

ISSUES

Vol. 13•8

A MESSIANIC JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

A large, elegant brown ribbon bow is centered on the cover, partially overlapping the title text.

A Generation **REMOVED**

To commemorate Yom HaShoah, we asked five children of Holocaust survivors what effect the Holocaust has had on their childhood, adolescent and adult experiences. Whether their responses would reveal legacies of resentment or resolution, we were uncertain. It is our sincere hope that these five snapshots of the offspring of Holocaust survivors will compel you to read, and to remember...

Jonathan Bernd

son of Hans Bernd

Continued from page 1

My father, Hans Bernd, was ten years old when he fled Germany on one of the last trains of the Kindertransport to England in 1939. His sister left just before him. He had to make the journey to England alone, and leave his parents behind. They were killed in Auschwitz. Several other relatives were also sent to concentration camps. Many had sadistic experiments performed on them and most died. My great-aunt is the oldest living survivor from the infamous “Voyage of the Damned” on the St. Louis. All were traumatized by their experiences during the Second World War, and their struggles affected me as well.

As a young boy I did not really understand the Holocaust. I just knew Hitler killed my grandparents. I knew that we were Jewish, and that my father had been beaten up when he was my age just because he was Jewish, even by some of his teachers. I used to dream of being an underground hero who would rescue everyone should the Holocaust happen again.

When I was a little older, I noticed my dad did not express his feelings as openly as some people, and I remember my mother trying to explain to me that as a young boy, my father learned to hide his feelings. He had learned that his persecutors in Germany were less

abrasive if he didn't respond to their actions against him.

When I was a teenager trying to “find myself,” I realized much of my personal insecurities could be traced directly back to the fact that I was the child of a Holocaust survivor. I was very angry with the Germans for what they had done to my family. Some of my surviving relatives decided to stay in Germany, so I had been there quite a bit, but I still harbored resentment and anger towards the German people.

My father, who started to believe that Jesus was the Messiah before I was born, did find in his faith the ability to forgive the Nazis for what they had done to our family. When I was 22 years old, I came to the same belief as my father. I realized that God had forgiven me for ignoring him, for trying to figure out life on my own, and for so many other things. It was now my turn to forgive

others, including the Germans. Forgiving them was a monumental challenge for me, and no, it did not happen overnight. It was a process, but I am thankful for the healing that has taken place. When I visit Germany today, it is without that bitterness.

Forgiveness does not mean forgetfulness. I think it is important to remember and memorialize the Holocaust because too many people try to pretend it didn't happen, or that it was not as bad as it was. We need to be confronted with what we can become when we ignore God.

The world should learn a lesson through the Holocaust: that it is imperative that we raise our voices for what is right. The world's silence during the Holocaust killed my relatives. Likewise, I would be committing the same crime of silence if I did not mention that the only way to have healing from the traumas and hurts of the Holocaust is to have reconciliation with God that comes through Jesus. Without the Messiah, though it is almost impossible to imagine, the fate that awaits all of us at the end of our lives is much worse than the Holocaust. God forgive us if we keep that to ourselves.



*Jonathan Bernd
as a young boy*



Hans Bernd's "kinder card" used for travel out of Germany

Jhan Moskowitz

son of Max and Lilly Moskowitz

Some survivors do not tell their kids anything. They just don't. Some survivors tell their kids everything. When I was a little boy, I crawled into my father's lap and asked, "What is that number on your arm?" He didn't flinch, he told me he was in the concentration camps. He grew up outside of Lodz, Poland, and spent four and a half years in several work camps as well as Auschwitz. He did not explain in detail what he had been through, but he told me more as I got older. I asked him if he went to school, and he said that Jewish kids didn't get to go to high school. He told me that when he was growing up in Poland the week of Passover was terrible; his family never left the house. If they did, the priest would come out of the church with a big cross and kids would throw rocks and call them "Christ-killers."

My mother's name is Lilly, and she grew up in Maramush, which is between Hungary and Romania. She was in the camps for almost two years. Because my parents were Holocaust survivors, I grew up with a keen understanding of the fact that I was Jewish. There was never a time in my life when I did not recognize the great price our people paid for our existence.

