In North Carolina, public school students begin the study of the Holocaust in the middle school years with the study of Europe. Often teachers will include a unit from the recommended reading list on *The Diary of Anne Frank*. High School students read *Night* by Elie Wiesel during World Literature and further study is concluded with American History and WWII. Each successive grade adds another layer of understanding to how such massive evil as the Holocaust could take place.

But *how can GENOCIDE ever be understood?*

No study of the American School of Eugenics, or the impact of the Treaty of Versailles after WWI, or the devastation of a global economic depression can explain the genocidal murder of 11 million people including 6 million Jews. And the cry of “Never Again!” is wasted on the successive genocidal murders of people in Cambodia, Bosnia, and Darfur.

It is tempting to label the perpetrators of such heinous acts as evil beyond the capacity of what normal human beings could fathom. But, the seeds of war and genocide are in every community and country and lay in wait to take root and flourish in the soil of ignorance, hate, fear, and violence.

As Catholic theologian Thomas Merton reminds us, the real horror of these crimes is that most perpetrators are neither insane nor pathologically cruel people. Rather, we should understand that these acts were committed by everyday regular people while other ordinary people stood by and watched.

Choosing to Remember was created using the methodology of “Facing History and Ourselves.” This national teacher education organization promotes the use of primary source documents and eye witness accounts to involve students in personally directed research. This exhibit, which uses small pieces of testimony of citizens in Asheville, NC, is paired with the longer testimonies and archived at the University of North Carolina Asheville Ramsey Library in the Special Collections. Those stories are available online by visiting [http://toto.lib.unca.edu/](http://toto.lib.unca.edu/).

*Shoah* – Hebrew Word for an all consuming fire – is often used in place of the Latin root word for Holocaust which comes from “a burnt offering.”

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Dr. Michael Heller, Western Carolina Regional Cancer Specialists

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Ordinary German Life

In 1998 Markus and Ilene Procida moved to Asheville from Munich, Germany. Ilene had grown up in California in a Jewish family. After college, she participated in a kibbutz Ulpan (work/study) program in Israel where she met Markus, a German student. They fell in love, married, and lived in Germany for ten years where their two daughters were born.

Markus’ mother, Gertraud, was a child in Munich during WWII. Her parents were Catholic and members of the Christian Social Democrats who were in opposition to the Nazi Party. This collection of documents and artifacts from the Markus family helps create a larger picture of how the philosophy of Nazism penetrated every part of German life.

By 1933, membership in the Hitler Youth Movement was 100,000. By 1936, all other youth organizations were outlawed. With membership compulsory for 10 – 18 year olds the figure grew to 4 million members in Germany. Activities for the boys prepared them for military service while the girls were prepared for motherhood. Dressed in brown uniforms, the boys were encouraged by leadership to target Jews, the disabled, and others seen as inferior by the Nazi’s with aggressive acts including name calling, rock throwing, fights and more.

The Hitler Youth Movement

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In 1939, Rubin Feldstein and his family were on a Polish ship on the way to England to immigrate to America. He recalls an encounter with the Hitler Youth as they were going through the Kiehl Canal in Germany. Knowing there were Jewish families trying to escape Europe on the ship, the youth stood with Nazi flags on the side of canal and sang a popular song called the “Horst Wessel.” One of the verses went: “When Jewish blood spurts from the knife, things will go well again.”

Postcards like this were sold at the post office. The translation reads “The Fuhrer knows only struggle, work and worry. We want to relieve the Fuhrer’s load when we are able.”

Name: Rubin Feldstein  
Birthdate: Feb. 15, 1933  
Birthplace: Zamosc, Poland  
Siblings: one  
Children: three  
Grandchildren: two
Dick Braun grew up in Prussia and left with his family in 1936. Dick's education began at a private elementary school and continued at a gymnasium or public high school. By the time he was ten, the sense of a Nazi presence began to grow. In 1933, he recalls seeing Nazi’s marching in the streets carrying banners and an increased Nazi presence in his school. Fellow students would come to school wearing Hitler Youth Movement brown uniforms. Dick said, “I didn’t fare too badly; although every once in a while, the whole class would go on an official outing and I was excluded.” Outings, hikes actually, were a big part of the curriculum. The outings became a time of tension for Dick. “With individual kids I got along fine, but when they got into groups, then all of a sudden things would get nasty.” More than once he had to run from the youth that were chasing him. He finally said to his parents “I don’t think I want to go on these outings.” Eventually, Jews were prohibited from attending the hikes and later were barred from attending school altogether. Before Dick left his school in 1935, all the teachers were wearing buttons with the Nazi swastika on their clothing identifying their loyalty to the new party.

Hilde and Lotte were best friends. They had looked forward to attending each other's confirmations, but by the time they were twelve, it was against the law for Jews to go to public places, including churches. Hilde recalls sneaking into the church service where Lotte was being confirmed. A week later, a picture of Lotte in her white confirmation desk appeared in Hilde’s mailbox.

Hilde with her lion cub on the last day Jews were allowed to visit the zoo because of the Nuremberg Laws.

The Nuremberg Laws and Friendship

The Nuremberg laws were enacted in 1935 which restricted the movement of Jews and others targeted by the Nazi Party. The laws had their own special impact on children including whom they could play with and where they could go. Jews were not allowed to visit public places such as the zoo. Hilde's family loved animals and had been supporters of the Leipzig Zoo. Many days after school, she visited the animals and made friends with several keepers. In particular, she befriended a small lion cub whose mother had refused to nurse him. Hilde would go each day to bottle-feed him. On the last day that Jewish children were allowed to visit the zoo, the keeper took a picture of Hilde with the lion cub in her lap.

