

VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE

ZACHOR



FALL 2023

AUNT REBECCA'S ORANGE CAKE

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE IN UKRAINE

COURAGE TO ACT: DENMARK, 1943

VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE

AGE OF INFLUENCE: YOUTH & NAZI PROPAGANDA

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FALL 2023

ZACHOR

Zachor is the Hebrew
word for remember.

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Dear readers,

With encouragement from the local Holocaust survivor community, we dedicate this issue to Alex Buckman^{z1}, who passed away on April 21, 2023, while participating in the March of the Living in Poland. As a tireless outreach speaker and a longstanding president of the Child Survivor Group, Alex's impact on the VHEC, the audiences we serve, and the local survivor community is immeasurable.

Alex was four years old when his father handed him over for safekeeping to Mademoiselle Andrée Geulen, a 20-year-old teacher in a Brussels school, one of the Righteous Among the Nations, who also saved hundreds of other Jewish children during the Holocaust. Both of Alex's parents were murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Alex was adopted by his aunt, Rebecca Teitelbaum, a survivor of Ravensbrück concentration camp. In a video testimony recorded in 2008, Alex describes how Rebecca and other women in her barracks recorded, in secret and at great personal risk, recipes from memory in a handmade book. Alex donated Rebecca's recipe book to the VHEC so that it could be preserved and support learning over time, and it is currently on display in the exhibition *In Focus: The Holocaust through the VHEC Collection*. When he spoke to students, Alex would share a copy of his aunt's recipe for *gateau à l'orange* (orange cake). Over the years, Alex and the VHEC received countless letters about the significance of the act of baking Rebecca's cake; in this issue we are pleased to share just such a story. We are also pleased to share reflections from some of those touched by Alex and his story, as well as his love and care for fellow survivors. May his memory continue to be a blessing and a source of courage and inspiration to us all.

The transformative legacies of Holocaust survivors are explored elsewhere in this issue, in contributions by Deborah Ross-Grayman about a writing project initiated by the Vancouver Second Generation Group, and in the remarks of Lindsay Hutchison, this year's recipient of the Meyer and Gita Kron and Ruth Sigal Award for Excellence in Holocaust Education. All those in attendance for the presentation of this award at the June AGM were deeply moved by the words of Ms. Hutchinson and one of her Grade 12 students at Tamanawis Secondary, Samar Jain, and we are honoured to share them with our readership.

We invite you to join us for the community-wide commemoration of Kristallnacht on November 9, presented in partnership with Congregation Beth Israel. The keynote speaker, Janus Møller Jensen, director of the Danish Jewish Museum, will reflect on the 80th anniversary of the rescue of the Jews of Denmark and the historical and contemporary significance of this remarkable act of collective courage.

I write this message on the heels of the Hamas terror attacks on Israel. The VHEC, its survivor community and members, the local Jewish community and the entire world are grappling with the murder of the largest number of Jews in a single day since the Holocaust. At the same time, the VHEC leadership is renewed in its conviction that the study of the Shoah is more vital and relevant than ever. Thank you, on behalf of the VHEC, for your partnership in advancing our work, now and into the future.

Sincerely,



Nina Krieger
Executive Director

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

As I write to you, we are preparing for Rosh Hashanah, a time when Jews around the world will observe the beginning of a new year, 5784. It is a time of celebration as we connect with the people we love and feel a sense of joy and peace. At the same time, the Chaggim are a time of reflection. I am profoundly grateful to the VHEC community, including the Centre's staff, volunteers, members and supporters. I am awestruck by the tremendous strength, commitment and resilience of our local survivors of the Shoah, who share their stories and, by doing so, continue to play an essential part in the increasingly urgent fight against antisemitism. Their stories are inextricably linked to the ongoing efforts to achieve the VHEC vision, as expressed in our vision statement: a world free of antisemitism, discrimination and genocide, with social justice and human rights for all.

This Rosh Hashanah, in addition to celebration and reflection, there is also a sense of urgency to stand up for truth, justice and the rule of law. Perhaps not since the Shoah have we felt the weight of history and the responsibility to do all that we can to tackle mounting intolerance and xenophobia as much as we do now. All this to say that the work of the VHEC is more important than ever. Indeed, it is through our programs that young people are learning to recognize injustice, and to respond to hate and distortion with facts and compassion—turning hate into hope.

Hope is very much a part of the core of the VHEC's mission. Although the VHEC engages with an extremely dark chapter of human history, the Centre and its activities are permeated with light and optimism. To explain what I mean by this, I share here the closing of a letter received by one of our survivor speakers, from a Grade 12 student in Ladysmith on Vancouver Island, after a Zoom speaking engagement. She wrote: *"Although your story is one of loss, it is also one of bravery, and how one, even in the depths of despair, pulls himself out, and not only survives, but lives. You will always be on my 'wall of heroes' because you are an example of good in the world. Your story will make me a better person, daughter, sister, woman and more. I mean this from my heart. Your story will stay with me forever. Even if I get old and my brain starts to deteriorate, your smile, your kindness and the story that is yours will be one of the last memories to leave."*

This letter speaks to the transformative impact of Holocaust education. The VHEC can do this work, and grow this work, thanks to you. Accordingly, on behalf of the VHEC Board of Directors, I would like to take this opportunity to extend a heartfelt thanks for your unwavering partnership, support and trust. Together, may we go from strength to strength.

Wishing you and your loved ones a healthy, sweet and peaceful year. Shana Tova U'metukah,



Corinne Zimmerman
President, Board of Directors

PS: The VHEC stands in solidarity with Israel in the wake of Hamas' horrific terror attacks on Israel. Holocaust survivors were prominent in building the modern state of Israel in the aftermath of the murder of six million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators. For our small population of local survivors of Nazi atrocities, the targeting, killing, defilement and kidnapping of Jewish people by these terrorists brings up heartbreaking memories of past suffering and loss. The VHEC joins those in Canada and around the world who stand in solidarity with Israel. And we stand with all those praying for the safe return of family and friends—children, women and men—kidnapped by Hamas terrorists. Am Yisrael Chai.

2023 Meyer and Gita Kron and Ruth Sigal Award for Excellence in Holocaust Education

Each year, the VHEC presents the Meyer and Gita Kron and Ruth Sigal Award for Excellence in Holocaust Education to a British Columbia teacher in any discipline who has demonstrated excellence and commitment to teaching students about the Holocaust and its important lessons for humankind.

