would collect intelligence and undertake resistance and sabotage missions.

Hannah’s preparation for the Parachutist Mission, as it came to be called, was surprisingly brief. November 20 found her at a *Haganah* basic training course that included instruction in small arms, followed by parachute training by the British [Fig. 2].

On January 11, she made a last, brief entry in her diary, noting that she was to leave for Egypt the following week. There, she would receive advanced training in operating a wireless transmitter, in Morse code, and in encoding messages, as well as further briefings on conditions in Hungary.

By this point, the British objective, rescuing downed Allied airmen, was well defined and primary. The *Haganah*’s objectives were far less defined and more symbolic. Nobody was naïve enough to expect the parachutists to save very many, if any, Jews, but the parachutists could serve as emissaries from the *Yishuv*. That this symbolic objective was important is underscored by the fact that the leaders of the *Yishuv*—David Ben-Gurion, Berl Katznelson, Yitzchak Tabenkin, and Golda Meir—met with Hannah and four of her colleagues only days before Hannah’s departure for Egypt. As one of the parachutists, Shaike (Dan) Trachtenberg, reported, Ben-Gurion instructed them “to pass on wherever we could the tidings of the land of Israel” (Friling, 2005, 1:354).

Hannah finally set out for further training in Cairo on



FIG. 3: Hannah and Gyuri (Giora) Senesh in Tel Aviv on the day of Hannah's departure to Egypt, February 3, 1944. Collection of the Senesh family.

February 3, 1944, having spent the preceding 24 hours with her brother, who had just arrived in Palestine [Fig. 3].

While there, she composed the poem "We Gathered Flowers," which makes clear that she had fully absorbed Ben-Gurion's message:

We gathered flowers in the fields and mountains. / We breathed the fresh winds of spring; / We were drenched with the warmth of the sun's rays, / In our Homeland; in our beloved home. // We go out to our brothers in exile; / To the suffering of winter; to frost in the night. / Our hearts will bring tidings of springtime, / Our lips sing the song of light. (Bar-Adon, 1947, p. 102)

To her colleague Reuven Dafni, she expressed these sentiments more succinctly. "Even if they capture me, if it becomes known to the Jews, they will at least know that someone tried to reach them" (Dafni, 1993).

Hannah departed Cairo for Italy in early March 1944. A few days later, on the night of March 13, a Royal Air Force airplane piloted by a Polish crew took off from the airfield in Brindisi, Italy, and dropped Hannah, three other Jewish volunteers from the *Yishuv*, and a British officer near the village of Metlika in the mountains of northwestern Yugoslavia. From there, they would proceed overland to carry out various, and sometimes individual, missions. The next three months, spent in Yugoslavia, were dangerous and dif-

ficult. Hannah desperately wanted to begin her assignment in Hungary, but the group first had to cross enemy lines to partisan-controlled areas near the Hungarian border and then find ways to cross the border itself. The German invasion of Hungary on March 19 altered and complicated the mission's chances for success, and relations with the partisans were sometimes strained.

During this period, one incident demonstrates Hannah's continued focus on the *Haganah's* objectives for the mission. Early in May, she and two of her fellow parachutists, Reuven Dafni and Yonah Rosenfeld, came to the small Yugoslavian village of Serdice. "We spent two nights there," Rosenfeld (2001) remembered.

Hannah appeared before a group of partisans and spoke. Among the group was a young Jewish woman. . . . Emotions ran high. We spent the entire night with this young Jewish woman. . . . She had decided to become a Communist, and as such had been drafted to fight with the partisans. . . . The young woman said . . . "You went to Israel. . . . You made the right choice. And I am here. I am a [Communist] partisan, but inside, I have remained a Jew." (p. 6)

Dafni (1948) wrote that a day or two later, Hannah, who had been moved by the evening, handed him the poem "*Ashrei Hagafurur*."

Happy is the match that was consumed but sparked flames, / Happy is the flame that burned in the secret places of the heart, / Happy are the hearts that knew how to cease beating honorably, / Happy is the match that was consumed but sparked flames. (p. 436)

Whether Hannah saw this young partisan woman as possessed of "the flame that burned in the secret places of the heart," or the parachutists as matches sparking flames among the Jews of Europe, "*Ashrei Hagafurur*" asserted the symbolic value of resisting the Nazis and their allies. At the same time, it recognized how little these isolated bands of partisans and intelligence agents could accomplish in the war against the Jews.

Several weeks later, a small group that had slipped out of Hungary joined the partisan encampment where Hannah was staying. It included, among others, Jacques Antoine Tissandier, an escaped French prisoner of war; two Hungarian Jews, Péter Kallós and Sándor Fleischmann; and "a man who called himself Albert, who claimed to be an agent of the British Secret Service. . . . He had important information that he wished to transmit." (Nussbacher, 1945, paragraph 12) Albert (the code name of Gábor Haraszti) was en route to British headquarters in Bari. There, on June 15, he reported to the deputy chief of Hannah's

British intelligence unit.

I gave instructions to Minnie [Hannah's British code name] how to go to Budapest. I sent her with a Frenchman [Tissandier] who brought me through [from Hungary to Yugoslavia]. I have talked to Minnie on conditions in Hungary for 6 hours one day and 3 hours another. (Haraszti, p. 1, 1944)

Albert's report continues with further detail.

It is easy for Minnie to send in word that "A" Force [British Intelligence] are waiting to guide [Colonel Howie, a British officer in Budapest] across. He should reach Yugoslavia very quickly. . . . I have put Minnie in touch with the Polish community, who are very helpful. . . . It is not difficult to escape from most prison camps.

This was current information reflecting the conditions under German occupation and coming from a reliable British agent (who apparently was also Hannah's distant relative).⁷ The report makes clear that Hannah's mission was not suicidal and that, for the British, the primary targets of the operation were captured or escaped Allied servicemen, not Jews.

Hannah was the only parachutist to cross into Hungary on the night of June 7. She was accompanied by Tissandier, Kallós, and Fleischmann, who had come to Yugoslavia from Hungary, seeking ways to smuggle people—Allied prisoners of war in Tissandier's case, and Jews in the case of Kallós and Fleischmann—out of danger. Crossing the border turned out to be a complicated affair, but the four eventually made it to the outskirts of the village, which was their destination. Hannah, who had the radio with her, sent a message to Dafni on June 9, informing him that they had arrived.⁸ This would be the only message she sent from Hungarian soil.

Hours later, disaster struck. Kallós and Fleischmann, who had gone ahead, were stopped by Hungarian gendarmes, who requested that the two accompany them to the police station in a nearby town. Kallós did not hear one gendarme say to the other that they should release the suspects well short of the purported destination. For reasons still unclear, Kallós drew his pistol and committed suicide. Fleischmann was immediately subdued, and Hannah and Tissandier were quickly captured. Hannah's wireless transmitter was also found. For the next few days, the three were held near where they were captured. During that time, Hannah "fled from the room, quickly ran upstairs to the next floor, a floor with an external balcony. But she was caught and severely beaten. They knocked out her front teeth." (Fleischmann, 1989, p. 51) All three were

transported to Budapest and handed over to Hungarian military authorities. The mission had ended before it had really begun.

