

THE HEIRS OF THE HOLOCAUST

By Helen Epstein

Shami Davidson, director of Shlava Psychiatric Hospital in Tel Aviv, puts it succinctly: “The trauma of the Nazi concentration camp is re-experienced in the lives of the children and even the grandchildren of camp survivors. The effects of systematic dehumanization are being transmitted from one generation to the next through severe disturbances in the parent-child relationship.” Such disturbances are now being studied among children of survivors in Israel, Canada and the United States, but the investigations have been difficult. There are no experts or statistics to consult. “The subject is so complex, there are so many variables that it puts researchers off,” Davidson says, “and it is hard to find the nonclinical population because many parents don’t want their children disturbed. Most people tend to deny a problem exists. They want to avoid confrontation with pain of this extremity, and psychiatrists and psychoanalysts are no exception.”

Neither are the children of survivors themselves. Many refused to talk with me. Some, like violinist Pinchas Zukerman, agreed to the use of their names, but did not want to talk. Others spoke, but only on condition that their names not be used. The 25 interviews I conducted to write this article were unlike any in my experience. People battled with the questions I posed. Or answered indifferently — until one question hit a nerve. Some felt exhilarated. Others developed headaches and stomach pains. Often, I felt as if plasma were flowing between us.

“You have to share with the reader the inexplicable sense of turmoil it involves,” says Mitchell Lerner after three hours of being interviewed. “You must force your reader to achieve in

himself a semblance of this chaos, to assemble his own tension in the place where he is the most private. Because you are making a private issue public.”

THE ISOLATION

Just before the outbreak of World War II, there were more than 8,861,000 Jews living in Europe. No one knows exactly how many survived. It is estimated that between 400,000 and 500,000 got through the war years in labor camps, or hiding in the forests or the countryside. No more than 75,000 outlived the concentration camps. Two of them were my parents.

Before I was 5, I asked my mother: “Who put the number on your arm? Why? Did it hurt? Why don’t I have grandparents? Why did the Germans kill them? Where are they buried? Why aren’t they buried? Then where are they?”

My mother said that before the war, my father had a fiancée, two parents and two brothers. All five were gassed to death in Auschwitz. Before the war, she had a mother, a father and a husband. All three were shot dead by the German S.S. She and my father had been deported to the Terezin ghetto along with most Czechoslovak Jews, and then sent to a series of camps including Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. Like many survivors, they met after the war and married as soon as they could assemble the requisite documents. Like most survivors, they had a child as soon as possible. I was born in Prague, and was named after my grandmother Helena, the mother my father had adored (other children were named after aunts, uncles, stepbrothers or stepsisters killed in the war). Seven months later, we emigrated to America, part of a massive, voluntary relocation that scattered survivors across the world.

More than 150,000 came to the United States and Canada. Some clustered in

neighborhoods like Crown Heights, Brooklyn, where a child like Irwin Blum, for example, could grow up, as he said, thinking “everybody’s parents had been in concentration camps.” Others pushed on to Detroit, Toronto, San Francisco or small towns like Asheville, N.C., where Connie Adam remembers “not only were we different from the community but from the few other Jews in the community.” A few thousand survivors settled in Australia, as far away from Europe as possible. Far more remained there. Several thousand emigrated to South America, where one daughter was the classmate of several children of Nazis. The largest number, about 250,000, went to Israel, where exposure to the relics of Nazism — yellow cloth Stars of David, were a part of their children’s school fieldtrips.

I became an American child. I watched the Mickey Mouse Club, played baseball and memorized the score of every musical on Broadway. My teachers were pleased with me. I had several “best” friends. I seemed to be as well adjusted as any other little girl growing up on the Upper West Side of New York. But when my mother took me to Carnegie Hall, I would often imagine a group of men in black coats bursting into the auditorium and shooting everybody dead. Other times I went to St. Patrick’s Cathedral, crossed myself, and lit four candles for my grandparents. When I rode the subways at rush hour, I pretended the trains were going to Auschwitz. These were important childhood rituals, but it was not until now, not until I began interviewing other children of survivors, that I found the reciprocity I needed to talk about them out loud. While I was growing up, I tried to bury them. Although I saw it every day, I could not remember the four-digit tattoo on my mother’s arm. When my father gave me war books to read, I could not retain a single fact. When my friends went to see horror films and thrillers, I stayed at home. Violence or mutilation of any sort was very real to me. I knew that my mother’s back had been irreparably damaged in concentration camp and that my father was possessed by a rage and sense of loss that made him withdraw deeply into himself for hours at a time. I saw that our family was unlike any family on television or in the movies. It was certainly unlike any Jewish families I knew or the ones I read about in the novels of Saul Bellow and Philip Roth.

