

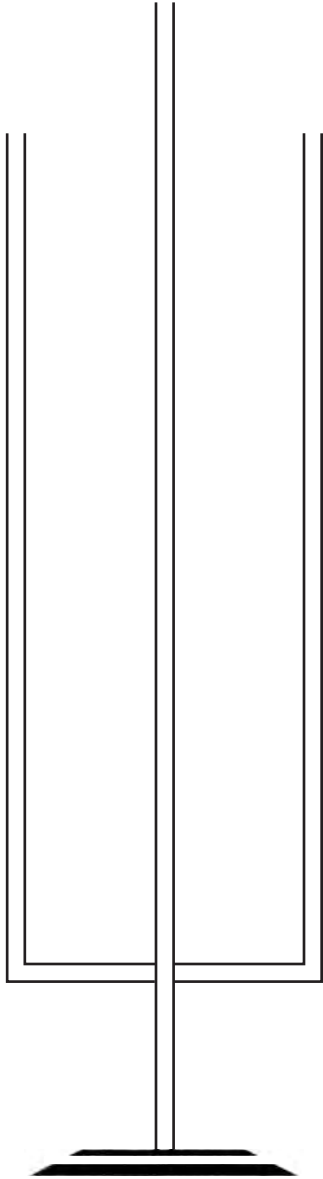
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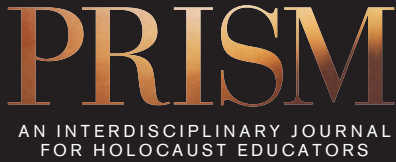


In memory of
Henry I. Rothman ז"ל
and
Bertha G. Rothman ע"ה
לחמו מלחמות ה'

*"who lived and fought
for Torah-true Judaism"*

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Introduction

Welcome to our 10th-anniversary issue! We take this opportunity to thank our thousands of readers in over 40 countries and in every American state, especially those who graciously take the time to write appreciative notes to us. Your feedback is needed to inform us of your interests, and we welcome your suggestions for themes and topics you would like to see addressed. Commendations of our work and that of our contributors confirm that our service is appreciated and our educational goals are being met. We are especially grateful to those of you who have included donations with your letters of praise. Funds are necessary if we are to continue to produce this journal and send it at no cost to readers around the world.

We also thank Steve Schloss, our project manager from the beginning of this venture. His was a steady, patient, and guiding hand always, and although we are delighted that he has made *aliyah* and we wish him and his family all the very best in his new home in Israel, we will miss him. We thank our art director, Emily Scherer Steinberg, for taking over his role this year, and we welcome Laura L. West, our new project manager.

French artist Francine Mayran is well remembered for "*L'Exode*," her cover painting for our spring 2010 issue. Her work graces our current cover as well in the form of *A World Lightened by a Ray of Hope* (2017), which seems just the message we need in these troubled times. On the inside covers is her painting "Calls," and her portraits of 12 of the Righteous Among the Nations illustrate Stephen Cipot's poem "The Righteous," which was inspired by Francine's work and her belief that "by saving the honor of humanity, the Righteous shine for future generations as lights in a dark world." We extend a very special thank you to Francine for her generous gifts of these important works of art.

In honor of 10 years of publishing, we are pleased to include a special section from editors Karen Shawn, Charles Adès Fishman, and Pnina Rosenberg (pp. 29–50). This unique segment includes a pedagogic essay by Karen; two poems by Charles; additional poetry by Michael Blumenthal, Annette Bialik Harchik, Stephen Herz, Yakov Azriel, Sheila Golburgh Johnson, and Tino Villanueva; original illustrations of these poems by artist Nancy Patz; and commentary on the artwork by Pnina, all with the purpose of helping educators use artifacts found in Holocaust literature to deepen and broaden students' understanding of the Jewish experience of that time. This unit of study is available as a stand-alone booklet for use in



classrooms and conferences. To place an order, write to prism@yu.edu and include your complete mailing address.

This anniversary marks our second open-themed issue, so the offerings within are wide-ranging yet interrelated. "One can't say how life is, how chance or fate deals with people," wrote Hannah Arendt, "except by telling a tale." Because we agree with that sentiment, we opened each of our first nine issues with a short story. For this one, we chose a highly engaging tale, an excerpt

from the memoir *Young Lothar: An Underground Fugitive in Nazi Berlin* (2017), co-written by the late Larry Orbach and his daughter, Vivien Orbach-Smith. Orbach recounts a moment from his childhood in Berlin in 1934, a vivid introduction to the harsh realities of Jewish life for a child in the early years of Nazi rule.

Another tale-like memoir comes from Pnina Rosenberg, who recounts her family's experiences, focusing on her mother and highlighted by a remarkable photograph.

Translated from Polish by Marcin Bieszczyński is Justyna Biernat's fascinating biography of Lutek Orenbach, a 19-year-old Jewish writer-philosopher-artist from the Tomaszów-Mazowiecki Ghetto, whom we meet through his letters to his beloved.

Translated letters of another romance are the heart of "a story of love" by educator Christopher Gwin, whose high school German-language students used their second-language skills to help the granddaughter of two survivors understand the experiences of her grandparents, hidden until then in letters she could not read.

Poet Seymour Mayne, himself a renowned translator, treats us to a brief recollection of his association with the legendary Yiddish poet Abraham Sutzkever. Mayne includes an original ode about his friend, along with translations of four of Sutzkever's many evocative elegies. Poet Myra Sklarew, who interviewed the French Jewish resistance fighter Charlotte Sorkine and shares remembrances of the time they spent together, also was moved to write a poem about her friend, sending her "lost words" and little-known deeds "out into the world." It is published here in Charlotte's memory.

While our special anniversary study unit on artifacts asks who will tell the story when survivors no longer can, Charles Adès Fishman's poem "Witnesses" reminds us that there are others besides the Jewish survivors who know grim facts from the Holocaust. Difficult truths are told as well in Rafael Medoff's "Walls of Paper" as the historian details the unnecessary barriers that prevented Jewish

refugees from finding haven in America.

Andrew Kavchak provides us with a role model for life-long learning as he shares his quest for a deep understanding of the Holocaust, an event he confronted only as a young adult in law school.

Finally, Mark Gudgel offers critical perspectives on popular Holocaust films along with a helpful overview and synopsis of each. His essay sagely reminds us that the most popular films are not necessarily the ones to which we should introduce our students.

As always, we are indebted to our dean, Rona Novick; to the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration of Yeshiva University, Henry Rothman, and the Henry, Bertha, and Edward Rothman Foundation

for their generous funding; to AGS staff members Louisa Wolf and Rabbi Eliezer Barany for all that they do behind the scenes to ready and distribute this publication; and to our art director, Emily Scherer Steinberg, and our copy editor, David B. Greenberg, whose support and superb work, advice, and exactitude make each issue a keepsake.

Aharon Appelfeld has noted that “there cannot be an end to speaking and writing about” the Holocaust. We agree. With the help of Hashem and the tireless colleagues and friends recognized here, and with your help, devoted readers and admired contributors, *PRISM* looks forward to its second decade.

Karen Shawn

In Memoriam



Rabbi Dr. Chaim Feuerman



Fanya Gottesfeld Heller

On a very sad note, we mourn the passing of one of Azrieli's most beloved faculty and *PRISM* board members, Rabbi Dr. Chaim Feuerman Z"l. He was a brilliant, devoted educator, a gentle and gracious man, a staunch supporter of this journal and our work, and a dear and treasured colleague and friend. He will be greatly missed at Azrieli and by the many generations of *talmidim* he influenced and inspired.

We also note with profound sadness the passing of our YU benefactor Fanya Gottesfeld Heller, A"H, a Holocaust survivor, author, lecturer, and philanthropist. She established the Benjamin and Charlotte Gottesman Chair in Talmud, the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Chair in Jewish Education and, together with her children, Benjamin and Beth Heller, the Azrieli Graduate School's Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Division of Doctoral Studies. Many other important institutions in New York and Israel are beneficiaries of her vision and largesse. Her passion for teaching about the Holocaust infused her listeners with the need to know more. She will be missed, but her legacy survives.

The late Larry Orbach noted in 1996 that “studies of . . . survivors have identified some common traits—adaptability, tenacity, initiative, quick thinking, and the ability to disregard one’s emotions and moral qualms by focusing single-mindedly on the goal of survival. I think I had all of them in some measure. I had another asset . . . critical to survival: the knowledge that some of one’s family still lived. And I had two others as important as any: dumb luck and faith in my personal God, who seemed always to hover over my shoulder, albeit silently. After writing this book, and reflecting on my life over the 50 years since I left Germany, I can say that hatred and vengeance have not motivated my life. Rather, it was the blossoming of my identity, commitment, and practice as a Jew, my wholehearted participation in Jewish life in America and in Israel, that was the legacy I took from those dark years from which God delivered me.”

Larry Orbach

Prologue

In the twilight of a spring evening, I stand unsteadily on a piano stool in the parlor of my parents’ Berlin apartment, looking at myself in a gilt-edged mirror above the piano. The year is 1934, and I am 10 years old. My mother, in the doorway, gazes at me with delight, though I have said nothing yet. My father sits expectantly in his old wing chair, his hands folded on top of the evening newspaper. Heinz and Manfred, my teenaged brothers, are sprawled on the floor, their expressions a mixture of amusement and envy.

I am about to rehearse an epic poem I have been asked to recite at the commencement exercises of my public school. Although I am only in the fourth grade, I have been selected for this honor because of my success in a school-wide genealogy project. Through great diligence, not to mention a bit of help from my father, I have traced my German ancestors farther back than has any other student in the school—to the 1490s, when a Moses Auerbach (or Orbach or Urbach, since all three names are spelled alike in Hebrew) was a court Jew to the Bishop of Regensburg.

The school’s rector, Herr Bothe, had assigned me the prized soliloquy earlier that day. “My heartiest congratulations, Lothar Orbach!” he had said, pumping my hand mightily. “And remember, you must speak loudly and forcefully, like a Senator!”

Loudly and forcefully, like a Senator. This, I know, will not be difficult for me, because the poem “*Kämpfe, Blute!*” is among my favorites. It was written by Hoffmann von Fallersleben, who also wrote “*Deutschland Ueber Alles*,” our country’s stirring anthem. And there is nothing, nothing in my whole life, I am prouder of than being a German, a German descended from those who had served in the

courts of Bishops. In fact, I have already fought and bled, if only a little, for Germany, having recently leapt off my bicycle to join my brother Heinz in a street brawl against some Communist youths who mistook us for members of a Nazi gang.

And so, turning to face my family, I declare in a voice filled with passion:

*Kämpfe, blute, werbe; siege oder sterbe,
Deutsch sei bis ins Mark.
Was dich auch bedrohe, eine heil’ge Lohe,
bringt dir Sonnenkraft;
Lass dich nimmer knechten,
lass dich nie entrechtchen,
Gott gibt den Gerechten
wahre Heldenkraft!*

(Fight, bleed, propagate; win or die,
be a German to your marrow.
Whatever threatens you,
a holy flame gives you the strength of the sun;
Ne’er let them enslave you,
ne’er forgo your rights,
God gives the righteous
true, heroic powers!)

Then I fold my wiry body into a low bow. Mama begins applauding. My brothers hoot loudly and call out sarcastic “bravos” as they race out the door to meet their friends. Papa rises wordlessly from his chair and scoops me into a tight embrace. His eyes are filled with tears.

Although we are not a very religious family, I have

been taught to recite the Shema Yisroel each night: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One." I usually say it before drifting off to sleep. But that night, and for weeks thereafter, as I nestle into my bed I whisper, "*Kämpfe, Blute!* . . ."

Several weeks pass. Just days before the commencement gathering, I am summoned to the rector's office. I am not nervous—in fact, I am exhilarated, because I assume he wants to hear my oration, and I know that my delivery is flawless.

The rector smiles at me solicitously from behind his mahogany desk and motions for me to sit. A portrait of the Führer hangs on the wall facing me. In his usual polite tone, the rector tells me that the administration has decided that it would not be fitting for a Jew to represent the student body by reciting "*Kämpfe, Blute!*" Because I am a Jew, the indisputable fact that I won the genealogy competition is irrelevant. The second-place winner, a surly sixth grader whose German ancestors are all Aryan, will have the honor.

This cultured, intelligent gentleman, this respected pedagogue, relays this news to me in the most matter-of-fact way, as though he is pointing out some obvious anomaly that makes my participation in the commencement a logical impossibility: You have no legs, so you cannot run the race; you have no arms, so you cannot carry the torch; you are a Jew, so you cannot be a German.

I hold back the tears for what remains of the school day. But when I come home, I run sobbing to my mother. When I tell her what has happened, she is outraged that I, her youngest and most sensitive child, must endure such a disappointment. My father, possessed of a fierce temper, announces that he is going directly to the school to beat the hell out of the rector. My mother beseeches him not to cause trouble. "This racial hatred, you know, it comes and it goes," she reminds him. "In another six months, it shall all pass." My brothers—they are outright gleeful, because now they need not sit through the boring commencement exercises, watching the pampered baby of the family gather all the attention and applause.

That night, in bed, my throat sore, my eyes stinging, I once again utter "*Kämpfe, Blute!*" It is my poem. They cannot take it away from me. In the days that follow, my mother notes my glum face and tries to comfort me. "Every childhood has its hurts, Lotharchen," she says soothingly. "This one too will soon stop hurting, though you will probably always remember it." So this is the way we chose to view this sorry episode: a lesson learned, a childhood hurt, a rite of passage.

Today, a lifetime later, I look back and wonder if in any way I could have sensed that my entire world, everything I trusted and believed in, was about to disintegrate. That my education, to which I was so committed, would end with the eighth grade, because no *gymnasium* [secondary

school] would accept me. That my schoolmates, those good-natured, jostling boys on the soccer field, would soon pledge to destroy me. That my father, a staunch German patriot, would be sent to die in a concentration camp by the country he had served valiantly. That during my teens I would be hunted like an animal and that, to survive, I would have to cheat, steal, deceive, perhaps kill. Or that in a dark and distant future, I would find myself repeating the words "*Kämpfe, Blute!*" as I stood, starving and bereft, among my dying people in Auschwitz.

No, I didn't know then. I knew that something terribly wrong had happened, that this was not the way things were supposed to be in my Germany. But I had no idea of what was to come.

This excerpt is reprinted from *Young Lothar: An Underground Fugitive in Nazi Berlin* by Larry Orbach and Vivien Orbach-Smith (2017, London: I.B. Tauris) with permission.

While we can learn much about the ghetto through historical documents, photographic materials, and posters,¹ writes Justyna Biernat, “it is a collection of letters written by Lutek Orenbach, a 19-year-old Jewish man in the Tomaszów Mazowiecki Ghetto, that offers the most valuable, direct testimony of the cultural pursuits and aspirations of the Jews there and a rich image of Lutek himself, a young, educated, and talented artist.” Read this profile in conjunction with the essay by Christopher Gwin (pp. 22–28).

Justyna Biernat

A Melancholic’s Smile: Profile of a Young Writer of Letters from the Ghetto in Tomaszów Mazowiecki

In September 1939, the first bombs dropped on Tomaszów Mazowiecki, a city in central Poland, hitting tenement houses on Krzyżowa, Wieczność, and Zgorzelicka Streets and killing three people (Góral & Kotewicz, 1992). On September 8, the Germans entered the town and, days later, started the first anti-Jewish action. Some 300 men were transported first to Częstochowa and then to a POW camp in Zgorzelec. About 100 were arrested there on felony charges, while the rest were transported to Buchenwald. The process of gradually denying the Jewish inhabitants of Tomaszów Mazowiecki their rights began with curtailing their freedom of movement and an obligation to wear armbands with a Star of David (Wojniłowicz, 1997).

The next stage of repression was the establishment on May 3, 1940, of a ghetto, whose population consisted of between 17,000 and 18,000 Jews from Tomaszów Mazowiecki and the surrounding area. At first, the ghetto was comprised of three separate districts, but on December 8, 1941, after two districts were liquidated, all remaining Jews were forced into one area. The Germans continued their murderous actions intended to eliminate any potential threat posed by the Jewish population. In the spring of 1942, on April 27, many Bundists and Zionists were murdered in an action directed against political activists, traders, and smugglers, followed by the murder of representatives of the Jewish intelligentsia on May 6th and members of the Jewish council on the 7th. The Tomaszów Mazowiecki ghetto was liquidated over two days, October 30 and November 1. About 14,000 Jews were transported to Treblinka, and the ghetto became a forced labor camp still inhabited by some young and relatively healthy Jews.

The Nazi occupiers continued to murder still more representatives of the Jewish intelligentsia. Michael Grossman (1969), in his memoirs, presents a detailed account of the January 5, 1943, deportation, dubbed Operation Palestine, and of another action on Purim of that year. Books by Ignacy Bierzyński-Burnett (1995) and Zenon Neumark (2008), two friends from Tomaszów Mazowiecki who managed to survive the war, are testimonies of the living conditions in the forced labor camp and the ghetto.

However, it is a collection of letters written by a 19-year-old Jewish man that offers the most valuable, direct testimony of the Nazi occupation there. While the letters provide little information about the history of the ghetto or the living conditions inside it, they are both a record of cultural pursuits and aspirations of the Jews imprisoned there, and a rich image of a young, educated, and talented artist.

“MY YOUTH KEEPS PASSING BY”

Israel Aljuhe Orenbach, also known as Lutek, addressed his letters to Edith Blau, an 18-year-old German Jewish girl born in Gdańsk who lived with her family in Bydgoszcz, where they met. Lutek was born in the city of Tomaszów Mazowiecki, but in the 1930s moved with his parents to Bydgoszcz, where in 1939 he graduated from high school and got involved in “a little May fling that grew into a strong love” (letter of May 15, 1940). However, the Orenbach family moved back to Tomaszów and the Blaus moved to Minden, Germany, in August 1939, separating the two young people, and so three years of correspondence between them began. An unusual aspect of these

letters is that Lutek wrote to his beloved in Polish, while she replied to him in German.²

Initially, Lutek's artistic aspirations were manifested only in his longing for the intellectual life of Bydgoszcz, where he had had the opportunity to speak in the many languages he knew and actively participated in an amateur theater. He had many friends there who deepened his knowledge of literature and art, and, after Lutek returned to Tomaszów Mazowiecki, those contacts were maintained through correspondence. Both Lutek and Edith kept in touch through letters with the "Bydgoszcz gang," a designation that symbolized youthful friendship, freedom, and amateur theater. Memories of the gang return repeatedly in Lutek's letters, which mention the names of many individuals: Bronka, Niusia, Tola, Lolek, Bronek, Heniek, Fisz, and Ruth Goldbarth, the last of whom, though imprisoned in the Warsaw Ghetto with almost all of the others, enabled Lutek and Edith's correspondence.

The return to Tomaszów Mazowiecki and the deterioration in living conditions there not only put a hold on Lutek's creative life, but also discouraged him and even produced an aversion to the residents of the town:

I'm alone. Constantly alone. I'm afraid of becoming wild, but I can't stay with the local people, I just can't. I'm wasting away here. My youth keeps passing by and I'm doing nothing about it. . . . I'm totally losing my culture. I'm so fed up with this beastly life, I'm close to losing my mind. (January 17, 1940)

Initially, Tomaszów Mazowiecki racked Lutek's nerves, a condition certainly associated with the loss of his Bydgoszcz friends, his favorite places, and Edith. In Lutek's letters, this "backwater town" where the factory workers live with no prospects (September 3, 1940) is a source of anger and resentment, symbolizing hard, industrial labor and an intellectual vacuum. Lutek discovered his first passions in Bydgoszcz; hence Tomaszów Mazowiecki, the city of his birth, became to him an alien place devoid of any appeal.

"CLOUDS IN THE SKY"

The gradual imposition of restrictions on the Jewish population and the formation of a ghetto may have deepened Lutek's despondency, his dislike for the locals, and his despair over the change in the town's rhythm. Lutek had an opportunity to travel to Warsaw in May 1940, and he visited his friends there, which made him immensely sad. The occupied city provoked in him, in a way, a premonition of the murder of the Jews of Tomaszów Mazowiecki. The image of the capital left Lutek with a feeling that "above all this, there is a beautiful sky and some kind of hard, cold God, like a God without God" (May 10, 1940). On May 22, Lutek wrote, "May is coming to an end, still clouds. Clouds

in the sky, clouds in my heart."

The anguish caused by the visit to Warsaw was deepened by the tragic events in Tomaszów Mazowiecki, including the establishment of the ghetto there. Paradoxically, however, this is also the time of the first artistic steps taken by both Lutek and his new friends. Games of bridge and social meetings started to be interspersed with small performances given by Lutek's sister Bella, who "sings like a nightingale" (July 17, 1940), and Alfred (Fred) Rotberg [Fig. 1], a 24-year-old cousin of Lutek's from Łódź who accompanied her on the piano.



FIG. 1. Caricature by Lutek Orenbach of Fred Rotberg, his cousin from Łódź ca. 1939–1942. Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The pair quickly became popular and began to give concerts in the ghetto, further stirring in Lutek the need to create. Consequently, he returned to his old passions and started drawing caricatures [Fig. 2], immortalizing in them many well-known and important ghetto inhabitants.

Lutek's works were met with great interest and admiration throughout the ghetto. One admirer of his drawings was Henryk Barczyński (or Henocho Barciński), a painter from Łódź. When Łódź had been incorporated into the Third Reich, Barczyński had gone to Tomaszów Mazowiecki and ended up in the ghetto. Lutek had written about him in his letters much earlier:

Lately, we have been visited by Mr. Barczyński, you know, the painter. He sometimes talks about Madrid, other times about Paris, or Prague, then again about Dresden (where he studied painting). An exceptionally nice bloke. Barczyński is sitting by the window painting a Tomaszów Mazowiecki street. I like this time of day,

when it is getting dark (in Polish we say “the grey hour”), the painter’s silhouette by the window, and I sit in an armchair in the corner, reading Balzac. (February 9, 1940)

Lutek’s acquaintance with Barczyński and another painter from Łódź, the 23-year-old Władysław (Wolf) Rejder, resulted in the November 1940 establishment of an artists’ club whose social gatherings were accompanied by music, recitations, and theatrical performances of Lutek’s works.

Soon, there was an opportunity to present their work to a larger audience. Orenbach organized a meticulously prepared poetry evening to commemorate the birthday of Bolesław Szeps, one of the leaders of the Jewish community in Tomaszów Mazowiecki. Bella recited poetry, and Lutek staged two love poems by the Jewish poet Julian Tuwim. One was titled “The Dancing Socrates,” and Lutek, as the title character, performed in full makeup in the glare of an improvised spotlight, earning fame and acclaim among the intelligentsia of the ghetto.

The group took to meeting in the mansard apartment of M. Sz. (probably the pianist Sura Szczęśliwa, who also gave concerts during the occupation), and Lutek sent Edith an invitation to an evening of humor and songs that he organized along with his fellow actors. The artists signed the letter themselves: Paulina Szladkowska, Rubinek, Marysia Pikówna, Tuska, Hejnesznajderowa, Mordkowicz, Seweryn Różaner, Rejderowa, Stefa Rozenblum, Helena Kolska, Wajs Kaz, and Lutek’s cousin Fred. The group, now a large one, soon came to be called “the gang” by its initiator, symbolizing Lutek’s cultivation of new



FIG. 2. Cover drawing of Lutek Orenbach’s sketchbook, ca. 1939–1942. Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.



FIG. 3. Studio portrait of Lutek Orenbach in the Tomaszów Mazowiecki Ghetto, ca. 1939–1942. Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

friendships, his commitment to cooperation, and a sense of finally belonging in Tomaszów Mazowiecki [Fig. 3].

As much is confirmed by subsequent letters from 1941 in which Lutek informs his beloved with obvious excitement of a planned “spectacular revue,” despite the actors’ lack of discipline and the chaos of rehearsals. Out of genuine or affected self-criticism, he called the play his modest Ersatz.

The enthusiasm of the young troupe was its reaction to escalating repression by the Nazis, to which Lutek responded with both horror and comedy: “What a horrible misery, what a tragedy is unfolding here. . . . Is all this not scarier than one stupid, drunk Lutek, one fly compared to the enormity of this tragedy?” (May 15, 1941). He moves from this image of misery to an image of the stage:

You can’t even imagine how wildly successful this revue has been. The show is running for the ninth time (because there is only room for 50 spectators, and obviously we want to satisfy all our friends and acquaintances). The community’s officials have become very interested and are trying to find a better rehearsal space for us. People leave the “theater” enchanted and can’t believe that something like this has been accomplished here; in the town they look at us like gods. People (and they are connoisseurs, intelligentsia) say that we can perform on the Warsaw stage (they’re crazy!). One gentleman from Vienna said to me in German, “You have a big future; you need to learn more languages.” (I’m not sure I wrote it down correctly.) (May 15, 1941)

“LET OUR YOUTH SMILE”

The group received its own premises, money, and the name Little Art Theater (*Klein Kunst Teater*). The small organization developed a structure: The post of director was given to Artur Kahan, a chemical engineer from Łódź; the literary director was Adam Lichtenstein; and the musical director was Fred Rotberg. Lutek became the director, at times assisted by his more experienced father, Shmuel Binem Orenbach, who played a significant part in the creation of the theater thanks to his experience. He returned to the stage after a 20-year hiatus from artistic life, surely motivated by the enthusiasm of his young colleagues and the quality of their repertoire.

The theater also had a secretary, box-office clerk, technical director, and set designer. According to the accounts of both Lutek and other residents of Tomaszów Mazowiecki, the Little Art Theater presented works of a high artistic level, evidence that the goal of the troupe was not simply to escape from the pain of everyday life, but above all to improve its members' skills. As survivor Zenon Neumark (2008) wrote in his memoirs:

To alleviate the misery of our lives, we sought to escape it through our own entertainment and cultural activities. Debate clubs and reading circles were created, lectures were delivered, and young intellectuals organized amateur theater performances. The theater group gave performances consisting of original satirical sketches in which the members joked sarcastically about themselves and everything around them, including the leaders of our ghetto, and also made fun of our oppressors. (p. 29)

Neumark noted that the period of Nazi occupation had been marked by intense cultural activity among the local Jews, especially the creators of the theater. Neumark was particularly impressed by the abilities of the very young literary director, a 17-year-old satirist and cabaret songwriter by the name of Adaś Lichtenstein. A close friend of Lutek, Adaś was “one of the most important authors of the literary and drama evenings. He was exceptionally talented, [and] wrote humorous skits, poems, and song parodies” (p. 29)—and droll letters, as we see from this letter fragment all about Lutek, addressed to Edith on her birthday:

Eternal harmony results in marriage and boredom, while eternal strife results in friendship or hatred, the only two feelings that bring color to our lives, as dull and hopeless as Lutek's daily chatter. Therefore, I am happy that Lutek and I have been on a war footing since time immemorial. Whenever he says *Yes! I reply No!* and he responds to my every project with *I don't want to!* The end will surely be merry, because

we will either grow to hate each other until death does us apart (I have already sharpened my knife, and I rejoice at the thought that one beautiful evening I will plunge it into his back) or we will grow very fond of each other. And that is why Lutek must admit that I'm probably his only friend who doesn't make him yawn in his moments of nostalgia. So, as you can see, I'm a very interesting young man and you do lose a lot by not being able to get to know me in person. Moreover, I'm very modest and, except for my great literary talent and many other virtues, I do not think highly of myself. In short, there is a spiritual kinship between Lutek and me—neither of us suffers from delusions of grandeur. (August 8, 1941)

The writer signed his note “Genius.”

