

The Newsletter of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre

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Zachor

"Remember"

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www.vhec.org

RAVENSBRÜCK FORGOTTEN WOMEN OF THE HOLOCAUST

FEBRUARY 14 – MAY 30, 2003



Opening Program & Reception

Ravensbrück: Forgotten Women of the Holocaust

Thursday, February 13, 2003, 7:00 pm

Lecture by Dr. Rochelle Saidel, *Remember the Women Institute*

Norman Rothstein Theatre - JCC, 950 West 41st Avenue, Vancouver

Tickets \$10 | \$5 for students & VHEC members

Reception to follow in the VHEC

Exhibit was produced in association with Mahn - Und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück

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To volunteer please contact Rome Fox
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The 3rd Biennial Shafran Educators Conference TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST

FEBRUARY 13 & 14, 2003

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2003 - 7:00 PM

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Forgotten Victims: Ravensbruck Women's Concentration Camp

by Dr. Rochelle Saidel



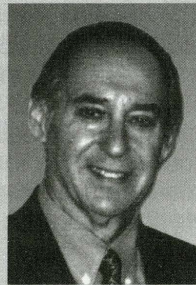
Dr. Saidel will provide general background on the Ravensbrück camp and then focus on the Jewish women who were at the camp, mentioning the stories of some of the individuals. She will also provide a gendered analysis of women's experiences and address how politics has influenced the memorialization of Jewish and other victims at Mahn- und

Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück, the memorial at the site of the camp.

Dr. Saidel is the founder and executive director of the Remember the Women Institute, based in New York City, which conducts and encourages research and cultural projects that integrate women into history. Her own focus is on Jewish women, especially women during the Holocaust.

She is also a senior researcher at the NEMGE – The Center for the Study of Women and Gender at the University of São Paulo, Brazil. She has authored several books including the forthcoming book "Jewish Women in Ravensbrück Concentration Camp."

Remarks by Alex Buckman



Alex Buckman survived as a hidden child in a Belgium orphanage. Orphaned after the war, he was raised by his aunt Rebecca Teitelbaum, who was interned in Ravensbrück and whose remarkable recipe book is featured in this exhibit. Alex Buckman is an active outreach speaker, who addresses groups in both French and English. He is a Board member of the VHEC and serves on the Survivors Advisory Committee and the Child Survivors' Group.

member of the VHEC and serves on the Survivors Advisory Committee and the Child Survivors' Group.

All are welcome to attend this public lecture and opening reception of the exhibit *Ravensbrück: Forgotten Women of the Holocaust*. Tickets are \$10 | \$5 for students and VHEC members and will be available at the door only.

Teachers, student teachers, docents and others interested in attending the full conference which continues on Friday, are invited to register by calling 604.264.0499.

WORKSHOPS AND SESSIONS ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2003

The Ogres Were Coming: The Holocaust History of Children's Fiction

Dr. Adrienne Kertzer

The appropriate boundaries of information for the younger reader are difficult to evaluate. Holocaust books are either like a nightmare or a fairytale, too awful or too wise – and the machinations beyond those of a child's imagination or psyche.

Kertzer will address the subject of Holocaust representation, whether children's Holocaust literature constitutes a distinct genre and, if so, what



are its distinguishing characteristics? She will consider how we represent to children an evil that defies our powers of imagination, let alone our comprehension. How do we convey, in addition to historical facts, the enormity of the crime while continuing to encourage hope and a sense that individual choice can make a difference?

Adrienne Kertzer is Professor of English, University of Calgary with degrees from the University of Toronto and Harvard University. She is the author of *My Mother's Voice: Children, Literature, and the Holocaust*, and the winner of the F.E.L. Priestley Prize for "Fugitive Pieces: Listening as a Holocaust Survivor's Child." She has published and spoken internationally on the intersection of children's literature and Holocaust literature. A past president of the Canadian Association of Chairs of English, she currently chairs the Children's Literature Association Phoenix Award Committee.

SHAFRAN EDUCATORS CONFERENCE

Using New Technologies

Stephen Feinberg

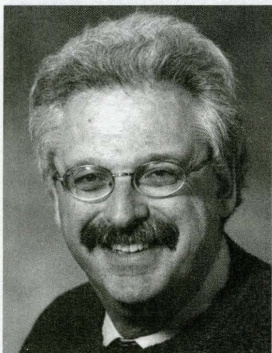
Technology has the potential to be a very potent educational tool. As with other instructional tools, it is vitally important for classroom educators to be aware of the wide variety of these technological resources. With this in mind, this session will explore a variety of Internet websites associated with the Holocaust. From public institutional websites, such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Israel, to public and private university sites, such as Yale University and Calvin College, educators will be introduced to websites that will benefit both teachers and students.

Stephen Feinberg is the Director of the National Outreach program in the Education Division of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. He is responsible for the creation, design, and implementation of the entire national educational outreach program. Formerly, he was the Coordinator of the Mandel Teacher Fellowship Program at the USHMM, a Peace Corps volunteer and a Social Studies teacher and supervisor in schools in the United States and Europe. He has developed curricula in the areas of Holocaust education, American constitutional history and is the co-editor of *Teaching and Studying The Holocaust*.

The Holocaust & the Crowded Curriculum: A 2 Hour Crash Unit

Kit Krieger

Teaching about the Holocaust is daunting for many teachers. One challenge is finding the time to address the many issues raised by the Holocaust in a very crowded curriculum. Texts used in most BC schools give scant reference to the Holocaust and provide a narrative that fails to identify the historical and existential issues central to the Holocaust. This "mini unit" uses the work of historian Lucy Dawidowicz to frame the central themes, including historical anti-semitism, international responsibility, and the roles of victims, perpetrators, bystanders and rescuers. The unit also identifies some of the critical issues in Holocaust scholarship and confronts the phenomenon of Holocaust denial within the context of contemporary anti-semitism.



The Holocaust & Social Responsibility Performance Standards

Kit Krieger

Over the past several years, teachers have developed performance standards to assist in the assessment of student work. The performance standards identify both goals to be achieved and exemplars of student success. This workshop will apply these

performance standards for Social Responsibility to the study of the Holocaust. The work of Holocaust survivor and scholar, Nachama Tec, will be used to help students identify the attributes of socially responsible behaviour in times of moral crisis.

Kit Krieger has had a keen interest in Holocaust education for nearly 30 years. He is a member of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre's Teacher Advisory Committee and has presented workshops on Holocaust education, media literacy and other curriculum areas throughout British Columbia and across Canada. He has worked in West Vancouver schools since 1974. He is a past president of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation and is currently the president of the West Vancouver Teachers' Association.

