



Zachor | *Remember*

The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre Newsletter | Number 4 | October 2005

THE VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE is pleased to inform our membership of the following course being offered by the Jewish Learning Institute (www.MyJLI.com)

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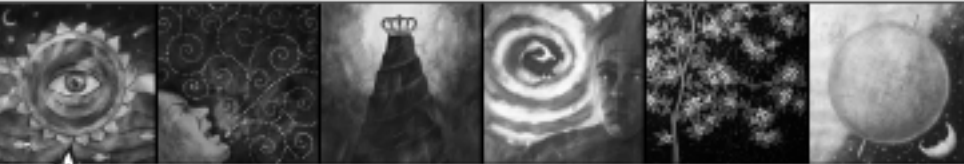
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THE HOLOCAUST—A VIEW FROM THE SOUL

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For More Information Contact:
The Jewish Community Centre: 604.266.1313
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JANUSZ KORCZAK ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
HOSTS CHILDREN’S ART EXHIBITION

The Janusz Korczak Association of Canada is proud to present an International exhibition of children’s art: “My World and I” in the Moat Gallery of the Vancouver Public Library, 350 West Georgia, Vancouver BC. The exhibit will open on November 20, 2005, at 5 pm, the public is welcome to attend. The exhibit will run through November 29, 2005.

There are approximately 100 children’s drawings from Canada, United Kingdom, Poland, Israel, Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kyrgystan and Japan. The theme of the drawings, made by children aged 4-12, reflects a child’s view of the world as run by adults. Some drawings relate to the characters in the stories written by humanitarian and children’s rights advocate Dr. Janusz Korczak.

Dr. Janusz Korczak (Henryk Goldszmit) a pediatrician, writer and educator was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1878. He was a well-known pediatrician, educator and a psychologist by vocation and a pioneer in supporting the issues of children’s rights. The Janusz Korczak Association of Canada was formed in 1999. Its mandate is to support the human rights of children, to foster recognition of Janusz Korczak’s work and to disseminate the Janusz Korczak ideas through publications, exhibits and translations. The Janusz Korczak Association publishes its own newsletter and is active in charitable work.

Zachor | Remember

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Cover: Currency from the Lodz Ghetto



MARCH OF THE LIVING
2006 – INFORMATIONAL
MEETING

Thursday, October 27, 2005
7:30 p.m. at the JCC

For further information and
registration contact Yair Tabenkin
604.257.5100, ytabenkin@jfgv.com

VOLUNTEERS
AUGUST – SEPTEMBER 05

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We apologize for any errors
or omissions. To volunteer call
Rome Fox 604.264.0499

Questionable Issue:
Currency of the Holocaust

On display until December 15, 2005

This exhibit, *Questionable Issue: Currency of the Holocaust* produced by the Houston Holocaust Museum will be on display in the Legacy Gallery of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre until December 15, 2005. The exhibit consists of various pieces of scrip (currency) issued at 13 Nazi concentration camps or ghettos, including Dachau, Buchenwald, and the Warsaw Ghetto. This unique exhibit presents several authentic Holocaust artifacts that have never been publicly displayed in Canada before.

There are many categories of Holocaust-related money, ranging from currency printed by the Germans, to money printed by Jews interned in the ghettos such as the Warsaw Ghetto. The Nazis required that these special banknotes be used exclusively in the ghetto. Outside of the camps and ghettos this money had absolutely no value, yet there are important stories embedded within both the design and the use of the scrip.

The exhibit features a selection of artifacts of the extensive Charlton E. Meyer Jr. and Gloria B. Meyer Collection of the Holocaust Museum Houston. Meyer, a numismatist, (historian and collector of currency) from Shreveport, Louisiana, has been accumulating camp and ghetto scrip since the 1980s. He donated over 400 pieces to the Houston Museum in 2002.

The Nazis also printed so called “special privilege” money which was to be given to Jewish inmates who worked harder so they could “purchase” extra rations – what actually occurred was that the Nazis took food away from some prisoners and gave it to others.

At the end of the war, Allied troops found this “ghetto money” extremely attractive, purchasing, or trading cigarettes or toiletries for it, from surviving prisoners. This exchange is how much of this currency came to North America. An interest in collecting these artifacts has resulted in an active trade in re-printed



Top: *The printing of this 50 grozny note in the Warsaw Ghetto was an act of resistance by Jewish postal authorities. Illegally printed, the design shows 18 Jewish Stars, representing life, being guarded by an SS flame and barbed wire.*

Bottom: *This coupon from the Lodz Ghetto entitled its bearer to a mikvah, a ritual bath. Lodz had the most complex scrip structure of any ghetto and the most developed economy.*

currency made from old printing plates that survived the war. There are numerous collectors of these “artifacts” as well as numismatists who study their design, use and origin. When asked why they would focus on such items, these collectors replied: “these bits of paper and metal can speak to us of a broad tragedy in an especially personal and understandable manner.”

