

VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE

# ZACHOR



**WINTER 2017**

**CANADIAN LIBERATORS  
— AND THE MEANING  
OF 'LIBERATION'**

**KICKING AT THE DARKNESS,  
A COMIC BY COLIN UPTON**

**BEYOND THE TEXTBOOK:  
NEW APPROACHES TO  
HOLOCAUST EDUCATION**



VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE

# INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18 | 7PM**

NORMAN & ANNETTE ROTHSTEIN THEATRE  
950 WEST 41ST AVENUE, VANCOUVER

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

**DR. MARK CELINSKAK**

RECIPIENT OF THE 2016 VINE AWARDS FOR CANADIAN JEWISH LITERATURE

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WINTER 2017

**ZACHOR**

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**Cover:** A convoy of the Royal Canadian Air Force passes through the town of Celle, Germany, on its way to Bergen-Belsen. Courtesy Directorate of History and Heritage/Canada. Dept. Of National Defence/PI-43508

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

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The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre's current exhibition is *Canada Responds to the Holocaust, 1944-45*. We are especially proud of this project developed under the direction Richard Menkis and Ronnie Tessler, who have long associations with the VHEC, because it exemplifies something the Centre does uniquely well: It examines a facet of previously under-researched material at the intersection of Canadian and Holocaust history.

So new is this realm of inquiry, in fact, that when Professor Mark Celinscak first began work on what would become his award-winning book, *Distance from the Belsen Heap: Allied Forces and the Liberation of a Nazi Concentration Camp*, he was assured by several leading scholars that Canadians had played no role whatsoever in the liberation of Nazi camps. As you can read in this issue of *Zachor*, Celinscak's tenacity has opened an important area of history to greater investigation. He will tell that story — and also explore the meaning of the term “liberation” itself — when he speaks here as part of the VHEC's observance of International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 18. If you have not yet had an opportunity to visit *Canada Responds to the Holocaust, 1944-45*, the Centre will remain open until 7 p.m. on that day, so that visitors can tour the exhibition before the lecture.

Just as that keynote address complements the exhibition, so does an innovative publication that is being offered to every student who participates in the current school program. Working with Richard and Ronnie, and with students in one of Richard's UBC classes, Vancouver comic artist Colin Upton created a visual representation that provides readers with an intimate glimpse into the reactions of Canadian military personnel who were involved in the liberation of Nazi camps. The comic book, *Kicking at the Darkness*, uses the unexpected medium of graphic storytelling to continue the learning experience students begin with their visit to the Centre. The comic book is available to anyone, at the VHEC front desk, for a suggested donation of \$5. A story about this project is also in this issue of *Zachor*.

Another example of the VHEC's core mission takes place in the coming weeks. The 10th Biennial Shafran Teachers' Conference is part of an important, ongoing partnership between the VHEC and British Columbian teachers. This full-day program provides professional development for elementary and high school educators around teaching this complex history. This year's conference will introduce new approaches, including a web-based resource developed by the VHEC in collaboration with leading classroom teachers. This initiative will support educators and students as they work with newly digitized survivor testimonies from the VHEC collection.

These are a few of the significant current and upcoming developments at the VHEC. You will also find other news in this issue. As you read *Zachor*, we ask that you keep in mind that all the projects and programs of the VHEC — and the positive, lasting impacts of our work — are possible because we have the support of people like you, who recognize the importance of education and remembrance.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Nina Krieger  
VHEC Executive Director

## Hidden Holocaust History

International Holocaust Remembrance Day speaker Professor Mark Celinscak to address little-known Canadian role in liberation — and the meaning of ‘liberation’ itself.

BY PAT JOHNSON



Wing Commander Dr. John F. McCreary, right, of the RCAF Nutrition Group, before a mass grave at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, May 1945. John F. McCreary, Courtesy Krell Collection, VHEC.

The involvement of the Canadian military in liberating Nazi concentration camps was nearly lost to history, according to Professor Mark Celinscak, a result partly of the overall chaos at the end of the Second World War. Rediscovering Canadians’ role in that pivotal history led to Celinscak’s book, *Distance from the Belsen Heap: Allied Forces and the Liberation of a Nazi Concentration Camp*, which also explores how military personnel struggled with

the evidence of atrocities they witnessed. The book won the 2016 Vine Award for Canadian Jewish Literature. In the process, Celinscak identified and began investigating another under-researched subject area: the very concept of “liberation” itself.

“Ideas that we have about liberation are often oversimplified,” Celinscak says. “I think people like to put

nice and tidy bows on things. The war is over, what we call the Holocaust is now finished and everyone goes on and lives happily ever after. That is false.”

Through his career, which has included three years interviewing survivors of the Holocaust for the Azrieli Foundation’s Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program, Celinscak has been surprised to find many survivors have little or no recollection of the moment of their “liberation.”

Celinscak will discuss these topics in Vancouver on January 18, at an event marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day. His lecture is titled “Liberation 1945: Canadian Responses to the Holocaust.”

The lecture is related to the current exhibition at the VHEC, *Canada Responds to the Holocaust, 1944-45*, for which Celinscak wrote the panels about Bergen-Belsen.

Enduring images of liberation are often photographs of camp inmates beaming while greeting Allied soldiers. This may be an accurate portrayal of some survivors’ experiences, he says, if they were recent arrivals and still comparatively healthy.

“Even in Bergen-Belsen, you can find inmates who had just arrived and looked, comparatively speaking, healthier,” he says. “Sometimes, these are the images that were displayed in some newspapers and things like that.”

Beyond the camera’s lens at Bergen-Belsen, there were approximately 10,000 unburied dead when the Allies arrived.