Hilde’s best friend was Lotte who was Lutheran. For years they had looked forward to attending each others confirmations, but by the time they were twelve, it was against the law for Jews to go to public places, including churches. Hilde recalls sneaking into the church service where Lotte was being confirmed just as the bell rang for everyone to be seated. A week later, a picture of Lotte in her white confirmation desk appeared in Hilde’s mailbox.

The confirmation picture of Hilde’s friend Lotte that was secretly sent her in the mail.
Choosing to Remember: From the Shoah to the Mountains

Roundups

Throughout the 1920’s and 30’s, whole communities of Jews in Eastern Europe were relocated. One such community from Poland had moved to Leipzig, Germany to escape. Mostly Yiddish-speaking and poor, they lived in a neighborhood at the outskirts of town.

One early morning, the Brown Shirts (Nazis) made a raid through the neighborhood and took away entire families. Parents who were able, hid their children in nooks and crannies. Later that day, leaders of the Jewish community went through the area, knowing that there were probably children still hiding. Calling out in Yiddish, they encouraged the children to reveal themselves. Some twenty children emerged. The local Jewish community then had to decide what to do with them. Hilde was hired, along with several others, to care for them. It was not an easy task. She recalls what it was like to hear the children crying in the night for their parents.

Hilde Cohen Hoffman in Asheville in 1998

Names: Edna and Gus Lichtenfel
Children: Joe, Helen, Carolyn and Johanna
Birthplace: US and Leipzig, Germany

Sponsors and Affidavits

The trauma of Hitler’s rise to power and its consequences for Jews in Germany was immediately felt by their relatives and friends in America. Joseph Lichtenfels remembers when his father, Gustav, began to receive letters from folks back home in Leipzig, Germany asking for assistance in coming to the United States. Joseph remembers his mother, Edna, and his sister, Helen, setting up an entire office with typewriters and filing cabinets full of correspondence where they worked to rescue over 30 relatives and friends. Everything they wrote was typed with a carbon paper copy. United States Senator Bob Reynolds was particularly helpful in speeding the process of affidavits. This was especially interesting since he was actively opposed to raising the quota limits to allow more immigration. Among those the Lichtenfels sponsored were Fred Hoffman and his family and Rudolf Gumpert who later married their daughter Helen.

Gus and Edna Lichtenfel
Refugees in a New Home

Refugees from WWII in Asheville experienced their new environment in many different ways. Some formed close attachments to other refugees; others felt welcomed by the larger Jewish and non-Jewish community; while still others felt excluded.

Herbert Shiftan was from Stuttgart, Germany. He immigrated to the United States in May 1938. In New York, the Council of Jewish Women was arranging a job for him in Winston-Salem, NC when Gustav Lichtenfels intervened. Mr. Lichtenfels was in New York on business, and to visit the Council of Jewish Women. There he met Herbert Shiftan and offered him a job working for Leo Finkelstein’s store in Asheville. Mr. Shiftan worked for Finkelstein’s store for some fifty years.

Hebert met his wife Lore through a friend in New York. Lore Shiftan said that, “Dr. and Mrs. Samuel Robinson (of Asheville) took in Herbert like a son. Dr. Robinson would pick up Herbert on Fridays for dinner at his house and together they went to services.”

Lore Shiftan was from Wilhelmshaven, Germany. Her dream was to be a dress designer. In order to be accepted at a school of design, she needed a three-year apprenticeship with a master dressmaker. The Nuremberg Laws thwarted her every effort to find someone to apprentice with and finally forbade her entry to a school of design altogether. Lore’s great-uncle in the United States provided 184 affidavits, including one for Lore who left in December of 1938.

Lore and Herbert Shiftan settled in Asheville a few years later, and Lore’s parents settled in Newark, NJ. Mrs. Shiftan was able to continue her work as a dressmaker in Asheville. The Shiftans and their friends Hilde and Fred Hoffman called the Lichtenfels “Uncle Gus and Aunt Edna.”

Separating Families

Jan Lakin (Kahn) was a year old when England entered the war against Germany. Her parents decided to send her and her mother to New York. She would travel with another aunt and her two daughters to wait out the war away from the nightly air raids. But less than three years later, America joined the war, and Jan’s mother and aunt felt they should return to England. Once in England, Jan’s parents chose to do what many other families did—get the children out of London. Her parents selected a school in Devon, England that would take a five-year-old. Fortunately her cousins went there as well. Her parents braved the war conditions and the seven-hour journey to periodically visit their young daughter.
Family Separation

Carla was ten when her mother and future stepfather left Berlin on tourist visas for Palestine to search for a way to permanently escape Nazi Germany. A year later, in September of 1938, Carla’s parents wrote to the nanny, Dudi, to put their daughters on a train bound for Vilona, Italy. Traveling alone across Nazi Germany and Austria, the children made a rendezvous with their parents and returned with them to Haifa. The family spent the war years in Palestine.

As the Nuremberg Laws tightened the grip on Jewish families in Germany, Carla’s grandmother left Berlin to return to her native Poland where she thought it would be safer. She tried to convince Carla and Ula to join her, but their travel visas for Haifa arrived just in time. Sadly, the entire Debronizka family in Poland, including the grandmother, perished in ghettos and death camps.

