

E C H O E S

*of memory*

VOLUME  
3

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

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*of memory*  
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3

STORIES FROM THE MEMORY PROJECT

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

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\*Works of fiction

## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

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*Sara J. Bloomfield*

As we move forward into the 21st century—whose early years have been filled with enormous challenges and great opportunities—we will undoubtedly look back to the 20th century for guidance, lessons, and perspectives. The Holocaust was a pivotal event of that most eventful century, and it continues to shape our own world. But as the Holocaust recedes in time, how will we ensure that it is meaningful to each new generation that encounters its horrible realities and important lessons?

The Museum has reached millions of individuals with these lessons. And we know both from those who actually visit our memorial and from our cyberspace visitors on our Web site that the personalization of Holocaust history is the single most powerful part of their experience. Some mention the suitcases; others recall the victims' belongings. Most remember the shoes. But *all* talk about the survivor testimony film and, for a very fortunate few, the opportunity to meet a survivor.

Those of us who spend our careers at the Museum have the rare privilege of working closely with many survivors every day. It is always very special to encounter a survivor. But, it is really extraordinary to know them personally, to work with them in many situations, and to see them interact with our staff and our visitors—especially the hundreds of thousands of young people we reach each year.

So, through this volume, those of us who are so blessed to have the survivors in our midst want to share a glimpse of that special experience with others. *Echoes of Memory*, Volume 3, offers their very personal accounts of suffering and loss, of hope and renewal. Survivors were abandoned by the world

## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

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and left to a horrible fate. They could have responded with anger and hate, yet they responded with compassion and love. They could have been indifferent about life, yet they embraced it. Like me, you will be amazed and inspired to read their accounts, remarkable testaments to these survivors and to the potential of the human spirit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sara J. Bloomfield". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Sara J. Bloomfield

Director

September 18, 2005

## INTRODUCTION

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*Margaret Peterson*

*Memory Project* participants meet once a month at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. For nearly five years, this group of Holocaust survivors has come to these meetings to craft the truest telling of their memories. They sit at a conference table and critique the stories or memoirs they have written. The participants subject their work to scrutiny to fulfill the mission that each writer has set for himself or herself—to show clearly how the Holocaust affected an individual life. Each month these writers tell another part of the story of their lives during the Holocaust. Each month they attempt to use their writing as a means of deciphering their pasts. Every story is a part of history, a memoir, a first-person account that did not exist before it was written down and shared during the monthly meetings of the *Memory Project*.

The group is aptly named, it seems to me, because the reality is that this type of remembering is work. The memories of Holocaust survivors are often painful to recall. Memory is unreliable and does not easily transform into the chronology of a story. It takes time and patience to commit to writing the stories of one's life. But each month the group meets, and each month participants continue their "memory projects." Their telling is important work, and I am grateful that they do it.

Every year, I ask, "How long do you want to continue this work? How long are you willing to continue meeting? When do you want to quit?" And each time the answer is the same: "Not yet, we are not finished yet." I am never surprised. I expect this answer from these people who survived the devastation of the Holocaust and made lives for themselves and for their families. These survivors feel



## INTRODUCTION

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a commitment to one another and to the histories that they are relating during these monthly meetings. I never leave the sessions without feeling buoyed by the bravery and the resolve of their commitment. The writing that they have labored over this year is compiled in this, the third volume of *Echoes of Memory*.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Margaret Peterson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Margaret Peterson

*Memory Project* Instructor

# IN THE GHETTO WITH MY MOTHER

*Erika Eckstut*

ERIKA ECKSTUT, FROM ZNOJMO, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, SURVIVED THE WAR POSING AS A CHRISTIAN WITH FALSE IDENTIFICATION PAPERS.



One day my mother asked me to take off my yellow star because we had to go to the country. We lived in a ghetto, and we were not supposed to leave. If we were caught on the outside we could be killed and they also might kill other people in the ghetto for good measure. But both my mother and I had blue eyes and blonde hair and spoke German fluently and therefore did not think that we would be discovered as Jews from the ghetto.

Without asking any questions, I took off the star and waited for Mother to get ready. She wore my father's winter coat, which was very nice with a fur collar. We walked for a long time without stopping. After a while, my mother started to explain that Grandmother was very ill and that she wanted to get a chicken for her. I wondered how she was going to get a chicken. How would we carry it?

After a long time, we came to a farm where we saw a lot of chickens. My mother approached the farmer and told him she would like to buy one. She wanted to pay for the chicken with money, but the farmer did not want money. He only wanted her coat. She agreed under two conditions: one, that he would kill the chicken, and two, that he would clean it. The farmer agreed. He killed and cleaned the chicken and gave it to my mother. She in turn gave him my father's coat. I could not believe that we had a chicken and that mother had given away the coat.

On the way home I asked my mother if she was cold and she said, no, she was not cold. When we finally arrived back in the ghetto, she washed the chicken and placed it in a pot on the portable stove. I watched my mother cook and did not say a word. She made soup from the chicken and gave it to Grandmother. Grandmother wanted to know who had killed the chicken because she was very religious.

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My mother said without blinking, “The *Shokhet* [ritual slaughterer].” I could not believe what she had said.

My father saw the look on my face and took me aside and asked me what was wrong. I said that Mother had lied to Grandmother. I told him I saw who killed the chicken and it was the farmer. My father said he knew that Mother had lied to Grandmother. He said Grandmother was very ill, and she would not eat the soup unless a *Shokhet* had killed the chicken. He said if God saw what Mother did, he would understand that the lie was to save Grandmother from starving to death. 🌹

## MY LIFE IN STANESTIE

*Erika Eckstat*

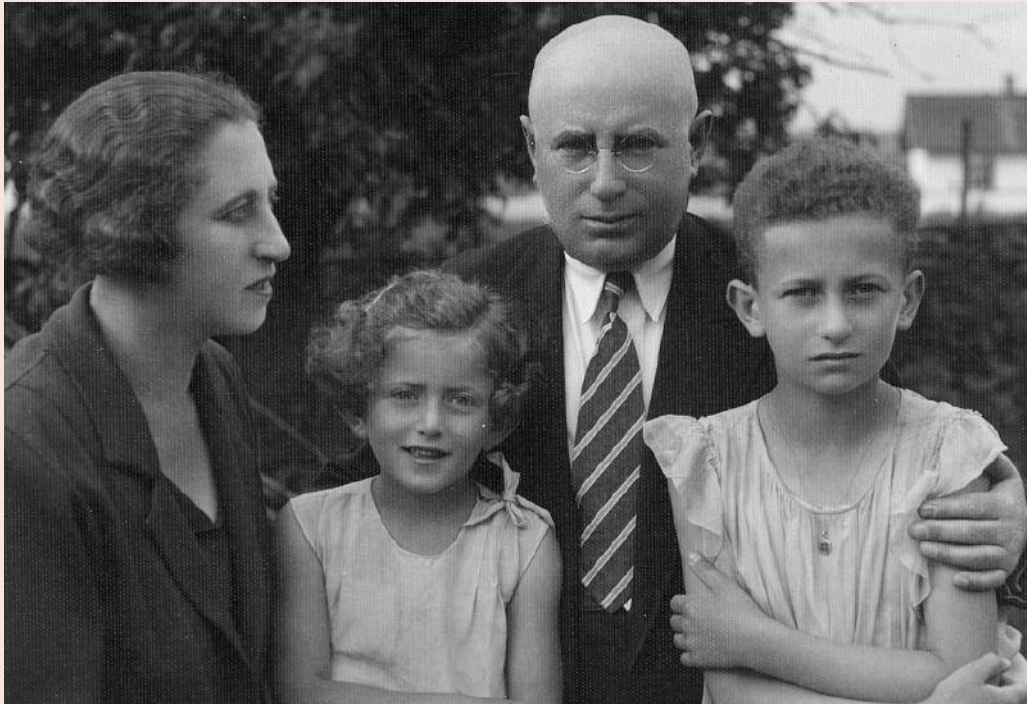
How do you describe a little town you loved when you were young? I never thought of it as a little town. It had everything. I lived with my father, mother, and sister. I went to school, played there, and had lots of friends. I also had my grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins nearby. My grandfather was special. My sister and I were the only grandchildren he had in Europe. My grandparents had five sons. One was killed in the First World War. Three lived in the United States—my grandmother went every day to the mailbox to see if there was anything from her sons there, but she very rarely received mail from them. My father was the only son left in Europe.

My grandfather spent all his time with my sister and me. However, he gave me most of his attention. My sister and I used to sit outside my grandparents' house. We always had books to read. My grandfather would come out and stand behind my sister. As soon as she started to read, my grandfather would wink at me, and we would leave her while she was busy reading.

I loved to go with him to visit the cows and the chickens. He would always pick me up for me to see if there were any chicken eggs. I had a little basket and I always found some eggs. He also bought me a horse when I was six. We always rode horses together. He was on a big horse and I was on the little one. When I grew older and bad times came, I always remembered my wonderful times with my grandfather.

When I was six, I started public and Hebrew schools. I was very busy with both. My father was strict with both my sister and me. With my sister, my father had no problem. She was a good student. However, he had a few problems with me. I cut school quite a few times.

I finished first grade with all A+'s. The teachers loved me and I loved them. When I was in second grade, I noticed that the school principal was visiting my father at home in his office. I knew exactly



DOLLY AND EPHRAIM NEUMAN WITH THEIR DAUGHTERS BEATRICE AND ERIKA (CENTER)

*ERIKA NEUMAN KAUDER ECKSTUT*

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what was going on. I was in trouble again. I went to my nana and told her that I was leaving. She yelled at me not to forget to be home in time for dinner. I said thanks and left as fast as I could.

When I returned home for dinner, my father asked me to bring my schoolbook reader and read to him. I opened the book and read from it without a problem. He closed the book and opened it again. He put his hand over the picture on the page and asked me to read. I couldn't—I knew the book by heart. In those days I had a photographic memory. I still have a photographic memory, but without film. My father was disappointed. He hired a tutor and I learned to read.

We had performances at the Hebrew school at the end of each school year. My assignment was to learn a poem in Hebrew. My father checked on my progress and was satisfied that I knew the whole poem by heart. However, my grandfather was not happy because he felt that he was being cheated out of spending time with me. Then came the moment when I was supposed to perform. My grandfather gave me a little bowl of the cherries that wine is made from. A little later I started to recite my poem to the audience. I started to recite it from the beginning and then from the end, and then I started over from the beginning and recited the whole poem correctly. I received a great deal of applause. Most people in the audience did not know Hebrew. However, my father, who had started the Hebrew school, knew Hebrew perfectly. When I walked off the stage, he met me and asked me to breathe on him. He asked me what I was drinking. Before I could answer, my grandfather said to my father, "If you have a question, address it to me." They did not talk to each other for a week.

These were happy times. I have so many nice memories. Then came 1940 and the Soviets. We the children had to attend Soviet school and learn Russian. I learned Russian perfectly that year. It was not an easy life under the Soviets, who left in 1941.

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A few days after the Soviets arrived, four men came to our house and said my family must go with them. My father asked the men where we had to go. One man responded in an unfriendly manner that we should just come and then we would see where they would take us. My father was a veteran from the First World War and he walked with a cane. My father was a lawyer and the mayor of our town. He knew all the people in town. However, he did not know these four people.

They took us to the end of the town. All Jews in the town were there—about 500 people. They selected the Rabbi and his two sons and shot and killed them in front of us. And then they proceeded to shoot the rest of the men. That day I lost my uncles and cousins. I asked my father why I had to die. My father always had an answer. But that day he had no answer. He just asked me to please not cry. Everybody was crying and praying. All of a sudden, they ran out of ammunition. They placed the rest of us in the courthouse. My father was standing outside smoking and a man came over and said he would take him home. My father said he was not leaving without his family. The man took all of us home. We heard one man say don't worry, they would get us tomorrow. The next day they came for my father. My sister insisted on going with him. They did not want her, but after much argument they took her along. When they were almost back at the courthouse, a man in a suit came along and said they did not belong there, and my father and sister were returned to our house. An hour later the chief of police came by to tell us that he would help us escape. We escaped that night and we went to Czernowitsie. Czernowitsie was the capital of Bukovina and was in the northern part of Romania. 🐣

# THE GOLDEN COCKROACH\*

*Frank Ephraim*

FRANK EPHRAIM WAS BORN IN BERLIN, GERMANY, AND EMIGRATED WITH HIS PARENTS IN FEBRUARY 1939 TO THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS, WHERE HE LIVED UNDER JAPANESE OCCUPATION AND LATER IN A REFUGEE CAMP.