“They were absolutely astounded,” Celinscak says. “In their minds, they thought they were entering something like a prisoner of war camp, not a camp where inmates were starving to death, eating grass. That’s actually all they had in the last week before the Allies arrived. They were literally ripping grass out of the ground to eat.”

Healthier survivors were there to greet their liberators, but many more couldn’t lift their heads off the bunks in their barracks to see what was going on.

“Many of the inmates at Bergen-Belsen were so sick, so emaciated, so disillusioned, they couldn’t really make heads or tails of what was going on,” Celinscak says. They saw men with guns, but that was a common enough occurrence. The uniforms looked different, but many survivors really couldn’t appreciate the moment.

Despite the apparent centrality of liberation to the survivor experience, it has been largely ignored as an area of academic investigation. The complexity of survivors’ experiences and the enormous obstacles ahead of them in the days, months and years after liberation have been of little interest to scholars or the general public.

Popular culture, particularly film depictions, have entrenched the tidy ending in which liberation is the end of the horror and the beginning of a happy new life. Liberation, in fact, was a time when survivors confronted the enormity of what had happened to their families, communities and European Jewry.

Celinscak wanted to investigate the experience beyond superficial ideas of liberation.

“What does this word even mean? What does it mean to liberate a concentration camp? That became my starting point,” he says. “In many ways, there is no one set story. There is no one set angle that will encapsulate all of it. The complexity of liberation is just that: complex. Liberation was a highly ambivalent experience.”

For many, liberation is not recalled as a particular moment at all.

“I can’t tell you how many survivors told me the same thing: I have very little recollection,” Celinscak says.



A typhus warning sign at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, 1945. John F. McCreary, Courtesy Krell Collection, VHEC

Celinscak, who is Canadian-born and educated, is the Louis and Frances Blumkin Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and Director of the Sam and Frances Fried Fund of Holocaust and Genocide Studies. The two roles exemplify his work, says Celinscak.

The academic chair is endowed by an American liberator and the fund was created by a survivor to help promote genocide and Holocaust education in the Midwest.

Lack of memory is not limited to survivors. On the related matter of Canadian involvement in the liberation of camps, Celinscak basically stumbled upon his topic by accident. The first five books he took off the shelf all described different liberation narratives about Bergen-Belsen. Not one included reference to Canadians. He consulted leading scholars.

“I called up and emailed a number of Canadian military historians and I asked them, did Canadians liberate Bergen-Belsen and any of these other camps? And the answer was always no. Absolutely not,” he recalls. “Then I came across a whole bunch of Canadians that were involved and I remember thinking, well this is odd.”

One name led to 10 and 10 led to 100.

“Eventually, I had over 1,000 Canadians who were involved in Bergen-Belsen alone,” says Celinscak. “I’m glad I was a bit stubborn and didn’t listen to the experts, otherwise I wouldn’t have created the book I did.”

“These are two things I’m extremely proud of,” says Celinscak. “What a perfect fit, to have the name of a liberator as my endowed chair and to be director of a survivor’s fund. It means a great deal because those two — liberators and survivors — are so central to my work.”

Professor Mark Celinscak will deliver the keynote address, *Liberation 1945: Canadian Responses to the Holocaust*, at the VHEC’s International Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration.

Wednesday, January 18, 2017, 7 p.m. at the Norman and Annette Rothstein Theatre, 950 West 41st Avenue, Vancouver.

*Presented by the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre in partnership with the Norman and Annette Rothstein Theatre. Funded through our community’s generous contributions to Federation Annual Campaign and by the Province of British Columbia. Audience members will receive Holocaust survivor memoirs generously donated by the Azraeli Foundation. Supported by the Akselrod Family in memory of their beloved Ben Akselrod z”l.*

Pat Johnson is a journalist and communications and development consultant to the VHEC.

# 10th Biennial Shafran Teachers' Conference

## Beyond the Textbook: New Approaches to Holocaust Education

BY ILONA SHULMAN SPAAR

The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre will host the 10th Biennial Shafran Teachers' Conference on February 24, 2017. The conference was launched in 1999 to offer a forum for British Columbian teachers to share best strategies around teaching the Holocaust by engaging with scholars and educators at the forefront of Holocaust studies.

As teaching methodologies and learning environments shift in the context of the new B.C. curriculum, reflecting on new approaches in Holocaust education is important. In response to these changes, this year's Shafran Teachers' Conference, themed *Beyond the Textbook: New Approaches to Holocaust Education*, is featuring two innovative education initiatives that focus on Holocaust education beyond the use of traditional textbooks and classroom settings.



Victoria high school teacher Georgina Hope, right, with a student during the pilot project of *Teaching the Holocaust Through Graphic Novels: A Community-Engaged High School Project*. Courtesy Chorong Kim.

The program opens with a keynote address by Dr. Andrea Webb, lecturer in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, at the University of British Columbia. Webb will present the web-based teaching resource *Primary Voices: Teaching Through Holocaust Survivor Testimony* that she developed for the VHEC together with leading classroom teachers. This resource supports educators and students as they work with newly digitized survivor testimonies from the VHEC collection. It acts as a portal for educators and students to engage with Holocaust testimony in a lesson, for a larger unit, or as part of an independent research project. Students are provided with the opportunity to learn how a testimony can be used as an historical source, how to analyze it and critically think about this topic. The project encourages students to work with testimony resources individually, a feature that meets the new curriculum's emphasis on the individualization of the learning process. Webb's keynote address will be followed by a workshop in which participants are invited to explore *Primary Voices* as a teaching tool.