There was no one to tell this to. My parents had a stake in our “normalcy”; any hint of disorder, I felt, would hurt them. My two brothers and I rarely discussed our family dynamics. My friends sensed a taboo and kept quiet. Most people appeared not to care. The war that had partitioned our parents’ lives into “Before” and “After” seemed not to have touched theirs. In high school we never got to World War II. In Sunday school and in books, grave voices evoked “The Six Million” and “The Holocaust”—abstract, antiseptic terms that had nothing to do with the messy, volatile emotions so palpable at home.

Other children of survivors I spoke with, whether they were raised in refugee communities in Israel or non-Jewish neighborhoods in the United States, recall the same sense of isolation. “You never learn any history in yeshiva,” say those who attended religious schools. “We never discussed the effects of the war,” say those who have been in psychotherapy. “The shrink never asked.” Their response, like mine, had been to bury their feelings. They studied hard, learned to play sports and instruments, entered the social and cultural life of their respective countries. “I never thought of myself as a child of survivors,” many recall.

Our parents had not yet become the subjects of books, films and doctoral dissertations; it was not difficult to ignore their difference. Besides, other things were happening. We grew up in the 60’s when it was easy to be lost in a crowd of one’s choice. We watched group after group — blacks, women, homosexuals, ethnics, single parents, students, even *block* associations — organize, brainstorm and air vital issues. Some of us joined other groups, but we did not form our own. We surfaced singly, in such a variety of contexts that only a journalist working back from interviews could reconstruct a chronology.

AFFINITY OF FEELINGS

In 1971, the judges of the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City were confronted with Connie Adam. In response to the application question, *What are interesting facts about yourself or your family which you would want publicized (anything you have done that is a bit different, hobbies, interests, etc.)*, the first Jewish Miss North Carolina had written, “I am a first-generation American. My parents, homeless and orphaned after surviving the Nazi concentration camps of World War II, came to America in quest of a new life.” In 1973, a group of Vietnam Veterans Against the War were driving to radio station WBAI in New York when one began to sing a German song. “I told him to shut up,” recalls tax accountant Al Singerman. “I got very upset and he wanted to know why. I said: ‘What do you mean why?’ I was sure I had told them my parents were in the camps. I mean, these were the only guys I trusted in the world.” In Germany, a concert musician was engaged in conversation with a concert manager when the manager suddenly began to wonder out loud why it was that some Jewish musicians refused to perform in his country. “I looked puzzled,” the musician recalls, “and he went on to say that everything being said about the war now was much exaggerated. ‘We suffered as much as anyone else,’ he said. ‘My boat capsized in the North Sea, and can you imagine how cold it was?’ To which I exploded: ‘I can’t have too much sympathy considering that my mother spent an entire winter without clothing in Auschwitz!’”

In New York in 1975, six children of survivors published their feelings and

questions in *Response*, a Manhattan-based quarterly with a circulation of 3,000. One year later, in a *Newsweek* cover story, designer Diane Von Furstenberg made known that her mother “spent 14 months in a German concentration camp at the age of 19. When she got out, she weighed 44 pounds. I always think that somehow I am the answer to her.” While that issue was on the stands, a small notice began to appear in Boston’s *The Real Paper*, in Cambridge bookstores, on university bulletin boards and in kosher butcher shops: *Group Forming for Children of Holocaust Survivors. Call Eva.*

“I saw that psychiatrists were beginning to extend the Survivor Syndrome to us, that severe pathology was being attributed to the second generation just as it had been to our parents,” Eva Fogelman told me last month. “I began to feel that this was all wrong. Sure we were affected. But not to the point where we’re not functioning normally or where we have more psychological problems than the normal population.” She and colleague Bella Savran, both psychotherapists, had been looking for a way to apply their skills to an area of personal concern. Last spring, they began to run “awareness groups” for children of survivors, similar to

women’s consciousness-raising groups or the rap groups organized by Vietnam veterans. Their purpose was simply to air issues that had been kept secret for years.