When I got sick as a child I remember feeling a moral obligation to get better. Both my mother and father made me feel guilty if I got sick. I had to be strong and live to defeat the Nazis' intentions. Knowing the pain and suffering my parents endured meant that I could not complain about incidental problems. When I came home one day and said, "There is nothing to eat, let's go out," my father said to me sternly, "There is bread, there is a meal!" How can you tell a man who was so malnourished that eating a full meal would have killed him when he was liberated, that there is not enough food?

I constantly lived with a sense that the Holocaust could happen again. I'd visit someone's apartment or house and immediately I'd look under the stairs and think that would be a good place to hide. Most kids

don't think like that. There was also an "us and them" mentality. My father was a very joyous, loving man. But he had a terrible hatred of Germans. He worked through this later in his life, but when I was younger he'd say, "Don't turn your back on a German, they'll stab you in the back." I was raised in a pluralistic American society, and this was contrary to the values taught at school and in my somewhat liberal home. Clashes were inevitable.

I remember once I came home and told my family I was dating a German girl. Now, she wasn't German; she was American. Maybe one of her distant relatives a hundred years ago was German. But she wasn't Jewish, and it was like I had brought an SS guard into the house. My father's family was one of the most important things in his life, and so he wanted to protect us as much as he could.

My father really celebrated the fact that he was alive. When I asked him his birthday, he told me his age from the date he was liberated from the camp. He said he felt like he was brought back from the dead, or re-born. I learned to appreciate life from him.

But there was a bad side to being a child of a survivor. Despite his loving nature, my father had a horrendous temper. I remember the intense fury my father would unleash. Only later did I begin to understand that his flood of rage was a result of constantly having to suppress his emotions while he was in the camps.

I felt sad for my father. I felt he was ripped off, that his youth was stolen, that his faith was stolen. I found it remarkable that he was able to survive and to love and to laugh again. It's a great testimony to the strength of the human spirit, but I still feel like the Nazis robbed him.

In 1967 I went to Israel to work on a kibbutz. One day, someone on the kibbutz found me and said, "There's a police officer to see you." Of course, I was apprehensive. The police officer walked over to me, and



Jhan at 11 months

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started crying and hugging and kissing me. In broken Hebrew, he told me his name was Kozak. When the Nazis invaded Poland, they hung Kozak's sister, my father's first wife. My father had never told me he was married before. He never told me the Nazis hung his first wife.

I decided to visit Kozak in his home in Haifa. I was standing on the street with him and his family, when suddenly an old Jewish man came running down the street, and he said, "Is this Moishe's son?" Kozak smiled and said yes. And the man just fell upon me and he kissed me and he started telling me how much my father meant to him. I learned that because my father was a tailor, he had access to certain things like potatoes from the camp chef. He made sure people were fed. This man said my father saved his life, and the lives of many others.

That was a very telling moment, to discover for certain that my father was a hero. When I asked my father why he never told me these stories, he said he didn't feel as though he was keeping it from me, it just never came up.

The Holocaust has shaped much of my thinking and my worldview. I think the idea of humanism died fifty years ago; humanity can no longer believe that we are evolving into a better people. Germany was the pinnacle of humanism, and yet it brought us to Treblinka. If ever there was a doubt regarding the sinful human nature, it was resolved by the Nazis. We can have no more illusions of progress. Humanity is so steeped in its own sin that it was unable to resist even the most blatant of evil.

The person who has suffered through this kind of evil wants to understand how God can allow such suffering. There is a point at which you come to believe that you are allowed to go through the consequences of life, whatever they may be, because there is a greater good

that is going to happen. I say that with great reservation. I can't apologize for God; I can't give the correct theological answer to the question of pain, not to the one who has gone through it. It's not that God was powerless. It wasn't that God wasn't able and it wasn't that he didn't care. It's just that somehow, in God's mysterious ways, something good will come of this. I guess I just wait.

When I became a believer in Jesus, I came to my father with a Yiddish New Testament. I opened it up to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. I wanted my father to meet the real Jesus, not the one that's portrayed as a tank rolling into his neighborhood or the one who turned the gas on his parents, but the Jesus that talks about love.