The conference's second keynote speaker is Dr. Charlotte Schallié, an Associate Professor of Germanic Studies at the University of Victoria. Schallié presents *Teaching the Holocaust Through Graphic Novels: A Community-Engaged High School Project*. This project brought together a high school in Victoria, the University of Victoria, the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria and Hillel at the University of Victoria. By using graphic novels about the Holocaust as textbooks, the pilot project drew attention to graphic novels as an effective teaching tool that offer transformative

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## *Kicking at the Darkness* follows Canadian military as they liberate concentration camps

BY PAT JOHNSON

When developing the current exhibition at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, Richard Menkis and Ronnie Tessler had an idea to provide something that visiting students could take home to continue learning about the history they had encountered.

*Canada Responds to the Holocaust, 1944-45* is believed to be the first public examination of the Canadian military's role in liberating Nazi concentration camps and their reaction to what soldiers, medics, war artists, chaplains and others witnessed.

Menkis, a professor in the department of history at the University of B.C., was teaching a course on Jewish identity in graphic novels and the idea emerged to provide students with an historical comic representation related to the exhibition. Comics may not seem like an obvious

vehicle for conveying the history of the Holocaust, though that changed somewhat with the publication of the landmark graphic novel *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992.

Menkis and Tessler were introduced to Colin Upton, who has a long history in the Vancouver graphic arts scene, and the result is *Kicking at the Darkness*. The comic book, which will be offered to all students who attend the exhibition, brings to life the experiences of members of the Canadian military, including a Jewish chaplain, medical officers and ordinary soldiers, as they came face-to-face with the evidence of Nazi atrocities.

Upton admits the Holocaust is a daunting topic to take on in comic form. But anxiety about doing justice to the subject was alleviated by the knowledge that he was helping increase understanding of that history, particularly when there are voices challenging that truth.

"The fact that there are still people casting doubts on historical events, to me, is appalling and it's just so disheartening that we still have to talk about these things to this day," says Upton. "I hope I can contribute something to the education of young people."

He was intimidated, he admits, by the enormity of the subject and its resonance today, but the self-described "history nerd" had some background in Second World War military history and access to Holocaust scholars in the form of Menkis and Tessler.

Upton met with students in Menkis's class and small groups were assigned to represent in images and words



Colin Upton, left, at the opening reception of *Canada Responds to the Holocaust, 1944-45* with VHEC executive director Nina Krieger and exhibition creators Ronnie Tessler and Richard Menkis. Courtesy VHEC.



aspects of the exhibition's narrative, which Upton used to help guide his work.

The comic, which was made possible by the government of Canada with the support of Yosef Wosk, confronts a range of issues that support the lessons learned by visitors to the exhibition. Disbelief among survivors at their liberation, combined with fear and uncertainty about their loved ones, is depicted. Disbelief also is seen among the Canadian military personnel who at times could not differentiate the living from the dead. Righteous individuals who hid Jews are acknowledged in the pages, as are attitudes back in Canada, which included xenophobic ideas that Jews were Europe's problem, as well as a form of enlightened self-interest that saw Jews as ideal immigrants to a newly industrializing and urbanizing Canada. When one man contends that the refugees would make good Canadians because they're "damn clever," another replies, "Too damn clever if you ask me."

Upton, whose father was a history professor at UBC, was part of the small press mini-comics renaissance of the 1980s and '90s.

"I think I was probably the first person in Vancouver to start doing mini-comics in Vancouver, in 1985," he says.

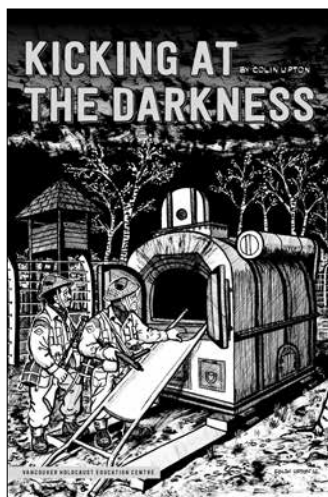
When Spiegelman's *Maus* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992, it reframed many people's ideas of what topics illustrated media could address. Even so, Upton says, *Maus* was not really a model for *Kicking at the Darkness*.

"The work of Art Spiegelman has certainly been an inspiration, although there wasn't any attempt to model this on his work," Upton says. "The thing about *Maus* is it's not only a story about the Holocaust, it's also the story of his relationship with his father — and I don't have any personal relationship with the Holocaust, so mine was a more factual approach."

The comic is basically made up of two parts, he says.

"It's the factual story of the Canadian Army as it fights its way across Europe, with these little episodes and anecdotes and stories of the Holocaust as they encountered it," says Upton, who has broad knowledge of military history. He relied on Menkis and Tessler to advise him on capturing aspects of Holocaust history accurately.

In addition to being given to students who visit the exhibition, which continues until March 31, *Kicking at the Darkness* is available through the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre for a suggested donation of \$5.



Cover of the historical comic *Kicking at the Darkness* / An excerpt from Colin Upton's comic about Canadian liberators of Nazi concentration camps.

## German students stage Holocaust play with a Vancouver connection

BY DAN SONNENSCHN

My article in the previous issue of *Zachor* described the current chapter in a saga starting with the friendship between Markus Schirmer, a school teacher in Germany, and my late mother, Bronia Sonnenschein. Her legacy of cooperation with Markus on Holocaust education continues in our family.

My niece, Emily Sztabyb, wrote a play called *The Treasure*, based partly on the Holocaust experiences of my mother and my aunt Paula. Last May, Emily gave a drama workshop about it to German exchange students in Vancouver with Markus, who had arranged student performances of the play in Ingolstadt last October. The director, guided by a drama teacher, was also a student, as were the set designers and a musician who composed and produced a moving score.