The exhibit focuses on 85 of the most interesting and rare artifacts. Each piece in the display is unique in representing the concentration camp or ghetto where it was issued. “This is the most comprehensive collection of Holocaust scrip that exists in North America,” said Collin Keel, the Museum’s Director of Changing Exhibits. “Some of the artifacts in the collection are extremely rare, and one piece in particular, from the Natzweiler camp in France, is the only known piece in the world.”

Along with the Natzweiler scrip, artifacts from Dachau, Ravensbrück, and the Sokolka Ghetto are considered to be the rarest pieces in the collection. The scrip from Dachau is unusual because it has spaces for handwritten notations. Both prisoner numbers and the date of issue were often written in by hand, making each piece of this scrip unique and extremely rare.

Unfortunately ghetto money and coins are the most counterfeit items of all Holocaust artifacts. One of the most “reproduced” has been the 10 Pfenning coin from the Litzmannstadt (Lodz) Ghetto. Demand and the inability of purchasers to identify the fakes from the originals contribute to the trade in these forged items.



THERESIENSTADT & AUSCHWITZ

On money from Theresienstadt:
“Again, the money I only received after the war. It was again money which I had got from my [second] wife... who had survived in Terezin and therefore she had the money. I had nothing.”

On the “real” currency in ghettos and camps:
“In the camp, you got a certain amount of bread, you got a certain amount, a little piece sometimes, of artificial honey, and sometimes you would get a little bit of a sort of kind of sausage. And some would try and exchange the sausage for a little piece of honey or whatever. But the going currency in the camp still was cigarettes.”

Eric Sonner

Theresienstadt Scrip

Czech Jews were interned in 1940 in a walled town near Prague named Terezin, renamed Theresienstadt by the Germans. Later it became a concentration and transit camp for Jews, most of whom were later transported to Auschwitz. In total over 140,000 Jews were imprisoned in what was “posed” by the Nazis as a “model camp” to the outside world.

So-called “Ghetto Money” was issued in the summer of 1944 in Thereisenstadt for ‘use’ within the camp even though it bought absolutely nothing. Prior to an inspection in the spring of 1944 by the International Red Cross, the Nazis instituted an entire scam banking system, which included a fake bank building.

Beginning in June, we were suddenly issued varying amounts of this Ghetto money in payment for the slave labor work we performed. There were store-fronts established within the camp which offered nothing. They displayed some of the clothing that had been confiscated from arriving prisoners. But they sold nothing. One “food stuffs” (“Lebensmittel”) store did allow us to purchase mustard with this money, but none I knew bothered to buy that. We had no food where such a spice could be used.

Charlotte Guthmann Opfermann,
Inmate of Terezin (Theresienstadt)

< *Theresienstadt currency was designed by Peter Kien, an artist from Prague who later died in Auschwitz. Kien’s original picture of Moses holding the tablets of the Ten Commandments was rejected by the number two man in the SS, Reinhard Heydrich, who claimed that Moses looked too Aryan. The notes were modified to show a more “Semitic-looking” Moses, whose hand is covering the commandment, “Thou shalt not kill.”*

SKARZYSKO MUNITIONS FACTORY, POLAND AND BUCHENWALD

“In 1940 the ghetto was formed in Skarszysko. My brothers had special employment cards and worked in a munitions factory outside the city. Aaron was able to smuggle me out to the factory... I was 9 years old.

I worked in a munitions factory. How did I succeed to survive ? I was very good mechanically. ... I was able to do what an adult wasn’t able to do, I was much quicker and had very nimble hands. That allowed me to live. It was as simple as that.”

On Currency: “It was floating around but you couldn’t do anything with it. There was a black market; mostly people traded for food”

Robbie Waisman

Lodz Ghetto Currency

To organize and implement Nazi policy within the Lodz ghetto renamed “Litzmannstadt” by the Germans. The Nazis chose a Jew named Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski to head up the Juderat or the Jewish Council. At the time Rumkowski was appointed Judenälteste (Elder of the Jews), he was sixty-two years old, with billowy, white hair. He had held various jobs including insurance agent, velvet factory manager, and director of the Helenowek Orphanage before the war began.

Rumkowski was a firm believer in the autonomy of the ghetto. He started many programs that replaced outside bureaucracy with his own. The ghetto currency bore Rumkowski's signature and the money was soon referred to as "Rumkies."



“Rumkies’ were worthless like Monopoly money.”



LODZ GHETTO, POLAND

“We used ghetto money to get our rations and to buy our allotted bread from the ghetto stores. We called the money “Rumkies” after Rumkowski, the Jewish administrator of the ghetto. I worked in the Jewish administration office and I received Rumkies as my weekly salary for my work. If you didn’t work, you didn’t get Rumkies. You could only use this money on the inside. Outside of the ghetto it was worthless – like Monopoly money.”

