REMEMBRANCE AS ACTION
ANNOUNCEMENTS AND EVENTS

Watch for the following Holocaust films during
THE 13th ANNUAL VANCOUVER JEWISH
FILM FESTIVAL, MAY 13 – 24 2001
With sponsorship by the Loew Memorial Fund of the VHEC

POLA’S MARCH
Pola’s March is an inspirational film chronicling the emotional journey of Holocaust survivor
Pola Susswein. The film travels from Israel to Poland, where she recounts her experiences for
the first time to March of the Living students.

CHILDREN OF THE STORM
Children of the Storm, tells the story of the 1,123 war orphans who came to Canada between
1947-1949. The director and producer Jack Kuper, himself one of the war orphans, examines
their adjustment in this insightful film.

SUGIHARA: CONSPIRACY OF KINDNESS
There is no more compelling story than that of the Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara. At
great risk to his life and career he saved more than 2,000 lives. This documentary explores the
relationship between the Japanese and the Jews during the 1930s and '40s.

AIMEE & JAGUAR
In 1943 as the Allies were bombing Berlin and the Gestapo was purging the city of Jews, a
dangerous love affair blossomed between two women, Lilly Wust, an exemplar of Nazi
motherhood and Felice Schragenheim, a Jewish member of the underground. The film was
nominated for a 1999 Golden Globe Award and this year's Best Foreign Language Film Oscar.

ONE DAY CROSSING
Budapest, Hungary, October 15, 1944, the Hungarian Nazi movement of the Arrow Cross grows
stronger. "One Day Crossing" chronicles the struggle to maintain identity and extend
compassion in times of oppression. Bravery and anger fuel this intense story of moral
responsibility.

For information on dates, times and location please check the Film Festival Guide or contact:
13th Annual Vancouver Jewish Film Festival
tel: 604.266.0245, email: vjff@hotmail.com, web: www.vjff.org

Upcoming Events

April 19
Thursday, 7:30 pm, Yom HaShoah
Beth Israel Synagogue

April 22
Sunday, 12:30 pm, Yom HaShoah
Cemetery Service

May 2
Wed., 6:30 pm, Volunteer Recognition
Event

May 9 - 10
High School Symposium on the
Holocaust at UBC

May 15 - 24
Jewish Film Festival

June 3
Sunday - 9:30 am, Second Generation
Conference
7:30 pm, Public Lecture by Dr. Nathan
Kellerman.

June 13
Wednesday, 7:30 pm, Annual General
Meeting

THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS, SEPT. - DEC. 2000

Docents: Jody Dales, Nita Daniels, Fay Davis, Irene Dodek, Nadine Frame, Debby Freiman, Phillipa Friedland, Frances Grunberg, Theresa Ho, Sheryl Kahn, Anney Keil, Lise Kirchner, Gabriella Klein, Lani Levine, Karen Martin, Craig McAdie, Nava Mizrahi, Sally Rogow, Heather Wolfe

Educators Conference Committee: Steve Bailey, Linda Clode, Dan Conner, Gavin Hainsworth, Odie Kaplan, Kit Krieger, Gaby Minnes Brandes, Fred Ribkoff, Stuart Rothgiesser

Special Projects: Sheila Barkusky, Saul Cohn, Amalia Boe Fishman, Esther Chetner, Phillipa Friedland, Haya Fuchs, Bill Gluck, Evelyn Goldman, John Gort, Frances Hoyer, Gerri London, Debbie Maki, Isa Millman, Steven Mills, Nava Mizrahi, Prof. Shia Moser, Stuart Rothgeisser, Yvonne Rosenberg, Mark Rozenberg, Debbie Rozenberg, David Schaffer, Ruth Sigal, Dimitri Stone, Stan Taviss, Gloria Waisman, David Zack


Mailings: Saul Cohn, Steven Cynader, Lillian Fryfield, Aiden Fox, Aylee Fox, Danya Fox, Luba Gempel, Molly Goodson, Bob Seligman, Marilyn Weinstein

Peer counselors: Susan Bluman, Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, Alex Buckman, Anne Derek, Ethel Kofsky, Alan LeFevre, Mayer Nelken, Agi Rejto, Louise Stein Sorensen, Irene Watts

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Cover: The cover features a combination of two photos from the collection of Jack Gardner, one each of the cemetery before and after the restoration.

Zachor
Editor: Roberta Kremer  Layout & Design: Sean Matvenko
Some people think it is better to leave well enough alone. Why bring up unpleasant memories when it is easier to look toward the future? Fortunately for the buried Jews of Sambor and Stary Sambor, Ukraine, a benevolent spirit in the form of Victoria survivor Jack Gardner merely scoffs at such a notion.

"Forgetting is destruction." Jack Gardner's voice is strong, belying his 86 years. He is talking to me from Victoria B.C. where he resides with his third wife. He is describing the enormous undertaking that first took root in his psyche in 1974. It was during that momentous return journey to his home town of Stary Sambor, a former Jewish shtetl that was once home to 30,000 residents before World War II, when Jack Gardner knew he had a mission. Neither Sambor nor Stary Sambor can claim any living Jewish citizens today, but there in the centre of Jack Gardner's childhood village sits an abandoned Jewish cemetery which sprawls over thirteen acres. What's more, in the forest surrounding the two towns, three mass graves huddle over their dark secrets. He felt compelled to restore both the cemetery and the site of the mass graves.

"If I did not do it the city would build a housing project because it is in the center of the town. It would be a crime!"

The only member of his family to survive the Holocaust, Mr. Gardner returned from Russia to find that his family and community had been murdered at the hands of the Nazis. He was serving in the Polish army in 1939 and was then conscripted into the Red Army during the war before being wounded. It was during this time he met his first wife. What he discovered upon his return, six long years later, was that a total of 135,000 Jews had been liquidated, including the 1200 Jewish men, women and children taken from the Sambor Ghetto who were murdered on April 14, 1943, one day before Passover. The dead were buried there, on the outskirts of their former village, in three unmarked mass graves. The remainder of the Jewish population was shipped off to the Belzec Concentration Camp where they perished.