The award was established in memory of Meyer and Gita Kron, Lithuanian Jewish survivors of the Holocaust who re-established their lives in Vancouver. Through their lifelong involvement with education and community, they touched the lives of thousands of students. Their daughter, Ruth Kron Sigal, who survived the Holocaust in hiding, was a dedicated VHEC outreach speaker before she passed away in 2008.

At the VHEC's annual general meeting in June, the 2023 Kron Sigal Award was presented to Lindsay Hutchison, a gifted and remarkable educator who has been committed throughout her career to teaching high school students about the Holocaust. Lindsay is the head of the Social Studies department at Tamanawis Secondary School in Surrey, where she has taught for almost two decades. She includes the study of the Holocaust in each of the courses she teaches: Social Studies 10; Twentieth Century World History; and Genocide Studies 12.

We are pleased to publish her remarks upon accepting the award.

—Lise Kirchner, Acting Education Director

LINDSAY HUTCHISON

Social Studies Department Head

Tamanawis Secondary

Thank you all so much for this award. I'm honored and humbled by your recognition and, more importantly, I'm grateful to get the chance to be able to share with you all how impactful the work of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre has been to me and my students.

As a high school student in the 1990s, I was lucky to attend two Vancouver Holocaust Symposia at UBC. My high school usually reserved this event for Grade 12 students but for some reason I was invited to attend when I was younger. I jumped at the chance to attend. History was my passion, and I was excited to get the chance to learn from eyewitnesses to history. I remember that Faye Schulman was a featured speaker. She had just written *A Partisan's Memoir*, which I devoured in advance of the symposium. Up until that point, I had learned history as a series of dates and facts but not much emphasis was placed on the human story. The symposium changed that.

Dr. Christopher Friedrichs' compelling lecture gripped me from the outset. It raised important questions of choice, complicity and responsibility. But more importantly, it was the survivor speakers who connected the head with the heart. That afternoon, I attended a few breakout sessions with survivors who generously shared the gift of their testimony. I can't imagine the courage that it must have taken to share their most personal stories—the stories of connection, love and laughter before the war; the stories of persecution, horror and loss of the Holocaust; and the stories of rebuilding after the war. I walked out of the first symposium feeling a



Lise Kirchner, VHEC Acting Education Director, and Lindsay Hutchison at the presentation for the 2023 Meyer and Gita Kron and Ruth Sigal Award for Excellence in Holocaust Education.

profound responsibility to carry my learning forward to others and to continue to learn more. That feeling only deepened the following year when I got the chance to attend the symposium again.

As Elie Wiesel once said, “Whoever listens to a witness, becomes a witness.” Through these two symposia, I had become a witness and I was coming to realize that a witness who says nothing is a bystander. And so, I made a conscious decision to carry this learning forward through education. I decided to pursue a bachelor of arts in history and a bachelor of education with a social studies specialty. I was lucky to very quickly obtain a teaching position in that discipline at Tamanawis Secondary in Surrey.

Throughout my time at Tamanawis, the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre continued to play an important role in both my teaching and learning journey. I have taken students to more symposia than I can count. Together we have listened to countless stories. We have been honored to hear from so many, including Dr. Robert Krell, Alex Buckman, Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, Janos Benisz, Mariette Doduck, David Ehrlich²¹ and so many others. We have also engaged in such thoughtful programming at the VHEC itself. The meticulously curated exhibitions and accompanying activities have been profoundly impactful—so much so that I still reference the teacher packages today.

Like the annual Symposia on the Holocaust and annual exhibitions, the biennial Shafran Teachers' Conferences have shaped my capacity to, and confidence in, teaching the Holocaust and, as an extension, other difficult histories and social justice issues. These conferences introduced me to the work and resources of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem and Facing History, for who I now co-facilitate seminars for educators across Canada. It's not an understatement to say that none of this would be possible without the VHEC. Your work has ripple effects that go far beyond what you can see.

With the rising tide of antisemitism and polarization, this work grows more and more important. We are hearing and experiencing the echoes of history and we know what this can grow into. We have a responsibility to educate and to push back against hatred and oppression, and we must equip students with the tools to do so.

Thank you all for your tireless work to make a hate-free world a reality. And a heartfelt thank you for supporting me on my journey to carry this learning forward to my students. I am beyond humbled to be acknowledged.



Samar Jain, student of Lindsay Hutchison.

SAMAR JAIN
Grade 12 student
Tamanawis Secondary

I have come to learn that Holocaust education is a living science. It lives in the minds and souls of the descendants of those who had to leave behind everything

they had ever known. It warns us about the fragility of democracy and dangers of prejudices in a world in flux. In the age of amnesia, studying the Holocaust keeps this dark chapter of human history from fading into

oblivion. As global politics increasingly slide towards authoritarianism, it also takes the form of resistance.

I know this through the numerous opportunities with which I've had to engage intellectually with Holocaust education, including my Genocide Studies course at school. And through the rich tapestry of resources and materials available, I can conclude that memory can never be divorced from its bearer.

I have never met the survivors in person, but I have met them through their testimony (video and print) and I feel like I gained some measure of understanding of the souls that went through what I do not and cannot fully understand. It has raised questions about human behaviour, choices and justice.

In that, I have also realized that Holocaust education is not merely a study of the past, it is the knowledge we urgently need to address systemic inequities that continue to disadvantage marginalized and racialized members in our society and beyond. These inequalities are insidious and leave no aspect of society, politics and the economy untouched. Difficult histories like the Holocaust offer a cautionary tale on how these disparities are not a coincidence. They are the legacies of long-standing lies, myths and rumours.

These lies, myths and rumours continue to impact our present, and our role in countering global hate becomes more important by the day. This hate tells us that someone is less than human, less than equal, and that's simply not true.

The knowledge of the Holocaust has taken me closer to the world in a way that's been eye-opening. It has taught me to be compassionate about the struggles of all people, and how speaking truth to power is noble and essential. I have been inspired by the leadership of educators and organizations working to expand access to this critical learning discipline, and they have pushed me to see a world beyond myself. This learning will be important to my future career in international development. ■

A Bridge over the Chasm of Oblivion: Spaces of Holocaust Remembrance in Ukraine

BY DR. NATALIYA IVCHYK



Entrance to Sosonky.

One summer day in 1990 or '91, my mother and I were travelling by bus to our cottage in the countryside near an area called Sosonky, on the outskirts of the city of Rivne, Ukraine. At one point in our journey, we passed by a road, and I asked my mother where the road went. My mother was silent for a moment, and then confessed that she did not know.

