

TELL THEM NOT TO HATE

Words of Witness
and Sacred Imperatives

Rabbi Victor Hillel Reinstein
Edited by Richard Kool

“Tell Them Not to Hate”: Words of Witness and Sacred Imperatives

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University of Victoria

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Victoria Shoah Project

The Victoria Shoah Project (VSP) is a diverse group of Shoah survivors, descendants, educators, and caring individuals whose passion is to share innovative, informative and inspirational ways to honour, commemorate, and educate about the Shoah. The VSP is sponsored by Congregation Emanu-El, and can be found on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/victoriashoahproject> and at <https://victoriashoahproject.ca>

Defying Hatred Project

A project of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Faculty of Humanities at the University of Victoria.

Rabbi Victor Hillel Reinstein



Rabbi Reinstein was born near Boston, MA, in 1950. He was the rabbi of Congregation Emanu-El in Victoria, BC Canada from 1982 to 1998. He then returned to the Boston area and, along with his wife Mieke, founded the *Nebar Shalom*

Community Synagogue in Jamaica Plain, MA. Drawing from Torah and Jewish life, the "vision and the way," he seeks at the core of his work to help fulfill God's hope for a world of justice and peace. As founding rabbi, he stepped down from his role as the active rabbi of *Nebar Shalom* in June, 2020.

About this project

**Dr. Jordan Stanger-Ross,
Department of History, University of Victoria**

Rabbi Victor Reinstein visited Victoria in 2020 as a guest of the *Defying Hatred Project* at the University of Victoria. The project collaborated with Congregation Emanu-El to explore the local Jewish community's responses to acts of hate and expressions of anti-Semitism and racism. Led by myself and fellow-historian Lynne Marks, political scientist Matt James, Germanic and Slavic Studies professor Helga Thorson, and Victoria Shoah Project member Frances Grunberg, the project was dedicated to critically examining the history and current possibilities of defying hatred in Victoria.

When I met Rabbi Reinstein in Boston in the summer of 2019, I discovered (as many had before me) the warmth and depth of his reflections on these topics. This story, I felt, had to be told back home, in Victoria.

Funds from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada made the visit possible.

Preface

Dr. Richard Kool

For those of us growing up in families profoundly touched by the Holocaust, there seemed to be two situations: either our parents rarely said anything about their experiences, or they often or always spoke of their experiences.

In the former situation, we knew something was wrong: grandparents, uncles, and cousins were missing from our lives and we didn't know why. They weren't spoken of: we didn't know what had happened, and knew we weren't supposed to know.

Or, we knew about those grandparents, aunts, cousins: we knew about them and we knew exactly what happened to them; we knew about their murders at the hands of the Nazis and other European anti-Semites.

My family's secrets were hidden until 1994, when, at the Victoria Yom Ha'shoah service, I realized I needed to understand what happened to my mother. Rabbi Reinstein's influence at that time was an important part of my journey to uncovering her history as a Dutch teenager in hiding.

Hearing Victor's talk in Victoria in January 2020, I realized I still owed a large debt to him. This elaboration of his presentation, featuring images of the people he spoke about, is an offering of gratitude to him for all the gifts he's given me and my entire family.

“Tell Them Not to Hate”: Words of Witness and Sacred Imperatives. ד”סב

There are many strands to weave, of time and memory, of legacies and life, and we are the weavers. I offer especial gratitude to Professor Stanger-Ross for this opportunity to return to Victoria, to be here among you, to be with old friends and new. It has been a deep and emotional journey for me since that day last August when Jordan came to Boston and we spent the better part of the day in conversation about Holocaust remembrance. Probing my memories and my files, we explored, as we shall today, the early days of the commemorative gatherings in Victoria, so beautifully embroidered now and carried forth, the ways of our remembrance and the people remembered on *Yom Ha’shoah*¹ and on the anniversary of *Kristallnacht*,² the night of November 9–10, 1938. I am grateful to all of you, as we wrestle together, well beyond today, to meet the challenge held in the name of this conference and its sponsoring project, “Defying Hatred.” Of lessons learned and meant to be learned, the essence

1 Holocaust Remembrance Day, held in April or May in conjunction with the Jewish calendar date of Nisan 27.

2 “The Night of Broken Glass,” 9–10 November 1938, the large Nazi state-organized anti-Jewish riots across Germany and Austria.

is in the echo of a beloved survivor's words, "Tell Them Not to Hate." In the inexorable turning of time, their words of witness become as sacred imperatives in our lives as we become the witnesses, we who heard their stories and held their tears, we who were touched by the strength of their souls. Thinking that we were comforting them, we were the ones so often comforted, given strength and hope. In this place, where mountains rise from sea to sky and eagles soar, they found peace, but the trauma was never far away, as we came to know. "Tell Them Not to Hate" — Words of Witness and Sacred Imperatives: How then to remember and respond, and yet to live with hope?

Living in this world of so much beauty and so much horror, how to hold them both and walk the fine line between? In introducing our children to the Holocaust for the first time, that was the unique challenge in speaking to the most innocent of those who would hear the survivors' words. In the tension between remembrance and hope, the beauty and the horror, innocence was gently opened to the world as it is, while envisioning together and allowing in the sunshine of the world as it might be. In the eye of heart and mind, hold an image, please. There is a large square of tables set as one in the back of the old shul, subdued light and mood. In the middle of the table, there is a single rose in a simple vase and a *yahrzeit*³ candle with a flickering flame. Children are sitting all around the large table, uncharacteristically quiet, gazing at the flower and the flame, and at the woman with a warm smile who is sitting next to me. The children are welcomed and told how special they are, simple words offered by which to soothe and frame. Why such simplicity, we wonder together, why the flower and the flame, why no food? Thoughts and feelings are elicited, speaking then to the children of the beauty and the horror, some of the painful tale, and in our being together, reassurance.

The woman begins to speak, her voice ever so gentle, quavering, telling of her Warsaw childhood and of life turned upside

3 The anniversary of a death as marked in the Jewish calendar.

down, avoiding the horrifying details. She tells them everything in a way beyond words, transmitting memory by her presence. Somehow, she kept at least the outline of a smile, wary of how her words would affect her young listeners, her greatest fear not to scare or scar them. A flower and a flame, seeds of memory planted, children empowered with hope and with knowledge of their ability to act for the sake of goodness. Words of witness and sacred imperatives, touched by the woman's love, children learned the lesson that is for all of us, defying hatred cannot be abstract. Each of us is called to deeds of love and compassion if we would make of the world as it is the world as it might be.



