Karkomi Permanent Exhibition Personal Narratives

Extended Biographies









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Aron Derman

World Before

Aron Derman was born in 1922 in Slonim, Poland, a town close to the Russian border. Haim, his father, and Merke, his mother, owned a clothing store. He grew up in a middle-class family with three sisters, Libby, Fagel, and the youngest, Edcia.

In Slonim, the majority of the population was Jewish. It had a vibrant Jewish community with many synagogues, summer camps, and Jewish schools. At the age of ten, Aron joined a Zionist youth group, Ha-Shomer ha'ir, in which he learned about Palestine. He came to the conclusion that there was no future in Poland and wanted to immigrate to Palestine.

It was not until the 1930's after Hitler came to power when Aron began to notice the increase of antisemitism in Slonim. In churches, priests started to preach that Jews were taking over all the businesses in Slonim. Polish Catholics started opening businesses in order to compete the Jewish shops. They hired people to stand in front of Jewish stores and tell them, "Don't go in, that's a Jewish store." The police would not help because there were no Jewish policemen in the city. All government positions were held by gentiles.

World at War

When the war broke out in Poland on September 1, 1939, the Soviet Union occupied the eastern half of Poland. The people of Slonim were excited to be under Soviet rule rather than the Nazis. They believed the Russians were the lesser of two evils. During this time, Aron wanted to pursue his education in Wilno. He went to a Russian technical school and learned to work with movie projectors. He stayed in touch with secret Zionist groups, which were illegal under the occupation.

On June 22, 1941, the German army invaded Soviet-occupied Poland during Operation Barbarossa. Aron experienced the German military tactic of *Blitzkrieg* when the Germans began bombing the village of Ostrin. The German pilots were killing people indiscriminately from the air, causing chaos among the population. People began running to escape the German onslaught. Aron decided he would leave Wilne, return to his hometown of Slonim, and reunite with his family. Along the way, he encountered many Soviet Red Army soldiers trying to avoid getting caught by the Germans. When Aron came close to Slonim, people were running in the opposite direction, relaying to him that the Germans had already occupied the town. Aron was faced with the question of whether to risk his life to see his family or run with the others. He knew he had to keep on his path. He was determined to see his family again.

When Aron reached the outskirts of Slonim, he was stopped by two Germans screaming, "Halt." He was captured and brought to a camp with Soviet prisoners and Jewish men. Aron snuck out of the camp and arrived at his family's home. On the night of June 27, 1941, Aron awoke to screaming and shooting outside of his house. His house was engulfed in flames while Nazis waited to capture those who tried to escape the fire. The officers took Aron and his father and forced them to dig a mass grave for the innocent men who had been murdered during the night.

Ghettos

After the occupation, Slonim's Jewish population grew to around 20,000. It was only two weeks later that the Germans ordered all Jews to live in one area of the town. They made three small ghettos and one large one for 20,000 Jews. They enclosed the ghettos with barbed wire and the punishment for leaving was death. Aron and his family were starving, but they were still happy that they were together. Within the Jewish ghetto, the German authorities established a Jewish Council, the Jewish Police force, and Jewish authorities who issued the Nazi decrees. First, they registered all Jews in the ghetto. The Jews were ordered to wear yellow patches on their clothing and the Germans kept restricting the living space for Jews in the ghetto. The Germans continuously dehumanized them with sadistic acts by not allowing Jews to walk on the sidewalks, cutting off Jewish men's beards, and beating them in the streets.

Mass Murder

On Friday, July 18, 1941, Aron witnessed the beginning of the Nazis' plan to exterminate all Jews in Europe. The Nazis and special commando groups arrived in the ghetto and went from house to house calling for all men to come outside. Aron's father was the first one to leave his house. When Aron ran outside, his father was no longer there. He was told to go to the marketplace, which was overcrowded with Jewish men. Upon arrival, he saw his father from a distance being beaten. He was waiting in line to be checked by the Germans. Every ten minutes, the Germans ushered thirty men onto a truck to be taken to "work." His father was one of these men. This was the last time Aron saw his father. Out of 1,500 men in the courtyard, 300 were told to go back to their homes. Later, Aron discovered that the men were taken to Shpakover Woods, murdered by firing squad, and buried in a mass grave.

Over the next couple of months, life conditions in the ghetto began to worsen. Starvation and disease were rampant, with the Germans issuing a decree that each Jewish household could only have 5 kilos of food. The Jewish Council fulfilled all the harsh orders given by the Nazis. Aron always had steady jobs in factories, saw mills, tanneries, tailoring, and locksmith shops, which allowed him to have access to food for his family.

On November 13, 1941, Aron got word that the Gestapo was planning an attack on the ghetto. He told all his neighbors, friends, and acquaintances to hide in the workers' quarters. By five o'clock in the morning on November 14, 1941, the rumors came true. The Gestapo, Lithuanians, and White Russian soldiers blocked the ghetto streets and began to inspect every Jewish home. Some Jewish residents believed the Nazi propaganda that they were being transported to another ghetto. They wore their best clothes, packed a suitcase, and waited for the train. Many hid themselves in cellars or attics of their houses. Those who did not hide were taken to a nearby field where there were large mass graves. The Germans separated the women from the men and forced them to undress. They tore children from their mothers and massacred all the innocent men, women, and children. After the mass shooting, those who lived prepared camouflaged hiding places for the next *Aktion*.

After, Aron went to a new place of work at Camp Boyte, a munitions camp. At this time, Aron and others heard of the Jewish partisans in the woods around Slonim. The young people in the ghetto formed a circle of friends, meeting daily to prepare plans to smuggle arms into the ghetto. In a short time, the group grew and procured many weapons. The partisan group became more and

more active. They could hear the explosions of the mines the partisans planted on the main roads and train tracks. Many Germans used this attack to take revenge against the Jews.

When life went back to "normal" in the ghetto, Aron met Lisa Nussbaum. In order to see her, he bribed her father with food and cigarettes. Eventually, Aron visited her every single day and built a relationship with Lisa.

A short time later, another German *Aktion* was to be carried out. When the *Einsatzgruppen* came into the ghetto, everyone hid in their hiding places. This time they knew what was coming. In Aron's house, forty-two people, including his family, hid together under the floor.

Before the *Aktion,* Aron was taken out of the ghetto by an SS officer named Miller to a workplace near the train station. The *Aktion* started at seven in the morning. The SS searched many houses and could not find the majority of Jews because they were in hiding. Because of this, the angry SS began an all out assault on the ghetto. They lit buildings on fire to drive the Jews out of their homes. The SS murdered all those they caught with firing squads and buried them in mass graves. The officer, Miller, declared only a small number of Jews would remain in Slonim. Only nine workers were left alive, including Aron.

After the *Aktion*, Miller allowed Aron to go into the ghetto to clear the bodies of those who the SS murdered and to collect their valuables. He went to his established hiding place and found forty-two Jews in hiding, including his mother and three sisters. He left them with the promise to find them food. Aron went to find Lisa. He went to her house and started shouting her name. He found Lisa with her father and brother in a shack. He made the decision to take her with him. He immediately dressed Lisa in men's clothing and gave her the life certificate that Miller had given him. He hid Lisa in the warehouse where he worked. The next day he did the same for his two older sisters. Eventually, Aron was able to obtain life certificates ensuring the safety of his whole family. Throughout the next week, the Germans murdered all the remaining Jewish inhabitants in Slonim who did not have life certificates. Approximately 900 to 1,000 Jews were left out of the 20,000 who had been in the ghetto.

After the last *Aktion,* Aron found a way to leave Slonim. He found a farm lady who would take them to another city. Lisa left Slonim first and Aron left with his family shortly after that. When he got to Rozhinoy, he looked for Lisa. The refugees in the town told him she was in Grodno. Aron had to make the most important decision of his life, to leave his mother and sisters behind to be with Lisa in Grodno or stay behind with his family. Aron chose to go to Grodno. He believed that they could only survive if the family split up. That was the last time he saw his family.

The Final Solution and Deportations

On August 19, 1942, Aron was living with Lisa in the Grodno ghetto. Months later, the Germans began ordering the *Judenrat* to round up Jews for "resettlement." Aron and Lisa hid through the many *Aktions* that occurred throughout the month. In December, Aron met a Polish man, Tadeusz Soroka (known as Tadek), while working as an electrician outside the ghetto. He learned that Tadek was able to help people leave the ghetto and go to Wilna.

Later, Tadek told Aron the ghetto was about to be liquidated. Aron had to make the choice to go back to the ghetto to get Lisa or leave with Tadek for Wilna. Aron decided to go the ghetto, but

took down Tadek's address before he left. While Aron was on his way back, he was arrested and taken to a crowded synagogue. Aron was put into a boxcar with 60 to 70 people for deportation. People could not move or relieve themselves because there were so many people in the boxcar. Aron managed to pull the metal bars out of the window and proceeded to jump out of the car. He was unconscious when a Nazi guard woke him up and took him back to the synagogue. He continued to look for Lisa, worried that she was in the crowd awaiting deportation. Finally, Aron was able to barter with a man to stay in his hiding place under coal. Because of this hiding place, Aron lived through the deportation and was reunited with Lisa.

Getting the Word Out

Aron and Lisa began plotting how to reach Tadek in order to escape the ghetto in Grodno. Because Lisa had blonde hair and did not look Jewish, Aron sent Lisa to make contact with Tadek. Lisa made arrangements with Tadek to get on a train to Wilno. They met at a public washroom and walked to the train station. They jumped onto the roof of the train and rode 180 km to Wilno.

While in the Wilno ghetto, Aron joined the United Partisan Organization, the FPO. He learned the secret underground organization had hundreds of members in the ghetto. Aron insisted that he fight in the woods with the partisans. Over time, Aron and Lisa were able to arrange for a partisan to help them escape the ghetto and take them to the woods. It took them seven or eight nights to reach the underground camp in the Narozh forests in Belarus.

The underground was made up of many different groups - Russian prisoners, Poles, farmers, and Jews. Joseph Glazman was the leader of the Jewish underground group. They formed a unit made up only of Jews. They wanted to be a strong fighting force. The Jewish unit did not fight for survival but for revenge against the Nazis. They wanted to do as much damage and kill as many Nazis as they could. The Jewish men in the unit were the first to volunteer when commanders needed people for missions. Their missions were to blockade roads coming into the camp, cut down telephone wires, cut down bridges, and bomb trains. Aron was active in both direct and indirect actions of the underground. Aron insists he "wasn't a hero [...] I was active as anyone could be."

Obtaining food was not a problem in the underground. They stole food from both friendly and unfriendly farmers. Aron's group of partisans would help Jews who fled the massacres by threatening farmers to hide them or they would burn their farm down. They were like "kings of the woods."

There was antisemitism within the underground. There were even incidents of antisemitism that mimicked life in the ghetto. Some Russians and Poles would make fun of the Jewish fighting unit by stating, "A Jew doesn't even know how to keep a rifle, how to fight with a rifle." Most leaders were Russian and took away power from the Jewish partisans. Some would round up and force people to go on deadly missions as well as steal from them. Many Jewish partisans were disappointed and lost their morale in their quest to fight their own way. Russians also told women they could not fight on missions and that they belonged in the kitchen. Although there was antisemitism, Aron became friends with some Russians. In the underground, there were some good and some bad.

Liberation and Return to Life

The Russians liberated Aron and Lisa in June 1944. After, Aron traveled back to Slonim where he found two or three Jews left out of the 20,000 who had lived there. Aron still experienced antisemitism while in Slonim, so he decided to leave after one night. From there he went to Bialystok and connected with the B'richa, an underground organization that helped Jews evacuate Eastern Europe. He left Poland and traveled through Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and into Italy in hopes of getting to Palestine. In 1946, Aron and Lisa moved to Rome and were married in a large synagogue.

Becoming Americans

While in Italy, Lisa was able to get in touch with family members who lived in America. In March 1947, Aron and Lisa boarded the *SS Marine Shark* headed to New York City. In New York, they were united with their aunts, an uncle, and a cousin. They decided to settle in Chicago, IL.

Aron took on many jobs when starting out in Chicago. He worked at a steel mill as a shipping clerk, and in a sweat shop. Aron and Lisa had their first son in 1949 and their second son in 1952. In all, they had three sons: Howard, Gordon, and Daniel. Aron eventually opened a clothing store named "Howard's" in the 1960's while Lisa raised the children.

They taught their children that despite the terrible things that go on, there are good people and to stay positive. All three sons became medical doctors. Aron and Lisa have eight grandchildren. Their passion was to speak of their experiences and teach young people about the Holocaust.

Aron and Lisa kept in touch with Tadek and brought him over to America. When asked why he saved people during the Holocaust, he stated, "What else could I do [...] I am not a hero. I didn't do anything special. I did what I felt a person should do." With the help of Aron and Lisa, Tadek was honored by Yad Vashem as "Righteous Among the Nations" for his selfless actions during the Holocaust, saving both Aron and Lisa's lives.

Lisa Derman

World Before

Lisa Derman, given name Lisa Nussbaum, was born in 1926 in Raczki, Poland, a small town near the German border. Herschel, her father, was an exporter of geese and lumber to Germany and Gittel, her mother, ran a fabric store in town. Lisa was one of three children with an older sister, Pola, and baby brother, Busiek. Lisa grew up in a loving home in which her parents instilled in her wonderful values that she held throughout her life. Raczki had a small Jewish population, but it was a highly active and religious community. Lisa went to public school as well as Hebrew tutoring and religious education.

Lisa and her family lived among a population of 1,000 - 1,500 Polish Christians in Raczski. It was a highly antisemitic town which affected much of the Jewish community. When Adolf Hitler came to power in January 1933, conditions in Raczki changed and antisemitism increased throughout Poland. Her father's business abruptly came to a halt when he was no longer able to trade with Germany. Although Lisa's mother worked for many Christians in the town, priests began to give sermons telling Christians not to buy goods from Jews and specifically from Gittel's fabric store. After *Kristallnacht*, Jewish refugees began to flood into Raczki, bringing with them stories of the horrors that were occurring in Germany.

World at War

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, beginning World War II. Poland was divided in two by the Germans and the Soviet Union. Since Raczki was on the German border, it came under German occupation. After Soviet soldiers met with the German Army, the Soviets encouraged people to leave with them. Lisa's parents had the foresight to leave Raczki with the Soviets and move to Augustow.

In Augustow, the family adjusted to their new life as refugees. Lisa went to a Russian school and made new friends. But her father had difficulty working under the Soviets, and the family decided to move to the town of Slonim. Slonim had a vibrant Jewish community with a majority Jewish population. Lisa enjoyed the Jewish culture and made friends with both Jewish and Christian children.

Ghettos and Mass Murder

On June 21, 1941, the German Army invaded Soviet-occupied Poland. Within a very short time, the Nazis ordered Jews to live in certain quarters in Slonim, creating ghettos.

Soon after, an SS special action group called the *Einsatzgruppen* entered Slonim and selected 1,500 men. The Nazis marched them to a mass grave and the men were murdered by firing squad. Lisa's father and brother hid in an outhouse behind their old house outside of the ghetto to avoid selection.

Months later, Lisa personally witnessed a massacre, or *Aktion,* conducted by the *Einsatzgruppen* along with auxiliary forces from Ukraine, Estonia, and Latvia. The Jews living in the ghetto sensed the Nazis were planning something when they started issuing *scheins*, an ID card issued as a work

permit from the Regional Commissioner of Slonim. They were given to the "desirable people." There was panic throughout the ghetto. Since Lisa's family was not given *scheins*, her mother made arrangements with their former neighbor, a Christian, to take her daughters in if something went wrong in the ghetto. On November 13, 1941, Lisa's mother took her and her sister to the barbed wire at the edge of the ghetto and said good bye. That was the last time Lisa saw her mother alive.

Lisa and her sister took off their yellow stars and walked confidently to their former neighbor's house. The woman took them in, but the next day she heard that the Germans were murdering the Jews from the ghetto and became scared. She told them they needed to leave and forced them to go into the woods. During their walk they came to the scene of the mass murder of 10,000 Jews. They witnessed Jews being shot to death by firing squad and thrown into a mass grave. Lisa and her sister ran from the scene of the murders and were caught by a ranger in the forest. He forced them to walk with a group of Jews being led to their death. They took their chances and ran from the ranger. He chased them into the field, but they were able to escape.

Together, Lisa and her sister knocked on doors to find a place to hide, and they were able to find a woman who did not turn them away. She opened up her house to them, gave them food, and hid them inside the sleeper sofa. Lisa's sister eventually made the decision that they should leave the house because she did not want to endanger the woman. The sisters were able to find another kind woman who let them stay for two more days until they heard people were still alive in the ghetto. They walked on foot back to Slonim. When they arrived, Lisa learned that her mother and aunt were killed in the mass murder. Her father and little brother were the only family members who survived.

After the mass murder, the ghetto became smaller and smaller. They had to move into one room with one bed in which the four of them slept. They shared everything with the family next door. Among the death and suffering in the ghetto, a sense of normalcy set in after the massacre. The community suffered together. Everybody had lost someone close to them. People in the ghetto tried to cope as best they could. There was a tremendous urge to live within the ghetto, so they did what the Nazis told them. They did whatever they possibly could to survive. It was during this time when Lisa met Aron Derman and developed more than a friendship. Day after day, he went to her house to visit.

As time went on, people began to think about ways to survive. Some joined the underground or built hiding places in case of another *Aktion*. They found places in yards, the floors, attics, or in shacks. Lisa's family had a hiding place under the floor for thirty people.

In June, panic spread throughout the ghetto. When the *Einsatzgruppen* entered the ghetto, most of the Jews went into hiding, hoping to survive the second wave of murders. Lisa and her family hid but had to move into another hiding spot behind an old-fashioned oven used for baking bread. Her sister was the only one who did not make it to the hiding spot. The Nazis caught her running across the street and she was never seen again. They survived the first day of the *Aktion*. The second day, the Nazis began to set the ghetto on fire to force those in hiding to come out. Lisa, her father, and her little brother found a shack and hid there for three days watching the ghetto burn.

Lisa and her family stayed in the shack waiting for a miracle. Then Lisa heard someone calling her name in Yiddish. It was Aron. He was able to survive the *Aktion* and managed to get permission from the German officer, Miller, to enter the ghetto. Aron took Lisa to an attic and dressed her in a boy's jacket and pants. He cut her hair until she resembled a boy.

Aron was able to get Lisa out of the ghetto and hid her behind furniture in the basement of a Nazi-owned house. He asked Officer Miller for help in saving Lisa's life, but Miller refused to allow her to stay. Aron proceeded to ask another German officer, Bauer, for help. Lisa was terrified when Bauer walked up to her in the basement and ordered her to stand up. He told her to put on girls' clothes and follow him. Aron and Bauer brought her to a warehouse with food and hid her. They left just enough space for her to breathe.

The next day, the Nazis announced that the *Aktion* was over and they were allowing those who were in hiding to live. Lisa's father and brother emerged from hiding and were immediately arrested and put in jail. The remaining Jews went through a selection process in which they chose who would live and who would die. The Nazis selected Lisa's father and brother to live. Out of 20,000 Jews in the Slonim ghetto, only 1,000 people remained.

Lisa's father knew that they had to leave Slonim. He found a woman farmer that would take them to Grodno. Lisa did not know how her father managed to bribe the woman, but they were able hide under the hay in her wagon to Grodno. When they arrived at the Grodno ghetto, they immediately spoke with the *Judenrat* and were given one room to live in. Shortly after, Aron showed up in Grodno. He told her about how he had made the decision to leave his family in order for one of them to survive. He believed if the family stayed together, they would perish together. He told her their only survival would be in the underground.

In Grodno, Aron went to slave labor remodeling a house for the Gestapo. It was there that Aron became friends with one of the most influential people of his life, Tadeusz Soroka, a Polish gentile, known as Tadek. Tadek bartered with Aron, providing them with goods and food.

The Final Solution, Deception, and Deportations

In November 1942, the Nazis sealed the ghetto and the deportations began. No one knew of the death camps: Auschwitz, Treblinka, or Madjanek. No one knew that Jews were being gassed to death. The Nazis told them to take a certain amount of clothes, a toothbrush, and any necessary things that they would need to resettle. People tended to believe it. The *Judenrat* was forced to make lists of the people in the ghetto to be "resettled." Lisa was first on the list. Lisa, her father, and brother knew that they needed to hide. During the first deportations, they changed hiding places frequently. One night they hid in five different places.

A short time later, Tadek went to Aron and told him the Nazis were sealing off the ghetto. He told him they were taking Jews for resettlement again. Tadek offered to help Aron escape to Wilno. He pleaded with him not to go back to the ghetto. Aron decided to take his chances and risk going back for Lisa. Aron took down Tadek's address just in case he survived.

Lisa, her father, and brother decided to run and hide during the wave of deportations. They found a shack in the courtyard where they lived. They stayed in the shack while the police searched many

times but never found them. Lisa could see the thousands of people being marched to the trains and ultimately to their death. Around 800-1,000 people survived the transports.

When Lisa came out of hiding, she immediately met with Aron. She was so surprised he had survived. He told her Tadek's address and that they needed to contact him and escape from Grodno. Aron was able to sneak out of the ghetto and make contact with Tadek. First,he took Lisa's father and brother to Wilno. Lisa went to Tadek next. He told her that on Sunday he will take her and Aron on a train to Wilno.

Tuesday came and Lisa, along with seven other people, met Tadek in a public washroom. She told him that she had other people with her. Tadek told them that he could only take Lisa and Aron. Once at the railway station, Tadek told them to hide in a ditch and wait for the train to start moving. The train contained passenger cars for the Wehrmacht. They were to jump onto the train and pull themselves to the roof. Aron and Tadek went first. When the time came for Lisa to jump, she was unable to catch the car, but jumped onto a ledge of the train. When they realized Lisa was not on the roof, they began to panic. Tadek looked all over and found her holding on for dear life. They managed to pull her up on the roof. Tadek had saved her life. They rode together on the roof of the train for 100 miles in subzero weather to Wilno.

In Wilno, they went into the ghetto and registered with the *Judenrat*. They were given a place on the floor of a room to sleep and ration cards for food. The ghetto was still large and very vital. There was a library, a theater, and even a restaurant. It was a different world, but Aron and Lisa knew and warned the *Judenrat* of the deportations in Grodno. The *Judenrat* wanted to keep their story quiet so they would not put the whole ghetto in a panic.

Getting the Word Out

Aron immediately formed a group with the other survivors of Grodno, called the "Grodno Group." The group decided to look into ways to get in touch with the resistance. Because Aron and Lisa were young and fit, the resistance took them in. It was a very secretive organization. Lisa could not even tell her father or brother about their existence. The *Judenrat* played both sides. They were a part of the resistance, but they were working for the Gestapo as well. The *Judenrat* did not believe that the resistance should form an uprising inside the ghetto because it would jeopardize the people's lives and possibly cause the Nazis to deport them. They wanted to believe that the population of the ghetto could survive until liberation.

Little by little, Jewish partisans began taking groups of 25-28 people out of the ghetto and to the underground in the woods. When it came time for Lisa to leave, she could not say good bye to her father and brother. She had to sneak out of her room in the middle of the night without being seen.

Two fighters came to the ghetto and helped Lisa and Aron escape. Lisa was the youngest of the group. On the way, they got lost many times. They even crossed railroad tracks guarded by the German soldiers. It took them seven nights to walk to the underground. Lisa never forgot the moment when they reached "Partisan Territory." They finally felt safe.

Lisa described the underground as Robin Hood. There were so many people walking around with rifles, there was plenty of food, and people lived in huts made out of logs. She could not believe the camp was out in the open. They were welcomed right away by the Jewish partisan unit. The

leader of the unit was Joseph Glazman. Lisa felt free despite the danger of German units around them. The work of the partisans was to make it impossible for the German Army to move. They cut down trees to block roads, cut down telephone wires, dynamited roads and trains, and helped other Jews escape the ghetto. Whatever Lisa was asked to do, she did it and did it well.

At first, the spirit of the camp was wonderful, but shortly after, they realized there was antisemitism within the camp. The Soviet partisans looked down upon the Jewish partisans and made it known. They also would not provide the Jewish unit with guns. Later, the Soviet partisans disbanded the Jewish unit. They wanted to integrate them with other groups. They sent most Jews to work in the family camp. Women were forced to stay in the kitchen because they did not think women could fight. They had to cook or mend boots for the partisans. The Jewish partisans felt rejected. Lisa felt it was a tremendous injustice against them.

While in the underground, Lisa begged a partisan guide to reach out to her father and tell him she was alive in the Naroch woods. Lisa and her father were reunited after her father left the ghetto and walked all by himself to the underground. He decided to escape after Lisa's brother was taken to a labor camp in Estonia. Her father was given a hut to live in and was finally safe.

Liberation

Lisa, Aron, and her father were liberated in the summer of 1944. First, they traveled to Slonim to see if anyone had survived. They went to their former homes and asked the new inhabitants for their belongings. The only thing they gave Lisa was her mother's embroidered slip that she treasured. Next, they traveled to Bailystok, Poland. Poland became very dangerous for Jews because of the pogroms that were taking place. Aron and Lisa decided to look for a way out. Aron, being a part of the Zionist organization Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir, learned of the B'richa, the underground organization that helped Jews evacuate from Eastern Europe. Lisa and Aron were given Greek passports and began their journey out of Poland.

Return to Life

Aron and Lisa traveled through Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria, and ended in Italy. They were immediately helped by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and given food and a place to live. Lisa and Aron hoped to immigrate to Palestine, but the borders were closed. Lisa was then contacted by her family in the United States. Both their uncles made affidavits for them to come to the US under the Refugee Act of 1947. Lisa and Aron lived in Italy from 1945-1947. They were married in a beautiful synagogue in Rome before they left for the US.

Becoming Americans

In March 1947, Aron and Lisa boarded the *SS Marine Shark* headed to New York City, where they were united with their aunts, uncles, and a cousin. They made the decision to settle in Chicago, IL. In 1949, Aron and Lisa had their first son, Howard. In all, they had three children, Howard, Gordon, and Daniel, and eight grandchildren. They tried to instill in their children consciousness, good values, and morality.

Lisa became an activist for Holocaust education after the 1960's, when historians were distorting the history of the Holocaust. She began speaking about her experience as a Holocaust survivor and a partisan during the war. Lisa spoke to many different groups of people, including schoolchildren,

scholars, educators, and the general public. She was very active in the Holocaust Memorial Foundation of Illinois and became the chairperson of the Speaker's Bureau that located and encouraged other survivors to speak of their experience. Before her death in July 2002, Lisa lobbied for funds to construct a Holocaust Museum and Education Center. Because of her efforts, this museum is here today.

Aaron Elster

World Before

Aaron Elster does not know exactly when he was born. He guesses that it was February 4, 1933, but it is possible that he is six months or one year older.

Before the war started, he grew up in a little town called Sokołów Podlaski, Poland, about 60 miles east of Warsaw. His hometown was a vibrant community with about 1,200 people, several schools, traders, tailors, shoemakers, store owners, and synagogues.

Aaron, who grew up in a Jewish community, describes his childhood and his home life as "fairly normal". The family stayed together, and he appreciated the companionship of his sisters, Irene and Sara. His parents, Chaim Sruel and Cywia, had a butcher shop. Although Aaron's father was very religious, the butcher shop was not kosher. For this reason the family was acquainted with the gentile Polish population, which was important for Aaron's survival later on. The war prevented Aaron from attending public school. In the pre-war period, he received religious education, which deeply impressed him. He was afraid that he would not go to heaven if he did not follow the Commandments. Already Aaron had started thinking about death and dying.

Rise of Nazism and Life Under the Swastika

When the war began, Aaron was six years old and did not realize what was going on. But he remembers that things started slowly. Jews had to wear armbands, food was rationed, and people from outside of the town were ghettoized. Aaron recalls the first bombs falling in 1939 and that his family ran into the woods in order to protect themselves. A German Jew, who was expelled from Germany, lived next to the Elster family's house. He told them what was going on in Germany, that ghettos and concentrations camps were being built, and that Jews were expelled. He predicted that Jews in Sokołów would lose their businesses and that the Nazis would exterminate them as well. Several people decided to flee to Russia, but Aaron's parents stayed. They did not believe in the rumors and their business was still doing well.

In 1940, life changed dramatically. Walls and barbed wire were put around the ghetto; police officers patrolled through the streets; food was running out. In 1941, the first rumors of Treblinka began circulating. Treblinka was known as a labor camp that was about 20 miles away from Sokołów. One night, Aaron's father was taken away by the German police and sent to Treblinka. No one knew how, but he was able to make a deal, escape, and return home. Along the way Aaron was frightened because he believed that Jews were being killed. He started making deals with God and pledged to be a good person if God would spare him. This kind of religious conflict stayed with him for many years.

Ghetto in Sokołów

In 1942, the ghetto was closed. At that time, farmers who were connected to the German government had the right to select people from the ghetto to work on their farms. Aaron's family was chosen by one of their former customers in June 1942, along with 30 others. Although they were working for the farmer's local farm village and living under poor circumstances, the families had to pay for their stay because they were out of the ghetto. Aaron's parents had to work in the

fields. Aaron himself hung around, made "*nonsense things,*" and felt bored. But overall he was happy that they were able to escape the ghetto and starvation.

Unfortunately, the family could live on the farm only for a few months. When the Jewish holidays came in September 1942, the family had to go back to the ghetto. His mother expected that bad things would happen. Therefore, she made a deal with Mrs. Gorski, Polish gentile woman who agreed to care for Aaron's elder sister, Irene. Aaron, his parents, and his younger sister Sara returned to the ghetto. On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the ghetto was invaded by SS and Ukrainian soldiers and the liquidation began. Aaron remembers that his mother woke him up at night and told him that he had to get dressed in a hurry and to go to a hiding place. In a room the size of an average bedroom, the family hid with 30 to 40 other people. They were squeezed in and children started crying. Through a little window, Aaron saw Ukrainian guards yelling and pushing people around. Suddenly, a wooden square was ripped off the ceiling of the hideout. Shots were fired, and a Ukrainian guard yelled at the people in the hiding place to come out. The group was forced to exit the room, expelled into the street, and lined up in front of a wall. Aaron's mother was separated from the family while Aaron, his father, and his sister were pushed to move to the market place in the middle of the town.

At the center of the market place stood a German soldier with a machine gun, and guards were marching around all over the place. Aaron was shaking and crying, but he kept his eyes on the ground, convinced the soldiers would not see him if he could not see them. The presence of guns made Aaron think about his uncle, who had died slowly from the bullet wounds he received from German soldiers. He consulted his father and asked him what to do. Chaim Sruel recommended fleeing and returning to the farm where they had spent the summer. Aaron wanted to live and decided to follow his father's advice. He backed up to the rows where people were sitting and crawled 10 to 15 yards on his belly. He hopped into an open sewer, crawled another 30 to 40 yards, and started running for three or four blocks. He ran to his uncle's house, looking for a place to hide. He went into the cellar and found his cousin and his aunt downstairs. By morning, Aaron proposed to find another hiding place. Because his aunt was afraid and did not agree, he left by himself and moved towards the barbed wire fence. A Polish woman outside of the fence encouraged him to flee. She helped him to pull up the thorny strands of wire so that Aaron could crawl through the fence. On the other side of the fence, he started running and went to the farm as his father had instructed him.

There, he met two women who told him that his mother was still in the ghetto working for German soldiers. She was supposed to pack and sort all the belongings that were left behind. Aaron decided to return to the ghetto where he finally found his mother. They were not able to stay together very long. After a couple of weeks, the SS and Ukrainian soldiers came again to liquidate the ghetto. Aaron's mother realized what was going on and knew that the Germans would kill all remaining Jews as soon as they would have no use for them. She decided to flee at night. To Aaron's surprise, the German Jew, who lived near their home and who scared the little boy, accompanied them.

In Hiding

For a few weeks, they moved from farm to farm, negotiating with farmers to get hiding places and some food. Because Aaron's parents knew people in the surrounding area, his mother was

successful from time to time. But more often than not, they were refused. People were afraid and threatened that they would turn the three of them over to the Germans if they remained or returned. One day, Aaron's mother negotiated with a Polish man. After the conversation, Cywia prompted Aaron to leave the farm without her. He was supposed to find Mrs. Gorski, the woman his sister Irene stayed with. His mother's faint hope was that the Polish lady would take him as well. But Aaron could not understand why his mother wanted him to leave her. Not sure whether her decision was a matter of survival or whether she did it for her or for his benefit, Aaron had a feeling that his mother chose the German Jew over him – he felt abandoned.

As his mother asked, he left the farm. Making his way alone, Aaron hid in the woods, eating sugar beets and potatoes to survive. One day he was so desperate that he knocked on a farmer's door, begging for hiding. After offering jewelry his mother had given to him, Aaron was hidden in the cellar and given some food. But later, the farmer asked him to come up. He and his wife were afraid that they would be killed if they hid a Jewish child. Aaron was given the jewelry back and had to leave the house immediately.

For survival, Aaron continued his strategy: during the day he slept in barns, at night he went out to find food. Around December 1942, he became sick because it was cold and he only wore short pants and his sister's coat. He refused to give up and decided to go back to the Polish couple his sister stayed with. Happy that nobody bothered him, he went into a random house in the ghetto and spent the night there. The next day, he headed off to find the Gorskis. Mrs. Gorski was not pleased to see him and wanted him to go away. Aaron started crying and begging and promised that he would stay only for a couple of days. Finally Mrs. Gorski agreed. She sent him to the attic, which became his home for the next two years. Although he was given a blanket and a little food, he was in a terrible plight. Like a prisoner, he could not go out and had to be quiet so that no one would hear him. In the attic were lice and worms. It became horribly cold in winter and very warm in summer. To alleviate his constant hunger, he crept out of the attic at night and picked up the leftovers from the pig trough or ate the stored apples in the attic. He was barely in touch with Irene who lived with the Gorskis in an apartment downstairs. The Gorskis themselves did not talk to him either. Instead they let him feel that they were mad at him. In their opinion, Aaron had placed all of them in danger by showing up at their house. Lonely and bored, rain became his friend. The raindrops on the tin roof made such a noise that no one could hear him. On rainy days Aaron cried, sang, screamed, prayed, and made deals with God. Even though his situation was terrible, the attic was possibly the safest place to survive. Aaron took refuge in daydreams in which he saw himself as a successful adult far away from all this pain. This helped him to suppress the loneliness, the despair, the hunger, and the hurt that he felt in the attic.

In summer 1944, the Gestapo ordered the eviction of the building. Mrs. Gorski offered to do the laundry and cook for the soldiers. In return, she and her family were allowed to stay when the Germans moved into the apartments downstairs. This meant that Aaron had to be even quieter than before. About four weeks later, the Russian Army approached. Shortly afterwards, the town was bombarded and the Nazi soldiers fled. While the Gorskis hid in the cellar, Irene joined Aaron in the attic because the Gorskis said they "did not want to die with a Jew in their midst."

When a bomb fell next to the house and huge parts of the roof were ripped off, the two of them realized that they were in danger. They decided to leave the attic to look for safer surroundings

outside. When they grasped that they could be killed by bomb fragments, they went back in the house. In one of the apartments where the soldiers had stayed, they discovered bread and marmalade. Aaron compares this day with July 4th – they had a ton of food and the falling bombs created no fear for them.

Liberation

When the bombing stopped, the Gorskis were afraid that the Poles would attack people who had hidden Jews. Because it was impossible to return in the attic, Mrs. Gorski put Aaron and Irene in a chicken coop to hide them. The children stayed there for a couple of days. Soon, a Ukrainian soldier came into the backyard, opened the chicken coop, discovered the two children, and threatened Irene with a gun. His companion shouted for him, saying that he had found some food. The soldier let them live.

Aaron and Irene survived the war, but both of them were so weak that they could barely walk. One day, Mrs. Gorski brought a survivor, Mrs. Rafolowicz, to the chicken coop. This Jewish lady took care of the children and brought them to a building in town where survivors stayed for safety. Aaron realized that only a few families survived and he and his sister were the only children who made it on their own. Mrs. Gorski let the siblings know that their mother survived in hiding for most of the war but was shot by the Gestapo in 1944. Aaron and Irene have never found out what happened to their father and their baby sister, Sara. They can only guess that both of them were killed in Treblinka.

Post-War

After the war, life was difficult for Aaron. While Irene got new clothes and the chance to work as waitress in a restaurant, Aaron ended up as a "street kid," begging for food. He realized that he was an orphan, felt lonely, and was disappointed about life after liberation.

To his surprise, Aaron's Uncle Sam – who escaped to Russia in 1939 – showed up and took care of the siblings. His uncle did not see their future in Poland. He moved them to Lodz where many Jewish survivors lived. In Lodz, Aaron was sent to an orphanage where he spent two months recovering. Aaron remembers this as a good time with fresh air, a lot of food, and children to play with. He recovered his health and his uncle came to take him to leave Poland. They went to Prague, ended up in a camp for displaced persons, and stayed there briefly. Their plan was to cross the German border and enter the American Zone. Unfortunately, they were stopped at the border and sent back to Czechoslovakia. They tried it a second time by boarding a train in the middle of the night and jumping out when the Military Police tried to capture them. They reached a displaced persons camp outside of Nuremberg. While Uncle Sam stayed in the displaced persons camp, Aaron and Irene were sent to a farm that was patterned on a kibbutz. Irene was supposed to work in the kitchen and Aaron was told to learn farming. Aaron describes himself as rebellious and wild. He was not pleased with his situation and did only the things that were necessary. He also began buying and selling on the black market and doing business with American GIs who treated him like a friend.

His stay at the farm did not last long. He was sent back to the displaced persons camp and ended up in Neu Freimann, near Munich. He stayed there with his uncle in a one-room apartment, played soccer, went to school, and learned to read and write Hebrew. His uncle found out that a brother

of his grandfather was in the United States, so they left Germany after two years and arrived in New York in June 1947.

Becoming Americans

Aaron describes the fresh start as a fabulous time. He invested the first money he made in candies, explored the city, and felt free. In late July 1947, they arrived in Chicago but the new family life did not work out. The Jewish Children's Bureau took care of Aaron and he was passed among several foster homes. Aaron could not forget what had happened to him, and his experiences affected his life significantly. He had nightmares in which he was chased and almost killed by Germans. Although there was no reason for it, he stole food from his foster families. He felt like a stranger and worked hard to become an American by learning English fairly well, becoming a member of a soccer team, and wearing American clothes. At age fifteen, his formal education began. Because of his limited language skills, he was placed in a sixth grade. Feeling very embarrassed among these younger kids, he worked hard to improve his language skills. He was then allowed to skip grades so that he entered high school when he was sixteen. He graduated high school and wanted to go to college but could not. He joined the army and was sent to Korea for two years where he became a Supply Sergeant. Aaron describes this as a good experience that coached him physically and made him feel empowered.

After the war, he married Jackie, started a family, and built a successful career in the insurance industry.

Alice Fink

World Before

Alice Redlich Fink was born to George and Ella Redlich in the German capital of Berlin. Growing up, she lived with her parents and her brother, Heinz Alfred Redlich, in a third-floor apartment in a Jewish neighborhood in Berlin. Her grandmother, aunt, and uncle lived in the same building.

Alice's father owned a tobacco business, and her mother helped out in the office. Alice has described living in the 1920's as not quite easy for ordinary people.

While Alice's mother grew up in an Orthodox Jewish family, her father did not receive a Jewish education. A World War I veteran, he had received the Iron Cross and was proud to identify as German. He had served in the same unit as Ella's brother. As a consequence, Alice's childhood was imbued with both Jewish culture and German patriotism. Alice would occasionally go to synagogue with her family, and they celebrated Jewish holidays together. In 1936, Alice was the first girl in her community who had a Bat Mitzvah.

