American Society for Yad Vashem Annual Tribute Dinner

“WE MAY BE MANY, BUT WE ARE ONE.”

O
n Sunday, November 17, 2019, the American Society for Yad Vashem (ASYV) gathered at the Pierre Hotel in New York City for its Annual Tribute Dinner, honoring three generations of one family. Holocaust survivors Paula and Jack Gora received the ASYV Remembrance Award, while their daughter Mona Gora Sterling and her husband David Sterling (board member) received the ASYV Leadership Award. The Gora-Sterling-Friedman family reflects the theme of this year’s dinner, which comes from a passage in Kohelet, “Two are better than one... and a threefold cord cannot quickly be broken” (Kohelet 4:9–12). All three generations of the family are deeply committed to Yad Vashem’s mission of Holocaust remembrance and education. As stated by Dinner Chair Mark Moskowitz, “They are a truly extraordinary family and the outpouring of attendance and support this evening is a vivid testament to the esteem in which they are held by family and friends and those whose lives they have touched.”

Over 600 people attended this year’s Tribute Dinner. Esteemed guests included rabbi Marc Schneier, Cantor Netanel Hershtik (the Hampton Synagogue), Rebbetzin Chaya-Ita Lau and Rivi Lau (wife and daughter of Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, former chief rabbi of Israel and chairman of the Yad Vashem Council).

The evening’s program began with “The Star-Spangled Banner,” performed by Rebecca Gabin, and “Hatikva,” performed by cantor Netanel Hershtik. ASYV Chairman Leonard Wilf welcomed everyone and introduced a video message from Avner Shalev, chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate, as well as a beautiful video showing the passion and heart that every single person at Yad Vashem brings to his or her work. Guests also watched a video of highlights from the recent Yad Vashem International Missions and were invited to join for the 2020 Generation to Generation Mission to Berlin and Jerusalem.

Stanley Stone addressed the room for the first time as executive director of the American Society for Yad Vashem. Both of Stone’s parents were able to escape from Nazi Germany to Great Britain and eventually to the United States. This is just one of the many reasons he feels so privileged to have joined the ASYV family this year. Addressing the room, Stone affirmed that “by being here tonight, each of us is ensuring that the message of Yad Vashem remains strong in these uncertain times.”

Board member David Halpern, son of Sam, Z’l, and Gladys Halpern, presided over this year’s In Memoriam, in which we honored the memories of those members of our Yad Vashem family who have passed on since the last time we gathered. Halpern emphasized how lucky we are to still have survivors with us: “We should spend time with them, care for them, listen to them, remember what they begged us to remember, and love them with all our hearts.”

By honoring those who perished, we are not only remembering the past, but also securing the future. Dinner honoree Sam Friedman poignantly expressed this sentiment in his remarks. “We represent each and every one of those children who were murdered by the Nazis, and it is our duty to make sure that their legacies, their traditions and their values did not die with them.” It is through education and outreach that we can continue to honor the memories of those who perished and the testimonies of those who lived. Education and outreach are two of the fundamental components of Yad Vashem’s and the American Society for Yad Vashem’s mission. These are also the things that will allow us to combat the current surge of anti-Semitism in the world. We live in trying times, and, honoree David Sterling said, “As the flames of hatred grow higher and higher, the water to extinguish them is the educational work that Yad Vashem does.”

As an internationally recognized institution with the world’s leading experts on anti-Semitism, Yad Vashem has the ability to reach diverse communities all around the globe. We strive to engage anyone and everyone. As Dinner honoree Jonathan Friedman reminded everyone, “you don’t need to be the son or daughter, the grandson or granddaughter, of someone who survived or perished in the Holocaust.” After the conclusion of the evening’s program, guests filtered into the next room to dance and celebrate life. We rejoiced in the miracle that we are still here and reaffirmed our commitment to the future. Finally, we confirmed the words of Dinner honoree Sam Friedman — “We may be many, but we are one.”

BY JILL GOLTZER
THE POWER OF EDUCATION CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

On November 25, 2019, Marlene Yahalom, American Society for Yad Vashem director of education, and I had the pleasure and honor to observe a talk that Lawrence Burian, ASYV board member, gave to 100 students, faculty and staff at Brooklyn College. Lawrence spoke about the book that his father Andrew wrote, A Boy from Bustina: A Son, A Survivor, A Witness. The president of Brooklyn College, Michelle Anderson, reached out to Lawrence, her former classmate at Yale University Law School. When I asked President Anderson why she had initiated this program, she told me that over the past two years, she had seen an increase in hatred of all kinds on campus. Fortunately, it has not reached a crisis level, but she feels it is time to be proactive. President Anderson felt that Mr. Burian’s story was a compelling message that students, faculty and staff needed to hear.

The entire afternoon was extraordinary and powerful. It was a standing-room-only crowd. The students — a cross section of cultures, ethnicities and religious backgrounds — were captivated by Lawrence’s presentation, and their questions were thoughtful. The program lasted one hour, but I have no doubt that the students would have stayed for another hour. The fact that at the conclusion of the talk, students gathered around Mr. Burian and wanted him to sign his book was testimony to the impact that programs like this can have.

Additionally, we had the opportunity to display the traveling exhibit BESA: A Code of Honor, which highlights Muslim Albanians who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. The exhibit, coordinated by Marlene Yahalom, was prominently installed in the school library lobby in a manner that was extremely professional and impressive. I believe the exhibit has garnered attention, and the school was very appreciative.

Following the talk, President Anderson sponsored a reception for faculty, student leaders, community leaders, and Hillel and Chabad representatives. During the reception, she shared with me her desire to have this type of program again next year.

Recently, the American Society for Yad Vashem hosted five representatives from universities, as well as student leaders, to discuss the role that Yad Vashem can play on our campuses in the coming months. The power of education, as was demonstrated at Brooklyn College, can make a difference.

BY STANLEY H. STONE, Executive director of the ASYV
Josef Levkovich was a teenage slave laborer when Amon Goth, the villainous "Butcher of Plaszow" who murdered Jews for sadistic sport, pointed his gun at Josef's head.

"I was working at the Plaszow concentration camp, dismantling the remnants of a Jewish cemetery," Josef told Aish.com from his home in the Arzel Habira neighborhood of Jerusalem. The cemetery's wrought-iron fence — all 150 tons — was needed to make weapons for the Nazi slaughter of millions across Europe.

Josef was high atop the fence, removing some bricks, when Goth rode up on his horse — flanked by two snarling dogs trained to tear in- to pieces. "He's not to be moved," a Nazi officer outside the camp hissed to Ludolf's major. "He will die.

"Josef protected his face with his hands; he bore the scars for a lifetime.

"Up on the fence, my job was to carefully re- move each brick, then toss it down to another prisoner," Josef explains. "But when Goth passed by, the other prisoner dropped the brick.

Goth hit him on the spot.

"Goth shouted to me: 'Throw down a brick!'" Josef vividly recalls. "I did, but Goth let it fall to the ground.

Josef was then led to a garden and given the daily task of feeding the Arzei Habira neighborhood of Jerusalem. He recalls, "I approached what appeared to be a regular Wehrmacht soldier, and my blood began to boil. It was Amon Goth hiding his identity!

Josef snuck up behind Goth and years of pent-up frustration let loose. "I started screaming, spitting and beating him — rattling off the list of atrocities I'd seen him commit in the camp.

"Goth was arrested, put on trial in German court, and condemned to hanging. He was happy to have it all over," Josef says. "But the Polish government insisted he be extradited and put on trial in Poland, where he'd committed his crimes. Josef says: 'I was happy because this meant I could repeat my accusations against him, and his suffering would be prolonged. He deserved it.'

In Poland, Goth was sentenced to death and was hanged in the Plaszow camp, on the same spot where he'd sadistically murdered untold inoc- cent Jews.

The Holocaust film Schindler's List would immortalize Goth as the paradigm villain.

During this time, Josef met Oskar Schindler in a DP camp. "He heard that I was looking for one incident at Melk, a sub- camp of Mauthausen.

