
SECOND GENERATION: SEVENTEEN HOLOCAUST ESSAYS

Written by Children of Holocaust Survivors Participating in the Jacqueline Berke
Legacy Writing Workshops For Children of Holocaust Survivors (2018-2019)



Edited by Dr. Robert Ready and Dr. Ann L. Saltzman
Drew University Center for Holocaust/Genocide Study

Second Generation: Seventeen Holocaust Essays

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Table of Contents

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Introduction Robert Ready and Ann L. Saltzman	iii
Helen Aron Frozen in Time	1
Aliza Augustine Making Art is Silent Testimony	5
Robert Braun A Question of Resilience	15
Andrew Breit Pictures at an Exhibition: Memory Reclaimed	23
George Celler The Silence Lasts a Long, Long Time	29
Stefanie DeFronzo To Tell Their Story	33
Hannah Edelman Conquering the Silence	35
Barbara Gilford Finding Susi	47
Molly Honigsfeld From Child of the Holocaust to Social Activist	49
Janet Jacobs In Spite of Everything	55
Renata Kessler Lost and Found: A Journey of Self-Discovery	59
Myron Kolski Strength for the Mission	65

Renée Riczker	
Jacques and Renée: A Holocaust Survivor and His American Daughter	75
Ann Scheingold	
Unanswered Questions	87
Emily Schuman	
A Second-Generation Holocaust Survivor	97
Susan Steiner	
Imagining Aunt Susan	105
Eva Vogel	
The Arc of My 2-G Story	109
Brief Biographies of Second-Generation Writers	117
Brief Biographies of Workshop Leaders	120

Introduction

Robert Ready & Ann L. Saltzman

The personal essays in this portfolio were written during the Jacqueline Berke Legacy Writing Workshops for Children of Holocaust Survivors. The workshops met for six weeks between September and November, 2018. Some of the writers chose to pursue their writing in six subsequent sessions in late fall 2018 and spring 2019. As you read this poignant collection, you will see that it was not an easy task for these 2G (Second Generation) writers to move past their parents' experiences and focus on their own personal histories as children of survivors. As Eva writes: "I talked about the life of my parents for years, but in the following essay I will try to stop describing my parents' experience and try describing my own. That is harder than I imagined."

Of course, the parents' experiences during the Holocaust is always in the background of the 2G experience, but it was the enduring memories of these 2G individuals that we wanted to get at. What was it like growing up in a family of survivors? What and when did you learn about your parents' Holocaust experiences? How did you understand them? Feel about them? How did their Holocaust background affect the way in which they parented you? What was it like trying to develop your own identity in adolescence? How, as Helen describes it, did their "parents' fear and anger [get] ... passed on to [them] as if by osmosis"? And as adults, what truths about both survival and life had they gleaned from their parents?

Their narratives yielded a spectrum. Myron writes: "I was born on May 3, 1945. My birth quickly became a sign of hope to many others. There had been no talk of having children during the war. But now that the war had ended and there was a new baby to cuddle and protect, there was hope." For Janet, "I only have warm, happy memories of my family life. My sister and I were the center of their universe. ... My parents were always loving and kind, and they were enough." But Andy writes, "In my mother's grief there was no place for me, no one to help me through my own process." Susan ends her essay, "... we were not just a household cloaked in silence. We were a household choking on respect for a man who was so grief stricken he was unable to speak about what happened to his—and my—family."

Both Andy's and Susan's statements allude to a central theme that emerged in many essays: the unresolved grief of their parents had textured their ability to attend to their children's needs. For some—especially for those who had lost a first family during the Holocaust—their parents' fear that they might lose their “new children” caused them to be both distant and over-protective. As Ann writes, “I knew he loved me deeply but was so afraid to show it. He was over-protective and he was afraid something could happen to me. I was forbidden to ride a bike or swim.” For many, this over-protectiveness impeded the children's self-development. For a small number, the distance and over-protectiveness spilled over into verbal or physical abuse. And yet, as Emily writes, once she understood in her adult years what motivated her father to inflict the severe punishment she endured, she was able to forgive him. As children, it was hard for the writers to understand what was going on; they only knew, as Renata states, that “some cataclysmic, life-altering event happened ... before I was born.”

In trying to learn about such events, many of the writers described their need to “pierce the silence” that characterized their childhood families. Renée “learned to be constantly vigilant. I learned to be quiet and observe. I listened like a hawk for any clue that might inadvertently slip out.” For Aliza, “things ... came out randomly. I never knew when or where I would hear something. Now, it's like Pandora's box: at any point, memories—painful memories that are not even mine—can emerge and disrupt my day.” In contrast, Bob “first learned there was a Holocaust when I was about five years old; that most of my family had died and that many other Jews had also died. ... I was stunned, my mouth agape.” For George, “the silence of the sudden unexpected death and disappearance [of family members] without a trace[was] the most powerful silence of all.”

The process of writing about *their* experiences and not those of their parents required the writers to go back in time, to re-visit their childhoods, their adolescence, and even their adult years. Barbara likened it to “travel[ing] down to the ocean floor to that hidden place in the sand where our dreams sleep. My professor said, ‘Take a walk with someone.’ We knew what he wanted. Like a good pupil I obeyed and then it was easy.” For others, however, “Coming to terms with the shortcomings of one's parents was painful.” “The memories that were drawn out

from the depths of my mind that were repressed from so long ago ... [created much] discomfort. [yet] I felt a strange eagerness to search for more, as if I was addicted.”

Even so, the writing allowed them to articulate their pride in “what I had to do to overcome the past. When I think about where my strength comes from, I think about my parents and how strong they had to be to survive. I carry that heritage with me” (Molly). Or the recognition of those seminal moments when the writer “determined that I would not permit myself to live another moment seeing any type of injustice perpetrated or allow myself to observe someone being treated unfairly or disrespectfully. I resolved that I would become a force to be reckoned with” (Hannah). Our poet Stefanie captures it quite simply: “I am myself; I am my tongue.”

Finally, it is important to note the impact that the writers’ essays and experiences had upon the workshop leaders. There was much tender material that was exposed which required a response from us. As the writing delved deeper into psychological discovery and recovery, we stayed alert to emotions being stirred and truer sentences coming forth. In the process of writing—and reading aloud—their essays, we, the listeners and then the readers, came to be participants in the writers’ essays as they worked to create (and to re-vision) their own narratives. Indeed, their writing in this workshop exemplifies “essay”—attempt, endeavor—to find language adequate to Second Generation self-understanding.

Their pain, anxiety, and determination became ours; their sense of achievement and accomplishment despite the trauma that “floated in the background” fortified us as well; and their realization of their own resilience and strength despite all allowed us to end the writing workshop experience on our own “high.” These writings participate in a growing literature about the ongoing impact of genocide on the next generation—and the generation after that. We applaud the writers for their courage and fortitude in seeing this project to completion.

Frozen in Time

Helen Aron

My parents wanted nothing to do with Germany or the German people. They had been lucky to flee the country of their birth in the mid-1930s with little more than their clothing. Both lost several close family members in the concentration camps and on death marches. My father lost a thriving business; my mother lost her sense of security. For them, even in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, Germany remained the same nation it had been in the 1930s and 1940s, frozen in time. The Germans were the same people they had always been: they were Jew-haters and Jew-killers. Time stood still.

My parents refused to set foot in Germany ever again, not even to visit the cemetery where a beloved relative lay buried. They never purchased anything that was manufactured in Germany, no matter how much my father wanted to drive a Mercedes Benz or my mother coveted that Rosenthal candy dish with the little flower design in the center. They did not associate with anyone of German ancestry who was Christian.

My mother and father did not speak to me about what happened to their families during the period leading up to World War II and during the war. They were silent on that subject. All their friends were German Jewish refugees like themselves. I never heard any of these people speak about events that happened before they settled in the United States either. If I dared to ask a question about my father's twin sister or some other family member who died in the war, I always got the same answer: Good children do not bother their parents with a lot of questions.

My parents' fear and anger were passed on to me as if by osmosis. As an adult I traveled throughout Western Europe but never to Germany or Austria. Those were two countries I avoided. Then in the late 1980s my husband Paul's job included some international assignments, and he went to Germany regularly. As his business trips to Europe became more frequent, occasionally I would join him for a few days. I loved it when he was working in London or Brussels or Milan. However, visiting him on one of his trips to Germany was more problematic.

I felt very nervous and uncomfortable. Every German I encountered was suspect. On the weekends I always asked if we could drive to Holland or to Switzerland. I sought escape.

After a few trips to join Paul in Berlin, I began to look at the Germans a bit more tolerantly. Anyone my age or younger could not have participated in World War II or in the atrocities that accompanied it. They were either too young or had not been born yet. I began giving them a pass. I only glowered at old people, like an elderly couple sitting near us at a café having their afternoon coffee, cake, and whipped cream.

I spoke to Germans in their language when I was ordering food in a restaurant, checking into a hotel, or shopping in a department store. Invariably they asked me what part of Germany I was from. They were sure I was a German, but my accent indicated I was not from their part of Germany. I always said that I was an American who had studied German at university. It was sort of true. I had majored in German literature as an undergraduate. I never admitted that even though I was born in the United States, I had learned German at home as my first language. None of the Germans believed my white lie about having learned German at college. I could see it in their eyes.

Then Paul was assigned to the international division of the corporation he worked for. From 1990 to 1992 we moved to London so that Paul could work exclusively in Europe. I found a job teaching at Richmond University, an American institution of higher education in London, while Paul worked out of four European offices – one in Düsseldorf, Germany.

On weekends when Paul was staying on the continent rather than flying home to London, I would join him in whichever city he was located. That was when I met Jürgen, Paul's colleague in Düsseldorf. Jürgen was in his early thirties; Paul was about to turn 50. Jürgen spoke very little English; Paul spoke no German. Yet, Jürgen had adopted my husband. The first weekend that I joined Paul in Düsseldorf, Jürgen took us to places Paul had never been despite his many visits to the city. Jürgen did not want to entertain just Paul; he also made sure we stopped at a popular shopping area filled with high end stores because he thought I might enjoy seeing them. Jürgen was kind, considerate, and genuinely desired to make us feel welcome.

That first Sunday night we were invited to Jürgen's house to have a home-cooked meal prepared by his wife Petra and to meet their young daughter. The child was a blue-eyed, blonde little girl, a perfect Aryan child. Her appearance both attracted and repelled me. I chatted away with Jürgen and Petra in colloquial German. Of course, they asked me that same question: Where had I learned their language? Was I going to respond with my usual *Spiel* about studying German literature at college? Was I going to lie to these two people who had invited us to dinner at their home and who were being so nice to us? Finally, I told the truth. I was the child of two Holocaust survivors who spoke German at home.

Jürgen and Petra asked me so many questions. When I said that my mother's aunt and uncle were passengers on the ill-fated ship the *St. Louis*, they wanted to know why it was infamous. They had never heard of the *St. Louis*. When I told them that my father had a twin sister who died along with her husband and teenage daughter while on a death march, they did not understand. Where were my aunt and her family marching to? Why did I use the term "death march?" Most shocking to me was a question asked by Jürgen: Since it was so terrible for Jews in Germany during the Nazi era, why didn't they just go to England or America or Australia rather than stay where they were?

At the time Jürgen and Petra were going to school, the German public education system included almost nothing about the Nazis and about Germany's role in World War II in its curriculum. As adults they had done some reading and talking with their friends, but there was so much they did not know. Their parents, like mine, had been silent about what they did and what happened to their families during that dark period.

I did quite a bit of teaching and explaining that night. I wondered if they believed much of what I said but was reassured when Jürgen told me I was brave to be willing to come to his country given my family history.

Over the period of two years that we lived in London, Jürgen and Petra slowly and patiently enabled me to see that I was living in the 1990s, not the 1930s. I became willing to visit and enjoy various regions of Germany though I was still on alert for signs of anti-Semitism.

Because of Jürgen and Petra's kindness, or perhaps to preserve my own sanity, I learned to relax. I could survive in Germany.

Jürgen, Petra & Laura; Laura & me (1996)



Making Art is Silent Testimony Aliza Augustine

In this essay, created in the Writing Workshops, I try to record this dynamic for myself and my family: the Holocaust is alive and visceral in my life; the past and the present merge.

My father rarely spoke of the Shoah until the end of his life, when he began revealing the sort of details that made his life feel more real to me. The family, my grandparents, his older brother, my uncle David and my dad lived in an apartment in Toulouse, France, across the street from my grandfather's fur shop. Dad told me, the shop was next door to a photo store. When we looked together on Google Maps there was still a photo store in the same location. The fur shop, the apartment and a car that they owned were all taken by the Vichy Government or the Nazis. There is a photograph of the four of them standing proudly next to the car.

He told me that often, as a boy, he woke up in the middle of the night and saw strangers sleeping on the living room floor of their apartment. It was a way station on an "underground railway" to freedom for others. One night he woke up and saw his parents in the living room. His father was crying and his mother was trying to comfort him. My grandfather had just learned his parents had been sent to Belzec and murdered. No one survived Belzec; literally two people managed to jump out of the tiny windows in the cattle car carrying them to their death. My grandfather said, "This is how we will end up".

The things my dad told me came out randomly. I never knew when or where I would hear something. Now, it's like Pandora's box; at any point, memories—painful memories that are not even mine—can emerge and disrupt my day.

The oldest child in the family, I was the only one who heard these stories from my dad and my grandfather. Unlike my father, my grandfather talked to me about the Holocaust all the time. While he bombarded me with stories about their experiences during the war, everyone was silent about the family that was murdered. No one mentioned them. I only began learning about them fairly recently. I had known of my great Aunt Helen and her son Miki, a hidden child. I

assume they had to explain his existence, so they told us her story. She hid behind a false wall in a closet in her large apartment. I see that wall covered in floral wallpaper, the paper in a Vuillard painting where the people blend into the background the way she faded into the closet.

Denounced by neighbors shortly after her husband was rounded up, soon after she suffered the same fate. They were sent weeks apart to Drancy and put on a cattle car to Auschwitz, where they were gassed on arrival.

After the war my grandfather flew to Paris to find Miki and sent him to Uncle Zvi in Israel, the only brother with no children.

I heard about great Uncle Rumek, who was in a camp and lived through a death march. It left him mentally unstable, unable or unwilling to drive, fly or use the Metro. He refused to move to Israel and live with his brother Zvi, who made Aliyah before the war. When Uncle Rumek died, my father went to Paris to bury him. Rumek's apartment which had been Helen's was found with stacks of newspapers everywhere. He had become a hoarder.

On this first trip back to France my dad was arrested at the airport entering Paris for being a draft dodger; it was mandatory for French men to serve in the military. Crazy, this boy who fled for his life at the age of nine, the little boy who had his tenth birthday on the run from the Nazis going back to Paris and getting arrested for not serving in the military.

My childhood was spent listening to my grandfather talk about their escape. Some of the stories sounded like adventures, very scary ones but still nothing in my life would be as difficult or scary. I can't remember when I was first told about the Holocaust; it's as if I've always known.

I would walk a couple of miles from my house to his shop in downtown New Rochelle, New York: Marcus Klipstein French Furrier. The front room was the shop, decorated with seating, mirrors and a zebra skin hanging on the wall. The back was a large work room with a huge table and industrial sewing machines. I could spend hours watching him. After slicing the skins into small pieces, he reassembled them and wet and stretched the fur skins by nailing them

onto patterns on the huge table. Later they were sewn together on a very funny looking machine which I know now is a serger. The fur coat linings were silk and incredibly beautiful. I used his silk linings to make a quilt when I was in art school.

While he worked, he told me he got the lists of Jews who were scheduled for deportation; he smuggled them from Le Vernet, the French concentration camp where he was stationed as a translator. I don't remember exactly what he said he did with them, but when my dad told me he would wake up to find strangers sleeping in their apartment it confirmed my belief that he was working with the resistance. That and having known that they had access to forged Spanish passports that they used to escape France.

Le Vernet was infamous for its eminent political and intellectual inmates, particularly Arthur Koestler, whose book *Scum of the Earth* describes his internment there. I don't know if my grandfather stayed there or came home every night.

My family escaped with forged Spanish papers. The very morning they were to be picked up for deportation to a concentration camp, they left Toulouse for a small town on the border called Banyuls-Sur-Mer. From there they entered the Pyrenees and climbed through the mountains at night with a group of other Jews fleeing, the group walking, silently. One Basque led the way with a gun; a Jew had to walk last with a gun so the guides wouldn't shoot them and take their possessions. In Spain they split up, the couples separated from their spouses and the children sent with adults who weren't their parents to lessen the risk of being sent back. My grandfather told me he and another woman went into a town hall somewhere in Spain. Once they went in, they realized their forged papers were from that town. I picture them in the building, sitting on a bench waiting in terror. This is all I remember him telling me. Were they posing as a married couple?

When the families reunited, they met in a café in a train station on the Portuguese border. Thrilled by the amount of pastry in the café they ate lots of cake. The children hadn't had any cake or much food in so long that they all threw up. They were silent when they crossed over the river into Portugal. Each person was carried across on a rope in a small box high above the

water. I look at maps trying to figure out what river it was. This story I believe because I heard it from more than one person. Some stories I question. They are outrageous. Perhaps I imagined them.

My grandfather never spoke of his large family in Bochnia, but maybe I just don't remember. My father and my uncle were sent on the SS Pinto Doria from Lisbon, Portugal to Philadelphia and on to an orphanage in Newark, New Jersey, for about six months until my grandparents miraculously got a visa in the summer of 1943. I never asked the name of the orphanage. I never asked what it was like. I haven't been able to find anything about it. I think of the two boys alone, my grandparents putting them on the ship to America not knowing if they would ever see them again. I have great empathy for the refugees coming into this country. I hear about the children separated from their parents in America now, 2019, and feel physically ill. It is very painful to listen to stories on the news about the trauma these children separated from their parents will suffer. I know that it is true, I've lived my whole life with the aftermath. I use this in my artwork as personal expression and political commentary.

During the Syrian Refugee Crisis, I had begun the photo series you are seeing examples of here. At that time, I was using dollhouse size dolls and miniatures to make photographic narratives and was working on the series "Is It Safe?" which both drew on my family's experience during the Shoah and included photos of my relatives, those who survived and those who did not.

The images of the Syrian refugees, particularly those in Southern France frightened me. The stories reminded me of my family's escape from France. I worried about what was happening in the world and with a desire to expose people to the fact that people were affected by the Holocaust, not just survivors but their children and grandchildren, who are alive today. I began planning a new portrait project of children of Survivors. My aim was for this work to be very contemporary in order to make the threat feel real. Sadly, in the time since I began this work, I feel it is more urgent.

I have become the family historian. My two younger brothers and my cousins Sybil and Jackie come to me if they want to know something. In the last few years I have acquired family photographs—the same kind that I use in my art project—that were taken to Israel in the 1930's. The first time I saw photographs of my grandfather's sisters I realized I had never seen a female relative on my grandfather's side of the family. After a bombing in a plaza in Toulouse a few years ago, my dad told me that on Sundays my grandparents would go there to dance to live music. Picturing them there is very romantic. I can imagine the life they would have led if the war had never happened.

No one spoke of Dora, my grandfather's other sister. I didn't know she existed or that she, her two children and husband, were murdered. Never heard of them. I learned of these siblings from my fathers' cousins Miki, the hidden child, and Melanie, his cousin whose parent got out of France in 1939. They had a trove of photographs including two of Dora, both taken on snowy days. In one she is young and wearing ice skates. In the other she is wearing a lush fur coat standing next to her two children. It's not possible to tell if they are two daughters or a son and daughter. I never heard of my Uncle Joseph but am still looking for him.

I knew my grandmother's sister Aunt Louise. She survived in Morocco with her husband Jacob Rosenberg. I knew them and their son, my dad's first cousin Danny. Danny came to the States on the same route a few months after my dad and uncle. In the 1950's they changed their name from Rosenberg to Rosard. We were told they were orphaned young and were only children. This wasn't exactly true ... I found out there were other brothers and sisters, one with a family outside Paris and two in Belgium. All murdered.

I don't remember my grandmother speaking about the war or really much at all; she was diagnosed with a rare disease, scleroderma, after the war in New York City and given five years to live but she lived twenty-five. Today one hears more about scleroderma. I also have an autoimmune disease that is in the same family of illnesses as scleroderma.

My grandfather took care of her. He did everything around the house, cooking under her direction though he had a few of his own recipes we loved, like tuna salad and a vinaigrette with

mayonnaise. I loved watching him work in the kitchen or his shop. Grandma made calves feet jelly, veal pot roast and every fall damson plum jam. All of the children loved the food. Their dining room was one of my favorite places.

My mother, born in 1935, also a child during the war, grew up in England, not a “survivor” but a product of the havoc wreaked by the Germans. Too young to be evacuated to the countryside with her elder sister and brother, she lived at home in Leeds in the North of England with her parents. She slept in the cellar, during the Blitz. Rationing was very severe. Married and living in the States, my British mom became a French cook and we ate dinner together every night. My dad was very strict; we had to eat with European table manners or suffer the consequences.