Name: CARLA SILKERSTEIN SANDLER
Birthdate: 1927
Birthplace: BERLIN, GERMANY

The Kindertransport

In 1924 Anna Klahr took her three children and one on the way (Rita) to Palestine to be a part of rebuilding the Jewish homeland. By 1931, Rita’s father had persuaded his wife to return from Israel to Hamburg, Germany – even though the rise of Nazi power was well underway. Abraham felt that his medals from WWI would protect him and the family. By 1938, he understood the dire need for Jews to leave Germany. Since the two family businesses had been confiscated they no had the money to pay the required taxes for Jews to leave the country. Through her mother’s foresight, Rita obtained a British Passport for Palestine which allowed her to leave, though reluctantly without her parents, for England. She was attached to one of the last Kinderstansports and arrived in England alone at the age of 14. She was apprenticed to a hair dresser while going to night school.

In response to Kristallnacht, the British Jewish Refugee Committee appealed to members of Parliament to admit into England an unspecified number of children up to age 17. The transports in sealed trains began one month after Kristallnacht and lasted until days before the war broke out on Sept. 3, 1939. Approximately 10,000 children made the trip.

Name: Rivka (Rita) Klahr Reiser
Birthdate: July 12, 1924
Birthplace: Haifa, Palestine
Parents: Abraham and Anna Engelberg Klahr

Rita’s identification card in Germany

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Choosing to Remember: From the Shoah to the Mountains
Max was eighteen early in the summer of 1937 when he met fourteen-year-old Trude Schonthal at an Austrian resort called Bad Voslau. He told Trude that they would marry some day.

Just a short time later, Max returned to Vienna and happened to go to a dance. A chaperoned group of girls from Greenville, South Carolina, who were visiting Vienna, were at this dance. Max met and danced with one of them named Mary Mills. Neither teenager could speak the other's language, but they Max and Mary met the next day for a walk and exchanged addresses.

After the takeover of Austria by the Germans in March 1938, Max knew he had to quickly find a way to leave Austria. He remembered the young woman from Greenville, South Carolina. Max immediately began drafting a letter to Mary Mills using a German/English dictionary.

In May, he received a return letter from Ms. Mills. She wrote him that a Greenville man named Mr. Shepherd Saltzman would send him an affidavit. When Mary had first read Max's letter seeking a sponsor, she had asked her father for advice. Mr. Mills suggested that she ask Mr. Stalzman, a Jewish man who owned Piedmont Shirt Company in Greenville. Mr. Saltzman told Mary that he would sponsor Max, by replying "If you as a Christian are trying to help a Jew, how can I [a Jew] refuse to help?"

Several years after safely reaching Greenville, SC, Max received a card from Trude Schonthal in Belgium. Once she and her parents made it safely to New York, Max visited her there and they were married soon afterwards.
Choosing to Remember

From the Shoah to the Mountains

Name: EGON FRIEDLANDER
Birthdate: JUNE 9, 1920
Birthplace: VIENNA, AUSTRIA
Parents: MICHAEL AND KAROLINA FRIEDLANDER
Siblings: KURT, KATE (RICHTER), TRUDE (LOBEL)
Children: TWO
Grandchildren: FOUR

Egon Friedlander grew up in Vienna, Austria. At seventeen he was discharged from his job at a department store because he was Jewish. He managed to get a job as a store clerk for the father of a friend of his, Trude Schonthal. On November 9, 1938, Egon set off for work as usual. On his way, he was warned that something dangerous was going on but, not encountering anything unusual, he continued on. Soon after his arrival at the store, Trude and her parents, who were aware of the danger, came to close the store and roll down the gates in front of it for protection. After a few phone calls they learned that the Nazis were arresting Jewish men. They realized the seriousness of the situation and remained in the store all night where they could hear the sound of Brown Shirts pounding on the door and the noise of breaking glass up and down the street. That night came to be called “Kristallnacht” or the “Night of Broken Glass.”

The next morning Egon returned home to find that his father and younger brother were safe. His father had hidden in the refrigerator of his delicatessen and his brother in a neighbor’s attic. Unfortunately, not all of the neighborhood men had been so lucky. He saw many people grieving over the arrests of husbands, fathers, and friends. That morning Egon came to the painful conclusion that there was no hope left for Jews in Austria and decided that he must leave the country.

Kristallnacht – The Night of the Broken Glass

Never give up!

The night of Kristallnacht turned Trude’s life around. Within days, her father escaped over the German border with her friend Egon Friedlander. Once safely in Belgium, he sent word of a helpful, dining car waiter who, for a fee, would hide Trude and her mother under the tablecloth in the dining car of the train while the crossed the border into Belgium. In January of 1939, Rose and sixteen-year-old Trude boarded the train. They had no permits to leave Nazi Austria or to enter any other countries.

Trude and Rose went to the dining car to find the waiter who Schimek (Trude’s father) had described to them. They held menus while Trude—the braver one—told the waiter who they were and that he had promised her father that he would help them hide for twice the amount of money that her father had paid for his own ride to safety. The waiter replied, “Don’t talk to me! I’m being watched!”

