



Zachor

Remember

VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE NEWSLETTER | NUMBER 1 | JANUARY 2007

Chutzpah! 2007

The Lisa Nemetz International Showcase of Jewish Performing Arts

FEBRUARY 25 — MARCH 3

WORLD PREMIERE

THE INVISIBLE LIFE OF JOSEPH FINCH WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY SERGE BENNATHAN

Starring Jonathon Young, *The Invisible Life of Joseph Finch* opens with a man sitting at an airport café writing his life story in a letter to the daughter he has searched for since the liberation of Auschwitz. Having discovered her at last in Toronto, at the age of 83, he has decided to immigrate to Canada to join her. The letter, he says, is "the book of my life that finally I will be able to close."

Sunday, February 25 at 7:00 pm

Tuesday, February 27 at 8:00

Wednesday, February 28 at 8:00 pm

Thursday, March 1 at 9:00 pm

Friday, March 2 at 1:30 pm

Saturday, March 3 at 7:00 pm

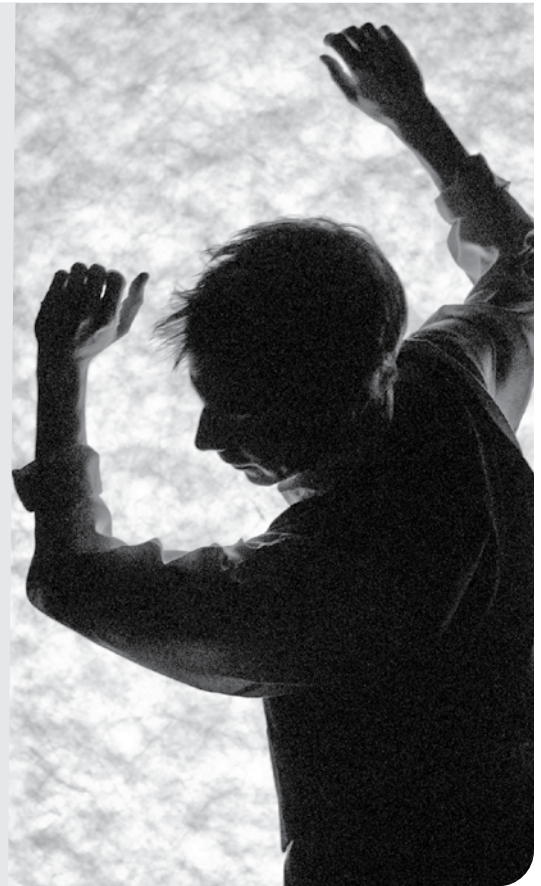
NORMAN ROTHSTEIN THEATRE

Tickets: \$20 Adults, \$18 JCC & VHEC members & seniors, \$12 students

Call Chutzpah Box Office in January for tickets at 604.257.5145

Presented in association with the Vancouver International Dance Festival

CO-SPONSORED BY THE LOVI MEMORIAL FUND OF THE
VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE
AND BY NONI AND JÁNOS MATÉ



VOLUNTEERS: OCTOBER 2006 – JANUARY 2007

OUTREACH SPEAKERS: Janos Benisz, Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, Alex Buckman, Marion Cassirer, Mariette Doduck, Barry Dunner, David Ehrlich, Serge Haber, Katy Hughes, Robert Krell, Chaim Kornfeld, Inge Manes, Jack Micner, Peter Parker, Claude Romney, Ruth Sigal, Bronia Sonnenschein, Louise Sorensen, Peter Suedfeld, Tom Szekely, Bente Thomsen, Robbie Waisman, Danny Wollner

DOCENTS: Holly Anderson, Sylvia Berkson, Julia Bernhardt, Beth Bogner, Michelle Brewer, Liliás Cameron, Brian Campbell, Yael Caron, Jody Dales, Fay Davis, Amy Fehr, Debby Freiman, Phillipa Friedland, Patricia Friedman, s Fuller, Derek Glazer, Linda Gold, Paige Grunberg, Fran Grunberg, Shoshana Krell, Bethany Knourek, Emily Kung, Michelle Levin, Jineane Payne Babish, Lee Simpson, Sally Scott, Vanessa Sorenson, Wendi Vaisler, Rina Vizer, Linda Wener, Heather Wolfe

SPECIAL PROJECTS: Reva Adler, Alex Buckman, Michele Dore, Barry Dunner Ethel Kofsky, Shannon LaBelle, Alissa Horii, Rob Krell, Janos Mate, Audrey Mehler, Kit Krieger, Claude Romney, Jennifer Bancroft, Andy Rosengarten, Yvonne Rosenberg, David Schaffer, Ruth Sigal

MAILING: Jed Blumes, Aaron Friedland, Elisheva Friedland, Phillipa Friedland, Lillian Fryfield, Lisa Kafka, Mary Knopp, Marilyn Weinstein

TO VOLUNTEER PLEASE CALL THE VHEC 604.264.0499

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VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE

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Cover: Students from New Westminster Secondary
examine Else Dunner's hidden photographs during a
school visit to the VHEC.

INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY COMMEMORATIVE CONCERT

JANUARY, 29, 2007 – 7:00PM AT THE NORMAN ROTHSTEIN THEATRE

In 2005, the United Nations General Assembly designated January 27th, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, as an annual International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust. With the declaration, came inquiries and the expectation that the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre would act as the lead organization to mark this occasion in the Lower Mainland. The VHEC responded by organizing a multi-cultural, commemorative program, which will be held annually to mark this special Remembrance Day, in partnership with the Norman Rothstein Theatre and various community groups. In 2006, the community partner was the Consul General of Italy, Vancouver.

This year, the VHEC in partnership with the Norman Rothstein Theatre, welcomes the support of the Consul General of Italy in Vancouver, under the authority of the President of the Republic of Italy, the Istituto Italiano di Cultura and the Consul General of the Republic of Poland. Also for the first time, the VHEC is pleased to acknowledge the financial assistance of the Province of British Columbia for this event.

As a result, members of the Italian, Polish and Jewish communities will come together to attend a remarkable musical program during which artists from both Italy and Poland will share the stage.

This event offers the Jewish community a unique opportunity to join with members of other cultural and national communities to commemorate the Holocaust and reflect upon the destructive effects of racism and genocide on all people. This is multi-cultural work at its best, bringing together different community groups to work towards a common objective, bridging differences and underscoring common bonds in Canada.

If the turnout at last year's concert was any indication, tickets will go very quickly. Admission is free, but reservations are required. To reserve please call 604.688.0809 ext. 23 or italcult@iicvan-ca.org.

RECEPTION TO FOLLOW AT THE VHEC

ABOUT THE PERFORMERS



Born in Milan, Italy, Emanuele Torquati completed his musical studies with pianist Giancarlo Cardini at the State Conservatory in Florence. He then went on to specialize in both traditional and contemporary repertoire, and achieved a Masters Degree at the International Music School in Duino

(Trieste). The recipient of several Italian and international awards, Emanuele Torquati has performed extensively in Europe and has often collaborated with important composers such as Sylvano Bussotti and Alessandro Solbiati. Maestro Torquati, from Florence-based "Associazione Shalom", will perform works by Mario Castelnuovo Tedesco, Aldo Finzi and Olivier Messiaen.