Our family looked perfect to my friends. My dad went to work in a suit and tie, though his dumpy office was above a car parts store across from the Major Deegan Parkway and the Cross- County Shopping Center in Yonkers. He came home from work and had scotch, Pernod or Campari. Our house was immaculate. Years later my mom told me my dad would check the mantelpiece in the living room for dust. It was a façade, play acting a life in the suburbs. Family would come over for a resplendent dinner on Sundays. The women would drink whiskey sours and the men scotch. I would sit on their laps and have sips. There was always wine with dinner. The adults spoke French. They were sophisticated. We had more books in our house than anyone else I knew.

Yet, my childhood was spent hiding in my bedroom reading to escape from my family. I hid in my room from my younger brothers, the American kids, who were out of control. They were born in Queens while I was born in Israel. They don’t remember living in a small apartment with the Long Island Railroad tracks in the backyard. They don’t remember lying in bed and watching the lights of the train go around the walls. They asked for expensive presents, which shocked me. Though they were younger, they ganged up on me, pulled my few board games down from the shelves. One of them had what was probably ADHD; my young parents were totally unprepared to handle him. The entire household revolved around him.

I cried all the time. This was not a fact allowed to go unnoticed. It was mentioned frequently. “Let’s get her a bucket.” I had butterflies in my stomach waiting to go to school in the morning. Shortly after I entered junior high school, I pretty much stopped doing homework. No one noticed. I had a fear of getting arrested and imagined it.



“She Cried So Much She Filled Buckets”; 20” x 30” from the series “Is It Safe?” Photograph © Aliza Augustine

The vintage photograph used in this photograph is of my grandma Manya Klipstein, taken on the Circle Line in New York City (1950s). The little doll represents me.

Listening behind closed doors, I heard things, knew things that didn’t make sense for me to know at a young age. Is this normal or part of being the child of a survivor? I listened to my parents constant fighting, screaming in Hebrew. For years when I heard Hebrew the skin on my neck would crawl. I was never able to speak the Hebrew I spoke as a child, my first language. Or French either. I was too mortified my accent would be ridiculed. An A student, I failed French one marking period, unable to comprehend the grammar and aggravating my father who tried in his own way to help but who despite being fluent missed out on French grammar in school because of the war.

My father, due to luck and natural intelligence, was basically a self-made man and very successful. He was also a highly critical person. I was frequently told that I wouldn't be able to accomplish anything I wanted to do. He rarely if ever approved of anything we or our friends did. He never acknowledged his father, my grandfather, who saved their lives in 1942 by getting the family out of France. My father belittled people. He belittled his older brother, my Uncle David, an alcoholic wine salesman. I admired my grandfather, a man who left Poland when he was about sixteen with little education. He made his way through Europe working at loading cargo on ships; eventually after a long period of learning, he became a furrier. He ended up in France. His own father, my great-grandfather was abusive; he beat my father's older brother but not my dad. But the abuse was passed on verbally. My father's fury was irrational and relentless. By the time I graduated college, my father had left my mother for another woman and a path of disaster behind him. While affected I was fortunate to have already left home; my younger brothers, still teenagers, lived at home with my mom. We strived even harder for his approval, never really getting it.

Although it was clear that we as a family suffered because of the Holocaust, we never used the word "survivor" about ourselves. We escaped. We had no right to use that word. "Survivors" was for people who really suffered, people in the camps, people who lived through death marches. Survivors' guilt, a constant mind game of who suffered more. In the early 2000's my friend Elaine told me my family weren't survivors. I became defensive. Now, I believe that we were/are survivors. The past is never very far from the present.

I never called my father a survivor to his face. I was too scared to ask him to tell his story for the Shoah Foundation. I don't think he would have agreed, but I regret never asking him.

As a child I watched and read everything that came my way about the Holocaust. It was—and still is to some extent—a torturous obsession. I have sought it out. It was and is my responsibility and occupation to take in all this information—and transform it via my art into testimonies without words.



“Home is Where the Heart Is.” 20” x 30” from the series “Is It Safe?”
Photograph © Aliza Augustine

The man in the black & white vintage photo is my Uncle Rumeck in front of the building where he and his sister, my Aunt Helen, lived prior to being taken to Auschwitz. The pile in front of the building represents the piles of objects he hoarded after the Shoah.

A Question of Resilience

Robert Braun

Mom first told me there was a Holocaust when I was about five years old; that most of my family had died and that many other Jews had also died. I don't remember why, but she pulled me aside to the corner of the living room where my father sat with their best friends Fred and Bianca Baar, also Holocaust survivors. I do remember that I was stunned, my mouth agape. Was it really true? How could it be? Why? My parents and their friends were so nice, such good people. If all the others died, how did they survive? And so the question of resilience began. Answers came only years later.

I recall feeling helpless and sad. I forgot about it, though, and went to school the next day as if nothing was ever said. Until years later, when I noticed that my Bar Mitzvah was much smaller than those of many of my friends. Maybe it was because we didn't have much money, I thought, but I had almost no family there. Then I remembered what Mom had said.

She said all survivors were wounded; no one emerged unscathed. They and our circle of survivor friends never discussed their experiences. Mom said no one wanted to listen to their stories anyway. They really tried so very hard to fit in, to be "normal." But my father would scream out with night terrors; they couldn't sleep without the radio blaring the news - that was normal to me. Only later did I realize they suffered from trauma (now called PTSD) and were never completely healed.

My father Miklós (Nicholas) Braun was born in Szalóka, Austria-Hungary, now the Ukraine, in 1915. As a Jew, the Numerus Clausus quota forced him out of the prestigious Karl University in Prague soon after he was accepted. He attempted to join the Hungarian army to fight but was detailed to an all-Jewish slave labor battalion. He never gave up and ultimately escaped, the only one to do so. After hiding under the floorboards of a stall in a dairy farm for days without food or water, Nick was intercepted by a Soviet Army patrol. They nearly shot him because he spoke so many languages that they assumed he was a German spy. However, an

officer with a Jewish grandmother interceded and decided that he should become a translator and join the Soviet Army.

He participated in the liberation of Budapest where he accidentally found his younger sister Julia Pastor and her two young sons Gary and Peter. As a Soviet soldier, he guarded them from the local Jew-haters who coveted their apartment. He was without exaggeration, heroic, especially to Peter and Gary.



Nick in a Soviet army great coat and lamb's wool cap, armed with an automatic rifle when he guarded his sister's apartment. Budapest, 1945

Later on, when things settled down, Nick moved to escape the clutches of the Communist Party and the Soviet Army and make his way to Sweden. He ditched his uniform but was arrested by the local police for not having proper papers. He was tossed into a local jail, but escaped. He was arrested again, but by different police. His new papers proved to be not much better. Thrown back into the same jail, he escaped again. He finally reached Sweden, contacted relatives in Pittsburgh and made his way to the US.

He learned that his parents and older sister, Lenke and her son Tibike were murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Her husband and seven-year-old son died in a forced labor march. May their memory be for a blessing.

In high school Nick said that I should become an engineer, because if I needed to leave the country, it was a skill I could bring with me, unlike professions that needed licensing or retraining such as law or medicine. Looking back, I was better suited to teach history, but I really enjoyed my career in electronics engineering working with very smart, good people on interesting projects, especially at Ft. Monmouth, NJ, and at Bell Labs.

Nick was a tough act to follow. Even when I was a child, he never wanted to be called Dad, only Nick. I never found out why, even asking him as an older adult. He told me that I didn't live up to his expectations, even though I had greatly surpassed my own. I got married, we raised two fine girls who started families of their own. My greatest ambition was to work at the world-famous Bell Labs where I achieved a management position. I led the Lab's efforts to win government contracts for semiconductor R&D, earning the respect of my peers at other private and government labs (including the amazing Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency or DARPA) for my management skills and insight into critical technical issues. For Nick, that wasn't enough. I never became a big businessman or executive, I never wanted to. Maybe he felt that I didn't have what it took to survive. For example, he said I cared too much for what others thought of me; it was a weakness. I did want to be liked but I never felt it was a handicap. Still, he was my hero.

My mother, Florence Riemer Braun, was actually an American citizen. She was born in New York City in 1925 but the family returned to Sabinov, Czechoslovakia (now Slovakia) when she was 2 1/2 because her mom was homesick.

She recalled her mother teaching her that a Jew doesn't have a name. "Florika, if you do something wrong, it wouldn't be that Florika did something wrong. It would be that a Jew did something wrong." Perhaps a Jew did something wrong, I thought, and all Jews paid the price with the Holocaust. The warning has always stayed with me.

- I was probably in junior high school when Mom first told me about her final family meeting with her parents Morris and Irene (Stehr) Riemer, and her younger brother Robert, whom she loved so much and after whom I am named. It was 1942, she was seventeen, and the Nazis were coming. They had heard about the murders but her father tried to reassure her: "Czechoslovakia is a civilized country. It couldn't happen here." Her parents and brother decided to stick together, though she thought they'd have a better chance to survive if they split up. Robert said: "We will all live together, and if it comes to that, we'll die together."



The Riemer family (z"l) in Sabinov, Czechoslovakia, 1941:
Grandparents Irene (Stehr) and Morris and uncle Robert

After that meeting, she courageously followed her instincts and made her way, alone, to Budapest to seek help at the US embassy. It was closing and the American staff was gone, but a local Jewish office worker told her of a convent nearby where they were hiding Jewish girls. On the way there, she had many close calls and experienced acts of

kindness and heroism by strangers. In one instance, Mom entered a town during a roundup of Jews to be sent by train to death camps and a Nazi soldier spotted her. She ducked into a bakery and the young baker instantly realized what was happening. He put her in a flour bin and put a bag of flour on top of her. The Nazi entered but after a moment was summoned away. They had narrowly escaped death. Heroes might be found everywhere but you couldn't count on finding them anywhere. They were very rare, indeed.

The convent's Mother Superior, Slachta Margit (OBM), told her nuns that Florence Riemer, now Maria Horvath (a typical Christian name) was a novitiate, a nun in training; that she knew nothing about Catholic practice and was not to be asked about her past. The convent relocated as the Soviet Army advanced with heavy fighting and once, while a nun was shopping for food in the market square, the siren warned of approaching bombers. People took shelter in an abandoned castle nearby. A bomb struck and over sixty were killed. The nun was the only survivor, and untouched. She said that she survived because the mysterious girl they were sheltering must be Jewish. Mom was terrified at having been found out, but the nuns called her "the blessing."

While good luck would often smile upon her, Florence Riemer was not spared the trauma of what she witnessed and the constant fear for her own life and that of her family. Miracles do happen, but the one she prayed for every day did not; her parents and brother had perished in Auschwitz. A surviving witness, a family friend, told her the grim details of how they were killed. When the train arrived at Auschwitz, the guards fired into the railroad cars, and everyone stampeded out. Robert was trampled to death. When my grandfather told my grandmother, she screamed. A guard shot and killed her. My grandfather, a big strapping man who was an officer in the First World War, collapsed. He lost his will to live and soon died. Almost all Florence's family in Europe, my family, perished there: her grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. May their memory be for a blessing. The evil that had devoured them was real and seems to be reawakening in Europe.

Ever since she first told me of that fateful meeting, I'd rarely have another long conversation with her on any subject in which she wouldn't retell it as if it just happened. Almost in tears, the anguish of her survivor's guilt would come through each time. I sometimes fantasized that I could travel back in time to save them, but in the end, I just felt resigned. But she went on with life, got married and raised a family.

We moved from Brooklyn to Lakewood, NJ, in 1963 when I was about fifteen. To finish out my year at Stuyvesant HS in Manhattan, I stayed with some of Mom's distant relatives in Brooklyn. They spoke only German so we couldn't converse. Though I had school chums, I had no close friends. I was very lonely and depressed, not just sad. On a subway ride to their home after school one day, I suddenly felt that I was on a train to Auschwitz. Through the train's windows, I saw not only the bridge and the river, but also the trees of a forest. The illusion seemed so real. Later I realized that I imagined I was my namesake uncle. We would've been about the same age when he was killed.

Though Nick started and failed in two businesses, one in which he was robbed by his partner, he did not give up. He tried again and again until he succeeded. We didn't have much money, but he paid off all his debts, including taxes. And he even helped Julia and her family get

an apartment and furnishings when they immigrated to New York. A display of resilience, determination and integrity.

Our family's friends had struggles of their own. They came to America alone with no money, didn't speak English and didn't know anyone here. Everyone who knew them, their family and friends, all who could say they had a life before coming to America, were dead, leaving them utterly alone. They endured the betrayal by the civilization they once admired. Not valued for being law abiding and useful, they were hated for being Jews and considered vermin to be exterminated. To be with people who understood them, most made friends with or married other survivors. Upstanding, hard-working people. That was the world of my parents.

My parents did the best they could to raise Peter and me as normal kids - with hope, integrity, respect for others, to value education and hard work. Mom especially taught me that kindness and helping others gave meaning to life that couldn't be taken away.

Though they weren't very observant, their Jewish identity and Israel were vitally important. Israel embodied hope and could be a refuge "just in case." Even when we were broke, Mom would send packages of clothing to her nuns in Hungary and put coins in the Hadassah *pushka* for Israel. In college, I was very serious about a non-Jewish girl but when I brought her to meet the folks, they weren't home. Even I could get the message.

In my parents' world, resilience was a common denominator. Maybe it gave them an edge in surviving. But me? Not when I needed it most; it wasn't in my DNA. I left Bell Labs for a doomed startup and was looking for another job a year later. I had a nervous breakdown and hallucinated that I was living in a desert with my wife and young kids. We could've moved into my parents' new house at any time, but I was still overwhelmed by panic and dread. My parents had to deal with truly serious trauma without any help, but I collapsed. Nevertheless, with some resilience of my own, I persisted. After being unemployed for nearly two years and despite that at fifty-five, the odds were against my ever finding another job, I did find one at Picatinny Arsenal, in my field and only four miles away! It seems that I did learn something from my parents and their friends, after all.

From my Holocaust survivor parents and their friends I learned resilience, mostly by example. Even terrible events can be surmounted when they are viewed as a part of life rather than the whole of it or even the end of it. Resilient people seem to know this instinctively, but I struggled to understand it. Don't give up; look to the future and focus on your goals - they're the keys to developing resilience, even if it's not in your DNA.

All of us needed to be resilient at times, and we may yet again. With anti-Semitism growing, especially in Europe, perhaps sooner than we expect.

The Holocaust was an ineluctable presence, a black hole just waiting to devour whoever might forget. We never experienced joy at home. Joy portended doom. I never really felt joy, of immersing myself completely in another, even at my wedding or the birth of our two girls. Happy, yes, but not joy. But I've overcome my small setbacks and appreciate what resilience is.

Now, with my grandkids, joy! It was all worthwhile.



2017 Three Generations! Joy!

Pictures at an Exhibition: Memory Reclaimed

Andrew Breit

Pictures in an exhibition, canvases without pictures. These represent images of my journey as a child of Holocaust survivors. I've been shaped by memories, by pictures taken by my father, family mementos, the writings of my mother and the death of my father.

The history of my family has always been centered around loss. My parents survived the war. My mother's immediate family, her parents and brother survived. My father's mother and a small number of his relatives survived. The Germans and Russians murdered the rest of their families. My parents' lives were upended by the war. My father's career in Polish film and my mother's hope for a college education and a comfortable life were no more.

The pictures, the book, the movies, the magazines are a visual representation of my family's history. There's a written diary and letters from my mother. They describe their struggles during and after the war. There is also a taped interview of my mother. I can't watch it. It's something I find difficult to do. It's easier to read her diary. The empty canvas represents lost memories. Questions unanswered. I can only speculate, there are no answers. Here's an example. In a safety box in New York City, there is a dental bridge with two diamonds. This was my father's. Did he have the foresight to prepare? What was his motivation? I will never know.

I delivered a talk to my temple on my parents' story. I interpreted the choices they made using an old Bob Dylan phrase: "A simple twist of fate." If they had stayed in Poland in all probability they would have died. Instead they ended up in the former Soviet Union, in the City of Samarkand. After the war they made their way from Poland through Czechoslovakia, Austria, France (where I was born), and eventually to the United States.

My mother passed away two years ago, the last remaining member of her family. On my father's side a number of family members survived. I still have one member of my family who has a number on her arm. I was able to recreate some of my mother's journey from Poland to the Soviet Union but little of the horror she experienced with German planes dropping bombs as

they escaped the oncoming German Armies. They traveled to Lvov, fleeing East from the Germans and staying with friends. The Soviets invaded Eastern Poland and occupied Lvov. They were safe from the Germans, but with the Soviets came the NKVD, Russian Secret Police, who began to round up so called undesirables. The Gestapo also arrived around the same time. They offered Jews the option of returning to the German side of Poland. This was the most critical decision my mother's family made. They decided to stay and found themselves in Siberia. My grandmother on my mother's side lost her father, four brothers and their ten children. They died in Treblinka. People I would never know. My father's mother lost six sisters in Belzec and Plaszow. These were facts I didn't know until I began reading papers that my mother saved. My parents met in Samarkand during the war. They survived but their world was lost. The hatred experienced at the end of the war by their fellow Poles and stories of pogroms forced them to flee their native land.

In understanding their ability to survive (working in sub-freezing temperatures, lacking food, experiencing sickness and threats from bombs and potentially from their fellow Poles), they exhibited a will to live. This fact shaped their personalities and also impacted how they experienced life. My image of my father was that of a confident individual who knew what he wanted. My mother lived a shattered life. Given their different personalities and experiences, I mirrored more of my mother's behavior.

After the war my parents made their way to Paris and the United States. In Paris they lived their lives as part of the Jewish community in which my father was the editor of a Jewish magazine, *Actualites Juives*. There was a large population of Eastern European Jews. My mother talked about meeting Marc Chagall and Martin Buber. These were difficult times, but there seemed to be a yearning for a better life. Recreating things that were lost.

In the United States, my parents were able to create the semblance of a normal existence. We lived in Manhattan. The address was 674 W 161st Street apartment, 6B. My father's mother lived with us. My father had a dark room in the apartment where he continued to develop his pictures. I still have a large number of his negatives. He was able to build a career in film, making a documentary on Israel. He also wrote a book on Israel and was beginning to gain

commercial success making TV commercials. They became US citizens. I assume there was a feeling of hope.



A Happy Family, 1957

My father died in 1959. He was forty-nine years old. I was eight, my sister was four. I never really had the opportunity to know him. My grandfather on my mother's side passed away a year later. He was a successful business man whose life was shattered by the war and who never recovered. My father's father is a mystery. No one knows what happened to him. He disappeared during the war. Rumor has it that he was a military officer. I continue to search the archival records with the hope of solving the mystery. My mother survived but never really recovered. Her world as she knew it and the world as she imagined came to a screeching halt. My father provided stability and assurance. With his loss, this was gone and my mother never really recovered. This was probably her greatest loss. She lost members of her family but it was my father's death that shaped the way we were raised.

She was trapped, looking for something to hold on to but not finding it. There was anxiety, fear of loss, no real support structure or at best minimal support. These feelings were passed on me. Anxiety, fear of failing, fear of losing everything were driving forces in the way I

lived life. I was cautious in making my decisions. My mother worked to pay the bills. She never went anywhere, never returned to Poland or France. She took care of her mother after her father passed away. Her focus was on her children. Her joy was in her grandchildren and her small community of survivors.

We always had a roof over our heads, but the hope of rebuilding our lives was shattered. We moved from Manhattan to Queens. My mother briefly remarried, but that didn't work out. We lived in Elmhurst and eventually moved to Forest Hills. She worked part time for a period of time, eventually working for RH Donnelly until her retirement. Compared to other people I knew we survived only on my mother's salary and Social Security. I slept in the living room while my sister slept in the same room as my mother. When my father was alive, we had a huge apartment and we had a car which he parked in a garage on 157th street. It was a Plymouth with push button controls on the left side of the steering wheel.

I never felt a real sense of continuity and community. Looking back, it was as if I was a refugee searching for a home. Living in Manhattan I remember going to Riverside Park, going to the movies, attending a local pre-school, eventually going to PS 128 on 168th Street, going to the synagogue on 161st Street with my father. I remember Senator Jacob Javits addressing our congregation. I had some friends in my building and neighborhood. I still have a friend from 165th Street whose parents were also survivors of the war. I remember spending summers in the Catskills when my father was alive and afterwards. We shared our summers with mostly Polish Jews who were survivors of the war.

How did the refugee experience of my parents and especially my mother shape my life from adolescent to adulthood? In my mother's grief there was no place for me, no one to help me through my own process. I'm always worried. There's a feeling of anxiety, as if something is going to go wrong. I think of my parents. Did they know where their next meal was coming from? Would somebody knock on the door and take them to jail? During the war, my mother had been arrested for selling black market tea obtained from her brother. In examining my own upbringing, what's striking is the feeling of being an outsider, being different, never blending in.

As previously mentioned, members of my father's family survived. They were able to rebuild their lives.

When I meet friends and acquaintances and participate with groups and organizations, it always feels as though these others have complete lives. Everything seems to be going smoothly for them, but not for me. I ask myself how were they able to rebuild their lives after the war? I know I was born in France. I know my parents lived lives of privilege in Poland before the war. I have photographs. My mother had a chauffeur. My father made movies before the war. I found three movies that he was involved in. I continue to search for more information about his movie career in Poland. I have a photograph of him directing a film hanging in my living room.



