

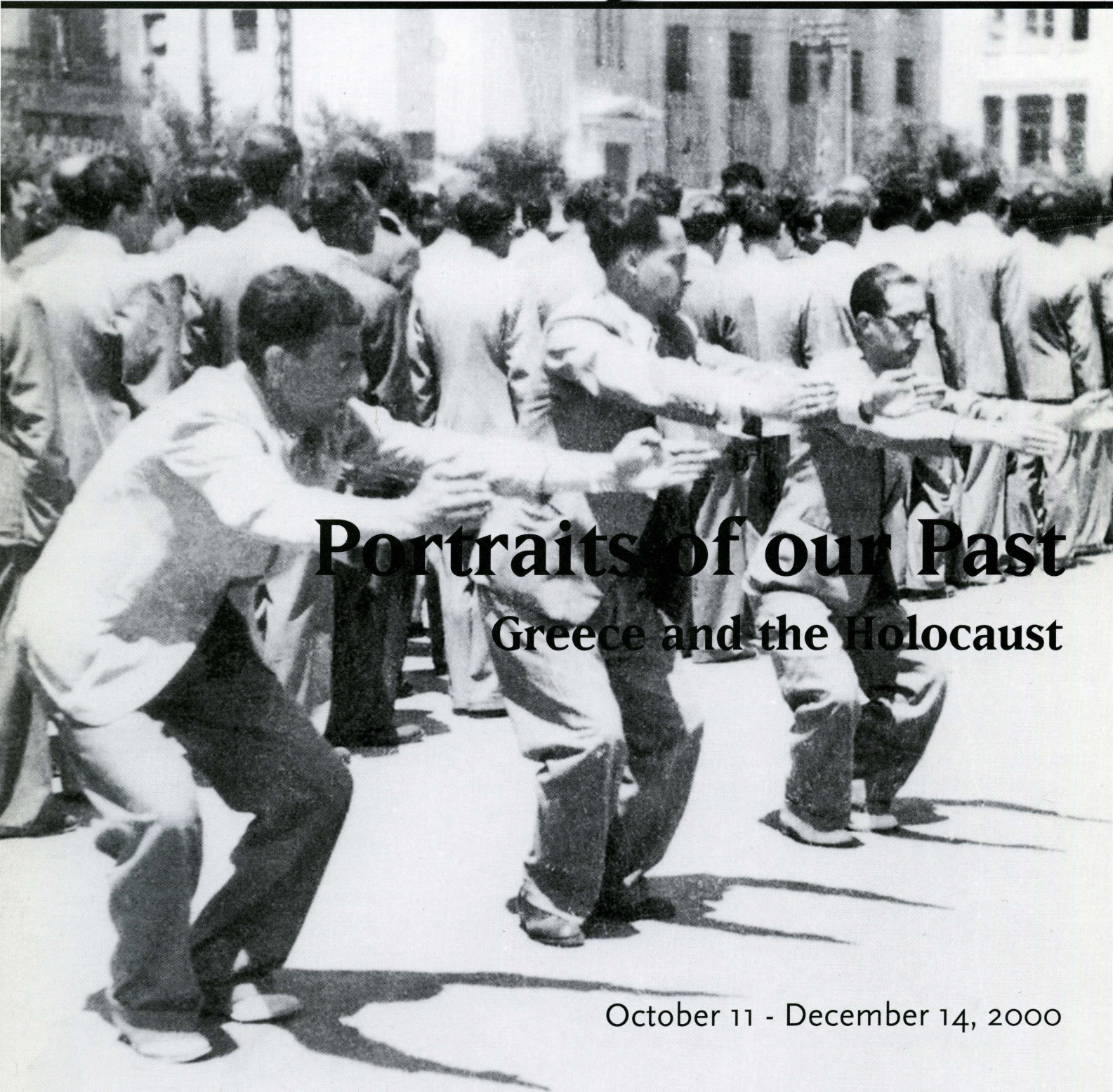
The Newsletter of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre

#50-950 West 41st Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5Z 2N7
tel 604.264.0499
fax 604.264.0497

Zachor

"Remember"

Number 4
October 2000



Portraits of our Past Greece and the Holocaust

October 11 - December 14, 2000

EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Events Calendar

October 8, 12:30 pm

High Holidays Cemetery Service at Schara Tzedek Cemetery. Bus Service available. Call 264-0499 for information.

October 11, 7:30 pm

Special Opening of the Greek Exhibit, *Portraits of Our Past: Greece and the Holocaust*, Norman Rothstein Theatre, tickets \$5.50. Call 264-0499 for tickets. Reception to follow in the VHEC.

October 10, 2 - 4 pm

Survivor Drop-in: Talk by Sam Fromowitz on *The Jews of Greece*; Film and Discussion will follow at the VHEC.

November 5

1:00 pm

Lillian Boraks-Nemetz launches her new books, *Ghost Children* and *The Lenski File*.

2:30 pm

Dr. Robert Krell, talk and book launch, *The Children of Buchenwald: Child Survivors of the Holocaust and Their Post-War Lives*; and Dr. Richard Menkis, talk and launch of Canadian Jewish Studies Special Issue: *New Perspectives on Canada, The Holocaust and Survivors*.

These readings are part of the 16th Annual Cherie Smith JCC Jewish Book Fair. These events will be held in the Dayson Board room of the JCC.

November 5, Sunday, 7:30 pm

Kristallnacht Commemorative Program: Prof. James Young: *The Uncanny Arts of Holocaust Memory* at the Beth Israel Synagogue.

November 7

4:00 pm

Book signing by Sir Martin Gilbert, author of *Never Again: The History of the Holocaust*, outside the Zack Gallery. A JCC Jewish Book Fair Event.

7:00 pm

Mielnicki Book Launch and tribute to Morris J. Wosk and Yosef Wosk. Sir Martin Gilbert will speak at the Norman Rothstein Theatre. A JCC Jewish Book Fair and VHCS Board Event.

November 14, 2 - 4 pm

Survivor Drop-in: Rita Akselrod speaks about *What's New at the Louis Brier Home and Hospital*.

November 19, 2 - 5 pm

Sunday Gallery Opening - *Portraits of our Past: Greece and the Holocaust*. 2:30 pm, film screening - *It Was Nothing...It Was Everything*, on Greek rescue.

December 3, 2 - 5 pm

Sunday Gallery opening. 2:30 pm, talk by Alfred Zara, *The Unique Jewish Customs & Practices of the Jews of Salonica*. VHEC Education Room.

December 12, 2 - 4 pm

Survivor Drop-in: Claire Osipov sings at our *Annual Survivor Chanuka* program.

Combined Jewish Appeal

This year, campaign members of the community were encouraged to increase their gifts to the Combined Jewish Appeal. Did you know that 75% of any increase can be allocated to "Plus Gifts"? You can designate this "Plus Gift" to the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre as we are a designated "Plus Gift" recipient. Thank you to all those who have donated to the VHEC in this way.

High Holiday Memorial Service

Sunday, October 8, 2000, 12:30 pm
Schara Tzedek Cemetery

Transportation to the cemetery for the High Holiday Memorial service will be provided to anyone wishing to attend the Memorial Service on Sunday, Oct. 8th at 12:30 pm at Schara Tzedek Cemetery in New Westminster.

There is no charge for this service but you must call the VHEC office (264.0499) in advance to reserve a space.

The bus will be leaving at 11:45 am sharp from the JCC parking lot.

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Cover: *Black Saturday, Salonica, July 11, 1942*. Photo courtesy of the Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies & Culture.

Zachor

Editor: Roberta Kremer, Layout & Design: Sean Matvenko

PORTRAITS OF OUR PAST: GREECE AND THE HOLOCAUST

An Overview

The mention of the Holocaust immediately evokes images of death camps, deportations and the Nazi occupation of countries such as Germany, Austria, Poland, Lithuania, and later in Holland, France and Belgium. The reach of Nazism and its effect on Jewish communities actually extended to places we do not normally associate with the Holocaust, such as Rhodes, Greece and Macedonia. The destruction of Jewish communities in the Balkans and the murder of 62,000 Sephardic and Romaniote (Greek-speaking) Jews at the hands of the Nazis has remained one of the least-known chapters of the story of the Holocaust. Greece suffered one of the highest percentages of deaths of its Jewish citizens, of any Nazi occupied country. Although deportations did not begin in Greece until March 1943, between 80 and 90 percent of its Jewish population was murdered during the German occupation. The speed and thoroughness of the extermination of Greek Jews was particularly tragic in light of the rich and long established Jewish culture that flourished there before the war. In 1939, Greek Jews represented the longest continuous Jewish presence in all of Europe. Jews had lived in Germany for 1,618 years, in Lithuania for only 600 years, but the Jewish communities of Greece had existed there for over 2,239 years - dating back to the time of Alexander the Great. Today, few traces remain in Greece of these once vibrant Jewish communities.