"Because I'm short, I was always in the front row for morning inspections. One day, the camp kommandant, Julius Ludolf, stopped right in front of me. Without thinking, I saluted, clapped my wooden shoes together, and said in German: 'Sir! I will shine your boots to shine like the sun!'"

The next thing he knew, Josef was being led by an officer outside the camp to Ludolf's magni- ficent villa atop a hill.

"After a while," Josef recalls, "Ludolf came. Instead of speaking, he made barking noises like a dog, 'which I understood meant to shine his boots.'

Josef was then led to a garden and given the daily task of feeding the kommandant's rabbits and chickens. This gave Josef access to animal food, far better than he was eating in the camp. "I was happy to see carrots for the rabbits," he says, "and I was the first 'rabbit' to be fed!"

In the evenings, Ludolf would throw parties at the villa for SS officers. "They threw out a lot of food, which I ate," Josef says. He also smuggled food into the camp, risking his life to feed dozens of other prisoners.

At the villa, a lieutenant named Otto Striegel enjoyed mistreating Josef. "He'd order me to stand in the corner with my mouth open, then try throwing pebbles into my mouth. They usually ended up hitting me in the face." [While Nazi hunting after the war, Josef dis- covered kommandant Ludolf hiding in a vil- lage. Josef testified in court, telling of Ludolf's crimes and his huge quantity of stolen jewelry, gold and foreign bank notes. Ludolf and the lieutenant who threw pebbles were both exe- cuted.]

Even though Josef spent so much unattended time at the villa outside the camp, he didn't try to escape. "I'd managed to escape previously," he says. "I slipped away from a work detail and wandered in search of someone to give me food or shelter. But people slammed the door on my face. Either they were cruel or afraid; it is not for me to judge."

The next morning, Josef went back to the slave labor camp; there was no better option.

Another treacherous time, Josef was put onto a cattle car headed for Auschwitz. "We were 160 men in the car, packed so tight, worse than sar- dines," he says. "We had no air or water. Every few minutes, another person died. When we ar- rived in Auschwitz, I was standing on so many layers of bodies that I reached the roof."

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O
n March 4 of this year, the Vatican announced that it would finally open the papacy archives of Pius XII, the pope whose tenure, from 1939 until 1958, covered the years of the Second World War. This step has been a long time coming, and historians hope that it will finally shed light on the actions taken by Pius XII and the Catholic Church as Jews were being rounded up and slaughtered in Europe by Nazi Germany and its collaborators.

"The Church is not afraid of history," declared Pope Francis, the current leader of the Vatican, of the decision to open the previously secret archives to the public. And, indeed, in the years since the war the Catholic Church has taken measures to publicly confront its own long history of institutional anti-Semitism. Starting with the Second Vatican Council in 1965, the Church officially condemned anti-Semitism and absolved Jews of the charge of deicide, formally renouncing the charge that they bear any collective guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus. But those steps toward atonement and reconciliation do not actually illuminate the Vatican’s role during the Holocaust, a period of contested history during which, critics say, Pius XII veered between inaction and complicity toward the crimes of the Nazis.

Foremost among the lingering questions that Jewish leaders hope will be resolved by the newly opened archives are the names and birthplaces of Jewish children placed for safekeeping with Catholic families or Catholic institutions (monasteries, convents and schools) during the war. Many of those children were converted to Catholicism, an act that may have helped save their lives. But prominent Jewish leaders like Abraham Foxman, former head of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), believe that even after the war, when it was safe to come out of hiding, most were not told they were Jews. In many instances, the children were the only members of their families to survive — but there were other cases where surviving relatives did exist, and sought in vain for the remnants of their devasted families.

At the end of World War II, with Europe in chaos and its Jewish communities all but destroyed, Jewish priorities, of necessity, focused on the immediate physical needs of the survivors. Yet Jewish leaders already knew that thousands of frantastic parents, barely a step ahead of the Gestapo and its collaborators in Poland, France, Belgium, Holland and elsewhere, had placed their children in the care of non-Jewish neighbors, employees, convents, monasteries, Catholic schools and orphanages in the hope that they would survive. Motivations varied among those who volunteered to become the guardians of this lost generation. Some people took in Jewish children out of individual charity and human decency or because they felt compelled to do so out of communal responsibility, while others sought to profit from a desperate situation.

Some 1.5 million Jewish children were murdered during the Shoah and fewer than 100,000 in all survived, many because they were hidden by non-Jews, according to the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). By late 1945 and early 1946, Jewish organizations, largely led and funded by the JDC, estimated that around 10,000 of those survivors were in Catholic institutions or with non-Jewish families, and set out to find as many of them as possible.

Among those who made it their personal mission to find these children was Rabbi Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog, Israel’s first chief rabbi, father of Isaac Herzog, the current chairman of Israel’s late President Chaim Herzog, and grandfather of Isaac Herzog, the current chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel. According to The Rabbinate in Stormy Days: The Life and Teachings of Rabbi Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog, Chief Rabbi of Israel, by Shaul Mofzil, Rabbi Herzog met with Pius XII in early 1946 and demanded that he cooperate in finding the children and returning them to the Jewish community. Although the pope did not issue a public decree from the papacy archives, he cooperated in the transfer of some children from monasteries and Catholic families to the care of Jewish institutions. After the war, the children were reunited with their Jewish parentage until he was an adult. He now lives in Israel and is no longer a priest.

In a telephone interview, Foxman told Tablet that he believes there were many more saved, hidden children than have yet been brought to light. "We are losing hundreds of Jewish children every day," Foxman said, referring to those who after being sheltered during the war never learned of their true origins and will die without knowing their birth families or their connection to Judaism. "It’s hard to impugn Church motives during the war," Foxman added, but "afterwards might be another issue."

Rabbi Michael Schudrich, the New York–born Chief Rabbi of Poland, gets hidden children coming to Warsaw’s Nozak synagogue several times a month these days. Some have discovered they were born Jewish as the result of a deathbed confession of an older relative, while others make the discovery through other means. Schudrich views the Vatican announcement as a hopeful sign, and one that "needs serious academic examination." But there are also "moral questions," he said. "What do we do with the information if we get it? Do we or don’t we have an obligation to tell affairs?"

The opening of the Vatican’s sealed archives will not provide all the answers, or definitely end one of the darkest chapters in Jewish and world history, but it may, as Rabbi Schudrich acknowledged, "allow us to begin asking new questions while there is still time."
HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR BREAKS SILENCE TO SHARE HER HORRIFIC STORY

For more than seven decades, Edith Fox kept her Holocaust story inside. In recent months, her health began to fail, and she decided—at age 90—that she didn’t want her story to die with her. She was concerned people were forgetting about the Holocaust, and she wanted to make sure that some deny it ever took place. She wanted to do her part to make sure people never forget. Here is Fox’s story in her own words.

My name is Edith Fox, maiden name Weingarten. I was born and lived in Czechoslovakia in a town called Teplice (Teplice-Sanov before 1948). My mother, Giselle Weingarten, never talked about her parents, so I don’t know what happened to them, but her big brother raised her and two other sisters. At that time in Europe we didn’t discuss family matters. In my time, all I did was go to school, prepare food, play with my friends and do homework. My mother was married to my father, Mano Fogel, who worked at a lumber yard. She had a fabric store; she always was a businesswoman.

I was the youngest in my family. I had five brothers. They were very protective of me. Two of my brothers were drafted into the Czech army.

I was 13 years old when the war started. In 1941, Nazis came and rounded us up: my parents and my three other brothers. They told us to take our personal belongings. They also told us they would take us to Poland, which at that time was divided, occupied by Germans and Russians. They told us we would get homes and businesses for free.

Instead, when we got to Poland, the Nazis made us run; if you couldn’t run, you’d get killed. They killed my mother right in front of me. She couldn’t run fast enough. I grabbed her. It was too much for a kid to see. I told the Nazis to kill me, too, but they said no, you are going to work. People were dying in front of me. I saw a rabbi who was lying in the corner with his feet cut off, but he was still alive. He was lying out there until he died. It was unbelievable what they did.

