

UNITED STATES
HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

CENTER FOR ADVANCED HOLOCAUST STUDIES

**Psychological Reverberations of the Holocaust
in the Lives of Child Survivors**

Robert Krell

WASHINGTON, D.C.

**Psychological Reverberations of the Holocaust
in the Lives of Child Survivors**

Robert Krell

MONNA AND OTTO WEINMANN LECTURE SERIES
5 JUNE 1997

The assertions, opinions, and conclusions in this occasional paper are those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council or the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Third printing, August 2002

Copyright © 1997 by Robert Krell,
assigned to the United States Holocaust Memorial Council

THE MONNA AND OTTO WEINMANN LECTURE SERIES centers on Holocaust survivors who came to America, and on their families. Born in Poland and raised in Austria, Monna Steinbach Weinmann (1906-1991) fled to England from Vienna in the autumn of 1938. Born in Vienna and raised in Czechoslovakia, Otto Weinmann (1903-1993) served in the Czech, French, and British armies, was injured in the D-Day invasion at Normandy, and received the *Croix de Guerre* for his valiant contributions during the war. Monna Steinbach and Otto Weinmann married in London in 1941 and emigrated to the United States in 1948. Funding for the program is made possible by a generous grant from their daughter, Janice Weinman Shorestein.

I WAS FIVE WHEN the war ended in Holland. I had been hidden for three years with a Christian family, Albert and Violette Munnik and their daughter Nora, ten years older than I.¹ In my native Dutch I called them Moeder and Vader, and to this day, Nora is my sister.

My parents had received notification to report for "resettlement" on August 19, 1942. To that date no friends or family had yet returned from their mysterious trip eastward, so they gave me to non-Jewish friends for several days, who then were visited by the righteous angel who took me in. "Who is that baby?" she asked. Told that I was Robbie Krell, a Jewish child whose mother was looking for a place to hide, she agreed to take me for two weeks. I stayed three years and became Robbie Munnik.

My father hid in an attic. My mother on false papers, alone, in an apartment. How they survived was as miraculous as my personal good fortune.

At war's end we were reunited and therefore it was a happy outcome. Or was it?

I had been torn from my parents twice. Once at age two from my Jewish family, once at age five from my Christian family. Although the Krell family unit was intact, nothing else was. My grandparents, aunts, and uncles had all been murdered. My parents, not yet 35 years old, were orphans.

We were liberated only to discover that friends and family were gone, that the city of The Hague was a city of ghosts where only 1,300 Jews remained of 20,000 before the war.

My first school was a Catholic kindergarten and I was a prize pupil. Many weekends were spent with my Christian family and they remained my parents' best friends.

Years later I asked my Moeder "Did you want my parents to die?" She said "Of course I thought of it, you would have been all mine. But for your sake I wanted them to live." Several other things she said to me, in case you wonder whether my Jewish mother insisted I become a doctor. Not so. It was Moeder who said I was a child saved to help other children. I believe she had in mind that I become a pediatrician. In later years she granted me her blessing for child psychiatry, although she never quite figured out what it was I did. On another occasion, when I was dating a non-Jewish girl, she reminded me quite forcefully that my life was not saved to contribute to the disappearance of the Jewish people through intermarriage. Yes, my good Christian mother was a great Jewish mother as well.

And so I was raised by my Christian and Jewish parents and was triply blessed at my wedding in 1971 to have both sets of parents and my wife's parents present. Rabbi Marvin Hier,

then of Vancouver (now of the Simon Wiesenthal Center), officiated and when my Moeder spoke in Dutch and I translated, the 400 guests cried. It was one of those moments.

We had emigrated to Canada in 1951. I was the world's most eager immigrant. Leave-taking was difficult, but here was an opportunity, a new beginning.

My life centred on school, primarily a junior and senior high school of 2,200 students with no more than a dozen Jews. For my Jewish social life I joined Habonim, a labour Zionist youth group, and went to summer camp. Life was good. We were poor for the first ten years in Canada but it made no discernible difference to me. I had wonderful friends. My best friend, a Greek boy across the street is now a surgeon in Fresno. My twenties were busy. I graduated with an M.D. from the University of British Columbia in 1965 (Moeder and Vader attended my graduation), followed by an internship and residency in Philadelphia and in Stanford and then I returned to Vancouver. The only glitch on the landscape of my life was my trip to Israel in 1969 when TWA 840 was hijacked by the PLO out of Rome and I got to see Damascus under trying circumstances. But I survived that, too. Lucky twice.