That road led to the site of one of the worst massacres of Jewish citizens of Ukraine. The site had no place in the city's collective memory. It wasn't signposted in any visible way, so there was little opportunity for citizens to participate in meaningful dialogue about the violent history of the place. How do political elites choose to commemorate what should be remembered? How do these decisions influence public memory, what is remembered, and what is forgotten?

Spaces of commemoration, symbolic spaces, have the power to underscore the significance of certain events,

mark the activities of cultural or political figures, and they can silence aspects of a city's past, deliberately concealing them, as was the case with Sosonky.

Rivne is one of 26 regional centres in Ukraine. It has a population of about 240,000 people. Like many other cities in Ukraine, it is the inheritor of a multicultural past.

During the Second World War, Rivne became the capital of one of the administrative districts occupied by the Nazis, the Reich Commissariat of Ukraine. On November 6 and 7, 1941, in Sosonky, the Nazis executed

17,500 Jewish inhabitants of Rivne. More than 5,000 Jewish people ended up in the ghetto, where they were imprisoned for eight months. In mid-July of the following year, those 5,000 Jews were executed nearby, in the town of Kostopil. Rivne lost what had been its largest ethno-religious community, which in the prewar period accounted for about 80% of its overall population.

In the former USSR, and thus in Soviet Ukraine, the victims of Nazism were considered a homogenous group of Soviet people. For decades, the state imposed the ideal of the Soviet man on its citizens, influencing not a process of integration but of assimilation. The policy was to erase the memory of the Holocaust, an approach informed by Stalin's antisemitism. Until the late 1980s and early 1990s, objective coverage of the Holocaust was impossible. Similarly silenced was the topic of the Holodomor, the Soviet-engineered Ukrainian famine that took place in 1932–33.

Commemorating those who perished during the Holocaust became a topic of conversation during *perestroika* under Gorbachev. Ukrainians and Jewish people both recognized themselves as victims of totalitarian regimes. The participation of some Jewish people in the People's Movement of Ukraine for Perestroika built bridges of understanding between the two cultural groups, especially in the western part of Ukraine.

However, Ukraine was slow to include the Holocaust in its collective memory. Political elites at the national and regional levels disagreed about whether to hold their own homogenous pain (that is, the traumatic memory of the Holodomor) and someone else's pain (that is, the "legacy" of the Holocaust) as equal, or whether they would differentiate the two, and eventually marginalize the pain of the "other." These conversations often occurred around the development of symbolic commemorative spaces in cities like Rivne.

Rivne's first memorial to victims of the Holocaust was erected immediately after the city's liberation from Nazi occupation in 1944. One year later, the monument was rebuilt, this time with the Star of David displayed on it, in order to signify the loss of the city's Jewish inhabitants. In 1967, a plaque was erected at the site of the mass shooting with the inscription: A monument to Soviet citizens who died at the hand of fascist invaders during the Great Patriotic War of 1941 to 1945 will be erected here.

This wording of the inscription reflects the discourse of heroism and sacrifice of the Soviet people that prevailed in the USSR, where there was no place for victims from individual ethnic groups. As a result of the 1967 monument's ambiguous language, Sosonky did not become a site where commemorative events took place. The plaque did not speak to Jewish descendants of the victims. Accordingly, the Rivne tragedy of the fall of 1941 was effectively erased from the memories of Rivne residents, my mother and I included.

In November 1990, a memorial commemorating the massacre was unveiled in Sosonky. City and state authorities attended the event. In June of the following year, on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the massacre, a memorial was unveiled in Rivne, in front of an audience of local Jewish residents and Ukrainian politicians.

With the creation of these memorials, local authorities took a significant step forward in incorporating the Holocaust into the collective memory of the city. The memorials helped create the conditions for the instrumentalization of memory. They spoke to Ukrainians about the city's



Top: Rivne's first memorial to victims of the Holocaust, erected in 1944. Centre and bottom: Rivne's first memorial to victims of the Holocaust, rebuilt with the Star of David on it in 1945.



A plaque erected in 1967 at the site of the mass shooting in Sosonky.



Left: Opening of a monument in 1990 at the site of the mass shooting in Sosonky. Right: Monument at the site of a mass grave of Soviet soldiers, erected in Rivne in 1967.

non-Ukrainian past. However, the potential inherent in those conditions was not fully achieved. The memorial in Sosonky still doesn't effectively encourage a dialogue with visitors, because virtually no one visits it.

Until recently, monuments in Rivne only conveyed memory from two perspectives: that of the Soviet and the Ukrainian. Commemorations of the heroism of the Red Army and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army dominated the landscape of Rivne, and the Holocaust was a secondary component. Rivne's commemorative spaces addressed events of the Second World War, remembered the victims of fascism, and glorified nationalistic pride. In 2005, a monument to Ulas Samchuk, a journalist, writer and editor active during the Nazi occupation, was unveiled in the city center. Samchuk headed *Volyn*, a nationalist newspaper which published pro-Nazi and antisemitic propaganda. Symon Petliura, linked to anti-Jewish pogroms while he was head of Ukrainian People's Republic, was similarly memorialized in Rivne.

In 2016, Mykhailo Balyk and Volodymyr Yakshyn, political science graduate students at Rivne University, initiated a project titled *From Mammoths to Rivne: Historical Trails of Rivne*. The project received financial support from Rivne city council with support from residents.

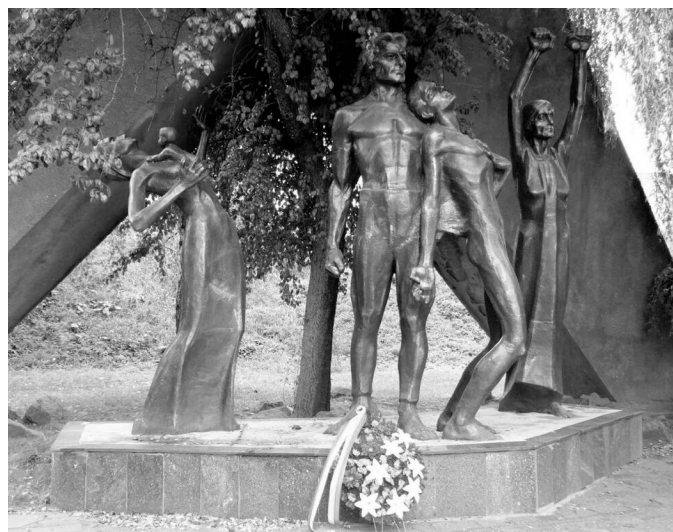
It was implemented in 2017-18 and involved the installation of sign boards displaying information



about the city's historical and cultural heritage. The project highlighted objects related to the Polish, Jewish and German history of the city, forgotten after the Second World War. Through 209 memorial plaques and signs, some of which present the Jewish history of Rivne, the city initiated a conversation about

its multicultural past. Bilingual signage, in English and Ukrainian, was added to the Sosonky memorial, the Great Synagogue, the Tarbut Jewish school, the Zafraniv theatre, the Jewish cemetery, and other sites of historical and cultural significance, allowing local and international visitors to gain deeper understandings of the city's past.

