יד ושם
YAD VASHEM

The Jewish Family *during* the Holocaust

"Unto Every Person There Is A Name" - Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 2026

Table *of* Contents

Cover:
Jewish family wearing the Yellow Star, Wloclawek, Poland

נשיא המדינה
رئيس الدولة
THE PRESIDENT

Jerusalem, December 24, 2025

Dear Friends,

As Yom HaShoah approaches, communities throughout the world once again gather around "Upon Every Person a Name" ceremonies, to speak aloud the names of those individuals — those whole worlds — that the Nazi monster sought to erase.

In the simple, public calling of a name there is a profound moral act -- the reverse gesture of annihilation. Where the perpetrators sought to reduce human beings to an anonymous mass, memory restores the irreducibility of each life, each story, each human presence. In this way, remembrance becomes not only an obligation to the victims, but a recovery of something essential to humanity itself.

This year's remembrance centers on the theme **"The Family During the Holocaust."** The family is the most intimate and private of human spheres — and also the most foundational. It is the first space of belonging, care, and moral formation; the place where memory, identity, and responsibility are first transmitted. Upon this small and fragile structure rests the wholeness of Jewish life, and of human society more broadly.

The systematic destruction of Jewish families was therefore not a secondary consequence of the Holocaust, but one of its most devastating dimensions. Parents were torn from children, spouses from one another, generations from their continuity. Homes were shattered, lineages ruptured, and the quiet architectures of care and meaning that sustain human life were violently dismantled. In destroying the family, the perpetrators sought to destroy not only Jewish bodies, but Jewish continuity itself.

And yet, from the aftermath of devastation emerged one of the most remarkable acts of resilience in Jewish history: the rebuilding of family, home, and continuity. Survivors formed new families, raised children, rebuilt communities, and chose life in the face of almost

unimaginable loss. In this sense, the recovery of the family became one of the deepest forms of healing for a wounded people.

Today, the lessons of this history feel painfully close. Jewish hatred has once again become a living and pervasive reality — robbing people of their lives, destabilizing communities, and undermining the ethical foundations upon which free societies depend. The distance once imagined between past catastrophe and present danger has narrowed. The memory of the Holocaust speaks urgently into the present, warning what follows when prejudice is tolerated and human dignity is allowed to erode.

It is for this reason that acts of memory matter so deeply. In naming the victims, the sanctity of each life is affirmed. In recalling the destruction of families, the moral necessity of protecting the structures of care and belonging that make human society possible is reaffirmed. And in transmitting these memories forward, the world is reminded what must never again be taken for granted.

Friends, I thank every community and every individual who carries this responsibility. Through intentioned acts of memory and renewed commitment to human dignity, we pave the path to a more just and compassionate world.

Yours sincerely, Shalom!

Isaac Herzog
President of the State of Israel

Unto Every Person *There Is* A Name

Public Recitation of Names of Holocaust Victims in Israel and Abroad
on Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 2026

"Unto every person there is a name, given to him by God and by his parents", wrote the Israeli poetess Zelda. Every single victim of the Holocaust—men, women and children—had a name. A first name, given by their parents, and a surname, carrying on the familial heritage. The vast number of Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust—some six million men, women and children—is beyond human comprehension, and we are liable to lose sight of the fact that each and every victim was an entire world.

This year marks the 37th anniversary of the global Shoah memorial initiative "Unto Every Person There Is A Name," held annually under the auspices of the President of the State of Israel. The project aims to reach out to as many communities and institutions as possible, in Israel and elsewhere. In Israel the main events take place in the Knesset, with the participation of the President and Prime Minister, government ministers and Members of Knesset, and in Yad Vashem's Hall of Remembrance, with the participation of Holocaust survivors, students and youth movements. Name recitation ceremonies are also held in local authorities, schools, universities, youth movements, IDF bases, and in commemorative institutions and Jewish communities around the world. The Unto Every Person There Is A Name project is conducted through the efforts of B'nai B'rith International, Nativ, the World Jewish Congress and the World Zionist Organization. The project is coordinated by Yad Vashem in consultation with the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Name recitation ceremonies form part of a larger network of educational and commemorative programs carried out on Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day.

The theme of this year's observances is: **The Jewish Family during the Holocaust**

Despite the considerable shifts effected in Jewish society in different locations between the two world wars, the family unit remained a hub of identity and connection. On the eve of the Holocaust, many Jewish families still adhered to the traditional social construct of generational connection, division of labor and everyday life, which shaped the world of each individual, giving them a feeling of stability and meaning. With the rise of the Nazi regime, in one fell swoop this reality disintegrated. Systematic alienation from the public sphere, expulsion from educational frameworks, persecution, deportation, forced labor and perpetual violence meant that hundreds of thousands of Jewish families were no longer able to function as they had in the past.

During the first stages of the war the Nazis' violence and savagery toward the Jews were primarily directed at men. Many men were arrested and conscripted to forced labor, or fled and hid to avoid persecution. This led to an unavoidable role-reversal: the responsibility for keeping their families afloat fell on the women. In the face of the punishing decrees, the deportation to ghettos in Eastern Europe, and the ever-present terror, the struggle to sustain their families led many women to search for resourceful ways to make a living.

Children often participated in this daily struggle to survive, becoming smugglers or taking on other roles to support their families, despite their young age and the harsh living conditions.

In a reality of extreme shortage, overcrowding, hunger and perpetual fear, the relentless endeavor to maintain a semblance of normal family life, preserve standards of hygiene, and gather together for meals, even when there was barely anything to eat, was a persistent challenge.

In this sense, the family constituted a refuge from the ostracism and persecution, providing a source of resilience and an anchor in a disintegrating reality.

However, the family unit also sometimes aroused worries and tensions. Scant resources, uncertainty, and the unending struggle over each scrap of bread eroded family ties and forced parents to face harrowing dilemmas.

Even before the outbreak of World War II, and especially during the period of the "Final Solution," comprehension gradually dawned that in some cases, the dismantling of the family unit was the key to survival. Parents were forced to assist in their children's escape, to send them into hiding, or to separate family members—agonizing decisions made in the faint hope of saving life.

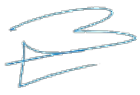
In a reality of *Aktionen*, deportations and mass murder, the fate of those families who stayed together and those who were forced to disband was for the most part the same—annihilation. Indeed, the fracturing of the Jewish family unit also heralded the rupture of Jewish society as a whole.

Even in the most extreme conditions, in the ghettos, concentration and labor camps, familial affection and interpersonal solidarity were crucial in the perpetual struggle to survive. Under unspeakable conditions, Jews did everything they could to establish groups that could act as family units. These human ties, sometimes forged between complete strangers, provided support, meaning and the ability to hold on even in the most harrowing of circumstances.

After the war, Holocaust survivors searched desperately for family members who had managed to survive, and also started families of their own, an important step in their rehabilitation and return to life. Despite the many tribulations and ongoing trauma, the renewal of family ties was a pivotal factor in the rehabilitation of the survivors, their return to life after the Holocaust, and the rebirth of the Jewish people as a whole.

Learning about the Jewish family during the Holocaust affords an understanding of a fundamental dimension of loss: not just the loss of individuals, but the loss of entire families, generational connections and whole worlds that were erased. Against the backdrop of the fracturing of the Jewish family during the Shoah, every name represents not only one person, but a whole family unit: parents and children, brothers and sisters, grandfathers and grandmothers: family ties that were brutally severed. By reciting the names of Shoah victims, we restore their human and familial identities, and make space for them in the public and national collective memory. The Unto Every Person There Is A Name materials enable contemplation and reflection on the Shoah through the lens of the stories of individuals and families, and remind us that behind each name lies an entire world that was and is no more.

Yours sincerely,



Dani Dayan | Chairman

Unto Every Person There Is A Name
לכל איש יש שם
Public Recitation of Names of Holocaust Victims on Yom Hashoah

YOM HASHOAH | HOLOCAUST MARTYRS' AND HEROES' REMEMBRANCE DAY
14 APRIL 2026 – 27 NISSAN 5786

Letter from the International Committee "Unto Every Person There Is A Name"

Introduction

The worldwide Holocaust memorial project "Unto Every Person There is a Name", now in its 37th consecutive year, is a unique project designed to perpetuate the memory of the Six Million - among them one-and-a-half million Jewish children – murdered while the world remained silent. The project offers the opportunity to memorialize them not only as a collective, but as individuals – one at a time - through the recitation of their names on Yom Hashoah – Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day. You can help to restore the identity and dignity of the victims of the Holocaust by organizing a name-recitation ceremony on Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day – 14 April 2026 – 27 Nissan. Links to lists of names taken from Yad Vashem's Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names, and planning recommendations are included below.

The Unto Every Person There Is A Name project focuses attention on the urgent need to retrieve additional names of Holocaust victims, before they recede into oblivion.

The "Unto Every Person There Is A Name" project is conducted around the world through the efforts of four major Jewish organizations: B'nai B'rith International, Nativ, the World Jewish Congress and the World Zionist Organization.

The project is coordinated by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, in consultation with the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs and enjoys the official auspices of President of the State of Israel, the Hon. Isaac Herzog.

Personalizing the Holocaust

The most fundamental feature of the Shoah is the systematic murder of six million innocent Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators for the sole reason that they were Jewish. Each of their deaths was a separate, distinct tragedy and crime that together has caused indelible lasting trauma to the Jewish people. As time passes and fewer witnesses remain, it is imperative to create a personal link between the Jewish people today and those who were murdered under the Nazi genocidal regime. Recitation of names of Holocaust victims - together with such information as their age, place of birth and place of murder - personalizes the tragedy of the Holocaust.

Emphasis is thus put on the millions of individuals – men, women and children - who were lost to the Jewish people, and not solely on the cold intangibility embodied in the term "The Six Million".

