Passing the Legacy of Shoah Remembrance, l'Dor v'Dor

From One Generation to the Next

April 12, 2010

Temple Emanuel

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They may walk with a little less spring in their step and their ranks are growing thinner, but let us never forget – when they were young, these men and women peered into the abyss of the Shoah and returned to bear witness.

paraphrase of President Bill Clinton's remarks about WWII Vets on the 50th Anniversary of D-Day

Temple Emanuel's Yom HaShoah commemoration has traditionally featured a survivor recounting his/her saga. But, as survivors now enter their eighth and ninth decade, the spring in their step and force of their voices has naturally diminished and their message often fails to resonate as in years past. We have reached a point where *The Legacy of the Shoah* mandates the torch of remembrance to be picked up and carried by the next generations. This represents a new direction for Holocaust commemoration, not just for our community, but for the entire Jewish people.

That was the reality check our committee faced when we met earlier this year. The dreaded prospect of a time in the not too distant future when there would be no surviving eye witnesses was palpable. Knowing the voices of witnesses had diminished while those of Holocaust deniers and revisionists had grown louder, we sensed it was time, or past time, for the children and grandchildren of the survivors, the Second and Third Generation - 2Gs and 3Gs, to step up and speak out about how their experiences growing up in the shadow of the Holocaust had affected their lives and what the implications were going forward.

This volume brings their stories, and most importantly the impact of those stories, to the whole congregation. What better complement to accomplish the critical mission of passing the legacy *l'dor v'dor* - from one generation to the next. We hope you will read the statements which include submissions from our survivors and other members who have direct connections to the Shoah. Share them with family and friends and embrace the collective linkage to our history. The torch must be passed.

Danny Mandeau,
Chairman
Dennis Buchenholz, David Greenfield
Vice-Chairs
Yom HaShoah Committee

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Written by **Carl Katz (2G and 3G)**

Connection to the Holocaust:

Manfred Katz (father), 81; escaped Germany 1938
Walter Katz (paternal uncle), deceased; escaped Germany 1938, enlisted US Army, CIC officer—Battle of the Bulge
Irmgard Klein (maternal grandmother), deceased; escaped Germany 1937
Kurt Klein (maternal great uncle), deceased; escaped Germany 1937, US Army Lieutenant—Liberator
Gerda Weismann Klein (maternal great aunt), 85; survivor—author, lecturer
Ludwig and Alice Klein (maternal great grandparents); perished at Auschwitz, 1944

My family, like so many others, is comprised of ordinary people who survived extraordinarily dark times in Eastern Europe between 1933-1945. Most but not all overcame life and death challenges to escape the Holocaust and begin their lives anew in America.

My father, Manfred, was born in 1929 in Jesberg, Germany, a small village in Southern Germany not far from the closest major city of Kassel. He and his older brothers, Walter and Max, along with their parents, Jetchen and Karl, and his uncle, aunt, and cousins, all lived together in a two-family home in Jesberrg. My grandfather, Karl, and his brother, Aaron, were cattle traders and farmers. After Hitler became chancellor and things began to change for Jews all over Germany, my father and his brothers personally encountered the growing anti-Semitism that pervaded the country when their elementary teacher forced them and the other Jewish children to stop attending classes and stand in the hall while he espoused Nazi rhetoric and anti-Semitic remarks. When things really escalated in November of 1938 and Krystallnacht was declared throughout the country, one of my father's non-Jewish neighbors (and ultimately a good, life-long friend), Marianna Hahn, warned my father's family a day in advance what was coming so that they could hide in the fields far beyond the house and remain safe while the night of the broken glass unfolded. Even in such a small village, the Nazis raided homes and broke valuables and desecrated religious artifacts. The day after, my father, who was 8, took his wagon and went to the shul. There, sifting through the carnage he found one of the congregation's torahs, slightly soiled but in tact. He picked it up and placed it in his wagon and took it home. That torah made the journey with my father and his parents shortly after Krystallnacht to America, where it was used for many years for holidays in my Great Uncle Jake's home in Stillwater, OK. (My father's family settled in Oklahoma because that's where my grandfather's brother, Jake, had settled after leaving Germany in the late 1800s to seek his fortune.) In the 1950s, when the torah was no longer being used regularly in Stillwater, my Uncle Walter took it to Wichita, KS where he now lived, and it was used in his temple (Emanu-el) until 2002, when it was donated to a fledgling congregation restarting in Ardmore, OK; it is still used there today.

A remarkable coincidence somewhat related to my father's story above is that one of our own Temple Emanuel congregants, Margot Kann, grew up in Jesberg with my father and has been a life-long friend of my father's cousin Erica Salomon. My father and Margot only reconnected after many years without contact in Margot's home here in Newton in 2006.

My father's brothers, Walter and Max, and their cousin Jack who lived with them in Germany and also came to America, all enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1941. Max ended up staying state-side during his entire service, but Walter and Jack were sent back to Europe as American soldiers to fight against the Nazis between 1944 and 1945. After finishing his basic training in New York, my Uncle Walter was sent to Camp Ritchie, Maryland, where he became one of the original "Ritchie Boys," who were trained as intelligence officers to interrogate Nazi prisoners of war. It was a natural fit for Walter because, of course, he spoke fluent German. In September 1944 he was assigned to the Central Intelligence Corp (CIC) attached to the 12th Army Group in Belgium.

He participated in the Battle of the Bulge by serving numerous times for courier runs between Belgium and command headquarters in Holland. Besides being in one of the most renowned battles of the war, Walter also had a most remarkable personal experience at the end of the war. He and Jack, who had been in different units throughout, met up in their childhood town of Jesberg in May 1945. There they encountered a Jewish girl whom they both knew when they were all children. She was returning home after liberation from a concentration camp with her new fiancé. She intended to start life again in Jesberg by getting married and living in her family's former home. She explained to Walter and Jack how everything was a terrible mess and she had no worldly possessions at all. Walter said he would take care of it for her. He found the former town Nazi official and told him to clean up and repair the house and stock it with food. At first the Nazi asked how he could possibly do it by himself, and Walter told him to get the other towns people who had been Nazis to help. Of course, the man originally refused, but Walter persuaded him otherwise by putting his .45 in his ribs and insisting that it be done by the time he returned the next day. Sure enough, when he returned, it was done.

I am also connected to the Shoah on my mother's side. My maternal grandmother, Irmgard Klein and her brothers, Kurt and Max, unable to leave Germany as a family with their parents, escaped Waldorf, Germany individually in 1937 to come to America. The three siblings all came and stayed in New York. From 1937 until the end of the war, my grandmother and her brother Kurt tried incessantly to procure the necessary visas for their parent's emigration. In the end, however, due to the U.S. immigration quota system enacted by the Roosevelt administration and its policy to delay and cap the influx of European immigrants, my grandmother and Great Uncle Kurt were ultimately unsuccessful in rescuing their parents, Ludwig and Alice Klein—my great-grandparents; they perished in Auschwitz in 1944.

During this frustrating period of trying to facilitate visas for his parents, my Great Uncle Kurt was drafted into the U. S. Army as an intelligence officer. He served as a Lieutenant with the Fifth Infantry Division, part of Patton's Third Army. I am amazed and proud that he, like my paternal Uncle Walter, escaped Nazi persecution as a young boy only to return to Europe several years later as a young man to fight against the Nazis as part of the Allied Forces. Kurt was a quiet, lovely, unassuming man who never sought or relished the spotlight. However, his extraordinary and unusual military experiences are unbelievable. As an intelligence officer responsible for interrogating Nazi prisoners of war, he had many fascinating experiences, including walking into a bunker and telling the armed SS troops they needed to surrender, earning a bronze star; debriefing Ernest Hemingway who arrived at Kurt's office one morning with captured German soldiers in tow; interrogating Hitler's chauffer shortly after Hitler's suicide; and arranging for Oskar Schindler's safe passage to the American zone at the end of the war. Most of my family never knew about such exploits until the 1990s when he was the subject of a PBS American Experience documentary called America and the Holocaust: Deceit and Indifference and many of these stories were revealed. Perhaps my entire family and I and Kurt's close friends were unaware of these amazing stories because the only war story Kurt regularly told—and was interested in telling—was how he met his wife.

Gerda Weissmann was a young girl growing up in Bielsko, Poland when the Nazis invaded in 1939 and destroyed the happy life she had known.

Gerda Weissmann was a young girl growing up in Bielsko, Poland when the Nazis invaded in 1939 and destroyed the happy life she had known. She was separated from her parents and her beloved brother Artur, who all perished in different concentration camps. Between 1939 and the end of the war, Gerda spent six harrowing years in and out of various slave labor camps and on death marches. As the war was coming to an end, she and 2000 other young Jewish girls were marched during the bitterly cold winter months without proper attire on a 350 mile death march from Germany to an abandoned factory in Volary, Czechoslovakia. Of the 2000 girls that started out on the march, only 120 survived and ended up in the factory. The German soldiers that led the march knew the war was lost and abandoned the emaciated women in the old factory, but not before setting explo-

sives intended to blow it up to cover up what they had done. The explosives never detonated but the women were close to death when they were liberated by my Great Uncle Kurt's unit. Of the 120 that made it to the factory, another 30 would die before being saved. The first person to greet the American Lieutenant was Gerda Weismann, who showed him the Nazi atrocities inflicted on her and her companions. In a moment of such unbelievable horror and desperation, Gerda made an indelible impression on my Uncle by quoting the German poet, Goethe: "Noble be man, merciful and good." Kurt recognized that quote and was astonished that someone who had survived such terrible things could recount such a thing at that moment. He took a special interest in Gerda and her welfare from that moment on. In the ensuing months they began a courtship as he finished his military service in the war's aftermath and she rehabilitated in a hospital. They shared an extraordinary bond, having both lost their parents to the Holocaust. Eventually, they were married in Paris in June 1946 and began a life back in Buffalo, NY. In 1958 Kurt encouraged Gerda to tell her story. She wrote her autobiography, All But My Life, which has been continuously in print since and was made into an HBO documentary, One Survivor Remembers, which won the Academy Award for Best Documentary in 1996. Kurt and Gerda's love story endured for 56 years, in which time they raised a family, lectured, wrote books, and worked tirelessly for social justice, such as fighting against hunger and promoting tolerance. Kurt, unfortunately, suffered a fatal heart attack in 2002 at the age of 82. Gerda has persevered without her true love and companion, but it has been difficult to say the least. They were and are truly remarkable people.

All of the family members that I have recounted here are or were remarkable people, and I feel privileged to have known them. They have each shaped how I think about my Judaism and my place in the world. I am in awe of the sacrifices they all made and the irreplaceable losses they endured. The biggest lesson I have taken from their experiences is to ensure Jewish continuity for my family by actively participating in our Jewish community. My wife and I feel that we are doing this directly by choosing to send our daughter to Jewish day school to instill in her a proud Jewish identity that is firmly rooted in the values, ideals, beliefs, and traditions for which so many of our relatives were persecuted more than a half century ago.

The Impact of the Shoah on Danny Mandeau

Story by Danny Mandeau (2G)

Connection to Holocaust

Eva Neumann, mother, survivor

Working on the Yom HaShoah program this year for Temple Emanuel has had a profound affect on me. As I listen and read the stories of fellow congregants who are children of survivors like myself – 2G's – I realize that my generation has a strong obligation to carry on our legacy. To me, the holocaust was real. I know this through what I have read, seen and heard. Nevertheless, it is also surreal. Living my life without any real hardship at all it is difficult for me to actually believe that 13 years before I was born that something as horrible as the Shoah could have happened. Yes, I've seen the current tragedies of today on TV such as Rwanda, Cambodia and Darfur, but still the idea of total annihilation of my people in modern times just doesn't click with my middle class suburban American Jewish mind.

I grew up knowing that my parents were from Europe. We were not religious at all. As a matter of fact, I remember being very upset as a child that I could not have Xmas decorations. I was Bar-Mitzvahed in a Reform Temple and certainly was aware that I was Jewish although it was not a big deal to me. That all changed when I became involved with USY in the ninth grade. This led to a summer trip to Israel which changed me forever. When I returned home at the end of my summer in the Jewish State my parents came to view me as sort of a family deviant. They were agnostic at best (especially my Mom) and

were bewildered, although supportive, of my Jewish ways. I believe that this zeal for my religion brought out feelings from my Mom regarding her past. We went to a gathering of survivors in Philadelphia and returned to Berlin as guests of the German government. What affected her most though was when I played Mr. Frank in my High School production of "The Diary of Anne Frank". Although still ambivalent about religion per -se, my Mom was very proud of my portrayal of the patriarch of a family that was very similar to hers. The summer after watching me in this production my parents decided to visit Israel for the first time. I believe I was the inspiration for my parents to make the journey.

The holocaust has always been important to me. In college I was privileged to study under Elie Wiesel twice. In my adulthood I have always made a point of keeping the commemoration of the Shoah a priority. Even so, I have not been consumed by this topic. Currently, working on this project has changed that. I have spent many hours talking, reading and listening to our congregant's stories. It is a labor of love as I realize the importance of this work. Clearly, this significant change in holocaust commemoration in our temple has struck a nerve with many of our members and I feel proud to be part of this project. However, despite all the powerful communal work I wonder what about my own family. Do my own children understand the importance of carrying on this legacy? Certainly my wife and I have given them a Jewish upbringing but I still wonder. I also reflect on the other members of my family whose feelings are not as passionate as mine towards the shoah and Judaism all together. I realize that there has to be a balance between not dwelling on the holocaust and not dealing with it at all. I strongly feel that as a 2G I have a special obligation to keep the story of the shoah alive especially in my own home. Unlike many American Jews, my family would not be living in the U.S.A. if it was not due to the circumstances that were imposed on my Mother's family during World War Two. It is with this sense of duty and obligation that I pass the torch to the next generations and hope that chairing this year's program helps a little in accomplishing this goal.

The Piano

Foreword by Dennis Buchenholz (2G) Story by Michael Buchenholz (3G, written in 2002)

Connection to the Holocaust:

Kurt Buchenholz, Survivor, passed away in 1994
Pauline Buchenholz, Survivor, passed away in 2001

Foreword

Over the years, I heard and read numerous stories about the Holocaust from my parents. It was important to me and my wife Marilynn that these stories, and lessons from them, be told and taught to our children.

One aspect of Holocaust remembrance that concerned my mother was that she didn't want her future generations to be overwhelmed by the Holocaust to the point of despair where they couldn't lead normal lives. She taught me that life is a gift, and while it is not always fair, enjoying life must come from within.

The Piano

Jazz! There is nothing quite like it: the cool sound of Miles Davis' trumpet or the wailing saxophone of John Coltrane or music of one's own creation. Every few weeks on a Sunday night, I drive fifteen minutes on the long and winding Route 1. With my sheet music by my side and jazz gracefully pouring out my car speakers, I am prepared to play. As I pull leisurely into a vacant space by the front entrance, I turn off my stereo, grab the music books, and stroll to the front desk of the Hebrew Rehabilitation Center for the Aged.