The apartment on Broome Street on New York’s Lower East Side is steamy in the sweltering heat of July. Odd smells waft from the old furniture; the dark brown wood casts a depressing mood over the crowded room. Only a single bright square—crisscrossed by shadows of the fire escape—illuminates the floor, its shellac worn by generations of tenement dwellers. Emma kneels on the floor and tries to concentrate on her book. The English is still hard, but Mama says she must learn to read her new language. “Next Monday the school starts,” she said yesterday, “and Mr. Sondheim will take you there on the first day for registration.” Mr. Sondheim brought Mama and Emma to this apartment. It has one room, a little kitchen. The toilet is down the hall.

Mr. Sondheim had met them at the dock when the ship arrived in New York. He is a nice man—bald, with a gray beard and a twinkle in his eyes. He gave Emma a small basket filled with chocolates wrapped in brown and silver paper. That was in May of last year, 1947. Mama works all day in a clothing factory. Emma is too young to go to work, but she feels so much older than the other ten-year-old girls that live in the building. They are supposed to be her new friends. They always laugh when she tries to speak English. So Emma avoids them and stays in the apartment trying to keep busy.

And that is what she is doing at this moment, cutting patterns into folded pieces of old newspaper. The result always brings a surprise when the paper is unfolded to reveal the design. An old woman on the ship that brought Emma and Mama to New York had shown her how to do that. That woman could produce wonderful patterns—rows of paper dolls, swans, and stars. It helped pass the time.

\*Work of fiction



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Last night Mama let out a cry just as Emma was in the hall. With her heart pounding, Emma ran into the apartment to see her mother, the old piece of newspaper rolled up in her hand, swatting at something on the floor. The cutouts lay scattered about and Emma thought Mama was angry at her.

“Dirty pest. He ran into the closet. Maybe he is hiding in the newspaper.”

Emma had seen it before. A large insect with a flat gold-colored body. Mr. Sondheim had told Mama about them. They had a strange name—“kkratch,” or something. He said to use “Flit,” an insect spray, and he made a pumping motion with his fist. “That will kill them,” he had added. Mama shuddered when he said that.

Emma puts her book down on the floor. It is time for making more cutouts, and she opens the closet door to reach in for an old newspaper that is stored there.

With a shriek she scurries backwards as she spies the insect on top of the stack of newspapers. In a few rapid spurts the cockroach makes its way onto the floor as Emma stares down from atop the light green, threadbare bed cover. The insect halts briefly and then moves forward. The sunlight turns the wings into a golden hue. Emma’s body is rigid, her eyes fixed on the cockroach, and then she shifts them towards the door to measure the distance for a quick escape.

But before she acts, several smaller cockroaches make their appearance. Emma bolts for the door, slams it shut, and runs down the hall just as three of her new friends are trampling up the stairs.

Gasping, Emma tries to tell them what she saw.

“Kkratch, kkratch!” they mimic, laughing. Emma wants to cry, but she controls herself. She had done that before when, with Mama, they had hid in the attic as Nazi troopers searched their house, looking for Papa.

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That night Mr. Sondheim arrives with food for supper and three candles. It is Friday night, and Mama lights two candles for Sabbath before they eat. Emma knows the third candle will be lit tomorrow. It is the day set aside to remember Papa, who never came back from the war in the East. Mama never says much about that, but she will cry tomorrow.

Tonight Mr. Sondheim also brings a small bottle of wine and he makes the blessing, after which he lets Emma sip from the cup. It is very sweet and Emma wants another sip, but Mama casts a forbidding eye and shakes her head.

“So, Emma, are you ready to go to school on Monday?”

Emma does not answer because she is afraid the other children will tease her.

“Oh, yes,” Mama says as she nods her head toward Emma to encourage her to agree. “Or do you want to work in a clothing workshop also when you are older?”

Mama is glad she has a job but complains about the long hours, the bad light, and the nasty foreman. But she never tells this to Mr. Sondheim. She is always nice to him.

“Listen to your Mama, she wants the best for you,” he says in his gentle voice. “Maybe you will be a doctor someday and live in a big beautiful house,” says Mr. Sondheim as he spreads his hands wide. Emma smiles at him but quickly looks down at her plate as Mama serves the corned beef and mashed potatoes.

Mama and Emma share an apple after supper, and Mr. Sondheim reaches into his vest pocket. He selects a quarter from the coins in his hand and gives it to Emma.

“This is for your lunch at school, young lady.”

“Thank you, Mr. Sondheim,” Emma says as Mama looks on with an approving smile. Emma knows she is happy about the “thank you” because she had so often scolded Emma for not saying it.

“Always good to have a little pocket money,” Mr. Sondheim says as he slips the coins back into his vest pocket. Then he chuckles and tells them a story about the man who lived in their apartment before he died.

The man was short with a very bad limp and he sold newspapers down at the corner. During the bitter cold of winter, he wore an old black overcoat, and in the humid summers, he dressed in a well-worn white long-sleeved shirt, but always the same dark blue woolen pants. The newspaper vendor belted out the headlines to passersby. He had a practiced way of swiftly folding a newspaper as the buyer handed him coins in payment. Everybody called him Sol.

Sol Weisman was found dead one dark early morning waiting for the newspaper truck to dump its daily delivery at his feet. He had no relatives, so the community paid for his funeral. Only when the local ward commissioners came to go over his effects did they discover he had over \$25,000 stuffed in his mattress.

Mr. Sondheim sips his second cup of wine and slowly shakes his head. “Poor man, he did not know better.” Mama manages to smile just a little, but Emma gets up from her chair in the kitchen, walks to the bedroom, and stares at the bed. Mr. Sondheim sees this.

“Oh, no, all of Sol Weisman’s furniture was removed,” he says quickly. “The refugee committee supplied this furniture. It was donated by some nice people.”

The next morning Emma at first does not want to reach into the closet for a newspaper. Perhaps she should go downstairs and play with the other girls. They have dolls and make clothes for them with needles and thread. As she sits on the bed the cockroach appears and slowly makes its way out of the closet. Then, one by one, smaller cockroaches follow the first one as Emma watches in fascination.

“A family of insects,” she thinks. “Only a mother, no father.” A feeling of empathy flashes through her as the brood of small creatures moves furtively about. She slips off the bed, and as her feet touch the floor, the cockroaches scatter, then make for the space under the closet door.

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Emma walks to the closet, opens the door, and sees the last of the insects disappear behind the stack of newspapers. She kneels down and slowly pulls the papers away from the inside wall. The morning sunlight shines into the closet. There is a very narrow gap between the floor molding and the wall. That must be where the insects hide.

As Emma puts her fingers over the gap, she feels that a piece of the three-inch-high molding is loose. She easily pulls it away, revealing a large hole in the wall. There is no sign of the cockroaches, but Emma kneels lower to see inside the hole.

Several strands of twisted black cord lie at the edge of the hole, and Emma hesitates. What if that is the nest of the cockroaches? Or perhaps something else filthy? But she is curious and the insects no longer repel her. Her small fingers slowly touch the cords and loop around one of them. As she pulls, Emma realizes that the cords are attached to a flexible material, and as she continues to pull, the neck of a pouch appears. Her body obscures much of the light, but the pouch is made of dark leather. She pulls harder and feels as if there is something heavy inside. No, she thinks, maybe I should push it back, there could be something creepy inside. Emma removes her hand from the pouch and wipes the dust off on her skirt. She waits. All is quiet, nothing moves, and there are no sounds.

With her index finger she probes the pouch. A little poke here, then a little harder. Whatever is inside feels solid—not a dead mouse. She overcomes her fright.

At last she holds the neck of the pouch, but Emma cannot lift it while crouching on her knees, so she drags it out of the closet. The pouch is black, as revealed when her hand brushes the leather, disturbing the caked dust coating. Emma's heart is pounding with anticipation as she pulls open the pouch.

The glint of bright metal momentarily disorients Emma as she tries to grasp what she sees. Her small hand reaches inside the pouch, and her fingers rake out a dozen golden coins. She cannot believe what

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she sees. She covers her eyes with her hands and shakes her head. Slowly Emma drops her hands and lifts her eyelids just a bit. The coins are still there, and her small hands, fingers spread wide, pounce on them. She squeezes the coins in her fists and lets them slide back on the floor.

Suddenly Emma freezes. She turns around to make sure no one is behind her at the door. She turns back to look at the coins again to make sure she is not in a dream. Yes, the shiny golden coins are still there. Are they real?

Emma is curious. There are designs on the coins: the larger ones have a bird on one side, the smaller ones show the head of an Indian. Emma can read “\$10” on the smaller ones. She starts to count the coins and stops after reaching 100.

Emma cannot wait to tell Mama.

But Mama will tell Mr. Sondheim.

And Mr. Sondheim will take the pouch away.

Now only Emma knows the secret, a hiding place guarded by the golden cockroach and her family.

Emma looks at the pouch, then at the hole. She cups her face in her hands, closes her eyes, and thinks. What would it be like to buy the things she wants? Oh, those beads in the shop window at the corner. And Mama—she would be so happy with a new winter coat.

But Mr. Sondheim will take the pouch away.

A wave of anger wells up and Emma clutches the pouch for a long time. No, the coins are hers now; no one can take them away. Then she pushes the pouch back into the hole inside the closet and sets the molding in place. 🐞

# THE WATCH IN THE WINDOW\*

*Frank Ephraim*

The window of the pawnshop on Second Avenue had not been washed in a long time. Peeled black paint showed ridges of rust on the heavy iron frame that surrounded the window, and only the three globes hanging above the doorway appeared to have received any maintenance care. They glistened in the lamp-lit street like stacked cannonballs from another age.

Albert had walked by the shop many times during the last three months, but never stopped because he was usually in a hurry and besides, the cold weather of New York City in this winter of 1946 had a special bite that made him seek the warmth of Mrs. Levy's flat. Even there, the radiators went cold after midnight and did not warm up again until six in the morning. But Mrs. Levy's meals were generous and sometimes even tasty. The chicken soup, the slice of brisket, and the mashed potatoes were a delight every Friday night for Sabbath.

Tonight, his hands in his overcoat pockets, Albert slowed just a little as he approached the pawnshop. The crammed display included so many items, making it difficult to distinguish them, but there were small radios, a whole array of vicious-looking knives, and rows of wristwatches in shiny gold and silver. Albert kept walking, his hot breath vaporizing in the cold air as he lowered his chin into the turned-up collar of his overcoat.

The city with its millions of lights had hordes of people who rushed as if they all had a mission to accomplish. He climbed the 12 stone steps to Mrs. Levy's flat and rang the doorbell. As he waited, Albert saw his reflection in the coated glass door panel. His dark eyebrows were aligned with the black beret that had, not so long ago, been part of his disguise. The mustache no longer decorated his upper lip, which in any case was overshadowed by his nose. But at least here the light blue eyes did not cause suspicion as they had on the streets of Madrid. He should have stayed in Barcelona where blue eyes might have enabled him to pass as a Catalan, but he had had to get to Lisbon because that was the only way out—and even that was taking a chance.

\*Work of fiction

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“You smell of a cold winter,” Mrs. Levy, her big body covered by a flower-patterned housecoat, said after she had opened the door. “Get ready to eat before the food gets cold.” She had a kindly voice, not threatening, but still emphatic like a mother hen.

“Good evening, Mrs. Levy,” said Albert. “I will just take off my coat and come back down immediately.” He gave his landlady a little bow as he spoke, but he no longer proffered his hand, a gesture that belonged to Europe, she had told him.

The boarders were all men. By now Albert knew their names: Andrew, who worked as a bookkeeper; Marcus, the shoe salesman; and Stephen, a goldsmith’s apprentice. They all considered Albert the most fortunate because he worked for a small importer of French wines. While he knew nothing about wine, Albert spoke French—not gladly, but it got him a job and that is what counted now.

Only Stephen sat at the table as Albert approached. The others came home much later—their work hours often lasted into the early evening—and they had to warm up their supper themselves.

“Cold enough for you?” Stephen always spoke first. He was short and with a round freckled face. All of 18, he had completed an apprenticeship and now polished gold rings or watched a crucible melt gold scraps for reuse. He had talked about his job and the prissy goldsmith who tutored him so that he might become a journeyman. This evening, after his habitual gesture of sweeping the unruly red hair from his face with his long thin fingers, Stephen dropped his hand to the floor and came up with a bottle of beer.

“For you and me to share.” There was something triumphant in his smile.

“Oh, thank you, but the beer is yours and I...” But before Albert could finish, Stephen held a finger to his lips. “Not so loud, Mrs. Levy won’t like it, drinking beer on Sabbath, but I am celebrating.”

Vaguely curious, Albert nodded his head, reached for the knife and fork, and began to eat, with the firm knowledge that Stephen was eager to tell him why.

“You know the pawnshop on Second Avenue?”

“Yes, I pass it every day.”

“Well, last month the pawnbroker brought in a very old pocketwatch. He told my boss that a man had pawned it a few days ago and showed us a dent in the gold casing. The pawnbroker asked if the watch could be repaired. He hoped to sell it at a high price because the watch was an antique and worth a lot of money—if the man did not return to reclaim it within 30 days. After he heard what it would cost to repair, he left saying he would think about it.”

