New Acquisition:
Letters from Vienna, 1938

SPRING 2022

AUSCHWITZ TO ŽILINA: SECRETS OF MY NATIVE TOWN
BLACK EXCELLENCE DAY: THE WEIGHT OF A NAME
SMALL INSIGHTS: REVISITING THE VHEC’S SHANGHAI ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
WEDNESDAY
APRIL 27, 2022 | 7 PM
WOSK AUDITORIUM
JEWSIH COMMUNITY CENTRE
950 WEST 41ST AVENUE, VANCOUVER

YOM HASHOAH
HOLOCAUST COMMEMORATIVE EVENING

KEYNOTE SPEAKER
AMALIA BOE-FISHMAN
HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

SECOND GENERATION SPEAKER
MARTHA LEDERMAN
AUTHOR OF "KISS THE RED STAIRS"

WENDY AND RON STUART MUSICAL PROGRAM
CANTOR YAACOV ORZECH

HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS ARE INVITED
TO LIGHT A MEMORIAL CANDLE.
EVERYONE WELCOME. NO RSVP REQUIRED.
A LIVESTREAM LINK WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE
AT VHEC.ORG TO AUDIENCE MEMBERS UNABLE
TO ATTEND IN PERSON.

Presented by the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. This program
is funded throughout community’s generous contributions to the
Jewish Federation Annual Campaign and by the Province of British
Columbia. Supported by the Gail Feldman Heller & Sarah Rozenberg-
Wu Memorial Endowment Funds and the Jewish Community Centre
of Greater Vancouver.
Dear readers,

As the VHEC looks forward to Passover and spring—a time of renewal—our doors are reopening to public visitors and school groups. While online programs and resources will continue to expand our reach, we are very much looking forward to convening in person, as health and safety guidelines permit, to experience aspects of our work that are enriched by standing shoulder to shoulder as a community.

Yom HaShoah will be observed in person in the JCC’s Wosk Auditorium for the first time since 2019, with keynote speakers Amalia Boe-Fishman, a child survivor from the Netherlands, and the Globe and Mail’s Marsha Lederman, a child of Holocaust survivors. With eyewitnesses and survivors present for a candle lighting tribute in memory of the victims of the Shoah, this will no doubt be a very moving commemoration, and we hope that you can join us. The program will also be livestreamed.

Another public program offered in person (in addition to a livestreamed option), in partnership with the Cherie Smith JCC Jewish Book Festival, will celebrate the launch of two important publications: Out of Hiding: Holocaust Literature of British Columbia by Alan Twigg, and Sounds from Silence: Reflections of a Child Holocaust Survivor, Psychiatrist and Teacher by Dr. Robert Krell, to whom Twigg’s book is dedicated. Moderated by Yosef Wosk, the event promises to be a meaningful exploration of the remarkable breadth of writings about the Shoah in BC, honouring the achievements and legacies of Holocaust survivors, descendants and others. The event is not to be missed.

Looking ahead, the VHEC team is busy working on a number of exciting exhibition-, education- and collections-related projects, highlighted in the news sections of this issue of Zachor. We are grateful for the writings contributed this issue, which affirm a theme in Twigg’s Out of Hiding: that our community is enriched by the experiences, insights and commitment to the legacy of so many touched by, and engaged with, the events and ongoing resonance of the Holocaust.

Our members’ voices and perspectives are essential to the VHEC’s successes going forward. You will soon be surveyed by email asking about your experiences with the Centre and our offerings. Your responses are deeply appreciated and will inform our planning for the future. Thank you in advance for your participation.

On that note, if you have any feedback about Zachor—what you value, what you would like to see more (or less) of—I would love to hear from you directly. Please reach out to me at any time: ninakrieger@vhec.org or 604-264-0499.

We look forward to seeing you at the Centre or at one of our programs soon and wish you, on behalf of the VHEC, a happy, meaningful and safe Passover.

Sincerely,

Nina Krieger
Executive Director
EPILOGUE–DOUBLE BOOK LAUNCH
TUESDAY, APRIL 5  |  7 PM

FREE EVENT  |  REGISTRATION INFORMATION AT VHEC.ORG/UPCOMINGEVENTS/

JOIN US FOR AN IN-PERSON COMMUNITY EVENT CELEBRATING THE LAUNCHES OF TWO SIGNIFICANT BOOKS ROOTED IN AND CONTRIBUTING GREATLY TO OUR LOCAL VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR COMMUNITY. MODERATED BY YOSEF WOSK.

Out of Hiding: Holocaust Literature of British Columbia, by Alan Twigg, is a celebration of 85 Holocaust survivor authors who have written and published books in British Columbia. Featuring heroic whistleblower, Rudolf Vrba, credited by historian Sir Martin Gilbert with saving at least 100,000 lives; Robbie Waismann, likely the only person ever to sneak his way into a concentration camp twice; and child survivor, Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, who escaped the Warsaw ghetto, hiding in Polish villages under a false identity.

Alan Twigg is the author of twenty books and founded BC Book World. He is a member of the Order of Canada and has received the Lieutenant Governor’s Award for Literary Excellence.

Sounds from Silence: Reflections of a Child Holocaust Survivor, Psychiatrist and Teacher by Robert Krell. Krell explores the lost pieces of his childhood while in hiding with a Christian family and his efforts to regain a Jewish identity. He shares how the lives of family members unfolded, and offers deep insights into the trauma of survivors.

Robert Krell was born in Holland and survived the Holocaust in hiding. After the war, the Krell family moved to Vancouver and he became a professor of psychiatry at UBC, often treating Holocaust survivor families and Dutch survivors of Japanese concentration camps. He is the founding president of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre and a member of the Order of Canada.

Programmed in partnership with the Cherie Smith JCC Jewish Book Festival
The VHEC is pursuing access partnerships with two major US-based testimony repositories, the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies and USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education (USC SF). Partnering with these organizations allows us to broaden our reach and achieve our mandate with a user base of university professors and students around the world, to complement our current outreach activities focused on Vancouver high school students. We are pleased to increase the accessibility of our testimonies through Fortunoff’s and USC Shoah Foundation’s connections with academic universities around the world.

The VHEC is the repository of original testimony recordings created as part of the Vancouver Holocaust Documentation Project (initiated in the late 1970s by Dr. Robert Krell and continued in the 90s by Krell and Dr. Peter Suedfeld). Today we preserve and provide access to these testimonies, and create new testimonies, used in support of our work in education and remembrance of the Holocaust. Collections staff facilitate the research and reference of these testimonies for families of survivors, students and educators, and the public wanting remote access to digitized recordings. The VHEC is a proud custodian of this important collection, and is working toward increasing its use and reference globally.

The Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society for Education and Remembrance has long been an affiliate of the Fortunoff Video Archive, started by Holocaust survivors in 1979; many of its earliest recordings are already in this collection, accessible in libraries at 161 universities in 24 countries through Fortunoff’s Aviary system. These testimonies (more than 4,400) were produced in cooperation with thirty-six affiliated projects across North America, South America, Europe and Israel, and record willing individuals with first-hand experience of the Nazi persecutions, including survivors, bystanders, resisters and liberators. Testimonies are in multiple languages and range in length from 30 minutes to over 40 hours (recorded over several sessions). We are delighted that the longstanding affiliation between Fortunoff and VHEC is going strong. In 2022, staff are working to transfer to Fortunoff digital copies of testimonies not yet in the Aviary platform. As an affiliate and access site, visitors to the VHEC can book appointments to stream Fortunoff testimonies after logging in and submitting an access request. We look forward to finding new ways to cooperate now that the collection is digitally accessible.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24
In Swahili, Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous words, I have a dream, translate beautifully to nina ndoto. In British Columbia, when the Ninandotoo Society formed in 2021, its members added an “o” at the end of nina ndoto to illustrate that they, too, have a dream.

The Ninandotoo society, like the VHEC, believes being truly anti-racist is about inclusion for all. Black Excellence Day was first held in 2022 by the Ninandotoo Society to highlight the historic and ongoing civil rights struggles of Black and racialized Canadians, and calls for the inclusion of Black history and Black Canadians in school curricula. Recognized by the province of British Columbia, Black Excellence Day is a day to not only learn about the struggles that BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of colour) have faced in Canada, but also, importantly, to celebrate their achievements, culture, languages, music, art and more.

Black Excellence Day evolved out of last year’s Black Shirt Day, a day which shared the goal of acknowledging the struggles of Black and racialized Canadians and fighting for mandatory curriculum on Black history, but carried a namesake which brought up traumatic experiences for Holocaust survivors. In consultation with the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner and the VHEC, the Ninandotoo Society changed the name of the day, in order to avoid reference to Benito Mussolini’s fascist paramilitary organization known as the Blackshirts, and other groups using the term.

To acknowledge the importance of this name change, Kamika Williams, president and co-founder of the Ninandotoo Society, invited the VHEC to participate in an online program celebrating Black excellence on January 14, 2022. Lillian Boraks-Nemetz spoke eloquently about her first-hand experience with the terror inflicted by groups who drew inspiration from Mussolini’s Blackshirts. In closing, she read a poem written, first published in Zachor, after the murder of George Floyd by American police.

I offered a brief historical overview of the Blackshirts, and shared how this political movement affected my family. The following is based on that presentation:

When I hear the term “Blackshirts,” I remember the story my zia, my aunt, told me of her brother-in-law in Italy in the 1930s.

Following the First World War, as Mussolini rose to power, he was surrounded by supporters wearing black turtlenecks in the winter and black collared t-shirts in the summer. These supporters are known as the camice nere, or Blackshirts. They swept through regions of Italy, terrorizing local populations and burning down socialist offices and unions, all at Mussolini’s helm. In the fall of 1922, he and his militia of Blackshirts organized a march on Rome in hopes of bringing the Italian government to its knees and replacing it with fascist power. Days later Mussolini became Prime Minister, and Blackshirts continued to use violence as a political tool.

They repressed and reprimanded any opposition or resistance to Mussolini’s regime. Known antifascists in Italy were taken by these militia squads and abused or killed. Within my own family, my zia’s brother-in-law was beaten so badly by Blackshirts that the consequences affected him for the rest of his life. Because of what they did to him, he was never able to father children.

Many fascists understood violence merely as a tool to reach a political end. Violence was considered an essential instrument in a political struggle, and a cornerstone of the Blackshirt individual and group identity. The Blackshirts attacked and destroyed...
organizations linked to communists, republicans, Catholics, trade unionists and more, and used power and intimidation to attempt to sway fascist opponents. Torture was a common practice.

Blackshirts also fought for Mussolini internationally, with as many as seven Blackshirt divisions sent to fight in Ethiopia, five in Eritrea, and one for Italian Somaliland during the Italian invasions and colonization efforts in the 1930s. They volunteered to fight alongside Francisco Franco’s Nationalist forces during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), and launched attacks on linguistic or ethnic minorities, especially Slavic nationalists, in Italian border cities or occupied territories. This included attacking priests giving sermons in Slavic languages.

The ethos, and even the uniform, of the Blackshirts was copied by political figureheads across Europe who shared Mussolini’s political ideas. Most famously are Hitler’s Brown Shirts—a name given to the SA (also known as the Assault Division or Storm Troopers) in the early Nazi era, before they were absorbed into the SS in 1934. The SS, or Protection Squads, dealt with all police, “racial” and security matters, including overseeing the Gestapo and administering concentration camps. At times, the SS were called Blackshirts, referencing their black uniforms. You could replace the term Blackshirt with SA or SS, and the historical accuracy of these statements would remain. Each of these groups were fascist paramilitary organizations which damaged lives across Europe and Africa, from Italy to Germany, Russia to Albania, Tunisia to Ethiopia.

In Italy, illustrator Paolo Garretto designed the camice nere uniforms. By designing the all-black look, Garretto created a symbol that represented a group, power, rank, affiliation and—importantly—an ideology. Symbols evoke powerful memories and emotions, connecting us to a past that we might not have otherwise consciously accessed.

Like symbols, words also have very specific meanings to communities today, which is why it is so significant that the Ninandotoo Society now refers to this important day as Black Excellence Day.

Close to 10,000 students participated in Black Excellence Day. The event was well organized and received support from around the world. The VHEC looks forward to marking this day in 2023, in celebration of Black communities, contributions and achievements. Watch the recording online here: blackexcellenceday.ca.

Giorgia Ricciardi, MA, is the program coordinator at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. Her research interests include Holocaust memorialization, gender and the Holocaust, and women in anti-Nazi and antifascist resistance during the Holocaust.
A little over 20 years ago, the VHEC started the Shanghai Oral History Project. Led by Roberta Kremer and Daniel Fromowitz, the project recorded the oral histories of Vancouver’s small Shanghai Jewish survivor community. They interviewed 10 survivors and/or their descendants, learning about their rich and unique experiences of survival in Shanghai. This project, along with loaned artefacts and memorabilia, became the basis for the VHEC’s 1999 exhibition, *Shanghai: A Refuge During the Holocaust*. It opened alongside another exhibition, *Visas for Life: The Story of Feng Shan Ho*. Both were well received, and included film screenings on the topic of Jewish refugees in Shanghai, and a demonstration of Mahjong, a game which remains popular in the Jewish community in Vancouver.

Once the exhibitions concluded, materials were returned to their lenders or safely placed under the VHEC’s care, and the interviews were catalogued and filed away.

In January 2022, I began my co-op position as Digital Projects Coordinator with the VHEC. One of the first tasks assigned to me was to help improve accessibility to the Shanghai interviews and the audiotape transcriptions. In the 20 years since these oral history transcriptions were created, the VHEC has changed its digital file management and storage system. Some files were missing while others were mislabeled. Many files would no longer open within the current version of Microsoft Word. At the top of some transcriptions was a disclaimer: “The whole tape is not transcribed, only that which is related to Shanghai.” And throughout the transcriptions comments like “(side discussions)” denote what the original transcriber believed to be unrelated to the subject matter.

