

PERSONAL HISTORIES OF SURVIVORS AND VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST

Visitors to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Permanent Exhibition receive identification cards chronicling the experiences of men, women, and children who lived in Europe during the Holocaust. These cards are designed to help personalize the historical events of the time.

The accompanying personal histories are a sample of the Museum's collection and offer a glimpse into the ways the Holocaust affected individuals. Each identification card has four sections: The first provides a biographical sketch of the person. The second describes the individual's experiences from 1933 to 1938, while the third describes events during the war years. The final section describes the fate of the individual and explains the circumstances—to the extent that they are known—in which the individual either died or survived. In addition to revealing details of the history of the Holocaust, the personal accounts reinforce the reality that no two people experienced the events in exactly the same way.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Bertha Adler

June 20, 1928

Selo-Solotvina, Czechoslovakia

Bertha was the second of three daughters born to Yiddish-speaking Jewish parents in a village in Czechoslovakia's easternmost province. Soon after Bertha was born, her parents moved the family to Liège, an industrial, largely Catholic city in Belgium that had many immigrants from Eastern Europe.

1933–39: Bertha's parents sent her to a local elementary school, where most of her friends were Catholic. At school, Bertha spoke French. At home, she spoke Yiddish. Sometimes her parents spoke Hungarian to each other, a language they had learned while growing up. Bertha's mother, who was religious, made sure that Bertha also studied Hebrew.

1940–44: Bertha was 11 when the Germans occupied Liège. Two years later, the Adlers, along with all the Jews, were ordered to register, and Bertha and her sisters were forced out of school. Some Catholic friends helped the Adlers obtain false papers and rented them a house in a nearby village. There, Bertha's father fell ill one Friday and went to the hospital. Bertha promised to visit him on Sunday to bring him shaving cream. That Sunday, the family was awakened at 5 a.m. by the Gestapo. They had been discovered.

Fifteen-year-old Bertha was deported to Auschwitz on May 19, 1944. She was gassed there two days later.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Willem Arondeus

August 22, 1894

Naarden, Netherlands

One of six children, Willem grew up in Amsterdam, where his parents were theater costume designers. When Willem was 17, he fought with his parents about his homosexuality. He left home and severed contact with his family. He began writing and painting, and in the 1920s was commissioned to do a mural for the Rotterdam town hall. In 1932 he moved to the countryside near Apeldoorn.

1933–39: When he was 38, Willem met Jan Tijssen, the son of a greengrocer, and they lived together for the next seven years. Although he was a struggling painter, Willem refused to go on welfare. In 1938 Willem began writing a biography of Dutch painter Matthijs Maris, and after the book was published, Willem's financial situation improved.

1940–44: The Germans invaded the Netherlands in May 1940. Soon after the occupation, Willem joined the resistance. His unit's main task was to falsify identity papers for Dutch Jews. On March 27, 1943, Willem's unit attacked the Amsterdam registry building and set it on fire in an attempt to destroy records against which false identity papers could be checked. Thousands of files were destroyed. Five days later the unit was betrayed and arrested. That July, Willem and 11 others were executed.

Before his execution, Willem asked a friend to testify after the war that "homosexuals are not cowards." Only in the 1980s did the Dutch government posthumously award Willem a medal.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Inge Auerbacher

December 31, 1934

Kippenheim, Germany

Inge was the only child of Berthold and Regina Auerbacher, religious Jews living in Kippenheim, a village in southwestern Germany near the Black Forest. Her father was a textile merchant. The family lived in a large house with 17 rooms and had servants to help with the housework.

1933–39: On November 10, 1938, (*Kristallnacht*, ‘Night of Broken Glass’) hoodlums threw rocks and broke all the windows of our home. That same day police arrested my father and grandfather. My mother, my grandmother, and I managed to hide in a shed until it was quiet. When we came out, the town’s Jewish men had been taken to the Dachau concentration camp. My father and grandfather were allowed to return home a few weeks later, but that May my grandfather died of a heart attack.

1940–45: When I was seven, I was deported with my parents to the Theresienstadt ghetto in Czechoslovakia. When we arrived, everything was taken from us except for the clothes we wore and my doll, Marlene. Conditions in the camp were harsh. Potatoes were as valuable as diamonds. I was hungry, scared, and sick most of the time. For my eighth birthday, my parents gave me a tiny potato cake with a hint of sugar; for my ninth birthday, an outfit sewn from rags for my doll; and for my tenth birthday, a poem written by my mother.

On May 8, 1945, Inge and her parents were liberated from the Theresienstadt ghetto where they had spent nearly three years. They immigrated to the United States in May 1946.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Gad Beck

1923

Berlin, Germany

Gad grew up in Berlin. His father was a Jewish immigrant from Austria. Gad's mother had converted to Judaism. The Becks lived in a poor section of Berlin, populated predominantly by Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe. When Gad and his twin sister, Miriam, were five, the Becks moved to the Weissensee district of Berlin, where Gad entered primary school.

1933–39: I was just 10 when the Nazis came to power. As one of a small number of Jewish pupils in my school, I quickly became the target of antisemitic comments: 'Can I sit somewhere else, not next to Gad? He has such stinking Jewish feet.' In 1934 my parents enrolled me in a Jewish school, but I had to quit school when I was 12 as they could no longer afford the tuition. I found work as a shop assistant.

1940–44: As the child of a mixed marriage (*Mischlinge*), I was not deported to the east when other German Jews were. I remained in Berlin where I became involved in the underground, helping Jews to escape to Switzerland. As a homosexual, I was able to turn to my trusted non-Jewish, homosexual acquaintances to help supply food and hiding places. In early 1945 a Jewish spy for the Gestapo betrayed me and a number of my underground friends. I was interned in a Jewish transit camp in Berlin.

After the war, Gad helped organize the immigration of Jewish survivors to Palestine. In 1947 he left for Palestine, and returned to Berlin in 1979.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Ezra BenGershom

1922

Wurzburg, Germany

Ezra was born to a Jewish family in the Bavarian city of Wurzburg. In the summer of 1929, his father, a third-generation rabbi, accepted a position as a district rabbi, guiding 12 congregations in Upper Silesia. In primary school, Ezra, who showed a keen interest in chemistry, was often harassed by his schoolmates for being Jewish.

1933-39: Because of my “Nordic” features, I was able to frequent places where Jews couldn’t go. In 1938, one year after I entered a Jewish secondary school in Berlin, the Nazis began deporting Jews to concentration camps. Seeking a way to get out of Germany, I joined a Zionist training cooperative near Berlin where city youth were being prepared to emigrate to Palestine to found agricultural settlements.

1940-44: In 1941 I fled to Berlin when the Nazis stepped up deportations of German Jews. To elude Gestapo patrols I constantly moved about the city and I fashioned a Hitler Youth uniform. With the swastikas and my blond appearance, I passed as an Aryan. In April 1943 I escaped to Vienna using false documents stating I worked in the armaments industry. Then I made my way to Budapest, where I went underground until the Germans invaded Hungary. I fled to Romania where, in November 1944, I boarded a Turkish vessel to Palestine [the Yishuv].

In Palestine Ezra realized his dream to study biochemistry. For 25 years he headed the Clinical Chemistry Division of the Academic Children’s Hospital in Rotterdam.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Inge Berg

March 27, 1929

Cologne, Germany

Inge lived with her parents, grandparents, uncle, and younger sister, Gisella, in Lechenich, a small village outside Cologne. The Bergs were an observant Jewish family. Inge's grandfather was the president of the local synagogue association and her uncle was the cantor. Her father, Josef, was a respected cattle dealer, who had many business and personal contacts with their Jewish and non-Jewish neighbors.

1933–39: In 1935, two years after the Nazis came to power, Inge was forced to leave public school in Lechenich, so began to attend Jewish schools in Linnich and Cologne. On November 9, 1938, the Nazis carried out a nationwide pogrom against Germany's Jews, known as Kristallnacht ("The Night of Broken Glass"). Alerted to the danger by a family friend, the Bergs fled to Cologne. Inge's mother later returned to Lechenich, only to discover that their home had been ransacked and their possessions had been damaged or destroyed. In May 1939, the Bergs left for Kenya.

1940–45: In Kenya, then part of British East Africa, the family lived on a farm in the highlands, raising cattle and pyrethrum—a flowering plant used to make insecticide. Conditions there were quite rustic. Their home had a tin roof and cement floors, and their only source of water came from the rain. Inge, Gisella, and their mother moved to Nairobi so that the girls could finish their education. To support the family, Inge's mother ran a guesthouse that quickly became a stopping point for Jewish soldiers on furlough.

In 1947, the Bergs came to the United States, and eventually purchased a chicken farm and dairy business in Vineland, New Jersey. Inge took a position in an attorney's office in New York, and, in 1951, married Werner Katzenstein, a fellow refugee from Nazi Germany.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Gerda Blachmann

April 24, 1923

Breslau, Germany

Gerda was an only child of Jewish parents. They lived in Breslau, a large industrial city on the Oder River. Before World War II, Breslau's Jewish community was the third largest in Germany. Her father worked as a salesman for a large hardware and building materials company. Gerda attended public school until age 9 when she was admitted to a Catholic girls' school.

1933-39: I walked through the city to see the aftermath of a pogrom. The windows of Jewish shops had been shattered. A torched synagogue continued to smolder. I begged my parents to leave Germany. Months later, they decided we should flee. We got visas to Cuba and left from Hamburg aboard the ship St. Louis on May 13, 1939. Arriving in Cuba on the 27th, we were told our visas were invalid. Denied entry, we had to return to Europe.

1940-44: Disguised as farm women, my mother and I drove a hay wagon past the German border patrol to a farm on the French-Swiss border. We walked down a small ravine, crossed a stream and then slipped under a barbed-wire fence that marked the official border. But we were apprehended by Swiss border guards and held overnight. The next day, we were put on a train with other refugees. No one told us where we were going or what was going to happen to us.

Gerda was interned in a refugee camp in Switzerland for two years, and then worked in Bern in a blouse factory until the end of the war. She immigrated to the United States in 1949.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Gideon Boissevain

June 5, 1921

Amsterdam, Netherlands

Gideon was known affectionately as “Gi” by his family and friends. His parents were descended from the Huguenots, French Protestants who came to the Netherlands in the 16th and 17th centuries. Gi had two brothers and two sisters, and his father worked in the insurance business.

1933–39: Gi had a large circle of friends, both Christians and Jews, and after school they all liked to get together. He and his friends enjoyed taking bike trips, having parties, and playing records. In the mid-1930s his parents joined the Dutch Nazi party because it appeared to them, at first, to offer a good, orderly political system. They quickly abandoned the party, however, when they saw how brutally its members behaved.

1940–42: Gi completed a training course to be an actuary, and was working at an insurance company. Then on May 10, 1940, the Germans invaded the Netherlands, and by the 18th German troops had occupied Amsterdam. Gi and his brother began to work for the Dutch resistance. His parents helped to hide Jews. On Sunday, August 2, 1942, Gi and his brother were arrested and imprisoned.

Gi was executed by the Nazis on October 1, 1942, along with his brother and 18 other resistance fighters. He was 20 years old.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Edith Fuhrmann Brandmann

September 11, 1931

Kriesciatik, Romania

Edith's village of Kriesciatik was located on the border between Romania and Poland. Her Jewish parents owned a large ranch where they raised cattle and grew sugar beets. They also owned a grocery store. Edith had a brother, Jacob, and a sister, Martha. At home the family spoke Yiddish and German, and Edith learned Romanian after she began school.

1933–39: Our village was by a river, and I spent summer days by the water with my friends, swimming and playing. My mother would pack me bread and butter sandwiches and cherries. Sometimes I'd go to the forest with my best friend, Fritzie, to pick wild strawberries and flowers. During Easter, my parents made sure that we stayed inside because the local peasants would get drunk and sometimes attacked Jews, blaming them for killing Jesus.

1940–44: In 1940, a year after the war began, Romania became Germany's ally. I was 9 when Romanian police expelled the Jews from our village and sent us, on foot, to a place in Ukraine where Jews were concentrated. We were brought to a huge barracks where there were thousands of Jews. Nothing seemed organized. We learned that every day, 1,000 Jews were rounded up and sent to Ukrainian ghettos. When Father heard about this, he told us to stall until he could arrange our escape.

Edith's family spent more than three years sheltered by Jewish families in a Ukrainian village, and they survived the war. In 1959 Edith immigrated to America.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Thomas Buergenthal

May 11, 1934

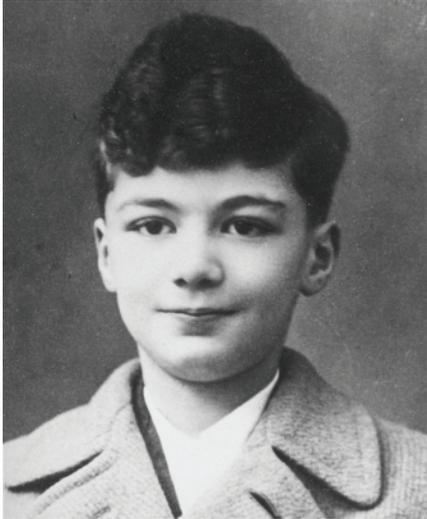
Lubochna, Czechoslovakia

In 1933, just after Hitler and the Nazi Party came to power, Thomas's Jewish parents moved from Germany to Czechoslovakia. Thomas's father had worked as a banker in Germany, and then bought a small hotel in the Slovakian town of Lubochna. Many of his father's friends in Germany came to Czechoslovakia to escape the Nazi government's unfair policies and stayed at the hotel.

1933–39: Slovak soldiers who had sided with Hitler took over our hotel in late 1938. We fled to Zilina, a nearby city, and lived there until after I turned 5. Then, my father took us across the border into Poland. On September 1, 1939, we boarded a train heading for a boat that would take us to England. But the German army invaded Poland that day, and our train was bombed. We joined other refugees, and walked north to Kielce.

1940–45: In Kielce we were put into a ghetto and then a labor camp. In 1944 I was deported to Auschwitz with my parents. It was now January 1945, and the advancing Soviet army forced the Germans to evacuate. We were marched out—children at the front. Day one was a 10-hour march and tiring; we began to lag. Stragglers were shot, so two boys and I devised a way to rest as we walked: We'd run to the front of the column, then walk slowly or stop until the rear of the column reached us. Then, we'd run ahead again.

Thomas was one of only three children to survive the three-day death march. He was deported to Sachsenhausen, where he was liberated by Soviet troops in April 1945.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Franco Cesana

September 20, 1931

Bologna, Italy

Franco was born to a Jewish family living in the northern Italian city of Bologna. Even though a fascist leader, Benito Mussolini, came to power in Italy in 1922, Bologna's Jews continued to live in safety. Like many Italian Jews, Franco's family was well integrated in Italian society. Franco attended public elementary school.

1933–39: When Franco was seven, Mussolini enforced “racial” laws against the Jews: Franco was expelled from school and went instead to a Jewish school hastily organized in makeshift quarters in one of Bologna's synagogues. Franco could not understand why he had to leave his friends just because he was Jewish. His father died in 1939, and he moved with his mother and older brother, Lelio, to Turin, where he began religious school.

1940–44: Mussolini was overthrown in July 1943. Two months later, German forces occupied Italy and gained control of the north, the part where Franco's family and most of Italy's Jews lived. The Italians had been protecting the Jews, but now Germany controlled Italy. The Cesana family went into hiding in the mountains. To evade the Germans, they moved from hut to hut. Lelio joined the Justice and Liberty partisan group. Though only 12, Franco joined as well, proud that so many Jews were fighting in the Italian resistance.

