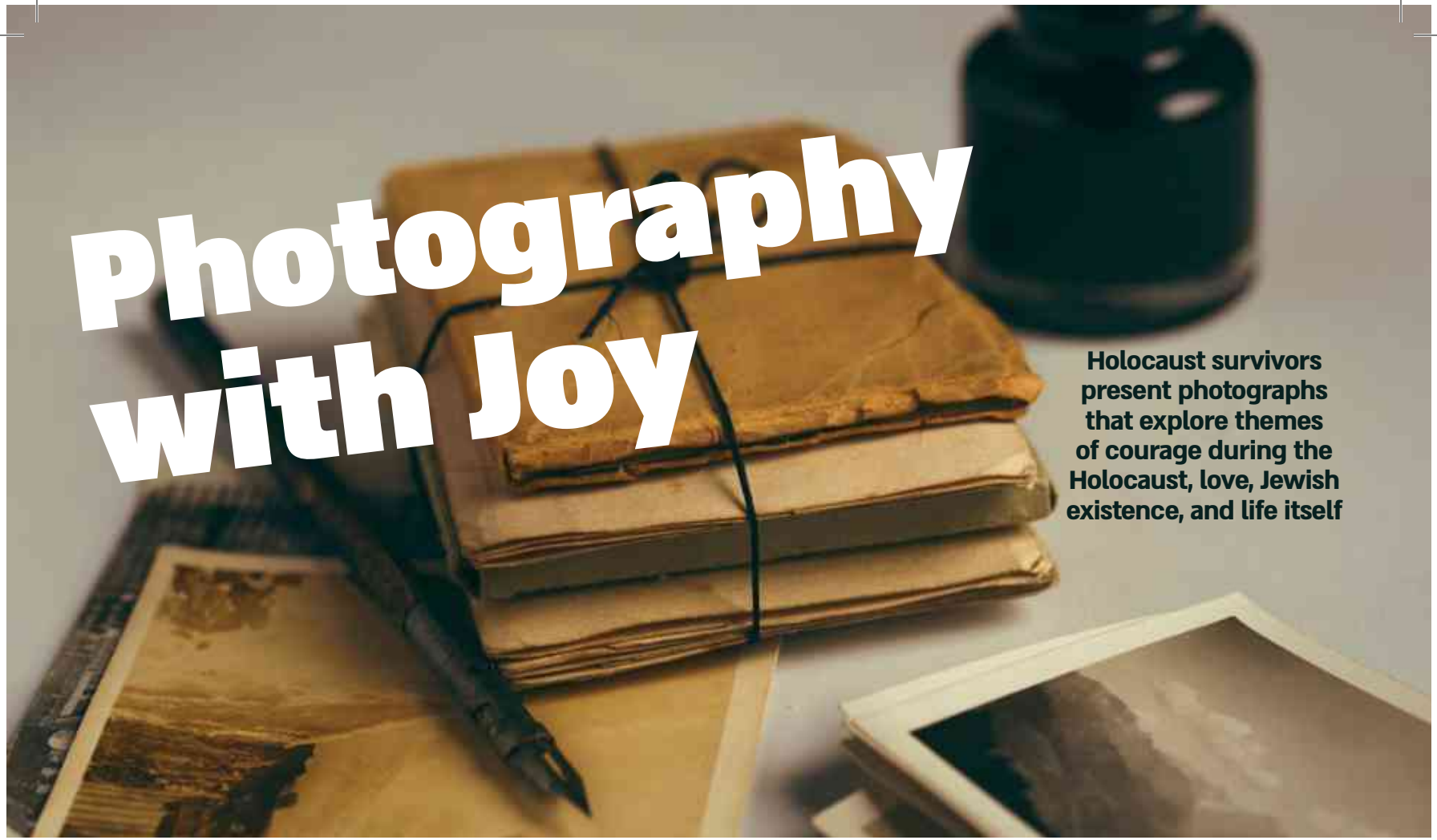
Photography with Joy

Holocaust survivors present photographs that explore themes of courage during the Holocaust, love, Jewish existence, and life itself



UJA Federation of New York

JDC | JDC Israel Eshel 50
Touching Lives, Transforming Communities

Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ

The photographs and accompanying stories in this book are the products of “Photography with Joy” (Tzilum Begil) – a JDC ESHEL program that utilizes photography as a therapeutic tool for Holocaust survivors to cope with the traumas of their past and share their stories.

These men and woman – survivors of one of the darkest chapters in Jewish history - embarked on a creative journey in which they explored their stories and brought them into fascinating visual expression through images from their lives today.

Some of the survivors chose to document defining moments of their lives by recreating scenes and photographing them.

Others used their camera to catch critical moments that connected them to emotional experiences from their past. Some chose still life photography as a means to express the ineffable.

These images are expressions of longing, bravery, coping mechanisms, loneliness intertwined with courage, fear mixed with hope, and overall, a strong will to live.

As of 2019, the Photography with Joy program has been run 44 times throughout Israel, impacting 510 participating survivors, and tens of thousands of others who have visited the exhibitions and borne witness to the survivors’ experiences.

Exhibitions have been held throughout Israel, including at the Knesset, and the exhibition has been translated into English and hosted in the Unites States and at the House of Lords in England.

Should you be interested in hosting an exhibition, running a course for survivors in your community, funding a Photography with Joy course for survivors in Israel, or learning more about JDC ESHEL programs for Holocaust survivors in Israel, please go to:

www.Eshelnet.org.il/en or email MarcC@jdc.org

Born: 1938

Birthplace: Sophia, Bulgaria

Aliya: 1948

Family: 3 children, 10 grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren

Rachel (Shelly) Heilbrun

Rachel's father fought with the partisans against the Nazis. Her mother and her two daughters, Rachel and Luna (6 and 7 at the time) remained in Sophia, and were forced to wear a yellow star. When their mother was taken to forced labor in the city of Plovdiv, the girls hid in a stable in the town. Their home in Sophia was destroyed by bombing.

I Had No Childhood

For two years I hid in a stable. Behind the stable was a vegetable garden; behind that was a bakery that sent its aromas to my empty stomach. A little further on, a church stuck out. Mother hid us in the stable and disappeared. We did not know if she would return. I lived with my sister in a room made of bricks with three horses and one trough. We slept on straw, and drank water with the horses. We ate potato peels and stale bread that the stable owner – a toothless old woman – could not chew. A shower was a distant dream and pretty soon we were covered in lice. For weeks and months I played with the thousands of lice that moved in convoys on my body and my hair. I caught them and crushed them, so I would not itch so much. It was a game that took my mind off the hunger.

The girl with black curls and the happy smile remained in Sophia. In the stable in Plovdiv, my eyes were wet from crying, wishing my mother would return already. But my mother did not return. My sister Luna and I understood that we were alone in the world. We had to take care of ourselves. Once a day, for half an hour, we went out to scavenge for food in the garbage cans. If we were lucky, we found some leftover flour riddled with worms. We wet the flour with water and ate the dough in a corner of the stable.

When the church bells bonged continuously I was happy. I ran to the funeral procession in rags and with a bloated stomach. If I was not chased off I got a sweet biscuit. I was also glad of weddings – in the churchyard sweets and money were thrown at the couple and I, a little Jewish girl whose life was worthless, went out to gather money and sweets from the floor. It was risky but I was ruled by hunger.

The girl I was not, in the childhood I did not have, lives within me and demands to come out.

Even now. The dolls I did not have sleep in my bed with me. For my last birthday, I received a wooly teddy bear from my granddaughters. It sleeps beside me, and in my dreams, I am a happy child in a room filled with toys.

Reuven Robert Fisherman

In 1943 they began arresting Danish Jews, most of whom escaped to Sweden. Reuven's father and two older brothers joined the Danish underground. His mother and the four youngest children (age 5–15) were sent to Theresienstadt ghetto, where they stayed for 18 months. They didn't know of the secret deal between Denmark and Germany, according to which Danish Jews would not be sent to the crematoria. A few days before liberation they were sent to Sweden. Here they were informed that Reuven's father and brothers had drowned in the sea while trying to escape to Sweden.

Born: 1928

Birthplace: Copenhagen, Denmark

Aliya: 1972

Family: Married, 2 daughters, 8 grandchildren, 2 great-granddaughters

Man Has No Advantage Over Animals

When the Nazis came to take us from our home in Copenhagen we were proud Danish Jews with equal rights. Some two hundred Jews were loaded onto a German ship. Among them my mother, me – the oldest (fifteen), and my three younger siblings. My father and older brothers remained in Copenhagen. I felt a heavy responsibility on my shoulders. We arrived on German soil and from the ship we were taken directly to filthy cattle cars. Some fifty people in each cabin with a small window above. It was the beginning of October 1943, very cold. So crowded, not enough room for everyone to sit and the journey does not end. Where are we being taken?

A terrible stench of urine and excrement fills the car. It is hard for people not to relieve themselves. One woman who tried to maintain her dignity finished the tea in her thermos and used it as a toilet. Others used the straw prepared for the animals who had been transported in the car before us. Suddenly we stop. The doors are opened, they are shouting at us to get down. We all relieve ourselves in the field, close together, men and women, like a herd of beasts. The Germans watch over us with weapons, mocking us. Humiliating us. They take us back to the cars, traveling on the tracks continuously day after day on our way to an unknown destination.

Within four days, the time it takes to travel to Theresienstadt, we became faceless people whose lives are as worthless as dust. Each day another layer of human dignity and control over our lives is peeled away.

"For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that man hath no pre-eminence above a beast; for all is vanity." (Ecclesiastes 3, 19)

Born: 1939

Birthplace: Kezmerok, Czechoslovakia

Aliya: 1947 - from Marseilles, France on board the S.S. Providence

Family: Married to Dina, 3 children, 8 grandchildren, 2 great-grandchildren

Arie Shapira

In 1944, the Nazis began sending transports of Czechoslovakian Jews to concentration camps in Poland. Despite attempts to escape, Arie and his extended family were caught and sent to the camps. When the allies liberated the camps in 1945, Arie and his mother returned to Spisska Nova Ves, Czechoslovakia and then immigrated to Israel. Later on, Arie married Dina.

Life in the Palm of Your Hand

In 1944, my family was living in Spisska Nova Ves. The Germans were preparing lists of individuals to transport to the concentration camps. One way to postpone your transport was to work in a factory vital to the German army. My father quickly learned shoemaking skills and got a job in a shoemaking factory. The postponement of our transport was brief. Once again, our names appeared on the lists, and we were forced to flee and hide in villages. In time, the villagers became frightened and refused to hide us even for large sums of money.

The men decided to build a hut in the forest because the Germans were afraid to enter the forest due to the partisans. We managed to hide in the forests for a few months. Someone must have informed on us because the Germans came into the forest and caught us. We were sent by cattle car to Ravensbruck concentration camp. There they separated the men from the women and children. I will never forget this moment, because it was the last time I saw my father.

Some two months later, they sent us to the infamous Bergen-Belsen camp. There we suffered terrible hunger and disease. Each day, I would watch in horror as another corpse was dragged out of the bunks.

On April 15, 1945, the British liberated us. My four-year-old-sister contracted tuberculosis and did not survive. I do not know her burial place. My mother and I returned to Spisska Nova Ves where we learned that apart from my aunt, her husband and son, everyone else in my family had perished.

In 1947, we immigrated to Israel with false papers. My mother married a lovely man who warmly adopted me and insisted I keep my surname to continue the Shapira legacy. My mother gave birth to my brother and I had a family once again. In 1961, I married Dina and we raised our own family to continue the Shapira legacy. Today we are very happy great-grandparents.

Avi (Robert) Parles

Born: 1937

Birthplace: Vienna, Austria

Aliya: 1947

Family: Widower, 2 children, 6 grandchildren

In June 1929, Avi escaped with his mother from Austria to Belgium. They chose to be deported in exchange for renouncing their Austrian citizenship. His father did not leave with them and in 1939 they lost all trace of him. Avi and his mother escaped to Brussels and from there to France. However, the Nazis conquered France and in 1942, at the age of five, Avi and his mother were sent to Auschwitz where his mother was murdered.