"Unto Every Person There is a Name" rests on the success of Yad Vashem's Shoah Victims' Names Recovery Project that to date has identified 5 million names of Shoah victims and that continues its quest to recover all the six million names.

The Central Theme for Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 2026: **The Jewish Family during the Holocaust**

Despite the considerable shifts effected in Jewish society in different locations between the two world wars, the family unit remained a hub of identity and connection. On the eve of the Holocaust, many Jewish families still adhered to the traditional social construct in which the father was the main breadwinner, and the mother took care of the household and the children. However, with the rise of the Nazi regime, in one fell swoop, hundreds of thousands of Jewish families were no longer able to function as they had in the past. Children were expelled from educational frameworks, and Jews were banned from the public sphere. The Nazis' violence and savagery toward the Jews, which during the 1930s and the first stages of the war were primarily directed at men, quickly caused the collapse of the traditional family unit, leading to an unavoidable role-reversal. Many men were arrested and conscripted to forced labor, or fled and hid to avoid persecution, and as a result, the responsibility for keeping their families afloat fell on the women. In the face of the punishing decrees, the deportation to ghettos in Eastern Europe, and the ever-present terror, the struggle to sustain their families led many women to search for resourceful ways to make a living. Children often participated in this daily struggle to survive, becoming smugglers or taking on other roles to support their families.

The relentless endeavor to maintain a semblance of normal family life, preserve standards of hygiene, and gather together for meals, even when there was barely anything to eat, was a persistent challenge.

Scroll down to see the complete rationale and a collection of texts and readings for your use.

In addition to this collection of texts and readings, Yad Vashem has created several Ready2Print exhibitions on a range of subjects that can be printed locally, free of charge.

For more information about the different exhibitions available, and to order the exhibition files, click here .

Yad Vashem's extensive collection of video testimonies by Holocaust survivors is also available for your use.

Recover Names of Shoah Victims

"Unto Every Person There is a Name" events provide a unique opportunity to gather heretofore unknown names of all the Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

Since its inception, one of Yad Vashem's central missions has been the recovery of the names and personal stories of all victims of the Shoah. While the Nazis sought not only to physically destroy the Jews but also to obliterate any memory of them, The Shoah Victims' Names Recovery Project realizes our moral imperative to memorialize each victim as a human being, and not merely a single collective number. (To learn more about the project click here)

The relentless endeavor has to date identified five million names of Shoah victims, documented in the Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names online at: www.yadvashem.org with over 2,820,000 names registered on "Pages of Testimony" submitted by relatives and others who knew of the victims. The remainder of the victims' names in the database were derived from various archival sources and postwar commemoration projects. The outstanding universal value of the Pages of Testimony Memorial Collection has been recognized by UNESCO, which in 2013 inscribed it in its prestigious Memory of the World Register.

The Names Database, uploaded to the Internet in 2004, marked a pioneering use of technology in the service of memory, documenting and commemorating nearly three million names of Holocaust victims. To continue to meet the needs of an expanding worldwide community of users, Yad Vashem has upgraded and re-designed the database, making use of an innovative platform that allows the accessibility of online information in a fast and user-friendly format.

The milestone figure of 5 million names was recently announced by Yad Vashem in a press release. "Reaching five million names is both a milestone and a reminder of our unfinished obligation," said Yad Vashem Chairman Dani Dayan. "Behind each name is a life that mattered- a child who never grew up, a parent who never came home, a voice that was silenced forever. It is our moral duty to ensure that every victim is remembered so that no one will be left behind in the darkness of anonymity."

Names recitations may be utilized to call upon members of your community to complete a "Page of Testimony" for each unregistered victim, or to volunteer to assist others with this urgent task.

Important links

Lists of names

Pages of Testimony

Video testimonies

The official opening ceremony at Yad Vashem marking the commencement of Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 2026 will take place on Monday, 13 April at 20:00 (8 PM) Israel time.

The ceremony will be broadcast on Israel's television and radio channels, on Yad Vashem's website and Yad Vashem's youtube channels.

We are available to answer any questions that might arise and provide additional material as necessary.

Sincerely,

Members of the **"Unto Every Person There Is A Name"** International Committee: **Orly Nir, Esther Voloshin** (Yad Vashem); **Alan Schneider** (B'nai B'rith International); World Jewish Congress; **Sarit Handknopf** (World Zionist Organization); **Arezoo Hersel-Rohila** (Israel Foreign Ministry); **Masha Novikov** (Nativ).

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The Central Theme for Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 2026

The Jewish Family *during* the Holocaust

Despite the considerable shifts effected in Jewish society in different locations between the two world wars, the family unit remained a hub of identity and connection. On the eve of the Holocaust, many Jewish families still adhered to the traditional social construct in which the father was the main breadwinner, and the mother took care of the household and the children. However, with the rise of the Nazi regime, in one fell swoop, hundreds of thousands of Jewish families were no longer able to function as they had in the past. Children were expelled from educational frameworks, and Jews were banned from the public sphere. The Nazis' violence and savagery toward the Jews, which during the 1930s and the first stages of the war were primarily directed at men, quickly caused the collapse of the traditional family unit, leading to an unavoidable role-reversal. Many men were arrested and conscripted to forced labor, or fled and hid to avoid persecution, and as a result, the responsibility for keeping their families afloat fell on the women. In the face of the punishing decrees, the deportation to ghettos in Eastern Europe, and the ever-present terror, the struggle to sustain their families led many women to search for resourceful ways to make a living. Children often participated in this daily struggle to survive, becoming smugglers or taking on other roles to support their families.

The relentless endeavor to maintain a semblance of normal family life, preserve standards of hygiene, and gather together for meals, even when there was barely anything to eat, was a persistent challenge.

In this sense, the family constituted a refuge from the ostracism and persecution, providing a vital sense of cohesion in the chaos, as described by Reuven Feldschuh (later Ben-Szem) in his depiction of the Passover seder he held with his wife and their only daughter in the Warsaw ghetto in April 1941:

> *He lurks outside, the world's most deadly foe, the Angel of Death's double… one millimeter beyond the windows, but he has no control here, in the room, my room, my house. Here… despite all the impediments and mishaps, the obstacles and quarrels, family kinship and inner joy prevails… Sitting and basking in their own radiance, there is joy in their souls, which has not been quashed by him, even now, even in the ghetto.*[1]

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1. Reuven Feldschuh (Ben-Szem), entry from April 1941, *Be'einayim Yeveishot Midema: Yoman Vereshimot Migeto Varsha*, 1939–1943, ed. by Bella Gutterman (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2024), pp. 212–213.

However, the family unit was not only a source of strength and vitality; oftentimes, it was a cause for concern and even an impediment. Scant resources, uncertainty, and the unending struggle over each scrap of bread aroused worries and tensions, which eroded family ties. Even before the outbreak of World War II, and especially during the period of the "Final Solution," comprehension gradually dawned that in some cases, the dismantling of the family unit was the key to survival. The attempts to save family members started even before the war, when many parents tried to save their children via the Kindertransport, the organized passage of thousands of Jewish children from Germany and Austria mostly to Britain, when this measure was still a possibility.

Confronted with unrestrained roundups in Eastern and Western Europe, deportations, and mass murder, mothers and fathers were faced with one of the most devastating dilemmas presented during the Holocaust. These stricken parents realized that obeying the natural human instinct to hold their children close would be a death sentence for them, and that sending them away to a safe haven might be the only chance to save them. Parents often enabled their children's escape, urging them to completely detach themselves from their families and not to be concerned about their family's welfare, in a bid to secure their survival. Youngsters thus fled the ghettos for the forests and other hiding places. Shalom Kaplan-Eilati's mother made the agonizing decision to arrange her eleven-year-old son's escape from the Kovno ghetto, ordering him to survive, come what may. Others sent their children into hiding with non-Jewish friends and acquaintances, usually in return for payment, or through underground organizations and rescuers who were later recognized as Righteous Among the Nations. Parents were also tormented by the fear that hiding their children in convents, and with Christian families in general, would prevent their return to the Jewish fold after the war, a fear that was often realized after the Holocaust, particularly in cases where the child was orphaned.

Relentlessly hunted down, the fate of those families who stayed together and those who were forced to disband was for the most part the same—annihilation. Indeed, the fracturing of the Jewish family unit also heralded the rupture of Jewish society as a whole. In his diary penned in the Vilna ghetto, Herman Kruk described the shock waves that reverberated throughout the ghetto after the elderly residents were deported. He wrote of the indescribable difficulty involved in continuing to function in a society whose natural structure had been overturned so savagely. A similar feeling of crushing loss, akin to amputation, was described in the Lodz ghetto after the Sperre, the brutal roundup in September 1942 in which thousands of children and elderly were deported to their deaths.

Among Jewish prisoners in the concentration and labor camps too, familial affection and interpersonal solidarity were crucial in the perpetual struggle to survive. Under unspeakable conditions, Jews did everything they could to establish groups that could act as family units. Women in the Ravensbrück concentration camp would gather together and recreate from memory the recipes of dishes they used to cook in their homes before the war. The very fact of sharing and human closeness helped them to hold on, day after day. This phenomenon reached its zenith amongst the groups of partisans, principally Tuvia Bielski and his brothers in Belorussia, who saved over 1,000 Jewish men, women, and children during the war. The Bielski brothers escaped to the forest and made the courageous decision to direct their

energy and resources not only toward fighting the Nazis but first and foremost to facilitating rescue, establishing family camps that saved many Jews. Similar efforts to preserve the family unit also existed in certain Nazi concentration camps, for example in the Giado camp in Libya, where entire families were deported together.

