

# Stories of Survival

OBJECT · IMAGE · MEMORY

A new travelling exhibition from the  
Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center



**When you've lost everything,  
a single object can take on  
extraordinary meaning.**



ILLINOIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM  
& EDUCATION CENTER

# Stories of Survival

## OBJECT · IMAGE · MEMORY

A new travelling exhibition from the Illinois Holocaust Museum featuring personal artifacts and stunning collaborative artworks by award-winning photographer Jim Lommasson and survivors of genocide and their families

### ABOUT THE EXHIBITION:

A teddy bear, a set of house keys, a typewriter – everyday objects that ordinarily provide convenience or comfort take on deeper meaning and become storytellers, in their own right, when they are remnants left from a world destroyed. *Stories of Survival: Object. Image. Memory.* reflects upon the individual stories of 59 Survivors of the Holocaust and genocides and conflicts including Armenia, Bosnia, Cambodia, Iraq and Syria, Rwanda, and South Sudan, told through objects, photographs and personal reflections. Created by the Illinois Holocaust Museum and **award-winning photographer Jim Lommasson**, the exhibition includes large-format photographic prints of precious objects from a Survivor, on which the Survivor or their family member(s) reflect on the objects' meaning directly on the print. The photographs are exhibited adjacent to the physical artifacts with text labels that present a period photograph of the Survivor, inviting audiences to explore how time and distance influence meaning and experience of these objects and their stories.

Through the objects and handwritten memories, themes of childhood, home, culture, and religious practice, but also war, violence, displacement, and exile emerge. These stories of survival resulting from incomprehensible inhumanity represent shared human experiences despite differences of time and place: experiences of resilience and courage, the fragility of life, family history, and hope for the future. The exhibition inspires visitors to reflect on their own families' stories of immigration, the meaning behind their keepsakes and heirlooms, and the common experiences of people as they made their way to a new home. It also draws connections between genocides throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, prodding visitors to ask why the promise of "never again" remains unfulfilled.

The Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center in Skokie, Illinois (12 miles north of the city center of Chicago) is the third largest Holocaust Museum in the world, founded by Holocaust Survivors in response to neo-Nazi activities in Skokie in 1978. With the mission to "remember the past and transform the future," the exhibition draws from the Museum's significant collection of artifacts from Holocaust Survivors, while also pulling from rich connections with other genocide-affected communities. After hosting Jim Lommasson's exhibition *What We Carried: Stories by Iraqi Refugees*, which shared reflections on Iraqi refugees' beloved objects from their homeland, the Museum and Lommasson partnered to create an exhibition that expanded that vision to the experience of Holocaust and genocide Survivors.

*Stories of Survival* is a scalable exhibition and can be adapted to the needs of museums and libraries and comes with educator materials, a family guide, docent scripts, and a beautiful companion catalogue. As part of the exhibition, the Illinois Holocaust Museum has partnered with the Tenement Museum, New York on its "Your Story, Our Story" web platform, which encourages visitors to photograph and share a family object and its significance on social media. Borrowing institutions can continue to contribute to this web platform.

## CONTENTS:

### Exhibition Components:

- 65-28 x 40" framed photographs
- Accompanying artifacts
- Digital files for overview texts and object labels
- Audiovisual component (*equipment must be provided by hosting institution*)
- Exhibition catalog (*available for purchase*)
- "Your Story, Our Story" web platform

The exhibition is available in two sizes:

### Full size – Approximately 3,500 square feet; 325 running feet

- 65 framed photographs
- 30 objects, subject to condition of the object

### Alternate size – Approximately 1,800 square feet; 160 running feet

- 32 framed photographs
- 15 objects, subject to condition of the object

The exhibition is also available solely with the framed photographs and without objects, as requested. Please contact the Museum for more information.

### Accompanying Materials:

- Press kit (*including high resolution images and exhibition style-guide*)
- Educational materials including a family guide, pre- and post-visit packets for Jewish educators and secular educators, docent tour scripts for field trips and adult groups

### Venue Requirements:

- Monitored and environmentally controlled gallery space; AAM General Facilities Report required for review

### Exhibition Fees:

#### Full size:

- \$40,000 rental fee + incoming shipping
- Travel and accommodation for IHMEC Registrar during install and deinstall
- Travel and accommodation for IHMEC Curator for opening event and/or docent trainings (*optional*)

#### Alternate size:

- \$20,000 rental fee + incoming shipping
- Travel and accommodation for IHMEC Registrar during install and deinstall
- Travel and accommodation for IHMEC Curator for opening event and/or docent trainings (*optional*)

Rental fees for the exhibition with only the photographs are available upon request.

## AVAILABILITY:

Beginning February 2019

## ABOUT THE ILLINOIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM & EDUCATION CENTER:

Illinois Holocaust Museum honors the Survivors and victims of the Holocaust and transforms history into current, relevant, and universal lessons in humanity. Through world-class exhibitions and programs, the Museum inspires people and provides a universal wake-up call to action: Take history to heart. Take a stand for humanity.

## ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER:

Jim Lommasson is a award-winning photographer and author living in Portland, Oregon. Lommasson is a recipient of the Dorothea Lange–Paul Taylor Prize from The Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. Lommasson's work has been exhibited nationally at museums and galleries including The Arab American National Museum, The Ellis Island National Immigration Museum, Japanese American National Museum, The Portland Art Museum, and Blue Sky Gallery, Portland.