Franco was shot by Germans while on a scouting mission in the mountains. His body was returned to his mother on his 13th birthday. He was Italy's youngest partisan.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Hetty d'Ancona

May 1, 1930

Amsterdam, Netherlands

Hetty was the only child of a middle-class secular Jewish family. Hetty's parents were Sephardic, the descendants of Jews who had been expelled from Spain in 1492. The family lived in an apartment above her father's clothing business. Hetty's grandparents and other relatives lived nearby.

1933–39: I enjoyed growing up in the Netherlands. Our Jewish neighborhood was in the older part of Amsterdam, in the city center. When I was 6 years old, I began attending a public school. Everywhere in Amsterdam there were bicycles, canals and old buildings. Every summer my parents rented either a room or a house at the beach. We'd spend about a month there, and our friends and relatives would visit us.

1940–44: Just after my tenth birthday, the Germans attacked and occupied the Netherlands. One by one my relatives disappeared, picked up by the Germans. Even my closest friend, Judith, was sent away. Fearing we might be next, we left our home and I separated from my parents to hide. The Dutch underground placed me with a Protestant family in the south, who fed and hid me. In September 1944 there was fighting nearby. German soldiers moved into our house. Then the Germans ordered the townspeople to leave. Rather than go, we all hid in the basement of a bombed-out house.

Several days later, Hetty and the family were discovered by American soldiers and freed. It was December 1944. She later married, and in 1962 she immigrated to the United States.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Kornelia Mahrer Deutsch

April 7, 1904

Budapest, Hungary

Kornelia was known as Nelly. She was the older of two daughters raised by Jewish parents in the Hungarian capital of Budapest. Her father fought in the Hungarian army during World War I. Kornelia attended public school and later worked as a bookkeeper for a soap factory. In 1928, she married Miksa Deutsch, a businessman who sold matches.

1933–39: Kornelia's husband was religious, and the Deutsches' three children attended Jewish schools. Miksa and his brother were the sole distributors in Hungary of Swedish-made matches, and the business prospered. In May 1939, the Hungarian government began to limit the number of Jews who could be employed in a business, forcing the Deutsches to fire some of their Jewish employees.

1940–44: In 1940, Miksa was conscripted into the Hungarian army's labor service. Later, he was forced to surrender control of the family business to a brother of the Hungarian prime minister. After Germany occupied Budapest in March 1944, Jews were ordered to move to special houses marked with a Star of David. In October 1944, Hungarian fascists began rounding up Jews from these houses. Kornelia was offered a job at an orphanage through the Swiss embassy, but on November 15, before she could take the job, she was rounded up.

Kornelia escaped detention but was recaptured and deported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany, where she perished. Her three children survived the war.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Leif Donde

May 30, 1937

Copenhagen, Denmark

Leif was born to a Jewish family in the Danish capital of Copenhagen. Both of his parents were active in the Jewish community there, and his father owned a small garment factory. The majority of Denmark's 6,000 Jews lived in Copenhagen before the war. Despite its size, the city's Jewish population supported many Jewish organizations, often aiding Jewish refugees from all over Europe.

1933–39: I went to a Jewish nursery school, which was next to a girls' school in Copenhagen. I didn't like my school because they made me take a nap in the afternoon. At school, we learned how to spell and read and sometimes we even sang songs. I played with all kinds of children—some of them were Jewish and some of them were not. I didn't really care; they were all my friends.

1940–44: The Germans occupied Denmark in April 1940. On August 28, 1943, the same day they took over the government, my parents took us to Tivoli Gardens, a huge amusement park in the center of Copenhagen. Leaving the park, we saw people gathered in the street as a convoy of German tanks passed by. Later, my father told us to prepare to leave the city. My parents were scared but it seemed like an adventure to me. We collected warm clothes and took a train south. In October we were smuggled to Sweden on a fishing boat.

After German troops in Scandinavia surrendered on May 4, 1945, Leif and his family returned to Denmark.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Thomas Elek

December 7, 1924

Budapest, Hungary

Thomas was born to a Jewish family who moved to Paris when he was 6. His father's outspoken criticism of the fascist government and his affiliation with the Hungarian Communist Party led to the family's expulsion from Hungary in 1930. With the help of his father, a professor of modern languages, Thomas quickly learned French and excelled in school. He had a special interest in poetry and music.

1933–39: Thomas's father often argued against fascism, and he was greatly disturbed when Hitler became the chancellor of Germany in 1933. His father's uneasiness permeated the Eleks' family life.

Thomas concentrated on his studies and was admitted to the Louis-le-Grand secondary school, one of the most prestigious in Paris. He was upset to learn that Hungary, his mother country, had instituted anti-Jewish laws.

1940–44: In 1940, after the Germans occupied France, Thomas's mother enlisted in a women's resistance group. Following her example, Thomas joined a progressive students' organization in 1941 and later, with his brother, Bela, joined the armed resistance group, Franc-Tireurs et Partisans. Thomas participated in sabotage actions against the Germans. His group launched numerous grenade attacks, and set fire to a German library on the Left Bank. On July 28, 1943, his unit blew up a convoy of German officers and soldiers, killing 600.

Arrested on November 21, 1943, Thomas was tortured and condemned to death. On February 21, 1944, at the age of 20, he was executed by a Nazi firing squad.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Marcus Fass

ca. 1925

Ulanow, Poland

Marcus, known to his family as Moniek, was one of three children born to a Jewish family in the Polish town of Ulanow. His father worked as a tailor. Ulanow's Jewish community had many of its own organizations and maintained a large library. From the age of three, Moniek attended a religious school. He started public school when he was seven.

1933–39: In 1935 Moniek's father left for America to find a job so that his family could later join him. He sent money to them while they waited for their emigration papers. Moniek's mother worked as a seamstress to help support the family. At age 14, Moniek graduated from secondary school. In September of the same year, the family was completing the paperwork for emigration when Germany invaded Poland.

1940–43: After Ulanow was occupied, Moniek was forced to work as a laborer for the German army. In 1942 the Nazis ordered a roundup of all Ulanow's Jews. Fearing deportation, Moniek went into hiding with a friend. For more than a year they managed to elude the Germans by hiding in the forests and fields near Ulanow. But during a German search for partisans, Moniek and his friend were trapped in a rye field. Sweeping the field inch by inch with their dogs, the Germans finally captured the pair.

After being seized outside Ulanow in 1943, Moniek and his friend were never heard from again.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Moishe Felman

1926

Sokolow Podlaski, Poland

The youngest of seven children, Moishe was raised in a Yiddish-speaking, religious Jewish home in Sokolow Podlaski, a manufacturing town in central Poland with a large Jewish population of some 5,000. Moishe's parents ran a grain business. Moishe attended a Jewish school and began public school in Sokolow Podlaski in 1933.

1933–39: Summer vacation had just finished and 13-year-old Moishe was about to begin another year at elementary school when the Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. German aircraft bombed Sokolow Podlaski's market and other civilian targets before German troops entered the town on September 20. Three days later, they set fire to the main synagogue. Later, the Germans confiscated the family's grain business.

1940–42: Over the next two years, the Germans imposed restrictions on the Jews, eventually ordering them to wear an identifying Jewish star on their clothing. On September 28, 1941, the Germans set up a ghetto and concentrated all of the town's Jews there. About a year later, on the most solemn holiday of the Jewish religion, the Day of Atonement, the Germans began to round up the people in the ghetto. Those who resisted or tried to hide were shot. Moishe, his mother and sister were herded onto the boxcar of a train.

On September 22, 1942, Moishe and his family were deported to the Treblinka extermination camp. He was gassed there shortly after arriving. He was 16 years old.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Moshe Finkler

October 9, 1926

The Hague, Netherlands

Moshe was brought up in a religious Jewish family in The Hague, the center of government in the Netherlands. His father was a businessman, and his mother raised their seven children. Introspective by nature, Moshe was an avid student.

1933–39: Moshe was starting eighth grade when the war began in September 1939. At home, his family discussed the terrible things happening to Jews in Germany. Moshe believed more than ever that the Jewish people needed their own homeland. He continued attending public school and also was tutored at home in Jewish studies. He loved learning languages and was studying eight of them, including Hebrew.

1940–44: Germany invaded the Netherlands, reaching The Hague on May 10, 1940. When the Nazis began rounding up Jews in the summer of 1942, Moshe and his family escaped to Belgium, where no one knew them and where they hoped they could pass as Christians. His father secured false papers, including an “Aryan” permit to live in Brussels. But on April 7, 1944, while the Finklers were celebrating the Jewish holiday of Passover, Gestapo agents stormed their apartment. They had been betrayed.

Moshe and his family were deported to Auschwitz, where Moshe died at age 18.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Mario Finzi

1913

Bologna, Italy

Mario was the only child of a Jewish couple who were secondary school teachers in Bologna. Like many Italian Jews, his family was well-integrated into Italian society. Even though Fascist leader Benito Mussolini came to power in 1922, Jews in Italy continued to live in safety. Mario played piano as a hobby. When he finished high school in Bologna, Mario went on to study law.

1933–39: In 1938 Mario began practicing law in Milan. But later that year, Mussolini's government issued "racial" laws that prevented Mario from continuing to practice. Mario moved to Paris and began a new career as a pianist. In August 1939 he returned to Italy to renew his visa. On September 1, while he was there, Germany invaded Poland and two days later France declared war on Germany. Mario was detained in Italy.

1940–44: Mario worked in Bologna with a Jewish service agency, helping refugees. In July 1943 Mussolini was overthrown and German forces occupied Italy. The Jews in Bologna were sent to a German transit camp at Fossoli di Carpi. For some, the destination of the transports out of Fossoli di Carpi was not a secret-- "Auschwitz" had been written in chalk on one of the railway cars. In March 1944 Mario was deported to Auschwitz.

In Auschwitz, Mario threw himself on the high-tension wire that surrounded the camp. He left behind a message for his parents, asking their forgiveness. Mario was 31 years old.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Sevek Fishman

July 14, 1918

Kaluszyn, Poland

Sevek's religious Jewish family owned a haberdashery business in Kaluszyn, a suburb of Warsaw. The oldest of six children (three boys and three girls), Sevek completed high school and was then apprenticed to a tailor.

1933–39: Each Friday, before the Sabbath began, my mother asked the neighbors if they had enough food for the Sabbath. If they didn't, she brought them a meal. Although I belonged to a non-religious Zionist group, Ha Shomer ha-Tsa'ir, and didn't wear a skullcap like religious Jews, when I entered my parents' home I respected their wishes to cover my head—to defy them would have shamed my family.

1940–44: In 1940 my family was forced into the Warsaw ghetto, and I was married there that same year. After two years, my wife Lonia and I escaped to Lonia's town of Wegrow, and later to a village near the town. A peasant couple, Jan and Maria, agreed to hide us. With bloody fingernails we dug a dank cellar "grave," lined it with straw, and lay motionless, concealed from danger for 18 months. Jan and Maria risked their lives by bringing us food and emptying our chamber pot every day. Once a week they sponged us down.

Sevek and Lonia were liberated by the Soviets in 1945. After so many months in confinement, they had to relearn how to walk. In 1948 the Fishmans immigrated to the United States.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Isadore Frenkiel

ca. 1898

Gabin, Poland

Isadore and his wife, Sossia, had seven sons. The Frenkiels, a religious Jewish family, lived in a one-room apartment in a town near Warsaw called Gabin. Like most Jewish families in Gabin, they lived in the town's center, near the synagogue. Isadore was a self-employed cap maker, selling his caps at the town's weekly market. He also fashioned caps for the police and military.

1933–39: Isadore felt the pinch of the Depression, but although business was poor, he was able to provide for his family. Shortly after the Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, they occupied Gabin. Ten people were shot in the streets; others, such as doctors and teachers, were taken away. The Germans rounded up the Jewish men and held them in the marketplace while soldiers doused the synagogue with gasoline and set it on fire.

1940–42: In 1941, the Frenkiels heard rumors that the Germans were evacuating some towns and deporting the Jews to a death camp. A cousin visited the family after escaping from a transport and said the rumors were true. "They put you in trucks, gas you, then throw your body into a burning pit," he said. Isadore's three-year-old son ran to his mother crying, "Will they burn me, too?" Isadore urged his cousin to tell the Jewish elders. He met with them, but they did not believe his story and told him to leave town.

In May 1942, Gabin's Jews were deported to the Chelmno death camp. Isadore, Sossia, and four of their sons were placed in a sealed van and asphyxiated with exhaust fumes.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Jakob Frenkiel

December 3, 1929

Gabin, Poland

Jakob was one of seven boys in a religious Jewish family. They lived in a town 50 miles west of Warsaw called Gabin, where Jakob's father worked as a cap maker. Gabin had one of Poland's oldest synagogues, built of wood in 1710. Like most of Gabin's Jews, Jakob's family lived close to the synagogue. The family of nine occupied a one-room apartment on the top floor of a three-story building.

1933–39: On September 1, 1939, just a few months before I turned 10, the Germans started a war with Poland. After they reached our town, they doused the synagogue and surrounding homes with gasoline and set them on fire. All the Jewish men were rounded up in the marketplace and held there while our synagogue and homes burned to the ground. Our house had also been doused with gasoline, but the fire didn't reach it.

1940–45: At age 12, I was put in a group of men to be sent to labor camps. More than a year later, we were shipped to Auschwitz. The day after we arrived, my brother Chaim and I were lined up with kids and old people. I asked a prisoner what was going to happen to us. He pointed to the chimneys. 'Tomorrow the smoke will be from you.' He said if we could get a number tattooed on our arms, we'd be put to work instead of being killed. We sneaked to the latrine, then escaped through a back door and lined up with the men getting tattoos.

After 17 months in Auschwitz, Jakob was force-marched to camps in Germany. Liberated in April 1945 near Austria, he immigrated to the United States at the age of 16.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Sossia Frenkiel

ca. 1898

Warsaw, Poland

Sossia and her husband, Isadore, were the parents of seven boys. The Frenkiels, a religious Jewish family, lived in a one-room apartment in a town near Warsaw called Gabin. Like most Jewish families in Gabin, they lived near the synagogue. Sossia cared for the children while Isadore worked as a self-employed cap maker, selling his caps at the town's weekly market.

1933–39: Because of the Depression, Isadore's business had fallen off, but the Frenkiels managed to continue providing for their family. Shortly after the Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, they occupied Gabin. They shot 10 people in the street and took away others, such as doctors and teachers. Then the German soldiers doused the synagogue with gasoline and burned it.

1940–45: In 1941 a cousin visited the Frenkiels after escaping from a transport. He confirmed rumors about the killing of Jews, warning them: "They put you in trucks, gas you, then throw your body into a burning pit." Sossia's three-year-old son cried, "Will they burn me, too?" Isadore urged his cousin to tell the Jewish elders. He met with them, but they did not believe his story. In May 1942, two months after three of Sossia's sons had been deported for forced labor, the Germans rounded up all the Jews in Gabin.

In May 1942 Gabin's Jews were deported to the Chelmno extermination camp. Sossia, Isadore and four of their sons were placed in a sealed van and asphyxiated with exhaust fumes.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Irene Freund

October 15, 1930

Mannheim, Germany

The younger of two children, Irene was born to Jewish parents in the industrial city of Mannheim. Her father, a wounded German army veteran of World War I, was an interior decorator. Her mother was a housewife. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, Irene's older brother, Berthold, was attending public school. Three-year-old Irene was at home with her mother.

1933–39: Celebrating Jewish holidays with all my aunts and uncles was really nice. One of my favorite places was the zoo; I especially liked the monkeys. When the Nazis forced Jewish children out of public school, I began attending a Jewish school. I was a 'daddy's girl,' and my father would take me home from school on his bike. After the Nazis burned our school, my older brother left for safety in Britain—I was too young to go with him.

