Learning from the past ~ lessons for today

The Holocaust Memorial Day Committee
in association with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Dublin City Council;
Dublin Maccabi Charitable Trust and the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland
Mauthausen, Austria
An orchestra escorts prisoners destined for execution.
Yad Vashem
Programme

- **Introductory remarks**, Yanky Fachler
- **Words of Welcome**, Lord Mayor of Dublin, Cllr Vincent Jackson
- **The Stockholm Declaration**, Winni Fejne, Minister at the Swedish Embassy, Dublin
- **Keynote address**, Michael McDowell T.D., Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- Choral interlude
- **Survivors of the Holocaust** – Geoffrey Phillips, Suzi Diamond, Tomi Reichental, Zoltan Zinn-Collis
- **Primo Levi**, The Honorable Mrs Justice Susan Denham
- **The only Jew on Leros**, Barry Andrews TD
- **Persecution of the Deaf**, Theo Dorgan
- **Camp Orchestras**, John Bowman
- Musical interlude
- **Recalling the victims**, pupils of Belvedere College, Rathdown School, Stratford College and Presentation Secondary School, Waterford
- **The Great Raid**, Estelle Menton, President of the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland
- **The Nazi Holocaust**, Ruari Quinn T.D., chairperson of the Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland
- Choral interlude
- **The plight of the St Louis**, Senator David Norris
- **Warsaw Ghetto**, Dick Roche T.D., Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
- **Inge’s story**, Dr Katy Radford
- **Second Generation**, Dr Leon Litvack, Queens University, Belfast
- **Go home from this place**… Brigid McManus, Secretary General, the Department of Education and Science
- Minute’s silence
- Candle lighting ceremony
- **El Male Rachamim**, Prayer for the Repose of the Souls of the Departed, Dr Yaakov Pearlman, Chief Rabbi of Ireland and Cantor Alwyn Shulman, Dublin Hebrew Congregation
- **Closing remarks**, Yanky Fachler
Holocaust Memorial Day

Mission Statement

The Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration is designed to cherish the memory of all of the victims of the Nazi Holocaust. A candle-lighting ceremony is an integral part of the commemoration at which six candles are always lit for the six million Jews who perished, as well as candles for all of the other victims. The commemoration serves as a constant reminder of the dangers of racism and intolerance and provides lessons from the past that are relevant today.

Summary of the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust

Issued in January 2000, on the 55th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1945 and endorsed by 44 countries, including Ireland.

We, the governments attending the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, recognise that the Holocaust was a tragically defining episode of the 20th Century, a crisis for European civilisation and a universal catastrophe for humanity. In declaring that the Holocaust fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilisation, we share a commitment to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust, and to honour those who stood against it. The horrors that engulfed the Jewish people and other victims of the Nazis must forever be seared in our collective memory. With humanity still scarred by genocide, antisemitism, ethnic cleansing, racism, xenophobia and other expressions of hatred and discrimination, we share a solemn responsibility to fight against these evils. Together with our European partners and the wider international community, we share a commitment to remember all the victims who perished, to respect the survivors still with us, and to reaffirm humanity’s common aspiration for a democratic and tolerant society, free of the evils of prejudice and other forms of bigotry.
Message from the Lord Mayor of Dublin

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the City of Dublin, I am proud to be the host of this auspicious evening here in the Mansion House. We mark Ireland’s National Holocaust Memorial Day each year on the Sunday nearest to 27 January, the date of the liberation of Auschwitz in 1945. This commemoration has now become permanently established in the national calendar. It is an important date not just for Dublin, but for the whole country.

As always, we are honoured to have Holocaust survivors who have made Ireland their home here with us this evening. Their presence reminds us of our solemn duty to make sure that the victims are never forgotten, that the survivors are never abandoned, and that we never allow an event such as the Holocaust to be repeated.

We in Dublin have enjoyed a proud association with Ireland’s Jewish community that goes back more than 150 years. Although small in number, this community has made a remarkable contribution to all spheres of life, in Dublin and in Ireland.

My thanks go to the committee and individuals who work so hard to ensure that we give this solemn occasion the respect it is due.

Vincent Jackson, Lord Mayor of Dublin

Excerpts of the address by Mary Hanafin T.D., Minister for Education and Science, at the National Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration, Dublin, 29 January, 2006

I am honoured to have been invited to address this solemn commemoration where we remember the millions who perished in the Holocaust – their humiliation, their degradation, their suffering, their despair and their terrible destruction.

The Holocaust was a chillingly systematic effort to exterminate an entire people, not for what they had done nor for any threat that they posed, but simply for being who they were – whether young or old, every last man, woman and child. It represented evil on a nearly unimaginable scale.

The Holocaust raises in a most awful way the darkest questions the mystery of evil has put to the human race in recent times. We may never get to the bottom of these questions – because, for something this evil, there is in the end no explanation the mind can accept. However, what we cannot explain, we must nevertheless remember. The warning contained in memory is our protection, and is essential to ensure that something like the Holocaust never happens again. Unfortunately, the evil that turns man against man, cheapening, degrading and destroying life, still lurks in the world.

During my visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau in May 2005, I had the experience of seeing at first hand the railroad tracks on which the trains full of victims arrived and hearing from surviving eyewitnesses the details of what happened at the gas chambers and crematoria, which made an indelible impression. It brought home to me that in spite of all the progress that has been achieved in so many spheres of life, human nature is still capable of perpetrating unspeakable horror.

I am taking steps to ensure that schools generally are more aware of the Holocaust and the Holocaust Memorial Day. My Department is working in this regard with the Primary Curriculum Support Programme and at second level with the Civil Social and Political Education support. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust in raising Holocaust awareness and education in Ireland.

I would like to pay particular tribute to the four Jewish survivors of the Holocaust who are living in Ireland and who were themselves children of the Holocaust all those years ago. At the commemoration this year, we are especially remembering the children of the Holocaust. The Nazis targeted children in order to control the future of particular groups of people such as the Jews, gypsies and people with disabilities and therefore ensure that they did not endure for future generations.
Europe – The number of Jews annihilated by the Nazis in each European country

The white figures on black relate to the approximate number of Jews that perished in each European country between September 1939 and May 1945. The total of just over 5,750,000 does not include thousands of infants murdered by the Nazis in late 1941, before their births could be recorded. Thousands of people from the remoter villages in Poland were added to the deportation trains which left larger localities, without any record of their existence or of their fate.
The Nazi Holocaust –
A systematic programme to exterminate the Jews of Europe

• The first concentration camp, Dachau, is established to hold the prisoners arrested after the arson attack on the Reichstag parliament building in February 1933.
• May 1933 – Nazi students and militiamen light huge public bonfires in which they burn books by Jews, communists and other ‘disruptive’ influences.
• 1933 onwards – Jews are expelled from the army, the civil service, professional associations, sports and social clubs.
• 1935 – The Nuremberg Laws strip Jews of citizenship and define them by racial criteria.
• 35,000 Jewish war veterans who had won medals for bravery during WWI lose their privileges.
• 9 November 1938 – Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass).
• 275,000 men, women and children with disabilities die in Nazi euthanasia programmes.
• 100,000 Jews die in labour camps between 1939 and 1940.
• Following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, SS mobile murder squads known as Einsatzgruppen murder over 2,000,000 civilians, most of them Jews.
• Some 500,000 Jews die in ghettos from starvation and disease.
• 30,000 Jewish partisans fight the Nazis in Eastern Europe.
• In the Warsaw Ghetto, more than 100,000 Jews die of starvation and disease, more than 300,000 are deported to the death camps and 7,000 are killed in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising between 19 April and 16 May, 1943.
• 1,000,000 Jews, 70,000 Christian Poles, 23,000 Gypsies, 15,000 Soviet prisoners and thousands of others die at Auschwitz.
• 1,500,000 Jewish children were murdered by the Nazis as well as thousands of other children whom they considered unfit to live.
• Of the 300,000 Jews who go into hiding, pretend to be Aryans or acquire false identity papers, 100,000 die after capture or betrayal.
• Only one third of the nine million Jews living in Europe before 1939 survived the Holocaust.
Survivors of the Holocaust living in Ireland

I was born in Wanne-ekel in Germany in 1925. Year by year there are less of us, who lived through those eventful days and can bear personal witness to them. We owe it to those who died as well as to those who come after us that the horrors of the Holocaust are remembered.