After the war, Holocaust survivors searched desperately for family members who had managed to survive, and also started families of their own, an important step in their rehabilitation and return to life. Many expressed the fierce yearning to start life anew, to get married and build homes, objectives that were hampered by issues including *aginut* (the situation of being unable to remarry, according to Jewish law, due to lack of information as to the spouse's fate), cases of marriage to minors, and the post trauma of many of the newly liberated survivors. In many countries, the recuperating survivors and communities struggled to return the largely orphaned children and teenagers to their relatives, or at least to a Jewish educational framework. A touching initiative saw the gathering of children into groups and *hachsharot* (pioneer training schemes) that served as replacement families.

Despite the fatal blow dealt to the Jewish family unit during the Holocaust, and notwithstanding the obliteration of so many grandparents and children, the renewal of family ties was a pivotal factor in the rehabilitation of the survivors, their return to life after the Holocaust, and the rebirth of the Jewish people as a whole.

The official poster marking Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 2026

Design: Yoav Kahana

The Jewish families were large, united and loyal, which gave us all a sense of security, stability and hope for the future."

(Anna Podgajecki, *Anna, A Teenager on the Run*, Yad Vashem, 2011)

The Family *as a Source of* Support and Wellbeing

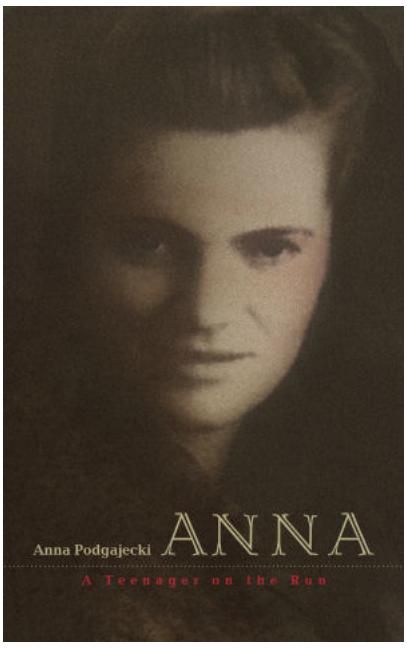
CHAPTER 1

Six-year-old Tamar Witnik with her parents, Shmuel and Sarah, Bucharest, Romania, 1941

I am Anna, daughter of Wolf and Idit Rubinstein who lived in the village of Korzec (Korets) in the Volhynia region. I am grateful to God that I was lucky to be born to such good-hearted and young, beautiful people, both inside and out. I was a happy, much loved, child and my entire world was marvelous…. I loved Korzec and everything in it; I thought it was the most beautiful place in the world. My family was with me and my parents created healthy, stable living conditions for us all. My life was without worry, so that when I look back on it, my early childhood seems like paradise […] I was proud of my parents and wanted to be just like them in every way.

They knew how to unite the family and to create a warm atmosphere of mutual love. Truth and honesty were the foundations of their existence. Today, I yearn for those wonderful years; I had no idea then that my childhood would prove to be the happiest period of my life.

Anna Podgajecki
Anna, A Teenager on the Run
Yad Vashem, 2011



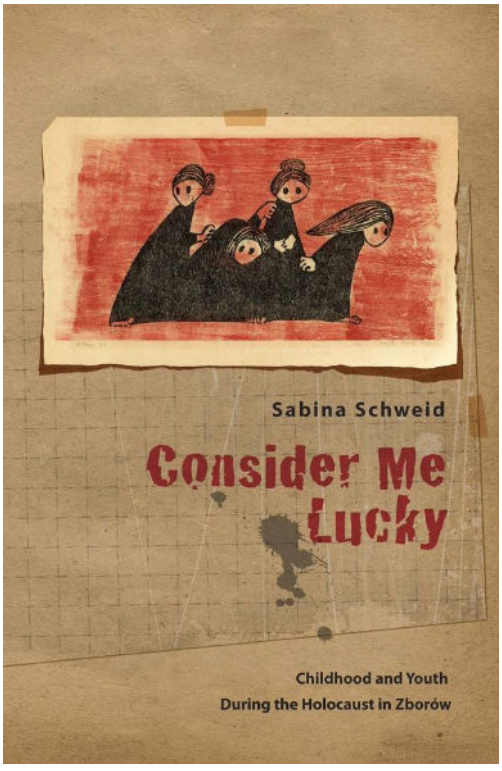
Anna Podgajecki was born in Korzec, Poland. She was very beautiful, and also possessed the unique skill of predicting events, yet none of the Jews of Korzec listened to her warnings. Alone, wandering from place to place, everyone looked at her and admired her, although unscrupulous people took advantage of her goodness and innocence. Anna survived the war as a Russian-German translator in a tire factory, as a housekeeper, on the roads, under house arrest by secret police, and finally, by working as a nurse at the front. In 1958, she and her husband were allowed back to Poland, and in 1960 they immigrated to Israel.

I spent my early childhood in Auntie Rózia and Uncle Punio's home. I had a good life there surrounded by my extended family. It is no wonder I believed I could really fly. Those years gave me basic confidence in my abilities, trust in the goodness of people, and belief in beauty and well-being. Despite everything I experienced later, and what I heard about from others and even witnessed personally, nothing could squash the joy I felt, and still feel, when I see the sun shining in the morning and I feel healthy. I will always have very fond memories of the house where I was born and spent my early years.

Sabina Schweid | *Consider Me Lucky*
Childhood and Youth During the Holocaust in Zborów
Yad Vashem, 2011

Sabina Schweid

Sabina Schweid grew up during the war in Zborów, in occupied Eastern Galicia. She had a very happy childhood, but when the Germans marched into town in July 1941, it all came to an end. Sabina's father was appointed chairman of the Judenrat in Zborów. Sabina took refuge in a hiding place and was alone with the problems she faced in growing and maturing into a woman. She moved from one hiding place to another, and when the war was over, Sabina was reunited with her mother. She joined a Zionist youth movement, came to Israel, and fought in the War of Independence.



Mother was the center of our lives. Although I was the middle child, usually known as the "sandwich child," I never felt deprived. I knew she loved me very much. She taught me good manners, to treat people with respect, and to be fair and honest. She had her own way of showing us how. […]

If I was sad or upset, Mother would ask me, "What happened, my child?" When I told her that I had fought with a friend, or had not played well in a football game, she would hug and kiss me, and say, "It's not that bad, Urinke. Such things happen to everyone. It will be all right; it will pass." She would wipe away my tears with a white handkerchief that was always in her pocket, and it would pass.
My mother used to sing us a song, whose refrain is all that I recall now: "After the rain, the sun will shine." Mother explained that life was also like that and, when bad things happen, we must not lose hope. We have to believe that life will improve, and the sun will shine again. I have kept this message in mind all my life, and remind myself of it in my most trying hours.

Uri Chanoch, Judith Chanoch
The Story I Never Told: From Kovno and Dachau to a New Life
Yad Vashem, 2020

Uri Chanoch *z"l*

The Chanoch children, Lithuania, prewar.

The Seifman family,
Warsaw, Poland
24/04/1938

We called our parents Vater and Mutter (Father and Mother) as was customary at the time. I am quite certain we had a sheltered childhood. Our relationship with our parents was warm and loving. We had a good childhood, paradoxical as it sounds in light of the events that befell us, and our parents protected us as best they could from the outside world.

I have often been asked: "How do you explain the fact that you remained emotionally healthy, after all that you and your brother lived through?" I think it's because our early years were happy, those years that are crucial for the stable, confident and secure development of the child. Children are by nature egocentric. If the nuclear family is strong, nurturing and protective, then nothing can harm them.

Frederick Raymes and Menachem Mayer
Menachem and Fred
Yad Vashem, 2002

I'm browsing through the old family album. Yes, here it is, the old family portrait! Taken by a professional photographer in Łódź, in the early 1930s, the name of the studio, "Parisian", is proudly displayed in the lower right-hand corner. With a name like this, it must have been a well-known and rather expensive studio, and the occasion for which the photo was taken was considered to be a suitably important one.
Yes, I remember that it was quite an event. My parents, my two sisters, and I all went to be photographed for this family portrait. My parents wanted to send it to our family members, Rachel and Mayer, our older siblings, who at that time lived in Brussels, Belgium, having recently emigrated from Poland in search of a better life and future than Poland could provide or promise. Over time, the photograph has turned dark brown, but the images of the people have remained clear and unfaded.
Here they are: my parents, Ajgla Sznurman and Chaim Moshe Rabinowicz, and the three girls between them, from left to right: my baby sister, Helcia, my sister, Sala, and myself. The missing members of the family are included on the snapshots which Helcia and I are holding. With their snapshots in the portrait, too, a kind of magic act was accomplished, and the family was complete and whole again! This seemed to be the real reason for which the portrait was taken. It was to reassure the two absent family members, as well as all of us, that the family was doing fine, and remained intact.
Now I look at the old portrait, the images of my loved ones imprisoned within that photograph, unchanged by the passing years, motionless, while I by some miraculous, inexplicable outcome have stepped out of that frame into life and am looking at them from the outside, still wondering, always wondering: How? Why? […]

I remember going with Mother to the grocery store on a Friday. It was a small store packed with merchandise and buyers who were mainly housewives like my mom.
I liked that place; it smelled nicely of cinnamon and other condiments, and the barrels filled with flour, barley, dried beans of all kinds, and sugar, were full of promise.
The store was quite a distance from our home, but because the prices there were lower, it was favored by lots of housewives, who often came from afar. There was no problem with lugging the merchandise home; this was not buying in bulk. Flour, kasha, or beans were bought in small quantities, and sugar in even smaller quantities.
I still see the attentive, worrisome expression on my mother's face, comparing prices and adding the small sums, careful to stretch her few zlotys to allow her to buy whatever was necessary to prepare a decent Sabbath, with the ***challah*** *and the* ***putter-kuchen*** *that she would bake for the whole family to enjoy. On a Sunday morning, Father would serve us, the two youngest, a piece of that* ***kuchen*** *with a cup of milk to have in bed. It was so good! (p.51). […]*