Flashing my volunteer badge at the receptionist's desk, I head toward the long corridor leading to the dining room, where the aides are getting ready to serve dinner. Slightly out of place, the ever-present grand piano sits majestically in the left corner of this

cavernous room, welcoming me. As I settle down at the piano and run my fingers across the iridescent ivory keys, some hungry seniors start inching their way into the institution-style dining room. Few appear to acknowledge my presence; some even stare at me, an interloper interrupting their peaceful meal. Regardless, I begin to play, and my mind wanders.

…She began her piano lessons at the age of eight. Later, she studied at the Krakow Conservatory of Music. Then, it finally happened. The Jews were ordered into the ghetto in Krakow. Her father immediately made preparations to move the piano to her music teacher's home…

Performing, I always open with one of my favorite pieces, "Maiden Voyage", a slow ballad by Herbie Hancock, a master pianist. As I play through the chorus and into my solo, I notice some people listening and even filling the vacant table next to me.

…Relocated to the Plaszow concentration camp, she met a man named Kurt, and they fell in love. Even though they had hoped never to be torn apart, one day she told him, "Should we be separated there is one way we can find each other again. Write to my music teacher, Olga Stolfowa." Several months later, my grandmother was transported to another camp. She learned that she was able to send letters with underground couriers in exchange for zloty (Polish currency). When she came down with typhus she wrote to her piano teacher, asking her to sell the piano and send the money. The money from the piano paid for food and kept my grandmother alive…

The diners realize that I am not there to intrude, but rather to entertain. As I play, some spectators approach me with comments, questions, comparisons to pianists of their time, and even some compliments. One cool September Sunday, a well-dressed gentleman marched up to me, blaring his discontent: "Will you stop? We're trying to eat here!"

Should I pay attention to his disgruntled directions? I am unsure. At that moment, a bit confused, I continue "Maiden Voyage" without missing a beat.

…After being freed by the Russians, she had no place to go but back to Krakow. She could not find Kurt. Everything looked different; the memories were painful. By instinct, she walked to Mrs. Stolfowa's house. There she was given a letter, a letter from Kurt. He had survived the war, and he told her where he was…

I finish my set with "Autumn Leaves", a well-known jazz standard. As I push open the exit door, the fresh cool night air greets me. Unlike the slow-footed residents, I leap youthfully into the driver's seat. Leaving behind the stifling surroundings, I select my favorite CD.

…My grandparents' lives during the war must have been unimaginable. If it were not for the piano, I probably would not be here today. The piano is my history. Playing it is my passion. My grandparents are no longer living, but my grandmother's beautiful new grand piano has been given to me. I will keep our history alive.

Harriet Mazansky Family Holocaust Survivor Story

Story by Harriet Mazansky (3G)

Connection to Holocaust

Paul Benedick, Survivor, Grandfather,
passed away in 1953
Anna Benedick, Survivor, Grandmother,
passed away in 1980

My Holocaust survivor story relates to my step-father & his family. My biological father died when I was a very young child. My mother remarried a couple of years later, so that my stepfather & his family are like my own.

My step-father, Frans Leopold Benedick (note the loyal German names) was born in the early years of the First World War. Disliking intensely the way Germany was evolving he emigrated to South Africa shortly after Hitler came to power, thus avoiding both the nightmares of the soon-to-follow anti-Jewish campaigns & ultimately the Holocaust. However, this is the survivor story of my step-grandparents.

Paul & Anna Benedick were affluent, intensely loyal, nationalistic modern German Jews living in that part of Berlin which after the war became East Ber-

lin. During the First World War my step-grandfather fought in the German army. I have a photograph of him proudly displaying his army uniform. He & his family were of that large segment of German Jews who felt this service & loyalty would in the end protect & save them from Hitler's wrath.

Even after my father left they persisted in remaining loyal German residents. However, it must have been presumably after Kristallnacht that they underwent a change of mind. They applied for German passports with a view presumably to emigrate. I have both of their passports in my possession. However, by late 1938 doors to countries accepting Jewish refugees were rapidly closing.

They were issued their Third Reich passports in January 1939. These are striking in that on the fist page there is a large "J" (for Juden) stamped in red. It also has the eagle of the Third Reich. Their passports contain visas for Equador & also on the following page there is a Chinese visa, filled with Chinese lettering. Both these visa were issue only in August, 1939.

He then describes the problems the German Jews had with emigrating since countries would not accept them, & the tragic mistake of having forsaken his religion.

However, only on the 17th of August (2 weeks before the onset of World War II) did they manage to leave Germany on a flight out of Frankfort. It is somewhat confusing what course of travel they took. Although a presumption, somehow they must have been one of the thousands of Jews who spent some time in Shanghai.

Ultimately though they arrived in Equador, South America. This was one of the only countries accepting Jews at that stage. South Africa was not & therefore they could not join my stepfather there. They lived in Equador until the mid-fifties when my grandfather died there. Only then could my grandmother join my father in South Africa.

While in Quito, my step-grandfather gave a speech to the community there which was in the form of a letter to my stepfather who at that time was serving in the South African Defence Force in the Western desert of North Africa. It is beautifully & poignantly written & makes for fascinating reading. It is the story of so many German Jews of that era. It describes how he came from an Orthodox background, living an idyllic existence as a child & young man, & then the factors that led him to become a modern Reform Jew. He describes his pride in serving in the German army, his German heritage & rejection of Zionism. He then goes onto describe the effects of the early Third Reich years & his ultimate realization that the naivety of the German Jews had come home to roost ("the lightening & thunder came down upon us"). He then describes the problems the German Jews had with emigrating since countries would not accept them, & the tragic mistake of having forsaken his religion. He ends on an optimistic note of his acceptance in Equador, of the growing Jewish community there & how he changed his name from the German "Paul" to the Hebrew "Saul".

The English translation of the address in full is included below.

Impact of the this Holocaust story on my life:

I grew up surrounded by refugees from Germany who were fortunate to have also escaped Nazi Germany in time. However, many had left family behind there. The Holocaust was an ever-present aspect of my life. I was nearly ten years old when I met my step-grandmother for the first time.

I and my family were personally affected by the refusal of most countries to accept these Jewish refugees. This has left a deep & permanent imprint on my life & how I view such events even when they apply in our current world.

An address given by Paul Benedick (1885 to 1953) in Quito, Ecuador in 1941.

This was in the form of a letter written to his son who at that time was with the South Africa Forces in the Western desert.

A Letter to my Son

My dearly beloved son,

Your last very nice letter came thank G-d "from Cairo, which had a calming effect on us knowing of the hard fights which took place in Libya.

Very touched we were with your description of the Seder-evening in the desert, which reminded me of the Jewish holidays we lived through on the Eastern Front in 1914.

If you ask me how I stand now to the Jewish Religion and the politics in general, and what influence it has on me, I have to reach far back in my mind to explain to you my change of opinion in this respect. My earliest lovely childhood memories go back to the religious application and observance of the Jewish law in my family.

The festive table laid on Friday night with its lights, the father blessing his children. On Seder evening the reading of the Hagada - the holy sound of the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah, the delicious sweets in the Succah, the lighting of the candles on Chanukah with its many surprises cast in fact an unbroken spell over us children.

The reciting of the Kaddish in the year of mourning after the untimely death of my still so very young father, the tragedy which I didn't realise at the time.

Heavenly childhood in my deeply religious parents' home then my free and happy youth in the little town in the Pfalz - the time at high school, the proud years in uniform and then finally into the unknown and off to adventures - the Frankfurter years where we sowed our wild oats, loosened already the religious ties. We only acknowledged the most important holidays in favour of our very orthodox mother. In those years I experienced Berlin the most lively and modern town in Europe in the days before the war.

Dr Lehmann, your beloved teacher who had changed over to the Reform Synagogue joined your mother and myself in marriage and influenced us strongly against Orthodoxy. We stood for our German heritage and believed ourselves to be Germans with a Jewish religion. We even strongly rejected the newly formed Zionist Movement.

You my dear boy born to us during the first war year lived through your nicest years of your youth in the circle of the Reform Youth.

The passing and unhappy ending of the first World war for four years I had been a soldier.

After that came an unbelievable ascent also for the Jewish population in Berlin in spite of the inflation and deflection and in spite of other worries we felt we had a happy and assured future in front of us...but things changed. We were so blind and unconcerned and didn't notice the little clouds which appeared on the horizon. Even when they spread and the sky became darker and darker until the 30th January and again still stronger on the first of April 1933.

The lightening and thunder came down upon us - at first trembling with fear we consoled ourselves that soon the sun will shine again and even if not, it cannot become bad for the long established Jews in Germany who both in peace and war did their duty for the Fatherland.

They will let us live even in a very modest form and with a very heavy heart we let you go away at the end of 1935 after we could not work any more against your constant urgent pressure. So we hoped again and waited again, 1936,37,38 until disgusted and deeply shocked of the pain and indescribable horror, on the morning of the 10th November I stood in front of the burnt out Torah cupboard of our beloved Reform Synagogue.

A veil fell from my eyes and I had to realise we were no longer German citizens only hateful Jews and officially dismissed as outcasts even from those people whom we believed to be our brothers.

After this horrible awakening came the weeks and months of deep depressions and fear. Disgust of the people I had loved and trusted not only the hordes of HITLERS' followers but also all the others who silently looked on and soon followed in their footsteps.

We only heard one cry - lets get out of here - anywhere where we can breath again freely. And now came the bitter disappointment. One country after the other closed its borders and wherever we knocked and rapped, from the smallest to the largest country we got no answer. I had to learn in these months from November 1938 until August 1939 that we Jews stood alone in the world and would have been lost had it not been for our Jewish brothers outside Germany and their Organisations.

I had to recognise my tragic mistake that we did not only have a religion but we belonged to a people of a different race. Sprinkled all over the whole world and only connected through our eternal Belief.

And I understood now the "words" which a German minister once said to me:

The Jews will one day perish through assimilation, one day they will thank Hitler that he woke them up from their dreams and therefore re-united them even if that sounds paradoxical today. HOW we then without any belongings received the permit to immigrate that you know my son. For nearly two years I lived here dull and solitary the lone wolf who didn't look around until one day I was called from the local municipality and woke up. I looked into their hearts and realised that these were human beings who thought like me people from all over the world with the same belief the same worries the same pain of separation, the same hope.

One country after the other closed its borders and wherever we knocked and rapped, from the smallest to the largest country we got no answer.

I learned here the "Oneness" - the fight against envy brought to the surface through the lost past, past suffering and the misfortune of ones loved ones. What wonderful work to try side by side to work for a better understanding community to belong to a "Unit" to work for the good of the country and everybody. And here I got to know the Jews who came from the Eastern countries, who in my former life in Germany were strangers and I learned now that they were warm human beings always ready to help, to sacrifice for the good of others, to pray with conviction. They helped to build up the country with zest and in a laughable short time I became a new human being proud to be able to build up the country with them. The various organisations, the charities, the educational centre, the cultural scheme and many more... Our Maccabis, only 6 months at work, already successful in their sporting activity... and to admire the workroom of the "Comite-Hicem" the saviour of so many people and who after a long struggle have practically succeeded. Here we have an honest growth of our national Life. We all live under one Government who heavens be thanked is well disposed towards us, we appreciate their laws and they hope for our well-being. Don't you think my son that this Praiseworthy Jewish Life throws a beautiful light into the darkness that embraces us in the outside world.

And what does it look like in the Hell of Europe where our brothers and sisters burn to death?

Unbelievable lack of understanding and human feelings in the whole world! We read some time ago the statistics of those Jews who were able to get a visa to another country. The Aufbau wrote only 152.81500 (152.815) were lucky enough to enter the large American continent. And the other countries? Nearly all had their borders closed already long before an immigration would have been technically possible. Although many countries say: They have a friendly attitude towards JEWS. We didn't need attitudes, we needed deeds but we can only expect it if we ourselves do something about it.... We have to fight everybody at his position wherever his position is - his place of work. This fight and his success will decide the fate of the Jewish people all over the world to be able to ask the Allierten to finally extinguish the Jewish problem and be willing to find a solution.

Can you see my son that we can all say proudly, a light shines in the darkness. Do you understand now why I changed from Paulus to Saulus.

You YOURSELF learned earlier to work against your hate and to have to fight to maintain your identity. With thousands of your comrades - our boys.

In spite of our worries about you we are proud of you and pray for you all.

We old people cannot do much more but pray that a Jewish nation may rise again.

For that we pray to 'GOD' and beg him to give you back to us.

Story by **Barbara Riemer Krupat (2G)**

Connection to Holocaust

Parents

Anna Riemer (holocaust survivor, passed away 2008

Jacob Riemer (holocaust survivor passed away 1984)

Grandparents

Gittel Kleinmann Landau (holocaust survivor, passed away, 1970)

Yehuda Landau (holocaust survivor, passed away, 1970)

Rosa Kampler Riemer (perished in the holocaust)

Ruben Mendel Riemer (perished in the holocaust)

As a child growing up in the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York in the 1950's, I was surrounded by survivors of the holocaust, those who had been in camps, those who were lucky enough to get out of Europe as refugees, those who were the only surviving members of their families and those who were lucky enough to come to the United States with some of their extended families. The neighborhood I grew up in was sometimes referred to as the Fourth Reich or Frankfort-on-the-Hudson. Everyone in my neighborhood spoke German, maybe a few spoke some Yiddish or Polish, but for sure they all had accents. To me that was just the way it was. I was a first generation American and knew very few adults who were born in this country. Growing up we learned about the holocaust in Hebrew school and some of us from our parents' or relatives' stories. Not until I was older, I would say in my teens, did I realize the uniqueness of my neighborhood and the tragedy of peoples lives that surrounded me every day.

The person in my family who talked most openly about the holocaust was my mother. Her stories were those of hope and survival, which she passed on to me and to her grandchildren, my two sons. My mother was born in Vienna, Austria in 1917 and died at the age of 91 at the Hebrew Rehabilitation Center in Roslindale, Ma. I never thought of my mother as having a hard life, (although she did). She did not focus on the hardships that befell her, but rather she met the challenges and moved forward. My mother was 21 years old when Hitler marched into Vienna and through sheer perseverance and good luck she was able to leave the country. One story that she told and one in which my son Jason captured in his eulogy to her was about her escape from Vienna; how she packed a single bag and waited day after day in front of the Rothschild palace to get her visa and passport. Then one day when they arbitrarily closed the office after a long day of waiting, she'd had enough. She ran up to the front of the line, burst in through doors and into the first open office, sobbing. The young officer asked her to sit down and stay calm. "What do you need?" he said. She told him that she needed her papers signed in order to leave Vienna. He left the room and then returned with her documents and signed them right in front of her. "You're free to go," he said. She left Vienna forever the next day accompanied to the train station by her parents who could not go with her. With that one packed bag in hand, her signed papers in the other, she left not knowing if she would ever see her parents again. Her father's parting words were, "Be strong and believe in yourself, and one day we will be together again." On the train after she had crossed into Belgium, and felt safer, she opened up the papers to see who the man was who had let her go. It was signed Adolph Eichmann, the future architect of the holocaust, who apparently on that day in March 1938 had been a young SS officer sitting in the front office of the Rothschild palace and who had effectively saved her life.

