

VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE

ZACHOR

*What's In a Name?
A Childhood Remembered
by Miriam Dattel*

SPRING 2021

HISTORY DOES NOT STAND STILL: HOW A NEW VHEC WORKSHOP
ADDRESSES ANTISEMITISM, HATRED AND PROPAGANDA

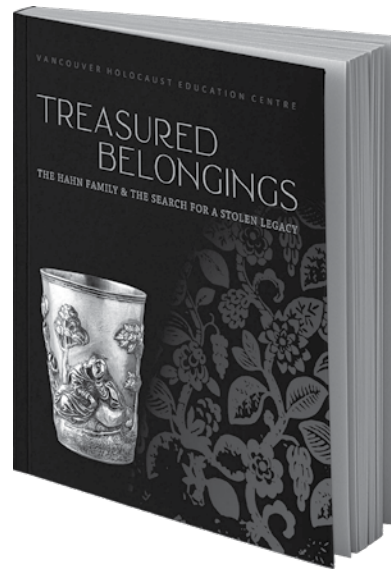
A NEW ACQUISITION:
UNCOVERING A TRAGIC STORY

MY WAR: FLEEING
THE GERMANS

TREASURED BELONGINGS: THE HAHN FAMILY & THE SEARCH FOR A STOLEN LEGACY

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Order your copy today of this beautifully illustrated book about the Hahn family during the Holocaust and their collection of artefacts, photographs and correspondence, with a preface and foreword by VHEC Executive Director Nina Krieger and curator Dr. Ilona Schulman Spaar, and an afterword by the exhibition's historical advisor, Dr. Sharon Meen.



This stunning and compelling publication extends the exhibition's reach, longevity and learning potential.

This is the first exhibition catalogue published in English about the Hahn family and their collection.

All proceeds from catalogue sales support the educational activity of the VHEC.

Catalogues are available for purchase for \$18 (pick-up) or \$25 including shipping anywhere in Canada. The VHEC can accept credit cards over the phone or cheques by mail.

TO ORDER, CALL AT 604-264-0499 OR EMAIL INFO@VHEC.ORG

Catalogue supported by the Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany in Vancouver, Diana and Benny Kanter and family, and the Azrieli Foundation. With profound gratitude to the Hahn-Hayden family for entrusting the VHEC with their materials and memories for the purpose of advancing Holocaust education and remembrance.

SPRING 2021 ZACHOR

Zachor is the Hebrew word for remember.

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Dear all,

As we reflect on our work one year following the onset of the pandemic, the VHEC's professional team is proud of the adaptations we have made to deliver our core educational and commemorative programs to audiences at a time when learning from the history of the Holocaust is more important and relevant than ever. Our programs prompt young people to consider the dangers of dehumanizing any group of people and what is at stake when remaining a bystander to injustice.

Our new online workshop on antisemitism, hatred and propaganda was developed in direct response to the rise of antisemitism in British Columbia and around the world. Tailored for students in grades 10 through 12, this workshop features historical examples of antisemitism and propaganda from the VHEC's archival and museum collections, and explores how the Holocaust represents a paradigmatic genocide and the most severe consequences of hate and racism left unchecked. A focus of the workshop is on connecting historical examples of antisemitism to contemporary forms of the hatred of Jews, including examples taken from current events involving the far-right, white supremacists and Neo-Nazis. The workshop includes a toolkit to help students apply concepts and become allies against antisemitism and other forms of racism.

By providing practical guidelines to students, this workshop will help students to enhance their media literacy skills, detect antisemitic tropes and consider how to safely respond to antisemitic comments, images and conspiracy theories when encountering these in person or online.

The workshop was previewed by educators at the BC Social Studies Teachers' Association spring conference and the Liberation75 teachers' symposium, and will be launched later this spring. It supports educators in their teaching about antisemitism, racism and the Holocaust in a variety of settings, including home-based learning.

This and other initiatives are featured among our education updates in this issue, which also introduces topical new library acquisitions and other updates from the Centre's collections. Archivist Shyla Seller contributes an article about a gift of thirteen photographs from local Holocaust survivor Shoshana Fidelman to the VHEC, and reflects on the distinctive process of gathering information and insights about Holocaust-era artefacts donated by eyewitnesses.

Also in this issue, we are honoured to feature three moving personal accounts that capture relatively unknown aspects of the Holocaust: Reva Dexter on her evolving identity as a child survivor from Kazakhstan, Lev Shapiro on his wartime experiences in the former Soviet Union and Miriam Dattel's story of survival as a young child from Croatia. We are grateful to these individuals for sharing their writings with the VHEC and our membership.

Please watch your mailboxes for a special gift, accompanied by an appeal to support the VHEC's 2021 Annual Campaign. We thank you in advance for your partnership and invite you to renew—and if possible, increase—your donation to the VHEC, as we work to meet the changing needs of our school audiences, and to strengthen our ability to advance the access to and educational use of artefacts and archival materials entrusted to the VHEC, ensuring that we can teach into the future.

Sincerely,



Nina Krieger

Executive Director

History Does Not Stand Still: How a New VHEC Workshop Addresses Antisemitism, Hatred and Propaganda

BY GIORGIA RICCIARDI

Jürgen Habermas, in his essay “Concerning the Public Use of History” (1988), comments that “despite everything, history does not stand still.”¹ While Habermas was referring to a change in the West German collective memory of its Nazi past in the late 1980s, this phrase resonates globally today as we bear a collective witness to an alarming uptick in antisemitic trends.

At the VHEC, Dr Ilona Shulman Spaar has spearheaded a workshop entitled *Antisemitism: You Can Make a Difference!* in direct response to the local and global rise of antisemitism. This workshop, geared to students in grades 10 through 12, looks at the long history of antisemitism, and explores how the Holocaust represents the most severe consequence of hate and racism left unchecked. The workshop uses examples of antisemitic propaganda, video testimonies and other resources pulled from the VHEC’s museum and archival collection holdings. As a Masters student in Holocaust studies at the University of Victoria, it has been a welcomed challenge to work alongside Dr Shulman Spaar as a research assistant on this project.

Since starting on this project in November 2020, my research has been dynamic and evolving, proving that, unfortunately, our work is extremely timely. Every week came new current events to add to the course, events which usurped age-old, historical antisemitic tropes and wrapped them in modernity. Following the blatant display of antisemitism at the US insurrection on January 6, 2021, we decided to include reference to the capitol riots and elaborate on the workshop sections looking at white supremacy and QAnon. At first, QAnon played a small role in the workshop. During an October

2020 presentation for the British Columbia Social Studies Teacher’s Association (BCSSTA), participants were asked if they had heard of QAnon or were familiar with the conspiracy, and the majority answered no. In a subsequent BCSSTA presentation in February, 2021, all teacher participants had heard of the conspiracy group. QAnon played a major role in the violent US insurrection, hand-in-hand with neo-Nazis and white supremacists; as such, this workshop will unpack the conspiracy’s nuances and dangers.

Given the major role the internet plays in fostering modern antisemitic and extremist discourse, it is important that this workshop empower students to take action, and to recognize red flags signalling fake news, propaganda and radicalization online. We provide students with guidelines on how they can enhance their media literacy and detect antisemitic tropes, comments and images, and tips on how to respond to dialogues or conspiracy theories such as QAnon in person or online. We incorporate student questions via video, questions which are answered in the workshop. We are excited to connect with students, and collaborate with them in making this a valuable, empowering and personalized resource.

A key element of the workshop is an understanding of the power of propaganda. The Holocaust is a severe example of how propaganda can be used to indoctrinate the masses and turn strangers, neighbours and friends against one another. The Holocaust section prompts students to connect the role orchestrated propaganda played through the stages of the Holocaust in Germany and beyond from April 1933

¹Jürgen Habermas, “Concerning the Public Use of History,” *New German Critique*, no. 44, special issue on the Historikerstreit (Spring/Summer, 1988), 43.

through to January 1942. From anti-Jewish laws and regulations to de-naturalization and racial defining, from failed boycotts to a nation-wide pogrom; and in its later stages, ghettoization, forced identification (visible othering) and racially “justified” genocide.