Zapomniana Melodia was a romantic musical produced in Poland before the war, 1938.
Production manager, Jan Breit, center, in white shirt.

I realize the horror of war, the suffering of my parents and their losses and their flight to safety. The house they lived in during their time in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, was a hovel. They endured all sorts of indignities while traveling in cattle cars to the Soviet Union where they worked in a labor camp in Siberia. They had no shoes and just enough to eat to survive. They subsisted on a few spoons of kasha and fish soup.

There is silence about the lost world they lived in. The silence is my lost family that I never knew. Today I continue searching, looking for clues. This is an on-going process. With regard to the empty canvases, I may never be able to complete a whole picture but if I can paint

the background, I may be able to reclaim a bit of my identity. I hope to build a narrative that I can live with and share with my children.

The Silence Lasts a Long, Long Time

George Celler

The silence can last a lifetime or close to it. I grew up as the only child, born two years after the war ended. I had no family other than my mother and father, no aunts, no uncles, no grandparents. When I was little, I probably did not even fully understand the concept of an uncle or a cousin. I was told to call some of the closest friends of my parents' aunts and uncles, but this felt very awkward and I always tried to avoid it. For a long time, I did not realize that it was something unusual not to have relatives. My closest friends were at first children of my parents' best friends, people they knew before the war and sometimes reminisced with about who lived in which street and who was the most popular with boys or girls. They never talked about what happened during the war, just about their days before everything they knew and cherished collapsed. The children, my friends, were all only children and none of them had grandparents or aunts. So, everything looked perfectly normal.

Only later, at about nine or ten I started noticing that my family was not typical, that some classmates of mine had much larger extended families. By that time, I was also finding out that I was Jewish and that there was a huge difference in suffering during the war between Polish Catholic families and Polish Jewish families. But my parents still did not talk about it. Only much later I heard little bits and pieces of their experience. To be honest, I was not that much interested, or maybe I did not know how to ask or was afraid to ask for more details. Now one of my greatest regrets is that I did not ask enough questions, did not find out more, and most of all that I did not try to find out how they felt and what they thought when they were witnesses to the unimaginable horrors.

When we think of the silence that lasts a long time, the silence of the sudden unexpected death and disappearance without a trace may be the most powerful silence of all. I feel just such a silence when I think of the tragic experience of my uncle Jozef (Joseph), whom I never met. This occurred in August 1941, at the beginning of the German occupation of Stanislawow, the town where both my parents grew up. Before World War 1, Stanislawow was an important town in a region known as Galicia, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, ruled from Vienna by

Emperor Franz Joseph. After 1918, this region rejoined newly independent Poland. Jews were a large fraction of the town population. Almost as soon as Germans took over the town, a bunch of Nazi killers of an Einsatzkommando headed by SS-Captain Hans Krüger started their systematic extermination of local Jews.

They first demanded that all the prominent Jewish citizens of Stanislawow – attorneys, physicians, scholars, etc., – report at a specified time to the main town square on August 3. My father, Karol, had two older brothers and one of them, Jozef, was among those told to report. He was an attorney, still single, extremely nice, handsome, and a true gentleman according to Lucia, my mother, who greatly admired her much older brother-in-law. My parents lived at the time with Karol’s and Jozef’s mother and witnessed what happened.



My uncle Jozef, born in 1903, killed on August 3, 1941.

Jozef had a premonition that following the orders and going to the gathering place was not a good idea. He did not want to go. But his mother, Fanna, a lovely lady concerned about her “boys” felt different. “You have to go” she said. “There are severe penalties for not showing up, you may be in big trouble if you do not report there.” So, Jozef, a good son, listened to his mother, left his watch with his mom – in those days a good watch was a very valuable possession – and he went to the meeting place. Nobody saw him ever again. Just the silence. A man of great character and great potential was loaded into an open truck with hundreds of other victims, the intellectual elite of Stanislawow, taken to a nearby forest, shot, and thrown into a mass grave.

In June of 2019, I had an opportunity to tour Western Ukraine and see the places my family came from, and in particular visit Stanislawow. The center of the city was not damaged during the war, and I could identify buildings in which my parents and grandparents once lived. It was quite emotional to imagine them happily going about their daily lives before the war, and then the nightmare of their lives under the German occupation. But my most moving experience was finding a small monument in the notorious “black forest” outside of the city,

commemorating 2,865 members of the Jewish intelligentsia, killed at that place execution style on August 3 and 4 of 1941. Here my bright and handsome uncle Jozef perished, this polished piece of granite with just an engraved number of victims the only remaining trace of his existence.



Sadly, for other members of my immediate family there is not even a symbolic marker to identify where they were killed. Another brother of my father, Norbert, their mother Fanna, my mother's parents and sister all perished about 1941-42 somewhere in the general area or in the death camp of Belzec. The silence of their disappearance from the surface of the Earth is overwhelming.

To Tell Their Story
Stefanie DeFronzo

I am my Mother.
I am my Mother crying from Bogotá to JFK.
I am my Mother one year old, screaming for some
homeland.
I am my Father.
I am my Father wearing a suit on the first day of school.
I am my Father and the bullies in Middle Village laugh
while they'll never know what seminary school in Giovinazzo is like.
I am my Grandmother.
I am my Grandmother removing her star.
I am my Grandmother removing her star to sneak into the movie theater.
I am my Grandmother in hiding.
I am my Grandfather.
I am my Grandfather begging his parents to leave Essen.
I am my Grandfather *we are Germans.*
"We are Germans, nothing will happen to us."
I am my Mother
I am Southern Italy
I am my Father
I am lighting the menorah on Christmas
I am my Grandmother
I am the handmade red polka dot dress
I am my Grandfather
I am baking German spice cookies
I am the last butterfly
I am Theresienstadt
I am six million souls
I am ashes
I am

I am myself
I am my tongue.



My Mom (a 2G) and my grandparents
(Holocaust survivors)

Conquering the Silence

Hannah Edelman

So much of my life has existed in silence. The question that racked my brain and enveloped my soul has been whether the silence was genetic, or had I merely learned it as part of the legacy of being the child of Holocaust survivors. Perhaps it was a combination of the two that had been inexplicably fused together. Sometimes I thought of silence as a welcome friend that gave me respite and peace of mind, while other times I felt that silence gripped me with such anxiety that it caused me to feel as though I might suffocate as I gasped for air.

It's hard to know what to do with feelings that create such a dichotomy. On one hand, silence had created a veritable safety net, because it was so insulating and protective, and then, on the other hand it produced such incomprehensible, self-limiting possibilities. When you are silent, you don't have to take a chance of revealing yourself to others. Your feelings can remain hidden, while your ideas can persist intact. No one can exploit your thoughts or ideas because they are sequestered deep inside your soul. On the other hand, silence can cause such heartache and pain, if you are unable to share your thoughts and feelings with others. You are relegated to suppress important viewpoints or notions that can become obscured and eventually forgotten. Silence can cause regret, missed opportunities and can inhibit the growth and development of your intellect as well as your character.

How do you explain your ability to deal with the consequences of a life threaded with silence? How do you analyze the impact that silence has had on that life? Did I really want to enter this domain and challenge myself to answer or confront these lifelong queries? The response for me, was a resounding, "No," until I became involved with the Second-Generation Writing Workshop at Drew University. The thoughtful writing assignments have challenged me to expose a hidden nerve that I pretended never existed. Step by step the facilitators have compelled me to confront distressing feelings that have smoldered and festered under the surface of my skin for many years, by virtue of the topics that have been assigned to the group. Reading our personal writing aloud in such an intimate setting, has given voice to feelings buried deep within the recesses of my memories that had long been forgotten.

I have come to appreciate why my parents made such a deliberate and extraordinary effort not to talk about their experiences in the concentration camps. The daily indignities and dehumanizing acts that they endured were unspeakable. The fact that they were able to survive the most repugnant conditions was no less than miraculous. For them, a wall of silence became their armor, a safeguard, a shield to ensure that their children would be protected and never have to be exposed to the humiliations they faced on a regular basis, because they would never have to know about them. Silence was their insurance policy that whatever had occurred on a continent so far away, in their past, could not touch upon the current lives of their family in the United States of America. If they had nightmares about any of those experiences in the ghettos and camps, they were not about to provide verification of any kind to their children. They made a pact to be silent about their past as if a cancerous growth had been surgically removed. They also vowed that they would only speak English in their home. My parents never encouraged us to learn how to speak Polish or Yiddish, for that matter. Once they became American Citizens, their World War II experiences faded into oblivion.

My mother passed away in 1968, too soon for her to decide to begin any form of dialogue or open the evocative floodgates of what her life was like while she grew up in Lodz, Poland, or disclose what she endured in the Lodz Ghetto until it was liquidated. In fact, she never talked about any occurrences that transpired during the Holocaust. As a result, I'll never know why or how my grandparents were killed or what happened to my Aunt Rose, who cared for my mother in the Ghetto. All I know is she did not survive. Silence has obliterated almost all knowledge of half of my family. I am completely unaware of any historical records or data relating to my mother's family. It is all a mystery that may never be solved. So, for me, the well-meaning, purposeful insulation of silence constructed by my parents' unwillingness to speak about their lives during the Holocaust has effectively become a weapon or perhaps a tool of mass destruction of memory. It has effectively precluded me from being able to easily reconstruct or gather much information about my mother's family. Even my mother's documents of entry to the United States list her as being "Stateless," a non-person, from nowhere. She was actually supposed to go to Sweden as a war orphan when she was liberated from Bergen-Belsen, but she

met and married my father instead. In my opinion, silence has effectively caused more harm than anyone in my family could have ever anticipated.

My father first started to talk about his Holocaust experiences when he was in his mid-seventies. We video-taped an interview he did at my high school in the early 1990's. He talked about his experiences in Camp Konin, Auschwitz (Camp Buna), Camp Dora and finally Bergen-Belsen where he was liberated on April 15, 1945. He also shared the fact that he appears in a famous Margaret Bourke-White Holocaust photograph. It appears in many U.S. history books, and it was quite the story to tell. He didn't know the picture existed when his friend took him to the Simon Wiesenthal Museum in Los Angeles. The photograph was on display in the museum and when my father saw it, he was in pure, unadulterated shock.

DAD



He called me and described the photograph. I gasped, because as he described it, I immediately knew what photograph he was talking about. Months before, I had seen it in one of my U.S. history books at school. I initially got chills when I looked at it because one of the faces seemed to stare back at me. It looked exactly like my twin brother. At the time, I assumed it was

just a coincidence and later forgot about it, I thought, “No way.” Much to my astonishment, finding out that my father was in this photograph conveyed a strong message to me. It appeared that the photograph was pursuing me, because it magically turned up whenever I least expected it. I could not escape from it. I must have amassed a collection of no less than twenty-five photographs that were printed in various magazines and newspapers. As a result, I felt compelled to use the videotape and the Margaret Bourke White photograph to give presentations to English and History classes at my school, and did so for over twenty-five years. This was the pathway that would end the silence that had enveloped so much of my life for so long. How ironic, public speaking from such a quiet, invisible, dispassionate woman. The courage it took to embark on that journey was laborious and excruciating.

Reflecting on how that change occurred made me think about how I had always felt like an outsider while growing up. A fringe player, never quite believing that I truly belonged to any one specific group or another. No matter how hard I tried, I didn’t fit in. I was a painfully shy girl who found it agonizing to reveal her innermost feelings to anyone. Again, maybe it was learned behavior that seeped through the pores of my skin while I was growing up in a house with parents who refused to talk about their concentration camp experiences. There were so many secrets and unconnected dots that made no sense to me. There were no childhood pictures of my parents’ early lives to link with mine.

Maybe it was an inherited characteristic, part of my DNA that caused me to be so introspective and pensive. All I know is that I didn’t even have the courage to raise my hand to ask a question in any of my classes in school. I didn’t have the strength of character to risk making a mistake in front of my peers. I didn’t want to draw attention to myself. In my mind’s eye, I can envision my father telling me not to make trouble, and not to voice any strong opinions against other students or my teachers. Was he trying to impart his own survival skills to me, by telling me not to stand out, not to talk back, not to ask questions? Maybe my interpretation of these pearls of wisdom that he gave me, ensured that I would live a life cloaked in silence, for fear of hearing my own voice. Maybe my interpretation was so skewed through a child’s eyes that I never allowed myself the luxury of letting it mature as I grew older. I kept seeking solace within myself rather than taking a chance of expressing any thoughts out loud. I consistently

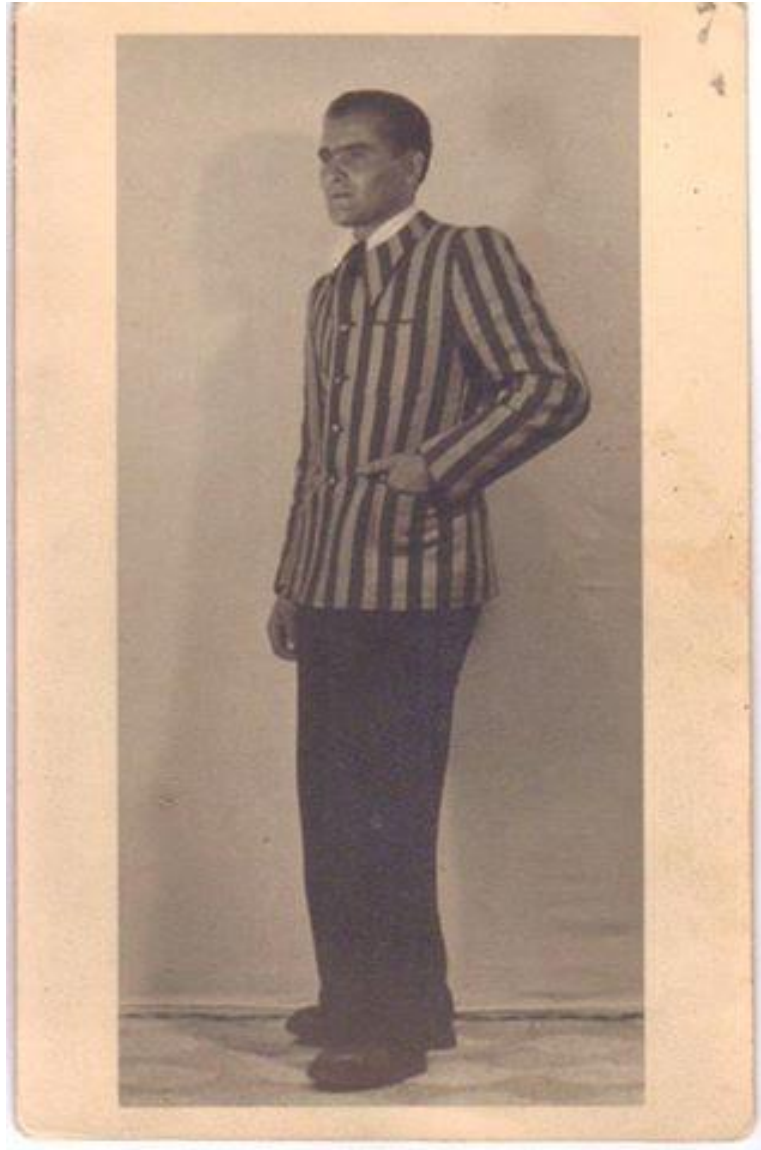
maintained a very low profile, preferring the shield and comfort of invisibility and mystery. I was ambivalent about everything. No opinion one way or the other. The irony is that in reality I was so reflective and contemplative. I had strong opinions about everything. No one could possibly have any indication of what was truly going on in my mind because outwardly I appeared to be so distracted and unfocused.

Truthfully, I was always thinking, projecting and problem-solving. I was living a secret life within the confines of my own mind. The worst part of it all was that I didn't show any emotion. I was like a lump of clay, outwardly molding myself into whatever shape I needed to be. Worse than that, the emotions that were never exposed, were bottled up internally and wreaked havoc on my somatic system. It's probably the reason I suffer from a number of health-related autoimmune diseases today. In the past, most of my interactive communication skills were self-limiting at best. I never talked to strangers, barely spoke to people I knew and had a sense of great trepidation and anxiety whenever I was forced to be in any type of social settings. Today, no one would ever suspect that I have had such conflicted inner feelings because over the years I have masterfully acquired and executed strategies to compensate for my social skill inadequacies. I have forced myself to literally become an actor in a play of my own creation so that I can perform and be viewed as being a friendly, outgoing person. The supreme irony is that nothing could be further from the truth. It has always been an exhausting effort to constantly be on stage and get no accolades for such a bravado performance.

Silence has its price. Sometimes circumstances are such that they are irreversible. I'll admit I've made my share of mistakes, but my interactions with my father seem to pointedly exemplify my consistent inability to act like an adult in his presence. As my father continued to age, I traveled to Florida every six or eight weeks to oversee his mental, physical and financial needs. Ironically, every time I was there, he held all the cards, directing me as to what I could or couldn't do. I never challenged his authority. I willingly submitted to his dictatorial rule, as any obedient child might do. First, I was forced to go to his high-tech gym and follow his exercise routine to a T. We would always start with the treadmill, then the recumbent bike and finish by going into the sauna. Did I mention how much I hated the treadmill? Yet there I would be, running in place. Did it matter what I thought? No, he was in charge, and I would invariably grit

my teeth and just do as I was told. He would tell me not to drive on the highways because I could be shot by a sniper. He would expect me to be home by ten o'clock or he would be frantically worried about my well-being. These were snapshots of the behaviors I was expected to follow when I went to visit my father in Florida. Did I mention the 4:30 pm Early Bird Dinners? I accepted all these directives as if I were a child living in my parents' home.

Even when my father was well into his eighties, he was able to remain in great physical form. He had always been a top athlete, well recognized throughout the Warsaw area. I wonder if his athletic prowess contributed to his survival in concentration camp; as I wonder if my athleticism would underwrite my ability to survive his spate of directives. I would look at my father and think about the way he was dressed for the gym. Most people wore mismatched, sloppy work-out clothes, but not my father. Everything he wore matched. Was this his response to being forced to wear a striped uniform in concentration camp? He was always dressed to perfection and he believed I should follow his lead. I start to think about his striped jacket from concentration camp and I begin to feel my anger and resentment surge and bubble up. He's been gone for ten years and I'm still so furious with him. Truth be told, I think I'm angrier with myself. My father kept his jacket from concentration camp and had it when he came to the United States. When he and my mother lived in the DP Camp in Zeilsheim, Germany, he restyled the jacket by adding pockets to it, as if it were a blazer. He and his friends took turns wearing the jacket because no one had a lot of clothing. He was a master tailor and I'm convinced that his skills enabled him to survive in concentration camp. Anyway, I always thought that he would leave his jacket to me. That way, I would have a tangible connection to him and his wartime experiences. I envisioned using the jacket as primary source documentation when I spoke to History and English classes at my school about the Holocaust. I believed I would inherit the jacket because it was my legacy.



Did I get it? No, of course not. Dad had bigger plans for his jacket. He didn't tell me until well after he delivered his jacket to the Holocaust Museum in Michigan that it would never be mine. I had always looked at that jacket as a link between his past, as well as mine. Maybe he thought that because he had to be silent when he was in concentration camp, the world would now know that this jacket belonged to "Ben Guyer." The fact that I never said anything to him was just a perpetuation of the legacy of silence that had been such an integral part of my childhood. Maybe that's why I became a child all over again every time I traveled to Florida. As I contemplate about being such a quiet, shy and obedient child who did not have her own voice until well into adulthood, I see the damage it has done. I could never muster up the courage to

tell my father how much I wanted his jacket. So, to large extent, I still feel the weight of my inability to talk to him or anyone for that matter, and the heavy price that the burden of that silence has cost me.

Over the years, the quest to confront my conflicted inner feelings and learn how to compensate for my social skill shortcomings has been a slow and painful process. One example that comes to mind occurred when I finally decided to go back to school to try to earn an advanced degree. I didn't think I was intellectually capable of succeeding so it took me an inordinate amount of time to build up the courage to finally enroll in a graduate course. I began as a non-matriculating student. I made a deal with myself that no matter what happened, I had to speak at least once during every class. I could ask a question, answer a question, contribute to a class discussion; any verbal response was acceptable. This deal was revolutionary for me. I can't remember why I even decided to do this, but it was daunting and fear-provoking to say the least. I knew deep in my heart that this deal was an absolute necessity and that I was obligated to execute this plan to its fruition. As a result, a small miracle occurred.

I decided to pursue a master's degree in Learning Disabilities and the professor was a kind, but lackluster lecturer who tended to ask inane, and innocuous questions. My classmates would look at him in disbelief while I courageously raised my hand to answer the question. Invariably, my hand would be the only one in the air. I would always answer correctly, be praised for my insight and acumen, while my classmates would mutter under their breaths that they knew the answer, too. As the semester progressed, it appeared that I was the class genius, who ultimately became the teacher's pet and the obvious go-to person for any and all class discussions. How did that happen? It was a mystery to me then, but not so much now. It was because I had finally chosen not to perpetuate my legacy of silence and therefore, for the first time in my life, I appeared to be visible. I stood out in the crowd. I gambled and it paid off with more dividends than I could possibly fathom. It paved the way for me to earn my master's degree with a 4.0 GPA, and go on for a post master's certificate as an LDT-C. I now believe that my intellectual capacity far exceeded whatever I imagined or determined to be possible. Who knew?