Śława Przybylska is a Polish singer who has performed in Yiddish and Hebrew all over Poland, in Russia, Georgia, Germany, Sweden, Israel, the US and Canada.



She sang for the first time in Yiddish in 1960 at the 17th Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Later on, she contributed to the commemoration of the Holocaust in Poland by familiarizing Polish and Jewish audiences with the poetry of one of the most influential and popular writers of Yiddish songs and poems, Mordechai Gebirtig (1877-1942), who was shot to death in the Krakow Ghetto, July 1942.

Accompanied by Vancouver pianist Ryszard Wrzaskala, Śława Przybylska will sing ghetto and Holocaust songs in several languages, including Hebrew and Yiddish.



THE NORMAN
ROTHSTEIN THEATRE



FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON LAST LETTERS & MICRO-HISTORIES

BY SHIRLEY COHN

At Kristallnacht 2006, Professor Chris Friedrichs gave a very moving analysis of the importance of micro-history in family letters, especially when written close to the time of the author's death in the Holocaust. Dodie Katzenstein (*Zachor* article *My Grandparents' Letters*, November, 2006), Rhoda Friedrichs and Helen Waldstein also shared their very personal, and somewhat painful, family histories.

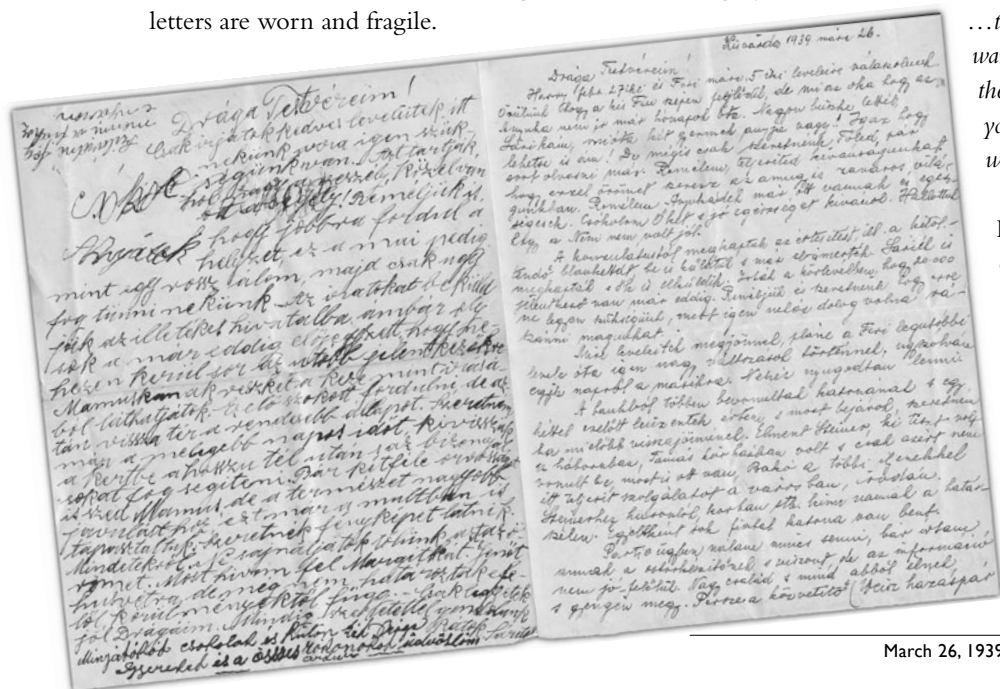
I have a Hungarian perspective on the subject of such letters. When my aunt died many years ago, a box of letters was found in a drawer. The letters dated from 1915 to 1957, with a large gap between 1941 and 1946, are between my father and his brothers in Detroit, and their mother and siblings in Kisvarda, Hungary. These letters are worn and fragile.

Everyday life is the topic most of the time (a new coat, preparing matzos for Passover, and what the neighbours are doing). However, there are glimpses of difficult times, including the 1920s numerous clausus, which prevented my father from attending university. My aunt's dowry is a subject of much discussion, as the family had little money. Emigration efforts become more fervent as time goes on, with quotas being discussed, even though Hungarians themselves felt somewhat removed from what was happening around them – until total darkness hit in 1944.

However, there is an earlier feeling of foreboding. In March, 1939, an aunt writes:

...the Jewish question is put in the background by the war news. The situation is very muddy, but we hope that they will arrange it peacefully... Please keep on writing your dear lines. We need them very badly here. They say where there is great danger, help is close.

I have distributed translations of the letters to my extended family. The letters bring these deceased relatives to life. I now know more about my Aunt Shary, for whom I am named. I also now have a better understanding of the grief my father held within him, and rarely showed. My cousins and I share a strong, common bond, united by this family tragedy. There is no question that micro-history plays a great role, demonstrating that everyday life does, indeed, go on, even when hope is diminished.



March 26, 1939

WAS ANYONE IN YOUR FAMILY INSURED BY GENERALI PRIOR TO WORLD WAR II?

If your family was persecuted by Nazis or their allies during World War II, your family might be entitled to a payment.

If your family was the insured or beneficiary of an insurance policy issued by Assicurazioni Generali S.P.A. or its affiliated companies between 1920 and 1945,

CALL THE TOLL-FREE NUMBER at 1.(866).217.4455 and ask for a Claim Form Package to be mailed to you
GO TO THE WEBSITE at www.NaziEraInsuranceSettlement.com
OR CALL THE VHEC for forms, 604.264.0499

SUBMIT VALID CLAIM FORMS POSTMARKED BY MARCH 31, 2007 TO THE FOLLOWING ADDRESS:

Assicurazioni Generali S.P.A.
Policy Information Center
Piazza Duca Degli Abruzzi, 2
34132 Trieste, Italy

RAOUL WALLENBERG DAY — SPECIAL FILM SCREENING
SUNDAY, JANUARY 21, 2007 — 2PM VANCITY THEATRE
BY DEBORAH RAMM

The Swedish and Jewish communities have joined together once again to pay tribute to a very courageous man - Raoul Wallenberg. He was a Swedish diplomat who saved the lives of as many as one hundred thousand people, who were condemned to death in Hungary by the Nazis during WWII. Wallenberg disappeared on January 17, 1945 and was subsequently imprisoned in the Soviet Union. He was never heard from again. Wallenberg was made an honorary citizen of Canada, the United States, and Israel; if he were alive today we would be celebrating his 95th birthday.

In January 1986, members of the Second Generation Group of Vancouver arranged a ceremony to dedicate a plaque to honour Raoul Wallenberg, which they had created and installed next to the waterfall in Queen Elizabeth Park. His Excellency, Per Anger, the Swedish Consul to Canada and representatives from the City of Vancouver, and the Federal and Provincial governments attended the event. As the twentieth anniversary of this ceremony approached the current Swedish Consul, His Excellency Anders Neumueller, contacted members of the Second Generation Group to co-sponsor another event commemorating Raoul Wallenberg. In January 2006 over 100 people braved the rain and attended this meaningful event at the site of the plaque unveiled twenty years earlier. The Mayor's representative read the City of Vancouver's Proclamation of "Raoul Wallenberg Day."