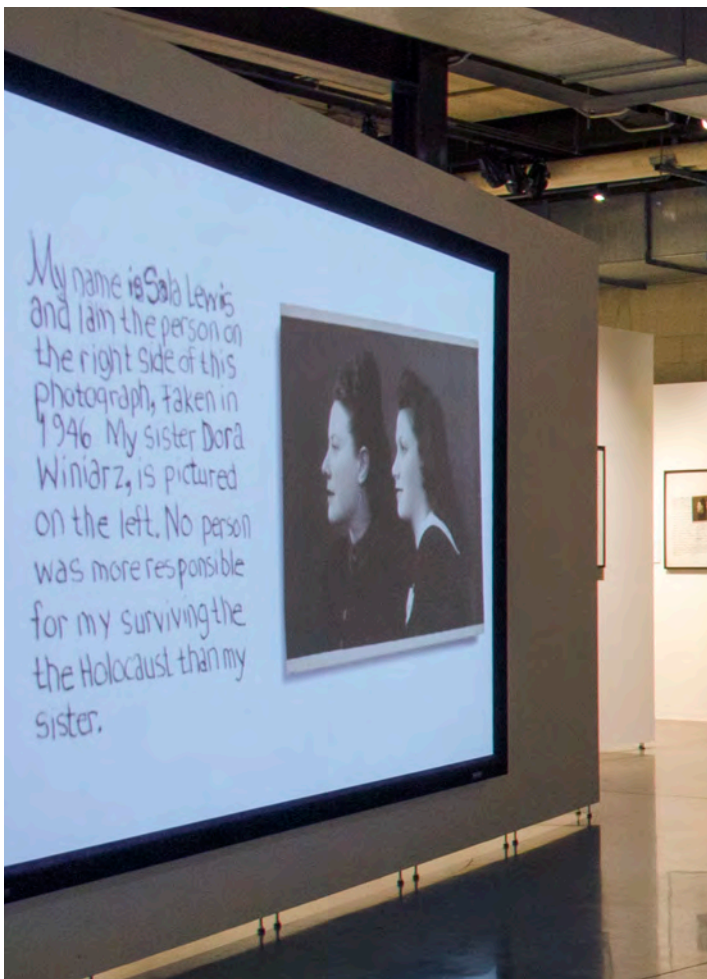
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## Installation Images



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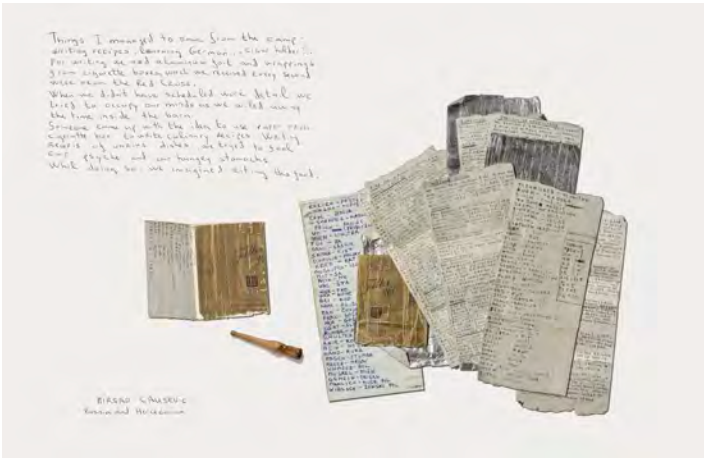
## Installation Images



# Stories of Survival

## OBJECT · IMAGE · MEMORY

### Selected Object Images



**Mirsad Causevic's Recipes** (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1992)  
On loan courtesy of Mirsad Causevic

"Things I managed to save from the camp: writing recipes, learning German, "cigar holder"...For writing we used aluminum foil and wrappings from cigarette boxes, which we received every second week from the Red Cross. When we didn't have scheduled work detail we tried to occupy our minds as we wiled away the time inside the barn. Someone came up with the idea to use paper from cigarette box to write culinary recipes. Writing recipes of various dishes, we tried to fool our psyche and our hungry stomachs. While doing so we imagined eating this food." — Mirsad Causevic



**Domino Set of Othman Al Ani** (Baghdad, Iraq, 1992)  
On loan courtesy of Othman Al Ani

"I brought this dominoes with me from Baghdad because it's mean the great times I spent with my friends. I chose this dominoes from all other stuff because I know those old times may not back again. When I went to see my friends for last time before leaving my country, they gave this dominoes to me to keep it with me to remind me about all great times we spent together." — Othman Al Ani



**Domino Set of Olga Weiss** (Brussels, Belgium, 1943)  
Gift of Olga Weiss, in memory of Reginé and Jacques Kirschenbaum

"This domino set was given to me by "St. Nicholas" (the counterpart of Santa Claus), on December 6, 1943, when I was 7 years old. December 6 was the traditional date when St. Nicholas came down the chimney with gifts for Belgian children. At that time, I was hidden with my parents in a small town outside of Brussels. Because I was attending a Catholic school (under a false name), my parents wanted to be sure that I, like the other children, had received a gift from St. Nicholas, who by the way, wrote his name on the outside of the box, together with mine." — Olga Weiss



**Irma Schwarz's Cookbook** (Germany, 1930s)  
Gift of Ellen Vogel Glass and Ruth Vogel Glick

"Tante (Aunt) Irma was my mother's older sister. As a young girl she went to work in the kitchen of a nearby resort. There she was introduced to gourmet recipes for her handwritten cookbook. Thus she became a fabulous cook. But after immigrating to Milwaukee, Wisconsin in May 1939, with our extended family, she only would cook for her husband and son. Unfortunately her only child, Arnold Schwarz passed away in 1948 at age 18 of acute Leukemia. As was the custom, single girls started their own hand-written recipe books and added on throughout their life. My mother, Hannah Vogel also had such a book, which I still treasure." — Ellen Vogel Glass

Chicago Tribune  
**A+E**  
 Sunday



Objects on display in the haunting exhibit, *Stories of Survival: Object, Image, Memory*, which opens at the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center in Skokie July 19. (Zbigniew Badak / Chicago Tribune)

# OBJECTS OF GENOCIDE

## Precious possessions tell 'Stories of Survival'

An electric train set taken out of Germany by Jews fleeing the Holocaust.