A gold pocketwatch. That brought back painful memories, but Stephen’s voice interrupted Albert’s musings.

“You know what?” Stephen paused and lowered his head. “The pawnbroker came back to our shop with the watch today, and the goldsmith gave it to me to fix. My first solo job.” Stephen poured beer into Albert’s water glass, then filled his own and lifted it. Albert did the same and in a subdued voice offered his congratulations.



Upstairs in his room Albert sat on the dark brown wooden chair and thumbed through yesterday’s newspaper. The *New York Times* was like a schoolbook for him because the many stories inside were the keys to learning not only the English language, but also the character and customs of Americans. From news to sports, Albert absorbed American life, and even the advertisements helped him understand his new country.

Tonight his eyes caught a full-page ad for watches and he started to read. He knew why. That did not take much analysis. The pawnbroker’s gold pocketwatch had ignited a spark that lit an image of the magnificent gold Breguet—grandfather’s pocketwatch that his own father had given him on his bar mitzvah.



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Albert had not really used it very much, only on a few festive occasions when the gold chain and fob hung from his vest pocket. That was in Lyon, home of the Dargent family, of which Albert was the youngest child. The family name had been Silver until his great-grandfather had changed it to its French translation.

Albert's hand instinctively touched the pocket on his grey vest. Of course there was no watch in it. The secondhand suit came from a nearby refugee aid organization but fit him quite well—well enough to wear to work. Albert laid the paper on the bed and let his head roll back. Streaks of dirty white showed through the grey ceiling, which merged, in his imagination, into an early afternoon dusk in the Les Brotteaux district of Lyon on that fateful Sunday of November 22, 1942, when, in the late afternoon, he had returned to his parents' apartment. He could still hear the anxious voice of their neighbor.

"Albert, quick, come into our apartment," the man had said, beckoning with his forefinger. "The Gestapo came and arrested your parents right after lunch. They allowed them to take only a small suitcase."

Albert had been too stunned to reply and had just stared as if he had been looking into a chasm.

"You should not stay here," his neighbor had continued. "They would have grabbed you as well."

There was little point in asking where the Gestapo had taken his parents. The headquarters were in the Hotel Terminus, near the railway station—a place that he, as well as every resident of Lyon, now feared to enter.

Flight in the event of the Germans occupying the so-called Vichy zone of France had often been a subject of discussion at home. What to do when that happened. There had been talk of crossing the border to Spain and the difficulties that entailed. But now Albert was faced with a decision and there was little time to think. He raced back to his parents' apartment, packed his rucksack, changed into his corduroy trousers, put on his sturdy walking shoes, and pulled a heavy sweater over his wool shirt. Then, from the very back of his desk drawer, he retrieved his bar mitzvah pocketwatch in its dark blue case.

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A quick flip of the lid revealed the beautiful Breguet bedded in soft ivory-colored velvet. Albert snapped the lid shut and slipped the case into the inside pocket of his leather coat. He reached for a pair of gloves, grabbed his black beret, and locked the apartment door. He never looked back.

The scene in front of the Hotel Terminus had remained etched in his mind. In eerie silence several hundred Jews had been herded onto trucks. He had stopped across the street. His parents had stood in the truck. They had seen him, but showed no acknowledgment. His father had only turned his head from front to side very slowly several times as if to say “No, no, do not divulge that you know us, Albert.” His mother had covered her eyes.

Albert had felt as if he were in a trance and that he had seen himself from outside his own body. All he could remember was that he had stood there like a frozen image.

“Ticket, please.” The conductor had looked at him strangely, fully expecting that Albert had snuck aboard the train. But Albert had not and managed to produce a ticket—he had no recollection of having bought it nor of boarding the train. But now he had slowly regained his senses and had actually managed to smile at the conductor who had punched the ticket with a curt “Thank you.”

It had taken nearly a month to reach Lisbon after joining a group of refugees who had been led across the Pyrenees by a smuggler. The man had exacted a heavy price, but Albert had some money to contribute, and the gold Breguet pocketwatch remained sewn inside the lining of his leather coat. That had been until he reached Lisbon.

Help from the refugee committee had been limited to accommodation with a family and a little money for food, but the long lines at the American Legation took hours to move. A transit visa through the United States—good for a 30-day stay—was all he had been able to obtain, but that had been good enough for a booking on a Spanish freighter. And that is when the watch had to be sold to pay for the passage. There had been no other choice.



The nights were getting colder, and on his way home one evening the sight of the pawnshop sparked a desire to enter. Glad for the warmth of the store, Albert pretended to show an interest in several violins locked in a glass-enclosed showcase, but all the while he cast a glance at the counter where watches were displayed and where at this moment the pawnbroker stood talking to a customer, a youngish man with straight blond hair wearing a herringbone overcoat. Albert could overhear the conversation.

“A fine Swiss movement with 21 jewels, and just look at the design etched in back.”

“Yes, very nice, but too heavy.”

The pawnbroker hesitated for a second and then replied, “Well, I have another one, a magnificent piece just being polished in the workroom. Let me get it.”

The customer strolled toward the a display of cameras, and Albert edged closer to the watch counter. As he scanned the watches, he heard the pawnbroker talking, and seconds later he and Stephen appeared from behind the green door-curtain that separated the shop from the workroom behind it. Stephen had a satisfied look on his face, and Albert assumed that he had just delivered the repaired watch to the pawnbroker.

“Ah, here we...,” and the pawnbroker stopped abruptly as he spied Albert instead of his customer. “Where...?” Then he saw the man as he approached the watch counter. Stephen looked at Albert but hesitated to say anything until Albert smiled at him.

“I am interested in a pocketwatch, something inexpensive,” Albert blurted out.

“Show him some of the watches over there,” the pawnbroker said to Stephen and pointed to an adjacent counter. “You know which ones they are, I’m sure.”

“Do you really want to buy a pocketwatch?” Stephen knew Albert did not have much money.

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“Can I just look?” Albert whispered, and Stephen replied with a wink.

“Also a Breguet, but a very unusual antique.” The sound of the word from the pawnbroker’s mouth struck Albert like a sack of bricks and he froze, not daring to look in that direction. He suddenly felt removed from the scene, just like when he saw his parents on the truck in front of the Hotel Terminus in Lyon. The image of his father slowly shaking his head appeared, as if forbidding Albert to even think about his bar mitzvah watch.

“A beautiful pocketwatch,” the customer said as he held the timepiece in his hand. Then very quietly he asked, “How much?”

“For you, let’s say \$95.”

“Oh. Too...” The man’s voice grew faint.

“Well, we can talk about the price some more. Do you like it?”

“Yes, very much.”



Mrs. Levy brought in a pile of firewood, and Stephen showed Albert how to make a fire in the hearth. They sat and drank coffee, then Albert told Stephen about his Breguet and why he had made such a quick exit from the pawnbroker’s shop earlier in the evening.

“Funny thing, the pawnbroker mentioned that the man who brought it in to pawn had a Spanish accent,” Stephen said. “I could run over to the pawnbroker’s and ask him to look up the name on the receipt.”

“No, don’t bother, there are many Breguets around, it will only open old wounds.”

“The customer will probably return one of these days. I know, if they are really interested, they come back.”

The next evening Albert stopped to look into the window of the pawnshop. To his surprise, the Breguet had been placed smack in the middle of the display. The blue felt cushion the pawnbroker had placed under the bright gold timepiece brought out its beauty, and Albert could see the second hand make its jerky rounds. He kept staring at it as his brain recorded the image over and over until he almost convinced himself that he was looking at his bar mitzvah watch.

Then Albert stepped back and closed his eyes for a moment to bring back a sense of reality. The Breguet in the window was not his watch—such a coincidence would be absurd. But the recollection of that lost heirloom and its family history, and the memories that this vision aroused, made Albert wistful and he opened his eyes.

As he again looked into the shop window, Albert saw the face of a man standing next to him. The reflection was a little blurred because the window was dirty, but Albert could tell he was an older man and certainly not the customer he had seen in the shop several days earlier. Was the man next to him looking at the Breguet? Oh, probably just his imagination, there were so many things displayed in the crowded pawnshop window.

Albert shifted his eyes to have a quick glance of the man standing next to him. A worn gray hat with a black band, a large nose that seemed supported by a gray mustache. Something about the man made Albert begin to turn his head. Perhaps another refugee—there were so many in New York.

The man must have seen Albert’s head movement in the window and suddenly they were face to face. The quiver that began in Albert’s shoulders instantly exploded into a momentous gasp.

“Albert!”

“Papa!” 🌹

## HOW CAN I FORGET?

*Manya Friedman*

MANYA FRIEDMAN, FROM CHMIELNIK, POLAND, SURVIVED THE GOGOLIN TRANSIT CAMP, RAVENSBRÜCK CONCENTRATION CAMP, AND A DEATH MARCH.



“Forget what has happened over there. You are now in this golden country. Start a new life.” Those were the words uttered by my American cousins every time I mentioned the Holocaust.

I did start a new life. I got married and hoped to start a new family. Only one of my cousins who had survived the Holocaust and a few American cousins, whom I met on my arrival in the States, attended my wedding. There was no one from my immediate family with whom to share that happy occasion in my life.

When my first child, a son, was born, I was overjoyed with the new addition to our family. He was a new beginning. He would be the child to ease some of the pain from the loss of my entire family. My delivery happened during Hurricane Edna. My husband was informed by a neighbor that the shingles were being blown off our roof, and he had to leave the hospital to go home to mop up the water in the attic. No other family member was there to rejoice with me. I tried to picture how proud my parents would have been at becoming grandparents and my two brothers, David and Motele, at becoming uncles, had they been there. I even imagined my mother sitting on my bed, holding my hand or wiping my brow.

Years later, I overheard my three-year-old daughter ask my husband’s aunt, “Aunt Roma, would you please be my grandmother?” My heart ached when I heard this. How can I describe the pain I felt watching my children grow up without the love of grandparents, aunts, and uncles? We had just moved to a new development where the houses were large enough to accommodate grandparents who came to visit and stay over the weekend. Most of the neighbors’ children had their grandparents visiting. Hence my daughter’s plea to have at least an adopted grandmother.

In observance of the traditional Jewish holidays, I used to make the seder for about 20 people (my husband’s extended family). It was a joyous occasion, especially watching and marveling over the new

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additions to the family. Glancing around the table always reminded me of how, when I was a child, our entire family had gathered in our grandparents' house for each holiday. There was my immediate family, along with aunts, uncles, and cousins. My mother and my two maiden aunts, Rachel and Miriam, were always busy with preparations, while my grandmother presided like a queen. The others came to join in the festivities. But none of those familiar faces were present at my seders.

Later, at our son's wedding, another happy occasion in my life, it took the photographer quite some time to arrange the bride's family to pose for a photo. Then, resting half his backside on the edge of the table, the photographer waited for the groom's family to gather and line up for our photo. There was only my daughter, me, and my son, the groom. My husband had already passed away at the age of 51.

Then, when my son was to become a father, I was in ecstasy with the pride and joy of becoming a grandmother and the hope for the new baby to carry on the family name. The baby's other grandparents, aunts, and uncles filled the waiting room, awaiting the new arrival. This became another joyous occasion where I was all alone, missing the family that was gone, with whom I wanted to share my happiness.

It is now 60 years since I was liberated, and some people wonder why I still talk about the Holocaust. 🌹

## THE TRANSITION

*Manya Friedman*

The skeletal figures descended the white buses with uncertainty and in bewilderment looked around at the throng of civilized human beings awaiting their arrival.

The white buses, belonging to the Swedish Red Cross, kept arriving on barges at the shores of Sweden. The vice chairman of the Swedish Red Cross, Folke Bernadotte, while negotiating the release of Scandinavian POWs with Himmler, head of the Gestapo, also managed to persuade him to release some inmates from the Ravensbrück camp.

Sweden had remained neutral throughout World War II and became a haven for many refugees fleeing Nazi persecution. In late April 1945, only days before the war ended, Sweden opened its doors to us, inmates from the Ravensbrück slave labor camp and its subcamps. The mission, called “Bernadotte’s Expedition,” was not well-known because of the need for secrecy. It took place while Germany was still at war.

Those white buses carried loads of emaciated people rescued from Nazi concentration camps. With uncertainty we followed the Red Cross workers, clutching the few filthy possessions we had salvaged while leaving the camp, or some remnants of the Red Cross packages given to us on the bus. As we were taken to the showers, we followed with suspicion, hesitating to enter, not trusting anyone.

After showering, delousing, and disinfecting, I was given clean clothing donated by the local people. It felt good to get rid of the filthy rags infested with lice. I was put up in a school for temporary shelter. The first few days we spent mostly sleeping or just lying on our mattresses, exhausted from the ordeals during the years in the camps, but there was always someone looking out the window trying to be convinced that we were no longer in camp.

