The Hidden Children's Holocaust: from suffering to healing?

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Introduction

Ehud Loeb was a hidden Jewish child during the Holocaust. He was born in Germany and was six-and-a-half when he was sent into hiding in 1940. The Germans "took everything from [him]."[1] His grandmother died in Gurs, his aunt in the East with her unborn child and husband, and his parents died in Auschwitz. Before his parents sent him into hiding, his mother tried to reassure the little boy. She told him "you will always have a shadow, your personal shadow. . . It will never leave you" and she reminded him to always eat the whole apple, seeds included, that his toenails were like his father's, and that if they were separated they would always be looking at the same moon.[2] His parents were trying to say good-bye without alarming him too much. Yet, during the war, his shadow did leave him in the "tear-stained nights, in the endless hours of desolation, in the gray perilous days, in the thick forests where we hid."[3] Today he still feels the resentment about the times when his shadow left and he worries, "Who will know about the toenails of my children's grandfather? And the significance of apple seeds? . .

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[1]*The Hidden Child*, New York: Anti-Defamation League Fall/Winter 1997 vol. VII no. 1, p. 11. *The Hidden Child* is a newsletter established after the 1991 conference. Most of the articles are written by hidden child survivors about their lives today and during the war. In the following footnotes, *The Hidden Child* newsletter will be referred to as HCF (referring to the foundation).

[2]HCF, Fall/Winter 1997 vol. VII no. 1, p. 11.

[3]HCF, Fall/Winter 1997 vol. VII no. 1, p. 11.

And no one will remember my shadow."[4] These things were important to the child he had been and continued to be important to the adult he became. Yet, they are sheer nonsense to so many others in his life.

Struggling to find a constant in a life full of instability is something that all hidden children did. The story of Ehud Loeb raises the question: how did the Holocaust affect the lives of the hidden children after the war? How can you escape a past that you return to with a single memento, or sound, or smell? The answers are complex and involve tracing the lives of the children from World War II to the present day. The Holocaust is an event that cannot be bound by time. The effects of the Nazi-led war against the Jews reached beyond World War II to touch the lives of the survivors and their loved ones. The Holocaust defined a generation of children, and the ways that they grew and developed. The lives that they led are alien to many of us today, and so are many of their reactions to life.

In the past, historians have ignored Jewish children. It was not until the 1980s that Holocaust literature began to distinguish between the experiences of children and those of adults[5]. This academic recognition of youth's holocaust

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[4]HCF, Fall/Winter 1997 vol. VII no. 1, p. 11.

[5]Dwork, Deborah, *Children With A Star,* published in 1991 by the Yale University Press; Friedman, Ina R., *Escape or Die,* published in 1982 by Addison-Wesley; Grynberg, Henryk, *Children of Zion,* published in 1994 by the Northwestern University Press; Kestenberg, Judith and Ira Brenner, *The Last Witness: the child survivor of the Holocaust,* published in 1996 by the American Psychiatric Press; Lukas, Richard C., *Did the Children Cry?,* published in 1995 by

experiences developed at the same time the youth themselves claimed the survivor label[6]. At *The First International Gathering of Children Hidden During World War II*, they took control of the historical record and claimed their place in the history of the Holocaust and World War II. Smaller, private healing groups had been organized in the mid- to late-eighties by Judith Kestenberg and Sarah Moskovitz, two researchers of children's holocaust experiences who's book will be discussed later. However, 1991 was the first united, public appearance of the hidden children. They helped to create the field of study within which this thesis operates. Finally a time had come when the hidden children were ready to tell their story and the rest of the world was ready to listen.

Before this period, the "norm" or "representative experience" of the Holocaust was that of an adult. Children were not given a separate status and in many cases were not considered survivors. Their age led many to believe that they "couldn't remember" or that they "didn't really suffer". However, recent literature has proven those assumptions wrong.

There are two main approaches to this topic in the secondary literature. Many authors interview young survivors and then simply tell that person's story: anthologies. This approach

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Hippocrene Books; Moskovitz, Sarah, *Love despite Hate*, published in 1983 by Schrocken Books; Stein, Andre, *Hidden Children*, published in 1993 by Viking in Penguin Books.

[6]The planning for the first international gathering of hidden child survivors began in the spring of 1989. The Gathering was held in 1991. *The Hidden Child*, summer 1991 vol. I no. 2, p. 1.

establishes a child's sufferings in order to validate the claim that children were victims as well.

Ina Friedman, Henryk Grynberg and Andre Stein all use this approach. Both Friedman and Stein organized the individual stories into separate chapters. Stein focused specifically on Jewish children and used his book, *Hidden Children: Forgotten Survivors of the Holocaust*, as an attempt "to return their voice to the Jewish children"[7]. He chose his stories to reflect the different types of hiding experiences.[8] Ina Friedman's book *Escape or Die: true stories of young people who survived the Holocaust* does not focus just on hidden or Jewish youth. She proves that all children who suffered under Nazi rule, whether they were Jewish or not, are survivors. Both Stein and Friedman are trying to prove that age does not protect one from suffering, and so it should not deny a person the status of survivor.

Henryk Grynberg uses his stories in a different way. In *Children of Zion,* he uses individual narratives to demonstrate how the children as a group were victims. For example, in his chapter titled "When war broke out" he described the circumstances through the words of the children, with no overt interpretation of his own. He would start with one child's story

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[7]Stein, Andre, *Hidden Children: Forgotten Survivors of the Holocaust*, Toronto: Penguin Books 1993, p. xi. Andre Stein is a psychotherapist as well as a hidden child survivor, so he had both personal and professional reasons for writing his book.

[8]For example, Robert Krell had a loving foster family and did not want to leave them at the end of the war. Aniko Berger was not so lucky; her foster parents treated her as less than human and their sons raped her.

and seamlessly move into another's so that you were not completely sure of the shift. One of the most striking parts of his book is how, despite the individuality of the stories, a common thread exists. The calm, matter-of-fact words of the children illuminate the terror of their situations.

The second approach found in the secondary literature is more analytical. Individual stories become only examples for the authors' interpretations. Some authors focus on a specific aspect of the war years, childhood development, or groups of children. Others try to tell the whole story of the children's Holocaust. Yet, all of these authors have moved beyond simply identifying Jewish youth as victims and helping to tell their stories.

Both Kiryl Sosnowski and Richard Lukas wrote monographs about the experiences of children in World War II. However, neither of their books were specifically about Jewish children. *Sosnowski wrote the Tragedy of Children under Nazi Rule* in 1962. He focused on all children who fell under Nazi rule. His main premise was that all children went through a type of Nazification. They learned about their inferiority or superiority and truly came to believe it. At the end of the war, all children experienced permanent mental, emotional, social, physical and educational changes. No child was untouched (or unharmed?) by Nazi teachings. Richard Lukas focused on Polish children in his book *Did the Children Cry?: Hitler's War against Jewish and Polish Children, 1939-1945.* Lukas does not

distinguish between Jewish and Gentile Poles and defends the Polish people against anti-Semitic charges[9]. The entire book seems to focus on making the Poles into innocent victims. His argument is flimsy because he dismisses allegations and evidence that might speak to the contrary with weak counterclaims. This casts doubt on the academic validity of his whole book. Lukas uses the story of the children (whom many do see as innocent victims) to try to establish the same status for the Polish people.

Deborah Dwork in her book, *Children with a Star*, is one of the first authors to write specifically about the Jewish children's Holocaust. She identifies and examines the Holocaust experience in detail: hiding, ghettos, transit camps, slave labor camps, and death camps. She asks repeatedly: what were the children doing, how was it different for them? She maintains that children experienced the Holocaust in ways greatly different from adults. For her, "a history of our society which does not accord a focal role to children fails to provide us with a useful and proper analysis."[10] Children are the future and the ways in which they are raised affect the path that history will take. So, not only did the children have a unique experience, but it

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[9]For example, he states that postwar anti-Semitic outbreaks were due to "criminal elements" and that they were exaggerated in the western press. Lukas, Richard, *Did the Children Cry?*, New York: Hippocrene Books 1994, pp. 221-2.

[10]Dwork, Deborah, *Children with a Star*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1991, p. 254.

was also as important as the adult experience[11].

Historians are not the only ones to lay claim to the Holocaust experiences of children. In *The Last Witness*, Judith Kestenberg and Ira Brenner, who are psychiatrists, examine the impact of the Holocaust experience on child development. The Holocaust forced the young people to mature more rapidly and incompletely[12]. Kestenberg and Brenner studied this accelerated maturity and explained how some parts of growing up were shortened and others left out completely. Growing up in the extreme circumstances of the Holocaust produced a hybrid childhood (and adult) that was ill prepared to meet the world that the rest of us live in.