The Jewish cemetery in Sambor, covers thirteen acres. It was established at the beginning of the 19th century and was in continual use by the Jewish population until they were murdered by the Nazi's. Of the simple headstones, erected based on Jewish law, most were removed and many had been lost. The dismal state of the cemetery prompted Mr. Gardner, upon his return from the Ukraine, to begin a letter writing campaign to the authorities to obtain permission to begin restoration. Sorely neglected, with its 560 crumbling headstones bulldozed over and weeds choking the last remnants of a once thriving culture, there was no time to lose if the cemetery was to be saved.

A one sided correspondence with the Russian authorities commenced, including appeals to President Gorbachov, without any answers forthcoming. When Ukraine seceded from Russia Mr. Gardner directed his letters directly to...
the Ambassador of the Ukraine in Ottawa, once again without any reply. In 1987 a friend informed him that the town had plans to build a sports stadium on the site of the Jewish cemetery. The situation had become urgent.

In 1997, the indomitable Mr. Gardner hired a law firm who petitioned the Ukrainian Embassy in Ottawa and finally the squeaky wheels began to turn. By 1998 Jack Gardner returned to Stary Sambor and developed the necessary contacts to begin. The work began in 1999.

"In November 2000 we finished restoring the three mass graves. In the cemetery we built up the shrubbery, restored the headstones and built a fence. I hired an engineering firm. I am going back next month"

When I marvel that at his age, despite recent heart bypass surgery he plans to return he informs me about the recent defilement of the cemetery. Last October a group of Ukrainian Nationalists filed a petition with the Sambor City Council stating that in the same Jewish cemetery are buried Ukrainian patriots who were killed by the Nazis. They planted three crosses on the cemetery land. Despite another round of letter writing vehemently protesting the placing of crosses on sacred Jewish land, Mr. Gardner told me the crosses have not been removed as yet.

Although some help was forthcoming, the Jewish World Congress in Jerusalem connected Mr. Gardner with Association Ukraine-Israel, the main impetus behind the rebuilding of this cemetery is the vision of this one lone man.

Asking him why it is so important for him to remember, he explains, "For future generations, so the people will know, find their roots. We should remember. If I do this then maybe other people will do it in their own cities."

Each of his three children is named after one of his deceased relatives. "They are living monuments. I always see my mother and father in front of my eyes. Who forgets what happened is living in exile."

As a child of Holocaust survivors I am eternally grateful to those who provide me with memories of a past that I can only imagine. In this time of Yom HaShoah, this time of remembering, it is comforting to know that there are those like Jack Gardner who refuse to live in exile, who refuse to forget.

"I asked an old Ukrainian friend to find out what happened to the old Jewish cemetery in Sambor. He told me that the Russians bulldozed it to make a sports stadium. There was a mass grave there of 1200 Jews that the Nazis killed. The Russians left the mass grave but took away the memorial headstone that the Jews had erected after liberation and put up a plaque that says, Here are buried Soviet citizens which have been shot by the German Fascists during the temporary occupation in 1941-1944. The Soviets wiped out all trace that the victims were Jews."
Jack Gardner

Victoria survivor Jack Gardner was born in 1912 in the town of Stary Sambor. At the time of his birth it was part of Poland. Now it is part of Ukraine. He was the youngest of five children. His father was a shoemaker, his mother the proprietor of a small dry-goods store. At sixteen he became a member of the Communist underground where he made friends with other radical Ukrainian youth who organized strikes and distributed leaflets. He was arrested several times by the police. He was sent by his parents to Paris for a year returning in 1930 at age 19 to what was then Poland.

In 1939, Jack was in the Polish army when the Nazi's invaded Poland. Under the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the area of Poland where the Gardner family lived came under Russian rule. The German military border was only forty kilometers away. He was soon inducted into the Polish army. Within three days of the breaking of the Nazi-Soviet pact the town was occupied. Jack fled. It was the last time he saw most of his family.

Returning in 1944, within hours of liberation, he discovered the fate of his family. His parents, sister and brother-in-law had been deported and sent to the Concentration camp in Belzec. His two nephews were shot immediately in the town. He never found out what happened to his other sister or her two sons. They never returned. Jack and his wife left everything in Russia, went first to Poland and then to a DP camp in Munich.

"Never in my life did I think I would leave the Soviet Union. I felt comfortable in the system, but when I came back to my father's home it hit me very hard. I asked myself, what is more important my personal life or to pay tribute to my parents. Where we were living there was no Jewish life anymore, it was torn out by its roots. So we decided to leave everything behind and come to a new country where Jews still live and to put living stones to mark my parents lives. We wanted to raise a new Jewish family and name our children after both of our parents - that was our main objective and that is what we fulfilled. All of our children and grandchildren are named after relatives who were exterminated."

All quotes from Jack Gardner as told to Rhoda Kaellis, in Keeping the Memory

"Of the Jewish population of three thousand, which was really the whole town, only a handful survived. When the Germans first occupied the town, they gave the Ukrainians a free hand for 24 hours. They killed fifty Jews the first day. There was nobody left."

Yom HaShoah in Victoria

This year the Yom HaShoah commemoration in Victoria will be held on Sunday, April 22, at 11:00am. The Victoria Holocaust Remembrance and Education Society has undertaken a fundraising campaign to raise funds for repairs to the Shoah Memorial. Donations will be greatly appreciated and a tax receipt can be provided for donations of $18 or more. For further information contact David Katz at 250.592.6134 or Stephen Berer at 250.384.7985.
This year's Yom HaShoah Community Commemoration will take place on Thursday, April 19th at the Beth Israel Synagogue at 7:30 pm. Opening remarks will be made by Second Generation member Murray Fraeme, son of Izzy Fraeme and the late Bertha Fraeme. The program will include a special candlelighting ceremony that will commemorate Jews who perished in various countries throughout Europe. March of the Living students will be participating.