Rysia Kraskin

It would be several more years before Rysia Kraskin, (*zichrona liv'racha/ber memory be a blessing*) would speak at the community *Yom Ha'shoah* gathering. It would be several more years before she would find the strength to share her story more fully, more publicly, beyond the tender, supportive embrace of the children's innocence. It was only after the deaths of her dear friends, Willie and Helen Jacobs, who died less than two months apart from each other in October and December 1993, that Rysia found that strength. When Willie died, Rysia lamented, "We lost a man who did a lot for us, who educated non-Jewish kids about what we went through. I don't know who will do it now."



Rysia Kraskin, Bernie Packford, Willie and Helen Jacobs

For Rysia and for others, new strength was found in a context in which their voices were needed. Without any sense that he was empowering others, Willie offered humble leadership in creating the Holocaust memorial in the Jewish cemetery, a *matzeyvah*, a memorial stone for the Six Million, a marker for all the graves they did not have. It was built to the left, just beyond the gate and the two stone entrance columns. At the top of each column are hand-chiseled two Hebrew words in the rough, beautiful hand of an old-time artisan, *Beys Ha'chayyim*/House of the Living/בית החיים.



Entrance to Victoria's Jewish Cemetery
Beys Ha'chayyim/House of the Living.

Beys Ha'chayyim is one of the traditional Jewish terms for a cemetery, emphasizing not death, but the ever-unfolding cycle of life that death is a part of. It is meant to tell of death that comes in the fullness of years, of people brought home to sleep

with their ancestors, not of lives taken with unspeakable cruelty, gassed and incinerated, and scattered on the wind. For the survivors, this became a place to be with loved ones in the way that others could visit the graves beyond, others who could lovingly trace with their fingers a precious name upon a stone. For those named and unnamed among the Six Million, the Holocaust Memorial became their stone, their *matzeyvab*, a place in the House of the Living where their loved ones who survived could come and remember them.



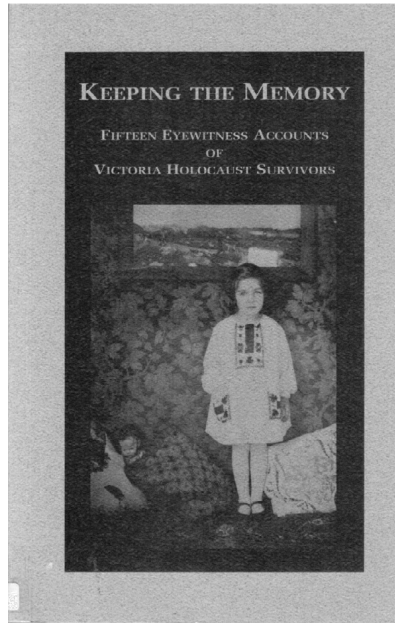
Rabbi Reinstein leads the Yom Ha'shoah commemoration at the Victoria Jewish Cemetery, April 1988. Willie Jacobs is centre with his back to the camera; Kurt Weiss is to his left and on his right with kerchief is Jannushka Jakoubovitch and her children, Joshua and Kalina. David Katz (with beard) is in profile on the left, and next to him is Rysia Kraskin. Horst Rothfels is standing behind David wearing a 'newsboy' hat The woman facing the camera is Kathy Bennett, a long-time Hebrew School teacher. Richard Kool, with his son David next to him, is wearing a fedora.

Telling of our gatherings in this sacred space, in a photograph carefully held in my files through the years, people are gathered around Willie, his broad-shouldered back to the camera. The monument is behind us, though we seem not to have approached it yet, preparing, perhaps reviewing program details, but most of all in those moments it was just being with each other that mattered, asking of feelings, of emotions, quietly grateful to be together.

Even before each year's ceremony began, being together in that place was a time to be with many of the survivors among us, to hug, to hold, to cry with them, though they were often the ones to comfort us, and now they are gone and we comfort each other. The *Yom Ha'shoah* memorial gatherings emerged from a desire to honor the survivors, to give them a place to remember and to mourn. More than remembering the magnitude of the Holocaust and its decimating impact on the Jewish people, more than horrified recognition of the blot on the pages of human history, it was a time to remember the personal sorrow and suffering of our own dear ones, the individual losses, the loss of real people, the deaths of mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, *bubies* and *zaydes*, great grandparents, aunts and uncles across generations, nieces, nephews, and cousins, friends and neighbours, all without graves, their bodies as ash scattered on the wind, their souls gathered here among us in the House of the Living.

As in the ways of personal mourning and cycles of grieving, so in the ways of a people's remembrance, of holding collective grief. There are times when we turn inward and times when we turn outward, times when we just want to be alone. Although in each of the first two years there was a non-Jewish speaker, deeply caring university chaplains, the *Yom Ha'Shoah* observance was from the beginning primarily a time to turn inward. Perhaps in the way of *shiva*,⁴ or more aptly as a *yahrzeit* gathering, it was a time for the family to gather, to listen, to grieve, to cry, to sing. It was a time to transmit memory and to uplift the souls of our dead. As to everything there is a season and a time for every purpose, there are times to grieve among ourselves, to share within the family, with those closest, with those who carry the same psychic scars of a particular suffering and its legacy. It was a time for survivors to tell their stories, fifteen of which were lovingly gathered by Rhoda Kaellis, of blessed memory, to form her book, "Keeping the Memory."

4 A week-long mourning period for the immediate family of a deceased.



Of memories transmitted, words of witness meant to become our own, Willie Jacobs was the survivor to speak at the first Yom Ha'Shoah commemoration at the monument on April 21, 1985. As was his manner, Willie spoke with a steady voice that belied the vortex of pain that churned within him, that woke him up screaming at night. His words were raw, as though from beyond himself, haunted verbal messengers that became triggers for our own nightmares, as he told of all he had seen and experienced; from Belchatow to the Lodz ghetto, six years in the hell of slave labor and death camps; the rabbi, the baby, his brother. His brother with whom he was a slave laborer building the autobahn, his brother who collapsed while working and was killed by a guard and buried right there in the road, Willie often spoke of his brother, bitterly reminding us that the autobahn is a Jewish cemetery.