Using material from the VHEC’s collection, students will engage with Nazi-era propaganda posters and learn how to do a primary source analysis by closely examining the symbols and language used in the posters. Additionally, the workshop shares testimony clips from Serge Vanry and Jannushka Jakoubovitch, who were children during the Nazi period, and who recall the negative effects the propaganda they were exposed to in their youth had on their own self-image as Jewish children.

Antisemitism is known as “the longest hatred,” and thus it is imperative the workshop broaden students’ understandings of antisemitism beyond the Nazis and the Holocaust. Broadening the students’ historical comprehension of antisemitism includes drawing parallels between modern antisemitic tropes and historical myths. For example, the workshop notes parallels between the vilification of Jews during the COVID-19 pandemic and when Jews were blamed for the existence and spread of deadly disease during the bubonic plague (1346–1353).

The workshop spotlights local antisemitism in Vancouver and Canada by using images of antisemitic vandalism spray-painted on Vancouver school property,



The Canadian Nationalist political newspaper, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1938. Donated to the VHEC by Dr. Jack Naimark in 1993. Item 93.08.0089.



Left: High school student Vida Sussman speaking in her video message for Antisemitism: You Can Make a Difference!, January 2021. Right: Screenshot from Antisemitism: You Can Make a Difference! workshop.

YOUR NEWS LITERACY TOOL KIT: 5 PRACTICAL STEPS

■ Here are 5 steps to learn how to distinguish fact from fiction

1. Check your **emotions**: What's your first reaction?
2. **News or not?** — What's the purpose of this article?
3. Detective at Work — Is this **source credible**?
4. Fact Checker at Work — Is this **content credible**?
5. Digital Image Accuracy — Is this **photo for real**?



and sharing first-hand accounts of antisemitism experienced by Jewish people living in the Vancouver and Victoria areas. It provides insight into Canadian antisemitism during the Holocaust, addressing the MS St Louis and the “none is too many” immigration sentiment. (Canada admitted fewer than 5,000 Jewish refugees between 1933 and 1945—the fewest among developed nations. In 1945, a Canadian official was asked how many Jews would be admitted to Canada at the end of the war. He answered “none is too many.”)

The workshop will feature videos from locals who share thoughts on what it means to be Jewish to them in 2021, how they identify as Jewish, if and how they have experienced antisemitism, and more. Our hope is that students will feel connected to the Vancouver

and Victoria Jewish communities through these video messages, learn something new about the diversity of identifying as Jewish, and stress how antisemitism affects real people around us today. By standing up as an ally against hate and antisemitism, we hope to improve the sense of safety and acceptance for Jewish individuals in a local (and growing) community.

When Habermas asserts that history does not stand still, I take it as a lesson that we, as a society, must do more than simply look back on the past and make note of all that our predecessors did wrong. We must be cautious not to spend all our energy only looking back, to take what we learn from the past and apply it to today. Antisemitism did not disappear when the last concentration camp was liberated in 1945; history does not stand still. Communities continue to be victimized by hate—a hate that continues to redesign itself, but at its core, is the same hate that has existed since time immemorial. We hope that the repetitive antisemitic tropes seen throughout history, re-presenting themselves contemporarily, focussed on in the workshop will resonate with students and empower them to respond in allyship and educated resistance, rather than stand idly by. ■

Georgia Ricciardi is a Masters student in the Holocaust MA stream at the University of Victoria. Her primary research interests include gender and resistance during the Holocaust, and her thesis focuses on Spanish Republican women and resistance in Nazi concentration camps.

ANTISEMITISM: YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE! WORKSHOP

- Free-of-charge online resource
- Two hours long, adaptations possible
- Supports in-classroom and online teaching
- Integrates video-taped student questions
- Recommended for teachers & students of grades 10–12
- Launching in Spring 2021

ONLINE GUIDED TOUR

***Treasured Belongings: The Hahn Family
& the Search for a Stolen Legacy***
<https://vimeo.com/502529730>

Join us for a 30-minute video-recorded tour with curator Dr Ilona Shulman Spaar through *Treasured Belongings: The Hahn Family & the Search for a Stolen Legacy*. This online resource brings our current exhibition to your home. Learn about the German-Jewish Hahn family and find out how their story is connected to Vancouver. This tour offers engagement with themes including Nazi persecution and discrimination, looted art and the question of justice after historical wrongdoings.

Tailored to a high school audience, the tour is accompanied by a Teacher & Student Activity Guide. Students learn about the theft of Jewish belongings in Nazi Germany through two case studies. The guide provides further activities related to the question of justice in the aftermath of the Holocaust and offers links to Canada's own history of injustices.



Education Director and Curator Ilona Shulman Spaar offering a tour through the exhibition *Treasured Belongings: The Hahn Family & the Search for a Stolen Legacy*.

GRAPHIC NOVEL AND SHORT FILM

If We Had Followed the Rules, I Wouldn't Be Here
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCDlGZ_SWik

Based on local Holocaust survivor David Schaffer's experience during the Holocaust, illustrated by graphic artist Miriam Libicki.

This documentary shows the making of a graphic novel of the same name as part of the international SSHRC-funded project Narrative Art & Visual Storytelling in Holocaust and Human Rights Education. As a project partner, the VHEC assisted in the production of the film clip. The project was recently featured in two articles for Facing History and Ourselves Canada, a social justice education organization for teachers and educators.

Find out more here:

- <http://holocaustgraphicnovels.org>
- <https://facingcanada.facinghistory.org/when-story-telling-intersects-with-holocaust-human-rights>
- <https://facingcanada.facinghistory.org/approaches-to-gathering-trust-based-testimony>



Scene from short film *If We Had Followed the Rules, I Wouldn't Be Here*, based on the making of a graphic novel about survivor David Schaffer's experience during the Holocaust, illustrated by graphic artist Miriam Libicki.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Education Director and Curator Ilona Shulman Spaar participated in several online teacher conferences, presenting on existing and upcoming teaching resources developed by the VHEC.

- **OCTOBER 2020:** Annual conference, British Columbia Social Studies Teachers Association.
- **OCTOBER 2020:** Preparatory workshop for teachers for Holocaust Education Week. In partnership with Fighting Antisemitism Together (FAST).
- **FEBRUARY 2021:** Pro-D Day spring conference, British Columbia Social Studies Teachers Association, with thanks to the generous support of the David & Lil Shafran Endowment Fund.
- **MARCH 2021:** Liberation75's Teacher Professional Development Symposium offered to teachers across Canada. More than 120 teachers and educators attended the presentation: Antisemitism, Propaganda and the Holocaust: Teaching Resources from the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre.



Photo by Chris Montgomery on Unsplash.

JENIFER READS

Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl
Read by Diverse Canadian Youth
jeniferreads.com

As an educational partner of Jenifer Reads, the VHEC was represented at a live virtual launch event as part of the 17th Annual Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival, October 28 to November 8, 2020, featuring Ilona Shulman Spaar as special guest speaking to Holocaust education in Canada and the undertakings of the VHEC. As part of the project's speakers series, VHEC survivor speaker Dr. Robert Krell shared his experience of hiding as a child in the Netherlands during the Holocaust. ■



Screenshot of jeniferreads.com.

My War: Fleeing the Germans

BY LEV SHAPIRO

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY RIMMA SHAPIRO

The day before the start of the war was a warm and sunny day in Stalino (now Donetsk, Ukraine). High school graduates celebrated the end of the semester and dreamt of a new and happy life. The main street of the city was full of joyful sounds. No one had died yet.

The next day was just as sunny. At nine in the morning, three radios resembling gramophones hanging in the central square sounded an alarm, then projected this announcement: "At 12 in the afternoon listen for an important message." This combination of alarm and announcement was repeated many times that morning. Finally, at 12 o'clock, Molotov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, spoke: "Today, at four in the morning, treacherously and without warning, fascist troops crossed the Soviet border. Our cause is just, and victory will be ours." People in the crowd discussed how long the war might last; they said: "two weeks, maybe a month." We were taught that "the Red Army is the strongest, we are ready for war because Stalin is our saviour." Unfortunately, the reality was the opposite: we were fully unprepared for war.