The Second Generation group enjoyed working with the Swedish community and believes it is important to continue to pay tribute to such an important man. Members of the group and the larger Vancouver Jewish Community owe their lives to Wallenberg and his efforts to save their family members. Thus the Second Generation Group has committed to continuing the work begun twenty years earlier and plans to co-sponsor an event annually with the Swedish Consul. In the future they also hope to co-operate on other projects, such as encouraging Canada Post to issue a stamp honouring Raoul Wallenberg.

The Second Generation Group welcomes new members who are sons and daughters of Holocaust Survivors. It is an independent group, which meets regularly and operates in association with and receives funding from the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. If you would like more information about the group and its activities, please contact the Second Generation Liaison, Deborah Ramm, devora@telus.net.

RAOUL WALLENBERG DAY JANUARY 21, 2007



Please join us for the screening of the film,
"GOOD EVENING MR. WALLENBERG"

Wallenberg Day Proclamation by the City of Vancouver and special guest remarks.

Sunday, January 21, 2007 2pm

VANCITY THEATRE
1181 Seymour St.
FREE ADMISSION
Refreshments with a \$2 donation.

FREE FILM SUNDAY 2PM IN VANCITY THEATRE

Consulate
of
Sweden

Second
Generation
Group

Vancity

Swedish
Charitable
Association

Liberty Bakery
Swedish Press

SCHINDLER SCHOOL PROGRAM: DOCENTS' PERSPECTIVES

BY VANESSA SORENSON

The sight of students huddled around banners and plinths is a common one at the VHEC. Since the *Schindler & Vancouver's Schindler Jews* exhibits opened on October 18th, almost every day there has been at least one and as many as four school groups in to learn about Else Dunner, Bernard Goldberg, Esther and Leon Kaufman, and the man to whom they owe their lives, Oskar Schindler. This fall, the school program has consisted of a 45-minute tour of the exhibits led by a volunteer docent and 45 minutes with a survivor speaker sharing their own story.

Although the *Vancouver's Schindler Jews* exhibit will run through the spring, the closing of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's *Schindler* exhibit on December 15th offers an opportunity to reflect on the school tours and the impact of the program on students. Since joining the VHEC as a Research Assistant in September, I have had the opportunity to act as a docent, leading school groups through the exhibits, offering them information, and observing them formulate thoughts and questions in response. This direct interaction with students allows the docent to experience first-hand the impact of the exhibits on students. Thus, we have asked our docents to offer reflections from their unique perspective.

Lee Simpson:

I am amazed at how well prepared teachers had instructed students before the tour. The students are responsive and open to the experience, which I feel is invaluable as a learning tool not only for the past but the present. It is a pleasure to docent this exhibit.

Brian Campbell:

The response has been positive and students have been very involved. I think the complexity of Schindler as a character makes him appealing, that he could be both a perpetrator and a rescuer simultaneously. Many students have seen the movie and want to know the real story behind the man himself.

The physical artefacts also hold a special attraction. The list itself captures their attention and I get a lot of questions about who was on the list and what they did. The link to Vancouver's own Schindler Jews is also critical: hearing the testimonies and seeing Else Dunner's Auschwitz number and photographs. Students crowd around them after the talk is over and it makes a distant historical catastrophe real and present for them today.

Beth Bogner

On the day when the Centre had a blackout I was docenting for a group of grade seven Talmud Torah students. They held a flashlight for me and were very attentive and very knowledgeable. The strange thing is that it wasn't very difficult or even different than a regular day. This exhibit almost speaks for itself in the way it is presented so it reaches everybody. Since I did not grow up with the Holocaust in my family and I am not a history buff or even a teacher, I get educated each time by the Centre and the students. I feel that educating the young about this time in history is an important job that I take very seriously.





Yael Caron:

I had a great experience with one class of grade five and six students. The teacher had prepared them with the use of literature rather than a textbook approach. The students also appeared to have a very positive relationship with the teacher, which translated into the students having a good rapport with me and with the survivor speaker.

I have found that with every group the students come away from the exhibit with many questions and a desire to learn more. The Rwanda panel in particular brings up questions and ideas about how the Holocaust continues to relate to what is going on in the world today.



Jody Dales:

It is exhilarating to teach the story of Oskar Schindler. Because it is the story of an unlikely hero, it is particularly meaningful for students today. To be able to tell them about a man who behaved badly, who was a womanizer, who smoked incessantly and drank. Students sometimes giggle at this picture of him, and they don't exactly know where the story is going - then to surprise them with the outcome. It is precisely because of Schindler's flawed character that his story is so relevant and so important for students who are themselves imperfect. It leaves them with the message to never sell yourself short because you never know what decisions you might make one day and what impact you might be able to have.

I can hear my own docenting experiences echoed in the accounts shared here. Some students arrive extremely well prepared, and others not at all. Some groups are vocal and actively participate, and others listen quietly and hesitate to speak up. But for each student in every group there is at least one point in the exhibit that truly makes them think and reflect - you can see it in their eyes or their furrowed brow. These moments seem to come when the events are made real for the students - when they read a quote from Esther about what it was like to work in Schindler's factory, or when they see a video clip of Bernard describing his experience in Gross-Rosen, or when they stand in front of the number that Else wore at Auschwitz, and carried with her everyday thereafter.

The exhibit tour ends with a banner about the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Students are then presented with open questions for further reflection, and it is with these questions that I will end this article. To quote long-time VHEC docent, Debby Freiman:



The more we connect the Holocaust to students' everyday experience and to events going on in places such as Rwanda and Darfur, the more we connect to their understanding. The more that we bring it back to them, the more they can take it somewhere. I very much want to bring it back to them, and to today: Why are we not forgetting this history? Why is it important to learn? Does genocide still occur? What can we learn from the Holocaust that has meaning for us today?

TWINNING: REMEMBRANCE ON THE BAR MITZVAH OF AARON FRIEDLAND

BY DR. SERGE VANRY

The concept of Bar Mitzvah twinning is not widely known in our community. As a survivor, I had never heard of this process, until Alex Buckman, a fellow survivor, suggested that I offer my brother Edouard's name as a candidate for a Bar Mitzvah twinning as a way of memorializing Edouard's short life as a victim of Nazi persecution.



Edouard Vanry

The idea of the twinning was to blend the celebration of a young man's Bar Mitzvah, in this case, Aaron Friedland's, with the memory of a child who never had a chance to celebrate this milestone in his own life.

I have always been eager to take advantage of every opportunity to memorialize my brother's young life, so brutally taken away. Jewish people often need markers such as this event to remember those who have no resting place other than the grey dust that covers the railroad tracks, the bricks, and the walkways of Auschwitz.

My brother Edouard was born in 1939 in Paris when the clouds of war were drifting over Europe. On the 16th of July 1942, very early in the morning, the Nazis came to our apartment to take us away to an unknown destination. I was ten years old and I ran away very quickly to find shelter with kind friends and neighbours. I was never to see my brother again.

