HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

'45 AID SOCIETY

JOURNAL

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CHAIRMAN'S *comments*

During the first thirteen years of the existence of our Society we kept in touch with our members via a Newsletter, which was issued whenever it was necessary to do so, and it was not until 1976 that our first Journal was published. Thus the journal continued to perform the functions hitherto performed by the Newsletter i.e., conveying members news as well as providing an opportunity for our members to write about their experiences during the war and other matters relating to the activities of our Society. We felt that our experiences should be remembered, not because they were our experiences, but because they were of a kind that should not fall into oblivion with the passage of time.

Although our Journal was published once a year, the contributions from our members were initially not readily forthcoming. This was due mainly to their pre-occupation in carving out their careers and raising their families. There were, also, many who found it difficult to describe their experiences. They preferred to ignore and even to suppress their recollections. It was not until their retirement and especially the publication in 1996 of "The Boys" by our President, Sir Martin Gilbert, that they decided to write their stories.

We are publishing two articles "But for a stroke of fickle fate", one by William Samelson PhD and one by Jacob Guttenbaum PhD. Both could have come to England in August 1945, but fate ordained otherwise. In their articles they explain how it happened that the former finished up in the States and the latter in Poland. It is almost inevitable that they are known to some of our members as their paths may have crossed in different concentration camps.

As our children were growing up we encouraged them to send in their contributions to the Journal and over the years some have responded, but we would welcome a wider response. In this issue we publish a poignant speech given by Naomi Gryn at the launch of her book "Chasing Shadows", at the Imperial War Museum and we reprint from the Jerusalem Post Magazine Aloma Halter's interview of Naomi Gryn. There is also a touching account "My Grandfather", by Darren Richman, Zigi & Jeanette Shipper's grandson.

Although the Journal was established by our Members for our Members we always welcomed articles from our friends and well-wishers and from those whose contribution is of interest to our members. I would like to draw your attention to the Prime Minister's address on the Holocaust Memorial Day 27th January 2001 and to the importance he attaches to the Holocaust "as a reminder, particularly to young people that events of the Second World War must never be repeated". Also, Professor David Cesarani's "Reflections on the Holocaust Memorial Day".

We have also included a speech given by Field Marshal Lord Bramall KG., GCB., OBE., MC., JP., on the occasion of the presentation to him by the International Council of Christians and Jews of the Interfaith Medallion. He was our guest of honour at our Re-union in 1997 and was the driving force in establishing the permanent Holocaust Exhibition. His thoughts are very profound.

This year at our Re-union we honoured Stuart E. Eizenstat, the former Deputy Secretary of the United States Department of the Treasury, who played a leading role in bringing to a successful conclusion the Forced and Slave Labour negotiations. The speech which he made on this occasion is also included and hopefully will be read with great interest.

The article by Rafael F. Scharf is of a soul-searching nature and our readers will find it most stimulating.

The publication last year of Jan Gross's "Neighbours", where he describes the massacre of about 1,500 Jews on July 10th 1941 in Jedwabne by their Polish neighbours, with whom they had lived together for hundreds of years, sparked unprecedented controversy in Poland. For over a year the argument went on unabated and is continuing to do so. To this day, most of the present inhabitants of Jedwabne find it difficult to reconcile themselves to this fact. Many Poles, too, refuse to admit that this massacre was carried out by Poles and put the blame on the Germans. However, there are also many who have expressed contrition and regret. We include two speeches, one by the President of Poland, Mr. Alexander Kwasnieski, and one by Professor Shevah Weiss, the Ambassador of Israel to Poland, made in Jedwabne on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the massacre.

Usually we publish the Leonard G. Montefiore Memorial lecture but, due to unforseen circumstances, it will have to be published next year. This year's lecture was delivered by the Chief Rabbi, Dr. Professor Jonathon Sacks and it was based on his book "Celebrating Life". We have, however, published an appreciation of the lecture by Ramsay Homa, who is no stranger to our Society.

We were privileged not only to survive the Holocaust but also to witness the phoenix-like rebirth of the State of Israel just three years after our liberation. Our ancestors have prayed for two thousand years for this event to take place. Since her independence in 1948 the Jewish population in Israel has grown from 600,000 to almost 5 million. Before the War, Palestine, as it was then, was considered an arid and barren land and the thought that it would absorb five million people would have been considered with derision. Today Israel is not only self-sufficient in food, but it is also exporting agricultural products.

The problem of refugees, a problem which has become a major pre-occupation in the Western World, is paradoxically no longer a Jewish refugee problem. Before the Second World War, the word *refugee* was synonymous with being Jewish. Today, there are no Jewish refugees, nor are there likely to be in the foreseeable future, because, if Jews ever feel threatened or are not welcome wherever they live, there is always a home for them in Israel We are joined in a common destiny with the people of Israel. Our fate is inextricably bound with them. We must not forget what it was like to be a Jew before there was a State of Israel. We were persecuted, despised and humiliated. We were at the mercy of other people. Our commitment to Israel must never falter. What happens to the people of Israel must inevitably affect us. Many of our members and their families live there, some of our children live there; most of us have families and a large number of friends who live there. Israel's security guarantees our security.

The people of Israel crave for peace, but not at a price that would eventually lead to its destruction. The Oslo accords in 1993 stipulated that all future disagreements between Israel and the Palestinians will be resolved by negotiations and in spite of many hiccups that have occurred, it seemed that the two people will in the end reach a modus vivendi. Unfortunately, the failure of the Peace summit at Camp David in September 2000 and the subsequent unleashing of the intifada by Arafat has dispelled this cherished hope. By rejecting the far-reaching concession made by Barak, Arafat has shown that the Oslo accords were only a means towards achieving his absolutist end i.e., the eventual elimination of the State of Israel. Even if Israel were to abandon the settlements in the West Bank and Gaza and withdraw to the pre-1967 lines, it would not satisfy Arafat as by demanding the return to Israel of four million Palestinians he has clearly indicated his intentions. In addition, since his return to the West Bank and Gaza in 1993, Arafat has continued promoting and prescribing school books which incite racial hatred, religious intolerance and outright genocide. It is from such an indoctrination that the breeding ground of suicide bombers emanates.

The people of Israel have experienced many crises during their short statehood and this is probably one of their worst. Anxiety and uncertainty remains, but it is hope rather than despondency that has sustained the Jewish people throughout the ages. At the same time, they must continue to be firm, vigilant and strong. This is a time for the people in Israel, as well as the Jews in the diaspora, to be united. We cannot afford the luxury of disunity because the very existence of the State of Israel is at stake.

Wishing you and your family a very happy and healthy New Year.

ROSH HASHANAH MESSAGE FROM JO WAGERMAN OBE, PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF DEPUTIES OF BRITISH JEWS

Dear Friends,

It gives me great pleasure to write a Rosh Hashanah message to you in the second year of my Presidency of the Board of Deputies.

This has been a difficult and challenging year for the community. The issue that has dominated the Jewish community this year has been the armed uprising in Israel. The media hostility to Israel is of grave concern. The Board of Deputies has made every effort to respond to the worst excesses of the British media. It has been painful to witness the bias against Israel. Nevertheless, we have lobbied the Government and the media to take a more balanced approach to the current Middle East conflict. Altering the public's perception of Israel is something that can only be achieved by challenging entrenched views together.

The forthcoming UN conference in Durban is another cause for great concern. The conference is supposed to be a generic conference about racism with no specific references. However, there is a move by Arab states to hijack the conference in an attempt to equate Zionism with racism. This resolution was originally passed at the U.N General Assembly on November 10 1975 and was eventually expunged in 1991. We are acting to head off this challenge to delegitimise the State of Israel and to downplay the Holocaust. The Board hosted a recent meeting of international Jewish NGOs and letters have been written to every European Ambassador and the new Foreign Secretary. Our thoughts, as always, are with Israel in this distressing period.

We are disappointed that the High Court has failed to uphold the exclusion order on Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. Louis Farrakhan has long espoused racist and antisemitic views and has never apologised for the obscene remarks he has repeatedly made. The increased racial tension in the north of England has made the court's decision all the more alarming. As a community we have been horrified at the race riots and it is our belief that the invitation of Louis Farrakhan to Britain will heighten an already sensitive region. Despite this recent event, the relationships that exist between our community and other ethnic minority communities are growing with many shared experiences in our drive to create a harmonious multi-cultural society.

This year we witnessed the first Holocaust Memorial Day. The Board was one of a number of groups that participated in the Home Office planning for the day. The national ceremony brought together victims of genocides from all over the world to share their stories and to educate. This was a resounding success with the extremely moving national ceremony placing its emphasis on educating the younger generation about the dangers of hatred and intolerance. The Holocaust Memorial Day this year enabled us to share our experiences as a community with other ethnic minorities.

There are more Jewish schools and centres of learning and more opportunity to travel and study than ever before. Our children have never been so well educated in their religious traditions, or so comfortable with the Hebrew language. We have given back to the British society as a result of this with more Jewish musicians, actors, painters and writers than every before. Our culture is wider and richer; we must continue to provide our children with the knowledge and strength to continue this trend for the Jewish community of Britain.

We have worked together as a community on a number of issues, putting aside our differences and showing respect for the good of everyone. This is seen on many occasions, including the Yom Hatzma'ut celebrations and the campaign for missing Israeli servicemen. These are just two examples of where leaders of religious organisations and lay leaders meet to discuss issues of commonality.

I have had the privilege to serve the Jewish community as President for just over a year. Without the young leaders of the community to carry on our work we will not be in a position to see our work through. It is imperative that we encourage the leaders of tomorrow to engage in the business of the community today. This is a challenge that I take into my second year and ask for your help in achieving this. Serving the Jewish community is a privilege that can be shared by so many more.

L'Shana Tova Tikatevu

Jo Wagerman OBE

President
Rosh Hashanah 5762

PAST AND PRESENT

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS IN RHEMSDORF

By David Herman

David came from Prague in the winter of 1946 with "The Boys" from Ruthenia. He was born in Mukacevo and his family owned a brick factory. He and his wife Olive have two sons and two daughters, three of whom are married and have grandchildren. They have been very active and generous supporters of our Society from its inception.

It is ten o'clock. Soon the lights will go out. I climb up on to my bunk. I always select a top bunk. It is colder on top, but the person above you does not pee on your face. I lie down on my side. There are five of us squeezed together in one bunk, no room to move.

The lights are switched off. I am itchy and scratching myself. I'm riddled with lice, bitten all over my body. I am hungry and very tired. I cannot sleep. I have to wait until Sunday to get at the lice; Sundays, the day of our rest, we play games of finding the lice. They are in all the seams in my striped prisoners uniform; they are filled with blood, my blood. I kill hundreds, but there are always more. I cannot wash my clothes because there is no warm water or soap. I have nothing else to change into. I wear the same thin striped cotton outfit day and night, summer and winter: my clothes smell, my body is red all over, full with bites. During the day it does not bother me, I'm too occupied to think of it. At work we are continuously beaten, abused and sworn at, the days are long and the work is hard. I'm getting used to existing and working hard without food; I'm so thin I can count all the bones in my body. Many of my friends are like zombies (muselmen), they just stare at you; they look through you but see nothing, they walk slowly, ready to collapse at any time. They are the living dead. They have given up the fight for life, they do not talk, only mumble. They will be next; their bodies laid out in the washroom. Soon, new prisoners will arrive from Buchenwald to replace the dead and the weak. There is an unlimited new supply; nobody cares, nobody worries, and it is a death factory where the worn parts are continuously replaced.

I sink into a dream. I do not know if I'm asleep or just hallucinating; I'm back at home, I promise my parents that I will be good and will not fight with my sister and brothers. It is Friday night, Erev Shabat. I can smell my favourite food, chicken soup and paprika chicken with dumplings. We all sit at the table. We have three guests for supper; one is Meir Tzitz the town's fool, and then there is Mendi and Dudi, students from out of town. My father invited them at the synagogue to come to our home for supper. The children all laugh at Meir, but he is very serious. I can taste the food. It seems that nothing has changed; life in the camp is only a dream, a performance on a stage, everything is as it was and we're all together again as a family.

I dream of dogs barking, I hear shouting and screaming. Suddenly the lights are switched on, the time is 4am. The SS enter our block with rifles on their shoulders, holding onto dogs and whips in their hands, the Kapos holding wooden clubs, hitting out they do not care whom they injure and what damage they cause; they are all shouting: "Auf stehn auf stehn. Raus raus raus, du ferfluchter Jude, du schwein hund du scheiss kerl, raus raus raus, mach das schnell schnell". I climb down from the bunk still half asleep; we gather the dead bodies and take them into the washroom. There they are laid out and counted.

It is frosty and very cold. The latrine is outdoors - a large trench dug in the ground - it is all frozen up.

We line up for Appel. It is snowing and bitter cold. I am shivering, jumping up and down to get warm. The counting has started; you must stand to attention and not move. "56478", I reply "Javol".

The Appel takes a long time, the numbers don't add up and the counting starts again. When it is over, more lifeless bodies are collected and carried into the washroom and laid out with the other dead. A lorry arrives to remove the dead bodies to the crematorium. Today there are 38 dead, some days only 12 - 15, other days there are as many as 50 - 60 dead in one night.

Camp life goes on. We receive a slice of black bread, a small piece of margarine and a cup of warm Ersatz coffee. It is nearly 6am; we line up in fives and are counted again passing through the gate on the way to the Brabak factory. We march to the sound of "Links zwo drei vier, links zwo drei vier, links, links links los, los, mach das schnell". On the way, many of those who are too weak collapse in the road, unable to stand up. They are left behind to be collected and taken away. About an hour and a half later we arrive in the factory exhausted, with blistered feet and hungry. Work starts immediately unloading from freight trains very heavy 10 meter long steel rail tracks, railway sleepers and tons of 50kg bags of cement and ballast. Then we continue with the rebuilding of the railway lines.

At the beginning in this camp we were all Jews from the Carpathians, now there are very few left of the original 3,000. The dead have been replaced by some Dutch inmates, (criminals, homosexuals and communists) many of them have become helpers to the Kapos and are very cruel. Hungarian Jews, German Jews and now Polish Jews are arriving. It seems like it is an experiment to find out how long a human can survive working very hard on very little food. On our way to and from the camp, we pass many Germans in uniform and civilians. They wave and smile to the SS guards, they talk to them, but show no interest in us. It is like we do not exist. I have the impression that they feel sorry for our SS guards because they have to be in charge and torture sub-humans like us. They don't seem to object or care when the SS beat us; they think we must deserve it for being lazy, listless and not able to walk fast enough in the wooden clogs we wear. The German civilians never show sympathy towards us, there is no curiosity of who we are, where we are from, what we are doing and why we are being punished. The thousands of German civilian workers in the factory know exactly what is happening in the Camp, they are aware of the conditions we are working under; when passing us, they look the other way, pretending not to see us.

Between 9 and 10 on most mornings, the air raid warnings start "Achtung, Achtung, Luftgefhar" and the sirens start blaring. Another day of bombing. They are the only times when we have hope. Soon the surrounding area is enveloped in an artificial smog, visibility is down to 3 or 4 metres. The German civilian workers and uniformed Todt workers all run to the bunkers to hide, nobody cares for us, the condemned Heftlinge; we are marched at a fast pace out of the factory for 1 - 2 km to sand pits, no air raid shelters for us; we are under the open sky, waiting for the bombs to start falling and the explosions and fires to follow.

I enjoy watching the hundreds of American heavy silver bombers sparkling in the sky high above, the engines throbbing with their heavy loads. The sky is full of anti-aircraft shells exploding. I watch the planes releasing the bombs; I see the air battles in the sky when the German fighters are sent up, airmen parachuting down when their planes are hit. Even though we are in the open and in danger of being bombed, it gives us confidence and encouragement when seeing that somebody is hitting back at the Germans, at their factories, cities, towns and villages.

Sometimes it takes a long as 2 - 3 hours before the all-clear is sounded. When the raid is over we are marched to the nearest towns to fill in the huge craters in the roads caused by bomb explosions. We extinguish fires and help with the clearing up. We see the destruction of German towns, delayed bombs exploding, houses on fire, many German civilians dead and wounded. There are no thanks from the Germans for the work we do. They blame us for everything that is happening to them.

It is 9pm. The Appel has begun. On the Appel plaz 2 Heftlinge are hanged for trying to escape, others are flogged for the smallest of things such as losing a cap or tin plate, for speaking to strangers, being late for Appel, avoiding work, for stealing, caught hiding something or trying to smuggle anything into the camp. To maintain Nazi discipline punishment for this is 25 - 100 lashes. While these punishments are carried out, we all must stand and watch. Few people recover after they are flogged.

I am exhausted and hungry. I can hardly stand up. It has been a long day.

A GLIMPSE INTO MY EXPERIENCES IN PLASZOW

By Harry Balsam

Harry came to England with the Windermere group. He lived in the Loughton and Belsize Park hostels. He is the Vice-Chairman of our Society.

I was one of the lucky ones. The Commandant of the camp by the name of Muller, picked me out of around 350 men and 35 boys between the ages of 12 - 14. He told me that I was to be his *Putzer* (Boot Polisher). The remaining 34 boys he said, would be shot. He told me that I could have one boy with me. I was petrified and not thinking clearly. I told him that all of the boys were my friends and cousins. He shouted back to me *"One boy only - I said."* The first name that came to my mind in a panic, was Monek Rosenbaum[1]. He was called out and told to stand beside me. The remaining boys were crying and screaming. He told us that small boys would be of no use to him as he needed men to work and help build the direct railway line from Cracow to Berlin.

After keeping the men and boys standing for about two hours on the Apel-Platz (Roll Call Ground), he decided not to shoot any of them but to transfer them to another camp called Prokocim, which was about three miles away.

We were surrounded by the guards with their machine guns pointing at us ready to fire.

Rosenbaum and I stayed behind in Plaszow with the other men. Rosenbaum worked in the camp whilst I worked only for Muller cleaning and polishing his boots. When Commandant Muller was not around, I spent my time walking around the camp. I used to go into the kitchen and take out as much food as I wanted for friends and people I knew. One such person was a boy called Pomeranc with whom I became very friendly. He was already in Plaszow when I arrived. Other such people were the elders of my town who were helping teach me my barmitzvah. This I recited in Plaszow Slave Labour Camp sometime in September 1942.

I am not aware of any other boy being Barmitzved in a camp.

After a few months of being Commandant of Plaszow, Muller was promoted to a higher rank and put in charge of the complete Cracow Ghetto and surrounding towns, including the main Plaszow Concentration Camp. This included Prokocim and Biezanow camps. I was with him most of the time, even on his visits to the different camps.

Muller had suitcases filled with diamonds, watches, gold coins as well as large amounts of cash, all of which had been confiscated from Jews when they arrived in the camps.

If anyone was found with items of value after being searched, they were shot on the spot without any hesitation. This happened in front of me on many occasions. Killing Jews in that way was a normal everyday occurrence.

After working for Muller for several months, he trusted me enough to give me access to all his treasures, which were hidden under his beds in various rooms, including my room which adjoined his, outside the main camp.

He gave me a pass enabling me to go about freely. I used to go to Cracow on a bicycle to buy cigarettes and spirits for him on the black market. These were often used by Muller whilst entertaining his friends, both male and female, as well as SS and Gestapo officers who would visit him from the main headquarters in Cracow.

Several such frequent visitors were the SS Oberfuhrer Sherner, SS Hauptsturmfuhrers Amon Goeth and Dr Hassar, Gestapo officers Herman Heinrich and Wilhem Kunde. Goeth was to succeed Muller as Commandant of Plaszow Concentration Camp. Sherner, Hassar, Heinrich, Kunde and Kruger between them controlled the entire deportation and extermination of millions of Jews in Poland.

I used to go two or three times a week to the Cracow Ghetto to visit people I knew who were still living there. I never had to wear a yellow star on my arm reading *'JUDE'* (JEW) as everyone else did. If a Jew was caught not wearing the yellow star, they were immediately executed.

On one such occasion, the railway police stopped a young girl of about 18 years old about to board the train at Plaszow Station. Her name was Christine[2]. Upon interrogating her, she broke down and admitted to being Jewish. In turn she was brought before the Commandant of Plaszow to be executed for the crime of not wearing the "Yellow Star". I happened to be with the Commandant at the gate of the camp when she arrived. Muller personally took charge of the situation, leaving the two railway police behind at the

main entrance. He marched her to the rear of the block, which was the execution ground of the camp. I ran after them begging him not to shoot the girl. Muller looked at the fear in my face and fired two shots into the air. He told the girl to run into the block. Muller and I then marched back to the main entrance where the two police were standing. He told them that the girl was dead. They returned to the railway station. I thanked Muller for his compassion in not shooting the girl. He told me to tell her that she was a very lucky girl and that she could stay in the camp and work in the kitchen with the other girls.

One day, Muller told me to go with him to get clothing for the camp. We were going to a town called Tarnow which, prior to 1939, had a large Jewish community. Half the Jews of Tarnow had already been deported, leaving all their belongings behind. Their clothing had been stored in the large synagogue of Tarnow, which was outside the boundary of the ghetto.

We travelled in a large lorry with a trailer at the back. The driver of the lorry was Mullers' personal guard and I sat with them in the front. It was a freezing cold day with snow covering the ground. It took us about three hours to get to Tarnow. I was absolutely frozen. We drove into the ghetto and went straight to the Jewish Police Station where they dropped me off. The Jewish Commandant was instructed by Muller to look after me. He then went to the headquarters of the Gestapo to make the arrangements to collect the clothing. After about two hours they returned telling me that they would be back for me tomorrow as the clothing could not be collected until the following day. Muller suggested I should stay overnight in the Police Station. I was very happy as it was nice and warm, and I didn't fancy a long journey back in the lorry. The Jewish Police fed me well and I went to sleep after the meal.

It was about midnight when I was awoken by the noise of machine gun fire and the screaming of people. The SS police were shouting "Alle Heraus" - Alle Heraus" "Everybody Out" - "Everybody Out". This included everyone in the Jewish Police Station. The SS were smashing down all the doors screaming at everybody to go to the Apel-Platz (Roll Call Ground). Their alsation dogs were growling and barking and the SS were firing their machine guns and rifles all over the place. This continued throughout the night until daylight, by which time everyone had been rounded up and forced to stand at the Apel-Platz. That was the last selection of the Jews of Tarnow. We were then marched to the train station where the wagons were waiting for us. The SS guards were hitting out, beating and shooting anyone not marching quick enough. I kept on telling the guards that I shouldn't be amongst the group. I was beaten on my head with the butt of a rifle many times. I kept on telling them, and the more I did, the more I was beaten over the head. I shouted that I should be with Commandant Muller from Plaszow. All to no avail. However, as I was being herded with everyone into one of the wagons on the train, my luck changed. SS Haptsturmfurhrer Hassar recognised me and called me off the train. He asked me if I was Balzam the Putzer of Commandant Muller? I screamed "*Yes*". In sheer delight, I told him the whole story. One hour later I was on my way back to Plaszow.

After that episode I never returned to Tarnow. The entire transport that night from Tarnow went straight to Auschwitz Extermination Camp. Nobody from that transport ever returned from Auschwitz.

That was the last of the *"Jews of Tarnow."*

1. Moniek Rosenbaum also survived the war and came to England with our group in 1945. He now lives in Jerusalem and the last I heard of him he had ten children.

2. In August 1945 we came together to England with three hundred and thirty-two other boys and girls. In 1948 Pomeranc left London for Palestine to fight in the War of Independence. One year later he returned to London where we lived together again right up until he got married.

   Pomeranc worked very hard helping to bring up his two children, Denise and Stephen, whom he adored. He was very proud to see them both qualify as solicitors before unfortunately dying of cancer in 1983. His memory will always live on.

3. Christine also survived the war, ending up in the USA, marrying an American businessman. In 1960 she came to England specially to see me with her husband as she had heard that I had survived the war and was living in London. She could not thank me enough for saving her life.

I REMEMBER

By William Himmelfarb

William came to England with the Windermere group in August 1945. He emigrated to the U.S.A. towards the end of the '40s'. He lives in the Bronx and keeps in close touch with our members.

My name is William Himmelfarb. I, too, came to England with the Windermere group on August 14th 1945. After a short stay, I was sent to live in Manchester with fifteen other friends, in a Bnei Akiva Hostel. The five years that I spent in England were great. While attending evening school in 1948, I wrote this essay.

"Life in England has given me a new start for the future. To understand it, one has to compare it with the life in other parts of the world. I was born in a small town (Kopshevuitz, Poland). In 1942 I was torn away from my family and friends by the Nazis. The years I have spent in the camps or, as I call it, Hitler's Hell. The impressions which were left in my memory, what my parents told me. I still have faint memories of the life and customs in my homeland. When I arrived in England with little expectation, I entered a new country with a future. I was put in an orphanage home with fifteen other boys. The staff were my parents and the boys were my brothers. I could feel something fresh had come to me. At the hostel I found recreation, education, etc. After a few years, I regained my feelings as a free human being. I noticed that the English people were very loyal to the Queen and Government. I found people to be friendly and kind. I will always bear in my mind the good impression which I gained in this country (England). Therefore, my heart is full of gratitude to the Jewish Committee and the country for the chance of a new life and a new beginning." End of essay.

I left England in 1950 for the United States and I made my home in New York. I served in the U.S. Army during the Korean war and after the war became a U.S. citizen. I married a wonderful woman (Ruth). We raised a family, a son and a daughter. I also have two beautiful grandchildren. Life has been good to us and we give thanks to the good Lord for our achievements.

MEMORIES

By Yisroel Rudzinski

Yisroel came to England with the Windermere group and studied at the Yeshivah in Gateshead. He is a committee member of our Society and it was his inspiration that resulted in the Society commissioning a Sefer Torah and in erecting memorial plaques of our parents at the Borehamwood and Elstree Synagogue.

Normally, as time goes by things get forgotten, but lately just the opposite is happening to me. I start to remember things from the past, and this usually happens at the time of a Simcha - either the wedding of a grandchild or a Bris of a great-grandson - both of which we have celebrated recently.

A few days before the wedding of my granddaughter, I 'phoned my friend Moishele to enquire after him and, at the same time, I mentioned the wedding and if he'd like to come I'd be delighted to see him. He came with his wife - well, words cannot describe his emotion; he was standing and crying and thinking back to our days in the concentration camp Skarzysko Kamienna and Schlieben, those dreadful times, and here I was standing under the Chupa marrying off a grandchild. Never in our wildest dreams did we think that this would ever happen to us.

As you probably know, I come from Piotrkow. We were fortunate that there were two factories in our town that employed young boys, thus enabling more boys to survive than from many other towns. Amongst the survivors of our town is the Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Lau. The Radoszycer Rebbe lived in Piotrkow but unfortunately he did not survive the war. He was taken from Schlieben to Buchenwald and died there. Two of his daughters did survive, one died soon after the war and the other one married a well-known writer, Reb Yechiel Granatstein, who lives in Israel. Unfortunately, this daughter passed away a few years ago.

They have one son living in Benc Berak who holds and important position im Mishmeres Stam (testing Sefer Torahs, Tefillin and Mezuzos by special computer).

From Piotrikow I was sent to Skarzysko, together with the Rebbe. He was actually hidden in the Ghetto with his family, and elderly mother, two daughters, a son-in-law and himself. One of the daughters went out from her hiding place and she was caught and was put with a group to be sent to Skarzysko. When the Rebbe heard this he came from hiding to plead for his daughter. When the Germans saw him they said "We have been waiting for you for a long time." When his pleading did not help, he said "Then we all go together", and so the whole family went to Skarzysko. I travelled in the same lorry with them; I am not going to describe the conditions on our arrival in Skarzysko, that would take a whole book. The next day we were marched to the ammunition factory and the Germans started to select people - those who had a trade either working with wood or iron were sent to a different department. The young boys were put to another side. I myself was thinking, young boys are not of very much use to them and as I was tall I stayed with the grown-ups. As we had no trade, we were given the hardest job making the shells for underwater mines. The Rebbe was amongst us. We carried on as best we could, working twelve hours a day with very little food, getting weaker day by day. But the way, the young boys were sent to work in Work C where they filled the mines with gunpowder and explosives and within a couple of weeks they became yellow and died from inhaling the poisonous fumes. The Rebbe's mother and son-in-law died from typhoid soon after arrival.

Coming back to my remembering, our day started at 7 in the morning till 7 in the evening. At 12 noon we had a half-hour break when we got a ladle of soup, which was just like a bit of warm water and if you found a bit of potato in it you were lucky. The days were very cold and we managed to find a petrol barrel and some wood. We lit a fire and warmed ourselves. The Rebbe was amongst us. Although he was in the same bitter position as we were, he started to talk to us and give us encouragement. "Yidden," he said, "Don't worry. G-d is only trying us. You will see that one day we shall come out of here and have families, children and grandchildren." I was 16½ years old, had a swollen body from malnutrition and was listening to the Rebbe's words and started to become happy with my lot - after all the Rebbe said so.

I am happy to say that the Rebbe's words became a reality. I now have, thank G-d, a bunch of grandchildren and great-grandchildren DR some of whom are living in Israel. When I come to Israel, my grandchildren and I usually enjoy a Shabbos together and on one such occasion recently I remembered the Rebbe's blessing. We were in Bene Berak one Friday evening and whilst sitting at the Shabbos table I suggested to my grandchildren that we visit the Rabbi's son-in-law and family the following Shabbas morning. After davening we met together and went to the house of the Rebbe's grandson. He was sitting together with his father and family. I told them of this story and showed them that I was bringing living proof of the Rebbe's blessing - Reb Yitzchokel of Radoszyc of blessed memory.

I ONCE SAW AN APPLE IN RAVENSBRUCK

This article consists of extracts from a presentation given at Princeton University on the subject "The Terror of History"

Judith Sherman, November 2000

Judith Sherman (nee Stern) lived with her younger sister Mirjam in Weir Courtney. She studied Social Science at the L.S.E. and later emigrated to the U.S.A., where she lives with her husband Reuben in New Jersey.

It is not I who should be telling this story. Because this is the Holocaust story - the final solution story. The goal of the final solution is the killing of every Jew in the German sphere of influence. The Holocaust has an impact on me - I feel branded, but I survive. My brother Karpu, age 9, gassed in Auschwitz should be here to tell what that "final" means - to be gassed. My mother, Ilona, dies in a transit camp in Sered, Czechoslovakia. She should be here telling. Eite, my father, 43, dies of starvation in concentration camp Sachsenhausen. An hour and a half out of Berlin, the capital of the Third Reich. He survives labour camps and hiding and is captured when the Russians are already liberating Czechoslovakia. He holds out until a day or two after the liberation of the camp, as does his brother, Moshe. They spend all their prewar and war years together and die in Sachsenshausen. I do know something of starvation, but not all of it, not like they do. And the others too, should be here telling, cousins, aunts, neighbours, baker, shoemaker - almost everyone, every Jew I know until age 14 and the many whom I do not know in life, but see in their death in Ravensbruck.

My memory of Karpu is my most intense and the most vulnerable. He goes into Auschwitz gas with his nine year old cousin Yidu and Yidu's grandparents, both in their 80's. Yidu's mother, Irenke, who is with them, is sent to the other side and dies in Auschwitz later.

I wrote this a long time ago.
Karpu in Auschwitz
eight - perhaps as much
as nine
I tease him around our
kitchen table.
Did anyone want to
care to
was strong enough to
touch his pale hair
when gas was filling ?
and his breathing
his breathing
I want to be there
and help him breathe
and postpone dying
and I do not want
to die
until he does
and - - and - -

A biographical memory.

A brook runs through the centre of the main street. On each side is an alley of acacia trees - providing elegance and shade. On Shabbat afternoons we stride back and forth, back and forth along this pathway. Wearing our best and noting everyone else's best. Everyone knows everyone - guests too. Shabbat preparations start on Wednesday with a seriousness of purpose and no short cuts. So now after prayers, meals and nap time we "schpatzir" (promenade). Predictably and pleasantly.

And the river! The river on the south side of the meadow. Such a meadow - a carpet of wild flowers. The river runs the mill. We splash and run in the river. My brother, sister, cousins, all the village population.

Somewhere in Czechoslovakia you can still find this place. I did - again. After Auschwitz and Germany, London and Jerusalem and the USA. After marriage, children and grandchildren. I went back.

the house not there
the plum trees in the
garden
recognize me.

And then terror. I am about nine years old. I wake up at night to have a rifle with bayonet pointed at my face. The German soldier says "du kanst ja ruhig schlaffen - wir wissen dass ihr alle Juden sind." (You can sleep peacefully. We know that you are all Jews.) At this point my parents and relatives are standing undressed in the hallway with rifles pointed at them. Other soldiers are rampaging through the house. Later I hear my mother say "Shoot us or leave us alone!" How does she dare? Eventually they leave, surely not because of her words; probably because it is not time to shoot Jews in Czechoslovakia yet - though it is in Poland. This is in 1939. This German troop is on the way to complete the occupation of Poland.

I have heard it said, with surprise or with contempt, that Jews went to their death without resistance. In spite of overwhelming power on their side and none on ours, there was resistance and usually at tremendous cost. In my family there was a decision, a determination, that we survive. All of us. Some of us. Somebody. My parents arrange for us children to be smuggled across the Czechoslovak border into Hungary, which at this time is still safe for Jews. They pay peasants to take us across the border at night and deliver us to my aunt - father's sister - in Kassau.. (Now that I have children I appreciate the anguish of sending one's children into risky, dangerous situations because the alternative is definitely worse. Parents choose dangerous uncertainty because

the known certainty is even more dangerous. Such are the times for parents and for children.) We wait for a cloudy night in a border village to lessen the chances of getting caught by the border police. Sister Mirjam is age six and being carried across. We end up in an internment camp in Budapest. My aunt Frida takes us there by train illegally at great risk to herself so that she can then petition for our release to her. She comes to visit us in the internment camp. She is not allowed inside. We meet at the gate. I cry and she says why are you crying? I explain how can I not cry when I do not even have a toothbrush? She thinks that rather amusing - in the scheme of things to cry over a toothbrush. To me it is cause for crying. You need some physicalness in your life that you take for granted. The toothbrush starts your day and ends your day - a routine like a prayer. Aunt Frida brings a toothbrush the next day and a comb. Later - in Ravensbruck - a toothbrush is no longer what I crave. I am now concerned with more basic physicalness. We spend a year in Kassau,

It is April, 1944. The Germans are deporting Jews from Hungary. We are now smuggled back into Czechoslovakia and go back into hiding. Mirjam and I together. We are betrayed. By now everyone has heard about Gestapo interrogations. A friend of our family was there. Being tortured. His interrogators keep asking "What do you say?" Whatever his response they repeat "What do you say?" Finally a local policeman whispers in his ear "povedz dakujen" - say thank you. He does and he is thrown back into his cell where he dies. I know of this because his cell mate was released and told us. Our friend's family was allowed to bury him I know of other Gestapo stories as well. I am terrified in this prison - Mirjam too, but less so - she knows less. They keep asking me where my family and other Jews are hiding. I do not say and fortunately do not know. We are not tortured physically, but the intense fear is paralysing - it hurts. In our case, too, a local policeman smuggles us out of prison and through various contacts we finally join relatives in a small eastern town. Shortly after I go with a group of Jews into hiding in the forest.

★ ★ ★

We in the forest, about 25 people, live on blueberries, black bread and raw bacon, which one of our women, dressed as a peasant, obtains from a nearby village. We sleep in huts on the floor. We sleep in our clothing.

And once again on a predawn morning I wake up with a gun and a flashlight pointing in my face. Schnell! Schnell! Herraus! A unit of German soldiers ordering us to leave the huts. Outside a man runs away from the group. He is shot in the back. His wife runs to him. She is also shot. They have an infant daughter cared tor by a peasant family whom they pay. When they hear of the death of the couple they poison the baby. I hear this when the war is over.

Our group is shoved into cattle cars and sent somewhere. We are not told the destination. We have to sit with our knees pulled up or stand. No room for lying. There is light only from a small barred window high up. We are not given food and worse, no water, for several days. There is a bucket as toilet. It is soon filled and never emptied. People go mad for lack of water. When we eventually stop once along the way and they drink, they recover their sanity. (That lack of water madness remains another non-erasable vision of sounds and images.) A young man wants to push aside the bars and jump out the window. Some fear German retribution and some say do it. He does and as he jumps we hear a train coming from the opposite direction. We do not know if he got killed or if he makes it. And to make it - from there - well that takes another whole world of - everything ---- I know that we do not want our train to go "East" - to Auschwitz. I know that would be bad, but I do not know about gas chambers. I pray a lot and make a deal with God - if we are spared Auschwitz I will fulfill a promise I make there - after the war I will ---- - we go to Auschwitz. The wagon door is opened. Men in striped shabby clothing jump up into the wagon and yell for us to get out. They push. People try to take their belongings. They are not given time. Our forest group has no belongings. On the platform are many soldiers with guns and dogs. Our welcome is fierce, harsh and bewildering. We stand on the platform. There are crowds of people everywhere - rows of people as far as you can see. We are perhaps even more confused than scared. Then another order barked in German and the men in stripes start pushing us back into the train. We go on to Ravensbruck, Germany. Later we learn that because of the massive Hungarian deportation, even Auschwitz is too overcrowded. 10,000 people are gassed in a day during that time period. And later we also hear that ours is the only transport to be shipped on directly from Auschwitz. Every survivor has a miracle story - a luck story. That is mine. For that one day or hour, no room in Auschwitz. How many trainloads were killed for that "miracle' I do not know.

The women are given striped, rough prison dresses, no underwear, no stockings. I put on my red polka-dot summer dress and thin gray jacket and my shoes. The women are given wooden clogs. Apart from bread, my shoes are now my most important survival aid. The issued clogs are surely a sadistically calculated hindrance. They hurt, create blisters and sores and you cannot walk fast in them. My aunt Ella trades her bread rations for rags to wrap around her feet to ease her clog problem. She gives up bread so she can walk faster (slow walking may mean punishment or death), but she is too weak without the bread. Such are the wooden clog life and death decisions.

We are given a metal bowl and spoon. These we keep with us at all times. They are not replaced if lost. I go into the wash room where there are only sinks. As soon as I go in, I run out. The floor is covered with bodies of naked women. They are so thin and have missing noses or ears or parts of thighs. Rats feed on them. I do not go near for several days and then I do. There is no other way to wash. The water is always cold. I walk outside and see two prisoners pulling a cart with women's bodies. They pick up the bodies and throw them on top of the pile. I look away and hear one say to the other, "Da ist ja eine neue." Yes, I am new, but not for long. When you are cold in Ravensbruck, you do not get warmer-just less cold, perhaps. When you are hungry - just less hungry. Options for better are minimal and unpredictable. I become sick. I cough and my cough does not get better. I am sent to the clinic by the block-elteste. I go in fear and panic. By now we know that being sick is bad news and seeking a cure is very risky. I am examined, not told of my diagnosis, I am told to report to "Revier, " the hospital. I take my bowl and spoon and go to Revier. In this Revier, as with so much else in this place - where things are upside down and inside out - in this Revier - where women are sent to die and selections to the gas chambers are regular - here in this barrack my life is saved. Erika Buchmann, a German political prisoner, who has been there since 1939, after serving in several other prisons, pays life-saving attention to me. She puts an extra potato in the soup and takes me to the clothing storage, where I am given a warm brown woolen sweater with a large white "X" painted across the back. The sweater is great, but soon becomes lice infected - even more so than my red cotton dress. I am embarrassed to search for lice in the company of others. But soon the four of us who share two bunks make this into a social activity. Every one's temperature is taken daily and people with temperature above a certain level are removed. Two of my bunk mates are soon gone. No one is informed as to where - but they know and we know. Gas chambers are operating. When in Revier, we do not stand appell. Many there are unable to do so anyway, but in the other blocks, physical disability is not an excuse, just a reason for shooting or gassing. No appell in Revier. But I have an image from there that I cannot erase or weaken. It is in my eyes, my ears, in my skin. Off the corridor leading to the wash room is a room. It is small and crowded with "dei veruckte" (with the crazies). I think there are no bunks in there and not enough blankets. When they are taken out, some are naked. I hear them scream, shout, fight, cry. They are kept in there until taken to be killed. I do not know what constitutes madness in Ravensbruck. -- crying too much for a lost child, getting into a squabble, displeasing a person in authority - even a prisoner in authority - losing one's mind, attempting suicide at the electric fence. Ravensbruck is madness , but these women labelled such are taken away and the empty room is quickly filled again. I still hear the screaming ones and the silent ones. Some are naked when taken out.

★ ★ ★

I never see a prayer book in Ravensbruck. Punishment death. I once see an apple in Ravensbruck. The SS guard walks by. She is dressed warmly - and eats the apple casually. We look. I think often of the casualness of her. She is not even eating to provoke - just eating. Casually. How came she by such casualness? I know how we victims are made. How was she? She should tell. We should know. Regina, from the bottom bunk of my previous block comes to the fence. She arrives in Ravensbruck with another woman. They both come with babies and occupy the adjoining lower bunks. I

watch how hard each tries to keep her baby alive. Regina, at the fence, says my "baby died". Regina looks empty and worn. She does not cry. I do not cry. I do not cry much in Ravensbruck. But this is a time for crying. For smashing up the world. For ripping bark off trees. For puncturing God's eardrums. I do not ask her did you place the baby on the cold wash room floor - how long before they took her? Did you have something to wrap her in? Did you watch? These questions I still have. Some intensities do not leave you. The other baby dies also.

After the evening soup, the women in their bunks discuss recipes - for poppy seed cake, challah for Shabbat bread. They do not talk of family back home, just food back home. It is easier. (Shortly after our marriage and arrival in America, Reuven and I are invited to a wedding. I sit next to a man and when upon his inquiry I tell him I am from Kurima - he says "I know you - I was with your father in Sachsenhausen. He always spoke of the family Friday evening meal, and the zmirot. I even know where at table you were sitting." My father was in Sachsenhausen, one half hour from Ravensbruck. We did, of course, not know of each other's presence. At this time of hunger we connected through family food - 30 kilometers and a world apart).

From this part of the camp you can see Lake Schwedise. Beautifully calm waters with two swans on it and trees. I say to myself yes there is a world out there - peaceful, lovely, natural. It does exist. And when I revisit Ravensbruck 50 years later I learn that the ashes from the nearby crematoria were dumped into this lake. I place flowers onto the water - for those I knew and for those who have no one to place a flower for them.

It is April, 1945. We expect the war to end. We expect President Roosevelt to save us. We all believe in him. It is fortunate we do not know at the time how uninvolved he is with saving us. Where would our hopes have gone? His goal for first ending the war before taking any measures to save us is so late for so many of us. We are given a Red Cross package and marched out of the camp.

