

child survivors of the holocaust

CONNECTIONS

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Introduction

Dear Child Survivors,
The year has rolled by and as we come to the end of 2014 we can reflect on a busy year for the Child survivors. The *Time Capsule* event was a huge success; our time capsule is filled to the brim with your stories, photos, poems and memories, stored safely in the archives at the Holocaust Centre waiting for the all important "Opening Ceremony" in fifty years time.
Child survivor function: We thought it best to hold our annual get together early in the New Year when we will have a representative from Jewish care

attend to answer all your questions regarding your application for the Child Survivor compensation.

Thank you to all child survivors who have shared their stories, we look forward to many more contributions, please call me at the JHC on 9528 1985 to register your interest.

To all our members especially the newcomers we send you our best wishes for a wonderful Chanukah and look forward to seeing you all in the New Year. Warmest regards

viv.

Claims Conference Update - December 2014

The CSH Fund is now at the administrative stage due to commence in January 2015, we will be in constant communication with Claims Conference and Jewish Care on your behalf and will let you know immediately the application forms are ready.

As mentioned above you will be invited to the JHC for a special meeting regarding the CSH Compensation when

all the details are finalized.

We understand who ever receives an Article 2 pension, BEG or Slave Labour Fund may be contacted directly by Claims Conference via a letter early 2015.

We look forward to contacting you soon with more details, and a reminder that you can contact Jewish Care for any help and support you may need 8517 5999.

Effects of the Holocaust on Jewish Child Survivors



A Review of Their Traumas and After-effects

Introduction

One and a half million Jewish children were purposefully murdered in the Holocaust. The 10% who survived are arguably the remnants of the most massive trauma on a most vulnerable group in history.

Effects of the Holocaust were recognized in adults in the 1960s. Effects on the children of

these survivors were recognised in the 1970s.

Child survivors (those who were 16 years old or younger during Nazi occupation), were the last group to be recognized, in the 1980s, forty years after the Holocaust, when most child survivors were around fifty years old. Now they are around 80 years old. They are still not recognised easily as the one and a half generation; meaning that they are both survivors and children of survivors.

In fact, the most vulnerable of the vulnerable, and the most traumatized group of the Holocaust became also the most unrecognized one.

Why was that? Like abused children, children of the Holocaust did not know that they were traumatised. They demurred, saying that they were "only children" in the war,

traumatized group of the Holocaust became also the most unrecognized one.

Why was that? Like abused children, children of the Holocaust did not know that they were traumatised. They demurred, saying that they were “only children” in the war, that their parents were the real survivors, that they had not been in concentration camps.

Their survivor parents did not want to hear their children’s pains. Then the children were hampered by not having clear memories, and the memories they had were not of normal prewar parents and circumstances.

Traumatic sufferings and their after-effects

The Traumatic Situations

Children were spared nothing in the Holocaust. Like adults, they were subjected to bombings, ghettos, yellow stars, humiliation, roundups, shootings, concentration camps, torture, and medical experiments. As poor workers children were particularly expendable, and their inability to execute orders was treated with special impatience and brutality. For instance infants who could not evacuate a hospital in Lodz ghetto during a roundup were thrown out of the window. Others were thrown in the air for target practice, while others still were swung against walls and had their heads crushed.

Children saw maltreatment of other children and realized that it could be them next time. They saw adults, including their helpless parents similarly mistreated, humiliated, and killed. Parental disappearance and death were constant realistic threats.

Separation from parents was almost ubiquitous. The traumatic loss of parents could happen fast. A knock on the door in the middle of the night, and parents were taken away forever. Or parents suddenly gave children away to strangers.

Few children survived concentration camps. However, surviving outside concentration camps could be even more distressing. Children had to suffer numerous changes of unsympathetic caretakers whose discipline was often harsh and included threats of turning in the children. One in six children in hiding were sexually abused. Common children’s nightmares of aloneness, abandonments, being unloved, and being surrounded by murderous predators and strangers, were reality.

