STORIES AND FACES OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

Final volume | Book 1–15

Memoirs of Holocaust survivors ✡

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Final volume of the series «Memoirs of Holocaust survivors»

With the kind support of:
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FOREWORD

«It is our responsibility towards the younger generations to explain what made possible such crimes against humanity and how to prevent similar tragedies in the future. Auschwitz-Birkenau is a universal symbol. A symbol of the worst horrors mankind is capable of».

I wrote these words at the beginning of my presidential year, in January 2014, in the commemorative book at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. The museum is a place of remembrance that I visited with the granddaughter of one of the survivors.

Auschwitz-Birkenau stands as the very symbol of the Holocaust and of something that touches us all. Indeed, some of the testimony featured in this collection takes place against the horrendous backdrop of that extermination camp. Yet other aspects of the Holocaust history also repel us: other death camps, ghettos, deportations, and human suffering. We can only take solace in the hiding places, rescue efforts, and moments of solidarity.

In 2008, an association of survivors living in Switzerland encouraged its members who had not already done so to bear witness, by writing the story of their lives before, during, and after the Holocaust. The result was a series of memoirs in book format. Although small in size, they have a great impact through the intensity of the lives and experiences that they recount. I would like very much to thank those individuals and institutions both at home and further afield which have supported this wonderful, vital project.

Looking through and reading these books, the image that comes to mind is one of a mosaic. Outwardly and through the life stories they tell, they form part of the same collective history. Still, each account tells of one or more unique destinies, independent of the others. They are accom-

panied by a name and a photograph. The victims are no longer silent and anonymous; neither are they reduced to statistics. Thus these testimonies restore a dignity to them that others once tried to strip them of.

Two common threads touched me in particular when reading these moving accounts. The first was the difficulty – but also the importance – of retelling the horrors and ordeals that had been endured. I would like to extend my deep respect and gratitude to the survivors and their families for these efforts, which are so important for our younger generations.

Second, this testimony shows how children who had lost everything, or virtually everything by 1945 – their parents, other family members, their possessions, and often also their faith in humanity – eventually managed to rebuild their lives, to start families, and to flourish, in particular by having a successful professional career in Switzerland. This is by virtue of their own determination. Yet it also occurred because Switzerland opened up to them and allowed them to integrate. As my year as President draws to a close, it seems to me more important than ever to share this message.

DIDIER BURKHALTER
President of the Swiss Confederation.
December 2014.

PART I

VOICES FROM THE CONTACT POINT

HISTORY OF THE PUBLICATION SERIES

The final volume acts as a «complementary» work to the founding volume in which, during the last moments of our existence, we set ourselves the goal of writing about the Holocaust after decades of silence and voicelessness. We also pause to ask ourselves if we have remained true to our intentions.

The collection of 15 reports was completed and turned into an elegant edition for the public. The authors have given everything they could – whether as members of the Contact Point for Holocaust Survivors or people who avoided «official» membership – and have all surpassed themselves in contributing to this work. The authors have not tried to produce a work of literature; they have only wanted to give their testimonies. And this they have all done. At the time of publication, three of the authors are sadly no longer with us.

The entire board of the Contact Point, as well as a small number of its members who decided to contribute on their own initiative, stand behind the memoir project. We knew that our appeal would in no way spark the interest all of the members: many feared that «no-one would be interested in our stories» or «would choose to read them»; some even believed that «too much» had already been written about the Holocaust. We did not necessarily seek to present it from all perspectives. Everyone thought and acted for themselves during that time. After decades of silence we began to talk about our past and even dared to take a giant step in writing down everything on paper that, until now, had only been discussed among friends.

Finally, a paragraph from the founding volume should be repeated here.

Several authors formulated a purpose for their writing, such as «for my granddaughter» or «so nothing like this ever happens again». It is of course fine to wish to achieve something with each individual piece of the puzzle, but

for the picture as a whole – made up from all the many pieces – it is not at all important, at this point in our lives, whether what has been written will be read or not. We are there to bear witness. It would be presumptuous to think that we could rouse and change the world with our statements; neither is it important whether these accounts – of ten people or ten thousand people – are read. The granddaughter may wish to read it, and an immediate goal in the form of a reminder (to the irredeemable nature of humanity) is useful, but this should not be the deciding factor in writing. Our statements form a part of the story of the Holocaust.

Instead of repeating the acknowledgements, I would like to refer you to the founding publication which names many of the people and institutions we have to thank. All the people who helped us in the beginning have continued to support us – in word and deed – until the completion of the concluding publication. Without their help, we could not have brought the series to an end.

IVAN LEFKOVITS
Member of the Board of the Contact Point for Holocaust Survivors.
February 2014.

>
Start of a meeting headed by Gábor Hirsch.

Visit from the FDFA: Ambassador Jacques Pitteloud reports about the involvement of Switzerland in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

Andreas Sàs reports about his Holocaust experience.

Attentive audience.

>>
Flowers for the lecturer are arranged by Christa Markovits.

Ivan Lefkovits explains the new project of the «Holocaust Memoirs».

A moment of silence for the recently deceased members.

Attentive audience.

Cheerful and serious moments with coffee and cake.

Klezmer
music with
lively
dancing.

Christa Markovits deep in conversation with Margrith Bigler-Eggenberger, the first female Federal Judge of Switzerland and widow of Holocaust survivor Kurt Bigler.

Attentive participants at the meeting: Eva and Jan Biro, Lily Demant-Hausner (dark glasses) and her daughter Eva Korach; Vera and Alexander Gordon.

Vera Sigut and Nina Pelc; Marta Szpiro; Ota Soyka, Nina und Wilhelm Pelc; Jolana Gross.

>
Eva Alpar;
Eva Sigos;
Léon Reich, a
founding
member of the
Contact Point.

>>
Questionnaire
with data of a
founding member
of the Contact
Point.

Kontaktstelle für Überlebende des Holocaust

Unabhängige Vereinigung zauasch und politisch Verfolgter des Nationalsozialismus

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WESTERBERK

HUGLHM AUSCHWITZ BIRKENAU

Befreit in DP-Lager/S

Meldekarte

Documentation from
the inaugural meeting.

Information about the Auschwitz Memorial.

Commemorative Medal
of 27 January 2011.

PART II

SUMMARIES OF THE BOOKS 1–15

SUMMARIES OF THE BOOKS 1–15*

NINA WEILOVÁ 71978

RECOLLECTIONS

Nina Weilová was born in southern Bohemia, in the small town of Švihov (now in the Czech Republic) in 1932. Her father Karl, who owned a small lingerie factory in Prague, died accidentally in 1936. Two years later Nina, who was an only child, and her mother, left Švihov for good and settled down in Prague. She became friends with Jindra Klement, the son of a Jewish family who lived in the same building.

Nina Weilová remembers seeing her mother cry for the first time on March 15th, 1939, the day German troops entered Prague. She then recalls how discrimination and persecution began affecting more and more, step by step, the Jewish population: First came interdictions, then the Jewish schools were closed down and the Jews were made to wear the yellow star; and finally, from October 1941 onward, several deportations to Theresienstadt took place – first her grandmother, then two uncles and an aunt, then the Klement family. In September 1942 it was Nina's and her mother's turn. Nina Weilová remembers the anger she felt upon arrival in Theresienstadt, when an SS man snatched the doll from her hands and laughed as he broke it open to see if anything compromising was hidden inside.

She spent little more than a year in Theresienstadt. Her entire family had already been sent to Nazi extermination camps in Poland, except for uncle Franz, who died in Theresienstadt soon afterward. In 1943 Nina

* Some summaries in the final volume may slightly differ from their original publication in the books.

Weilová barely survived the first typhus epidemic that raged through the camp. Her mother volunteered as a nurse and was able to nurse her back to health; she offered her blood as well, which is what saved her daughter. Shows and performances such as the opera Brundibár could not erase the sadness and distress caused by the never ending flow of cattle trains leaving for Poland. As with her transport to Theresienstadt before, Nina Weilová narrates in detail her transport to Auschwitz-Birkenau with her mother, on December 15th, 1943. Next to them in the cattle car lay the corpse of an old woman. Shortly after arrival some prisoners whispered to them: «Most of all do not say you are sick or else you will be sent to the gas chambers». Her doll was taken away, this time for good. Her personal prisoner number 71978 was tattooed on her left forearm; the following number was her mother's. Nina Weilová witnessed her sick mother gradually losing her strength and becoming weaker and weaker. On March 12th, 1944, she found her dead, and as she was looking for help, a German slapped her in the face. For fifteen days in a row she came looking for her mother in order to talk to her dead body lying in the snow.

Nina Weilová had to undergo another massive selection – the second selection following the first one just after her arrival – which was carried out by Dr. Mengele. Everyone knew that being shown to the left meant being sent to the gas chambers. Nina stood before him: he pointed to the left. Still wondering to this day how this could happen, she moved a little bit closer and told him in German that she was strong enough to work. Mengele then pointed to the right.

Later she was sent to the Stutthof Concentration Camp and assigned to a work unit. For her too, January 1945 meant the beginning of a death march that would lead her to Korunovo in Poland. There she was freed by Soviet troops on January 24th, 1945. Nina was then 12 years old and she weighed only 25 kg.

Nina Weilová travelled to Lodz with four Czech women who had shared her path, from Theresienstadt to Stutthof via Auschwitz, and whom she had befriended during the death march. After the end of the

war, they returned to Prague. Nina Weilová returned to her mother's apartment. In the meanwhile, however, it had been occupied by former tenants of the building, who recognized her but wouldn't let her in.

Of her entire family, only an uncle and her cousin Pavel Kraus, who had been transferred to the ghetto of Warsaw, before going into hiding with a Polish family, survived the war. His uncle brought her to a Catholic orphanage in Klánovice, near Prague. He died in 1977, and they never spoke of what they had both gone through during the Holocaust.

Nina Weilová also dwells on the post-war years until her marriage in 1962. At the age of 15, she had to leave the orphanage for a catholic boarding school where she finished her schooling. She pursued her education (commerce and trade) and she found employment in an office, then in a polyclinic. By taking evening classes she eventually became a nurse. She lived in a Jewish girls' home until the new Communist regime closed it down. Nevertheless, the friendships she had made there were everlasting. After the Prague Spring was crushed, Nina Weilová and her husband found asylum in Switzerland.

BOOK 1 / 2009

ERNST BRENNER

I SURVIVED THERESIENSTADT

Ernst Brenner wrote down his recollections in 2004 and 2005. They were meant for his son and his two granddaughters. In view of the present publication they have been reviewed and completed. In his introduction he recalls, at first, how the years he spent in Theresienstadt with his parents left a lasting mark in their lives. In each of their conversations, his mother would speak of Theresienstadt.

Ernst Brenner was born in 1933 in the former Czechoslovakia, in Iglau (now Jihlava, Czech Republic), a town where the majority of the inhabitants and of the Jewish community spoke German. His mother, Erna Kaufmann, had settled down there with her family after World War I; his father Ignaz had met her during his military duty. The newly wed couple opened a small grocery store led by Erna, while Ignaz travelled as a sales representative.

One day his father was arrested, and the family was left without any news for a fortnight. He eventually returned, and his family learned that he had been caught and accused of having distributed leaflets, and that he had been set free after signing a letter by which he agreed to sell his house to a German and leave Iglau. So the family left for Prague in 1939, accompanied by Ernst's grandmother Berta Kaufmann, who eventually was deported to Theresienstadt in 1942, and from there to Maly Trostinec (Belarus) where she was murdered. A similar fate befell Ernst's paternal grandparents, who died in Theresienstadt and Treblinka, and his maternal uncle's family. All the same, most of his uncles and aunts on the paternal side of the family succeeded in reaching Palestine.

Ernst Brenner narrates a few important episodes of his life in Prague until his deportation to Theresienstadt in the summer of 1943, such as the dramatic circumstances surrounding his school attendance: Public school

until the Jewish students were barred from attending public schools; then Jewish school until its closure. The Hagibor playground – the only one which was open to Jewish children – whose leader, Fredy Hirsch, had a great influence on Ernst, and no less on young Nina Weilová who remembers him affectionately in her own Recollections. Meanwhile his father was learning to become a locksmith. These professional retraining classes were organised and led by the Jewish community.

Ernst Brenner's description of the ghetto-camp Theresienstadt, its origins, organization and daily life, is accurate and detailed. After having been assigned to the youth barracks in Theresienstadt, Ernst finally met his father again in the «Hannover Kaserne». Every family member was then given different tasks: Ernst had to repair leather objects, Erna performed cleaning tasks before being assigned to the production of asbestos platelets. Ignaz directed a clothing workshop.

As it turned out, it was these activities which protected the family from being deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in the autumn of 1944. On the 18th of October mother and son were summoned. Protected by his status, Ernst's father asked to be allowed to leave with them. However, in the end, all three of them were removed from the deportation list.