Also in 2016, Maksym Gon, Petro Dolganov and I, all historians, founded the Mnemonics non-governmental organization. Mnemonics works in the area of academia, science and publishing, creating books and other educational resources. Through Mnemonics, we conduct



Memorial to victims of fascism, erected in Rivne in 1968.



Monument commemorating the Ukrainian poet Ulas Samchuk, erected in Rivne in 2005.



A street sign, part of the From Mammoths to Rivne: Historical Trails of Rivne project.



Memorial commemorating victims of the Rivne ghetto, organized by NGO Mnemonics in 2019.



Memorial commemorating Volhynia Czechs who died during the Second World War.

research on memorial policy and public history; we search for, develop and promote the implementation of optimal democratic models in the field of memory policy in Ukraine; and we attempt to form an inclusive model of memory in the city of Rivne, the region and the whole of Ukraine, supporting the principles of tolerance, freedom, understanding and responsibility.

By including in public commemorative spaces representations of non-dominant social groups (ethnic, religious, gender-based, etc.) and by including city residents in decision-making about commemorative projects, we aim to foster an inclusive model of memory policy.

To honour the memory of the Holocaust, and victims from minority ethnic groups, we installed stumbling stones on Rivne sidewalks dedicated to Volodymyr Mysechko, Yakiv Suhenko, Zuzanna Hinchanka, and Yakiv and Rachel Krulyk. We created a memorial to the victims of the Rivne ghetto. We featured the city's multicultural history in a virtual museum—The Museum of One Street—of a single city street in the interwar period, told through the stories of historic buildings and their inhabitants. This project, launched in 2021 with the support of Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future out of Germany, aims to actualize the memory of the Second World War through the experience of participants in the events (un)noticed by public history to date: prisoners of war, Jewish people, Roma, Volhynia Czechs, Polish communities, forced labourers, psychiatric patients and women. We also present little-known examples of rescue and interethnic conflict in the Rivne region during the Second World War.

Our work has presented many challenges. Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, memory, perception and reading of the tragedy of the Second World War, interethnic conflicts, and crimes of totalitarian regimes have undergone significant changes: new forms of memory and commemoration are emerging. Public farewells to fallen soldiers in the war, public demonstrations of destroyed Russian military equipment (which in turn represent the strength and importance of the armed forces of Ukraine), renaming streets after fallen soldiers, and more, are emerging in the arena of collective memory.

With each passing day, the public and collective memory in Ukraine changes the way it remembers, understands and presents historical narratives of its past. ■

Dr. Nataliia Ivchuk, from Rivne State University of Humanities in Ukraine, is the 2022–23 visiting scholar in the Department of History at UBC and researcher in residence at the VHEC. Learn more about Mnemonics at mnemonika.org.ua/en.

Aunt Rebecca's Orange Cake

BY BRANDI RASOVIC

It was late winter, early spring of 2009 when I met Alex Buckman at Queen of All Saints Elementary School in Coquitlam, BC. I remember walking into the school gymnasium that day, the room well-lit with natural light. Alex was there to speak to my eldest son's Grade 7 class about surviving the Holocaust.

Alex began his talk by describing the house in Belgium where his family lived. Next door lived his aunt Rebecca, his uncle and a female cousin who was close in age to him. When he was around three years old, the Nazis were advancing, and Alex and his cousin were taken one night by nuns, who escaped with them through the forest, taking them to a convent up on a hill for

safety. Alex described a secret cellar where the Jewish boys were hidden when the Nazis came to search the convent. He described the terrible smell and how dark it was. His parents, Aunt Rebecca and his uncle were captured. Rebecca was sent to Ravensbrück, where she worked in the office of the Siemens ammunitions factory. She would get very weak and tired. To appear healthy enough to continue to work, she would prick her finger with a pin and apply blood to her cheeks to look rosy. One day while at work, Rebecca stole a pen and paper, concealing it in her bra so she and her fellow inmates could later on write out their family recipes. This is what she found to help her stay sane. She later stitched and bound the recipes into a book.



Orange cake baked by Brandi Rasovic, from Aunt Rebecca's recipe. Photo by Brandi Rasovic, 2023.



Brandi Rasovic and her daughter, with Alex Buckman, in 2015.

On the day the allies arrived at Ravensbrück, people started fleeing with their belongings. Rebecca grabbed her sack with a few personal items and ran. During this time she was injured and taken to a hospital, the sack was lost. Eventually she was reunited back in Belgium with her husband, daughter and her nephew Alex. Alex's parents never made it home; he would later in life find out the details of what happened to them. A few years later there was a knock at Rebecca's door. On her front step a man was holding the sack she had left while fleeing the ammunition factory. Inside was her recipe book.

In 1951 the family moved to Montréal. Alex eventually settled in Vancouver, marrying and starting his own family. Decades later Alex visited his aunt in Montréal, as her health was deteriorating. Behind a closet door in her home he found the sack with her recipe book. He asked her if she would donate it to the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. At this point in his talk Alex shared

with us one of Rebecca's recipes, for orange cake, encouraging us to make our own, as he did with the thousands of people who heard him speak throughout the years. Alex shared so much more with us that day. I will never forget the long pauses he took—the memories of his life were so traumatic, he needed to gather his thoughts. I also remember the moment the lights all flickered in the gym, we all had goosebumps. He shared with us that survivors were ageing and he feared that one day people would say the Holocaust never happened.

The Thanksgiving after Alex's talk I started a new family tradition of making Rebecca's orange cake. It is the only time of year I make this cake. My family and I deliver them to family, friends and neighbours.

We share Alex's story and hope that it will never be forgotten. Every year we add someone new to share his story with.