These authors all addressed how the children suffered and survived World War II. However, the post-war experiences remained in an epilogue. They were not a story of their own. In a field where the main purpose so far has been establishing its legitimacy and then exploring the claims made, it is hard to extend authority into post-war (which many consider synonymous with post-Holocaust) experiences. Many have the attitude that when World War II ended, so did the Holocaust. Yet, the Holocaust was more than the murder of 6 million Jews. It also involved the mental and emotional destruction of a whole group of

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[11]Here she seems to fall back on proving that children have a right to be considered survivors. Yet, she does more than that, she establishes children as equal survivors.

[12]Kestenberg, Judith and Ira Brenner, *The Last Witness*, Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 1996, p. 59.

Europeans. It is this aspect of the Holocaust that carried over into the present.

Sarah Moskovitz's book *Love Despite Hate* carries the Holocaust into the present. She traces the lives of young survivors from a group home in Britain. The children she wrote about lived through the Holocaust in a variety of ways; some hid and others lived in camps. First, you learn about life in the group home and how the children disbanded: whether family claimed them, adopted, or simply moved on. Then, you hear the voices of the children as they tell her about their lives today. However, she published her book in 1983, and much has changed in the child survivor community since then. It was not until the 1990s that the community united in the national and international sense and became public. Moskovitz's book focuses mainly on showing the lives of a specific set of children, rather than on drawing conclusion about the general post-war lives of the child survivors. My thesis incorporates the phenomenon of the early 1990s when the children came out of hiding. It also focuses upon the specific sub-group: hidden children. It further develops the concepts introduced by Moskovitz in a specific, rather than general, group.

Sarah Moskovitz extended the literature to deal with children as survivors, not just as victims who will become survivors. When historians only relate events of World War II, they give the reader the narrative of victims. It is only as they move on and live their lives that the children become

survivors. This paper will tell the story of the hidden children survivors, not just the victims. The thesis is in two parts. The first is the past: World War II and the period immediately following it. The past is where the suffering begins and where the permanence of a new life is established. However, the present plays an integral part. The story actually began in 1991 with the first Gathering of hidden children. It also marks a transition from victim to survivor as hidden children begin to confront their past and its effects on their lives. You might say that it was not until 1991 that the hidden children actually came out of hiding.

Part One: The World of the Past

The past holds the roots of the Hidden child experience. World War II and the immediate post-war period set the foundations for the rest of their lives. The past is an important part of their stories and provides the clues to understanding their presents. Hidden children did not always have the exact same experience (each situation was different), but their experiences produced common emotions and traumas. This section will explore those traumas and emotions through the stories of four specific children. These four children are just a few among many who wrote their memoirs in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At that time there was an explosion of hidden children who came out of hiding to share their life experiences with the rest of the world.

Magda Denes

In 1939, Magda's father abandoned his family for the safety of the United States. He had been a wealthy owner and publisher of an anti-Nazi newspaper in Budapest. His family was then forced to move in with Magda's maternal grandparents who were very poor and "lived in an area that almost qualified as a slum."[13]

She lived there with her mother, brother, aunt, cousin and

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[13]Denes, Magda, *Castles Burning*, New York: W.W. Norton and Co. 1997, p. 12. Previously Magda had lived in one of the best areas in Budapest in a huge apartment that overlooked the Danube. They had a permanent staff of five and numerous private instructors.

grandparents. Magda's brother Ivan became the support and stability of Magda's life. They created a world separate from the adults. One specific story illustrates this closeness with her brother. As conditions worsened, her mother brought up mass suicide. Initially, only the adults and older children discussed it. However, Ivan, her cousin and the grandfather were all against dying, while her mother, aunt and grandmother were for it. The decision came down to Magda, Ivan "shook his head almost imperceptibly"[14] and Magda voted no. She chose to follow her brother, not her mother.

By October 1944, life in Budapest had worsened and Magda's family went into hiding. They fled a Nazi raid and spent several days separated from one another. Magda had a short-lived reunion with her brother before her mother took her to the Spanish Red Cross. She was only there a few days before her mother took her to Ilonka's flower shop and she hid upstairs. She remained separated from her family. She compared this to "no dessert because [she] hadn't finished [her] main dish"[15] and felt that her mother's reasons for keeping her apart were trivial and vindictive. Her mother wanted to keep Magda safe and the rest of the family worked and lived in the headquarters for Jewish resistance, not exactly the safest place for a young girl.

While Magda remained with Ilonka she had to "lie on the bed . . . not to move, not to pee, not to read . . .[She] was to

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[14]Denes, p. 52.

[15]Denes, p. 117.

ignore air raid sirens at all times"[16]. If Magda's presence was revealed in any way, it could mean death for her and the woman hiding her. However, despite her precautions, Magda was discovered when Ilonka opened the shop early for a "good Arrow Cross" member while Magda was downstairs. Then Magda went to Vadasz Utca with the rest of her family and remained there until the end of the war.

At the end of the war, her brother was missing and her cousin and grandfather were dead. Their "friends" had stolen the things they had left with them and they lived in near poverty. They had to set up barricades in the evenings to keep the Russian liberators from looting[17]. Yet, there was no legal way for them to leave Hungary. Instead, they paid to be smuggled into Austria and willing chose to live the uncertain life of Displaced Persons. They experienced difficulties with the UNRRA officials who suspected her grandmother of being a non-Jewish Nazi collaborator. Yet, eventually, they did make it on a boat to Cuba to begin again.

Lala Weintraub

Lala Weintraub was actually born in the Ukraine, but, when she was still a newborn, her parents fled Russia for Poland. She grew up in Lvov. Her parents chose to assimilate into mainstream society. They had lived a relatively normal middle class life

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[16]Denes, pp 117-18.

[17]Denes, p. 257.

until war started in 1939. The Russian occupation they first experienced was mild compared to the later German one.

In 1941, the Germans pushed further into Poland. Each day that passed made life harder to live, but they "still had hope, although it was rapidly fading."[18] Within several months, only Lala, her mother and her younger sister, Rysia were left of the family. They left Lvov to start new lives.

Unfortunately, in one small town all the passengers on the train were detained by the Nazis. Lala had memorized Christian prayers and traditions to give believability to her church birth certificates. She was able to become Urszula Krzyzanowska. However, her sister and mother had not been able to learn how to act like a Christian. The Nazis released Lala and she never saw her mother and sister again. It was "the end of the world [she] had known as a child."[19]

She then moved to Krakow where she found a job and tried to live safely. Here she was picked up in a Gestapo roundup. They were looking for Jews masquerading as Christians. Instead of meekly (and guiltily) answering their questions, Lala yelled at them for arresting her and "control of the situation had momentarily passed into [her] hands."[20] The Nazis released her. Unfortunately, when she returned to her work an unknown man, who

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[18]Fishman, Lala, *Lala's Story: a memoir of the Holocaust*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1997, p. 133.

[19]Fishman, p. 184.

[20]Fishman, p. 225.

claimed to have proof of her Jewish identity, blackmailed her. Rather than risk another run-in with the SS she left her home and her job.

After a job on a farm in the country, Lala went to Katowice. She worked for a coal-mining company and blended in with the town's gentile population. When the war ended in Katowice on January 28, 1945 Lala could not believe it. Even after they were liberated, she kept her Polish-Christian identity. The townspeople of Katowice were still virulently anti-Semitic and when a transport of Jews from camps went by they made remarks like "`Why didn't they get killed, too?'"[21] Eventually Lala made contact with her brother[22] in Palestine through the Red Cross and he put her in touch with an uncle. Together they went to a Displaced Persons Camp.

Here Lala met Morris Fishman the director of the Joint Distribution Committee and her future husband. However, the JDC could not be of help to the many who wanted to emigrate to the U. S. because the quotas for United States immigration had been filled. Lala continued face discrimination by a government who was not willing to welcome large amounts of Jews. Eventually she married Morris and entered the United States as his wife. She was ready to begin life anew. Yet, the Holocaust continued to make itself felt in the nightmares she had. Lala also felt

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[21]Fishman, p. 12.

