

VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE

SPECIAL EDITION 2024-2025

ZACHOR



The VHEC
at 30

Zachor
Through
the Years

Torah Scroll 579:
Celebrating 30 Years
at the VHEC

Transcending Myth
to Preserve Memory:
The BC Holocaust Memorial

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ZACHOR

Zachor is the Hebrew word for remember.

VHEC 30^{YEARS}

SPECIAL EDITION

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CONTENTS

02 Letter from the Editor

03 Thank You, Nina

06 *Zachor* Through the Years

14 Walter (1926–1945): How the Life of One German Boy Helped Me Teach About the Third Reich
by Chris Friedrichs



19 Transcending Myth to Preserve Memory: The BC Holocaust Memorial
by Jarrad Warren



23 Commemorating the Genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda
by Liliane Pari Umehoza

27 Vulnerable to Oblivion
by Nataliia Ivchuk

29 Education News

32 Torah Scroll 579: Celebrating 30 Years at the VHEC
by Caitlin Donaldson



34 Collections News

38 Generations After

Moved to Action by Jessica Lithwick

42 Last Witnesses

A Tribute to Peter Voormeij ^{z1}
by Amalia Boe-Fishman

Our Friend, Peter by Sidi Schaffer

The Lonely Path of the Child Holocaust Survivor by Robert Krell



47 A Family Not of Blood but of Experience
by Leah Collins

ON THE VHEC'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY

Dear reader,

We are celebrating 30 years of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, which opened in the fall of 1994. However, this was not the beginning of our efforts in Holocaust remembrance and education. Rather, it marked the culmination of a process that brought together various important community programs on the Holocaust under one roof.

Commemorative events had been held in Vancouver since the mid-1940s, strengthened by the arrival of Holocaust survivors in the city. One early initiative, organized by survivors, was a memorial service for those who were lost in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. By 1978, this commemoration evolved into a broader annual Yom HaShoah remembrance which continues to bring together local community members to honour the memory of those lost and to bear witness to the testimony of those who survived.

In 1976, a group of dedicated community leaders—Graham Forst of Capilano College, William Nicholls, head of Religious Studies at the University of British Columbia, Morris Saltzman, executive director of the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), and Dr. Robert Krell, then chair of Holocaust Remembrance at CJC—founded the Standing Committee on the Holocaust. They initiated annual Holocaust education programs for BC high school students. In addition, an audio-visual project was begun in 1978–79, capturing survivor testimonies under the guidance of Robert Krell, an effort which expanded significantly in 1983–84.

In 1983, at a social gathering for Holocaust survivors and their children, attended by more than 250 people, Robert Krell shared his vision for building a Holocaust education

centre. The response was overwhelmingly positive, though many survivors expressed the need to first create a memorial to victims of the Holocaust. This led to the 1987 unveiling of the BC Holocaust Memorial at Schara Tzedek Cemetery (discussed in Jarrad Warren's piece on page 19). The memorial's presence galvanized the survivor community to take on the challenge of creating a centre devoted to Holocaust education.

In 1985, the Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society for Remembrance and Education was incorporated. Founding members included Marie Doduck, Leon Kahn^{z1}, Robert Krell, David Shafran^{z1} and Robbie Waisman. The Society first operated from a small office in the Jewish Community Centre under the direction of Barry Dunner. Then with the support of the survivor community, the Society hired its first executive director, Ronnie Tessler, who guided the building process within the revamped Jewish Community Centre, as well as consolidated the various Holocaust education programs under one roof.

The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre officially opened on November 7, 1994, with the affixing of the mezuzah and the launching of the exhibition *Anne Frank in The World: 1929–1945*, curated by the Anne Frank Center in New York. Since then, the VHEC has presented 60 exhibitions, more than half of which were original projects developed by the Centre. These exhibitions have traveled widely over the past 30 years, reaching audiences across Canada and internationally.

The Centre's success over the years is a testament to the leadership and vision of three remarkable executive directors: Dr. Roberta Kremer^{z1}, Frieda Miller and Nina

Krieger. Thanks to their dedication and to the efforts of all those who have participated at the board level, the VHEC has flourished and made a lasting impact on Holocaust education locally, provincially, nationally and internationally.

This special issue of *Zachor* celebrates the past efforts of some of the people who have shaped the VHEC: survivors, founders, employees, volunteers and others who have contributed in various ways, like the Shafran family who brought a Torah Scroll to the VHEC 30 years ago (see page 32). It features five pieces from past issues of *Zachor* which particularly resonate with current VHEC staff. This issue of *Zachor* also looks to the future of Holocaust commemoration, including a piece by Jessica Lithwick, a third-generation descendant of survivors who carries on her family's legacy in word and in action (page 38). This issue also features the commemoration of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda by one of its survivors, Liliane Pari Umuhoza (page 23).

Though we've doubled our page count for this issue, it's still not enough to acknowledge everyone who has contributed to the long, rich history of the VHEC. Instead, we honour their efforts through our work of combatting Holocaust denial and distortion every day, in the pursuit of a world free of antisemitism.

For you and for those no longer with us, we give thanks.

Hannah Marazzi

Hannah Marazzi
Acting Executive Director

THANK YOU, NINA

The board of directors of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre extends a heartfelt thanks to Nina Krieger for her commitment and dedication to the VHEC over her 18 years of service; six years as director of education and 12 years as executive director. Nina has played an important role in maximizing the VHEC's outreach to and connection with teachers, students and representatives of all levels of government. She has also done an outstanding job representing the VHEC and Canada at the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.



Significantly, Nina has made our survivor community and stakeholders feel a part of the VHEC and its vital mission. With levels of antisemitism increasing in Vancouver and elsewhere, Nina has also steered the VHEC's involvement in helping to realize and develop mandatory Holocaust studies in high schools across the province—an invaluable achievement.

The board wishes Nina success in her role as MLA in the Victoria–Swan Lake riding.

Nina, our sincere thanks. We wish you and your family the very best.



VHEC 30 YEARS



Government
of Canada

All of us at Jewish Federation wish a huge mazel tov to the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre on your 30th anniversary! The VHEC's exceptional work on Holocaust-based anti-racism education and commemoration has made an indelible impact in our community and across the province. In this time of rising antisemitism the role you play and the work you do is more important than ever, and we are very proud to partner with you. We wish you all the best on the occasion of this tremendous milestone, and we look forward to seeing your work impact the lives of British Columbians.

Warm regards,

Becky Saegert

Vice President, Marketing and Communications
Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver

Thirty years ago, the Vancouver Jewish community took a significant step forward in preserving the memory and lessons of the Holocaust by creating the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre.

In these times of uncertainty and division, the history of the Holocaust offers powerful lessons: the dangers of prejudice, the consequences of indifference and the importance of standing up against hatred in all its forms. The Centre's work is not only about recounting history but also about inspiring actions to ensure atrocities like the Holocaust never happen again.

Congratulations to the VHEC on 30 years of education and community building! We all look forward to what the next 30 years will bring.

Sincerely,

Deborah Lyons

Canada's Special Envoy
on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance
and Combatting Antisemitism

Congratulations to the VHEC, celebrating 30 years, 1994–2024

Minister of Diversity,
Inclusion and Persons
with Disabilities



Ministre de la Diversité,
de l'inclusion et des Personnes
en situation de handicap

Gatineau, Canada K1A 0M5



PRIME MINISTER · PREMIER MINISTRE

As Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities, I'd like to congratulate everyone at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre on its 30th anniversary. The work that began here three decades ago is more important than ever now. Around the world, the rise of antisemitism requires us all to come together and stamp out hatred wherever it is found. Our government is proud to support your efforts and we wish you continued success in the years to come.

The Honourable
Kamal Khera

Privy Council, Member of Parliament



It is with great honour that I send my best wishes on the 30th Anniversary of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. The Holocaust reminds us of the importance of how division, repression and hatred can have deadly and horrific consequences. For the last 30 years, the VHEC, founded by Holocaust survivors, has done crucial work to help us all remember the Holocaust, and as a result has fought against hatred, for a more positive and peaceful future.

I would like to recognize all that the VHEC has done over these years to educate the public, advocate for social justice and human rights, and honour victims of the Holocaust. I know that this will continue, with success for years to come.

With my very best wishes on 30 years of invaluable service to Canadians.

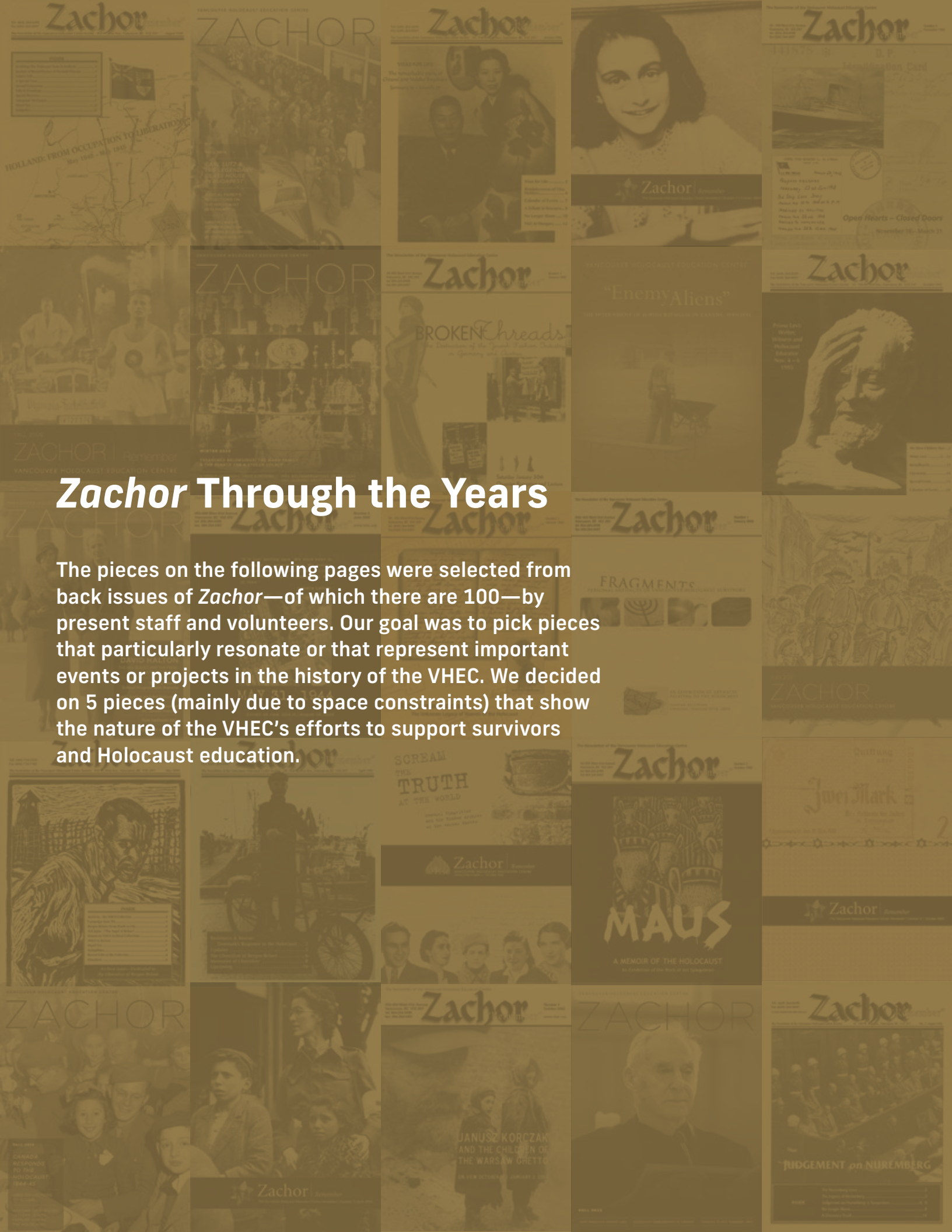
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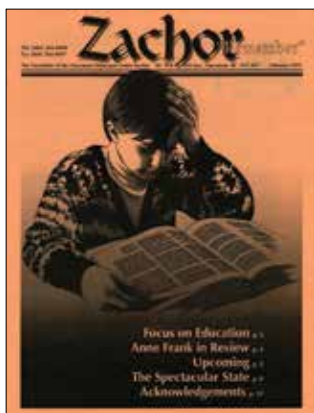
Prime Minister of Canada



Zachor Through the Years

The pieces on the following pages were selected from back issues of *Zachor*—of which there are 100—by present staff and volunteers. Our goal was to pick pieces that particularly resonate or that represent important events or projects in the history of the VHEC. We decided on 5 pieces (mainly due to space constraints) that show the nature of the VHEC's efforts to support survivors and Holocaust education.





February 1995

Why Study the Holocaust?

By Stanley H. Winfield

It is hard to believe, or accept, that there is a growing movement in Canada which denies the most fully documented atrocity in human history, a catastrophe within memory of many people still living. Recently I was asked by a friend whether, half a century or more after the horror, the Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society really serves any worthwhile purpose. My answer of course was “yes,” and I gave him two very important reasons for its existence: the danger of ignorance and the power of antisemitism. I reminded him of the Keegstra, Zundel and Collins triumvirate, the Liberty Net, the Heritage Front and the Aryan nations, who would have the young and/or gullible believe that the Holocaust is a hoax, that nothing of the sort happened, or if it did, was much less grave, was really deserved, or was some kind of Jewish provocation.

My friend shrugged off such charlatans and neo-Nazis by suggesting that they are simply “a lunatic fringe” to whom few pay attention. A disturbing rejoinder, particularly since, as a Jew, he should know better. Unfortunately he is not alone in dismissing these racists, whose “theories” defile the memory of the millions who were murdered. It is intolerable that survivors of the butchery should suffer such anguish because of these revisionists’ claims.

Since its incorporation in 1985, the Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society for Education and Remembrance (VHCS)

has sought to counter the calumny of Holocaust denial by promoting public education against racism and antisemitism through knowledge of the events and implications of the Holocaust. The Society’s Holocaust Education Centre will “interpret and present the events of the Holocaust, its antecedents and its contemporary relevance, as well as the continuity of the Jewish people and the human will to survive. Through its programs, resources and activities, it will assist teachers and students to learn what happened, to try to understand some of the reasons for it, and to develop skills and insights which will ensure that a Holocaust will never recur, to any group, anywhere, any time.”* In this regard, the Holocaust Education Centre (HEC) is an important resource for teachers preparing lessons dealing with human rights, recognizing that the Holocaust is a seminal crystallizing moment in the notion of human rights.