During the fifteenth century, Jews fleeing persecution in other parts of Europe found refuge in Ottoman-ruled Greece. The empire's system of administration by millet, or semi-autonomous religious communities, gave Jews considerable freedom. Following their expulsion from Spain and Portugal in 1492, more than 20,000 Sephardic Jews arrived in Salonica after the Turkish Sultan opened the lands of the Ottoman Empire to Jewish refugees. Because of their large numbers, these Sephardic Jews soon imposed their Ladino language and customs on the local Romaniote community and the city became a major center of Sephardic culture. Proudly known as the "Jerusalem of the Balkans," Salonica was renowned throughout Europe for its synagogues, rabbinical schools, cemetery, and libraries.

Following the German invasion in April 1941, Greece was divided into three distinct zones of occupation: Bulgarian, Italian and German. Bulgaria annexed Thrace and Yugoslav Macedonia; Germany occupied Greek Macedonia, including Salonica, Piraeus, and western Crete; and Italy occupied the remainder of the mainland and the islands. The zone in which Jews resided determined their subsequent fate. In Zakynthos all the Jews were saved through the efforts of its archbishop and mayor, while in Corfu, the mayor and chief of police declared a public holiday on the day that the Jews were deported. The primary determinants of survival were the resolve of community leaders to circumvent Nazi imperatives and the varying attitudes of non-Jewish populations toward their Jewish neighbors.

Jews living directly under German rule were the first to feel the full weight of the Final Solution. By no accident the German military command headquartered itself in Salonica, where the Jewish population was the largest. Beginning in the summer of 1942, the Jews of Salonica became targets of public humiliation, restrictions, lootings, and forced labour conscription. In February 1943, the Rosenberg Group arrived in Salonica to confiscate property and valuables. Next came Dieter Wisliceny and Alois Brunner, representatives of Adolf Eichmann, who immediately began

enforcing the Nuremberg Racial Laws. The Nazis appointed Chief Rabbi Koretz, originally from Vienna, as the head of the Judenrat, the German-appointed governing board of the Jewish community. In just five days, Koretz completed the census of the entire Jewish community and organized the production of yellow star patches, *la cocarda*. Every Jew over the age of five had to wear a yellow star imprinted with the same number as their ID card. German authorities soon closed Jewish businesses and seized property. The Nazis destroyed the city's Jewish cemetery monuments and confiscated all of the community's archives, priceless manuscripts, and synagogue ornaments.

Salonica had the second largest Jewish cemetery in the world. It contained nearly half a million graves. During the occupation, the Germans placed a lien on the cemetery, an unachievable ransom for the impoverished community. When it came due on December 6, 1942 work gangs with hand tools and bulldozers entered the cemetery and smashed headstones; within hours they turned a 400 year old cemetery into a marble quarry. Those who had the funds were able to bribe the Nazis and move the remains of their ancestors.

The deportation of Salonica's Jews was achieved with remarkable efficiency. The first deportation took place on the Sabbath

The Consulate of Greece in Vancouver and the Board of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre invite you to the

OPENING RECEPTION, Wednesday, October 11th

Portraits of our Past: Greece and the Holocaust

Speaker Dr. Photini Constantopoulou, *Director, Service of Historical Archives, Athens, Greece*

Performances by *The Hellenic Choir of Vancouver & The Jewish Mens Choir*

7:30 pm at the Norman Rothstein Theatre

Reception to follow in the VHEC

Tickets are \$5.50 available at the VHEC

Made possible through generous support from Christopher Investments Ltd., the Consulate of Greece (Vancouver), Jewish War Veterans of Canada and Carole and Lucien Lieberman.

PORTRAITS OF OUR PAST

morning of July 11, 1942 when nine thousand Jewish men were rounded up and conscripted for forced labour. Throughout March and April of 1943, entire Jewish neighborhoods were deported. In three

nation's borders, it willingly handed over those Jews living in its occupied territories. Because non-conformity to Bulgarian identity was perceived as a threat to national unity and due to the state's expansionist ambitions, the Bulgarian government initiated a policy of open terror to rid the region of its Greek minority. In the middle of the night on March 3, 1943, the Jews of Kavalla, Drama, Komotini, and nearby villages were rounded up and deported to Treblinka. Approximately 4,200 Jews died in the gas chambers there within hours of their arrival. On May 16, 1943 the Jews of Didimoticho were deported, wiping out what was once a flourishing Jewish community.

Italian authorities were generally supportive of the Jews and often disobeyed the Nazis' anti-Jewish directives. Following Italy's surrender in September 1943, however, the Germans immediately began to deport the remaining Jews in Greece. Two weeks before Passover in March, 1944, 350 Jews were lured out of hiding to the synagogue to collect their matzah and were immediately imprisoned. Thus began the mass of deportations of Jews from the southern occupation zone.

Despite their late arrival at the camps, Greek Jews participated in two of the most significant acts of resistance that occurred in any concentration camp (See following article on Greek Resistance). The resistance of Greek inmates is all the more remarkable in light of the disadvantages that Sephardic Jews faced in the concentration and death camps. Because they did not understand German, and did not have much Yiddish, Greek Jews could not comprehend or follow orders in a context where instantaneous responses or hesitations meant life or death. Since the ability to orient oneself as quickly as possible and to form coalitions were key factors in survival, the Greeks' lack of linguistic and cultural affiliation with Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jews diminished their chances of surviving. Greek Jews arrived at Auschwitz when the crematoria were functioning at optimum efficiency and few were "given the opportunity" to be slave labourers. These obstacles to survival had a devastating effect



Orphaned Jewish children in Salonica after World War II

short months most of the city's 56,000 Jewish inhabitants were sent in 19 transports to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Only 1,600 of Salonica's 56,000 Jewish inhabitants survived.

The next Jews affected by Nazi policy were those living in the Bulgarian occupation zone. Although the Bulgarian government attempted to save Jews living within the

The fate of Jews living in Athens and other Italian-occupied towns contrasts markedly with the swift and thorough destruction of those living in German and Bulgarian territories. Designated an "open-city" safe from aerial bombings, Athens became a popular destination for Jewish refugees from Greece and Central Europe. The

These few survivors from the Jewish colony of Salonica, with their two languages, Spanish and Greek, and their numerous activities, are the repositories of a concrete, mundane, conscious wisdom, in which the traditions of all the Mediterranean civilizations blend together.

- Primo Levi



Jewish males forced to perform exercises during the roundup on Black Saturday. Salonica, July 11, 1942

on the Jewish population of Greece. Of the over seventy thousand Jews living in Greece before the war, only ten thousand survived. 55,000 Greek Jews were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp.

The Nazi occupation had a devastating effect on the Greek way of life. Although Jews were singled out as targets of Nazi persecution, the entire Greek population suffered during the German occupation. Food and fuel supplies dwindled and the influx of refugees from Central Europe put additional strains on an already starved and impoverished population. At the end of the war nearly ten percent of its population was dead and over a million were homeless. Greek Holocaust survivors found themselves in Displaced Persons camps scattered across Europe where, due to language and cultural differences, they found themselves an isolated minority. Of those that survived, only a handful

It took the Nazis two years, working every day, to loot Jewish Salonica of its artistic treasures. It took fifteen trainloads over a period of five months to empty Salonica of its Jews.

- Robert Kaplan

returned to their native towns. In Salonica, there were less than 1,600 Jews who survived the Holocaust - a loss of 96% of the city's total Jewish population. With their families killed, their communities destroyed, and their property confiscated, many chose to start life anew in places such as Palestine, the Americas, and South Africa. Over two hundred orphaned Jewish children were gathered from Greece and went as a group to forge new lives in Palestine. One thousand Greek Jews emigrated to the United States and Israel. Only 5,000 Jews presently live in Greece, mostly in Athens and Salonica. The Holocaust placed in jeopardy the survival of their distinct Sephardic values and traditions.

The House by the Sea: A Portrait of the Holocaust in Greece

by Rebecca Camhi Fromer

Mercury House, San Francisco

Reviewed by Aviva R. Roseman

In the compelling biography, *House By The Sea*, Rebecca Camhi Fromer tells the story of Elia Aelion, who miraculously survived the Holocaust in Greece.

Elia was born and raised in Salonica, Greece in his beloved grandparents' house on the edge of the sea. He was often ill as a child. Both his parents had many siblings and the house was alive with aunts, uncles and their children, all of whom pampered the young boy. Writing in the first person, Fromer gives numerous anecdotes of normal family-life including the gatherings on Shabbat, religious holidays and special occasions. Elia's childhood memories of warmth and inclusiveness are associated with the house by the sea to this day.

As a young man, Elia worked in the family's wine business, and later, in 1939, at the outset of the Second World War, joined the Greek army in its unsuccessful attempt to keep the invading Italians at bay. In 1941, when Elia was stationed somewhere between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, the Germans invaded and the Greek army dispersed. Elia and his comrades escaped by walking hundreds of miles back into Greece.