One of the best known episodes, which is also remembered by Ernst Brenner, concerns the visit of a delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross in June, 1944, prior to which the ghetto-camp had been embellished. Another episode concerns the arrival of prisoners from other camps in the final weeks of the war, all of them emaciated and reduced to skeletons.

Finally, Ernst Brenner writes that the 8th of May remains a very special date in his life: In 1945, he was liberated and in 1968, he, his wife Betty and their young son Tomas fled from Czechoslovakia.

BOOK 2 / 2009

PETER LEBOVIC

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE LONGEST YEAR OF MY LIFE

In his introduction, Peter Lebovic stresses how hard it is to describe, to express in words, what he has gone through, the sufferings he had to bear, the emotions inside of him. This is why he will only write about a few «small, hard chunks of memories». He adds how much he regrets having destroyed, upon his repatriation to Czechoslovakia after the end of the war, a notebook which he had begun using as a diary. Shortly afterward, the tale of his experiences met with disbelief. A good friend of his, non-Jewish, as well as a Jewish cousin, simply told him that they had suffered terribly as well. He did not talk about it until 1993 and never told his daughter what he had experienced.

However, he has recorded the history of his family (see Annex, «Die Familie Lebovic»). Peter Lebovic's family was decimated by the Holocaust. His paternal great-grandfather's remaining seven children, who were still alive by 1939, all perished in Auschwitz. Three of his grand-parents – the fourth had died in 1921 –, as well as his brother Michal and his sister Lilly were victims of the Holocaust. His parents and himself were the only ones to survive.

Peter Lebovic was born in 1926 in the town of Piešťany in the former Czechoslovakia (now Slovakia). His recollections begin in 1940, with the decision, by the Slovak government, to ban all Jewish children from attending schools in Slovakia. He was forced to leave the gymnasium in Piešťany and had to resort to cash-inhand employment by helping out in shops and stores owned by relatives.

At the end of March, 1942, his father was warned by one of the owners of the factory where he was employed, of an impending wave of arrests and deportations, and that he'd better send his two sons to Hungary. A

smuggler made them cross the border and they finally found refuge in Ungvár, Peter with his uncle, his older brother Michal with other relatives. They received several sets of forged documents, mostly thanks to the help of a notary.

When the German forces occupied Hungary on March 19th, 1944, the two brothers fled to a nearby forest where they hid for a few days. However, they were mistaken for Soviet soldiers, denounced and imprisoned in a ghetto, a brickyard in the surroundings of Ungvár.

From this ghetto they were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau between May 23rd and 25th, 1944. «From being a refugee with several identities I had become a prisoner without identity», he writes. An uncle of his, six years his senior, was with him, and Ernest was going to stay with him until Liberation, helping him and encouraging him to hold on. Another fellow deportee who, according to Peter Lebovic, saved him, was Ladislav Fischer, a former dental technician whom he had met in Piešťany, and who had been deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau as early as 1942. Fischer was a member of the «Kommando» instructed to extract gold teeth from the corpses that had just been dragged from the gas chambers, and he had eventually become head of the unit. Given his good relations, he was able to leave Auschwitz-Birkenau for a camp in Warsaw in early June, 1944. Peter Lebovic and his uncle made the same journey, and he believes that it was thanks to Fischer's intervention.

In Warsaw, the were assigned to the work camp in charge of cleaning up the leveled ruins of the former Warsaw Ghetto after its destruction in May, 1943. For almost two months, Peter Lebovic worked in a group whose task was to recover building material for a construction business in Berlin. An inscription in Polish above the entrance door to a house has remained in his mind ever since: «Avoid dirt, always be clean, dirt causes lice, lice causes typhus». At the end of July the camp was evacuated.

A long death march first, then by cattle train to Dachau. After having spent some time in Ampfing, where the prisoners were made to remove their excrements by hand, Peter and Ernest Lebovic were sent to Müh-

ldorf, yet another satellite camp of Dachau, where they remained until Liberation. Peter Lebovic recalls one of his many traumatizing experiences: Order were given to evacuate all the sick inmates, to wrap them in crêpe paper and to throw them in a carriage. He later learned that these were the last people to die in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

By the time the American troops arrived, on May 2nd 1945, Peter Lebovic was utterly exhausted and unable to move. He needed treatment in hospital, and that's where he began writing down what he had witnessed. He went back to Czechoslovakia and after completing his studies he found a job in a chemical plant. In 1968 he left for Switzerland and settled down in Basle. His uncle Ernest had previously emigrated to the United States in 1946. His brother Michal had succumbed to typhus shortly before Liberation, either in Buchenwald or in Bergen-Belsen.

BOOK 3 / 2009

JAKE FERSZTAND

STOLEN CHILDHOOD

It was a long time before Jake Fersztand could overcome his hatred of the Nazi perpetrators. And yet, he did not feel any resentment or revenge when he spoke before a reformed Church community group in Basle in late 1997. He wanted to react against attempts to deny the Holocaust. This narrative is a transcript of the speech he delivered in 1997. The chronology is interspersed with recurrent reminiscences, mainly of the persistent hunger and of the joy he felt whenever he was able to get hold – seldom enough – of a chunk of potato.

Jake Fersztand was born in Kozienice, a small town 80 km south of Warsaw. There were 20 000 inhabitants, half of them Jewish. All his uncles and aunts, and their families, were killed during the Holocaust. His father was deported as well, probably to Treblinka.

One of his earliest recollections: his father, returning home utterly broken down, after having been tortured and threatened with hanging if he revealed what he had been made to suffer. His son had witnessed his arrest by SS officers. Several men from the surroundings had fled from the Nazis to the USSR. His father did the same, but he soon returned to share his family's fate.

A ghetto was built in Kozienice, but for a while the family stayed on in their apartment. A mock work camp was established outside of the ghetto, thanks to intervention by influential inhabitants and bribe money. The Fersztand parents were taken there, like hundreds of other families. Jake and his little sister found refuge – for money – with a peasant's family in the surroundings.

A few months later the dissolution of the ghetto began, the prisoners were deported, likewise the workers of the mock work camp. Jake's father

was also deported, whereas his children remained with the peasant and his family, posing as «cousins from Warsaw». Shortly afterwards, Jake and his sister were refused shelter, either out of fear, or for lack of payment.

They went back to their mother at the camp. Shortly afterward, the three of them were transferred south, to another camp in Skarzysko under control of an ammunition factory. The other prisoners kept his sister sheltered. Jake, however, soon became supervisor of a food storeroom. Most of all he was afraid that his real age – 9 years – would be revealed. One encounter has stayed in his mind to this day: On the Appellplatz, during working hours he came across an SS man who pointed a gun at his temple. He said he would shoot him if he met him again.

From Skarzysko the whole family was transferred to Czestochowa, once more to a subcamp of an ammunition factory. Jack had to do cleaning work; his sister stayed under cover. He grew more and more hungry. For the very first time he was separated from his mother and sister in November 1944. He was sent to Buchenwald, they were sent to Bergen-Belsen shortly afterwards. In Buchenwald, for the first time, he was made to wear the zebra striped suit all prisoners wore, and he was given a number: 115110. He realized that the end of the war was close, but he doubted he would still be alive to see it happen.

A few days before liberation, yet another relocation, this time to Theresienstadt. During transport they were offered a soup. Although he had not eaten for several days, he refused to swallow it, because it was much too salty. Many of his comrades gobbled it down. The following day he found out that they had died afterwards.

Jake Fersztand left Theresienstadt for Great-Britain in August 1945.

BOOK 4 / 2010

«Die sonnige Seite dieses Projektes bestand in der Kontaktaufnahme mit Menschen, welche ich bei der Gestaltung des Projektes einzuspannen beabsichtigte.»

IVAN LEFKOVITS / Founding volume

«Ich erinnere mich, wie meine Mutter grosse, gelbe Sterne an die Mäntel der Erwachsenen nähte.»

SIGMUND BAUMÖHL / Book 5

«Vom Flüchtling mit mehreren Identitäten wurde ich ein identitätsloser Häftling.»

PETER LEBOVIC / Book 3

«Seither kann ich es nicht ertragen, wenn mit Essen unachtsam umgegangen wird, oder, wenn Essensreste weggeschmissen werden.»

ERNST BRENNER / Book 2

«Vom Aufenthalt bei den Bauern blieb mir in Erinnerung, dass oft christliche Kinder zu Besuch kamen und als erstes fragten, wer wir seien.»

JAKE FERSZTAND / Book 4

«Ich war sehr froh, als wir festgestellt haben, dass in unserem Haus eine weitere jüdische Familie wohnte.»

NINA WEILOVÁ / Book 1

SIGMUND BAUMÖHL

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

The «childhood memories» of Sigmund Baumöhl are filled with names of relatives, friends, and people he met in the course of his life. Throughout his story, the author attempts to reconstruct the lives of some thirty people whom he met and with whom he shared some moments of his life. In addition to that, their fate is outlined in the final pages of the volume.

Sigmund Baumöhl was born in Prešov, Czechoslovakia (now Slovakia) in 1937, the only child of Henrik, a construction engineer, and Marta Baumöhl. The housemaid, Mrs. Zlatohlava – whom he always refers to as Goldköpfchen, the German word for «little golden head», i.e. the meaning of her name – and her husband took good care of him. Mister «Goldköpfchen» even used to take him to places where Jews were not allowed to go.

Henrik Baumöhl was on good terms with the head of the local police and he often was invited to his house with his family. This notwithstanding, Sigmund Baumöhl remembers their house being searched, and two episodes in particular, when his family barely escaped deportation. Once his family was made to assemble in the courtyard of the synagogue, although later on everyone was released, unharmed.

At the end of spring 1944, the Baumöhl family and other Jewish families from Prešov fled to a small town nearby, Spišské Vlachy, thus hoping to survive the war. Then they tried to go into hiding in a neighbouring village. Their plans were thwarted and the fugitives had to return to Spišské Vlachy. There seemed to be no way to avoid deportation and their luggage was ready when, in the early days of October 1944, German soldiers came looking for them. They were rounded up in trucks and taken to Prešov. From there they were sent by cattle train to Ravensbrück.

Soon after his arrival at camp, he witnessed two events which would remain engraved forever in his memory. The first occurred when men, women and children were separated, and when an SS-officer allowed his father to hand over the blanket draped around his shoulders to his son. Sigmund then watched him kiss his mother and line up with the men's column. The second occurred when, some time later, while he was waiting inside a room, he caught a glimpse of the blue sky through the window, like a little corner of freedom. «I would always think of that moment, not only in the concentration camp, but also later on in my life, during difficult times», he admits.

Both his grandmothers died at the camp. Apart from a few happy moments, like playing with his friend Egon Holländer, who lives in Zurich today, and the birth of a little girl inside their barrack, their daily life was dominated by hardship and pain. Hunger was a steady companion and unbearable images have stuck to his mind to this day.

Marta Baumöhl and her son were evacuated to Bergen-Belsen. Before leaving Marta Baumöhl was able to see her husband again… but young Sigmund did not recognize his father, because he was wearing a prisoner's suit. Henrik Baumöhl was bound to die during a death march leaving from Sachsenhausen concentration camp. In Bergen-Belsen the child got weaker and weaker. Given that the only food available was turnips from a nearby field, he suffered from chronic diarrhoea and could barely leave the barrack. Sigmund met other children from Prešov, such as Irma Grosswirth and Ivan Lefkovits, who now lives near Basel and with whom he is very close.

After the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, Sigmund Baumöhl's mother disappeared from his sight. Later he was to learn that she had died of typhus shortly after the camp's liberation. Sigmund was then looked after by an Irish paediatrician who had set up an improvised hospital inside the camp. He weighed 10 kg.

Sigmund Baumöhl was sent to the seaside-town of Malmö in August 1945, on the southernmost tip of Sweden, for convalescence and rehabili-

tation. He spent almost ten months there, gradually trying to find his way back to life. He holds fond and grateful memories of the doctor, the nurses, and the children. He returned to Prešov in 1946, but because of his weakened condition he was admitted to a sanatorium for children in the High Tatras for three years. «A chapter of my life was coming to a close» he says.

BOOK 5 / 2010

GÁBOR HIRSCH

FROM BÉKÉSCSABA TO AUSCHWITZ AND BACK

Gábor Hirsch was born in 1929 in Békéscsaba, a small town in south-eastern Hungary. His father owned a small electric appliances business. The Hirsch family belonged to the local liberal Jewish community and Gábor attended the community schools from 1936 onward. He remembers that only three girls and himself, out of sixteen pupils in his class, survived the Holocaust.