[22]She had thought that her brother was dead and was very relieved to find out that he was alive and fighting for the Palmach.

different from those around her and felt that she had "yet to *be* an American."[23]

Lothar Orbach

Lothar Orbach was born in a small German village, but, when he was five years old, his family moved to Berlin to escape the anti-Semitism of that small village. He and his family were "Germans first, and Jews second, and disdained anyone for whom religion superseded national identity."[24] He continued to live in Berlin after it was declared Judenrein. Lothar became Gerhard Peters and a member of the Berlin underground, a "diver".

Yet, before all this happened, his family had been surviving well in Berlin after the Nazi rise to power. They had made themselves "useful" taking care of Jews who the mental institutions expelled. However, one by one the Gestapo took the patients and finally his father was taken as well. Soon afterwards, he and his mother went into hiding. She remained in actual concealment in a house of a friend while Lothar worked at taking care of himself and providing for his mother and the friend.

As Gerhard, Lothar romanced German girls, learned to hustle pool and cards, carried a gun, participated in robberies, and learned to survive on the underside of life. He seemed to live

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[23]Fishman, p. 338.

[24]Orbach, Lothar, *Soaring Underground*, Washington D.C.: Compass Press 1996, p. 16.

well, always having ration books, money or food. Yet, every instant was interspersed with danger. For example, he lost his key once and so had to sleep on the streets of Berlin. A soldier found him there and almost arrested Lothar, but he managed to overpower the soldier[25]. Lothar was able to do and experience things that many Jews at the time could not, but he was very vulnerable to detection. Lothar was not only Jewish, but he was a criminal. He always had to be "on" and focused on survival.

The reality of his life was too much for him at times, and he found a temporary escape with Hans Scheidt. Hans was a schoolteacher and the only person who knew Lothar's real identity. Hans gave Lothar understanding, a safe place to stay and a real job. Hans was a relief from the life Lothar had been leading with his fellow "divers". He had problems keeping "Lothar's spirit soaring underground"[26] and this break helped him to do that. However, Hans died about a year before the war ended. Lothar went back to his life as a diver and soon afterward, the SS arrested him. Another Jew had betrayed Lothar.

Lothar spent eight months in Auschwitz and Buchenwald before liberation. When he was finally free, Lothar rushed back to whatever family remained and, amazingly, his mother had survived. However, Lothar was never able to find the group of "divers" with whom he had been friends. Those people had been his family; they had worked at surviving together. Their loss had been a blow to

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[25]Orbach, p. 211.

[26]Orbach, p. 199.

him as he went to start his new life in America. Yet, Lothar now "had other things to dwell on besides yesterday."[27] He wanted to leave his past behind and live in the future.

Ephraim Shtenkler

Ephraim was living with his parents in Bialsk, Poland when war broke out. He remembers that his family owned a shop and that they were rich. For young Ephraim, "life was pleasant."[28] Then the Nazis came. They were driven from town to town until they reached the ghetto in Zvirdje. His father managed to smuggle Ephraim out of the ghetto and hid him with a polish woman. He was only two years old. Ephraim's mother was ill; the Nazis killed her in her bed in a ghetto roundup.

Ephraim's father was able to visit him everyday in his hiding place. He brought Ephraim toys and things to make his hiding easier. One day, however, he did not show up and Ephraim never saw his father again. On that day, the woman who was hiding him wanted to send him away. Yet, she was afraid of what would happen to her if the Germans found out where Ephraim was hiding.

The Polish woman who hid Ephraim was anti-Semitic. She hid Ephraim because he was such a young child. However, as the days

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[27]Orbach, p. 336.

[28]ed. Holliday, Laurel, *Children in the Holocaust and World War II: their secret diaries*, "What Happened to me in my Childhood" by Ephraim Shtenkler, New York: Washington Square Press 1995, p. 22. The essay that Ephraim wrote when he was eleven is published in its entirety here.

went on her fear and anti-Semitism gained more control over her actions. She was very cruel to young Ephraim. When someone had told her that his father had died, she "flogged [him] with her husband's belt, saying `I'll drown you in the well this very day.'"[29] Instead, she went on to make Ephraim's hiding experience hellish. She took all the toys that his father had brought and gave them to her daughter. The woman hid him in a cupboard that was too small for him to even stand up in. He had to remain in that cupboard for the majority of the five years that she hid him. Ephraim thought that she was trying to "break [his] heart so that [he]'d die."[30]

Ephraim was seven years old at the end of the war and he did not even know how to walk. He had been in that cupboard for so long that his feet were twisted backwards. It took him months to learn how to walk "not so badly."[31] Even then, he was subject to the ridicule of the other children in the home that he was sent to. The adults there did not protect Ephraim and so the children continued to abuse him. This home was only one of many that he lived in after the war. He went from youth home to family friend to family friend to youth home, etc. No one seemed to take the responsibility for the child; they just wanted to "save" him. Eventually he went to Israel. His trip to Israel was marked with a personal illness that kept him isolated from the rest of the

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[29]Holliday, Shtenkler's essay p. 24.

[30]Holliday, Shtenkler's essay p. 24.

[31]Holliday, Shtenkler's essay p. 26.

children and the typical difficulties of emigration. Yet he recalls "how excited we were"[32] when the youth arrived in Israel and the children's village at Hadassim. They were finally coming to a home after the confusion of the preceding years. At this time, the war had been over for about three and one-half years.

[32]Holliday, Shtenkler's essay p. 30.

Chapter I: World War II

Jewish youth during World War II had a variety of experiences. However, the most common experience for child survivors of the Holocaust was one of hiding. Very few children managed to stay alive in the death or work camps. Despite the higher survival rate, hidden children were not any "safer" nor did they feel more secure than the children who were in the camps during World War II[33]. Their world was a precarious one that depended upon their ability to follow strict, yet sometimes unclear, rules and upon the support of people who were hard to distinguish from the enemy. In order to live in this environment, the hidden youth had to develop a variety of survival mechanisms-- the creation of a new self, denial of their own existence, or hopes of the future. These survival mechanisms helped ensure physical and mental survival during the period of World War II.

Types of Hiding Experiences

Jewish children who hid during the Holocaust fall into one of two broad categories of hiding experience. The first group spent the war in confinement: they were concealed. The second spent the war "passing" as gentiles: they were disguised.

Living in Concealment

The majority of the children in hiding spent the war without

[33]Kestenberg and Brenner, p. 132.

their family. Only the lucky few, like Anne Frank[34], were able to retain the stability that family provided. Living in concealment meant receiving assistance from outside sources. They could not be as self-sufficient as the children who were "disguised" could be. They would not be able to easily obtain food or supplies without help. Even such a basic function as going to the bathroom had to be covered or explained away by someone else. For example, Magda Denes could only use the bathroom if it could be explained as Ilonka using the bathroom[35].

Few children were able to hide with their family. The majority of the children were separated from their loved ones for their own safety[36]. Those few who remained with their family were able to have a family life, but it was more like a family of equals. The children became as responsible for a family's safety as the adults were. Instead of being the cherished younger generation, they often represented the biggest danger to a family. Children were more likely to divulge their Jewishness or their locations by careless mistakes. Hiding in large numbers was more dangerous than hiding one young person.

The majority of children who were hidden spent the war apart from their families either because it was too difficult to hide

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[34]Anne Frank's hiding experience should be considered atypical. Not only did she remain with her entire family as well as other families, but they also lived in relative comfort compared to most who were in hiding. Dwork, p. 31.

[35]Denes, p. 117.

[36]Kestenberg and Brenner, p. 132.

more than the child, or because the parent's main focus was on keeping the child safe. Magda Denes's mother kept Magda apart from the family's hiding place because she wanted the child kept away from the dangerous activities they were participating in as partisans. Hiding alone was scary for the child, although it was safer. Magda recalled having to remain on the bed during the air raid and the panic she felt when she thought she would "die all alone, without even God for company,"[37]. It was also easier to find hiding places for just children. Ephraim Shtenkler was taken by his father to the house of an anti-Semitic gentile and hidden. Yet, even she could be persuaded to hide a child where she would never have hidden an adult because of the difficulties it would cause. One can only guess at her reasons, but children are so often seen as the only truly innocent victims.

"Disguised"

Children who were "disguised" had to be adept at deception. This deception meant denying their Jewishness and becoming gentiles, even with those they grew to trust. Lothar Orbach even told an old friend "my name now is Gerhard Peters" because he wanted this new identity to completely conceal the old one[38]. For some, the role became more real than the person whom the role

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[37]Denes, p. 119.