The people I have interviewed as well as those who have participated in research or awareness groups range from 18 to the early 30’s. They include housewives, students, teachers, artists, business people, people in the helping professions, doctors. They are single, married, divorced, homosexual and heterosexual. Some have children of their own. They include strictly Orthodox and areligious Jews. Their political affiliations are radical, liberal, conservative, Zionist, anti-Zionist — or they declare themselves apolitical. They live in cities and in the country, in common or affluent suburban homes. Some say their parents’ experience has affected them only slightly while others say it has determined their choice of profession, friends and spouses.

Despite this diversity, all described feelings of affinity to other children of survivors. “There’s a tacit understanding between us,” says one. “A completeness without conversation,” said another. There’s “the incredible experience of hearing from other people’s

mouths the thoughts I had lived alone with for years,” says Bella Savran.

MITCHELL’S ANGEL

Mitchell Lerner, 22, sociology student: “I always knew that my parents were in concentration camp. The fact that it wasn’t talked about made me know it more. All I had to do was look at my mother’s face and I knew I’d better not ask questions. I didn’t want to make her cry. Even my sister didn’t ask her questions. . . . I could never remember what was said. I always had to ask dates over and over again. I always had to ask again how many brothers and sisters had died. I could never retain it. I always wanted to ask my father questions as a son. I never could. He would lapse into thoughtfulness, and for me the lapse was an answer. You know, the fact of the matter is I know nothing; even though I’ve heard it inside out, I can never bring myself to recount.

“My problem is that I can’t feel what it’s like to have a parent murdered. The closest I ever came to death was having my uncle die. I could never feel it. I wanted to share with my parents, and

the fact that I couldn’t share it made me feel helpless and guilty. Whenever there’s an opportunity to be helpful, I’m always helpful. And there was nothing I could do. I couldn’t even convince myself that listening was helpful.”

Mitchell Lerner lit a cigarette. “I want you to know it’s a big thing for me to submit myself to these questions. Things are crystallizing for me as I talk and I don’t know what to do with them. I remember this story as if it were yesterday: I was in grade 10. It was a break between classes and this guy across the room looked over at me and said, ‘Hey, Lerner, Hitler missed one.’ I was shocked. I thought: What do I do? I didn’t even know what I felt. He said it again and I got up and walked out of the room. I began to cry and my body began to shake. I went halfway down the hall and then I turned. I went back, tapped him on the shoulder and struck him so hard in the mouth that he fell down on the floor. I was shaking. I felt terrific and terribly guilty. I never felt so polarized in my life. It forced me to think about everything I’d never thought about, all those things that were so unapproachable. I not only felt a sense that I had avenged my father,

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but all the images of my uncles and grandparents. I could look at the pictures my father kept in his shoe box. I felt like an angel had pushed my arm."

Mitchell's "angel" is more than a metaphor for children of survivors, who frequently allude to "hives" they are living in addition to their own. Like many other children, we were named after dead relatives. But most people's relatives were not systematically murdered, and most people who die leave some token of their presence — a ring, a watch, a photograph — behind. We often have no idea what our families owned or loved or even looked like. Our sole inheritance is the name we bear. Our parents enlarge it with "name stories," beautiful or heroic tales of the person they loved. We invest it with magical significance.

"My Hebrew name is Serifka, which was my father's mother's name," says social worker Dina Rosenfeld. "When I was young and my father took me to services, I used to say, 'My name is Serifka from Orhay.' I was never in Orhay in my life, but my grandmother lived there. This was my identification. My grandmother reincarnated." Doctoral candidate Robert Eli Rubinstein says, "I'm very aware of being named after both my grandparents. It's a weak kind of substitute for having them, but it enables something to live on in me." A freshman at the University of Michigan: "I was named after my mother's brother who died in the war. I was taught it was an honor to die in the war. Anyone making a sacrifice of that magnitude was assured immediate and perpetual rest in heaven."

Few of us remember the first time we were told "name stories," just as few of us remember how we first found out about "the war." Some parents, almost always the fathers, cut short discussion whenever the subject arose, and their children got their information elsewhere. Other parents told war stories at the dinner table, during outings in the country or when company came over. We heard them over and over and over again until they became as smooth, familiar and unreal as fairy tales.