Although he was subjected to anti-Jewish laws from 1938 onward, the overall situation remained tolerable, until the German occupation of Hungary began in March 1944. He was enrolled at the Protestant Lyceum in 1940. His father, being a veteran of the First World War, enjoyed a few privileges which enabled him to carry on selling and repairing radios – and all the while secretly listening to BBC – after these appliances had been confiscated from the Jewish population. All his family knew were rumours, based on what Czech and Polish refugees had told them about the persecutions of Jews in other countries. Nonetheless, the Hirsch family still had faith in the Hungarian government.

The situation in Békéscsaba quickly changed for the worse after the German occupation. The Jews were concentrated in 84 houses. The Hirsch family home, built for three, had to accommodate 14 people.

Gábor Hirsch writes about the lack of privacy, lack of food and the brutality of the Hungarian gendarmes displayed against the prisoners of the ghetto, who were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau on June 25th and 26th, 1944.

Upon arrival in the camp, on June 29th, young Gábor was chosen for work and interned in the so-called «gypsy camp», together with his cousin Tibi. The other six family members in the same train, among them his

mother, did not survive the Holocaust. He was able to see his mother twice on the campgrounds. Decades later he learned that she had been deported to Stutthof concentration camp in September 1944 and that she died there in December.

Gábor Hirsch was registered and given a number. The number had to be stitched to his trousers and shirt, but he was not tattooed. Even if they were just a stone's throw away, he was unaware of what really took place inside the crematoria, in spite of the smoke and the flames from the chimney. He writes of his daily life in camp, sweeping barracks and occasionally working outside of the camp premises with a Kommando.

He recalls vividly and in detail the «selections» that took place inside the camp, often during Jewish holidays. A selection was held on Yom Kippur (September 27th, 1944) in the «gypsy camp» among several thousand youngsters, one of them being himself. A wooden stick had been fixed at a certain height; the children had to walk underneath it. Gábor Hirsch found himself on the bad side, with the younger children. However, there was a «reselection» and he was saved in extremis along with another 20 young inmates. On Sim'hat Torah (October 10th, 1944) the inmates from two blocks were made to walk to the Crematorium V where their health was checked. Gábor Hirsch and about 50 of his comrades were found to be able to work and returned to the «gypsy camp».

By December 1944 he was sick and weak, and he was admitted to the camp's sickbay for two weeks, where he had the number B-14781 tattooed on his forearm. He felt too weak to join the evacuation marches but was transferred to another barrack instead. When on January 24th,1945, German soldiers returned to the camp, Gábor managed to hide. They wanted to cover the tracks of their crimes.

He also remembers standing in front of the barbed wire while pictures were taken of him and other prisoners shortly after Liberation. He was then 15 years old and he weighed 27 kg. There is a well known photograph of a boy just like him, that went around the world. Could that be him? He is not quite sure, but he thinks he might be.

He was then brought to Czernowitz (now Tchernivtsi in the Ukraine) and from there to a camp in Sluzk near Minsk. The war ended and by mid-August 1945 he was back in Budapest where he met with his father again. He went back to school, first in Békéscsaba, then in Budapest; eventually he enrolled in a technical school. Meanwhile his father was regarded as a «capitalist profiteer»; therefore Gábor was barred from attending the University of Budapest. However, he went to evening school and he worked as a technician in a radio factory during the day.

In 1956 he emigrated to Switzerland. He continued his studies at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, and he became an electronic engineer in 1958. He married in 1968. His wife gave birth to two children.

BOOK 6 / 2010

GÁBOR NYIRÖ

THE BURDEN OF MEMORIES

Gábor Nyirö's narration is dedicated to the loving memory of his mother, out of gratitude for having saved her husband's and her son's life by foreseeing the dangers that lay ahead.

From the outset he admits that talking about these events remains difficult, and that memories of the past still come to haunt his sleep. Gábor Neuman was born in Szombathely, Hungary, in 1929, the son of Aladár Neuman, a gynecologist, and Kornelia Neuman, née Bader. His hometown lay near the Austrian border and was soon occupied by the Germans (January 1944). In early May 1944, the local Jews were moved to a ghetto whose gates were closely guarded by Hungarian Nazis.

In early July, the ghetto prisoners were stripped of their last valuables and sent by train to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Upon arrival in Auschwitz on July 7th, Kornelia Neuman decided that Gábor should stay with his father, so that he should not feel alone, whereas she would stay with her daughter Agnes, aged 12. After their separation Gábor Neuman never saw his mother and sister again. Both he and his father were sent to the «gypsy camp», but not in the same barrack (barrack 9 for him, barrack 21, then 19 for his father). They made use of the opportunity to send postcards, without daring to disclose their fate; both cards reached their recipients.

Gábor Nyirö describes daily life in camp, the «meals» consisting of some kind of soup for lunch and bread in the afternoon. One of the strongest perceptions was one of cold. The prisoners tried to protect themselves by covering their bodies with any scrap of paper they could find, or by standing close to one another. Twice he was made to stand with his fellow prisoners on the «Appellplatz» where corpses hung from the gallows, something which made him feel utterly powerless. With the help of Hans Andrischeck, a common prisoner from Germany, he managed to survive

two selections. Andrischeck also advised Gábor and his father to escape as soon as possible, and he even smuggled them into a carriage that left Auschwitz on 10 October 1944.

The convoy reached a satellite camp of Dachau (Kaufering III). After being assigned to potato-peeling duty for a few weeks Gábor Neuman was sent to a work detail of thirty prisoners (one of them being his father) who were building a camp for the Todt Organization. After this work detail was dissolved in late December 1944, Gábor and his father were sent to the main camp, Kaufering I, where they remained until shortly before liberation. The camp was evacuated on April 24th. The train ride was interrupted frequently by Allied bombing. They jumped off the train, ran through the woods and finally hid in a bunker in Penzing, until the town was liberated by U.S. forces on the 30 April 1945.

The war ended and when they returned to Szombathely in August 1945, they were met with mistrust, even hostility, by many inhabitants. Only 80 out of 3200 Jews had survived. By decision of the authorities, their name – Neuman – was changed into Nyirö. Gábor waited and hoped for the return of his mother and his sister. He resented his father for remarrying soon after. He was glad to move to Budapest for his studies. He attended a technical school and graduated in 1949.

He left Hungary for good in 1956 with his wife and their young son, Peter. They arrived in Eastern Switzerland. Gábor Nyirö worked for the Georg Fischer Company and became a Swiss citizen in 1972. He recalls two more painful experiences involving Germans: His boss cut off all ties with him the moment he learned that Gábor Nyirö had been in Auschwitz-Birkenau; and during an exam; a doctor asked him if he feared death, although he was aware of his past as a Holocaust survivor.

His book opens with the photographic portraits of his parents and his sister Agnes and ends with a series of documents. In his conclusion Gábor Nyirö dwells on the burden of memories. He does not agree with the view that time heals all wounds. His closing words are: «My feeble voice gained

strength throughout this narration. Instead of six million human beings whose voice was silenced forever, I can tell my tale.»

BOOK 7 / 2010

IVAN LEFKOVITS

BERGEN-BELSEN, ACCOMPLISHED – UNACCOMPLISHED

Ivan Lefkovits' book is made of narration, dialogue, excerpts from documents, photographs and a chronological overview. This richness and complexity reveals that the question «how to talk about it?» is just as important and just as difficult as finding an answer to the question «what to say?».

Born in Presov (Czechoslovakia, now Slovakia) Ivan Lefkovits was 8 year old when he was liberated from Bergen-Belsen with his mother Elisabeth, whose memoirs were published in 1993 – 1994 («Ihr seid auch hier in dieser Hölle?», Chronos). This is her son's account of how her memories originated. For his part, he wanted a third-person narrative mode, based on interviews. Zamira Angst, a historian, relates the first eight years in the life of Ivan Lefkovits.

The Lefkovits family (father Desider, a dentist, mother Elisabeth, a pharmacist, and their two sons, Paul, or «Palko», and Ivan) eluded the first wave of deportation, but the aryanization policy hit them hard. In early 1944, they saw an opportunity to escape to Hungary. Ivan and his father left for Hungary before the Germans arrived in March 1944. Ivan saw his father for the last time and was able to return to Presov. In November 1944, the family was arrested and deported to Ravensbrück. Ivan was allowed to stay with his mother; whereas his brother Palko, aged 13, was placed in the men's camp.

In February 1945, Ivan and his mother were evacuated and had to walk all the way to Bergen-Belsen. Everywhere piles of dead bodies were lying around, hunger and apathy reigned. But then they met Ilka, Elisabeth's sister, whose first words later gave the title to her book. They were given food and drink for the last time at the beginning of April. On April 15th, 1945, British forces liberated Bergen-Belsen. For Ivan and his moth-

er, though, the key date – the anniversary of which they will commemorate every year – remains April 17th, that is, the day they saw the first drop of water. After recovering for two months in a convalescent home they returned to Presov.

It was not until then that they learned that Palko and his father had died. However, the exact and documented circumstances of Ivan brother's death at Ravensbrück were not revealed to him until the summer of 2010, when he met Bernhard Strebel, a historian. Palko was put to death on April 4th, 1945, the youngest victim of the killings in the men's camp at Ravensbrück.

In 1992 Ivan Lefkovits visited the Imperial War Museum in London, to gather documents for his mother's planned book. He stayed there for three days and viewed the films made by the British at Bergen-Belsen in 1945. At least thirty photo cuts of these films are reproduced in his book and given a caption. Their purpose is to provide historical evidence to support his narration based on his memories.

Back in Presov in 1945, Ivan Lefkovits resumed school. Occasionally he had to take time off school for recovery stays in the mountains. He moved to Prague 4 years later. He studied chemistry and lived in Naples for two years (1965 – 1967) in the context of the Euratom's programme. In the meanwhile he was married to his former fellow student Hana and they had a son, Michael. In October 1967 the family left Czechoslovakia for good and settled down in Frankfurt, waiting to emigrate to the United States.

In the end though, another destiny lay in wait for Ivan Lefkovits. Early in 1969, he was offered the opportunity to be one of the founders of the Basel Institute for Immunology. He accepted the proposal and worked at the Institute until his retirement. Ivan Lefkovits and his family live near Basel; Elisabeth Lefkovits and her new husband, Gabriel Sommer, came to stay with them.

In 1995 Ivan Lefkovits was invited to the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen. It was his first vis-

it to the former concentration camp since the end of the war – many photographs of this visit can be seen in the book – and he couldn't orientate himself, until he detected the remnants of the fire-extinguishing water basin that he remembered. In the «Memorial book» he discovered both his mother's name and his own. In the following years he would return to Bergen-Belsen frequently to bear witness before YMCA summer camp participants. Several of these young participants' impressions can be found in the book.

In 2006, during one of his journeys to Bergen-Belsen, he stopped over in Bad Arolsen. Among millions of case files of the International Tracing Service he wished to find some traces of his own family. However, the recent efforts to open these Archives to the public as well as the establishment of databases are viewed with scepticism by Ivan Lefkovits: «When you work with electronic databases you forget that millions of individual destinies are hidden behind megabytes. On the other hand, when you see huge shelves with millions of files and folders, that is different. You become yet again aware of the singularity of the Holocaust.»

BOOK 8 / 2010

«Frauen und Männer mussten sich getrennt in Fünferreihen aufstellen – so wurde ich von meiner Mutter getrennt.»

GÁBOR HIRSCH / Book 6

«Meine Mutter sagte, eine Jüdin muss mehr können als die andern.»

HANA UND HANUŠ AREND / Book 10

«Mit meinem Vater, der weiterhin in einer anderen Baracke untergebracht war, habe ich abgemacht, dass wir beim zehnten Pfosten der Sperrbaracke versuchen würden über die Barackenwand Kontakt zu halten.»

GÁBOR (NEUMAN) NYIRÖ / Book 7

«Es sind Jahre, die mich stark beeinflusst und bis heute tiefe Spuren in mir hinterlassen haben.»

ARNOST SCHLESINGER / Book 9

«Während Wochen und Monaten nach der Befreiung galt meine Hauptsorge, ob mein Bruder lebt und ob mein Vater lebt; in dieser Reihenfolge.»

IVAN LEFKOVITS / Book 8

«Ich weiss, dass ich in diesem Bericht über Auschwitz aussagen muss, aber ich kann die furchtbaren, grausamen Bedingungen nicht noch einmal vor meinen Augen passieren lassen.»

ANDREAS SÀS / Book 11

ARNOST SCHLESINGER

LIVING WITHOUT FREEDOM

In 2008, on the day of his 80th birthday, Arnost Schlesinger found himself back in Ruzomberok, a small town in Slovakia, where he had been born in 1928, and he decided he would put on paper all the memories of his youth that have resurged ever since.

His recollections begin with a portrait of his family in which he traces the fate of his grand-parents, his uncles and aunts. Almost all of his relatives who had not emigrated to the United States by 1939 perished in

the camps, mainly in Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is followed by a very dense chronological narrative. His father Alexander, who held an important position at the Mautner textile factory, and his mother Friderika, née Field, spoke alternatively in Hungarian, German or Slovak. His name changed accordingly: Ernöcske, or Ernest, or Arnost.