The performances and related activities were considered a great success. The two performances open to the public

were followed by lively audience discussions. A review by journalist Andrea Hammerl stated (in English translation) that “Franziska Jastrow and Julia Wuschko in the lead roles of Bronia and Paula succeeded in transporting the audience into an essentially unimaginable emotional world.” Their acting “was excellent, poignant and intense.” Having seen the film of one performance, I agree. Interested readers may be able to judge for themselves by arranging with the VHEC to view the film. The printed script is also in the Centre’s library.

Markus arranged for his English students who had seen the play to write letters to Emily, followed by separate Skype sessions with that class and the students who had worked on the production. Among many appreciative comments in the letters was this: “It’s a great idea to bring the Holocaust closer to students by a play which is, by the way, far more fascinating than other plays or even books I read about the Holocaust.” Another wrote, “I think it’s really important that ... we tell the stories of our beloved survivors in creative ways like you do. And I was really impressed by how interesting, sometimes really thrilling, and how well played *The Treasure* was.”

Markus wrote to us afterward that the English students “enjoyed Emily’s direct and immediate responses in the Skype session.” One student “clearly expressed her gratitude that Emily took the time and made the effort of answering all the students’ letters in writing and getting up so early for the Skype session.” The drama students “appreciated and enjoyed Emily’s open and friendly way.”



Franziska Jastrow, left, and Julia Wuschko as Bronia and Paula in the play. Courtesy Markus Schirmer.

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# Writing Lives Project: Documenting Local Holocaust Survivor Memoirs

BY DEBORAH SCHRATTER

A select number of Langara College students are being paired with local Holocaust survivors to pen their memoirs. This is part of a project called *Writing Lives: The Holocaust Survivor Memoir Project*. The memoirs will be archived at the Azrieli Foundation, with a possibility of being published for general readership.

*Writing Lives* is an eight-month collaboration between Langara's English and History departments, the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, and the Azrieli Foundation. In the first half of the project, students learned about the history and impact of the Holocaust. In the second half, which begins this month, students are paired with local Holocaust survivors associated with the VHEC.

"*Writing Lives* provides an opportunity for students to immerse themselves in the history of the Holocaust beyond physical textbooks," says Rachel Mines, Langara English instructor, and project coordinator. For example, on November 9, students commemorated *Kristallnacht* (The Night of Broken Glass) by lighting candles in memory of the violent anti-Jewish events that took place on November 9 and 10, 1938. The course also regularly features guest speakers from different organizations, giving their perspective on the events surrounding the Holocaust.

Dr. Gene Homel, who taught the history portion in the fall semester, observed that the students were keenly engaged.

"They were eager to learn about the roots of the Holocaust and to examine the roles and motivations of the perpetrators, victims and bystanders," he says. "The history part of the course provides a strong foundation for the survivor interviews."



Child survivor and VHEC Outreach Speaker Alex Buckman speaking to Langara College students participating in *Writing Lives: The Holocaust Survivor Memoir Project*. Courtesy Pamela Post.

"I feel grateful for the opportunity to investigate the events and prejudices that served as a catalyst for the Holocaust," says Lucille Welburn, a Peace and Conflict Studies student who is taking the course. "With the help of survivors, professors, librarians, and fellow students, I am learning that individuals, communities and organizations all have agency when it comes to fighting racism, and how we can work together to prevent such tragedies in the future."

Robin Macqueen, a Langara instructor and Chair of the Health Sciences Division, is auditing the course out of personal interest.

"This is a fantastic opportunity to engage with and honour people who survived a time of unimaginable prejudice," he says. "I'm getting a lot out of the course, and enjoy being a student again."

For the VHEC, survivor testimonies are seen as a useful and powerful method for teaching about the Holocaust. "Holocaust testimony provides a connection with people,

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learning experiences for young adults. Together with Georgina Hope, a secondary school teacher, and Noga Yarmar, a teacher at the Congregation Emanu-El Hebrew School in Victoria, Schallié co-developed a Holocaust teaching unit for high school students in 2016 that will be presented at the workshop following her presentation.

The Victoria-based project is featured in the documentary *Readers of the Holocaust* by Chorong Kim, a student of Schallié. The film won the Best Documentary Award (Student Category) at the Montreal World Film Festival 2016 and will be screened during the conference.

Breakout sessions during the conference provide opportunities for teachers to further discuss their engagement in Holocaust education.

Conference registration is open to B.C. teachers of grades six to 12. Registration closes January 30, 2017. For more information or to register, please visit [www.vhec.org](http://www.vhec.org).

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Dr. Ilona Shulman Spaar is the Education Director of the VHEC. She has an international background in museum education.

Markus noted that, for most of them, “the project of the play first seemed very difficult and barely manageable, later the great task created a new and exhilarating bond between the group; acting on stage in front of a large audience turned out to be fun, ‘a very cool experience.’”

Although Holocaust education is emphasized in German school curricula, there, as well as here, so much depends on the dedication and knowledge of individual teachers. Markus deserves great credit for his initiative and work on this and other such projects. I also thank the students who contributed to this production, the school’s supportive teachers and principal, and, of course, Emily for her creation of this compelling approach to teaching the Holocaust. It certainly resonated with the participants and audiences there, and Markus believes “we should encourage more schools in Germany, Canada or anywhere to put *The Treasure* on stage.”