Bronia Sonnenschein

< *In addition to the Menorah, the currency displays Stars of David in the form of barbed wire.*

< *Currency labeled as a “Quittung”, or receipt, indicating that this is occupation money, not exchangeable for currency or goods outside the ghetto, it bears the motto, “Der Aelteste der Juden”, or “The Eldest of the Jews” (echoes of classic Dark Ages anti-Semitism), designating the nominal authority of the “Judenrat”, or Jewish Council, the Nazi installed puppet government of the ghetto.*

< *The initial design for the Lodz Ghetto 10 pfennig coin was rejected by the Nazis because it resembled the circulating German 10 pfennig coin. The replacement coin, shown above, was accepted. Lodz was the only ghetto to issue coins.*

Annual Kristallnacht Commemorative Lecture

Sunday, November 6, 2005, 7:30 pm
Beth Israel Synagogue

KEYNOTE SPEAKER:
DR. DAVID ENGEL
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

TITLE OF LECTURE:
**A JEWISH COLLABORATOR CONFESSES:
THE STRANGE LIFE AND AFTERLIFE OF CALEK PERECHODNIK**



Dr. David Engel

This year’s Kristallnacht commemoration in the Vancouver community will feature a keynote lecture focusing on the agonizing dilemma of Jewish victims of the Nazis who tried to save their own or their families’ lives by collaborating with their oppressors.

The keynote speaker is Dr. David Engel, the Maurice R. and Corinne P. Greenberg Professor of Holocaust Studies at New York University. Professor Engel’s lecture is entitled “A Jewish Collaborator Confesses: The Strange Life and Afterlife of Calek Perechodnik.” The Kristallnacht program will take place at 7:30 p.m. on Sunday, November 6 at Beth Israel Synagogue. The event is open to all members of the public.

In his talk, Professor Engel will tell the tragic story of a young man from the town of Otwock, near Warsaw, who joined the local ghetto police force in 1941 in hopes of protecting his wife and infant daughter, only to be tricked into handing them over to be deported to Treblinka in August, 1942. He himself was later sent to a labour camp from which he escaped. He died in 1944 after surviving for a few months in hiding in Warsaw.

While living in hiding, Calek Perechodnik wrote a 600-page confession in which he meditated on the moral choices he and others had made under the stress of Nazi occupation. In 1992 a book purporting to contain the text of this confession was published in Poland under the title *Am I A Murderer?* It quickly became a best-seller and was translated into French, Italian, German and English. It was also the subject of a documentary on German television.

Professor Engel’s research, however, raised serious questions about the authenticity of this text. In 1995 Professor Engel was able to locate the original manuscript of Perechodnik’s memoir and he soon determined that the published book was riddled with errors and falsifications. In 2004 the Polish publisher issued a corrected version of the memoir edited by Professor Engel, and recalled copies of the previous edition. The Kristallnacht lecture



will describe Calek Perechodnik’s own story and explain the significance of his “afterlife” as the author of a widely-read but partially falsified Holocaust memoir. Professor Engel will describe the differences between the false and true texts of Perechodnik’s memoir, explain how he himself discovered the forgery, and show how his revelation of the truth was received in Poland and elsewhere. He will also discuss what this episode reveals about Polish and Jewish perceptions of the Holocaust and describe how Poles and Jews alike have struggled to find meaning in the most sordid forms of behavior practiced under the stress of Nazi oppression.

David Engel is one of the most distinguished American experts on the history of Jewish life and the Holocaust in Poland. In addition to holding the appointment as Greenberg Professor of Holocaust Studies he is also a Professor of Hebrew, Judaic Studies and History at New York University. He has served as a visiting professor at Tel Aviv University, the University of Pennsylvania and the Russian State University in Moscow, and has received awards for outstanding teaching both from Tel Aviv University and from New York University.

Since completing his Ph.D. at the University of California at Los Angeles in 1979, Professor Engel has published six books and over forty articles on various aspects of the Holocaust. His books include *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1939-1942* (University of North Carolina Press, 1987); a sequel to this work entitled *Facing a Holocaust: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1943-1945* (University of North Carolina Press, 1993); *Between Liberation and Flight: Holocaust Survivors in Poland and the Struggle for Leadership, 1944-1946* (published in Hebrew by Am Oved Publishers, 1996), and *The Holocaust: The Third Reich and the Jews* (Longman, 2000).