While Elia was living in Italian-occupied Athens, his family and many of his friends living in German occupied Salonica, were put on the notorious "transports." Elia began his life as a fugitive, still able to seek refuge in Athens until 1943 when the Nuremberg racial laws were implemented, but emotionally pulled to his hometown of Salonica. Attempts to raise funds to help his family to survive were met by increasing

anti-Semitism and hostility by the native Greek population. Betrayal of a few remaining family members by once trusted friends and business associates left Elia feeling despondent and alone. His only recourse was to survive and carry on the family name as his father's last words to him had implored.

With the destruction of Salonica's once dynamic Jewish community in full force, Elia managed to remain alive, often under atrocious conditions. He survived by continuously being on the move, running, riding on cattle trains or stolen trucks, hiding with guerrilla bands in the mountains, and eluding the Germans in every imaginable way. At one time he was surreptitiously living in a hide-out next door to a room that housed Nazis, and another time he was inadvertently made to wait at a

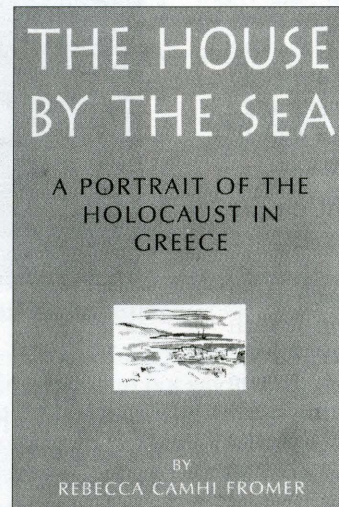
dinner party while his temporary home was raided and the inhabitants were sent to Auschwitz.

After the war, Elia was forced to acknowledge the excruciating fact that his family and 96% of Salonica's 56,000 Jews had been murdered.

The introduction, the many footnotes, the afterword and the appendices create a complete picture of the war years in Greece. In the introduction, Fromer presents an historical and cultural background of the Jews of Salonica (the

city that was the main centre of Sephardic life). In the afterword, she informs the reader of Elia's marriage and subsequent emigration to the United States. The appendices include an historical time-line, a chronology of the Holocaust in Greece, a map and an archival document on the deportations from Greece. One of these documents, declassified in 1998, is published here for the first time and demonstrates that by 1943 the Allies knew that the European Jews were slated for extermination.

Fromer's empathetic account of Elia Aelion's life and her painstaking research is written in a sensitive, readable and touching manner. It illuminates an era in history that has received little attention so far.



RESISTANCE AND RESCUE

Against All Odds: Greek Resistance and Rescue During the Holocaust

by Nina Krieger

In his introduction to Ya'acov Handeli's memoir, *A Jew From Salonica Remembers*, Elie Wiesel recalls his impression of the Greek Jews in Auschwitz:

There were Jews from Salonica in our block in the camp. They did not understand my Yiddish, nor I their Greek or Ladino. Despite the language barrier, I liked being among them. We were all impressed by their group cohesion. After the war, I heard and read about the heroism of the Greek deportees. The strong ones among them were chosen to work in the Sonderkommando. They all refused. Under no circumstances were they willing to burn bodies. They would rather die, and were shot on the spot.

Wiesel's comments cast light on the remarkable story of Greek resistance during the Holocaust. Jews did not go, as popular myth suggests, "like sheep to the slaughter." Nor were all non-Jewish Greeks complicit with Nazi policy. Individuals made choices, often defying the dictates of reason and self-preservation, to support or oppose the Nazis. The story of resistance and rescue among Greeks during the Holocaust speaks to the obstacles to, as well as the possibility for, action that existed for Jews and non-Jews alike under Nazi occupation.

Remarkable courage in the face of adversity is nowhere more evident than in the story of the Greek Jews. Despite their late deportation, Greek Jews participated in two of the most significant acts of resistance that occurred at Auschwitz-Birkenau. In the summer of 1944, the Nazis selected over 400 of the strongest Greek Jews to serve in the Sonderkommando and expedite the destruction of the Hungarian Jews. The Sonderkommando was a unit of prisoners assigned to do the most degrading work in the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Their tasks were to clean out the gas chambers after victims had been gassed, remove hair and gold



Ruins of Crematorium III in Birkenau

teeth from the corpses, and shovel bodies into the ovens of the crematoria. The Nazis normally killed off Sonderkommandos every three months and replaced them with new prisoners. The Greek Jews courageously refused to comply with German orders to serve in the "special command" unit, well aware that their disobedience would mean certain death. All were gassed, but not without first leaving a strong impression on the remaining inmates.

On October 6 and 7, 1944, Jewish inmates from Poland, Hungary, and Greece took part in an uprising at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Jews attacked SS guards with hammers, stones, picks, crowbars, and axes. Using explosives that had been smuggled into the camp from a nearby munitions factory, the prisoners blew up one of the camp's four crematoria. The Germans fought back with machine guns, hand grenades, and dogs. Two-hundred and fifty Jews were

shot, including 135 from Greece. An additional 12 Jews who escaped were later found and executed. According to survivor testimonies, nearly all those involved died singing the Greek national anthem.

Other acts of resistance took place in the form of rescue that Jews initiated or in which they cooperated with non-Jews. In Greece, men and women joined underground partisan units to help regular Allied forces defeat the Germans. Spanning a range of political loyalties and including both Jewish and non-Jewish Greeks, partisans represented one of the sole possibilities of escape for many Jews. Most of the Jews of central Greece fled to the mountains or escaped to Palestine via Turkey with the help of partisans. Thanks to the efforts of these armed resistance groups, a number of Jewish communities survived in their entirety or in part.

These acts of Greek resistance speak to the fact that many Jews did not go to their deaths without a struggle. Similarly, the rescue efforts of non-Jewish Greeks provide evidence of the possibility of moral actions during times of tremendous hardship. Individuals effectively acted to save Jewish lives when governments, churches, and international conferences failed to intervene. Just as Jews faced extreme barriers to opposing the Nazis, particularly in the atmosphere of terror and chronic starvation in the concentration and labour camps, Gentiles who defied the Nazi interdiction on helping Jews did so at grave personal peril. Any person caught hiding a Jew was immediately shot on the spot or publicly hanged by the S.S. At a time when living space, food, sanitation facilities, and medicine were extremely scarce, those who helped Jews sacrificed a great deal in addition to risking their own lives.

The actions of community leaders in Athens affirm the possibility of personal fortitude during moral crisis. Designated an "open-city" safe from aerial bombings, Athens became a popular destination for Jewish refugees from Greece and Central Europe. The Italian authorities were generally supportive of the Jews and often went so far as to disobey the Nazis' anti-Jewish directives. Following Italy's surrender in September 1943, however, the Germans immediately began to deport the remaining Greek Jews. Despite these efforts, leaders of the

Greek citizens and community worked tirelessly to thwart the planned extermination. The Head Rabbi of Athens, Elia Barzelai, used his connections with the partisan movement to destroy lists pertaining to the Jews of Athens and to flee to safety in the mountains. Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens ordered Greek Orthodox clergymen to hide Jewish children and issue false baptismal certificates to those threatened with deportation. The city's Police Chief, Angelos Evert, issued hundreds of false identification cards that allowed Jewish families to hide in and around Athens. Thanks to the efforts of these community leaders, 85 percent of the Jewish population of Athens survived. Police Chief Evert and Archbishop Damaskinos were declared Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem.

Although the Jewish population of Rhodes fared less well - 90 percent of the island's Jews perished during the final months of

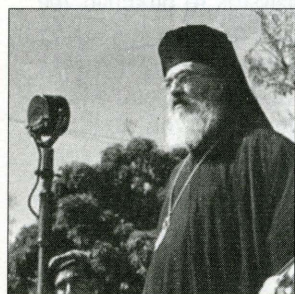
the war - the actions of one individual saved numerous Jewish lives. Selahattin Ülkümen, a Moslem, served as Turkish Consul General of Nazi-occupied Rhodes. In late July 1944, the Germans began the deportation of the island's 1,700 Jews. Ülkümen requested that the Germans release Turkish citizens and their families, who numbered only 15 at the time. Ülkümen added another 30 people to the list whom he knew had allowed their Turkish citizenship to lapse.