"The last day they were in concentration camp, just before liberation, the Germans had all left," recounts law student Irwin Blum. "They were standing around discussing what would happen next. One man said to my father that all the survivors would be taken and put into a prison camp so they would never tell anyone what had happened during the war. Because the world wouldn't be able to live with the fact. They wouldn't be able to endure it."

"They were separated, my mother and her sister, from their mother," remembers Connie Adam. "They were given postcards and told to write to their parents and tell them how good life was. And then the other inmates told them, 'You fools! You're writing to your mother? Your mother's in there!' And they pointed to the crematorium."

Al Singerman says about his parents, "It seemed they never talked to me except to say what the Germans had done to them. I was told what the Germans did to my father's hands, his nails, his back. How my mother was struck in the head. I was able to listen for maybe 10 minutes, 15 at most. Then I'd block my ears and yell, 'I don't want to hear!' or leave the room to make them stop. I'm 30 years old and I don't know my parents. They're like strangers to me."

The stories about camp experiences were underscored by hundreds of asides our parents made every day. When our fathers were provoked by our misbehavior, some of them shouted epithets like "Idiots!" or "Filth!" or "Swine!" — the same epithets their Nazi guards had used on them. One son remembers his mother screaming: "Enemy of the Jews!" when she lost her temper. Other mothers invoked their war years less violently: "If something has gone wrong and my mother or I are upset about it," says Dina Rosenfeld, "my mother will say, 'The kind of mistakes that were once made were worse. When I didn't hide my daughter, that was a real mistake — everything else is really nothing in comparison.'" We all heard variations of: "How can you behave like this to your

parents? I wish I had my parents alive and here!" or "Is this what I had to live for? I should have died there with the rest of them!"

LEGACY OF ANXIETY

The things children are told — no matter how disturbing — often make less of an impression than what they sense or observe. "It came through in the way my parents expressed uncertainty about the future," Eli Rubinstein says. "Even though they're very much rooted in Canada, they're wary and uneasy. After they'd lived in the same house for 12 years, my mother decided it was time to move. Not because she wanted a different house but because she felt she was getting complacent. She feels that if you find yourself becoming too secure, you should shake yourself up to spare yourself the terrible feeling when someone does it to you."

We saw the same insecurity manifest itself when our parents had dealings with officials, state troopers, judges, inspectors, policemen, parking attendants, even waiters in restaurants. Some of these "authority" figures were accorded a respect we found disproportionate; others inspired undue fear or anger. My father found it impossible to leave a gasoline station without having an argument with the attendant. "When the Fire Department came to inspect the house wiring," Al Singerman says, "I could not believe my aunt's behavior. She was practically groveling, she was so frightened. By two firemen!"

Researchers may not have penetrated the "normal" front our parents adopted, but we lived with their "bad" legs, arms and backs, their recurrent illnesses, their anxieties about everything from food to the international political situation. "My mother always had a closet full of pills," says one son. "Every ailment in the world she had. She would faint at the drop of a hat. Anything that involved stress, she just couldn't take." The paradox was that our parents were also the toughest people we encountered. They had learned new languages late in life, had changed professions, life styles and living quarters. They were awesomely competent at what they did, yet,

more often than with other parents we saw, their lives were centered on their children rather than on careers.

"It's a family joke," says one daughter. "We can't go into the next room without my father saying, 'Be careful.' It's become an automatic reflex with him." Other children of survivors speak of their parents living through them, succeeding through them, noting that each of their achievements were victories against Hitler. "A life that is not a 'given' but an unexpected 'gift,'" psychiatrist Vivian Rakoff wrote about children of survivors in Montreal, "may become not a life but a mission."

Unlike many children with overprotective parents, our response was to protect them back. "It's not as if they're the parents and we're the children," Rochelle Rubinstein Kaplan says. "It changes all the time. I think a lot of other Canadian kids took their parents for granted. The parents were there to serve the kids mostly. But we were always trying to shield each other from pain. We all worked hard at preserving the serenity. Terrible things had happened, so terrible they didn't even want to tell us what. They said all they wanted was for us to be happy and see a beautiful new generation growing up. I felt it as a tremendous responsibility. I didn't know if I could do it."