He began school in 1934. Being the only Jewish pupil in the school he was mocked and bullied by some class mates. Others, though, came to his defence, and his teachers always behaved correctly. Their neighbours behaved equally ambivalent. One evening the Schlesinger family was invited by some Germans to enjoy Christmas dinner with them. Another neighbour told Arnost that he was just pretending to be Slovak, but that in fact he was really Jewish. The relations got even more strained after the creation of an independent Slovak state, especially after anti-Jewish measures had been adopted. Arnost Schlesinger describes in detail what these measures meant for his family's everyday life. In 1940 he had to leave his school and enroll in the Jewish school.

The deportations of 1942 had a profound impact on young Arnost. Because of the location of their house near the station he witnessed the departure of several convoys. He couldn't fail to notice the efficiency of the Slovak railways: never before had the trains been run so efficiently, al-

ways arriving and departing on time. Even today he remembers Erika Goldstücker looking at him from behind her glasses with her large, brown eyes. Along with her comrades the girl was deported from Ruzomberok to Auschwitz. It turned out to be the first convoy of young girls to Auschwitz-Birkenau. He wonders if he is the only living witness left of this convoy. There are no survivors left.

Friderika's parents had been given American citizenship for having lived a few years in the United States, where they had changed their name from Schönfeld to Field; therefore she was able to secure American citizenship for herself around 1943. Arnost and his father were safer this way. Arnost also helped the local Jewish Community send food parcels to fellow countrymen interned in labor camps.

During the Slovak national uprising in August 1944, German troups forced the partisans out of Ruzomberok, forcing Arnost and his family to leave as well. Finally they were able to find refuge in a village (Jergaly) in the Banska Bystrica district, staying with a family that had been recommended by a workmate of Alexander Schlesinger. After the breaking down of the uprising in October 1944 the family was on the road again. They went into hiding in a small village (Vysna Revuca) but the Germans found out about the hideout in early 1945. Meeting with a former teacher of the Ruzomberok Jewish school turned out to be a disappointing experience. The teacher, who was hiding with false papers, refused to help them.

The Schlesinger family was sent by truck to Ruzomberok prison. The Germans made more and more Jewish prisoners, until they were evacuated, in late January 1945, to a labor camp in Sered in Eastern Slovakia. Mother and son were assigned to cleaning tasks, whereas Alexander Schlesinger had to write the names of dead German soldiers on wooden crosses.

The front line was getting closer to Sered every day, and therefore many convoys of prisoners left for Theresienstadt. Arnost and his parents left with the penultimate convoy and arrived at the ghetto-camp in early

March 1945. A lasting memory dates back from this time. In Theresienstadt Arnost and his friend Karol wanted to attend a concert given by the famous pianist Alice Herz-Sommer, but they didn't have a ticket. As soon as she had appeared, the pianist spontaneously handed them two tickets. In 2008, just as he was listening to an interview with Alice Herz-Sommer on TV, he decided to call her. Now 104 years old, she was overjoyed to speak to her audience of so long ago.

Arnost was in quarantine until he finally left Terezin on 27 May 1945, the day of his 17th birthday. He reached Ruzomberok with his parents and they tried to rebuild their life from scratch. He emigrated with his family to Zurich in 1968. Not owning a Swiss passport, he was unable to attend his mother's funeral in Bratislava in 1983.

BOOK 9 / 2010

HANA ET HANUŠ AREND

WITNESS ACCOUNTS OF TWO HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS FROM PRAGUE

Eva Halter-Arend writes in her foreword that her mother's funeral in the spring of 2010 was the turning point that made her decide to publish both her parents' accounts based on interviews made in 1996 and 1999.

Hana Arend was born in Prague in 1922, the only child of Elsa and Vilém Nagelstock. Things began to change in 1933, when Jewish refugees arrived from Germany, and definitely when the Germans occupied Prague in March 1939. Special restrictions applied to the Jews, and the beer brewing machinery business Vilém Nagelstock owned with a friend was aryanized. Hana was barred from attending public school, and the Jewish high-school where she had been trying to obtain her final certificate was closed down by the Germans. All in all, though, her community remained friendly towards her. There was no hostility at school, neither from her classmates, nor from her teachers. Her private music tutor gave her lessons right until the eve of deportation.

On 28 October 1941 Hana Nagelstock and her parents were deported to the Łodź ghetto, firmly expecting to return to Prague in the following months. However, she would stay in Łodź for almost three years, during which time her mother died. She suffered hunger, thirst and cold and lost most friends and acquaintances to continual deportations. During the dissolution of the ghetto, Hana and her father tried in vain to hide. They were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau on 24 August 1944 and separated upon arrival. She was never to see her father again.

Among the new arrivals at the camp there were acquaintances of hers from Prague that she had met in Theresienstadt. At first they would give her their meagre soup rations as they refused to eat them. One night she saw young women on their way to the gas chamber being shot to death for

trying to escape. It is then that she realized she might never leave the camp alive. Nevertheless, she was sent to an ammunition factory in Kudowa-Sackisch, a satellite camp of Gross-Rosen, along with her two friends from the ghetto of Łodź, Eva Schneider and Vera Popper. Her living conditions improved somewhat: Hana Nagelstock found a way to communicate indirectly with an aunt who later managed to send her some money; there was more to eat. The woman running the camp was less unbearable.

A few days after the camp's liberation the three friends returned to Prague. Hana had lost almost her entire family. At the end of 1947 Hana created a new family for herself by marrying Hanuš Arend, born in 1922. Hanuš was the offspring of one of the oldest Jewish families of Prague – the Abeles – who underwent a name change in 1910. He spoke both German and Czech with his parents, Olga et Viktor.

In 1938 – 1939, Viktor Arend began preparing his family's emigration. To which extent the gravity of the situation was being underestimated on the other shore of the Atlantic Ocean is evidenced by a few letters he exchanged with an uncle in the United States appended to the book. In the end, only Hanuš Arend's sister Doris was able to leave Prague before the onset of war. He was made to leave the Czech gymnasium in September 1940, after which he worked as a tanner, first as an apprentice, than illegally, until his and his parents' deportation to the ghetto of Łodź, in October 1941. Hanuš Arend writes about the daily life in the ghetto. He worked as a tanner and did not fail to notice the beautiful eyes of a fellow worker – they were to get married after the war. He lost both his parents, who died of malnutrition and tuberculosis in the spring of 1944.

He was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau in August 1944 where good luck and bad luck alternated. Prior to a transport leaving Auschwitz – his name was on the list, and his occupation was listed as «mason» – he remained asleep and missed the convoy. When he contracted scarlet fever, which in camp was tantamount to a death sentence, he was kept hidden and nursed by a medical doctor from Prague, Dr. Epstein, whose son used

to hang out with him at the gymnasium. Having become Professor Epstein's assistant also meant seeing Dr. Mengele every week. He often had to stand holding his bicycle and he became a first-hand witness to his sadism.

Hanuš Arend was made to take part in one of the last death marches. He arrived in Mauthausen on 25th January and moved on to the Ebensee satellite camp. Regardless of the extremely harsh working conditions the local population eagerly turned to the SS to denounce prisoners who were just taking a break from shoveling snow. After the camp's liberation he was sent to a hospital in Sankt Wolfgang. Owing to the tireless efforts of Dr. Lagali his life was saved; after the war he did not fail to express his gratitude. Of the 150 people in the hospital who were treated for typhus only two survived, one of them being Hanuš Arend.

Back in Prague, one day he met the woman whose eyes he had found so impressive in the Łodź ghetto. Hana and Hanuš Arend had two children, Michal and Eva. The family left Czechoslovakia in 1968. Hanuš Arend died in 2004, followed by his wife in 2010.

BOOK 10 / 2011

«Ich wurde nach vorne gedrängt und verlor meine Eltern und Schwester aus den Augen, ohne Abschied von ihnen nehmen zu können.»

FABIAN GERSON / Book 13

«Ich dachte, es würden bloss unwahre Schreckensnachrichten verbreitet werden.»

EVA ALPAR / Book 15

«Die Kontaktstelle schliesst die zweite und dritte Generation nicht aus, aber in erster Linie verbindet sie Menschen, die den Holocaust direkt erlebt und überlebt haben.»

IVAN LEFKOVITS / Founding volume

«Während unsere Eltern Tag und Nacht Angst hatten und immer wieder neue Verstecke finden mussten, lebten wir wohlbehütet im Kloster.»

CHRISTA MARKOVITS / Book 15

«Bei meiner überaus kurzfristig notwendig gewordenen Flucht aus Deutschland durfte ich nur ein Gepäckstück mit auf die ungewisse Reise nehmen.»

KLAUS APPEL / Book 12

«Ich war glücklich, da ich die Ideen des Zionismus eingesogen hatte und auf keinen Fall nach den Ereignissen in Ungarn bleiben wollte.»

ANDRÉ SIRTES / Book 14

ANDREAS SÀS

HOW I BEGAN TO TELL MY STORY

In 2009, Andreas Sàs agreed to talk about his experiences before local school students during Holocaust Remembrance Day. This book is based on his presentation, to which a series of documents and photographs have been added.

Right from the start, Andreas Sàs explains what the expression «Arm in Arm gehen» (to walk arm in arm) means to him, quite literally. He survived a death march in 1945, only because he was able to lean on two comrades who supported him on either side, for several kilometers. Falling would invariably have meant death by shooting.

Andreas Sàs was born in a village in southern Hungary where his father was country doctor. He left home with his brother in order to attend the gymnasium in a nearby small town. His childhood was fairly uneventful, until the Germans arrived in March 1944. At the beginning of May, his family – mother, father, brother and himself – was forced to move and resettle, first in a small town, then in a larger town located near main railway lines. It was very hot outside, and he remembers seeing thirsty people repeatedly asking for water. His family knew that hard times lay ahead, but they didn't know Auschwitz even existed.

When Andreas was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau with his parents and his brother, he was barely 14 years old. The entire family passed the first selection. Two weeks later his mother was lucky enough to be sent to a garment factory in Peterswaldau. His father and his brother, however, were evacuated from Auschwitz in September and in October 1944, and they both died at the Dachau concentration camp a few weeks later. Andreas Sàs survived four selections. The last one is stuck forever in his memory. Locked in some kind of room, it occurred to him to write down his father's name and the name of a Polish man he had been working for

on a slip of paper, and to throw it out of the window. Shortly after, an SS-man entered the room, next to him a young man. «The young man stayed inside, while I was made to leave the place. I didn't know until later that we had been exchanged. This is something that I have not been able to forget, not until this day.»

Andreas Sàs recalls various events, situations he had to endure in Auschwitz-Birkenau and Buchenwald: the roll calls, the omnipresent fear, the betrayals, the resistance, particularly the Sonderkommando revolt in Birkenau. From Buchenwald he was sent to Theresienstadt and finally repatriated to Hungary after the end of the war. He left his hometown in 1946 with his mother and relocated in Budapest. Soon enough they left again for Austria, then for Switzerland in 1956. He completed his studies in Zurich and was then employed by Ascom in Bern for many years.

In his Ascom years – in the late seventies – Andreas Sàs began talking about what he had gone through in the camps. As for his two sons, Philippe and Roger, and judging by their reactions, he feels he has said too much. But then, for several years since liberation, nightmares and gas chambers haunted him in his sleep. And he never could make up his mind to return to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The final pages of his narration deal with his admiration for men like Carl Lutz from Switzerland, and Raoul Wallenberg from Sweden, who saved many thousand lives in Budapest.

BOOK 11 / 2011

KLAUS APPEL

IN THE MORNING THEY WERE ALL GONE

Looking back, Klaus Appel is aware that the orderliness of his numerous Curriculum vitae which he wrote during his career does not reflect his life as it really has been. He was born in Berlin in 1925 into a family with many uncles, aunts and cousins. His mother Erna, née Bieber, died before his fifth birthday. Paul Appel chose not to remarry and raised his three children Willi-Wolf, Klaus and Ruth-Henrietta, who was then barely one year old, on his own. He owned a dental laboratory but lost more and more of his patients after Hitler's rise to power.

At the end of 1937, Paul Appel chose to leave for the Netherlands with his children. He hired a smuggler who took all his savings but was discovered by the Gestapo and confessed. Paul Appel was fined and sentenced to close to three years in prison. On a Monday morning, just as he was leaving for school, young Klaus heard the doorbell ring, followed by men's voices asking for his father. His father swallowed a few tranquilizers, then he simply told him: «Go to school». He was never to see him again.