My memories of Edouard have faded somehow, but I do recall so vividly, his voice calling out often from his play area, "Mummy, are you there?" Edouard was deported to Drancy transit camp with our mother but became ill and was admitted into the hospital. By the time he returned to Drancy, our mother had been deported to Auschwitz. Sadly and tragically, she was no longer there for him when he arrived. Neither was she

there when he was placed in an orphanage. She was not there when the Gestapo came to arrest the 300 small children two weeks before the liberation of Paris. She was not there when the children were pushed into cattle cars with the other victims, deprived of food and water for the three-day journey. She was not there during the

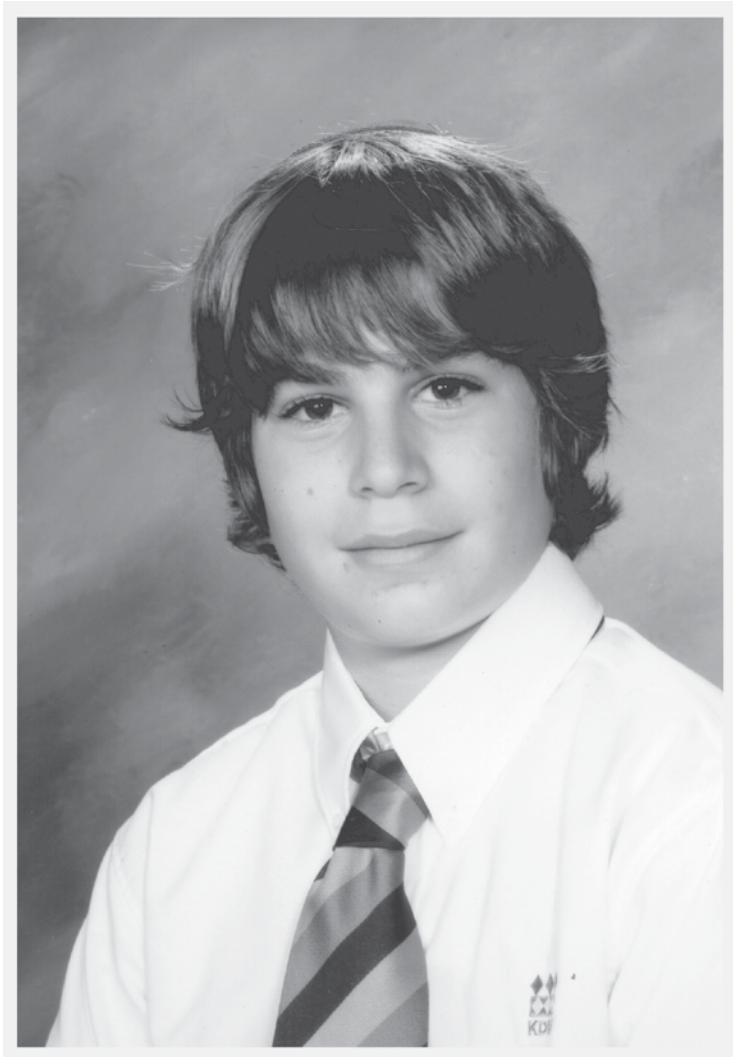
“selection” after which the children were headed for the “showers.” This five-year old child’s life ended in a horror beyond description and comprehension.

It is heartening to know that in some Jewish communities, particularly in North America, parents and their children thoughtfully include in their Bar Mitzvahs the memory of some young boy who perished at the hands of the Nazis. I am thankful to Aaron, the Bar Mitzvah boy, who shared the podium with my brother, his name and the memory of him, and I was also deeply touched by the welcome and emotional response I received from the Schara Tzedek Congregation to my remarks on December 1, 2005. Aaron Friedland and his parents clearly understood the importance of their involvement and were eager to make the event of “twinning,” meaningful. Perhaps in the future this community will realize that in order to make the Holocaust a living memory effective and widespread, we must connect at the individual level. Twinning is one way to meet this objective.

IN AARON’S WORDS.

My name is Aaron Friedland, and I have just celebrated my Bar Mitzvah in a very meaningful way by making Edouard Vanry, Serge’s brother, my “Bar Mitzvah Twin.” Edouard was a little boy of five when he perished in the Holocaust. When I was up there reading from the Torah, I felt so deeply for him. I felt that he was somewhere watching the service and was finally able to move on, knowing that he had accomplished what had been intended for him in his lifetime. My simcha was not only meant for me. I shared it with Edouard and his family who had been deprived of this marvelous occasion. From now on every one of my mitzvahs will be dedicated to Edouard. I feel so privileged and lucky to be here and able to do this.

Serge Vanry, Edouard’s older brother spoke so beautifully before the Torah was taken out. He told us how his family’s life had been devastated by the Holocaust. I wish to thank him for sharing this emotional story with us, thus making my Simcha more special to me, giving it more depth and spirituality than if I had just experienced it by myself.



Aaron Friedland

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST THE VHEC'S 5TH BIENNIAL SHAFRAN TEACHERS' CONFERENCE FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2007 AT THE LIU INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL ISSUES, UBC BY NINA KRIEGER

The Holocaust brings questions about human nature, modern society, social responsibility and global citizenship into sharp focus. As such, it is a topic of study profoundly relevant to teachers across a range of grade levels and subject areas. Yet, with curriculum learning outcomes that do not mandate the study of the Holocaust, as well as limited budgets for field trips, teachers are faced with a daunting question: how, given these practical constraints, can such a momentous and complex historical topic be successfully integrated into the classroom?

In 1999, the VHEC inaugurated the Biennial Shafran Teachers' Conference to address this question, and to offer British Columbia's teachers access to historians and educators at the forefront of Holocaust studies. Since its inception, the Shafran Teachers' Conference has garnered a reputation for informing, engaging and inspiring participants with programs that include distinguished guest speakers from across the globe and hands-on workshops led by outstanding local educators.

The upcoming Shafran Teachers' Conference will be held at the Liu Institute for Global Issues at the University of British Columbia, a venue that speaks volumes about the pedagogical implications of the Holocaust. As an interdisciplinary policy centre devoted to human security and international justice issues, the Liu Institute will act as an ideal forum in which to discuss the theoretical and practical implications of Holocaust education.

The conference's keynote speaker, Dr. Simone Schweber, will address the cross-curricular nature and interdisciplinary possibilities of Holocaust education. Author of *Making Sense of the Holocaust: Lessons for Classroom Practice* (Teacher College Press, 2004), Schweber is the Goodman Professor of Education and Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin. In addition to discussing the different ways the Holocaust is taught and learned about in both public and private religious schools, Dr. Schweber will offer an assessment that identifies the ideological debates surrounding the teaching of the Holocaust and provides guidance for navigating them.