We know little about what happened to Hannah while she was in Hungarian custody. Another of the Jewish parachutists, Noah Nussbacher (Yoel Palgi), who had crossed into Hungary several weeks after Hannah and had also been captured, claims to have met with Hannah for 90 minutes in September 1944, three months later, and that during the meeting, she told him that she had been tortured in an effort to extract from her the code for the radio. (Nussbacher, 1945, Appendix A, paragraph 5) Unfortunately, when it is possible to check other statements in Nussbacher's report against independent sources, they often prove unreliable. We know that when Hannah revealed her true identity to the Hungarians, they immediately brought her mother, Kató, to the prison. Nussbacher says the Hungarians threatened to torture and kill Kató unless Hannah revealed the radio code, and Kató claims that, despite being pressured, she did not urge Hannah to reveal any secrets (Senesh, 2004, p. 258). After the meeting, Kató was sent home, only to be rearrested later that day by the Gestapo and imprisoned. Days later, Hannah was transferred to German custody and placed in the same Gestapo prison. Her mother, Nussbacher, and other witnesses agree that Hannah appeared to have recovered physically from her initial beating. She looked healthy and did not show evidence of further physical torture; indeed, she seems to have been treated better than other prisoners (Senesh, 2004, p. 277). Mother and daughter remained in German custody for the next three months. Hannah spent much of that time in solitary confinement.

While her arrest definitively ended the British objective for the mission—to rescue Allied airmen—Hannah still attempted to carry out her Haganah objective of serving as a Jewish emissary. Despite her solitary confinement, she had occasion to speak with other prisoners while being transported from the prison to Gestapo headquarters for questioning or while waiting her turn in the anteroom for interrogation. There, she gathered news and, back in her cell, devised a signaling system to disseminate what she had learned. She also used the prison network to send her mother Hebrew lessons, and whenever possible, she spoke to other prisoners, her jailers, and even her Gestapo interrogators about Jewish life in Palestine, understanding the symbolic value of these actions.

During the second week of September, the Gestapo returned Hannah to Hungarian custody. Two weeks later, when her mother was released from custody, she learned that her daughter would stand trial (Senesh, 2004, p. 282). The trial took place on October 28, 1944, before a Hungarian military court. Hannah, accused of treason, was rep-

resented by independent defense counsel chosen by her mother; the counsel later testified that the trial had been fair (Protocol, September 21, 1946, p. 4). Kató, who was able to see Hannah briefly at the conclusion of the trial, says that Hannah characterized the lawyer's defense as "brilliant" (Senesh, 2004, p. 287).

At the trial's conclusion, the court returned a guilty verdict but was unable to decide on her sentence. The prosecuting judge, Capt. Gyula Simon, adjourned the court for eight days and left Budapest on other business. Upon his return, he found an order that Hannah be executed immediately, signed by Colonel-General Ferenc Feketealmi-Czeydner, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Hungarian Army (Protocol, September 21, 1946, p. 5).⁹ We do not know why.

On November 7, 1944, Capt. Simon informed Hannah that she had been sentenced to death and that her request for clemency had been denied. Simon ordered that the sentence be carried out within two hours and changed the method of execution from hanging to a firing squad (Protocol, September 7, 1946, p. 3). Georg Vida, a prisoner who witnessed the execution, reported that Hannah did not allow her executioners to cover her eyes before she was shot. Her body was conveyed to one of Budapest's Jewish cemeteries, where it was buried.

The more than 1 million Jews who served in the armies that opposed Hitler, the 30,000 from the *Yishuv* who fought in British units, the tens of thousands who died, and the thousands who were decorated for gallantry are largely forgotten. Yet Hannah and her fellow Jewish parachutists from Palestine are still remembered and honored. Why?

I would suggest that they are remembered because they are the one identifiable group allowed to fight both the war against the Jews and the Second World War. As Eldad Harouvi (n.d.) contends, many of the parachutists were successful in the mission assigned to them by the British; they helped save hundreds of Allied lives. That, however, is not why they are remembered. Most people who know of Hannah Senesh are not even aware that this was a part of her mission.

It was for their participation in that second war, the war against the Jews, that the parachutists are remembered. In that war, only the *Yishuv* could aspire to fight as a corporate entity. The *Yishuv*, however, was not a sovereign state that could act independently; it needed Britain's permission and logistical support. That permission was not forthcoming. In the end, the parachutists' mission was the most that the *Yishuv* could extract from the British. Even though it came late in the war and would not make a difference, the *Yishuv* would have to settle for the largely symbolic value of having tried. The parachutists had done what they could to contact Jews, tell them they were not forgotten, and assist them when the war ended.

As for Hannah's story? Despite the myth, her primary mission was the British one, not a mission to save Jews. It was not suicidal. Her capture, by the Hungarians, not the Germans, was the result of a tragic mistake, not of a betrayal, and it brought her mission of rescuing Allied airmen to an abrupt end. She may or may not have been tortured by the Hungarians during her first weeks of capture, but once transferred to German hands, she seems to have been well treated. When finally tried by the Hungarians, she sensibly left her defense to her attorney. Most poignantly, she did ask the Hungarians for mercy, which was not granted.

None of these corrections of the myth, however, diminish the power of her story. Hannah understood her mission as a Jewish emissary from the very start. In Egypt, she wrote a poem to "her brothers in exile" that she and others were coming; in Yugoslavia, she spoke about Palestine and the Zionist enterprise at every opportunity and composed the immortal four lines of "*Ashrei Haganah*." Even when capture brought her British mission to an end, she continued her *Haganah* mission in prison with anyone who would listen. She seems to have been particularly successful in this effort.

Confirmed information that Hannah Senesh had been executed reached the *Yishuv* by the summer of 1945. Hers was the first of the fallen parachutists' stories to make it back home, and as we noted, her private diary and poems were quickly made public. During the war, the parachutists' mission was necessarily kept secret. When it ended, the symbolic value of the mission was used both inside and beyond the *Yishuv*, and Hannah's story became the primary vehicle for conveying it. Hannah was the young woman who had come from outside to fight in a war that few others had been able to join, and she continued to carry out her mission until her execution. Her accomplishment, even when stripped of the myth, still looms large, and deservedly so, in the collective memory of the State of Israel almost 70 years after her death.

NOTES

1. The anglicized spelling of the Hungarian "Szenes" is used throughout the essay. My research was conducted in part while preparing the exhibition *Fire in My Heart—The Story of Hannah Senesh*, which was on view at the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust from October 13, 2010 to August 7, 2011. My profound thanks to Eitan Senesh and the Senesh family for allowing me to use Hannah's material.

When quoting from Hannah's diary, I have checked each entry against the original manuscript. If the published English translation (Senesh, 2004) reflects the original, I have used that edition as the reference. If it does not, and the published Hebrew version (Senesh, 1972) does, I cite that. Otherwise, I have used the original manuscript of the diary (Senesh, n.d.) as the basis for my translations.

