Studies of survivors’ testimonies that concentrate on the ability of the afflicted to find meaning in suffering are at best problematic in the face of the overwhelming force of Holocaust testimonies. To many of those who survived, survival was not a triumph but an unbearable burden. "Nothing can ever be good again" and "All my happiness is gone for ever" are recurring motifs in their testimonies. The lives of survivors are forever haunted by images, sounds, and smells that contain ominous questions about survival and about guilt for having survived. "Why me?" and "Why was I saved?" appear in the testimonies over and over again. As Elie Wiesel phrased it, the question is not "to be or not to be" but rather "to be and not to be." One woman, a survivor of Auschwitz, compared herself to a hollow tree: "still alive but empty inside." The appended diary by Agi Rubin embodies these themes of despair, guilt, and inner emptiness.

Chapter 4

THE VICTIMS WHO SURVIVED

by Sidney M. Bolkosky

I'm tired of being "a survivor." I want to be a person again.

A survivor of Auschwitz

Between 1933 and 1945, one-third of the Jews of the world lost their lives in the Holocaust.1 Approximately four million Jews remained in Europe after World War II. Estimates of the number who survived the Nazi death, labor, and concentration camps, and the infamous death marches with their aftermath of more disease, starvation, and violent death, range from 250,000 to 300,000 people, the "saving remnant." Other Jews managed to stay alive in hiding or with partisan groups.2 Still others endured the hardships of survival in the Soviet Union. From these numbers, approximately 250,000 Jewish refugees, "displaced persons," relocated from their former homes. Of these, 142,000 went to Israel, 72,000 to the United States, and 16,000 to Canada. From 1945-1951, approximately 550,000 more Jews left Eastern Europe.3

A "conspiracy of silence" seemed to follow the war: liberators who witnessed the camps were stunned into silence, struggling to cope with what they had seen; survivors were desolately silent, knowing they were already perceived as reminders of death; the perpetrators were indifferently silent, eager to continue their normal lives; the historians were baffled and silent; governments were ignorantly and defensively silent.

Victims who spoke of their experiences found themselves confronted by quizzical, unsympathetic listeners. One survivor recalled that "the message was
cry and you cry alone.' So we kept quiet." Since around 1980, however, significant numbers of victims began to modify their attitudes of silence and survivor testimonies have supplemented historical examinations of the Holocaust with moving, personal evidence. Like all sources, these "life records" ought to be considered carefully and critically. As some historians have pointed out, oral histories, especially ones so laden with emotional trauma, cannot substitute for more traditional, written documents.

While victims of the Holocaust directly experienced the consequences of the actions of the perpetrators, they could not know the character of the vast apparatus with its networks of bureaucracies and the professional involvements of every socio-economic stratum—the businesspeople or the administrators, the physicians or the plumbers, the ideologues or the technicians. Nor could they know about the enormity of the camp system, its dependent relationships with the railroads and the military-industrial complex of Germany. Indeed, most could not know much about what occurred in the next barracks, much less the next camp. Should a student of the Holocaust wish to know how it came about and how it progressed, or raise questions about why it overwhelmed the Jews of Europe, he or she would be better served by turning to documents, records, and historical texts.

A survivor's testimony, then, constitutes only a small contribution to the subject of the history of the Holocaust and ought not supplant more traditional and professional approaches to history. Those testimonies, however, provide a deeper insight into the nature of the Holocaust. Even if a testifier incorrectly identifies an individual, offers misinformation about statistics, or misrepresents the chronology of events, the value of the testimony still remains: the victim's experience, personalized, direct, and concrete, draws the listener into an intimate knowledge of the Holocaust; penetrates the very heart of the darkness in ways that not even diaries or other written accounts can approximate.

From these fragments of fragments, the centrality of loss for survivors emerges: the loss of a culture, brutally erased from the world physically and spiritually. Their testimonies give specific names of family members and friends, villages, and towns to this abstract loss. Even a historian who focuses primarily on the perpetrators ought to retain this central point. Whatever aspect of the Holocaust one addresses, the anguish of one person recounting his or her specific loss complements the broader historical information, confronts a listener directly and explicitly.

After years of silence, for those who decided to bear witness, the poverty of language presented an immediate barrier to communication. Few words that deal with the Holocaust are without controversy or qualification, in part because of the apparent inadequacy of conventional language: not the differences in tongues, but the utter lack of common usage for words like "bunk" or "cold," "roll call" or "train" hinder full appreciation of the narratives. "How can I tell you this?" recurs almost as a refrain; and the meaning is quite literal. What words will convey this extraordinary, other-worldly, unbelievable ordeal? The Czech writer, Helena Malirova, wrote as early as 1937 that "there is no human tongue capable of conveying the crimes perpetrated by the Nazis." A failure to find common meanings for words in part explicates the fear that many victims retained, expressed eloquently by Primo Levi in his final work, that no matter how articulately or how much they spoke, survivors would be disbelieved. "I don't believe this myself," exclaimed one man. "How can I expect you [the interviewer] or my children or anyone who wasn't there to believe it?"

Weighted words, full of recollections, heavy with associations that encase the meanings, become locked in a specific context. Elie Wiesel, among others, has written of the multiple meanings of each word: "Every word carries a hundred meanings." Some survivors cannot see or speak about chimneys without recalling the chimneys at Auschwitz; some cannot hear a train without reliving the horrifying, box car deportation which caused the deaths of their families and divided their own lives into before and after; some cannot think of a word like "bunk" without envisioning the boards that served as beds in the camps.

This past and its lexicon remain inescapable and permeate the present for survivors. "The two worlds haunt each other," Lawrence Langer has noted, the one polluting the other. Not only do these recollections infect the present, they settle like some miasma upon the warmer glow of the pre-war past. Memories, then, become "unspeakable" in over-determined ways. To many survivors, the events of the past may be unnerving to recall and thus to retell. But the more immediate problem of how to tell, what words to use, compounds the phenomenon, complicated again by the conviction that no listener can share the meanings of specific words.

Even the epithet, "survivor," creates controversy. A popular view of the victims revolves around Auschwitz, the place that has come to symbolize the six death camps and the quintessence of the Holocaust. Survivor, in that appraisal, means a person who suffered the vicissitudes, the atrocities, tortures, and attendant miseries of those hellish places. Some victims of those camps also believe that only those who lived through such horrors may be classified "true" survivors. A working definition adopted by some psychologists reinforces this stark and reduced one: "a survivor is
someone who has survived an immediate and traumatic life-threatening experience."