My mother was one of the lucky ones. She survived, as did her parents and two brothers. Only later when she came to this country in 1939 from London, did she find out that most of her aunts, uncles, and cousins who lived in Poland were not as fortunate as she was, as many as 80 members of our family perished in the holocaust. My mother was the first of her immediate family to come to America, living with friends until she met my father, who also was a survivor and who came to this country from Frankfort am Mein, Germany. His parents and many relatives also

perished in the Shoah, but his sister and brother survived. Together my parents made a life for themselves settling in Washington Heights where they became part of the group of refugees and survivors who began to pick up the pieces and rebuild their lives.

So what is the message that I have learned from my mother's experiences that I want to share and impart to my children and grandchildren? The stories she told were the stories of a survivor and the strong will to live. Her father's parting words rang true, "Believe in yourself, be strong and you will survive." My son, Michael wrote in his eulogy to her, "My grandmother was the cornerstone of our family. She would comfort us with her home cooking-Wiener schnitzel and potato latkes. She would tell us stories of her childhood in Vienna, her mischievous brothers, her devout parents and her adventures. My grandmother was not only the cornerstone of our family; she was also the cornerstone of my faith. She had to fight for her faith and the freedom to live a Jewish life. And because of her, I will never take my faith for granted. I will never forget the sacrifices she made, what she endured and what she achieved." This belief in herself was her message and legacy, despite the war, the hardships, the Shoah and the loss of many many relatives. Her strong love of life, her faith, independence and perseverance were the messages she passed on to my children and me. I hope that one day I will be able to pass on these stories to my grandchildren and that they will embody the same spirit and values that she lived with every day of her life.

Mazansky Family Holocaust Story: Annihilated Near Ponevez, Lithuania, August 1941

Story by Cyril Mazansky (2G/3G, written first in 2002 & then in 2010)

Connection to the Holocaust:

Sarah Rachel Mazansky, Grandmother, murdered August, 1941
Channah Mazansky-Zeidel, Aunt, murdered August, 1941
Chaim Mazansky, Uncle, murdered August, 1941
Mioshe Mazansky, Uncle, murdered August, 1941
Other spouses & cousins, murdered August, 1941

As a child & youth I always remembered my father saying kadish for his mother & siblings on Yom Kippur. He would never speak about it, but only said it was because he did not know the dates of their deaths. The word Holocaust was never mentioned. However, by the time we were adults we understood this tragedy to be the reason.

In about 1990 when my younger brother was in Israel he went to Yad Vashem to record the names of our grandmother, uncles, aunts & first cousins. However, he found that the names had already been entered in 1953 by one Leah Slonimsky, living on a kibbutz near the Sea of Galilee. After months of research he made contact with her. She still lived on the same kibbutz.

My family & I were about to leave on a trip to Israel when I received this information. I immediately re-arranged our schedule & had our private guide-take us there. Her family told us that she had been

apprehensive & very emotional for most of the week since I had made contact.

As this diminutive woman who was then eighty years old emerged through her front door, she threw her arms around me & stood weeping on the steps for several minutes. Over refreshments, with our tour guide acting as the interpreter, she unfolded to us the story of my family's annihilation.

Leah had been a lifelong friend of my Aunt Channah where her family had been neighbors of my father's family in Pumpian, a village in northern Lithuania near Ponevez. Being a lifelong socialist, in 1934 Leah made aliyah to Palestine. After the war she was told the story by a Jewish survivor who had joined the partisans, & had come to Palestine after the war. He had witnessed how members of her family & my father's entire family had been rounded up & finally murdered.

Within a few days of the Nazis conquest of that part of Lithuania in late June 1941, they organized local nationalists to round up the Jewish residents for hard labor. In mid July they were herded into a small ghetto, without provisions, subjected to hard labor, beaten & robbed.

Then on August 26, these Jews, together with the Jews of Ponevez, & including my grandmother, Sarah Rachel Mazansky, my Aunt Channah Mazansky-Zeidel, my uncles Chaim & Moishe Mazansky, together with their spouses & children, were taken to the Pajouste Forest, where there were already prepared pits & then fired upon. While a number were still alive their bodies were covered with earth.

Leah then gave me photographs of my family which she had in her possession since the 1930s. They are now permanently preserved in the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

After we left our guide, who is a Sabra, said to us: "It is stories like this that have made the State of Israel. There are many of us who believe that if it were not for the Holocaust, there never would have been a State of Israel".

This story of my family's deaths has had a powerful impact on me in a variety of ways.

First & foremost it brought a sort of closure to my father's many decades of uncertainty.

For me personally, & essentially related to my life in America, it has had both a positive & a negative impact.

The most distasteful aspect to me occurred in my hospital about fifteen years ago when a Lithuanian, who was about to be deported from the US, became ill & required an invasive radiological procedure. This individual was thought to be most likely responsible for organizing my family's deaths under the Nazi supervision. I was scheduled to do the procedure that day & I had to recuse myself from doing it. I remember looking at him & a whole flood of emotions rushed through me.

From a far more pleasant perspective, several years ago, through happenstance, & which is another fascinating story in its own right, I learnt that the Jewish partisan fighter who witnessed their deaths ultimately made his way to Massachussetts & married the aunt of our member, Myra Kraft.

Our other member, Michael Bohnen, knew this man's son.

Truly a full circle of a long & mostly sad story.

Story by
Ethan Schaff (2G)

Connection to the Holocaust

Frances Schaff, Survivor, b. 6/1/36)

There are many stories that have come to me from my mother, she being the sole survivor of 10 brothers and sisters and two parents. However, as early as my freshman year of college, one continues to resonate and stick in my mind. Maybe it's because my mother has only one sibling whose fate is completely known and not subject to some guesswork. His name is Nissan Bader, *ZS"L*, my mother's older brother who was hidden with her by Voitek Woloshtchuk on his hayloft in Kosow, Poland, now Kosiv, Ukraine.

Mr. Woloshtchuk would sneak into the barn at night and hoist food up in a bucket through a trap door in the loft, either him or one of his children, usually Branek, his son. He did so religiously, except as the war dragged on for the next 3 years, privation came not only to his hidden guests but also to him and his family. Sometimes, Nissan would have to

jump down from the hayloft and milk the cows in the barn just to deliver something into my mother, his wife and 2 children's stomachs (2 other of his children were killed prior to their going into hiding).

But as 1945 rolled in, Nissan, my mother and his family were facing starvation. One night Nissan made the risky decision to jump down, leave the barn and venture out in search of food. He was lucky and came upon a Ukrainian family who supplied him with all kinds of sustenance which he brought back in a covered basket. My mother remembers that they were all sick and throwing up from the amount of overeating they did that night.

Two weeks later, Nissan tried it again. He arrived at the same family's home, but it turned into a trap. Within 10 minutes of his arrival the Gestapo entered the home and arrested him. They brought him to the central jail in Kosiv and asked him where he had come from. But he refused to say. They tortured him badly insisting that he talk. Though his fingers were crunched and flattened from being slammed in-between a metal door, he still refused to give even a hint where he was hiding.

A few days later, Mr. Woloshtchuk came up into the attic and threatened my mother, her sister-in-law and cousins that if they went down from the loft he would turn them out for good. He showed my mother the article from the local newspaper that told of Nissan's capture, his refusal to cooperate and ultimate death. He explained that he was providing as much food as he could and it would have to do, but he would not stand for anyone jeopardizing his and his children's lives.

The level of Nissan's heroism is in many ways incomprehensible to me. I think about him often. I have told my only son about him. Together, we wonder, if put into that horrible situation, we could have withstood and saved the lives of those that remained hidden on the hayloft.

There really is no good way to avenge Nissan's blood. But I think about him often. Or talk to my son about him. And then we both wonder….

(Nissan's plight is confirmed in Danek Gertner's book, *Home is No More.*)

Ethan Schaff

Child of Frances Schaff, nee Feige Bader, survivor.

Letter from Dachau April, 1945

Story by Michael Bohnen

Connection to the Holocaust

Rabbi Eli A. Bohnen, a liberator, who passed away in 1992, father of Michael

Constructed in 1933, Dachau was the first Nazi concentration camp, and it was the second concentration camp to be liberated by American forces. Tens of thousands suffered and died there, grotesque pseudo medical experiments were performed on inmates there, and the gas chamber and crematorium can still be seen by visitors.

My father, Rabbi Eli A. Bohnen, served as a chaplain with the 42nd "Rainbow" Infantry Division which participated in the liberation of Dachau on April 29, 1945. A few weeks earlier, Passover was approaching as his Division advanced through Germany. He helped prepare a Haggadah for the Jewish soldiers to use at a makeshift seder. It was probably the first Hebrew book published in Germany since the beginning of the war. When the soldiers had to clean the Division's photo offset press to print the Haggadah, the only rags available were some Nazi flags which, in my father's words, "for once served a useful purpose." The introduction to the Haggadah said "This celebration of freedom should have unusual significance for you, for like your ancestors of old, you too are engaged in a battle for freedom against a modern Pharaoh." Shortly thereafter the Division entered Dachau.

On the day after the liberation from Dachau, my father wrote a letter to my mother:

"...nothing you can put in words can adequately describe what I saw there. The human mind refuses to believe what the eyes see. All the stories of Nazi horrors are underestimated rather than exaggerated. We saw freight cars with bodies in them. The

bodies were skeletons with skin on them. The people had been transferred from one camp to another, and it had taken about a month for the train to make the trip. In all that time, they had not been fed. They were lying in grotesque positions, just as they had died. Many were naked, others in thin clothing. But all were horrible.

We entered the camp and saw the living. The Jews were the worst off. Many of them were worse than the dead. They cried as they saw us…. They are emaciated, diseased, beaten, miserable.... I don't know how they didn't all go mad…. I shall never forget what I saw, and in my nightmares the scenes will recur…. No possible punishment would ever repay the ones who were responsible."

My father stayed on in Europe after the war to work with displaced persons for about a year, before returning home.

David Greenfield (2G)

Connection to the Holocaust:

Joseph D. Greenfield, my father, Survivor, passed away in 2006
Rachele Greenfield, my mother, Survivor, passed away in 2008

David Greenfield

My parents (*z"l*) were survivors originally from Poland who met and married while in a post-war DP camp set up in the Allied Occupation Zone of Austria. After four years and several unsuccessful attempts to emigrate to the emerging Jewish State in Palestine, papers previously filed my father's aunt Tova living in Brooklyn, NY allowed my parents with me in tow to sail from Hamburg, Germany aboard the USS Marine Tiger and dock at the port of New York. My mother's sister and my father's brother were the only other survivors from their immediate families. They followed my parents to the States a year or two later. In 1996 I published a photo-essay *Journey to Poland: a family mission* (online at www.fotovisions.smugmug.com) chronicling their lives during the Shoah accompanied by a running narrative of my experiences retracing their steps.

I have been on the Yom HaShoah Committee for almost all the 30+ years my wife Carol & I have been TE members. During that time I have worked to represent the **Second Generation**, or **2Gs** as best I could.

Impact Statement

If pressed to define a specific event or story as the impact focal point of my Shoah connection, I could select from several options in my life's timeline.

It could be emotionally charged days spent with my parents in 1981 at the **World Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors**. Thirty six years after Liberation, survivor activists sensed it was the right time, indeed the first time, to assemble survivors from around the world, and the State of Israel was the right place for that gathering. Survivors could acknowledge their global numbers and celebrate how far they had come despite all odds from the charred remnants of their former lives. It was also time to sound a "shofar blast" for the **Second Generation**. They would inherit the **Legacy** of the survivors' bearing witness to history. As a **2G** I formally and willingly accepted that **Legacy**, returning home with my head, heart and eyes aligned for the vital mission of preserving lessons of the Shoah and promoting the critical role Israel serves for the future of our people. Soon after, I initiated my role as a speaker, personalizing Shoah history through the filter of my family saga. In addition, as guardian for an array of pre- and post-war letters, documents, and photos from my parents' files, I also serve as the family archivist, representative for donations of artifacts to organizations such as YIVO and the USHMM, and point man for German reparations issues.

But my Shoah epiphany could actually be linked to a time several years later when I traveled to Poland with my family to directly confront the place where my parents' traumatic journeys began. At the edge of a mass grave in a clearing within the dark, eerie silence of Chelmno's Rzuchowski Forest, just a few kilometers outside Dabie, my father's family hometown, I said Kaddish for the first time for grandparents I never knew. In 1941 when the Jews remaining in the Ghetto Dabie were to be "re-settled," transports took them only as far as Chelmno where they

were murdered. Standing on hallowed land, I picked up a stone and placed it graveside reciting the words while unsuccessfully stemming a torrent of tears that spontaneously welled up from somewhere deep within my core. That day in Chelmno I was imprinted with evidence of the raw aftermath of evil in our world and the tragic consequences of indifference.

Despite this encounter, the message I also carry with me every day saw its first light of day in a small flat in eastern Poland several days later. There I came face to face with the family of Anna Kucharska, Polish Catholic neighbors of my mother's family. Anna embodied the Talmudic teaching "*he who saves one soul saves the world entire"* and as such had always been a larger than life figure for me. When the danger to Jews during the Nazi occupation reached "red alert level," my mother's father urged his children to flee home for the uncertain safety of the surrounding forest. At great personal risk to herself and her unsuspecting family, Anna offered periodic refuge in her barn. My mother credited Anna for her survival during the nightmare years of hiding from 1942 until liberation. Her name is now inscribed at the **Garden of the Righteous** at **Yad Vashem**.

There are countless examples of man's inhumanity to man during the darkness enshrouding our world during the Shoah. It requires no effort to have that sinister chapter of 20th century history cloud one's vision. Anna Kucharska's actions opened my eyes to another view. I continuously struggle to keep both visions clear.

Truth is, the legacy of the Shoah has been intertwined with my DNA from Day One. Many of my earliest memories of *family* were actually of *landsmen* who shared the post-war experience with my parents. They took on the role of *family* since there precious few blood relatives, most of whom became trapped in Europe and did not survive. And that box of *family* B&W photos that I used to love to pore over as a very young boy, it held a world dominated with images of DP barracks, GIs, and young Jewish refugees breathing in new found life before boarding ships sailing out of Europe. There was never a time I did not know of or feel the Shoah. Holocaust denial or Revisionism was not in my vocabulary. What I did absorb as I navigated adult- and parenthood was a profound awe of how my parents were able to start over and carry on after falling into and climbing out of the abyss of their youth. But there remains one connection that leaves me trembling even to this day.