As a child psychiatrist at the University of British Columbia, I began my career in 1970 at the academic level of assistant professor and retired from a full professorship in 1995. I am now a relatively young professor emeritus, working full time at the Children's Hospital in British Columbia.

Lest you think that the Holocaust was absent from my normal life as a normal Canadian, let me assure you it was not. In our home, like the homes of most survivors, it hovered like a shadow in every nook and cranny.

In Habonim, several friends had themselves been children in the Holocaust. At our synagogue, our seats were with the other survivors. Their stories were a constant reminder of the time in 1945 and 1946 when returning survivors to The Hague arrived in our living room. At age five and six, I heard stories no child should ever hear, in Yiddish, a language I cannot handle to this day without tears. I cannot speak it. It comes back to me only in my dreams, just before I travel to Israel.

My father took me to synagogue because his father had taken him. But he told me not to expect him ever to open a prayer book. And he did not. Ever. But in his later years he purchased 1,000 High Holy Day prayer books so that congregants would not have to carry them back and forth from home. Our rabbi in a eulogy called him a man of "holy disbelief," a description originally attributed to Eliezer Berkovitz.

Surrounded by survivors I grew up. In front of me, Anshel, whose first wife and children aged three and five were murdered. I believe he was there. I believe he saw the murders. He remarried to a survivor and they were childless. I loved him. I wept with him when he said Kaddish for his children. To my right was Boris. Silent. Strong. He fought off two drunken Ukrainians, and jumped into a river of ice where he stayed for over an hour.² A little further to the back was Leon, whose sister was bayoneted before his eyes and whose father died in his arms. Leon, the partisan fighter, who witnessed the torture and murder of the entire town of Eišiškes at the cemetery where he was hiding.³ Leon, a childhood friend of Yaffa Eliach, whose

tower of photos memorializes those innocents in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

No, the Holocaust was never far away. And there was my dear friend Larry, from Transnistria. A child who survived in the forests, fostered in Vancouver, who was one year ahead of me in medical school and then psychiatry where he set the course I followed in part, the Philadelphia General and Temple University hospitals.

I convinced Larry to speak publicly and one day he joined me at a panel before 400 psychiatrists at the 1984 American Psychiatric Association annual general meeting. By way of introduction Larry described how he was presently head of psychiatry at his hospital, had undergone psychoanalysis, and was the proud father of three children. He challenged the audience with the provocative question "And perhaps based on that information you might think that I am normal?" And then he launched into his astonishing lecture.⁴

The Discovery of Child Survivors

Allow me to take you on a journey of discovery. Perhaps the most peculiar part of this entire story is my unawareness, or perhaps our unawareness, of the particular existence or designation of children who survived. No child survivor thought of himself or herself as a child survivor. We knew we had gone through and survived the Holocaust, but for the most part we considered this an insignificant experience compared with the *real* Holocaust survivors, those from concentration camps. In addition, adults reminded us that we really had no story of survival worth noting and that we were to get on with life and be normal. And that we did. Normality was our objective, our challenge, our mission; to be more fluent in English than native-born Canadians, to be great athletes and, through our accomplishments, to be invisible and to blend in.

It was not difficult. I won spelling contests within three months of arrival. Larry became the province's top student of English and won the English literature scholarship prize. Murray sang with the opera in San Francisco and Jack won the high school 100 metre race. We were so normal we forgot, for a moment, our beginnings. But only for a moment. Trust me. For then it happened. The floodgates of memory burst open.

Since the early 1970s I had worked with children who had been brought for assessment and treatment by their survivor-parents. In their eyes, I qualified. A Jewish child psychiatrist *and* from a survivor family. I got to know the second generation in their teens. Now I see them in their 40s. As a trained family therapist, I insisted on working with parents as well and came to know something about Holocaust survivors and the dynamics of survivor families.⁵ Soon my small private practice (the University Child & Family Psychiatry Clinic was my main preoccupation) consisted of survivor families. In 1975, while on sabbatical for six months in Jerusalem, at the Hebrew University and Ezra Nashim, with psychiatrists who were themselves survivors, survivorhood remained unspoken. There was no recognition of this remarkable little entity, the tiny world of children from the Holocaust.