Rummaging through these transcriptions, it became apparent that I would not simply be ‘tidying up’. By revisiting the Shanghai Oral History Project, my goal was to do more than just emphasize the unique experiences of this small group of individuals. As I listened to their interviews and transcribed their words, I wanted to offer a glimpse into how Shanghai Jewish survivors expressed themselves and reflected on their time in Shanghai, while...
also highlighting things that weren’t considered when the exhibition first opened 20 years ago.

On the list of possible interviewees for the Shanghai Oral History Project, George Melcor’s was the only name with “very elderly” added beside it in parentheses. Listening to George’s interview, it became clear that this would be a challenging transcription. George sometimes mumbled, which made it difficult to comprehend his words, or he would mix up his stories. But, for 88-year-old George, Shanghai left an impression. When asked by interviewer Daniel Fromowitz what memories of Shanghai come to mind, George lit up with excitement. “Shanghai was alive all the time. Never closed, always open... Oh, Shanghai, if I tell you Shanghai... life, never stopped. Nighttime. Clubs and gambling, everything was free. Shanghai was a very free city.” At this point, the slow progression of the interview sped up: the emotions in George’s voice suggest that he was reliving his 16-year-old self. For a moment, George was not elderly.

What is striking listening to these Shanghai audiotapes is the dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee. Lore Marie Wiener was interviewed about her experiences in Shanghai by both Roberta Kremer and Daniel Fromowitz. But rather than just giving answers, Lore proceeded to converse with both interviewers, asking about where they were born, their experiences growing up and whether they faced antisemitism. Lore was also very reflective. She questioned the nature of Jewishness and what it consists of; she questioned “...why did we not interfere in Rwanda, and we do interfere in Yugoslavia?” With the former, there was a back-and-forth between Roberta and...
Lore, but with the latter, Daniel was not sure how much to engage. These side stories provide a picture of Lore that is more than just her experiences of escaping the threat of Nazi violence and survival in Shanghai; it is the continuation of her life after the Holocaust.

Lastly, how did the interviewees recall, if any, their connection to the local Chinese and Japanese communities? In general, although interviewees were in Shanghai, Chinese people featured only in the background. They were acquaintances, as was the case for Anne Chick and the two Chinese kids living in her neighbourhood. For most interviewees who did interact with Chinese people, it was through a working relationship with Chinese servants, workers or amahs.

For Lore, she employed several Chinese tailors in her shop, as well as a chauffeur and a cook called ‘Dunzen.’ Interracial relationships were also possible. Kurt Weiss noted that after divorcing his first wife, he had a Chinese girlfriend until he left Shanghai. Gerda Gottfried Kraus mentioned in passing how in postwar Shanghai, one of her acquaintances married a Chinese woman and wanted to bring her with him to the United States. Knowledge of some Chinese, particularly Shanghainese, was also a common theme found in these interviews, though many interviewees state that they’ve either forgotten it after not using it for so long, or knew only the absolute basics. Additionally, they never learned how to read Chinese characters.

Knowledge of Japanese people was more limited. Kurt Weiss’s success as a suit salesman was due to his patron relationship with a Japanese engineer named Kato. Lore mentioned she was helped by a Japanese engineer when she and her mother were stranded in Harbin. But the one individual whom most interviewees referenced was Ghoya, the Japanese commandant of Hongkew ghetto. Ghoya developed a reputation as an unpredictable ruler: while Lore mentioned that her father and husband were treated well by Ghoya due to their academic connections, other interviewees mentioned episodes of violence committed by Ghoya and his guards against the Hongkew inhabitants. Their brutality is matched only by their treatment of the local Chinese. Most interviewees mentioned the mistreatment that local Chinese faced.

The experiences of Shanghai Jewish survivors are often overlooked when compared to those who survived in Europe. Lore Wiener was very concerned about this. At the end of her interview, she stated: “I’m not uncomfortable with anything. [But] … just try to be careful about the parts where I am too pleased with my life because there are so many people who suffered.”

With the ‘global turn’ in academic research into the Holocaust, the sub-category of ‘Shanghai survivor’ has been gaining strength. It is a term that validates the experiences of refugee Jews and others who survived the Holocaust in Shanghai, while also acknowledging the unique circumstances and challenges they faced.

It is heartening to know that in the 20-plus years since the VHEC’s Shanghai exhibition, research into this dimension of the Holocaust and the voices of these survivors have not been obscured, but instead, has expanded into a vibrant subfield. By revisiting past projects and exhibitions, and making them more accessible, we can hopefully gleam new information about the Holocaust and the multiplicity of survivors’ experiences.

Ryan Cheuk Him Sun is a PhD candidate in the UBC Department of History. His research is on Jewish refugees in Hong Kong and Singapore, and their experiences onboard ships.
I was born in Žilina, Slovakia, the child of Holocaust survivors. My paternal grandparents, Leon Wertheim and Helen Wertheim (née Grun), were taken from Žilina to Auschwitz in 1944, where they were gassed and killed on arrival. My maternal grandparents, Leopold and Margit Kulka (née Kohn), were exempted from deportation by the Slovak fascist state in 1942. In the fall of 1944, after the Slovak National Uprising was crushed and the Nazis occupied Slovakia, my maternal grandparents went into hiding. They survived in a village, Kaliště, and in snow bunkers in the mountains above that village.

My parents were unable to talk about their painful and scary memories, and therefore I assumed that this period of our history was a taboo subject. I could not believe that Rudolf (Rudi) Vrba, who I met in Vancouver in the 1980s, was able to talk about this dreadful part of his life without emotion. He even wrote a book entitled I Escaped from Auschwitz, first released with the title, “I Cannot Forgive.” At the back of my copy of this book is a map of the route of his and Alfred Wetzler’s April 1944 escape from Auschwitz.

I could not believe my eyes when I noted that their escape route headed straight to my native town of Žilina.

Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler succeeded in escaping Auschwitz and fleeing more than 130 kilometres before giving the first graphic and exact account of activities at that deadly concentration camp, activities which up to that point had only been rumoured. Their report, entitled the Auschwitz Protocols, warned the world that the Nazis were preparing to kill nearly 800,000 Hungarian Jews. First published in Switzerland and then in the western

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1 Originally published in London, reprinted in 2002 by Barricade Books. collections.vhec.org/Detail/objects/1643

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press, this report made the reality of Nazi annihilation camps explicit and unequivocal to Pope Pius XII, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

On June 6, 1944, two more escaped Auschwitz prisoners, Arnošt Rosin and Czesław Mordowicz, arrived in Slovakia with the latest news from the camp, which formed the basis of another report. In the short time between the start of Hungarian deportations on May 15, 1944, and Rosin and Mordowicz’s escape on May 27, 1944, over 100,000 Hungarian Jews arrived in Birkenau, most of them promptly murdered. The Mordowicz–Rosin Report described the ongoing slaughter of Hungarian Jews in Auschwitz. Both reports were recorded by the Jewish council in Slovakia.