Where are you going?

I sat with my mother on a stone seat in the stadium. Tens of thousands of Jews had arrived at this camp to be sent east, to Auschwitz. My mother hugged me and said, "Son, do not forget three things: your name, my name, and your language."

The next day we boarded a train. I was five and my mother said we were going for a train ride. On September 11, 1942, Transport #31 left Drancy camp for Auschwitz. I was going wild with the children in the crowded car and every so often my mother would reprimand me for making too much noise.

Many hours passed until the train stopped. My friend, Hilda, who was fourteen, asked if she could climb on my mother to see why the train had stopped. The small window had no glass, only barbed wire strung across it. Hilda said she saw fields and then she became silent. She moved the barbed wire aside and jumped out into the field. "Throw Robert down", she shouted.

My mother had thirty seconds to decide. She knew two things, where the train was going and that she would never see me again. She quickly kissed me and threw my thin body through the small window. I landed on the ground and Hilda pulled me into the bushes.

The train disappeared into the horizon. I thought my mother had thrown me out because she was angry with me for making a noise, otherwise why would she have thrown me from a train?

I began to cry.

Born: 1939

Birthplace: Chernivtsi Bukovina, Romania

Aliya: 1964, on board the Moledet

Family: Widow, 2 sons, 5 grandchildren

Miryam Davidson

Deprived Childhood

I threw away my childhood. I no longer wanted it, it was no good. Yet it returned to me. I gave my childhood to anyone who may have needed it, but no one wanted it, and I had to take it back.

The past stands before me, the Holocaust is in my soul and my memories. True… dozens of years have passed since then, yet my entire past continues to flash by relentlessly, every day, all my life. And so we, my childhood and I, cannot be rid of each other. The years have scoured my face with marks of grief and nights of suffering in which I cannot sleep.

Yes, it is me, the girl with the long braids. My past hurts, my fate hurts. I hold an old wooden box, full of faded photographs; all the memories are hidden within. I am thrown back to those days, I see myself before me. Scenes from the past follow me, through all of my years. I am a young girl, dressed in a thin dress, in the harsh winter of 1941, walking on the frozen snow - in my hand, a doll. Who can understand a Holocaust child? No one – no one!

Days without food or drink, nights without sleep on a cold floor, bare feet frozen and aching. A journey in a cattle car – travelling for endless hours, terribly crowded – not knowing where or why. Tears, screams, suffocation and humiliation, crushing, and no air to breathe. This is a childhood that has only fear, and the fear is unforgettable. Unforgettable – and will never be forgotten!

A childhood without toys and games, a childhood without friends, without smelling a flower, planting a shrub or a tree, no playing with dolls, no fairytales, no rifling through children's books, reciting poems, or dancing. A childhood without knowing what holidays are, without celebrating birthdays, speaking quietly, quietly, or not speaking at all. My childhood was taken, my childhood was stolen, a chapter of my life was robbed from me and erased. The years pass, and another. The Nazi oppressor has left me a memento – for generations.

I hid my secrets in my heart. Today I close my tearful eyes, and sail into the distance again, remembering my lost childhood in Transylvania.

You tell me – tell me, what kind of childhood was it?

I can testify – it was a deprived childhood.


למה?

Born: 1934

Birthplace: Sosnowice, Poland

Aliya: 1957, sailed to Israel on the Sante Fe

Family: One daughter, 2 grandchildren

Shlomo Torbiner

From age 6 to 9, Shlomo hid with his family in a pit in the Soproniak family's barn for the duration of the war. The Soproniak family were ultimately recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations.

The Pit

In 1941, when the Nazis began to force Jews into the ghetto, Father decided to escape. He made an escape plan ahead of time to save the entire extended family – four children and seven adults.

Father's friend, Kostak Soproniak, dug a pit in the barn of his house – a meter and a half deep and three meters wide. In this tiny Ukrainian village, every farmer knew what his neighbor was cooking for lunch – and in the Soproniak barn, 11 Jews were hiding.

We sat there, crowded and silent, praying that no one would betray us. The pit was covered with thick boards, and the two cows and three pigs walked over them. Just one small opening let in air so that we could breathe.

Every day, Kostak's wife, Maria, came into the barn carrying a bucket of slop to feed the pigs. Next to the pail, she placed a bit of milk, potatoes, and scraps of bread. On her way out, she took the pail we used as a bathroom.

Kostak and Maria Soproniak gave us food and shelter for three years, until the end of the war.

In 1990, when our request to grant them the title of Righteous Among the Nations was approved, I discovered that they were no longer alive.

I found out where they were buried and did not rest until the mayor of the town agreed to accept the award on their behalf.

I will never stop thanking them as long as I live.

Born: 1932

Birthplace: Kosovo, Yugoslavia

Aliya: 1949, sailed to Israel on the Radnik 3

Family: 2 children, 5 grandchildren, 1 great-grandchild

Asher Avraham

Asher is a survivor of "The Lost Train", which left the Bergen Belsen camp at the end of the war, headed for the gas chambers at Theresienstadt. The train was caught in the crossfire between German and Soviet forces. During the two weeks of that terrible train journey, the people received no food or water; many of those aboard perished.

The Lost Train

It was April 1945 - the Bergen Belsen camp. I was 12 years old, emaciated, indifferent to fear, indifferent to death, I just wanted something – anything – to stave off my hunger.

The war is about to end, but we did not know that.

They cram us into a cattle car, the last death transport.

For two weeks, we ride the rails, dozens of people packed in like sardines. A hopeless trip to nowhere – to anywhere.

Every day people die of starvation, thirst, cholera, and typhus. We push the bodies to the side of the car, and strip off anything of value that is left. The journey does not end, we just travel continuously day after day. No food. No water.

I have no idea where we are or where the train is going. Every once in a while, we hear airplanes and artillery. To me it makes no difference.

Suddenly we stop. The door of the railcar opens. Outside, there is a huge puddle of rainwater.

I jump out and run towards the water. Suddenly, I see tadpoles; quickly I catch them in my hands. I am so hungry.

The Nazis beat us with their rifles. It makes no difference. They shout: "Go back to the train!" Out of the corner of my eye, I see dead bodies thrown out of the train. It makes no difference.

Another day is over.

Clara Hershkowitz

Born: 1930

Birthplace: Teleneshty, Bessarabia (Moldova)

Aliya: 1948, sailed to Israel onboard the Pan Crescent, which was diverted to a DP camp in Cyprus

Family: Widowed, 3 children, 8 grandchildren, 5 great-grandchildren

Go with God

Winter of 1941, in Transnistria, Ukraine. I am in the Vasdowca death camp. My family was killed a few weeks earlier in a bombing that caught us on our escape route from Romania to Russia. 11 years old, freezing and frail. Alone in the world. Around me – piles of human beings, some dead, some dying and indifferent to their fate. Hunger and cold compelled me to escape the death camp. I seized the opportunity when the guards were talking to each other, and crept out of the main gate. I walked in the snow to the nearby village, my feet wrapped in rags. There, I went from house to house, knocking on the doors, begging for a crust of bread.

"Go with God!" people whispered through closed doors, but drove me away. Night was falling, and I had nearly come to the last house in the village. My fear of sleeping outside and freezing to death pushed me to keep trying until finally, a young woman named Prusia opened her door. Hiding behind her skirts were three young children. She let me in and warm up by the fire, and offered me a plate of chicken and potatoes. A miracle happened. I used the few Russian words I knew to thank Prusia, and in tears, I begged her to let me sleep there that night. It was not simple. Her husband, a soldier in the Soviet Army, was far away and she had to take care of her children on her own. The Germans are searching, killing those who harbor Jews. I slept there that night and the following nights. Prusia was too kind to throw me to the cold and the terror that were outside. In exchange, I did everything I could to help with the housework. I milked the cows, fed the chickens, cleaned the barn, and did anything else I could in the house and in the fields.

One time, when Prusia asked her eldest daughter, Mila (who was my age), to fetch a pail of water from the well, the girl looked at me and muttered "Let the Zhydovka (dirty Jewess) bring it." I got up and picked up the pail, determined to be nice and not anger anyone in the house. "Sit down!" Prusia commanded me with a stern face, and then turned to her daughter and said, "In my house, we do not use the word 'Zhydovka'. We are all human beings," and hit her with a corn stalk. Afterwards, we became good friends, Mila and I.

Prusia, a Russian woman, simple and humane, was my guardian angel in the wretched years of the war. She saved my life!

Born: 1943

Birthplace: Krilvitzia, a refugee camp in Yugoslavia

Aliya: 1948

Family: 2 children, 5 grandchildren

Nechama Ben Ari

When she was nine months old, a revolt broke out in the camp and the prisoners escaped. With her grandmother, Nechama lived in the forest until the end of the war. At the age of two, she was reunited with her parents.

The World into which I was Born

Germany conquered Yugoslavia in nine short days in April 1941. Croatian friends turned into Ustasas (supporters of the fascist Ustasa regime) and even before receiving orders, they were evicting Jews from their homes and imprisoning them in camps on the outskirts of the city.

My parents and grandmother managed to obtain forged documents bearing Christian names and headed towards Area B, which was under Italian rule. They heard the Italians were not murdering Jews.

They went to Krilvitzia, which had been a holiday resort before the war and was turned into a refugee camp during the war.

Hard to believe, but, despite the conditions in the camp, my mother became pregnant. On a cold and snowy day in 1943, I came into the world, surrounded by people who were ill and dying from typhus.

My mother had enough milk to nurse me and another baby who was thirteen days younger than me.

My “milk brother” and I were the only infants in the camp and, against all odds, we survived, despite the reality into which we were born.

We survived, made aliya to Israel, and built a home here.

Yaffa Orbach

Born: 1935

Birthplace:
Chernovitz, Romania

Aliya: 1948

Family: Widow,
2 daughters, 6
grandchildren

The Jews from Chernovitz were exiled to Transnistria with the Nazi occupation in 1941. During that time, Yaffa's mother contracted typhus and was shot to death. Yaffa (5) and her brother (11) remained with their father. When the region was conquered by the Russians, their father was exiled to Siberia and the children were sent to an orphanage. The children returned to Chernovitz after three years, emigrating to Israel as part of the Youth Aliya.

Passover Eve. My Aunt Mali is dressed in typical Tyrolean costume and is photographed with the extended family on her farm. Apart from Aunt Mali, my mother's sister, are also Aunt Ella, my grandmother Hannah and other family members, all sophisticated and elegant. The villagers, my Aunt Mali's "good" neighbors in their peasant dress, are in striking contrast. The picture was found in our vandalized home, after the war, creased along its length and breadth. Some of those in the picture did not survive the Holocaust. I am two years old, sitting in the front. Psychologists say that at this age, memory is sensory. Here I am, waking up in a village home before Passover with the smell of whitewash flooding my nostrils. An immense basket sits in the corner, in it a bottle full of borscht – a sour soup made before Passover. The ducks quack and the chickens cluck back. My first sensory memory is so pastoral, the last gathering of a warm, loving family.

When the war broke out, the smiling villagers – my Aunt Mali's "good" neighbors – murdered her and her family and raided the farm. Some of those photographed survived the Holocaust - I am one of them.

For dozens of years I was silent, I did not speak about what happened to me during the Holocaust. I wanted to give my daughters a stable home and a happy family, and at times I also thought it was all a figment of my imagination. At the age of eighty the terror burst out, like lava from a volcano. The suppressed memories wanted to come out and relate what happened to that little girl who survived the Holocaust and established a home and family – despite her bleak past. After writing my book I realized that my daughters, my sons-in-law and my grandchildren are testimony to the fact that I have no need to search for roots in the country of my birth. I am deeply rooted in this country.

Born: 1932

Birthplace: Moldova, Romania

Aliya: 1945

Family: Widow, 2 children, 5 grandchildren, 9 great-grandchildren

Yehudit Friedman

At the outbreak of war Yehudit's father, who was a Russian citizen, was taken to a work camp and she did not see him again until 1949. Yehudit's mother and her four young children (3, 5, 6, and 7) were taken to Transnistria where her mother and two youngest children died of hunger and diseases. Yehudit and her brother were the only survivors.

