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CANADIAN HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS: FROM LIBERATION TO REBIRTH

And the surviving remnant of the House of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors.

(II Kings 19: 30-31)

All through the years of hiding in an attic near Tarnow, Israel Unger had listened as his parents discussed the future. They believed that they were the only Jews left alive in Poland. “We felt,” he recalled, “that we would be an oddity. We felt that after the war, Jews from America would come and take us to America and we would be sort of taken around and shown as the only Jews that had survived in Poland.”¹ The reality was much different. Not only was there the immense task of reclaiming physical and emotional health, those few who had survived found they had nowhere to go. For the *She’erit Ha-Peletah*, the Saved Remnant, the road to Canada was strewn with obstacles.²

Nathan Leipziger, a teenager who survived the camps with his father, described the psychological struggle he faced at Liberation. “You just felt, felt very, very empty....Up to this point you’re only thinking of survival,” Nate explained. “You’re not thinking of your mother, your sister, your aunts, just everybody that was around you. [I was] suddenly confronted with the reality... who was there to go to? Who was left? And, you know,

you're happy to be free, but we realized what has happened to us, what happened to all those thousands and millions of people that we were with, and the suffering we went through."³

Once they had begun to face the burden of survival, most survivors focused their limited energies towards finding their families.

Many Western Europeans and Hungarians went home to stay. Others returned to their homes to search for relatives, fully aware that there was no future among the collaborators who had been their neighbours. In cities and towns across Europe, Jews scanned the walls of community buildings where survivors posted their names and locations. They met every train, praying a familiar face would appear. More often than not, survivors encountered hostility and violence. They saw their murdered parents' clothing worn by strangers. "It was an extremely lonely life," Michael Rosenberg recalled, "because when one comes back to...one's own ground and you find everything so strange, not the same sights, not the same feeling, you sort of try to forget what was in the past and you carry on with your new realities."⁴ Reclaiming property was often a long, futile and dangerous process. Between 1944 and 1947, fifteen hundred to two thousand Jews who returned to Poland were murdered by Poles and Ukrainians. Individuals and small groups were attacked, sometimes pulled from trains; Jewish institutions were bombed. There were pogroms in twelve Polish cities, culminating in July 1946 with the murder of forty-two and wounding of a hundred survivors in Kielce.

I

The search for new homes had begun. Canadian Jews received heartbreaking letters from their surviving relatives. Leah Nisengarten heard from her two orphaned nieces that her entire extended family had perished. "You will of course be anxious to know how we survived the tempest in Poland," Sala and Necha Kaufman wrote the sixty-six year old. "If [we] were to write

about everything we went through and of all our sufferings, then all the oceans would have to be turned into ink...When we were finally set free, we found ourselves totally orphaned and saw that we have no one to live for. But regardless of all this, when we were so broken up spiritually, we reminded ourselves that we do have someone to live for. That we have our beloved mother's sister who will be a great comfort in our life."⁵

Survivors looked toward Canada for refuge. Albert Zimmerman's sister Sarah Szklarska had lost her husband and her children. She wrote: "Please do not forget me as I am all alone."⁶ In July, 1946, fifteen year old Idessa Czernikowsky wrote her aunt in Toronto: "I have lost my dear parents, sisters and grandmother. I have lost everything, my whole life...The best assistance would be that we leave this cursed earth and not be together with the murderers of our parents."⁷ Jacob Matea was living in a children's camp in Sweden when he wrote this to his uncle: "I am still a child and I have no parents...At least with relatives I may hope to be as other people. Your Jacob."⁸

II

Liberation was followed by several years of dislocation, searching and adjustment. For most of the survivors who eventually settled in Canada, the path first led to Western Europe and the Displaced Persons (DP) Camps. Their paths included illegal border crossings, circuitous routes, jails, confiscations, and long delays.

By the end of 1946, 250,000 homeless Jews had congregated in the British and American zones of Germany, Austria and Italy. Some lived on their own. Most were housed together with non-Jewish "Displaced Persons," including Nazi collaborators fleeing the Communists and justice. Some DP Camps were on the sites of former concentration camps like Dachau, Bergen Belsen, Feldafing, Landsberg, Wels and Ebensee. These camps came under the administration of UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. At first, conditions were not much better than in the Nazi camps; there were German

guards and restrictions on movement. Despite reforms and the creation of exclusively Jewish camps, the DPs spent many demoralizing years waiting to find new homes, in Israel or anywhere else that would take them.