In preparing this article, I spoke with Frieda Miller, the HEC’s dedicated education coordinator, about what she wants to accomplish. From our conversation, I came away with another answer to my friend’s question. Frieda explained that the Holocaust Education Centre, never forgetting the horror of the Holocaust, but not sensationalizing or exploiting it, will ensure that the Centre acts as a “museum of hope and justice, as opposed to one of destruction and horror, and will communicate this stance in its educational programs.” While respecting other genocides, past and present, the HEC is devoted to what students can learn from the lessons of the Holocaust, amongst them that even the most civilized nations risk falling into barbarity. The hope is that the students will be moved to share their new insights into social justice, gained in part by their visit to the Centre.

The educational programs of the HEC are multidisciplinary and interactive, emphasizing ethical values and personal courage. The Centre’s mandate, after all, is to “assist in the fight against contemporary racism and antisemitism by developing in students an understanding and respect for human life, morality, the law, citizenship and social justice.”*

The Survivor Outreach Project, which is reaching thousands of British Columbia students yearly, has been operating

since 1986. Students hear firsthand the experiences of survivors. A teacher wrote recently to David Ehrlich, a survivor who participates in the project, “Every student was deeply moved by your story... almost all asked questions—how is it possible? Your presence shows beyond a shadow of a doubt, that it is possible ... Please be the one to keep on getting to our students first.” Another teacher wrote, “It is my personal goal to make sure that no student from Fraser Valley Christian High leaves this school without being exposed to stories from people such as yourself.”

Thanks to a 1991 grant of \$23,100 from the federal government, audio-visual eyewitness testimonies with teachers’ manuals are now in circulation. Over 200 hours of testimonies have been recorded and stored in duplicate at Yale University’s Fortunoff Archive of Holocaust Testimonies. In 1994, a grant from VanCity was received to continue taping survivors, liberators and rescuers for the VHCS Audio-Visual Documentation Project. A book of survivor accounts, *Keeping the Memory: Fifteen Eyewitness Accounts of Victoria Holocaust Survivors* by Rhoda Kaellis (VHCS, 1992), contains an introduction for teachers by West Vancouver high school history teacher Kit Krieger. This project was funded by grants, donations and Society money and has been purchased by libraries, schools and individuals in Canada, the United States and Israel.

There are many well-meaning people who ask if the VHCS and similar organizations simply re-nourish a terrible but futile anger towards Germans. I submit that the answer is a firm “no.” As I grow more and more familiar with the VHCS, I see an organization committed to fighting and overcoming racism, not only as a memorial to the many millions of innocent people who perished, but as a means of healing—by using the negative experiences of the Holocaust towards positive ends. ■

Stanley H. Winfield was a lawyer and a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force. He was in Bergen Belsen following liberation. He was involved with the VHEC in various roles, including as a member of the archives committee and the editorial board of *Zachor*.



July 1999

The Gesher Project: Healing Holocaust Trauma Through Writing and Painting

(author unknown)

The Gesher Project was a unique, innovative, multidisciplinary intergenerational Holocaust project carried out in Vancouver. Last January Holocaust survivors, child survivors and children of survivors embarked on a five month journey of intergenerational healing through creative expression—through writing, painting and discussion. Participants included survivors: Bernard Goldberg, Frances Hoyd, Rosa Marel and one survivor who wishes to remain anonymous; child survivors: Marion Cassirer, Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, Malka Pischansitskaya, Sidi Schaffer and Louise Stein-Sorensen; and members of the second generation: Mary Adlersberg, Jean Adler, Barbara Bluman, Nurit Fox, Robert Grosz, Andrew Jordan, Gabriella Klein, Deborah Ramm-West, Marianne Rev and Elsa Weinstein. The nineteen participants listened to each other’s stories, and produced the writings and paintings currently on display in the gallery in the HEC.

The facilitators, writer Dale Adams-Segal, artist Linda Dayan Frimer, and psychologist and member of the second generation Dr. Alina Wydra, conceived of the project five years ago. Having worked with survivors of trauma in the First Nations community, Alina decided that it was time to use her expertise in working with survivors of trauma in her own community. Having been introduced to Dale Adams-Segal’s healing writing techniques, she approached Dale to begin a group. Together they approached Linda Dayan Frimer

to illustrate a book, which would follow their work. Linda suggested that she would rather facilitate the participants' creation of their own works of art. The facilitators chose the name Geshher, the Hebrew word for "bridge," because it symbolized what they set out to do—to use creative approaches to bridge generations and as a means of healing Holocaust trauma.

Exploration in The Geshher Project was thematic and chronological. The group began by creating a collaborative piece of artwork, representing a symbolic "bridge" between the past, the present and the future. The lives of survivors prior to the war were discussed so that the context of "normal life" became the backdrop to the beginnings of the Holocaust. The aftermath of the Shoah, with its period of hope and expectations became another theme for discussion. The effect of the past on the present was the focus of the intergenerational exchange.

Themes of survival, guilt, significance of names, importance of family, Judaism, ambivalence, normalcy, numbing of emotions, secrets and silence were chosen for their intergenerational relevance. The exploration of "names" evoked different responses. For survivors it evoked memories of those who had been lost and could not be mourned. A child survivor expressed a familiar sense of responsibility: "I am driven to be her voice." Second generation members expressed their sadness over not having family: "I don't even know their names," stated one of them as she was about to pay tribute to her lost relatives on a memorial piece of artwork. The interdisciplinary and intergenerational approach to the theme of "names" resulted in discussion, individual writings and a collective wall mural.

The Holocaust is generally remembered in black and white archival photographs and documentary film. In truth, the victims experienced the events in all shades of colour and emotions, and in images and experiences often too difficult to capture. The interweaving of psychological exploration, painting, and writing provided group members with three different ways of expressing these multilayered shades of emotions. Each form impacted the others; the discussions enriched the writing, the writing enriched the painting, and the painting the discussions.

Dale Adams-Segal describes the individual and collaborative writing of Geshher: "This inspired writing emerges from the profound substance of the human spirit, from all the knowing that was hidden behind the horrific, behind the need to justify, to silence, to understand—and blazes forth with legitimacy and veracity: fierce words which bring us out of the past into the present and home to our own reclamation."

Linda Frimer describes the art: "The artistic expression of The Geshher Project issues forth from a life affirming urge to change and transform the darkest shadows of Holocaust trauma. The resulting art, born from a place of truth, has the ability to confront the silence and to gain entrance into the most intimate and horrific of historical legacies. The experience of family losses, known and unknown, can never be assimilated or abandoned. The artistic process offers participants a bridge from the dark unconscious to the releasing light of awareness."

Geshher was a therapeutic group at its best. Very early in the process, a participant said, "In one word, it is 'healing!'"

Dr. Alina Wydra wrote about the psychological process: "I was fascinated and gratified to watch moments of real connection, real understanding, and the resulting sense of emotional relief, as evidenced by the psychological progression that occurred for one of the second generation members, who said, "My silence is because it is too much." Later in the process she said, "It's actually not so much pain—it's a cathartic release, finally I can feel connected"; and still later, "Envisioning the other side of the bridge is really seeing the possibility of love."

Participants broke the silence between the generations, releasing long held pain while increasing self-awareness and understanding. Reisa Schneider, scribe, witnessed the process during meetings. She recorded such profound moments, as when one survivor said to a child of other survivors: "I can say to you what I cannot say to my daughter," and the child of survivors responded: "I hear you as I cannot hear my mother."

Facilitators and scribe, together with project administrator Joan Fromowitz, are in the process of producing a book, which

will include a section on the methodology involved in leading “a Geshher group.” The multi-disciplinary, creative approach of The Geshher Project has far reaching implications for other survivors of trauma. The publication will include The Geshher Project members’ paintings, poetry and prose and serve as a lasting legacy of the project for future generations.

The merging of deep painful memories and self-awareness during The Geshher Project sessions resulted in evocative artwork and poignant writing. Bringing this artwork and writing to the public is another step in the healing and educational process. Individual and collective poetry, writing and paintings created by the Geshher Project participants was on display in 1999, at the Holocaust Education Centre. ■



October 1999

Vancouver Holocaust Child Survivor Group

By Leo Vogel

Nearly ten years ago, the first meeting of the Vancouver Holocaust Child Survivor Group was initiated. It had become quite evident, at that time, that there was a strong need for such a group, since more and more people, who were children during the war, had a profound need to break their silence and acknowledge that their war experiences had left a dark mark on their lives. For others, this self-imposed silence was never an issue. Historically, these first meetings coincided, more or less, with the first of the international conferences of hidden children.

In the early nineties, when the majority of child survivors were already in their 50s and 60s, it was still a commonly held belief that camp survivors had “suffered” more intensely and severely than we, the children, who were, after all, “too young to have taken it all in.” Many of the child survivors, when wanting to talk about their own monstrous backgrounds, were hushed into silence and guilt for not having actually experienced the atrocities that had been witnessed by the adults in their lives. Others did not speak, because they had never stopped hiding. Their war time experiences remained a deep dark secret inside themselves. Others, who had been brought up in Christian families, only began to accept their Jewishness when their psychological hiding finally ceased. But in one way or another, for children who survived the war, hiding was a large part of their “lifestyle.”

When the opportunity to express themselves with others of a common background finally arose, the group was instantly welcomed by many of the child survivors of the Vancouver and surrounding areas, and it quickly grew from a few participants to what it is today: a vibrant self-help group. But it is a self-help group with a difference. Unlike other self-help groups, whose membership is open, this group, thankfully has no new eligibles. So the group meets, once a month, at the Vancouver Holocaust Centre. A handful of souls, who as children survived the Holocaust and seek solace and comfort from others, with similar backgrounds and experiences. Monthly we gather as old friends and adopted families, to talk, listen, cry, and laugh. The discussions centre on how our present behavior was molded by our early childhood.

During the meetings we feel safe, for a couple of hours, to express ourselves in a manner only a “mother” could accept. Many of us have never had the knowledge of what it was like to have a mother, and for some the group takes her place. Others, whose parents or parent returned from the camps, or hiding, continued to deal with feelings of abandonment and loss of childhood experiences. We gather as an assortment of strong individuals and experiences, self-sufficient and capable. Within the group there are subgroups which represent the various nations of war-torn Europe and Russia. A Babylon of different accents.

Some participants express their emotions and feelings openly. For others it feels safe to just listen. The group is both supportive and therapeutic. Long-hidden memories are dredged up, examined and dealt with. Once our emotions, memories, or feelings are “touched,” we tend to become like children. Not in a negative sense, but rather in the sense that we try to make up for lost childhood time. For our members, childhood had little joy, no parties, no frivolities, and for many, no family.

Why do so many of us go to meeting after meeting? It is a question which has been bandied about many times. The answer seems to be that in this group each of us recognizes that the others understand instinctively what it is we are trying to express. Our experiences and feelings of the past, as well as the present, have an uncanny commonality, even though as individuals we are very different. So for the last ten years, a small group of child survivors have managed to deal, often painfully, with long-suppressed and deeply hidden feelings. But there are other child survivors who have never had the opportunity or inclination to become involved with the group. They are always welcome. ■

Leo Vogel is a child survivor of the Holocaust and a Holocaust survivor outreach speaker. He is a member of the Child Survivor Group of Vancouver. He was born in the Netherlands and lives in Courtenay, BC.



October 2003

Why and How I Speak to Students

By Alex Buckman

I witnessed the Holocaust, which is why I must speak to students. I owe it to my parents and family. I was spared and survived; my parents did not. After I am gone, who will be a witness? It is my story that will survive. Those I speak to will know that I lived because they met me and heard my story firsthand.

When I am about to speak, I ask the students to get out of their chairs and surround me. I sit on the floor and show them a picture taken before the war in Brussels, Belgium. In the picture are my parents, my aunt, her husband, their daughter Anny and myself. I ask the students to return to their seats. I sit with them in a circle so they can see and hear me. I ask them to help me, because the subject is sensitive and it is a difficult experience to speak. I tell them of my family, what happened to them and to me when I was young and placed in hiding. I encourage the students to ask me questions, which they do.

I tell them how I was taken to an orphanage and then discovered that my cousin Anny was there. Our names were changed. We were now to be Catholic children posing as brother and sister. Vividly imprinted on my mind are memories of when the Nazis came to the orphanage and I was forced to hide under the wooden floor. The orphanage staff gave me a cloth to bite in case I cried out. They told me to be quiet for my own protection. I was scared of the dark. If the Nazis found boys they thought looked Jewish, they

would force them to drop their pants. If the boy had been circumcised, he would be considered a Jew and taken away.

I tell the students what happened to my parents. My mother chose to go with her sister to the gas chambers. My father had foot problems and was unable to work. Both of my parents were murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Later I tell them about my uncle, who was interned in the Buchenwald concentration camp for 16 months. I tell them about my aunt, who was interned in the Ravensbrück concentration camp for 16 months. To keep her sanity, and to curb hunger in the camp, she wrote a recipe book. She would read the recipes to other women in her barracks. This unique book is often on display in the Vancouver Holocaust Centre. I tell them about my aunt's orange cake, and give each student a copy of the recipe. I suggest they might try baking it at home. I ask them to hug and kiss their parents, siblings and families when they get home this evening, and to tell them how much they love them, and to never forget that.

I get emotional at times. The students listen intently. When I have finished talking, I ask for their questions. Most of the time the students are stunned and shy. My history touches them deeply. Some even cry. I tell them, if you ask me questions, I will continue to talk. One student begins and then more follow. I ask them to respond to the experience of hearing a child survivor speak.

At the end of my talk, I feel emotionally drained, unable to say another word. Students come to me, they want to shake my hand. I respond. Others want to hug me. I let them. When they send their letters to the Vancouver Holocaust Centre and I have had a chance to read them all, I am deeply touched and amazed that they had understood my feelings. Their comments humble me. They touch my inner core and for a moment we share a common bond. Some tell me they made my aunt's orange cake with their mother. This touches an emotional chord in me. I know that my aunt, the woman I called "Mom," would be pleased to know her recipe lives on. As I get older, telling my story becomes more difficult. I know that I must continue in memory of my parents, and of those in my family who did not survive. When I speak, I feel connected to all survivors and I understand why I was spared. I understand my parents' difficult decision to leave

and hide me with strangers. This was the biggest proof of their strength and their love for me, their only son. ■

Alex Buckman was a child survivor from Belgium who survived the Holocaust in hiding. He was the president of the Vancouver Child Survivor Group. He spoke to thousands of students as a VHEC outreach speaker.