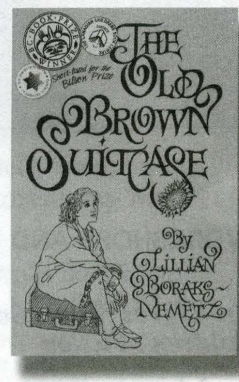
The Old Brown Suitcase – A Literature Unit

Ben Pare

It seems only natural to add life to history by reading a significant piece of literature such as *The Old Brown Suitcase* by Lillian Boraks-Nemetz. Similarly, it is difficult to fully comprehend a piece of literature without understanding the era from which it emerged. The approach used in this workshop will address and reflect on the novel's timeless themes of discrimination and prejudice, among others, recognizing that the novel can be viewed as a window into one of the most horrific tragedies of the twentieth century.



Ben Pare is a teacher at Burnaby North Secondary, where he has taught English, Social Studies, and Special Education. He has a BA in English and History from Simon Fraser University and is interested in the use of primary sources, particularly literature, as a way to examine and understand history. Pare worked with Teacher Librarians at Burnaby North, Odie Kaplan and Lorraine Gannon to develop this unit.



**Those interested in attending
the full conference**

**Thursday evening, Feb. 13 and
Friday, Feb. 14th 9 am - 3 pm**

should register in advance by calling 604.264.0499

Registration is \$90 and \$50 for students
with some subsidies available upon request.

A Reflection of the Unique Experiences of Women During the Holocaust

In many present-day armed conflicts men go missing, are detained or murdered leaving women and children as head of households. However, during the Holocaust, the Nazis specifically targeted women and children. Over 1.5 million children perished during the Holocaust and women were doubly victimized by their membership in a group targeted by the Nazis and by their gender. Women's ability to procreate and thereby threaten the purity of the "Aryan race" resulted in the murder of women or their forced sterilization, one a direct act of genocide, the other a form of delayed genocide.

The exhibit *Ravensbrück: Forgotten Women of the Holocaust*, which opens on February 13, 2002, is the first VHEC exhibit to focus specifically on the unique victimization of women during the Holocaust. The exhibit explores the response of the female inmates in Ravensbrück Concentration Camp, the largest Nazi camp established for women inmates. In the six

"Genocide is different from war. In genocide, women and children are primary targets, not accidental victims or occasional combatants"

years that Ravensbrück existed, 132,000 women and children passed through its gates. 117,000 had perished by the time the camp was liberated by the Soviets in 1945. Twenty-five percent of the women inmates were Polish, 20 percent German, 15 percent Jewish, 7 percent French, 5.5 percent Gypsy, and 8.5 percent members of other groups. The experiences of these women are communicated through the drawings, poetry and writings left by the women themselves.

The presentation of the experiences of women in Ravensbrück is not being given in opposition to, or comparison with, those of men. It does not suggest that women suf-

fered more, only differently and that as historian Marion Kaplan states, gender mattered. In many instances their gendered responses contributed to their very survival and dictated the specific strategies these women employed in an attempt to save themselves physically and emotionally. In other ways, the fact of their femaleness made them even more vulnerable.

The exhibit does not focus on the extreme persecution and sexual exploitation of these women even though these are central aspects of their experience during the Holocaust and existed to a disturbing degree at Ravensbrück. Instead the focus of the exhibition is on themes significant to women's survival: social bonding and interchange, the evidence of solidarity and attachment among unrelated women; how women responded uniquely to hunger through creative

instinct to preserve life in circumstances where it was almost impossible to do so. Women maintained their dignity amid despair by stubbornly holding on to who they were, not who their enemies defined them as.

Affection and caring was as precious a commodity in the camp as bread. Prisoners formed small, intimate groupings that served as surrogate families. The formation of these "family units" helped women cope with the brutality of camp life. For many, the love of those in their family became the reason and the means to survive, therefore, family units took every risk and precaution to stay together. Family units nurtured, shared provisions and protected each other against outsiders. Many of these camp families were closed units that did not share resources or favours with outsiders.



acts; women's acts of resistance and documentation through poetry and drawings and the way in which they continued to be caretakers – to each other and the few children that survived for a time in the camp.

These themes, solidarity, attachment, resistance and caretaking are interrelated actions and sensibilities that contributed to women's survival when and where that was possible. These aspects utilize skills that women brought with them into the camps; skills they applied to relieve suffering, to help them cope and to carry out continuous and determined acts of resistance. Solidarity, friendship, caretaking and nurturing all arose in the camp from the

Family units nursed each other when ill, and mourned the death of their members. In units of only two, if one perished the other often lost the will to live. These groupings reinforced the feeling of belonging; most had an older woman who served as a camp mother or *Lagermutter*, a protector and teacher to the younger women. Sometimes the woman in this role was only thirty years old.

A creative life was maintained by the women despite the harsh conditions, lack of resources and the risk involved. To be caught with a drawing or poem was grounds for severe punishment, yet the

making and giving of little tokens or gifts, drawing, writing poetry and the keeping of journals was a widespread activity. Camp families held birthday parties where precious handmade cards and little gifts were given. As one survivor stated there was delight in being able to give something, it did not matter what, as long as it was a rare or clearly distinctive as a gift. *"Ilse, who worked the day shift, came back at noon and turned away so I could not see what she was doing. She dug into her pocket. I have brought you a present she announced. There on a fresh leaf was a red, slightly smashed raspberry."* These gifts fought against dehumanization, the erasure of individualism and reinforced special relations. Gifts made the women conscious of the worth they held in the others eyes. Most were humble in nature, sewn or fashioned out of pliable material.

Any personally held object had to be very small in order for it to be hidden from the SS and protected from theft by other

inmates. Materials were scarce and could only be acquired through bartering or stealing from work areas; all punishable offenses. When there were searches, women would pass objects back and forth to keep them from being discovered. Women sewed secret compartments in their clothes to conceal the little recipe books and personal journals. Inmates produced hundreds of miniature drawings that documented the brutal reality of camp life, often trading a piece of bread for a stub of pencil or scrap of paper.

Even the possession of handwritten poems was a punishable offense. Yet over 1200 poems have been documented. The poems were written on fragile scraps of stolen paper and were often passed from person to person, translated into many languages and copied endlessly by other inmates. They have survived because they were hidden on their persons or in their clogs, where they were smuggled out of the camp.

Whenever possible groups remained connected to their political affiliations and beliefs. They celebrated national holidays, and were concerned with the fate of their countries. On November 11 the French women observed Armistice Day with a minute of silence. Among the items secretly made in the camp were small French flags. The women followed the frontlines of the war on a handmade atlas drawn in the camp and shared information through the 'toilet radio' where women passed information to each other while in the latrines. Most of these activities took place on Sundays, the only time the women were not in forced labour.