The theater gained the patronage and support of the Ghetto's Jewish council, so it could expand its activities with a small stage, curtain, spotlight, and backdrop. Lutek, who took care of the costumes and make-up, described the set designs as primitive but original. Considering their young age and the conditions in the ghetto, the artists proved to be very ambitious. While Lutek openly confessed to Edith that, due to technical difficulties (mainly concerning costumes), he had stopped staging “great Polish literature” (probably romantic literature, which he often mentioned in his letters), he did stage comedies by Anton Chekhov. He mentioned just one of these, *A Marriage Proposal*, so we are left to infer his literary interests from letters to his girlfriend. Lutek read both Polish works (Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Krąszewski, Krasiński, Zeromski, Przybyszewski, Kasprówic, Wyspiański, Malczewski) and those of foreign writers (Homer, Shakespeare, Schiller, Maeterlinck), frequently quoting them in his letters. His reading list was dominated by Polish literature, and he called himself “a wild Pole,” a native Slav of Mazovia (February 1, 1941).

Lutek had been brought up amidst Polish culture and identified with it almost completely. He called the Jews his “fellow believers,” but in his correspondence there is no mention of Jewish holidays, religion, or even Jewish literature. The ghetto boasted several Jewish combat organizations, and its Akiva youth movement included Underground activists Tusia Fuchs, Halina Rubinek, and Benjamin Yaari-Wald, who were among those in contact with Warsaw, Łódź, and Kraków. However, Lutek never joined them. His youth, he believed, would be saved by art, and his weapon against deteriorating living conditions was his joy. “Let our youth smile, and let it smile in response to all tragedies” (June 25, 1941), he wrote to his Edith.

“MELANCHOLY AND MONOTONY”

In her analysis of the condition of spirituality, the Polish philosopher Agata Bielik-Robson (2000) writes that melancholy is the existential attitude that best expresses the monotony of an existence surrendered entirely to burden and the boredom of identity, gravity, profundity, and memory—all the existential modi, which are based on persistent, conscientious, self-enclosed repetition.

I use this definition as the starting point for my description of Lutek, while I understand his preserved letters as a record of his ongoing search for the creative expression of his youthful energy. I refer to Lutek's aspirations as a process because for him, the first year of correspondence is primarily a time of becoming accustomed to unwanted circumstances: a place identified with an artistic vacuum and a feeling of longing for Edith, the lost object of his love. His creative desire is stimulated by people involved in the arts, newly met in the ghetto, but certainly also by Edith, who is interested in her sweetheart's passions. However, before his creative drive can bear fruit, Lutek must combat the despair of his constant longing for Edith, the monotony of everyday life in an industrial town organized only around repetitive work, and the endless cycle of hunger, poverty, and death.

The first source of Lutek's melancholy, which I regard here as a tool of the artist, recognized by Aristotle and related to genius, is his separation from Edith and his adopted city of Bydgoszcz. This melancholy was triggered in the case of young Lutek by the experience of loss, resulting in a constant feeling of weariness and discouragement only intensified by the traumatic events of the Holocaust.

His first letters to Edith in Minden are a testimony to Lutek's deep sadness: “I guess I'll always be alone and with you only in spirit. I'm afraid you will remain for me forever a myth, an idea, and will never take on actual form” (December 20, 1939). Melancholy, undermining the metaphysics of presence (Bienczyk, 2000), manifests itself in Lutek as a sense of internal exile that dooms him to emotional solitude, adds to his despair over his physical separation from Edith, and later leads to a sense of alienation and unreality of self. His longing for his sweetheart is paralleled by his longing for the theater, the lack of which gives rise to the “chronic disease of boredom,” which manifests in boozy meetings with friends and solitary roaming, and accounts for the mood he describes here:

I don't get it. Sometimes I'm overwhelmed by sorrow and a sense of longing for something. It just makes you want to cry and cry. . . . It often happens to me in the street when I'm walking alone (and I like to walk alone). . . . At such times, sad tunes play in my head, music of my own that comes from my mood. And I'm so damn sad, I feel so horribly lonely, I want to lay my

head on someone's chest and cry, just cry, to finally cry it all out. And there's no reason for this. I don't know what's coming or going. (February 9, 1940)

Lutek calls the oft-mentioned void his *Weltschmerz*. He is always accompanied by “the same melancholy and monotony”: “I'm beginning to lose track of who I am and what I'm doing in this world. I no longer know what I want and what I'll become. I know nothing” (September 3, 1940).

The desire for silence, for solitude, to shut himself away, was evident in his roaming around the streets of the town, which were filled with smoke from nearby industrial plants. The deteriorating living conditions and creation of the Jewish ghetto led to his gradual physical and mental deterioration, while his growing weariness and apathy turned into a melancholic “delirium of negation” (Bienczyk, 2000) of his sense of himself: He was losing his identity.

“Sometimes,” Lutek writes, “I don't know myself whether I'm alive or dead. Is it me or not me? Sometimes you have to repeat to yourself for the hundredth time: I'm alive, you're alive, he's alive. . . . You forget that you exist” (February 18, 1941).

According to Julia Kristeva (2007), the regression of subjectivity that accompanies melancholy is associated with the category of time: “Melancholy is regression of a subject that suddenly falls out of time. Human life takes place between timelessness and time, between silence and speech” (p. xxvi). A melancholic lives in a “decentered reality, which is governed by a massive moment, ponderous, undoubtedly traumatic, because it is burdened by too much pain” (p. xxvi). The young Orenbach seems to be trapped between the reality of the old life in Bydgoszcz and the unreality of the ghetto life in Tomaszów Mazowiecki. The present, for him, is absence of self, a permanent sense of loss that defies the passing of time:

Everyone else is pleased with me, but I'm not. Time flies. I'm getting older. Time is running out. What will become of me? What will I attain in life? Now is nothing. Now I don't live. I don't exist. There is some Tomaszów. There is this stupid dream about Tomaszów. But what will happen when I wake up? Where will I go, what will I do, who will I be? That's important. *Today* doesn't matter. *Today* is a stupid, bad dream. (February 18, 1941)

Lutek's lack of a sense of identity and self, manifested in his apathy for the theater and other creative outlets, resulted mostly from the criminal activities of the occupiers. It seems that laughter, so often featured in his letters, only intensified his melancholy.

For God's sake! After all, I'm only 19 years old! And I don't want to cry! And if you can't laugh, because

nothing works, you must make yourself laugh. You must drink, you must sing. Maybe the world will end tomorrow. (May 25, 1940)

The call for laughter and accompanying exclamations in Lutek's melancholic narrative seem to offer a fantasy of strength for him in the monotonous, murderous functioning of the ghetto. The "sad laughter," as the author called it, fits perfectly with the character of "parodic I" described by the Polish literary historian Marek Biencyzk (2000):

Melancholy deceives with its mask of joy. . . . Illusion and mask are both its strength and its weakness, its strength when it fantasizes and its weakness when it wants to materialize into existence. Irony and laughter intensify melancholy; they silence the ironist and the man of laughter. (p. 72)

Laughter, as a metaphorical mask of melancholy, became the central component of Lutek's first theatrical performance in Tomaszów Mazowiecki. The "Dancing Socrates" of Tuwim's poem became a stage illustration of Lutek's mood, a perfect expression of a grotesque look at reality, enclosed in a deliberately crippled, distorted image of an "old wretch" revealing his weariness with philosophy. Lutek ascended the stage with the wry smile of a drunk Socrates, who, roasting in the sun, exposes to his student the pathos of dialectical sophistry:

But I keep on, yippy yeah! / Thus without an end, till death calls / Let the brilliant sky keep spinning, / Upward so—and kicking downward, / Sideways, yippy yeah and running, / Pity not the ancient legs! (1968, p. 82)

Dance, laughter, and alcohol were Lutek's defenses against the murderers, while art could only be a mocking caricature of life [Fig. 4].

"I don't like excessive seriousness," he wrote to Edith. "Life must be taken half-seriously. You should always be a little drunk. Excessive sobriety makes life miserable" (April 6, 1941). Persistent attempts to overcome the boredom of everyday life through theater, laughter, and letters to his sweetheart were regularly interspersed with a scream of terror—"We are dying!" (June 15, 1941)—that intensified the sinister tone of the melancholy. Edith, socializing with friends, and the Little Art Theater constituted a form of illusion that saved Lutek's life from total despair. Yet at times, with reluctance, he spoke to her of what he had in his inner heart:

You don't know how people are dying on the streets (Ruth may write to you about it!). You don't know

what a horrible misery, what a tragedy is unfolding here. . . . Why would I write to you about it? Do you want to cry like a child? Is all this not scarier than one stupid, drunk Lutek, one fly compared to the enormity of this tragedy? . . . Can anyone withstand all this, can anyone look calmly at it? It's hardly surprising that a man wants to forget, wants to close his eyes and not see, not see, not see! Vodka is the fog. (June 15, 1941)

A sober and serious look at reality weakened Lutek's hope that the situation would improve, that the war would come to an end, that he would see Edith again. Laughter and the dance of the crazy Socrates allowed him to turn life into theater, deny terror, and invalidate death, while regular letters from Edith provided life-saving consistency, ordering the chaos of everyday life. These were traces of the sort discussed by Walter Benjamin (Frydryczak, 2003): "A trace is a manifestation of closeness regardless of how far away the thing that has left it may be" (p. 233). Letters were a trace of undying presence and its memory, a remnant of the old life, and an impulse opening the space of memory: "Sometimes I reminisce and remember everything, but as if in a dream. . . . Sometimes I dream about different things, quite funny. Tonight I was in Bydgoszcz again" (June 16, 1940). Lutek's memory was molded by traces of Edith, which allowed him to cope with a sense of alienation towards himself. Thanks to this, Lutek, as an artist, created his own story, whose central themes were the May fling and his passion for acting. He used both stage and letters to confess and comment on the reality of war, redirecting his thoughts towards the hope for survival,



FIG. 4. Self-caricature by Lutek Orenbach, ca. 1939–1942. Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

and these traces allowed him to build a sense of identity and memory of what was most precious. Perhaps they had a therapeutic function, too, as described by the Polish neuro-semiotician and cultural theorist Jan Kordys (2006):

Each of us has his own life history, an inner story, whose continuity and meaning is our life. One could say that each of us constructs and lives our own “story,” and this story is our identity. . . . As a “story,” history, each of us is unique, one of a kind . . . we have to “remember” ourselves, remember our inner show, the story. A man must have such a story, a history continually narrated to oneself in order to be oneself, to have an identity. (p. 218)

For Lutek, remembering himself and his own identity took the form of writing letters detailing his most important passions and problems. The symbolic, inner story took on a real shape in the form of this correspondence. The content and meaning of the story come to an end on February 5, 1942, when Lutek, terrified by the long silence of his sweetheart, sends his last letter to Mrs. Bradtmüller, a relative of Edith. This desperate call closes his story:

My dear lady, with respect,
A few days ago, I asked you where Edith and her mother were located. Since I remain without an answer, I ask you—with all sincerity—to tell me if you know something about where the two are located, because I am very upset because I have not heard from Edith in so long.
Thank you in advance.
Respectfully,
L. Orenbach

Lutek could not have known, but the exchange of letters had come to an abrupt close towards the end of 1941 because Edith and her mother had been resettled in a labor camp in Riga. Lutek never heard from her again. He and his immediate family probably died during the two-day liquidation of the Tomaszów Mazowiecki Ghetto in October and November 1942, or in Treblinka, where the ghetto residents were sent.

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This essay was translated from Polish by Marcin Bieszczanin. Original English translations of Polish works are unattributed.

END NOTES

[1] The main materials concerning the Jewish population of Tomaszów Mazowiecki are filed in the town's national archives, its registry office, the archives of the district court, and the files of investigations carried out by the Regional Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes Against the Polish Nation, a division of the Institute of National Remembrance, in Łódź. Neither the files of the Jewish council of Tomaszów Mazowiecki nor the files of the town commissioner have been preserved.

[2] For detailed information regarding the nature of the correspondence and its historical value, see Witczak (2011).

"I first met Abraham Sutzkever when I was still in high school," writes Seymour Mayne. That meeting turned out to be auspicious. "Nearly 20 years later, in Israel, I began meeting him regularly in Tel Aviv," and thus began a long friendship and collaboration. Mayne translated a body of Sutzkever's poems from Yiddish to English, including four that appear following Mayne's short narrative and his own original poem about Sutzkever. We are proud to publish works by this brilliant poet and his translator.

Seymour Mayne

A Note on Abraham Sutzkever, a Portrait Poem, and a Few Works by the Poet

I first met the great Yiddish poet and Holocaust survivor Abraham Sutzkever when I was still in high school. In the late 1950s, he was invited to Montreal, Canada, to give a reading at the Jewish Public Library, which was then located on the corner of Esplanade and Mount Royal Avenues, right in the heart of Mile End, the district of the city with the largest Jewish population at the time. A large crowd milled around the entrance to the auditorium on the third floor of the building, and their excited anticipation was rewarded by a spirited program that evening, which drew an enthusiastic response.

At the reception following the reading, the director of the library introduced me, in Yiddish, to Sutzkever as "a young Jewish poet." The word for "Jewish" and "Yiddish" is the same, and Sutzkever's face lit up. He couldn't believe his eyes: Here was a teenager writing in Yiddish! He was crestfallen when it was carefully explained to him that yes, this was a Jewish writer, but his language of original expression was English.

Nearly 20 years later, in Israel, I began meeting Sutzkever regularly in Tel Aviv, first at Cafe Olga, the older poet's favorite meeting spot, around the corner from his home in north Tel Aviv, and then at his penthouse flat, in his living room and study, where the bookcases were filled with the books of a lifetime and the walls with masterpieces, including several by his longtime associate Marc Chagall. When I reminded Sutzkever about our first meeting, he found the story amusing, now that Israeli/Yiddish poet and Canadian translator were sitting together in the old new land of the Jewish people, conversing in Hebrew about all matters poetical and literary.

His life was as rich and fascinating as his poetry. Abraham Sutzkever was born in 1913 in Smorgon, a small town near Vilna. He became a member of the literary

group Young Vilna in the 1930s, and his first book, *Lider* [Poems], appeared in 1937. During the early part of World War II, Sutzkever found himself trapped in the Vilna Ghetto, but he and his wife escaped with others and joined the partisans. In the spring of 1944 he was flown out of the Vilna forests and brought to Russia. Later he was called to serve as a witness at the Nuremberg Trials.

Many of his books grew out of his wartime experiences, including the collections *The Fortress* (1945), *Ghetto Poems* (1946), *Jewish Street* (1948), and *Secret Town* (1948), and his prose account, *From the Vilna Ghetto* (1946). He finally settled in Israel, where he edited the Yiddish literary quarterly *Di Goldene Keyt* [The Golden Chain]. In 1963 his collected poems were published in two volumes. In 1985 he was awarded the Israel Prize for his writings in Yiddish. He passed away in Tel Aviv in 2010.

Sutzkever's work has been widely published in translation, and a number of collections have appeared in English, including *Siberia: A Poem* (1961), *Burnt Pearls: Ghetto Poems* (1981), *The Fiddle Rose: Poems 1970–72* (1990), *Selected Poetry and Prose* (1991), and *Laughter Beneath the Forest: Poems from Old and Recent Manuscripts* (1996).

In our meetings, Sutzkever was always glad to parse words and phrases with me, but generally we did not engage in literary criticism or theory. We focused on the poems of the ghetto period and the time he had spent in the Narocz Woods with his fellow partisans. As translator, I noted from the start that his sharp focus on the concrete word and image gives a clear urgency to his poems, so that when readers engage them decades after they were written, the works are as immediate and vivid as if they had just been spoken.

The Jewish present and past, no matter the destructive onslaught of enemies, find strength and hope in the Yiddish word. All who touch and are touched by Sutzkever's consummate art carry the vibrant legacy of his words into the cultural renewal of the Jewish people. This poem is for him.

Abraham Sutzkever, A Portrait Poem

Tired and bloodshot
your aging eyes
match your bald
pate and full moustache
memento of your girth
and Partisan strength.

You speak and sing
always of some past's
indefinite future
which is not the present
ever but that frozen
waste where unpeopled
the ghosts of millions
wind into the snow
and darkening light —
northern hell
of the world, Siberia
where history
is grimly imminent.

Surrounded by paintings
Vilna mementos and nameplates
here in your flat
over lightwashed Tel Aviv —
here you say
you never write
but only find yourself reflected
in the books and portraits.

Hurrying you seem
always rushing and writing
poems as all poets now do
in haste, secretly,
unseen in no man's
land, invisible place,
the impossible promised land
where all the refugee words
are gathered and make shelter.



"In that time of mass murder and destruction," explains Seymour Mayne, "poetry was primary as affirmation and resistance, and poetry in Yiddish even more so. 'For a Comrade' is a powerful poem about the chain of sustenance that connected all Jews. The speaker has no choice but to keep his strength by eating a morsel of bread, the staff of life, even though it is flecked with the blood of a slain comrade. While the poem has a strong partisan theme, it also offers unexpected allusions to the Christian Mass. Whether the poet was aware of this echo in his works or not, I do wish I had raised it with him years ago when we met to parse his Yiddish words so they could be rendered as accurately as possible into concise and resonant English."

Abraham Sutzkever

For a Comrade

Murdered comrade
at the barbed wire —
you still press this scrap
of food to your heart.
Forgive my hunger
and forgive this daring —
I must bite into your
bloodstained bread.

Nameless comrade
now I know your name —
let this stained morsel
comfort you too.
As the healing light
sustains our people,
together with the bread
you enter me.

Silent comrade,
absorbing you I live.
Demand of the world a reckoning
through every fiber of mine.
If I fall as you fell
at the barbed wire
let another swallow my words
as I, your bread.

Vilna Ghetto
December 30, 1941



"In 'I Feel Like Saying a Prayer,' the unobtrusive alliteration helps to render the compelling need to pray and speak," writes Mayne.

Abraham Sutzkever

I Feel Like Saying a Prayer

I feel like saying a prayer — but to whom?
He Who once used to comfort me won't hear it now.
So to whom shall I pray?
The prayer holds me like a vise.

Should I ask that star in the sky: "My far-away friend,
I have lost my speech. Come, take its place."
But that good star
also won't hear.

Yet I must say a prayer. Someone very near,
within me, tortured, demands the prayer.
Senseless, I begin to babble
until dawn.

Vilna Ghetto
January 17, 1942

• • • •

"'Burnt Pearls' affirms the need to speak and to write, to assert Jewish existence and defiance in the face of the horror of the Nazi occupation and the collaborators, military and civilian, who set out to annihilate the Jewish people," Mayne explains.

Abraham Sutzkever

Burnt Pearls

It is not just because my words quiver
like broken hands grasping for aid,
or that they sharpen themselves
like teeth on the prowl in darkness,
that you, written word, substitute for my world,
flare up the coals of my anger.

It is because your sounds
glint like burnt pearls
discovered in an extinguished pyre
and no one — not even I — shredded by time
can recognize the woman drenched in flame
for all that remains of her now
are these grey pearls
smouldering in the ash —

Vilna Ghetto
July 28, 1943

• • • •

"Prayer and above all poetry were crucial means of resistance for the poet," Mayne notes. "In this poem about the daring act at the Romm Printing Works, the use of the plates of the famous publisher of Jewish religious works connects the partisan present with the resistance of earlier eras—and with the transformation, the letters of these religious works take on an added and insistent struggle for Jewish survival, if not continuity."

Abraham Sutzkever

The Leaden Plates of Romm's Printing Works

Like fingers reaching out between the bars
to seize the bright air of freedom
we moved through the night to steal
the leaden plates of Romm's Printing Works.
Dreamers who had to become soldiers
we converted spirit of lead into bullets.

As once again we lifted the seal
to enter into the shelter of the ancient cave,
armored with shadow, lit by lamps,
we spilled the letters — line after line —
just as our forefathers in the Temple
poured the oil into the festive menorahs.

By the casting of bullets the lead
illuminated thoughts — letter after letter melted.
One molten line from Babylon, another
from Poland, flowed into the same mold.
Jewish bravery once hidden in words
must now strike back with shot!

Whoever saw this ammunition strapped round
the brave Jewish boys in the ghetto
saw Jerusalem struggling for life,
the fall of those granite walls.
Whoever understood the fiery words
recognized their voices in his heart.

Vilna Ghetto
September 12, 1943

“How can one rely on a fragmentary family album,” asks Pnina Rosenberg, to “confirm a person’s identity, his familial relationship, in the absence of past documents?” Yet this essay, along with its illustrative documentary photographs, seeks to do just that.

Pnina Rosenberg

The Lens of Memory: The Private Archive of Haviva Minz-Rosenberg

In memory of my mother, Haviva Rosenberg, née Liuba Minz

Liz Stanley, in her thorough research on *The Auto/Biographical I* (1992), rightly states that

memory’s lane is a narrow, twisting, and discontinuous route back through the broad plains of the past, leading to a self that by definition we can never remember but only construct through the limited and partial evidence available to us: half-hints of memory, photographs . . . and other people’s remembrances. (p. 62)

Indeed, family albums are significant elements in autobiographies and a most valuable means of encouraging and stimulating remembrance and close examination of personal histories (Hirsch, 1997).

Yet, how can one rely on a fragmentary family album? How can one confirm a person’s identity, his familial relationship, in the absence of past documents? In our era of selfies and Instagram, with the abundance of recorded and instantaneously mega-diffused images of almost every instant of one’s life, it is almost impossible to grasp the reality of survivors who were lucky to have in their possession less than a handful of black-and-white photographs, sometimes blurred and hardly recognizable, that enabled them slowly and gradually to reconstruct their pre-Holocaust childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Each photograph or document that somehow came into one’s possession in an odd and unexpected way becomes a treasure trove that fills autobiographical lacunae.

THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE CHOIR

Scholar Marian Hirsch (1997) states that “family is constructed by desire and disappointment, love and loss. Photographs, as the only material traces of an irrecoverable past, derive their power and their important cultural role

from their embeddedness in the fundamental rites of family life” (p. 5). This statement could be applied to the photograph of the Great Synagogue Choir [Fig. 1], though at first glance (and even at additional ones), its composition and content do not bear any resemblance to a family photograph.

The picture was taken in the Minz family residence on Pagizu Street in the Lithuanian city of Shavl (in Yiddish; in Lithuanian, Šiauliai) after Cantor Binyamin Minz, the founder and conductor of the choir at Shavl’s Great Synagogue, finalized the choir’s composition. The photo seems to depict 18 Jews, men and boys, arranged in three rows, each wearing a hat and a *tallit* (prayer cloak). In the center, in the middle of the second row, sits the bearded *chazzan* (the cantor who led the congregation in prayer). The portrait is formal and solemn, as is appropriate and required by the nature of this event. Although the photograph was taken in the private space of a family home, there is nothing to indicate this. The photograph does not reveal a domestic interior and does not allow any access to family intimacy; the blank wall prevents any penetration inward, and thus the viewer does not get any insight into the private sphere of the Minz home. It is essentially a public, official image taken in a private space, with no hint of the dwellers’ life.

Before unveiling and discussing the group portrait’s intriguing elements, I will describe the uniqueness of the synagogue choir, a backdrop that reflects and sheds light on the cantor and his kindness.

Binyamin Minz was born in Vilnius in 1892, and until the age of 18 studied music in a Vilnius academy and religious texts in a *yeshiva*. In 1914 he married Rasha Minz (née Lancman, b. 1893, Ciobiškyje, Lithuania). The couple and their two eldest children (Kolev, b. 1915, and Liuba, b. 1922) moved to Shavl, where Minz, who was an outstand-



FIG. 1. The Great Synagogue Choir, Shavl, ca. 1930s. Courtesy of the Minz-Rosenberg archives.

ing tenor, established and conducted the choir of its Great Synagogue. Except for the two bass and the two tenor choir members (middle row, the two men at his left and right), he recruited only children, as sopranos and altos. Minz, who was a rigorous musician, chose the children according to their voices, ability, and readiness to study music and learn to read notes. Yet, since choir members were paid by the local Jewish community (soloists received an additional fee for their solo performances), Minz also took into consideration the children's financial situation, preferring those whose salaries as choir participants would assist their families. Though the Minz family lived on a tight budget, the cantor, who knew that several children in the choir came from very poor families, used to arrive at rehearsals carrying a big sack of fresh loaves of bread bought with his own money. These were distributed among all the singer-children, to avoid marking and offending the needy ones.

The picture of the choir is not a "generic family photograph from a long time ago" (Hirsch, 1997, p. 2), and it is not a glimpse that reflects and gives insight into intimate family moments. Yet this black-and-white group snapshot

taken during the early 1930s is the earliest and only remaining visual evidence that depicts and attests to my mother's pre-war existence. It is a personal, familial portrait, embedded in a group portrait, that exposes a personal and particular moment interwoven into collective cultural and communal history.

Let us look again at the portrait. In the front row are five children; the one to the left is somewhat separated from the other four. This separation is not in vain: The one on the left is a young girl, Liuba Minz, the cantor's daughter—and my mother. Her gaze, as captured by the photographer, reflects seriousness and timidity as well as her status as an outsider. It is not the only gaze: "multiple looks circulate in the photograph's production, reading, and description" (Hirsch, 1997, p. 1).

Liuba, at about the age of 10, had a melodious voice and wanted to take part in the synagogue's ensemble, but as a girl was not allowed to participate. When she realized that a group photo was to be taken in her home, she took advantage of the domestic location, disguised herself in the choir uniform of a boy, and infiltrated the photograph (Minz-Rosenberg, interview by the author, 2008).

AMBIGUITY AND OBSCURITY: THE CHOIR PORTRAIT

The photograph is full of contradictions. Despite depicting the choir of an Orthodox synagogue, it includes a (camouflaged) girl. Although it depicts various members of the Minz family—my mother, Liuba; her father and my grandfather, Binyamin; and the elder son, Kolev (third row, third from left), my uncle—it is not what one would consider a family portrait.

Yet, if we focus on the three members of the Minz family, we can see different gazes that subtly reflect familial relationships. Kolev, despite being some eight years older than Liuba, had a very good relationship with his sister.¹ He faces forward, yet his gaze is to the left, and, in spite of the distance, guards and protects Liuba. My grandfather, Cantor Binyamin Minz, who looks more openly in his daughter's direction, is slightly smiling, as if giving his daughter his unspoken consent, thus taking part in her unorthodox and somewhat rebellious act. The only family member who does not have any eye contact with either the group or other family members is my mother, Liuba, who courageously assumes her role as a fighter against gender exclusion. Thus she was, in a way, some five decades ahead of Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Yentl the Yeshiva Boy* and Barbra Streisand's musical cinematic interpretation in *Yentl*.

THE PHOTOGRAPH AS A FIND

In many cases, surviving pre-war photographs of loved ones had not been kept by the survivors themselves. They were, rather, bequeathed to them by members of their *landsmanshafts* (hometown societies of Jewish immigrants from the same European town or region) who carried them while fleeing interwar Europe, as was the case with the choir photograph.

The photo came to be in my grandfather's possession during the 1950s. He sent a copy of it to an old friend of his, surnamed Traub, who had immigrated to Palestine and worked for the Haifa branch of the daily *Davar*. After the war, when Traub learned that Minz had survived and was living in Haifa, he invited him and my mother, Liuba, to the newspaper offices, where he presented them with copies of the photograph. My mother had additional copies made and distributed them among the *Shavlers* (individuals from Shavl). For many, it was the only token of a past life. Such sharing of pictures was a common practice and explains how old photographs were circulated among and distributed to the community of survivors, a community that, in many cases, served as a second family, replacing the ones that had been lost.

