IN HIDING:
THE HOLOCAUST YEARS IN HOLLAND

by Louise Stein Sorensen

Louis Stein Sorensen has been a Vancouver area resident since 1959. She is a Holocaust survivor, born in the Netherlands in the same year as Anne Frank.

Fifty years ago, on the 4th of August 1944, the Nazi police raided the Amsterdam hiding place of Anne Frank and her family. All the occupants were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Anne died subsequently, in March, only weeks before the allied troops reached the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Only Anne's father survived the war.

After the hidden Jews had been taken away, their helpers returned to the hiding place and found Anne's writings, which were published in 1947 as "Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl". Her diary, covering the period from June 1942 to August 1944, has since appeared in millions of editions all over the world.

That spring of 1942, just shortly before the Frank family went into hiding, our family, along with other families living in areas within commuting distance of Amsterdam, were loaded onto buses and transported to inner city neighborhoods where the Jewish population was being concentrated. This way, the Nazis found it easier to round up their victims destined for deportation.

Our businesses, homes and most of our possessions had already been taken away. Because my father had managed to have us registered on a worker's exemption list, we continued to reside in our Amsterdam tenement until January 1943.

A letter reached us by a secret courier to announce the devastating news that nearly all the members of our extended family had been deported from their homes in Rotterdam. My great-grandfather, aged 96, was roused from his bed at midnight, my cousin aged 6, grandfather of 75, aunts, uncles, cousins. Our fears about their fate were confirmed after the war when we received a letter from the International Red Cross listing their names and the dates of their deaths by gassing at the extermination camp of Sobibor.

While constantly under threat of arrest and deportation, we witnessed the beginning of the mass raids and mass deportations of most of the Jewish working people and their families. Amsterdam had been their home for centuries. All were dragged out of their houses, whether they were newly born or elderly, sick or healthy. Armed, helmeted thugs, called the "green police" (Germans) and the "black police" (Dutch Nazis) according to the color of their uniforms, pushed them into waiting trucks.

Gradually we were surrounded by empty apartments. The last meager furnishings had been looted. In the dark of winter it was an eerie sight. It became evident our situation was becoming untenable. Several people on the exemption list were being arrested. January 1943 we removed the yellow stars from our clothing and managed to escape Amsterdam during the night, each of us ending up in separate hiding places. For almost 28 months my parents, my sister and I remained one step ahead of the Nazis. Thanks to the help of some very courageous people, we were able to welcome our Canadian liberators in April, 1945.

The history of the Holocaust illustrates the ultimate consequences of racism perpetrated by seemingly ordinary people. Our vigilance in guarding human rights must never cease. The Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society Holocaust Education Centre officially opens its doors on November 7, 1994. Designed as an education tool to help combat discrimination, the Centre's programming will start with a five week showing of the exhibit, "The World of Anne Frank: 1929 - 1945". We invite and welcome you to attend this important event.

Louise Stein, c. 1940, at Montessori Elementary School in Bussum, a suburb of Amsterdam. Anne Frank attended a branch of the same school in the city.

August 4, 1994

was the 50th Anniversary of the Deportation of the Frank Family from the Secret Annex


Journey of Remembrance: A Personal Odyssey

by Jacques D. Barth

Dr. Jacques D. Barth was born in Amsterdam in 1948. He graduated from Maimonides Lyceum in 1967 and Yeshiva University (N.Y.) in 1968. He obtained his MD and Ph.D. at Erasmus University (Rotterdam) in endocrinology and cardiology. Since 1992 he has lived in Vancouver, where he is director of the "Healthy Heart Program" at the Vancouver General Hospital.

I

was born in 1948 of a Polish father and a Dutch mother, in Amsterdam, the city of Anne Frank. My father, with his first wife and young son, had gone to Vienna from Poland, which he fled in 1939 after the Anschluss, intending to make it to the United States via Holland. Trapped by the German invasion, my father's wife perished; he survived the occupation, but that's another story. After the war my father met and married my mother, Miriam, a Dutch citizen. They remained in Holland, where my mother, who is 88, still lives. My father was the Gabbai of our Stieb (small synagogue) in Amsterdam, which had a membership of about forty families, all of whom were survivors from Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Romania and Russia.

As a youngster growing up in Amsterdam, I was always puzzled by the desire of Canadian and American tourists to visit the house of Anne Frank. Why all this adulation and interest in a girl who was so naive as to really believe that men are basically good? What about the Holocaust? Most of the members of our synagogue were Holocaust survivors who had lost their families and all their possessions and were strangers in a strange land.