Henry before WWII

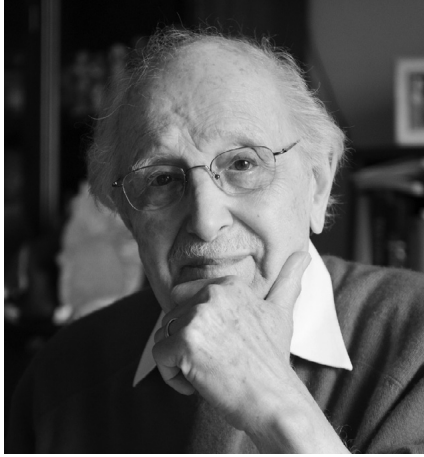


Henry and Edith Sitwell, 1989

The survivors who spoke with us were often very different from one another, different in their stories and experiences, different in their ways of being, as Jews and as people, different in their ways of speaking to us, words from some pouring out as a torrent, from others coming slowly and haltingly. Some told of the horrors of the camps, some of living on the knife edge of uncertainty in hiding, some of fleeing and flight, of living as human prey. Staying one step ahead of the hunters, at times caught in snares, Edith and Henry Sitwell made their way from Poland to Tashkent, an Evangeline tale of separation along the way, as told by Edith in 1989, lovers in the end reunited. There were those who had been religiously observant before and those who had been secular, those who found faith and those who lost faith, those who experienced God's presence in the camps, those who searched in the years beyond and never found.

As musical notes in a whirlwind flung from the staff, Peter Gary sought to raise back up to the staff of life the fragments of his own faith, dissonance always remaining. An expression of his quest, he composed an oratorio, "An Old Jew in Search of God," touchingly dedicated to me. Tirelessly speaking with students across Vancouver Island and beyond, he spoke at the *Yom Ha'shoah* gathering in 1992. A ceremony in which faith was

implicit, in the words of *Kaddish*,⁵ in the singing of children, in the words of Anne Frank; a note to myself before he spoke: "be sure Peter Gary is comfortable."



Peter Gary

Reminding us in their presence that the Six Million were not an amorphous mass, the survivors reflected in their own diversity the diversity among those remembered, among the Jewish people then and now, among us. Unique for the language of his sharing, in 1986 our speaker was Mr. Marcus Gutwein, a newcomer to Victoria who would only be among us for a short time, who would die later that year. Born in Poland in the town of Nowy Sacz, the seat of the *Sanzer Rebbe*,⁶ his own family were *Belzer Chassidim*,⁷ his father the head of a *yeshiva*,⁸ a wise man who could

5 "*Kaddish*, also known as the 'Mourner's Prayer,' is said in honor of the deceased. This prayer focuses on life, promise and honor of family and individuals of the Jewish faith." <https://www.shiva.com/learning-center/sitting-shiva/kaddish/>

6 A Chassidic dynasty founded by Rabbi Chaim Halberstam (1793–1876) of the city of Sanz, now in Poland.

7 A Chassidic dynasty founded by Rabbi Shalom Rokeach (1781–1855) of the city of Belz, now in Ukraine.

8 A Jewish institution where students study the primary religious texts, Torah and Talmud.

recognize that his son would take a different path. With honesty and foresight, his father sent him to live with uncles in Belgium, and so he became the only one of his family to survive. Escaping a labor camp, he became a Belgian partisan, later honored by the Belgian government. Mr. Gutwein, as he was always called, spoke to us in Yiddish, his words translated by Jack Gardner, of blessed memory, a special bond forged through the language of those whose memory he very simply asked us not to forget.



Of one who came forward slowly, haltingly over time, seeking to re-embrace her Jewish self, there is in my files a small note with an arrow to give emphasis pointing to a few words, "try to get Jannushka to open up." A child survivor, born in Paris of Polish Jewish parents, caught throughout her life in the tension between child and survivor, so fragile and so strong, Jannushka ran from being Jewish until she could run no more. She would say later that we told her then, "you are precious, needed, and cherished." As she found the strength to open up and tell her story, Jannushka Jakoubovitch spoke for the first time at the *Yom Ha'shoah* gathering in 1987. Her remarks were brief, one paragraph, telling in one sentence of her story in its essence, "I have suffered as a very small child of beating, persecution and fear." She spoke again in 1994, her remarks now filling three pages, expanding upon the essence of her story, a little girl in hiding, a safe-house through which members of the resistance would

pass, expressions of caring from some of them, each one in turn betrayed, and so the heart of the little girl.

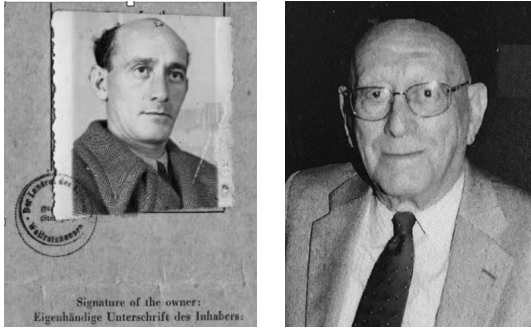


Jannushka Jakoubovitch “Still image from Jannushka J. Holocaust testimony (JJ1010_03_VD).” Courtesy of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre.

Jannushka died on the eve of Chanukkah 2019, the flame of her soul joined with the flower that yearned to grow in her heart. We had corresponded regularly for about the past ten years. The subject line of her last email, written to friends just before she died, was ever so simple, *au revoir*. So, you remain, Jannushka, precious, needed, and cherished.

A presence larger than life, Jack Gardner [Jacob Gurtner], *zichrono livracha/his memory be a blessing*, spoke at a number of *Yom Ha’sboah* gatherings, both formally and informally, and at so many other times, whenever there was a moment, an opening in which to remind, whether opportune or not. Ebullient, irrepressible, so filled with life, “I am a survivor,” he would begin, having lived to tell the tale of those who didn’t. Jack was unique in his knowledge not only of what happened to him and those he loved, but in his knowledge of the larger social and historical context that framed his own experience. Having joined the Russian army to fight the advancing Germans, Jack was wounded and sent away from the front, so his path to survival, making his way to Uzbekistan, meeting his first wife, Rae, and journeying together. In addition to reminding us of the horrors, Jack

lovingly told of the worlds that were destroyed, that we would better understand the magnitude of the Shoah.



Mr. Gardner in Victoria BC.



Jack Gardner in Sambir cemetery. Courtesy of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, Jack Gardner fonds.