In the beginning, I did not understand what was going on around me. I was only seven with a young mother and my three younger siblings. We boarded boats to Transnistria and it all seemed like a game to me. I was amazed when the moveable bridge opened like a gate and our boat passed through on the water, but when we arrived at a large, castle-like structure surrounded by a high fence, and a German pushed us through the gate, I thought I was in a bad dream. My mother refused to enter, she had a bad feeling. The evil German told her, "If you run, I will shoot the children." My mother entered, submissive, and we entered with her.

It was a huge hall with no bathrooms. Hundreds of Jews arrived there and pretty soon excrement was everywhere. It was hot and we were not given food or water. I was thirsty and hungry. I saw people lying motionless, people said they were dead – from hunger or suffocation. I thought I would soon awaken from this bad dream. Luckily my mother brought some rusks and a flask of water in her sack. Many soldiers with guns went around shouting. I became accustomed to their noise, a scary buzzing that did not stop. I imagined it did not exist.

One night the usual noise made by the soldiers stopped and the sudden silence shouted in our ears. Small, curious children went out to the yard, me among them. We saw soldiers lying on the ground with empty bottles near them. They were fast asleep.

We looked at each other, here is an opportunity. We grabbed any article we could dig with, using our fingers as well. We dug a burrow under the tall fence, enough to crawl through. My mother, my three younger siblings and lastly me, went through the tunnel to the other side, to the city of Mogilev.

The soldiers were still asleep.

Born: 1928

Birthplace: Lantzot, Poland

Aliya: 1944 from Cadiz, Spain

Family: Married, 3 children, 3 grandchildren

Yaakov Fishler

1928-1939 (Czechoslovakia): I grew up in a bourgeoisie home, wealthy and assimilated, in the German part (Sudetenland) of Czechoslovakia. When the Germans entered Sudetenland, we escaped to Prague and waited for immigration papers to Australia. When these were delayed, my brother and I (7 and 10) were sent to my cousin in Toulouse, France. My parents remained behind and that was the last time I saw my father. When Czechoslovakia was invaded, my parents escaped to Poland, trying to get to Romania from there. At this stage my father was arrested by the Germans and murdered. My mother survived by using a false Christian identity until the end of the war.

1939 – 1942 (France): I easily adapted as a youth in school. In 1939 my cousin's husband (she was pregnant at the time) was drafted and I, a boy of 12, became the man of the house. That was the end of my childhood.

When the persecution of foreign Jews began, my brother and I were hidden by the underground in the dormitory of a Catholic friary. The strict regime made it difficult for me to adjust.

1943 (Spain): When the persecution worsened, our family tried to cross the border to Spain through the Pyrenees. We were caught at the border by the Spaniards. The whole family was arrested and taken to prison, while I was sent to an orphanage alone. The Joint Distribution Committee managed to obtain our release and transfer us to Barcelona, where we received food. There were no Germans, there was light, there was no curfew and no blackout!

1944 (Palestine): At the end of 1943 we immigrated to Palestine on a Portuguese ship intended to return foreign citizens and war wounded from the East to Europe.

We arrived at the port of Haifa in February 1944, and from there we were taken to the Ahava Institute in Kiryat Biyalik as part of Youth Aliya.

Here we were free for the first time and we began to lay down loving roots.

Born: 1936

Birthplace: Tunis, Tunisia

Aliya: 1948

Family: Widow, 3 children, 8 grandchildren

Dina Kiva

The Germans entered the capital city, Tunis, in 1944. Dina's family lived in the south of Tunisia, in the town of Gafsa, suffering daily air raids. Her father was drafted into the allied army because he was a French citizen.

This Is What War Looks Like

The war reached Tunisia. The capital city Tunis was captured and the Germans advanced south in the direction of our town. Air raids began. I attended first grade in the French school every day.

One teacher who had escaped from France told us that the Germans were murdering Jews in Europe. We thought she had gone mad. Every night there were bombings. German airplanes whistled past, over our houses.

One night my mother snatched me from bed. She gripped me in one hand and my little sister in the other. My older sister ran next to her. We all ran to the trench in the yard. Mother threw us in and told us to shield our heads. Someone threw blankets over us for our protection. I was paralyzed by fear.

The move from the sweet dream to the terrible noise, the run through the yard, flames of fire in the sky, flying shards.

Mother says this is what war looks like.

And then mother decides we will escape to Algiers. She is strong and takes care of everything. Buses full of French people leave the police station. We also have French passports but they do not let us board the busses, they say we are Jews.

Mother does not give up, she is fighting for our lives. The Germans are already in the city and beginning to round up Jews.

A mother and three young girls board the last bus.

Mother saved our lives.

Born: 1926

Birthplace: Michelin, Romania

Aliya: 1949

Family: Widow, 2 children, 4 grandchildren

Gita Baruch

In 1939 Gita's family (parents and five children, ages 8–15) was exiled from Romania to a labor camp in Transnistria, Ukraine. Twelve-year-old Gita and her grandmother remained in the Butushan ghetto, Romania. None of the family survived apart from Gita, her brother and sister. Gita's brother was later killed in Israel's War of Independence.

In the Bread Line

The family decided I would remain with my grandmother because I was her favorite granddaughter. My grandmother and I were privileged – we remained in the Jewish ghetto in Butushan. It was the privilege of wealthy Jews who paid the authorities to stay in Romania. The others were exiled to terrible Transnistria. Each day I cried, missing mother and father and my five siblings, I was afraid they would die. My grandmother comforted me and said, "At least there will be someone to light a candle in their memory, you will light it".

Her words caused me to burst out crying again. I looked at the yellow star my grandmother sewed on my dress. She comforted me again and said, "Soon the line for bread will open, bring us warm, fresh bread." I hated waiting in line. Every day an hour was allocated to buy bread and a long line of Jews straggled all the way to the end of the street. Everyone was pushing me, the thin little girl.

German and Romanian gendarmes maintained order with drawn rifles. The baker looked at me kindly and said, "In a moment, girl, you will receive bread," and handed me two loaves. The money I had was enough for one loaf but I received two. I was so happy, grandmother would also be happy. The warm bread burned my skin, but it was a good pain. A Romanian gendarme struck me on the shoulder with the butt of his rifle and terrible pain gripped me. The loaves fell to the ground. He crushed one loaf before my eyes. I grabbed the second and ran away. When I got to my grandmother I cried with pain, fear, insult.

"I will not go there again!" I shouted.

My grandmother wrapped a towel around my shoulder and arm. We had no other medicine.

A bone still protrudes from my shoulder, a reminder of those times.

Moshe Gal

Born: 1936

Birthplace: Lublin, Poland

Aliya: 1948, on the ship Exodus

Family: Married, 2 daughters, 8 grandchildren and one great-grandchild

Come, Mother

I dream a lot. Every night when I go to sleep I ask for a dream, the same dream for dozens of years – I want my mother. I was three and a half when we parted – Mother did not return. The war memories were thoroughly repressed, and with them, the memories of Mother.

One photograph remains, hanging over my bed, and countless open questions: Who are you, Mother? Did you love me? Were you happy I was born? Did you hug, kiss, stroke me? What did your food taste like? I did not ask those who survived, not my father or your sister, and they did not say anything because you had to survive and not collapse under the weight of the stories.

I did not collapse. I was strong, I worked, I married, I raised a family and built a home to be proud of. The years go by, I become older but my longings do not diminish. I want a mother's hug, a good word, a kiss, just one time. A small taste of my mother. I want.

And once, when I was seventy, the dream came. In my dream were large, rectangular buildings, made of red brick, and in their shade, in the wide street, a woman is walking. Her back is familiar to me, I run after her, Mother, Mother! We will finally meet, I will see your face, you will hug me, and I will kiss you. Come on, mother, turn around to me already.

She turns her face, and I am terrified, her face is empty, the face of a skeleton. The scent of death rises from her and she says, "I am no longer here, let me be!"

I cannot let you be, Mother.

I continue to ask for you in my dreams.


SNIADANIA
KOLACJE
KAZIMIERZ 1937

Rivka Shimon

Born: 1933

Birthplace: Sa'ardahi, Czechoslovakia

Aliya: 1940

Family: Widow, 5 children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren

Following the Vienna arbitration of 1938, the region where Rivka and her family lived was handed over to Hungary. The family (parents and seven children, ages 1-17) was arrested and taken to jail in Budapest due to her father not having Hungarian citizenship. A few months later they were transferred to a camp in Budapest, where converted Jews and those without Hungarian citizenship were held. The family remained in the camp for two years, until they received certificates for Palestine in March 1940.

If God Is Willing

The Hungarians – who were as bad as the Germans – gave mother only a few hours to leave, go home and pack all our belongings. Mother packed alone, my father and older brother were in prison and could not help. In the lift she placed the trousseaus she had prepared for my two older sisters who had remained in the camp. My three younger sisters and I were in the children's home in the forest and did not know anything about our family winning the lottery – the lottery of life. Mother prepared an organized list of contents, not knowing that the Hungarians would not even bother to place the lift on the ship taking us to Palestine.

"If God is willing, He can help even through a small opening", my mother said once, and here we had a miracle. It happened in 1940, before Hungary was occupied by the Germans. A lawyer went in and out of the camp in Budapest, making arrangements for the Jews. Mother turned to him, "When will you arrange something for us also?" He answered that he already had. Mother asked him, "Is it nice to make fun of a woman of my age and situation?" and the lawyer replied, "You have won the lottery of life. I have three certificates for immigration to Palestine. Only three Jewish families who arrived from Czechoslovakia received them, and you are one of them".

We boarded an elegant ship from Constantza port in Romania – the last civilian ship to leave there. We parted from my beloved grandfather. We would never see him again. "Be good and religious in return for the great miracle granted to you," wrote my grandfather on the last postcard he sent us through the Red Cross. Mother sent a happy, encouraging postcard back: "Oranges, apples, and nuts abound in the Holy Land". I do not know if grandfather managed to read that postcard.

Born: 1937

Birthplace: Falticeni, Romania

Aliya: 1949

Family: Widower, 2 children, 2 grandchildren

Efraim Zvaltover

When the pogroms began in the Romanian city of Iasi, Efraim's family escaped to the town of Chernovitz in the Bukovina region that was occupied by the Russians. They lived there in tolerable conditions until the area was captured by the Germans. His father was drafted to the Russian army. Efraim's mother and both children (4 and 6) were sent to a labor camp in Transnistria, where they lived in harsh conditions until the end of the war. His brother died of disease in Transnistria, while both parents and son were united after the war.

On the Border

The war has ended. My mother and I are returning to Romania and beginning all over again, without my father who remained in the Russian army, and without my older brother who died in the labor camp in Transnistria.

One morning a telegram arrived from my father's sister. "Your husband is with me in Chernovitz, the Russians are not letting him leave for Romania, come and get him!" My mother and I were excited. That day we set out in our rags with the coins my mother managed to scrape together for the trip. We met at the border. My father was in Russian army uniform, with decorations covering his chest. I did not know this man – I was two when we separated, but I wanted someone to call father.

Mother and father gazed at one another with loving eyes and their hearts broke. The Russians were not letting father cross the border and unite with us. Father was Russian, and if that was not enough, he had recently wed another woman because he was certain we had all perished in the war. In a last attempt to release her husband from that marriage my mother offered the last of her savings. I did not stop crying. With blue eyes, I begged the Russian officer at the border station, "I want my father, give me back my father." The officer looked at me, a gaunt child, dressed in rags, with bare and dirty feet. He took pity on me. With a quick motion he signed the certificate, allowing father to cross the border and unite with us.

My father came towards me, his arms outstretched for a hug. Again I burst out sobbing. I do not want him to hug me, I do not know him. He is a stranger to me.