Simultaneously, during the time I was earning my master's degree I was an extremely well behaved and obedient school employee. I followed directives and rules to the letter, never deviating to any degree. I saw students during my prep time and lunch. I stayed at school well after the end of the day. I'm sure that my behavior in school was a perfect reflection of all the lessons I had learned from my father as to how to conduct myself in the presence of my supervisors. Do what you are told and don't stand out in the crowd and don't ever challenge authority. I'm sure this advice helped my father when he was in concentration camp. If you are invisible, you will survive. In late April, my colleague and I were called down to the principal's office and informed that we were accused of mis-administering the High School Proficiency Test because we supposedly encouraged students to make sure that they looked over all their possible answers before bubbling in their responses. We were then directed to appear before a closed session hearing before the Board of Education. Depending on the outcome, we could lose our increment, or worst-case scenario, we could lose our tenure. I was in total shock. If I could have fainted and been carried out of the office by EMTs, I would have been relieved. I wanted to crawl into a hole and disappear. This directive came out of nowhere. I later found out that the principal hated my colleague and was looking for a way to get rid of him.

We shared a classroom and suddenly it all made sense. I was caught up in a maelstrom. It was a witch-hunt. I had never been in trouble for anything in my life, ever. I was a good citizen, the most obedient follower of the rules, who never criticized, challenged, or spoke up against anyone or anything. Silence was my middle name. I felt persecuted. Is this what it was like to be a target of hate for no reason at all? We had to prepare our case with the help of NJEA. We had a month to formulate our defense and we had at least fifteen-character witnesses. The entire experience was similar to being on trial for something you didn't even know that you had done. It was the most petrifying experience I had ever encountered.

I can't say I could compare this event to my parents being imprisoned in a concentration camp because they were Jewish, but the idea that I had to defend myself against the administration, even though I had done nothing wrong was astonishing. The fact that I could lose my livelihood because of someone else's manufactured accusations was beyond alarming. The charges against us were completely bogus and we were never given an opportunity to present

any facts that could have ended the whole process. The event turned into a prolonged horrific nightmare. I could not comprehend on the most basic level why we were being treated so inequitably. Our hearing was set for July 13th, the anniversary of my mother's death. Talk about irony! The end result of our hearing was that the Board voted that we each receive a letter of reprimand in our file. This was counter to what the superintendent had requested, (e.g. increment withholding or tenure charges), which was effectively a pyrrhic victory. Boards generally never go against their superintendent's wishes, but even though this Board had, they felt that they couldn't totally dismiss the charges against us.

This event was life altering, for me. It forced me to recognize that maintaining a life filled with silence was no longer an option. It made me comprehend, on the deepest level, that even if you have done nothing wrong, a case can be made against you, and ultimately, it is your responsibility to vigorously fight to defend yourself. That was effectively my moment of truth. It created a revelatory flash in my mind where I saw the absolute damage, I had inflicted upon myself through the years of my complete acquiescence to silence. It was then, that I determined that I would not permit myself to live another moment of seeing any type of injustice perpetrated or allow myself to observe someone being treated unfairly or disrespectfully. I resolved that I would become a force to be reckoned with. I would never again idly sit on the sidelines of my life. I would actively participate in my life, no matter how challenging or uncomfortable it might become.

Within several years of this life-altering breakthrough, I was elected the president of my district's Education Association. We had 750 members and I pledged to work tirelessly on their behalf. I remained president for nine years and then succeeded as vice president for the next thirteen years. I held that position until my retirement. During the time I was an officer, I negotiated contracts, filed grievances, met regularly with Central Office Administration, spoke at Board meetings, and defended members' rights until the day I retired. It was the best pronouncement that I could have made to ultimately terminate the silence that had threaded so many years of my life. The irony of this dramatic transformation of my persona was that I soon realized how incredibly adept I was at public speaking. I was especially proficient at speaking extemporaneously. Apparently, my years of self-reflection and problem-solving in my mind had

been an excellent training ground and had given me the tools I needed to easily execute the duties of my new office. My voice was formidable and could not be silenced. I became the representative of choice for anyone in the district who needed assistance. My membership knew they could always count on me to provide a voice and unwavering support. I'm aware that my new role was far different than anything my father envisioned for me, but I also know that he was incredibly proud of the dramatic change that occurred. Somehow, I think he finally understood how important it was to speak out publicly whenever an injustice transpired. He didn't always like it, because he still thought I would get into trouble, but I was a woman on a mission. I felt compelled to make up for lost time because the silence had lasted for far too long and it needed to be conquered once and for all.

Finding Susi

Barbara Gilford



To rediscover my lost family, I travelled down to the ocean floor to that hidden place in the sand where our dreams sleep. My professor ordered, “Take a walk with someone.” We knew what he wanted. Like a good pupil I obeyed and then it was easy. There was my cousin Susi just waiting to be found since October 5th, 1942.

I had been so upset when I learned that Aunt Gretl and Uncle Hugo hadn’t escaped during those crucial three days in 1939 when Great Britain granted entry without a visa to the Jews of Czechoslovakia. The realists got on trains going West from Czechoslovakia and found sanctuary. Some parents, in an act of desperation and hope, put their children on *Kindertransports*. My family did neither and rode without tickets to the camps in the East.

Susi had been part of the imaginary world of my childhood. We played dolls and dress-up in her bedroom, which I envisioned as a miniature boudoir from Versailles. We spoke English with German accents, just like my father, Susie’s Uncle Johnny. I needed her and begged my father to try harder to find her.

I found Susi out of a sense of urgency as I traversed the border between the autumn and winter of my life. She was waiting for me in front of the British Museum at Russell Square in London. We walked to a nearby tea shop where we ate tiny sandwiches made salty with tears. I gave her an envelope of family photographs that traced the arc of her brief childhood. Eleven years of our Oma Clara, of her parents Gretl and Hugo, and of her curly headed self came back for Susi.

A five-foot work of art at age eleven, already a precious pearl, Susi is part of my inner being once again. Now we are grown-ups together, crossing the landscape of this last major stage of life. When you dive down to the bottom of the ocean, you will find the elixir of memory and love that will give you all the buoyancy you need for the rest of your journey.

Suzana “Susi” Spitzer and her parents, Gretl and Hugo Spitzer, were exterminated at Treblinka on October 5, 1942.

From Child of the Holocaust to Social Activist

Molly Honigsfeld

You had to be still and silent and not breathe if you were to survive. You couldn't move. "Jews are not really ever safe." I wondered if I could I live in silence so I practiced survival techniques throughout my life-- be ready to go, to run, to hide, be clever and courageous, just in case. And why am I practicing survival techniques? It's past history, it can't happen again. We are in America now. We are free.

How do I live and not show my hurt and pain for a family and life I never knew? How do I acknowledge my past but not scream? How can I forget? How can I go on? How do I survive this history that I can't talk about? How do I live a "normal" life? How do I understand who I am? I don't know how to answer those questions; so I am silent and soon it doesn't even seem real.

And this is where I break my silence, about a painful subject for me with regard to my parents and being a child of the Holocaust. I am terribly ashamed and humiliated and deeply pained. Growing up as a child of the Holocaust was surreal, living in a new country with new opportunities. I was, after all, the first born American in my family. We were told we were safe from the old world. Gas chambers, and Nazis were over. Never Again. We had no family that survived, no connection, no history apart from the concentration camps. Family life was dark, and at times, for me, brutal.

I was an unwanted child.

I came to find this out when I was in my mid-twenties. My mother, in a rare moment of conversation with me, told me. Here is her story, as I recall it: My mother, Bluma Lichtman, was 16 when her family was murdered. She was captured and taken into the camps. After she was liberated from Auschwitz, the women who helped her survive, made a shidach and introduced her to my father, Paul Honigsfeld. They both lost their entire families, but that's how it was. My father had a wife and child, who were murdered. He didn't want another family but didn't want

to be alone. My mother didn't think life was worth living without children, and so they agreed to have one child. That would be my sister, Sarah, who was born in Germany.

Not long after they arrived in the U.S. my mother found out that she was pregnant and was scared that my father would leave her. My father was the youngest of twelve and when his mother remarried, he was put out on the streets at the age of four or five, to fend for himself because she did not want her new husband to think he had another mouth to feed.

I have often thought about that moment when my mother told me I was unwanted. I wonder why she told me? Was it her guilt? Did she want to get it off her conscience, or just to be mean? What could I do with this information and the depth of pain I felt. But most brutal of all, my mother showed no remorse.

I was visiting my mother at her home in Florida. I was doing something in the dining area, and she just came out with it. "You know, Molly, I didn't want you." I thought my head would explode. "You were a mistake." Oh my god, can this get any worse? And she went on, "I tried to get an abortion and couldn't. I was afraid your father would leave me. When I finally told him, he prayed you would be a boy." I wanted to scream, but just went numb. I was so confused, and while it always seemed very mean on my mother's part to tell me this, I was grateful to learn the truth, even though she never said she was sorry. That always hurts the worst

The Holocaust was always a part of my life – I can't remember how or when I knew and became aware of it and how or why my parents told their stories, but it always seemed that it made them come to life again. My parents would tell stories to us with pride, but as soon as they remembered their loved ones, tears and quietness would surround us.

My home was dark in spirit. My parents worked hard and lamented their lost families. They were grateful for being in America. My friends' families were also affected by the Holocaust, as well as being recent immigrants, and they wouldn't talk about it. School wouldn't talk about it. We didn't talk, we didn't ask questions. There was no one to rescue me from this silence.

What was I to do? I felt deeply sensitized to the horrors of the war, death, gas ovens, murder, torture, starvation. I couldn't get these images out of my mind. I was angry.

I had a very difficult time growing up. I felt like something was wrong with me. My sister ran away to a neighbor for two weeks when I was born and refused to play with me. She was caught a few times trying to strangle me.

The only physicality I remember is, that my father gave me a few beatings. I couldn't tell you what I did to deserve the beatings. My mother did not protect me from this cruelty, and my sister and later my brother did not get beaten. The cruelest time came, when my father beat me with my beloved doll. Susie's arms and head came off as he hit me with her. I would never forgive him for this, even if he was a survivor.

One time, on a cloudy fall Sunday, something happened. I can't remember what it was. Perhaps it was after the beating with Susie. I was so angry I decided to run away. I left the apartment, ran around the block and was so cold and scared that I came back. No one really knew I ran away. I remember making an oath to myself that I had to make my life mean something. Such a little girl did nothing to deserve being beaten and feeling so unloved; she had to be put on this earth for a reason. I really held on to this belief. I think it saved my life.

When I was around six, I was sent to Talmud Torah. I hated Hebrew school and hated learning about a kind god and that you had to observe the commandments and respect your parents. I am thinking a lot about the Holocaust and the child beating. My father prayed all the time and also beat me. I didn't like praying. I became more rebellious.

When I was around sixteen, I went to the Newport Jazz Festival and heard Phil Ochs and other political singers. The Vietnam War was raging, Civil Rights demonstrations were on the news and lots of things were happening in the country that were rebellious and militant but also sought peace and love. It all awakened the fight in me. I would listen to folk and anti-war songs for hours. I knew nothing about politics, and I never heard anybody talk about current events.

My parents worked practically round the clock, and I was pretty much on my own. But when it came to college, I could only go if I still lived at home and it didn't cost much. At eighteen, I went to Hunter College in the Bronx. No sooner than I landed in the spring of 1968 when protests broke out everywhere and I tried to get involved. My friend Elaine and I would go looking for peace organizations and demonstrations to be part of.

My last year in college, I studied art and made pottery, when I wasn't protesting as part of the "movement." I never felt right about how I was so different from my family and couldn't be part of their world, yet I didn't feel a part of the movement's world either.

Emotionally, I tried to be happy, but I was very sad and dark. My friend, Sonia recommended that I try going into therapy to help with my unhappiness and depression. This was the late sixties and new psychotherapy communities were erupting all over the West Side of Manhattan. I loved the social approach to therapy, which had a focus on the group, rather than the individual. I learned how to support and help others whose emotional pain was preventing them from living the life they wanted. In helping my peers, I learned something about my strengths and weaknesses in relating to people. My world opened up to new possibilities. I developed a strength in building community. That was my answer and resolution to my painful family history. When I graduated College, friends helped me move out of my parents' home.

That's when I became a grass roots organizer. I finally belonged somewhere and had a reason to live. I learned not to be a victim; I was responsible for my life and could have a new family, friends and love in my life, even if I didn't grow up with it. My passion for organizing left little time to dwell on the past or indulge in nostalgia. I worked on grass roots campaigns around unfair housing and health care issues; built free and low-cost health clinics; fought for union rights, welfare rights; organized local election campaigns for grass roots candidates; the rights of independent and third-party candidates to gain access to the ballot and media attention, for fairness in the electoral process for women and gay rights and other left causes. I always had plenty to do and keep me busy. I never focused on my past and was very happy to create a good life and accept it for what I could make of it. I was open to new things, always and everywhere.



The New York City Unemployed and Welfare Council summer youth program in Jamaica, Queens which I organized in 1976.

Despite all this, I am grateful for what I do know, for the strength I feel as a child of the Holocaust. I've overcome the emotional stranglehold of resentment and anger. I appreciate my life and the loving relationships in it. I am proud of what I had to do to overcome the past. When I think about where my strength comes from, I think about my parents and how strong they had to be to survive. I carry that heritage with me. Even so, I was alone and had to take care of myself, always. There was no one else to account to or for but myself. When my loneliness would hit new lows, I remembered the story of the camps. After a good cry, I realized my situation wasn't the worst, and that keep me from total despair.

In Spite of Everything

Janet Jacobs

When I decided to take this course, it was with lots of trepidation. I don't read books or watch movies about the Holocaust. I've never written about my parents' experiences or what it was like to be raised by people who had experienced what they did. I was born in Munich in 1948. My parents and I were sponsored by HIAS and arrived at Ellis Island on October 29, 1949. I had my first birthday on the ship. My parents were sent to Newark, New Jersey. My father was given a job with a scrap metal dealer in Newark. After a few days, they rented a small cold water flat in a home owned by a Jewish woman. My parents were observant and so happy to be here.



Mom, Dad and me (1950, Newark)

My sister Marilyn was born a year later. Both of my parents did not speak English. Both went to night school to learn. My father went to work for an elderly European Jewish man and my mother stayed home with my sister and myself.

I only have warm, happy memories of my family life. My sister and I were the center of their universe.

My parents' friends were other people like themselves. I somehow understood that their friends were like them. Maybe it was their accent, maybe it was the bits and pieces of conversation. I vaguely feel like they would speak about the "camps," but not in a way that made me feel afraid. I knew I had no uncles, aunts or grandparents. Somehow, I did not feel like this hurt me or that I was missing anything. My parents were always loving and kind, and they were enough.

My mother survived Auschwitz with a niece who was two years younger than she was. Regina lived in Flushing, New York. My mother and Regina spoke very frequently, and I regarded her an aunt because she was mother's age. She was married to Leon (also a Holocaust survivor) and they had three children. I can only say that times together were filled with laughter and fun. Regina was more outspoken about the Holocaust than my mother.

I always knew that my mother lost her five siblings and both parents. My father, Irving, was in a slave labor camp. He lost seven siblings and his parents. He was a quiet, wonderful, gentle man who took pride in his religion and his family. Both he and my mother never raised a hand to us. Sometimes in the night I would hear my mother scream, and I would hear my father tell her it would be okay, and not to upset the children. I've often thought that considering what they had been through, they could have been angry, or crazy protective, but they were not. We were raised in a wonderful home. My sister and I knew that we would become teachers (at about six years old) because it was a respectable job, and that we would be able to stay home and raise our children. We were respectful to our parents and elders, because that was the way it was in the world. We understood that our parents had lost everything and that we didn't want to make them sad or hurt them. Incredibly, we didn't. I had many friends, and nice boyfriends. I don't think our parents were more protective of us than other parents would be.

I knew that our Jewishness was a very important part of our lives. Our traditions and culture held an important place in our home. My father rescued his father's Torah and returned to Poland to retrieve it after the war. My father was always active in *schul*. My mother was a traditional Jewish mother. We were always needing a hat, a sweater, were warned about the

“Goyim” and understood absolutely that a non-Jew would never, ever, ever be acceptable as a mate.

I went to college, became a teacher, married a handsome Israeli (now 44 years). Our two sons went to Jewish Day Schools, married two nice Jewish girls (who both went to Jewish Day Schools). Thank G-D I still have my mother. She now speaks about the Nazis. It is very, very painful for me to imagine what my parents went through. I am unable to read about the Holocaust or watch movies about it.



My multi-generational family; Mom (in red) is honored at a Yom HaShoah program at Temple Beth Ahm, Springfield, NJ. Our affectionate name for Mom is “our favorite girl.”

Do I know people whose parents treated their children differently because of their horrendous experiences? Yes. My parents absolutely spared us. They did everything to ensure that we had a peaceful, loving home. Did I understand how much was taken away and lost? Yes.

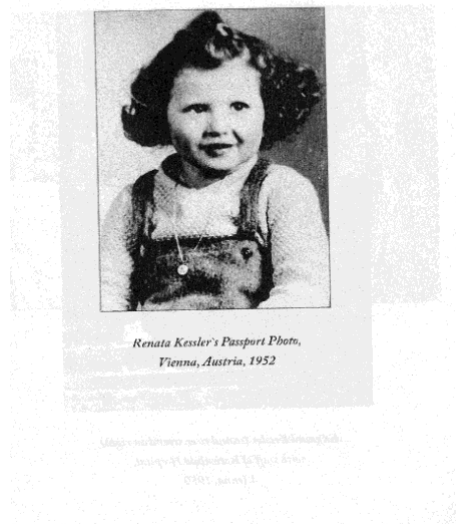
Our parents were both treated and cared for in a way that reflected our upbringing. Our care for our parents (my father when he was sick and my mother now) is endless and boundless. We don't know another way.

Lost and Found: A Journey of Self-Discovery
Renata Kessler

Some cataclysmic, life-altering event happened to me before I was born. This event separated me from life like an invisible wall. I felt untouchable, Rapunzel in her tower. I was in shock but didn't know it—the shock of the Holocaust. I can only describe a vague feeling of having been severed from my family tree. At a young age, I became aware of being unable to give my full attention to the present. This began to happen at about age six or seven when we first moved to America. It took me another fifty years to realize that disassociation was my denial of the Holocaust and its trauma.

I was born in 1946, virtually on the funeral pyre of my family and my people. I always knew I was different from other children, as if I were born wearing an invisible “H” for Holocaust. Other children seemed to avoid me. I was different and I didn't know why, but I knew it was a dark secret that my parents kept from me. Mentally and physically exhausted after the war, my parents had nowhere to shelter me after I was born, and wanted to put me up for adoption in Vienna. A young nurse, who later became a nun, said to my mother, “Don't give her up. She is so beautiful. I will help you!” And *Schwester* Hilda became my first nanny.

APPENDIX



When we moved to American, she sent me her wedding picture, a beautiful bride dressed in white, with flowers in her hair. “Where is her husband?” I asked my mother. “I think she married Jesus,” said my mother, much to my bewilderment.

We were transplanted from Europe to America because my father, Edmund, did not want to raise me among former Nazis or their sympathizers in Austria, where I was born. I was overwhelmed by a new country, a new language, and a new culture. In the 1950s, no one wanted to hear about the Holocaust—it was squashed, and so was a large part of myself. Psychologists in the field of PTSD claim that “psychic numbing” and “emotional anesthesia” begins soon after a traumatic event. Many psychologists and therapists in the postwar world were reticent about the Holocaust and relatives talked about it in quiet whispers behind closed doors, while we children played.

My parents did not want to spoil my innocence, but I knew something was amiss, being told little of this story. I had no grandparents, or a large extended family as many of my friends had. At ten years old, by the memorial *Yitzkor* lights, during Yom Kippur, I was told my grandparents, and many of my aunts, uncles, and cousins had died in World War Two and that a kindly Christian farmer had saved my parents. I was given a cleaned up, sanitized version of what had really happened. It was only some fifty years later, when I found my father’s diary in our linen closet, that I had it translated, and the grizzly details emerged about the Lwow Ghetto and the Janowska Concentration Camp where my father had been interned. Before my father died in the United States, he told me that he never translated the diary from his original Polish language for fear that it would fall in the hands of unfriendly strangers. He feared that someone might take retaliation against him and his family for exposure of heinous crimes against the Jewish people and other groups targeted by the Nazis. Not all of the perpetrators, their accomplices, and sympathizers had been caught. There are too many who still want to invalidate, deny, recreate, or eradicate the history of the Holocaust.