Given the program of the "Final Solution," however, the annihilation of the Jews of Europe, any European Jew who stayed alive from 1933-1945 might be termed a survivor. This would include those who managed to flee from Europe, those who were hidden, who made their ways to the Soviet Union, who joined partisan groups, who managed to evade the Germans by hiding in forests or barns or bunkers.

Jews who managed to survive endured the hardships of the destruction process with its ongoing, cumulative, efficient, and systematic procedures. In Germany, the process began with discriminatory laws, reaching a significant plateau in 1935 when the Nuremberg Laws removed civil and human rights from German Jews. Upon occupying Poland, the German military government passed similar laws, removing citizenship and all civil rights from Polish Jews. Thus, the first stage of survival entailed intensified separation and isolation from non-Jews, removing them from what sociologist Helen Fein called their "universe of obligation." The laws escalated degradation and humiliation and prepared the way for forced deportation. When Germany invaded Poland, over two million more Jews fell under their jurisdiction—which now included Czechoslovakia and Austria—and the numbers increased until, by 1942, German authority had almost all of Europe's Jews in its grasp.

Along with the non-Jewish victims of the war, Jews became subject to occupation, martial law, rationing, and curfews. But for Jews, just as the military government removed their citizenship, the other legislation took devastatingly harsher forms. Food rationing for Polish Jews was approximately one-third what it was for non-Jews. By the end of September 1939, Reinhard Heydrich, one of the principal architects of the "Final Solution," had ordered ghettos established in major cities and towns on railroad lines. By 1941, typhus had overtaken almost every ghetto; diseases, lice, malnutrition, overcrowding, and starvation began to take their tolls almost immediately. By mid-1944, when the Lodz Ghetto, the last major ghetto in Poland, was liquidated, between 500,000 and 700,000 Jews had died in ghettos.

Those who survived recall watching their families wither away; enduring severe, forced labor conditions; living daily with uncertainty, confusion, and terror. They recall fathers and grandfathers suddenly appearing without their traditional beards, shaved or cut off by vindictive soldiers or SS men in the streets, a symbolic gesture which underscored the loss of their traditional authority. Such actions reduced those authority figures to helplessness as their families suffered the abuses of German policies. Traditional family roles and cohesion began to disintegrate: "I saw my father without his beard," said one woman who was thirteen at the inception of the Lodz Ghetto, "and he sat on a chair in the middle of the room and wept. All of us began to cry, the children, the baby, my mother and grandmother. It was like everything that held my life together suddenly fell apart."

Survival, then, entailed overcoming the loss of order and traditional authority; coping with the breakdown of family and community. In the testimony cited above, the beard and its senseless removal encapsulated all this. And the woman's conclusion to her story must be heard in the context of Jewish history and tradition to fathom its layered meanings: "I think my father gave up then—I knew he would not live much longer."

Jews in Eastern Poland and the Soviet Union, invaded by Germany in June 1941, immediately confronted violent deaths at the hands of the Einsatzgruppen or SS mobile killing units. Survival in those regions, before the Nazis implemented mass deportations to killing centers, involved combinations of fortuitous circumstances and blind luck. Escaping a ghetto meant abandoning family. Such an escape, already burdened with guilt, rarely included a definite destination and carried little prospect of help from non-Jews. Joining partisan groups in the vast forests of Eastern Europe forced the same abandonment and uncertainty.

Einsatzgruppen operations or Aktionen utilized native anti-Jewish elements and Jews lived in terror of daily raids which arbitrarily targeted particular groups—old people one time, children another—and drove them into makeshift hiding places like cellars, bunkers, or false rooms. Children learned not to cry; their parents learned to be prepared to smother them in order to save the lives of those hidden together. Between June 1941 and December 1942, when their operations ceased, the Einsatzgruppen murdered 1.4 to 1.5 million Jews in Eastern Europe.

For those fortunate enough to have non-Jewish people willing to offer assistance—at the risk of their own lives—a child might be saved, a family hidden for a while or smuggled through the countryside to some sort of hiding place. As one survivor observed, it was only after he had lost everyone in his family that escape for him became possible: there was nothing more to lose. Yet another, at age seven, was hidden by a Ukrainian peasant in a loft in his barn for more than two years. She and her parents and sister remained in almost complete silence for those years; lice-ridden, diseased, with muscles atrophied and in the most unsanitary of conditions. They crawled out from the barn, unable to walk, as the Russian armies advanced.

Such stories demonstrate that survival, in Langer's words, was "less a triumph of the will than an accident.
of the body, combined with so many gratuitous and fortuitous circumstances that we will probably never be able to disentangle chance from choice, or relate effect to cause."17 Terrence Des Pres, in his path-breaking work, The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps, has suggested that determination and survival went hand in hand, that "it depended...on social bonding and interchange...on keeping dignity and moral sense active."18 But in a book that describes methods of degradation and humiliation that stretch the human imagination, a book which includes a chapter entitled "The Excremental Assault," breaking the silence on this hitherto unspeakable subject, this type of traditional, idealistic language seems inappropriate and inadequate as it tries to salvage some shred of human dignity from the death camps.

A survivor of the Holocaust lives first with the identity of a victim—a victim who survived. As earnestly as he or she may yearn to throw off that status, to "be a person again," it remains irreducible and inescapable. Few survivors contend that they have freed themselves from the unique burdens of their pasts. Most recognize that "no matter how hard we try, no matter what someone tells you, we are all psychologically scarred forever."

Psychologists of all sorts have produced theories of "survivor syndromes" to explain and delineate the psychological, social, and political consequences of the Holocaust.19 The suggested symptoms include anxiety, disturbances of cognition and memory, chronic depression, guilt, tendencies toward seclusion and isolation, and a heightened sense of vulnerability to danger. Post-Holocaust difficulties among survivors also often prove traumatic, according to some theorists, and are accompanied by drastic personality changes.20

Many survivors attest to the aftermath of such traumatic events; they openly discuss nightmares, "unreasonable" fears, and anxieties directly and palpably related to their Holocaust experiences and to the loss of families, communities, perhaps religion and dignity. For all the attempts at categorizing and formulating a "survivor syndrome," however, and despite the recurrent presence of obvious elements of the symptoms, generalizing and abstracting seems insensitive and unwise. While some seem to exemplify the syndrome with textbook exactness, others appear to have escaped several of the symptoms: those who speak of clinging to the slightest of human conventions under the most inhuman circumstances contrast those who speak from apparent deep depression of the loss of feeling and social awareness. Paradoxically, interviews with survivors regularly reveal both types of sentiment in the same person, again defying simple categorization.