[38]Orbach, Larry, *Soaring Underground*, Washington D.C.: Compass Press 1996, p. 94. Even amongst his fellow "divers" (whom he partially depended upon to survive), Larry did not discuss his past or true identity.

was supposed to protect. For example, there came a time when Gerhard's gut reactions or reflexes took over Lothar's actions. Amongst the youth that were "disguised" it was possible to survive on their own, with no outside help. However, like those who were concealed, these young people rarely remained in family groups.

It was simply too hard to pass as a gentile when in a group (whether they had false papers or not), and many families broke up. Lala Weintraub tried to remain with her mother and sister, but, in the end, she could only survive alone. Passing required the person to make split second decisions in order to survive and often that meant they could only look after themselves. It was harder to go unnoticed in a group. Often times families were divided between those who could pass as gentiles and those who could not. Lothar Orbach was able to survive in Berlin as a gentile. However, his mother had to remain in concealment. World War II led to the separation of families in order to insure the safety of individual members.

Some youth who were "disguised" could manage on their own. Generally, these persons were in their teens. For example, Lothar Orbach and Lala Weintraub were around ages fifteen and sixteen when the war broke out. They had the knowledge and experience to avoid doing or saying something that would give them away. Lala was able to memorize Catholic prayers and brazen her way out of dangerous situations. Many of the older youths that passed relied on their abilities to act as if they belonged

to their new world. The younger children who passed had to depend upon outsiders for help. The youth not only needed to have a place to stay; they needed to be protected against making larger mistakes. Beatrice Westheimer is one example. She depended upon the two women who hid her and the village priest. She could not have survived alone.

Difficulties Experienced by Hidden Youth

Although hiding experiences varied, they produced similar psychological responses in the youth. These difficulties can be divided into two emotional responses: fear, and anger and guilt. All of the children experienced these emotions to one degree or another. Many did not understand why Judaism became the most important part of their identity (some did not grasp what "Jewish" meant and others would identify themselves as Jews only second to nationality)[39]. This change and the persecution by the Nazis destroyed the way in which the youth lived. Stability gives children the confidence to grow out of what they are and become strong adults; the Holocaust took that away from them.

Fear

Hidden children learned tc fear the outside world. They lived in a constant state of tension in which anything and everything could threaten their continued existence. They could no longer be protected from the harshness of life because to keep

[39]Kestenberg and Brenner, p. 59.

them sheltered could mean their death.

For children who were actually hidden away from the world, this meant that they had to live as if they were not alive. They had to conceal all traces that pointed to their existence or their hiding place. Many of them knew that if they were seen or heard they could endanger themselves, their family, or those who were hiding them[40]. This placed tremendous pressure upon the shoulders of the youth. Magda felt this responsibility for her life and the life of the woman who was hiding her when she stayed above the flower shop[41]. Being found, and the consequences that would evoke, was a fear that the children could never ignore. Ephraim Shtenkler feared discovery by the Nazis more than he feared the woman who hid him[42]. At least she did not kill him.

The disguised youth had to make their new identities a reality, because if they were doubted they could be killed. Lala Weintraub had to move often to flee the suspicions of those she worked with or lived by. The fear of discovery was exacerbated by their regular contact with the Nazis. Lothar Orbach's ability to conform to situations and to the beliefs of those he encountered helped him to survive in Nazi Berlin. Lala Weintraub deceived Nazi officials on at least three occasions with her brazenness and ability to mask fear. The youth never knew whom

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[40]Kestenberg and Brenner, p. 54.

[41]Denes, p. 117-8.

[42]Holliday, p. 25 from Shtenkler's essay. This particular story was about the murder of a mother and her young child.

to trust. They were constantly aware that even the smallest act could betray them[43]. For young men and boys, this was worse because any doubts about their identity could be confirmed because only Jewish males were circumcised in Europe.

This fear of discovery went hand in hand with a fear of being Jewish. Being Jewish was a brand they could not escape. For Lothar, Judaism had only been part of his identity, but when he was disguised, his faith became the most important thing to the state. He was judged and condemned based on something that he could not change. Being Jewish became something to fear and despise. Lala wore a cross and went to church in order to distance herself further from Judaism.

Anger and Guilt

Hidden children also had to deal with the anger and guilt that hiding produced. The anger was directed at their parents and at themselves. It is this self-anger that often was indistinguishable from feelings of guilt[44]. The youth felt cheated and angry that they had to hide and miss life. They blamed their parents for being Jewish and not protecting them. Many children also felt guilty that they survived when so many others died, and they were angry with themselves for what they had to do (or become) to survive.

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[43]In *Lala's Story* (p. 223) , she recounts an event in which a girl was condemned for the way she said a single word. She gave it the Yiddish inflections instead of the German ones.

[44]Kestenberg and Brenner, p. 132.

Jewish parents were unable to keep their children safe, and so the children felt neglected or unwanted. Many found it hard to forgive their parents after the war. Magda Denes felt abandoned when she was hidden separately from the rest of the family[45]. Magda was angry with her mother for leaving her behind because that was not what a "good" mother would do. The children could not understand that it was only out of parental love that they were given away or left with strangers and that it was the hardest decision for a parent to make[46].

The seeming randomness of survival rendered feelings of guilt more intense. Survival came to feel like an unearned honor or privilege, but they did not turn it down. Lothar Orbach felt guilty about his ability to "pass"[47]. He had a "skill" that allowed him to live. Lala Weintraub felt "invincible, indestructible, even immortal" because of her ability to pass, but "then I think of my mother and Rysia, and my sense of amusement dies,"[48]. The children's desire to survive conflicted with their guilt about being part of the "chosen few" to escape the Nazis.

Guilt over survival was mixed with anger at themselves. This was most common with those who were "disguised" because they

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[45]Denes, p. 104.

[46]Dwork, p. 65.

[47]Orbach, p. 51.

[48]Fishman, p. 192. Lala survived the SS questioning, but her mother and sister did not.

grew to hate who it was they had to become to survive. The children felt like they had betrayed their families in order to live and this made them angry with themselves. Lothar Orbach had to become something he was not, not only for his own survival, but also for his mother's survival. However, Lothar had moments of extreme self-hatred when he felt that "the ugliness of it all had seeped into my skin,"[49]. He could not erase his shame at what he had to do[50]. Lala often felt angry with herself for abandoning her mother and sister when they were all arrested by the Gestapo, although that action was necessary for her to survive. The need for these types of changes, or betrayals, was compelling, but that did not make it any easier on the youth who had to make them.

Survival Mechanisms

The hidden youth had to find coping mechanisms to deal with the Holocaust. One way they survived was by dreaming of a better future, by having hope[51]. The other was by distancing themselves from what they had to do or become. These survival mechanisms were an attempt to survive mentally, not just physically. During the war, the focus was on survival. It is not until after the war that the psychological costs of these survival mechanisms are

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[49]Orbach, p. 215.

[50]He felt that he was no longer the son his father had raised. Orbach, p. 215.

[51]They hoped to reunite with families, return to their homes, and just get back to the business of living.

fully realized.

The "disguised" youth adopted new personalities and new lives along with their new names. They had to become (not just act like) those they were imitating. Lothar Orbach became Gerhard, the German technical student who romanced the girls and even hustled at a pool hall. Urszula Kryzyanowska gave Lala Weintraub confidence and the ability to face the Nazis. Urszula was able to stand up to the Gestapo and demand her release.[52] The adopted personalities had to come into existence in order to ensure the survival of the Jewish youth.

For those young people who were concealed a different type of transformation had to take place. These children had to almost cease to exist; they had to become ghost-like. By feeling less than human, they could put up with all types of degradation. Ephraim Shtenkler was able to remain hidden in a cupboard for five whole years. He needed to go unnoticed not only by the strangers who lived in the outside world, but also by the woman who was hiding him[53]. Magda Denes also did her best to be ignored. She spent her days motionless and ignored all physical discomfort[54]. She compared this state to "living under water, under deep water,"[55]. These children had to lose parts of

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[52]Fishman, p. 227.

[53]Holliday, Shtenkler's essay p. 24.

[54]When she got head lice, she would not even scratch for fear of making noise.

[55]Denes, p. 126.

themselves in order to fight to survive. Hiding often forced both types of hidden children to do things that were so alien to their natures that they had to change who they were. Separation of self was the support upon which their physical survival rested. It protected their personalities from greater damage.