With a remarkable memory for detail, he told of people and politics, of professions and places, of his *shtetl*,⁹ Sary Sambor (Sambir), and its people and ways; of his father the pious shoemaker; of Boruch Shammes and Yona Pillisdorph; of beer making and of the pastries in the bakery window; of the shuls and *shtiblach*; of the *T'hilim Kloyz* and the *G'morrah Kloyz*,¹⁰ and even

9 A small Jewish village or town in Central or Eastern Europe.

10 Rabbi Reinstein explained that in the world Mr. Gardner grew up in, a *Kloyz* was a small synagogue, *shtibl*, or *beis medresh* (a house of study) organized in the way of a guild around a particular group's learning focus or their profession. The *T'hilim Kloyz*, as Jack

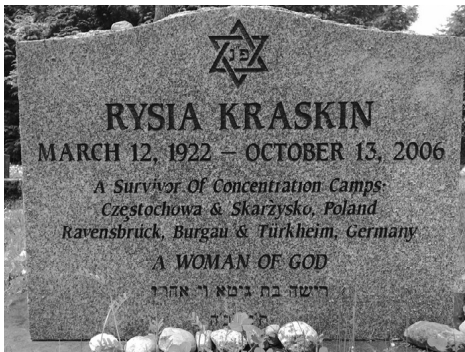
of the tensions among them, as in all the fullness of life lived with people. When the war ended, Jack and his wife made their way back to Stary Sambor. Realizing that he was the only survivor from his family, they stood in front of his family's home, vowing to leave that "bloody land" and give *laybedike matzayvos*/living memorials to their parents, children who would bear their names. Of responses to hate, Jack would tell of the time in the Displaced Persons camp, Foehrenwald, near Munich, when an American soldier offered him and others a gun to go into town and take revenge. With a depth of feeling, pride and pain welling up, Jack recounted their refusal, not a one would take the gun, for that was not the Jewish way, not the way to begin again, not the way to raise up living *matzeyvos*.

In my yellowing files, another note: "Rysia — visit Tues. (set time) — have her speak and I write/edit ... — work with themes of human kindness in the hell of the camps... — Helen toward her... — the water — (the lipstick?) — Rysia's effort to protect her bunk mate."

For some reason a question regarding the lipstick, perhaps seeming too close, too personal, but so important, in time to be told and ever retold. Sitting at Rysia's kitchen table, she spoke and I wrote, words flowing, slowly at first, and then as though a floodgate had opened. I wish that I had recorded her, that I might have her words in her voice, though in the moment it somehow seemed more fitting, more respectful, to quietly write, and through my fingers a way to channel my own emotion, hearing her voice nevertheless. We called her talk "Acts of Kindness in Hell." Held earlier in the innocent embrace of the children, the memory of her beloved friends inspiring her now, Rysia spoke at the Holocaust Memorial for the first time, sharing

referred to it, would have been a gathering place for learning and *davenning* of less learned Jews, "Psalm Jews," probably workers who did not have time for more in-depth learning.... The *G'morrah Kloyz* would have been a place for more learned Jews who could study Talmud. There is certainly some social stratification reflected in the different *kloyzn*. The origin of the term is from the German *Klaus*, the origin of 'cloister', and in western Europe *Klaus* would have been a synonym for *Kloyz*.

the words now typed and held in shaking hands, on April 14, 1996. She told of her Warsaw childhood, an only daughter with three older brothers, attending a Jewish school, graduating from high school in 1939, her parents' desperate attempt to get her to safety, sending her to friends in the countryside as the ghetto was sealed, and the fates of all within. Taken from the street in the summer of 1942, she began her journey through five camps, Skarzysko, Czenstochowa, Ravensbruck, Burgau, and Turkheim. With quiet strength, she taught us of kindness in hell and of the meaning and mark of human dignity: "Even as we went through hell, even amidst the horror of this terrible time, we didn't forget that we really were human beings and how to care for other people in need.... The girl who was sleeping with me in one bunk got sick. I knew if I would leave her and go somewhere else because I would be afraid to catch it, they would take her away. I stayed with her although I was sure I would get typhus, not to let the Germans know that she was sick. I stayed with her, and her aunt who was also there helped her until she got better. She is still my friend and lives in Israel."



As Rysia spoke, fittingly, Michael Jacobs stood by her side, representing his parents, giving voice to the story of the second generation. Sharing among us their parents' legacy and its burden, children of survivors began to speak as part of the program in

1991, with Felix Reuben joining Jack Gardner. In other years David Katz spoke, and John Sitwell, and Rick Kool. In 1994, Rick spontaneously asked to read a letter at the monument from a member of the Dutch resistance who had saved Jews and wondered with torment what else he could have done to have saved more. So began Rick's journey to discover the details of his mother's story as a Dutch child survivor.



Rysia and Stefi

Carried to the next generation, bonds of friendship forged in fire, still needing the hope of springtime flowers, the ritual around which the ceremony turned was from the beginning the shared formation of the Star of Hope by survivors and children of survivors. To include all the survivors that were among us then, three groups of survivors would place three long-stemmed flowers on the monument to form the top-pointing triangle of a *Magen David*.¹¹ Three groups of children of survivors would then place their flowers to form the down-pointing triangle. In my notes, a reminder upon a small scrap of paper to ask dear Goldie Gardner, of blessed memory, to bring gladiolas from her and Jack's garden, their nice long stems to form the Star. Each group

¹¹ Star of David, a Jewish star.

taking up their flowers, soul flames flickering, I would read from handwritten notes upon a small card:

Six flowers, six million of our people. Flowers that burst into life in the springtime sun. Six lines that form the *Magen David*, Star of David, Star of our hope. A yellow badge sewn to our garments to degrade, but for us glory emblazoned on our souls, our promise to survive. Survivors, children of survivors, even unto the third generation now, Holland — in hiding, Belgium — in the underground, Auschwitz, Buchenwald, the destroyed world of the shtetl of *Stary Sambor*, for Six Million worlds — we call on them to form these flowers into the lines of the *Magen David*.



Edgar Strauss and wife Lilly (née Stein). The 'stumbling stone' in front of the Strauss family home, Wredstrasse 10a in Ludwigshafen (Rhein)

We needed to turn inward as a community to hold the emotional intensity of *Yom Ha'shoah*. As to everything there is a season, the words of *Kobelet/Ecclesiastes* upon the wall at the entrance to the cemetery, so there is a time for turning outward. There is a time to share pain with others, to allow it to be held in universal embrace, and a time to speak to the pain of others from the depths of our own. The *Kristallnacht* commemoration was quite different from that of *Yom Ha'Shoah*. Turning outward, the *Kristallnacht* observance came to be held as a very public event, as the events

of that night in 1938 had happened in the public square for all to see. Invitation was made to the interfaith community of Victoria. There came to be an annual proclamation from the mayor that honored the event as a time of remembrance and of recognizing the horrifying endpoint to which hate and bigotry can lead. Of many communities gathered in the synagogue as one, the public observance of Kristallnacht became a public expression of commitment to stand together in the face of hate directed to anyone. In those years, Holocaust denial was rife in Canada¹² and the hate from which it comes, and to which it gives rise, was frightening. Standing together with our neighbors, we offered witness in each other's presence to the way of neighborly love that had been consigned to the flames in Germany and Austria on that night when neighbors stood idly by and watched synagogues burn.