We are marched out of the camp five to a row, SS guards and dogs on either side. Long, long convoys. It is rumoured that the Russians are coming and the Germans do not want us to fall into enemy hands. We march all day and I am again grateful for my shoes. In the evenings we stay in a field and eat from our Red Cross package - powdered milk, canned meat, beans, cheese and biscuits. Such a new experience - to spend time on food - to have food to spend time on. We are not used to such food any more. Many get sick and some die. But for now we eat. We march for days. Our food is gone. We do not get more. Women who cannot keep up, slow down or collapse and are shot. At first we turn around at every shot. Later less - and then we just march on robot-like. We have to keep to the side - the road is crowded with tanks, army trucks, soldiers retreating from the front, civilians running from the Russians. The end is clearly in sight. What of our end? The guards and their dogs stay with us. And then we wake up on a farm one morning and the SS are gone and Russian soldiers are there --- We are free.

Someone slaughters a cow and my aunt brings asparagus from somewhere. We eat. Some dance and sing. Some do not. We walk into the nearby town and stay in an old hotel. The faces in those hotel mirrors need re-introductions - to ourselves. Other survivors arrive. I do not know when exactly I begin to see myself as a survivor rather than a Haftling -victim, but it is energizing - a life jolt.

I am back in Kurima. The people who see me have such a look of surprise - less I think at my scrawny appearance than that I appear at all. It is as though our time there has passed. We are out of order. Cousins Elza and Mella arrive too and then sister Mirjam. We wait for our fathers. Somehow we know already that our mothers and brothers have been killed. Our fathers do not come. I am sent to the Tatry Mountains for recuperation. The British government has agreed to allow 1000 youth survivors into Great Britain. Just over half that number can be found. We go to England under the auspices of the Central British Fund. Because my sister is only eight, we are sent to a children's home in the country. It is a home for the youngest Holocaust survivors. Several of the children from age four have Auschwitz tattoo numbers on their arms. They are Mengele's twins. Dr. Mengele performed medical experiments to see how he can improve German fertility rates and ensure blue-eyed babies for the Fatherland.

SS man - what do you tell your children?
SS man
what do you tell your
children?
Do you say
obedience is the law
the law is loyalty
us - Uber Alles?
Do you have nightmares
with the boots polished
of stains
under your bed?
Do you tell your children
of the children
who stained your boots?
Do you have nightmares?

Yes - to this day I am affected by the Holocaust. I have been fortunate and have had a good full life since those times. Family, friends, education, work, fun. I also live on two tracks - always. I am here and I am there - when I have a shower; when I eat potatoes; when I am hungry - when I am not hungry. When I sneeze - I think in hiding that would be a give-away. If an infant cries - would this baby have to be smothered to save the others in hiding? Would there be milk? Water? A mother? I do not fast on Yom Kippur, but do attend services. I do not wear striped clothing. I own sturdy boots. I do not turn off bad news on T.V. - because the bad news should be heard by someone. In supermarkets I do not select fruit or vegetables. I just take these from the top. I cannot engage in selections because of Auschwitz rejections - because of Mengele.

Parenting. Because of the traumatic separations in their own lives some survivors have difficulty letting go of their children. My reaction is the opposite. I have not spoken about the Holocaust to my family. But I did have a very definite intent to encourage our three children to "make it out there" My own model for survival. And also very deliberately provided "good moments" - for warmth in hard times. Some good words too from some good poems. And a mother they can stand up to! My biggest accomplishment!!

And death - I want an un-Auschwitz funeral - visibility in death. Concreteness. Rituals. Witnesses. Markers - a gravestone. A defiant-in-your-face Mengele death. After a lot of searching, at my request, Reuven and I bought twelve cemetery plots, just for the two of us. Maximum space - concreteness. On a hill - under a poplar tree - with view. I ask my favourite Rabbi to make the eulogy - she agrees. And my good friend also agrees to speak. This puts a smile on my face. I want words spoken by people who pay attention. This is all somewhat bizarre but logical to me. A solid death with all the trimmings.

God. God was as much part of my Kurima existence as the colour of my eyes. He was there because he was never not there. Shabbat preparations, Kashrut, Hebrew school, the meadow, our plum trees. My cousin and I slip anonymous envelopes with money under needy doors. No-one but God is to see us. In the wagon train I make an oath - "if we don't go to Auschwitz" - after that I do not remember addressing God. I do not remember. All the power in Ravensbruck is concentrated in SS hands. They rule so totally. No one seems more powerful, only President Roosevelt, and he is so slow - What I associate with God is absent --- ??? People help each other - that often makes a life and death difference. Does God help? How? Every survivor thinks she survives by some miracle. But every survivor could as easily not have survived - like most, not have survived. Chance. Luck. The margin is so minimal.

I believe in God - I do not know how not to. But if He cannot be there with us in Auschwitz - cannot intervene - Is He vulnerable? Embarrassed? Please not a bystander. Is He a God for Kurima, not for Auschwitz? Have things changed in heaven as they have on earth? How should we see you, God?

November 16th 2000

YOU ARE INVITED TO MY FUNERAL

You are invited
to my funeral
to my un-Auschwitz funeral.
Attire optional-
no stripes please.
Come nearer,
come nearer
and attest
that beneath this poplar tree
this season-marking-poplar-tree
in this pleasant ground
chosen and paid for -
with space reserved nearby
for husband to join
in timely manner
for company and closeness -
attest people,
that Yehudit
the person Yehudit
Yehudit the Jew
is according to custom
here buried.
You come too, Lord.
(were you too embarrassed to
attend in Auschwitz?)
You come too, Lord
And share and smile.
No! Not smile!
Just be.

Yehudit Sherman

STAMP COLLECTION - MY KEY FROM A NAZI HELL

By Arthur Poznanski

Arthur came to England with the Windermere Group and lived in the Manchester and Nightingdale hostels. He has an abiding interest in music and has been a choirmaster for many years.

In Praszka, the small provincial Polish town where I was born, children played many games using bundles of real bank-notes and piles of coins. Naturally we were not so affluent as to be able to play with valid money; the cash we used was authentic but obsolete. Successive foreign governments of Polish territories left a plethora of currencies rendered worthless by raging inflation. The cost of a postage stamp, for example, would be thousands of Russian roubles or German marks. In any event, all notes and coins became unusable and were discarded when Poland gained independence, and the Polish zloty became legal tender.

We children hardly cared that our play treasures had no value in the adult world. We were elated to discover these hoards of intrinsically worthless money whilst playing hide-and-seek in the cluttered attics of tenement blocks. It was such great fun for us to raid the old coffers and chests of drawers stored there and emerge millionaires. Within a short time I had managed to acquire an old Gladstone bag and several big boxes full of old bank notes and coins. These cluttered up my toy cupboard and I had nowhere to keep any more. Eventually, running out of the games we could play with old money, I became bored and started searching for other treasures.

My interest and curiosity were aroused when, picking among some abandoned boxes, I came across postage stamps on old envelopes. Through ignorance I must have damaged many good stamps through trying to tear them off. "Stamps?" responded my father Wladyslaw, from whom I had sought advice, "Well, I used to collect them and now you can collect them too." I still did not know why stamps were collected but I was fascinated by their varied designs, colours and inscriptions. At first I kept my stamp collection in a disused cigar box. Failing to create a game we could play with them, I merely continued to collect and swap duplicates with friends.

It was not until my ninth birthday in 1936, that my father, noting my unceasing passion for collecting stamps, gave me his much prized collection. On handing to me the old Russian album in which it was housed, he explained to me the importance of retaining each item in good condition. My real initiation into the world of serious philately was when my father demonstrated the careful removal of stamps from an envelope, using steam or warm water. I was delighted to see how smoothly and undamaged they slid from the paper; and, later, to witness them being affixed to the album page with special, gummed hinges. These were rather expensive, however, so I made my own by cutting up strips of ordinary gummed paper.

Initially, I was interested mainly in stamps from countries of which I had never heard, or whose names sounded odd to me. Togo, Cameroon, Chile or Dahomey, for instance, were places from which mail was unlikely to arrive in Wielun, the town to which we had moved. I scoured through an old world atlas to discover where these countries were situated. Not only was such an exercise great fun, it also helped my knowledge of geography. Collecting stamps opened up for me a small window into the exotic locations which, previously, I had not even imagined existed.

Some names, however, I could not find in my atlas. I was enlightened when my father explained that, for example, Bayern was in fact Bavaria, a province of Germany; that Helvetia was Switzerland, and a stamp without the name of any country was from England. Then there were the mysterious stamps with writing or signs I could not decipher. These were a real challenge to my imagination. Much later I discovered a booklet on stamp collecting which introduced me to the mysteries of watermarks and perforations. I became a very keen philatelist.

My father's album, which contained a few old and rare specimens among many commonplace stamps, became the nucleus of my own collection. My pocket money was wholly insufficient for me to buy foreign stamps; nevertheless my collection continued to expand. This was mainly due to acquisitions from the exchange of other collectible items: photographs of film stars, prints of wild life and cigarette cards. Swapping duplicates with other boys, pestering all friends of my parents for stamps from their mail and asking for stamps for my birthday presents, were other means of filling my album.

Without access to a catalogue I had no idea of rarity or the commercial value of my collection. I was not particularly concerned about my ignorance in this respect, for I grew to love all my stamps. Whenever anyone showed the slightest interest in my album, I was proud and eager to display my treasures from so many lands. Little did I suspect that one day, in appalling circumstances, my stamp collection would be instrumental in saving my life and help me and my brother Jerzy to survive the Holocaust.

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Constantly on the lookout for opportunities for exchange, I liked to keep the entire collection with me whenever I was away from home. This proved to be extremely fortunate for me. The collection accompanied me when, shortly before the German invasion of Poland in 1939, the family went to stay with my grandparents in Piotrkow, a large town farther away from the German border than Wielun. The political situation was tense and my father, my mother Peria, two younger brothers Jerzyk and Tadzio and I were glad to be moving.

Unfortunately, Piotrkow was also bombarded and we hid in villages to avoid the worst of it. After a few weeks, when German forces occupied Piotrkow and most other Polish territory, father left his two younger sons with their grandparents, to return to Wielun with mother and me. I made my own decision to leave behind in Piotrkow my beloved stamp collection, safely locked away in my father's leather briefcase. It was a heartbreaking decision to make but I knew it was sensible in the perilous circumstances. The only item I brought back to my home town was an exercise book filled with duplicates for swapping with friends.

On return to Wielun we found to our dismay that, during the first few weeks of the war, our apartment had been ransacked. It had been stripped of everything of value and was now occupied by some Volksdeutsche, German ethnic Poles who had accepted German nationality. Most of our possessions had disappeared, either confiscated by the German Occupation Authorities or stolen with their tacit approval.

My camera, bicycle, model train, fountain pens, toy soldiers, books and many games and toys vanished, together with our family heirlooms, jewellery, gold coins, silver and furniture. Even our family photographs and holiday snaps had been looted. In the circumstances, we could not reclaim any of our belongings, even when we learned subsequently that they were in the possession of our Volksdeutsche neighbours. Nor could my father withdraw any money from our bank, which left us virtually destitute. Naturally, my parents were devastated.

By comparison the loss of my personal items, though painful, was insignificant. The

only consolation for my own deprivation was the thought that my stamp collection was safe in Piotrkow. At this time the collection attained in my consciousness a position far beyond that of a mere hobby. It became almost a mystical symbol of my past, my happy childhood, my united family, my warm home life, ...in a word, normality.

With difficulty, my father found us somewhere to reside. Although living through a period of dreadful upheaval there were some compensations for me in the field of philately. This was a time when many new, interesting varieties were issued by the postal authorities. German stamps were overprinted for use in Poland and Polish stamps were overprinted in German. To my disappointment however I discovered that very few boys were keen to exchange duplicates with me. For most part this was due to the German influence under which many Polish youths, formerly my friends had fallen. They had now become violently anti-semitic and avoided all amicable contact with their Jewish contemporaries.

The few Jewish youngsters who still remained in town had either lost their collections during the earlier German bombing and artillery bombardment, or had completely lost interest in philately. This was hardly surprising as, under the new German regulations, the entire social life and the atmosphere in Wielun had been utterly transformed. Even walking in the street became hazardous for a Jew, easily identified by a white armband and later, by a yellow star sewn onto an outer garment. Jews were banned from the pavements and were compelled to move along in the gutters. They were harassed by frequent round-ups for work parties mostly engaged in clearing the debris from gutted buildings, or for performing menial jobs for the officers of the Wehrmacht (German army) officers stationed in the town.

Professional men such as lawyers, doctors and teachers, were hunted down like animals and incarcerated in jails, allegedly as hostages. They were never released from prison and simply disappeared. In such a dire situation my father, who had been a senior schoolmaster, fled reluctantly but in fear of his life, to join the rest of the family in Piotrkow. My mother urged him to go there because he was not so well known in that town. I was too young to realise how precarious our lives were and barely appreciated that, in the circumstances, it would be almost impossible to collect or exchange stamps.

My mother, who had been a teacher in a public elementary school, resumed her profession, but in a private capacity. There was a great demand for anyone able to teach German. Despite my young age I was able to help her by supervising small classes of Jewish as well as Polish children. I even assisted in teaching Polish and German, in which languages I was quite literate. These activities which naturally involved meeting parents, increased my opportunities to collect current postal issues. I felt no inhibitions in asking these adults to let me have the envelopes from their correspondence which they would normally discard. Occasionally I was able to persuade one of my Polish pupils to go to the post office (which was out of bounds for Jews) to buy for me a whole set of a new commemorative issue with some of the money I earned teaching.

Although I was a child, it was difficult for me to move freely about the town. With the growing problem of avoiding the constant round-ups for forced, unpaid work, which everybody tried to evade at all costs. One day I was caught in a trawl for workers. I was taken to the German police station, where Jews were assigned to various hard labour tasks around the town. Fortunately this happened during the relatively early days of the occupation when few German officers encountered were of the Einsatztruppen killing squads.

The German officer in charge spotted an envelope with one of the attractive new issues protruding from my pocket. He pulled it out and gazed at his find with great interest. Seizing the opportunity which presented itself, I said: "Please sir, you may have the stamp if you like it" and I added quickly, "I have a few more stamps from the same set at home which I shall be happy to fetch for you, if you allow me to go." Obviously a philatelist, he readily agreed. A small sacrifice, I thought, as I hurried home for the stamps, and a German officer who was also a keen stamp collector might prove a useful acquaintance." I was more than content to avoid a day of hard labour, under the supervision of a brutal Polish foreman, happy to torment the Jews in his charge. The incident at the police station made me aware for the first time that my stamps had a practical value.

The persecution of the Jewish population in Wielun intensified daily. The Jewish Council seemed ineffectual in stopping the jaws of the Nazi vice tightening around our community. In time, each family was ordered to surrender all its possessions, including valuables, stocks and even businesses. Every Jewish male, apart from very young children, was required to register for a quota of forced, hard manual labour. Shortly afterwards every Jew was compelled to resettle in an open ghetto on one side of the town. My mother and I had to move yet again; this time to a small apartment which we had to share with two other families.

Bad as it was, the situation in Wielun deteriorated considerably during the autumn of 1941. The uncertainty of our fate became even more evident when, without any warning, several Jews caught in the street were deported, allegedly to a labour camp. A few weeks later I saw men running in great panic trying to hide wherever they could, out of sight of pursuing German police. Through the grapevine, we heard that ten Jewish men were to be taken hostage in place of unknown others accused of alleged kosher slaughter of a cow. Some women, frantic to find a hiding place for their men, put up a ladder and helped them to climb into an inaccessible attic that had no floorboards. I was allowed to hide with them. We stayed there for some hours, laying on single beam rafters in utter silence, while down below German police were searching for men with growing frustration. Within hours, many Jews had been caught. Ten of those seized, although innocent of the alleged offence, were hanged publicly in the market square without a trial. All other Jews caught in the round up had to watch the execution and some, under threat of joining the victims, were compelled to assist the executioners. The gruesome event left little doubt in our minds what the future held for us.

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Without prior warnings, mass deportations of Jews in Wielun began during the following winter. Every street in the ghetto was blocked from both ends by the SS. Men, women and children were chased screaming out of the houses. Terrorised by the rain of blows from rifle butts and by sharp prods by fixed bayonets, the terrified Jews were herded into large black vans parked outside the buildings.

I was fourteen years old at the time. Although small for my age, I was very agile. My agility stood me in good stead when I was captured by the SS outside the house where we lived. Instinctively, in fear of my life, I refused to climb sheepishly into the black van. Instead, I dropped to the ground, dived between the legs of the SS man who stood with his feet apart and vaulted over a high wooden fence behind him.

Luckily the orchard into which I had launched myself was covered with a deep, soft blanket of snow. The SS troopers, either too busy with the job in hand, or, perhaps unable to climb easily over the fence, did not follow. Maybe they could not be bothered to chase one small boy, so they fired their rifles randomly in the general direction of my escape. I ran as fast as I could across the snow covered field beyond the orchard. Exhausted, I came finally across a ditch which was partially filled with snow. Guided by instinct I jumped into the hollow and remained there for the rest of the day, trembling with cold and fear. As I lay there, concealed from view and hoping to avoid discovery, the realisation that I was not playing a game and that my life was at stake, shook me profoundly. Luckily there was no pursuit, but it was nonetheless a narrow escape for me.

As soon as dusk fell, I hastened cautiously to the Polish section of Wielun by a roundabout route. With some trepidation I knocked on the door of the family of one of our Polish pupils. They assured me that the vans had departed and that the ghetto was clear of the SS. My mother's well-being had filled my mind throughout the day; now I set about looking for her. Eventually I found her in the house of a sympathetic Volksdeutche family, whose son was my mother's pupil. No sooner did she see me than she hugged me tightly, tears streaming down her face. Distressed and disorientated after hiding the entire day in a toilet in the Polish section of the town, my mother had become distraught with worry about me. The friendly German woman who had taken her in

clearly knew what this deportation was about, but refused to discuss it.

Obviously concerned about our well-being, the woman urged us to flee Wielun while we could. She believed Jews would be safer across the border, in the General Government of Poland, where Piotrkow was situated. (Wielun had been annexed to the Greater German Reich). She gave us the name and address of a Pole who lived a couple of miles outside our town. He owned a horse drawn sleigh and might for a price help us to escape. Though we did not even suspect that the black vans were mobile gas chambers, or that the destination of the evacuated Jews was the death camp at Chelmno, my mother and I heeded the woman's advice.

Offering our deepest thanks we left the woman's house, not wishing to place her in any further peril for harbouring us. We returned to our room in the ghetto, donned as many garments as we could reasonably wear and collected a few essentials. For me, these had to include my secondary stamp collection, which I wrapped carefully into a small flat bundle and carried between the two shirts I was wearing. We could not take much with us on the journey; we had been warned that it would involve a lengthy trek through the winter countryside and being smuggled across the German border.

The Polish sleigh driver demanded an exorbitant price for his help, but we had no option but to accept his terms. It was well past midnight when he drove us to the outskirts of a nearby town called Krzepice. The horse blanket in the sleigh afforded mother and me scant protection against the biting frost. The driver left us to make our own way into the town, where we managed to contact some Jewish friends. They introduced us to our Polish guides who usually worked with smugglers and who would, again for a hefty fee, take us with them on foot across the border.

Later that night the guides led us to a small hut on the outskirts of Krzepice. There we met the smugglers who would accompany us on the journey. Mother and I were very tired but we had no choice other than to set out with the men, in the direction of Czestochowa, the nearest town across the border. Our trek, at a time when the landscape was gripped by a severe winter, proved long, exhausting and tense. We could have been shot on sight just for breaking the curfew regulations. I was suffering from a bad cold and kept coughing. This made the guides and smugglers edgy, especially during the periods when complete silence was essential. A heavy woollen scarf was wound around my head; it helped to muffle the sounds of my spluttering.

To avoid German road blocks and patrols we needed to detour many extra miles across fields, meadows and along remote paths through dense forests. Despite the many additional garments we were wearing, we were frozen by the sub-zero temperatures and icy winds. I was only happy that my stamps were snug and safe between the layers of my shirts. Mother and I hoped that, once on official Polish territory, it would be easier for us to make our way to the Piotrkow ghetto and join our family. That town however was still many miles away and we were both becoming utterly fatigued by the journey. Finally we slumped into Czestochowa having safely traversed the German border.

After a night in the town, which we spent with some old friends of the family, my mother decided we could walk no further. Relying on our non-Jewish appearance and a pure Polish accent, she resolved we should take the train to Piotrkow as Poles. At the railway station my mother managed to purchase tickets for the journey without any problems. When the corridor train pulled into the platform, we entered a carriage which happened to be occupied by five German soldiers. Despite the trepidation we felt, we were determined to play our parts. As it turned out the young men were very polite and moved quickly to make space for a good-looking woman and her young son. As soon as the train chugged away from the station, I took a harmonica from my trouser pocket and began to play. The soldiers enjoyed the music and hummed or sung with me some of the current tunes I was able to offer them.

Time elapsed in a strangely surreal yet not unpleasant way. The seemingly congenial atmosphere was greatly enhanced by the fact that no one came into our compartment to check either our tickets or our identities. Even several SS inspectors walked by without entering, probably thinking we were family or friends of the soldiers. When the train arrived at Piotrkow, we wished the soldiers a pleasant journey and left them with a deep sigh of relief.

My mother and I mingled with the crowds in the Polish section of the town, anxious not to draw attention to ourselves. Eventually we succeeded in slipping into the ghetto by joining a column of workers returning from their factory shift. The joy of our reunion with my father, brothers and other family members, after such a long separation was incredible. It should have been an occasion for a great celebration but with food and money in short supply we had to be content with just being together again. The hardships and tensions of the journey now over, mother and I could relax a little and relate all the details of our escape from Wielun. Now I could finally rescue my bundle of stamps from between my shirts and unite them joyfully with my main collection, still safely stored in my father's leather briefcase.

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Once again the now combined collection of stamps became my main preoccupation. My troubles seemingly behind me in Wielun, I was impatient to reclaim my album and to add to it the interesting items I had proudly acquired despite the many dangers and difficulties. However the state of comparative tranquillity which prevailed in the Piotrkow ghetto did not endure for long. News from other towns about continuing deportations of Jews were soon superseded by rumours and then by fearful information that similar action in Piotrkow was imminent. Talk had it that only those in safe jobs, more specifically work deemed essential for the German war effort, would be allowed to remain behind. At the cost of what was left of my mother's jewellery, my father bribed some officials to secure work for Jerzyk and me. The jobs were in Hortensja glassworks which supplied the Wehrmacht with bottles and jars. Not long after we started work, official confirmation of the impending deportations threw the whole population of the ghetto into a panic to secure employment in any German-owned industries.

In October 1942 all Jewish workers employed in the glassworks Hortensja and its sister factory, Kara, were ordered to report with some essential belongings to remain encamped on the sites of the factories during the deportations from the Piotrkow ghetto. We were allowed to bring with us anything we could carry on our shoulders. Mother rolled up a blanket for me and packed my best suit and some other articles into a rucksack. Likewise, she packed a rucksack for Jerzyk. In my naivety and failing once again to appreciate the danger we were in, I cared only for the safety of the leather briefcase which contained my stamp collection. After brief goodbyes I left with my brother to join the assembling groups of factory workers. Because of my father's employment in the administration of the ghetto, I felt confident about the welfare and security of my parents and Tadzio. I expected to be reunited with them within a few days.

During our days at the factory camp we were fully occupied by work and acclimatising to our new living environment. My stamp collection was often on my mind; mostly though I left it untouched, only occasionally checking that my treasure was safe and intact in the cramped corner allotted to me. Isolated and fairly secure in the camp I was totally oblivious to the cataclysmic tragedy which engulfed the inhabitants of the ghetto. I was too young and immature to grasp, or even imagine, the enormity of the events taking place a short distance away and from which we were protected. On 22nd October 1942, the deportations completed, we were ordered to return to the ghetto.

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To my consternation, the ghetto area had contracted since we had left it a few days previously. The place appeared utterly alien, condensed as it was to a few of the most derelict and dilapidated streets in the shabbiest part of Piotrkow. Later we referred to this compacted living area as The Little Ghetto or The Block. Soon after I returned to the town, having left Jerzyk working his shift at Hortensja, I was approached by a member of the Jewish militia. Apparently bribed by my parents, he handed me a crumpled scrap of paper, obviously scribbled hastily in pencil by my mother. As I began to read, my legs weakened and buckled under me. The sudden realisation that my parents and Tadzio had been deported struck me like a thunderbolt. Stunned by this horrific news and overcome by unfathomable grief, I collapsed

onto a large stone. As I lay prostrate, in a mind numbing state of shock and disbelief, all other worries receded into the distance.

Many minutes passed before I could move or even think straight. Eventually, I dragged myself into a sitting position; but my deep sorrow was accentuated by feelings of complete helplessness and abandonment. Staring with disdain at my few possessions, including the leather briefcase with my stamp collection, I thought with mounting panic of the serious implications of my bitter plight. "No parents, no home, no money and Jerzyk to look after ... how am I going to cope?"

Sitting on the stone, uncontrollable sobs wracking my body, I struggled to think of a way out of my predicament. From time to time, peering through the mist of tears shrouding my eyes, I re-read, like a sacred and most precious scroll, my mother's farewell note. "We are being taken. May God help you, Arthur. We cannot do anything more for you, and whatever may happen, look after Jerzyk. He is but a child and has got no one else, so be his brother and parent... Goodbye"

The heartbreaking poignancy of my mother's words tugged at my confused emotions. "I'll try! Yes, I'll try", I kept repeating to myself, "but how?" I felt so lonely and helpless. How could I look after my brother when I could barely take care of myself. My brain could hardly accept the fact of being torn from a large family - parents, grandparents, my youngest brother, uncles and aunts. I was alone and in a turmoil but glad that Jerzyk was safe and as yet unaware, working his shift at Hortensja. There on the stone, sitting bowed in anguish and despondently contemplating my many problems, I was found by my two aunts. Miraculously, they had slipped through the SS dragnets. Aunt Sabina and her two young sons owed their salvation to her husband Ernest. He had an excellent knowledge of German and, in consequence, had secured even more privileged employment in the administration than my father. Aunt Hanna had escaped the deportations by pure chance. Now they were both here in The Block looking for us. The three of us wept together, clutching each other for a long time but my aunts' words of comfort and consolation had little effect on my depressed state of mind. Aunt Hanna decided to wait for Jerzyk's return at the gates of The Block. Meanwhile, at my request, Aunt Sabina told me reluctantly about the terrifying events of the past few days. I was in two minds about knowing of the sadistic brutality of the SS squads taking part in the Aktion. This was the euphemism used by the Germans to describe the forced removal of Jews from the ghetto to the death camps. It included rapes, beatings, looting and other unspeakable atrocities in which Ukrainian guards and Polish police eagerly participated. Even some members of the Jewish militia took part ignominiously in collaboration with the Sonderkommando (Special Action Squad) of the SS. As I listened intently to my aunt's tearful description, my senses refused to comprehend the notion that my family, and all other Jewish deportees, had fallen victim to organised mass murder.

After a while, the thought that Jerzyk and I would not be entirely alone gave me some measure of relief. When my brother returned from his shift it was his turn to weep. My eyes were red, but now dry. Since that day, and despite many traumatic experiences, I have been unable to shed tears. I had exhausted my lifetime's supply on that October day in 1942 in the Little Ghetto in Piotrkow.

Taking advantage of her husband's influence in the administration. Aunt Sabina arranged for the allocation of a bed for us. The bed was in the attic room in the same house my aunt occupied with her family and aunt Hanna. This arrangement, aunt Sabina said, would enable her to keep an eye on Jerzyk and me. I enquired about the other bed in the room, but she explained that it had been assigned to two brothers named Grubstein. This did not concern me in the circumstances. A single shared bed was sufficient; one of us would sleep in it while the other was working his shift. There was little time for us to be together. The garret itself was dingy; the floor comprised bare and dusty floorboards and the discoloured paint peeled from the damp walls and sloping ceiling. A small pine table and two rickety chairs stood near a tiny window overlooking the back yard. Two, time-worn, wood-framed beds and a ramshackle wardrobe with one of the doors hanging loosely by a broken hinge, completed the spartan furnishings. One of my new room mates, Shimon Grubstein, a big lad about three years older than me, introduced himself when we first met in the attic. I was stretched out on a bed when he came in. Perceiving that I was in an emotionally charged state, he refrained from speaking to me for several minutes.

"I can guess how you feel", he said finally, "I have been through it all myself. You know we are in the same boat. I am called Shimon, but my nickname is Shimba ... my brother's name is Lazar. It was not our choice to live in this tiny garret, but we have to make the best of it. So, pull yourself together and let's talk about it. First, we must clean it up and divide the space in the wardrobe drawers. Then we should agree on our respective duties for the future. Rest assured that we will respect your personal rights if you will respect ours."

He waited patiently and in silence while I regained my composure. "I am Arthur and my brother's name is Jerzyk," I responded and continued, "You are right, of course, Shimba, if I can call you that." He nodded and I went on, "At present, I am unable to care about anything. I realise that I have to face the facts, but I need a little more time to come to terms with the situation." Shortly afterwards, we both set to work cleaning and dusting the room, and shaking out the beds. We had to carry the water in a bucket, from the tap in the yard all the way up the narrow stairs to the top landing of the building. When the job had been completed, I emptied the contents of my rucksack. I hung my best suit and coat in the wardrobe and put the other articles in one of the drawers. The briefcase containing my stamps I placed on top of the wardrobe. "Be sure to tell your brother to keep his hands off this case," I warned Shimba. "It's my precious stamp collection. I treasure it greatly. Jerzyk apart, it's all I have left to remind me of my home and family." "I understand," Shimba nodded sympathetically. "We have our own keepsakes to remind us of happier days" he confided, adding quickly, "We must learn to trust each other. There is no other choice." We shook hands to dispel the tension; after a very short time Shimba and Lazar became our good friends.

The Block was situated in the southern part of Piotrkow. Many of the buildings in the cramped area had been partially damaged by the German bombing at the start of the war. Over 3000 Jewish men, women and children, from all walks of life were penned up in undignified squalor. The requirements of privacy or hygiene had steadily, inexorably evaporated. The few tenements in better condition than most had been assigned to members of the Jewish Council and their families and to the communal kitchen and stores. Near the barbed wire fence adjoining the main gate of The Block and amidst several ruined houses was a site which had been completely cleared of rubble. It formed a sort of passage into a yard where, propped against a partially demolished building, there stood a single, timber-framed latrine without its front door. The befouled wooden seat was always besieged by a swarm of green flies. This sordid sight remains imprinted on my memory; every day I had to pass it on the way to work. At the time, it seemed aptly symbolic of The Block and our meagre, unseemly and precarious existence within it.

The entire area of The Little Ghetto was overrun by rats, mice and other vermin. For us, the plague of bedbugs was a constant nightmare. Only a few nights after arriving in our attic accommodation, we were covered by red, itchy spots. These seeped blood and turned septic when scratched. We could not stop ourselves from rubbing the tormenting and infected bites, and hardly slept for more than one hour at a time, even on transferring from the bed to one of the chairs. One morning, after a sleepless night in a chair in the attic, Jerzyk fell asleep during a short break on the shop floor at Hortensja. He was thrashed by an irate Polish foreman. "Please do something about the bedbugs, Arthur," he pleaded with me later that day, "or they will be the cause of our downfall even before the Germans." We endured long hours of hard labour, shortage of food and harassment by the Jewish militia. The bedbugs were the last straw, turning our lives in The Block into a nightmarish hell. During the brief spells between work and what passed for rest, Shimba and I discussed the bug problem and how we might deal with it. At first we thought that the vermin could be eradicated only by poisonous gas, which would kill us as well; or by fire, which would probably set the building ablaze. Then it occurred to me that boiling water might serve the same purpose. My aunts promised to help us by boiling the water in their kitchen. The morning after I had the idea, on return from the night shift,

Shimba and I set about collecting firewood from the heaps of rubble piled up around derelict houses in the neighbourhood. We carried the wood and several buckets of water to my aunts' kitchen. Our next task was to scrape and strip the paper and loose emulsion paint from the walls of the attic. This was not very easy when our equipment consisted of old and rusty kitchen utensils. To our horror, we discovered sickeningly large nests of bugs behind the wallpaper and in the crevices between woodwork and plaster. In our immediate terror and panic, we despatched hundreds of the wretched, scattering pests with rapid whacks from a pair of old boots. Then we splashed the bucketloads of boiling water onto the walls, floor, beds and mattresses, which took over a week to dry out.

The results of our watery onslaught were staggering. Countless bugs and other insects floated in the water, swishing against the walls. Shimba and I mopped them up into an old washing bowl covering our noses against the distinctly sweet stench of the dead vermin. We were now able to sleep in our beds virtually unmolested for over two months before the bugs reappeared and we had to repeat the process.

Gradually we settled down to the peculiar routine of work at Hortensja and existence in the "Block". Occasionally, I would take the briefcase down from the wardrobe and look through my stamp collection; it brought back nostalgic memories of my home and family before the war, but gazing at the pages of my album made me very sad and downhearted. During this period my aunts were of great help and comfort to us. Sometimes they washed our clothes; and, generally, they monitored our standard of hygiene, so far as we could attain them. This assisted us to maintain a certain discipline, which boosted our morale. Some evenings, before going on shift, I consoled myself by playing tunes on my harmonica.

The Germans frequently rounded up innocent Jews in the ghetto for executions. The SS and their allies celebrated every major victory, or marked every defeat, with random selections for the firing squad. They even slaughtered victims as a reprisal for their adherence to certain Jewish festivals. The Jewish Council was totally ineffectual in its attempts to prevent these atrocities. Although we were physically exhausted by our strenuous work efforts, nervous, knife-edged tension kept us awake at nights. Fear of being the next victim prompted constant vigilance and alertness. We were ready to run or hide at the slightest hint of an Aktion although we tried to pretend that the danger did not exist.

The Block was plagued by frequent searches for the so-called illegals. These were Jews who had evaded deportation by remaining undiscovered in their concealment. Later, they had returned to The Little Ghetto to merge with the remaining Jews, hoping to avoid arrest. Hunted by the SS, police and militia, the illegals led a perilous existence. Unable to register legitimately for safe employment, they could not obtain ration cards and were forced to buy food at exorbitant prices on the black market. They were desperate to avoid detection and to acquire secure shelter. This objective was difficult to attain because anyone caught harbouring illegals faced instant execution by pistol shot. Because of the swift and final punishment awaiting those found assisting them, very few fugitives succeeded in gaining legitimacy, by employment in one of the factories either through influence or bribery.

By now we had reached the conclusion that we lived in the Block on borrowed time. Although we were careful to avoid falling foul of the authorities, we had little trust in them. Realisation had dawned that the Little Ghetto was merely a temporary haven for its remaining Jews; and that our fate depended not on our good conduct, but on the whim of the Nazis. Our usefulness to the German war economy won us our transient existence; but we harboured few misconceptions about our likely destiny. We were captives in the lair of a wild and unpredictable animal, helplessly waiting to see which one of us it would devour for its next meal. The Damoclesian sword, of what we later learned to be Hitler's infamous Final Solution of the Jewish Problem, hung constantly and dangerously above our heads. Only with my harmonica, or my stamps and the dreams of faraway places from which they came, could I escape momentarily from my living hell.

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Due to the German army's growing demand for sheets of armour plate glass, many unskilled employees from the Hortensja works were transferred to the Kara factory that winter. The aim was to construct a huge new furnace capable of handling the increased production requirements. It was my misfortune to be selected for transfer to Kara to work on this new building project. The work squad to which I was assigned on arrival had been formed especially to excavate the foundations and erect the furnace. The management insisted that our task was an urgent priority; and because there was no mechanised equipment available to assist the team, the work was murderously hard. Under the supervision of Polish and German overseers, only too eager to use their power over the defenceless, and often weak Jews, we were chased, punched, kicked, whipped and generally abused. Our group had so many daily casualties that we compared ourselves to the victims in the arenas in ancient Rome. To mark that comparison we named the assignment "The Circus".

Being unable to lift a mortar filled "traga" (an oblong wooden box measuring approximately one cubic metre with a long pole on either side for carrying it), I was one of the first casualties. Literally, I was kicked out of the work force and pronounced, "fit only to be melted down for soap ", a grim allusion to the rumoured by-products of the crematoria in the death camps. The loss of employment in the glass works, for which my parents paid so heavily, was a bitter blow to me. It could have sealed my fate for, without a legitimate job, I would have been declared an illegal, suffering the consequences that that status implied.

Apart from my uncle Ernest, I had a few other influential friends in the administration, people who knew my parents well. Fortunately, they were concerned at my situation and helped me to secure approved work at the Befehlstelle, a Special Orders Group employed by the SS to clear houses in the former ghetto. The work involved collecting the goods left behind by the deported Jews and sorting them for despatch to Germany.

Disposing of the remnants of the Jewish families was a heart-breaking operation; but the ever present threat to our own lives hardened us against the luxury of sentimentality. Each day as we worked through the deserted dwellings, we could barely believe that their former inhabitants had perished. Countless books, diaries, photographs and memorabilia were thrown onto bonfires. Mountains of bedding, clothing, furniture, utensils, tools and ornaments were sorted and loaded on lorries for transportation to Germany. We neither knew nor cared whether any of these goods were appropriated by the local SS individuals or their cronies. Personally, I found nothing of any great value concealed in the many unoccupied rooms which I searched, though I did manage to "organise" (that was our name for this activity) a few items of clothing for Jerzyk and myself. I did not consider it a crime, or morally wrong, to take these pathetic items. It was more an act of defiance and a small recompense for the possessions plundered from my family. But it was a dangerous pursuit. As we worked through the buildings, we were watched constantly and searched frequently. Anyone caught in possession of an organised article faced immediate and public execution. One young Jewess was shot in front of the whole work group when a pair of stockings was discovered in her coat pocket. A young Jew was shot in the street for trying to smuggle a few potatoes hidden in a pillow case through the gate into The Block. Despite the perils involved I continued to search for any useful commodities with a firm belief that I had more right to them than the Nazis; and in the happy knowledge that I was depriving them of their use.

The day I came across an exercise book crammed with stamps I could not resist the temptation. Carefully I concealed it inside my shirt and smuggled it into the Block. I spent a few happy hours in the attic examining my serendipitous find; then added it to my existing collection in the briefcase. On another occasion I exchanged my small shabby saucepan, hitched perpetually to my trouser belt, for an organised newer and larger one, which had a capacity of one and a half litres. This newer pot, though more cumbersome to carry, proved very useful. Because a ladle full of soup, which was our daily ration, hardly covered the bottom of it, the foreman dishing it up usually poured in extra, thinking he had short-changed me. I did not mind if this procedure caused some mirth among the German guards, who called me the little worker with the big pot. The extra soup more than compensated for their sarcasm. Although the work at Befehlstelle was hard, I feared nonetheless that it was destined not to last for long.

To avoid the dangerous implications of redundancy, I would need eventually to find employment in one of the large local industries.

Within a much shorter time than I had hoped, my fearful expectations of redundancy proved to be justified. I was anxious to obtain alternative, legal employment as quickly as possible. I did not want to follow in the fateful footsteps of those who, like myself, had been found too weak or injured at the Kara factory, but who had failed to find alternative work. They had been herded, together with many other unfortunates and illegals, into the local synagogue which was locked and guarded by SS troops and some Ukrainian and Polish Nazis. Men, women and children were detained in the synagogue in unspeakably atrocious conditions. They were compelled to sleep on bare floorboards, and had no access to any sanitary facilities. Of the 520 persons imprisoned in the building, very few gained release through efforts of influential relatives and friends or by means of bribery. Escape was impossible.

Three weeks after their incarceration, on 19th December 1942, twenty volunteers were selected from amongst those who had offered to work. They were led to a glade in a forest outside a village called Rakow. Here they were ordered to dig anti- tank trenches. Glad to have been given the opportunity to get away from the squalor of the synagogue prison, they worked vigorously. As a reward for completing the task quickly, the twenty men were lined up, machine-gunned and buried in the trenches. Unknowingly they had dug their own graves. Next day the 20th December 1942 at dawn, all Jews remaining in the synagogue were marched to the same glade. They were forced to undress in the freezing weather, continuously terrorised by bayonets and rifle butts. Then they were lined up in groups, machine-gunned and buried in the trenches excavated the previous day. In the confusion of the massacre six or seven Jews, some wounded, managed to escape into the forest. I met one of the fugitives a few months later, when I was lucky enough to be employed at the Di-Fi timberworks in the suburb of Bugaj. He was a very pale, strangely white-haired boy, about fourteen or fifteen years old, with large, staring blue eyes. He told me how, only slightly wounded, he manoeuvred himself on top of a pile of bleeding corpses. Covered with piles of leaves and chunks of frozen earth and barely able to breathe, he remained virtually motionless until nightfall. Under cover of darkness he crawled out and dragged himself back to The Block. The president of the Jewish Administration took pity on him legalising his position by enrolling him for employment at "Di-Fi". I will never forget the boy's unusual appearance, doubtless brought about by the dreadful trauma he had suffered.

In my attic room in The Block, I trembled whenever I pondered how close I had come to being one of those "illegals" herded into the synagogue. At such times I clutched the stamp collection which had now become a unique symbol of a normal life, to which I knew not if and when I would return.

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On the 12th of March 1943, the night shift workers had been prevented from proceeding to their jobs. We were all confined to The Block without any reason being given. During the night The Little Ghetto was surrounded by SS troops, Ukrainian guards and Polish special police. At dawn Jewish militia aroused us with orders to pack all our belongings and assemble at the main gate. I helped Jerzyk to pack his rucksack, then, somewhat intuitively, I dressed in my best suit and put on my shabby, nondescript overcoat. I then packed my own rucksack and took the briefcase with my stamp collection from the top of the wardrobe. Shimba and Lazer also prepared themselves. Unable to locate my aunts, we filed out of the building and moved towards the gate filled with a dreadful apprehension.

We joined the huge crowd assembling in the small square by the main gate of The Block. Most people were sitting on their packaged possessions or squatting on the ground. On the other side of the barbed wire perimeter, we could see several large trucks guarded by the SS and their Ukrainian levies with bayonets fixed and rifles held at firing position. The scene looked dangerous and we all shuddered with fear. Then the main gate was thrown open and in walked the president of the Jewish Council, whom we referred to deferentially as Mr. President. He was accompanied by some high-ranking officers of the local Gestapo and the SS, with their large retinue of armed guards, and the German directors of the main industrial compounds licensed to employ Jewish slave labour in the area.

Mr. President, who had little option but to co-operate with his nazi masters, addressed the crowd of Jewish workers: "Don't be alarmed. Nobody will be banned. Workers are urgently required for a very important factory situated not too far away. The camp, where you will live is well established and has accommodation far superior to that here. You will be treated very well there. Who wants to go?"

Hushed whispers permeated the assembled Jews. The name Skarzysko, a nearby town with a large munitions factory, went the rounds of the workers. Why the show of force if the change is for the better? I wondered. We could end up digging our own graves. Good treatment could mean breathing carbon monoxide inside locked vans. It would be folly to trust the Nazis. The crowd must have harboured similar thoughts. There were no volunteers.