A set of playing cards made from an empty box of crackers by concentration camp inmates in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Dresses and a cardigan sweater worn by two sisters — both children — who did not survive killings in Rwanda.

These precious items and dozens more like them have been gathered in a haunting exhibit opening July 19 at the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center in Skokie: "Stories of Survival: Object, Image, Memory." The objects bear witness to the toll of genocide, a term coined to characterize the Holocaust but applicable to humanity's seemingly never-ending campaigns to erase identity.

Which is the point of the exhibition: to remind us all that when one group of people is marked as different, alien, unwanted, less human, the result can be cataclysmic.

"Stories of Survival" imparts this lesson in intensely human terms. For rather than cite epic histories and copious figures, it brings us personal, closely held possessions: clothes, toys, photographs, letters, recipes and other seemingly ordinary items that the survivors of genocide — or their loved ones — managed to cling to.

Each item appears alongside a large photograph of it by Jim Lommasson, plus a handwritten description by a survivor or family member about the object's meaning.

Conceived in anticipation of the museum's 10th anniversary next year, "Stories of Survival" will serve as the institution's first touring exhibition. From the outset, it was designed to explore not only the Holocaust but other genocides.

"Sadly, refugees and immigration has been in the news for far too long, when we have millions of people displaced worldwide," says Susan Abrams, CEO of the Illinois Holocaust Museum.

"This is a universal story. And Chicago is a city and Illinois a state of immigrants. So we should all understand that and have empathy. This (exhibition) is a way for us to communicate that.

"We want people to be able to walk in somebody else's shoes, make that discovery for themselves. Not to be told it — but to feel it and experience it." It's impossible not to feel the human cost of genocide when you look at these items, which were cherished by people who lost those close to them or who never survived themselves. Each object represents an eye-opening narrative.

"It was important for us to show people that these everyday items are imbued with such importance when they are the only things you have left," says Shoshana Buchholz-Miller, the museum's vice president of education and exhibitions. "They're not sentimental."

All the Holocaust-related items were drawn from the museum's collection, but because the museum does not gather materials from other genocides, staff needed to look elsewhere for the rest.

"We contacted the different communities through longstanding partnerships we've had because of programming and outreach to other institutions," says Arielle Weinger, chief curator of collections and exhibitions.

"They sort of self-selected who would participate, and we asked them to offer up whatever was appropriate." Thus the exhibition encompasses genocides from Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, the Holocaust, Iraq, Rwanda, South Sudan and Syria.

To look deeper into the stories behind some of the items, we visited four of the survivors whose possessions are included in the exhibition and asked each the same questions: What happened? Why did you save these objects? Why is there genocide? How has this experience changed you?

Their testimonies (edited here for clarity and space) illuminate their heroism, not only for what they endured but for their willingness to share their histories with a world that doesn't always want to listen.

In the end, their stories reaffirm that they themselves were the objects of genocide.

## Ralph Rehbock

**Born:** Gotha, Germany  
**Genocide:** Germany/Holocaust  
**Object saved:** Toy train set, 1938

**What happened?** 1933, Hitler came to power. By '35, he realized that the German Jews that he would have liked to have left had not. So he passed the Nuremberg Laws. How did the Nuremberg Laws affect us?

My father's passport was taken away. My father's driver's license (was taken). My mother's job as a dental hygienist (was taken) because she was working for a non-Jewish dentist, and that was against the Nuremberg Laws.

Early in '38, my parents decided that they needed to make contact with the family in Chicago, to see if they might be willing to sponsor us. My father said to my mother: You go because they're your relatives.

So she, God bless her, was a gutsy lady, and she went to America, to Chicago, all by herself, by boat. She told what was going on in Germany and said (to relatives) that if you are willing, we would like to have an affidavit of support from you, and I will take it back to Germany, and turn it in to the American Consulate.

We were told that a date had been set for us at the American Consulate on the 10th of November, 1938. The three of us left our home, went to Berlin on the 9th, because we didn't want to be late for our appointment on the 10th.

The night of the 9th, we looked out of our hotel room window, and a synagogue which happened to be located across the street from our hotel was burning (the start of Kristallnacht, the "Night of Broken Glass").

We didn't know at that time, of course, that our synagogue in our hometown, six hours away, was also being burned at that same time. They came for my father in our hometown. And a young teenage girl who was house-sitting for us, a Jewish girl, could have said: He's in such-and-such a hotel in room number so-and-so. She didn't.

She said: I don't know. She immediately made a collect phone call to my father in the hotel room where they were staying, because she knew where that was. And they had a coded message that they had created between them saying that: If someone were to happen into the house, she was supposed to say, in German, "The English lesson has been canceled." Which had nothing to do with an English lesson, but it told my father that he should not come home again.

So here it is the evening of the 9th, when all the other things were happening, the store windows that were broken, and why it was called the "Night of Broken Glass."

So the next morning, which was the 10th, we came downstairs of the hotel, and a sign went up: No Jews allowed.