The most perfect demonstration of God's love throughout all of history is the offering of the Messiah. So my father read the story, and for the most part he accepted that Jesus was a Jew and that there was good reason for me to be drawn to him. Then he got to the place where it says, "...forgive us as we forgive those who trespass against us." He closed the book and said, "I can't do this, I can't." He looked at me and said, "I would rather go to hell, knowing I could take the Nazis with me, than forgive them." I said, "Dad, they still win that way." He said, "I can't."

I once was asked by someone to extend forgiveness to the Nazis for what they did. You can't imagine what that did to me. So much of my identity was wrapped up in the consequences I had suffered because my parents were survivors. I sat down and prayed and said, "God, you really have to help me." I came to a place that my father couldn't come to. Forgiveness is not absolution, forgiveness is letting go of the hate. I don't think my father was ever able to do that. The Holocaust did that. For many of us, it ripped off the ability to forgive. And that's the worst thing.

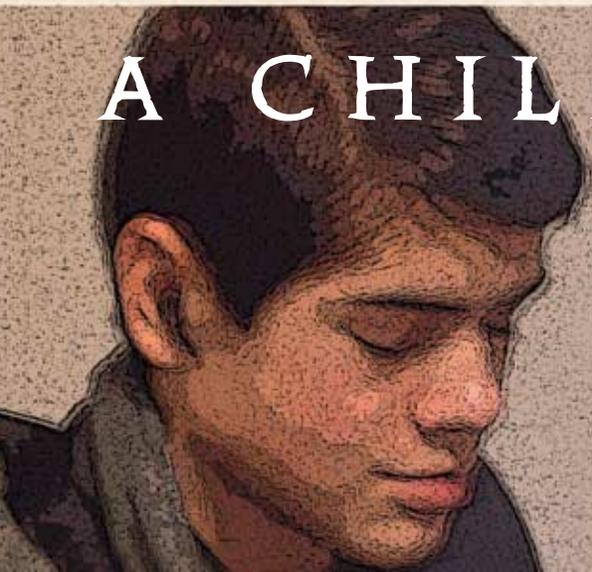
A CHILD QUESTIONS

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?¹

Why, O LORD, do you stand far off?

Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?²



Mark Landrum

son of Flora Landrum

My mother, Flora, was born towards the end of the Holocaust. Her family lived in Northern Greece, in the middle of a thriving Jewish community. Her father was part of the Greek underground resistance movement. When the Nazis told the Jewish community that they would be allowed to live if they cooperated, he didn't believe them. Instead, he decided to take his family into hiding. For part of the war, they hid with a Greek Orthodox priest. The rest of the time they hid in the woods. There was not nearly enough food for the whole family. Some of my mother's older brothers did not survive. Because my mother was the baby, she received most of the food. It is hard to imagine what her mother and father must have gone through, deciding which child would eat the little food they had, and which would go hungry.

The Nazis rounded up over half of the Jewish population in Greece and deported them to death camps. Most of the people in my mother's community perished. After the war my grandmother, grandfather, and their three surviving children sought to leave Greece and move to the United States. The Greek government would not let them leave. Rather, they stole their reparation funds from Germany. Eventually my grandmother gave the authorities so much grief that they finally let them leave. The Jewish Federation sponsored their immigration. They came to live in America when my mother was about eight years old. In the United

States, other children called her a "Christ-killer" before she even knew who Jesus was.

Even though my family was not very religious, because of my mother's experiences I always knew that we were Jewish. As a child I was glad to be Jewish, but feared the possibility of another Holocaust. I went to a Christian school located in the middle of a Jewish neighborhood and always felt like the "token Jew." I felt singled out; they all expected me to know the Hebrew Scriptures better than anyone else. One day, on the bus on the way to school, a kid threw a ham sandwich out the window while we were driving through the Jewish neighborhood. I was horrified. Knowing what my mother had been through made me much more sensitive to actions like this, I think. But I did not hide my Jewish identity. I treasured being able to celebrate Passover with my mother's family. I have good memories of special occasions like going to synagogue with my aunt during the High Holidays.