Alice remembers going on walks with her family in the forest near Berlin and visiting her grandparents every Sunday. She spent her afternoons attending Hebrew school and was an active member of a local German-Jewish youth group that organized outdoor activities and trips. Before the Nazi-German laws restricted her further education, Alice attended elementary, middle, and high school in Berlin. During her time at school, Alice claims to not have experienced any anti-Semitism during this time. She remembers having as many non-Jewish friends as Jewish friends.

Rise of Nazism

One of the first changes Alice observed once the Nazi party rose to power was the boycott of Jewish businesses. Consequently, her father was unable to keep his shop and her parents had to rent some rooms in their apartment to make ends meet. Alice's friends began showing up to school in uniforms, and they started to ignore her.

Though life for German Jews had become difficult, Alice's father belonged to a Jewish veterans' organization, and most of the members, her father included, were convinced that the new government would not interfere in their affairs. Her father saw himself as a German practicing the Jewish religion and did not see why his life should change.

Life Under the Swastika

As the Nazis imposed more restrictions upon the Jewish population, many of the Redlich family's friends fled Germany. However, Alice's family was not wealthy, and they had no relatives in other countries, making it was almost impossible for them to emigrate. Unable to believe Germans would subscribe to Hitler's ideas, Alice's father continued to believe these hard times would pass quickly because he could not believe Germans would seriously subscribe to Hitler's ideas. As it became increasingly difficult for Jewish children to go to school, Alice's parents began to consider sending Alice and Heinz away.

In 1935, the Nazis passed the Nuremberg Laws, stripping German Jews of their citizenship and further marginalizing them. At her father's behest, Alice stopped attending school in favor of

something more practical, so she received training in nursing at a Jewish infant's home, graduating in 1938. Her first job after nursing school was with a lovely family in Berlin; one of the women in the family had a brother who fancied Alice. They started dating despite the fact that both of them knew that their relationship had no future.

Shortly thereafter, one of Alice's cousins moved to England with his wife, where he founded a hospital in London. Seeing an opportunity to continue her nursing education, Alice prepared to immigrate to England. Her cousin died in a car accident two weeks before her arrival.

November Pogroms

After saying goodbye to her family, Alice left from Bremerhaven on November 8, 1938. Her whole family was convinced they would see each other soon, and Alice thought she would find a way to bring her family to England.

When Kristallnacht began on November 9, 1938, Alice was on her way to England. Once she arrived, she called her family only to discover that her father had been sent to the concentration camp of Uranienburg. Though George had returned home just a few days later, Alice's mother reported that he was in a bad shape. Kristallnacht had been the final warning sign: Jews were no longer welcome in Germany.

Alice's parents tried to sign her brother up for the Kindertransport to England, but the application process was competitive, and he was not accepted. Instead, he commenced training in automobile mechanics, and as conditions grew more hostile to Germany's Jews, Alice's family had to move to a smaller apartment.

Deportation

In October 1942, Alice's father was deported. Her mother was required to work for Siemens until she too was deported in March 1943. Meanwhile, Alice's brother went to a nearby agriculture school with the hope of immigrating to Palestine, but ultimately, he was deported on April 19, 1943. Her mother, father, and brother were all murdered in Auschwitz. Alice was able to communicate with her family until September 1939, when World War II broke out with the invasion of Poland. Though the Red Cross brought letters to Germany, the service took about three months, and you were able to write only twenty-five words. The last time Alice heard from her family was on her birthday in August of 1939.

Arrival in a New Country

When Alice started her nursing training on November 14, 1938, she was still trying to get accustomed to life in a new country. Although she had begun learning English three months prior to her arrival in England, adapting to the new environment, language, and people was incredibly difficult. She recalls having a "home sister" who was in charge of everyone, including Alice, but she still felt lonely at the beginning of her stay in London.

Since Alice was both Jewish and German, she was considered special in her neighborhood. She remembers many people in England had never met a Jew before, and thus she was confronted with countless stereotypes. When she received information that her family was deported by the Nazis, many of the sisters in the hospital showed great concern for her and tried to cheer her up.

Apart from her work at the hospital, Alice maintained a modest social life because she had little free time and her money was limited. However, she recalls that with the outbreak of the war, nobody had money to spend and there were certain coffee houses where refugees gathered. A couple of her German girlfriends managed to come to Britain as well. In addition, Alice attempted to forge a connection with the British Jewish community, hoping to find sponsors for her family, but unfortunately nobody was interested in helping her.

When the London bombings started, the hospital was evacuated to the countryside despite the fact that there were not many bombings in this particular area of London. Alice recalls that she met many refugees from Germany who had no place to stay or go because everything had been destroyed. At one point, a Nazi invasion of England seemed imminent, and fear was omnipresent. Yet, there were small things Alice could keep in mind to give her hope: The King and Queen of England stayed in London during the bombings, and they went out to see the people as well as their ruined homes. Alice was lucky to not have all of her possessions obliterated by the Luftwaffe attacks.

When the war broke out, the British began conducting background checks of every German living in England since they were considered enemy aliens. Alice was spared being sent to a camp and was given clearance to continue working in England.

Alice has some memories of her rare vacation time during the war. In November of 1942, she went with a girlfriend to the east coast of England, where the hospital had some resorts. However, it was around the same time Britain began hearing about the crimes committed against Jews in continental Europe. After a while, Jewish organizations such as the Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad were formed. They began to think about post-war problems and were in search of volunteers. Alice joined the group and participated in the preparation program. She remembers that nobody really knew what to expect, so they honed their existing skills.

Political Aftermath

The first team of Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad left for Germany in the summer of 1945, but because Alice was considered an enemy alien, she was not granted permission to leave until August 1946. She received a British uniform and was sent to the British sector in Germany, which included the DP Camp Bergen-Belsen. Alice lived outside of the camp with the staff and took care of the children in the camp by teaching them good hygienic practices and basic life skills.

Alice recalls many people asking her how she was able to go back to Germany. Her answer was that she would go wherever help was needed. Moreover, Alice was hoping to find information about her family. After following countless small leads, she became close to discovering her family's fate. She went to Berlin to ask her family's old landlord about her parents and published information about her family in the local newspaper, and through her efforts, she located one cousin who had survived the camps. However, it was only when the Red Cross published the lists of the deceased that Alice knew for sure that her family was dead. She recalls that she felt terrible and guilty because she managed to escape Germany but could not find a way to bring her family over to the UK.

Becoming Americans

One way to return to normalcy was by sticking to religious traditions. Alice recalls that the whole DP camp celebrated Rosh Hashanah together. The refugees prepared a meal for all the British soldiers and they had a huge celebration together.

Soon after Alice arrived in Germany, she met John Fink, who worked in the camp and joined the British staff for meals. Few people spoke German in the camp, and when John and Alice realized they both did they felt connected immediately. On June 20, 1948, they married in the DP camp Bergen-Belsen. Alice recalls that on the day of her wedding, the new currency in Germany was released. John, who was born in Berlin, had survived several concentration camps. Whilst he was in the DP camp, he discovered that his sister survived as well. She joined them in the DP camp and arrived in time for the wedding.

In 1947, Alice obtained British citizenship. Subsequently, she and John applied for visas to the United States. Although they were granted their visas at the beginning of 1949, they had to wait for a plane because Alice was pregnant at the time and could not take on a long journey. Nevertheless, she was determined that her child be born in the U.S. Four weeks after she arrived in Chicago, Alice gave birth to her first child. All of her four children (David, Esther, Miriam and Debbie) were born in the U.S. John Fink was an electrician his whole life and died at the age of 80 in 2000. Alice currently has six grandchildren and lives in the Self Help Home in Chicago.

Alice considers herself lucky, saying her greatest fortune was receiving the opportunity to go to England. Accordingly, she tries to live a life of high standards and strong morals. After helping in Bergen-Belsen and living in England, she is still in contact with the friends she made there and states that she has strong bonds to these people because she went through so much with them. She also thinks about how the war changed her: If the war would not have happened, she would have been able to have received a more general education. Alice also thanks the war for having served as the catalyst for her to connect more with her Jewish heritage, because it was a constant in her confusing life and it held the people together. From her survival, she managed to take away a message that she wants to pass on to the world: “It is very important to have faith and to keep it. You can’t foresee the future, but you have to try to make the best out of your possibilities.” It is important for her that we stay positive; we must take a chance and never give up.

John Fink

World Before

John Fink was born Hans Finke in, 1920 in Berlin, Germany. His father, Julius Finke, owned a dry goods store in a suburb of Berlin called Oberschöneweide, which he lost in 1923 when the economy began suffering from hyperinflation. Shortly thereafter, his family moved to the city, where they lived for several years. When John was three years old, his biological mother died from cancer. However, he did not find out about this until his stepmother, Ella Finke, revealed the truth to him when he was thirteen. Together, John, his parents, and his step-sister Ursula shared a four-room apartment in Berlin's inner city.

To provide for their family, John's parents worked hard at multiple jobs. His father often went from house to house to sell groceries, and at night John's parents addressed envelopes for a mail order house. They led a poor life, but for John it was all right since this was what he was used to.

Growing up, John attended elementary school, and once a week he attended another school, where he had lessons in religious instruction and he learned the basics of his faith. When he was ten, John transferred to a German middle school, where he stayed until Hitler became Chancellor in 1933.

By the 1930s, John had become well aware of the turbulent political situation in Germany. Street fights broke out frequently between extremist parties, and the Nazi SA became ever more involved in violent excesses. One day, John's sister accidentally dropped something from their balcony and hit two SA men standing below; enraged by what they considered a trick, the two men came upstairs. They left only after Mr. Finke bribed them with the precious few goods he had; at the time, the Fink Family were "the poorest of the poor." However, the SA continually returned to the Finks' house, eventually prompting the family to move elsewhere.

Life Under the Swastika

When Hitler came to power, John had been enrolled in a Jewish middle school, which he attended for only a year. His father decided there was no point in an education in the humanities and that his son would be better off learning a trade. After searching for an apprenticeship vacancy, he found a small Jewish electric business where John was hired.

In 1933, John celebrated his bar mitzvah. Though his family was not religious, he knew all the prayers, and his family attended a reform synagogue. They benefitted from the vibrant German-Jewish community in Berlin.

On June 30, 1934, tensions within the Nazi Party came to a head with the Night of Long Knives, which saw to a purging of undesirable elements and the assassination of numerous high-ranking party officials. The indiscriminate violence affirmed the Finks' concerns about the Nazis: "People could see: if they were that ruthless with their own people, what will happen to everybody else?"[1]

[1] Cited from USC Shoah video testimony of John Fink, Tape 1, 17:04.

Shortly after the Night of Long Knives, Sachsenhausen, the first concentration camp in Berlin, served as an internment camp for political opponents such as social democrats or communists. Gestapo headquarters also began housing prisoners, intimidating them and roughing them up whilst there. Rumors about the violence worried John's family, the greater German Jewish population, and even the non-Jewish public. Luckily for Jews in the city, however, they were more assimilated and less exposed than those living in the less developed provinces. "We grew up in a country where there was supposed to be law and order, a country that had a Beethoven, a Brahms, a Goethe and Schiller. Everyone who had a good education -- even in middle school – would have never thought of things the Nazis used to torment other people."[2] Family gatherings turned into somber reunions as people did not have any good news to share. They kept repeating that the Nazis would not last long and that it was just a matter of time until it would blow over.

In 1935, the Nazis passed the Nuremberg Laws, and less than a year later, John's boss, also Jewish, was forced to sell his business, leaving John unemployed. He found another private company, where he finished his apprenticeship and took his journeyman exam. However, because he was Jewish, he never received his test results.

November Pogroms

John was lucky to find work with a small contractor in the Neukölln area, where the Air Force Ministry under Hermann Göring was constructing new offices. This put him in a strange position as his site was guarded by SS-men who knew him by name and greeted him every morning. On November 9, 1938, John was still working for the construction crew, but he did not learn about the pogrom until he arrived home at night and saw synagogues burning. Although many apartments were invaded by mobs that night, John's family was spared because of their apartment's remote location.

For many people in Germany, Kristallnacht was a wake up call. Especially in western and southern Germany, people began attempting to illegally cross the borders to neighboring countries. One of John's uncles, who was arrested during Kristallnacht, managed to get papers to go to Shanghai.

World at War

When the war broke out in September 1939, John was still working for the same electrical company making installations for the Air Force Ministry. As a consequence, he learned a great deal about the ruthless tactics the German Luftwaffe had employed in Poland.

Around the same time, the Nazis ordered that all gold and Jewish businesses were to be turned over to the German government.

In 1941, the Nazis mandated all Jews wear the Star of David. Though removing the yellow star and pretending to be a non-Jew was incredibly dangerous, John and his friends did so on most weekends to secure large bags of potatoes from farms in the suburbs. Hunger was already becoming a problem.

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[2] Cited from USC Shoah video testimony of John Fink, Tape 2, 2:07.

Eventually, John was sent to work for the Siemens electronics company, and his entire family was relocated to do hard labor in factories. People began disappearing, and all Jews were told to have a suitcase with necessary clothes always prepared. John had a feeling he would be relocated again soon, but he was not worried because he thought hard labor in Berlin would not be different from hard labor anywhere else.

The Finks' situation deteriorated even further when they were forced to live in Berlin's worst neighborhood. They would spend their days in the factories and their nights in dilapidated houses. Frequently, they had to seek shelter from British air raids, and before long, they were exhausted.

Deportation

In early 1943, a rumor spread across the city that Berlin would be *judenfrei*, or free of Jews, by Hitler's birthday on April 20. John had just had his appendix removed and was staying in the Jewish hospital when the Gestapo took him, doctors, and nurses to the assembly point where deportees were gathered. His parents had already been rounded up and deported several days earlier. His sister was under the protection of Palestinian Jews with Turkish passports and therefore managed to send John his luggage and warm clothing.

On March 12, 1943, John was taken to the railroad station and loaded onto a cattle car. All this took place in daylight and in full view of other citizens. His transport, "36 East Transport," would be the last big transport from Berlin.

The train ride was a horrifying experience for John. The uncertainty of his destination and the conditions in the car were unbearable. The next day, people realized that they were in Upper Silesia, an area where they knew many labor camps were located. In the afternoon, the trains suddenly came to a halt. When the doors finally opened, SS-guards chased everyone out of the cars and brought the arrivals to an unloading platform, where they were examined by two SS-officers.

Camps

John and many other men were loaded onto trucks and taken to a sub-camp, Monowitz, or Auschwitz III. Upon arrival, they were forced to strip down and were then shaven all over. John and the other men had never experienced anything close to what was happening around them, and it took some time to figure out what their fates would be.

After his first night in Barrack no. 2, John received his number, 107821, which was tattooed into his forearm. As a new arrival, he always had the hardest tasks, such as carrying heavy bags of cement, and he got as little as a piece of bread, some margarine, and a watery soup each day. John and his fellow inmates were constantly watched by Kapos, who, though prisoners themselves, were just as brutal as the SS. In fact, it did not take many SS personnel to run the camp because the prisoners were required to run it. During the first week, many deportees from Berlin could no longer stand these circumstances and committed suicide.

After six weeks, all tradesmen were ordered to report themselves. John reported himself as an electrician and was moved to another block, which he shared with the famous band from Warsaw that played as prisoners marched in and out of the camp. Out of the twenty men who had claimed they were electricians, only John and one other person were actually tradesmen. However, they managed to keep their jobs without being detected. Later that year, John was made foreman of his commando and received a few more privileges. Nevertheless, he still had to deal with the worst aspects of camp, specifically the extreme weather conditions and constant Selektions, for they now knew that being "selected" meant death.

After a few months, John became more accustomed to life in camp: "You became an old-timer. You had to. Either you lose your head and you die or you went along the best you could with the climate."[3] Still the SS's torture tactics would always horrify him. An especially traumatic experience was the execution of three prisoners who tried to escape. All prisoners were assembled to watch the escapees as they were hanged. Though a haunting sight for John, he had seen so much hardship that he had already hardened to the point where such atrocities did not leave a deep emotional wound.

When in 1944 the word had gotten out that the Germans lost at Stalingrad and the American air raids had started, John was anxious that the prisoners would all be deemed useless to the Nazis and murdered. However, to his surprise they were sent to work as usual until one day in January when they were no longer marched out of the camp as per usual. For a short time the inmates received extra rations and were told to take any blankets they could find, and on the night of January 17, all prisoners were marched out of the camp, the SS shooting anyone who collapsed along the way.

After arriving at an overcrowded satellite camp at the German border, Gleiwitz, they were all loaded onto open train cars. Conditions were so awful in the cars that the train stopped every once in a while so the dead bodies could be tossed out; sometimes, this occurred in front of civilians. The train, initially destined for Mauthausen, was redirected to Berlin when the camp reached its capacity. Once more in his hometown, John was given a shower and selected for another transport to Flossenburg, where he remained briefly. He eventually found himself at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, which was terribly overcrowded at the time.

Again, John was singled out as an electrician, and he shared a barrack with other tradesmen. Considered more useful than other prisoners, they each received their own cot. John and another prisoner would walk through the camp every day, checking barracks and gun towers for malfunctions. At the time, the camp was guarded by older soldiers considered more decent than the SS. They often gave prisoners more food, and John began realizing that the Nazis were not innately evil; rather, they had become capable of committing these atrocities after a long process of dehumanization. Reflectively, John said, "you have to make people hate before they can kill. If people see other people as humans, they hesitate to kill."[4]

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[3] Cited from USC Shoah video testimony of John Fink, Tape 3, 28:11.
[4] Cited from USC Shoah video testimony of John Fink, Tape 4, 24:03

Liberation

The situation in the camp continued deteriorating towards the end of the war; typhoid spread and food was scarce. Even the Germans were afraid to enter the camp, eventually fleeing in mid-April as the Allies approached. On April 15, the Second British Army announced through loudspeakers that all prisoners were now free, but freedom at this point meant nothing to them.

The British, unprepared to treat the large number of emaciated prisoners they found, sent British medics and medical students to the camp over the next few days to evacuate the camp slowly.

After regaining his strength, John was asked by a British engineer to restore electricity and water in the camp. He remained in Bergen-Belsen until all barracks were burned down; then, he was relocated to a DP camp just two kilometers away. Whenever he could, he would make himself available to the Allies, and he frequently contributed to the rich cultural life in the camp.

In October, John made his way to Berlin, where he found out that his sister had survived in hiding. Overjoyed though he was by this discovery, he decided not to stay in Berlin because he did not want to contribute to the German economy. He returned to the DP camp where he worked for the Red Cross, the UN, and eventually the American Jewish Distribution Committee. His future wife, Alice, came to the DP camp as a nurse from England. John met her on the eve of Rosh Hashanah when he overheard her speaking German. They soon got engaged and married shortly thereafter.

Becoming Americans

John and his wife Alice applied for visas to numerous countries, including South Africa, Australia, and the United States. As soon as they received their visas for the U.S., they flew to New York and then came to Chicago, where one of Alice's cousins lived. The young family first settled in Hyde Park, but they later moved to Andersonville, where John started work as a maintenance electrician with the Tool and Drill Company. When he later became a union electrician, he moved to Rogers Park to provide his four children with a Jewish education and access to Jewish communities.

Throughout his professional life, John never thought about the Holocaust. He was always busy working and providing for his family, so his experiences hardly ever crossed his mind. Subconsciously, he was, of course, impacted by the Holocaust, as he was rather protective of his children and did not try to speak German with them because he hated anything German at that point. He never shared his story with them.

It was not until he was retired that John, having more time to himself, began reflecting on his experiences during the war. Though he does not know where God was during the Holocaust, he continues to cherish his Jewish heritage and would never deny his identity. Further, he feels close to all survivors, which led him to become involved with the Holocaust Memorial Foundation of Illinois.

John passed away in his home on December 20, 2000.

Betty Zwang Fleischman

World Before

On November 12, 1912, Betty Zwang was born to Herman and Flora Zwang in Stein am Kocher, a small village in Baden-Wurttemburg, Germany. One of two Jewish families living in Stein am Kocher at the time, the Zwangs had called the town their home since at least 1809 when they adopted their surname. As in most of Europe, antisemitism existed in Stein am Kocher. Much to the Jewish community's horror, a twelve-year-old Christian boy murdered a Jewish boy of the same age in 1844. However, it seems Jews and Christians in Betty's hometown were able to coexist with one another in relative harmony.

Growing up, Betty had a comfortable childhood. She attended the local public school with her four siblings, Victor (b. 1908), Jenny (b. 1915), Ludwig, and Selma, and her father, co-owner of a successful textiles business, served as mayor of Stein am Kocher for several years. Just next door to her father's business, Betty's grandfather Jakob and another Zwang, Abraham (who succeeded Herman as mayor by 1932), owned a cattle dealing business.

Though comprising about one percent of Stein am Kocher's population, the Jewish community of Betty's childhood was active. They worshipped at a small synagogue in town, which remained open until it was disbanded in 1937, and they sent their children to a Jewish religious school to be educated in their faith.

As a teenager, Betty attended a women's needlework school in Heilbronn am Necker to learn how to sew. She then began apprenticing for the L. Blum business in Heilbronn, where she later worked as a salesgirl.

Rise of Nazism and Life Under the Swastika

In 1933, when Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany, Betty had just gotten a job working for the Julius Metzger family in Worms. Though she did not know it at the time, the Nazis' rise to power would soon alter the fabric of her family's lives as well as the lives of millions others across Europe and around the world.

On September 15, 1935, the Nazi Party announced the implementation of the Nuremberg Race Laws, which stripped German Jews of their citizenship. Now stateless, Betty and her family were exposed and delegitimized; they were unprotected by their government, and as a consequence, they could be abused in ways citizens could not. Less than three years later, another anti-Semitic piece of legislation required the Zwangs to add Israel or Sara to their names.

Under increasingly difficult circumstances, Betty found work as a domestic servant for the Kaufman family, who lived in Heilbronn. In 1938, Betty and the family moved to Frankfort, home to some 26,000 other Jews.

With conditions in Germany growing more hostile to Jews daily, and with Germany's increasingly aggressive foreign policy, Betty's older brother Victor Zwang decided to leave his homeland for Antwerp, Belgium in 1938. There, 19-year-old Victor secured passage to the United States aboard the *SS Westernland*, arriving in New York on September 27.

Less than one month after Victor emigrated from Germany, the Nazis decreed all German Jewish passports invalid. To be honored as legitimate, Betty's and all others would need to be stamped with a large "J," a policy suggested by the Swiss government.

November Pogroms

When a German Jew named Herschel Grynszpan shot Ernst vom Rath, the German Embassy in France's Third Secretary, Betty was living in Frankfort with the Kaufman Family. Two days later, on November 9, 1938, vom Rath died from his wounds, and Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels urged the SA and Hitler Youth to take to the streets in retaliation.

Over the next two days, the Nazis unleashed a wave of terror on Germany's Jewish population: they destroyed hundreds of synagogues, including the four main synagogues in Frankfort, vandalized thousands of Jewish businesses across the country, and arrested some 30,000 Jewish men.

The pogrom, which marked the first government-sanctioned violence against Germany's Jewish population, became known as Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, because of the glass from smashed-out Jewish storefronts that littered the streets afterward.

Considered by many as the start of the Holocaust, Kristallnacht signaled to Betty and the rest of Germany's Jews that they were no longer welcome. In February 1939, Betty wrote to a Mrs. Laura Willstaedt in London, seeking employment with her family as a domestic servant. One month later, she was granted a Kennkarte by the German government, and by April, she had arrived in London. Her younger sister Jenny obtained a visa as well and arrived in Southampton by 1942.

Unfortunately, Betty's parents and sister Selma were unable to procure emigration papers. Her father, Hermann, lived on Hindenburgstrasse in Stein am Kocher until his death on October 12, 1940. He was 63. A death certificate from the Jewish hospital of Mannheim confirms that Betty's former employer, Ludwig Kaufman, who was living in Mannheim at the time, had been his caretaker.

World at War

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland and the Second World War began. Two days later, Britain declared war on Germany. At the same time, Betty was working as a cook for another household, the Bayreuthers, in London. Though she switched jobs several times, she remained in the city for the duration of the war, surviving the devastating Battle of Britain in autumn of 1940. In 1942, Betty began working for Bertha Fleishmann and her family; her future husband Julius Fleischman also worked for the Fleishmanns, but it is uncertain when. The same year, Flora and Selma Zwang's applications for visas to England were officially denied by the Undersecretary of State's Office.

Deportations

In January 1942, fifteen high-ranking Nazi officials spent a day at Wannsee to discuss the implementation of the plan to annihilate European Jewry, the Final Solution. They agreed upon the construction of six extermination camps, the largest being the Auschwitz complex in Oswiecim, Poland. Large-scale deportations to concentration and transit camps began shortly thereafter.

On October 22, 1940—two years before the British government rejected their visa applications--Betty's mother Flora and sister Selma were deported to the interment Camp de Gurs in southwestern France. For a time, they exchanged letters with Betty and Jenny. Betty also wrote the United Africa Company Limited, the Friends Service Council, and the International Red Cross inquiring about sending care packages and money to her mother and sister. However, on August 8, 1942, Selma and Flora Zwang left Gurs for Drancy, a transit camp outside of Paris. From Drancy, they were deported to Auschwitz, and on August 30, 1942—probably upon arrival at Auschwitz—they were murdered in the gas chambers. Flora was 62; Selma's age is unknown. Betty did not learn of their fates until April 7, 1943, when she received a response from the International Red Cross regretting to inform her of Selma and Flora's deportations.

Departure and Arrival

In England, Betty continued working for the Fleishmanns until 1944. In 1943, her sister Jenny had married fellow German Jewish émigré Ernst Hugo Meisel, a World War I veteran and wood laborer from Frankenthal, Palatine. Soon thereafter, Jenny and Ernst invited Betty to live with them in Hendon, Middlesex, and Betty got a job with The Holiday Fellowship.

On December 28, 1945, Betty said goodbye to her sister and brother-in-law and began her journey to the United States. She took a Pan-Am flight to New York, where she arrived the next day.

Becoming Americans

Though a stateless immigrant in a new country, 33-year-old Betty Zwang already spoke English and had several contacts in the States. The day after her arrival, she received a money order from Julius Fleischman, a German Jew who had immigrated to Chicago in 1934 and had corresponded with Betty while serving in the U.S. military, welcoming her to the U.S.A. After spending some time in New York, Betty went to Los Angeles to see her brother, Victor, who had gotten a job as a clerk and gotten married in 1940. His wife was Zelda White, a stenographer and the daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants from Cleveland, Ohio.

Jenny and her husband Ernst Meisel left England for New York in 1946. They eventually settled in Los Angeles as well, where they remained married until Jenny's passing on June 15, 1980.

Sometime before 1949, Betty moved to Chicago, where she married Julius Simon Fleischman, a German Jewish immigrant and World War II veteran. He was born on September 11, 1907 to Adolph and Julia Fleischman in Altenhmuhr, Germany. He had two siblings, an older brother named Norbert (Bert) and a sister named Carola. Adolph, a World War I veteran, owned a butcher's shop in Altenmuhr. Hoping to continue the family business, Julius went to Furth in 1921 to work as a butcher's apprentice, and in 1925, he received his butcher's certificate. The same year, his brother Bert left Germany for the United States, arriving alone in New York on March 24 at just nineteen years old. By 1930, he had moved to Chicago, where Julius would join him in 1934 after traveling aboard the *SS Europa* to New York. In 1942, Adolph and Julia followed suit, living with Bert and his wife Ethel in Oak Park for several years before moving into the Chicago Self-Help Home. A house established by Jewish European emigres to assist other aged Holocaust survivors arriving in the U.S., the Chicago Self-Help Home later went on to provide room, board, and medical assistance to over 1000 elderly survivors of the Nazi genocide.

Julius was drafted into the U.S. Armed Forces the same year his parents came to Chicago. He served as a private for one year before being honorably discharged with two medals.

Once married, Betty and Julius lived together in the suburbs of Chicago for the remainder of their lives. On October 19, 1988, Julius passed away in Skokie, Illinois at the age of 81. Nine years later, on March 2, 1997, Betty passed away. She was 84.

Betty's sister-in-law Zelda died in 1987, and her brother Victor passed away on February 17, 1987.

Whether Betty's brother Ludwig was able to emigrate after his father's death is unknown; however, we know he survived the Shoah as he passed away in Colombia on an unknown date.

Though Betty and Julius never had children, Julius's brother Bert did. After his wife Ethel passed away in 1945, Bert married Emma Polin Fleischman, and they had a daughter, Sandra. In 1954, Sandra married Dr. Richard Rubinstein, and they had two children, Dr. Scott Rubinstein and Donna Price. Donna eventually donated Betty and Julius's artifacts to the collection at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center.

The Frankenstein and Fleischer Family

World Before

Julius and Martha Frankenstein, the parents of Carla and Heinz Frankenstein, lived in Swinemunde, Germany before the rise of Adolf Hitler and Nazism. Swinemunde was a fashionable spa town on the Baltic Sea. Julius and Martha Frankenstein owned a fabric and dressmaking shop in the town. Carla Frankenstein met cantor Leopold Fleischer in January 1937 when he moved to Swinemunde and rented a room in Julius and Martha's apartment building. He came to the town to start his first position as a cantor in the town's temple. Carla and Leopold fell in love and married on May 30, 1939.

Nazis in Power

In the 1930's, life became increasingly difficult for the Jewish community. The Frankensteins and Fleischers felt the growing antisemitism in their town. Attending school was particularly hard for Heinz because he was Jewish. Heinz also attempted to get an apprenticeship in a bakery in Swinemunde, but the owners feared the authorities would close their bakery if they hired him. At that time, the Nazis began encouraging Jews to emigrate from Germany. However, it was not until after *Kristallnacht* that the family decided to leave the country. In 1939, Julius Frankenstein was arrested and imprisoned for six weeks in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Martha, a very resilient woman, was insistent that the family leave Germany as soon as possible. She chose one of the most unlikely places to immigrate—Shanghai.

The city of Shanghai had unique circumstances. Beginning in 1842, Shanghai was a divided city. The Western Powers had established extraterritorial rights administering an International Settlement and French concession. There were already two distinct groups of Jews living in the International Settlement, the Sephardic and Ashkenazi, who fled from either Russia or Iraq. After the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, China fell under Japanese rule. Since the new Japanese puppet regime was not recognized internationally until 1940, Shanghai came under no legal jurisdiction of any sovereign power. This resulted in the absence of passport controls. Shanghai became an open port which refugees did not need to obtain a visa to enter. This made it possible for German Jews to immigrate.

The Fleischers and Frankensteins felt they had no other choice but to gain passage to Shanghai. In January 1939, they obtained ID cards and passports to leave Germany. Both documents were stamped with the letter "J," identifying them as Jewish, and they were required to adopt the middle name Sara for females and Israel for males. The Nazis made the emigration process extremely difficult for Jews. They stripped the fleeing Jews of all their possessions to make their life difficult after they left. To be able to afford the passage to Shanghai, Martha sold her house, clothing store, and some furnishings to a wealthy, non-Jewish neighbor. She bought tickets for the entire family on the German Lloyd Line.

After obtaining exit papers to Shanghai, Martha presented the passenger tickets to the Gestapo at Sachsenhausen. Soon after, Julius was released from the camp. In June 1939, Julius, Martha, Carla, Leopold, and Heinz immigrated to Shanghai. Despite Leopold's pleading, his parents, Ernst and Freida Fleischer, chose not to leave with them. The family sailed across the Straights of Gibraltar,

through the Suez Canal, around India, the Philippines, and Hong Kong to finally reach Shanghai. The journey took four weeks.

Life Under the Swastika: Shanghai

Once they reached Shanghai, they were immediately taken to a *Heime*, German for "home." Many *Heimes* were converted barracks crammed with narrow bunk beds. By the end of 1939, around 2,500 people lived in the *Heimes*, sleeping anywhere from 6 to 150 to a room. Shortly after, the whole family moved into an apartment in a small area of the International Settlement called Hongkew. On March 6, 1940, Carla gave birth to her daughter, Judith "Daisy" Fleischer.

Jews residing in Hongkew tried to maintain a normal life. They established European-style cafes, delicatessens, nightclubs, and shops. Many ran small factories and were even able to remain practicing doctors or teachers. Although the influx of Jews to Shanghai caused fewer jobs and financial resources for many inhabitants of Hongkew, the Frankensteins and Fleischers were successful in gaining jobs to support the family. Leopold officiated as a cantor and taught the Talmud Torah schools and Julius and Martha ran a transportation company, called Star Transportation. With an older gentleman, Heinz opened up a small café, called "Daisy Café." Later, he ran his own bakery.

Life in the Ghetto: Shanghai

On February 18, 1943, the Japanese authorities established the Hongkew ghetto ordering all refugees who had arrived from Europe after 1937 to move into the Designated Area for Stateless Refugees. The ghetto area totaled less than three-quarters of a square mile and housed more than 18,000 European refugees and around 100,000 Chinese. However, life remained normal for the family. They had enough to eat and ate together every night. They made friendships with other German refugees. However, because of the language barrier, the Germans and Chinese often did not intermingle. Judy remembers Chinese children throwing rocks at her while walking to school.

There were many hardships in the ghetto. The Japanese commissioners did not permit refugees to leave the ghetto without a special ID card. Japanese soldiers, specifically a man named Ghoya, decided who could leave the ghetto. This depended on his mood. The experience was particularly unpleasant for most refugees. When Julius had to leave the ghetto for work, a Japanese soldier accused him of having improper documentation. He was imprisoned in the Bridgehouse jail for three weeks. Heinz traveled often to bring him food and clothing.

The ghetto also had unsanitary conditions, causing many diseases. Judy caught whooping cough and intestinal worms. Martha suffered from dysentery and cramping. People in the ghetto had to be very careful to take care of their health. Furthermore, after the US entered the war, residents were fearful of Allied bombings. On July 17, 1945, an American aircraft accidently bombed the Hongkew ghetto, injuring nearly 250 Jewish people and killing thirty-one. An unknown number of Chinese were killed as well.

After the Japanese surrendered on August 7, 1945, the family stayed in Shanghai for another three years. It was later that they learned that Leopold's parents, Ernst and Freida Fleischer, along with his sister, Margot, were deported to Auschwitz in 1942, where they were killed. Fortunately, Leopold's brothers fled Germany and immigrated to England before the deportations.

Becoming Americans

After the war, the family made plans to leave Shanghai. On January 8, 1948, the family, including Heinz's new wife, Inge Kaufman, immigrated to the United States. They boarded the transport ship *SS Marine Adder* to San Francisco. The family arrived four weeks later. Upon arrival, Judy was not officially allowed into the US. The authorities claimed she had tuberculosis and detained her in a hospital for a few days. After her release, the family lived in a hotel while they became accustomed to life in the US. Leopold officiated as a cantor at a small synagogue, B'nai Emunah, and gave private bar mitzvah lessons. Martha and Carla secured jobs at the Levi-Strauss factory sewing jeans, and Julius worked at a factory. Within three weeks, the family bought a house in which they lived under one roof, eight adults and Judy. In 1950, Judy's brother, Ernest, was born. Later in 1958, Heinz and his wife opened a successful bakery with his wife called Ahren's Bakery.

In August 1955, Carla, Leopold, Judy and Ernest, and Martha and Julius moved to Chicago. Heinz and Inge stayed behind. Leopold Fleischer became cantor of Habonim Congregation and passed away in 1995. Today, Judy resides in Northbrook, IL and volunteers at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie, IL. She has three children and seven grandchildren.

Jerry Glass

Jerry Glass was born on April 14 1926 in Chicago. He was raised Jewish and spoke Yiddish as his second language. Because his Russian grandparents were brutally murdered by the Nazis, he enlisted in the Army in 1943 as a 17-year-old. He was part of the Army 3rd Division, 259th Infantry and landed with the third wave on Omaha Beach (Normandy, France) on June 6, 1944, as part of Operation Cobra. During the battle on Omaha Beach, 2,499 American soldiers were killed in action. The 3rd Division reached Germany by mid-September and fought in the Battle of Aachen and later in the Battle of the Bulge. On March 23, 1945, Allied forces captured Cologne and crossed the Rhine River. The division suffered more soldiers killed in action than any other US division. Jerry helped liberate Mauthausen concentration camp in May 1945, and he was overwhelmed and shocked by what they found in the camp. The forces of the 3rd Division stayed in Germany until 1947.

Leah Gutman

World Before

Leah Gutman, née Grochowsky, was born on December 10, 1919 in Bialystok, a city in the northeastern part of Poland about 100 miles east of Warsaw. During the first 18 years of her life, she lived in Bialystok with her parents Josef and Luba, her older brother Alexander, her younger sister Chaya and different Polish or Russian housemaids. Her father was an agent for an army clothing factory, and the family lived in a wealthy neighborhood.

Leah remembered going to two movie theaters in the city, walking and playing in the beautiful public park with her parents, taking piano lessons, and being a part of sport teams. Her father Josef was the head of the family; her mother Luba was very domesticated. Leah described herself and her siblings as spoiled children because her parents never asked them to help in the household. Moreover, they never had to worry about money.

The total population of Bialystok at that time was about 100,000, and about half of its residents were Jewish. Leah's memories of her childhood were very positive. She and her siblings went to a private Gymnasium for Jewish children, where they received an excellent education. All of her classes were taught in Hebrew rather than in Polish or Yiddish. Education played a very important role in her upbringing. Like most Jews from Bialystok, Leah did not grow up in an orthodox Jewish family but in a traditional Zionist environment. The city had a Jewish majority, as Polish gentiles lived mostly in the suburbs. There was a kibbutz which prepared the Jewish population for immigration to Palestine, along with many synagogues. Although Leah had friends who were part of the socialist Zionist movement of Bialystok, she was not really interested in politics. Furthermore, her family was not a part of the right-wing Nationalist-Zionists who were present in the Jewish day-to-day life of the city. Instead, her family was part of the local Jewish community, spoke only Yiddish at home, and supported all efforts for the creation of a homeland in Palestine.

Jewish holidays such as the Shabbat dinner, Passover, and Yom Kippur were really important for the family and their friends. Leah remembered her mother cleaning the whole house, cooking for days, and preparing all sorts of traditional dishes for these holidays.

Although Leah Gutman had positive memories of her childhood, she was confronted with antisemitism by Polish gentiles long before 1933 when the Nazis came to power. Leah was active in the Jewish sports club "Maccabi" at her school, and as the captain of her basketball team, she was often the first target of physical and psychological harassment during games. She remembered that the Jewish community of Bialystok hired Jewish workers to protect the students from the Jewish Gymnasiums because they were frequently attacked by young Polish gentiles on their way to and from school. A strong foundation in Zionist education as well as increasing antisemitism in her hometown convinced Leah that immigrating to Palestine was the best opportunity for a good life.

Rise of Nazism

When Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, Leah's family was concerned about what would happen to the German Jewish population. Despite this, they trusted the Polish army,

not understanding the Germans' power or their ambitions. This false sense of security made it impossible for Leah's family, and many other Jews, to anticipate what was to come.

In 1935, Leah's brother Alexander left Bialystok for Palestine in 1935. Her parents had planned to send their three children first, and then to join them in Palestine once they had obtained visas. When new anti-Semitic laws were passed in Poland, Leah decided to leave for Palestine against her family's wishes. She had not even finished her education. The road to Palestine was rough and exhausting; to get to Haifa, Leah took several trains as well as a ferry. When she finally arrived at the end of 1938, her brother was waiting for her.