I longed to visit Poland and see the country where all my aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews and nieces lived and perished. After receiving permission from the Polish authorities—no easy task—my father, my brother and I set off in August, 1976, for Rzeszow (near Cracow), my father's birthplace. We entered the communist world via East Berlin and were greeted by a young VoPo (special police), who welcomed us to "die Deutsche Demokratische Republik" with a machine gun slung around his shoulder. After a short flight, we landed at the airport in Warsaw and in a rented car drove to our hotel. I was surprised to see a sign at the hotel indicating that it was for "foreigners only".

We wanted to see the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Memorial. I asked the hotel tourist guide how to get there. He said that no such memorial existed. Shocked, I produced a photograph of Willi Brandt, one of my idols, the former Chancellor of Germany, kneeling in front of the Memorial. The guide became upset, pleaded a misunderstanding of the question, acknowledged the existence of the Memorial and told us how to get there. We were shaken by this encounter. So many years after the war—where was the logic? What of Anne Frank's idealistic notions?

A few days later we headed for the countryside. It reminded me of scenes from the movie Fiddler on the Roof, so beautiful yet so eerie. After visiting Belzec and Majdanek, we arrived in Cracow. In the marketplace there were antique shops selling Jewish silver utensils and ornaments. The shop-keeper told us that the items were purchased from Jews "who had to leave". A choking feeling came over me when I touched a Psumbisl. We left without buying anything.

On to Rzeszow, a quiet town stilled in the beautiful sunshine, at peace with itself. We found the former residence of my grandparents without difficulty. It was a tavern, but easily recognized by my father. The outside of the building had not been altered and he had brought pictures with him. My brother and I went inside but our father could not bring himself to do so. Speaking in German, I asked the innkeeper what the building was used for during the war. His reply was astonishing: he said that the place had been in his family "for many generations" and then he told us to leave.

We visited the site of a former synagogue, now housing civil records for the area. We were forbidden to enter by the caretaker, but from the outside we could see a large round window with a Magen David. We asked some townspeople what happened to the Jewish population and one reply was, "Well, some Jews once lived here but they moved away". Usually the answer was a simple "I don't know", accompanied by a shrug. Sometimes the tone was aggressive, other times apprehensive. We found the cemetery where my grandparents were buried. It was in an appalling state—tombstones were smashed and weeds had overtaken the site. It was obviously abandoned.

My father wanted to say Kaddish at the gravesite of his parents. It was impossible to find so he recited the prayer in an area where he thought the graves might be. We noticed that some smashed gravestones were dated as late as 1946. How could this be? Didn't the Germans retreat from the area in 1944? We saw a man following us, so we spoke to him. He turned out to be a nice young fellow who sincerely grieved over the desolate state of the cemetery, explaining that it was destroyed by local hoodlums in 1948. My father was outraged. When he returned to the Netherlands, he wrote to the Pope suggesting that if the Pope, being Polish, was serious about reconciliation with the Jewish people, a memorial in that cemetery should be erected. Something may have been done, but we were not informed.

My cynical view of Anne Frank's idealism has long since left me; it was her way of surviving a terrible ordeal. Telling my story is a substitute of sorts for the family I never knew. And like the Dutch poet A. Roland Holst wrote, "I must tell the story about the war thousands of times and every time I remember I will shed tears."
THOMAS KENEALLY SPEAKS

On June 12, 1994, the VHCS welcomed Thomas Keneally, author of *Schindler's List*, to the Schara Tzedeck Synagogue to hear the story behind the book. A press conference was held at the synagogue, followed by a reception for the sponsors at the home of David & Lil Shafran.

Dr. Robert Krell, President of the VHCS, acted as master of ceremonies for the evening. Rabbi M. Feuerstein gave the invocation and Zev Shafran introduced the Honorable John Fraser who, in turn, spoke about the VHCS and its 1994 Fundraising Campaign. Jack Kowarsky then introduced Thomas Keneally.

Mr. Keneally spoke to an audience of five hundred for an hour and a half. He said that writing this novel has changed his views on racism, that he has become a strong advocate against anti-Semitism and racism.

Esther Kaufman, a Schindler's List survivor, thanked Thomas Keneally for speaking.

Arthur's Talk

The Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society is co-sponsoring an "Artist's Talk" with the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Goethe Institute. Featured is German-born conceptual artist Jochen Gerz. Gerz, whose work centers on anti-fascist statements, has begun creating an invisible "Monument Against Racism" in the medieval German city of Saarbrucken.

Gerz frequently collaborates with his Israeli wife, Esther Shalev-Gerz, a second generation survivor. The couple lives part time on one of the local Gulf islands.