The theme of Professor Engel’s lecture – Jewish collaboration with the Nazi oppressors – touches on one of the most complex and sensitive aspects of the history of the Holocaust. As Michael Marrus, the leading Holocaust historian in Canada, notes in his definitive work, *The Holocaust in History*, “Among those [Jews] who did the Germans’ work ... there were virtually none who ‘collaborated’ in the sense of identifying with wider German aims – such as those found in every occupied society in Europe ... Sometimes the Germans simply dragooned Jewish representatives on their own. Once in place, leaders faced the excruciating dilemmas of ‘collective responsibility’: in reprisal for opposition, or even recalcitrance in the executions of their demands, the

Germans kidnapped for forced labor or simply massacred ghetto inmates.” Professor Engel’s Kristallnacht lecture will illustrate this theme by highlighting an exceptionally complex individual story, not only demonstrating the moral dilemmas faced by a Jewish “collaborator” during the Nazi occupation but also revealing the different ways in which his behavior has been interpreted by Jews and non-Jews alike ever since his memoir was discovered long after the war ended.

The annual Kristallnacht lecture in Vancouver commemorates the “Night of Broken Glass” of November 9, 1938, when synagogues and Jewish places of business all over Germany and Austria were destroyed by Nazi hoodlums – an event which is generally regarded as a major escalation of the Nazis’ anti-Jewish program that eventually culminated in the Holocaust. The keynote lecture will be preceded by the traditional candle-lighting ceremony in memory of the six million Jews killed by the Nazis. Following the lecture, members of the audience may gather in Beth Israel’s Maccabee Room for a question-and-answer session with the speaker.

The Kristallnacht commemorative program is sponsored jointly by the Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society and by Congregation Beth Israel, with funding from the Combined Jewish Appeal of the Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver, from Congregation Beth Israel, and from the Gottfried Family Endowment Fund of the VHEC.

For more information, call the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre at 604.264.0499.

KRISTALLNACHT THE “NIGHT OF BROKEN GLASS” – took place throughout Germany and Austria on the night of November 9-10, 1938. In the course of just a few hours, hundreds of synagogues were burned, thousands of Jewish-owned places of business were destroyed, almost one hundred Jews were killed, and thirty thousand Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps. The shards of broken window glass seen in front of Jewish-owned stores all over Germany the next morning gave this event its name.

Kristallnacht marked a dramatic change in the policy of the Nazis toward the Jews of Germany and (since its annexation by Germany in March 1938) Austria. Beginning with Hitler’s accession to power in 1933, the Jews had been deprived of their rights as citizens and had been subjected to increasingly harsh measures of social and economic isolation. Yet there had been only sporadic episodes of actual violence directed against them. Now this changed.

Most historians believe that Nazi leaders had planned a wave of violent actions against the Jews for some time, but waited

- PROFESSOR DAVID ENGEL
- FELLOWSHIPS AND HONOURS:
- Golden Dozen Teaching Award, New York University, 1995–1996
- Center for the Study of Polish Jewry, Research Grants, 1985–1986, 1987–1988
- Tel Aviv University, Faculty of Humanities, Outstanding Lecturer, 1986–1987
- Inter-University Project for the study of Illegal Jewish Immigration to Palestine, Research Grant, 1985–1988
- Bernstein-Maslansky Fund, Research Grant, 1983–1984
- Charles Brown Foundation, Israel Research Fellowship, 1982–1984
- Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, International Fellowship in Jewish Studies, 1980–1981

for a suitable opportunity to put these plans into force. This opportunity was provided in November 1938, when a 17-year-old Jewish student named Herschel Grynszpan assassinated a German diplomat at the German embassy in Paris. Grynszpan’s motives are well-known. A few weeks earlier the German government had ordered all Jews holding Polish passports to be expelled from Germany – yet the Polish government refused to let the Jews re-enter Poland, so thousands of them were trapped in no-man’s land between both countries. Among the Jews languishing there were Grynszpan’s parents.

Grynszpan’s deed was the act of a single desperate individual, but Nazi leaders used it as a pretext to order the destruction of Jewish houses of worship and places of business and the arrest of Jews all over Germany. Increasingly repressive measures against the Jews of Germany and Austria followed. Kristallnacht showed the Nazis that anti-Jewish violence on a large scale might result in some expressions of outrage in other countries but nothing more. Kristallnacht emboldened Nazi leaders to escalate their anti-Jewish policies to unprecedented levels and paved the way to the eventual deportation and murder of six million Jews in the Holocaust.

A Jewish Children’s Home in Post-War France

BY RENE GOLDMAN

As soon as France was liberated, Jewish organizations set out to retrieve children who had survived in hiding in Gentile homes or Catholic institutions. The task of raising those children that had been orphaned and were traumatized by their experience proved to be no less daunting than the danger-ridden endeavour to hide them from the Nazis and their collaborators, albeit in a different way. Pedagogical ability became now even more important than financial resources and administrative competence. Each of the several organizations established its own network of group homes, which were called “maisons d’enfants” (children’s homes), or even “homes d’enfants”, instead of the depressingly institutional designation of “orphelinats” (orphanages).