Geoffrey Phillips

I think I was born on 1st August 1940 but cannot be certain, in Kazmarok in Slovakia but maybe that is where the birth was registered. I was found with my sister, Edit, in Bergen-Belsen by Dr Bob Collis who brought us to Ireland in 1946 and reared us in his home.

Zoltan Zinn-Collis

I was born in Debrecin in Hungary and my family was amongst the final Jews rounded up and sent on the last cattle truck out of Hungary to the concentration camps. All of my family perished except for my brother, Terry and me. We were adopted by an Irish Jewish family and have lived in Ireland since 1946.

Suzi Diamond

I was born in Piestany, Slovakia in 1935. By sheer luck and circumstances, my mother, brother and I survived the horrors of Bergen-Belsen. For over 55 years I didn’t speak about the dark days and months we spent there. I just couldn’t. In the last couple of years I realised that, as one of the last witnesses, I must speak out.

Tomi Reichental

Their children are Second Generation

Searching for a home...

Grandpa was always a wholehearted supporter of Jabotinsky’s proud, uncompromising nationalist politics, and considered himself a militant Zionist. However, even as the ground of Vilna burned underneath his and his family’s feet he was still inclined – or perhaps Grandma Shlomit inclined him – to seek a new homeland somewhere a little less Asiatic than Palestine and a little more European than ever-darkening Vilna.

During 1930-32 the Klausners attempted to obtain immigration papers for France, Switzerland, America, a Scandinavian country and England. None of these countries wanted them: they all had enough Jews already. “None is too many” ministers in Canada and Switzerland said at the time, and other countries did the same without advertising the fact.

Some eighteen months before the Nazis came to power in Germany, my Zionist grandfather was so blinded by despair at the antisemitism in Vilna that he even applied for German citizenship. Fortunately for us, he was turned down by Germany too. So there they were, these over-enthusiastic Europhiles, who could speak so many of Europe’s languages, recite its poetry, who believed in its moral superiority, appreciated its ballet and opera, cultivated its heritage, dreamed of its post-national unity and adored its manners, clothes and fashions, who had loved it unconditionally and uninhibitedly for decades, since the beginning of the Jewish Enlightenment, and had done everything humanly possible to please it, to contribute to it in every way and in every domain, to become part of it, to break through its cool hostility with frantic courtship, to make friends, to ingratiate themselves, to be accepted, to belong, to be loved…

Extract from A Tale of Love and Darkness by Amos Oz
The plight of the St Louis

On 13 May 1939, the German transatlantic liner St. Louis sailed from Hamburg for Havana, Cuba. Most of the 937 passengers were Jews fleeing the Nazis and planned to remain in Cuba until the US visas they had applied for were issued. The Jews held landing certificates issued by the Cuban Director-General of Immigration, but even before the St Louis arrived in Cuba, President Federico Laredo Bru had revoked all landing documents.

When the St. Louis docked in Havana Harbour on 27 May 1939, the only passengers allowed to go ashore were 6 non-Jews and 22 Jews with valid entry documents. The Cuban media’s agitation against allowing the Jews to disembark, can be explained by the fact that three of the most influential newspapers were owned by the Rivero family, which staunchly supported the Spanish fascist leader, Franco. A huge anti-Semitic rally was held in Havana, addressed by a former Cuban president who urged Cubans to “fight the Jews until the last one is driven out.”

Five days after the St. Louis arrived in Havana, the Cubans ordered the ship out of Cuban waters. The ship sailed so close to Florida that the passengers could see the lights of Miami. President Franklin D. Roosevelt ignored appeals from the passengers, who had all applied for US visas, and the State Department adamantly refused to allow them to land. The St. Louis had no choice but to return to Germany, where some fortunate passengers managed to make their way to Britain, while a few others eventually received their US visas. But when the German army swept across Belgium, Holland and France in May 1940, the majority of the St. Louis passengers who had been so tantalisingly close to safety, were rounded up and shipped to the death camps.

Were they monsters?

We have to recognise that this crime could be repeated. But we do not want to see the perpetrators as normal citizens, it would be easier if they were monsters. We must learn that this is not just about bad guys; a whole society can believe in the extermination of other people. This is why we must continue learning.

Luis Moreno Ocampo, Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court
The Nazi Holocaust

It happened because it could happen; and because it happened once, it can happen again. The Holocaust can be a precedent, or it can become a warning. We ought to do everything in our power to make sure it is a warning, not a precedent.

The Holocaust is on the one hand, a genocide and must be compared with other genocides; on the other hand, it is a unique genocide, with unprecedented – and, so far, unrepeated characteristics.

Nobody threatened Germany in 1939, the economy had risen from the depths of the world economic crisis to almost full employment and prosperity. The Jews had no territory to be coveted, and contrary to legend, German Jews did not control the German economy. The desire to expand to the east and control Europe was motivated by a phantasmagoric racial-biological ideology. The Jews were, from the Nazi point of view, the main enemy. The war was indeed a war against the Jews.

The Holocaust is unprecedented in its global, indeed, universal character. All other genocides were limited geographically. In the case of the Jews, persecution started in Germany but spread all over what the Germans called the German sphere of influence in Europe and then became a policy of total murder. The Germans fully intended to control not just Europe but the world. This meant that Jews would ultimately be hunted down all over the world. This global character of the intended murder of all Jews is unprecedented in human history.

It is its intended totality that sets the Holocaust apart from other genocides. The Nazis were looking for Jews, for all Jews. According to Nazi policy, all persons with three or four Jewish grandparents were sentenced to death for the crime of having been born. Such a policy has never been applied in human history before and would have undoubtedly been applied universally if Germany had won the war.

The extremeness of the Nazi Holocaust – the ideological, global and total character of the genocide of the Jews, is what makes it unprecedented.

We should avoid the term dehumanisation to describe what happened to the inmates of camps and ghettos because, if anything, the term fits the Nazis. What they did to their hapless victims was to transfer their own abandonment of all previous behaviour accepted as ‘civilised’ onto really civilised beings, Jews and others. The common use of the term dehumanisation would leave the perpetrator as the ‘human’ and the victim as less than human. That, indeed, was the intended outcome, but in fact the Nazi treatment of those interned in camps and ghettos showed the opposite, because it was the Nazis who lost the characteristics of civilised human beings.

The Holocaust happened to a particular people for particular reasons at a particular time. All historical events are concrete in this manner: they happen with particular people for particular reasons at particular times. They are not repeated exactly but approximately and with the same characteristics of particularity. And that is exactly what makes them of universal significance. What happened before can happen again. We are all possible victims, possible perpetrators, possible bystanders. With Rwanda, Cambodia, former Yugoslavia, and other places, most of us are bystanders, who have so far learned very little from the past.

The Holocaust is a warning. It adds three commandments to the ten of the Jewish-Christian tradition: Thou shalt not be a perpetrator; Thou shalt not be a passive victim; and Thou most certainly shall not be a bystander. We do not know whether we will succeed in spreading this knowledge. But if there is even a chance in a million that sense should prevail, we have a moral obligation, to try.

From: Rethinking the Holocaust by Yehuda Bauer

Were they monsters?

What I found most shocking was that the Nazi German leaders were normal people!