A special performance by the Vancouver Jewish Men's Choir with the Hellenic Choir of Vancouver will perform the choral piece titled Mathausen. These two choirs performed this piece at the recent opening of the Greece and the Holocaust exhibit. The audience was moved. We have received many requests to have them perform this stirring piece again. The lyrics of this song cycle were written by the Greek playwright, survivor Iakovos Kambanellis. They poignantly express his own wartime experiences. After the Nazi invasion of Greece in 1941, Kambanellis who was 19 at the time, quit his job and fled Greece. He was arrested on a train en route to Switzerland and sent to Mathausen Concentration camp in Austria along with 43 other Greek prisoners. These poems have been put to music by the composer of Zorba the Greek, Mikis Theodorakis.

Kambanellis returned to Greece determined to tell the story. He recalls that after US tanks entered the camp, on May 5, 1945, he, like many inmates, was plagued by the same agonizing concern: Who will believe what has happened to us? He retrieved the raw manuscript he had penned 18 years earlier, and created a memoir as powerful as the works of Primo Levi, informed by a similar sense of detached passion and unflinching honesty.

The cantata was written to coincide with the launch of the memoir in December, 1965 at the Gloria theatre in Athens, where it was first performed by [Maria] Farantouri. The inspiration was simple: a photo Kambanellis had found in the dust of Mauthausen. He had carried it with him throughout his incarceration, and it helped sustain him. It became his talisman, a secret love-object.

The photo was of a teenage girl dressed in a school uniform. It was merely a snapshot, a moment frozen in time. Yet it was priceless. The inmates had everything taken from them the moment they entered. They were robbed of their identities and reduced to skeletal frames that ached their way through each terror-filled day. To find a remembrance of humanity such as this photo was a source of wonder. Out of this nothingness there emerged something that you could gaze at in the depths of an endless night.

This is what the cantata captures, both in words and melody: the need to find love in the darkest of times. It was a perfect collaboration. Theodorakis, too, had been a prisoner during the Nazi occupation. As soon as he read the poems he discerned their essence. In May, 1980 Kambanellis joined thousands of Mauthausen survivors on the 35th anniversary of their liberation. They walked together, in silence, towards the site of their incarceration. As they neared the courtyard the marchers heard fragments of music floating towards them from inside the camp.

The melody seemed familiar, but only when they were close did Kambanellis realize he was listening to an amplified record of Maria Farantouri singing the Mauthausen Cantata. Later, without revealing who he was, he approached the camp's administrators and inquired about the music. He was told they had been playing it for years; the cantata had become an enduring expression for a legacy of Jewish prisoner as he learns that the woman he loves has just been taken to the gas chamber. The lyrics will be read in English by well-known radio personality and survivor Otto Lowy. He has received many honors including The Masaryk Award, given by the Czechoslovak Association of Canada, and the Czech republics presidents Award, presented to Otto Lowy in Canada by president Vaclav Havel. In 1988 Lowy was inducted into the BC Entertainment Hall of Fame.

Myrna Rabinowitz accompanied by Moshe Renert, of the local music group Olam, will present Holocaust songs and poetry, in Yiddish, set to music. Myrna Rabinowitz is a well-known Vancouver singer and songwriter. She has recorded five albums of Jewish music.

Rabbi Charles Feinberg will officiate, with Cantor Steve Levin.

Co-chairs are Ethel Kofsky and Rome Fox.
Recently, I participated in the 55th commemoration of the liberation of the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen, the site that gave the world its first dramatic view of the horrible excesses of the Holocaust. Bergen-Belsen was liberated by British troops on April 15, 1945. Our delegation of some 50 Americans and Canadians, mostly survivors, was joined by more than 250 other survivors and their children from Israel, the former Soviet Union and Western Europe. Hosted by the German state of Lower Saxony, participants included the former president of the European Parliament, Simone Veil; the president of the World Federation of Bergen-Belsen Survivors, Sam Bloch, and many others. We came to commemorate at the mass graves of Belsen, that terrible resting-place for tens of thousands who were caught in the turmoil of the final days of Nazi terror. Belsen was their last unkind way-station and the beginning of a difficult conversation that continues until today.

One of the speakers, Menachem Rosensaat, son of the survivor and postwar Jewish leader Josef Rosensaat, spoke of our generation’s duty to oppose those who would rewrite history. During informal meetings, survivors and their offspring spoke of their concern for the future of the mass graves as well as for the stewardship of important sites throughout Europe, as remembrance for the vanished and as a moral lesson against intolerance. There was a very clear sense that this was one of the last significant commemorations that would have a large number of survivors still present. As importantly, the gathering was a moment of transition from one generation to the next.

As we commemorate the 55th anniversary of the liberation of Europe and usher the Holocaust into the 21st century, we should think deeply about its representation in this new millennium. Who and what are being remembered, what is being forgotten, and what use is made of experiences that, above all, belong uniquely to survivors? Or do they?

find themselves on is the difficulty of reconciling history with historical memory. Recently, some commentators have been less generous, dismissing survivor testimony as unreliable, a weak methodology for recounting a tortured past, as if the subjective selection of historical data has a greater validity in the quest for an “absolute” truth. If the survivor experience has any meaning, it is about moral action in a world that denied it and continues to do so, whether this takes place in Auschwitz, Cambodia, Rwanda or Kosovo. To question a survivor’s retelling of the story is not to do good or bad history but to straddle an amoral universe, where duty to memory is absent.

There are, however, some moments that jar us back to an actual encounter with the past of the Holocaust and perhaps its future in the 21st century. The question this gathering left many of us with is the following: Through which channels will remembrance of this sort likely take place once survivors are gone? Historical representation in this instance has its limits, in that nothing can replace nor ensure the telling of the survivor experience, except making it a morally relevant action for the future and as a project for the next generations.

A moral action in this regard is twofold – both subjective and ultimately directed toward other human beings. Survivors have intrinsically understood this, well before the explosion of Holocaust studies programs, hence the early proliferation of diaries and other survivor manuscripts. This is useful as a guideline for distinguishing the survivors’ Holocaust from those of the museums. It is not at all evident that the survivor experience, as a moral form of action, will survive the historical narration of the Holocaust. The subject is simply too expansive. But, as the Columbia University professor Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi has argued, historiography is but one expression of the awareness that history is meaningful. Neither meaning nor memory ultimately depends upon it. The survivor experience mimics this tension by demonstrating the “doing,” from a moral standpoint, is more powerful than chronicle.