"Artist's Talk" will take place on Wednesday, September 21, 1994, at 7:30 PM in the Judge White Theatre in Robson Square Conference Centre. Admission is $5 for adults, and $2.50 for students (with valid I.D.).

Light refreshments following.
A SPECIAL TRUST

by Elly Shafran

Elaine and Zev Shafran traveled to London, England, in April of this year to bring home to Vancouver the Holocaust Education Centre's memorial scroll.

We rang at Kent House on Thursday afternoon, a cloudy day that held no promises...Mrs. Ruth Shaffer, trustee for the Memorial Scrolls Trust opened the twelve foot high door and welcomed us in and immediately took us to the third floor of the elegant old building.

We were lead straight to the “waiting room”. This is where 1,564 torah scrolls have found themselves a temporary resting place, a place for refuge and solace. In 1964, the torah scrolls were delivered on permanent loan to Westminster Synagogue at Kent House by the Czechoslovakian government. Since then, they have been catalogued and stored and then shipped to organizations, synagogues and institutions around the world. Each of the 1,564 scrolls were rescued from the Nazis in or around the city of Prague. Some are kosher, many are unusable with minor repairs, and as many more are in a desperate state. Only 150 or so remain in the coded racks, but the shock of seeing so many torahs in one place was overwhelming.

Swiftly, our minds counted the hands that once held these torahs aloft, the eyes that once read its words. The room was still. Each torah scroll was lying on its side in its own state of disrepair, numbered, waiting. Some were burnt, fragments of parchment hanging by a thread or handles that were once intricately carved, now blackened by fire. Many were cracked and faded, having been unfurled and left on a heap to be destroyed. Stunned, we walked down the two rows of floor-to-ceiling racks, each step a burden. This room had once contained over 1500 sefer torahs-racks and racks of sefer torahs. Extreme emotions emanated from this room and from the torah scrolls that seemed to moan in the silence. Later, I would come back to this place; my husband would not.

We then visited their small museum. It was a memorial to the Jewish people of Czechoslovakia. On the outside walls were maps and pictures of Jewish life, drawings of the great synagogues and then, on the inside walls, we saw the yellow stars of David, the edicts announcing that Jews were no longer free to buy cheese or fruit or fish or poultry, or to learn, or to travel, or to play music. In the centre of the room was a twisted heap of torahs and tallits in testimony to how they may have been found on a ruined synagogue's floor.

We signed for our scroll and said good-bye. Mrs. Shaffer made us promise to tell her about our torah's new future. She knows each and every one of these torahs and has presided over many farewells to the inhabitants of the “waiting room”. As we leave, she assures us that they will all find a home in the near future. Solemnly we carry our torah out the door. Weakly, the sun appears through a mass of clouds and shines upon us for a moment. We head for home.

SECOND GENERATION

The Second Generation Group, sponsored in part by the VHCS, brings together people with this in common: one or both parents survived the Holocaust. Each parent's story of survival is unique, their Holocaust experiences shaped their attitude towards raising children and coping with everyday life. We are the product of this legacy.

Through our annual conference and regular programming, we share and explore our common experiences. Our mandate is to be a meeting place for individuals with a common history, to discuss emotional, educational and political issues. We meet on the first Monday of each month. Social events are also planned.

The Second Generation Group committee consists of Alina Wydra (co-chair), Max Pinsky (co-chair), Rome Fox (arrangements), Sylvianne Feder (conference), Jack Micner (conference), Deborah Ramm (programming), Corrine Zimmerman (publicity) and Jonathan Festinger.

If you are interested but are not receiving our mailings, please contact Alina Wydra (733-4321) or Max Pinsky (327-0974).

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

We encourage you to fill in and submit your membership renewal forms as soon as possible.

TO DONATE ARTIFACTS OR BOOKS

call collections chairman Rubin Pinsky, 873-9842.
Your generous contributions help the Society fulfill its mandate of Holocaust documentation, education and remembrance.

Larry Goldenberg - family prayer books
Family of Joseph Eisner - books
Paul Meyer - family photos, documents, notebooks
Boris Shak - books, photos
Kurt Wallersteiner - testimonial interview
Jannushka Jakoubovitch - testimony
Shirley Cohn - family documents
Clair Perry - letter from Buchenwald from Dr. Tom Perry Sr.
Peter Frinton in honour of Eric Sonner.
Bert Smollan - In honour of my three brothers Dennis, Jossy and Harold Smollan, who died while serving in his Majesty’s armed services during World War II.