After a few days, in the middle of the night, the students came running up the stairs, shouting, “The war is over. The war is over. ” In disbelief we joined them, hugging, kissing, dancing, and rejoicing at the news. I had hoped then to be able to find some members of my family.





MANYA FRIEDMAN IN HER FIRST CIVILIAN DRESS AFTER THE WAR, SPEAKING TO A SECURITY OFFICER AT A SCHOOL IN LUND, SWEDEN

*MANYA FRIEDMAN*

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Malmö, the city where I had arrived, became overcrowded with newcomers, so I was transferred to nearby Lund. I was again put up in a school, this one converted into a hospital, where I spent the next four months recovering from the spots on my lungs that I had acquired in one of the camps while working in a factory that produced soot (carbon black). We had nurses in attendance and were visited often by doctors. Our diet was strictly watched until our stomachs could get adjusted to regular food. The doctors even advised the public not to give us any food packages.

The Swedish people were very generous considering that almost everything was strictly rationed—most of the food staples, as well as clothing. A woman, for example, could receive only one dress, one pair of shoes, and two pairs of stockings a year. And no bra.

I still remember the two dresses I received: one had little flowers on a white background, the other a combination of orange and white with a black thread running through forming little squares. I also received a raincoat—charcoal with gray and white little checks—which I wore as a regular coat. It fit perfectly, the only drawback being its rubberized backing. So when it was cold I was freezing, and when it was warm I was sweating. But a girl has to make sacrifices to look good.

One day we heard a rumor that in one of the camps the Swedish flag had disappeared from the flagpole. The staff was walking around puzzled. Who could have stolen the flag? The crime was soon solved when, shortly afterwards, blue and yellow bras began to appear on the clothesline.

I was eager to rejoin the human race again and to appear normal. I practiced better hygiene and started grooming my hair, and the donated clothing seemed like the latest fashions. Even my reflection in the mirror became more amiable. After the afternoon rest I was allowed to go out into the schoolyard. We paraded around like models, our bodies erect, not with slouched shoulders like in the camps. We posed for photos taken by the service personnel, the nurses, or anyone with a camera. But there were among us a few girls who still walked around in the hospital robes, wearing felt slippers and wrapped in their blankets.

The transition to normal clothing from the lice-infested camp garments was an easy task, but the nightmares and the memories of the camps still linger. 🦋

## TWO DECENT GERMANS

*Manya Friedman*

I met them at the first concentration camp I was sent to. Their appearances and personalities were completely different from each other. One, called Shaika, was emaciated, thin. He had to wear suspenders to hold up his trousers. He had a lean, drawn face, protruding cheekbones, searching eyes, and a pipe forever hanging from the side of his mouth—even when it wasn't lit. He only removed it when he spoke, which happened infrequently. He was forever restless, with hurried steps and a very serious expression. His stiff arm with a deformed hand and crushed fingers, which he constantly held bent and close to his body, indicated that he was already a casualty of the war.

The other was older—I do not recall his name. We did not address any of the bosses by their names; we could only speak to them when we were asked to speak. He was very tall with broad shoulders. His frame filled the entire doorway when he entered. He was a jovial man with a jolly expression, and when his jolly expression turned to full-hearted, roaring laughter, which happened quite often, his entire body shook as if in a convulsion. From his happy expression one could not tell that he was the owner of a brick-making factory that had been taken over by his own government for some secret production and that he had become an employee in our factory.

The two of them were my bosses in my first forced labor camp, in Gleiwitz, Germany. The thin one was the “big” boss, and the other, his assistant. I often recall some events that cause me to think of them as decent Germans.

The camp in Gleiwitz where we had just arrived was privately owned by a German company. There was a brand new factory, not yet well organized, and new barracks. Our job was to produce soot (carbon black), the key ingredient in the production of synthetic rubber used to manufacture the tires on which the *Wehrmacht* depended.

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I and several other girls were chosen to work in the first department of the factory, to keep hourly records of the material used, weigh and record the output from a sample machine, and record the oil waste. When the director of the factory was selecting us from the line, he remarked that he was looking for some intelligent girls. The irony was that most of us were very young—we had barely finished elementary school when the war started and our education ended. For some reason I was chosen to be in charge of the group of girls; therefore, I had daily contact with the two bosses. My job was to deliver to their office after each shift the records kept by the girls, figure out the averages, and, when necessary, explain the discrepancies.

At this point our barracks were still new and clean. We still had our personal belongings. In addition to the German camp elder, we had a Jewish camp elder and Jewish overseers who walked us from the barracks to the factory and back. Soon rumors started to circulate that the camp would be taken over by the SS and we would become a subcamp of Auschwitz. Once I mentioned this to our “big” boss. I added that our heads would be shaved, and German women (*Kapos*) would oversee us, to which he replied, “Do not worry, to me you will remain the same *Maneea* [his pronunciation of my name].” As for the *Kapos*, he added, “Their job will probably be more to be available to the SS men than to watch you.” As it turned out, the SS did take over our camp and everything changed—everything except our two bosses, who still treated us humanely.

For example, whenever we worked the morning shift, the jolly boss would send me to the office, which was quite a distance away, to get the newspaper for him, but each time he warned me not to dare even a glance at the paper on the way back for fear that I would be watched. However, when we worked the night shift he would leave the door to the office ajar, part of the newspaper sticking out from the desk drawer located near the door, knowing that we would take a peek while he went to take a nap. One of us did manage to read some of the paper while another was on the lookout. Of course, there wasn’t much real news—it was mostly propaganda. In turn he trusted us to watch out for unexpected visitors and for the girl nearest his secret retreat to wake him. Sometimes we even had to motion for him to smooth down his hair or button his trousers.

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One day, one of the girls from our shift ran away from the factory. When the jolly boss heard about it, he laughed so hard his whole body shook. It was visible that he admired her bravery and kept repeating admiringly, “*Die kleine H* [the little H]...” She indeed was small in stature. On the other hand, the SS men lined us all up and sternly warned us, “If this happens again, you will all go through the *Schornstein* [chimney].”

Another memorable event occurred once on the night shift. Two of the girls who routinely disposed the waste to the containers outside thought they saw a mirage. The girls could not believe their own eyes. Right in front of the factory, on the rails that served to deliver the oil tanks, was diverted a car full of potatoes. What to do with this found treasure? We had to think fast. We could not bring the potatoes to camp for fear we would be searched, which occurred often. Where could we hide some? We could only roast a few on the machine’s burner. But how could we pass up such an opportunity? I hesitantly confided in our “big” boss our dilemma. He immediately came up with a solution. He let us use his hip-high fisherman’s waders, which he used whenever he went to the packing station, and after we filled them up with potatoes he locked them in his office cabinet. We had a ball for the next few nights, roasting a few potatoes at a time on the burner.

In our camp’s maintenance department worked a group of young men from France and Poland. They were not forced laborers like the rest of us and could occasionally go home. Among them was a young man from our hometown. Each time he went home we anxiously awaited his return. He would bring some general news about the situation of the remaining Jews in the ghetto.

The news lately was disheartening—hardly any Jews were left. Of course that made us very sad, we cried, and we often neglected our chores. We no longer cared what might happen to us.

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Often those young men passing by noticed that the gauge on an oil tank was showing almost empty and they would open the valve to fill up the tank. I noticed that sometimes even our bosses, pretending that they were checking something in the area, would fill the tank—a job that was one of the girls’ responsibilities.

The jolly boss noticed the changes in us, and once he asked me what was going on. After I explained the situation to him—about the news we were getting from home, that there was hardly anybody left alive—he said to me, “You must try to hang on until the war is over. Then you will have it better than us.”

As I think about them now, they were two decent men, though Germans. They did not give us anything really, maybe just some dignity by the fact that they called us by our names, not by numbers. Besides hunger for food, we were just starved for some humane gesture. 🍷

## A CLOSE CALL

*Fritz Gluckstein*

FRITZ GLUCKSTEIN, FROM BERLIN, GERMANY, MANAGED DESPITE SEVERAL ARRESTS TO SURVIVE IN BERLIN THROUGHOUT THE WAR BECAUSE HIS MOTHER WAS NOT JEWISH.



Spring 1944. I had just left the apartment house where, in the attic, we were storing some of our furniture and other belongings. We had rented the storage space when we had to move from our own apartment to one we had to share with another family. I was carrying a shopping bag containing some books and a few household items and was walking along, lost in thought, when someone stepped in front of me and asked me to stop. I looked up and realized immediately that I was facing a Gestapo officer. One usually could recognize members of the Gestapo, not so much by their clothing but more by the way they carried themselves.

The officer showed me his oval-shaped, copper-colored badge, insisted that I look at both sides of it, and asked for my identity card. I knew why he had stopped me; he was curious why a young man like me was not in uniform. I thus handed him my exclusion certificates from the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (Labor Service) and the Armed Forces. The Labor Service certificate listed the reason for my exclusion: *Geltungsjude* (“counted Jew”). A *Geltungsjude*—anyone who had one non-Jewish parent and was raised as a Jew—was subject to all laws, decrees, and regulations pertaining to Jews, including the wearing of the yellow star. I was not wearing the star since it would have been unwise to let people in the apartment house know that Jews had a storage space in the attic.

The officer looked into my shopping bag and then studied the certificates. He surely was aware that I was required to wear the star. I remembered that only a few days before, a high school classmate had been caught without a star and had wound up in the pre-deportation facility. Aside from some uneasiness, I felt no fear, let alone panic. I had an almost extracorporeal experience; I was standing next to myself, observing what was happening, wondering what the officer would do next. He scrutinized me for a long time, deliberating, I was sure, whether my “German” or “Jewish” blood was predominant. At last, he returned the certificates, turned around, and without a word walked away. 🐦



## GROSSE HAMBURGERSTRASSE

*Fritz Gluckstein*

“Have your husband and son report tomorrow morning to the deportee collection center on Grosse Hamburger Street!” the Gestapo officer ordered my mother. She had accompanied friends who had received their deportation orders to the collection center in the Levetzow Street synagogue, where the officer questioned her, wanting to know why she was concerned about “those Jews.”

The next morning, my father and I set out for the designated collection center, a former old people’s home. There we were registered by employees of the Jewish Community Center and assigned to a room already occupied by five or six men who also had non-Jewish spouses. The room was empty aside from mattresses on the floor. The building was guarded by regular uniformed Berlin policemen under the command of the Viennese SS Captain Alois Brunner, well known for his brutality. Brunner had given the order that no one was to lie down during the day, but, of course, some of us did so anyway. However, no one was caught, since whenever Brunner left his office for an inspection, one of the policemen rushed through the building warning us of the commandant’s approach. The policemen’s action was remarkable; at the very least, they risked being posted to the Eastern Front.

On the second or third day—I do not remember when exactly—I was told by a policeman to be at the commandant’s office in half an hour for interrogation. My father and an older gentleman, a distinguished journalist I was told, prepared me for the ordeal: “Do not be a hero. Do not show any hostility or contempt. Answer questions fully, but do not volunteer anything.”

At the appointed time, I was ushered into Brunner’s office. He was sitting behind a table, facing the door; on chairs along one wall about ten SS officers had settled down, ready to observe the proceedings. Right away, Brunner tried to catch me off guard. “Your mother is Jewish?” was the first question he threw at me. “No,” I replied, “my mother is Aryan.” He then asked me about my past and my daily activities—at

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the time I was working at a Jewish welfare office. After about five minutes he instructed me to report the next day to the labor exchange for a “useful job,” and then he told me to get out.

In the anteroom, I was told to wait for my father, who was to be released with me. A short time later, we both stepped out into the street, heaving a sigh of relief. The date—I remember it well—was January 24, 1943, my 16th birthday.🎂

# T E D I U M !

*Fritz Gluckstein*

“The roof tiles are here, take your places on the steps.” Oh, not again, we thought; why all this nonsense? We work all day to get the heavy brick tiles up to the roof of the apartment building, and tomorrow morning, after an air raid, they probably will all be in small pieces on the ground. But we had to do it.

This time I got a place on the steps between the third and fourth floors, and soon it began. Grab two tiles from the fellow below you, turn half a circle, and pass them to the next in line. Grab, turn, pass; grab, turn, pass. So it went for hours and hours, ad infinitum. We started to sing:

*Tedium, tedium, you my great pleasure,*

*Tedium, tedium, you my great joy.*

*Were there no tedium there would be no pleasure,*

*Were there no tedium there would be no joy.*

Once in a while one of us had to leave for a short time, creating a gap in the line, but this hardly affected our rhythm. Those next to the gap simply had to take a few steps when receiving or passing the tiles. To carry on a coherent conversation was next to impossible, since one constantly had to swivel from side to side.