Despite the risks of severe punishment, prisoners within their language group pursued learning despite the conditions and barriers to such activity. Secondary school classes were organized for the younger women, complete with a textbook that was written down from memory by a former teacher. The pursuit of knowledge and learning gave the women a shared sense of purpose and an awareness of the outside world vital to their survival.

Many of the Polish women who had been teachers and professors, passionately promoted learning among the Polish inmates. They held lectures in chemistry, physics, geography, languages and literature. Many groups pursued the learning of languages, especially German and English.



Women of Ravensbrück, by inmate Helen Ernst
History Museum, Schwerin

Handwritten, tiny bound textbooks and dictionaries, small enough to be hidden were passed around and copied by the hundreds. One Polish inmate, Eugenia Kocwa wrote her own English textbook on 80 sheets of stolen toilet paper. All these activities if discovered, were punished with time in the bunker, beatings or execution.

Some women forged close bonds for warmth, physical comfort and love. A number of memoirs have been written which have as their central theme the intense attachment to another female inmate. These memoirs are often dedicated to the person that helped the author sustain the will to live. I would caution against a purely sexual interpretation, as sex did exist within the camps and was a punishable offense, but more pervasive in the camp population were the bonds of friendship.

Food, memories of it, missing it, needing it, dreaming of it, and stealing it occupy the accounts of most survivors. However, in women inmates' extreme hunger evoked a creative and gendered response; the production of small handmade recipe books. On display, as part of the Ravensbrück exhibit is one such artifact, a rare recipe book compiled and made by Rebecca Teitelbaum who was an inmate in Ravensbrück. None of these recipe books are known to have been made by men. It appears that the talk of food and the sharing of recipes during such extreme conditions was not frivolous or simply escapist. The exchange of recipes brought women back to loving families and forward to a future, a place of hope. Exchanges that strengthened their will to survive. *"The loving labour of preparing it, and the devotion, art and beauty in its creation, the*



The Stone Carriers by Maria Hirszpanska-Neumann
National Museum, Warsaw

"If you are sister-less, you do not have the pressure, the absolute responsibility to end the day alive"

Isabella Leitner, survivor

pride, and the respect on those faces around the table that knew the tortes deeper meaning. I jotted it down on scrap paper found in trashcans in the factory – taken, stolen. They were pieces covered in penciled recordings of German workers wages, but I overlooked the words underneath. I wrote the ingredients down, hardly able to grip the stump of a pencil, the recipes of nameless women."

This 'cooking with the mouth' brought women back to the experience of the family, to their identity as wives, daughters and mothers. These books must be seen as acts of spiritual resistance against a de-human-

even the subtlest forms of resistance, women still carried out defiant acts of sabotage in almost every work detail. Inmates impeded or slowed production, pretended to make mistakes, and intentionally removed parts from machines. Women sewing buttons on uniforms left the threads un-knotted so they would fall off after a short time. French women working in factories routinely grabbed handfuls of parts and threw them into the woods as they marched back to camp.

Women made difficult choices in resisting Nazi barbarism, choices for which they suffered all of their lives. In many of the camps, women who gave birth were automatically murdered with their children. To save some of the lives the women working in the hospital inmates took heroic measures. "One day we decided we had been weak enough. We must at least save the mothers. To carry our plan we would have to make the infants pass for stillborn. The pain of such a decision was the price women had to make – to salvage something rather than nothing. And so the Germans succeeded in making murderers of even us. To this day the picture of those murdered babies haunts me. The only meager consolation is that by these murders we saved mothers."

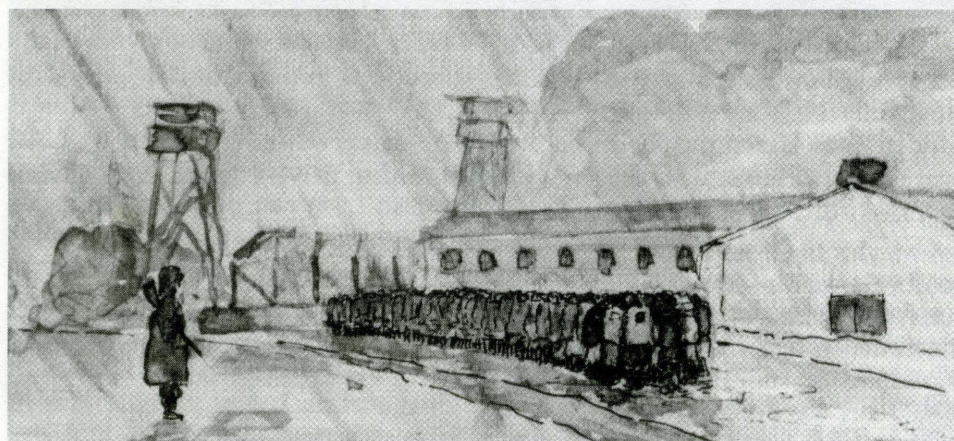
the Red Cross rescue, died in Sweden between May and November 1945. The oldest was 46, the youngest 14. It is important to remember that these women died after their liberation.

Tens of thousands of women who had remained in Ravensbrück were forced on a northwesterly 'death march' by the SS. Many hundreds died of exhaustion during



Girls with Red Cross packages arrive in Denmark, April 1945

Collection of Tage Christensen



Prisoners on the road to work

ized world. Some were even used as a form of clandestine documentation. The list of ingredients masking lists of transports and nationalities arriving in the camp.

Even though the penalty for sabotage was death and guards were trained to detect

Shortly before the end of the war, 7,500 women survivors from Ravensbrück were brought to Switzerland and Sweden with the help of the International Red Cross. Many of the women who were evacuated were too starved, brutalized or ill to survive. For example, 3500 Jewish women, part of

these marches. A Red Cross official who was present, by chance, as the marchers set off from Ravensbrück wrote in his report: "As I approached them, I could see that they had sunken cheeks, distended bellies and swollen ankles. Their complexion was sallow. All of a sudden, a whole column of those starving wretches appeared. In each row a sick woman was supported or dragged along by her fellow-detainees. A young SS woman supervisor with a police dog on a leash led the column, followed by two girls who incessantly hurled abuse at the poor women."

On April 30, 1945 Soviet troops entered Ravensbrück. They found 3000 women who had remained behind in the camp; these women were ill, malnourished and in very poor condition. As the Soviet troops overtook those on the death march they found several thousand more that were still alive. After liberation, the suffering for many women was not over – for many the legacy of their incarceration and starvation was sterility and shame.

RIDING THE BUS TO FREEDOM

Bus Operator: Swedish Red Cross

Departure Point: Ravensbrück Concentration Camp

Departure Date: April 28, 1945

Destination: Sweden

by Vanessa Matt, Museum Studies intern, Museum of Anthropology

This was no ordinary bus ride. No one gathered at a bus stop awaiting its arrival. Nor did anyone purchase a ticket from a booth, then sit in a terminal and wait. For those women able to squeeze into one of the white buses with the identifiable red cross, this bus ride generated opposing emotions: fear of further atrocities to come or that fair-weather friend, hope. Although the physical destination was Sweden, the last stop on this route would be more appropriately named freedom.

