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Gover Story» Putting the Past in Collage project provides tangible tales of Holocaust survivors By Daniel Nozick 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.





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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."

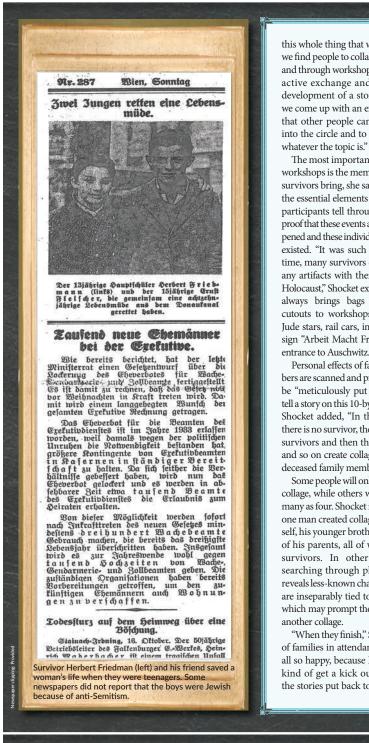
Shocket explained, "The idea between

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."









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

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

"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 greatgrandchildren' 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." JT

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