Clergy, administrative officers, and foreign diplomats were often uniquely positioned to help Jews by providing asylum in churches, convents and orphanages and issuing life-saving visas. However, many ordinary individuals risked their lives to save Jews. Through archival footage and interviews, the film *It Was Nothing...It Was Everything* highlights the courageous efforts of Greek friends, neighbors, and strangers who lent their hands to Jews during a time of need. The rescuers

represented a broad spectrum of identities: male and female, young and old, urban and rural-dwellers, rich and poor, devout and irreligious. The testimony offered in the film illustrates that, despite their disparate backgrounds, the rescuers shared a profound sense of moral obligation. Just as Stavros Xirouhakis explains that "they were strangers and they needed help. There was no other way. We had to help them," Stavros Diamantis affirms that "we helped them to survive through our friendship-not for anything else. It was as if they were our own." Remarkably, entire villages were often complicit with individual rescue efforts. Stratos Paraskevaides recounts how, of the 150 families who knew that he was hiding a Jewish woman in his farm, not one informed the German authorities of his rescue efforts. These courageous individuals, who risked their own lives and those of their families to help others, are among the 200 Greek nationals honoured by Yad Vashem.

***It Was Nothing...It Was Everything* will be screened at the VHEC on Sunday, November 12 at 2:30 pm**

Archbishop Damaskinos and Police Chief Angelos Evert



Archbishop Damaskinos

When Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens heard about the fate of the Jews of Salonica, he was determined to rescue the Jews of Athens. Enlisting the help of various community leaders, Damaskinos defied Nazi orders and succeeded in saving the lives of thousands of Athenian Jews.

In a letter to the Greek Prime Minister written in March 1943 and signed by numerous Athenian public figures, the Archbishop issued a passionate appeal to halt the displacement of Greek Jews. Reminding the Prime Minister that all Greek citizens were granted equal treatment regardless of race or religion under the terms of the armistice, Damaskinos argued that Jews were invaluable Greek citizens who contributed to the country's economic success, intellectual life, defense, and solidarity. Damaskinos emphasized the historically peaceful

relations between Jews and Greeks, noting the "indissoluble bonds between all Greek citizens without exception, to whatever race they may belong." Calling the deportation of Greek Jews "unjustified" and "morally unacceptable," Damaskinos demanded

that the Greek administration take up an unequivocal position against Nazi injustices.

When General Jurgen Stroop, a senior SS officer and Police Leader for Greece, found out who was behind the letter, he threatened to shoot Damaskinos. The Archbishop bravely reminded Stroop that, "According to the traditions of the Greek Orthodox Church, our prelates are hung and not shot. Please respect our tradition."

After his letter was ignored, Damaskinos called the Athenian Chief of Police, Angelos Evert, to his office and said, "I have spoken to God and my conscience tells me what we must do. The church will issue false baptismal certificates to any Jew who asks for them and you will issue false identification cards."

In addition to personally issuing hundreds of backdated baptismal certificates and ensuring that over 250 Jewish children were safely hidden in Christian homes, Damaskinos implored all adherents of the Greek Orthodox Church to protect the Greek Jews. He called on the clergy to issue false baptismal certificates and to urge their congregations to help their Jewish neighbors. On Evert's orders, the Athens police force issued about 18,500 false identity cards to protect Jews hiding from the Nazis. Evert personally issued false identity cards to over fifty Jewish families.

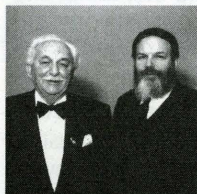
Thanks to the efforts of these courageous community leaders, 85% of the Jewish population of Athens survived. In October 1945, Damaskinos became Prime Minister of Greece. After the war, both Damaskinos and Evert were honoured for their courage and awarded the title of "Righteous Among the Nations" by Yad Vashem.



Police Chief Angelos Evert

relations between Jews and Greeks, noting the "indissoluble bonds between all Greek citizens without exception, to whatever race they may belong." Calling the deportation of Greek Jews "unjustified" and "morally unacceptable," Damaskinos demanded

JCC JEWISH BOOK FAIR EVENT / BOOK LAUNCH



Honouring the vision of Morris J. Wosk & Yosef Wosk
who endowed the Wosk Publishing Program at the VHEC
and celebrating the publication of

Bialystok to Birkenau

Memoir of Michel Mielnicki as told to John Munro

Guest speaker: Sir Martin Gilbert, who wrote the introduction

Tuesday, November 7, 2000 at 7:00 pm

Norman Rothstein Theatre

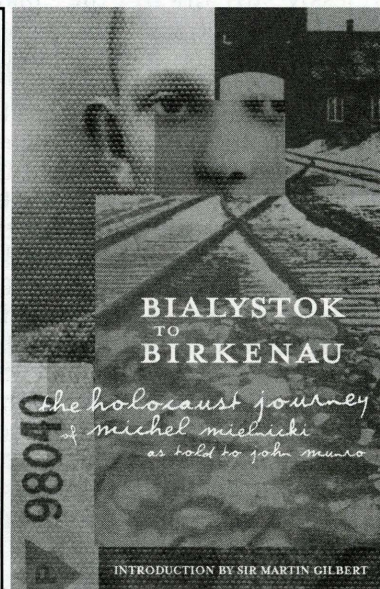
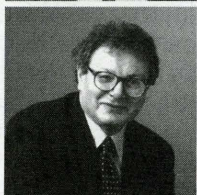
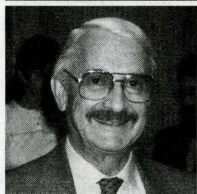
#950 West 41st Avenue, Vancouver

Reception to follow in the VHEC

Tickets are \$6.50 which is a coupon worth \$6.50 off the purchase price of the book.

For tickets please call 264-0499

Sponsored by the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre
and the 16th Annual Cherie Smith JCC Jewish Book Fair



Bialystok to Birkenau

The Holocaust Journey of Michel Mielnicki

Published by Ronsdale Press and the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre.

Based on over 800 pages of oral history, *Bialystok to Birkenau* is a revealing and powerful autobiography and memoir of local Holocaust survivor Michel Mielnicki as told to writer John Munro. Michel Mielnicki takes us from the pleasures and charms of pre-war Polish Jewry, now destroyed, into some of the darkest regions of the 20th Century: the death camps of Birkenau, Buna, Mittelbau-Dora and Bergen Belsen. Mielnicki tells his story with great courage and attention to painful detail. The book contains an introduction by Holocaust historian Sir Martin Gilbert and many photographs. This important book marks the first publication of the new Wosk Publishing Program of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. This book was co-published with Ronsdale Press, Vancouver.

Michel Mielnicki was born in 1927 in Wasilkow, Poland just a few kilometers from Bialystok. After surviving the Holocaust, he emigrated to Canada where he became a fur fashion designer.

John Munro is the author and editor of over seventeen books, including the best selling memoirs of John Diefenbaker and Lester Pearson.

The following excerpt is taken from the forthcoming release of Bialystok to Birkenau, the Holocaust memoir of Michel Mielnicki as told to John Munro.

Before we'd parted company in Birkenau in early 1943, my brother Aleksei and I had vowed to meet at our home in Wasilkow, if we survived the Nazi war against our people. Little did I know that Aleksei, in his rush to keep this promise, had left the Mauthausen concentration camp shortly after its liberation by the Americans without either fully recovering his health or receiving his travel documents. In consequence, when he was apprehended by the Soviets just before he reached Warsaw, he had nothing, save the number 98039 on his left forearm, to prove who he was. Because, like me, he spoke perfect Russian, and now Ukrainian as well (a result of

This is a story, not only of survival, but of the lives, qualities, enthusiasm and Jewish hearts that were destroyed in the twentieth century: the century which brought science, medicine and communications forward as never before, yet also saw the backward march of mankind.

-Sir Martin Gilbert

nearly two years working for a Ukrainian Kapo on a roof repair Kommando), he was judged a Soviet citizen and inducted into the Red Army for a term of compulsory military service.

Thus, while I was wending my way towards the Polish border, he was being forced to march a thousand kilometres or more to Kishinev, the capital of Moldavia, to begin his military training.

He was to have his own experience at the hands of drunken Russian officers. Simply because he was a Jew, they attacked him in his bed one night, and brutally beat him, so much so that he was hospitalized for two months with a number of broken bones (including one in his nose that never did heal properly). He'd gone from one form of enslavement to another, with hardly a pause for breath. Because he was never allowed to leave the Soviet Union to search for Lenka or me, he eventually accepted that we hadn't survived, and got on with such life as was permitted a Jew in Stalinist Russia after his release from the army in 1950. In the meantime, I'd waited for Aleksei in Bialystok (you couldn't actually wait in Jewless Wasilkow anymore, unless you wanted to be murdered) until I thought it reasonable to conclude that he hadn't survived the Nazi murder machine. It was only in late 1946, when I was in Paris, that I met a survivor from Mauthausen who told me that he'd seen my brother alive after the camp's liberation. Then I heard that someone else had heard that he was a conscript in the Red Army's 100th Infantry in Kishinev.