Then they separated men and women, and after that I never saw my father or my brothers again.

They took me and my friend, Leah, to the ghetto in Stanislau in Poland, where all the toddlers of Jewish families were housed. When we found out that the Nazis were coming to take us all, we asked the adults caring for the children if we could go into the bunker with them to be safe, but there was no room, so Leah and I went into the cellar where the furnace was and climbed into its chimney to hide.

The Nazis came and threw all the children into trucks like trash. Then they killed everyone in the bunker.

Leah and I stayed there, hiding near the furnace, for two to three days. Then we walked and walked, trying to get to the Czech border with Hungary. We saw a Czech soldier and thought he would help us, but he was controlled by the Nazis and was going to turn us in at the head-quarters near Auschwitz. At the last minute, he let us go, telling us to go with God. We hid in the gutter. Leah wanted to go home, but she was killed when she tried. I was recaptured, and they took me to the Auschwitz concentration camp and I was all alone there. I didn’t know what happened to the rest of my family. I was put in the line where (Josef) Mengele sent people to the right or to the left. To the left, people were killed. To the right, they were sent to work.

One day they came and took us—50 girls. We thought they were going to kill us, but instead they got us to Gleiwitz near Auschwitz and put us to work at an ammunition factory. We had to stand in line for eight hours and were not allowed to talk to anybody. We had to clean a little light with a stick of black soot. They made bullets out of it. I worked there for about three years or so.

While I was in Auschwitz, I saw too many things. Some people couldn’t take it anymore and ran into the electrified fence to kill themselves. They just went up in flames. I saw people coming into Auschwitz from different places who were sent to take a shower and were killed. Then they took them to the crematorium. I met a boy who was watching the crematorium where he had seen his parents die. He was hoping they would come and bomb the place. He told me to come to that spot once a week and he’d throw me a package. Shoes or clothes. Maybe they were from people they killed in the gas chamber, I don’t know.

As the war was ending, Nazis put all of us who were strong enough and could still run fast—the young ones—on a freight train with open boxcars without water, without food. They wanted us to die. Three days I was on that train. People were dying, stepping on everybody, lying on the floors. There were already dead bodies. Three days I was on that train. Finally, I said, “No! I don’t want to be stepped on!” So I jumped off the train. I jumped during the night when the train was moving slowly. I didn’t want people to step on me; I decided if I die I’d rather die outside on the snow; it was January. Many people were shot after they jumped off the train. But there were not so many who had the courage to jump. I kept running and running. I hit a tree and bumped my forehead. I thought I was shot, but then I realized it was only a small injury from running into something. I was in Malá Pevnost: Czech territory. I was hurt and still have a mark.

I didn’t know exactly where I was, but I was in the woods. I was waiting for daytime to figure out where to go. I saw a person in a Czech uniform, I was so happy and I figured that a Czech soldier would never give me trouble. The war was ending. They knew they lost the war, but it was a Nazi in a Czech uniform.

He was taking me to Theresienstadt camp. There were seven girls with me. I don’t know where they came from. They were running away, too, but the Germans caught them. When they were taking us, they put us in a house and were going to rape us. The first girl, a 13-year-old, started screaming and fighting them, so they pushed everyone else out. They killed the girl right in front of me and I pushed them away. They shot her. She saved the rest of us.

I was put in the hospital, and instead of being treated for my injuries, they made me work in the kitchen. The Russians took us to the hospitals. We couldn’t even walk. At the hospital, they tried to help us to get jobs. I said I wanted to go to America. They smuggled us from Czechoslovakia to Germany to get to the place where I could register to go to America. I didn’t want to go home; there was no one there.

First, I came to New York City. They told me they would fix my nose, which I broke when I jumped off the train, if I left New York City. That’s how I moved to Buffalo. Everybody wanted to live in the big city. I said I will go to Buffalo because I wanted to fix my nose. It was all flat. They fixed my nose in Buffalo. I didn’t do anything for three to four weeks, but then they put me to work. I never went back to school. I only finished eighth grade when the war had started.

Two years later I met my husband, Joseph Fox. I worked as a manager of apartments: fixing them up, dealing with the mortgage, loans. We raised three children in Buffalo—two sons and a daughter. Then we moved to Tucson for my husband’s health, but he died in 1997. We have six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

My brothers Sam and Zigmant survived the concentration camp. Sam came to New York, Zigmant moved to Argentina, but I don’t know what happened to the rest of my family. I looked for them after the war but could never find them.

I wanted to tell my story because I’m afraid people are forgetting. We can never forget what happened. We can never let it happen again.

The Buffalo News
Esther F. arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau in August 1944 — a period when the camp’s crematoriums were operating at full capacity. Esther, a physician, was held for five days before being transported to Guben, a labor camp in Germany where she was assigned to care for Jewish factory workers. At Guben, a subcamp of the Gross-Rosen concentration camp in eastern Germany (present-day Poland), a female Nazi officer instructed Esther to produce a list of medical supplies she needed. Mentally and physically exhausted, Esther struggled to compose a list of necessities, including aspirin, iodine, cotton and alcohol. Upon reviewing the list, the officer asked Esther whether she required any additional supplies.

“She came and she says to me, ‘That’s all you ask right now?’” Esther said in a video testimonial recorded when she was 83 years old. Her testimony is part of Yale’s Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, a collection of more than 4,400 interviews recorded with survivors.

Esther's account sheds light on the dynamics between the Nazis’ pursuit of two different yet overlapping initiatives: the exploitation of the Jewish labor force and the extermination of European Jewry, said Sari J. Siegel, the Geffrey H. Hartman Postdoctoral Fellow at the Fortunoff Archive.

The fact that the Nazi officer appeared prepared to provide medical supplies beyond those Esther had requested offers insight into the value that the Nazis accorded to their Jewish slave-labor force, said Siegel, whose dissertation examined the film “to be titled” experiences of Jewish prisoner-physicians in Nazi camps.

Her experience echoes my findings related to Jewish prisoner-physicians within the industrial subcamps of Auschwitz,” said Siegel. “Surviving doctors report that on a variety of occasions, SS medical orderlies or doctors obtained requested medical equipment or medications. The importance of the Jewish doctors to the [Germans’] industrial program is clear from their transfers from Birkenau to the subcamps and from one subcamp to another.”

A JEWISH DOCTOR’S HOLOCAUST EXPERIENCES

A DOCTOR IN THE LODZ GHETTO

Esther was born in 1906 in Lodz, a city in central Poland. Her family kept a kosher household and observed Shabbat. Growing up in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood and attending a Jewish school, Esther experienced little anti-Semitism as a child, she reported.

In 1926, she traveled to France for medical training because Poland’s numerus clausus (“closed number”) system severely restricted the number of Jews who could attend the country’s medical schools. After earning her medical degree, Esther returned to Lodz in 1933 and worked at a children’s hospital before taking a job as a doctor for a workers’ union. She married the principal of a Jewish school shortly before the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. She last saw her husband

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LAST DAYS OF THERESIENSTADT


Each individual who survived the Holocaust and tells their story helps to more fully document this terrible time period, having experienced it from their own unique perspective. No less importantly, each individual who survived the Holocaust and tells their story speaks not only for themselves, but also gives voice to those who were not so lucky.