Birgitta Fisherman

Born: 1932

Birthplace: Copenhagen, Denmark

Aliya: 1972

Family: Married, 2 daughters, 8 grandchildren, 2 great-granddaughters

The German's plan to round up the Jews of Denmark and send them to death camps was leaked to the Jewish community. The Jews went into hiding, hidden by Danish friends, while the Danish underground – under the Germans' noses – smuggled 7,000 Jews to neutral Sweden in fishing boats. Birgitta's family, parents and three daughters (18 months, 11, 14) escaped to Sweden in 1943 and were saved.

My Savior

During the war, in 1943, we escaped from Denmark to Sweden. We lived ordinary lives in Sweden, maybe not exactly ordinary but definitely safe. At the end of the war we returned to Denmark. I was an adolescent girl, independent and spirited, who wanted to devour life.

One summer after the war, a Jewish girlfriend and I went on a bicycle trip. We went from town to town, sleeping in boarding houses. My friend's parents thought this was a little too daring for 16-year-old girls and found a solution – they sent her little brother as chaperone. His presence did not deter us from initiating acquaintances with boys.

In one of the hostels we found the names of two Jewish boys in the guest book, travelling like us, and we followed them until we found them. One of them was Reuven, a good-looking red-head. The moment I saw him, I knew.

That summer the Jewish community organized a party for the youth. One of the boys asked me to dance. Reuven stood in the corner, and I signaled him with my eyes to come and save me. We danced together for the first time. I was seventeen, and he was twenty-one. Since then and for sixty-five years we have been dancing together and saving each other.


Youth Hostel

Aliza Krischer

Born: 1939

Birthplace: Radauti, Romania

Aliya: 1949

Family: Married, 4 children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren

At the age of 18 months, Aliza was exiled with her mother, grandparents and aunt to a labor camp in the Ukraine, near the city of Mogilev. They were kept there for four years in conditions of extreme hunger and disease. Her father was conscripted to forced labor and sent to a prisoner camp in the Urals when Ukraine was captured by the Russians. At the end of the war they returned to their town to discover that their house had been burned by anti-Semites and all its grand contents had been looted.

Wild Animal

Many sick and starving dogs were brought into the camp. The Germans did it deliberately, as another way to exterminate Jews. I cannot forget the bite. I was four. A rabid, starved wolfhound wanted to devour me. I will never forget the wild look in his eyes, his height and the leap he took at me until his jaws locked on my arm.

The shoemaker saved me. He knew me, we had been exiled here from the same town. He raised the iron mold in the shape of a shoe on which he processed soles and leather and quickly threw it at the wild animal. It ran off and I screamed. I cried terribly. The blood dripped from my arm, creating a pool around which pretty, delicate ladybugs buzzed. A few moments earlier I had gathered them in the desolate yard. I was happy with them and we played together.

It was clear I would die of rabies if no vaccine was found. But where can you get vaccines in a camp? My mother was a delicate woman but my aunt was strong and brave. She loaded me onto her back and escaped under the camp fences to the city, where she turned to a Ukrainian doctor. The doctor had one last kit of a vaccine against rabies. She refused to waste it on Jews. My aunt opened a secret pocket in her clothing and extracted all of my mother's jewels. Only then did the doctor agree to vaccinate the Jewish baby.

And here is another memory that my body still remembers – a huge syringe and a thick needle piercing my stomach. Seven or eight injections. The medicine spreads through my swollen stomach. I feel searing pain, I am scared to death and screaming desperately. Over seventy years have gone by since then, but my terrified screams still echo in my ears.

Ruth Bauman

Born: 1933

Birthplace: Oswiecim, Poland

Aliya: 1949

Family: Widow, 2 children, 9 grandchildren

When the Germans entered Poland, Ruth's mother, the two girls and a baby (1, 6 and 11) escaped to the Ukraine, where they hid in a cowshed for a few months. Her brother and father had escaped previously. When the Germans entered the Ukraine they escaped to the forests, where they met their father and brother. They were caught by the Germans. The mother and daughters managed to escape to Russia, where they were caught and deported to Siberia. When Russia entered the war, they were liberated from the labor camps in Siberia and escaped to Uzbekistan, where they lived until the end of the war.

Good Eyes

Only yesterday we met with my father and my older brother, after long months of running and hiding in the Ukrainian forests. We did not want to be separated, only to be together, all the time. We wandered around the market, parents and four children. We were overjoyed. Suddenly many Germans came with cars. They closed off the market and began looking for 'Jude', and the Ukrainians were enthusiastically helping them. We were caught. We were lined up in rows of six and ordered to stand at attention. It was winter and cold. Whoever sat down or moved was shot. Father exchanged a few words with my older brother and two shots rang out. My father and brother fell and their blood made the snow red. I was paralyzed with fear. Mother was a hero. She glanced at her husband and son who were no longer alive and continued to hug Moishe'leh, my baby brother. He was already frozen and dead, but mother could not part with him. A German officer accompanied by a dog and two Ukrainian gendarmes passed through the rows and kept an eye on us. Mother looked the German in the eye and decided, he has good eyes! "Let me go, you are a good man," she whispered to his eyes in her good German. Every time he and the dog passed by her, she repeated her plea, again and again, in her fluent German: "You have good eyes, let me go." Children fell near us, old people collapsed and died. Darkness fell and the train still did not arrive. And mother continued to address the German officer's heart in her cultured German. And then the miracle happened. The German gave the Ukrainian gendarmes cigarettes and joined them for a cigarette break. As he went off he whispered to Mother, "Frau, laufen sie – Madam, run!" Mother jumped out of the row followed by my 11-year-old sister and by 6-year-old me. She was still holding Moishe'leh in her arms. We escaped in the dark towards the forests. Screams still echo in my ears.

Born: 1928

Birthplace: Antwerp, Belgium

Aliya: 1951

Family: Married, 2 children, 6 grandchildren, 3 great-grandchildren

Moshe Weitzman

On May 10, 1940, the German army invaded Belgium. The country surrendered after two days. Moshe's family escaped to France – his father, mother, aunt, 11-year-old Moshe and his 18-month old sister. His father was taken to Drancy camp in France, and from there to Majdanek. His mother was taken to a concentration camp in the Pyrenees and miraculously survived.

The Cousin from Sweden

Thanks to good people who endangered their lives, I remained alive.

Thanks to simple, people-loving Christians, my Holocaust story is not 'Holocaust-like'.

Thanks to humane French people, who were raised on the sanctity of life, while risking their own lives, my survival story is not dramatic.

Thanks to the mayor of Montelesson, who liked and employed my father as a tailor, we had money to buy food to eat.

Thanks to the farmer who employed me as a youth on his farm, I could financially support my aunt and my sister after my parents were taken to the camps.

Thanks to that same farmer, I escaped from the French gendarmes who searched for me after I turned 14.

Thanks to our cousin from Sweden who sent a letter to the Red Cross through the mayor of Montelesson, my mother was released from the labor camp and her life was saved.

Good people were not able to help when my father was taken to the Drancy camp and from there to the crematoria in Majdanek.

Born: 1939

Birthplace: Radauti, Romania

Aliya: 1949

Family: Married, 4 children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren

Moshe Frohlich

In May 1943, when he was 15 years old, Moshe was drafted into the Hungarian workforce and forced to perform manual labor for the Hungarian army. His parents and younger brother were sent to Auschwitz concentration camp, never to return.

The Marvelous Story of Joske Hoffheimer

In my brigade, there were some 200 Jews, all at the right age for army service. I was one of the younger ones in the bunch. I was only 15. I had learned carpentry and the Hungarian army needed robust laborers. Joske Hoffheimer was our brigade commander, a senior Hungarian officer. He had a white horse and a team of soldiers. He was a brave man but more than that – a humane one. He was game for any trick that would save our lives and was even willing to risk his own.

When we arrived at Budapest, the war was nearing its end. Intense shelling by tanks and airplanes bombarded the city. Our job was to build anti-tank ditches. We dug with pickaxes. We repaired roads and bridges and knew that as long as we were working our lives were relatively safe. Then it was our turn. The Germans decided to transfer us to Germany by train. Joske managed to find additional work for us, cleaning stables in the horseracing track in Budapest. We gained time. We waited for the Russians and Allies to enter. The borders closed and Joske said that now they could not load us onto trains. But the Germans did not give up. An order is an order.

They decided to murder us by shooting. Joske was replaced by a German officer and a firing squad stood before us. We waited for the end. Joske, who had become deputy commander, stood in front of the machine gun and said: “Me first!” The Hungarian staff followed him - Us first! Again we were saved. The heavy shelling continued. Liberation was just ahead. The German escaped and Joske, as a last gesture, moved us to a safe place in the emptied Jewish ghetto. He said goodbye to us and went on his way.

Tears come to my eyes when I remember this special person. For many years I did not know what had become of him. In 1975, I went back to Hungary and checked. ”Joske Hoffheimer?” They answered me in the offices of the Jewish community in Budapest. “The Germans murdered him.”

Eliezer Shimoni

Born: 1928

Birthplace: Feldebro, Hungary

Aliya: 1946

Family: Married, 3 children, 12 grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren

Eliezer's parents and their seven children were put in the Nyíregyháza ghetto and then sent to Auschwitz. During the selektzia, Eliezer was directed to the left with his mother and younger sisters, but his mother ordered him to slip out to the other side, where his older brothers stood, and so saved his life. In January 1945, Eliezer was taken to Gleiwitz work camp. From there he was sent in an open train, in the cold of winter, to forced labor in Buchenwald, Germany, where he was held until the day of liberation, in April 1945.

The Tree

The fire that consumed most of the trees in the forest,
Left a few blackened remnants.
The rain that followed the fire,
Washed away the black ashes.

Despite being badly injured,
The seedling grew into a tree.
Its trunk thickened and its roots dug deep into the earth.

The tree's first fruits were unripe,
Yet in time, the fruit improved.

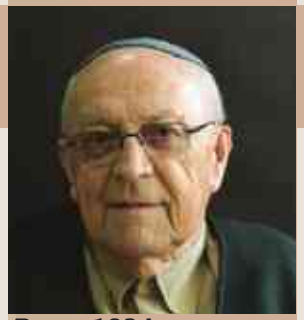
Its offshoots became a small grove, surrounding him with love.

Autumn, winter, spring and summer, the tree stands in place,
In the sun, the wind, the rain and the frost
Its roots are deep, its trunk is wide,
Its branches are thickly spread and its leaves are green.

May the tree continue to be as a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither ;and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

The tree that became a grove will, please God, become a forest once more.

Written by Giora Shimoni for Papa Eliezer's 70th birthday



Born: 1924

Birthplace: The village of Sagujifalu, Nograd County, Hungary

Aliya: December 1948

Family: Married, 3 children, 11 grandchildren, 7 great-grandchildren

Eliezer Sheffer

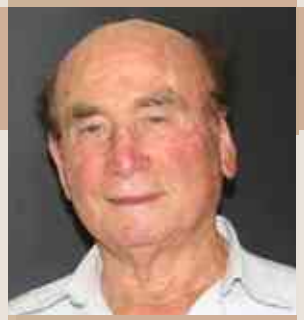
In April 1944, Eliezer was transferred to the Szecseny Ghetto together with his parents and seven siblings. From there he was taken to the Hungarian army's work brigade to clear wreckage, lay roads and build barricades across Europe. In March 1945, he built barricades in Austria; later, he was sent on the Death March to Mauthausen. On the way to the death camp, he was injured in an air raid and was hospitalized in an Austrian hospital until liberation.

A Moment Before the End, an Injury

For about two weeks, I marched with the brigade on the Death March to Mauthausen. "Beaten and injured" S.S. officers shot us for every infraction of regulations. On April 2, 1945, we arrived in Gratz under massive shelling by American bombers. We were placed in a soccer field and the gates were closed, we fell asleep. In the afternoon, a bomb fell near the field. I woke to the sounds of terrible screaming and clouds of dust and smoke. Many dead and wounded. The gates were opened and we were ordered to leave. I noticed that my pants were torn and blood flowed from my right knee.