In the *Atlas of the Holocaust*, Martin Gilbert writes, "On April 28 the Red Cross arranged with the SS for the transport of 150 Jewesses from Ravensbrück to Sweden". The rescue efforts of the Swedish Red Cross, the International Red Cross, and the Danish Red Cross meant that thousands of women's lives were saved, Jewish and non-Jewish, from the concentration camp at Ravensbrück. In the highest estimation of those saved, Leni Yahil states, "In the end 14,000 women of all nationalities were released from Ravensbrück and transferred, either by ship or by train, first to Denmark and then on to Sweden" before the war ended.

Ravensbrück was established by the Nazis as a female work camp, the only one of its kind. The number of women who were interned at the camp is staggering: 132,000, of which 117,000 perished. The camp housed women of various nationalities and affiliations, such as those who were Jewish, Jehovah's Witnesses, political dissidents, Gypsies and homosexuals. However, all were one and the same to the undiscerning "high wall with electrified barbed wire enclos(ing) the women in the camp". One survivor of Ravensbrück, Barbara Szymanska, narrates her experience as an inmate, saying: *"I worked in many places in the camp. For a while I was working in the fields, then in the squad of twenty-five or thirty women who were working outside of the camp making airplane parts. In the morning we walked a few miles to the factory, worked the whole day, and walked back to the camp at night. I was transferred many times from one place to another until finally I was working in the kitchen. There I had more bread, I could eat enough."*

When it became evident that Germany was losing the war, Heinrich Himmler began to negotiate with the Allies. In 1945, as head of the Gestapo and commander-in-chief of the German home front, Himmler decided to take matters into his own hands. His aim was to bargain with Count Folke Bernadotte, a diplomat from neutral Sweden, in order to bring about an armistice.

Although the Allies did not give consent to Himmler's offer of conditional surrender, Bernadotte still succeeded in achieving the release of female prisoners in the spring of 1945. In terms of securing the liberation of prisoners, it has been suggested that, "Kersten and Masur negotiated for the release of the Ravensbrück prisoners; Bernadotte merely worked out the



Ravensbrück prisoners in Padborg await transport to Sweden, April 1945

Museum of Danish Resistance

Born in Stockholm, Sweden, Count Folke Bernadotte held the position of vice-president of the Swedish Red Cross in 1945. It was with his assistance that an agreement, not for Germany's surrender to the Allies but, for the release of prisoners from Nazi concentration camps would be solidified. Bernadotte met with Himmler who stated that, "Hitler was dying and that he was in authority, (he) offered the complete surrender of Germany to Britain and the United States, provided Germany was allowed to continue resistance against Russia". Over the course of four meetings between Bernadotte and Himmler, discussions took place regarding "the possible transfer of the concentration camps to the International Red Cross [and] of releasing Polish women from Ravensbrück".

details of the transportation of the inmates to Sweden". Indeed, the rescue was due in part to the involvement of Norbert Masur, of the World Jewish Congress in Sweden, as well as Felix Kersten, whose affiliation with Himmler was most curious and crucial.

As Himmler's masseur, Kersten gained a position of close confidence that led to his role as mediator during Himmler's political negotiations. Kersten's unusual appointment arose from his ability to relieve Himmler of severe abdominal pains. One source suggests that Kersten refused pay and instead, "requested that certain people then held in custody by Himmler be freed".

Being the go-between for the World Jewish Congress in Sweden and Himmler,

Kersten was the messenger of Himmler's new tactic for survival: saving the Jews. This maneuver is described as follows: "Just as Himmler had negotiated with Bernadotte in the hope of opening an

Regardless of what had been said behind closed doors, the buses were allowed through the gates of Ravensbrück and women were shuttled out. The following descriptions of the rescue, including first-hand testimonials, will attest to the success of the potentially dangerous deliberations with Himmler, which opened up the world to those who had so long been kept in the dark.

On each mission of retrieval, "they managed to pack sixty women per bus – fifteen hundred women on vehicles meant for one-third that number". Hannah Horon, a Polish Jew, was a passenger on one of the buses sent by the Swedish Red Cross.

The fear she felt, as opposed to relief, at the hands of her rescuers illustrates the effects of the cruel treatment she had experienced during her imprisonment at Auschwitz and Ravensbrück: "The Red Cross sent buses, and the Germans gave us packages with food that came from America. First, we didn't know where we

were going (sic). We didn't believe that we were going to freedom, so we didn't care anymore. We were traveling with the Swedish Red Cross during the day, and during the night we were in the woods. And the Swedish soldiers were giving us chocolate, and we were afraid to take it, because we thought maybe it was poison. And they were talking Swedish to us, but we didn't understand. And they were smiling, 'take it,

good, good,' but we were afraid. So, we traveled for a few days, three or four days."

Although an agreement had been made between the Nazis and representatives

from neutral countries, the journey to freedom was riddled with obstacles due to the secretive nature of the endeavor. As the war turned sour for the German front, Hitler called for 'total war', which broadened the field of intended targets for both warring sides. Ted Schwarz writes: The Allied pilots knew nothing of the Bernadotte mission. All they saw were bright red "targets" set off against white painted buses in a sea of humanity. The pilots undoubtedly would have avoided the buses had they known of the mission. But the rescue that was taking place in secret- if revealed it would cost the lives of as many as thirty thousand inmates whose freedom would have been denied. An example of the dangerous consequences of these stealthy movements was the death of five passengers during an Allied air-raid.

Liberated from the camp in late April, Mina Lefkovitz Goldstein recalls "there were 30 buses with 100 women each [and] once in Sweden, she was first placed in quarantine for two weeks". When the buses reached Copenhagen, Denmark, the women sailed to Malmö by ferry. In Sweden, "they received clothing, food, and medical attention and were then sent to recuperate in different locations".

Though not an account of the arrival of women from Ravensbrück, Cor Bouchette details the vision of Jewish refugees coming from the Netherlands, who were submitted to similar disinfecting practices in Sweden. As a bystander, he describes the vision that greeted him and the feelings of those on shore:

"When the Ferry Boat arrived in Malmö, Sweden, gang planks were installed and the first contingent of Jewish Dutch woman (sic) stepped out onto the docks, as scared to death as street dogs. However, then they heard 'Welcome to Sweden', it was as if the sun broke through the dark clouds, and they smiled and waved. Some of us on the docks wanted to put out arms around them and hug them, however we were not allowed to touch our own countrymen because they had to be disinfected first."

It was under similar circumstances that the passengers of the Red Cross buses would have found themselves miraculously transported back to life.