In Last Days of Theresienstadt, the author, Eva Noack-Mosse, reveals to us what it was like to be in what Hitler referred to as an “interracial” marriage, or, more specifically, a “privileged mixed marriage,” where the husband was German and the wife Jewish. For Eva, born in 1902 to a well-respected, “highly successful and as-similated” German-Jewish family living in Berlin, married Moritz Eduard Noack, a non-Jewish German, in 1934, just before Hitler’s 1935 Nuremberg Laws came into effect banning such marriages. Interestingly, in cases like Eva’s we read that “for various reasons the regime shrank from targeting already married couples.” An especially thought-provoking reason: the fear of “civil unrest.” Still, the Nazi authorities would do everything possible to encourage and make it easy for Germans in such marriages to divorce the Jewish spouse. And, when that didn’t work, they eventually took matters into their own hands. In February 1945, in a last effort to clear the Reich of Jews, Jews in mixed marriages were to be deported to the ghetto in Theresienstadt. Thus, Eva’s story . . . Theresienstadt, a part of what is now Czechoslovakia, was Nazi Germany’s “model” camp. It was here that the International Red Cross was invited to supposedly see how “well” the Nazis were treating Jews in their camps, a devilish sham to prove to this agency how humane such places were! It was also here, in Theresienstadt, that the Nazis planned to produce and even began work on a film to further confirm this atrocious lie to the entire world. (While “fragments” of the film “to be titled, Hitler Gives the Jews a City,” are still around, the film itself was never completed.) Meanwhile, “thirty-five thousand people died” in this camp from starvation and disease, and from there “ninety thousand were sent to death camps in Eastern Europe,” usually Auschwitz. Among those who were sent to Theresienstadt were prominent Jews like Rabbi Leo Baeck. Jewish veterans that had fought for Germany in World War I, and Jews with Aryan partners, like Eva.

Luckily, because Eva was a “proficient” typist, she was immediately assigned to the Central Evidence (Zentralverfuegung) office, “the main administration office” at the camp. This meant that for ten hours a day, she typed an endless number of lists for the SS: “lists of individuals deported to the East, lists of inmates arriving in the camp, lists of food parcels received that would not be distributed to the Theresienstadt population.” And, undoubtedly, because she was also a journalist, she surreptitiously began recording all this in a diary she secretly kept. The result: The Nazis, obsessed as they were with the smallest detail of events, ironically and unwittingly made her witness to their crimes. Needless to say, such evidence goes a long way in defeating those who still insist Nazis never murdered Jews . . . and, sadly, we still seem to need such evidence.

Of interest to scholars and readers of Holocaust materials will also be Eva’s descriptive writing, particularly about many of the women around her, all struggling to survive in Theresienstadt’s overcrowded and brutal environment. Not only was she impressed by their resilience, a resilience the reader quickly realizes she most assuredly shared with them, but Eva also took note of their altruistic concern for one another, alongside their battle to care for themselves as best they could under impossible circumstances. Indeed, here we learn that looking good had nothing to do with impressing another. It was all about the hope it gave the self, the hope that the nightmare they were living would soon pass.

Finally, through Eva we learn what liberation was like for the survivors — bittersweet at best. So very many were gone that everyone was jubilant when anyone was reunited with a loved one. In fact, Eva notes time and again how very happy she was when, drawing up survivor lists at Theresienstadt after the war, she could tell someone that a relative was still alive. It meant more than the world to the one fearfully inquiring.

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN
THE HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR
WHO CAPTURED AMON GOTH

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Of the original 160 men, 20 walked out. Josef’s first job in Auschwitz was to carry those dead Jews to the crematoria.

Josef pauses and thinks back to those hellish times:

“I endured bitter cold and never-ending hunger. But no matter how grim the situation, I found the courage and faith to survive. Even dur-

ing the worst times, God filled my entire inner world. I believe the worst times, God filled my entire inner world. I believe that kept me going.”

Left: Josef on the day he caught Amon Goth. Right: Goth on trial for war crimes.

body to reclaim these children. Josef knew, “If I don’t do something, these Jewish children will be lost to the Jewish people forever.”

With no idea how to achieve this gargantuan task, Josef discovered a distant cousin named Daniel who was a Communist leader in postwar Poland. “I told him that I had an idea to unite families that the Nazis separated. I put it in secular terms, because ‘Jewish’ was a hated term in Poland.”

Daniel introduced Josef to a Polish general who agreed to help the rescue activities — supplying a team of 40 people, including 20 soldiers, rifles, trucks, a tank(!) — and total authority to fend off anyone who might resist.

Locating these orphaned Jewish children was like looking for a needle in a haystack. Through a network of informants, Josef would follow leads to a particular address.

“We’d knock on the door, show our badge, and say, ‘We’d like to ask a few questions. Is this your daughter? Show us her birth certificate.’ Many times they claimed the child was adopted, so we’d insist: ‘Show us the adoption papers!’”

Josef had a keen sense for spotting Jewish children and — working with psychologists and security personnel — succeeded in rescuing 600 orphans.

Josef became involved with the Zionist movement and was headed toward a career as a diplomat. One day, he saw a Red Cross announcement that someone in Buenos Aires was looking for information about the Levkovich family. It was Josef’s great-uncle. “I was a lone survivor. I was eager for family. So I answered the call and they sent me a ticket to come by boat to Argentina.”

Josef became a diamond dealer and met his wife Perla in Colombia, South America. When their oldest son reached school age, they moved to the larger Jewish community of Montreal, Canada. Josef continued working in the diamond business, even operating a diamond factory in Communist Cuba.

He bemoans one deal that got away. Mrs. Pablo Picasso wanted to swap some of her husband’s paintings for diamonds. The paintings were appraised at a few thousand dollars each, but Josef thought they looked odd and passed on the deal. He says: “Today those paintings are worth about $30 million — each!”

In the 1980s Josef became involved in a development company that built projects all over Israel. They built Arzei Habira, a residential neighborhood in Jerusalem, where Josef secured the apartment he lives in today. One apartment project in Rechovot was given the street name Levkovich.

For many years, Josef refused to speak about his Holocaust experiences. His children and grandchildren pushed him to write a book, so his story would be remembered. The result is From the Ashes to Lechaim: A Miraculous Journey, published this year as a small print run for family and friends.

“I realized that if I don’t tell my story, nobody will. I lost my entire connection to the past, and now I must alert generations to come,” he says.

In 2011, Josef traveled back to Poland with his youngest son, visiting Krakow, Auschwitz, Belzec, where his mother and brothers were murdered, Dzialoszyce, the village where he grew up, and Plaszow, where he survived the dark shadow of Amon Goth.

“Never forget how much is written about the Holocaust,” he says, “it is impossible to describe the terror and starvation. For five years, from morning till night I did back-breaking labor in quarries, railroads, and salt mines. I eagerly did everything I was asked. I was occupied with just surviving the moment, with no time to think. Otherwise, I’d go crazy.”

Those memories still haunt him today. “I often wake up during the night, soaked with sweat,” Josef says. “Last week I dreamed of fighting with a Nazi who wanted to shoot me. I grabbed his rifle and turned it around on him.”

Josef Levkovich rescued 600 orphans, captured Amon Goth and built a beautiful life. After the nightmare, this is revenge.

BY RABBI SHRAGA SIMMONS, Aish.com

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PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ANNUAL TRIBUTE DI

Dinner honorees Paula and Jack Gora receiving the ASYV Remembrance Award.

Dinner honorees receiving their awards (left to right): David Sterling, Mona Gora Sterling, Sam Friedman, Paz Friedman, Samantha Friedman, Jonathan Friedman.

Holocaust survivors Joseph Garay, Paula Gora and Olga Garay.

Dinner honorees Paula and Jack Gora receiving the ASYV Remembrance Award.

Lili Stawski (board member), Rebbetzin Chaya-Ita Lau and Rivi Lau.

YLA board members Mike Distenfeld, Erica Distenfeld, Barry Levine, ASYV board member; and Jackie Levine.

Honorees Sam Friedman and Jonathan Friedman.
INNER OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM

Holocaust survivors Sam Hersky, Marvin Zborowski (board member) and Joseph Garay.

Honoree Jack Gora with his grandson Abe Friedman.

Beth Wilf, Leonard Wilf (ASYV chairman), Halle Wilf (YLA board member) and Alex Oshinsky.

Mission participants Mark Moskowitz, Adina Burian (Mission chair) and Barry Levine.

Jessica Glickman Mauk and Mark Moskowitz (Dinner chair).

Stanley Stone (executive director, ASVY), Shaya Ben-Yehuda (managing director of international relations, Yad Vashem), Dorit Novak (director general, Yad Vashem), Leonard Wilf (chairman, ASVY) and Jeremy Weiss (director, U.S. Desk, Yad Vashem).
when he left to serve as an officer in the Polish army. He was soon captured, sent to the Wlodawa ghetto, and later killed at the Sobibor extermination camp, Siegel said.