THE GROUP PORTRAIT GOES PUBLIC

In 2010, my mother and Hanoach Freidman, her pupil in the Shavl branch of the Dror youth movement, tried to identify the choir's members. Once the identifications had been

completed, though with many lacunae, the photo and names were posted on YouTube and, as a seven-minute film with a musical score by Clint Mansell, entered the virtual world under the title "*Chór Wielkiej Synagogi w Szawlach. Choir of the Great Synagogue in Siauliai—Kopia*" (Rosenberg & Wisniewski, 2012), available at [youtube/m9QqS8qARsk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9QqS8qARsk).

To our amazement, we received emails from Shavlers who identified several members of the choir. Lior Himelstein (personal communication, 2013), for example, wrote that "my father is in the back row, 2nd from left (Avraham Mordechai Himelstein)." Lior, who lives in Los Angeles, grew up in South Africa, a country with a large Lithuanian Jewish community. Coincidentally, my grandfather served as the cantor in the Yeoville Synagogue in Johannesburg from 1955 until 1964 [Figs. 2a & 2b]. Lior knew him and shared reminiscences with me:

I remember Cantor Minz. My father was the choir-master of the Yeoville Synagogue, and a friend of Cantor and Mrs. Minz[,] who often came to our house. . . . [Cantor and Mrs. Minz] often mentioned their horrific experiences in the camps, where [Cantor Minz] said he wore cement bags for clothing. They spoke about the children they lost, and the survival of your mother in Israel, thank G-d.



FIGS. 2A & 2b. Cantor Binyamin Minz, Johannesburg, 1957. Courtesy of the Minz-Rosenberg archives.

Imagine what a strong man he was. After suffering such a lot in the concentration camps, he still took on a new job as chazzan at age 63, when most people retire. As I said, we met him on Shabbat going to shul. This walk for him was at least 3 kilometers each way. (Himmelstein, 2013, personal correspondence).

Himmelstein's vivid and moving testimony sheds light on my grandparents' life in Johannesburg. Despite our regular correspondence with them, we, the families of the two daughters living in Israel, knew very little about their mundane life there or about their lives during the Holocaust. My grandfather was interned in a Dachau satellite camp, while my grandmother, my mother, and my aunt were in other German forced-labor camps and had no information about him. Afterwards, although we shared an apartment, my grandfather hardly talked with us about his experiences in the camp. He probably needed more time and distance to open up and talk, which happened only as a result of the publication of the 1930s choir group photograph.

FROM THE SHAVL GHETTO TO THE STUTTHOF CONCENTRATION CAMP

The Minz family was comprised of two parents and their six children: Kolev, Liuba, Bat Sheva (b. 1926), Hirsch (b. 1928), Israel (b. 1932), and Hanna (b. 1934). All four younger siblings were born in Shavl. From the beginning of the German occupation, all were interned in the Shavl Ghetto except for Kolev [Fig. 3], who joined the 16th Lithuanian Division of the Red Army (mostly composed of Lithuanian Jews) and fought in the summer 1943 Battle of Kursk, in which he was mortally injured. Decades later, a



FIG. 3. Kolev Minz wearing his Red Army uniform, 1941–1943. Courtesy of the Minz-Rosenberg archives.

copy of Kolev's photograph was given to my mother and her sister by his wife.

Enlarged and framed, it hung in my mother's living room alongside other mementos. Not only was it the only tangible evidence of her elder brother, but it also attested to her and my aunt's indefatigable search for any thread of information concerning their lost family members.

The family's daily life in the ghetto was characterized by scarcity of food, unhygienic conditions, forced labor, hardship, abuse, and detentions in the Šiauliai Red prison. Yet, the most traumatic event, the one that finally shattered them, was the infamous Kinderaktion (children's roundup) of November 5, 1943, during which, when parents and other adults were at work, Israel and Hanna (aged 11 and 9) were found in their hiding place and assembled among the 574 children and hundreds of elderly and disabled individuals taken and murdered by the Nazis. This brutal event haunted my mother till her dying day and never stopped tormenting her parents.

STUTTHOF CONCENTRATION CAMP AND LABOR CAMP

Following the liquidation of the Shavl Ghetto in July 1944, the reduced Minz family was interned in the Stutthof camp, near Danzig (in Polish, Gdansk), where they were registered. Ironically, their camp registration card was the only official document that attested to their identity.

Shortly after, the family was dispersed. My grandfather and his son, Hirsch, were transferred to Dachau; Rasha Minz, my grandmother, was classified as an old woman and separated from her two daughters, who did not believe that they would ever see her again. Liuba and Bat Sheva, who were sent to forced-labor camps, miraculously managed to smuggle their mother, who was on her way to liquidation, into their camp, and the inseparable three survived the camps and the death march, then traveled together to Poland, where they eventually were reunited with Binyamin.

LODZ AND BENDIN: GROUP AND SOLO PORTRAITS

Liuba Minz, already an active Dror member in Shavl, joined other survivor-activists in Lodz, where she was engaged in the Hachshara—a training program that was part of their preparation for *aliyah* (ascent, i.e., moving to the Land of Israel). During this time, she prepared her students for life on a kibbutz and was involved in teaching Hebrew and agriculture. In comparison to the scarcity of earlier photographs, these two years are characterized by some 10 of them, a relative abundance. The photos fall into two categories: formal group portraits [Figs. 4–6, pp. 20, 21] and solo portraits [Figs. 7–8, p. 21].

The 23-year-old Liuba changed her name to the Israeli name Haviva. A graduate of the Tarbut Zionist Hebrew Gymnasium who knew Hebrew perfectly and had past



FIG. 4. Liuba Minz with her students in the Dror-Shacharia Kibbutz, Bendin, Poland, 1945. Courtesy of the Minz-Rosenberg archives.

experience as a counselor, she was sent to train young survivors at the Dror-Shacharia Kibbutz in Bendin, Poland, about 120 miles from Lodz, where we see Haviva [Fig. 4] (second row, second from right) flanked by students holding a Hebrew poster, while the back wall is adorned with the inscription “Welcome” in Hebrew.

A photograph of another formal gathering depicts Liuba, now Haviva, in a meeting of shlichim (emissaries) from the United Kibbutz Movement with other Dror activists [Fig. 5]. Haviva is seated in the front row, third from the left, next to her best friend, Zivia Lubetkin, who was one of the leaders of the Jewish underground in Nazi-occupied Warsaw.² Haviva and Zivia immigrated in 1946 to Palestine, where they lived for two years in Kibbutz Yagur (near Haifa).

In another group portrait of Dror members [Fig. 6], which depicts Haviva in the first row (third from the left), her image is reminiscent of that in the Great Synagogue Choir photo [Fig. 1, p. 17]. She looks younger than the other members of the group, and less formal. Her oval face and uncommunicative look retain some childish traits. She seems more pensive and introverted, as if unhappy with something but refraining from disclosing it. The more I look at her gaze, at her sweet, delicate features, the more I am intrigued. That gaze certainly does not contain the readiness and openness that she manifests in the group portrait with Lubetkin [Fig. 5]. She seems less a public persona and much more a private one.

Despite the differences among the three group portraits, there is a common denominator. Haviva is an integral part of the group: she shares the others' ideals and plays an important role in fulfilling them. This is the main difference between those group photographs and the Shavl choir picture. Ironically, in that earlier photograph, which was taken in her home, she was an intruder, while as an activist in the Hachshara, she is equal with her peers, an integral member of the community.

Along with the formal group photographs, Haviva had several spontaneous solo photographs taken. Both of these—the outdoor picture, where she is seen against the background of the ruined Lodz [Fig. 7], and the indoor shot, taken in a studio in Bendin [Fig. 8]—depict her as a young, attractive, and confident woman. Her open smile reveals beautiful, even teeth, contrary to what one would expect after several years of poor nutrition. Her curled auburn hair is adorned with a kerchief or a coquettishly small fur hat. She has just endured the long years of the Holocaust. She lives and works in a devastated foreign country, surrounded by survivors who are still

looking, often in vain, for their loved ones. Yet her gaze seems optimistic, an outlook derived, perhaps, from her strong personality and her belief that she is starting a new life according to ideals she has believed in and fought for since reaching adulthood.

A PERSONAL DISCOVERY

Liz Stanley (1992) writes, “When the seeing eye gazes on a photograph with which it has a direct subject-relation, its gaze infuses the photograph and everything there with life, even if only of a kind” (p. 53). This is especially true when one holds the real photograph, as opposed to a scan, in hand. For this essay, I looked at the original photos rather than the scans I am accustomed to using in my work. The studio portrait of my mother [Fig. 8] had sat for many years on my bedside table, yet only for the writing of this essay did I remove it from its frame and turn it over. There, to my great surprise, was my mother's dedication in Hebrew:



FIG. 5. Meeting of United Kibbutz Movement shlichim with Dror activists, Lodz, 1945–1946. Courtesy of the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum Archives.



FIG. 6. Meeting of Dror members, Lodz, 1945–1946. Courtesy of the Minz-Rosenberg archives.

“For Yechiel as a memento! . . . Haviva, Shacharia, Bendin.”

So many questions flooded my mind! Who was Yechiel? What was the nature of the brief encounter that merited the memento? Does he appear in the group portrait from Bendin [Fig. 5], and, if so, where? Did she send the photo to him? If so, why and how did it revert to my mother’s possession?

I was flooded with despair as well, for there was no one left to answer. Thus the search into my mother’s sparse family album is shadowed by a veil of loss, grief, and regret.

TINY PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

Jane Galop (1999) writes in “Observation of a Mother” that family snapshots “are in fact all about showing, about the privacy of family life and exhibiting it to a public gaze” (p. 73). Yet, while this is true of typical photo albums, albums of a survivor’s photos are more complex. There one has to



FIG. 7. Haviva Minz, Lodz, 1945. Courtesy of the Minz-Rosenberg archives.



FIG. 8. Haviva Minz, Bendin, 1945–1946. Courtesy of the Minz-Rosenberg archives.

be content with the meager finds in her possession, not for the purposes of exhibition, but rather for trying to reconstruct the life of those whose past was completely or almost completely annihilated. In such a case, it is not “all about showing.” One has to settle for glimpses, fragments, for tiny pieces of the puzzle that enable one to have some insight into the mundane and dramatic moments of the lost life of a lost loved one. To try to tell my mother’s story by decoding scarce narrative images that will always remain fragmentary and incomplete is a laborious, Sisyphean, and frustrating task. So I gaze at the photos that I do have. These artifacts, despite their

limited number and the unbridgeable void of knowledge, bring me close to her and make her memory live.

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END NOTES

[1] When Kolev got married before the war, against his parents’ wishes, his loving sister Liuba was the only member of the Minz family who openly attended the wedding, protesting what she considered her parents’ unjustness (H. Minz-Rosenberg, interview by the author, 2008).

[2] Third from the right in the upper row in Fig. 5, (p. 20) is Yitzhak Zuckerman (Antek), Lubetkin’s husband, who was one of the leading fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Antek and Zivia were the leaders of the Dror movement and later were among the founding members of Kibbutz Lohamei HaGeta’ot and the Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum.

Christopher Gwin writes, "For years we have been saddened and worried by the knowledge of the ever-decreasing survivor population. As few survivors can now visit classes, how will teachers make Holocaust history accessible? The project of translating the Altenberg family letters from the original German into English is a brilliant example of how we can still reach for and touch this history in ways that are meaningful and relevant for today's teens." Compare this essay with Pnina Rosenberg's personal narrative (pp. 16–21) on the importance of family photographs in uncovering history.

Christopher Gwin

The Altenberg Family Letters: A Story of Love in Translation

In 1994, just after the inauguration of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the year that *Schindler's List* premiered, the year that the New Jersey legislature mandated instruction on the history of the Holocaust in all public schools in the state, and the same year that the Interahamwe attacked Tutsi Rwandans in a genocide that killed possibly a million people and was broadcast to the world, my colleague Beth Baird, a history teacher, and I, a teacher of German, attended a conference on Holocaust education and crafted a pilot unit on the subject of the Holocaust to be taught in her United States History 2 class and my level 4 German class. We taught it twice each semester to full classes of students. Its success prompted our supervisor at that time, Henry Silver, to encourage us to develop a full-semester elective on the topic of the Holocaust and other genocides. Beth and I completed rigorous coursework in the field of Holocaust history at Rutgers University and carefully planned the curriculum, not knowing how many students such an elective would attract in a school with a student population of under 700. The first course drew 125 students.

When I began my initial unit and discussed it with colleagues in the American Association of Teachers of German (AATG), I explained that, as an adjunct to our language program, our school had a student-exchange program with various schools in Germany. Yet across the years, the students' immediate connection between the Holocaust and present-day Germany began to fade. Forty years ago, students would ask the German visitors about Hitler and the Holocaust. That almost never happened by the mid-90s. Despite, or perhaps because of, that changing perspective, many colleagues advised me that teaching such a course would be counterproductive to me, that

teaching adolescents about the Holocaust would kill the German program, that learning about Germany as the perpetrator of the Shoah would dissuade them from an interest in learning German. Their fears, though, proved unfounded. Our enrollment in German language classes was large and continued to increase after the Holocaust course was established in 1996.

In my German language courses, especially the upper levels, in which we tackle German history, I strove to balance the fun of learning and using the language against the responsibility to understand German history. As I taught the Holocaust and Genocide course, I found that the students of German who also sat in that course held an advantage there because of their ability to read original source documents and to see the genocide in the larger historical context. I believed also that it engendered empathy toward contemporary social justice issues because the teens had the added lens of language through which to attempt to comprehend the history in detail.

I taught this Holocaust elective for 14 years before my schedule changed; it has now been eight years since then. I miss teaching the course, as nothing can replace the power of being a witness, a guide on the side, of seeing the transformation that happens often in Holocaust education when students reach a deeper understanding of something fundamental about human nature and about their role in the human community. It takes a considered, thoughtful, and strategic approach to create a classroom environment in which such transformation can occur and, if this is achieved, it is quite powerful, because it hints that a future of peace might be possible.

CARRYING THE STORY FORWARD

Last winter, I received an email from Helen Kirschbaum, the executive director of the Goodwin Holocaust Education Center at the Katz Jewish Community Center in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, near the school where I teach. Throughout the years I taught the Holocaust and Genocide course, I had regular interactions with Helen and her team, who worked with many survivors and ensured that students in schools across our region met them and heard their stories. Lieselotte Sommerfeld and Hans Altenberg were two who often spoke, and since their passing, Helen explained, their granddaughter Carly Altenberg had been carrying their story of survival forward. Carly, a freshman at Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, had prepared a PowerPoint presentation on her grandparents' story, Helen continued, and was now sharing it through school visits. Carly also had a collection of some 200 letters her grandparents and other family members had written during the war, but she could not read German. Very curious about the content of the letters as she continued to piece her family story together, she had asked Helen for advice, and now Helen was writing to ask whether my students would be able to translate at least a few of the letters for Carly.

BREAKING A TABOO

Translation has been taboo in the world-language classroom for as long as I can remember. Today as well, we teach in a standards-embedded learning environment, where the target language is the language of discourse in all interactions between students and the instructor. In the second-language classroom, it is almost as if English were not in play. In the early years of instruction, we do explain new grammar concepts in English, but this moves to the target language rather rapidly as everyone gets comfortable with the new normal: the target language as the language of operation in all interactions. Immersion works, creating an atmosphere in which the expectation is that all conversations, regardless of how small or monumental, are attempted in some version of a second language. This helps to guide students along the path toward increased target-language acquisition. If the students dive in, suspend a little pre-established belief, and invest themselves and their time, they can achieve. For me, seeing students gain in fluency is one of the true joys of teaching. Using the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) world-readiness standards; interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes of communication; and the ACTFL proficiency guidelines provides the structure and foundation for real achievement.

Yet my immediate reaction to Helen's translation request was "Great idea—let's do it!" What an educational opportunity this would be! I had never done such a project, and my interest and curiosity were piqued.

That year, I taught level 4 German twice, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. I felt that these classes were the right place for this project, as we study German history in the level 4 class and because most students, although juniors, are preparing for undergraduate work. When Helen's letter arrived, our classes had been dancing between Holocaust history and the contemporary political situation of refugees streaming over borders and into Germany.

Helen dropped off printed PDFs of a portion of Carly's trove, and we began to dive into them, great excitement vying with great trepidation that we would be unable to read and translate properly such important documents. As we read together carefully and slowly, something magical unfolded: We realized that what we held in our hands was a cache of love letters between Lieselotte and Hans [Fig. 1].

Yes, they provided many important historical facts and details about Jewish life under National Socialist oppression—in her letter dated February 11, 1941, Lilo, believing she will be able to leave Amsterdam soon to meet Hans, writes, "Now I can't bring a lot with me, which means I can't bring more than two cases that I must be able to carry myself!" and she adds, "Please try to do everything possible to allow my parents to follow me soon" [Fig. 2]—but they also painted a rather private and intense portrait of the love between Lieselotte, called Lilo in the letters, and her beloved Hans.



FIG. 1. Lieselotte (Lilo) and Hans, ca. 1938. Courtesy of Carly Altenberg.

Amsterdam, 11-2-1941

My dearest, dearest Hansel!

What are you hearing now . . . it is believed we will go within four weeks. What do you say to that? We've done it all in two days! Yesterday we were ready to be immunized. I'm already very excited!!!!!! . . . So now you can expect me!!! The lovely parents are very sad! . . . With one eye I'm crying, but with the other I'm looking forward to it! Can you understand that? Now I can't bring a lot with me, which means I can't bring more than two cases that I must be able to carry myself! Now I want to look for something of yours to take with me! . . . Write to me quickly if you think of anything! . . . Please try to do everything possible to allow my parents to follow me soon. . . . How are you? Will you be available when I'm near you? And now, my dear, goodbye! I hug you tight and send plenty of kisses your way!

—Lilo

FIG. 2. Letter from Lilo to Hans, February 11, 1941. Courtesy of Carly Altenberg. *This is an edited, retyped version of the original, translated letter.*



FIG. 4. Lilo and Hans, ca. 1938. Courtesy of Carly Altenberg.



FIG. 3. Lieselotte (Lilo) Sommerfeld, ca. 1937. Courtesy of Carly Altenberg.

THE SOMMERFELD-ALTENBERG STORY

Lieselotte Sommerfeld was 12 years old when Hitler seized power in Germany in 1933 [Fig. 3]. She met Hans Altenberg in Berlin when they were teenagers. They fell in love in the shadow of the Nazi regime [Fig. 4]. As the Nazi party

began to make life miserable for Jews, the two families reacted in different ways, illustrating a theme examined each year in our Holocaust classes. Hans's family insisted he leave, and he took a job traveling the world on the SS *Groenlo* as a steward. He disembarked in the Dominican Republic as the war intensified, because he could not get permission to stay in New York. Hans lived in the Dominican Republic in Sosua, the community to which General Trujillo, a participant in the 1938 Evian Conference, had invited 100,000 Jews to settle and become agriculturists. Hans, one of the few who actually arrived there, spent his time and all the resources he could gather to get his and Lilo's family out of Europe.

Lilo's father, meanwhile, had decided to stay in Germany, which, he declared, was their home. As things got more difficult for Lilo in school and for the family in general, though, the father made the difficult decision to move them, one at a time, to Holland, where he thought they would be safe. While there, however, the family was rounded up twice, terrorized but then released. As we can see from this passage in the 11/2/1941 letter [Fig. 2] from Lilo, she planned to leave Amsterdam to be with Hans:

It is believed we will go within four weeks. I'm already very excited!!!!!! . . . So now you can expect me!!! . . . With one eye I'm crying, but with the other I am looking forward to it! Can you understand that?

She was prevented from leaving, however, and in July of 1943, the family were forced from their home a third time and sent to Vught, a concentration camp, where men were separated from their families. Lilo, though traumatized, managed to sleep next to and to work alongside her mother, unlike most of the others in the camp. This in no way diminished the indescribable horror of the Nazi slave labor apparatus, but Lilo described her “luck” in working inside next to her mother in a sewing factory, where she also, later, saw her father. Tragically, on a random day, her parents were both deported, her mother to Westerbork and her father to Auschwitz. Lilo never heard from them again.

Imprisoned in various brutal camps, Lilo worked tirelessly, including as a radio lamp maker for Philips Electric. She subsisted on starvation rations. In June 1944, she was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, the most notorious of the camps in the Nazi regime of terror, and spared from being gassed only because of need for her labor. At first she was forced to work outside carrying rocks up and down stairs for a road being built; soon she was moved inside, which perhaps helped her to survive. In July she and a group of women were pushed from camp to camp, forced on what have come to be called the death marches. After being incarcerated briefly in at least nine different camps, she was sent to Denmark, and on May 4, 1945, just before the official end of the war, she was taken by the Red Cross to Malmö, Sweden, where she stayed until she returned to Amsterdam. From there, she wrote to close relatives, whom she addresses as “My loves!”:

October 6, 1945

There are too many memories here in Amsterdam. . . . Aunt Erna understands how awful it is to live with her because the only thing I see in her apartment is Papa. And it is twice as bad for me! My desire [for my parents] is too great and it is so extremely painful. I’m begging you not to write about my parents and please do not ask about them. . . . It’s still too painful! . . . I will be happy when I finally get to Hans. Once I am there, I think I can really write you about everything that happened in the last few years. Sadly, I do not think that there is hope for anyone else from our family. . . . I am so glad that I still have all of you.

Two years later, she managed to sail to the Dominican Republic and married Hans upon arrival [Fig. 5, p. 26]. They ventured to New York, arriving with \$3 in their pockets, and began a new life, which led them eventually to New Jersey and which brought their granddaughter Carly Altenberg to our class in 2016.

I had agreed to Helen’s request because I thought it would be an interesting side project to learning about the

history of Germany and would also help my language learners increase their sensitivity to the nuances of word choice. I could not have guessed the enormity of the emotional impact this project would have on us all.

First, adolescents today do not live in a world in which they write love letters to each other; they do not write letters at all. Their world is digital and ephemeral. Holding a document from the past, reading it, and trying to understand the history it contained made us realize that we will never have the same depth of understanding of the present generation, of the moments in which we are living and how we are responding to each moment. Additionally, the power of the love story came through strongly in the individual lines of the letters. To close the letter of February 2, 1941, for example, Lilo wrote, “How are you? Will you be available when I’m near you? And now, my dear, goodbye! I hug you tight and send plenty of kisses your way!” These were two people deeply in love and yearning to be together, and my students held in their hands the documents that showed vividly just one aspect of the damage and pain of separation that the Holocaust and the war caused.

LOVE IN TRANSLATION

The translation project did not replace the traditional class lessons. We translated whenever we had a few extra minutes: at the end of class, after a longer activity, outside of class, on days when many students were absent due to a class trip or other event, and also as an anchor activity in small groups during class. Helen had sent me the letters as a PDF file as well, and a few times we looked at them together on the large classroom screen. This was the most efficient way to work together on the lines of the text, but such public sharing felt rather uncomfortable to me, as though we were invading Carly’s family life by reading words exchanged by two people in love. This common viewing was helpful in gathering and considering all of our ideas, though, and so we pressed on.

We used German, our target language, to discuss our translations, so the structure and framework of the lessons did not change from normal, daily instruction. Many intense back-and-forth discussions, even arguments, occurred as we delved into the letters, asking, “Should the line of text be this in English or this?” “What is the best word to convey this sentiment?” The level of engagement among the students was extremely high. Not every curricular theme interests each student every time, of course, but this project seemed to captivate the imagination and curiosity of everyone; each student was eager to contribute to learning the content of these letters.

I was amazed at how adept the students were. As we never translate in class—the immersion model does not allow for this—I did not have any data on student achievement in this area, but they were clearly comfortable and



FIG. 5. Lilo and Hans ca. 1947, together after their long separation. Courtesy of Carly Altenberg.

very quick with it. Translation felt easy, and this amazed me. I knew that translation happened when students were studying together and when they stayed with German friends, chatting about language and cultural differences during the exchange program, but I had never witnessed its power in the classroom. I believe that part of the ease and comfort they exhibited lay in the energy created by their interest in learning the full story of Hans and Lilo.

Translation presents challenges. Often the letters from Lilo began, “*Mein heissgeliebter Hans.*” A direct translation of this into English would not precisely capture the sentiment, so we engaged in lively discussions about how to do so. “My dearest Hans” was agreed upon, but there were several other suggestions, including “my beloved” and “my most loved.”

We did not know either of the individuals corresponding, of course, so capturing the exact sentiments and tone they were expressing was difficult. Language, style, culture, and even handwriting styles all change over time, and these letters were written in an era much

different from today. This challenge also provided great material for class conversations. One day we discovered that we could not translate two of the letters, not because of the German, but because none of us could read the handwriting [Fig. 6]!

The handwritten letters were obviously more difficult to decipher than were the typed ones, and working only with printouts of PDFs also made this a tougher challenge. If we had had the original documents, it might have been a bit easier, but they still would have posed a difficulty because of the style of handwriting, beautiful to look at but often impossible to decipher and thus to translate.

In one letter we examined, Lilo wrote, “*sollen wir mit dem Handschuh heiraten?*” Two students were paired to work on this letter and came to me to ask me about this line. They knew the English word for *Handschuh* was “glove,” but they did not understand this in context. I was floating around the room checking with pairs, each of which was working with a different letter that day. I also had no context for this and decided to check with the AATG listserv, an online forum for sharing materials and pedagogical tips. Right there, during class, I posted a query about this, and within minutes we had three responses. My colleagues in the AATG group discussed the meaning of this line as well as the context; as a result, in class, we decided it meant *to marry by proxy*, and we moved on with the translation. The listserv is a reliable resource for educators, and the discussion had an impact on the students, who were amazed that I, as their teacher, had access to such a network for collaboration and support. This made me think about what students think, know, and wonder about how teachers grow, share knowledge, and connect to the wider world, a topic for later exploration.

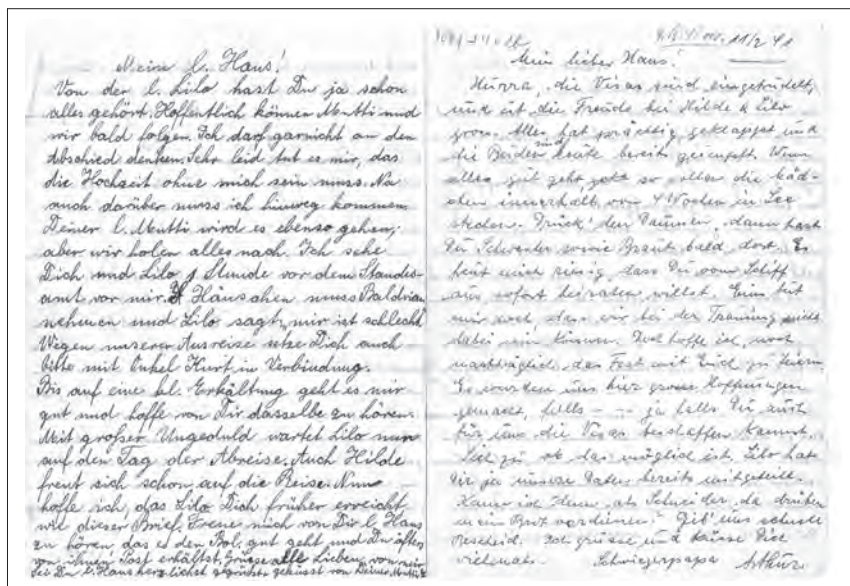


FIG. 6. The letter is hard to read because of the handwriting. Courtesy of Carly Altenberg.