In 2015 I received a call from Linda Epplete, a teacher who I kept in touch with from Queen of All Saints School. She said Alex was coming to speak again. I brought my daughter to meet him. Linda shared with him the family tradition I had started. This would be our second time meeting and the last time we spoke. I'm so grateful that he knew about the tradition and that I started it to share his story so that the Holocaust would never be forgotten.

With Alex's passing this past April, our tradition will be even more meaningful this Thanksgiving, and for the years to come. ■

Brandi Rasovic was born and raised in Vancouver. She has been married to her husband, Sasha, for 28 years. They have three children, Nic, Alex and Vanessa. Brandi is looking forward to being a Gigi (grandma) this coming January.

VANCOUVER
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Kristallnacht Commemoration

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 9 | 7 PM

CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL
989 W 28TH AVENUE, VANCOUVER

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Janus Møller Jensen

Director, Danish Jewish Museum



CONTEXTUAL HISTORICAL REMARKS

Dr. Chris Friedrichs

Professor Emeritus, University of British Columbia

Holocaust survivors are invited to light a memorial candle.

EVERYONE WELCOME. NO RSVP REQUIRED. LIVESTREAM LINK AVAILABLE AT VHEC.ORG



CONGREGATION
BETH ISRAEL

This program is funded through our community's generous contributions to the Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver Annual Campaign and supported by the Robert and Marilyn Krell Endowment Fund of the VHEC.

Courage to Act: October 1943, Denmark

BY JANUS MØLLER JENSEN

During the night between October 1 and 2, 1943, German occupying forces initiated an action against Jews in Denmark. However, a warning had been issued and through a tremendous common effort by a large part of the Danish population, most Danish Jews escaped to Sweden in small and large vessels organized and sailed by Danes.

This is a remarkable story in the dark history of the Holocaust. It shines like a bright light that reminds us of how courage and personal choices are important and relevant, not only in a historical perspective but also in the present.

The story has its shadows. Some acted indifferently, or even handed over Jews to the German occupying forces. As a result, approximately 500 Jews from Denmark were deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto. And even though most were rescued, the journey and the persecution had long-lasting consequences for those who experienced it.

After the war, most of the Danish Jews returned to Denmark. Generally, they found their homes and belongings intact and were welcomed by friends and neighbours. Some, however, were less fortunate, and had to begin all over; some chose to migrate to Israel. Even though they survived a terrible fate, many of those who returned learned that relatives had perished in the camps or during the escape. Families were separated and broken apart, leaving scars that did not easily heal—if ever.

It has been 80 years since these dramatic events took place. We are at a dividing line where the last witnesses are slowly disappearing, and the story of the courage to act in Denmark is therefore more than ever relevant to remember. A series of events and commemorative acts in Denmark and internationally have been planned for this autumn. The Danish Jewish Museum and the Jewish



Still from *Voices in the Void*, produced by Humanity in Action (humanityinaction.org)

Heritage Museum in New York are holding exhibitions aimed at young audiences and their families. Special mention should be made of the new animated film *Voices in the Void* and accompanying educational material, which engage students in debates about values and personal choices in the present, based on the history of the Danish Jews. These are available free of charge in English, Hebrew, Danish and Arabic through The Ghetto Fighters' House Museum in Israel and the USC Shoah Foundation's educational platform, IWitness.

My keynote lecture at the 2023 Kristallnacht commemoration event will examine this history in light of trends in current research and public opinion and its ongoing relevance for today and future generations. This research focuses on those who were deported to, and died in, Theresienstadt, as well as on the agency of the Danish Jews, who were not bystanders in their own rescue, but rather took action to save themselves, which in no way diminishes the extraordinary fact that they received help from most in Danish society during the dramatic escape to Sweden in the autumn days of October 1943. ■

Janus Møller Jensen is the keynote speaker at the Kristallnacht commemoration at Congregation Beth Israel this year. He has been the director of the Danish Jewish Museum in Copenhagen since 2020.

COLLECTIONS NEWS

NEW TO THE COLLECTION

The VHEC has accessioned a number of items into its collection this year, including donations from Jeff Weissler, a VHEC volunteer docent, Andrew Rosengarten, Peter Hay and Joan Payne, an artist who lives in Sechelt. Payne is the granddaughter of the famed violinist Bronisław Huberman, a Polish Jew who formed an orchestra of exiled Jewish musicians in Palestine in 1936. She inherited personal items, a pastel portrait, photographs and correspondence related to Bronisław from her father, John Huberman, who passed away in Vancouver in 1998. Thank you to those who donated to the collection for their generosity in gifting us their family stories and one-of-a-kind documentary evidence of the Holocaust and its impacts on individuals, families and society. We are looking forward to digitizing and cataloguing these donations in support of our mandate.



Two medals and a pocket watch from the Bronisław Huberman collection, to be processed (2023.029 Payne).

CATALOGUING AND ACCESS UPDATE

New collections now available for research and reference include the Cohn family collection, featuring photographs and a letter donated by Saul Cohn in 1998, the Bronia Sonnenschein collection, comprising materials donated by Bronia and her son, Dan Sonnenschein, in multiple accessions, and the Eugeniusz Wilczyk Kazimierz photographs collection, donated by Mark Dwor in 2002. The VHEC compiled currency from a variety of donors over the years into a new pre-war and Second World War currency collection. View these materials in our catalogue online at collections.vhec.org.



Cohn Family collection: Letter from Nathan Cohn to his uncle A. Cohn, 99.001.001. Photograph of Nutta (father) and his sons, Saul, Sigmund and Max, 98.011.002.



Bronia Sonnenschein collection, stamp and currency series:
1-krone banknote from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia,
2020.007.008 (left: verso, right: recto).

PAST TEACHER'S GUIDES NOW DIGITALLY AVAILABLE

The VHEC received a \$1,560 grant from the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre's British Columbia History Digitization Program to digitize its complete collection of teacher's guides, prepared to accompany educational exhibitions programmed by the VHEC since opening its doors in 1994. VHEC Archivist Chase Nelson scanned seventeen teacher's guides, edited the digital files and ran optical character recognition to increase their accessibility and searchability. Completed scans can now be found on collections.vhec.org, where their lasting educational value remains accessible to the public.

STAFFING CHANGES

This summer, Director of Collections Shyla Seller left her position at the VHEC for a new opportunity in records and archives at the Land Title and Survey Authority of British Columbia, and Digital Archivist Amanda Alster took on a new position at the Museum of Vancouver. Librarian Shannon LaBelle also stepped down from her position after fifteen years of building and operating the Centre's library. Registrar Caitlin Donaldson and Archivist Chase Nelson have taken on increased responsibilities and are looking forward to bringing new energy and perspectives to collections-related projects at the Centre.