He and Ruth were admitted to an orphanage of the Jewish community in Berlin. The director of the orphanage did all he could to send his pupils to Great-Britain. The departure of the two children was scheduled for April or May 1939, but since Klaus' papers were not longer valid, Ruth had to leave alone. He was able to leave in the nick of time, during general mobilization and after having said goodbye to his brother, whom he would not to see again. Owing to the dedication and persistence of a Dutch woman, Gertruida Wijsmuller-Meijer, the bus carrying Klaus and other Jewish children made it to the Netherlands. Klaus finally arrived in Great-Britain.

Half of Klaus Appel's narration deals with the years he spent in England. At first he stayed in a refugee camp in Ipswich, where he was quar-

antined while a diphtheria epidemic was raging. Later he joined his sister in a small village in West Sussex. However, the family she was staying with did not really take good care of her. The same thing happened to Klaus, until Miss Pyke and Mr. Goodman took care of both children. After a while Klaus Appel worked in an agricultural school near Oxford, then in a youth hostel for refugees in London, where he met his former classmate Adi Scheinmann. Both found a jobs at a demolition enterprise and lived by themselves. After a few months spent working in a restaurant, the Swiss Cottage, Klaus Appel found employment with a chemical factory in 1942. The factory was directed by Ernst Pokorny. He worked there until the end of the war. He tried vainly to enlist in the Royal Air Force, subsequently in the merchant navy. His employment in a factory which supplied the Navy and was therefore deemed of national importance may have determined his failure to enlist.

After the war ended, he attended evening classes and became an electrical engineer, all the while working for Mr. Pokorny. He was the only one to graduate from evening school; his fellow students gradually stopped coming to class. From a very young age on, he had been unpreparedly thrown into a harsh new reality, and the daily struggle for survival had given him determination. Around this time he met a young Swiss woman, Myriam. By now Mr. Pokorny's business venture was not doing well, and Klaus Appel and Myriam decided to go to Switzerland. For 38 years the couple worked in their own family-owned watch factory ANTIMA. They have been blessed with two children and three grandchildren.

In the 1960s, Klaus Appel appealed for a reversal of the court ruling pronounced against his father in 1938. The German court rejected the appeal by arguing that a customs offence which had occurred in the past maintained its validity from a legal point of view. He tried again in 1997, and this time his request for rehabilitation was granted. At the same time he found out that his father Paul, his older brother Willi and the latter's wife were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau on February 19th, 1943.

The first part of this narration goes back to 2001 when it was written for the first time. A few pages were added in 2010. These pages are meant to be a tribute to the members of his extended family who were killed mercilessly by the Germans. He had a granite memorial plaque placed at the Jewish cemetery of Berlin-Weissensee, where his mother and grandfather are laid to rest, bearing the following inscription: «To Paul, Jenny, Willy, Edith Appel, ruthlessly murdered in Auschwitz in 1943». He then retraces the fate of his father, who was deported in 1943, of his uncle Fritz, who had found refuge in France, and of his cousin Ingrid Zettlin. When she realized she was about to be deported with her husband, she laid her baby son, then aged ten months, on a bench nearby. The baby was taken to a convent. The Gestapo somehow learned that there was a Jewish child hidden in the convent, and the boy ended up in the ghetto-camp Theresienstadt. He survived, and by the end of the war he was but two and a half years old. Klaus Appel's story ends with the names of his relatives – more than twenty – who perished in the Holocaust and the dates of their deportation. His narrative's final words are: «We must speak out about ourselves, and we must do it now, because this is the last opportunity to do all we can, before it is too late.»

BOOK 12 / 2011

FABIAN GERSON

A MEMOIR

Fabian Gerson's Memoir is divided into two equally important parts. The first part describes his childhood in Poland, the forced labor and his deportation to Buchenwald after he had had the presence of mind to avoid deportation to Treblinka. The author always views his life as part of a broader political context. The second part of his narration concerns his arrival in Switzerland in 1945, a tuberculous child whose hard work and tenacity paid off – he embarked on a remarkable academic career.

Fabian Gerson was born in 1926 in Lodz (Poland), a large industrial town, where his father Pinkus and his mother Dora, née Kon, owned a wholesale textile business in the heart of the old town on Piotrkowska street. One third of the population was Jewish. Fabian and his only sister Franciszka attended the local Jewish high school. The rising of anti-Semitism, which is well described by the author, forces his parents to consider emigration. However, this was a difficult choice for Pinkus Gerson to make, because due to his travel experience and professional contacts since the beginning of the century he had a long standing affinity for German culture, language and traditions – and he cared deeply for his business.

The German conquest of Lodz in September 1939 put an end to these projects. At the same time Jewish property was confiscated and a ghetto was established. The family decided therefore to leave for Czestochowa, one hundred kilometers away. Fabian and his father however waited until it was too late and ended up in the ghetto. They were able to get away after all in October 1940 by bribing the SS and they finally reached Czestochowa where they were reunited with the rest of the family. They managed to survive with whatever means they had left but they had to live in a ghetto once again.

The 22nd of September 1942 is a day that Fabian Gerson will never forget. In the morning the ghetto population assembled in the market square, while a selection took place. His parents and his sister disappeared from his sight. He had heard rumors about the extermination camp of Treblinka and there was no doubt that his loved ones and all the deportees were going to die. He was going to be deported as well. However, he managed to escape from a column of prisoners, to hide and to join another column, which was being led to forced labor. For two years and a half he worked at HASAG, an ammunition factory in the outskirts of Czestochowa. Polish inmates working in the kitchen would help him every now and then; but still, he was very hungry.

In January 1945, as the Red Army was approaching, the HASAG factory inmates were transferred west in cattle cars. In Buchenwald he fell ill immediately. When the Jewish prisoners were forced on a death march, he was able to hide until the American soldiers arrived. They took pictures of him, he remembers; he was a young boy who looked like a «walking skeleton».

Fabian Gerson belonged to a group of «child survivors» of Buchenwald who were sent to Switzerland for medical treatment. His tuberculosis was so severe that a Bernese doctor thought he would not survive. However, with the financial support of Swiss Jewish organizations, his health gradually improved. He alternated long periods of medical treatment in mountain sanatoriums with stays in private pensions until 1951, first in Davos, then in Leysin.

Ever since he was a child, Fabian Gerson had always taken a keen interest in reading and studying. He studied hard to obtain the Federal Matura and passed the exams with flying colours in the fall of 1949. He began his engineering studies at the ETH Zurich, a university for technology and natural sciences. No sooner had he begun his studies that he came down again with tuberculosis. After he had overcome this relapse he resumed his studies at the ETH in the fall of 1951 but opted for natural sciences instead. In 1958 he passed his final examinations with brilliant

results and became Doctor of Science in organic chemistry. To preserve his regained health he also engaged in sports and physical activity, mostly swimming and rowing.

Important changes took place in the early 1960s. Fabian Gerson acquired Swiss citizenship without difficulty and married Ingeborg (Inge) Waldmann in 1962. Two children were born, Daniel and Deborah. The family moved from Zurich to Basel in early 1969 after he had been appointed Extraordinary Professor (Extraordinarius) of Physical Chemistry. He became Ordinary Professor in 1975 and retired in 1997.

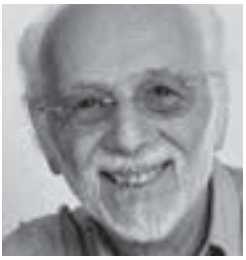
He remembers visiting Poland twice, in the early 1990s, for professional purposes. He took his son on a family history journey to Lodz, Treblinka and Czestochowa. His Memoir ends on this note.

BOOK 13 / 2014

ANDRÉ SIRTES

ALONG THE ROUTE

André Sirtes was born in Budapest in February 1935, as Endre (Andrew) Stern, to Károly and Margrit. His parents were poor and often forced to move. In 1935 they opened a dye works and drycleaning store. After many difficult years, their situation gradually improved. Miklós (Nicholas), their second child, was born in 1937. Their business had a good reputation and attracted new clients, which made it possible for them to hire two more people (Mr. and Mrs. Beér) to do the ironing.



André Sirtes' narration of his life is intertwined with a description of the spread of Nazism and anti-Semitism. These developments were so worrisome for his father that he gathered the necessary documents for his family to relocate in Madagascar. However, his wife was not keen on leaving her mother, brothers, and sisters behind. For this reason they remained in Budapest.

Endre describes his childhood as happy and carefree. A brief feeling of anxiety came over him when his father was conscripted into forced labor and had to part from his family in November 1942. Two months later he was reported missing in the Ukraine. After that, his wife considered converting to Protestantism with her children, but young Endre refused.

After Nazi Germany occupied Hungary, the Sterns had to leave their home and move in with an uncle. His home was a designated «Jewish house». Endre and his brother were banned from attending school. When the Arrow Cross party (the Hungarian Nazis) came to power after October 1944, the situation deteriorated even further. Endre's mother was conscripted for work at a brick factory in Obuda before being sent on a «death march» to the West. He and his brother ended up in a camp on Kolombusz Street. Meanwhile, the Beérs, who had taken care of the

store, looked after them regularly. When they escaped from the camp in the early days of December, Mr. and Mrs. Beer readily took them in.

Their uncle Tibi hid them in a house under Swiss protection within the international ghetto. They were still in danger, because their home was raided by an Arrow Cross gang; the residents were driven out and lined up on the banks of the Danube, where the first victims were shot. But a siren's wailing sound frightened the murderers away, and Endre narrowly escaped death.

After the end of the war, the two Stern children were reunited with their mother who had survived Dachau. They moved into a boarding school in Szeged in southern Hungary. When the boarders were granted permission to leave for Palestine, both Endre's mother and brother, unlike Endre, were unwilling to leave Hungary.

The family returned to Budapest only to find that the tailor shop had been emptied of all its equipment. Once again the Beér's were there to help. Endre and his brother entered the Jewish gymnasium on Abonyi Street, the same school which Theodor Herzl had attended. Two events of this period remain forever carved in his memory: an accident in which his brother lost one arm, and his own Bar Mitzvah in the Csaki Street synagogue.

The Communist regime consolidated its hold on society, and anti-Semitism was on the rise again. These developments weighed Endre down, and they prompted his name change from Stern to S(z)irtes. He found a job in a textile factory and joined the army in 1955. After suppression of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, he and some friends made plans to leave Hungary for good. They succeeded, thanks to their forged identity papers.

In Austria Endre was issued a refugee identity document. Much to his disbelief, his document bore the letter «J». «Welcome to the free world!», he exclaimed. All this made him to think about Judaism and anti-Semitism. The local branch of the Jewish Agency helped him find a room in a guesthouse right in the heart of Linz.

Endre's choice for permanent settlement was Israel. Yet his application was rejected by the Israeli Consulate, because he asked to be exempted from military service for one or two years. Switzerland was his second option, since a cousin of his mother's had lived there for more than 20 years. Endre was permitted entry and granted a train ticket into Switzerland on his 22nd birthday. His mother and brother are able to leave Hungary for Switzerland in August 1957. André Sirtes' story ends with his arrival in Lucerne, where he was to meet his new family.

BOOK 14 / 2014

CHRISTA MARKOVITS: I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN LUCKY

EVA ALPAR: A SURVIVOR'S TALE FROM BUDAPEST

Christa Markovits: Ivan Lefkovits explains in his prologue that there is something unusual about the 15th volume of the collection. First, it differs in both size and content from the earlier books, which are usually larger: a whole story with a beginning and an ending. Second, the book comprises two memoirs written by two survivors; both of them sketchy memories and thoughts inviting reflection on other people's lives and fates. It took a lot of effort for Christa Markovits, a quiet and unobtrusive yet very active committee member of the Contact Point for Holocaust survivors in Switzerland, to write her story. Eva Alpar, who also grew up in Budapest, wrote down a few recollections shortly before moving to a retirement home. «By publishing these fragments», Mr. Lefkovits says in his closing words, «we wish to address the importance of every victim's life; for us, every life and every destiny matters».

Christa Markovits (née Barabás) and her twin sister Vicky were born in Budapest in 1936. Their parents came from Transylvania; however, during World War I, military and territorial turmoil had caused them to leave. Their father was an architect; their mother worked in an important bank. They converted to Catholicism with their daughters in late 1938, probably, according to Christa, under the impact of the first Hungarian «Jewish law». The family wanted to leave Hungary, but the outbreak of World War II thwarted such plans. Christa doesn't recall much of what happened prior to the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944,

but she is well aware of the general context, mostly through post-war conversations with her mother.

As for the German occupation, the first thing that comes to her mind is the yellow star sewn on her coat. She and her family were afraid to step out of their apartment building near the Danube on Balassi Bálint Street without wearing it. Barely aware of the tragic events unfolding around her, she remembers her mother in tears; she had just received a postcard from her sister who was about to be «sent East» with her family. After the war she received word that the Glesinger family had been deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau and that only their oldest daughter had survived.