I was brought up in a succession of four children’s homes run by the Commission Centrale de l’Enfance (CCE), an organ of the urban Jewish communist resistance organization UJRE. The CCE was for several years chaired by Sophie Schwartz-Micnik, who in her resistance activity in Paris and Lyon had distinguished herself by organizing the hiding of children. Our educators (called “moniteurs”) drew their pedagogical guidelines from the teachings of Dr. Janusz Korczak, although Anton Makarenko also served as a model of progressive pedagogy. The leading professional pedagogue of the CCE was Mathilde Seibald, who in 1937 underwent a period of training in Dr. Korczak’s orphanage on Krochmalna

Street in Warsaw. Mathilde was a wise and warm-hearted woman, totally dedicated. She looked upon all of us, alumni of the homes who remained in contact with her over the decades, as her “children”. Every time I visited her, when I traveled to Paris, she greeted me like a mother, calling me “mon petit René”.

The home in the Parisian suburb of Livry-Gargan, where I spent the years 1948 to 1950 was the organization’s finest example of Korczak’s “children’s republic”. Each of the forty-odd children, aged 12 to 18, who lived in it belonged to one of eight commissions: hygiene and cleanliness (which assigned the house-cleaning chores); sports and leisure; culture; press; workshops, etc. The home was administered by a director, whom we called “Madame Helene” and addressed using the polite pronoun “vous”, whereas our three “moniteurs” were called by their first name and addressed with the familiar “tu”. Our chief-educator, Henri Goldberg, an Alsatian Jew, whom everyone called “Heini”, was a young man of amazing ability, imagination, and resourcefulness. Heini, who conceived the formal structure of our “republic”, his wife Hanka, a native of Warsaw, the occasional third councillor, and the chairpersons of the eight commissions, the latter being elected at the general assembly, formed the “Direction” (directorate), the governing body of our republic.



Rene Goldman in the choir of the CCE children’s home of Livry-Gargan. Rene is in the last row, the last boy in the left corner.

That body met frequently to discuss current activities. Important matters were referred to the general assembly, which met about once a month and decided on the basis of majority vote. It however never met as a children’s court, as happened in Dr. Korczak’s homes. When a serious breach of discipline occurred Heini resorted to the prerogative of his authority, although he did on occasion consult the directorate.

Our “republic” even had an anthem, of which, as an “established” poet, I wrote the lyrics, and the composer Ivan Kholodenko, who was a frequent visitor, the music. Another visitor friend of our home was Fessler, former director of a Yiddish theatre in Buenos Aires, who led us in staging theatricals. Ours was a richly varied life. We attended different schools, academic and vocational. Housed in a large cabin behind the house were: embroidery, photographic frames, book binding, printing, and other workshops, in which we spent hours on Thursdays (there was no school on Thursday in France) and Sundays. Every Saturday night after dinner the tables of the dining-room were set aside and the stools arranged in a circle for a “veillée” (vigil), i.e. an evening of games, singing, telling or reading of stories, and individual performances. In addition, Heini organized us into a choir, which sang in four voices and performed in various venues, notably on Jewish occasions in Paris. Once a year in summer we held an open house (“kermesse”), at which we displayed and sold the products of our workshops, performed theatricals under the direction of Fessler, and our choir sang.

I successively chaired the culture commission, which was responsible for the library (where some of us did our homework) and the press commission. The latter edited, besides a permanent bulletin board, our monthly “journal mural”, which was a large framed wall surface, to which pinned were, with an eye for aesthetic appearance, hand-written articles relating to our activities, poems, drawings, water-colours, etc. My partners and I invited contributions, edited the articles for spelling, grammar, and style (as was done in the French class-room of those times, when rhetoric was prized) and had them copied “in clean” with illustrations in the margins.

Some people at the time criticized the CCE, claiming that it did not prepare us for life in the “real world”. The same charge had been leveled against Dr. Korczak, who dismissed it with the question “do you want me to put lice in the children’s hair and bugs in their bed?” There were, nevertheless, significant failings in the CCE experiment, the most deleterious of which was the communist indoctrination to which we were subjected. We, who had suffered in the Shoah, were simply not allowed to be carefree children for a few years. This fact has left many of the alumni embittered. Worst of all, the end result of the education that my generation received at the hand of those who raised us, is that most of the alumni are deplorably ignorant of our Jewish heritage, and indifferent to it. Only the few of us who in adult life acquired the will



Rene Goldman

and extended the required efforts succeeded in becoming committed and proud Jews. We must nevertheless recognize that our educators were unquestionably idealistic and wholehearted in their devotion to what in their eyes was the road to a happy future without social injustice and oppression. We cannot judge them from the perspective of our awareness of today. I believe that it is their accomplishments, rather than their failings, which in the distant perspective of half a century ought to stand foremost in our memories and in our hearts. Most of them are no longer with us; Mathilde, Heini, and Hanka, all died in 2003. Zichronam livracha: may they rest in peace.