Dreams about the future helped to secure their sanity. They helped the children preserve a sense of belonging in the world, while the war tried to destroy that belief. Most of the dreams the youth had centered on reuniting with family, even when there was strong evidence to suggest that family members had died. Magda Denes's brother had gone missing during the war. Yet, Magda clung to the hope that she would find her brother when the war was over[56]. Lala also hoped to find her brother, even though he had joined the Russian army and it was likely he was dead. Family was a support for these children and they could not imagine a future without at least one family member in it. They wanted their families to help make sense of what their lives had become.

The children hoped to return to the lives they had led before the war. Magda Denes wanted to continue her education and socialize with people the way she had before the war. Ephraim Shtenkler's first wish was for clothes[57]. He wanted to be dressed as one should for "this world". The children wanted to return to a recognizable world, and, the whole time they were

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[56]Denes, p. 191.

[57]Holliday, Shtenkler's essay p. 26.

living in the hell that Europe had become, they daydreamed about all that world would be. It was an idealized version of the world before the war and the Nazis.

World War II was the end of childhood for the hidden children. Many had to become self-sufficient, while others were given adult-type responsibility. The changes wrought by the war and the children's reaction to them had permanent consequences. Pre-war life was gone forever. As one hidden child said, "After the war everything was the same, just the guns had stopped."

Chapter II: The Immediate Post-War Period

The end of World War II was a time of great rejoicing all over Europe. Hitler and the Nazis had finally been vanquished. Europe was "safe" once again and Europeans were more than ready to get back to the business of living. However, the changes caused by the war would make this difficult. The mask of civilization had been torn off many countries and their citizens. It could not be replaced merely by defeating Hitler. This desire to return to a "normal" life was shared by the Jewish youth who had hidden from the Nazis. They had lived a life for which they were unprepared. Therefore, by the end of the war, they were more than ready to join the ranks of normal citizens. The end of the war, though, did not bring the peace and answers that they needed. The defeat of Hitler in 1945 marked the start of their personal struggles.

Transition to "Normalcy"

Family members were gone forever, homes and countries irrevocably changed, and anti-Semitism lived on without Hitler. Hitler had only built upon the anti-Semitism found in Europe. It would take many years before that pattern of hatred and persecution was changed. Re-entry into society both created and revealed the reality of the losses in their lives.

Loss of Loved Ones

For the hidden youth, the anguish caused by the loss of

their family and friends at the end of the war was the greatest. These people had been the foundation for the children's worlds before World War II, so in reuniting with them the children hoped to re-build that world.

The complete reunification of families rarely, if ever, took place. This was devastating for the children. A time of renewal turned into a time of despair. Magda Denes had hoped that her brother had survived the war, but, as she started her new life, she recognized the futility of these hopes in a "terrible dream" in which Ivan left her[58]. The incredible will that had supported her was gone and she felt all alone. Ephraim was an orphan at the end of the war. Lothar lost his surrogate father, Hans. Family and friends had been one constant for these children and discovering the extent of that loss after World War II was unbearable.

Even after the war the children continued to lose those they were close to and who supported them. Ephraim Shtenkler was continuously losing people after the war. He was constantly moving from one place to the next without ever gaining a sense of belonging[59]. Magda's grandfather died after the war, as did a beloved cousin who had lived with them. It did not seem as if there was an end to their losses.

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[58]Denes, p. 383.

[59]Holliday, Shtenkler's essay pp. 26-28.

Loss of Place

At war's end, many Jews, children included, officially became "Displaced Persons". They were placed in DP camps until a permanent decision could be made about whether to return to old homes, or try to find new ones. In the end, very few Holocaust survivors chose to remain in Europe. Most emigrated either to the United States or to Israel. Europe had become a place of torment and distrust. Neighbor had turned against neighbor and many could never again feel safe in their old towns or villages. Not even the liberators were seen as truly beneficent. The Soviets continued to harass the citizenry, especially in countries that were considered collaborators. The U. S. made it difficult for the survivors to escape their places of torment. However, whatever the cause (old or new enemies), the effect was still the same: loss of a place to belong.

Lala Weintraub "still felt threatened-- though by whom [she] could not say-- and [she] I told no one [her] real name."[60] The Nazis' persecution had destroyed her sense of belonging in Poland. Lothar had grown up in Berlin, but after the war he could not stay there. There he had looted stores, threatened people with a gun, been threatened himself, and hunted by the Nazis[61]. The places that the hidden youth had held unchanged in their minds were destroyed by the Nazis (not always physically, but the meanings and safety of home were lost). The children

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[60]Fishman, p. 276.

[61]Orbach, pp. 335-6.

wanted to find a fresh start in a new place, and so Europe became a place that the children ran from rather than to.

The political situation at the end of the war also led to emigration by many Jews. Many did not want to live in Soviet-dominated regions. Magda Denes felt threatened by the Soviet soldiers and her mother, aunt, grandmother and herself fled to an American zone of occupation[62]. Lala Weintraub left Poland as much to escape the Soviets as to escape the Poles. These young people had survived the Nazis, but they did not want to take their chances with the a new undetermined regime. The war, which had devastated their homelands, also altered the very stability and meaning of place.

Continued Persecution

The Nazis were defeated in 1945, but anti-Semitism was not. Anti-Semitism had been part of European traditions for centuries. Hitler had just taken it to the extremes that modern science, bureaucracy, and technology allowed. However, for these children, there had been little previous awareness of anti-Semitic acts. They hoped, futilely, that Hitler's demise would end their persecution. The persecution continued on two levels: the individual (soldiers and other citizens) and the official (difficulties experienced with liberation authorities).

Most of what the children experienced after the war was not direct anti-Semitism, but greed and the casual cruelty that war

[62]The only way they could leave was illegally. Denes, p. 301.

fosters. Magda Denes's family received only a few of the valuables they had left with various gentile friends.[63] The Nazis had fostered an environment in which the strong took advantage of the weak, and the weak were typically Jewish. Ephraim's deformities caused by his years in hiding were not cause for understanding or empathy, but rather they inspired cruelty[64]. He had been marked as a victim and was treated as such. Lala Weintraub continued to hear anti-Jewish sentiment expressed after the war[65] and felt unsafe in the town where she lived. Jews had been marked as victims (easy prey) by the Nazis and this characterization did not end with Hitler's defeat.

The Jewish youth faced difficulties from native officials when trying to leave Europe and from foreign officials when trying to immigrate to a new country. Magda Denes had to leave Hungary under illegal papers[66]. The only way for her to start a new life required her to continue a life of hiding. Lala, while in a DP camp, was informed that the U.S. government was not giving out any more visas to East Europeans[67]. Definitions of who qualified as a DP and time limits for claiming that status further hindered the Jewish youth in coming out of hiding and

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[63]Denes, pp. 194 and 197-8.

[64]Holliday, Shtenkler's essay p. 28.

[65]Fishman, p. 274.

[66]Denes, p. 295.

[67]Fishman, p. 308.

finding new lives[68]. This was true of emigrating to Israel, as well as the United States[69]. In the aftermath of World War II, the Jewish youth still had to struggle and hide their identities to escape from the ruins of their lives in Europe. They had been victims and, now at the mercy of new bureaucrats and requirements, continued to be so.

Confused Identities

Post-war experiences did not lead to an integration of the hidden and Jewish self. In some ways, that split was more pronounced because it was not a necessity in their lives. During the war, they had identities as hidden youth, persecuted Jews, or the false identity of a gentile. Yet, at the war's end they did not know who they were. None of those identities really applied to the "future" that they found themselves in. At the end of the war Lala Weintraub said, " I didn't know who I was or who I should be."[70] The war had destroyed her sense of identity and ending the war could not bring it back. Ephraim Shtenkler also felt a continued split from humanity at the end of the war. He had gained the identity of orphan, yet he was still made to feel

[68]Morris Fishman, Lala's future husband, had to "finesse" the rules to help Jews who had not met all the requirements set by the various governments and aid agencies.

[69]Fima, Lala's brother, had had to lie to get into Israel. The British were not ready to let that country become the Jewish homeland and unrestricted immigration did not occur until the end of the decade.

[70]Fishman, p. 274.

like a thing. The "future" had not effected any improvements for the hidden youth. Their old survival mechanism continued to be a way of life.

Perhaps the hardest thing for the children to deal with immediately following the war was the permanence of the changes in this "future". The changes had actually been made during the war, but it was only in the aftermath that the permanence of these changes was realized. During World War II, the dangers and difficulties that they had faced had been temporary. This was the way that they had to live their lives, but beneath all of that, there lay the belief that their torments were only fleeting. If they did not believe that Hitler and the Nazis were impermanent fixtures in their lives, there would have been no point in hiding and struggling to live. However, nothing was as it should be after the war and this time there was no enemy to defeat to regain a way of life. They could no longer cling to the hopes and dreams of ruined lives; instead, they had to learn to move on. Everything that had changed became fact only when their expectations failed to become reality. Their present became permanent and final; they could not just survive it, they had to live it.