Telford Taylor, one of the chief prosecutors at the first trial in Nuremberg
Bełżec

This is one of the German extermination camps that was built in Poland during the German occupation. Its construction took five months but it only functioned for nine months, between March and December 1942. In that short period of time, approximately 500,000 Jews were murdered there. Bełżec is much less well-known than Auschwitz. This is partly because in 1942, the camp was demolished on the orders of the Germans who wanted to hide the evidence of their crime. Also, unlike Auschwitz, there were fewer than ten survivors of Bełżec and no great books documenting the horrors of the camp. Today there stands an impressive new monument at Bełżec but when this picture was taken, the monument did not yet exist. This illustration shows what was left of Bełżec after it was demolished – nothing! How would anyone looking at this picture believe what took place on this beautiful calm piece of land? No trace or evidence of any activity, not a stone remaining. Not a soul.

All there is to know about Adolf Eichmann

- Eyes: medium
- Hair: medium
- Weight: medium
- Height: medium
- Distinguishing features: none
- Number of fingers: ten
- Number of toes: ten
- Intelligence: medium

What did you expect?
Talons? Green saliva? Oversize incisors? Madness?

From Flowers for Hitler by Leonard Cohen, 1964
Camp Orchestras

At the concentration and extermination camps, the Nazis created orchestras of prisoner-musicians. These musical ensembles played concerts for the Nazi and SS officers. But most of the time, the orchestras were forced to play classical music while their co-prisoners were marched out each morning and back each evening after ten or twelve hours of gruelling slave labour. Most sadistic of all was the imperative for the orchestras to play as fellow prisoners were herded to the gas chambers or marched to the gallows.

Gina Turgel was born in Krakow in 1923. She survived Plaszow, Auschwitz-Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen. She recalls her arrival at Auschwitz: “The first sight that greeted us as we walked through the massive iron gates into the muddy compound at Auschwitz was a small group of women fiddlers. They came out of a hut on our left hand side, playing their instruments. I remember thinking: ‘this is like a madhouse.’ It was too sweet, too good. I was suspicious because I felt that the sweetness of the music was likely to signify a brutal act. At Auschwitz, every last remnant of respect and dignity was squeezed out of us. In our loose, striped, insect-ridden clothing and with our hair cropped or shaved, we felt completely dehumanised.”

Alma Rosé was a brilliant violinist and niece of the famous composer and conductor, Gustav Mahler. Her family had converted to Christianity to escape persecution as Jews. In 1942 Alma went into hiding, but was betrayed, arrested, and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau where she took charge of a musical ensemble of women inmates. By sheer courage, fortitude, and determination, she turned this motley group into a viable orchestra, driving herself and her musicians to exhaustion. Alma Rosé died in Auschwitz in 1944, probably of typhus.

Fania Fenelon was a member of the women’s orchestra in Auschwitz. In her book Playing for Time, Fenelon recalls that she had to play “gay, light music and marching music for hours on end while our eyes witnessed the marching of thousands of people to the gas chambers and ovens.”

Another musician was Anita Lasker-Wallisch, a German-Jewish girl who was sent to Auschwitz in 1942 when she was aged seventeen. Anita was a cellist and recalls how music played a part in saving her life: “Within a very short time, you were reduced to an absolute nobody – your hair shaved, a number tattooed on your arm, and your clothes taken away. You lost all sense of identity – or dignity, for that matter. The girl who was processing me asked: ‘Where do you come from? and what is the news outside? What did you do before the War?’ I said that I played the cello – I really thought it was rather a stupid thing to say at the time. But she seemed excited. She said: ‘Oh, that is wonderful!’ and told me to wait. She fetched the conductor of the orchestra, Alma Rosé. Instead of being led to the gas chamber, I had a conversation about cello playing and music. It was totally bewildering. Alma Rosé was a very disciplined person. She kept enormous discipline in the orchestra, which at the time we thought was absolutely crazy – but, which, in retrospect, was almost lifesaving for us. We were so busy being frightened of her and whether we played the right notes that we temporarily put ourselves in another world. We didn't look out, if you understand what I mean. If you looked out of the window, you saw the chimneys and the smoke of burning people. And we, in an almost crazy way, concentrated on playing music, playing the right notes.”

Glimpses

After a tough day selecting who'd live or die,  
For light relief Mangele had the camp cellist  
Anita Lasker play him Schumann's Träumerei.  

But in concerts under Mahler’s niece’s baton  
Hints of perfection outside a chimney’s shadow.  

Behind all hopelessness a kind of life went on.  

Depths of survival. Klezmer or jazz or céilí,  
A story squeezes at the edge clamours of music;  
Out of darkest histories, profoundest gaiety.  

A feast of rich food and well-aged wine.  
Visions beyond loosening back into a world  
Too deep and copious for black suns to shine.  

Imagined surprises, surprises beyond our ken.  
Dream and reality feeding circuitries of hope;  
A promise to remember, a promise of never again.  

Micheal O’Siadhail
The fate of Gypsies during the Holocaust

There are no exact statistics of the number of European Gypsies exterminated during the Holocaust. Estimates place the number between 220,000 and 500,000. Lack of documentation on the Gypsies has made it difficult to record their numbers before, during and after the war. Today, the Gypsies are referred to as the Roma or Sinti people.

Deportations of German Gypsies began in May 1940 when 2,800 Gypsies were transported to Lublin, in occupied Poland. In early November 1941, 5,000 Austrian Gypsies were deported to the Łódź ghetto and from there to Chelmno, where they were among the first to be killed in mobile gas vans. In the summer of 1942, German and Polish Gypsies imprisoned in the Warsaw ghetto were deported to Treblinka, where they perished.

In February 1943, approximately 23,000 Gypsies from Germany or territories annexed to the Reich including Bohemia and Moravia, were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. German Gypsies were also deported to ghettos in Bialystok, Cracow, and Radom. As the Nazis swept across Europe, Gypsies from Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, France and Norway were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. 90,000 Gypsies were exterminated in Yugoslavia and hundreds were killed in Poland and Hungary. After Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, special SS killing squads (Einsatzgruppen) and units of the regular army and police began shooting Gypsies as well as Jews in Russia, Poland, and the Balkans.

In western and southern Europe, the fate of Gypsies varied from country to country. Across German-occupied Europe, Gypsies were interned, killed, or deported to camps in Germany or eastern Europe. The collaborationist regime of Vichy France interned 30,000 Gypsies, many of whom were later deported to Dachau, Ravensbrück, Buchenwald, and other camps. In Croatia, members of the local fascist Ustasha movement killed tens of thousands of Gypsies as well as Serbs and Jews. Between 1941 and 1942 in Romania, thousands of Gypsies were expelled to Transnistria (western Ukraine) where most of the deportees died from disease, starvation, and brutal treatment. In Serbia in 1941 German army firing squads killed almost the entire adult male Gypsy population, alongside most adult male Jews.

The Roma, Sinti people have been living in Europe since the fifteenth century sharing a common language, culture and nomadic way of life. The Gypsies were one of the three main groups of victims targeted for destruction by the Nazis.

Greece – The only Jew on Leros

On 19 July 1944, the Germans began rounding up the 2,000 Jews of Rhodes and Kos. After being detained for several days, they were loaded on to barges headed for Athens. During the eight-day journey, the ships stopped at Leros and collected the island’s sole Jewish resident. Once in Athens, the Jews were loaded onto a train; four weeks after the round-up, they reached Auschwitz-Birkenau. Nearly all who had survived the tortuous journey were murdered immediately on arrival.
Dawn came to us like a betrayer; it seemed as though the new sun rose as an ally of our enemies to assist in our destruction. The different emotions that overcame us, of resignation, of futile rebellion, of religious abandon, of fear, of despair, now joined together after a sleepless night in a collective, uncontrolled panic. The time for meditation, the time for decision were over, and all reason dissolved into tumult, across which flashed the happy memories of our homes, still so near in time and space, as painful as the thrusts of a sword.