My father was liberated from Mauthausen by the US 11th Armored Division on May 5, 1945. He truly felt reborn on that day. May 5th became his second birthday and we celebrated it as such every year. Exactly 30 years later on May 5, 1975, I found myself in a phone booth at the Beth Israel Hospital, exhausted and sweating as I nervously tried to dial up my folks. I would wish my dad a happy birthday as was the tradition, but I would also tell my parents their first grandchild, a boy named Joshua, had just been born, coming into this world a little earlier than expected. When my wife Carol felt we were to become parents that day ahead of schedule, I quietly thought to myself it was a good day, a very good day. When the euphoria of our new addition subsided just a wee bit later, we all sensed a message of Biblical proportions had just been received. *In every generation there are those who rise up to defeat us. They have all been defeated and the Jewish People live on.* In the Greenfield family that history is more than an annual recitation at the Seder table. It is real, and the linkage between May 5th 1945 and 1975 will always be a powerful, pervading presence in my life.

Story by
Roz Leshin

For me the Holocaust comes up in conversation again and again. People tend to pick up on my accent, find out I'm from Curacao, and are curious to know why we "ended up" there. Well, there you go: we ended up there because of the Holocaust. And so I tell them my family's story, usually an abbreviated version. I have been asked to do this many times, and each and every time that I am prompted by non Jews to share my story, I feel a vague sense of unease come over me; perhaps I'm experiencing an irrational sense of embarrassment, the kind that victims often experience. My grandfather had been the "town doctor" of "Veere," in the southern Dutch province of "Zeeland." The mayor had repeatedly denied him permission to leave with his family, knowing

full well that they were Jewish and in great danger. Only when the Nazi's were just a few miles away did the mayor consent, having nothing to loose at this point. The mayor's parting words to my grandfather: "the Jews are just like rats, always the first ones to jump off a sinking ship." On a visit to Holland in the 1980's, Michael and I made a point of stopping in Veere. At the town hall to inquire about archives, we stumbled upon a photo exhibit on "WWII and the Province of Zeeland." I knew I was "close to home" here, but did not expect to come face to face with a photo in which my family name – TAYTELBAUM – appears several times on a cemetery monument erected in nearby Middelburg to honor the Holocaust victims of that region. An employee at the town hall accompanied us to the cemetery so we could see the monument in situ. He let us spend as much time there as we needed.

Knowing that I had a personal connection to the Holocaust was one thing; coming face to face with my family's last name spelled out multiple times on a Holocaust memorial monument is another thing. It was then that it hit me like it had never hit me before.

The Holocaust's Impact on my Life

Story by Eric E. Ungar (Survivor)

I was born in Vienna, Austria, on 12 November 1926, the first-born son of Isidor and Sabine Ungar. My only brother was born about five and a half years later. My father was born in the little South-Austrian town of Gross Engersdorf on 5 December 1892 and was of at least the fourth generation of our family that lived in Austria. My mother was born on 20 June 1896 in Vienna; her parents came from Slovakia and Bohemia.

My father was trained and apprenticed as a pharmacist, but did not work in this field during my lifetime. He owned a small store in Vienna's "Inner City" central district, which store my mother minded by herself most of the time, while father traveled extensively throughout Austria and Southern Germany as a sales representative for a company that distributed "Spirits and Essences." We were by no means rich, but perhaps a little better off financially than some of our neighbors.

In a diminutive bar area in the front part of our store we sold liquor by the bottle and by the drink. The storage area in the back contained racks with large bottles (perhaps 10 gallon size) of spirits and flavorings, which Dad mixed to make up some of the items sold in the store. I generally did my homework at a work table in that area.

We lived in Vienna's *Leopoldstadt* district, which was the district with the greatest percentage of Jews. It may have been a ghetto in earlier times, but during my years there it also housed many non-Jews. I attended a public elementary school about three blocks from where we lived for the required four years, until I graduated on 4 July 1936. In the school, which was all male as was typical at the time, I experienced little overt anti-Semitism, but was well aware of being different from the other boys and had no friends with whom I interacted outside of school.

Everyone in our elementary school had one hour of religious instruction per week, during which our class was divided into three sections (Catholics, Protestants, and Jews). A rabbi came in to teach our small group of Jews; we barely learned to read Hebrew phonetically and memorized the beginning of the Sh'mah. This was essentially my only exposure to Judaism. Our family was totally assimilated and unobservant; we worked and went to school on Saturday and on Jewish holidays, except perhaps Yom Kippur, and I barely knew that there was such a thing as kashrut.

Near the end of my elementary school days, as I learned later, the Austrian government gave in to Hitler's threats and legitimized the Nazi party that had been underground. Suddenly many of my classmates appeared in Hitler Youth uniforms, but no one paid much attention to them. Little else changed at first. I only recall one incident where an anti-Nazi scribble was found in the toilet area and the whole class was confined to our classroom by police and men in Nazi uniforms until late in the evening with the intent of pressuring the culprit to come forward to confess. No one did.

After elementary school I attended a relatively prestigious *Real-Gymnasium* in the inner city as preparation for admission to university. The Nazis had not yet annexed Austria and our lives changed little, except for Hitler Youth boys occasionally accosting Jewish kids on the street and beating them up. Then, on 13 March 1938 came the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany. We felt increasing psychological pressure due to stories we heard and propaganda publications we saw, but at first life went on without great changes. My father was confident that we would not be touched, since he had served in the Austrian army in World War I and had earned several medals. Beginning with Kristallnacht on 9 November 1938 (just before my 12th birthday), however, our lives changed drastically. Although our apartment was not near any synagogues or Jewish stores, we did hear commotion during the night and were aware of fires nearby. The next morning I saw splintered glass covering parts of the streets and graffiti on remaining windows and doors of some large Jewish-owned stores. Incidentally, nothing happened to our store on that night, perhaps because of its location in a predominantly non-Jewish area and because of its small size. (Its front was no more than two yards wide). The synagogue where I would have been Bar Mitzvah if life had not changed also was not burnt down like many others in the city; it was nestled between two buildings that would have been damaged if it had been set on fire. The synagogue still stands and is in use to this day.

As the result of anti-Jewish legislation I was forced to transfer to an all-Jewish Gymnasium and then to a lower-level high school. But none of us students did any studying or learning by then; we understood that our school days were numbered. Eventually I just stayed home. My father arranged for us to move from our apartment in the heavily Jewish Leopoldstadt to a sublet partial apartment in the inner city, thinking – correctly so – that we would be safer in the area where there were fewer Jews. Before long our store was "aryanized"; I was there with my mother when a man came in, showed some papers, demanded the keys to the store and money and valuables, took over, and expelled us.

We heard of many incidents were people were pulled from their apartments and never seen again. One story that sticks in my mind is of one of our non-Jewish friends whose wife was Jewish; when men came to their apartment in the middle of the night and he tried to defend her he was beaten to death. It became clear that we had to leave to survive. I have a vivid recollection of the Russian-Jewish owner of a small store near ours telling my father: "Mark my words; your sons will bless Hitler." I understood that he meant that we would be grateful for the better lives we would have elsewhere.

In order to emigrate one had to obtain all sorts of documents from the Viennese and German administration, as well as visas from the country to which one wanted to go.

Getting a visa for the USA was difficult; among other things, one needed a sponsor who would guarantee that the sponsored persons would not be a financial burden to the government. Also, one would have to wait until one's number came up in a quota. Because of the many applications from Germany, of which Austria was then a part, there was a long wait. In attempting to find a sponsor, my father somehow obtained the addresses of all people in New York with the same last name as ours and wrote to them, indicating that we probably were not related but needed their help. One person, a Henry Ungar, replied positively and filed the necessary papers, but was found by the US authorities to have insufficient assets. My mother's youngest sister, who had been able to emigrate and reach New York a few months earlier (having been sponsored by a distant cousin), then made the rounds of synagogues in Brooklyn and asked the rabbis to announce from the bimah that a certain family needed to be sponsored. As I heard the story, our sponsor, a Mr. Podel, simply got up and asked "where do I sign?" He saved our lives, but I did not meet him until many years later.

We endured months of repressions, rationing, and confinement to our apartment, fortunately with some food provided surreptitiously by kind non-Jewish owners of stores near ours. (With considerable trepidation my parents sent my then blond and six-year-old brother to pick up this food at times the stores were open and Jews were no allowed there.) Eventually – I don't know how he did it – my father got all of the papers together. Affidavits, police clearances, identity forms from the American consulate, and train and ship tickets. Near the end of October 1939 were ordered by the police to report to the *Umschlagplatz* (collection area) for deportation to Poland. It turned out that we had official permission to emigrate on

the same day that we were to report to the collection area, and so we were able to leave literally in the last minute.

Our train on the way to Amsterdam apparently was filled with refugees like us. As it neared the border of Holland there was a great concern that the Nazi inspectors who would come on the train would pull people off. So, my father and others gave the German train conductor all their remaining money with the request that he arrange to have the inspectors bypass our compartment. Fortunately, they did. As the train started to move again – I'll never forget it – I could hear a collective sigh from everyone, and the compartment that had been entirely silent until then now began to be filled with conversation.

In Amsterdam we were put up in an apartment, of which I only remember that the steps leading to it were high, narrow, and steep. The next day we boarded the *Westernland* of the Holland-America line and left Europe. The ocean voyage seemed like paradise to me. We felt no threats or antagonism, had good food (served in elegant style as on a pleasure cruise), and I found some other emigrant children of my and my brother's age. I enjoyed the waves, fresh air, and the excitement of the voyage. We arrived in New York on the 5th of November 1939, one week before my 13th birthday, and were met by my aunt and her husband.

The Austrians of my parent's generation and those who are my seniors by a decade or so were on the average more anti-Semitic and stauncher Nazis than their German contemporaries.

Let me not go on now with the difficulties we encountered in establishing ourselves in the United States. Rather, let me focus briefly on what I have lost while I gained survival and freedom. First and foremost, I lost my maternal grandparents, who were simple, hard-working, honest people, who doted on us grandchildren and whom I loved very much. They remained in Vienna, and my grandmother wrote extensive letters describing their situation to the extent that the Nazi censorship would allow. I have copies of their letters still in my possession; I donated the originals and my translation of them to the United States Holocaust Museum. My grandparents were subjected to severe rationing, ran out of money to buy food, had to move out of their apartment to a single room, and needed to burn their furniture in their stove to survive the cold winter. All of our family in the US tried our best to get them out and bring them to the US, but the numerous bureaucratic obstacles – many from the US State Department – made it impossible for them to get all their papers together in time before they were deported. They were sent to Theresienstadt, where my grandfather died, and from where my grandmother was sent to Auschwitz. I have a copy of the records from Theresienstadt.

We also lost other relatives, including my father's oldest sister, who was the matriarch of the family. She and her husband had an antique store in the area near ours, where I used to love to browse and learn about some of the old art objects. We know that they, as well as my father's second sister, were sent to concentration camps, but have no other information about their fates.

I feel that I lost a good part of a normal childhood and since my early experiences always have felt that I am "different", not fitting in anywhere and not being able to make close personal connections. In contrast, I am grateful that I have been able to acquire a wonderful family, to learn about our religion and to live as a Jew, and to achieve some academic and professional success – all of which would not have happened if my life would have continued as on its initial path in Vienna.

Strangely enough, I feel that I also lost my home town. I used to know every little street in Vienna's old city and all the associated history and legends, and I had a warm feeling of connectedness. I have never had such a feeling anywhere else I have lived. I have visited Vienna four times since I had left, at roughly ten-year intervals, and found that its veneer still is much the same, but its soul is empty; it is not as it was.

How do I feel about the Austrians and the Germans? Ambivalent. The Austrians of my parent's generation and those who are my seniors by a decade or so were on the average more anti-Semitic and stauncher Nazis than their German contemporaries. To this day, the Austrians tend to claim that they were victims of the Nazis, rather than the more-than-willing collaborators that history showed them to be. Although I intellectually cannot hold the younger

generation responsible for the sins of their fathers, I can't help believing that some of the older generations' views rubbed off on their progeny.

I served in the US Army beginning near the end of World War II and shortly after the end of hostilities in Europe was assigned to Graves Registration. I headed a team that located graves of US military personnel, tried to learn how they had died, disinterred and identified them, and brought them to central locations for transportation to the US for reburial. During my nearly two years of this work in the eastern, Russian-occupied, part of Germany I spoke with many Germans from many walks of life. Most seemed like decent sorts, none admitted a liking for the Nazi regime, and almost none made any anti-Semitic remarks. (Of course, they would have been somewhat intimidated by my uniform and that of my Russian liaison officer, but they would not have known that I was Jewish.) One occurrence that is etched in my memory colors my attitude toward Germans to this day. When we investigated the fate of several airmen that had bailed out and landed safely near a small town I learned that all were rounded up by the local militarized peasants and most were turned over to the military authorities, but one was beaten to death. Why? "He was Jewish". I asked: how did you know? "Because he looked Jewish."

Story by
Michael S. Turner (Survivor)

It always feels strange when someone asks me to speak about my experiences during the Holocaust. For some years I was a member of a Child Survivors of the Holocaust group and at the first meeting I asked the members if I really belonged since I had never spent time in a concentration camp. They answered that by their definition any Jew who had lived in Germany under the Nazi regime and come out of it alive is a survivor of the Holocaust. We used to be called refugees, and I consider myself a survivor of religious oppression.

I was born in Hamburg. My father and mother were both born in Galicia, Poland at a time when it was still a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. After serving in the Austrian Army, my father decided to settle in Hamburg and open a small eggs-butter-cheese and "colonial provisions" store, located in a blue-collar area of the city where we were the only Jewish family. He married my mother, who incidentally was born in Oswiecim which the Nazis later renamed as Auschwitz, and my sister and I were born in the early 20's in Hamburg. The business thrived and soon my father was able to invest in some real estate. Having struggled to establish himself, and being a good-hearted person he frequently lent money to others having a difficult time.

My sister and I were brought up by Nannies (I don't know if this is an accurate translation of "Kindermädchen"). Even though they were not Jewish, they became familiar with dietary laws, and other religious customs, becoming an integral part of the family. The situation on the street was different. My playmates frequently called me derogatory names, the most common was Schacherjude, a petty thief or haggler. EPAJude was another name referring to a cheap 5-and -dime store chain. Then there were more serious references to Christ killers and other obscene references. I could have gone to public school but my parents wisely enrolled me in a Jewish day school which had received the highest governmental accreditation.

It was like living in two worlds, for the vast majority of my fellow students came from families with professional or commercial backgrounds in contrast to my everyday playmates.