1940–44: In 1940, when I was ten, our family was sent to Gurs and then Rivesaltes, terrible camps in southern France. The food was awful. The Jewish Children's Aid Society took me away and placed me in a Catholic convent along with 13 other Jewish girls. I became Irene Fanchet and studied under Sister Theresa. One day the SS came to our convent looking for hidden German Jewish children. One of our girls, who was fluent in French, did the talking for us. It worked. The Germans left, and we were safe.

Thirteen-year-old Irene was freed by Allied troops in July 1944. After being transferred to several children's homes in France, she immigrated to the United States in 1947.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Joseph Gani

1926

Preveza, Greece

Joseph and his family lived in Preveza, a town on the Ionian seashore with a Jewish population of 300. Joseph's father had a small textile shop. The Ganis were of Romaniot descent, Jews whose ancestors had lived in Greece and the Balkans for more than a thousand years.

1933–39: Joseph attended Greek public school in Preveza. He also received a religious education; the local rabbi would come to the public school for several hours a week to give religious instruction to the Jewish students. Joseph loved sports, especially soccer and baseball.

1940–44: Germany invaded Greece in 1941 and took over Preveza in the fall of 1943. The Jews of Preveza were deported to Auschwitz in Poland in March 1944. There, Joseph was assigned to work in Birkenau as part of the Sonderkommando, a work unit that carted corpses to the crematoria. On October 7, 1944, Sonderkommando workers in Crematorium IV revolted, disarming SS guards and blowing up the crematorium. Soon, other Sonderkommando workers, including Joseph, joined in the uprising.

Joseph was killed in Birkenau in October 1944. He was 18 years old.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Pinchas Gerszonowicz

January 21, 1921

Miechow, Poland

Pinchas was born into a large family living in the town of Miechow in south-central Poland. His father was a machinist and locksmith. Pinchas spent long days studying, either learning Hebrew in the Jewish school or taking general subjects at the public school. He belonged to the Zionist youth organization Ha Shomer ha-Tsa'ir and played left wing for a Jewish soccer team.

1933–39: At 13 I finished school and started work as an apprentice machinist and blacksmith in a building contractor's shop. When the German army invaded Poland in 1939, my parents decided that my older brother, Herschel, and I should flee to the Soviet-occupied part of Poland. We were on foot and no match for the motorized German division that overtook us about 150 miles east of Miechow. We had no choice but to return home.

1940–44: I repaired vehicles for the Germans in Miechow and later at their Krakow airbase. In July 1943, I was deported to Krakow's suburb of Plaszow, where the Nazis had established a labor camp over a very old Jewish cemetery. There, I worked as a machinist and blacksmith with my father. Every day I saw Jews being shot by the SS guards or torn to death by dogs. The camp's commander, Goeth, always had two large dogs with him. All he had to say was, 'Get somebody!' I never knew if my last minute was approaching.

Pinchas was deported to Auschwitz in early 1945. One of the few survivors of a two-week death march, he was liberated near the Dachau camp in April. He immigrated to the United States in 1948.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Dorotka Goldstein

February 1, 1932

Warsaw, Poland

Dorotka was the youngest of three children in a Jewish family. Her father was the director of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in Warsaw and worked for a popular newspaper. An avid Zionist, he had traveled to Palestine.

1933–39: My father established a soup kitchen in Warsaw for Jewish refugees who had fled from Germany. In September 1939 I was supposed to begin first grade when war broke out. My father escaped to Vilna with other Jewish leaders. People were suffering, but I didn't understand why. I was content with my playmates and my dolls.

1940–44: After my father brought us to Vilna, the Germans killed him and deported me, my mother and sister to the Stutthof camp. My mother died slowly of hunger. When my sister and I were sent to be gassed, a German saved me, saying, "Look at this rotten Jewish child; she has such beautiful eyes." My sister waved so I wouldn't follow her. When the Soviets neared Stutthof, two Germans with machine guns shot everyone in my barracks. Lying sick on my tummy and weighing just 40 pounds, I felt the sting of two bullets in my back.

Dorotka was found unconscious in her bunk two hours later when the camp was liberated by Soviet troops on May 9, 1945. She immigrated to Israel in 1952.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Matvey Gredinger

June 2, 1921

Vertujeni, Romania

Matvey was the youngest of three children born to a Jewish family. The Gredingers lived in the town of Vertujeni in Bessarabia, a region of Romania. His father was a kosher butcher, preparing meat, especially chicken, for sale in his kosher shop. Matvey attended a Jewish school where he studied Jewish history and Hebrew.

1933–39: We heard stories from other towns about antisemitic groups, especially the League of National Christian Defense, harassing and sometimes attacking Romanian Jews. But only small groups tormented us in our town. After I completed the seventh grade, I went to the Romanian capital of Bucharest in 1934 and secured a job working in a textile factory. While I was away, my family moved to the town of Vysoka.

1940–44: While I was visiting my family in 1940, the Soviets occupied Bessarabia. Within a year the Germans occupied the area. At once, Romanian soldiers began shooting Jews. We barricaded our house but the soldiers broke in. I was dragged out and a soldier fired at me; the bullet passed through my neck. I collapsed, unconscious but alive, lying in a pool of blood. Later, the soldiers used a match to check my breathing. I feigned death. They heaped rocks on me and left. After dark, I rose and ran through the woods.

Matvey fled to a nearby town, but the Germans came the next day. He was then deported to a forced-labor camp in Ukraine. In 1944 he was liberated by the Red Army.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Zuzana Gruenberger

March 3, 1933

Kosice, Czechoslovakia

Zuzana was the youngest of three children born to Hungarian-speaking Jewish parents in the city of Kosice. She was the baby of the family, and they called her Zuzi. Her father was a tailor whose workshop was in the Gruenbergers' apartment.

1933–39: In November 1938, when Zuzana was five years old, Hungarian troops marched into Kosice and made it a part of Hungary. The Hungarians changed the name of the city to Kassa. The Hungarian government was friendly to Nazi Germany and introduced anti-Jewish laws in Kosice.

1940–44: In 1941, one year after Zuzana began school, the Hungarians moved the Gruenbergers and other Jewish families to camps in other parts of Hungary. The Gruenbergers were released the following spring and returned to Kosice, but Zuzana's brother and father were taken soon after for slave labor. In 1944, Hungarians who were cooperating with the Germans rounded up Kosice's 12,000 Jews, including Zuzana, her mother, and sister. They were sent to a brickyard at the city's edge and put on trains headed for Auschwitz.

Zuzana and her mother were gassed immediately on arriving in Auschwitz in May 1944. Zuzana was 11 years old.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Ita Grynbaum

1926

Starachowice, Poland

Ita was the second-youngest of nine children born to religious Jewish parents in Starachowice, a town in east-central Poland. Their small one-story house served as both the family's residence and their tailor shop. The tailoring was often done in exchange for goods such as firewood or a sack of potatoes. Ita often helped her mother with chores around the house.

1933–39: Ita's father died at home on a Saturday in June 1939, shortly after returning from synagogue. He had lain down to rest, when suddenly blood ran from his mouth. Her brother, Chuna, ran for the doctor, but when he returned, their father had already died. They buried him in the Jewish cemetery outside town. Ita's mother and older siblings kept the tailor shop running. That September, German forces occupied Starachowice.

1940–45: In October 1942, SS guards forced the town's Jews into the marketplace. Ita, who already was a forced laborer at a nearby factory, was lined up with the "able-bodied," along with Chuna. They were marched to a nearby forced-labor camp, where Ita was put to work serving food to the Polish workers. When a typhus epidemic struck the camp, Ita contracted the disease. Unable to work, she was sent to the barracks for sick prisoners. Chuna visited her daily, often bringing her rags to pad her painful bedsores.

With no medicine or doctors for the sick prisoners, Ita died of her illness after three months. She was buried in a nearby stone quarry. Ita was 17 years old.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Renate Guttman

December 21, 1937

Teplice-Sanov, Czechoslovakia

Renate, her twin brother, Rene, and their German-Jewish parents lived in Prague. Shortly before the twins were born, Renate's parents had fled Dresden, Germany, to escape the Nazi government's policies against Jews. Before leaving Germany to live in Czechoslovakia, Renate's father, Herbert, worked in the import-export business. Her mother, Ita, was an accountant.

1933–39: Our family lived in a six-story apartment building along the #22 trolley line in Prague. A long, steep flight of stairs led up to our apartment, where my brother, Rene, and I shared a crib in our parents' bedroom; a terrace overlooked the yard outside. Rene and I wore matching outfits and were always well-dressed. Our days were often spent playing in a nearby park. In March 1939 the German army occupied Prague.

1940–45: Just before I turned 6, we were sent to Auschwitz from the Theresienstadt ghetto. There, I became #70917. I was separated from my brother and mother and taken to a hospital where I was measured and X-rayed; blood was taken from my neck. Once, I was strapped to a table and cut with a knife. I got injections that made me throw up and have diarrhea. While ill in the hospital after an injection, guards came in to take the sick to be killed. The nurse caring for me hid me under her long skirt and I was quiet until the guards left.

Renate and her brother survived and were reunited in America in 1950. They learned that as one pair of the "Mengele Twins," they had been used for medical experiments.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Leo Hanin

November 20, 1930

Vilna, Poland

Leo's Jewish family lived in Vilna, which in 1913 was part of the Russian Empire. In 1916, fearing revolution, his family left for Harbin in northern China, a city with a well-organized Jewish community. There Leo joined a Zionist group and studied Jewish history, and for two years attended a Jewish primary school and learned Hebrew. He then studied at a Russian secondary school in Harbin.

1933–39: When Japan occupied Manchuria in 1931 and conditions in Harbin deteriorated, my parents sent me to Shanghai. There I attended a British school and learned English, and I also served in the Jewish Shanghai Volunteer Corps, which protected Shanghai's foreign citizens. I got a job at a textile import firm that sent me, in 1937, to Kobe, Japan. The small Jewish community there elected me its honorary secretary.

1940–44: In 1940 and 1941 many Jewish refugees from Poland and Lithuania were saved from the Holocaust by receiving transit visas via Japan, which were issued to them by the Japanese vice-consul in Kovno. These refugees traveled by train across the Soviet Union to Vladivostok, where they were eventually transported by ship to Kobe, Japan. There our small Jewish community looked after them by finding them homes, donating medical supplies and clothing, and arranging their visas so they could stay on in Japan.

In 1942 Leo returned to Shanghai and spent the rest of the war working there. He immigrated to Israel in 1948 and later moved to the United States.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Ivo Herzer

February 5, 1925

Zagreb, Yugoslavia

Ivo was an only child born to a Jewish family in the city of Zagreb. His father worked in an insurance company. Though blatant antisemitism was considered uncommon in Yugoslavia, Jews were barred from government and university positions unless they converted to Christianity.

1933–39: In Zagreb I studied at a public secondary school. The curriculum was fixed and included three languages as well as religion. My school was highly selective but I enjoyed studying and did well. Though I didn't personally encounter overt prejudice in Zagreb, some Croatian fascist groups were fiercely antisemitic and supported the policies of the Nazis. I was 16 when the war began.

1940–44: In 1941 Yugoslavia was invaded by the Axis powers and split into occupation zones. Fearing the Croatian fascists, my family wanted to escape to the Italian zone. Using the only two Italian words I knew, "Jew" and "fear," I approached some Italian army officers. They understood and sneaked us into the Italian zone. We weren't the only refugees; the Italians were shielding many Jews. My family was even invited to one of their army concerts. How ironic that Jews were being protected by a German ally.

Italy, defeated in 1943, pulled out of Yugoslavia, and Ivo crossed the Adriatic to southern Italy, recently liberated by the Allies. In 1948 Ivo immigrated to the United States.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Johanna (Hanne) Hirsch

November 28, 1924

Karlsruhe, Germany

Hanne was born to a Jewish family in the German city of Karlsruhe. Her father, Max, was a photographer. When he died in 1925, Hanne's mother, Ella, continued to maintain his studio. In 1930 Hanne began public school.

1933–39: In April 1933 our studio, like the other Jewish businesses in Karlsruhe, was plastered with signs during the anti-Jewish boycott: "Don't buy from Jews." At school, a classmate made me so furious with her taunts that I ripped her sweater. After the November 1938 pogroms the studio was busy making photos for the new ID cards marked "J" that Jews had to carry. The studio remained open until December 31 when all Jewish businesses had to be closed.

1940–44: In 1940 we were deported to Gurs, a Vichy detention camp on the French-Spanish border. I learned from a social worker there that a pastor in Le Chambon village wanted to bring children out of the camp. This social worker, from the Children's Aid Society, got me out. Being free was heavenly. But by 1942 the German roundups reached even to Le Chambon and I was sent to hide at two different farms. The farmers were glad to help. One said, "Even if we have less, we want to help more people." In early 1943 I escaped to Switzerland.

After the war, Hanne lived in various cities in Switzerland. In 1945 she married Max Liebmann and three years later she immigrated with her husband and daughter to the United States.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Monique Jackson

October 29, 1937

Paris, France

Monique's Jewish parents met in Paris. Her father had emigrated there from Russia to study engineering, and her mother had come from Poland as a young child. Monique's father did not have enough money to finish university, so he went to work as an upholsterer. He also shared a small business which sold his hand-tooled leather purses.

1933–39: Monique's mother was 20 when she gave birth to Monique in 1937. Two years later, Parisians were threatened by the possibility of bombing by the Germans, and French authorities suggested that all mothers with young children leave the city. With the help of the authorities, Monique and her mother fled to the town of St. Laurent de Neste in the Pyrenees. Monique's father soon joined them.

1940–44: When she was 5, Monique was hidden with other children at the home of a family in the Pyrenees. The family would punish the children by not giving them food. Monique was sometimes so hungry that she would dig outside for roots in the ground to eat. Monique knew she was being hidden with the family because conditions were dangerous, but she missed her parents very much. One day, sensing that Monique was not well, her mother came and took her.

Monique and her family survived the war with the help of many people in St. Laurent de Neste. In 1950 the Jacksons immigrated to the United States.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Maria Justyna

March 28, 1925

Piotrkow Trybunalski, Poland

Maria was born to Roman Catholic parents in the industrial town of Piotrkow Trybunalski in central Poland. Her father and mother were schoolteachers. Maria attended grade school and secondary school in Piotrkow. She and her older sister, Danuta, became friends with two Jewish girls, Sabina and Helena Szwarc. Although their houses were more than a mile apart, the girls often played together.

1933–39: The Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and occupied Piotrkow four days later. Most schooling for Poles was banned so, at 14, I had to stop attending secondary school. That October, our good friends, Sabina and Helena, were among those forced to move into the ghetto the Germans established for the Jews in Piotrkow. Only a few weeks after Piotrkow was occupied, I joined the resistance movement.

1940–44: I was a courier for the Polish Home Army, guiding saboteurs who parachuted in from England. I also delivered weapons, explosives, and underground newspapers. When the Germans liquidated the Piotrkow ghetto in 1942, Mother hid Sabina and Helena in our house until they could sneak out with false IDs. During the Warsaw uprising in 1944, I was caught smuggling two resistance leaders out of Warsaw. The men were shot on the spot. I was sent off to a concentration camp, but on the way I escaped from the train.

After the war, Maria reunited with her family in Piotrkow Trybunalski. In 1963 she obtained a medical degree, and became a general practitioner.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Ilona Karfunkel Kalman

May 12, 1906

Erdobeny, Hungary

One of four children, Ilona was born to religious Jewish parents living in the village of Erdobeny in the highlands of northeastern Hungary. The Karfunkel's house, on the village outskirts, had a large garden in the back and fruit orchards. Ilona's parents had a small vineyard and a little grocery store. Ilona married Ferenc Kalman, and the couple moved to Hatvan, 36 miles northeast of Budapest.