With the absurd precision to which we later had to accustom ourselves, the Germans held the roll-call. The corporal saluted smartly and confirmed that there were six hundred and fifty ‘pieces’ and that all was in order. They then loaded us on to the buses and took us to the station of Capri. Here the train was waiting for us with our escort for the journey. Here we received the first blows: and it was so new and senseless that we felt no pain, neither in body nor in spirit. Only a profound amazement.

There were twelve goods wagons for six hundred and fifty men; in mine we were only forty-five, but it was a small wagon. Here then, before our very eyes, under our very feet, was one of those notorious transport trains, those which never return, and of which, shuddering and always a little incredulous, we had so often heard speak. Exactly like this, detail for detail: goods wagons closed from the outside, with men, women and children pressed together without pity, like cheap merchandise, for a journey towards nothingness, a journey down there, towards the bottom. This time it is us who are inside. Among the forty-five people in my wagon only four of us saw their homes again; and it was by far the most fortunate wagon.

It was the very discomfort, the blows, the cold, the thirst that kept us aloft in the void of bottomless despair, both during the journey and after. It was not the will to live, nor a conscious resignation; for few are the men capable of such resolution, and we were but a common sample of humanity.

The doors had been closed at once, but the train did not move until evening. We had learnt of our destination with relief. Auschwitz: a name without significance for us at that time, but it at least implied some place on this earth.

Precisely because Auschwitz was a great machine to reduce us to beasts, we must not become beasts; that even in this place one can survive, and therefore one must want to survive, to tell the story, to bear witness; and that to survive we must force ourselves to save at least the skeleton, the scaffolding, the form of civilisation.

We travelled here in the sealed wagons; we saw our women and our children leave towards nothingness; we, transformed into slaves, have marched a hundred times backwards and forwards to our silent labours, killed in our spirit long before our anonymous death. No one must leave here and so carry to the world, together with the sign impressed on his skin, the evil tidings of what man’s presumption made of man in Auschwitz.

We fought with all our strength to prevent the arrival of winter. We clung to all the warm hours, at every dusk we tried to keep the sun in the sky for a little bit longer, but it was all in vain. Yesterday evening the sun went down irrevocably behind a confusion of dirty clouds, chimney stacks and wires, and today it is winter. We know what it means because we were here last winter; and the others will soon learn. It means that in the course of these months, from October until April, seven out of ten of us will die. Whoever does not die will suffer minute by minute, all day every day…
So for us even the hour of liberty rang out grave and muffled and filled our souls with joy and yet with a painful sense of pudency. Nothing could ever happen good and pure enough to rub out our past, and that the scars of the outrage would remain with us forever, and in the memories of those who saw it, and in the places where it occurred and in the stories that we shall tell of it...

We felt we had something to say, enormous things to say, to every single German, and we felt that every German should have something to say to us; we felt an urgent need to settle our accounts, to ask, explain and comment, like chess players at the end of a game. Did ‘they’ know about Auschwitz, about the silent daily massacre, a step away from their doors? If they did, how could they walk about, return home and look at their children, cross the threshold of a church? If they did not, they ought, as a sacred duty, to listen, to learn everything immediately, from us, from me; I felt the tattooed number on my arm burning like a sore.

What did the Germans know about the concentration camps? Outside the concrete fact of their existence, almost nothing. Even today, they know little. Most Germans didn’t know because they didn’t want to know.

In Hitler’s Germany a particular code was widespread: those who knew did not talk; those who did not know did not ask questions; those who did ask questions received no answers. In this way the typical German citizen won and defended his ignorance, which seemed to him sufficient justification of his adherence to Nazism. Shutting his mouth, his eyes and his ears, he built for himself the illusion of not knowing, hence not being an accomplice to the things taking place in front of his very door.

The Nazi camps were the apex, the culmination of Fascism in Europe, its most monstrous manifestation, but Fascism existed before Hitler and Mussolini, and it survived, in open or masked forms, up to the defeat of World War II. In every part of the world, wherever you begin by denying the fundamental liberties of mankind, and equality among people, you move toward the concentration camp system, and it is a road on which it is difficult to halt.

My number is 174517; we have been baptised, we will carry the tattoo on our left arms until we die.

From: *If this is a Man and Truce* by Primo Levi

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**Were they monsters?**

It is everyone’s duty to reflect on what happened. Everybody must know, or remember, that when Hitler or Mussolini spoke in public, they were believed, applauded, admired, adored like gods. We must remember that these faithful followers among them the diligent executors of inhuman orders, were not born torturers, were not (with few exceptions) monsters: they were ordinary men. Monsters exist but they are too few in number to be truly dangerous. More dangerous is the common men, the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions, like Eichmann; like Hoss, the commandant of Auschwitz; like Stangl, commandant of Treblinka.

Primo Levi
Persecution of the Deaf

A long tradition of antisemitism in Christian Europe laid the groundwork for the popular acquiescence to the isolation of the Jews. But only the transformation of religious into racial antisemitism during the nineteenth century made possible the exclusion of the Jews regardless of their commitment to German Culture. Their heredity, and not their culture, determined their fate. The same applied to the Gypsies. The disabled made up the third target of the Nazi policy of exclusion. Alongside Jews and Gypsies, people with physical and intellectual disabilities were designated as unfit – to be eliminated from the German national community. Amongst these, deafness is listed.

The extermination of deaf people in the Third Reich cannot be ignored. Deaf people were a sociocultural minority that Nazi racial hygiene theorists wanted removed from society. Deaf Germans were not racially intact or hereditarily fit, according to German eugenicists. They come under the category of unfit or unworthy of life.

The Jewish Deaf in Germany

When the Nazis took power in Germany, Jewish deaf people were the first group to be delivered to a power apparatus specifically created for their extermination. Initially it was not from brown-uniformed hearing persons, well known to them from daily encounters that they suffered harassment, denunciation, curses and persecution, but from their fellow deaf, the Nazi deaf. Soon after the general seizure of power and with brutal force, the deaf Nazi leaders went to work to expel Jews from deaf associations. In The Jewish Review (Judische Rundschau) of 15 August 1933 we are informed: By order of the Reich association for the German deaf, all deaf Jewish members are to be expelled from the associations. Through this measure they also lost the right to their monthly subsidy, as they did from all other social welfare protection.

A time of terrible suffering began for the Jewish deaf who were still in Germany, a time that only a few would survive. Most were deported and sent to the camps. They were never heard from again. Some went into hiding and survived with the help of non-Jewish Germans.
Deaf people in Germany under the Third Reich had nowhere to turn for support. The church played its part in acquiescing to the Reich’s demands:

Extract from a letter from the Pastors of the Protestant Deaf, Reich Union.

The authorities have ordered that whoever is hereditarily diseased shall have no more children in the future, for our German fatherland needs healthy and sound persons.

Many persons, from birth onwards, have severe disabilities or afflictions. Some have defective hands, arms or feet. Others are so weak mentally that they cannot attend school. Still others are blind. And you, dear friend, you are afflicted with deafness. How burdensome it is! You are often sad because of it. Certainly you must often have asked, “why do I have to be deaf?” And how unhappy your parents must have been, when they first learned that you could not hear!

There are deaf children whose father or mother is also deaf. There are deaf persons whose grandparents were deaf, too. They have inherited this affliction. They are hereditarily diseased.

To such persons the authorities say: You should not transmit this affliction to your children or grandchildren. You must remain childless.

If you suffer from hereditary deafness, you will receive a summons from the hereditary health court. The court will judge whether you should ever have children. One thing above all others: You must tell the truth when you are asked. God wishes this of you! You must tell the truth even if it is disagreeable.

Now, this is where the authorities want to help you. They want to protect you from transmitting your affliction.

But, you will say that this is unpleasant, very unpleasant. Because people will talk if I am sterilised. They will scorn me. No, you should not think in this way. The authorities have ordered: No one may speak about sterilisation. Not even you yourself. Take note: You are to tell no one about this! No even your relatives. And the doctor and the judge, they too must keep silent.