The representation of the Holocaust in the 20th century has produced an avalanche of historical analysis and representations. The challenge for the next generation’s preservation of survivor memory may be to take some distance from this and ignite a shift in standpoint. Perhaps the Holocaust historian’s pen will be replaced by the artist’s and the novelist’s focus on the centrality of myth and ritual, and the activist’s concern with justice, all of which encourage us to think of the best and worst of the human condition, ultimately the most enduring lesson of the survivor experience.


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Precocious Wisdom Displeases the Jews
Le Coglu, May 1939

SAGESSE PRECOCE QUI DEPLAIT AUX YOUPINS

Juliette: "Papa told me to never buy from Jews."
Margo: "Why?"
Juliette: "Because it deprives Canadians of our money and the Jews use the money to dominate us."
Margo: "This makes a lot of sense. I won't ever buy from Jews either."

The Writing on the Wall

Hilda Glynn-Ward was a leading BC journalist in 1921 when she wrote her virulently anti-oriental novel The Writing on the Wall, in which Orientals are responsible for drug running and aim to enslave the white population.

All Jews are greedy, sly, evil, ugly, dangerous, miserly, corrupt and cruel. What is more than they have hooked noses, prey on innocent women and children and dominate international banking and politics. Such are the images of Jews that confront students visiting our current exhibit Too Close to Home: Antisemitism and Nazism in Canada. These stereotypic portrayals of Jews are part of the hate promulgated not only by Nazis in Germany, but also by extremist groups in Canada during the 1930s and as such are an integral part of the exhibit Too Close to Home.

As the VHEC staff prepared to curate and mount the exhibit, we found ourselves extremely troubled by the virulently antisemitic imagery and particularly concerned with how these images would be perceived by the hundreds of students visiting our Centre. There was the very real danger of leaving students with the lingering impression that Jews might in fact resemble the stereotypes portrayed. There was also the worrisome possibility of re-offending Jewish students, members of the targeted group. How would they feel to see themselves portrayed in such a manner?

It was clearly unthinkable to exclude these images from the exhibit. To do so would be to sanitize and diminish the story of antisemitism and Nazism in Canada. The cartoons visually embody the impact that extremist groups had on the socio-cultural, political climate of the time. Words were not enough. The graphic evidence had to be presented as part of the historical record.

The question that remained was not whether, but how to present the material to students in a way that revealed its racist intent. The school program of a cartoon workshop was developed as a way of meeting that challenge head-on. Our Centre's volunteer educators (docents) participated in two evenings of training. Their perceptive and engaged struggle with the offensive material resulted in many useful suggestions that were incorporated into the school program.

The cartoon workshop begins with a preliminary activity to help students understand the concept of stereotyping as the process of stripping away individuality and attributing negative characteristics to an identifiable group. Teenagers who value their individuality are usually quickly moved to indignation over the clear injustice of racial stereotyping.

Before proceeding, docents take a moment to prepare students for the disturbing nature of the cartoons they are about to see. This is done to minimize the risk of offending students, who themselves may be members of...
The cartoon workshop helps students decode visual stereotypes. Students first learn to read and analyze antisemitic cartoons and are then asked to extend their understanding to cartoons targeting other groups such as, Asians, Blacks, First Nations, women and homosexuals. Docents have reported a high level of engagement and participation on the part of the students. Students have expressed moral outrage at the hatefulness of the material and support for the afflicted groups. Our hope is that students leave the workshop better equipped to respond to racist stereotypes wherever they may encounter them.

Both the exhibit and the workshop have been extremely well received by students, teachers and parents alike. Only halfway into the run of the exhibit, over thirty school groups have booked visits. Bruce Seney, a Social Studies and History 12 teacher at McMath Secondary is currently writing an article on the school program for the BCTF newsletter BC TEACHER. Even more telling, have been the unprecedented number of requests received from teachers who want access to the photographs, documents and cartoons for use in their classrooms. Many have even requested copies of the script that docents use to lead the workshop. To meet this clearly expressed need, the teaching materials from this exhibit will be developed into a discovery kit or artifact folio for classroom use by the fall of 2001.
In September 1999, I attended the World Meeting of Jewish Child Holocaust Survivors held in Prague. More than 700 participants came from 22 countries. On the last day of the conference we came in 10 tour buses to Terezin, also known as Theresienstadt, for a memorial service. These were my personal thoughts and feelings at that time:

Approaching the town of Terezin, we arrive in air-conditioned buses after driving along some narrow country-lanes lined with ripening pear trees close enough to reach out and touch. We stop in a square. As we get out we walk by ice-cream vendors and souvenir stands. A German Tour bus next to us has a large sign - "Steige ein – Gute Fahrt" – come in – pleasant journey. The members of our bus get back on bitching about the heat, complaining about prices, or just gossiping. “STOP IT,” I scream silently. THEY who came long ago arrived here too. You are breathing the air and walking on the same ground they did. Close your mouth and breathe in their souls to take with you forever.

We cross railroad tracks ending at the road to nowhere. Only no guards with dogs or wire enclosures greet us now as we start our journey to the crematorium.

As I walk along the path leading to our first stop, I hear the wind through the willows sound like the sighs of those who lived and died here. It touches my skin with a caress of the hands of all the mothers who perished. I am standing alone and shaking like a branch of a tree. The very ground I walk on so casually, even callously, is Holy. Here in this Krematorium, the catacomb of their final physical existence, their souls mingled into one long chain ascending to the throne of heaven. Outside, I embrace the living tree rooted in their ashes. Those of my fellows courageous enough to enter, stumble back outside, the women with tears streaming down in mascara colored streaks and men with clenched jaws and tight fists.