Spring 2015

The Face of the Ghetto: A Unique Lens to History

By Lauren Vukobrat & Adara Goldberg

Following the invasion of Poland in 1939, the Nazis imposed a ghetto in the city of Łódź, which they renamed Litzmannstadt after a First World War German general. From 1940 to 1944, more than 180,000 Jews and 5,000 Roma and Sinti lived in the cramped quarters, with many working in factories that supported the war effort.

Among other things, it was illegal for Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland to own cameras. Inside the Łódź ghetto, a handful of Jewish photographers were exempt from these laws. Under the leadership of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, Mendel Grosman and Henryk Ross served as official ghetto photographers in the statistics department of the Jewish Council. Noted prewar photographers who specialized in colour imaging and sports photography, respectively, Grosman and Ross were officially assigned a twofold task: to produce worker headshots for identification cards; and to document the productivity and efficiency of the ghetto labour industry, which was producing goods for the German war effort. But at great personal risk, the photographers captured intimate moments of family,

childhood and community on their cameras. Taken in defiance of Nazi law and often in secret, the photographers captured moments that humanized ghetto Jews and their fight to survive. Approximately 12,000 of these images survived the Holocaust, while most of the individuals on film did not.

Lódź stands as the most documented of all the ghettos under Nazi rule. Collections held in the Lódź State Archive, the Art Gallery of Ontario and various archives and museums provide a nuanced and complex picture of daily life under Nazi occupation. Supplemented by personal accounts of life in the ghetto, *The Face of the Ghetto* travelling exhibit from the Topography of Terror Foundation in Berlin provides entry points for considering the dehumanizing conditions of the ghetto and for learning about the bravery, resistance and compassion of the individuals within it.

The Face of the Ghetto raises important questions about the obligation and responsibility placed on visitors to museum exhibits dealing with complex and sensitive subject matter. Visitors must bear in mind that the individuals featured in photographs were in vulnerable positions, and continually fighting for their lives. The exhibit prompts student groups and adult visitors to think critically about the role of photography in teaching about the Holocaust. At first glance, a viewer may be captivated by the aesthetic of the photographs. But while beauty is alluring, it is important to look beyond the surface and think about the underlying ethical implications of these photos. Are you looking at a picture of children playing, or is there something more than meets the eye? What exactly defines childhood “play,” especially play within a ghetto?

The photographers resisted taking photos of scenes they perceived as being dehumanizing to their fellow Jews. Mendel Grosman refused to photograph a family carrying a wagon filled with human waste until he was asked by the patriarch to take a picture and, “Let it remain for the future, let others know how we were humiliated.” This family was thus photographed at their most vulnerable, in a situation and setting where their dignity and pride could be easily lost. In freedom, would they have allowed such photos to be taken? And would we, as museum visitors, want such pictures taken of ourselves and then placed on public display?

When the negatives and slides were recovered after liberation, few contained captions, dates, credits, or identifying details about individuals photographed. There is, however, one recognizable face of the ghetto. Bronia Sonnenschein (née Schwebel) was born in Galicia, Poland, and raised in Vienna, Austria. Following the Anschluss (German annexation of Austria on March 12, 1938), the Schwebels returned to Poland and were later interned in the Lódź ghetto. An educated woman who spoke several languages, Bronia became a valued secretary for Rumkowski, which likely prolonged her family’s time in the ghetto. In August 1944, the family—parents, sister Paula, Bronia and her husband, Eric Strauss—were among the final transports to Auschwitz. Bronia, her mother, and sister survived. Her father and husband did not.

After brief stops in Prague and Israel, Bronia settled in Vancouver, where she eventually became a founding member of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. As a dedicated Holocaust Survivor Outreach Speaker for the VHEC for more than twenty years, Bronia shared her story of survival with thousands of students in BC and across Canada. Bronia passed away in 2011.

While reviewing the exhibit slides, VHEC staff recognized one of the unnamed faces as Bronia. Research in the VHEC archive confirmed that the photo was taken at the September 18, 1943, double wedding ceremony of Bronia to Eric Strauss and Mary Schifflinger to Ignaz Jelin. Rumkowski presided over the ceremony. The dresses worn in the photo were borrowed from the ghetto dress factory, where Bronia’s sister worked. Of subjects in the photograph, only Bronia survived.

This photographic exhibit illustrates a rarely seen story of Jewish resistance, courage and self-preservation in the Lódź ghetto. *The Face of the Ghetto: Pictures Taken by Jewish Photographers in the Litzmannstadt Ghetto, 1940-1944* was on display at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre from May to October 2015. ■

Lauren Vukobrat graduated with a master’s degree in museum studies from the University of Leicester, UK.

Dr. Adara Goldberg was an education director at the VHEC. She has a background in social work and holds a PhD in Holocaust history.

Walter (1926–1945): How the Life of One German Boy Helped Me Teach About the Third Reich

BY CHRIS FRIEDRICH

By growing up in an environment suffused with Nazi ideas and images, Walter would have absorbed the everyday antisemitism that the Nazis made a cornerstone of their regime.



Walter Schreiber in his Hitler Youth uniform (age seven), 1933. All images courtesy of Historisches Museum Frankfurt.

One day in the spring of 2023 I went to the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre to acquaint myself with its exhibition *Age of Influence: Youth & Nazi Propaganda*. I was impressed with the way the exhibition demonstrated how the Nazi regime tried to inculcate its supernationalist and racist values in German children and teenagers. At the heart of the Nazi program for Germany's young people were two organizations: the Hitler Youth for boys and the parallel League of German Maidens for girls. Not only were all German children—except for Jews, of course—expected to join these organizations when they reached the right age, but what they learned there was enhanced by a flood of shrewdly designed books and magazines, which conveyed the message that Germany's younger generations could look forward to a bright future under the benign rule of Adolf Hitler. Many or most of the targeted youth were completely swept up into the Nazi value system. But as the last panel in the exhibition made clear, some teenagers pushed back against these expectations by engaging in forbidden activities, such as joining illegal clubs where they could dance to American jazz, a form of music scorned by the Nazis due to its Black origins.

As I studied this superbly designed exhibition, I realized that for more than thirty years I had been lecturing to my students at the University of British Columbia (UBC), and to other young people in our community, about the life of one German boy whose life story perfectly exemplified the themes of *Age of Influence*. When I mentioned this to the leadership of the VHEC, I was invited to offer a lecture about this topic in conjunction with the exhibition—a welcome opportunity to describe this boy's life to a different kind of audience.

But who was this boy? How did I know about him? And why had I found his story so effective in explaining the nature of the Nazi system?

In the fall of 1986, I found myself doing research in the German city of Frankfurt am Main. Like most large cities, including Vancouver, Frankfurt has a museum devoted to the city's history. One day I noticed in the museum's bookstall a volume with an intriguing title: *Walter *1926 +1945 an der Ostfront: Leben und Lebensbedingungen eines*

Frankfurter Jungen im III. Reich (Walter, b. 1926, d. 1945 on the Eastern Front: the life and circumstances of a Frankfurt youth in the Third Reich). The book turned out to be a detailed and richly illustrated biography of one boy whose parents had scrupulously saved all their family photo albums, as well as the toys the boy had owned, all of his notebooks, and every other scrap of paper related to his existence until his death as an 18-year-old soldier near the end of the Second World War. After both of his parents had died, relatives donated the boxes of this material to the Frankfurt Historical Museum, whose curators used the contents—supplemented by interviewing surviving cousins and others—to reconstruct Walter's life on an unparalleled level of detail, making possible both an exhibition devoted entirely to Walter's story as well as the published biography. After reading the book, I realized that this one boy's life could be used to animate the evil nature of the Nazi regime in a way that my UBC students and other young people could relate to on a deeply personal level. Sadly, the book

But who was this boy? How did I know about him? And why had I found his story so effective in explaining the nature of the Nazi system?

has never been translated into English. But lecturing about its contents was a way to make this story known. Most of my students, after all, were roughly the same age as Walter was when he died. Many of them told me over the years that of all the lectures they had attended in my courses on modern European or world history, the story of this boy was the lecture that they recalled most vividly.

Walter was the only child of Wilhelm and Lina Schreiber. His father was a draftsman in the engineering department of the city of Frankfurt. His mother, like most middle-class women in Germany of the 1920s, was a homemaker. The father was immensely proud of the fact that he had served as a German soldier in the First World War, although due to a mysterious minor ailment he was discharged from the army just before his unit was sent to the murderous Western Front. An ardent patriot, he was enthused about the Nazi movement which emerged after the war, and eagerly joined the party right after Adolf Hitler came



Walter (age 10) with his parents Wilhelm and Lina Schreiber, 1936.

to power in 1933. He also joined the infamous Nazi paramilitary organization known as the SA and wore its uniform whenever he could. His wife, by contrast, was firmly apolitical and resisted her husband's expectations that she would join one of the Nazi women's organizations. She also refused his request that she stop going to one of her doctors who happened to be Jewish. But while her husband could not bend his wife to his will, he could use his paternal authority to turn his son into a Nazi paragon. And for many years he succeeded.

Although normally boys joined the Hitler Youth at age 10, special permission could be granted to well-prepared boys to admit them earlier, and this father coached his son so assiduously that Walter met all the necessary requirements and became a Hitler Youth at the tender age of seven. He clearly enjoyed the outdoor and indoor activities which the Hitler Youth provided as a way of inculcating enthusiasm in the Nazi way of life. But this was not enough for the father. The family's home life also had to be nazified. Wilhelm was a fierce disciplinarian, but he was glad to shower his son with Nazi-themed gifts, including toy soldiers with Nazi flags and a Hitler figurine. Even the family's Christmas tree was not spared—in addition to the customary candles the tree was decorated with glowing swastika pendants. Surrounded by all this, Walter became a dutiful Nazi child. With his gentle mother, however, he could share his love of music and animals.

All of Walter's school notebooks were carefully preserved by his parents. Walter certainly developed a flawless

handwriting, but he did not always pay attention in class. He doodled and daydreamed. Once he had to repeat the whole school year.

In 1939, when Walter was 13, Hitler's army marched into Poland and soon Europe was engulfed in the Second World War. But at first Walter's life as a young teenager was only slightly impacted by the war. Only after a few years would all this begin to change.

At age 14, members of the Hitler Youth advanced to membership in one of the specialized units for teenage boys. Due to his interest in animals, Walter opted for the Riding Youth division in which boys worked with horses. Walter posed proudly in the Riding Youth uniform which his father had paid for, but what he really enjoyed were the hours at the Riding Youth stable where he groomed and rode horses. He also made new friends there, many of whom came from upper-class families in which horseback riding was routine. His new friends had access to American jazz records smuggled into Germany via Sweden, and Walter gladly joined an illegal jazz dance club. He was also getting increasingly interested in girls and eventually had a series of girlfriends.

Walter kept a diary. I often mentioned to students that in this way Walter was superficially similar to a posthumously famous teenage girl who was also born in Frankfurt. Anne Frank, born in 1929, was Jewish, and soon after Hitler came to power the Frank family emigrated to the Netherlands. It was there that at age 13 Anne Frank began to keep the diary which recounted her family's life in hiding until they were arrested and sent off to camps where Anne and her mother and sister all died. But her heartrending diary eventually became known and turned into the most widely admired work written by a teenager in the twentieth century.

That will never happen to Walter's diary. He simply used it to record some aspects of his leisure hours. The names of movies he saw were written in German. But other entries were written in a secret code. The museum curators were

able to crack the code and discovered that those entries recorded the progress of Walter’s sexual activities with his girlfriends.

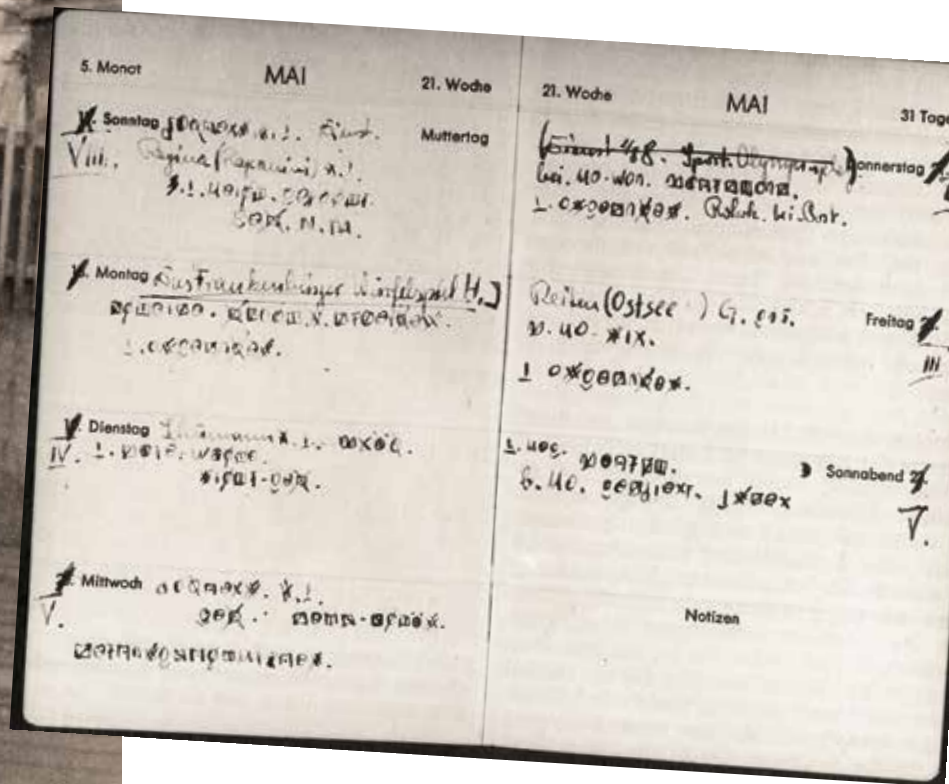
For a while, Walter’s life of school, horses, girlfriends, and dancing at a secret jazz club continued—until one night in 1942, when the jazz club was raided by the Gestapo and all the participants were thrown into jail. His mother came the next morning to bail him out, while his father furiously fumed about this disgrace to the family. As punishment for his illegal activity—and because he had been neglecting his schoolwork—Walter was prematurely drafted into military service. At first he was assigned to light duties with an anti-aircraft unit posted in the Netherlands. But by 1944, after a stint in France, Walter had been assigned to much more

dangerous service in a unit fighting against the advancing Soviet army, which was rapidly approaching the German border. The fighting was deadly and Walter was terrified. He repeatedly wrote home to beg his father to use any Nazi connections to procure a brief home leave for him. His father haughtily replied that he would do no such thing and clearly implied that Walter was being a coward. To this Walter replied in one of his last letters home:

Well, if in the end I really do run into bad luck, then you as a big Nazi will have nothing to feel sorry about, because after all “no sacrifice can be too great.”