Obey the authorities. Obey even when it is difficult for you. Think of the future of your people and make the sacrifice that is asked of you. Trust in God and don’t forget the words of the Bible: We know that all things turn out for the best for those who love God.

Righteous Amongst the Nations

In early 1943, the pace of deportations quickened and, thousands of Jews fell victim to the night raids. But at this late hour, there were also Germans who would not give in. One of these was Otto Weidt, a little man with a lined face, who ran a small factory on Rosenthalerstrasse in Berlin, where blind and deaf Jews worked. Documents show that over the course of the Reich years he employed 165 disabled Jews, hid 65 of them and looked after their food, shelter and various amenities. He was arrested eleven times by the Gestapo, and had his premises searched 52 times between 1940 and 1945. Weidt had the heart of a lion and great human compassion. He fought for the life of each Jew who had sought refuge in his house or workshop, and 27 of those protected by him survived the war years.
Warsaw – before, during and after the Holocaust

Before

Jewish communities lived throughout continental Europe for hundreds of years prior to the Nazi rise to power. These communities stretched as far north as Norway and Sweden, as far south as Greece and Rhodes, as far east as the Baltic States and Russia and as far west as Britain and Ireland. There were large Jewish communities in Russia (2.5 million) and in Poland (3 million).

Jews are believed to have lived in Poland for approximately 1000 years prior to World War II. During the upheavals of the Middle Ages that included The Black Death and the Crusades, Jews from neighbouring countries escaped to Poland to flee persecution. At that time, Poland was tolerant and forward-thinking. In 1264 Jews were given freedom to worship, trade, speak their own language (Yiddish), and to follow Talmudic Law. With their separate language and Polish spoken with a strong accent, Jews were easy to identify.

Before World War II, the Jewish communities of Poland numbered approximately three and a half million. They were broadly divided into three groups: Zionists, Orthodox, and the Bund. At the outbreak of World War II, the Jews of Poland participated in every walk of Polish life. At the end of the war, more than three million had perished in the Holocaust.

The population of Warsaw before World War II was 1,300,000 including 380,000 Jews (the largest Jewish community in Poland), who accounted for 30% of the city’s population.

During

In November 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Jewish bank accounts were frozen, Jewish houses confiscated, Jewish workplaces and shops were shut down. Jewish schools and synagogues were closed, prayer gatherings in houses were forbidden, sick Jews in hospital were expelled. In 1940 the Nazis introduced armbands for Jews, a blue Star of David on a white background. Notices appeared prohibiting Jews from public places.

In October 1940, the Nazis issued a decree establishing the Jewish Residential District (The Warsaw Ghetto) in the North-West of the city. The Nazis drove the Jewish inhabitants and Gypsies of Warsaw and surrounding towns and villages into this concentrated area from which they were forbidden to leave. The ghetto was divided into two areas, joined by a bridge that crossed Chlodna Street. It was sealed off on 16 November 1940.

At its peak, the Warsaw Ghetto housed 450,000 Jews. Officially, in had an administration, in the form of the Jewish Council (Judenrat), led by Adam Czerniakow. This was a sham, however, as only Nazi orders were carried out. The Nazis hoped to exterminate the ghetto’s inhabitants by conducting a reign of terror and creating appalling living conditions. They took over Jewish factories and introduced slave labour. By July 1942 over 100,000 people had died in the Warsaw Ghetto from starvation, cold and disease. Those left were transported in their thousands to extermination camps.

After 1941, Jewish ghettos in other parts of Poland were liquidated. Word about the destruction of the Jews in other cities reached the Warsaw Ghetto where it was fully understood that deportation to the East meant murder.

In March 1942, the Nazis began to actively destroy the population of the Ghetto, transporting over 300,000 to gas chambers at Treblinka.
On the 19th April 1943, realising their fate, a group of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto rose up against their Nazi oppressors, determined to die with honour. The desperate Jewish Uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto was led by Mordechai Anielewicz. 7,000 Jews died in the uprising which lasted until May 1943. At the end, the Nazis razed the Warsaw Ghetto to the ground, the vast majority of its population was murdered or transported to the death camps. There were few survivors.

In 1944, the non-Jewish population of Warsaw finally rebelled against the tyrannical occupation of the Nazis. The Nazis knew that their days were numbered as the Russians approached from the East, but they were determined to quell any dissent. Between 1 August and 2 October 1944, Polish troops resisted the German-led forces, leaving 18,000 Polish soldiers dead and 25,000 wounded. Over 250,000 civilians died in this conflict, mostly in mass executions conducted by German troops. Acting on Hitler’s orders, German forces burned the city systematically, block after block, destroying an estimated 85% of it. The Russians did indeed reach the outskirts of Warsaw but watched impassively from the banks of the Vistula river as the citizens of Warsaw struggled to repel the Nazis.

After

In December 1970, the Chancellor of Germany, Willy Brandt, visited Poland. He asked pardon for the terrible atrocities committed by the German people during the Holocaust.

Today, the number of Jews living in Poland is about 6,000. The large, vibrant communities have disappeared. Synagogues and Jewish cemeteries have fallen into disrepair.

There is, however, a movement of Jewish revival which is restoring synagogues, cemeteries and opening Jewish schools. The Jewish presence in the history of Warsaw has left its mark in many places in the city. The Jewish people were an important and integral part of its development and history. Today, the boundaries of the Jewish Ghetto of Warsaw are marked on street corners with inscribed black basalt stone.

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Inscribed basalt stone marking a corner of the Jewish Ghetto in Warsaw 1940-1943.

Righteous Amongst the Nations

Thousands of ordinary Polish people risked their lives to help save Jews during the Nazi occupation. They hid them in churches, convents and monasteries. They sheltered them on farms, in their homes and in their places of work. They hid them in forests and fed them clandestinely. All of these people from all walks of life have been awarded the title of Righteous Amongst the Nations by Yad Vashem the Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem, Israel. There are over 20,000 Righteous from all over the world who put their own lives at risk to save Jews during the Holocaust. The majority of them are from Poland.
The Fall of France

In 1938, France made an attempt to appease Nazi aggression by signing the Munich Pact but after Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, Britain and France declared war against Germany.

In 1940 Paris was occupied by the Nazis and France officially surrendered to Germany on 24 June of that year.

The country was divided into two regions: the northern part including Paris, under direct German military rule; the southern so-called 'Free Zone', under the command of Marshall Pétain, a First World War hero, considered a puppet of the Nazis. On the 10 July 1940, the new French state was formally ratified giving Pétain full executive and legislative powers without restriction. The small spa town of Vichy would never again be remembered as a pleasant holiday destination but rather, as the home of a shameful political régime.

Drancy and the fate of French Jews during World War II

In Paris, Adolf Eichmann’s staff began their programme of isolating French Jews – first registering them, then establishing an ‘Anti-Jewish Institute’ for propaganda against them. Jews were put under a curfew, forced to wear yellow Stars of David, and were banned from theatres, cinemas, shops and other public places. In 1941 the transit camp at Drancy was set up in a northern suburb of Paris in preparation for deportations to the East. Designed to hold 700, at its peak Drancy held 7,000. In March 1942, the first convoy of 1,112 Jews was deported to concentration camps in Poland and Germany.

In both the occupied and the ‘free’ zones of France, the Nazis used French police to carry out their plans for the Jews. The Vichy regime needed no encouragement. From

The round-up of 14 May 1941: foreign born Jews at Austerlitz station in Paris, about to board the train for internment camps. They were allowed to take with them only what they could carry.
October 1940, Jews were barred from public, social, and economic life and their property and businesses were 'Aryanised'. 30,000 foreign Jewish refugees were imprisoned in camps where the able-bodied were drafted for work battalions. There were a number of other transit and concentration camps created throughout France, run by the French police.