All of the events surrounding the Holocaust carry the weight of unbearable sadness. From this perspective, the heroic activities of those with courageous hearts are the more memorable and wonderful. The ride of the Red Cross buses is one such event that offers proof that the will of those to do good can and will prevail.



Rescue bus of the Swedish Red Cross
Photo by Bengt Ericsson

avenue to talks with the Western Allies and of concluding a separate peace, he now apparently believed that the Jews could help him in this cause". This led to the unlikely meeting of Norbert Masur, from the World Jewish Congress, and Himmler himself. From this conference, it



Ravensbrück prisoners in transit to Sweden
Collection of Tage Christensen

is said that, "The only concrete result of the talk was his agreement to release 1000 Jewish women from Ravensbrück in addition to the French women imprisoned there".

BLACK TRIANGLES: THE ROMA AND SINTI OF RAVENSBRÜCK

by Scott Anderson

Since 1945, thousands of works have been written exploring Holocaust history. Of these, only a few recent studies fully explore the extent of the Nazi persecution of the Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), two distinct groups, persecuted by the Nazis for their heritage, lifestyle and culture. Approximately 500,000 Roma and Sinti perished during the Holocaust in camps such as Ravensbrück. Knowledge of their story, for much of the twentieth century, has been absent from the public consciousness.

On June 29, 1939 the first transport of Roma and Sinti women, and children, arrived in Ravensbrück from Austria. Labelled racially 'inferior' and 'a threat to the biological purity of the Aryan race' they were imprisoned and marked with the black triangle for asocials. Roma and Sinti encountered prejudices even among other inmates at Ravensbrück. They were considered 'dirty' and degenerate thieves, looked down upon by other inmates. Jews and Roma and Sinti were the only groups with segregated barracks and were at the very bottom of the camp's hierarchy.

The interaction between Roma and Sinti and women from other groups was limited. This interaction, part of a larger cooperative among the inmates of Ravensbrück, was typical in that each group had skills or resources that the others utilized. Roma and Sinti would tell fortunes for other inmates using handmade cards, made by non-Roma and Sinti women for this purpose. The telling and receiving of a fortune offered them hope for the future. This simple act was an important form of spiritual resistance for both participants. One they were willing to risk their lives for, as to be caught with illegal items, such as cards, could mean severe punishment.

Roma and Sinti also participated in more overt and direct resistance activities. A Roma woman carried out the first escape from Ravensbrück. She wrapped herself in a blanket to insulate her from the high

voltage wires and crossed into the surrounding woods. A massive manhunt with dogs was launched and severe reprisals were taken out on the remaining Roma and Sinti women in her block. On the third day, she was found and brought back to the camp where she was beaten to death.

Some of the most monstrous acts Nazis committed were the medical experiments and forced sterilizations performed on prisoners, many of them were Roma and Sinti women and children. Ravensbrück was a major site for a variety of Nazi experimentation programs. Experiments, without the use of anaesthetic, were carried out against the will of prisoners. After inflicting indescribable pain, these experiments were often fatal.

Many Roma and Sinti women and young girls were sterilized in Ravensbrück. These invasive and painful procedures were performed on 'volunteers' who took part with the promise that they would be freed. The sterilizations were part of the Nazi program of 'delayed genocide' - murdering a future generation by making the women unable to

procreate. Many who were sterilized in these experiments died from infections. All suffered untold mental and physical anguish. None of the 'volunteers' were ever freed.

By 1945, 5,000 Roma and Sinti women and children had passed through the gates of Ravensbrück. The majority did not survive. Germaine Tillion, a Ravensbrück survivor, once noted, "nothing else in the long catalogue of German crimes surpassed the slaughter of the gypsies (even the Jews often had the good fortune to die quickly). Every variety of murder was tried on them: more than any other group they were forced to serve as guinea pigs for 'scientific' experiments, and at Ravensbrück, while some Germans might be sterilized as a form of punishment, only the gypsies were subjected to such treatment as a group, one after another - even the youngest girls."



'Gypsy Girl' drawn by Aat Breuer

Strength in the Telling: Gypsy Women Survivors of the Holocaust

by author Toby Sonneman

Free public lecture

March 6th, 2003, 7:30pm

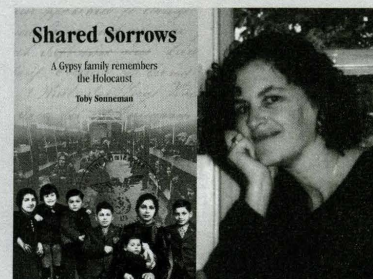
Alice MacKay Room

Vancouver Public Library

Central Branch, Lower Level

350 West Georgia

"In Honour of International Women's Day - March 8"



Toby Sonneman has a BA in anthropology and a MA in writing. She currently teaches journalism at Whatcom Community College in Bellingham, Washington.

In 1991, Toby co-founded, The Romani-Jewish Alliance, a coalition organization of Jews and Gypsies, which was active until 1996. Toby devoted ten years to the oral history project for Shared Sorrows her most recent book.

Toby Sonneman's talk is sponsored by the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, the Institute for European Studies UBC, Women Studies SFU, and the Vancouver Public Library.

A Ravensbrück Concentration Camp Survivor's Story

by John Gort

When contemplating a Nazi killing machine, such as the Ravensbrück concentration camp for women, it is essential to view the prisoners not as a faceless mass within the millions who suffered the Holocaust but as individuals who suffered a tragic fate at the hands of their torturers. Understanding the fate of individual victims demands that we re-create these victims in our minds as living, breathing persons.

Dr. Gertrud Luckner was born in Liverpool, England, in 1900. Having been left an orphan following the early death of her parents, she was chosen as a foster-child by the Luckner family. It wasn't until 1922 that she was finally adopted by the Luckners. While Gertrude was still a toddler the Luckners moved to Germany. She spent her early years in Berlin, where her education was often interrupted by illness. Because of her poor health she did not obtain her high-school certificate until the unusually late age of 25 years. Although she continued to suffer from health problems, Gertrud pursued her interest in the social sciences by studying economics at several universities including those of Königsberg, Frankfurt and Birmingham. In 1938 she completed her doctoral dissertation entitled "Self-help Among the Unemployed in England and in Wales Based on English History of Ideas and Economics" and went on to obtain her Ph.D. degree from the University of Freiburg.