Time raced on as we moved slowly but with unflagging interest through the letters. I struggled to fit this work in among the myriad other curricular demands and the rampant student absences that plague my classes all year. Many students miss class on any given day for scheduled doctor visits, college campus tours, coach interviews, team captain breakfasts, family vacations, field trips, school programs, and many other reasons, making group work a tremendously difficult if not impossible challenge. As it turned out, because of all of the scheduled interruptions, the only day we could invite Carly to a full class to share the translations was the final day of classes in June.

Accompanied by two undergraduate interns from the local Jewish Community Center, Carly visited our afternoon class. I invited the school administration, interested colleagues, the students from the morning class, and the parents from both classes. We began by welcoming Carly and introducing ourselves, and then sat quietly as she screened her PowerPoint presentation on her family history, which mesmerized us. For the students and me, it was

stunning and very moving to see the images of Lilo and Hans, to match their photos with what we knew about their story. As Carly talked, we were transported. As we would do for her later with our translations, she did for us now, filling in the pieces of the story we did not know. My students began to gasp and exclaim: “Oh, that’s Lilo!” “Wow, that’s Hans on the ship!” “Oh, look at them!” [Fig. 8]. The energy created in that classroom by this young woman, who opened her heart and her life to these strangers by sharing her grandparents’ triumphant story of love and survival, filled the room, bounced off the walls, and touched everyone. Eyes filled with tears as Carly recounted, in a calm and strong voice, the parts of her grandparents’ history that she knew well.

After hearing Carly tell the story and after seeing the images of Lilo and Hans, students took turns reading translated passages aloud to Carly and the assembled group. Again, the air was filled with sobs and exclamations. The emotions were palpable and Carly was overcome with the power and meaning of these words, words she had not been able to read and had not heard until that moment. Listening intently to these unknown facts and details of her grandparents’ story touched her profoundly and connected her, deeply and unexpectedly, to these young strangers. Through their second-language skills and their compassion, they had given her the gift of knowing more.

The students had worked to translate the letters with precision, care, and affection for the people who had written them. No one received any points or class credit for this work. We did it solely for its own merit. In the contemporary world of credentialing and “how can this benefit my résumé?” or “will this look good for college?” these young people labored only for the sake of the task and in memory of Lilo and Hans, and not for themselves. We had used our second-language ability for a real-world purpose—what a great feeling!

It was at this moment that the power of the project came to life. My students, through their German-language skills, were able to fill in parts of the story Carly did not have. Their ability was put to good, meaningful, and real-world use. The language of the perpetrators of the National Socialist state-sponsored mass murder, the ideology of supremacy and hate, was also the language of a beautiful and triumphant love story. These two realities came together with this newly acquired clarity in my classroom.

At the end, Margaret, a student’s sister who was attending university in Maryland, introduced herself to Carly and explained that she, an alumna of our school, was currently studying German.



FIG. 7. Lilo and Hans together, ca. 1947. Courtesy of Carly Altenberg.

She told Carly that she had time in the summer and was available to translate even more of the 200 letters, a generous and unsolicited offer emblematic of the infectious spirit of empathy and interest that this project sparked.

In the final moments of the class, we presented Carly with a binder of the letters that we had been given, each followed by the English translation. We exchanged hugs and contact details, and I felt that Carly had found, almost instantly, a place of safety and community to which she would return. I suspected that no one in the class would forget the meaning of what they had been able to accomplish with their language skills, their caring, and their determination to uncover one more story of survivors.

MAKING THIS HISTORY ACCESSIBLE

I know that translation is taboo in the world-language classrooms of today, and I have believed in the power of immersion for many years. I felt, though, that this translation project was necessary and that its story was worth sharing. One of the great benefits of being a teacher of languages across levels of proficiency is that the teacher witnesses the development of the students' skills. Seeing a student move from being able to produce only short chunks of language independently to being able to discuss literary works of art is magical and can provide the teacher with the sense of efficacy that we seek. I have been fortunate to teach in a learning-rich environment and have experienced more than two decades of magical moments of student achievement, those interpersonal exchanges that make worthwhile all of the hours of sweat and tears we gave to get to those moments. It was this translation project, though, that proved to be the highest of the highlights, and the final class lesson on the last day of the school year proved to be the most magical of moments.

For years we have been saddened and worried by the knowledge of the ever-decreasing survivor population. As few survivors can now visit classes, how will teachers make this history accessible? The project of translating the Altenberg family letters is a brilliant example of how we can still reach for and touch this history in ways that are meaningful and relevant for today's teens. As war, terror, and other horrors remain headline news day after day in our digitally connected world, the necessity of Holocaust education—and the power of the story of the individual—remain clear. These high school students reached for more and found it. They learned that second-language skills and knowledge can have a meaning and significance that lasts beyond the ephemeral moment of communication. They also know now, deeply and personally, what the history of the Holocaust meant for one family, for one young couple very much in love.

This essay begins a special section of pedagogy, art, and poetry (pp. 29–50) that can facilitate teaching about Holocaust artifacts in ways that help us understand the people who owned, used, and lost them, and the contexts where they did so. In the reflection below, editor Karen Shawn writes that examining artifacts and placing them in their historical context may help us come “as close as we can to what survivors wanted us to know and understand.” Also in this section are seven classroom-friendly, artifact-rich poems illustrated with evocative drawings by Nancy Patz, whose work graced the spring 2014 issue of *PRISM*; an analysis of this artwork by *PRISM* art editor Pnina Rosenberg; and a contribution by *PRISM* poetry editor Charles Adès Fishman that offers advice on how to read Holocaust poetry.

Karen Shawn

A Violin, a Crimson Scarf, a Pair of High-Heeled Shoes: Unpacking Artifacts From Holocaust Narratives

Twenty-five years after the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel, in his essay collection *One Generation After* (1970), wrote that that watershed “will soon be ancient history.” To the name Auschwitz, Wiesel believed that the next generation would respond, “Never heard of it” (p. 3). Of course, Wiesel was profoundly mistaken, fortunately, and he recognized it. In his introduction to the 2011 edition of the book, he wrote, “And now, sixty years later, the entire world listens to the words of the witness” (p. ix).

Now it is 2018. Wiesel has left us; few other survivors remain to visit classrooms, offer testimony, speak the words of the witness as the entire world listens. Teaching about the Shoah has always been a daunting task. How much more so will it be without survivors to humanize the grim statistics?

One way to meet this challenge, I believe, is to examine artifacts found in Holocaust narrative and place them in their historical context as a means of coming as close as we can to what survivors wanted us to know and understand. Such an approach highlights and reinforces the unbreakable interconnection of the fields of literature and history, both necessary disciplines in teaching the Holocaust well.

A simple, concise, long-standing definition of history is “the knowledge of events that have occurred in the past” (Becker, 1969, p. 6). If history is story, and knowledge is essentially memory, as Becker posits, then the definition

can be revised to read, “History is the remembered story of people and things left behind,” a meaning that supports the interrelatedness of literature, history, and artifacts.

What things did the Jews leave behind? Michael Berenbaum (2006) notes that before Auschwitz was liberated, “twenty-nine storerooms were burned. . . . In the six that remained, they discovered 348,820 men’s suits, 836,255 women’s coats . . . and even 13,964 carpets” (p. 185).

What can we learn from such artifacts? These mute possessions that the Jews took with them when they were deported tell us a great deal, including, for instance, the fact of the large-scale Nazi deception that made the Jews believe that they were going to be resettled to work in the East and would survive.

Why do we care about artifacts? The Polish art historian Joanna Branska has said that “everyday objects . . . ordinary things . . . have become extraordinary because the people who owned them have vanished from the earth” (Robertson, 2014, p. 4). For me, it’s the intimacy of such things. Perhaps because I am not a historian by training, I don’t study history for its generalizations, but for its particulars and for its feelings. After all, notes Ramsay MacMullen (2012), “history is feeling” (p. iii). I believe it may be only through what we might call micro-history—the analysis of daily life and of certain, singular things left behind—that we can most fully understand the scope and scale of historical events. The remnants of an era, the

objects people left behind, can illustrate a particular moment, illuminate an individual story, and elucidate a specific detail of a broad historical narrative, making history both tangible and personal. Artifacts help us find the story within the history, the person within the statistic, demonstrating the partnership among the facts of an era, its people, and their objects.

Artifacts and their study, then, should be an integral part of every history and literature class—but they are not. Why? Sometimes we have the artifacts themselves, unearthed from attics and closets, drawers and steamer trunks. Site workers find them as well. Research teams digging at Treblinka and Sobibor, for instance, have “found hundreds of artifacts belonging to victims” (Lebovics, 2015, n.p.). The vast majority of relics, though, have disappeared. They have disintegrated; they have been burned, buried, lost, stolen. Those that remain rest safely behind glass in museums and resource centers, or in research havens at scientific institutes. We can share images of artifacts in photos, in slides, on the web, but their two-dimensional representations feel sterile and cold.

When we cannot hold the objects in our hands, and when viewing them from a distance holds little excitement, we can seek and find them in literature, where emotions reside. There, descriptions of the fate of these objects tell us something about their owners’ feelings and ways of responding to the tragedy engulfing them, even if the owners themselves cannot.

Let’s return to Berenbaum’s statistics. That such clothing and rugs were found in the Auschwitz storerooms is a fact: important, of course, but Google-able. To learn about artifacts as they were being used by a Jew trying to survive, however, is of import in a quite different way.

The most iconic artifact is, perhaps, the yellow star. These badges, too, were found in great numbers in the aftermath and are common in museum displays. If we want our students to uncover their historical context and to wonder about the people who were forced to wear them, though, rather than to learn only the fact of their existence today, we must offer texts that provoke the learner to question. Following this essay are seven such texts, offering classroom-friendly, illustrated, artifact-filled poems.

The poem “Star” (p. 37), by Charles Adès Fishman, offers such a prompt. In this hint of the experience of one young man, Fishman writes that “he walked slowly under the new burden,” of wearing the star, while “at work, the others smiled in their sleeves.” What was it like for those marked, in the beginning, by the yellow badge? When others saw them, did they sympathize or mock? How big, students might wonder, was the star? “Did they enclose / a template with the order?” Fishman’s poem demands. Were Jews of all ages forced to mark themselves as the Germans occupied successive countries? Why? What happened if they

refused? For how long did the Jews have to wear them? How did these artifacts come to be saved?

Such questions, and the individual stories that answer them, motivate learners to uncover a history that numbers alone can never tell. Here, I believe, is where studying narratives and the artifacts embedded within them may teach us crucial aspects of Holocaust history.

ARTIFACTS IN GHETTO NARRATIVES

A story called “Bread,” by Isaiah Spiegel (2008), also illustrates the ways in which artifacts can help students first to empathize and then to seek to be informed. The account presents the grim surroundings of a family of four after they are forced into the Lodz Ghetto:

Not a stick of furniture, no closet, no beds. When the family had fled here, Mama Glikke had even brought a decent cabinet with her from the old place in the city. Back there, at home, a pair of silver Sabbath candelabras used to stand in the cabinet. . . . But . . . the cabinet fell apart on the journey, as they were rushing into the ghetto, and now the two Sabbath candelabras are lying on the floor in a corner near the window, in a pile of junk, among empty pots and torn clothes. (Shawn & Goldfrad, p. 122)

Treasured possessions lose their meaning, value, and ability to bring joy and stability to the people who own them. If we were reading this merely as literature, we might focus on that alone, or we might examine the rhythm of the language—“not a stick of furniture, no closet, no beds”—or analyze the profusion of prepositional phrases within a single sentence: “*on* the floor, *in* a corner, *near* the window, *in* a pile, *among* empty pots and torn clothes.”

If we seek historical truths, though, a focus on the artifacts prompts us to ask: Why and how did this happen? Why were they deported, and from where? What were the circumstances that led this Jewish family to a place with no furniture, no beds? Why were they rushing? Did anyone intervene? What do the objects—the torn clothes, the empty pots, the Sabbath candelabras—tell us? Did the family lose their identities along with their possessions? Did they lose their faith? Was dehumanizing the Jews a goal of the Nazi ghettoization policy? Is this picture true for other Jews in the ghetto? For other ghettos? Is it a generality or a singularity?

A close look at other artifacts in literature—or even similar ones in the same ghetto, but in different homes—teaches us that we cannot generalize, that artifacts and their meanings are singular, just like the people who owned them, each dependent on unique conditions and dispositions. In Rachmil Bryks’s (2008) “A Cupboard in the Ghetto,” for instance, Hershel and Henye lavish care on

their wedding clothes and trousseau, which they managed to retain as they were forced into the Lodz Ghetto. As the narrative unfolds, we read that the couple, despite their desperate hunger, refuse to sell or barter these items because “the war might end any minute. . . . and we’ll go home in our new clothes” (Shawn & Goldfrad, p. 114).

“By the merely factual, we are interested,” McMullen (2012) points out. “By the other, we are brought to feel that we could have acted in the same way” (p. 133). This newly married couple, too, have taken a cupboard with them to the ghetto, but even as they are forced to use shelf upon shelf for firewood, they manage to keep the cupboard standing, a testament to Jewish strength, dignity, and resistance.

Their determination to keep their trousseau and their cupboard raises yet another essential question. How important to survival were the retained remnants? How important were qualities of faith, optimism, and resilience? Such questions emphasize the singularity of each Jewish life and each unique experience, reinforcing the understanding that *deep* knowledge comes only through learning the history of discrete individuals who endured this tragedy.

Here we have the motivation to begin the historian’s task of unearthing, inferring, finding evidence, bringing to light the truths surrounding the facts. Here we have what MacMullen (2012) calls “a certain way of . . . searching out the emotions that determined behavior; and entering *into* them, ourselves . . . so as *more accurately* to reveal the past, or *re-feel* it, and so to understand it” (p. 135).

UNCOVERING THE IMPORTANCE OF ARTIFACTS

Using the work of educators Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (1998, 2005), I encourage my students to study *deeply* and *broadly*, learning more about the individuals, their emotions, and the history of the event as they make meaning from the artifacts they unearth from the many available narratives. For instance, in studying the Spiegel and Bryks narratives, when students deepen their examination, they might make explicit their assumptions about ghetto life and its restrictions, its opportunities for survival, and the identity and background of the people portrayed, and then confirm, modify, or reject those assumptions based on the historical facts as they learn them. They might consider the moods of both optimism and despair and consider the ways in which such emotions shed light on the beliefs and situations of those who expressed them. They might argue that the Jews showed agency by maintaining the few belongings they still possessed and managing to eke out an existence in the ghetto, then support that conclusion with the text, and finally verify it through historical research.

When students broaden their examination, they might compare the artifacts in these stories to those in

other testimonies. They might examine photos and art of ghetto homes and possessions, or find and discuss ghetto scenes in films. They might subsume this event under the more encompassing ideas of displacement and loss to understand as much as possible about ghettoization. They might go beyond the facts of the narratives to uncover what happened to the people and the things they carried into the ghettos and camps, and what they left behind.

They might ask essential historical questions: “Why the Jews?” “Was the Holocaust inevitable?” “What remnants of the Holocaust remain *for us*?”

By encouraging readers to understand the Jewish experience of the Holocaust through literature and its artifacts, even while using the tools of the historian to analyze, make connections, probe, question, reflect, verify, and extend their thinking, we move them to feel compassion, an emotion that “may also serve to inform” them, notes McMullen (2012, p. 133).

ARTIFACTS LEFT BEHIND

We can learn history even from stories about the possessions that the Jews did *not* take with them when they were forced from their homes. In Elie Wiesel’s (2008) short story “The Watch,” we learn what his family did with the things they could not carry:

The time was late April, 1944.

In the early morning hours of that particular day, after a sleepless night, the ghetto was changed into a cemetery and its residents into gravediggers. We were digging feverishly in the courtyard, the garden, the cellar, consigning to the earth, temporarily, we thought, whatever remained of the belongings accumulated by . . . generations. . . .

My father took charge of the jewelry and valuable papers. His head bowed, he was silently digging near the barn. Not far away, my mother, crouched on the damp ground, was burying the silver candelabra she used only on Shabbat eve. . . . As for me, my only possession was my watch. It meant a lot to me. And so I decided to bury it in a dark, deep hole, three paces away from the fence, under a poplar tree whose thick, strong foliage seemed to provide a reasonably secure shelter.

All of us expected to recover our treasures. On our return, the earth would give them back to us. Until then, until the end of the storm, they would be safe.

Yes, we were naïve. We could not foresee that the very same evening, before the last train had time to leave the station, an excited mob of well-informed friendly neighbors would be rushing through the ghetto’s wide-open houses and courtyards, leaving not a stone or beam unturned, throwing themselves upon the loot. (pp. 220–221)

As literature, of course, Wiesel's work offers myriad opportunities for examination. As history, though, what can we learn from the fate of the artifacts in just this passage alone? Clearly, the Wiesel family, like so many others, chose to hide their most valuable possessions because they believed, as most did, that they would return to their homes at the end of the war. What gave them this false belief? What history must be uncovered for us to comprehend the language of deception, the enormity of the duplicity perpetrated on the Jews by the Nazis?

We also learn some ugly truths about the neighbors and their eager acquisition of Jewish belongings. Where do they fall on the continuum linking the bystander to the collaborator to the perpetrator? Their behavior here sheds light on the values they had—and perhaps also on how the Holocaust could have happened in the first place.

ARTIFACTS IN CAMP NARRATIVES

Musical instruments, jewelry, postcards: artifacts all, they help us learn. "In the dark halls of Buchenwald," writes Michael Blumenthal (2018, pp. 38-39), Julie plays a violin. Why were Jews allowed to keep musical instruments? What scheme did Nazis have for Jewish musicians?

Annette Bialik Harchik (2018) tells us that "mother was stripped, shorn, / and tattooed, leaving behind her earrings / in a huge glittering pile of jewelry" (p. 40). If we were analyzing only the poem, we might discuss the idea that although today Harchik's mother's "lobes hang heavy, / the empty holes / grown shut," the poet, by placing key words apart from the text, draws our attention to the lost earrings, visually pulling them from the grasp of the Nazis. Necessary historical questions, though, are clear: What did the Germans do with the stolen silver and gold, the countless rings, watches, earrings, necklaces that women wore or hid on themselves, hoping to use them, perhaps, to barter for food or for life itself?

Stephen Herz (2018) writes that the Jews of Birkenau were forced to write "*Es Geht Mir Gut*"—"I am well" (p. 41)—on cards to be sent to relatives still to be deported. Students will ask: What was the purpose of this cruel deception? What was the reaction of the recipients? Where are these cards today? Who saved them, and why?

ARTIFACTS IN LITERATURE OF THE AFTERMATH

Some artifacts, like some survivors, were saved. Anthropomorphized, they, too, are bereft. Yakov Azriel's "We, the *Tefillin* of Once-Was Europe" (p. 42) highlights one of the myriad religious objects that succored European Jews. His *tefillin* "lament" and "protest." What role did religious artifacts play in helping Jews resist? Of what use and value were stolen religious objects to the Nazis?

Shoes, of course, are iconic artifacts, heaped in museums. "At the end," Sheila Golburgh Johnson writes, "the

shoes / . . . spoke" (p. 43). Literature written about preserved and displayed artifacts animates them and teaches us how critical the individual object is to our understanding of the multiplicity of events that make up the Holocaust. Elizabeth Spalding (2016) takes us with her as she visits Majdanek and wanders past the shoes that "filled three prison barracks." She is numb, overwhelmed with the enormity of the crime—until understanding dawns suddenly, sharply, as her eyes pick out one of those artifacts:

Floor to ceiling, rows on rows / I could not comprehend this crime. / The numbers were too huge. // But when I saw a pair of red high-heeled sandals / still bright among the piles of rotting shoes / I stopped. // What kind of woman would wear / high-heeled sandals to a death camp? / I realized: my mother. / And then I understood and wept. (p. 104)

Tino Villanueva's (2018) poem "At the Holocaust Museum: Washington D. C." (pp. 44-49) clarifies the way in which the text and the museum artifact interact:

"We've had it told to us before; / we've seen annihilation / . . . Now before our eyes: how darkly different / when a deep terrain of text persists with artifacts; / and photographs, each one a cell of time made real. / We turn, . . . / and through a freight car walk along once more, / fitting facts in place—: / what led up to what; how a people lived / keeping at their tasks which came to be their lives / with the etched impression of their / history taking place, / until one day: were seized" (pp. 44-45)

The artifact, the text that contextualizes it, and the questions that it prompts—this is how learning occurs, how we "fit facts in place" and how we learn "how a people"—and how each person—lived.

Such particular artifacts can prompt students to pose questions they did not know they had. Azriel writes that the *tefillin* "have been waiting" for "forty years, fifty years, eternity" (p. 42). For what do they wait? In the poem "Pigtail," the poet Tadeusz Rózewicz (1948) writes:

When all the women in the transport / had their heads shaved / four workmen / with brooms made of birch twigs / swept up / and gathered the hair // Behind clean glass / the stiff hair lies / of those suffocated in gas chambers / There are pins and side combs / in this hair // The hair is not shot through with light / is not parted by the breeze / is not touched by any hand / or rain or lips // In huge chests / clouds of dry hair / of those suffocated / and a faded plait / a pigtail with a ribbon / pulled at school / by naughty boys.

For what does the pigtail wait? And the freight car, the piles of suitcases, shoes, eyeglasses? At the least, they wait to teach us—and, perhaps, to warn us.

ARTIFACTS AND THEIR OWNERS' NARRATIVES

In this excerpt from a poem called “Shoshana,” Reva Sharon (2009) recalls several Holocaust artifacts consigned to oblivion and illustrates the necessity of continuing to reclaim them—even those in literature, even those that remain only as a clear and grateful memory—so that we who remain will be able to uncover their histories, to learn about the Jews who owned them. Shoshana Schreiber, Sharon tells us, bears the number A-25415 on her arm and

remembers a scarf / long lost white and crimson / rescued from a heap / of abandoned clothes / and stuffed (verboten) / in the toe of her shoe / as she passed (otherwise / innocent naked and shorn) / the armed guards of Auschwitz // *Shoshi Shoshi* / you will survive // On her high hard bunk / she tied the scarf / securely around her head / crimson and white in a sea of sick gray / caught the eye of the kapo / who selected her for / work in the kitchen / where she ate what she could scrape / and wondered why with a scarcity of bread / the stacks always smoked at the bakery ovens // *Shoshi Shoshi* / you will survive. (pp. 98–99)

How much did luck contribute to survival—and how much did luck depend upon one's possessions, as well as one's cleverness, quickness, and resilience, and upon other people? A white-and-crimson scarf, “rescued” from a pile of abandoned clothes, stuffed into her shoe, tied around her head, noticed by a kapo who lets her work in the kitchen—what does it tell us about Shoshi and about the conditions she endured in Auschwitz? Focusing on artifacts in narrative can motivate us to explore the profound losses suffered by survivors even as they introduce us to the reservoirs of strength these saved remnants somehow summoned.

THE FRAGMENTS LEFT BEHIND

The world will be bereft when the eyewitnesses to this grim history are no longer with us. We may, though, take some small comfort in the knowledge that when survivors themselves can no longer testify, their things, the fragments left behind and memorialized in literature, can quietly but very clearly speak for them.

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Pnina Rosenberg explains that in the work of Nancy Patz, “inanimate objects such as earrings, shoes, postcards, a yellow star, tefillin, and a violin reflect and represent the vicious pattern of persecution—deportation—annihilation, and create a sensitive dialogue with poems centered on those artifacts.” Patz narrates “the story of the Holocaust and its commemoration through objects that reflect both the identity of their individual owners and the role of those owners in shaping collective memory.”

Pnina Rosenberg

Nancy Patz and the Topography of Pain and Memory

*To look
into devastated eyes is not enough; to touch
the photographs is not enough
Even if their breath could reach me,
I could utter nothing among the ruins
written with light.*

(Villanueva, 2018, this issue, p. 48)

Nancy Patz, a well-known American artist and author of numerous picture books, has previously traced the identity and fates of the Jews in the Holocaust through objects. In 2003, she published the award-winning *Who Was the Woman Who Wore the Hat?*, a picture book inspired by a hat the artist saw on display at the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam. Intrigued and saddened by its anonymity, she created possible stories to humanize the faceless, nameless woman behind the hat. In 2014, Patz contributed to this journal a delicate and moving series of panels based on Holocaust artifacts. Treating each as a portrait, Patz wondered, “From where did it come? To whom had these objects belonged?” and concluded, “Artifacts move us even when they tell us only mere fragments of the full history” (p. 15).

Her series here is comprised of nine images (8.5 in. × 11 in.) that draw a topography of pain and memory.

IN THE BEGINNING: STIGMATIZATION AND SEGREGATION

The series opens with “Star,” a watercolor that depicts a yellow star inscribed with the word *Jude* whose stitches indicate that it was sewn on Jews’ clothing. On the upper-right of the painting, Patz scribbles a bigger Star of David in white chalk on a shop window. The juxtaposition of the

two images accompanies Charles Adès Fishman’s moving poem “Star,” echoing the stigmatization of European Jews that socially and spatially isolated and segregated them in the initial phase of the Holocaust. “He walked slowly under the new burden. . . . The butcher’s door / was shut but a star scrawled on the glass / spoke openly: *Juden! Juden!*” (p. 37).

Through the double images—the yellow star and the Star of David—Patz represents the suffocation of the European Jewish space that preceded outright murder. The yellow star metonymically represents a Jew, perhaps dismissed from his work and walking aimlessly. He is confronted and blocked by the red brick wall of the local butcher’s shop, on which a bigger and more threatening Star of David is inscribed, a visual manifestation of being unwanted, undesirable. The graffiti-like inscription also reminds the viewer of the images violently scrawled on Jews’ enterprises during the November 1938 *Kristallnacht* pogrom, the menacing prologue to the second stage of the Holocaust.

IN THE CAMPS: FROM INTERNMENT TO ANNIHILATION

The step that followed the Jews’ stigmatization and segregation was interning them in ghettos and camps. “Juliek’s Violin,” a Chagall-like double-spread painting that illustrates Michael Blumenthal’s eponymous poem, depicts two violins. The left, done in shades of brown, is in a rectangular frame; the right, done in delicate black and grey, is held by the young and fragile inmate, Juliek. As he plays, the notes rise like chimney smoke and penetrate the barracks. “In the dank halls of Buchenwald, / a man is playing his life” (p. 38).

Despite being stripped of his material possessions, Juliek’s spirit lives. He finds consolation, a momentary refuge from the horrendous circumstances, by pursuing

the art that confirms his existence as a human being. “To discover that there was any semblance of art in a concentration camp must be surprise enough for an outsider . . . [it] was another of the soul’s weapons in the fight of self-preservation” (Frankl, 1984, p. 54).

The arrival at Auschwitz and its process of dehumanization are portrayed in the minute watercolor-and-acrylic painting “Earrings,” which accompanies Annette Bialik Harchik’s poem of the same name. Patz depicts a “glittering pile of jewelry” on a golden background that reflects and symbolizes the progression of stripping the Jews’ clothing, their possessions, and all emblems of individuality. The heap of gold earrings in the lower part of the painting contrasts with its otherwise void space, an echo of the old survivor whose “lobes hang heavy, / the empty holes / grown shut” (p. 40). The swirling golden background evokes a vortex about to draw the jewels—and their owners—into the depths of the infernal ocean of the Final Solution.