Kurt Weiss (front row, third from right) in Shanghai, after the war.

Responding to an appeal from the Simon Wiesenthal Center¹³ to remember what had happened on that night, gathered beneath the high-vaulted ceilings of the synagogue, imagery unmistakable of another time and place, the first Kristall-

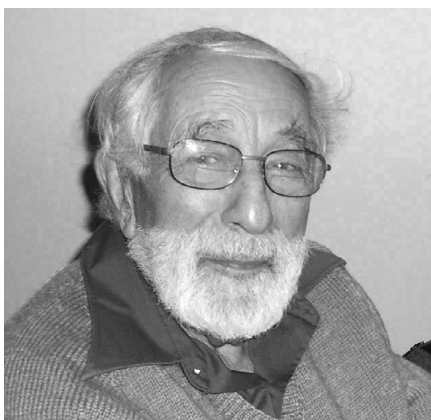
12 Prominent anti-Semite and Holocaust deniers that visited Victoria during those years included Paul Fromm, Jack Mohr, David Irving, Doug Collins and Ernst Zundel. When charged with hate crimes, Zundel was defended by Victoria lawyer and Holocaust denier Doug Christie, whose organization regularly invited Holocaust deniers to speak here.

13 Named for Holocaust survivor and Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal, the Center is "a global human rights organization researching the Holocaust and hate in a historic and contemporary context."

nacht commemoration was held to mark its fiftieth anniversary on the night of November 9, 1988. Though it was to become an important interfaith public event, the first two years were, in fact, not public. Teetering on the edge of Jewish vulnerability, we seemed subconsciously to be asking in the ways of our Holocaust remembrance if we could really allow ourselves to turn completely inward in marking *Yom Ha'shoah*; and in marking the anniversary of Kristallnacht, did we really have the confidence to turn outward and expect understanding in publicly sharing our pain? The answer came from events in the world around us, reminding us that we needed to lead the way in "defying hatred," whether directed at us or at anyone else. For the third year's observance, held on November 8, 1990, a flyer announcing the event said at the bottom, "In light of a recent event held in Victoria, where the magnitude and significance of the Holocaust was denied, we urge you to attend this memorial service. For the first time, this annual community event is open to the public."

As with the early days of *Yom Ha'sho'ah* gatherings, there were many survivors, many witnesses among us, even to Kristallnacht itself. In that first gathering in 1988, only German and Austrian Jews lit memorial candles: Kurt Weiss for Muenster, Henry Newman for Breslau, Esther Diegel, and Lonia Menzer each for Vienna, Ursula Barnett for Berlin, Helen Alexandor for Posen, all of blessed memory. Kurt Weiss, who would escape from Germany to Shanghai, shared a witness's account of Kristallnacht, as Steffi Porzecanski, Dr. Edgar Strauss, and Dr. David Kirk would in subsequent years.

In his talk in 1992, Dr. Kirk, who died recently at 102, urged us to replace the term Kristallnacht, antiseptic in its literal meaning as "Crystal Night," with the more powerfully realistic term used in Germany itself, *Reichspogromnacht*.



H. David Kirk

Remembering initially only towns and cities in Germany and Austria from which those survivors came, our scope later expanded to include survivors from other parts of Europe, so acknowledging the full fury of the Shoah that began in earnest on that night. From the lighting of memorial candles by the survivors themselves, each saying the name of the town or city from which they had come, there evolved an intergenerational ritual of transmission. Handing a lit *shammes*¹⁴/serving candle to a young person, the elder would quietly say the name of the place from which they had come; the young person, as they lit the memorial candle, then saying for all to hear, though perhaps most of all for the hearing of their own heart, "this is the flame of memory for the Jews of," each place in succession then remembered among us.

14 A candle used to light another candle at Chanukkah.



As hands reaching through time, a *shammes* from the world beyond, the flame of memory would still guide us as the reality came home that our living links to the Shoah would leave us. Willie Jacobs died just a little more than a week before the Kristallnacht observance in 1993, his spirit and his absence deeply felt among us as we gathered. Two *Times Colonist*¹⁵ newspaper articles at the time told of Willie's death. One of the articles, by Lon Wood, a friend of the Jewish community and loving champion of humanity, described a shocking incident that in its attempt to mar Willie's funeral, brought home even more the urgency of his message that was now for us to carry on. As we brought Willie to his rest and held his family, a car stopped at the entrance of the cemetery, the four men inside shouting obscenities and engaging in mock crying. Willie was supposed to be somewhere else that day, an appointment that only death could prevent him from keeping. At the very hour of his funeral, he was supposed to be speaking with students on Thetis Island, telling of his experiences, seeking to inoculate young people against hate.

¹⁵ The major daily paper on Vancouver Island.

Lon Wood, *Times Colonist*, 15 November 1993

...Willie Jacobs was to have spoken at the symposium — to share with area teenagers the realities of his six-year nightmare amid the engineered horrors of Auschwitz, Alach, Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau and Mauthausen.

Jacobs, 73, was a gentle bear of a man. He was featured here in March after I watched him calmly roll up a sleeve to show students his ghastly death camp tattoo — A14382 — in the 90-minute talk that was one of scores given at Island schools before he died on Oct. 26.

The afternoon of Oct. 28, as Rabbi Victor Reinstein delivered the eulogy at Jacobs's funeral, a big old sedan slowed outside the Jewish cemetery on Cedar Hill Road near Hillside Avenue.

"There were four men in the car - not teens," said Bridget Ittah, among mourners including Jacobs's wife and two sons. "They screamed, yelled obscenities — then fell to mock crying. It was sad — but we said nothing." After I thought, 'I can't let this go by.' Hate from conflict over race, religion and nationality daily sets the world in flames.

In another classroom, at another time, as Willie finished speaking to the stunned students, a young woman spoke tearfully from out of the silence, "what do you want us to remember, what do you want us to tell our children?" Raising his hands as though in prayerful plea, the number A14382 bearing witness on his burly forearm, he would say so simply and quietly, "tell them not to hate, they shouldn't hate." Words of witness and sacred imperatives, what do these words mean as we become the witnesses? How shall they not become simply words? They are not simple, and as sacred imperatives they are more than words. They are holy commandments in the way of the mitzvot that give structure to Jewish life and values, commanding us not to hate, but to love.