Other stresses involved interference in children’s developmental phases, absence of regularity, sequence and constancy, and interruption of play and schooling. Compared to the above, bombing was described as a comparatively much lesser stress.

Children’s responses

Even very young children could understand what was going on. For instance, a 3 year old told an SS man he should not kill her as she had good hands for work. However, for

children up to the ages of 3-4 control was tenuous. Their worlds frequently fragmented. They suffered physically, for instance with asthma or diarrhoea. Their actions were often inappropriate.

Children experienced both reality and fantasy according to their ages. Older children experienced dread, fear, desolation, torment, and death ever more akin to adults. With increasing age children’s mental numbness, sense of unreality, and freezing of feelings of pain, terror, anger, guilt, grief, and despair resembled those of adults.

Suppression of feelings allowed children, even as young as four, to take correct actions such as hiding under the bed or running to a neighbour. Capacity to not feel, to the point of apathy, helped children to survive parental loss, murder, torture and death.

Two more factors helped survival. The first was an overwhelming drive to live. The other was a tenacious secret clinging to goodness. That could be memories or hopes of loving parents; or tangible objects that represented them, such as photos, lockets or combs; or injunctions such as “Remember us.”

Fragile lines to goodness were outbalanced by the constant background of fear and dread, which were forcefully suppressed. Fear of inside added to fear of outside, for eruption of emotions could lead to annihilation. Children’s adaptations were quite remarkable. Children separated from parents without a whimper; they assumed a series of false identities; they hid in small spaces for inordinately long times; they arranged their psyches as ordered.

Parents cushioned external reality. But even when present, they imparted their dreads and helplessness verbally and nonverbally.

Childhood interpretations that made matters worse

In their hearts children judged separations as abandonments. In turn they were interpreted as betrayals, or self-blame and guilt. “They must have left me because I was bad,” or , such as “I chose to stay in bed while my parents were led away.”

Resilience

Lastly, children never quite lost their creativeness, hopes, and fantasies appropriate to their ages. They played when they could, even in ghettos and concentration camps. The innocence and hopes expressed in children’s games were precious to adults, who dared not hope so openly. Even SS guards could be moved by such games.

However, survival was predicated by luck more than by superior skills.

Liberation

For the children liberation was both a great “..joyous running, falling, feeling the earth, then getting up to run again.” and the beginnings of understanding the enormity of what had happened. “Suddenly, I saw that I had no one,...absolutely

nothing." Some died of overeating and many took ill.

Early Postwar

There was often a cascade of traumas, some of which were worse than the wartime ones. Some children had to recognise that parents and siblings were lost forever. Some had to separate from loving caretakers to be with biological parents who were strangers to them. For others, parents who returned were different to the ones hoped for and they sometimes had strange partners. Sometimes there were further separations as children were sent to sanatoria and orphanages for the sake of their and their parents' recuperation. This was experienced as a bitter betrayal of wartime hopes.

Many children returned to hostile anti-Semitic environments, dashing hopes that they would be received with joy and sympathy. Many emigrated to new countries and their past lives seemed to be unreal. Adoptive countrymen joined parents who seemed to be indifferent to the children's pasts, and wanted the survivors to forget their pasts.

Children's Postwar Responses

In the initial weeks to months camp habits persisted. For instance, children appeared to be greedy for food, quarrelled, and lacked social skills. They clung, pushed away, couldn't trust, slept badly, had nightmares, and wet the bed. However, most became socialized, and formed friendships among themselves.

Child survivors coped psychologically with postwar stresses through similar means to the wartime ones - mainly by cutting off feelings, meanings, and memories, and focusing on the future.

The Phase of Building and Rebuilding Lives (Latent Period) Child survivors continued to suppress the past. They worked hard to establish security. Many became businessmen, professionals, and financially successful. They married, became devoted parents, and contributed to society. Just as after the war outsiders marveled at children's survival, many marveled now at how well they had done.