Although writers and film makers have developed elaborate theories of survival, our mothers and fathers were clearly at a loss to explain why they had lived while the rest of their families had died. "We were strong and healthy," many told us. Others credited "God" or "luck." But as we grew older, many of our par-

ents began to say that they had survived the war in order to have us. Family was their first priority. They had few close friends. Their social life was with their children. Those survivors who were ill suited to each other rarely divorced. They clung to their marriages because no one else was left, and when they did socialize, it was in tight, memory-bound groups. "All they did was talk, talk, talk," Connie Adam recalls. "Other kids' parents went to cocktail parties, played cards, danced; the women got together by themselves; the men got together by themselves. My parents never did anything separately. And we children were usually included."

Our parents did not mix well — even with other Jews. They felt separated by experience, by different definitions and expectations of community. Many stayed away from organizations and synagogues. Many joined survivor organizations. In either case, their children were left with no community of their own. We lived in a social vacuum where the usual criteria of income, education or parental profession did not seem to apply. Few of our parents had gone to college, yet they were multilingual and intellectually sophisticated. They had middle-class tastes and yet, for most of the time we were growing up, no money to indulge them. They spoke of owning homes, farms and factories before the war, of being carefree, even frivolous. It was difficult for us to imagine them that way. We saw them scrambling to pay bills, working with the intensity required to rebuild from scratch. When people asked us our parents' jobs, we also began to use the terms "Before" and "After." (Be-

fore the war, my father was a water-polo coach; in New York, he became a cutter in the garment center.) We picked up our parents' attitudes toward authority, family life and death, as well as their attitudes toward being Jews. Some of our parents took great pride in being Jews. Others displayed a confusing ambivalence. One son was not circumcised until the age of 10 because his parents could not make up their minds whether or not to mark him as a Jew. One daughter passed as a Protestant until she went to college; that was what she saw her parents doing.

We noticed that our parents had an ambivalence about Americans as well. On the one hand "they were the enemies of the Nazis, which made them our allies," ski-instructor Tom Epstein says. But one daughter points out: "My parents would always say: 'Americans? What do they know about life!' Many parents said they were lifelong Democrats because Roosevelt had "ended the war." But the books they gave us to read contained contradictory information. Between 1941 and 1945, the United States allowed an average of 5,000 Jews—not much more than the population of an American high school — to enter the country each year. We noticed all these things and absorbed them without any clarification, any dialogue at all.

'WOULD WE HAVE SURVIVED?'

"I was frightened," Rochelle Rubinstein Kaplan says. "I just really wanted to escape from the whole thing. I come from a religious family, and although I stayed observ-

THE OBLIGATION TO SPEAK

For the past few years, when my friends discover I've been writing about children of survivors, they ask why I persist in such a "depressing" avocation. I never had a ready answer because I did not myself know why; all I knew was that it kept coming up, it was a part of me that never remained quiet for long. It turns out that many children of survivors feel a variant of the same thing. "I feel an obligation to tell the story of what happened," Connie Adam says. "People need to be reminded. They shouldn't be so naïve and content to think it couldn't happen again. I think children of survivors appreciate that much more than the average person. For myself personally, I knew I didn't want to wait long to have children. I wanted my children to have grandparents. I feel very good about the fact that I have one baby and I'm expecting another one. I feel as if I'm paying my parents back for everything they've given me."

"I take life very seriously," Eli Rubinstein says. "I'm aware of evil in the world. I'm not complacent: I feel it requires an active struggle to prevent a revival of the sort of thing that led to the murder of my family. That brings out a certain activism in me that wouldn't be there otherwise."

"There was a whole civilization wiped out and only a few people remain from it," Irwin Blum says. "I feel an obligation to help that culture survive. Everything you allow to die—you're continuing the Holocaust. But if anything—it's the Germans who have to relate to that time. Our parents didn't commit genocide. There were people in the concentration camps. There were people who ran the concentration camps. There were people fighting the war, and there were people who went to the World Series in 1943. An entire era ended with the Holocaust and a new one began. Everyone has to relate to it."

It has been very difficult for me to finish this article. For weeks, I have felt surrounded by a community whose kinship is plainly evidenced in the piles of typescripts on my desk. I do not want to put them away in a drawer. But the generation born just after the war is now turning 30. We are only now reaching places where we can make ourselves heard. I suspect this article is only the beginning of a long conversation. ■

France, Germany and Austria. "I wanted to stand on the same spot, be among the same people, come as close as possible," says Eli Rubinstein, who visited his father's village in Hungary a few years ago. "My parents were very upset that I would even think of going. They had both vowed never to set foot in the country again and couldn't understand what would drive their child, who had been born outside, back."