I follow the group to The Little Fortress and enter the courtyard square. In the distance I see the gateway with its arch – ARBEIT MACHT FREI. Was it there then or only added later for 'cosmetic' reasons? It doesn’t matter – the letters are still sharp enough to stab my heart. I approach slowly, reluctant to enter. A shrill little sound draws my eyes upward. There – in the corner of the sign, rests a bird nest filled with new life. What a beautiful blessing. Did anyone else even notice? I wander through the cells, hearing voices echoing through the chambers in the languages of the world, like the echoes of their bodies being bounced off the walls by their tormentors.

Some of us sit outside a small museum for a few moments of respite. I observe fingers adorned with gold and diamonds sparkling in the light reach into a plastic bag to retrieve a roll "stolen" from breakfast. Suddenly an acrid smell assails my senses. Is it only my imagination? NO – smoke starts to billow upwards and I stare at the others in fear. Should I flee, run away – my first thought. "It's only a man burning leaves" I am reassured by our tour guide. In this place? Here no smoke can ever be “only” the burning of leaves. Did the inmates constantly smell and see the smoke of their fellows? How could they live with the relentless horror I instantly feel? I still sense their never ending pain through my individual wounds, but through sharing with others the pain slowly dilutes like blood flowing from a bucket into the ocean of my life.
The Pianist
by Wladislaw Szpilman, translated by Anthea Bell
Victor Golancz, London
Reviewed by Lillian Boraks-Nemetz

The Pianist is Wladislaw Szpilman’s haunting memoir of a Jewish musician who escapes from the Warsaw Ghetto into the Aryan side of the city, and goes into hiding. The memoir’s recurrent theme defines the prevailing spirit of a man who fights death against all odds while playing the concerto of life with all its tragic resonances.

This book was first published in 1946 under the title of Smierc Miasta (Death of a City). Parallel to Szpilman’s own story runs the fate of Warsaw, a city heading for ultimate destruction. Szpilman describes its progressive demise with a strange mix of technical detail and emotion. One learns within the story that, in spite of the overt anti-Semitism in Poland, many Polish Jews loved the city of Warsaw and accepted its culture as their own.

As the story weaves on, a horrendous and twisted pattern of survival ever forced on man unfolds. It begins with a sense of normalcy, then escalates to a crescendo of horror. Moments of danger, such that only survivors themselves would have the ability to imagine, dominate the latter part of the memoir. One discovers in The Pianist that for Szpilman, as for many Holocaust survivors, survival was a matter of pure chance, matched at times with the survivor’s own courage and cunning.

The story begins in the Warsaw Ghetto with Szpilman playing the piano at the café Nowoczesna on Nowolipki Street, in the heart of the ghetto. From his position at the piano Szpilman observes Ghetto life, in all its abnormality by juxtaposing the different realities of ghetto life: the ever-present Nazi danger; the plight of the poor and sick, the smugglers, children performing dangerous adult work, gaudy prostitutes offering services to war profiteers, and the rich, coming daily into the café, dripping with gold and diamonds. Hardly anyone pays attention to the pianist’s music as people go about trying to secure a livelihood, and some degree of safety.

Later he moves to the Sienna Street Café. Life in the Ghetto deteriorates but the musician’s spirit prevails, and he continues to play in spite of the people’s indifference to his music. He makes friends with the many personalities that visit the café, among them several well-known musicians and the famous Dr. Janusz Korczak.

A witness to the Warsaw ghetto uprising, Szpilman escapes the ghetto and goes into hiding. He becomes a fugitive on the run, a criminal whose only crime is being a Jew. He lives in different places offered to him by kind friends, or places he simply finds by chance when on the move. Spending all of his time alone in apartments, attics, and burned buildings, he finds himself in a kind of Kafkaesque situation, bordering on the absurd, in a world where nothing makes sense except playing the game of hide and seek with death. Yet, against the horror of the times, friendship and goodness are ever present. Szpilman’s friends, both Jewish and non-Jewish, provide help in these difficult times, while sacrificing their own safety.

In his most difficult and lonely moments, when he is stripped naked of all earthly privileges available to man, Szpilman’s thoughts focus on his love for his family and his music. As he plays his favorite concerto in his mind, note by note, he uses a survival technique similar to one described by Victor Frankl in his Theory of Logotherapy. Through this concentration on what he loves most, his music and the people in his immediate past, his very act of survival becomes a triumph over despair.

In the fortissimo section of the novel, when all chances for survival become hopeless, Szpilman finds himself in the hands of fate with its most miraculous innuendoes.

Following Szpilman’s memoir, is a short diary of a German officer, Wilm Hosenfeld, written in a camp in Poland. The Nazi’s diary spells out his outrage at the inhumanity and persecution of Jews. He condemns the German people for their cruelty and passivity. “When the Nazis came to power, we did nothing to stop them: we betrayed our own ideals. Ideals of personal, democratic and religious freedom.”

Finally, in an epilogue, Wolf Biermann, one of Germany’s best known poets, song writers, and essayists, offers a commentary that forms a bridge between the Szpilman and the Hosenfeld diaries. Biermann impresses upon the reader that Szpilman was instrumental in the Jewish resistance of the Ghetto. “He (Szpilman) mentions this brave deed modestly and only in passing”.

The Pianist is an extremely well-written and poignant memoir that adds stature to the already impressive body of Holocaust literature.
Thanks to further funding from the Law Foundation of BC, the VHEC has been able to continue assisting Holocaust survivors and heirs in their restitution claims. Over the last year, we have reached out to many survivors helping them to untangle the confusing web of funds for compensation and property recovery. Survivors are already receiving successful results in their claims and we are confident that many more claims will be recognized. A special thank you is extended to all those individuals who have made donations to the Restitution Program.

Our goal is to reach out to as many survivors and heirs as possible in Western Canada – to inform them of restitution opportunities and to assist in any way possible. Through the Zachor newsletter we will keep you updated on developments in compensation and property restitution. If you would like to know more about restitution options or need assistance in filling out forms, please make an appointment at the VHEC by calling 604.264.0499.

**COMPENSATION FOR FORMER SLAVE AND FORCED LABOURERS**

The German government together with German industry has recently established a fund of DM 10 billion (about CDN $7.5 billion) to compensate, among others, former slave and forced labourers who worked for the benefit of the German Reich.