They got off the train in Cologne, Germany, the next-to-last-stop before the border, and went to the Marienhof Hotel. A waiter at the hotel was “pushy” with Trude, and this made Rose all the more uncomfortable. For the five weeks that they stayed in Cologne, the kind proprietor of a nearby cheese shop helped sustain them with bread and cheese.

They made four attempts to escape by foot across the border, but each time they were captured and sent back to Cologne, Germany.

From Antwerp, Belgium, Schimek found a Nazi who wanted money from outside of Germany and who would guide the women across the border. This man led Trude and Rose from the hotel—for their fifth escape attempt—to some woods where they walked for three or four hours in the icy wet cold. This area was referred to as “no-man’s-land.” A driver met them at the pre-arranged location on the other side of the woods, and drove his car, without using headlights for the first two hours, to Antwerp where they met Schimeck who completed the payoff.

Name: TRUDE SCHONTHAL HELLER
Birthdate: JUNE 19, 1922
Birthplace: VIENNA, AUSTRIA
Parents: SIMON AND ROSIL HAAS SCHONTHAL
Children: THREE
Grandchildren: TEN
Great-grandchildren: FOUR

From Antwerp, Belgium, Schimeck found a Nazi who wanted money from outside of Germany and who would guide the women across the border. This man led Trude and Rose from the hotel—for their fifth escape attempt—to some woods where they walked for three or four hours in the icy wet cold. This area was referred to as “no-man’s-land.” A driver met them at the pre-arranged location on the other side of the woods, and drove his car, without using headlights for the first two hours, to Antwerp where they met Schimeck who completed the payoff.
Joe was desperately trying to get out of Austria, but the Austrian quota to the United States was very small and few countries would accept Jewish refugees. Joe had relations in the United States, but could not get a visa. Fortunately the Society of Friends, the Quakers, launched an international effort. With offices in Berlin and Vienna, the Quakers were working to relieve those suffering political persecution and to help Jews emigrate. The Vienna Center Quakers were able to help some 2,408 Jews leave Austria between March 1938 and August 1939. Joe registered with the Quakers, and in the summer of 1939, they helped him go to England. The Quakers were able to obtain British visas by sending boys as farm workers and girls as domestics.

One of the prominent Quaker families involved were the Cadburys, the internationally-known makers of chocolate. They established a hostel for boys in Bromsgrove, England, a small town southwest of Birmingham. Joe and fellow classmates from his high school were in this group of twenty-five boys, all approximately nineteen years old. In the mornings there were lectures, and in the afternoon the boys worked on local farms. Joe says, “We were all city boys—who had played sports—but we were not used to farm work such as stacking hay, shoveling manure, and milking cows.” Joe worked in Bromsgrove during the summer of 1939 and remembers that one of the “Quaker chocolate people” invited the refugee farm boys to his home to swim in his pool.

Making the most of a coincidence

Ruth Marx was the only daughter of a family in Munich, Germany. Her parents, Salo and Ella, had been searching for a way out of Germany for years. The only real option was immigration, but for that one needed an affidavit-sponsorship from a citizen of the country to which one wished to immigrate. The Marx family knew no one outside of Germany who would provide them with an affidavit. Meanwhile, her father applied for a visa, hoping that something would turn up. In the late 1930s, he received a very low quota number and he knew he had a long wait.

One day in 1936, Salo’s mother, Emma, called her son to say that she had found a box of old correspondences in her attic which she would discard unless he wanted them. Salo replied that he would look at them during his next visit. On examination of the letters, he found one posted from Louisville, Kentucky written to Joseph Marx, Emma’s husband, before his death. The letter was thanking Joseph for his financial assistance in helping this young man leave Germany for America many years earlier. No one in Ruth’s family recognized the name and there was no address. Salo wrote to the mayor of Louisville and asked if this name was familiar. The mayor sent Salo a long list of names with all of their addresses. Salo wrote each one and asked if they were related to the person who had written the letter of thanks. He asked that they now return the favor and help his family leave Germany by signing an affidavit.

Months later, one of them replied that they were related to the person mentioned and that they would think about providing an affidavit for Salos family. It was no easy matter, since they had to complete a detailed financial statement, providing their personal solvency, in case the need arose for financial assistance for the new immigrants. After Salo’s imprisonment and release following Kristallnacht, the Kentucky relatives signed the affidavit and the Marx family departed for America.
Vichy, France

The Nazis knew they did not have the organizational structure to capture all those they had designated for removal. They selectively invaded countries one by one rounding up Jews, Communists, Gypsies, and others with each new conquest. But always there were those who escaped. The Nazis found that by actively advertising one place as “safe,” those who had escaped would naturally migrate to that one place such as Vichy, (southern) France. Famous labor organizers, artists, and politicians wound up in southern France, including the artists Max Ernst and Marc Chagall.

Miriam and her family escaped Antwerp, Belgium on the day Germany invaded their country, May 10, 1940. Having made their way to Vichy, France they were sitting in the middle of the Nazi’s trap. At that time (until 1942), a boat could be hired to take people across the Mediterranean Sea to Africa. The entire family decided to try to make it to the Belgian Congo (now Zaire) to wait out the war. After some fifteen members of the Bernstein clan boarded the boat, Miriam’s mother, Anya, became frightened. Miriam reports that her mother looked at the crew and was afraid that once at sea they would steal their valuables and throw them into the water. She took her daughters and got off the boat leaving her mother, siblings and families to sail off without her. While the Bernstein family made it safely to Africa, Anya looked for another way out.