Eventually they were transferred to Drancy where French police immediately separated the children from their parents. The parents were transported to Auschwitz where most of them were gassed. Many of the children stayed several weeks in Drancy, where large numbers of them died through lack of care or adequate food. Finally, they were all taken to the Gare d’Austerlitz in the centre of Paris where they were loaded into cattle trucks and sent directly to Auschwitz where most of them were gassed upon arrival. Only 811 Jews survived the round up of Le Grand Rafle. More than a quarter of the 42,000 French Jews sent to Auschwitz in 1942 were deported from Vel d’Hiv. More than 6,000 Jewish children from all the regions of France were arrested and transported to their deaths between 17 July and 30 September, 1942. These events demonstrate the collaboration of the Vichy regime and the French police during the Holocaust in which it is estimated that 25 percent of French Jews perished.

For more than 40 years, the French Government refused to admit the responsibility of the Pétain regime and the French police in the deportation of French Jews. In 1995, in a speech in memory of the victims of the “Grande Rafle”, President Chirac finally acknowledged the role played by the Vichy regime during the War.

The Great Raid of the Velodrome d’Hiver (Le Grand Rafle de Vel’ d’Hiv’)

As deportations increased, an infamous round up took place in Paris on 16/17 July 1942. French police forces arrested 12,884 Jews – including 4,051 children. They were brought to the Velodrome d’Hiver, a stadium in Paris designed for cycle races. They were kept there for five miserable days without any food or medical care. Parisians living nearby could hear the wailing and screaming day and night.

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The Anguish of Liberation

…The camp guard who came to open the gate said: “You are free and you can leave.”

All the guards with the dogs that used to stand in every corner had disappeared. It was all gone, as though it had never been. It was one of the miracles! The Russians entered, and we were in such a condition that no one moved, no one went out. We did not laugh, were not happy, we were apathetic – and the Russians came. A general came in, he was Jewish. He told us that he was delighted, as this was the first camp in which he had found people still alive.

He started to cry: but we didn’t. He wept, and we didn’t.

Testimony of Bela Braver, born in Poland 1913, deported to Auschwitz and liberated at Lichtewerden, Czechoslovakia by the Red Army.
Jacob Cukier

Jacob Cukier, a 9-year-old French child from a Polish Jewish family, was hidden during the war by a French family in the village of Bollene. After France surrendered to Germany in June 1940, the unoccupied southern zone of France, that included Bollene, was known as Vichy. While officially neutral, Vichy actively collaborated with the Nazis.

Sixty years after the end of the war, Jacob returned to Bollene to honour the memory of George and Marie-Angèle Charmaison, who had hidden him during the German occupation. Here are some excerpts from his address:

"The Charmaison family saved my life at great peril to their own. Last year, after several years of effort, I finally succeeded in getting Yad Vashem to award them, posthumously, the Righteous Among the Nations medal.

In September 1939, my father, an immigrant from Poland, volunteered to serve in the Polish section of the French army, and in February 1940 he was stationed in Bollene, where my mother and I joined him. In June 1940, after the defeat of the French Army, my father presented himself to the Marseille police station, in the belief that he would be demobilised. He was unaware of one of the armistice clauses, whereby Poles were to be considered prisoners of war. He had volunteered for the French Army, and was now regarded as a prisoner of the French Police. Realising his mistake, he jumped out of the window and escaped on foot to Bollene.

The mayor, Mr Marius Cuillerai, allocated us a small plot of land to cultivate. My father worked in a factory, and I went to school where I had lots of friends, some of whom are here today. The persecution of Jews began in June 1941, but my father refused to register us as Jews as the law demanded. Since we did not figure on any documentation, his attitude was: If they want us, they will have to find us.

In September 1942, my Aunt Sarah Hendl Strausman was arrested by the French police in front of my eyes. She managed to get a letter to us from the Rivesaltes camp, but she was deported from Drancy on 16 September on convoy number 33 for Auschwitz. We never heard of her again.

It is thanks to Georges and Marie-Angèle Charmaison and the complicit silence of other good people, that my parents and I managed to escape deportation. Many people must have suspected that we were Jews. No one denounced us, and in the local church, the priest had the courage to denounce the deportations of innocent Jews.

In November 1942, Anglo-American forces landed in North Africa. Hitler ordered the invasion of the Occupied Zone, and a thousand Italian troops arrived in our district. But instead of persecuting the Jews, they actually protected us from our own authorities. In September 1943, with the capitulation of the Italians, German troops took their place, and suddenly, the risk of arrest and deportation became a daily danger.

In order to survive, we had to hide. But where? Thanks to Dr Marianne Basch, a doctor who later became my gynaecology professor, and other good souls, Jewish children were taken in by Christian families. These people were risking their lives. They were in danger of being denounced. Some of them were indeed arrested and deported to Buchenwald, never to return.

I don't know the exact date that I was taken into hiding on the farm of Georges and Marie-Angèle Charmaison, where I stayed for two years. I had to change my name, and found myself with a family I did not know. My parents were hidden by another family nearby, and my parents used to take a walk close to our farm so that they could see me from a distance. We never dared exchange a word. I was always on the lookout for danger. As soon as I spied the police, I would climb into the loft and hide.

I was aged 9, and I actually have happy memories of my time on the farm. The Charmaines were the grandparents I never knew. Life was good. No school. No parents to tell you what to do. Whenever visitors came, I went to hide in the back. Georges used to teach me about the night sky, and I still remember all the names he taught me. When the Allied advance reached Bollene, we were liberated by American troops on 26 August 1944, and I was reunited with my parents.

How can I define the conduct of Georges and Marie-Angèle Charmaison? Heroism? Courage? Yes, but maybe it was simply that they could not look on when their neighbour was in danger. I think that their attitude can be summed up in the Biblical phrase, Love your neighbour as yourself. Their actions, and the actions of all those who put their lives at risk to hide Jews, were the practical application of the Talmudic maxim: Whoever saves a life, has saved the entire universe."
The Righteous Among the Nations

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**TOTAL PERSONS** 21,310

These figures are not necessarily an indication of the actual number of Jews saved in each country, but reflect material on rescue operations made available to Yad Vashem.

The Netherlands includes two persons originally from Indonesia.

The Danish Underground requested that all its members who participated in the rescue of the Jewish community, not be listed individually but as one group.
My brother’s Bar-mitzvah

We are huddled wrapped in blankets freezing and trying to get some heat. We are in Belgen-Belsen concentration camp, it is December 1944, the winter is biting. How did we get to this hellish place?, inmates are starving and dying all around us.

My brother Miki will soon be Bar-Mitzvah, he is 13 years old and I am only 9 years old. Our childhood has been taken away from us, the only thing on our minds is to stay alive.

We had a nice life in Slovakia until 1939, when the new Slovak fascist government began to enact anti-Jewish legislation. Then in rapid succession came a series of decrees restricting Jews from all levels of Slovak society. Despite the fact that our family had lived in Slovakia for several generations, we became aliens in our own country. As children from the age of six we had to wear yellow stars so that everyone would recognise us as Jews.

In early 1942 the fascist Slovak government began to expel and deport Jews to Auschwitz.

We managed to avoid arrest and deportation for nearly two years while we were in hiding, and my Father had to bribe many officials. We even considered converting to Christianity to save ourselves. Following a national uprising by the Slovaks against the fascist-led government in mid-1944, Slovakia was occupied by the German army. From that moment, with the ruthlessness and efficiency of the Nazi machine to eliminate the remainder of Slovak Jewry, our fate was sealed.

The Gestapo was everywhere, and eventually in November 1944 we were apprehended. We were then deported to a detention camp where, within a couple of days, we faced the selection. Selection was the cruelest way to set families apart, the men to one side and the mothers, children and the old to the other side. By Nazi standards, the age of thirteen was considered adult. Our Mother’s decision at this moment was the most important; my brother’s thirteenth birthday was to be in December. When faced with the question of his age at the selection by the German officer she retorted “he is only twelve years old” therefore he was not parted from us. If she had let him go with the men, he would have been sent to Buchenwald concentration camp as a slave labourer and most likely, he would have perished like my Uncles who were sent with the men’s group.