Individuals who performed slave or forced labour under the National Socialist regime may be eligible. Individuals who were children in camps or ghettos may also be eligible even if they did not perform slave or forced labour, and are encouraged to apply. If the person who was persecuted died on or after February 16, 1999, the heir may apply to this Fund.

The amount of the compensation payment will depend on how many applications are approved. The maximum amount allowed is up to DM 15,000 (about CDN $11,000) for former slave labourers and up to DM 5,000 (about CDN $3,500) for former forced labourers. Forced and slave labourers are separately defined under the law. Successful applicants will receive an additional payment of between USD $500 - 1000 (about CDN $750 - 1,500) from the Swiss Banks Holocaust Litigation Settlement.

All applications must be received by August 11, 2001. Application forms are available at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre (950 West 41st Ave.). Please identify if you are non-Jewish, as there are separate forms for non-Jewish survivors. For assistance or notarization of your signature, please call (604) 264-0499 to make an appointment.

**COMPENSATION FOR SEVERE PERSONAL INJURY OR DEATH OF A CHILD UNDER THE NAZI REGIME**

Did you suffer severe personal injury in connection with Nazi injustices? Or did you suffer the death of a child or serious injury to the health of your child kept in a home for forced labourers' children? If so, you may be entitled to compensation by writing to:

Fund for Victims of Medical Experiments and Other Injuries
P.O.B. 1570
New York, NY 10159-1570
USA

**CLAIMS FOR DORMANT SWISS BANK ACCOUNTS**

Is it possible that you or your family members deposited money in a Swiss bank prior to World War II, and never claimed the money? A new process has recently been set up to allow Holocaust victims and their heirs to claim dormant Swiss bank accounts. A list of 21,000 names of dormant account holders has been posted on the Internet at www.dormantaccounts.ch (The list is not complete and even if a name does not appear a claim may still be put forward.)

The deadline for applications is August 4, 2001. Application forms are available at the noted web-site or at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre at 950 W. 41st Ave. Please call (604) 264-0499 to make an appointment for assistance. Individuals who completed the Initial Questionnaire last year are still required to complete the new application form.

**CLAIMS FOR HOLOCAUST-ERA INSURANCE POLICIES**

Is it possible that you or your family member purchased an insurance policy (life, education, dowry, etc.) prior to World War II, and never claimed the proceeds? A process is now in place that allows Holocaust victims or their heirs to claim such policies from certain European insurance companies. An increasing list of names of policyholders of Holocaust-era insurance policies has been posted on the Internet at www.icheic.org (The list is not complete and even if a name does not appear a claim may still be put forward). Once an application is made, five European insurance companies will search their archives and notify you if an unpaid insurance policy exists in your relatives' name. If you are an eligible heir, the insurance proceeds will be paid out. The deadline for applications is January 12, 2002. Application forms are available at the noted web-site or at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre at 950 W. 41st Ave. (There is a separate form to request a search of unpaid Dutch insurance policies.) Please call (604) 264-0499 to make an appointment for assistance.

**INTERNET SEARCH SERVICES AVAILABLE AT VHEC**

Are you unsure whether your family members had unpaid insurance policies or dormant Swiss bank accounts from before World War II? The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre will do an Internet search of your family members' names and notify you whether their names appear on published lists. Assistance can also be provided to fill out application forms to claim the proceeds. Please call (604) 264-0499 to request an Internet search.

**RESTITUTION OF LOOTED OR CONFISCATED ASSETS**

Austria – In January 2001, the Austrian government agreed to make payments of USD $7,000 (about CDN $10,500) to victims who had their homes or personal belongings seized by the Nazis in Austria, to a total of USD $150 million. A claims process is not yet in place, but individuals may write a letter to the Austrian Embassy for further information at:

Austrian Embassy Ottawa
445 Wilbrod Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 6M7
France – To apply for restitution of looted or confiscated assets in France, please write to:

The Drai Commission
Commission on Compensation for the Victims of Spoliation
66 Rue De Bellechasse
75007 Paris, France

Belgium – The address for the Commission to Investigate Confiscated Jewish Assets in Belgium provided in the January 2001 issue of Zachor is now out of date. The new address will be published in the next issue of Zachor.

CLAIMS FOR PROPERTY DAMAGE CAUSED DIRECTLY BY GERMAN COMPANIES

Did you suffer property damage in the context of Nazi injustice directly caused by German companies, and did not receive any payments? If so, you may make a claim by August 11, 2001, by ordering an application form from the following address:

International Organization of Migration
– Property Claims
P.O.B 71
CH-1211 Geneva 19 Switzerland
Tel. 4122 717 9235
www.compensation-for-forced-labour.org

UPDATE ON SWISS BANKS HOLOCAUST LITIGATION SETTLEMENT

The Plan of Allocation of the $1.25 billion settlement provides as follows:

• USD $800 million is allocated for claims to dormant Swiss bank accounts. Application process is noted above.

• Former forced and slave labourers (and heirs of such persons who died after February 15, 1999) should apply to the new German fund (noted above). Successful applicants will receive an additional USD $500-1000 from the Swiss Banks Holocaust Litigation Settlement.

• People who were admitted into Switzerland as refugees, and were detainted, mistreated or abused are entitled to USD $250 – 500 and people who were denied entry into or expelled from Switzerland are entitled to USD $1,250 – 2,500. Heirs of such persons are not eligible. Application forms are not yet available.

Individuals will not receive payments for confiscated assets. Instead, USD $100 million will be distributed to various Holocaust survivor programs that benefit the neediest Nazi victims.

UPDATE ON AUSTRIAN BANK HOLOCAUST LITIGATION SETTLEMENT

The deadline for applications was May 31, 2000. The processing of claims is expected to be complete by the end of 2001. Claimants who did not submit sufficient documentation will be notified and given an opportunity to do so. Individuals who lived outside the geographical area where the Austrian banks conducted business will have their claims disallowed, unless they can provide information detailing a direct connection with the Austrian banks.