But not all, and often only on the outside. Many child survivors suffered physical and psychiatric illnesses. Some suicided. Most suffered nightmares, disjointed memories, distressing emotional states such as anxiety and depression, and relationship problems especially with spouses and their own children.

As mentioned, child survivors were to hide these problems. They were denied their memories. They were told not to remember. They should not remember, They could not remember, and that what they remembered was wrong. "Since you were only a child and can't remember, it didn't mean anything."

Behind their mask of wellness lived children who, as during the Holocaust, were not allowed to feel or complain, who had to appear well to live, who arranged their minds as

desired by others, and who, truth to tell, also did not want to know the devastating truth.

Behind the masks of wellness persisted existential problems. One jovial looking survivor described a feeling that pervaded his life in relation to his mother whom he could not remember, "I feel lost, waiting to be found." Another said, "I am successful, I have a family, everyone says I'm amazing. But I cannot love. That capacity has been taken away from me." Many could not enjoy the world with humour and optimism.

Period of Recognition

The 1980s, and especially the 1990s saw the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War, and outbreak of peace throughout the world. At the end of the millennium the world was ready to revisit its worst tragedy and its most affected victims.

Child survivors of the Holocaust became a source of interest, and they started to discover themselves. Films like Schindler's List, the subsequent Shoah Foundation, and many books written by child survivors gave child survivors a voice and testified to their experiences. Child survivors formed local groups like the ones in Melbourne and Sydney. In 1991 child survivors held their first World Conference in New York.

It should be remembered, however, that probably the majority of child survivors continued to be hidden from the world and from themselves. They continued to live in their survivor modes. The process carried greatly in different individuals.

Around the turn of the century child survivors reached the age when most people try to make sense of their lives. Child survivors had to grapple with the following issues:

Identity

To accept the identity of a child survivor of the Holocaust went against previous survival needs of hiding one's Jewishness. It required overcoming shame for being identified with a degraded persecuted people, and overcoming fear of being excluded from normal community life, and fear of a stigma of being damaged or abnormal.

On the other hand, accepting the identity of child survivor of the Holocaust was healing. It promoted connection with other child survivors, a sense of siblinghood and belonging. It allowed a view of oneself as having been an innocent victim and being proud of one's survivorship. One's identity was of an ordinary and loving human being who had survived extraordinarily cruel circumstances.

Identity allowed reconnection with the broader history of one's people and prewar culture, which were modified to current circumstances. Identity with Israel gave broader political identity.

Recovery of Memories and Reworking of Traumas

Acknowledging oneself as a child survivor meant

confronting one's memories. Many experienced a hunger for memories, as if life depended on it. "Memories make us feel alive, and as we connect them to the present and the future, we triumph over death."

Many fleshed out their memories by reading, breaking lifelong silence and asking questions of parents, and going back to the places of their own and their parents' wartime experiences. Such trips validated memories and helped to assemble fragmented memories into a jigsaw puzzle.

However, retrieved memories evoked the original numbing, dissociation, splitting and fragmentation, and beyond them the excruciating emotions, judgements and meanings of children's traumatic situations. Many feared their memories for they "...might unleash the demons of remembrance to haunt the already haunted".

There has been an almost ubiquitous dialectic between avoiding and recovering memories, paying the cost of the pain in opening wounds for the benefit of feeling more whole.

Meanings, Values, Purpose.

In order to heal from traumas one has to find alternate meanings to the traumatic ones. But it was difficult to extract positive meanings from the Holocaust. Negative meanings emerged more easily, such as that parents were helpless and abandoning, and the world was dangerous and untrustworthy. Civilized values and principles of concern, humanism and charity were shaken. It was difficult to reconcile a moral Jewish God and the Holocaust. The Holocaust negated the most basic sense of justice. The fact that the world stood by and allowed the wholesale murder of children and their families led to a cynical view of an unjust and uncaring world. Beliefs in the world continued to be vigilant and pessimistic.