I asked the International Red Cross and various other aid organizations to help me find him. Requests for information were made on my behalf, but the Soviets ignored them. The Iron Curtain was a reality that seemed destined ever to keep Aleksei and me apart. Ironically, it was SS-Unterscharführer Heinrich Kuhnemann (or, more particularly, his War Crimes Trial at Duisburg in 1991) who brought us back together after an interregnum of nearly fifty years. At the time, perestroika and glasnost were the new order in what was still Gorbachev's Russia, and Aleksei had taken the opportunity this had provided to journey to Auschwitz, where he filed a written

request for confirmation of his imprisonment there, so that he, at long last, could claim compensation from the German government. Meanwhile, in Vancouver, I had begun to worry about whether some old Nazi or some new neo-Nazi skin-head would attempt to

assault or even murder me if I appeared to testify against the criminal Kuhnemann. Unfortunately, as I've grown older, it has become my second nature to fret, and, in consequence, to become clinically depressed (part of my death-camp legacy, it seems); being a dead hero has never been high on my list of personal ambitions. In the event, of course, I knew where my duty lay, and so boarded the plane for Germany in search of justice for my father, my mother, the Jew with the gold pocket watch, my friend Yossele, and all the rest of Kuhnemann's victims.

Naturally, after my wife June and I arrived in Duisburg, I spent a great deal of time in conversation with the German prosecutor in charge of Kuhnemann's case, a fine man by the name of Dr. Feld. Because my story could not be told without reference to Aleksei, the subject of his possible whereabouts was much discussed as well. Dr. Feld didn't consider that Aleksei's testimony would be necessary to convict Kuhnemann, but undertook for my sake to find my brother, if he were still alive. And, some months later, almost by chance during an official visit to Auschwitz, he discovered Aleksei's certification request. This German gentleman then tracked my brother down, with the help of the Russian

authorities, with the result that on 15 June 1992 I received official notification from the German Consulate General in Vancouver that a Mr. Aleksej Haimowicz Mielnicki resided at Ul. Straitieley 16/46, Iwano-Frankowsk, Ukraine (the former Polish city of Stanislawow). For four years, until his death in 1996 from a third heart attack, we celebrated our reunion by phone and letter, and in person during an extended visit June and I made to his home in August 1992. To have found one's brother after fifty years was a reward of cosmic proportion, but it would have been sweeter by far if I could have reported to Aleksei that I'd helped send former SS-Unterscharführer Heinrich Kuhnemann to prison.



Michel and his brother Aleksei reunited after 50 years



Michel at commemorative event, Montreal, 1960

KRISTALLNACHT

Annual Kristallnacht Commemorative Program

Sunday, November 5th at 7:30 pm

Beth Israel Congregation

Keynote Speaker: Professor James E. Young
The Uncanny Arts of Holocaust Memory

This year's Kristallnacht commemoration in the Vancouver community will feature a keynote address by Professor James E. Young, one of the world's leading experts on the design and significance of Holocaust memorials and the rituals of Holocaust commemoration.

The Kristallnacht program will take place at 7:30 pm on Sunday, November 5th at Beth Israel Synagogue. The event is open to all members of the public.

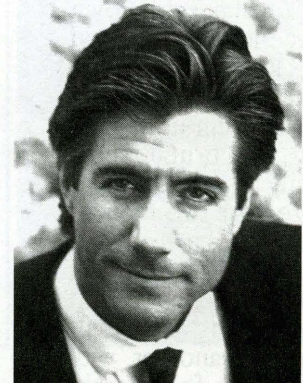
Professor Young's address will be entitled "The Uncanny Arts of Holocaust Memory." The lecture, which will be illustrated with slides, will explore the astonishing variety of ways in which artists and architects have struggled to deal with a subject matter for which it is almost impossible to find an appropriate form of expression.

James Young is Professor of English and Judaic Studies and chair of the Department of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He is the author of three major books: *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Indiana University Press, 1988), *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (Yale University Press, 1993), and *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (Yale University Press,

2000). *The Texture of Memory* received the National Jewish Book Award in 1994.

In 1997 Professor Young was appointed by the Berlin Senate to the five-member commission to approve a final design for the Memorial to Europe's Murdered Jews, which is to be built in the heart of Berlin as Germany's major Holocaust memorial.

The Kristallnacht program commemorates the "Night of Broken Glass" of November 9, 1938, when synagogues and Jewish places of business all over Germany and Austria were destroyed by Nazi hoodlums--an event generally regarded as a major escalation of the Nazis' anti-Jewish program which eventually culminated in the



Holocaust. The keynote address will be preceded by the traditional candlelighting ceremony in memory of the six million Jews killed by the Nazis. Following the close of the formal program, members of the audience who wish to do so may remain at the synagogue to meet Professor Young and ask him questions.

The Kristallnacht commemorative program is sponsored jointly by the Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society and by the adult education committee of Congregation Beth Israel, with funding from the Combined Jewish Appeal of the Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver and from Congregation Beth Israel.

For more information call the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre at 264-0499.



Night of Broken Glass

November 9, 1938

Organized by the Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society and the Adult Education Committee of Congregation Beth Israel
Sponsored by the Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society, Congregation Beth Israel and Combined Jewish Appeal of the Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver

James Young and the Expression of Holocaust Memory

by Chris Friedrichs

Throughout the world there are thousands of monuments and memorials dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust. The impulse to build such monuments continues unabated, with new ones being planned all the time. Yet the location and design of almost every Holocaust memorial has involved arguments and controversy. Even Vancouver has not been spared: when the community-wide Holocaust memorial in the Schara Tzedek cemetery was being planned in the 1980s, there were serious disagreements about exactly what should be inscribed on the monument. In many communities the disputes have been far more public and intense.

Perhaps this is not surprising. The memory of the Holocaust calls forth powerful emotions. Jews and non-Jews alike approach any such site with a confusing mixture of feelings. It is hard to imagine any monument that would support and sustain with equal effectiveness the emotions of all who visit it.

Few scholars have thought as deeply about the design and impact of Holocaust memorials as James E. Young. His best-known book, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), is a broad-ranging description and analysis of Holocaust memorials in Germany, Poland, Israel and the United States. While the book includes some discussion of commemorative rituals, most of it deals with physical monuments—including some which were planned but in the end were never built. Young's book makes clear that almost every such project has been fraught with controversy, but he suggests that these discussions and disputes, painful as they may seem at the time, can actually have an educational value that may be just as important as the finished product itself.

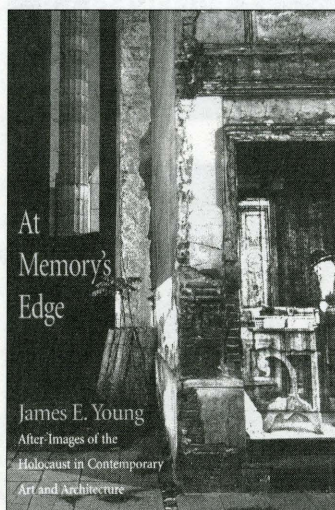
Young's newest book, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), is a collection of essays about recent attempts to deal with the Holocaust in a variety of artistic forms. Some of these essays carry forward the main theme of Young's earlier book by discussing the design and construction of major Holocaust

memorials, especially in Germany. But other chapters address entirely different ways in which contemporary artists address the theme of the Holocaust. One essay, for example, deals with Art Spiegelman's comic-art classic *Maus*, which, as Young emphasizes, is not so much about the Holocaust itself as about the artist's attempt to comprehend and confront it. Other chapters deal with artists who use photomontages or photographic images projected onto outdoor spaces as a way of confronting Holocaust themes. Another

that such art may give rise to reflection, contemplation or sorrow—but not to aesthetic pleasure or satisfaction.

The final chapter of Young's books deals with one of the most intensely debated projects in recent German history—the construction of an official German Holocaust memorial in the very heart of Berlin, just a few hundred metres south of the famous Brandenburg Gate. An initial call for designs resulted in over five hundred submissions, one of which was chosen in 1995 as the winner. But so many objections were raised to this design that the government decided to name a new commission to reconsider the whole matter. One of the members was James Young, by then already famous as the author of *The Texture of Memory*. He was the only non-German—and the only Jew—appointed to the commission.