After completing her degree Dr. Luckner joined the Catholic Caritas Organization of Freiburg. With the approval and active support of Archbishop Conrad Gröber she organized the "Office for Religious War Relief" (Kirchliche Kriegshilfsstelle). At a time when most Germans enthusiastically embraced the Nazi program that deprived their Jewish fellow-citizens, first of their rights and eventually of their very lives, she, as a Christian and a German did everything in her power to mitigate the effects of the Nazi persecution of the Jews and other enemies of the regime. During the night of November 10th 1938 she warned many Jews of the forthcoming Kristallnacht action and thus saved them from arrest and incarceration. Much of the means she used to assuage the hunger of the Jewish victims of Nazi savagery were procured by her own fearless initiative. She also used financial offerings contributed by

her clerical superiors to meet expenses, such as bribes, incurred in smuggling Jews across the Swiss border and to send to the outside world messages from Jews and other "non-Aryans" who were endangered by the hate laws of the Nazi regime.

The Gestapo, had been aware of Dr. Luckner's clandestine activities for some time. They finally arrested her in Berlin on March 24, 1943. She was found in possession of RM. 5000, intended to help alleviate the distress of the remaining Jews of Berlin. The Gestapo sent Dr. Luckner to Ravensbrück, where she remained for eight months in constant mortal danger. She was released in July 1943, with her health severely impaired by her ordeal, and returned to Freiburg to continue to strive for understanding between Christians and Jews. After the war The Federal Government of Germany showed its appreciation of Dr. Luckner's heroic work by awarding her the Great Service Cross with Ribbon. The city of Freiburg honoured her by bestowing upon her the freedom of the city in 1979, as well as naming a school, the Gertrud-Luckner-Gewerbeschule, in her memory.

This then, is the story of Dr. Gertrud Luckner as told by contemporary German historians. Jewish sources share this admiration for Dr. Luckner's steadfast adherence to her humanitarian principles in the face of personal mortal danger. The State of Israel acknowledged its admiration for Dr. Luckner's work by inducting her into Yad Vashem as "Righteous among the Nations" in 1966.

Yet this story of Dr. Luckner's service remains mired in historical controversy. The dispute is focussed not on her personal merit, which is agreed upon by all parties, but rather on the assertion of the active help that she is said to have received by her Caritas Order, by the archbishop and by the Catholic clergy of the arch diocese of Freiburg. Thus Daniel Jonah Goldhagen an American historian of the Holocaust, asserts that Luckner had "difficulty in persuading others to participate in her work", and considers the story of the help given to Dr.

Luckner by the Catholic Church one more clumsy attempt to obscure the facts of the collaboration between the Nazi government and the Catholic Hierarchy.

Goldhagen supports this contention by relating that when Luckner approached the office of the Pope Pius XII after the war to request his help for her work as head of the only Catholic group in Germany devoted to the goal of reconciliation of Christians and Jews, he not only refused her request but issued a warning to the German Church alleging that efforts of religious groups (such as Luckner's) to attack antisemitism "encourages religious indifferentism. (the belief that one religion is as good as another.)"



Dr. Gertrud Luckner

All this puts into serious doubt the assertion by post-war apologists that the Catholic hierarchy assisted those few Germans who actively engaged in helping Jews. The evidence adduced by Goldhagen and others points to the opposite conclusion, which is that the Church hierarchy lent their active support to the eliminationist practices of the German government during the Nazi era.

The problem of the role of the Church during the Holocaust deserves much closer scrutiny than it can receive here. However, Dr. Gertrude Luckner deserves to be remembered as just one of the many inmates of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp who were punished for refusing to surrender their humanistic principles to the brutal threat of Nazi rule.



Rebecca Buckman Teitelbaum

Alex Buckman last saw his birth mother in 1941 when he was only two years old. After the war, and for the majority of his life, it was his aunt Rebecca, sister of his father Isaac Buckman, who became his primary caregiver, raising him as her own. Rebecca left several precious artifacts to Alex that have been placed in the VHEC archives. These artifacts help us tell not only Rebecca Buckman Teitelbaum's story but also the stories of the other women who were deported and interned in Ravensbrück. Several of these artifacts are on display as part of the exhibit: The Forgotten Women of Ravensbrück opening on February 13, 2003.

Within months Alex's cousin Anny knew the reality of what had occurred. Later young Alex learned what happened to his parents and about Rebecca's time in Ravensbrück. Throughout his childhood Rebecca spoke to him about her Holocaust experiences. After the Nazi occupation of Belgium in May 1940 anti-Jewish measures were quickly enforced and a census of all Jews was required. Jews were prohibited from working in many fields and a process of intimidation and humiliation preceded deportations, which began in 1942. Even though Belgium opposed the deportations of its own Jews, the Germans began immediately to deport Jewish refugees living in the country. Jews in Belgium numbered nearly 90,000, about half were not Belgian citizens, but were mostly Jewish refugees who had fled from Nazi persecution in neighboring countries. Most of the population denounced the measures and many joined ranks and began to work in resistance activities.

Non-Jews working in the Belgian resistance put in place a complex network to keep Jewish children safe by placing them in hiding. Alex, and his three-year-old cousin Anny were placed in hiding, arranged by Alex's father Isaac Buckman. They were placed in an orphanage as though they were Catholic children. They were registered as siblings in the hope that they would be kept together.

In November 1943, after placing the children in hiding both Alex's and Anny's parents were arrested by the Gestapo in the middle of the night and deported. They had been betrayed by a neighbour. She had been extorting money and food coupons from the Buckmans. In one year alone, from 1943-1944 over 8,285 Jews from Belgium arrived at Auschwitz- Birkenau on ten transports. Dwora and Isaac Buckman, Alex's parents were among these transports. Most, like Alex's parents, were gassed soon after their arrival. His mother was the first to be murdered by the Nazis, his father a short time after. Anny's parents were also deported, Herman to Buchenwald and Rebecca to Ravensbrück. Herman sent two heavily censored letters from

Buchenwald dated April 13, 1944 and August 6, 1944, to his wife in Ravensbrück.

Alex and Anny, believing they were siblings, remained in hiding for four years, hoping and waiting for their parents return. When the war ended Alex was six and a half, Anny was seven. The end of the war found Rebecca in a hospital in Copenhagen, Denmark recuperating from her experiences at Ravensbrück. She had been part of the remarkable Swedish Red Cross rescue, which took place near the end of the war. A telegram arrived at the hospital in Copenhagen. She was afraid to open it because three other women had received telegrams that same day telling them that their husbands had not survived. Rebecca's telegram was from her husband Herman telling her that he was alive and waiting for her in Belgium. Three months later Rebecca arrived back in Brussels. The "new" family, which included their daughter Anny, nephew Alex and a new baby Abe, born in Brussels in 1946 immigrated to Montreal in 1951. In 1953 another daughter, Shirley, was born in Canada.



Rebecca's story parallels, yet is unique among the thousands of other Jewish women who were in Ravensbrück. Most Jewish women who were interned in Ravensbrück were only in the camp toward the end of the war, for only a few weeks or months. Rebecca was interned there for 17 months. Most of those who were there for this period of time did not survive, making Rebecca's survival unique. She was, literally one of a small number of Jewish women to survive.