2. The opening word of *Ashrei Hagafur* has been translated both as “happy” (Bar-Adon, 1947, p. 81) and “blessed” (Syrkin, 1947, frontispiece). Dictionaries allow for both translations. I have chosen “happy” because *Ashrei*, as the first word in a Hebrew poem, strongly evokes its use in the biblical Book of Psalms, where it is often found in this initial position, beginning with Psalm 1. Most modern translations of Psalms (New Jewish Publication Society, 1982; New English Bible, 1970; Alter, 2007) translate *ashrei* as “happy,” rather than the “blessed” of the Authorized (King James) Version and translations that follow in that tradition (Revised Standard Version, 1952). Furthermore, while there is overlap in the semantic range of “blessed” and “happy,” the former connotes a gift, a blessing, bestowed from some external source, that is, God, fate, another person; while happiness can be internally generated. I find it hard to imagine that Hannah, who so savored life, would see death, even “while kindling flame,” as blessed; she was not a martyr. Yet she extolled the opportunity to accomplish something extraordinary, and a person might indeed be “happy” with the thought of “kindling flame,” even if she were consumed in the act.

3. Also, *Bama’aleh*, August 17, 1945, 5 (Hebrew); D’var Hapoelet, August 20, 1945, 1 (Hebrew).

4. See also the 1939 statement of the Committee of Imperial Defense: “We assume that, immediately on the outbreak of war, the necessary measures would be taken . . . to bring about a complete appeasement of Arab opinion in Palestine and in neighboring countries” (Morris, 1999, p. 155).

5. The sense of the entry is correct, but the editor has taken considerable liberties with the actual text.

6. Kibbutz Me’uchad Archives, Beit Tabenkin, 18/101.

7. Unpublished research notes by László Ritter for the 2008 film. *Blessed is the match: The life and death of Hannah Senesh*. Collection of Katahdin Productions.

8. Haganah Archives 14/454/27.

9. Simon’s testimony to this effect was given when he was brought to trial after the war ended; it was confirmed by Andor Szelecsényi, Hannah’s defense attorney.

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"Marek Edelman was 19 when he became a commander in the Jewish Fighting Force that led the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (April 19 to May 8, 1943)," explains Jennifer Robertson. "He survived to fight in the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. Edelman became a cardiologist and was a constant moral force in postwar Poland. When his wife, Alina, herself a ghetto survivor, and his two children left Poland during the antisemitic pressures of 1968, Dr. Edelman refused to leave. 'If I go, Hitler will have won,' he said. April 19th has become the day for an annual commemoration of the Uprising. Dr. Edelman always made a personal act of memory, but in 1999, the 60th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War, he led a formal procession to the top of the grassy mound that covers the underground hideout where the leadership of the Jewish Fighting Force—his friends and comrades—took their own lives on the night of May 7, 1943."

Jennifer Robertson

*Dr. Marek Edelman Lays
Flowers on the Ghetto Monument,
19th April, 1999*

He brings flowers to the monument,
walking with firm steps despite the cold
and unremitting weight of five decades —
walking freely now where then flames flowered
as pavements melted beneath his fighting feet.

He mounts steep steps, a grassy mound
where comrades died at their own hands,
covers unshrouded bones,
then halts, moves on.

A slow procession follows in the biting wind.
The April dusk
pours down snowflakes thick as memories,
buries formal roses, wired lilies.
Brief candle flames which children lit go out.

Windows overlook the memorial route.
Here curtains are drawn tight
and shut out ghetto ghosts that haunt the night.

“Like acts of courage, these stories of agency, defiance, and resistance come as free and precious gifts, instants of unexpected grace amidst an ocean of horror,” writes Robert Jan van Pelt about Michaela Melián’s unique and remarkable memorial *Memory Loops*. “The visitor to *Memory Loops* must stumble over them, as there is no index or search engine that allows him to sort the audio recordings with the help of concepts such as ‘Jewish agency,’ ‘Jewish defiance,’ or ‘Jewish resistance.’ These stories cannot be forced from the site. Therefore, when they do present themselves, the listener cannot but receive them with reverence and gratitude—and as calls to reflection.”

Robert Jan van Pelt

“I Shall Survive You All!” An Instant of Grace Amidst Michaela Melián’s *Memory Loops* Memorial



FIG. 1: Dr. Michael Sieger and SA men on the Karlsplatz, Munich, March 10, 1933. German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv), picture 146–1971–006–02, photographer Heinrich Sander.



FIG. 2: Dr. Michael Sieger and SA men in the Prielmayerstraße, Munich, March 10, 1933. German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv), picture 183-R99542, photographer Heinrich Sander.

On March 23, 1933, the *Washington Times* published two photos taken 13 days earlier in Munich. Both showed a barefooted man wearing long johns and carrying a board with a text [Fig. 1]. He is accompanied by armed SA men.

One photo was taken on the *Karlsplatz*, a major public square; the other, close to the (at that time) already irrelevant *Justizpalast* (Palace of Justice) in the *Prielmayerstraße*. These photos were accompanied by the caption “How Hitlerites treat foes.”

The paper noted that this incident had occurred in Munich, but it did not mention the identity of the man; today, we know it was Dr. Michael Siegel, a Jewish lawyer who was a partner in the well-known *Kanzlei* [law firm] Siegel.

One of the earliest pictures illustrating the Nazi violation of human rights and disregard for human dignity, the photo of Dr. Siegel’s humiliation [Fig. 2] has become a staple in histories of the Holocaust, a ghost who continues to haunt us when we think of the possibilities, still present in March 1933, for decent Germans to stand up and oppose the imposition of the Nazi dictatorship. I think that I was nine when I saw it for the first time in the mid 1960s—that is, in a time before the term “Holocaust” was widely used to

denote the genocide of the Jews. The man’s walk of shame touched me even at that age—perhaps I should say “especially at that age,” because too many nine-year-olds experience the deep and seemingly irredeemable humiliation that results from everyday schoolyard bullying.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The historical background of the picture is as follows. On January 30, 1933, Hitler had become Reich Chancellor, presiding over a coalition cabinet in which Nazis were in the minority. A little over four weeks later, Hitler had received emergency powers in the wake of the Reichstag fire. This initiated the Nazi destruction of civil liberties. On March 9, the Nazis took control of Bavaria: The local Nazi boss, Adolf Wagner, became Interior Minister, and the latter appointed SS Chief Heinrich Himmler as police chief of Munich. On Wagner’s orders, the police began to arrest communist and social democratic functionaries and some prominent members of other political parties. One of them was Max Uhlfelder, the owner of *Kaufhaus Heinrich Uhlfelder GMBH* [inc.], which was, with a sales area of 70,000 sq. ft. and 1,000 employees, the second largest department store in Munich. Uhlfelder was a Jew—one of the 9,000 Jews living in the city.