The four Auschwitz escapees moved to Bratislava, the capital city of Slovakia, in June 1944. Because Arnošt Rosin had done his "Hachshara" (a Hebrew term describing work in preparation for emigration to Palestine) at Žilina’s Ripper distillery before the war, he knew my maternal grandfather, who also worked at the distillery. To my surprise, Rudi Vrba told me that even after the Ripper distillery was Aryanized, my grandfather continued to advise its workers and was able to arrange, with the help of the Jewish council, for the escapees to work in Bratislava, selling and consuming Ripper liqueur while they lived there in the summer of 1944.

Since 2015, every summer, except during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Vrba–Wetzler Memorial (vrbawetzler.eu) organizes a walk from Auschwitz to Žilina in memory of the first escapees. During this walk, people read from the books of Vrba and Wetzler and remember. Accommodations, programs and meals are organized, and a support vehicle carries participants’ luggage. The walk is attended by school teachers, young people and interested members of the public, mostly coming from Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and England, with a few from Israel.

In Žilina, a part of the building where Vrba and Wetzler hid and their report was prepared has been converted into a memorial. The rooms, where each escapee was interviewed separately to assure the objectivity of the compiled report, have been restored to their original states, and an exhibit prepared by the Jewish religious community in Žilina. The rooms are open to tourists interested in learning more about the history of Vrba, Wetzler and the Auschwitz Protocols; those rooms and the Žilina synagogue are the final destinations of the Vrba–Wetzler memorial walk.

Through educational events and memorial spaces like these, the secrets of my native town are no longer secrets.

Dr. Helen Karsai is a retired physician. In the 1990s, she visited Arnošt Rosin in Dusseldorf, Rudi Vrba’s mother in Bratislava and Czesław Mordowicz in Toronto. She attended the Vrba–Wetzler memorial walk in 2015.

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2 A history of the Ripper’s house distillery is available here: tikzilina.eu/en/rippers-house/.
3 Wetzler published *Escape from Hell: The True Story of the Auschwitz Protocol* under the pseudonym Jozef Lanik.

The 2022 Vrba–Wetzler memorial walk is planned for July 31 to August 6. For more information and to register visit: on.icej.org/Vrba-Wetzler-2022.
1938

The Anschluss, Evian Conference, Munich Agreement and Kristallnacht: 1938 was a watershed year in Holocaust history. These events marked a turning point in the lives of the Jews of Europe and on the international stage, where political decisions made by western democracies would reverberate for generations to come.

Some have argued that the genocide of European Jewry “started with the washing of the streets” of Vienna in the weeks immediately following Anschluss. They assert a “critical correlation between these events and the genocide that lay ahead.” Appreciating what transpired on the streets of Vienna after Anschluss and understanding how those events paved the road to genocide is imperative in the study of the Holocaust.

For Canadian students learning about these events eight decades later, it can be difficult to grasp the horror, fear and disbelief felt by Austrian Jews as they were brought under Nazi rule, overnight. One meaningful way to convey their experience is through primary sources. Personal letters, diaries and photographs from the time can evoke the range of emotions felt by Jewish individuals and families as they struggled to comprehend and respond to the events of 1938.

In 2021, the VHEC was privileged to receive a donation of personal letters which do just this. The donation, arranged with assistance from Elspeth Rogers Cherniavsky’s grandchildren, Alix Cherniavsky Morgan and Nick Gudewill, comprises 39 pages of correspondence written by Elspeth to her mother, in Vancouver, during Elspeth’s visit to Vienna in May and June 1938. With clarity and compassion, the letters give a first-hand account of the circumstances facing dozens of Elspeth’s Jewish friends.

ELSPETH ROGERS CHERNIAVSKY

Elspeth Rogers was born in Vancouver in 1900 and grew up in her family’s mansion, Gabriola House, which still stands on Davie Street. She attended Crofton House School, volunteered with the Alexandra Orphanage and, in her leisure time, rode her horse in Stanley Park.

Elspeth’s father, prominent Vancouver industrialist B.T. Rogers, founded BC Sugar Refining Co Ltd. (now known as Rogers Sugar) in 1890. The BC Sugar factory remains a Vancouver landmark, its origins and history linked to the completion of the cross-continental Canadian Pacific Railway and the expansion of industry in Vancouver. Elspeth’s mother, Mary Isabella Rogers, was born into the Angus family of Victoria. She became a

A New Acquisition: Letters from Vienna, 1938

BY LISE KIRCHNER

My thanks to Beth Harrop, Ben Cherniavsky, Nick Gudewill and Alix Morgan for their generous assistance and support.

1 Sculptor Alfred Hrdlicka as quoted in James E. Young, The Texture of Memory (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 110.

leading patron of music in Vancouver in the first half of the 20th century and is credited as the *de facto* founder of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra.4

Elspeth’s connection to Jewish social circles in Vienna came through her husband, Jan Cherniavsky, whom she wed on June 1, 1922, at St Paul’s Anglican Church on Jervis Street, in the high society event of the season.5 Jan was a classical pianist with the internationally renowned Cherniavsky Trio of musical brothers: Leo, Jan and Mischel Cherniavsky.

Their father, Abraham Cherniavsky, harnessed his young sons’ musical talents to secure the family’s passage out of Russia, with its antisemitic restrictions, at the turn of the century. The Cherniavskys moved to Vienna in 1904 to study music and gain the support of influential people there. The Bettelheim family of Vienna quickly embraced the Cherniavsky Trio and promoted them in Vienna’s music circles. The Bettelheims used their connections in England to facilitate the Trio’s move to London in 1906, launching their international career.6

Throughout his life, Jan Cherniavsky returned to Vienna frequently and maintained his boyhood friendship with the Bettelheim family, particularly with Karl Bettelheim, who was closest in age to Jan. After Jan married Elspeth, he immediately took her to Vienna to meet Karl and Karl’s wife Gaby.

During the 1920s and 30s, Jan and Elspeth lived alternately in Vancouver, London and Vienna, as dictated by the international performance schedule of the Cherniavsky Trio. Elspeth and Jan rented a flat in Vienna and lived for a time there with their children. With the Cherniavsky connections in the music world and the Rogers family connections in the sugar industry, Jan and Elspeth amassed a large circle of Jewish friends in Vienna, including composers, performers, sugar refinery magnates, timber products manufacturers, academics, art collectors, lawyers, doctors and engineers.

**LETTERS FROM VIENNA**

Elspeth and Jan were living in England in the spring of 1938 when Nazi Germany annexed Austria. Disturbing news reports of mob violence and persecution compelled the Cherniavskys to travel to Vienna to check on the well-being of their many Jewish friends there, particularly Karl Bettelheim.