A selection commenced immediately, conducted by the SS assisted by the Jewish militia. Those registered as skilled workers and employed by the Hortensja, Kara and Di-Fi factories, as well as members of the Jewish Council with their families, were pulled out, pushed to one side and cordoned off. Jerzyk went with this group; I found myself among the 500 or so others on what we considered to be the wrong side of the cordon. The guards lost no time chasing us through the gate towards the waiting trucks, propelling us with kicks, punches and blows from rifle butts and screams of "Schnell, schnell"' (Hurry, hurry!").

Swept onwards by the tide of panic-stricken people, I weaved and ducked to avoid the gauntlet of violence like a hunted animal desperate to evade a predator. Judging by this sample display by our guards, I thought cynically that the camp awaiting us must be a paradise on earth, but only for masochists. My mind struggled despairingly to find a solution to this apparently hopeless situation. In any event, the deportation meant for me a heart-wrenching parting from my younger brother, perhaps for ever!

On reaching the trucks, men ahead of me began climbing in. Some distance farther down the road I could see Mr. President chatting amiably with the Gestapo chief and senior SS officers. An audacious idea flashed into my head and I sprung into action at once. Dodging the men waiting to be hauled into the trucks, I took off my rucksack and overcoat and threw them into one of the vehicles, seemingly preparing to follow. Instead, unencumbered by give-away articles and relatively well dressed in my smart suit, I started to walk calmly in the direction of Mr. President. Holding the leather briefcase containing my stamp collection, and adopting an air of confidence and importance, I passed unchallenged between the rows of troops and police. It helped that I was moving in a direction away from the apparent safety of the main gate to The Block and towards the group of local top brass. With a deep and respectful bow, I addressed Mr. President in faultless German. My hurriedly formed intention was to plead with him to allow me to remain with my younger brother.

"Excuse me, Mr President, sir..." I began but, before I could utter another word, the head of the Jewish Council must have guessed my purpose. Obviously uninterested in what I had to say and angered that I had interrupted his conversation, the President slapped my face and summarily dismissed me with a curt command, ‚t Veg! "go away!). As if on cue, the Gestapo and SS officers copied his action and extended their arms to wave me away. They did not realise that they were sending me not only in the direction of the trucks, but also towards the main gate of The Little Ghetto. I bowed again and, behind the backs of the guards pushing the unfortunate deportees on to the trucks, I walked nonchalantly up to the gate. In my best suit, with an important looking briefcase under my arm and an aura of impertinent assurance, I afforded an excellent impression of a messenger acting on orders of the Gestapo and SS officers accompanying the President.

Ignoring the Jewish militia, I approached the German guards: "Machen sie auf, bitte" ("Open up, please") I said with polite firmness. The soldiers looked perplexed. Although there was no doubt that they had witnessed me, only a minute before, speaking to the President and the officers with him, they were reluctant to permit me to enter The Block.

Knowing that this charade could not endure for much longer, and growing inwardly more desperate by the second, I played my last trump card. I raised my briefcase and pointed to it, as if to imply the importance of its contents. Next with

an impudence that could have cost me my life, I indicated the otherwise engaged Gestapo and SS group and enquired with a wry smile, "Why don't you ask them?"

Once more luck was on my side. Apparently pleased with something Mr. President had told him, the local Gestapo chief nodded several times while turning in our direction. The guards at the gate stiffened and raised their right arms in a rigid "Heil Hitler" salute and quickly opened the gate. I shot through it like an arrow, diving into the crowds milling around, and emerging at the other side of the square. My heart hammered against my rib cage as I turned surreptitiously into a small side street. Overjoyed, but hardly believing my narrow escape, I hid in a dark hole leading to a half-buried cellar. I had remembered this convenient sanctuary from the day we went gathering the firewood needed to boil the water for dousing the bed bugs.

Soon after I concealed myself in this secure niche, I heard an uproar and guttural German voices shouting: "Where is that cheeky Jew Schweinhuruf!" The soldiers and police were searching for me everywhere. Shivering and sweating with fear, I kissed the briefcase with my precious stamp collection; it had been seriously instrumental to my escape. I put it under my head and forced myself to relax. Lying uncomfortably in my cramped bolt hole, surrounded by rubble and filth, I could barely move and breathed with difficulty. I could not afford to make the slightest sound. I prayed they would not find me.

Eventually the clamour above me subsided. The instant I heard the sound of the trucks departing I assumed that the guards must have also dispersed, allowing the remaining Jews in the Block to return to their dwellings. As the day dragged on my discomfiture had increased; but I was afraid to abandon the safety of my hideaway. Only with nightfall did I dare to crawl out and, hugging the shadows, return to the attic. I was relieved to be reunited with Jerzyk, our two roommates and my aunts. The departure of the night shift to the various factories had been delayed considerably by the upheaval earlier that day. Everyone listened intently to my story and congratulated me on my quick thinking. My brother was ecstatic to see me again, and we hoped that my escape would not prompt serious repercussions.

The following day I reported for work as if nothing had happened. Nobody said a word to me about the events of the previous day. I had got away with my escape unscathed. Keen to replace the few essential articles I had lost when hurling my rucksack onto the truck, I organised a pair of trousers, a shirt, some underwear and a rucksack. In addition I found a one hundred zloty note which had been screwed up hidden inside a box of matches. This was a miraculous discovery; the money would have been sufficient to buy four loaves of bread on the black market. For the time being I held on to that bank note; it made me feel like a rich man.

Two weeks later we learned through the grapevine that the Jews taken on that Friday, the 13th of March, had been transported to a slave labour camp feeding the munitions factory in Skarzysko. Most of them had been assigned to the department manufacturing explosives for marine mines. The work involved handling poisonous chemicals without any protective clothing, gloves or masks. One of the chemicals used, a picric acid compound, caused a yellowing of the skin and made all food taste very bitter. When touched or inhaled for lengthy periods it led to general debility and, ultimately, a painful death. According to reports of a handful of survivors, the average turnover time of the entire workforce in the department was four months. At the end of this time span the workers were examined by a German doctor. Those men considered beyond redemption were pronounced unfit for further duties and eliminated. I often shudder to think that I would probably have been one of them.

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Eventually the ghost town that was the former ghetto of Piotrkow was cleared of all worthwhile goods and traces of its former inhabitants. This meant the end of work at Befehlstelle and also heralded the closure of The Block, which was finally abandoned and demolished in August 1943. All Jewish workers at the Hortensja and Kara glassworks were ordered to encamp again on the factory sites. Jews employed at the Di-Fi timberworks set up camp within its boundary. All other Jewish slave workers were transported to labour camps in nearby Blizin, Pionki and Ostrowiec.

Some of the men engaged at Befehlstelle who claimed to be skilled craftsmen joiners managed to secure assignment to the Di-Fi timberworks. Unable to gain acceptance for a return to the glassworks, I considered myself fortunate to be sent to Di-Fi. The suburb of Bugaj was only a few miles away from Hortensja and Jerzyk. Both my aunts, Uncle Ernest and their children were sent to the camp in Blizin.

On the day I was forced to part from Jerzyk I advised him never to volunteer and never, under any circumstances whatsoever, to trust the Nazis. There was some comfort to me in observing that my brother was maturing rapidly and becoming adept in the art of survival. Recalling my mother's final note to me and, mindful of my responsibility as his guardian, I gave Jerzyk my best suit. Although it did not fit him properly it could, if necessary, be sold or bartered for food. I also gave him the 100 zloty note which I had found together with what I considered my most cherished possession, and which had help to save me from virtually certain death in Skarzysko, the leather briefcase containing my collection of stamps. "May it be of as much benefit to you, Jerzyk, as it had been to me" I said, happy to make this sacrifice for his sake and to meet my mother's last wish. There was nothing more I could do for him.

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AUTHOR'S POSTSCRIPT

By a stroke of pure chance I found Jerzyk in Theresienstadt in May 1945 soon after Germany's defeat. He had given my entire collection of stamps to a very influential person who, in gratitude, gave him daily a slice of bread and protected him from random selections for executions and, for as long as possible, transfers to other camps. Eventually, however, all the Jewish workers at Hortensja were transferred to another camp in Czestochowa, and from there to the notorious concentration camp of Buchenwald. At least my stamp collection had helped Jerzyk to endure the difficult time he had spent in Piotrkow. Had he not disposed of it for some returned value, it would have been confiscated when his personal belongings were seized in Buchenwald. As the allied armies approached the infamous camp, Jerzyk with other inmates were transferred to Theresienstadt. I had also been sent to Buchenwald, but I was assigned to other camps in 1944 before Jerzyk's arrival there. In each successive camp the conditions became worse, the work harder and the SS guards more sadistically brutal. During the journey from my last camp, Flössberg, to Mauthausen, and after fourteen days in a sealed cattle truck, I managed to wriggle out of the small window hole and jump to the side of the track. At the time the train was climbing through the hilly region of Czechoslovakia. The guards on the train fired at me and I was hit and wounded in my right thigh. Nevertheless I escaped into the surrounding countryside. After a painful struggle, I managed to crawl to a village, where I was taken in by friendly Czech partisans, hidden in a barn and given medical treatment.

Even after the liberation, the Jews in Theresienstadt, an old fortress town, were kept in strict quarantine. To enter the town, I had to slither under its barbed wire perimeter fence, wade across a moat and creep through sewers. Throughout these efforts I was limping heavily, my leg wound not having completely healed. But it was all worth it to be with Jerzyk again. In August 1945, with many other youngsters from Theresienstadt, we were flown to England in the belly of a Superfortress. After a period of adjustment, during which I learned English, I found employment in a factory. With money saved from my first pay packets, I visited the nearest philatelic shop. The urge was strong in me to resume collecting stamps. The renewed hobby gave me a sense of continuity with my early life in Poland and assisted me in returning to normality. To this day, I am a keen philatelist; but, whenever I open one of my many albums, the memories come flooding back. Auntie Sabina, with one of her sons, Yitzchak, survived the war. Until her death, she lived in Israel and would often send me some of that country's magnificent pictorial issues. I decided to live in London, while Jerzyk settled in Gateshead-upon-Tyne. In gratitude for the benefits he derived from my first stamp collection, he frequently sent me new issues on first day covers. Jerzyk died in May 1995. After his death we discovered that he began to collect British first day covers.

NOTE

Aspects of my life story have been included in Sir Martin Gilbert's book "The Boys: Triumph Over Adversity".

MY STORY OF THE HOLOCAUST

By Chaim Szlamberg
(name changed to Charles Shane)

Charles came to England with the Windermere group and lived in a hostel in Manchester. He spent a few months in a kibbutz in Thaxted and in 1948 went to fight for Israel's independence. He returned to England in 1950. He was a successful businessman and is a member of the Committee of the '45 Aid Society.

The time has come to write and tell my story about the Holocaust. No doubt what I am about to tell you, you would have heard many times before. Nevertheless, the tragedy that happened to our people in Europe must never be forgotten and, for the few of us who had the luck to survive and are still here today, our duty is to tell exactly what happened and educate both the younger generation and those people who deny the Holocaust.

Life in Poland before the war was never all milk and honey, anti-Semitism had its problems, but the Jewish people lived there for generations and somehow had got used to it and so when gentiles called us names, we didn't take much notice. Most of the time we lived in peace and had some good Polish friends.

I was born on 31st December 1927 in Lodz and lived in a tenement block of flats on Ciegielniana Street No. 24, which was right in the centre of town. On the ground floor of the building was a synagogue which was in use most of the day and every day of the week. As children we used to play in the synagogue and our upbringing had a lot to do with the environment around us.

Let me tell you what happened to my family. I come from a family of seven, my parents Rifka and Mordchai, my two sisters Sara and Hadasa, my two brothers Zelik and Icek, and myself Chaim. My parents were very orthodox, and my father belonged to Aguda-Israel, my two sisters went to a religious school Bet Jacov (House of Jacob), my elder brother Zelik and I went to a Jewish state school and to Cheder in the afternoon and my younger brother Icek was too young to go to school.

I remember, a few months before the war, many Jewish people came to Lodz as refugees, having been expelled from Germany, and those who had nowhere to live slept in the synagogue. They had no spare clothes or possessions and I remember my father always invited one or two people to spend Saturday with us. We were not rich, but whatever we had we shared. Little did we know that in a very short time the same fate awaited us.

Lodz had amongst its population many Polish nationals of German origin. They created a panic amongst people that all able-bodied men should go and defend Warsaw. So, on the day that war broke out, my father and elder brother had left on foot with others to defend Warsaw. This left Lodz defenceless. After one week of fighting Lodz was occupied by the Germans. The first thing they did was to hang three Jewish men in the market square, burn down the most beautiful synagogue in Lodz and close down all the other synagogues.

A few days later my father and brother returned. Many others did not, having been killed by the Germans. The first few weeks of the occupation were not too bad, although we had to wear white armbands with a blue Magen David. My father carried on with business, the Jewish markets were still open and we could trade as before. Life had to go on.

All of a sudden, things changed; Lodz was annexed to the Third Reich and became part of Germany. Every day different orders were issued;

- Jews of a certain age had to report for forced labour.
- Jews could not walk on the pavement when a German soldier was nearby, we had to walk in the gutter.
- Jewish shops had to have a sign with the word "Jude" written on the shop window. Many other degrading slogans were written on the walls.

I remember my father had half of his beard cut off and his Jewish hat torn off his head. So he went to the barber and had his beard completely cut off, and bought a new cap. When he came home we did not recognise him. He cried a lot. That was the first time I saw my father cry. The same week my brother had to report for forced labour. When he came home he also cried. He was beaten up by his so-called Polish friends. They were 'Folksdeutschen' (Polish nationals of German descent).

My brother and a few of his friends decided they had had enough and would leave home for Russia. At first my father did not want him to go. He said "It's a land without religion", and after much shouting and arguing he eventually agreed, but asked my brother always to remember to remain Jewish. By early November 1939 we had to leave our home and go for so-called voluntary resettlement, which meant .... If we did not go freely, we would be thrown out. My mother made everyone a small parcel with personal belongings and the following day we reported to an allocated place. I remember my mother giving the key from our apartment to our neighbour. Her name was Ochocka. She could not believe what was happening.

At the assembly point I met friends with whom I went to school. Some were from the same block of flats, but most were from the same street. On the way to the station we were treated well by the guards, but when we got there all hell broke loose. They pushed us into the wagons, sealed the doors and our three day journey began. We did not have enough water, our provisions were low, and the only means of sanitation was one bucket in the corner of the wagon. When we arrived at RzeszÛw most of us were in a very bad way. From Rzeszów we were transported by horse and cart to Lancut, a few kilometres from the Russian border. I remember the winter of 1939 was freezing cold; as we breathed, icicles were forming on our lips. They left us in Lancut. We could go anywhere but not back to Lodz. My parents wanted to cross the border to Russia. However, the Jewish woman smuggler wanted too much money to take all six of us across, so my parents decided instead to go to my mother's cousin in Krakow.

There was no joy for the Jewish people in Krakow, and by early December 1939 we were back in Warsaw where my father, grandfather and great-grandfather were born. At first we stayed with my father's sister for a few weeks until we found a place for ourselves on Smocza Street No 5. During the first few months of 1940, life in Warsaw was bearable. Jewish people could still trade freely. We had a Jewish district, but not a ghetto.

By May 1940 Warsaw's Jewish population was increasing rapidly; people came to Warsaw by the thousands with nowhere to live and conditions were getting worse day by day. I remember at the beginning of September 1940 Chaim Rumkowski, the leader of the Lodz ghetto, came to Warsaw telling us how good the Lodz ghetto was. There were Jewish policeman and Jewish shops - in fact, everything was Jewish. However, when asked why people were dying by the hundreds, he did not answer.

Beginning in October 1940 and finishing before the Jewish New Year, all Jewish people living outside the Jewish district had to leave home and move to the Jewish district. Likewise, all Polish people living in the Jewish district had to leave home and move to the Polish district. Can you imagine the chaos! People didn't know where to go, they did not have anywhere to go to, they were people without a hope.

I remember going home with my father after the Neilah service on Yom Kippur. We could see the walls being erected and my father said to me "Chaim, they are closing us in". This was the thought we all dreaded. On the 14th or 15th November 1940 the Warsaw ghetto was closed and we were all trapped. Now we could see that what Chaim Rumkowski said was true - *all Jews together*. We did have Jewish policemen and the Jewish police had big batons and some used them too often. Some of them became 'big boys'

of the ghetto. Every day was a nightmare and every night was hell! We did not have enough food, we had no heating, people were freezing and little children with bare feet were crying in the streets and begging for food. More and more people were coming into the ghetto from other towns, people lay dying in the streets. The smell of death was all around us. I started smuggling food by running out with other boys through Okopowa Street to the Christian side to get whatever we could. Most of the time it was bread and potatoes. I had a long coat with a thick lining and long pockets; we used to stuff them as much as we possibly could and get back to the ghetto. Many times we got caught by the German guards, the Polish police or Jewish police and all the food was taken from us. We were beaten and kicked but we did it again and again until all routes were closed. I became 'streetwise' and got to know all the corners of the ghetto.

My father died on the 8th May 1941. He was only 46 years old. At the beginning we cried, then we were happy, because he still had a proper funeral and was buried one to a grave. Some people were buried four and five to a grave. The food rations we received in the ghetto were not enough to feed five people, so my little brother Icek and I decided to run out of the ghetto for good; this way my mother and sisters would have our rations. When we got out we ran and ran. We didn't know where to go and ended up in Sobiénie Jerzory. There we stayed with a Polish farmer, one or two days at a time, and looked after the cows. We were not allowed to sleep in the house or in the barn, so we slept outside like dogs.

We used to beg for food from the Polish farmers and every time cross ourselves and say the Catholic prayer before we got something to eat. Once or twice we went back to the Warsaw ghetto to tell my mother where we were, then ran out again to Sobiénie - we were not scared.

In September, my mother, who did not look very Jewish, got out of the ghetto and joined us in Sobiénie. Sobiénie was a very small Jewish Shtetl, three or four kilometres from Otwock. My mother told us that my sister Hadassa died in the ghetto of starvation and my elder sister Sara got a job sewing uniforms for the Germans. My mother wanted us to go to Staszow to her sister as they did not have a ghetto there yet. We split up. I went first and I never saw them again.

I walked for fourteen days until I reached Staszow. I didn't know the way and sometimes got lost. I got to Radom where I was picked up by a Polish policeman and thrown into the ghetto. I stayed in Radom overnight and when I ran out in the morning to go to my uncle and aunt, I was shot in my right leg. I couldn't feel a thing, I was lucky. When I got to my uncle and aunt, my leg was so swollen they had to cut my boot off my leg. I was full of lice. I had typhoid and ended up in hospital. I stayed with my uncle until the end of 1942 when the Germans liquidated Staszow.

A night before the liquidation many Jewish people started to hide in order not to be taken away on the transport. My uncle and aunt used to have a tannery which had large wooden vats. There were large enough to hide in and so we hid there. My cousins, who were older than me, worked in the workshop for the Germans, I do not know what happened to them. After a few days in the vat, my uncle asked me to go out and find out if all was clear. I was picked up by the Germans and was sent away to an ammunitions factory in Kielce. This was the first camp I was sent to. I worked for Hasag Ltd which was all slave labour. Later on we got to know that all people coming out from hiding were shot.

I worked for Hasag until the summer of 1944. Conditions in the camps were not as glamorous as depicted in the film 'Schindlers List'. People were being murdered by the thousands and every day you lived was a bonus day.

From the beginning I worked in the camp kitchen as I was too small to work in the factory. I had a cart in which I brought wood shavings for the kitchen and many other articles needed in the camp. We also did the washing for the camp Commandant, his name was Shiicht. He had a villa on top of a hill so he could see all around him. One day whilst collecting his washing I noticed a big stack of potatoes on the main road. I decided that on the way back I would help myself to some of them. Of course, when you are hungry and young you take risks. I asked friends of mine, Yankel Ajzenberg and Myer Bomsztyk to help load the cart full of potatoes we got caught, as Shiicht could see what we got up to. Yankel and Myer got ten lashes each and I, being the leader, got twenty lashes. For days we slept on our stomachs as none of us could lay on our backs - we were lucky he did not shoot us. The following day the whole camp had to stand to attention and for my punishment my pass to work in the kitchen was taken away and I was sent to work in the ammunitions factory.

To write everything in detail of what happened in the camp will take pages and pages. The few of us who survived can talk about it for days on end and wonder why it happened just because we were born Jews and lived in Europe.

As the Russians were advancing, Kielce labour camp was abandoned and we were taken to Przedboszcz, to dig out tank ditches to stop the advancing Russian army, after which we were taken to Czestochowa to work again in the ammunition factory. In January 1945 we left Czestochowa by transport for Buchenwald. Hundreds of Jewish men and women were taken to Buchenwald by one little Ukranian soldier boy. His rifle was bigger than he was. We could have all run away, but where to? If the Germans did not get us, the Poles would. They used to sell a Jew to the Germans for a bottle of Vodka or for a kilo of sugar. As we walked to the main gate of Buchenwald a cold shiver passed through my body. We were standing in the bitter cold until we were processed just like cattle. After we had a shower we had to run through a very long tunnel - every one of us had one thought in mind. Some of the older people were saying the last prayer. I and three friends, Yankel Ajzenberg, Myer Bomsztyk and Shmuel Rozegarden all stayed together, we looked at each other and not one word passed our lips.

Again we were searched. We had to bend down - they were looking for gold and jewellery. We got dressed in the Buchenwald clothes, everyone of us got a number and a triangle. There were no more names. We had a red triangle with a yellow triangle forming a six pointed star.

Buchenwald was a hell created by the SS. The work was hard and I worked in a stone quarry for a short time and later in Weimar, clearing away bombed houses.

I left Buchenwald on the 9th April 1945. I remember walking out of the gates. It was a lovely spring day, there were thousands of us being taken to the transport. There were not supposed to be any Jews on that transport. They thought they had killed all of us in the two previous transports. We lived on the acacia leaves from the trees and it took us four weeks to get to Theresienstadt, arriving on the 7th May 1945.

I was liberated by the Russians on the 9th May 1945. When the war ended we were given 48 hours free time to do to the Germans whatever we wanted. We could have killed the S.S. but it was not in our blood to kill.

Soon after the war we came to England, I think we were the first transport of 320 boys and girls to arrive in Windemere. Our Madrichim did not know how to handle us. Mr Freedman and Rabbi Weiss were two wonderful people. Indeed, all the people who looked after us deserve the highest regard from us all, though I will point out Miss Trudie (she was a nurse in our block) and Israel Cohen, our Madrich, I will never forget them. Our fate brought them together; they married and now live in Israel.

I was in a religious hostel in Liverpool and although it was run by Bloomsbury House, it was associated with the Mizrachy movement. After two months I left the hostel and went on a Hachshzara to Thaxted Kibbutz. There we worked half days on the farm and half days we studied. I was together with Moshe Rozenberg, Mordchai Lewenstein, Meillachim Friekorn, Arje Szwarc and Juda Avner, ex-Israel Ambassador to the U.K.

In 1948, I went to Israel and joined the army and returned to England in 1949 where I met Anita, a beautiful girl from Manchester, and we were married in 1950.

A new chapter and a new beginning. We brought up two lovely sons, Michael and Elton, and gave them a good education. They married Linda and Caron and they gave us lovely grandchildren, Daniel Katie, Samantha and Georgia.

So Hitler and the Nazis did not succeed in their quest to destroy us and the Holocaust was another chapter in our history. But something far worse than the Holocaust will be if we ever forget it.

THE SURVIVOR'S DILEMMA

Michael Etkind

Michael came to England with the Windermere group. He lived in the Cardross hostel and later studied architecture. He has been a regular contributor to our journal and was dubbed by our President, Sir Martin Gilbert, as the poet of our Society.

Dare I become a spokesman for the millions dead
and bear witness to the crimes I saw...?

Would I do justice to their plight -
their pain - their fear...
And could I ever grasp and comprehend the perpetrators'
twisted minds - their thoughtlessness?

Would I be able to describe those sights
and sounds -
give credence to the terror that prevailed -
that held us in its grip...?

Will I find words that measure to the task...

But... if I don't... who will?
The Nazis who kept records of some of their crimes -
The killers who took photo's of their hideous deeds...?

If I do not add to the historian's maps, statistics,
dates, and to the snapshots which the Germans took -
their souvenirs, will not the Truth remain more
incomplete - less real?

And if I don't discuss the horrors of my past,
will not my nightmares return to haunt me in the night?

THOSE WHO HAVE BROUGHT US TO THESE LUCKY SHORES

Michael Etkind

Those who have brought us to these lucky shores
Thought that our psyche was harmed by the war
That our Weltanschauung was not like their own
That it has been distorted by the sights that we saw.

They might have been right - we were boisterous and rude
Demanding defiant one could say - uncouth
We have slaved and obeyed for year after year
And we felt that at last it was time to rebel.

We have lost our past - our childhood was gone
We were hungry for love - felt abandoned - alone
Yet we laughed sang and joked - like young people still do
But inside we still grieved for the life we once knew.

We still are as we were - very little has changed
Yes - the camps left their mark even time can't erase.

JERUSALEM - APRIL 2001

Janina Fischler Martinho

Janina lived in the Krakow Ghetto from where she escaped at the time of its final liquidation in March 1943. She survived the war in hiding. Her story is told in her book "Have You Seen My Little Sister?". Like many others who did not come to England with the "Boys", she joined our society in recent years. She is a regular contributor to our journal.

A small group of "pilgrims" bound for The Holy Land gathered at Heathrow Airport under the banner "Love for Israel". The pilgrims came from all walks of life - a retired bank manager and his wife from Morden, a maths teacher from Wales, a mother of three from Yorkshire, a young lady, personal assistant to a London Archbishop, from Shepherds Bush... About fifty middle-aged and elderly ladies and gentlemen of leisure and ample means - all intrepid, all imbued with true love for Israel. I, the only East-European and Holocaust survivor, tagged on to this motley crew at the invitation of The Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary of Darmstadt, Germany.

How did I come to be of the party?

In November 1998, I had the honour to be invited to take part in a commemoration service held in memory of, and as a sign of penitence for, the expulsion of the Jews from York in 1298. I was then asked to address The House as a Holocaust survivor, as a representative of those who had perished in it.

After the ceremony, Sister Pista, a German nun, came over to speak to me. Weeping, she embraced me. I, too, put my arms around her and our tears mingled. Sister Pista and I have been in touch ever since and it was she who, with her Order's concurrence, invited me to be the Holocaust representative at "Changing the Future by Confronting the Past" Convention held in Israel, just outside Jerusalem at Ramat Rahel, from the 16th to the 21st April 2001.

I had never been to Israel before, but I well remember the greetings we, as a family, exchanged on the Shabbat and on holy days: "Next year in Jerusalem..." It was not given to my Dear Ones to realise this wish, this greeting, so that I was even more conscious of my bereavement there, in Jerusalem, than I normally am...

I cannot discuss here the entire Convention proceedings... I bring out, however, my own contribution to it, as well as one or two more salient points and the audience's, as well as my own, reaction to them.

On the 18th April it was my turn to address the audience of 1,500 people. They had come from all over the globe - from as near as Tel Aviv and as far as Brazil - to add their voices to the Act of Repentance, to express their deep sorrow...

Roughly, about two-thirds of those present had come from Germany. The Germans were mostly young people who were born well after the war and whose grandparents would have been actively involved in the war.

I did not feel at all intimidated. I spoke freely...

I spoke about my background and my family, about the Cracow Jewish community.... About the terrible war years - the Cracow Ghetto, the loss of my family, the annihilation of my people... the pain, the grief, my unquenchable desire to live... I finished with an image which haunts me still....

By May 1944, the Germans were losing the war. The Allies were to land in Normandy any day.... At the Plaszów Concentration Camp the last handful of Jewish children is being gathered up, whilst their unsuspecting mothers, parents, are standing to attention in the Appelplatz. The loud-speakers are disgorging sentimental dance music. The children are quietly whisked away to the cattle trucks waiting on the camp rail spur-line - destination Auschwitz.... The audience wept, as I have done!!! Still do!!!

The last person to speak at the Conference that day was one of the nuns - a Canadian by birth. She chose to remember the 1939 Evian Conference.

I had first read about the Evian Conference many years ago. A description by Golda Meir - who was the Palestine representative to the Conference - the total incredulity, bewilderment and pain at the delegate's negative response towards European

Jewry's plight left her numb with despair.

The nun's voice was very pleasant to listen to - mellifluous, yet resonant, but what she had to say was mind-seizing in its brutality and she went on ".... my country's statement 'None is too many' was particularly callous, particularly wounding." - I felt bludgeoned - dazed!!! - ".... I am deeply ashamed to this day...." continued the Canadian nun.

On Friday the 20th April, we visited Yad Vashem. For me it was the most poignant experience of the whole visit. I do not have the words to describe adequately the feeling of desolation, of overwhelming sorrow, that swept over me as I stood in the star-spangled darkness on the Children's Memorial and listened to the eternal chant of the children's names. The word Polin, Polin, Polin... came up again and again. The Jewish children, our peers, among them our brothers, sisters, cousins, friends.... And endless thousands of unknown children who perished and who have remained nameless ... yet so much part of us... so close!!!

I had composed a list of a handful of children I knew before the war, during the Ghetto days... among them my eight-year-old brother and two cousins - a boy aged twelve... A toddler girl aged two... The others are children I went to school with, played with, and finally shared the horrors, the calamities, the terrible plight of the Ghetto days.... They all perished. I am today the only one who knows, who remembers that they had once lived...

And so I composed the list, rendering them that final homage... I deposited the very meagre scraps I possess about their identities at Yad Vashem. I took them home!!! And I placed a pebble at the feet of Janush Korczak and his orphans. I HAD BEEN!!!

The Convention ended on Saturday evening, the 21st April, and we had the whole day to ourselves, to spend as we wished. I do not live in North London. I am not familiar with the aura of holiness, of celebration and joy that descends upon the city, the home, the family on the eve of The Shabbat.

I was invited by two members of our group, both of whom were regular visitors to Israel, both of whom feel absolutely at home in Jerusalem: "Let's go to The Old City, let's go to The Wailing Wall..." There are experiences in one's life which become indelibly imprinted upon one's vision, upon one's very soul. This was one of those experiences for me. As soon as we set foot in The Old City, with its narrow, winding streets, its cool, shadowy darkness, its East-European odours - the men in their mediaeval garb, the women festively attired, the children freshly scrubbed and bright-eyed - I was transposed to the Shabbat in Cracow's pre-war Kazimierz. The pain, the joy!!! Again, I do not have the words... I stared, unable to believe my eyes, unable to get my fill.

And it came to me - the very last image of the very last Hassid I saw on Polish soil, for it is part of me to this day - a middle-aged man, his beard, his side-locks matted with sweat, his face purple with effort, the tzitzis peeping from under his black jacket... He was being driven, the homely bundles bouncing on his shoulders, in the great June heat of 1942, out of the Cracow Ghetto... to his death...

We strolled down to The Wailing Wall. I found a crevice in which to place my rolled-up scrap of paper. No grandiose request for renown, glory, riches... Just a humble plea for good health and our daily bread. I stood there, inarticulate, for a while. I did not sob. I did not pray. I remembered and grieved silently.

And there they were again - the Hassidim - young and old - their countenances grave, their gait dignified, their gestures measured ... And their wives - quietly elegant in their long-sleeved silk frocks, their chic hats. And their daughters modestly maidenly, their long, silken hair caught in beautiful hand-wrought silver clasps. And their sons - well grown and straight. Sober in their conduct and gaze. But it was the children - lively yet mindful of the Shabbat, with their sun-tanned limbs, robust bodies and those brown Jewish eyes, already grave and wise, that I loved best of all.

I add the following paragraph as a Post- Scriptum:

On the 18th of April, after I had made my address, after I had described my experience of war, I found that people would greet me wherever I went: "Shalom, Janina..." I also noticed that many people wanted to approach me, to speak to me directly, but were timid to do so. The young Germans were particularly on their guard - wary - not knowing how I would react to their "advances..." I was myself. I returned greetings. I shook hands. I smiled. I spoke. They were young people - the third generation. They had come a long way. Their sense of guilt, of outrage was genuine. They carry a burden. They will do so for as long as they live. I, too, carry a burden. I know how it feels. How could I not accept the youngsters' offering of true, sincere 'grief for their grandparents' deeds? There is no erasure. There is no atonement. The young Germans know it.

I know it.....

THE HIDE AND SEEK CHILDREN

CHILD SURVIVORS FROM SLOVAKIA: Summary for a lecture in London 2001

By Barbara Barnett, M.Phil

Barbara and her husband Richard took a great interest in our members at the Primrose club. Their musical appreciation sessions were very popular. Barbara continues to take an interest in our Society and is a most welcome member.

Rabbi Dr. Solomon Schonfeld had many achievements. He was religious leader of the Adass community established by his father but probably he is best remembered as the founder of the London Jewish Day School Movement. Less widely known was his one-man stand to save Jews from the Nazis... He found ways against all odds for many hundreds to escape to Britain until the declaration of war cut contact. When the war ended, Rabbi Schonfeld recognised that surviving and exhausted relatives were in no condition to take adequate care of children. Far less could they provide any Jewish stimulus or education, missing long since. So he offered for children a safe haven in Britain, pending plans for their future. Any parents or relatives were promised that the children would receive good care and education in a traditional Jewish environment; but as soon as the adults had sufficiently recovered their health and found a place to settle, they would be re-united. For orphaned children, he would take full responsibility and make plans for their future. His offer was quickly taken up; the opportunity recognised although it entailed another devastating separation of unknown length. He returned again and again to retrieve from the prevailing chaos children severely debilitated by years of horrific conditions and bereft of any Jewish life.

There were numerous problems to face in setting up this enterprise, legal, administrative and financial.. but as Executive Director of The Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Committee in London Rabbi Schonfeld succeeded in bringing from Europe several groups of children from Austria and from Poland. The last group, snatched away just as the communists walked into Prague, came from the eastern part of what was then Czechoslovakia, now Slovakia.

A party of 148 children left Prague on April 22, 1948 for London on a Collective British Visa. They were to be under 16 years old and orphans. The Russians insisted they must not be Czechs. All were either concentration camp survivors or had been hidden, with or without a relative; many had been moved from place to place. With peace came great relief at last; but this was immediately swamped by the utter confusion that ensued with lack of food, of housing, of basic services.

One hundred of these children, after spending the week of Pesach in London, went on to Eire, eighty to Clonyn Castle to the care of Rabbi and Mrs Israel Cohen - now retired and living in Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem. Twenty older boys stayed in a hostel in Dublin.

The rest stayed in London. All were cared for and helped to recuperate while plans were made for their future by Rabbi Schonfeld in collaboration with parents or any other relatives surviving. Slowly and with much difficulty over decision-making, the children were dispersed. Clonyn Castle Children's Home closed a year or so later; the last 25 children stayed on in Dublin a bit longer but by December 1949 none were left in Eire.

At least one third of the 148 joined relatives - in Israel, in the States, and in Canada, a few returned to Europe. The rest were placed with orthodox foster families, in hostels or were old enough to take rooms in London. Many attended the Hasmonean or Avigdor Schools. Several older boys studied at Yeshivot: in Gateshead, Sunderland and Staines or in London at the Schneider Yeshiva When their studies were completed many moved on to join relatives or friends..

It was in 1996 that Anna Nussbaum , one of the group who settled in London, suggested a Reunion be planned to mark the fifty years since the group reached London. By chance I became involved in its organisation. Addresses were eventually traced for about half the original group; and about half of these took part in the Reunion. This was held over three days in London and in Bournemouth in April 1998. The next day some of us flew to Dublin and visited Clonyn Castle; it was a fascinating week-end and although only a small number took part, many brought their spouse; some brought their children. And all became engrossed with each other, recalling episodes in the past and discovering how others had fared during the past half century!

I collected and distributed at the Reunion some twenty personal stories and added material related to the group's history. It was also an opportunity to hear more reminiscences, encourage others to write their own or to take up my offer to do so for them. The idea has arisen that perhaps this story and these recollections should, with the permission of contributors, be published. More accounts have been written since the Reunion and others have been promised. Attempts are continuing to make contact with those members of the group or their relatives who we as yet have failed to trace. Only then will this story be complete.

CAMERAS BEAR WITNESS AS MAYER BOMSZTYK GOES HOME AT LAST

By Judith Hayman

(Reproduced by courtesy of the Jewish Telegraph Group of Newspapers)

Mayer came to England with the Windermere group and subsequently lived in a hostel in Manchester. He is the Chairman of the "Boys" who live in Manchester and is highly regarded in the Manchester community.

A Manchester Holocaust survivor has returned to his birthplace for the first time in 58 years.

The emotional return of Mayer Bomsztyk (72) to the once-thriving Polish town of Staszow where the vast majority of its 6,000 Jews perished will be screened on this Sunday's *Songs of Praise* on BBC1 (5.30pm).

The BBC initially approached Rabbi Y Y Rubinstein for a suitable candidate. Rabbi Rubinstein asked Mayer: "Do you know a survivor ready to go?"

Without hesitation he replied: "Yes me let's go for it."

Mayer told me: "I wanted to go and I didn't want to go. Why did he pick me? I never dreamt I would go myself.

"Friends would come back and ask when I was going. Every Friday night my family would ask the same question.

"Talking about it was one thing but the reality is different."

Mayer, accompanied by his wife Lily, daughter Jackie Field, son Warren, granddaughter Nicola Field (16) and grandson Joshua Bomsztyk (13) will be watched by an estimated three million people on Sunday.

The 35-minute programme on the theme of remembrance will keep returning to the experiences of the Bomsztyk family. There is also a two-minute talk by the Chief Rabbi, Professor Jonathan Sacks.

The family visited the apartment building where Mayer was raised. It overlooked the town square where thousands of the town's Jews were lined up for deportation to the camps.

Jackie told me: "We stood in the cellar where Dad hid for two weeks before the Germans came. We were seeing the location of the stories we grew up with."

By November 1942, the town and the majority of its ultra-Orthodox citizens had been liquidated.

The family visited the cemetery but most of the graves had been looted for use as paving stones. Now only 10 stones remain in the cemetery to represent a minyan. There is also a monument over a mass grave.

Another Manchester survivor, Jack Aisenberg, has put up a gravestone in memory of his family who also lived in the town.

The family are filmed in the cemetery reciting their legacy to remember the horrors of the Holocaust and pass it on to future generations.

Jackie told me that her father escaped his fate by being sent to work in the Hassag munitions factory in Kielce in 1942.

After the munitions factory he was sent to Buchenwald before being liberated from Theresienstadt. Sadly, both his parents and his brother perished.

Mayer said: "My house had been rebuilt a few times but it was basically the same.

"I spoke to a few Poles and they all said how good they were to the Jews!

"We were a Chassidic Jewish community. There was a shool and plenty of shteibls (prayer houses). The centre of town was all Jewish.

"On Friday afternoon and Shabbat all the shops were closed and on Shabbat afternoon all the Jews were in their best clothes. It was like Northumberland Street, Salford. At least in Krakow I found 110 Jews left, here there were none."

A visit to his old school evoked more bitter memories. He still remembers the taunts of stone-throwing antisemites.

But not all memories are bad. He spoke of a "poor but enjoyable" upbringing. His father ran a leather shop in the square. Other Jews worked as shoemakers, joiners or water carriers.

But all this rich life has vanished without trace. Mayer added: "I visited Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre and saw a rose garden of remembrance but in my village there was nothing."

BBC Religious Programming producer John Forrest said: "We are seeing a person who suffered loss of close family, a survivor with an incredible story who wanted to pass on this story to his children and grandchildren.

"We wanted to help to provide some sort of realistic human angle to the tragedy of the Holocaust when so much has been said."

He added: "It was exciting to see someone of strong faith and how it relates to their experience. As an observant Christian I felt a unity with an observant Jew."

As to Holocaust Memorial Day itself, Mayer added: "Of course it's a good idea. Ours was the worst tragedy and still we didn't learn. We have to keep up with the message. Only education will stop it happening again."

Nicola, who recounted her experiences to fellow Yavneh pupils in today's Holocaust Memorial Day assembly, said: "I have always felt the need to pass on the message.

"Now I can picture better what happened to my grandfather. Fifth formers learn about the Shoah in History GCSE but they do not learn enough."

She was saddened by her visit to Staszow Museum. "There was a little trace of the Jews in the town," she said. "A tiny room in the museum was devoted to the Jews. It doesn't explain what happened to them. Everything just stopped in 1942."

Warren will tell Stenecourt members about his experiences on Shabbat. The Holocaust Memorial Day Service in central London tomorrow will be broadcast on BBC2.

BUT FOR A STROKE OF FICKLE FATE (1)

By William Samelson, Ph.D.

William obtained a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature & Philosophy. He has written many books, both fact and fiction. His latest manuscript "WARNING AND HOPE: NAZI MURDER OF EUROPEAN JEWRY" will be published in the year 2002.

Wilek Samelson soon after Liberation April 1945.

We all piled out of the barrack in the wee hours of the morning. It promised to be another freezing day in Buchenwald. The capo called the inmates' numbers in a vulgar monotone, while we shuffled from one foot to the other to avoid frostbite. - Any person who hasn't had the good "fortune" to wear the Dutch wooden "clappers" will fail to fathom the discomfort. - Our ears were peeled, though freezing in the brisk winter wind, eyes blurry, dazed by lack of sleep and perpetual exhaustion. Not to hear one's number called and not to utter a loud response resulted in severe repercussions. We all knew the punishment for such a cardinal omission. So we listened attentively, unwilling to antagonize our wardens who only meant to elicit our response.

Thousands upon thousands of enfeebled men, known in their derisive appellation commonly as *muselmen*, crowded the vast expanse of the *Appellplatz*. The three of us Piotrkow boys huddled as closely as we could, as if to share the heat of our bodies for some mutual comfort. The *three* were my brother Roman, Szlamek Winogrodzki, and myself, Wilek. I looked at their faces and I spied concern. What if after all the trials we had endured together from the very beginning of the Nazi inflicted *churban*, we would now be separated? A routine call of inmate numbers meant another transport for parts unknown. Whether it meant life or death was a toss-up.

Through the darkness of my present condition, I glanced back into the happier times of my seemingly distant childhood. So many friends filled my life then. Friendship was to become a very precious commodity in times of need and adversity. Many have perished due to the treachery of false friends. Others have survived supported by the devotion and random acts of the kindness performed by strangers.

A kaleidoscope of memories sailed through my mind's eye. How we shared our fate with Szlamek and other local boys at the Piotrkow ghetto while working on the local Hortensia glassworks and immediately forged a brotherly friendship, one that had all the earmarks to last an eternity. Well, not really, the term eternity was quite limited by circumstances then. We worked the Edelmann shift, first as carriers, then as master glass blowers, through the heat of the summer, forged by the scorching inferno of the great furnaces. During severe winter weather, the part of your body facing the furnace developed heat blisters, while those exposed to the raging blizzard would suffer frostbite.