And yet each child was also carrier of good meanings, as none would have survived without care, often at risk to the lives of the carers. Some interpreted their unlikely survival as a special miracle of God and did reconnect to religion. Many empathised with other persecuted and deprived groups. They were sensitive to injustice. Many took up healing and justice promoting professions.

The most hedged optimism of child survivors related to their

descendants. Child survivors' children and grandchildren symbolised triumph over genocide and Hitler, of life triumphing over death.

Unfortunately the triumph was often soured by the fact that survivors transmitted their traumas down the generations.

Child Survivors Now

Child survivors who are still alive are in their 70s and 80s. Many can look back on a life of survivorship, achievement, and family.

However, retirement, bereavement, disability and hospitalisation have re-evoked helplessness and terrors of separation and death. early traumatic helplessness and fears. For some, loosening of mental processes has resulted in eruptions of long suppressed memories.

Some see illness and hospitalisation as a death sentence, the way it was in the Holocaust. They experience doctors and nurses as Nazis and they fear injections as lethal.

We must remember that in all phases individual survivors vary greatly. Some have come to terms with their experiences to a large degree, while others die still hidden from the world and themselves. For most the dialectic continues between avoiding and recovering memories, opening wounds for the sake of coherence.

Many child survivors are only now discovering themselves and taking the last opportunities to tell their stories. Some visit their places of persecution with their children and grandchildren.

Child survivors are the last living witnesses of the Holocaust. They feel a special mission of bearing witness, of hoping that the Holocaust will not be repeated. However, they are chagrined that genocides are continuing, that the Holocaust is denied, and anti-Semitism is resurging.

In conclusion, though child survivors of the Holocaust like any large group of children show great varieties in their experiences and development, the extreme traumas they experienced have imprinted certain patterns on them, which I have tried to demonstrate to a small degree.

Dr Paul Valent (Holocaust Centre Education Group)

<http://www.paulvalent.com/holocaust/>

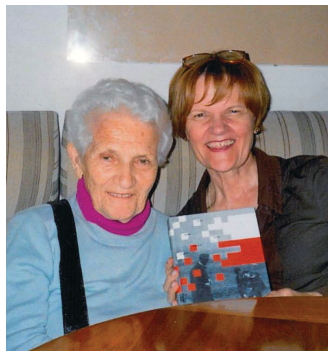
Personal Notices

For those who missed the earlier season of our Lena Fiszman starring with Jack Felman and Allen Brostek in **"Your Driving Me Crazy!"** - we are delighted to announce a return season of their sellout show - for one week only.

Dates: 9 December – 14 December,
Nightly 8.00 pm and one matinee on
Sunday 14 December, 2.00 p.m.

Address: Little Chapel Street, Prahran
Bookings: 8290 7000 or
www.chapeloffchapel.com.au
Website: www.lostriosamigos.com

My Lost and Found Homelands



Halina with Joanna

I came to settle in Australia in July 1961. The communist authorities ruling Poland wouldn't give me a proper passport, so I had to resign officially my Polish citizenship and was given only a "Document for travel" to get out with no right to return.

The first time I could attempt a visit to my "lost"

homeland was in 1971. Naturalised in Australia I received a valid passport and with trembling heart booked my trip to Warsaw. I was so afraid I might be prevented from leaving the airport to get into the country that I elected to go by charter flight. Within the next twenty five years I travelled to Poland eleven times.

In between my travels I made a real effort to become Australian. Read only books written in English, had mostly "fair dinkum" friends and after years of being a widow from my Polish husband, I even remarried a man born locally and together we travelled Australia trying to become familiar with all the things so foreign to me in my early years settling 'Down Under'.

Now aged, incapacitated and a widow again, I wanted to return to my country of birth one last time. Prominent amongst the things I wanted to look at was the newly opened Warsaw "Museum of Jewish Culture". My family decided that I could not go on such a difficult trip alone at my age and state of health, hence I was escorted by my daughter who took leave without pay from her work.