The next miracle was that our transport consisting of mothers and children from Slovakia was the first transport which did not go to Auschwitz. After seven days of gruelling travel in cattle trucks, we arrived at Belgen-Belsen concentration camp. We were in hell, but we did not end in the Auschwitz gas chambers!

Here we were in this terrible place and my brother was approaching his Bar-Mitzvah. In the Jewish religion, when a boy reaches the age of thirteen he celebrates his Bar-Mitzvah which marks his transformation from childhood to adulthood. This great tradition is always celebrated.

It is now 18 December 1944, my brother’s thirteenth birthday. By tradition we must celebrate his Bar-Mitzvah in some small way. It is cold, we are hungry and sitting in a large unfriendly room on our bunk beds, blankets around us, huddling together to keep warm. Just by chance the small stove in the corner of the room had wood burning in it. Mysteriously, several potatoes appeared which were sliced and put on the stove to bake. The smell was glorious! Suddenly a female friend of the family entered the room and in her hand she carried a small cake with one candle in the centre. The cake was made from the camp’s black bread which had been cut in slices, spread with margarine and layered to resemble a cream cake. To make this cake, our friend saved her rations for at least two days which meant she went hungry to give some happiness to my brother. This was the nicest cake we could wish for at this moment in time! The gloom lifted and celebratory humour ensued with Mazeltov wishes, embraces, kisses and well-wishing from friends. This is how my brother crossed from childhood to adulthood.

When I think today of this event, it is unbelievable under those conditions that we managed in a very small way something so precious. The big present to my brother was that he survived. We fulfilled a very important Jewish tradition.

Tomi Reichental, Ireland, survivor of Bergen Belsen, and cousin Chava Shelach
In 1942 my widowed mother and five brothers, Sigmund, Kurt, Walter, Herbert and Fritz, were deported from Vienna to Minsk in the former USSR. From evidence given in the post-war Criminal Trials we know what they, with thousands of other Austrian Jews, endured before they were finally shot or gassed. I am grateful for this opportunity to remember publicly and in print, their suffering when they were initially incarcerated in the Minsk ghetto and then transferred to the labour/death camp in the village of Maly Trostinec.

This camp was built by Soviet prisoners-of-war and Jewish slave labour. Conditions for the prisoners were extremely harsh and their treatment was brutal. They were housed in damp barracks and slept on straw in three-tiered bunks made from thick, unshaved planks with no bedding or mattresses. The camp staff were free to beat, shoot or hang any prisoner on their own authority alone. A subterranean bunker was built with a Nazi tank standing above it. Those who were to be killed next day were held in the bunker.

Murder at Maly Trostinec was committed mainly by shooting prisoners in the forests surrounding the village. Before they were killed, the victims had to undress and hand over their possessions, then march in their underwear to the 60m long and 3m deep pits where they were shot by the SS. To cover the shots and the screams, music was played from a gramophone, amplified by a loudspeaker.

Maly Trostinec had no permanent gas chambers but a further contribution to the Nazi’s “Final Solution for the Jewish Problem” was made by the use of mobile gas vans. In May 1943, 500 victims were murdered every day in the gas vans which went daily to and from Minsk and Maly Trostinec.

Five of my family were spared the unspeakable ordeal of ghetto living, imprisonment and violent death. At 16 my eldest sister, Elli, went to live with relatives in the USA. My 13 and 14 year old brothers, Ernst and Erich, went to live on farms in Denmark, and my 9 year old sister, Rose, and I aged 7, came to England (separately and unbeknown to each other for several years) under the auspices of the Jewish Children’s Refugee Organisation.

That we five grew into relatively unscarred and useful citizens was due to many people – Jewish and non-Jewish – whose aim, whether acting from religious or humanitarian motives, was to minimise the trauma of family separation and loss for us and for hundreds of other Refugee Children. People such as the Danish branch of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom arranged for 25 Viennese boys to be looked after and trained by Danish farming families. Regional Committees were also set up all over the UK to raise money and find accommodation for others. My sister lived happily with a Yorkshire Baptist family until she joined our older sister in America. Again a local Voluntary Committee set up in Sevenoaks, Kent – the epitome of ‘middle England’ – raised money to bring me and five other children out of Europe, and to guarantee the £50 per child asked for by the British Government who had arranged the mechanics of our escape.

Homes and hearts were opened to us. Many children, like myself, stayed with our ‘adopting’ family through school, university, marriage and parenthood. For me, these new, kind and loving relationships blurred the picture of a small, smiling woman surrounded by several boys all waving as the train pulled out of Vienna station. Even so, during sleep there have always been chinks in the protective layer of acquiescence and acceptance that mask the bewilderment and hurt which are allowed to surface only in dreams. High-roofed buildings like Victorian railway stations, journeys, chase and escape, frightening darkness and reassuring light are recurring symbols. A red ball, smoked cheese sandwiches, and a little brown cardboard case accompanied me on the journey across Europe. Small wonder that in waking life I still treasure (and share with anyone in the family undertaking a potentially difficult journey), the Miraculous Medal of the Virgin given to me by the nuns who looked after me.

Inge Radford, Ireland
Many people in Ireland know some details about the Holocaust, but most won’t know what it’s like to be a child of Holocaust survivors. I grew up in Canada; both of my parents had been in the camps – my mother (who is still alive) in Auschwitz, and my father (who passed away seven years ago) in Mauthausen and elsewhere. He had the tattoo ‘KL’ (Konzentrationslager) on his wrist, and his prisoner number was 85353; my mother has a number imprinted on her arm: A17074. My parents displayed some of the psychological symptoms that are common among the 850,000 Jews who survived: chronic anxiety, fear of renewed persecution, depression, recurring nightmares, an inability to experience great pleasure, social withdrawal, fatigue, an inability to concentrate, irritability, and a hostile and mistrustful attitude towards the world. They often chose partners who had endured similar experiences, because they believed that only such people could possibly understand what it had been like during that long nightmare. Their continued suffering became a means of bearing witness.

I was an only child, adopted at birth after my mother had suffered the added nightmare of bearing two stillborn children – both dead in the womb. As a result, I was a prized possession – a gift from God, a vital link in a broken chain, who needed to be cherished and loved, and constantly reminded of my good fortune compared with their deprivation. My parents became totally involved in every aspect of my life, and I was intensely aware, from my earliest memories, of their suffering. I went to a Jewish school in Toronto, where a number of my friends were also children of survivors. We rarely spoke about it openly; nevertheless at school we were reminded in various classes and assemblies about what the Nazis did to our people, so that the Holocaust became inescapable. The school instilled in us a tremendous need to succeed and to prove ourselves; perhaps these feelings were accentuated in kids of survivors. Pain and loss were central components of our identities, and we developed added strength to try harder and do well.

As a teenager growing up with parents who were excessively interested in everything I did, it was impossible to have privacy or to have an escape. When I brought friends over (male or female) we wound up eating a great deal, and then talking to my mother in the living room. Maybe her interest was accentuated because she didn’t have an adolescence; she was sixteen when Hitler invaded Poland, and so through me she enjoyed years that were lost to her. My needs seemed to be diminished in the face of her horrible suffering, which included sexual humiliation at the hands of Dr Josef Mengele, the ‘Angel of Death’, who performed the selections on the railway platform at Auschwitz. It was difficult to exercise independence and challenge my parents’ entrenched views. They were more worried, more prohibiting, and more careful than non-survivor parents. They were also outwardly different: they spoke English with a heavy accent, often broke spontaneously into Yiddish (which I myself speak), and talked openly about their European past. Everything was punctuated by the upheaval of 1939-45: when they talked about the past, events were dated either before the War, or after the War.