In those first few months, almost without resistance, the Germans took over our territory. On August 31, 1941, I was getting ready to start second grade, but the Germans bombed our city, and we couldn't go to school. The city's residents were forced to tape their window glass with an "X" shape so that during a bombing the glass wouldn't shatter and wound us. When it got dark in the evenings, all houses with lights on inside had to have their curtains fully closed. Factories and other production facilities were evacuated. There was no working or public transportation after dark. Our radio had to be on at all times; it broadcast air raid warnings with a siren. In the case of an air raid, we had to run to our bomb shelter, a communal basement in the yard. The Germans usually bombed at night.

Authority escalated, as did the paranoia surrounding spies and enemies in the country. Posters in the streets of Stalino portrayed a woman with her index finger to her lips, and read, "Pst ... an enemy doesn't sleep, they eavesdrop." These had political aims: to shut people up.

Other than members of the Party and their associates, who lived in better apartments and ate better than the general population, there were no rich people in the Soviet Union. We lived a poor life; our family consisted of five people. My older sister was 11 years old, I was nine,



Lev Shapiro and his older sister, before the war. Photo courtesy of Rimma Shapiro.

and my younger brother was three. My mother didn't have a job. We ate meat and fish only on special occasions. Our money barely lasted us from pay cheque to pay cheque. From reading the newspaper, we knew that the Germans treated their Jews badly, but that was all.

At this time of war, members of the Party were evacuated from the city, but the government, with Stalin in charge, didn't help the Jews evacuate to the east. The government never even warned the Jews of the danger we were in. We had no money, and not even one train ticket, with which to flee.

The company my father worked for owned a three-tonne truck. After the bosses fled, they left my father in charge of it, with the understanding that he would use the truck to transfer company paperwork and stamps to an office in Samara. The firm's driver agreed to join us; he was a communist and thus also afraid of German persecution. Another of my father's co-workers, with his wife and teenage son, asked to come with us in the truck. My mother invited her two sisters and the wife of her brother along, with her three kids. One of her sisters had a two-week-old baby, and one had a baby of seven months. Together we fit tightly into the back of the truck, along with a barrel of gasoline, and left Stalino for Samara.

A strong, cold wind blew into the back of the truck; we sometimes also got soaked by the rain. By evening we made it to Makeevka. An officer with a gun in his hand blocked the road in front of us. He told us that all vehicles in the country were to be confiscated for the use of the Red Army. So, we unloaded there on the roadside. It was dark and cold, the rain was encroaching; it was the end of October. We were on the outskirts of an unknown city, with no electricity to light the dark streets. The women, with small children in their arms, cried of hopelessness and the unknown. But then, a miracle! The officer approached my father and said: "In the yard of that neighbouring house is a broken car" (two times smaller than the truck just confiscated). "If your driver is able to fix it, you can take it." At that time,



Lev Shapiro at age 12. Photograph courtesy of Rimma Shapiro.

almost all drivers knew something about mechanics. Our driver turned on his flashlight, found the car and worked his magic for a while. The car started to make some noise. Eventually it started and we hopped in the back. There was not enough space for the family of my father's co-worker, so they decided to go by rail. As the sun rose, we noticed an unfamiliar bag with new boots inside it. The family must have forgotten it in their hurry and the darkness. I believe that the bag with the boots were left there not by accident, but to save us.

The closest city to the east of us was Rostov-on-Don. On our way, to the right and the left, black fields surrounded us: there was no time to harvest the crops, they were burned to avoid being taken by the enemy. When we arrived at the bridge over the Don River, we saw a lineup of wagons pulled by oxen and horses, tractors,

harvesters, and wagons filled with cargo, pulled by people, reaching all the way to the horizon, all waiting to cross to the other side. Rostov-on-Don was being bombed, and the bridge was empty, closed due to the airstrike. We pulled up to an officer at the bridge and said, "In our car are women and newborns, we are not able to stand in line. Help us get to the other side, in exchange we will give you new boots." The officer looked at the boots, thought, and replied: "If your driver is able to get down this hill, beside the bridge, with its dangerously sharp inclines, then you will can quickly access and traverse the empty bridge."

Our driver took the risk. Everyone got out of the car, and our driver, with short jerking motions, maneuvered the car down the embankment beside the bridge. We got back in, and with maximum speed crossed the empty bridge, and got to the other side, as if we had wings. We got lucky! And then continued our journey to Saratov.

In the Stalingrad region (now Volgograd), in the village of Kamyshin, we were stopped by another officer who confiscated our car, for the same reason as the first, for the use of the Red Army. The closest train station was still very far away. Getting to Saratov would only be possible via the Volga River, which was already starting to freeze over. At the marina they told us that the last steamboat would arrive in ten days. If the weather wasn't too cold, then the steamboat would be able to pass down the river.

In Kamyshin, there were many empty houses with cellars filled with potatoes and pickled goods, and yards filled with firewood. These houses were previously occupied by Germans who had left for Siberia and Kazakhstan. The driver and his wife stayed in one of them; we stayed in another, for ten days. We drew drinking water from the Volga, and drank it without boiling it. It was clean!

As promised, and to our surprise and happiness, our steamboat arrived. A large crowd gathered at the marina in anticipation. When the ramp was brought out,

everyone in the crowd rushed onto it, and the railing broke. People were thrown off the ramp and our group was separated in the rush. After the ship departed, we looked for one another. Did everyone make it on? Fortunately, yes, we all made it safely on board! The vessel was a small, old, single-decked ship with a steam engine. There was coal in the downstairs compartment, where the passengers sat tightly packed.

Eventually we made it to Samara. My father delivered his paperwork to the company head office. We found some sort of covering outside and spent the night under it. Snow fell, and we all froze. In the morning we decided to head to the train station and get on any empty train car heading south. There was another miracle waiting for us at the train station! An empty freight car was headed to Central Asia. We loaded onto the train, and already felt shielded from the wind and rain. As for food, there was only bread, which had turned green on the inside due to mold. We still ate it, as there was nothing else.

We passed the dried-out Aral Sea; its beaches were covered with thick layers of salt which sparkled in the sun. The train stopped right at the coast. We could have gathered some salt, but we did not, which we later greatly regretted. Salt was expensive. Finally, the train made it to Tashkent, but meeting every car was a police officer, prohibiting people from disembarking, as the city was already filled with refugees. "Ride further along on the train," they told us. But my mother's sister and her brother's wife had asked their husbands who were fighting on the front to post letters to them in Tashkent, as they did not have a home address. So, we got off at the next stop and met an Uzbek with a horse and cart. He agreed to take us back to Tashkent where he was building a house close to the city. The house already had a roof, but no windows or doors. He allowed us to temporarily stay there, as apartments in Tashkent were very expensive. We rang in 1942 there. Our money was almost out; we saw no prospects. We slept on the cold ground in our winter clothes.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

A New Acquisition: Uncovering a Tragic Story

BY SHYLA SELLER

Shoshana (née Ejnesman) Fidelman first called the VHEC in February 2020, wondering if there was anyone interested in coming to her home to have a look at her family photographs, portraits of members of the Jewish community in pre-war Wierzbnik, in Poland. I booked an appointment to visit her in the first week of March. This would be the last time I would visit a donor indoors, without social distancing requirements in place, for a very long time.

On the day of our meeting, Shoshana welcomed me in and invited me to sit down on a couch in her living room, beside a coffee table, photographs carefully laid out on its surface. She started going through the pictures of her family, identifying each person by name, their relationship to her, and where they died. I tried to keep up, quickly writing down names and other details, and any identifying features, so I could accurately link the notes to the right picture when I returned to the office. We went through each photograph one by one.