Bubbe Estera was, exactly as a Jewish ***bubbe*** *(a grandmother) should be: a tiny, round woman and her face had the shape and color of a dried apple. She was energetic, kept her family firmly together, and her word, especially after Grandfather Shoel passed away, was final. She was admired as being wise and just. Many years after the war, people who had known her during those prewar years, asked me if I knew how wise and just a woman my grandmother was.*

Hanna Temkin
My Involuntary Journeys, A Memoir
Yad Vashem, 2023

Hanoch Henryk Lezhnik with his wife Neha and his daughters Esterke and Zipporah

I only knew them as my parents, with the emphasis on "my", i.e., the way they related to me. I was under the impression that I was the center of their lives. […] The ever-evolving relationship between parents and children is very intriguing. First, when a baby is born it is fully dependent on his or her parents, mainly the mother. With the years, this dependence is gradually reduced and later in life it begins to turn in the other direction. Parents become more and more dependent on their children. Then, in the end, and providing a parent reaches a ripe old age, there is a complete reversal in the relationship. The parent becomes fully dependent on his or her offspring. In my case, because of the tragedy of the Holocaust, I never came even close to experiencing all the phases of this saga because I lost my parents when I was still a child and they were still so very young.

Asher Bar-Nir | *A Journey of Survival*
A Young Boy's Odyssey from Hungary through Auschwitz and Jaworznow, to Eretz Yisrael
Yad Vashem, 2010

Family photograph: Lezer Gurary, his wife Bronya and their son Rafik. Chelyabinsk, Russia, USSR, 26 November 1944

On 23 November, at age eight, I put on my clothes with the Star of David sewn on them, I left home and walked towards an unknown future. That same day, I stopped being a child . . ."

(Nathan Weiler | *Hashoah Sheli, Hazikaron Shelachem,* Docostory, 2007)

The End *of* Childhood

CHAPTER 2

Toddler Rosa Warman-Wolf with her teddy bear in a children's home during the war, Wezembeek, Belgium

Children were privy to everything that happened in the Jewish arena and were always the first to disseminate and spread any kind of news. In those dark times children tried very hard not to bother their parents who were occupied with the endless concerns of basic existence. Children were no longer playing games; their faces were sad and very serious and they talked about death and other weighty subjects, just like their parents.

I was only a teenager, but the circumstances forced me to grow up very quickly. During the German occupation I had acquired a great deal of life experience and knew how to fend for myself. I had become a woman. Everyone told me that I had to survive, to be a living witness, to tell the story of the Jews of Korzec. So I left the ghetto at a time when my little brothers and sisters needed me more than ever before and my mother was dying.

I felt like a plant that had been uprooted and was now having to grow and develop all on my own, with no time to spare. My upbringing had been based on honesty and integrity, and now I found myself having to create an imaginary persona for myself that was nothing short of a lie.

Anna Podgajecki
Anna, A Teenager on the Run
Yad Vashem, 2011

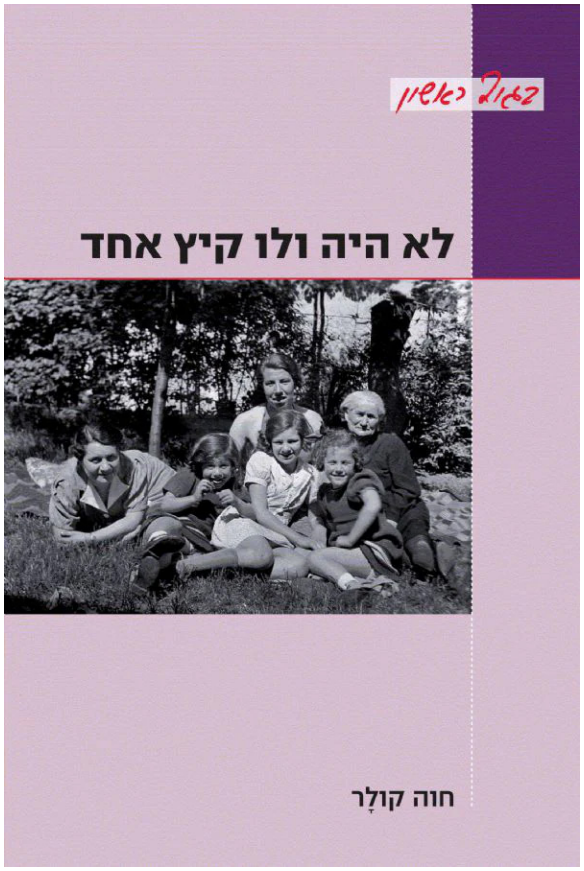
The Offenberg family wearing the Yellow Star, Brussels, Belgium

As soon as the Red Cross informed us of Father's death, Erwin [Yitzhak's brother] sought not just to be source of support, but also to be "responsible". He didn't put himself in a position of authority, and didn't pressure Mother into making decisions, but in the everyday realm, as predictable and unpredictable developments arose, a new presence could be felt in our midst. He was as alert as always, and also aware of himself and of our situation. He searched for courses of action that would prevent our being ground down by passively awaiting the inevitable.

Yitzhak Kashti
Ga'guim Leminyon
Yad Vashem, 2001, translated from the Hebrew

Georges Kars (Karpéles) (1880-1945)
Mother with her Children, 1943
Pencil on paper
35x50 cm
Yad Vashem Art Collection
Moshal Repository
Acquisition, courtesy of the estate of
Frida Redei, France

Chava Koler was born in 1932 in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia. At the beginning of World War II, Chava's family converted to Christianity in an effort to evade persecution, and hid with a Christian family every time there were rumors of a deportation. After Chava's father was released from a labor camp, her parents decided to hide her and her twin sister Vera in an orphanage under assumed identities, while they hid with farmers. The family was reunited after the war, returned to Bratislava and immigrated to Israel in 1949.



In those moments, I felt keenly that my childhood was over.
My parents were no longer by my side.
Vera and I, 11 years old, were left alone and forced to live a life in which there would be more lies. Even our name was taken from us and changed to a different one. Grandma and Grandpa Doppler, Grandma Kaufman, Agi, Adele, all our many uncles and Father too had already disappeared from my life, and now Mother had abandoned me too. Would I ever see any of them again?

Chava Koler
Lo Haya Velu Kayitz Ehad
Yad Vashem, 2011, translated from the Hebrew

How can anyone describe the final parting between a mother and a daughter? I had always believed that we shared a single soul; and now we were being forced to part forever."

(Anna Podgajecki | *Anna, A Teenager on the Run,* Yad Vashem, 2011)

The Pain *of* Separation

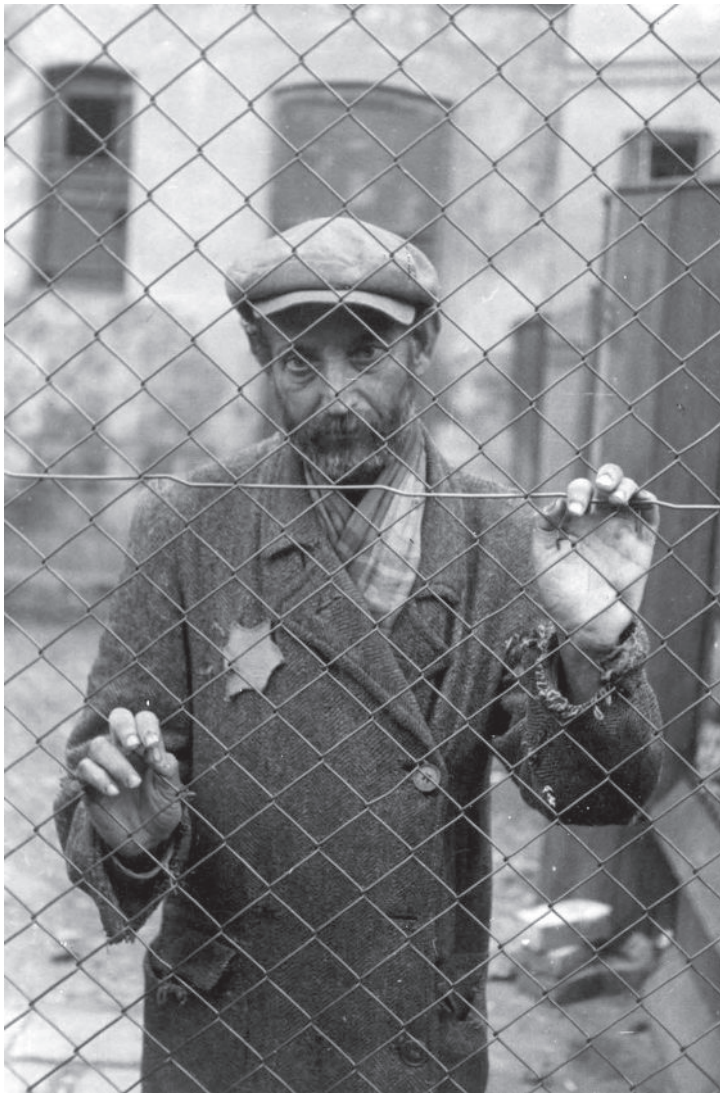
CHAPTER 3

Young girl behind the ghetto fence, Lodz, Poland.