The delicate watercolor “*Es Geht Mir Gut*” depicts a handful of seemingly ordinary postcards that are scattered on, and frame, part of the background. These objects mirror another diabolic scheme implemented before the gassing “in the undressing room / in Birkenau,” chillingly evoked in Stephen Herz’s poem: “Jews were given postcards / to write home” (p. 41). Patz depicts various tourist-like postcards addressed to numerous European destinations. The addresses and their calligraphy are variable, yet the content is uniform. Some wrote in pencil, others in ink; some reveal a greater mastery of penmanship, while others are more hesitant. Yet despite their variety, all are doomed to the same collective fate.

MEMORY AND COMMEMORATION

Religious and worldly objects left behind by the Jews gain iconic and symbolic meaning in the process of remembrance. “*Tefillin*,” a monochrome charcoal painting, depicts a set of small black leather boxes; containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah, they are worn by observant Jews during morning prayers. Patz’s black tefillin and their white-grey straps are depicted in the lower part of the painting and morph into an endless mass of blank graves drawn only in contour. The tefillin symbolize not only their murdered owner but also the vast, vanished, nameless Jewish community, most of whom have no tomb. Thus Patz’s oeuvre illustrates Yakov Azriel’s poem in which “the *tefillin* of once-was Europe . . . / are small, but large enough to be / our people’s only tombstones” (p. 42).

Piles of shoes left by the inmates are not only exhibits like those displayed at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, but have also become moving memorials, as with the bronze “Shoes on the Danube Bank,” commemorating Budapest Jews shot by fascist militiamen after being

ordered to take off their shoes at the edge of the river. Only their shoes remained, while their bodies fell into the water and were carried away. Patz’s “Shoes” depicts a variety of shoes in different colors, sizes, and styles, circularly scattered haphazardly around the frame, as if their owners had left them in haste. The painting’s composition and color are a delicate and sensitive reflection of Sheila Golburgh Johnson’s graphic poem (p. 43). Both artist and poet animate the orphaned inanimate objects, enabling their numerous owners to tell the story of those who were tragically silenced. Both poem and painting confer on the shoes dynamic and free movement, a right that their owners were forever denied. The contrast between the colorful image and the painful content intensifies the experience of the horror suffered by the shoes’ owners.

The cycle closes with three double-spread monochrome triptychs inspired by Tino Villanueva’s “At The Holocaust Museum: Washington D. C.” (pp. 44–49). The triptych combines a visit to the museum’s historical evidence and objects with the visitor’s personal involvement: “Now before our eyes: how darkly different / when a deep terrain of text persists with artifacts” (p. 44). This movement and this personal interaction are evident in the visual images. Patz (2017, personal correspondence) explains:

I wanted the art for this poem to be united in spirit because, although it reflects different subjects, this is one poem, so I used a limited palette of black and white for all three drawings. I think some of the power of this poem lies in its movement from “Before Our Eyes”—the overwhelmingly catastrophic *Vernichtung* (annihilation/destruction/extermination) of the first part to “The Freight Car”—the endless lines of people forced into freight cars and then to their deaths, so many people we can hardly see them as individuals—to “The Photographs” of very specific people at particular moments in their lives—so many, many photographs! Identifying with particular people in the photographs helps us feel the loss of six million in a very personal way.

The triptych and the poem introduce the museum as a mediator, as a keeper of memory, as one that encourages the viewer to see the events through its concept. Once all phases of the Holocaust have been displayed and one has passed between the stations, the accumulated images and narrative confer another experience on the visitor. He gains a wider perspective in which to embed the great catastrophe and, thanks to the interaction with the palpable and tangible artifacts, he is better equipped to grasp its enormity.

THE SILENCE OF INCOMPREHENSION

The series that opens with a personal narrative visualized by the Star of David concludes with a walk in and through the “geography of pain.” The objects move from stigmatizing (“Star”) and misleadingly colorful (“Shoes”) images to monochromatic ones based on documentary black-and-white photographs (“The Freight Car,” “The Photographs”). Despite the diversity of the artist’s media, a common denominator unites her compositions: a huge and almost tangible void, a blank space, a roaring silence of incomprehension of the scope of tragedy, a silent memory of commemoration. This void could be filled only with the sensitive, subdued, and shattering poems.

The artifacts simultaneously reveal and conceal. As Patz (2014) concludes, because we are familiar with them from daily use, once they are embedded and contextualized in Holocaust remembrance, they

urge us to question, to study, to listen to testimony, and to remember. They call on us to wonder about the lives of those who owned, wrote, wore, used, posed for, played with, and prayed with these remnants. If we do not, we will find no answers at all. No one will know the stories, and no one will ever remember. (p. 15)

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The title of this essay was inspired by Tino Villanueva’s poem “At The Holocaust Museum: Washington D. C.,” pp. 44–49 in this issue of *PRISM*.

Charles Adès Fishman

Star

She made the star too large —
who knew better? Did they enclose
a template with the order? It was
her nature to be generous. And he?
He walked slowly under the new burden.
At work, the others smiled in their sleeves:
The star among us! one wit called him,
and another: *Star of our nativity!*
Later, under a street lamp, darkness
radiating from him. . . . The butcher's door
was shut but a star scrawled on the glass
spoke openly: *Juden! Juden!* On his back,
his own star moved. *Star of Life.*
Star of Death.





Michael Blumenthal

Juliek's Violin

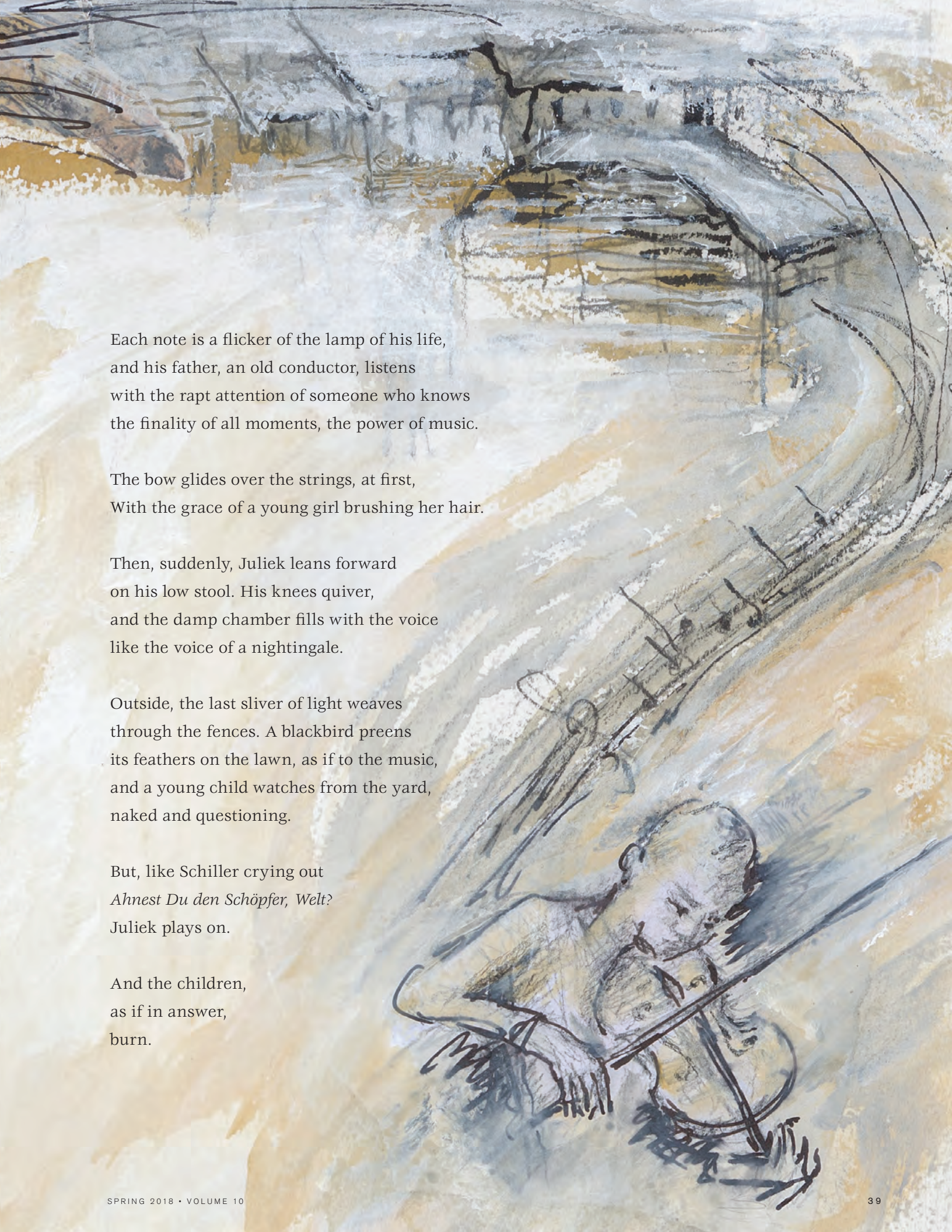
Ahnest Du den Schöpfer, Welt?
(World, do you feel the Maker near?)

—FRIEDRICH SCHILLER, "Ode to Joy"

In the dank halls of Buchenwald,
a man is playing his life.

It is only a fragment from Beethoven —
soft, melodic, ephemeral as the sleep
of butterflies, or the nightmares of
an infant, but tonight it is his life.

In one hand, he holds the instrument,
resonant with potential. In the other,
the fate of the instrument: hairs
of a young horse, strung between wood,
as the skin of a lampshade is strung
between wood.



Each note is a flicker of the lamp of his life,
and his father, an old conductor, listens
with the rapt attention of someone who knows
the finality of all moments, the power of music.

The bow glides over the strings, at first,
With the grace of a young girl brushing her hair.

Then, suddenly, Juliek leans forward
on his low stool. His knees quiver,
and the damp chamber fills with the voice
like the voice of a nightingale.

Outside, the last sliver of light weaves
through the fences. A blackbird preens
its feathers on the lawn, as if to the music,
and a young child watches from the yard,
naked and questioning.

But, like Schiller crying out
Ahnest Du den Schöpfer, Welt?
Juliek plays on.

And the children,
as if in answer,
burn.

Annette Bialik Harchik

Earrings

A Bialik tradition back home was
for a woman to wear earrings
from birth to death.

Ears pierced in infancy were
adorned in string;
small gold hoops for girlhood;
diamond studs with marriage.

When the trains pulled up
at Auschwitz
my mother was stripped, shorn,
and tattooed, leaving behind her earrings
in a huge glittering pile of jewelry.

Under her wavy white hair,
her lobes hang heavy,
the empty holes
grown shut.



Stephen Herz

Es Geht Mir Gut

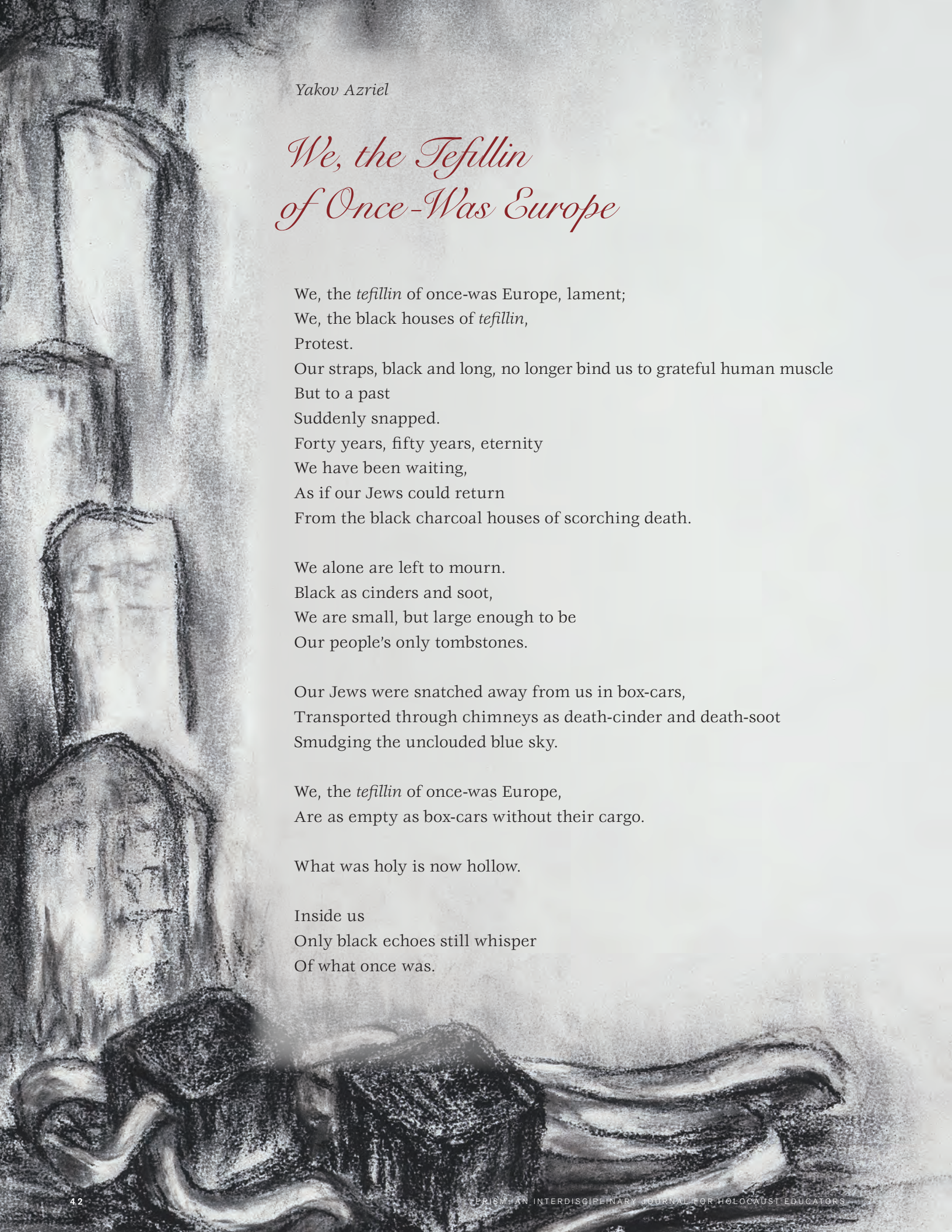
In the undressing room
in Birkenau

Jews were given postcards
to write home.

Each had to say:
Es geht mir gut.

I am well.





Yakov Azriel

We, the Tefillin of Once-Was Europe

We, the *tefillin* of once-was Europe, lament;
We, the black houses of *tefillin*,
Protest.

Our straps, black and long, no longer bind us to grateful human muscle
But to a past
Suddenly snapped.

Forty years, fifty years, eternity
We have been waiting,
As if our Jews could return
From the black charcoal houses of scorching death.


We alone are left to mourn.
Black as cinders and soot,
We are small, but large enough to be
Our people's only tombstones.

Our Jews were snatched away from us in box-cars,
Transported through chimneys as death-cinder and death-soot
Smudging the unclouded blue sky.

We, the *tefillin* of once-was Europe,
Are as empty as box-cars without their cargo.

What was holy is now hollow.

Inside us
Only black echoes still whisper
Of what once was.

An abstract painting of various shoes in different colors and styles, rendered in a textured, expressive style. The shoes are scattered across the page, with some appearing more clearly than others. The colors include red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and black, set against a light, textured background.

Sheila Golburgh Johnson

Shoes

At the end

the shoes

powdered over with dust

or ashes

faded

splattered

stained

worn cowhide

canvas

sandals

streaked velvet

battered kidskin

pumps

oxfords

wedgies

boots

sneakers

toe shoes

Mary Janes

gaping throats

torn tongues

spoke



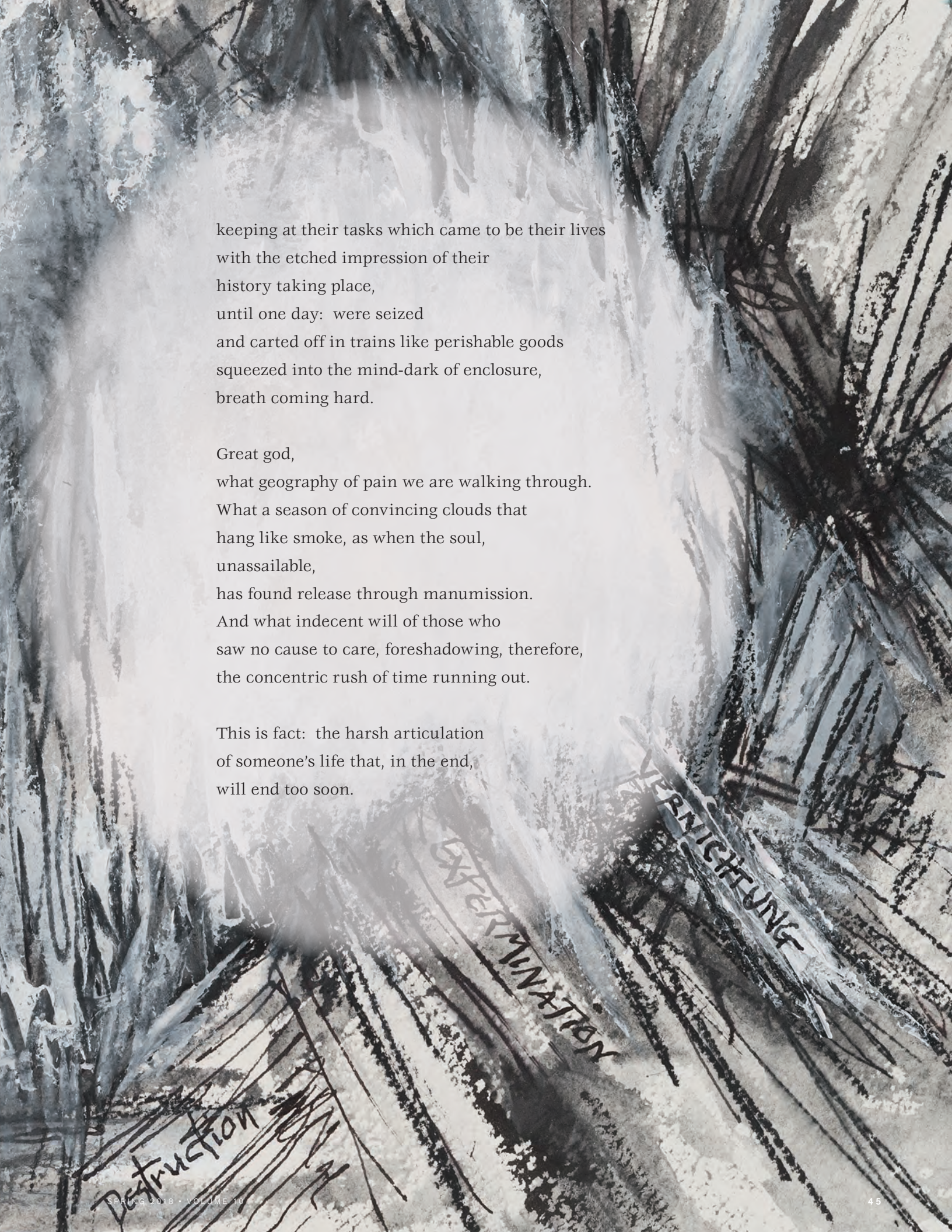
Tino Villanueva

At The Holocaust Museum: Washington D. C.

I – *Before Our Eyes*

We've had it told to us before;
we've seen annihilation, *Vernichtung*,
at the movie house in town.
Videos reveal the same declensions of rage,
speech acts crowds shall act upon —
no principles governing reflection,
words shattering glass, building up the
circumstances of the fire,
the same conclusion mortality demands.

Now before our eyes: how darkly different
when a deep terrain of text persists with artifacts;
and photographs, each one a cell of time made real.
We turn, and make our way on cobblestones
pounded out from Mauthausen,
and through a freight car walk along once more,
fitting facts in place —:
what led up to what; how a people lived



keeping at their tasks which came to be their lives
with the etched impression of their
history taking place,
until one day: were seized
and carted off in trains like perishable goods
squeezed into the mind-dark of enclosure,
breath coming hard.

Great god,
what geography of pain we are walking through.
What a season of convincing clouds that
hang like smoke, as when the soul,
unassailable,
has found release through manumission.
And what indecent will of those who
saw no cause to care, foreshadowing, therefore,
the concentric rush of time running out.

This is fact: the harsh articulation
of someone's life that, in the end,
will end too soon.

II – *The Freight Car*

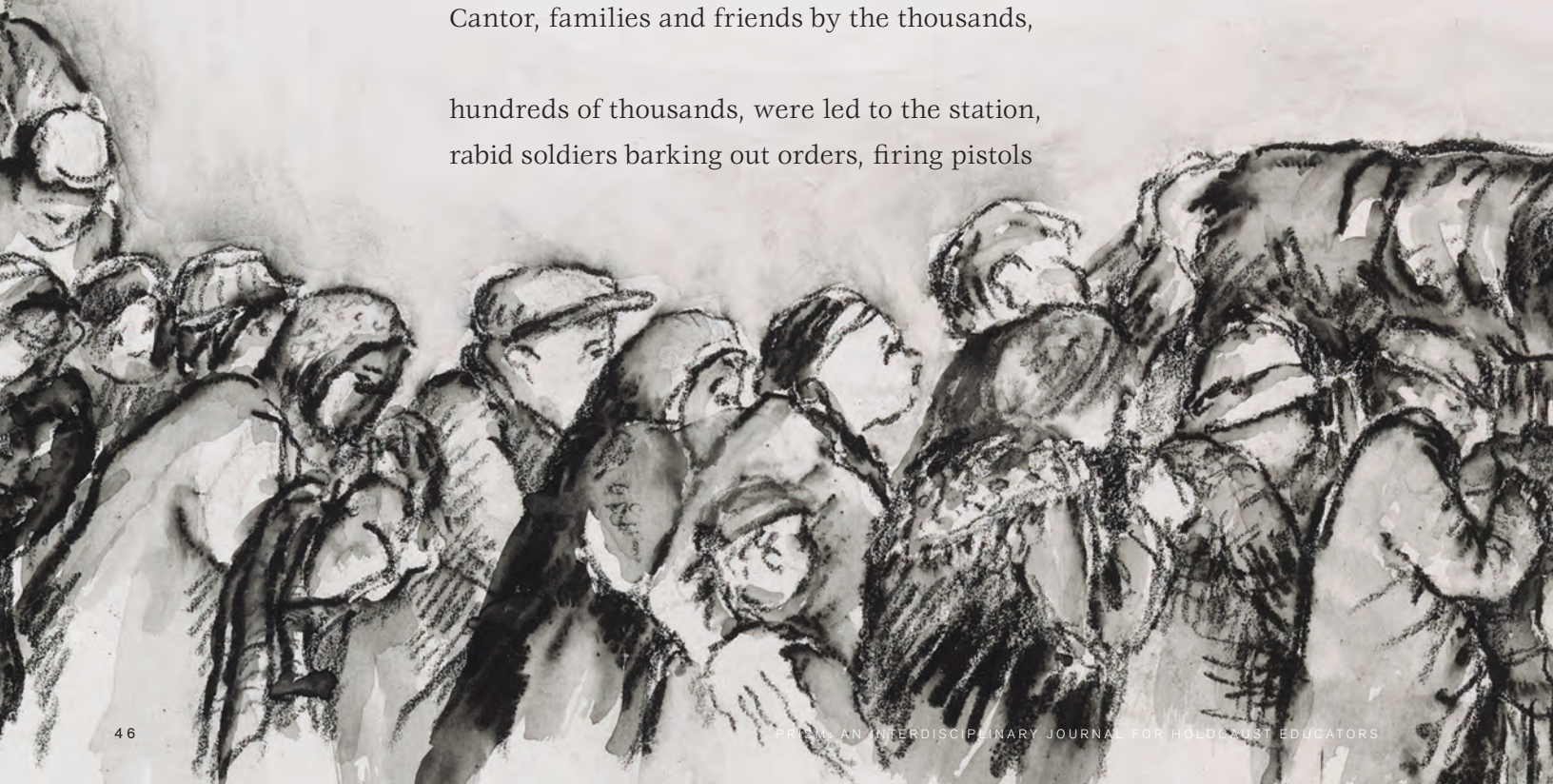
We move on, affirming the proximity of everything, eyes breaking open to the light: installations here, photographs and objects there, the visual details of time-kept dying. Suddenly: an intractable fragment of truth — a freight car brought, finally, to a halt

on the same illicit logic of rails. No stench now; human grime gone, washed away by water and soap and the varnish of time. Still it affronts: the tight seal of steel and wood, a prisonhouse suffocatingly small, non-sequent, disconnected from the event.

If steel and scarred wood could recount their story from memory, could beg forgiveness or bring back the dead, then my hand might not flinch at their touch as I enter, enter the past: One evening a cantor was singing before a full congregation,

true worship known by heart. Peacefulness in the infinite, and the lightness of candlelight breathlessly still when: a muster of men from a shadow realm broke forth, cutting off the prayer. Cantor, families and friends by the thousands,

hundreds of thousands, were led to the station, rabid soldiers barking out orders, firing pistols



in the air, dogs bringing up the right flank. So many helpless immortals so far from their dwelling,

clutching their garments, huddled like the bundles they carried, unable to run away from their names. To think they leaned where I'm standing, squatted or kneeled, dark-stricken, their children driven to tantrums; or stood where they could against

steel-dug-into-wood, no heaven above them, no earth below. Some in their places fell mute, were confused, riddled with fright when the train screeched, jolted forth, shimmied and swayed and pulled out. Others kept faith, and for them the summit of sky remained

whole; still others felt death beginning to sink into them — everyone drawing a breath: breath in, breath out, holding their breath, sighing, inhaling-exhaling full breaths, half-breaths, gasping with all complexities of thirst. Long after Treblinka,

“Water,” I hear them cry. “Water, air.” I step out, looking back as I move away with the crowd. One freight car at a standstill, uncoupled from its long concatenation of steel dissolved into this artifact: the summation of all that advances no more.



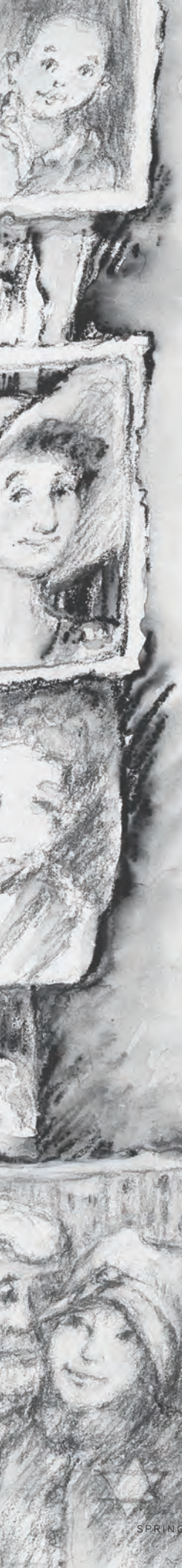


III – *The Photographs*

To look
into devastated eyes is not enough; to touch
the photographs is not enough.
Even if their breath could reach me,
I could utter nothing among the ruins
written with light.
But someone such as I, a nobody in all of this,
has come to see (this much the heart allows):
what man has done to man, human acts of the profane,
and the defeated country side.

Led to camps
by the uniform substance of hate,
one by one they held
still enough to be caught in the strict regulation
of natural or flat light. I read it in their eyes:
reluctance seeking its own landscape
with so much night to come. To myself I say:
this face, or that face had a name:
Joseph, Daniel, or Hannah,
but oh, you are a number —
sharp alchemy scored on skin.
I pray your soul remained intact until the end.