We carried on, buoyed by mutual words of encouragement and cheered by shared moments of triumph over adversity. We engaged in dark humour during those rare intervals from horror when things were "not as bad as they could have been."

Over the course of time, we fantasized about joint endeavours we would undertake "someday when all this was over," if only fate allowed us to succeed in our ongoing battle for survival. Yes, those were the modest dreams we shared of mutual togetherness in the imagined future, even when the time would come to form new liaisons, have families of our own, children and grandchildren...if only fate would favour us...

The first threat of separation struck with the impending liquidation of the Piotrkow ghetto. Our lives were thrown into turmoil. Deep down we had known all along that our temporary safety under the umbrella of labour at the Hortensia could not last. What with all the Nazi *Umsiedlung* ("resettlement") activities in progress-most of them to the killing factory at Treblinka-we had sensed that our day would come. Yet when that day arrived, we tried so very hard to push it into the subconscious, to block out the reality of another disaster, to live with the illusion that all this was only a surreal world of some bizarre alien imaginings.

The 650 remaining slave labourers of the Hortensia and Kara factories and their families were assembled at the railroad tracks. A row of freight cars waited there for us. "Where to?" was the question on everyone's trembling lips, and in the minds of those who were unable to speak, silenced by unspeakable grief and the panic that gripped their hearts. It was now November 1944, and we stood facing deportation. It was one of those dreary days in whose course nothing good ever happens, full of dark clouds hovering above, ready to burst, as if in concert with the sinister activities.

We were packed like animals into the stench of the overcrowded cavernous cattle car - over ninety people - and each tried to guess our destination.

"We're going to our deaths!" lamented the pessimists.

"Don't be a fool," another admonished. "The Nazis need us more than ever to toil for them inside their *Vaterland* while most of them are off in the pursuit of conquests," sounded the optimist with an undertone of humour in his voice. Under normal circumstances, the remark might have elicited laughter. But this was not the time for laughter.

Fact was, the uncertainty of what lay ahead for us was well nigh as tortuous as the journey itself. The convoy made numerous stops, some to pick up provisions for the guards; others to replenish firewood and water for the engine. On occasions, stops were intended to offer the "passengers" relief. At all stops, regardless of purpose, we tried to guess the area and the direction of the journey. The three of us huddled in the corner, as day became night and then day again. On several occasions, we peered out of the small aperture above us hoping to recognize the surroundings, but what we saw was only wooded countryside; there were no railway stations, no towns, and no people to talk to. We shared what food and drink we had brought along from Piotrkow, and we were comforted with the knowledge of staying together.

Not to lose track of time, we carved markers in the wall to indicate each dawn. We were on the way already for two days and three nights. Sleep was restless, and listening to the sound of steel beating against steel reminded one of some strange, sinister music to accompany the condemned. I dozed off, only to be visited by my alter ego of times past. I saw my grandfather Srulko; his well-manicured handlebar moustache bristled with silver and gray, and his blue eyes shone with the usual humour when we engaged in dialogue.

This was not the time for idle conversations. He was silent and I had no recourse other than to conduct a solitary monologue. "Why have the Jews been treated so poorly throughout the ages?" I asked and quickly responded to my own query: "I think that the *final answer* is that there is no answer. Evil is not logical. Hatred does not sit down and carefully calculate, then choose its victims." I observed my grandfather's reaction, and I thought there was a whimsical sign of approbation in the mischievous sparkle of his eyes.

Suddenly, jolted by the loud collision of the braking wagons, I woke.

Szlamek peered out of the small "window." In the deep obscurity of the night, guards rushed from wagon to wagon. A dim light illumined what seemed a platform at a railway station. More freight trains stood idly nearby.

"Czestochowa!" Someone shouted from the other end of the car. "We are in the city of the Holy Virgin Mary!" the voice added.

The sliding doors opened suddenly, and the disoriented, exhausted, passengers disgorged from the car's entrails into the cordon of the waiting Ukrainian surrogate SS militia. Filed into ranks of six, we marched under close scrutiny of armed guards to our unknown destination. From far off, the wind carried that special smell of the molten steel lava toward us. *Czestochowa Steel Mill* announced a large wrought iron sign above the steel gate. As we all struggled into the inner yard of the compound, many wondered how long we would remain there. Anyhow, what did we know about steel?

We would quickly master the art, as we had done in glass not so long ago on the Hortensia. When becoming instant experts is a life-saving issue, the overriding concern for one's safety becomes a great incentive for intuitive learning. In pairs, we learned to operate hydraulic forks. As the great furnace disgorged a large cube of white-hot steel onto the forks, we guided the lava-like steel onto rolling mills that shaped the formless stub, after many repetitions, into railway tracks. There was no time for hesitation or a sense of fear. What had begun as a relatively mild initiation by fire at the Hortensia glass furnaces, assumed the aspects of a hellish damnation through the flames of the Czestochowa Steel Mill. I felt that fate was playing tricks on us. We were damned in hell together, nature tossed us from extreme heat to ice cold, but our presence sustained us. Anxiety dictated that the time would come when they would separate the three of us, as if they knew separation would break our spirits. I looked at Szlamek. He was tranquil as usual. Then my eyes transferred to Roman. He seemed serious, worried, the gloom of fate in his eyes. In one tiny, deepest corner of my heart, I held out the hope that Roman was overly influenced by past events to be anything but pessimistic.

Our tenure in Czestochowa lasted only three weeks. At the crack of dawn, one wintry morning, we were again summoned by the shouts of our keepers and great commotion in the barrack for yet another deportation. As we dragged ourselves in semi-consciousness to form the customary marching ranks, rumours informed us that we were on a journey into the interior of the Reich. Once again, Szlamek, Roman and myself huddled in our customary corner under the faint intrusion of light from the small barbed-wire aperture above us. We tried to cheer each other up with the thought that at least we were all still safely together, and we resigned ourselves to the eternal changes to our situation. We would be very careful, for there was danger lurking in the dark innards of the cattle car.

Five days into our journey, the convoy had come to a permanent stop on a railroad spur in a remote, hilly area replete with beech trees. The rich fragrance of their sap penetrated the putrid confines of the freight car and filled our nostrils.

"Beeches," said Roman, savouring the aroma.

"Another one of Hitler's fine resorts," quipped Szlamek.

"The word "beech tree" translates into the German word *Buche*," I remarked, continuing: "So, if there are a whole lot of them here, it would add up to a *Buchenwald*." I concluded my interpolation, and a dark silence ensued for a long moment. It was followed by quick exchanges, worrisome questions and even more sinister responses. The dubious fame of the labour camp had long preceded our arrival there.

Suddenly, locks were released and the doors slid open. *"Rauss! Alles rauss!"* A hoarse voice commanded. The people obeyed, piling out of the cars onto the gravel ground. Only then, did we realize there were already some casualties lying on the car's floor. They were beyond all human orders; above all threats and deaf to the growling of vicious dogs, both human and animal. Someone remarked: "I envy them, for they are the most fortunate among us." I disagreed. As long as there was breath left in me, I would strive to overcome adversity and dream of seeing the Nazis in prison garb.

After an hour's marching ordeal, we were able to discern the shadow of a wrought iron structure in the distance as well as a compound surrounded by barbed wire. We saw also what seemed to be guard towers placed at regular intervals. As we approached, the picture became clearer. There were rows of barracks within the greater compound. A two-metre high double fence of barbed wire enclosed the smaller compound; dogs barked and men milled around in prison attire. It was not a pretty picture.

We marched through the gate bearing a noble dictum arched above it announcing: *"Arbeit macht frei."* If work will make us free, I reasoned silently, then it can't be too bad. The welcoming reception we had received at the hands of the capos, however, did not bode well for our stay in the new environment. Makeshift clubs in their brutal hands turned into lethal weapons. The vilest language we had heard thus far accompanied the blows. The SS stood by shaking with laughter, amused at our expense.

The usual routine took place. Delousing in a large chamber, where a special detail of "barbers" shaved our body hair with dull instruments, causing much loss of anaemic blood. Following that, we were submerged in formaldehyde that all but burnt holes in our skin, whereupon we were handed a striped, blue-gray uniform and a pair of Dutch clappers. As was expected, none fit too well. Upon arrival in the barrack, everyone tried his best to barter the ill-fitting articles of attire for a better fit. Miraculously, many succeeded. One problem remaining was, as expected, the need to hold up loose trousers. We bartered part of our meagre bread rations for pieces of rope, which would serve as a waist band of sorts.

Barrack accommodation left few options. There were two rows of four-tiered lairs alongside each wall-counting the floor as the first tier-of which the uppermost reached beneath the ceiling. We quickly occupied one of the upper lairs, for obvious reasons. Once again, we beat the odds. The three of us were together. So it was with the daily toil. We managed to work on the same work details, whether it was the quarry or unloading coal. We shared the labour as well as our daily rations. Fortune smiled upon us, but it wasn't to last very much longer.

There were too many SS on the *Appellplatz* that morning, and the capos ran in and out of the barrack to make sure all of the inmates were out in formation minus the ones who were found dead in their hardboard lairs that morning. The latter were unceremoniously dragged out and piled up in front of the barrack from where the daily lorries delivered them to the daily cremation. There was much shouting and clubbing of the stragglers. We looked at each other, and we prayed. That special sense one develops in prison had told us that the end of our togetherness was near.

The capo called out the numbers. Those called made an effort to respond in as loud a voice as their ailing lungs were able to muster. We stood patiently in formation. Two familiar numbers sounded. Szlamek responded to the first and Roman to the second. A few more numbers followed, and then it was all over. I was stunned. I looked from Roman to Szlamek and then up to heaven and again at the two of them. There was a certain indescribable feeling in the pit of my emaciated stomach, but my tongue seemed paralysed. At the thought of imminent separation from Roman and Szlamek I panicked. It was a paralysis of despair. They did not call my number. To face the uncertain future alone was unthinkable.

Memories of a lifetime travelled through my desperate mind. Being together was a victory of sorts over the Nazis. Was our success coming to an end? Suddenly, I felt Szlamek's hands on my shoulders. "Quickly, give me your jacket!" He hissed. I released it into his hands and he gave me his to wear. "Go with Roman! You belong together!" These were the last words I heard my dear friend whisper before we marched off in formation to the waiting boxcars. There was no time for goodbyes; to thank him for the supreme sacrifice he had just performed in a wink of an eye. Would either of us cheat fate in having exchanged identities? I couldn't help but wonder. Szlamek was in my thoughts throughout our journey. I wanted to weep, but there were no longer tears left to moisten my eyes.

Colditz was a satellite camp of Buchenwald. Once there, we learned yet another trade; that of working on a punch press, which fashioned triggering devices for the anti-tank gun called *Panzerfaust*. The Allied front was quickly approaching. Another deportation was imminent. It happened suddenly and without warning. In the middle of the night, some 1,300 men were assembled to begin what we called a "death march" to an unknown location. Neither Roman nor I were in condition or in the mood for that kind of travel. We had become virtual skeletons, incapable of sustained physical exertion. We made up our minds quickly. There was no time to waste. We decided to hide on the premises.

I was ready for all sorts of changes. But I was also certain that in the midst of all the turbulence I never felt indifference, a sense of fatalism, and stillness within me. I rebelled against being a pawn of history. No, I wasn't going to join the death march from our camp. And I wondered what had happened to the Piotrkow boys whom we left behind in Buchenwald. Were they still alive? I hoped with all of my heart they were. Rumours had it that we were to march all the way to Theresienstadt, alongside the Nazi retreat from the advancing allied forces. Would that we had only known of our boys being driven on a similar death march to the Theresienstadt camp even as we planned our escape from our transport!

We hid in the inactive furnace, somewhere in the darkness of the second level and listened to the commotion beneath, as the columns of men moved out on their way to their new destination. After a while, an eerie silence was felt around us. But our sighs of relief were premature. A detachment of the SS returned the following morning to ferret out those of us who were missing from their columns. It was then we heard whispers and movement beneath and above us in the entrails of the great furnace. How foolish of us to think we were the only fugitives!

Soon, smoke filled the interior of our hiding place. When we emerged from the furnace, coughing violently, we found ourselves in the company of 29 men lined up and facing the welcome of the SS man's rifle. I was so frightened, my anaemic heart threatened to burst. He did not fire immediately. He lined all 31 of us up against the quarry wall. Only then did he commence firing, and the noise of the automatic killing tool was so overwhelming, I forgot the words to my prayers. Twenty-five of our comrades lay dead or nearly so in the course of a few horrendous moments. The smell of gunpowder, the shock of the barbaric event, were so radical, I felt like I was losing my mind. But I stood silent, whispering the *Kaddish* for the departed.

"Bury the swine! *Schnell!*" The sentry barked. The six remaining walking skeletons worked feverishly for over eight hours to lay our comrades to rest. From twelve noon till eight in the evening, we carried them on makeshift boards up the sand dunes, our hands as bleeding shovels, we prepared their temporary resting place. In spite of the haste, darkness came and we were still not finished with our sad task. We heard the sounds of artillery booming in the vicinity. "What a useless way do die," I thought silently, "when the end is so near." We looked at one another. All six of us agreed. "Let's hide again." Roman whispered.

Profiting from the darkness and in the absence of sentries, we fled once again into the nearby barrack. Once there, we lay under the nearest bunk, immersed in every word of prayer we had committed to memory. Our prayers were answered, for it was at dawn the next day we were liberated by a small US Army detachment.

The road to physical recovery was slow. But the very moment I was freed from the shackles of slavery, I had begun the search for Szlamek, in the hope that he had not paid with his life for the great *tsedakah* he had done on my behalf on that *Appellplatz* in Buchenwald. Over the course of the next 40 years, I kept up my search, never giving up the hope of seeing my dear friend. I knew that to find him I would also find the rest of the Piotrkow boys. It was all to no avail. How was I to know that he had changed his name to R.S. Wino? There was no record at the International Red Cross of one survivor named R.S. Wino.

One day, in my research work at the Mazal Holocaust Library, I came upon Martin Gilbert's book "The Boys." And there, as big as life, one of the enclosed illustrations presented the youthful photo of my dear friends Szlamek Winogrodzki and Ben Helfgott. That was 54 years later! We had come a full cycle. Quickly, I wrote a letter. Szlamek responded by ringing me up as soon as he received my telephone number. His voice sounded as calm and confident as I had remembered it from those days many years ago in times of grave crises. We talked as if it were only yesterday when we parted. This happy reality is testimony to the phenomenon of brotherly love that does not cease with the passage of time and in the abyss of space.

What might have happened, had I been more confident in my own ability to reach Theresienstadt by surmounting the obstacles of the death march from Colditz? I, too, might have been one of "The Boys" that came to England with the Windermere Group in August 1945. Well...what if? We might have been spared the suspense of a 54-year long search. Then, again, what if I might have failed to...? Oh, but for a stroke of fickle fate...?

Jakub Guttembaum in Helenowek - Poland August 1945.

BUT FOR A STROKE OF FICKLE FATE (2)

Jakub Guttembaum

I first heard about the '45 Aid Society from Felek Scharf in 1992. He told me that many of the members were liberated in Thereseinstadt in May 1945 and subsequently came to England. He talked about their achievements and extolled the work of the Society. He mentioned Ben Helfgott, but the name did not mean anything to me.

I was very interested to learn about the Society for two reasons. Firstly, I too, a sixteen year old boy, was liberated in Theresienstadt after having been for two years in concentration camps and among those who went to England were my comrades in adversity about whose post-war fate I was completely oblivious.

Secondly, I was at the time of meeting Felek Scharf, the Chairman of the newly-established association in Poland "Children of the Holocaust" and the knowledge of similar organisations abroad with many years' experience was of great interest to me. Felek promised to put me in touch with Ben and, knowing Felek, I was sure that he would keep his word.

I did not have to wait long as in April 1993, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto, I received news that Ben Helfgott was in the Forum Hotel in Warsaw and was anxious to contact me. I 'phoned him immediately and we arranged to meet in the hotel lobby. When I arrived the lobby was crowded with Jews from abroad who had come especially to participate in the commemoration.

I was very apprehensive that I may not recognise among such a throng of people a person unknown to me. I looked around and I saw a man walking briskly towards me. His face was strangely familiar to me. He, too, recognised me immediately. We fell into each other's arms and after a few desultory exchanges we established how we knew each other. We were both in the concentration camp in Schlieben in Eastern Germany and lived in the same barrack. We worked in the munition works of Hassag, producing 'panse-fausten' anti-tank weapons, which used Jewish slave labour on a large scale.

Since that time, I have been in constant touch with Ben and we meet sometimes during his short trips to Warsaw. He told me much about the members of the '45 Aid Society and their history. Ben sent me Martin Gilbert's book "The Boys" , which I read with great interest.

During our meetings I enquired about "the boys" whom I knew in Skarzysko and Schlieben. Unfortunately, I could not identify any, due to the fact that I hardly knew their names. They were very rarely used in the concentration camps. One of the few names who remained in my memory was Shmulek Karmionka, with whom I shared a bunk for one year in Skarzysko in Werk C. He came from a Chasidic home and used to call me 'shaigitz', laughing at my ignorance of the Jewish religion. He prayed ardently every day. What stuck in my memory was that on Pessach he exchanged his slice of bread (our daily ration was a loaf of black bread shared between seven people) for a handful of grits. I was brought up in an irreligious home. I think he influenced me to have great respect for people who are genuine believers. I was overjoyed and amazed to learn that he lives in Stamford Hill, London, and that he is an orthodox Rabbi, has a large family and is highly respected.

Another "boy" whom I remembered was Pozner. He was in Skarzysko with his father. Once, when I was working on the night shift, Pozner's father was in charge of the group. We were unloading anti-aircraft shells from a wagon. Suddenly it was discovered that among the boxes were two boxes of ammunition for pistols and rifles. Pozner went somewhere to report it. He was not away too long but when he returned the boxes were gone. It was said that it was taken away by the Polish underground to which many of the Polish workers in

Hassag belonged. The Gestapo arrived and we were beaten and interrogated during the whole night but they could not find out who had taken "care" of the two boxes. Pozner was, however, arrested and was taken to the Gestapo in Skarzysko or Czestochowa. Young Pozner made every effort to find out what happened to his father. He went to Ajrenberg, the Jewish Commandant of the camp; he made promises but nothing came of it. I lost contact with young Pozner when I was still in Skarzysko. I don't know whether he survived the selection which was carried out before we were deported from Skarzysko.

You may wonder, having been liberated in Theresienstadt, why I did not come, like many of you, to England. In order to explain it I need to tell you briefly something about myself. I was born in Warsaw and my parents were teachers. When the Germans entered Warsaw in September 1939, my father expected to be arrested because of his political activity. He therefore escaped across the river Bing to the Russian-occupied Poland. At the beginning he worked in Kowel but, in 1940, he was deported, like many others, to Siberia. In the summer of 1940, before the Warsaw Ghetto was closed, we received a postcard from him from the district of Novosibirsk.

My mother and I, with my younger brother, had to move into the Warsaw Ghetto where we managed to stay until 19th April 1943 when the uprising in the Ghetto began. We were hiding in a concealed bunker in a house in Zamenhof Street. When the building was on fire, we had to close the ventilation to avoid being choked by the smoke. Inside the bunker the heat became unbearable. In spite of these horrendous conditions, none of us thought of surrendering to the Germans. Unfortunately, on the 30th April our bunker was discovered and all of us were chased along the burning streets of the Ghetto to the Umschlagplatz. We were at the mercy and cruelty of the Ukrainians of the SS-Galizien who were beating, tormenting and killing us as much as they could. After two days, when a sufficient number of Jews were collected, we were loaded into cattle trucks, squashed as tightly as possible, by using the butts of the rifles, and transported to Lublin. Those who arrived alive in Lublin were hurried by foot to the concentration camp of Majdanek. There the first selection took place, in which my mother and younger brother, together with others whom the SS man considered unable to work, were sent to the gas chamber.

I found myself, as a fourteen year old boy, completely on my own in a Nazi concentration camp. To add to my misfortune, I was given a pair of clogs which caused my feet to bleed and these wounds did not heal for many months. This is not the place for me to describe my ordeals in detail.

After two months in Majdanek, I was deported to Skarzysko. There the prisoners were exploited as slave labourers in the munition works of Hasag, Hugo Scheider Aktion Gesellschaft. Those who worked in Werk C were most unlucky as the picric acid and trotil used for the manufacture of mines emitted a fine poisonous powder of a yellow colour and this penetrated into the clothing, body and hair. People who worked near the picric acid, receiving starvation food rations and brutal treatment, could survive at most two to three months. I was very fortunate as I worked in Schmitz factory dismantling shells in a closed hall with normal temperature. Even in this place people died from hunger, cold and disease. During the winter of 1943/44, I walked without shoes. In the factory I wrapped my feet with paper bags and tied them with wire. Lice in the place were ubiquitous - typhus was prevalent. There were selections from time to time. The sick and those unable to work were sent to the shooting place where executions were carried out. I contracted typhus in March 1944. I was lying in hospital half-conscious, with a temperature of 40. During this time the Germans carried out a selection, killing almost all the sick. I survived thanks to the help of one of the doctors, Alter Rozenberg, who hid me underneath his bunk before the Germans arrived.

In August 1944, as the Russian forces were drawing near, the Jewish inmates of Skarzysko were deported. At the same time, the final selection took place where many slave labourers were killed.

I was deported to Buchenwald and from there to Schlieben where a few months later I met Ben.

I worked for some time in the armament factory and later as an attendant in the sick bay. There were a few Jewish doctors working there. The man in charge was a Belgian who, after the war, became the Mayor of one of the health resorts in Belgium. In reality, the medical help was limited to cleaning the pus from the ulcers and to dressing the wounds with paper bandages. The only practising doctor was a Belgian and the only medicine at his disposal was a powder against diarrhoea. The doctor examined the patient and then gave him a sachet of powder, showing him with a spoon how to take the portion in one gulp and saying "So viel pulver nehmen" (take so much powder). I can't remember him saying any other words. He once did something wrong and the camp Commandant ordered him to clean the toilets.

There was a camp nearby for women, most of whom were French. On one of the Allied air raids, they decided to sing the Marseillaise. They were punished by having their hair shaved off. This was done by male prisoners who later told us what a traumatic experience it was for the French women. When they were liberated they took their revenge in cutting the hair of the German women in Schlieben.

In April 1945, we were deported from Schlieben and after a gruelling seven day journey we arrived in Theresienstadt.

We were liberated in the early morning of 9th May by the Soviet army. My main aim from the day of my liberation was to return to Warsaw. I hoped that my father would return from the Soviet Union and the only place where we could meet would be in Warsaw. During one of the looting expeditions outside the camp, I acquired a bicycle, a knapsack and, thus equipped, I decided to return to Warsaw. How amazed I was when I was stopped near the gate by a bearded Russian soldier. He wanted to confiscate my precious possessions, but I fiercely resisted him. In the end, I was arrested and taken to the military headquarters. They brought an interpreter and I was intensively interrogated. Somehow I managed to persuade them that I had no ill-feeling towards the Red Army. They even treated me to a plate of tasty soup and after instructing me how to behave they released me. Unfortunately, I did not retrieve my bicycle which I noticed later finished up in the possession of the bearded soldier. I was not too worried about it. I thought 'easy come, easy go'. However, I did not relinquish my intention to return to Warsaw even if I had to get there by foot. My thinking was probably influenced by the fact that I did not have any idea where and how far I was from my intended destination. It has to be remembered that my education at that stage consisted of only three years of elementary education and after almost six years of no schooling, I had forgotten most of what I had learned previously.

One day I left Theresienstadt and made my way to Prague. I will not describe how I made my way to Poland but, needless to say, instead of going to England with "The Boys" I remained there. Unfortunately, I did not meet up with my father. I found out very much later that he died from hunger and the Siberian cold.

After wandering around for a while, I finished up in a children's home in Helenowek near Lodz, where my return to normalcy began.

I matriculated and studied engineering in Moscow. I obtained a doctorate from the Warsaw Polytechnic and became a professor. I wrote a few text books and published many papers. Now I am retired but still work in the educational field. I give lectures and supervise students for their doctorates.

Readers of the '45 Aid Society Journal may be interested to learn about the activities of the Association of the Children of the Holocaust, which I mentioned earlier. The association was formed in 1991 after constitutional changes took place in Poland following the collapse of Communism, which made it possible for independent social activity. It includes those who during the German occupation were persecuted because of their Jewish origin and were not older than thirteen when the war broke out. When an announcement was made that such an association was formed, forty people applied. At present, the membership is about seven hundred. The largest number of members live in Warsaw, but smaller branches are in Krakow, Wroclaw and Gdansk.

Members consist mainly from the hidden children who survived due to the help they received by Poles, living in Catholic convents, with Polish families, as well as wandering from village to village begging for food - doing the odd job. Two-thirds of the membership are women.

The main aim of the association is mutual help and to preserve the memory of our nearest and dearest and the crimes the Nazis have committed against our people. We help to find relatives of those who have lost or never had contact with them. Many of our members were very small

during the war and did not even know anything about their background.

The association has, from its inception, endeavoured to obtain compensation for the victims of the Holocaust by writing petitions and protesting to the Polish and German governments and to Jewish organisations abroad. As a result of our efforts "the hidden children" have been war victims, just as the Polish war combatants and those who survived the ghettos and the concentration camps. We make every effort to keep in touch with the "Righteous Among Nations." In May 1995, on the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, we paid homage to the "Righteous Among Nations" by organising a big symphony concert at the National Philharmonia in Warsaw.

We published a number of books about our experiences/ A book about us, "The Last Eyewitnesses - Children of The Holocaust Speak" was published in Polish, German, as well as in English, by the North Western University Press, Boston. We are now in the process of preparing the second volume.

We organise monthly group meetings and once a year we meet collectively for three days. We reminisce, we play and try to forget about our daily worries. We arrange trips abroad, including Israel. We organise individual as well as group psychotherapy for about eighty people. In emergency cases, we help our members financially. This is made possible thanks to the help of the Claims Conference. I would also like to thank World Jewish Relief in London from whom we received help for the psychotherapy programme in the years 1996 - 98.

Our association participates actively in the social life of the Jewish community in Poland. We are one of the five organisations which form part of the Federation of Jewish Associations in Poland. We are also members of the World Federation of Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust. I was the chairman of our association for nine years, 1991 - 2000, and since last year the chairman is Zofia Zaks.

Finally, I would like to express my very warm wishes to members of the '45 Aid Society. I wonder whether there are any who still remember me from Skarzysko and Schlieben!

HERE AND NOW

BRITISH PRIME MINISTER'S ADDRESS HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY, 27 JANUARY 2001

Tonight we remember the Holocaust's victims and we honour the survivors, some of whom are with us here. It was to Britain, amongst other places, that they came to rebuild their lives. Their memories have become part of our memories, our history. Tonight we have heard stories of horror, suffering and great courage. Of industrial might harnessed to evil and of the resilience of human spirit. Of course, history is littered with instances of people's inhumanity towards one another. What made the Holocaust so frightening was its goal, its unimaginable scale and its wickedness in attempting to use false science to further human destruction. Each step humanity takes is the product of a struggle between good and evil. We know both exist in our nature.

The Holocaust was the greatest act of collective evil the world has ever known. It is to reaffirm the triumph of good over that evil that we remember it. We remember it so as we do not forget what the human race at its worst can do. We also remember it so as we learn how it happened and never believe, in our folly, that it could not happen again. Indeed, in some parts of our world it has happened recently. The appalling reality of the Holocaust caused a profound crisis in human civilisation. But I believe it also marked a turning point in European and human history. That is, it served as a catalyst for the reconstruction of our continent founded on the values of democracy, liberty, equality, opportunity.

Today we gather to light candles and bear witness in remembrance. Because the passing of time makes it more vital than ever to remember the Holocaust and try to learn its lessons. I hope and believe Western Europe has learned the lessons of its past. Yet across the world, and closer to home, we still see the same forces of racism, extreme nationalism and bigotry actively at work today. Cambodia, Rwanda and the Balkans prove that hate-mongers and tyrants persist in their conviction that race, religion, disability or sexuality make some people's lives worth less than others. But the Holocaust's deep scar on our history means that we cannot escape the responsibility to oppose genocide today.

So the Holocaust continues to be of fundamental importance and relevance to each new generation. A reminder, particularly to young people, that the events of the Second World War must never again be repeated. In remembering the Holocaust and its victims, we reaffirm the kind of society that we all believe in. A democratic, just and tolerant society. A society where everyone's worth is respected, regardless of their creed or skin colour. A society where each of us demonstrates, by our word and actions, our commitment to values of humanity and compassion. A society that has the courage to confront prejudice and persecution. That is our hope and that is why the Holocaust deserves this permanent place in our collective memory.

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Remembering Genocides, lessons for the future, Westminster Central Hall, 27.1.01

A personal view

By Witold Gutt

Witold Gutt D.Sc., M.Sc., C.Chem., FRSC., FCS., came to England with the Southampton group in November 1945 and lived in the Finchley Road Hostel. He was Senior Principal Scientific Officer and Head of Materials Division at the Building Research Establishment of the Department of the Environment. He is now a consultant in chemistry and Chairman of the British Standards Institution Technical Committee of Cement and Lime.

The first memory is of the schoolchildren singing, and acting as guides to those eminent people who were lighting candles. The children, graceful, strong and beautiful, provided hope in this event which was overwhelming by the catalogue of horrors that were near to unbearable for me, as a survivor, to relive.

The report by Richard Dimbleby of his findings in Belsen immediately after liberation was too harrowing to watch, most effective in his description and selection of incidents, but revealing happenings straight from Hell which had occurred, we must remind the reader, in cultured Germany where some of the greatest music, literature, and philosophy were created with Jewish participation.

The Prime Minister was right to single out from 'Shindler's List' the incident when a normal conversation between Goeth and his mistress, in Plaszow camp, is followed by the arbitrary murder of a Jewish prisoner

shot by Goeth through the window. It illustrates that Plaszow was indeed a Heart of Darkness. I was there. (no. 7535) for a whole year August 1943 - August 1944 and remain familiar with the personality and body language of Goeth as he wandered around the camp. When we were marching back from work one day, a group of electricians, we saw Goeth walking toward his villa, and wondered whether he would turn on us. We decided to march in a military fashion, and Josef Feniger, our 6ft tall front man, shouted 'augen links' as we passed Goeth, who was obese and walking slowly. He ignored us, the moment passed. We survived the encounter.

Roman Halter and Esther Brunstein were perfect in their dignified recollection of unspeakable horror, personally experienced. Esther's account of her inability to eat after liberation because she was ill with typhus, reminded me of the typhoid epidemic in Dachau following our liberation there by the Americans on 29th April 1945. Many of those newly liberated died, and many were to emaciated and too starved to eat the food provided by the American Army.

★★★★★★

The presence at the Memorial meeting of the highest in the land - the Prince of Wales, the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the Home Secretary, the Cardinal, the Archbishop of Canterbury, added strength to the occasion. The Chief Rabbi spoke well, and the Cantor, Moshe Haschel, and his Ne'lmah Singers deserve praise for their rendering of El Male Rachamim.

The terrors of Cambodia, Rwanda and Sarajevo without doubt deserve the attention given to them. 'Ubupfubyi' by Cecile Kayirebwa was beautiful as well as sad and was sung by Cecile with great feeling. The lighting of the candles at the end, while 'I believe in the sun' was sung by the children was faultlessly arranged, like a mosaic. The presence of the camp survivors in the audience added validity to the occasion. Ben Helfgott thanked the Government for creating the Memorial Day.

Aspects that could have been mentioned somewhere are the long-term effects of the Holocaust on some of the survivors and the damage to some members of the second generation.

REFLECTIONS ON HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

David Cesarani, University of Southampton

David Cesarani is Professor of Modern Jewish History. He is a broadcaster and writer on the Holocaust Zionism and the Jews of Britain.

The decision to hold Holocaust Memorial Day was announced by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in January 2000, on the occasion of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust. Speaking at the concurrent opening of the Anne Frank Exhibition in Westminster, Blair said: 'The Holocaust and the lessons it teaches us for our time, must never be forgotten. As the Holocaust survivors age and become fewer in number, it becomes more and more our duty to take up the mantle and tell each new generation what happened, and what could happen again. As we fight to build a multi-racial Britain, we know that the evils of racism, anti-semitism and intolerance still lurk. As we celebrate our diversity and build a new patriotism that is open to all - whatever colour, religion, or ethnic background - we know that there are still those who hate this vision of Britain and would seek to destroy it. We must always remain vigilant.' So how was it achieved and how well did it live up to the aspirations of those who initiated the day and the many people who laboured hard to make it a reality?

Soon after the announcement the Home Office set up a working group that included representatives of the Home Office, the Foreign Office, the Department for Education and Employment, the Department for Culture Media and Sport, the devolved administrations of the UK in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and a range of non-governmental organisations as well as academic and educational experts. The working group, which soon sub-divided into numerous smaller units, faced many substantial tasks. It was to plan the national ceremony that would be the focal point of the day, encourage parallel events to be put on by local authorities around the country, stimulate educational programmes in schools, and produce material to assist local government officials, school teachers, and interested members of the public. The time scale for all this activity was extremely tight and soon members of the numerous sub-groups were toiling for several hours each week to bring on their particular project.

Despite the constraints of time and the need to satisfy many different points of view, the results were impressive. The groups working under the aegis of the Home Office produced an informative pamphlet for distribution to local government, a fine HMD Education Pack, a superb web site packed with information and linked to other important sites, and the concept for a major national ceremony in Westminster Hall. The realisation and production of the ceremony was placed in the hands of a BBC team whose outstanding professionalism ensured that it was a momentous and memorable event for those who witnessed it in the hall and millions of people who watched it around the world on television. (According to figures provided by the BBC, one and a half million people watched the ceremony in the UK, while 'Schindler's List', which followed, attained two and a half million viewers.)

However, the day was not without critics and the constructive points which were raised were taken on board by the Home Office team. From the moment that the government announced that it was contemplating a memorial day and launched a consultation exercise (from October to December 1999), it was attacked for supposedly proposing an event that would exclusively memorialise the Jewish victims of Nazism. Several groups, notably the advocates of a day to commemorate the stupendous horrors wrought by the transatlantic slave trade, complained that it should either be broadened to include their history and memory of suffering or serve as a precedent for other such days. A frequently heard objection was that the day screened out the victims of Soviet oppression. Some critics in the press wondered why the UK needed such a day at all. Others, taking their cue from the American critic, Peter Novick, wondered whether something as extreme ad the Holocaust could teach any useful lessons for today. Ex-servicemen were perturbed by the possible confusion between Remembrance Day and Holocaust Remembrance Day.

In the run-up to 27 January 2001 most of these criticisms were answered. The successful opening of the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition demonstrated the relevance of the Holocaust to people in Britain and showed how sensitive education about the subject included the fate of non-Jewish victims of Nazi racial biological policies. When defenders of HMD pointed out the scale of Jewish suffering, the specific role of anti-semitism rooted in Christianity, and the uniquely modern combination of racism, eugenics and social engineering implemented by the state criticism from other groups subsided. Sadly, due to the persistence of racism in Britain, the antics of Jorg Haider, and the occurrence of state-sanctioned mass murder and 'ethnic cleansing' in the Balkans, it was easily shown that the Nazi persecution and mass murder of the Jews was a recent event which was horribly pertinent to society in Britain and present-day Europe.

To ensure the relevance of the day and demonstrate its inclusivity, the Home Office added a 'strap line' to all material about the event. It became 'Holocaust Memorial Day, Remembering Genocides. Lessons for the Future.' By highlighting in the national ceremony and the Education pack the vast slaughters of humanity if Cambodia, Bosnia and Rwanda it was intended to show that the Holocaust could serve as a basis for commemo-

rating and learning about genocides post-1945, too. Efforts were made to involve church groups, British Muslims, and ethnic-faith groups in the UK.

These changes did not assuage certain critics, such as the journalist Nick Cohen. Writing in 'The New Statesman' and 'The Observer' he objected that HMD would be irrelevant, hypocritical, exclusive, and counterproductive. Cohen was particularly exercised by the alleged 'exclusion' of any reference to the Armenian genocide. From mid-2000 Armenian lobbyists bombarded the Home Office, the BBC and the press with letters of protest. This intense lobbying and the negative press comment on HMD marched in step. Antagonists ignored the fact that HMD was designed from the start to be inclusive; they paid no heed to the powerful arguments that the Holocaust was an unprecedented event in modern history which engendered, ad novum, a terrifying new era - as symbolised by the drafting and adoption of the UN convention on genocide in 1949.

In the event, lobbyists for the recognition of the Armenian genocide were satisfied by reassurances that the BBC's own commentary on the national ceremony and certain BBC journalists taking part in the event would refer to it. (This, in turn, caused deep offence to the Turkish government which made a formal protest and withdrew its ambassador from the audience at the ceremony.) However, the tragic direction of events in Israel and the Middle East in the autumn of 2000 introduced a new, largely unforeseen area of contention. Key Muslim groups maintained that memorialisation of the Holocaust was being used to justify Zionism, Israel's existence, and repression of the Palestinians. They wanted the catastrophe which fell upon Palestinian society in 1948 to be commemorated on Holocaust memorial day. Some Muslims also objected to the national ceremony because it prominently featured the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. Sadly, they could not be persuaded to remain involved and in the weeks preceding the event the Muslim Council withdrew. Several ambassadors representing Arab countries also declined to attend. Even so, a few prominent individual Muslims did participate in the ceremony.

In fact, on the day the ceremony proceeded smoothly apart from a noisy demonstration outside Westminister Central Hall by Turkish Cypriots who claimed that the commemoration of genocide inside ignored the alleged attempted genocide of Turks on Cyprus in the 1960s and 1970s. The press coverage on the day and the following Sunday was extensive and almost universally positive. A host of activities ranging from musical performances, to inter-faith services took place around the country, directly exposing tens of thousands of people to the history of the Holocaust and triggering reflections on the causes and the consequences of genocide. Jewish survivors of Nazi persecution were in demand for meetings in every corner of the UK as well as on TV and radio. The event also succeeded in drawing an unprecedented level of attention to the Armenian genocide as well as to more recent atrocities in Africa, the Balkans, and East Asia.

At the same time, it provoked a serious debate about the desirability and the efficacy of using the Holocaust to combat racism. The day highlighted the dangers of inadvertently encouraging 'competitive victimhood'. The government's initiative became entangled in the malignant controversy about the existence of a 'Holocaust industry' and was cynically taken to prove that there is one. All of these issues will be taken into consideration during the planning of the next Holocaust Memorial Day. The critics failed to shake the government's commitment to the concept and had little effect on the public's support for it. If television viewing figures are the equivalent of people voting with their channel selection buttons, it may be considered significant that only 800,000 people opted to watch the one-sided programme on Channel 4 devoted to knocking memorialisation of the Holocaust. This figure was roughly on a par with the number that watched the Holocaust documentary 'The Last Days' which was screened at the same time on BBC2, barely more than half the number who watched the national ceremony, and a mere fraction of those who tuned in for 'Schindler's List'. To this extent, HMD succeeded in transforming the memorial and educational landscape of Britain and met most of the goals set for it by all those across the political, religious, and ethnic spectrum of the population who initiated, planned and worked towards it.

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY IN SALZGITTER

Anita Laskier Walfisch

Anita was deported from her home town of Breslaw - now Wroclaw - to Auschwitz where, as an inmate, she played the cello in the camp orchestra. Later she was sent to Bergen-Belsen where she was liberated. She came to England in 1946 and three years later she became a founder member of the English Chamber Orchestra, in which she still plays. She published her biography "Inherit The Truth 1939 - 1945". She is a supportive member of our Society and she has been a regular contributor to our Journal.

When the first 'Holocaust Day' commemoration took place in England at Central Hall, Westminster, on the 27th January, I was invited to Salzgitter. I had never heard of this place.

Saltzgitter is yet another concentration camp one does not normally hear or speak about. It is about a one hour car ride from Hanover, where I had been invited to a conference that lasted for three days.

The conference was attended by a lot of psychologists and psychiatrists and was all about the 'evil' in humans, etc..... What's new?

Whilst I appreciated the thoughts behind it all and the immense efforts made by the organisers, I thought it was a bit of a waste of time.

My visit to Salzglitter, by contrast, was extremely worthwhile. It was a relatively small camp situated in what used to be the 'Hermann Goering Werke'. It was - and still is - a huge industrial estate, and I was told that the local population had a fight that lasted for years and was ultimately successful, to retain the section of the former concentration camp in its original form. So, in the middle of this vast complex, there is now a well-kept memorial to what had been.

When I arrived there, the organisers expressed their usual worries about whether anybody was actually going to attend the ceremony. After all, the weather was terrible and the place difficult to reach by public transport. Well, they need not have worried. The venue was packed to the rafters, additional chairs had to be brought in and many people sat on the floor. They had hired a very good grand piano, and the evening started with a musical offering by two very young gifted music students.

I talked for about an hour and answered many questions.

The audience was a mixture of old - not too old! - middle-aged and very young. I could not help feeling that here a real honest effort was being made to confront the past.

However, decent people in Germany are very concerned with a really frightening recurrence of neo-Nazi activities, and although only a handful of Germans actually know any Jews personally, anti-semitism is alive and well. What can I say? Again: 'what's new'! It is not just anti-semitism, it is anti-everything and everybody who does not fit into the imaginary picture.

But there again I take courage from my latest visit there. I was invited to a place called Wadersloh, a tiny place in the middle of nowhere. I cannot even find it on the map.

> Wadersloh setzt Zeichen -
> Hände reichen statt Fäuste recken.
> Aktionswoche gegen
> Fremdenfeindlichkeit und
> Gewalt.

What I witnessed there gave me a lot of hope. My contribution was framed with some musical offerings which made it unsuitable to be followed by questions from the audience. So it was arranged that I should go to the local high school and talk to the students. I encouraged them to ask any questions that came to their mind. It was a lively, intelligent and, I felt, worthwhile question and answer session, and I had the definite feeling that I was able to contribute to their understanding of the shameful inheritance they are lumbered with. None of these young people had ever met a Jew before in their lives!

In the afternoon a group of schoolchildren performed a play. It consisted of sketches, all of them related to the dangers of neo-Nazi activities, hatred and mistrust of anything and everybody foreign, and last, but by no means least, the Holocaust. It could so

Some of the 'Boys' of the Bedford Hostel in 1946.

At the home of Victor Breithburg.
L/R: **Louis Buki, Edith Bernacki, Charley Bernacki, Bernie Kornfield, Judith Zylberger, Lucille Breitburg, Roma & Herman Rosenblatt.**
Standing: **Matin Buki, Victor Breitburg & Alec Walter.**

The 'Boys' Madrihim in Darleith House, Scotland in 1946.