To attribute survival to a strong "will to live" or, as one survivor put it, "the power of positive thinking," seems rather foolish under such circumstances. Viktor Frankl, survivor and psychiatrist, has proffered a "will-to-meaning" which suggests that victims had the choice, the "ultimate freedom," to determine their attitude toward their plight. He argued that the ability to rise above the circumstances of the camp, finding meaning in the suffering, made some victims "worthy of their suffering."21 Yet, positive attitudes of this sort, revelation of meaning to their suffering, rarely emerge from survivor narratives. Indeed, the unresolved quest for meaning betrays a possible source for survivor depression and discontent.

While many survivors, striving to find meaning in their experience, speak of the will to live, many others openly confess their deep depression during the war, the wish to die after losing families or witnessing some horrible tortures. Still others openly admit to an utter lack of concern, an apathy and indifference especially in the camps. Yet others suggest they acquired "survival skills," ways of "floating above the reality," or "pulling down the shade," or "becoming small and even invisible as if no SS man could see me in Auschwitz." The search for "survivor prototypes," given this wide range of attitudes, seems futile and artificial; and such optimistic conclusions as Frankl's, when applied to survivor experiences, appear at best problematic in the face of the overwhelming force of Holocaust testimonies.

Rather than a triumph, survival, to many victims who survived, oppressed them like some unbearable weight. "Nothing can ever be good again," one child survivor told psychoanalyst Edith Sterba, "and even if it is good, what good is it to me if my family is not here to enjoy it....I cannot forget my family. It will never be possible to replace the loss of my family....All my happiness is gone forever."22 Charlotte Delbo, in a poignant yet shocking admission, revealed that as she gave birth to a child in 1952 she "didn't think of the joy that a child would bring me; I was thinking...of the women my age [32] who had died in degradation without knowing that joy."23 And a survivor of Lvov, upon the birth of his grandchild, immediately commented upon the specific ways infants were murdered by the Einsatzgruppen. A sense of having survived at the expense of others lingers in these thoughts, as it permeates such frank works as Borowski's: "It is true, others may be dying, but one is somehow still alive, one has enough food, enough strength to work...."24

Once again, memories intersect, haunt the present and impede what might be considered a "normal, happy existence." Images, sounds, smells linger arduously, bearing ominous questions about survival and guilt. "How come me? Again and again I have asked myself
"Why was I saved?" burst out one survivor. And another: "Why me? Okay, I can see my [old] parents or the child, but why not my brother or my sister?"

In this demanding entreaty, the survivor seems to acknowledge the standards of Auschwitz: yes, the parents and children were too old to work, but why not the healthy young man and woman, his brother and sister? To whom is the question addressed? Does he question himself, or the interviewer, or God? Behind the questions lurks awareness of arbitrary, indiscriminate luck.

A bizarre sort of guilt lurks, too. Like much about the Holocaust, the guilt remains paradoxical: irrational and logical. Irrational for obvious reasons—no victim had choices; the selections may have been random in their perception, but Dr. Mengele and his ilk had their own insanely logical criteria. At the base of some "survivor guilt"—another inadequate term—lies Borowski's brooding recognition that life depended on death. The monumental uncertainties, deeply irrational guilt, and the recollection of impotence in the face of overwhelming forces remain irreducible and immovable.

Intimations of the inadequacies of language, the prospect of exacerbating anguished memories, the disquieting implications of guilt which do not consider the realities of the Nazi system, along with myriad other factors coalesce to constrain speaking. Survivors' silence about their experiences ought not mystify us. Yet, after years of relative silence, some survivors have taken their cues from Elie Wiesel who admonished them to be witnesses. He echoed the Jewish historian Emmanuel Ringelblum's call from the Warsaw Ghetto that Jews witness the catastrophe and "write and record" it.

A witness transforms memory into history, and some survivors intuited the prospect of sharing their memories in order to preserve the historical record. For others, witnessing brought the prospect of retelling in order to regain dignity and meaning, or to discover a reason for their turmoil and their survival. If speaking has not freed them from their nightmares or unburdened them of their memories, if it has not uncovered the mystery of the meaning of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust, if it has not conferred a lost dignity, it has revealed new, deeper levels of Holocaust history.

With or without testifying, survivors have created new lives for themselves. They have not, because they cannot, completely freed themselves from their pasts. Nevertheless, for all that they carry with them, they endured, bore children, in some cases overcame postwar urges for suicide, and became vital parts of their communities. Their stories and their voices present the rest of the world with profound questions about the human spirit, endurance, and survival. They rarely provide affirmative answers, hope, or inspiration simply because of the nature of the Holocaust, a process which disallowed avenues for martyrdom and heroism, for triumphant joy at final victory.

For survivors, Elie Wiesel has said, the question is not "to be or not to be," but "to be and not to be." One woman, a survivor of Auschwitz, compared herself to a hollow tree that still lived, "still alive, but empty inside." They adumbrate our present and future and tacitly challenge us to examine what their heritage of pointless murder means for our own lives and the lives of our children.

NOTES


4. All quotations from survivor testimonies come from interviews on audio and/or videotape housed in the University of Michigan-Dearborn Holocaust Survivor Collection of the Mardigian Library.


6. Benzion Dinur, commenting on the value and uncertainty of survivor memoirs and testimonies, argued that the reason behind such misinformation "need not be any desire to 'amend' or to 'improve' upon actual events for any ulterior purpose." Dinur continued that such errors grow naturally from the nature of such reminiscences. Benzion Dinur, "Problems Confronting 'Yad Vashem' in Its Work of Research," Yad Vashem Studies 1 (1957): 7-30.


17. Langer, 28.


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**CHAPTER 4: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**Major Titles**

* 4.1 *


Brenner examines the ways in which the Holocaust affected the religious beliefs of those who survived. Drawing on the responses of almost one thousand survivors, Brenner attempted to discover what survivors thought then, and think now, about God, the Jewish people, and the religious doctrines they had once been brought up to believe in. Fifty-two percent responded that the Holocaust had little or no effect on their religious behavior. Others found their faith challenged in that they questioned the existence of a god that would permit such atrocities.

* 4.2 *


Dimsdale's collection of essays is of varying quality; it contains some important articles by Leo Eitinger, Robert Jay Lifton, and others on psychological effects of survivors' experiences, the impact on children of survivors, coping mechanisms and psychotherapy. The book is divided into three parts—"The Setting," "The Victim," and "The Perpetrator"—and contains an excellent historical article by Raul Hilberg on "The Nature of the Process," excerpts from the diaries of Goebbels and Hoess (commandant of Auschwitz), and essays by George Mosse on Weimar intellectuals and the rise of Nazism and by John Steiner on "The SS Yesterday and Today: A Sociopsychological View."