A brick had hit my leg. The brigade moved far off and I could not go on. I realized that if I delayed and remained with the injured, I would have no hope of staying alive. Without hesitation, I took my fate into my own hands and turned in the other direction. Using a board as a crutch, I took one step and then another. I wanted to live! With my remaining strength, I walked a distance of three houses until I collapsed at the entrance to a home. A German woman gave me a glass of milk and called an ambulance.

At the entrance to the hospital, hundreds of wounded lay on stretchers. A whole night passed before I was treated. I lost blood and the open wound became infected. I began to lose consciousness and I was careful not to speak, to avoid being recognized as a Jew. I only muttered "Soldat Hungary." I was placed in quarantine. I regained consciousness on May 8, 1945. I saw a nurse remove a picture of a German officer from the wall. I understood that the day of liberation had arrived. Six months later I was still there, injured, in pain and limping, knowing nothing of my family. I decided to escape the hospital to fulfill my purpose in life.



David (Dugo) Leitner

Born: 1930

Birthplace: Nyíregyháza, Hungary

Aliya: 1949, on the Galila ship

Family: Married, 2 daughters, grandchildren and great-grandchildren

The family was taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau. His mother and two sisters "disappeared" immediately, and his father and brother were put to work. Dugo, along with another 4,000 children, was fated for extermination. He survived several selektzias and was even "privileged" to be among the few with two numbers tattooed on his arm. On January 18th 1945, he was sent on the Death March together with the other Auschwitz prisoners. He woke up in a hospital in Austria, saw the numbers on his arm and remembered who he was.

Since 1990, Dugo has been accompanying groups to Poland. He tells the students, "Do not leave here in sadness. Am Yisrael Chai! The Jewish nation is alive and well! The Jewish nation is alive and well and happy!"

The Best Job in the World

"… They gathered twenty strong boys and I was very lucky to be included among them. The Kapo called us "twenty thorough-bred Hungarian horses," and in the camp, we were called the Scheissecommando - the shit-house cleaners. It is the best job in the world if you are in a death camp, and whoever was chosen knew they might stay alive. I was up front. A huge pipe was placed on my shoulder to suck up the filth, and I walked with my head held high and sang. I had no idea what was taking place a couple of feet away. I did not want to know either. In the filth, they would sometimes sneak a letter to someone in the men's camp, a package to someone in the women's camp; we also transferred explosives, we were "bucket mail". Still, I did not ask anyone what was going on. I did not want to stop being a child."

Excerpt from Dugo's Story, published by Yediot Books

Every year on January 18, Dugo goes to the Tzanani Falafel shop to avenge Auschwitz-Birkenau, by eating two large servings of falafel, one after the other, until his stomach hurts.

Tova Weiss

Born: 1936

Birthplace: Haidunanas, Hungary

Aliya: 1948

Family: Married, 3 daughters, 17 grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren

In 1942, her parents, their ten children and her grandmother are transferred to the Debrecen Ghetto. A selektzia takes place there, and her grandmother leaves with the old and the sick. Her parents and siblings are sent to the Lichi work camp in Austria. The train had been headed for Auschwitz, but due to the Kastner deal, the train changes direction and arrives at a forced labor camp in Amlintzorf Village. Toward the end of the war, they are transferred to Theresienstadt until liberation. The entire family, parents and ten children, survived the war together.

Liberation Day Gift

Tova'leh was sitting by the window, doing nothing as usual. They have been in this place called Theresienstadt for many months. Living in a bleak, gray block divided into rooms, each room oppressively crowded with bunks.

Days pass endlessly. Waiting, without knowing for what. There is severe hunger, and each day more people die, and others clear the bodies from the yard.

She turned eight this year. These last years have taught her not to ask, not to scream and not to cry. Her mouth has learned to remain silent but the fear, the fear has not learned. It wraps her body and dominates her thoughts.

When the Russians arrive, the joy is limitless. The Jews burst out, like animals from a cage, and grab whatever comes to hand. And again, they die, this time from eating uncontrollably. In addition to her food portion, Mother hands Tova'leh a doll, a Liberation Day gift. Her happiness is boundless.

She clings to the doll, and the doll, to her. May the good days return, she prays in her heart.

They return home, this time in a clean passenger train with toilets, and seats for everyone. In a package on her knees, is Tova'leh's new doll. She imagines how she will soon be home and will play with her doll and everything will be the way it was.

A Russian soldier standing next to her grabs the package from her hands and throws it down into the river flowing under the moving train.

Yona Taub

Born: 1931

Birthplace: Berlin, Germany

Aliya: 1946

Family: Widow, 3 children, 12 grandchildren, some 70 great-grandchildren

Yona was two when she and her parents fled from Berlin to Brussels in 1933. When Belgium was invaded in 1940, the family fled to Nice, France. In 1942, upon the Nazi occupation of the south of France, her father was taken to the Drancy Camp, and from there to the extermination camps. Her mother posed as a Christian in a village near Nice, and little Yona was smuggled into Switzerland with a group of Jewish children. At the end of the war, mother and daughter were reunited.

Last Photograph and Parting

I was walking with Father on the streets of Nice. It was summer, August 1942. A street photographer stopped us and took our picture. My family loved being photographed; we took pictures at every opportunity. The photographer gave my father a note to come get the picture once it was developed.

We walked hand in hand.

Suddenly there are shouts from a loudspeaker, as an undercover policeman announces a curfew. A tumult begins in the street, and nervous people rush every way. A French plainclothes policeman comes up to Father and asks for an ID card. Father shows him.

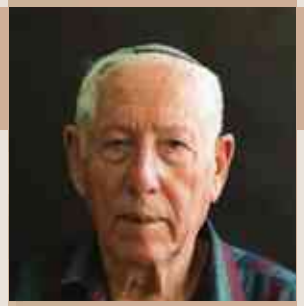
The word Jew blazes out.

The policeman tells Father to get on the truck. I did not know what to do. My parents had warned me so many times, “Thea, you must not say you are Jewish”. The policeman came up to me, “Girl, do you belong to anyone?” From the truck, Father motioned “No” to me with his head, but I had already understood. I ran home crying.

In the last photograph of Father and me, he is wearing white clothes and a hat and I am in a summer skirt. Behind us is a coffee shop and beside it is a square. It is not visible in the picture, but I remember it clearly.

Boulevard Grand-Beta. A peaceful moment in a resort town. The look in our eyes shows no hint of knowledge of what was to come in the next moment.

A hasty parting and no more.



Yishayahu Deutch

Born: 1927

Birthplace: Bodrogkeresztúr, Hungary

Aliya: 1946

Family: Married, 3 children, 13 grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren

In 1944, upon the Nazi invasion, Yishayahu's family (parents and 4 children) are taken to the Ghetto, and from there on a train to Auschwitz. Yishayahu and his brother are taken to forced labor. Yishayahu is sent to work in Warsaw. When Warsaw is liberated, he walks on the Death March to Dachau, Germany until May 1945, liberation day. Yishayahu and his nephew, Tzvi Deutch (z"l) survived the death camps and made Aliya.

The Eyes See – The Mind Does Not Comprehend

We reach Auschwitz in a crammed cattle-car on Shavuot. Almost 5:00 a.m. and still dark outside. At other stops, they already took the money and gold we brought. At Auschwitz, we disembark quickly. Jewish Kapos hint to us, "Give the children to the grandmothers…"

They are afraid to talk to us in Yiddish, they do not tell us what is going on inside. S.S. officers are watching them. In the camp, Mengele quickly instructs, right and left.

Before I understand what is happening around me, I am sent to the next station. I see people around me taking off their clothes, their hair being shaved. A mountain of hair is collected. The naked ones are sent to the showers. I am among them.

Others are less lucky, they are sent to the gas chambers. I look around me, my eyes see but my mind does not comprehend. The heart locks down.

Rosh Hashanah Eve, September 5, 2002, awful news. Aviad was killed. My beloved grandson, the soldier. 21 years old at his death. May God avenge his death.

How much pain can a man endure. Hannah, my wife – boundless warmth and individual attention that come straight from the heart – disconnected. I continue the journey, a heavy load.

Despite it all I must smile, be a good father and a good grandfather. I gather my strength. If I start to "leave myself," it will not be good.

Leah Landsman

Born: 1931

Birthplace: Ujpest, Hungary

Aliya: 1947, with the Youth Aliya

Family: Widow, 6 children, 30 grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren

When Hungary was occupied on March 19, 1944, Leah's father was arrested and never returned. Her mother was taken to an unknown place as punishment, because her yellow star was attached only by a safety pin – she too never returned. Their places of death are unknown. At 14, Leah was alone in her village. Later, she was taken to the Monor Ghetto and from there to Auschwitz. She was miraculously saved by Mengele in one of the last selektzias before the end of the war.

Completing a Line

We arrived at Auschwitz toward the end of the war. One hundred people crammed into a cattle car. In the first selektzia, Mengele sent me to the side of the living.

We waited in Auschwitz. For what? For whom? We knew nothing. The days passed.

One day they took the young ones for another selektzia. This time we already understood: on one side were those chosen for work, the other side – the crematorium.

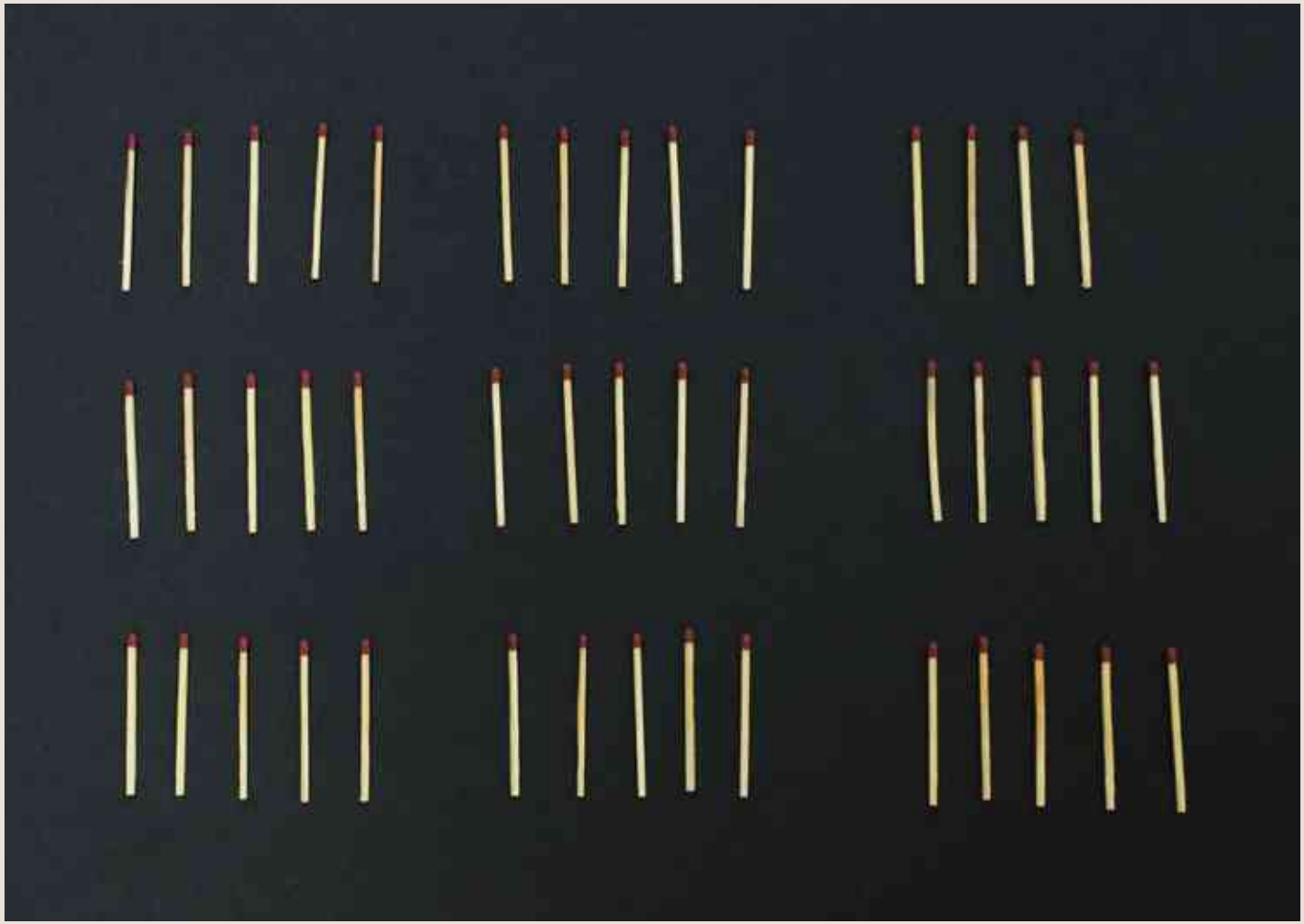
Mengele looked at me, a small, skinny 14-year-old, and sent me to the side of the crematorium. I understood this was the end. Father and Mother had left me, now it was my turn.