The *No Longer Alone* page welcomes submissions from Child Survivors.
Send submissions to the NLA editor: Lillian Boraks-Nemetz
c/o VHEC, 50 – 950 W. 41st Ave, Vancouver, BC V5Z 2N7

Herschel Rubinstein : A Hero of the Night



The exhibit, Faces of Loss, reminded us that for many survivors closure will never come. Many do not know the details of the fate of their families and the unknown resists closure. Local survivor Jack Margolit longed to know the fate of his older brother Herschel. Herschel, who joined the Partisans at age 30 was 13 years older than Jack. Jack knew that his brother had been in the

forests near Lublin, Poland as a Partisan. He knew that he fought and died there, but the exact circumstances of his brothers death were not known, nor was the exact fate of his wife and young child. Jack searched through all new publications on Partisans and went to the film Unlikely Heroes to search the faces of the Partisan groups pictured, hoping to see a glimpse of his brother's face. In 2005, Jack received a volume titled Heroes of the Night, a book published in Yiddish in 1950 about resistance fighters. His son Nathan had seen it listed for sale on the internet. Jack began to read the book as soon as he received it. As he turned the pages late one night, his eyes met the title of the next chapter. It was titled "Herschel Rubinstein", Jack's brother's name. What follows are translated excerpts of this chapter devoted to his brother during the war, even more meaningful because it was recounted by the men who he led and fought with him and saw him as their leader and moral compass. This text offers a unique insight into the lives and courage of Partisans.

Herschel Rubinstein from Heroes of the Night

WRITTEN BY CHAVER PAVER,

PUBLISHED BY GERSHON AINBINDER, 1950

TRANSLATED FROM YIDDISH

BY DAVID SCHAFFER & SHEILA BARKUSKY

Everyone went to look at the young man as if he had come out of a legend: the legend of the uprising of the Warsaw ghetto. His name was Herschel Rubinstein.

Around the fire they often told stories about these heroes whose bravery had never been equalled in the history of the Jewish people. Not many details were known; the little they did know, the friends embellished with their fantasies. The stories gave them strength and encouragement, and many wished that, if it was to be their destiny to die in the struggle, they should die like the legendary Resistance Fighters. And here stood one of these legendary heroes, alive before their very eyes.

He did not have powerful shoulders, or a wide chest with steel-like arms, but was a regular man of middle stature with strong, sparkling, Jewish black eyes, large ears and wide nostrils with which he constantly snorted. Only one of his hands was functioning; the second one, the left, was twisted backwards and was immobile as if paralyzed. He was dressed

in a military cap and a black leather jacket with his khaki trousers tucked into his high boots. A revolver stuck sideways out of his belt. He stood before the partisans, smiling at them warmly with his black eyes sparkling.

His escape from the Warsaw Ghetto and his arrival here at Achozsha alone were a story of heroism that had no equal. Herschel and his wife had crawled through the Ghetto's water piping system until they arrived in an area on the other side of the Ghetto where there was a representative of the Leftist Underground Workers' Organization, the PPR. The PPR directed him and his wife to the partisans in Achozsha. In a village not far from Warsaw, the Nazis captured both of them and put them on a train in a sealed car with a transport of Jews headed for Treblinka.

But what is a sealed car to a fighter of the Warsaw Ghetto? While the train was leading to Death, on its journey across the fields, Herschel and the remaining Jews started breaking down the car door. Despite the fact that their hands were weakened from hunger, fear and lack of air, every person, old and young, lent a hand to help. The door gave in and everyone started to jump from the moving train.

It was a very dark night. While jumping from the train, Herschel's hand was twisted backwards and remained that way permanently. He did not know what happened to all the Jews from the sealed car as he had fainted from the pain of his twisted hand. When he woke up, he found his wife sitting by his side in the field under the embankment of the railroad tracks.

Herschel had the unique ability to influence others simply by speaking with them. The peasant, who took both of them into his hut late that night, was so moved by his pleasant and clever conversation that he agreed to hide Herschel's wife, as she had no obviously Jewish features in her appearance.



Summer 1933, small glass factory near Lublin owned by Zionists. The workers were all members of Kibbutz Kiosoua, employed by the factory to get them used to manual labour in preparation to make Aliyah.

Rubinstein arrived after much difficulty at Minsk-Mazovietsk and met a Polish friend from the Underground Movement who directed him to another friend in a nearby village. From friend to friend, from village to village, he was smuggled in the darkness of the night until he reached the point where the Central Organization directed him to Achozsha. Herschel Rubinstein immediately set to strengthening the morale of the People's Guard in the Achozsha.

Even though a majority of the members had voted a few weeks before to join the General Organization, Moshe Lichtenstein, who had settled with friends from Wladower on a separate hill, wanted nothing to do with it.