Some of the older ones among us imagined what they would like to eat after the war and began to recite elaborate menus: Ragout fin. Tenderloin Chateaubriand. Beef Wellington. We younger ones had never even heard of such dishes. Our minds were set more on generous portions of things like hamburgers, fried potatoes, or macaroni and cheese. And the varieties of wines that were mentioned were complete enigmas to us. The only wine we had tasted so far was the one used for Sabbath and holiday blessings.

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Through all the tedium you had to be alert, since you did not want to drop the tiles on your toes and certainly not on the toes of the ones next to you. At times work was interrupted by an air-raid warning, followed about half of the time by an actual air raid. We rushed down to the basement hoping—it seems almost grotesque in retrospect—that some bombs falling into the neighborhood would undo everything we had just accomplished.

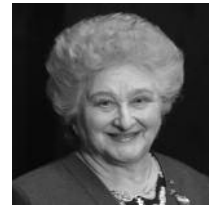
Passing off roof tiles, while certainly mind-numbing, was actually not a bad assignment. Thanks to a decent overseer—a petty criminal before the war—the pace was sensible, and the work as such was physically less demanding and far less dangerous than some of the other tasks we had to perform. 🙏



# DEAR PAPA

*Nesse Godin*

NESSE GODIN, FROM SIAULIAI, LITHUANIA, ENDURED A CONCENTRATION CAMP, FOUR LABOR CAMPS, AND A DEATH MARCH. SHE SPENT FIVE YEARS IN A DISPLACED PERSONS CAMP IN FELDAFING, GERMANY, BEFORE IMMIGRATING TO THE UNITED STATES.



Dear Papa,

During the day I think about you.

In the night I dream about you.

I remember your soft caress and your powerful hugs.

I remember your sweet voice in song—the voice and words through which you encouraged me to be a good girl, a good student, but most of all a good human being.

I remember your eyes blue like the sky—the gentle, loving eyes that gazed upon me when you were with us on earth. I remember your eyes even now when you are not among the living.

I remember your hands so white and strong. The hands that carved little toys for me to play with.

I remember my little hands touching your head, touching the bald spot on the top of your head, and always asking what happened to your hair.

I remember your body so tall and strong towering over me, making me feel safe and protected.

I remember the aroma of the tobacco in your pipe that you held between your soft lips, which you kissed me with.

I remember you, Papa, standing in the synagogue on the *bima* near the Holy Ark as a *Kohen* chanting the priestly blessings like Aaron the Holy Priest during biblical times.

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Your strength of body and strength of character I will always remember.

I will remember the love of family and humanity that you instilled in me. I will carry those principles to the end of my life.

I thank G-d for the years that I had you, but I cannot forgive the Nazi murderers that killed you at the age of 47 when you were in the prime of your life.

I will continue to think about you during the days and dream of you during the nights. I will always remember you as long as I live. 🌹



PINCHAS GALPERIN, FATHER OF NESSE (GALPERIN) GODIN

*NESSE GODIN*



# I NEVER KNEW THEIR NAMES

*Nesse Godin*

I am a Holocaust survivor. I lived through a ghetto, a concentration camp, several labor camps, and a death march. When I share memories of those four years, people from the audience ask questions.

Some people say that I must have been strong to survive, some say I must have been wise to survive. Some ask what I would have done differently in my life.

Unfortunately my life in my preteen and teen years was controlled by others—the Nazis. Surviving through the darkest days in the history of humanity, the Holocaust, was not due to my strength or wisdom. It was by the grace of the Lord above and by the kindness of Jewish women, the women who helped me.

I never knew their names.

When I was given a ration of bread that was just one small slice, I tried to save a small piece of it for the next day. I tore off a piece of my blanket and wrapped the small bite of bread in it and put it in the straw that I slept on. The next morning my bread was gone. I sat in the straw and cried. A Jewish woman asked me why I was crying and when I told her about the bread that I lost, she suggested that there were many hungry people and I should hide the bread in my bosom. My problem was that because of the starvation I never developed and had no bosom to hide it in. The lady offered to hide my bread in her bosom. This lady, whose name I did not know, helped me survive.

I never knew her name.

When I was shivering from the cold, we had no coats, no hats, no stockings, just a dress, a pair of underwear, a pair of shoes, and a blanket. A Jewish woman who shivered from the cold offered to wrap my body in straw to keep me warm. This woman helped me survive.

I never knew her name.

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On the death march when I was beaten up by a Nazi soldier and fell to the ground, Jewish women picked me up and helped me walk. They did not leave me behind to die. If you stayed on the ground and could not walk, they shot you.

Yes, these women helped me survive.

I never knew their names.

At the end of the death march, when we were in a barn, most of us sick and starved, I prayed to die but the Jewish women around me encouraged me not to give up, to have hope.

These women helped me to survive.

I never knew their names.

We were prisoners without names, just numbers.

Yes, it was these Jewish women who gave me a bite of bread, wrapped my body in straw, picked me up when I was on the ground, and gave me hope when I was ready to give up.

These Jewish women also made me promise that I would remember them and that I would teach the world what hatred, prejudice, and indifference can do to humanity.

I am in the autumn of my life dedicated to this promise, sharing memories so others will not have to suffer as I did.

I fulfill this promise to these Jewish women. I remember them with prayers. I speak about them. My only regret is that I do not know their names.

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These angels, these Jewish women, saved me. I do not even know where they were from or to whose family they belonged.

When I say *Kaddish*, the prayer for the dead, I just say, "These Jewish women that helped me survive."

I wish that every face of these women that is etched in my memory would have a name.

*Hamakom yenachem etchem.*

May you, my angels, rest in peace. 🕊️

## THE REFLECTION IN THE WINDOW

*Nesse Godin*

On March 10, 1945, the Soviet Army found us in the barn. We had been there for three weeks. The Soviet soldiers told us that the Germans were losing the war, that the Nazis were retreating. They informed us that they had already found other camps and some survivors.

The soldiers could not believe the sight they saw in that barn. There were not quite 200 women there, some sick and in terrible shape, some dead. Outside there was a mountain of naked skeletons, dead women piled up on top of each other.

The Soviet soldiers suggested that if we could, we should try to walk to the village where there were many empty homes. Some of the Germans were afraid of the Soviet soldiers and escaped toward the interior of the country.

The soldiers also promised that they would come back and carry the women that could not walk to the village.

Lena, her cousin Mollie, and I started to walk toward the village, which was less than a mile away. The ground was covered with crisp snow and on the side of the road there were piles of snow that the people must have shoveled off the road.

We must have walked ten steps when Mollie fell to the ground and refused to continue to walk. She was having chills and had no strength to go on. The three of us sat on top of the snow on the roadside. It was very cold and we had very little clothing on— just underpants, a dress, and a blanket over our head.

We saw some women passing us and some were just falling to the ground.

The soldiers kept their promise and came back and started to carry the women toward the village. A young soldier stopped near us and wanted to take Mollie, but Lena did not want to separate from her

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cousin, so he picked me up and carried me instead. Many months later I was reunited with Lena and she told me that Mollie died while they were waiting to be picked up to be taken to the village.

The Soviet soldier who carried me told me that they were setting up a hospital in the school gymnasium and it would take a few days until it would be ready. In the meantime he would drop me off at one of the houses.

The soldier took me into a house and put me in the kitchen. He laid me down on a sack that was stuffed with straw. A woman was lying there already. She looked very familiar and then she told me who she was. She had been a teacher in one of the schools from my hometown of Siauliai.

I was so tired and weak that I fell asleep. I was awoken by the noise of women near the stove. They were boiling water. They had found some dry bread and were dipping it in the hot water and eating it. We had not had any food for a few days.

I was so hungry that I asked the women if they would share some of the bread with me and my friend, the woman who was next to me.

The women handed me a bowl of hot water with bread in it. I was not too sure if that was all for me or if I was to share it with the teacher. I asked the ladies about food for the woman next to me. They answered that my friend would not need food anymore—she was dead.

I felt so bad that we were free but many of us still died even after liberation.

A few hours later, some soldiers came and carried the body of my friend out. I did not have the strength to go out with them. I never knew where she was buried.

Later in the day some other soldiers came and brought us some food and promised to come the next day to take us to the hospital. By that time it was starting to get dark. I was thinking that now I was free.

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How does the free world look? I gathered all my strength, stood up, and tried to look through the small window in the door. I could not see outside because it was dark already, but what I saw was the reflection of a horrible-looking creature. Eyes sunken into the head, one cheek swollen, the other hollow to the bone—a living skeleton. I turned around to see who was standing behind me. Whose reflection did I see?

There was no one there. This is when I realized that the horrible-looking creature was me. 🐉

## WHERE DO I GO?

*Nesse Godin*

It must have been a few days after the Soviet soldier dropped me off in that house in the small town of Chinow when other soldiers came to take us to the school that was converted into a hospital. When I arrived there I saw some familiar faces, women who recognized me from the camps and the barn. Some of them were helping and translating what the soldiers were saying.

I was told to undress, to take off my dress, underwear, and boots. I had worn them for almost a year and they were infested with lice. I was very glad to get rid of the dress and underwear but did not want to give up the boots. Before we were taken to the ghetto my parents made sure that every member of the family would have some valuables in their possession. For me, gold coins were hidden in the lining of my boots.

By sheer luck I wound up with my own boots in the concentration camp at Stutthof. I did not dare to remove them from my feet for fear that someone would take them. So many women had no shoes, just rags around their feet. When the women around me asked why I did not take the boots off, I always said that they were the last thing I had that my father gave me. He was killed in Auschwitz.

When the people in that hospital wanted to pull off the boots I cried and told them the same story, but no crying helped. They could not even pull them off; they had to cut them off my feet. I saw them being thrown in a trash box.

My hair was shaven. They put me into a tub filled with some kind of disinfectant that was supposed to kill the lice that were all over my skin. The next thing I remember, a Soviet doctor who was Jewish was shaking me and trying to find out what my name was and where I came from. It turned out that I had been unconscious for some days.

When I opened my eyes I saw that I was in a very large room with many beds with survivors in them. The doctor asked me again if I could remember my name and where I was from. I said, "Nesa Galperin from Siauliai, Lithuania."

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When I said my name, someone from another bed across the room yelled, “Nesale, is that you? I could not recognize you. No one knew who you were.” It was someone from my hometown who was related to my mom.

The next day I was weighed and checked out by a doctor. I weighed 69 pounds and had frostbite on my fingers and toes. The doctors were considering cutting off some of my toes but the Jewish doctor felt that they should not rush into doing so. He said that sometimes the frozen flesh peels off. That is what happened to me, and some of my toes are there minus some flesh on them.

I was in that hospital about six weeks. The Soviets were getting ready to close the hospital. One day I was called into a little office and told that I could leave. I remember saying, “Where do I go?”

When the Soviets told me to go home, my answer was, “I have no home, no one to go to in Lithuania.” At that point I did not know if anyone in my family was still alive. 🙏





## THE INVITATION

*Pete Philipps*

PETE PHILIPPS WAS BORN IN ESSEN, GERMANY. IN 1936 HE AND HIS PARENTS FLED TO PRAGUE, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, THEN TO GENOA, ITALY, AND IN 1939 TO QUITO, ECUADOR. THE FAMILY ARRIVED IN THE UNITED STATES IN MAY 1941.



The sound was unlike anything I'd ever heard. Bewildered, I spun around and became alarmed. A burly man about my age appeared to be having a convulsion. Steadying himself against the Information Desk, he was sobbing uncontrollably, his face crimson and contorted. Is this what an epileptic seizure is like? I wondered. Convulsions were not among the contingencies we had been told to expect during our training as the first class of volunteers at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. I did not know how to react, nor did anyone else in the immediate vicinity—until the visitor uttered a few guttural words of German. That's when I stepped in.

Hearing me address him in German took the visitor by surprise. He introduced himself as Rudi, a retired mason from a small village near Cologne. He assured me that he was not in any physical distress and apologized for losing his composure. Gradually pulling himself together, he said he had just gone through the Permanent Exhibition and had experienced a violent attack of remembrance. I had seen many first-time visitors break down, but never so dramatically.

Rudi said he was in Washington on a sightseeing trip with a men's chorus from his village. "Where are your friends?" I asked, surprised that none of his companions had come looking for him.

Rudi looked at me sorrowfully and dabbed at his eyes.

Had I said something wrong?

"They had absolutely no interest in visiting the Holocaust Museum," he said. "They went to the White House." He paused. "I am the only one in the group who came here."

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Nothing has changed, I wanted to say, but instead I asked Rudi what had made him want to come. There then flowed forth the tale of his first personal encounter with the Holocaust. He was 13 at the time, the war was nearly over, and the Nazis had begun moving concentration camp inmates westward ahead of the advancing Russians. One day a group of skeletal women were force-marched through Rudi's village. The macabre scene never left him and had tormented him all his life, especially because of what happened next.