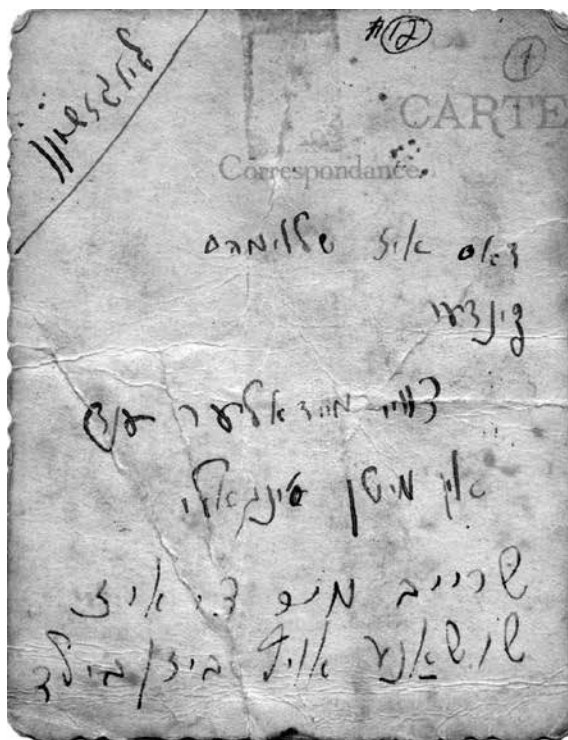
In my role as archivist, I try and gather as much contextual information about an archival artefact as possible, to aid in its description and cataloguing later, when I fill out fields of information guided by national standards followed by archival institutions across the country. When was this photograph taken, where was this taken, by who? How did this end up in your possession? When and where were you born? What were your movements during the war? When did you come to Canada? What does this inscription in Yiddish on the back translate to? Approximately how old is this person at the time this photo was taken?

Archivists also try and understand and retain what is known as a creator's original order—the order an owner keeps papers and photographs in, which contributes

to the items' meaning as a whole. By disturbing that order you can break that meaning and interfere with the relationship between the items, or their archival bond. Those details, and this training, is important, but it can take over a conversation. As I formulated questions, Shoshana picked up all the photographs we had just gone through and reordered them, placing them down again on the coffee table in the order of the year in which the person pictured was murdered. 1942, Treblinka. 1942, Treblinka. 1942. 1944, the Starachowice labour camp complex. 1944, the forest near Starachowice. 1945, after the war ended, in a pogrom in her home town of Wierzbnik. 1945.

I looked down at my notes, and the order they were in, worried that I would lose track of which notes referred to which image. And then I started to understand that the information I was asking for was eclipsing what was essential for Shoshana to express about these pictures. I needed to capture the traditional information in order to record the creation, form and transmission of an archival record, which archivists use to assess and communicate a document or photograph's authenticity, its trustworthiness and reliability as a historical source. But as well as this, and more importantly, I needed to convey what the photographs represented to their owner: the only remaining personal items in her possession of her family who were murdered by the Nazis during the war and by anti-Semites in a pogrom in Poland at the end of the war. Her father, mother, brother, sister, aunts, uncles, healthy and beautiful and together, with a strong family resemblance, were taken from her at a young age in the course of events she couldn't comprehend, events which left her entirely alone in the world.

At the end of our meeting we completed paperwork establishing the legal transfer of ownership from



Without a testimony to turn to for information about a donor's biographical details and story of survival, I needed to find contextual information to better understand this donation elsewhere. Shoshana had never

Before Browning's research, Starachowice was a little-known camp without much of a historical record because of little remaining traditional evidence. According to Browning, the use of survivor testimony as historical evidence has always been somewhat contested; he gives examples of flawed historical research conducted by historians who embraced survivor testimony too uncritically and emotionally, and missed errors in memory and fact. Testimonies differ greatly in the way they are delivered, he notes, depending on who is taking

1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026, 2027, 2028, 2029, 2030, 2031, 2032, 2033, 2034, 2035, 2036, 2037, 2038, 2039, 2040, 2041, 2042, 2043, 2044, 2045, 2046, 2047, 2048, 2049, 2050, 2051, 2052, 2053, 2054, 2055, 2056, 2057, 2058, 2059, 2060, 2061, 2062, 2063, 2064, 2065, 2066, 2067, 2068, 2069, 2070, 2071, 2072, 2073, 2074, 2075, 2076, 2077, 2078, 2079, 2080, 2081, 2082, 2083, 2084, 2085, 2086, 2087, 2088, 2089, 2090, 2091, 2092, 2093, 2094, 2095, 2096, 2097, 2098, 2099, 2100, 2101, 2102, 2103, 2104, 2105, 2106, 2107, 2108, 2109, 2110, 2111, 2112, 2113, 2114, 2115, 2116, 2117, 2118, 2119, 2120, 2121, 2122, 2123, 2124, 2125, 2126, 2127, 2128, 2129, 2130, 2131, 2132, 2133, 2134, 2135, 2136, 2137, 2138, 2139, 2140, 2141, 2142, 2143, 2144, 2145, 2146, 2147, 2148, 2149, 2150, 2151, 2152, 2153, 2154, 2155, 2156, 2157, 2158, 2159, 2160, 2161, 2162, 2163, 2164, 2165, 2166, 2167, 2168, 2169, 2170, 2171, 2172, 2173, 2174, 2175, 2176, 2177, 2178, 2179, 2180, 2181, 2182, 2183, 2184, 2185, 2186, 2187, 2188, 2189, 2190, 2191, 2192, 2193, 2194, 2195, 2196, 2197, 2198, 2199, 2200, 2201, 2202, 2203, 2204, 2205, 2206, 2207, 2208, 2209, 2210, 2211, 2212, 2213, 2214, 2215, 2216, 2217, 2218, 2219, 2220, 2221, 2222, 2223, 2224, 2225, 2226, 2227, 2228, 2229, 2230, 2231, 2232, 2233, 2234, 2235, 2236, 2237, 2238, 2239, 2240, 2241, 2242, 2243, 2244, 2245, 2246, 2247, 2248, 2249, 2250, 2251, 2252, 2253, 2254, 2255, 2256, 2257, 2258, 2259, 2260, 2261, 2262, 2263, 2264, 2265, 2266, 2267, 2268, 2269, 2270, 2271, 2272, 2273, 2274, 2275, 2276, 2277, 2278, 2279, 2280, 2281, 2282, 2283, 2284, 2285, 2286, 2287, 2288, 2289, 2290, 2291, 2292, 2293, 2294, 2295, 2296, 2297, 2298, 2299, 2300, 2301, 2302, 2303, 2304, 2305, 2306, 2307, 2308, 2309, 2310, 2311, 2312, 2313, 2314, 2315, 2316, 2317, 2318, 2319, 2320, 2321, 2322, 2323, 2324, 2325, 2326, 2327, 2328, 2329, 2330, 2331, 2332, 2333, 2334, 2335, 2336, 2337, 2338, 2339, 2340, 2341, 2342, 2343, 2344, 2345, 2346, 2347, 2348, 2349, 2350, 2351, 2352, 2353, 2354, 2355, 2356, 2357, 2358, 2359, 2360, 2361, 2362, 2363, 2364, 2365, 2366, 2367, 2368, 2369, 2370, 2371, 2372, 2373, 2374, 2375, 2376, 2377, 2378, 2379, 2380, 2381, 2382, 2383, 2384, 2385, 2386, 2387, 2388, 2389, 2390, 2391, 2392, 2393, 2394, 2395, 2396, 2397, 2398, 2399, 2400, 2401, 2402, 2403, 2404, 2405, 2406, 2407, 2408, 2409, 2410, 2411, 2412, 2413, 2414, 2415, 2416, 2417, 2418, 2419, 2420, 2421, 2422, 2423, 2424, 2425, 2426, 2427, 2428, 2429, 2430, 2431, 2432, 2433, 2434, 2435, 2436, 2437, 2438, 2439, 2440, 2441, 2442, 2443, 2444, 2445, 2446, 2447, 2448, 2449, 2450, 2451, 2452, 2453, 2454, 2455, 2456, 2457, 2458, 2459, 2460, 2461, 2462, 2463, 2464, 2465, 2466, 2467, 2468, 2469, 2470, 2471, 2472, 2473, 2474, 2475, 2476, 2477, 2478, 2479, 2480, 2481, 2482, 2483, 2484, 2485, 2486, 2487, 2488, 2489, 2490, 2491, 2492, 2493, 2494, 2495, 2496, 2497, 2498, 2499, 2500, 2501, 2502, 2503, 2504, 2505, 2506, 2507, 2508, 2509, 2510, 2511, 2512, 2513, 2514, 2515, 2516, 2517, 2518, 2519, 2520, 2521, 2522, 2523, 2524, 2525, 2526, 2527, 2528, 2529, 2530, 2531, 2532, 2533, 2534, 2535, 2536, 2537, 2538, 2539, 2540, 2541, 2542, 2543, 2544, 2545, 2546, 2547, 2548, 2549, 2550, 2551, 2552, 2553, 2554, 2555, 2556, 2557, 2558, 2559, 2560, 2561, 2562, 2563, 2564, 2565, 2566, 2567, 2568, 2569, 2570, 2571, 2572, 2573, 2574, 2575, 2576, 2577, 2578, 2579, 2580, 2581, 2582, 2583, 2584, 2585, 2586, 2587, 2588, 2589, 2590, 2591, 2592, 2593, 2594, 2595, 2596, 2597, 2598, 2599, 2600, 2601, 2602, 2603, 2604, 2605, 2606, 2607, 2608, 2609, 2610, 2611, 2612, 2613, 2614, 2615, 2616, 2617, 2618, 2619, 2620, 2621, 2622, 2623, 2624, 2625, 2626, 2627, 2628, 2629, 2630, 2631, 2632, 2633, 2634, 2635, 2636, 2637, 2638, 2639, 2640, 2641, 2642, 2643, 2644, 2645, 2646, 2647, 2648, 2649, 2650, 2651, 2652, 2653, 2654, 2655, 2656, 2657, 2658, 2659, 2660, 2661, 2662, 2663, 2664, 2665, 2666, 2667, 2668, 2669, 2670, 2671, 2672, 2673, 2674, 2675, 2676, 2677, 2678, 26