Small children, with no memory of pre-war family life, faced the most difficult adjustments, difficulties that have permeated their entire post-war lives. Rose Slutsky of Vancouver said she felt like “an animal. I knew nothing. I’d never gone to school.” She had never drunk milk, and the first time she saw it she screamed; different vegetables, fruits, were all foreign to her—she only knew potatoes, bread and corn. Her mother had to struggle to get her to eat her first cherry!⁹

Alone in the DP camps, teenagers ran wild. A survivor of Auschwitz and Dachau, Philip Riteman of Halifax, was barely twenty when he went to Landsberg DP camp. This is how he described that time: “There was nothing left. I was not human. I was a wild animal. Really. That’s how I was taught from thirteen years of age, to steal and rob and kill, whatever I could do, to survive.”¹⁰

Another Camp survivor, Romanian Bill Gluck of Vancouver, was fifteen when he arrived, alone, in Feldafing. He hung out with a group of teenagers like himself. “We didn’t trust anyone adult,” Bill explained:

All our lives all bad things were happening were done to us by adults. We didn’t trust fellow prisoners, survivors, SS, civilians....We instinctively formed a little group that we trusted each other....And we protected each other. And we felt comfortable only among each other....We didn’t take orders from anyone. We hung out in packs...we did a lot of fight, alot of beating...we could have killed just as easily as we were killed if challenged....We got in trouble, but we didn’t care. Camp rules didn’t count, nothing counted. We refused to follow anything.

Then one day a buddy ran in to tell him that there was a “Joseph Gluck” listed in a hospital. Could it be his father? Bill replied: “So what?.” And it was his father. And the news spread

in Feldafing that this boy had found his father. When Bill reached the meeting place there was a mob; every one was excited to see a reunion. This is how Bill described what happened next: “There was a man...in a jacket that was half empty. And I look at him and I look again and I realize that he was my father. Problem was when he hugged me I didn’t feel anything. I was like a log. That was the first time I realized I’m in deep trouble. Everybody was crying around us. And I started shouting at them, ‘what the hell is everybody crying!’ . And my dad said, they cry because they happy for us. I was the only one who didn’t care. Who was beyond. Gentle man that he was, he quickly brought me back. At least encouraged me back to some normalcy.”¹¹

There were survivors who could not face the losses. Suicides were not uncommon just after the war. And they have continued to this day, exemplified by the recent deaths of prominent writers like Primo Levi, Jerzy Kosinski and Bruno Bettelheim. To overcome the loss of everything that gave them an identity, to be alone with no one who knew you “before”—your family, or even your community—was a tremendous burden.

But not everyone felt lost. Henry Morgentaler explained that: “This period when I was coming back to health was one of the most beautiful periods of my life in the sense that I realized I had survived, the flowers were beautiful, the air was wonderful, the grass was green...it was like a rebirth, it was wonderful it really dawned on me that I really survived and a new life opened before me.”¹² Indeed, the coping mechanisms developed by each survivor were as varied as the individuals themselves.

With the assistance of the IRO (International Refugee Organization), Palestine Jewish Brigades, ORT, HIAS, the JDC (Joint Distribution Committee), and other American, British, French and Yishuv Jewish welfare and educational agencies, survivors developed vibrant communities within and outside the DP Camps. Cultural organizations, vocational, agricultural and academic schools, nurseries, workshops, newspapers and synagogues functioned in the camps, often with the aid of Jewish youth movements. But until the creation of the Jewish State,

when the camps began to empty, life revolved around waiting. “We played soccer, we played Ping-Pong, we didn’t do anything constructive, we wasted three years of our lives” recalled Murray Kenig of Vancouver, an orphan from Hungary. “There were a lot of dances, social affairs, everybody was waiting, waiting for some place to go. Nobody would have us. Occasionally some representatives of certain countries would arrive and we would line up and apply for, for that country. We spent interminable hours answering questions and what not. They left... and we just were left waiting. Nobody would have us.”¹³

Conditions were overcrowded and food was meagre, leading to strikes and public protests. Agencies struggled to combat the black marketeering, idleness and apathy that pervaded the Camps. Some survivors found work outside the camps in various jobs, or made ends meet in the thriving black market. Sam Eisenmann spoke of an American captain who gave a group of musicians instruments and music. “We couldn’t even blow into those instruments, we couldn’t do a thing about it for about two months. But then he said ‘Just keep on trying and practising’ he says that, ‘One hour of music in any DP camp would be better than all the medicines they can give a month.’ And after about two months or so we started playing for the DP camps all around Germany... [in] a German ambulance that we travelled in... We called ourselves the HAPPY BOYS , just to think about it, how happy we were.”¹⁴

Many survivors found a way to recover a semblance of joy. They married, had children, reconstituted families as quickly as they could in order to recapture their losses. These marriages were more often based on practical considerations than on romance, often reflecting enormous differences in education, pre-war social status, lifestyle and age. Wedding dresses were passed from hand to hand, the birth-rate was high and children were raised among groups of survivors who were restructuring extended family ties among each other. The new families lived with the ghosts of the murdered.

Many survivors went to Israel. Eventually, when they found the life and weather too hard, and the constant threat of war and fear impossible to live with after all they had suffered, some of this group made their way to Canada. Others waited in Europe for the doors to open to the US, Canada, Australia. They didn't care where; they just wanted to be as far away from Europe and their memories as possible. They did not realize how well memories travel.