In the diaries and memoirs of the hidden Jewish youth not much is said about the immediate post-war. The months and years right at the end of the Holocaust are dealt with briefly and awkwardly. The few pages or sentences that do address their immediate post-war life are filled with emotion and trauma. For

Magda Denes, the true death of her hopes and dreams occurred when she finally accepted her brother's death and came to a realization of what type of man her father was. He spent his time with her "running down New York" to emphasize his suffering and he never asked about Ivan[71]. Yet, this only warranted a few pages of a 384-page memoir. Lothar had little to say about his life right after World War II. He wanted to move on from the Holocaust, but he could not communicate what it was about the post-war that disturbed him.

This lack of focus on the immediate post-war years might also reflect guilty feelings about "petty" complaints. After all, they were the lucky ones-- the survivors. It might seem selfish to claim that they were still hurting when so many were dead. This was a time when they were supposed to be getting better.

This desire not to complain was compounded by the fact that the post-Holocaust experiences of these children were not recognized as traumatic. They were expected to move on with their lives as if nothing had interrupted them. Therefore, they had no outlet for those feelings as they did for their Holocaust experiences[72]. Many survivors had to bury their feelings and their memories. Yet, they were always there, beneath everything that they did or said. The silence that the children learned

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[71]Denes, p. 381.

[72]However, even their Holocaust experiences were not really recognized as "valid" until the 1980s when children and the Holocaust really became an area for historical inquiry.

during the Holocaust continued to protect them afterward. They continued to live a life of hiding even after the war ended. Ignoring the Holocaust was almost worse than living through it. This "future" was just as confusing and difficult a place to live in as the Holocaust had been. One survivor said it best, "after the war, it was the worst."

Part 2: The World of the Present

It is only in the present that the Hidden children developed a public identity. For years, they had been ignored by survivor communities as well as academic ones. For all intents and purposes, they seemed to be healed. Many were very successful in the business world. They had good families and their children flourished. Yet, despite these leanings toward assimilation and normalcy, inside they still lived with the Holocaust. Time had not dulled their pain or their feelings of displacement; it had merely improved their ability to mask and hide them. Yet, in 1991, their way of life began to change. That year marked the *First International Gathering of Children Hidden During World War II.*

In the 1980s, healing groups of hidden children were formed on the east and west coasts. Sarah Moskovitz organized the groups on the west coast, while Judith Kestenberg was organizing in the east. It was not a joint effort, although it did occur around the same time. These groups were small and private. They were devoted to healing the past and, if you were not part of the group, you did not know that it existed. Then, in 1989, the film *As If It Were Yesterday* was shown to a group of survivors.

It effected such a response and need to talk among that group that they wanted a "kind of get-together" to address these emotions[73]. After talking with Judith Kestenberg, they decided

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[73]HCF, Summer 1991, vol. I no. 2, p. 1.

to contact a much larger group of survivors and the idea of an international gathering was born. The hidden children then sent out a questionnaire to five hundred survivors[74] to determine interest. The responses were positive and in January 1990, the organization of the conference began in earnest.

The purpose of the conference was to "share memories, help those who were too young to remember, and, importantly, tell the world for the first time that a significant number of people had their childhood taken from them during the Holocaust."[75] The organizers only expected about three- to four hundred people to attend. But on May 26, 1991, sixteen hundred showed up at the New York Marriot Marquis Hotel to participate in the conference.

The conference consisted of meetings and workshops, with socializing interspersed. The conference was only supposed to be a one-time thing. Nevertheless, it inspired the formation of the Hidden Child Foundation, local survivor groups, more conferences, and even a newsletter. Today some children continue to go to gatherings because of the workshops and the issues they address, while others go to see newfound friends and for the benefit of being "with people you don't have to explain everything to."[76]

For some years, there were conflicts with the older Child Survivor groups founded by Moskovitz and Kestenberg and the new

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[74]Twenty survivors got together to "network" this list of five hundred.

[75]HCF, Summer 1991, vol. I no. 2, p. 1.

[76]This quote is from Irene Sobol, who I talked to when I visited the Detroit group.

Hidden Child groups. The groups struggled with each other as they sought to find their place in this new public world of child survivors. Eventually they were brought under an umbrella organization for hidden children, child survivors, and kindertransport children.

1991 was the year that the children stepped into the public life and their lives have begun to change since then. The Holocaust continues to live inside them, but they have begun to heal. However, it must be emphasized that this healing is only a beginning and it is marked with starts, stops, and, sometimes, retreats. This section will explore the lives of Hidden Children today through the lives of three specific children.

Renee Roth-Hano

When Renee was born, her father gave her a boy's name. He did the same for her middle sister, and then told everyone that his youngest daughter was actually a boy. Her mother also told her that "women don't count"[77] when she was a child. Then, when she was eight-years old, the Holocaust came to France. It seemed like everything changed overnight. She wore the Star of David, was banned from movies, cafes, and parks, and alienated from her friends.

Then Renee was taken to a convent with her two sisters and placed in hiding. She and her sisters were baptized and Renee, who was responsible for the two younger ones, felt that "it was a

[77]HCF, Fall/Winter 1991, vol. VII no. 1, p. 6.

betrayal of sorts."[78] She began to suffer from sleepwalking, attacks of breathlessness, and nightmares in which she and her sisters went to Heaven without her parents. She was already convinced that her parents were dead, either from the bombing or from the Nazis. At one point, when the bombing attacks were so severe, Renee promised that if she survived the night she would become a nun. Renee had been "terribly hurt and scarred as a Jew"[79] and Catholicism seemed to represent safety.

She continued to be drawn to Catholicism even after the war, though she did not tell anyone of her vow. Partly because of her vow and partly because of her desire to rebel against her parents (who did survive), she continued to go to Mass. The day her father found out he yelled at her and forbid her to continue going. Three days later he died, and she never went back. However, that did not mean she returned to Judaism.

It is only now, after she left France to settle in New York and attended the Gathering in 1991, that she can say she is Jewish without "choking or blushing."[80] She found a place where people talk about the Seder in public and where being Jewish does not seem so dangerous. The Hidden child groups give her "an extended family where [she] could feel unconditionally accepted."[81] Yet, her Jewish identity is not accompanied by

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[78]HCF, Fall/Winter 1997 vol. VII no. 1, p. 1.

[79]HCF, Fall/Winter 1997 vol. VII no. 1, p. 6.

[80]HCF, Fall/Winter 1997 vol. VII no. 1, p. 6.

[81]HCF, Fall/Winter 1997, vol. VII no. 1, 1997.

religious tendencies. She is still looking for the "ideal congregation" with a "rabbi-- a hidden child, perhaps-- who will welcome individuals who have been exposed to Catholicism."[82] Her reconciliation with being Jewish and Judaism is only half complete.

Writing has also helped her to "relive and to rethink the past."[83] In this way, she is able come out of hiding as a Jew. It was only as an adult that Renee could begin this healing process. She had to be able to claim a voice and find a safe place and method to explore her life in the Holocaust and after. Unfortunately, no one helped her to do this immediately after the war, so she had to wait until she could do it for herself. Renee had to remain a hidden child even into the present.

Rene Lichtman

Rene was born in Paris in 1937. Even before the war, he spent time with a couple who looked after other people's children. When Rene's father joined the army, he asked the couple to "look after [Rene] permanently if something happened."[84] Rene's father was sent to the front in 1939 and was killed immediately.

Rene went to live with his foster family in a small town outside of Paris. His mother survived the war by being hidden by

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[82]HCF, Fall/Winter 1997 vol. VII no. I, p. 6.

[83]HCF, Fall 1992 vol. II no. 3, p. 3.

[84]Interview with Rene Lichtman in Detroit on April 10, 1999.

two Christian women who lived in the apartment above theirs. Rene was baptized by his foster parents in order to make the deception complete. Since he was two when the war started, he does not have "many clear memories of those days."[85] However, he believes that he spent most of his time in the house or in the backyard. The backyard had a nice vegetable garden and many pets and animals lived back there. He was kept occupied, but he was not allowed to go to school or to socialize with other children. Rene felt very much alone in this period, even though he was with two adults who loved him very much.[86]

Some in the village suspected that Rene was Jewish and they threatened his guardians in order to force them to give Rene up. However, his guardians were able to protect him when the Germans came and removed all the Jewish children from the village school. Rene even had to live in concealment for a while. He was not allowed to go outdoors, walk past windows, or draw attention to himself in any other way. Even in this small town, German presence was strong.