On January 16, 1945, Walter’s luck did run out. In a fierce house-to-house struggle between his unit and the invading Soviet soldiers near Gumbinnen in East Prussia, Walter was shot and killed.

Walter’s parents were bereft at the death of their only child. Walter’s mother died a few years after the war. But his father lived much longer. Since he had been a Nazi party



Left: Walter in his new Riding Youth uniform (age 14), 1940. Right: Walter’s secret diary.



The last known photograph of Walter (in uniform at age 18), 1944.

member, the Allies who occupied Frankfurt dismissed him from his city job. In order to secure his pension, Wilhelm Schreiber had to be assessed by a “denazification” tribunal, which accepted his false claim that he had never really understood the implications of the Nazi ideology. He got his full pension but in fact he remained an unconverted Nazi to the very end, convinced that his son had died a heroic death for the Reich.

After both parents had died, Walter’s relatives inherited the huge pile of boxes recording every detail of their young cousin’s life. They were only too glad to pass all this material on to the Frankfurt Historical Museum, whose curators immediately recognized the rich potential of this material.

Over the years I lectured about Walter’s life again and again, not only at UBC but also to high school students. After lecturing about this boy’s life—in much greater detail than I could provide here—I often asked the students a simple question: Was Walter, who served in uniform as a German soldier in the war that Hitler started, guilty of participating in the criminal Nazi enterprise—or was he in

fact himself just another victim of the Nazi system? They were never quite sure of the answer, and often suggested that he was both at the same time.

In October 2023 I lectured to a different group, consisting mostly of adults, at the VHEC. The lecture was followed by a discussion period, and one obvious question was whether all this documentation included much evidence of antisemitic material. The simple answer was no. One of the school notebooks had a vocabulary list that included the word *entjuden*—a Nazi-coined word that translates roughly as “de-jewify.” It is a reminder that Walter’s education at school and in the Hitler Youth was infused with anti-Jewish thinking. But was there originally more? Following the war the father seems to have destroyed any photographs of himself in his once proudly-worn SA uniform, perhaps because such material might have compromised his successful attempt to get “denazified.” One member of the audience suggested that perhaps at the same time, and for much the same reason, he shrewdly destroyed whatever overtly anti-Jewish material he found. But even if in fact the boxes included little material of that sort, by growing up in an environment suffused with Nazi ideas and images, Walter would have absorbed the everyday antisemitism that the Nazis made a cornerstone of their regime.

Walter Schreiber was certainly not a hero. But he was not an evil person. He was an obedient child who, up to a point, conformed to the expectations placed on him at home, at school, and in the Hitler Youth he had belonged to since the age of seven. As an adolescent he pushed back in his limited way against some of what he had been taught and came to resent his father’s blind obedience to Nazi doctrine. Who knows what he would have been like if he had survived the war? Many members of his generation in West Germany embraced democratic values once the utter hollowness of the Nazi regime became clear to them after 1945. Perhaps Walter would have been one of them. ■

Chris Friedrichs is a professor emeritus of history at the University of British Columbia, where he taught European and world history for 45 years until his retirement in 2018. He has been involved for many decades in the educational and commemorative programs of the VHEC.

Transcending Myth to Preserve Memory: The BC Holocaust Memorial

BY JARRAD WARREN

The BC Holocaust Memorial exemplifies a community's efforts to preserve memory.

In the summer of 2023, during a history class on public memory taught by Dr. Nataliia Ivchyk at the University of British Columbia, I was given the chance to conduct original research on a Vancouver memorial for my final project. Of the ten or so options of public memorials that students could choose between, one clearly stood out to me: the BC Holocaust Memorial at Schara Tzedek Cemetery. My interest in this memorial stemmed from the fact that I had no prior knowledge of its existence, despite having visited the cemetery earlier that year to attend the funeral of my partner's grandmother. I immediately wanted to know more and set out to learn what I could about the memorial's history, location and meaning to the community.

In 1984, Dr. Robert Krell convened a meeting at his home with fellow members of the Holocaust survivor community in Vancouver. Intent on bolstering Holocaust education in the city, Krell proposed establishing an education centre in Vancouver. As a staunch advocate of Holocaust education and memory, Krell had already organized commemorative lectures, remembrance events and the Annual Symposium on the Holocaust for high school students. While initial steps were taken that evening toward an education centre, including the establishment of the Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society for Education and Remembrance (VHCS), community members expressed a more immediate desire: for a local memorial to honour the victims of the Holocaust. Previous attempts to create a memorial had failed, leaving the community without a dedicated space to mourn loved ones lost in the Shoah. In response to these suggestions, Krell redirected efforts at creating a monument and urged the newly formed VHCS to allocate funds initially raised for an education centre to go toward a memorial. Krell, in explaining this shift in focus to a financial donor, emphasized the community's longstanding wait for a memorial: "The reason for the present thrust toward completing the memorial is self-evident. We have waited a long time and we all want to have it. The education project has gone on for 11 years without a permanent home; it will wait a bit longer."

Schara Tzedek Cemetery, 2024.
All images courtesy of the author.

FEATURE

With momentum growing, Krell and David Shafran recruited Jack Kowarsky, President of Congregation Schara Tzedeck, to chair the memorial committee of the VHCS. Kowarsky secured an allotment of land within Schara Tzedeck Cemetery to host the monument. They planned to fund the memorial through community donations and by charging \$100 to inscribe a name on the base of the memorial. Next, the committee went to work in procuring the services of an artist, architect and engineer to bring the idea to life. They chose the local artist Naomi Spiers, the architect Jack Lutsky, and the structural engineer Ralph Schwartzman.

Spiers' design made room for the inscribed names of family members who perished in the Shoah. In addition to names at the memorial's base, the design includes a section dedicated to honouring Jewish suffering during the Holocaust, commemorating the millions who perished. Two 15-foot black granite columns, spaced apart, symbolize "a nation shaken by atrocities." Doves emerge from the columns to evoke "eternal hope." As the memorial took shape, the committee's dedication to honouring individual lives and shared suffering formed the foundation of a tangible, localized remembrance.

The BC Holocaust Memorial was unveiled on Yom HaShoah in 1987, in front of a crowd of 1,300 witnesses. Barry Dunner, a second generation descendant who was there that day, shared his thoughts about the opening of the memorial:



Left: Watercolour depiction of BC Holocaust Memorial. Right: BC Holocaust Memorial, 2024.

It was very important for the survivor community because so many of the people didn't have actual graves for their family members, and in the Jewish history and tradition, a cemetery is a very important place. So... to a special spot, and obviously we know that the family members are not actually buried there, but you have that sense that they're remembered... It was a somber day, but it was a very happy day, that they were able to have that space.

The memorial was not received entirely without criticism. In an interview with the *Jewish Western Bulletin* to promote his 1990 exhibition, the Vancouver artist Jeff Wall discussed his photograph of the BC Holocaust Memorial and expressed his curiosity about the monument: "As a Holocaust memorial it should be a hole. As it is, it is the same as a war memorial. It stands up above the horizon in order to triumph... The Holocaust was not such an event." Wall's objection to the design of the monument echoes the views of those historians who see monuments not as community approaches to remembrance, but as objects that present a simplified version of the past for either political aims or to promote tourism. Wall was suggesting that the BC Holocaust Memorial presents a misleading depiction of the past by standing tall, thus potentially conveying something triumphant about the event it commemorates.

Wall's view might seem logical, especially when considering the context of Holocaust perception in Canada in the 1980s, a period notable for two egregious cases of Holocaust denial: one perpetrated by James Keegstra, a high school teacher who taught his students the Holocaust was a hoax, and another by Ernst Zundel, an independent author who published Holocaust denial literature. I asked Robert Krell about whether the memorial's creation reflected a response to Holocaust denial in Canada during the 1980s, and he resoundingly refuted the claim. According to him, the idea for the memorial stemmed from discussions within the community regarding their personal experiences, and he emphasized that combatting Holocaust denial and antisemitism influenced other projects, such as the education centre, but not the monument. In our conversations, Barry Dunner echoed this sentiment.

The memorial's location and accessibility further point to its community purpose. Situated amid quiet residential streets on the outskirts of New Westminster, approximately a thirty-minute drive from downtown Vancouver, the memorial's existence is subtly marked. The only indication of the cemetery's proximity is a sign on a streetpost off of a busy main road, pointing down a serene neighborhood lane. The committee considered a more prominent area in central Vancouver but ultimately chose Schara Tzedek Cemetery as the home for the memorial. Barry Dunner recalls:

Well, on a certain level, it would have to be in a cemetery because it's like a gravestone. But on another level, a better location might have been at the Jewish Community Centre or somewhere downtown where a lot of people could see it on a daily basis. Right now, unless you make a special effort to get there, you're never going to see it. So, there's different benefits for it to be in either place.

Dunner highlights how the location of the memorial directly impacts its function. If its purpose were to stand tall in order to triumph, as Wall suggested, the memorial would be better suited to a more accessible and visible location. Its placement within a suburban Jewish cemetery, however, reinforces the purpose of the memorial as representing the collective memory of a community.

Positioned within the cemetery, the solemn atmosphere engulfs the memorial, while the memorial itself radiates a collective sense of personal tragedy.

Madi Slobin, a third generation descendant from Vancouver, has significant connections to the Jewish community in Vancouver and to the Schara Tzedek Cemetery. Slobin's paternal grandmother is named on the memorial and her maternal grandparents are buried directly behind it. We journeyed to the memorial together. As we entered the cemetery, the monument was shrouded by large trees at the end of a lengthy path cutting straight through the grounds. The path, bordered by benches and shrubs, led past hundreds of graves in all directions. Walking along this



Madi Slobin at the BC Holocaust Memorial.

path toward the Holocaust memorial, we experienced the profound, sombre atmosphere that a cemetery exudes. As the distant monument loomed larger, it created the feeling that we were approaching a marker of immense personal tragedy. Upon reaching the edge of the memorial, two entrance plaques immediately caught my eye, one bearing “זכור,” the other, “Remember,” the English translation. Finally, stepping into the rectangular memorial space, we encountered hundreds of names etched onto coffin-like floor panels and walls, beyond which stood the tall black pillars with the dedication to the six million lives lost in the Holocaust. Positioned within the cemetery, the solemn atmosphere engulfs the memorial, while the memorial itself radiates a collective sense of personal tragedy.

Having not seen the memorial since she was a child, Madi was immediately drawn to the inscribed names at the memorial’s entrance. I then asked her about the location of the memorial:

I think the question is just, like, who is [the memorial] for then? I think if it’s in a public place, then it feels less like it’s for our families and more like it’s for public consumption or public education... It’s special, I think,

to have this in a cemetery where you can visit your other ancestors who have passed and these ones at the same time.

Slobin considered the memorial’s resonance for those whose families are named, and its ability to nurture connections to ancestors and community. For three generations of descendants, the memorial is still a place for reflection and understanding:

It feels special to have a Holocaust memorial for the people that are from this city, or came to this city, and created a community here... I love that there’s a localized memorial here, where there’s a place for families that are connected to this city, and communities in this city to come and to commune with ancestors that they lost, that don’t have graves or don’t have graves anywhere close to here. It’s a really beautiful place and a really beautiful opportunity to think about people who meant a lot to me...

The BC Holocaust Memorial is a powerful example of a community’s efforts to preserve memory. The words of the community members I spoke to show not only how impactful the memorial continues to be, but also how significant it is for preserving memory across generations. While this is in large part thanks to the Holocaust Memorial Committee members’ efforts, new possibilities exist for the memorial’s future. With mandated Holocaust education coming into effect in BC in 2025, teaching methods may expand beyond the classroom setting. Perhaps the BC Holocaust Memorial could play a role in helping students learn not only the history of the Holocaust, but to experience the memory that lives on through the commitment and dedication of local survivors and their families. ■

¹ Krell, Robert, “Dear Pal,” August 18, 1986. Holocaust Memorial Committee fonds, collections.vhec.org/Detail/collections/805.

² Press Release, Holocaust Memorial Committee fonds, collections.vhec.org/Detail/collections/805.

³ Michael Aizenstadt in conversation with Jeff Wall, “As I See It... A Commentary on the Arts,” Jewish Western Bulletin, March 15, 1990.

Jarrad Warren graduated from the University of British Columbia with a BA in history, with a focus on Jewish studies. He is interested in applied research that amplifies lived histories and preserves collective memory.

Commemorating the Genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda

BY LILIANE PARI UMUHOZA

Our stories serve as evidence of what happens when discrimination takes hold of a society.



The flame of hope at Kigali Genocide Memorial, Rwanda, 2024. Photo by Paul Kagame.

April 7 of 2024 marked the 30th anniversary of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. This day marks the beginning of *Kwibuka* (the Kinyarwanda word for “to remember”), a period of 100 days of commemoration when Rwanda and the rest of the world remember and mourn the lives lost during the genocide against the Tutsi and stand in solidarity with the survivors. During this three-month period, Rwandan communities in Rwanda and abroad hold ceremonies to remember and honour the lives of one million victims who were killed because they were Tutsi. This time serves as an occasion to learn about the history that led up to the genocide, thereby enabling us to draw lessons from the past and actively prevent such actions from being repeated anywhere in the world.