Esther survived four and a half years of cold, hunger and fear in the Lodz ghetto, also called the Litzmannstadt ghetto. She worked in a hospital and for the ghetto’s emergency medical service, caring for the injured and sick. The references in Esther’s testimony about official measures intended to preserve the lives of ghetto doctors — specifically, orders to perimeter guards not to shoot people wearing a medical uniform — and efforts to transfer additional doctors from the Warsaw ghetto. This suggests “that doctors had value to German officials as possible preservers of their labor force,” Siegel noted.

“These are small clues that draw attention to a larger fact,” the researcher said. “By pointing this out, I’m in no way negating the horrific circumstances under which Jews lived in the Lodz ghetto … but there was something there that [German officials] wanted to do, and I see that as preserving doctors’ lives, and, in some cases, allowing medication to enter the ghetto and providing minimal supplies to keep workers alive.”

Supporting the labor force was not the ghetto doctors’ only function, Siegel said. “Jewish doctors also served to minimize the risk of transmission of epidemics from the ghetto inhabitants to the populations beyond the ghetto’s boundaries,” she explained.

Extrapolating from the findings of her dissertation, which concerned the recruitment of Jewish doctors for work in forced labor camps in the same region during the same period, Siegel concluded that German officials’ desire for ghetto doctors to help maintain the Jewish labor force — to whatever limited extent they could — outweighed their desire for the doctors to help protect public health outside the ghetto.

The Germans shut down the ghetto in August 1944, a decision that was “a key flashpoint between the German officials most intent on extermination and those more invested in harnessing Jewish labor power for financial gain and/or for the benefit of the German war effort,” Siegel said.

Austrian-born Esther’s mother immediately was sent to the gas chamber. Esther was taken to a recently established transit camp within Auschwitz-Birkenau and subsequently transported to Guben.

Her transfer to Guben to care for Jewish women who worked in a factory that produced radio equipment for German aircraft demonstrated a clear interest on the part of the Nazis in preserving their source of slave labor, said Siegel.

The camp’s location within the Reich proper draws further attention to the importance of the Jewish labor force as the Jews were brought back into territory that was previously declared to be — and was meant to stay — Judenrein, cleansed of Jews,” Siegel said.

Running through Esther’s testimony are painful reminders that some Jewish functionaries held privileged positions and performed tasks that, one way or another, helped the Nazis achieve their goals. The anguish and complexity of that history is given voice through Esther, who, for example, refuses to pass judgment on Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, the Polish-Jewish businessman whom the Nazis appointed Judenälteste, the “Elder of the Jews,” and thereby made responsible for implementing German policies and maintaining order in the ghetto.

“History can judge this,” Esther said. “I will not say what was right and what was wrong. There were a lot of abuses and a lot of things that shouldn’t have happened, but as you say, it is self-preservation. I am not going into psychology right now. … I don’t want to be the judge of all this.”

At the same time, Esther states that her fellow ghetto doctors neither abused their patients nor collaborated with the Germans.

“Perhaps she was not aware or no longer recalls, but there were ghetto doctors who, under coercion, assisted Nazis in mass murder,” Siegel said.

Nazi officials required Jewish doctors to perform medical examinations on people on deportation lists to determine whether they would be sent to either a forced labor camp or Chelmo, an extermination camp located about 30 miles northwest of Lodz, she explained. She pointed to the former Lodz ghetto doctor Arnold Mostowicz, whose memoir addresses this dilemma. Further emphasizing the power imbalance, Siegel said that Mostowicz ’and the other doctors who were coerced into carrying out this process, had to decide who would be exempt from the transports, and in doing so, they had to determine who would live and who would die.”

In her testimony, Esther discusses an act of resistance she took to protect her patients from the Nazis. She kept two sets of records: one that recorded patients’ actual condition, which she kept hidden, and another that concealed the degree of their illness, which would provide to a German doctor who oversaw her work.

“The majority had TB [tuberculosis] and I didn’t know if he should know it,” Esther said.

The deception potentially saved people’s lives because German health officials may have dispatched tuberculosis patients to their deaths, Siegel noted.

Her liberation, Esther was moved to a displaced persons’ camp in Warsaw, which served as a depot for Jewish refugees. She explained that many survivors were “They should remember.”

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Artifacts from the Holocaust — which arguably began on Kristallnacht 81 years ago — provide us with an intimate link to the Jews who lived through those horrific years. By the items they left behind, we draw closer to them, and we shudder as we realize we could have been they, had we been born a few generations ago.

The artifacts below represent slivers of normalcy and sparks of hope amid terrible darkness. In many cases, they were the only remnants of regular life for their owners. Jews in concentration camps sometimes created them and held onto them as a survival mechanism — to cope and mentally escape.

THE FATEFUL DAY

In 1944, Benjamin Anolik and his brother Nissan were taken to the Klooga labor camp in German-occupied Estonia. They were young adults who should have had futures of endless possibilities to look forward to, but instead they witnessed horror, unimaginable cruelty and senseless tragedy.

The Red Army was approaching, and the Nazis wanted to murder all of the Jewish prisoners. The day after he arrived at Klooga, Benjamin saw 2,500 prisoners “sitting cross-legged on the ground with their hands on their heads.”

His uncle, Dr. Włodzimierz Poczter, was among this group of Jews who had been taken to the forest to be killed. “Uncle Poczter stepped out of line and approached my brother with his pocket watch and told him: ‘Take the watch, I won’t be needing it anymore.’”

Benjamin and Nissan found an abandoned building to hide in. They heard gunfire blasting as the Red Army came to finally liberate the Jewish prisoners.

Dr. Włodzimierz Poczter died with a picture of himself and his family lovingly tucked in his pocket.

CHESS AS A TOOL FOR PEACE

Elhanan Ejbuszyc, a professional carver, was confined to a block in Auschwitz-Birkenau run by a sadistic Nazi who beat Jewish prisoners and later spent the rest of his life in prison for allegedly murdering his own family.

This evil prison leader liked to boast about his impressive chess skills, which gave Elhanan the bold idea of asking him if he could carve chess pieces out of his club. Shockingly, the prison leader gave him his club and even handed Elhanan a pocketknife along with it.

There was one caveat, though: if Elhanan failed to finish the project within four days, he would be killed. Elhanan’s life was quite literally in his own hands. Before his time was up, Elhanan was transferred to the Goerlitz labor camp. On his way there, he tucked the knife, chess pieces and remnants of the club safely in his pocket.

Jews in concentration camps, playing chess was much more than a pastime; it was a temporary escape from foreboding circumstances and a rare, treasured opportunity to bond with other prisoners. Elhanan poignantly illustrates the crucial role chess played for him during this period:

“[W]hat I achieved — turning a tool of punishment into a tool of peace after breaking it into pieces and carving chess pieces from it — was to give my fellow Jews a rare chance to forget their pitiful circumstances for a while. That brief moment of solace that I managed to bring to my fellow sufferers filled me with such joy — this was my reward…” (‘Bearing Witness — Stories Behind the Artifacts in the Yad Vashem Museum Collection’)

Elhanan Ejbuszyc was liberated by the Russian army. His chess pieces are featured in a Yad Vashem exhibit titled “Chess Sets, a Brief Respite from a Harsh Reality.”

DREAM RECIPES

In 1938, at age 24, Yehudit (Aufrichtig) Taube left her birthplace of Hungary to emigrate to Amsterdam, where she studied to become a beautician while working as a nanny for a Jewish family. Two years later, the German army occupied Amsterdam, and the wife of a Hungarian ambassador provided Yehudit with a fake passport to conceal her Jewish identity.

Yehudit joined the resistance and surreptitiously helped Jewish families in hiding by giving them food and ration cards. In 1944, Yehudit’s life suddenly changed when a Dutch woman exposed her activities. She was deported to Westerbork, a concentration camp in the Netherlands, and then to Ravensbrück in Germany.