L/R: **Paul Gast, Alec Walter (Adek Wassercier), Victor Breitburg & Herman Rosenblatt.**

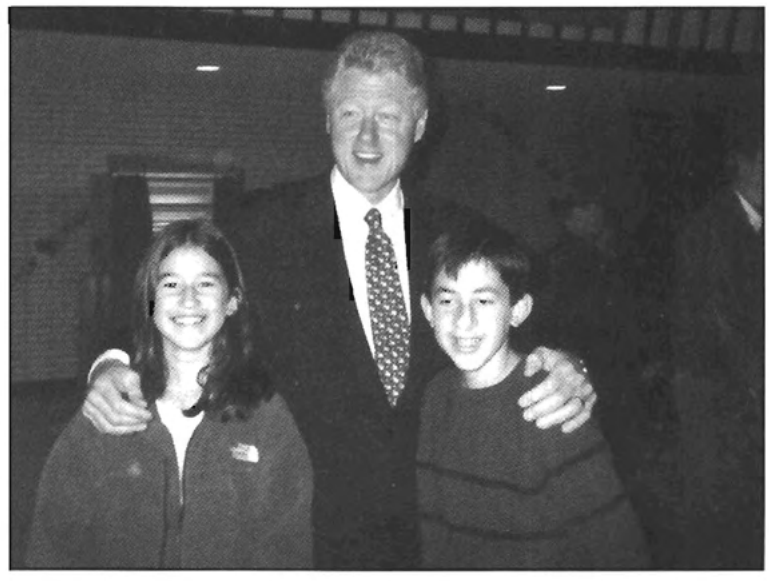
easily have been kitsch. It wasn't. It was moving to see these youngsters so concerned with the past and the future.

A few days later I went to Berlin to a book launch.

My childhood friend, Konrad Latte, and his parents had left Breslau one day before the last transport of Jews was sent 'to the east', took a train to Berlin and tried to survive there. It is a long story that ended in the well-known disaster for the parents, but Konrad survived, thanks to unbelievable ingenuity and an amazing number of German people who helped him and hid him. One of them, a well-known composer, even gave him his own identity papers.

Whilst in Berlin, I took the opportunity to visit the Jewish Museum. It is closed at the moment because the air-conditioning needs to be improved before it opens to the public. I managed to get a 'private viewing' and I must say this is an extraordinary building. It is not planned as a museum dedicated specifically to the Holocaust, but to Jewish life in Berlin 'before'. But even in its empty state, one cannot escape the feeling that nothing can ever be taken for granted. This building is like a 'Song without Words'.

L/R: **Stanley Faull (Falinower), Ruby Friedman (our Secretary) & Alfred Huberman at the opening of the permanent Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum May 2000.**



November 7 2000. Election USA at the voting station Chappaqua New York. 10 years old Kimberley & 13 years old Jeremy - grandchildren of Paul and Idyth Gast of Florida.

THOUGHTS ABOUT HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Anita Laskier Walfisch

When, in 1998, 27th January (the day of the liberation of Auschwitz) was first decreed as a day of commemorating the victims of National Socialism, the eminent historian, Jehudah Bauer, addressed the German Parliament. With superb lucidity and complete absence of bitterness or animosity, he outlined the uniqueness of the Holocaust and, at the same time, the futility of claiming 'first place', so to speak, vis-a-vis all the other genocides that have taken place since. At the end of his speech he said (and I quote): ....'to remember the Holocaust is but a first step. To learn from it and teach it, and everything that happened in the Second World War in the way of racism anti-semitism and xenophobia is the next responsible step...'

I was not only surprised, but somewhat dismayed, to learn that quite a number of Jewish people are against a Holocaust Day in this country. One has to ask why.

It seems to be fear of too high a profile and of increasing anti-semitism. Do we really still feel that we must keep a 'low profile' and not attract too much attention? A 'low profile' has never changed the minds of anti-semites, and surely attention can also be attracted in a positive way. Or is it fear of being seen as eternal victims? Of course we were victims, but we could also see ourselves as *survivors* rather than victims and frontline fighters against all genocides and, for that matter, discrimination of any kind.

There are also doubts about the name: 'Holocaust Day'. Should that day not be dedicated to all the genocides that have taken place in the last century. I tend to agree.

However, the word 'Holocaust' has become a by-word for mass murder and it will be up to educators to teach that it is truly without precedence. Whilst genocides normally happen in specific areas, the genocide of the Jews was envisaged as being universal and happened in the middle of 'civilised' Europe. It was premeditated in every detail, and administered with the most sophisticated technology.

These are the facts that permit the Holocaust to be compared with other genocides and serve as a warning.

That England, a country that was neither invaded nor occupied by the Germans, has recognised the importance of having a day dedicated to this mega human tragedy, gives me a great deal of hope.

It may have taken half a century after the event, but we now have two Holocaust museums in this country. 'Beth Shalom' near Nottingham and the Imperial War Museum. Don't let us forget that both these ventures were conceived by people who are not Jews.

For the thousands of schoolchildren and adults who will visit it, the Holocaust will cease to be something that happened in the deep and distant past that no longer concerns us.

An official day of remembrance will be a confirmation of that fact.

Last, but by no means least, there was the International Forum on the Holocaust in Stockholm early this year, attended by leading statesmen - not Jews. Here are two points of an eight-point declaration made there by high representatives of governments:...

... The magnitude of the Holocaust, planned and carried out by the Nazis, must for ever be seared in our collective memory. The selfless sacrifices of those who defied the Nazis, and sometimes gave their own lives to protect or rescue the Holocaust's victims, must also be inscribed in our hearts. The depth of that horror and the heights of their heroism, can be touchstones in our understanding of the human capacity for evil and for good.

... We share a commitment to encourage the study of the Holocaust in all its dimensions. We will promote education about the Holocaust in our schools and universities....

To my mind, there can never be enough reminders of how precarious relations are between the various members of the human race.

SPEECH BY THE CHIEF RABBI, PROFESSOR JONATHAN SACKS ON YOM HA'SHOA, SUNDAY 22ND APRIL 2001

Friends, before I begin my words this morning on the Shoah, let me just express on all of our behalf our shock and grief at the latest tragedy in Israel, the bomb this morning in Israel in which two people were killed and many injured. To the families of the dead and the injured, we say your grief is ours. We are with you in this time of tragedy, as we will always be with the people of Israel in the tough times, as well as in the good times. To those extremists on the other side who are attempting to murder not just people, but the very hope of peace itself, we say what you are doing is a tragedy and a travesty, not just to our people but also to yours. It is your children and ours who are seeing their hope destroyed and in the name of God we say stop, too much blood has been shed and too much pain has been endured. Let our tears bring us together, not drive us apart. And let us, for the sake of our children, our future and our faith, finally realise that the time has come to make peace, for there is no other way.

Friends, just over a year ago, on the 11th April 2000, Mr Justice Gray handed down a momentous judgement in the case brought against Deborah Lipstadt by the revisionist historian, David Irving. That judgement was a landmark victory in the fight against Holocaust denial and a warning against all those who claim that the greatest single crime of man against mankind didn't happen - never was. And what a terrible fact it is that not only did six million of our brothers and sisters die in that greatest destruction but that ever since we have had to fight for that fact to be acknowledged and known and carved in the chronicles of mankind. We now know that Deborah Lipstadt won that case but in the weeks of waiting for the verdict, we didn't know, she didn't know. And, as the case closed and the court went into recess, Deborah found herself in shul and suddenly, as she tells the story herself, she realised that this was no ordinary Shabbus, it was, in fact, Shabbus Hagadol, the Shabbus in which we are commanded to remember another nation that attempted to destroy our people, the Amalekites. Deborah Lipstadt has told us that the realisation that the case ended on 11th April, just before Shabbus Hagadol, came as a sign from Heaven that what she was doing was right and necessary and would succeed - Zahor, remember, never forget. And that is what we are doing today and that is what we must continue to do for generations to come. Why do we remember? So that those who were murdered live on at least in our hearts and our minds and in the hearts and minds of our children and our children's children, so that those who died continue to speak to us, telling us that these things happened and must never happen again. And so that the candle we light to their memory is a flame not only of grief for those who died, but also of hope for those not yet born. That what we remember we can fight against and make this a world in which people are no longer murdered for their faith, their race, their difference. That was Deborah Lipstadt's mitzvah, and it's ours. Zahor, remember. Remember as a religious duty. Remember as a moral imperative. Remember as our responsibility to the past and to the future. And therefore this year I want to pay an especial tribute, to those who, for fifty years and more, have carried the burden of memory - a special tribute to the survivors, to Ben Helfgott, the '45 Group, to all the survivors, and to realise what they have done. It is hard to die but sometimes it is no less hard to live when all those around you have died, when you have seen your parents, your brothers and sisters, your families, your friends, all those you knew, killed. Sometimes, surviving can be the hardest thing of all. The Torah says that when Noah saw the world destroyed and he eventually came back to earth, to dry land, he planted a vineyard and became drunk because he couldn't bear to think of what he had seen. The Torah tells us that when Lot's wife turned around to look at the destruction she was turned into a pillar of salt. That is how hard it is to survive. And yet, not only have the survivors survived, they have dedicated their whole lives since that day to being witnesses, to telling the story, to carrying the weighted memory, so that my generation and the generation of our children should know and not forget. And because of you, the survivors, in this past twelve months two momentous things have happened, the first, the Holocaust Exhibition in the Imperial War Museum, the second, the creation of National Holocaust Day, first held on January 27th of this year - two events that more than any other will ensure that all of us, Jews and non-Jews alike, will remember and learn and never forget what we have to fight for, a world of tolerance and respect, a world of freedom and dignity, a world, we pray, of peace. And therefore I say to the survivors, your strength has given us strength. Your courage has given us courage. You have honoured six million memories and, more than that, you have honoured the very condition of humanity itself. Today we pay tribute to your work and to your courage and may your prayers and ours be answered, that one day we may build a world, with God's help - a world without hatred and fear, a world in which we finally remember the sanctity of life.

YOM HA'SHOA COMMEMORATION AT BET SHALOM

Paul, Rudi and Rachel Oppenheimer

The Yom Ha'Shoah commemoration at Beth Shalom on Sunday 22 April 2001 included the inauguration of a stained glass window depicting the Star Camp in Bergen-Belsen. Paul, Rudi and Eve (Rachel) Oppenheimer were fortunate to survive in the Star Camp for more than 14 months. They were "exchange Jews", because Eve was a British subject, born in London. But despite certain privileges, more than half the 4,500 inmates of the Star Camp eventually died of starvation, exhaustion, disease and typhus, including both Oppenheimer parents. All four grandparents were killed in Sobibor.

This window was donated to remember Dr Hans and Dr Friederike Oppenheimer and all the other victims who died in the Star Camp and other parts of Bergen-Belsen.

The beautiful window was created by Roman Halter, himself a Holocaust survivor, and his daughter Aviva Halter-Hum.

The window shows the yellow star, worn by the exchange Jews in the Star Camp, the barracks and the barbed wire fencing around the Star Camp with the gate half open - symbolic of our hope to be exchanged and to get out of the concentration camp alive.

Stephen Smith introduced the ceremony and explained the background to the window.

Paul Oppenheimer thanked Roman Halter, and his daughter Aviva, for designing and making this remarkable window. He continued to thank Stephen Smith and the Smith family for their support, ever since the opening of Beth Shalom, and for their assistance in installing this commemorative window.

The three Oppenheimer "children" then spoke as follows -:

Paul Oppenheimer
THE PAST

When the Nazis invaded Holland in 1940, Eve, Rudi and I were children. We did not make the difficult decisions, or worry about how things would turn out. That was left to our parents and our grandparents. By the time we had been moved to Amsterdam, then to Westerbork, then to Bergen-Belsen, things were very different. We were still children, but by April 1945, we were on our own. Our parents had died of starvation and disease in Bergen-Belsen, and all four grandparents were murdered on arrival in Sobibor.

A few years ago, we placed a headstone at Bergen-Belsen, as a mark of our respect for our parents. We don't know where they were buried exactly, but we know they are there somewhere, and that is our way of paying our last respects. In placing this window here at Beth Shalom, we are extending our desire to remember our parents, and all the other inmates who died in the Star Camp. And to ensure that the experience we went through together at Bergen-Belsen, will always be remembered.

Rudi Oppenheimer
THE PRESENT

Virtually every week, either Paul or I sit here talking to young people and telling them the story of our experiences. It is always difficult to convey across the generations the exact details of what happened, where, to whom and how. It is difficult to convey the deep emotions that resurface each time those days are told and retold. But that is a duty we feel we owe to our past, to our parents' and grandparents' past and owe to the next generation.

Having this window here in this hall, adds another dimension to our story. It says that while we want to tell the story, we also have a duty to remember those who became its victims and to pay our respects in whatever way we can. In telling my story here, I will be proud to point out this window to the students to see it in another, even deeper part of our sorrow.

Eve (Rachel) Oppenheimer
THE FUTURE

I was just a small child when all this happened to us. I don't remember all of it, but I do know that it stole my past and stole my future too. I hope that this window will not only pay respects to the victims of the past, but will also encourage younger generations to appreciate the good things they have and to make their future one, which is free of persecution, needless suffering and wasted lives.

(Eve felt unable to speak in front of the large audience, and her older brother spoke these words on her behalf - starting off by recalling that it was Eve, and her British nationality, which was the reason for our survival - without her, we would have been deported from Westerbork to Auschwitz or Sobibor, with little chance of survival).

Speech given by Field Marshal Lord Bramall KG., GCB., OBE., MC., JP on the occasion of the presentation to him by the International Council of Christians and Jews of the Interfaith Gold Medallion

The award was made in recognition of Lord Bramall's exceptional contribution to the improvement of understanding between faith and his personal involvement as the former Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Imperial War Museum in the setting up of the permanent Holocaust Exhibition. He and Lady Bramall were honoured by our Society at our Anniversary Reunion in May 1997.

Sir Sigmund, Lady Baroness Boothroyd, Ladies and Gentlemen, I feel deeply honoured that the International Council of Christians and Jews should have decided to present me with this Inter-faith Gold Medallion; honoured, but extremely humble about my deserving this award, particularly in the company of such a distinguished past recipient and in the wake of so many very distinguished people.

I certainly have always tried wherever I have been in the world to foster good relations and above all mutual respect between different faiths. And like so many others, I have never failed to be impressed by the remarkable concentration of genius amongst the Jewish people, or indeed to realise and appreciate how much the Christian religion owes, for its roots and history, to Judaism. So my motivation is real enough; although there must be so very many others who have done so much more for, and had so much greater influence over, the improvement of understanding between our faiths, than I have.

But I realise that (as you have said) you have done me this singular honour because of my determination in getting the Holocaust Museum, with in the Imperial War Museum, started and off the ground, that that awful (and for various reasons unique) crime against humanity, during World War II, known generally as the Holocaust, which includes tyranny, persecution, depraved brutality and coldly calculated genocide of over 6 million Jews must never be forgotten by future generations.

Particularly never forgotten, because students of human nature will realise only too well how, under certain circumstances and pressures on political climates, these ghastly manifestations of envy, hate, cruelty and indifference can so easily come to the fore or be stirred up. And we can only hope for the future that our religious faiths and common belief in God and the goodness of God will always aim to foster respect for fellow human beings, and indeed constitute powerful influences in calming down and reversing such evil thoughts whenever and wherever they start to emerge, and certainly never, never do anything to inflame them.

We all have to learn from history and as a young solider who suddenly came across the horrors of Bergen-Belsen in 1945, that learning came very quickly. And indeed this is where, as Robert Crawford, the Director General, has just said, the permanent Holocaust Exhibition (a museum within a museum) has such a large part to play for future generations who have not lived through these things and need to have history properly and honestly presented to them. And this must particularly apply in this country where we now have a Holocaust Memorial Day and where, quite rightly, the Holocaust is on the school curriculum.

But my initiative (with the encouragement of the last Director General Dr Alan Borg) of getting the political support and putting the funding in place, so that the Holocaust Exhibition could get under way, would have been to no avail, if it had not been for the brilliant way that Suzanne Bardgett, with the help of her team and under the overall direction of Robert Crawford, the Museum's Director General, and after nearly four years of the most intense research, was able to get the whole terrible story presented in its proper historical context, factually, without undue sentiment, and drawing heavily on the experiences and records of witnesses and survivors. All done in a way

which has made such a deep impression on all of those who visit, as well over 100,000, nearly 200,000, have already done since the opening last June and countless more students and adults will do so in the future.

Robert and Suzanne and Penny Ritchie Calder are the ones who deserve the praise and I am so glad they are here this evening with me as I receive this medallion because I feel that I am accepting it on behalf of their whole team.

And in conclusion, Ladies and Gentlemen, may I just say that understanding between our faiths which may have been, I hope has been, helped by recording, for the benefit of posterity, the Holocaust and why it happened is never more needed than today when Israel - the homeland of the Jews, is locked in a deadly struggle with Palestinian Arabs - a situation which is crying out for a peaceful and just solution and where, of course, the third faith represented in the forum - that of Islam - is so involved as well.

When I was in Israel some three years ago, giving the Balfour Memorial Lecture, with that good and brave man Ehud Barak (as yet not in office) my co-speaker, I reminded my audience (though many needed no reminding) of what our great poet Milton had once written "That peace has its victories no less renowned than war" and I urged them to apply themselves to peace with all the courage, resolution, dedication that their people with a martial tradition going back to Massada and beyond, had shown in battle, particularly in the last 50 years. And although it would be quite wrong of me, especially at a time like this, to comment, in any way, on the complex and involved situation out there, raising such deep emotions, we can, remembering history, condemn extremist on all sides; and we can and should wish God speed to those in Israel and in the Palestinian territories who do want to bring about a lasting peace, as so many do and which can be fully supported by the International Community at large. And perhaps, too, we should be looking to our various faiths and their leaders, however difficult it may be for them on occasions, to try to work together and show leadership and encouragement in such a noble enterprise.

Thank you for this wonderful award, which means so much to me and my family.

ADDRESS GIVEN BY STUART EIZENSTAT AT THE ANNUAL REUNION OF THE '45 AID SOCIETY - HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

May 6, 2001

Stuart E Eizenstat was Deputy Secretary of the US Department of the Treasury and represented the US government in all the negotiations that he describes in the following article. Many of those who participated in the negotiations made an important contribution but without the perseverance, tact, patients and sagacity of Mr Eizenstat, it is doubtful whether these intricate and arduous negotiations would have been brought to a successful conclusion. It was indeed a great privilege to honour him at our 56th anniversary of our liberation reunion and to express our appreciation and gratitude for the indispensable role he has played in these negotiations.

I am delighted to be here for several reasons. Each of you is, himself and herself, an inspiration. Your courage, your ability to survive under almost impossible circumstances; your ability to rebuild a shattered and painful younger life into productive citizens, your capacity to pass on your faith, to your children and to your grandchildren is critically important. Your tenacity underscores the spirit of the Jewish people. I don't want to sum up some 5,000 years of history but, in some respects, the most amazing thing about 5,000 years of Jewish history is simply that we are here. That we have survived the destruction of two temples, the exile of 2,000 years and I have to say that without question the Holocaust was as much a catastrophe for our people as the first and second temples. And yet we are here. I am moved beyond words. I am honoured to be here at the 56th anniversary of your liberation.

The Holocaust was very personal to you. I have to say that, like most American Jews of my generation, I came very late to the recognition that it even happened. If you look at the educational materials in American schools - and, if I may say so, I think this is true even here in European schools - you will not find a reference to the Holocaust - nowhere; books on World War II, but of the Holocaust there is a footnote, at most. It was not a part of my life growing up, although I later found that I had three grand aunts, sisters of my grandfather, who were killed in the Holocaust. I visited their village just a few years ago. But let me tell you how I came to it because when I did come to it, it came very hard and had a permanent impact on my life and through me, perhaps on the lives of others.

I am full with emotion because of the history of the '45 Aid Society and what you represent. Martin Gilbert has been a friend, a family friend, a personal friend and colleague for many decades. He turns out books at a rate that some of us read them. The depth and scholarship of his work is really remarkable and since he is your President, with my President, President Clinton out of office, I can still say I know a President.

I am also moved because of Ben Helfgott. Ben and I first met at the London Gold Conference in 1997, sponsored by your government, and I will talk to you about that in a minute. I announced with Foreign Secretary Robin Cook the Nazi Persecutee Relief Fund. Ben and I then met at the Washington Conference on Holocaust Assets in December 1998. Then we negotiated this seemingly difficult German negotiation which was one of four which I have been involved in - the Swiss, the German, the Austrian, and the French negotiations. And Ben was always a voice of strength for the Holocaust survivors, but also a voice of reason. I am grateful for Ben's wisdom and dedication. Ben, may you go from strength to strength - you are a wonderful inspiration for me.

In 1968 - I was then really a kid - I was working on the Vice President Hubert Humphrey presidential campaign - running against Richard Nixon, and I worked with Arthur Morse. Arthur Morse wrote the first of a dramatic set of books that other authors then took up. The book was called "Why Six Million Died." It was a chronicle of what the Roosevelt Administration knew about the Holocaust and failed to act on. It was an unbelievable shock - you know, Jews worshipped Franklin Roosevelt. He was almost a deity for most American Jews. There was a joke that American Jews of that generation believed in three things - "die velt, yenna velt, and Roosevelt." So, what a shock it was to learn that Roosevelt had known of the Holocaust and had failed to act upon it.

Let me then move you forward from 1968 to 1978 when it came to our attention that there was no memorial in the United States to Holocaust victims. So, in May of 1978, when I was President Carter's Chief Domestic Adviser in the White House, I sent him a memo recommending the creation of a presidential commission, which was chaired by Elie Wiesel, to propose an appropriate memorial to the Holocaust victims. That became, 15 years later, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, which is now one of the most visited sites in Washington. Two-thirds of the visitors are not Jewish. Schoolchildren pour in from all over the country.

In 1979 - one year later after that memo, the Iranian Revolution occurred. The Shah falls, and 2,000 years of Jewish history in Iran, are at risk. Jews flee the radical revolution. They get into transit sites in Rome and elsewhere in Europe and they are looking for visas to get into the United States because our immigration people who, in some respects, had not changed their mentality from the 1930s, wanted to send them back to Iran. They had no basis to come to the United States because at that time we were not prepared to declare them refugees, which requires a well-founded fear of persecution. They could not come as students, they did not have visitors' permits, they did not have green cards. What would happen? So a delegation came to me in the White House and with the recognition of Arthur Morse and what the Roosevelt administration had not done, I said to myself " We can't let this happen again." I convinced President Carter for the first, and I think the only time that a President has ever found this, to redefine a visitor's visa. And we let 50,000 Iranian Jews come in with a visitor's visa. A visitor's visa requires you go back after 60 or 90 days when your visit is over. But the

redefinition of the President was that they did not have to return to Iran until the status quo anti was returned. And today they are now citizens of the U.S. living in Los Angeles and elsewhere.

I then left the White House and went into private law practice. I was Ambassador to the European Union in Brussels. I got a call early in 1995 from Richard Holbrook - that may be a name that many of you know - he became U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. At that time he was Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs. He said "There are now a whole host of new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, the former Iron Curtain countries, and there is a lot of Jewish property - synagogues, cemeteries, community centres, schools - that were confiscated by the Nazis and nationalised by the Communists. Would you be willing to take on a special assignment as a special envoy to encourage those governments to return them to the Jewish communities?" Against the advice of my entire staff, who said "You don't have time. You have a full time job", I decided to take this, and this became a six-year part of my life. Just let me try to give you just a few pieces of that. Because what became obvious as I went through this was that the Holocaust was not only the greatest destruction, the crushing of human life and human rights, perhaps of all time, it also was the greatest theft of all time. Businesses, apartments, jewellery, gold teeth, art, insurance policies - all stolen. So I started with property restitution, and let me just - in each of these sections I can talk for two hours on each of these - give you a precis of what we found. I went to twelve Central European countries over the course of several years - and some of them on several occasions - to encourage the new democracies to return to the re-emerging Jewish communities the physical infrastructure they would need to rebuild Jewish life in those countries, and I coined a phrase that these were the "double victims" of the two tragedies of World War II, Nazism and Communism, and that they had survived both. For fifty years after the destruction of the Holocaust, they were unable to practise their religion. Yet, here they were, albeit with the exception of Hungary and the Ukraine and Russia, in tragically small numbers - Poland ten thousand from 3.5 million, Lithuania, five thousand from two hundred and twenty thousand, and so forth. And yet, they were here. They wanted to rebuild their Jewish life. And my job was to get them back the property to pray in, to have schools in, and then if they couldn't use it all, to sell to have money to support their progress. And I have to tell you, one of the greatest inspirations in my life was going to see these re-emerging Jewish communities, struggling to rebuild their life in what had been very infertile and hostile soil. And now there are three day schools in Hungary. There are Jewish newspapers, there are Jewish Museums, and in Bratislava, where the whole Jewish population is 1500 on a good day, Chez David, a wonderful Kosher Jewish restaurant. There is a Jewish camp in Hungary, supported by the Lauder Foundation, two thousand kids last summer, adult education. It is a true inspiration. As this property restitution was gaining momentum, I happened to read on June 21st 1995, a front page story of the Wall Street Journal about the fact that there were dormant bank accounts in Swiss banks into which Holocaust victims had put their money to protect it from the onslaught of Hitler's forces. For 50 years heirs of those people had been unable to find out what had happened to the bank accounts. So I went to Basle, Switzerland, early in 1996 and met with the Swiss Bank Association. They said "Yes, we read the article ourselves and we looked at it ourselves. I am here to tell you that we have found 775 accounts with about 30 billion dollars and we are going to repay it all". That's it, it's done. To make a long story short, we appointed an independent commission, headed by Paul Volcher, former Chairman of the Federal Reserve System. After three years of auditing by three international firms, at a cost to the Swiss banks of 300 million dollars, there were not some 775, there were 54,000 accounts. And, under the agreement that was reached, the banks agreed to pay 10 times the value of the accounts, to take into account the passage of time, interest over that period of time. And then I helped mediate a class action settlement for 1.25 billion dollars that will not only pay nominal account holders and their families but will provide monies to Holocaust survivors and their families who had assets looted and then put into Swiss Banks, and to refugees, but for those tens of thousands who were blocked at the border, they will be able to recover from this fund.

In the Swiss situation, we turn history into action. I chaired a government report in May 1997 and in that report we documented that 4 billion dollars of gold was stolen by the Germans of the countries they overran - given false markings, transferred to the Swiss National Bank, which laundered the money and gave the Germans the hard currency they needed to buy raw materials to finance the war effort. But we made another discovery and that is, included in that looted gold was victim gold, which was smelted down by the DeGussa Company into gold bars. This gave them a false marking from the Reichsbank to make it look as if it came from their inventory. They then went to the Swiss National Bank. After the war over 337 tons of that gold had been collected by Allied troops and given to the ten countries from whom it was stolen. And, remarkably, we found that fifty years later there was still seven tons of gold left. Because we found out that some of that gold was victim gold, we went to those ten countries and said to them: "Look, over the years you have actually gotten not only your gold, you have gotten victim gold." And we got those countries, all but Albania, 9 out of 10, to agree to defer getting their amount and putting it into The Nazi Persecutee Relief Fund.

As we were getting the Swiss negotiations concluded, we came to look at the German situation. Now Germany. We learned --- which was no secret to you because I have talked to Ben and to a number of you tonight who were forced slave labourers. But we found out that there were 12 million forced and slave labourers and that the way in which the Germans had such a huge standing army was they emptied the farms and factories of working age men and used these forced labourers from Russia, from the Ukraine, from Poland, as well as from other countries, as well as the Jews. The difference was that the Jewish slave labourers whose cause Ben so ably represented in our negotiation, were being worked to death. It was an alternative form of extermination. The forced workers, mostly Catholic non-Jews, were an asset of the State. They were the way in which the German economy was being run. And after very difficult negotiations, we agreed on 10 billion deutschmarks , 5 billion dollars. We allocated that money among different countries to slave and forced labourers between Jews and non-Jews. We also have a fund for those who were subjected to medical experimentation. We have an insurance fund for those who had German insurance policies. And for those whose property was Aryanised, they can also claim because of our agreement. And we did the same thing with Austria on January 17. Three days before the end of the Administration, I concluded the Austrian negotiations, close to a billion dollars for labour, property and insurance. Then two days before the end of the Administration, on January 18, we finished negotiations with the French banks and the French government..

Let me tell you about two other pieces which I found particularly fascinating - insurance and art. What happened with insurance was that in many countries - France was an example, Austria was another example - huge fines were levied on the Jewish community. There was a one billion French franc levy on the Jewish community. Where were they going to get that money? Well, a large part of it came from having to go and cash their life insurance policies. You have a certain cash surrender value. You can borrow from it. They had to cash in their policy. They take the cash surrender value out to pay these fines. After the war, for others with insurance policies, if there were beneficiaries left - a child, grandchild, spouse - they would go to the insurance company and say: "My father, my grandfather, relative, was killed and I believe he had an insurance policy with you. Now can you please pay it? They were treated the same way the Swiss banks treated people looking for their bank accounts - in fact, go away, for fifty years. Now we have set up under the former Secretary of State, Larry Eagleburger, the International Commission on Holocaust Era Claims. Five European insurers, Generali, AXA, Zurich, Allianz, and Winterthur, have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to pay claims, also with ten times the value of the insurance policy.

Art - Ben was delegate at the Washington conference in December 1998 when we developed what are called the Washington Principles. The Head of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Phillip de Montebello, said that the art world has been forever changed by the Washington Principles. The art world is a very secretive world. You buy a painting, you don't ask too many questions of where you got it from Now, under the Washington Principles, museums in 40 countries who are participating are researching their inventories and if there are art works of questionable ownership, posting it on a Website and giving the painting back to

their original owners. Let me just give you a few examples of what has happened. The eight largest museums in the United States, the Metropolitan, The Museum of Modern Art in New York, National Gallery in Washington, the Cleveland Museum, and others, have gone through their inventories and primarily they found almost two thousand paintings with gaps in their ownership. They have been posted on their Website so people can claim them. In France, a thousand paintings have been posted on their Website. The same is being done in Austria, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands. The National Gallery just a couple of weeks ago returned a famous painting, a Franz Snyder's still life. Let me give you my favourite story. The State Museum of North Carolina, in Raleigh, had a prized painting called "Madonna & Child, in a Landscape" by a medieval German painter called Lucius Cramm the Elder. And lo and behold, it turns out that two sisters in their eighties, who were the grandnieces of a Jewish Viennese physician, claimed that painting. And the museum hoped against hope that their painting was a different painting, that the other painting was a copy, that it was done in a workshop. Remarkably, the Germans being Germans, had stored negatives of those things that were stolen so that Hitler would be able to review them for what he hoped to become a "Museum to a Dead Race". In fact, experts determined it was the same painting. The museum had only 600,000 dollars in their whole acquisition budget. The painting was several million dollars. The two sisters were so taken by the positive attitude of the museum in North Carolina that they agreed to accept $600,000 to leave the painting in the museum. This is happening all over the United States. And it's happening in Great Britain. The Tate and your other museums are going through their inventories and also finding looted art. Unfortunately, a lot of the families who owned it have been wiped out. And what the French are doing in that situation is that if after a claims period nobody claims the looted art, it will go back on exhibit, but with the insignia saying "This was stolen from an unknown Jewish family", which itself is a historical landmark.

And I want to close by the following -

As important as the eight billion dollars and the art restitution, insurance and so forth, the last memory of the Holocaust should not be money, it should be memory and lessons. Ben has just come from a conference that exemplifies that. Let me close with three points on what I think is the lasting impact of all this.

The first is that there are now about 24 countries from Argentina and Brazil in the western hemisphere and in the United States to Lithuania and Switzerland, France, Turkey, Spain and Portugal, who have set up presidential level or prime ministerial level commissions to look at their role during the Holocaust, their treatment of the Jews and the treatment of Jewish assets. Many of them are striking at the self-examination that has been done, particularly the Swiss and French.

Second, a task force that Ben has participated in this year in Sweden, is dedicated to promoting Holocaust education in the school systems around the world. Why Sweden? Because a wonderful Prime Minister, Persson, who hosted the Stockholm Conference in 2000, and listened to the radio and heard a poll that indicted that two-thirds of Swedish school-age children either had not heard of the Holocaust or thought that it had never happened. So, in the course of a few months, he had two historians put together a booklet called "Know Ye Thy Children". One million copies were distributed to the homes of a country of 9 million people. They say there are more copies of that than there are bibles in Sweden. And videos were prepared, teacher training techniques. Then the Swedes said "Look, we're doing this here, let's see if we can't do this around the world" - and they created this 10-country task force - the UK is one, the US, Germany, Poland, and others - and this task force is for promoting Holocaust education worldwide. Yad Vashem is the adviser. The task force has an outreach programme to Argentina. This will give a lasting memory, a lasting impression. Not just look back to what happened, but why it happened? What happens when the rule of law breaks down? What happens when intolerance is allowed to go unchecked? What happens when countries sit on the sidelines and do nothing? And, last, let me suggest that what has been done over the last 6 or 7 years in this enterprise is part, I think, of a broader enterprise, even with human rights. Why did NATO intervene in Kosovo and Bosnia? I can tell you I know for a fact that Secretary of State Allbright - I was Under Secretary of State then - because of her background, said "We are not going to have another ethnic cleansing on the European continent twice in the same century." It was belated; it should have come earlier; but it came. There are now two UN war tribunals, one for the Rwanda genocide and one for the Balkans, using Nuremberg principles. There is an evolving international law standard in countries like Chile, who are considering using that against Pinochet. Korean comfort women are now suing Japanese companies and the Japanese government. And, yes, African Americans are now raising it in respect of slavery - very difficult issues. But it is all part and parcel of the fact that the Holocaust has now been put into the people's consciousness. This will have an everlasting impact and I think that the most important thing I can say to those of you who are "The Boys and The Girls" - by the way, you would never have been called The Boys in today's politically correct world, because I've learned some of you were also girls, but I know it is also the girls who are the spouses - perhaps your suffering and your tragedy, but also your courage, your perseverence, will not have been in vain, that it will inspire generations yet to come to make this world a better world, a more tolerant world, a world less forgiving of discrimination. And if that happens, then what you have done and what the '45 Aid Society exemplifies, will have a lasting historical impact.

IN SEARCH OF A CAREER

Arthur Poznański

Arthur came to England with the Windermere group. He later stayed for a short period in a hostel in Manchester and then moved to London where he lived in the Nightingale Road hostel. He is a regular contributor to our Journal.

Perusing the articles in the last Journal, I came across the one written by Barbara Barnett. In her "Recollections of the Primrose Club" she mentioned that her husband Richard helped me to find more congenial employment. It triggered off in my memory a scenario, which was not that simple, and made me ruminate about my early days in London and the efforts to insinuate myself into a semblance of normal life. Like most of "The Boys" psychologically attuned to the struggle to survive the Nazi hell, I had no clear idea of what to do and how to progress in the rather strange environment into which we surfaced, or what was really available to us in this land of relative freedom.

To clarify the situation, I have to regress to the time when I decided to pursue a career in music, or to be more accurate - singing. I do not think that those in charge of us, looking realistically at the prospects of my success in this field, were delighted with my decision. However, I explained that music, which had helped me to survive and to retain, at least partially, my sanity was my true vocation. They agreed to help me with the first stages of my tuition, on condition that I got a job in order to earn my living. With my head still in the clouds and assuming that in the free world everything was possible, I said I should like to get employment as a dentist's assistant, or maybe as a dental technician. There were, however, no such openings available. We have to recall the fact that the political and economic conditions in the early 1950s were vastly different from the ones of today, when every alien asylum seeker, once admitted, is housed and supported by the government. I had been very politely informed of the conditions for aliens (like myself) laid down by the government of those days. Any of us was welcome to work in this country but only in coalmines, as domestic help or in industry.

In the meantime, I began to study singing and music under Professor Ivor Warren of Trinity College of Music. Within a short time the Committee decided that, owing to shortage of funds, I had to commence work and the best job they could find for me was in the optics industry. This involved grinding lenses or making spectacle frames. Just then I was headhunted by a company of Viennese singers, who were rehearsing a version of the operetta Fledermaus in English. They thought I was very well suited for the role of the Italian Singer and offered me the part. I was delighted. Whether or not I was ready for the stage, it seemed to be an excellent launch of my musical career, not to be missed. Assiduously I studied the score and swiftly learnt my part in English with a very genuine foreign accent, which I was assured was in character for the portrayal of this role. I religiously attended

every rehearsal. Most evenings I spent at the piano in the Primrose Club, which I found the most congenial place to learn the music. The time to sign the contract arrived. For this I needed a permit from the Ministry of Employment. Foolishly I thought that the employment restrictions did not apply in the sphere of art. After several attempts at diverse branches of the Ministry, my application was refused on the grounds that, in order to qualify for such a permit, I must become a member of either the Musicians Union or Artists Equity. Both of these organisations refused me membership because this could only be granted on presentation of a valid and signed contract. This, of course, I could not obtain without the stamped approval of the Ministry. So, I returned to the Ministry to explain and plead, but to no avail. Back to the Union office and yet again to the Ministry... a Catch 22 situation. The show had to hit the road; I lost my chance to become an international star of the operetta. Submersed in gloom, I stood on Waterloo Bridge vaguely thinking of jumping down. After all I had been through was prevented from realising my dream by intransigent officialdom and having no-one of sufficient influence to intervene on my behalf.

Left with no alternatives, I commenced work in a small factory where metal spectacle frames were being produced. The work was pleasant and not difficult. Most of the frames were made of gold-filled wire. My weekly earnings of five pounds barely covered my living expenses. In the meantime I continued to study music and singing in the evenings and at the weekends. Within a short time at work, I acquired expertise in producing and soldering the bridge pieces. Yet the accurate and artistic handling of the gold-filled wire was slow and, as the only expert who had mastered the art in this small factory, I could not produce the bridges fast enough. To encourage me to speed up my work, the manager put me on piecework. No more wages; I was to be paid according to the amount of my output. I worked really hard, ignoring or cutting out all breaks, and soon I was earning between seven and eight pounds per week and was able to save some money in a post office account. The other workers became envious and complained. The manager decided to cut my wages, insisting that having proved my ability to do so, I should be able to produce the increased amount without any monetary incentive. Confident in my newly acquired skill, I decided to seek another job.

After interminable hours at various Labour Exchange offices, I was offered a job in a newly established factory at Park Royal. At the time I was living in Clapton. The daily journey to work took nearly two hours by several buses and trolleybuses. Transfer tickets facilitated the journey. Every morning I had to commence work at 7.30. At that factory spectacle frames were made of plastic, not metal - a completely different mode of manufacture. Sheets of plastic were immersed in hot oil in order to get them softer and pliable before the shape of the spectacles could be pressed out. These rough shapes had to be put into a degreasing plant before any further processing. The manager assigned me to work at the degreasing plant. It was the worst job in the factory. The solvents (trichlorethylene) used were rather toxic and made me feel dizzy. After a month or two of this work, afraid of the serious health risk, I asked for a transfer. Affixing the hinges to the frames, my next task, was tedious but easy and not hazardous. Alongside others, I worked at a long bench, but nobody spoke to me during work which made me feel lonely, indeed ostracised. At the end of the working day, most of the employees adjourned to the nearest pub. My failure to join them in drinking may have been at least partially the cause of their resentment. They avoided speaking to me even during lunchtime, and deliberately excluded me from their circle. I did not know why I had been sent to Coventry. My immediate aim at the factory was to acquire as much expertise in the various stages of producing the spectacles as I could, which might improve my chances of promotion. Of course, earning my living in order to be able to study singing was the most important consideration. With this in mind, I decided to quietly suffer all the humiliations I had to endure at the factory. Music and singing and the dream of a different career kept me from spending my evenings in the pub. After a day's work I obviously preferred to take myself to the Primrose Club, where I could practise at the piano.

Having spent some time filing and sandpapering the rough edges of the plastic frames, I found myself at yet another assignment. I was operating an electric drill, making holes for the hinges with which the sides could be attached to the frames. One day the incessant hum of the electric motors sent me into a musical reverie. To the tempo and background tone of the motors, I started singing "La donna e mobile", not realising that I had raised my voice to its full volume. I finished with a long top B when I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was the manager. "Come with me to the office," he said. Without ceasing to work I asked why. "You are sacked," he said. "Why?" I asked again. "Because you are singing," he replied. "But I did not stop working," I argued. "No," he blurted out, "but everybody else did." Hearing this, I turned around. The entire workforce was standing there gaping open-mouthed, listening, all work abandoned. They did not applaud as, thoroughly infuriated, I followed the manager to the office. If he expected me to beg for forgiveness and reinstatement, he was disappointed. I took my earnings to date and dismissal papers and left with a loud expletive.

Now, however, I was without a job and with very little savings in the Post Office account. Again I faced interminable hours at the Labour Exchange while my meagre savings were rapidly running out. I tended to spend more time at the club, or rather the hostel on the upper floor, where some of my friends lived. There I could scrounge sandwiches and tea, and on some evenings go downstairs to attend functions which I found of interest, like music appreciation sessions conducted by Richard Barnett. He was a London man who displayed a concern for our group and tried to be helpful by bringing some culture into our environment.

After one of the classical music sessions, he noticed that I was far from happy and unable to concentrate and asked me if anything was wrong. He listened as I told him of my predicament, making it clear that I would simply hate going back to another job among rough and unfriendly labourers in factory conditions. The hostility of the managers and employees was more than I could bear. In the circumstances, both Richard and I came to the conclusion that an office job would be more suitable for me. However, I had no office experience in addition to insufficient knowledge of literary English. To top it all I had no permit for variation of conditions of employment. "It's a tall order," he said, "but I shall do my best to help you." He seemed to me genuinely concerned and sincere and meant well, but, to be honest, not knowing his professional or social status I was very doubtful that he could help me.

At about that time a slender young woman called Barbara appeared at the club to join Richard in his efforts to imbue members of the club with love of culture and music. Within a fortnight, she approached me saying that Richard had some news for me. When we met again, he said that one of his friends, a solicitor with offices in Pall Mall, would be prepared to offer me a job in his firm if he found me suitable and willing to accept his terms. After an interview with both partners of the firm, I accepted a position as filing clerk with prospects of promotion if and when I proved myself capable. "Observe, read, ask questions and learn," advised my new principal. I did, and also took evening courses in litigation procedure and bookkeeping run by the Law Society. In time I was promoted to outdoor clerk, involving daily visits to many County Courts and all divisions of the High Court. My knowledge of the language, as well as understanding of the legal jargon, grew considerably. When my principal stopped correcting my letters, I was promoted to the position of litigation clerk. The job did not set me on the way to making a fortune. On the contrary, I had to start at a greatly reduced weekly wage with rises coming very slowly, but a smile returned to my face. I was working in congenial surroundings with intellectual and pleasant colleagues ready to help and advise. Incidentally, regarding a work permit, I discovered that having a powerful firm of solicitors to support you had a distinct advantage. An official summons to the head office of the Ministry of Labour in Whitehall brought me to meeting the chief clerk, who said he did not realise I was "so highly connected" and presented me with a cancellation of the conditions restricting my employment in this country.