1933–39: Ferenc and I have always considered ourselves Hungarians who happened to be Jewish, and we've always been well-respected in Hatvan. In the last few months, though, right-wing antisemites have grown in power, and the atmosphere here has slowly been changing. Some of our daughter Judith's schoolmates have started to taunt her, and she is learning that to many others, we are Jewish before we are Hungarian.

1940–44: After German troops entered Hungary a few weeks ago, Ferenc was conscripted into forced labor. Now, Judith and I have been ordered to relocate to the sugar factory in Hatvan, where all Jews in the area are being concentrated. The Hungarian gendarmes are letting us take only 110 pounds of baggage into the ghetto. Judith is tough: She refuses to leave any of our nice things behind for someone else, so despite my tearful pleas, she's started to smash our beautiful, never-used glass dishes from Czechoslovakia.

In June 1944, 38-year-old Ilona and her daughter were deported to Auschwitz. Judith was selected for forced labor. Ilona was gassed upon arrival.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Judith Kalman

August 23, 1927

Erdobeny, Hungary

Judith was the only child born to a Jewish couple who lived in Hatvan, a small town 36 miles northeast of Budapest. Judith's father worked in his brother's business, marketing grains and other agricultural products purchased from local farms. When she was 3, Judith gave her first public recitation of poetry, an interest that she pursued throughout her childhood.

1933–39: My family wasn't religious--we were Hungarians who happened to be Jewish, and our family was well-liked in Hatvan. But in the late 1930s everything slowly started changing. New, anti-Jewish laws restricted entry for Jews into high schools, universities, and certain professions. My father lost his white-collar job and became a bricklayer. When I walked home from school, kids spat on me and called me names. I learned that I was a Jew.

1940–44: German troops entered Hungary on March 19, 1944, and a few weeks later, I was forced with hundreds of other Jews into a ghetto set up at the sugar factory. One day, my mother and I were taken out of the ghetto with a group to work in the fields. Returning at the end of the day, we were forced to walk on the sides of the road and kiss the filthy ground where horses had passed before us. Townspeople lined the roadsides, jeering and clapping. My so-called "friends" in the crowd laughed and pointed at me.

In June 1944, 16-year-old Judith was deported to Auschwitz. She weighed 48 pounds when she was liberated at Seehausen on May 1, 1945. Judith immigrated to the United States in 1948.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Helen Katz

January 2, 1931

Kisvarda, Hungary

The youngest of eight children, Helen was born and raised in a religious Jewish family living in a town in northeastern Hungary. She was the “baby” of the family and the focus of everyone’s hopes and affection. Although her Hebrew name was Hannah, her family called her by her nickname, Potyo, which meant “the dear little one.”

1933–39: Helen liked school, but was afraid because some of the kids and teachers hated Jews. There was talk that there might be a war. Her mother wanted them to leave Hungary before things got worse, but her father, who had been to America before, was reluctant to take the family there because he thought it was not religious enough. But he finally gave in and managed to return to New York, where he tried to get them immigration papers.

1940–44: The immigration papers arrived too late; Hungary was at war with America. Helen began to suffer from nightmares. Following an absence due to illness, Helen was forbidden to return to school because she was Jewish. Later, Hungarian police forced the Katzes to move into Kisvarda’s ghetto. On May 28, 1944, they were ordered to be ready to travel at 4 a.m. Helen stayed close to her mother as they boarded a cattle car. It was dark inside and she huddled next to her.

Helen was killed upon arrival at Auschwitz on May 31, 1944. She was 13 years old.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Izabella Katz

May 28, 1924

Kisvarda, Hungary

Izabella was one of eight children raised in a religious Jewish family in the small town of Kisvarda in northeastern Hungary. Every Friday Izabella and her brother and four younger sisters went to the library to borrow the maximum number of books for their mother. Izabella attended public schools and longed to move to a big city.

1933–39: Antisemitism was prevalent. I can't count the number of times I was called "smelly Jew." We cringed at "Heil Hitler" speeches from Germany on the radio because we knew our neighbors would happily join up with the Nazis, and these were people with whom we'd shared our town for generations. My father went to the United States and desperately tried to obtain immigration papers for us.

1940–44: By the time Papa got our visas, Hungary was at war with America. Later, Hitler invaded Hungary. In April 1944 Jews were moved to Kisvarda's ghetto. On May 28 we were ordered to be ready to travel at 4 a.m. Smiling townspeople lined the street to watch us squeeze into cattle cars. At Auschwitz my mother and youngest sister were gassed. My sisters and I were put in camp "C." As the Soviets advanced, we were moved towards Germany to a labor camp. Force-marched west from there in a blizzard, we made a run for it.

Izabella and two of her sisters hid for two days and were liberated by the Soviets on January 25, 1945. They immigrated to the United States and joined their father.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Elizabeth Kaufmann

March 7, 1924

Vienna, Austria

Elizabeth's father was a journalist who covered financial and political subjects. In 1930, because of the economic crisis in Austria, her father relocated his family from Vienna to Berlin.

1933–39: In 1933 the Nazis blacklisted Father as an anti-fascist writer, so we returned to Vienna. With fascism rising there, Father left, eventually making it to Paris. We were to join him, but the Reich's borders were closed to Jews. Finally, Mother used her jewelry to get French visas. In November 1938 we reached Paris. When war broke out in September 1939, the French interned German males as 'enemy aliens,' including my father and brother.

1940–44: In June 1940 the German army advanced toward Paris, and Mother and I had to flee again. We joined the flow of refugees heading south on the day before the Germans invaded Paris. She hitched rides; I traveled by bicycle. We agreed to meet each day at the city hall of whatever town the ride took her to. While I was waiting for her in Vendome, German planes bombed the city and strafed the highway. I was evacuated before we could meet. I was distraught I'd lost Mother, but I had to ride on.

Elizabeth's father was one of 1,000 intellectuals granted special US visas. The family fled in 1942 on one of the last passenger boats to cross the Atlantic during the war.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Kalman Kernweiss

1920

Kupno, Poland

Kalman was the oldest of ten children born to poor, devout Jewish parents in a small village in south central Poland. His father supported the family by buying chickens, eggs and vegetables from the peasants and selling them at the Kolbuszowa market a few miles away. Kalman walked to Kolbuszowa each day to attend public school in the morning and religious school in the afternoon.

1933–39: In 1933 Kalman was accepted to study at a renowned rabbinical institute in Lublin. When there was time, he taught himself English from an old grammar book. English became his passion; he asked people to call him “Charlie” instead of Kalman. He focused his sights on emigrating to America and wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt telling her of his wish. She wrote him back an encouraging response. He carried the letter with him for good luck.

1940–44: Kalman escaped with 16 others from the Glogow labor camp, where they had been slave laborers building roads for the Germans. Kalman returned to Kupno. There, he hid in a barn and ventured out each week to get food from a peasant he knew in the village. One night, he was visited by two Jewish friends who had escaped from the Kolbuszowa labor camp and were hiding in the forest. Kalman decided to join them. He spent several months hiding in the forest, and made regular trips into his village for food.

On a trip into Kupno, Kalman was ambushed by some Poles--his former neighbors. A friend from the forest found him with a pitchfork in his chest. Kalman died the next day.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Henoah Kornfeld

1938

Kolbuszowa, Poland

Henoah's religious Jewish parents married in 1937. His father, Moishe Kornfeld, and his mother, Liba Saleschutz, had settled in Kolbuszowa, where Henoah's mother was raised. There, Liba's father bought the newlyweds a home and started his new son-in-law in the wholesale textile business.

1938-39: Henoah was born in late 1938, and was raised among many aunts, uncles and cousins. Around Henoah's first birthday, Germany invaded Poland and soon reached Kolbuszowa. Polish soldiers on horses tried to fight against the German army, but they were no match for tanks. After a short battle, there were many dead horses in the streets. Henoah's town came under German rule.

1940-42: Everyone in town, including the children, knew of Hafenbier, the vicious German police commander with the face of a bulldog who was posted in Kolbuszowa. Hafenbier terrorized and killed many of the town's Jews. Henoah often played a game with the other children in town in which he would portray Hafenbier, saying to his friends, "If you are a Jew, you are dead." Then, with a rifle made from a piece of wood, Henoah would "shoot" his playmates. They, in turn, would fall over, pretending they had been killed.

Henoah and his family were deported to the Rzeszow ghetto on June 25, 1942, and then to the Belzec extermination camp on July 7 where they were gassed. Henoah was 3 and a half years old.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Felix Krakauer

April 1, 1902

Hodonin, Czechoslovakia

Felix was one of six children born to Jewish parents in a small Moravian town, where his father ran a dry goods and clothing store. The family spoke Czech and German at home and Felix attended German-language schools. As a youth, he belonged to a Zionist club and liked to ski. He graduated from an international trade school in Vienna before settling down in the Moravian capital of Brno.

1933–39: During the 1930s Felix married a Christian woman from the town of Hodonin. When Felix's father retired in 1938, Felix declined his father's offer to take over the family's dry-goods business. In March 1939 the Germans occupied Bohemia and Moravia and imposed restrictions on the Jews. Felix was dismissed from his job because he was Jewish, and his wife divorced him.

1940–45: For two years, Felix was put to work as a forced laborer for the Germans. When ordered to report for deportation to the Theresienstadt ghetto, he did not appear. Instead, with the help of his Czech cleaning lady, he staged his own suicide by throwing his clothing in the Svatka River and leaving a farewell letter. For the next three years, Felix and two friends hid in a secret cellar that had been dug out under the barn of the cleaning lady's farm near Brno.

Felix was liberated by Soviet troops in May 1945. In 1966 he emigrated from Czechoslovakia and settled in Australia in 1967.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Karl Lange

October 28, 1915

Hamburg, Germany

Karl was born in the north German port of Hamburg. His father was American, and his mother was German. Soon after Karl was born, his father returned to the United States, and a little later, his parents were divorced. Karl left school when he was 14 and worked as a shop apprentice.

1933–39: In 1935, an informer told the police about my secret meetings with a 15-year-old youth, and I was arrested under the Criminal Code's Paragraph 175, which defined homosexuality as an 'unnatural' act. Although this law had been on the books for years, the Nazis broadened its scope and used it as grounds for mass arrests of homosexuals. I was released after 15 months but was arrested again in 1937 and imprisoned.

1940–44: In 1943, Hamburg was the target of heavy Allied bombing, but the Fuhlsbuettel prison, where I had been held for six years for 'security reasons,' was not hit. During that period, many prisoners were transferred to the Neuengamme concentration camp, but I was in the group sent to the Waldheim prison in Sachsen. I had a nervous breakdown there and entered the prison hospital. I was lucky, because as the Allies moved closer, many of the other prisoners were released for combat and died on the front lines.

After the war, Karl found a position in a bank in Hamburg, but he was fired after 18 months when his employer learned that he had been imprisoned under Paragraph 175.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Helene Melanie Lebel

September 15, 1911

Vienna, Austria

Helene, the elder of two daughters born to a Jewish father and a Catholic mother, was raised as a Catholic in Vienna. Her father died in action during World War I when Helene was just 5 years old, and her mother remarried when Helene was 15. Known affectionately as Helly, she loved to swim and go to the opera. After finishing her secondary education, she entered law school.

1933–39: At 19 Helene first showed signs of mental illness. Her condition worsened during 1934, and by 1935 she had to give up her law studies and her job as a legal secretary. After losing her beloved fox terrier, Lydi, she suffered a major breakdown. She was diagnosed as schizophrenic and was placed in Vienna's Steinhof Psychiatric Hospital. Two years later, in March 1938, the Germans annexed Austria to Germany.

1940: Helene was confined in Steinhof and was not allowed home even though her condition had improved. Her parents were led to believe that she would soon be released. Instead, Helene's mother was informed in August that Helene had been transferred to a hospital in Niedernhart, just across the border in Bavaria. In fact, Helene was transferred to a converted prison in Brandenburg, Germany, where she was undressed, subjected to a physical examination, and then led into a shower room.

Helene was one of 9,772 persons gassed that year in the Brandenburg "euthanasia" center. She was officially listed as dying in her room of "acute schizophrenic excitement."



PERSONAL HISTORY

Lidia Lebowitz

ca. 1934

Sarospatak, Hungary

The younger of two sisters, Lidia was born to Jewish parents living in Sarospatak, a small town in northeastern Hungary. Lidia's parents owned a successful dry goods business. At the time, ready-made clothes were still rare in the countryside.

Townsppeople and local farmers would purchase fabric at the Lebowitz store and then take it to their tailor or seamstress to be sewn into clothes.

1933–39: Lidia was two when her Aunt Sadie, who had emigrated to the United States many years earlier, came to visit with her two children, Arthur and Lillian. All the cousins had a good time playing together on their grandparents' farm. On the trip over from America, Lidia's aunt's ship had docked in Hamburg, Germany, and Aunt Sadie had seen Nazis marching in the streets. Aunt Sadie was worried about what could happen to her family in Sarospatak.

1940–44: In 1944 German forces occupied Hungary. A month after the invasion, Hungarian gendarmes, acting under Nazi orders, evicted Lidia and her parents from their home. The Lebowitzes spent three days crowded into the local synagogue with hundreds of other Jewish citizens. Then they were all transferred to the nearby town of Satoraljaujhely, where some 15,000 Jews were squeezed into a ghetto set up in the Gypsy section of town. The ghetto residents had a hard time getting enough food to eat.

The ghetto was liquidated in May and June of 1944. All the Jews were deported in sealed freight cars to Auschwitz. Lidia and her parents were never heard from again.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Barbara Ledermann

September 4, 1925

Berlin, Germany

Barbara was the older of two daughters born to Jewish parents in Germany's capital, Berlin. Barbara's father was a successful lawyer. As soon as Barbara was old enough to walk, he would take her around Berlin to see the sights and tour the city's art museums. Barbara liked to go horseback riding and dreamed of becoming a dancer.

1933–39: After the Nazis came to power in January 1933, it was illegal for my father to have non-Jewish clients. His law practice quickly folded. Later that year when I was seven, our family moved to the Netherlands where my mother had relatives. I continued my schooling in Amsterdam and quickly learned Dutch. Although we no longer lived in a big house with servants, I enjoyed Amsterdam—it had a much less formal atmosphere than Berlin.

1940–44: The Germans invaded the Netherlands in May 1940. Two years later, when they began to deport many Jews, my boyfriend, Manfred, told me that these deportations to 'labor camps' really meant death. He got false IDs for me and my family, and told me, 'If you get called up, don't go.' I asked, 'What will happen to my parents if I don't go?' 'Nothing that wouldn't happen otherwise,' he answered. 'What do you mean?' I asked, and he responded, 'Everyone who goes will be killed. They are all going to die.'

Barbara remained in hiding until May 1945, when Amsterdam was liberated by Canadian troops. She immigrated to the United States in November 1947.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Susanne Ledermann

October 8, 1928

Berlin, Germany

Susanne was the younger of two daughters born to Jewish parents in the German capital of Berlin. Her father was a successful lawyer. Known affectionately as Sanne, Susanne liked to play with her sister on the veranda of her home and enjoyed visiting the Berlin Zoo and park with her family.

1933–39: After the Nazis came to power in January 1933, it became illegal for Jewish lawyers to have non-Jewish clients. When Susanne was 4, her father's law practice closed down and the Ledermanns moved to the Netherlands. Susanne began attending school in Amsterdam when she was 6. She was a good student, and she quickly made friends in the neighborhood. Some of her friends were also Jewish refugees from Germany.