Parting from my family was unbearable. My mother was certain we would never see each other again and gave me a lot of advice: that I should take full advantage of being outside the ghetto; to consider distancing myself from Korzec and moving toward Poland. My blonde hair and fair skin gave me an 'Aryan' look and since I could speak the language and knew the culture, it would be easy enough for me to blend in with the locals. She begged me not to think of the family, that there was no point in doing so. She stressed the importance of someone from the ghetto surviving this, in order to testify later to the German atrocities. "You must stay alive and tell the world what the Germans did to the Jews," she said. "You must never allow the German murderers to whitewash their crimes." Mother knew how close I was to my little brothers and sisters and tried very hard to convince me that my mission in life was to survive. "Don't worry that others haven't succeeded," she told me. "You have nothing to lose, so just do your best. Move forward and get away from here so long as you have the chance. "Mother was unable to withstand my emotional parting and fainted, tearfully, painfully, on the front doorstep.

Anna Podgajecki
Anna, A Teenager on the Run
Yad Vashem, 2011

Jews before their deportation to Chelmno during the Sperre, Lodz, Poland, 1942



Jew in the ghetto,
Lodz, Poland

Father couldn't bear to tear himself from me, but it was getting late. As tears poured down my face, Father said in a strange, hoarse voice, "Don't ever forget who you are. You must remember all that you saw and heard during the occupation. Now go."

Anna Podgajecki
Anna, A Teenager on the Run
Yad Vashem, 2011

How can I possibly describe my feelings at that moment? How can anyone describe the final parting between a mother and a daughter? I had always believed that we shared a single soul; and now we were being forced to part forever. I knew I would never see her again, never be able to embrace her again, never be able to speak to her. There are no words to describe the agony we were feeling. We could only stand, hugging each other in silence; we held each other so closely that we almost became fused into one entity, a motionless statue of grief, love and torment. All this took place in the center of the usually bustling main street, a spot that was treacherous for Jews. Mother did not move, and I did not want to leave her. Once again, I was full of doubts; I knew I would be unable to live without my family. But I could not disobey my parents; I could not deny them their last wish- not to see me die. It had taken much persuasion, but I, too, had reached the conclusion that it was best for us to die separately.

I could no longer watch my mother's suffering. She was a woman who never thought of herself, only of her loved ones, and I was now witnessing her utterly selfless devotion to the very end. I knew she would not move away until she was sure that I would continue alone towards my future. I felt as if my throat was on fire; I opened my mouth but could say nothing, and then I felt myself about to collapse. No, not here! I shouted to myself. I gathered my strength and ran forward, trying to put as much distance between myself and my mother. I knew I could not allow myself to fall.

I turned to look back; Mother had not moved. A scream welled up inside me, threatening to erupt, and I feared losing control. My mother stood there, full of grace, noble, tall, slim and blonde. Her sunken green eyes had taken on a uniquely piercing gaze. Her long, black shawl fell from her head to her shoulders. Her long, thick blonde hair, usually pinned up on the top of her head, was now loose over her back. It was an awe-inspiring sight, my mother's anguish. This last vision of my mother will remain eternally carved in my memory.

Anna Podgajecki
Anna, A Teenager on the Run
Yad Vashem, 2011

After the selection process, when my father was led away to another barrack, I was so absorbed in my own distress of having been separated from him that I didn't think of the pain he must be suffering. But at the time, when I was left alone in Auschwitz, I was only concerned about my own survival. I felt a near physical pain, as if someone had twisted a knife in my stomach. I constantly suffered from this semi-physical pain for months on end. I don't know when it left me for good, but most probably only after years had passed.

Asher Bar-Nir | *A Journey of Survival*
A Young Boy's Odyssey from Hungary through Auschwitz and Jaworznow, to Eretz Yisrael
Yad Vashem 2010

Selection on the ramp, Birkenau, Poland, 27 May 1944

Parting from Jews
about to be deported,
Lodz, Poland

A few days later, Mother and Helcia went with me to the train station to see us off. I said goodbye to Father at home. For a Jew, in his traditional Jewish garb, the streets were too dangerous to walk on. Father seemed strangely agitated sending me off. "Go," he said, "Hanele, go, it's time!" He urged me as if he were glad to see me go; as if he knew somehow that he was sending me off to live.

It had been more than a year since the last letters from the Łódź ghetto, scarce, short letters that nevertheless spoke volumes. Over a year had passed since I received that tragic postcard from Sala in which she had asked for a food parcel. How are my parents, my sisters, Sala and Helcia? I would close my eyes, trying to imagine them, but there was nothing, a blank, not because the memory of them had already faded but simply because of the total lack of any new information. I did not have anything, any new input to feed my imagination, I just had what was in my memory, and this was no longer enough, I was unable to envision what their life was like.

Hanna Temkin
My Involuntary Journeys, A Memoir
Yad Vashem , 2023

At the Landsberg- Kaufering concentration camps of Dachau, the Germans did not bother to tattoo a number on our forearms. They knew that we would not survive the hard work and starvation for more than a few weeks. They gave us wooden clogs, but they did not give us socks to wear with the wooden clogs, perhaps because they feared that we might hide things in them. After walking a few dozen yards, the clumsy clogs had already made deep cracks and wounds on the soles of our feet. I wondered where I could put the photograph of my mother. The pajamas we were given did not have pockets. I had no choice but to slip it into one of my clogs. After a few days, the dirt and perspiration erased the picture, and I knew that I would never see my mother again.

Uri Chanoch, Judith Chanoch
The Story I Never Told: From Kovno and Dachau to a New Life
Yad Vashem, 2020

Prisoners on their way to forced labor, Dachau, Germany

Deportation to
Treblinka, Poland

We marched on, wrapped in a cloud of dust so dense that we could hardly see the way. […] Even in this terrible distress, people embraced their dear ones and rushed to help one another. I ran alongside my brother and watched over my mother, who was walking behind a cart full of children. […] The procession was finally ordered to a halt a short distance from Stock Lacki, several miles from the county seat, Siedlce. The SS officer allowed the carts to move on and lashed out with a riding crop at people who attempted to follow them. He allowed my mother to pass anyway, but when I tried to follow her he struck me in the head and forced me to stay where I was. Tears poured from my eyes as I struggled to make out Mother's retreating figure. I was glad to have taken the blow instead of her.
I could not know then that my eyes were following the person dearest to me of all, Mother, for the last time.

Eddie Weinstein
17 Days in Treblinka, Daring to Resist, and Refusing to Die
Yad Vashem 2008

Fred: I remember Father standing next to the truck - he sobbed as he made me promise to look after my younger brother, not yet nine years old.

Menachem: I remember Father lifting me into the truck and gazing into my eyes. I imagine he said something like "Be a good boy and listen to your big brother." I can't really remember his face, but I still see his eyes - large, blue and very sad. We didn't have a chance to say goodbye to Mother because the truck didn't wait, but I can still see her standing on the wooden bridge and waving as the truck passed.

None of us could ever have imagined that we would never meet again.

Frederick Raymes and Menachem Mayer
Menachem and Fred
Yad Vashem, 2002

Deportation of children from the ghetto, Lodz, Poland

Who can judge such parents who took it upon themselves to so decide for their children? Not I, for sure! It must have been pure hell to make such a decision!"

(Asher Bar-Nir | *A Journey of Survival - A Young Boy's Odyssey from Hungary through Auschwitz and Jaworznow, to Eretz Yisrael*, Yad Vashem, 2010)

Dilemmas

CHAPTER 4

Two Jewish children from Vienna after arriving in England on a Kindertransport. December 12, 1938.

After what seemed like an eternity - a day and a night, perhaps more - the train halted. "Where are we?"
"There is a sign that reads, Stutthof," someone announced.
"Are we in Germany?" "No, we are in Poland." It was pitch dark in the boxcar. The searchlights outside were blinding. "Women and children, get off!"
The order was blared from loudspeakers, accompanied by the barking of dogs and the banging of rifle butts on the sides of the freight cars. We were already familiar with the command, "Schnell, Schnell!" (Quickly, quickly!) We knew very well that the Germans always screamed that.
After a brief exchange, Mother and Father decided that Danny would not get off the train but would stay with us, the men. Perhaps, this would improve his chances of surviving. Mother and Miriam were pushed toward the opening of the carriage. No farewell embrace or kiss. There was no time for anything in that crowd and under such pressure. A moment before Mother disembarked, she placed a small photograph of herself in my hand, and said, "Don't forget me, my son."

Uri Chanoch, Judith Chanoch
The Story I Never Told: From Kovno and Dachau to a New Life
Yad Vashem, 2020

Jews being loaded onto the deportation train, Zilina, Slovakia

Lea Greenstein-Kaplan (1903-1944)

Lea Greenstein published her first poem, "Ich Vart" (I Wait) at the age of 27, and continued to publish one or two poems each year in newspapers or literary supplements, to great literary acclaim. In 1941, Lea and her family were incarcerated in the Kovno ghetto, where she was murdered in 1944.

April 1944, the Kovno ghetto, Lithuania.

An 11-year-old boy dressed up to blend into the crowd, I joined my mother's brigade, which crossed the river on the way to work. Her instructions were clear: on reaching the other side, like Lot's wife I was not to look back. Walk straight ahead, into the hills; a woman would be waiting for me there.

Like Moses in the bulrushes, I was cast by my mother, the poetess Lea Greenstein, onto the shores of life. She gave me life twice, but was unable to save her own even once. […]

The actions of parents such as my mother, who dared to gamble, to part from their children and to send them on a perilous path, but one that held an infinitesimal chance of survival, those too were heroic.

What gave us the strength to keep going? It was the profound hope that redemption would come, that the demise of evil would occur. A deep-rooted faith that my mother had instilled in me from the start.