In total 1,000 Jewish women were part of the Swedish Red Cross rescue. They had permission to take 3,000 Jewish women, but could not find that number still alive in the camp. Since there were not enough Jewish women to fill the quota, Polish Catholic women went in their place.

Rebecca spent her seventeen months in Ravensbrück as a slave labourer. She was first assigned to work in hard labour (4 months), hauling wood and stone in heavy carts in harsh outdoor conditions. Any longer than 4 months and she might not have survived this work assignment. However, because she had worked in a department store in Belgium, she was able to secure a better work assignment in the office of the Siemens Factory. All those working in the Siemens factory moved to the Seimenslager to live, which contributed to Rebecca's survival. Conditions in the barracks of this sub-camp were better than those in the main camp. It was at Siemens that she was able to steal a roll of brown paper, a pencil and a pair of scissors used to produce the items on display in the exhibit, one of the rare surviving recipe books produced by women in the camp.

NO LONGER ALONE

Food dominated the consciousness of the women. Called "cooking with the mouth" women tried to assuage their hunger by talking about food, menus and recipes. Many, like Rebecca, deprived themselves of a half-ration of bread in order to "buy" needles and thread or they stole materials in order to create tiny recipe books that became valued pieces of personal property. In these "cookbooks" they recorded recipes from memory, or those recited to them by other inmates. These booklets had to be made and kept secretly. To possess such a book was a punishable offence. Rebecca related later in life, how the recipes were read over and over and over again - they were dreaming of life before and after the Holocaust and the foods they would prepare for husbands and families. On one recipe it says in French – something to make your hair grow back.

When this book was completed, Rebecca went on to produce two more recipe books as gifts for other women, as well as another thin volume containing poems and resistance songs (on display). She made two sets of playing cards; Gypsies in the camp used them to tell fortunes. The cards and one of the recipe books were stolen in the camp. In a world where the smallest infraction was met with immediate punishment and even death, these books, and the determination to hide and retain a few personal possessions within the camp can only be seen as an act of spiritual defiance.

The survival of the recipe book was as remarkable as Rebecca's own survival. As the Allies approached in late March 1945 the order was given for Ravensbrück to be evacuated. Twenty four thousand prisoners were sent on death marches to Mecklenburg. Rebecca was among the 1,000 Jewish women prisoners who were part of the Swedish Red

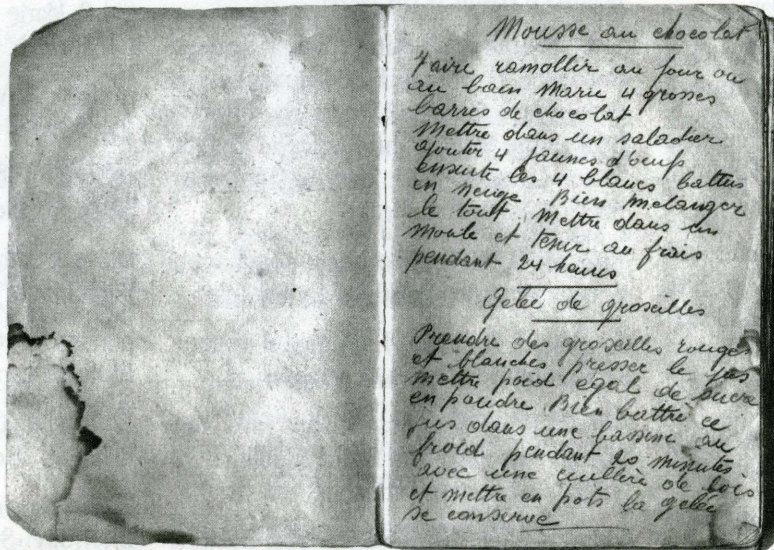
Cross rescue effort, some of which were handed over to the Danish Red Cross. During the evacuation process, which was secret, not known to either the Allied or German forces, the Red Cross trucks were hit by "friendly fire". As bombs hit, everyone was ordered to jump into a

nearby ravine. Rebecca hesitated before complying but some of the other women who remained behind were killed in the ensuing bombing attack. Shrapnel from the explosion injured Rebecca's left arm and during the scuffle her bundle of things she had kept hidden in the camp was left on the truck. Surprisingly, two years later this package, containing the recipe book and the precious letters from her husband, sent to her in Ravensbrück was returned to her. Her name on the letters contained the information needed to trace her in Belgium. This little book was tucked away but not forgotten. Alex found the book of recipes fifty years later in a drawer in his aunt's home in Ottawa. After Rebecca's death Alex brought the book to Vancouver where he placed it for safekeeping in the VHEC archives.

"The pages are meticulously hand stitched as a little volume that can rest comfortably in the palm of one's hand. The space is so parsimoniously apportioned that usually two recipes share each of the tiny 4x6" pages. Rebecca explains how upon

the book's completion each of the women would take turns reading from its pages: mousse au chocolate, gelée de groseilles, gâteau-neige, plat hongrois, oeuf hollandais, sabayon italien, soufflé à la confiture."
- Frieda Miller, VHEC Education Coordinator

Rebecca Buckman Teitelbaum, who is the only mother Alex has ever known, passed away in December 1998.



Rebecca's recipe book
VHEC Archives, donated by Alex Buckman



Rebecca and friend after Liberation in Copenhagen
Collection of Alex Buckman

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In Honour of the Terry Szajman Education Endowment Fund; Bertha Fraeme Endowment Fund; Regina Feldman & Gail Feldman Heller Fund. Bert Smollan

A video has been donated in honour of Lola Apfelbaum.. Rob & Marilyn Krell & Family

David & Gary Feldman, A book has been donated in Memory of Regina Feldman. Rob & Marilyn Krell & Family

John Gort, Thank you. Lucy Laufer

Leon Kahn, In gratitude for your book *No Time to Mourn*. Errol Lipschitz

Marla Morry, Thank you. Lucy Laufer

In Honour of Or Shalom & your blessing of the Bearing Witness trip. Patricia Wilensky

Dr. & Mrs. Stanley Sunshine, With appreciation. Lee Glusman

Bronia Sonnenschein, In Honour of your Outreach Presentation. Port Moody Secondary School

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Get Well

Archie Baker, Wishing you a Speedy Recovery. Leslie Spiro

Mr. Morry Chernov, Get Well Soon. Leo & Jocy Lowy

Dora Davis, Wishing you a Speedy Recovery. Hymie & Fay Davis

Sid Doduck, Wishing you a Speedy Recovery. Debbie & Eddie Rozenberg & Family; Jack & Karen Micner; The Board & Staff of the VHEC; Grace & David Ehrlich; Celina Lieberman; Art, Sam & Al Szajman; Sheila & Norman Archeck

Rita Eidelstein, We hope you have a Speedy Recovery. David & Gary Feldman

Dr. Lionel Fishman, I am glad it is over, recover quickly! Celina Lieberman

Miriam Friedberg, Best Wishes for a very Speedy Recovery. The Board & Staff of the VHEC; 2nd Generation Group

Henry Gelfer, Speedy Recovery. David & Gary Feldman

Mr. Bernie Reed & Family, Speedy Recovery. Leo & Jocy Lowy

Mrs. Vera Rozen, Quick Recovery! Celina Lieberman

Leslie Spiro, Thinking of you & wishing you Good Health. Norman & Linda Gold & Family

Herschel Wosk, Speedy Recovery. David & Gary Feldman

Meyer Wohl, Speedy Recovery & Good Health! The Losers of the Poker Game.