III

In March 1947, Rachmil Midownik, a sixty-four year old peddler in Toronto, received a letter from his forty-seven year old brother Ezriel.

Dear Brother Rachmil, Dear Sister-in-law, Chana Hendel and Dear Children. I wandered around in the woods and at the time I could never imagine that the war will end. For me the war has not as yet ended. Have we not the right to live the same as other nations? When I was in the woods I did not think that nobody will return home. I still cannot imagine it. When I remind myself that my wife and children are no longer alive—they were burned alive—I shed many tears. I don't want to cry but the tears just come. Now you are my nearest relative. I beg you to see what can be done to enable me to come to Canada.¹⁵

After 1948 the doors began to open. Among the tens of thousands of European Displaced Persons who entered Canada after the Second World War were about 40,000 Jewish survivors of the Nazi Holocaust. They were followed in the 1950s, 60s, 70s and 80s by successive waves of survivors from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, South America, the USSR and Israel. They ranged in age and nationality. They had lost their homes and national identities, the young had been deprived of education, and few had any material possessions. Most were the sole survivors of extended families, often entire communities which

had been murdered by the Nazis, their allies and collaborators. Many were physically and emotionally scarred. And they were determined to build new lives, new families and new identities. They arrived in Canada filled with a drive to succeed so intense, and many succeeded so well, that it could be argued that Canada had never before encountered an immigrant group like these Jewish survivors of the Shoah.

They trickled into Canada during the first decade after the War. Some came as individuals, sponsored by relatives; most came in groups as part of different schemes: orphans, furriers, domestics, and tailors. In Lublin, Dr. Joseph Klinghoffer had been in charge of language instruction in all the district *gymnasia*. His entire family was murdered. With his wife, he managed to survive on false papers in Warsaw, assisting the Polish Resistance by working in underground schools and translating BBC broadcasts to Polish for publication in the underground press. After the War Dr. Klinghoffer worked as a translator. Assigned to a French Canadian consular official, he asked: “Does Canada need only tailors and furriers? They don’t need one intellectual maybe?” He was told to speak to Max Enkin, the Jewish chairperson of Canada’s selection committee. He explained to Enkin that he barely knew how to sew on a button. At first, Enkin denied his application—Canada was taking tailors, not intellectuals, and he was obliged to follow the rules. A sleepless night later, Enkin called Dr. Klinghoffer back, saying that indeed, Canada needed people who could sew buttons! The forty-five year old educator and his six months pregnant wife arrived in Canada in February 1948. Placed in the dilapidated reception homes that the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) had just purchased, they were miserable, wondering “where did I come to?” The ‘intellectual’ was soon employed by the Jewish community, first helping raise money to assist the new immigrants, then as Director for the Orphan Reception Centre. Unlike most of the survivors, Dr. Klinghoffer was soon integrated into the mainstream of Canadian Jewish life.¹⁶

Survivors settled across Canada, mostly in the larger communities. They were not overly impressed. "Toronto, it was so dull compared to Amsterdam," said Mathilde Sugarman. "My God, it was dull. Then, there was nothing to do."¹⁷ Another Polish survivor recalled that she liked Toronto, but coming from Warsaw and living in Paris after the war, she had expected it to be a 'real' city. All she saw were two storey apartment buildings. "In Europe," she said, "a city is a city with apartment houses. So I said to my husband, where did we come in? That's not a city, that's a little village!"¹⁸

Louis and Helen Lenkinski were sponsored by the Jewish Labour Committee. "We cried," Helen remembered, "because we left a life, a good one and a bad one. We didn't know what we are facing next. But the moment we came here, we were the happiest people." They loved Canada, they felt free. Times were hard, money scarce, but they had lots of friends from home, and opportunity. Helen explained: "Even when it was very bad. We took our hands together and we will get over this. And that's life. I didn't complain for anything. I was happy whatever I had, even when I hadn't got anything."¹⁹

Sara Dickerman and her husband came to Montreal in 1948 as part of the tailor scheme. He kissed the ground. The CJC welcomed them, paying for a room until they could get jobs. Her husband's first employer noticed how he wore the same suit every day. It was made from a blanket. He insisted on taking both of them out and buying them clothes. He then found them rooms in a Jewish home with a couple that treated them like family. The landlady asked about Sara's past, and listened. She had many nightmares and cried often. Her landlords took her to doctors. "I felt like I had a home again. People that cared."²⁰

Survivors often settled in the same neighbourhoods, and as their material well-being increased, they moved into the same suburbs. In Toronto, the Canadian Jewish Congress bought several houses on Beverley Street at Dundas to provide temporary housing. Many then moved to the Spadina/Ossington/Harbord/College area where immigrant Jews had long congregated. Louis