Moved by the spectacle of the prisoners shuffling past, several townspeople, including Rudi's mother, tried to throw scraps of food to the women. ("Slop that we ordinarily fed to the pigs," he explained). The guards ordered them to stop. Anyone caught aiding the women was threatened with the same fate as the prisoners. "One of the guards knocked my mother into the mud with the butt of his rifle," Rudi added with a pained look. "We weren't even allowed to give those half-dead women water to drink."

Rudi had other, equally horrific anecdotes. Each brought on fresh tears, and after a few more minutes I tried to distract him by telling him about my own circuitous exodus from Germany to America. Soon I had to rotate to the next volunteer post, so we quickly exchanged addresses and promised to stay in touch. Shyly, Rudi reminded me that he had been a laborer all his life and not much of a correspondent. His parting words were an invitation to visit him. "You can have your own room and bath and a TV with American programs," he said.

I had little expectation of hearing from Rudi, much less of ever seeing him again. But not long afterward he sent me a handwritten letter repeating his invitation. He even included several photographs of his house. The childlike scrawl ended with a sorrowful lament about the travails of the human race over the past hundred years, "in particular," he wrote, "of the Jewish people." And so we began a years-long correspondence that eventually led me to the conviction that if Rudi hadn't been too young, he would have performed some selfless and courageous deed to earn a place among the Righteous Gentiles.

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Two years later an opportunity to visit Rudi presented itself quite unexpectedly when Essen, the city where I was born, invited my wife and me for an all-expenses-paid weeklong visit, a gesture of contrition to former Jewish residents who were forced to flee. I was eager to accept, but my American-born wife, the only child of refugees from Nazi Germany, was reluctant to set foot on German soil. But Evelyn came around when I proposed that, in addition to visiting Rudi in Cologne, we spend a few days in Berlin, the city that her Berlin-born mother had spoken of so adoringly and with a fervor undiminished by time or events.

A warmer greeting than the one we received at Cologne's main railroad station is hard to imagine. Rudi and his wife Maria embraced Evelyn like a long-lost sister. The two women hit it off immediately, and off to lunch we went like two couples who had been friends for years.

Rudi had our schedule all figured out. Partly by car, partly on foot, we saw a good bit of Cologne—including a number of the buildings that were destroyed in the war and that, Rudi proudly informed us, he had helped restore. Time was also set aside to visit their modest, white stucco home and its immaculately manicured garden (which Rudi, tongue in cheek, calls "Villa Maria") for the obligatory coffee and cake.

Cologne's famous cathedral was, of course, high on Rudi's must-see list, but so was the imposing synagogue on Roonstrasse. Destroyed on *Kristallnacht*, the synagogue was rebuilt after the war and rededicated in 1959. Like a five-year-old on the way to a toy store, Rudi couldn't wait to take us there. "Just wait," he said, barely able to contain his enthusiasm. "It is so beautiful."

When we pulled up the main gates were locked. Crestfallen, Rudi led the way to a side entrance and repeatedly pushed the intercom button. After what seemed like a long time, a disembodied voice asked what we wanted. "I am here with visitors from the United States," said Rudi. "They want very much to see the synagogue." A silence followed, and Rudi repeated his plea with greater urgency. "My friends are here only for the day," he said, adding, with pardonable hyperbole, "They came all the way from America to see the synagogue."

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“It is *Shabbat*,” the voice at the other end of the intercom declared gruffly. “You are not allowed to ring the bell.”

Rudi’s massive shoulders hunched over. “Should I tell him you are a survivor?” he asked.

I, too, was disappointed—and, yes, angry. With an effort I held myself in check, certain that any further attempt to gain admission was useless.

“Next time you come we’ll pick a weekday to visit the synagogue,” Rudi said, his pleasant face finally breaking into a grin. “Then we won’t be turned away.”

Our visit to the great gothic cathedral also made a lasting—but altogether different—impression. Begun in the Middle Ages, the cathedral’s twin 525-foot-high towers make it the defining symbol of Cologne’s skyline. The massive and ornately carved exterior is awe-inspiring, despite some minor damage inflicted by Allied bombs during the war. The interior, with its 142-foot-high nave and stained glass windows, enveloped me in a spiritual embrace. As we gawked admiringly at the ornate woodcarvings and gilded altars, clusters of people were silently praying, seemingly in a world of their own.

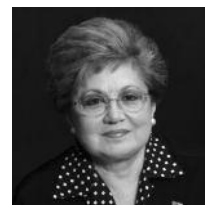
Rudi, not one to linger over artistic or historical details, soon had us follow his giant strides to a bank of votive candles before the altar. “Here,” he said, insistently handing me a candle while he dropped some coins in a box. “Light it and say a prayer for all the members of your family who were murdered.”

I did as he told me, unself-consciously and without reservations, and when I left the cathedral it was with a wholeness of spirit—and a transcendent hopefulness. 🌹

## FOR A RAINY DAY (*MEN ŻOL NIT BEDARFEN*)

*Charlene Schiff*

CHARLENE SCHIFF, FROM HOROCHOW, POLAND, SURVIVED THE HOLOCAUST BY HIDING ALONE IN THE FORESTS NEAR HER HOME.



I still hoped that Mother would show up in one of the forests that abounded in that area of Poland. It was autumn of 1942. At that time I believed that this nightmare was temporary, and that any day I would find Mama. Had I thought differently, I would have given up.

I attempted to learn directions—deep green moss meant it was north, and so I took it from there. Sunshine never penetrated the thick forests, so it was hard to know directions.

Broken pieces of glass and metal parts of a shovel which I found outside a village helped me dig the little “graves” in the forests where I hid in between “excursions” in search of food. I usually covered my hiding place with branches and leaves, and I felt pretty secure there.

It was getting chilly. Dampness in the forests had been quite pervasive, and I always felt wet. My search for food usually was done under the cover of darkness—the only protection I had. Often I had to run from the villages as the dogs’ loud barking kept announcing my unwelcome presence. I still had my good high-top shoes and the lined jacket that Mama told me never to leave behind.

After Papa had been taken away so abruptly when the Germans entered our town, Mama had gathered all her jewelry and divided it into three little piles. She sewed one into my sister Tia’s heavy sweater, another into my lined jacket, and the third into Papa’s jacket, which she had been wearing almost all the time. Nothing was ever mentioned about this again. Mama left out a few pieces of jewelry, which were hidden in a small drawer in a bureau in the main bedroom. We used these later to survive in the ghetto.

One night I returned to my little “grave” without any food. I was very tired and discouraged. It was almost daylight. I should have covered the top of my “grave” more carefully, but I was too tired and weak

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from hunger. I thought later would be time enough. Again, I dozed off. An unexpected sound woke me. I looked up through the branches of my cover and saw a pair of shiny black boots.

“*Wylaz*,” a man’s voice said, meaning “crawl out” in Ukrainian. I clumsily got out of my deep hiding hole, pulled the branches to one side, and found myself in front of a man of medium height, dressed in a short brown sheepskin coat, britches, and almost new knee-high black boots. On his head he wore a fur hat with earflaps tied on top. A rifle was slung over his right shoulder. I heard a horse whinny nearby.

The man started asking questions. To the first—“How old are you?”—I answered, “Ten years,” although I was actually 12. Then he wanted to know where I came from. I told him, “From Horochow.” He looked at me with some disbelief—he said I was quite far from Horochow, but he would not tell me the actual location.

I had to do something quick. I told him I needed to use a “bathroom.” He smiled and said not to try to run—it wouldn’t work. I assured him that this was not my intent. He gave me permission to leave for a short time.

What I needed to do was to take out one of the gold coins that Mama had sewn into my jacket before we were herded into the ghetto. When I returned from the “bathroom,” I had the coin in my hand.

The man, a forest ranger (*gajowy*), tried to tell me that I would never survive the harsh winter ahead. He would take me to the authorities and they would decide what to do with me. That made a lot of sense to him. I said, “Of course, they will kill me.” His answer was, “Not necessarily.”

I realized it was pointless to argue, and so I offered him the gold coin to let me go. He looked at me intently without saying a word. Stupidly, I commented that the coin was worth much more than the reward that the authorities would give him for taking me to them. With a sly smile he replied, “I could have both.” A shiver still runs down my spine thinking of his words. There was an awkward silence, and

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then he offered his outstretched hand. I put the coin into his hand and looked searchingly into his eyes. A friendlier smile lit up his face. He repeated that I would not survive the winter but said he'd let me go. He really was not a bad person. He turned around to get on his horse, and left with a stern warning—"I don't ever want to see you in these forests again."

It had only been a little more than a year before when Mama had sewn the jewelry into my jacket, and I hadn't comprehended what she had meant when she said, "This is for a rainy day." 🌧️



## THAT FIRST DAY

*Charlene Schiff*

I don't remember the name of the displaced persons camp, or which country I was in, but I do remember that first day.

After a filling breakfast of chicory-flavored coffee and fresh bread and jam, we were directed to a long, narrow hall. There we waited our turn to enter a room. A middle-aged woman was sitting behind a large desk. She was neatly dressed, her salt-and-pepper hair pulled in a tight bun behind her neck. She had a faint smile on her kind face, but her large brown eyes reflected great sadness.

When it was my turn, I was invited to sit down in a chair in front of the desk. The woman looked me over, and I could sense the pity in her expression. This was not what I had wanted. I felt angry and embarrassed for looking dirty and disheveled. I felt out of place in a room so clean and orderly, so near a woman dressed with impeccable taste and looking so lovely. The woman asked me a number of questions. She verified my name, the place and date of my birth, and the fact that I was an orphan. To this last statement I objected strongly, saying I knew I would locate my parents soon. She looked at me with those sad eyes. She got up quickly, surprised me with a hug, and directed me to the end of the hall where a door led to a large garden. It was a well-kept garden with lovely flowers and old trees—only the far corners were messy and cluttered with hoses.

A woman in a white coat appeared seemingly from nowhere and told me to strip. I tried to object, but this no-nonsense woman pushed me impatiently into a corner and started helping me undress. I was completely bewildered. Soon I was naked, and a stream of white powder coming from a hose held by the woman was hitting my body. The spray was strong and felt like sharp needles pricking me all over. In addition, the foul odor of the powder was making me sick. It smelled like rotten eggs or sulfur. I vomited, and the woman stopped the spray. She was obviously annoyed with me. After a short while she resumed her job with a renewed vengeance. It seemed as if it lasted for hours. When it finally stopped,

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I opened my eyes and every pore of my skin, as well as my hair, was covered with a thick coat of white powder. I felt humiliated. The woman commanded, “Don’t just stand there—go to the showers.”

The showers were in the next building. I had to walk over naked, covered with the repugnant powder. My eyes were lowered and I did not see anyone—did anyone see me? I’ll never know. The humiliation was complete. I heard the rush of water. I entered a stall and tried to turn on the water; only cold water came out, but no matter, it felt liberating to cleanse my body and hair. Soaping myself vigorously, I scrubbed and washed myself for a long while, getting rid of the powder, the lice, and all the other filth. On the outside of the stalls there were towels. I dried myself, and for the first time in five years I felt really clean. First, while in the ghetto, and then running from forest to forest searching for my mother and trying to stay alive against unbelievable odds, personal hygiene had become nonexistent.

As I looked around, wrapped in my towel, a gentle-looking woman motioned for me to come closer. Around her were cartons filled with all sorts of stuff. She looked at me and rummaged in the cartons. She dug out some underwear, trying to find the right size. She pulled out several dresses and asked which one I liked best, then socks and shoes. She even found a cardigan sweater—“So you won’t catch cold when it starts getting chilly,” she said with a smile. I was overwhelmed with all these gifts, but there were more to come.

I was given a pillow, a sheet, a blanket, a small towel, a cake of luxurious soap, a toothbrush, and toothpaste—items I had not seen in five years. I thanked the woman, and she watched with pleasure as I gathered my new possessions.

“Your new home is Barracks Two, locker number 12,” she said. 🌸



MEMORIAL TO THE JEWISH VICTIMS FROM HOROCHOW, ERECTED BY THE CITIZENS OF HOROCHOW

CHARLENE SCHIFF

## WHAT MATTERED MOST

Charlene Schiff

My sister Tia came home from work ill. She couldn't even eat the soup that Mama prepared for supper. We were putting thin slices of potato on her forehead to bring down her fever—precious potato slices that should have been put in the soup instead.

Mama stayed up half the night trying to comfort her. Early the next morning Tia felt a little better but was in no shape to go to work. I asked Mama if I could take Tia's place in the warehouse where she and a group of older girls were knitting articles of clothing for the German soldiers. This way I could collect her food ration for the day, which would have been lost to us otherwise.

Mama was skeptical at first since I was only 11. I tried to convince her that the Ukrainian guards in the warehouse were not very strict. As long as the head count was correct they were usually satisfied. Tia had told us how fortunate she was to work in the warehouse.