Meir Ejnesman (left) and his two sons, Noah (centre) and Shlomo (right). Meir, grandfather of Shoshana Fidelman, was sent from the Wierzbniak ghetto to his death in Treblinka on October, 27, 1942. Shlomo was killed following his escape from the Starachowice labour camp in 1944, and Noah was killed by Polish anti-Semites in 1945. Item 2020.012.001.

the testimony, and whether the interviewer simply asks the witness to speak, if they shape an interview with predetermined questions, or if they ask unplanned follow-up questions as the conversation progresses. For his book, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave Labor Camp*, Browning scoured through recorded testimonies, conducted his own interviews, and, in total, gathered eyewitness accounts from 292 survivors. These were often conflicting, contradictory, and at times mistaken, but had enough points of agreement in order for him to construct a very helpful timeline of events in Starachowice, where Shoshana had been imprisoned as a child. In the course of this work he met and interviewed Shoshana Fidelman. Her memories inform Browning's chapters on children in the camp, an escape attempt from the camp which killed 64 prisoners, including Shoshana's brother and sister, the prisoners' return to Wierzbniak after the war, and the Wierzbniak

pogrom which killed Shoshana's mother and family friends, in which Shoshana was badly injured, and the sole survivor.²

The events of Starachowice are untypical, Browning notes, in the way that its residents, deported to Birkenau after its liquidation, avoided selection. Of the approximately 1,200 to 1,400 Starachowice Jews deported to Birkenau in July 1944, about one half were alive at the end of the war. They gathered in DP camps and some, like Shoshana and her mother, eventually returned to their hometown of Wierzbniak to look for relatives. He writes, "We must be grateful for the testimonies of those who survived and are willing to speak, but we have no right to expect from them tales of edification and redemption."³

Working on this collection of photographs, with Shoshana Fidelman and the work of Christopher

² Shoshana Fidelman is referred to by the name Roszia Einesman in Browning's book, *Remember Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave Labor Camp*.

³ *Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony*, Christopher R. Browning. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003.

Browning, has taught me to be more thoughtful and considered in my reliance on Holocaust testimony as a main source for biographical sketches, in cases where the donated records themselves don't provide enough information. Biographies are an especially essential component of archival descriptive work in the context of the VHEC, as it is the events in a survivor's past which can establish an artefact as relating to the Holocaust, and thus falling under the VHEC's collecting mandate. In reading about Browning's experience with different testimony approaches and styles, I realized that I can take some of what he learns from survivor interviews and testimonies and apply it to donor conversations and related archival work. It is tempting to try and guide a conversation with a donor in the direction of predetermined fields of information I know I will need to fill out in a database later, but, in the course of that conversation, how can I make room for a donor to express what is significant to her about the items being donated? How can I make room for what is difficult to speak aloud? Or for long-buried memories reignited by

looking at artefacts from the past, which may lead the conversation in a surprising and unexpected direction?

After spending time with Browning's work and familiarizing myself with the history of the Jews from Starachowice and Wierzbniok, I completed a draft of a finding aid describing Shoshana's donated materials, and scanned and numbered each item. I mailed copies of these to Shoshana with a letter of thanks, and asked her to check the work over before we made it publicly available. She replied quickly, noting one photograph scan I'd made upside down, which made the Yiddish difficult to read, so we flipped it. This work is now accessible, with biographical information of the Ejnesman, Kornwaser family, and scans of the beautiful photographs, evidence of vibrant pre-war Jewish life in Poland, from which you can now put faces to the names mentioned in Shoshana's family's deeply tragic history. ■

Shyla Seller is the Archivist at the VHEC.



Chana Ejnesman, née Szafir, and Lea Ejnesman, both sent to their deaths in Treblinka on October 27, 1942. Item 2020.012.002.

COLLECTIONS NEWS

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

In November 2020, Archivist Shyla Seller participated in a virtual workshop entitled Using Holocaust Documents Online: The Changing Relationship between the Archivist and the Users, hosted by Yad Vashem with support from the EVZ Foundation. Shyla presented on a panel with the Archivist of the Melbourne Holocaust Centre and the Director of the Sardinian Shoah Memorial Centre, providing a comparative perspective on the activities of institutions holding Holocaust archival materials during the COVID-19 pandemic. The workshop addressed the changing role of the archivist and reference expert in interaction with the user and attempted to define expertise in an age where large amounts of source material and information is accessible online. Participants attended from all over the world, and included staff of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Wiener Holocaust Library, Arolsen Archives, Yad Vashem and the Ghetto Fighters' House.

NEW IN FINDING AIDS

Newly described and digitized materials are now available for research in the VHEC's online collections database at collections.vhec.org. These include photographs donated by Klara Forrai, from when she was a displaced person at the Bergen-Belsen DP camp. Holocaust survivor Mottel E. Menczer's manuscript, entitled *Between the Prague, Dniester and Bug Rivers*, and related travel and immigration records are now described and accessible in the Yiddish original and English translation. Parts of Menczer's manuscript first appeared in the April 2004 issue of *Zachor*, available at vhec.org/annual-reports-publications. Dr. Helen Karsai donated documents she created and/or gathered as a result of her volunteer work with the Western Association of Holocaust Survivor Families and Friends and other Holocaust remembrance and educational

activities in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Sara Frisby donated 67 photographs taken in 1945 by Royal Canadian Air Force photographer Fred Thompson and collected by her grandfather, Albert Edward Frisby, who also served in the Canadian military during the Second World War. The photographs have been captioned by the photographer. Now available in an English translation by Gabriela Wieczorek is correspondence written from Holocaust survivor Maryla Zalejska-Komar in Warsaw to Alexander Dimant in Vancouver. The translations, from Polish originals, were generously funded by Gina Dimant, and increase the accessibility of her and her husband's moving correspondence with a fellow Holocaust survivor in Warsaw. The letters cover subjects such as Zalejska-Komar's memories of the Warsaw ghetto, the political situation in Poland in the 1990s and personal information about her life and family.

CONSERVATION UPDATE

This past year's fundraising efforts focused in part on improving the storage and conservation of items in the VHEC's archival and museum holdings. With funds generously donated by our supporters, the VHEC was able to purchase a map cabinet to safely store posters, maps and other large-format flat pieces. Conservator Sabina Sutherland has completed work on some of the VHEC's most fragile and damaged artefacts. She cleaned and strengthened paper artefacts, including an antisemitic propaganda poster donated by Peter Moogk and a songbook made by Rebecca Teitelbaum in Ravensbruck, removed handmade lace owned by the Meyer family from an acidic and potentially damaging backing and frame, and prepared preservation and storage recommendations for some deteriorating leather pieces. The successful conservation of these items results in the extension of their useful life and supports research, reference and exhibition in service of the Centre's continued work in Holocaust education and remembrance. ■

28.11.95

Witam Pana, dziękuję za list z 15 lutego. Już się trochę niepokoiłam brakiem odpowiedzi. Ale teraz rozumiem, że dla Pana publikacja Pana listu musiała wywołać wiele wątpliwości, że przynajmniej nie Pan z nimi przeszedł pół wieku. Kawał życia. Ma to być oczywiście. Niewiele z nich czas spędzić się zdawało, że musiał wykreślić z pamięci adresy i telefonów osób, które opuściły ten świat.