And we went on to the consulate, and all day long there was paperwork, paperwork, paperwork, and at 5 o'clock in the afternoon the clerk, the American consul clerk, said: "We go home at 5 o'clock. Come back tomorrow."

Well, we did come back tomorrow. But tomorrow was the 11th of November. The 11th of November was Armistice Day. The consulate was closed. A Marine guard took it upon himself to go into the town of Berlin



and went to get the ambassador.

And he was willing to come back, open the gate for us, take us in and finish our visas so that we could leave.

So Kristallnacht to us was very important in the sense that the teenage girl really saved my father, who otherwise would have been picked up with the other men that were arrested that night. And then that the Marine guard and the ambassador helped us. So now with that, together with the man in Chicago that was willing to do all the paperwork for us, we had four people that had interceded, and we at the (Illinois Holocaust) Museum now call that being an upstander. They were upstanders.

So here it is now — the boat was leaving Southampton, England, on the 15th of December. My father, as my mother told it, snuck on an airplane that he knew was going to England. And he got to England, and he got to his uncle's house in England, and he waited for us.

My mother and I took a train to the Dutch border, and we were supposed to take another train from the Dutch border across Holland, (then go) across the English Channel, to ultimately get the boat to America. The people at the border, the Germans at the border, strip-searched us to make sure that there was nothing hidden and said to get dressed again and wait for the next train.

And a total stranger, number five now in our story, the total stranger came up to my mother and said: Don't pay attention to them, come with me.

And she decided to take that route, rather

than staying with the guys with the guns and the uniforms. And he (the stranger) knew a way of getting across the tracks into a local train on the Dutch side of the border. And since Holland was still a free country, that was then freedom.

And we went to his home, we got onto another train, we got across the English Channel, we got to England, we met up with my father, and we took the boat on the 15th.

We got to New York on the 22nd of December, and a man was there to meet us and told us how to get to Chicago from there. We immediately went to Chicago and met up with the family that had sponsored us, and that's how we got — my mother, my father and I — got out of Germany.

**Why did you save this object?** My parents realized that two things were happening: One, that they were thinking of leaving, and then ultimately planned to leave; and what the opportunities were of what they could take with them.

They decided that something that would be important, besides some books and some (toy) blocks, would be important for me to have once we got to America was a Marklin train set.

My father bought that train set very close to the time that we were leaving, and it was part of what my mother packed up while he was in hiding, and then ultimately (flying) to England. So it was my mother that was doing all the packing into the container, and the train in its original box was sent to Chicago with the other belongings. We always had it in our house.

It means two things. It means that, one, my parents were very thoughtful, wanted something for me. Secondly, it is a connect with the first four years of my life, and the first 30-plus years of my parents' life in Germany. I just felt that it was important for us to keep.

**Why is there genocide?** Genocide only proves that the wars that we've had in past generations and through history, none of

them were the war to end all wars, like was said about World War I. Ancient wars, to say nothing of wars based on religion, the Crusades, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, all those things happen because people had hate. Hate of one group or another.

And then it moved into the various genocides, with the Armenian genocide and Bosnia and Darfur and now the hatred that's shown in Europe to immigrants, even in Germany now, that is happening. And in some of our universities, where there's now hatred for Israel and Jews being expressed.

And so why is there that? And the why is that it's, unfortunately, human nature that has presented itself in so many, many ways. Some political, some for religious regions. But it doesn't seem to have yet been able to be made by politics — or anything else — to come to an end.

And that's why we have to be so vigilant in protecting memory, so maybe people, particularly young people, can understand that if the early Nazis were bullies, the bullies of their day, and maybe they can understand why bullying in today's world needs to be stopped, or needs to be dealt with when they see it happening in their schoolyard.

So we do as much as we can to make it known that the young people should be upstanders, as the five people that saved us were.

**How has this experience changed you?**

It changed me — that experience that we lived through and that my parents lived through — made me want to be involved: continue to be involved in Scouting, continue to be involved in doing a program for disabled adults in Scouting, continue to volunteer. All the kind of things that I felt I could be of help, and speaking at the museum, my story.

## Siyin Duong

**Born:** Cambodia  
**Genocide:** Cambodia  
**Objects saved:** Copper urn, 20th century

**What happened?** (My father's family) speaks Chinese. That's why, at that time, they say all the Chinese, they kill them. So that's why my dad's family side, they're all gone. Only him stays.

But he run. He run out from the Cambodia. He come to Thailand, then come to United States. That's what he did. I have experienced the Khmer Rouge when he run.

We walk all day, all night. We walk, we see all the people to die that stepped on the bomb (land mines). And they say, be careful, the walking: You only step what we (saw) people before, you step after them, that be OK. But if not, you catch the bomb, that make you dead.



That's what I remember. I said, "Oh my God."

And no water. When we see the river, we want the water, see all the blood in the water.

That time, you know, Pol Pot, they almost kill me, Khmer Rouge.

(They) ask: "Who's walking?"

And, you know, a little kid, (I) say: "Me, I want to look for my mom."

That's what I say. You know, that's nighttime, no light, no nothing.

**Why did you save this object?** The big



piece (urn) is from my great-grandma (who hid it under floorboards of their house as the Khmer Rouge approached). The house what they have now, at Cambodia, they build before the Khmer Rouge.

It looks like copper. They put the water, blessing the water.

I have that before my great-grandma passed away. She keep in china cabinet.

Important, for (it) belonged to my great-grandma. Looks like she stay with me (after death). Looks like she's still here. She stay with me.