Rene grew very close to his foster parents. However, at the end of the war, he was returned to his mother. Rene first became conscious of anti-Semitism at the end of the war. At school the other kids would "taunt him, and the teacher wouldn't stop them."[87] Then, in 1950, Rene and his mother moved to New York.

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[85]Interview with Rene Lichtman.

[86]Interview with Rene Lichtman.

[87]Interview with Rene Lichtman.

Rene believed his mother was "crazy".[88] Once when she caught him drawing[89], she picked up his crayons and paper and threw them across the room yelling, "You will not be an artist!" She also seemed to be jealous of his relationship with his foster parents and told him that she "had paid them" and that they "didn't really love him."[90] Yet, he did keep in touch with them until they died. Rene's real frustration and anger came from his mother's answer to the question: what was my father like? All she would tell him was, "He was tall and handsome."[91] Therefore, Rene was never able to learn about the man his father was.

Today Rene coordinates the meeting of the healing group of Hidden children in Detroit. He is also a member of the group devoted to education about the Holocaust.[92] Rene's way of addressing the Holocaust and its effects is through action. By talking about it, especially the aftermath of World War II, Rene is able to better understand what happened and place distance between him and those events. This is the way that he has found to start to heal himself. The opportunity to act was not given to him until after the 1991 conference. He and several others

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[88]Interview with Rene Lichtman.

[89]Rene had done this often during the war to pass time. The creative outlet had helped his spirit to survive.

[90]Interview with Rene Lichtman.

[91]Interview with Rene Lichtman.

[92]These groups split when the hidden children realized that they did not want the same thing from a group. Rene is one of the few who stands with a foot in both camps.

from Detroit attended and this led them to form the Detroit branch of the Hidden children. Yet, despite his action, he still suffers today. He is not always sure what to tell his children about his childhood and he had a very rocky relationship with his mother until she died in 1995. Rene seems to be a very self-confident man, but underneath that veneer you can see the uncertainty and occasional flashes of anger and hurt.

Fred Lessing

Fred Lessing was born in the Netherlands. He was four when the Germans invaded and six when his family went into hiding. His family had to separate; though for a time he and his brother were hidden together. Fred spent the war in "disguise", moving often from place to place posing as a Christian boy.

Even when Fred was among the people who were hiding him he felt alone. There were only two constants in his life: "that [he] lived in a hostile world, that [he] was to trust no one except [his] mother who would appear at times to move [him] to a new place."[93] Fred was a lonely child who eventually found companionship and family with a stuffed bear. Bear never had a name. Yet, he was one of the most important parts of Fred's six-year-old life, "[Bear] kept [him] company and [Bear] kept [his] secret."[94] Yet, the lack of human companionship was trying on young Fred.

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[93]HCF, Fall/Winter 1997 vol. VII no. 1, p. 7.

[94]HCF, Fall/Winter 1997 vol. VII no. 1, p. 7.

Sometime after the war, his family moved to the United States. His mother and two of his brothers survived. Even in the United States and reunited with his family Fred continued to feel like he was alone. He had a hard time reconnecting with his family.

Both of his brothers had been more interested in studying the Holocaust than Fred was. Fred wanted to "forget about it, pretend that it didn't exist."[95] Then, one of his brothers saw a picture titled "Star Children" which had Fred in the front row of a class of children. This picture was what drew Fred back into his past. In 1987, he stopped ignoring and burying the emotions the Holocaust produced. He went to the conference in 1991, helped to form the Detroit Hidden child group, and began speaking to outsiders about his experiences. Fifty years after the war, Fred still has Bear. Bear is the link to his past, "for when [he] hold[s] him (the bear) in [his] hands, [he is] once again 6 years old and [he] feel[s] the submerged terror and . . . [he] remember[s]."[96]

Fred is a psychologist who is in private practice. His children are happy and his life seems to be moving forward. He seems to be starting to heal from the wounds of the Holocaust. Yet, this front is deceiving. Fred is easily angered when he goes to speak if the audience is not attentive enough, or things have not been prepared properly. It is easier for him to give

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[95]Detroit Hidden Child meeting on April 11, 1999 at 10 am.

[96]HCF, Fall/Winter 1997 vol. VII no. 1, p. 7.

speeches, and it is the unprepared for questions that put his guard up.

A guest at one of the Detroit Hidden child meetings angered Fred while asking questions about post-war experiences. He became "offended" and said you "can not talk about the Holocaust without emotions because it was that intellectual distance that allowed it to occur."[97] Fred reacted to what he felt was a threat and all the anger and helplessness of childhood came back. Outside of the group, he leads a seemingly normal life, but within it he lets himself be vulnerable and addresses issues that he normally would not. Therefore, he was unprepared for the emotions he felt when an "outsider" asked about his life. There are times when Fred seems to make progress in healing, but there are others when he seems to reverse and he is a hidden child again.

[97]Detroit Hidden child meeting. The guest mentioned was me.

Chapter III: Living in Today's World

The life of a hidden child survivor today is a curious mix of new healing and continued suffering. For many years they had striven for "normal" lives and so, had tried to forget their Holocaust memories. Denial of their Holocaust experiences often began at home, after the war. Lili Silberman grew up in "a home with no past . . . waiting for [her] parents to ask about that once-orphaned child"[98]. This pattern was broken with *The First International Gathering of Children Hidden During World War II,* which was held in 1991. The Hidden Child foundation and local groups, gatherings and the newsletter not only provide the framework for studying the suffering and healing of hidden children today, but are also examples of that same healing and suffering.

Continued Suffering

For many hidden children, Christianity was a safe haven during World War II. Their struggle with their own Jewish identity is still continuing today. Renee Roth-Hano felt rejected by Judaism and hurt by her Jewishness as a child. Catholicism was a safe haven. These two attitudes continued to dominate her thinking into adulthood. She has begun to integrate herself into the Jewish community, but she still struggles with the religion. Rene Lichtman is not particularly religious. He still celebrates the holidays, but that is more for his wife and

[98]HCF, Fall/Winter 1995 vol. V no. 2, p. 4.

children. Judaism is not a statement of faith, but one of loyalty. The hidden children find it hard to believe in a God who let his people be massacred, but they believe in the Jewish people.

Though it is not true of the children profiled, some hidden youth are left with the mystery of who they are or what happened to their family. The past remained an unknown because of the lack of records and the chaos that followed World War II. Others were not told of their history because their adoptive families wanted to protect them. The result is the same; they have very little information with which to begin a search. *The Hidden Child* newsletter is one forum through which these people look for their lost pasts. Karin Mueller did not find out she was adopted until after her father died in 1971. She has no real information and, in fact, is not even positive that she is Jewish. However, she is "very desperate"[99] and needs to find out who she is. Herbert Huberman is looking for his brother who was "known to have been [in Minsk] until the liquidation of the Minsk ghetto,"[100]. Herbert has no proof that he escaped the liquidation, yet he still looks for his brother, not just information about him. The loss of loved ones is still deeply felt by the hidden children, especially since not all of the losses have been confirmed. The live their lives, but always

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[99]HCF Fall/Winter 1997 vol. VII no. 1, p. 10. These are personal ads that children can place to find out information about themselves. There is a similar column titled "Looking For. . .".

[100]HCF Fall/Winter 1996 vol. VI no. 1, p. 8.

with the questions that compel them to write into *The Hidden Child*.

Rene Lichtman was two when he went into hiding and he was lucky enough to have good foster parents. At one of the meetings, another child survivor said, "you were lucky. You had a good hiding experience."[101] It was as if he had not really suffered, so was not the same quality of survivor that they were. The youngest hidden children continue to feel shut out, even by those who know how painful it is to be excluded and their experiences discounted. They are denied the healing that comes from knowing that you are not alone in your troubles[102]. In fact, their suffering is increased when other hidden children deny they validity of their suffering.

Healing

1991 was a turning point for many hidden children. They gained their own organizations, conferences and newsletter. Some of the hidden children found hope in the continuing generations. Others claim their pasts by honoring the rescuers who made it possible for so many to live. Still others find healing in helping the children of today's wars. Yet, none of this would have been possible if they had continued to live their lives in

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[101]Detroit Hidden Child meeting.