Dr. Roland Case, Executive Director of The Critical Thinking Consortium (TC2), will speak about the value of primary sources in fostering historical understanding. TC2 is a non-profit association of institutional partners, school districts, faculties of education, teaching professionals, associations and other educational organizations committed to promoting critical thinking from primary to post-secondary education through professional development, publications and research. Dr. Case's presentation coincides with the launch of TC2's new integrated Language Arts/ Social Studies resource, *Come To Canada*. This curriculum incorporates the VHEC's acclaimed teaching website, *Open Hearts – Closed Doors: The War Orphans Project*

as a powerful vehicle for nurturing empathy about the immigrant experience, as well as for developing historical perspective and other key concepts in historical thinking. All conference participants will receive a TC2 publication.

In the afternoon session, primary teachers will have the opportunity to further explore the application of *Open Hearts – Closed Doors* in their classrooms. I will lead a workshop that takes teachers through this multimedia and bilingual website, a resource that presents the stories of eight war orphans and their journeys to Canada. This site puts invaluable primary documents, photographs and artefacts into the hands of students, creating a rich learning experience about the Holocaust and the broader history of Canadian immigration during the twentieth century.

Another one of the VHEC's most successful teaching resources, *Too Close To Home: Anti-Semitism and Fascism in Canada, 1930s – 1940s*, will be the focus of a workshop by Andrea Webb. A Social Studies and English teacher in the Burnaby School District since 1999, Webb has also volunteered with the VHEC since 2000 on both the High School Symposium and Teachers' Advisory Committees. Using the *Too Close to Home* artefact folio and resource package, she will look at how to teach students to "read" photographs and other primary sources materials that reflect anti-Semitism and racism in Canadian history.

Graeme Stacey, a teacher at Mount Boucherie Secondary School in Kelowna and the 2005 recipient of the Meyer and Gita Kron Award for Excellence in Holocaust Education, will discuss his school board-authorized course, Holocaust 12: A Blueprint for Modern Societal Tragedy. The only Holocaust 12 course offered in the province, Stacey's curriculum examines the role of victims, perpetrators, bystanders and rescuers in the Holocaust and other genocides. Stacey was awarded a scholarship to study at the Yad Vashem International School for Holocaust Studies in the summer of 2006, and will also speak about how this learning experience gave his course a new purpose and focus.

As with any learning opportunity, the 2007 Shafran Teachers' Conference will no doubt provoke as many questions as it will answer. Throughout the day, participants will have the opportunity to meet in small discussion groups, to reflect upon the new ideas they encounter and to brainstorm how they might apply these ideas in their classrooms the very next day.

The Shafran Teachers' Conference, for teachers and student teachers, requires pre-registration (deadline: February 1, 2007). For complete program and registration information please visit www.vhec.org.

ESTER AND RUZYA, HOW MY GRANDMOTHERS SURVIVED HITLER'S WAR AND STALIN'S PEACE

BY MASHA GESSEN

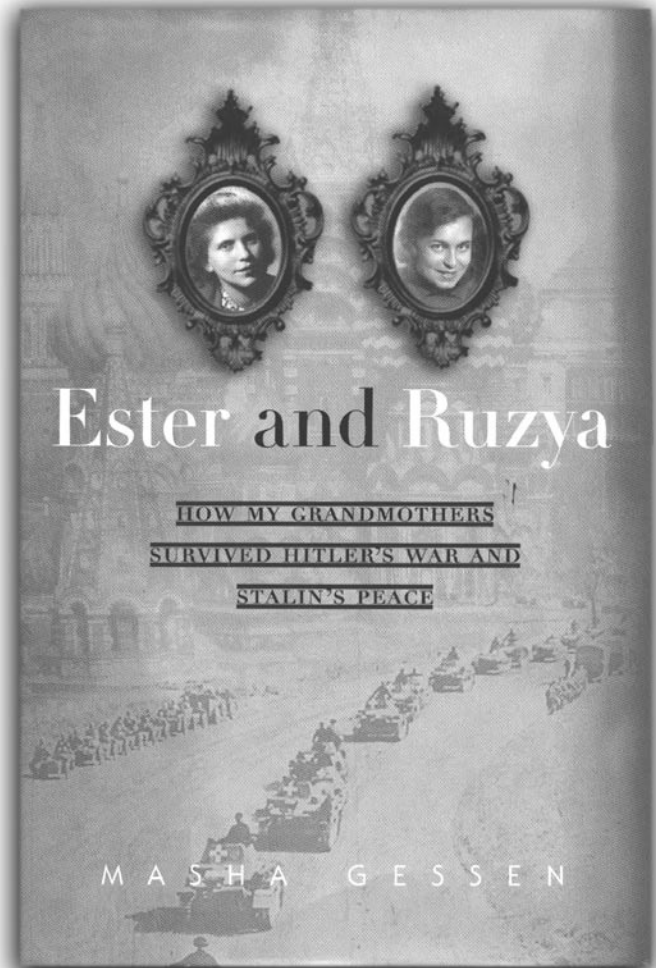
REVIEWED BY LUCIEN LIEBERMAN

In 1966 my parents, Leo and Clara Lieberman, made an extensive visit to the Soviet Union to visit the remnants of their families in Moscow, Kharkov, Cernovitz and Yalta. It was their first and only visit to that part of the world since they migrated to Canada as young people in 1923. They invited me to go along but I knew it was going to be a grim visit as the relatives were bound to trot out their stories of WWII and the Gulag. My parents returned, my mother full of stories, some repeated against my father's wishes. My father was depressed by the whole affair and summed up the visit with the comment, "It was the same old Czarist jail." Their visit left me with the question, how did Soviet Jewry manage to survive Stalin, Hitler, and Stalin all over again and carry on a meaningful existence?

This question and its answers are most thoughtfully considered in a 2004 publication *Ester and Ruzya*, by Masha Gessen. The author was born in the Soviet Union and emigrated to the U.S. with her parents when she was a teenager. She returned to Moscow in 1991 as an accredited journalist for an American news agency.

In her prologue the young author asks the basic questions: "How much of the past needs to be exposed and examined before we can proceed with the future? How much can be forgiven? How much can we understand?" She observes that Russian culture and the Russian state have conspired to make the family a tight and almost immutable structure. You know that the family are the people who will always respond to individual needs." She frames her family story around dates of great consequences. Most Russian Jews know these dates by heart. September, 1939, the German invasion of Poland, followed by the occupation of Eastern Poland and the Baltic states. July, 1941, the German invasion of the Soviet Union. May, 1945, the defeat of Germany by the Allied Powers. January, 1948, The murder of the actor Mikhoels, leader of the Jewish Community, by agents of the secret police. 1953, the announcement of the trials of nineteen Jewish doctors charged with conspiring to poison the Soviet leadership, followed by the death of Stalin and the dropping of all charges against the nineteen doctors. 1956, Khrushchev's famous speech at the 20th Communist Congress denouncing Stalin.