* 4.3 *

Epstein's was the first book to deal with the situation and phenomenon of the second generation. Much of her book is autobiographical, moving back and forth between her own story and those of others she interviewed in Canada, Israel, and the United States. She found consistent patterns of behavior including guilt, anxiety, and the need to protect parents. Her examples demonstrate that some survivors placed extraordinary burdens of guilt on their children, often shrouded in silence, because of their experiences; that some children of survivors experienced deep-rooted anxieties and fears that derived from their unique status; and that in most cases the guilt and anxiety were accompanied by exaggerated needs to protect or shield their parents.

* 4.4 *

Drawing on interviews and survey materials, Hass provides an informed account of the experiences of the second generation in terms of depression, guilt, anger, feelings of being different, and difficulty in separating from parents. Hass devotes particular attention to how much survivors talked about their experiences to their children and how this affected the children. He also examines the attitude of the second generation to such issues as anti-Semitism, Jewish identity, Israel, God, and intermarriage.

* 4.5 *

Although it has received criticism in the last ten years, Krystal's psychoanalytic work on massive psychic trauma continues to offer a starting point for the study of the effects of the Holocaust on victims who survived. He has identified, along with William Niederland, a "survivor syndrome" which includes varying degrees of avoidance, depression, intrusion of memories, and other symptoms.

* 4.6 *

Langer continues his earlier thesis (see 4.7) now supported by his extensive viewing of the videotapes in the Fortunoff Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale. Langer here posits five types of memory: "deep memory," "anguished memory," "humiliated memory," "tainted memory," and "unheroic memory." "Deep memory" refers to the coexistence of "two adjacent worlds that occasionally intrude on each other"; "anguished memory" disallows any closure or resolution of painful recollections as it "imprisons the consciousness it should be liberating"; each of the other three deals with various aspects of humiliating experiences or recollections which survivors find shameful or "tainted." For another interpretation, see 2.134.

* 4.7 *

Langer has relentlessly pursued the strands of Holocaust narratives and memoirs to rebut any sanguine theories of inspiration or tutelary conclusions—particularly those of Frankl and Des Pres. Langer argues that any value judgments based on the morality of civilized life are spurious when applied to life as it was lived in the concentration and death camps. He argues that victims of the Holocaust daily were presented with "choiceless choices," alternative courses of action in which equally horrible ends resulted. Langer's is perhaps the most important work on survivor testimonies. It is a seminal and uncompromisingly honest interpretation of survivors' accounts.

* 4.8 *

In his last book before his death, Primo Levi offers his final penetrating, searing reflections on the nature of the survivor's experience. Particularly powerful and suggestive are his concept of "the gray zone," the area between moral judgments in which the experiences of the victims become blurred with the behavior of the perpetrators, experiences for which there can be no mediation and no relief, and his discussions of the tainted lives full of paradoxical shame. His is perhaps the most disturbing and necessary of survivor essays.

* 4.9 *

At the end of the war, the British government allowed one thousand child survivors to enter England. The German refugee Alice Goldberger established and ran a home for some of these children in Surrey. Moskovitz interviewed twenty-four of these survivors, most of them citizens of the U.S. or Israel. They still suffer continuing feelings of loss and outsiderhood but they are reasonably well-adjusted and actively involved in communal affairs.
4.10
Sichrovsky, an Austrian-born journalist, investigated how children and grandchildren of former Nazi war criminals deal with their heritage. He found that, initially, they knew very little of their parents' or grandparents' activities. The ways in which the children discovered their ancestors' crimes varied widely, as did their reactions to what they learned. Reactions ranged from severe guilt to outright denial.

4.11
In an empirical study, the authors examine the psychological consequences of the Holocaust across three generations of a sample group in Montreal. They challenge the dominant thrust of previous studies which emphasized dysfunction in the family life of survivors and psychological impairment in their children.

4.12
Perhaps the first and still one of the most powerfully moving survivor accounts, Wiesel's autobiographical novel has become the classic survivor testimony. Tracing the experience of his family from Sighet, Transylvania, into the ghetto, then to Auschwitz, and finally the death march and Bergen Belsen, Wiesel expresses the disillusionment, anguish, and utter disorientation wrought by the Holocaust on children and families. The opening pages brilliantly describe pre-Holocaust Jewish life and the final passages stand in stark contrast to that opening. For another interpretation, see 2.121.

Briefly Annotated Titles

4.13
Israeli psychologist Bar-On interviewed middle-aged Germans concerning their feelings about their knowledge that relatives and parents had committed crimes during the Holocaust. Bar-On found that between parents and children there were "double walls" of denial. For another interpretation, see 8.1.

4.14
Generations of the Holocaust is the work of the Group for Psychoanalytic Study of the Effect of the Holocaust on the Second Generation. Contributors stress the complexity of survivors' influences on children. The editors also include a section on the children of Nazis.

4.15
A psychiatrist survivor attributed his survival to the development of a philosophy which focuses on the meaning of life. Logotherapy is based on finding meaning in and through suffering. Frankl challenges the Bettelheim thesis that those who became more like their tormentors had the best chance of living. For another interpretation, see 2.23.

4.16
When Memory Comes is a powerful and suggestive memoir of a Jewish orphan's Holocaust experience dealing with the issue of memory and history. Friedlander was left by his parents, at age seven, in a Catholic seminary in France. He was baptized and trained for the priesthood. When the war ended, he discovered his actual identity and made his way to Israel in 1948.

4.17
Gill explores the variety of adjustments made by 120 survivors to the concentration camp experience. He also examines how they adjusted after liberation. His book is based on interviews with survivors of varying social and political backgrounds and from many countries.

4.18
This was Levi’s first book. It is a brilliant, frank, and moving account of life and death in Auschwitz in which he offered remarkable perceptions into the nature and meaning of survival. It remains a classic along with Wiesel’s *Night*. For another interpretation, see 2.66.

* 4.19 *

The ongoing impact of the Holocaust on survivors and especially on society in general is the subject of this collection of essays. Most essays focus on the psychological and moral implications of the Holocaust.

* 4.20 *

In a review of the psychological literature on survivors and children of survivors up to 1981, Porter concludes that there are survivor syndromes. He draws upon the work of Niederland and Krystal in particular.

* 4.21 *

Rabinowitz has compiled a sensitive and thoughtful collection of interviews with 108 survivors living in America. The interviewees discuss the Holocaust, the difficulties of beginning again, acclimating to America, and reconstructing their lives.

* 4.22 *

Sichrovsky here investigates how children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors now living in Austria and Germany deal with their situations.