Her parents' plan was to send Chaya to Palestine in 1940, and then they themselves would leave. However, Poland was invaded in September 1939, and neither Chaya nor Leah's parents were able to escape the country. Leah and Alexander were the only members of her family to survive the Shoah.

Arrival in a New Country

Leah lived with her brother, Alexander, and his wife in Haifa until the spring of 1939, when she began school in Jerusalem. For the next two years, Leah was in contact with her parents and sister, who were living under Russian occupation at the time. The whole family felt positive about the occupation, especially her Russian-speaking mother, but in June 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union and occupied eastern Poland. After a last letter in May 1941, Leah and her brother never received word from their family again.

From 1939 to 1941, Leah had received financial support from her parents, allowing her to go to university in Jerusalem. However, after the German occupation of eastern Poland in 1941, her father's money transfers stopped, forcing Leah to leave university, move back to her brother's house, and become a construction worker in the suburbs of Haifa. After months of intensive physical work, she started working in a kitchen and became restaurant manager. At that time Leah met Ernie Gutman, a German Jew from Dresden who immigrated to Palestine in 1932 when he was just 16. A member of the Kfar Giladi kibbutz, Ernie was a staunch Zionist. Well-educated, he had been raised by patriotic, assimilated parents and could speak seven languages. His father Karl Gutmann was a World War I veteran and identified Germany as his family's homeland. Four years after Ernie immigrated to Palestine, he returned to Europe from 1936 to 1938 to fight Franco's fascist army in the Spanish Civil War.

After only three months together, Leah and Ernie got married. In 1942, Leah became a member of the Palmach and the Haganah, both predecessors of the Israel Defense Force.

Becoming Americans

In 1947, 28-year-old Leah Gutman decided to leave Palestine and immigrate to the United States of America, before the State of Israel even declared independence. Leah, and especially Ernie, did not want to leave Israel as they considered it their home and the home of the Jewish people. However, Leah saw it as her and Ernie's responsibility to help her parents-in-law, who had immigrated to Chicago after escaping the 1938 November Pogroms (known as Kristallnacht). The loss of almost her entire family had led her to prioritize those loved ones who had survived. Ernie agreed to leave Israel and help his parents build a new life, but he insisted that they would

eventually come back to Israel. Despite Ernie's desire to return to Israel, Leah convinced him to stay in the U.S., though both of them felt guilty not supporting their new country, particularly during the Independence War of 1948.

In the United States, Ernie worked as a driver and Leah as a Hebrew teacher, although she was not very religious. In 1951, Leah became pregnant with her first child, Elana. Her second child, Joseph, was born in 1958. After more than 20 years, Leah found two uncles who had also survived the Holocaust and lived in the United States. One lived in California, working for the newspaper "The Jewish Voice," and the other was in Chicago. Finding these two family members after many years of grief gave Leah new hope. Leah's uncle and his whole family in Chicago welcomed her with open arms.

On June 1, 1995, Ernie Gutman died at the age of 79, after more than 50 years of marriage to Leah. In January of 2012, Leah Gutman died in Glenview, Illinois. She was mother to her two children, Elana and Joseph, and grandmother to her five grandchildren, Danny, Natassia, Brian, Mikey and Angela.

Ludwig Haas

World Before

Ludwig Adolf Haas (Hebrew: Jehuda Ben Aron) was born on October 26th 1924 in Landau, Palatinate in Germany. Growing up in the small farmers' village of Ruelzheim, he was one of approximately 250 Jews in a population of 4000. Located about two miles west of the Rheine River and between the cities of Karlsruhe and Mannheim, Ruelzheim was a predominantly Catholic town founded during the age of the Romans.

Ludwig, his sister Friedl, and his parents Adolf (b. 8.8.1892) and Anna (b. 12.26.1902) lived in a two-story house on Neue Landstraße with his grandmother, Berta, Uncle Julius, and Aunt Dorothea. They had a barn and stables as well as a garden where they grew vegetables; to help out around the property, the family hired a maid and a farmhand. They did not have running water, and the house had to be heated by coal stoves during the winter. Like most of Ruelzheim's Jews, Ludwig's father was a cattle dealer who would go to surrounding towns to trade or sell cattle and horses.

The Haas Family was very conservative and went to the synagogue in town frequently. On Saturdays, when all the other children in town went to school, Ludwig and his sister stayed home to observe the Sabbath; they would pick up their homework from classmates in the afternoon. Friday nights always culminated in big dinners and homemade dishes.

Ludwig attended the Jewish school in Ruelzheim for two years before the Nazis shut it down. Following his school's closing, he transferred to a public school where boys were taught by male teachers and girls by nuns. After a short while, the German government replaced the nuns with young Nazi teachers from out of town. There to teach the children the superiority of the Aryan race, the first thing the new teachers did was point out what a true Aryan girl looked like. She chose Ludwig's sister Friedl, the only Jewish girl in her class, as the perfect example; her blonde hair and blue eyes met the Nazis' stereotypes perfectly.

Rise of Nazism

Soon after Hitler came to power, Ludwig and his family began feeling the effects of numerous antisemitic laws and declarations passed by the Nazis. In 1937, all Jewish cattle dealers' licenses were revoked. Ludwig and his sister were kicked out of the public school and forced to travel to a neighboring town, where a Jewish school remained in operation. Ludwig's Christian friends told him they were no longer allowed to play with him.

On the day of Ludwig's bar mitzvah, the German police entered his family's house to examine his gifts, displayed on a table. The men looked over every present, marking down the names of Christians who had sent gifts. Ludwig knows of at least one man who lost his job following that incident.

On January 20, 1938, about three months after Ludwig's bar mitzvah, his father passed away after a hernia surgery failed to heal intestinal problems. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery, but his family was not allowed to place a gravestone in memory of him. The next morning, the Nazis printed the names of all Christian men who attended the funeral in the local newspaper.

Shortly after Ludwig's father died, his grandmother moved in with the family. However, the family was ordered to leave their home during Kristallnacht; as a consequence, they moved to Mannheim, where they stayed with friends. The family later discovered that their house had been destroyed during the pogroms, along with the many synagogues the Nazis had burned down.

Becoming Americans

With an uncle already residing in the United States, Ludwig and his family had it easier than most German Jews when they decided it was time to leave Germany. In 1940, the U.S. Embassy called the Haases' quota number, and, with visas for Italy, the family left their homeland. First taking a train to Genoa, they later boarded an Italian ship in Naples destined for New York. Because German currency was not accepted, they received aid from Ludwig's uncle, who collected money from relatives to decrease the burden of travel costs. Once they were aboard the ship, the travelling party—Ludwig, his mother, his grandmother, and his sister—shared a small room with four beds; Ludwig enjoyed the experience at sea. It was one of the last boats to get out of Europe before the war broke out.

Upon arriving in New York, the Haases bypassed the processing period at Ellis Island and went to stay with relatives until the Jewish Aid Society could help them board a train to Milwaukee. Once in Wisconsin, they stayed with Ludwig's mother's brother, Ludwig Meyer. His mother's sister, who arrived shortly before they did, shared a flat with them. Immediately, the immigrants began learning English to fit in as well as they could. Ludwig's mom got a job working in a potato factory; eventually, she began working for a kitchen.

In Germany, Ludwig had been persecuted as a Jew and a noncitizen; once in America, he was persecuted as a German. After the U.S. declared war on Germany in 1941, for example, the American government, fearing that some German immigrants could be spies, confiscated the family's radios.

World at War

In May 1943, just before the end of his freshman year of college, Ludwig was drafted into the U.S. Army. Despite his German-language skills, he was randomly assigned to a unit and stationed in Camp Grand, Illinois. While undergoing medical training near Rockford, he became a naturalized citizen; in August of that year, he went first to Boston and then to Liverpool. Travelling aboard the *Mary Posa*, a former luxury liner that had been converted into a troopship, Ludwig and his fellow soldiers crossed the Atlantic surrounded by an entourage of fighter planes and barrage balloons prepared to take out enemy submarines.

From Liverpool, Ludwig's unit took the train to Bournemouth on the south coast, right across the channel from France. During the war, his unit supplied others with equipment and never saw combat.

In September, Ludwig's unit landed on Omaha Beach and began slowly making their way to Holland. They ended up in Maastricht, where they slept in a bombed out railroad station until Ludwig, still able to speak German, arranged for the men to stay with local families. He also volunteered to drive jeeps, weapon carriers, and trucks to a depot in Paris.

Because the German military dropped spies in uniform behind U.S. lines, the Allies set up checkpoints all over the continent. To pass them, soldiers asked Ludwig questions only an American would know rather than passwords, which the Germans could access. He would be asked where he lived in the U.S. and what towns the train stopped at on its way to Chicago. Sometimes, soldiers would test him by commenting that "they make good Budweiser Beer" in Wisconsin, to which Ludwig would reply that they were mistaken, Budweiser was a St. Louis brew.

About 10% of Ludwig's unit was Jewish, but he does not recall any antisemitism in the army during the war. His unit moved across Germany, arriving first in Aachen and then in Münster before being stationed in Drensteinfurt.

With the permission of his commander, he went to Mannheim to search for an aunt and uncle, but the city was entirely bombed out. While there, Ludwig asked a man if he knew anything about his family; he explained that Ludwig's aunt had died in a bombing, and his uncle had passed away in the hospital.

Having been unsuccessful in Mannheim, Ludwig hitchhiked to his home in Ruelzheim, where he found many of his old friends and neighbors. He visited the Jewish cemetery where his father was buried and arranged for somebody to make a headstone as well as maintain his grave. Because the Nazis had used Jewish headstones to build roads after Kristallnacht, Ludwig had to employ a local stonecutter to make a new one. Before returning to his unit, he learned that his childhood home was still registered under the Haas name, so he sold it as well as the surrounding farmland.

While in Germany with the U.S. Army, Ludwig never heard more than rumors regarding the Final Solution, much less see a concentration camp. As a consequence, it was impossible to ascertain the scope of the Nazis' crimes while serving as a soldier.

In 1946, Ludwig was shipped back to New York. From there, he traveled to Fort Sheridan, where he was discharged in February of that year. He returned to school, and in 1950, he graduated from Marquette Engineering University. He got a job with the city of Milwaukee as a civil engineer, and over the years, he worked his way up to district manager, a job he found both fulfilling and satisfying.

Return to Life

In February 1960, one of Ludwig's cousins set him up on a blind date with one of her college friends, a girl named Silvia. Ludwig and Silvia fell in love, and on October 23, 1960, they got married at Temple Shalom in Milwaukee. They had two children, a son named David, and a daughter named Karen, who grew up and raised four and three children, respectively.

After the war, he and his family returned to Ruelzheim several times. In 1988, the city invited them back and paid for all of their expenses.

On October 26, 1999, Ludwig's wife, Silvia, passed away after battling leukemia.

In February 2002, Ludwig took his children and grandchildren back to Ruelzheim, where they visited some old friends still living there. It was for them, his family's younger generations, that Ludwig eventually recorded his life story.

His sister Friedl is married, has two children, and lives in Milwaukee.

Ludwig Adolf Haas passed away on January 12, 2005 in Northbrook, Illinois. He was 80 years old.

Samuel Harris

World Before

Samuel Harris, whose birth name was Szlamek Rzeznik, was born on May 13, 1935 in Deblin, Poland, about 40 miles in the southeast of Warsaw.

Sam has few memories of his childhood, but he remembers that his family lived together with his cousins, aunts and uncles in a Jewish neighborhood. He also recalls that life in Deblin was peaceful and secure. Since Sam's father married a second time after the death of his first wife,[5] Sam is much younger than most of his siblings. As the youngest of seven children he was loved by everyone, which gave him a feeling of being "*special*" (Tape 1, 18:43). He had many friends with whom he would run around in the streets or swim in the river. And he recalls playing in the hayloft as well as chasing chickens whenever the family would gather for the Sabbath at a farm just outside of Deblin.

Sam's father, Shmuel Rzeznik, was a religious man who wore a beard and dark clothes. A scribe, he spent much of his time surrounded by stacks of books in front of the window at home, where he would write Torah. He stressed his children's education, so Sam spent his childhood at cheder, learning how to read Hebrew. Growing up in a Jewish neighborhood, Sam did not know anything about anti-Semitism.

World at War

In September 1939, the Germans attacked Deblin, which had an airport and would become an important base for the war later on. Alerted by the sounds of circling airplanes, Sam's family ran outside to see what was happening. Sam recalls this moment as the first time he felt fear. A short while later, soldiers in tanks and men with machine guns arrived to take over the town. Once they had occupied the city, German soldiers went forth marching and singing through the streets. Jews were forced to stay quiet in their homes. The sick, weak, and old were chased out and shot.

Ghettos

Almost immediately the Nazis built a ghetto surrounded by barbed wire. Jews were confined to the ghetto and required to wear a Star of David to identify themselves as such. Indeed, Sam remembers that his mom, Sheva, made the stars, but he doesn't recall that he was supposed to wear one as well. Since there was not enough food, people would sneak out of the ghetto to smuggle in whatever they could find. Sam's sister Rosa, who lived in Warsaw, came back home and became the leader of the family. Sam describes her as strong, beautiful, smart, and alert. She was fluent in Polish and therefore able to leave the ghetto without being recognized as Jewish. As Germans gathered Jews for work a little later, Rosa was forced to work in a camp close to the airfield. In this way it became easier for her to smuggle food, but it still was not enough to feed her family. To help themselves, people stole potatoes from farms close to the town. This was very dangerous because the farms were guarded by German soldiers. Being discovered meant being shot on the spot. Life in the ghetto was determined by the soldiers and was completely under

[5] Sheva, Sam's mother, is Shmuel Rzeznik's second wife. According to a Jewish custom, he married his first wife's youngest sister.

German control. Jews were scared, demoralized, brutally treated, abused. Sam has two distinct memories of that time. One day, a soldier came to the family's house and asked for a hot cup of tea. Sam's father gave it to him and the soldier threw the hot water in his father's face. A little later, soldiers bashed him up with branches from trees so that he could hardly move. As an important man of the Jewish community, the Germans tortured Sam's father to humiliate him and reduce his influence.

Deportation

In 1942, the Nazis rounded up the Jews of Deblin, lining them up in long rows and packing them in boxcars, to be sent to concentration camps. While Sam and his family waited in line to clamber aboard the train cars, Sam remembers thinking that "throughout it all…I just felt that I was gonna be all right. I always had that feeling." (Tape 2, 7:46) Unable to see anything other than legs and the cloudy sky above, he found himself suddenly pushed out of the line by his father, who told him to join his sister Sara. Sam obeyed and ran to his sister, who was hiding behind a pile of bricks. Meanwhile, those in line were beaten and forced to move to the boxcars. This was the last time Sam saw his parents, siblings, cousins, friends, and neighbors. He never had a chance to say goodbye.

Rosa, who was not transported but forced to work in the camp, took care of her siblings. Although she did everything she could to provide food, Sam constantly felt hungry. When German soldiers came to deport the remaining Jews, they were even crueler. Sara, Rosa, and Sam did not see people as they were shot, but they could hear the gunfire and saw dead bodies lying all over the street. They started running as fast as they could and ended up in an outhouse of a farm. Pretty soon, the owner discovered them and chased them out. The soldiers were coming closer and closer; they seemed to be everywhere. Rosa decided that they needed a new hiding place, and they needed one fast. Running through the fields, they finally came to another farmhouse with a barn. They found a little opening, so they snuck into the barn, where they covered themselves with straw. Lying scared in the straw for hours, they heard gunfire and German soldiers yelling for the Jews to come out. When the shooting was over and it became quiet outside, they left their hiding place and went back to their house for the night. The next day, Sam noticed that the piles in the streets he saw the day before were not garbage as he had assumed. They were piles of dead human beings–his neighbors. People were moving around the corpses to find out for certain who did not make it. Sam remembers that he felt disgusted by the Polish town people who started collecting the things they needed: "*The field was full of–I saw people all over and I saw the town people, the Polish people, and that really bothered me, going around and picking off watches and taking things out of pockets, just as the bodies were started to be put away and as this couldn't strike me too well that there was no sad–didn't seem to be sadness. […] It really left a permanent impression. And I don't wanna say it, but it made me not like the Polish people. As I got older, I distinguished the bad from the good. But as a child … It kind of burned a bad feeling of Polish people because I didn't know any individuals. That's kind of sad–because I don't want to be angry about anybody*" (Tape 2, 21:05).

Camps

The Germans had orders to make Deblin *judenfrei*, or free of Jews, by the end of the second transport. The few remaining Jews, including Rosa, were sent to a concentration camp for work. Since Rosa was unable to get her siblings into the camp she entrusted them to a friend. Some time

after, her friend feared that the Germans would harm his family as well if they were to find out that he was hiding Jews, so his wife separated the children and give them to different families. Sam ended up in a potato cellar with several other Jews. After about a day or two, Rosa sent for Sam. She arranged for Sara and him to sneak into the concentration camp. Although the conditions were poor and required Sam to remain hidden, Sam describes this step as "*a ticket to safety*" (Tape 2, 25:35).

They lived in wooden barracks and ate meager rations of soup with some horse meat in it. The prisoners quickly grew weak; starving, living in poor hygienic conditions, and suffering from exposure to the frigid Polish weather, many of them died. Escape was nearly impossible. Those who were caught were either shot on the spot or hanged. Dead bodies were strung up between barracks to remind prisoners what happened to those who tried to flee. Terrified of what might happen if he left the barracks, Sam decided not to go to the outhouses, especially at night, making bedwetting inevitable; he contracted numerous infections as a consequence.

During this time, Rosa developed an acquaintance with a Jew from Vienna who used to work in the washhouse. Rosa and Walter fell in love and married in the ghetto. Although the circumstances were strange, Sam was happy about this relationship. He liked Walter a lot and knew that he would help Rosa protect her siblings.

In spring of 1944, the war was closing in on Deblin. The Germans decided to transfer the remaining Jews (among them 20 to 25 children) to Czestochowa, a labor camp where they would be forced to make bullets for the war. Walter, who was needed by the Nazis because of his German language skills, was able to convince the Nazis to keep Rosa and her siblings in the camp. Finally, the family went on the second transport two weeks later as the Russians approached. Sam still recalls the sound of the train, the crowded boxcar, crying people, and the hunger he felt when he left Deblin's concentration camp one-and-a-half years after his arrival.

Upon arriving in Czestochowa, Sam heard people screaming, German voices yelling, and dogs barking. The Nazis began dividing the transport into three groups—men, women, and children—and Sam worried about being separated from his sister. Rosa told him to stand on his tiptoes so he would look tall enough to work, but the tactic failed: Sam was sent to the left and separated from his family. He recalls one of the soldiers kicking him with his shiny boot, humiliating him and sticking in his memory, even all these years later. Nevertheless, Sam believed he would make it. He wrote a little note in Yiddish for Rosa and gave it to a Ukrainian soldier. He wanted to let her know that she should not worry. He would be all right; he would survive.

Though he is unsure why, Sam was brought back to the main camp one day.[6] Upon his return, he was greeted by prisoners and handed from person to person. No one had seen a child for a long time, so they kissed and hugged him, passing him as they would have passed the Torah.

[6] In his book, Sam tells a concrete story: One day, a Jew from Deblin was arguing in German with one of the SS officers. He had a letter that promised that his daughter would stay with him in the camp. He got this because he seemed to be in a high position in Deblin. At first, the officer answered that he would not care what people told him in Deblin. But when he saw the signature on the letter he changed his mind. No one knows how but the guy was also able to get the other

Though once again reunited with his siblings, Sam remained at great risk: as a small boy, he was unable to work, and as a consequence, he was in constant danger of being shot. Rosa's family received support from other people in the camp who would help her hide the children and share food with them.

Terrible living conditions ensured filth, lice, and diseases, and the German and Ukrainian officers treated prisoners even worse than the Nazis in Deblin. To help themselves, prisoners crafted policies to enhance their situation. Close to the camp was a railroad car filled with potatoes. Since Sam was small, he was able to sneak into gaps adults would have been too big for. He wore a long coat with deep pockets in which to hide the potatoes before passing them off to other prisoners, who would put the potatoes in a rusty, water-filled can and cook them using a steam pipe coming from the factory. One time, Sam was discovered by a soldier while sneaking into the car. The soldier held his gun up to Sam's face, and Sam, terrified, began running, the soldier in close pursuit. He hopped into a trench and kept running, but the soldier stopped. Sam never found out why he did not open fire.

Liberation

Germans continued sending Jews to Auschwitz through 1945. Since people were transported alphabetically and Rosa's last name became Appel after she was married, her family was at the top of the list. Before they were put on the train, however, there was commotion in the camp and the soldiers started leaving their posts. On January 17, 1945 the Russians liberated the camp. The prisoners were hesitant and did not know what to do next. Then one man decided to run into the Nazi quarters, where he found some food. For the first time in years, the prisoners had the opportunity to eat real food; however, their bodies were ill-equipped to handle it, and many of them got sick. Sam, who ate too much butter, knew this problem well.

Early in the morning, Rosa and her family left the camp. They saw German soldiers lying dead on the ground and former prisoners beating the bodies as they walked over them. This image remains engrained in Sam's memory, and he remembers the satisfaction and relief it brought.

The liberation was unexpected. Not knowing what to do or where to go, they went back home. But upon their return to Deblin, they discovered that the Polish people had taken over their former homes; threatening and attacking those Jews who came back, they convinced Walter and Sara that the Rzezniks' home was unsafe for the family, even after the war.

Rosa and Walter went to Vienna, Walter's hometown, to find relatives who could help them start a new life. Meanwhile Sara and Sam stayed temporarily in an orphanage in Lublin (Poland). Although the people were nice and he was treated well, Sam was unhappy. He was separated from Sara, in bad shape from his time in the camp, and recovered slowly. In addition, he started going to school, where the Polish kids made fun of him because of his accent and treated him badly because he was Jewish. Sam tried to cope with the situation, and he turned his thoughts to Rosa's promise of picking him up as soon as she could. He was totally aware that he had gone through hard times and he did not want to be bounced back by others. One day, which Sam remembers well, Rosa

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four kids into the main camp. Harris, Samuel R./Gorder, Cheryl. Child survivor of the Holocaust. Mesa, Arizona 1999, p. 36-37. His sister Sara Hafft can't remember this either (Tape 2, 4-5:15).

finally arrived for her siblings. Almost a year after leaving them, she had earned enough money to bribe a Russian soldier to help her smuggle her siblings in an oil truck from Poland to Czech and finally into Austria.

In Vienna, the children went to both public and religious school. Both of them were doing well. Nevertheless, they were teased by others because they were Jewish. Sam asserted himself and earned respect from the other kids at school, but Rosa considered giving Sara and him away. Jews were not treated well after the war and the married couple was not convinced that life in Vienna would be good for the children. Also, it was difficult to make a living. Finally, Rosa decided that the best way to ensure her siblings would have better chances in life, so she sent them to the U.S. and put them up for adoption. Before Sam left Austria, Rosa arranged for his bar mitzvah, hoping that this would help him follow the Jewish traditions abroad.

Becoming Americans

Once again, Sam had to leave behind people he loved, but this time it would be for a better life. Sara and Sam went by train to Bremerhaven, Germany, where, the 12 year-old boy boarded a ship that would bring him to the United States. On September 21, 1947, the ship arrived in New York. Sam recalls the overwhelming feeling when he saw the Statue of Liberty–life started over.

The only item he kept from his early childhood was a belt he had found in a closet of the work camp in Deblin.

Before Sam and his siblings came to Chicago, they stayed in a temporary home provided by the United States Committee for Care of European Children. They got to know the city, began learning English, and got used to the new customs. A couple of weeks later, Sam and Sara arrived in Chicago, where they lived in a foster home run by the Jewish Children's Bureau. Sam continued to learn English, began playing American football, started getting used to the food, and slowly became accustomed to his new surroundings. Every week, he wrote letters in German to Rosa to stay in touch with her.

Though their social worker tried everything he could, he could not find a family who would take care of both Sara and Sam. Eventually, Sara was adopted by a family on the South Side of Chicago, and Sam was adopted by a family from Northbrook in April 1948.

Sam immediately fell in love with his new family. Dr. Ellis Harris, a pediatrician, his wife Harriet, and their daughter Sue welcomed him with warmth and love. They lived in a beautiful house, and the teenager had his own room as well as a big garden and a dog with which to play. Soon, Sam went to school in Northbrook, gave up his Polish name, and fully adapted to his new life in America. As Dr. Harris remembers it, *"Sam came to live with us on April 10, 1948. Along with his personal belongings he brought with him a pair of white mice for which he had great enthusiasm. He unpacked his clothing with dispatch, showed us his few treasures and pictures brought from Europe, gave to Susan little things he said he didn't want, and when he was finished, gave me his*

two suitcases with instructions to throw them out because he never wanted to see them again. He definitely was locking the door to his past."[7]

In 1954, Sam graduated from high school; four years later, he finished college and started a family with his wife, Dede. With the births of his son and his daughter, he caught up with his childhood. He read "Little Miss Muffet" and sang "Marry had a little lamb"; he played tennis and went to ball games. He worked for the Equitable Life Assurance Company, was very successful, received a promotion, and became the agency's manager after a time. As an active member in his community, he was well-known and well-liked by everyone as well. It took him a while to reconnect with his past and speak about it. However, his experiences deeply affected his attitude. Doing worthwhile things for people who need support became very important to him. His motto in life became "*make the best things out of everything*" (Tape 5, 24:18)

[7] Harris, Samuel R./Gorder, Cheryl. Child survivor of the Holocaust. Mesa, Arizona 1999, p. 71-72.

Gisela Hesse

World Before

Gisela Emily Hesse, née Meyer, was born in Berlin, Germany on February 15, 1913. She was 82 years-old at the time of the interview. She has an older brother, Hans Joachim Meyer. When she was only a few months old, her family moved to Delmenhorst in the county of Oldenburg because her father sensed that World War I was about to break out and wanted to be close to his sister, who could promise them food security. While in Delmenhorst, Gisela's younger sister was born in 1919.

Gisela says that she had a very nice childhood. Her family often joined her aunt for gatherings, and her parents made many friends, so they always had company. On holidays, Gisela's family visited other relatives in the vicinity. Although Gisela was not Catholic, she attended a Catholic school for three years, receiving a good education without being required to say Sunday prayers or attend church. When she reached the age requirement to continue her education at high school, Gisela took the entry examinations and passed. However, she did not wish to attend a co-educational school and enrolled at a business school for two years instead. She recalls that there were four boys in her class, but they sat all in a single row in front of her, so it was not too bad.

Gisela made a lot of friends in Delmenhorst. She joined a swimming club as well as a gym club. She had a wonderful time playing because there was little traffic, and she fondly remembers a grocery store across the street where she had to weigh everything and put produce in bags. Gisela learned how to sew and knit both at home and at school. She recalls that at school, all the girls had to go into a different building where they would learn how to cook and sew. She was 14 at the time.

At the time, Gisela's father was a linens salesman for a department store in Westphalia. After World War I, he sold watches and clocks wholesale, while his sister sold cattle. Often, Gisela would accompany her aunt into the meadows to milk the cows. She enjoyed drinking freshly squeezed milk. She recalls that one day, as she went out into the meadow, a bull started to chase after her, so she ran as fast she could and hopped the fence to escape being mauled.

Once a week, Gisela's friends would come over to drink coffee and do needlework. Gisela explains that at the time, all of the women had to know how to crochet, knit, or sew whether they wanted to or not. Gisela did not have much contact with her mother, and later on they always had a housekeeper. In 1933, her mother died at home from a brain tumor. Although they had lived together in the same house, Gisela had not felt close to her mother the way she did with her father. As a young child, she did not understand why she was not wanted, but when she was older, she was told she had been born too soon after her older brother.

Later on, Gisela also found out that she had briefly had a sibling born between herself and her younger sister. When the child died young, Gisela's parents decided not to tell the other children.

In fact, the children were completely ignorant on several facts. For instance, Gisela recalls that she was told not to visit her aunt's house, but she was never told why. Disobeying her parents' orders, she went over anyway, but she was promptly rushed away and told to search for a bottle. It was only later that she understood that she had witnessed her aunt's daughter in labor. Nevertheless,

Gisela would visit her aunt almost every weekend because she had a nice garden and because everybody came to visit her, especially all the Jewish families and ladies in the neighborhood.

Gisela states that Delmenhorst was home to a vibrant Jewish community. She and her siblings attended Jewish schools once a week after class, where they learned Hebrew and history, which she found quite interesting. However, she points out that not only was there always a Christmas tree at home during the winter, they exclusively spoke German, too. The family celebrated both Christmas and Easter, but they did not celebrate Jewish holidays. Shortly after her mother passed away, Gisela learned she had not been Jewish. As a consequence, it was primarily at her aunt's house where they would observe the holidays. Though her parents were not religious, Gisela always identified as Jewish, as did her friends, Jews and gentiles alike. She recalls that there was no difference amongst them.

Gisela distinctly recalls celebrating Passover at her aunt's house. She said that because she was young, it felt as if the service would go on forever. She remembers that she really enjoyed her aunt's cooking and that she had a big stove. Each side had a seat so that one could warm oneself up whenever it was not being used to cook. Gisela remembers that her aunt slaughtered the cows that they would raise, and in the attic of her house, she had a rack containing a variety of delicious sausages. Gisela believes that her aunt kept kosher.

Gisela was able to travel from city to city to participate in competitions with her swim club. At the age of 15, she received first place at such a competition. Gisela says that as a teenager, she simply liked to play around and do nothing. For instance, she would often hang out with her brother and his friends. As she was the youngest, she would follow their orders. One day, her brother and his friends wanted to see if it was safe to walk on a frozen lake. Gisela was sent to try it out. After putting one leg on the ice, she fell in. Another time, her brother and his friends told her to lick a piece of metal during the winter. Unsurprisingly, her tongue got stuck. Regardless, she still loved spending time with them, and they had great fun together.

Growing up, Gisela had a Doberman, whom she would pet him all the time. However, she recalls one time when she tried to pet him while he ate, and he bit her.

After World War I, Gisela's father realized that Delmenhorst was too small a city for his clock and watch-making business to flourish, so the family moved to Bremen. After moving, Gisela stopped attending school, and, at age 15, she began working as a bookkeeper for her father's business. She became friends with another girl who worked for her father, and the two would walk together on the way home from work every day. After a while, they bought bicycles, and they would go on day trips to have picnics.

Bremen, according to Gisela, was a beautiful city. Unfortunately, since she was always working, she had little opportunity to get out. She recalls a big railroad station, which her former town lacked. Moreover, Bremen had streetcars. Her family would often go to the countryside to have picnics and spend the day on the weekends. She recalls one day that, upon returning home, her parents told her the stork had brought a baby: her younger sister.

Prior to entering the business world, Gisela went to finishing school. Gisela has wonderful memories of this time, such as museum visits and being serenaded with music by other students.

Sometimes, one of her uncles would come and visit her at school. He would take her out to eat at a restaurant, and she would be allowed to order French fries, which were a luxury for her at the time. She recalls that people did not go out to eat often but rather almost always had meals at home.

While Gisela worked for her father's store, her brother attended a watchmaking school in business to learn the inner workings of watches as their father was unfamiliar with the mechanics of clocks. Apart from cooking, Gisela also learned maid's duties, even though the family had hired a maid throughout her childhood.

Later on, one of Gisela's cousins had arrived in Bremen to stay with her family. This cousin, according to Gisela, was fond of her father and wanted to marry him, but he was not interested in her. One day, while attending a relative's funeral, this cousin met Walter, another Jew living in Bremen. Hoping to get her family involved in the Jewish community once more, Gisela's cousin insisted that she introduce Walter to her relatives, so one evening, he came to Gisela's family's home for dinner.

Gisela's family did not meet many Jews in Bremen through Walter, but Walter took them on many outings in the city. Over time, Walter and Gisela grew to like each other, but initially, Gisela's father did not want his daughter to marry a man who did not have a good reputation. Though Gisela's father was concerned about Walter's ability to provide for his daughter, Gisela told her father she truly loved Walter, convincing him to let her marry him. When she was twenty-five, Gisela married Walter in the city hall. They celebrated at her family's home.

Rise of Nazism

Gisela does not recall hearing many antisemitic remarks when the Nazis came to power. However, she remembers antisemitic activity. For instance, she remembers that SS soldiers would stand in front of Jewish stores, prohibiting people from entering them. She also distinctly remembers Kristallnacht, which happened shortly after her marriage. She allowed two SA members to enter her house for inspection, but they told her to get dressed and to follow them. She did as she was told and was taken to a facility where they had kept and processed other Jews. She saw her father's gardener, who was an SA member, and he told her that her father and brother had already been here. Ultimately, she was let free, and she returned to her parents' house to discuss what had happened with her housekeeper and sister. Her husband then arrived and recounted the news he had heard about the burning of the synagogues.

Deciding to go into hiding with some of her mother's relatives, Gisela and her husband returned home quickly to pack their belongings. They then left Bremen via highway under the cover of nightfall. Eventually, the couple made it to a city whose name Gisela has since forgotten, where they rented a room. They then made a phone call to Walter's friend's wife in Bremen to inquire about the situation. She told them that they had been interrogated by somebody, but she would not give his name out of fear. Worried, Gisela and Walter decided to abandon their car and take a train back to Bremen.

Once in Bremen, they went directly to Gisela's father's house. They awoke the housekeeper and then proceeded to visit the business. As soon as they arrived to the business, they saw that the Gestapo were arresting the bookkeeper. They decided to return to their house, where Gisela's

mother's in-laws already were, but the Gestapo arrived soon after to check out the house. Although the Gestapo discovered Gisela's relatives, they did not take anyone, not even her husband.

However, Walter soon received a notice telling him to go to the Gestapo headquarters, where they told him he had to leave immediately. The couple never moved back to their house. Gisela's father was picked up and temporarily thrown in jail. He was then forced to march to the railroad station with other detainees, and from there they were deported to a concentration camp.

After a time, Gisela's father was given permission to leave the camp to go sell his business. When he returned, his head was shaven, and he wore dirty, wrinkled clothes—to Gisela, he looked awful. Although he quickly regained his energy, he went to a bar one evening and announced that he would outlive Hitler. Upon hearing this, an employee reported him to the police, and he was arrested soon thereafter.

Departure and Arrival

When they saw that there was no way for them to continue making a living in Germany, Gisela and her husband decided to flee. Walter had already begun inquiring about some relatives in the United States; Gisela wrote to some friends in England for support, and they sent over 1,000 pounds for Walter and Gisela in Kenya. Ultimately, they were granted passage to Holland.

Once they arrived in Rotterdam, a couple greeted them and allowed them to stay in one of their rooms. However, Gisela states that the room was rather disappointing: it had two iron beds, a wash stand, a cabinet, and straw mattresses. They had to share the room with another couple from Berlin, who was already living there when they arrived. Gisela's brother joined them around Christmastime. To accommodate him, Walter constructed a bunk bed. Around this time, Gisela found out that she was pregnant and was asked if she wanted an abortion, but she refused. Gisela and her husband stayed there for four months before they were called into the American consulate to obtain their visas.

The couple and Gisela's brother left continental Europe for England, and upon their arrival they went to a Jewish organization that helped refugees to see if they could get Gisela's father out of Germany. The organization provided Walter and Gisela with the information they needed, but Gisela's father believed he was safe where he was and did not want to leave. After failing to persuade Gisela's father to flee, the couple took a boat from Southampton to New York. Gisela was seasick the entire journey.

Becoming Americans

Once they had arrived in New York, Gisela, Walter, and Hans were greeted by several relatives, who took them to the Greyhound Bus Station. From there, they traveled by bus to Pittsburgh, where they stopped for breakfast and switched to a bus destined for Cincinnati.

In Cincinnati, the three emigres were met by several people who arranged a room for them. Though grateful for their help, Gisela and Walter opted to move into an apartment as soon as they could. However, with Walter unable to make a living in Cincinnati and with Gisela performing odd jobs such as sewing and cleaning as the main means of financial support, the trio knew they could not stay in Ohio for long.

Walter began forging connections with a friend in Chicago, and Gisela's brother found a well-paying job in New York. Ultimately, they moved to Chicago. For the duration of the war, the family received little to no information regarding their relatives back in Germany. They found out about their fate after World War II only when their former housekeeper wrote to them informing them the Russians had liberated the camp in which they had been imprisoned. Gisela's sister and father were the only relatives left in Europe who survived. Both of them lived in Bremen for the rest of their lives.

Gisela's first daughter was born in Cincinnati. Her second child was born in Chicago. She then had another son.

Gisela says her father and sister were lucky to survive the Shoah. She considers her husband and herself blessed. They have lived a wonderful, long life together, and they are grateful to call the United States their home.

Walter Hesse

World Before

Walter Hesse was born in Leer, Germany on June 30, 1907. He lived in a house on Main Street with his father, birth mother, a half-brother named Max, and a sister named Paula. He was the youngest in the family. He also had one half-sister and one half-brother who lived with an aunt and uncle of their mother's in the Rhineland. He had a rather uneventful youth. His family was very close. His father, a simple man, worked very hard and owned a dry goods store. Whenever there was little business at the store, his father would go out to the neighboring little villages to take orders, which they would then fill and ship to customers via the postal service.

With the outbreak of the World War I in 1914, Walter's mother died. Because they lived in a small town that lacked medical facilities, she had gone to Hanover to seek treatment, but she never returned. Walter does not remember what her ailment was. This time period was rough for seven-year-old Walter as food was scarce and his family could not keep kosher. Nevertheless, his family did celebrate Jewish holidays such as Passover, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur. In addition, Walter attended a Jewish school where he learned Hebrew and Jewish history on Sunday mornings and Wednesday afternoons. He did not particularly enjoy it as it reduced his amount of time for recreation, but he received a good education and had a Bar Mitzvah, which all his closest relatives attended. He claims that he did not have to remember or recite anything from the Torah for the occasion.

Passover was an extremely important holiday for Walter's family. They would clean the entire house to remove all the chametz, and the morning of Passover, they received a big, wooden box filled with squares of matzah. It was a nice time for Walter as his father would sit in a chair surrounded by pillows and lecture before announcing they could eat. They would eat chicken and chicken soup. As the youngest of the family, Walter was required to recite the prayer and the Four Questions. His parents would also hide little presents for the children to find, a tradition that Walter later carried on with his own children.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur were also nice holidays for Walter as their town had a vibrant Jewish community of about one hundred families. For services at the town synagogue, the men would go downstairs, and the women would walk upstairs. According to tradition, they celebrated Rosh Hashanah for two days and Yom Kippur for one day. When Walter was younger, he did not have to fast. However, after his Bar Mitzvah, he fasted the entire day. Thus, his family would fill themselves up the night before. After Yom Kippur was over, they would run to eat food. The first thing he and his family would eat was herring. His father would drink a lot of wine, and, Walter recalls, as he drank more, he became happier and said prayers better. Otherwise, his father would not drink much.

Walter's house was situated on a harbor, and he had many friends, all of whom were gentiles. He does not recall any anti-Semitic remarks made at the time. However, he notes that later there would be. Walter learned how to swim early on, and he spent his summers with the swim club. Eventually, Walter became a very good swimmer and began playing water polo. His family was very proud whenever his name appeared in the local newspaper after a sporting event.