Ester and Ruzya were born in 1920. They represent the young generation most affected by these calamitous events. Although they do not meet until they are in their early thirties, their life experiences and careers follow a similar path and lead to a lifelong friendship. Ester Goldberg is born into a family residing in Bialystok. This city in pre war Poland had a population of 100,000, half of whom were Jews. Her father, Jakub is a struggling businessman with strong ties to the Zionist leadership. Her mother, by contrast, is active in socialist Jewish circles. Ester is a gifted student and active in a Jewish youth movement, training young Jews for a life in a future Jewish state in Palestine. In August, 1940, Ester gains admission to a Moscow teachers college. Little did she know she was joining the Soviet Union's most wretched generation at its worst moment. 1940 was the fourth year of the "Great Terror". Like every institute in the country, the college was steeped in paranoia; the enemy was everywhere and denunciations could appear at any moment. In Bialystok, Jakub is arrested by the NKVD (political police) for his Zionist affiliation and capitalist background. Ester's mother, Bella, is placed on a deportation list numbering 25,000 people. Twenty trains are dispatched, five never make it because of the German invasion of Soviet territory. The Jews in the five trains come under Nazi power and probably died. The deportees who succeeded in getting to the Urals, survive but are forced into labour camps without trial. For Jakub, the German invasion ironically



frees him from the NKVD jail to face a grimmer fate. He is elected to the Judenrat and given the task of organizing food rationing in the ghetto.

Following the invasion of the Soviet Union, Ester volunteers in a unit supplying food to soldiers at the front. Eventually she is evacuated to Turkmenistan where she encounters safety and hunger. Her five year domestic Soviet passport and membership in Komsomol (communist youth league) allows her to travel. She is united with her mother Bella in Byisk Altai where the two are able to find work and refuge. In Byisk, Ester's youth and attractiveness draws the attention of a NKVD major Gurov who wants Ester to sign a document in which she agrees to inform on her Polish countrymen. She refuses with the comment, "I did not join the Komsomol to become a snitch." Bella supports her in this but they know that when one is faced with a choice between one's life and one's conscience, one usually chooses life. Major Gurov persists but the situation is resolved by the intervention of Boris, a Jewish Red Army soldier recuperating from his war wounds. Boris wears the decoration of a wounded soldier/hero. He declares Ester to be his wife and Gurov backs off. Ester marries Boris, not out of love, but for convenience. She is twenty-one years old. The families of the young couple move back to Moscow in 1944 and Ester resumes her education.

Ruzya Gessen is from a Moscow Jewish family. Her father is an accountant in an industrial establishment. At the outbreak of the war she is teaching German in a military academy. She marries Samuil a young Jewish believer in the communist cause. His enrollment at the Military Law Academy leads to a position as a political officer. His job is to ensure that the troops have the correct political conviction to fight to the death. He is killed, not in battle, but by an errant piece of shrapnel. At the time, Ruzya is living with Samuil's family in Ashkabad, Turkmen. She gives birth to a girl, Yolochka, and in 1944 returns to Moscow with her in-laws to seek a living. Although trained as a teacher, Ruzya has acquired an understanding that means teaching history in a Soviet school is always eventually lying. She finds work with a government agency, Glavit, the Head Directorate on Affairs of Literature and Publishing. This is an organization given the responsibility to read and censor all foreign published materials coming into the country. This job at censorship does not impress her father, Moshe, who says with a wry smile "Daughter, you have become a gendarme." Later in life she would recount to her granddaughter her obsession with the work "For Whom The Bell Tolls" by Ernest Hemmingway. Each night she would smuggle the volume out of the office to be devoured in the privacy of her bedroom. She knew that Hemmingway's work would never be allowed past her censorship post.

Victory in Europe, VE Day, 1945 finds both Ester and Ruzya celebrating the end of the war and hoping for better prospects. Ruzya's talents as a translator is noted by her superiors and she is offered a better position in a department translating and censoring the work of foreign correspondents. Although there is a wall separating the correspondents from the censors, Ruzya becomes

intimately aware of important events as reported by correspondents such as Harrison Salisbury of the New York Times. In 1946 Stalin makes a highly publicized speech in which he toasts the Russian people for their war effort. He says the Russian people are first and foremost amongst the people making up the Soviet Union. At the same time a vicious, organized anti-Semitic campaign begins under the guise of the epithet "rootless cosmopolitans". In this environment the Jews are accused of sitting the war out in Tashkent. Masha Gessen has done her own research. She writes, "virtually all able bodied Jewish men served in the wartime Red Army and about 200,000 died in the ranks. Jews had the largest proportion of any Soviet ethnic group of 'Heroes of the Soviet Union' the highest military honour awarded. Mikhoel's murder in 1948 served to reassure the Soviet Jews that they were a people under siege.

During the anti-cosmopolitan campaign Ester is denied entrance to graduate studies. Ethnicity doomed her application. She is offered a Hebrew translating job with the JAC, (Jewish Action Committee) which was established by Stalin during the war to drum up support for the Soviet cause in America. Within the four days that Ester is to start work, the Soviet authorities close the office and arrest the leadership. In an ironic twist of fate she is then offered a similar position with the NKVD at a better salary. She has no choice; it is better to have a job than have a family doctor tell you that your Jewish child is malnourished. The job requires passing a medical exam. Ester is partially blind in one eye and fails the test. The position eludes her. She then moves to a less political position as editor in the Polish division of the Journal of Soviet Literature. She will toil at this job for 40 years.

During this period personnel forms and university admission forms require individuals to state their ethnicity and list relatives living abroad. In order to keep her position, Ruzya is asked to apply for Party membership. She fails to get the appropriate recommendations from her co-workers and is denied membership. Her boss, a decent man, manages to keep her in the job.

In the years 1944 to 1953, six different ethnic groups were packed into cattle cars and moved to remote regions of the Soviet empire. In 1953, the trial of nineteen Jewish doctors led many Moscovites to believe that deportation of the Jewish population would follow the hysteria of the show trials. On March 6, 1953 Stalin's death led to mass hysteria in the streets. Many were trampled in the push to see the great master lying in state. Ester and Ruzya are quietly pleased with the event. The doctors' plot is exposed as a sham and the doctors are released. In the post Stalin period there is an easing of tensions between the Soviets and the West, which also eases tension within the country. Despite the end of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign there are quotas established limiting Jews in jobs and university admissions. Ester's son Sasha is stymied in his attempts to get into a physics program. Ester tells him the story of her experience as a high school student in pre war Bialystok where the Polish authorities segregated the Jewish students to a side table labeled "the ghetto bench". The Jewish students demonstrated by standing during class rather than sitting at the side table.

In 1950 Ester and Ruzya meet through mutual friends. They are both translators and editors and believe in the notion that they can get by being “internal émigrés”, by this they mean a citizen can find seclusion in the country, seclusion in outdoor activity. They become avid cross-country skiers and rock climbers. They enjoy a group of Jewish friends that are trustworthy. “There is proof of this friendship”, remarks Ester, “Well, we are all here, nobody has been informed on.” The pair’s friendship is further bonded by a family relationship when Yolochka and Sasha are married, even though both mothers consider this “not to be a match made in heaven.” In 1982 the married couple take their children and emigrate to America. Ester will go on to have a second and third marriage and two more children. Ester and Ruzya will live into their eighties, retaining their wisdom and physical health. They both travel extensively in their later years to America and Israel.