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Dan Sonnenschein was born in Israel and grew up in Vancouver. He has worked in the computer industry and in publishing.

culture, persecution, and survival,” says Ilona Shulman Spaar, Education Director for the VHEC. “Eyewitness testimonies have proven to be a powerful and effective teaching tool, which affords a personal connection to the events of the Holocaust as we hear survivors’ accounts of their experiences. Testimonies provide a way for students to connect with survivors’ stories and gain an understanding of events that other sources can’t give them. The VHEC is proud to partner with Langara College and the Azrieli Foundation on *Writing Lives: The Holocaust Survivor Memoir Project*.”

Throughout the fall semester, students were asked to keep a journal to write their reflections on the historical events of the Holocaust. Many of the students wrote creative short stories or poems in response to their studies. A poem written by Langara student Ashley Seatter in response to Terrence Des Pres’ essay “The Will to Survive” concludes: *We must carry on and study and learn and write and record. / These terrible memories must not be lost. / We must find a way to reconcile and heal. / We must learn from this.*

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Deborah Schratter is a Communications Officer at Langara College.



## A Legacy of Restitution

Canadian art dealer Max Stern, a Holocaust survivor, bequeathed a project around Nazi-looted artworks

BY MICHELLE DODEK



Max Stern, about 1920. National Gallery of Canada, Library and Archives, Fonds Max Stern.

Max Stern grew up in the bosom of European art. He attained his PhD in art history in 1928 and shortly after became a partner with his father, Julius Stern, at the renowned Stern gallery in Dusseldorf. Not long after Max joined his father in business, the Nazis began implementing their boycott of Jewish places of business as well as an escalating attack on all art deemed

“non-Aryan.” This turn in the political and business climate in Germany broke Julius Stern, who died in October 1934.

Max was left with the gallery and an untenable position: the Nazis forced him to sell his entire collection, mostly to officers in the SS. The proceeds of the sale amounted to the cost of a visa for himself and his mother out of Nazi Germany in 1937. The two fled to London.

As was the case with all male “German aliens” to arrive in England in the late 1930s, Stern was interned on the Isle of Man. He volunteered to go to an internment camp in Canada and was eventually released from internment in New Brunswick when William Birks, of the Montreal jewelry family, discovered Stern’s talent and knowledge and sponsored his release.

What followed was a fairytale for a refugee art dealer. Within three years, Max Stern became a partner in

Dominion Gallery of Fine Art in Montreal. He forged a new direction for the gallery, mounting exhibitions of contemporary Canadian painters at a time when Canadian art was largely unrecognized.

Although Emily Carr enjoyed critical acclaim during her lifetime, she had limited economic success. Max Stern recognized potential in her tremendous body of work and, in 1944, just months before Emily Carr’s death, he launched Carr’s first successful exhibition in a commercial gallery. It was the “culminating show of her career,” according to Carr biographer Maria Tippett. It also resulted in the largest paycheck Emily Carr ever saw.

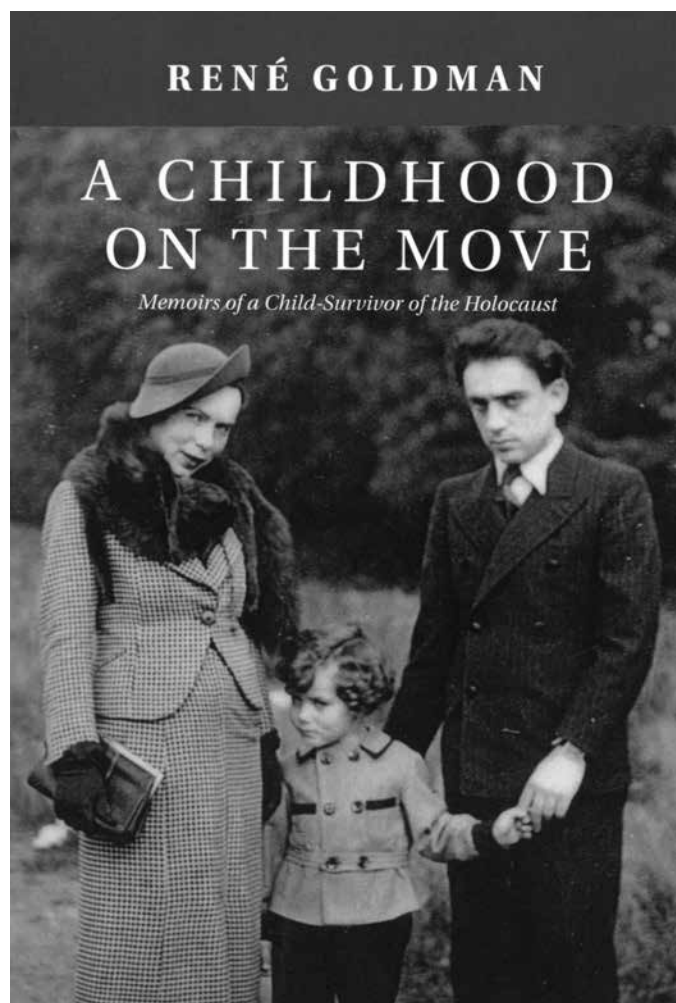


Max Stern in the Dominion Gallery in front of three sculptures. From left to right: Auguste Rodin, Aristide Maillol and Pablo Gargallo. Photo by Yousuf Karsh. National Gallery of Canada, Library and Archives, Fonds Max Stern.