My singing also improved to the extent that I was able to join some operatic societies in order to gain more experience. Soon I was engaged to sing professionally at several concerts, but these as yet were few and isolated occasions. Now I had to await another opportunity to present itself, which would allow me to change my career again and take up singing as my profession. But until then, though impecunious, I was not unhappy with my bohemian way of life. Thanks to Richard Barnett's act of kindness, my lifestyle changed completely. I owe him a debt of gratitude, which shall not be forgotten. Barbara became his wife and I wish to thank her for reminding me of our long-standing trust and friendship.

SEPTEMBER SONG

Witold Gutt

Witold Gutt D.Sc., Ph.D., M.Sc., C.Chem., FRSC., FCS., came to England with the Southampton group in November 1945 and lived in the Finchley Road Hostel. He was Senior Principal Scientific Officer and Head of Materials Division at the Building Research Establishment of the Department of the Environment. He is now a consultant in chemistry and Chairman of the British Standards Institution Technical Committee of Cement and Lime.

September is the cruellest month, mixing memories and desire.*
The summer kept the memories at bay, as at Feldafing on the Starnbergersee, but here they come, invasion of Przemysl, arrest of father and his murder by the Gestapo on the 19th.
How to reconcile these with September birthdays of oneself and the children?

Krakow, a city of culture for the millennium year beckons; Wawel, the Trumpeter's interrupted call, and the Lady with the Ermine.
But memories of Plaszow 1943-1944, a full year, forbid for me a visit - a must for Schindler tourists. A visit to Przemysl is unthinkable.

The damage to the second generation is underrated and often, I believe, not admitted.
Where it occurs, it may be the most serious threat to the survivor's full rehabilitation.
This should be exposed and recognised in Holocaust history. Is it featured in the Imperial War Museum?
I cannot face the new exhibition so I do not know.

Witold Gutt 19.9.00

* with acknowledgement to T.S. Eliot, 'The Wasteland' 1922

AIR-RAID ON RIM 1945

Witold Gutt

We are filling in the
holes the American bombers had
made at Rim Airport.

Suddenly the bombers return.

All hell breaks loose
the Germans try to take
off in their fighterplanes
American pilots descend on parachutes
planes burn:
We run, no longer
caring at the guards
firing to stop us
Some prisoners are killed by
shrapnel.

We reach a village
and risk our lives
asking for food at back doors
some carrots are given.

The raid is over and
we return slowly.
Escape seems to be
impossible. Where would
we go?

SECOND/THIRD GENERATION

Witold Gutt

They may be proud or resentful
it varies.

Some wish to escape from
this inheritance at all costs
they feel the sadness
overwhelming and seek escape
in Eastern religions.

Buddhism is in revolt
against Samsara and offers
eventual enlightenment and
Nirvana which ends
reincarnation and hence all pain.

My grand-daughter aged 12 told her
teacher 'my grand-dad was in a
concentration camp, he escaped.'
'No-one escaped' said the teacher, but it
is enough for me
that the child is proud
not ashamed, it lessens the pain.

Witold Henryk Gutt ex-prisoner Dachau
No. 147597
May 2001

TADEUSZ PEIPER

An appraisal by Witold Gutt

In my article about my mother Jadwiga Gutt (nee Peiper) (Journal no .24 Autumn 2000 pl4) I referred briefly to my cousin Tadeusz Peiper, the poet, novelist and literary critic who was born on 3rd May 1891 in Krakow and died in Warszawa on 9th October 1969 at the age of 79. He spent the second World War in Russia.

His biography 'U Podstaw Awangardy Tadeusz Peiper Pisarz I Teoretyk' written by Stanislaw Jaworski was published in Krakow by Wydawnictwo Literackie in 1968.

I have a collection of his poems and plays entitled "Poematy I Utwory Teatralne" published by Wydawnictwo Literackie in Krakow in 1979, and I read them often. It is a large volume, with photographs of Tadeusz at various stages of his life, and it is illustrated by Moise Kisling. He too was born in Krakow and later became known as a French painter and a prominent figure in Montpamasse as one of the leading artists in the School of Paris which at that time included Modigliani, Soutine and Chagall.

Tadeusz attended Gymnasium in Krakow and studied at the Jagellonian University; further studies followed in the University of Berlin and the Sorbonne.

Between 1914 and 1920 he lived in Spain where he became familiar with the literature and dramatic works of that country. During this period he began to work on his acclaimed novel about Columbus, 'Krysztof Kolumb, Odkrywca,' which, however, was not completed and published until 1949 by Spoldzelnia Wydawnicza.

After the first World War Peiper returned to Poland and lived in Krakow, the city which is at the heart of his most important work, his poetry and critical writings published between the wars. In particular during this period he published the collection of poetry entitled 'Zywe Linie' (Living Lines) in 1924, 'Na Przyklad : Poemat Aktualny' (For Example, a Poem of Reality) in 1931 and Poematy in 1935. His theoretical works 'Nowy Usta I Tedy' (New Mouths and Trends) were the bible of the contemporary avant-garde. He built the foundations and provided the inspiration for the influence of the West to reach Polish poetry, drama and the visual arts.

The reason for this article at the present time is the publication in the year 2000 in Wroclaw of a book by Andrzej Zawada published by Wydawnictwo Dolnoslaskie entitled 'Dwudziestolecie Literackie'. This book deals with important developments in Polish culture and literature in the years 1918-1939, and the third chapter, entitled 'Robotricy Wyobrazni' (Workers of the Imagination) is devoted to the work and contribution of Tadeusz Peiper.

Throughout the rest of the book there are many other references to the central role played by Peiper after his return to Poland from Spain in 1921. This deals with his decision to reform Polish poetry and reach understanding with groups of young writers. He co-operated in the production of a journal called Nowa Sztuka (New Art), and wrote Zwrotrica (Switch) which in theoretical terms was an important intellectual catalyst in Polish cultural life.

Zawada says that Peiper saw himself chiefly as a 'Builder' and that the key to his theory was intellectual discipline. He wanted to ensure a proper connection between life and literature. He felt that in a deep sense literature is always realistic. Zawada points out that Peiper argued that 'the skin of the world had changed,' and that Western civilisation had entered a new phase and a new quality because of industrialisation.

In '3 Razym' Peiper speaks of"Miasto, Masa, Maszyna' (the City, the Masses and Machines). The artist, he felt, had to take note of these great changes, emphasising masses of people rather than the individual. The city is the natural centre for the masses, and literature should abandon rural sentiments which were so strong in Poland. It should build its new ethos according to the model of the architecture of a new city, and the importance of machines was to be recognised. Between the 1940s and 1960s his work was almost forgotten, but then the young generation of poets re-discovered Peiper's writings of the 1920s, and the thoughts of this 'worker of the imagination' had a renewed effect influencing in particular the formation of 'Nowa Fala' (New Wave). Zawada's book constitutes a fresh re-appraisal of Peiper's contribution, and an implicit acknowledgement of a Jewish contribution to the development of Polish culture.

Other Jewish writers are mentioned, either implicitly or explicitly as such, eg. Bruno Schultz, Julian Tuvim, and the Yiddish writers Isaac Bashevis Singer and his brother I J Singer. I recommend the book, which is very well produced, beautifully illustrated and contains a lot of information about Polish literary history between the wars.

Witold Henryk Gutt
June 2001

MARCH OF THE LIVING

David Borgenicht

David came to England with the Windermere group and subsequently emigrated to the U.S.A., where he has lived for fifty years.

As a Holocaust survivor from Poland, I promised myself, after the liberation in Theresienstadt, that I shall never step on Polish soil again. (1) I had nobody to go back to, and (2) due to the suffering I encountered at the hands of the Christian students and the teacher "Nitribituwna", who said to me three months before the war, "Hitler is coming after you".

But then, in January of this year, I heard about "The March of The Living". I joined some of the Holocaust survivors from my building and we attended several meetings. The organisation was trying to recruit as many survivors as possible, to inspire the teenagers joining the march. The group was made up of teenagers as well as adults and they treated us - the survivors - as V.I.Ps. I have been very active in The Holocaust Documentation Center of Miami since its inception. Since the law was passed in Florida that all students have to learn about the Holocaust, I have never refused, when asked, to join as many survivors as we could gather, to speak to the hundreds of students from elementary schools; high schools and colleges. As the meetings progressed, I met the appointment Bus-Captain in charge of my group. After enquiring of her how many times she had been on The March of The Living, I was told this was going to be her 8th trip. I was very inspired. I felt an obligation to be part of the team. Many of the adults came on the march with their teenage children. Our group of 383 from Miami and the suburbs consisted of over 300 teenagers, about 24 survivors, several nurses, doctors, psychiatrists and psychologists: the rest were the devoted leaders, who used their previous experiences to guide us and bring the march to a successful conclusion.

The Trip

After three months of meetings, study sessions and guidance about the trip by the leaders of the march, which was to take place in Poland and Israel, we were ready. On Saturday, 29th April, we met at Miami Airport and boarded an El Al plane for our journey to Warsaw. Out arrival was late because of a flight delay. Nevertheless, we started our tour with a visit to the Warsaw ghetto and the next morning we toured old synagogues and cemeteries. In the afternoon, we took buses to the railroad station and travelled to Cracow. We travelled by bus to Treblinka, Majdanek, Birkenau and Auschwitz. From Auschwitz, about 5,500 people from all over the world took part in the famous march. I was never in those areas during the years that I was incarcerated, but when I looked at the shoes, hair, glasses and talisim, I thought of my family - all of whom were annihilated there. We also visited the old famous Jewish area, the ghetto and many famous old synagogues and cemeteries. We travelled to the old Lublin Yeshiva, which is now used as a school. We visited a famous temple in Toczyn. A group of us went with the Polish guide to the Wavel Castle and church. Some of the Poles appeared to resent us being there. We rose at 5.45am after only six hours sleep to attend a prayer service of either Reform, Conservative or Orthodox. After breakfast, we boarded the buses for a full day's schedule. We were supplied with large bottles of water and urged to drink a lot. I was surprised in Birkenau when I saw a large supply of green bottles of natural spring mineral water from my home town of Krynica. Road travel in Poland was very good and our Polish guide spoke very good English. The teenagers on our bus were very well behaved and compassionate. Most of them were the age of our two oldest grandchildren - the oldest of whom will turn 17 in June this year.

Steve Pomerantz was very helpful to me throughout the entire trip. His help with my luggage in and out of hotels, airports and especially his help with my back pack on the march from Auschwitz to Birkenau, was much appreciated.

The Guide and the Guard in Poland

Our guide in Poland was helpful to our captain, Sharon Horowitz, but did not work well with our Polish guard "Kristoff", who was very efficient. She would disappear as soon as we arrived at the hotels. The only one Kristoff could comunicate with was me. He was concerned about the things that were left inside the bus and in the cargo hold. He searched me out and asked me to go with him through the buses; he did not want to do it alone in order to avoid being accused of theft. I was glad to be of service, but I was the last one to enter the hotels. I was also happy to be useful when we made a pit-stop. The Polish anti-semitic kiosk owner was accusing people of taking ice-cream, soda and other merchandise without paying for it. Then, he asked to be paid in Polish money. I ran around to the bus drivers, guards and guides to change dollars into zlotys. When I noticed that he was taking 5 zlotys for a 2½ zloty bottle of soda, without giving any change, I stepped in and told everybody not to buy anything without my supervision. I bought nothing for myself, but I made sure that he did not take advantage of anybody. At another stop, I was able to help Sandy when he tried to buy a book for a friend. I managed to get him some Polish money to complete the transaction.

Although I spent three years in nine concentration camps - six of them in Poland - the ones we visited - Treblinka, Majdanek, Birkenau and Auschwitz - were not among them. When I toured those places, I knew that my mother, brothers, uncles and cousins, were annihilated there. When I looked at the hair, shoes and talisim exhibited there, I visualised my family in these places.

The hotels in Poland were good. In Israel, Hotel Hatatzmaut in Tiberius was clean, nice and good. Hotel Windmill in Jerusalem was very disappointing.

My friends and relatives in Israel tried to get in touch with me on Wednesday, but they were told that I was not registered there. Eventually, I got in touch with my friend from England whom I had not seen since 1948 when he left for Palestine to fight for the land of Israel. He told me that he had tried to get in touch with me, but was told that I was not there.

In Israel I visited many of the places that I had not seen during our guided tour visits in 1971 and 1978. We had a wonderful Israeli guide and guard.

I was fortunate enough to be in good health. In the year 2002, if I am still in good health and I am called upon to join the march, I'll be happy to be part of the team.

Your friend
David Borgenicht

From Poland to the land of Israel

May 7th 2000

We left Cracow at 3.30am and arrived in Tel Aviv at 7.30am. No sleep. At 9am the buses took us to Jerusalem. We spent a couple of hours at The Kotel (Wailing Wall). Later, the buses took us to Ben Yehuda Street, where we spent three hours, mostly shopping and eating Israeli foods. I bought a Talit for my grand-daughter Michele, whose Bat Mitzvah we shall celebrate on June 10th in Buffalo, N.Y. At 4pm we left for Tiberias, to Hotel Tatzmaut. After unloading and dinner, followed by a sharing session (discussion of what we had accomplished and learned that day), we were given the privilege of 7 hours sleep. The normal was 5½ - 6 hours sleep.

May 8th 2000

We left the hotel, kept our date with our famous 104 bus, and travelled from the Lower Galilee to Upper Galili. Our Israeli guide, Esther, lives in this area. She told us that the inhabitants of the area consist of Arabs, Christians and Jews. They all live in peace. There are many olive trees growing in the area - a symbol of peace. From there, the caravan of our buses travelled to Zefat. We visited a couple of old synagogues. Then we had an hour to ourselves to go shopping in the narrow streets, from small kiosks, stores and art galleries. Some people bought art, jewellery and other items. I bought only postcards to put into my album. We left Zefat for a 2 hour drive, with a short "pit-stop". Ladies used the portable toilets, while the men "watered the woods". A short time later, we landed in a Druze village. We feasted on "Druze food", with plenty of it, followed by a dessert similar to "Baklava". Lunch was followed by a lecture given by a Druze minister who spoke in excellent English. He explained that the Druze people have their own religion and live with their parents until they get married, with the youngest married couple taking care of their parents. They believe in re-incarnation.

They do not want their own country. They are happy to be part of Israel and serve in the Israeli Army, just like any Israeli. It was very interesting. Esther, our Israeli guide, was with us in Poland and learned first-hand about the concentration camps and gas chambers and crematoriums.

We returned to the Hotel Hatzmaut in Tiberias. After dinner, Joe Sachs (another survivor) and I were called to the front to celebrate our rebirth. We were both liberated on May 8th 1945.

We then went on the lawn in front of the hotel for the start of Yom Hazikaron - the evening and next day - when all of Israel stops to mourn the "Fallen Soldiers" in all Israeli wars. Our Israeli guides and armed security guards eulogised their fallen comrades. Then we left for our rooms to pack for the next day's trip to Jerusalem.

May 9th 2000

We arose at 6am, put out our luggage, attended "Conservative morning services" with 90 other people, ate a good breakfast and left for the Golan Museum, where we also attended ceremonies by the army. About 1,000 people gathered at any time. Now we were on our way to Jerusalem. We drove along Yam Kineret and the Jordan river, which empties into the Dead Sea. On the other side of Yam Kineret, we saw the Golan Heights. Eventually, we arrived at the "Windmill Hotel" in Jerusalem. My luggage was carried to my room for me (as it had been throughout the trip). After dinner we did a trip to a city called Maale Adamim (50,000 inhabitants), where we spent 3 hours. We joined an ongoing celebration of Yom Ha'atzmaut - the 52nd anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel. It starts in the evening and continues all of the next day. There was a large stage, with continuous singing and dancing by famous Israeli groups.

May 10th - Yom Ha'atzmaut

We left for Ceasaria. I had been there in 1971 and 1978. At that time, we just saw the wall structure and the amphitheatre, which was impressive. Now there are stores and restaurants and still more building in progress. After a while, we walked over to an area in the wide-open spaces. There were tables and chairs, with food stalls where 5,500 people were to be fed. The weather was co-operating and the atmosphere and friendship was very enjoyable. There was plenty of food for everybody, including ices for dessert. After we had finished the meal, we walked over to the amphitheatre, where we took our seats for the concert. The concert lasted three hours, with singers, dancers and beautiful costumes. Then came a grou p called "Af Simchas". They sang up a storm and rocked to the music. About 500 teenagers got on the stage, dancing and rocking with the music.

May 11th 2000

I called my friend, Zvi Brand, with whom I had lived in Stamford Hill and attended the O.R.T. School. I had not seen him since 1948 when he left for Palestine to fight in the War of Independence. I took three buses, enjoyed the sights, and arrived at his apartment before he returned from his part-time job. I communicated with his wife in English and Yiddish until Zvi arrived at 1pm. At 6.30pm we left for the reunion, which took place at David Intercontinental Hotel, where I met some of "The Boys" from the reunion in 1992, when I travelled to England after a 42-year absence. I also met many of "The Boys" who, like Zvi, had left England in 1948.

Friday May 12th 2000

We walked through the old section of Jerusalem with our guide telling us about the history of the area and its surroundings. In the evening, after dinner, we drove with our respective buses to the Kotel. There were a lot of Chasidim, young and old. We prayed with our own group; we were considered outsiders by the others. We were told before we started that we would have to walk back because of Shabat. The walking was not bad until we had to climb 228 steps in order to get to the hotel!!!

Saturday May 13th 2000

After breakfast, I joined a group of teenagers and adults from the marchers and we walked to attend services at Temple Mechal Schlomo. When we returned, we had lunch and packed for our return trip to Florida. We left for the airport at 9.30. After an all-night flight, we arrived in Miami at 10.30 Sunday morning.

It was a good experience. I hope that I am capable to join the next March of The Living.

A MEMORABLE DAY - 22ND MARCH 2001

By Hettie Ward

Hetty has not only been a dedicated wife to Alec, she has also been a staunch supporter of our Society.

Just before Ben was leaving for Poland he telephoned to ask whether Alec would give a talk to some prisoners at Lincoln Prison in two weeks time. For reasons best known to Alec he agreed! Ben gave him the telephone number of the Chaplain and asked him to telephone to make arrangements. During these two weeks a rapport began with Alan Duce, the Chaplain, and ourselves. It was explained that Alec was to talk to a group of men who were on remand for serious offences, or who had already received long sentences. This group was called ALPS which stands for Anticipating Long-term Prison Survival.

At the beginning Alan wanted Alec to go alone to Lincoln but Alec refused point blank unless I was able to accompany him . After consultation with the Governor Alan was able to tell us that tickets would be sent for the two of us.

So, with some trepidation, Alec and I set out at 5.15a.m. on this very cold, grey Thursday to catch the 6.45 train from Kings Cross to Lincoln. We did not have very kind thoughts of Ben at that time in the morning, I can assure you!

We were in good time and settled into our reserved seats. We watched the countryside speed by (no animals of any kind in sight due to foot and mouth) passing through Stevenage, Peterborough, Grantham (Margaret Thatcher's birthplace) and on to Newark where we changed trains for Lincoln.

We were met by Alan (a kindly man) who took us in his car to the prison, pointing out various landmarks on the way. Arriving at the prison, Alan knocked loudly on the gate, which was immediately opened by a prison officer. We entered a courtyard with a big gate at the end guarded by another armed prison officer. We had to show our bus passes with our photographs to the security officer working behind the high window of the security office. Alan explained to us that mobile phones were not allowed in the prison so our phone, together with his, was put in a small cubicle no. 31 and locked. We then went on to the guarded gate and were introduced to the officer by Alan. He unlocked the gate and we were outside again, facing steps leading to the Chapel and Hospital Wing. The Chapel door was opened by Alan, who holds various keys, and we were led up a winding stone stairway to a little room which led into the Chapel. Here we met one of the outside facilitators, Liz, who was having trouble with the urn - the handle having come off. With the help of a safety pin, this was temporarily repaired! She was arranging mugs for coffee and there were also some biscuits for the group. We were introduced to other members who would be with us. This included the Deputy Chaplain, previously a Senior Probation Officer for 35 years, and also two prison officers, one male named Keith and the other female, Valerie. They were in civilian clothes. The Deputy Governor came in and Alec had a short talk with him.

The panic button was pointed out to us and we were told that if there was any trouble from the prisoners we should press this button and ten officers would be there within seconds. This reassurance did not help Alec and he was quite concerned.

Eighteen chairs were arranged in a circle with the names of each person attending the meeting set on the floor in front of them. The pews were behind this small area leading up to a locked door at the top. Suddenly this door was opened and the 12 prisoners (mostly in their 20s) came down the steps in single file. Alec instinctively moved forward to greet them and shook each one by the hand. I think this stunned them somewhat and I certainly felt that it was very touching. I helped to hand round coffees and biscuits and they were very polite and each one thanked me.

We then sat down and Alan opened the meeting by introducing Alec and myself - Alec as a Holocaust Survivor. Alec, inevitably, started his talk with a joke !! This time it was about football and they all laughed and the atmosphere became very relaxed. Alec gave a full

and moving account of his story (during which time the Governor came in and stayed with us). He spoke for over an hour. He told them that he identified with them as he also was a prisoner with various prison numbers. He explained that he wanted to leave these numbers to our grandchildren, together with his story, as their heritage, to show man's inhumanity to man. He added that his crime was that he was born a Jew. I doubt whether any of the prisoners had met a Jewish person before .

I know Alec's background as well as my own, but I have never heard it told as movingly as he told it to these long term prisoners in Her Majesty's prison. The prisoners sat there without moving a muscle or blinking an eye - as did the staff.

Alan called on me to say a few words about life with Alec - which I did to the best of my ability. Alan asked if there were any questions. There was only time for three:-

1. How was Alec able to suppress his past?
2. When did Alec first start to talk about it?
3. How did he know that all his family had been murdered?

Alec was able to answer all these questions, which seemed to satisfy them.

Alan thanked us both profusely.

Alec then presented to the Governor the book "The Boys" for the Lincoln Prison Library and explained about "The Boys"; how they came to England, and how a brotherhood was formed between them. He spoke of how they support one another morally and financially and also help other charities. The book was very well received by the Governor who told Alec that it would be read by the prisoners.

Then the unbelievable happened. The men got up, led by the most difficult 'lifer' (we were later told), who came over to Alec, shook his hand and hugged him. The others followed suit and Alec was overwhelmed by the warmth towards him and was overcome by emotion. They went back up the steps through which they had come and through the door, which was then locked behind them.

Afterwards, the assistant chaplain informed Alec that his talk to the prisoners would help to make them realise not to worry about little things and to take each day as it comes. They are normally very irritable and hard to manage.

At this point I would like to say how wonderful the Governor, Assistant Governor and their staff are. They put in a great deal of effort to get ALPS started and therefore help the prisoners to lead a better and more constructive life in prison.

We said our warm goodbyes to the others and left by the way we came, collecting our mobile phone from cubicle 31.

Alan then took us to the Cathedral where we said our goodbyes to him and hoped to be in touch with one another.

We walked around the Cathedral and shop but were feeling very bemused and thoughtful about the events of the morning. We decided to walk through Lincoln, even though it was raining, and visited Jews House and Jews Court on Steep Hill. We understand that there are a few Jewish families living in and around Lincoln and use Jews Court to worship.

So we wandered around, had something to eat and started on our return journey home.

If Alec's talk has helped the staff with their work (which I am convinced it has) then Alec's effort was not in vain and I can assure you it was a great effort for him.

Alec has given many talks to adults, youth groups and schoolchildren, but his talk in Lincoln Prison was one he found most rewarding. The 22" March 2001 was certainly an experience for me which I shall not forget for a long time to come.

Postscript by Alec.

I would like to thank my darling wife, Hettie, for her support, without which I would not have been able to accomplish my visit to Lincoln Prison.

I would also like to express my thanks and gratitude to Ben Helfgott for giving me the opportunity of carrying out this extremely rewarding task..

UNDERSTANDING THE JEWS

Rafael F Scharf

Rafael E. Scharf was born in Cracow and came to England in 1939. He served in the British Army during the Second World War and by the end of it was a member of a war crimes investigations unit. He has written and lectured extensively and most poignantly about the vanished world of Polish Jewry. He was a co-founder of the Jewish Quarterly, as well as of the Institute of Polish Jewish Studies in Oxford.

In one of the leading British newspapers, The Daily Telegraph, there appeared the other day an article by a well-known journalist, Graham Turner, under the above title. "How can a people" - he asks - endure appalling punishment, yet survive to accomplish so much?" He interviews many Jewish figures in Great Britain, in the United States, in Israel, on the subject of their beliefs, their fears, to find out how they see their future.

I would not have been a good person to engage in such an enquiry. I have no need to justify, to question or to analyse my Jewishness. My Jewishness is natural, obvious, requiring no definitions. Although I am a non-believer, I do fast on Yom-Kippur, conduct a "seder" on Pesach, say Kaddish on the anniversary of my parents' death and attend Talmud lessons with my favourite rabbi because the study of these texts warms the cockles of my heart and I like the shape of the Hebrew letter. If I was pressed to define why I stay true to Judaism and am trying in some form to continue and transmit it, I would say that a sufficient reason in my eyes is the inner compulsion to deny Hitler a posthumous victory. A single moment has not passed in my life without me being aware that I am a Jew and the Holocaust is the dominant and omni-present event in my consciousness.

I do understand why the author of this discourse is puzzled and would like to learn more about us, from us. Non-Jews, with few exceptions, know little about Jews and Judaism. This is certainly true of the Poles. During their age-long cohabitation, the Poles had a good chance, if they but had the will, to learn something authentic about their Jewish neighbours. But they had no desire to do so. They had this general feeling of superiority, prejudice and contempt, suspicion of some sinister secret. The fact that Christianity had its roots in Judaism, that Jesus was a Jew and - what was even more incomprehensible - that Virgin Mary, the Queen of Poland, as she was called, was Jewish - created some inner unease. An average Pole would have been amazed to hear that on the neighbouring street there flourished a civilisation with its own language, literature, philosophy, music, its own ethos.

I shall give a precis and quote from this article. The author is perplexed, in the first place, by this thought: how this desert tribe, dispersed throughout the world, persecuted as no other, survived through the ages, whilst great empires - the Assyrian, the Greek, the Roman have gone under and perished. During the last 2000 years Jews have been expelled from virtually every European country. They have been kicked out from the German states six times; out of France four times. They were massacred by the Babylonians, the Romans, the Crusaders, most recently the Germans. The Holocaust was no solitary event. It has a long and appalling lineage. Where they were not expelled or massacred they were being vilified and herded into ghettoes or into reservations such as the Pale of Settlement in Russia, blamed for everything from the death of Christ to the Black Death. Theirs is surely the most astonishing story of survival against all the odds in the whole of human history.

They have not merely survived, they have flourished. "There are only about 13 million of us" - says Ed Koch, three times mayor of New York. "That is less than a third of one percent of the world's population, and yet coming from the loins of the Jewish people, you have Jesus, the prophets, Freud, Marx, Einstein - the seminal thinkers of the modern world, not to mention 116 Jewish Nobel Prize Winners". The spiritual power of Jewish ideas has been overwhelming. They have given the other monotheistic religions a catalogue of priceless gifts. They gave Christians and Muslims the notion of one God who is

not only the Creator of the Universe but also the God who speaks through "the still, small voice" of conscience. They gave Christians the basis of their moral law in the shape of the Ten Commandments. They gave us the idea of the day of rest. The Pope was not uttering some saccharine platitude when he called them "our revered elder brethren".

But how did they manage to survive? And how are they faring now that the Holocaust is more than half-a-century behind them? How far are they still marked by the scars of history of such relentless vilification?

Victor Rothschild, a man as close as anybody to the very core of the establishment in Great Britain, when asked whether he felt that at some stage the Jews might have to move from the country where they are now, he answered sadly: "Every Jew has this awareness". Professor Arthur Herzberg, who lives in New Jersey. says: "Our history teaches us to be insecure, that no place is forever". Jeremy Oppenheim, the chief executive of Jewish-Care, agreed: "All my adult life, whenever I met someone who is not Jewish, I have asked myself the question: Would they hide me in their loft?"

The crucial factor in the survival of Judaism was the genius of the rabbis of old. In the long centuries after the Babylonian exile 2,500 years ago, they succeeded in creating a marvellously shock-proof survival capsule for a religion whose followers had no firm land base and from the moment the Emperor Constantine became Christian were forbidden to swell their ranks by making converts. They had to create a survival mechanism that will enable our people to keep their faith and identity in the diaspora.

That involved a way of life "astonishing in its completeness". They did not want to live in the ghettoes but they did want to be separate and different because their very survival depended on it. Otherwise they would have been swamped by the hostile majority cultures that surrounded them. The rabbis made sure that this did not happen. The Jews were told, through the dietary laws of 'kashrut' what was fit to eat and what was not. That, in itself, put an immense social barrier between themselves and non-Jews. They were told in the minutest detail how they should dress. They were told that every male child must be circumcised on the eighth day after its birth. Not satisfied with the ten commandments of Moses, they were given no fewer than 613 'mitzvot' to observe. The first 'mitzva' was 'to be fruitful and multiply' and that was why in the Jewish oral law wives were actually given the right to sexual satisfaction. Enjoyment of sex led to the keeping up the numbers. One of the elements of self-preservation was pride of one's origin, habits, family life, care of children, care of the poor. There was virtually universal literacy from the time of Jesus. The lifestyle seemed far superior to any of the alternatives. So why would Jews want to start mixing with the barbarians?

The rabbinic tradition that enabled the Jews to survive is enshrined in the vast series of volumes that make up the Talmud, a key part of the Jewish Holy Writ.

"Studying the Talmud" - says Rabbi Adin Steinsalz, a great Jewish scholar who is translating it from the original Aramaic into both Hebrew and English - "is the nearest thing we have to a Holy Communion. It is an act by which we are united to God".

"Rabbinic Judaism" was predicated on a small, excluded, closely knit minority which kept itself apart from the rest of society. It was not designed to cope with the sort of open society we have got now. In an open society you mix and, if a Jewish boy falls in love with a non-Jewish girl he meets at the university, what happens? What happens is that a huge proportion of Jewish youngsters in both Britain and America are now marrying out of the community.

As a result, it has shrunk so dramatically in both countries that many Jews fear for its future. Can Judaism, they wonder, survive tolerance and kindness as successfully as it survived persecution?

"If we don't check the decline" - says Norman Lamm, President of The Yeshiva University in New York - "the story of the Jewish people could come to an end". Such are the voices of some of the Jewish leaders: "You can fight an enemy who persecutes you, but how can you fight a friend?. They are killing us with kindness. Assimilation is inevitable and we shall lose our historical identity".

The statistics certainly look ominous. In America six out of ten Jews are marrying out. In Great Britain it is as many as two thirds - a massive, demographic devastation. In the fifties the Jewish community in Great Britain counted 450,000 souls, today it counts 260,000. In America they represent 2 percent of the population, half of what they represented 40 years ago. The Orthodox Jews claim that this crisis is upon us because many Jews "do not take their Jewishness seriously. The anti-Semites obviously got it wrong. Instead of persecuting the Jews, which only served to perpetuate Jewish identity, what they should have done was to embrace us".

The Jewish community is certainly not going to boost its numbers significantly by conversion, since joining its ranks is made incredibly difficult. Judaism is not and has never been a proselytising religion. "The religious element is the easy bit" - says Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain. "The risk, the plight of becoming Jewish is joining a people who have known a huge amount of suffering down the centuries. You have to ask yourself very seriously: do I want to be a part of that people? Because it is going to affect your children and grandchildren".

Jonathan Sacks confesses that he is sometimes driven to deep despair by his own community's lack of charity towards each other. As if Jews did not have enough external crisis to contend with, they are also faced with an often bitter conflict between Jew and Jew.

In Britain arguments between Orthodoxy and more liberal Jews can be impassioned but in Israel hatred between the Ultras and the rest carries echoes of the vilest periods of history. The Orthodox declare openly that they do not consider their "liberal" brethren as real Jews and do not want to have anything to do with them - the division is unbridgeable. This hostility is a greater threat to the future of the State of Israel than anything from the Arab world.

The rifts between the various factions in the Church of England seem, by comparison, no more than a hairline fracture. In the eyes of the Orthodox the "Liberal" and the "Reform" Jews strike at the very foundations of the Jewish faith. They bend the commandments to suit their convenience - this is immoral and undermines the whole system.

In Israel the Ultra-orthodox do not serve in the Army because that involves "secularisation" and the fact that men and women serve together runs counter to their way of life. Their spiritual leaders who enjoy enormous authority fear that contact with the outside world could undermine that authority. Countering the reproach that it is immoral not to share the burden of defence and rely on others to defend them they declare that the study of the Torah provides as effective, or even more effective a defence than the Army.

The massive cost of maintaining the religious schools falls on the whole community and the Orthodox, as a political party which tips the balance of power, extracts this cost from the Exchequer to the last drop. There are more pupils in the "yeshiboths" in Israel now than there were before the war in those schools in Poland and Lithuania. One might suspect that many of these students devote themselves to those studies in order to avoid military service, but the great majority see in this the fulfilment of a great ideal. It is one more cause of friction and resentment from the outside. An unprejudiced observer is driven to the melancholy conclusion that this is no longer one nation but a community at war with itself like no other (the Irish? the Poles?)

When one tries to form a view on these matters it is important to remember that when one talks of conflicts in other parts of the world - and, sadly, they abound - they are mainly about power, about money. In Israel the battle is about its very existence, its outcome literally a matter of life and death.

A few hundred settlers, mainly from the United States, surrounded by millions of Palestinians are protected by the Israeli Army. The Army is sometimes inclined to over-react against the excesses of Palestinian terrorists. This seriously affects Israel's standing. It loses it a good deal of sympathy and support - the sentiments which were the pillars of its existence and growth.

"When Israel was founded" - says one of the leaders - "we exchanged the anguish of powerlessness for the anguish of power. Israel is the testing ground to see if we can live by the Torah now that we have power. Power is potentially corrupting and we can't go on being seen as an occupying force for ever. It corrupts us and saps our strength. We didn't come here to dominate other people. Israel was supposed to be a healthy alter-

native to the fear and insecurity of all the centuries. The tragic irony is that we are more anxious and insecure here than our cousins in Britain and America. We are going to have to sacrifice land and power in favour of Palestinian freedom and dignity..."

Another Orthodox leader says:"No amount of concessions to them will give us genuine peace because the more you give the more you will be asked to give. The whole peace process is a self-delusion. The only sensible policy is deterrence, to force them to be afraid of you".

Graham Turner ends his article with an observation: "At the moment the Jews are like a big, unhappy family - but still a family. Happy or unhappy, it is a family that has given a great deal to the world - and has a great deal still to give. The rest of us owe the Jews an irredeemable debt, and we ought never to forget it".

I feel prompted to add here something from my own experience, because this also throws some light on the dilemma of Jewish identity. Some time ago, before the Israeli elections which handed power to Ariel Sharon, I took part in a public discussion where my opponent was a Palestinian resident in London, one of Arafat's spokesmen. "I am challenging Mr Scharf to say honestly, does he or does he not think that an injustice is being done to the Palestinians?" I answered with a quotation from Albert Camus: "I am all for justice - but my own Mother comes before justice". That satisfied my audience for a while, but was only a rhetorical gambit. Someone else from the floor hit harder. When I was mildly critical of Barak, he said: "It is very easy to criticise from a cosy armchair in London. Your future and the future of your children does not depend on what will happen in Israel. You call yourself a Zionist? Why didn't you go to Palestine to build that State, to fight for it, to make it better?"

I thought that speaker was absolutely right. I decided not to speak in public on these matters. But after deep consideration it occurs to me that I have some right to say what is on my heart. Israel is a Jewish State. I am a Jew living outside its borders. I have a certain (modest) input to the creation of the State, have a sense of loyalty and allegiance to it. Does this not entitle me - even oblige me - to raise my voice?

ELISHEVA SCHECHTER

Henrietta Kelly

Henrietta is a member of our Society. She and her mother were, during the war, in the Bochnia Ghetto and in the Monte Lupich prison in Kraków. They were deported from there to Belsen in August 1943. They believed that they would be sent from there to Switzerland. Instead, they were imprisoned for nineteen months. Two weeks before the concentration camp was liberated, they were put in cattle trucks and were eventually liberated, by the Russians, in Trōbitz in East Germany. They were sent back to Poland by the Russians. There was a pogrom against their house in Kraków in September 1945, which forced them to leave Poland. After a few months of wandering, they finished up in Paris where they were reunited with their father. They came to England at the end of December 1945.

My aunt Sheva was a girl of nineteen when she disappeared from our home in Lvov. She was my mother's younger sister and my special friend. She would tell me fairy stories; I got to know these so well that I would join in the story telling.

Sheva was a pretty girl with blue eyes and blonde hair. Although her manner was quiet, before the outbreak of war, she had had many friends with whom she would go camping in the woods outside her home town of Oswiecim.

In the autumn of 1939, we were living in Lvov in the Jewish ghetto under Russian occupation. Our home was in rooms on the top floor of an old house. In addition to my mother and me, and my aunt Sheva, our family included my mother's parents, then in their forties, my mother's brother and his wife, and their two children.

I do not remember what food we had during this period, but I do recall that I often ate porridge made with water.

From my point of view as a child, we seemed to live a normal life. My grandfather was in business with my uncle. We could go out each day, but there was a curfew at night.

On one occasion, my mother took me for a haircut. As I had behaved well at the barber's, my mother bought me a toy, a paper windmill on a stick (wiatrak) which revolved quickly in the slightest breeze.

Later that day, my mother had a photograph taken of me to send to my father. As she had no address for him, but believed he might have reached Palestine, she addressed the envelope to the Chief Rabbi, Jerusalem, Palestine. Amazingly, the photograph arrived safely and my father eventually received it. This was the only contact between my parents from September 1939 until they met again in November 1945.

We share the house with several other familes, all of us using the kitchen and what other facilities there were. I cannot remember ever seeing a room other than the one where I slept in a cot while my mother slept beside me on the floor on a straw mattress. This room was also used as a living room by my family. So I could see and hear much of what went on.

From time to time, a group of Russian soldiers would come to the house for what we called a "rewisia" - an inspection. In reality, they came to see what they could steal.

One afternoon when my grandfather and Sheva were sitting with me in our room, the others having gone out, three Russian soldiers came to the house. We could hear them as they went through the building, shouting and making a lot of noise.

Immediately Sheva lifted me up and placed me in the cot, making sure I had my doll and her clothes to play with. She then checked to see if the small parcel of jewellery was safe under my mattress next to the wall. This was the usual place, indeed the only place for hiding valuables or cash.

Whenever we had intruders, my mother would say to me, "Go on, cry!" Then she would tell the intruders, "The child has scarlatina. Keep away! It's very catching!" And she would point to my face, normally quite free of spots.

On this occasion, I was already in tears when the soldiers came bursting through the door. My grandfather left the room, returning immediately with food of some kind to give to the men.

The soldiers looked around the room, opening some drawers and lifting the cloth on the table. Then one of them noticed Sheva and said, "Ladna dziewczynka!" in Polish, meaning "Lovely girl!"

Sheva became most agitated and frightened, but she tried to smile and moved into a corner of the room to get as far away as possible from them.

They began to cluster around her, very excited, talking to her in Russian, touching her hair. She cowered with fear and was crying quietly when they led her out of the room. My grandfather had been trying to intervene and now ran after them, trying to hold onto Sheva to prevent her from leaving, but he was easily pushed away.

My grandfather began to groan and cry, swaying back and forth in pain, with me in his arms for comfort. When my mother and grandmother returned, as soon as they realised that Sheva had really been taken away from us, they began to scream and wail, focussing their anger on my grandfather who was weeping helplessly.

"You should have gone with them!" they cried. "And taken the child too! Had we been at home, we would all have gone and Sheva would be safe."

Over the next few weeks, they went through the streets, calling her name. They knocked on doors to ask about her. They went to the Russian military headquarters to enquire about her. They scoured the area until late each night, ignoring the curfew.

Finally, after a long time, we were forced to accept that a great tragedy had befallen us; Sheva, my poor beautiful young aunt had been taken from us for ever.

My mother would often speak about her. Now there are only two other people who remember her.

RABBI MAJOR BARUCH STEINBERG

Henrietta Kelly

Baruch Steinberg, my father's brother, was the Chief Rabbi of the Polish Forces in the period between the two World Wars. He was a career soldier and chaplain to the Jewish soldiers, holding the rank of Major.

In September 1939, he was taken prisoner by the invading Russian army and held, together with other Polish officers, in three camps, Starobielsk, Kozielsk and Ostashkov in the forest of Katyn.

In the spring of 1940, in Starobielsk, he was executed by the Russian secret service, together with the Catholic priest, Alexandrowicz. He was only forty-one years old and as yet unmarried.

His tragic and premature death took place as part of the atrocity in the forest of Katyn when the Russian Army murdered 15,000 Polish officers with the intention of depriving the Polishing people of their leadership, both spiritual and military.

Until recently, little was known about this tragic event. The Russians who for a long time had blamed the Germans, have now finally admitted their guilt. That admission has opened up the possibility of research into this sad period of Jewish and Polish history.

The American historian, Dr Simon Schochet who has undertaken extensive research into this subject, has estimated that in the three camps the number of Jewish officers murdered was about 800.

In his paper "An attempt to identify the Polish Jewish prisoners in Katyn", which was part of the Holocaust Studies Programme at the Yeshiva University, Dr Schochet writes that these officers were professional men, doctors, lawyers, engineers, pharmacists and journalists.

He goes on to say, "When they served in the army, their religious rights, observance of Jewish holidays, prayer times, etc., were honoured, and they were ministered to by their chaplains, who were rabbis with full officiary rank. In this respect, their religious rights were equal to the ones afforded the Polish Christian soldiers. In many units, which were stationed near large Jewish communities, Jewish soldiers even had access to kosher food."

Baruch Steinberg, "this remarkable man" in Dr Schochet's words, was born into a family of rabbis, serving various communities in east Galicia, now in the Ukraine. His father, the communal rabbi of Przemyslany, a shtetl near Lvov, had five sons, four of them rabbis and one a doctor, and three daughters who were active in the business world. Like all his younger siblings, Baruch was raised by his older sisters on the death of their mother.