Young candidly admits that he was initially skeptical as to whether any official German Holocaust monument could be successfully designed. In fact he was clearly attracted to one of the most original submissions in the original competition—a proposal that instead of constructing a new monument the German authorities should tear down the Brandenburg Gate as a permanent reminder to the German people that after the Holocaust their capital was not entitled to keep its most triumphalist emblem. But Young explains that once he joined the commission he came to see that although no design would be perfect, an acceptable monument could and should be constructed in the space put aside for this purpose. He has by now become a firm proponent of the design which his commission—and the German parliament—finally accepted: an uneven field with thousands of stone pillars through which visitors will be able to wander as they contemplate the way in which Germany and Europe were transformed by the elimination of millions of Jews. Yet at the same time Young emphasizes that no physical monument ever can or will be as important as the ongoing "memory-work" which every form of Holocaust-related art should inspire among Jews and non-Jews alike as they confront an event that was devoid of all hope, purpose or meaning.



chapter reflects Young's fascination with "countermonuments"—monuments which are hidden from public view or gradually become invisible, such as the anti-fascist monument in Hamburg which got shorter each year until it finally disappeared underground. What unifies all these forms of expression is the artists' conviction—which Young fully shares—that art related to the Holocaust must never become "redemptory." What this means, in short, is that the artist must never imply and the viewer must never believe that the horrors of the Holocaust can in any way be diminished by having stimulated the creation of something beautiful. This does not mean, of course, that Holocaust memorials or Holocaust-related works of art must always be ugly. Rather, it means

BOOK REVIEW

The Children of Buchenwald

by Judith Hemmendinger &
Robert Krell

Gefen Books, New York

Reviewed by Lucien Lieberman

On April 11, 1945, American soldiers were astonished to find 1,000 children in Buchenwald's Barrack 66. All of them survivors of the death march from Auschwitz and orphaned. Within two months, those children were admitted to France, Switzerland and England. Of these, 426 children were brought to France by OSE (Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants), an organization devoted to helping children. Approximately ninety were placed in the Castle of Vaucelles, a group home in Taverny near Paris where Judith Hemmendinger was in charge from 1945-47.

The children, all boys mainly in their teens, were viewed as damaged beyond hope of repair, of recovery or normalcy. As co-author, Robert Krell, asks in his introduction, "How did they learn to talk again, to trust again, to love again, to regain compassion, to play and pray again?"

The Children of Buchenwald, first published in Dutch in 1984, was a collection of personal accounts based on Judith Hemmendinger's 1981 doctoral dissertation. She formulated a set of questions that asked: "What happened to you from the day you were liberated and from the day you left the hostel two years later?" Sixty of her former "children" (well into their 50s at the time), living in the United States, France and Israel agreed to be interviewed. The recent reissue of the 1984 edition in co-authorship with Robert Krell adds additional personal accounts, commentary by the authors as well as photographs.

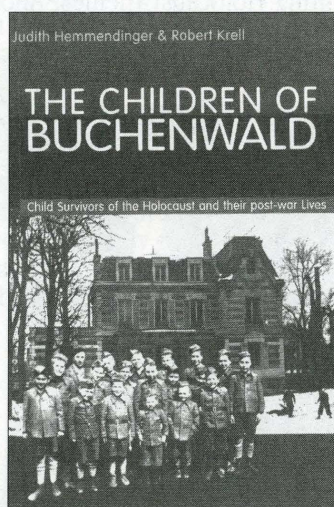
Born Judith Feist of Orthodox Jewish-German parents, Judith Hemmendinger had gone into hiding during the War with her mother and sister in France, later entering Switzerland through the Alps. She was in a refugee camp until the OSE helped her attend a six month course in social work. She was only 22 when assigned the task of director of the home at Taverny. The liberated boys from Buchenwald, dressed in striped pajamas or in uniforms of the Hitler Youth, were viewed by the staff as

young savages. Many were only known by their camp numbers or their nicknames. Suspicious and frightened by authority, especially doctors, they were sorted by age, nationality, language and degree of religious observance. The group that fell under Judith's supervision came from observant homes in Poland and Hungary. Having lost their parents, they chose to re-establish as best they could the kosher food and observant atmosphere of their former homes. The main objective of the group home was to restore the boys' faith in

wards and that she and her assistants Niny Cohen and Leo Margulies were accepted because they too were young and had survived the same murderous events.

A poignant event is recalled in Romek's Story (Robbie Waisman): "A certain expert was brought in to talk to us. We drowned him out by continuing our own conversation. He was furious. He took off his jacket and looked like he wanted to hit us. As he rolled up his sleeve we saw his Auschwitz number tattooed on his arm. A hush fell over the crowd. There was a long pause. He did not speak. After several minutes all he managed to say was *Meine tyrer kinder* (my dear children) and began to cry. We cried with him. For many it was the first time." This incident suggests that the boys would forever hold in high regard those who shared their experiences. Alliances and friendships were established for a lifetime. These young boys would discuss amongst themselves their past experiences. From their personal accounts we learn: "The camps left me the ability to quickly assess people. I know who I will deal with and who not." Or, "Having shoes could save your life in the camps."

The boys had to be persuaded not to squirrel away food into their rooms at night as they had done in the camps. They had to learn that there would be a meal the next day and the day after. They liked to dress up and pose for the camera. They were seeking identity. There was also shared loneliness and shared realization of being orphaned. Robbie Waisman has told me that his greatest dream at that time was to go back to his home, to his family, walk across the threshold and proclaim that he had made it back. He had survived. The



humanity and themselves. While most knew German, the language of their tormentors, their language of choice became Yiddish. Survival depended on close relationships with others. The younger boys looked up to the older ones. Whereas most directors of these group homes were selected according to their ability to command authority, Judith's methods were liberal, sensitive and successful. The reader quickly observes that the secret to her success lay in the fact that she was not much older than many of her



Children of Buchenwald...continued on p. 14



Buchenwald Reunion

by Robbie Waisman

Sitting next to my wife, Gloria, high above the clouds, I finish dinner while a movie is being shown. The stewardesses are settling everyone down for the rest of the flight to Tel Aviv. I push back my seat, close my eyes and try to sleep, but instead all sorts of thoughts rush through my mind. I start thinking about the reunion. Who is coming? Who will I see for the first time after all these years? I already know some of those who may be coming: from Australia, Joe Schwarberg; Abe Chapnick from New York, with whom I shared a bunk in Buchenwald in Block 8 and Chenstachow; Willy Fogel, Zonus, Aaron Bulwa, Lolek Buzyn, my cousins Micheline and Bernard, all from Paris; George Goldblum, Joe Dziubak and Herb Karliner from Florida; from Canada, Jerry Kapelus, Toronto, Stanley Weinstein and Eddie Balter, Montreal; and Rob Krell from Vancouver. Rob Krell's book, *The Children Of Buchenwald*, co-written with Judith Hemmendinger, is going to be launched during the reunion.

Fifty-five years have passed since we, the children of Buchenwald, were liberated on April 11th, 1945. A date that is our rebirth, we are all the same age from that date on. Who were we then? Who are we now? What have we made of our lives? What responsibility do we have to those that perished? So very few of us survived. Have we kept the faith? Have we honoured and kept the memory? Did we fulfill our pledge of continuity? So many questions.

I keep thinking about how we separated after the War and dispersed all over the world seeking some magical place to rebuild our shattered lives. Time has changed us all. We are no longer the youngsters we were. Together we were enslaved in various concentration camps, in particular the notorious Buchenwald death camp. We shared the pain, the deprivation, the humiliation and the uncertainty. We also shared the ruthless loss of loved ones, mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers and school friends. We lost our childhood, our innocence and our humanity.

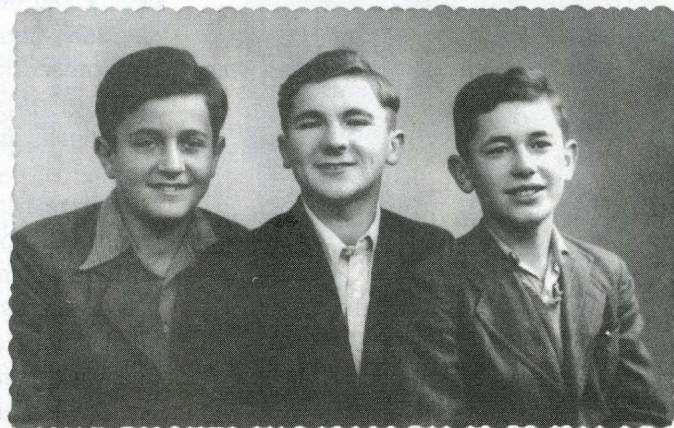
When we arrived in Ecouis France after our liberation, we were not human, according to the OSE, an aid society for children. The staff tried desperately to rebuild our shattered lives. I remember how we tried to tell them, to unburden the heavy load we carried with us, but we could not. Instead we let rage and anger do the talking for us, thinking that if we showed what was in our hearts and minds they would not

believe us anyway. All we had was each other, not fully realizing how much this togetherness meant. Despite the disparity of languages we spoke, Yiddish, Rumanian, Polish, German, when we spoke, we spoke together. The bond formed between us is impossible to explain. Fifty-five years later this closeness has strengthened beyond belief.