"You know how it is in any small village: Everyone comes out to look at you. All the peasant women were chattering and gossiping among themselves until one finally came up to me and asked who I was. I said I was the son of Bela Rubinstein, who used to live here before the war. They seemed a bit nervous about that. Some were afraid I had come to reclaim my father's house and flour mill, which has by now been nationalized anyway. I had a very, very uncomfortable feeling. One of the lousiest feelings I've ever had in my life. I felt that by all rights I should be dead, that I shouldn't be there at all. And I think they felt: Where did this guy come from? He came from Canada? You mean there are still Jews alive somewhere?"

"They were all very solicitous. They said: 'How's your father doing anyway? I hear all the Jews from this village live in America and they're all very wealthy, very happy. They have a good life.' They talked among themselves about me, always referring to me as 'the Jew'—something I was totally unaccustomed to. I felt like an alien creature in that little Hungarian village. All during my stay in Hungary I had a feeling of being in the presence of ghosts. It made me feel the events that had been so remote, so ethereal before."

ant, I didn't want to be conspicuously Jewish. I had very blond hair when I was young, and when it started to turn dark I got very upset. At the time, I thought that was about being pretty, but I realize that it was about being safe. I had this crazy idea that if people knew I was Jewish I'd be one of the first to be taken away."

Other children of survivors had nightmares that continued for years. Al Singerman: "It was always the same dream: a skeleton descending upon me in the darkness." Eli Rubinstein: "I didn't dream about Hitler or Nazi Germany. I just dreamed about bad people coming to kill me and my relatives for no good reason." Connie Adam dreamed more about the Miss America Pageant than about people chasing her, but felt an implacable anger that had no outlet in the world she grew up in. Her husband, physician Paul Adam, says, "I had great fantasies of revenge. I thought: 'Wouldn't it be great if there were a group of people whose sole purpose would be to wipe those Nazis out. Not bring them to justice.' No nonsensical punishments. There are thousands of murderers walking the streets, living high off the hog. People who committed murder at our parents' expense." Many sons and some daughters had similar fantasies. "I loved watching Germans getting killed," is a phrase that recurs among the group who became devotees of the war movies available on American television.

As we become politically aware, we asked ourselves what we would have done as Germans in Germany, and we felt guilty about not contributing to or working for a wide range of social causes. We were troubled, also, by whether, in our parents' place, we would have survived. In the 60's, while most of our contemporaries were busy throwing their parents' values out the window, we were trying to measure ourselves by their standards. We studied our parents; we took on their values. "Most people I grew up with viewed their parents as part of a society they had to fit into," says one son. "My parents didn't come from this society. They came from a society that no longer exists. They were victims, not oppressors."

Their survival stories loomed large over our lives. They were a challenge, a test. "If I was unhappy," wrote Toby Mostysser, "I would wonder whether I would have sustained the drive to stay alive through several years of the most abject misery. When I failed at something, whether it was at making friends or at finding a job, I wondered whether I would have had the ingenuity, the skill, the craft to have kept myself in food and shelter and out of the hands of the Germans, the Ukrainians and Poles."

Ronnie Winchell, a medical student, says, "We all felt there was something less significant about our lives than the lives of our parents"; and Rochelle Kaplan: "I wanted to suffer, because my parents and all our deceased relatives who were so brave and noble had suffered. I thought that to be noble I had to suffer, too."

Some of us did simple things. We scrimped on food, clothing or material possessions. We became involved in political demonstrations guaranteed to be herded by policemen. Some of us went to jail, some of us went to Germany to try to have the experience that separated us from our parents. A few of us actually managed to put ourselves in war situations, in border kibbutzim in Israel or, in at least one case, Vietnam. "It was something I had to prove to myself — that I, too, was a survivor," Al Singerman says. "I joined the Army! On the boat going over, we stopped at Okinawa and everybody got off to have a good time. I stayed. When the guys came back, they said: 'What are you talking about? I'm coming back alive.' I mean, there was no doubt in my mind about that. My survival was going to be Vietnam."

