

AS SEEN IN THE JULY 22, 2016
BALTIMORE JEWISH TIMES

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Cover Story»



Putting the Past in
Perspective

Collage project provides tangible
tales of Holocaust survivors

By Daniel Nozick



Elie Wiesel

Elie Wiesel once said, "Without memory, there is no culture. Without memory, there would be no civilization, no society, no future." Memory is an important faculty, particularly to those of Jewish faith. On Passover we remember, on Tisha B'Av we remember — as a community we remember. This remembrance is the foundation for a growing, international art project known as the Holocaust Memory Reconstruction Project.

The project started with Lori Shocket, an artist born and raised in Los Angeles who learned her father's survival story late in life.

"Most of my life, I heard very little about his story until recent years," she said. "I started painting with my dad, and he would drive to my studio every single week, and we would paint together. And while we're painting one day, he started telling me a story. It was like someone flipped a switch, and I started to learn all of these incredible stories."

These stories that her father, also an artist, shared inspired Shocket to create a periodic table of human elements in the form of collages that tell the stories of Holocaust survivors and their families.

Photos courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Maryland, unless noted otherwise

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The memorabilia that the survivors bring to the workshop is proof that the horrors of the Holocaust happened.

The Jewish Museum of Maryland will be home to the Holocaust Memory Reconstruction Project's third exhibition, which will be on display for Yom Ha'Shoah in 2017. To create the art project, area survivors and their families assembled collages in June workshops, more of which will be held in the coming months, including one on July 31. Baltimore's exhibition follows a notable exhibition at the Simon Wiesenthal Center Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles in 2015 and a forthcoming display at the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne, Australia.

"We realized that the periodic table has all the elements but does not reflect in any way the human part, the emotional part, your feelings and experiences. We took it upon ourselves to put the human element

into the periodic table," Shocket said. "We wanted to take not only survivors, but families of survivors. Often it is second, third and even fourth generation that come together at one table to go

they're explored and looked at"

The workshops in each city provide Shocket with enough collages to create a periodic table of human elements. Each element represents an individual

"Sometimes, survivors are talking for the first time, and for the first time they're telling their stories to their grandchildren or even their great-grandchildren."

— Lori Shocket, artist and project creator

through all these pictures and documents that were at one time sitting in a box on the shelf or in an envelope somewhere, and then they're taken out, and

Holocaust survivor, and the atomic symbol represents the initials of a survivor, i.e. the symbol for the artist herself would be "Ls." Additionally, the atomic

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weight of elements is replaced by the age of the survivor or their family member at the time the collage was created. These “elements” are arranged around a dominating central feature labeled “Hu,” to represent the human element. So far, approximately 25 participants have contributed at least 50 collages to the future Baltimore exhibit.

Some stories have stuck with Deborah Cardin, deputy director of the Jewish Museum of Maryland. She recalled that at one workshop, a woman had brought an interesting picture of her daughter standing next to a tunnel. When Cardin inquired about it, she was informed that it was a picture of the tunnel that the participants’ mother had passed through after having her star ripped off by her own mother. She was told that on the other side of the tunnel she

would find a new family to care for her.

At a June 26 workshop at The Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore’s offices, Herbert Friedman recounted how in Vienna at age 13, he and a friend were recognized as heroes for saving a 19-year-old woman who tried to commit suicide over a failed love affair by throwing herself into the river. He and his friend jumped into the freezing winter water and somehow managed to save a woman. Friedman shared a photocopy of an article that was written up in the local Austrian newspaper about his heroism just a few years before the Holocaust began.

“Austria was anti-Semitic before even Hitler came. Jews were always characterized as being cowards,” Friedman recalled. “There was a big disagreement going on between newspapers because

it just so happened that the people who ran down the embankment and into the water were two Jews! And the one who ran to get the ambulance was Christian. I have articles at home which describe attacking the Christian newspapers for not recognizing the fact that the two boys who ran down were Jewish.”

Cardin explained that she first heard about the project when Shocket cold-called her. “I felt like she had come up with a project that really fit a need that we had, which was to record the stories of our local Holocaust survivors in a creative way that we could actually display in the museum,” Cardin shared. “Certainly, there are a lot of oral history projects, but something like creating collages is neat. You just can’t imagine what people experienced and how they survived.”

Shocket explained, “The idea between

The participants, says project creator Lori Shocket, “are putting all the pieces together, and they’re making a little visual vignette of their life and their history.”



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Newspaper clipping provided

Nr. 287 Wien, Sonntag

Zwei Jungen retten eine Lebensmüde.