From stories of love actualized *in extremis*, we learn the way of loving-kindness for every time and place, and of love's moral challenge to be met in the day to day of our own lives and times. Willie taught us not to hate, Helen and Rysia taught us what it

means to defy hate, to love in the face of hate; of what it means to be human and to recognize the humanity of others and to respond accordingly. As Rysia reminded us when she gathered the courage to speak on that *Yom Ha'shoah* in memory of her dear friends, "we didn't forget that we really were human beings and how to care for other people in need." That is the key to survival, then and now, retaining our humanity in spite of all that would deny it.

Every year on *Yom Ha'shoah*, I share two quintessential stories of Rysia and Helen, as Rysia shared them at the monument. Before the telling, I hold up a small tube of lipstick and ask: what does it have to do with the Holocaust? What does it have to do with loving-kindness? What does it have to do with survival? What does it have to do with us? I share the stories now in Rysia's own words, as she at first shared them with me at her kitchen table:

During the trip on the cattle train from Ravensbrück to Burgau, after arriving in Burgau without water for many days they opened the doors. Half were dead. When they opened the doors, German women handed up cups of water. Helen Jacobs, who was living here and who was with me in all of the camps, she got first the water. She was standing near to the door. Instead to drink immediately the water, she brought it to me where I was lying on the other side of the wagon. Then she went back to drink for herself. If this is not a great kindness! She handed me life, *mayyim chayyim*. She saved me.

I don't know where she had the strength, Helen. We had to walk from where the train stopped to the camp. I was half alive. Half of the women were dead. When we came to the barracks, we were told that the SS women will soon come and look us over, if we are capable to work. I was

so weak, I wanted to lay down on the bunk, but Helen didn't let me. She took out lipstick. I don't know from where she got it, and she put some on my lips and a little bit on my cheeks, I should look like a healthy person. And again she saved my life.

These stories of affirmation continue to challenge us with the same pain and power as held in Rysia's quavering voice that day at the monument. Stories of the Shoah touch us in the raw places of our souls, scratching psychic scars never to heal. We hold the Six Million and the survivors we have known in scheduled rituals of remembrance as on a collective *yahrzeit*, and in day to day moments of memories spontaneously awakened. We remember them because we love them, because they begged us not to forget, זכור/*Zachor*, געדענק/*Gedenk/Remember!* We remember them because they are family, because they are us, because they are human beings who were brutalized. We challenge the world never to forget and we promise ourselves, "never again." Not to hate is the beginning, to be followed and made real through active love, deeds of loving-kindness and compassion made manifest in the world on behalf of others. It is Willie's simple plea and the courageous love of Helen and Rysia joined as parts of one whole, the three of them and their stories forever joined as one, in death as in life. Asking ourselves as we would ask others, "what would you have done?" ample opportunity is given to answer, whether in our readiness to speak truth to power, to put our bodies on the line, to challenge state and society when law and policy serve to victimize the vulnerable. So too, when called as one person to risk our own safety in sustaining the life of another, as in the way of a sacred tale of water and lipstick. We know in our bones and in our souls that "never again" cannot refer only to Jews, but to all of suffering humanity.



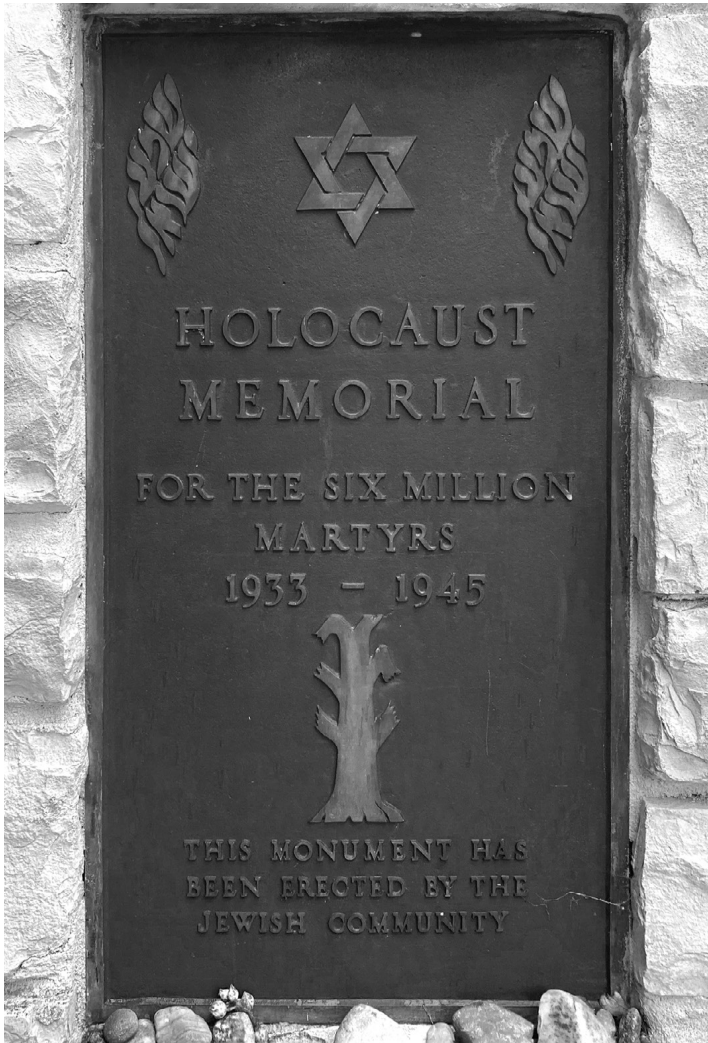
Ursula Barnett

A group of young Jews leading a march through the streets of Boston to a county jail, there to offer compassion and love to migrants being held for deportation. At the start of the march, grandchildren of Holocaust survivors cry out, "this is what never again looks like." Challenges are raised to their use of language, our language, to describe the plight of others, and so in regard to similar application of words we think of as ours. Sometimes I wince, even as I cry with pride and pain, remembering that this is what Torah looks like in its command to love the stranger, the immigrant, *וְאֵתְּהֵם* *va'a'hav'tem et ba'ger* (Deut. 10:19). The Torah itself draws from earliest time on our own experience of suffering as the basis for what is to be our response to the suffering of others. Reminding thirty-six times that we were strangers in the land of Egypt, our own experience as an oppressed people becomes the basis for protecting all who are vulnerable: *and you shall not oppress the stranger — for you know the soul of the stranger because you were strangers in the land of Egypt* (Ex. 23:9). One of the urgent lessons of the Holocaust is the evil of indifference and inaction. If not to hate, so we are called to actively love, to see ourselves reflected in the face of the other; to know the soul of the stranger as our own, to respond to the suffering of another simply because the other too is a human

being created in the image of God. "This is what never again looks like."