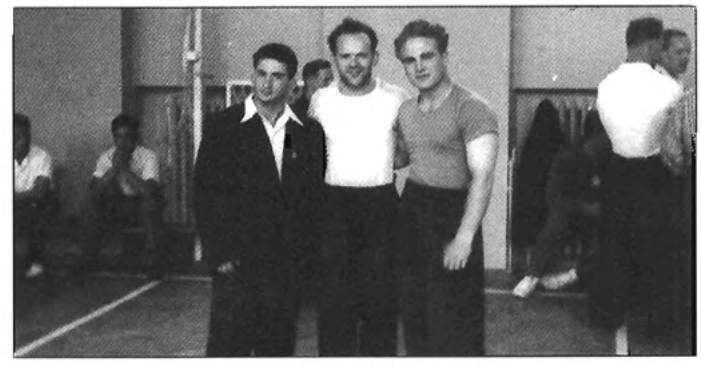
For his Torah studies, he learnt with his father and older brothers. He also studied philosophy at the University of Lvov. As a learned rabbi on the one hand, and as a well educated Polish officer on the other, he was uniquely qualified to act in a representative role at official government functions.

The last news from Baruch was a letter to his brother, Moshe, asking him to send him a raincoat and rubber overshoes. Moshe's letters in reply were returned marked "Unknown". News of Baruch's death reached my father in the Middle East in 1941.

How ironic that those members of my father's family who survived the Shoah did so deep in Russia, having been deported by the Soviet army, whereas Baruch died a martyr's death at the hands of the Soviets as a Polish officer in the woods of Katyn.

A LONG WEIGHT

This article was written by Ben Helfgott and appeared in The Jewish Chronicle.



Picture taken at the World Festival of Youth, Warsaw August 1955 from left: Pinchas Kirshon, Ben Helfgott & Ivan Rylbak.

I recently went to the Ukraine as part of a small group representing the Claims Conference. We were there to observe the administration of Hesed - a network of community centres in the Ukraine supported by the American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee, World Jewish Relief, and others, including the Claims Conference, and staffed by volunteers.

The Hesed programme aims to revive Jewish life and strengthen communal identity, while answering to the basic needs of local residents.

The elderly Jews are the most vulnerable, living as they do well below subsistence level. Their savings were wiped out by inflation and they receive a pension of between 10 and 20 US dollars per month. Without the meals and food packages from Hesed, they would go hungry.

They live in apartments that beggar description. These people, for the most part, belonged to the professional and managerial class under the Communists. Their dignity and bearing are remarkable given the conditions in which they live. They never could have imagined that this would be their lot in their old age.

On our first evening, we were briefed by the director of Hesed. In the course of his talk, he spoke about a man in desperate straits who had come to see him. The man said he had been a Soviet Union and World Champion sportsman.

"In which sport?" I asked.

"Weightlifting," was the reply - my own sport.

"What was his name?" I enquired.

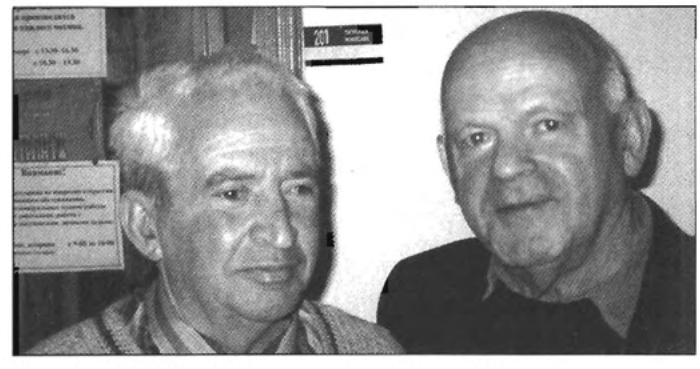
"Mazur," came the reply.

I told the director that this meant nothing to me. I knew of no weightlifting champion by that name.

The director said he would investigate the case a little further.

The following morning, when we met at the Kiev Hesed Avot Centre, the largest in the welfare-organisation network, the director told me he'd made a mistake. The name of the former champion was Pinchas Kirshon, and the director had arranged for us to meet at the centre.

I recognised the name instantly. I had met Kirshon (though he was not known as Pinchas then) in the summer of 1955 at the World Festival of Youth in Warsaw. He was, indeed, the featherweight weightlifting champion of both the USSR and the world. I struck up a warm friendship with him during my stay in Warsaw, but had not seen him since. He never appeared



Kiev October 2000 Pinchas Kirshon & Ben Helfgott.

at subsequent international championships.

In the 1950s and '60s, Soviet weightlifters were among the best in the world - indeed, often any of the USSR's top three lifters in any weight class could have been world champions. Kirshon was a genuinely outstanding competitor.

I had often thought about him, and wondered what had become of him. I never imagined we would meet under these circumstances. I was excited at the prospect of renewing our acquaintance.

When he arrived, we gazed at each other. We hadn't met for 45 years. In those days, we were both 25 years old. He weighed 132 lbs; I weighed 148. Now, he was 168 lbs and I was around 180 lbs.

I had lost most of my hair but he still had most of his and, looking at him, I could see traces of the young face I had encountered all those years ago. Still, I probably would not have recognised him had I passed him in the street.

I reminded him where we'd met and mentioned some of the members and officials of the Soviet weightlifting team who had been with us in Warsaw. His face lit up and he exclaimed, "Of course I remember you!"

It was a moving moment, not only for the two of us but also for my colleagues from the Claims Conference and for the Hesed volunteers and officials who happened to be present. Kirshon recalled when we had met, and said he had always remembered me, if only because I had given him a Phillips electric shaver.

We spent some time together, and he told me how, in the past few years, his economic situation had worsened. His savings were wiped out by inflation in the early 1990s and, although he was reasonably fit, he could not work, as he had to look after his chronically ailing wife.

I thought of how, as a boy of 15 at the end of the war, I had been freed by the Russians in Theresienstadt. I was one of a group of a few hundred youngsters and there was talk that our liberators were prepared to take us to the USSR to give us the opportunity to make a fresh start in our lives. Fortunately, the British authorities also offered to admit us - an offer we accepted with alacrity. I could not help wondering what would have happened if the British offer had not been forthcoming.

I would, no doubt, have gone to the USSR - and might now be living under similar conditions to those of my old friend Pinchas Kirshon.

DIFFERING VIEWS ON THE 'BIG THEME'

By Rubin Katz

Like many others, Rubin did not come to England with the "Boys" but joined our Society later. He arrived here with the first post-war Schonfeld transport directly from Warsaw in March 1946 and lived for a time in the Woodberry Down hostel.

It was Rafael F. Scharf's article entitled "Scattered thoughts on a Big Theme" in the previous issue of the '45 Journal, which prompted me to respond, echoing his call for all voices to be heard and truth, however painful, to be spoken. I always enjoy Felix's talks and witty anecdotes from the vanished world of Polish Jewry. I have great respect for him. However, I must take issue with him when he endeavours to extenuate Polish misdeeds and it dismays me whenever he attempts to espouse their cause. I can appreciate why the present Polish administration has a vested interest in trying to foster Polish-Jewish accord, but I find it baffling why some Polish Jews and survivors at that, would wish to be associated with it. We owe it to the victims to at least leave this sensitive issue to future generations - fifty years is all too soon.

Felix states provocatively that "Before casting a stone, it's as well to pause and think what one would have done oneself". This example from the Gospels is, in this instance, both insensitive and hypothetical. One may deduce from this that we would have acted no better than the Poles, and it also implies that we would have committed similar wrongs, had roles been reversed. The contention is not about what the Poles failed to do, but rather about what they did!

The fact that several thousand righteous Poles were justly honoured in Jerusalem does not mitigate the ugly deeds perpetrated by countless other Poles who set about denouncing, blackmailing and actively assisting the Nazis in purging their country of its Jews. And worst of all, after the liberation, they still did not have it in their hearts to show any compassion to the small remnant and again set about to finish where Hitler had left off. And not just in Kielce, which is often cited, but all over Poland where no town was free of attacks against returnees. Some were even pushed out of speeding trains to stop them reaching their former homes. In my own town of Ostrowiec, several survivors were cruelly hacked to death in March 1945 and others injured under a trumped up accusation that a "list" had been drawn up with names of local Poles against whom the Jews had a grudge. My sister narrowly escaped the same fate by being absent, at the time of the assault on the "Jewish house" where they had all stayed together for safety. Incidentally, some of the 42 Kielce victims were also from Ostrowiec, including my childhood friend Bela Gertner whom I knew well as one of a handful of young survivors in my town. She had gone to nearby Kielce for Hachshara training prior to her departure to begin a new life in Eretz Israel. Bela was the sole survivor of her entire family. To die so young and so soon after the liberation was a cruel twist of fate. A more obscene crime is hard to imagine.

My sister had several more narrow escapes at the hands of the Poles. On one occasion, she was denounced by her concierge and ended up in the infamous Aleja Szucha Gestapo headquarters in Warsaw in 1943, from where she miraculously emerged. The Gestapo officer ordered her release in spite of the condemnation by the Polish interpreter during her interrogation. The Germans often went by the book: my sister had good papers and the 'Aryan' looks to match. But the Pole knew better - they had an intuitive sense of perception.

Felix Scharf seeks to draw encouragement from a "conciliatory letter" circulated by the Polish Catholic Church which declares anti-Semitism a sin and in the same breath condemns anti-Christianism as an equal sin and also refers to (Jewish) anti-Polonism. Clearly, any gesture of goodwill by the Church has to be, it seems, counterbalanced by a "jibe" at the Jews, no doubt to head off any public criticism. The "letter", according to Felix, also refers to Polish wartime sins against the Jews in the form of "indifference and hostility". I looked up the adjective 'hostile' in my Oxford Concise which is defined as "antagonistic and unfriendly". Were it only that and no worse, I dare say, countless more Polish Jews would still be alive today. It would appear that no voice in Poland, however conciliatory, is as yet capable of uttering the unvarnished truth. One often reads how Poles and their apologists, the likes of Lord and Lady Belhaven, are keen to point to the sizeable Polish contribution in the Avenue of the Righteous and maintain they don't deserve the reputation they have been saddled with. However, they are not prepared to concede much regarding their shameful past and in their defence claim that they too, like the Jews, were victims of the Nazis.

I would like to list but a few examples of what the Church describes as Polish "indifference and hostility" towards members of my own family during the war:-

One day a sack was found lying against the Ostrowiec Lager fence. Inside it were two severed heads, those of my cousins Moshe and Yossel Berman. They had earlier escaped from the ghetto to be hidden by two peasant farmers for money, in the nearby hamlet of Denkow. After the peasants, working as a team, had presumably taken away all their money and my cousins were no longer of any use to them, they butchered them in a most gruesome manner, running them through with pitchforks. Their severed heads were dumped against the Lager fence in a grisly display of hatred to the Jews and their headless, lacerated bodies were ditched elsewhere.

As the Ostrowiec Lager was being liquidated ahead of the Russian advance at the end of July 1944, my sister's fiancé Shaul Rapaport managed to escape. As he was making his way across town, he was recognised by local people who first beat him mercilessly and then dragged him to the Gestapo where he was murdered. The streets of Poland were not safe for Jews, not so much because of the Germans but because of the Poles. The Germans were gullible enough to believe that Jews were only to be found in ghettoes and to them many Jews were indistinguishable from Poles anyway.

Earlier in 1943, several young men from our ghetto made contact with a Polish resistance group supposedly operating in the area. Each was required to pay a hefty sum for the privilege of joining this partisan unit and also towards

the purchase of their arms. On the designated day, they were guided to an underground bunker in a wood. Having first handed over their money, ostensibly in exchange for guns, they were then treacherously killed by being blown up with hand grenades tossed through an opening into the bunker and were thus entombed in their dugout. Another cousin of mine, Meier Berman, was amongst them.

There was another similar atrocity involving a larger group, also deceitfully killed in cold blood. They had fallen into the hands of a murderous Armia Krajowa gang who were viciously anti-Jewish. Incredibly, one Shloime Zwajgman survived the execution and, feigning death, although badly injured, he managed to make his way back to the Ghetto and lived to tell the tale. These despicable murders put an end to any further attempts by young men from our ghetto to make contact with the Polish underground, convinced that Poles could not be trusted. Their fate was thus sealed. Thereafter, they had to operate alone or in pairs and be on guard not only against Germans but also against Poles. The forests in our region were dominated by the AK and NSZ Polish fascists. Had we had the support of our Polish neighbours, we could have at least made the Germans pay a heavy price.

Several young Jews, running for their lives, were hiding at the local Zaklady steelworks. They were discovered there one day by Polish steelworkers who alerted the Germans. They in turn got their Ukrainian underlings to toss them alive into the roaring furnace one by one. Amongst them was a relative of mine, Yankel Fiksenbaum.

I could go on and on, but there is little point. One may safely deduce that Ostrowiec was in no way unique and similar ugly crimes took place all over Poland. The tally of crimes committed by the Polish public at large against Jews is endless and will never be fully documented. Such a work cries out to be written before it's too late. I fear, however, no one would undertake such a daunting task - it is too incredible to handle.

In his article, Felix Scharf also refers to the recently published book 'Neighbours' which details the horrendous murder of 1600 Jedwabne Jews by their Polish neighbours. He asks why the book has been published only now, after 60 years? The simple explanation lies in the book itself. The Jedwabne Society in America and Israel published their Yizkor Book in 1980. But it was not until some years later that the eminent scholar Jan T. Gross became aware of this horrific event and decided to research it further. One can only assume that by asking "why now?", Felix regrets this being brought to light now, as it would open fresh wounds in Polish-Jewish acrimony. I would have thought there is no time limit on publishing the truth, however embarrassing it may be to some.

Felix is also surprised that he had not heard of the Jedwabne atrocity before. Many crimes lie forgotten because dead witnesses cannot speak and these would have only been known to the people of that area in the first place. It is certainly not in the Poles' interests to bring their ignominious deeds to public attention. Only recently, I myself have become aware of another Polish outrage which I am pretty certain Felix would not have heard of either. In the summer of 1944, as the Red Army was nearing the Vistula, the villagers of Masów and Mtynek, near Deblin, fell upon and massacred 64 frail and pitiable camp prisoners who had escaped from a moving train speeding west towards Czestochowa.

It is significant that the murderous Jedwabne pogrom occurred early in July 1941, soon after the Germans entered Russian-occupied Poland and long before the decision had been taken to implement the Final Solution. Pogroms swept eastern Poland after the Germans arrived there in the summer of 1941. Apart from Jedwabne, these took place in Grajewo, Radzilów, Wasosz all in the Lom?a province, where Jews were either murdered or burnt alive by their neighbours. The Jedwabne Poles asked the Germans for guns to 'do the job' which was refused. Ironically, some Jews of Jedwabne, writes Jan Gross, survived because they happened to be at the German gendarmerie at the time of the massacre and others ran to the Germans for protection from the bloodthirsty mob. Even the Germans recoiled in disgust at this horrific butchery. Their role was limited to taking photographs for propaganda purposes to depict how Poles treat their Jews!

According to Jan Gross, a stone inscription was erected in Jedwabne during the Communist era, which propagates the blatant lie that 1600 Jews were murdered there by the Nazis. A different stone inscription was erected there again after 1989, in post-Communist Poland, which is even more significant. This refers only to the memory of 180 people, including 2 priests, who were murdered in the district between 1939 and 1956 by the NKVD, the Nazis and Polish secret police. It entirely ignores the massacre of the Jews by the locals. Is this the face of the new Poland some would have us embrace?

This brings me to the main subject of the 'Big Theme' as to why the Germans built all the death-camps on Polish soil. Felix maintains that the reason was simply a question of logistics and proven beyond doubt!... And to corroborate this theory, he says it was where the majority of the victims lived. How can this be right when in fact, only half of the six million were Polish Jews! His argument does not stand up to close examination. The Nazis did not do things willy-nilly and without careful planning. Surely, it would have been far more efficient (something the Germans approved of) to have placed at least some of the mass-murder facilities in other countries. One could, however, concede that Auschwitz was strategically situated, but it only accounts for less than one quarter of the victims. Why have millions of victims criss-cross the whole of Europe, thereby diverting much needed rolling-stock from the war effort? The Nazis had ready-available facilities within Germany from before the war and all that was needed was the installation of crematoria. Or why not build the odd camp in other areas of Jewish concentration outside Poland? If logistics were the primary reason, it makes no sense at all to transport German and west-European Jews to Poland. Why, for instance, send Dutch Jews to distant Sobibor in eastern Poland? This is poor logistics. No, the real reason cannot be just logistic. The fact is. Hitler and his henchmen did not want the death-camps on German soil nor anywhere else in western Europe. Contrary to the usual school of thought, it has been established that Hitler was susceptible to public opinion within the Reich, lest it affect civilian morale. The Nazis knew the Poles well and chose Poland as the ideal killing ground, where they knew they would get away with it, without repercussions and without opposition.

According to the Diaries of Victor Klemperer, which are considered an important historical document on every-day life within wartime Germany, the public were told that their absent Jewish neighbours were resettled in the East. Klemperer remained in Germany throughout the war and as a Jew, he had no axe to grind; he may have had his doubts later on as to the fate of those taken East, but this was nevertheless what the Germans were told all along. The Nazis did not kill German Jews en-masse in their own country, but transported them to Poland. A clear sign that they were concerned about public opinion at home and tried to keep their public sanitized from their more odious crimes.

There is also the case of the Rosenstrasse Protest in 1943 when the last remnant of Berlin Jews were rounded up and were about to be "evacuated" East. Hundreds of German women married to these men protested in the street outside the detention centre, day after day, demanding that their spouses be released. They were later joined by their brothers and relatives in Wermacht uniform, some wearing the Iron Cross. Goebbels threatened to have them all mowed down. But wary of public unrest, he backed off and ordered their release. They were even made to remove the Yellow Star. As a result, thousands of intermarried Jews survived the war. Clearly the Nazis did not relish any disorder on the home front.

Himmler outlined in a high-level speech in Posen in 1943 to some of the Party faithful, the necessity to keep the annihilation programme secret because "Eighty million worthy Germans and each one has his one decent Jew". Clear proof that the Nazis were heedful of public opinion. The stench from the crematoria and the red sky at night, evident for miles around, could not have been kept secret from the population within the Reich for long, but in Poland it would not matter. This may rankle the Poles, but the fact remains that Poland was chosen as the killing ground.

Felix Scharf is wide off the mark again when he says "the Germans were not in the least concerned with the feelings or the reaction of the local population". He is certainly right in relation to Poland and that is precisely why Hitler built the death-camps there. Nowhere, apart from Poland (with the exception of the Baltic countries where local people initially assisted in the massacres) were crimes committed openly as they were in Poland. During the Aktions all over Poland, people were shot in the streets by the tens of thousands, in full view of the local population. The

Germans had no inhibitions or constrains there whatsoever. It was clearly evident that the vast majority of Poles were grateful to them for ridding their country of its Jews and it also gave them an opportunity to enrich themselves by taking advantage of the situation, by widespread plunder and by taking over so-called "leftover" properties.

In post-communist Poland, honour is heaped upon ex-members of the Armia Krajowa. The present Government even has the gall and chutzpah to seek the extradition of some Jews from Israel and England who may have had a hand in the prosecution of nationalist elements who in earlier times were probably also guilty of killing Jews. These officials whom they now wish to put on trial, were after all part of their own former administration and judiciary, comprising countless Poles, but of course they would choose to single out a few Jews. Would the present Polish administration be equally intent on taking steps to indict Poles who had a hand in the killing of Jews during and after the war? Perhaps they would consider putting on trial two notorious wartime Polish policemen in Ostrowiec, Kaczmarek and Bombel, who guided German search-and-destroy units to likely hiding places, resulting in many Jews being flushed out of their hide-outs and shot on the spot. I also have a testimony, I recorded when in Poland, from an honest and scrupulous woman in Ostrowiec, naming a local forest ranger who deceitfully had a house signed over to him in payment for hiding a Jewish family he later murdered. He still lives in that house in full knowledge and maybe even with tacit approval of his neighbours. The dear old woman referred sardonically to such people as Nasze Polacy, our Poles!

I found myself in Warsaw with my older sister during the uprising in August 1944. We had been seized and were being escorted at gunpoint by Waffen-SS guards, out of the Warsaw inferno, but this time as "fellow Poles" with hundreds of others. We passed the vicinity of Wola where the streets were littered with leaflets. The Germans warned us not to pick them up, but the bold caption in Polish caught our eyes and I could not resist doing so. My sister and I were shocked to the core by what we read:

CITIZENS OF WARSAW!
We are fighting for a
FREE POLAND
A Poland without Germans,
Jews and Russians

I quickly threw away the leaflet without reading any further. Poland was bleeding and Warsaw was dying. The uprising was being crushed ruthlessly and the capital levelled to the ground. This really was the Poles' darkest hour and yet they thought it imperative to denigrate the Jews, even though they were fully aware that by then virtually all of Polish Jewry had been wiped out. And worse still, the AK rounded up and killed some Jews taking part in the uprising. Others fought on as covert Jews and died in the rubble of Warsaw as unknown Poles. I knew all along about this hardly known odious crime and I am pleased to see that, at last, Jan Gross mentioned it in his book.

At the behest of my children who wanted me to retrace my steps, we went on a reluctant trip to Poland in 1992. The people I came across in my hometown adopted a hostile and even aggressive attitude when we tried to show an interest. Furthermore, when I approached the Municipality for some information, I was told that all records had been destroyed during the war, but a non-Jew managed to obtain for me what I requested.

I would like to finish on a lighter note which is, nevertheless, rather illuminating. During my visit to Poland, I took my family to a brickyard in Ostrowiec. I approached the gatekeeper and asked him for permission to go inside which he politely refused. I then explained to him that I was Jewish and wanted to show my family where I had been hiding for several months during the war. I went on to say jokingly that, if permission was not granted, I could easily, knowing the complex well, find my way in and out again unseen, as I did during the war. The astonished gatekeeper immediately phoned the director for instructions. I could not of course hear what the director was asking, but the gatekeeper's reply in Polish was: "No Sir, he has no beard. . . No Sir, he looks quite normal and is dressed like a Pole". . . The Kierownik then personally appeared at the gatehouse to meet me.. .I suppose to see for himself the Jew he had conjured up in his imagination!

In spite of the good offices of some well-meaning people who seek to mend fences and wipe the slate clean, in my opinion and that of many visitors to Poland, the rank and file has not changed much in the last fifty years.

A REPLY TO THE ARTICLE BY RUBIN KATZ

From Jerzy Lando

Jerzy was born in Lodz and during the war lived in the Lodz ghetto, Warsaw ghetto and then on the Aryan side. His book "Saved By My Face" is due to be published.

I am a survivor of the Holocaust. With my parents, I found myself in the Warsaw Ghetto in the late autumn of 1940. By the time I escaped from it in September 1942, two months after the start of the liquidation of the Ghetto, some 80% of its population were already deported to the death camps. From then onwards I lived under false papers on the "Aryan side" and this is how I survived. My father and most of my family and friends did not survive the slaughter and I would not be surprised to hear that my father was a victim of denunciation by a Pole. The purpose of this article is not a desire to white-wash the Poles or to deny Polish anti-Semitism, I just want to place the events the author describes in the right perspective. I also want to reject his self-assumed role as a spokesman for the Polish Jewish community. It is not for him to say what "we" owe to the victims of the Nazis, nor is it up to him to choose the time when the bridges between the Jews and the Poles will be rebuilt.

The controversy over the role of the Poles in assisting the Nazis in the destruction of the Jewish community will run for as long as the remaining survivors are alive. There is hardly a survivor who has not come at least once across a "*szmalcownik*" - a Polish black-mailer. They were people at the margin of society, the criminals and the morally weak, looking for a quick buck. There were also the Jew-haters. To Mr Rubin Katz it was "clearly evident that the *vast majority* of Poles were grateful to Germans for ridding their country from Jews." This was not evident to me. What an irresponsible and inflammatory use of the words "majority" and "evidently"! I happened to spend this morning as an onlookers at the Highgate Magistrate's Court and found that all those I saw accused of selling hard drugs were black. Did I conclude that the vast majority of drug dealers, oblivious to the indescribable sufferings of the people they supply, are blacks?

The Poles are proud that they were the only people in occupied Europe who did not co-operate with the German authorities. Who commits a greater crime? The illiterate men inspired, like the generations before them, by the teaching of the Church who taught them that Jews had crucified Christ and had been using Christian blood for Passover Matzos, who then kill the Jews with their own hands, or the highly cultured politicians like General Petain and his many Vichy henchmen, that condemned with one stroke of pen tens of thousands of Jews to death? In her recently published book *Long Shadows* Anna Paris tells us that many French Jews were murdered in a death camp located on the French soil. What supports your statement that "Nazis" chose Poland as an 'ideal killing ground'? It was the French and not Polish policemen that delivered voluntarily tens of thousands of Jews to the Germans, knowing that they would be sent to their deaths. Would that make France deserve the author's epithet as an "ideal killing ground"? As for the controversy over the erection of a plaque to commemorate the butchering of several hundred Jews in Jedwabne, Mr Katz might ponder on the plaque in memory of the Jews handed over to the Germans by the French having been placed inside an obscure building in Vichy that nobody ever visits (as described in the recent BBC programme on Vichy France).

The author's bias leads him to an illogical answer to what he calls the main subject of Felix's article "why did the Germans build the death camps on Polish soil." He won't accept the simple fact that there was no greater concentration of Jews anywhere in Europe than in Poland - over 10% of the country's population - and that Poland was home to over 40% of European Jewry. Mr Katz prefers to think that Hitler was so concerned about the German public opinion, that he decided to erect concentration camps in Poland, where nobody but the heartless Poles would know anything about their existence. He ought to know that there were hundreds of thousands of Germans living and serving within the pre-war Polish borders, capable of sending the

horrific news to the Fatherland. What about the concentration camps in Neuengamme, Ravensbruck, Sachsenhausen, Belsen, Grossrossen, Mittelbaudora, Buchenwald, Flossenberg, Dachau, Stutthof, Mauthausen being located right from the birth of the Nazi regime in the heart of Germany and Austria? Was their existence and the savage treatment of their inmates hidden from the German people?

Felix Sharf's invitation to think what one would have done oneself under the circumstances prevailing in Poland is not insensitive, as the author chooses to call it. Would the author put his own and his family's lives at risk by helping a fugitive Pole pleading for shelter? This may be a "hypothetical question" (to use the author's words), but most relevant to his assessment of Poles.

The author dismisses any reference to over five thousand "righteous Poles" (as compared with only 327 Germans) honoured by Yad Vashen for risking their lives to save the Jews. I personally owe my life to four such Poles and I only succeeded to get two honoured in this way. For every Jew that survived there were a hundred that did not. None of the dead wrote to Yad Vashem and most survivors never bothered to write about the "Righteous Gentiles" to whom they owed their lives. For every one Pole honoured in Yad Vashem there must be many more that are not represented there.

As for the post-communist Poland where I spent at least nine months over a period of four years from 1993 to 1997 working in a professional capacity, I recall two events, in strong contrast with the author's unfortunate experience:

During the commemoration in April 1993 of the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto rising, I heard in the Nozyk Synagogue the Archbishop of Warsaw. In purple robe, a purple skullcap covering his head, his face exuding warmth and sympathy, he said: 'As Catholics, we must understand the meaning of this event for us and for the future generations. We must pray to God that we may draw the right conclusions and the lesson we have learned is that we have all been blessed together as the sons of Abraham so that we shall become a source of blessing for others.' He recited a Psalm: '.... As I walk and look I see that no one cares for me, no one asks about me, I call for help but no one listens. Hear my cries, save me from those that persecute me and are stronger than I...' He ended with the words: 'To all those present here I say Shalom, my words of respect.'

In Ostrowiec Swietokrzyski, the frequently quoted background of the author's gruesome narrative, I was privileged to visit in 1996 an exhibition in the local museum that depicted in photographs, writings and artifacts the prewar history of the Jewish population of the town and its valuable contribution to the local community. It was organised by Poles.

I suggest Mr Katz should try to come to terms with his own and what he knows of his friends' painful experiences at the hands of the Poles. Unless he is a historian in search of truth for truth's sake, he might be better off not to delve into further revelations of atrocities that took place more than half a century ago. They will only stoke the fire of his bitterness without helping anybody. May I also suggest that he should at least avoid provoking countless human beings to get at each other's throats, in order to gratify his predilections. This is particularly important, when the two peoples are embarking on a journey of reconciliation. How will such incitement help anybody? And ascribing prejudices to Felix sounds like pot calling kettle black.

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND MR ALEKSANDER KWAŚNIEWSKI JEDWABNE, 10 JULY 2001

Dear Ambassador of Israel,
Dear Rabbi Baker,
Dear Representatives of Jewish Milieus,
Dear Mr. Mayor,
Dear Residents of Jedwabne,
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, Fellow Countrymen!

Sixty years ago, on 10 July 1941, crime was committed against Jews on this land, at that time conquered and occupied by the Nazi Germany.
This was a dreadful day.
A day of hatred and cruelty.

We know much about this crime,
though not yet everything.
Maybe we will never learn the whole truth.
But this has not prevented us from being here today.
To speak in an open voice.
We know enough to stand here in truth - facing pain, cry and suffering of those who were murdered here;
Face to face with the victims' families who are here today;
Before the judgement of our own conscience.

This was a particularly cruel crime.
It is justified by nothing.
Among the victims, among the burned there were women, there were children.
Petrifying cry of people closed in the barn and burned alive - continues to haunt the memory of those who witnessed the crime.

The victims were helpless and defenceless.
The criminals had a sense of being unpunished
since German occupants incited them to such acts.

We know with all the certainty that Poles
were among the oppressors and assassins.
We cannot have any doubts -
here in Jedwabne citizens of the Republic of Poland died from the hands of other citizens of the Republic of Poland.
It is people to people,
neighbours to neighbours who forged such destiny.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
At that time - sixty years ago - Poland
was to be wiped off from the map of Europe.
There were no Polish authorities in Jedwabne.
The Polish state was unable to protect its citizens
against the crime committed with the Nazi permission,
at Nazi inspiration.
But the Republic of Poland should persist in the Polish hearts and mind.

And the standards of a civilised state, the state with ages-old traditions of tolerance and amicable co-existence of nations and religions were binding and should be binding on its citizens.

Those who took part in the bloody campaign, beat, killed and set fire - committed crime not only against their Jewish neighbours.
They are also guilty towards the Republic of Poland, its great history and glorious traditions.

Ladies and Gentlemen
We are standing on a tormented land.
The name Jedwabne, by a tragic ordain of fate had become for its today's citizens a byword recalling to human memory the ghosts of fratricide.

It is not only in Jedwabne that superstitious prejudice was enkindled into the murderous flame of hatred in the "furnace era."

Death, grief and suffering of the Jews from Jedwabne, from Radzilów and other localities, all these painful events which cast a gloomy shadow on Poland's history are the responsibility of the perpetrators and instigators. We cannot speak of collective responsibility burdening with guilt the citizens of any other locality or the entire nation.

Every man is responsible only for his own acts.
The sons do not inherit the sins of the fathers.
But can we say: that was long ago, they were different?

The nation is a community.
Community of individuals, community of generations.
And this is why we have to look the truth in the eye.
Any truth.
And say: it was, it happened. Our conscience will be clear if memories of those days will for ever evoke awe and moral indignation.

We are here to make a collective self-examination.
We are paying tribute to the victims and we are saying - never again.

Let us all be the citizens of Jedwabne today.
Let us feel what they felt!
Let us remain with them in a common sense of grievance, despair, shame and solidarity.
Cain could have killed Abel anywhere.
Any community could have been tried in the same way.
The trial of evil, but also of good.
Of meanness and nobility.
Righteous is the one who was able to demonstrate compassion in the face of human suffering.
How many Poles - also inhabitants of the neighbourhood also residents of Jedwabne -
deserve to be called righteous!
Let us recall all of them today
with greatest gratitude and with highest respect.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
Thanks to the great nation-wide debate regarding this crime committed in 1941, much has changed in our lives in the year 2001,
the first year of the new millennium.
Today's Poland has courage to look into the eyes of the truth about a nightmare which darkened one of the chapters in its history.

We have become aware of the responsibility for our attitude towards the dark pages in our history. We have understood that a disservice is done to the nation by those renouncing the past
Such attitude leads to a moral self-destruction.

We, who have gathered here, with all the people in our country
who have clear and sensitive conscience, with the lay and religious moral authorities consolidating our adherence to basic values, paying homage to the memory of the murdered and most deeply deploring the despicable perpetrators of the crime,
give expression to our pain and shame,
we manifest our determination to learn the truth
courage to overcome, the evil past,
firm will of understanding and agreement.

For this crime we should beg the souls of the dead and their families for forgiveness.
This is why today, as the citizen and as the President of the Republic of Poland, I beg pardon.
I beg pardon in my own name and in the name of those Poles whose conscience is shattered by that crime.

In the name of those who believe that one cannot be proud of the glory of Polish history
without feeling, at the same time, pain and shame for the evil done by Poles to others.

Dear Gathered,
I wish with all my heart that the name of this village not only evokes memories of the crime but that it acts as a signal for self-examination and becomes a venue for reconciliation.

Polish bishops prayed on 27 May "for all those who harbour animosity and resentment towards the Jewish nation
that they accept a change in their hearts with good grace".
These words express only too well the feelings of a great part of the Poles.
May, then this change occur.
Let us spare not effort for it!

The tragedy which took place here cannot be annihilated.
Evil cannot be wiped out; suffering cannot be forgotten.

The truth about what happened will not redress what happened.
The truth is not so potent.
But only truth - even the most aching and painful - will allow to purify the wounds of the memory.

This is the hope that we cherish
This is what we are here for today.
We are saying today the words of sorrow and pain,
not only because this is a must for human decency,
And not only because others expect us to,
Not because it will be a compensation for the murdered,
Not because the world is listening.

We are saying these words because this is what we feel
Because we ourselves need them most of all.
We are doing it too
To be better, stronger with moral strength,
free from prejudice, animosities and hatred.
To respect and to love men.
To turn a wrong into a right.

THE SPEECH OF PROFESSOR SHEVAH WEISS AMBASSADOR OF ISRAEL TO POLAND

10 July, Jedwabne

The Honourable President, The Honourable Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Close your eyes, and try and imagine this place as it was more than sixty years ago; the market square, the carriages tied to the horses and the children playing in the market place. Jedwabne - this beautiful town, where Poles and Jews lived together. Jedwabne was so typical of the Poland of those days - a colourful and alluring world, and a place where Polish and Yiddish were almost interchangeable.

This reality - this era of Jewish life came to an abrupt and shocking end, on a tragic summer's day, exactly sixty years ago. People who lived together with the Jews of Jedwabne, these people, who knew them by name and were friendly with them - these same people set upon their Jewish neighbours, dragging them to the local barn, before slaughtering and burning them alive. It is this fact which makes this event so utterly brutal, shocking, painful and distressing.

I, Professor Shevach Weiss, Israel's Ambassador to Poland, was brought up in this country, and was fortunate to get to know other neighbours. Thanks to these people, my family and I were able to survive the Holocaust. Thanks to these people, I am standing here before you today. I know also of other barns where Jews were hidden away. For the sake of a better future for us all, I feel the need to state this fact here and now. I have come here on behalf of the State of Israel - a country which represents rebirth and renewal as well as a reflection of the fortitude of the Jewish people. Living among us also are Holocaust survivors whose lives were saved as a result of the brave actions of their Polish neighbours - courageous and noble people.

I have come here to this valley of tears, in order to severely condemn this evil massacre, and in order to emphasise the fact that no-one will be able to bring our victims back to life. I know that there are many courageous Poles who, out of a sense of historic justice, have taken it upon themselves to research this appalling event. I am certain that when the research and investigation process is completed, the memorial stone here will contain the full truth of what happened in Jedwabne, terrible though it may be. In this way, justice will finally be done for the victims of Jedwabne.

In this very place and at this particular time, I would like to make an appeal to all fair-minded and decent people throughout the world, and especially to the young generation of Poland and Jedwabne, specifically; let us campaign together and act with determination against any manifestation of anti-semitism, racism, xenophobia, evil and cruelty. In this way, we will be able to build a better world, where the sanctity of life and individual freedom are sacrosanct.

May God help us in this noble mission.

CELEBRATING LIFE - A COMMENT ON THE MONTEFIORE MEMORIAL LECTURE

By Ramsay Homa

Ramsay was born in England and has many friends within our Society. He was particularly close to the late Kurt Kloppholz. The text of the lecture will be published in the next issue.

Last March, the annual Montefiore Memorial Lecture was given by the Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, to a well-attended gathering of survivors, their families and friends, at the Hendon Synagogue hall. Introduced by His Honour Judge Israel Finestein. The Chief Rabbi's topic was the title of his latest book "Celebrating Life".

It had earlier crossed my mind that in preparing his talk to an audience of survivors on the celebration of life and its sources of happiness, Dr Sacks had almost certainly faced something of a dilemma. On the one hand, since all survivors had actually walked through the valley of the shadow of death - and lived! - 'celebrating life' must surely have a particularly positive resonance for them, fortunately not within the experience of the rest of us. On the other hand, notwithstanding their incredible courage and resilience, there remained the delicate and sensitive issue of unhealed wounds; most of these same survivors had been torn from parents and childhood; had endured years, even decades of horror and hardship, and all the while shouldering the burden of that discomforting and unanswerable question, "Where was God?" What might 'celebrating life' mean to them?

But if such a problem actually existed, it evaporated with Dr Sacks's opening remarks. By confiding to his audience that his book had emerged "in response to my mother's persistence that I please write something she can understand!" the tone was set for an engaging discourse on happiness and how and where it might touch our lives.

It was no surprise to learn that the proffered route was through a closer and deeper commitment to faith; the surprise was that the Chief Rabbi focussed primarily not on faith as in religion or God, but on faith in one's fellow man. And although he made a tangential reference to Scripture showing that whereas God's first reaction on creating man was that for man to be alone was not good, this was really in the nature of a professional aside. Pragmatically, said Dr Sacks, living alone or aloof with market-stimulated props of fast cars and designer clothes was no substitute for the warmth of human friendship from which spring both momentary and lasting forms of happiness.

In a relaxed manner, punctuated with intentionally exaggerated bursts of stentorian speech, Dr Sacks embarked on a series of verbally painted events, mainly from personal experience, to illustrate a theme which, with his legendary fluency and an unexpected repertoire of jokes and humour, won him the rapt attention of the audience.

He proposed that happiness was essentially derived from the giving of oneself; from not taking events or the actions of others for granted; for making commitments and sticking to them. Achieving this, he went on, might involve considerable introspection and sometimes a thorough realignment of values, but if this resulted in friendship and trust being shown to others, and gratitude, when due, being articulated as an overt manifestation of appreciation, it would not only produce a sense of inner contentment but could also result in reciprocity and the mutuality of a relationship as a potential fountain of happiness.

It was a philosophy that rekindled memories of Rousseau's Social Contract and more recently, Amitai Etzioni's culture of Communitarianism, but Dr Sacks offered an additional dimension: that real personal relationships evincing a faith built on trust, an understanding of the needs of others and the expression of thanks for even simple acts of kindness, let alone to God for the gift of life, lead not only to a higher level of happiness but ultimately to the awareness of an inner spiritual dimension.

The Chief Rabbi did not speak to, but rather with the audience, composed mainly of survivors and their offspring, that figuratively embraced and took him to its collective heart. He came across as the man he is: erudite, eloquent, intellectually impressive, warm, caring, spiritual, and in terms of Jewish stereotypes, quite unique, because while his broad approach to scholarship and the quest for knowledge are seemingly fuelled by Rabbi Sampson Raphael Hirsch's doctrine of "Torah im Derech Eretz" - the pursuit of both Jewish and secular learning - he imbibes deeply and rejoices in the spirit and spirituality that flow from Lubavitch, whose philosophy actually frowns on secular study.

It may be that these two contradictory yet paradoxically complementary sources of energy, one directing the mind and the other the soul, can cause discomfort and consternation when inadvertently blended to an imperfect mixture, but certainly last March such an eventuality was not in evidence. The Chief Rabbi's meaningful message, although light-hearted in presentation, was refreshing, stimulating and thought-provoking.

I came away from the gathering with a few disconnected lines from Rudyard Kipling, (a pity he was such an anti-semite), flitting in and out of my mind: ".... walk with kings, nor lose the common touch .... all men count with you but none too much .... Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet, Lest we forget ...". I felt a warm and pleasant surge of body and soul; not exactly happiness, rather celebrating life!

SECOND AND THIRD GENERATION

SPEECH BY NAOMI GRYN ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF THE BOOK "CHASING SHADOWS" AT THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

Naomi is a writer and film producer and is the daughter of Jacky and the late Rabbi Hugo Gryn.

In the summer of 1999 I was deeply immersed in the compilation of "Chasing Shadows" when the caretaker at my father's synagogue discovered yet more rusting filing cabinets hiding on the roof and presented them to me. After three years of tidying up my father's affairs, I was feeling so saturated with him that I could hardly bring myself to look at this latest find. Shula - a friend who'd popped in to say "hi" - was more intrigued. She put her hand into one of the drawers and haphazardly drew out some papers, which included a letter that I'd sent my father in 1986 in which I had written: *"Part of my own motivation now towards writing is out of sheer exasperation over your reluctance to tell all your story and the lessons you learnt..... "*

Fifteen years later, having ensured that the film we made together for Channel Four in 1989 reached as wide an audience as possible and with the publication of "Chasing Shadows" in paperback - a bargain at £6.99! - my job is nearly done. Actually tonight feels rather like my leaving party and I am confident that my father's account is finally in responsible hands.

Of course there was a time when the Holocaust was perceived as a paradox of mostly Jewish interest. Then, in 1995, the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz was commemorated in Britain with considerable public attention. In my mind, that's when the Holocaust belatedly began its formal integration into British consciousness as the universal story of how, under the cover of war, one group of people had senselessly murdered another group, while the rest of the world stood by and did almost nothing. The Holocaust is an awful bloodstain on European history and we all have to come to terms with it.

That was the same year that I first heard about the permanent Holocaust exhibition that was going to be installed here at the Imperial War Museum. My father was asked to join its advisory committee and I went with him to the press conference that launched the project.

There have been a number of events since his death in 1996 which would have made him sad - like the painful rift which erupted amongst Jews in Britain after he died and the apparent collapse of the peace process in the Middle East. But other changes would have given him great pleasure - particularly the arrival of three new grandsons [Zaki, was born just as this paperback edition was going to the typesetters and I held up production until the last possible moment so that his name could be included in the Acknowledgements along with his four cousins'] and he would have been very proud of this exhibition as well.

He was passionately driven to make this a safer world for his children and grandchildren, a world where no one is cold or hungry and everyone respects their neighbour, a world where war belongs only to history. He devoted much of his life towards the peaceful co-operation between people of different cultures and creeds. Perhaps that's why I find the display of killing machines in this atrium so anachronistic, along with all the other incongruities of cultural domination. But, like a scene out of the Beano, the halls throng with crowds glorifying the military history of a faded empire, while I have spent many fruitful hours researching in the Museum's extensive film and photographic archives. Something for everyone.