Der 13jährige Hauptschüler Herbert Friedman (links) und der 15jährige Ernst Fleischer, die gemeinsam eine achtzehnjährige Lebensmüde aus dem Donaufanal gerettet haben.

Tausend neue Ehemänner bei der Exekutive.

Wie bereits berichtet, hat der letzte Ministerrat einen Gesetzentwurf über die Lockerung des Eheverbotes für Wachwachen und Zollbeamte fertiggestellt. Es ist damit zu rechnen, daß das Gesetz vor Weihnachten in Kraft treten wird. Damit wird einem langgehegten Wunsch der gesamten Exekutive Rechnung getragen.

Das Eheverbot für die Beamten des Exekutivdienstes ist im Jahre 1938 erlassen worden, weil damals wegen der politischen Unruhen die Notwendigkeit bestanden hat, größere Kontingente von Exekutivbeamten in Kasernen in ständiger Bereitschaft zu halten. Da sich seither die Verhältnisse gebessert haben, wird nun das Eheverbot gelockert und es werden in absehbarer Zeit etwa tausend Beamte des Exekutivdienstes die Erlaubnis zum Heiraten erhalten.

Von dieser Möglichkeit werden sofort nach Inkrafttreten des neuen Gesetzes mindestens dreihundert Wachbeamte Gebrauch machen, die bereits das dreißigste Lebensjahr überschritten haben. Insgesamt wird es zur Jahreswende wohl gegen tausend Ehepaare von Wachwachen, Gendarmen und Zollbeamten geben. Die zuständigen Organisationen haben bereits Vorbereitungen getroffen, um den zukünftigen Ehemännern auch Wohnungen zu beschaffen.

Todessturz auf dem Heimweg über eine Böschung.

Steinach-Str. 16, Oktober. Der 50jährige Betriebsleiter des Fallendurger C. Werkes, Heinrich Wackerhacker ist einem traurigen Unfall

Survivor Herbert Friedman (left) and his friend saved a woman's life when they were teenagers. Some newspapers did not report that the boys were Jewish because of anti-Semitism.

this whole thing that we do is that we find people to collaborate with, and through workshops and interactive exchange and hands-on development of a story, together we come up with an exhibition so that other people can be invited into the circle and to learn about whatever the topic is."

The most important part of the workshops is the memorabilia the survivors bring, she said. They are the essential elements of the story participants tell through collages; proof that these events actually happened and these individuals actually existed. "It was such a turbulent time, many survivors do not have any artifacts with them from the Holocaust," Shocket explained. She always brings bags of printed cutouts to workshops — yellow Jude stars, rail cars, images of the sign "Arbeit Macht Frei" over the entrance to Auschwitz.

Personal effects of family members are scanned and printed out to be "meticulously put together to tell a story on this 10-by-10 canvas." Shocket added, "In the case that there is no survivor, the children of survivors and then their children and so on create collages for their deceased family members."

Some people will only create one collage, while others will create as many as four. Shocket recalled that one man created collages for himself, his younger brother and both of his parents, all of whom were survivors. In other instances, searching through photographs reveals less-known characters who are inseparably tied to a survivor, which may prompt the creation of another collage.

"When they finish," Shocket said of families in attendance, "they're all so happy, because I think they kind of get a kick out of seeing the stories put back together. The

whole idea is that they're reassembling a very fragmented story, which has been going on for however many years since the war ended in 1945. So now they're putting all of the pieces together, and they're making a little visual vignette of their life and their history."

Shocket claims that the main purpose of the project is to inspire collaboration and communication among participants. "When Lori had talked about how the workshops take two-and-a-half to three hours, I couldn't imagine why," shared Cardin, "and really so much of it is the story sharing. People come and sit with their families and start looking through old photographs, and their memories are sparked. They start talking, and it is just such a beautiful process."

"Sometimes, survivors are talking for the first time, and for the first time they're telling their stories to their grandchildren or even great-grandchildren," Shocket said. This sentiment was expressed by Mark Friedman, the son of Herbert Friedman, who said "how difficult it is to remember and, at the same time, impossible to forget."

As the number of living Holocaust survivors shrinks, efforts such as the Holocaust Memory Reconstruction Project ensure that their legacies and the stories of their families live on.

For Shocket, the biggest takeaway from the workshops is that "so many [survivors] ended their stories saying, 'Well, I have six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren' and so on. Now there are even more Jews, and they have families and they're successful. Despite the tragedy of the Holocaust, as a people, we survived — triumphantly." Jr

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