Christa's family got hold of forged papers by using the name Sebestyén. The twins were under Swedish protection from June 1944 on. Their mother made sure they were hidden in the Sacred Heart Convent. However, after the Hungarian Nazis (the Arrow Cross) seized power, this «haven of peace» was threatened. Because people were rounded up all the time, the nuns made sure that the girls were placed in safe houses in the «International ghetto». In December they were reunited with their parents who had left their apartment building with a «yellow star» near the Danube and went hiding with forged papers, the mother with the baby, the third daughter, Zsófi. In the meantime, she became ten months old. Oddly enough, it was German soldiers who protected them against Arrow Cross attacks.

After the war, Christa attended school at the Sacred Heart Convent. Later she worked in a factory and studied to become a mechanical engineer. When the 1956 Hungarian uprising was crushed, the family fled by different routes: Christa and her twin sister went to Switzerland, whereas the rest of the family found refuge in Los Angeles. Christa became a physicist and found work with the Paul Scherrer Institute for Nuclear Research. She married Michael Markovits in 1972.

Eva Alpar: Eva Alpar's testimony begins in March 1944, when Germany occupied Hungary. She mentions the political context prevalent at the time, even if young Eva wasn't quite aware of the complexities. Now she

blames herself for only thinking about herself and her own will to survive. Eva was 20 years old in March 1944. She lived with her maternal grandmother in Budapest, not far from the Eastern Railway station. The neighbourhood was Christian, and aside from her family she didn't have any contact with Jews. When the Germans occupied Hungary, her mother and her sister Jolan came to live with her, but her father decided to stay in the family apartment in the suburbs of Pest. In despair, Eva tried to commit suicide by ingesting morphine. She had obtained it from her sister, in exchange for an address, as well as a set of forged identity papers a classmate had given her. The address belonged to a dressmaker who had offered to help her. One day, they had met unexpectedly in the street and as Eva was wearing the yellow star, the dressmaker was surprised and had offered to take her in. Thus her sister Jolan was the eventual beneficiary of this generous offer. She stayed at the dressmaker's until the end of the war.

Eva was able to procure other identity papers; they belonged to Margit Urfi, a neighbour and former classmate. Eva had often given her bread and butter sandwiches when they were children. In the summer of 1944, she asked if she could borrow her identity papers. Margit agreed, and when the Arrow Cross seized power, the documents enabled her to hide in a hospital. Her tearful assertion that she had been bombed out in the countryside paid off and got her a job as a chambermaid. Eva writes about daily life at the hospital; there were four incidents when she gave away her real identity and Jewish origin by mistake, but fortunately nothing happened. She recalls helping a very young German soldier; he had been wounded and didn't want to be captured by the Russians. She gave him some civilian clothes she had stolen. She likes to think that he might remember her with gratitude if he is still alive. She left the hospital at the end of January 1945.

During this time, her mother and grandmother were sent to the large ghetto of Budapest. Her grandmother died shortly after Liberation; her malnourished stomach couldn't handle too much food eaten too quickly.

Her mother, who had been confined for weeks in the ghetto, would never speak about her terrible ordeal.

Daniel Gerson explains in his afterword why these two eyewitness accounts are indicative of the destiny of European Jewry. The Holocaust was initiated by the Nazis and implemented with the help of their local collaborators; however, this would never have been possible if there hadn't been a millennial tradition of anti-Semitism.

BOOK 15 / 2014

PART III

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY AT THE FEDERAL PALACE IN BERN 2011

SPEECHES IN BERN JANUARY 2011

WELCOME BY AMBASSADOR GEORGES MARTIN

We have gathered here to perform a ceremonial act: disbanding of the «Contact Point for Holocaust Survivors» association, which was founded in Switzerland in the 1990s at the initiative of Gábor Hirsch.

The association is now to disband, although the men and women of the Contact Point, their partners, family members, sons, and daughters will continue to meet informally. But the experience of those who suffered, which brought so much to the Contact Point during the many years of its existence, remains.

That is because something particular has been created as a result of its work: a series of 12 memoirs. Other speakers will talk at greater length on this theme in due course.

Since foundation of the Contact Point, hardly any other issue has been written about more in commemorative books, novels, or academic literature than the Holocaust. Nevertheless, ladies and gentlemen, no history book or standard reference on National Socialism can really describe the suffering you and your families went through.

This is why it is so important that so many of you have found the strength to write about your terrible experiences.

The idea of committing to paper the stories of individuals' experiences of the persecution was long discussed within the Contact Point. Mr. Ivan Lefkovits was, and still is, the driving force behind this. Of course, some accounts written by Holocaust survivors living in Switzerland had already been published. I am thinking for example of Sigmund Toman's memoirs, of Nathalie Gelbart's book about her grandfather Ruben, or that of Jerzy Czarnecki about the fate of his family during the Holocaust. An impressive documentary film by Peter and Suzanne Scheiner is based on his story.

The aim at that time was to encourage all members of the Contact Point to write about their suffering during the persecution by the Nazis and their collaborators.

It is a particular honor for me today to say a few words on behalf of the President of the Swiss Confederation, Madame Micheline Calmy-Rey.

Ambassador Alexandre Fasel, driven by his strong commitment, carried out decisive pioneer work. It was he who first contacted Professor Lefkovits and was asked to give a lecture to the members of the Contact Point. He will join us later. Following Ambassador Fasel, the memoirs project found a strong supporter in Ambassador Jacques Pitteloud, my predecessor, a partner in the FDFA who was both interested in and convinced about the project.

Our special thanks also go to Madame Ruth Dreifuss, former President of the Swiss Confederation, who honors us with her presence and will speak later.

Today, the activities of the Contact Point for Holocaust Survivors draw to a close in their current form. However, despite many painful experiences, the stories of these men and women have become the life of the Contact Point through their vividness and will remain with us through these elegant and attractive volumes. May they help make our world a more human and compassionate place for all.

GEORGES MARTIN
Head of the Political Secretariat of the Federal Department
of Foreign Affairs (FDFA).
Head of the Swiss delegation to the IHRA.
Bern, 27 January 2011.

RUTH DREIFUSS
FEDERAL COUNCILLOR FROM 1993 TO 2002
PRESIDENT OF THE SWISS CONFEDERATION IN 1999

Joining you for this event awakens deep emotions in me. Today we are here not only to mourn those who were murdered and remember their terrible fate but also to celebrate the triumph of life over death. Because you, the survivors of the Shoah, despite the horror that you suffered – a horror that continues to cast a shadow over our lives to this day – can also be seen as victors.

You were at the mercy of an enemy that not only wanted to kill you, to exterminate and physically destroy you and your entire families, but to deny you all humanity in the name of an ideology of murderous anti-Semitism. But precisely this you succeeded in resisting both during and after the persecution.

Those who read these memoirs will discover how you, as children and adolescents, nevertheless found the ability to love, to learn, to grieve, and to regain trust in others. You owe this especially to the love and devotion of your families during the persecution.

After the liberation you found the strength to return to human society. You also made your career ambitions come true, and so did your vision of a meaningful life that would also benefit society as a whole.

Without doubt, your own new families represent a manifest triumph over destruction and extermination. You have learnt to love and be loved again.

And now you have given testimony of your life as it was during the persecution by the Nazi regime. Your statement has come late. For a long time you probably wanted to spare your spouse, children, and friends. What you experienced seemed so unimaginably cruel, and still so painful that words seemed incapable of conveying the true meaning. Some of you have suffered a deep abiding, though irrational, sense of guilt that you survived. Why did you survive when millions of others were gassed, shot,

or tormented to death? For a long time the general public did not even want to hear your account of the evil past you lived through.

Many of you only came to recount what was done to your families, your communities, and your people at a very old age. But with this you have achieved yet another triumph: a triumph over the tormented memories of the barely imaginable crimes perpetrated by humans against humans only a few decades ago in Europe.

You have found the strength not only to remember but to pass on the memories. You have borne witness in writing, thus ensuring that later generations do not forget the extreme consequences that racism and the incitement to hatred against minorities can lead to.

I am convinced that many of these memoirs would never have been written without the loving support of your partners and children.

You had the support of others who went through the same experiences as you; you found each other through the Contact Point for Holocaust Survivors in Switzerland. The association is to be disbanded today because you yourselves have made a conscious decision to disband it. Your organisation should not disappear as a result of the natural deaths of its members. You have decided to determine your destiny in this respect too.

Various professionals have also made valuable contributions to your project: historians, archivists, and graphic artists have made it possible for us to have these meticulously edited memoirs today.

The project has also received official backing. In this context the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education deserve mention. The education authorities are especially called upon to ensure that these texts are widely disseminated among the young generation. It is important that these testimonials are made accessible through wide circulation. In your memoirs you have left behind a lasting legacy.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to everyone who participated in this undertaking in remembering those who were murdered and the

injustices they endured; it recognizes the courage and humanity of the surviving victims as a warning against hatred.

RUTH DREIFUSS
Federal Councillor from 1993 to 2002,
President of the Swiss Confederation in 1999.
Bern, 27 January 2011.

IVAN LEFKOVITS
HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

Here before me is the founding volume of the memoirs series and its interesting contributions, including those by Jacques Picard, Jacques Pitteloud and François Wisard. For the first time, we, the members of the contact point, are not alone but in another setting, a different kind of setting, and we can reflect on what it means to be received in this festive atmosphere. We should perhaps pause for a moment and ponder on how the times have changed, how our surroundings have changed, and how we have changed.

I have selected a topic for which I would like to use an unusual term: «perceived anti-Semitism» It is a term that I have borrowed from the field of meteorology. In weather forecasting one often talks about «perceived temperature», or «perceived cold». Perceived temperature expresses how an individual feels the ambient temperature. In weather conditions of minus two and a force 3 north wind, subjectively we feel a considerably lower temperature. Objectively, the temperature may be minus two but subjectively we feel minus twelve. And with saturated humidity we shiver from the cold even more. Although many of us of are hardened against perceived cold or, if not, we put on a warm pullover, we are often less well armed to fight perceived anti-Semitism. We are sensitive, perhaps even over-sensitive. The physiology of the body is one thing, the psychology of our souls is another. I am in no way trying to suggest that we should harden ourselves against anti-Semitism; what I want to say is that we should be more aware that the one and same phenomenon affects each of us as individuals differently – differently even when the sun shines or the wind blows.

In the more than 40 years that I have lived in Switzerland, I have been the target of only one act of anti-Semitism. Jake Fersztand, who is with us today, was with me. I will not recount the story here but I would like to reflect on one thing. I reported the incident and went to court. It

was something concrete and that I can deal with; I can live with it. But a remark such as: «You can do that in Israel but not here» is what I sense as an instance of the perceived anti-Semitism I have just mentioned.

Refugees who came to Switzerland in the late 1940s often experienced undisguised anti-Semitism. The 1956 immigrants had it better, and the 1968 refugees arrived in a completely changed Switzerland.

Gábor Hirsch – an Auschwitz survivor – dared to set up a contact point for Holocaust survivors a good fifteen years ago. Destiny brought us together and a lively body grew out of our association. The members acknowledged each other and the association was recognised by the outside world. For the members it was a place to talk frankly amongst each other about the past (and the present). But gradually, in fact only when our ranks had started to dwindle, the realisation dawned on us that we should not leave this world without having said something. As one of the youngest survivors of Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen, I was able to motivate a few members and friends to take part in a memoirs project. The committee fully identified with the project and we gave it a try. Here is the result: 12 books, 12 stories. It is not bed-time reading. They are the stories about how we survived. They are reports about how we evaded Nazi Germany's machinery of death. When I remarked to someone recently that our individual survivals represent the «average story», he corrected me by saying «No, no, they are the exception stories» because the average stories ended with mass graves.

I do not intend to explain the details of our way to survival – this would go beyond the scope of my speech – but I would like to refer to the founding volume. Although all the acknowledgements are listed, in this ceremonial setting I cannot leave unmentioned the fact that without the generous support of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, this project would not have been possible. From the FDFA, I should like to mention Jacques Pitteloud, François Wisard, Georges Martin, and Claude Altermatt. Many other institutions and individuals deserve mention, without whose commitment the project would have been doomed to failure:

in particular Jacques Picard from the Institute for Jewish Studies of the University of Basel, Martin Sommer and Christine Jungo from the Basel School of Design, editors Tanja Hammel, Deborah Freiburghaus, Martina Walser, Lea Bloch, Stefan Roser, Melissa Detling, Zamira Angst, and Linda Mülli. And not least, Mr. and Mrs. Eytan for their financial contribution.

In concluding, I would like to return to the term perceived anti-Semitism. Although it is a subjective impression, it is at the same time real for those affected by it – I feel it therefore it is. But if this is the case, and we allow ourselves to be guided by our feelings, then we must also acknowledge the reverse side of the coin – a situation of empathy that we experience on Holocaust Remembrance Day – a Switzerland that shares our feelings. What country, government, or institution would have the generosity to send off an association like ours – one that stands to its last breath for humanity – at the moment it disbands, as is happening here and now?