Excerpt from the address by Dr. Shalom Kaplan-Eilati on Behalf of the Survivors | Opening Ceremony of Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 2014

Just then, disaster struck hard. Mother became pregnant. She would have to have an abortion, because pregnancy and carrying a baby were tantamount to a death sentence. The house filled with a horrific sense of despondency.

One evening, a Jewish doctor whom I did not know - maybe one of the refugees - came to our house. Father prepared a basin, a kettle of boiling water, and some rough laundry soap. They kept me at home because sending me out might have raised suspicions and it was too cold to be outdoors. I went to the kitchenette in the corridor and sat there in the dark. The doctor needed two kerosene lamps. I did not hear any shouting or sobbing; the whole thing took place in utter silence.

Sabina Schweid | *Consider Me Lucky*
Childhood and Youth During the Holocaust in Zborów
Yad Vashem, 2011

Rosa Klein with her daughter in a pram, waiting for deportation, Würzburg, Germany

Soon, larger groups of people started moving east and the question was debated in my family, as it was in many others. My parents would not move. Being around their fifties (Father was fifty-five), they considered themselves too old to undertake the risky trip. Here they at least had a roof over their heads and they also had some provisions stocked up; barley, flour, potatoes, not much but it would somehow see them through the few months of the coming winter. And to think further than that seemed unseemly as everything would certainly change in the spring, everything would be over by then. Why? Nobody asked and no one would have attempted an answer anyway.

My younger sister, Helcia, would stay with our parents; she was now their only help and comfort. Sister Sala would not move either as she was four or five months pregnant and where do you go in such a condition? But my brother and his wife wanted to go and this was wonderful and rather unexpected. Dora's two brothers had already left and sent news and some instructions. Mindful of the incident that had implicated me recently with the Polish police as a "political activist," my family decided that it would be safer for me to leave, too. And so, it was decided that I would join my brother.

We knew all about emigration in the family and we knew that visas and proper papers were required to emigrate safely. This was impossible right now and the hope and belief were that the members of the family who would go now would perhaps be able to arrange for such visas and papers later on and bring the rest of the family over under more favorable conditions, once all this nightmare would end. Perhaps next spring because how could it last longer? It had to vanish in the same way in which it had come upon us.

The Germans were demanding "quotas" of children for deportation, which meant death, as a pay-off, a ransom for allowing the ghetto to exist a little bit longer. Warsaw's Czerniaków committed suicide protesting that demand, Rumkowski of the Łódź ghetto made such bargains with the Germans many times. Similarly, the ghetto mothers had "a choice" when deported with the children: a mother could abandon her child and this way prolong her own life for a while or share the child's fate. And it is a well-known, documented fact, that mothers were choosing death with their children rather than abandoning them, rather than sending them to a lonely, horrible death. These are heroic cases of sacrifice, telling the story of the modern-day Niobe, the Jewish mother in the Holocaust. On the other hand, tragic cases when children were sacrificed, killed, either for the "good" of a group of grown-ups, escaping and trying to hide from the Germans or, in an extreme, most tragic situation, by their parents, when this seemed to become the only "solution," are also known and documented.

Hanna Temkin
My Involuntary Journeys, A Memoir
Yad Vashem, 2023

I have been pondering this event for years. Did my father do the right thing by not saying anything about me to the SS officer who selected him but not me? Was he supposed to ask that his son go with him as well? It was logical to assume that my father was selected to be taken to a work camp and not to the gas chambers. Was the reason he didn't say anything because he was too frightened to speak up? Or maybe he didn't speak up on my behalf because he was standing in front of me and the SS officer came to him first and only then to me, so my father couldn't have guessed that he was not going to select me as well? Or maybe my father was so shocked that he was unable to think clearly at that critical moment. And what about me? Why didn't I speak up? When the SS officer passed my father and his number was taken down by the clerk I should have realized that my father might be taken to some destination without me. Why didn't I speak up? Why didn't I say to the SS officer looking at me that he had just chosen my father, that I am his son and would like to go with him? To be honest, I don't think that I even contemplated the idea of addressing an SS officer.

The atmosphere was one of sheer terror. Nobody dared to utter a sound. You could hear a fly buzzing in the air. We were all terrorized knowing that life and death were just the blink of an eye away. This SS officer who chose the men for his particular assignment had the power to order the immediate execution of anyone without a second thought and his order would have been carried out right away. Therefore, it is no wonder that my father didn't speak up nor should anyone be surprised that I didn't say anything either.

During the long years that have passed, especially after I became a parent and later a grandparent, I have often thought about the suffering then and my father's state of mind in the hours, days, weeks and maybe months after our separation in Auschwitz. Maybe he felt that he had abandoned me to my fate, had left me all alone in the hell of the concentration camp. His conscience most probably bothered him for all the limited number of months he was still allowed to live. In addition, I have wondered, how a man, the head of his family, being aware consciously and instinctively of the traditional "male responsibility" for the well-being of his tribe or family, could endure such a situation in which he was prevented by forces much beyond his control to fulfill his responsibilities. How both my parents must have suffered not knowing anything about the fate of their only child and most probably fearing the worst. How I wish I could have told my father not to blame himself and not to worry for what "fate" had in store for me. After all, it all turned out well for me. I survived the concentration camp on

my own, grew up, raised a family and was even fortunate to actively participate in the rebirth of Jewish independence in the State of Israel.

I sometimes wish that I could convince myself to believe in the existence of life after death, somewhere, so I could see him and my mother again and comfort them by demonstrating that despite all the odds, I at least survived.

Asher Bar-Nir | *A Journey of Survival*
A Young Boy's Odyssey from Hungary through Auschwitz and Jaworznow, to Eretz Yisrael
Yad Vashem 2010

Men considered fit for work on the ramp after the selection.
May 1944, Birkenau, Poland

There were rumors, which turned out to be true, that some families committed suicide rather than move into the ghetto. Such was the case with an MD, Dr. Kain, who poisoned himself, his wife and his daughter. I knew the daughter, Ági; she was a year younger than me. Ági was a gifted, pretty, quiet girl who maybe squinted a little. Later, I also found out that the Balázs family did the same. They had a pharmacy in the town so they had access to poison just like Dr. Kain. The Balázs family had two sons. The older son was one year older than me and the younger son, Jancsi, was a year younger. I used to go to their house to play. The mother, Mrs. Balázs (maiden name, Erzsi Glück), was a beautiful woman. She was the daughter of Mór Glück, my father's predecessor in his work at Futura.

I have often wondered to what degree those parents who committed suicide, and convinced their children to do the same, were justified or not, in taking such a fatal decision. For sure, the Kain and Balázs families didn't delude themselves; they didn't want to lie to themselves about the fate they must ave known was awaiting all of us.

True, as it turned out, all the Jews of Nyiregyháza ended up in Auschwitz. Most of them were murdered there or perished in other concentration camps. All young or young-looking, and thus unlucky, children were put to death by the Germans upon arrival. I don't know of any child from Nyiregyháza younger than me who survived the deportation. Only some of the boys and girls, born in 1930 or earlier, managed to stay alive in the various concentration camps.

Therefore, those suicide victims who would have gone to their deaths in Birkenau or perished in one of the concentration camps later, were spared that terrible fate, and at least died by the loving hands of their parents, in the "comfort" of their own homes. Who can judge such parents who took it upon themselves to so decide for their children? Not I, for sure! It must have been pure hell to make such a decision!

Asher Bar-Nir | *A Journey of Survival*
A Young Boy's Odyssey from Hungary through Auschwitz and Jaworznow, to Eretz Yisrael | Yad Vashem 2010

Death march of camp prisoners, Dachau, Germany, 1945

Still Mother wavered, agonizing over the possibility of taking my sisters and me to join the march of death. We both knew that as soon as one of us climbed down the ladder and left the house, the murderers would track us down and kill the children. I have no idea how the drama in the attic would have ended, but Mother suddenly collapsed and fainted. I was actually happy, and thought, "If only Mother were to never wake up, she wouldn't have to suffer like all the others." That's the thought I had about my lovely, dearly beloved mother of whom I was always so proud. I was so confused. It was a lovely, sunlit summer day, yet I felt as if I was in a dark tunnel with no way out. Once I had noticed Efi and Raya on that march, it was as if the skies had fallen in on me and everything had become black and cold. Like my mother, I blamed myself for not joining them on their last journey. Instead, I, the eldest child, was standing aside, watching. What was I to do? I was confused, uncertain, and incapable, in an impossible situation.

Anna Podgajecki
Anna, A Teenager on the Run
Yad Vashem, 2011

It suddenly occurred to me that my parents had been working all night. Mother came and held me close to her; she then placed her hands on either side of my face and looked deep into my eyes and said, "Anna, your father has decided that it's time for you to leave the ghetto. You know yourself that it can no longer be delayed, this is probably your last chance to escape. There is not a moment to waste." Mother looked past me into the distance for a moment, before saying. "You know, of course, that anyone caught with forged documents is tortured to death. Nonetheless, your father is up in the attic, working to correct a forged identity card for you to use. You must be extremely careful; any mistake you make can result in your death. Use this document only when you have absolutely no alternative and you have nothing left to lose." Mother handed over the identity card with Father's revisions. I looked up at my parents, who stood waiting tensely for my response. I didn't know what to say.
Even a child could have discerned the obviously forged stamp.

Anna Podgajecki
Anna, A Teenager on the Run
Yad Vashem, 2011

Selina Krasninska's forged identity card in the name of Paraskiewia Poterejko

Mother looked over my head and said, "Anna, we have wasted far too much time because I believed I could convince your father to leave, too. But I couldn't. You know him; he cannot live without his children. He decided to stay with us right to the bitter end. But a large family like ours needs to have a survivor. So it's up to you to try; maybe you'll be the one to succeed."