Around the same time, Walter was enrolled in a co-educational school, where he stayed for three years. Afterwards, he attended Gymnasium for nine years. Although both schools he attended were public schools, his father was required to pay for his attendance. Walter's family made this choice because these schools offered a better education. For instance, regular public schools did not teach language. In his first year at Gymnasium, however, Walter started to learn Latin. He went on to learn French in his second year and English by his third year.

Believing he had had enough of school, Walter chose not to go to university and quit school after obtaining his diploma from Gymnasium. He also declined to volunteer for the army although he could have entered as a sergeant. Instead, Walter's family pushed him to work for a bank, a prospect he did not enjoy. Rather, he wanted to become a businessman, so he launched himself into the field of advertising and moved to a small town in Hanover, where he began an apprenticeship.

He and his father traveled by train to Hanover, arriving at noon one day. The same day, his father delivered his son to his new bosses and returned home. It was the first time 16-year-old Walter found himself on his own. His bosses, two brothers, were wonderful, and he lived on the second-floor of the building where their store was. He regularly received food from his bosses, and when his father died, they allowed him to return home to attend his funeral. Further, they encouraged him to attend the small synagogue in Hanover, and they insisted he say the kaddish for a year after his father's passing.

Walter says that the brothers kept kosher households. They owned another building across the street in which their mother lived. He relates that they did not have a toilet in the building, but rather that they had to go outside and use an outhouse to relieve themselves. Walter stayed there for two-and-a-half years and claims to have learned a lot. The brothers sold cookware, and Walter joined them as a salesman. He recalls that ovens came in square plates; one of them fell on his big toe, splitting it open. The scar can still be seen today.

Around age eighteen, Walter began searching for another job in a small town. He was no longer an apprentice but rather a salesman assigned to the curtains and drapes department of a store. It was the first time that Walter rented a room with another man. They would go to a Jewish butcher to obtain food for meals. He stayed there for two-and-a-half years. One day a salesman from Berlin who had a relative in a suburb of Hamburg arrived. He told Walter that some people he knew were interested in hiring him, so Walter moved and fell in love with the big city.

Walter was a very good employee. His bosses trusted him, so he was responsible for making the weekly advertisements and checking them for mistakes. There were about 60-70 employees. He loved the fact that you could easily reach Hamburg by train, and he visited often. Walter remained there for around three years. During this time, Walter feels he grew up a lot. He would go to dance halls, taverns, and cabarets almost every night. He met plenty of new people and began drinking rum. On Sunday mornings, he would go to a fish market.

Rise of Nazism

Around this time, Hitler had a political victory, claiming a seat in what was the German equivalent of the House of Representatives. This disturbed Walter very much. He later discovered that one of

his partners was a sympathizer of Hitler. Upon learning this, Walter cut off ties with the man and returned to his hometown.

Walter wrote to his manufacturer requesting a district in Northern Germany, and after a short while, his request was granted. After a brief stay with his aunt and uncle, he started to travel on his own. Walter eventually met a Jewish man who sold wholesale men's clothing. This man asked Walter to join him and he did. At age twenty-four, Walter purchased his first car, a Ford, and learned how to drive. Although he received his driver's license, Walter claims to have been a very poor driver, hitting a garbage truck early on.

Around 1935, Walter began noticing that things were changing. For instance, he recalls a time when he was walking down a street and noticed that some people walking the opposite direction crossed the street to avoid walking past a Jew.

While travelling, Walter came across a small town in Northern Germany where he would later meet his future wife, Gisela. They would go out to eat and dance, and they soon became engaged. Because Gisela had not converted to Judaism, no rabbi wanted to marry them; however, they got married when Walter was thirty years old. He often jokes that he wanted to marry Gisela's younger sister but that his father-in-law told him the older one had to go first. Jokes aside, however, Walter was aware that the situation in Germany was deteriorating rapidly.

Departure and Arrival

Walter remembers being told over the phone what happened during Kristallnacht. He was in Westphalia at the time, and he eventually received a call from the Gestapo, who told him to evacuate his dwelling within four weeks. Around this time, the Dutch government announced a program that gave away green cards to any Jewish person who wanted to temporarily stay in the Netherlands as they waited for their entry visas to any country that would accept them. Walter received three cards: one for his wife, one for his brother, and one for himself, and thus, they were able to flee Germany.

Walter had decided to leave because he realized that there was no future in Germany. He worked for three firms, one that was Jewish and two that were gentile, but the gentiles had received orders from the Nazis to cut off any ties with Jewish agents or representatives.

Although Walter left, the rest of his family did not. His father-in-law did not want his youngest daughter to leave, a decision Walter says he later regretted. Walter bid his family goodbye as they boarded the train to Holland. As he left, Walter's father-in-law was confronted by SR men who ordered him to show his passport. He was permitted to carry only ten marks with him, which at the time could purchase about twenty peanuts.

Once in Holland, Walter and his wife were taken by a couple to a big building where they housed and rehabilitated seamen who had fallen ill.

When Walter and his wife moved into the couple's building, they had to share a one-room apartment with another couple from Berlin. The environment was rather primitive, but they were very happy as they had finally been able to escape Germany. Upon the arrival of Walter's brother-in-law at the end of the month, they constructed a bunk bed so he could sleep in the same room.

Walter and his family stayed there for approximately four months, from December 1938 to April 1939.

Eventually, Walter received a letter from the American consulate requesting that he and his wife come to start their process for their visas. At the time, one needed an affidavit from a relative living in the United States. Walter's father had some cousins who lived in Cincinnati. Walter wrote to the Chief of Police of Cincinnati requesting contact information on his cousin named Max. Max warned Walter that the situation in the U.S. was less than ideal and asked him to stay where he was as long as he could. However, Walter knew he could not stay in Europe any longer.

By the time Walter had obtained his visa and left Europe, people were already being murdered by the Nazis. However, Walter was unaware of this; though he knew about and even saw some of the concentration camps that held political enemies, such as communists and socialists, he had no idea about the plans to annihilate European Jewry.

Walter and his relatives smuggled gold out of Germany with them to provide a financial safety net for themselves. As a consequence, they were able to purchase first-class tickets on a ship bound to the United States. From Holland, they traveled to London, stayed in a hotel for three days, and boarded the *S.S. Washington*. Shortly before their departure, Gisela discovered that she was pregnant, complicating matters a bit as she often fell seasick during the trip. Still, the couple arrived in New York, and from there they took a Greyhound bus first to Pittsburgh and then to Cincinnati.

Becoming Americans

A relative picked them up and offered one of their rooms for rent. As Gisela's body grew in size, the couple eventually had to break the news of her pregnancy to their cousins. Fortunately, their relatives received the news well. A daughter, Evelyn, was born. Walter searched for employment and found a job at a gas station where he washed windshields and replaced tires. He recalls that one day, a man tipped him a quarter, and Walter ran home merrily, feeling as though he had just received a million dollars. Walter started off working for $10/week and made his way up to $13/week at the time. Gisela started to do a little housekeeping for a local rabbi's wife and began earning more money than her husband. Soon thereafter, she became pregnant with her second child.

Walter knew that one of his old friends had managed to arrive in America as well and had moved to Chicago. Walter wrote to him telling him he would like to start a business together, and his friend replied with an invitation to Chicago to discuss details. After several successful talks, Walter returned to Ohio to tell his cousins he and Gisela were moving to Chicago. The couple moved in with Walter's friend's family, the Rosenbergs. Around this time, Gisela's brother, a watchmaker, had lost his job in New York, so Walter invited him to come to Chicago where he claimed he would be able to find something. However, Gisela's brother refused to find work until he could first find an apartment. Eventually, the family was able to find an apartment in Chicago. Walter lived there with his daughter, his wife, and her brother.

Walter soon bought a car, which allowed him to expand his business's reach, and sales improved. However, he was running his business from his apartment, and upon learning he was storing

inventory in the basement his landlord complained. As a consequence, Walter purchased a storefront for his business, where his two other children were later born.

Around this time, the United States entered World War II. Aware of the draft, Walter wanted to enlist in the army and reported to the local recruitment station. However, they did not want to draft him, and instead, his brother-in-law was drafted. For the duration of the war, he served as a nurse primarily in France, where he eventually found his wife. The couple married in Atlanta.

Although business was doing well, it was hard to acquire merchandise during wartime. Nevertheless, business continued to improve and Walter was able to hire a part-time worker. Following the war, Walter's business thrived, and the family celebrated its 50th anniversary in the 1990s.

Walter's children all received a good education. As a family, they enjoyed participating in the boys scouts.

Walter says that he was extremely lucky to be able to escape Germany and arrive in the United States, where he had the opportunity to begin a successful business and raise a family. He is thankful that he has lived such a long life, married a wonderful wife, and watched his beautiful children and grandchildren grow up.

Boris Kacel

Life Before the Holocaust

Boris Kacel, given name Boris Katzel, was born in 1922 and grew up in Riga, Latvia with two younger sisters and one younger brother. Before the German Invasion (Operation Barbarossa) started in June 1941, his family lived a very happy life. He grew up in a mixed neighborhood and always felt that the family had a very good relationship with their Latvian neighbors. Antisemitism not common and could mostly only be found in university fraternities. Boris received a very good education and spoke fluent Russian, Yiddish, and German. In his free time, he and a group of friends, including both Jewish and non-Jewish people, enjoyed playing soccer. The family was situated in the upper middle class because Boris' father, Abraham, had owned a shoe store.

German Invasion

On June 22, 1941, the Nazi Regime started Operation Barbarossa, with the goal to invade the Baltic States. Prior to the attack by the German Army, Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union. However, the Soviet defeat during Operation Barbarossa resulted in a Soviet retreat and subsequent Nazi takeover. Latvians saw the German Army as liberators and had positive attitudes towards them. Around July 1, 1941, the city of Riga was controlled by organized, strongly antisemitic vigilante groups who started imprisoning and killing Jewish people. Latvians generally knew very little about Nazi Germany at that time other than that there was very strong antisemitic sentiment and that Hitler was charismatic. Many Jewish people made the decision to leave Latvia for the Soviet Union so they would not be under German control, but Boris's family was under the impression that their lives would be better if they stayed and accepted the German occupying forces instead of living under Stalin’s regime.

German Occupation

When the Germans arrived, the general population of Riga started to realize that Latvia had not been liberated, but once again occupied. Vigilante groups started to associate with the official German troops. Restrictions for the Jewish people in Riga were soon introduced which Boris remembers as painful and degrading. The situation continued to worsen and the vigilante groups abducted and killed Jewish people, hunting them down in their homes. Boris and his father thought they would be safe if they worked for the Germans, so the Germans would need them and would prohibit the killing squads from touching them. After losing his store, Abraham, Boris’s father, lied about being a stonemason in order to avoid a transport. He was then hired by a German bakery. Boris also decided to lie about his profession and pretended to be an electrician, which got him several jobs with German-affiliated companies such as the German Railroad Company. Life in Riga was still dangerous for the whole family, but they thought their new jobs, though unpaid, would keep them safe.

Move to the Ghetto

When the family learned that all Jewish families in Riga had to move to the ghetto, Boris's father began making arrangements with an old business acquaintance. He was able to secure the family a house in the ghetto by trading their apartment for it and giving all their furniture to a friendly shoe store owner who agreed to bring special food packages to them.

The Riga Ghetto

In the ghetto, Boris' family met many members of their extended family and old friends which made the situation more bearable. The house they lived in was relatively spacious, so a second family was soon ordered to move in with them. Although at first it was very crowded, the two families soon became close friends, and Boris even started developing a romantic relationship with the other family's daughter. Boris and his father were able to get into a *kollone,* group of ghetto inhabitants ordered to work outside of the ghetto for companies affiliated with Nazi-Germany. Although their work situation—de-icing German railroad cars—was difficult, it was one of the most desirable jobs in the ghetto. On November 28, 1941 everybody who was a part of a *kollone* was ordered to move out of the ghetto to a labor camp called "The Little Ghetto" next to the original ghetto, leaving the elderly, women, and children in the old Riga ghetto. Although it was very hard to move away from their family, they were under the impression they would be able to visit them frequently.

The Little Ghetto

Boris, his father, and his cousin (also named Boris) were able to find beds in a house in the Little Ghetto with a few other men they had previously worked with. Boris describes the camaraderie between the men in this little house as a very strong, friendly bond. The three family members in particular grew very close and decided to do everything to help each other to survive, including sharing all food among the three of them. On November 30, 1941, the men in the barracks of the Little Ghetto heard shooting and screaming during the night which did not seem especially unusual to them, since the Latvian guards frequently got drunk at night and screamed and shot around. This time, however, it turned out to be the liquidation of the Riga ghetto. Boris found out many years later that his mother and his three siblings were shot in the woods of Rumbula as a part of this gruesome massacre. At the time, they only knew that their family was gone. They realized that the ghetto liquidation was violent and that some people had been shot, but they still had hope that their family was alive. Although hygiene and work conditions were horrible, the group of people sharing the barracks grew close and tried to help each other out. During the many months Boris spent in the Little Ghetto, he heard about concentration camps for the first time when German Jewish prisoners arrived in the Big Ghetto and found the first clues about his family's fate. Boris was able to work with electricians again, at first pretending to have some basic knowledge and eventually learning a lot from the men he worked with. This would save his life later on. However, after the group of men settle into their routine, got used to their jobs, and even got the chance to befriend a group of young female Jewish prisoners, the situation in the Little Ghetto started to get worse. In late 1942, the Latvian police inside the ghetto was shut down and the ghetto was controlled by the SS more directly. After the change in leadership, men from the ghetto were ordered to burn the corpses of victims of the Rumbula massacre. The men in the Little Ghetto now knew for certain about their families' fate.

Kasernierung at Cement Factory

In the beginning of 1943, Boris and his two family members were chosen for a *kasernierung* at a local cement factory. *Kasernierung* meant that the men would live at the work site instead of commuting from the ghetto everyday. The conditions at the cement factory turned out to be just as bad as in the ghetto, but the three men at least had a relatively good relationship with their supervisors, which led to a better work environment for them. The horrible months the three men

had spent imprisoned started to make them weak, and Boris witnessed more and more men lose hope. The group of three tried to keep each other going and made each other go on, no matter what, giving them an advantage for survival.

Kaiserwald

In September of 1943, Boris's work group was transferred to the Kaiserwald concentration camp where his head was shaved, he was assigned a number, and he endured the horrors of a concentration camp for the first time. The Jewish prisoners were controlled by Nazi criminals, who treated them cruelly and without any respect or human dignity.

Vaivare

In October, the three men were transported to Vaivare concentration camp in Estonia where Boris encountered his first multiple-day boxcar transport. Their work included heavy lifting, which required so much energy that many of their fellow inmates died of exhaustion and malnutrition. It was an especially shocking moment for Boris when his bunk-neighbor died right next to him in his sleep. In the winter of 1943-1944, the prisoners were given a new assignment: to build a road. This was particularly difficult because that winter was unusually brutal. Boris took the chance to make the Nazis believe he was a trained electrician once again and therefore got an off-sight job. The new work allowed him to trade stolen electricity supplies for food which he shared with his father and cousin.

Sonda

When Boris's father and his cousin were selected for transport to a work camp called Sonda, he volunteered to go with them so the three of them would not be separated. There they worked together with an almost all Polish camp population. At this camp, Boris's father was finally able to trade five valuable gold coins he had managed to smuggle in for valuable rations of meat. In August 1944, Boris witnessed one of the worst occurrences of his time in the camps as the SS picked out the physically weakest 20% of the camp population to be exterminated. Although it was close, the trio survived the selection.

Stutthof

Because of the advancing Soviet army, the inmates of Sonda were transferred to Stutthof in Germany. Although the transport was still grueling, it was the least stressful one that Boris and his family members experienced because there was much more space in the boxcars than usual. In Stutthof, Boris witnessed one of the infamous "*Arbeit macht frei*" (work makes you free) signs at the entrance of the camp and was assigned a new camp number. In the camp, the three men met many of their old friends from Riga and learned more about family members' fates. Boris realized that many inmates, including himself, went through phases of losing human decency. For example, they started to bet on people's lives and enjoy seeing other people die as a form of entertainment. Boris signed up for extra work assignments to receive additional food rations. There were many chances to sign up for other camps, but they did not seem right to Boris and his father. However, Boris's cousin chose to take one of these assignments, splitting from the group. He ultimately perished because of it.

Buchenwald #1

At Buchenwald, Boris and his father once again met many familiar faces from their time in Riga, which immediately created a better work atmosphere than in previous camps. Boris was assigned as an electrician once again, now with a better grasp of electrical work. His father was assigned to work heavy machines, which he did so well that even the German supervisor congratulated him. A typhus epidemic gave Boris and his father a much-needed 10-day rest due to camp quarantine. At Buchenwald, Boris was able to steal food every other day, giving him and his father extra rations. At one point, Boris and his father fought over a cup of food. This was the only fight they had during the entire Holocaust. To Boris, it was a sign of how desperately starving they were. Allied bombings became more frequent which slowed down production and gave them more time to rest.

Escape to Freedom

On April 9, 1945, the fighting between the Allies and the German Army came so close to the camp that Boris and other inmates thought liberation might be near. He decided to hide. Unfortunately, he was discovered by SS officers and was supposed to wait for his execution with two other inmates in one of the barracks. They decided to try to escape, so Boris quickly gathered whatever food he could find and put it into a backpack that the other inmates considered unlucky. They managed to escape and Boris hid in a barn for a few days, living on the supplies he had in his backpack.

A Free Man Again

Leaving his hiding place in the barn, Boris learned that the attack had been an American victory and was very happy. However, he was mistaken for a German and put into prison with German war criminals until the misunderstanding was resolved. Only then was Boris finally told he was a free man. Although he felt great joy, he was overwhelmed with the sudden liberty and had problems adjusting to things like eating normal portions again. He met fellow prisoners who told him that they had been liberated about three days earlier and he missed the celebration. Unfortunately, nobody knew where his father was.

The whole town of Magdeburg surrounding the camp was in a state of destruction and laws did not apply anymore. Ex-inmates started looting and taking over apartments, and most Germans either fled or let them do it. After everything returned closer to normal, Boris was able to receive clothing and groceries and lived in an abandoned apartment. Boris felt strong guilt and shame in the behavior toward the German population of Magdeburg. Soon, however, many Jewish people left Magdeburg to go to Palestine. Boris found a group of old friends in Magdeburg and a strong Jewish community that met almost every day. Because Boris had been separated from his father during the process of liberation, he was still eagerly looking for any trace of him, but had little luck. Slowly, life returned to normal and people began using money again. For this reason, Boris needed a job. He worked with the newly formed German police for a while, before he started working for the Red Army as a translator after they took over the territory of Magdeburg from Germany. Boris finally found out where his father was in the summer of 1946 but could not meet up with him because he was in Latvia and was not allowed to leave the Soviet Union. In the fall of 1946, officers from the Soviet Union ordered all the Jewish people who were originally from countries that were now on USSR soil, to get on a transport back to the Soviet Union. Boris once again escaped with nothing but the filled backpack that he had gotten in the concentration camp. With sponsorship

from his aunt, Boris finally immigrated to America after spending a year in different DP camps with people from his Jewish community in Magdeburg.

New Life in the USA

Boris immigrated to the USA in 1947. After being welcomed by his family and a few difficult months of adjustment, he started to work as an electrician again. He married Tamara Abramson, a survivor he met in a DP camp in Germany, went to night school, and caught up on lost education years. Eventually, Boris started his own successful business and today is still happily married with two children.

Cipora Katz

World Before

Cipora Katz, given name Cipora Fuchs, was born July 10, 1938. Before the war, she lived in the small town of Semiatych, Poland which had been turned into a ghetto shortly after the beginning of World War II. Cipora was an infant at the start of the war and so has no memories of pre-war life in Poland. She does remember that her grandfather worked in a flour mill and her father was a schochet (or ritual slaughterer).

First Memories and Flight from the Ghetto

Cipora's extended family lived together in the ghetto, including her grandfather Chaim Bash, father Benjamin, mother Shifra, sister Bluma, uncle Benjamin Feldman, his wife Libby and their four children (Cipora's cousins) aged eight, ten, twelve, and fourteen. In addition, Cipora's aunts, Bashe and Kelle, lived with them. Her grandfather worked in a flour mill and her father was a *schochet*, a Kosher butcher. They spoke Yiddish in the house and Polish to the gentiles.

Life in the ghetto was very hard. Cipora's earliest and most vivid memories are of her uncle, Benjamin Feldman. Benjamin Feldman, a man of action, was the leader of the family. He was determined that his family would survive. On November 22, 1942, Cipora's uncle Benjamin Feldman was informed by Jewish leaders in the Semiatych ghetto that the family must flee immediately because the ghetto was being surrounded by SS troops and Polish police. He told his wife to dress all the children very warmly and to notify all the relatives that they must flee the ghetto immediately or become trapped by the Germans. Anticipating that food would be difficult to obtain, Uncle Benjamin gave each of the children a package of sugar cubes because sugar would provide them with extra energy. Cipora's mother refused to leave because she was waiting for Cipora's older sister, Bluma, to return from visiting relatives in another village. Grandfather Chaim refused to leave since he was going to the local synagogue to say Kaddish for his mother. Cipora's two aunts also refused to leave and went to stay with friends in the ghetto. All of Cipora's relatives who stayed behind in the ghetto were murdered by the Nazis.

It was decided that Cipora's mother would remain behind and join them after Cipora's sister returned home. Cipora's mother wrapped her in a blanket and handed her to Cipora's father. Uncle Benjamin cut a hole in the wire fence surrounding the ghetto and led the party of eight into the forest. The Germans shot at them but missed. Uncle Benjamin was familiar with the area from the years before the war when he was a manager in a flour mill.

Uncle Benjamin had to find a place to hide eight people. His strategy was to look to his network of Polish acquaintances. On their first stop after leaving the ghetto, Uncle Benjamin hid the group in the forest while he proceeded to the farmhouse of a Polish acquaintance. He knew this man because before the war, the man delivered milk from his farm to the summer cottage of Cipora's family. The farmer feared for the life of his family because a notice had been published that any Polish people who helped Jews would be killed. He gave Uncle Benjamin a loaf of bread and asked him to move on quickly.

Uncle Benjamin met other families in the forest, and some advised him that his only hope of surviving would be to abandon his family and travel alone. Cipora's uncle said, "No way, whatever happens to one of us will happen to all of us."

In Hiding

After a few weeks, Cipora's uncle began to search for a temporary shelter deeper in the forest where he hoped they would be less likely to encounter German troops and collaborators. He spotted a light in the distance and proceeded toward it alone. He arrived at the house of Mr. Luchinski, a Polish veterinarian who was indebted to him for past favors during the Russian occupation. Uncle Benjamin reminded Mr. Luchinski of the time he had come to the flour mill pleading for flour to make bread for his family. Cipora's uncle had given him 20 kilos of flour and had told him to come back for more.

Because of Uncle Benjamin's previous act of goodwill, Mr. Luchinski and his wife agreed to hide Uncle Benjamin and his entire party of eight. Mrs. Luchinski almost fainted when she saw the poor condition of Cipora's family, especially the children. The Luchinskis told their children never to tell anyone that their family was helping Jews or they would all be executed by the Germans. The Luchinskis hid little Cipora and her family in their potato silo which was located near the farmhouse. The silo was nothing more than a hole in the ground where potatoes were stored during the winter. It was covered by branches with leaves and was not visible from the ground or air. Cipora, her aunt, uncle, father, and four cousins lived in terror in this silo for 22 months. The silo was so small that Cipora, still a young child, was the only one who could stand up. There was barely room to sleep. They were completely cut off from the world and had no idea what was happening to their family in the ghetto.

At night, Uncle Benjamin left the silo to look for food. Mrs. Luchinski prepared a pot of boiled potatoes and very thin soup. Upon returning to the silo, Cipora's uncle divided the soup and potatoes into very small portions that needed to last for several days. Cipora's father would not drink the soup because he was very religious and kept strictly kosher. Sanitary conditions were appalling. They were all covered with lice and their only toilet was a metal pot. At night, Uncle Benjamin took the pot deep into the woods, dug out an opening in the ground, and buried the waste so that it could not be seen or smelled. After one year in the silo, two thugs entered the silo and, as Cipora and her family were Jews, assumed that they had valuables. They found nothing but beat Cipora's father and uncle. When the Luchinskis found out about the attack, they became fearful that the thugs would return, so they brought Cipora and her family to their attic. At the same time, the Germans came to the house for a routine search but they found nothing. Because Mr. Luchinski was the only veterinarian in the area, it was only a cursory search as his skills were needed. A few hours later, Cipora and her family returned to the silo.

Uncle Benjamin became very ill after the attack to the point where he could not even swallow a spoonful of water. Mr. Luchinski applied leeches to his back and after several treatments, Cipora's uncle started improving. Mr. Luchinski said that if Cipora's uncle died then he would not be able to continue hiding the family. A few weeks after Cipora's uncle recovered, her father died from the effects of the beating and starvation. They had to keep his body in the silo for a week because her uncle was not yet strong enough to take him out and bury him. She slept next to her dead father for the week thinking that he was asleep. Late at night and with the help of Mr. Luchinski and his

sons, Cipora's father was taken out and buried deep in the forest. Before burying him, they had to pour boiling water on the ground to thaw it out so they could dig the grave. Cipora's uncle marked a tree near her father's grave and vowed that, if he survived, he would return for her father's remains and rebury him in the Jewish cemetery in Semiatych.

Liberation

The Russians liberated Cipora and her family in October 1944. The seven looked like living skeletons and could barely stand. The Russians helped them onto trucks and attempted to feed Cipora and her family in small amounts. However, because they had starved for almost two years, they vomited up all the food. The soldiers were very kind. Cipora's uncle was determined to rebury her father in Semiatych. The soldier provided them some money. With this money and the assistance of a Polish acquaintance, they were driven back to their home town of Semiatych. After returning to Semiatych they learned that Cipora's mother, sister, grandfather, aunts, uncles and their children were sent to Treblinka where they were murdered on November 11, 1942 while Cipora was in the silo. If not for the quick thinking and action of Cipora's uncle, they all would have perished as well.

Return to Life and Arrival in a New Country

Cipora and her family remained in Semiatych for six months. During that time, they were aided by the Jewish Agency which provided them with medical help. After they regained their strength, Uncle Benjamin and his son Shlomo went back with a horse and wagon to retrieve her father's body and reburied him in the Jewish cemetery in Semiatych. The house where Cipora's uncle and aunt lived before the war was occupied by a Polish family, and no attempt was made to get the house back. The house of her father's brother was empty, so they stayed there. The Polish people were not happy to see the Jewish people return. It was clear to Cipora's uncle that there was no future for the Jews in Poland. His new focus was to get the entire group to Israel. Their first stop was Romania, where they lived on a kibbutz for five months. Cipora, along with her Aunt Libby and two male cousins, made this trip to Romania while Uncle Benjamin and two female cousins were sent to Italy. The immigrant organizations made the arrangements, and Cipora thinks they were split up for immigration quota reasons. Cipora, along with her aunt and two cousins, left for Israel in 1945. One year later, her uncle and the remaining two cousins arrived in Israel, all settling in Petah Tikva (Gate of Hope). Cipora completed her grammar school education at Bet Hasefer Levanoot Netsach Israel and continued with two years of high school at the Mikveh Israel high school in Holon.

Becoming Americans

Cipora's great-uncle Herman Bush, who lived in the United States, found out that Cipora and relatives had survived the Holocaust. He wanted to bring Cipora to the United States. Cipora's aunt wanted her to move to the US so she could have a better life and because she was the youngest. Cipora learned English while still in Israel. It took her uncle seven years to obtain a visa for Cipora, and she arrived in the US on June 2, 1955 at age fifteen. Cipora lived with her great-aunt and uncle in Chicago and attended Van Steuben High School. She was asked to teach Hebrew at a Hebrew High School. In 1957, she finished an advanced degree and decided to become an R.N. (registered nurse). She attended the Cook County School of Nursing. Her great-uncle financed her education.

She always kept a dictionary with her to improve her English. She met her future husband just before finishing high school and was married to Mordechai Katz on August 23, 1960.

Cipora, her family in Israel, her great-uncle, and her great-aunt never forgot the Luchinskis and sent them food, clothing, and money. They continued to do so until communications were severed by the Polish government in the wake of the 1967 Six-Day War. They were afraid to try to contact the Luchinskis and put them in danger due to the anti-Israel and antisemitic stance of the Polish government.

Cipora worked at Edgewater Hospital from 1960-1970 and then became Director of Nursing at the Founenbleu Hospital. She worked mainly with older people. She wanted to do something for older people because she did not have the privilege of knowing her own parents when they were old. In September 1962, her daughter Simona Shifra was born. Cipora spent the rest of her career working in various long term nursing facilities in the Chicagoland area and found a great deal of satisfaction in this career. She was helping people and saving lives. In September 1990, she suffered a major heart attack on her way to work. Cipora's daughter said that this was a sign from God that he saved her again, and she was very grateful. Cipora never spoke of her experiences during the Holocaust until after her heart attack. She often woke up in the middle of the night screaming. She often dreamed that the Germans were chasing her in her nightmares.

Cipora attributes her survival to Mr. Luchinski, the help of God, and the incredible stamina, intelligence, and determination of her uncle. Uncle Benjamin passed away in Israel at the age of seventy-eight.

Postscript: The Blanket

The only memento that Cipora has of her experiences during the Holocaust is a wool blanket. Her mother wrapped her in this blanket when she handed Cipora over to her father to escape the ghetto. Throughout her journey, the blanket kept her warm and reminded her of her mother and family who had been left behind in the ghetto. She viewed the blanket as a protective shield. Cipora explained that after her father was buried she had an even closer bond with her blanket because it shared all her experiences of the twenty-two months in the silo. As she got older, she continued to share her experiences and pain with the blanket. This blanket is now one of the treasures housed in the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center.

Simone Liebster

World Before

Simone Liebster, given name Simone Arnold, was born in 1930 in the countryside of Alsace-Lorraine. Her father, Adolphe Arnold, worked as an artist and designer at a local printing plant, and her mother, Emma, was a housewife. Adolphe Arnold was an intellectual man who taught Simone about geography, art, and literature which influenced her desire to learn and study. The family was originally Catholic but converted to become Jehovah's Witnesses. In 1937, Simone's mother bought a bible for their house and they started studying it. In 1938, they read the Swiss book "Crusade against Christianity," which discusses treatment of early imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses in concentration camps. Reading this book, as well as news about Germany, gave Simone her first impression of Nazi Germany and made her aware of Hitler. When Austria was annexed in March of 1938, Simone's parents became aware that Alsace-Lorraine would most likely be annexed soon because of its history and German-speaking population. Simone's family spoke an Alsace-Lorraine dialect which was a mixture between German and French. Newspapers were either in German or French at first, although closer to World War II almost only German newspapers were left. School was held in German as well.

Rise of Nazism and Life Under the Swastika

In 1936, Simone started school and witnessed the first signs of strong antisemitism, as some of her Jewish classmates were called names and were being left out. She remembers that the number of Jewish students in her school was not very high to begin with and got smaller as time progressed because most of them moved to the south of France. As her family became more involved with their religion and Simone started to talk to other kids about her faith, she experienced discrimination and bullying herself. She was often called "dirty Jew" but did not take it as an insult because in the Witnesses' faith, Jewish people are well-liked and seen as God's people. The persecution became worse when Nazi Germany occupied France.

Simone's father was the first person in town to be arrested by the Gestapo because of his faith in 1941. He was sent to a prison in Schirmeck, which at the time was known to be a place for "German re-education". After Adolphe Arnold was arrested, the Gestapo came to their house regularly to interrogate her mother and find out the names of other Witnesses. Her mother refused to give them any information about fellow Witnesses. The Gestapo kept pressuring her and publicly provoking her, but Simone's mother would not give up any information.

After Adolphe Arnold's arrest, Simone and her mother went through many struggles. The Gestapo ordered the bank to close their account, so they had to live off a form of social care provided by other Witnesses. Simone suffered from severe colds, headaches, and other symptoms because of the stress.

In 1941, a teacher at her school noticed that Simone refused to say "Heil Hitler" because of her faith. The school judged her behavior as rebellious and, as a consequence, made her go through all classes for several days with a sheet of paper in her hands publicly shaming herself. After this punishment, the school gave her an ultimatum: either adapt to saying "Heil Hitler" or leave the

school. Although she did find people on her side, like a teacher who tried to help her, she would not say it and chose to leave the school.

Simone intended to transfer back to a school she had previously gone to, but the principal did not want to take her back because of what happened at the other school. In the end, the principal had to take her in because of the legal situation at the time, but refused to give her a chance to participate in class. Simone had to sit by herself in the back of the class and was not allowed to talk to anybody. Fortunately, her father had made friends with a well-educated young Jehovah's Witnesses who taught Simone after school and arranged for her to have piano lessons. Meanwhile, Simone and her mother tried to maintain a regular life and observe their religion as much as possible. They met at a friend's house to do bible studies, continued to pray at home, and her mother even managed to smuggle small bible texts into her father's concentration camp by hiding them in care packages which she was still allowed to send him.

Simone's situation changed dramatically when her class was supposed to go on a Nazi-sponsored school camping trip, and she refused to go because she did not share the beliefs. First, her teacher set up a so-called school psychologist appointment for her which turned out to be a multiple hour long examination by Gestapo officers. Later, he publicly shamed her in front of all the students at the school and finally he denounced her which led to Simone receiving an arrestment letter in early 1943 when she was 12 years old.

Mosaic of Victims: Konstanz Penitentiary House

Simone was ordered to move to a penitentiary home two days after she received the letter. Although Simone's mother was incredibly sad, she tried to make it as comfortable for Simone as possible and encouraged her to keep faith in God and to learn from this experience.

Her mother was allowed to accompany her as two policemen took her on the six hour train ride to a town called Konstanz in southwestern Germany. The director of the re-education home permitted Simone and her mother another day together because she had not received Simone's documents from court yet. They used that day to eat at a small hotel and have last prayers together.

The re-education home was originally an orphanage and now functioned as both. During the time that Simone was there, there were 37 girls between 5 and 14 years old. All of the teachers were very strict Catholics, which led to many hardships for the girls. The girls were not allowed to wash anything other than their backs and faces on a daily basis; they were not allowed to fully undress, making changing clothes a tedious procedure; the girls were only allowed to shower twice a year, and female personal hygiene was frowned upon, which led to many unsanitary circumstances. The girls were also not allowed to talk to each other.

Simone faced hard labor under terrible circumstances on a daily basis. She often had to perform one of her many household duties outside as a punishment, regardless of freezing temperatures or rain. The work she had to do included sewing, washing, cooking, cleaning, and various other tasks. Although Simone's teacher picked on her and made life for her at the home even harder than it already was, the director of the institution always acted reasonably and treated her relatively fairly compared to other teachers.

Simone was able to bring a small bible into the re-education home because she hid it in a box with other things in it. Later on, Simone was assigned to a daily duty of cleaning the floor in one of the teacher's rooms. She saw that as an opportunity to pray a little bit every day and hid the bible under the bed springs so she could always use it when she was cleaning under the bed. While all the Catholic kids went to church, Simone had to cook for them. However, she asked to read the bible by herself during that time. The right to even say "Heil Hitler" had already been taken away from Witnesses, so Simone did not face this problem any longer. Simone was also no longer called by her first name because it was French, not German. Instead, she was called by her middle name, Maria.

Five months after her arrival, Simone earned the teachers' trust and was given special tasks, like taking care of a 5-year-old girl at the orphanage and going to town to buy groceries. She used those trips to town to gather information about the current political situation. Later that year, 1943, she was informed that her mother had been arrested, which shocked her, but she was sure that her mother would have the strength to make it through any hardships. Starting from the time when her mother was arrested, she felt very connected to her parents through her prayers because she knew, no matter where her parents were, they would say the same ones.

In 1944, Simone's aunt started to visit her. She always took Simone to a nearby castle and would study the bible with her all day, then on their way back, Simone would study facts about the places from postcards her aunt bought and told the teachers at the orphanage that she had visited all the sights of the castle. Because the teachers wanted to enforce her interest in German arts, they allowed the visits and daytrips. Although she was happy to see her aunt, Simone felt that it made her time there even harder because she had to say good-bye over and over and then return to the hardships of her everyday life. From her aunt, Simone received the news that thirty-five out of forty-five Witnesses in her town had been arrested and her father's friend who helped her with her education had been killed as a conscientious objector.

Liberation

When US bombings started to increase in southwestern Germany, Simone and the other girls at the orphanage had to stay in the basement. However, Konstanz was never bombed. The whole town was ordered to leave their lights on during bombings so that pilots would think the town was part of nearby Switzerland. In the spring of 1945, after one of the nearby bombings, Simone's liberated mother came to the orphanage to pick her up. At first, Simone was not sure that is was actually her mother because she was in a very bad shape after solitary confinement in a concentration camp. Her mother asked to take Simone back home with her, but the director of the orphanage would not allow it unless Simone's mother had the complete documents from the court. The court in Konstanz had been abandoned, because of the approaching Allied forces, so she was unable to get the documents. Her mother stayed at the house and helped there for several days to get the director's respect so she would be allowed to take Simone home anyway. The director only allowed them to leave the orphanage when the French army progressed closer to Konstanz because she was afraid that they would consider people from Alsace-Lorraine French citizens and punish the home for keeping them captive. Simone and her mother managed to go to Switzerland and stay in a refugee camp for a few days until they could travel back home safely.

Return to Life and Becoming Americans

Fortunately, their home had not been plundered and they were able to move back in, just as they left it. Simone's father was on a list that was posted in the city center of people who died in concentration camps. However, a few days after their return in early July, Simone's father arrived at their home as well. He had gone almost completely deaf and could hardly walk. It took him many months to recover from the hardships of several concentration camps.

The family struggled to readjust to regular life after the war but found a common way of dealing with what happened through bible study. Adolphe Arnold started working again in late 1946. Simone continued her education and eventually won an art contest that got her a scholarship to an art school in France where she enrolled for two years. Later on, Simone became involved with missionary work and the international society of Jehovah's Witnesses where she met her husband Max Liebster with whom she eventually moved to the United States.

Adolphe Arnold's Story

Adolphe Arnold was the first person in Mulhouse to be arrested because of his faith. He was deported to prison in Schirmeck in early 1941. In December of 1941, he was transferred to Dachau, where the SS wanted to take advantage of his former occupation as an industrial painter. He refused to paint any cases that carried ammunition, and because of that, he was ordered to be used for medical experiments. The only memory he shared about that time with Simone was that he was used for experiments concerning malaria because, according to him, Rommel's troops in South Africa faced problems with the disease. Adolphe reported that multiple flies were attached to his body in little glass cages and he was left like that for days. For some reason, however, he never got the disease and was therefore transferred to Mauthausen concentration camp in August 1944, then Ebensee concentration camp in early 1945. In both camps he was forced to do hard manual labor. Towards the end of the war, when he was in Ebensee, the situation changed for the worse, as he lost most of his hearing after a SS-officer repeatedly kicked him in the head as a punishment. Adolphe sewed a little pouch inside his camp uniform where he kept bible texts his wife sent him hidden inside care packages.

Emma Arnold's Story

Simone's mother was sent to the prison in Schirmeck as well, just a few months after Simone was arrested. In Schirmeck, Emma spent several months, until the middle of 1944, in solitary confinement because she refused any work that was connected to the war, like sewing uniforms, which was the main task for female inmates in Schirmeck at that time. The prison management was still considering her execution when Heinrich Himmler visited the prison in Schirmeck. He inspected all inmates in solitary confinement and somehow took a liking in Emma since she was very polite and called him "Admiral," because she was not aware who he was. Prison guards told her that Himmler ordered the prison management not to execute her because of that. She was transferred to Gaggenau concentration camp where she was ordered to work as a maid in one of the SS guard's houses. This house was bombed while Emma was working in the garden. She was able to find decent shelter but still suffered wounds. Therefore, she was unable to continue her work as a maid there and was ordered to be transferred to Ravensbruck. On the way there, her transport was liberated in early 1945 and Emma immediately returned to Konstanz to take Simone out of the orphanage.