Finally, Mama gave in and allowed me to take Tia's place. I walked out with Mama—she joined her group and I joined Tia's.

When we ended up at the warehouse, Tia's friends pointed her seat out to me. I sat down, trying to be inconspicuous. I picked up the needles and a half-finished scarf and started working, watching the older girls who were encouraging me with their eyes and nodding their heads approvingly.

Suddenly, there was a commotion outside. A group of Germans burst in, positioning themselves at various points of the huge warehouse. We didn't know what was going on. One of the Ukrainian guards told us to continue with our work. We were all wondering if this was a *lapanka*—a round-up—and if all of us would be taken away in trucks, never to be heard from again. The Germans were walking back and forth. The sound of their boots was terrifying to my ears; it always connoted something bad. One of the Germans walked up and stood close behind me. He shouted at me to knit faster. I knew I was not as

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efficient as the older girls, but I tried to do my best. The more he yelled and cursed, the slower I knitted. I wished that I could disappear. The German became enraged and jumped in front of me, his face red, twisted in anger, foam coming out of the corners of his mouth. He spat and cursed and screamed at me. He pulled the needles out of my hands and stuck one of them in my right forefinger. I don't remember what happened after that. I was told later that I passed out, and the older girls had taken care of me the rest of the day. This visit by the Germans was one of their surprise inspections. It had been my exquisite bad timing to have found myself in the wrong place at the wrong time.

There were no medications and no doctors in the ghetto. My right forefinger became infected and I lost the tip of it.

Lost also was the food ration for that day, and that was what mattered most. 🥲

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS SOMETIMES LIE

*Flora M. Singer*

FLORA SINGER, FROM BERCHEM, BELGIUM, SURVIVED THE WAR BY HIDING WITH HER TWO SISTERS IN CATHOLIC CONVENTS.



I stood at the front of the classroom facing my students, who were themselves teachers within the same school district as I was—Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland. They had enrolled in the summer in-service class for teachers to study the history of the Holocaust, as well as to learn methods for teaching this history to their own students when they returned to their classrooms the following fall.

One of the teachers raised his hand to ask a question. It was a very probing question, which made me uncomfortable—I almost had the feeling that I was being cross-examined, that the questioner was testing the validity of what I was saying. Usually, I was pleased and welcomed questions flowing forth after I spoke, or when my colleagues spoke, but this man's questions didn't seem devised to receive a clarification on something that I had said, but rather seemed to indicate a lack of belief. I had the distinct suspicion that my questioner was probing the veracity of what I was saying.

Later, during another class session, that same teacher brought in several items from his collection of Nazi memorabilia. I wondered why—why would an American high school teacher, a chemistry teacher, collect Nazi memorabilia? Was he in agreement with their philosophy? Did he admire them, or...? Another question troubled me: Why did he enroll in the course we were teaching? We all looked at the items he brought into class. We talked about them, and somehow my suspicions about the teacher's personal philosophy started to evaporate.

As a culminating assignment for the course, the teachers were assigned an in-depth paper instead of a customary exam, as well as a presentation in class for the benefit of all teachers enrolled in the course. When I reviewed that same teacher's paper, I was totally unprepared for what I read. The paper was an

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excellent in-depth study of the subject of the Holocaust and the lessons he learned from it. My faith in the teacher's beliefs was totally restored. On the final day of the class, my colleagues and I returned the graded papers to the teachers.

Together we had a light lunch, consisting of contributions from each participant in the class. The teachers talked about what their experience of being immersed in the study of the Holocaust meant to them. They talked about what it meant to them to have spent the last few weeks with a survivor of the Holocaust (me), as well as their meeting several survivors who came to the class one day to speak to them about their experiences. The teachers said good-bye to their colleagues and me and left.

Later that same year, I received a telephone call from an administrator of the local Jewish day school. The administrator was looking for someone to teach the history of the Holocaust to their upper-school students. They turned to me, knowing that I was involved in training teachers in that subject.

The teacher who immediately came to my mind was that high school chemistry teacher. However, I felt compelled to say, "He's excellent, but he's not Jewish. Do you want him to teach this to Jewish teenagers?"

The reply was immediate: His religious affiliation did not matter. What did matter was his knowledge of the subject and his ability to teach and share his knowledge with his students. This non-Jewish high school chemistry teacher taught the history of the Holocaust to Jewish students. That teacher was also a chemistry teacher in the Montgomery County Public Schools, where he managed to incorporate the teaching of chemistry, his designated area of expertise, with the teaching of the Holocaust.

Time went by. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was planned and built. As one who survived that horrible period in man's history, I felt obliged to offer my services as a volunteer to this institution. Imagine my surprise when I learned that a Montgomery County teacher had pledged \$50,000 to the Museum. How would the donor make this gift on a teacher's salary, I wondered.



DON McCOMB

*thomasarledge.com*



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Later I learned that this teacher was my and my two colleagues' student who had attended the in-service class we taught on the history of the Holocaust.

The teacher, to pay off his pledge, had undertaken a job teaching part-time at a local community college.

Hearing of this high school teacher who had pledged such an incredible sum to the Museum, a local Holocaust survivor was inspired to set up a scholarship fund to enable one student a year from that teacher's school to study the history of the Holocaust.

So who is this high school chemistry teacher who, with the full support of his partner in life, his wife Marcia, made this incredible gift? None other than Don McComb, who had participated in the in-service course that I taught with colleagues Bob Hines and Sue Shoket, who were also instructors in the Montgomery County Public Schools. The same teacher that I had suspected of harboring pro-Nazi sentiments. 🦋

## A SPECIAL BOOK

*Esther R. Starobin*

ESTHER STAROBIN WAS BORN IN ADELSHEIM, GERMANY, AND SURVIVED THE WAR IN ENGLAND WHERE SHE WAS SENT BY HER PARENTS ON THE KINDERTRANSPORT IN JUNE 1939.



Jon, our grandson, was studying biographies when he was in second grade. Jon loved to read and was familiar with this type of literature. I had told him a little bit about living in England and of course he knew Alan, my foster brother. So he was aware that my life had been a little out of the ordinary.

Imagine my surprise and delight when he was assigned to write a biography about a family member and he picked me. Since he was only eight, I assume my daughter influenced his decision somewhat. Jon knew that I had lived in England with Alan and his parents. He was also aware that my parents were dead, but his mother Judy—my daughter—did not really want me to go into detail about the Holocaust with him at this time. She felt he was too young and I certainly respected her wishes.

In class, Jon and the other students were given questions to ask the subjects of their biographies. Jon called me on the phone and asked me these questions, taking notes so he would remember. I was pretty impressed with the questions he asked.

Jon and Judy talked about my life and collected pictures to illustrate various periods in my life. Jon wrote the book by himself after this preparation. It was a wonderful book that told about my experiences of leaving Germany and going to England. It continued with my life after I arrived in the United States. The actual story is written in a bound book with a white hardcover. Inside, Jon put pictures along with his writing. The class had an Authors Day when each student read their story to the assembled group of students and parents. I wish I could have been there.

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The next time I visited the family in Indiana, I read the book. I was quite amazed at the information it contained. I didn't remember discussing all of this with Jon or even Judy. But over the years I must have done so.

I would like a copy of this book, but Judy doesn't want to subject it to the copy machine. It is one of her most treasured possessions. 📖

## ACCEPTING HISTORY: RETURN TO ADELSHEIM, THE SECOND TIME

*Esther R. Starobin*

The letter had been sent to Bertl, my sister, by Reinhart Lochmann in September 2000. In his letter he described the special program he was planning to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the deportation of the Jews from Adelsheim and Sennfeld, Germany, to camps in southern France. I said it seemed a pity for this commemoration to happen without the presence of some Jews. My sister said she was thinking the same thing, so we quickly began to plan a trip to Adelsheim, our home before the war.

We checked out flights and made arrangements to go on a Lufthansa flight that would land in Frankfurt. Our niece, Renee, decided to join us and made her own arrangements for travel. On the Internet, I checked out possible places to stay overnight in Frankfurt and found there were no rooms available—it was the week of the annual book fair. We, of course, had never heard of the book fair and were quite surprised. We spoke to Reinhart again and learned that his sister was married to a man from India who had a friend with a hotel in Frankfurt. Through this connection we were able to make a reservation.

Once we had made our plans to fly to Germany, with Bertl's prompting I contacted Timm Kern, a German we had met through the Jewish genealogy Web site, to see if we could stay with him and his family to visit Rexingen. Timm e-mailed back and said we were very welcome. We arranged to meet him at the train station in Stuttgart on our second day in Germany. Renee had found a flight that took her directly from California to Stuttgart. After Timm picked Bertl and me up at the train station, we did a little sightseeing and then proceeded to meet Renee at the airport. Renee came off the plane carrying an unbelievable amount of camera equipment. She was working on the TV show *The West Wing* at the time and had borrowed all kinds of cameras and lights.

We went to Timm's family home, which was in a small suburb not far from the city, where we received a warm welcome from his parents. They had arranged for Renee to stay in a local hotel while we stayed at their home. Once we were settled in, Timm took us to the local Jewish cemetery. It was well kept and quite large.

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Bertl told me that 40 percent of the residents of Rexingen before the war were Jewish. We walked around the cemetery and found the graves belonging to members of our family. Renee took many, many pictures, with Timm as her helper holding lights according to her directions. Later we went to a restaurant in an old castle with Timm and his family. We were made to feel very welcome and enjoyed lively conversations throughout our stay.

The next day we went to meet Adolf Sayer, who had written a book cataloging all the Jewish gravesites, along with information about the people buried in each grave. Bertl bought his book, *In Stein Gehauen (In Stone Engraved)*, with all this information. We went with Mr. Sayer to the building which had been a synagogue. It is now used for a different group, but there were display cases within it telling the history of the Jewish community. On the outside there was also a plaque in memory of the Jews killed in the Holocaust. Again, Renee took many pictures, again with Timm as her helper.

On Friday, Timm had arranged for us to go to the local newspaper to be interviewed. It was an odd experience because of our need for translation. I found myself wondering what the interviewer was really thinking. The article, which was published in the *Horber Chronik* on October 24, 2000, described us as “elderly, but mentally remarkably alert ladies,” and explained our connection to Timm, as well as the history of our family during the Holocaust. After that, Timm drove us to Adelsheim to spend the weekend with the Lochmanns. It took us a very long time to get there because the Autobahn was clogged with people in cars going away for the weekend.

The Lochmanns have a home with many rooms, so we were all able to stay there. Reinhart also had put an article in the local paper to announce the upcoming events and our arrival from the United States to participate in them. At this point, Bertl was still translating what was being said in German so Renee and I would know what was going on. Almost as soon as we arrived, Bertl showed Reinhart the message she had written to deliver at the ceremony. He took the English version and translated it into proper German so that Bertl could practice.

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During the early afternoon, two women came to visit. Bertl had gone to first grade with them. They talked about events that had happened in their childhood. I remember them discussing that a girl in their class had died and at the time they didn't know why. Bertl asked them if they wondered what had happened to her when she no longer came to that school. They said their parents had given them some explanations that they didn't remember. It was a strange evening, with Bertl talking to these people as though they were at a school reunion, as though no war and persecution of the Jews had occurred in between. When they left, we drove into the shopping area to buy a few things. Imagine our surprise when we couldn't use our credit cards. I guess Adelsheim is still a small place. Later we went to visit the Jewish cemetery, which was well-maintained. It was odd to walk through and find stones on the tombstones. Reinhart said he visits sometimes and always leaves a stone. Again Renee took many pictures.

On Saturday we visited various local places, went to a program at Reinhart's school, and talked to some other people who knew our family. In fact, we met a woman on the street who said her mother used to trade food for items our mother had. The Germans set up rationing in the late 1930s, but the Jewish families did not receive ration books. Another person we met said his father used to leave food, after dark, on our family's doorstep. He said his mother was upset about this because she was afraid her husband would be caught. I asked Bertl how we could know if this was true. Bertl told me that our mother had written about it in letters she sent to Bertl in England. About this time, Bertl's German had become quite fluent and she often forgot to translate for Renee and me. Sometimes, Reinhart or Heide would tell us what was being said, but frequently we really had no idea.

At some point, Reinhart disappeared for a while. He had to make sure everything was set up and ready for the ceremony on Sunday. The building was also open in case people wanted to visit the exhibits that day. When he returned, he brought copies of the deportation orders and of the lists the Germans had made of the contents of our home when our parents, brother, and aunt were deported 60 years ago. The list was long and very detailed. Of course it was in German, so I couldn't read it. We also received

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copies of the *Baulander Bote*, the official bulletin of the city of Adelsheim, for October 20, 2000. In German it said, "This hour of commemoration on Sunday afternoon at the Sennfeld Synagogue was dedicated to their [the Jews'] innocent suffering, their gruesome death, the mourning of their surviving children and relatives and the responsibility of the later born generation of the people which has to bear the common guilt for the perpetrated crimes when atonement and peace should characterize the present and the future...." As I collected all this written material, I knew that I would have a lot to think about when I returned home and had it translated.