On the other side, girls who were 16 or older stood in military-like rows of five. Exactly five girls in each row. The last row had only four girls. Mengele, an order-minded German glanced over and his gaze fell on me.

He motioned for me to come forward and asked for my age. "Sixteen," I answered without hesitation.

Mengele pointed to the incomplete line of five and motioned for me to complete it. I did as he said.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the other group moving away.



Esther (Mogdi) Ungar

Born: 1928

Birthplace: Sarret-Udvari, Hungary

Aliya: 1948

Family: Widow, 4 children, 10 grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren

Esther's father was taken to forced labor. Her mother and two daughters to Navygarad Ghetto, then to Auschwitz for two and a half months. From there Esther was sent to Reinickendorf Camp in Berlin, until April 1945. She walked the Death March to Sachsenhausen and Frynstat. Her father passed away after liberation. Her mother and sister never returned from Auschwitz. Mogdi joined Bnei Akiva hachsharah in Hungary and made Aliya with them to Israel.

Parting without Parting

In June 1944, we reached Auschwitz. They opened the doors, and German soldiers on the ramp ordered us with horrible shouts, "Get out, get out, quickly, quickly! Leave your things by the car, you will come and get them later…" I was with my mother and my younger sister. I am 16 and my sister is 11.

We get out. Mother turned to me, "Mogdushkam (my Mogdi) go see how Grandfather is."

She was worried about her father. I went to look for Grandfather in the cars in the back.

In the mayhem I could not find my grandfather and I went back to my mother and sister. They were not there where I left them. They must have been pushed with the crowd to where the S.S. soldier was standing; with one finger, he was deciding people's fates, and he sent them to the place from where no one returned.

I did not say goodbye to Mother, I did not get a last smile from her, a parting embrace, a loving look. Something for life's journey ahead. Mother disappeared.

I was alone in the camps.

I knew my father was sent to a labor camp and I imagined he was alive and how it would be when we would meet at home. That helped me.

All those who had a loved one waiting for them bore the hardships more easily.

Only when I returned home did I find out that my father was not among the living.

Born: 1934

Birthplace: Beit Israel neighborhood, Jerusalem

Family: Married, 3 children, 9 grandchildren, 5 great-grandchildren

Mazal Weiss

Fear

In the beginning, I had a happy childhood. We lived between Meah Shearim and the Bucharim neighborhoods. All the ethnic groups lived together, and were "cooked" in the same pot. People sat on chairs in the narrow alleys and chatted. I grew up with four and a half languages: Hebrew, Ladino, Yiddish, Arabic and English.

The British ruled the country then. They opposed the establishment of a Jewish state, and for that, we hated them.

I was twelve years old when the days of fear began. Many of the young people in the neighborhood belonged to Irgun, Etzel, Lehi or the Haganah. At night, they would gather and speak heatedly.

They would hide their weapons and hand grenades in the homes, and we all knew it. Nightly searches by British soldiers became the norm. "Open the door!" they shouted and banged on the door with their rifles, and I would hide in my bed.

They entered the house and shined their flashlights on the beds to see if anyone was missing. If someone was missing – he must be an activist in the underground.

At unexpected hours, they would suddenly announce curfews on the loudspeaker and we would shut ourselves in our houses until it passed. They enclosed our neighborhood with barbed wire. No one goes in or goes out.

We were given a window of just two hours a day when we were allowed to leave the neighborhood to buy food. The families would run like crazy in order to buy bread and water. I was most afraid of the noise made by the Jordanians.

Our neighborhood was on the border and were a target for bombing. Our mother prepared a parcel for each child and wrapped it in a cloth diaper. I was very afraid. If we were forced to retreat, where would we go? Our parents would say, here we live and here we will die!

Born: 1935

Birthplace: Bangor, North Ireland

Aliya: 1949

Family: Married, 3 children, 10 grandchildren, 3 great-grandchildren

Ruti Even

The Will

I had an especially close relationship with my father. His words were few, because he was a silent man, and yet he and I understood each other well. My father dreamt of moving to Palestine and I used to imagine my entire family living together in Israel.

My father was killed in April 1946. He was a successful gold merchant. He would travel from place to place by jet to do business. One day his plane crashed. I was eleven years old, the second of five children. In one moment, our situation became very bad.

Once, when my mother's sisters visited us, I heard them whispering behind the closed door, asking, what will we do with the girls? I heard them. I barged in and said, "I want to move to Israel." Only 14 years old, I was determined.

Within three weeks, after doing a short agriculture hachsharah course in England, I was sent to Israel with a group of youth, most of whom were Holocaust survivors.

We arrived at the Haifa port in 1949. The dock was full of families - every boy and girl in the group had relatives waiting for them. I could feel the happiness of reunion.

The Holocaust survivors had found family. I cried tears of joy with them. Within a few minutes, the platform was empty, I was alone, in the sweltering August heat.

I had no Hebrew and no family.

You must be strong and overcome, I consoled myself. You are carrying out Father's will. You have made Aliya to Israel!

Seven decades have passed since then. I am here!

Born: 1929

Birthplace: Hangony, Hungary

Aliya: 1947

Family: Married, 4 children, 20 grandchildren, 27 great-grandchildren

Shraga Shemer

Shraga's mother died from illness a year before the Nazis invaded. In 1944, his father and five children were moved to the Ozd Ghetto. From there he and his father were taken to a work unit. His four sisters and a brother were taken from the Ghetto and sent to Auschwitz. The two older sisters survived. Shraga's father died of typhus one month before liberation.

An important matter: "And you shall tell your son on this day…." (Leviticus 13). Ever since our children were old enough to understand, we would tell them about the Holocaust. They need to remember, every moment, we have no other place to go.

Shoes Growing out of the Earth

I was conscripted the Hungarian army's forced labor groups and sent to the Carpathian Mountains. I was 15 years old. We had many experiences that were difficult for someone of that age. Here is one of them: One day as we were moving toward the front line, we saw a pair of legs wearing soldier's boots that looked as if they were growing out of the ground. One of the soldiers explained what caused this "phenomenon": "This morning the Russians were shooting wildly all over the place. A bomb fell near a group of soldiers and sent one of them flying through the air. He landed head first in the pit the bomb created. The soldier was killed and buried by the debris in the hole with only his feet sticking straight out of the ground."

We were shaken by the sight, and even more by the story.

One of the youths in our work unit, Mordechai Peter, could barely walk in his shoes and decided to take the dead soldier's boots. He took the boots from the dead soldier and put them on instead of his own tattered ones. This way, he could march more comfortably.

Whenever I see a tree trunk, like the one in the photo, I think of the dead soldier whom I did not know and of my friend Mordechai Peter. Mordechai survived the Holocaust and came to Israel on one of the illegal immigrant ships. He served in the IDF and when he finished his army service, he settled in Moshav Yad-Nathan. In 1980, he returned his soul to his maker. May his memory be blessed.

Born: 1939

Birthplace: Radauti, Romania

Aliya: 1949

Family: Married, 4 children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren

Sarah Sheffer

Sarah (8) was sent with her twin sister and mother to Auschwitz. Her father was conscripted to forced labor for the Hungarian army, was sent to Ukraine and never returned. Her mother, who was pregnant, was sent to the crematorium. The Eckstein twins, Sarah-Vera and Genzel-Leah, were sent to Mengele's laboratory to undergo his experiments. Paradoxically, this is what saved their lives. Their entire family was killed.

The End of Childhood

The gate at our house led to a big yard with fruit trees, grass, flowers and a well with a hand pump. There was a tall fence around the yard. Our house had two rooms and a large kitchen. My parents slept in one room and my sister and I slept together in a double bed in the other.

The house always smelled of cleanliness and cooking smells. My father was an intellectual Orthodox Jew. Many women wanted to marry him, but he chose my mother. They married for love, and they raised us with love.

We were a happy family, we got attention and affection from our parents. We used to love snuggling in Father's bed while he told us stories. Mother would sew us dolls with matching dresses. I could tell my mother anything.

When we walked down the streets of Sarvar, we were an attraction. The three of us would wear matching dresses. "Eckstein Kish Laniok", people would call out to us with a smile, the small Eckstein girls.

It all ended in an instant in 1944. My father was sent to forced labor and then, one day we were ordered to leave our home. We had to move all of our belongings out into the yard. Father came home to help Mother. The Zandermers, the Hungarian policemen, had just walked in. They were looking for deserters. Father sprinted out of the house, and jumped over the two-meter fence behind the house and disappeared. He was 38 years old, he wore a grey wool winter coat and a hat.

That was the last time I saw my father.

That was the moment my childhood ended.

Avraham Shlomi

Born: 1930

Birthplace: Lodz, Poland

Aliya: 1945, on the Princess Kathleen ship

Family: Married, 3 children, 7 grandchildren, 9 great-grandchildren

Tangled roots

On the ramp in Auschwitz they told me that children under the age of eighteen were not permitted to live.

I was fourteen years old and short for my age.

At the selection I dared to tell Mengele I was twenty one.

A sharp slap made me realize I had overdone it.

He asked again: “How old are you?”

“I’m eighteen, sir.”

“Where did you work?”

“In a steel factory, sir.”

My reply satisfied him. I breathed a sigh of relief as he directed me to the right – to slavery and hard labor.

I sighed with relief, because those sent to the left were sentenced to die in the gas chambers.

That was the first of many selections I endured during the Holocaust years.

But…

I survived.

I won.

I raised a wonderful family who struck roots in our homeland.

Leah Ezra

Born: 1942

Birthplace: Radom's Willke, Poland

Aliya: 1949

Family: Married, 1 son, 1 granddaughter

My mother described one of her fondest memories:

A nine month old baby girl crawling in dense woods – the Tarnów forest, looking for strawberries, murmuring in Yiddish "eine du, eine du" (here's one, here's one). She plucks the fruit with her little hands and pops them into her mouth. I was that baby.

We fled to the forest with our extended family. There were fifteen of us. Six survived.

Not far from us was the farm my mother had known as a child. Some nights she sneaked over there to beg food. We were living in a bunker – a pit dug in the earth and covered with twigs. From time to time there were German incursions and we would all scatter.

I was very small, everyone's plaything. My mother could depend on me. It was almost as though I understood the situation. I never cried, never complained of cold or hunger, never even became sick. I just kept close to my mother. She nursed me. My mother's milk nurtured me until I was two years old.

When we fled from the bunker my mother left me under a broad tree. She thought it would increase my chances of remaining alive. I did not cry, despite the cold, the damp, and the loneliness. I was a "quiet bundle." Children develop survival instincts.

Miraculously, the Nazi soldiers' terrifying dogs did not find me. I gazed at the sky and watched the swaying tops of the trees, the dense greenery, the snowflakes, and the first blossoms. I listened to the myriad sounds of the forest.

We survived in the forest for two years. Plenty of time to absorb and internalize its four seasons.

I grew up. I matured. I traveled and continue to travel a great deal. Wherever I go, I am drawn to dense forests.

I love "our" forest in the National Park.

I go there every day. Forests, scenery, everything connected to nature evokes in me nostalgia and serenity.

I have come to the conclusion that the forest is ingrained in my DNA.