(Print after print: I am carried away by destruction
exhausted into fact, forgetting
the persecuted who escaped; who from the
edges of the battlefield were saved, here by a
timely neighbor, a benevolent baker; there by a
factory owner, a farmer, or by decent Catholic nuns
— reflexive acts of the unsung.)



Then there was Ejszyszki (A-shish-key), 1941:
a village of 4,000 that could not find the
doors to exodus — slaughtered in two days.
I touch the photographs of how it was
before it ended in a great field of darkness . . .
and my body shrieks.
Five decades, and in another country,
I am too late as in a blazing nightmare
where I reach out,
but cannot save you, cannot save you.
Sarah, Rachel, Benjamin, in this light you have risen,
where the past is construed as present.
For all that is in me: Let the dead go on living,
let these words become human.

I am your memory now.



"I wrote 'How to Read Holocaust Poems' in the early 1980s because I felt even then, less than 40 years after the Destruction, it had become too easy to write about the Shoah," explains Charles Adès Fishman, "as if the murder of 6 million Jews were merely another subject for an author to address. It seemed to me then that there had not been enough change in the way human beings lived on this planet, that only a small minority were actually living in response to that enormous catastrophe of the mind and spirit.

"As with all serious attempts to comprehend the destruction of the Jews of Europe,' I once wrote and still believe, 'in the end, Holocaust poetry is a bridge between that which can be known and expressed, and that which cannot. The best use of our mother tongue is a form of spiritual resistance. It is memory given voice, and it is prayer.'

"The way to read such poetry," Fishman concludes, "is with a quiet mind and an open heart."

Charles Adès Fishman

How to Read Holocaust Poems

The sun beats down
its cryptic ode
to violence
and desire rides high
in the saddle
of the cold wind:
tufts and drifts
of straw, slivers
of charred bone.

Though each verse
rings true,
the poem is a lie:
only one's ache
to speak
matters —
only one's hunger
to waken.

Forgiveness is not
the theme
nor is despair.
Only the first hush
matters —
the rest, a voice that
drones
at a deaf ear.

From The Death Mazurka

In this interview, Myra Sklarew introduces us to Charlotte Sorkine, a fighter in the French Jewish Resistance. “In Nice, France, during World War II,” writes Sklarew, “Sorkine conveyed groups of children to the Swiss border to be rescued. Under the direction of Maurice Loebenberg, she and Adolfo Kaminsky created thousands of false papers. After the Gestapo arrested 24 members of her group, she joined the Jewish Fighting Organization, and later took an active part in the liberation of Paris. For her service in the French Resistance, she was awarded the Médaille de la Résistance, the Croix du Combattant Volontaire de la Résistance, the Médaille des Services Volontaires Dans la France Libre, and the Medaille Commemorativa de la Guerre 1939–1945. Yet few know her story.”

Myra Sklarew

Charlotte Sorkine

Shortly after she agreed to speak to me for an interview, Charlotte Sorkine Noshpitz told me that she had had a dream. Members of her Resistance group are seated on the floor, the way children in a group sometimes arrange themselves. She is standing—behind them, looking down at their heads. She is shocked to see them. Most, she tells me, are dead by now. She was the youngest of her group, 17, and at the time of this interview, she was 88. If the others had been alive at that time, they would have been nearly 100.

Charlotte died on January 12, 2017, at the age of 91. I had known her for more than 50 years. We met in 1964, when she and her husband joined us for a Passover seder at the home I shared with my then-husband, Bruce Sklarew, in Maryland. A psychoanalyst, he worked at the National Institute of Mental Health with her husband, Joseph Noshpitz, an eminent child psychiatrist and child psychoanalyst who conducted our seders for more than 30 years. He died in 1997 at the age of 74, and my former husband and I edited and published *The Journey of Child Development*, a collection of his unpublished papers, in 2012.

Though I had wanted to interview Charlotte for decades, as I feared that her story would never be told, she had demurred. “It is not a story, but a life,” she said. “It came about because of the situation I lived in. If it becomes a story, you can rent it. Like a good movie. But it would not be understandable,” she told me. I recall her saying at one time that it would no longer be hers if she told it.

In 1986, when I was thinking of leaving my life of that time and heading north to direct the artists’ community of Yaddo, Charlotte gave me two gifts. The first was a tiny book called *The Essay of Silence*, published in 1905. All its pages were blank. The second gift was a small book by Vercors, a pseudonym of Jean Bruller, written in 1942 and

called *Le Silence de la Mer* (*The Silence of the Sea*), published secretly in Nazi-occupied Paris. It tells the story of an elderly man and his niece who refuse to speak to the German officer occupying their house. Both gifts reminded me that Charlotte did not wish to make a story out of her experiences.

The impetus for our conversations came in 2012 when I received the spring issue of *PRISM*. It fell open to a page with a photograph of a young woman who had been a member of the French Jewish Resistance during World War II. Marianne Cohn had taken hundreds of children to the Swiss border before the Gestapo captured, tortured, and killed her, only three weeks before the liberation of Annemasse [see Davi Walders’s “From ‘A Late Kaddish for Marianne Cohn,’” *PRISM*, Spring 2012, pp. 100–102—Ed.]. Though Cohn had the chance to save herself, she determined that to do so would put the children at too great a risk, and she refused. I was struck by the similarities between Cohn’s life and Charlotte’s. Could Cohn have been someone Charlotte knew?

Over the years, Charlotte talked informally with my husband and me about the times during the war. After I mentioned Cohn, though, and Charlotte agreed to be interviewed, she and I talked in a more deliberate way. We would sit together at the huge dining room table in her Washington, DC, home, which was filled with her sculptures, including a bust of her father, figures reminiscent of the work of Alberto Giacometti, small abstract metal pieces mounted in wood, and hand-blown glass pieces made by her grandson. Over the course of our conversations, among the many things I learned was that Noshpitz did know about Cohn. In fact, one of Noshpitz’s duties was to assume Cohn’s responsibilities of transporting children to the Swiss border.

Charlotte Sorkine was born in Paris on February 15, 1925. Her mother was born in Braila, Romania, and her father in Rogachev (now in Belarus). They were not French citizens at the time of the German occupation, which is important to note because foreign nationals were taken in the first roundups. As early as 1940, Vichy laws revoked the citizenship of naturalized Jews and decreed that foreign nationals of the Jewish faith could be interned in camps or restricted to residence by regional prefects. [Fig. 1]



FIG. 1. Charlotte Sorkine. Courtesy of Myra Sklarew.

Charlotte's maternal grandparents lived in the family home, as did her brother, Leo Serge Lazare Sorkine, a poet who served in the Resistance and was betrayed and sent to Silesia to work in the salt mines. He was killed before the Russian liberation, too weak to survive a forced march in freezing conditions.

Charlotte grew up in a highly intellectual household. Her maternal grandfather, Wolf Louis Horowitz, born in 1866, was a professor of anthropology who spent much of his professional career at King's College London. They held weekly salons with such individuals as Henri Bergson and Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers. During the war, Horowitz and his wife were taken to the Rothschild Internment Center. They both died in 1946. His numerous publications are archived in New York at the Center for Jewish History's Leo Baeck Institute.

As a young child, Charlotte heard about the Germans and an apparent danger, though not a clearly defined one. She recalls German refugees coming to the door to sell pencils. At one point, she gathered up a collection of prized porcelain dolls marked "Made in Germany," walked to the balcony of her home, and threw them over the railing, where they broke into pieces. Years later, when she and her brother were teenagers, their mother told them that they must attach to their clothing a Jewish star made of yellow cloth and outlined in black to indicate that they were Jewish. They both wept. [Fig. 2]



FIG. 2. Star of David worn on clothing of French Jews.

In July 1942, French police came on several occasions in the middle of the night, looking for Charlotte's father, who was hiding in their house. In the daytime, on July 16, 1942, two French policemen came for her mother. Charlotte packed a suitcase for her. This was the beginning of the infamous Vel D'Hive raid, a two-day-long mass arrest where more than 13,000 Jews were taken, 44% women and 31% children. (On a visit to Paris, in 1988, Charlotte walked us past the prefecture of police: "Here is the place where the policemen served who came to take my mother," she said. "They were young, embarrassed.")

Her mother was taken to the center of Paris, to the Vélodrome d'Hiver, the cycling track where Jewish people were taken in large numbers and kept for five days without food or water, other than that provided by relief groups, and without toilets or a place to rest. From there they went to the internment camp in Drancy, and then by train to Auschwitz, where they were killed.

Charlotte tells me she has had a dream about her mother: "I saw her from the back, with her navy-blue coat and hat. She didn't even say goodbye." She tells me this in French. "It cannot be said in English," she explains. She repeats this phrase in French several times. "I see myself bringing the suitcase. She didn't even say goodbye."

Her brother had already left for Nice; their father left shortly thereafter. Charlotte, then 17, remained in the family's home in Bourg-la-Reine with her grandparents. Eventually she headed south to join her father and brother

in Nice, in the basement apartment they shared. One day, her father, upon opening a closet in their room, came upon a stash of his daughter's weapons: by then Charlotte had joined a Resistance group. She realized that she had to arrange to get her father out of the country immediately. She explained:

I made false papers for him as a Chinese man, and led him to think that I would accompany him to Switzerland, but as we approached the border I bid him goodbye. A *porteur*, one who led people to safety, guided him to a camp in Switzerland, where he lived out the war. At the Liberation, he returned to Paris. He was shocked to discover that his son had been deported.

When Charlotte took over Marianne Cohn's responsibilities, she continued the work of transporting groups of youngsters to the Swiss border. She made false documents, received and transported weapons and money, planted explosives where Germans gathered. One time, she pasted plastic explosives on the wall of a movie theater in Paris where members of the SS were meeting. "We heard the boom," she recalled. "It worked! Imagine!"

Among Charlotte's many responsibilities was guiding men to Toulouse, where *porteurs* took them to the Spanish border.

"Here at night they crossed the Pyrenees to the Spanish frontier and were brought to bordellos that served as safe houses," she said. "Some spoke only Yiddish. Some went to join the Resistance in North Africa."

She recalled riding her bike, its basket loaded with weapons and weapon parts, when German soldiers confronted her. In that split second—with no time to think—she let her bicycle fall at the feet of the soldiers. They assisted her in getting to her feet, and she rode off.

Such situations arose often, and required an instinctive response. One day, she boarded a train for Nice carrying a suitcase with weapons. Her journey required a train change in Marseille. She chose to sit among the German soldiers because it was far more common for the French soldiers to inspect French passenger bags. The Germans talked with her and helped her off the train in Marseille. They checked her suitcase with their own luggage in the train station, as there was a wait for the connecting train to Nice.

"If you want to see a real French soccer match while we wait for the train, I will take you," Charlotte told the soldiers. With that, they all went off to the game. When they returned to the station, the German soldiers removed her suitcase—green, with a double floor for hiding weapons and money—from the baggage check. They handed it to her and boarded the train for Nice.

Among those in Jewish Resistance organizations in France during the war, some 40% were women—an aston-

ishing figure, considering that women had few rights at this time, including the right to vote, which was not granted until 1944. A very small percentage of girls had matriculation degrees or any university education. Yet women played a major role in the Resistance in both decision-making positions and the execution of missions. Charlotte told me she believed that women had quite different instincts from men: "perhaps not the same species!"

What makes one person seek the hidden contours of safety and another put aside all risk? Perhaps it would have gone differently for Charlotte Sorkine or Charlotte de Nice or Anne Delpuch, or any of her various identities, had she not opened the door of a synagogue where a Jewish resistance group was forming. It might have gone differently had she not passed a test she did not know she was taking, given by Lariche, one of the Resistance leaders, at the start of the occupation. She had gone in search of false identity papers and made her first contact with him:

We met in a park. I am with a big, tall man, Lariche, on a bench. All of a sudden, a man comes and tells him that such and such were arrested and tortured. I didn't move. I waited and waited. Then Lariche talked with me and gave me the papers. I suppose when that man came to talk in front of me, it was to see my reaction.

When I asked about the change in her thinking, from child to Resistance fighter, she responded, "Risks and fear are two different things. . . . When you are young, you don't think things can happen to you. You don't think of it; you have something you must do."

"But," I said to her, "some were hidden. OSE [Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants, a humanitarian organization for the rescue of children] took care of and hid the children. Why didn't you take that route? You could have gone into hiding."

"I had no choice," she told me. "You cannot go back. My grandparents were arrested, my mother taken, my brother sent to the free zone. It was my destiny." [Fig. 3]



FIG. 3. Medals awarded to Charlotte Sorkine for her service in the French Resistance. Courtesy of Myra Sklarew.

After the war, Jean-Paul Sartre met in cafes with some of the young people who had served in the Resistance. His thinking about existentialism seemed to be in accord with their lives at that time: Where do they go from this moment? They cannot reconstruct their former lives: Parents, siblings, and family structures are missing. What do they do with what they, as youngsters, have been required to learn in these war years: risk-taking, destruction, loss of life, loss of trust, and on the other hand, deep trust in their particular group?

At first, Charlotte began to study—at an atelier for life-drawing classes, then on to the Sorbonne to study psychology, to the Louvre for the study of art history, and to language school. She had a darkroom in her house, and at the time in 1946, Richard Wright was in Paris and arranged with her to work there. *Black Boy*, the first half of his memoir, had recently been published.

Charlotte was offered the opportunity to come to the United States to study mental health treatment centers and new therapeutic disciplines, including art, dance, and drama therapy, and to aid a group of French doctors who planned to build a treatment center outside Paris modeled on the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas. She boarded the *Île-de-France* and headed toward New York. The lengthy, rough trip caused many to become ill; however, she and a few others weathered it well. Among her companions were Ernest Hemingway and the folk singer Josh White.

“You want a Screwdriver?” Hemingway asked her. She had no idea what it was! “A Bloody Mary?” A strange name to this young Resistance fighter!

“We had a wonderful few days together,” she said.

Joseph Noshpitz and Charlotte Sorkine met at the Menninger Clinic. They eventually married in Paris. When it came time for him to say “I do,” a chorus of her Resistance compatriots, concerned that his French was not sufficient, chimed in, “Oui, Monsieur le Maire!”

“I married them all!” Charlotte told me.

Charlotte Sorkine Noshpitz carried with her the knowledge of how one makes the decision to take action when human beings step across the line in their treatment of one another, and she reminded us of our own obligation to stop injustice when we are aware of it.

“There is no conclusion,” Charlotte mused.

It is a circle. It will start again. Always there will be people who do these things—no end. As in Vietnam, young people were taught to be aggressive. The military teaches the young—look at today! We are still doing it today.

“What kind of a tree do you want to be when you die?” Charlotte, often playful as she began to talk about serious issues, asked me. “A rosebush? I will evaporate one day,

floating around like waves and clouds over the houses, all my world. You will see me, like a Chagall. That’s my conclusion.”

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“What makes one person seek the hidden contours of safety and another put aside all risk?” asks Myra Sklarew. In this poem, she “sends those lost words” and deeds of Charlotte Sorkine “out into the world,” perhaps to help us begin to answer that question. Read with Myra’s essay about Charlotte on pp. 51–54.

Myra Sklarew

Words

Their words fly past me like the wind through a bird cage.

—CHARLOTTE SORKINE, *French Resistance*

She remembers crossing
a body of water in a blue suit,
headed for the Occupied Zone.

Words were scarce in that country.
Used with care. Sometimes
her brother set down

a line of poetry. Sometimes
he was bent in half
in a Silesian salt mine.

Bialik said that words cover
the void. A tangled bridge
over a raging pit.

She tried the other route:
bringing children
across the border to safety;

leading men over the Pyrenees
into Spain. She saved
her father’s life.

Now, when words are taken
from her, her thoughts
finding no avenue to her lips,

we urge our hidden pathways —
like those footsteps across borders
all those years ago —

to make a new geography
that once more she can shape
language and send those lost

words out into the world.

"It is a fantastic commentary on the inhumanity of our times," wrote journalist Dorothy Thompson in 1938, "that for thousands and thousands of people a piece of paper with a stamp on it is the difference between life and death" (Zucker, p. 172). Rafael Medoff elaborates on the difficulties faced by the Jews of Germany and Austria who sought haven in the United States during the Holocaust.

Rafael Medoff

Walls of Paper

For over a century, the United States had an open-door immigration policy, welcoming newcomers from around the world in almost unlimited numbers. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, however, a number of prominent American anthropologists and eugenicists began promoting the idea that Anglo-Saxons were biologically superior to other peoples. This racist view of society reshaped the public's view of immigration in the years following World War I. The shift in attitudes took place at the same time that Americans were becoming increasingly anxious about Communism, as a result of the establishment of the Soviet Union. The combination of racism, fear of Communism, and general resentment of foreigners created strong public pressure to restrict immigration.

CLOSING THE DOORS

In 1921, Congress passed—and President Warren Harding signed into law—the Immigration Restriction Act. This legislation stipulated that the number of immigrants admitted annually from any single country could not exceed 3% of the number of immigrants from that country who had been living in the US at the time of the 1910 national census. If, for example, there were 100,000 individuals of Danish origin living in the United States in 1910, the maximum number of immigrants permitted from Denmark in any future year would be 3,000.

The Johnson Immigration Act of 1924 tightened these regulations in two important ways. The percentage for calculating the quotas was reduced from 3% to 2%, and instead of the 1910 census, the quota numbers would be based on an earlier census, the one taken in 1890. The restrictions were intensified in order to reduce the number of Jewish and Italian immigrants, since the bulk of Jews and Italians in the US had arrived after 1890. The sponsors of the legislation made no secret of their motives. The Johnson Act was submitted to Congress with a report by the chief of the United States Consular Service, Wilbur

Carr, that characterized would-be Jewish immigrants from Poland as "filthy, un-American, and often dangerous in their habits . . . lacking any conception of patriotism or national spirit" (H.R. Rep., 1921).

A BAD SYSTEM MADE WORSE

In the public debates over immigration that took place in the 1920s, Franklin D. Roosevelt came down squarely on the side of the restrictionists. As the Democratic nominee for vice president in 1920, Roosevelt gave an interview to the *Brooklyn Eagle* in which he expressed concern that immigrants tended to concentrate in urban areas and retain their ethnic heritage. "The foreign elements . . . do not easily conform to the manners and the customs and the requirements of their new home" (Robinson, 2001, p. 35), he asserted. The solution he proposed was dispersal and rapid assimilation: "The remedy for this should be the distribution of aliens in various parts of the country" (p. 38). Writing in the *Macon Daily Telegraph* in 1925, FDR said he favored the admission of some Europeans, so long as they had "blood of the right sort." He urged restricting immigration for "a good many years to come" so the United States would have time to "digest" those already admitted (Robinson, 2001, p. 40).

The immigration system that was adopted in the 1920s was made even more restrictive by President Herbert Hoover in 1930. Responding to the onset of the Great Depression, Hoover instructed consular officials to reject all applicants who were "likely to become a public charge" (Wyman, 1968, pp. 3–4), that is, dependent on government assistance. It was left to the consuls to make that determination on a case-by-case basis.

The Roosevelt administration inherited this harsh system and made it worse. When Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany in 1933, large numbers of German Jews urgently began looking for countries that would shelter them from the Nazis [Fig. 1] —and US consular officials in

Germany urgently looked for ways to reject their applications. By crafting a maze of bureaucracy and unreasonably rigorous requirements, these officials ensured that most Jewish refugees would never reach America's shores. David S. Wyman characterized those restrictions as "paper walls" in his 1968 book of that name.¹

Those walls ensured that the quotas would almost never be filled (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1947, p. 111). The German quota was 25,957. Just 5.3%, or 1,375, of the quota places were used in 1933, Hitler's first year in power. Of the next 12 years, the German quota was filled in only one. Places that were unused at the end of the year did not spill over into the next year; they simply expired. In 1934, a total of 3,515 immigrants filled 13.7% of the quota; the next year, 20.2% of the quota was filled (4,891 immigrants); and in 1936, the total was 24.3% (or 6,073 immigrants). In most of those 12 years, less than 25% of the quota was filled. As the Nazi persecution of Jews intensified, the US quota system functioned precisely as its creators had intended: It kept out all but a relative handful of Jews.

THE PAPER WALLS

The visa application form, which had to be filled out in triplicate, was more than four feet long. Its length, however, was the least of the difficulties applicants faced. To begin with, the "likely to become a public charge" clause posed a kind of Catch-22. The applicant had to prove he would have a means of support in the US—but foreigners were not permitted to secure employment while they still lived abroad.

Typically, the way to satisfy this requirement was to provide an affidavit from an American citizen guaranteeing financial support until the immigrant found work. Obviously, many German Jews did not have American relatives or friends. Even for those who did, however, not just any

relative would do. When New York Governor Herbert Lehman asked FDR in 1935 about the seemingly extraneous visa requirements, the president replied that guarantees offered by anyone other than a parent or child would be treated skeptically, because "a distant relative" might not feel any "legal or moral obligation toward the applicant" (Roosevelt to H. Lehman, July 2, 1936), as closer relatives presumably would.

In the case of 19-year-old Hermann Kilsheimer, for instance, three relatives did not suffice. He presented the American consulate in Stuttgart with affidavits from his brother-in-law and two cousins, all gainfully employed American citizens, pledging to support him. The cousins' affidavits were rejected on the grounds that they were not close enough relatives, and the consul decided that Hermann's brother-in-law earned too little to both support his own family and pay for Hermann's tuition if he chose to attend college (Breitman & Kraut, 1987, p. 47).

The reasoning behind other rejections of visa applications ranged from absurd to maddening. Numerous German Jewish refugee students, for example, were admitted to American universities but were prevented from entering the United States. As Raymond Geist of the US consulate in Berlin explained in turning down a student who had been accepted by Dropsie College (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), "He is a potential refugee from Germany and hence is unable to submit proof that he will be in a position to leave the United States upon the completion of his schooling" (Zucker, 2001, p. 120).

Faculty members at accredited European universities who were offered positions at American universities were eligible for non-quota visas. However, when the Hebrew Union College established a college-in-exile and began inviting European Jewish scholars to its faculty, the Roosevelt administration threw up an array of roadblocks. One

distinguished German Jewish scholar was disqualified on the grounds that he was primarily a librarian rather than a full-time professor. The State Department also accepted the Nazi regime's downgrading of the Higher Institute for Jewish Studies, the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, from *Hochschule* (an institute of higher learning, or college) to *Lehranstalt* (a lower-level institution of learning), which made its faculty members ineligible for non-quota visas because their home institution no longer was considered to be at the level of a university (Meyer, 1976, p. 364).



Fig. 1. Jews waiting for visas outside of application office ca 1939. Courtesy of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

When the world-famous German Jewish chemist Fritz Haber approached US Ambassador to Germany William Dodd in July 1933 to ask about “the possibilities in America for emigrants with distinguished records here in science,” Dodd told him (according to Dodd’s diary) “that the law allowed none now, the quota being filled.” In fact, the German quota was 95% unfilled that year (Dodd, 1941, p. 17).

Ten-year-old Herbert Friedman was denied permission to accompany his mother and brother to the United States in 1936 after an examining physician at the Stuttgart consulate claimed he had tuberculosis. Tests all proved negative, and an array of German and American specialists who reviewed his X-rays likewise concluded that he did not have the disease. Yet the consulate would not budge. The family eventually managed to enlist the help of Albert Einstein, who, in a letter to the surgeon general about the case, reported:

I have spoken to a reliable young man who recently emigrated from Germany; when I told him about the Stuttgart Consulate’s refusal to issue the visa for the child, without giving the young man the reason for the refusal [that is, Einstein did not tell him about the claim of tuberculosis], he immediately said, “That is an old story. Tuberculosis!” This shows clearly that this case is not an isolated case but that it is becoming a dangerous practice. (Einstein, 1937)

Some applicants in Germany ran into trouble when they presented a *ketubah*, the traditional Jewish religious wedding certificate, as evidence of their marital status. Some of these Jews had been married in a religious ceremony only, and not according to civil law, while others simply found it impossible to obtain evidence of their marital status from a Nazi government office, or else had been married in Russia before the Soviet takeover and could not enter the USSR to retrieve documentation. US consular officials refused to recognize a *ketubah* as proof of marriage and therefore deemed the applicants’ children “illegitimate” and rejected the family on the grounds of low moral character (M. Kohler, November 29, 1933). In these cases and many others, consular officials used their discretionary abilities to achieve what one consul characterized as “the Department’s desire to keep immigration to a minimum” (Mashberg, 1978, p. 21).

In late 1936, there was a modest increase in the number of German Jews admitted to the United States. By the end of 1937, a total of 11,127 immigrants from Germany had arrived, representing 42.1% of the available spaces. Consuls in Germany had complained that they were short-staffed, so Foreign Service Inspector Jerome Klahr Huddle was sent to Germany to assess the situation. In his report, Huddle recommended that more-distant relatives could

be relied upon to provide support, because they undoubtedly felt genuine sympathy for their persecuted family members. Eliot Coulter of the Visa Division agreed, in an internal memorandum, that “the Jewish people often have a high sense of responsibility toward their relatives, including distant relatives whom they may not have seen” (Breitman & Kraut, 1987, p. 49). Yet the majority of the German quota remained unfilled.² John Farr Simmons, chief of the State Department’s Visa Division in the 1930s, was proud to note, in 1937, “the drastic reduction in immigration” that “was merely an obvious and predictable result of administrative practices” (p. 21).

SPURNED OPPORTUNITIES

Germany’s annexation of Austria in 1938 (the *Anschluss*) marked a significant intensification of the Jewish refugee crisis. Now a second major European Jewish community was in need of a haven. The well-publicized scenes of anti-Jewish brutality accompanying the German army’s entrance into Austria, including Jews being forced to scrub the streets with toothbrushes, showed that the problem was reaching crisis proportions.

Although polls showed most Americans still opposed relaxing immigration restrictions, a handful of members of Congress and journalists began urging US intervention. Senior State Department officials decided to—in the words of the department’s internal year-end review—“get out in front and attempt to guide” (Wyman, 1968, p. 44) the pressure before it got out of hand. They conceived the idea of an international conference on the refugee problem, to create an impression of US concern while coaxing other countries to assume responsibility for the bulk of the refugees.

On March 24, 1938, President Roosevelt announced he was inviting 32 countries to send representatives to a conference in the French resort town of Évian-les-Bains. FDR emphasized in his announcement that “no nation would be expected or asked to receive a greater number of emigrants than is permitted by its existing legislation” (Wyman, 1968, p. 43). He did permit the German and Austrian quotas, now combined, to be filled that year, the only year that happened.

With one exception, the delegates at Évian proclaimed their countries’ unwillingness to accept more Jews. Typical was the Australian delegate, who bluntly asserted that “as we have no real racial problem, we are not desirous of importing one.” The only exception was the tiny Dominican Republic, which declared it would accept as many as 100,000 Jewish refugees [see Carson Phillips, “The Evian Conference: A Political Potemkin Village,” in *PRISM*, spring 2010, pp. 25–27—Ed.].

Scholars have chronicled the sad fate of that offer. After the first several hundred refugees were settled in the Dominican region of Sosua, the “biggest problem” the

project encountered—according to Marion A. Kaplan (2008)—was the “unrelenting US opposition” (p. 81) to bringing in more refugees and “the State Department’s hostility and obstructionism” (p. 103). Allen Wells found that Roosevelt administration officials harbored paranoid fears that some German Jewish refugees entering Sosua would serve as spies for the Nazis and pressured the Dominican haven organizers to refrain from bringing in more Jews (Wells, p. 114).