Wiem, że pamięta Pan tylko w naszej pamięci i myślimy, do których się nie wrócić, nie wierząc, że się już nigdy nie zobaczą, ani nie usłyszą. W tym momencie kupiłam książkę, którą Pan wymienił w liście: "Wspomnienia z lat 1945-1946" Janusza Leśkiewicza. Co się týczy tam, a mianowicie koncertów Festiwalu Kultury Żydowskiej, to od razu się dowiedziałem, że w Warszawie odbył się koncert z udziałem organizatorów Festiwalu Kultury Żydowskiej w Krakowie, ul. Świętej Gertrudy 5, 31-107 Kraków. Tel. 012 211884, fax 012 21 14 02. Ale nikt w Warszawie nie wie, czy mają oni jakieś nagrania do ewentualnej sprzedaży. W tym momencie przesłałem m. in. redakcji "Głosu Żydowskiego" które zajmują się podzielnictwem red. Główna, siostry te informacje.

U nas tutaj bardzo daleko się w tym roku w znaki. Krzyż, smutny, a najgorzej - to milczenie - tak się rzadko wychodzi z domu. Już nie to słowo, niewiele. Z redakcji przysłała do mnie guzik po artykuły, tak, że sama tam raczej nie chodzę. Trochę się martwię, że podobno czasopismo "The Jewish Western Bulletin" przestało przychodzić od Nowego Roku. Zawsze można tam być zmiennie od interesującego. Nie wiem, czy to wina poczty, czy też czegoś więcej. Inne przysyłają.

Bardzo satysfakcjonuję się z listu z 15 lutego w tym roku w Polsce i przywrócić miś Matka Pana na nie zapomnienie. Ale to pewnie minie, czego oczywiście życzę.

28.11.95

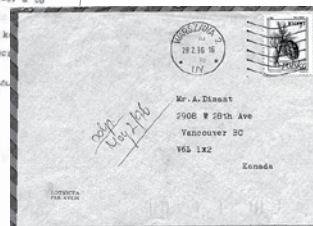
Witam Pana, ile ma Pan pracy w związku z Wystawą Wzrostu i Obniżenia. To wzrastające, że dzisiaj daleko na drugiej półkuli ludzie będą czuli tę rocznicę Powstania. Ja wtedy byłem już po 12.00. Wyznaję stronie (Spis treści) w połowie marca 1945 - parę tygodni przed Powstaniem i pamiątką, że jak patrzyłem na tym bez przerwy unoszący się nad płonącej żydowskiej dzielnicą i jak musiałem trwać żyć i rozpaczać, żeby się nie odemaskować. A przecież tam byli moi najbliżsi: ojciec, matka, babka, ciotki, wujkowie, kuzyni i kuzynki - całą rodziną. Wychodząc z gęstoty obłoków mojej trzypięcioletniej kuzynki, że postanowiłem się zapisać jej jakiś bezpieczny miejsce. Właśnie w polskiej dzielnicy, która została, nie miałem już żadnych możliwości z chwilą wybuchu Powstania. Miałem swoje rzeczy - w sprawie ewakuacji umieszczając je w klasztorze. Nie było to nic pewnego, ale starałem się jak najszybciej. Ma jej osobisty portret w polskiej dzielnicy - w tym czasie była ruda i miała smutny wyraz...

Żyła Pan o naszego nowego prezydenta, że trudno coś powiedzieć, jak to z nim będzie. Ale napewno jest antysemitem, a to jest coś...

Kam nadzieję, że nie ma żadnych nowych dalszych kłopotów. A tymczasem krótkie pozdrawiam Panią i Pana w dniu 28.11.95.

Maryla Zalejska-Komar

Letter from Maryla Zalejska-Komar to the Dimants dated February 28, 1995. Translated by Gabriela Wiczorek. Item 2019.012.010. Donated to the VHEC by Gina Dimant in 2019.



French prisoner of war poses to show his scarred face, the result of SS men. Item 2019.098.061. Donated to the VHEC by Sara Frisby in 2019.



Organizers and participants of a demonstration of displaced persons at Bergen-Belsen. Klara Forrai is pictured at right. Two of the men pictured were members of the Jewish Brigade, according to a note taken at time of donation of photographs. Item 96.041.004. Donated to the VHEC by Klara Forrai in 1994.

LIBRARY ACQUISITIONS

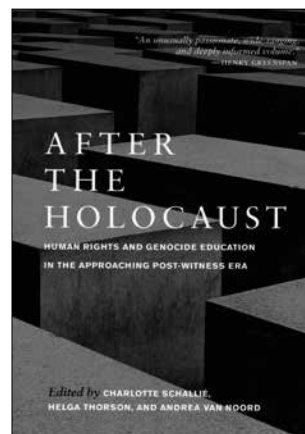
****After the Holocaust: Human Rights and Genocide Education in the Approaching Post-Witness Era***

Edited by Charlotte Schallié, Helga Thorson and Andrea Van Noord

REGINA, SK: UNIVERSITY OF REGINA PRESS, 2020

LIBRARY CALL NUMBER: 371.3 A258

CATALOGUE RECORD: [HTTPS://COLLECTIONS.VHEC.ORG/DETAIL/OBJECTS/9112](https://collections.vhec.org/detail/objects/9112)



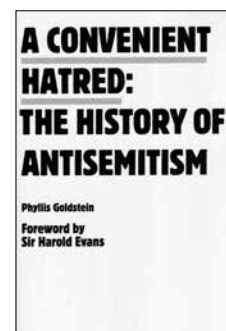
A Convenient Hatred: The History of Antisemitism

By Phyllis Goldstein

BROOKLINE, MA: FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES, 2012

LIBRARY CALL NUMBER: 305.8924 G62C

CATALOGUE RECORD: [HTTPS://COLLECTIONS.VHEC.ORG/DETAIL/OBJECTS/8982](https://collections.vhec.org/detail/objects/8982)



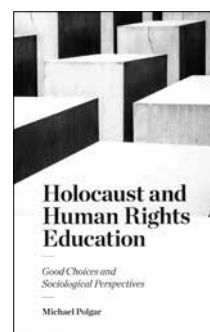
****The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary***

Edited by Randolph L. Braham

EVANSTON, IL: NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2013

LIBRARY CALL NUMBER: REF 943.9 G345 V. 1-3 (REFERENCE COLLECTION)

CATALOGUE RECORD: [HTTPS://COLLECTIONS.VHEC.ORG/DETAIL/OBJECTS/9121](https://collections.vhec.org/detail/objects/9121)



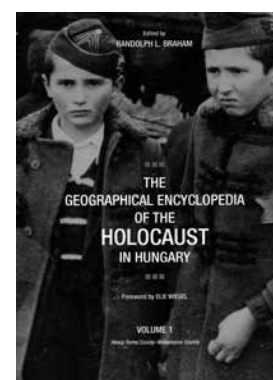
****Holocaust and Human Rights Education: Good Choices and Sociological Perspectives***

By Michael Polgar

BINGLEY, UK: EMERALD PUBLISHING, 2019

LIBRARY CALL NUMBER: 371.3 P76H

CATALOGUE RECORD: [HTTPS://COLLECTIONS.VHEC.ORG/DETAIL/OBJECTS/9110](https://collections.vhec.org/detail/objects/9110)



****The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt***

By Anna Hájková

NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2020

LIBRARY CALL NUMBER: 940.5317 T398HA

CATALOGUE RECORD: [HTTPS://COLLECTIONS.VHEC.ORG/DETAIL/OBJECTS/9120](https://collections.vhec.org/detail/objects/9120)



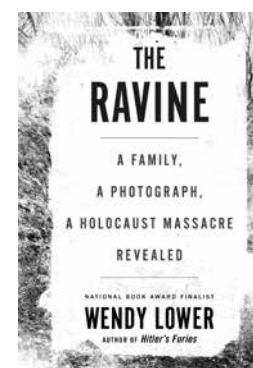
The Ravine: A Family, a Photograph, a Holocaust Massacre Revealed

By Wendy Lower

BOSTON; NEW YORK: HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT, 2021

LIBRARY CALL NUMBER: 947.708 L91R

CATALOGUE RECORD: [HTTPS://COLLECTIONS.VHEC.ORG/DETAIL/OBJECTS/9184](https://collections.vhec.org/detail/objects/9184)



The library collection can be searched online in the VHEC collections catalogue: <https://collections.vhec.org/>.