Elspeth, by her own description, had always been “mortaly afraid about everything” and was particularly trepidatious about visiting Vienna during this “reign of terror” with a husband who was Jewish by birth. But the couple was determined to see their friends and offer what help they could. As Canadians, the Cherniavskys hoped their citizenship would protect them and possibly allow them to assist their friends in their urgent search for a means to flee the Nazis.

So it was that eight weeks after Anschluss, in May 1938, Elspeth and Jan Cherniavsky arrived in Vienna by car. On May 29, 1938, Elspeth wrote home to her mother in Vancouver describing the scene that met them in Vienna:

> It was a mad-house in Vienna and we began to feel, after a few days, that we were losing our senses too... Hitler’s photograph is everywhere until it stinks and swastikas cover everything. Streicher’s paper, Der Stürmer, on sale at every corner and the pictures in it make you sick... I walk for blocks to look for a shop that is not marked “Aricshes Geschäft” [Aryan business].

Unlike Nazi Germany, where the persecution of Jews evolved over a period of five years, daily life for Austrian...
he had lived his entire life in Vienna and fought for Austria-Hungary in the First World War, Karl lived in fear of being visited by the SS, molested in the streets or arrested in a raid. He told Elspeth, “he never thought that he would feel like a criminal and a fugitive.”

Karl’s despair and hopelessness radiate from the pages of Elspeth’s letters as he spoke frequently of suicide. Understanding that his life in Austria was over, Karl was desperate to get himself and his teenaged daughter out of the German Reich, even though it would mean leaving everything behind. But it was “almost impossible” to find a country which would accept Jewish refugees and unlikely for Karl to muster the financial resources to support himself in a new country, with the crippling flight tax imposed on fleeing Jews.

Elspeth and Jan visited many of their friends in Vienna and found them in a similar state of anguish and panic:}

When we got to Germany, everything seemed peaceful in comparison to Austria. People didn’t Heil Hitler quite so avidly as in Wien... After five years the people in Germany must be a little tired & yet I believe they are starting there on another wave of persecution. But think how violent it is in Vienna to do in two-and-a-half months what it took five years to do in Germany.

Upon reaching Vienna, the Cherniavskys went immediately to Karl Bettelheim’s flat. Karl could no longer practise law, his car was confiscated and his assets registered with the Nazi authorities in anticipation of expropriation. Though he had lived his entire life in Vienna and fought for Austria-Hungary in the First World War, Karl lived in fear of being visited by the SS, molested in the streets or arrested in a raid. He told Elspeth, “he never thought that he would feel like a criminal and a fugitive.”

Karl’s despair and hopelessness radiate from the pages of Elspeth’s letters as he spoke frequently of suicide. Understanding that his life in Austria was over, Karl was desperate to get himself and his teenaged daughter out of the German Reich, even though it would mean leaving everything behind. But it was “almost impossible” to find a country which would accept Jewish refugees and unlikely for Karl to muster the financial resources to support himself in a new country, with the crippling flight tax imposed on fleeing Jews.

Elspeth and Jan visited many of their friends in Vienna and found them in a similar state of anguish and panic:

We can’t do anything much, it is true, but we can talk over prospects and perhaps some suggestions... It was like going from one death bed scene to another, some had lost
everything already and felt the worst was over and those that hadn’t waited for it to come… It is like seeing people drowning slowly (only I think that is too human a way to describe it) and not doing much to help them.

Elspeth’s letters are filled with stories of their friends’ public humiliation and social isolation: taken from their homes and forced to clean the streets, ousted from their professions, arrested and jailed without warrant, robbed of their assets and businesses, prohibited from public spaces and even turned on by their neighbours and employees.

Lili Bettelheim, for eight hours, had to clean lavatories with her hands, to pick up dirt on the floor and even more unspeakable things—with her teeth and all the time not be allowed to go to the lav herself…

Rosa Lemberger was in prison for three weeks with four other women in a one-roomed cell… and was allowed out only when she signed a paper saying she would give all her money and properties to them…

We went to see the Strakosches. Their factory has been taken away. At least bought from them at such a small sum it was practically taken and they have lost everything… Georg Strakosch was in prison too…

[Dr. Patzau] had been one of the 4,000 rounded up… Just before we left Vienna we heard that all they know is that he is either at Dachau or Munich—or Bremen. I think that is rather bad—sometimes they come back from there in urns…

We went to see poor Mrs. Dub. She had a small pension 800 sch. from the newspaper her husband [Mortiz Dub] worked for all his life. The first month it was cut down to 400. This month she was told she would have none…

Poor Pepi [Josef Hupka] broke down completely when we left—he has so little hope. He has some very fine drawings by Schwind which were exhibited in the Albertina… He wants to sell them—but a new law by Goebbels says a Jew will be imprisoned if he asks too much for an art treasure—so Pepi is frightened to sell.

Although the worst of the mob violence had quelled by the time Elspeth and Jan arrived in Vienna, Elspeth observed an atmosphere where the “terrorizing is more subtle and secret and everyone lives in daily fear.” It was dangerous for Jews to go out in public, and equally dangerous to meet in homes, so the Cherniavskys met their friends in back rooms, behind locked doors, using whispers, away from windows where they might be seen or overheard.

During these clandestine reunions, many of the Cherniavskys’ friends broke down in tears, speaking of suicide and swallowing sedatives to survive the daily nightmare. They begged Elspeth and Jan for help in leaving the country. Eight weeks after Anschluss, their friends had moved past denial and were resigned to the necessity of flight, accepting that their fate would be complete financial ruin and the permanent dissolution of their families and community.

**WHO WANTS THEM?**

Anschluss brought 185,000 Austrian Jews within the German Reich; almost all lived in Vienna. The ensuant refugee crisis was acute, with hundreds of thousands of Jews seeking protection and very few countries willing to offer it. Jan and Elspeth were determined to use their Canadian citizenship and international connections...
to help their Viennese friends caught in the Nazi regime. At the British Consulate in Vienna, they saw “about a hundred people waiting to get permits to go to England.” Their meeting with a CPR agent regarding immigration prospects in Canada was unsuccessful. Obtaining official permission to leave was difficult and illicit flight was risky.

We talked with Karl about his plans—how he is to get out & where to go—as we must get him out... Jan & I have most pessimistic views of his chances of getting out, but we left promising to do anything we can... We had the usual dismal talk and discussed the possibilities of every country. Jan is a walking atlas and full of geographical information...

Of course everyone asks us about Vancouver—if we came from anywhere else it would be the same. It is terribly cruel to say, ‘I'm afraid you would have no chance and besides it is almost impossible to get in.’ We try to think of other places where living would be cheaper and where there would be more opportunities. But the trouble now—where to go? Who wants them?

Elspeth’s observation was confirmed just five weeks later. In July 1938 the Evian Conference addressed the Jewish refugee crisis, and all but one of the 32 countries in attendance refused to relax their immigration restrictions to admit Jews fleeing Nazi persecution. The Western democracies turned their backs on the Jews of Europe. As if in direct response to Elspeth, the Nazi paper Völkische Beobachters, reporting on the outcome of the Evian Conference, smugly proclaimed on July 15, 1938: “Germany has offered the world its Jews. No one wants them!”