Kate Lipner

Early Life

Kate Lipner, given name Marie Catherine Rossi, was born into a Catholic family in Nice, France on May 29, 1925 to a father who was a construction laborer and a mother who was the caretaker of their apartment building. Fifteen months later, Antoinette, Kate's littler sister, was born. As children, the two girls never really played together. Antoinette was a sickly child, and Kate was very active; however, Kate did protect her little sister at school.

As a child, Kate always had many responsibilities, but she was not always well-behaved. At 6 years old she would blatantly disregard what she was told to do and would walk all the way across town by herself to see her grandmother, who she loved dearly. When reminiscing about this time, Kate admitted that she believed her grandmother loved her more than anyone else did, even her parents. When she returned home, Kate was always met with a spanking for going so far alone, but she did not care. When Kate was 8 years old, her mother sent her off to live in a convent in hopes that she would learn to behave. Instead, her rebellious spirit and stubbornness were brought out even further. She was always being punished by the nuns for disobeying. They would lock her in closets, pull her hair, and hit her with rulers. This inclination toward rebellion would later help her save lives.

Before the War

In the years leading up to the outbreak of war in France, Kate became increasingly curious about what was happening in the world at large. When she would come home from the convent to visit her family in 1935 and 1936, she remembered hearing from people on the street of the terrible happenings in Spain during the civil war and subsequent revolution. As war drew ever closer in her own country, Kate would slip out of the house and get lost in the crowds at town gatherings. At such a young age, she did not quite understand what was happening, but she wanted to witness the movement. She wanted to understand the turmoil in the world around her.

War in France

After Germany invaded Poland in 1939, France finally declared war. Kate's father promptly joined the French forces, leaving behind his wife and two daughters. In 1940, the French formally surrendered. France was split in two, with the Germans occupying the northern territory, and the Vichy Regime in the south. This is when life really began to change for Kate.

The Resistance

Although Kate was raised Catholic, there were many Jews in her neighborhood. Growing up, she was friends with many of the Jewish children. As she became increasingly alienated from her faith as a result of her harsh treatment in the convent, Kate spent more and more time with these Jewish friends and found that that life appealed to her. While she never discussed religious difference, Kate would forever have a warm spot in her heart for the Jewish faith.

In 1940, at just 15 years old, Kate became involved with the black market in Nice to survive. She bought and sold food and other goods to provide for the people in her apartment building. Her mother always hated this and feared for Kate's safety, but Kate was not afraid. In fact, she said

never thought she would get caught. She also extended her involvement to an underground resistance group. She canvassed the community and plastered anti-Nazi posters onto every surface she could.

By 1942, Kate's resistance activities had grown to include procuring ration stamps and falsified identification papers for Jewish families and leading refugees across the border into neutral Switzerland. Jewish children were taken by train from Nice to Leon, where they would spend the night in a rundown house in a bad neighborhood. The next morning, they would be picked up and taken to the Swiss border, where Kate would meet them. In the dead of night, she would usher them across Lake Geneva into the safety of Switzerland. When her mother died suddenly in 1942, 17-year-old Kate had to give up her role as a guide; she had her younger sister to look after.

In 1941, Kate met Henri Aboudarame. Jewish, a widower, a father, and twenty-some years her senior, Henri became a fast friend of Kate's and she began caring for his young son, Robert. She soon came to love Robert as her own and fell in love with Henri in the process. As the city became more and more dangerous for Jewish families, Kate decided to hide Henri and Robert. Soon thereafter, they were joined by a Belgian woman, Dora Spruch, and her two children, Maurice and Helen, after Dora's husband and his brother were taken by the Gestapo.

When Dora fled to Spain and Henri was found hiding in a countryside monastery, Kate took over caring for the three young children, as well as her own little sister. The five lived in the Rossis' small one-bedroom apartment on the first floor. They all slept in one bed and had no hot water or central heat. While the quarters were cramped, the apartment did offer a measure of safety. As it was the caretaker's apartment, it was the only unit in the building that had access to both the main entrance and the service entrance. This service door, which opened out onto an adjacent street, would have allowed them a speedy exit if the Gestapo came to the front door.

Even though they were in hiding, the children were not always confined to the apartment. They played in the courtyard of the building and were even able to go out on the street with Kate on occasion. She was not worried about the other tenants in the building giving them away, as everyone kept to themselves; those who saw them on the street merely surmised that the children must be relatives of some sort. Kate admitted, however, that these outings were more dangerous for the two little boys than for the girls, as they always ran the risk of being subjected to circumcision checks. When they did have to stay indoors, Kate and the children occupied themselves with music, sewing, and reading.

Kate was picked up for questioning twice while hiding the children. The first time, she was apprehended after she had returned from dropping the children off to visit with Henri for a few days. Kate was held in a large hotel-like building for two days, where they accused her of helping Jews and continually threatened her life. She remembered vividly one specific event that happened while she was in custody. They brought her to a room with a large table with a baby lying in the middle. The officers told Kate that the baby was Jewish, and then shot the poor child right before her eyes. The horror of that moment would be burned in Kate's memory forever.

These were not Kate's only encounters with the Gestapo. One night in 1943, a single officer came to her apartment building. She could hear his boots as he marched down the hallway, as if warning her of the horrors he had in store for her and the children. Kate quickly reached into a drawer and

pulled out the gun she kept hidden there. She slipped it into her apron pocket and stepped out into the hall, where she came face to face with the young officer who she estimated to be about 18 years old. Without even stopping to think, Kate pulled the gun out of her apron and shot him at close range. She then collapsed immediately. Kate would never learn the particulars of what happened in those moments after she killed the officer, but when asked about the experience later she simply said, "I was not going to take chances. I had to do it." Before she was even out of her teens, Kate had already lived a lifetime.

Liberation

France was liberated in 1944. What should have been, and was for many, a joyous occasion was actually the most painful part of the war for Kate. For most families, liberation meant the possibility of a reunion with loved ones. For Kate, it meant parting with the ones she loved: the children she had protected for the past two years. Dora Spruch survived the duration of the war in Spain, and soon strangers came to Kate's apartment to collect Maurice and Helen and return them to their mother. She was also separated from Robert, as Henri came out of hiding and the two reunited and returned to their villa. After all three children were returned to their families, Kate felt abandoned and unneeded.

Life After the War

One day, Kate met an American boy at the Red Cross. They spoke for a bit and made plans to meet up the next morning. When the boy never arrived, Kate entered a nearby church to pray. On her way out, she noticed an American soldier following her. She stopped to talk to the man, and two days later, he proposed. Kate, of course, was honest and told him, "I don't love you very much." He responded perfectly with, "I love you for both of us." Two days later, Kate married Lawrence Benashiak, a Polish American from Chicago, and became the first girl from her hometown to wed an American soldier. Kate joined her husband in America in January 1946 and settled in the Chicago area.

After twenty years of marriage, Lawrence suffered a stroke. After his death in 1969, Kate married family friend Philip Lipner in a civil ceremony, as he was Jewish and she was still nominally Catholic. Sadly, Philip passed away only a month after they were wed. Although the marriage was cut short, it had a lasting impact. Kate's son from her first marriage, Paul, named his own son Philip after his beloved stepfather. For Kate, her relationship with Philip inspired her to finally convert to Judaism, a seed that had been planted many years before.

Righteous Among the Nations

In addition to starting her own family, Kate continued to stay in touch with the children whose lives she had saved. She was even reunited with Maurice in France. After their reunion, Maurice saw to it that Kate was honored by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations. The day she received this honor in 1995 was yet another bittersweet time in Kate's life. On the very same day, Robert, her beloved Henri's son whom she had saved during the war, died in France.

Kate is also honored on the Ferra Fountain of the Righteous at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center and at the Avenue of the Righteous at the Civic Center in Evanston, Illinois.

Kate died in Glencoe, Illinois on November 11, 2010 at age 85.

Hannah Messinger

World Before

Hannah Messinger was born Hannah Löwy on October 16, 1920, in Karlovy Vary in the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia. Though citizens of Czechoslovakia, her father and mother spoke German, the region's vernacular. As a consequence, while Hannah and her sister learned Czech at school, they spoke German at home.

Hannah describes her hometown as an idyllic place surrounded by mountains and forests. She spent a lot of time outdoors, hiking and skiing with her family. She lived in an apartment with her father, who owned a small business, her mother, and her younger sister. An artistic person, Hannah's father loved music and books, and he, as Hannah remembers, was an exceptionally gifted painter. Her mother was humorous and pragmatic. Growing up, Hannah and her sister were very close, and Hannah pictured her sister as "sunshine" because she was very pretty, outgoing, and open-hearted. Though the Löwy Family was Jewish, they were assimilated to the non-Jewish community; they did not keep kosher, but they attended synagogue.

Rise of Nazism

In 1936, Hannah began feeling the effects of increasing antisemitism when her non-Jewish friends began treating her differently. Hannah's father was optimistic that nothing would happen to his family, and he believed that people would change their attitudes. However, Hannah's cousin convinced him to leave the Sudetenland, so just months before the Nazis annexed the territory, Hannah and her family left Karlovy Vary for Prague, one suitcase for each of them in hand. Hannah's parents were unable to work in Prague because they did not speak Czech. Therefore, Hannah, who worked in an office, was the sole financial provider for her family.

Life Under the Swastika

In March of 1939, the Nazis marched into Czechoslovakia, and life changed dramatically for the Jewish population. Hannah remembers that they were neither able to go shopping before 5 pm nor were they allowed to travel.

Hannah and her family were forced to wear the Star of David, which made Hannah feel like a criminal. As life got increasingly difficult for Czechoslovakia's Jews, Hannah found work in a beauty shop and as a cleaning lady, but her earnings were barely enough for her family to get by in a small apartment. In March 1940, Hannah got married to Karl Messinger, and the couple lived in Hannah's family's apartment.

Though Hannah and her family knew about the concentration camps and tried to obtain visas, the world's countries had closed their doors to Jewish emigres, and they could not leave.

Ghettos

When the transports to Theresienstadt began in December 1941, Hannah's husband, Karl, was deported. At the time, Hannah did not know where he had been taken, but she received a letter from him saying he was fine. Later, she was forced to say goodbye to her family and report to the train station. Her father told her to come to Prague after the war, and he urged her to remember

the address of an aunt living in Chicago. The last words she heard from her sister were, “Hannah, you’re my best friend!” In shock after leaving her family, Hannah stopped talking for several weeks. Once at the railway station, people were separated by number signs hanging around their necks. Hannah’s number was “M930.” What it meant, nobody was certain.

Once in Theresienstadt, Hannah found her husband, who was taking suitcases away from the entrance. Hannah was brought to the “Dresdener-Kaserne,” a barrack that was entirely bare but for straw strewn about the ground. Men and women lived separately, and they ate meager rations of bread and soup.

Hannah worked as a hair-cutter because of her previous experience in the beauty shop. On average she would cut the hair of about 400 women each day.

While in Theresienstadt, Hannah was allowed to communicate with her family, and they sent her care packages with good food as often as they could. She later moved to another barrack, “Hamburger-Kaserne,” where she made a friend named Margaret.

In May 1942, many new prisoners—including Hannah’s parents--arrived in Theresienstadt. However, they were only stopping at the camp before being transported to Poland. Unaware that the transports almost certainly led to their deaths, Hannah and her husband tried to join her parents, but they were unsuccessful. Hannah also found her sister’s boyfriend in Theresienstadt; he was sad to inform her that her sister had been deported directly to Poland. The dual shocks of losing her sister and her parents silenced Hannah once more.

In June 1942, Hannah’s husband was sent to work in a nearby town. When he returned, he told her that thousands of the town’s people had been murdered, and he had been forced to clean up the aftermath of the mass execution.

In 1943, it was possible that Hannah and her husband could move into one room, so it was the first time they had any kind of privacy together. Shortly thereafter, she became pregnant. As children were not allowed in Theresienstadt, Hannah and Karl hoped that the war would be over soon and she could have the baby, but after a few months it was not possible to hide the pregnancy. She signed a paper agreeing to an abortion.

The Red Cross came to investigate Theresienstadt in June 1943 or 1944, but Hannah cannot remember the exact date. For the organization’s two-day visit, the camp was given a total overhaul: houses were painted and prisoners were required to create signs for synagogues, restaurants, cafes, and schools. They were forced to wear their best clothes, sit in cafes, and call the SS officer “uncle,” all to perpetuate the image the Nazis wanted the world to see. While the Red Cross observed the camp, prisoners were not allowed to talk with anybody affiliated with the international nonprofit. Once they had left and the Nazis had finished filming the camp for propaganda purposes, they took down the façade and life continued as usual. Though the conditions were terrible and the prisoners were faced with countless diseases, Hannah said that Theresienstadt, when compared to what happened later, was a paradise.

Camps

In September 1944, Hannah's husband was deported to Poland, and Hannah lost the last person dear to her. A few weeks later, she too was stuffed into a cattle car and deported to Auschwitz. Upon arrival at the largest extermination camp, the people were divided into two groups, and an SS officer began selecting who would live, and who would die. Since they needed a haircutter, Hannah was led into the camp. As she walked inside, she saw a woman begging for some food, so Hannah threw some bread over the fence. The woman was shot immediately.

Hannah's head was shaven, and she was forced to take off her clothes. Everybody looked so similar, she said, that she would not have been able to recognize her own sister if she had been there. The prisoners were given the same set of clothes, no underwear, and wooden clogs. They had no work to do, but they had to leave the barracks for roll-call every day, where they would stand outside for hours. Hannah cannot remember whether she talked to anyone the entire time. There was no privacy: five people slept on a single wooden plank so small that if anyone wanted to turn around, everybody had to. The latrines simply housed a long bench with holes in it. Sometimes, the prisoners were forbidden from going to the bathroom; when that was the case, Hannah would urinate in her shoe at night and empty it the next morning. It became typical to find new dead bodies every day.

One day, Hannah was forced to stand naked in front of an officer, who recognized that she had been pregnant. He asked her why she had had an abortion, to which Hannah answered, "Because I did not want to bring another Jewish child into this world." Explaining that she did everything just to survive, she hoped some of her family would be waiting for her after the war; for them, she had to survive.

Because everybody in the camp knew about the gas chambers, they lived in a state of constant fear; everybody, it seemed, was waiting to die. During roll-calls, weak and ill persons were taken to the "showers." Hannah could recognize them because they had "big eyes staring into nowhere."

In January 1945, Hannah was selected and brought to a room where people removed their clothes. Hannah remembers that she looked for German officers because if there were not any, they would have been taken to the gas chambers. In this room, she met Margaret again and they received new clothes, shoes, and a coat; then, they left the camp by train. They were transported to a factory in Koduwa and again, there was a selection. Hannah and six other women were called "Müll" (trash) and should have been sent back. But Hannah said that they knew this would be their last journey because "trash" would not be needed any longer. Standing in front of the train, Hannah and the six women began speaking to one another in German in front of three German soldiers; Hannah believes the soldiers recognized these woman as "normal humans." The soldiers gave them food and brought them to another factory at the labor camp Metzdorf, sparing them from the gas chambers and, as a consequence, saving their lives. After this miracle, the women decided to stay together.

While in the textile factory, Hannah operated heavy machinery. One day she was too slow and did something wrong, so her supervisor lifted his weapon to kill her; however, Hannah started staring in his eyes, and he let her live. Roll-call took place every morning, and Hannah was deeply cold.

Because of this, and because she wanted to feel like a human again, she created a bra out of stolen material from the factory.

Liberation

Hannah recalls that in May 1945 the doors to their barrack were not opened and she could not see any German soldiers. There was only a single Russian soldier with a bicycle. He told them, "You are free." A soldier brought Hannah and the six women to a city where they found an empty apartment with food, beds, and clothes. But Hannah describes that they could not sleep in the beds and at night, so they would lie on the floor.

The Russian soldiers started to "see the woman as women," and a lot of people got typhus, so the liberated prisoners decided to walk to the Czech border. A soldier gave bicycles to the women, but no one was able to drive it because they were not strong enough. Hannah remembers that they were afraid not only of the German soldiers but of the Russians as well.

It was not until Hannah and the other women shared a dinner with candles and lots of food at an empty farmhouse that she finally realized she was free.

When they reached the Czech border Hannah collapsed and was taken to the hospital. Because she was so light and slim, the doctors did not believe that she was 25 years old and instead thought she was a child. With the hospital overcrowded, Hannah had to share her bed with a patient suffering from tuberculosis.

Return to Life

Worried she would become ill, Hannah left the hospital and went to the nearest railway station. When she told her story to the staff, she got a ticket for free and was able to return to Prague. She went back to the apartment where she had used to live, just as her father had told her to. However, after some time waiting for her family, Hannah returned to Karlovy Vary.

While she had hoped so desperately that somebody had survived, Hannah recognized she was the only member of her family to survive the Shoah. Now that she was alone, she did not know what to do; she could not believe her entire family was dead. It was the hardest period of her life.

She wrote to her aunt in Chicago, who began the process of getting Hannah to America. In 1946, a stranger called Imre Messinger wrote Hannah seeking information about his cousin, who was in Theresienstadt. He too was planning on immigrating to the United States, and the two began corresponding in English.

Becoming Americans

In 1946 Hannah arrived in America. She married Imre Messinger in New York in 1947, and they had two children together. Hannah studied art at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Evanston Art Center, and Northeastern University.

Imre became successful at his job, and Hannah was able to work as a painter and artist. She later found that she could come to terms with not being able to save her family by drawing her experiences. While she did not speak to her children much about her life during the Shoah, she wrote her story down. While she has since been able to stop nightmares of the past, Hannah says

she cannot shake the feeling of guilt that she was the only person to survive “out of a wonderful family.” This, she says, will always remain with her.

Irene K. Poll

World Before

Irene Poll was born Johanna Elisabeth Kahn in Mannheim, Germany on June 29, 1921. Her parents, Joseph and Marta, married in 1920 after Joseph returned from France, where he had been a prisoner of war during World War I.

Irene's mother was born in Luxembourg , and her father came from a small village in Germany. Irene's brother, Robert, was two-and-a-half years younger than she. The family lived together in an apartment and had a live-in maid as well as a nanny to look after the children.

Irene remembers that because poverty was rampant, it was extremely difficult to live in Germany during the 1920s. With millions unemployed and hyperinflation exponentially reducing the value of the franc, Joseph lost his business. Irene recalls purchasing pretzels with a one million mark bill. She looked forward to the week ends when her family would go for long walks along the Rheine or have picnics in the park. Though she describes her childhood as quiet and pleasant but without luxury, she wishes she had not been living in Germany.

Her parents were not Orthodox Jews, so they celebrated only the main Jewish holidays. The family dressed up, went to synagogue, and had friends over. Irene sang in the children's choir and recalls falling asleep whenever her father read the Hebrew texts.

Irene went to kindergarten, elementary school, and high school in Mannheim. Unlike most of the children in that time, she never joined a youth group because she detested the notion of wearing a uniform. In retrospect, she believes that she developed the aversion to uniforms after listening to her father talk about the Great War; she believed people in uniforms would do evil things.

Rise of Nazism

In 1927 Irene began noticing graffiti swastikas on her way to school, but she had no idea what any of it meant. She also remembers that her brother also drew the Nazi party's symbol, and it made her feel uncomfortable. In 1931, children in the Hitler Youth started wearing armbands with the swastika, and she started to realize Jews had no place in the lives of these children.

Life Under the Swastika

Irene remembers that in 1933, she and her brother watched many Nazi marches in the streets from the window of their apartment. She distinctly remembers being terrified by one song about Jewish blood splashing from German knives.

One day, Irene was called into her brother's classroom and had to watch as a teacher beat Robert. When she started crying, the teacher told her to stop or he would beat her next. Robert and Irene never told their parents because they felt they could not do something about it. They started to hear about Jewish people who were sent to prison without reason and children who denounced their parents.

The maid of the household dated a Jewish man who was working in Joseph's business. One day, two young men ran into their apartment and started beating Irene's mother and father. Robert and

Irene had to watch as their parents were unable to defend themselves and accused of "Rassenschande" (racial defilement).

On April 1, 1933, the boycott of Jewish businesses started, and Irene recalls that a big sign was placed in front of her father's business. That day she asked her father when they would leave Germany, but he was convinced that this would blow over and there would be no need to leave the county. Irene, however, felt increasingly uncomfortable in her homeland. One day, she fell on the playground in school and cut her hand, and when she asked a teacher for help, he started laughing, saying he would not touch dirty Jewish blood. It was the single-most significant moment that convinced her she needed to leave Germany.

In March 1934, Irene left her family to live with her aunt and uncle in Lille, France. She learned French and attended school there until she graduated in 1940. She does not remember encountering any antisemitism while she was there. Only for her brother's Bar Mitzvah did she return to Germany. On her way back, she was stopped at the border, and a Nazi soldier told her that she would have to prove she was Jewish if she wanted to leave the country. As a consequence, she had to find a member of the Nazi party who would give her a signed paper. After that, she vowed never to return.

During the Kristallnacht pogrom on November 9, 1938, Irene's father was arrested and sent to Dachau along with some 30,000 other Jewish men. For several months, her family did not know where he was, but he was released from the concentration camp after he traded his business with a Nazi officer in Dachau. Once he came back, Irene's family left for Luxembourg. Since Joseph had family in the United States, he applied for a visa.

Nazi Racism Spreads

In 1940, the Nazis invaded France, but Irene continued to go to public school in Lille. When the Luftwaffe's air assaults got too close for comfort, her aunt and uncle moved to the countryside, leaving Irene to stay by herself at their house. Soon the Germans occupied houses on her street, and it was no longer safe for her to live there anymore.

In 1942, Irene began working as a translator for the car company Peugeot. Often servicing Nazi soldiers' cars, the company found Irene particularly useful because she could translate conversations between the Germans and her French coworkers. One day, two German soldiers came in with a British car they needed fixed up; Irene, frustrated to once again be in a situation where she could not run from the Nazis, asked, "why don't you wait until the British come back?"

After a while, all Jews registered at the local synagogue were required to report to the French police. When Irene went, she was told she needed to wear a yellow star on her clothes. After several days of donning the conspicuous symbol, she realized that the French looked at her with pity while the Germans ostracized her. She decided to stop wearing it; it felt too much like committing suicide.

Shortly thereafter, she got a job as a nanny for a family who lived in a castle in the countryside. However, by the end of the summer of 1942, she received information that the Gestapo were searching for her. Trying to find her, they had already threatened her aunt, so Irene decided to leave immediately.

Rescuers

The same night she learned she was being hunted, Irene took a train to Lille, where a woman picked her up and brought her to the house of Father Vancourt and his cousin Raymond. For the rest of the war, Irene lived in hiding at this apartment. Father Vancourt was a professor of philosophy and a priest at the hospital next door. It was not until the end of the war that Irene learned her rescuer had been a member of the French underground.

While staying in Father Vancourt's house, Irene slept in his bedroom. A caring, open-minded man, he took down the crucifix hanging in his room out of respect for Irene's faith. Moreover, he involved her in his religious studies, asking her for help with translations. In doing so, he helped Irene remain occupied, and she was able to forget her fear for a little while.

Regardless, Irene lived in a state of constant fear. Worried she would be discovered when people visited Father Vancourt's home, she asked the priest if baptizing her would help hide her true identity. His answer was very clear: "I love you as a human being and I respect you as a Jew so never ask me something like that again!"

Father Vancourt's cousin Raymond was a full time student at the local university, and Father Vancourt spent his time either at the university or in the hospital, so Irene was alone most of the day. She prepared meals, cleaned, did the laundry, made the beds, fed the cat, and chased mice. In the winter, her biggest challenge was to make a fire in the morning because she had few things to burn. Food was also limited. They received an egg and a pound of meat per month, and they had neither butter nor milk. Sometimes, Father Vancourt cycled to the countryside to get food; occasionally, he came back with ham, which presented Irene with the moral dilemma of either filling her stomach or keeping kosher.

Worse than the hunger was the feeling of not knowing what would happen. Irene could not go to the windows, did not know what her parents were doing, and was at the mercy of her painful thoughts. She started to knit and she recalls that somebody was always reading for others to help keep their minds busy. Later on, Irene found out that her parents and her brother were able to get a visa to immigrate in the United States, but Irene could not leave the country because the war had already broken out.

In 1943, the Nazis started to round up the French Jews, and Father Vancourt received information regarding an order to pick up all Jews living in Lille. He notified Irene's aunt, and the family moved into his house. Irene recalls that while the family stayed with him, Father Vancourt offered to celebrate Passover with them. Because he had lived in Palestine, he could speak Hebrew and knew a lot about Jewish culture. Somehow, he managed to get a bottle of wine, and the unlikely group celebrated the first Seder. Irene also remembers that the whole family was convinced they would never be liberated, but they sang, "Next Year in Jerusalem" to hold on to hope.

Liberation

In September 1944, the Germans fled Lille before the British army arrived. In the meantime, Father Vancourt helped the city stay organized, and Irene discovered he and many of his students had been members of the underground. When Irene asked Father Vancourt how she could thank him,

he told her that she should simply enjoy life. For Irene, however, that seemed impossible; her whole family had disappeared, and her life had been altered drastically by the Nazi regime.

Irene had fallen out of touch with her family once they left Europe, so she had no idea whether or not anybody had survived. Her parents, hoping to reconnect with her, gave their old address to an American soldier who eventually followed the lead to Father Vancourt's home. He arrived with good news, and Irene was able to send a telegram to her parents.

After an unusually cold winter in 1944 and many battles in the nearby fields of Belgium, Irene joined the Red Cross in Maastricht as a translator. When celebrating Passover with the Jews of Maastricht in 1945, she felt close to her ancestors who had fled Egypt, and she said she was finally liberated from the "jar of evil." As she worked for the Red Cross, she met many American soldiers, and learned English as well as basic American culture. She also began learning about big American cities such as San Francisco and Chicago, and about racism against African and Native Americans.

Arrival in a New Country

In January 1946, Irene's parents prepared her papers so Irene could immigrate to the United States. She got on a priority transport with 7,000 G.I.s and arrived in New York. Irene remembers that she could not see the stature of Liberty because it was too foggy. She brought a bottle of champagne with her from France, which she opened with her family when she arrived in Chicago.

Becoming Americans

To make a living, Irene worked for *Time Magazine* and the University of Chicago. For her, working was never about establishing a career but about earning money.

One year after she arrived in Chicago Irene married Nathan Diamond, a Polish-born émigré. They had two children together, Mark and Fay, but in 1956, tragedy struck when Nathan died in a car accident. After a failed second marriage, Irene married a man named Albert Poll in 1983.

Irene tried hard to fit into American society and she recalls that nobody wanted to know about her past. They sad: "You are here now. You are safe. Have a good time." But Irene felt like she did not know how to have a good time. This also affected how she raised her children.

One day, the children's teacher told her Mark and Fay never smiled, and that was when Irene realized she had forgotten how to smile. She began standing in front of the mirror to learn how to smile again.

Irene also says that she is not sure whether she will ever feel at home, whether she will always feels different. But she is proud of her children, who went to college, have wonderful jobs, and have raised loving families. Her son became an architect, her daughter a teacher. Both are more sensitive about discrimination and oppression in the world because of their mother's experiences. Her daughter adopted two Korean children, whom Irene feels very connected to because they left their home country in the hopes of having a better life, just as she had to when she was a child.

Once she had immigrated to the U.S., Irene began drawing again, having attended art school in France. Her son encouraged her to use art as a medium through which to deal with feelings she could not verbalize. When her brother Raymond visited her in 1979, his goodness compelled Irene

to talk about what good people can accomplish. This, along with her husband Albert's encouragement, convinced Irene to begin telling her story. She believes it is important we remember not only the horror of the Shoah but also the people who helped, rescuers such as Father Vancourt. Irene believes we cannot learn from the horror itself; we must learn from the goodness of others because it is such a simple feeling, a feeling that is easy to understand.

Eventually, Father Vancourt and two others who had helped Irene were honored by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations. As evidence of Irene's conviction that everybody can make a difference, her rescuers received Yad Vashem's message, "He who saves one life saves humanity."

Maurice Raichel

World Before

Moses Reichel (birth name M. Sohkliar) was born on December 27, 1907 in Ponewcesz, Poland. At a young age, Moses moved to Kovno, Lithuania where he went to school and later to college. During his time studying engineering, Moses met his future wife Lea Reichel, who was born on March 15, 1916 in Kovno.

Camps

In 1941, Moses' life changed dramatically when Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. The Reichel family lived in the Kovno-Sobotka Ghetto for the next three years, where Moses suffered through inhumane conditions. Hard physical work, malnutrition, and extreme physical punishment were part of everyday life in the Ghetto. In July 1944, the Germans evacuated the Ghetto, and the entire Reichel family was sent to concentration camps in Eastern Europe. Moses himself ended up in Dachau, where he continued to live as a slave laborer for the Germans. Over the next ten months, his physical condition deteriorated as a consequence of the lack of hygiene in the camp as well as malnutrition and back-breaking work, such as lumbering trees and carrying cement. Following a confrontation with a Nazi, Moses was beaten up and his nose was broken, causing him to lose his sense of smell.

Liberation

In April 1945, Moses was liberated by the American army and was sent to the DP camp Neu Freimann near Munich, where he resided for an additional twelve months. He was in a very weak condition, and a persistent nosebleed, headaches, and numerous colds significantly slowed his recovery. In addition to losing his sense of smell, he partly lost his sense of hearing and suffered from an infection in his shoulder. Despite the challenging circumstances, he remained in good mental health. The Nazis murdered Moses' parents, two sisters, and three brothers in various concentration camps.

Becoming Americans

In 1946-47, Moses Reichel changed his name to Maurice Raichel and immigrated to the United States. After arriving in New York City, he travelled to Paterson, New Jersey where he started his new life.

Ralph and Ruth Rehbock

World Before

Ruth Rehbock, née Nussbaum, was born in Schmalkalden, a small town in Thuringia, on November 24, 1906. When she was eleven years old, the Nussbaums moved to Ohrdruf which had an army base close by. During this time, World War I was still going on. Accordingly, Ruth's father, a cattle dealer, was forced to provide meat for the army. Her mother stayed at home and took care of the six children Alfred, Ludwig, Kurt, Renate (Renny), Rosalie and Ruth.

After finishing school at the age of sixteen, Ruth moved to Gotha. She trained as a dental hygienist and also learned how to sew and type. On weekends, she usually travelled to Ohrdruf where she loved to spend time with her family. The Nussbaums were not devout but observed the Jewish holidays. In her childhood, Ruth did not experience any antisemitism. Because the Nussbaums were one of two Jewish families living in Ohrdruf, they had many non-Jewish friends; they forged relationships with their gentile neighbors and coexisted peacefully prior to the rise of Nazism.

Rise of Nazism

In 1933, the proliferation of antisemitic propaganda began, and the Nussbaums' neighbors stopped talking to Ohrdruf's Jewish families. Jews themselves refrained from talking to one another out of fear of being observed or overheard. As relationships between neighbors and friends changed dramatically, family relationships grew stronger.

Through her father's acquaintances, Ruth met Hans Rehbock in Gotha. He was an intern at Ruppelwerk, a metal factory in Gotha that exported products to European countries as well as the United States. Later on, Hans became the exports manager of the company, which helped him live a comfortable middle class life. Although Hans's mother did not fully agree with his relationship with Ruth, Hans married her in 1933. Since Hitler was already in power and the propaganda had already started, they did not have the ceremony in a temple but in their bedroom. It was obvious that things were changing. Ruth remembers that all six Jewish doctors in Gotha left the town, one after another, that relationships with neighbors changed, and that Jews were beaten up. Nevertheless, Ruth and Hans decided to stay. They were able to keep up their middle class lifestyle. Convinced that the political situation would pass by, they wanted to raise their son Ralph, born on July 11, 1934, in his homeland.

As exports manager, Hans was able to keep his passport and his driver's license, since the money that was brought into the country through exports was important to the Nazi government. Ruth, on the other hand, lost her position at the dentist's office when a 1935 law forbade Jews from working in the medical sector. A little later, Ruth's nephews and nieces started leaving the country because Jews were not allowed to go to school anymore. Ruth's brothers, Ludwig and Kurt, immigrated to South Africa after they were fired.

Finally, Hans and Ruth decided to leave the country as well. They made arrangements and applied for papers at the beginning of 1938, but the clerk at the embassy in Berlin was unwilling to hand out visitor visas for the entire family. He assumed that Hans and Ruth Rehbock would not come back when there was nothing held in pledge. Since Ruth's relatives lived in Chicago, Hans insisted

that his wife would go to the U.S. in order to arrange all the paperwork that was needed for their sponsorship and exit visas.

In April 1938, Ruth travelled to the U.S. She remembers her stay very well as it happened to be Passover. Out of fear that she would be persecuted for observing a Jewish feast, she drew the curtains, surprising her American relatives.

November Pogroms

During her stay in Chicago, Ruth took the chance to figure out what her family might need for starting over in a new country. As soon as all the formalities were completed, she returned to Germany. When she came home, the emigration process was put on hold temporarily since Ruth had an appendix operation. She recalls that she felt uncomfortable, especially because the surgery was done by Nazi doctors, but Ruth recovered quickly. She submitted all forms and finally got an appointment at the American embassy on November 10. To ensure they were on time, the family travelled to Berlin several days in advance. There, they witnessed the Night of Broken Glass. The burning synagogue by their hotel is one of Ruth's strongest memories.

The following day, Hans Rehbock got a phone call from his teenage house sitter. She told Hans that his English lesson had been cancelled. This was a predetermined code and signified Hans not come back to Gotha. Later on, the family learned that Nazi officers came to imprison Jewish men between 30 and 60 years old in the concentration camp of Buchenwald. Ruth's brother-in-law Salo (Renny's husband) died that night. Nazis overtook the house and forced Salo to come with them, but Salo, who had been injured during World War I, could not walk fast enough for the officers. He died after they beat him up and pushed him down the stairs.

While Hans went into hiding in Berlin, Ruth took care of the exit visas by herself. She visited the American embassy on November 10 but could not complete the paperwork. She was asked to come back the following day, but because it happened to be Armistice Day, the embassy was closed. About five hundred desperate women whose spouses were in hiding or picked up by the Nazis, shared Mrs. Rehbock's fate. They begged for help, but the guard told them to leave. Eventually, they persisted in finding the ambassador, who opened the doors for them and finalized their papers.

While Hans stayed hidden in Berlin, Ruth and Ralph went back to Gotha. Ruth began filling containers with the family's possessions to be shipped to Chicago. In addition, she travelled to Berlin to see Hans on a daily basis. She left Gotha at six o'clock in the morning and arrived at noon. Since their former friends were afraid to help them, Hans and Ruth moved around and spent time in public, before Ruth left Berlin at 6 pm.

A couple of weeks later, Hans managed to sneak on an airplane he knew would go to London. His wife and son boarded a train a little later. When they arrived at the Dutch border, the train stopped and all Jews were called out. They were strip-searched and lined up. Out of nowhere, a man appeared, tipped Ruth on her shoulder, and told her to follow him as soon as he tapped his hat. Although Ruth did not know him, she trusted him. When the stranger gave her the signal, she took Ralph, started running, crossed the rail road tracks, and jumped on a local train, which took them to Holland. The man then escorted them to his home, where Ruth made a phone call to Gotha to

tell her family that she and Ralph were safe. They also left a message for Hans saying that they would arrive in England a little later than planned. Ruth and Ralph stayed in the stranger's house for about 24 hours before leaving for England. There, they met Hans and boarded a ship, arriving in New York on Christmas Eve of 1938. Welcomed by the Statue of Liberty, they knew that they were free. They did not spend much time in New York but took a train to Chicago almost immediately.

At that time, Ralph was four years old and did not realize what was going on. He remembers that he used to spend time with his cousins at his maternal grandparents' farm in Ohrdruf[8] and that outings were important to the family. Other than that, he does not recall his early childhood very well. Ralph has always been aware of his German heritage but identifies as an American.

Becoming Americans

The Rehbocks spent a couple of days with Ruth's relatives before they moved to their own apartment on Chicago's south side. Trying to adapt quickly, the family bought new clothes, learned English, stopped speaking German at home, and began learning American customs and traditions. Ruth started working for her cousin's husband in an insurance company, and in 1943, they became naturalized citizens, officially cutting their ties to Germany.

By the time Ralph began kindergarten, he was fluent in English and did not have so much as an accent. Like other kids, he went to school, became a Cub Scout, played the bugle, and blew the shofar in his synagogue; he went to a local high school, and then he graduated from Northwestern University in 1957. As an engineer he got a decent position in the Air Force, allowing him to support his family. Later on, he worked as a sales agent for different companies.

Although Hans and Ruth brought all their belongings from Germany to the U.S., they left their past behind and refused to talk about their background. While German furniture, tableware, potato salad, and Thuringian dumplings always reminded the Rehbocks of their life Gotha, Ralph recalls that, "There was never anything hidden but neither was anything volunteered. And I really never asked for details" [A-M.H, 1:55:50]. Ruth hesitantly started speaking about her German heritage during the 1970s when her grandchildren began asking questions. However, she did not speak about her escape from Nazi Germany until Hans Rehbock died in 1983. On that night, Ralph finally learned the details of his family's escape from Germany when the rabbi's wife asked his mother to tell them their story. He listened to his mom as she spoke about the burning synagogues in Berlin, the call from their house sitter, her attempt to get exit visas at the American embassy; about Hans's escape by plane, and the stranger who tapped her on the shoulder, instructing her to follow him as soon as she saw his signal.

Holocaust Awareness/Survivor Empowerment

Ralph was struck by that story and the difference one person could make in another's life. As a consequence, he got involved in Holocaust education. When the Skokie museum sent his temple, Temple Shalom, a letter requesting members to serve as synagogue representatives on the museum board, he was contacted because of his story and his work with the temple education committee. After the meeting, Ralph decided to serve on the board. He did some additional

[8] Ohrdruf is about six miles away from Gotha and became a satellite camp of Buchenwald.

research on Holocaust studies and, with his mother's help, started putting his story together. Wanting to learn more about his background, Ralph returned to Gotha in 1985 against his mother's wishes. He explained, "I wanted to be able to walk through the past in the present," [T.K.], his mom identified the places integral to the Rehbocks' biographies. As a result, the story Ralph tells today is deeply influenced by his mother's memories.

As an American, Ralph felt uncomfortable in the German Democratic Republic. However, he keeps his encounters with contemporary witnesses, who were able to tell him stories about his family, in good memory. Ralph also went to Ohrdruf in order to visit his maternal grandmother's farm. When he told his mother about the clock and the bell at her parents' house, Ruth was unable to hide her emotions any longer: "She burst into tears over the phone, my mother who never cried. She was a very unemotional person. [...] I realized for the first time, I had mentioned something that she had never told me about. [...] By mentioning the clock and the bell, I clearly had proved to her that I had been back from whence I had come." [T.K.]