Lenkinski described how “every night you could walk down the street and find the people walking, talking, how the day was.” They talked about finding jobs, what they had accomplished. “Did you buy yourself a refrigerator? Are you still using an ice box? Things like that.” Survivors from Poland seemed to stick together. Louis explained that: “it wasn’t very easy. There was also the culture, the language, difficulties. Not easy, you know. When you are thrown into a completely strange environment, culturally speaking, with no language, you’re in trouble. Some people never go out of it.”²¹ And for many survivors, this sense of separateness remains. Others made an effort to acculturate. Sidney Menkis was a Berliner who had escaped to England and spent the war serving in the Polish Army in Exile. He came to Toronto with his camp survivor wife, Carol. When they had time, Sid would join other German Jewish refugees and survivors, “to go to hockey games,” he recalled, “and stand in the greys for 75 cents, because that’s all we could afford. The lower seats were \$1.50, it was too much already. I was only making \$25 a week!”²²

In Calgary, Clara Bronstein began to recreate her lost family. Her first child, she said, “was gorgeous and I loved him so much. All my love and all my soul went into this child. I remember I used to look at him and think to myself, oh god, I do have somebody in this world. I’m not all alone any more. And it meant a lot.”²³ Their children grew up in extended families of survivor friends. In Toronto this kind of group was common, though few remained together into this decade. Mike and Lily Rosenberg talked about the group they are part of, ten couples, who still meet regularly. “We had children together,” Lily explains, “we walked with the carriages together, we visited from one little street to another, we had suppers together, it was just like a family. More than a family.” Eventually six couples bought cottages on the same lake, and now, when they spend the winter in Florida, five couples stay in the same complex. The women walk together in the morning and the men golf. There are weekly card games and lunches all year round. “Unfortunately,”

jokes Lily, “we cannot sit in the restaurant and hold hands. But we are in the same area.” And their children see the couples as aunts and uncles, the only extended families most of them had before they married.”²⁴

Some survivors came with non-Jewish spouses. After escaping the Warsaw Ghetto and surviving on Aryan papers in a labour camp, Eugenia Pernal married a Polish camp survivor. Their friends were a mixture of both worlds—Poles, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who had survived the Nazi camps. They too talk constantly about their past; their children have maintained close ties.²⁵

Sometimes their Canadian relatives and community organizations assisted the so-called “newcomers,” enabling younger survivors to attend school, subsidizing housing, offering re-training. Sid and Carol Menkis were sponsored by Carol’s maternal relatives. “It was a lovely family,” Carol explained, “they included us in everything.” They felt like they had found a real home. When their first son was born, one cousin “sent a brand new carriage from Eatons. Things like this you don’t forget.” But many found the warmth and caring they expected from their relatives and fellow Jews lacking. Or they refused assistance, determined to make it on their own. “I was always too proud,” said Sid, “I would never ask for money. I always tried to make my own way.”²⁶

For the most part, the survivors came from an Eastern Europe which was much changed from the world that the last Jewish immigrants in Canada had fled. They still angrily tell of the relative or landlady who felt it necessary to explain how the plumbing and toilets worked. Louis Lenkinski talked about how “some people taught me...how you flush a toilet. That really sent me up the wall...they considered us to be rough necks, brutes, people that don’t know how to behave.”²⁷ This kept the older survivors from trying to make friends in the general community. They were also met by ignorance and suspicion. Mike Rosenberg tells how he was asked,

how did you survive, how did your mother survive? She must have been a *kapo*,²⁸ or she must have been a policewoman or something like this. Because somewhere along the line there was a wrong perception, out there, that you only survived because you did something. That you did not survive miraculously.²⁹

Seldom did Canadians sincerely want to hear of the war. There were food shortages here too, they were told. So the survivors who lived within survivor communities kept their stories and their sufferings to themselves. Those who settled in smaller cities and towns may not have ever told anyone. They buried their pasts. “I don’t tell my ghost stories” said Kenny Ertl of Cornwall Ontario, “You are not interested.”³⁰

Mike Rosenberg had escaped a labour camp and spent the rest of the war passing as a Catholic on a Polish farm. He recalled that the first years were filled with reminiscence.

We were reliving and retelling, not the *haggadah* [Passover liturgy of the Exodus], but our own *gehenna* [Hebr: Hell], our own tragedy. And there were common memories, common experiences and so on.... We would talk about the little home towns that we came from...we all had different backgrounds. Some people’s parents were professionals, some people’s parents were business people, some were craftsmen.³¹

And so, for many survivors, it has remained very much a closed group, bound together by memory.

To be a DP, a ‘dirty DP’ in those early years in Canada, was difficult. The Jewish community, unprepared for the large numbers of refugees and their intense needs, failed over and over again. There was also a sense, shared by many survivors, that it was best to focus on the future and forget the past, including past aspirations.