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## A Childhood on the Move

BY LILLIAN BORAKS-NEMETZ



René Goldman's account of his childhood is set in Belgium and France during the Second World War, when Hitler's plan was to annihilate all European Jews. Each European Jewish child was automatically sentenced to death. Only between six and 11% of European Jewish children survived the Holocaust. Ironically, this memoir describes both a heart-breaking and an uplifting story of one Jewish boy's struggle to stay alive and sane despite all odds against him. It is both personal and at the same time an important, historical document. The story, written with a spatter of

tongue-in-cheek humour, is a fascinating labyrinth of multiple narratives; stories within stories. It is not only about René the child, but also René the man, who revisits the past and examines the wounds left by war. Goldman weaves his experiences throughout the periods of war and post-war when he is a young man who travels back to the places that sheltered him and other children lost in the horror of war. The entire narrative is skillfully infused not only with historical and political facts but with the geography of various places so poignantly described one can feel and see them.

Goldman writes about the time when children lost parents, siblings and homes. These children had to depend on the kindness of strangers or were left alone to fend for themselves.

René Goldman was six years old when the Nazis invaded his native Luxembourg, where he was born, and Belgium, where his family had taken refuge. In 1942, the family fled Belgium for France. From the last station before the French border, they walked on foot to the Demarcation Line between the German Occupied Zone and the Free Zone. No sooner did they cross the line than they were arrested by the French police who were rounding up Jews escaping from the Occupied Zone and the family was interned in Lons-le-Saunier. On August 26, René and his mother were taken to the city's train station for deportation. His aunt appeared from nowhere and tried to take the boy away but to no avail. Eventually, she found someone in authority to send two officers to rescue the young boy and save him from boarding the train. His mother was already in one of the cars waving goodbye to René as the train was pulling out of the station. This was the last time René saw his mother. He was eight years old.

His father disappeared that morning and it was only in 1944 that René was reunited with him for a brief time, until his father was arrested and taken away. Only after the war did René find out that his father died at the end of the death march from Auschwitz, in January 1945.

In 1942, René was placed in the care of the OSE (Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants) and brought to Chateau du Masgelier. After two weeks, he was taken to the village of Vendoeuvres, where a young couple offered to take care of him. Soon afterward, the Free Zone was invaded by the Germans.

What followed for Goldman were moves to several homes due to the changing circumstances, which necessitated a constant search for safe places for children.

Left an orphan in 1945, Goldman was placed in the care of the CCE (Commission Centrale de l'Enfance), an organization, inspired by communist ideology, which was instrumental in shaping his political beliefs. His faith in this system remained unshaken until he lived in Poland for three years, when he became disillusioned, even shocked, by the communist system.



René's parents, Mira Arenstein and Ze'ev Goldman on their wedding day, 1931. Courtesy René Goldman.

He writes, "I can now in all candidness recognize that I caught myself wondering whether communism was not the greatest lie of the century, if not of all time."

Goldman's narrative strength, among his many others, leans towards the lyrical.

One of the immediate post-war places René was moved to in France was the town of Andrésy and its Manoir de Denouval, which inspired poetic instincts in him. Here he found the beauty of gardens and serenity, a "sanctuary" that shielded him for a time from his loneliness and the post-war chaotic reality. Interestingly, Marc Chagall, who donated funds for the children's care, would occasionally visit the manor.

"I was enthralled with the Enchanted Manor," the author writes. "It nourished in me a fascination with mystery as I explored it for hidden nooks and ventured up the narrow winding steps that led to the turret, sometimes even in the dark of night." And, indeed, these were dark times in the young boy's life for it was then that he realized he was an orphan.

Friendships played a huge part during the war and in the post-war period. In the boys and girls René befriended along the way, and some of the kind teachers, he found a certain relief from the loneliness he felt, and from the lack of affection and support. One person who played an important role in Goldman's life was Sophie Micnic who became his caregiver and kind friend. This woman, a founding leader of the MOI, the Jewish communist resistance movement in Paris and Lyon during the war, later became the director of CCE. It was she who took René under her wing, and recommended that he live in the "Enchanted Manor."

This memoir — a must read — is a powerful testimony of a child's response to the calamities of war and their everlasting imprint on his life. It is also a statement of courage and survival in the face of adversity. Eventually,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

After more than 45 years as a world-renowned art dealer, Max Stern died in 1987, leaving his fortune and works to be distributed between Concordia, McGill and Hebrew universities. He also stipulated in his will the establishment of the Max Stern Art Restitution Project in order to seek restitution for pieces confiscated by or sold under duress to the Nazis. As a result of this project, legislation and legal precedents have been, and continue to be, set worldwide regarding Nazi looted art.



Clarence Epstein, Concordia University ©Concordia University

A joint program between the Canadian Friends of Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the VHEC and Congregation Schara Tzedek will feature Professor Clarence Epstein (Concordia University) speaking about *The Max Stern Art Restitution Project: In Search of Nazi-Looted Art*, with introductory remarks by Robert Heffel.

Thursday, March 23, 2017, at 7:30 p.m. at Congregation Schara Tzedek, 3476 Oak Street, Vancouver. There is no charge for admission but RSVP is required at [vanc@cfhu.org](mailto:vanc@cfhu.org).

*This event is sponsored by the Estate of Frank and Rosie Nelson, Abbotsford, B.C. They loved the Jewish people.*

Michelle Dodek is a freelance writer in the Jewish community.

Goldman developed a tremendous hunger for knowledge, education and a desire for communication in as many as 10 languages.

In the last section of the book, the author reveals himself as a poet and a grown man still deeply immersed in his past.