It was not until 1981 when I heard Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, now Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel, tell the World Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors of his background, that it hit me. (An astonishing discovery). He said "My name is Israel Meir Lau. I believe I am the youngest

survivor of Buchenwald. I was eight years old at liberation. My father was the last Rabbi of Piotrowsk in Poland, and was killed in Treblinka. My mother died of hunger in Ravensbrück concentration camp."

All of these children I had known, *we* were the child survivors.

How was it possible? How was it possible not to know? Holocaust survivors had formed organizations, founded programs, and created support groups. In fact, I had done exactly that, co-chairing in 1975 Vancouver's first annual Holocaust Education Symposium for high school students, and now in its twenty-second year. In 1978 I also founded an audiovisual documentation project of survivor testimony which has taped 120 accounts. I had not taken these steps as a child survivor. It had taken Rabbi Lau's description of himself as an eight-year-old from Buchenwald and my dear friend Sarah Moskovitz, the author of a pioneering work on child survivors,⁶ to highlight the fact that Helen Epstein's ground-breaking book about the second generation *Children of the Holocaust* was misnamed. *We* were the children of the Holocaust.⁷

In 1983, I spoke to the fledgling child survivor group of Los Angeles at Sarah's request. Previously, at their first meeting, they had not been able to successfully define a purpose for their gathering, but they recognized that their need to be together was overwhelming.

What were the difficulties in their coming to grips with their situation? The stumbling blocks to self-recognition? Were child survivors truly an unrecognized group of Holocaust victims? To the contrary.

Much publicity accompanied the postwar arrival of Jewish children on North American shores.

In Canada, 1,116 children arrived as war orphans between September 18, 1947, and March 10, 1952.⁸ Their coming and the lives of many of them have recently been described⁹ in a book by Fraidie Martz; child survivors have been the subjects of stories and accounts throughout the postwar years, but were seldom identified as a unique and distinct subset of Holocaust survivors.

For example, in Leo Eitinger's classic psychiatric study *Concentration Camp Survivors in Norway and Israel*,¹⁰ amongst his case studies of psychiatric patients in Israel, he refers to two Holocaust survivors, one born in 1930, the other in 1935. He discusses their traumatic illnesses but although aware of their ages, Eitinger nevertheless fails to distinguish them from other survivors suffering psychoses.

Differentiating Child Survivors from Adult Survivors

For practical purposes, we may define a child survivor as one whose age was no greater than sixteen in 1945. It is obvious that a child born in Poland in 1930 was caught up in war in 1939. A child born in Hungary may have been relatively safe until 1944. The country of origin is crucial for it determines the sequence of events which befell the child and at what age.

Let me describe in a simple way what happened to typical young adult survivors, for example, someone about nineteen years old at liberation. Such a young man or woman faced and made many major decisions while still in a D.P. camp. It was not uncommon for him or her to

marry another survivor, opt for quick immigration, and begin life anew, somehow. In large Canadian cities, such as Toronto and Montreal, adult survivors settled within the Jewish community, often close to other survivors, and many preferred to be near those from the same European country. Many such survivors had a substantial Jewish education, a sense of community, a collection of memories. Deeply traumatized, desperately bereaved, nevertheless they felt connected.

Contrast this situation with that of a twelve-year-old in 1945. Often alone, deprived of any significant education either secular or Jewish, the child was swept up in one or more rescue operations of various kinds. A typical twelve-year-old might spend three more years in limbo until immigration in 1948 or 1949. The twelve-year-old, now fifteen was placed with a Canadian Jewish family—not necessarily near other survivors and without a guarantee of further Jewish education, just a Jewish home.

Where else did Jewish children go? Thousands were gathered up from the corners of Europe, from orphanages and convents, and taken to Israel. Those who had been sheltered by Christian families often remained there. Organizations and surviving family fought over them. The postwar fate of children remained complicated. Liberation was not altogether liberating.¹¹

Children gathered at war's end were destined for adoption or foster homes, perhaps on a Kibbutz in Israel or with a family in America and this had two immediate consequences. This placement usually separated the child from the community of survivors and frequently provided the opportunity to begin or resume an education.