FATE OF THE VIENNESE FRIENDS

The Cherniavskys were able to help Karl and his daughter Trauti reach safety in England in 1938. Trauti secured a permit to study and work as a children's nurse in Northamptonshire, while Karl lived in London. Karl and Trauti stayed in England as registered “enemy aliens” until their immigration to the United States in 1940. The Cherniavskys assisted other Bettelheim family members in building new lives and businesses in Vancouver.

The younger Viennese friends mentioned in Elspeth’s letters made it out of Europe before the start of war, immigrating to England, the United States, Canada and Australia. But tragically, most of their older friends either could not, or would not, leave Vienna.

Karl’s brother, retired judge Hofrat Ernst Bettelheim, and his wife Elly, were deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto in 1942. They perished in Theresienstadt within a year.

Mrs. (Gisela) Dub was deported to Theresienstadt and subsequently transferred to Auschwitz concentration camp in May 1944. Mrs. Dub was murdered in Auschwitz.

Following the aryranization of the Strakosch sugar refining factory and seizure of his property, Georg Strakosch committed suicide in Vienna, just weeks after Elspeth and Jan left the city. The remaining family fled to Switzerland and eventually immigrated to the United States.

Pepi (Josef) Hupka, once Dean of Law at the University of Vienna, fled with his wife Hermine to Amsterdam in 1939 only to be forced into hiding when the Nazis invaded the Netherlands in 1940. The Hupkas were caught by the Nazis in 1944 and deported to Theresienstadt where Pepi died in April 1944. Hermine was deported to Auschwitz and murdered. Decades later, following a legal battle for restitution of the Moritz von Schwind drawings mentioned in Elspeth’s letter, Hupka’s grandsons received what remained of their grandfather’s looted art.

LEGACY

Elspeth Cherniavsky was deeply affected by what she witnessed in Vienna in the spring of 1938.

I don’t think we can ever feel quite the same again ... I just wish a few more people could see these things. To read leaves one feeling sorry but still quite cold-blooded about such things—but to see and talk to all these people makes...
NEW IN FINDING AIDS

Newly described and digitized materials are now available for research in the VHEC’s online collections catalogue at collections.vhec.org. These include photographs taken by Corporal John Rodgers, present at Bergen-Belsen on April 17, 1945, memorabilia related to Theresienstadt collected by Joseph Segal, and items belonging to Holocaust survivor Michel Mielnicki, documenting his pre- and post-war life and reunion with his brother after fifty years of separation following their internment in Auschwitz-Birkenau. UBC iSchool student Amanda Alster completed a finding aid describing materials created as part of Celia Brauer’s Survivors Today project, which include photographs documenting the 1985 Canadian Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and their Children in Ottawa, Ontario as well as photographs of survivors in the Lower Mainland area taken in the mid-1980s. This arrangement and description project was completed as part of a professional experience program and counts as credit toward Amanda’s Masters of Archival Science degree.

Another UBC iSchool student, Chase Nelson, Project Archivist funded by the Library and Archives Canada Documentary Heritage Communities Program, completed a finding aid describing materials generated as part of the Keeping the Memory: Fifteen Eyewitness Accounts of Victoria Holocaust Survivors book publishing project of the Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society of Education and Remembrance. Keeping the Memory, by Rhoda Kaellis, was published in 1991 and the VHEC is the repository of original audio-recorded testimony, transcriptions and other records related to that book project.
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Collections Registrar, Caitlin Donaldson, attended a distance education course entitled Introduction to Archival Preservation, hosted by the Archives Association of BC. Subjects covered in the course included concepts and terminology in archival preservation, basic material science and preservation needs of paper documents, photographs and electronic media, preservation management planning, the exhibition of archival records, and more. The VHEC is looking forward to applying knowledge gained in this workshop to our current practices and planning for our new space and storage facilities as part of the JCC’s redevelopment project.

NEW IN THE LIBRARY

Librarian Shannon LaBelle has made significant progress cataloguing issues of Zachor magazine; tables of contents of past issues are now available for browsing and searching, and issues are linked from collections.vhec.org/Detail/objects/8860. Members and educators are encouraged to borrow books from the library; a list of newly catalogued library books available for borrowing is available here: collections.vhec.org/Detail/collections/647.

TRANSLATION AND ACCESS UPDATES

With funds from Library and Archives Canada’s Documentary Heritage Communities Program, the VHEC has translated and increased the accessibility of the last correspondence home to family written by Erno Vilcsek, father of Erika Fleischer and Eva Kero, while he was interned in a Hungarian labour camp. We’ve also translated items donated by David Reed and Jack Gardner, and descriptions of these items are in process.

A few titles recently added to the library.

Postcard mailed from a Hungarian labour camp, 1942. Item 93.07.0043, donated by Erika Fleischer.
ONLINE MEMORIAL EXHIBITION

In 2005, an exhibition curated by Dr. Roberta Kremer, *Faces of Loss: Remembering Those Who Perished*, focused on the victims of the Holocaust whose families later immigrated to Canada and lived in Vancouver. Families touched by the Holocaust loaned their few precious pre-war photographs of family members who were lost during the Holocaust. In many cases, no photographs remain of those who perished. A recently refreshed online exhibition developed by Sarah Ruediger is now available at vhec.org/faces-of-loss/.

IN FOCUS: DIGITAL MUSEUMS CANADA

The original exhibition *In Focus: The Holocaust Through the VHEC Collection* brought to the forefront more than 80 artefacts mostly from the VHEC’s archival and museum collection. The VHEC will launch an online version of the exhibition with new digital content, interactive features and teaching resources in the fall of 2022. The project, supported by Digital Museums Canada, allows a wider audience to view this important exhibition.

Screenshot of *Faces of Loss* online memorial exhibition, developed by Sarah Ruediger.

Screenshot of *In Focus* online exhibition in progress.
LAST CHANCE TO VIEW IN PERSON

Visit our acclaimed exhibition about cultural loss, reconciliation and the intergenerational legacy of trauma before it closes on June 30. Acclaimed Holocaust scholar Dr. Michael Berenbaum called Treasured Belongings: The Hahn Family & the Search for a Stolen Legacy “professionally curated, meticulously researched, intellectually informative and deeply moving.” An exhibition catalogue is available for purchase.

EXHIBITION WEBSITE

Although Treasured Belongings: The Hahn Family & the Search for a Stolen Legacy closes soon, with generous support from the Diamond Foundation, the VHEC will launch an online version in June. The Treasured Belongings website will extend the reach and impact of this acclaimed exhibition, and be enhanced by our educational programs and resources for students and educators which engage with the exhibition themes.

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 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.

Screenshot of Treasured Belongings online exhibition in progress.
you shudder and think that we should never mind anything, as long as we are free and have enough to eat and exist.