I found Warsaw more beautiful than when I saw the city on my last trip in 1996.

I visited the new Museum on my first day in Warsaw. The permanent exhibition was not installed as yet but the building was magnificent. Many events as well as smaller non-permanent exhibitions were staged continuously and were very well attended. The Museum was certainly one of the best known places in Warsaw and considered very interesting.

My short stay in Warsaw was very rewarding; I spent a day with the granddaughter of my saviors and her family, met a close friend from the

past and her two daughters and got in touch with relatives of my first husband who passed away thirty seven years ago. I have kept in contact by Internet with people I had met on my previous trips to Poland, now I could meet them in person as well as their children and grandchildren. The most memorable time was the couple of days spent with my grandchildren, who live in London, Paris and New York; they wanted to meet me in Warsaw, being so much closer to get to than Sydney.

This trip will remain in my memory for ever. Although returning home very tired I am happy that I decided to make the journey. I was also happy to return home to Manly, there is no doubt my homeland is Australia.

Halina Robinson



Halina with Joanna's daughter Angela and her two children Jack and Claudia.



Halina on her 70th birthday with daughter Joanna and son Vitek.



Halina with Joanna and Vitek's son Sebastian in a park in Warsaw.

World Kindertransport Day: 2 December 2014

Kindertransport: 'To my dying day, I will be grateful to this country'



German-Jewish refugees arrive at Southampton in 1939 Photo:

"There is always a bitter-sweet element to these events," says Michael Newman, director of the Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR), the body organising the commemoration and which represents Kindertransport in

Britain. "It comes from a tragic history but it is an opportunity to be together."

Amid pressure from British Jewish groups and, importantly, from the Quakers, a Westminster debate on November

21 1938 led, amid some opposition, to a Bill allowing up to 10,000 refugee children to be temporarily admitted to Britain. A group of agencies, operating under the umbrella of the Movement for Care of Children from Germany, promised to find homes for the children, together with sponsorship so that there would be no burden on the public purse.

With permission granted, the rescue agencies acted fast. The call went out for host families, and links were made with contacts in Germany and Austria to arrange trains and draw up lists of children. In less than a fortnight, on December 1, the first Kindertransport left Vienna, each child carrying their small suitcase and identified by a manila label.

Lucy Ward (excerpt reprinted from The Telegraph)

Can you help?

If anyone knows of the any members of the **Nayman** or **Najman** family (originally from Bendzin in Poland) now living in Australia, please let them know there are 300

family photos recently discovered in Israel. Contact Litzi, Child Survivors of the Holocaust (NSW) on (02) 9331 6304 to arrange for the photos to be sent to the family.

JHC Calendar of Events

Monday 8 December 2014 - Sunday 1 February 2015

Exhibition

'Facing the Past'

Enquiries: 9528 1985 or admin@jhc.org.au

Thursday 11 December, 11.15am

JHC Social Club

Bram Presser

Lawyer, Writer, Musician & Community Activist

"In Search of the Talmudkommando"

Enquiries: 9528 1985 or admin@jhc.org.au

Wednesday 24 December,

Christmas Eve

Museum open until 1.00pm

Office closes at 1.00pm

Thursday 25 December & Friday 26 December

Christmas Day & Boxing Day

Museum & Office Closed

Public Holiday

Wednesday 31 December

New Year's Eve

Museum open until 1.00pm

Office closes at 1.00pm

Thursday 1 January

New Year's Day

Museum & Office Closed

Public Holiday

Monday 26 January

Australia Day

Museum open from 12.00pm - 4.00pm

Office Closed

Public Holiday

Tuesday 27 January

United Nations Holocaust Memorial Day

Keynote speaker: Professor Konrad Kwiet

Jewish Holocaust Centre

Enquiries: 9528 1985 or admin@jhc.org.au