On Father’s Day, nine years after my father died, I revisited his grave. At the last moment, my mother told me she wasn’t up to it, so I went by myself. As I drove up to the cemetery at Sharon Gardens, in Valhalla, New York, my father’s unmistakable voice came

suddenly to mind. “So, you finally came.” It was as if he that had been waiting for me all that time. I knelt before the gravestone, engraved with the eternal flame and the Kessler family name. A thought surfaced in my mind, perhaps my father’s, “You never know what you can do until you try. Write a book about history.” I thought that “history” meant “art history,” since art had been my passion since childhood. Time passed, and the idea faded. Several years later, my mother passed away. It was from her letters, journals, and my father’s diary, which I found upon her death, that a story begins to emerge. It then became clear to me, that it wasn’t art history to which my father’s voice alluded, but my own family’s history.

I was fifteen years old when I first began to help my father translate his Holocaust diary, which he wrote between 1942-1944 while hidden by a Polish farm family in an underground bunker. After translating a few of his poems about the Lwow Ghetto, I noticed that reliving these memories proved to be too much for him. My mother, fearing he would have another heart attack, hid the diary. “One day you will publish it,” she told me, “You have a gift for writing just like your father.” Time passed and this experience faded from my consciousness.

Several decades later, in the disarray after my father’s death, my mother couldn’t find the diary, or so she claimed. It wasn’t until her death, eleven years later, while cleaning her apartment, that I found the yellow faded manuscript in a linen closet. Not being able to read Polish, I had it translated into English, at first by my parents’ friends, and then by a professional translator, himself a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto. Thus, began my journey to meet my parents’ rescuers and to find the other survivors of the bunker who were hidden with them; twenty-four in all.

I wrote to Kazimierz Kalwinski, the son of the farmers who saved my family to inform him of my mother’s death. As a teenager, he was a primary caretaker of twenty-four hidden Jews on his father’s farm. Kazimierz wanted to meet me and I wanted to know more about my family’s experience in hiding. A series of letters went back and forth, translated by his grandson. In 1998, I went to Poland for the first time to meet him. It was an emotional experience returning to Poland, the birthplace of my ancestors for centuries.

Kalwinski Family Home
167 Warszawska Street
Lwow, Poland



Returning to Poland, I was full of tears, tears of being rejected and severed, and tears of love and gratitude at being embraced by the warm arms and kind faces of those who had risked their lives to save us from a blood-thirsty enemy. I showed Kazimierz pages from my father's diary. Together we conceived the idea of writing our shared history for future generations. From there, I went on a mission to find the other survivors of the bunker who contributed their experiences to the book. This mission took me to Israel, *Rzeszow*, Poland and *Lviv*, Ukraine, where my family was savagely murdered by those who wanted their property and were envious of their success.

Lwow, Poland, now called *Lviv*, Ukraine, had once been the equal of Krakow, Prague, and Vienna. It had been an impressive city, now the infrastructure was crumbling. Most impressive, however, was the humble farmhouse on the outskirts of the city in small *Holosko*, where my parents' lives were saved by Poles who risked their lives to do so, against a savage and

deadly foe. The Kalwinskis hid twenty-four Jews in a root cellar under a barn for almost two years until the Russian liberation of the city. Circumstances were very difficult, needless to say, but miraculously everyone survived, even though there were some close calls with the Nazis.

While I was working on the book, my late partner, George, like my father, was afraid I might be targeted for exposure of these crimes by anti-Semitic groups. Despite their fears, my loyalty was to bear witness to my father's experiences, and ultimately, to record this part of Jewish history.

I was rejected several times, before finding a publisher who would help me bring this story to light. "We already have too many Holocaust books," I was told, but Feliks Tych, historian and director of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, read the manuscript and was moved. "This is my story, as well as yours, the facts are different, but the story is the same. It must be told," he said. In December, 2007, the book was first published as *Przezyc Holokaust We Lwowie* (Surviving the Holocaust in Lwow). I sent the English translation to Antony Polonsky, a scholar at the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. He wrote the introduction for the English edition, *The Wartime Diary of Edmund Kessler*, which followed in 2010, published by Academic Studies Press in Boston and included in the series, *The Jews of Poland*.

When the book was first published, I shared a platform with Feliks Tych and later with Antony Polonsky at both Seton Hall University and University College in London. It was not surprising that the son of the rescuers was reluctant to participate with us about his family's rescue activities during the Holocaust. It made me realize that to this day those who helped Jews are still reluctant to make their efforts public for fear of retaliation by anti-Semites. However, my relationship with our rescuers endures.

The Kalwinskis have been acknowledged by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust archive to which I donated the actual diary. The dedication ceremony was bittersweet, because my parents were not there to see it, nor did any of the survivors come. They were too emotionally volatile, too ill, and too infirm, to make the trip to Jerusalem. My cousins, friends, and descendants of

Lwow survivors living in Israel, joined me at the Archive to mourn the loss of their families in Poland.

The publication of my parents' story of survival, has helped me to reclaim the lost part of myself. During my presentations, I have often been asked if I would have been able to hide Jews if I was in the same position as the Poles who hid my parents. I can only say that I hope I would, but we never know who we really are until we are tested.

The first and second generations of survivors are never really finished mourning our losses, especially such deep and profound ones. I have dealt with mine through creativity. In coming years, I hope to move this story from the page-to-the-stage. I am currently working on the script, as well as teaching, speaking, and sharing my parents' experiences with others, as a way of bearing witness.

A new generation wants to learn about the Holocaust. The *Wartime Diary of Edmund Kessler* is dedicated to them, in memory of my parents, their rescuers, and the other members of the bunker who endured this life and death struggle for survival together.

The Kalwinskis, risked their lives and those of their family, to save twenty-four Jews from the Nazi reign of terror between 1942-1944. When asked if she was afraid of being caught and punished with death for hiding Jews during the Holocaust, Katarzyna Kalwinska responded, "If God wanted me to die because I hid Jews, I was ready to go up on the cross, like Jesus." Her son, Kazimierz Kalwinski, said he would do the same thing now under similar circumstances, "Because a person's life is only worth what he does for others."

Strength for the Mission

Myron Kolski

My parents and grandmother recounted their stories to me as a young child. Not wanting to frighten me, they seemed to relate them as adventures, just like the Grimms' fairy tales that were also read to me in Polish routinely.

As Jews, if we ask the question, "Where is G-d," the answer we are given is "G-d is all around us." Our Jewish prayer books seem to assume confident belief in G-d ... that if we are fortunate this belief will survive within us. While this belief does not give us immortality, it does give us strength.

My mother had a very difficult childhood. My maternal grandmother died when my mother was very young. The woman her father subsequently married was very harsh and mean to her, not motherly at all. She was eighteen years old when, in 1930, my mother traveled to Warsaw and got a job in the butcher shop owned by her aunt and uncle. It is important to know that my mother was a devout Catholic, as were all members of her family.

My mother, Stasia, prayed throughout this time of upheaval and occupation by and war with Germany. Stasia got her strength through prayer. She asked only for more power and strength as the obstacles grew in size and frequency. My mother truly believed that she was, at that time of her life, chosen to save my father's family, which became her family. As she put it, "Given this mission, I only pray and ask, please G-d give me power and strength so I can do my best to overcome these obstacles and endurance so I can make the right choices in this time of evil and darkness."

My father's family came to Warsaw in 1939 after the Germans began to target Jews in Kalis for expulsion to work camps. He arrived in Warsaw with his parents and his sister. Other members of his extended family also came to Warsaw or the area around it. My grandfather's brother and his family (wife, daughter, and in-laws) came from Lodz and found a farmer outside Warsaw who allowed them to hide on his farm. Of course, the farmer was well compensated, but

he was greedy. My paternal grandmother's sister, her deaf husband and their two sons headed towards Warsaw but eventually migrated beyond the city to small towns around Krakow and southwest. The deaf husband was a "meister" knitter and carpenter. He was very skilled in mechanical processes which were in demand. These skills enabled him to make fraudulent documents, to build hidden compartments, and to make blackout curtains. Also, the network of other deaf individuals (both Jewish and not) was to become a hidden asset as things got worse.

In 1941, a cousin of my father's lived in Warsaw with her husband and son. The husband owned a textile mill and a sewing factory in the Ghetto. He later moved the business outside the Ghetto and transferred ownership twice, as was regulated. If a Jew owned any commercial property or business, he/she was forced by the German authorities to transfer that property to non-Jews and that non-Jew had to transfer it to yet another non-Jew. Of course, there were ways of transferring the business to trusted Gentiles who were paid for undertaking this risk. The agreement was that some income generated by the business would still go to the original owner. My father, usually the go-between in making these deals, also received compensation.

Other members of the family group living in Warsaw were my mother's cousins: a Polish policeman, his wife and their infant son. It was this cousin who introduced my parents to each other. He did not know that my father was a Jew. My father had an Aryan appearance, spoke excellent Polish and never adhered to the regulations requiring Jews to wear a Yellow badge.

In October of 1942 my parents married in a Catholic church. My father did not disclose to my mother that he was Jewish. The "story" that my father told my mother was that he was working as a merchant both in and out of the ghetto and was assisting Jews because they promised to pay him in land for their safety through the war. Again, my father's appearance was Aryan and he spoke excellent Polish and even knew how to say Catholic prayers in Polish and some Latin. As a Jew, he could not participate in commerce, own a manufacturing facility, or secure employment. His relationship with my mother's family enabled him to exist as an Aryan, to pass easily between the ghetto and unwallled Warsaw, to be recognized but not pursued by other Polish officers and/or extortionists (and if pursued to offer a bribe for silence). He was also able to buy processed raw materials in the ghetto and sell them within Aryan Warsaw at a profit.

This was extremely important, since survival necessitated inventing various means of earning money. This was true even after receiving meager financial assistance from the Joint Distribution Committee for Jews in Hiding, with support from the Council to Aid Jews (Zegota).

After the failed 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the Germans regarded Warsaw as a mostly Aryan populated city. They were not convinced all the Jews had been captured or killed. Therefore, they redirected their efforts at ferreting out hidden Jews. During early 1944 the Germans attacked any discovered Jews and/or their protectors/hiders. In midsummer 1944, the Polish Underground Army in Warsaw rose up in defiance. All areas of Warsaw became battlefields. Simultaneously, the Russian Air Force was bombing the German troops as they retreated. The Russians were conducting a land grab in Poland and forcing the Germans westward, back towards Germany.

During this time, it became clear to my immediate and extended family (sixteen people in total) that they could no longer be sheltered as they had before. One cousin and her young son were able to survive in a hidden compartment in an apartment building. Her husband survived in a concealed basement bunker. Twenty-nine other Jews hid in that same bunker. The thirteen others stayed together in a tunnel which housed conduits containing electric cables for the trolley system. They soon learned that they were "sharing" that space with trolley utility workmen who were also fearful of the German threats above ground.

After several days, the Germans discovered the tunnel and forced my family out. Once above ground, they were put into separate groups. My grandmother, my aunt, and my grandmother's sister were sent to Stutthof. My parents were arrested and utilized as forced labor by Germans (my mother was a cook; my father, who was very strong, did various heavy labor jobs). My grandfather's location and fate were unknown until much later. (When we were already settled in the US, we learned that he had died in Auschwitz in early 1945.) Four cousins were somehow able to escape by fleeing from a stopped transit train. They survived. Two other cousins (Catholics from my mother's side of the family) were confined in a church and later escaped and survived. One cousin was wounded during an altercation with the aforementioned trolley men and later shot and killed by the Germans.

As described above, my father was instrumental in the survival of a good number of the extended family. Out of the original twenty in this particular group of relatives, fourteen survived (including three hidden children). My father, of course, did not do this alone. My father's efforts were part of an organized network which included my mother, a couple of cousins and their wives.

When the war finally ended, my parents returned to Kalis to await the birth of their child. I was born on May 3, 1945. My birth quickly became a sign of hope to many others. There had been no talk of having children during the war. But now that the war had ended and there was a new baby to cuddle and protect, there was hope. There are many photos of me being held by different women. Each looked at me as though I were a gift.



I am a "gift of life." Me, age 2 ½ years, with unnamed women

My parents went to Kalis so that they could determine if any of their business holdings physically outlasted the war and if they could reclaim any of the machinery that was still there for the taking. My grandmother's sister had also returned to Kalis after surviving a death march from Stutthof. Soon after I was born, my parents took me and travelled to Lodz to try and reconnect with any other family members who may have survived. In Lodz, we received mail from my Grandmother and Aunt, who had survived Stutthof, only to have the Germans set them adrift in the Baltic Sea. The Germans emptying the camp believed the barges would capsize in the stormy weather and that those aboard would perish. Luckily, some Swedish fisherman intercepted the few barges and rescued my grandmother and aunt. They were now living in Malmo, Sweden. My parents had assumed that my grandmother and aunt had not survived.

Poland was now occupied and controlled by the Russians, which did not make it any easier for Jews. After a 1946 incident/pogrom in Kielce during which forty Jews were killed, my parents realized that Poland was still not a place where Jews could exist safely. They decided to try to get to Sweden, which was open to displaced persons. Sometime later that year, we were able to join my aunt and grandmother in Sweden. Before we left Poland, my parents needed to exchange the valuables they had hidden during the war (which they could not easily remove from the country) for something they could transport. They traded the valuables for sixty-seven industrial sewing machines. These machines and our family made it safely to Stockholm, Sweden where we lived happily until 1953. In Sweden, my parents were able to set up a contract sewing business in which the sixty-seven machines were utilized.

During the high holidays the Jews in Stockholm (many of whom were displaced persons) attended services at a local synagogue. Many found old friends who had also survived. Most made new friendships, which allowed Jews to share their stories of survival. Although we were content and comfortable in Sweden, my parents felt we were displaced persons still living too close to potential enemies. They started the process to travel to the United States. The list was long. Finally, at the end of 1952 our number came up, and we flew to Idlewild Airport, New York City in January 1953. The sewing machines made the long journey by ship. Having the sewing machines allowed my parents to set up a clothing contracting business in Manhattan, which they operated until moving to Florida in 1975.

No one would be able to survive the horrors of war and the Holocaust without being permanently scarred either consciously or subconsciously. While writing this essay, it became clear to me how my parents' experiences affected their personalities and decision making and how that, in turn, affected my life.

First and foremost, my parents were resilient. They faced every challenge with a can-do attitude. They did not easily accept my giving up too easily, which I often did.

My parents were loudly and angrily argumentative with each other (probably in part due to the deceptive way in which my father married my mother). Each felt he or she was the "boss" when it came to making decisions (probably from how they were forced to exist during the war when they were not together or with their group). I do not easily take direction from anyone either at home or at work. I become argumentative, stubborn, and often shut down.

My parents always had a need to be prepared for any adversity or difficult situation. My mother kept a closet filled with rice, flour, sugar, etc. They always dealt in cash, no credit cards. Because, during the war, they had learned the value of the deaf cousin being able to work through his hands-on abilities, they learned how to be a mechanic and a seamstress, both of which were important in running their clothing factory. They also started training me in these skills. By the time I was in high school I was working in their sewing factory. Among other tasks, they taught me how to clean the machines, how to change pulleys, how to change oil, and how to keep the work flowing smoothly by sorting components and making bundles. This was their way of assuring that I would be prepared to survive, if need be.

I also feel that my love of being a Boy Scout came from the need to know how to survive and that it is important to help others. The Boy Scout motto, after all, is "Be Prepared." As a scout, I learned First Aid, how to fish and cook outside, how to shoot an arrow, and how to work in a group. I am always ready to help anyone who either asks for help or, sometimes, even before I am asked. Finally, I cannot throw anything away that I might one day need. My two-car garage currently is a no-car garage.

My parents always seemed to be stressed and not easily relaxed. You can never be too safe. This even carried over to my school. The minute there was an altercation at my middle school, they took me out and enrolled me in a private school for grades 7 through 12. They wanted to keep me safe. Of course, we all want to be safe, but my fears keep me from travelling to certain places, especially Israel. My wife has been working on that one, though.

My mother had a rapidly flammable temper toward anyone she felt was "against" her. There were times I was truly afraid both physically and emotionally. Could she ever think of me

as her "enemy" and try to hurt me or escape from me? In truth, however, when my mother was not stressed or angry, she called me her precious jewel. I have to admit that I also am quick to get angry.

My mother remained concerned about unrest in Poland, as she had many relatives still living there. She would never trust Russia. She never gave up Polish as her first language. I enjoy being able to speak Polish when the opportunity arises. Our new neighbors are Polish and I am often able to speak about the Polish side of my family with them.

My mother never really trusted anyone. This is probably again directly related to the deception of my father. She only learned about my father being a Jew when a young cousin of his turned up at my parents' door when her parents were killed. I have come to realize that I too deceived my mother. As an adult, I decided to choose Judaism as my religion. This was a difficult decision as I did not want to seem to be favoring one parent over the other. As part of the deception, I insisted that my wife and I be married first by a Justice of the Peace. My mother attended this ceremony. We were then married by a Rabbi but my mother did not know about this ceremony.



Civil wedding, June 8, 1972
Bronx Supreme Court Judge Gellenoff officiating



Jewish wedding, June 11, 1972
Van Cortland Jewish Center, Rabbi Sodden officiating

When my wife and I learned we were expecting our first child, my wife wisely insisted that my mother be told that our children were going to be raised Jewish. My mother took the news well, never questioned this decision, and proudly stood on the *bima* during both my daughters' bat mitzvahs. I do not know if she ever guessed that I had converted.

I do not trust many people with my true feelings and, therefore, have not made or kept many friends. I suppose it could be said I did not even trust my own mother to love me although I did not choose her religion.

While my parents were happy about having a child (a sign of hope), they were workaholics with very little time to nurture a child. I admit that I also have a hard time being nurturing. I left the parenting of my two daughters to my wife. Even now, I have a hard time relating to the joys of being a grandfather.

Both my parents were most comfortable when surrounded only by others who had the same experiences they had. When they thought I was old enough, they and their group of friends would share photos and more dramatic accounts of their experiences. The group, known as the Kalishers, met several times a year. I usually accompanied my parents to these meetings. To this day, I very often try to steer a conversation into a discussion about my family's experiences during the war. While I am comfortable doing this, those to whom I am speaking would usually rather discuss something else.

In some smaller ways, understanding the hate my parents and extended family experienced during the war has hit me and my wife directly. We have both experienced anti-Semitism. We do not let it go unanswered. The harshest anti-Semitic experience I had was while working at a major ladies' undergarment company. I had taken the job with the hope of great opportunity for growth of position and income. My wife and I decided that rather than move immediately, I would give the job a six-month trial. This necessitated my leaving my family in New Jersey during the work week and being home only late Friday night through Sunday night. This was stressful enough, but the stress was only just beginning. When the high holidays were approaching, I requested time off to observe Rosh Hashanah. This request was not received well. A meeting on the matter was conducted during which comments such as, "What are we supposed to do? Ask them to drop their pants before we hire them." This was said by the second highest person in management. The horror of hearing this statement brought back a memory of a story my dad had told about the same comment being made to him when he was stopped on the Aryan side by Polish policemen. He actually had a letter from a urologist stating that severe STD

caused him to have to be circumcised. This was upsetting enough, but the fact that the CEO, who was Jewish, thought the way to "handle" the situation was to arrange for me to be offered a better paid position in another area of the corporation rather than handle the anti-Semitism made it worse. I felt as if I were being paid for my silence. I decided to quit and luckily was re-hired by my previous employer (a *shomer shabbos* company), one of the many competitors in the industry.

My wife's family did not experience the Holocaust to the same intensity as mine did. Her mother, maternal grandparents, great grandparents and aunt had already come to the United States by 1929. My wife's paternal grandparents died in the camps. Her father began to realize that to be safe they had to flee Europe in the early 1930s. He began obtaining paperwork for safe passage to Trinidad and was the first of the brothers to leave Poland. Every two years, he was able to send for another of his four brothers. However, the oldest brother would not leave because he could not be assured there would be kosher food. He died in Auschwitz. One brother, who did escape, saw his wife and two young daughters being taken away by the Germans but was held back by another brother so that he too would not be taken away. My wife did have many cousins who survived the camps and a few who did not.

We both strongly believe that the Holocaust must never be forgotten. We have recently been attending Holocaust Remembrance Day observations. I had previously attended such observations with my parents during the 1960s through 1980s but had stopped for reasons I can only guess as being too "busy." Hearing first hand stories being related by the few first survivors who are alive and able to recount their tales of survival chill us to the bone. But, they also remind us that we are a strong and resilient people. Never again!

**Jacques and Renée:
A Holocaust Survivor and His American Daughter**
Renée Riczker

The silence lasts a long, long time. My brother and I instinctively know not to question why. We know our father is fragile at times like this. We don't want to upset him or stir things up to make it worse for him. Or for us. Sometimes Dad seems almost catatonic - staring into space, smoking his cigarette in silence. That ever-present Chesterfield with its thin trail of white smoke emanating from his fingers. We know his thoughts are troubled. He doesn't speak. His ice-blue eyes stare right through me if I say something to him. It's like he doesn't even see me. What is he thinking? At times like this, I actually feel as though I can figure out what he's thinking; we've been through this many times before. My father is haunted by a traumatic past that I am not privy to. It's a past that is so filled with horror that he cannot speak of it. Horror so enormous that it must be swallowed. Yet I feel it, too. I feel it like a stone in my gut. Like I've swallowed it, too. Hushed secrets. Sad secrets. Terrifying secrets. Secrets that lay heavy and dark over our house like an ominous storm cloud ready to burst. Secrets that make me scared. I'm pretty sure my father is still scared, too. Even now, thirty years after his family was forcibly taken from their Paris apartment and sent to Drancy internment camp and then to their deaths at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

My father's family moved from Romania to Paris in 1929. My father was born two years later. His mother, Hana Lea, died shortly thereafter and my grandfather then married a Jewish woman from Poland. My father, the youngest of four children, was the only one in the family who was a French citizen.