Orphans claimed that they came to Canada because they had been promised schooling, yet only the most scholastically accomplished could get assistance to continue their education

past the age of sixteen. To be a normal teenager was impossible. Nate Leipziger, attending Harbord Collegiate in Toronto, said:

my problem was with the social life, you know, it was very difficult ... to form any type of social communication, any type of social life because I was a DP. A DP was a dirty name in those days. You know, everybody was afraid if...that they have to give me something or that they'll ask for something and I made very few friends... even with the kids that I was in school who were eighteen or nineteen, I didn't have anything in common. I couldn't talk about the things that they talked. I mean, you know, I couldn't talk about the baseball game or the football game or the hockey game....As a twenty year old man I was in a completely different level than they were as far as social interaction was concerned. ... there were some mothers that didn't allow their daughters to go out with a DP and I was just as eager to get away from that label. I wanted to start a new life.³²

Eve Bergstein of Waterloo, Ontario had been rescued by a Polish farm couple, and found a year after Liberation by an uncle. She was eleven in 1947 when she came from an orphan home in France to join an aunt in Toronto. "It was a whole new world." Eve recalled, "it really wasn't what I imagined it to be at all... Somehow we were given to believe that everything was wonderful and luxurious. It really wasn't like that at all." It was a long and difficult adjustment. She spoke only Polish while her relatives spoke Yiddish, and no one seemed interested in her past. She felt humiliated to be placed in grade two. But she soon moved up and made friends. Her life in Poland ceased to exist. Eve explained: "I put that whole life, the war years, the pre-war years, everything, behind me. I blocked it out to such an extent that I even forgot the Polish language." Although she wrote her Polish rescuers, her aunt intercepted all their letters and she lost touch. She concentrated on fitting in. She didn't know any survivors. Eve's goal became the recreation of a family of her

own.³³

The older survivors set out to work, and while a significant number remained in the labour force all their lives, many became entrepreneurs in a number of areas, particularly as store owners, manufacturers, importers and real estate developers. Their lack of formal education was not an impediment in these fields. As other Jewish immigrants before them, they worked long hours and their children became the sole focus for their success. In Winnipeg a couple from Poland began by selling scrap in the countryside, using their language skills to win the trust of the local farmers who also came from Eastern Europe. They developed their contacts and became successful real estate developers. In Edmonton another couple from the Netherlands bought a little corner store from a Ukrainian. There was no business, since the store had been operated within the Ukrainian community. One day, as they contemplated failure, a salesman convinced them to display some Dutch food in their window. Dutch immigrants began to flock to the store and eventually they thrived with a large Dutch import business. Philip Riteman went to Newfoundland. He became a peddler, selling dry goods all over the countryside. "I know the country coast to coast," Philip explained when he was interviewed in 1981, "everywhere, the little towns, you go, people go, people know me."³⁴

Many survivors operated these business as couples. These marriages, often based solely on practical issues of Jewish continuity, created family dynamics which reverberated in the lives of their children. Jewish social agencies began to see the results of the difficult first years of adjustment when the first group of 'Second Generation' children entered their adolescence in the 1960s, and had to deal with parents who never had the luxury of a childhood. One Polish survivor described the best day of his life as the day he married his survivor wife. The worst time for him was when his children moved away from home. He had to enter therapy to deal with what seemed to him to be the loss of his family all over again.

For no matter how materially successful survivors

became, the memories were close to the surface. Even in the early years when they focussed all their energies on rebuilding, on their families and their futures in Canada. Murray Kenig settled in Vancouver as a teenager. He explained that:

After being here [Canada] for, oh, three or four months. Once I recognized and realized that I can have all the food I ever want, without fear of having it taken away from me...in my mind something happened. All of a sudden I started to wake up in the middle of the night screaming, the beads of perspiration coming down on my face....Invariably I was being chased, machine-gunned, and pursued. There were people running after me. Well that still wasn't the worst of it. The worst of it was when I began to see families together, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters. You know, they were actually kissing each other, hugging each other, putting their arms around each other, sitting down at the same table together and I saw this and I really went to pieces inside. The whole thing just suddenly came into focus as to what happened to me.. I was eighteen now and all of a sudden I saw everything I no longer had. the impact was total and devastating. I didn't have a mother, I didn't have a father, I didn't have a brother, a sister, a family, someone to hug, someone to kiss. Love I didn't have. All I ever knew was hate. All I ever knew was hunger. And all of a sudden the other side of humanity, what I term as the normal way of life which today we simply take for granted, suddenly confronted this personality with devastating effect...And to this day I still suffer from it, That is the scar that I have. Somehow I am never the same. I know I never will be the same as someone who has grown up under normal circumstances... I know that the scar will be there. The scar of survivor, or surviving, the art of surviving which is a costly one in terms of sweeping your emotions and your feeling under a carpet until

the carpet begins to bulge and build up underneath and begins to affect you as a human being. This is with me today.