Therefore, an examination of the life experiences of an adult survivor versus that of a child survivor must take into account the demographic framework that influenced career decisions, marital preferences, and the raising of children. After all, the so-called Second Generation, the offspring of Holocaust survivors can be as young as 20-30 (children of the children) and as old as 40-50 (the children of the adult survivors). Each grouping experienced a distinct set of expectations and aspirations, and these differences have been little examined.

The Jewish identity of adult survivors was strong, often informed by Jewish learning from Orthodox homes; that of child survivors, comparatively weak, and often informed not by Jewish learning but by Christian learning from rescuers who had recognized that such knowledge was essential to the child's survival. After the war, children lived with non-survivor families and were more likely than older survivors to marry a spouse of non-survivor background.

What is the major problem for the child survivor as compared with the adult survivor? It is memory or its absence. The older survivor possesses a memory of family and tradition, daily life and habits, smells and sounds of a past. Child survivors may have no such memories or only fragments of them—disrupted, broken, frightening bits and pieces of an existential puzzle. Too young to have secured a life's foundation, too traumatized to experience childhood, too preoccupied with survival to reflect on its impact, the child survivors were not blessed with the opportunity for the systematic, chronological collection of ordinary personal history.

The youngest recall neither parents nor experience of family. Some do not know their first language or real name. The older ones recall bits and pieces from which a memory can be

reconstructed, if they are afforded the opportunity or if they are sufficiently self-motivated.

Fate played with us who survived. Following liberation I entered my first school year. Classes were held in a Roman Catholic convent. It was the only school with a kindergarten in my area of The Hague. Suddenly I did get Hebrew lessons; my teacher was Mr. Krakauer. A top student in regular classes at school, I was unable to learn Hebrew. Perhaps I felt it to be a language tainted with sorrow. My teacher was. As a child it did not occur to me. As an adult I understand. He too was a survivor, trying to make a living teaching those who could not be taught in 1946.

Here was a bereaved adult survivor teaching a confused child, who luckily had just been returned from a Christian home to his own parents, who had then informed him he was a Jew.

How could I know then what I know now? Not only was I a child who had survived. I had been returned to parents, each with a large family in 1940, now themselves orphans. They were attempting to cope with living in a city where Jewish life was now only a memory. In 1940, everything. A mere five years later, nothing.

Psychological Phenomena

One of the most enduring psychological consequences for child survivors was the encounter with silence. Children quickly learned that silence was essential to survival and developed a degree of comfort with it: "Be very quiet," Samuel said. "Don't even breathe. Blow out all the candles. Just sit. I'll put the false wall in place from the outside. Then I'll leave for the street. It is a great sacrifice. You must survive. You owe it to me. Shalom."

These were instructions to Budapest Jews, crowded together in a hiding place, as described by then nine-year-old Magda Denes.¹² "No one moved. No one whispered, no one breathed. An hour passed, two, many hours. Survival is a tedious activity, I thought. Death might be more exciting."

At the mercy of adults, most children understood the need to remain quiet and not complain. The cloak of silence enveloped all activities. The child survivor moved silently through a tumultuous world where one misstep, even after a thousand correct decisions, meant death. The instructions of adults were complicated. Jewish parents who had taught their children to be proud Jews and always tell the truth now told them to lie about who they were and to conceal their Jewish identity. Christian hiders worried about their charges' Jewish looks, their inability to pray Christian prayers, and their ability to blend in. My friend Ruth was not allowed out of a closet for three months until she had learned fluent Lithuanian. Her hair was bleached and she was baptized.

Silence became so comfortable for most of us that it remains difficult to break it to this day. No wonder child survivors were not known as a distinct group. We did not speak. When we did, it served to cover our fragile origins.

Apparently, immediately after the war, Jerzy Kosinski could not speak for two years. Elie Wiesel chose not to speak of his experiences for ten years. We know that for children too traumatized to bear an enormous burden, mutism offers one possible escape from speaking about

what one must not know. One child survivor acquaintance told me that at age fourteen he tried to speak of Auschwitz and what he saw but was stopped by a listener. He vowed not to speak another word for one year. He kept that vow.