Censorship

After several months, Anya secured passage across Spain to Portugal. Miriam recalls wearing Christian crosses around their necks and speaking to no one on the train ride. In Portugal, she went by “Maria” and continued to wear a cross. Miriam had been but three weeks shy of graduating from high school when the bombs began to fall in Antwerp. If she were to attend college on arrival in the United States, she would need her transcript. While she was in Portugal, she wrote to her principal in Antwerp and asked that the record of her grades be sent to her. A few months later, Miriam received a reply with the transcript. However, the letter had been opened and read by Nazi censors.
Escaping Deportations

By 1939, the full toll on the Jewish population of Ober-Riedenberg, Germany was beginning to be felt. The deportations to concentration camps had begun with the first targets being all adult males. Joseph Vandewart, at twenty-four years of age, escaped the first roundup. But he knew it was only a matter of time before the Nazis found him. He knew two Jewish women in a larger city whose father had already been taken away. Since the registered male of that house had been picked up in the first round of deportations, he reasoned that they might not return to that location. It was not to be.

One day Nazis circled the house and when Joe tried to escape, he was caught. He was taken to a police station. There, one of the policemen happened to know one of the Jewish women who had hidden Joe, so he released him. It was his incredible good fortune. As a diabetic, he needed daily insulin shots and he could not have survived for more than two days in jail.

Non-Jewish Family Members

Jeanette Goldberg was the only child of Moritz and Marie Goldberg. Moritz had been brought up in a very Orthodox family. Marie converted to Judaism before their marriage. Jeanette left Germany in the mid-1930s and spent the war years worrying about what had happened to her parents. Fortunately, they had survived and Jeanette brought them to the United States and she learned this story:

In 1942, the roundups began in Kassel, Germany. All the Jews were ordered to report to the playground across the street from Numbers 7 and 9 Schiller Strasse (Street). Once they were all in one place, they were forced to stay at those two addresses until further notice. There were generally 10-15 people living in each room.

Amazingly enough, Marie and Moritz were not required to live in those houses. Since Marie converted to Judaism, she had a number of non-Jewish family members. One of her brothers was a member of the Nazi Party in Kassel and fairly high up in the chain of command. While the rest of the community awaited deportation to concentration camps, Moritz and Marie were sent to live in barracks in a rural part of Germany near Kassel called Niederzwehren.

For the move to Niederzwehren, they were allowed to take what could fit into two rooms. Moritz was required to wear a Star of David.

Once in Niederzwehren, Moritz was required to report for the compulsory work of building streets. He walked two hours there and two hours back each day. The walk and the work were very difficult on the aging Moritz. Marie went to her brother, the Nazi soldier, and asked that he be given a lighter job. He was switched to laundry work. Around the barracks, they were able to grow a small garden and lived out the rest of the war in this fashion. Still, each day they feared that their fortune would change and that they would be deported.

There are a number of recorded instances where non-Jewish spouses openly advocated for the release of their Jewish family members. One of the most well-known was in front of the Berlin Police Station where non-Jewish women staged an open protest calling for the release of their husbands. Their husbands were released.
Choosing to Remember: From the Shoah to the Mountains

Name: HORST BAUMGARTEN
Birthdate: NOVEMBER 8, 1923
Birthplace: ERFURT, GERMANY
Siblings: HONEY
Children: THREE
Grandchildren: FOUR

Having witnessed the burning of the family synagogue on Kristallnacht in Cologne, the Rosenthal family made plans to emigrate to the US. John's family were refugees in New York for four years before he turned 19 and entered the US Army to become a naturalized US Citizen. Because he was fluent in German, Flemish, and French, he took Military Intelligence Training, and a year later found himself on a troopship bound for Europe.

After one month in Northern Ireland and a few more in England, where he witnessed at first hand the terrible impact of German bombing on English citizens, John found himself in muddy Normandy not long after D-Day. From there he was sent to Antwerp in Belgium where he finally performed the activities for which he had been trained. He now belonged to a Military Intelligence Interpreter team and his various duties included interrogation of Belgian civilians who wanted to work for the U.S. military, checking barges and ships for contraband, and interpreting Flemish and French newspapers into English to show what the Belgian people thought of the American Army. He also kept track on a map with pins of the places in Antwerp where German V1 and V2 rockets hit, so that the pattern might be used to figure out where in Germany those rockets were launched from.

Name: JOHN ROSENTHAL
Birthdate: SEPTEMBER 4, 1923
Birthplace: COLOGNE, GERMANY
Parents: PHILIPP and POLLY (IMMERGUT) ROSENTHAL
Siblings: MAX ADOLPH RESENTHAL
Children: TWO
Grandchildren: FOUR

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From Denmark to Theresienstadt

By four, Horst and his sister Honey were orphans and living at relatives. While Honey was soon old enough to immigrate to Israel, Horst had to wait until he turned 18. He was 17 when his sister sent him to a farm in Denmark to escape the Nazis. For two years, Denmark valiantly fought against the Nazi occupiers but finally succumbed. They again fought valiantly to warn and rescue the Danish Jewish community that numbered over 7,000. Because Horst was in an isolated part of Denmark (Jutland), he did not hear the news in time. Horst remembers that on one Friday evening in September of 1942, a loud pounding at the door brought his protector, the farmer, to attention. When the farmer opened the door, Horst saw the Nazi soldier and knew it was too late to hide. Horst was loaded up on an army truck with a tarpaulin covering the back and sat through the roundup of many of his fellow teenagers in the agricultural program. Toward the end of the roundup, the soldiers were coming up empty-handed as farmers began to warn others of what was taking place. They drove throughout the night, and the next day were put on a boat in Copenhagen and eventually taken to Theresienstadt.