The sense of chaos and urgency she experienced in Vienna is reflected in the feverish pace of her writing—a “jumbled account I have been scribbling in haste.” Yet her “screeds,” with their vivid details and biting commentary, transport the reader into “the mad-house” that was Vienna in 1938; “that filthy country that is so beautiful” where “everything is so upside down that no one really knows anything.”

The public acts of cruelty and dehumanization; the uncontested violence carried out in broad daylight; the disintegration of the rule of law; and the collapse of basic human morals—all these elements described in Elspeth’s letter were on full display in Vienna in May 1938 for those who cared to see. But it was the “cold-blooded” indifference of bystanders and the international community which emboldened the perpetrators and demoralized the victims, setting the stage for genocide.

Elspeth’s perspective on the history she witnessed is unique. She was removed from the events, protected by her Canadian passport and non-Jewish status, yet also deeply connected through her intimate relationships with the victims. Elspeth’s perception was also coloured by her belief that, as a Canadian, she ought to be in a position to help. Her letters resonate with growing frustration that she could not do more. Elspeth’s refusal to simply stand by and watch history unfold distinguishes her from other non-Jewish North Americans who witnessed the atrocities in Vienna in 1938.

During her life, Elspeth was invariably described in relation to the others: “the sugar king’s daughter,” wife of the distinguished pianist, or daughter of Vancouver’s patron of the arts. When described in her own right, it was often as a “socialite” or “Vancouver society girl.”

Michael Kluckner writes: “Throughout her life, Elspeth was frustrated by her inability to accomplish anything which she felt to be sufficiently worthwhile—she called herself stupid for her lack of self-confidence.”

And yet 34 years after her death, on the 80th anniversary of Anschluss, Elspeth’s letters were published in German by a small press dedicated to the voices of strong and inspiring women. In an anthology entitled 1938: Why We Must Look Closely,11 Elspeth’s letters are presented as a summons to moral and civil courage.

Elspeth’s wish that more people could witness the dehumanizing cruelty of the Nazi regime and understand the dangers of indifference has not fallen on deaf ears. With the donation of her letters to the VHEC and their presentation in our online collections catalogue, the preservation and accessibility of this historic correspondence is ensured for future generations.

The VHEC is grateful to the Cherniavsky and Gudewill families for entrusting Elspeth’s letters to our care and for the opportunity to introduce them to students, researchers and historians around the globe.

Lise Kirchner has worked with the VHEC for two decades in the development and delivery of education programs with special focus on the pedagogical use of the VHEC’s collection.

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8 For example, Helen Baker, an American woman in Vienna during Anschluss, wrote in her letters home to family: “My feelings about the Jews are equally mixed. I feel so sorry for them, but would like to boot them out of America.” See: Erin Harper, “Accidental Witness,” March 31, 2021, 12 Days that Shook the World, podcast, United States Holocaust Museum, accessed April 6, 2021.
In the summer of 1942, as the persecution of Belgium's Jews began, a clandestine campaign linked to the Belgian underground worked to rescue Jewish children by hiding them with Christian families and monasteries around the country.

The most active team involved in this successful campaign consisted of twelve women, non-Jewish, who managed to hide some 1,000 Jewish children. The only remaining survivor from that team today, Andrée Geulen-Herscovici, saved 300 Jewish children during the Holocaust.

In 1943, my father connected with Mademoiselle Andrée through the Jewish Defence Committee. I was four years old, and accustomed to being shuttled between different households. Periodically, I would return to my parent’s apartment, until another family agreed to hide me. One time, however, my homecoming was different. Instead of being greeted at the door and hugged by both my mother and father, I met Mademoiselle Andrée. My father told me she would take me on a long trip, and said, “You will have to be a good boy, and always listen to her. Alex, do you understand what I am saying to you?”

But I was not paying attention, I was so happy to see my father. I asked, “Where is Maman?” He told me she was in the bedroom, not feeling well. “Please do not disturb her,” he told me. I ignored my father and ran to their bedroom, calling, “Maman! Maman!”

I stood outside the bedroom door, trying to turn the doorknob, pushing against it, but the door would not budge. I kept crying, “Maman! Maman!” The door did not have a lock on it, so my mother must have been on the other side, holding it shut. She would not come out. Most probably, she knew that if she saw me, she would not have the courage to let me go.

Upset, I ran back to my father, and cried, “The door is closed.” Mademoiselle Andrée stood up from the kitchen table, and calmly said, “We have to leave.”

My father hugged and kissed me goodbye at the front door. It happened so fast. This was the last time I would ever see my parents, and the last time that my father would kiss me.

Mademoiselle Andrée was a strong woman, just like my mother. She was nice, very strict and all business. The first words she said to me were, “Don’t talk!” She drove us down winding lanes and through the vast forest, avoiding the main roads.

I was too young to understand anything about the war, or antisemitism. I was not
aware that I was Jewish, or what that meant. After Mademoiselle Andrée told me not to say anything, I did not speak for four days, not a word. I trusted her and did whatever she told me to do.

Sometimes she would get us food, but more often she would apologize and tell me to wait. Some nights we would sleep in the truck, other nights we would hide in the forest. On the fourth evening of our journey, we exited the truck and walked through the forest for two hours, until we reached our destination. I saw tall black iron gates, and wondered what could be behind them. Mademoiselle Andrée rang the bell, and we waited until a woman emerged from behind the gates.

The two spoke briefly, in hushed voices, and before I knew it, Mademoiselle Andrée kissed me goodbye and left. The woman took my hand and brought me inside, into a room with many beds.

The next day I was introduced to a little girl named Anny. They told me that she was my sister. We did not say anything; we kissed on both cheeks. Now, I had a sister. They told us we were in an orphanage in Namur, not far from Brussels. I played with the other children, but every day seemed the same. I thought about how I didn’t get to say goodbye to my mother.

One day, the women asked the boys to follow them. They told us to go down into a dark, smelly cellar and hide. We were scared and cried, “Why are you punishing us, we did not do anything!”

They replied that there was no choice, we had to hide, and gently pushed us down the stairs to the cellar. Then they shut the door and covered it with a carpet. We sat in the dark and listened to the sound of rats running around us, as loud noises erupted from upstairs.

The women had told us to be quiet, but how do you tell a scared child not to cry?

Finally, the cellar door opened, and they told us to come up.

We did not want to go up. We had wet our pants and were soaked; they promised to give us warm baths. We told them that we never wanted to return to that cellar. But we did, many times, over the next two and a half years.

When the war was over, the people in charge of the orphanage were happy, and told us our parents would come to pick us up. But no one came for us. Anny was crying and asking, “Where are our parents? Why are they not coming for us?” I told her they would come soon, but no one came.

The women explained why we had to hide in the cellar. If a Nazi thought a little boy was Jewish, they would ask the little boy to pull down his pants. If he was circumcised, he would be recognized as a Jew and taken to a concentration camp. A little boy in a camp would not have lasted long.
Bones

BY DEVORA

Your mother sleeps with the TV on.
In the morning finds chicken bones in her bed.
She dumps these remnants of the dead in the trash, with her memories.
They lie fermenting with the leftovers of hungry days.