The Kwibuka this year was somehow harder for my husband, D’Artagnan Habintwari, and me, our families and fellow survivors, than in previous years,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26



VHEC 30 YEARS

This timeline shows some of the milestones in the rich history of the VHEC. They represent the various methods we have developed over the years to bring Holocaust education to increasingly broad and diverse audiences —which is at the core of the VHEC mission. Behind each milestone are years of planning and hard work by the dedicated survivors, board members and staff of the VHEC, who continue to find ways to honour the legacy of the Holocaust every day.

1994

First issue of *Zachor* (“remember” in Hebrew). Initially, *Zachor* was published 4 or 5 times a year as an 8-page newsletter, featuring articles, community updates and listings. It has grown in size and scope since then to communicate with VHEC members and the wider public about the Centre’s programs, events and current issues related to human rights, social justice and Holocaust education.

1996

First No Longer Alone feature in *Zachor*, dedicated to writing by child survivors. The first edition had poems by Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, Louise Stein Sorensen ²¹ and Irene Kirstein Watts ²¹. Writing by child survivors had appeared in *Zachor* previously and the Child Survivor Group of Vancouver had published an annual publication of their writing.

1996

Dedication of the donor wall—created by the artist Joel Berman—at the VHEC. The donor wall lists more than 400 names, of which nearly 300 are survivors (and their spouses) involved in the founding of the VHEC, and another 100 are individuals, families, foundations and government bodies who contributed funds to the building of the VHEC.

1994

Opening of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre on November 7 with the mezuzah affixing ceremony and the launch of the inaugural exhibition *Anne Frank in The World 1929–1945*, produced by the Anne Frank Center USA, and introduced by its president, Cor Suijk, a friend of Otto Frank.

1995

Inaugural Meyer and Gita Kron and Ruth Kron Sigal Award for Excellence in Holocaust Education presented to Edward (Ted) A. Palmer of Cariboo Hill Secondary School in Burnaby. The award was established in memory of Meyer and Gita Kron and their daughter Ruth Kron Sigal, Lithuanian Jewish survivors of the Holocaust who re-established their lives in Vancouver and who, through their lifelong involvement with education and community, touched the lives of thousands of students. The VHEC has presented the award each year since to BC teachers in any discipline who demonstrate excellence and commitment to teaching students about the Holocaust and its ongoing lessons.

1999

Inaugural Shafran Teachers’ Conference. The conference is now held every two years, bringing together 60 to 80 educators from across BC and elsewhere. Participants hear from internationally renowned speakers, historians and educators at the forefront of Holocaust studies, including, over the years, Irwin Cottler, Irving Abella, Michael Marrus and others. Educators share best practices related to teaching the Holocaust in primary, secondary and post-secondary school settings.

2000

First VHEC publication supported by the Wosk Publishing Endowment Fund: *Bialystok to Birkenau* by Michel Mielnicki, who had been an inmate at Auschwitz and Dora-Nordhausen and who testified at a Nazi war crime trial in Germany in the 1990s.

2000

Launch of two Holocaust education resource packages: *The Holocaust: Social Responsibility and Global Citizenship for Social Studies Grade 6*; and *Canada and the Holocaust: Social Responsibility and Global Citizenship for Social Studies Grade 11*. These were produced by the BC Ministry of Education in partnership with the VHEC and Canadian Jewish Congress, Pacific Region, and distributed to every school in BC, with a letter of endorsement from the minister of education.

1998

Development and distribution of the first VHEC discovery kit, *Journey to Canada: The War Orphans Project, 1947–1949*, exploring the War Orphans Project and Canadian immigration policies. The VHEC has developed two discovery kits for students of grades 6 to 12, which include reproductions of documents and artefacts from the VHEC and other collections, and student information cards and teachers’ guides.

2009

Canada becomes a full member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (later IHRA). At the invitation of the Government of Canada, Frieda Miller, executive director of the VHEC, was part of the Canadian delegation to Oslo, Norway. Nina Krieger, long-time former executive director, served as deputy chair on the IHRA committee and in that capacity attended IHRA meetings across the world.

2014

First district-wide symposium on the Holocaust held in Burnaby and Delta, featuring talks by Alex Buckman ²¹, Robert Krell and Kit Krieger. Since then, the VHEC has held dozens of district-wide symposia for high school students across the Lower Mainland. District-wide symposia include historical overviews of the Holocaust, screenings of documentary films, presentations by Holocaust survivor outreach speakers, as well as dedicated time for students to engage with the speakers.

2014

VHEC receives funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada for a major testimony preservation project, including the digitizing of audio and video Holocaust survivor testimony in its collection. The VHEC holds more than 200 testimonies, totaling more than 500 hours, by survivors of the Holocaust, documenting their experiences before, during and after the Holocaust. The bulk of the testimonies were recorded as part of the Vancouver Holocaust Documentation Project, started by Robert Krell, and later co-led by Krell and Dr. Peter Suedfeld, with support from the University of British Columbia.

2015

40th Annual Symposium on the Holocaust for high school students held at the Chan Centre at the University of British Columbia. Over the years, speakers have included local Holocaust survivors, as well as Leon Bass, Eloge Butera, Nehama Tec, Irving Layton, Sigmund Sobelanski, Gerda Wiseman Klein, James Wallner and Faye Schulman.

2018

VHEC Renewal Project, funded by private and corporate donors, as well as the province of BC and the government of Canada 150 Fund. Through this major renovation of the VHEC, public exhibition areas, the archives and collections work areas, as well as the library and staff working spaces were all revamped and modernized, leading to significantly expanded access to VHEC exhibitions and improved preservation of archival and collections holdings.

2018

Launch of collections.vhec.org, an online system integrating the VHEC’s diverse holdings—including Western Canada’s largest collection of Holocaust-related artefacts, survivor testimonies, archival materials and publications—and educational resources aligned with the BC high school curriculum to support teaching with primary source materials. This project was awarded a 2019 Award of Merit: Excellence in Collections from the BC Museums Association, recognizing excellence in collections best practices, including innovative approaches to collecting, collections management, preservation, repatriation, collections-based research, dissemination and accessibility.

2020

First Online Symposium on the Holocaust, developed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2023

Age of Influence: Youth & Nazi Propaganda opens as the sixtieth exhibition at the VHEC. Over the years the VHEC has produced many original and innovative exhibitions, including *More Than Just Games: Canada and the 1936 Olympics*, “*Enemy Aliens*”: *The Internment of Jewish Refugees in Canada, 1940-1943* and *Treasured Belongings: The Hahn Family & the Search for a Stolen Legacy*. Additionally, the VHEC has hosted travelling exhibitions from acclaimed institutions, including Topography of Terror Foundation, Berlin; Carl Lutz Foundation in Budapest; Anne Frank House; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; and others. Since 1994, VHEC exhibitions have been viewed by hundreds of thousands of students and members of the public.

2024

The VHEC marks 30 years of being the leading Holocaust museum in Western Canada.

COMMEMORATING THE GENOCIDE OF THE TUTSI IN RWANDA
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

though I feel like we say that every April 7. But the 30th anniversary brought immense mixed feelings: feelings of deep gratitude for not only surviving one of the deadliest genocides of the twentieth century but also for thriving over the 30 years since then. My husband and I woke up on that day, looked at each other and said, “We did it!” At the same time, we felt immense grief and sadness at the thought of how life would be if our family members and all of those who were killed were with us now.

Thirty years may sound like a long time but for survivors the genocide feels as if it happened yesterday. The memories are still vivid, and the psychological impact continues to affect many survivors today.

That day I couldn’t stop looking at my father’s photo, the only memory of him I have, as I was only two when he was killed. I have been told by many people that he was a great man, a charismatic leader who loved his family and everyone around him and who was very intelligent. I know that I cannot be like him, but I hope he is proud of me.

D’Artagnan was almost six years old when the genocide happened. He lost his four siblings and his father. As we were having coffee on the morning of April 7, he recalled, “I remember my father; he was a family man, very academically invested, and he would do anything for his children to be successful.”

Thirty years may sound like a long time but for survivors the genocide feels as if it happened yesterday. The memories are still vivid, and the psychological impact continues to affect many survivors today. In a 2022 study co-conducted by D’Artagnan on the transmission of intergenerational trauma in adult children of Rwandan survivors of the genocide, significant levels of mental health issues were present among participants. More than 40 percent of study participants showed symptoms of PTSD that are considered secondary, meaning their PTSD is related to their parents’ traumatic experiences, rather

than their own. And almost 40 percent of participants exhibited symptoms of clinical depression or anxiety. This shows that the psychological impact of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda extends beyond the survivors to their children, even those who were not born at the time of the genocide.

As D’Artagnan and I commemorate the 30th anniversary of the genocide against the Tutsi, we not only remember the tragic loss of life and the profound suffering endured, but we also recognize the resilience of the Rwandan people. Over the past three decades, Rwanda has undergone a profound transformation, emerging from the shadows of its past to build a better nation and ensure that such atrocities are never repeated. Most importantly, we commend the resilience of our fellow survivors, who, despite years of emotional and physical wounds, have played a key role in reconciliation and rebuilding our nation.

It is important to remember that genocide is never a surprise but a deliberate and systematic act of mass violence and extermination. The genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, much like the Holocaust and other genocides, highlights the devastating consequences of long term hatred and intolerance. Such atrocities are fueled by deeply ingrained prejudices, including antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism, hatred of immigrants, and by rhetoric that promotes an “us versus them” mentality—forces that are increasingly visible in the world today.

I hope that D’Artagnan’s and my stories, and the history of Rwanda, serve as evidence of what happens when discrimination takes hold of a society. We want to remind everyone that it is our moral responsibility to actively combat all forms of discrimination. This way, there is hope that “never again” will become a reality. ■

Liliane Pari Umuhoza is a child survivor of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, and the founder of the Women Genocide Survivors Retreat. She lives with her husband in Vancouver. She was the keynote speaker at the 2022 Kristallnacht commemoration at Congregation Beth Israel.

Vulnerable to Oblivion

BY NATALIYA IVCHYK

The words of Dr. Robert Krell reflect the profound invisibility and silence that shrouded the lives of Jewish children who survived the Holocaust.

The voices of child Holocaust survivors, who are one of the most vulnerable groups of victims of genocide and conflict, are seldom heard. After all, children rarely have enough power or agency to fight back against perpetrators. Conflicts and conditions incompatible with life destroy their lives, dreams and childhood. Children, faced with no choice in times of genocide, are forced to grow up and take responsibility for their lives and the lives of their families in order to survive. Survivors' memories are a history that comes alive and sheds light not only on historical events and facts but also on the very essence of human childhood: the emotions, experiences, pain and trauma that they endured during the Holocaust.

Children who survived the Holocaust experienced it in a way that was radically different from adults. Their memories are often fragmented, shaped by childhood and the decades of silence which followed. Dr. Robert Krell, himself a child survivor of the Holocaust, has dedicated his life's work to bringing these voices to light, preserving them and their memories for generations to come.

In the 1980s, Krell made child survivors an important part of a documentation project designed to preserve the memories of Holocaust survivors. Many of those who gave their testimonies were taught as children to remain carefully still and silent, to hide their emotions, and always keep a poker face. Krell's testimony project aimed to record on video the experiences of these survivors, including many who had never before shared their memories publicly. The project not only provided a platform for child survivors to share their memories but played a significant role in bringing together a community of survivors and their families in support of Holocaust education and remembrance, in Vancouver and Canada.

Krell's background in psychiatry and psychology informed his approach to the documentation project. His methodology empowered survivors to release the pain they experienced and even, if only partially, to begin to let go of trauma. The video-recorded conversations were organized into three time frames: one-third was about pre-war life, one-third about war-time experiences, and the final third focused on post-war life and the process of adaptation to a new home, and the integration of survivors into life in Vancouver. These testimonies were part of Krell's larger goal of creating a Holocaust education centre and erecting a memorial to Holocaust survivors.

Today, the testimonies are part of the VHEC's collection and are used in educational and exhibition programs. The stories of survivors are an important tool by which society and the state can and should remember those who perished and those who



Dr. Robert Krell, Janos Benisz and Nataliia Ivchik, 45th Annual Symposium on the Holocaust, 2023.

survived. Each voice is important, individual and unique. The experiences of those who survived tragedy are the memories of both those who survived and those who died. Krell's Vancouver survivor documentation project is unique in that it presents the individual and emotional dimension of childhood experiences as reflected by survivors as adults.

Krell's groundbreaking work on Holocaust documentation projects has profoundly influenced my own research on the memories of Jewish child survivors of the Holocaust in Ukraine; I was inspired by the methodology and ethical considerations underpinning Krell's work. After meeting Krell and working with his archive, I decided to record the memories of Jews who survived the Holocaust as children in the former Soviet Union, and later settled in the lower mainland. These testimonies have been conducted in Russian, Ukrainian or English, depending on the preference of the survivor. They will be accessible at the VHEC and in the collection of my own non-profit in Ukraine, Mnemonics, dedicated to the study of memorial policy and public history. I consulted with Krell about my documentation project, and

he asked me a fundamental question: What is the purpose of recording testimonies? He went on to express how recording survivor stories is not just a project; it is memory. It is our responsibility to preserve and honour these memories. We must consider, What prompts an adult to return to their traumatic childhood, and why do they do it? What can we learn from it? What is the significance of adult-child memories?

Many Jewish child survivors of the Holocaust in the former Soviet Union faced repression and antisemitism after the Second World War. Because of this, their stories are vulnerable to oblivion. By documenting their stories, we not only preserve their memories, but make an important contribution to collective memory and the documentation of the Holocaust in the former Soviet Union. The recordings will foster empathy and a deeper understanding of the impact of the Holocaust on individuals and families whose stories might not have been heard otherwise.

By collecting the testimonies of Jewish child survivors from the former Soviet Union, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the Holocaust on its youngest victims and the long-term effects of trauma. My goal is to lift the veil of the Holocaust from the silencing that took place in the former Soviet Union, and to honour and preserve the memory of those who survived and those who perished. With the support of the VHEC, we will provide Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking survivors with a platform to share their experiences and stories with future generations. ■

Dr. Nataliia Ivchik is an associate professor at the Department of Political Science at Rivne State University for the Humanities. She was a visiting scholar at the VHEC between 2022 and 2024. She currently holds the Gilbert and Eleanor Kraus Endowment Fellowship at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST DOCUMENTATION PROJECT

collections.vhec.org/Testimonies/collection
collections.vhec.org/Testimonies/history

EDUCATION NEWS



Left: Eli, Capstone 12 student, with Janos Benisz, Holocaust survivor speaker. Right: Lise Kirchner, VHEC education director and Tamara, Capstone 12 student.