That says: That's my (great-)grandma,

stand by here. She not gone.

**Why is there genocide?** New people, they don't like. You have to leave.

**How has this experience changed you?**

That time, (Khmer Rouge) make me scared. And right now, when sometimes I sleep, I still see all these things.

Right now make me so hurt. The people that lost parents, sister, brother. Like my dad that lost sister, mother, nephews. He doesn't have big family. He have small family. He have only him and sister and two nephews.

Right now, he stay alone. He have only one child, only me; no sister, no brother. To stay alone, it hurts.

I changed myself when I come to the United States. I change myself in here. Change here by the things I learn, the lessons to speak English, the things I learn about the job what I do, the things I learned driving. I can do by myself what I want to go.



## Mirsad Causevic

**Born:** Prijedor, Bosnia-Herzegovina  
**Genocide:** Bosnia-Herzegovina  
**Objects saved:** Recipes written on paper from cigarette boxes; playing cards made from empty box of crackers; 1992

**What happened?** I was a war prisoner in concentration camp, for five months, very bad camp called Omarska, and Manjaca. And bunch of killings in front of my eyes.

For example, in Omarska, which was one of the brutal concentration camps in Bosnia-Herzegovina, there was one room, or building, that was called the White House, that was just painted white, but that's why the guards call it White House. A building with four small rooms, 10 feet by 10 feet, and in each room, believe it or not, they squeezed around 100 people on top of each other.

It was summer time. Very warm outside. And inside there is no air conditioning. Only one window, one door. Just being in that room with 100 people, we couldn't breathe. One day, a lot of people passed out in this, they're screaming and crying, and then they open the window a little bit.

But when they close the door, it's like 150 degrees in there, and people sweating. You could take your shirt off and squeeze, it's like you had a shower, actually. A lot of people died due to diarrhea and losing, the dehydration, you know.

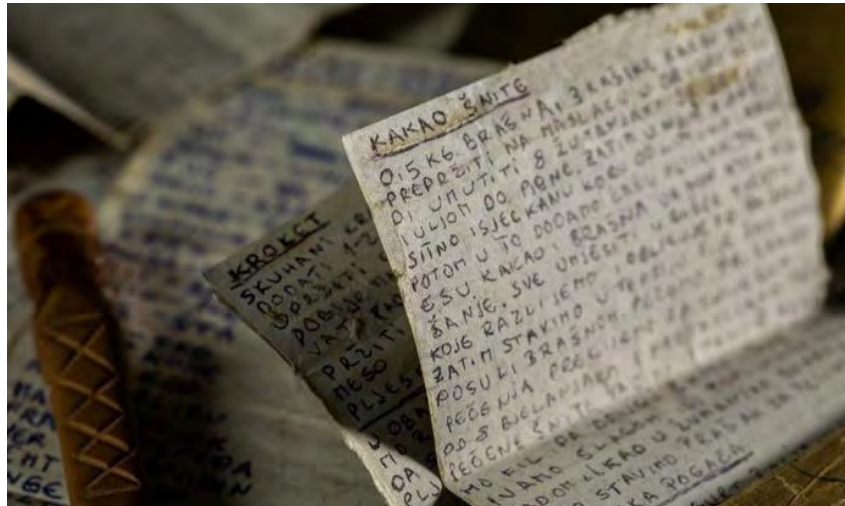
First day when we came, actually, they line us along that house, White House, along the wall, and start beating us with anything they had in their hands. Batons, police batons, guns, tables, school tables, chains. I mean it's hard to describe. It's screaming, people, blood everywhere. I actually passed out.

I woke up in that room. And when I woke up, and there was another guy screaming, ran in the room. He was — at the beginning I thought, like through the fog, that this guy had tattoos all over his body. He was naked and screaming like a wild animal. But he was actually black from beatings. And they shoot him, that first day they shoot him in the head in front of us, just to scare us.

So this continued, day after day. And you could see daily, this is true story hard to believe, daily you could see 10 dead people, 10 bodies through the window in a pile. And then at night they come with tractors or something, some vehicles, and they take them away.

It's still for me, as a victim, it's really hard to understand that really happened. Like neighbors could, or friends, schoolmates, former employees or co-workers that could come and do this to you.

In Bosnia, all of a sudden, we are sepa-



rated by (ethnicity), who you are. Basically, our neighbors came, and one day they attacked our village, and in one day ethnically cleansed probably 3,000 people in that area. And then after that around 15,000 people. But they burned everything. Every house, one by one. Daily they took the valuables from the homes and then burned the homes one by one.

And then we kind of lived for two months in one part of the city. First they attacked with the heavy artillery, and then they came the next day with the soldiers and went house to house, separated adults from kids and women and elderly, and took us to the camp.

I'm a Bosnian Muslim. That's my crime. What did I do to be who I am, to make them believe that I am their enemy, I have no idea.

I can say that I'm still asking myself, how can I live with somebody for that long, and then all of a sudden I be their enemy? And how can somebody do this to so many people? How can they kill so many people for no reason?

**Why did you save these objects?** Because we were starving. I was like a skeleton. If you look at those pictures you will see, we looked like people from Auschwitz.

Somebody came (up) with the idea — and actually that's somebody that read about Auschwitz — (of what) these people did in Auschwitz: They (wrote) recipes to kind of confuse your brain, that if you write the recipes, you get your stomach full.

And then we started writing recipes. And we wrote anything and everything that we could come up with. How to make that food, for example, just like a cake, a basic cake. And United Nations and Red Cross used to bring us every two weeks a bag of cigarettes, because everybody was smoking.