Once he had children, Murray's fears were transferred onto them. Like others, he worried that the babies might inherit some genetic malformation as a result of his experiences.³⁵

Most survivors never felt part of the mainstream Canadian Jewish world. Only the youngest, who married Canadian Jews and were able to develop themselves professionally, were able to make the label of survivor disappear, at least for a while. Susanne Reich was taken in by a foster home in Montreal where there were already five children. She felt fortunate to be part of a warm family life, an experience most child survivors never regained. Despite her easy integration into the community, the wounds eventually resurfaced. Susanne explained that during the 1950's no one really discussed the Holocaust, including many of the survivors who were focussed on building new lives. "It was already a good fifteen years after concentration camps, I had children of my own, and I kept thinking 'Wouldn't it be something if my mother would come through that door one day, or my father' They had just realized that I am alive, and they found me." She says that the Eichmann Trial caused a breakdown. "Even though I did not die in Auschwitz and the camps after that I lived through, but I died later."³⁶

Fred Gerson, a German child survivor who had survived passing as a non-Jew in France, described his belligerence after the war as a teenager in the United States. When asked to respond to a question about his 'race' on a job application, he proclaimed "Jew," knowing full well they wanted to know his colour. For his father's profession, he wrote "murdered." When friends warned it would appear that his father was a criminal, he wrote "deceased, murdered by Nazis." Fred recalled that it was four or five years before his anger and hatred began to subside. Forty years after the War, he still found himself judging his friends on whether they could be trusted to hide him or protect

his secret if the Holocaust should happen again.³⁷

In Winnipeg, Bernice Meller still suffered from her fearful years passing and hiding in Ukraine. She felt constantly insulted by the ignorance of the people she worked with; her first employer told her to sign some papers with a cross, since she couldn't possibly know how to write. Bernice began to cry "because I only spoke five languages and wrote and read, and he tells me that I don't know how to sign my name." She repressed the past, didn't even tell her twins until they were twelve. But, like many survivors, Bernice could not escape the dreams. "I used to have terrible nightmares when I was in Canada already." Bernice explained. "And every time the only good thing about it that every time I was running I survived...the millions of times I was running in the middle of the night ...this time when I was in Canada already it was different. I had twins. Which one was I going to take with me when I was running?...I used to get up in sweat."³⁸

IV

A failure of imagination, and the belief that the damage inflicted on the psyches of survivors could best be healed by repression and avoidance, characterized the response of those who dealt personally and professionally with survivors during the early years of adjustment. Even close family members reconciled their own fears of hearing, with the belief it would damage the survivors to tell. Some ached to speak and could not stop. Others chose to be silent. Some rejected their Jewishness, hiding their pasts even from their children. Others found redemption in their faith. Many had their tattoos removed. None could hide from their dreams.

The years in the DP Camps and during resettlement were filled with physical recovery, a search for meaning, and a struggle to regain independence. Suicides resulted from disillusionment and continued isolation. Tuberculosis and mental illness led some to lonely deaths in institutions. Those who had survived the camps and in hiding were faced with making decisions

after years of powerlessness and following orders. Those who had participated in armed resistance or passed as non-Jews had shared the constant fear of death. Survivors were overwhelmed with a multitude of emotions which each individual dealt with in their own way.

A cluster of symptoms became part of the lives of some survivors: chronic anxiety, irrational fears, sleep disturbances, depression, apathy, violence, sexual dysfunction, and an inability to find joy, feel empathy, express love or form close relationships. For some, these were challenges to live with and overcome. Others sought relief in repression or psychotherapy. For the child survivors, issues of identity and security were central to their postwar lives.

In Toronto, the Jewish Family and Child Service (JFCS) worked with some of the survivors, including the orphans who came in 1948 as wards of the Jewish Congress. Later they assisted the families that returned to ask for help with their children. In the early years there were many tragic stories, and mental health professionals were limited in their knowledge of the long term effects of trauma. But from their case work files we can hear the stories of the wounded who never recovered, and who can not talk to us today.

There was “Tom,” who first came to the agency for financial aid in 1955 when he was twenty-five. He had already been in several jails, was married to a black woman and had a child. He suffered from a variety of physical and psychological symptoms. Over the next ten years he was in and out of jail for petty crimes, his family left him, and he continued to suffer from terrifying nightmares. A lost and never reclaimed soul.³⁹

There was “Jenny,” also from Hungary, who hungered to be an artist and could not win a scholarship to finish school. At seventeen, living on her own, she took an overdose of aspirin but was discovered by her orphan boyfriend and resuscitated. She told her social worker about her loneliness and unhappiness and how, since the loss of her family, she had decided to never become involved in a close relationship again. What is clear

from her file is that in this case the agency was able to draw her out after her initial suicide attempt, and assist her through talking about her feelings.⁴⁰