PENDING LITIGATION AGAINST THE FRENCH RAILROAD

A lawsuit was filed in September 2000 in the United States on behalf of victims of the Holocaust who were transported to Nazi slave labour and extermination camps by the French Railroad, Societe Nationale des Chemin de Fer, SNCF. The class action lawsuit demands damages for SNCF's knowing deportation of civilian French residents. If you are a survivor of these deportations or are an heir of such a person and would like to join the class action lawsuit, please contact the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre at 264-0499.

ARTICLE 2 FUND

Are you a Holocaust survivor who is not collecting a BEG or Article 2 pension from the German government? Are you from an Eastern European country or Germany? Were you interned in a concentration or forced labour camp for at least 6 months? Or were you confined in a ghetto or in hiding under inhumane conditions for at least 18 months? Or were you living under false identity for 18 months while under the age of 18 years old and separated from your family? Is your annual income under CDN $24,000 (single persons) or CDN $32,000 (couples)? If you are over 70 years old, your social security income is not included in the calculation of your income. If you meet these criteria, you may be entitled to a monthly pension from the German government. Application forms for the Article 2 Fund are available at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre at 950 West 41st Ave. For an appointment, please call (604) 264-0499.

HARDSHIP FUND

Are you a Holocaust survivor who was living in a former Communist Bloc country up until 1965? Have you ever received any compensation from the German government for your suffering? Is your annual income under CDN $24,000 (single persons) or CDN $32,000 (couples)? You may be eligible for a one-time compensation payment from the German government. Application forms for the Hardship Fund are available from the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre at 950 West 41st Ave. For an appointment, please call (604) 264-0499.

Marla Morry (r) shown here assisting survivor Rosa Ferera with compensation claims.
SECOND GENERATION AND THE LEGACY OF THE HOLOCAUST: A WORK IN PROGRESS

Second Generation Conference at the VHEC, Sunday, June 3, 2001

The Second Generation group in association with the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre will host a conference on Sunday, June 3, 2001 at the VHEC. The Conference, Second Generation and the Legacy of the Holocaust: A Work in Progress, is intended for members of the Second Generation, Survivors and those interested in Second Generation issues. The planning committee hopes the conference will bring the Second Generation greater understanding of why we are so affected by events that occurred before we were born. Much has been written about the "transference" of the Holocaust experience from parent to child, including the transference that occurs both literally and figuratively through parenting and other means. As members of the Second Generation, we hope that through furthering our understanding of the issues we will be empowered in our own process of growth and healing.

The conference will begin with an opening address by Dr. Nathan Kellerman, focussing on the trans-generational transmission of trauma. Kellerman is the Chief Psychologist of AMCHA, the National Israeli Center for Psychosocial Support of Survivors of the Holocaust and the Second Generation. He specializes in Trauma Transference and Psychodrama and is well known for his ability to bring groups of people together to facilitate healing. He has authored numerous books and papers on this topic.

The word “AMCHA” was first used as a code word to identify fellow Jews to survivors during World War II. This non-profit organization though founded only in 1987 has already had a profound effect on survivors and their descendants. AMCHA promotes counseling to Survivors, Second Generation and Third Generation. Call the VHEC (604.264.0499) for registration information. Registrants will select one of the following afternoon workshop sessions:

The Effect of the Holocaust on Jewish identity within the Second Generation

Members of the Second Generation will describe their journey away from and to a connection with their Jewish identity. Opening remarks will be made by workshop facilitator Dr. John Kahn-Tietz. A panel discussion by members of the Second Generation, will include author Claudia Cornwall whose book Letters from Vienna, describes the uncovering of her family's Jewish past and how this discovery affected her. Following the panel, participants will engage in a discussion of their Jewish identity, their personal journeys, and the effect of the Holocaust on their lives.

Dr. Joseph Kahn-Tietz has worked in various Jewish communal agencies, universities and private clinics and is also a member of the Second Generation. He holds a PhD. in Clinical Psychology with a specialization in community development.

"I enjoy and rely upon Shabbat and Jewish ritual as a spiritual rejuvenator and source of fulfillment in my life." - Joseph Kahn-Tietz

Breaking the Silence: The Effects of Parent's Holocaust Experience on the Second Generation

Psychologist and member of the Second Generation Dr. Alina Wydra will facilitate this workshop. This workshop will give participants an opportunity to explore some of the emotional realities of being in the Second Generation.

Dr. Alina Wydra is a clinical psychologist who specializes in working with intergenerational transmission of trauma. She has worked extensively with Aboriginal survivors of residential schools, as well as being one of the facilitators of Gesher Project, an inter-generational approach to healing the trauma of the Holocaust. Dr. Wydra is a psychologist with a full-time practice in Vancouver, BC.

"The multi-modal approach to exploring trauma allows for this exploration to occur at not only the intellectual, but also at the emotional, spiritual and creative levels. This process results in a profound breaking of the silence about the effects of parents' Holocaust experiences upon the Second Generation."

Nathan Kellerman

Public Lecture by Nathan Kellerman

Sunday, June 3rd at 7:30 pm
Norman Rothstein Theatre
Suggested donation of $5.00

Problems and Inspirations: A Discussion of the Impact of Parental Loss on the Second Generation

Psychiatrist and Child Survivor Dr. Robert Krell will facilitate this workshop. Dr. Krell has an international reputation for working on psychosocial issues relating to Survivors, Child Survivors and members of the Second Generation. Dr. Krell served as Clinical Director of the Child and Family Psychiatry at UBC until 1995, when he became Professor Emeritus. Dr. Krell is one of the founders of the VHEC, serving as President of the Board until 1999. Dr. Krell's extensive list of publications include the recently published, The Children of Buchenwald, which he co-authored.

"In the literature by and about children of Holocaust Survivors, there are references to the experiential themes conveyed by survivor parents - that life is very serious, special dangers exist, and nothing is certain or predictable. Do the experiences of the first generation, relived in so many subtle ways by the second generation sometimes translate into special talents, deeper compassion, a more profound appreciation of what to do in life and how to do it?" - Dr. Robert Krell.
Get Well


Joseph Auerhahn. Wishing you a speedy & full recovery. The Board & Staff of the VHEC.