Anna Podgajecki
Anna, A Teenager on the Run
Yad Vashem, 2011

Menachem: We keep asking ourselves how they found the inner strength to send their sons, twelve and not yet nine, into the unknown. Their bravery seems all the greater when we consider that they were in the minority - most of the parents, unable to foresee what lay ahead, refused to part with their children. All of them perished in Auschwitz.
Fred: When I think of my children and grandchildren I can't help but wonder how our parents found the courage to do what they did.
Menachem: That's right: I only began to think about it when my grandchildren reached the same age. That's when I appreciated their heroism.
Fred: I only have one answer - living conditions in the camp were so appalling that to send us away may have seemed the lesser of two evils.

Frederick Raymes and Menachem Mayer
Menachem and Fred
Yad Vashem, 2002

Mother was used to being the one supporting the children. In the ghetto, the situation was reversed, and children were the breadwinners"

(Dov Shilansky | *Hasheha Leor Hayom*, Yad Vashem 2006, translated from the Hebrew)

Role Reversal

CHAPTER 5

Young girl selling pretzels in the street, Lodz, Poland

Suddenly I saw them! There they were, Efi and Raya. In the middle of a row my brother Efi marched along, holding the hand of his four-year-old sister Raya. She was having difficulty walking and Efi supported her. Occasionally he would turn to hug her, taking the place of his parents. It broke my heart to see so much love and compassion between those two children.
They were barefoot and dressed in short, sleeveless turquoise summer pajamas. The march was hard on their bare feet, I could see that; the road was covered with particularly rough stones. Crying bitterly, the two children gazed up at our house as they walked past; they must have believed that none of us was still alive and were silently saying goodbye. My mother stood at my side watching with me as her children were led to their deaths. We both knew that we would never see them again and we could not turn our eyes from them.

"Efi was born in December, he's still so young," my mother whispered. "He's trying to take care of Raya as a parent would, although he needs us himself." She stopped for a moment. "I should be there, with my children who need me, and not hiding here, watching." She was in agony, blaming herself relentlessly.

We were like two wounded lions in a cage, with no way out. Our suffering was worse than death. Mother said she no longer wanted to live; her place was with her children. But we still had three children with us, so we did our best to avoid being discovered. Mother kissed my foot and begged my forgiveness for her 'sin' of bringing a large family into the world and being unable to protect or care for it.

Anna Podgajecki
Anna, A Teenager on the Run
Yad Vashem, 2011

I could see that Mother was on the verge of collapse so I quickly removed Batya from her arms before she fell to the ground. Once again I thought, "If only Mother would die now, peacefully in her sleep, without having to suffer any more." I wished that we could all die in our sleep. My entire body ached but, as the oldest daughter, I felt enormous responsibility toward the little girls who depended on me. That day they had seen dreadful things and had suffered quietly. They were afraid of being alone and their eyes followed me all the time. They did not cry, they did not utter a sound but their eyes spoke volumes and begged me to stay.

After a few days, those of my family who were still alive were now back in our house; no one came to bother us. Most of the time we just sat on the floor and watched as our Mother slowly died. I took responsibility for the younger children, who were in desperate need of a parent figure, although I was no less needy. The tension we had lived under for so long had left our nerves jagged and every little noise from outside caused us to jump. The children were constantly alert, listening day and night for every sound inside and outside the house. We were like hunted animals.

Anna Podgajecki
Anna, A Teenager on the Run
Yad Vashem, 2011

Children playing in the ghetto street, Lodz, Poland, 1940

Young boy leaves the soup kitchen with a pot of soup, Lodz, Poland

Mother was used to being the one supporting the children. In the ghetto, the situation was reversed, and children were the breadwinners. 'You risk your lives on a daily basis in order to sustain our family, and I sit at home doing nothing,' she said. We brought up her [ailing] heart, but she would not give up. I think it was important for her to prove that she could be of use to the family.

'There is no choice,' she said, 'In the ghetto, if you want to live, you have to risk your life. I've already lived my life, now you need to live.' The next day, she took Chaya with her and left her hiding between the houses close to the fence. She approached the fence with some of the items she had brought to barter. Domicella stood on the other side of the fence at a distance, and when she saw Mother, she came closer to the fence holding two big baskets. Mother passed her objects via the fence and waited for her goods. When Mother no longer had anything left to barter, a masculine voice rang out from the other side of the fence: 'Police!' Mother ran. "Quickly Mother, quickly,' cried Chaya from her hiding place. Her cries were drowned out by the whistle of bullets.

We suspected that Domicella had organized the whole incident. Chaya returned in a state; Mother came back emotional but pleased with herself. She had survived the ordeal we faced each day. We were very proud of her.

Dov Shilansky
Hasheha Leor Hayom
Yad Vashem 2006, translated from the Hebrew

'I'm so scared,' I said, and immediately felt that I had made a mistake. I had caused my mother pain, and she had no way of helping me. Why did I hurt her? Here, I feel the tears spilling out of her eyes onto my arm, on my hair. That very moment, I made a vow to my brother, who made this request of me: 'Tzelinka, for the duration of this cursed war, don't complain to Mother. Whatever situation you find yourself in, you have to suffer in silence and not cause her any more pain.'

Tzila Lieberman
Tzelinka: Yalda Shesarda et Oshvitz
Yad Vashem 2002, translated from the Hebrew

The letters are in very cramped writing, because they were all censored. They deal mainly with everyday life in the camp, the inadequate food, incessant hunger, their concern for us, their children, and their conviction that they did the right thing by sending us away. Our parents write about the past, their longings for their former life, and their hope that we would be reunited in the future. And between the lines we learn a great deal about our parents and ourselves, how they coped with the great gap in distance and years that yawned between us. It is remarkable how much they involved us - children not yet thirteen years old - in their daily lives, their worries and their concerns, especially when we consider they had no idea they were writing for posterity...
These, the last words of those who perished, are very precious to us.

Frederick Raymes and Menachem Mayer
Menachem and Fred
Yad Vashem, 2002

After all the food in the farmhouses had been eaten, people started walking or riding on bikes to distant farms and villages to ask for food… My brother Albert became an expert at that, he always found places where there was food and other essential items. He was only twelve and a half, but in many ways he was the main breadwinner of our family, as Papa's health had gradually deteriorated since the journey on the death train.

Laila Perl and Maron Blumenthal-Lazan
Arba Avanim Mushlamot
Yad Vashem, 2016, translated from the Hebrew

Jewish children selling cigarettes, Warsaw, Poland

So it was that the strength of our family tie, which had contributed to the survival of our people for centuries, became a tool in the exterminator's hands."

(Elie Wiesel | *All Rivers Run to the Sea,* Harper Collins publishers, 1997)

Family Values *as a* Tool *in* Enemy Hands

CHAPTER 6

Photograph of Yaakov Korman's family, Brest Litowsk, Poland, 1921

All my life I had heard my parents talk about truth and justice, honesty and integrity; they had taught me and my brothers and sisters that mankind is inherently decent, merciful and compassionate. But in reality, it was just the reverse. My bitter thoughts stung like salt on a wound. My parents' blind faith had led them straight into the German hellhole.

Anna Podgajecki
Anna, A Teenager on the Run
Yad Vashem, 2011

Jozef Kowner
(1895-1967)
Family, Łódź ghetto, circa 1941
Watercolor and ink on paper
Yad Vashem Art Collection
Moshal Repository
Gift of Nachman Zonabend

Growing up, I had always seen my parents as strong, wise and enterprising people. I often listened to their words of wisdom; I was proud of them, and tried to be like them. My parents never complained of discrimination or accused people of taking advantage of them; instead they talked about honesty and justice and told us that the human race was good and merciful. My parents had always demanded absolute truth from their children, but we had been thrust into a completely different reality. In order to survive we were obliged to lie and cheat and we had to contend with the cruel brutality of others, including people who had once been our friends. I used to ask myself, "What planet did my parents come from? What kind of education did they give us, which so contradicts our own reality? What type of children did they hope to bring up?" Inside I was angry with them for trusting others when they had no rational basis for doing so.

My parents taught us to love humankind and they paid dearly for it. They had brought us to the verge of an abyss from which there was no way back.

Anna Podgajecki
Anna, A Teenager on the Run
Yad Vashem, 2011

Jewish family wearing the Yellow Star, Wloclawek, Poland

Photograph of the Selymes family, Szerencs, Hungary

Mother looked at me as if asking for mercy and forgiveness, "If I had known what kind of life my children would face, I would have killed myself before they were born. But I couldn't have known what these murderers would do to us. I wanted a big family, so you would have brothers and sisters to help and support one another. I was wrong; please forgive me. Try to understand and not blame me; my intentions have been nothing but good."

Anna Podgajecki
Anna, A Teenager on the Run
Yad Vashem, 2011

At the other side of the rails there were also several camps where we saw men, women and children together, some of them even wearing normal clothing. I found out after the war that these were Czech Jewish families that the Germans didn't separate at the start but suddenly one morning, later in the summer of 1944, took all of them to the gas chambers. This happened after the majority of the Hungarian transports had arrived in Birkenau.

But human nature, as it is, looks for some hope, any hope to hold onto even in the midst of hell. So we, at the time of our arrival in Birkenau, felt relieved seeing people resembling "normal" families, parents and children together. Come to think of it, the fact that these Czech families were conveniently quartered beside the railroad tracks was no accident. It was deliberate. The SS wanted to delude the arriving, mostly Hungarian Jews, into believing that their families would also be allowed to stay together. It was another trick designed to facilitate the train-disembarking selection procedure of the SS.

Asher Bar-Nir | *A Journey of Survival*
A Young Boy's Odyssey from Hungary through Auschwitz and Jaworznow, to Eretz Yisrael | Yad Vashem 2010

Deported Jews from Carpathian Ruthenia going from the train to the ramp, Birkenau, Poland, 27 May 1944

What can I write to my one and only, most precious girl in the world?"