* 4.23 *

Steinberg reviews the clinical literature on survivors and their families up to 1989. Her work is thorough and objective.

* 4.24 *

The editors, themselves children of survivors, collected a series of essays, poems, and reflections on what it means to be part of the second generation. They emphasize the privilege and responsibilities of their status.

* 4.25 *

*A Jew Today* contains some of Wiesel’s most profound essays, including two on survivors. His "A Plea for Survivors" raises the question of silence, remembering, and the treatment of survivors in the post-Holocaust world.

* 4.26 *

Young’s book is a provocative and scholarly work on historical and literary interpretation of oral, visual, and written texts on the Holocaust. Young is somewhat over-theoretical in places but his insights into the problems that surround narrative accounts of the Holocaust are extraordinary. For another interpretation, see 2.138.
Appendix: The Diary

by Agi Rubin

with commentary by Sidney Bolkosky

Part I: Description

April 20, 1945. 10:00 p.m.

We are surrounded by flames. Our liberators are coming. And our enemies are also approaching. So we, forsaken, tired and hungry, are walking toward liberation. The marching mass, the long line of the transport, drags itself along. It moves slowly and painfully, on and on.

I see only four people. A dying woman who still wants to live, her two daughters, and myself. We surround the dying one, and we are begging her to look at us. She must go on. She wants to continue, but she falls back. Her strength is gone. She cannot move. There is nothing to do. We are not going either. Let them shoot us. That is all we can expect from the German overlords.

I look around: flames, terrible screams coming from the line. I look up at the sky. I call for my father who is suffering somewhere in Russia. "Help me, Father. You are the only one. Only you are waiting for me. I still have to live for your sake." I receive no answer. Only dying words.

[Mr. Bolkosky's commentaries are set off by indentation.]

One day after her official liberation, on April 23, 1945, Agi Rubin began her journal to retell the final days of her personal experience of the Holocaust. Part I, a descriptive account, begins near the end, on a road from Ravensbruck concentration camp. It concludes in a barn in a prisoner of war camp near the small town of Mulberg. Before the death march from Ravensbruck, there was Auschwitz, and the death march in January. And before that, Agi faced the flames of the crematorium at Auschwitz every day from May 1944 until November. She and her family, along with more than 25,000 other Jews, had been torn from their home in Munkacz, an Orthodox and Hasidic center in Carpatho-Ruthenia. In 1939, Hungary had occupied the region, and in 1944 the Germans came. Shortly after that, Agi's father was taken to forced labor in Russia.

Sometime after May 15, 1944, members of the Hungarian fascist Arrow Cross Party forced the Jews of Munkacz into a brick yard where they kept them for four weeks. Then came the deportation—the dividing line in so many lives: the stench, the darkness, starvation and thirst and dying of the cattle car. Auschwitz, she recalled in an interview, made her "divided, forlorn" forever as her mother, aunt, and little brother went to one side and she, reluctantly, to the other. In Auschwitz, Agi clung to her two girlfriends from home and their mother. They adopted each other and she became the "lagersister" [camp sister] and daughter to "My Lady," her "lager-mother." Their Auschwitz family survived even the first death march from Auschwitz to Gleiwitz and then to Ravensbruck.

By April 1945, the western Allies had reached Bergen-Belsen and drawn within sixty miles of Ravensbruck; the Russians approached from the east and had reached a point some thirty miles from the camp. In a host of evacuations that served no purpose other than the agonizing murder of thousands of prisoners, the Germans evacuated Ravensbruck on April 15. Seventeen thousand women and 40,000 men struggled westward amidst flames and shooting. Martin Gilbert has quoted one Red Cross observer of this march: "As I approached them, I could see that they had sunken cheeks, distended bellies and swollen ankles...All of a sudden, a whole column of those starving wretches appeared. In each row a sick woman was supported or dragged along by her fellow-detainees. A young SS woman supervisor with a police dog on a leash led the column, followed by two girls who incessantly hurled abuse at the poor women." Hundreds died of exhaustion and hundreds more were shot.1 For Agi, yet another dividing point in her life came as the march arrived at a wooded area outside the town of Malchow—another of what she later called her "foundations," an event...
which has haunted her incessantly, inescapably, the death of "My Lady." Somehow, she and her two "sisters" continued, dazed, broken, almost automatons, until the end, the place where liberation finally stopped the march, in a barn, in a make-shift prison of war camp at Mulberg.

Delirious, I even turn to the guards: "Herr Posten! Herr Posten! Sir, if you know God a little bit, bring me a little wagon for the dying one. With this maybe I can save a life." No answer. The gentlemen are passing by. A wagon does not arrive.

Suddenly, I have a thought. I grab my lady and start pulling her along. "Let's run. Let's take her. Let's don't carry her too far.

We stop, and she falls down. And the three of us, two sisters and I, the lager-sister, remain standing. Now we wait for the end. I don't want to leave them. And the countless rows, the dark rows, pass us by.

Someone among them calls out. "Agi, Agi, come with us. You can see they are barely alive. You are strong. You can still work. You cannot stay with them. Come with us."

They are enticing me. Suddenly, I turn around and look at my threesome. Maybe I could go to my father, to my liberators. But still no. Something is happening. We are sitting together. And, sitting up, we are shoving in the truck. The truck [driver] has accomplished his task, and he turns around and disappears.

An elderly German man receives us. He listens to our sufferings, about the starvation and the misery. We three introduce ourselves as the dead mother's daughters, and the German is almost fatherly toward us. We surround our dead one who lies on the ground.

We want to speak with her, but no words come out. We stare at the ground until we are shoved in the back by a German guard. "Remove that corpse immediately!" I look at him in bewilderment. I don't move. Then he hits me hard across the face.

Dizzy and hysterical, I fall to the ground. I get up still crying and disoriented. Then the old German consoles me. He says to the guard that he shouldn't hurt me.

We removed the coat from the corpse. And we ate a piece of potato that had been in her pocket. Don't be surprised. We were hungry.

Later, they brought a few stretchers for the very sick ones. We have to move on again. I bent down to the dead one, very close to her, and I asked for her forgiveness. I wanted to pray but I couldn't. I had only the tears in my eyes.

We kissed her and left her in the end of a ditch. We went on with the heavy stretchers. We went and we went. We wanted to get to some place warm, wherever that could be.

Surprise. We arrive at a barn that is filled with hay. Without thinking, we throw ourselves into that linen. There is no word nor thought within us. One moment and we are all in a deep sleep. Let's dream, let's forget. This day has brought enough.

April 21, 1945.