### EXCERPTS FROM LONS-LE-SAUNIER 1942-1992

(TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY NETTA ZUCKERMAN)

*That railway station so nondescript, so grey,  
Where today travelers lug their suitcases,  
Reverberates for me a different hubbub.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*The train stops for only one minute.  
It warms up, starts and slowly speeds along  
Towards Lyon, towards Avignon and the luminous South.  
Those low-lying hills gently  
caressed by the pallid sun*

*Was that the scenery traversed  
by that other train*

*From the distant past,*

*Which she must have seen  
through tear-dimmed eyes?*

*Oh, Mother: what were  
your last thoughts?*

*Alas, no one will ever know*

*I was eight years old...*



René Goldman, age 6, with his mother, Mira. Courtesy René Goldman.

René Goldman's memoir will be published by the Azrieli Foundation's Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program in 2017 as *A Childhood Adrift*.

Lillian Boraks-Nemetz is a VHEC Outreach Speaker, an award-winning author, an instructor at UBC's Writing Centre and the editor of the "No Longer Alone" section of *Zachor*.



## VHEC has Experts on Legacy Giving



When people give to charitable causes, they are motivated by altruism more than tax benefits, according to studies. But financial planners are quick to point out that astute estate planning can mean more money for family and good causes, which makes altruism go further.

Phil Levinson, president of the board of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, is also a chartered professional accountant (CA) and an associate at ZLC Financial, with expertise in estate and succession planning.

“With proper planning, we can reduce the proportion of an estate that goes to taxes,” he says. “Through planned gifts and a range of other strategies, we can usually ensure more money for both family and legacy gifts by minimizing the tax burden.”

Planning to maximize a legacy could involve life insurance, annuities, trusts, real estate, shares in publicly traded companies and other financial and estate planning tools.

“The variety of avenues is almost limitless,” says Levinson. “The key is to find the fit that is right for realizing your wishes. Through effective planning, you can provide for family and probably leave a more

substantial legacy to causes that have been important to you through your lifetime.”

The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, Levinson says, is taking advantage of the talent of members of its Planned Giving Committee to encourage supporters to consider leaving a legacy gift to the Centre.

“We have an in-house team of experts ready to help people craft a plan,” Levinson says. In addition to Levinson, with his insurance and investment expertise, Planned Giving Committee members who are donating their time to advise supporters include Jeremy Costin, an estate planning lawyer, and Marcus Brandt, a chartered professional accountant (CA) with expertise in personal tax planning.

“The VHEC is fortunate to have people with this specific expertise who are willing to advise,” Levinson says. “We are also fortunate to have a number of supporters for whom the work of the Centre has been an important cause during their lifetimes and who want to continue supporting the VHEC through a legacy gift.”

**To arrange a meeting with the VHEC’s experts in financial, tax and estate planning, call 604.264.0499.**

# TRIBUTE CARDS

**AUGUST 11 - DECEMBER 19, 2016**

## GET WELL

Agi Bergida, Speedy recovery and a Healthy & Happy New Year. Ida & Odie Kaplan, Louise Sorensen, Stanley & Joycelain Sunshine

Marilyn Glazer, Get well. Gloria & Robbie Waisman

Ralph & Bob Markin, Refuah shelemah. Harvey & Jody Dales

## MAZEL TOV

David Ehrlich, On your 90th birthday. Marilyn & Derek Glazer, Bill & Adella Moscovitz

Alex Buckman, Happy Birthday. Robbie & Gloria Waisman

Frieda Miller & Danny Shapiro, On the arrival of your second grandchild, Annie. Ida & Odie Kaplan

Harvey & Jody Dales, On your 25th Anniversary. Sid & Toby Rubin

Rob Krell, For all your deserved honours and awards. Irving & Sharon Kates

Cathy Golden, Happy Birthday. Julie Kuchinsky

Stan Taviss, Happy Birthday. Ben, Heather and Robbie Baker, Sandra & Bernie Bressler

Harold & Pat Laimon, In your honour. Nancy Benyaer

Robbie Waisman, For all your deserved honours and awards. Irving & Sharon Kates

Estie Kallner, On your Bat Mitzvah. Michael, Tami and Hailey Lipton

Corinne Margulius, Happy Birthday. Cathy Golden

Rob Krell, On receiving the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award. Evelynne & Herb Loomer

Louis Sholzberg, On your birthday. Debbie & Eddie Rozenberg

Lionel Fishman, Happy Special Birthday. Les & Karen Cohen and Family

Mark Epstein, On your 70th Birthday. Victor & Judy Stern and Family

Ed Lewin, So proud of your work. Sharon Lewin

Len & Brenda Wall, On your anniversary. Barb & Herb Silber

Lenny Wall, On your special birthday. Aunt Ida & Odie Kaplan

Robyn & Allan Hanson, On your wedding anniversary. David, Cathy, Tyler & Shane Golden

Otto Farkas, On your 90th Birthday. Marilyn & Perry Ehrlich

## HAPPY CHANUKAH

Jack Azouz, Children's books donated to the VHEC Library, Happy Chanukah. Hymie & Rome Fox

## SYMPATHY

Family of Babs Cohen, On your loss. Rita Akselrod

Les & Karen Cohen & Family, On the loss of your mother and grandmother, Babs. Rob & Marilyn Krell, Harvey & Jody Dales, Faye & Richard Elias, the Szajman Family

Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, In memory of your mother, Wanda Melamed. Irving & Sharon Kates, Irene Watts, Estika Hunnings, Kit Krieger

Louise Sorensen, On the loss of your husband, Ike. Irene Watts

Evelyn Goldenberg, On the loss of your husband, Irving Goldenberg. Lana & Mendy Landa, Marilyn & Perry Ehrlich, Danny & Vera Wollner

Ruth Wolochow, On your loss. Ida & Odie Kaplan

Linda Civkin, On the loss of your mother. Odie Kaplan

Jane Remocker, On the loss of your husband, Geoff Remocker. Peter and Sarah Moogk