When Ralph's mother died in 2000, Ralph found a letter in Ruth's underwear drawer. This letter is the last sign of life of Ruth's sister Renny. Afraid of starting over in a different country, Renny and her son Alfred were the only family members that decided to stay in Germany. Renny's letter shows that she was fully aware of her plight. "Our situation is more tragic. I had thought Alfred and I would see you again, but other plans have been made for us. [...] I thank you for everything and have only the best wishes for you. Stay well! Don't forget about us. I will think of you until my last hour. Everything good for your lives. I kiss you in my heart and will love you until my death." [Renny's letter, dated 10-01-1943] In 2008, the international tracing service in Bad Arolson confirmed that Renny and Alfred were transported from Berlin to Auschwitz, where they finally perished.

Two years later, Ralph got an invitation from the mayor of Gotha.[9] Apart from giving talks at a school and a library, he made some interesting acquaintances and discoveries. He met an elderly lady at the Jewish cemetery who remembered the Rehbock family and showed him pictures of Gotha back in the days. In addition, Ralph met relatives of the Groll family and got information about the people who helped the Nussbaums under the Nazi regime. The mayor presented him with several interesting documents from the local archives. Among other things, Ralph got a copy of his mid-wife certificate. He also discovered a picture that showed a sign saying: "Kauft nicht bei Herrn Nussbaum und Herrn X" ("Do not buy from Mr. Nussbaum and Mr. X").[10] The discovery was a very emotional moment for Ralph. The picture proves that his grandfather was directly affected by the boycott in 1934.

Ralph, who was accompanied by his family, also travelled to Berlin, where he joined a guided group that focused on Jewish life in Berlin. He also went to track 17, the station in Berlin Grunewald where thousands of Jews were transported to concentration camps. There, he discovered Renny's name on a metal plaque. Ralph, who survived the Holocaust because of his parents' actions, feels responsible for teaching the Holocaust and keeping the stories alive: "My very, very deep feeling –

[9] This trip was arranged by Anette Isaacs, who lives in Evanston and teaches about German culture and history.

[10] Ralph doesn't remember the second name. But he recalls his surprise about the second Jewish family that used to live in Ohrdruf. His mother had never mentioned other Jews in her hometown.

because of my personal experiences: once lived and then remembered, refreshed, reawakened – is that we cannot forget, we cannot allow our children not to understand fully what happened. [...] We who survived have a challenge and those who are interested in those who survived have a challenge. And that challenge is the education of the youth and the education of the adult to carry to their graves that what went on and what didn't happen what should have happened to teach Jews and non-Jews alike that the experiences were real experiences. There is no way they should be suppressed and that the memories must be vivid. [...] We have the obligation and the responsibility to teach the youth of today and tomorrow. This has to be perpetuated. This cannot be allowed to be forgotten – ever." [T.C.]

Walter Rosenbush

World Before

Walter Rosenbush was born on June 23, 1913, in Kattowitz, Germany (now Katowice, Poland). His father served in the German army during WWI and received multiple accolades after being seriously injured. After his return, he became a successful businessman, owning a third of the company that he worked for. This allowed for a very comfortable life for Walter and his two older sisters, who grew up speaking only German and living a very happy childhood free of antisemitism. He lived in a building with many non-Jews and was close to many of his neighbors. Christians and Jews coexisted together and would even celebrate holidays together. This normalcy was interrupted by the Silesian Uprisings of the Polish-Russian War, when the Polish army fought the German nationalists. Walter's town eventually became Polish territory. His older sister and her husband lived in the nearby city of Gleiwitz, which remained part of Germany, but because of their father's business, the rest of the family stayed in the now Polish town of Katowice. It was not an easy transition, as none of the family spoke Polish.

The schools remained closed for two years because of the turmoil, but during this time Walter was tutored and managed to jump a grade ahead. He finished his German high school degree in 1930, leaving him with the choice to go to university in Poland or Germany. At that time, there were no private universities and a high school diploma guaranteed your right to be accepted into any public university in either country. Thanks to the Geneva Convention, former German citizens could also travel freely between the two newly created sides. Walter chose to study in Germany.

Rise of Nazism

Walter studied for his master's degree in Berlin, where he said he felt little direct effect of the rise of Nazism despite Hitler's growing presence. He remembers very little political activity at the university, and when he finished his degree in 1933, there were still Jewish professors teaching. Walter was studying as a "foreign German," with a room in a non-Jewish family's home.

Though Hitler was appointed Chancellor on January 13, 1933, Walter finished his degree in peace and began working on his dissertation. He then moved to Freiburg to begin his doctorate, where he says there were few Jews, but also few Nazis. Though he knew the country was experiencing great political tension, Walter felt untouched by it. He received his doctorate in 1936 and moved back home with his parents. One year later, his oldest sister and her husband immigrated to Palestine—they were the only family members to escape Europe before the war broke out.

Walter remembers an incident two weeks before the outbreak of the war in which he went to Gleiwitz to visit his sister. Upon arriving in the city, an SS officer asked him why he still came to Germany. Walter explained that he was visiting his sister, but on his return home he saw war materials everywhere and understood that international conflict was imminent. He stopped in a café by the train station in Katowice and told his friends what he saw. They laughed and made jokes about the guns they owned, saying there was nothing to worry about, but Walter believed differently.

World at War

Walter's fears were realized when, on August 31, 1939, Gleiwitz became one of the sites of a false flag operation by Nazis, creating pretext to invade Poland. The Gestapo took prisoners from the Dachau concentration camp and dressed them in Polish uniforms, fabricating a story that they had attacked a German radio station. The event served its purpose and on September 1, 1939, Hitler announced the invasion of Poland, plunging Europe into the Second World War.

The Gestapo quietly arrived into Walter's town of Katowice, but when Walter accompanied his father to his firm two days later, they were informed by an officer that it was now government property.

Ghettos

In Katowice, Jews under the age of forty were told they would be sent to work camps. Walter was put on a train supposedly heading to one of these camps, but found himself kicked off the train in the middle of Poland. A Nazi tactic to rid the nation of Jews, they would dump trains full of Jews far from their homes, telling them to go to Russia. After a week-long journey by foot, Walter made it to Lviv, then the center of Soviet Ukraine. It was extremely disorganized there, with little food, and rumors circulating that non-citizens would soon be sent farther east. Walter received a letter that his father was in the Lublin ghetto and immediately decided to go find him. In January 1940, he and another Jew boarded a train for Lublin, and after several weeks, he got a job at the town leather factory, which changed ownership after only a few days. Fortunately for Walter, the factory was bought by a nice man who took a liking to him and gave him a job as a minor accountant. He stayed there for seven months, quite safe, as the factory was fenced in with guard dogs. The factory soon officially closed down, but the owner took Walter with him to work in another factory. As Walter explains, having a leather maker's ID made you a very desirable worker, so times were easier for him than most. He realized just how fortunate he was when all Jews were forced to move into the city center. His ID gave him a degree of protection that the masses did not have. He decided to move into the "open ghetto," with friends to help protect them.

In 1941, the Germans invaded Russia and conditions deteriorated. Rumors of the ghetto being liquated began circulating, and tensions escalated. In the spring of 1942, the Jews were marched out of the ghetto and, while blinded by large lights, surrounded by the SS. They were then divided into two groups depending on their ID cards and physical condition. Group A, consisting of about 32,000 Jews, was sent to Belzec and gassed. Group B, which consisted of only about 5,000 Jews, remained in the ghetto.

Walter was put in group B, consisting of only 5,000 Jews, who remained in the ghetto. This event marked the beginning of the liquidation of the Lublin ghetto, the first city in Europe in which almost the entire Jewish population was exterminated. Walter is one of only about two hundred and thirty known survivors from Lublin.

Soon after this event, the initial 5,000 Jews left in the ghetto were cut down to 4,000 and Lublin became a closed ghetto. Walter went back to work in the leather factory, and life resumed with some degree of normalcy until June of 1942. One day, an SS officer visiting the factory asked Walter, who spoke fluent German, for a tour. Once they were outside, the SS man informed Walter that a friend in the Gestapo had spoken of the "final extermination" decision made at the Wannsee

Conference. Giving Walter his word of honor, the SS officer urged him to go into hiding as all of Europe's Jews would soon be annihilated. Though shaken by the news, Walter's fears were assuaged after he spoke with a friend in the underground; as insurance, he received a cyanide capsule in case he found himself captured.

On November 9, the ghetto was surrounded by Gestapo, SS officers, and Latvian police, and the Jews were driven about a mile away to the camp of Majdanek. Walter, along with other factory workers, was pulled out of the mass after arriving in the camp and promised that he would not be harmed; he was just going to work. Conditions were adequate for these workers, and life was generally quiet for several months. However, on March 19, 1943, a Jewish engineer at another factory called, informing Walter and his coworkers that the Gestapo had already rounded up the Jews working there. Walter immediately left for a friend's house, where he remained for three days until his friend's brother, who worked for the railroad company, could get him a train ticket to Warsaw.

Rescuers

While in Majdanek, Walter had become friends with a couple who had also escaped to Warsaw. They were well connected, and the wife's brother was in the Polish underground. A personable man, Walter recounted him as a playboy of sorts, with many girlfriends. Luckily for Walter, the couple took a liking to him and asked their connections to help save him as well. Upon his arrival in Warsaw, Walter called the wife's brother, who helped him go into hiding. He placed Walter with one of his girlfriends and her sister. They were very nice ladies, quite patriotic and obviously bourgeois, but they were out of money. The women did not particularly like the Jews, believing that they should have a separate state, but they did not support their extermination, either. Despite this, they liked Walter immensely, and they all got along quite well.

They received two underground newspapers daily, so they were always up to date with what was going on. Walter was living with false papers at the time, and he was in a perpetual state of terror at the prospect of being discovered and murdered. Over the summer, his friends from Majdanek were murdered in their home.

On August 1, 1944, Polish Nationalists staged in insurrection, stopping the Russians from coming to Warsaw. It was the beginning of the two month-long Warsaw Uprising, the single largest military effort taken by any European resistance movement during the war. The Germans wanted to take the city back, and began bombing it aggressively. Walter decided to leave, knowing the area wasn't safe, and asked the women to go with him. They refused and were ultimately killed by German planes. Half of Warsaw was bombed, and the Germans eventually regained control of the city—but only after razing it with flamethrowers. The Jews were sent to death camps, and many others were sent to work.

Walter, who had maintained his false identity, was recognized by a family who knew him as the cousin of the women that he lived with. He stuck with this family and was sent to lower Silesia to work on repairing a huge rail line. Thanks to his fluency in German, he was chosen to work in the office registering people. He remembers being extremely cautious, trying to please everyone, and avoiding making even the slightest mistake. He recalled that the officers were annoyed with his

constant questions, but he knew he must avoid making any mistakes if he wanted to keep this job. There were many other foreigners there, and he was afraid of being discovered as a Jew.

After work on the railroad was completed, the German labor boss announced that one of his friends needed workers for his lumberyard. Many people volunteered to go work, including Walter. It was a long journey, as there were fifteen cars of people and equipment. They arrived by train in Kemlitz in December of 1944. Walter continued to receive news from the underground, most of which made him sad, and it seemed everyone was constantly in a bad mood.

On the evening of February 12, 1945, Walter saw lights late in the evening, and felt the earth shake for hours. He realized that nearby Dresden was being bombed, first by the British and then by the Americans. The Allies wanted to break the people's will and convince the Germans that the war was over, but in doing so, they killed between forty and fifty thousand people. Walter left and went farther north, taking side roads to avoid the bombing. He ended up in a little agricultural town, which was very peaceful.

Walter found life relatively normal here, disrupted only when German officials who knew the end was near came through the town to escape Germany. By April, Walter knew the war was over and that the Allies were approaching. He wanted to go to the British side, but before he was able to, a Russian tank arrived in town. He remembered a Russian officer emerging and announcing that the war was over; he was told the soldiers needed to abandon their weapons and leave within two hours. People immediately began stealing weapons, which Walter found a comical first act of freedom. For Walter, there was no greater tool than freedom.

Return to Life

After liberation, Walter went back to Lublin and found that the factories were still operating. A friend in charge of a factory convinced Walter to stay with him, which he did for a few weeks. He was surprised to find that only ten or eleven Jews from the ghetto still remained there, and he realized just how fortunate he was to have survived.

He went back to his home town of Katowice and was able to get radio contact with someone in Israel. He then discovered that his sister in Gleiwitz had perished in Terezin, along with his parents and all other relatives in the area. He traveled to Czechoslovakia, and from there he was smuggled into Bavaria. He spent a short time in Munich before going to Stuttgart. Several weeks after arriving in Stuttgart, he recognized a woman, Rena Eibel, while walking on the street from his time in Majdanek. They reconnected, and a few months later they were married. At the time, the government was looking for German Jews to work in factories, so Walter took a job in a chemical factory. He was happy to get a company car and be able to drive once again, but he quit after a few months to prepare for immigration to the United States.

Becoming Americans

In January 1947, Walter and his wife immigrated to New York, where his wife had relatives. Ultimately, they ended up in Chicago, where Walter got a job with a distribution company traveling around the Midwest. They had three children and built a happy life for themselves in the United States.

In 1968, Walter received a letter from the German consulate asking if he would participate in the Majdanek Trials. The trials would be held in Germany, but first there was a session in the U.S. as a sort of precursor. It was a real court session, complete with prosecutors, lawyers, judge, and consul. Walter continued to converse with prosecutors after this session, telling them of other incidents. He developed a relationship with them and was asked to return to Germany to participate in a trial for the first time in 1971. This trial was against the chief SS officer in the camp, who was ultimately convicted. Walter shared that this man's son was so distraught by the sins of his father that he moved to Israel and worked in a Kibbutz. Walter returned to Germany twice more to participate in trials, and although neither defendant was convicted, he was still very glad for the opportunity. These trials forced the German public to face their past; prosecutors invited press, students, and ordinary Jews to the trials to listen to Walter's testimony and face the truth.

Walter passed away on November 15, 2004. He is survived by his three children and three grandchildren.

Klaus Schaap

World Before

Klaus was born the only child of Moritz and Erna Schaap on August 9, 1933, in Nordhorn, Germany. His father, Moritz, owned a butcher shop in Nordhorn and made a comfortable living, allowing Erna to stay at home with Klaus.

Rise of Nazism

On January 30, 1933, President Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler Chancellor of Germany, marking the establishment of the Third Reich. Under the regime, undesirable elements of the German population—homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, political dissidents, Roma and Sinti, and Jews—would be stripped of basic rights, imprisoned in concentration camps, and eventually, lose their lives.

When Klaus was only one year old, Nazi soldiers marched through his hometown and broke the windows of all the Jewish-owned stores, including his father's butcher shop. With the public's growing hostility towards Jews, Moritz decided Germany was no longer safe for him and his family and moved to Angerlo, Holland, where there was little antisemitism. Their new town had a synagogue and a fair-sized Jewish population, allowing the Schaaps to feel safe from the Third Reich's decrees. Moritz became a successful cattle dealer in Angerlo, and Erna remained at home to raise Klaus.

World at War

In early May of 1940, German troops invaded Holland, and the country was forced to surrender six days later. Klaus was six years old at the time and attending a public school in Angerlo. He recalls that following Germany's invasion, school changed drastically for him and his classmates. Instead of learning in the classroom, the children spent most of their days hiding in bomb shelters, which were not well constructed and sometimes resulted in children's deaths. Klaus recalls watching a girl in his class die in a bomb attack.

Nazi Racism Spreads

Jews in Holland were also forced to wear the Jewish star as a conspicuous symbol of their heritage. Children who were once Klaus's friends mocked him and called him a dirty Jew. Signs declared "Juden verboten" ("Jews forbidden") in parks, stores, and certain areas of the city. Denied access to places they had once frequented, Klaus and his family began fearing for their lives once again.

Shortly after Germany gained control of Holland, Klaus was kicked out of the school he had been attending because he was Jewish. Before he was forced to leave, his school's head hugged him, crying, and said, "When the war is over, you will come back to my school."

Rather than attend the public school in Angerlo near his house, Klaus was forced to travel eight kilometers outside Angerlo to a school built specifically for Jews. To get there, Klaus had to take a train frequently filled with Nazi soldiers every morning; as a Jew, he was not allowed to sit down, and the soldiers often beat him. One day when Klaus got on the train, an old man saw his star and got up for him. "Here," he said, "you sit." Klaus feared for his life, afraid the German soldiers on the

train would shoot him for sitting down in place of a non-Jew. Fortunately, the soldiers did not respond.

Deportation

In 1942, when Klaus was nine years old, the Nazi Regime ordered the Dutch police to round up every adult, Jewish male, and Klaus's father was taken away by two Dutch officers. Initially taken to the Angerlo Police Station, Moritz was eventually deported to Mauthausen. It was the last time Klaus ever saw his father.

Shortly after his father was arrested, Klaus's maternal uncle Walter showed up to their house in a panic. He had come to warn his brother-in-law about the Nazis' order, but he was minutes too late. He urged Klaus and his mother to go into hiding as they were no longer safe living in the open.

Rescuers

Though initially, Erna did not think she and her son were in immediate danger, increasing hostility towards the Jews convinced her otherwise. Fortunately, her husband had made numerous connections with Christian farmers near Angerlo before his deportation, and they had promised to help his family should they ever find themselves in danger. Before Erna and Klaus left their home, Erna took her mother's fine china to the neighbors, hoping they would take care of it until she returned. Apart from the china, Klaus and his mother left their house exactly as it was.

With nothing but the clothes on their backs, Klaus and Erna left their home under the cover of darkness and biked 149 miles to Boekelo in the Netherlands. There, they stayed with Wulder Schukkers and his family, whom Moritz had befriended through his cattle dealing business. Wulder, his wife, and his children Johaan and Berthe accepted the Schaaps without hesitation.

As time passed, it became more and more dangerous to help Jews. Nazi soldiers began scouring towns for hidden Jews, and the Schukkers, concerned that Klaus and Erna would be discovered, began fearing for their own lives. Wulder eventually decided he could no longer put his family at risk, and he told Klaus and his mother they needed to leave.

Erna and Klaus went to the Schukkers' neighbors, the Burgmullers, for help. They agreed to hide them in their barn's hayloft, but because it was so dangerous, the Schaaps were confined to the hot, fly-infested hayloft at all times. Once a day, they were brought the family's leftover potatoes and bread.

Eventually, Klaus' uncle (Walter), his aunt (Gerda), his cousin (Inge), and his grandmother (Emma) found Klaus and his mother at the Burgmullers; the hayloft, however, was too small to fit them all, so Mr. Burgmuller told them that he would help them dig an underground bunker on his farm. The bunker was the size of a small bedroom and deep enough for Klaus to stand up in. They used a ladder to get in and out and lined the walls and floor with straw for insulation. They built a sleeping area out of boards and covered the top of the bunker with dirt so they would not be discovered. Because the bunker was completely closed off to the outside, a pipe system was constructed that allowed them to breathe and cook. Klaus recalls that sometimes, rabbits would climb into the pipes, shutting off their air supply until the rabbits left. They used carbite as a cooking and a lighting source, and they dug a well, which they had access to inside of the bunker. Mr. Burgmuller

continued to bring them food daily, but only when it was safe. Like the hayloft, it was vital they stay hidden, but Klaus and his cousin would sometimes sneak out at night to steal sugar beets from Mr. Burgmuller's farm. When they ate the beets, they had to eat all of it, leaves included, so no one–neither Mr. Burgmuller nor the Nazis–would know they had been there.

One night when Klaus and his cousin were out looking for food, they heard voices coming from an area near their bunker. When they went to inspect the noise, they discovered another family's bunker right next to their own. Unlike Klaus' family, the family living next to them had no food, so Klaus' family gave their newfound neighbors some of their own.

One Sunday morning, Klaus' family was woken up by Johann Schukker's yells. A hunter had betrayed them and given up their location; Nazi soldiers were on their way to extract them, so Klaus and his family had to leave immediately. Before they left, they warned their neighbors about the approaching danger. Unfortunately, Klaus' neighbors took too long to leave. Only two survived.

When they fled the Burgmuller's farm, Klaus' family split up into different groups. Klaus went with his mother and grandmother, but he does not know where the others went. The three of them did their best to find shelter and hide in barns, but it was winter and very cold. None of them had the proper clothes for the weather conditions, and Klaus' mother became very ill. Klaus and his grandmother decided to try to find help, and they eventually came across two houses, one on the right and another on the left. They chose the one on the left, not knowing that the one on the right belonged to a pro-Nazi family. Fortunately, the family they spoke to was kind and agreed to take the three of them to Becken, where another of Moritz's friends lived. The wife owned a carriage and, thinking it would be less suspicious, disguised Klaus and his grandmother as a bride and groom. The trip to Becken took several weeks, but Klaus, his mother, and his grandmother arrived safely.

Their father's contact, the Hurker Family, had six kids. They hid Klaus and his family inside a false step in the basement stairs. Unlike their previous hiding places, Klaus and his family only had to hide when when people came over to the house or when Nazi soldiers were in the area. Any other time could be spent among the rest of the family, and Klaus's life began returning to a certain measure of normalcy. Because the Hurkers owned a clandestine radio, they knew the war was coming to and end and that it would be only a matter of time and patience before Klaus and his family could return to Angerlo.

Several weeks before liberation, Klaus' Uncle Walter and Aunt Gerda found Klaus, his mother, and grandmother at the Hurkers. The Hurkers kindly took the three of them in despite the increased threat.

Liberation

Klaus recalls that his liberation day came on Easter Sunday. American soldiers came to the house with chocolates and turned the oven on for heat, which Klaus got too close to and ended up burning his knee.

Concerned it was not yet safe enough to return to Angerlo, Klaus and his mother were wary about leaving the Hurkers' farm. After a few weeks, however, they journeyed home only to discover that their house had been looted; nothing from their old life remained. Even though they still had their

house, Erna and Klaus moved into the upstairs of an old friend's home. Klaus went to work in a bookstore and Erna remarried to a man who was a cattle dealer.

Klaus, like his father, was drawn to the cattle business, and his stepfather taught him all he needed to know. Before Klaus could pursue his own dreams, however, he had to serve in the Dutch army for one year. During this year, Klaus' Uncle Walter moved to the United States to deal cattle. Walter told Klaus that as soon as he was settled, Klaus could join him. So, during his year of service, Klaus applied for an American visa. A little over one year later, he received it.

Becoming Americans

In 1954, at the age of 21, Klaus moved to Freeport, Illinois with only $80 in his pocket. His uncle employed him at his cattle business, and while working there, he met a man from Dickson, IL who had a niece Klaus might want to meet. Klaus made plans to meet with her, but Evelyn never showed up. Klaus then wrote a letter to Evelyn's uncle asking him to talk to her and convince her to meet with him. She did, and the two married a few years later.

Klaus and Evelyn moved to Rockford, IL, and Klaus began his own cattle business on a 60 acre farm he purchased in Winnebago. He and Evelyn had three children together (David, Karen, and Susan), as well as three grandchildren (Michael, Rachel, and Andrea). After 38 years of marriage, Klaus passed away from natural causes. He was 72.

Ava Kadishson Schieber

World Before

Ava Kadishson Schieber was born in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia on April 12, 1926. She lived in an apartment complex with her older sister, her parents, and her grandparents, and she attended elementary as well as high school in Novi Sad. Ava and her family lived a traditional Jewish life by attending synagogue, celebrating the Jewish holidays, and actively participating in their town's small Jewish community. Though religious, Ava recalls that she had both Jewish and non-Jewish friends and that she was "Yugoslav with Jewish religion."

Ava's father, Leo, fought for the Austro-Hungarian army during World War I. Her mother, an Austrian who had been born into a Viennese Christian family, had converted to Judaism before marrying Leo. At home, Ava, her parents, and her older sister, spoke German, Hungarian, and Serbian. The sound of music often lilted their household as her father, a musician, loved to play the violin when he was not busy traveling. Her mother used to sing with the children, and she taught them to appreciate nature, taking them for long walks during the warmer months and ice-skating with them during the winter.

Ava had a close relationship with her sister, who was five years older than she; for Ava, she was a role model and a friend. Before the war, she married a Serbian man.

Ava's childhood was happy and fun-filled. She cannot recall any anti-Semitic experiences in school before the Nazis invaded Yugoslavia, and her parents were well informed about what was going on in Germany as well as Europe. They tried to prepare her for the possibility of a war breaking out.

Life Under the Swastika

In 1939, Ava's family moved to Belgrade because her father decided it would be a safer place for them. He said, "Let's go to a city with one million citizens. It is easier to hide in the background." However, Ava remained in Novi Sad with her grandmother to finish the school year before joining her parents in Belgrade. Ava enjoyed the time she spent with her grandmother and was happy to live with a self-sufficient, independent woman.

World at War

In Belgrade, Ava continued attending high school, but her life changed entirely when the bombing of Belgrade began on April 6th, 1941. She says that the war came "like a black cloud," and she decided to join a youth anti-war organization. On April 12, 1941, the Nazis entered Belgrade. A few days later, all Jews were required to report themselves to the Germans. Ava's father decided they would not report themselves even if that meant that they would be killed immediately if caught. Seeing her mother terrified of the war was a formative moment for Ava. She remembers she was scared to death as well and that she had the feeling the Nazis had come to punish. Nearly the entire city of Belgrade had been burned down, and Ava remembers that there was a time when they had no water in the city.

As soon as the Nazis entered Belgrade in 1941, the round-up of Belgrade's Jews began, and Ava's family had to devise a plan for survival. Ava's father found it extremely difficult to hide: because he

did not speak with the standard Serbian dialect, he was easily identified as a foreigner. Further, he had been circumcised according to Jewish tradition, making it almost impossible to hide his background. With no other options, he planed to escape to Hungary, where he had friends, connections, and family. Ava's mother still had a Christian birth certificate from which she could obtain an Aryan passport.

Because she was married to a Serbian, Ava's sister could also pass as Aryan. Ava alone could not obtain falsified documents, but her brother-in-law had some distant relatives who lived on a farm near Belgrade, and they agreed to hide Ava. Because Ava's family had publicly identified themselves as Hungarian rather than Jewish, and because they had never joined a synagogue in Belgrade, the Nazis would have no reason to question their identities.

Rescuers

The farm on which Ava would stay the next four years was a three-hour walk away from the city. For several days, Ava moved family possessions such as books and jewelry to the farm; however, it soon became too dangerous to enter Belgrade. The Nazis had begun looking for Jews who had not reported themselves, and Ava was forced into hiding. She remembers that should she have been discovered, the family who took her in would pretend not to know her at all and report that she had been looking for work.

While in hiding, Ava never asked questions because she thought that anything she did not know could not hurt anybody. All she knew was that the family who took her in, a married couple and their mother, "hated the Nazi invaders and were ready to risk themselves and hide a Jew." Ava describes herself as a "non-person" at that time; she did not need a name because nobody knew she was there. Because life was reduced to a bare-bones routine of food and work, "time stopped being meaningful" while she lived on the farm. She provided assistance by taking care of the animals, and she recalls that it was hard work for a privileged girl. Nevertheless, she enjoyed being with the animals because it was the only time she got to interact with other living beings. Although grateful to the family who took her in, Ava felt homeless; it was as if she had no place, no name, and no existence.

She says that two pieces of advice kept her alive during the war. The first, from her father, was that she should never feel sorry for herself. The other, given by another man in the family, was that she should never look somebody directly in the eyes, nor should she talk to anybody. In Ava's words, "my protective shield was silence."

Ava recognized two children living on the farm next to her hiding place, and because of their behavior she concluded that they were hidden children as well. When she walked by the farm one day, she saw that they had been discovered and taken away. Ava heard that their mother had led the Nazis to their hiding place because she had thought they would be spared due to their father's high position. These events made Ava reflect and she voiced: "With my growing awareness of how hatred became the big killer in the world, I was haunted by a solemn memory from my childhood– that love could kill as well."

After some time, Lepa, the young woman in the family, obtained a license to sell tobacco on her farm. Ava's job was to smuggle cigarettes out of the shop so they could sell them on the black

market. She remembers that a German soldier was in the shop, and Ava had nightmares after every day she had to steal the cigarettes. Lepa paid Ava with cigarettes, and she stared smoking.

Ava recalls that she was not growing during the time she spent in hiding and could wear the same clothes the entire time. Only her shoes managed to break after some time, but she managed to make herself new ones out of newspaper, her old shoes, and a blanket. In Ava's opinion, she did not grow because she had no food, which also limited her rational thinking. Her hair started to fall out, and she had boils as well as swellings; ultimately, she stopped looking in the mirror.

Occasionally, Ava managed to see her mother and sister during her time in hiding. Once, she was going to get some food for her mother when a German soldier hit Ava with the rifle in the face, breaking all of her front teeth. She could not say anything or go to a doctor because it was too dangerous, and, officially, Ava did not exist. To preserve their mental health, Ava and her sister designed crosswords for each other. Eventually, Ava's sister found out that her husband was gambling away all their money, and she fell out of love, beginning an affair with a courier. They joined the partisans together and later were killed. In Ava's opinion, her sister's husband was the reason for their deaths.

After three years in hiding, Ava was invited to a party thrown by friends of the family who had given her shelter. Ava was excited to meet people around her age and also afraid of what effect she would have on them. At first, she had time to talk to a girl named Verica about her life in hiding, but at the party she became invisible to everyone. She recalls that it was a "short holiday from [her] grey day-in and day-out existence," because she enjoyed hearing the talks about a reality that was not hers. However, a boy came over to her and told her that she should brush her teeth. At that moment, Ava realized that she did not belong there and that she looked horrible to other people. The party left a lasting impact on her: "I knew then that I wasn't going to cry anymore. There was no place in my reality to feel sorry for myself."

In winter 1942, Ava heard that all the Jews of Novi Sad had been rounded up and thrown to their deaths in the icy water. She also knew about the death camps and the news of the war because she was able to listen to the BBC on the farm.

During her time on the farm and with nearly no one to talk to, books and education helped Ava persevere through her isolation. Because nobody can take education away from her, Ava is convinced that it is the most important thing in the world.

Liberation

When Ava heard that there was door-to-door fighting with the Russian army in Belgrade, she decided to check on her mother and sister. After four years in hiding, she left the farm with a dog. She discovered that her sister had been taken away because she was involved with the partisans.

Because their apartment had been destroyed, Ava lived with her mother in a neighbor's house at first. Ava remembers that everybody thought she was in shock because she was not reacting to the explosion in the city, but Ava says: "I might have been in shock for the last four years; my reality had been so different from theirs." Ava worked at the infirmary for the new Jewish community in Belgrade, and her job was to talk to dying people from the labor camps.

Ava traveled to Novi Sad with a Russian convey of the Red Cross to find out about her father and grandmother. They had to pass all the battlefields, where fighting was still going on, and Ava saw all the dying soldiers. One of the Russian officers told her that he was Jewish and begged her not to tell anyone because Jews were not accepted in the Soviet Union. In Novi Sad, Ava was told she was the first Jew to return. Her old neighbor told her that her father and grandmother had been taken to Auschwitz, and she gave Ava some old family pictures and clothes she had saved. After some years, Ava got a certificate confirming that her father, grandmother, and sister, had been killed in concentration camps.

Return to Life

From 1945 to 1949, Ava attended the Art Academy in Belgrade, found a job, and took care of her mother. Ava recalls that her mother never recovered from the loss of her husband and her daughter. She says the reason why she survived was pure luck, and the fact that she had to move on to help her mother kept her from giving up. Books were a getaway for her because she could live in two different worlds.

Ava had been asked to join the Communist Party, but she turned the nomination down. Since then, she had the growing feeling she was being watched by and isolated from society. She describes that Jews were just accepted in the communist regime, but never wanted.

Arrival in a New Country

Feeling uneasy under the communist regime, Ava decided to leave Yugoslavia. In 1949, she left for Israel with her mother and never came back. In Tel Aviv, she found a job at the comedy theatre, and after some months she married the manager of the theatre. She describes that she fell in love with him because he made her laugh and that is, in her opinion, the most important thing in the world. She was married to him for 30 years until he died. They had three children together.

Ava recalls that after eight years in Israel she finally felt she was home again and and began drawing. Years after her husband passed away, she met a man who had been collecting her artwork in Chicago. They married and Ava moved to Chicago. Since his death, Ava has lived in an apartment in Chicago and shares her story with students. Ava feels fortunate that she had survived, and she is happy that, in spite of everything, she can live without hatred now. However, decades later she feels that the war remains in everything that she does, from raising her children to painting to writing.

Fred Sinay

World Before

Fred Sinay, given name Fritz Sinai, was born on November 16, 1921 in Vienna, Austria. Fred's father, Berthold, owned a clothing manufacturing business making men's and boy's clothing. His mother, Else, was a housewife and helped with his father's business. Fred grew up in a religious household, and Berthold was very active in the Jewish community. He was the Vice President of the governing body of about 100,000 Jews living in Vienna.

Fred grew up in a beautiful neighborhood, where his family owned a villa. He played soccer and other sports in the nearby park. The majority of their neighbors were non-Jews. Everyone was very nice and friendly to each other. When Fred turned ten, he took the test to go to gymnasium, a selective school. Fred was chosen to attend and went to school with a mixture of students. However, antisemitism was everywhere. In school, professors would make sarcastic remarks about Jews.

Rise of Nazism

Until 1938, the National Socialist Party was outlawed in Austria. In 1933, Austrians believed the Nazis would not come into Austria, but it soon became clear that this belief was incorrect. Listening to the radio in March 1938, Fred heard the Chancellor of Austria stating he was going to confer with Adolf Hitler to have a plebiscite in order to establish if Austria would remain an independent country or be incorporated into Germany. The Chancellor was in favor of independence and Hitler knew the vote would go against Germany. Hitler decided not to wait for the results. On March 12, 1938, the Nazis marched into Austria and annexed the country into Germany, an event known as the *Anschluss*.

Life Under the Swastika

Fred's father was not in Vienna at the time of the *Anschluss*. He was in England on business. He could have stayed in England, but came back for his family. Suddenly, Jews started leaving the country overnight. It was difficult for Fred's family to emigrate, as they had a large business with many employees. They felt they could not just leave and start from scratch. Keeping the entire family together was very important to them. They did not want to flee without the others.

Antisemitism increased rapidly across Vienna. The first time Fred encountered a Nazi threat was in eighth grade. Fred was told that all Jewish students would have to leave school and go to another school for Jews only. In front of the school, crowds of SS men waited outside for the Jewish children to leave in order to beat them up. Fred and his friend found a different exit in the rear of the school and ran all the way home. All the other Jewish children were beaten up by the Nazi men.

November Pogroms

On November 9, 1938, *Kristallnacht*, the Nazi persecution of the Austrian Jews escalated. The Nazi police went around the cities and burned synagogues and destroyed Jewish businesses. The next morning, Fred went with his father to their business office. Within an hour, SS men arrived at the office. Fred saw them coming and ran out the back door to get away. The SS men grabbed Fred's father and took him to a concentration camp. The family did not know where he was for weeks. The

Nazis seized Fred's family business and SS men bought the company for a few dollars from the Party. They fired all the Jewish employees and left the non-Jewish employees alone. These men ran the business until the end of the war.

Afterward, Fred returned to normal life and went back to school, but his mother was afraid of what would happen next. The SS would constantly harass his mother looking for Fred and his cousin. Fortunately, his mother heard about the *kindertransports* that brought Jewish children out of the country to safety.

Kindertransport

On December 10, 1939, Fred went to the train station with one suitcase, ready to go to England. He was with hundreds of children. He was one of the oldest. Fred traveled to Belgium and then across the English Channel to Great Britain. When he arrived, the British government put him in a hotel by the sea until they dispersed the children to different areas across England. First, Fred stayed at a college for four weeks and then he was fortunate enough to be taken in by friends of his parents, the Lidner family. They were an affluent family with two children, a boy and a girl. Fred enrolled in Polytechnic school in London until May 1939, when he was sent to summer camp. When it was time to return, he had heard the Lidners fled to the United States. They realized that war was imminent and did not want to be in England when it started.

Fred went to the government office at Woburn House, which took care of refugees, to ask where he should stay. They told him to wait for a couple of hours. Fred never forgot waiting on a bench in the park in front of the building not knowing where he would spend the night. By chance, a lady approached him and asked what he was doing. Fred told her that he was waiting for a place to stay the night. She asked him how old he was and told him that he could stay with her family. The Sattles took care of him from late 1939 until 1940 when all the school children were evacuated to the countryside due to the bombing of London. He moved with the whole school to the coast. Classes were held in many different buildings across the town, and he took accounting and tailoring. Fred also played on the school soccer team and ping pong team.

While going to school on the coast, Fred contacted his distant cousin who lived in Chicago, asking for an affidavit to come into the US. The cousin sent affidavits for the whole family, but they had to wait for their quota number to be called. Fred had little communication with his mother in Vienna at the time. His mother was working as a nurse at a Jewish hospital in order to be protected from deportation. His father was held in Dachau concentration camp until May 1940. Since the family had many non-Jewish friends, they had connections with people in the Nazi hierarchy. With their help, Fred's mother was able to buy his father out of the camp. Within 24 hours after he was released, they booked him a trip on a German boat from Hamburg to the United States. Fred's mother stayed behind in Vienna until she made sure everyone else was safe.

Fred's father traveled across the Atlantic, but was interned in Cuba because his quota number was not called yet. He stayed in Cuba from June to December 1940. He reached the US through Florida and then he traveled to Chicago.

Departure and Arrival

In 1941, Fred's number to go to the US was called. He went back to Woburn House to purchase a ticket on a British ship, the *SS Antonia*. By the end of May, he was heading across the Atlantic Ocean. Fred landed in the Halifax, Canada and took a bus to New York. He stayed with a friend of his father for a few days. He remembered the city being very noisy and all he wanted was to see his father. They were reunited in Chicago.

Unfortunately, it was not as easy for Fred's mother to get out of Vienna. In June, 1941, she unexpectedly received a call from a friend that she was on the list for the next transport to Poland. She left Vienna and traveled through Russia to Shanghai. She stayed in Shanghai with her aunt and cousin, who had emigrated there in 1939. While she waited for her quota number to be called to go to the US, she worked as a nurse in a hospital. Fred's mother had problems getting into the country because the consulate in Shanghai would not provide her with a visa. She mailed a letter to Fred's father in the US asking whether they knew anyone who had influence that could help her. Fred's father went to Washington, D.C. to negotiate for her to come into the country. Amazingly, Fred's father was escorted to the State Department and met with Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State. He told Fred's father he could not help, but he sent a telegram to Shanghai saying that he would appreciate it if they would allow Fred's mother to have a visa. He was successful, and in December 1941, Fred's mother left Shanghai on the *SS Coolidge* to the US. However, the tragic events of Pearl Harbor affected the ship's crossing. They zig-zagged in the Pacific Ocean and three weeks later she arrived in Hawaii. Fred and his father received a wire from his mother and they helped her travel to Chicago.

In Chicago, the family lived in a one room apartment. His father sold buttons for a wholesale apparel business during the day and at night sold shirts and ties to law offices on LaSalle Street. Fred delivered mail and worked in a bakery carrying sacks of flour. They were elated to all be living together again.

World at War

Fred was drafted into the United States Army. He went to basic training and officer training, then Fred joined the Prisoner of War Processing Unit in Texas. This unit interrogated prisoners for military information. He was good at asking questions to find out information without them realizing it. Fred felt hatred for the German prisoners and thought they were all guilty. While interrogating the Germans, Fred did not feel any antisemitism from the prisoners. They were unaware he was Jewish and answered his questions. However, there were some instances of antisemitism in the US army.

In 1944, he was shipped to England for the upcoming invasion of France. On June 6, 1944, he landed on Utah beach in Normandy in the third wave of the D-Day invasion. He immediately started interrogating German P.O.Ws. Once the US Army broke through the front lines in France, Fred's unit was assigned to General Patton's 3rd Army.