Yechiel wanted to surround the Wladower people, disarm them and put Moshe before a partisan "court," but Wanka would not permit it, saying that only with patience and with understanding should they proceed.

Wanka was pleased with Herschel's arrival at Achozsha. He hoped that Herschel would agree to convince Moshe to join the General Command. Herschel Rubinstein, Pesach, Yechiel and Wanka started heading for the hill where Moshe's headquarters lay. As soon as their feet trod on the hill, however, the guards told them that they were not permitted to advance a single step further unless they knew the password. How could Yechiel, Herschel and Pesach have known the password that Moshe had invented for his people? They told Mottel, the Tall one, who they were and he gave them permission to enter.

In a short while, in his spotlessly clean cabin, Moshe, who prided himself on his well-dressed appearance even in the mud, received his guests with coolness and arrogance. Herschel Rubinstein, with his unique talent to speak to people, told Moshe about the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto and the enduring unification of all political parties and groups; and



Winter 1933, members of Kibbutz Kiosoua.

about the help that they received only from the organization known as the Guardia Ludova, the People's Guard. But Moshe looked as though it was all going into one ear and out the other.

"These are empty words. I do not unite with anyone," he stated firmly and to the point. "If the Poles want to have a Guardia Ludova, let them have it, with pleasure. I cannot join with the Anti-Semites."

Herschel was very patient with Moshe and told him about the real anti-Semitic Polish organization, which was establishing itself all over with its own fighting group under the name of "Armia Kraiowa". For this reason, Herschel argued, as Jews, they should align themselves with the People's Guard, which contained democratic elements.

"Democracy is in my gun," Moshe exclaimed arrogantly. "We will also be able to debate with the AK (Armia Kraiowa)."

"A mania of self-aggrandisement," Herschel said as they left Moshe's, disappointed. "We shall have to go over his head, talking with and influencing each member of his group."

Moshe Lichtenstein also understood that the longer he stayed in the Achozsha, the more the discipline he had installed in his people with an iron hand would loosen. So he packed up and left Achozsha, but one third of Moshe's group, among them Moshe Katzav, refused to follow him and remained with the partisans under Yechiel's command.

A few months later, the Wlodowa group that had left were heard to have taken part heroically in a fight with Soviets on the other side of the River Bug, but not under the leadership of either Moshe Lichtenstein or Mottel the Tall One. Both were killed; not in action, but in an argument with the Russian partisans from Volodke's group.

At Midnight

The partisans in Achozsha who were with the Principal Commander were in the Partzever forests and were cut off from the whole world. The radio contact with the Partisan Commander and with the rest of the world (i.e. the Soviet Union) had been dead for a long time. And Wanka with his small group of companions did not return. The couriers from that region told us that the AK had tortured them murderously and then shot them. The Jewish and Polish partisans quarrelled about taking revenge on the murderers, but Herschel Rubinstein would not permit it. "That is exactly what the Nazis want," he said, "inciting brother against brother, one part of the Polish population against the other so that they would kill each other. We'll settle our score with the AK later. In the meantime, we must do as much damage to the Nazis in any way we can. For now, we should make friends among the simple, honest peasant who belong to the AK and make them think that this is the organization that fights the occupiers. Only by patience, enlightenment, information, propaganda and big achievements, as Wanka used to say."

Continued from p. 11

Everywhere

It was the end of the summer in 1943. The news from the Soviet front strengthened our hearts, gave us hope and encouraged us to action. But other news also arrived: news that induced melancholy in us; news from the murder camps; news of total extermination. “Who knows,” said Berish Kornman once, “whether or not we are the last little remnant that remains of all the Jews in Poland.” “Stop moaning with this black talk,” Herschel scolded him. “Do not shout at my father,” said Bebele in a stern voice when Berish had left. “He speaks that way because his heart is very sore. The Nazis murdered my mother and all my brothers and sisters. She was such a beauty, my mother, and so good-hearted.” “His words depressed the remaining partisans,” Herschel said to the blue-eyed and delicate-featured, twelve-year-old Bebele as if speaking to a grown up. “A partisan has to be strong in his body and strong in spirit and not allow himself to be dominated by depressing thoughts.” “But why did you shout at him?” Bebele reproached Herschel. “You can achieve the same thing through kindness.” “I will do it with kindness,” Herschel said, patting the serious child affectionately. Herschel spoke to Berish Kornman and to the other partisans with kindness, for they were also harbouring depressing thoughts. Herschel believed that many Jews were somewhere in hiding and his confidence in this was increased when the “Marianker” group found someone called Mendele.