Yehudit and her friends were forced to work at a factory nearby, where they would dream up recipes of delicious gourmet dishes they wished they could eat. Talking about cooking and preparing these meals united them. It also served as an escape that gave them hope and something to look forward to amid their bleak and desolate reality. They tried their best to record as many recipes as they could. Yehudit fondly remembers:

“We had low-quality white paper. We took out a large sheet and folded it into small pieces. I brought a thread and a needle and sewed it so that it would not come apart, and we wrote in it. … The objective was to satiate our need for food. If you are hungry you don’t care about anything but food.”

Yehudit’s recipe book is featured in the Yad Vashem Artifacts Collection.

A REMINDER OF INNOCENCE

An unimaginable 1.5 million children had their lives cut short in the Holocaust. For children who were rounded up, separated from their families and forced to go to concentration camps, holding onto a doll or playing with a toy may have been one of the only fleeting moments of normalcy they had.

Before World War II broke out, Zofia Chorowicz-Burowska’s parents gave her a cherubic-looking, brown-haired doll wearing a peach-colored dress. She kept it with her when she lived in the Wolbrum and Krakow ghettos in Poland, then gave it to a non-Jewish friend for safekeeping before she was deported to two forced labor camps in Poland.

She was liberated from the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany, and after the war ended, she went back to Krakow and found her doll.

BY EVE GLOVER, Jewish Press
The Nazis were waiting until they won the war to deport the rest of the German Jews, namely the ones who were married to Aryan women. Then they jumped the gun, and ended up facing the only major act of public protest by Germans throughout the entire war.

Before dawn on February 27, 1943, the Gestapo pulled Jews from their homes and jobs, captured them off the streets, and stuffed them into trucks headed for various detention centers throughout Berlin. Most of these people were Jewish men who were married to “Aryan” women, or the male children of these so-called intermarriages (called mischlinge, or mixed blood). Some 2,000 of these people were transported and held at a local Jewish community center on Rosenstrasse (Rose Street). There, police planned to check their papers and determine whether the prisoners would be deported — for labor camps or extermination camps, no one really knew.

Family members, wives, mothers and children panicked. Initially, they had no idea where their men were being detained, and didn’t even know if they would ever return.

Adding to the anxiety was operation Fabrik-Aktion (Factory Action), a German move in early March that rounded up 11,000 Jews and shipped them to Auschwitz. The Gestapo never intended to send mischlinge Jews to Auschwitz, but rather to keep “exempted” Jews inside the Reich borders, at forced labor camps. But that didn’t matter.

In short order, word spread among the “mixed” families that their relatives were being held at the Rosenstrasse center. Inside, the men had very little food and inadequate sanitary facilities. Slowly, a crowd amassed, mostly of wives and mothers hoping to learn more about who was inside. Frustrated by the lack of information, they stayed day after day in the freezing temperatures. They chanted, “Give us our husbands back.”

February crept into March. The crowds grew to 150 and then 200 people — some reports say into the thousands. Word spread about the group, first across the city, then to the international press. It was an unprecedented demonstration by German citizens against Jewish incarceration. The protesters occasionally yelled but sometimes stayed silent, watching. When officers and trucks with machine guns threatened lethal force, the women stayed and faced them.

“Without warning, the guards began setting up machine guns,” said Charlotte Israel, one of the protesters, in 1990. “Then they directed them at the crowd and shouted: ‘If you don’t go now, we’ll shoot.’ The movement surged backward. But then, for the first time, we really hollered. Now we couldn’t care less. . . . Now they’re going to shoot in any case, so now we’ll yell too, we thought. We yelled, ‘Murderer, murderer, murderer’ . . . .”

The Nazi Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels knew a massacre of hundreds of German women in the middle of Berlin wouldn’t look good. And it would further depress military morale after recent defeats on the battlefield — half a million soldiers had died in the Battle of Stalingrad by the time the Nazis surrendered on February 3. Goebbels ordered the release of the intermarried Jews at Rosenstrasse. In his journal, he promised to finish the job “in a few weeks.”

Officials released the first “mixed-marriage” Jewish man on March 1. The processing would continue until March 12, by which time the protesters had dispersed. Of the 2,000 detained men, 25 were sent to Auschwitz. The rest were considered “exempt.” However, the day after their release from Rosenstrasse, Gestapo officials returned and deported them to nearby labor camps. The plan was to ship them on to extermination camps once the Germans had won the war.

The same paranoia and uncertainty that Nazi Germany cultivated as a weapon against its own people was what ultimately caused citizens to rise up. Partners of “mixed” marriages had been persecuted since the rise of the Third Reich in 1933. Jews whose German spouses divorced them were sent to death camps; those who refused divorce were spared but faced complete social ostracism. By the end of the war, 98% of surviving German Jews were those in intermarriages. But between 160,000 and 180,000 German Jews were killed; in total, up to 6 million Jews died in the Holocaust.

At Rosenstrasse, the wives and mothers could only guess what horrible fates awaited their husbands and sons, and they would not take it. Without their actions, it’s unclear how many more men would have been shipped directly to Auschwitz.

The success of the Rosenstrasse protest — albeit mixed — raises uncomfortable questions about what other public steps German citizens could have taken to protest genocide under Nazism, writes Nathan Stoltzfus in Resistance of the Heart: Intermarriage and Rosenstrasse Protest in Nazi Germany, with the knowledge that resistance might not necessarily lead to martyrdom. To be sure, all acts of resistance came at great personal risk, not the least of which was deportation. Roughly 77,000 German citizens were killed for sabotage. Other subversive German efforts to cripple the Reich included hiding or smuggling out Jews, distributing anti-Nazi literature, attempted coups, or using established government, military or church channels to spy and hatch conspiracies. As such, much of the effort against Hitler happened from within, argued German historian Hans Mommsen in 1985. It was a “resistance without the people.”

Well, most of it. The Rosenstrasse community center no longer exists, but a sculpture memorial called Block der Frauen (Block of Women) was erected in a nearby park in 1995. The inscription reads, “The strength of civil disobedience, the vigor of love overcomes the violence of dictator-ship; Give us our men back; Women were standing here, defeating death; Jewish men were free.”

BY STEPHANIE BUCK, Timeline
The source said the deportations were part of a systematic, organized campaign. The Americans, however, were not the only ones whom Riegner had contacted. He also asked the British consulate in Geneva to send his telegram to Sidney Silverman, a Jewish member of the British parliament.

Frank Roberts of the British Foreign Office warned his colleagues that the telegram might "provoke embarrassing repercussions." Other officials agreed that drawing the public’s attention to the Allies’ inaction regarding European Jewry might be "embarrassing," but they feared withholding information from a member of parliament could be more trouble than it was worth. The Foreign Office chose to send Riegner’s cable on to Silverman. He, in turn, forwarded it to Rabbi Wise, on August 28, seventy-seven years ago.

Shortly after receiving the shocking message, Wise telephoned Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles. Welles, feigning surprise and need letting on that the State Department had tried to stop Wise from receiving the news, poured cold water on Riegner’s telegram. He told Rabbi Wise the Jews were being deported for “war work.” Welles and his colleagues had already received reports about Nazi mass killings of unprecedented proportions. On July 21, the U.S. consulate in Stockholm, Sweden, had sent the State Department a report from Polish officials listing the number of Jews “executed by the Germans” during the previous year: 60,000 in Vilna, 40,000 in Latvia and Estonia, 84,000 in White Ruthenia, 100,000 in Kiev. Still, that was not the same as the kind of systematic, carefully organized annihilation that Riegner was describing.

Welles asked Rabbi Wise to keep the Riegner information out of the press while the State Department investigated its veracity. Rabbi Wise believed he had no choice but to comply with the request, since he had no way of authenticating the information on his own, and he would need the cooperation of the State Department if the worst turned out to be true.

Welles and his colleagues did indeed begin investigating, but the pace of their efforts suggested they did not take the matter very seriously. It was not until three weeks later, on September 23, that the State Department asked the Vatican if it had any information about the mass killings. A curt reply from Rome mentioned only unverified reports about unspecified “severe measures against non-Aryans.”