Several additional opportunities to assist Jewish refugees in 1938 and 1939 likewise were spurned by the Roosevelt administration. The president refused to support the Wagner–Rogers Bill of 1939, which would have admitted 20,000 German children outside the quota [see Davi Walders, “Killing the Wagner–Rogers Bill,” in *PRISM*, spring 2013, pp. 52–53—Ed.]. The legislation went nowhere, thanks to the sentiments of nativists such as Laura Delano Houghteling, a cousin of FDR and wife of the US commissioner of immigration, who complained that “20,000 charming children would all too soon grow up into 20,000 ugly adults” (Feingold, 1970, p. 150).³ In the spring of the same year, 907 German Jewish refugees aboard the *MS St. Louis* were turned away from Cuba and the United States. The German–Austrian quota was already filled, and any proposal to Congress to admit them likely would have been defeated. However, they could have been admitted as tourists to the US Virgin Islands, as Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr., proposed at the time. Secretary of State Cordell Hull, after conferring with the president, rejected Morgenthau’s proposal on the grounds that the passengers could not demonstrate they had permanent

residences in Nazi Germany to which they would return after their visas expired (Morgenthau, 1939) [see Medoff, “Revisiting the Voyage of the Damned,” in *PRISM*, spring 2014, pp. 63–69, for a full explanation of the *MS St. Louis* tragedy—Ed.].

EMERGENCY VISAS

In the aftermath of the German conquest of France in June 1940, thousands of refugees, including many exiled German Jews, fled to southern France to avoid capture by the Nazis. Many refugee families included members who were prominent artists, scientists, and intellectuals. On June 22, Marshal Petain’s Vichy regime, the ruling authority in the southern part of the country, signed an agreement with the Nazis agreeing to “surrender on demand” anyone sought by the Germans.

In the days to follow, American friends and colleagues of the refugees established the Emergency Rescue Committee, hoping to bring renowned cultural figures to the United States. With help from the first lady, the committee secured President Roosevelt’s authorization of emergency visas for several hundred artists and intellectuals and their families. The president was receptive to the proposal precisely because it was not a typical request to admit ordinary Jewish refugees. The world-famous exiles in France were the cream of European civilization; the fact that most of them were Jewish was incidental.

American journalist Varian Fry [Fig. 2] volunteered to lead the mission. He arrived in Marseille in August 1940 with a list of 200 endangered individuals and \$3,000 taped to his leg to hide it from the Gestapo. During the months to follow, Fry’s network—which included a dissident US consul, Hiram Bingham IV—rescued an estimated 2,000 refugees, in many cases by smuggling them over the Pyrenees into Spain disguised as field workers.

Catching wind of the Fry operation, furious German and French officials complained to the State Department. Secretary of State Cordell Hull responded with a telegram, in September 1940, to the American ambassador in Paris, instructing him to inform Fry that “THIS GOVERNMENT DOES NOT REPEAT NOT COUNTENANCE ANY ACTIVITIES BY AMERICAN CITIZENS DESIRING TO EVADE THE LAWS OF THE GOVERNMENTS WITH WHICH THIS COUNTRY MAINTAINS FRIENDLY RELATIONS” (Marino, 1999, pp. 189–190). Hull also sent a telegram to Fry, pressing him to “return immediately” to the United States in view of “local developments” (pp. 189–190), meaning the opposition of the Germans and French. When Fry failed to heed that demand, the Roosevelt administration refused to renew his passport, thus forcing him to leave France. It also transferred Bingham to Portugal, then Argentina.

Even the small number of refugees Fry was rescuing was too much for Assistant Secretary of State Breckin-



Fig. 2. Varian Fry and friends ca. 1940. Courtesy of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

ridge Long, a personal friend of Roosevelt's who was in charge of 23 of the State Department's 42 divisions, including the visa section. In a June 26, 1940, memo, Long advised his colleagues:

We can delay and effectively stop for a temporary period of indefinite length the number of immigrants into the United States. . . . by simply advising our consuls to put every obstacle in the way and to require additional evidence and to resort to various administrative devices, which would postpone and postpone and postpone the granting of the visas. (Wyman, 1968, p. 173)

The German invasion of Poland the previous September, followed by the rapid conquest of Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Holland, and France in the spring of 1940, provoked a wave of fear—among the American public and within the administration—of Nazi spies reaching the United States. Newspapers frequently published wild stories about Hitler planning to send “slave spies” to the United States. Attorney General Robert Jackson complained to the cabinet that “hysteria is sweeping the country against aliens and fifth columnists” (Wyman, 1968, p. 186).

The president's rhetoric fanned the flames. FDR warned about “the treacherous use of the ‘fifth column’ by persons supposed to be peaceful visitors [but] actually a part of an enemy unit of occupation” (p. 188). In fact, there was only one instance in which a Nazi disguised as a Jewish refugee reached the Western hemisphere; he was captured in Cuba and executed (p. 188).

Three days after Long's June 1940 memo, the State Department ordered consuls abroad to reject applications from anyone about whom they had “any doubt whatsoever.” The new instruction specifically noted that this policy would result in “a drastic reduction in the number of quota and nonquota immigration visas issued” (Wyman, 1968, p. 174). It worked as intended: In the following year, immigration from Germany and Austria was kept to just 48% of the quota. [Fig. 3.]

In the spring of 1941, with Roosevelt's approval, Long devised what has come to be known as the Close Relatives Edict. On June 5, 1941, he instructed all US consuls abroad to reject visa applicants who had a “parent, brother, sister, spouse, or child” (p. 194) in any territory occupied by Germany, Italy, or the Soviet Union. The rationale was that the relatives might be taken hostage in order to force the immigrant to become a Nazi or Soviet spy.⁴

Refugee advocates were horrified. The political weekly *The Nation* (July 19, 1941) denounced the new regulation as “brutal and unjust” (Wyman, 1968, p. 45). The October 1941 issue of *Workmen's Circle Call*, a Jewish immigrant laborers' publication, described it as “cruel and unimaginative” (Wyman, 1968, p. 4).

B'nai B'rith's *National Jewish Monthly* (December 1941) asserted that the new policy could be called “Keep Your Tired, Your Poor” (Wyman, 1968, p. 113)—a reversal of the famous poem inscribed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. Protests were to no avail; the administration refused to budge. Use of the quota from Germany fell to less than 18% in 1942, and only 14% of the quota for immigrants from German-occupied Poland was filled that year. In 1943, less than 5% of the German quota was used, as was only 16% of that for German-occupied France. A total of almost 190,000 quota places from Axis-controlled European countries were left unused during the Hitler years (Wyman, 1968, p. 198).

MOTIVES

What motivated senior State Department officials to take such positions regarding Jewish immigration? Antisemitism certainly played a role. Wilbur Carr, an assistant secretary of state in the Roosevelt administration, wrote in a 1934 diary entry that he preferred a particular summer resort because it was so “different from the Jewish atmosphere of the Claridge” (n.p.). Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle confided to his diary in 1940, “The Jewish group, wherever you find it, is not only pro-English, but will sacrifice American interests to English interests. . . . It is horrible to see one phase of the Nazi propaganda justifying itself a little” (Berle & Jacobs, 1973, p. 342). Undersecretary of State William Phillips, in his diary (May 18, 1923), once described a Soviet official as “a perfect little rat of a Jew.” It is no exaggeration to say that antisemitism was rife in Roosevelt's State Department.

Such sentiments also were common among the consular officials in Europe who directly decided the fate of



Fig. 3. Refugees waiting for visas from any country willing to admit them, to no avail, ca. 1941. Courtesy of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

visa applicants. Bat-Ami Zucker (2001), in her *In Search of Refuge*, the definitive study of US consular officials in Nazi Germany, found that the consuls “often commented on the danger of permitting a flood of Jewish immigration into the US,” warned of “its potentially dangerous impact on American society,” and suspected “a Jewish conspiracy in the United States to pressure the administration into facilitating immigration” (pp. 176–177).

In a similar spirit, William Peck, at the US consulate in Marseilles, wrote to a colleague that he “deplore[d] as much as anyone the influx into the United States of certain refugee elements.” He was open to immigration by “aged people,” because they “will not reproduce and can do our country no harm.” On the other hand, “the young ones may be suffering, but the history of their race shows that suffering does not kill many of them” (Taylor, 2016, p. 254).

However, antisemitism within the State Department alone does not suffice to explain US immigration policy, because it was President Roosevelt, not Breckinridge Long, who was the final authority. Ignorance was not the issue: President Roosevelt’s correspondence makes clear that he was aware the quotas were under-filled. Many references in the correspondence and diaries of Breckinridge Long allude to his regular briefings of the president on immigration policy, to which FDR responded positively (Roosevelt, F. D., 1933–1935, box 1, Roosevelt to Lehman, November 13, 1935; Long, n.d., entries for October 3 and October 10).

Some historians have explained Roosevelt’s strict policy as anticipating the likely electoral consequences (that is, the strong public opposition to immigration) and congressional opposition to liberalizing the immigration quotas, but those factors do not reflect that what is under discussion here is immigration within the existing quotas, not any effort to change the immigration system. An unpublicized instruction from the White House to the State Department to permit the existing German quota to be filled would have saved numerous lives while likely causing only the tiniest of political ripples.

A more plausible explanation is Roosevelt’s attitude toward minority groups that he regarded as unassimilable. FDR in general exhibited little sympathy for immigration, expressed concern about what he saw as immigrants’ resistance to assimilation, and harbored racist sentiments about the dangers of “mingling Asiatic blood with American blood” (Robinson, 2001, p. 40). His conviction that the Japanese were biologically different, undesirable, and untrustworthy made Roosevelt receptive to the proposal by some of his military advisers, after Pearl Harbor, to incarcerate Japanese Americans lest their “undiluted racial strains” (Robinson, 2001, p. 85) inspire them to secretly assist the Japanese war effort. By order of the president, more than 110,000 Japanese Americans were rounded up throughout California and shipped to internment camps in Arizona,

Wyoming, Arkansas, and elsewhere in 1942, even though there was not a single documented case of a Japanese American spying for Japan in World War II

Roosevelt’s private remarks about Jews in many ways echoed what he wrote and said about Asians. Jews, he believed, tended to overcrowd specific geographical locations, dominate certain professions, and exercise undue influence. At a White House luncheon in May 1943, FDR told British Prime Minister Winston Churchill that “the best way to settle the Jewish question” would be “to spread the Jews thin all over the world.” According to Vice President Henry Wallace’s account of the conversation, Roosevelt

said he had tried this out in Marietta [Meriwether] County, Georgia, and at Hyde Park, . . . adding four or five Jewish families at each place. He claimed that the local population would have no objection if there were no more than that. (Blum, 1957, pp. 210–211)

Roosevelt resented what he perceived as excessive Jewish representation in a variety of institutions. As a member of Harvard’s Board of Overseers in 1923, he helped institute a quota to limit the number of Jews admitted to 15% of each class, and still boasted about doing so two decades later (Freidel, 1990, pp. 295–296). In 1941, FDR remarked at a cabinet meeting that there were too many Jews among federal employees in Oregon (Freidel, 1990, p. 296).

The president was concerned about Jewish influence abroad, too. In 1938, FDR privately suggested to Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, the era’s most prominent American Jewish leader, that Jews in Poland were dominating the economy and were to blame for provoking antisemitism there (Medoff, 2013, pp. 18–19). In the same spirit, President Roosevelt remarked at the 1943 Casablanca Conference that in governing the 330,000 Jews in North Africa, “the number of Jews [allowed to enter various professions] should be definitely limited to the percentage that the Jewish population in North Africa bears to the whole of the North African population,” which “would not permit them to overcrowd the professions.” He said this

would further eliminate the specific and understandable complaints which the Germans bore towards the Jews in Germany, namely, that while they represented a small part of the population, over fifty percent of the lawyers, doctors, school teachers, college professors, etc., in Germany were Jews.⁵ (Aandahl and Slany, 1943, pp. 608–611)

Certain individual, assimilated Jews could be useful to FDR as political allies or advisers, but the presence of a substantial number of Jews, especially the less assimilated

kind, was, in his view, undesirable. Roosevelt's private views help explain the otherwise inexplicable policy of suppressing refugee immigration far below the legal limits. His vision of America was of a nation that would be overwhelmingly white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant, with no room for any substantial number of others.

WHAT OPTIONS EXISTED?

Realistically, what options existed for President Roosevelt to assist Jewish refugees without endangering his political position or risking a difficult, and probably unsuccessful, clash with Congress?

First, filling the existing quotas. The policy of almost never allowing the quotas to be filled "cost Jewish lives directly," and "the restrictionist policy also played a crucial role in Nazi Germany's decision to solve its 'Jewish problem' by more radical means" (p. 84), Henry Feingold (1986) has argued. "The visa system became literally an adjunct to Berlin's murderous plan for the Jews" (Feingold, 1970, p. 296).

Next, permitting more non-quota immigration. The existing law permitted professors, college students, and members of the clergy and their families to enter the United States outside the quotas. Yet from 1933 to 1941, the US admitted only 698 students identified as "Hebrews," 944 professors (not all of them Jews), and 2,184 "ministers" (not all of them rabbis). With a more humane attitude, the administration could have taken advantage of this legal loophole and granted haven to many more endangered Jews.

Finally, offering temporary admission into US territories. The determination as to whether an applicant for a tourist visa had a valid return address was strictly arbitrary; a more generous approach would have looked past that technicality and granted Jewish refugees temporary haven in an American territory, such as the Virgin Islands, whose governor offered to take them in, a move that would likely not have provoked any substantial domestic opposition.

Tragically, the Roosevelt administration opted to turn its back on traditional American attitudes toward the downtrodden and chose instead, as Albert Einstein wrote to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, "to make immigration impossible by erecting a wall of bureaucratic measures" (Wyman, 1968, p. 198).

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END NOTES

[1] Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut (1987, p. 9) concluded that the administration utilized a strategy of “altering bureaucratic procedure” to implement a policy based on “intent of exclusion.” They named four key officials as the main culprits: “Assistant Secretary of State Wilbur Carr, George Messersmith [head of the Visa Division], Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long, Commissioner of Immigration Daniel MacCormack, and many other officials at lower levels of authority devised and carried out adjustments to immigration regulations that had a major effect upon the level of immigration to the United States.”

[2] In 1984, 1986, and again in 1987, Richard Breitman et al. publicly chided Henry L. Feingold for suggesting that President Roosevelt had had something to do with the increase. See Breitman & Kraut (1987), p. 261, n. 101; “Anti-Semitism in the State Department, 1933–44: Four Case Studies,” by Richard D. Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, in *Anti-Semitism in American History*, edited by David A. Gerber (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 194, n. 33; “The State Department, the Labor Department, Immigration Policy, and German Jews, 1930–1939,” by Richard Breitman, Alan M. Kraut, and Thomas Imhoof, 1984, *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 3(2), p. 35, n. 76.

[3] Had Wagner–Rogers passed, Anne Frank and her sister, Margot, as German nationals under the age of 16, could have qualified for admission to the United States. Documents discovered by the staff of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in 2007 revealed that Anne's father, Otto, sought permission to bring the family to the United States; their application was denied in 1941, even though less than half of the quota for German-born immigrants was used that year (Wyman, 1968, p. 221; Medoff & Bittinger, 2007).

[4] For evidence of Long's antisemitism, see his diary entries for February 6, 1938; December 16, 1940; February 15, 1941; November 28, 1941; and June 13, 1944 (Long, n.d.).

[5] Where FDR obtained these wildly inflated statistics is unclear.

Stephen J. Cipot's poem bears the inspiration of portraits (pp. 65–67) painted by artist Francine Mayran, whose work previously graced the cover of the spring 2010 issue of this journal and is featured again on the present covers. As Cipot notes, the Righteous Among the Nations were, indeed, “those willing to sacrifice everything” to save the lives of Jews, adults and children alike. We honor and remember them.

Stephen J. Cipot

The Righteous

When the Nazis marched their evil across Europe,
North Africa and Ukraine, there were those
who opened their hearts and homes to hide the children:
crouched behind a stove; stuffed into a barn, crawl space, attic;
shoved under a bed, or into a crack in a wall.
Jammed deep into the bowels of hope, difficult to get at.
Given false papers to attend life and sometimes school.

Clothes and faces and hair matted with dust
like little ashen angels. Not knowing how or why
they came to be there without their families, shuddering and
living in fear, still, knowing an enormous comfort —
proof that there was a human race, those willingly offering
their souls and lives. A wellspring of good versus evil.

Stately souls against the muscle of a nation emptied of civility
bent on reaching Hell the fastest way possible.
Those willing to sacrifice everything for the children
of a lost world against impossible odds,
struggling to uphold good and to heal, as if the history
of humanity were placed in the soft flesh of their hands.
As if it were God's work.

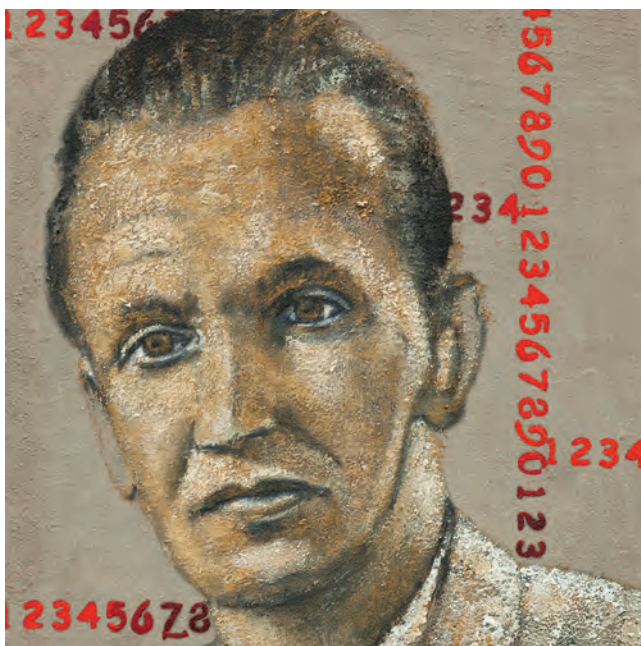
These paintings by Francine Mayron, titled "Portraits of Righteous," introduce us to 12 of those who, as Mayron writes, "by saving the honor of humanity, shine for future generations as lights in a dark world. Humanity is stronger than barbarism."



Aristides de Sousa Mendes, Portugal



Father Damaskinos, Greece



Jan Karski, Poland



Nadire Proseku, Albania



Germaine Ribière, France



Sheik Taieb El Okbi, Algeria



Dimitar Pechev, Bulgaria



Irena Sendler, Poland



Elizabeth Eidenbenz, Switzerland



Fatima Kanapatskaiya, Bielorusse



Sister Skobtsov, France



Raoul Wallenberg, Sweden

This personal narrative by Andrew Kavchak is a welcome follow-up to Agnieszka Kania and Karen Shawn's essay "What We Never Knew, What We Learned, and How: Polish Students Reflect on Their Introduction to the Holocaust" (PRISM, spring 2017, pp. 81–88). We appreciate and encourage such ongoing reflections on Polish–Jewish relations in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Andrew Kavchak

It's Never Too Late: My Holocaust Education

I am a Canadian of Polish origin. Like 96% of the post-World War II population of Poland, my parents were Catholics. Concerned with the fate of Poland and the values of Polish culture, they immersed me in all things Polish. Though reared in Canada, I studied in Polish school on Saturday mornings, served as an altar boy at the local Polish church on Sundays, joined the Polish national folk-dance group at the Polish community center, and enrolled in a Polish unit of the Boy Scouts.

I traveled to Poland on three occasions during the 1970s to visit family, who did their best, while we were not standing in line (a frequent requirement and time-waster during the Communist years), to teach me about Polish history. We visited different cities, including Kraków, seeing churches, castles, palaces, museums, public squares, monuments, and the occasional cemetery. I don't recall any mention or focus on anything that had to do with a "Żyd" (Jew) or "Żydzi" (Jews) or any discussion of the Jewish presence in, or contributions to, Poland before the war.

I do remember that during my first visit, when I was 11, my relatives debated the wisdom of taking me to a place called Oświęcim (Auschwitz) and deciding against it because I was too young. I had no idea of what the place was or why my youth made it an inappropriate site to visit. One of the relatives I met at that time was a cousin of my father who had been one of the civilians rounded up in Warsaw by the Nazis in August 1944 and sent to Oświęcim. He survived, and after a January 1945 death march, he was liberated by Americans at Mauthausen on May 5. I remember this tragic story, but it was a tale without any mention of Jews or their fate.

Over the years, whenever I met someone with a Polish accent or a Polish name, I would begin a conversation, a normal, friendly exchange in which we discussed where our families had lived and when they had come to Canada.

In the process, I discovered that many Jews also had some family connection to Poland, but from them I sensed an unspoken barrier, a distinct but baffling lack of enthusiasm to continue our chat.

When I entered Osgoode Hall Law School in the 1980s, there were so many Jewish students that, to my delight, my educational institution was closed not only for Christmas but also on Jewish holidays. One of my Jewish classmates at Osgoode frequently engaged me in discussions about the relations and history of Polish Christians and Jews; I often felt defensive and compelled to explain or justify historic Polish national and individual behavior, as he seemed to accuse the Poles of antisemitism and collaboration with the Nazis. Our conversations were eye-opening. While his perspective on World War II was dominated by the fate of the Jews during the Holocaust, my perspective on the same war centered on Poland's attempt to preserve itself in the face of invasion from its two colossal and vicious neighbors.

The distinct paradigms through which we perceived history and everything that flowed from it became evident to me when I mentioned the heroism of the Polish people during the Warsaw Uprising of August and September of 1944. One of my father's cousins, a member of the Polish Home Army (or Underground), had fought and died in that battle. Although every Pole is fully aware of the history and tragedy of this uprising, my Jewish friend was not; he suggested that I might be confused. There was indeed an uprising in Warsaw, he told me, but it was a battle of the young and heroic Jews imprisoned in the Warsaw Ghetto who fought the Nazis in April and May of 1943. I was speechless: I had never heard of it. My friend and I both, I realized, had much to learn.

During my articling year at a midsize law firm in Toronto, I had lunch with one of the young Jewish lawyers.

As we discussed our respective backgrounds, he looked at me with an air that indicated that he knew his suggestion would benefit me and said, “You should see the Lanzmann film *Shoah*.” Why my Polish background would prompt him to suggest a movie I had never heard of puzzled me, but I noted his suggestion. I left him, musing: Oświęcim, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, *Shoah* . . . the list of things to research and learn was growing longer.

MY EDUCATION BEGINS

Then *Schindler's List* came to our theaters, and I went to see it. Like the others who left the packed movie house, I was shocked and speechless. Now clear to me was that if I was ever to understand the complex nature of Polish–Jewish relations and the Holocaust, I needed to learn both Polish and Jewish history.

In 1995, I returned to Kraków and visited places I had seen during my earlier trips: the beautiful Wawel Castle, Old Market Square, St. Mary's Basilica, and other landmarks. I also made a point of visiting places I had known nothing about as a much younger man, such as the historic Jewish quarter of Kazimierz (where much of *Schindler's List* was filmed) and the Podgórze district, once the site of the Kraków Ghetto, where I was fortunate to meet an old woman who offered to take me on a tour.

We walked to the front of the factory where Oskar Schindler ran his business and saved so many lives. I recognized the front of the building from the movie. The factory was closed; now it is a Holocaust museum. My guide took me to see the two remaining parts of the Kraków Ghetto wall. We walked to the top of a hill that overlooked Podgórze; the sight reminded me of the spot where, in the movie, Schindler witnessed the liquidation of the ghetto. It is a dramatic scene that foreshadows Schindler's awakening; his approach to the Jews soon after changes from considering them to be no more than “cheap labor” to seeing them as human beings who deserve to be saved. The tour saddened me and prompted me to continue learning.

The following day, I made my first trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

When I entered the main camp, the infamous words “*Arbeit macht frei*” still hanging over the entrance gate, I inquired in the administrative offices whether there were any tours. The camp does not offer scheduled tours, a staff member explained, but a Polish tour guide had just met up with a group visiting from Israel. She would be speaking in English, which the Israeli guide would translate into Hebrew; perhaps I would be welcome to join them. I was.

We slowly walked through the camp and stepped into each of the blocks that contained exhibits, including mounds of possessions brought by Jews who thought that they were going to be resettled. We visited the Death Block (Block 11), where the first experiments with the use and

effects of Zyklon B were conducted. We walked by the location where Camp Commandant Rudolf Höss was hanged in 1947. We walked into the gas chamber. We walked through the door to the crematoria, all of us dumbstruck with horror. This was ground zero of the Holocaust.

In a block containing exhibits dedicated specifically to the Jews murdered there, the group spontaneously formed a circle. Someone dimmed the lights; I stood on the side wondering what was happening. The men and women, with great solemnity, began to pray in unison; I learned they were saying *Kaddish*, a prayer for the dead. Experiencing Auschwitz with this Israeli group was a moving and priceless experience for me, and standing next to these Jews saying *Kaddish* was among the most precious moments of my life.

I joined them for the 1.2 mile ride to Birkenau, and silence again overcame me as we walked through its notorious gate and past the railway tracks leading to the center of the camp, where the Jews had been pulled off the transports and selected for death. We wandered through the still-standing barracks and made our way to the back of the camp, where the ruins of the gas chambers and crematoria remain, stark testimony to the evil humans did. The images were haunting, the facts and numbers shocking and searing. At the end of the day, profoundly shaken and moved by what I had learned and grateful to these Israelis for permitting me to join them on their pilgrimage, I bid the group good-bye, knowing that this day was yet another milestone in my Holocaust education journey.

At home I began to amass and devour a small library of books about the Holocaust. I read overviews of the entire Nazi era by Raul Hilberg, Martin Gilbert, Nora Levin, Lucy Dawidowicz, Saul Friedländer, and Leni Yahil; memoirs of death camp survivors, including Viktor Frankl and Primo Levi; diaries of those who perished in the ghettos, including Emanuel Ringelblum, Adam Czerniaków, Dawid Sierakowiak, and Chaim Kaplan; diaries and memoirs of ghetto survivors, such as Mary Berg; and memoirs of those who fought in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, such as Antek Zuckerman. I collected texts by the perpetrators, including the memoirs of Rudolf Höss, and their children; I read the complete and total denunciation by Niklas Frank of his father, Hans. I immersed myself in what to me became one of the most complex aspects of the Holocaust: the relations between Poles and Jews during that time, and the stories of the Righteous Among the Nations—the works of Władysław Bartoszewski, Nechama Tec, and Martin Gilbert, and those about Irena Sendler (née Krzyżanowska).

In 2009, I visited Polish relatives living in The Hague and took some time to visit Amsterdam, where my first destination was the Anne Frank House. Walking through the entrance, I was struck by the pictures of the beautiful young girl on the wall and her words: “I keep my ideals

because in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart." A few years later I returned, this time with my son. Sometimes, exhibits are even more powerful the second time around.

Finally, belatedly, I bought the nine-hour DVD of *Shoah*, which I have watched several times in its entirety. Twenty-eight years after the young Jewish lawyer recommended that I see it, I found his email address and wrote, thanking him for his suggestion.

In my process of learning the facts of the Holocaust, I have made some observations that continue to evolve as my education progresses. First, one has to study and understand the history of the entire Nazi period and the complexity of World War II in order to comprehend the nature, and the depth and breadth, of the Holocaust.