We belonged to a small Synagogue whose members were mostly Eastern Jews, from Poland, Russia and Baltic countries. These members formed the basis of my parents' social circle. It would have been a struggle to break into the more aristocratic Hamburg Jewish society many of whose members traced their ancestry back to the seventeenth century when they emigrated from the Netherlands which had forbidden them to engage in trading with the Orient. They entertained each other in each other's homes attended the movies, theater and Jewish cultural events I was busy adjusting to school, taking violin lessons and somehow managed to block out the progressively restrictive persecution of Jews. The propaganda was

very persuasive and the uniforms and hobnailed boots of the Hitler Youth were very impressive. Hitler was regarded as a temporary nuisance who would soon be put in his place by the democratic government, ridicule and common sense. The 1933 boycott of Jewish stores and businesses was more serious. Hamburg had always been a very liberal city with a strong Social-Democratic attitude, yet on the day of the boycott there was fear among us all and my parents made sure that my sister and I stayed at home. It was telling that the only person to evade the boycott was the Lutheran minister from the neighborhood church who sneaked in through the back and told my father that what was being done to us was a shame. A year later things changed dramatically: suddenly there was an influx into my school of students who had been going to public schools which they were now forbidden to attend. There was activity at night in my house: my sister and I were told that the hammering was to send some boxes to England where my mother's cousin had ordered some "things". My parents went to a Purim festival ball, where my father played a lucky number on a wheel of fortune used for fund-raising and won a round-trip to Palestine. After he returned he sold his store, and my sister and I bawled our heads off when our beloved Nanny Erna left us ostensibly to help her father in his dairy farm. I was aware that Jews were forbidden to hire gentile women under the age of 45, but never thought that this might have an effect on me. Then, on November 13, 1935 everything came to an abrupt climax: my mother woke me up and I asked if it was time to go to school, no, she said, you're not going to school, we're leaving. I was half pleased about not having to go to school, but then I asked where are we going and she said to Karlsbad, Chechoslovakia. There was some frantic last-minute packing, and I couldn't believe I was leaving everything behind forever. I was frozen, and suddenly the anger rushed out. I went to my old gramophone took out my favorite records, the music from movies, operas, operettas , and threw them one by one against the wall instantly shattering . "No Nazis are going to get these" I yelled as loud as I could.

The trip to the train station was full of tears and moaning. My mother's closest friend (who later died in Theresienstadt) was the most affected. Why are you leaving, she moaned, everything is going to change. My mother told me later that the previous evening she had borrowed a couple of baby carriages and donated dishes and silverware to Mrs Bernstein. My mother, sister and I were on the train. No sign of my father, but once we crossed the border, my father suddenly appeared walking the length of the train, and I finally realized that we had safely escaped. Later, my folks told me the rest of the story: My father was an ardent Zionist who had planned to emigrate to Palestine for a long time. He never admitted this but I think the trip to Palestine was not the result of a lucky bet. My father gambled very rarely. While he was in Palestine he had bought a house for $15,000 with money he had smuggled. After he had sold his store he wanted to collect money from some of the friends to whom he had lent it. One of these friends said to him that he did not have to return the loan because he had found out that my father had bought a house in Palestine and that he could turn him over to the GESTAPO for having smuggled money out of the country. My father said to my mother "when one Jew does this to another Jew it is time to get out." They kept my sister and me in the dark for fear that we might tell one of our school friends. The reason for ostensibly going on "vacation" in Karlsbad was that the British quota for German immigration to Palestine was filled for years, and that even though both my parents were German citizens. They felt that the Nazis were earmarking "Ostjuden" as their first persecution targets. After a brief stay in Karlsbad, we visited my mother's relatives in Oswiecim, and my father's brother and children in Cracow. As I think about it now, I believe that my father's readiness to take action spared all our lives. I think he sensed what was to come while his friends were telling him not to be hasty- that "things will change. My folks obtained visas to immigrate to Palestine under the Polish quota, because Polish Jews were not aware of the coming onslaught. We arrived in Palestine in December 1935. It was a bad time in Palestine. Hitler was furnishing military and ideological support to the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who called for a boycott against Jewish immigration and who later spread his Jew hatred over the Nazi radio. We were under nightly attack by Arabs hiding in the desert, while our British protectors were more interested in courting young German-Jewish girls.

We were able to bring my mother's father to Palestine and he lived a long life in the land. My

father immigrated under the German quota to the US ten months before sending for the rest of us. Those were ten difficult months for I missed my father during a crucial period in my physical and emotional maturation. When I look back over my experiences, I am both grateful to my father for having had the foresight to help us escape what would surely have been a terrible fate. But I am also apprehensive about what the future may bring. One of Hitler's inflammatory slogans was "Die Juden sind unser Unglück", Jews are our Misfortune. When times are bad, anti-semitism is inevitably on the rise, and people unfortunately buy into such slogans.

Recently I've heard people say the same thing about Israel - if it weren't for Israel we wouldn't be having problems with terrorism, fuel shortages, and other bad things. I recently saw a TV excerpt from an American Nazi Party rally in Wisconsin in which one of the speakers pretended to use the Israel flag as toilet paper. Don't tell me it can't happen here - that's what they said in Germany. I've made two visits to Hamburg in the past ten years. What I saw there is an honest, realistic effort to deal with their past. I met with school children who were studying the Holocaust as it progressed from day to day. They were trying to understand how a civilized society could permit such barbarity to take place. Perhaps if we could emulate this effort of self-evaluation on the German's part it could help us here to prevent the possibility of fanning the smoldering flames of Anti-Semitism.

Story by **Yona Rosenman (2G)**

My parents, Leah and Meir Kleinman, were Holocaust survivors. In September 1939 my father, aged 22, and his older brother Aaron hurriedly left their home in Lodz and ran towards the East. They left their parents and 3 siblings behind.

My mother was urged by her parents to do the same. At the age of 19, Leah Rosenbaum left Stardyn, a small village near the Bug River, close to the Russian border. In the middle of the night, she said goodbye to her parents and to her younger sister. Her 2 older siblings were married and were not home. My grandfather, a baker, bribed a local farmer with a sack of flour to take my mother to the river and to make sure she crossed safely to the other side – to Russia.

My parents made their way across Russia, ending up in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where they met. My father was drafted into the Red Army and also served time in a labor camp in Siberia. His brother, Aaron, became ill and died in Russia.

After the war my parents returned to Poland and wandered through Europe for 2 years, staying in various DP camps. They finally arrived in Israel in August, 1948.

My mother's parents, Ber and Ruchel, together with their daughter, Basha, were helping many refugees who passed through their town. They were killed in Treblinka in 1942. Their older daughter, my aunt Miriam, and her baby, Dvora, were shot in Stardyn. Miriam's husband, Avram-Moshe, survived in a nearby forest for 4 years. He and his new family immigrated to Israel in 1956. We do not know the fate of my mother's brother.

In 1940, my father's parents, Mordechai and Bracha, were forced to leave their apartment in a nice part of Lodz and move with their 2 children (23 year old Lola and 15 year old Romek) to the Ghetto. Their 25 year old daughter, Hela, lived separately in the Ghetto, near the hospital where she worked as a nurse.

In 1942, my grandfather died of hunger at age 57. My grandmother and her 3 children lived in the Ghetto for almost 4 years. In August 1944 they were sent to Auchwitz in one of the last transports from the Lodz Ghetto. My grandmother Ruchel was immediately taken to the gas chambers, and her daughter Hela chose to join her. My aunt Lola and uncle Romek remained in Auchwitz until they were liberated in January 1945. They came to Israel (Romek arrived after a detour in Cypress, where he was detained by the British) in 1948.

I grew up in Israel. My parents never talked about the Holocaust. My father and my uncle Romek both died very young in the late 1970's. I interviewed my mother during the 1980's and my mother's cousin, Nettie, in 2000. In 2004 I conducted my own research, assisted by 2 genealogists from Lodz and

Warsaw. They discovered very valuable documents regarding my family.

In August 2004, together with my husband and 2 children, I traveled to Poland for 10 days. We were accompanied at first by the 2 genealogists, who had looked through the archives for us. We visited the places that are part of my family's past. Many places in Lodz had not been destroyed. We were able to visit the apartment where my father grew up, the apartment in the Ghetto where my aunt had lived, and the hospital in the Ghetto where my grandfather died. We said Kadish at the place where my grandfather was buried (there was no gravestone). We went to Stardyn and stood at the place where my mother and her mother used to sell the baked goods from the family bakery.

We went to Treblinka and Auchwitz as well, where we said Kadish and cried.

Yom Hashoa

Story by Charlotte Bailey (spouse of 2G) and grandson Adam Kimball

"We're not leaving" our relatives said, "we're staying right here in Poland". This is what they said to Zelig Bailey (my father in law and Adam's Great Grandfather). They wanted to stay in Poland instead of going to Finland. No one could convince them that they should leave. They said they would fight them off if they came for them.

Zelig and Rebecca Bailey decided to go to Finland with their son (my husband and Adam's Grandfather) and other family members.

The post card we have is the last letter sent from the Jewish Ghetto in Turek Poland where they spent the end of their lives. The post card was sent in the 1940's from Hudes Traskala to her daughter Rebecca Bajle. The letter took a very long time to translate because it was Yiddish with German letters. When Hudes wrote this she had to be careful what she wrote because the Nazis would read all correspondence. If they didn't like what was written they would throw it away. The postcard was saved for many years and was found on Rosh Hashanah in 2007. It was found in a clear sheet with an original picture of Hitler and Finnish General Mannerheim.

The family was very large and very little of the family survived. One was shot while trying to escape a concentration camp. We have a picture of the family, 12 of the 20 members of the family were killed by the Nazis. The others had left Poland in time and came to either Finland, Israel or the United States.

At one point during the war Abi (my husband and Adam's Grandfather) went into hiding for awhile in Sweden because they were afraid that the Nazis were taking over Finland. The Nazis did not take over Finland but were very visible and made them worried having them there. Zelig, Rebecca and Abi Bajle came to the United States in 1946.

Cognitive Dissonance

The relationship between my mother and myself is complicated. I love her very much and we get along pretty well. But at the same time, our relationship is difficult and we have to tread carefully over some minefields from the past. This is because my mother is a concentration camp survivor……. and I am the survivor of the survivor.

My mother's story:

My mother was sent to Auschwitz a few days after her 14th birthday. As the Nazis shouted and fired randomly, and fierce dogs aggressively barked at the crowds, she was forced apart from her family. In the chaos, as she was being loaded onto a cattle car, she saw her mother being kicked and beaten by the guards as she tried to help her own father who had fallen down. My mother never saw her parents or grandparents again.

In the camps, life was terrible. I know that she suffered enormously from the starvation, constant fear, death threats, cruelty, brutal degradations, filth, sickness,…. I am sure I don't know all the details. It is really painful for her to talk and for me to hear everything.

My mother is one of the youngest survivors alive today who actually went through the camps. She turns 80 this year. One of the main reasons she survived, I am told, is because her sister worked with a 'doctor' whose job it was to regularly pick through those selected for the gas chamber shower line to see if anyone was still healthy enough to work, and therefore, should not be killed yet. My aunt pulled my mother out of the line this way several times.

My mother was liberated within days of her 16th birthday. As the war appeared to be ending, another aunt managed to get a German worker in the camp to help them escape into the forest. Just after they escaped, the rest of the prisoners were rounded up and either shot or sent to another death camp ahead of the Allied soldiers.

As you can imagine, my mother never had a normal teenage life. After the war, at 17, she lived in a Displaced Persons camps, before making her way to England, and eventually to the United States. There, 11 years after leaving the camps, she married my father, a man who had also suffered a lot as a Jew in Eastern Europe. I was born a year after that. It was not a great marriage. He had alcohol and other serious issues. We didn't see him a lot. I think she was lonely and angry about that too.

I can remember watching concentration camp film clips on tv with my mother when I was a child. She would sit transfixed watching the gray-black screen, straining to see if she could recognize her family members from the people staring out from the film, or as the bodies hurled down the chutes in front of us.

People knew we were Jewish, and many knew she had been "in Europe during the war". But no one talked about her as a 'survivor' in the 50's, 60's, or 70's. Even in Hebrew school, we didn't really talk about concentration camps, and no one mentioned my mother's past. It was all sort of glossed over.

Also, people didn't see therapists as readily as they do today. I don't think it ever even crossed my mother's mind to see one. (Those were for people who were *really* 'insane'). So even though I am sure she suffered from PTSD while we were growing up, my mother kept her problems to herself.

My story:

My mother was incredibly mean and violent to us when my sister and were growing up.

We would hide in the curtains hoping to escape from her. Frequently and suddenly furiously, and for reasons only she could imagine, she would grab anything in sight to attack us with: the dog's leash, a shoe, a chain belt, a hanger, .. It did not matter that we begged her not to hurt us "please mommy don't… .I'll be good", she continued to take out her anger on us all the years I lived with her.

I used to pray for houseguests because then I knew we were safe for that night.

She also often belittled us, cursed us in English and her native language and prophesized how we were destined to fail forever because of all of our alleged character flaws. These comments were caused even more damage than her beatings. She made us feel terrible about ourselves. And we each developed problems from those years we still have to struggle to keep from destroying us.

And I grew up feeling very alone, with neither a parent or a grandparent to be kind and supportive.

And now:

For years I was haunted by my past, but I really am much better now. Sometimes if I make the mistake of comparing my own children's happy lives with what mine had been like, or while taking care of my mother, I remember that she did not take care of me when I needed her to, it makes me sad. But I try not to let myself think this way too often, because it really doesn't help.

And there have been some plusses gleaned from my experiences with my mother! I think that I am a much better mother than I would have been had I not told myself as a child that I would *never* treat my own kids like this. (Hand on heart: I have kept this promise.) I used to joke that I learned how to be a good mother from my mother. What I meant of course, was that I learned that I must do the opposite.

I also think I am a better person to others for this reason. At least I hope that I am. I have a lot of patience and empathy for people who have suffered

difficulties in their own life. It is not surprising, I suppose, that I have ended up in a profession where I work all day with people with traumatic childhoods. I understand this.

I also have been lucky because I do have a life that is comfortable, with good health, a loving husband, wonderful children, kind friends, complete with devoted dog. I kind of see this as my reward for the first twenty years which were an unmitigated disaster. However, to this day, I cannot watch a movie that has even the slightest hint of violence without becoming incredibly stressed. My poor husband has to put up with far more than his fair share of romantic comedies for this reason……

Most newsworthy is, I have made peace with my mother who now lives near me, (so that I can take care of her as she ages, of course..). But it is not an easy relationship, because past hurts cannot be completely erased just because one wants them to be.

Honestly, I am not sure that had she not been a survivor, that I would forgive her at all for how we were treated as children. But then again, I know that I would feel far worse if I did not find a way to include her in my life, and I know that leaving her out would make me much more miserable. (My sister chose instead to move very far away). And also, I am a mother now too, and I don't want them to not love her, or think less of me for not being good to her. And please note: she is a loving and sweet grandmother to them!