It was not until early October — more than a month after his conversation with Rabbi Wise — that Welles asked the U.S. consul in Bern, Leland Harrison, to contact Riegner for more information. Harrison then took two weeks to reply.

In the meantime, Riegner had obtained letters from a Jewish refugee in German-occupied Warsaw who eluded the Nazi censors by using Hebrew phrases as codewords. The letters reported that “Mr. Jager [hunter; i.e., the Germans] told me that he will invite all relatives of the family Acheinu [our brothers; i.e., the Jews]; that Uncle Gerusch [deportation] works in Warsaw: he is a very capable worker” and that “his friend Miso [death] works together with him.” Riegner gave the letters to the U.S. consulate in Geneva on September 28. Yet they did not reach the State Department until October 23.

Finally, on November 24, nearly three months after their first conversation about the Riegner telegram, Welles called Rabbi Wise “to confirm your deepest fears.” At the same time, Welles made it clear that Wise should not attribute the confirmation of the news to the State Department. Officials feared that if the U.S. government verified the news, “the way will then be open for further pressure from interested groups for action” by the Allies to aid the Jews. R. Borden Reams, head of Jewish affairs in State’s European division, confided to colleagues. “The threat of the unhappy peoples of Europe including the Jews can be alleviated only by winning the war.”

Wise immediately organized a press conference in Washington. He told the assembled reporters that Hitler had “ordered the annihilation of all Jews in Europe by the end of the year,” and that “this news is substantiated in documents furnished to me by the State Department after my telegrams.”

The New York Times, which did not send a reporter to the press conference, published five paragraphs about it from the Associated Press on page 10, tucked onto the end of another story. The following day, the Times published additional details in six paragraphs at the end of a related story, which it relegated to page 16. The Atlanta Constitution buried Wise’s press conference on page 20, next to the train schedule. The major radio networks ignored it altogether.

In the months and years to follow, many excuses were offered by the Allies as to why Europe’s Jews could not be rescued. But nobody could plead ignorance any longer. The news was not given the prominence it deserved — but the wall of secrecy had been shattered.

BY RAFAEL MEDOFF, HNN
Sophie Tucker was best known for her sexy songs — crowd-pleasers that showed off her curves, her sass and her frank love of men and money. But when the singer took to the stage in 1925, something else was on her mind: her mother.

That night, Tucker debuted a new song. Instead of singing about dating or success, it was about a successful person mourning her departed Jewish mother — an angelic “Yiddishe momme” who had suffered in life, but was now dead. Performed in both English and Yiddish, the song was a hit. When Tucker finished, there wasn’t a dry eye in the house. And though she felt a deep personal connection to the song, she had no idea she had just performed an anthem.

The 1928 record for Columbia sold over a million copies. “My Yiddishe Momme” took the world by storm during the 1920s and 1930s, giving voice to many immigrants’ complicated loss of a mother. But the song was more than a tearjerker, or an American phenomenon. “My Yiddishe Momme” would go on to play an unexpected role in Nazi Germany and even the Holocaust.

The song hit a nerve with Jewish and non-Jewish audiences alike, writes biographer Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff. “The singer was steadfast in her explanation that the song was meant for her dear little lady so old and gray. And ask her to forgive me for things I did that partied Jewish mother — an angelic “Yiddishe momme” who had suffered in life, but was now dead. Performed in both English and Yiddish, the song was a hit. When Tucker finished, there wasn’t a dry eye in the house. And though she felt a deep personal connection to the song, she had no idea she had just performed an anthem.

The 1928 record for Columbia sold over a million copies. “My Yiddishe Momme” took the world by storm during the 1920s and 1930s, giving voice to many immigrants’ complicated feelings about assimilation and the sorrow of losing a mother. But the song was more than a tearjerker, or an American phenomenon. “My Yiddishe Momme” would go on to play an unexpected role in Nazi Germany and even the Holocaust.

The song hit a nerve with Jewish and non-Jewish audiences alike, writes biographer Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff. “The singer was steadfast in her explanation that the song was meant for all listeners,” she notes. But it expressed a bitersweet emotion that would have rang true to audiences of immigrant and second-generation Jews who were far from home and whose mothers had sacrificed to make their lives better. My Yiddishe momme I’d like to kiss that wrinkled brow I long to hold her hands once more as in days gone by And ask her to forgive me for things I did that made her cry

The song was written by lyricist Jack Yellen and composer Lew Pollack. Yellen is best known for writing upbeat hits like “ Ain’t She Sweet” and “Happy Days Are Here Again.” He had something in common with Sophie Tucker: Both were Jews who had emigrated to the United States as children in the late 19th century, and both were drawn to New York’s burgeoning Yiddish theater scene.

At the time, Jewish immigrants were flooding to the United States, driven from their homes by pogroms, institutional discrimination and anti-Semitism that made life in Eastern Europe intolerable. Between 1881 and 1924, about 2.5 million Jewish people came to the United States from Eastern Europe in search of opportunity and religious freedom. They brought the Yiddish language with them, and soon Yiddish papers, books and theatrical productions boomed in New York.

The city was “the undisputed world capital of the Yiddish stage,” writes Yiddish scholar Edna Nahshon, and it attracted star talent like Tucker. She had begun her career wearing blackface and performing in minstrel shows, but eventually made her name by defying her producers, revealing her Jewish identity and refusing to perform her act in blackface. By the time she met Yellen, Tucker was a bona fide star, renowned for an act that included references to her plus-sized figure and a comic, partially spoken singing style.

“My Yiddishe Momme” was a departure — a sorrowful song that acknowledged Tucker’s Jewish roots. When she debuted the song, her own mother was ailing. Her mother died soon after it became a bestseller. In 1930, the song inspired a film, Mayne Yiddish Mame, the first Yiddish musical on film and one of the first times Yiddish was used in a talking picture.

In 1931 Tucker took her show to Europe. But not everyone loved the song. During a performance in France, she sang the song to a mixed group of Jewish and gentile theatergoers. During her performance, anti-Semitic tensions in the crowd boiled over as gentiles booed and Jews shouted at them. The shouting match “threatened to turn into a riot,” writes biographer Arnold Fields, and Tucker quickly switched songs.

It was a taste of things to come. When Hitler came to power in 1933, “My Yiddishe Momme” was one of the songs banned and destroyed by the Nazis. “I was hopping mad,” wrote Tucker blithely. “I sat right down and wrote a letter to Herr Hitler which was a masterpiece. To date, I have never had an answer.”

Later, the song she popularized was sung in concentration camps by Jewish victims of the Holocaust. After the war, reports the BBC World Service, Tucker received a letter from Robert Knowles, an Army soldier who had heard a Jewish comrade talk about his longing to hear Tucker’s song played on the streets of Berlin. “We did reach Berlin, four days after the war was over,” he told Tucker. By then his friend, Al, was dead. So Knowles and his fellow soldiers devised a tribute: They rigged up a record player on a truck and drove around the city playing “My Yiddishe Momme” at full volume.

“Might I say that you gave a wonderful performance,” Knowles wrote. “You sang…for over three hours, and didn’t even get hoarse. I was proud of you that day, and I think that Al was too, for I am sure that he knew about it….The record was old and believe me very scratched, but you were in voice my friend, you were in voice.”

Today, “My Yiddishe Momme” is seen by scholars as an expression of the guilt and nostalgia of Jews like Tucker and Yellen who felt the pressures of assimilation and accomplishment that came with the Jewish immigrant experience. For Jewish immigrants to the United States and Holocaust survivors alike, the song spoke to the importance of family and the resilience and sacrifice of Jewish women: How few were their pleasures, she never cared for fashion’s styles Her jewels and treasures she found them in her family’s smiles Oh I know that I owe what I am today To that dear little lady so old and gray To that wonderful Yiddishe momme of mine

The song’s popularity survived into Tucker’s old age, but Yiddish vaudeville and theater didn’t. Over the years, the use of Yiddish declined among American Jews, and Yiddish theater slowly gave way to Broadway. But Tucker remained proudly, openly Jewish and devoted time, energy and money to raising funds to help other Jewish performers and to help Jews displaced by the Holocaust.