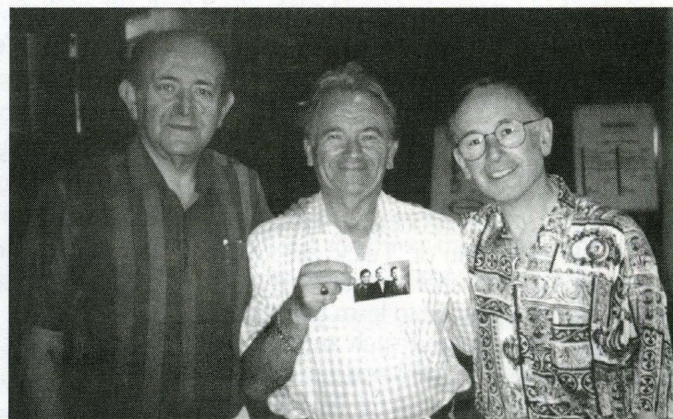
Buchenwald Reunion...continued on p. 14

16th Annual Cherie Smith JCC Jewish Book Fair Event
Book launch and talk by Dr. Richard Menkis, editor of *New Perspectives on Canada, The Holocaust and Survivors* & Dr. Robert Krell, co-author of *The Children of Buchenwald*

**2:30 p.m. Sunday, November 5
in the Dayson Board Room at the JCC**



Marek Goldfinger, Joseph Dziubak and Romek Wajzman in Paris, France 1946
(above) and Mark Goldfinger, Joe Dziubak and Robbie Waisman
in Tel Aviv, Israel in 2000 (below).



The Child Survivor Page – "No Longer Alone" welcomes submissions from Child Survivors.

Send to the Editorial Committee: Leo Vogel and David Reed, c/o Holocaust Education Centre 50-950 W. 41st Avenue, Vancouver BC V5Z 2N7

BUCHENWALD

Children of Buchenwald...continued from p. 12

dream was not to be fulfilled.

The photographs provided in the second edition suggest that the boys quickly regained their health, were provided with good clothing and had an air of optimism. Certainly Taverny provided a surrogate family, a period of transition and the establishment of a strong sense of brotherhood. Gradually the boys were re-integrated with family, some close, most distant, or they emigrated to the U.S., Israel or Canada. Somewhere along the way Robbie Waisman was advised: "If you keep on with the past it will surely destroy you. You must learn to put it aside, go back to school and concentrate on your future." Time and geography left old ties to wither and weaken. Yet there were events that caused survivors to confront their past and to talk about it with their families. The Eichmann trial in Israel in 1961 was one such event. Perhaps it was the questioning of a new generation as grandchildren matured. In Robbie Waisman's case it was the emergence of Holocaust deniers here in Canada that caused him to speak out and to help organize the Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society.

The strength of this collection of 16 personal accounts and the accompanying analysis by the authors lies in the personal reflections provided in the individual stories. There is also the contrasting reflection of both the religious believers and the non-believers. Amongst the personal accounts are memories provided by two high profile individuals, Elie Wiesel, who had a part in encouraging this study in 1981, and Meir Lau or "Lulek" who holds the title of Chief Rabbi of Israel. In the case of the latter it is good to learn that there is a human face behind such an imposing contemporary title. Lulek was age eight and amongst the youngest of the boys liberated in 1945.

In May of 2000 the Buchenwald Boys held a reunion in Tel Aviv. While it is interesting to know that a number of the Buchenwald boys achieved significant financial and professional success, it is more important to know that when arranging the reunion, the financial fortunate helped those less able to afford the expensive travel. This same group has made donations to the OSE, the French organization that is still in the business of helping disadvantaged children.

Buchenwald Reunion...continued from p. 13

The lobby of the David International Hotel in Tel Aviv is elegant and very large - ideal for meeting. From the moment we arrive, the hugging and kissing is non-stop. Wives are introduced, photos of children and grandchildren are exchanged. In the morning, buses arrive to take us to Yad Vashem to meet the many Buchenwald boys who now live in Israel. The emotions that we experience in that particular place are hard to describe. A meaningful service is held for all our loved ones that perished. Over the years our hearts and souls have mellowed and we are finally able to cry. Somehow, it feels right and yet the pain does not diminish. Will it ever?

Later, we gather to have lunch. As soon as we are together the table hopping begins. Old photos circulate. Most have changed their first names: Lolek became Elie; Idel, George; Romek, Robbie, etc. We have name-tags and begin to recognize each other. The atmosphere is overwhelming. How do you begin to catch up on 55 years of life? When we finally get back to the hotel, I feel exuberant but emotionally drained.

The next day, apart from the hassle and bustle of the reunion, I take time to chat with Abe Chapnick from New York. In a small cafe we start to reminisce. Events long passed suddenly surface and feelings emerge that had laid dormant all these years. It is a journey that amazes me. We remember the American bombers that used to bomb cities close to the camp. As the bombs came down they made a hissing sound before exploding. Abe used to imitate the sound and it drove me mad. I remember once telling him to stop: "Abram these bombs are not going to kill you. You know why? Because I am going to do it, if you don't cut it out!"

Another time, several truck loads of potatoes arrived at the camp, but for some reason the Germans emptied the trucks in the middle of the yard about 30 to 40 feet from the barracks. Two guards with rifles patrolled the pile of potatoes going round and round. We timed the completed round at 48 seconds. Abe convinced me that he could run up to the pile, pick up a bunch in a container and return safely. He insisted on going first but ultimately we took turns. We were constantly hungry in the camps, a great motivation for risking one's life. Had we been caught, we would have been shot right on the spot. That night we went to sleep for the first time in a long time with a full stomach. What is important is that 55 years later I am finding out how my friend Abe felt about me, moreover how we felt about each other. He told me that at the time, he would not have been able to bear it if something went wrong and if one of us should die, he hoped it would be him. After I had been separated from my father and brother, Abe and I became very close. We depended on each other and that meant more than we both realized. Why these feelings were not expressed until now, I will never know.

It is strange how the reunion forced us to reflect on our survival. To take stock so to speak. What is the meaning of all of this? This is the third reunion we have shared together. Will there be any others? Every time we meet we are fewer in number. Out of the 431 that went to France from Buchenwald, almost all became good decent human beings in spite of the predictions to the contrary. It is a tribute to the human spirit. I believe very strongly that we became the kind of people our parents would have wanted us to be. As we age, we have a strong urge to leave a legacy. Yes we remember. We remember because for us to do otherwise would be unthinkable. We remember everyone who was so dear to us, stronger with each passing year. We will go on remembering each other as well, we will never forget.

RHODES AND THE HOLOCAUST

One Survivor's Story: Rosa Israel Ferera

When I was a child in Rhodes, life was very happy. We never knew any sort of discrimination. My family had lived on the island for generations, since my ancestors fled the Inquisition in Spain. The Jewish community was a very close knit, religious community. At one time, before the war there were six or seven thousand Jews. People began emigrating to places where they could make a better living than what the small island offered. In the end, before the deportations, there were only about two thousand Jews left on Rhodes.

In my family there were four sisters. One left just before the War for Africa and survived the Holocaust. The other three, myself included, were deported. Two of my sisters perished in the camps.

When Italy made the alliance with Germany in 1938, the Italian government decided to enforce the racial laws. People who weren't born on the island had to leave. We saw families leaving everything behind and going to different countries - wherever they could. We couldn't continue to go to school anymore. Jews weren't allowed to have radios. I heard from a certain Italian ship captain who came to Rhodes from Greece about the deportations in Salonica. How the entire city which was mostly Jewish had been deported and was now nearly deserted. We wanted to leave. We wrote to all our relatives everywhere. Then in 1939 war broke out and we couldn't go anywhere. We were stuck on the island.

The Germans took hold of the island in September 1943. In July, 1944 we were ordered to a hall in the Italian quarters. All the Jews, men, women and children had to assemble and bring only a change of clothing and their valuables. Whoever did not obey the order would be punished. Everyone ran to assemble. We were there for two days, then they sent us to Greece. A few got out because they had foreign passports. That's all, just a few escaped.

The Germans announced that they were going to send us to work. We were taken to

Greece in small cargo boats. The conditions were terrible. We stayed in a school building in Greece for two days, without food, without water, in extreme heat, it was unbearable. We witnessed terrible scenes of elderly people fainting, even dying in that place. My uncle who was diabetic died from thirst. One day the order came for us to go in to the trains.

The trains were cattle cars. The conditions in the car were absolutely impossible. It is something one cannot describe. We were so tired and sick of what we were witnessing that wherever we arrived it would be heaven, as long as we got somewhere. We saw fields of Polish women working, and we thought this is what we will be doing. It wasn't so.

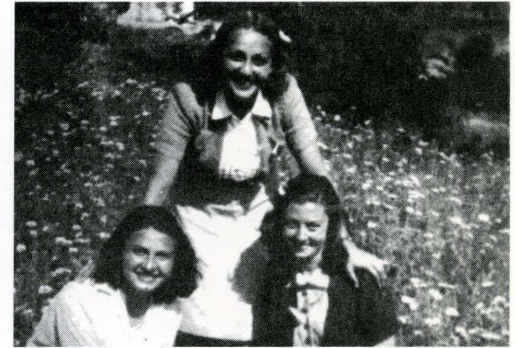
When I arrived at Auschwitz, it was daytime. I was still with my family. We had stayed close together thinking that we could stay together, which was just a dream. When they opened the doors at Auschwitz, the first thing they said was, "Young people here, old people there." We didn't know what was going on. Other people around us said, "Don't turn even your face, just walk straight", and we were walking and that was the last glimpse we had of our parents.