With Patience and Kindness

It rained day and night: a cold, desperate rain. It was dark and gloomy; the heavens, the earth and all the trees wept. Berish Kornman’s words weighed heavily on the moods of the members of the group. He said, “For how much longer can a person endure this kind of life? And what reason is there to go on living? Wouldn’t it be better to take one’s own life?” Then Rebi Yankel Holovner joined in and said, “Suicide is the greatest sin against God and Man.” Berish shouted in reply, “‘God,’ you said! ‘Mankind,’ you say! Where is God? And where is Man?”

In the summer months there had been rumours that the us and England were about to open a Second Front. This had given hope to the members of the group. But the rumours had died down. The victorious Red Army was so far away from their region. A black despair crept into many of the members in those dark and rainy days.Herschel spoke to the group. “Doubt is an enemy even worse than the Nazis. The Nazis want us to fall to the evils of great despair, to become weak and dependent. Let me tell you that this autumn rain is a blessing for us; the autumn rains are ideal weather for we partisans. The Nazis’ tanks and armoured vehicles cannot achieve anything in the mud, but we can achieve a great deal.” “Last winter,” said Pesach, “it was much worse for us. We were scattered and spread in the woods in small groups without arms. If we were able to survive last year’s winter, then we will survive this year’s winter.” Andy survive they did.

By the summer of 1944 the general command of all the partisan activity, including the Jewish partisans, was in operation in this area. The Jewish partisans prepared five fires to signal to the airplanes where to drop their loads of ammunition. The airplanes dropped eight parachutes, six with ammunition and arms and two people exchanged code words and greeted the partisans when they arrived. One parachute was loaded with propaganda material, in Polish and Russian, and the mood of the partisans dropped. Pesach, one of the group said: How happy Herschel Rubinstein would have been with all the gifts from Heaven, as he worked so hard for these supplies.

Herschel, who had gone on a mission to the Soviet partisans on the other side of the Bug River, drowned in a lake on his way back, the partisans had discussed that, if not for his twisted hand, he might have been able to save himself.

And as it came close to liberation, a great fear overtook many of the group that they would not survive liberation. When the Nazis realized that they had lost, they would take revenge on any remaining Jews. Pesach told them, “Brothers and sisters, if Herschel Rubinstein were alive today, what would he have said? He would have said, ‘Despair is the worst enemy: worse than the Nazis. Despair weakens you and you lose your courage.’”

“Balak told us once that in the concentration camps of Poland and Germany, tens of thousands of Jews are still alive. Balak does not indulge in empty talk. I myself believe that somewhere, in hiding, there are still many Jews. They look to us, they pray to God for us; and if we can shorten the war even by one minute, as Herschel Rubinstein said, in that minute we could save tens of thousands of Jews in the concentration camps.

“We, the Jewish partisans, who maintained our strength all this time, when the liberation looked so distant that it was merely a dream, we cannot diminish our strength and courage now, when we are about to greet the Red Army.”

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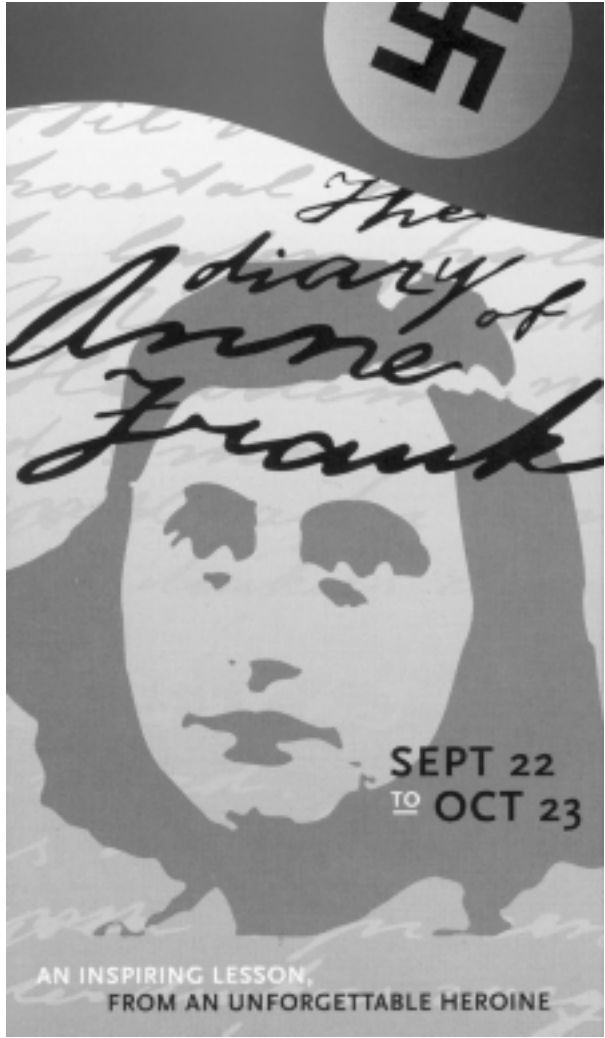
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