VHEC members and BC teachers may borrow library materials using our takeout service: <https://collections.vhec.org/Libraries/guide>. To request any of the titles above or to inquire about other library items, please contact the Librarian at library@vhec.org. ■

**The purchase of these titles was made possible thanks to a generous contribution from the Chaim Zbar Foundation.*

COVID RELIEF & RECOVERY

Canadian Heritage Museum Assistance Program— COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund

The VHEC has received \$100,000 in funding from Canadian Heritage's Museum Assistance Program—COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund to support our activities as a heritage institution. This funding will support ongoing work to support the preservation, access and educational use of the VHEC's collections.

The library, museum, archives and testimony collections were formally established when the Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society opened the VHEC in 1994, and have continued to grow ever since. Survivors and their families have donated personal items, which are accessible to researchers along with gifts from private collectors, military veterans, community members and academics. Each item carries a unique Holocaust perspective.

Staff are continually adding catalogue records and digitizing items from the collection. Researchers are encouraged to contact the VHEC to inquire about its holdings and to access non-digitized materials described in this system: collections.vhec.org.

Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver— Community Recovery Fund

The VHEC has received a grant of \$25,000 from the Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver's Community Recovery Fund program to support technological upgrades to continue our online outreach to students, teachers and the broader community, and to offset lost revenues from our Symposia programs.

Thanks to the Jewish Federation's Community Recovery Fund, the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre's Holocaust survivor speakers are able to

continue to engage with students in online seminars, at a time when at a time when increasing antisemitism, racism and xenophobia are making Holocaust education more critical than ever.

One teacher commented: "Thank you again for bringing a survivor speaker to my students. There is one student in particular I've had a hard time getting through to. He strongly connected with the survivor's story about settling into Canada after the war. The survivor speaker really gave this young man a sense of hope, and I am so grateful."

SENIORS TECHNOLOGY LENDING PROGRAM FOR HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

Supported by an anonymous donor through the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Vancouver, the VHEC has received a grant from the Jewish Community Foundation to acquire tablets for circulation to local Holocaust survivors, to support participation in online programs and to counter isolation. The devices will include a data plan, in the event that the borrower does not have wi-fi connectivity.

The VHEC is pleased to partner with the JCC's Issac Waldman Library to offer this borrowing service.

Further details about this program will be announced soon. Please contact info@vhec.org or 604-264-0499 to learn more. ■

THE VHEC is grateful for all grants, donations and bequests which support our mission to advance social justice, human rights and genocide awareness.

Jewish Community Foundation Helps Seniors Connect Online

BY THE JEWISH COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



The past year has been an isolating time for us all, but some people in our community have been impacted more significantly than others. When it comes to our seniors, who are among the most vulnerable to COVID-19, many have not left their homes in months. Combined with the lack of access to technologies that many of us take for granted, such as internet connectivity and video calling, some seniors are doubly vulnerable to the pandemic's impact on mental health and social isolation. The Seniors Technology Lending Program aims to alleviate these challenges by providing seniors with the tools they need to connect virtually to community programming, as well as with their family and friends.

The Jewish Community Foundation was able to launch this initiative by partnering with the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre (VHEC) and the JCC's Isaac Waldman Jewish public library. This pilot program allows

seniors to borrow tablet devices and learn their basic functions, as well as providing data services to those borrowing the devices when needed.

The Seniors Technology Lending Program addresses two critical needs as identified by the Jewish Federation's Community Recovery Task Force: access to technology and technical support, and mental health support. In order to meet these needs, the Foundation, with the support of a fund holder, identified two community partners, the VHEC and the Isaac Waldman Library at the JCC. The VHEC was a natural choice, because of the number of seniors they work with and the services they provide, as was the Waldman library, with its existing information infrastructure and expertise in lending materials. The three organizations in partnership are launching this critical pilot program to serve seniors.

The Foundation is uniquely positioned to partner with communal agencies and fund holders to address community needs in impactful ways because of its deep understanding of community and its relationships with fund holders. The Seniors Technology Lending Program is a great example of the impact that can be achieved through collaboration and strategic partnerships.

Thanks to the combined efforts of the Jewish Community Foundation, the VHEC and the JCC's Isaac Waldman Library, the Seniors Technology Lending Program promises to enable seniors to participate virtually in community life until it is safe to resume in-person programming. During this challenging time of social disconnection, it's encouraging to see how our community continues to come together to ensure that no one is left behind. ■

The Jewish Community Foundation is the centre for philanthropy in the Greater Vancouver Jewish community.

Mother Saved by Flowing Milk

BY REVA KANNER DEXTER

FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE *JEWISH INDEPENDENT* IN DECEMBER 2020. REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION.

A year ago, I attended the 31st Annual World Federation of Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust and Descendants. I have kept the story of my own Holocaust experience suppressed because it never seemed as tragic nor as diabolical as other people's stories. Furthermore, because I was an infant, born in 1944, I did not think that I had the right to call myself a child survivor. However, attending the conference changed that perception.

I claim the dubious distinction of being in the one percent of children born of Polish parents who survived. As three million Jews of Poland were murdered, I feel very privileged.

Of course, the circumstance of my miraculous survival is due to several factors. First, my parents escaped Poland in September of 1939. Second, they were living close to the Ukraine border. Third, they had the essential skills and resilience to overcome many hardships.

My mother Sarah (daughter of Pinchus and Chana) and my father Mechel (son of Israel and Esther) were born



The author as an infant with her parents Sarah and Mechel, and brother Hy, in Kazakhstan, where she was born in 1944. Photo courtesy Reva Kanner Dexter.

and grew up in small towns in southeastern Poland. Krasnystaw and Izbica were 12 kilometres apart. Close enough for biking and walking between the two towns along the Wieprz River.

Typical of small towns in that region and era, Sarah and Mechel grew up poor. Sarah's father was a barber, who taught her his skills as soon as she could hold a razor blade. Mechel's father was a tailor who had taught him the art of sewing, also at a young age.

Sarah and my father had moved to Chelm after their marriage, and Sarah was already six months pregnant when the German troops invaded.

Mechel was a member of a Zionist/socialist club, so he got the news early that the Nazis had taken over the town—1,500 young men were rounded up and shot. Rumours of castration created panic. Mechel took off by bike with some of his pals, telling Sarah he would be returning.

Sarah's birth mother lived in Rovno, Ukraine, so she made her way alone across the border with the help of a Yiddish-speaking Russian soldier. She had the prescience to bring her barbering tools. Little did she know that trains and train stations were going to dominate her life from that night forward for the next six years.

Sarah and Mechel gave birth to their first child, Chaim (Hy), who an aunt testified was born in Rovno, while an immigration document states that he was born in Novosibirsk, Siberia. Memories do seem to play tricks when the brain is violently assaulted.

The Russians saw and seized the opportunity of so many Jews fleeing Poland into Ukraine. They tricked Jews by



A photo taken at a displaced persons camp in Germany, 1947. The author and her older brother, Hy, are in the centre, with their arms draped over each other. Photo courtesy of Reva Kanner Dexter.

telling them that eastern Poland was now under Soviet rule and that they would be given safe passage back home.

It was a lie, a big one. The Jews were shoved into open cattle cars and sent to forced labour camps all over the USSR. Workers were required to keep the country running under the murderous hand of Stalin.

My parents and baby brother survived the train ride from Rovno or Kiev, which finally stopped in a logging camp on the banks of the Ob River, in Siberia. They realized immediately that their lives were only worth what their labour could produce.

I recall stories of wolves howling in the night and rats “as big as kittens” stealing their meagre rations while they slaved in the tundra in the day and tried to sleep in the frozen barracks in the night.

My father organized a strike—after all, they were in a communist country weren’t they? The demands for better working conditions were answered rapidly by rounding up the leaders during the night and incarcerating them in the Gulag.