While Al Singerman and others refuse to return to the places our parents abandoned, others make pilgrimages to Poland, Hungary, Russia, Rumania, Czechoslovakia,

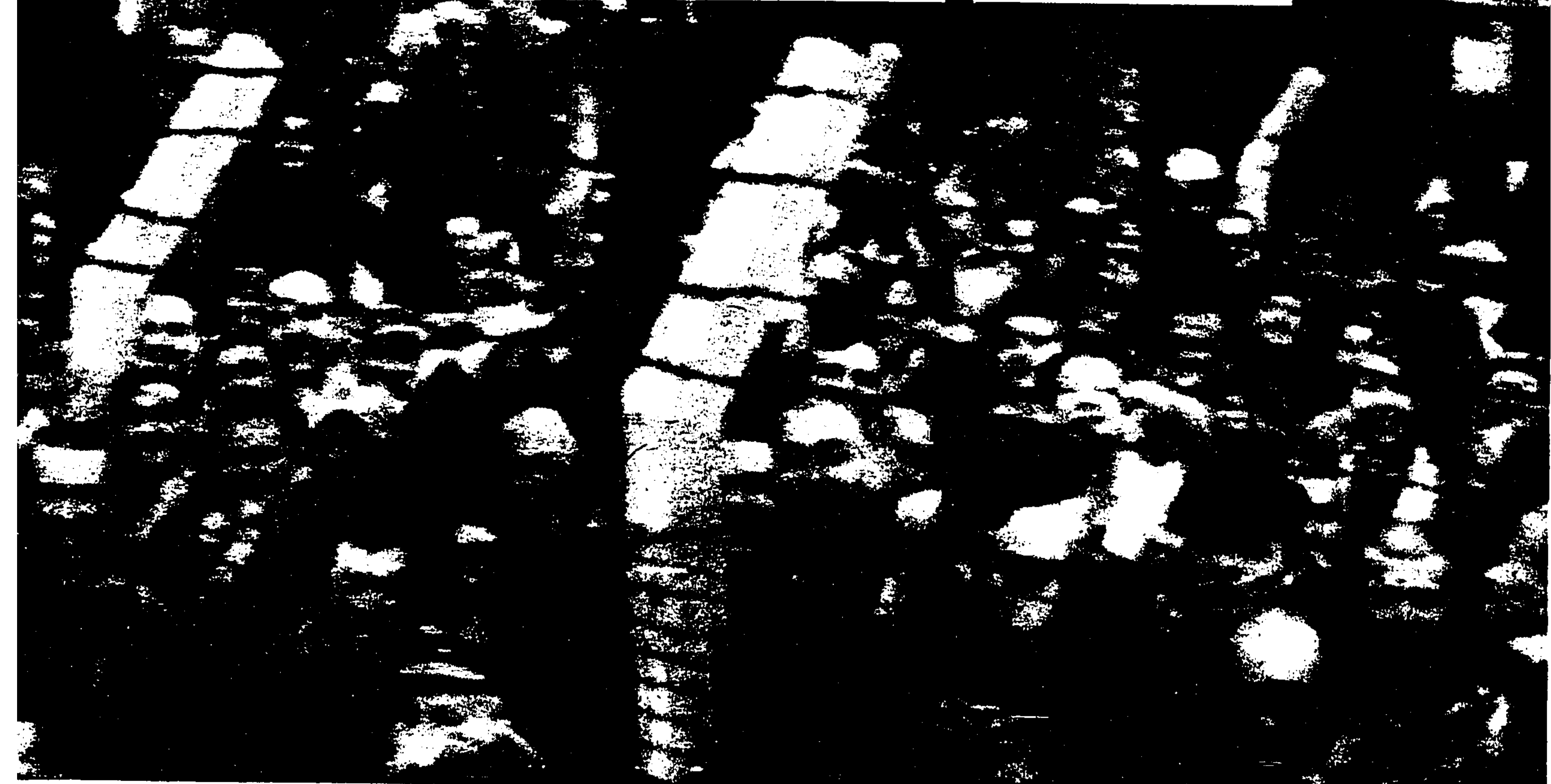
‘I was frightened. . . . I had very blond hair when I was young, and when it started to turn dark I got very upset. . . . I had this crazy idea that if people knew I was Jewish, I’d be one of the first to be taken away.’

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Thirty-two years ago, the prisoners of Dachau (below) and other Jewish survivors of Nazi concentration camps were liberated. Today, research shows that the traumatic experiences they suffered have been revisited upon their children. On the following pages, Helen Epstein reports on her discoveries of the impact of the Holocaust on the victims and their heirs.