1940–44: On May 14, 1940, Susanne heard the roar of German planes bombing Rotterdam 35 miles away. Amsterdam was soon occupied by the Germans. When Susanne was 13, the Germans forced the Jews out of public schools and Susanne enrolled in a Jewish school. By June 1942 the Germans were deporting Jews, ostensibly to work camps in the "East." Susanne's father, who worked as a translator for the Jewish council, believed that the family would not be harmed as long as they obeyed the law and followed German instructions.

On June 20, 1943, Susanne and her parents were deported to the Westerbork camp in Holland. In 1944 they were sent to Auschwitz, where Susanne perished. She was 15 years old.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Elzbieta Lusthaus

May 15, 1938

Cracow, Poland

Elzbieta grew up in Iwonicz, a resort town in southwestern Poland noted for its mineral water. Her father, Edmund, was a respected physician and Helena, her mother, had studied pharmacology. At home, they spoke Polish and were among the few Jewish families who lived in Iwonicz.

1933–39: When German troops invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, Elzbieta's father was drafted into the Polish army. Seventeen days later, the Soviet army drove in from the east and Edmund was captured. He was transported to a camp for Polish prisoners of war in Novosibirsk (Siberia), where he served as a physician. In November 1939, Elzbieta and her mother went to Tarnow, where her maternal grandmother lived. There they were subjected to a growing number of Nazi anti-Jewish measures, such as forced labor. Helena worked as an assistant pharmacist for the Germans.

1940–45: In June 1942, some 3,500 Jews, including Elzbieta's grandmother, were deported to the Belzec killing center. Realizing the danger, Helena purchased "Aryan" papers for Elzbieta and herself and escaped to Milanowek, a town near Warsaw. There they lived with a Polish family. Four-year-old Elzbieta was given the name, Barbara Stachura, and raised as a Catholic. After the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto, German authorities intensified their efforts to find Jews in hiding. Helena worried that they would be discovered and sometimes kept her daughter from school or hid her in the basement.

In January 1945, Soviet troops occupied Milanowek. In May, Elzbieta's mother bribed a Russian soldier to smuggle them in shipping crates across the border to Czechoslovakia. From there, the two went to Austria and then Germany, where they learned that Edmund had survived and was in Italy with the Polish army. In 1951 Elzbieta and her family came to the United States.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Emanuel (Manny) Mandel

May 8, 1936

Riga, Latvia

Manny was born to a religious Jewish family in the port city of Riga, Latvia. Shortly after Manny's birth, his father accepted a post as one of the four chief cantors in Budapest, and the family returned to Hungary, where they had lived before 1933. Manny's father was based at the renowned Rombach Street synagogue. Between the wars, Budapest was an important Jewish center in Europe.

1933–39: Father wouldn't let me have a bicycle. He thought someone might take it away from me because I was Jewish. After anti-Jewish laws were passed in 1938, Jews were severely harassed in Hungary. Father followed me to school to see that I made it there safely. My school was only a few blocks away, but he was afraid someone might come up behind me and push me into traffic. Father said things like that had happened before.

1940–44: I was just old enough to explore my neighborhood when the Germans came to Budapest in March 1944. Mother told me we were being deported. I wasn't sure what that was, only that we were leaving. It sounded like an adventure, but Mother said it was serious. We were with a group of Jews the Germans were exchanging for trucks. We left on trains; at night we slept outside in tents. We came to the Bergen-Belsen camp. It was muddy and my shoes fell apart. That meant I couldn't run around; running was the only 'play' we had.

After the war, Manny went to Switzerland with his mother for several months, before immigrating to Palestine in 1945. He moved to the United States in 1949.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Agnes Mandl

October 26, 1918

Budapest, Hungary

When Agnes was a teenager, she attended Budapest's prestigious Baar Madas private school, run by the Hungarian Reformed Church. Although she was the only Jewish student there, Agnes's parents believed that the superior education at the school was important for their daughter. Agnes's father, a textile importer, encouraged his daughter to think for herself.

1933–39: In 1936 I studied educational techniques with Signora Maria Montessori in Italy and earned a diploma so I could teach. Hoping to improve my French, I traveled to Switzerland in 1939. On September 9, while swimming with friends at Lake Geneva, I met some Polish Jews attending a Zionist Congress. Suddenly, news blared that Germany had overrun Poland. Frightened and still in swimsuits, the Poles ran to try to call their families.

1940–44: In Budapest in 1944 I worked for Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat working to save Jews. That December, the fascists ordered Jews executed at the banks of the Danube River. The Jews were tied in groups of three, and the person in the center was shot so all three fell in and drowned. Wallenberg asked his staff, "Who can swim?" I said that I could. We rushed to the water's edge, and when a group fell in we'd plunge into the icy river. We rescued 50 people. Later, I got sick and fell into a coma for a day and a half.

After the war, Agnes went to Sweden and Australia, and moved to America in 1951. Later, she dedicated herself to writing and teaching about Wallenberg and his actions.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Michel Margosis

September 2, 1928

Brussels, Belgium

Michel's parents were Russian-born Jews. His father had been a police official in Russia who had been deported to Siberia for being an outspoken Zionist. After escaping, he and his wife had made their way to Belgium, and two of their four children, including Michel, were born in Brussels.

1933–39: In Brussels my father owned and edited two newspapers, one French and one Yiddish. As a kid, I enjoyed reading comics like “Yordi,” who in the United States is known as Superman. A day after my eleventh birthday in 1939, I was shopping with my mother when church bells rang out, announcing that France and England had declared war on Germany because the Germans had invaded Poland.

1940–43: Four days after the Germans invaded Belgium in 1940 we fled for the south of France, where we tried to find refuge. We ended up in a detention camp in France, where refugees were interned, and my parents decided to escape. Our first night there was our last, and after sneaking out we got on a train. Still in France, we arrived at a friend's farm and there we hid for a whole year, until it became too dangerous to stay. We then made our way to Marseille, where we hoped to get exit visas and sail for the United States.

The Margosis family did not succeed in obtaining exit visas, and they escaped instead over the Pyrenees into Spain. From there, Michel was sent to the United States in 1943.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Henry Maslowicz

December 25, 1940

Wierzbnik-Starachowice, Poland

Henry's Jewish parents lived in a Polish town in which their families had lived for 150 years. The Jewish community enjoyed good relations with their Polish neighbors; the local Polish population refused to cooperate when the government encouraged a boycott of Jewish businesses during a wave of antisemitism that swept Poland in the mid-1930s.

1933–39: In the years before I was born, my father owned an iron and coal factory. The Germans occupied Wierzbnik on September 5, 1939. While some Jews fled, most, including my parents, remained.

1940–44: The Nazis established a ghetto in May 1940. I was born there eight months later. In 1942 my father, learning the ghetto was to be emptied, arranged for me to be hidden in a Catholic convent in Cracow. Perhaps because the convent was bombed, I was put out on the street—I was 3. A woman picked me up and took me to an attic above a candy store. It was dark and I was alone. The only person I ever saw was this woman who fed me and taught me to make the sign of the cross. I didn't know my own name or why I was in an attic.

Henry was discovered by a Jewish social worker and taken to Israel. He was reunited with his father eight years later, and settled in Ecuador. In 1980 he moved to the United States.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Channah Mazansky-Zaidel

ca. 1908

Panevezys, Lithuania

Channah was one of six children born to a Jewish family. In 1914, a year after her father died, the family fled during World War I to Russia. After the war they returned to Lithuania and settled in the village of Pampenai in a house owned by Channah's grandparents. When Channah's three oldest siblings moved to South Africa in the 1920s, Channah helped support the family by sewing.

1933–39: Channah was working as a seamstress in Pampenai when, in the mid-1930s, she met and married Channoch Zaidel. The couple had one child.

1940–41: German troops invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, and soon overran the area around Pampenai. In late summer 1941, German troops approached the village in an action that was part of a Nazi plan to eliminate Lithuania's Jews. Before the troops arrived, however, groups of armed Lithuanian collaborators herded Pampenai's Jews to a nearby forest and forced them to dig trenches and strip naked. The Jews were then ordered to climb into the trenches and were machine-gunned.

Channah, Channoch, and their child were killed, along with Channah's mother, Sara Rachel, her twin brother, Moishe, and her younger brother, Chaim. Channah was 33.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Flora Mendelovicz

August 16, 1930

Berchem, Belgium

Flora's Romanian-born parents emigrated to Antwerp, Belgium, in the late 1920s to escape antisemitism. Flora's father owned a furniture workshop. Antwerp had an active Jewish community. There were butcher shops, bakeries, and stores that sold foods which were prepared according to Jewish dietary laws. Flora was the oldest of three girls, and the family spoke Yiddish at home.

1933–39: When I arrived for my first day of kindergarten at public school, I was shocked to learn that there were other languages besides Yiddish! Every day after school I went to a Yiddish school where I learned about Jewish culture. In 1937 my father lost his shop. He found work as a ship's carpenter and began to travel the world. In November 1938 we learned that Papa had stayed in America, hoping that we could join him there.

1940–44: After the Germans invaded Belgium in May 1940, we had to wear a yellow star. When I started fourth grade in September, kids pushed and insulted me because I was Jewish. One day that winter we were forbidden to go to school. I took my sister and said, "It's o.k. if we can't study, we'll go to the park." A sign at the park said "No Jews or dogs allowed." Then we went to the movies, but the same sign was posted. I said, "Don't worry, we'll get ice cream," but at the shop a sign said Jews could not be served. We returned home in shame.

On the advice of a friend who was in the German army, the Mendelovicz family fled to Brussels. Flora was hidden in convents in Belgium and was spared deportation because of the efforts of resistance fighter Georges Ranson, Father Bruno Reynders (a Benedictine monk), and others. In 1946 Flora and her family immigrated to the United States, where she first worked as a dressmaker, then completed her schooling, and became a teacher.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Maria Sava Moise

June 1, 1925

Iasi, Romania

Maria was one of four children born to poor Roma (Gypsy) parents in the capital of Moldavia in eastern Romania. The family lived in a mixed neighborhood that included Romanians and Roma. Maria grew up in a house with a yard where the family kept a pig and some chickens. Her father made a living by singing and by working at some of the many wineries that dotted the Moldavian countryside.

1933–39: My parents couldn't afford to send me to school. To help make ends meet, my sister, older brother, and I helped my mother pick grapes for a local winery. The work was seasonal, and we were contracted by the week. We worked hard and long, from 5 a.m. until evening.

1940–44: When I was 16, my father was drafted by the Romanians to fight against the Soviet Union. The following year, Iasi's Gypsies were rounded up by the Romanian police and sent eastward by cattle car. When we disembarked in Transnistria, we were marched to a farm and left in open fields to die slowly. That's how my sister died. My husband, Stefan, managed to run away. By coincidence, my father's unit was stationed nearby, and on New Year's Eve of 1943, he smuggled some of us back to Romania on a troop train.

Maria survived the rest of the war in Iasi. After the war, she and her husband reunited and resettled in Iasi.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Joseph Muscha Mueller

1932

Bitterfeld, Germany

Joseph was born in Bitterfeld, Germany, to Gypsy parents. For reasons unknown, he was raised in an orphanage for the first one-and-a-half years of his life. At the time of Joseph's birth, some 26,000 Gypsies—members of either the Sinti or Roma tribes—lived in Germany. Though most were German citizens, they were often discriminated against by other Germans and subjected to harassment.

1933–39: At age one-and-a-half, Joseph was taken into foster care by a family living in Halle, a city some 20 miles from Bitterfeld. That same year, the Nazi party came to power. When Joseph was in school, he was often made the scapegoat for pranks in the classroom and beaten for “misbehaving.” He was also taunted with insults like “bastard” and “mulatto” by classmates who were members of the Hitler Youth movement.

1940–44: When Joseph was 12 he was taken from his classroom by two strangers who said he had “appendicitis” and needed immediate surgery. He protested, but was beaten and forcefully taken into surgery where he was sterilized, a procedure legalized by a Nazi law allowing the forced sterilization of “asocials,” a category that included Gypsies. After his recovery, Joseph was to be deported to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, but his foster father managed to have him smuggled from the hospital and hidden.

Joseph survived the remainder of the war by hiding for five months in a garden shed.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Andras Muhlrad

July 27, 1930

Ujpest, Hungary

The second of two children, Andras was born to Jewish parents living in a suburb of Budapest. His father was a pharmacist. The Muhlrad family lived in a large house with Andras's grandfather and aunts. As a toddler, Andras often played with his older sister, Eva, and their cousins in the big yard behind their home.

1933–39: Andras was 4 when his family moved to their own apartment. It was 1936 when he began primary school and Hitler had already been in power in Nazi Germany for three years. At night his father would turn on the radio to listen to news of the Third Reich. All this still seemed far away from Hungary. The young boy concentrated on earning good grades. He knew only a few top Jewish students were admitted to the public high school every year.

1940–44: Four months before Andras turned 14, the Germans invaded Hungary. Soon after, the Muhlrad family had to leave their apartment and move in with the family of Andras's friend Yannis, whose building had been marked with a Star of David. At first, living together was tolerable, but conditions became increasingly more crowded until there were 25 in the apartment. The residents were allowed to leave the building for errands a few hours a day. Then one day a gendarme took up guard in front of the entrance. The residents spent three days trapped inside fearing what would happen next.

Andras and his family were among the 435,000 Hungarian Jews deported to Auschwitz in the early summer of 1944. Andras was later moved to a camp in Bavaria, where he perished.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Preben Munch-Nielsen

June 13, 1926

Snekkersten, Denmark

Preben was born to a Protestant family in the small Danish fishing village of Snekkersten. He was raised by his grandmother, who was also responsible for raising five other grandchildren. Every day Preben commuted to school in the Danish capital of Copenhagen, about 25 miles south of Snekkersten.

1933–39: There were very few Jews in my elementary school, but I didn't think of them as Jews; they were just my classmates and pals. In Denmark we didn't distinguish between Jews and non-Jews, we were all just Danes. By fifth grade, my classmates and I heard rumors of a German military build-up. But later, in 1939, my parents said that Hitler had promised not to invade Denmark, which made us feel relatively safe.

1940–42: Occupation. In April 1940 I arrived in Copenhagen, where I saw planes overhead and German officers in the street. I joined the resistance as a courier, but I became more involved in October 1943 when the Gestapo began hunting down Danish Jews. We began to help Jewish refugees. We hid them in houses near the shore and brought them to waiting boats at an appointed time. Under cover of darkness, we took up to 12 Jews at a time across the straits to Sweden. The four-mile trip took about 50 minutes.

Preben helped transport 1,400 refugees to Sweden. He fled to Sweden as well in November 1943 when the Germans seized the Danish government. Preben returned home in May 1945.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Kato Dicker Nagy

February 2, 1912

Ujpest, Hungary

The fourth of five children, Kato was born to a Jewish family who owned a successful furniture store and lumberyard in Ujpest, five miles from Budapest. As a young girl, Kato enjoyed singing and playing the violin in her family “orchestra” in their large home. She was also athletic, and loved to swim, bicycle and play tennis. Best of all, Kato enjoyed rowing on the Danube with her friends.

1933-39: Newly married, I moved to Zagyvapalfalva, a town northeast of Budapest with only five or six Jewish families. My husband owned a large general store there; I worked as the cashier. We enjoyed picnicking and other outings with the notary, postmaster and other friends--until 1939. Nazi youths terrified us when they chanted antisemitic slogans and banged on our windows at night. One of them was the notary’s teenage son.