We get up and look around the room. Soon we are meeting our companions in the barn. They are Hungarians, Poles, Russians, French, Mischlingens. None make a very good impression on me.

The sun comes in. Food is arriving. Bread, margarine, and black coffee that we haven't seen in many weeks. To us, this is like a fairy tale, a Cinde-
There was enough to fill us. But we don’t dare. "What will happen tomorrow?" We look at it and put it aside.

As the healthiest among us three, I start to work. I bring water and wash the sick ones. The morning goes by quickly. Sleeping, eating, drinking coffee, washing ourselves for the first time in two weeks. Noon comes and dinner arrives—a two-course meal! Soup and a potato. So we are kept busy. We are under shelter and getting food, but are afraid of having to go on. So we don’t eat everything.

In the afternoon, we were surprised by a policeman at the window who speaks Hungarian. He had served in Germany. We spoke with him and he promised to bring canned milk in the evening. We look forward to that reunion. But he disappeared, and we never saw him again.

There is dead silence in the room. Suddenly the door opens, and the opening of this door brings back our lives. A clean-cut officer enters whom I immediately like. And others, too. Unusual feeling—they are not Germans yet they wear military uniforms. But these are our friends. They come in and bring smiles and contentment. Who they are we don’t know. We only know that they are good.

One bends down, but before he does, he looks like he is afraid of something. He says to us, "Juden?" Then he looks to the side, and he tries to hold back his tears. He leaves the room, wipes his eyes, and comes back.

Using his kindest words, he tries to comfort us. He tells us that he is a prisoner of war, a Jew. They are going to take us to the hospital which is a very good place. Suddenly, we are unsure. "A hospital? What is this?" All three of us answer in horror that we don’t understand. How good it feels!

The room fills with inquiring Frenchmen, Yugoslavs, Britishers, and others of many nationalities. These are soldiers who had not seen anyone like us before. They are very interested in our fate. And when they leave, they bid good-bye with sadness and sensitivity in their eyes. They don’t want to overly disturb us.

Now a bucketful of sweet milk arrives, and everyone can have as much as they want. And we don’t have to stand in line for it! This didn’t happen to us in the German camps. But now this has happened too!

Next, a very kind-looking French doctor comes in. He goes around and writes down everybody’s ailment on his chart. Yes, we have come to live this, too!

I am here in a prisoner of war camp—me as a woman, as a child. The American and English care [CARE] packages come, and they provide what we need in the camp. After dinner, the doctor says good-night. He wishes us rest and peace. "By tomorrow, not one German will remain here in the hospital. They will no longer rule over us." We take his word and sink toward sleep. For the first time since I can remember, we can stretch out on white sheets. We can rest. They are not going to wake us in the morning for the Appel [roll-call].

From out of deep sleep we wake for breakfast. Hot tea is awaiting us. From the potatoes that remain, I fix a good puree that we spread over the bread. We still restrict ourselves to one slice of bread only. It doesn’t matter, it’s clean. We are not scratching and always imagining the lice.

After breakfast, we get a very profitable visitor who brings us men’s shirts and men’s underwear. It doesn’t matter, it’s clean. We are not scratching and always imagining the lice.

Many of the visitors’ names we don’t know. We can’t even write down their names because there are so many. Among them is the Jewish man who brought us to the hospital. He takes the three of us as sisters. His name is Marco Rubinich Belgrade.

All the men are very courteous and kind, but this one is different. His name we must mark down, and even if we didn’t, we would remember. From his story, I learn that he went through some of the same suffering that we did. He lost his family. But he himself didn’t suffer as much because he was a prisoner of war and treated as a soldier through political arrangements. Thus, he didn’t see the Auschwitz crematorium but only
heard about it. Only through our stories did he learn what was done.

It’s enough to listen to these horrors. The gas, the crematorium, the forced marches. It’s enough to hear about it, let alone to see it. But enough about this.

Marco comes in very often and always arrives with fresh news. "Be happy. Tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow at the latest, we will be free. All the German dogs have left the hospital already. Now we are done with them. Brothers, sisters, be happy!"

The poor man was wasting his breath trying to make us feel good. We still don’t believe anything. Up until the last moment, the crematorium is our nightmare. We are telling everybody about it, whether we want to or not. Our stories are only about the crematorium, whether we want to or not. Either in my dream or if I am awake, I can only see the flames in front of me. And the vision never fades.

With her economy of words, this repeated passage appears arresting and may lie at the heart of Agi’s—and most survivors’—consciousness. Their thoughts, if not their words, "whether we want to or not" remain with the flames, with the crematorium. Agi’s experience in Auschwitz may symbolize that more than most. As her daily task, the Germans assigned her to sort the clothes of dead Jews. She worked each day directly across from one of the crematoria; watched the flames and the smoke and refused to believe—both believed and did not believe. And so, whether she wants to or not, she speaks of simultaneously expressing another feeling: "but enough about this."

Too much talk tires us, so it’s better for us to rest. The visitors are courteous. They would like to sit longer, but the doctor makes them leave.

This is our new life. The day goes fast and it is good. But now it’s quiet. It’s night. Let’s sleep. Let’s dream that we shall be happy.

Behind the diary is her story, her recollections of how "everything always happened at night...the screaming and the crying" and her "no sleep without nightmares" without "the sounds...in the night." To speak of happiness under such circumstances and with such memories demands a double definition, a historically specific context. The camp at Mulberg, among the POWs, defined a new happiness: free from torture, from starvation, from the fear that there would be no bread or potato tomorrow; and haunted by the memories and the reality of lost family, childhood, community.

April 22, 1945. The Liberation Day.

There is a lot of commotion in the hallway. We wake up wondering—maybe it’s our liberators. We don’t wait very long because the men rush in with great joy. "The Russians are here! Be happy! We are free! In a week or two Germany will be completely kaput!"

Later on, a very high-ranking Russian officer and his retinue come in. Our friend Marco is with them as their translator. His face glows with happiness. He introduces us to the officer. We show him the numbers on our arms that we received in Auschwitz. The officer shakes his head. "This is rare."

This is not the way I pictured the liberation. It’s not true. I don’t believe it. "They can still take us back," I think to myself with fear. But I don’t say anything out loud. The high-ranking officer kindly says good-bye.

In the room, we just look at each other. We can’t speak. Everybody’s eyes are filled with tears. But nobody dares to show it.

Everybody can go wherever they want when they are healthy. Now we are free. We are no longer under the Germans.

Later, Marco comes back and asks if we want to go to Palestine. He can register the three of us as Palestinian or as British citizens. He tells us that Munkacz will be under the Russians. And once that happens, we would not be able to leave.