There were many Salonica boys who were working at the trains. They spoke Spanish to us. They told us in just a few words what was going on. They said: "Don't have illusions. Just try and be strong or you will perish." So the three of us sisters stayed together.

At the time of my "selection" my sisters were in hospital. They had a rash on their skin and when the order came they were still in hospital. I went to see if they could leave that day with me but they couldn't. I was leaving my sisters behind. I didn't know what would happen to them. We knew we were leaving the camp and it was a relief in a way because we knew this was one of the worst camps.

I only knew after the War what happened

to my sisters. They were sent to Bergen Belsen which was another extermination camp. I heard from some friends that they died there after the liberation, as many did.



Rosa (far right) with her sister Flora (left) and friend, Becky Hazan (centre), circa 1943.

They were skeletons walking in the streets. Before I heard all this, I always hoped that I would find them.

I was selected to go because I was young. I still looked healthy because I had only been in Auschwitz three months, although in that time we were already completely changed. One of my dreams was to survive and to tell the world. It gave us hope that the Allies were advancing, and that they were winning the War. Just before the end we watched some of the SS take off their uniforms and throw them out in the streets in case the Allies came unexpectedly.

I was observant, we were all very good Jews in Rhodes. But in Auschwitz we started asking questions about God. Why is God doing this? There wasn't a day that this didn't pass through our minds. At other moments we also had some hope which kept us alive. We observed Yom Kippur inside the camp which was absurd if you think of it, to be a day without eating completely, because we were so hungry all the time. It is really beyond understanding, but we still did it. We were still clinging to something. We knew that it was Yom Kippur. There was no service, not at all. But we all sat together in a corner, just trying to pray to ourselves, and pray hard that this suffering would end. We tried to feel a little relief. That's all.



Rosa, 1946

Cards & Donations

JUNE 29TH - AUGUST 31ST

Donations

In Memory Of Bertha Fraeme, A Dear Lady I Much Admired And Respected, from Frances Belzberg.

In Memory Of My Father, Morris Gechman, from Sheila Gechman.

In Memory Of Gail Feldman Heller, from Sam and Lola Haber.

In Memory Of Katharine Ketcham, from Elizabeth Johnson.

In Memory Of Katalin Spiro, Lil Shafran, Rachel Samuel and Ava Samuel, from Leslie Spiro.

In Recognition Of Neri Tischler's Assistance This Year, from the Minnes Family.

Mazel Tov

Jack & Sheila Bermack, On Your Anniversary, from Karen, Steve, David & Erin Kline.

Sandy & Morris Bojm, On Eric's Bar Mitzvah, from Susan & Joe Stein and Family.

Bill Brandt, On Your Special Birthday, from Izzy Fraeme.

Sander Caplan, In Honour Of Your Second Bar Mitzvah, from Sarah Rozenberg-Warm.

Les Cosman, On Your 70th Birthday, from Serge & Brenda Vanry.

Mark & Sylvie Epstein, In Honour Of Your 25th Anniversary, from Elizabeth, Richard & Arthur Wolak.

Joey & Lori Jachimowicz, On The Birth Of Sara, from Richard, Arthur & Elizabeth Wolak.

Dr. Robert Krell, On Your Special Birthday, from Beatrice, Lew, Shawn & Lianne Lewis.

Mrs. Emmy Krell, On The Marriage Of Your Granddaughter, Shoshana, from Sarah Spivack.

Dr. Robert & Marilyn Krell, On Shoshana's Marriage, from Ivan & Laurie Gasoi.

Dr. Robert Krell, In Honour Of Your Special Birthday, from Ethel & Reggie Lewis, Mark & Gerri London, Helen & David Mars, Michael & Phyllis Moscovich, Stephen & Rhona Schneiderman, VHEC Board & Staff, Robbie & Gloria Waisman, Danny Weinstein & Charlotte Berman.

Congressman Tom & Annette Lantos, On Your 50th Wedding Anniversary, from Paul & Edwina Heller.

Rachel Levine, In Honour Of Your 80th Birthday, from Ettie, Matthew, Michael & Jordan Kosfky.

Jack & Chana Margalit, On Your Grandson's Bar Mitzvah, from Susan Bluman.

Tyla Meyer, In Honour Of Your Birthday, from Paul Meyer.

Judy & Ron Remick, On Your Anniversary, from The Thals.

Rochel Resnik, In Honour Of Your 90th Birthday, from The Yiddish Reading Group.

Neal & Tamara Schuster, On The Birth of Eliana, from Richard Wolak.

Sympathy

The Altman Family, Our Deepest Condolences On Your Recent Loss, from The Thal Family.

Joe Auerhahn, On The Loss Of Your Beloved Wife, Ina, from Abe & Goldie Miedzygorski and Family.

Diane & Gary Averbach and Family, On The Loss Of Your Beloved Mother & Grandmother, from Abe & Goldie Miedzygorski and Family.

Jackie Ayzenberg & Family, On The Loss Of Your Beloved Father and Grandfather, from David & Regina Feldman.

Sarah Bentel, On The Loss Of Your Beloved Brother, Mottie, from Irv Wolak and Susan & Joe Stein.

Barry Dunner, In Memory Of Your Beloved Mother, Else, from Herb & Shirley Fitterman.

Izzy Fraeme, On The Loss Of Your Beloved Wife, Bertha, from Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, Harry & Katherine Herman, David & Chela Herman, Chaim & Aliza Kornfeld and Family, Michelle (Margolis) & Eli Mina.

Martin Hector, On The Loss Of Your Beloved Brother, Richard, from Robbie & Gloria Waisman.

Mrs. Lil Hector and Family, On The Loss Of Your Beloved Husband, Richard, from Robbie & Gloria Waisman.

Anna & Jane Helman, On The Loss Of Your Dear Husband and Father, from Shoshana, Moshe and Revi Fidelman.

Elenor & Al Hornstein, To Honour The Memory Of Your Father, from Lillian Boraks-Nemetz.

Samuel Huberman, On Your Recent Loss, from Izzy Fraeme.

Mrs. Rose Jordan & The Lithwick Family, On The Passing Of Your Loving Husband, Father & Grandfather, from Tibor and Agi Bergida.

Emerich Klein, On The Loss Of Your Beloved Wife, Jenny, from Izzy Fraeme, David & Regina Feldman, The Szajman Family.

Lehrer Family, On The Tragic Loss Of Your Beloved Grandson, from Robbie & Gloria Waisman.

Al Linds, On The Loss Of Your Beloved Wife, Ruth, from George & Frieda Wertman.

Dahlia Maar, In Memory Of Your Beloved Son, Eyal, from Dr. Roberta S. Kremer.

Mrs. Mimi Noodleman, On The Loss Of Your Beloved Husband, from David & Regina Feldman.

Debbie Pollock, In Memory Of Your Grandfather, from Susan & Joe Stein and Family.

Mrs. Gladys Rose, On The Loss Of Your Beloved Daughter, Cathy, from Dorothy Goldenberg, Chaim & Aliza Kornfeld and Family, Robbie & Gloria Waisman.

Dr. and Mrs. Alvin Rossman and Family, Our Deepest Condolences On Your Recent Loss, The Thal Family.

Genie & Norman Wexler and Family, On The Loss Of Your Beloved Father and Grandfather, Benjamin Mandelkern, from Gloria, Jack & Joanna Altman.

Speedy Recovery

Ben Akselrod, from Robbie & Gloria Waisman.

Barbara Bluman, from Gina Dimant.

Fay Davis, from Robbie & Gloria Waisman.

Esther Dorchik, from The Abraham & Leah Fox Family, Harold & Bella Silverman, Regina Wertman.

David Ehrlich, from Tibor & Agi Bergida.

Michael Farber, from Izak & Lili Folk.

Mrs. Else Herman, from Izzy Fraeme.

Tilley Levine, from Lylane & Larry Thal.

Hector Ross, from David & Grace Ehrlich.

David Shafran, from Susan Bluman, Annette & Syd Shafran, VHEC Board & Staff.

Mrs. Terry Szajman, from Ben & Rose Folk, Lili & Ignace Folk, Ida Kaplan, Norman & Celia Margolis, Abe & Goldie Miedzygorski and Family.

Thank You

Lola Apfelbaum, from the Staff of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre.

Thinking of You

Barbara Bluman, from Frieda Miller and Daniel Shapiro.

Gary Romalis, from Michel & June Mielnicki, VHEC Board and Staff

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