1940-44: On March 19, 1944, the Germans invaded Hungary. Several months later, my baby boy and I were deported. Squeezed into a suffocating cattle car for three nightmarish days, I nursed Sandor and also the baby of a friend whose milk had dried up. Helping us off the train at Auschwitz, a man whispered to me, “Give your baby to an older woman who will stay with him while you’re working. In the evening you will see him again.” This calmed me some, and I passed my Sanyika to an elderly woman, and begged her to take care of him.

Kato, age 34, was selected for forced labor. She learned later that the babies and the elderly had been gassed upon arrival. Kato was liberated from the Mauthausen camp in 1945.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Lajos Nagy

April 2, 1898

Zagyvapalfalva, Hungary

The Nagys were one of several Jewish families in Zagyvapalfalva, a town 45 miles from Budapest. They owned a general store that served the many coal miners in the mountain valley town. As a young man, Lajos served with the Hungarian army in World War I. He then studied in Budapest to be a diplomat, but a 1920 law restricting the number of Jews in certain professions kept him from pursuing his career.

1933–39: My father has passed away and I have taken over the general store in Zagypalfalva with my bride, Kato. This last antisemitic prime minister pushed through a law prohibiting Jews from selling basic items like sugar, tobacco, and liquor, and our business slacked off drastically. Sometimes at night, hooligans bang on the windows of our home, chanting, ‘Jews, go away!’ One is the son of our good friend, the town notary.

1940–44: Two years ago the situation in Zagyvapalfalva got so bad that we had to rent out our store and house and move to Kato’s family home outside Budapest. While we were there Kato gave birth to Sandor Michael. Our Sanyika was just 3 months old when the Germans invaded Hungary. It was only a few weeks later that I received orders—along with hundreds of other men aged 18 to 48—to report for labor service. I’ve been put to work outside Budapest laying new roads and clearing the rubble caused by Allied air raids.

That October, Lajos was killed by an Allied bomb. His wife and baby were deported to Auschwitz. Sandor was gassed on arrival. Kato was chosen for forced labor and survived the war.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Maria Nemeth

December 14, 1932

Szentes, Hungary

Maria's parents lived in Szentes, a town in southeastern Hungary, located 30 miles from the city of Szeged. Her mother, Barbara, was born in the neighboring town of Hodmezovasarhely, but moved to Szentes when she married. Maria's father was a dentist.

1933–39: Maria was born in 1932. In 1937 her mother took in a young Austrian woman who lived with the family and helped Maria learn German.

1940–44: In March 1944 German troops occupied Hungary. Members of the Hungarian fascist party, Arrow Cross, confiscated Maria's grandparents' store. She and her parents, grandparents, uncle and aunt and their families were among thousands of Jews from towns around Szeged who were deported to a makeshift ghetto in Szeged's Rokus sports field and brickyards. The Nemeths were deported from Szeged to Austria, via the Strasshof concentration camp, to a labor camp in the small farming village of Goestling an der Ybbs.

Maria and her family were among 80 Jews in the camp who were machine-gunned to death by retreating SS soldiers just days before American forces reached the area. Maria was 13.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Pola Nussbaum

September 1922

Raczki, Poland

Pola was born to a Jewish family in a small town in Poland about three miles from the German border. Her family had lived there for generations. Pola's father exported geese and other goods to Germany; her mother owned a fabric store. They lived with Pola's grandmother in a large, single-level, gray stucco house. Raczki had a small Jewish community with a Hebrew school that Pola attended.

1933–39: In 1937 Pola began secondary school in the town of Suwalki. She excelled in math, and hoped to study engineering and oil exploration at the university. When World War II began in September 1939, Pola and her father went to a town about 40 miles away to hide some of Pola's mother's valuable fabrics. Then the Nussbaums escaped east towards the Soviet border.

1940–42: By 1941 the family was in the Slonim ghetto. Pola's mother slipped her daughters Pola and Lisa out to a Christian friend in town who refused to hide them and sent the girls to the forest. There they came across Jews being shot into pits. Found by a forester, they were marched to the line of those waiting to be killed but managed to flee. The forester shot at them but missed. Then he threw his axe and hit Pola's leg. The sisters ran to town where a Christian woman hid them in a sofa-bed until the massacre ended.

Pola and her sister returned to the ghetto to find their mother dead. On June 29, 1942, Pola was shot to death while attempting to escape under the ghetto fence. She was 19.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Robert T. Odeman

November 30, 1904

Hamburg, Germany

Born Martin Hoyer, Robert took Robert T. Odeman as his stage name when he began a professional career as an actor and musician. A classical pianist, Robert gave concerts throughout Europe, but a hand injury tragically ended his concert career.

1933–39: In 1935 Robert opened a cabaret in Hamburg. One year later the Nazis shut it down, charging that it was politically subversive. Robert then moved to Berlin where he developed a close relationship with a male friend who was pressured to denounce Robert to the Gestapo. In November 1937 Robert was arrested under Paragraph 175 of the Nazi-revised criminal code, which outlawed homosexuality. He was sentenced to 27 months in prison.

1940–45: Robert was released from prison in 1940 but remained under police surveillance. They monitored his correspondence with a half-Jewish friend in Munich and with friends abroad. In 1942 Robert was arrested again under Paragraph 175 and deported to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. There he was assigned an office job. On a forced march from the camp toward the Baltic Sea in April 1945, 40-year-old Robert escaped with two other “175ers.”

After the war, Robert returned to Berlin, where he worked as a writer and composer. He died in 1985.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Kurt Pauly

March 26, 1930

Aachen, Germany

Kurt was born to Jewish parents in the city of Aachen, where his mother's family had resided since the 18th century. His father, though trained as a chef, worked as a butcher and also managed several stores for his father-in-law. The Paulys lived over one of those shops in the nearby suburb of Eilendorf. Kurt enjoyed large family gatherings, where he would play with his cousins, Anne and Margot Frank.

1933–39: When the Nazis came to power in 1933, the situation drastically changed for the Paulys. Brown-shirted storm troopers stood in front of the family's stores urging customers to boycott Jewish businesses. Worsening conditions forced the family to close its shops. In 1936 the Paulys immigrated to Palestine, where Kurt's father had a trucking business. Two years later, the family came to the United States, after receiving affidavits of financial support from friends. They settled in Cincinnati, Ohio, a city with a large German population.

1940–45: In Cincinnati, Kurt attended school and his father found work in a cafeteria peeling potatoes and onions. Later, Kurt's father became a chef at a local restaurant. As the war in Europe escalated, Kurt's parents grew ever more concerned about the family that they had to leave behind in Germany. His father had hoped to bring more of his relatives to the United States. In fall 1941, the Nazis prohibited Jews from leaving Germany and soon began deporting them to ghettos and killing centers in occupied eastern Europe.

After the war, Kurt learned that some of his closest relatives in Germany had perished in the Holocaust. In 1948 the Paulys moved to Vineland, New Jersey, where they bought a chicken farm. After serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, Kurt went on to graduate with honors from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Shulamit Perlmutter (Charlene Schiff)

December 16, 1929

Horocho, Poland

Shulamit, known as Musia, was the youngest of two daughters born to a Jewish family in the town of Horocho, 50 miles northeast of Lvov. Her father was a philosophy professor who taught at the university in Lvov, and both of her parents were civic leaders in Horocho. Shulamit began her education with private tutors at the age of 4.

1933–39: In September 1939 Germany invaded Poland, and three weeks later the Soviet Union occupied eastern Poland, where our town was located. Hordes of refugees fleeing the Germans streamed through our town. Soviet rule didn't change our lives very much. We remained in our home and Father continued to teach in Lvov. The most important change for me was at school; we were now taught in Russian.

1940–45: In 1941 the Germans invaded the USSR and set up a ghetto in Horocho. In 1942, with rumors that the ghetto was about to be destroyed, Mother and I fled. We had just hidden in the underbrush at the river's edge when we heard shots. We hid, submerged in the water, all night as machine guns blazed in the ghetto. By morning others were hiding in the brush and I heard a Ukrainian guard scream, "I see you there Jews; come out!" Most obeyed, but we hid in the water for several more days as the gunfire continued. Sometimes we would doze; once I woke to find Mother had vanished.

Shulamit never saw her mother again and never found out what happened to her. Shulamit spent the rest of the war living in the forests near Horocho. She is the only survivor of her family.



PERSONAL HISTORY

György (George) Pick

March 28, 1934

Budapest, Hungary

György was the only child of middle-class Jewish parents living in the Hungarian capital of Budapest. His father, Istvan, was an engineer responsible for producing hydraulic grape presses for wineries. His mother, Markit, worked as a legal secretary. The Picks lived in a new district on the Pest side of the Danube River, and they had many close relatives in the city.

1933–39: In the 1930s, as Hungary drew closer to Nazi Germany, the situation for Jews there worsened. György listened to the radio and was disturbed by the sound of Hitler's voice. In 1938 and 1939, the first major anti-Jewish laws were introduced. The legislation severely restricted the participation of Jews in the economy and defined them in racial terms, much like the Nuremberg Laws had in Nazi Germany. As a result, György's parents lost their jobs. His father soon set up a tool and machine parts business, which was registered in the name of a non-Jew.

1940–44: In 1940, György's father was conscripted into the Hungarian labor battalions and sent to the newly annexed territory of Ruthenia, where he worked on building roads for the military. He was released after three months but then conscripted again in 1943 and 1944. György attended school until March 1944, when German troops occupied Hungary. In June, the Picks, along with other Jews in the capital [Budapest], had to move into special buildings marked with a yellow star. As the Allied bombing raids increased, destroying some of the neighboring buildings, György hoped the war would be over soon. In November 1944, just weeks after the Hungarian Nazis (the Arrow Cross Party) took power, György and his family went into hiding. A month later, they were discovered. György was placed in a home with 500 other children, but he soon escaped. Those who remained were killed.

In January 1945, the Picks were liberated from the city's ghetto by Soviet troops. After the war, György learned that 130 of his relatives had been deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center, where they perished. In 1956, he immigrated to the United States.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Rebecca Pissirilo

March 16, 1923

Kastoria, Greece

Rebecca was the oldest of three children born to Ladino-speaking, Sephardic-Jewish parents. The Pissirilos lived in Kastoria, a small town in the mountainous region of Greek Macedonia near the Albanian border. Rebecca's father was a successful fabric merchant. The Pissirilo children attended public schools.

1933–39: After finishing elementary school, Rebecca went on to study at secondary school. She liked to sing and enjoyed studying. Rebecca kept a diary, like some of the other girls in her class. The girls used pseudonyms, usually the name of an actress that they admired. Rebecca's pseudonym was "Marlene Dietrich."

1940–44: Italy attacked Greece in 1940, and in 1941 Italian officers were billeted in the Pissirilo home. During the Italian occupation Rebecca married Leon Franko, a Jewish refugee from Yugoslavia. In September 1943 Italy surrendered. The Germans occupied Kastoria and deported the town's 700 Jews to Salonika. There the Red Cross interceded on behalf of Rebecca, who was about to give birth, and rushed her to a hospital. On April 1, 1944, the day Kastoria's Jews were deported to Auschwitz, Rebecca gave birth to a daughter.

Rebecca tried to hide in the hospital, but was betrayed, and was executed by the Germans on September 8, 1944. A nurse in the hospital saved her infant daughter.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Stefania (Fusia) Podgorska

1925

Lipa, Poland

Bertha was the second of three daughters born to Yiddish-speaking Jewish parents in a village in Czechoslovakia's easternmost province. Soon after Bertha was born, her parents moved the family to Liege, an industrial, largely Catholic city in Belgium that had many immigrants from Eastern Europe.

1933–39: Bertha's parents sent her to a local elementary school, where most of her friends were Catholic. At school, Bertha spoke French. At home, she spoke Yiddish. Sometimes her parents spoke Hungarian to each other, a language they had learned while growing up. Bertha's mother, who was religious, made sure that Bertha also studied Hebrew.

1940–44: Bertha was 11 when the Germans occupied Liege [Belgium]. Two years later, the Adlers, along with all the Jews, were ordered to register and Bertha and her sisters were forced out of school. Some Catholic friends helped the Adlers obtain false papers and rented them a house in a nearby village. There, Bertha's father fell ill one Friday and went to the hospital. Bertha promised to visit him on Sunday to bring him shaving cream. That Sunday, the family was awakened at 5 a.m. by the Gestapo. They had been discovered.

Fifteen-year-old Bertha was deported to Auschwitz on May 19, 1944. She was gassed there two days later.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Nenad Dusan Popovic

June 17, 1909

Sremska Mitrovica, Yugoslavia

Nenad was the youngest of nine children born to Serbian Orthodox landowners in the eastern Croatian part of Yugoslavia. During World War I the Popovic family was evacuated to Vukovar by the Austro-Hungarian army, which was then at war with Serbia. In 1928 Nenad moved to Belgrade, where he attended Belgrade University, graduating with a law degree in 1932.

1933-39: My specialty was law related to economics and I found a job in the economic research department of the Yugoslav central bank in Belgrade. Also, I served as an editor for the daily newspaper, Time. I was openly anti-fascist and was alarmed by the rapidity with which fascist ideas were spreading in Europe. When war broke out in Europe in September 1939, Yugoslavia declared itself neutral.

1940-44: On March 27, 1941, two days after Yugoslavia concluded an alliance with Germany, Serbian army officers overthrew the Yugoslav government. On the morning of April 6, the Germans bombed Belgrade in a punitive attack. I had just left my apartment when, minutes later, I saw my building get blasted away. I tossed my keys, and with nothing but the clothes on my back, set off to join the resistance. I never made it. In Sarajevo I was captured by the Germans, and ended up in Germany as a political prisoner.

On April 16, 1945, Nenad was liberated in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. After the war, he returned to Yugoslavia and served as a diplomat. He immigrated to America in 1961.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Eva Rapaport

October 27, 1929

Vienna, Austria

Eva was the only child born to nonreligious Jewish parents. Her father was a journalist. Eva enjoyed spending time with her cousin Susie, who was two years older. Eva also took special vacations with her mother. Sometimes they went skiing in the Austrian Alps, and on other occasions they stayed at her uncle's cabin along the Danube River.

1933–39: When the Germans annexed Austria in 1938, life changed. Father was harassed by the Gestapo for writing articles against the Germans. My good friends called me bad names because I was Jewish. My parents said we had to escape. We fled by train to Paris. There, during my third-grade class, one day bombs began falling. We raced to the air-raid shelter and put on gas masks. The smell of rubber was overwhelming. I felt like I was choking.

1940–44: After the Germans entered Paris in 1940, we escaped to the unoccupied south. Two years later, when I was 13, Germans occupied the south, and we were forced to move on again. During the treacherous trek in the mountains between Switzerland and France, we took refuge in the small French village of St. Martin. The village priest, Father Longerey, let my parents hide in his basement. I lived openly in the parish house as a shepherdess. I attended church with the other children and learned the Catholic mass in Latin.

Eva and her parents remained hidden in St. Martin. They were liberated at the end of 1944. In 1948, when Eva was 18, she and her parents immigrated to the United States.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Leah Kohl Rapaport

June 22, 1908

Kamionka Strumilowa, Poland

Leah and her four brothers were raised in a religious Jewish family in the city of Lvov. After obtaining her high school diploma, Leah attended university for one year. In 1931 she married Joseph Rapaport, and the couple settled in Warsaw.

1933–39: The Rapaports lived in the suburbs, and Joseph worked as a banker. Their daughter Zofia was born in May 1933. Each year at the Jewish holiday of Passover, they returned to Lvov to visit Leah's parents. Two days after Joseph was mobilized for military duty in late August 1939, Germany invaded Poland. After Poland's defeat, Joseph returned and the family fled to Soviet-occupied Lvov.