One by one they disappeared. The first to go was his oldest brother Max. Max once escaped the Gestapo by climbing out the skylight of their apartment building. They eventually came for him another day when he couldn't escape. Then, they came for his brother Joseph. Joseph tried using an alias to avoid detection. It didn't work. They got him, too. Next, his step-mother Sura went out to buy food and never returned. A German soldier had been killed in the

market square that day and Sura was taken away in retaliation. Finally, his father Saul, a shoemaker, disappeared, too. Jacques, age eleven, was alone in a city ravaged by war. Not knowing if he'd ever see his family again. The enormity of that is hard to fathom. He once said he came home to a ransacked, empty apartment with a Nazi symbol on the door. I don't know which time that was, though.

How did he survive? I know that a kind couple helped him part of the time. And I also know that he was starving because why else would he have eaten raw potatoes and turnips? Why would the honest father I knew have stolen farm produce for his older sister to sell on the black market? He still felt guilty for that. When my dad occasionally gave snippets of information like this, I knew to hoard them away in my memory because they would be few and far between. I'm sure he wanted to spare us from knowing the extent of the hatred and violence that could be visited on someone just because of their religious beliefs. Such knowledge could make you feel hunted like an animal, persecuted, always looking over your shoulder, wondering who you can trust and who would turn on you in a second. Therefore, the secrets were necessary.

Despite my father's efforts to protect me, I knew there were many terrible secrets and I wanted to know what they were. The secrets cast a constant shadow of grief and fear over our household. This included the secret that my dad's family was Jewish. I figured that part out on my own, though, years before he told me when I was fifteen. How did I know? I knew because I learned to be constantly vigilant. I learned to be quiet and observe. I listened like a hawk for any clue that might inadvertently slip out. Never questioning, just listening. This is how I assembled bit by bit, piece by piece, like papers in a collage, a fraction of the unspoken secrets in my family history. Though my father and his sister died decades ago, taking their secrets to the grave with them, my yearning to know lives on.

It was difficult for me to become my own person. It was hard to assert my independence, to figure out what I wanted, and to make my own decisions. This was not so much because I didn't want to, but rather because it was so hard for my father to let me grow up. I don't know

which one of us experienced more anxiety around the issue of my burgeoning independence. It ended up being impossible for either of us to let go gracefully.

It was always necessary to avoid upsetting my father, even if it was at my own expense. An example happened in fifth grade when the music teacher visited my class to tell us that we would be able to study an instrument that year. He demonstrated a number of instruments to the class. I was captivated by the cheerful sounds of the silver flute. That night after dinner, I showed my parents the music teacher's written announcement. I told them that I wanted to play the flute. My father preferred the clarinet. He stood by his seat at the head of the table and announced that I could learn to play like Benny Goodman. I was aware of Benny Goodman, but I was a girl, so I didn't think much of aspiring to be like him.



Dad and me, age 7



Dad and me, age 16

A few nights later, my parents accompanied me to the meeting in the school auditorium where each student's instrument would be determined. We lined up with the other potential musicians and waited our turn to speak with the instructor. I desperately wanted to play the flute. When we reached the front of the line, my father told the teacher that I wanted to play the clarinet. Feeling deflated, I didn't say anything. The teacher looked at my teeth and determined

that my overbite made me a suitable candidate for the clarinet. I didn't object. I practiced my clarinet with determination and seriousness throughout my school career. I earned first chair in the concert band and won a medal in a state-wide classical music competition. Sometimes, though, I wonder how much happier I would have been had I been allowed to study the instrument I was truly interested in.

When I was a senior in high school, I wanted to go away to college. I had good grades and I fantasized about going to a good university. I wanted to study languages or English. But to say so was out of the question. I remember standing in the basement with my father. His pale blue eyes fixed on me from behind his thick glasses. He told me I'd be going to the local community college in the fall. After that, I'd commute to the nearest university. He said he hoped I'd never leave home. I wouldn't have to because he'd eventually make an apartment for me in the basement.

He also told me that I was going to study accounting, a good field that would provide a good income. Then, he told me to call a local CPA and ask him if he agreed that it was a good field and if there were opportunities for women in accounting. (After all, this was the mid-1970's.) He told me to go use the phone in his and my mother's bedroom. I didn't want to make that phone call. I procrastinated. He persisted. He hounded me until, finally, I acquiesced. I went to my parents' room and stood by the nightstand. I tossed the phone book onto the bed, then stood there staring at the black phone. Reluctantly, I flipped through the yellow pages and selected a random CPA. With a sick, nervous feeling I dialed the number. The man answered and I asked him the dreaded questions. What was the guy going to say? Of course, he said, "Accounting is a wonderful field to go into. It provides me with job satisfaction and a good income. There are many opportunities in accounting for women today. I strongly recommend that you major in accounting." I thanked him, then hung up the phone, deeply embarrassed. I went to the living room where my father was sitting in his easy chair smoking a cigarette. He spat a shred of tobacco from his lip, then asked me what the CPA had said. I reported the conversation to him and he was glad. I was not.

My father didn't want me to date. But once I started college, I began seeing someone. After the first time my boyfriend came over to our house, my father bluntly asked me if I'd been kissed. When I said yes, he made fun of my boyfriend's looks. After we'd dated for a couple of years, my boyfriend and I decided to get married. I was only twenty years old. My father told me that he was going to object during the wedding ceremony.

“This isn't the right person for you. Besides, you're too young to marry. Your mother was twenty-one before we got married.”

Knowing that my father might make a scene at the church, I was nervous and dreaded my wedding day. I guess my father thought better of his plan, though, and the ceremony went smoothly. My brother and I clung to each other sobbing in the receiving line at my wedding. I remember the guests seemed confused about what was going on. I felt as if I were doing something terribly wrong. I felt that I was betraying and abandoning my family. Throughout that fifteen-year marriage, my father and my husband never got along with each other.

The day after our wedding, my husband and I moved 2,000 miles away to a military base in New Mexico. It was a relief to be so far away. With the desert wind in my hair, I finally felt independent and free. I soon felt guilty again when my father called and told me that I had abandoned my mother by getting married. He said she was lonely and had no one to go shopping with now.

Eighteen months later, my husband got orders for Germany. We'd be living there for three years. At the time, I couldn't understand my father's anxiety over this matter. The war had happened so long ago. When my daughter was born in Augsburg, my parents didn't come visit. I felt sad about that.

While I lived in Europe, my father said he wanted me to visit Auschwitz and take pictures for him. I knew that would be extremely upsetting for him. In a minor act of disobedience, I didn't do it. I felt guilty, yet empowered. How dare he try to make me a party to

his self-flagellation? I wasn't about to provide him with something that would put him over the edge. I wanted him to get over the past and live in the present.

After returning to the States, I eventually lived about sixty miles from home. It was often difficult for me to choose my husband over my parents. As I continued to try to live my life and be my own person as a wife and mother, my father's response was severe and cruel. I remember sitting at the desk in our little den in Buffalo talking with him on the phone. The phone cord was all twisted and I was thinking I'd untangle it after our conversation.

“We haven't seen you in a while. Did you get your hair cut since we saw you?”

“No.”

“Well, your mom and I think you'd look so much nicer if your hair was shorter.”

“I like my hair long.”

“It would look better shoulder length. You should get it cut.”

I sighed and didn't respond.

“We want you to come stay with us next weekend.”

“Oh, we can't. We're going to be at Mike's parents' house.” I braced myself because I knew this wouldn't go over well.

“You always go to their house. When's the last time you came here?”

We didn't go there because of the anxiety it always caused me. But, I couldn't tell him that. I couldn't tell him that being around him gave me stomach aches and insomnia. I could tell by his voice that his anger was rising. I could picture his lips pursing and the vein in his forehead starting to bulge.

“You go to church. Don't you know the Bible says 'Honor your father and mother'?”

“I do know that. I also know it says 'A man shall leave his father and mother...' and it says 'Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.'”

Well, that did it. There was a momentary tension-filled silence.

“You are no longer my daughter!” he bellowed, then hung up on me.

I sat there, stunned, the receiver still pressed to my ear, the familiar sick feeling settling in the pit of my stomach. I knew I wouldn't be able to eat much for a few days.

He and I didn't speak again for several years.

I've always wondered what it would have been like to grow up in a “normal” family. Over the years, I've developed a sense of acceptance around the tribulations I went through with my father. These challenges made me a stronger and possibly more interesting person. They taught me perseverance, determination, and how to stand on my own two feet. And you know what? A few years ago, I bought myself a flute.

Although he was largely defined by his Holocaust experiences, of course that wasn't all there was to my father. He was handsome, smart, and had a cool French accent. He spoke English really well. (Although, somehow, he never learned the correct pronunciation of “marshmallows” and insisted on calling them “mashmellows.”) He kept a well-tended vegetable garden and populated our yard with fruit trees. He boiled up colorful jars of jam from the fruit. He could fix just about anything, build things somewhat successfully, and knit. He taught me how to develop black and white film in the basement darkroom and how to play soccer before it was fashionable. He even taught me how to shoot a gun. The gun was a Mauser supposedly taken from a dead German soldier in France. Another weapon my father taught me about was silence.

The slightest transgression, whether intentional or not, could result in days or weeks of the silent treatment. My parents never spanked me, but the silent treatment inflicted much more pain than any slap ever could have. Sometimes, the silent treatment would be topped off with a letter in the mail telling me what an awful person I was.

Later, when he'd decide to end the torment, my dad would hold me on his lap and cry. He'd sob and tell me that he was a bad father. I would reassure him otherwise. I had to, because

at times like this, our roles were reversed and I knew the role I had to play. I didn't realize this was abuse until I was in therapy many years later.

My dad's older sister, Aunt Betty, had problems, too. She'd married an American GI in Paris immediately after the war. She divorced him after a couple of years and moved to Canada. After a stint as a nightclub singer in Montreal under an assumed name, she moved to Queens and married an Orthodox man. My five cousins were born in quick succession, despite Aunt Betty's unstable mental condition. Her husband divorced her after her frequent mental breakdowns became too much for him to deal with. My New York City cousins ended up in a Pennsylvania orphanage for a while. My mom told me that having all those kids had driven my aunt crazy. That made me scared to think of having kids of my own. What if I ended up crazy, too?

Sometimes, Aunt Betty came to stay with us. I worried that our neighbors would notice her. She talked loudly with a combination French - New York City accent. I definitely did not want people to notice her because her accent wasn't the only strange thing about her. I was more than a little scared of her odd behavior. More often than not, her visits ended with a stay in the nearest state mental hospital.

Then, in 1977, she was murdered during a break-in of her New York City apartment, shot in the head by some random criminal. He was caught roaming the streets with her television set. After all she went through in the Holocaust, how does this even make sense? My father never recovered from the shock.

Things got worse when the recession hit and my dad lost his job. Living in rural Western New York, he was unemployed for a long time. This only added to the problems. He increasingly self-medicated with prescription drugs. A shady pharmacist, who was later arrested, provided him with extra bottles of pills in addition to the prescribed doses. My teen years were extremely stressful because of the drug abuse. I never knew what shape my father would be in when I got home from school. Once, I found a stash of drugs in his shoe shine kit. I had brought the bag of supplies into the living room to polish my shoes. I dumped the contents out onto the

floor. Amidst the polish and brushes were seven or eight bottles of prescription drugs. The cache included antidepressants, antipsychotics, and opioids. My hands started shaking and I felt sick to my stomach. I showed my mom what I'd found. She told me to put them back and say nothing about it. I never did polish my shoes that day.

Throughout the following years, as his condition worsened, my father attempted suicide several times. Overdoses, carbon monoxide poisoning, and driving the car into a tree were the methods he tried. Life seemed dangerous and insecure. I was always braced for the possibility of something awful happening.

At one point, he ended up in the psych unit of the local hospital. I visited him the first day. His suitcase lay open on the bed, the contents in disarray. "They searched my bag and took my razor," he said incredulously. "Why did they do that? I wasn't going to hurt myself with my razor." I felt sorry for him. He seemed small and forlorn.

A few days later, he was given a shock treatment. I don't think they'd invented the nicer sounding name of ECT back then. I'm pretty sure that PTSD wasn't recognized back then, either. Anyway, this barbaric practice was supposed to make him forget his troubles and snap out of his deep depression.

I visited him the day after the "treatment." The only things he had forgotten were the things that had happened in the past few weeks. He cried helplessly and said they were going to shock him again because it didn't work the first time. I felt really scared. What was happening to my dad? I felt sorry for him having to go through this torture and I felt ashamed for our family. I didn't know what to do with my feelings. I was too ashamed to talk to anyone about this. I wanted the whole situation to be kept secret. So, I crumpled those feelings up and got rid of them, just like I did with those terrible letters he sometimes sent me. I didn't want to think about it at all.

In July 1988, my father's silence became permanent. He died from a prescription drug overdose. I'll never truly know if it was intentional or not. But, the coroner said suicide was indicated. My father still had that German handgun, too. My brother told me he'd found bullets in Dad's pocket after he died.

I was in Canada when I got the news. My kids were staying with my in-laws while my husband and I spent a long weekend with friends in Toronto. The first morning there, we went to a pay phone and called home to see how the kids were doing. My mother-in-law put my eight-year-old daughter on the phone.

“You always said grandpa Jack would die last, but he died first.” It took me a moment to process what I'd just heard. Then, I got dizzy and sank to the floor in the phone booth. My husband took the phone and ended the call. I phoned my mom to find out if it was true. It was. I asked her if he'd killed himself and she lied and said no.

After I'd calmed down, I went for a swim in the hotel pool. I inhaled deeply and dove into the cool water. I swam underwater the length of the pool. Rays of sunshine slanted into the depths all around me. I felt weightless and swam effortlessly like a mermaid. It felt as if a heavy weight had been lifted from my shoulders. In the silence under the water, I thought, “This is the first hour in my entire life that my father isn't here. It's the first time in my life that I've ever been free.” Then, I wondered if those thoughts meant I was a horrible person.

As difficult as it was growing up with a parent traumatized by the Holocaust, I realize that this is one of the things that shaped me into the person I am today. Those experiences enabled me to become a compassionate and empathetic person who can think clearly in a crisis. I have a strong work ethic. Knowing the odds that my father had to overcome in his life, and the high expectations he had for me, propelled me to set high standards for myself and to work hard to achieve my goals. I earned a master's degree and worked my way to the top of my profession. I have a stable second marriage, a wide circle of friends, and many interests.

In the end, I'm left with many puzzling questions. Was I destined to be resilient from the day I was named? Maybe so. After all, my name means "re-born" in English. Does my hard-earned resilience make me a better person than I otherwise would have been? Should I be grateful for the trials that led to my resilience? If so, am I supposed to be grateful to that bastard Hitler? And what about God? What if I feel angry at God? Does God even exist? What if He doesn't? When I start thinking like this, my brain feels thick and heavy in my skull. I don't like to think about these questions, so usually, I don't.

This past July, on the thirtieth anniversary of my father's death, for the first time, I lit a yahrzeit candle for him. I had to look up the accompanying prayer online, for I'm not well-versed in such things. I struck a match and briefly inhaled the sharp scent of sulfur. With a flash, the flame ignited the wick. It burned for a long, long time.

Unanswered Questions by Ann Scheingold

How was my mother, Regina, able to remain kind and tender, after all she had been through? She prepared Shabbat dinner lovingly and taught me how to as well...table cloth, Shabbos lecht, the silver five-armed candelabra polished to a mirror shine and aglow with three candles; one for each of us. I was an only child, as were my mother's two nieces and nephew.

We spent Sundays at my Uncle Joe and Aunt Mollie's home in Brooklyn with cousins and cousin's cousins. They were considered well-off since they owned a home and a car. Summers were spent in the Catskill Mountains. I was related in some way to most of the bungalow colony. My aunts were like second mothers, and cousins more like siblings. I felt very lucky.

My mother survived a slave labor camp in Siberia with her sister Helen and future sister-in-law Mollie along with some of Mollie's siblings. My mother's two brothers Joe and Hersh survived, although I am unsure of their stories. My Aunt Mollie was most fortunate. She survived with all nine siblings, her mother and fiancée Joe. Shortly after the Nazis invaded Poland, there was a ceasefire. My grandfather Aaron took my mother and Helen to the Russian border by train, hoping it would be safer than remaining in Zamosc, their hometown. Aaron returned home to his wife Chana, for whom I am named and two married daughters. Each daughter had two girls. From the research I have done, I surmise they were ultimately exterminated in Belzec. Belzec predated Auschwitz as the first death camp in Poland but was less "efficient."

In the Siberian slave labor camp, my mother had the task of chopping down trees. It is sadly comical, since she was a tiny woman barely reaching four foot ten inches. How she was chosen, defies logic. She was always in poor health. No doubt, her war experience played a significant role. In addition, living with my father was difficult in many ways. He was a troubled man and they struggled financially.

As a young child in Brooklyn, I recall my parents sending care packages to people in Russia. Who would want hand-me-downs that I had been given? Since we were poor, I deduced, they must have been very poor indeed. I did not have an answer for another two decades.

My father had family in Israel. A younger brother and a niece made Aliyah, went to Israel, in the early 1930's. His other surviving family members went to Israel following liberation. My father wanted to come to the U.S., and so he and my mother emigrated in 1950, sponsored by HIAS and a welcoming childless couple: Pauline and Isaac Duchovny. A year later, I was born, the first of my family to be born in the United States. Initially, the Duchovnys were our only family and treated us as such. Isaac Duchovny baked my first birthday cake. Tragically, he died shortly thereafter. "Aunt" Pauline as I referred to her, remained a nurturing and important part of my life throughout my adulthood. She introduced me to theater and museums, which I love to this day. I was never permitted to refer to an adult by a first name, out of respect for them; hence "Aunt" Pauline.

I was very attached to and deeply loved my mother. When I was four years old, my mother was gravely ill with stomach cancer. I vividly remember her standing me on a chair, so we were eye to eye. She told me about her upcoming surgery. I could tell how hard it was for her to reassure me everything would be fine. I understood enough to realize the gravity of her illness. Being a child of survivors, I became quite intuitive and sensitive.

I stayed with next door neighbors during my mother's illness but missed her terribly. Their daughter and I were best of friends. The mother was caring and kind. My father had to work seven days a week in his grocery store to support us. Before going to a convalescent home, my mother briefly stayed at my Uncle Joe and Aunt Mollie's home. I had a short, emotional visit with her. When Aunt Pauline came to visit, she found Mollie's home easily since she recognized the five-armed silver candelabra in the window. My Uncle Joe bought one for each of his two sisters and one for his wife. He was always most generous and thoughtful.

My mother often spoke of her happy childhood in pre-war Zamosc, Poland. Her family was well off. She had a care-free life, attended school, was well dressed, went to movies and ice

skated with friends. My grandmother Chana was quite modern for the times. She helped her husband Aaron Speisman run a dry goods business. They had a very warm and happy Shabbos observant home. In contrast, my father's father, Moshe Oksman, was very religious and ruled with an iron fist. A very different home environment from my mother's.

After the war, my Uncle Joe introduced my mother to my father in a Displaced Persons camp. My father came from a prominent and good family. Initially, it was to be a marriage of companionship rather than love. Shortly before they married, an "old flame" of my mom's reappeared. He had been searching for her. My mother, not having heard anything from him for quite some time, thought he had been killed. He gave her a necklace and asked her to marry him, but it was too late. She had already given her word to another. I found out about her beloved gold necklace and this story as an adult. I was stunned and did not want to upset her, so I never asked any more about it. After my mother's death, I was thirty-five, she seventy-one, I found tiny photographs of her and her sister with other young people. A young man's arm hung around her. Was this her love? What was his name?

We buried my mother on my fifteenth wedding anniversary, June 27th. Twenty years later, on June 27th, my daughter delivered the most beautiful baby girl who was named Rivka in Hebrew, after my mother. I proudly gave my daughter my mother's necklace. A link to a loving grandmother. Something, I so dearly missed having or knowing.

My father Isaac rarely shared specifics of his life. He was certainly emotionally damaged. Today, I realize it was PTSD Syndrome. Then, there was no name, no diagnosis, just trying to cope with such great loss and trauma. I never knew which persona to expect; short-tempered and angry or kind and loving. I knew he loved me deeply but was so afraid to show it. He was over-protective and he was afraid something could happen to me. I was forbidden to ride a bike, or swim, etc. Even so, I learned to ride on a friend's bike, taught by her mother. I became a fish in water, self-taught. I did things that were normal for a child to do, but did it all behind my father's back, so he shouldn't worry.