CAPSTONE 12 PROJECTS

The Capstone 12 project is a key component of the BC high school graduation program and is a requirement for all students to graduate. It serves as a culminating project that allows students to demonstrate their learning in a field they are passionate about.

This year, three BC high school students—Eli, Tamara and Teagan—chose the Holocaust as their field of study and used material from the VHEC’s testimony collection as the basis for their Capstone 12 projects.

Eli studied the VHEC testimony of Janos Benisz, a child Holocaust survivor from Hungary, to learn about his Holocaust experience, from which he developed his own questions for an interview of Janos. Eli produced an essay about the process, entitled “The Experience of a

Youth Holocaust Survivor: Conducting a Survivor Testimony.” Eli presented his Capstone 12 project to parents and fellow students at his high school’s Capstone fair in June.

“I am incredibly thankful for the opportunity I was given by the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre and the generosity of Janos Benisz in devoting his time to record this testimony for my Capstone. Rarely these days would one be lucky enough to meet a Holocaust survivor, let alone conduct a full testimony and connect with them on a personal level. For this experience I carry the utmost gratitude.” —Eli

Tamara studied three survivor testimonies from the VHEC collection to conduct a comparative analysis of women’s experience of Nazi concentration camps.

“This has been a rough topic mentally to write about, not only because it deals with death and sorrow, but I feel like I have gotten to know these women on a personal level.” —Tamara

Teagan used VHEC survivor testimonies to create a 15-minute-long documentary that explores identity, values and culture in the context of the Holocaust. The title of the documentary is *How Learning from Holocaust Survivors Experiences Can Inspire Action Against Anti-Semitic Hatred Today: A Case Study on Canada*.

“Showing these perspectives of Holocaust survivors provides crucial insights into the impact of genocides. Understanding these stories of genocides is important to human resilience and educating future generations.” —Teagan



Chloe, Lord Byng high school student with Amalia Boe-Fishman (left) and Miriam Dattel (right).

SURVIVOR TESTIMONY WORKSHOPS

Chloe, a ninth grader at Lord Byng High School, noticed growing antisemitism among her peers. As one of the few Jewish students at the school, she felt a responsibility to bring education about Jewish culture, faith and history to her classmates. As a result, Chloe, her teachers, and the education team at the VHEC worked together to facilitate two days of programming for Lord Byng students. More than 60 students heard Miriam Dattel and Amalia Boe-Fishman, both child Holocaust survivors, tell their stories. Miriam spoke of her survival as a young child in Croatia during the Holocaust, always on the run from danger. Amalia recalled her life in hiding with the Spiekhout family in the Netherlands. Another 90 students at

the school saw a presentation based on the video testimony of the Vancouver survivor Regina Feldman. Students heard Regina’s account of her experience as a child during the Holocaust, including her internment in the Będzin ghetto, her separation from her family at the age of 11, her imprisonment in Klettendorf and Ludwigsdorf concentration camps, her post-war search for family and her immigration to Vancouver as a Holocaust orphan. Students who participated in the workshop commented that they experienced empathy and personal connection to the Holocaust, which they had not experienced through other learning methods. Some said that hearing Regina’s testimony dispelled myths and distortions about the Holocaust and helped them see the importance of Holocaust education and critical thinking.

UBC STUDENT PROJECTS

In early 2024, UBC graduate students in a public history course taught by Dr. Richard Menkis gained practical experience at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre by researching special topics reflected in VHEC collections. The students produced online exhibitions and podcast episodes, using VHEC artefacts, documents and testimonies to give insight into how various themes, including photography, propaganda and correspondence, can be studied from a public history perspective. Listen at podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/vhec-podcast.

2024 MEYER AND GITA KRON AND RUTH KRON SIGAL AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

The VHEC presented the 2024 Meyer and Gita Kron and Ruth Kron Sigal Award for Excellence in Holocaust Education to two outstanding educators in the province: Ben Lane of Collingwood School (Vancouver) and Mike Wolthuizen of Rutland Senior Secondary School (Kelowna). Ben and Mike have demonstrated exceptional commitment to Holocaust education throughout their careers and have significantly impacted their students, colleagues and school communities.

Find out more at vhec.org/2024-kron-sigal-award-recipients.

12TH BIENNIAL SHAFRAN TEACHERS' CONFERENCE

The Shafran Teachers' Conference will take place on February 14, 2025. This year's keynote address, *Oath and Opposition: Education Under the Third Reich*, will be presented by Kristin Thompson, based on her research at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. Other speakers will include Dr. Kristin Semmens, a University of Victoria associate professor of history and the author of *Under the Swastika in Nazi Germany*;

Dr. Sebastian Huebel, a sessional instructor of history at the University of the Fraser Valley and the author of *Fighter, Worker and Family Man: German-Jewish Men and Their Gendered Experiences in Nazi Germany*; and Dr. Andrea Webb, an associate professor of teaching at UBC, Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy. The conference is open to all in the teaching profession, including retired teachers and student teachers. To register or to find out more, visit vhec.org/professional-development.

NEW WORKSHOPS

This autumn, the VHEC's education team introduced a series of workshops on various themes, including propaganda, Holocaust denial and distortion, art during the Holocaust, intergenerational trauma, moral courage and rescue, and survivor testimonies. To meet the growing need for Holocaust education, the VHEC now offers workshops online across Western Canada and in-person throughout the Lower Mainland. To book a visit, go to vhec.org/school-programs/workshops.



Dr. Richard Menkis with UBC graduate students.



Martha, A Short Film and Survivor Video Testimony Workshop—two workshops that delve into personal narratives, transformative experiences and Canadian stories.

Torah Scroll 579: Celebrating 30 Years at the VHEC

BY CAITLIN DONALDSON

The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre is one of more than 500 organizations around the world to host a Torah scroll from the Memorial Scrolls Trust (MST) in London, England. The Torah scroll on loan at the VHEC, numbered 579 by the MST, was written in 1850 for the Jewish community of Smíchov, a district of Prague, and remained in the synagogue there until the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939. In 1942, it, along with hundreds of other Torah scrolls from across Bohemia and Moravia, was transferred by the Central Jewish Museum of Prague to the Michle synagogue turned warehouse. Under Nazi order, the Torah scrolls and other

religious objects were catalogued; the number assigned to this Torah scroll by the Nazis, 37111, is still visible on the bottom plate of the right roller.

After the Second World War, the scrolls fell under the control of Czechoslovak state authorities and the subsequent communist government. They were neglected until 1963, when a British art dealer, Ralph Yablon, purchased the entirety of the warehouse, which contained 1,564 surviving Torah scrolls. Yablon brought the Torah scrolls to London and donated them to the Westminster Synagogue, where the MST committee was formed in 1964, 60 years ago.

Torah scroll 579 was selected and brought to Vancouver in 1994 by Anita, Zev and Elaine Shafran. It was their father, David Shafran, a Holocaust survivor and one of the founders of the VHEC, who suggested acquiring a Torah scroll from the MST. In an interview with Terri Tomsky—who in the early 2000s conducted extensive research and wrote *The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre's Sefer Torah* (collections.vhec.org/Detail/objects/8008), a history of the Jewish community in Smíchov and the rescue of the Torah scrolls—the Shafrans explained that they felt “it was important to pick a scroll that was intact so that it could be displayed and visitors could see the



From left: the Torah Scroll numbered 37111 by the Nazis. Zev Shafran (left) and Leon Kahn²¹, Rescued Torah reception, 1994. Torah Scroll 579 on display.



Torah Scrolls at the Memorial Scrolls Trust in London, England, 1994.

scribe's words." Tomsy wrote, "For Zev, as for Elaine, the Torah scroll's providential escape, intact, helped cement the decision to bring it to Vancouver: 'Maybe it was because the Sefer Torah was a survivor as well.' Here he pauses to think before continuing 'and we'd like to think of it as a living Torah and its life strength will be passed onto the Holocaust Centre.'"

Some years ago, in reflecting on Yom HaShoah and her family's support of the Torah scroll, Anita Shafran described "a void never filled," referencing her experience of never having the opportunity to meet her paternal grandparents, Israel and

Chana Shafran, who perished in the Holocaust (*Zachor*, April 2014).

Torah scroll 579 has been on display at the VHEC since 1994. Prior to renovations in 2017, it was prominently displayed in a custom alcove, next to another Torah scroll in the VHEC collection, donated by the Balla family from Hungary. Most students who tour the VHEC with their classes are not Jewish and are encountering a Sefer Torah scroll, and Judaism in general, for the first time. This is an invaluable experience for them—as Holocaust educators, we know that engaging with primary sources is one of the most impactful experiences a student can have.

Each organization that hosts a Torah scroll from the MST is responsible for the care and maintenance of its scroll, and is required to submit a report every five years. This year, the VHEC will report several exciting developments. Torah scroll 579 was featured in the exhibition *In Focus: The Holocaust Through the VHEC Collection*. After the exhibition was done, it was moved into a new custom-made case for permanent display. Recently, it was removed from its case for maintenance and photography, which required external art handlers to carefully remove the glass vitrine. Collections staff conducted a thorough condition assessment to identify and monitor any physical changes. Then we unrolled the scroll to air out the parchment and ensure it remains pliable.

Next, we photographed the interior of the scroll, which had never been done before. We will be providing the MST with the photographs to share on their website and for their own research. Given the age of the scroll, the MST is particularly interested in the script and may be able learn more about the original Sefer and the community from which it came. ■



Caitlin Donaldson (left) and Chase Nelson (right) of the VHEC collections team photographing Torah Scroll 579.

Caitlin Donaldson is the VHEC's Director of Collections and Exhibitions.

COLLECTIONS NEWS



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NEW DONATIONS

Documents and photographs from the Łódź ghetto (Marla Gropper)

We received an exceptionally well preserved identity card and transit pass used in the Łódź ghetto by Ziso Eyebshitz (later Sydney Eibschutz), along with photographs and ephemera. Eibschutz managed the paper factory in the Łódź ghetto until 1944, when he was deported to a forced labour camp. He and his wife, Sylvia, also a Holocaust survivor, came to Canada through the Tailor Project. Ziso Eyebshitz's video testimony interview with Robert Krell was recorded in 1985 and is viewable upon request (collections.vhec.org/Detail/objects/776).

Nomi Kaplan fonds

Nomi Kaplan donated records and photographs related to her family history and artistic practice as a photographer. Kaplan was born in Lithuania. In 1940, she, her father and

her brother obtained transit visas issued by Chiune Sugihara, allowing them to emigrate from Europe. They joined extended family in Ontario. Nomi Kaplan settled in Vancouver in 1955.

Second World War-era propaganda

An anonymous donor donated a second-class Cross of Honour of the German Mother, made of silver, along with a deed of conferral. The decoration was awarded by the Nazis to eligible mothers with six or seven children, honouring exceptional merit and motherhood. A third-class Cross of Honour of the German Mother (made of bronze) is currently on display as part of *Age of Influence: Youth & Nazi Propaganda*.

Peter N. Moogk donated a Nazi-produced flyer written in French and depicting a US dollar bill with Henry Morgenthau's signature, claiming that the Second

World War, with American participation, was a "Jewish War." These flyers were air-dropped over France in 1943.

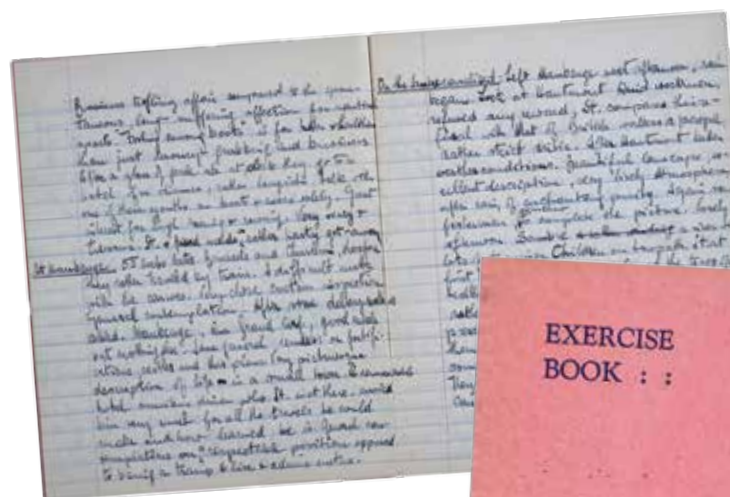
Oberlander family collection

The VHEC received a significant donation from Wendy, Judy and Tim Oberlander of materials belonging to their mother, Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, who was a world-renowned landscape architect. The donation includes archival items: albums, letters, postcards, photographs, travel records, educational and employment documents, as well as personal and family documents. It also includes museum artefacts: clothing, shoes, dollhouse furniture and toys. These sources provide a thorough record of the lives and histories of the Hahn, Oberlander, Kummerman and Jastrow families.

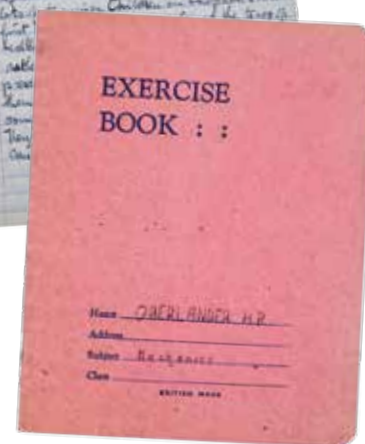
1. Identity card and transit pass, donated by Marla Gropper. 2. Dress, donated by Nomi Kaplan. 3. Second-class Cross of Honour of the German Mother, donated anonymously.



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THE OBERLANDER PROJECT

UBC iSchool (School of Archival Information Studies) student Fin Bartels digitized and prepared a finding aid for materials donated by the Oberlander family in 2019, now available for research at collections.vhec.org. The materials include a diary, telegrams, correspondence, family records and school notebooks, all of which provide insight into the life of Peter Oberlander, an Austrian-Jewish refugee from Nazi persecution who was interned as an “enemy alien” in the United Kingdom and Canada. He settled in Canada after his release and became the founding director of the UBC School of Community and Regional Planning and the Centre for Human Settlements. Additional materials related to Peter Oberlander, donated by the Oberlander family in May 2024, were also processed. This project was completed with funding from the British Columbia History Digitization Program grant.