From this cigarette bags or boxes, we used that paper and write recipes on that. We go to prisoner to prisoner and ask him if you know any new recipes. Or you sit with him. That's how we actually, during the free time, tried to find a comfort.

But these recipes did, in my opinion, make me feel like I actually felt more hungry when I was writing this recipe.

So besides recipes, we made cards, playing cards, from boxes from cookies that we got every two weeks. We'd play cards in free time. We had to hide all of this from the guards, obviously.

Importance today for me, or for the general public, is actually a proof. It's just a proof it really happened back there.

I do all of this (to) prevent this to happen to somebody else. Purpose of this, it's

just to maybe open eyes to people that this should be, in our power if we could, stop this to happen to somebody else.

**Why is there genocide?** Why people do this, why? I don't know how can I answer this simply. When I was in the camp, I realized people are worse than animals.

How can you kill innocent civilian? How can you kill thousands? After all of this what happened, people still talk about hating each other. That's what I don't get it. Why don't you live normal life? Why don't you talk about future? About freedom? About rights? About our kids growing up happy? I don't understand.

**How has this experience changed you?** What I've been through, actually, changed me to actually become stronger person. It's really true what they say, whatever doesn't kill you makes you feel stronger. It made me stronger.

Still, I believe in people, even though these people did this to me. I still believe, I trust people. And it made me to be probably better person, you know. I help a lot of people. I want to help.

Yeah, it changed me, like I said, to be who I am now. And everything I do now is about what happened in past. It changed me to understand life better.

This pain will never go away. It will always be there. Especially one of my brothers is still missing. We never found his remains.

So that's another goal I have: to find him.

## Immaculee Mukantaganira

**Born:** Muko, Rwanda  
**Genocide:** Rwanda  
**Objects saved:** Her daughter Raissa Umotoni's dress and cardigan; her daughter Clarisse Uwunkunda's dress; circa 1994

**What happened?** When I was a child, there was no peace in my region and in Rwanda. Sometimes we had to spend night in the forests, because we could not be in our houses, with the fear of being killed, because we're Tutsi. My parents' house was burned twice during my childhood.

It was just a challenge to grow up in the environment, just because, you know, Tutsi were denied education. Tutsi could not attend high school. So some parents will try to do everything possible for their children to go in private school. And private school, weren't many. There were very few in the country. And so we had many Tutsi were fleeing to neighboring countries, so that they can live their life, they can live without a fear of being killed.

So for me, when I got married, and I had my children, and when in 1993 we realized that the genocide was being planned, and there was reason (to believe) Tutsi were going to be exterminated.

(The) government has been preparing, planning for the genocide. In the city, you



could hear like shots everywhere. Military on the road are saying, "Every Tutsi will die, have to die."

The strategy of killing people was to

tell them: "Let's go to one area, so that you can protect you better." I was reading this morning about the Holocaust and realized that that was the same thing. They will promise them to go to this place and protect them, but then that was their way of making sure that they have everyone so that they can kill them.

(We) have to wait for our destiny, which was death.

And they divide us. They started measuring faces of Tutsi, and they start saying: "You know, Tutsi are tall, they have long nose, and Hutu are this."

So they started classification. They

started classifying us.

And so they gave us identity card; we have an identity, Tutsi, and Hutu had an identity, Hutu.

When those militia came to the house, they started asking for identity. So we would show our identity, they will take identity. We were all Tutsi in the house.

So they say: OK, now let's go. We went out of the house, and they took us to this forest that was close to the house, and when we got in the forest, they started killing one by one.

When they got to me, it was like militia will come, and there was a military beside him, and he started approaching me and pushing me. And I told him, "Please don't kill me. If you don't kill me, I give you money."

And I have money in my dress, in our traditional dress, you can put money inside. So I pull out the money, and I gave to him. And I say, "If you don't kill me, there is more money inside the house."

So he pushed me like far from the line. And he continued his killing. But when he pushed me, for some reason, I wasn't even sure what I was doing, really, I was just saying: If you don't kill me, and I was just waiting for my death. But for some reason I moved backward in the forest.

And I kept moving backward. They continued with the killing, and when I get farther from where they were, I sat under a tree. My son was on my back.

We were rescued. But everything I did

during that time, I didn't know my two girls had died. I didn't know my husband was killed. Because I didn't see them killing him.

I was hoping to see my two daughters, but they were gone. And I started telling myself, so now why, why did I survive? Everything I did, everything I tried, I was hoping if my husband died, at least my children will have a mother.

If my husband survived, I will see him. But they were gone.

That was the worst of my life. Surviving and not seeing them.

So now I know it has been 24 years after we lost them.

For so many years I didn't — I kind of like postponed finding the bodies of my girls. It was just so hard for me. And last year I decided to go and do it.

I wanted to find a skeleton, at least. But what I found was just unbelievable.

So I found the two girls, they were 5 and 3 when the genocide took them. So I was about to find their bodies, because I don't want to say I only found bones. It's their body; they were together. So I call them "body," just to restore their dignity.

**Why did you save these objects?** When I went to find the bodies of my girls, when they found them, that was the only thing that can tell me that was them. That's why I'm sticking to them. So I recognized those, it's just unbelievable. Everything is gone but their clothes.

So I took them, and I decided to keep them. Because that's the only thing from (them) that I have. Today they (would) have grown to conquer the world and they would be married, and they would be surrounding me. They were just bright kids. Very bright. But God only knows.