Next, while there is no question that during and after the Holocaust many Poles were antisemites who committed criminal acts, such as the Jedwabne Pogrom of July 10, 1941 (the subject of Jan Gross's book *Neighbors*), there were also those who did what they could to help, despite the penalties imposed by the Nazis in every country they occupied on those caught trying to aid a Jew. The penalties in Poland were the most severe: summary execution of the person who helped, along with his or her family. Yet of the 26,513 Righteous Among the Nations identified by Yad Vashem, 6,706 are Poles. One was my father's friend Zdzisław Dydyński, recognized by Yad Vashem on December 25, 1980. The Dydyńskis lived in Montreal, in the same neighborhood as my family. Zdzisław was a humble person; I did not find out about his exploits until many years after his passing. This is not surprising, as those who helped Jews had to do so with the utmost of secrecy to avoid the risk of discovery by neighbors who might become suspicious. Even in the aftermath, many remained quiet, fearing retribution from members of their communities.

When I took my 18-year-old son to Poland this past summer, it was my sixth trip and his first. We visited as many members of our family as we could, as well as historic sites, including Auschwitz. While in Warsaw, my son and I went to see the monument at the Umschlagplatz, where the inhabitants of the Warsaw Ghetto were forced onto trains bound for Treblinka. From the Umschlagplatz, we walked to the new Museum of the History of Polish Jews. As we approached it, I noticed, in the space between the buildings across the street, something unusual. A few people were standing there, listening to a man speaking Hebrew. I could not understand his words. We walked closer and discovered the memorial known as the Anielewicz Mound, at 18 Miła Street, the final resting place of some of the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, including its leader, Mordechai Anielewicz.

The street was quiet, touched by a light rain. Umbrellas were open. I stood there with my son, looking at the mound

and the monument, recalling the uprising, a tale of epic courage and honor in the face of desperation, and feeling overwhelmed by awe and admiration for the young Jewish men and women who fought a losing battle but won the deep and profound respect of all who know their story.

MY EDUCATION CONTINUES

Today my name is on a list to receive advance notice of Holocaust commemoration and education events throughout Ottawa. I attend as many as I can. I am one of the few non-Jews in these audiences, which I hope will change in the future. I learn something new at each of these events. I am comforted by knowing that even now, after 70 years, the murdered Jews and the survivors of the Holocaust continue to be acknowledged and remembered.

I continue to read books that shed more light for me on one of the darkest periods in history. Although it has been several decades since I finished my last degree, I plan to return to university to take a Holocaust history seminar, eager to learn about current research and understanding of these events. One day, I hope I will be able to join the ranks of Holocaust educators and contribute to spreading knowledge and encouraging study about the Holocaust.

"The many cinematic resources available to us were not created equal," observes Mark Gudgel. "Which films we teach and how we use them to enhance and enrich our students' understanding are critical decisions that have a powerful impact on how our students come to understand the Holocaust—or don't."

Mark Gudgel

When the Lights Go Down: Critical Perspectives on Popular Holocaust Classroom Films

When the lights go down in a classroom and student attention shifts towards the screen, what follows can do much to enhance—or convolute—student understanding of the topic at hand. When that topic is the Holocaust, a complex and arguably already often misunderstood event, the choice of film matters that much more. In the ideal setting, with attentive students and the necessary pre-teaching completed, film as a supplement can bring to life what textbooks and lectures cannot. Used ineffectively, however, films about this difficult and grim history can confuse and even traumatize.

A 2015 study I conducted of 420 American teachers nationwide showed that 226 different films were being used in the Holocaust studies classroom. Of these, however, only 12 enjoyed popularity above the rate of 5%, and only four were reportedly used by more than 10% of classroom practitioners.

The tremendous diversity of the films shown in American classrooms was a fascinating discovery. The table below [Table 1] displays the percentage of teachers who used these most common films, in descending order.

These 12 are the only Holocaust films screened by 5% or more of US teachers. The 2015 study also found that, as a topic, Anne Frank was taught via film by some 7.8% of American teachers, but the wide variety of films they used to teach her story prevented any one film from breaking the 5% threshold.

The study participants were teachers who had received some form of training from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), which may in part account for the popularity of three videos the USHMM was instrumental in creating (*One Survivor Remembers*, *I'm Still Here*,

FILM TITLE	% TEACHERS REPORTING USE
<i>Schindler's List</i> (Spielberg, 1993)	25.71
<i>One Survivor Remembers</i> (Antholis, 1995)	16.19
<i>I'm Still Here</i> (Lazin, 2005)	11.19
<i>The Pianist</i> (Polanski, 2002)	10.71
<i>The Boy in the Striped Pajamas</i> (Herman, 2008)	9.29
<i>Defiance</i> (Zwick, 2008)	6.67
<i>The Path to Nazi Genocide</i> (USHMM, n.d.)	5.71
<i>Life Is Beautiful</i> (Benigni, 1997)	5.23
Oprah Winfrey's (2006) interview with Elie Wiesel	5.00
<i>Conspiracy</i> (Pierson, 2001)	5.00
<i>The Last Days</i> (Moll, 1998)	5.00
<i>Escape from Sobibor</i> (Gold, 1987)	5.00

TABLE 1. Most-used films as reported by teachers and percentage of teachers using them.

and *The Path to Nazi Genocide*), as well as the omission of other popular free resources, including the ADL's Echoes & Reflections (1.9%) and the USC Shoah Foundation's digital archive of survivor testimony (2.3%). I suspect that if study participants had been drawn from teachers trained by the ADL or USC Shoah Foundation, those figures would have been substantially greater, because both of these programs offer easily accessible, excellent, historically sound, classroom-friendly resources.

No one is more acutely aware than a classroom teacher that, as the expression goes, what is popular is not always right. That these films are the most used does not mean that they are the best choices, but rather simply the choices teachers have thus far most frequently made. What follows is a critical analysis of the eight most widely used films as

reported by teachers, and an accompanying overview of key information, a brief synopsis of each film, and an attempt to synthesize data and personal experience to provide practical ideas and recommendations about how, and whether, to use these films in today's classrooms.

OVERVIEW

Film title: *Schindler's List*

Running time: 3 hr 15 min

Genre: Historical drama

Rating: R (graphic violence, sexuality, nudity, strong language)

Grade for historical accuracy: C

SYNOPSIS

The story, based on true events, revolves around the life of Oskar Schindler, a Nazi who opened a factory near the Płaszów concentration camp to take advantage of Jewish slave labor during the Second World War. Over the course of the story, the protagonist, Schindler, opens his heart to his Jewish workers and uses his vast resources and influence to save, ultimately, over 1,000 Jews from almost certain death before fleeing prosecution at the end of the war.

IN THE CLASSROOM

Schindler's List enjoys the highest popularity of any film among Holocaust educators in the United States by a wide margin, with more than one in every four teachers reporting using it in his or her classroom. Of the total number of survey respondents who reported using *Schindler's List*, just under 58% used the film from start to finish, while slightly more than 42% indicated that they in some way cut or abbreviated the film.

However, most teachers interviewed, including those who used it, expressed concerns with the film. There are numerous sexual scenes and scenes depicting nudity, including, but not limited to, necropornographic material, which make the film unsuitable in classroom environments. Furthermore, the film is quite lengthy, and most educators in my study complained of having too little time to teach about the Holocaust even without showing films. Said one California teacher when asked about *Schindler's List*, "Showing that movie would take 4.5% of a 180-day year."

Perhaps most troubling, however, are the historical inaccuracies of the film. Thomas Keneally's book (1982), the basis for the screenplay and subsequently the film, is classified as "Fiction/Judaica" on the back cover, while the front cover refers to it as "a novel." While numerous historically inaccurate events are portrayed in the film, including a scene of Schindler arriving personally at Auschwitz to rescue "his" Jews, it is perhaps the very premise of the film, the notion that Oskar Schindler created a list of people to save, that is its greatest historical flaw. "In

reality, Oskar Schindler had absolutely nothing to do with the creation of his famous transport list," according to the preeminent Schindler historian of our time (Crowe, 2004, p. 361). Moreover, Schindler's wife, Emilie—who was all but written out of the movie when, in fact, she was working alongside her now-famous husband the vast majority of the time—portrays things quite differently from Spielberg's version. In her memoir, *Where Light and Shadow Meet* (1996), she quotes her former husband from a dinner discussion about the making of such a list:

Another problem that worries me is the list of people we are to submit to him [Camp Commandant Amon Göth]. I don't really know the men, their families; I barely know the names of the few who come to our office when something is needed. (p. 63)

The appeal of a film that not only is engaging and emotionally compelling but also covers many of the topics that teachers attempt to include in their respective units (e.g., ghettos, concentration camps, death camps, rescue) is understandable. However, the drawbacks of presenting *Schindler's List* to young people are numerous and significant. Teachers are advised to proceed with great caution and to consider their students, their environment, and their rationale for teaching about the Holocaust before including any film, especially this one.

OVERVIEW

Film title: *One Survivor Remembers*

Running time: 39 min

Genre: Documentary

Rating: Not rated

Grade for historical accuracy: A

SYNOPSIS

This Oscar-winning documentary is largely composed of interviews with survivor Gerda Weissmann Klein and, to a somewhat lesser extent, her husband, Kurt. Their on-screen interviews are supplemented by narration and still images that ultimately tell the story of Gerda from her life before the war to the time she was liberated by American GIs, her future husband, Kurt, among them.

IN THE CLASSROOM

The film is part of a kit designed expressly for classroom use. A cinematic companion to Gerda Weissmann Klein's memoir, *All but My Life*, the film was produced by HBO and the USHMM.

Arguably, if not paired with the book, the film requires more context than it provides in its short running time. That said, it appeals to educators for a whole raft of reasons, from its brevity, historical accuracy, and lack of cost to the

level of engagement by students who watch it. Another selling point for teachers is that it is accessible to students from grade 6. The film deals with many topics often covered in units, including concentration camps, death marches, and liberation, and introduces students to two individuals with whom they can connect and begin to sympathize. The kit, which includes the documentary film, Klein's memoir, a teaching guide, and more, is available for free to teachers through Teaching Tolerance, an initiative of the Southern Poverty Law Center, at www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/film-kits/one-survivor-remembers.

Though survivor testimony in general is based largely, if not entirely, on the memory of an individual who is likely not a historian, it holds tremendous value in helping students to connect and reflect on the experiences of the Jews during the Holocaust.

OVERVIEW

Film title: *I'm Still Here*

Running time: 48 min

Genre: Documentary

Rating: Not rated

Grade for historical accuracy: A

SYNOPSIS

I'm Still Here is the companion to Alexandra Zapruder's *Salvaged Pages* (2002), an edited collection of diary entries from young people who endured the Holocaust. It tells partial, episodic stories of European Jewish youth. The narrators include such famous actors as Zach Braff and Kate Hudson, and the soundtrack was composed by the musician Moby.

IN THE CLASSROOM

A desirably short film, students have expressed a preference for this over other options at least in part due to the efforts of producer MTV and the combination of famous actors, catchy music, and well-done cinematography. The film is engaging and powerful from start to finish and is cool, a fact that makes it appeal to students but may prompt slight hesitation in some classroom practitioners, given that within the first few minutes of the narration, the speaker uses a curse word.

Nevertheless, the film inspires high levels of student engagement and couples historical accuracy with a message that is anything but cool: that the Holocaust was a horrific event that claimed the lives of millions, including children, to whom the film does a terrific job of helping students relate. *I'm Still Here* is an undeniably useful teaching tool and a pedagogically sound selection, especially for those teachers who already use Zapruder's *Salvaged Pages*.

OVERVIEW

Film title: *The Pianist*

Running time: 2 hr 30 min

Genre: Historical drama

Rating: R (violence, strong language)

Grade for historical accuracy: B+

SYNOPSIS

Based on the memoir of Holocaust survivor Władysław Szpilman, the movie is set inside the Warsaw Ghetto, where Szpilman, a pianist, is separated from his family and avoids deportation by hiding until, at last, he is liberated by the Russians.

IN THE CLASSROOM

Like *Schindler's List*, one problem with *The Pianist* is that it is a feature-length film, and as such cannot possibly be shown in one class period, even with block scheduling. It makes good sense to use this film when pairing it with Szpilman's memoir of the same name, though on its own the story portrays the Holocaust through the limited lens of the Warsaw Ghetto and thus fails to help students understand what took place outside of that extremely important but limited setting. In short, the film is more set during the era of the Holocaust than it is about the Holocaust, and will require of any teacher who uses it a serious effort to fill in the many blanks not covered.

There are disturbing scenes of violence and cruelty, but also moments of levity and goodness that make the feature-length film something slightly more than tragic. The story of the German officer who, toward the end of the war, helps Szpilman, for instance, properly complicates students' narratives about those who perpetrated the Holocaust. There are abundant curricula, including study guides and lesson plans, that have been written around this widely used film and are easily found online. Though lengthy and somewhat narrow in its focus, the film is well done and engaging and contains only minor dramaturgical liberties, with no egregious historical inaccuracies to confuse meaning.

OVERVIEW

Film title: *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*

Running time: 1 hr 34 min

Genre: Fiction, fantasy

Rating: PG-13

Grade for historical accuracy: F

SYNOPSIS

A German officer takes the job of commandant of a death camp, which is clearly modeled after Auschwitz-Birkenau, and moves his family into housing on the outskirts. There, his son, Bruno, befriends a little Jewish boy, Shmuel, who

is interned on the other side of the electrified fence and wears a prisoner's uniform. Bruno digs his way under the fence to play with Shmuel, and the two boys, along with hundreds of others, ultimately die in a gas chamber.

IN THE CLASSROOM

Much has been written in response to the popularity of this film, not least by academics and practitioners who are outraged by its absurdities and their implications. The late David Cesarani (2008) wrote that the film “beggars belief” (n.p.), while Alan Marcus (2017) of the University of Connecticut pointed out that the Jews portrayed in the film lack complexity and voice, making the film a “dangerous” choice for educators. Both agree that the very story is both implausible and misleading. As Marcus (2017) put it, “There are numerous flaws that make *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* a good fit for entertainment and a failure for education” (p. 170).

Furthermore, the film raises questions that need not be asked: If Bruno can dig his way into the camp, then why did all Jews not dig their way out? Did the Germans really not know what was happening to the Jews? Did Zyklon B lead to a quick and painless death? Could imprisoned Jewish children have played with non-Jewish children, visiting on both sides of a fence? Chasing such proverbial rabbits calls into question some of what is known about the Holocaust, and is at best a waste of time, at worst a nudge in the direction of Holocaust denial.

Further, in addition to the many serious historical inaccuracies and incorrect implications, what I find especially disturbing about the film are the emotions elicited by the events portrayed toward the end. While an even reasonably astute student can easily infer that tens or even hundreds of thousands of people have been arriving and being murdered at “Out With” (Auschwitz) non-stop since long before the movie began, the moment at which the story is designed to pull strongest at the heartstrings, especially of students who are understandably most able to connect with and care about characters close to their own age, is not the death of any of those seemingly countless people, but rather when the young German boy, Bruno, mistaken for a Jewish child, is murdered in the gas chamber. In fact, the scene elicits a strong sense of pity for the commandant and his wife, who are overcome with grief when they discover the fate of their son. The commandant is portrayed less as a murderous SS functionary and more as a doting father, ignoring the fact that he is largely responsible for the death that surrounds him, including Bruno's. His wife is similarly portrayed as a good mother, oblivious to the murder of the Jews around her, including her own household help.

The movie has no value as a teaching tool, save perhaps for upper-level film students who already possess a deep

understanding of the Holocaust and might choose to analyze it critically. It offers nothing that other films cannot provide without distorting history and denying the facts.

OVERVIEW

Film title: *Defiance*

Running time: 2 hr 17 min

Genre: Historical drama

Rating: R (violence, language)

Grade for historical accuracy: C+

SYNOPSIS

Set in 1941 in Belorussia, the film focuses on the Bielski brothers and the group of partisans that they lead. Together, the partisans engage in attacking occupying German forces and protecting the Jews who have successfully escaped the Nazis' murderous grasp.

IN THE CLASSROOM

This film has enjoyed both the enthusiastic support of organizations such as the Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation and the scrutiny and disdain of the Polish Government (Leigh, 2009). While based on the historically true story of the Bielski Otriad, the omission of the crimes of which the Bielskis have been accused, coupled with an exceedingly narrow focal point, paints a picture that can at best be described as incomplete.

The laser focus on partisan resistance, though an important and worthy avenue of study, is far from representative of the Holocaust as a whole. Most Jews were not partisans, and most Jewish resistance was not armed. For this reason, *Defiance* is perhaps best used only in small clips, or as part of a much longer unit on the Holocaust than most educators have the luxury of teaching. To show this film from start to finish as a substantial part or the entirety of a unit on the Holocaust would be, as the USHMM (2017) terms it, to “romanticize history” by failing to “strive for balance in establishing whose perspective informs your study of the Holocaust” (n. p.).

OVERVIEW

Film title: *The Path to Nazi Genocide*

Running time: 38 min

Genre: Documentary

Rating: Not rated

Grade for historical accuracy: A+

SYNOPSIS

Divided into four chapters, this short film traces a historical route from the turn of the 20th century to the conclusion of the Second World War, focusing on antisemitism, the Nazi rise to power, and ultimately the Holocaust, its causes, and its aftermath.

IN THE CLASSROOM

Available as a free download and also widely circulated on DVD at USHMM events, *The Path to Nazi Genocide* is a teaching tool that helps most students comprehend the rapid transition of events from the peace, prosperity, and growth of 1900 through the First World War, the Great Depression, the rise of the NSDAP, the Second World War, and the Holocaust.

Engaging yet accessible, suitable for students in middle school and up, the film provides necessary historical context for understanding the events that quickly set off what we call the Holocaust. This makes it especially well suited for teachers who may lack such background, such as English teachers (like this author) who are tasked only with teaching a novel, yet need to contextualize that text for their students.

In a few places, graphic images may be difficult to watch or even inappropriate for some, most notably perhaps the film clip of a 1941 Einsatzgruppen action in Liepaja, Latvia. Prescreening is always a must, especially for teachers in private or religious schools and with younger audiences.

OVERVIEW

Film title: *Life Is Beautiful*

Running time: 1 hr 56 min

Genre: Fiction

Rating: PG-13

Grade for historical accuracy: D-

SYNOPSIS

The movie is presented in two distinct parts. In the first, a charming if arguably silly man woos a lover, who eventually concedes to marry him. This part is a comedy, thanks in part to the acting and direction of Roberto Benigni, who plays Guido, the main character. He is persecuted for being Jewish, and the persecution extends to his wife, but nothing is taken too seriously. They have a child, time passes, and the father and his young son of seven or eight, but not his non-Jewish wife, are deported to a death camp.

The second part details the life of the father and son in the camp, where the father goes to heroic (and absurdly impossible) lengths to successfully convince the son that their deplorable conditions are merely part of a game they are playing. A contest of hide-and-seek and other shenanigans often elicit laughter from students and allow them to easily forget the very real and somber history that should have contextualized this film. Ultimately, the man dies and his son survives.

IN THE CLASSROOM

As Lawrence Langer (2006) bluntly responds to the film, “Life is not beautiful” (p. 30). Of course, one can easily argue that point, especially in times of peace, yet his allusion to the movie and his sardonic invocation are more

than warranted here. The Holocaust was many things, but it most certainly was not beautiful. As Langer goes on to say of director Benigni's best-known film:

The film's allure is based on a willing suspension of disbelief: that in Benigni's version of a death camp milieu, it really was possible for a victim to preserve enough physical and spiritual mastery to “outwit” singlehandedly the murderous intentions of the Germans. Benigni seems unconcerned that by infusing the gloom of his Holocaust scenario with the comic ingenuity of his character he allows Guido's antics to profane the solemn impact of the surroundings. . . . Benigni has thus shaped a legend of survival to counter the darker truth of how the Holocaust experience threatened to erode the reigning image in Western civilization of an inviolable self. (pp. 30–31)

Life Is Beautiful, not unlike *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, requires that the viewer completely and utterly separate from reality in order to engage with the story and accept what Cesarani (2008) described as “a travesty of the facts” (n.p.). The film ultimately succeeds in portraying the Holocaust and the plight of camp inmates as something far less grim and murderous than it really was. The father dies in the end, gunned down in an alleyway off-screen, yet his small son, improbably, lives. All this takes place within a camp in which foolish guards are easily duped and the freedom to play hide-and-seek is somehow part of this alternative reality.

While the film is engaging (and of an altogether higher literary and dramatic standard than *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*), there are other films that engage without deliberately and grossly distorting the realities of the Holocaust. I recall vividly the great offense that a survivor friend took upon seeing this particular film, and would thus strongly encourage fellow teachers to avoid screening it.

The film may also be considered uplifting, given the humor and the attempt at a happy ending. Yet while the Holocaust gives educators countless opportunities for reflection and growth in the classroom, the opportunity to uplift is not rightfully among them. There is no happy ending to the Holocaust. We are not to leave its study feeling uplifted, but rather enlightened, enraged, and perhaps empowered with the knowledge that what happened was preventable, and that what is still occurring in the world around us is equally so.

CONCLUSION

While administrators and school boards in some districts across the US have unscrupulously wrested the right to select materials, including film, from the purview of classroom practitioners, in the main, these titles represent

choices made by teachers with well-thought-out learning objectives and long-term goals in mind. Nevertheless, several are seriously flawed. Films about the Holocaust must be meticulously examined for historical authenticity and strict adherence to the reality of the Jewish experience. If they fail these tests, they should not be shown.

While some of these films were designed to be educational and geared towards a student audience, others were created for their entertainment value with the singular goal of profit. The latter still possess the potential to be efficaciously utilized in a classroom setting by a thoughtful and skillful practitioner, but their use places a far greater burden on the teacher to be diligent in her examination of the facts and situations presented than do the former.

The Holocaust has become widely taught in American secondary education, and film is an integral, possibly even necessary, supplement to that study. A close examination of the films most in use today suggests the imperative that we be deliberate, thoughtful, and cautious about how we select and use film in the classroom. The many cinematic resources available to us were not created equal. Which films we teach and how we use them to enhance and enrich our students' understanding are critical decisions that have a powerful impact on how our students come to understand the Holocaust—or don't.

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Once there are no survivors to tell the story, who will? Charles Adès Fishman reminds us that not only those who survived but also non-Jewish bystanders lived to tell the truth. "For a short while," he writes, "there will still be witnesses." Will they come forward before it is too late?

Charles Adès Fishman

Witnesses

Eastern Europe, 1941

The Nazis entered the village, one village then another, everything anticipated. There was often resistance, but its impact was minimal, easily dealt with, and the flourish of mild force, the side-stepping of a few, sharpened their sense of mission.

Once the Jews understood no door opened to escape, it was easy to line them up, to march them to the pit, to arrange them — man, woman, and child — at the lip of the grave's wide mouth. And soon the shooting began. Each child. Each woman. Each man.

Only 3 or 4 minutes to line them up. So much for the Jews of Jieznas, of Kaisiadoris, the Jews of Makow Mazowieki, of Kaunas and Jonava, the Jews who filled the graves in Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine —

• • •

It was almost 4 pm, and he had been grazing the cows, she bringing in the wash.

And, for a short while, there will still be witnesses.

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Seymour Mayne, professor of Canadian literature, Canadian studies, and creative writing at the University of Ottawa, is the author, editor, or translator of more than 70 books. Six collections of his poetry have been rendered into Hebrew, including *Fly Off Into the Strongest Light: Selected Poems* and *Ricochet: Word Sonnets*. A selection of his short fiction, *The Old Blue Couch and Other Stories*, has been published in Hebrew, French, Romanian, and Spanish. His most recent book is *In Your Words: Translations from the Yiddish and the Hebrew*. A four-time winner of the Canadian Jewish Book Award, he has received the J. I. Segal Prize, the American Literary Translators Association Poetry Translation Award, and the Louis Rosenberg Canadian Jewish Studies Distinguished Service Award.

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Francine Mayran, a French painter, ceramics artist, and psychiatrist, gives expression to the memory of the Holocaust and other genocides in her creations, bringing together art, remembrance, and history. Since 2008, her exhibition *Témoigner de ces vies / Witnessing These Lives* has built a path of remembrance with more than 65 showings in France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Albania, Greece, Bulgaria, and Poland, as well as at a meeting of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in London. She works with teachers from all over the Continent to help awaken the consciousness of the next generation and fight against racism and antisemitism. Her website is www.fmayran.com.

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Dr. Rafael Medoff is founding director of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies in Washington, D. C. He is the author or editor of 18 books about the Holocaust, Zionism, and American Jewish history and has contributed to the *Encyclopedia Judaica* and other reference volumes. Dr. Medoff has taught Jewish history at Ohio State University, SUNY–Purchase College, and elsewhere, and served as associate editor of the scholarly journal *American Jewish History*.

LARRY ORBACH

Larry (Lothar) Orbach (1924–2008) was a child of a patriotic German Jewish family in Berlin when Hitler rose to power. He went underground in 1942 with false papers, but was captured in 1944 and sent first to Auschwitz, then to a slave-labor camp (Niederorschel), and finally on a death march to Buchenwald, where he was liberated. After emigrating to the US with his mother, he married a fellow refugee and launched a successful jewelry messenger service. He served on the New Jersey State Commission on Holocaust Education.

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Vivien Orbach-Smith is a Connecticut-based writer, book editor, and adjunct professor in NYU's Carter Journalism Institute. She co-authored her father's newly reissued memoir, *Young Lothar* (I. B. Tauris, London, 2017; <http://younglothar.com>), originally published as *Soaring Underground* (1996). As a voice of the second generation, Vivien addresses audiences of all backgrounds on safeguarding democracy and breaking free of inherited trauma. She recently narrated a GPS-guided walking tour in Berlin based on Lothar's life: www.detroit.com/berlin/berlin-the-underground.

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Nancy Patz has written and illustrated 13 picture books. *Who Was the Woman Who Wore the Hat?* (2003, Dutton) won the Sydney Taylor Award, among other prizes. *Eighteen Stones* (2011, Jewish Museum of Maryland) was premiered in her solo exhibit at the Jewish Museum of Maryland and shown at Holocaust Museum Houston, where she is a frequent lecturer. Patz's drawings of artifacts in the spring 2014 issue of *PRISM* have been exhibited at Goucher College and Temple Oheb Shalom in Baltimore, Maryland. Her most recent book, co-written with Stuart Sheer, is *The Elephant With a Knot in His Trunk* (2017, Baltimore: Barton Books).

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Pnina Rosenberg, Ph.D., is an art historian specializing in the art and legacy of the Holocaust. She lectures on these subjects at the Technion and the Yezreel Valley Academic College in Israel. Her research on the art and memory of the Holocaust has been published in books, articles, and exhibition catalogues. Her latest publication (co-edited with Ruth Amir) is *Critical Insights of Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl*. (Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2017). Rosenberg is the art editor of *PRISM*.

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Myra Sklarew, professor emerita at American University and former president of the Yaddo artists' community, is the author of collections of poetry, fiction, and essays including *From the Backyard of the Diaspora* (National Jewish Book Council Award in Poetry) and *Lithuania: New & Selected Poems* (Judah Magnes Museum Anna Davidson Rosenberg Award). *A Survivor Named Trauma: Holocaust and the Construction of Memory* is forthcoming from SUNY Press.

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Tino Villanueva is the author of seven books of poetry. A painter and writer, he won a 1994 American Book Award for his *Scene From the Movie Giant*. Six of his poems appear in *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* (2011), and his artwork has appeared on the covers and the inside pages of *Green Mountains Review*, *TriQuarterly*, and *Parnassus*. His most recent book of poems is *So Spoke Penelope* (2013), translated into Spanish as *Así habló Penélope* (2014). Tino retired from Boston University in 2015.

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