Students and teachers of Burnaby Central and the March of the Living Students - In tribute to the VHCS Outreach Program.
Emmy Krell-Stelzer “In honour of Robert and Marilyn Krell and their children”, with love, from their mother and grandmother.
Celia & Michael Barkusky, in honour of the birth of their daughter, Ilanna Miri Barkusky
Henry Hister, in memory of my father, from Art Hister
Margaret & Terry Adler
Rita & Ben Akselrod
Susan & Steven Albersheim/Barer
Joe & Ina Auerhahn
Gary & Diane Averbach
Dr. Mario Baff
Rabbi Imre Balla
Philip & Lori Barer
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Leo & Marlene Franken
Mark Freedman
Leonore Freiman
Ariela Friedmann
Peter Frinton
Jack Gechman
Harvey & Jean Gerber
Bernard Goldberg
Arnold & Clair Columbia
Dr. Morris & Kathy Gordon
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Julie & Henry Gutovich
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Gloria & Don Hendin
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Dennis & Joyce Hoffman
Leon Holz
Estika Hunning
Leon & Evelyn Kahn
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Odie Kaplan
Esther Kaufman
David & Gerry Kline
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Ruth & Ralph Kraminsky
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Robert & Marilyn Krell
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Dr. Harry Winstab
Irving Wolak
Kenneth G. Young
Irina & David Zack
Ruth Zolotk

Joe Auerhahn—from Helen Berger; Don & Rachel Levine; David & Regina Feldman
Carola Robitschek—from Helen Berger
Hal Davis—from Helen Berger
Regina Feldman—from Ida Kaplan; Ronnie Tessler
Rosalie Segal—from Lynne & Larry Thal; Esther Kaufman; David & Lily Shafran
Alina Wydra—VHCS
Morton Kaplan—from Odie, Sherri & Jordan
Yvonne Rosenberg—from Henry & Julie Gutovich
The annual High Holiday Yizkor service will be held at the Schara Tzedeck Cemetery on Sunday, September 11, 1994, at 12:30 PM. The chairman for the service is Leo Lowy.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of: The Government of B.C. through the Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture; Ministries of: Education, Multiculturalism and Human Rights, Community and Race Relations Program; Vancouver Foundation; VanCity Community Grants Program; Secretary of State for Multiculturalism.

Special thanks to co-chairs of the Thomas Keneally event, Norman Gladstone and Birgit Westergaard; and to the following for their donations: Rolf Welker and Lazerset Graphics, Paul Peter Dacher and Dacher Printing Ltd., Ozzie Kaban and Nelson Yoemans, Kaban Security, Jack McLean, Gladstone & Company, Wine Imports, Perrier Mineral Water, David & Lil Shafran.
TRIBUTE CARDS

The VHCS gratefully acknowledges contributions through Tribute cards. To order a card for any occasion, please call Grace Ehrlich (327-8064), Regina Feldman (327-3358), or Cindy at the office (734-5325).

MAZEL TOV

Phillip Swartz—special birthday from Irving Wolak
Peter Gary—on your 70th birthday, from VHCS; Ronnie Tessler
Rosaline Segal—on your 80th birthday, from Marlene & Leo Franken
Rica Menashe—on your special birthday, from Rosa Ferera
Hershel Wosk—on your birthday, from Art & Terry Szajman; Regina and David Feldman
Chaim Micner—on your special birthday, from Regina & David Feldman
Joc Lowy—on your special birthday, from Regina & David Feldman; Ronnie Tessler
Mr. & Mrs. Slobin—on their 40th wedding anniversary, from Irving Wolak
Leonore & Milt Freiman—on their 50th wedding anniversary, from Sol & Shirley Kort; Estika Hunning; Harold & Julia Shatsky
Josh and Bella Abramson—on your 55th wedding anniversary, from Regina and David Feldman
Chaim and Susie Micner—on your 40th wedding anniversary, from Regina and David Feldman; Sally, Sid and Alex Coleman
Menachim Mendel—on your Bar Mitzvah, from Marlene & Leo Franken
Aren Altman—on your graduation, from Larry, Lyliane, Todd and Ricki Thal
Clara & Lawrence Auerbach—on your 60th wedding anniversary, from Dr. Harry Winrob
Jonas Altman—on your graduation, from Larry & Lyliane Thal
Simone Krell—on your graduation, from Larry & Lyliane Thal
Ryan Davis—on your graduation, from Larry & Lyliane Thal
Sam & Ida Huberman—on your 42nd wedding anniversary, from David & Lil Shafran
Jody & Harvey Dales—on the birth of your daughter, from the VHCS
Celia and Michael Barkusky—on the birth of your daughter, from the VHCS
Su & Barry Dunner—on the birth of your son, from the VHCS

“Remember. For there is, there must be, hope in remembering” — Elie Wiesel