On March 10, Dr. Siegel, Uhlfelder's lawyer, heard about the arrest of his client. He immediately went to the city's police headquarters, located at the Ettstraße, and demanded Uhlfelder's release. In the 24 hours since Himmler had taken control, however, much had changed. Dr. Siegel was not greeted with the usual respect due to a prominent lawyer but was instead brought into a room full of SA men who had been given the status of auxiliary police constables. The guardians of the new order beat him, knocking out Dr. Siegel's front teeth, perforating an eardrum, and, to add insult to injury, cutting off the legs of his trousers above his knees, revealing his long underwear (in Munich, March can be cold). Then they created a big board, painted on it a text, the exact wording of which continues to be a matter of dispute, and paraded him with the board around his neck through Munich as a clear warning to all who contemplated insisting on *habeas corpus* and other fundamental civil rights.

Heinrich Sanden, an unemployed press photographer, saw the scene and took two pictures that he developed, with the help of Wilhelm Wissmann, on glass plates. He offered these negatives to Munich papers, which did not dare to publish them. However, the Berlin representative of Hearst's International News Service believed that they had potential, bought the plates, and sold them to the *Washington Times*, which was the first to publish them, and to four other dailies and serials in the United States, Great Britain, France, and Argentina.

The editors of these papers immediately recognized the two photos as an indictment against the emerging tyranny in Germany. Yet they faced a problem. When they finally had a positive print in their hands, they realized that the text on the board was partly illegible. They all made an effort to reconstruct the text and retouched the photos to reflect their conclusions. The *Washington Times* and the New York-based *Daily Mirror* applied the text "*Ich werde nie wieder um Schutz bitten bei der Polizei*" (I will never again request protection from the police), but an Argentinian newspaper published the photo with the text "*Ich bin Jude, aber ich will mich nicht über die Nazis beschweren*" (I am a Jew, but I will not complain about the Nazis), while a French publication published a redrawn version of the photo with the board carrying the text "*Ich bin Jude, will mich aber nicht mehr über die Nazis beschweren*" (I am a Jew, but I will not complain about the Nazis anymore). The Nazis used the discrepancy to their advantage. They happily pointed to the differences, claiming it was proof that the photos were forgeries. Dr. Siegel himself, who survived the war as a refugee in Peru, was absolutely certain that the text had read "*Ich bin Jude, aber ich will mich nie mehr bei der Polizei beschweren*" (I am a Jew, but I will never again complain to the police).

In recent years, I had read various discussions published on the Internet that contributed to establish the identity of the man who was carrying the sign, the historical circumstances of Dr. Siegel's civic courage and his humiliation, and the questions surrounding the exact wording of the text. A few months ago, I was reminded again of the picture. I discovered the *Memory Loops* website, the new Internet-based memorial to the Nazi tyranny and the persecution and killing of Jews, homosexuals, the insane and hereditary ill, and others, maintained by the city of Munich. On the website, I found an audio recording in which an actor, accompanied by piano music, read the testimony of Dr. Siegel's daughter, Beate, who, age 14, on June 26, 1939, had left Munich on a *Kindertransport* train for Britain. Listening to this account, I began to realize the drama embodied in the photo—a drama that did not end when the SA let Dr. Siegel go after an hour's march through Munich.

THE MEMORY LOOPS MEMORIAL

The origins of *Memory Loops* go back to 2005 when the Munich City Council took the initiative to create a new monument for victims of National Socialism. The 20-year-old *Denkmal für die Opfer der NS Gewaltherrschaft* (Monument for the Victims of National Socialist Tyranny) had become a source of embarrassment: The conventional form of the monument—a nine-foot-high basalt pillar on which rests a cubical steel cage that holds an eternal flame—seemed mute, if not provincial, compared to the innovative and thought-provoking (counter) monuments created to memorialize National Socialist terror in general, and the Holocaust in particular, such as Jochen Gerz's and Esther Slavev-Gerz's vanishing monument in the Hamburg suburb of Harburg (1986), Norbert Radermacher's slide projections that make up the *Neukölln Memorial* (1994), or Peter Eisenman's vast *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* (Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe) close to the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin (2005).

Munich politicians faced a serious question: Should they attempt to trump Berlin's *Holocaust-Mahnmal* (Holocaust Memorial)? Instead of running headlong into a competition, the cultural department of the city decided to invite specialists and lay people to reflect on the place and nature of a memorial in the 21st century. It organized a two-day symposium of academics involved in the field of public remembrance, a workshop in which 16 high school students from Munich wrestled with the question of what a 75-year-old past meant to them, and a roundtable discussion that also involved citizens from Munich. From these three preparatory events arose an ambition to create a memorial to the victims of National Socialism that would not only embody new forms of cultural memory but would also engage and link various places within the city that are

associated with both the victims and the perpetrators. In December 2007, Munich officials invited the artist Michaela Melián and 13 others to join a closed competition to develop such a memorial project. The competition brief did not offer nor suggest a particular site.

Born in 1956 in Munich, Melián (whose surname derives from a Spanish grandfather) studied cello at the Richard Strauss Conservatory in Munich and then attended the famous Academy of Fine Arts there. As the singer and bass guitarist of the new wave FSK band, and as the author of several solo albums, she became well known as a musician, while her work as a visual artist received critical acclaim for the manner in which she addressed the politics of both public and private memory. In 2005, she confronted for the first time the continued presence of the ghosts of the Nazi era in the contemporary German landscape in her installation on the Föhrenwald (Pine Forest) settlement that was exhibited in the major gallery for contemporary art in Munich. Built in the late 1930s on the outskirts of the Bavarian town of Wolfratshausen as a model settlement to house the personnel and their families of a nearby munitions factory, the place became, during the war, a fenced-in, overcrowded internment camp for the forced laborers who made up the bulk of the workers in the plant. After the collapse of the Third Reich, the United States Army took over the settlement, making it into a transit camp for displaced persons of various nationalities. In October 1945, General Eisenhower decided that Föhrenwald was to be used by Jewish Holocaust survivors only, and for the next 12 years, it was to be a *de facto* extraterritorial and autonomous Jewish town within Germany. During this time, the place had a rich political, cultural, and religious life. When the last Jewish inhabitants left in 1957, Föhrenwald was renamed Waldram. It became first a neighborhood for Germans who had been expelled from the Sudeten area of Czechoslovakia and slowly morphed into a “normal” suburb in which residency is determined by one’s attraction to the place and one’s financial situation. Yet in its five incarnations—Nazi model village, internment camp, displaced persons camp, *Heimatvertriebenen* (expellees) village, suburb—the place looked essentially the same. Using recordings of historical texts and interviews with munitions factory employees, forced laborers, Jewish displaced persons, and expellees who had lived, or in the case of the latter, were still living, in Föhrenwald, and combining it with her own musical compositions and the projection of line drawings of the place, Melián created a powerful audiovisual narrative in which she raised the many ghosts that still inhabited the place.