CONSERVATION UPDATE

As part of the Out of the Archives: Increasing Access to the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre Collection project, funded by a Documentary Heritage Communities Program grant, the VHEC hired Sabina Sutherland, a conservator, to flatten and box two Sino-Jewish ketubahs from the Gottfried family fonds. A Snow White photo album from the same fonds was cleaned, and nine diaries from the Fred Arnich fonds were also treated.

Through the Peter Oberlander Collection: Digitization and Accessibility Project, with funding from the British Columbia History Digitization Program, we repaired a detached spine in a diary from the Oberlander family fonds. These efforts enhance the preservation, durability and accessibility of materials crucial for research and exhibitions in Holocaust education.



Fin Bartels, UBC iSchool student.

4. Post office savings bank book, donated by Judy, Tim, and Wendy Oberlander. Item 2024.011.012. 5. Mechanics notebook, donated by Wendy Oberlander. Item 2019.048.007.

A person with long brown hair, seen from behind, is operating a large, black, high-precision digitization copy stand. The stand is positioned over an open book with handwritten text. The camera and artifact holder are suspended above the book, and the person's hands are visible near the book's edges. The scene is dimly lit, with a bright light source on the right side.

NEW DIGITIZATION EQUIPMENT

We acquired a copy stand (a camera and artefact holder used for photographing) and camera thanks to a grant from the Jewish Community Foundation (JCF). This new equipment will improve the quality of our digitization efforts, strengthen our digital preservation initiatives and increase access to our archival and museum collections, which are available at collections.vhec.org. With enhanced quality and efficiency, we can digitize materials more quickly, providing faster access to our collections. Thank you to the JCF for their support in enhancing our digital preservation initiatives.

Fin Bartels operating the new copy stand.

LIBRARY NEWS

Members of the JCC are welcome to browse and borrow materials from the VHEC library.

This past fall, the VHEC library and the Isaac Waldman Jewish Public Library hosted the Banned Book Club, geared toward teens and adults, for which participants read and discussed books by Jewish authors or with Jewish content that have been historically challenged or banned, including books by Judy Blume, *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank, *Anne Frank's Diary: The Graphic Adaptation*, adapted by Ari Folman, illustrated by David Polonsky, *Night* by Elie Wiesel and *The Storyteller* by Jodi Picoult.

To donate books to the VHEC library email library@vhec.org. Due to space constraints we can't accept titles that are already in our collection, but we can suggest other places to donate. Unsolicited drop-offs are not accepted.

CALL FOR DONATIONS

Many survivors and community members have Holocaust-related artefacts, even the smallest of which may tell an important story. The VHEC's library, archives and museum collections are the result of generous donations from survivors, families and members of the community. Original materials form the foundation of our exhibitions and educational programming.

We collect materials that are related to:

- Evidence of rich Jewish life in pre-war Europe;
- The experience of antisemitism and efforts to leave Europe resulting from the rise of Nazism and increased persecution;
- The Holocaust and the experiences of Holocaust survivors;
- Experiences of liberation and the immediate post-war period, including refugees in displaced persons camps;
- Post-war immigration of Holocaust survivors to Canada;
- Experiences of "enemy alien" refugees interned in Canada;
- Documentary evidence of historical antisemitism, including Nazi-produced propaganda.

We cannot accept the following materials:

- Nazi or Allied military weapons;
- Photocopies or scans of original documents and photographs;
- Materials with suspicious provenance or authenticity that cannot be verified through independent research;

To donate items or gain further information about collections call 604-264-0499 or email collections@vhec.org.

Moved to Action

BY JESSICA LITHWICK

Collectively, descendants of Holocaust survivors are driven by a sense of duty, dedication and connection. These traits enable the stories of their survivor relatives to not recede but to live on. This *living on*—by retelling—is at the heart of the Generations After section of *Zachor*. As a member of the third generation, Jessica Lithwick is the epitome of a descendant who acts in a thoughtful and purposeful manner by preserving the firsthand testimony of her Holocaust survivor grandparents and her great uncle, the beloved VHEC outreach speaker David Ehrlich ^{z"l}. By being the keeper of their stories, Jessica actively participates in the sharing of their histories and espousing the lessons within them. When you hear a story, you become a witness. Jessica is creating witnesses to history by telling her grandparents' and great uncle's stories.

Jessica Lithwick was the keynote third generation descendant speaker at our 2023 High Holidays Cemetery Service, an annual commemorative program during which participants mourn those who perished during the Holocaust and honour local Holocaust survivors who have passed away during the past year.

The High Holidays Cemetery Service is presented by the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, Schara Tzedek Synagogue and the Jewish War Veterans. This year our commemoration was held on October 6, at the chapel of the Schara Tzedek Cemetery and concluded at the Holocaust memorial monument. The keynote descendant address was delivered by Rabbi Levi Varnai.

Dr. Abby Wener Herlin,
Editor of Generations After

My bubby's brother, my great uncle, whose name was David Ehrlich ^{z"l}, died last year at the age of 96. He was the last remaining Holocaust survivor in our family and his death was hard for all of us. The Jewish community knows the importance of eyewitnesses. When we lose one we are not only sad, we are afraid—afraid of losing our best evidence.

Although I cannot offer a first-hand account of the Holocaust, I can commit to preserve and share my family's stories of survival. Until recently I viewed these stories the same way I did when I was a child, when I thought that adults have all the answers. I viewed my family's hardships exclusively as tales of strength, and I was proud of them. But while viewing their stories as accomplishments, without dwelling in the dark spots, allowed me to continue to feel safe and removed from the atrocities they had experienced, it also prevented me from reflecting on the impact of the Holocaust on my family, including on me. Until recently, I had not considered the obvious truth that the survivors in my family would have been very different people but for the Holocaust.

Uncle David was not the only survivor in my family. Two of my grandparents were survivors, as well. I should have had a large extended family, but I don't. I should have had some of my great grandmother's jewelry, but I don't because she flushed it down the toilet when the Nazis knocked on her door.

My uncle David was a teenager in Bistrița, Transylvania (then a part of Hungary), when the "Final Solution" began to be implemented there. His older sister, my bubby, Rose Jordan, formerly Ehrlich, was already married to my zedah Louis Jordan and had moved to the nearby town of Năsăud. After the Holocaust, my zedah set about re-establishing a home for himself and my bubby, without knowing if she was still alive after she was taken to Auschwitz. He then travelled on horse and buggy with her photo from town to town trying to find her, undeterred by the constant and overwhelming reports he was receiving about the extremely high death rates of the Jews who had been rounded up and taken away. Against all odds, after six

months of searching, he found her and brought her to their new home.

Years after the Holocaust, my grandparents were able to start their own family in Canada. But that happened only after their survival was threatened a second time; they had to flee Romania after the Second World War when they were tipped off that my zedah was to be disappeared by the Romanian communist party because he was seen as a Jewish enemy of the state. My bubby and zedah lived a modest life in Canada.



David Ehrlich²¹ and Rose Jordan, 1999. Courtesy of the author.

We know very little about my zedah's Holocaust experience. He was conscripted into the Hungarian army before the Jews of the area were sent to ghettos. We believe that through bribes and business connections he was able to avoid fighting on the Russian front. He stayed in Transylvania, working in a labour camp. He did not want to talk about the Holocaust, at least not with his wife, his children or his grandchildren.

My bubby, on the other hand, did share some of her experiences. She was taken to live in a Jewish ghetto, where her brothers and parents also lived, but none of them knew it. We know that she would have wanted to know that, because in her letters to Louis, she wrote that she was planning to go back to Bistrița to be with them, but she did not get the chance before being rounded up. We have four loving and desperate postcards that she wrote to my zedah just days before she was rounded up, when he was already in a labour camp.

From the ghetto my bubby was taken to Auschwitz. She was not yet a mother and that likely saved her life. She did not stay in Auschwitz, like my uncle David did. She was sent to a Lithuanian concentration camp, where she worked at a cable factory and was fed just enough to survive. We know that in the camp my bubby and a friend decided to take an opportunity to join a transport leaving the camp the next day. Although they did not know where it was going, they assumed it would be better. My bubby and her friend took turns staying awake through the night so that they would not miss the transport. When it was her turn to sleep, my bubby had a dream about her mother warning her not to line up for the transport. She was lucky for having listened to her dream, as the transport went to a death camp.

After my bubby was liberated by the Soviet Army, it took her around six months to travel back to her home

in Romania. It took Uncle David even longer. He had stayed in Auschwitz until he was forced on a death march in January 1945. When Uncle David arrived at Auschwitz, he was not sent to the gas chambers, like the rest of the Ehrlichs who had been rounded up in Bistrița. His father, my great grandfather, who was carrying the unnecessary crutches that had saved him from conscription to the Hungarian army, was quickly deemed unfit for work and was sent to his death, along with his youngest son, wife and mother-in-law. Uncle David's two other brothers were killed two months before liberation. Uncle David was saved because he lied and said he was a carpenter. When he was asked to show his skills, the officer assessing him took pity on him and showed him some basic skills, which allowed him to work in carpentry. During the death march from Auschwitz, Uncle David saved the life of a man named Yiddle Fox by pulling him off of a pile of bodies presumed dead and giving

him water shortly before the Soviets liberated them. Yiddle was my zedah's cousin and Yiddle ended up living down the road from my grandparents in Winnipeg and being a regular in their home.

David, Louis and Rose all ended up in Canada. In their later years, when they all lived in the Lower Mainland, our families did all of the holidays and many shabbats together. It was not uncommon for me to be sitting with three Holocaust survivors on a Friday night.

I saw Uncle David speak several times. He always had an engaged audience, and that was not only because of the story he had to tell, but also because of the way he told it and the charming way he carried himself.

My grandparents showed acceptance for others in a way that was ahead of their time, and I think arose from knowing what it is like to be dehumanized or stigmatized based on your identity. Everyone was welcome at the Jordan table, and no one ever left hungry. I could bring anyone at any time to their home without prior notice and there would still be leftovers. All to say that my grandparents spent their golden years living modestly but generously and Jewishly, stubbornly refusing to abandon the identities that had nearly led to their deaths.

They instilled in their families optimism in grassroots movements. My grandparents had restarted their lives several times: after the Holocaust, after fleeing communist

Romania and after immigrating to Canada with nothing. They were entrepreneurial and willing to tread on new ground. It is this characteristic that led my mother to be one of the co-founders of the Richmond Jewish Day School. She intrinsically knows that you might have to build the things you want.

My uncle David did these things as well. He was also entrepreneurial with his dry cleaning business, and he created many opportunities for himself and his family throughout his

life. A different and equally important part of Uncle David's survival story is that he was an active Holocaust educator for more than 40 years. He was a Holocaust survivor outreach speaker for the Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society for Education and Remembrance starting in the 1980s, when news of James Keegstra's Holocaust denials broke more than 35 years of silence for Uncle David. Before that, even his own sons knew little about his story. However, Uncle David was moved to action when he learned of a public figure and public educator spreading lies about the Holocaust.

I know from my work as a lawyer that being a witness is not fun. A witness has to give up their story for assessment by strangers without getting anything from those strangers

in return. It is understandable to want to avoid that. It is understandable to not want to relive traumatizing experiences in front of an audience and to expose yourself to questions that could be intentionally or unintentionally hurtful or ignorant. I understand why so many survivors, including my grandparents, could not do that. We were very proud that my uncle David did.

I saw Uncle David speak several times. He always had an engaged audience, and that was not only because of the story he had to tell, but also because of the way he told it and the charming way he carried himself.

He once spoke in Salmon Arm, a region where white supremacy continues to have a firm toehold. After Uncle David gave his Holocaust account, a young girl approached him and hesitantly told him that she believed his story but that her father was receiving monthly magazines that claimed the Holocaust was made up. David told her that the bible requires children to respect their parents, but that respect did not mean that a child has to have the same beliefs as her parents. He gave her the titles of some books about the Holocaust written by SS guards that she could tell her father about and then gave her his phone number and welcomed her father to call him to debate anytime.

There is a saying in law that a lawyer who represents themselves has a fool for a lawyer and a fool for a client. This is because a person who advocates for their own cause has no



David Ehrlich²¹ at the 43rd Annual Symposium on the Holocaust, Beth Israel Synagogue, Vancouver, 2018.

objectivity. This can lead to emotional responses that are misguided or counterproductive. Although my uncle David was not a litigation advocate, at that moment in Salmon Arm he was definitely engaging in advocacy. He was offering himself as proof and asking to be believed. He responded in a firm, gentle and respectful way in discussing a person who would have denied the truth of the murder of his family. He did not let his emotions

stand in the way of his advocacy. He did not insult the girl's father, nor did he retreat and tell that young girl that her father was probably a lost cause. Instead, he gave her the tools she was asking for and offered her a way to navigate her home life with respect, but not blind deference, for her father. His response also left open the possibility—however improbable—of making a further connection by offering his contact information.

As a lawyer, and unlike a survivor speaker, I have the privilege of telling other people's stories instead of my own. I make a point of exercising that skill for people seeking equality. As a woman and a Jew and a third generation survivor, I know that it is possible to speak without being heard, to be truthful but not believed. I have always found it difficult to stay quiet when I perceive injustice. It gives me a sense of comfort to be able to work against injustice professionally. It's not selfless. A more equal world for others is a more equal world for me. If I advocate for others, I hope that someone will advocate for me when I need it. That is one way in which I am a testament to the history of my people and the history of my family. ■

SURVIVOR AND DESCENDANT GATHERING



In late July the Child Survivor and Second Generation Groups, along with some third generation representatives, gathered in the back garden of Temple Sholom Synagogue for an opportunity to connect, exchange ideas and get to know one another. Much of the conversation was about the carrying on of survivors' legacies by successive generations. As Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, a child survivor of the Holocaust, phrased it, "With time, the second and third generations will become the last witnesses."

Many thanks to Temple Sholom Synagogue for generously sponsoring this event.



Peter Voormeij ^{z'l} in his studio. Courtesy of Voormeij family.