At the southern border of the United States last spring, to learn, to comfort, to bear witness; visiting a children's home, children without their parents, trauma on their faces, not free to leave, not free to be children, not knowing when or if they would see their parents again. One child looks familiar to me, a young boy. I keep seeing his face, his soft, shy eyes; short, curly black hair, an unformed question on his tightly pursed lips, why? As I try to hold this child's face, it merges and becomes one for me with the face of a Holocaust child that stares at me weekly from a page in a small book of Shabbos table songs and blessings. Of blessed memory, still so hard to say, I think of Jannushka, and of all the children, then and now, whose childhoods have been stolen; each one precious, needed, and cherished.

Among all of those who survived and those who did not, we remember them, holding dear, as they did, the memory of the Six Million. In this place, where mountains rise from sea to sky and eagles soar, they found peace, though the trauma was never far away. We are the witnesses now, telling their stories, weaving their legacies, "Tell Them Not to Hate" — Words of Witness and Sacred Imperatives.



Plaque on the Holocaust memorial
in Victoria's Jewish Cemetery, placed in 1981.

Survivors mentioned in the text

Helen Boas Alexandor

While it has been difficult to find information about Helen, Rabbi Reinstein notes that she could be a “challenging person who softened and opened up as though touched by sunshine to expressions of caring and friendship, especially near the end of her life. She would light a candle at the Kristallnacht memorial, as referred to in my talk, for Posen, which I think was her birthplace.”

Ursula Barnett

Ursula Barnett (Sachs) was born in Berlin, Germany in October of 1922. Growing up in Weimar Germany, she experienced the rise of Nazism from the perspective of a *mischling* (half-Jew in Nazi terms). Her extended family was a microcosm of the contemporary assimilated German Jewry, encompassing observant Jews, assimilated Jews, Christians, and Christians that had converted to Judaism. But despite the mixed heritage, the impact of Nazism was felt acutely in the immediate family as Ursula’s two half-sisters were fully Jewish. Through the false testimony of a family friend, in 1941 Ursula and her twin sister were declared by a Berlin court to be the product of an affair between her now-widowed mother (who was not Jewish) and the Aryan friend, and so survived as “Aryans.” While thus spared the fate of Jews and *mischling*, she nonetheless lived through the many horrors of the times, including Kristallnacht, the Allied bombing of Berlin, and the arrival of the Russian army. She left Germany in 1948 to move to England, where she met her husband John and married in 1952, following her conversion to Judaism. In Victoria, she attended Congregation Emanu-El with the family, and was actively involved with the local chapter of Hadassah WIZO. She died in Germany in 1989. (Contributed by Jeff, Francis and Terry Barnett, Ursula’s sons)

Esther Diegel

Esther was born in Vienna in 1912, and fled in 1938 just before the *Anschluss*, the annexation of Austria into the German Reich. She spent the war years in England, marrying a Canadian soldier and coming to Canada in 1945. She was a seamstress, and a valued docent at the BC Provincial Museum. Filled with a spirit of life in spite of many sorrows, she cared for the dead as a member of the *Chevra Kaddisha*, encouraging and supporting others in doing this sacred work.

Jack Gardner

"Jack was born in 1912 in the small town of Stary Sambor, Poland (now Ukraine)... He was the youngest of five children.... Jack's father was a shoemaker, his mother ran a small dry-goods store.... He was sent to school, read a lot, became a radical. At sixteen he joined the Communist underground and made friends with the radical Ukrainian youth.... He was arrested several times by the police and, under threat of being sent to a Polish concentration camp, his parents sent him away to Paris for a year.... He was twenty-seven and in the Polish army when the Nazis invaded Poland." Jack enlisted in the Russian army, was injured in 1942 and discharged. Leaving Ukraine, he went to Uzbekistan. He was able to leave the Soviet Union, immigrated to the USA (Texas) in 1949, and retired to Victoria in the late 1970s. (*Adapted from Kaellis, 1991*)

Abram Peter Gary

Peter was a composer, businessman, and holocaust educator. One of the founders of the Victoria Holocaust Remembrance and Education Society in 1995, Peter tirelessly travelled Vancouver Island speaking to tens of thousands of students about the Holocaust. His oratorio, *A 20th Century Passion*, was written in the 1970s, and premiered in Israel in 2016. This composition is enormous; the score is nearly 600 pages, and requires a full orchestra, four soloists, and an adult and children's choir. Born in Poland in 1924 and raised in Hungary, he was liberated from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on his birthday in April 1945. He lived in Europe after the war, immigrated to the United States and came to Vancouver Island from California in 1991.

Markus Gutwein

"In the last weeks of his life Marcus Gutwein was able to say of the death he knew was near, "Je l'accept." And now his days are complete — and he is at peace. Mr. Gutwein, which seemed to be a title as much as a name, was a man who was clothed with dignity, in death as in life. He always put on a tie and even in his illness he was always dressed, receiving his visitors both graciously and gratefully. He died peacefully, having talked and even joked on the day before he died. And that day, his last full day, was a *Shabbos*. Marcus Gutwein stood tall and proud and yet was a most humble and gentle unassuming man. He was a quiet hero.... He was born in Poland and sent by his father to Belgium when he was 17.... Mr. Gutwein was not a religious man, as he said, but he was deeply rooted in the Jewish people. During the war he was taken to a Labour Camp in Normandy. He escaped from there and became a Belgian underground freedom fighter and for that he was later decorated by the Belgian government." (*From eulogy by Rabbi Reinstein*)

Willie & Helen Jacobs

"Willie was born in 1919 in Belchatow, Poland, the youngest in a family of eight children. Willie's father was a shoemaker and very pious; his earnings were meagre and often the children went to bed hungry.... Willie had little schooling, going to work early in life to help support the family.... He was nineteen when the Nazis invaded Poland." He was imprisoned in Posen, Auschwitz, Buchenwald and Mauthausen, where he saw and experienced horrific crimes prior to his liberation on April 17, 1945.

"Helen [born in Plock, Poland in 1918] has told no one of her experiences, not even Willie, and refuses to talk about them, read, see or hear anything about the Holocaust. All Willie knows is that she witnessed her brother being killed. She has nightmares from which Willie wakes her screaming and crying." (*Adapted from Kaellis, 1991*)

Jannushka Jakubovitch

Jannushka was born in Paris in 1933. When Paris was occupied, she and her brother were placed by their parents with an older Catholic family, and was taken to northern France, living in a house that was a hiding place for members of the French Resistance. Living with the Resistance, she and her brother acted as couriers transporting messages. She was not well-treated during that time in hiding, and in her last years, constructed a book of her memories of those horrible times (from Jakubovitch, *Tales of a Parisienne: Child Survivor of the Holocaust*, 2019).