To understand Melián’s work, it is important to remember that she explores the relationship between auditory and visual space, a fertile field of investigation and experimen-

tation. The Jewish-Austrian musical philosopher Viktor Zuckerkandl, who was to find refuge in the United States in 1940, explained, in his magnum opus *Sound and Symbol* (1956), that, contrary to popular opinion, music is eminently spatial, but in a way that is radically different from the space understood by painters, sculptors, or architects.

The space experience of eye and hand is basically an experience of places and distinctions between places. . . . The ear, on the other hand, knows space only as an undivided whole; of places and distinctions between places it knows nothing. The space we hear is a space without places. (p. 276)

The basic phenomenology of auditory space, the space of the musician, which also happens to be the space of the storyteller, was significantly present in the work on Föhrenwald and became of critical importance in Melián’s spell-binding proposal for the Munich memorial. Many of the artists invited to join the competition were defeated by the fact that the brief had not supplied a site for the new memorial. Melián was energized by it. As a musician, she realized that she could transform the whole of Munich into an entrancing auditory space, that the memorial could be everywhere if she were to focus on spoken words and music only. If, in the Föhrenwald project, images had still played an important role, she was to dispense with them for the Munich memorial.

Her idea was to create 300 German-language and 175 English-language audio tracks and tie them to particular places in the city. These tracks, which contain the narration of eyewitness testimonies or Nazi documents, accompanied for each document by a unique musical score composed and performed by Melián herself, were to be made accessible in three ways: (1) through the Internet, where the tracks are tied to locations drawn on a big hand-drawn map of Munich; (2) through a combination of signage and the telephone net, in which signs, each indicating a telephone number and placed at the relevant location within the city, encourage cell phone users to call a free 0-800-number, where they hear the audio track that records a testimony of an event that occurred at that very place; and (3) by making MP3 players containing the audio tracks available to those who seek to discover Munich on foot.

Melián’s proposal won the competition. When, after more than three years of work, it was dedicated in the fall of 2010, it received unequivocal acclaim. “In Munich something like a miracle has happened, and it reaches far beyond the city,” the prominent German art critic Jörg Heiser wrote in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the German paper of record.

“WWW.MEMORYLOOPS.NET”

I discovered *Memory Loops* in February 2011. I typed “www.memoryloops.net” and, after clicking on an English flag to get the English-language version, I was presented with a map of the city of Munich, filled with blue circles, distinguishable in the suburbs but making a dense agglomeration in the city center. I noticed that when the cursor touched a circle, it turned from blue to white, and within its center appeared a blue dot and a label that contained a number and an address. I clicked on a part of the map that depicted the district that was home to one of my favorite buildings: the Glyptothek, or sculpture museum, famous for the magnificent *Barberini Faun*. I noticed that as I zoomed in, the confusion of circles in the center now began to dissolve, with each circle becoming a marker of a recognizable location with a particular address. I found myself close to the Glyptothek in the *Arcisstraße*, which marked the heart of Nazi Munich (from 1935 until 1945, it housed Hitler's local headquarters; the building, located at number 12, is now a music and theatre academy). The map showed three memory points on the block between the *Briener Straße* and the *Gabelsbergerstraße*. The first referred to number 12, the second, to number 11. I clicked on the first one of number 11, and a window opened that told me that I was connecting to audio track 230 with a story about the *Landesentschädigungsamt* (State Compensation Office). I heard a man's voice, accompanied by a piano. A former inmate of Dachau, he talked about the trauma of survival amidst a community that did not want to acknowledge the past.

The nightmares troubled me for a long time. I also suffered from depression, and didn't know what I could do about it. Then, in the '60s, I went to a consultant psychiatrist to apply for health damage to be recognized by the Regional Compensation Office. He took my blood pressure and asked me the usual questions, confessional affiliation, and so on. And although he had seen my résumé, he diagnosed that my nightmares were a result of my low blood pressure. Outwardly calm, but boiling over inside, I said, “Doctor, I think you know everything now.” “Yes,” he said. Then I left. I never received any recognition of health damage. That was how things were.

The tours and lectures at Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site helped me a lot. What Freud did horizontally, I do vertically: I tell stories—I tell them and I tell them and I tell them. I've been doing it for many years now. I'm off the tablets. To begin with, it was very difficult to go past the crematoria at Dachau. It wasn't possible just to shut out the associations—although my parents didn't die in Dachau—and one has to be very

careful how one treats one's soul.

Right at the beginning I had come across a story that touched the very core of the project: The indifference of postwar Munich society to the events that had passed in that city between 1933 and 1945, and the way a particular but otherwise unnamed survivor had finally decided to take ownership of his own past and break the silence by giving his story to visitors to the Dachau memorial site. The unnamed survivor told his story, the *Memory Loops* website brought it together with all the other stories—of victims, bystanders, and perpetrators, with those of the latter often embodied in the documents they had created, terrible documents, shocking documents—but always read by cheerful children. The horror of those texts was articulated by the innocence of the voices that read them.

As I listened to the tracks, I realized that they affected me more directly than did photos, texts, or attempts by Radermacher to summon the spirits of the murdered Jews through slide projections of their photos at the places where they had lived. It is an experience that everyone who *listens* to testimony has had. Zuckerkandl explained that the auditory space is dynamic; it flows towards the hearer and catches him. Visual space is static and can be measured and controlled by the seeing subject.

As a creature who sees, I know space as something that is without, that confronts me—here I am, there it is, two worlds rigidly and permanently separated; as hearer, hearer of tone, who has no conception of ‘being without,’ I know space of coming from without, as something that is always directed toward me, that is always in motion toward. (p. 277)

Or, more concisely, “the road to the heart of the living is more difficult, more circuitous, by way of the visible than of the audible” (p. 2).

Memory Loops provides an auditory space in which music takes the place of pictures. Indeed: the music that accompanies the reading of the testimonies is vitally important. It doesn't take away from the story; to the contrary: It quite literally “attunes” the listener to the story, creating a mindfulness that overcomes the short attention span endemic to the world of the Internet and forging a responsiveness to the world at large and, in the case of *Memory Loops*, to the words spoken. Music serves “to restore one's hearing to the hearable,” the Jewish theologian Michael Fishbane (2008) has written in his beautiful study *Sacred Attunement* (p. 28). I cannot but agree with him: As I listened to the testimonies, I noticed that the music held me captive at moments that the story lost its punch.

As I went from location to location, the Nazi epoch and

its aftermath as it had unfolded within the city of Munich began to envelop me in all its historical complexity and numinous power. Most of the stories that told of the life of Jews between 1933, when 9,000 lived in the city, and 1944, when only seven were left, reveal to the listener the sense of shock and confusion as new decrees robbed them of their livelihoods and their ability to participate in the city's life. They provide an understanding of the quiet desperation of shifting relations with friends and neighbors, make palpable the fear when the first deportation trains leave for unknown destinations in the East, and contextualize the difficulty of any kind of Jewish resistance at that time and the importance of the moments of defiance that did occur. Among the stories are those of quiet resolve, such as that of a boy who tells how his non-Jewish father refused to divorce his Jewish wife, an act of courage that sent him to a labor camp but saved the family.