Born: 1929

Birthplace: Amsterdam, Holland

Aliya: 1947, on the Exodus ship

Family: 3 children, 9 grandchildren, 2 great-grandchildren

Marty Dotan

Raising the hat

Until I was four our family was well-respected in Amsterdam's Jewish community, but everything changed in 1936 when Hitler rose to power. Our home was filled with a never-ending stream of relatives fleeing from Germany. And not only relatives – Jews we didn't know also made their way to us. We became a way station from which refugees spread out in every direction. A welcoming boarding-house, free of charge. My mother, so stern and unbending as a rule, provided unlimited care and gave freely of herself. Our small family expanded, our warm home absorbed more and more German refugees. Mother was responsible for everyday management. She cooked and laundered, helped with the authorities, with language problems, with everything that needed doing. My father was busy with the small cosmetics plant he had founded in 1936 and with other work. He only came home at night to greet the family, distant and reserved in his own way. I went to synagogue every Friday night, and on the Sabbath and festivals as well. I was proud to be a Jewish girl with a synagogue like ours, with such good people. The Reform synagogue that my parents had helped establish was the center of my life, the consolidating factor of Jewish social life and culture. On Friday nights we heard the organ tunes and we made Kiddush (the benediction over wine). Every child received a goblet of wine. I was filled with the sense of belonging to a vibrant Jewish community. I was so proud to be Jewish. My mother sang in the synagogue choir and my father decided who would be called up to the Torah. It was done democratically, not according to who could pay the most money. The Yom Kippur fast was an occasion of unity. I experienced all these things, the prayers and the sense of cohesion, in the synagogue together with my friends. The festivities ended in 1940 when the Nazis invaded Holland, yet I continued to feel that my religion and my community were special. The Nazis could not take that away from me.The restrictions began gradually, craftily, each time a little more severe. Our Jewish community, clinging to routine, told themselves, "Nu, we can bear it." Even when they ordered us to wear the Yellow Star I wore mine with pride. It must have been apparent, because I remember that a well-groomed, elderly Dutchman once passed me on the street and silently raised his hat to me, a small child. It was a wordless token of empathy. After that came the transports. The horrors of the Holocaust came thick and fast. For many years I preferred to remain silent about the atrocities. It is only in the last fifteen years that I have revealed a little of what is locked within me. But that is another story.

Moshe ben Ozer

Born: 1931

Birthplace: Kovner, Lithuania

Aliya: 1948, on the Altalena ship

Family: Married – 2 children, 6 grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren

From the Death March to the IDF Parade

11.4.1945 – The American army enters the gates of Buchenwald. I am alive! A fourteen-year-old boy who survived Auschwitz, Dachau-Birkenau and Buchenwald.

I survived two of Mengele's aktions. Each one decided the fate of another few dozen boys from the group I belonged to.

The second time, I decided to take charge of my own destiny. I cut strips from my blanket and shoved them into my torn shoes.

When I marched past Mengele I was a few centimeters taller.

He sent me to the right – to life.

I took part in the death march from Auschwitz-Birkenau to Buchenwald (partly on foot and partly by train), in what was left of my shoes, with what was left of my strength.

My friends were alongside, gaunt and skeletal, a march of the broken and the fractured.

27.7.1948 – A mere three years and three months later I march with my head held high in the first IDF parade. In strong military boots we march together, proud, upright ranks of soldiers alongside me. I am marching under the flag of Israel.

My joy is boundless.

Born: 1937

Birthplace: Stanislavov, Poland

Aliya: 1958

Family: 4 children, 4 grandchildren

Henry Weich

A shortened short history. Age four and a bit?

Ghetto. A moldy slice of bread.

Very thinly spread with something. Eat it like that? We don't throw away bread. Mum. Short history of the slice of bread.

Besides God wouldn't allow it. But God is resting. I won't disturb his rest.

Even prayers he does not hear.

Tears. But Mum. So scrape the spread to the edge with your teeth.

Now eat it? How? In what order? First the tasty part and then the other one? We don't throw away bread.

First the tasteless part and then the yummy one? Sort of dessert.

Yes, that's the way. Despite the danger of not reaching it. Not to finish it.

Test of character? Perhaps.

Playing hide and seek. Nazis and Jews. In the small, stinking yard. Nazi counts. Jews hide. Nazi finds Jew. Bang. Jew falls. Floor covered by dead Jews. Until a Jew touches the wall. Turns into the Messiah.

Everyone comes back to life. But we must go on playing.

The Messiah turns into a Nazi. And so on and so forth. And so forth and so on? Paradox? What's that? Does it matter?

A sudden roar from the other side of the wall. A cultured shout. German. Immediately a primitive scream. Ukrainian. A real bang. A cry of pain. Surely from a Jew. Run hide quick.

Under the world. After a while, back to the game. Must play. Wet pants. Sorry Mummy. Anyway it stinks. Everything stinks.

Shlomo Bobbe

Born: 1937

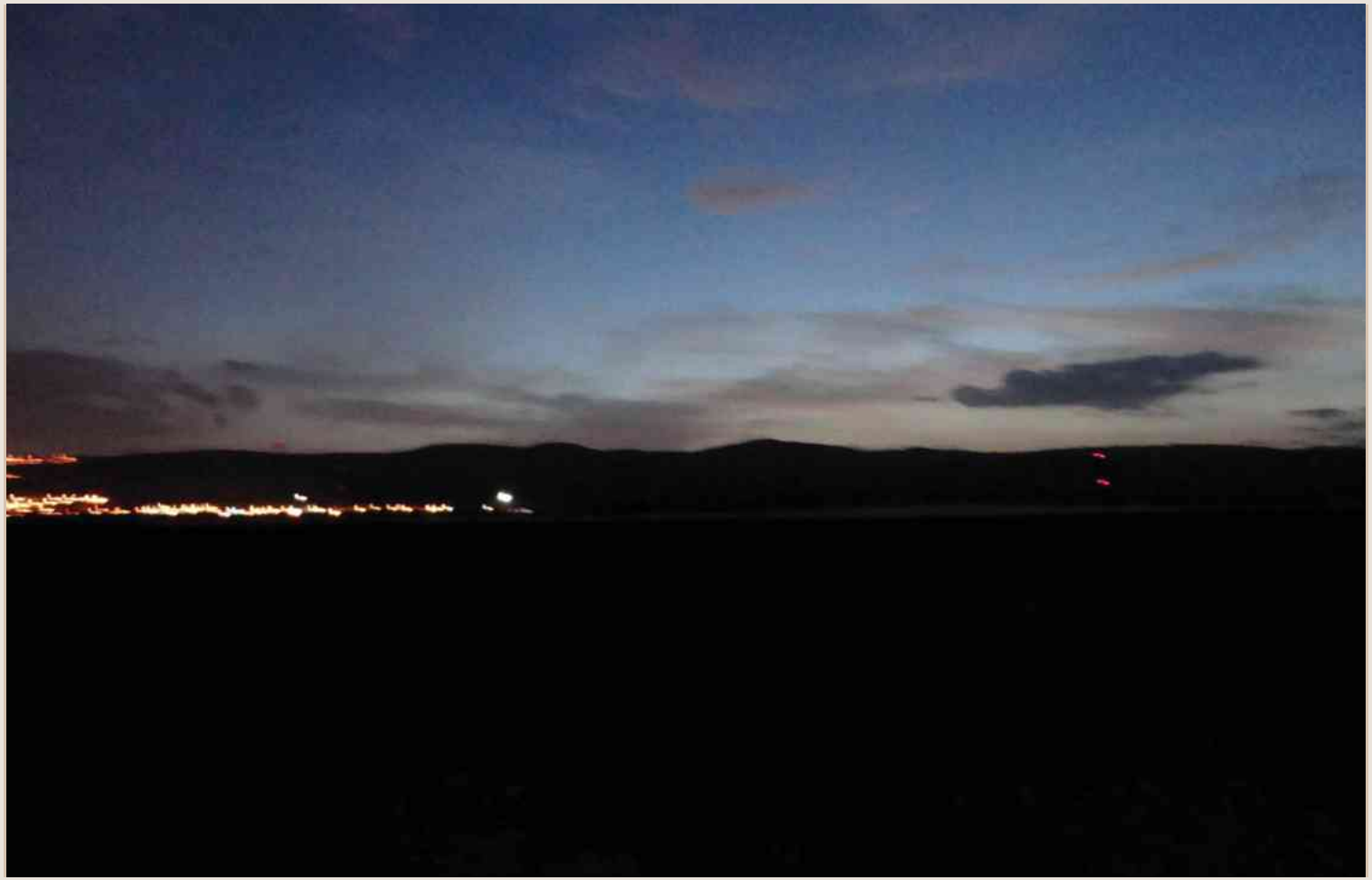
Birthplace: Eindhoven, Holland

Aliya: 1956, on the Jerusalem ship

Family: Married, 3 children, 6 grandchildren

Reception

We arrived on the wharf of the port of Marseille. We had marched on foot from the train station to the port. The ship 'Jerusalem' lay anchored in the harbor, preparing to set sail for Haifa. I was eighteen years old. I had just finished training at a farm in England, where I learned the basics of agriculture along with other Jewish boys and girls from all over Europe. The Jewish Agency had arranged for us to volunteer one year of service to an Israeli kibbutz. In 1956, the year I arrived in Israel, I knew very little about the country. My mother had collapsed and died during the death march. My father had survived and so had my little sister. We continued living in Holland even after the establishment of the State of Israel. I studied precision mechanics in high school. When I graduated I was called up to the Dutch army but decided I would prefer to serve in the Israel Defense Forces. A noisy crowd thronged the wharf. Suddenly shouts pierced the air above the throb of engines and people's voices. They enveloped us like a dark cloud. "War has broken out in Israel!" The Sinai Campaign had begun. Israel was at war and I was on my way there. An uneasy silence settled over our group. Some decided to stay behind and wait for better days, but I weighed anchor into the unknown. I wanted to make my home in Israel. We sailed across the Mediterranean in a chilly October. Occasionally rain lashed the deck. Two nights before the end of the voyage my heart almost stopped when the captain gave the order to douse the lights and turn off the engines. We were told to remain in our cabins, forbidden to come up on deck. We were in the middle of the ocean, surrounded by darkness and silence. An airplane circled above us once, twice. Would it bomb us? Would I ever see Israel? After an hour or two – time seemed to pass very slowly but it was probably less than that – the captain informed us that an Egyptian frigate had passed close by our ship, making its way to Israel's shores, but the danger was over. Black darkness accompanied us until dawn. When the sun arose in the east it illuminated the Carmel mountain range. Until then I had never heard of Haifa. I went up on deck and gazed eagerly. Having grown up in the flat countryside of Holland, I was deeply moved by the green mountains. As we drew closer to the harbor I could make out more details: the mountain was dotted with houses. On the pier were donkey carts, tractors, and crowds of people moving quickly. Where were they running to? My eyes followed the stream of humanity until I saw a boat anchored near our ship. There were Arabic letters on its prow but it was flying an Israeli flag. The date was October 13, 1956. On that very day an Egyptian destroyer, the Ibrahim el Awal, had succeeded in penetrating into Haifa bay, one solitary destroyer. After a brief battle it was overpowered. The navy towed it and tied to the dock, right next to our ship, the 'Jerusalem'. That's how we were welcomed: by the State of Israel, Haifa, and one Egyptian destroyer.