So I try very hard to be as kind to her as I wish she had been to me… And I do succeed most of the time, but not always. I do it because I know it is still better to be together and love each other, than it is to be 'right'. And because she is still my mother. And she really did have a horrible life. And I know she is sorry now. (*But how could she hurt her own children?? Why didn't she get help??*)

So, as you see, I still can't exactly forget.

But then again, neither can she…

And this is something I don't hear too much about when we discuss of the legacy of the holocaust. And that is why I wanted to write about this now. I don't want to embarrass my mother, so I will not sign my name. Also, because I do care deeply for the survivors and all they went through, it is hard for me to find the right forum in which to voice what I am writing you here….. For this reason, I rarely do. I usually just keep it to myself.

Story by
Sara Sadownik (3G)

Connection to the Holocaust:

Bronia Sadownik, Grandmother, Survivor
Israel Sadownik, Grandfather, Survivor
Pola Swietarski, Great-Aunt, Survivor
Charlie Swietarski, Great-Uncle, Survivor
Herbert Sadownik, Father, (2G)
Sharon Polk-Sadownik, Mother

On a recent trip to Ireland, I learned that the iconic woolen Irish sweaters hold a deeper meaning about identity. Unique woven patterns reflect centuries-old family names. Tradition specified that each fisherman should wear a sweater with his clan's unique pattern, so that he could be identified by his family's crest in the event that a death at sea rendered his individual body unrecognizable. I could not help thinking that this system of using tangible markers to define identity throughout the generations does not exist in Judaism.

In contrast, my grandmother bravely changed her tangible identity twice in order to survive the Holocaust and arrive at America's shores. After the Nazis invaded Poland, my grandmother Bronia and her younger sister Pola burned the identity cards that identified them as Jewish. They succeeded in convincing the Polish authorities that they were Christian girls who had lost their papers. While they were forced to perform hard labor in a Polish prison camp for the duration of the war, they survived. At the end of the war, my grandmother altered her identity again. My grandparents met as refugees in a Displaced Persons camp. Only a few short weeks after they met, they decided to marry and move to America together, but they faced a significant wait with their immigration numbers. They found a solution in acquiring identity papers on the black market of two people who had already moved to Israel. As a result, my last name does not represent a centuries-old crest, but instead reflects a story of luck and cunning. I am proud to be a product of survival, with my last name serving as a marker for part of the story of

this survival. I gained a strong Jewish identity from the influence of my parents, my grandparents, and my great-aunt and uncle who are also survivors. The Holocaust is tied so closely to Jewish identity, but what does it mean to have a Jewish identity, and how do we preserve it?

I thought a lot about the concept of Jewish identity when I fell in love with someone who wasn't Jewish. He too had a strong personal connection to World War II, although from a different perspective, as his grandparents lived through Nazi occupation in Denmark. He is still the only other person I know who grew up with a copy of "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich" in their dining room. Despite the closeness of our relationship, I felt troubled that he wasn't Jewish. Partly, this troubling was tied to one particular legacy of the Holocaust. There are voices within the Jewish community who view intermarriage as a rejection of Judaism or worse: "intermarriage and assimilation will finish what Hitler started." The hurt and anger in these voices is difficult to ignore. While these emotions made me feel badly, I ultimately decided that guilt should not govern my life choices. What I discovered when I decided to move past guilt was that my love and appreciation of being Jewish endured. In particular, when I moved to a new city, I remember a night in which I felt lonely. I decided to stop in for Friday night Shabbat services at a local congregation. Even though I knew no one there, I walked in and felt like I was home. When I later evaluated our relationship, I decided that I could, in fact, compromise on not having the Jewish partner that I had always imagined. I could compromise on many things. However, I would not compromise on raising Jewish children—on giving my children the opportunity to walk into any synagogue or Jewish community event and feel that they were at home. He was not willing to compromise to share this vision, and amidst many factors, we decided not to continue our relationship.

Tanta Pola once recounted the narrative of her life to me, terror and love and pride. She reflected, "It's okay. Even when it's not okay...it's okay."

I've realized that cultivating Jewish identity requires not only love, but time and work. My father grew up as a child of survivors, and my mother grew up in a community colored by the stories and perspectives of survivors. They infused me with a Jewish identity not only through their own examples of Judaism being a deeply appreciated, often joyful, but always ingrained part of their own identities, but also through intentionally sharing this identity with me. For example, my father filled a bookshelf from floor to ceiling with his library of Holocaust books, but my parents also bought me my own books on Judaica and the Holocaust. They planned a family vacation in Eastern Europe when I was three years old that included a tour of concentration camps (a less common destination for family vacations, to be sure). I saw my father's joy at continuously trying to learn Yiddish. After my father's death, my mother continued to pack my brother and I into the car and drive to New York to visit my father's parents, where they greeted us with exclamations in Yiddish about how tall and beautiful we were. My mother sent us to Hebrew school for all years at Temple Emanuel and at Prozdor. Holidays have been filled with love at being together, as well as celebrating together. My mother puts her soul into leading meaningful seders at Passover— every year, she goes over my father's handwritten notes in the Hagaddah, while at the same time searching out new meanings and means to connection. For example, last year, we all had to come dressed as an interpretation of redemption. I like Jewish holidays for more than just the food and the friends, although it would certainly not be the same without them; for me, the holidays bring joy, a feeling of connection, and a sense of the unknown that is filled by new meanings continuously finding me. These associations have become ingrained, and I enjoy continuing the traditions even after I've left home.

My father and I had only a short overlap of years alive. My memories of him endure, but his greatest impact on me is not through my recall of the time we spent together, but instead through how parts of his joy, passions and complexities have become integrated with my own identity. Similarly, we as a Jewish people face the challenge of internalizing the Holocaust as a living part of our identity, as our tangible

attachments fade as a primary means of connection. This challenge requires us to be active in preserving the stories of the Holocaust, but also requires us to be active in weaving a personal relevance of the Holocaust into a piece of a larger and enduring Jewish identity. Meeting this pressing need is as equally important for people who are direct descendants of survivors as for those who are not.

On Passover, we tell the story about the Four Children. One of these children is wise, because she asks about precepts and laws. One of these children is wicked, because she says, "What is the meaning of this story to *you*?", not recognizing the connection between herself and her ancestors. We are supposed to chastise her for distancing herself from the community and tell her that if she were in Egypt, she would not have been redeemed. I believe that creating these divisions stands directly at odds with the goal of continuing Jewish identity throughout future generations. We should not put our energy into creating barriers, but instead focus on how to bring people together. However, a more important question exists: which child are we raising? Instilling an appreciation for Jewish identity relies heavily on us demonstrating our own joy and appreciation for Judaism and then putting our backs into teaching new generations to care about it, to love and wrestle with it, giving them the opportunity to form their own opinions, connections, and relationships. Connecting through love is harder than connecting through directives, guilt, or hollow observances, but love nurtures deeper roots. I think that one generation largely holds the responsibility for instilling the foundation of the next generation's identity, although the next generation chooses how to build on that foundation.

Jewish identity encompasses many factors, but a consensus definition remains elusive. Our religious traditions weave through our identity, but do not wholly define it, and undeniably, our identity has become tightly wrapped around our history. Ultimately, however, Jewish identity means something different to everyone. To me, the core of Judaism is about living with contradictions. We have centuries of religious texts and regulations, yet we still allow ourselves to embrace wrestling with the unknown. We have carried our traditions with us as we continue to settle and re-settle throughout all corners of the diaspora. We are mysticism, and we are bagels and lox. Tanta Pola once recounted the narrative of her life to me, terror and love and pride. She reflected, "It's okay. Even when it's not okay…it's okay." We can feel joy at celebrating the holidays, while at the same time remembering those who are no longer with us. Our history continues to be shaped by allowing room in our hearts for both tragedy and survival, for pain and sorrow, as well for hope, joy and defiance. As we look to the future, we can remember that we are nothing if not proven experts on survival and renewal.

Submitted by **Naomi Greenfield (3G)**

I am a symbol, a representative of life and of the accomplishments of my grandparents.

In 2003, my Grandpa Joe was given the honor of *Hatan Beresheit*, the first *aliya* in the book of Genesis after the completion of the Torah on *Simchat Torah*. Months earlier, he had asked me if I would read the Torah portion for his *aliya*. At first, I thought of it as a simple favor for my beloved grandfather. But when I stood in front of his congregation in Marlboro, New Jersey, I realized just how much this meant to him. As any grandfather would be, he was excited about showing me off to the congregation. But that day, as together we ushered in a new beginning of the Torah and a new cycle of Jewish holidays, I felt there was something even more meaningful there for my Grandpa Joe. "Look everyone!" I could almost hear him beaming with his proud eyes, "I did it. I survived. And life has continued. Judaism has continued."

I felt the connection to the Shoah the strongest through my grandfather. He was a deep and emotional person, who never once forgot how lucky he was to have been given a new life post-Shoah in America. Sometimes, even the littlest things moved him with meaning and gratitude. For instance, my grandpa was very excited when I bought my first car. He shared with me that driving made him feel young, how he felt in complete control behind the wheel, and how

he enjoyed the freedom of the open road. His expression of this feeling was not because of an innate love of cars. It was an example of him fully feeling every experience of freedom in his life, with the knowledge that he would never take any of his post-Shoah life experiences for granted. He had missed his childhood because of the Shoah. He had missed the feeling of freedom. So for my Grandpa Joe, saying he felt young and free meant he recognized that he had never been young and free in his past life.

My Grandma Rachele was much more reticent about her experiences. Though my dad encouraged her for years to share her stories about the past, my grandmother was a stubborn woman who, rather than make connections to the past, chose to live in the moment. She enjoyed seeing friends and family, cooking and eating. Though the Shoah had obvious affects on her psyche and health, outwardly, she chose to shield her thoughts about it from her family.

Except for one time. It had been a long car ride from Boston to New Jersey and my long curly hair had become rather unruly from falling asleep against the car door. I pulled back my hair and put it into a bun. As I sat in the kitchen with my Grandma catching up after we had arrived, my Grandma remarked that she liked when I wore my hair this way. "Really?" I asked. She said it reminded her of her hair when she was my age. She then proceeded to tell me a story that she had never shared with any other member of my family. It was about the time in her youth when the Nazis invaded her town in Poland and were cutting off the hair of all the women before sending them to concentration camps. My grandmother, in an early act of defiance, cut off her own long curly hair before the Nazis could. It was a short story but one that had incredible power, especially coming from my Grandma. It is one of the few times that I remember her making a connection between her past and the present. There was something about my hair that triggered it with her. And from then on, I thought differently about my own unruly curly hair. It had special meaning to my Grandma and, therefore, had special meaning to me.

Through my own tears, I was suddenly able to achieve amazing clarity of my importance in my family.

But I don't think I fully understood my personal connection to the Shoah, until my family trip to Poland at age 15. My dad had organized a trip for us to go to Poland to see my Grandpa Joe's hometown of Dabie and to visit the family of Anna Kucharska, the righteous Polish woman who hid my grandmother and her sister in a barn for the duration of the war. The visit to Dabie was emotionally raw for us all. The town, which had once been populated mainly by Jews, was now a complete ghost town for Jews. Laundry hung from the apartments that make up the building that was once my Grandpa's synagogue. There was a family living in my Grandpa's old home, who undoubtedly got possession of the house when all the Jews were liquidated from Dabie. The young and strong (like my Grandpa and his brother) were sent to concentration camps and the rest, gassed and buried in a mass grave a short few miles from their hometown. And even though my Grandpa had previously shared a few good stories of growing up in Dabie, those memories were overshadowed by the evil that had polluted his town and the horrible memories of having to leave. So even though I tried hard to imagine what it once had been like, I felt no connection to this place that my grandfather and many of my relatives had once called home.

On the second half of our trip, we stayed with the daughter and granddaughters of Anna Kucharska. There, we were treated like royalty. They were a poor Polish family who must have spent months of income to buy all the special food and delicacies they fed us while we were staying with them. I was overwhelmed by their generosity, but still didn't fully understand my connection to them. It was only when we visited Anna Kucharska's farm that it all made sense. Up until she died (only several months before we arrived in Poland), Anna Kucharska lived in a small farm house in Zoltance. Though this was not the same farmhouse that she lived in when she sheltered and hid my Grandma, it was close enough to me. It had an old world feel–no running water, wood fireplace, a barn with creaky wooden slats and chickens roaming around the yard. There were many details that made me imagine this to be "the barn," and I was able to picture my Grandma and her sister hiding behind one of the hay barrels.

After we explored the area, Anna's daughter and granddaughters took us into Anna's tiny sitting room in the farmhouse and pointed us to a picture framed

and mounted prominently on the mantle. Gingerly, they took the frame down off the shelf and showed it to us, as if it had been Anna's most prized possession. As I looked at the photo in the frame, I immediately recognized it as a childhood photo of me and my brother. And on the back of the frame was written and inscription by my father from 1981:

"This is a photograph of Joshua and Naomi Greenfield, the third generation of survivors who are forever indebted to you for your heroic efforts in saving their grandmother, Rachele Greenfield, during the time of the Nazi occupation."

Through my own tears, I was suddenly able to achieve amazing clarity of my importance in my family. Of my place in history. I, Naomi Greenfield, am an important and powerful part of the story of survival. I am proof. I am life. I am a representative of my grandparents and their heroic survival. I am a symbol of what they accomplished, and I am their legacy of survival.

My Story

Story submitted by Barbara E. Epstein (2G)

My father, Alfred, was born December 1931 in Alsfeld, Germany. He lived with his father, Moritz Stein, his mother Melanie and his two sisters, Beatrice and Eva, in this small town located 60 miles northeast of Frankfort.

In 1936, my grandfather, Moritz, an extremely intelligent man, sensed the rising turmoil and unrest that was developing throughout Germany. He could see that the situation for Jews in Germany was becoming increasingly dangerous. This extraordinarily brave man made the difficult decision to leave all his possessions behind, take his family and immigrate to the United States. My dad was five years old at the time. In addition to saving the lives of his immediate family, my grandfather was able to secure visas for many of his relatives. There was one sad exception. Moritz's brother, Solomon, his wife Alice and their two children, Walter and Ernst were captured by the Germans and murdered in Auschwitz. My great grandfather, Little Opa, was able to immigrate to the United States on the last boat on which Jews were allowed to leave Germany before the war broke out in 1939.

I have always had a strong desire to feel more connected to my Jewish roots and identity. Neither my husband, Michael, or I were brought up with a strong sense of our Jewish identity. Michael was raised in a very reform Jewish home, where observance of Jewish traditions was not a major component in his upbringing. I grew up overseas. My parents were expatriates, living in predominantly Catholic countries. They found it very challenging to maintain many of the Jewish customs and traditions with which they had been raised. mI was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. When I was five years old, we moved to Spain, and when I was eight years old, we moved to London. It was challenging at times being a "foreigner" in someone else's country, let alone the only Jewish family at our school.