It took nearly thirty-five years for some child survivor memoirs to appear. Amongst others, Nechama Tec,¹³ Saul Friedländer,¹⁴ Michel Goldberg¹⁵ and André Stein¹⁶ broke the long silence. More practiced than some, I still struggle with my strong desire to remain silent. I actually became president of my medical school class without campaign speeches. I secured my votes moving quietly among small groups. I served on the University of British Columbia student council and spoke up only once when the council wanted to bring in a well-known American Nazi. Some issues enrage me sufficiently to counter the strong desire to remain in hiding. Others enrage me so much that hiding is my only option. And that is what many child survivors have done. They have remained in hiding from their spouses, their children, from themselves. Until, inevitably, memory comes.

Memory

The memories of child survivors, as we have seen, are but fragments of a shattered life. The younger the child, the fewer the shards. Some, as I have said, do not know their name or first language. The intrusiveness of bits of memory can literally make one crazy.¹⁷ And yet these pieces may be too important to suppress or to ignore, for each bit may recall a last moment with a parent, a tender caress, a lullaby. The problem is that the chronology of the momentous events may have been lost in the chaos of partings, midnight flight, transfers from family to family, the concealment of identity—the stuff of survival. Child survivors have a great need to reconstruct a sequence of memory that begins to make sense. When the fragments fit, more or less, into a chronology, they are less intrusive and not so disturbing.¹⁸ Memory may come into conflict with silence. For example, child survivors of the concentration camps may have been told and recall that they were helped in order to bear witness. Adults may have offered bread rations knowing that they themselves would not survive; the gift of the sustaining food was contingent on the child telling the world what he or she saw, should he survive. Not a few child survivors struggle with this compelling burden, complicated by their need to remain silent. Should they speak? Can they speak? Let us hear from them.

Two Accounts

Rebecca

Rebecca was a patient and her identity is concealed with necessary changes. Rebecca was born in Poland in 1933. When she was nine, her entire family was in a labor camp. One night there was a mass escape. It was the last time she saw her father. Her little sister was shot. Rebecca saw her body.

Rebecca and her mother eventually were sent to Auschwitz. They survived that and with others returned to their hometown in Poland. In the night, a band of Polish antisemites burst into their upstairs apartment and shot everyone to death. Only Rebecca, wounded, survived. She

was twelve years old. "I am not dead," she recalls shouting. "You have not killed me!"

I saw her when she was 57. She complained of feeling depressed, vulnerable, tired and frightened. This very intelligent woman had somehow managed for forty-five years to keep busy with a career, raising three children, and attending synagogue.

What had happened to her past?

She was smuggled from the hospital, placed into a Jewish orphanage and sent to Israel where, she states, "I learned to behave like a Sabra." She had a number on her arm and often wondered why no one took notice and why they would not want to know. Failing any interest, her resolve was firm. "I did not want my identity tied up with a concentration camp. I did not want people to say that I am whatever I am, because of my past. So I did not talk. Perhaps those who did are happier."

Not only did she put aside her past, convincing herself it was not all that traumatic but recognized however, that in fact she was emotionally numb and that she had deliberately numbed herself. She was annoyed with other survivors who grieved openly.

Then, at age 57, she could not stop her tears. Nor could she for quite some time. She cried more than she ever did. The smallest hardship took her back to her past.

Rebecca's strongest hold on life was through work. When cutbacks and shift changes threatened work it became clear that she equated work with survival. As she put it, "Work is the essential part of my being."

Her husband's occupation had brought them to Canada and she had quickly found a job.

When asked how she would like things to be if all could go a little better for the next few years, she replied "You are asking for my dreams. I have no dreams."

It took about five visits for her to take me into the abyss, the journey that we psychiatrists must take, yet fear. For in many child survivors lies a rage so vast it frightens both teller and listener, a legacy of the perpetrators' outrage. In Rebecca's case the rage surfaced rapidly. Fluent in Polish, Yiddish, Hebrew and English, she will not speak Polish. Not since the war. She finally produced a detailed family tree and revealed ambivalent, mostly angry, thoughts about her father. Had he been a hero or collaborator? He was apparently shot by fellow partisans following their escape. At the time of the escape, her mother tried to pick up Rebecca's wounded sister. She pulled her mother off. The child's quick actions saved them for a time. Hatred of Poles was followed by anger at her father (what did he do?), mother (I was forced to help her), herself (why do I have fears now when I don't really care if I live or die?)—all in rapid succession. From all of this she concluded: "I have lived as if nothing had happened. I did not want to inflict my pain on my family. I wanted to look like a normal Israeli and act as if my past was normal."