Eva Kenyon⁴¹ was herself a refugee, having escaped Poland with the aid of Sempo Sugihara.⁴² Her family arrived in Canada in 1940. Although her parents were converts, Eva did not hide her Jewish background and after completing a degree in social work, she applied for a job at the JFCS in Toronto. At that time, she explained, the agency had the best reputation in town and her ability to speak Polish made her a welcome applicant. Like many of those at JFCS, Eva was a young person in a young profession. At first she worked with the orphans, going to Union Station to meet the trains; looking for foster homes and working with the families. She felt she had a particular advantage over the other social workers; certainly she had a bond with the survivors, but, she recalled, "I was very naïve. I feel now looking back at it....I felt like everybody else that somehow if you gave people enough caring and love that was going to undo all this damage and it was going to be helpful." She told the story of a young boy who had survived alone in the forests. "He was wild," she said, "he had absolutely no conscience. He believed that...in order to survive you had to continue fighting. He drove all his foster parents crazy.... He needed a lot of help. Not love. He needed to be helped to realize it was not necessary to behave that way any more. We talked a lot about that but it wasn't enough. I was too young, I didn't know enough." The boy was knifed to death in a brawl in a bar.

The JFCS had psychiatrists who took referrals and they also advised the social workers, but Eva felt that they knew little more than she did. Indeed these were early days in the understanding of the effects of trauma. In 1953, at the age of twenty-one, one of the orphans suffered a complete mental breakdown. The file describes her behaviour: She walked around naked. Refused to speak. "She had bizarre delusions regarding her own body," the social worker wrote, "and stated that she was dead, and that she had been killed by Hitler. She made an attempt to

strangle herself. She responded to auditory hallucinations.” Eva recalled the case: When she was to be taken to the hospital, it took three men to get her into the ambulance. Eventually diagnosed as a schizophrenic, this survivor was institutionalized and spent only fourteen months of the next twenty years out of hospital. JFCS workers visited her, prevented the government from deporting her, and tried unsuccessfully to find her a home. Thirty years after her ‘liberation’ she was now a permanent ward of the state.⁴³

Eva also recalled how the agency staff argued with the foster parents who would buy things for the orphans and then be enraged when the teenagers didn’t respond with gratitude or with affection. “It wouldn’t matter what we gave them, it wouldn’t be enough,” she told the families. They could never make up for what they had suffered.

And there were the older survivors, like “Walter,” who was almost fifty when he arrived in Canada. His children had been murdered and he had found his wife a year after the war only to see her die after a botched surgery in a German hospital. Walter developed epilepsy and by 1958 could no longer work. The worker writes: “he had tears in his eyes when he spoke of the difficulty he had to decide to come to the Agency for help.” He “spoke of his good life with his family and the importance of a home and love, as opposed to the emptiness of his life in Canada.” Every March, until his death in 1976, Walter called the agency to “talk about something,” the worker wrote. “Usually his loneliness and guilt at having survived the Holocaust. This time of year corresponds to the *yarzheit* [anniversary on Jewish calendar] of the death of his wife and children.”⁴⁴

These are the stories that oral testimony projects never recorded. The lost generation of those who could never rebuild their lives.

V

The first years after the war were marked by realization of loss,

physical recuperation, wandering and family realignments. No one was safe from the waking and sleeping nightmares. Even now, a sound, a smell, a siren, a swing, certain music—all kinds of little everyday sights and sounds can trigger fears, anxieties, memories. Memory informs the survivor's existence. It cannot be escaped. Leon Kahn, a former partisan in Vancouver, tells how he goes "to a railway station sometimes and I see cattle cars pass by and I see cattle being taken to a slaughter....I see people in there being taken to a slaughter. I go to symphonies, I love symphony music and I go to the symphony and I don't hear the music, I see my life revolving in front of me... in colour, in music, every time I go....It's like you see sometimes a movie that starts rolling back."⁴⁵

Joseph Kohn of New Brunswick, explains what many survivors will tell you, if you ask: "To a certain degree there is no question that everyone that went through, other people and myself, it certainly left a scar, physically and a deep scar emotionally and I think it's beyond the stage of cure and this will stay with us to the end of our days."⁴⁶

After Rachel Korn survived the war alone with her daughter in Uzbekistan, she made her way to Lodz, where she served on the Executive of the Yiddish Writer's Union. In her post-Holocaust poem, "A New Dress," she wrote:

Today, for the first time
after seven long years
I put on
a new dress
But it's too short for my grief,
too narrow for my sorrow,
and each white-glass button
like a tear
flows down the folds
heavy as a stone.⁴⁷

Rachel Korn came to Montreal in 1949.⁴⁸ Although her luggage

was light, her memories weighed her down. Despite their experiences, and the legacy of trauma and loss, most of the thousands of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust who settled in Canada found ways to rebuild their lives and families. We end here, at their beginning.

ENDNOTES

¹Unger, Israel, 1996, Interview by Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation [SF], Toronto Ontario, 12 November. Interviewer: Jonathan Hellman. Prof. Unger lives in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

²See Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (Toronto, 1983).

³Interview with Nathan Leipziger, Canadian Jewish Congress Archives (CJC)/Montreal. Toronto: 23 November 1981. Interviewer: Paula Draper.

⁴Interview with Michael Rosenberg, Toronto: 22 April 1994.