Vivian & Jeff Claman, On the loss of your father and grandfather, Michel Mielnicki. Malcolm and Judy Weinstein, David & Ellen Bogoch, Les and Karen Cohen, Rita Akselrod,

Anna Sabha, Susan Curtis, Arnie and Dessa Sadovnick, Sharon Harowitz and Bob Willmot, Howard & Rosalind Karby, Faye, Molly and Toby Samson, Bev Spring & Alan Moranis, Neri & Aron Tischler, Miryam Filosof, Ralph & Vivian Rothstein, Cheryl Brownstein & Rick Schreiber, Rob & Marilyn Krell, Heather Wolfe, Julie Gutovich, Joseph & Simone Marciano, Sally, Sid and Alex Coleman, Brian and Sidnee Bell

David Eliach, On the loss of your beloved Yafa, wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. Evelyn Kahn & Family

Danya & David Fugman, In memory of your brother, Charles. Debbie & Eddie Rozenberg & Family, Evelyn Kahn & Family, Irving & Sharon Kates, Frieda Miller & Danny Shapiro

Daeniela Bheumont-Berne, In memory of your mother, Wanda Melamed. Estika Hunnings

Bergida Family, On the loss of Mary. Stanley & Joycelain Sunshine.

Ames Family, On the loss of your mother and grandmother, Surella Ames. Aron, Sam and Al Szajman

Darlene & Richard Ames, On the loss of your mother, Surella Ames. Odie Kaplan

Bruce Ames & Family, On the loss of your mother, Surella Ames. Ed & Debbie Rozenberg & Family

Tracy & Les Ames, On the loss of your mother, Surella Ames. Rita Akselrod

Alain Mielnicki, On the loss of your father, Michel Mielnicki. Faye, Molly & Toby Samson, Rita Akselrod

Tiki & Brian Goldenberg, On the loss of your father, Irving Goldenberg. Marilyn & Rob Krell

Shirley Swartz, On the loss of your husband, Stanley Swartz. Anita Shafran, Marilyn & Perry Ehrlich, Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, Vera & Bernard Rozen

Dr. & Mrs. Harry Frackson, On the loss of your brother. Lillian Boraks-Nemetz

Lorne Greenberg, On the loss of Sari Weintraub. Esther, Jacob & Jedediah Blumes

In honour of my parents, June & Michel Mielnicki. Alain Mielnicki

Carol Leiren, In memory of your husband, Hall. Ida Kaplan

Rosemary Elperin, On the loss of your dear cousin, Russ. Rob & Marilyn Krell

Sunny Wosk, On the passing of your sister-in-law, Alma. Ida Kaplan

Gordon & Leslie Diamond, On the loss of your son, Steven. Ida & Odie Kaplan, Lillian Boraks-Nemetz

Harold & Marla Groberman, On the loss of your son, Jory Neil Groberman. Lana & Mendy Landa, Ida & Odie Kaplan, Rome & Hymie Fox

Howard Breslau & Family, On the loss of your Father, Michael. Sarah Richman

Ruth, John, & Michael Kent and families, In memory of Jeanne Kent. Elizabeth Nicholls

Jeffrey Zilberman, On the loss of your mother, Mala. Mark Rozenberg

Jill Diamond, On the loss of your brother, Steven. Corinne Zimmerman & Jon Festinger

Mary Klonoff & Family, On the loss of your husband, father, and grandfather. Rob & Marilyn Krell, Les & Karen Cohen

Reta Goldberg, On the loss of your husband, Myer. Lillian Boraks-Nemetz

Zelda Fedder & Family, In memory of Dr. Josh Fedder. Dr. Serge & Brenda Vanny

## THANK YOU

Odie Kaplan, Thank you. Ruth Wolochow

Rita Roling, Thank you. Shoshana Fidelman

Rob Krell, Thank you. Ralph & Bob Markin

Sonia Hayes, Thank you. Odie Kaplan

Robbie Waisman, For your visit to my UBC History 441 class. Richard Menkis

# THANK YOU VHEC VOLUNTEERS!

## OUTREACH SPEAKERS

Janos Benisz, Amalia Boe Fishman, Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, Alex Buckman, Mariette Doduck, David Ehrlich, Serge Haber, Jannushka Jakoubovitch, Chaim Kornfeld, Robert Krell, Inge Manes, Claude Romney, Martha Salcudean, Louise Sorensen, Peter Suedfeld, Tom Szekely, Robbie Waisman; Coordinator: Rita Akselrod

## SPECIAL PROJECTS

Amalia Boe Fishman, Alex Buckman, Richard Elias, Bonnie Elster, Herb Mills, Lise Kirchner, Kit Krieger, Ella Levitt, Evelyn Ray, Stan Taviss, Anna-Mae Wiesenthal

## DOCENTS

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## TEACHER ADVISORY

Eyal Daniel, Mark Figuera, Stephanie Henderson, Kit Krieger, Tom Morton, Jinny St. Hilaire, Andrea Webb, Anna-Mae Wiesenthal

OUR SINCERE APOLOGIES FOR ANY ERRORS OR OMISSIONS



## MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

**YOUR SUPPORT ...**

- **PROVIDES** opportunities for students, teachers and the broader public to engage with the history of the Holocaust and its relevance for the present.
- **INSPIRES** young people to become advocates for social justice and human rights.
- **ENSURES** that Holocaust survivors are honoured and cared for and that their experiences of survival and loss are remembered.

**RENEW OR JOIN THE VHEC TODAY! GO TO [WWW.VHEC.ORG](http://WWW.VHEC.ORG) OR CALL 604.264.0499**

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