(*Last Letters from the Shoah*, Edited by Walter Zwi Bacharach, Yad Vashem 2013)

Letters

CHAPTER 7

A woman writes a letter before going on the deportation train, Lodz, Poland

Dr. Elchanan Elkes became leader of the Council of Elders in the Kovno ghetto on 4 August 1941. All who knew him affirmed that he was completely devoted to the Jewish cause, courageous and dignified in his dealings with the Nazis, an ethical and modest leader, and comfortable with his fellow Jews. Elkes supported the ghetto's resistance movement and helped gather supplies for the General Jewish Fighting Organization. In July 1944, the Soviet army was advancing towards Kovno. At that point, the Nazis began liquidating the ghetto and relocating its inhabitants to Germany. Elkes risked his life by approaching the commander of the ghetto, Wilhelm Goecke, to suggest that Goecke change his plan to transfer the Jews to Germany. Goecke refused Elkes' suggestion, but let him leave without punishment. The ghetto was emptied a few days later. Elkes was sent to the Landsberg concentration camp in Germany, and put in charge of the camp's hospital hut. Elkes soon got sick, and he died on October 17, 1944. A year before, almost to the day, Elkes wrote a letter to his children in England, an excerpt of which follows:

Williampola, Ghetto Kovno
October 19, 1943

My beloved son and daughter!

I am writing these lines to you, my beloved children, at a time when we have already been here, in the vale of tears, in the Kovno ghetto of Williampola for over two years. We found out that in the next few days our fate will be decided: the ghetto that we're in will be cut and shredded to pieces. Only God know whether we will all be destroyed or whether some of us will remain. […]

In the most difficult moments of our lives, you, my beloved, have always been on our minds and part of our thoughts. During long and dark nights, your beloved mother sits with me, and we both dream about your lives and future. Our souls yearn to see you again, to hug and tell you once more how attached we are to you and how our heart pounds when bringing up memories of you. […]

I am very doubtful, my beloved souls, whether I will be privileged to see

you again, to hug and squeeze you to my hearts. Prior to my departing from the world and from you, my beloved, I wish to say again and again how precious you are to us, and how we yearn for you.

My beloved Joel! Be a loyal son to your people… Try to settle in the Land of Israel. The power of faith is great, and it can transfer and move mountains from their place. Do not look either right and left on your path, my son, go straight before you… Truth, my beloved, should always be a guiding light, it will guide you and show you the path of life.

Concerning you, Sarah, my beloved daughter, read carefully the last words that I wrote to Joel. I rely, my lovely one, on your clear mind and intellect. Don't live for the moment and don't ask as you go on your way, for blooming flowers. They will wither and droop as fast as they've appeared. A pure life, a noble life, a life full of content is so full of beauty. The two of you should go together throughout life, attached and holding one another. No distance should separate you and no events of life should come between you. […]

My strength wanes. I feel as if a desolate desert is within me and my soul is departing. I am naked and empty with no words in my language. But you, my dear beloved, you will have insight and understand what I wished for you and wanted to tell you at this time. For a moment I close my eyes and picture the two of you standing before me. I hereby hug and kiss you and I tell you until my last breath that I am your loving father.

Elchanan [Elkes]

Last Letters from the Shoah
Edited by Walter Zwi Bacharach
Yad Vashem, 2013

Miriam Elkes, wife of Elchanan Elkes, with their children Joel and Sarah, Kovno, Lithuania, July 1930

Thursday, May 14, 1942

My Very Dear Spouse and My Dear Children.

I am writing you these lines to tell you that everything ends well. You don't have to think about me anymore. I am not suffering. It is over: Today at 10:00 o'clock I will reach eternal rest.

My thoughts are with the children, and this gives me courage. This is very important for me: One must die and therefore I am going to die. [My wife,] your mission is to raise the children as you are obligated to do, be courageous; this is my sole comfort.

My dear children, be good to your mother, from now on, all you have is each other. Don't make her suffer; your role is to be men in order to ease her suffering. Remember these words of mine always. Make her life less gloomy than it was until now.

Albert, you must take care of your younger brothers and your little sister, your role is to understand and behave properly. And you, my dear Odette, your role is to help your mother so she won't be sad always. I hug you for the last time with very deep sentiments.

Your father

And you, my dear wife, I request that you forgive me for any sorrow that I have caused you, and do not cry anymore.

Courage! Courage! Farewell!

Max Kawer was executed in the Cherche-Midi camp after he refused to turn in his underground comrades.

Last Letters from the Shoah
Edited by Walter Zwi Bacharach
Yad Vashem, 2013

Jewish fighters in the French Resistance, France, 1943

July 7, 1944

My Most Beloved and Precious Little Girl,

When I gave birth to you, my beloved, I never imagined that six and a half years later I would have to write you a letter on this subject. I saw you for the last time on your 6th birthday, on December 13, 1943. I had the false hope that I would see you again before we left, but now I know that this won't happen. I don't want to endanger you. We are traveling on Monday and today is Friday evening.
Your father, Paula and I together with another 51 "friends in trouble," are about to travel to an unknown destination. I don't know, my dear child, whether I will see you again. I take with me your beloved image, as you were in our home, the voice of your cute, childish chattering, the smell of your pure body, the rhythm of your breath, your smile and your cry. I take with me the awful, dreadful fear, which the heart of your mother could not soothe for even a moment. I am taking with me for my way your image from December 13, 1943, with your grown-up before its time look, the taste of your kisses that are sweeter than honey, and the hug of your little arms, my chick. This is the baggage that I'm taking with me for the road, perhaps Providence will grant us the privilege to go through this nightmare safely and send you back, my treasure, to our arms. If this indeed happens, I will explain to you many things that you don't understand yet, and I can assume that you will never understand if you are educated in different surroundings and in an atmosphere of freedom. My little child, I would like you to read this letter when, with Gods' help, you will grow up and be mature enough and able to be critical of our deeds towards you. I yearn with all my might, my beloved child, that you shouldn't condemn us, you should cherish our memory and the memory of this much-hated nation which are your roots. My chick, I want you not to be ashamed and not to deny your origins. I would like you to know that your father was an unparalleled man, one of a few in the entire world, and you could have been proud of him. His entire life, he lived doing good for mankind and good deeds, if only God blesses his path wherever he goes and protects him and makes him privileged to receive you back to his heart. My treasure, you are your father's entire world, his one and only ambition, the one and only compensation for the suffering and tortures, therefore I would want you to remember him favorably if destiny doesn't light our way.

Remember favorably your most distinguished grandfathers and grandmothers, your uncles and aunts and the entire family. Retain all of our memories, and please,

don't blame us. And regarding me, your mother, forgive me, forgive me my dear child that I gave birth to you. I would have wanted to bring you into a world in your own community and that you should live your own life, but if things ended up otherwise, it's not our fault. Therefore, I implore, my precious chick, my one and only child, please don't blame us. Try to be kind like your father and your father's fathers, and love those that replace your parents, and their families, who will certainly tell you about us. We would like you to appreciate how they sacrifice of themselves so much for your sake, and that you should be a source of pride for them, so that they won't have any reason to regret the burden that they willingly took upon themselves. Another thing I would like you to know is that your mother maintained a proud carriage, despite all of the humiliations that we suffered from our enemies, and if she is sentenced to die, she will die without condemning, without crying, but she will put a scornful smile on her face while facing her executioners. I grasp you close to my heart, kiss you with passion and bless you with all the might of the heart and the love of a mother.

Your mother

What can I write to my one and only, most precious girl in the world? One would have to pry open my heart and look in it because no pen is capable of describing what it holds at this moment. I believe with complete faith, despite everything, that we will all overcome and return our hearts to each other.

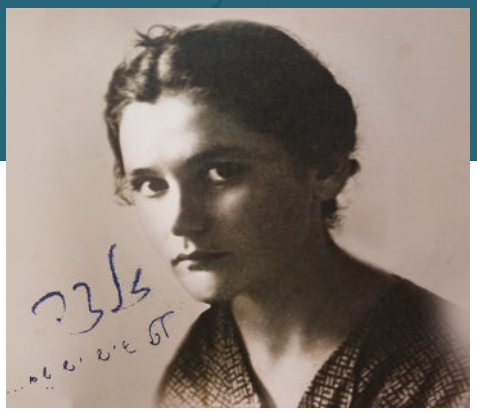
Your father

Sarah and Yechiel Gerlitz of Bendin, Poland, left their only daughter, Dita, six years old, with a Polish friend named Florchek; they had a feeling that they would never see their daughter again. They left her a letter which she was supposed to open when she grew up. The couple was saved,and together with Dita they immigrated to Israel.

Last Letters from the Shoah
Edited by Walter Zwi Bacharach
Yad Vashem, 2013

Dita Gerlitz

Each of Us *Has a* Name



Zelda

Each of us has a name
given by God
and given by our parents

Each of us has a name
given by our stature and our smile
and given by what we wear

Each of us has a name
given by the mountains
and given by our walls

Each of us has a name
given by the stars
and given by our neighbors

Each of us has a name
given by our sins
and given by our longing

Each of us has a name
given by our enemies
and given by our love

Each of us has a name
given by our celebrations
and given by our work

Each of us has a name
given by the seasons
and given by our blindness

Each of us has a name
given by the sea
and given by
our death.

The Spectacular Difference: Selected Poems of Zelda, translated, edited and introduced by Marcia Falk, (Hebrew Union College Press, 2004).

Menashe Kadishman (1932-2015)
Family Plaza Monument, 2001
Stainless steel
Gift of Ruta and Dr. Felix Zandman