⁵CJC/Toronto, Jewish Immigrant Aid Society (JIAS) Case Files/ Toronto, Box 9, File 2056.

⁶CJC/Toronto, JIAS Case Files / Toronto, Box 8, File 1672.

⁷CJC/Toronto, JIAS Case Files / Toronto, Box 7, File 1369.

⁸CJC/Toronto, JIAS Case Files / Toronto, Box 7, File 1549.

⁹Slutsky, Rose Schwartz Zipper, 1996 [SF], Vancouver British Columbia, 3 December. Interviewer: Fran Starr.

¹⁰Interview with Philip Riteman, CJC/Montreal, Halifax: 6 August 1981. Interviewer: Josh Freed.

¹¹Gluck, Bill, 1997,[SF], Vancouver British Columbia, 25 May. Interviewer: Wendy Barrett.

¹²Morgentaler, Henry, 1995, [SF], Toronto Ontario, 13 April. Interviewer: Paula Draper.

¹³Interview with Murray Kenig, CJC/Montreal, Vancouver: 13 January 1982. Interviewer: Josh Freed.

¹⁴Interview with Sam Eisenmann, CJC/Montreal, Toronto: 24 November 1981. Interviewer: Paula Draper.

¹⁵CJC/Toronto, JIAS Case Files / Toronto, Box 10, File 2427.

¹⁶Interview with Dr. Joseph Klinghoffer, Holocaust Education and Memorial Centre / Toronto (HC/T), Toronto: 14 January 1988. Interviewer: David Aronson..Dr. Klinghoffer was Director of Education and Culture at the CJC in Toronto from 1948-73.

¹⁷Interview with Mathilde Sugarman, Holocaust Education and Memorial Centre / Toronto (HC/T), Toronto: 5 February, 1990. Interviewer: Roz Lofsky.

¹⁸Interview with Eugenia Mittelberg Pernal, Toronto: 15 April 1994.

¹⁹Interview with Helen Ofman Lenkinski, Toronto: 21 April 1994.

²⁰Dickerman, Sara Somber, 1997 [SF], Montreal Quebec, 24 February. Interviewer: Sylvia Aikens.

²¹Interview with Louis Lenkinski, Toronto: 21 April 1994.

²²Interview with Sidney and Carol Fajwlewicz Menkis, Toronto: 24 August 1994.

²³Bronstein, Clara Zawodnik, 1996 [SF], Calgary Alberta, 9 February. Interviewer: Riki Heilik.

²⁴Interview with Michael and Lily Ingber Rosenberg, Toronto: 22 April 1994.

²⁵Interview with Eugenia Pernal.

²⁶Interview with Sidney and Carol Fajwlewicz Menkis.

²⁷Interview with Louis Lenkinski.

²⁸*Kapo* was the slang term used to designate an inmate appointed to an overseer position by the Nazis in the camps. Due to the cruelty of some of these individuals, the term has developed a negative connotation

²⁹Interview with Michael Rosenberg.

³⁰Interview with Kenny Ertl, CJC/Montreal, Toronto: 25 November 1981. Interviewer: Paula Draper.

³¹Interview with Michael Rosenberg.

³²Interview with Nathan Leipziger, CJC/Montreal.

³³Bergstein, Eve Nisencwajg, 1995 [SF], Waterloo Ontario, 5 September. Interviewer: Judy Schwartz.

³⁴Interview with Philip Riteman, CJC/Montreal.

³⁵Interview with Murray Kenig, CJC/Montreal, Vancouver: 13 January 1982.

³⁶Susanne Reich, CJC/M, Montreal: 22 October 1981. Interviewer: Josh Freed.

³⁷Interview with Fred Gerson, HC/T, Toronto: 21 August 1990. Interviewer: Paula Draper.

³⁸Meller, Bernice Auerbach, 1997, [SF], Winnipeg, Manitoba, 18 June. Interviewer: Evita Smordin.

³⁹Toronto Jewish Family and Child Service (JFCS), File 11473.

⁴⁰JFCS, File 10690.

⁴¹Interview with Eva Neuwelt Kenyon, Toronto: 25 April, 4 May 1994.

⁴²Sempo Sugihara was the Japanese consul in Lithuania in 1940. He provided transit visas which saved the lives of thousands of Jews.

⁴³JFCS, File 13019.

⁴⁴JFCS, File 12974.

⁴⁵Interview with Leon Kahn, CJC/M, Vancouver: 11 January 1982. Interviewer: Josh Freed.

⁴⁶Interview with Joseph Kohn, CJC/M, Halifax: 7 August 1981. Interviewer: Josh Freed.

⁴⁷Ruth Whitman, ed., *An Anthology of Modern Yiddish Poetry* (New York, 1966)

⁴⁸Frieda Forman, Ethel Raicus, Sarah Silberstein Swartz and Sarah and Margie Wolfe, eds., *Found Treasures. Stories by Yiddish Women Writers* (Toronto, 1994), pp. 456-7.