Fred knew very little about what was happening to Jews across Europe until he started talking to locals in the French towns. They told him that the Jews were taken away on trains and buses and were never seen again. He realized something was wrong. During the Battle of the Bulge, he continued to hear that the Nazis took all the Jews. When they reached Belgium, the army set up a

large POW camp, where Fred helped interrogate the prisoners. Most of the unit was Jewish. It was in Belgium that he heard on the radio what the army had found at Dachau and the other concentration camps. After V-E Day, the army told him that he needed to stay in Europe because he was essential to the war effort. His job was to help interrogate Germans returning home.

In December 1945, Fred went back to the US. He found out that many of his relatives had perished, including all of his father's family and most on his mother's side. Fred went on to marry Lillian Lekowitch, they had three children, and six grandchildren. In 2008, Fred passed away at the age of eighty-seven.

Adam and Pela Starkopf

World Before

Abraham (Adam) Starkopf was born on April 1, 1914 in Warsaw, Poland into a very Jewish-minded family. Adam's parents observed holidays like Passover and Rosh Hashanah. Today, his family's observance would be considered Reform-Judaism. His family lived in Warsaw in a rather average Jewish neighborhood. His family, including himself, was very Zionistic and dreamed of Israel. Adam's parents were family-oriented people. Adam adored his mother for her wonderful personality. She was very empathetic and felt sorry for everyone. His father had a prosperous leather goods business. Adam had an older brother Henjek (Henry) who was born in 1910. His brother Henry, who studied to be an electrical engineer, was single at that time. Henry dreamed of Israel. His brother eventually joined the Haganah and became one of the pioneers in Palestine. His mother, who apparently missed Henry very much, went to visit him in 1938 for about 3 months. Adam also had uncles, aunts, and cousins.

Pela was born on November 18, 1914 in Warsaw, Poland where she spent her childhood. Together with her younger brother, Benjek, she attended Jewish private school. In general, they had a wonderful life. Her family went on vacations to resorts, they had one maid and a cook in their house, and overall they were very well-off. Her father was a businessman and did very well. He bought out cows and horses from Polish counts and sold them in Warsaw.

Pela's family did not live in a particularly Jewish neighborhood. Her father was not very observant, but her mother was, as she kept a kosher household. Pela was not that religious and cannot recall whether she believed in God before the war. She took her Jewish roots for granted because the social world that she was exposed to was largely Jewish. However, major holidays like Passover were always observed and defined her Jewish life. Later, when she was married, she didn't observe these holidays anymore and didn't attend synagogue.

When Pela was still going to school, she never experienced any anti-Semitism. This changed at university. Pela studied law at Warsaw University. She didn't have any trouble getting in, but later they made Jewish students stand up in the auditorium as a discriminatory measure. Pela just stood up and left because she was proud to be Jewish

At the age of 14, while on his way to school, Adam saw a blonde girl and told a friend that this was the girl he would marry one day. Later, Adam saw the same girl on the way to the public library and asked if he could keep her company. She accepted and they started going out. They spent a lot of time together. For example, he took her to the movies, but they didn't go to nightclubs yet. They lead a normal and quiet life. Adam also used to wait for Pela in school. When she was writing a paper, he tried to throw useful notes into her classroom. Later they would meet friends at New Year's Eve parties and would go to a fine nightclub in Warsaw called "Adria." Adam would dance there, although he admits not to have been the best dancer. Adam said he needed an elephant trainer to teach him how to dance. Several years later, the girl, Pela, really did become Adam's wife.

They were married by the first Reform rabbi in Poland in 1936. His parents liked Pela very much, and Adam's mother, in particular, was very proud of her. Adam and Pela were both very family-

oriented. They tried to spend a lot of their leisure time with their parents and wanted to be close to them. Before his marriage, Adam lived in a two bedroom apartment together with his parents. His in-laws also lived in the same area. Later, Adam and Pela rented their own apartment that was near their parents' place.

Adam attended a private secondary school. After graduation Adam enrolled at Warsaw University to study Business Management and Accounting. After Adam received his degree, he worked as the manager of a Warsaw leather goods company and as an accountant for a company that specialized in farm equipment.

Adam recalls general antisemitism in Warsaw. In the Polish private school that he attended, he experienced antisemitism. At the University, a quota for Jewish students who wanted to go to medical school was introduced. Although these discriminatory measures were antisemitic, no physical harm was done. At work, Adam and his father didn't experience any problems with non-Jewish people until the war broke out.

World at War

On September 1, 1939, the German Army began attacking Poland. Adam points out that the war came not only as a surprise to him, but also to the Polish government. He had known about the events in Germany and was informed about the Nazis and Hitler. They were rather worried about Jewish people living in Germany, but they had not predicted a war. Many fleeing Jews from Germany settled in Zbaszyn, a city near the German border. Committees were held in residential buildings to determine how to help these refugees.

Adam remembered that one of the first bombs dropped on Poland fell onto a Jewish orphanage, but he didn't know if this was deliberate or not. All of the children died in this attack. During the air raids, people were ordered to go to their cellars. Adam was not in the army at that time because there was no general draft in place, but when the war broke out, all men of military age were drafted. The first order they received was to dig ditches in certain spots of the city. However, they were ill-equipped and disorganized, so Adam went home. On September 5th, people received the order via the radio that all men should leave Warsaw and report to Brzesc, a city 120 miles east of Warsaw, near the Russian border. Adam decided to leave in order to fight the Germans. All-night meetings were held in his building, in which the residents discussed whether they should follow the orders and who should leave the city. Eventually, it was decided that Adam and several other boys from his building would make the journey to Brzesc.

The next day, Pela and his mother walked Adam to the meeting point in the suburbs of Warsaw at 5 am. Adam didn't want them to accompany him to avoid a painful farewell, so he started running away from them. Pela was crying upon Adam's departure, but his mother tried to fake a smile. Adam later learned that his mother fainted when she got back home.

Adam assumed command of the group of young men from his apartment building and led them out of the city to a highway. However, no vehicle picked them up, and they had to walk almost the entire way. Because the highways were crowded with other draftees, refugees, and horse-drawn wagons, walking was the only possible way to advance. German planes were constantly flying

above people's heads shooting civilians and dropping bombs. This made their progress even slower because the group constantly had to take cover from air raids nearby.

Somewhere in the middle of the highway Adam found a revolver, and because they did not have any weapons, he took it with him. Days later Adam witnessed an allegedly Polish lieutenant watching a German plane take off at close range. This raised Adam's suspicion. He walked up to him with his gun out of sight but ready to fire and asked him what he was doing near a German plane. Although the man answered in excellent Polish, he turned out to be a traitor. Before Adam could act, Polish soldiers had surrounded the man who admitted to be a German officer and *Volksdeutscher*. That same night, the group of men that had left from Adam's apartment building in Warsaw dissolved. Some of his companions were unhappy with the travel route he had chosen and returned to Warsaw. Only two actually made it back, while the others fell to the Germans and were killed. A few remained with Adam.

On September 15th, 1939 Rosh Hashanah, the group arrived in Brzesc, which had been massively attacked and severed by German air raids. It was obvious that the Polish Army would not be able to regroup in this environment. Rumors spread that a train would be leaving shortly for Baranowicze, a city near the soviet border, where the counterattack was supposed to be launched. While Adam and his companions were making their way to the train station, German planes appeared in the sky and started dropping bombs. A piece of shrapnel hit Adam in his right foot. A medic was called and one of his toes was amputated in the field. His foot was bandaged, but he was bleeding heavily. Together with the ambulance that saved him, Adam and his companions went aboard the freight train to Baranowicze. When they learned that the city had also been under attack already, they paid a wagon driver to take them to the city of Kletzk just a few miles from the Russian border.

Near the Russian border it was quiet again. People from the town put the men up in a nice, good-smelling barn. It was the first time since the war broke out that Adam could sleep peacefully. Adam awoke to the sounds of Russian tanks rolling in. At first he thought the Russians came as Poland's allies, but then he learned that Russia and Germany had signed a non-aggression pact and divided Poland amongst themselves. The Bug River was the dividing line between the two territories.

Adam was afraid that he might never be able to leave the communist country again and planned to go back to Warsaw. Before he could travel, however, he had to wait for his foot to heal. Luckily, a Jewish family allowed him to stay with them while he recuperated. When he heard in early October that Warsaw had fallen to the Germans, he finally decided to leave and started heading west. When he reached the Bug River, he gave his wristwatch to a Polish peasant to row him across the river and then took a train to Warsaw. Adam was never suspected of being Jewish because he looked like a "typical Pole." He was blond, had blue eyes, and was skinny.

Back in Warsaw, Adam immediately went to see if his building was still intact. It still was, but he learned that his mother had died. She always had high blood pressure, even before the war. Adam was told that his mother overheard some of the boys, who returned before him, saying that Adam had died. Consequently, she had a stroke and said: "Adek is not alive; I will not live." Adam's mother-in-law tried to get a doctor, but it was too late. Adam's mother had already died by the time the doctor arrived. His mother's death came as a terrible shock to Adam and his father. Pela had attended the funeral. Adam wanted to go to the cemetery and see his mother's grave as soon as possible.

Adam was nonetheless glad to see that the rest family of the family was unharmed. After Adam had left, Pela convinced her younger brother to follow his example and join the army. For this reason, Adam's mother-in-law inquired about her son, who Adam hadn't seen. Pela's brother had left with a neighbor's son who would take him to relatives that lived in the town they were supposed to report to. Adam and Pela decided to go there to look for her brother. Adam's close friend and his wife joined them in their search. When they came to Brzesc, they left Pela and his friend's wife there. Adam and his friend continued to look for the neighbor's son who was supposed to be with his relatives. In the city of Kovel, Adam and his friend visited a hospital because his friend wanted to find a job and meet some other young doctors. After they left, they went to the address of the boy's relatives and found him there. He was very happy to see them and told them that Benjek caught typhoid fever en route due to the terrible marching conditions and that he was currently in the hospital of Kovel, but added that he would soon recover.

Adam and his friend went back to the hospital. There, the doctor informed them that Pela's brother had just passed away half an hour before.

When Adam was given Benjek's belongings, he could tell for sure that it was Pela's brother, since he was wearing his mother's wedding ring. She had instructed her son to trade the ring of a piece of bread, if ever he needed to. Subsequently, Adam sold the ring to arrange a funeral. Adam thought that it was strange that he himself couldn't attend his mother's funeral and now Pela was not able to see her brother's. Nevertheless, he absolutely wanted to keep Benjek's death a secret and thus told Benjek's companion to write a letter to Pela saying that her brother decided to cross the border to Romania and then to Palestine because he was an ardent Zionist. However, Benjek's companion made a mistake in his second letter to Pela by addressing Benjek as a deceased person in Polish. This caught Pela's attention, so she asked Adam what really happened. He eventually told her the truth, but her parents would never find out.

Ghettos

At the end of December, Adam and Pela returned to Warsaw where they were reunited with Adam's father. In May 1940, Pela felt that she was pregnant. Adam thought that this was terrible because nobody wanted to have children during this time. On October 16, 1940, the situation worsened when the Nazis established the Warsaw Ghetto. The conditions were awful and people suffered from starvation. In January 1941, Pela gave birth to her baby. She delivered the baby on the dining room table. Fortunately, the baby was healthy, but Pela became sick after the birth. The child was named Janka (Johanna) after Pela's grandfather Jankel. Adam and his father now tried to sell their belongings on the black market to get food for the baby. Only the survival of their baby mattered to them.

Because his building was already in the ghetto, Adam did not have to move and only had to put up several additional people.

At one point, Adam's father tried to commit suicide by leaving on the gas in the kitchen. Pela smelled the gas and saw Adam's father lying on the floor. She stopped the gas flow and saved his life. When Adam's father regained consciousness, he was angry with Pela for saving him.

Due to Adam's "Polish" appearance he was able to smuggle himself in and out of the ghetto. Gates were guarded by the Gestapo and Polish policemen, so Adam exited the ghetto by removing bricks from the wall. When he went out of the ghetto, he had to pull off his armband so that no one would recognize him as Jewish. Outside the ghetto, friends provided milk for the baby.

One day, Adam's father-in-law went out of the ghetto for a long time. Everybody was worried about him. However, he returned after several hours and held a handkerchief in front of his mouth. He had had his gold teeth removed to trade them for milk for the baby.

Adam once met a former classmate in Warsaw during one of his escapes from the ghetto. He told him that Adam had no right to be outside of the ghetto. In response to this hurtful statement, Adam kicked his former friend's legs, jumped on a passing tramway, and never saw him again.

During one of his flights from the ghetto, Adam was arrested by the Gestapo. He was imprisoned and then transferred to a Polish police station. A Polish police officer did Adam a favor by going to his family and telling them what had happened to him. After a while, Adam was taken to the military prison inside the ghetto. The conditions were unbearable there. People were constantly beaten up; as many as twenty prisoners had to share a cell; and sometimes they had to stand in their cell. A Polish police officer agreed to have Adam released in exchange for the Starkopfs' bed set.

However, Adam wasn't free for very long. Less than a month later, he was arrested again. There were only Jewish people in the military prison. Every morning at 5, the Gestapo opened the cells and several people were torn apart by German Shepherds. One day, Adam was taken to a small room where the walls were covered in fresh blood. It also contained benches that had pieces of glass cemented into them so that people who were forced to undress would be hurt when forced to sit on them. Adam was told to undress, but he refused. He thought they would kill him anyway and he didn't want to be tortured. Furthermore, he always thought that there was a small chance that he might actually survive. The policemen replied that they only wanted to scare him and that they would finish him next time.

Through his contacts, Adam learned that the Germans planned to liquidate the ghetto. At first they liquidated hospitals, prisons, and orphanages because it was easy to get a hold of these people. Young children and people who were unable to work were brought to the cemetery and executed immediately. The others were loaded on trucks, brought to the rail station, loaded on box cars, and transferred to Treblinka where only a few hundred people survived. While prisoners were loaded on the trucks, Adam and seven other men escaped amid the chaos. He ran out of the prison yard and then home. It was then that he pledged to himself that he would do everything in his power to protect his wife and his child.

Adam realized the Nazis were deporting people from the ghetto when they were loaded on trucks. Adam tried to save a family friend from deportation by trying to pull her off of a truck. However, he couldn't pull her off successfully and had to jump down from the truck, injuring himself.

Adam had friends outside the ghetto organize forged documents for them. Henceforth, Adam and Pela lived under the names of Adam Bludowski and Zofia Bludowska. While Adam was preparing his escape, he developed a high fever. The doctor said that his tonsils were inflamed and that he

didn't have any anesthetics to be able to remove them. Adam told him to remove them either way. Nowadays no one can believe this story, he says, but he endured the pain.

Adam decided it would be best to flee via the Jewish cemetery, which was adjacent to an old Tartar burial ground. He had the idea of arranging a phony funeral for his daughter. With the help of a doctor, they drugged the baby to put her to sleep, put her in a casket, and arranged a funeral. The funeral took place on July 31st, 1942. When the Germans wanted to check the casket, they were told that the child died from typhus, which kept them from opening the casket. Only a few people were allowed to attend funerals and had to return after a certain period of time. Pela was allowed to enter the cemetery, and when the Jewish gravediggers wanted to open the casket to throw the baby into a mass grave, she stopped them and told them that the child was actually still alive. She was directed to the morgue where she waited until Adam arrived. Adam smuggled himself out of the ghetto at night through an inconspicuous hole and crossed the cemetery wall to pick up his wife and his daughter. He had arranged with the caretaker of the Tartar cemetery that he would put up a ladder and help them across the wall. Luckily, the man kept his promise and the three were able to escape the ghetto.

Outside the Ghetto

Adam and Pela were helped by their friends, the Galewskis. From their friends' place they went to a high-rise building of the Polish underground that also housed German railroad police offices. They pretended to be part of the underground and were put up for a night. Nobody suspected them of being Jewish thanks to their "Polish" appearance.

The next morning Adam, Pela, and Johanna took a train to another city, Lochow. Adam left Pela and his daughter there because he wanted to go back to the ghetto to get his parents and his in-laws. However, by the time he got there, they had already been taken to Treblinka, and their house was on fire, since the Germans bombed basements and cellars to kill people in hiding.

It was difficult for the family to live outside the ghetto, constantly pretending to be people they weren't. The most important thing for Adam and Pela was to live to support their child. For example, when they had an apple, they peeled it and gave Johanna the pieces. Then they fought over who should eat the peels. Usually Adam won and made Pela eat them. Adam once stole a sausage when he was staying with a friend but did not touch it during a 75-mile train ride to save it for his daughter.

Adam got a job as a laborer in a lumberyard near the railroad tracks leading to Treblinka. The lumberyard formerly belonged to a Polish family, but it was taken over by the Germans. The son of the former owner was working as a manager, and the lumberyard was run by a German SS officer from Danzig by the name of Astmuss. Adam rented a little room close to the lumberyard. All the workers thought Adam was a Polish officer working for the underground.

One night, some people escaped the cattle cars near the lumberyard. Adam heard shooting outside of his room. Some of his neighbors knocked on his door and encouraged him to come and chase after the Jews. They said that they would be rewarded by the Gestapo for turning them in. Adam told his neighbors that Pela was suffering from a gallbladder attack and that he had to take

care of her. Later, Adam found out that that the Jewish people were either cruelly murdered or brought to the Gestapo.

Adam was suspicious of a boy of 17 or 18 years of age who also worked in the lumberyard because he would never go to church on Sunday. Adam didn't usually go, but Pela regularly attended services. Adam suggested that he and the boy, Walus, go to church next Sunday. On the way to church, Adam asked Walus whether he would kill Jewish escapees from the cattle cars and Walus replied that these people had a terrible fate already and that he would leave them alone. Hearing this, Adam was convinced Walus was Jewish, so he replied, "Walus, I'm Jewish, are you?" The boy admitted the truth and revealed to Adam that he and his parents were from Lodz, where they owned a factory. They were pretending to be Poles by working in a lumberyard. Adam and Walus became friends, but Adam made sure that they weren't seen together too often so that they wouldn't be associated with one another in case their real identities were given away. One day, Nazi trucks surrounded the lumberyard. The Germans asked for documents and accused Walus and his mother of being Jewish. Both of them were shot as he ran to his mother to ask for poison. Somebody had reported them to the police.

Adam's daughter Johanna once became very sick. Pela consulted a famous Polish children's doctor in Warsaw. They wouldn't have been able to pay him under normal circumstances, but he offered his help when Pela told him that her husband was in the Polish underground. The doctor diagnosed Johanna with tuberculosis and said that in order to save her, he needed gold injections. Of course, the family didn't have the means to obtain these injections. Subsequently, Adam got in touch with a friend who could organize these injections through connections in Italy.

One evening in early October 1943, the chief mechanic, Mr. Zielinski, knocked on the door of Adam's room. He could tell by the bottle of vodka in his hand and his speech that he was very intoxicated. Zielinski came inside and started explaining that he needed a couple of drinks to find the courage to talk to Adam. He continued that rumors had spread of Adam and Pela being Jewish. The mechanic emphasized that he personally did not care whether they were Jewish, Chinese, or Indian and that he really liked them. He added that there was already enough bloodshed in the lumberyard after the murders of Walus and Mr. Lieberbauer and he did not want them to be killed next. Zielinski suggested that, in case the rumors were true, they should leave the lumberyard as soon as possible. Adam tried not to show any emotion towards the mechanic, and Pela got his cue. She pretended to be really angry with Adam and said that this was how he was rewarded for being a Polish patriot and working for the Polish underground. Instead of being safe in Warsaw with their family and friends, he, the great idealist and former officer, had to go into hiding and risk all of their lives to work for a free Poland. Pela concluded that all they got in return was to be accused of being Jewish. Finally, she warned Zielinski that if the people in the lumberyard continued to spread these kinds of rumors that might lead to Adam's arrest, she would make the comrades from the underground burn down the homes of everybody who spread the rumors. Zielinski was actually relieved by Pela's words and invited Adam to take a drink with him. After Zielinski left, Pela wept and prayed that nothing should ever happen to her daughter.

Adam admits that he and his wife would probably have committed suicide if it hadn't been for Johanna. They held on to life to save their child. Sometimes they envied people in concentration camps because they were all together. Adam's family was all alone and he was constantly feared

that everybody suspected them. Adam was bothered by the question of how long they would be able to carry on pretending. He gave his brother's address in Palestine to a friend so that Johanna would be sent to Palestine in the event of his and Pela's deaths.

In January of 1944, Pela became sick with excruciating abdominal pains. First, Adam took her to a small hospital where they examined her and diagnosed an internal cyst which would have to be removed. To save her from further pain, Adam took her to Warsaw to a specialist surgeon. The doctor agreed to perform an operation on Pela without charge because Adam had explained that he was in the underground. Before Pela could go to the hospital, however, they had to find a place for their daughter. Adam decided to bring her to a sanatorium run by nuns who were also willing to care for Johanna for free. In the ward, Pela pretended to be a devout Catholic. One Polish roommate of hers was very nice and took a liking in her, but at one point she told Pela, "I hate the Germans, but one thing they did well - they got rid of the Jews."

Liberation

Adam was offered a new job by a Russian man at a section of railroad. Adam would never know if this man knew about his real identity, but he presumed that he knew. Together with his co-workers, Adam moved to Siedlce, where he worked on the tracks. Adam's family settled in a suburb of the city called Bialki. There, Adam heard rumors that the Germans were driven out of Leningrad and Stalingrad and that they were losing the war on the Eastern Front. In Bialki, people had potato cellars outside and when they heard shooting and planes flying over, people hid in the cellars. Adam and his family slept in one of these cellars, and the next day, when someone opened the cellar, they realized that the Russians had come to their town. At first, Adam couldn't believe that they had finally been liberated and pinched himself to make sure it was real. Among the Russians, he noticed a soldier who he believed to be Jewish. Adam walked up to him and discretely asked him whether he was Jewish. He was, so Adam told him about his family and how they survived. The soldier advised Adam not to tell anyone yet, as they may have to retreat and leave the city again.

The Russians liberated the Starkopfs in August of 1944, just before Rosh Hashanah. Adam, Pela, and Johanna went on a train to Lublin, where they went to the synagogue. In front of the temple, Adam met a man named Marek Silberstein, who he knew because both their grandfathers had gone to the same shul and had lived in the same neighborhood in Warsaw. Thanks to Mr. Silberstein, Adam got a job in the Polish government in Lublin. After a few months, he reached a high position. Repatriates, who wanted to cross the Polish border in order to return to their country of origin, needed Adam's signature. The government then moved from Lublin to Praga, a suburb of Warsaw. At that time, Adam was already working as a Zionist and supported Jews in Palestine. His superior officer, a Jewish communist, found out and called the military police to arrest him. Luckily, he was warned beforehand and escaped. Adam had a car and a chauffeur at his disposal and asked him to drive his family to Lodz to a close friend.

One day, Adam was out and Pela went to the store with their friend's wife, Eve Rokaczh. Johanna was 4- years-old and was at home with a woman helping Mrs. Rokaczh. When Adam came back home, the woman was crying and told him never to leave her alone with that child again. When Adam asked her what had happened, she told him that she had forbidden Johanna to climb a ladder and that the child had answered, "You dirty Jewess, you cannot tell me what to do!" This was the moment when Adam and Pela decided to tell her. They took Johanna to another room and

told her that they were all Jewish. When they came out, Johanna took off her cross and said, "If this is not my God, show me my God!" Pela told her they would be leaving Poland for another country and there she would try to get her a *Mezuzah* to put on her necklace. At first, Johanna was very unhappy about this revelation.

Becoming Americans

Adam escaped Lodz for the DP camp in Feldafing, Germany and originally wanted to immigrate to Palestine to see his brother, not to the US. At that time Adam worked for UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration). Adam's boss was a Belgian woman named Mrs. Denbitzer whose husband lived in the US. She liked Adam and asked him if he wanted to go to the US. She remarked that he would have to make up his mind quickly because he would have to leave that very day so she could get him an affidavit. Adam decided to do it.

He hoped the move to the US would allow them to immigrate to Israel more easily. Adam's uncle had come to the US in 1905. His father visited him in 1911 but did not like the US. Nonetheless, they were exchanging letters.

Adam's family came on a navy transport ship as refugees. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) brought them in. Adam remembers that they only had three dollars with them at that time. He told one of the men from HIAS that he had an uncle living in Chicago, but he didn't know his address. Nevertheless, the HIAS managed to find it and contacted him. The brother sent a telegram saying that Adam's family should come to Chicago, where he waited for them.
The Starkopfs came to the US, he initially had jobs in a stockyard and in a bookbindery. Adam spoke very little English. In the DP camp Adam had befriended a man named Martin Fax who had lost his whole family during the Holocaust. When Adam came to America, he asked a landlord to sponsor this man, allowing Martin to come to the US as well.

Adam had saved $15 to buy his daughter a tricycle. So Pela, Mr. Fax, and Johanna went to the toy store. There Mr. Fax saw a football and told the store manager that he used to work in the leather business and could sew footballs. The manager called the football company, which agreed to hire him. However, after a couple of months he came to Adam and suggested they start their own business. Adam and his partner went to the American National Bank to ask for a $2000 loan. Although they did not have any collateral, they were eventually granted the loan and able to start their own business.

Pela only started working after Adam had launched his business. She took a six week course at John's Commercial High School to learn English business terms. After her course, she was offered a job and the interviewer really seemed to like her, but when she happened to mention that she was Jewish, she was not accepted. Later she was given a job by the Jewish Vocational Service, but she was anxious about keeping the job because she did not want to leave Johanna all alone after school. Pela did not want her child to grow up as a "latchkey kid" and she knew that she would suffer seeing Johanna grow up under these circumstances, so she quit the job. She also tried to be an exceptional mother by always inviting Johanna's friends over for pajama parties and such. Pela considered these activities crucial to Johanna's childhood, because the transition to America was very difficult for Johanna. She often experienced bullying, because she only spoke Polish and she could not understand the other kids at first.

Adam and Pela went to Israel very often, but at first they could not afford the journey. One year, Adam was saving money to buy Pela a coat, but Pela insisted that she did not need a coat. She suggested that he should instead visit his brother in Israel, who he had not seen in 20 years. Eventually Adam decided to travel to Israel to see his brother who was so happy that he even kissed his fingers. His brother was in the Israeli army. He, in turn, wanted to visit Adam in 1965, but died suddenly at the age of 55. Adam and Pela also established a chair at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for studies of the Holocaust.

After the war, Pela and Adam wrote down any experiences they could remember. He thought it would be good for his daughter to know later on what had happened to them and how their family had been destroyed. When they came to the United States and became more assimilated, they translated Adam's writings and Johanna typed them. However, the idea to write a book did not occur to Adam until he made a business trip to California where he was invited for dinner at John Eppstein's, then the managing director of Universal Studios. When Adam related his Holocaust experiences at dinner, Mr. Eppstein suggested he should write a book about it. It was published by Holocaust Publications in New York under the title *There is Always Time to Die*. He chose this title because this is what he used to tell Pela when she wanted to give up. The New York University Press changed the title to *Will to Live*. Adam thought this title was misleading, because it was not his will to live, but rather his hopes for his daughter.

During the war, Adam was sometimes doubtful of God and asked where he was. His father asked an orthodox Jew on the matter who said that they had sinned and were now punished. But the children did not sin. Adam believes he survived to save his child which was most important to him.

Adam told his children that they, as a family, had to be there for each other and support each other the way Adam and Pela did. As a Holocaust survivor, he wanted to educate people and alert them against threats like the Nazis. For him, nothing could be more important than a child. All children are equal and therefore he did not understand how anyone could murder children and at the same time love their own.

Hilda Stern

World Before

Hilda Stern, given name Hilde Pander, was born on March 25, 1923 in the industrial town of Bochum, in western Germany. Her father, Max Pander, fought in World War I and earned an Iron Cross for his efforts. Max was well-established in the community and thought of himself as a German first and foremost. They were assimilated into German society and had many neighbors and friends who were non-Jews. Max was a skilled watchmaker and jeweler, which made him a respected man in the town. Max and Berta, Hilda's mother, enjoyed a pleasant and ordinary lifestyle. Hilda grew up in a privileged home and went to a respected private school. The school was made up of children from all different religious backgrounds.

Life Under the Swastika

After Hitler came to power, Hilda started to see her community change. Antisemitism was becoming more prevalent in her hometown. At her school, the rabbi was forced to leave. The teachers told Hilda and all Jewish students to sit in the back of the class in order to separate them from the rest of the students. They were banned from movie theaters, concerts, and public swimming pools. Hilda felt terrible because of the new restrictions. The growing antisemitism also affected the family business. Max's jewelry store was vandalized, with a Star of David painted on the window. Nazi police would stand outside of their store to prevent customers from entering. In 1938, Hilda and the other Jewish students were expelled from city schools. At the age of fifteen, Hilda decided to take a job making hats. Max believed that the Nazi movement was just a fad and would soon run its course. It was not until *Kristallnacht* that the Panders started to look into ways to save themselves from the growing Nazi persecution and oppression.

November Pogroms

On November 9, 1938, during *Kristallnacht*, the Nazi police burned down the synagogues and destroyed Jewish businesses. They reduced the family's jewelry shop to rubble and stole all the merchandise that was in the store. The next day, the family was ordered to clean up the broken glass on the street in front of their store. While they were cleaning, Max was arrested and taken with other men to Sachsenhausen concentration camp. All Hilda and Berta knew was that he was taken to the railroad station. They did not know of his whereabouts for a month. The Nazis harassed them and came to their home to ask for Max, knowing very well that he was in a concentration camp.

In response to the Nazi persecution, Hilda's mother asked Hilda whether she wanted to leave Germany on a *Kindertransport* to the Netherlands. Hilda was a planner and believed if she said yes, she would be able to reach her uncle in the US and convince him to adopt her. She thought that once she became a citizen of the US, she could bring her family over. This way Hilda could get around the immigration quotas. Hilda told her mother that she would go.

Max returned home from the concentration camp only days before Hilda was to leave on the *Kindertransport*. He would not speak of his experience but knew Hilda needed to be saved from Nazi persecution and leave Germany. On January 4, 1939, Hilda left for the station to await the transport. Dutch guardians were taking the children to two locations, the farming village of

Driebergehiw and Amsterdam. They divided the children into two groups. Hilda was told to go in the group headed for Driebergehiw. Hilda always thought about the future and knew that if she went to the farming village she would never be able to get home to her family on short notice. She decided to blend in with the group going to Amsterdam. When she arrived, the guardians checked the list and knew she was not supposed to be in the group. Hilda lied and said that at the station she was told to go with the group to Amsterdam. Hilda was taken in by Dutch caretakers and lived in a crowded dormitory with hundreds of other Jewish girls and boys. Some were as young as five or six, and Hilda cared for the younger children. Hilda feared that she would never see her family again.

World Response: Emigration/St. Louis

In April 1939, Max heard about German ships taking Jewish passengers abroad. He started to make preparations for both Hilda and Berta. Max contacted his brother-in-law in the US for help. The brother-in-law paid for Cuban landing permits for each member of the family. Then, Max purchased tourist class tickets on a German ship, the *St. Louis*, to Havana. Max's second concern was getting Hilda back into Germany to board the ship to Cuba. Because Max was well respected and had connections within the community, he was able to get Hilda on a train in the middle of the night back to Germany. She was accompanied by a Dutch woman, Mrs. Weismuller. Once Hilda met her parents at the train station, they checked into a hotel in Hamburg. Max did not leave the hotel for five days for fear of being picked up by the Gestapo. On May 13, 1939, the Panders boarded the ship to Cuba. They brought two suitcases, and Max made sure to bring his tools and parts for watches.

To Hilda, their time spent on the voyage to Cuba was luxurious. Captain Gustav Schroeder ordered his crew to treat the Jewish refugees with respect and courtesy. The feelings of persecution started to fade away. They dined together, swam in the pool, played shuffle board, watched movies, and danced in the ballroom. Max always asked Hilda to dance for the first song. Everyone waited for the two to start dancing first. However, unbeknownst to the passengers aboard the St. Louis, Cuban President Federico Bru signed a document invalidating all passengers' landing permits eight days before they sailed. Only twenty-two Jewish passengers had authentic Cuban visas. This was a part of a fraudulent plan of the Immigration Minister Manuel Benitez Gonzalez to sell temporary passes as permanent tickets and pocket hundreds of thousands of dollars.

On May 27, 1939, the *St. Louis* arrived in Havana Harbor. Hilda could see the palm trees and streets of Havana from the ship. However, the Cuban government refused to admit the refugees or allow them to disembark. President Bru ordered them to drop their anchor in the harbor. Passengers were distraught and their relatives stunned. Some rented boats and rowed out to the ship to see their family. Hilda saw her cousin and his wife from the balcony of the ship. Passengers waited days for a decision on whether they would be allowed in. Press all over the world reported on the plight of the passengers on the *St. Louis*. Although the stories were sympathetic to the refugees, public opinion still favored the immigration restrictions in their countries. The Jewish Joint Distribution Committee sent an attorney to Cuba to negotiate on behalf of the passengers. President Bru would not change his decision and ordered the ship to leave the harbor on June 1. Relatives called out their good byes from the row-boats and the approximately 907 passengers sailed away

Captain Shroeder was determined to find the passengers refuge. He turned the ship toward American waters off the coast of Florida. Many on the ship cabled President Franklin Roosevelt asking for admittance into the country. Roosevelt never responded, but the State Department sent a telegram stating that they must await their turns on the waiting list for admission. The US Coast Guard intercepted the ship near Miami. They strictly enforced the immigration quota and would not allow the ship to dock. On June 6, 1939, the *St. Louis* sailed back to Germany. Morale was low on the ship during the trip back across the Atlantic. Everything changed: the food was different, no one watched movies, and no one danced.

The plight of the passengers was not lost on every country. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee negotiated with four European countries - Great Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France - to admit the passengers. Belgium agreed to take in 214, the Netherlands 181, Great Britain took 288, and France accepted 223. On June 14, Captain Shroeder announced the news. People cheered with excitement.

The Netherlands were only accepting Jewish refugees with low US quota numbers in hopes that they would not be in the country for long. Fortunately, one of the Dutch delegates on board the ship was Mrs. Weismuller, the woman that helped Hilda get back to Germany. Her husband had connections to South America and hoped to guarantee visas into a country there. This solidified their entry into the Netherlands. On June 17, 1939, the Panders disembarked the *St. Louis* and boarded a Dutch steamer that brought them to a camp called Heyplaat, a former camp for sailors with infectious diseases. The Dutch people cheered for the passengers, making Hilda feel welcome in their new country. They stayed in barracks surrounded by barbed wire and dogs but were just thankful to be off the ship. In October, the family moved to a deserted office building in Amsterdam. The Panders lived with many other Jewish refugees in the small space. The refugees were not allowed to work or leave the building. Luckily, Hilda was able to persuade a Dutch director to attend trade school, where she learned to sew and patch clothes. She did not Dutch, but she gained self-confidence because of her new trade.

On February 27, 1940, all refugees from the *St. Louis* were moved to a new camp in the city of Drenthe, called Westerbork. There were favorable conditions in the camp under Dutch control, although the family only had two rooms and the clothes from the ship. Her father worked as a watchmaker and her mother sewed clothes. Hilda became a housemaid for the camp commandant's family. She ate at their table and learned Dutch. That all changed in 1941, several months after the German invasion of the Netherlands, when the Nazis took control of Westerbork.

Nazi Racism Spreads/Transit Camps

The Nazis transformed the camp into a transit camp existing only for deporting the Jewish refugees to killing centers and concentration camps. They built barbed wire fences, watchtowers, and railroad tracks. When Hilda was eighteen, the family was summoned with other prisoners to the yard. Hilda was scheduled to be on the first transport from Westerbork to the East. Since Max was a valued worker in the camp, he was able to get Hilda off the list. No one from the first transport survived. Twice a week people were taken on railcars to Eastern Europe. Those in the camp did not have contact with the outside world so they did not know what was happening to Jews across Europe. Later, prisoners started hearing rumors of the killing centers and crematoriums.

As time went by, Hilda met Adolf Wolff, a young carpenter who studied to become an architect. They fell in love in the camp. Within a short time, the two were engaged. The parents of the couple did not consent because of the circumstances.

On January 18, 1944, the Panders and Adolf Wolff's family were sent to Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia. They were chosen because Max had served in the German Army in World War I. When they arrived, the Nazis separated the men and women and took away all their possessions, food, and jewelry. In the camp, they were forced into hard labor and worked under harsh conditions. Everyone was in constant fear of the frequent transports. As a sign of hope, the family finally consented to Hilda and Adolf's marriage. On June 25, 1944, a rabbi conducted the ceremony. Hilda wore a white dress she saved from the *St. Louis* and a prisoner gave her a piece of curtain to make a veil. As a present, Adolf's twelve-year-old brother gave them a paper bag full of sugar. He had traded his bread rations for weeks in order to give them a wedding present. This was the most valuable gift Hilda ever received.

Three months later, Hilda's world shattered. Adolf, along with his four brothers and Max were on the list for the next transport east. She was at home when she looked out the window to see her father and Adolf get shoved into the boxcar. She quickly ran outside to tell her father and Adolf she was okay. He signaled with his hand to show he had heard her. This was the last time she cried. Hilda was in a complete state of grief and uncertainty. She felt that she should be with her husband and wanted to be put on the next transport east, but before her father was deported, she promised him that she would take care of her mother. She had to make a decision to risk her life to see her husband again or stay with her mother. She decided she would try to keep her mother alive and stay in Theresienstadt.

Hilda's mother grew weaker and weaker in the camp. She fell ill and was put in the infirmary. Since the Nazi guards usually sent the sick on transports first, Hilda was in fear her mother would be deported. She knew she had to get her mother out of the infirmary, but she could not be released without proper clearance. She convinced the officer to give her a slip to let her mother out. Immediately after Hilda's mother was released, the Nazis created a list of all the ill people in the infirmary to be deported. She had saved her mother just minutes before.

Berta moved in with Hilda and slowly regained her health. They shared the same bunk and helped each other by picking fleas off each other. At meals, the two tried to maintain a sense of dignity by putting down tattered cloths as place mats. They tried to recreate a sense of the old life and Hilda encouraged her mother to survive.

Hilda's work in the camp was splitting mica, which was needed for insulation. Since this was an important job, it kept her off the deportation lists. She took on extra hours to earn more bread rations for her mother. However, Berta had a less important job that put her at a high risk for deportation. Hilda knew she had to get her mother into her labor group. Hilda came up with a plan to persuade a Nazi officer to transfer her mother to split mica. She kept a pleated skirt from the *St. Louis* under her straw mattress. She walked out in the skirt instead of her camp clothes, in order to catch the attention of the officer. For three days, he did not notice her. Finally, Hilda courageously approached the officer, gave him her name and told him that she was a good worker and put in eight hour shifts splitting mica each day. She continued by stating that her mother is a hard worker as well and asked whether she could be put in the work group. The Nazi officer responded with,

"why not." Once Hilda left, her Jewish supervisors scolded her for approaching a Nazi officer. They told her she had risked the lives of everyone in the camp and was not allowed to speak to the officers. Without regret, she risked her life to save her mother from being sent away.

Emaciated Jewish prisoners from the death marches began arriving. They brought disease and lice that swept through the camp. Hilda wore her father's boots so she would not be bitten by disease-carrying fleas. This was the beginning of the end.