VOLUNTEER PROJECTS

Audrey Lieberman, a VHEC volunteer, is assisting the collections department to ensure that photographs are uploaded into the VHEC content management system. Audrey also double-checks titles and identifier numbers and creates inventories for the boxes. So far, Audrey has checked three boxes containing approximately 700 items, which has been a tremendous help to the collections department.



Eugeniusz Wilczyk Kazimierz photography collection: Meiselsa Street
Photo 1959, 2002.009.00, The Old Synagogue, 2002.009.003.

His Name Was Jan

A CONVERSATION WITH AMALIA BOE-FISHMAN AND SIMON SPIEKHOUT
BY LAKEN RANDHAWA

Amalia Boe-Fishman—a member of the VHEC Child Survivor Group and Holocaust survivor outreach speaker—was three years old when she went into hiding during the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands during the Second World War. She was hidden in the family home of Jan Spiekhout, a young man who worked for her father in a research laboratory in Leeuwarden. Since then, Amalia has kept in touch with the Spiekhout family. Recently she was visited by the much younger brother of Jan, Simon, who was born in 1941 while Amalia was in hiding with the Spiekhout family. When Amalia let the VHEC know that Simon was coming for a visit, we arranged for them to come to the Center to discuss their special relationship, what they are doing now, and the pivotal role Jan Spiekhout played in both of their lives. It was a rare opportunity to speak to them together to discuss the significance of their enduring relationship.

Jan Spiekhout was special to both Amalia and Simon. To Amalia, Jan was the man who saved her life by providing her shelter during the Second World War and helped her father evade the transit camps when his call-up notice came. To Simon, Jan was the beloved older brother who



Amalia Boe-Fishman, Laken Randhawa and Simon Spiekhout.

helped to protect many people, often putting himself at great risk. During our interview Simon recalled, “I was born during the war and so I had no memory about the war. My father did not tell me much and my older brother did not always speak easily about it. I did not get much information about what happened. When I was in high school, I read quite a bit about the Holocaust and I read extensively as I was very interested in what happened. Everything that I can recall is not based on life experience but on what I heard from my brother and other

family members. You see, I was the youngest of six. My older brother was nearly twenty-two years older than me and so much of the information that was passed down was through my siblings and my mother, who was often willing to speak about it.”

Amalia provided some further context relating to Jan Spiekhout’s role in helping her family and how he knew her father: “Simon’s older brother Jan was working for the resistance and he was working with my father as an assistant in a research lab. When Jan found out that my father got a call-up notice he believed he should go into hiding right away. A call-up notice is when political

dissidents and Jews were called up and sent to a central spot in the city and then sent to Westerbork, which was a transit camp. Due to this and knowing what was happening at the transit camps, Jan then found a place for each of us to live. He found a place for my father, my mother and my older brother and I went with him to his family home.” At this point in our discussion, Simon also recalled a story he had heard from his family members. “My dad was a policeman who was always on duty. Most of them at the time—many policemen—stayed home because they knew they had to go out with the Nazis to find people to do the work or to round up Jewish citizens,” Simon said. He stated that his father, instead of staying at home, often volunteered to go because he knew he could help to protect people by telling the Nazis that the people they were checking up on were not home or that they did not live in that place anymore. “He always went with the Nazis doing this type of work. He claimed he could do something if he was there. He was very brave. My father was taking many risks. As was my brother, who was doing similar work.” Amalia added, “He put his own life in danger but also put his family’s life in danger. Yes, he was very brave because the whole family could have been picked up.”

During my interview with Amalia and Simon, what struck me most was the strong bond of friendship shared between them. During our conversation, Amalia recollected a vague memory of when Simon was born. She recalled Simon’s mother being carried up the stairs of the family home. Later she realized that this was when Simon was born. She also recalled when Jan took her on the back of his bicycle to ride past the house where her father was staying so that he could see her. Amalia and Simon agree that what Jan did was significant; ultimately, it meant the future of a family history that both of them share today.

When asked about her own family, Amalia said that her father did not talk about the war much since his parents were murdered at Auschwitz and it was painful for him. Her mother, however, spoke more but only in certain contexts. Amalia recalled how important it was to her parents that they visited the families that had hidden

them during those years. “It was important to my father that we meet them and personally thank them for their bravery during that time.” During her talks as a survivor outreach speaker in schools, Amalia believes that this is a part of the story that children should hear. She and Simon feel strongly about addressing discrimination and about standing up to people who propagate hate. Amalia said, “We need to stand up to discrimination like Simon’s family did during the war.” They both are worried about what is happening online with hate speech and extreme right-wing views. Simon said it is important to “give the people the knowledge of what happened.” Amalia and Simon talked about how important it is to discuss their stories with their grandchildren.

When I asked Amalia and Simon what the word *family* meant to them, Amalia told me that she had been asked the same question several years before, during a Langara College project. “The students at Langara asked me what I wanted to call my story and I decided on ‘My Two Families,’” she said, “I always say I have two families and I call Simon my foster brother.” Simon and Amalia believe that family is important and that direct actions are important and that helping others is a legacy. When I asked them who was the one person who inspired them, they both named Jan. Amalia said, “He was always an example. And now my son [Jan’s namesake] is very proud of his name. Also, my parents always taught me to respect everyone and to try to do the right thing. They are also an inspiration.”

When asked what message they would like to conclude with, Amalia and Simon spoke about the importance of reading and to never stop learning. They talked about the courage it takes for survivors to tell their stories and the importance for future generations to know what happened. Amalia said, “I wanted to tell my story for my children, initially. But I also now go into schools because I want young people to know the positive side. To remember the people who were brave and showed courage and helped others at their own personal risk.” ■

Laken Randhawa is a volunteer in the VHEC collections department. She developed and conducted this interview.

Echoes of Resilience

A SECOND GENERATION GROUP WRITING PROJECT
BY DEBORAH ROSS-GRAYMAN

The Second Generation Group (2G) in Vancouver has been meeting for more than 20 years. We've composed a mission statement and guidelines to create a safe, confidential environment in which we can share our parents' stories of survival and our experiences growing up with survivor parents. In addition to meetings, our group has organized and participated in workshops, seminars, special projects, and local and international conferences.

During the years I have co-facilitated the Second Generation Group, our focus has shifted depending on the interests of the members. As the Covid-19 pandemic hit, a growing number of us wanted to write our own stories, of growing up as children of Holocaust survivors, and to document the survival experiences of our parents.