Your mother speaks with a heavy accent, like no other.
You feel different.
Parents point at how you use the cutlery.
Exotic, they say.
Not good enough, you hear.
No Mayflower for your people.
Somehow, this is your fault.

No grandmother, no grandfather, no uncle or aunt, no cousins.
No larger community to help you hold all that was taken or extend a hand when you fall into the rising waters of your mother’s tears, your next breath threatened.

Your mother loses herself in rage.
You wrap your arms around your knees and rock back and forth, your eyes shut.
Desperate to disappear, you live somewhere on the ceiling.

You get good at checking the weather but are rendered impotent at calming the storms that flash, flood and wash things vital to you away.

No matter how hard you try, her happiness lurks: hungry, seductive, teasing you with impossible dreams.

Your mother tells you Debbie, you are my closest soul.
Your good daughter disks herniate under the weight of her reason for living.

Now you sit with a group of Jews.
A woman—born in North America, whose parents were also born in North America—turns her head to look, and without seeing, says:

What does it matter to you, the Holocaust, you weren’t there.

I found this sole photograph of my grandmother after the death of my mother. Let me introduce you to her. This is Devora Baltupski Ramm. She was murdered in Ponar along with my uncle, Israel.

I do all my creative work in her name, Devora, as a tribute to her. With each painting, each poem and each word that I write, I bring her to life. She is not forgotten; I am of her, I carry her name and her spirit lives through me.

In the poem, “Bones,” I am motivated by a desire to share my journey through the impacts of the Shoah and my direct experience with trauma, as well as resilience, gratitude, love and joy. I am in awe of the miracle of this life I have been given.

Deborah Ross Grayman (Devora) lives in Vancouver and Salt Spring Island with her husband, Henry Grayman. Together they co-facilitate the Second Generation Group.
We are also pursuing a memorandum of understanding with the USC SF to formalize a project to transfer digital access copies of the VHEC’s testimonies to their repository, described in the Visual History Archive catalogue and also available in libraries and universities. We are working to transfer testimonies and metadata for cataloguing and accessible in, and are excited to become one of 172 Visual History Archive (VHA) access sites around the world.

The VHA aggregates information describing 55,000 audio-visual testimonies created by USC Shoah Foundation and its partners, conducted in 65 countries and 43 languages. Initially a repository of Holocaust testimony, the VHA now includes testimonies from the Armenian Genocide that coincided with the First World War, the 1937 Nanjing Massacre in China, the Cambodian Genocide of 1975–1979, the Guatemalan Genocide of 1978–1983, the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, the ongoing conflicts in the Central African Republic and South Sudan and anti-Rohingya mass violence. It also includes testimonies about contemporary acts of violence against Jews.

We are reviewing consent forms for any restrictions which may inform the inclusion of testimonies into these repositories, and for those witnesses whose families we are still in contact with, we will be in touch with updates about our access plans. If you or a member of your family have contributed a testimony and have questions or would like more information about this work, please contact collections@vhec.org or call 604-264-0499.

1USC Shoah Foundation partners include Jewish Family and Children’s Services (JFCS) Holocaust Center; the Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, the Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre, the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre; the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus; Holocaust Museum Houston; Florida Holocaust Museum; Museum of Jewish Heritage; the Richard G. Hovannisian Armenian Genocide Oral History Collection; the Azrieli Foundation; and the Blavatnik Archive Foundation.

The orphanage kept us for another six months hoping that our parents would come. When I was seven, they drove us from Namur to Brussels, and transferred us to the care of the Red Cross, who took down our names and advertised them on telephone poles around Brussels. This is how my uncle Jacques found Anny and me.

He picked us up and brought us to Anny’s father. My aunt Becky, Anny’s mother, soon arrived in Brussels and hugged and kissed Anny and me. I thought that she was my mother. Finally, I had a family and parents.

Later that summer, I found out what happened to my real parents. They were murdered in Auschwitz.

I was raised by my aunt Becky and her husband. At twenty-three years of age I returned to Brussels. My cousin Berthy arranged for us to visit Madame Geulen, who had known me as a young boy.

When we arrived, Madame Geulen invited me to sit beside her on the sofa. She asked if I remembered her; I replied no, I did not. She took my hand and said, “When you were a little boy, we travelled together.” At that point I remembered and asked her if she was Mademoiselle Andrée. She said yes and hugged me.

She told Berthy, “There is something that I never told you. I saved you, Berthy, and your sister Jacqueline, placed both of you with the nuns. I saved your cousin Jean, who was placed with monks. Your cousin Sabine was placed with nuns, and your cousin Alex was placed with Anny in an orphanage, in Namur.”

Berthy and I could hardly believe that this wonderful woman had saved all of our cousins. We were crying and hugging Madame Geulen, in gratitude for her having saved our lives and those of our family members.

Andrée Geulen-Herscovici was recognized as Righteous Among the Nations in 1989.

Alex Buckman is a Holocaust survivor speaker with the VHEC.
PLANNED GIVING

A bequest to the VHEC is a unique opportunity for you to ensure that future generations will remember the Holocaust and its lessons. Planned giving enables individuals to create a powerful philanthropic gift by making a direct impact on the causes important to them.

A legacy gift is a planned future gift that designates a part of your estate as a donation to the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre.

The mission of the Centre is to promote human rights, social justice and genocide awareness through education and remembrance of the Holocaust and your gift advances this mission. Planned gifts are distributed after you pass away and can be a specific dollar amount, a percentage of your assets, or an item of value and allows the person donating to leave behind an impactful and far-reaching legacy.

The VHEC is fortunate to have board members Phil Levinson, an associate of ZLC Financial, with expertise in estate and succession planning and Marcus Brandt, a chartered accountant, with expertise in personal tax planning to help people craft a personalized planned legacy plan.

Your bequest helps the VHEC meet the growing demand for Holocaust education and provides resources that make a difference.

For more information about planned gifts please contact the VHEC at 604-264-0499 or email abbyherlin@vhec.org.

THANK YOU TO OUR DEVOTED VHEC VOLUNTEERS!

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Janos Benisz, Amalia Boe-Fishman, Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, Alex Buckman, Miriam Dattel, Mariette Doduck, Serge Haber, Robert Krell, Claude Romney, Louise Sorensen, Peter Suedfeld, Tom Szekely, Peter Voormeij.

DOCENTS

TEACHER ADVISORY
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SPECIAL PROJECTS
Noah Duranseaud, Claudia Golombiewski, Sarah Ruediger, Megan Rogers, Claire Sicherman, Olga Yefremenko, Janice Masur, Herb Mills, Agnieszka Stadnik, Al Szajman, Ronen Tanne, Stan Taviss, Marg Van Wielingen, Peter Zetler.

Our sincere apologies for any errors or omissions.
TREASURED BELONGINGS
THE HAHN FAMILY & THE SEARCH FOR A STOLEN LEGACY

OPEN TO VISITORS
EXHIBITION ON VIEW UNTIL JUNE 30, 2022

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