**Why is there genocide?** I always ask myself that question. Why? Why? Why was it a genocide in Rwanda? Why was it the Holocaust? What makes people so evil? You know, to kill their neighbor. Because in Rwanda, when husband kill the wives if they were Tutsi. What makes people so evil to do that?

I don't have an answer for that, because I don't know what was in people's mind. But what I noticed myself is that when I was hiding, I heard someone saying: I am on my 943rd kill. And that sentence keeps,

stays in my mind. And I'm thinking: What? I mean, how can someone say that so proudly?

And I realize, you know, genocide is planned. People don't decide to do genocide overnight. And those (who) planned the genocide prepared to kill us. And they taught them to kill the enemies. And they tell: These are your enemies; you have a common enemy. And they would tell: Tutsi are your enemy. But we were not. We were neighbors. We are good neighbors. We are all friends.

But they prepared them. They mentally brainwashed them. I felt like in 1994, the majority of the Rwandan population was illiterate. They didn't go to school. Some did not even do primary school, others did not do secondary school.

When you don't have education, you don't have the critical thinking to decide for yourself. And you just follow blindly. So the elite who has his personal interest is using all his power and doing all he can to brainwash people. So my thinking is that education is critical to the well-being of a nation, of the society, and it's critical for peace.

**How has this experience changed you?** The experience of the genocide has changed my life forever.

First of all, you don't have your surroundings. So the loneliness and the care that you don't have from those people — I had a family, very strong and very caring family. And we're Christian people, and we had so many friends, and all of that was taken away in 100 days.

And so you find yourself in this world, and you're trying to survive, but you don't have the family that surrounded you — what is happening?

The women who were raped, I mean, it's difficult. But it makes you more compassionate. I've become more compassionate.

If I see someone falling on the street, I don't care if they say: Be careful, because you don't know. I will jump and grab him.

That's how I have become.

*Howard Reich is a Tribune critic.*

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# CHICAGO SUN★TIMES

ENTERTAINMENT

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## ARTIFACTS TELL STORIES OF LIFE AMID GENOCIDE

Exhibit features household objects, personal mementos that speak to the lives of those who endured - or died - during mass killings

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Look around your house. Your bedroom. Your kitchen. Look at those items that have been amassed over the course of a lifetime, or passed down to you from generations long-gone.

Now imagine which one (or two) precious items you would choose to take with you on a moment's notice — as you flee from religious persecution, war or worse. Or would all be left behind?

Visitors to the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie will find the answers to those questions and more in a new exhibit, "Stories of Survival: Object, Image, Memory." The exhibit, featuring a collection of personal mementos, everyday household objects, toys, clothing and writings, speaks to the lives of those lost and those who survived the Holocaust as well as genocides and wars in Rwanda, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Syria, Sudan and Cambodia. But unlike other exhibits from the museums' vast collections (and others amassed from outside sources for this particular exhibition), the items in "Stories of Survival" are also depicted in the work of award-winning photographer Jim Lommasson, who combined his photos of the items with the personal messages and stories written by survivors or their families. The photos speak volumes; their personal

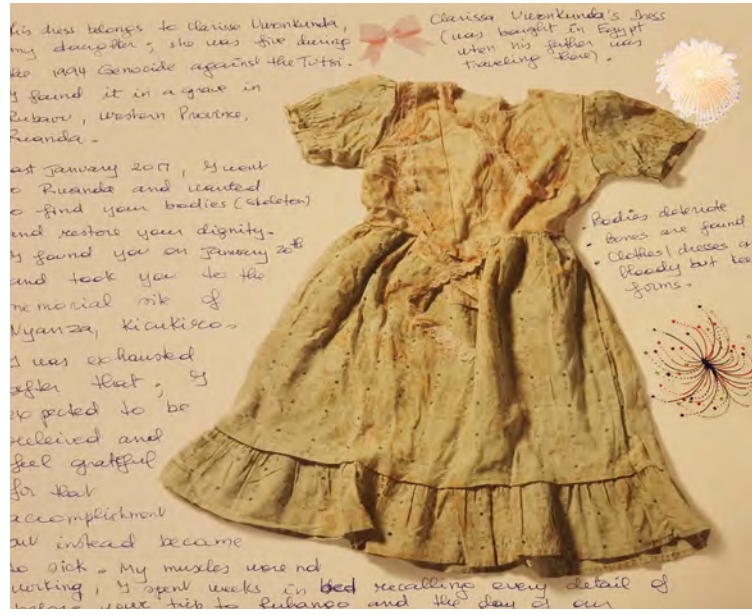
messages reveal even more.

"We've been working on this exhibit for two years," said Lommasson, during a recent visit to the museum as the exhibit was taking shape. "These are stories of Holocaust and genocide survivors

told through those items they brought with them as they escaped conflict. I photographed the objects and sent 13-by-19-inch prints to the survivors or their families and asked them to write something about the item or their family member, or the story of their homeland. Whatever message they felt the item conveyed to them. Whatever story they wanted to share. Then I took those stories and the objects and photographed them together and blew them up into these 28-by-48-inch prints, which make up the 65 photographs in the exhibit.

"All of the images tell a story," he continued. "When the participants add the narrative to that story it brings another level to it. In essence it makes the photograph its own artifact because it now has hand-generated writing on it."