The more I came to learn about the Holocaust, the more I associated with my parents’ pain and vulnerability. I often vividly projected myself into their position, imagining myself having a parent or other relation killed by the Nazis, being followed in the street and taunted, rounded up for deportation, arriving at Auschwitz and smelling the crematoria, or taken to the gas chamber. I was jealous of my non-survivor friends who had grandparents; all I had from my dead ones was a name given to me as a reminder, to make up for lost family.
I watched a great deal of TV as a kid, and became excited while watching Nazi war movies. I wanted the British or Americans to win, but still imagined what it was like to wear an SS uniform and have such absolute power over others. I was fascinated by the grotesque photos of the camps. My imagination was also occupied with my father’s persona: I saw him as ‘tough’, and a good role model. I remember the heroic or triumphant aspects of his experience; he built tunnels in the mountains of Austria so that the Germans could store munitions. It was, of course, slave labour; but I still felt pride in what he did; this was reinforced when I visited the place myself. It proved to me how and why he could be such an indefatigable worker at his job in Canada; but it also taught me that activity was an opportunity to seem normal, and avoid feeling.

When I go to Toronto, my mum remarks that she reads the Jewish newspaper because it is the source of all relevant information concerning reparation payments to survivors. In the 1950s, the German government had set up a scheme for payments which involved survivors’ undergoing medical and psychiatric evaluations at the hands of German doctors, in order to establish a connection between physical symptoms and Nazi persecution. I can remember being dragged to these doctors and to German lawyers as a child, not quite understanding what this was all for, or why I was there. My father did get regular reparation; but my mother did not. Now in a nursing home, she has only lately been compensated in a very minor way – a case of too little, too late. I have also discovered in recent years that my mother deals very well with death; I think it’s because she has seen so much of it – primarily during the war, when her own mother was shot before her, and now with the deaths of many of her elderly friends and family. There was passionate involvement and commitment in every area of my life, but it was just a wee bit out of proportion. Now, as my mother ages, I have an intense desire to protect her from a complex world that looks for the quick fix, the easy solution; but it’s just not that simple. Yes – the Holocaust has had a lasting effect on me; but growing up with survivors was not bad: it was powerful, zestful, never indifferent, and our family home was always filled with love.

Sometimes I feel like the family hearse, ferrying around the memory of the dead. That’s a heavy burden, which I don’t wish to pass on to others. We need to move beyond the oppressive and retarding weight of the Holocaust, in order to make it activating and facilitative. In order to learn from the past and provide a lesson for today, let us admire survivors for their heightened sensitivity towards individuals and society: their sense of justice with respect to individual and minority rights. Let us learn with their children to be open about ourselves, to build relationships of trust, cooperation, and mutuality as independent individuals with a bright future. Let us use the Holocaust not as a dead weight arousing anxiety and fear, but as a source of light to transmit our heritage to coming generations, and to measure how far we have come in treating our fellow human beings with dignity and respect.

Leon Litvack
Reflections on Anne Frank

Zoltan Zinn-Collis is a survivor of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp living in Ireland. He visited the Anne Frank exhibition, in Galway, 2006.

I have been living here in Ireland, since 1946, and delight in calling myself, the Slovak Irish Paddy.

I was brought here as a war-orphan, refugee, asylum-seeker, displaced-person, call me what you will, for the names are not important.

I came here from Bergen Belsen, one of approximately 1,700 Nazi concentration camps, this one in the North of Germany. This is the same camp in which Anne died. I cannot say if we met, we may have, for we were there at the same time. Anne, who was around twelve years old, and I about four and a half, had committed a terrible crime. We had Jewish connections!

Anne, of the black-hair, and the diary, some of which is reproduced here for us to see, did not survive that camp. She became a number, as did my mother, one of approximately twenty-thousand bodies waiting to be buried after the 15th of April in 1945. Anne did not get to live as I have, but in her diaries and in the tale she has to tell, she and millions like her, will never be forgotten.

This was more than sixty years ago, some time in the last century, during the Second World War; sadly there have been so many wars since. There has been ethnic-cleansing, genocide, mass-murder and mutilations. Rape and pillage, starvation and famine, dress it up in fancy names, and call it what you will. But we as a people, still have not learnt, and the question of course is, will we ever?

With the diaries of Anne Frank, and the testimony of people such as me, we have a chance to learn and to listen. Anne is long dead, but she has left her diary for us. A few of us are still left who survived what Anne could not. We must bear eye-witness and testimony, to what took place so long ago.

Now we also have the Holocaust Educational Trust here in our own Ireland, to help us to better understand, what is antisemitism or racism, in all their different forms. The Trust will help us learn and to understand how evil was allowed to flourish, while the world looked on in silence. The Trust will help us learn the importance of tolerance and respect.

And while we have the Trust and survivors such as me, it is for us, the living, using what means we can, with the help of exhibitions such as this, to keep the memory of Anne and what she stood for alive and the other twelve million people in our minds, for then they can never be really dead.

Zoltan Zinn-Collis

“I want to go on living even after my death! And therefore I am grateful to God for giving me this gift, this possibility of developing myself and of writing, of expressing all that is in me.”

Anne Frank

The Holocaust Educational Trust of Ireland educates and informs about the Holocaust in order to address antisemitism and all forms of racism and intolerance in Ireland.
Go home from this place...

Our generation, and the generation or two after us, will be the last that will be able to say that we stood and shook the hands of some of those who survived.

Go home from this place and tell your children and your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren that today in Listowel, you looked into eyes that witnessed the most cataclysmic events ever unleashed by mankind upon mankind.

Tell them that you met people who will still be remembered and still talked about and still wept over 10,000 years from now – because if they are not, there will be no hope for us at all.

The Holocaust happened and it can happen again, and every one of us, if only out of our own sense of self-preservation, has a solemn duty to ensure that nothing like it ever occurs again.

Paddy Fitzgibbon
at the unveiling of the Holocaust memorial in Listowel, Co. Kerry, Ireland 1995
Holocaust Memorial Day

HONOURED GUESTS
Mrs Suzi Diamond – Bergen-Belsen
Mr Tommie Reichental – Bergen-Belsen
Mr Geoffrey Phillips – Kindertransport
Mrs Doris Segal – Sudetenland
Mr Zoltan Zinn-Collins – Bergen-Belsen
Mrs Rosel Siev – Auriach, Germany
Inge Radford – Vienna

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I'VE GOTTA TELL YA, MISTER... THAT'S AN AWFULY BORING TATTOO ON YOUR ARM. IT'S JUST A BUNCH OF NUMBERS

WELL, I WAS ABOUT YOUR AGE WHEN I GOT IT, AND I KEPT IT AS A REMINDER

OH... A REMINDER OF HAPPIER TIMES?

NO... OF A TIME WHEN THE WORLD WENT MAD

"IMAGINE YOURSELF IN A LAND WHERE YOUR COUNTRYMEN FOLLOWED THE VOICE OF POLITICAL EXTREMISTS WHO DIDN'T LIKE YOUR RELIGION. IMAGINE HAVING EVERYTHING TAKEN FROM YOU, YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY SENT TO A CONCENTRATION CAMP AS SLAVE LABORERS, THEN SYSTEMATICALLY MURDERED. IN THIS PLACE, THEY EVEN TAKE YOUR NAME AND REPLACE IT WITH A NUMBER TATTOOED ON YOUR ARM.

IT WAS CALLED THE HOLOCAUST, WHEN MILLIONS OF PEOPLE PERISHED JUST BECAUSE OF THEIR FAITH..."

SO, YOU KEPT IT TO REMIND YOURSELF ABOUT THE RIMINGS OF POLITICAL EXTREMISM?

NO, MY DEAR. TO REMIND YOU..."
Holocaust
MEMORIAL DAY

Dublin
January 2007