On Sunday we went for a very nice lunch at a typical small-town German restaurant. We then proceeded to the old synagogue in Sennfeld for the ceremony. When we arrived there was a small police presence outside. I asked about it, and Reinhart said it was just a precaution. Inside the building, several bulletin boards were set up. On each, Reinhart told the history of one of the area's Jewish families. He had made photocopies of pictures, letters, and information that he and his students had collected while doing research. I found it a very moving display—done totally without government support. There was also a display with a menorah and I had brought one of the memorial candles that our temple brotherhood distributes each year on *Yom Hashoah*.

About a hundred people attended the program. There were officials from the town, young people from the schools, and residents from the area, but we were the only Jews. Of course, Renee was there with her camera recording it all. Reinhart had set up a varied program combining speeches, historical information, and music.

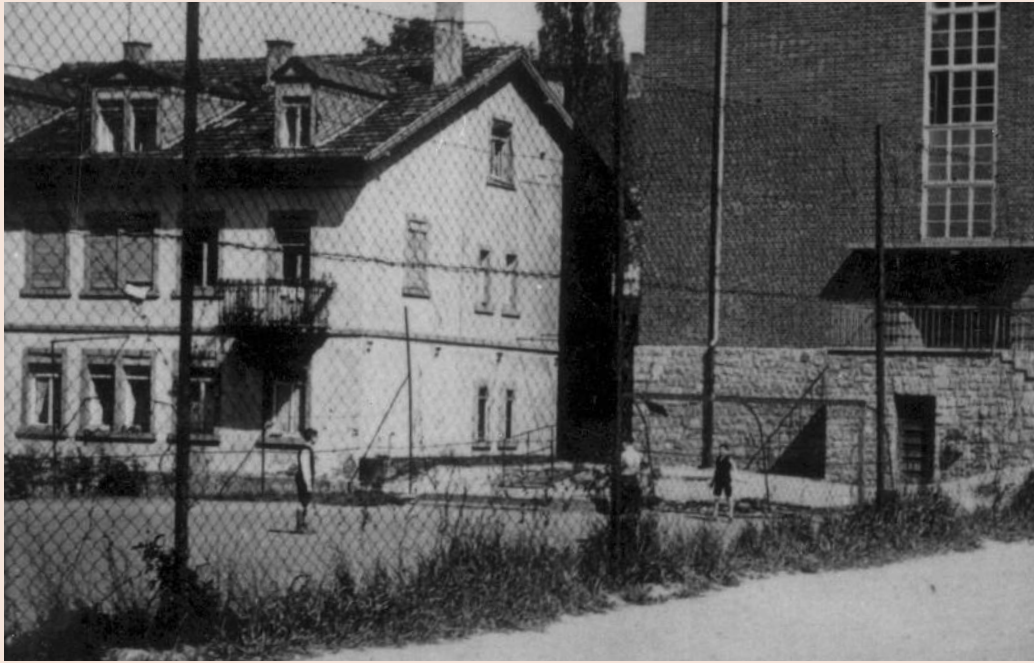
After Reinhart gave the introduction, he invited Bertl to deliver her message. She went up to the podium but broke down in tears and was unable to proceed. She stood there with Reinhart while he read her message to the assembled group.

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Unfortunately, the only thing I understood on the program was the music. However, it didn't matter. The program was very moving and somehow, without understanding the words, I felt the regret, the horror, and the searching for understanding that had gone into this event. I felt a deep thanks to Reinhart for not letting my parents' lives and deaths be dismissed and forgotten, especially when he read one of our mother's letters from Gurs. Many people came up to speak with us after the program to share their appreciation that we had attended the event. Somehow, it made the history seem more real and personal to them. In this trip, I did not feel isolated from the people who now live in Adelsheim in the way that I had on my first return there. This time I felt that there were residents of this area trying to understand what had happened, as I was doing.

We left the next morning. Reinhart took us to the train station on his way to school. Luckily, the station master accepted credit cards. After I got back to Silver Spring, Maryland, I spent time trying to find someone to translate all that had been said and written for the occasion. Finally, I found a member of our synagogue who was a translator by profession and I learned what the German said. Again, I found it very moving. I sent the translation through the technical wonders of the modern world to all the grandchildren of Adolf and Katie Rosenfeld. 🌹





VIEW OF WÜRZBURG JEWISH TEACHERS SEMINARY

*RABBI JACOB G. WIENER*

## AN UNEXPECTED LETTER

*Rabbi Jacob G. Wiener*

RABBI JACOB WIENER WAS BORN AND RAISED IN BREMEN, GERMANY, WHERE HE SURVIVED KRISTALLNACHT AND NEGOTIATED WITH THE GESTAPO TO SET UP A SCHOOL FOR JEWISH CHILDREN BEFORE HE IMMIGRATED TO CANADA IN 1939.



It was the summer of 1997 when I received an unexpected letter and a picture from a former non-Jewish playmate. The picture had been taken by a street photographer and was of a group of neighborhood youngsters near where we lived in Bremen, my hometown. We boys were then about 10 or 15 years old. It was taken shortly before Hitler came to power, when Jewish and non-Jewish children still played together.

In June 1997 I had visited Bremen at the invitation of the city. This playmate of mine, Gunther, wrote me that he had missed meeting me during my stay, but had wanted to show me that in our early lives we had been good friends. I myself had a copy of the picture. He wanted to assure me that he had never “touched a Jew.” His parents had owned a cleaning store right next to my father’s business and we frequently met as children. He knew my family and knew that my mother had been murdered by Nazis during *Kristallnacht*. He might have felt bad about that.

After more than half a century, you can say many things. I answered him that I remembered well our encounters before the war. We were a happy-go-lucky group, never thinking of harming each other. But I was interested in his life after Hitler came to power, during the time that non-Jews were forbidden to talk to Jews.

The answer was shocking. He wrote that he had been a guard in Bergen-Belsen. Again, though, he assured me that he “never touched a Jew.”

What I wanted to hear from Gunther was how he felt about his job. Did he think that killing Jews was the proper thing to do? His answer taught me how deeply the Nazis had been brainwashed and how frightened they were to tell the truth. That was the end of our correspondence; he never wrote to me again. 🌹

## NEGOTIATING WITH THE GESTAPO

*Rabbi Jacob G. Wiener*

After *Kristallnacht*, I returned to my hometown in Bremen, in northwest Germany. A number of Jews had been released from concentration camps. I had been set free after eight days of imprisonment. I was then in Würzburg, Bavaria, where I had gone to school. The Nazis called these arrests “protective custody.” From whom did we need protection?

The few Jews who had come back to Bremen formed a small congregation to help with emigration and establish a somewhat normal life again for ourselves.

The Gestapo demanded information about the activities of our small community because they wanted to increase their control over the Jews. They ordered us to send a contact person two or three times weekly to report on the status of our affairs. Being one of the younger ones—I was about 20—I was appointed to be that liaison.

I remember my first visit to the Gestapo office very clearly. The building was along the street called *Am Wall* (“at the rampart”). It was built along the medieval trench that surrounded the city. The building itself was without a house number. There was a small bell at the top on the right-side main entrance door.

Cautiously, I pushed the button. The gate opened silently. Inside I entered a large lobby with a big stairway leading up. In front of it was a big poster with a picture of a man holding two fingers upon his lips. Underneath was a German word written prominently: *Schweigen* (silence). A voice from upstairs called out, “*Komm Rauf, Jude, Zimmer 205* [Come up, Jew, to room 205]”. That was the office of Mr. Parchmann, the Jew Hater, in charge of Jewish Affairs. The office was cluttered with papers and chairs. He sat behind the desk, his feet on top of the table, smiling.

“*Setz Dich, Jude* [Sit down, Jew],” he said, pointing to a chair and speaking in a degrading tone.

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It seemed to me that he enjoyed mocking me.

Then he took out an envelope and emptied its contents. “Here are some of the items we found in your house.”

Of course I understood the irony behind his comments. Those were the items the murdering Nazis had pocketed after they killed my mother. The items were of no value to them. Among them was a small passport photo my mother had taken just a few days before, when she still had hope we all could get out of Germany alive.

I reported to Mr. Parchmann on a regular basis. He would always ask me in a devilish manner how the Jews were getting along. I asked to obtain release of those Bremen Jews still in concentration camps, to hasten the process by which they could emigrate. He asked me how many Jews had already left or were about to leave Germany.

Again, I have no idea of any reason for forcing the Jewish community to be in contact with him, other than to exhibit his power over Jewish life and death.

I usually stayed at Parchmann’s office for only 10 or 15 minutes. I was able sometimes to obtain the release of a few Bremen Jews, especially youngsters. Besides this, my agenda was to ask his permission to set up a school for Jewish children. After *Kristallnacht* all Jewish schools were closed and Jewish children were forbidden to be taught at all.

“Now that your government does not allow Jewish children to go to school anymore, our congregation plans to set up its own school for children. We want to prepare the children for when they leave Germany,” I told Parchmann one day.

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Mr. Parchmann sneered at me. “You must be daydreaming,” he snickered. “Do you think we will ever let you start a school where you will spread horror stories about our great nation and then tell them to the world? We are a law-abiding nation. We act according to the law, which has the stamp of our Leader.”

So I answered: “We also act according to the law, our G-d given law, the Torah. That’s what we will teach.”

Mr. Parchmann enjoyed baiting me and reveled in the power he possessed. Meanwhile, the German population lived in fear of the threats, terror, and intimidation that characterized Nazi policies.

I continued to visit the Gestapo at the house on *Am Wall*. One sunny February morning I entered the fortress-like building again, with pleas for the release of three youngsters from concentration camps. I prayed that G-d would soften the heart of Parchmann. Even a pharaoh’s heart had yielded eventually to let the Jewish people go.

I attempted to present myself in a self-assured but somewhat reserved way. I had learned that the threatening attitude of Parchmann was exacerbated if he viewed any person exhibiting self-pity or appealing to his emotions.

“Today I have had enough of you, Jewish swine,” Parchmann shouted. “You want those three pigs out? Out they shall go. I want all of you Jews out. It sickens the *Führer* (Hitler) to have you Jews infect our pure nation.”

“Fine,” I retorted. “Our school will help us get out.”

“You good-for-nothing...” he began.

I interrupted. “Would you want to feed someone unproductive? We will be preparing our children in order to be able to leave.”

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“Do what you want,” Parchmann burst out. “Use the old rundown dilapidated gym building near the river at Dyke Street. Not in the mornings when German youth are taught—that would be race-mixing. In the afternoon after German school ends.”

“We will use it,” I said. “Sign us up for it.”

“It’s yours,” he replied, “but see to it that you all scam out of Germany soon.”

And so, suddenly, we had a schoolhouse to start our plan of educating our children again.

The school was in existence until 1941 when the rest of the Jews still living in Bremen were transported to Minsk in Poland, where many were killed or suffered the lot of the many millions subjected to the Nazi goal of making the world *Judenrein* (“purified of Jews”). 🕊

## AN OMINOUS NIGHT CALL

*Rabbi Jacob G. Wiener*

About two weeks after *Kristallnacht*, my father and I returned to our house in Bremen. During that fateful night, my father had fled over the roofs and had been hiding with family in Hamburg. He was lucky, for if he had been found at home, he would certainly have been taken and sent to a concentration camp like my brother and all other men. I had met my father again in Hamburg when I was released from imprisonment in Würzburg.

Our house had been demolished inside, but we made it as best as could be, a place to sleep and live in. The mood in Germany was tense. One never knew what would happen next. The Nazis had stopped the persecution of Jews (temporarily), already a day after *Kristallnacht*. But Jews were never sure what the next day would bring.

One evening in January 1939, we had retired for the night and were about to fall asleep. Suddenly, we heard someone call “Josef,” my father’s name. I did not want to get up, pull aside the window blinds, and look out to see who the caller was. Always scary things happened at night.

But after several repeated calls, I decided to see who it was. There was a man in civilian clothes standing on the other side of the street, waving to open the door. The Nazis often disguised themselves as ordinary citizens to make believe that all citizens went along with them.

I opened the door and asked the man, “What do you want from us?”

“Just let me search through your whole place.”

“Do whatever you must do,” I said.

While I stayed at the door, he turned over everything from top to bottom. Then he came back. “What did you find? And what were you looking for?” I asked.

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“We were looking for your brother,” he said.

“Don’t you know that my brother was released from Sachsenhausen concentration camp and sent to the Hamburg Hospital?” I asked. “I thought you were so smart and knew all that.”

“Sorry, thank you,” he said and left.

This was one of their scare tactics. The Nazis hated the daylight, and most of their crimes were done in the middle of the night. 🦋



# C R E D I T S

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