I reached out to one of our members, Janice Masur, who had just published her book, *Shalom Uganda*. Through Janice, we connected with Wendy Bancroft, a trained instructor in the approach called guided autobiography (GAB), which was developed by Dr. James Birren, one of the founders of the organized field of gerontology. None of us were familiar with GAB, but we soon learned it involves writing on themes and sharing these stories in small groups. Initially, six of us signed up.

My husband, Henry, and I met with Wendy to discuss what themes might be particularly important for the second generation. Wendy read books and articles and watched interviews to better understand the impact of the legacy of the Shoah on 2G, as she crafted themes especially adapted for our group. A former journalist and qualitative researcher, Wendy drew on her experience as she guided us with care. We wrote 800 to 1,000 words each week on themes such as identity and spirituality, love and intimacy, finding resilience, facing fear and

finding courage, forgiveness, and my family and myself. For six weeks we convened online to read our pieces to each other. We marvelled at the similarity in the felt experiences despite the varied external circumstances. At times it was challenging to face and hold the trauma of our parents' experiences; at times we were sleepless and anxious, but we supported each other and persevered.

In a safe and confidential space, created by Wendy and committed to by each member, a deep intimacy developed as we shared what some of us had never shared. Through listening and reflecting on the stories of each participant, our understanding of ourselves and each other grew. As we understood more, we found a deeper compassion for ourselves and for our parents.

As the sessions progressed, I began to integrate the disparate threads of my experiences into a woven tapestry of my life. I shared the following sentiment about the impact of the group experience at the end of our series: *Joined by the impact of a historical event in our lives, we came together as comrades. Like the partisans in the woods—they with weapons, we with words—we fought for truth and freedom. Arm in arm we supported each other and found the strength to continue excavating the past. What was hidden was revealed; a light shone into the dark. Our guide pointed the way with kindness and compassion. And we arrived at the end full of purpose and understanding; more connected and complete; lighter, freer, and less entangled.*

What began as a six-week course for six of us, grew to a two-year writing project for twelve members: Sidi Schaffer, Fran Alexander, Esther Chase, Gabriella Klein, Barbara Gard, Jane Heyman, Marianne Rev, Agi Rejto, Olga Cambell, Marg Van Wielingen, Henry Ross-Grayman and me.



Members of the Second Generation Group guided autobiography writing workshop.

Wendy was so impressed with our stories that she recommended we organize an anthology. Our group's focus shifted again, to prepare a manuscript for publication of an anthology of 2G writings. We have written descriptions of our parents' survival. Professor Chris Friedrichs, who taught history through memoir, has written a general historical context for the Holocaust and a brief context for each country where our parents were born. Dr. Robert Krell, a psychiatrist, author, child survivor and founding president of the VHEC, agreed to write a foreword. Now we are looking for a publisher.

We hope that our readers will include those with an interest in the Holocaust, as well as those with little or no exposure to the Holocaust. We hope that the combination of our creative writing, the descriptions of how our parents survived, and the brief historical context, will create understanding and compassion.

It is important for these stories to be recorded so future generations can better understand the impact of the Holocaust and intergenerational transmission of trauma and resilience. They are not just for the future Jewish community, but for all communities and peoples affected by war, genocide and trauma.

We wish to express our gratitude to the VHEC, Dr. Robert Krell, Professor Chris Friedrichs, Wendy Bancroft and the Birren Centre for their support and encouragement.

We will announce when our book is to be published—watch this space! ■

Deborah Ross-Grayman co-facilitates the Second Generation Group in Vancouver with her husband, Henry Ross-Grayman. She is a writer and artist with a background as a child and family therapist. You can reach her at devora040@gmail.com.

Eulogy for Alex

BY LILLIAN BORAKS-NEMETZ

You died in the line of duty and so you lived
on those days your past kept merging with the present

you chanted your life's song like the thorn bird
who sings till his heart might break
you chanted your fear of the dark as you sang
to the children to appease their fear
and you sang to the students
to teach them lessons of those barbaric times
when human life was cheap

before that day of your final departure from this world
you, the orphan, alone in your Jewish grief
chanted the song of Auschwitz
of your parents whose lives were extinguished
of your beloved Mother who was selected to step
into the showers
and of your Aunt who went with her
then you, yourself, stepped into the past
into the shower room of Auschwitz
there on the wall you saw them
what might have been those desperate scratches
into the stone while gas fumes from Zyklon B
streamed from the ceiling,
your Mother's and others' nails carving their final message
of the barbarism committed there into concrete
your soul entered that room in Auschwitz and never left
when telling your story to the students at a Warsaw hotel
when your heart broke

you left us bereft
yet full of riches
riches of your kindness compassion and love.



Alex Buckman and Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, 2022.

Words for Alex Buckman

When Alex was winding down his marathon running, I advised him to switch to training with light weights. He took to three-a-week workouts like a duck to water.

His enthusiasm never wavered. When our sessions concluded, we would go for a brisk walk. I remember those days with fondness.

It solidified our friendship. I wasn't his only friend in the child survivor group with whom he participated in a sport activity. He played golf with his dear friend Serge Vanry and, later, with Peter Voormeij. That was our beloved Alex. If you needed a friend and adviser Alex was there for you. I cried like a baby when he was unexpectedly taken from us while on the March of the Living in Poland. Goodbye my friend—save a place for me in Heaven.

—Janos Benisz

Janos is a Hungarian child survivor of the Holocaust, who survived the Strasshof concentration camp. He is a Holocaust survivor outreach speaker and a member of the Child Survivor Group of Vancouver.

We are all in deep sorrow. We, the group of people, who were so dear to Alex's heart and for whom he worked hard and endlessly to maintain a togetherness and a feeling of belonging.

Alex was my friend and I was Alex's friend.

May his memory remain embedded in our memories and in all the memories of those he touched.

Goodbye, my friend.

— Leo Vogel

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 Courtney, BC.

The last few words we exchanged, dear Alex, were when, at the end of the last meeting, you approached me to ask if the MOL will encounter the many demonstrations that take place in Israel at the time. My reply, to calm you down, was that the leaders of the group will probably avoid the places of unrest. The majority of Israel's population is not affected by them and live their normal daily life peacefully.

You were looking forward so much to this journey with your son.

I asked you a favour: when at the Kotel, please to say a prayer for the health of the members of our group.