She would perform the mournful “mama” song for the rest of her life. It was later recorded by Willie Holiday, Tom Jones and Ray Charles. Even today, the nostalgic lyrics of “My Yiddishe Momme” evoke sorrow and love in listeners — but its most enduring legacy may be the one it left to people who drew on the song for hope and comfort during the darkest hours of the Holocaust.

BY ERIN BLAKEMORE, History.com
A few weeks ago, I saw for the first time my grandfather’s Häftlings-Personal-Karte, his prisoner cards, the small dossier documenting his existence as a slave of the Third Reich. The details there are sparse but meticulously: his dates of arrival at three “official” concentration camps (but not the more temporary labor camps where he was held earlier in the war), his date and place of birth, a few physical attributes and, most importantly, his occupations of “electrician” and “plumber.”

Those are the only falsehoods in his file. At sixteen when the war broke out, my grandfather had yet to learn a profession, but somehow, through ingenuity and good fortune, in those first undocumented camps, he had managed to apprentice himself to a plumber and then an electrician, learning enough to pass himself off as one by the time he was transported to his first big camp, Gusen, and registered in the system. It was those two words, electrician and plumber, which saved him in the last two camps he was sent to — Mauthausen and Gusen, the only ones officially designated as Category III — extermination through labor. Most of the Jewish inmates were put on the teams digging a giant underground hangar, and if they did not die in cave-ins, they were executed once their work was completed. But as a skilled worker, he was put on the assembly lines, building Hitler’s “wonder weapons” — the Messerschmitt Me 262 jet-powered fighter — where the death rates were a bit slower.

There are two more words on his prisoner card, the grounds for his incarceration — “Jew” and “Pole.” No other explanation was necessary. He was a member of a race that was to cease to exist and formerly a citizen of a country that had already ceased to exist, in 1939 when Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union had collaborated to wipe Poland off the map. But what did it matter to the camp system that he had once been a Pole? Surely being a Jew was enough? “The destruction of European states in the 1930s was a precondition to all of the major Nazi crimes, including the Holocaust itself,” writes Timothy Snyder in Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning. Snyder argues that rather than the extermination of Europe’s Jews being the result of the Third Reich as an all-powerful state, it was chiefly the destruction of states that made their Jewish citizens most vulnerable for wholesale murder. Therefore, Snyder notes that “the enormous majority of the victims of the Holocaust were not German citizens; Jews who were German citizens were much more likely to survive than Jews who were citizens of states that the Germans destroyed. The Nazis knew that they had to go abroad and lay waste to neighboring societies before they could hope to bring their revolution to their own.”

So yes. Being Jewish was reason enough for being murdered, but being Jewish from Poland, a country twice destroyed by Germany and Russia, made you a Jew with no form of state protection. Snyder’s theory is that the fate of the Jews was determined, not by the level of anti-Semitism in the countries of their birth, but by the existence of a national government and state institutions. Which is why, even when shorn of all their civil rights, German Jews still had a better chance of survival than Jews from states that had been officially erased, like Poland and the Baltic states, because they were, ironically perhaps, still German subjects. It explains also why most French and Italian Jews survived — as their national governments continued to exist. Three-quarters of the Jews of Holland and Greece, whose governments fell upon occupation and ceased to have any sovereign control, were shipped to the death camps for extermination.

BY ANSHEL PFEFFER, Haaretz

### END-OF-YEAR TAX PLANNING FOR DONORS

**IRA ROLLOVER**

If you are now over the age of 70½, you can make a qualified charitable distribution (QCD) of up to $100,000 annually from your individual IRA (traditional or Roth) to the American Society for Yad Vashem before the end of the calendar year. This type of gift is also commonly called the IRA charitable rollover. Many charities are recommending this option for donors over the age of 70½, especially toward the end of the calendar year.

**DETAILS**

A donor older than 70½ can individually distribute up to $100,000 each year from his or her IRA (through its administrator) to the American Society for Yad Vashem without having to recognize the distribution as income to the donor. This distribution can be used to satisfy the IRA RMD (Required Minimum Distribution) for the calendar year.

For donors over 70½, who have had a taxable account, this giving opportunity was made permanent as a part of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, a few of which are listed here: most insurance casualty and theft losses; tax preparation charges; moving expenses; and employee expenses not reimbursed by the employer. Many more individuals and families utilized the standard deduction in 2018 than in past years.

In addition, the standard deduction for individuals will be $12,200 in 2019, for heads of household it will be $18,350 in 2019, and for married couples filing jointly and widows it will be $24,400 in 2019. Some additional consequential income tax deductions were eliminated by Congress as a part of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, a few of which are listed here: most insurance casualty and theft losses; tax preparation charges; moving expenses; and employee expenses not reimbursed by the employer. Many more individuals and families utilized the standard deduction in 2018 than in past years.

Remember, it is always wise to check with your accountant or tax advisor as part of your review process.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by telephone at 212-220-4304 extension 213, or by e-mail at cmorton@yad-vashemusa.org.

**BY ROBERT CHRISTOPHER MORTON**

Director of Planned Giving American Society for Yad Vashem
The 2020 Census counts every person living in the 50 states, District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories. The count is mandated by the Constitution and conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, a nonpartisan government agency. The 2020 Census counts the population in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories (Puerto Rico, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands). Each home will receive an invitation to respond to a short questionnaire—online, by phone, or by mail. This will mark the first time that you will be able to respond to the census online.

The census provides critical data that lawmakers, business owners, teachers, and many others use to provide daily services, products, and support for you and your community. Every year, billions of dollars in federal funding go to hospitals, fire departments, schools, roads, and other resources based on census data.

The results of the census also determine the number of seats each state will have in the U.S. House of Representatives, and they are used to draw congressional and state legislative districts. It’s also in the Constitution: Article 1, Section 2, mandates that the country conduct a count of its population once every 10 years. The 2020 Census will mark the 24th time that the country has counted its population since 1790.

Participating in the census is required by law, even if you recently completed another survey from the Census Bureau. A complete and accurate count is critical for you and your community, because the results of the 2020 Census will affect community funding, congressional representation, and more.

IMPORTANT DATES

By April 1, 2020, every home will receive an invitation to participate in the 2020 Census. Once the invitation arrives, you should respond for your home in one of three ways: online, by phone, or by mail.

Counting every person living in the United States is a massive undertaking, and efforts begin years in advance. Here’s a look at some of the key dates along the way:

January–September 2019: The U.S. Census Bureau opens 248 area census offices across the country. These offices support and manage the census takers who work all over the country to conduct the census.

August 2019: Census takers begin visiting areas that have experienced a lot of change and growth to ensure that the Census Bureau’s address list is up to date. This is called address canvassing, and it helps to ensure that everyone receives an invitation to participate in the 2020 Census.

January 2020: The Census Bureau begins counting the population in remote Alaska.

April 1, 2020: Census Day is observed nationwide. By this date, every home will receive an invitation to participate in the 2020 Census. Once the invitation arrives, you should respond for your home in one of three ways: online, by phone, or by mail. When you respond to the census, you tell the Census Bureau where you live as of April 1, 2020.

April 2020: Census takers begin visiting college students who live on campus, people living in senior centers, and others who live among large groups of people. Census takers also begin conducting quality check interviews to help ensure an accurate count.

May 2020: The Census Bureau begins visiting homes that haven’t responded to the 2020 Census to make sure everyone is counted.

December 2020: The Census Bureau delivers apportionment counts to the President and Congress as required by law.

March 31, 2021: By this date, the Census Bureau will send redistricting counts to states. This information is used to redraw legislative districts based on population changes.

CENSUS DAY 2020

April 1 is Census Day, a key reference date for the 2020 Census. When completing the census, you will include everyone living in your home on April 1. Census Day will be celebrated with events across the country.