Mitchell Lerner, 22; mother incarcerated in Auschwitz.



Eva Fogelman, 28; mother escaped from Poland to Russia.



Eli Rubinstein, 29; parents wouldn't discuss where they were.



Irwin Blum, 25; father in Maidanek, mother in Dachau.



Ronnie Winchell, 23; mother and father went into hiding.



Connie Adam, 25; father in a forced labor camp in Hungary.

Helen Epstein teaches journalism at New York University and reports on the arts.



Helen Epstein

'When my mother took me to Carnegie Hall, I would often imagine a group of men in black coats bursting into the auditorium and shooting everybody dead. Or that subway trains were going to Auschwitz.'

The author's grandmother, Pepi, who was shot.



Al Singerman's mother, Bronia, (center) in the Demblin ghetto.



Bella with her parents in Bayreuth, Germany, in 1950.



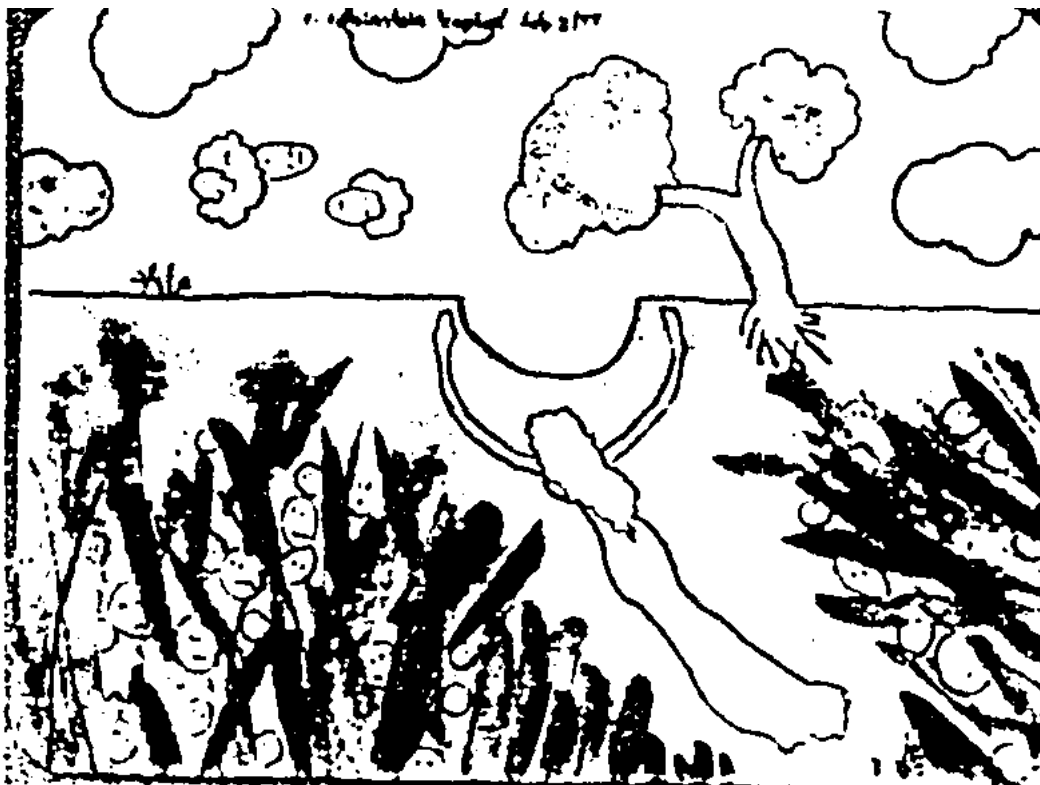
Al Singerman

'It seemed they never talked to me except to say what the Germans had done to them—what the Germans did to my father's hands, his nails, his back. How my mother was struck in the head. I was able to listen for 10 minutes, 15 at most. Then I'd yell, "I don't want to hear!" I'm 30, and I don't know my parents.'



Bella Savrar

Bella and her psychotherapist colleague have been running consciousness-raising groups or rap sessions for children of survivors. The purpose is to air suppressed issues: 'There's the incredible experience of hearing from others the thoughts I had lived alone with for years,' she says.



The work of artist-therapist Rochelle Rubinstein Kaplan depicts inherited childhood terror.

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