Liberation

On May 5, 1945, Russian troops liberated Theresienstadt. It was bittersweet because they had nowhere to go. The Allies chose to send the prisoners back to the countries from which they came. On June 7, 1945, Hilda, her mother, and other prisoners from Westerbork boarded a train headed to Amsterdam. They did not have any food for the entire trip and lived off wild berries and asked farmers for water. They arrived in Amsterdam on July 11. After Hilda returned to the Netherlands, she was given the opportunity to immigrate to Palestine by marrying a soldier and then have it annulled once she arrived. Hilda chose not to go. She could not leave her mother behind.

Hilda decided to register with the US Consulate for herself and her mother to go to the US. She was able to contact her relatives in New York, who sponsored them. The two waited for their turn to leave Europe and start a new life. Unfortunately, Hilda was chosen before her mother. Hilda, with her resilient spirit, went to the Consulate and asked to speak with the chief. Hilda was given the chance to speak with an assistant, who assured her that her mother would be on the next ship as soon as someone cancelled their trip. She decided it was her turn to start a new life. She knew her mother would be taken care of by friends. After two years of living in Amsterdam, on August 27, 1947, Hilda boarded the US freighter, the *Notre Dame*, to Hoboken, New Jersey.

Becoming Americans

Hilda was the only woman on board the ship. The men treated her very well. They taught her English phrases and gave her ice cream for the first time since she was sixteen. However, the memories of the *St. Louis* still haunted her. When the ship reached the shore, Hilda was told that she had to wait until the next day to disembark. Hilda became fearful and was filled with disappointment. She could see the Statue of Liberty from the ship and thought she would commit suicide if she had to go back to Europe. Over time, the men on board calmed her down and the next day, she was on land. For Hilda's first meal, she requested whipped cream, but the owner of the diner gave her a double deluxe banana split.

When she arrived, she adopted the American name, Hilda, and changed her surname to Pender. She established herself in Brooklyn and worked as a manicurist. Four months later, she was joined by her mother and rented a furnished room in Washington Heights from a Jewish couple who emigrated from Germany. In 1948, on Christmas Day, Hilda was introduced to her landlady's cousin from Chicago, Harry Stern. They were engaged by December 30th and married two months later. Hilda and her mother moved to Chicago, where Hilda and Harry ran a successful medical supply business in the suburbs. He sold the supplies and she did the shipping and billing. Together, they had two children and five grandchildren. Berta lived with Hilda and Harry until 1972, when she died at the age of 76. Harry passed away in 1994 of multiple sclerosis. Hilda considered herself lucky and felt it was her duty to give testimony of her experiences.

Paul Stiefel

World Before

Paul Stiefel was born on February 9, 1923, in Furth, Germany. A busy town of about 50,000-75,000, it was connected to the nearby city of Nuremberg. It boasted a strong religious community with about 2,000 Jewish residents. All of the synagogues (except one connected to an orphanage) were located in the same area, with Jewish butchers and other Jewish businesses nearby. Paul remembered living in a nice residential neighborhood with his parents and older sister, Ilse. He described his mother, Matilda, as a very kind and gentle woman whose children could do no wrong in her eyes. She did not work and was extremely social. His father, Arthur, was a strong disciplinarian who was very stern, though fair. He fought for Germany in WWI and received the Iron Cross as well as several other decorations after being wounded in battle. Paul was not particularly close with his sister, who was a year older.

The Stiefels were upper-middle class and employed a maid as well as a governess. Arthur owned a successful chemical factory with his father. He employed around twenty people, a majority of whom were non-Jewish. He also owned the building that his family lived in; each floor had two apartments, and the Stiefels occupied the entire second floor. They were conservative Jews, and their synagogue was conservative leaning towards orthodox. Though they did not keep kosher, the holidays and traditions were important to them. Paul fondly remembered going over to his grandfather's home on Friday nights and serving the Kiddush. He recalled how nervous he was to sing on his Bar Mitzvah because he had a poor voice. He did not remember much else of the experience except having a party afterwards and receiving many gifts. His sister joined a Zionist organization, but Paul was more sports-minded, participating actively in a Jewish sports organization. He had non-Jewish friends at school, but outside of school he interacted mainly with other Jews. He recalled encountering little anti-Semitism prior to 1933.

Rise of Nazism

Many of Paul's memories of being discriminated against as a Jew took place at school. He remembered around 1935-36 when Jewish students were taken into a side room by other students during gym class. The Jewish students would be laid spread eagle on the floor while their classmates rolled their knees across their muscles, which got to be quite painful. The Jewish kids were outnumbered, though, and could not do anything to stop the bullying. One gym teacher would single out his Jewish students, forcing them to stand in front of the class while he pointed out their "Jewish" noses and mouths. These humiliating, traumatic presentations happened to Paul multiple times; he wondered why he was different, but he felt so ashamed he never mentioned the incidents to his parents. The rabbi who came to school to instruct the Jewish students was not immune either: other teachers made fun of him and gave him the Sieg Heil, mocking him whether he saluted back or not. Swastikas and other Nazi symbols could be found in every classroom and throughout the town. With the rise of Nazism came an increase in demonstrations and parades, and Paul recounted more and more people saluting Hitler. For Jews, this was a double-edged sword. It was against the law for them to greet people with the Sieg Heil; however, if they did not salute, everyone around them would discover their Jewish identities. To avoid encountering people as they saluted, Paul would often bend down and pretend to be tying his shoes. He also recalled an uncomfortable evening when a family in his building came to his parents and informed them that

their son was now in the Hitler Youth, so they could not risk associating with Jews. People were changing dramatically, but that initially served to only strengthen Jewish ties.

In 1936, all Jewish children were forced to go to separate Jewish schools. Luckily, Furth had a pre-existing Jewish school for Paul and his sister to attend. Although restrictions upon Jews had not yet imposed on most facets of their lives, most people felt naturally restricted and avoided going out in public when possible. Signs saying "Jews not wanted" also began to appear. The Stiefels listened to Hitler's broadcasts on the radio, but Arthur, a World War I veteran, believed that there were enough Germans against Hitler to overpower him and that the Jews would never actually be persecuted or driven out of the country. Matilda, meanwhile, wanted to leave the country as early as 1936. Paul cited this period as extremely influential on his self-esteem and development. He felt different and inferior; he was constantly being exposed to caricatures of Jews and eventually found himself believing them. He began to turn against his own people, feeling ashamed to be a Jew and thinking Jews were bad. These negative feelings stayed with Paul for the rest of his life.

November Pogroms

The first real signs of danger came on November 9, 1938, during the nationwide pogrom known as Kristallnacht. The Saturday morning after these events, Arthur received a frantic phone call from his sister. She was surprised that he answered, telling him that their father along with almost all other Jewish men had been taken away. Arthur replied that his family slept peacefully through the night, unbothered. They later found out that Arthur's father had responded "here" to the German officials when both his and his son's names were called, allowing Arthur to fly under the radar. Although Paul did not see the events of Kristallnacht, he saw all of the burned synagogues and destroyed businesses the next day and realized the severity of what had happened.

Paul's father left for Nuremberg the following Monday morning to gather the necessary paperwork to leave the country. While his father was gone, Paul feared the worst, expecting to never see him again. He returned after a few days, though, having discovered that he must sell his factory before they could leave the country. He immediately arranged a sale. Paul accompanied his father to the police station the day he officially signed the company over to the buyer. The German officers had a meticulously written out contract, but after signing away his company for an agreed upon price, Arthur was forced to hand over his profit to the police for "unpaid taxes." Their house also had to be sold in one of these arranged "sales" before the family could receive their papers, but they were so anxious to leave that they did not think twice about it.

Arrival in a New Country

Paul departed from Germany with his parents and sister as soon as they got their papers, leaving all their possessions behind. He snuck only a few pages from his beloved stamp collection with him, keeping it hidden on his body. He remembered being very nervous that he would be searched and the pages would be found, as each person was only allowed to carry ten or twenty marks of worth (about $2.50), and stamps were very valuable. The family took a train to Hamburg, Germany, before taking a ship to New York. Paul remembered a Shirley Temple film on the ship as his introduction to America.

They arrived in New York on November 23, 1938. Paul described seeing the Statue of Liberty as a very emotional and freeing experience. Two days later, the family took a train to Green Bay,

Wisconsin, where an uncle lived. Although they had taken English lessons, the family found it extremely hard to communicate with Americans. Paul told a story about needing a haircut during the trip, but not knowing how to explain this to someone. He went up to a policeman and motioned to his hair, saying “cut” until the man understood what he needed.

Paul’s family arrived in Green Bay on a Monday; he and his sister started high school on Tuesday. Paul considered himself very lucky: his teacher took special care to teach him and his sister English, which they learned quickly thanks to his uncle, who forced them to speak only English with him. There were one or two other German refugee families in Green Bay, but they did not interact much as everyone was busy trying to make a life. Sadly antisemitism was prevalent in Green Bay at the time. Arthur could not be employed by even his brother, forcing him to do menial work. Though Paul enjoyed living in Green Bay, his family, hoping to find better jobs, relocated to Chicago after he graduated high school in 1941.

Life in America

Not wanting to go to college, Paul did a variety of odd jobs in Chicago. Shortly after the U.S. declared war on Germany and Japan, he was drafted and sent to basic training in Wyoming. From there, he went to Oregon with the 96th Division. His division was deployed to the Philippines in October of 1944, where he participated in Operation Leyte. They were then sent to Japan, where they took part in the Invasion of Okinawa. This was a far more perilous battle than Leyte for Paul, especially once they reached the narrow end of the island. He spent many nights in foxholes, truly fearing for his life. Paul was young, though, and did not mind the army life. After the Japanese surrender in Okinawa, Paul was sent back to the Philippines. Not long after, the United States dropped atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, finally bringing World War II to a close.

Ready to start a family and find a stable job, Paul returned to Chicago. Having served as a radio operator during the war, he decided to go to the Illinois Institute of Technology to become an electrical engineer. He emphasized that this education was the best thing the U.S. ever did for him.

Paul met his wife, Senta, whilst living in Hyde Park. There was a Jewish social club in the upstairs of a storefront where they both went frequently to play games and socialize. He took her to the opera on their first date, and they were married on July 11, 1948. Senta was a Holocaust survivor as well, which made Paul much more comfortable around her. He had dated American girls, but he found a more meaningful connection with Senta. Most of their friends had similar backgrounds. Paul reflected that people always tend to group together with those most similar to them, especially after going through such a unifying experience. Paul and Senta had three children, Ronald, Lynne and Michael. Proud of their Jewish heritage, the family honored their religious traditions; however, the couple never told their children about their wartime experiences, mainly because Senta’s past was extremely painful to relive. She had lost her entire family during the Holocaust. They also chose not to teach their children how to speak German, which Paul said he later regretted.

When asked to reflect on his experiences in the Holocaust and his perspective on it today, Paul said that he believed in forgiveness, but he would never forget. He returned to Germany, and while he bore no ill will towards the younger generations, he said that he wanted nothing to do with people his own age. They all said that they were not involved with the Nazis, but it was impossible

to tell who was truthful. Paul said he was very happy in the United States and preferred to remain there. Even decades later, he could not make sense of the events that occurred during the Holocaust, and he said that even the most religious Jews found their faith shaken afterwards. He reflected on the similarity in the treatment of African Americans in the U.S. to the experience of the Jews. For him, this demonstrated how much hatred people are capable of. Though it did not excuse the Nazis' actions, he began to understand that if you rouse people enough, almost anyone is capable of hatred.

Paul Stiefel passed away on April 26, 2012 in Skokie, IL, at the age of 89. He had served as the President of East Prairie School District 73 and the Oakton Community College School Boards. He is survived by his children, Lynne and Michael, five grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

Aline Wintergreen

World Before

Aline Eva Wintergreen was born in Tarnow, Poland on June 20, 1922. Her maiden name was Haspel. At the time of the interview, she was 74 years of age. A very striking, well-dressed and proud woman, she stated, "I was born in my grandmother's bed." She was the first female grandchild in the family and claimed, "I was spoiled by my family and shown off by my father." Her father was not around much as he had a wholesale building and supply business. The family moved to the town of Przemysl, an old city surrounded by walls and fortress in the Carpathian Mountains. Aline made a point of stating, "My mother did not work and was a mommy, a housewife." She stressed that she was a difficult child, spoiled, and obstinate; she was not very well behaved in school and often got in trouble.

Aline was raised and educated in the town of Przemysl where Jews represented ten percent of the population. She attended a public elementary school where both Catholics and Jews were present. She went to a private all-girls high school and completed the last two years attending the new Jewish Community High School her father had been instrumental in building. The school was co-educational, with boys and girls attending the same classes, studying religion and Hebrew. Aline commented that her Jewish friends were not religious. Her family did not keep kosher or fast, and she recalls that they attended only the High Holiday services.

She was not aware of any antisemitism before the war and pointed out that her friends were Jews and non-Jews alike, but her girlfriends were all Jewish. The family attended a divided, traditional synagogue. Her father had business with non-Jews and was on the City Council. If there was antisemitism, she confessed, "I was too young to notice; in fact the Mayor would invite my family over for Christmas, and we would in turn invite his family for Passover." Aline did, however, voice that there was a division amongst the conservative and religious Jews and there was no communication due to differences in class, education, and financial status. "We were snobby," she remembers.

Aline's sister, Henrika (Harriet), was born when she was six years old. She recalled, "I wanted to freeze my sister." During this part of the interview, a light came into her eyes and a smile grew across her face. She stated, "she became my favorite baby who I loved." The family hired a German nurse to take care of her sister, and Aline began learning German as well as German traditions. Aline's family moved into a modern high-rise with tile stoves, a cook, and a maid when she was eight. "Father upgraded our lifestyle," she said.

Her father traveled quite a bit, going to saw mills in Sweden, Sheffield, England, and Switzerland for precision tools. He was also active in the Zionist organization and traveled to Sweden as a representative.

World at War

Aline remembered that prior to the war, the air became agitated and people knew something was coming when German Jews began immigrating to Poland. "People gathered food, taped up the windows in their homes, and the talk of war began. We thought it was an adventure where we

could run and hide or that there wouldn't be enough food or water, not die. My plans were to go to college; we did not give up our plans. Then we learned about Kristallnacht."

Then, the Nazis attacked Poland and demanded Gdansk's surrender. Aline related, "The Polish Army did not fight sincerely as German equipment was superior." After a week at home, the family loaded their car and drove east to visit her father's family farm in a resort area. They met Jewish and Polish Jewish families along the road, taking their horses, wagons, and belongings southeast with them to the Romanian border. Throughout the interview, Aline kept commenting that she found it amazing the families were able to communicate without telephones. The family stayed at the farm and milked cows, fed the animals, cultivated, and had plenty to drink and eat. Aline said that just across the bridge you could see the Romanian border.

Towards the middle of the month, the Russians occupied the farm area. Both the Russians and Germans had squeezed Poland. Aline said, "Everyone knew the border was open to cross over." Her mother was especially afraid and wanted to leave; however, her father did not want to abandon everything for which he had worked. "My father was a smart man, he had his money in Polish banks and he still had a business in Przemysl. We watched the Polish government's high military officials as they left Poland. We didn't move. We watched the officials on the road going to Romania. It was very quiet for two weeks until the 'Big Boots,' Russians surrounded the house." When the soldiers arrived in their heavy brown coats, "A different world came."

On the frosty morning of October 5, 1939, Aline was sent back to the Przemysl apartment with the chauffeur without a "worry in the world." She arrived at the apartment at 6 a.m. to find it occupied by the cook and her son, a Polish army deserter. Wanting to find her friends, she questioned where everyone was and looked for them throughout the active city of Przemysl.

The Russians took over their apartment and the family lived in one room. They were friendly, but they cooked in the room where they lived and "had mice." A couple of weeks later, Aline's mother and sister arrived without her father, who decided returning would be too dangerous because he was a Zionist and capitalist. During the snowy winter of 1940, school was not in session, so she skied everyday and hung around coffee houses. Life changed; there was no purpose, discipline, or future.

Aline's father finally joined them and the family was pushed out of their own apartment. They occupied a small apartment in Lwow; though no Jews lived in the old building, the owner was nice. Aline's mother did not cook, and they ate out frequently. Aline commented that most of the family's fortune was in U.S. gold that had been sewn into a fabric belt. The rest was put into a tea can, buried in the snow, and forgotten. She said that the janitor took it, but she was afraid to tell her father because "he would kill me." The remaining $20 gold coins were put into a can and used later. "We had a cook as mother did nothing. I even wore surgical gloves when I baked bread, as I was so vain, I liked to look nice." During this time, Aline attended a Russian business college, learned Russian language and geography and made new friends. Although her father was in hiding, people came to the house to visit and they continued living as Jews.

Life Under the Swastika

In 1941, the Germans occupied Lwow before going east to invade Russia; it was "frightening," and Aline's family needed someway to survive. Aline commented that her father had joined the Judenrat because his German was impeccable. Mother was fearful of the Nazis' boots and would not go out. Aline commented that they had connections and money; therefore, they were able to buy lard and flour to eat. The ghetto did not yet exist, but Jews were required to wear armbands. Aline described her interaction with the Polish Army when she stepped outside without an armband. She was interrogated and put into jail with sixty-two other women, gypsies, prostitutes, the old and young. You could see Aline's facial expression change from dignified to sad. The inmates made her wash the floor, laughing and making fun of her. She put a rag around the face of one of the instigators; after that they discontinued the abuse. She slipped a note to an Austrian guard who gave it to her father, and within three weeks she left the jail legally, accompanied by a young Ukrainian who had been paid off. She was home before Christmas, where she ate pancakes and chocolate and had a bath.

During her time in jail, Aline had access to newspapers providing information about the war and Pearl Harbor. Aline stated that the, "Jewish community knew what was happening and what was coming." The community was gathered by the Nazis, and at the end of summer 1942, there was a final cleansing of Lwow's Jews; they were either to be shipped out or put in the ghetto. Consequently, Aline's family looked for places to hide. She recalls that a man took her to a one-room apartment, and she had to lie on the bed and not move, so nothing could be heard below. She had to relieve herself on top of the bed into a spittoon. She stayed for two nights and one day with little to eat. Then, the man told her it was too risky for her to stay.

On August 14, 1942, Aline crossed the city fearfully, painfully aware of her long, dark brown hair as she passed German and Polish Police. She knew she did not look Aryan. Her sister had stayed at another women's house but was already there joined by her father; her mother had been taken while she was wearing her best clothes. Aline hoped she would be spared because of her dignified appearance. "Mother instilled in me appearance. Don't come out scared you will look like a scared, Jewish woman. You will survive if you put on make up and nice clothes. To this day nobody told me what happened to her. Rumors were that she was shot. Some of my friends helped the Germans round up the Jews. There were Jews that did that; some were my young college friends. To the day he died, my father never told me what happened to her." During this part of the interview Aline cried and you could see the pain in her eyes. She commented that her sister was only eleven, did not go to school, and had no friends: "I was independent."

Rescuers

While in hiding, Aline's family had to remain quiet because their lives as well as the lives of their conspirators were in danger. The family stayed until they received papers for new names, identities and religion. Once the church papers were delivered, Aline's "name was changed to Alina Eva Kozlowska, [her] sister's to Dzwaka Kozlowska, and [her] father was now [her] uncle. His name was changed from Wilhelm Haspel to Jan Wolak. [They] were able to get these papers from [their] Jewish and Polish family friend who had connections. [Her] sister was sent to a Catholic convent and [Aline] was sent to Tarnow where [her] mother's family lived." Aline commented that it was hard for her to remember the exact facts. Again, she said it was amazing that communication continued between families. She lived with an old lady in a ground level apartment and

coincidently had contact with a Jewish shoemaker across the way. She stayed in the apartment during the week and on Sundays went to church with the lady. Aline wore a silver chain with a Madonna charm around her neck and learned the prayers. She was put in touch with her aunts in the ghetto and they had a very emotional meeting realizing they would die and never see one another again. One day after church Aline was brought to the German office and interrogated about her family and German dialect, as only Jews in Poland spoke German. She said she was from a wealthy family in a small village.

Aline knew it was getting more dangerous and that she had to leave the city. She heard a rumor that Polish workers were needed in Vienna and she planned to go, informing her father in Warsaw. She left for Vienna on a train and chatted sporadically with German soldiers. The train stopped in the famous Polish city of Czestochowa, the place of pilgrimage for the Black Mary Portrait. According to Aline, the travelers got off the train, and everyone was searched but her. She was questioned by German officers and placed in a cell by herself; she thought she was in the back of a church. There was no one to talk to, and she had a bucket for a toilet. She was there for about a week before she was moved to a building surrounded by guards. Everyone inside the building was Jewish. She went to work every day and was told to cook dinner for the German quarters. Eventually, Aline was able to befriend a German guard and told him he would be well paid if he could help her escape to Warsaw. She walked out of the camp with a Wehrmacht man, placed with an old soldier who had an apartment in town, and promised that she would leave on the train the next day. Aline confessed, “I was sexually abused, a price I had to pay.”

Once in Warsaw, Aline reunited with her father. He was working in a German facility as a bookkeeper. He very easily passed for Aryan as he had grey hair and green eyes. He and a beautiful prostitute with bleached hair shared a modern apartment with another couple. “They were paid to keep her there; everyone was paid, even toward the end of the war.” Aline bleached her hair and became totally blonde, making it easier to pass as Aryan. With the help of their Polish friends’ connections, Aline and her father moved to another apartment, where they lived with the wife of a Polish officer who had been killed in Russia. The woman desperately needed money.

While Aline’s sister remained at the convent in the Ukraine, Aline “was a brazen blond working in a German jewelry store with new clothes. I waited on Germans and felt safe and free.” In the Fall/Winter of 1943, two Polish men came into the store and followed her home. They threatened her, told her they knew she was Jewish and asked her how much she could pay. She said she was wealthy and agreed to meet with them the next day, when she would have jewelry and everything ready for them. That night Aline alarmed her landlady and Polish friends, and they moved immediately.

Aline found a nice apartment in Warsaw with a Polish woman named Maria Szcmarko. Aline recalled that she had been wearing a green tweed suit with a brown hat when she met Maria, who said, “I’ll take you in, I don’t want you to die, you’re too young.” Aline continued to point out that Maria was like her other sister, even today. Eventually, she connected with her father and sister, and they too arrived at the apartment: “My sister came back into my life.” They didn’t go out and were in total isolation with an armoire placed against the door. They served vodka and bread with garlic made on a wooden stove to their neighbors and friends. A professor friend of her father taught Aline English. “We always ate as Maria would go to the black market; there was always a

black market; we paid." Aline explained that they blackened their windows with pillows and large comforters, and when the Germans shot the windows, feathers would fly over the whole city. Her family stayed until the Warsaw uprising in 1944 when tanks came and blasted the building. They moved down to the cellar for a month, carrying their blankets and ate anything they could find, along with cat and dog meal. Finally, the Germans came and they were walked outside.

Camps

When the Germans captured Aline and her family, "The young and the old were separated and we were placed on a cattle train. No one knew we were Jews." Her father had given her a fifty-dollar bill to hide in her winter coat. They were on the dirty, cold and "smelly" train for three days and nights and arrived in Parchim in the northern region of Germany. "They did not know we were Jewish." The Poles were separated from the others; their papers and pictures were examined, and they had to take a medical exam. Aline stated, "She had to take a shower and the SS guards were in the shower touching me." She sighed and said, "It was degrading." The population in the camp was about 60,000, and they slept in three story bunk beds with other Jews who passed as Aryans. Their job was to build an airfield for the German Army. Aline and her sister dug ditches for the runways and she commented, "I was lazy, had a big mouth, and would talk about Warsaw. I stopped working when they turned away." Her sister was not well, and Aline developed sores and malnutrition. They lost their jobs after a couple of weeks when Italian prisoners came and took over their jobs.

Aline and her sister volunteered for a new camp, Wobbelin. Although they were paid, they could not use the money. They sent the currency to their father and Maria in Krakow, and in return they sent the girls packages. They had a new boss, Mr. Thomsen and Lady Claire who liked Aline, her sister and friend Julie. "It was a wonderful job, clean rags, food, and they were never hungry." During the Christmas of 1944, the girls got a new boss, of whom they grew fond. They could tell by his mood what was going on. He was not patriotic, and they could not listen to the news. Aline was shocked when their former boss returned with the Gestapo. Shortly thereafter, Wobbelin became a concentration camp. Aline remembers going to a New Year's dance in her nightgown and having a good time.

Liberation

The day the English Spitfires came, a loud explosion saw to the destruction of the camp. The sisters found their ID's with the edges burnt. Aline, her sister, and her friend Julie survived, and they stayed with their bosses. With the Russians and Americans moving into the area, the Germans left quickly. "Thomsen was the last to leave as he and his wife Claire embraced us. He was wonderful, we were alive and they respected us. We cried; it was a wonderful cry."

Aline described the Americans' arrival as "wild; they pushed them around and wanted to know who they were. It was bad, they just came from the front." This was her excuse for the rough treatment. The girls did not know where to go; they had no idea where they were, nor did they have a compass. A small group of American officers asked for their papers, looked them over, took Aline's $50 bill and drove off. They were then sent to the Russian front because they were from Poland, but Aline saw an American convoy, spoke English and asked to be brought to the American zone. The girls were separated in the trucks, Aline stated. The Americans were drunk and the truck carrying her sister crashed, sending her face-first into the windshield. They headed to the

American zone crying; they passed through fields of clover and slept under trees, hoping to find sanctuary.

One day, Aline and her sister passed a concentration camp, where emaciated bodies lay scattered on the ground. Aline's face became pained as she described the atrocities. "There were bodies on the ground that looked like they were dead and we touched them. They were infested with flies and people were clubbed. It was the worst image I had ever seen. The camps I was in didn't have anything like that…never kicked, hit or drew blood."

The girls ended up in the English sector, and Aline commented that very kind people gave them a bed and food. They joined the first convey and went to Brussels on an airplane. This was Aline's first flight, and she was sick to her stomach. Aline smiled while describing her airsickness. They were put into an organized displaced persons' camp in Brussels run by the American, Belgian, and French Governments. A woman who spoke broken Polish came into the camp and took the Polish refugees to a Polish mining town with houses about 400 years old. The old lady was the widow of a coal miner and gave them shelter, a room with linens, towels, and food. She remembers eating tomato salad with red onions and vinegar with bread for breakfast, "a strange desire."

Departure and Arrival

Aline recalls traveling to Mosel, Belgium to an office and identifying herself to obtain a Polish passport. She also took the electric train to Brussels, where she found two Polish friends who had become involved with diamond cutters from Antwerp. "They started to peddle cuttings and we had money constantly. It was not easy for my sister and me; we had Polish papers, but the consulate didn't understand that we were also Jewish. The consulate changed my name to Aline, which I did not like." Aline wrote to her father in Prague who was now separated from Maria, and the sisters went to see him. Her father was hard-pressed for money because he had spent it all to save the family. In the meantime, he had reconnected with cousins in Chicago he had known as a young boy. Wanting to help, the cousins sent a friend from a synagogue in Chicago, a Colonel Chase, with cash, and they met in an Antwerp hotel. He ordered champagne and oysters that I ate and later got sick." Aline started laughing as she told again how she got sick. "We were making connections and progress to get to the United States."

In the meantime, the Americans closed the Polish Quarter and ex-Polish citizens were wandering around Europe, unable to reach America. Aline joined a group in Brussels working to get Polish citizens out, and after one year, she learned that Brazil needed workers. All of her friends planned to go to Brazil to get "rich" and open up a trucking business with the money from the diamonds. Unfortunately, they separated due to their mother's illness, and her Polish friends went back to Warsaw. During this time, Aline had reconnected with an old Jewish friend from high school, who joined the sisters. They finally received a transit visa for two months to the U.S. and then on to Brazil. Aline smuggled three diamonds, a two, three and five carat, hidden in a Tampax that her Polish friends had given her for safekeeping.

Becoming Americans

Aline and her sister traveled to New York on a Pan Am flight and "befriended someone important, a colonel from Washington D.C." Aline commented that she had a martini with him and again got sick, smiling as she recalled this incident. They stayed with cousins for two days and were sent by

train to Chicago. They were met by the cousins who had paid for their passage to the U.S. and taken to their gorgeous apartment. The question was, “What were they going to do with us as they were not going to Brazil.” They were scheming and had contacted a lawyer, even Mrs. Truman, and Washington D.C. Aline started dating and her sister was sent to school; they shopped at Marshall Fields for clothes and went to the movies. The rest of the family kept arguing over the girls, and the cousins said “they were making it too easy for us and wanted us to go to work and get out.” Aline was dating her future husband Martin Wintergreen at that time, and he proposed when he heard that she was being thrown out. Her sister was sent to Toronto to study, where she lived with an orthodox Jewish family. Aline recalls, “My sister and I were never separated; it was horrible. She left in May and I was married in June, 1967.”

Aline went to see her sister in Toronto two years later after she had received her citizenship papers. Her sister never came back to the U.S. She also brought her father to the U.S. Furious with the family, he complained that her husband was not from the same class and that she should divorce him. Her father eventually married a wealthy American woman.

Aline had two children, Donna and Cary. Her daughter, Donna, married and they have two children, Katelyn and Kevin. Aline states “I love them both and am so happy to have them.” Her eyes light up when she spoke about her grandchildren.

The interviewer asked Aline, “What message would you like to leave based on your experiences?” She said, “I can’t say I forgave; I either love or hate. I want to be with people or not be. I did not forgive my American family; I lost very good people. I went back to Germany. Maybe I was alive because of these good people. The jail guard, the Ukrainian man all took risks, although we paid for cover. There were people that gave us love in their hearts.” Aline was crying and you could see the pain in her eyes. To the interviewer she said, “Thank you, I am grateful.”

Lucille Wolf

World Before

On October 11, 1923, Lucille Wolf was born to Walter and Lili Wollmann in Breslau, Germany. Her given name was Liselotte Wollmann (although the family would later change the spelling to Wollman). At the time of her birth, Germany was at the height of its depression, and the doctor demanded that her father pay him immediately because currency depreciated by the hour. Lucille says her father went to the bank, brought back a "laundry basket full" of money, and the doctor immediately went out to buy groceries for the hospital.

Lucille remembers Breslau as a very beautiful university city with a large Jewish population and two synagogues, one Orthodox and one Reform. Her father, Walter, was a WWI veteran and owned a family business that sold office supplies. The family was relatively well off, as indicated by their ownership of a car, which Lucille remembers as "unusual." Lucille also recalls that the chauffeur would drive her father to work. However, her mother Lili refused to allow the chauffeur to drive her daughters to school, calling it "ostentatious and not nice." If they were late, Lili said, they could run.

Lucille remembers a very happy life with her parents and two sisters, Ilsa and Susan. The girls frequently played games, read books, and played instruments. Lucille recalls several performances organized by her uncles in which Lucille, her sisters, and their cousins would participate. Lucille's extended family was central to her childhood and she has fond memories of uncles, aunts, and grandparents.

Life Under the Swastika

Although Lucille mostly recalled her adolescence fondly, there were several instances which spoke to the rise of Nazism and growing anti-Semitism. Slowly, change came to Lucille's high school. Looking back on her report cards, Lucille says the decline in grades is apparent as teachers began to ignore Jewish students and refused to give them any grade higher than a "C." Jewish students gradually left the school, eventually leaving only Lucille and one other girl. The situation worsened and the principal finally suggested to Walter that he withdraw his daughter.

At home, Lucille's first indication of change was when her father's brother fled Germany in 1933. Years before, Uncle Martin had married a non-Jewish woman who converted to Judaism; however, the wife's brother did not approve. Upon Uncle Martin's divorce from his wife, his brother-in-law threatened, "If we [the Nazi party] come to power, I'm going to get you." In 1933, Uncle Martin began to receive threatening phone calls and decided it was time to leave.

For Lucille and her sisters, consciousness of anti-Semitism dawned as time went on. The swimming pool and opera were no longer open to Jewish people, friends joined Nazi youth groups, and African-American Jesse Owens became a bigger hero than German Olympians. One day, as the girls and their mother were walking in the street, Lili hushed Ilsa and urged her to be careful what she said while on the street. Lucille remembers Ilsa throwing a temper tantrum and wished she could leave Germany. That night, Lili decided to see about getting her out. Soon thereafter, Ilsa left Germany, traveling to Holland to work as a nanny for a Jewish family. Later, just before the

November pogroms, Ilsa immigrated to Rochester, New York where she worked as a nanny throughout the war.

Meanwhile, Walter's business slowly lost customers; non-Jewish people stopped coming in and the word "Jew" was painted across the windows. Lucille recalls one day when a non-Jewish woman, an old school friend of her mother's, walked into the store. This woman, Eva Dietze, said she had family members in the Nazi party, and they indicated that things were going to get bad. She urged Lili to hide the children and promised that she would hide them if necessary. Not long after, Lucille says the family had "no choice" but to leave.

November Pogroms

On the night of November 9, 1938, Lucille remembers hearing the phone ring. It was the rabbi's wife telling Lili the synagogue was on fire and warning the family that men were being arrested. Another call indicated that the windows at Walter's business had been smashed. Lucille has few others memories of what happened that night but has clear memories of what happened the next day.

At the time, Lucille was baby-sitting for another Jewish family, the Sterns. When she arrived the morning after Kristallnacht, the couple told Lucille they were going to spend the day driving around, hoping to avoid Mr. Stern's arrest. They did not know when they would return, but Lucille should take care of the children while they were away. That afternoon, the Gestapo arrived to arrest Mr. Stern. The couple's cook said she did not know where they were but that Lucille did. Lucille denied any knowledge of the couple's whereabouts and the Gestapo left. After the visit from the Gestapo, Lucille decided she should take the children to their uncle's to warn him that he may be next. However, when they arrived, Mr. Stern's brother had already been taken away.

Lucille's uncles also chose to spend the day driving. When a German policeman came to arrest them at the home of Lucille's grandmother, she told them they were not home, but she could find them. The policeman, Lucille recalls, urged the grandmother not to find them. Lucille's uncles were never arrested, but her father was. That night, Walter was lined up at the train station when a policeman recognized him. The policeman had been a client of Walter's and remembered the favors Walter had done him, so he pulled Walter out of line and made a deal for him. If Walter came to the police station everyday and showed that he was taking steps toward immigration, he would not be arrested. But the deal would only stand for a few months. If the family was not gone by then, they would be arrested. Walter quickly discovered the deal was more difficult than it sounded. No one had room for the family and most countries had strong restrictions on immigration.

Finally, one day, Walter saw a wedding announcement in the newspaper. A distant American relation had married a German girl. Perhaps this would be their way out. Walter quickly sent a telegram to the cousin and his new wife congratulating them on their marriage. The cousin responded thanking Walter and asking if the family needed anything. Walter responded requesting an affidavit. The next telegram to Lucille's family said, "It's on its way." Unfortunately, it would be almost a year before the affidavit came through.

World Response

Only a few weeks after Kristallnacht, word of the Kindertransport came to Breslau. The city was given a total of ten boys who could join the Kindertransport, but they found only nine. The rabbi's wife called Lili and suggested Lucille be the tenth child (Susan was considered too young). Lili thought it was a good idea – Lucille would get out and it would be easier to immigrant with a family of three, but ultimately the decision was left to Lucille. Lucille recalls a great debate within the family, with Lili urging Lucille to go and Walter adamant against it. Lucille remembers her father telling his wife, "You are like the stepmother in Hansel and Gretel." In the end, Lucille chose to go.

Of the trip itself, Lucille has few memories. She recalls the gymnasium in Berlin where they spent the first night. She remembers struggling with her little suitcase, dragging it along behind her. And the young boy from Breslau who brought his violin still sticks out to her. In Holland, reporters saw the boy playing his violin and took the opportunity to photograph the children in his compartment, including Lucille. In the United States, Lucille's older sister saw that photograph and knew her sister had escaped. On December 2, the Kindertransport arrived in England and the children were taken to Dover Court, a sort of summer camp where Lucille spent a week before being moved to an old orphanage in Yorkshire. Twenty girls at Dover Court were taken to this Jewish home, where an old woman cared for them.

Lucille enjoyed her time at the old orphanage. She remembers people from the congregation who were very friendly to the German girls. The children quickly made friends with one another, and Lucille remembers the fun they had rigging the light switch with string so that they could keep the lights on late at night. The girls also started school there, where Lucille says her English slowly improved.

A few months after being in the orphanage, an English woman came to find a nanny for her children. She chose Lucille. After getting permission from Lucille's parents, or perhaps her grandparents, the woman brought Lucille home with her to York. Lucille speculates that the family wanted her because she had no family in the country and would not take a day off to go visit them. Thus, Lucille worked almost constantly, sharing a room with the children whilst only receiving about ten shillings a month. She remembers the huge house the family lived in, the disapproving older nanny, and the couple's heavy drinking.

Meanwhile, Lucille corresponded with her family. Ilsa would send a dollar whenever possible, which Lucille thought was a great sum of money. Most of Lucille's small wages, she remembers, went to postage for letters to her sister in America and her family in South America. Walter, Lili, and Susan were finally able to obtain fake visas to Honduras, which would get them out of Germany but not into Honduras. As soon as they arrived in Panama, the family was in contact with the authorities. They were given permission to remain in Panama for six weeks. Working quickly, Walter contacted the consul of Ecuador, asking for permission to enter his country. The consul told Walter that with a letter of credit, they would be welcome in Ecuador. A cousin in New York supplied the letter and the family moved to Ecuador, where they remained for the next two years.

Arrival in a New Country

When war broke out in 1939, Lucille remained in England. However, early in 1940, her American affidavit came up. Lucille booked passage on a Dutch-American ship that was to leave England in

May. However, when she and the other passengers arrived at the coast, the ship was nowhere in sight. As it turned out, the ship arrived a week late due to the Battle of Dunkirk. Two days after the ship finally set sail, Holland was invaded and the ship was no longer neutral. Lucille remembers the rest of voyage being very scary. She recalls the overseas journey taking a long time because the captain was zigzagging, trying to avoid submarines. Much later, Lucille learned the ship had carried Dutch gold and treasures in its hold.

Upon arriving in the United States, Lucille visited her sister, Ilsa, in Rochester, New York before continuing on to Chicago, where she became a nanny for the children of an uncle's friend, Dr. Norman Levy. During the day, Lucille attended high school, and at night she cared for the children. Lucille remembers feeling as though she were a member of the Levy family. When the United States entered the war, Dr. Levy joined the army, and Lucille moved back in with her family, who had recently arrived in America.

Becoming Americans

Lucille's family first immigrated to New York, searching for jobs near their eldest daughter in Rochester. When none were to be found, they moved to Chicago, where a family friend found positions for both Walter and Lili in his hotels. Although their English was poor, they worked in the hotel, Lili as a maid and Walter as a package boy. Both did odd jobs to make more money. Lucille recalls the horrible little apartment her family first lived in upon arriving in Chicago. She was happy they moved before she rejoined them.

Walter and Lili quickly became involved in the community, helping to found a synagogue. The Wollmans became good friends with the new rabbi, Mr. Wolf. Lucille remembers meeting Rabbi Wolf and asking her mother, "Who is this cute old man?" He mother replied that he was the new rabbi and that he also had a cute son. Lucille, however, stated that she was not interested in Rabbi Wolf's son. A few years later, he became her husband.

Lucille followed in the medical footsteps of Dr. Levy. She completed nurse's training in 1946 and began working at Levy's old hospital, Michael Reese. After marrying Rabbi Wolf's son, Henry, the couple had two sons. Reflecting on her life, Lucille says the closeness of family is what matters most.