Three years later, King Christian X of Denmark negotiated with Heinrich Himmler for his citizens' release and sent the "white buses" through enemy lines to bring them to Sweden where it was agreed that they would stay in a dormitory until the war was over. On April 15, 1945, the buses arrived at Theresienstadt and loaded up the remaining Danish Jews. Horst was carried onto the bus on a stretcher because, only the week before, he had had an emergency appendectomy performed by a fellow prisoner on a barrack table with only a kitchen knife and no anesthesia.
Choosing to Remember: From the Shoah to the Mountains

Name: Walter Ziffer
Birthdate: March 5, 1927
Birthplace: Cieszyn, Silesia, Poland
Parents: Leo and Anny Borger Ziffer
Siblings: Edith
Children: Six
Grandchildren: Twelve

Slave Labor Camps

Walter Ziffer was fourteen years old when he was rounded up by Nazi soldiers for deportation in 1941. Walter’s life over the next four years was one of unspeakable horrors. Nazi regulation allowed fourteen ounces of bread per day, but “one was more likely to receive nine or ten ounces.” Walter said that the starvation caused “numbness so that you couldn’t really feel the insults, indignities and beatings.”

All of the slave labor camps were usually assisting the war effort in some way. At the first camp, Walter worked on building an autobahn (highway) which included work in a quarry filling train wagons with sand. In another camp (Graeditz), he unloaded one-hundred-pound sacks of cement. At another camp he loaded and unloaded bombs. His last job, at Gross-Rosen, was drilling holes in bedrock in sub-zero weather. Sometimes he and other prisoners had to stand for 12-13 hours working while being hit and whipped. Another torturous labor was burying murdered Jews in a mass grave in the woods. Walter said that at this point in the war, ordinary Germans were employed as guards who taunted and beat Jews while watching them work.

Refugees

Even after some refugees had safely made it to the United States, sometimes there were problems. Visas fell into “preference” and “non-preference” categories. Since Walter’s happened to be in the non-preference category, his student visa had expired. Walter’s uncle was acquainted with Mr. Mortimer May who knew the Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver. Kefauver wrote and carried through a US Senate bill which gave Walter permanent residency in the United States. Soon after this Bill #2810 was passed, Walter graduated from Hume-Fogg Technical and Vocational High School in Nashville, TN.
Choosing to Remember:

From the Shoah to the Mountains

Name: Harry Lerner
Birthdate: 1923
Birthplace: Kisvarda, Hungary
Parents: Mendel and Sara Lerner
Siblings: Lipe, Jossi, Pinchas, Naphtali, Deena and Goldie
Children: four

Harry grew up in an Orthodox Jewish family and community where communications with the secular world were not encouraged. It was not part of a daily routine to listen to the radio or read the newspaper. To keep better informed, he joined a Zionist organization where he learned of the murder of Jews and the efforts to find refuge in Palestine. He encouraged his father to move the family to Palestine, but it was not to be.

By the fall of 1943, when Harry turned 20 he was required to serve full time in the Hungarian army where he joined a company of 220 men and was given the job of driving wagons carrying supplies and officers. Jewish soldiers were not allowed to carry firearms. The conditions for all Hungarian Jews were rapidly worsening.

One Hungarian officer, Szalay Gaza, kept Harry informed and made it possible for him to briefly visit his family in Kiswarda. Soon Harry saw more and more trains filled with Jews being deported. One day, after Harry’s company was moved just outside of Budapest, he happened to see his childhood friend, Jossi Klein, who told him about a resistance group and where its hideouts were located. When Hungary was falling to the Nazi’s, Gaza told Harry to “make his move.” Harry joined about 60 others in a resistance group that distributed food to those in hiding as well as sabotaged bridges, railroad crossings and strategic buildings and stopped some Nazi collaborators from killing “distressed individuals.”

One night, when his resistance group’s hideout was surrounded by German SS (the elite security and military organization of the Nazi Party) Harry escaped and sought asylum in the Swedish Embassy where Raoul Wallenberg was the diplomat. After the war he learned that the rest of his family had all been murdered by the Nazi’s.

Slave Labor and Death Camps

In 1944, the Jewish townspeople of Tolcsva, Hungary along with Lily Gluck and her family, were forced into a cattle car. Three days later they arrived at Auschwitz Death Camp. There she and her sister were separated from other family members and forced into slave labor with little food or shelter. The prisoners were worked in groups of five. Lily managed to find three cousins to work with her and her sister Margaret. Her spirit of optimism (she would often say “the word impossible does not exist”) kept all of them going. For the next year they were moved to other slave labor camps finally ended up in Leipzig, Germany where they air drilled rivets into motor parts.

In March, 1945 the Allies were surrounding Leipzig when the Commandant of Lily’s camp was ordered by Heinrich Himmler to kill all the remaining prisoners. The Commandant tore up the paper and began walking the prisoners in circles hoping they would meet Allied soldiers and surrender. In two weeks they met two American soldiers who liberated Lily, Margaret and the other prisoners.