86 ETTSTRASSE

Most of the stories are about things that had happened in the intimate sphere. Hence, it is not surprising that they were unknown to me. I made up my own images as I listened to these stories. Then, quite accidentally, I clicked on a location marked as "86 Ettstraße." A window opened and informed me that this was the location of the *Polizeipräsidium* (Police Headquarters). The audio track kicked in. I heard a woman's voice, accompanied by a few simple melodic chords played on a piano—chords that, as Zuckerkandl (1956) observed, always "open up" space and, as I believe, open up the space of our imagination as well (pp. 307–308). The result was an ever-extending frame for the words spoken.

In January 1933, Hitler came to power. On March 10, '33, my father went to Police Headquarters where he was beaten up, his teeth were knocked out, his eardrums damaged. He was beaten bloody, his trouser legs were cut off, and, barefoot, he was led around central Munich with a placard round his neck with the inscription: "I am a Jew, and I shall never again complain to the police."

I immediately saw the picture that had haunted me for almost half a century, the picture of Dr. Siegel carrying the sign through the Munich streets. Now, though, I was not watching a frozen instant of the scene but was instead listening to the account of how it unfolded, an account that, for the first time, made me ask about the impact of the public humiliation of the *paterfamilias* on his wife, Mathilde; his son, Peter; and his daughter, Beate, the author of the testimony. I was captivated.

I was in bed that day with a bit of a cold. My mother

was out shopping and I heard the front door open and shut and expected her to come to my room to ask me if I was all right. No one came. Normally my father would unlock the door, come in, [and] whistle, and my brother and I would run down the corridor to greet him, each of us trying to get there first. . . .

I got out of bed and went out into the corridor. There, on hooks outside the bathroom, hung my father's blood-drenched clothes.

It was the first time that I was really scared. Children are sometimes afraid of the dark, or of imaginary ghosts or whatever, but this was a real fear, not anything that I imagined. I tiptoed along the corridor to my parents' bedroom where, for the first time in my life, I knocked at the door and opened it gingerly. I saw my father pull up the eiderdown to cover his face up to his eyes so I shouldn't see his injuries. And he said: "Wait till your mother comes home." And that was weird; he would always refer to her as "Mutti," Mum.

After that, they tried to protect me from knowing more. It was some years later that I got the whole story. . . .

Uhlfelder, the owner of the big Uhlfelder Store, had been arrested. My father, his lawyer, had gone to Police Headquarters in Ettstraße to lay a complaint. [There] someone said: "Dr. Siegel, you are wanted in room number so and so." And that's where these SA chaps beat him up, cut off his trouser legs, and, barefoot, with a placard round his neck that said "I am a Jew, and I shall never again complain to the police," he was led [a]round Munich. When they got to the main station, they got tired of it all and let him go. When he was about to get into a taxi there, a man came up—and this my father told me himself—a man with an English or an American accent—who said: "I've just taken a photo of you; may I publish it?" My father told him he could do what he liked with it and got into the taxi. . . .

Many years after this event, when he visited us in London—my mother had died a year or so before—my middle son, Paul, announced at dinner: "You know something, Grandpa? Your picture is in our history book." My father said: "Let's have a look at it!" So, Paul went upstairs to get it while we . . . sat there rather anxious as to how my father would react. He looked at it and said: "Yes, very interesting." We laughed, relieved. Then Michael, my husband, a historian said: "I've always wanted to ask you this: What went on in your head at that moment?" My father answered: "I can answer that. From the moment they started laying in to me, I had only one thought . . . : 'I shall survive you all!'" That is defiance, not humiliation.

I continued to click on the circles of the *Memory Loops* site.

It contained many surprises. One of them was audio track 194, which was tied to the *Hauptbahnhof* (Central Station). It provided a narrative by Dr. Siegel's son, Peter. It revealed that his father's inner defiance had not ended in March 1933. You, our readers, have access to the Internet, so I'll leave it to you to log on to www.memoryloops.net/en#!/start/ and discover for yourselves the way Dr. Siegel, at the age of 58, decided not to wait for the fate the Nazis had planned for him but, against all odds, preserved his sense of agency, saved his children and then his wife and himself, and with nothing more than the clothes on his back, began again.

NOTES

1. See Isabel A [family name unknown]. "Two Photos Make History: The 10th March 1933 in the Life of Dr. Michael Siegel," Peter Sinclair (Trans.). p. 17. Retrieved October 28, 2011, from www.rijo.homepage.t-online.de/pdf/EN_MU_JU_siegel_e.pdf.

2. Helmut Hanko, "Die nationalsozialistische Machtsübernahme im Müncher Rathaus," in Richard Bauer and others. (Eds.) (2002). *München—Hauptstadt der Bewegung: Bayerns Metropole und der Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Edition Minerva), p. 196; L. Eiber, "Polizei, Justiz und Verfolgung in München 1933 bis 1945." In Bauer (2002), *München —Hauptstadt der Bewegung*, p. 235. Retrieved November 7, 2011, from www.stadtmuseum-online.de/aktuell/chiffre2.htm.

3. "Two Photos Make History," p. 4.

4. "Two Photos Make History," pp. 10–13.

5. Retrieved November 6, 2011, from www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/our_collections/siegel/index.asp.

6. Retrieved November 6, 2011, from www.muenchen.de/Rathaus/kult/bildende_kunst/kunst_im_oeffentlichen_raum/opfer_nationalsozialismus/321635/wettbewerb.html.

7. FSK is an acronym for *Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle* (voluntary self-control), a concept that refers to the self-censorship with which the German film industry polices itself.

8. Heike Ander and Michaela Melián, Eds. (2005). *Föhrenwald*. (Berlin: Revolver); also retrieved November 4, 2011, from www.foehrenwald-projekt.de/.

9. Jörg Heiser, "Das Unbehagen am geregelten Gedenken," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 19, 2010. See also: www.faz.net/artikel/C30997/memory-loops-in-muenchen-das-unbehagen-am-geregelten-gedenken-30282176.html.

10. Retrieved November 9, 2011, from www.memoryloops.net/en#!/321/.

11. Retrieved November 7, 2011, from www.memoryloops.net/en#!/105/.

12. Retrieved November 7, 2011, from www.memoryloops.net/en#!/258/.

13. With my thanks to Michaela Melián and Miriam Greenbaum.

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Resilience is sometimes manifested in laughter, even in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Oriana Ivy introduces us to her grandmother, who, "one day in the street . . . / stops before another grandmother," whom she knew when they were girls in Auschwitz. As they reminisce, "they are laughing like two schoolgirls." Perhaps these women use their laughter as defiance, a defense against the brutality of the war that was waged against them.

Oriana Ivy

Grandmother's Laughter

One day in the street my grandmother
stops before another grandmother.
Both stammer: "You — you — in Auschwitz —"

Turning to me: "She and I
shared the same blanket. Every night
she said, 'You've got more than I'

and pulled, and I pulled back,
and so we'd tug across the bunk —"
and the two grandmothers laugh.