Sarah Cohn. I'm glad you are feeling better and hope you are 100% very soon. Lola Apfelbaum.


Regina Feldman. My heartiest wishes for a very speedy recovery. Ida Kaplan, Odie Kaplan, Izzy Fraeme, the Staff & Board of the VHEC.

Bertha Fulep. Wishing you a speedy recovery. Leslie Spiro.

Marla Gropper. Wishing you a very speedy recovery. Lili & Izak Folk.

Oscar Jason. Get well soon. The Board & Staff of the VHEC.


Alex Schwartz. Wishing you a very speedy recovery from your surgery. Robbie & Gloria Waisman.

Lou Segal. Wishing you a quick and complete recovery. Cathy & David Golden & family, Leo & Joy Lowy.

Bronia Sonnenschein. Hope you are feeling better soon. The Staff & Board of the VHEC.

Mazel Tov


Barb Bluman. Wishing you well. Sandy Karmel & Larry Garfinkel.

Kris & Amalia Boe. Thanks for sharing Hanukah dinner together. Izzy Fraeme.

Bunny Braverman. Best wishes on your special birthday. Irv Wolak.

Esther Caplan. On your Grandson's marriage. Susan Bluman.

Jan Fishman & Carol Konkin. On the occasion of Hanukah, all the best! Izzy Fraeme.

Mr. & Mrs. Merwin Chercover. On your 50th Wedding Anniversary. Leo & Jocy Lowy.


Frances Hoyd. In honour of your Grandson Joshua's Bar Mitzvah. Annica, Barry & Susanna Carlsson-Hyman, the Board & Staff of the VHEC.

Dr. Robert & Debbie Israel. On your son's marriage. Susan Bluman.

Anney Keil. Congratulations on becoming a Safta! Harvey & Jody Dales, Mikki Dorn.

Al Kooper. Best wishes. Janice, Randy, Aaron & Benjamin Ling.

Hayden Kremer. Happy 16th Birthday! Jody & Harvey Dales.

Lucien Lieberman. Wishing you a wonderful birthday. The Board & Staff of the VHEC.


Otto Lowy. On this special birthday. Sylvia & Max Pawer, Dr. Nathan & Marilyn Divinsky.

Robert & Elka Mermelstein. Best wishes on your birthday. Izzy Fraeme.


Larry Meyer. Best wishes on your special birthday. Paul Meyer.

Karen & Nava Mizrahi. On being recognized by Nsei Chabad, Odie Kaplan.


Maria Pishanitskaya. In honour of your special birthday. Bill & Anita Ornstein.

Michael Silber. Congratulations on receiving your Masters Degree in History. Irv Wolak and Susan & Joe Stein.


Robbie & Gloria Waisman. Congratulations on the marriage of your daughter. Sheryl & Saul Kahn.

George Wertman. On this special birthday.
The Board & Staff of the VHEC.

Sympathy
Murray Brisker. My deepest condolences on the loss of your wife. Izzy Fraeme.

Mr. Morris Penn, Mrs. Cramer & Family. On the loss of your wife, daughter & mother. Leon & Evelyn Kahn.

Leonore & Milton Freiman. We are profoundly saddened by your tragic and untimely loss. Frieda Miller & Daniel Shapiro, Susan Bluman, Ronnie & Barry Tessler, Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, Harold & Julie Shatsky, Estika Hunning & family.

Debbie, David, Michael & Kyla Freiman. We will always remember Judith. Frieda Miller & Daniel Shapiro, the Board, Staff & Docents of the VHEC, Odie Kaplan.


Kathy Herman & Family. Our deepest sympathies. Jack & Margaret Fraeme.


Mosche, Elan, Galete & Talla Mastai. We are profoundly saddened by your tragic and untimely loss. Susan Bluman, Frieda Miller, Danny Shapiro, Jesse & Rebecca.


Lori Seemann. In loving memory of Gerda Kraus, Peggy & Herbert Cruickshank, Marg & Trish Glandfield, Donn & Helen Barrieau, Jessie & Don MacKay.


Donations to the Library
The Lenski File by Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, donated by the author.

Bound Upon A Wheel of Fire: Why So Many German Jews Made the Tragic Decision to Remain in Nazi Germany by John V.H. Dippel, donated by Graham Sharpe.

Fred Manus (Manusowicz) Survivor Testimony, donated by Fred Manus.

Newspaper articles, donated by Irene Klein.

Survivors of Warsaw, donated by Louis Checov.

Forging Freedom: A True Story of Heroism During the Holocaust by Hudson Talbott, in memory of Annie Rosenberg, donated by George & Yvonne Rosenberg.

New Perspectives on Canada, the Holocaust & Survivors by Paula J. Draper, Richard Menkis et. al, Jews and Judaism in Canada; A Bibliography of Works Published Since 1965 by Michael Brown, Richard Menkis et. al, donated by Ronnie Tessler.

Facing the Lion by Simone Arnold Liebster, donated by Chris Freimuth.

Dangerous Diplomacy: The Story of Carl Lutz, Rescuer of 62,000 Hungarian Jews by Theo Tschwy, donated by the Swiss Consulate.

My Bones Don't Rest in Auschwitz by Gisel Donath, purchased by the VHEC.

Social Discredit by Janine Stingel, donated by McGill-Queen's University Press.

I Rest My Case by Mark Verstandig, donated in honour of Leo Lowy with admiration & affection from Robert & Marilyn Krell.

In The Footsteps of Orpheus: The Life and Times of Miklos Radnoti by Zsuzsanna Oszvath, donated by the author & publisher.


Newspaper clippings, donated by Karl Landsberger.

I Too Hot to Handle by Josh Beutel, donated by the author & publisher.

Camps De Concentration, 1947 - In French, donated in honour & recognition of the Gesher Project, by Dr. John D Hackett.

Donations towards the Restitution Project
Ludvika Mazurek, Magda Rosen, Ruth Sigal, Alex Buckman.

Donations received from the United Way
Michael Kalef, Jennifer Lillis, Michael & Phyllis Moscovitch, Ralph W. Spitzer

CJA Campaign Designated Gifts