[102]In the first *The Hidden Child* newsletter, people wrote accounts of the Gathering. All throughout them rang phrases like "a sense of truly belonging" or "brothers and sisters" or "a times to heal". Finding people like themselves helped them to confront their own problems and look forward to moving on.

silence. 1991 was the year that they came into their own as survivors and, since then, many of the hidden children have been taking steps toward well being.

The Gathering in 1991 and the subsequent ones were the catalyst for the healing process. The sharing of experiences promoted by the Gatherings gave the Hidden children a voice and a peer group that they had not had previously. Fred Lessing felt it provided "the space and time and trust to really hear and tell our stories."[103] It so inspired Rene Lichtman that he went back and helped to found the Detroit group. Renee Roth-Hano found the "most valuable experience . . a community of peers"[104] in New York in 1991.

From the first, the newsletter was to be a "dialogue"[105] and it has proven to be so over the years. Almost all of the published pieces are submissions by Hidden children, which help other hidden children, as they read about experiences and feelings similar to their own[106]. Most of the newsletters have a topic that focuses the readings. One of the more recent issues is titled "Between Two Religions" and it is about the children who had strong ties to Christianity during the war. These

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[103]HCF, Summer 1991 vol. I no. 2, p. 4.

[104]HCF, Fall/Winter 1997 vol. VII no. 1, p. 6.

[105]HCF Summer 1991 vol. I no. 2, p. 1.

[106]Joseph Kleinhandler wrote a letter to the newsletter in which he thanked Dr. Nechema Tec for writing "Conflicts of Identity" and making the struggles with Christianity and Judaism "all sound so normal". HCF, Winter 1998/1999 vol. VIII no. 1, p. 9.

children are now having problems finding a community. Renee Roth-Hano wrote an article for this issue. *The Hidden Child* provides continuous contact with other hidden children an a voice to address the traumas.

The local Hidden Child groups help to fill the gaps between conferences. There is no set format for these groups, and so they cater to the specific needs of the community who created them. The Detroit group was founded after the 1991 conference. Initially, it was a healing group. However, some of the members wanted to move on from talking about their problems into taking action. These people got involved with a Holocaust education group. They confront their past on a regular basis as they develop new ways to educate the public. The rest of the members continued regularly with the healing group. They meet every five or six weeks and the agenda is usually fluid. This time is used to talk and confront issues that they have separated from their everyday lives. However, the one real guideline is that they do not conduct business when they meet, that is all done outside the meetings. Rene Lichtman is a survivor who takes advantage of both groups. He heals through action and talking.

Some hidden child survivors have taken to helping the children of today's wars. The group in Detroit is currently involved in raising money to help the refugees from Kosovo. They feel more attuned to the suffering of others[107], and so have a

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[107]This was expressed by Irene Sobol in the Detroit meeting on April 11.

need to reach out to those people. Many of the hidden children survived the war because of the charity of strangers, and now they have come full circle to be those strangers.

Hidden children have found healing in new generations. For Rene and Fred, their children bring them joy and hope. They see them growing up and leading normal lives. They can begin to see a reason for which they were spared. Hidden children might feel guilty to have their life, but they cannot feel guilty that their children live. All of today's children, not just relatives, also help the hidden children heal. Speaking to groups of today's youth is a way for the them to live out their past, heal the wounds, and to pass on their knowledge. Fred Lessing often speaks to groups about the Holocaust with his constant companion, Bear. This happened on a larger scale in Washington D.C. in April 1998 when high schoolers met with hidden children at a conference, One student sums up the importance of such endeavors for both sides with the last stanza of his poem, "Even artifacts (always knowing)/ only mumble, muffled and meek./ But when survivors share their stories/ all the faces start to speak,"[108].

Child survivors also find peace by thanking the rescuers, the Righteous Gentiles. This thanks can be on a personal level, or a more public one by having them honored as Righteous Gentiles by Yad Vashem. Renee Roth-Hano felt "very lucky" to survive long enough to "say `thank you' to those who saved my sisters and me

[108]HCF Winter 1998/1999 vol. VIII no. 1, p. 11.

from a certain death,"[109] by having one of the nuns honored by Yad Vashem. Rene Lichtman often regrets that he never gave the names of his foster parents to Yad Vashem. It was only after their death that he became aware of the significance of what they did for him and understood the true honor of the recognition[110]. Finding and thanking rescuers allow hidden children to give something back to the people who saved them. They are able to return to a place of fear as competent and able adults, which helps to offset the helplessness of the past.

The Holocaust can not be left in the past. For the hidden children, it is still an active part of their world. Whether they continue to suffer from the trauma or are beginning to heal the wounds, they are all still living with the Holocaust. In fact, we are all still living with the Holocaust.

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[109]HCF, Fall 1992 vol. II no. 3, p. 3.

[110]Interview with Rene Lichtman.

The Legacy of the Holocaust

World War II ended over fifty years ago. However, the Holocaust did not end with the war. Its effects can still be felt today by the hidden children and their families. The persecutions experienced by those Jewish children, the living with constant fear, the malnutrition, and the temporary-ness of life, all left marks. A spouse of a hidden child talked about "our isolation" that was caused by the "unsettling feeling of not really knowing this person we'd wedded,"[111]. The child that had been hidden and lost had grown to adulthood with terror, grief, rage and an inability to completely trust. The Holocaust did not end in 1945, and is still not over today.

The continuing Holocaust is seen most clearly in the children of child survivors. The Holocaust had differentiated a group of Jews from the rest of their world, and the differences remained in the second generation. One is left wondering about the lives of the third generation and the permanent effects of Hitler's war against the Jews.

The children of hidden child survivors are often raised in situations that feel unstable or temporary. Many child survivors do not know how to be parents. Their own parents could not be parents, protecting and nurturing their children, for about five years of their life. Then, when life went back to "normal" there were many barriers between parents and children. Moshe Bar-Semech resented being taken from her foster parents and "it took

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[111]HCF, Summer 1991, vol. I no. 2, p. 7.

[her] many years to accept [her] parents as parents,"[112]. These children never learned what it meant to be parents because they were never really on the receiving end of parental duties. Therefore, they were left with no idea or picture of what a parent is or does. This resulted in some unusual parenting techniques.

Children of hidden child survivors talk of being unsure about their parents. Julie Salamon learned "that it's better not to count on [her mother], just to be glad if she showed up,"[113]. Her mother was not a reliable parent because the Holocaust had taught her to live in the moment and not plan for the future. Therefore, Julie had to find someone else to depend on. It turned out to be her sister Suzy. She verified all information with "Is it so, Suzy?", even when her mother was the source of that information[114]. For Lisa Grace Lednicer, this instability was more overt. When she was three "[her] mother would hold [her] in her arms, take [her] to the apartment door and pretend to give [her] away to a stranger,"[115]. Yet, this instability was coupled with overprotectiveness. If either Lisa or her sister were late or forgot to meet their mother "she'd become frantic

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[112]HCF, Winter 1998/1999 vol. VIII no. 1, p. 3.

[113]Salamon, Julie, *The Net of Dreams*, New York: Random House 1996, p. 4.

[114]Salamon, P. 331-2.

[115]HCF, Fall 1994 vol. IV no. 2, p. 3.

and begin imagining that we'd been kidnapped"[116].

The Holocaust experiences of Lisa's mother created fears and uncertainties that she passed on to her daughter. She was so obsessed with the Holocaust that Lisa "sat in algebra class in high school and wondered which one of [her] friends-- Jeannette? Maria?-- would hide [her],"[117]. This fear that they would need to be saved was also experienced by Nuna Alberts, another child of a hidden child survivor. At the age of seven she "was transformed. From that night forward, I began to expect the worst; someday, I too would need to be saved but my grandmother would not be near,"[118]. Her grandmother had saved her mother in the Holocaust, and so became the only family member capable of such an act to young Nuna. These children did not understand the fear of their parents, but they reacted to it all the same.

We are left with the question: When will the aftershocks of the Holocaust end? Will the healing begun now help the hidden children and their families to leave the Holocaust in the past? or will the traumas of the Holocaust live within each generation? Maybe I am only clinging to the small spark of hope after so many years of sorrow, but things do look to be getting better. The hidden children have finally began to come out of hiding and make noise again. Isn't it a joyful sound, even if it is a quiet one?

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[116]HCF, Fall 1994 vol. IV no. 2, p. 3.

[117]HCF, Fall 1994 voI. IV no. 2, p. 3.

[118]HCF, Fall 1994 vol. IV no. 2, p. 1.

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