Museums give shape to the amorphous past that forms the bedrock of our culture. This museum is housed, so appropriately, in a former Bedlam. War is madness. It grips the psyche of society when the fragile mask of civilisation is allowed to crumble. Alongside all the great technical achievements of the twentieth century, 60 million people were killed in the course of its two world wars; the highly industrial design of the Holocaust exhibition underscores how modern technology would multiply those figures exponentially if the world ever went to war again. It is the inescapable postscript to the rest of this museum's collection.

I first came to see the finished exhibition last summer. I knew what to expect but it was still a shock when the animated face of my dead father suddenly appeared on a television monitor - talking about how he and his family had been rounded up and deported, along with all the other Jews of Berehovo, when he was just thirteen years old. In the next room is the centerpiece of the exhibition, the ghostly reconstruction of a scene by the railway lines in Auschwitz-Birkenau, masterfully designed by Gerry & Helen Judah. It depicts the arrival and selection of a transport of Hungarian Jews. By amazing coincidence, it is based on a collection of photographs known as the Auschwitz Album, which document the same transport that brought my father and his family to the now-infamous death camp on 31st May 1944. In fact I am convinced that one of the photographs in the album includes my grandmother, Bella, but other, more rational people tell me that the image is too indistinct to be sure.

Illuminated under bright, white light, the model is intricately detailed. Fifteen thousand men, women and children are disembarking from the train and walking towards SS officers in charge of choosing who will go to the gas chambers and who will be deemed fit to serve the German war effort as a slave labourer and thus enter the lottery for survival.

Frozen in time, the tiny figures process towards a stairway that descends into a gas chamber. Disembodied voices describe the chaotic scene that greeted new arrivals to Auschwitz. I was suddenly aware of my father again, recounting how, as he got off the train in Birkenau, he was approached by a man dressed in striped pyjamas whom he thought might be an inmate from a local lunatic asylum. The man spoke in Yiddish: "You're eighteen and you have a trade". By the time my father reached the selection table, he had prepared his lie. He claimed that he was nineteen and that he was a carpenter and joiner. On the side of the sculpture the same story is repeated in text, thanking for posterity the nameless prisoner whose courageous act saved my father's life.

As I reached the end of the exhibition - where Stephen Rubin has lovingly dedicated a statuette of Raoul Wallenberg to my father - I found myself wishing that I'd been at an exhibition about the history of comedy perhaps, listening to my dad telling some of his favourite jokes. I wouldn't have complained even if I'd heard the punch lines a million times before. Instead, his recollection of how he'd once seen grown men throwing live babies into ovens burns through my head like a poison. I would gladly expunge such images from collective memory, but amnesia is not a viable option.

The spectacle of David Irving trailing his ugly brand of race hatred through the Royal Courts of Justice last year - and claiming that the Nazi's systematic murder of Jews was itself a Jewish conspiracy - is still fresh in everyone's mind. Unanimously the British press reported the judge's ruling on the Irving trial as a victory against bigotry, but in a tasteless parody of fascist slogans from the 1930's, newspaper headlines about asylum seekers in Britain have become blatantly xenophobic. Since the dead can only scream in silence, regrettably, the testimony of

firsthand witnesses about the catastrophic consequences of racism still needs to be heard.

I have here my father's certificate of registration, endorsed by the Immigration Office in Prestwick on 19th February 1946 when he was just 15 years old but had already been to hell and back. He is registered as "stateless" and is given permission to land on condition that *"he registers at once with the Police on attaining the age of sixteen years, that he does not enter any employment without the consent of the Ministry of Labour and National Service, and that he emigrates from the U.K. at the earliest opportunity."* On page 10 it reports that Hugo was leaving for America on 28th November 1950. He was on his way to Cincinnatti to train for the rabbinate and only attempted to acquire British citizenship in 1992 when he was made a Commander of the British Empire, 28 years after he returned to Britain as rabbi of the West London Synagogue.

I wince every time I read about the detention centres in which creative men and women languish unproductively while our Home Office determines who may stay and who must go. I like to think that immigrants like my father and the rest of the group of child survivors with whom he came to Britain are the best evidence that newcomers are often motivated to become exemplary citizens. In a speech made to Jewish Council for Racial Equality on asylum not long before his death, my father concluded: *"How you are to people to whom you owe nothing is a signal. It is the critical signal that we give to our young, and I hope and pray that is a test we shall not fail. "*

The powerful and evocative video loops which navigate visitors through the exhibition were made by James Barker and Annie Dodds. They wanted to include archive recordings of my father with interviews they had filmed with other Holocaust survivors. Luckily they were able to use clips from a programme my father made in 1995, part of a series made for the Foreign Office about immigrants who have made a success of their lives in Britain. They also unearthed a programme made for BBC TV's "Light Of Experience' in 1978 which they shared with me. It brought back vivid memories of how, as a wayward teenager, I had announced that I wanted to work in broadcasting. Religious broadcasting, actually. A few weeks later, eager to encourage this newfound ambition, my father brought me with him to the BBC's studios in White City for the recording. I sat with the technicians while he spoke publicly for the first time about his family's deportation to Auschwitz, both of us unaware that twenty years later I would use some of his script to complete 'Chasing Shadows'. This is how the book concludes:

In the Book of Exodus, when the Children of Israel left Egypt after a long period of degradation and suffering, the Passover Service was instituted with the injunction that 'of that day you shall tell your children'. Well, we who are older are trying to say something to you who are younger and it is this: that you are now comfortable in your home and not condemned to being slave labourers. And you can read any book that you like and not one ordered by a propaganda minister. That you can worship where and how you like. Which is to say that you have freedom to think your own thoughts and to live your own life. But there are still so many prisons. Of poverty and of ignorance, of loneliness and being abandoned, of political tyrannies and religious fanaticism, bars around people made of racism, wounds inflicted by the barbs of intolerance and bigotry - all of them betrayals of humanity. Human rights are either the rights of all men or else they become a meaningless facade for a bankrupt conscience. Civil liberties are an empty slogan unless they guarantee every citizen freedom of opportunity to work where his talents best suit him, to live wherever he may choose and to enjoy an equal partnership in the brotherhood of man.

Those who survive a tragedy such as the Holocaust cannot keep silent, but must do everything in their power to testify to the fact that life is the gift of God, and that it is sacred. I recreated a family. I have devoted my energy to the building up of my people. I also became and remain a kind of ethical nuisance. Wherever there is oppression or hunger or brutalisation, regardless of colour or creed, I consider it morally my territory and their cause is my cause. Bigots, racists and fanatics are my personal enemies and I intend to do battle with them until they become civilised, decent people, if needs be for the rest of my life.

Time is short and the task is urgent. Evil is real. So is good. There is a choice. And we are not so much chosen as choosers. Life is holy. All life. Mine and yours. And that of those who came before us and the life of those after us.

Naomi Gryn 2001

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Aloma Halter

Aloma is the daughter of Susie and Roman Halter. She is a journalist and this article appeared in The Jerusalem Post earlier in the year.

Namo Gryn sets her bike against the display window of a bookstore on London's chic Marylebone High Street. She's waif-like, somewhere between 18 and 22, studying philosophy of science at the London School of Economics, and she dreams of becoming a filmmaker, an author, a broadcaster. Gryn studies the display. The entire window is taken up with one book, *Chasing Shadows*. It is a Holocaust memoir with a difference, begun by her survivor father and completed posthumously by his daughter.

Published by Viking Penguin, it first appeared in February 2000, when the libel trial between Holocaust denier David Irving and historian Deborah Lipstadt was at its height. Now, after five printings and the book selling out last August, the paperback edition has just appeared.

From the book's cover, the byline of Gryn's 40-year-old self, the self who compiled and edited, checked facts and added footnotes - to material from the 60 boxes of notes and lectures and jottings and drafts left by her father - looks back at the young Naomi, as if to say: "You did it. Nao. We did it."

Father and daughter. An exceptional team.

Chasing Shadows is the memoir of Rabbi Hugo Gryn, one of Britain's best-loved figures, whose popularity reached far beyond Anglo-Jewry. Upon his death in August 1996, many newspapers called him "the people's rabbi."

Born in the Carpathian town of Berehovo in 1930 and deported to Auschwitz at the age of 13, Gryn survived the Holocaust, went on to the US to train for the rabbinate, and eventually became the pastoral rabbi of a large congregation, the West London Synagogue, and flagship of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain.

Besides being widely known for his interfaith work, Gryn was a frequent guest on TV talk shows and round tables, and a hugely popular panelist on *The Moral Maze*, a BBC radio programme which commanded wide ratings.

Chasing Shadows was an overnight success. *The New Statesman* hailed it as "not only an important historical document and engrossing memoir, but the only convincing case for a belief in God that I have ever read." *The Evening Standard* wrote: "This book is an essential witness to the horrors of the 20th century and also to the resilience of the human spirit."

Gryn had survived his experiences in the Holocaust with the belief that the reason he had to "spend much of my time working for better understanding between religious groups is partly because I know that you can only be safe and secure in a society that practises tolerance, cherishes harmony and can celebrate difference."

Naomi Gryn has worked widely in radio and television - as director, broadcaster, researcher, producer and presenter, and for a number of years ran her own production company, See More Productions. She enabled the recounting of her father's story - on film and in print - bringing it out of the shadows and into the light. And the father enriched his daughter with his legacy, with a central theme that has fueled and focussed her professional creativity: the exploration of religious themes and ethical issues.

A glance at the list of Gryn's film productions gives insight into how important the Jewish perspective has been to her: *The Sabbath Bride; The Star; The Castle & The Butterfly; The History of the Jews of Prague; The Last Exodus; The Flight of the Jews from the Soviet Union.*

Gryn's themes, however, have not been exclusively Jewish, and she is proud of films made for Thames TV and for Channel 4; *Jesus Before Christ and Xmas in New York.*

Without Gryn, knowledge of the early part of her father's life - a life that touched so many that, upon his death, volunteers had to be recruited by the family to help open the thousands of letters of condolence - would not have gained that extra dimension. The chemistry they shared, even in a family that is exceptionally close, was special.

Although the filmmaker had been an active ally of her father's all along, her siblings also supported him in their own ways. Her older sister, Gaby, bore the name of her father's 10-year-old brother, who was sent to the gas chambers; and their younger sister, Rachelle, collaborated with Naomi at See More Productions. Their brother, David, began as a painter and completed several haunting

portraits of his father with Holocaust themes.

For the rabbi's 60th birthday, they all clubbed together to buy him a state-of-the-art Sony Walkman so he could record his experiences, intending for him to write up the tapes and transcripts into a book.

Naomi, the second child, most resembles Gryn, not only physically but also in terms of personality and psyche. They shared the same garrulous enjoyment of - and ease in being with - other people; an irreverent sense of humour; and the same easeful, unstrained creativity.

In 1989 - when the filmmaker was just shy of 30 - she persuaded her father to return to his hometown, Berehovo - now in Ukraine - to make a documentary about his childhood.

"When we hit on the title *Chasing Shadows*," says the younger Gryn, "it held great resonance for us both. My mission was to give shape to the swirling shadows of my father's past, which are part of my shadow also. I think he would have wanted that to be the title of his book.

"What we wanted to show in this documentary," she continues, "was in contrast to what has become visual cliches associated with the Holocaust - the mass graves and the mounds of rotting corpses. My father and I wanted to give the film's audience a microcosmic peep into what was destroyed in the Shoah, the life and the culture that had disappeared forever.

"This was a two-year period when I became integrated with him on some level," explains Gryn. "We had both been upset at how much material had to be left on the cutting floor in the course of trimming down our filming into a 52-minute programme for Channel 4. I managed to obtain for my father a publishing deal with Collins Brown but he never signed it. It wasn't just because of his amazing workload and being so busy and pressured; but I think he just couldn't bring himself to relive the horrors of Auschwitz and beyond."

Ironically, it was also sent to Tony Lacey [subsequently Naomi Gryn's publisher] at Penguin, who passed on it in December 1989.

She describes the chain of events that led to Penguin publishing the manuscript some nine years later.

"In 1997, about a year and a half after his death, I was packing up my father's office. There were dozens of desk drawers and filing cabinets all stuffed with his notes, his lectures, talks, sermons - anything he'd said or read or thought might come in handy some day. He'd kept everything. I was cataloguing his books and working through all the papers and documents, trying to create some order before filing everything into acid-free boxes.

"Behind a pile of ancient bank statements and chequebook stubs, I found a worn orange foolscap folder. Inside was the handwritten manuscript of a book that my father had begun in October 1951, when he was a rabbinical student in Cincinnati.

"I understood that this was like finding a very precious home movie, that this was my father's first attempt to record the tale of his family's descent into the Nazi inferno. It forms the kernel of the book. At first, I was afraid and could not bring myself to read it."

Gryn says that there were many reasons for her decision to begin work on the manuscript. "First of all, several people had approached the family with requests to write a biography of my father, but since he'd begun his own biography, we all felt very strongly that he should have chance to tell his own story in his own words. Another factor for me was the element of tribute, of mourning. Working on this material was a way of working through my own grief. And it felt appropriate to complete a project we had started together.

"At the time I was setting up a Jewish and Moslem women's dialogue group and I was negotiating with David Cesarani, at London's Wiener Library, to use a room there for the group. I happened to mention to him the interesting material that I had of my father's Holocaust experiences, and he mentioned it to his agent, who immediately contacted me, and within a couple of weeks I had a deal with Penguin. By the summer of 1999 it was already in the proof stage.

"It was a very symbolic moment for me when I was fisst shown the cover of the hardback, off-white with gold writing. I immediately understood - it was just like the gold off-white tallit that I'd once bought for him and in which, when he died, I asked he be wrapped for burial.

"For me, the cover of the book, like that tallit, represented closure and the final burial of my father."

Gryn transcribed and edited tapes her father had made, adding chapters compiled from his sermons and talks, tracking down the facts, and adding footnotes. She explains that she "approached it as it I were making a film with lots of disparate interviews and archive material which needed to be woven together as smoothly as possible. It contains his story; my voice ends with the introduction and then it goes over to his voice, at which point my involvement is as editor, to clarify with footnotes."

The writer, growing up in Gryn's congregation and having experienced him as her batmitzva rabbi, can attest to the fact that there was something quite special about Hugo's voice.

He was a wise, unassuming man with tremendous personal warmth and caring for his fellow men and it was all in his voice - a rich, deep, tobacco-stained and heavily accented voice, redolent of Gryn's Hungarian-Czech background. Actually, his was not the kind of voice one would at first associate with fluent sermons or memorable radio programmes. His sermons tended to be slow and meditative, and he'd hesitate and stammer, and make up for it with vivid, eloquent gesticulations and facial expressions. Rather than alienating them, this had the effect of bringing his listeners closer to him, as the pace forced them to slow their own thoughts and join Gryn as he set out on his spiritual, emotional and intellectual voyages.

His listeners were made party to the speaker's process of thinking and searching; even to his doubts. It was a voice lacking in rhetoric and oozing with humanity and warmth.

Later, what that voice was able to convey on the radio was that somehow being deported to Auschwitz and losing one's family could lead to the beginning of faith and a moral existence, rather than the end. It gave people hope.

As another of Britain's leading papers, the Observer, said in its eulogy: "What was it about him that touched a chord in so many people? At root, it was surely that in an age searching with increasing desperation for moral guidance, he didn't preach moral authority - he embodied it."

Because his daughter learned to type at the age of 12, she began working part-time at 14 to make money during her school vacations. "In 1978 I was on my way to university, but my father was desperate for some secretarial help; so I spent the summer working with him, which is when I got attuned to his filing system," and first got involved in his work.

Gryn's life is fuelled by great enthusiasms and passions. While she's scathing about the sales director at Penguin, who, this time last year, in his infinite wisdom, cut the print run of the book just as it was being excerpted in one of Britain's most popular weekend papers, *The Mail on Sunday*, she raves about her wonderful editor at Penguin, Tom Lace, "an exceptional, really fantastic person."

Neither does Gryn mince words about "anyone who disrespects my father" - such as Britain's Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks whom she describes as: "abominably yellow-bellied." She is referring to Sack's actions around the period of Gryn's death when Sacks sought both to acknowledge a colleague and a rabbi that the rest of Britain was mourning with such open affection, and yet tried, with a backstabbing letter, to utterly dissociate himself from anything that smacked of the Reform Movement.

"But all this," says the younger Gryn cheerfully, is nothing compared to "my sentiments about some of the bigots and racists who call themselves rabbis in Israel."

Chasing Shadows appeared at the height of the famous Irving trial last year. Many newspapers were quick to point to the importance of the appearance of such a memoir at this particular time; even the heroine was another Penguin author - Deborah Lipstadt. *The Daily Telegraph*, for example, advised: "This book should have as wide an audience as possible; it highlights the danger of revisionist accounts of the Holocaust, and throws into relief the reality of individual suffering in ethnic cleansing."

Gryn comments, "What Irving was gunning for during the trial was that, scientifically, you couldn't exterminate that number of people in such a short time. However, the transport from my father's hometown of Berehovo was well-documented. There are even photographs of it in the Auschwitz Album."

Gryn produces the album, which is at hand because she's currently collaborating with the renowned historian Sir Martin Gilbert on a research project. "I felt that somehow these 'coincidences' were orchestrated by my father from beyond the grave to give him a chance to stand in the witness dock and say to Irving: 'Look me in the eyes and tell me it didn't happen. Tell me that these people killed didn't include my grandparents and my little brother, Gaby.'"

Gryn didn't talk much about losing his grandparents, his younger brother, and his father, Geza - who died only a few days after liberation, after having survived the war together with his son. Nor did he talk about the separation from his mother for many years.

"He'd answer questions. He'd made a decision: If any of us had any question, he would

never lie, and answer as best as he could. But in 1978, a significant change took place for him, because that was the year he first saw Holocaust-denial literature which shocked him so much that he decided to talk about the Shoah publicly for a BBC programme called *In the Light of Experience*.

"At that time," says Gryn, "I was in the throes of a splendid teenage rebellion, and the things I most enjoyed were algebra, smoking pot and hanging out with grubby guitarists from Glasgow. My father was hugely relieved when I announced that I wanted to 'go into broadcasting'.

"To encourage this newfound ambition, he invited me to come with him to this recording and I sat upstairs with the technicians as he was making the programme, and for the first time when it wasn't just the family around him, heard him relate his experiences of his family being deported. Little did I guess that 20 years later I'd be using material from that programme to complete the book."

This key anecdote in their lives contains it all; their close relationship; Gryn finding it easiest to share his experience with his daughter there, as he later would when they made the film *Chasing Shadows*; the fact that she didn't only listen passively, but chose to actively carry on his message.

Hugo Gryn survived with his father throughout the war. They pretended to be cousins and the senior Gryn was able to look out for and help his son in infinite ways. This is a very rare story of survival; most survivors were left completely alone. But not much is heard about Gryn's mother, Bella, in the book.

"Her other son, my uncle Gaby," says Naomi, "was taken from her and sent to the gas chambers and she was sent to do slave labour. Meanwhile, she didn't know that her older boy and her husband were together throughout the war. Both my grandmother and father separately made their way back to Berehovo and met there." Naomi notes that when her grandmother saw Hugo walking alone from the train station, she understood that her husband had died.

"And the most courageous thing she ever did was to encourage her son, my father, to start a new life in the West. So, aged 15, my father went to Prague to resume his education. The Soviet border had come down in the autumn of 1945 and it was on New Year's Eve that my father smuggled his mother into Czechoslovakia and took her to Karlovy Vary where she had a couple of surviving brothers.

"My father then made his way to England, with the other 'boys' who were brought over by the Central British Fund, taught English, given an education and generally helped. Meanwhile, his mother remarried and lived with her new husband in Czechoslovakia.

"Soon, because of Communism, they were cut off in Eastern Europe and they couldn't see one another for years. Bella was only given permission to come to England for my parents' wedding in 1957, a month after they were married and by which time my parents had already left for America, so there was no point. Later my gracious, gorgeous mother, Jacqueline Selby, travelled with her own dad to visit Bella on the way to Hugo's first pulpit, in Bombay."

About the success of the book, Gryn says: "There are such important issues at stake, particularly about the need [for people] to regard each other with mutual respect. And rejection can feel like a judgment about the value of Jewish life. The worst thing that could have happened would have been if the book had been ignored; if it had just sunk into oblivion.

"Sometimes, when people express a feeling of saturation with the subject of the Holocaust, you feel a little despondent, as if they're too disinterested to hear my father's story. But I'm not entirely unsympathetic. The Holocaust is difficult 'to sell': It's not sexy, it's not fun - it's hard. After the book launch, for example, an Irish Catholic neighbour, who has himself experienced some of the dire consequences of racism and armed conflict, told me: 'Don't take this the wrong way, I wish the media would stop talking about the Holocaust, and that it just became part of the school curriculum instead.'"

Gryn remarks that Penguin "have been magnificent about supporting the paperback," and the British newspapers are full of adverts for *Chasing Shadows*.

Gryn spent a full year working on the book daily. There wasn't a particular moment or juncture when she decided to take the Holocaust "on board," it was simply "because I always enjoyed being with my father and the things he was involved in always fascinated me. He was such good fun, that it was worth the risk of the sadness in order to have the pleasure, I suppose; that's how I came to shoulder some of his Shoah baggage.

"These days, when a big episode happens, like an earthquake or fire, or like the Oklahoma bombing, a team of counsellors is sent to debrief the victims, and then need to be 'debriefed' themselves, relieved of the trauma absorbed from their contact with the victims. In Shoah families, there are children who help to 'debrief' a parent or the parents, and who then themselves need debriefing. Well, we children of survivors have often found creative outlets to debrief ourselves, which is what happened to me, in a way, with the book; it was part of the process of healing after the trauma of my father's death."

Gryn suffered quite a trauma herself in 1994, when she almost died in a car crash in Israel.

"I'm lucky to have survived, even though the recovery period seemed to go on forever. But one of the things that most offended me about this accident was how the insurance company's defence tried to use the fact of my being the daughter of a survivor to basically say I must have been unbalanced and unstable before the accident - so the dumping of this truck-load of oranges on my head and neck had little to do with the blinding headaches, and the various head and neck injuries I sustained from the collision!"

The "appalling" term "Second Generation" for children of Holocaust survivors, "makes me squirm," says Gryn. "Increasingly, people are looking to the children of the survivors, who are now reaching middle age, to somehow act as a continuation of their parents' stories.

"The way I see it is that being 'Second Generation' simply means that we have a duty, insasmuch as we can, to help our parents have their voice heard - if that's what we feel we should do. But we weren't there. So it's not at all about us, but about helping and facilitating our parents."

Growing up in a home as the daughter of a survivor "was normal because it was our home. But there were some things - like my mother never boiled cabbage because the smell reminded my father of burning flesh and gave him bad dreams; or we children never asked him for the end of 'the story' because we did not want to add to his pain."

In Gryn's book one sees how the "boiled cabbage" smell made its imprint. He must have been one of the very few people who saw the inside of the gas chamber at Auschwitz and lived to tell the tale. This chilling episode is at the core of *Chasing Shadows*, when Gryn has wandered off from his father's side as they're waiting to be assigned work details, and the curious 13-year-old has decided to explore a weird, windowless and foreboding-looking building that he at first thought might have been a bakery. He follows a group of children younger than himself, aged six to nine, inside, and befriends Karel, a little boy from Theresienstadt.

Gryn is fortunately spotted as being the wrong age by an officious gas-chamber guard and told to get dressed quickly and "buzz off." However, he still lingers, curious to see what will happen next. "The children lined up in twos and the double door opened. A strong smell came out of the hall beyond. It was a smell I had never experienced before.

"Sweetish, yet not sweet.

"The hall was lit by electricity and beneath the ceiling ran the usual metal pipes, but from where I stood, I could not see much of the interior. The floor, I noticed, was dry.

"The children went in, and Karel waved to me as he entered.

"My dressing, however, was completed and the man who had asked us in made signs at me towards the front door. The meaning was obvious. As I passed him he said something like: 'Are you lucky!' As I opened the front door, the double door behind me was closed by the officer. Outside, I took a deep breath. I was glad to be out again. It was inexplicable, but I felt very relieved. It was curious, I thought, that no soap was given to the children, and only two people were supervising their showers. When we showered, there had been a whole army of barbers and other assistants swarming around the place. Very curious! Going back to the square, I went round the other way. The wall on the other side had no windows either. There were piles of clothing and even what seemed to me ashes of burnt clothing. All the time the chimney smoked. Black smoke came gushing out with an occasional shot of red flame. It was not so bad during the sunshine, but at night it looked frightening.

"Back on the square everything seemed normal - that is, if the word 'normal' could be applied to anything that happened in Auschwitz. Dad was still talking to the Pole [with whom he had been talking when Hugo first slipped away], but he looked quite agitated."

The account of the gas chamber experience was not, however, the most harrowing part of the book for her. The time she "really broke down was when I downloaded an account from the Internet by Major Cameron Coffman, one of my father's American

liberators, an officer with the 71st division of the US Army. A decent man from Fort Thomas, Kentucky, who'd already seen a few years of service and the brutality of war. But, as he wrote in this eye-witness report: 'The living and dead evidence of horror and brutality beyond one's imagination was there, lying and crawling and shuffling, in stinking, ankle-deep mud and human excrement.'

"I'd already been working with the material for almost a year, but I found I was shaking and wanted to vomit... Any of those people starving and crawling about in the filth between the corpses could have been my father. I got his grandson's permission to reprint it as an appendix in my father's book."

It wasn't easy for Gryn to deal with living with this material, with which she had such a close connection, day after day.

"It was quite a dark period for me - a confusion of grief and anger. At times I felt distressed. In order to do this project, I had to extend myself to the personality of my father, and I enmeshed myself as much as I could in order to sympathise, and then afterwards it was quite a long process, getting unmeshed, coming back to myself."

One of the reviews at the time, from *The Financial Times*, said: "It is a brave act to have made this book happen." Naomi Gryn, and she alone, made that book happen.

Last month the paperback edition of the book was launched at the Imperial War Museum in London, which houses Britain's new Holocaust exhibit, for the venue of the launch because my father figures prominently there - a video made of him giving a short eyewitness account is one of the handful of survivor videos that is continually being played... so his presence was very much 'there.' But the next thing I'm working on - and I'm determined to keep away from the Holocaust! - is the biography of a 52-carat diamond which was once worn as a hair ornament by Catherine the Great."

Even if her next project is only half as successful as *Chasing Shadows* has been, it's hard to imagine Naomi Gryn being any different from how she is now - getting around London on her bike, or still leaning out the window of her colourful, bric-a-brac-filled flat and cheerfully waving at her neighbours across from the flowerpots. Neither can one imagine her without that unique, infectious laugh of hers.

MY GRANDFATHER

Darren Richman

Darren is the son of Michelle and Marcus Richman and the grandson of Jeanette and Zigi Shipper. He wrote this article when he was thirteen years old. He is now sixteen, studies at Merchant Taylors and has just sat for his G.C.S.E. examination. We wish him good luck.

It was just a Sunday like any other. Having read the newspaper, my father escorted us over to my grandparents, us being my brother, sister and I. I rang the bell five times, as one is inclined to at such an early age and eventually my grandmother answered the door. Having inquired about whether we were wearing vests and complained about the poor weather, she took our coats and we went inside. My memory is not perfect, it is just that my grandmother has greeted us that way for as long as I can remember. We then proceeded to devour our Sunday brunch, including the Leek and Potato Broth which I so despised, yet drank to avoid rudeness.

Once the meal was over and we had all diligently wiped our faces, it all began. I recall my grandmother whispering to my grandfather something about, "Tell him now". My grandfather, named Ziggy, merely nodded and began in his strong Polish accent:

"Come here Darren and sit on my knee. Right, I suppose I ought to begin at the beginning. When I was your age, I was as happy and content as you yourself are. I lived in a small town in Poland with many friends. All was well until one day, many years ago now, some horrible men from Germany known as the Nazis came and took this all away from me. That is to say that they took me off on a train to a place called Auschwitz. Everybody on that train was a Jew like you and me and we were so crushed we thought death was near, but that was nothing compared to the horrors we faced in Auschwitz. We were taken to a concentration camp; it was like a prison filled with Jews who had committed no crime. This is not Shakespeare, but it is genuine, many of us were killed. Some days we spent moving crates from one place to another, only to find that the next we would move them back again. Oh Jay, this is ridiculous, Darren is far too young to be hearing this."

My grandfather never continued his tale, he never needed to. His words had such an impact on my life, I do not even think he could foresee it. Since then, when I read about oppression in a text book, it is not merely the past and therefore not important. I think of my grandfather carrying the crates some nights when I am laying awake in bed. When I complain about having fish for dinner, I recall how he, and many others, would have nothing. As I grew and learned more about persecution, I realised how fortunate I am to have all four Jewish grandparents alive and well. Then I think of how many other grandparents there could have been who never even saw their fifteenth birthday. Other days, I simply try and count up to six million. I get tired but I realise the sheer multitude of Jews that were killed during the Holocaust.

Due to this experience, my personal identity changed in a great many ways. I no longer stand any racism of any kind. I know that black people, American Indians along with many other races have also faced oppression. I am hardly strong, but when faced with racist taunts, I will stand up for myself and feel double my size.

As grandpa told me that story, I recall a lone tear trickling down his cheek. I cannot be sure whether that was due to the tragedy of the events he was depicting, or the fact that my face remained expressionless. I wish I could tell him now that if the latter is the case, I was far from untouched, merely amazed and that now, every time I remember his past, it does bring tears to my eyes.

OBITUARIES

ESTHER BURGERMAN

Geoff Burgerman

My mother was born into a happy, hard-working family in Zdunska Wola, Poland, on 28th November 1927. She was joined almost immediately by another baby girl, Gertie, and later a younger brother completed the family.

Her father worked at transporting cloth between towns and although times were not easy and money was in short supply, there was never any friction or arguments in the Greenspan household.

Then, as we all know, the world went mad and life was never the same again.

Barely into their teens, "the girls", as they were known locally, experienced a living hell. As villages were razed to the ground and families decimated, their father's last words before being torn apart were "to look after each other" - and by a miracle they did.

The horrors of the following years in the camps need no expansion, but somehow the sisters stayed together, keeping secret they were twins and surviving against all odds.

Liberated in East Germany and sent to Sweden by the Red Cross in 1945, they settled in London the following year, thanks to the tenacity of Aunt and Uncle Smulevitch. For the first time in years they could smile again.

Then, at a friend's wedding, my mother met a handsome young man from Lodz who, like her, had seen all his family, apart from a sister, wiped out. In 1949, Esther married Moniek Burgerman and a year later I arrived. Five years later, brother Stephen arrived.

Do I really need to state what a wonderful, caring, loving, considerate and wise woman my mother was? Those who knew her can confirm all this - and more - is true. Everyone loved Essie.

The last few years were cruel to my mother. Hadn't she suffered enough? But she never complained because G-d had provided "her profit in life" - Ben, Jon, Robert, Stacey and Alex - her grandchildren, who she loved with a fierce passion. She was also proud of her daughters-in-law Shelley and my wife Lynda (also born on 28th November!) and how their marriages, like hers, were strong, stable and loving.

We must all pull together now. My Dad, Auntie Gertie, Stephen and myself. We must find the strength and courage my mum showed, not only when ill-health ravaged her in latter years, but also when she was a little girl amongst all that horror and destruction.

She will always be with us and we will love her forever.

OBITUARIES

MOSHE MALENICKY

Written in memory of my Daddy, Moshe Malenicky, an enormous achiever, a success and 'My Hero'.
With love from his daughter
Angela

My father was known and admired by many people in his community and , indeed, throughout the world for his charity, for his foresightedness and, above all, for his tenacious will. He was, and indeed is, the living embodiment of the word "character". You would imagine, therefore, that writing about such a man would be an easy task, yet when asked to write something about him, I was, for quite a while, utterly overwhelmed.

To many in the '45 Aid Society, the story of my father's early life will be a familiar one. Most know, or will have heard about the boy, the eldest son of the bakers of Piotrkow with three sisters, a brother and both his parents brutally ripped away to the gas chambers of Treblinka. Above all, many will remember my father for his enterprising spirit and resourcefulness that helped in his and others survival: Of making a fire and bartering for flour to make matzalach; of finding a way to wheel and deal for any goods he could lay his hands on; above all, his single-minded pursuit of staying alive. Indeed, this constant struggle to ensure he had enough food and water permeated every facet of my father's life. Following on from this, his astonishing successes, both as a caterer and property owner, were born out of a relentless, often inhuman energy. He had an almost crazed determination to ensure that he and his family would never go hungry, this ambition no doubt driven by showing the world, his family and, most poignantly, the Nazis, that he could not only survive and succeed but flourish.

These harsh lessons he learnt as a child were passed down to my sister and I. We were, from the cradle, imbued with a sense of the importance of being strong and single-minded in order to survive, often at a great emotional cost. Indeed, as a child and through to adulthood, the lessons my father taught left me feeling confused and ambivalent. On the one hand I looked up with protective pride at the achievement of this great surviving hero, on the other, I was often angry at his inability to express emotions like other daddies, often rendering me feeling cold and guilty. Any semblance of closely guarded praise was more valuable to me than any jewel, and a compliment would lift me up into the stratosphere. It was not until recently that I came to understand father's lessons, luckily before he died. For he was teaching me about being strong at any cost, about only saying something if you really meant it, of the importance of pursuing your own goals and dreams; above all he was teaching me about survival.

The night before my father died at home, I think of the faces of those standing around his death bed. To my sister and her husband, my husband, to his four grandsons and a granddaughter, to my mother, his wife of almost fifty years, and I am consumed by an overwhelming warmth. Because, for all his talk of survival, for all his material success, he achieved, quite undeliberately, a success far beyond survival. Through his lessons he managed to engender the unquestioned loyalty, love and respect of his children, his grandchildren and all generations who come to hear his story.

MEMBERS NEWS 2001

Compiled by Ruby Friedman

Yiddish Culture Clubs in Israel
February 2, 2001

Mr Menahem Waksztok
15 Ha-Atzmaut Street
Ashkelon

Dear Mr Waksztok:

I was very pleased to read of your nomination as an Honorary Member of the Israel Travel Agency Association for your contribution to the development of tourism in Israel with special emphasis on Ashkelon where you were a pioneer in this vital economic sector of the city - a place mentioned some eighteen times in the Bible, and known for having played an important role in the history of the Ancient Middle East.

Ashkelon, under the administration of Mayor Benny Vakin, has become the "Pearl of the South" and your tourist office, Ashkelontours, served as the "Nahshon" of tourism in the area. New agencies have been added during the years, but your place as a Holocaust survivor who re-established himself with his young family as a central figure in the cultural and economic development of the city will never be doubted. Your important work of retelling the story of the Holocaust to the new generations of citizens is a central part of your personal history. We have also enjoyed your support and activities on behalf of the Yiddish Culture Club of Ashkelon.

We wish you many years of health and happiness together with your family.

Raphael Blumenfeld
Chairperson of the Yiddish Culture Clubs in Israel

★ ★ ★

Congratulations to Jack Klajman on the publication of his book *"Out Of The Ghetto"* in which he describes his experiences during the war. Jack came to England with the Southampton group in November 1945. He lived in a hostel in Northampton and later moved to London from where he was taken with about fifty other "boys and girls" to Canada by the Canadian Jewish Congress. Jack and his wife Sonia live in London, Ontario. They have four children and Jack is a successful businessman.

★ ★ ★

Congratulations to Issy Hahn on the publication of his book *"A Life Sentence Of Memories"* Konin, Auschwitz, London. where he, too, describes his war-time experiences. Issy came to England with Dr Shonfeld's group. At first he lived with his aunt, but soon moved out of her home. He married his wife Lena in 1947. They live in London and have a son, Stanley, and a daughter, Helen.

Both books were published by Vallentine Mitchell, which set up a special project in 1993 under the umbrella of The Library of Holocaust Testimonies. To date, the list includes twenty-one titles, with seven more in the pipeline.

★ ★ ★

BIRTHS:

- Nehama & Geoffrey Herman mazeltov on the birth of your daughter Hava. Geoffrey is the son of the late Abe Herman.
- Tina & Victor Greenberg mazeltov on the birth of a grandson Zachary George born to Deborah and David.
- Margaret & Harry Olmer mazeltov on the birth of a grandson JAMES Gideon born to Pauline & Jonathan.
- Millie & Monty Graham mazeltov on the birth of a granddaughter Honour Lauren born to Lisa & Stuart.
- Sara & Jan Goldberger mazeltov on the birth of a grandson Orr born to Cilla & Dotan.
- Sonia & Jack Klajman from Canada, mazeltov on the birth of a

granddaughter Nadine Sarah born to Norah and Ed.
- Jeff and the late Edith Freedman from Florida mazeltov on the birth of a grandson Taylor Joshua born to Rachel and Kerry.
- Thea & Isroel Rudzinski mazeltov on the birth of a great grandson.
- Johnny Gutman mazeltov on the birth of a great granddaughter.
- Yehudit Ray mazeltov on the birth of a grandson.
- Sala Newton-Katz mazeltov on the birth of a great-grandson born to Sara & Fred, daughter of Janet & Dennis and the granddaughter of the late Benny Newton. With our apologies for the late announcement.
- Valerie Geddy mazeltov on the birth of a granddaughter Leila Star born to Madeleine & Steven. Madeleine is the daughter of the late Leo Geddy.
- Valerie & Chaim Kohn mazeltov on the birth of a granddaughter Maital Naomi, born to Frimette and Gabi.

BARMITZVAH:

Mazeltov to:
- Edith & Paul Gast on the barmitzvah of their grandson Jeremy son of Monica & John.
- Shirley & Joe Zeller on the barmitzvah of their grandson Bradley son of Howard.
- Gloria & Krulik Wilder on the barmitzvah of their grandson Max son of Mandy & Martin.
- Joan & Jack Bajer on the barmitzvah of their grandson Jamie son of Maryse & David.

BATMITZVAH:

Mazeltov to:
- Jasmine & Michael Bandel on the batmitzvah of their granddaughter Lauren daughter of Gaynor & Daniel.
- Shirley & Joe Zeller on the batmitzvah of their granddaughter Jessica daughter of Gail.
- Kitty & Koppel Dessau on the joint batmitzvah of their daughter-in-law Carol and their granddaughter Heather wife and daughter of Stephen.
- Marian & Myer Stern mazeltov on the batmitzvah of their granddaugther Kalia daughter of Lelia & David.
- Olive & David Herman on the batmitvah of their granddaughter Katie daughter of Rosalind & Geoff.
- Betty & Charlie Lewkowicz on the batmitzvah of their granddaughter Ilana daughter of Eve & Howard.
- Taunby & Mayer Cornell on the batmitzvah of their granddaughter Victoria Shoshana daughter of Marilyn & Martin.

ENGAGEMENTS:
- Wendy and Lipa Tepper mazeltov on the engagement of their son Justin to Stacey.
- Fay & Moniek Goldberg mazeltov on the engagement of their granddaughter.
- Gertie Finklestein mazeltov on the engagement of her granddaughter Deborah daughter of Elisabeth and Lionel and granddaughter of the late Issy Finklestein.
- Solly Irving mazeltov on the engagement of his daughter Hazel to Gary. Hazel is the daughter of the late Sandra Irving.
- Beatty Pollack mazeltov on the engagement of her granddaughter Tami to Itai, daughter of Simmy and Menachem.
- Tami is the granddaughter of the late Baruch Pollack.

MARRIAGES:
- Mazeltov to Thea & Isroel Rudzinski on the marriage of their granddaughter.
- Mazeltov to Doreen and Harry Wajchandler on the marriage of their granddaughter Melanie to Grant, daughter of Susan and Leslie.
- Mazeltov to Solly Irving on the marriage of his daughter Hazel (daughter of the late Sandra Irving) to Gary.

GOLDEN WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES:
- Anita & Charles Shane
- Sam & Sonja Freiman
- Mary & Bob Obuchowski
- Betty & Charlie Lewkowicz

Sincere congratulations and may you all share many more happy and healthy years together.

DEATHS:
- Our sincere sympathy to Helen Lazar on the death of her husband Mel.
- To Sybil Van Der Velde on the passing of her son David.
- To Pauline & Harry Balsam on the passing of Pauline's father.
- To Sender Riseman on the loss of his wife Freda.
- To Jack Hecht and Martin Hecht on the loss of their brother in Israel.
- To Monty Burgerman and family on the loss of his wife Essie, sister of Gertie Wolreich.
- To Lottie Mallenicki and family on the passing of Moishe.
- To Moric Friedman on the loss of his sister in Israel.

2ND AND 3RD GENERATION ACHIEVEMENTS:

Congratulations to Laura Friedman on gaining a 2.1 BA Honours degree in Media Production Management. Laura is the daughter of Moric and the step-daughter of Ruby Friedman.

Congratulations to Anne Rothmann granddaughter of Helen Lazar who graduated from High School and will be attending Santa Cruz University in California.

NEWS FROM MANCHESTER

Compiled by Louise Elliot

BARMITZVAH:
- September 2000. Arek Hersh had the barmitzvah he was deprived of. I am sure that those of us who were privileged to attend will say it was a very moving occasion. It was followed by a wonderful kiddush in the Shool in Leeds and afterwards we were entertained in their home by Jean and Arek.
- November 2000. Mayer and Lily Bomsztyk celebrated the barmitzvah of their grandson (the son of Warren and Sharon).
- March 2001. Jerry and Eunice Parker celebrated the barmitzvah of their grandson.
- May 2001. Hynda Silver (Sommer) celebrated the barmitzvah of her grandson.

BATMITZVAH:
- September 2000. Mayer and Lily Bomsztyk celebrated the batmitzvah of their granddaughter Lauren Field (daughter of Jacky & Rodney).

BIRTHS:
- January 2001. A grandson for Marita and Maurice Golding for their daughter Sara.
- May 2001. A granddaughter for Karl and Estelle Kleinman born to their daughter-in-law Justine and their son Lee.

BIRTHDAYS:
- February 2001. Nat Samson achieved the age of 80 years.
- March 2001. Mark Fruhman achieved the age of 80 years.
- June 2001. Louise Elliot achieved the age of 70 years.

I also hear that in October 2000 Stuart Ferster, the son of Chaim and Nan Ferster had the honour of being chosen as Chatan Bereshis.

Our members and the second and third generation were invited to Beth Shalom and although we circularised our members, we had such a poor response that it was insufficient to hire transport to take us to Nottingham. I know that many people have already visited Beth Shalom, but it would have been very nice if we could have gone with our families. This sort of apathy is very sad.

Mayer Hersh continues to visit schools etc., and talks to teachers and pupils and is very well thought of by everyone with whom he comes into contact.

If I have missed anyone out it is their own fault if they do not report events to me, but those of you who have done so I have mentioned, and those I haven't who have had celebrations, we wish you a hearty Mazeltov.