In the middle of a crowded
sidewalk, in old women's dusk,
widows' browns and grays,

they are laughing like two schoolgirls.
Tears rain down the cracked
winter of their cheeks.

On Piotrkowska Avenue,
on the busiest street,
they are tugging that thin blanket —

“Lack of political will, the tacit connivance of the new far right, and time itself conspire against the 21st-century quest for Holocaust justice,” writes Dovid Katz in this review of Efraim Zuroff’s *Operation Last Chance*. “Zuroff, however, fights on.”

Dovid Katz

Pursuing Perpetrators, Preserving History, and Educating the Next Generation: A Review of Efraim Zuroff’s *Operation Last Chance*

Efraim Zuroff’s (2009) *Operation Last Chance: One Man’s Quest to Bring Nazi Criminals to Justice* is much more than a finely written autobiographical work on his life and pursuit of Nazi war criminals. It is a captivating read, recounting the history of the last 30 years during which Holocaust perpetrators continued to be pursued to the far corners of the earth and explaining both the importance of the endeavor and its transformation into an ongoing battle to preserve the accuracy of the Holocaust narrative. Educators will find the short, episodic chapters that weave an embedded narrative of contextualized Holocaust history to be useful and classroom-friendly. Disturbingly, we learn that the Holocaust, notwithstanding the massive evidence assembled and confirmed, is far from “settled history” even today; rather, the history becomes ever more open to revisionism as survivors, perpetrators, and witnesses alike pass away. Lack of political will, the tacit connivance of the new far right, and time itself conspire against the 21st-century quest for Holocaust justice. Zuroff, however, fights on.

Zuroff was born into a prominent Modern Orthodox Jewish family in Brooklyn, New York, and graduated from Yeshiva University. Zuroff recounts his unlikely journey from his youthful fantasy of fame as the first Orthodox Jew to play in the NBA to a life dedicated to pursuing justice for Nazi war criminals under the inspiration of Simon Wiesenthal, whom he first met in 1978. He would become Wiesenthal’s heir to an extent neither of them could have then imagined.

Many heinous war criminals immigrated, led a blame-

less existence in their new countries and lived to a ripe old age. The widespread reluctance to lug old and locally respected men into court prompted Zuroff to become a lobbyist adept at interesting the media in his work and persuading governments to pass laws that would enable the prosecution of Nazi war criminals in their postwar homes. He credits his two years in Los Angeles at the then-new Simon Wiesenthal Center with providing valuable media know-how. Thanks in large measure to his and his colleagues’ tireless work, such laws were passed, after much debate, in Canada (1987), Australia (1989) and Great Britain (1991). During this period, Zuroff discovered how to utilize emigration records collected by the Red Cross to track the postwar escape destinations of fleeing Holocaust perpetrators. Many Nazi war criminals, typically East European collaborators who had presented themselves at the war’s end as refugees from Communist oppression, had found refuge throughout the prosperous West; the lists Zuroff had discovered (the tale of his discovering them is an intricate story in itself) made pursuit viable and justice possible.

The legal successes in the West were followed by the fall of the Iron Curtain and the rise of a number of democracies in Eastern Europe. Archives were opening up, and Zuroff gained access to the names of “new” war criminals who had escaped justice. Travel was becoming easier, and some leaders of these countries wanted to be in the good graces of Western countries and their Jewish communities on their journey to NATO and European Union membership. However, with opportunities came obstacles. Stumbling blocks were being purposely organized by nationalist East Euro-

pean states concerned about far more than the attempt to bring to justice former Nazi senior citizens. Some states were intent on playing down the massive collaboration of locals; in many parts of Eastern Europe, "collaboration" could mean doing the actual killing of Jewish citizens, often neighbors. This was particularly true in the three Baltic states, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which had the highest percentages of Jews killed in all Europe. These countries and others began to rewrite their history, recasting the perpetrators as "national heroes" for fighting the Soviet enemies. A special East European kind of antisemitism was growing (based on the old canard that communism was a Jewish-Bolshevist plot), and there was an utter failure to seriously prosecute Nazi war criminals.

Nevertheless, detective work, dedication, and constant innovation enabled Zuroff to continue his pursuit of Nazi war criminals in Eastern Europe. Few would have thought it possible that Dinko Šakic, for example, by then the last surviving commander of the Jasenovac concentration camp in the wartime Nazi puppet state of Croatia, would be brought to justice, but with the help of his Argentinian colleague Sergio Widder, Zuroff was able to help engineer the extradition and prosecution of Šakic. In early 1998, Šakic was found in the resort town of Santa Teresita in Argentina; a local television crew turned up at the Nazi criminal's residence and taped his admission of his wartime activities, which made the evening news. Eventually, Zuroff convinced Argentina to arrest him (after he had conveniently disappeared), urged Croatia to demand his extradition, convinced Croatian authorities to pursue the prosecution seriously, and helped extensively with the evidence. During the 1999 trial, which Zuroff attended, Šakic's supporters gave him the fascist salute when the judge looked away, but Šakic, who commandeered the murder of at least 2,000 people, was found guilty. The idea that aging major Nazi war criminals could be made to face justice successfully some 55 years after their crimes became reality.

"OPERATION LAST CHANCE"

After the astounding success in Croatia, Zuroff launched "Operation Last Chance" (www.OperationLastChance.org), which gives the book its name. It is a daring venture that starts with the publication, in local newspapers, of advertisements for monetary rewards for information leading to the arrest and conviction of perpetrators. It has led to the unmasking, if not convictions, of hundreds of war criminals throughout Eastern Europe and the much-enhanced retention of the history of the Holocaust in the places where it occurred.

At Zuroff's 2002 press conference in Vilnius (Vilna), the capital of Lithuania, upon the launch of Operation Last Chance, an angry local reporter asked: "Dr. Zuroff, why do

you dislike Lithuania so much that you come here to look for war criminals?" His answer was respectful and forceful:

You are wrong, sir. There is no dislike of Lithuania in asking that a suspect alleged to have killed many innocent Lithuanian citizens be given a fair trial in a Lithuanian court, before a Lithuanian judge, under the Lithuanian flag, and in the Lithuanian language. One day, your country will see how much was lost for society by failing to prosecute seriously local Holocaust perpetrators.

Operation Last Chance in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, however, was undermined by the state's agencies and by those who could be persuaded by largess to oppose the project. One of the most poignant points to emerge from these chapters is the contrast between nationalist elites in government, media, academia, and other power centers, on the one hand, and simple people in the population on the other. Elites, building their nations' myths, often portrayed Holocaust perpetrators as "anti-Soviet heroes" and opposed Zuroff with all the personal invective they could muster. By contrast, ordinary people far from the corridors of power rose to the occasion in each country. Aged themselves, they wanted to tell Zuroff the truth before they died. An inhabitant of Keydán (Kedainiai), Lithuania, Eleonora Vilcinskiene,

contacted us, explaining that she wanted to make the truth known. I went to see her in her dilapidated apartment typical of the Soviet era, with a film crew. She described a series of murders committed, she said, a few hundred yards away from her house in Rokiškis even before the Nazis arrived on June 28, 1941. Lithuanian men had forced Jews to dig ditches, shot them dead, and then threw the bodies into the ditches. They had raped Jewish women before killing them and had pulled out gold teeth from some of the corpses. She recounted that afterward, the men had gone home, their boots covered in blood. She gave us the names of eight of them. (pp. 156–157)

Tales like these give lie to the elites' propaganda that Zuroff is "against" the Baltic and other nations.