Sarah had to fend for herself again. Even though she was freezing, undernourished and exhausted, she had an ample amount of milk flowing from her body. This was noticed by the commandant, whose wife had just given birth and could not nurse their sickly baby. Sarah was promoted from lumberjack to nursemaid.

As the two women became friends, Sarah got news that Mechel and the other men were still alive.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

What's In a Name?

BY MIRIAM DATTEL

What I remember is the sweet smell of the hard, corn-husk bed we sat on in the loft at the windmill where we hid. What I remember is the small, leather-bound prayer book, clutched tightly to my mother's heart. What I remember is the softness of her hand, holding mine. What my mother remembered was me, whispering reassurance to her, squeezing tight: "Don't be scared—we'll be alright."

I was three years old, and that day, I went by the second name given to me.

It was 1943, and at an isolated windmill in a remote Italian valley, Fritz Oberson answered the door, knowing two SS officers were on the other side. Speaking perfect German, my Croatian-born Uncle Fritz convinced them that only he, his wife Lili and baby boy Gerardo lived there as refugees from southern Italy. His natural charm, from years as a performing musician combined with a masterful (and life-saving) ear for languages, convinced the Nazis to pass us by.

Though young at the time, there are unforgettable moments from these first years of my life, spent in a near-constant state of fight-or-flight, as two couples and their children (my parents, and my aunt and uncle) moved discretely through 18 different locations over four years, fuelled by fear and a fierce will to survive.

But let me go back: I was born in Zagreb, Croatia in September 1940 to Andor and Margita Friedman. The name first given to me was Branka. We lived with my maternal grandmother; my grandfather passed away three weeks before I was born. Since 1933, our home had regularly been a safe refuge for persecuted Jews fleeing Germany and Austria to Yugoslavia and points beyond. In Croatia, the fascist Ustaša movement had embraced anti-Jewish laws, and so my father was expelled from university, where he'd

been studying law. My mother worked for Union Chocolates designing boxes and packaging, and instilling in her family a lifelong love of good chocolate.

On April 11, 1941, just a day after raids had begun on Jewish institutions, as well as mass arrests and deportations, the German army entered Zagreb. The letter Z (Jew) on a yellow button was mandatory on all outdoor clothing, and was placed on my stroller as well.

My parents recognized the danger and planned to leave Zagreb with my grandmother for Budapest. Hungary was safe for Jews at the time, and my mother had siblings there. On the planned day of our departure, however, I spiked a fever and rash and my mother refused to leave with a sick nine-month-old baby (it was measles).

My grandmother, Irma Stern, went ahead to Budapest, and—sadly—that was the last time we saw her. She was later deported to Auschwitz, where she perished.

Once I recovered, my parents considered alternative safe places, and decided to head toward Dalmatia, a historical region of Croatia under Italian authority at the time; they were more tolerant toward the Jewish



Portraits of the author's parents when they were known as Filipi Gigi and Filipi Margarita. Photos courtesy of Miriam Dattel.

My parents heard that in Kazakhstan, there was a train station where you could get a clay wagon for next to nothing. We had nothing to lose—near Tashkent or the train station of a different republic—we didn't care, at least there was some sort of hope. By freight train, we made it to Chu station in Kazakhstan. Sure enough, a man was ready to sell us his clay wagon and help us look for a second one the next day. We stayed the night at the man's home; he and his family fed us meat and pieces of cut-up dough. In the morning, the man found us a room in a hut with its own entrance. The hut was made of clay and straw walls, a dirt floor and a straw roof. It was 3 by 3.5 metres and had one small window; my mother's sisters bought this hut for the nine of us to live in. The hut was the last on the street, closest to the desert. Sand surrounded us, and there were sandstorms; the dust would stand in the air like fog. The dust got in your eyes, ears, nose and mouth, and with all that, the heat! One day a woman knocked on our door and asked to stay with us because a sandstorm had pushed her to our house and she didn't know where else to go.

We lived there for almost three years. After the liberation of Donetsk, we decided to return home, but things weren't that simple. Our apartment had been taken over by a family who had lost a soldier in the war. Donetsk was burned down and ruined. There was no working transportation system. There was not enough space at school so we studied in shifts, with no heat, books, notebooks or ink. Almost all the city infrastructure was ruined. Factories and mines could not function, there were not enough workers. Captured Germans laboured at construction sites. These Germans worked for another ten years on the recovery of our ruined city. Women from Hungary and Romania, countries which fought against us, cleaned up our ruined homes. For the four-year duration of the war, nothing was produced, which led to a shortage of everything, but that in itself, is a different story. ■

Lev Shapiro is a member of Vancouver's Russian speaking society Mocr-Bridge. Rimma Shapiro is his daughter. An expanded version of this story, in its original Russian, has been donated to the VHEC and is accessible here: <https://collections.vhec.org/Detail/objects/9383>.

In June 1941, when the Nazis attacked Russia, the Soviets granted amnesty to the surviving Polish citizens. Poland and Russia became allies. The Jewish prisoners were released, only into a more dangerous predicament.

With Mechel's leadership, the ragtag group of Jewish lumberjacks built rafts, trusting the river to lead them to safety. They navigated the Ob River by day, roping up by night.

During the night, the women would scramble up the banks, scavenging for food on adjacent farms. My mother told us that she dodged many bullets through the darkness. But the plan succeeded in getting them to a train station.

The next few years, they were underground, following trains, bartering at train stations, trying to regain health. Sarah would do pop-up barbering, thankful for her tools and endurance.

They finally made it to Czymkient, Kazakhstan, where Mechel got a job sewing uniforms for pilots at a pilot training academy. I was born in December 1944. Hope and optimism returned to our little family.

Of course, the story does not end here. Other chapters will emerge, as I continue to pull pieces of the survival puzzle together.

Thanks to the conference, I realize how important it is to keep searching for objects and recording memories, which return our beloved victims and survivors to us in spirit. ■

Reva (Rivka) Kanner Dexter has been a docent at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre since 2007.



Postcard with picture of author at six months of age, when she was known as Branka. Postcard was mailed from Italy to her grandmother in Hungary. Postcard courtesy of Miriam Dattel.

population. A friend of my Uncle Fritz was our ticket to safety; she helped five of us (my parents and I, plus my mother's sister and her husband) depart to Split, Croatia on May 29, 1941.

There, we gratefully traded one captive experience for another, as the Italians transferred us just as the Ustaša were again deporting Jews from Split. Transported by boat and train to Italy, I was the lone child in a group of 28 adults. I passed my first birthday in much the same way we'd be for the next three years: on the run, with my parents in constant distress about finding food and nutrition for me.

On November 27, 1941, we arrived at the village of Valli del Pasubio in Northern Italy, where our movements were limited, and we were allowed no contact with locals. We were interned there until May 1943, a month after my cousin Gerardo was born to Fritz and Lili.

With the Germans closing in on Valli del Pasubio, we were helped by members of the Italian resistance, and

given new identities and false identification. It was here my Croatian heritage was muted, and I was given a second name, one upon which my life depended. At age three, Franka Fillipi spoke only Italian (taught by my uncle), memorized her family's new names, and never uttered a word of the language she first learned, nor revealed her true identity to anyone.

Tipped off by local police that Germans were on the hunt, we ran for our lives once again, fear around every corner and down every road; capture seeming imminent—finding some safety along the way, refuge in Switzerland and ultimately ending up back in Zagreb after the war ended.

There is much more to the story, as there is for all survivors, but my writing this tells you I am one of only twelve percent of Jewish children who survived the Holocaust. From the time we emigrated to Israel from Croatia in 1949 until now, I've gone by the third name I ever used: Miriam. ■

Miriam Dattel is a member of the Child Survivors group and will be one of the VHEC's outreach speakers. She lives in Burnaby, BC.

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Our sincere apologies for any errors or omissions.

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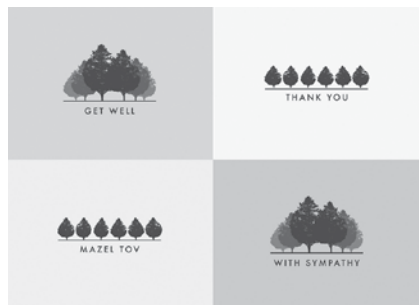
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