We asked for time to think about it. After a few hours, we decided to stay with our first thought: we are going home. We are going home to look around our town. And after that, we will emigrate somewhere. Marco agrees with our plan although he fears it might then be too late to get out. But he doesn’t want to confuse us. In a case like this, you can’t tell someone what to do. So we will be registered as Munkacz and as Hungarians.

We talked about the past and the future. And about the future and the past. We have suffered enough. Now good will come. Let the sunshine brighten our life.

As concerns the food, it’s not even news anymore. I think we could get back very fast to a regular life—a normal, human way of life as we were used to years before.

I was liberated in a prisoner of war camp among very fine people. They took care of us with good will and compassion. Life is unusual, and so is this liberation. Who knows where my poor father is suffering? Who knows what he is thinking about his family from
which hardly anybody remains? Who knows where he is liberated? Who knows where and when I will see him again?

Father, you are alone and you are my only thought. I am liberated, but I am afraid to go home. I am afraid for myself. But let's wait now. We shall see what will happen. Now let there be peace, peace of mind.

Part II: Reflections

April 1946 (?)—Auschwitz: An Endless Haunting.

One of the countless, inexplicable reunions, Agi discovered that her father had survived in Russia and had returned to Munkacz shortly after its liberation by the Red Army in October 1944. After three months in Mulberg, she had heard rumors that her father lived and managed to find her way back to Munkacz amidst the post-war chaos. Her father had rented a large house which served as a haven for those few who returned—an "open house" for those in transit. She convinced her father, two aunts, and cousin that they should follow Marco's advice and emigrate. One aunt had discovered the address of a third aunt who had married and emigrated to America before the war. With the American aunt's assistance, Agi and her family, ten people in all, attained passports and visas to leave Czechoslovakia in 1948. But what follows in her diary marked the first anniversary of Agi's liberation, an anniversary which stimulated reflections that have never left her.

The sound on the radio tells me it's twelve o'clock. I'm sitting and thinking back. The sound of the music tears at my heart because it always takes me back and makes me remember. Remember what? Don't ask. I shouldn't even write it. It's Auschwitz. Auschwitz and its flames and its electrified barbed wire.

I'm standing all alone in a large crowd. My face is close to the wires. I'm looking into the distance. I want to muffle the sounds that I hear, but they are too close. Just a little quiet, a little peace, a few people—that's all I want around me. Not even other people, but just myself alone. I'd like to be able to think, but thinking is impossible.

Beyond the wire fence there is another crowd of people. But these are different from ourselves. These people are free. They are the ones who rule over us. They are the German dogs. God, suddenly I can't even find words to describe them properly.

God, You took my mother away, and my little brother. Where did You take them? To the fire?

I'm looking into the fire. And I think I would go completely crazy if I thought that You, God in Heaven, You are also looking upon all of this. And You have not gone crazy.

You looked upon us while the innocent children, and my dear ones, were taken there. To us You granted the gift of having to suffer, of having to see all this, and of having to continue to exist. To them You gave Your mercy. They listened to the music in freedom. We were there to play the music for them. We played and we listened through our broken hearts. We were their prisoners. We were the ones whose minds You took away completely.

Here are sounded several motifs of Agi's life that reflect the "haunting" of survivors: the ineffable name, not of God, but of Auschwitz ("I shouldn't even write it"); the questions, from a Munkacever who remembers the famous Munkaczi rebbe and the quality of religious life in the Carpatho-Ruthenian region where Jews breathed religious piety as naturally as air, about God and mercy, insanity and survival. Fire, the phenomenon and the word, have assumed different meanings and significance in Agi's mind and life. Every fire bears the one she faced each day across from the crematorium, as every sleep partakes of that sleep for which "I hate myself" because her lager-mother slipped away while it enveloped her. Now, one year after, she ponders and agonizes over the possible meanings of these motifs, over the unholy or even absurd conclusions that lurk beneath the surface.

So I'm standing and I'm gazing. And the music plays unceasingly in my ears. It takes me home, sometimes all the way back home.

Can anyone comprehend what is going on? Broken-hearted Jewish prisoners are playing the music of broken hearts. They play "In Havana" and other sentimental pieces. They play "The Angels are Singing When You Talk to Me, My Sweetheart." But that is still nothing: They are playing "Mama."

The others, the killers, the ruthless German dogs with their wine bottles and their cigarettes, they are enjoying themselves. They are having a party. If we are lucky, they'll throw down a cigarette butt. One of us will pick it up.
We are the prisoners doomed to death. And I can only call ourselves stupid, ignorant, crazy. Because to live like this—denied everyone and everything, kicked and shoved underfoot, degraded and humiliated, doped and numb—only people who would just as soon be dead could live through this. Having lived it, we are no longer among the living. The living could not survive it.

Now, suddenly, I realize I have tears in my eyes. They are streaming down my face. Suddenly, I feel like I am home again and with my family. I am with those who were everything to me. It feels like a very long time ago that we were all together. But the fire, the cursed flames, still don’t let me think. They wake me up from my dreams, and my dreams hold the only hope for going on. The flames have awakened me again. Their hissing and crackling have awakened me again.

God, Oh God, give me a little strength. Give me a little sense and take away the daze. I can’t even think from the dope. I would like to be able to think that it still might be true that somebody, somewhere, waits for me.

This cannot be true: That I am here, on this earth, all by myself. That there is fire. That there are people. That there are bones. That there are the suffocated innocents. This is impossible: That ours, that mine, are there.

"Time had no meaning," Agi said during an interview. It has become a permeable boundary again. Where is she as she writes these words? In her father’s house in Munkacz in 1946? In the barracks, at the crematorium, listening to the prisoners entertain the SS in 1944? Is she alive or dead? Or is she "alive and dead"? The diary now includes an attempt to confront the past, to analyze or reflect upon the events that altered and marked Agi’s life and continue to assert a multivalent power over every thought, act, and word.

So perhaps it is good that I can only think rarely and rarely do I come to my senses. For it seems like now, at these moments, I am out of the daze. I can think clearly. I can see the whole truth.

You can do without mind and thought and still exist. But a living human being has to think. Therefore, we are not people anymore. We can’t call ourselves human beings because we can no longer think. And without this, life ceases to be life. It is gone completely.

I feel like a dead, degraded, cowardly Jew. And tomorrow, maybe tonight, I will have to get up to work and put on a living face. I will have to sew up the clothes and cut up the materials left by those who have gone to the flames. I will have to listen to the humiliating curses and feel completely numb and ignorant. All of this is true. All of this is real.