My question: "Did it serve its purpose?" The answer: "Yes and no. I fooled everyone but also myself."

And then she began to talk. "I don't like the hard shell, but I'm coming out of it. I see my little sister—dead. I lay on my dead mother, but didn't see her." As Rebecca's emotions were freed, she talked with her children, attended Holocaust survivor conferences, and I believe,

managed somewhat better. She used to call more often.

Robbie

Robbie is a friend born in 1930 in Skarczysko, Poland. He had received counselling as a young man from his family doctor, but never attended or needed a psychiatrist other than to apply for reparations—so far unsuccessfully.

Robbie worked in a munitions factory in the Ghetto for one and a half years, the assignment arranged by one of his older brothers. His mother was sent to Treblinka. He was alone from age twelve. His four older brothers disappeared but he expected they would survive. They were big and strong. He was small and weak. Three times he was loaded onto a truck with many others—to be shot. Each time, at the last moment he was miraculously spared. Robbie survived Buchenwald and with about 1,000 children gathered there, he waited. No one came for him, and he left with about 400 children to Écouis, France.

He recalls that they were angry and wild. At Écouis, a psychologist or psychiatrist told them they'd never recover. Robbie was brought to Canada in 1949 under the "war orphans" act, sponsored by the Canadian Jewish Congress. He lived in Saskatoon and Calgary and became an accountant and a successful businessman. He moved to Vancouver with his family and I received a call in 1982 or 1983. "Hi. I am a Holocaust survivor and I am coming out of the closet." (There were many types of closets in those days). Robbie has become a Holocaust educator supreme. His story is spellbinding and he offers it at his own great emotional expense to thousands of school children. But he admits that the emotional hardship of carrying it in silence was greater than that of bearing witness.

He has worked very hard for his entire adult life and, like Rebecca, his stability after the war was strongly tied to work. His effort to retire then unleashed a host of physical and emotional problems, some largely related to the return of memory. A wonderfully kind and optimistic man, he suddenly was overwhelmed with grief, intermittent depression, anxiety and panic—usually triggered by particular unpleasant smells (the camps), railroad crossings (deportation), and sirens (roundups).

Robbie suffered irritating gaps of memory. He could not recall for example, the train ride from Buchenwald to Paris. Nor could he recall details of barrack life important to him, particularly the protection offered by some political prisoners who were determined to save Jewish children. Whether from shock or malnutrition, the last few months of captivity and the early months of liberation were mostly obscured—until memory returned.

Each time we talked or when he spoke to student audiences, new details, some a total surprise to him, emerged. The fragments fell into place, memories were connected, healing was achieved.

Robbie admits to many characteristics that many of us child survivors share. We work until we drop. We pay little attention to illness or pain. We rely on others, often our spouses, to teach us about pacing and relaxation. And we cry away from them, insofar as possible, for we don't want to burden our families with the one pain we cannot handle.

Grief and Rage

Whatever else they reflect, our predominant memories resurrect feelings of loss and terror. These recollections are profoundly rooted in tragedy and victimization, triggering a rage so great that often the only possible response is silence. The bereavement is so enormous, so persistent, so fresh in the minds of such child survivors that a state of perpetual mourning is not unusual. Those harrowing early experiences have led to the tragic disruption of the otherwise routine expectations for a child's early life: a set of parents or at least one, an education, a base of tradition and values, a sense of security, and predictability. All was irretrievably and cruelly shattered. Is it any wonder that mental health professionals fear to tread into this arena of unremitting grief and overwhelming rage? For a long time now survivors and knowledgeable therapists have tacitly agreed to a policy of containment and cooperation in order not to intrude into that realm of protective silence. The rage seldom is expressed for it is seldom asked about. Who can deal with it? I once told my story for a documentation project¹⁹ to Sarah Moskovitz, the gentlest and most sensitive of interviewers. There came a point when she asked me what I felt now, at that moment. I tried to tell her of my rage, then became mute. I was unable to speak. My silence seemed endless. Words would not form. My mind felt trapped. It was a brush with the darkness within me, a hint of what lies there.