This event takes place under the patronage of former Federal Councillor Ruth Dreifuss. We thank you for everything that you and the government of Switzerland have done, and are still doing, for us and our concerns. We could not think of a more appropriate gift for you, Honourable Ms Dreifuss, than our small collection of Holocaust memoirs. I present them to you not only on behalf of the twelve authors but also on behalf of all members of the Contact Point for Holocaust Survivors.

IVAN LEFKOVITS
Member of the Board of the Contact Point for Holocaust Survivors.
Bern, 27 January 2011.

FRANÇOIS WISARD
HEAD OF THE FDFA HISTORY UNIT

«In 1997 the discussions about the […] survivors of the Holocaust intensified. Unfortunately these consultations were conducted about us but not with us».

These were the words used by Gábor Hirsch in 1999 to describe the genesis of the Contact Point for Holocaust Survivors. They touched me deeply then, and they still touch me deeply today.

All the more so no doubt because I started working as a historian for the FDFA in 1997, and since then hardly a month has gone by when I have not worked on the subject of Switzerland and the Second World War.

We in the FDFA have been speaking with you, at the very latest, since the beginning of the memoirs book project in 2008.

But even more important for us in the FDFA, this was the decisive reason for our unreserved support for this project: you speak, you write in your own way and in your own words about all the horror, all that which you and your families went through, all that which is unimaginable – unimaginable at least for all who were born after the Holocaust.

With the memoirs book project it is not the government of Switzerland, or historians or journalists asking you specific questions and wanting to know more about your life and how you survived, or wanting to use you for their particular ends. It was your own determination to come to terms with your past and set this down for posterity in the form you have chosen.

You decided to set up the contact point for this project – just as you decided to disband your association. For both steps you expressed the wish for support from the FDFA. In both cases, we answered without hesitation «Yes, of course».

We are happy and proud to have had this chance to provide this support together with the editors, layout specialists, and others involved in the project.

But most important of all is that you yourselves have every reason to be proud about the 12 books, and furthermore of the fact that more manuscripts exist. For those manuscripts still unpublished we will without doubt find a solution to satisfy all concerned. We will work for this, too.

Moreover, several of you have shared your memories through direct contacts with school pupils over the years. You can be very proud of this valuable work that you have done in schools.

Here in this room we have listened in stunned silence to Ivan Lefkovits, Gábor Hirsch, and Jake Fersztand who spent their childhood in Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland respectively. In the memoirs other survivors speak about their earliest years in Prague, Berlin, and elsewhere.

Of course, we could also speak and write volumes, compare and comment on these individual destinies. It will probably be done. And still decades after you have breathed your «last breath» people will still talk and hold discussions «about you».

Today, on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, lots will be said about lessons to learn or lessons learned. I won't do that here, and I will not report on the pedagogical work that has been done or remains to be done in Switzerland. This does not seem to be the most important thing here and now.

Prof. Ivan Lefkovits, who – be it in the spoken word or in writing – always finds the right words, wrote in the founding volume of the memoirs series: «It would be presumptuous to think that we can rouse and change the world with our statements, nor is it important whether they are read by 10 or ten thousand people.»

Here and now, in my opinion, the most important thing is that you have the opportunity to speak and that you do not have to sit through any high-minded and long-winded speeches. For this reason, I will only express my predominant feeling, and this feeling is respect.

At the end of his memoirs, one author says the following: «We must give everything of ourselves, and now we have the very last chance to do

everything we really can». Yes, «we must give everything of ourselves,» you write.

Throughout your whole life you have had to part with far more than others. You have lost family, friends, and acquaintances – you were forced to part with them.

You left behind houses and homes, the country of your childhood, not to mention all the things that very many of you had to part with during your internment.

Even after the war you gave much, but in a very different sense: the love for your spouses, children, and grandchildren. These experiences are also movingly recorded in your memoirs. Impressive too is all the patience and time that you had for your friends.

As if all this were not enough, you have recounted and have committed your stories to paper. Many of you have done this for the first time.

To be honest, I am not sure whether among the other people here today – many with the same experiences as you – there are many who would still have the courage to talk about their past. I, myself, very probably not. You had this courage.

Precisely for this reason you are an example for us.

We thank you for this, and we extend our best wishes to you for the next time you meet.

FRANÇOIS WISARD
Head of the History Unit of the Federal Depatment of Foreign Affairs (FDFA).
Swiss representative to the Memorials Working Group of the IHRA.
Bern, 27 January 2011.

Travel of the members to Bern: Vera and Alexander Gordon, Peter and Henrietta Lebovic, Jake Fersztand and Christa Markovits.

Arrival at the Federal Square in Bern.

At the entrance
to the Federal
Palace (Parliament
and Government
building)
and during the
ceremony.

Welcome by Ambassador Georges Martin and other speeches: former President of the Swiss Confederation Ruth Dreifuss; Prof. Ivan Lefkovits

Dr. Bernard Wicht;
Mr. Gábor Hirsch;
Mr. Jake Fersztand.

> Dr. François Wisard; Dr. Claude Altermatt; former President of the Swiss Confederation Ruth Dreifuss receiving a slipcase edition of the Holocaust Memoirs (1–12).

>> Prof. Ivan Lefkovits hands over a slipcase edition of the Holocaust Memoirs (1–12) to former President of the Swiss Confederation Ruth Dreifuss.

The audience attentively listens to Mark Varshavsky's musical intermezzo.

Commemorative medals (see p. 22) are awarded by former President of the Swiss Confederation Ruth Dreifuss and Prof. Ivan Lefkovits. Pictured here are some of the authors: Betty Brenner (her husband Ernst died shortly after submitting his manuscript); Nina and Wilhelm Pelc (Nina published the memoirs under her maiden name Weilová); Eva Halter-Arend (daughter of late Hana and Hanuš Arend); Peter Lebovic.

Ursula Nyirö (recently widowed after the death of her husband Gábor) is accompanied by Christa Markovits; Jake and Erika Fersztand; Klaus Appel; Gábor Hirsch.

Former President of
Swiss Confederation
Ruth Dreifuss
offers her thanks
to Alexander
Gordon – one of the
oldest members
of the Contact Point.

Former President of the Swiss Confederation Ruth Dreifuss extends her thanks to Ivan Lefkovits for the idea and implementation of the Holocaust Memoirs.

Vera Gordon;
Judith Schlesinger;
Pavel Weil;
Ursula Nyirö.

Sigmund Baumöhl with his wife Ursula Scheidegger; Vojka Krecic with her daughter; Eva Soykova and Wilhelm Pelc; Manfred Rosner (in the background), Arnost and Judith Schlesinger.

>
Peter Lebovic; Robert Schönhauser; Pavel Weil.

>>
At the reception that followed: Jake Fersztand and Dr. Claude Altermatt; Alex Dreifuss

Lively discussions with
Jake Fersztand.

Coffee break for
Ivan Lefkovits.

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Relaxed discussions during the reception with Helena Mechner; Shlomo Graber; Gábor Hirsch.

<<

Eva Halter-Arend and Peter Lebovic.

> Snapshots taken during the reception: Manfred Rosner; Veronika Klingler; Vojka Krecic.

>> Sigmund Baumöhl and Alexander Gordon.

PART IV

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC REMEMBRANCE

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC REMEMBRANCE: THE CONTACT POINT FOR HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS IN SWITZERLAND AND THEIR MEMOIRS.

My father's memoirs were published posthumously in Book 13 of this series. I had the privilege of editing his contribution and was also able to collaborate on the publication of Books 14 and 15, as well as the final volume of the series.

This contribution is a reflection of the contact point's importance in remembering the Holocaust in the private and public sphere in Switzerland. The text is based on both a historical analysis of the contact point's role in the dialogue on the genocide of the Jews as well as on the personal experiences of a member of the «second generation».

Like most survivors, my father began only late in life to speak about the murderous Nazi persecution during the Second World War. His memoirs, which have now been published, were written during the last years of his life. He did not appear in public as an eyewitness until 2006. On the occasion of the Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January, I arranged meetings between Matura students and eyewitnesses in the Archives for Contemporary History. Having hitherto related only fragments of his life during the Holocaust, at the age of 80 he found it possible to pass on his story as a cohesive narrative.

I already knew the broad outline of his story, because, although he did not talk much about the war years, his terrible fate between 1939 and 1945, which was in such contrast to the Swiss reality in which we lived, was always present. Place names such as «Auschwitz», «Buchenwald», «Theresienstadt» and «Treblinka» as well as words such as «deportation», «ghetto» and «reparations» were from the beginning part of our everyday life.

«HOLOCAUST»: A TERM FOR SOMETHING THAT IS HARD TO GRASP

In the 1970s, however, there was not yet any common terminology in my immediate surroundings for the crime that had been committed against the European Jews. I first became aware of the term «Holocaust» – so well-established today – with the legendary series of the same name in 1979. I still remember how my father left the television room after only a few minutes, while the rest of the family watched the drama of a Jewish family under the rule of Nazi Germany, from which we sensed, despite its simplification, a connection to our own destiny.

It was the beginning of a process of realisation that the missing grandparents, aunts and uncles as well as the material surroundings that had been completely destroyed affected not only oneself and a few people in our family, but large parts of European Jewry. The apparently idyllic Swiss-Jewish world was an exception. Stories of escape and persecution, which I had been familiar with since childhood, shaped European-Jewish life in the first half of the 20th century.

It would be many years, however, before the Holocaust survivors in Switzerland would find the strength and the self-confidence to make a collective commitment to come to terms with their fate, and to pass on the stories of their life and survival. While self-help groups were already being set up in the USA and in Israel for children of the «second generation», in the 1980s, Swiss survivors still had no possibility of acting collectively for their needs.

In the mid-1990s, various factors made the foundation of the contact point possible. The growing willingness on the part of many of those concerned to tell their own story was certainly decisive. Many survivors were now able to see themselves as part of a group and to share with others this unique historic experience of exclusion, destruction and the will to survive.

OPENING UP OF SOCIETY AND THE «SWITZERLAND – SECOND WORLD WAR» DEBATE

But developments in society as a whole also contributed greatly to the establishment of the self-help group in 1995. As society became more open and increasingly individualised, with numerous emancipation movements, stories as «foreign» and disturbing as those of the Holocaust survivors were able to find a place in public discussion. To be able to talk and if necessary write about one's own personal persecution and the resulting story of suffering was no longer considered to be arrogant but was regarded as a legitimate form of self-expression and the conscious, positive acceptance of one's own fate.

Furthermore, the second half of the 1990s was characterised by a more in-depth debate about Switzerland's role in the Second World War and its refugee policy with regard to the Jews. These were topics that concerned the Holocaust survivors to a high degree, so that many of them saw themselves obliged to emerge from anonymity and to confidently and publicly represent their version of history.

HELP AND DISTANCE: HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS AND SWISS JEWRY

The contact point must also be seen as part of the diversifying Swiss Jewish «landscape». Almost all Holocaust survivors in Switzerland were born Jewish. But only some of them joined Jewish communities. Some survivors had lost their connection with Jewish religious practices during the time of the persecution. For example, my father's parents and sister were deported to the Treblinka extermination camp on the day after Yom Kippur in 1942. While he was alive he remembered with bitter irony the fact that the family had even fasted on this holiday. From then on he never observed this commandment again. Others completely suppressed their

Jewish origins for years in order to protect themselves and their families from any possible further persecution.

Furthermore, most Swiss fellow believers did not really want to hear what Jews on the other side of the border had had to endure. Although most destitute refugees often experienced very generous material support from Jewish aid organisations, this dependency could also provoke a feeling of inferiority and of being tolerated that they would rather not remember.

It is therefore not astonishing that the contact point's meetings benefited mostly from the hospitality of the equally «non-conformist» reformed Jewish community in Zurich «Or Chadasch», founded in 1978. The relatively small «Or Chadasch» allowed the self-help group to use its premises free of charge, whereas the well established community, the «Israelitische Cultusgemeinde Zürich» (ICZ), expected payment for the use of its facilities, which was perceived by the contact point's founding members as a lack of empathy for their specific needs as a self-help group largely without funds.

When the contact point was set up in 1995, there would have been still far more than one hundred Holocaust survivors living in Switzerland. A couple of dozen people attended the first meetings. The majority of the survivors steered clear of the group's activities. My father was one of them; he did know some «activists» but shied away from meeting other fellow sufferers in an institutionalised context. Coming to terms with his own story was already difficult enough – a confrontation with the suffering of others, which was nevertheless familiar, may have appeared unbearable.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

Indeed, the meetings were often somewhat tense, as some of those present found it hard to share time and attention with those who had experienced

the same fate. Although many Holocaust survivors led professionally successful and socially integrated lives, most of them had suffered psychological damage which became especially apparent with increasing age. With the existence of the contact point, the need for specific professional psychological support became evident. Whereas in Israel and in countries with large Jewish communities, specific help had been available for some time for Holocaust survivors, up to that moment this had been almost completely lacking in Switzerland. Although the Association of Swiss Jewish Refugee Aid and Welfare Organisations (VSJF) had worked indefatigably since the end of the Second World War for the material needs of the individual survivors in Switzerland, until the 1990s there was no institutional framework for specific psychotherapeutic needs. Only in the Basel region in the 1980s with Children of the Holocaust was there a temporarily active, small self-help group for the «second generation».