My thoughts have started to wander again. They are wandering to Auschwitz. They are visiting the flames. They are in Heaven and talking with God. And who knows where else they are wandering?

Now, as a cowardly soul, I beg Your forgiveness. I thank You for at least giving my father back to me. Please give him peace of mind in his life. Give peace and well-being to all my loved ones. Give me no more dreams that will make me think back and remember again. Give me quietness.

God in Heaven, Amen.

May 6, 1946.

God, what’s wrong with me? I’m choked with my own cry. I would like to cry, but I can’t. Today, too, I came home full of anger. For no reason. I went to the theater and to a coffee house. And my poor companion couldn’t figure out what happened to me, with this unfortunate crazy soul. He couldn’t understand my behavior. He questioned, but unsuccessfully. I couldn’t answer. I could find no reason myself. How could I answer it? One thing I can say: That to think back is very painful. And I’m longing after a mother.

What is a family? Only a word. A home and food. Some passengers who by chance find a resting place. But when the comedy is over, the stage is taken apart. And soon it disappears.

"It’s hard to be smart. But it’s harder yet, with a smart head, to live as though ignorant."

People who dream of happiness, they wake up to sorrow. People who dream of sorrow, they wake up joyfully and meet their surroundings with happiness. This is an unsolved mystery, but tomorrow we might
find a wise one who will solve it. Maybe tomorrow, maybe in ten thousand years. Or maybe the wise one is already among us.

Nobody is right, and nobody is mistaken. What is true is the truth: Justice.

April 1950, Philadelphia.

Five years is like half a century when you live your life with bitterness and reminiscing. Even when you are at a party, and you are in a good mood, later you realize your guilt. Is this anger? Is this conscience? Is this self-consciousness or self-criticism?

But why? This is a mystery deep within the soul. But what do you want, my soul, if I can call you that?

Five years it's not long to write it down, and it's very easy to pronounce it. But, when I remember, I am carried back even more clearly than any time before.

It's five years today that I was liberated from the Germans’ chain. In my egotistic human way, I was happy then that I existed. That I remained alive. I was happy for every given day. For every bite that I received. But then I didn't live yet. I just thought I lived. My head was full of haze. I didn't plan because I thought everything came naturally, by itself. To like and be liked I took for granted. And I didn't know that I would always and always be carried back.

And yet I'd just stepped into life's school. I was only a child then, but the dolls I used to play with were so far from me. I had to mature very quickly. But it was too fast, and it didn't bring any fruit. Because at this stage of my life I still can't give myself any clear ideas.

I don't know what I am. I don't know when I'm doing right or wrong. Am I right when I am thinking? And for what I am thinking? Many times, I think I was just born for trouble. To be a burden and sorrow to everybody, because I cannot laugh. They say, "If you laugh, everybody laughs with you. And if you cry, you are alone."

Yes, my diary, I am here in America, Amerika! After many fights, I consented to come here rather than to Palestine. I consented to come here because of my family. I didn't take anything too seriously. And that's why I'm fighting now with everybody. Every day is a fight. Because I'm trying to make myself understood. My rights, my principles, and somebody else's—with my own double standards! But nobody's right and nobody's wrong. Only the truth is right. But that is so rare. Now I'm pushing the years back. For me, that's like putting the clock back a few minutes. Time elapses, but the impossible does not fade from my eyes.

Five years ago I finished my diary with a sentence that was full of hope that I will see my father again. Yes, God helped me. My dream became a reality. We met in my home town and with unbelievable happiness we were reunited. But my father left our home when I was a child, when he was taken away to the forced labor camp. And now he's realizing his daughter has her own thoughts about life's problems.

I knew we should get out of my home town because it would be Russian. And I also knew that in my home town, where I lived my sweetest, happiest life, it would never return. I wanted to escape from the memories because I didn't want to live through first the good, then the miserable destroying of life. Either way, for us to pack and leave meant little. We'd already tasted wandering, and it seems like this is the pattern of our lives—pack and go, pack and go.

1965: In Hospital.

After being established in the States as a citizen, wife, and finally a mother of three young children, I was told that I was sick and would have to part from my family for an indefinite time of hospitalization. This agony evoked all the dormant horrors of being a camp inmate. As I entered the hospital corridor, it looked like a typical jail. I was becoming a prisoner all over again. Entering the room and meeting my roommate only added to my sense of a nightmare returned. The lady was German.

As a fourteen-year-old carefree child whose interests were school, family, and friends, I watched our little city of Munkacz become a strange place. It filled with Hungarian and German occupying soldiers. Our neighbors whom we'd known all our lives suddenly became alien to us. We had to wear the yellow star. Still we walked our streets not realizing the seriousness of the situation.

One sunny, spring day, two German soldiers took up residence in our home. After two weeks, the order came to pack up five kilos of belongings and leave our house. We marched with our fellow Jews to a brick factory on the outskirts of the city. We made our new home under the skies. My mother and my young, newly-wed aunt, my beautiful six-year-old brother, and I. We had no father at our side to protect us because he had been taken to a forced labor camp well before. My aunt became the head of our household. She found a sleigh and out of it improvised a bedroom. We felt lucky to have such privileges.

The young people formed a working unit, throwing bricks to each other and making a kind of fence for privacy. And so we lived. Four weeks after this, we were wakened by a harsh command: "Pack! We are taking you to a place where you will work."

It was dark and gloomy when we were loaded on a caravan of closed cattlewagons, filled to capacity without even standing room. My mother made up a
corner in her lap, and we all huddled together very quietly.

I remember my mother's thoughts were with my father's safety. And to me she kept saying, "I hope God will watch over you not to starve. I know you have a headache, my child." She must have had a premonition that I would be the only one to be spared from the gas chambers.

Yes, the train came to a halt after four or five days of travel. Suddenly, the gate of the wagon was opened up, and the carload was ordered to form lines. "Push! Push! Fast! Fast!"—mothers holding onto their babies and older ones. My first thought of the striped clothes and shaven heads: "This is the crazy unit."

Soon I found myself in front of an extremely tall German officer who ordered me to the left. I ran back to my mother. I wanted to be with my family [who were sent to the right]. How lucky they are to be together. And I shouldn't be with them?

But Mengele, the Angel of Death, would not grant me the other side. After three attempts to run back to the moving line, I was thrown to the sandy gravel, pleading to my mother. With a concerned ache in her eyes, she saw her child being thrown and pushed.

With a wave of her gentle hand, she accomplished what could not be done by bayonet force. "Go, my child, go. We will see each other tomorrow."

And I've been going ever since then.

NOTES