As an adult, and a parent, I want my children to grow up with a strong sense of their Jewish identity and a deep understanding of their Jewish heritage. In December of 2008, Michael and I and our three children, Jake, Dan and Kira, were lucky enough to be chosen to participate in the Gloria Adelson Family Mission to Israel. The opportunity to experience Israel with other Temple Emanuel families was an extraordinary experience for us all. To see Israel firsthand gave us an amazing appreciation for the history of the Jewish people and the extraordinary accomplishments of today's Israeli Jews. Our visit to Yad Vashem had a profound impact on each of us. The Children's memorial was devastating. It is simple – just a dark room filled with hundreds of mirrors and a few candles. The flames, which appear to surround the visitor, represent the 1.5 million Jewish children who perished during the horror of the Nazi regime. I found inscribed on the wall at Yad Vashem the name of my dad's home town. This was the core of my strong desire to visit the town where my father was born and to learn more about our family's history.

Last September, I talked my dad into taking me and my family to Alsfeld, Germany. It had been over 30 years since my father had been to his birthplace. We spent an incredible day visiting the house my father had lived in as a small boy. We walked through the neighborhood where he once played. Not far from his house is the cemetery where many of our

relatives are buried. It surprised me that the Jewish gravesites remained unharmed. We spent a great deal of time walking through the cemetery, reading the headstones and figuring out how many of these individuals were related to our family. One very moving moment was when we came upon the gravesite of my great grandmother, Karolina, who died in 1937. She was the last member of our family to be buried in this cemetery. As we were leaving the cemetery that day, my dad turned to me and said "See what happens when one person escapes? They return with five more family members".

My connection to the Shoah is a personal desire to connect with my Jewish identity and to understand the rich and vivid history of the Jewish people. The story of the Holocaust is far deeper and more profound then what our children our taught in classrooms. Books and images cannot fully convey the destruction and devastation that the Holocaust had on the Jewish people. So many of us have been touched directly or indirectly by the Holocaust. It is almost impossible to communicate fully the devastating impact of the extermination of 6 million Jews during World War II. Throughout our travels in Europe, we have been able to see some of the aftermath of the Holocaust. We've visited the old Jewish quarters in Rome, Venice and Amsterdam. You can still find signs of the Jewish communities that once flourished in these cities.

I realize that my children are still young and that the significance of these events may be beyond their level of comprehension. Nevertheless, I feel I have a responsibility to teach them, as best I can, their family history. For our family, this story, so important for them to know, began with my grandfather, Moritz, when he had the extraordinary courage to uproot his family and flee to the United States. Our story, and every one of these stories, is such an important aspect of our Jewish history and helps to continue to strengthen our Jewish identity and heritage.

In Remembrance

Story by Amy Lowenthal Hyett (3G, written in 2010)

Connection to the Holocaust:

Rose Lowenthal, Survivor, passed away in 2009

Since I was a little girl, the Holocaust has always had a personal and important impact on me. A couple of early moments that I remember: I was six when my father showed me his family tree and almost every name had a tiny black dot next to them. When I asked why, I was told that each of these relatives had perished in the Holocaust. Fast forward a few years to a Hebrew school Holocaust class when I was nine. We were given a black and white paperback textbook that was filled with pictures of artifacts and suffering prisoners. The inside cover included photos of papers with different names on them. They were papers detailing export to the camps. One of the names was Lowenthal, which is my maiden name. I remember thinking, this could have been one of my relatives' export papers. I looked at that inside cover at least a hundred times. My insides felt like stone.

My grandparents were from another time and place. They met in Israel after the war. My grandfather joined the Zionist movement as a young man and left his family behind in Poland. His parents and all other relatives (save for his brother David who escaped to Cuba) perished at Auschwitz. For a while, my grandmother Rose had fake papers and lived openly but separately from her family, but visited them regularly in their large apartment in Poland. She was caring for her niece Hannah, since her sister felt she'd be in less danger living with my grandmother. One day Rose went to visit and found the apartment ransacked, all of her family gone. She deposited her niece with a Polish family and finished the war in hiding in Warsaw. When it ended, she went to retrieve her niece, and the family did not want to give her back. Rose said that she and Hannah would

just go for a short walk but she did not return her as promised. Instead, they made their way to Israel illegally via the Hagana organization. She met my grandfather on a bus there. Hannah still lives in Israel. My uncle David made his way to Manhattan from Cuba and helped my grandparents, father, and uncle settle there after they immigrated to the United States in 1956.

As I write this, I wonder what, in fact, is the truth. My grandparents did not give details about the war. When I tried to ask my grandmother specifics, she would say she didn't remember or didn't want to talk about it. Instead, it hovered in the room in their accented English, their conversing about me in Yiddish while I sat eating my morning hot cereal at their table. It hovered in the way that my grandmother would never waste food, sometimes re-serving the same meal again and again. And it hovered in the occasional guilt trip: "Amy, when are you going to have a baby? You're not getting any younger." "Sometime soon. You know, Grandma didn't have a baby until she was older than I am now." "Amy, there was a war on! How could she have a baby?"

My grandparents lived in Lower Manhattan for over thirty years, for my entire life. The dust from the fallen twin towers floated into their apartment. They lost power and water. They were so close to this catastrophe and they were sad, but also unfazed somehow. All I could think was that this tragedy was nothing compared to other moments in their past.

I think of my beloved Grandma, who was clearly an amazing young woman. The courage and bravery she had in the face of such sadness and loss astounds me. It is amazing to think of her making her way across the world, alone except for the company of her young niece, and beginning anew in Israel. I compare myself to her and don't know how I would face such a trial. The grandma that I knew and admired was a joyful person who loved to laugh, and cherished her family. She didn't want to remember the losses she faced, and thus that history will never be revealed and passed on. However, she will not be forgotten.

Both of my grandparents died last year. I have always felt a responsibility and a desire to share their story, at least the bits and pieces that I know. Now that they have passed, I feel this responsibility more than ever.

Holocaust Survivor Story

Story by Julia Priest (2-4G)

Connection to the Holocaust

Great-grandmother Celia Krakauer was in the camps, made it to the U.S.
Grandparents Adam and Locia Lichtenstein and mother Christine Lynn Priest left Poland in August 1939. Christine d. 1996.

My mother was named Christine. The name was in style, among a certain set, in Warsaw in 1935. Grandpa Adam was Colgate-Palmolive's Regional Vice-President for Eastern Europe. Grandma was called Losha, like Lucia, and that was short for Lillian Eglantine. She was a petite bottle-blonde fashion-plate. I have pictures of them skiing, playing golf. My mother remembered watching the cook make kluski, Polish noodles, and being taken care of by a nanny. "Going to the park with my mother was like a visit with royalty," she said.

In August 1939, somehow or other, Grandpa knew that it was time to get out. Grandma took jewels out of her bank vault. One night they wrapped their sleeping four-year-old daughter in a car blanket and drove the 1939 Buick right into the countryside, where a farm family took them in. My mother loved running around with a pack of children all day. My grandmother was horrified that they poured back indoors to serve themselves dinner with their unwashed hands.

Russian soldiers appeared on the farm to commandeer the car—with, they assumed, Adam as their driver. He gave them a driving lesson and sent them on their way with a wave. They left him, absurdly, a receipt for a 1939 Buick.

After about a month, Switzerland. Granda Locia visited embassies every day, looking for one that would guarantee the family so that another would give them a visa. The jewels from the vault must have gone out in bribes.

On the boat to the United States, there was another little girl, a six-year-old Swedish girl traveling without her parents. She played with my mother although they didn't share any language. My mother showed her how to make kluski.

The family spent a year in Canada before moving permanently to New York. On her first day of Kindergarten, the children laughed at my mother's funny language. Nobody had warned her that we don't speak Polish in Kindergarten. She told her mother, that afternoon, "I'm never speaking Polish again." She became an English teacher. Grandpa worked his way back up from salesman to some sort of important position in the cosmetics industry. They traveled regularly to Europe and socialized with Pierre Cardin and Yves Saint-Laurent. Our home always had extra bottles of Nina Ricci L'air du Temps perfume, with their glazed white dove on the stopper – just in case.

Friends were going to leave Warsaw two weeks after our family. They did not make it out. My mother's favorite cousin, Olesh, didn't make it out. My brother Alex is named after him.

Locia's mother, Celia Krakovaner, was in the camps. Upon arrival, they were told to pile all their shoes up. After de-contamination or whatever it was, Celia took back—not her own lady shoes, but rather men's workboots. Somewhere in the camps was a man who did not survive because he did not get his boots back.

On a forced march from one camp to another, Celia fell down in the snow, perhaps willfully. A young Nazi was sent back to shoot her. She looked up at him and asked, "Didn't you ever have a mother?" He shot into the snow beside her. That must be how she made her escape. She made it to New York, I don't know how, and lived there, independently, into her old age.

Luck and the Will to Survive

Story by Nicole Goldberg (3G, written in 2007)

Connection to the Holocaust

Kalman Goldberg, Survivor

"Each day after school I used to go play soccer with the Christian kids who let me play with them because I was the best player in the city, handsome, and thus didn't seem too Jewish. Later, when the Germans came, playing soccer was no longer important but the same combination of luck, skill, and G-d's gifts continued to help me through the ordeals that were to come."(Kalman Goldberg) During the Holocaust luck is what kept many alive. People not only needed luck but they need determination. At any point in time anyone could have just given up and died instead of struggling for survival. Kalman on the other hand never gave up or lost hope, even when things looked like they would never get better.

Before World War II, about 25,000 Jews lived in Tarnow, a city in southern Poland, 45 miles east of Krakow (Cracow). Jews made up half the town population and had a huge effect on its culture. Immediately following the German occupation of the city on September 8, 1939, the harassment of the Jews began.

Kalman Goldberg was born on May 25, 1923 in Tarnow, Poland. He had three brothers and three sisters, attended public school in the morning, and religious school in the afternoon. Kalman's father owned a factory that manufactured kosher soap, Sabbath candles and candles for church altars. The family lived above their factory. When the Germans occupied Tarnow, the factory began making soap for hospitals, orphanages and the German Army as ordered by the Nazis. Since the Goldberg family was a friendly family in Tarnow and most Christians knew the fate of the Jews, Sister Mary from the local parish and the doctor who headed the orphanage offered to

hide his sisters. Kalman's parents refused out of fear of their daughters being converted. In early 1941, Kalman's mother, Sarah, passed away. With all the problems in the town, the death of Kalman's mother made things even harder.

In March, 1941, the ghetto was established and all the Jews were moved there. Living conditions in the ghetto were poor. There was a very small food supply, a lack of sanitary facilities, and forced-labor without pay in factories and workshops producing goods for the German soldiers. Kalman worked in a hospital as a doctor's aide and then as a mechanic's apprentice in an auto garage. While working there, Kalman was the driver for the man in charge of the garage. Once a week they went to the slaughter house to pick up pork and beef for the German hospital. When they would deliver the meat to the hospital, they would always see the nurses in the kitchen. One of the nurses liked Kalman and would make him as many sandwiches as she could stuff in her bra. Kalman was not being fed well in the ghetto and the extra food helped keep him alive. At the time Kalman's father, brother and two sisters were living in Lemberg with false papers. Sooner than later, they were exposed as Jews and his father and brother were killed. Luckily, his sisters were able to smuggle back into the ghetto through the garage.

The Germans decided to liquidate the Tarnow ghetto in September 1942. The surviving 10,000 Jews were deported, 7,000 of them were sent to Auschwitz and 3,000 to the Plaszow concentration camp in Krakow. November during the liquidation, Kalman was sent to one line, and his youngest brother and sisters were sent to the other. He called to them and begged them to come with him, but they were too scared. That day Kalman was sent to Plaszow, and his siblings were sent to Auschwitz. While his oldest brother stayed behind to clean out the ghetto. He was killed because the Nazis found him with American money.

At Plaszow, Kalman became a mechanic. An SS truck with a faulty electrical system was sent in for repairs. When it returned to the front it broke down again. The night shift was accused of sabotage and sentenced to death by firing squad. Kalman had switched to the day shift but his name was still on the night manifest. So, unluckily he was taken to the camp prison, where they prayed and waited to die. Kalman's Jewish foreman, Mr. Warenhaupt, liked the group of Jews so he argued that their skills were needed in the camp. The sentence was reduced to 100 lashes. To this very day Kalman still has a scar on his kidney from this beating. In jail, he protested for his innocence, but received 100 lashes anyway. When Warenhaupt was asked if Kalman spoke truthfully he said yes, and Warenhaupt received 25 lashes. In 1943, Warenhaupt had to reduce the number of workers. He had assigned Kalman to Oskar Schindler's factory.

Oskar Schindler was a Nazi who showed compassion for the Jews and stood up for them. Schindler was able to save his workers by having a list made with the names of 1,000 Jews. He then convinced Nazi officials that these particular Jews were needed for his factory's production of good for the German army. He also spent a large amount of his fortune opening up a factory and bribing other Nazi officials to let him transport the Jews to the new factory. At the new factory, Schindler provided a safe environment for his workers. He kept the German guards from entering the factory or harming anyone. He and his wife, Emilie, secretly provided extra food and medicine to keep them all healthy. Regardless of the risk of being discovered, Schindler continued to take in several hundred more Jewish workers. By the end of the war, Schindler had spent all of his money to save the lives of around 1,300 Jews.

Locksmiths were needed in Schindler's factory, so Kalman asked two locksmiths, to vouch that he had been their apprentice. They agreed, and he volunteered. Shortly, the foreman knew he was not a locksmith and swore at him but a miracle occurred and he let him stay.

Betty Ganz worked in the Kitchen at Schindler's factory when Kalman was a locksmith. However, when Kalman would stand in line for soup she would give him a better soup that wasn't just water but instead thick and nutritious because she thought he was cute.

One day a prisoner escaped and the Commander closed the factory. Kalman became the cook's assistant in the SS kitchen. He snuck food for his barracks and saved many lives in the process. In the meantime Schindler and the Commander planned to reopen the factory. Schindler, the Jewish factory owner, Mr. Bancka, and a Jewish cook, Betty Ganz, were pulling

people out of their barracks and asked them to sit in a row because the factory had to cut down the personnel. Kalman wasn't on the list to stay so he hid behind large pots in the kitchen. He slid out and took one of the seats for the people on the list. The heads saw him but said nothing.

In November 1944, Schindler's factory in the Sudetenland opened. This time Kalman was on the list. The workers were shipped there, through Grosse Rosen. They stood naked in deep snow before taking a cold shower and receiving uniforms. At the new factory, he worked in the kitchen with Jewish professional cooks. Three days before liberation, Schindler was driven to the American zone by a few of Kalman's friends and released, because if he had stayed he would have been in great danger from the Russians. On May 1, 1945 the Russians liberated them in Cwitava. Kalman had no idea what to do with himself, and the Russians treated them very badly which made it harder.