A Tribute to Peter Voormeij ^{z'l}

BY AMALIA BOE-FISHMAN

I met Peter some 15 years ago. We sat next to each other when I joined the Child Survivor Group. We realized that during the Holocaust we both hid in Leeuwarden, a city in the northern province of Friesland in the Netherlands. Peter had been taken from a daycare in Amsterdam and smuggled to Leeuwarden, where it was safer to hide. Peter and his father left Leeuwarden after it was liberated on April 15, 1945. Sadly, his mother was murdered during the Holocaust. When we met, Peter told me that

he remembered little of his time in hiding in Leeuwarden. I was born and raised there, and I was lucky to be united with my family after the war. I was able to tell Peter about Leeuwarden, and I gathered information about the years he hid there. We spent many hours talking to each other and formed a strong bond.

A few years ago, my younger brother, Jan, came from the Netherlands to attend the World Federation of Jewish Holocaust Survivors & Descendants

Annual Conference. It felt wonderful to introduce Jan and Peter to each other. When Jan returned to the Netherlands, he gathered information about Holocaust-related events in present-day Netherlands and sent it to Peter, me and other child survivors from the Netherlands. ■

Amalia Boe-Fishman was born in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands. She survived the Holocaust as a child in hiding. Amalia is a devoted survivor outreach speaker and a member of the Child Survivor Group.

Our Friend, Peter

BY SIDI SHAFFER

Our minibus stopped in front of Peter's house. It was April 7, 2024. With trepidation we, the members of the Child Survivor Group, approached his home. The area was familiar: beautiful trees, gardens and houses. I remember quite a few years before when we visited him, his home and studio. He welcomed us with a big smile and open arms, eager and proud to show us his world of art. This time when we entered his home, there were many people there to honour his life and support his family in their grief of losing him so suddenly. In the background I heard the mournful sound of bagpipes being played in Peter's honour.

Our Child Survivor Group was warmly received by his family and his

partner, Mary. An abundance of food was set out on an elongated table. Inside the house I felt embraced by Peter's wonderful art. His dynamic paintings of interactions of forms, shapes and colours—hanging on all the walls, in every corner of his home and studio—challenged me and affected me deeply. I wished that Peter would appear and tell me the stories behind all of his works.

Peter was, in my opinion, a complex person. His home and studio were filled with many books, Judaic artefacts and music. He had much love for nature, music, for beauty, and yet there was a dark side to him, too. His art reflects beauty and also pain, dislocation, war, mystery—testimony to the difficult times in his life. His

painting *Never Give Up*, which covers an entire wall, reminds me of Jacob's ladder and his dream. The painting is dark, with lots of symbolic shapes in perpetual movement.

Peter was born in 1940 in Amsterdam. He came to Canada in 1965 after studying art in Australia and the US. (Later he studied in Montreal.) While in New York he studied with Willem De Kooning and Mark Rothko. You can feel their influence in his works. In the Netherlands he painted in a realistic style, which is evident in his early works. His two self-portraits, from his early works, are a reminder of Rembrandt's chiaroscuro technique—you are in front of a very handsome young man looking away from the viewer in a shy manner. I



Left: *Never Give Up*, oil on Belgian linen by Peter Voormeij²¹. Right: Peter's studio. Photos courtesy of Sidi Schaffer.

LAST WITNESSES

wish I could see more of his works from this period.

Peter found fame later through his expressionistic style. His abstract creations speak about his inner life, his joys, his struggles and his spiritual values. I identify with them very much. His works reflect his lifelong journey through good and bad times.

In his works you can see ravens, hawks, birds of prey fluttering their wings, ready to attack, like the one in his work *Berlin-Berlin*. It is for the

viewer to interpret the message, not only what they see but also how they feel about what they see. There is much wisdom, exaltation, imagination, testimony and mystery in Peter's images. Seeing these artworks was an extraordinary gift and privilege for all of us.

The most emotional experience for me was seeing Peter's work desk, with all of his paint cans and brushes, the dried out paint on his palette, waiting for him to come back and give it life again. Everything was exactly as he

had left it. Now his family members are the custodians of his studio and his precious paintings.

The Child Survivor Group, including me, owe much gratitude to Peter's family and Mary for including us in the celebration of life for Peter. We will miss him a lot. May his memory be a blessing and his art an inspiration for many generations to come. ■

Sidi Schaffer was born in northern Romania. She lived in Israel for 16 years and moved to Vancouver in 1998. She is a member of the Child Survivor Group.



Painted stage screen at the Roosendaal Theatre, Netherlands, 1986. Courtesy of Voormeij family.

The Lonely Path of the Child Holocaust Survivor

BY ROBERT KRELL

Child survivor groups have provided opportunities to share, to heal—to feel less alone.

“The story of the child survivor is one of profound loneliness. When I recall this sequence of my own growing awareness of being a child survivor, that peculiar and forbidding sense of aloneness comes into focus.”

I wrote those words in the Spring/Summer 1993 issue of *Zachor* and titled the article “No Longer Alone.” This became the section heading highlighting the Child Survivors Group of Vancouver, who had been meeting since 1990, as one way of dealing with that sense of aloneness. Ten years after the end of the Second World War, the majority of survivors had left displaced persons camps for new countries, where they worked to re-establish themselves and struggled to adapt to post-war life. It was too early in their recovery to have a great impact, but not too early to organize themselves and find one another. Weddings took place, children were born, and friendships were made with like-minded people who shared a tragic past.

Survivors 17 years of age or older during the Holocaust were telling their stories, many strongly and bravely declaring themselves

publicly to be Holocaust survivors, in particular, those who had been in concentration camps or fought as partisans.

The children of these “adult” survivors also discovered one another, the so-called Second Generation, identified in Helen Epstein’s 1979 book *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Holocaust Survivors*.

At first, I thought I must belong to this generation because my parents had miraculously survived. I attended meetings in New York and Los Angeles and spoke from the perspective of the Second Generation. But my cousin, who was my age, was not Second Generation: he survived in hiding, like I did, only his parents were murdered in Auschwitz and Sobibor. Were we not part of the same generation?

In 1981, I heard Rabbi Israel Meier Lau speak in Jerusalem at the World Gathering of Jewish Holocaust



Robert Krell, Judith Kestenberg and Sarah Moskowitz at the First International Gathering of Children Hidden During World War II, New York, 1991. All images courtesy of Robert Krell.

LAST WITNESSES

Survivors, about his liberation from Buchenwald at the age of eight. I realized that my cousin and I were like Rabbi Lau. We were ourselves Holocaust survivors.

That day, my self-identity was clarified. By 1983 I joined Professor Sarah Moskowitz for the founding of the Child Survivors of the Holocaust Group in Los Angeles. Its membership grew to 300 in just a few years.

Elsewhere, similar groups were taking shape. In 1987, Stefanie Seltzer of Philadelphia held meetings in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. In 1990, Sarah and the Los Angeles group held an international conference in Oxnard, California.



Robert Krell and Sarah Moskowitz, 2018.



Ruth Sigal speaking at an early child survivor group meeting.

All of this activity culminated in the First International Gathering of Children Hidden During World War II, held in 1991 in New York, attended by 1,600 people, almost all of them child survivors. I was privileged to have an insider view, serving on the international advisory board and helping to convince Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith (ADL) to join forces with the Hidden Child Conference, hence the name ADL/Hidden Child. Abe's story resembled mine. Also born in 1940 but in Poland, he was hidden by a young Polish woman. At liberation, his parents, who had somehow survived, returned to claim him, resulting in a struggle launched by the rescuer. She loved him so much. So, Abe, like me, was fortunate to have parents but lost those who had replaced them for a crucial period of time. I believe that our discussions in the late '80s helped cement his decision to link the ADL to the

Hidden Child movement. In addition, the New York organizers were unable to get Elie Wiesel to commit to joining the conference. They called me to ask if I would try to convince him. I did. He said, yes. Monday evening, May 27, 1991, the closing event of the conference, I introduced Elie Wiesel to a very large audience of perhaps a thousand to deliver his address titled "Hidden Memories" (published in *Child Holocaust Survivors: Memories and Reflections* by Robert Krell, Trafford Publishing, 2007). I also facilitated two workshops, titled Lost Childhood, of about 60 child survivors on Sunday and Monday and participated on a panel, The Psychological Impact of Being a Hidden Child, moderated by Sarah Moskowitz, with Judith Kestenberg, Paul Valent and myself as panelists. This pivotal event set the tone for the annual gatherings, some 34 of them over the years (except for the COVID years), including our own 2019 World Federation of Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust and Their Descendants gathering in Vancouver.

In 1991, these child survivors, then aged between 50 and 60, spoke to each

CONTINUED ON PAGE 48

A Family Not of Blood but of Experiences

BY LEAH COLLINS

The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre has been a second home for Holocaust survivors for more than 30 years.

The VHEC was founded by Holocaust survivors who wanted a space for Holocaust education and the preserving of Holocaust testimony. I spoke with two members of our community who helped build the survivor programs at the VHEC: Gisi Levitt, a former survivor services coordinator; and Mariette Doduck, a Holocaust survivor and founding member.

According to Mariette, the founding of the VHEC and associated fundraising efforts were a form of community building for survivors, many of whom were new to Canada. As a physical space, the VHEC has always offered survivors a place to meet and share their lives. This was thanks in part to a survivor drop-in group administered by Gerry London and Gloria Waisman.

Over the years, as some survivors could no longer feasibly attend meetings and Russian-speaking survivors attended more often, this group evolved into the Russian Survivor Group. The Child Survivor Group was running simultaneously, and continues to this day. To Mariette, the necessity of this service and the Centre in general is comparable to a “light that has to be on at all times.”

In 2000, the VHEC brought on Gisi Levitt as the survivor services coordinator to increase support for survivors. Gisi

was at the Centre once a week and open for walk-ins so that “survivors could drop in, talk about anything and stay as long as they needed.” Gisi felt that this open-door policy was a way to “honour and carry on the legacy of the Holocaust survivors who founded the VHEC.”

Gisi’s work focused on helping survivors file applications to the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, as many had not yet received reparations and the process was often difficult. Gisi told me that the Claims Conference applications were sent to Germany for approval, so “it was always a triumph when survivors’ claims were accepted... it meant a huge burden was off of their shoulders and changed lives.” For some, the reparations helped cover various expenses, including health care costs, like glasses and hearing aids. For most, it was the acknowledgement from the German government that was most important.

The survivor services provided at the VHEC include group meetings and hosting programs for survivors. Mariette shared that some weeks the Child Survivor Group programming includes hosting speakers, such as rabbis, authors and university



Gisi Levitt was named a Life Fellow of the Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society for Education and Remembrance in 2017.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

other, many for the first time. They understood one another, instantly. They emerged from a profound loneliness. We, who were there, were no longer alone. The silence had been imposed by well-meaning people who told us that we were lucky to have been too young to have memories, or to forget the past and get on with the future. How wrong they were. We were filled with memories, at least fragments of memory: of early separations, of hunger and illness, and of fear. And we carried untold stories within us, in total silence.

Ruth Sigal, who attended the Oxnard Conference in 1990, and Lillian Boraks-Nemetz agreed to co-chair the fledgling Child Survivor Group in Vancouver. We first met at Ruth's home, about 20 of us. And under their leadership, and subsequently that of Alex Buckman, the group flourished. Many of us attend annual gatherings around the world hosted by the World Federation of Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust and Their Descendants: in Washington, Houston, Cleveland, Toronto, Montreal, Jerusalem, Warsaw, Amsterdam, Berlin, and here in Vancouver in 2019.

It has proved to be a journey of healing. We have grown close, and we have lost members along the way as we have aged. To my recollection, no one has left the group unless they moved away from the city. It was, at least in part, the antidote to loneliness and its companion, the feeling of being alone. For the child Holocaust survivor so frequently entered the world of freedom in 1945 bereft of those who ensure a child is not alone: parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings and cousins. And the few adults who did return were themselves traumatized by unimaginable experiences and personal loss.

There is no doubt in my mind that our efforts worldwide and locally to bring together the children, at whatever stage of life, have provided opportunities to share and to heal. Certainly, less alone.

To learn more, I refer you to Lillian Boraks-Nemetz's lovely article in the Spring 2024 *Zachor*: "Child Survivors as the Last Witnesses of the Holocaust." It will help you to understand us and it will sear your heart. ■

Robert Krell is Founding President of the VHEC and the author of many books, including most recently *Emerging from the Shadows: Child Holocaust Survivors, Their Children, and Their Grandchildren*.

professors, while other weeks it's just meeting and talking as a group. This program has come a long way from the early days when "survivors themselves would bake treats and bring them to the meetings, which were originally held in a closet at the JCC." And yet, from the beginning Mariette felt that the VHEC functioned as "a place to take a deep breath in a safe environment."

Over the years, VHEC survivor programs have supported many survivors in sharing their experiences and engaging with the broader community, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Mariette recounted that by sharing their common experiences, members of the survivor group have strengthened their everyday lives in Canada and become like siblings. The VHEC has become the home of this child survivor family, born not of blood but of experiences. ■

Leah Collins is a student at McGill University, who worked at the VHEC last summer as a research assistant.

WITH THANKS

THANK YOU TO OUR DEVOTED VHEC VOLUNTEERS

The mission of the VHEC is made possible by the invaluable contributions of our volunteers—we are deeply grateful to them for their support and dedication.

Holocaust Survivor Speakers

Janos Benisz, Amalia Boe-Fishman, Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, Miriam Dattel, Mariette Doduck, René Goldman, Robert Krell, Malka Pischanskaya, Claude Romney, Michel Silver, Peter Suedfeld, Tom Szekely

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A Special Thank You

Kosher Food Warehouse and Temple Sholom synagogue for their generous in-kind donations.

Our sincere apologies for any errors or omissions.



GENERATIONS AFTER CALL FOR SUBMISSION

We are interested in featuring literary works by descendants of Holocaust survivors in all genres, including poetry, fiction, memoir, life-writing, graphic narrative and creative nonfiction. Submissions should be 500–1000 words long and accompanied by up to two original photographs or visuals. We offer editorial support and stewardship with submission. Kindly note that publication is at the discretion of the *Zachor* editorial advisory committee.

Writing published in *Zachor* remains the property of the author, though acknowledgement of publication in our magazine is appreciated if your piece appears elsewhere.

Please direct correspondence to Abby Wener Herlin: abbyherlin@vhec.org.

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