Future Directions

In an effort to learn more about the child survivors, Dr. Peter Suedfeld of the University of British Columbia Department of Psychology (himself a child survivor of Budapest), members of his team, and I have begun to explore the consequences of survivorhood. We have examined the coping mechanisms employed during the Holocaust and after, through study of a series of audiovisual tapes in which survivors offer testimony.

A content analysis of thirty videotaped autobiographical interviews of Holocaust survivors produced some interesting initial findings.²⁰ During the period when systematic persecution began, there was a decrease in children seeking social support, perhaps reflecting the fact that neither people nor the state were reliable protectors. With their having adapted to that coping, social networking by these individuals has remained low, even in adult life. Children, once vulnerable to the whims of adults, continued to rely on themselves throughout later life as they had during their lonely childhoods.

In general, older adolescents and adult survivors regained pre-Holocaust levels of seeking social supports that had decreased during the Holocaust. When the persecution began, adults and adolescents also had withdrawn, but not to such a pronounced degree as had the children. Adults reflecting on social supports before the war mentioned these concerns 32 times, but only 24 times when reflecting on the period of persecution. The comparable statistics for children were 62 times falling to a mere 8. All groups recovered to similar figures (around 30) after the war, but this still constitutes a large diminution of confidence for those who were children. One can infer that they experienced a precipitous end of childhood and functioned quickly in this respect as self-reliant adults.

Their coping styles, as described by child survivors in their narratives, demonstrate a problem-oriented approach devoid of psychological defense mechanisms such as denial or compartmentalization. Planned-for problem-solving and dogged persistence remain features in their adult lives.

In fact, in survivors' memories of events the focus is on problem-oriented coping by somehow solving the unsolvable while acknowledging a large component of luck, fate, and chance.

Focusing on physical attributes that may have helped, content analysis to date reveals that among hidden children the proportion of survivors with light-coloured hair is significantly higher than among adults who were hidden during the war. In general, in other situations such as existed in the concentration camps and ghettos, the trend towards those with light hair is the same.

And in the arena of personal healing, that struggle continues with child survivors forming stronger bonds of support. Over the next few years individual child survivor organizations likely will join the newly-formed Federation of Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust. We will continue to meet. Our common experiences bind us, for who but our own truly understand us?

And so the journey continues. The research literature grows.²¹ We learn about ourselves and each other. What we were and what we have become are worth discussing, for in those lie the seeds of further healing. There, too, are lessons for others who have been victims of outrageous assaults on mind and body. It is fair to say that in many instances the stories are an inspiration. For many have lived life well despite the damage.

There was no escape. It was not possible to emerge from that past unscathed. The child survivor recognizes the unhealed wounds and struggles daily, and nightly, with the never ending consequences.

I admire my friends, for the odds against them were great. I love them for their tenacity and persistence and for their capacity to harness the rage and somehow turn it to creative endeavor. Some have become extraordinary individuals.

Perhaps it is sufficiently extraordinary that so many have managed, despite a destructive beginning, despite the losses and the grief, to achieve success in the quest for normality and to survive after survival.