1940–44: The Germans occupied Lvov in 1941. Leah's father was forced to sweep streets and her brother was caught by the Nazis and shot, but he survived. In 1942 the Rapaports managed to return to Warsaw to hide with one of Joseph's former employees. For two years they were confined in an 8 x 10 foot room. Once, they were nearly betrayed when the bitter ex-wife of the employee threatened: "I'm going to tell the police that you keep a synagogue here!"

After the 1944 Warsaw uprising, Joseph was sent to a Nazi camp, where he died. Leah and Zofia made their way to Cracow, where they stayed until the Soviets freed the city.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Klara Gottfried Reif

December 19, 1896

Poland

Klara Gottfried Reif's parents, Herschel and Ethel Gottfried, owned a flour mill and a general store in a small Polish town. Klara could speak five languages. As a young woman, she took an interest in fashion, and enjoyed travelling. On a trip to Vienna, she met Dr. Gerson Reif, a young dentist. After marrying in 1925, the couple settled in Vienna and the first of their two children was born in 1927.

1933–39: After the Germans annexed Austria in 1938, they effectively prevented Jewish dentists from practicing. Forced to abandon his successful practice, my husband grew increasingly depressed. In September 1938, he was found dead, probably a suicide. In May 1939, my two children and I sailed for Cuba on the St. Louis. Turned back by Cuba and the Americans, the ship returned to Europe. We found haven in France.

1940–44: After the Germans invaded France in 1940, the children and I fled south to Limoges, which was not occupied by the Germans. I was traumatized by the shock of losing my husband and becoming a refugee. I was in France, but couldn't speak French. I had two children to care for, and food was very scarce. Once I heard that eggs might be available on a nearby farm so I set out from Limoges, children in tow. We walked for several hours to get there and back, only to discover when we got home that the eggs were rotten.

In 1941 American relatives, the Klinghoffer family, helped arrange passage for Klara and her children to the United States via Portugal. The Reifs settled in New York.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Ruth Freund Reiser

April 11, 1926

Prague, Czechoslovakia

Ruth was a child of middle-class Jewish parents living in Czechoslovakia's capital, Prague, where her father worked as a bank clerk. As native Czechs, her parents considered themselves as much Czech as Jewish. In 1933 Ruth was in her second year at a public girls' secondary school.

1933–39: The Germans occupied Prague in March 1939 and imposed many restrictions. Jews were no longer allowed to attend school, so my education stopped at age 13. Jews had to surrender many of their possessions such as radios, bicycles, musical instruments, and pets. We weren't allowed to walk in certain streets, or to go to a park or a cinema, or use a bus or a streetcar. For me, normal life was at an end.

1940–44: I was deported to Auschwitz from the Theresienstadt ghetto in late 1944. Some weeks later I was selected for a labor transport. Wanting to be sure I'd get out of Auschwitz, I managed to stand near the front of the column of 1,000 women. Then a command of "Turn about!" dashed my hopes. I ended up at the back of the line with those to be gassed. Nobody slept that night as, expecting to be gassed, we waited in front of the crematorium. By a twist of fate, the next day I was put on another labor transport.

Ruth was deported to Lenzing, a subcamp of the Mauthausen concentration camp. Liberated by American troops, Ruth returned to Prague. She was the sole survivor of her family.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Ernst Reiter

April 11, 1915

Graz, Austria

Ernst was an only child born to atheist parents in southern Austria during the middle of World War I. Raised in Austria's second largest city, he loved the outdoors, especially skiing in the Alps. In the early 1930s, Ernst became a Jehovah's Witness. Although Austria was then in a deep economic depression, he was fortunate to find a job as a sales clerk in a grocery store.

1933–39: Austria's Catholic government was hostile toward Jehovah's Witnesses. When the Germans annexed Austria in March 1938, our activities were banned. Following God's commandments, I refused to give the Hitler salute and to serve in the German army. I was arrested for this on September 6, 1938, and sentenced to six months imprisonment. When I again refused to serve, I was imprisoned in the Bayreuth penitentiary in Germany.

1940–44: When my second prison term ended in November 1939, I was transferred to the relatively new Flossenbürg concentration camp. My number was 1935. I was forced to be a stonemason, and subjected to brutal treatment, including attempts to break my faith in God. But God's power was far greater than anything the Nazis could do to me. The Jewish, Polish, and Soviet prisoners had it far worse than me. The only way the Jewish prisoners got out of there was "through the chimney."

Ernst survived Flossenbürg and a forced march in April 1945. He was liberated by American troops and bicycled back to his home in Austria during the summer of 1945.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Dora Rivkina

November 7, 1924

Minsk, Belorussia

Dora was the second of three girls born to a Jewish family in Minsk, the capital of Belorussia. Before World War II, more than a third of the city was Jewish. Dora and her family lived on Novomesnitskaya Street in central Minsk. Dora's father worked in a state-owned factory building furniture.

1933–39: As a young girl, Dora was athletic and excelled at swimming and dancing. When she was in the second grade, she was chosen to dance the lead part in a New Year's performance. She was also a member of the Young Pioneers, a Soviet youth organization that held lectures on Soviet history, and also organized camping trips.

1940–43: The invading Germans reached Minsk in 1941 and Dora's family was ordered into the Minsk ghetto. In 1943, when the ghetto was emptied, 19-year-old Dora escaped from a transport and joined the partisans but the Germans soon captured her band. When the guards ordered them to identify any Jews, everyone remained silent at first. But after a guard threatened to shoot them all if they didn't speak, a woman pointed at Dora. The Germans bound Dora's hands, tied a rock around her neck, threw her in a river and shot her.

Some young girls who were in the partisan band later related the story of Dora's death to her sister, Berta, the only surviving member of Dora's family.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Max Rosenblat

July 1939

Radom, Poland

Max's parents, Taube and Itzik, first met as children in 1925. Taube was the daughter of a tailor who hired apprentices in his shop, and Itzik was one such apprentice. The Jewish youngsters fell in love and dreamed of getting married even though Taube's family frowned upon the match.

1933–39: In 1938 Taube and Itzik married. The couple lived in an apartment on 49 Zeromskiego Street in Radom, where Itzik opened a women's tailor shop. Max was born in July 1939. He had curly hair and blue eyes like his father. Two months after he was born, Germany invaded Poland. The Germans occupied Radom and evicted all the Jews from Zeromskiego Street. The Rosenblats had to leave everything, even Max's baby carriage.

1940–42: Radom's Jewish Council assigned the Rosenblats to a shack, which was enclosed in a Jewish ghetto in April 1941. Max slept in a homemade bed of straw. He had no toys and little food. In August 1942, when Max was 3, the Germans began rounding up and deporting all the Jews in Radom's two ghettos who could not work for them. Max's father tried to hide his family in his shop, but they were caught in a roundup and Max and his mother were taken away. They were marched to the railroad and herded into a boxcar.

In August 1942 Max and his mother were deported to the Treblinka extermination camp, where they were gassed upon arrival. Max was 3 years old.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Moniek Rozen

November 10, 1922

Czestochowa, Poland

One of 12 children, Moniek grew up in Dabrowa Gornicza, an industrial town in western Poland. His father, Jacob, owned a general store, which he was forced to close in 1938 as the result of a boycott by local antisemites. Moniek attended both public and Jewish schools, and his father hoped that one day he would become a rabbi.

1933–39: On September 1, 1939, Moniek was awakened by the sounds of airplanes flying overhead as German forces invaded Poland. As the war drew closer, Moniek fled eastward, but was caught near the Vistula River by advancing German troops. Returning to Dabrowa, he learned that the Nazis had killed some of the town's Jews, and had begun imposing severe restrictions on the community. Jews had to turn over radios, money, and furs, and were subject to forced labor. Moniek worked for the German construction office as a carpenter and bricklayer.

1940–45: On August 12, 1942, German officials ordered Dabrowa's Jews to assemble in the town. Several thousand Jews, including Moniek's parents, were selected for deportation. A few days later, they were transported to the Auschwitz killing center. Moniek was later deported to a series of concentration camps. In February 1945, as the Soviet army approached, the SS evacuated the Kittlitztreben camp. The prisoners, including Moniek, were sent on a death march to the Buchenwald concentration camp, walking more than eight hours a day in the bitter cold. Moniek survived another death march and was liberated from the Theresienstadt ghetto by Soviet troops. He reunited with members of his family. His parents and five of his siblings perished in the Holocaust.

In 1949, after spending several years in displaced persons camps in Austria and Germany, Moniek immigrated to the United States.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Hans Rudelsheim

1922

Kampen, Netherlands

Hans was born to a Jewish family in the small Dutch town of Kampen. His father worked as a tailor, and he taught Hans about the tailoring trade.

1933–39: Hans was a skilled tailor, and an accomplished pianist as well. Inquisitive about all subjects, Hans loved to read and to keep abreast of current events.

1940–43: When the Jews in the Dutch provinces were ordered to relocate to Amsterdam in January 1942, the Rudelsheims complied. In early 1943, while in hiding with a Christian family near Leiden, Hans sneaked out to visit his friend Ina. Suddenly, a German came to Ina's door. Hans hid behind some clothes in a bathroom closet. The German searched the house and when they reached the bathroom, Ina opened the dark closet, saying as casually as she could, "... and this is the closet." Satisfied no one else was in the house, the German left.

In March 1943 Hans was betrayed. He was deported, and perished in a concentration camp.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Hans (John) Sachs

May 8, 1920

Decin, Czechoslovakia

Hans was born to a Jewish family in the Sudetenland, a region of Czechoslovakia that had a large German population. In 1922 the Sachs family moved to Vienna, Austria, where they purchased a dry goods store. Hans attended public school and had many non-Jewish friends.

1933–39: By 1936 many of Hans’s friends and their families supported the Nazi movement. In March 1938, German troops entered Austria and incorporated it into the Reich. Hans watched as large crowds in Vienna cheered Hitler when he visited the city. Local Nazis terrorized the Jews, forcing them to clean the streets and paint the word *Jude* (Jew) on storefront windows. One day, Hans’s best friend showed up in a Nazi uniform and ended their close relationship. That summer, the Sachs’s shop, like many other Jewish businesses, was transferred to an “Aryan” trustee. In September 1938 the family returned to Czechoslovakia, settling in Prague. In March 1939, German troops entered the city.

1940–45: Hans realized that the family had to emigrate. Before they left Vienna he had begun writing to people in the United States with the last name Sachs in a desperate effort to find someone who could help. In Prague, Hans received a letter from a dentist in New York who offered to sponsor him. His parents, then in their 50s, refused to leave. Hans left for the United States in April 1940. Arriving in New York, he found work as a plumber—an occupation he had learned in Prague. In 1941 he was drafted into the US Army. Hans fought in the Allied military campaigns in the Aleutian Islands and Italy.

In August 1945, he returned to America and soon afterward married a fellow refugee. He learned that his father had been arrested, deported to the Small Fortress in Theresienstadt, then Auschwitz, and later Buchenwald, where he died. His mother perished at the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Shulim Saleschutz

March 7, 1930

Kolbuszowa, Poland

Shulim was the oldest of three children born to religious Jewish parents living in Kolbuszowa, a town in south-central Poland. His father owned a wholesale general store in town and was known in the region for his impressive strength. Shulim's mother tended to the house and cared for him, his brother, Shlomo, and his sister, Rozia.

1933–39: When Shulim was nine, the Germans invaded Poland. Polish soldiers on horses tried to fight against the German army, but they were no match against the tanks. After the short battle, Shulim's father and his uncle Naftali were forced to help bury the many dead horses left in the streets. The Germans ordered that Jewish children could not go to school anymore. Shulim stayed at home with his mother, brother, and sister.

1940–42: In July 1941, the Germans forced all the Jews of Kolbuszowa to live in one small section of town. Two of Shulim's grandparents, an uncle, and two aunts moved in with his family, making their apartment very crowded. Shulim's 12th birthday was a milestone—he now had to wear an armband with a Star of David like the other men. He felt proud and asked his uncle Naftali to take a picture of him wearing the armband. Shulim was assigned to work details with the other men. He cleared snow and repaired the roads.

Shulim was deported to the Rzeszow ghetto on June 25, 1942, and then to the Belzec camp in July. There, Shulim was gassed with his mother, brother, and sister. He was 12 years old.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Herta Scheer-Krygier

1921

Munich, Germany

Herta's Viennese mother and Polish-born father owned a successful men's clothing business in Munich when Herta was born. After Hitler's antisemitic Nazi party attempted to overthrow the German government in November 1923, the Jewish Scheer family moved to Vienna, where Herta's grandparents lived.

1933–39: Hiking was one of Herta's favorite activities. She belonged to the Zionist youth group called Gordonia, and at their meetings the members spoke about creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine. After the Germans annexed Austria in 1938, Herta's parents decided it was better to leave and they were smuggled illegally, via the Netherlands, into Brussels, Belgium.

1940–42: The Germans occupied Belgium in 1940. In 1941 Herta married Srulek Krygier, but in 1942 he was ordered to "report for labor in the east." Later, she heard about a meeting where she might find out where Srulek had been sent. But it was a trick: She was arrested and deported. On the train she wrote a letter to her parents, writing on the envelope: "To whomever finds this: Maybe you have a son in the war and will understand the feelings of parents wanting to hear from their child..." She tossed the letter from the cattle car.

Herta sent one postcard from Auschwitz, using veiled language: "Unexpectedly, I met your mother here," implying she had met with death. She perished at Auschwitz.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Henny Schermann

February 19, 1912

Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Henny's parents met soon after her father emigrated from Russia. Henny was the first of the Jewish couple's three children. Frankfurt was an important center of commerce, banking, industry, and the arts.

1933–39: After the Nazis came to power, they began to persecute a large number of “undesirable” groups, including Jews, Roma (Gypsies), homosexuals, the handicapped, and left-wing politicians. After 1938, as one way of identifying Jews, a Nazi ordinance decreed that “Sara” was to be added in official papers to the first name of all Jewish women. Twenty-four-year-old Henny was working as a shop assistant, and was living with her family in Frankfurt.

1940–44: In early 1940 Henny was arrested in Frankfurt and deported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp for women. On the back of her prisoner photo was written: “Jenny (sic) Sara Schermann, born February 19, 1912, Frankfurt am Main. Unmarried shopgirl in Frankfurt am Main. Licentious lesbian, only visited such [lesbian] bars. Avoided the name ‘Sara.’ Stateless Jew.”

Henny was among a number of Ravensbrück prisoners selected for extermination. In 1942 Henny was gassed at the Bernburg killing facility.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Ceija Stojka

1933

Kraubath bei Knittelfeld, Austria

Ceija was the fifth of six children born to Roman Catholic Gypsy parents. The Stojka's family wagon traveled with a caravan that spent winters in the Austrian capital of Vienna and summers in the Austrian countryside. The Stojkas belonged to a tribe of Gypsies called the Lowara Roma, who made their living as itinerant horse traders.

1933–39: I grew up used to freedom, travel and hard work. Once, my father made me a skirt out of some material from a broken sunshade. I was 5 years old and our wagon was parked for the winter in a Vienna campground, when Germany annexed Austria in March 1938. The Germans ordered us to stay put. My parents had to convert our wagon into a wooden house, and we had to learn how to cook with an oven instead of on an open fire.

1940–44: Gypsies were forced to register as members of another "race." Our campground was fenced off and placed under police guard. I was 8 when the Germans took my father away; a few months later, my mother received his ashes in a box. Next, the Germans took my sister, Kathi. Finally, they deported all of us to a Nazi camp for Gypsies in Birkenau. We lived in the shadows of a smoking crematorium, and we called the path in front of our barracks the "highway to hell" because it led to the gas chambers.