Heinz David Kirk

H. David Kirk (Kirchheimer) was born in Dusseldorf Germany in 1918. He fled Germany and spent the war years in Scotland; his parents remained in Germany and did not survive. After the war, David came first to the United States where he studied at the City College of New York and earned his PhD in sociology at Cornell University. He spent ten years at McGill University before moving to the University of Waterloo, where he was a Professor of Sociology. David is widely considered the "father" of the field of adoption studies (*Shared Fate, A Theory of Adoption and Mental Health*, 1964). He was an active and engaged writer on Jewish affairs, Holocaust denial and anti-semitism. From their house outside of Victoria, BC, David and his wife, Beve Tansey, created Ben-Simon Publications in 1984, publishing children's books, political materials, and Judaica. (From *Lisa and Ben Tansey, children of David and Beve*)

Lonia Menzer

Lonia was born in Poland but raised in Vienna by a very observant family; her father was a follower of the *Chortkover Rebbe* (Hasidic dynasty from Chortkow, Poland). "Though she had memories of early love for Jewish life, Lonia had a life-long sense of frustration at the Jewish education denied to her in the context of her early years because she was a daughter. She married, moved to Budapest and visited Vienna soon after *Kristallnacht* and saw the destruction. She was able to immigrate to Canada in 1941 when Jewish immigration to this country was virtually impossible. She and her husband retired to Victoria in the early 1970s. She was interested in everything, engaged in both the Jewish community and the broader Victoria community, and contributed to many of the local Jewish organizations. (Notes from Rabbi Reinstein)

Henry Newman

Rabbi Reinstein remembers Mr. Newman: "He was a warm and friendly person, quite Jewishly knowledgeable. He was from Breslau and would light a candle for the Jews of Breslau in remembering Kristallnacht, which I believe he had witnessed. Knowing of my interest in *Rebbe Nachman of Bratzlav/Breslov*, he would often make the connection with its German name, his hometown of Breslau."

Steffi Porzeskanski

"Stephanie ("Steffi") Meta Kochmann, emigrated with her family from Germany in 1939 on the last ship to leave Hamburg harbour, the Cap Arcona, arriving in Montevideo, Uruguay. The family comprised her father Walter Kochmann, her mother Anne Marie (née Alexander), her grandmother Natalie (née Wertheim) Alexander, and her younger sister Gerda... Raised in Berlin by a wealthy family, she had been sent by her parents to complete her secondary studies in a finishing school in Lausanne, Switzerland, in order to spare her from the discriminatory Nuremberg Race Laws which isolated and disenfranchised German Jews. Steffi was fluent in German, French and English while in Europe, and then in Uruguay she learned and became fluent also in Spanish. (*From <http://www.porzecanski.com/Stephanie.htm>*)

Henry & Edith Sitwell

Edith was born in 1915 in a small Polish city near the German border. Henry was born in 1910 in a large city in central Poland... [they] married in Bialystok in October 1939. At that time, they were en-route to Romania fleeing the Nazi invasion. Ending up in the Russian-occupied zone, they were transported east of the Ural Mountains ending up in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. They returned to Poland after the war, but pogroms drove them to Austria where they lived for three years. They then went, with their young family, to Israel and finally to Canada. (*Adapted from Kaellis, 1991*)

Edgar Strauss

Dr. Strauss was born on June 11, 1909 in Ludwigshafen, Germany, to a family which was associated with the Conservative movement in Judaism. He was unable to complete law studies because of antisemitic laws and was dismissed from the Civil Service due to the "Nazi reorganization of the Civil Service to eliminate Jews" law. In November 1938, Edgar experienced *Kristallnacht* and was interned at Dachau concentration camp. After his release one month later, he went to Luxembourg but returned for fear of reprisals against his father. Edgar obtained a passport and visa and on August 15, 1939 he left for the United Kingdom where he worked in a machine shop.... In June 1940, after Dunkirk, Edgar was interned by the British as an enemy alien. He was sent to the Isle of Man and from there to Trois Rivières, Québec; New Brunswick; and Ile -Aux- Noix, Québec. In 1942, the Canadian government began to release internees to work. Edgar settled in Montréal. He and his wife later moved to Victoria, where their daughter (Dr. Esther Strauss) and family lived. *(From Montreal Holocaust Museum*
<https://www.cjhm.ca/en/list?q=edgar+strauss>)

Kurt Weiss

Kurt was born in 1919 on the Polish side of the Polish-German border, and moved as a child to Breslau (which was then in Germany and is now in Poland). "When the Nazis came to power our school was closed, so I went to learn a trade, house painting." As things closed in on the German Jews, Kurt and his girlfriend and her family tried to go to Shanghai at the end of August, 1939. Kurt was not able to leave then and after a great deal of trouble sailed from Genoa to China in May 1940. He left Shanghai in 1949 for Haifa and returned to Germany in 1956, where he became the chairman of the Jewish community in Muenster. *(Adapted from Kaellis, 1991)*

Credits

Kaellis, R. (Ed.). (1991). Keeping the memory: *Fifteen eyewitness accounts of Victoria Holocaust survivors*. Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society for Education and Remembrance.

Alex Porzecanski provided a website focused on the lives of his parents, Steffi and Bernardo,
<http://www.porzecanski.com/Stephanie.htm>

David Katz and Leah Levi identified some of the people in the photo of the *Yom Hasboab* commemoration in 1988. Leah also provided additional historical information.

Lisa Tansey provided the photo and paragraph about David Kirk.

Charlie Sitwell shared pictures of Henry & Edith Sitwell.

The information about Edgar Strauss is from
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stolperstein_Edgar_Strauss_LU_2018.jpg and http://ludwigshafen-setzt-stolpersteine.de/gedenkbuch/?tx_gedenkbuch_pi1%5Bbiography%5D=79

Photograph of Rabbi Victor Reinstein, taken by Tzvia Berrin-Reinstein.

The sons of Ursula Barnett provided the photo and brief biography of their mother.

Judy Estrin provided the photograph of Peter Gary.

Thanks to Nina Krieger and the staff at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre for their support and permission to reproduce three images.



HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL

FOR THE SIX MILLION
MARTYRS

1933 - 1945



THIS MONUMENT HAS
BEEN ERECTED BY THE
JEWISH COMMUNITY