In 2005, an e-mail tip from Scotland, of all places, by a Scot who was disturbed by the incessant boasting of an elderly Hungarian fascist that he had helped deport Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz led to the discovery of a picture on his wall of another elderly Hungarian officer, his old buddy Sandor Kepiro, a war criminal who had been twice convicted in the 1940s, escaped to Argentina, where he lived for half a century, and then returned to his native

Hungary in the 1990s. Kepiro was one of those who had rounded up Jews, Serbs, and Roma for massacre in Novi Sad, Serbia, in 1942. Zuroff found him alive and well in a Budapest apartment, just opposite—as fate would have it—a functioning synagogue. Zuroff held a press conference at the synagogue and told the world what Kepiro had done. In 2010, Kepiro, in his late 90s, was well enough to try to turn the tables; he sued Zuroff for libel. One result was that Zuroff was permitted to question the old Nazi himself, in a court of law, for the first time. In 2011, that suit was thrown out and the war crimes trial of Kepiro proceeded, but he was initially acquitted, to the delight of a courtroom packed with far-right sympathizers. (Kepiro died at 97, in 2011, between the trial and an appeal.)

Another battle that ended in disappointment is the story of Erna Wallisch, the “she-devil of Majdanek,” a major war criminal. Zuroff, who had tracked her down and hoped to see her on trial, learned of her death in 2008. He describes “the maelstrom of emotion that engulfed me, a combination of deep anger, frustration, and helplessness” (p. 171). Acquittal, illness, mental incompetence, death during an investigation or proceedings, lack of political and judicial will, nationalism, and antisemitism have all ensured that many of the Nazi war criminals pursued will never spend a day in prison. That is hardly surprising so many decades after the event. Still, the disappointment at a defendant’s dying before trial is balanced by the understanding that, thanks to Zuroff’s relentless pursuit of justice, no Nazi war criminal can ever again sleep soundly. A perpetrator’s past becomes widely known once Zuroff uncovers it and strips the criminal of the uncomplicated community respect in which he had cloaked himself, and that, too, is a potent measure of justice. Moreover, each judicial pursuit, investigation, and trial turns into a history lesson for the communities and countries where they take place, sometimes providing the Holocaust education that is utterly absent from their schools and colleges.

THE NEXT CHAPTERS

People often wonder what the work of Zuroff will focus on once the last Nazi war criminal has died. Just as it did when his successes in the West were followed by the new East European challenge of the 1990s and 2000s, history is itself providing the answer.

In June 2008, the “Prague Declaration” was proclaimed, insisting upon, among other things, the “overhaul of European history textbooks so that children could learn and be warned about Communism and its crimes in the same way as they have been taught to assess the Nazi crimes.” In April 2009, one of the Prague Declaration’s further demands, a recommendation to enact a unitary day of joint remembrance of Nazi and Soviet victims (August 23), was actu-

ally passed by the European Parliament, giving the movement a huge moral boost, though legally nonbinding. Once a number of nationalist-minded East European states had been accepted into NATO and the European Union, they began to flex their “New Europe” muscle in “Old Europe” (and the United States) by investing large sums, even in periods of dire economic difficulties, in getting one or another form of the “Double Genocide” model into the mainstream of Western thought, history writing, and education. Zuroff has led the international battle against the movement, and *Operation Last Chance* is written in such a way that both the history of the Holocaust and the post-Soviet battle over how the Holocaust will be taught and remembered are intertwined with the main plotline of the book.

Zuroff, on the book’s last page, explains the task he has set for the next chapters in his life, and one hopes, his next book:

I am a historian of the Holocaust. When the hunt for Nazi war criminals ends, we will . . . have to make sure that those seeking to deny and/or distort the events of the Shoah will not be able to change or manipulate the historical record. This task has already begun, [and] as we get further in time from the events of the Holocaust, the likelihood of denial and attempts at alteration will only increase. . . . Once again, in the spirit and tradition of Mr. Wiesenthal, I will be able to say that I did not forget the victims or the survivors and I remain committed to the making sure that the Holocaust will [not] be forgotten, . . . ignored, . . . denied, [or] distorted and that the historical record of its crimes . . . will be as accurate as humanly possible. (p. 224)

Precisely because revisionist models are now burgeoning in ever more prestigious academic spheres of Western historiography, it is vital that Zuroff continues to defend the historical record and that the battles chronicled in *Operation Last Chance* become part and parcel of contemporary Holocaust education.

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Mordecai Paldiel teaches courses in the Holocaust and in the history of Zionism at Yeshiva University's Stern College. He served for 24 years as the director of the Righteous Among the Nations Department at Yad Vashem and has written extensively on the rescue of Jews during the Holocaust. His books include *Path of the Righteous*, *Saving the Jews*, and *The Righteous Among the Nations*. To contact the author, e-mail him at mpaldiel@gmail.com.

RÉVÉSZ, PERETZ LÁSZLÓ

Peretz László Révész and his wife, Nónika, survived the war, remaining in Budapest to work with orphaned Jewish children. In May 1949, they made aliyah to Israel with their two Hungarian-born children, Judka and Dani. Forced to abandon his study of medicine during the war, Peretz ultimately became a social worker and for many years worked in Kfar Tikva, a kibbutz-style village for developmentally disabled adults. From 1949 to 2008, they were members of Kibbutz Kfar Hamaccabi; today, Nónika resides in Kibbutz Sde Nehemia.

ROBERTSON, JENNIFER

Jennifer Robertson has published three collections of poetry: *Beyond the Border and Loss and Language* (Chapman), and *Ghetto* (Lion Publishing), as well as numerous books for children and adults, including *Don't Go to Uncle's Wedding: Voices from the Warsaw Ghetto*. Recently, her work has been published in *Warsaw Tales* (2010) and *Bucharest Tales* (2011) by New Europe Writers. She lives in Edinburgh, Scotland. To contact the poet, e-mail her at jennifer.robertson42@yahoo.co.uk.

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Vera Schiff, née Katz, born in Prague in 1926, was imprisoned with her family in the Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1942. She was the only member of her immediate and extended family of 50 to survive the Holocaust. After the war, Vera worked as a medical technologist in Toronto, Canada, where she settled with her husband; she later worked as an interpreter and translator for the law courts and the board of refugees and immigration in Ontario. Vera continues to write and speak about her Holocaust experiences. To contact the author, e-mail her at veraschiff@aol.com.

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