Born: 1935

Birthplace: Ostrava, Czech Republic

Aliya: 1950, on the Komemiyut ship

Family: Married – 3 children, 7 grandchildren

Anka Goldfinger

Mother

There was another aktzia in the ghetto. No children remained apart from me and my eight-year-old sister Rachel, who was older than me by one year. We were hidden in the ghetto. Each day Mommy went to work in a workshop near the wall of the ghetto in our town, Bochnia. Daddy worked somewhere else. They were both "productive," they were able to work for the Germans, which is why they were still alive. But Mommy said they would find us in the next aktzia, so she was looking for a place to hide us. One morning she woke up looking pale and tense. She told us she would take Rachel and place her in hiding. She could not take us both together but I should not worry. In a few days she would come back and take me too. I kissed my emaciated sister. Mommy drew her close and covered them both with a long coat that enveloped them all the way down to their feet. Only Mommy's head was visible. She covered it with a scarf. She told me again that she would come back for me and gave me a kiss. Then they both left. I tried very hard to stifle my tears, and remained hidden in our apartment in the ghetto. Maybe three nights passed. I was completely alone. I cried, I was scared. Finally Mommy came and said, "Now it's your turn. Rachel is in a safe place and you're going to be with her." I clung to Mommy and hugged her. I could feel her bones. They were sharp, sticking out, but I felt lovely and warm with my Mommy. I knew I had to be quiet. Mommy explained that we were leaving the ghetto together and I must not speak. There were lots of German soldiers and lots of dogs and I had to walk in step with Mommy. The long coat would hide our legs. After that there was warm darkness, not like the cold darkness when I waited all by myself for my Mommy in the little room in the ghetto. I heard shouts in German, dogs barking. I matched my steps to Mommy's. I knew I was safe with her. She would do everything for me. But I also knew the Germans were strong and bad, maybe even stronger than my Mommy. Suddenly she stopped walking. Someone called to her in German. I stopped breathing. In my heart I was praying. It seems that my prayer helped because Mommy continued walking. We walked like that for a long time until we came to the workshop where Mommy worked. Suddenly she opened her coat and said, "Here's the kitchen. It's empty now." She pointed to a small window high in the wall. It opened with a latch. Mommy raised me up. In the dark I saw a frightened pair of eyes. I jumped down to the floor. It was my sister. We hugged and I became a little calmer. For ten months my sister and I stayed in hiding near the ghetto wall. When they torched the ghetto Mommy came back again to save us, with forged papers and money provided by a Polish rescue organization.

Born: 1925

Birthplace: Timisoara, Transylvania

Aliya: 1950

Family: 2 daughters, 7 grandchildren, 17 great-grandchildren

Edith Shonberger (z"l)

Bringing good to the world

My father, Rabbi Goodman, only did good. He was a Jew who loved people and everyone loved him. His heritage flowed in his veins. His life's purpose was to bring good to the world.

I was my father's youngest daughter but even though he was very busy he always found time for me. I saw and absorbed the fact that Daddy did good deeds in secret.

Daddy made peace between married couples, Daddy wrote sermons for the synagogue, Daddy collected contributions for the needy (in the afternoon when everyone was resting), Daddy sought to do good. Always to do good.

In the large yard of our house, under the leafy trees, poor Jews came to share our meal. Daddy always treated them with great respect. "We must invest in people, in family, in members of our community," said Daddy, repeating what he heard Herzl say in Prague. Herzl said: "If people have no time, then time has no people." Daddy was very impressed with this sentence. (It sounds better in German: Wenn die Menschen keinen Zeit haben, hat der Zeit keinen Menschen).

The night after Yom Kippur, before Daddy and Mommy moved to Eretz Israel, worshipers in the synagogue came to take their leave of him, touching the fringe of his garment.

He was known far and wide as a good man, and they hoped something of Daddy would cling to them too.

I also wanted to be good like my Daddy.

Many years before the outbreak of the war, and afterwards as well, hundreds of poor Jews came to us in Timişoara, fleeing from towns in Romania. Daddy provided each one with clothing, food, and a place to sleep.

It was God's will that the Jews of Timişoara would not be sent to exterminations camps. Those hundreds of Jews who fled to our town and were helped by Daddy remained alive.

That is how Daddy was, a man who wanted to bring good to the world.

Born: 1932

Birthplace: unknown

Aliya: 1972

Family: 1 son, 2 grandchildren

Alexander Waskov (z”l)

Survival

A picture from the concentration camp. The picture has remained with me all my life.

I hate it.

Autumn 1943. A harsh voice blared from the loudspeaker, ordering us to assemble in the camp square. Hundreds of Jews emerged, a huge herd, flanked by German and Italian soldiers. They lined us up with shoves, shouts, whipping, gunshots. They directed us like a herd of cattle.

I was nine years old. My head came level to the midriffs of those around me: my mother, my brother, and my uncle with his family. We stood in fear, not understanding what was happening.

I looked at the German officer, a large man with leather gloves and black boots, grasping a whip. Suddenly he came towards me. The sound of his boot heels shattered the silence.

He glanced at me and continued walking in the direction of a young mother clutching a baby; the baby was hidden in her arms. Only his legs could be seen. The German grabbed a little leg and pulled. The little one was dragged from his mother; no more than nine months old.

Savagely with two gloved fingers he hoisted the baby aloft, stepping away from the herd so everyone could see.

He held the baby head down, as one holds a chicken. The crowd gazed fearfully. The German pulled out a revolver and put a bullet through its head. Then he tossed it contemptuously on the ground.

All my life it has haunted me. Damn him, he stood there showing how one deals with Jews.

I was nine years old but I remember how shocked I was that such a large crowd of us were unable to rise up and fight against one evil man wearing gloves.

Today, many years later, I admire the boy who witnessed the horror while a small voice cried out within him, “Fight for your life, fight, rise up!” The boy who was always looking for cracks through which it was possible to survive the cursed war.

Michal Ben Aroya

Born: 1935

Birthplace: Persia

Aliya: 1950

Family: Married, 4 children, 14 grandchildren, 4 great-grandchildren

The Cry

My little brother was born at Beersheba hospital in the south of Israel, but we never got a chance to see him. Only Mother was given three days of grace… In 1950, we arrived at Moshav Melilot, to the open desert spaces and a period of food rationing. Life was hard.

Mother worked in the fields from morning to night, proudly carrying her pregnant belly, our family's first native Israeli. My siblings and I could not wait for the little brother or sister we would have. When the contractions began, Mother climbed into the only vehicle in the area – the moshav's truck, which doubled as an ambulance when needed.

Mother gave birth at the entrance to Beersheba. There on the barren ground were wooden huts that served as the hospital. A baby boy was born, pale and plump. Mother was amazed by his beauty and immediately fell in love with him. She nursed him proudly and already began thinking of a name for her beautiful baby. She kept her thoughts to herself though as the baby's name is announced only on the 8th day, at the bris.

After three days, my eldest brother came to take them home from hospital. "The baby has been taken to be weighed," the nurse told him. "In the meantime, go buy him a white outfit so he can leave here like a prince".

My brother crossed the street with a light heart on the way to the clothing stall. When he returned he was told that the baby had died! Mother's heartbroken cries could be heard far and wide. "I nursed him just an hour ago, and he was healthy and beautiful!" she shouted in Persian. She had not yet had time to learn Hebrew.

Mother did not stop crying to her dying day. The wound in her heart never healed. Her grief was so great that she did not want to have more children. We felt the presence of our little brother who had no name and no grave to mark his death, and waited every day for him to open the door and come in.

We felt he was alive. Where? We did not know.

Mother retold the story of his kidnapping over and over. Even in the last moments of her life, she remembered the pale, plump baby she had borne and lost.

Born: 1934

Birthplace: Kermanshah, Persia

Aliya: 1955

Family: Widow, 7 children, 30 grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren

Rachel Yona

Fruit of the Womb

If I had not seen the little ones with my own eyes and heard their laughter with my own ears, I would not have believed it. How could it be that my aunt had given birth after twenty years of infertility? She had experienced a miracle.

We discovered it in the middle of the night in the Beersheba refugee absorption camp, where we arrived because of my brother. He had immigrated before us and had already found a good job at Solel Boneh Construction Company.

The truck dumped us in the middle of nowhere.

When we got used to the dark, we could see houses abandoned by the Arabs who had run away during the War of Independence. Among the houses was a police station and piles of coarse sand waiting for the workers.

Father lit a cigarette – he did not even have a flashlight – and began feeling his way in the dark looking for my older brother's house. He knocked on the door of the first house he encountered. A woman opened and immediately we could hear excited cries. It was his brother's daughter whom he had not seen for many years. They fell into each other's arms, and suddenly Father heard the sound of children. Father raised his eyebrows in question and his niece told him, in a voice choked with emotion, that everything had happened because of the Holy Land.

Only here in the Holy Land, once my aunt had been purified in the mikvah, the ritual bath, did the miracle occur and God granted her offspring after twenty years of infertility.

Born: 1949

Birthplace: Persia

Aliya: 1950

Family: Widow, 5 children (the oldest daughter died of illness at age 40), 15 grandchildren, and a great-granddaughter

Sarah Kana

Sarah immigrated at the age of six months with her parents and siblings when the Persian authorities permitted Jewish immigration.

From Michal to Michal… there is no-one like Michal

When the pains started, my husband said, "You have time, you only just entered your ninth month," and then Michal, my first child, was born. I named her after her grandfather, Michael. She was everything to me.

We lost her only a few months into her illness.

I do not sink into grief.

She left so much good behind: children and a husband, good memories, and good deeds.

I do not sink into grief, but a part of me died with her, as though my right hand was cut off. My Michal, dead at the age of forty, at the peak of her strength.

We knew she was sick, we knew the end was near, and still I was surprised. Had she not promised us she was young and would overcome it, and on that terrible day she had even visited the hairdresser in the morning to have her hair colored for her brother's wedding, and her husband managed to place a new necklace he had bought her around her neck. She kept on living as though death was not waiting in the wings. She went to hotels, swam, exercised, dieted, and continued to secretly do good deeds.

My Michal is gone.

I wanted to follow her but I understood – I must live! Who will help my grandchildren? Who will accompany them to the army, their weddings? Who will show them their mother's path? As long as I am alive something of Michal lives on for my grandchildren.

About a year ago my great-granddaughter, little Michal, was born and with her hope was born. I hug my great-granddaughter and for a moment my Michal, my daughter, is restored to me.

Born: 1936

Birthplace: Salmaniya, Iraq

Aliya: 1951

Family: 6 children, 15 grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren

Tzvia (Salima) Chatan

The Farhud riots against Iraqi Jews took place in 1941 during WWII. Hatred against Jews increased after the establishment of the Jewish state, and the study of Hebrew and anything related to Zionism was forbidden. Jews were arrested, often on false charges, for Zionist activity. Jewish stores and property were nationalized; Jews immigrating to Israel were not allowed to take gold and silver and were forbidden from selling their property.

Kubeh Trembling in the Pot

My given name was Salima, but in the underground my name is Tzvia, which it has remained to this day. Together with my friends I learned Hebrew through the underground from the age of ten, each time at a different apartment. Our instructors rotate Hebrew textbooks between us. If we are caught, we will all go to prison. The atmosphere in town is hostile and dangerous, but in my home everyone is a Zionist and my parents wordlessly encourage me to keep studying. I study and wait for the immigration permits to arrive.

One morning, policemen burst into the house while the men of my family are at Mashmara prayers, prayers for the transcendence of my grandfather's soul. "You are a Zionist, come on – to the Kalabush [prison]!" they tell my father. Although Father has Zionist views, he does not engage in Zionist activities. The police search the house looking for evidence. I tremble. Just a girl of thirteen. In the drawer of my desk I had hidden my Hebrew notebook. If they find my notebook, Father will not come out of this alive…

The trembling in my body increases. Father is taken to prison. There are rumors that there is torture in prison, skin is burnt with an iron and fingernails are pulled out. Mother burns my notebooks in the oven in the courtyard. Time passes and it is as though Father was swallowed by the earth. Where is he? Is he alive? Mother sends me to market with a pot of boiling kubeh. Near the market is the house of detention, maybe the guards will allow me to bring Father kosher food. The owner of a nearby coffee shop, a friend of Father's, tells me gently, "My child, your father was taken to the prison in Baghdad." The kubeh trembles in the pot.

The days go by, and each day is an eternity. My uncle Nuri, head of the community in our town, rallies to save Father. He pulls all the strings he can until after a month and a half, Father comes home, thin and frightened. He seems to have aged suddenly.

We thank God for every day he is still alive, and wait impatiently for immigration.

Today, many years later, I admire the boy who witnessed the horror while a small voice cried out within him, "Fight for your life, fight, rise up!" The boy who was always looking for cracks through which it was possible to survive the cursed war.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