The Schonthal family (now known as Fagan) who were friends of Kalman had a very loyal maid who had saved their valuables during the war. The family told him to pull it together and took him to Prague with them. Later on, they were also very nice to him and took care of him. At a food store, people gave them coupons. A man said they should go to the bank and he would give them money. With this money they were able to stay at the Roxy Hotel.

The Schonthal family and Kalman were told to go as far west as possible. The Swedish consul gave them Dutch papers. The Russians let them go to the American zone because they showed them papers that they were from Holland so they let them go. If they had known that they were from Poland, they would have not have let them go and would have sent them back. The Americans brought them to the border between German and Holland. The guard asked if Kalman was from the Netherlands, but he said no, he was from Holland. He detained him until the Jewish Committee in Rotterdam arranged his release.

Once in Holland, Kalman worked for the Jewish Brigade as a mechanic. The Brigade was smuggling people from Germany to Belgium, then to France and finally to Palestine. Kalman was the only member of his family to survive. He was told not to go to Palestine due to wars but instead to go to America because it was safer and calmer, and he would be able to have a chance to rebuild his family. On October 1946, Kalman went to England and in December went to New York on a liberty ship. He stayed with an uncle in Washington Heights, and rented a room. Also he got a job working at Rikers Coffee Shop.

Kalman was introduced to Alma Bressler by Betty Ganz and her husband.

Alma Bressler was a Romanian who came through Cuba with her parents. Kalman and Alma got married in 1956 and Kalman and his father in law opened a sweater business. They had two children, Jeffrey and Sandra, and moved to Oradell, New Jersey in 1962.

Kalman survived because of luck, the will to survive, a good heart, and G-d's gifts. Even though he wasn't on the list when Schindler cut down his personnel, he was still able to stay in the factory because of his good fortune. Throughout his troubles Kalman never gave up. Even in the worst times when Kalman's family is killed and when the situation seems like it couldn't get any worse, Kalman is able to stay strong. This relates to life and that even when the situation looks bad, one should never lose hope and they should keep trying no matter how bad things get.

Story by **Joseph J. Grabowski (2G)**

Connection to the Holocaust

Jack Grabowski, Survivor from Lodz, Poland, died 1984

Golda Grabowski, Survivor from Turobin, Poland, died 2003

It almost goes without saying that putting pen to paper to describe my connections to the Holocaust through my parents is a significant challenge. I have decided to write a factual paragraph or two to give the some fundamental information about who my parents were, what happened to them during the war, and what life was like for them (and me) after they immigrated to the United States. Beyond that, I would like to give just a couple of examples of their indomitable

spirit and how the 'good' can survive in spite of the horrific experiences they were forced to endure at the hands of the murderous Nazis.

My father, Jack, was born in Lodz, Poland on April 15, 1921. Please note the date as it comes up in a prominent way later in this paragraph.) He left the Lodz Ghetto sometime after December 1940 and went to Germany to work in a forced labor camp. It was 1943 before he was sent to an actual concentration camp, first to Majdanek, then to another camp before he ended up at Auschwitz, specifically, a subcamp named Buna. He was there until January 1945 when the Russians drove the Nazis out of Poland and he arrived in Bergen Belsen after a brutal death march in January 1945. He was liberated on April 15, 1945 on his birthday from Bergen Belsen. He often described the liberation as his second 'birthday.' He met my mother in the DP (displaced persons) camp after liberation.

My mother, Golda, (ne Jacobsen) was from a small town called Turobin. She remained in her home town for several years under German occupation. In 1944, she was placed on a transport with her family and her mother managed to get her off the transport train hoping that she would find a way to survive. My mother managed for some time under a false identity but ultimately endured the hardships of the camps, and ended up in Bergen Belsen where she was liberated and met my father.

In spite of their huge losses— their family, their youth, etc.—they had a zest and enthusiasm about life and were proud that they had survived.

Like many people in the DP camp, they married and tried to immigrate to the US which they were finally able to do in 1949. I was born in the DP camp during that time but have no recollection of that time whatsoever. The Jewish agency in R.I. sponsored their efforts to come to the States, helped them with housing and work, and assisted them as they began their new life in South Providence. In the course of time, several other couples they knew from Belsen arrived in Providence and these folks and other survivors became our extended family. My parents literally lost every member of their family in the Holocaust and, if memory serves, my mother was the only Jewish survivor of her small town in Poland.

In 1950, my father fell gravely ill with stomach cancer, underwent surgery, and then radiation therapy. He survived but was not healthy and was in and out of the hospital the rest of this life. One should understand that he was in Nazis tortuous circumstances for five years and still survived Auschwitz to boot. I can not fathom the strength it took to survive all that and, obviously, it toll this took on his health. The family moved to suburban Cranston in 1961 to the only home they owned, down the street from the Cranston Jewish Center. In large measure, both my sister and I lived a typical middle class life (sans golf lessons) until we went off to college, graduate school, work life, marriage, etc. We came back to our little house on Sunset Terrace often to visit with our parents, enjoy Passover seders, south county beaches and the fireworks at Roger Williams park.

Sadly, my father died in 1984 and never met my son Jonathan who is named for him. My mother lived until 2003 moving to Florida several years after my Dad's death. She was able to enjoy and help raise all her grand children; watch as both my sister, Fran, and I had considerable success in our professional lives; and overcame, with great aplomb, a number of serious medical challenges. She survived pancreatic cancer for almost twenty years and deserved her nickname of Bionic Bubby.

When I was in the publishing business many years ago, I came across a book by Helen Epstein called Children of the Holocaust in which she described several aspects of growing up as a child of survivors. She commented that in several of her interviews (possibly her own experience as well), some survivors found it to be difficult to talk about their war experience and their children were "left in the dark" about what their parents went through. This was definitely not my experience. It was a common occurrence in my house that survivors would get together to play cards. The men and the women played separately and I often sat at the men's table to watch and listen. Invariably, their camp experience came up into conversation and I listened, learned and remembered much of what they talked about, which was only mildly edited when I was present. In a way, this is why I know much more about my father's experience than my mother's.

In general, I can say that the survivors that I knew and heard speak for years were not bitter people. In spite of their huge losses— their family, their youth, etc.—they had a zest and enthusiasm about life and were proud that they had survived. Make no mistake, they did not forgive the Germans and routinely referred to them as murderers and savages which they were. But it did not keep them from celebrating all the normal passages of life with passion and joy. The Jewish Holidays, parties, card games, traveling to Israel, enjoying summers in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, etc were all events that were enjoyed to the fullest and the survivors came together as family to celebrate everyone's special events.

Despite their long battles with illnesses, both my parents were hopeful in their view of life and their primary goal was to see that my sister and I received a solid upbringing and education so that we were well prepared for our own lives. We were a family with modest means, but we enjoyed the simple pleasures of life – going to the beach, visiting with friends, gardening, etc. Whatever burdens they carried from the Holocaust, they tried not to pass them to us (as best they could) and both my sister and I feel we were brought up in a household rich with love, a great gift from our parents ,and one which we've both tried to copy for the next generation as well.

Friendship and Courage

Just a few small anecdotes about my parents to give the reader of sense of their strength and joy about life and why they are missed so much.

My nephew, Seth, was the first grandchild to be born. As you can imagine, my parents were beyond themselves with happiness with the birth of the next generation and their first grandchild. But, my father could not forget that the Nazis had tried to destroy all of the Jews in Europe. As fate would have it, Seth was and is to this day a blue eyed blonde. My father would carry him around and say-"look at this child-the Nazis tried to kill us all off but here is the proof that they did not win!"

When my Dad died and we were sitting shiva in the family house in Cranston, there was a constant stream of people, who I did not know who came by to pay their respects. People who over the years my Dad had had modest contact with . . . kind of how are you conversations but they all expressed affection and respect for the man who had a number tattooed on his left forearm. How did Dad get to know all these people? What was it about him that allowed him to be friendly so people outside our family would do him the honor and kindness to go out of their way to make a shiva call? Having been through such torture for so long, how does one find the way to be so upbeat and friendly? Obviously, my father did and his outgoing personality and friendliness touched all who came in contact with him.

For my Mom, let me give you a life example as well. It was the night before her surgery for pancreatic cancer and a young surgeon at Sloan Kettering (Dr. Murray Brennan, who has become world renowned and head of surgery for the hospital) sat on the edge of her bed and asked her if she was ready for surgery the following morning. She responded by saying, "If you're ready, I'm ready as well" and his skills and her lust for life allowed her to live miraculously for 20 years after the surgery.

My sister related another story to me of my mom's incredible courage. Soon after 9/11, my mother was scheduled to return to Florida after spending the Holidays with the family. The fear of additional attacks was on everyone's mind. My sister asked my mother if she was afraid to fly back to Florida, did she want to change her flight to a later time. My mother's answer was, that if she survived all of the horrors of the Nazis, the fear of terrorism meant nothing to her and she flew back to Florida as scheduled.

I want to say that my continued involvement in Yom HaShoah related services is driven in large measure by my desire to honor my parents, other survivors, and the 6 million blessed souls that perished in the Holocaust. I hope this short note gives a picture of my parents and honors them for what they endured and for their success in building a new life for themselves and their children.

Submitted By

Cheryl Stober (3G)

Story published in book, Chicken Soup for the Jewish Soul

Connection to the Holocaust:
Max Curtis, Grandfather, Survivor

Owing a Debit of Gratitude
Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths: Where is the good way? Walk in it and find rest for your soul.

Jeremiah 6:16

It was the summer of 1996. My husband Joe and I, along with two other couples, were on a journey "tracing our roots" through Eastern Europe. Right before our trip to Annykst in Lithuania, the hometown of my husband's grandmother, we were joined by four more tourists. One of them, Miriam Libenson, was a witty, cultured woman who could recite reams of Hebrew and Yiddish poetry. She had left Annykst as a very young woman, and now she was returning for a nostalgic visit with her two sons, Michael, a psychologist, and Eli, and educator from Israel.

Before their trip, Michael had done some internet research on Annykst. He had learned the story of Max Curtis, an Annykster who, in 1941, at the age of eighteen, had fallen victim to the Nazis. He had been stripped naked and taken to a pit in town. There, together with several other young men, he was shot and left for dead. By a miracle he had survived and had come to the United States after the war.

Michael got in touch Max, who was living in Cleveland. They soon became close friends, and the Libensons invited Max to join them on their trip "home". So Max Curtis was the fourth person who joined us as we headed for Annykst.

As we traveled, Max told us his wartime story. After being shot three times, he had regained consciousness and climbed with great difficulty to the top of the pit. There, he discovered, to his horror, that he was the sole survivor of the massacre. Grief-stricken, he went down to a nearby river that night to wash his wounds. He then lay in a cornfield to hide. As dawn broke, he saw people walking by, and recognized Verutke, a local gentile girl. He instinctively decide to trust her, even though most of the townspeople had demonstrated allegiance to the Nazis. He revealed his presence to her. Verutke brought Max clothes, and for several days, brought him water and a small amount of bread. One cannot imagine the great risk she took, but Max, who had seen his entire family and all his friends and their families taken away and shot, realized the danger which Verutke had placed herself. Her brother-in-law, with whom she lived, was an active member of the Nazi Youth Movement.

After several days, Verutke told him that she had confided in the local priest, who suggested that Max come to the church. Not knowing what would await him there, and very frightened, he fled.

Max endured many hardships after that. He fought with the partisans and later was caught by the Germans, who thought at first that he might be a Russian spy. They were about to shoot him, but upon discovering that he was a Jew, they decided to put him in the ghetto instead.

Through all the ensuing years, Max had remembered Verutke. She was gentle, pretty and young, and knew that she had to do what was right no matter what the personal cost to her might be.

When we reached Annykst, we all went to the pit where Max had been shot. At the site stands a monument dedicated to the memory of the people who died there. It was a very emotional occasion, and we all cried bitterly as Max told us that he actually knew some of the people who had rounded him up and shot him. He had played the trumpet in a band with them. This betrayal was as painful as the bullet wounds. Max had a special request of Joe. Would he please make a *El Malei Rachamin* (the traditional Hebrew memorial prayer) for his friends? Joe was honored to fulfill the request, as Max supplied the Hebrew names of his friends, one at a time. Then suddenly, Max added one last name to the list: his own Hebrew name. "So much of me died along with them the day we were all shot," he wept. And so a *El Malei Rachamin* was then recited for Max, the sole survivor.

Regina, our resourceful guide, was deeply touched by Max's story. She was determined he should find Verutke since it was clear that the enormous debt he owed her had been on Max's mind for over fifty-five years.

The next day, a Lithuanian author who has written a book on the relationship between Jews and gentiles in Lithuania during World War II, accompanied Max Curtis and the Libensons to Annykst in search of Verutke. Max, demonstrating his usual sensitivity to others, repeatedly requested that if they should find her, they not immediately reveal his identity to her. He feared that the revelation of what she had done might still put her in jeopardy. He also prepared himself for the fact that she might no longer be alive. He said that in that case, he would repay whatever debt he could to her heirs if he could find them.

Together they walked through the town interviewing elderly people who might know of Verutke. With the help of local residents, they eventually found her. She was living, with her daughter and son-in-law.

When they visited Verutke, they found a poor, elderly woman. Some of her teeth had gone and had not been replaced. Her skin was leathery and wrinkled. She was most curious about her visitors.

After they had exchanged pleasantries, the Lithuanian author asked Verutke about the war years, and whether she remembered the boy of eighteen she had saved. Verutke nodded vigorously. Yes, she remembered him clearly, and she went on to relate the entire incident, referring to Max as "Motke".

Max, who had been listening to Verutke with deep emotion, knew that the time had come to speak up. He stepped forward and announced in a firm voice "I am Motke!" For a moment or two, Verutke looked at him, shocked, disbelieving. Then she began to smile, and her eyes, undimmed by time, sparkled once more. Max took another step forward an in a moment they were embracing, stiffly and awkwardly at first, but then with warmth and tenderness.

Max was overcome with joy, and the weight of the years seemed to fall away. For Max, the old woman to whom he owed so much was once more the pretty, vibrant, protective girl who had come to his aid when he had most needed it. When their embrace ended, Max spoke gently to Verutke. His words had a simple eloquence. "Your acts of kindness and concern encouraged me to continue and succeed in life," he said. "I owe you my life, but more than that, you confirm my faith in humanity. I can never repay you enough."

Verutke looked at Max and nodded her silent understanding. As they parted, Max promised to stay in touch.

Since that emotional reunion, Max has sent Verutke a monthly stipend that more than doubles her meager pension. Max is still visibly moved he tells of those days in the fields, and he is forever in awe of Verutke's simple, generous spirit.

385 Ward Street, Newton, MA 02459
www.templeemanuel.com