Ester and Ruzya after the war

At the end of the story, the author relates that in 1987 the authorities in the Soviet Union announce that visiting visas would be available to émigrés. Sasha and Yolochka ask Ester to deal with the paperwork. Ester needs a signature from her boss, Bochkarov. She has not told this man that she has children in the U.S. She decides to make the request. She rehearses her lines carefully knowing that if he refuses she could also lose her job. Bochkarov listens to her request, looks at the document in front of him and asks “How long have the children been gone?” “Six years” she replies. “That is a long time, you must miss them very much,” he replies, and signs the document. For Ester, this was the beginning of perestroika.

In 1948, upon hearing that the State of Israel had been proclaimed and endorsed by the Soviet Union at the UN, Ester, without giving serious thought to the consequences of her action, goes to the central Moscow telegraph office and sends a congratulatory telegram to the Polish office of the Jewish Community in Warsaw. In 1982 she receives a call from an Israeli Knesset member, Chaika Grossman, who is in Moscow to attend a Socialist Congress. They meet and the Israeli woman explains that she was on the receiving end of the telegram, which she kept. The telegram was noteworthy because it was the only one to come from a Soviet individual and

she recognized the sender as a fellow classmate from Bialystok. Chaika Grossman then went on to discuss her brief relationship with Ester’s father Jakub during the ghetto administration. Chaika had survived the failed Jewish uprising in 1943 and had written an account of the events. She is well known in Israel and is regarded as a hero of the resistance. Several years later Yakub’s great granddaughter will read Chaika’s story in an English translation, visit Bialystok, and gain a more balanced view of the events which took place in 1941 to 1943.

Yakub and Chaika had different objectives in their leadership positions in the ghetto. Yakub believed that for every day of the existence of the ghetto, there was a chance for survival. He was determined to see that food and fuel was shared fairly. Chaika, on the other hand, was part of a group arming for revolt under the slogan, “Jews, we must refuse to be the tools of their selection for deportation.” In their last conversation, Jakub is prophetic when he says to Chaika, “Unlike my daughter, you have the blond hair and the gentile features which allows you to merge into the Polish populace”. It is Chaika who survives and is able to relate the story of the deportation of the entire Judenrat council in a single day. Chaika is an observer mingling in the Polish crowd. Masha Gessen sums up their opposing views. “It was the difference between working to make life tolerable and working on making death beautiful.” There was a revolt in Bialystok. The Jews were better armed than those in Warsaw, but the Germans were better prepared for a surprise. The revolt failed. Chaika Grossman survived to be the narrator of the story and a heroine in Israel. Jakob Goldberg perished and it was left to his great granddaughter, Masha Gessen, to balance the story.

ABOUT THE RUSSIAN SURVIVOR COMMUNITY IN VANCOUVER

Following the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, a large group of Russian Jews came to Vancouver as independent immigrants in the 1990s. Some brought their parents with them or sponsored them after arriving in Canada. Many of these parents were Holocaust survivors, who had either fled the Nazis or had been evacuated by the Soviets to Siberia, including Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan during the war.

There are now over a thousand Jewish Russian survivors residing in the Greater Vancouver area, many of them with special social and financial needs, having arrived later in life with little English language skills.

With the assistance of Stan Taviss, a volunteer lawyer with the VHEC, some have applied for compensation from the Hardship Fund of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. This fund was established primarily for survivors who were refugees from Soviet Bloc countries.

TRIBUTE CARDS

OCTOBER 3RD — DECEMBER 7TH, 2006

GET WELL

Rhoda Friedrichs, Wishing you a speedy recovery.
Frieda Miller & Danny Shapiro

Rita Akselrod, Wishing you a Speedy Recovery. Judy Nagy, Frieda Miller & Danny Shapiro, Stan & Reena Taviss, Gloria & Gerri & the Survivor Drop-In, Lillian Boraks Nemetz, Louise & Ike Stein Sorensen, Bronia Sonnenschein, Gerri & Mark London, Agi & Tibor Bergida, George & Frieda Wertman, Grace & David Ehrlich, Sheila & Norman Archeck, Art Hister & Phyllis Simon, Ben & Rose Folk, Wendi & Barry Vaisler, Izzy Fraeme & Leonore Etkin, Saul & Sheryl Kahn

Peter Barnett, Wishing you a Speedy Recovery.
Lillian Boraks Nemetz

Alex Buckman, Best Wishes for a Speedy Recovery.
Stan & Reena Taviss, Art Hister & Phyllis Simon

Lili Folk, Get Well. Harold & Bella Silverman,
Regina Wertman, Debby & Mark Choit

Gustav Grunberg, Get Well. Rita & Ben Akselrod

Peter Parker, Get Well. Rita, Frieda & the VHEC Board & Staff

Brian Schreiber, Get Well. Neri & Aron Tischler

Peter Suedfeld, Get Well. Alex & the Child Survivor Group

Tom Wollner, Get Well. Tamar, David, Teah & Noah Bakonyi

MAZEL TOV

Byron Aceman, Happy 70th Birthday. Lana & Mendy Landa

Rosa Baerwald, Happy 89th Birthday. Eddie & Debbie Rozenberg

Cathy Best, On your special birthday. Neri & Aron Tischler

Amalia Boe-Fishman, On the arrival of your new Grandson! Rome, Frieda & the VHEC Board & Staff

Beth Bogner, On Your Birthday. Linda Wener & Marla Groberman

Diane Cohen, Happy 60th Birthday. Mendy & Lana Landa

Geri Davis, On your 60th Birthday. Beth & Leon Bogner & Linda & Joel Wener

Dennis Ditlove, Happy 70th Birthday. Lana & Mendy Landa

David Ehrlich, On your special birthday. Marilyn & Derek Glazer, Molly Ross

Felicia Folk & Alan Farber, On the birth of your Grandson. Linda & Joel Wener

David Feldman, On your special birthday! Bernice Neuwirth, Ben & Rose Folk, Abe & Goldie Miedzygorski, Izzy Fraeme, Jack & Margaret Fraeme

Jan & Carol Fishman, On your new addition! Izzy Fraeme & Leonore Etkin

Lillian Fryfield, On your 80th Birthday! Rome Fox and the VHEC Board & Staff

Sid & Dora Golden, On Your 60th Wedding Anniversary! Mendy & Lana Landa

Paul Heller, In honour of your special birthday. Ethel Bellows, Frieda Miller & the VHEC Board & Staff

Tova Kornfeld, On your special birthday. Neri & Aron Tischler

Annette Krygier, On your 80th Birthday! Lori & Claudio Guincher

Celina Lieberman, Happy Special Birthday. Gwen & David Tessler, Helene & Herb Rosen, Elaine & Charles Shnier, Gloria Ross, Merle & Manuel Rootman, Celia & Irvin Lerner

Gail Mainster, Wishing you a very Happy Birthday. Jeff & Vivian Claman

Mr & Mrs Russ Ritchie, Congratulations on the birth of Jamie. Mendy & Lana Landa

Steve & Marion Rom, On your special birthdays. Neri & Aron Tischler

Aaron Shtabsky, In honour of your special birthday. Rome & Hymie Fox & Family

Aron Szajman, Happy Birthday. David Feldman

SYMPATHY

Sarah Bender, On the passing of your son Ken. Linda & Joel Wener, Beth & Leon Bogner & Family, Ruth & Cecil Sigal, Lillian Boraks Nemetz