My father, like his own, ruled with an “iron fist.” Whatever he said was law. I bore a heavy weight trying to meet all of his expectations and compensate for all of his loss. He decided I needed a Hebrew education. At six or seven, I was enrolled at a Talmud Torah around the corner from my public school. I was forced to attend Monday through Thursday afternoons and Sunday mornings. I was expected to become well versed in Biblical studies, interpreting the *Chumash* [prayer book] and davening/praying. I attended for several years, HATING every minute and barely learning or retaining much of anything. As I walked into the synagogue, hordes of wild boys ran off their Yeshiva buses, almost trampling me in their temporary escape from confinement of school and bus before they were confined again for further study. They were older. I was small and quiet. They did not intend to harm me; they were just oblivious.

My father had arranged with the Rabbi to accept a girl. I was the only one. Looking back, I am perplexed by my father enrolling his daughter into an all boy Talmud Torah and even more puzzled why the Orthodox Rabbi would have encouraged and allowed it. Years later, my father relented. I began taking private lessons in conversational Hebrew. I could breathe.

My father worked very hard. We never went hungry. His first business was as a grocer. He later went into men’s and boy’s clothing with partners who were *lantzman* [from the same town in Poland]; he then branched out on his own. Isaac found it difficult to work with or for anyone. He had *shpilkes* [restless and impulsive]. As a result, he made some poor business decisions. Even though money was tight, he sent my mother and me to the Catskills each summer, while he stayed home and worked. I believe my Uncle Joe would quietly offer to help make ends meet so that my mother and I would have a healthy summer in the fresh air.

My father never took a vacation. He worked seven days a week. The only vacations he took happened in between selling and buying a business. He travelled to Israel to visit family alone. It was too expensive for all three of us to go—or so were told. Sometimes he would take a half day off on Sunday. He was thus alone for most of the summer though occasionally, he would come up for a weekend. My father was never interested in gadgets but he loved the transistor radio. He bought me one as a surprise when he came to visit. I was one of the first kids to have one. This is the only recollection during my childhood where I felt indulged. This never

happened! I was so excited; I could listen to the Beatles. He could listen to the Jewish news, read *The Forward* and keep informed about world events. He was in heaven!

My father did not drive. In Europe, he always had a driver. He came from a big wealthy family. His father owned a large farm/ranch in Rozyszcze, Poland. His older siblings were married or attended university. At fourteen years of age, his father took ill and my father helped run and oversee the farm. He did so until the land was confiscated by the Russians.

He later married and moved to Ludsk, Poland where he owned two mills. One produced electricity for the town and the other flour. Charity was always very important to my father. He had a strong moral compass. He always gave flour free of charge to those less fortunate. Once when I was grocery shopping with my father in Brooklyn, a man younger than my dad, recognized him. He lifted my father up and carried him around the store, declaring his gratitude for my father's generosity towards him when he was a poor boy in Europe. I was a very proud daughter!

When my two children were born, he allowed himself to love and laugh freely, perhaps freeing himself of his survivor guilt. Perhaps he began to feel safe and released the love he kept hidden for so long. He beamed with love and pride at living to see grandchildren and be part of their lives.



Passover 1980 with two grandchildren. My parents *kvelled* [swelled with pride]

Since I was very young, I knew my father had been married and had lost three children and most of his family during the Shoah. My father's command of the written English language was poor. Yiddish and later English were spoken at home. At about seven years of age, I was prompted by mother to assist in typing answers to a questionnaire regarding my father's war experience. I believe it was for *vidergutmachen* [reparations]. I remember a heated discussion in which my father refused to continue applying. He stated, "Their blood money would never be sufficient to undo the harm or lessen the loss we suffered. I will not help ease their conscience. They cannot buy forgiveness!" I asked my mother if the information regarding my father was true. She confirmed it was, but we were not to talk about it again since it made my father very sad. Being an obedient daughter, I never broached the topic for another twenty years.

I had many unanswered questions regarding my father's Holocaust experiences. As someone who has been active with Holocaust education and events, I wanted to interview and record my father. He refused. When I was pregnant with my second child, he agreed to a brief oral interview, while my preschooler napped. I wanted to name my soon-to-be-born-child for my half-siblings who perished. He instead wanted me to name for two brothers who were killed. He quickly rattled off some information. I wrote as quickly as I could. My son was named David Stephen in English, Shlomo David in Hebrew, for my uncles I never knew.

My father and his first family were moved to various ghettos. The commandant liked my father and took him, his wife and children with him from ghetto to ghetto. I believe my father kept his books. When the ghetto was being liquidated, he told my father to take his family and hide. He could no longer protect them. On a scorching August day, they attempted to hide in the tall grass of the cemetery but were found. Not knowing where they were going, my father bribed the guards to take him back to get water for the children, offering them his wife's fur coat and any valuables that remained. The guards were so busy looting, they wouldn't allow my father to return to the transport. He was shot and left for dead. His family were taken into the woods and shot.

My father was still alive when he was found. Udi, a former employee at my Dad's mill, rescued and hid him until the end of the war. Udi, his wife and a group of other families, were

later named “Righteous among the Nations,” by Yad Vashem. These were the people to whom our care packages and money were sent. An old question finally answered.

These rescuers also hid my Dad’s oldest sister, Henie, her husband, three daughters and a son-in-law. Sadly, only Henie and two daughters, Pnina and Shula survived. After the war, Henie and her girls made their way to Israel. The girls married and raised families.

My father had nine lives. After surviving the Shoah, he was inducted into the Russian army. His sister Henie gave him a Doxa brand wristwatch as a good luck gift before he went off. Shortly after induction, he and his entire battalion were to be sent into a battle knowing full well everyone would be killed. A surviving distant cousin, a medic, gave him medication that induced him to run a fever. He was sent back to the infirmary. Everyone else who went to battle was killed. My Dad and the watch survived. My son now wears that wristwatch with a strong connection to his Poppa and of his struggle to survive!

My parents instilled the importance of family in me. Their resilience in forging a new life together, growing to love one another and always celebrating with family was a lesson well learned. My parents kept in touch with family around the globe with phone calls and letter writing. I have taken over that role. I always had family parties at our home or organized get togethers.

My parents had to adapt by learning many different languages in order to survive. Foreign languages were spoken at home. I probably learned to speak English and Yiddish simultaneously. I became comfortable trying to speak other languages. I was not afraid to make a mistake. That is how we learn.

My parents were older when I was born. My father 47 and my mother 37. Both my mother and I barely survived my birth. More children were out of the question, not only because of the high health risk but for financial reasons as well. I always wanted to have a family when I grew up. Fortunately, I was young, healthy and able to have two remarkable children. I always wanted my children to have someone to rely on and be close to, especially once my

husband and I passed on. My children were my world. Later when they grew and married and each had two children, my world expanded to include four beautiful grandchildren.



Three generations celebrating Rifka Noa's Bat Mitzvah, June 2019.

My mother's dedication and love for her siblings' well-being, and they for her in return, were amazing and rare. Having elderly and ill parents prepared me to be a willing caregiver. My parents were loved and cared for in my home before they died. My mother passed away first, in 1986; my dad, four years later, *Erev Yom Kippur* [evening before the day of Yom Kippur]. I am able to visit their gravesites with a sense of connection. Whenever we travel, my thoughtful husband brings home rocks to place on their tombstones as a sense of continuity, respect and love. My husband loved and respected them; they loved him as a son they never had. My parents never had a gravesite to visit on which to place memorial stones or to touch as the last physical earthly connection for those they lost.

My dad's stories were unbelievable and painful to retell. After his death in 1990, I found a photograph album filled with pictures of his first family. What were the names of the children? There were two boys and a little girl. My dad's surviving nieces in Israel were elderly and had different recollections of the boys' names. There is no record of them in Yad Vashem. I have wanted to donate their photos but don't want to perform a disservice to their beloved memory by naming them incorrectly. Unanswered questions

The last time I visited family in Israel, I learned that my father may have had a “wife” between the one he lost in the Holocaust and my mother. Supposedly, after the Shoah, my father met up with a survivor from his town by the name of Sonya. No one is sure if they were officially married or cohabitated for about six months. My family thought I knew about her and were terribly sorry that they were the ones to break the news to me. I was mortified. Not because my father was lost and alone and needed companionship after losing his wife and three children. Most survivors sadly shared that fate. What angered, hurt and disappointed me was that I was never told. Yet my entire Israeli family knew and welcomed her as Aunt/Doda Sonya since she had been married to my father, their uncle. Sonya attended weddings, B’nai Mitzvot and all holiday celebrations. According to one of my cousins, Sonya and my dad were a mismatched couple. Sonya was very tall; my father was short. Their personalities were totally opposite. It was not a surprise that they did not last long as a couple. Sonya remarried but never had children of her own. Of course, my father married my mother in 1950.

Initially, I was very hurt and angry that my father kept yet another secret from me. Did my mother know? Was the reason for his solo trips to Israel just financial or was it to continue keeping his secret? As time has passed, I no longer am as angry or hurt. After all, it was his life before my mother and I came into the picture. Who am I to stand in judgment? Yet, I am left to wonder ... Just another unanswered question.

A Second-Generation Holocaust Survivor

Emily Schuman

From what I can recall of my life in Germany where I was born on January 14, 1946, life was good. My family seemed quite happy there, even though their goal was to emigrate to America. Although I have vague memories of my toddler years there, I do remember having a nanny named Sophie. She was a young German girl whom I adored. Being a poor eater, Sophie would seat me in the open window on an upper floor and entice me to eat by having me watch the passersby. No one seemed to mind that I was challenging to feed.

While we lived in Germany, I was told that my father had a wonderful job in the DP hospital as the supervisor of the kitchen. My mother did not have to work. In fact, she took dress design classes. (I still have her patterns and designs!) My mother's sister lived with us and her two brothers attended a university. One studied dentistry and the other became an engineer. My father was so financially secure that he was able to pay their tuition.

After several years, we were finally informed that we could leave Germany for America. Everything changed for us. We were sent to a DP camp. All of our possessions were confiscated. The only things we could bring were what we could carry. In an instant, I lost my home, my nanny, the children I played with and my extended family. We were reduced to living in a tent and sleeping on a cot. Sanitary conditions were horrible so I kept getting sick. Therefore, we kept being detained because the authorities would not allow anyone to leave if they were ill. Finally, after a few months, we were on our way to the land of opportunity.

When we arrived at Ellis Island, we were greeted by my father's first cousin Esther and her husband. We stayed with them for a few weeks which were horrible. My mother told me that they were demeaning and arrogant toward us.



In Germany, I am 3 years old (right)



With Mom and Dad, USA, 5 yrs.

Friends of ours from Germany were in a similar situation, so they decided to rent a small apartment which we shared. Food and money were scarce. I had to go to daycare so both my parents could work in a factory. Except for the forced labor they experienced with the Nazis neither of them had ever worked in a factory before. With two incomes I was told they hardly could afford to buy enough food for all of us. Sometimes my parents went hungry so I could eat. One evening I refused to finish my dinner. My father became enraged. He yelled at me to finish but I said that I could not eat any more. He threw me over his lap and hit me so hard that I was wailing. When he let me stand up I was extremely distressed to the point where I vomited. My mother embraced me and screamed, "Are you happy now? Did she eat more?" That was the beginning of my fear of my father.

In 1952 my sister was born. I found joy again.

My mother stayed home with us and my father had to work two shifts at the factory to make ends meet. Life was difficult for me because I could not speak English when I started first grade. Luckily, the teacher spoke Polish and taught my mother all the day's classwork in Polish and in turn mom taught



me the work in German. By December I was one of the top students in the class. I was grateful to both my mother and my teacher.

When my sister was three, my parents tried to enroll her in daycare, but she made such a fuss that they had to find another solution to our financial problems. They decided that my mother would work during the day and my father took a night job. Now the horror of our lives began.

Each morning my father would make us a slimy, sunny side up egg and gagging orange juice with pulp in it. I learned to choke it down but my sister was obstinate. At noon I came home for lunch and she was still sitting in front of that egg and glass of juice. After school, she was still at the table. She sat there until my mother came home from work. I started daydreaming a lot. My teachers even mentioned it on my report cards. I suppose it became my escape from the reality my life had become. When keeping her at the table did not convince Michele to eat, my father put her behind the bathroom door in the dark and forced her to stand there all day. My heart was so heavy because I felt powerless to help her. One day I came home from school and Michele had a weird look on her face. When my mother came home and took her out from behind the door Michele was expressionless. Her eyes were so wide open that they frightened me. I will never forget that moment. I whispered to my mother so my father would not hear me, "You have to do something or something bad is going to happen to Michele." That's when my mother threatened to quit her job if my father continued that treatment.

Putting Michele in the corner ended but not keeping her at the table all day. One day when I came home from school, my father needed to use the bathroom. I decided to take that opportunity to help my sister. I took the strainer from the drawer, strained her juice, threw the pulp in the trash, washed the strainer and put it back in the drawer. I told her not to tell. When my father returned to the kitchen, he saw that the glass of juice was empty. He smiled victoriously and said, "See, I knew you could drink it!" The entire time I stood behind my father with my finger to my lips and shaking my head no. I hoped she would not tell. Later, my father was preparing supper. When he threw something in the trash, he saw the pulp. He came into the room where I was. I saw him holding his belt in his hand. As he shook the belt, he said, "What

did you do?" I was frozen with fear. All I could say was, "Please don't kill me." He gave me the whipping of my life. I had black and blue welts across my back. The only defense I had was not to cry. So he just kept hitting me. Finally, he gave up and sent me to my room. That's when I wept in pain. I will never understand why he never hit me for not eating in Germany yet the only time he hit or punished us in America was over food.

I knew nothing about the Holocaust. Both my parents were silent. My first inkling that some terrible event had taken place was when we went to Newark to be sworn in as citizens. We were all in an office and the agent proceeded to ask my parents questions. He started with my father. He asked him, "Were you ever married?"

My father answered, "Yes."

Next he asked, "Did you have children?" Again, the answer was, "Yes." He asked, "How many?" In a whisper, my father answered, "Three."

After we were sworn in, my father bolted out of the room. He ran ahead of us down the stairs. As my mother escorted us out of the building, she held my sister's hand and mine. We walked slowly behind my father who was already at the foot of the stairs. My mother said, "Now you know about daddy and we will never talk about this again."

What did I really know about Daddy? I wanted to know where his children were. What happened to them? Why weren't they with him? What were their names? However, I knew I could not ask. After all, I was told never to speak of it again. Starting that day, I thought about his children all the time. About a year later I woke up one Saturday morning. My mother was busy cooking at the stove. I asked her if I could look at the photos of people from Europe. As I looked through the photos in the tin box, I would ask about the people and my mother would tell me their names and something interesting about them. This particular morning I noticed a picture of a little girl who looked exactly like me except that she had black curly hair.

When I was that age, I had blond curls. I asked my mother why I had black hair in that picture. My mother just said that it was not me. I never saw that photo again. As an adult I have reflected on that morning many times and I am convinced that she was one of my sisters. Her image haunts me to this day. Is that the reason my father found it so difficult to be with us? Did

we remind him of his children? Perhaps we were his starving children. He could not feed them but he tried to feed us and we refused to eat.

My sister went to afternoon kindergarten. I would come home from school and find her sitting in front of the egg and juice. Every day I walked her to her door at school and then I would go to my side of the building. The rule was that she had to wait at her door until I picked her up. Then came a day when my father decided to keep her home from school because she had not eaten her breakfast. I left for school feeling so helpless. At the end of the school day I arrived home. When my father opened the door he asked, "Where is Michele?" I was shocked. I asked, "What do you mean?" "Why didn't you bring her home?" "You said you weren't sending her! She must be so scared!"

I ran back to school as quickly as my legs could run. When I was a half block away from the play-ground I saw my sister cross the first street from the school. I started shouting, "Michele, I'm coming. Stay where you are. I'm coming!" She stopped walking and waited for me. She began to cry and sobbed, "Don't be mad at me." I assured her that I was not angry as I pulled her close to me and embraced her. As we stood there hugging, I knew we were all alone in the world.

School ended and summer began and so did our new life. My father received his reparation check from Germany. My parents bought a restaurant with the money. They left the house 5:30 in the morning and came home 9:30 at night six days a week. We were free at last. Although I was only eleven and my sister was five, we had the best times together. We ate what we wanted and as much as we wanted. We sang and danced and role played all the movies we went to see. I loved her so much and she loved me back. I was finally in charge to give her the life every child deserves. I woke her in the morning and dressed her. Sometimes we ate breakfast and at times we just drank a glass of milk. We ate lunch at home and then we would dance and sing. After school I would do her homework with her. We would watch some TV. Then I made us dinner. I gave her a bath and put her to sleep. Finally, I had the time to do my homework. Many times, I think of her as my third child.

There was one other time that my father frightened me. I was nineteen years old and engaged to my husband. I had an eleven o'clock curfew. The movie ran a little late and I arrived five minutes after eleven. My father was hiding behind one of the front doors in the dark. When I opened the door, he punched my arm. I had a huge black and blue mark. Not only did he startle me but I could not image what I had done. Many years later I went to hear a therapist speak who treated G2 and survivors. Her first question was, "How many of you were severely punished for being even a moment late?" Nearly every hand went up! I was shocked. She explained how people disappeared during the war. I imagined what my parents endured when I was late. I could finally forgive him.

There came a time when my mother broke her silence about their war experience. I don't remember how old I was. Once she started, she could not stop. I learned about the ghettos and the starvation and the underground. She lamented the loss of her parents and brother. I found out that they were hidden by Polish Christians. I learned about my sisters' death but not about who they were. That bothered me tremendously. Why wouldn't they tell me their names or birthdates?

About seven years ago, a man who belongs to my second-generation organization did a digital search for my father's three daughters. I only knew that my father was Moshe Gutman. Within a week, he found out that they were killed in Auschwitz. Now I knew their names and birth dates. I am able to say Kaddish for them. They are remembered. I also found out that my father's oldest daughter had the same Hebrew name as my sister. I do not know if Michele is named for our grandmother who died long before the war or my father's daughter.

So many stories passed with my parents and family. One Passover seder we were celebrating at my sister's home. My Tante Loda was there. I got the courage to ask her about what happened to her during the Holocaust. She proceeded to tell me her story. She lived on a farm in Poland. Her father had already been taken to a concentration camp. One day Nazi soldiers kicked in the door of their house. They took turns raping my aunt, her sister and their mother. When they were done, they stabbed my aunt in her skull and chest. When she regained consciousness, she discovered the gruesome truth. Her mother and sister were dead. She looked

at herself in the mirror and saw the blood pouring from her head and chest. She took the sheets from the bed, tore them into strips and made them into bandages. After she wrapped her head and chest, she wandered into the woods. There she was helped by other Jews who were hiding. I don't know if I was happy finding out her story or if I was better off not knowing. I didn't want to think of her as a victim but as the adoring aunt she had always been to me.

I believe that despite it all, I was in awe of my parents and family. My father remained a religious Jew. I loved watching him pray because it was the only time he seemed at peace. I loved Shabbat and celebrating all the Jewish holidays. Sometimes I wondered how he could believe in a G-d that let them down. So, I also developed a strong connection to the synagogue, Judaism and G-d.

My parents never gave up even in the toughest of times. Not only did they survive the Holocaust but they survived America. Life for an immigrant is not easy. However, they persevered and provided for us. Watching how hard they labored just to make a living has inspired me to not give up but to be strong and to be proud that I am a second generation.

There is this realization that I never wanted to cause my parents any more pain than they had endured. That in itself makes a person resilient. I witnessed how they sent packages of food and clothing to our family in Israel because they thought they were worse off than us even though we had so little ourselves. That teaches one *tikkun olam* - to make the world a better place. Their courage to get married, have children, to work hard, to live on has motivated me to do the same. Whatever my father did and whatever my mother did not do I believe have contributed to the person I ultimately have become.

Imagining Aunt Susan

Susan Steiner

It was not exactly that our house was silent. My father gave us small nuggets of information through our mother, or she took it upon herself to tell us. Certain statements came from him. “My parents came with me to the border and I never saw them again” was one. It is burned into my memory and I no longer know whether I heard it once or multiple times. In my childhood world, parents were there. They did not disappear.

Not silence - it was more that I sensed a tension simmering beneath the surface, a tautness. My father was bottled up, tightly wound. I saw him trudging off to catch the early-morning train to Chicago to work. He looked grim, one foot in front of the other. Occasionally he exploded, although never at us, but at an innocent person and for an inconsequential reason, like at the dry cleaner.

After I began the writing workshop, I asked my brother how we came to know about our father’s early life, his flight from Prague and the death of his family—the small amount we knew, that is. In his recollection, our mother had told us (or him) that our father had suffered during the war, that it was hard on him and that we should never ask him about it.



My father in Prague, about age 18



Leaving Europe in December 1939; my father is 2nd from left

I have no memory of this conversation, but I understood not to ask him anything. I had not even known that he was Jewish, so where would I start?