To fill this void, in 1998 the organisation «Tamach» was established – a psycho-social advisory centre for Holocaust survivors and their immediate family in Switzerland. Tamach tried to meet the specific psychological needs of the families of Holocaust survivors and was present at the contact point's meetings. However no close cooperation developed between the advisory centre and the contact point, and in 2013 Tamach stopped its activities.

For most members, the contact point's meetings were certainly an important way of coming to terms emotionally and factually with what had happened to them. As Jake Fersztand stated in his speech at the closing ceremony of 27 January 2011: «For many of us it was the only opportunity to talk about what we had been avoiding, even within our own families. It still hurts to talk about these experiences. But when we met up it was easier, here were people with similar experiences. When I was asked about certain events, I sometimes felt unable to keep talking. We carry a burden and whether we want to or not we are handing it down to the second and third generations». These words express a sensation of loneliness that many survivors were apparently unable to overcome even within

their families. A feeling of guilt could also be detected at having to leave such a gruesome legacy to their descendants. In particular for close family members, it was sometime difficult to be confronted with stories of survival containing so much violence and suffering.

In addition, of course, to the opportunity that the contact point provided of relating one's story during the Nazi persecution, there was also the possibility of enjoying a moment of relaxed company with people who were «related» to you through their past. Owing to the fact that some survivors had a rather distant relationship with traditional Jewish community life, the contact point served as a type of substitute community. For example, it was possible to spend the Passover Seder evening together and members exchanged good wishes for the Jewish New Year.

But due to the dramatic story of each individual survivor, the meetings were not always free from conflict. As in every group, there were personal tensions and rivalry. When someone started talking about their experience, others wanted to tell their own story. There was also a sort of «hierarchy of suffering». Some survivors had «only» had to flee Germany or hide, and had survived along with other family members. Others, however, had spent months or even years in the most dreadful circumstances in different camps right next to gas chambers and crematoriums where their families were murdered. It was no easy task for the contact point's members to accept the very different character of their various persecution experiences and at the same time consider themselves part of the same story, as a survivor of the genocide initiated by Nazi Germany.

EYEWITNESSES: LIFE STORIES (OF SURVIVAL) FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

For many survivors it became a matter of priority to relate their story. The «Switzerland – Second World War» debate that began in the media and in historical scholarship shortly after the contact point's foundation in-

creased the need to make known an authentic version of one's own experiences in the Holocaust. Gábor Hirsch spoke of this endeavour to be not just the «subject» of a discussion, but to become the subject of one's own storytelling, in the following words: «In 1997 discussions on the [...] Holocaust survivors intensified. Unfortunately these discussions were conducted about us but not with us.»

Thanks to the commitment of individual «activists» from the contact point it was possible for Holocaust survivors in Switzerland to become voices in the general public, who found listeners and were able to tell their stories. In particular schools and religious institutions became aware that in «neutral» Switzerland too there were people who had directly experienced the genocide of the Jews. In the context of the «Switzerland – Second World War» debate, the survivors became witnesses to historical events and thus rejected clumsy justification strategies like that of Federal Councillor Jean-Pascal Delamuraz in 1996 with his statement «Auschwitz is not in Switzerland».

Survivors from Auschwitz were living in Switzerland. The number of people who could have been saved from the gas chambers of Birkenau and other German extermination camps, had the Swiss refugee policy of the time not been governed by xenophobic and anti-Semitic fears, remains a controversial question for Swiss identity as a society committed to humanitarian values even today. With the contact point, «Auschwitz» became to a certain extent visible in Switzerland.

At the turn of the 21st century, the need of numerous survivors to tell their story met with an increasing willingness on the part of schools and universities to witness these testimonies and to document them. In particular, individual, dedicated teachers at colleges and universities who taught history recognised the quality and the impact of «meetings with eyewitnesses». Also invited were Jewish communities ready to listen to the reports of the extermination of their fellow believers.

Because the events with eyewitnesses were partly public, the media also recognised the fact that there were people among us who had re-

markable experiences to tell that went far beyond their current lives in Switzerland. In Raphael Gross, Eva Lezzi and Marc R. Richter's anthology *«Eine Welt, die ihre Wirklichkeit verloren hatte...»: Jüdische Überlebende des Holocaust in der Schweiz.* (A world out of touch with reality: Jewish survivors of the Holocaust in Switzerland) for the first time Swiss survival stories were written down in an academic context and published. The personalities portrayed in the book came from the contact point. There were further memoirs of individual eyewitnesses, of which we will publish a selection in this contribution.

At the end of the 1990s, Jewish survivors in Switzerland were given a face and a voice thanks to the commitment of contact point members. When, in the context of the so-called «dormant assets», the Swiss government and major banks were obliged to take a closer look at their involvement in the Holocaust, Jewish eyewitnesses in Switzerland received more attention from politically and economically influential institutions. With the Fund for Needy Victims of the Holocaust/Shoah, Swiss banking institutions, the Swiss National Bank and private industry finally made a commitment at the international level to the survivors of the Nazi persecution of the Jews.

REMEMBERING THE HOLOCAUST: AN INTERNATIONAL CONCERN

The international dimension of the genocide of the Jews and the growing awareness that the Holocaust constitutes an unprecedented collapse of civilisation that merits long-term and sustained deliberation in the political world also led to the continuing cooperation between the contact point and the Swiss federal authorities. On the initiative of the Swedish prime minister of the time, Göran Persson, the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF) was founded in 1998. (Since 2013 it is called the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance [IHRA]). The aim of this insti-

tution is to create a forum where academics researching the Holocaust can present the results of their research to the authorities. The member countries, which today number more than 30, are called upon to commit themselves to account for their country's involvement in the genocide and to create an appropriate culture of remembrance. Switzerland joined the ITF/IHRA in 2004.

The IHRA's main goal is to pass on knowledge about the Holocaust to future generations. For this purpose, the introduction by the UN of a Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust on 27 January – the day on which Auschwitz-Birkenau was liberated in 1945 – was an important symbolic step. Meetings with eyewitnesses are to this day an important part of the activities on this remembrance day, also in Switzerland. The question of how Holocaust experiences should be handed down once the eyewitnesses have all died, is currently an important topic. As the IHRA member countries have to regularly submit reports about their commitment to remembrance work and research of the Holocaust, an advisory group was established in Switzerland to brief the Swiss federal delegation prior to IHRA meetings about the various activities in this area. The contact point was one of the organisations involved, and for some ten years now, Holocaust survivors in Switzerland are in constant contact with highly placed representatives of the Swiss authorities. The Confederation relies on the cooperation of survivors when wishing to report to the IHRA on the way the Holocaust is dealt with in Switzerland. The series of memoirs arose from this cooperation. The reception in the Swiss Federal Palace on 27 January 2011 on the occasion of the official disbanding of the contact point symbolises this new closeness between Holocaust survivors and the Swiss government.

OFFICIAL RECOGNITION BY THE SWISS AUTHORITIES

The astonishing transition from a small self-help group on the fringes of society to an organisation recognised by the highest levels of government

is described in Ivan Lefkovits' speech of 27th January 2011: «For the first time, we – the members of the contact point – are not on our own, but in another setting, a different kind of setting, and we can reflect on what it means to be received in this ceremonious atmosphere. We should pause for a moment and contemplate how times have changed, how our surroundings have changed and how we have changed.»

It is hard to judge how lasting an impact the efforts of the contact point's members will be on Swiss people's understanding of the Holocaust. It is, however, undeniable that this small organisation has achieved the important goal of giving Holocaust survivors in Switzerland a face and a voice.

The fact that the Swiss authorities pay tribute to the Holocaust victims in their country in the context of the contact point is thanks to the commitment of the extraordinary men and women who despite their terrible experiences sought dialogue time and again with their fellow human beings. Although for some of them life in Switzerland was not easy, their memories are usually characterised by deep gratitude towards their new home country. With their experiences of a murderous, state despotism, they were especially well-placed to appreciate a firmly anchored, democratic political system. It is probably not presumptuous to describe most of them as critical Swiss patriots – the best way, in fact, of exercising one's duties as a citizen.

My father did not live to see his memoirs published. But his story, like those of more than a dozen other survivors will live on thanks to this series of publications. The happy smile of my aunt Franciszka, murdered at the age of 15, will also leave behind a lasting trace of remembrance in the only surviving photograph, in defiance of the racist fanaticism of Nazi Germany. It is not much but it is a great consolation.

DANIEL GERSON
Swiss representative to the Academic Working Group of the IHRA.
Historian with the Institute of Jewish Studies at the University of Bern.

Published memoirs of Holocaust survivors in Switzerland (selection):

CZARNECKI, JERZY
Mein Leben als «Arier», Constance 2002.

FAYON, RUTH AND VALLÉLIAN, PATRICK
«Auschwitz en héritage», Neuchâtel 2009.

GELBART, NATHALIE
B-8326 Ein Überlebender des Holocaust.
Biographie meines Grossvaters, Zurich 2008.

GRABER, SHLOMO
Schlajme.
Von Ungarn durch Auschwitz-Birkenau, Fünfteichen und Görlitz nach Israel.
Jüdische Familiengeschichte 1859 – 2001, Constance 2002.

RÜBNER, KURT AND RÜBNER–BRESZLAUER, CATHERINE
Nos chemins vers la libérté, Neuchâtel 2012.

TOMAN, SIGMUND, HONSBERGER, MICHÈLE
AND MOURON, MARTINE
«Vous, vous savez, mais moi je ne sais pas.», Neuchâtel 2008.

WICKI-SCHWARZSCHILD, MARGOT AND HANNELORE
Als Kinder Auschwitz entkommen, Constance 2011.

PART V

AFTERWORD

SOLEMN AND MOVING MOMENTS

The head of the Swiss delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and his deputy sent a joint letter in September 2008 to the Contact Point for Holocaust Survivors, congratulating it on the launch of its memoirs project. The letter's authors emphasised the importance of such testimony, in particular as a means of raising young people's awareness of tolerance and of human rights. This was not the only value they viewed as vital, as they continued: «such accounts also present the most compelling evidence against denials of the Holocaust».

The authors also offered their full support to those in charge of the project. Since then, these books of memoirs have been published as a serialized trilogy, and interest in them has only continued to grow. One function room at the Federal Palace was the setting for a 2011 ceremony, the photographs and speeches you have been viewing on the preceding pages. They demonstrate the solemn and moving nature of the occasion. The first 12 books of memoirs were presented officially to Madame Ruth Dreifuss, former President of the Swiss Confederation, whereupon the survivors decided to dissolve their association with dignity.

The publication of this volume, along with the last three books of memoirs, marks the final important stage of the project. It comes 10 years after Switzerland's admission to the IHRA. We find it difficult to imagine a more fitting anniversary gift.

Professor Ivan Lefkovits has been the mainstay of this project since it began. We should like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude for his exemplary and unwavering commitment. The title that he chose for his own memoir «Bergen-Belsen: accomplished – unaccomplished» (book no. 8) also perfectly exemplifies the nature of this project, which has been brought to an end superbly with publication of 15 memoir books.

At the same time, this testimony takes on a new and unending life. We hope that they will inspire everyone who reads them – and especially

the younger generation – to reflect and to act with respect for the dignity of every human being.

BENNO BÄTTIG
Secretary General of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.
Head of the Swiss delegation to the IHRA.

BERNARD WICHT
Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education.
Deputy head of the Swiss delegation to the IHRA.

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The collection of 15 reports was completed and turned into a graceful edition for the public. The authors have given everything they could – whether as members of the Contact Point for Holocaust Survivors or people who avoided «official» membership – and have all surpassed themselves in contributing to this work. The authors have not tried to produce a work of literature; they have only wanted to give their testimonies.

Professor Ivan Lefkovits has been the mainstay of this project since it began. The entire board of the Contact Point, as well as a small number of its members who decided to contribute on their own initiative, stand behind the memoir project.

After decades of silence the authors began to talk about the past and even dared to take a giant step in writing down everything on paper that, until now, had only been discussed among friends. It would be presumptuous to think that the authors could rouse and change the world with their statements; neither is it important whether these accounts are read by ten or by ten thousand people. The reports are and do remain forever a part of the story of the Holocaust.

Kontaktstelle für Überlebende des Holocaust, Zürich