Mazel Tov!

Selma & Eugene Albersheim, Happy Chanukah! Susan Albersheim, Steve Barer & Family

Joseph Achsen, Best Wishes on your Birthday! Frieda & the Family Wertman

Rita Akselrod, Congratulations on you Honour. You are an inspiring woman. Sheryl & Saul Kahn; Jody & Havey Dales

Mr. & Mrs. Averbach, Mazel Tov on the Birth of your great-grandson! Judy, Neil,

Dory & Megan Kornfeld

Agi Bergida, Best Wishes on this very Special Birthday. Norman & Sheila Archeck

Sid & Marie Doduck, Mazel Tov on Tyler's Bar Mitzvah. Barrie & Ellen Yackness

Andrew & Aimee Gabor, Congratulations on your new Grandson. Lillian Nemetz

Betty Goldblum, Happy Birthday, Aunt Betty. Debbie & Eddie Rozenberg & Family

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Marianna Goldstick, Happy Special Birthday. Leonore & Milt Freiman

Paul Heller, Our Best Wishes to you on your Birthday. Daeniela & Stephen Bheumont

Nadia Kaplan, In honour of your 95th Birthday! Sandi & David Crystal; Ruth Kliman

In Honour of Janos Maté. Gabor & Rae Maté, Eliza Shawn

Phil Moses, Mazel Tov! Gaynor, Ivor, Samantha & Marc Levine

Janice Newton, A very Happy Birthday. Judy, Neil, Dory & Megan Kornfeld

Mr. Jack Polak, Congratulations until a 120! Susan Ricardo Quastel

Mr. Max Power, Happy Birthday. Lola & Bill Mendelson

Dr. & Mrs. Rottenberg, On your 40th Anniversary. Mary Steiner

Elayne Shapray, for The New York Times & a very Happy Birthday. The Kornfelds

Salek & Nadia Sporn, Mazel Tov. Henry Sporn

Stan Taviss, Happy Birthday! Bernie & Sandra Bressler

Susan & Steve Tick, In Honour of the babies. Lani Levine & Andrew Thom

Mr. & Mrs. Trojanowski, In your Honour. Emelita & Nathan Batt

Jody & Harvey Dales, Mazel Tov on your 11th Anniversary. David Feldman

Deepest Sympathy

Mr. & Mrs. Jeff Gelfer & Family, Heartfelt Sympathy. Ida Kaplan; Odie & Sherie Kaplan; Karen & Les Cohen & Family

Steven & Harriet Albersheim, Our Deepest Sympathies on the passing of your Mother.

Susan Albersheim, Steve Barer & Family

Iris Andrews, In Memory of Your Brother, Neville Lawrence. Irv Wolak; Susan & Joe Stein

Doba Baker & Families, With Deepest Sympathy. Mary Knopp; Margaret & Jack Fraeme

Helen Berger, Deepest Condolences. Ida Kaplan; Odie & Sherie Kaplan; Lola Apfelbaum

Deborah Epstein & Family, Our Deepest Sympathy on the loss of your Father. Hymie & Fay Davis; Susan & Joe Stein; Irv Wolak

Mrs. Wosk & Family, Our hearts are with you. Rosalie, Dov & Sally Dimant

David Feldman, We're thinking of you, sending our love. Chaim & Susie Micner; Gerry & Andrea Zimmerman & Family

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Dr. & Mrs. M. Gelfer & Family, In Blessed Memory of your Father & Grandfather, Henry. Hymie, Rome, Aylee, Danya & Aiden Fox; Rob & Marilyn Krell; Gerry & Andrea Zimmerman & Family; Ida Kaplan; David & Gary Feldman; The Szajman Family; Odie & Sherie Kaplan; Leo & Jocy Lowy; Izzy Fraeme; Judy & Neil Kornfeld; Karen & Les Cohen & Family

Marcy Glanzberg, With our Deepest Sympathy on the loss of your Father. Judy & Neil Kornfeld

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Alex Jackson, Sorry to hear about the loss of your Father. Gary Feldman, Joe Markovich & Nathan Fox, your bandmates

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Eva Krug, Our Deepest Condolences on your loss. The Board & Staff of the VHEC

Betty Levine, In Memory of your beloved Mother, Tauba Szlukier. Joe & Susan Stein & Family

Sherry Levinson & Family, With Deepest Sympathy on the loss of your Father. Babs & Ted Cohen; David & Cathy Golden & Family; Ida Kaplan; Odie & Sherie Kaplan; Karen & Les Cohen & Family

Jocy Lowy & Family, With Deepest Sympathy on the loss of your Husband & Father, Leo. Mona, Morrie & Robin Chernov; Lyle & Rosaline Pullan; Shirley Stein; Joyce Lowe; Sam & Pearl Cohen; Ida Kaplan; Rose Lewin; Julie & Henry Gutovich; Evelyn Toban; Evelyn & Leon Kahn; Corinne Zimmerman & Jon Festinger; Laverne Gelmon; Lily Hersh;

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passing of your Brother-in-Law, Leo. Isser & Debbie Rogowski

Dr. Harley & Leslie Mackoff & Family, Condolences on the passing of your Uncle, Leo. Isser & Debbie Rogowski

Mr. S. Narvey, Our Deepest Sympathy on the loss of your dear Wife & Mother. Grace & David Ehrlich

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Rachel Wosk, With Deepest Sympathy. Abe & Goldie Miedzygorski; Gerry & Andrea Zimmerman & Family; Odie & Sherie Kaplan; Sheryl Davis & Saul Kahn; Lola Apfelbaum; Henry & Julie Gutovich; Ralph, Clara & Lori Swartz; Bill Brandt

Ron Wosk, Sorry to hear about the loss of your father. We're thinking of you at this difficult time. Gary & Judy Feldman

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Zamir, C., ed. *Ataki Supplements: Memorial-Book for the Jewish Community of Ataki-Bessarabia*. Donated by the Isaac M. Waldman Jewish Public Library.

Zeiger, Henry A., ed. *The Case Against Adolf Eichmann*. Donation unknown.