Margaret and Lily found their brother Icu after the war and learned that the rest of the members of the family were murdered. Lily married Harry Lerner and moved to Asheville in 1960 to create Connie’s Fashions.

Name: Lily Gluck Lerner
Life span: 1928-1988
Birthplace: Tolcsva, Hungary
Parents: Kornell and Zoltan Gluck
Siblings: Ernoke, Icu and Margaret
Children: Four

In 1944, the Jewish townspeople of Tolcsva, Hungary along with Lily Gluck and her family, were forced into a cattle car. Three days later they arrived at Auschwitz Death Camp. There she and her sister were separated from other family members and forced into slave labor with little food or shelter. The prisoners were worked in groups of five. Lily managed to find three cousins to work with her and her sister Margaret. Her spirit of optimism (she would often say “the word impossible does not exist”) kept all of them going. For the next year they were moved to other slave labor camps finally ended up in Leipzig, Germany where they air drilled rivets into motor parts.

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Name: Julius Blum  
Birthdate: March 30, 1925  
Birthplace: Muncaks, Hungary  
Parents: Ignac and Seren Arnowits Blum  
Siblings: Andrew  
Children: Three  
Grandchildren: Five

Displaced Persons Camps

For two years after the war, Julius worked undercover for the Haganah of Palestine. He was given an identity card as working with the United Nations Relief Administration and in the Displaced Persons Camps (DP). But his real job was to help Survivors who were interested in making their way to the Italian shore for boats to Palestine which by 1948 would become the nation of Israel.

Slave Labor and Death Camps

Julius was captured in Hungary in April 1944. Over the next year he was in a number of slave labor and death camps. The last camp was Gussen where he was forced to assemble machine guns. The camp was in a valley; the factory at the top of a hill was reached by 21 uneven steps. When anyone fell on those steps, his tattoo number was recorded and the next day he would be murdered.

In early May Julius fell. His number was recorded and he was told not to go to work the next day. For two days he sat with a fellow prisoner on the steps of the last barrack in the camp. For two days the cart that came by at the end of the day was too full with bodies to add two more to it. The inmates pushing the cart said, “We will come for you tomorrow.” Julius explains that his mind was too numb and his body too weak from starvation to care anymore. That afternoon, May 5, 1945, he gathered for the usual “appel” which began at exactly 5:00 pm. At each appel the prisoners would be accounted for. At 5:05 pm the roll call still had not begun and no guards were in sight. Suddenly, two men in green uniforms appeared at the gates – American soldiers. Some prisoners began to shout “We are free!” All the inmates stayed in line and began to sing their national anthems – people from every nation in Europe. Then they surrounded the soldiers as if they were “angels from heaven.” Ten days following his liberation, Julius received a piece of paper that allowed him to again travel freely in Europe. Julius says, “This piece of paper made me a human being again.” (pictured above)

Allied Troops from D-Day to Liberation

Eric left Austria following Kristallnacht and eventually was able (with the direct intervention of President Roosevelt) to bring over his parents and sister. Eric enlisted in the United States Army as an engineer. He participated at the tail end of many of the greatest campaigns of the war as the Allied troops swept across Europe. His main job was to rebuild the bridges that had been bombed out.

He landed on the beaches of Normandy and swung down to Brest, France, traveling in a four-man jeep across Germany to the border of the Czech Republic.

As part of Patton’s army, they were pushing fast to beat Stalin’s Russian army at capturing as much territory as possible. Part of the push to beat Stalin’s army took them past the entrance to Buchenwald Death Camp. Eric and his fellow soldiers stopped for a half-hour and saw firsthand the horrors about which they had only heard. Eric still recalls the piles of bodies and the smell of death on that day in May 1945.
At their arrival in Aushwitz, Cecilia Altberger and her family were immediately put through the selection process on the train platform. The parents and grandparents were sent to the gas chambers while Cecilia and her siblings were sent to Estonia and Latvia for forced labor in munitions plants. Towards the end of the war she and her sister Mugda survived a forced death march from Bergen-Belsen and were placed in a Displaced Persons (DPs) Camp. There they joined some 250,000 other Jewish DPs who lived in camps throughout Germany, Austria and Italy which were managed by the Allies and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) from 1945-1952. By 1948, Cecilia was on a boat for the US where she met Horst Baumgarten. They were later married and raised a family in Detroit, Michigan.

De-Nazification Program

Karl Straus came to America as a refugee from Germany in 1936. In 1943, he joined the US Army and returned to Germany. After the war Karl continued to work for the Army and later the US Treasury Department. He was a part of the interview teams that were working in the “De-Nazification Program” of the United States. The idea was that in order for Germany to repair its economy, it had to do so without the Leadership that had masterminded and perpetrated ethnic murder. General Patton did not feel the “de-nazification” of Germany was necessary before restarting the economy; this process lagged far behind in his district. Patton lobbied Congress to have it stopped altogether. Karl’s job was to coordinate the clerical work for a congressional report that would convince the elective body to finish the removal of Nazis from powerful positions in Germany. Some support was gained, and Karl received a Bronze Star for his work. The De-nazification Program in Germany was never completed to the degree that the United States had envisioned.
War Crimes Tribunals

Markus Reich grew up in a farming family in Bochnia, Poland which was invaded by the Nazis in 1939. In 1940, he was forced into a slave labor camp, later escaped, and was rounded up once again. By 1943, he was in Plaszow (the main camp featured that Oscar Schindler was involved with) outside of Krakow where the guards had formerly been prisoners in German prisons. A forced march from Plaszow took him to Auschwitz and then to Gliwice before he was liberated near Garching.