Even as an adult, I was afraid to break the silence. How could I force him to bring up the memories he must have carefully forced down? It was his pain, I felt, not mine to intrude upon. Even after I understood that it is my pain as well, I did not intrude.

A few years before his death, during a comfortable Sunday morning phone call, I broke the silence for the first time in my life and asked him about his sister, who died as a teenager in Treblinka and for whom I am named. I had found the bare stark facts of her death in the years before Internet searches, writing to Simon Wiesenthal and to the International Red Cross Searching Service. Finally, I was sure I had found her through the Holocaust Museum. My research was my attempt to break the silence; I didn't know how he would react. But I knew nothing about her. What was she like?

There was a long pause, but finally he said, "Oh, she was very nice." I never asked him again, but I have thought about his response for years. She was only twelve when he left, was it possible he had really forgotten her? Was she a blur, the little sister who never came into sharp focus? Or was he guarding his memories of her? Our photo album contained two photographs of her. They must have been sent to him after he came to the United States, because she looks closer to sixteen, her age when she died. She actually looks older than sixteen. She looks poised. She smiles slightly.



My Aunt Susan
before deportation.

My father never knew of my attachment - perhaps obsession to and with my aunt. As an adult, I repeatedly calculated her age and imagined that she had somehow survived and would find us, although I knew this was not possible. Today she would be ninety-two, and I feel a certain lessening of urgency. At ninety-two it is unlikely that she would still search for her brother. If she had been allowed to grow up normally, she might have passed away by now. I imagine her at home, in a comfortable bed, surrounded by people who loved her. I am there too. This normalcy is what I wish and dream for her.

In retrospect, we were not just a household cloaked in silence. We were a household choking on respect for a man who was so grief stricken he was unable to speak about what happened to his—and my—family.

The Arc of My 2-G Story

Eva Vogel

When our sons grew up and I retired, I finally took time to understand my parents' relation to me and the ever-present background of the Holocaust. I talked about the life of my parents for years, but in the following essay I will try to stop describing my parents' experience and try describing my own. That is harder than I imagined.

I wondered if my parents' personalities were affected or formed by their Holocaust experience. I searched and attended a group therapy for the 2nd generation (2G) Holocaust survivors to look for the answer. I was told that their personality traits were exaggerated by their experience of survival. Especially for my mother who was young, 18 years old when she arrived in Auschwitz. The 2G writing workshop participation is the continuation of my search to understand my parents—and myself. Since I can remember, maybe since I was 10 years old, my parents treated me as an equal member of the family team. I had to help with the household duties: bring the coal from the cellar, start and keep the fire going until they came home from work. They made me very independent at a young age, which helped me to deal with my own emigration to the US when I was twenty-three years old. They prepared me to survive.

I have my father's personality; if I start feeling sad, I get busy with work, family, some sport or volunteering. These activities make me think about other people and avoid focusing on myself. That is what my father did; to keep the difficult memories at bay he immersed himself in his medical research most of the time. He told me that helps him “not to think and to remember” the bad times.

My parents were Ruth Milárová Hermanstadt and Andrej (Andreas, Bandi Müller) Milár.

“I am your problem now.” That was my mother's “hello” when she stepped off the plane to live with us after she finished working in Czechoslovakia. Her mother was her problem when the war started and then later in the concentration camp. (Before the war started her father left the family in Kielce for a year and moved to Warsaw looking for a job. As a Jew he could not

teach anymore. He returned when the war started.) Now the cycle continued—except that it was between her and me.

I have precious few “things” from my mother’s life before or during the Holocaust. My father’s family dominated: his mother and his two sisters survived. My father always commanded respect: before the war in Prague as the rich, sophisticated student from a prominent family with the communist’ idealism; and during his imprisonment in Auschwitz as “Block Senior, intellectual and a man for whom the prisoners had a great respect” (as written in the book, *I cannot forgive*, by Rudolf Vrba and Alan Bestic). My father was *Blockältester* (Block Senior) in Block 15, *Quarantänelager* in Auschwitz.

After the war, after the Aryanization by Nazis and later nationalization by communists of his family’s businesses and belongings all that remained were stories about the life they lived. The Müllers were a prominent family in the Spiš region of Slovakia. They were in the lumber business, owned the lumber mills, many acres of forest, houses, cars and a vacation property in High Tatra Mountains. They brought electricity to the town of Podolinec and they traveled the world. My father entertained us for hours with the stories of their travels, places that we could not visit from communist Czechoslovakia. He also enjoyed making up fairy tales. I knew him as a man with a great imagination.

As a child I never asked or even wondered about my mother’s family. I just knew they lived and died in Poland. Later in life, when my mother retired and moved to the U.S., we would talk about her parents and her grandparents who lived with them. She was an only child and her mother was an only child. My mother never talked about how her mother died in Auschwitz. She started a few times to tell me, but she never could finish. I stitched together that my grandmother was killed by other inmates, criminals, for her belt. She did not go to work one day and stayed in the barrack by herself. When my mother returned from her work at “Canada” she found her beaten to death. The prisoners gave the ironic name Kanada (a country that symbolized wealth) to the warehouse full of possessions, clothing and jewelry of the arriving victims. Because her father had been selected for the gas chamber when they first arrived in Auschwitz, her mother’s death made her an orphan. She was alone in the world.



My grandmother's "Auschwitz photo." Her murder by inmates left my mother an orphan.

In 1992, my mother gave an interview for a publication called *Voices of the Woman Survivor*. The following quotes describe how she felt at the end of the war: "At the day of liberation there was joy and celebration all around me...I think that was the saddest day of my life. I found myself all alone in the world. What should I do now? Where can I go?" My mother lost everybody in the war and ended up in Slovakia with the Slovak women liberated from Auschwitz. During the three years of the imprisonment in Auschwitz my mother built a life there that suddenly disappeared. She met my father in Slovakia, they got married a few days after meeting for the first time and I was born a year later. Many survivors married and had children as soon as they could after the liberation. They wanted to catch up on what they missed during the war. Also, in my mother case, she was a foreigner in Czechoslovakia and needed a visa to stay there.

Until I was ten years old, we lived inside a hospital in Košice. Each family had one room but six families shared one kitchen and one bathroom. There was no place to return to for the Jews from the camps. Jewish doctors, like my father, ended up living in the hospital. We children loved it: it was a nice park setting and we had instant family. We are all still connected even though we live all over the world.

Ten years after the war ended, we had to move to a small village. This forced relocation was a result of anti-Semitic purges in the 1950s, called the Slánský affair. On 20 November 1952, Rudolf Slánský, General Secretary of the Czechoslovak communist party, and thirteen other

leading party members, were accused of participating in a Trotskyite-Titoite-Zionist conspiracy and convicted. Eleven including Slánský were hanged in Prague on December 3, and three were sentenced to life imprisonment.

We moved from Košice (population of 250,000) to Šarišské Michalany (population 3,000). As a Jew, my father lost his academic position at the Košice Medical School (University of Pavel Josef Šafarik). In Šarišské Michalany he participated in the design and building of a new pharmaceutical factory, Imuna. He left the practice of medicine and started research in immunology that he enjoyed. My mother's job was tied to his position; she was his research assistant. I was a ten-year-old kid who played happily with cows and pigs and with the children from village. I made a new friend, Cilka, and that friendship lasted until today.

The school in the village ended with the fifth grade. After that we had to commute to Sabinov (population 12,000) by train. This was the first time I felt that I was “not fitting in.” I was a commuter from a small village into a “big” town of Sabinov and the town girls looked down on the village girls.

During my years in high school my family applied for an exit visa to Israel, but the emigration was denied to us. In the years before the Prague Spring the only possible emigration was to Israel. The year of the Prague Spring was very unsettling. We saw what freedom of democracy means – it also included freedom for extreme nationalists and fascists.

People say that the year 1968 was “a most interesting year.” I was at home on vacation before my last year at University. My parents moved back to Košice from the village by then. On August 21, 1968, the Warsaw Pact armies invaded Czechoslovakia. The Russian tanks rolled into Eastern Slovakia in the middle of the night. We woke up to tanks and Soviet soldiers from Asia all over Košice. The Russians were smart; they sent the troops who could not communicate in Russian with the “natives”; they were sure they were in Germany. I still remember a bench in the city where my mother and I sat with sacks of flour and sugar – we were sure the war had started again so we ran to buy what we could. Yes, it was an interesting year.

In the fall of 1968, I continued my university studies. Unfortunately, I did my thesis at the Slovak Academy of Science with an advisor who, to my surprise, turned out to be anti-Semitic. Usually I did not identify myself as a Jew to strangers. It was easier to blend in than to explain to strangers what a real Jew is. All that most people knew about Jews was from church teachings that “Jews killed Jesus.” I was blond with blue eyes like any Slovak girl, but my name gave me away. My father’s name before the war had been Müller, but he changed it to Milár. There were too many SS officers with the name Müller, and Milár sounded more Slovak. My last name, in accordance with how names get feminized in Slavic languages became Milárová. It was not lost on my thesis adviser that it was obviously a made-up name, and that it was mostly Jews who changed their names after the war. She tried her best to prevent me from graduating. Luckily, there were some good people, other professors, who overruled her and I did graduate in 1969. As soon as I graduated, I left for the USA; fortunately, the borders were still open as they were during the Prague Spring.

Immigration to the USA was the ultimate “not fitting in.” I arrived at my cousin’s house in the suburb of Washington D.C. on August 22, 1969. He was a survivor who had come to the US in 1945, but his wife was American. America is a big and diverse country. It took me a few years to find a group of people who were good and tolerant. I did not have to “fit in”; I could be just me. I was granted American citizenship, but from my and my family’s experiences I understand that a country or a nation can easily reject you. It does not matter how you feel about your nationality. I was stateless for a few years after Czechoslovakia revoked my citizenship because I failed to return when my exit visa expired. The borders closed in November 1969 and the Iron Curtain came down again. That is why I prefer to identify myself first as a member of the human race and an American second. I hope that it never happens again that some people could be denied membership in the human race as happened to my parents and my grandparents just eighty years ago.

One piece of advice from my parents that I can trace back to their Holocaust experience (or maybe just living under communism?) was to get a portable education, as for example, in the sciences. I chose chemistry; I liked the field and I was good at it. This decision helped me during

my immigration to the US. Science is universal and not defined by a political system – most of the time!



Eva and her parents, Ruth Milárová and Andrej Milár, days before her emigration to the USA on August 21, 1969.

I always felt an obligation to make life better for my parents, to fix what went wrong in their lives as a result of the Holocaust and of living under communism. I could not bring back their parents or their lost youth, but I tried to make their “sunset years” easier.

I often make presentations in schools or churches and synagogues as part of Holocaust education. After my last presentation at a Holocaust event a friend asked me if my contributions are for myself or for the good of humanity. The answer is of course for both. It is my way to deal with the legacy of my parents’ complicated life journey. Maybe it is similar to writing the memories down. After I prepare the talk, think about it, and even before I deliver the talk and hear students’ comments, I feel good. While our parents were alive, they were able to speak, and we the 2G generation were mostly quiet. Now that they are not here, it’s our turn, our obligation to remember their complicated arc of life.

In the beginning of this essay I write about the ever-present background of Holocaust in my life. Unfortunately, the Holocaust memories are not receding because of the recent political climate. During my presentations in schools I stress the importance of being involved and to be aware. I encourage students to vote for the representatives with the strongest record of tolerance and inclusivity because we learned from history the dangers of intolerance and of good people doing nothing.

Brief Biographies of Second-Generation Writers

Helen Aron grew up in upstate New York within a community of German Jewish Holocaust refugees and survivors including her family. This inspired her to pursue a career in foreign languages and English for Speakers of Other Languages. She earned a B.A. in foreign languages from Syracuse University, a master's degree in linguistics from New York University, and a doctorate in reading from Rutgers University. Dr. Aron has had a career as a program designer, professor, teacher trainer, and college administrator directly or indirectly in the field of ESL.

Aliza Augustine was born in Israel to an English mother and a French survivor father. She came to the United States when she was three years old. Aliza has a BFA in Painting from the Rhode Island School of Design. After attending a Residency in Photography at the School of Visual Arts (2006) her major series have been narrative photographs dealing with family, socio-political issues, feminism, gender and genocide. Her work has been shown in solo shows at Rutgers and Kean Universities and the Monmouth Museum; group shows include the Whitney Museum, the Jersey City Museum, the Aljira Gallery (Newark), the Maloney Gallery (College of St. Elizabeth), and the PPAC in Philadelphia. She has received grants from the Puffin Foundation and recently received the Julia Cameron Award for Women Photographers in the category Documentary and Editorial. Aliza resides and has a studio in West New York, NJ, with Frank, her husband of thirty-one years.

Robert Morris Braun was born to two Holocaust survivors from the former Austro-Hungary (now Slovakia and Ukraine). He earned his MSEE from New York University in 1972. Bob was a design engineer at the US Army Electronics Lab at Ft Monmouth, NJ, and at Bell Labs in Murray Hill, NJ, where he was also a supervisor in government programs. He was a technology licensing and R&D manager at Lockheed Martin and at the US Army Armaments R&D center. He has two married daughters and four grandchildren.

Andrew Breit is a retired sales professional whose parents survived in Uzbekistan, where they met during the war. Both were born in Poland. After the war, they journeyed west to France, where Andrew was born. The family emigrated to the United States in 1953. Andrew has a B.A. in Anthropology from SUNY Buffalo and an M.A. in Regional Planning from Syracuse University. He is married with three children and currently volunteers for the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the Museum of Jewish Heritage in NYC.

George Celler was born in Poland, where he graduated from Warsaw University. Both his parents survived the Holocaust in Poland but lost all their immediate family members. George arrived in the US on a refugee visa in 1970, received his PhD in Physics in 1976, and worked for years in semiconductor research at Bell Labs in Murray Hill, NJ. Afterwards he was Chief Scientist at a French semiconductor company and a Research Professor at Rutgers University. He was elected a Fellow of the American Physical Society and of the Electrochemical Society, in which he held various leadership positions. He was granted twenty-three US patents and published over 200 technical papers. George and his Australian-born wife Lynn, whose parents were also Holocaust survivors, have two married children and five grandchildren.

Stefanie DeFronzo is the granddaughter of Hanna Aron, a hidden Holocaust survivor born in Essen, Germany. Stefanie grew up in Albany, NY, and is currently in her senior year at Drew University studying Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. She hopes to continue into a PhD program and a career in scientific research. When not in the lab, Stefanie loves to sing, watch *Stranger Things*, and write poetry. One of her poems, "Hope," was published in the 2018-2019 edition of *Insanity's Horse*, Drew's magazine of student work.

Hannah Guyer Edelman was born in Detroit, Michigan, to two Holocaust survivors who met and were liberated from Bergen-Belsen. She earned a Master's Degree in Learning Disabilities and worked part time for Catholic Community Services as an LDT-C. She worked for the South Orange Maplewood School District as an educator for forty years. Additionally, Hannah is a past-president of the South Orange Education Association as well as vice-president, grievance chair, and chief negotiator, serving over 750 members for well over twenty years. Hannah became a widow after forty-six years of marriage and has two sons and five grandchildren.

Barbara Buchsbaum Gilford has just completed a memoir about her family who were lost in the Holocaust. Formerly a teacher, a journalist and a psychotherapist, she earned a B.A. at the College of Saint Elizabeth and a Master of Social Work degree from Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University. In *Finding Susi*, inspired by the second-generation workshop sessions, Barbara found healing through the power of her imagination. Barbara has two adult sons and two grandchildren.

Molly Honigsfeld Greenspan was born to Holocaust survivors and raised in New York City. She graduated from City College of New York with a BFA and began a career as a grass roots political organizer, involved in social justice, fair elections and democracy issues. Molly held a second career as a development professional, raising funds for non-profit organizations. After forty years of service, Molly retired and pursued a new career as a watercolorist. She studied and taught watercolor painting at the Art Students League in NYC. Her painting, "Brooklyn Bridge Foggy Morning," was published in *The Art Students League of New York Painting: Lessons on Meditations, Styles and Methods* (Watson-Guptill, 2015). Molly married in 2016 and lives in Staten Island.

Janet Samuels Jacobs was born in Munich, Germany in 1948. She came to Newark, N.J. in 1949 with her mother, an Auschwitz survivor, and her father a slave labor camp survivor. She has Master's degrees in Education Media and Administration & Supervision; she retired from the East Orange School District three years ago. Ms. Jacobs is married for forty-five years and has two married sons and five grandchildren. Her mother lives nearby and enjoys her nine great grandchildren.

Renata Kessler is a child of Holocaust survivors. Her father, Edmund Kessler, an attorney in Lwow, Poland, kept an eye-witness account of his experiences in the Lwow Ghetto, the Janowska Concentration Camp, and in hiding on a farm on the outskirts of Lwow. After her parents' death, Renata had her father's diary translated and published in both Poland and the United States. She speaks both locally and internationally about *The Wartime Diary of Edmund Kessler*. Renata is a doctoral candidate at Drew University as well as a professor at County College of Morris in Randolph, NJ, and ESL tutor at Immaculate Conception Seminary at Seton Hall University, where she graduated with an MA in Jewish-Christian Studies in 2009.

Myron Kolski was born in Kalisz, Poland, a few days before the end of war. His father was Jewish, his mother was Catholic. She was named Righteous Among the Nations in 2006. Myron and his parents moved to Sweden in winter, 1946, and later immigrated to the US in 1953. Myron worked in military and industrial technology as well as the apparel and textile industry. He earned a BS in Industrial Engineering at FDU, Teaneck, NJ, 1982. Myron has two adult daughters and five grandchildren.

Renée Riczker was raised in snowy Western New York by a French Holocaust survivor father and an American/Christian mother. She earned an MLS degree from Rutgers University and spent the majority of her career in municipal library administration. A certified clinical hypnotist, Renée currently serves as a NJ Disaster Response Crisis Counselor, volunteers on a Community Emergency Response Team, and is Deputy OEM Coordinator in her community. She also volunteers as a zoo docent, raises honeybees, and has been a tap dancer since age three. Contrary to the Nazis' plan, Jacques' family continues on. Renée and her husband raised a daughter and son, and are grandparents to two little girls.

Ann Scheingold was born in Brooklyn, NY, in 1951 to Polish Holocaust survivors and is the first post-Shoah child in her family born in America. She attended Hunter College, where she met her future husband. She taught elementary school in New York City until 1974, when she moved to N.J. to raise a family. She subsequently became active in Hadassah and the Holocaust Council of Greater MetroWest. She worked for AT&T in Health Affairs for thirteen years before retiring. She enjoys traveling and spending time with her two wonderful children and four amazing grandchildren.

Emily Schuman was born in Cham, Germany, in 1946. She and her parents emigrated to the United States in 1949, settling in Passaic, NJ, where she grew up. Emily earned a Master's Degree in Education. She is certified in elementary education, English as a Second Language, supervision and guidance counseling. Her career includes membership on a special commission for the Department of Education in Trenton; participation in a think tank at ETS in Princeton; supervision in a statewide ESL program for bilingual teachers; and work for the Passaic school district as a teacher and guidance counselor. In retirement, she lectures and teaches Hebrew school.

Susan Marian Steiner was born in Michigan City, Indiana, the daughter of a Czech Jewish refugee and a mother of German/English Protestant ancestry. Her father received a scholarship from New York University and was able to leave Prague in 1939 at age nineteen. Except for a distant cousin, his entire family perished in the Holocaust. Before retiring, Ms. Steiner worked as an editor and translator and, in the last part of her working life, a paralegal.

Eva Milar Vogel was born to two Auschwitz survivors in Czechoslovakia. She earned her PhD in Chemistry in Slovakia and immigrated to the US in 1969. Eva worked in glass and ceramic research at Bell Labs at Murray Hill, NJ, and after thirty-five years retired as a Distinguished Member of Technical Staff. In 1992, she was elected a Fellow of The American Ceramic Society. Dr. Vogel is featured in the book *Successful Women Ceramic and Glass Scientists and Engineers: 100 Inspirational Profiles* (Wiley, 2016). She has two sons and three grandchildren.

Brief Biographies of Workshop Leaders

Robert Ready (A.B., M.A., Ph.D., Columbia University) is Professor Emeritus of English, and former Donald R. and Winifred B. Professor of Humanities, National Endowment for the Humanities Distinguished Teaching Professor, and Dean of the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies. He has taught nineteenth-century British Literature, Western Literature, twentieth-century American writers, interdisciplinary humanities, and creative writing. His novel, *Eck: A Romance*, was published in 2021 by Atmosphere Press.

Ann L. Saltzman, Professor Emerita of Psychology at Drew University and Director Emerita of Center for Holocaust/Genocide Study, earned her doctorate in Social-Personality Psychology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Most of her scholarly work has been at the nexus of Psychology, Holocaust Studies and History. She has presented at both Psychology and Holocaust Studies conferences and published book chapters, articles and reviews on the subject. Her awards and honors include a Grant-in-Aid from the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues; Drew's Presidential Award for Distinguished Teaching; the Honey and Maurice Axelrod Public Education Recognition Award and the Sister Rose Thering Award from the New Jersey Commission for Holocaust Education for her work in educating for prejudice reduction, inter-faith understanding, and social justice