Ceija was subsequently freed in the Bergen-Belsen camp in 1945. After the war, she documented and published Lowara Gypsy songs about the Holocaust.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Karl Stojka

April 20, 1931

Wampersdorf, Austria

Karl was the fourth of six children born to Roman Catholic Roma (Gypsy) parents in the village of Wampersdorf in eastern Austria. The Stojkas belonged to a tribe of Roma called the Lowara Roma, who made their living as itinerant horse traders. They lived in a traveling family wagon and spent winters in Austria's capital of Vienna. Karl's ancestors had lived in Austria for more than 200 years.

1933–39: I grew up used to freedom, travel, and hard work. In March 1938, our wagon was parked for the winter in a Vienna campground when Germany annexed Austria just before my seventh birthday. The Germans ordered us to stay put. My parents converted our wagon into a wooden house, but I wasn't used to having permanent walls around me. My father and oldest sister began working in a factory, and I started grade school.

1940–44: By 1943, my family had been deported to a Nazi camp in Birkenau for thousands of Gypsies. Now we were enclosed by barbed wire. By August 1944, only 2,000 Gypsies were left alive; 918 of us were put on a transport to Buchenwald to do forced labor. There, the Germans decided that 200 of us were incapable of working and were to be sent back to Birkenau. I was one of them; they thought I was too young. But my brother and uncle insisted that I was 14 but a dwarf. I got to stay. The rest were returned to be gassed.

Karl was later deported to the Flossenbürg concentration camp. He was freed near Roetz, Germany, by American troops on April 24, 1945. After the war, he returned to Vienna.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Marie Sidi Stojka

ca. 1906

Austria

Marie belonged to a tribe of Gypsies called the Lowara Roma who traveled in a caravan and made a living as itinerant horse traders. The caravan spent winters in Vienna, Austria's capital, and summers in the Austrian countryside. When Marie was 18, she married Karl Stojka from the same tribe. Marie's family was Roman Catholic and her ancestors had lived in Austria for more than 200 years.

1933–39: By 1936 I had six children. We lived with a caravan, and we were used to freedom, travel and hard work. Our wagon was parked for the winter in a Vienna campground when Germany annexed Austria in March 1938. The Germans ordered us to stay put and we lost our civil rights. We had to convert our wagon into a wooden house and I had to learn how to cook in an oven instead of on an open fire.

1940–44: Gypsies were forced to register as members of another "race." Our campground was fenced off and placed under police guard. A year later, the Germans took my husband away; they returned his ashes a few months later. Grieving, I cut my long hair, and with the help of a priest, secretly buried his remains in consecrated ground. Finally, the Germans deported the rest of us to a Nazi camp in Birkenau for Gypsies. I watched over my children as best I could in that terrible place, but my youngest son died of typhus.

In 1944 Marie was deported to Ravensbrueck, and was eventually liberated in April 1945 in Bergen-Belsen. After the war, she was reunited with her five surviving children.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Johann Stossier

May 29, 1909

Techelsberg, Austria

Johann was born to Catholic parents in the part of Austria known as Carinthia, where he was raised on the family farm. Johann enjoyed acting and belonged to a theater group in nearby Sankt Martin, which also happened to have a Jehovah's Witness congregation. He became a Jehovah's Witness during the late 1920s, actively preaching in the district around Sankt Martin.

1933–39: Johann continued to do missionary work for the Jehovah's Witnesses even after this was banned by the Austrian government in 1936. The situation for Jehovah's Witnesses worsened after Germany annexed Austria in March 1938. Like other Witnesses, Johann refused to give the Hitler salute, to swear an oath of loyalty to Hitler, or to enlist in the army.

1940–44: In April 1940, Johann was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned in Klagenfurt. The Nazis deported him to the Neuengamme concentration camp and then to the Sachsenhausen camp. In Sachsenhausen, the Germans tried to force Johann to repudiate his faith as a Jehovah's Witness, but Johann refused. Although it was forbidden, he had secretly hidden a tiny Bible, and reading Scripture enabled him to fortify his belief that the power of God was stronger than the power of the Nazi regime.

Johann was executed on May 7, 1944, in Sachsenhausen. He was 34 years old.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Walter Szczeniak

February 4, 1911

Dedham, United States

Walter was the oldest of eight children born to Polish-Catholic immigrant parents in a town near Boston, Massachusetts. The family moved back to Poland when Walter was a child, and lived on a family farm near Ostroleka in northern Poland that Walter's mother had inherited. Because his father's American nickname was "Stetson," Walter was mistakenly registered as "Charles Stetson" on his American birth certificate.

1933–39: After I completed secondary school, my father sent me to the University of Warsaw, where I graduated with a law degree in 1936. I was apprenticed to a Warsaw court and my goal was to become a Polish senator. While on summer vacation in 1939, I ignored an order from the U.S. consulate in Warsaw for American citizens to leave Poland immediately. Within a month the Germans had occupied Ostroleka. I joined the Polish underground.

1940–44: In 1941 the underground asked me to return to America to describe what the Nazis were doing, but I was caught in Slovakia and deported to Auschwitz. I knew that my life sentence in a penal unit meant certain death, so I requested to see the commandant to ask if I could be transferred. It was a gamble: either he'd be in a good mood and say "yes," or he'd be in a bad mood and have me shot. I was lucky; he transferred me to the kitchen detail, where I recovered my strength and avoided being selected for gassing.

Walter was later reassigned to a railway repair unit. He was liberated by American soldiers near Salzburg, Austria, on May 2, 1945. He returned to America in 1946.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Dawid Szpiro

February 27, 1922

Warsaw, Poland

Dawid was the older of two sons born to Jewish parents in Warsaw. His mother supported the family by selling women's clothing. Dawid's father wrote for the Yiddish newspaper *Haynt* and the journal *Literarische Bleter*. The Szpiros lived in the heart of Warsaw's Jewish district, where Dawid and his brother, Shlomo, attended Jewish schools.

1933–39: Dawid graduated from a trade school at the age of 17 and began working as a mechanic. When his father took a job in Argentina in 1937, Dawid and his brother sent clippings from local antisemitic publications to persuade their father to resettle the family in Argentina. But Dawid's father did not believe that Polish Jews were in danger and returned to Poland in 1938. That year, Dawid joined the Zionist organization, Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir. The Germans occupied Poland in 1939.

1940–44: In November 1940 the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw was sealed off. Dawid and his family obtained sufficient food by exchanging clothes they had sewn at home for food brought by Poles from outside the ghetto. Dawid worked together with other Ha-Shomer members in the ghetto to forge and deliver false papers. In 1942 he was smuggled to Tarnow, where he lived secretly in a non-Jewish section of the city. While there, Dawid obtained false papers for his mother, who had escaped the Warsaw ghetto, and for his brother, who was in a nearby labor camp.

Dawid and the other resistance members with whom he lived were discovered by the Gestapo and tortured to death. His brother and mother were the only members of the family to survive the war.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Sabina Szwarc

February 24, 1923

Warsaw, Poland

Sabina grew up in a Jewish family in Piotrkow Trybunalski, a small industrial city southeast of Warsaw. Her family lived in a non-Jewish neighborhood. Her father was a businessman and her mother was a teacher. Both Yiddish and Polish were spoken in their home. In 1929 Sabina began public school, and later went on to study at a Jewish secondary school.

1933–39: On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Four days later, German troops streamed into our city. After one month of occupation, my father had to give up his business, I had to give up school, and our family of five was forced into a ghetto that had been set up by the Germans. We shared an apartment with another family. From blocks away we could hear the sounds of German patrols and heavy German boots on the cobblestones.

1940–44: In 1942, as the ghetto was being liquidated, my Polish girlfriends Danuta and Maria got my sister and me false Polish ID cards. On the eve of the final roundup, we escaped and hid in their home. Two weeks later my sister and I took labor assignments in Germany where nobody knew us. I was a maid in a hotel for German officers. One of them asked me whether there were Jews in my family. He said that he was an anthropologist and that my ears and profile seemed Jewish. I looked offended and continued to work.

Sabina was liberated in Regensburg, Germany, by American troops on April 27, 1945. She immigrated to the United States in 1950 and pursued a career as an ophthalmologist.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Dora Unger

January 7, 1925

Essen, Germany

Dora, her parents, brother, aunt, uncle, and two cousins lived together in her grandfather's home in Essen, Germany. The Ungers were an observant Jewish family, and when Dora was eight, she began to regularly attend meetings of Brit Hanoar, a religious youth organization.

1933–39: In October 1938, a teacher, with tears in her eyes, came to me at the municipal pool, saying 'Jews cannot swim here anymore.' Just weeks later, on November 9, Jews were arrested and their property destroyed. A neighbor tried to protect us, but that night as our family huddled together, Nazis spotted our house. Suddenly, an ax flew through the window, landing by my head. A few days later, we fled for the Netherlands.

1940–45: In Amsterdam, as refugees, my parents were not permitted to work and so could not provide for me and my brother. I was sent by a Jewish aid organization to the Buergerweeshuis, an orphanage that had 80 Jewish refugee children. Just after the Germans invaded the Netherlands in May 1940, 'Mama Wismueller,' a Dutch woman who worked to rescue thousands of children by arranging their passage to England, came and told all of us to get dressed. We were taken by bus to a pier and put on the *Bodengraven*, a boat.

Dora spent the remainder of the war in England. Her parents and brother perished at the camps of Sobibor and Auschwitz. Dora immigrated to Israel in 1946.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Paula Wajcman

1928

Kielce, Poland

Paula was raised in a religious Jewish family in Kielce, a city in the southeast of Poland. Her family lived in a modern two-story apartment complex. Paula's father owned the only trucking company in the district. Her older brother, Herman, attended religious school, while Paula attended public kindergarten in the morning and religious school in the afternoon.

1933–39: Paula's school uniform was a navy blazer with a white blouse and pleated skirt. At age 9, she did the "Krakowiak" dance at school. Boys flirted with her when her overprotective brother was not around. Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Paula's father did not wait for German troops to reach Kielce. He loaded one of his trucks, and the family fled east to the town of Tuchin, 30 miles from the Soviet border.

1940–44: Paula's mother, returning to Kielce for supplies, was stranded when the border dividing Poland closed. German forces occupied Tuchin on July 4, 1941. Hearing that Jews nearby had been massacred, the family built a bunker under the wooden floor of the textile factory where they worked. They knew that the pits the Germans and Ukrainians were digging were intended for them. At dawn on September 24, 1942, police moved into the ghetto. People set fires everywhere. In the chaos, Paula and her father ran to the bunker.

The bunker was discovered by the Germans, and Paula and her father were shot. She was 14 years old.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Joseph von Hoppen Waldhorn

November 14, 1930

Paris, France

Joseph was the youngest of three children born to immigrant Jewish parents. His Polish-born father was a former officer in the Austro-Hungarian army who had met and married Joseph's Hungarian-born mother during World War I. Joseph was raised in a religious household and grew up speaking French.

1933–39: My mother says it's better here in Paris than in the poor village where she grew up. Unlike my mother, who speaks broken French, my older sisters and I have grown up speaking French fluently. I attend a special public school funded by the Rothschild family. My father says that the terrible things happening to Jews in Germany won't happen to us here.

1940–44: I've fled Paris and am staying with the sister of a friend who is letting me hide on her farm in Sees in western France. About a year ago, when I was 9, German troops occupied Paris. At first, I wasn't in danger. Unlike my foreign-born parents who were subject to being immediately deported, I was a French citizen. I fled Paris after the Germans deported my father in 1941. I have false papers; my new name is Georges Guerin. My sisters also have false identities and have gotten office jobs in nearby Alencon.

Joseph's sisters in Alencon were discovered and arrested. Joseph managed to remain concealed until the end of the war, and immigrated to the United States in 1949.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Gabrielle Weidner

August 17, 1914

Brussels, Belgium

Gabrielle was the second of four children born to Dutch parents. Her father was a minister in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. She grew up in Collonges, France, near the Swiss border, where her father served as a pastor. Gabrielle was baptized in the Seventh-Day Adventist faith at 16 years of age. She attended secondary school in London, England.

1933–39: Gabrielle became increasingly active in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, eventually becoming the secretary at the French-Belgian Union of Seventh-Day Adventists headquarters in Paris. Her student travels in western Europe and her knowledge of foreign languages proved useful in her work. On September 3, 1939, two days after Germany invaded Poland, France declared war on Germany.

1940–44: German forces invaded France in May 1940, and Gabrielle fled to the south. After the armistice, Gabrielle returned to Paris and resumed working for the church. On Saturday, February 26, 1944, the Gestapo arrested her during 10 a.m. church services. Along with 140 other members of the “Dutch-Paris” network that helped Dutch Jews and political refugees, Gabrielle was implicated by a fellow member who was tortured. On August 24, Gabrielle was deported from the Fresnes prison in Paris to the Ravensbrück camp in Germany.

On February 17, 1945, Gabrielle died of malnutrition in Koenigsberg, a subcamp of Ravensbrück, just days after being liberated by Soviet troops.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Sophie Weisz

February 23, 1927

Valea-lui-Mihai, Romania

Sophie was born to a prosperous Jewish family in a village near the Hungarian border known for its winemaking and carriage wheel industries. The village had many Jewish merchants. Her father owned a lumber yard. Sophie loved to dance in the large living room of their home as her older sister, Agnes, played the piano.

1933-39: My father believed in a Jewish homeland and sent money to Palestine to plant trees and establish settlements there. When I was 10, I was sent to a school in nearby Oradea because our village had only elementary schools. I missed my family, but studied hard, and swam and ice skated for fun. Though we heard about the roundups of Jews after the Germans invaded Poland in 1939, we felt safe in Romania.

1940-44: Hungary annexed our region in 1940; by mid-1941 they'd joined the German forces. We were forced into the Oradea ghetto in May 1944, and then deported to Auschwitz. In August my mother, sister and I were moved hundreds of miles north to Stutthof on the Baltic coast for forced labor. The prisoners were asked to entertain the German soldiers at Christmas; I danced to the music of the ballet Coppelia in a costume fashioned from gauze and paper. I earned extra food for this, and shared it with my sister Agnes.

Sophie and her sister escaped while on a forced march in February 1945. Her mother and father perished in the camps. In February 1949, Sophie immigrated to the United States.



PERSONAL HISTORY

Franz Wohlfahrt

January 18, 1920

Koestenberg-Velden, Austria

The eldest of six children born to Catholic parents, Franz was raised in a village in the part of Austria known as Carinthia. His father was a farmer and quarryman. Disillusioned with Catholicism, his parents became Jehovah's Witnesses during Franz's childhood and raised their children in their new faith. As a teenager, Franz was interested in painting and skiing.

1933–39: I was apprenticed to be a house painter and decorator. After Nazi Germany annexed Austria in 1938, like other Jehovah's Witnesses I refused to swear an oath to Hitler or to give the Hitler salute. Neighbors reported me to the police, but my boss protected me from arrest by saying that my work was needed. When the war began in September 1939 my father was arrested for opposing military service. He was executed in December.

1940–44: Following my twentieth birthday, I refused to be inducted into the German army. In front of hundreds of recruits and officers I refused to salute the Nazi flag. I was arrested on March 14, 1940, and imprisoned. Later that year, I was sent to a penal camp in Germany. A new commander felt sorry for me; three times he saved me from execution between 1943 and 1945. He was impressed that I was willing to die rather than to break God's command to love our neighbor and not kill.

Franz remained in Camp Rollwald Rodgau 2 until March 24, 1945. He was liberated by US forces and returned to his home in Austria.