I admired your courage and your drive. We hugged and we wished each other the best.

Will miss you so much, dear friend. Almost impossible to imagine our group without your warm welcome each time we met.

You took care of all of us.

NO LONGER ALONE



Child Survivor Group of Vancouver, Hannukah luncheon, 2022. Alex served as president of the group for almost 20 years.

Sometimes it wasn't easy. We are a strong-willed group. But you called, you emailed, you picked up, you dropped off, you "schlepped," you woke up early in the morning to send out all our emails. You made each of us feel important, cared for, and loved. Your sensitivity to all our Oys was so remarkable. You embodied what a real "mensch" is. I respected so much your search for "Yiddishkeit" in your life. You often asked David or me how to do certain things around the holidays. When you told your story and you were crying, we cried with you. It was hard to see how—with each time as you recalled the trauma of losing your parents, and your life growing up without them—your pain was visibly unbearable. I can't forget the time you told me how at the age of 4 or

5 you were singing lullabies to the younger children in hiding, afraid, in order to calm them down. The same lullabies my mother sang to me in the camp.

You cared then, and you cared until your last breath.

The kids that went with you on the march were so much more in touch with their feelings, because you were with them. Robert is right when he said that we gave you a lot in return as well. I hope so. You found your roots; you found your Jewish family, home and friends with us.

The culmination of your joy was when your son Patrick wanted to support you by going with you on this journey. It hurts to know how much you wanted him to

feel and understand your need of belonging, of sharing with the next generation your war experience, your pain, and your resilience in overcoming this evil time in your life. The joy of being with him in Israel after Poland did not happen, and that is very sad.

My dear friend, you will be missed beyond words. The war claimed another victim and that is number six million and one, Alex Buckman.

May your memory be for a blessing and may you rest in peace.

—Sidi Schaffer

Sidi is a member of the Child Survivor Group of Vancouver of Romanian origin. She is an artist and resident of Vancouver.

Walking Together



Alex Buckman at the Shawnigan Lake School symposium, 2023.

Before my trips to Montréal for my visits with Becky, I would step into the same gift shop in Kerrisdale for a little present to bring her. This shop specialized in things made in Israel, and Becky always loved whatever I brought her. The shop's owner was a friendly, talkative woman named Miriam, who I got to know well since I shopped there often.

Our initial conversations were just small talk. *Do you speak French?* Yes. *Where are you from?* Montréal. *Where did you live before Montréal?* Each time I stopped in to buy something she'd ask me more and more about myself. I finally told her I'd been born in Belgium. She then wanted me to attend a child survivor meeting group she was a part of. It was the first time I had heard the term "child survivor."

I tried imagining what a meeting would be like and thought, oh boy, it must be horrible. I told myself

I didn't need anything like that. Miriam kept at me though, until eventually I agreed to attend one meeting.

I arrived, on time as usual, at the address Miriam had given me. Meetings in those days were held in the homes of group members. I was feeling so awkward and so nervous that instead of knocking on the front door I turned around to leave. Before I could make my escape, I was stopped by a kind looking man who was coming down the front walk.

He looked at me and said, "That's exactly the way I felt when I first came here. You're new, aren't you?" I tried explaining that I didn't need to be here, that I would come back the next time. He replied, "No. It's this time. We'll walk in together." And we did.

Gathered in the living room was a group of nice, friendly-looking Jewish people. I was introduced to everyone and liked them all almost immediately. I felt welcomed and at ease, and in that moment I wished I hadn't stalled so long to join the group. I was forty-nine years old when I joined the Child Survivors Group, and it has been an integral part of my life ever since. Not since my friendship with Arnold have I felt such kinship as I do with the people in that room. They are truly my extended family. They are me, and I am them. ■

Excerpt from *Afraid of the Dark*, the memoir of Alex Buckman, produced in 2016-17 as part of Writing Lives, a Langara College project, with the recording, transcribing and editing assistance of Paulina Bustamante, Katelyn Ralph and Joey Law. Read the complete memoir at collections.vhec.org/Detail/objects/7884.

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Thank you for giving so generously to the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre's Annual Campaign. We are touched and inspired by the response. For those who have yet to donate, there is still time to give.

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Our sincere apologies for any errors or omissions.

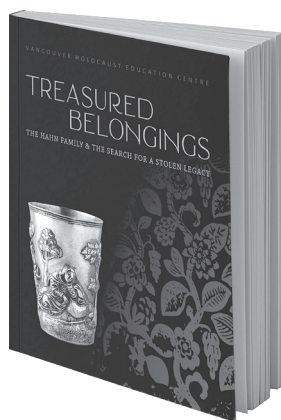
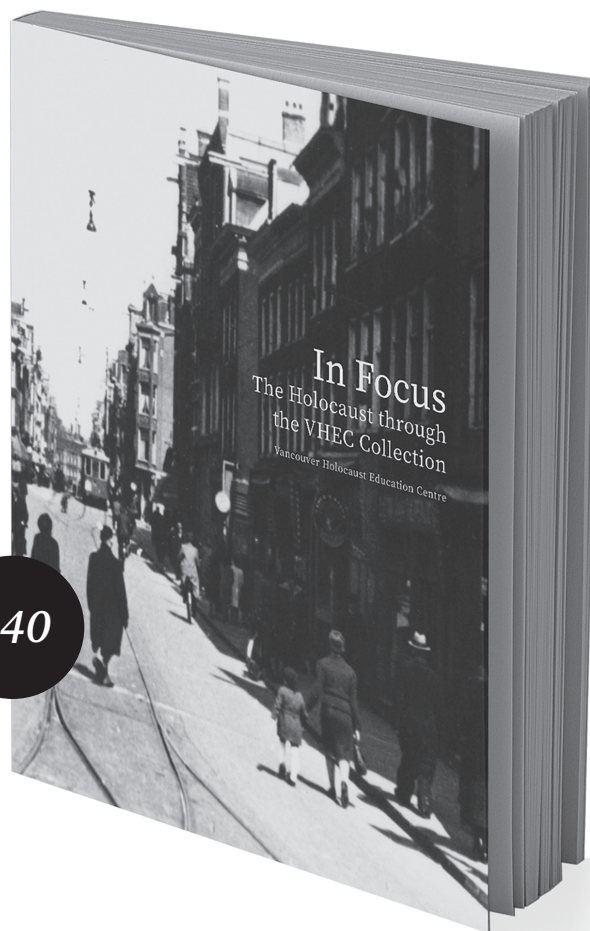
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