References

1. A. Stein, *Hidden Children: Forgotten Survivors of the Holocaust* (Toronto: Penguin Books Canada, Ltd., 1993).
2. E. Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1989).
3. L. Kahn, *No Time to Mourn* (Vancouver: Laurelton Press, 1978).
4. L. Rotenberg, "A Child Survivor/Psychiatrist's Personal Adaptation" *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, 24 (1985), 385-389.
5. R. Krell, "Holocaust Families: The Survivors and Their Children" *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 20 (1979), 560-568; R. Krell, "Family Therapy with Children of Concentration Camp Survivors" *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 36 (1982), 513-522; R. Krell, "Holocaust Survivors and Their Children: Comments on Psychiatric Consequences and Psychiatric Terminology" *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 25(5) (1984), 521-528.
6. S. Moskovitz, *Love Despite Hate: Child Survivors of the Holocaust and Their Adult Lives* (New York: Schocken, 1983).
7. R. Krell, ed., "Special Section. Child Survivors of the Holocaust: 40 Years Later" *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, 24(4) (1985), 378-412.
8. B. Lappin, *The Redeemed Children* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963).
9. F. Martz, *Open Your Hearts: The Story of the Jewish War Orphans in Canada* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1996).
10. L. Eitinger, *Concentration Camp Survivors in Norway and Israel*. Oslo: Universitets Forlaget Oslo, 1964.
11. R. Krell, "Hiding During and After the War: The Fate of Children Who Survived the Holocaust" in: H.G. Locke and M.S. Littell, eds., *Holocaust and Church Struggle: Religion, Power and the Politics of Resistance* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996), 279-284.
12. M. Denes, *Castles Burning: A Child's Life in War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co,

1997).

13. N. Tec, *Dry Tears: The Story of a Lost Childhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

14. S. Friedländer, *When Memory Comes* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979).

15. M. Goldberg, *Namesake* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

16. A. Stein, *Broken Silence: Dialogues From the Edge* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1984).

17. S. Moskovitz and R. Krell, "Child Survivors of the Holocaust: Psychological Adaptations to Survival" *Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Sciences* 27(2), (1990), 81-91.

18. R. Krell, "Therapeutic Value of Documenting Child Survivors" *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry* 24(4), (1985), 397-400.

19. S. Moskovitz, "Documentation Interviews." California State University at Northridge; *Archives on Child Survivors*, 1983-1985.

20. P. Suedfeld, R. Krell, R. Wiebe, and G. Steel, "Coping Strategies in the Narratives of Holocaust Survivors" *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping* 10, (1997), 153-179.

21. J. Hemmendinger, "The Children of Buchenwald: After Liberation and Now" *Echoes of the Holocaust* 3, 40-51. [Bulletin of the Jerusalem Center for Research into the Late Effects of the Holocaust. Talbieh Mental Health Center, Jerusalem, Israel]; J. Kestenberg, E. Fogelman, eds., *Children During the Nazi Reign: Psychological Perspective on the Interview Process* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994); R. Krell and M. Sherman, *Medical and Psychological Effects of Concentration Camps on Holocaust Survivors* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997).

ROBERT KRELL was born in Holland and survived the war in hiding. He emigrated to Canada in 1951. Dr. Krell obtained his M.D. from the University of British Columbia. He has been the Clinical Director of the Child and Family Psychiatry Outpatient Department at University Hospital, University of British Columbia, since 1970. This clinic is now located at British Columbia's Children's Hospital. Dr. Krell served as Visiting Professor of Psychiatry at the Hebrew University in 1975 and then at the U.C.L.A. Neuropsychiatric Institute in 1982. He is Co-Chair of the Standing Committee on Holocaust Education (since 1975), Founder and President of the Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society for Education and Remembrance, member of the Executive Committee of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, and has been National Vice-President of the Canadian Jewish Congress (1989-1992). In 1978, he initiated the Vancouver Audio-Visual Holocaust Testimony Project. He served on the International Advisory Board of the Hidden Child/Child Survivors Conference held in New York in 1991. Dr. Krell's publications focus primarily on the psychological effects of the Holocaust on survivors and their children, and on their psychiatric treatment. His work has particularly emphasized child survivors.

The Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum promotes the growth of the field of Holocaust studies, including the dissemination of scholarly output in the field. It also strives to facilitate the training of future generations of scholars specializing in the Holocaust.

Under the guidance of the Academic Committee of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, the Center provides a fertile atmosphere for scholarly discourse and debate through research and publication projects, conferences, fellowship and visiting scholar opportunities, and a network of cooperative programs with universities and other institutions in the United States and abroad.

In furtherance of this program the Center has established a series of working and occasional papers prepared by scholars in history, political science, philosophy, religion, sociology, literature, psychology, and other disciplines. Selected from Center-sponsored lectures and conferences, or the result of other activities related to the Center's mission, these publications are designed to make this research available in a timely fashion to other researchers and to the general public.



CENTER FOR ADVANCED HOLOCAUST STUDIES
100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW • Washington, DC 20024-2126 • www.ushmm.org