Mrs. Dora Davis, With sympathy. Jocy Lowy, Rosa Ferera

Bernice Carmeli & Family, In memory of your Father & Grandfather Sid. Hymie & Rome Fox & Family, Saul & Sheryl Kahn

Mrs. Minni Cohen, In Memory of Hy. Debbie & Eddie Rozenberg

Mel Davis, In memory of your Father. Dov & Rosalie Dimant, Lesley & Mike Rogers, Beth & Leon Bogner & Family

Martin & Debbie Davis & Family, In Memory of your Father. Debbie & Eddie Rozenberg

Mariette Doduck, In Memory of Sid. The VHEC Child Survivor Group, Louise & Ike Stein Sorensen, Ben & Rita Akselrod, Ben & Rose Folk, Birgit Westergaard & Norman Gladstone, Sally Rogow, Lillian Boraks Nemetz, Hymie & Fay Davis, Mendy & Lana Landa, Gloria & Robbie Waisman, Sally Zimmerman, Izzy Fraeme & Leonore Etkin, Geri & Mel Davis, Emerich Klein, Beth & Leon Bogner & Family, Saul & Sheryl Kahn, Ronnie & Barry Tessler, Susan & Arnie Fine, Andrea, Yossi, Eli & Ruth Kowaz, Sam & Fran Belzberg, Joe & Susan Stein & Ignatz Wolak, Arnold & Anita Silber, Alex & Colette Buckman, Ida & Odie Kaplan, Debbie & Eddie Rozenberg, Harold & Bella Silverman, Regina Wertman, Robert Haber & Arlene Tully & Family, Wendi & Barry Vaisler, Des & Phillipa Friedland & Family, Bronia Sonnenschein, Lucien & Carole Lieberman, Grace & David Ehrlich, Marion Cassirer & Miriam Friedberg, Mark Rozenberg, Jocy Lowy & Family, Ruth & Cecil Sigal, Mort & Irene Dodek, Rachel Wosk & Family, Lola Haber & Family

Family of Sid Doduck, Frieda Miller & the VHEC Board & Staff

Pierre Faber & Family, In memory of your Father & Grandfather. Sandra & Norman Miller & Family

Mogyoros Family, In Memory of Magda Mogyoros. Leo, Anne & Rachelle Shimerl

Rome Fox & Family, Our condolences. Saul & Sheryl Kahn, George, Yvonne, Elana, Alisa Rosenberg & Sheldon Franken

In Memory of Zoli Grunfeld. Izzy Fraeme

Debby Freiman & Family, Condolences on the loss of your Father. Evelyn & Jack Huberman, Ruth & Cecil Sigal

Edgar Gaerber, In Memory of your wife Marilyn. Frieda Miller & The VHEC Staff, Rita Akselrod & The VHEC Board

Morry Gaerber, In Memory of your mother Marilyn. Richard Wolak

Stephen, Allen & Morry Gaerber & Families, In Memory of your Mother & Grandmother. Frieda Miller & The VHEC Staff, Rita Akselrod & The VHEC Board

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Harowitz. Beth & Leon Bogner & Family, Robert &
Marilyn Krell & Family

Sharon Harowitz, In Memory of Booba Harowitz.
Beth & Leon Bogner & Family

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Ethel Kofsky & Family, On the loss of your Father.
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& the Child Survivor Group of Vancouver, Cathy &
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Robbie Waisman, Ben & Rita Akselrod, Rob &
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Kafka, Rome Fox, Frieda Miller & the VHEC Staff
& Board, Rob & Marilyn Krell & Family, Grace &
David Ehrlich

Rodney Massel & Family, On the loss of your
Mother, Grandmother & Great Grandmother, Golda
Massel, Irv Wolak & Susan & Joe Stein

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Aron Tischler

Avihu Nachmani, On the loss of your Father. Neri &
Aron Tischler

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Grandfather. Mark, Jacob, Talya & Nirit Rozenberg

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Sunni Stein & Family, On the loss of your Husband
& Father. Linda, Joel & Darryl Wener, Marilyn &
Derek Glazer

Mrs. Gerry Sugarman, Our deepest sympathy. Mendy
& Lana Landa

Sheryl Young & Family, On the loss of your Father &
Grandfather. Saul & Sheryl Kahn

THANK YOU

Reva Adler, Thank-you. Frieda Miller & VHEC
Board & Staff

Patsy Bruser, Thank-you. Mendy & Lana Landa

Alex Buckman, Thank-you. Frieda Miller & The
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Bartoszewski, Wladyslaw and Zofia Lewin (eds.)
*Righteous Among Nations: How Poles Helped the Jews,
1939-1945.* London: Earls Court Publications, Ltd.,
1969. Donated by the family of Sella & Sam Heller.

Brett, Lily. *Too Many Men.* Sydney: Pan Macmillan
Australia Pty Limited, 2000. Donated by Molly Ross.

Bruegger, Fred. *Survival: A Refugee Life.* Toronto: Key
Porter Books Limited, 2005. Donated by Ira Nader.

Chaneles, Sol. *Three Children of the Holocaust.* New
York: Avon Books, 1974. Donated by Robert Krell.

Chladkova, Ludmila. *The Terezin Ghetto.* Prague: Jitka
Kejrova, 2005. Donated by Ed & Debbie Rozenberg.

Drix, Samuel. *Witness to Annihilation: Surviving the
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1994. Donated by Robert Krell.

Eisenstein, Bernice. *I Was A Child of Holocaust
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Donated by publisher.

Elon, Amos. *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of Jews in
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Ltd., 2002. Donated by Terence Walsh.

Gilbert, Martin. *Atlas of the Holocaust.* London:
Michael Joseph Limited, 1982. Donated by the family
of Sella & Sam Heller.

Gilbert, Martin. *Kristallnacht: Prelude to Destruction.*
New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006. Donated
by publisher.

Gissing, Vera. *Pearls of Childhood.* London: Pan Books,
Ltd., 1990. Donated by Shannon & Ellen LaBelle.

Glassner, Ira and Robert Krell (eds.). *And Life Is Changed
Forever: Holocaust Childhoods Remembered.* Detroit: Wayne
State University Press, 2006. Donated by Robert Krell in
memory of Aurum Miller.

Greenfeld, Howard. *After the Holocaust.* New York,
Greenwillow Books, 2001. Donated by Robert Krell.

CORRECTION: Zachor November 2006
Further Thoughts on Rescuers by Claude
Romney should read as follows:

Paragraph 2 – I started making a mental list
of the men and women, thanks to whom, my
mother and I did not end up in Auschwitz, as
my father did.

Paragraph 3 – Not only did Zosia save Wisia,
but she also saved Wisia's father, whom Zosia
married after the war.

Paragraph 4 – Tetka had the rank of lieutenant
and participated in the Warsaw uprising in
August 1944.

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