Family members wrote letters or poems, embellished the photos with stickers, glitter or even colorful inked handprints of children just now learning the fate of their grandparents and other relatives. Some touched Lommasson in ways he could



This blood-stained dress from a 5-year-old girl killed in the Rwandan genocide is one of the many mementos included in a new exhibit by photographer Jim Lommasson titled *Stories of Survival: Object, Image, Memory*, at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center. | Miriam Di Nunzio/Sun-Times



This wallet was carried by a Jewish soldier in WWI, where it slowed a bullet and saved the life of its owner. It's among the many artifacts/mementos included in the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center's new exhibit *Stories of Survival: Object, Image, Memory*. | Miriam Di Nunzio/Sun-Times



Jim Lommasson's photo montage of a teddy bear buried for three years during WWII, and later exhumed by family members who returned after surviving a Nazi concentration camp. | Photo by Jim Lommasson courtesy of Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center

never have imagined.

"I guess a few of them really did make me pause for a while longer," Lommasson said. "There is the tiny blood-stained dress, for example. A Rwandan mother didn't know where the bodies of her 3- and 5-year-old daughters were after they were killed in the Rwandan genocide [in the 1990s]. When they opened a mass grave [in her village] over 20 years later [in 2017] she couldn't recognize her daughters' remains, but she recognized the dress that her 5-year-old was wearing when she was killed. When this dress came to me from the museum's collection to be photographed I already knew the story, but holding this tiny dress and reading what the mother wrote, I just lost it."



Jim Lommasson

The mother, Immaculee Mukantaganira, chose to decorate the photo of the tiny dresses and a cardigan with stickers and glitter to celebrate the lives of her young daughters. "It's much like you or I would put flowers on a grave," Lommasson said. The mother writes about the pain of losing the two little girls and how her two daughters were always dressed in the adorable dresses. And how she would never be able to dress them again.

A leather billfold carried by a Jewish soldier in WWI shows a single bullet hole; in essence it slowed the bullet enough to wound but not kill or maim its owner. A typewriter, used to type exit papers or forge other documents to save the lives of Jews seeking to exit Nazi Germany, calls to mind images of the lifesaving paperwork generated during the machinery's heyday.

"Documents are the most important things when you're under siege," Lommasson said. "A document can save your life. These were papers that allowed Jews to exit Germany or Austria and leave Europe altogether."

"Changing someone's name, nationality or date of birth or country of origin on

a document could mean the difference between life and death," said Arielle Weinger, the museum's chief curator of collections and exhibitions.

A collection of recipes, written by a concentration camp prisoner during the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s, might seem quaint at first, but they represent so much more. "These recipes, handwritten, are about ethnic foods," said Weinger. "They're a connection to your legacy and your culture. You're heading to new parts

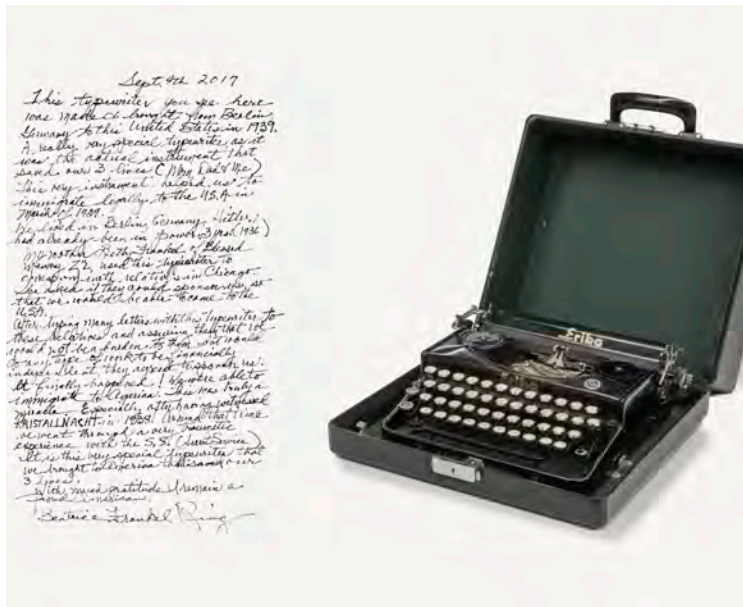
of the world, longing for those times before the hardship, and suddenly these foods become the only things that will help tie you back to your culture."

Most of the items included in the photographs and exhibit have never been seen before, which adds a wider scope to the museum's overall mission.

"We have the chance through this exhibit to bring a broader understanding of the collections. We looked at geographical span. We wanted to represent a wide variety of stories. Some Jewish refugees, for example, went to China, because you didn't need papers to enter. Some escaped to South America. They took very different journeys to get to new lives."

Other items in the exhibit include a dominoes game from a child in hiding during the Holocaust and a train set from a family taken during Kristallnacht. Not every object was a take-along. One remarkably preserved teddy bear would eventually bring joy out of such horrific events.

"For whatever reason, the teddy bear was buried in a family's back yard as the family fled the Nazis," Lommasson said. "After the war when the survivors returned to their homes they found the bear. Can you imagine what that meant to them and to anyone who sees this bear? We all have teddy bears. So here is a connection, our shared humanity."



Jim Lommasson's photo montage of a typewriter used to create life-saving documents during the Holocaust. | Photo by Jim Lommasson courtesy of Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center

Sept. 4th 2017

This typewriter you see here  
was made & brought from Berlin  
Germany to this United States in 1939

A really very special typewriter, as it  
was the actual one that  
I owned. I owned 3 of them  
(this very instrument was to  
immigrate here in  
March of 1939.

I lived in  
and abroad  
my mother  
memory

corresponding with  
he asked if they could sponsor us, so  
that we would be able to come to the  
S.A.

to typing many letters with this typewriter to  
these relatives and assuring them that we  
could not be a burden to them but would  
be a type of work to be financially