Following the war, Markus learned that his mother and siblings, along with other members had all died in death camps. He decided to continue to live in Garching rather than return to Poland.

After the war, the Allies established the International Military Tribunal to hold War Crimes Trials. The Tribunals defined crimes against humanity as "murder, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population, before or during the war; or persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds in connection with any crime within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal, whether or not in violation of the domestic law of the country where perpetrated." The courts were held throughout Europe and in Japan including one in Dachau, Germany. Markus traveled to Dachau to give testimony as a witness at the war crimes' trials. After four trials Markus reported that it became too hard to constantly relive what had happened. He and Maria moved to Asheville in the early 1950's.

Refugees in Israel

Peter Reiser fled Prague with his brother Stefan to join his mother's sister in Haifa Palestine. Their mother, Minnie, stayed behind to care for her elderly mother who was too weak to travel. In 1942, both brothers had joined the British Army. After the war Peter and Stefan learned that Minnie had survived Auschwitz and they were able to bring her to Haifa to join the rest of the family. By 1948, Peter had married Rita Khlar just before the newly weds along with Peter's brother Stefan were drafted for the Israeli War of Independence. In July, Peter's brother Stefan, 25 years old, apparently stepped on a mine and was killed on the spot. When Peter brought the awful news to his mother, Minnie, the tragedy of the wars really came to bear on her. She had suffered so much in WWII and now to lose one of her sons, whom she had saved from the worst.
Reconciliation

Lotte and her family fled Darmstadt, Germany in 1938 for Chicago, Illinois. She returned once in 1963. In 1999, Lotte again returned to Darmstadt. In a phone conversation with an old friend, she learned that the following week Darmstadt was organizing a reconciliation reunion sponsored by the City Government for former Jewish residents. Quickly, Lotte mobilized her family. She, her daughters, Sheella and Elana, and her brother, Walter and his wife all managed to be there. It was the 10th anniversary of the rebuilding of a synagogue in Darmstadt by the city government. Lotte was one of 19 former Darmstadt citizens and their families who attended the gathering. The German government has made a number of strides to address the evil of the Nazi government through War reparation payments to individual survivors as well as governments and organizations. Since the 1990’s many towns have sponsored reunions such as the one that Lotte attended in Darmstadt.

Searching for Family Long Gone

Sharon Fahrer grew up knowing that her mother, Irma, had lost her brother, Kurt, to the Shoah. Her grandmother, Marie, kept a table covered with candles and pictures of family members. Little was discussed about the lost relatives pictured there. Many years later Sharon decided to record the names of the family members who died in the Shoah at Yad Vasham, the Holocaust Museum in Israel. It was then that she realized that the names of her uncle’s wife and child were not known. This began a search for records which eventually included the Dutch and German governments, the Red Cross, and the Westerbork concentration camp. Coincidentally, the search also connected Sharon with the family of Kurt’s wife, Aunt Rita, who were doing their own search to find out what happened to their lost relatives.

Choosing to Remember:
From the Shoah to the Mountains

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Choosing to Remember: From the Shoah to the Mountains

Name: Lotte Straus Meyerson
Birthdate: October 27, 1922
Birthplace: Darmstadt, Germany
Parents: Meier and Elsie David Straus
Siblings: Walter
Children: two
Grandchildren: one

Name: George Tushak
Birthdate: 1919-1993
Birthplace: Vienna, Austria
Siblings: Renee
Children: three / Grandchildren: three

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Searching for Family Long Gone

Often students ask how families handle the loss and grief that comes with stories of the Shoah. Sometimes people try to put it behind them and never mention it again. Others have gone on intense searches to try to learn the truth.

Elise Tushak Israel came to know bits and pieces of her father’s (George Tushak) family’s history in Europe. But, she always wondered about the grandparents she had never known and had a concern for her lost heritage. Elise’s parents took the family back to Prague in the mid-1960’s. There they visited the Pinkas Synagogue, the oldest in Europe. The plaster walls were covered from floor to ceiling with the names (unalphabetized) of thousands of Jews who had been taken from their homes and sent to their deaths. Amazingly, Elise spotted the names of her father’s parents, Oskar and Elsa Tushak. This was the first confirmation for her father that his parents had died in Auschwitz.

Elise continued researching her family history and through the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC learned that her grandparents were on board the first transport out of Vienna with 1,000 other deportees to Theresienstadt in 1942. Ferdinand and Hermina Spira were murdered at the ages of 84 and 79.

George Tushak as a young boy
Searching for Family Long Gone

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Irma received a letter from the Red Cross in Holland on the death of her brother Kurt. “Heartweakness” was the term given to all who died in the crematoriums and death camps.

Remembeing the dead is a central part of Judaism. A special candle is lit on the anniversary of a loved one’s death every year. For those who died in the Shoah it is like lighting a candle for generations of descendants that will never exist since in Jewish thought to kill one person is to kill an entire world. The impact of the Shoah is far more than the murder of 6 million but also the murder of all those who would have been their descendants. Only in 2005 has the world population of Jews returned to the 1938 level of approximately 16 million people. For each of those that survived and for each of those that perished, we...

choose to REMEMBER

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