Mark in elementary school

I think it is important to remember what happened in the Holocaust and to try to prevent it from happening again. We have learned a very harsh lesson of how terribly humans can treat each other. The Holocaust displayed the incredibly sinful nature of humanity, and our need for forgiveness from God. Until humanity is reconciled to God, there will always be the possibility of another Holocaust. My mother was able to achieve her personal reconciliation to God through Jesus.

Continued on page 6

*I am my father's son:
His wounds embedded in my core
He bequeathed me more than a half-century's worth of tears
To weep on his behalf.
Will release ever come?
Will hate ever cease?
What of joy, laughter, what of song?*

*"You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.
A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come;
but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish
because of her joy that a child is born into the world.*

*So with you:
Now is your time of grief,
but I will see you again

and you

will

rejoice,*

And no one will take away your joy."³

1. Psalm 22:1 2. Psalm 10:1 3. John 16: 20b-22

Rahel Hirshenson Landrum

daughter of Sami Hirshenson

I remember when I was about ten years old, I found and read—with tears in my eyes—a report my dad wrote for the Romanian police, in which he described what he and his family went through during the pogroms and the Second World War. That was the first time I was introduced to what happened to my father during the Holocaust. I never asked him about it and he never mentioned it to me. Everything I learned I heard from my mom after he died.

My father, Sami Hirshenson, was born in Bucharest, Romania in 1923. He was 18 years old when the Romanian authorities forced Jewish people out of their jobs. He was fired from his job at a large electronic store, his parents' house was vandalized, everything destroyed and valuables stolen by Romanian mercenaries. Not long after that he was taken to a slave labor camp in Moldova. He and the other Jews were forced to dig trenches for the Nazis. If they did not meet their quota of trenches, they were severely punished, beaten and tortured to death. My father was young and able to work, but there were older people who found it too difficult to meet their quota, so younger people like my dad helped them.

They were given very little food. Most of the time they were starving. One day someone found a way out of the camp and went to steal food from the neighboring farms. My dad and his friends soon joined him. The stolen food enabled them to endure. One of my father's friends politely refused to join them in stealing food. He told my dad that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah and he came to the Jewish people. My dad knew he was starving like everyone else, but that his beliefs did not allow him to steal. So my dad offered him some of the food he stole himself. His friend again refused. This impressed my father. After more than a year of being in the labor camp, my dad was released. A friend of his decided to leave the

country and move to Israel. Not long after his friend's immigration to Israel, my dad heard he was killed in a mine explosion on a bridge. That put off my dad's plans to go to Israel for a while. He moved there after he was married, when I was bat mitzvah age. My mother became a believer in Jesus when I was 16. At the age of 18 I became a believer in Jesus, too, after

reading the messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Bible. My father became a believer in Jesus six months before he died of liver cancer in 1988.

Even now it is difficult for me to think about my father without being emotional, but as a child of a Holocaust survivor I feel I must talk about him and tell his story for the sake of others. It is difficult to imagine how these things were allowed to happen. Many Jewish people say, "Never again will we allow this to happen to us." The problem is that we can't

control other people's behavior. In fact, it can happen again. This is why we cannot rely on our own strength. We must trust the strength of God, who is able and willing to sustain us, and who never breaks his promises.

I often think about the first Jewish person who told my dad about the love of the Messiah in the middle of the terrible conditions of the labor camp. I remember my dad's peaceful face as he was lying in the hospital bed, having finally responded to that love forty years later. One of his favorite verses in the Bible was, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in [Messiah] Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38).



Rahel with her parents





Rob Wertheim

son of Fred Wertheim

My father, Fred, was born in Germany in 1925. The son of a baker, he lived in a village of 2,000 people. The town had very few Jews, ten families to be exact. As a young boy, my father had to look among the non-Jews for playmates.

By the time my father was eight, the Aryan philosophy of Hitler was gaining acceptance by most Germans. His best friends did not want to play with him anymore. His parents, who were prospering in the bakery business, held to the illusion that Hitler would lose his popularity and that things would get better once again for the Jews. Instead they got worse.

My dad's family finally decided to leave Germany for America. However, wanting to leave and getting out of the country were two different things. Because of immigration quotas, they needed to apply to the Consulate for clearance. They were number 48,878 on the list of families waiting to leave Germany.

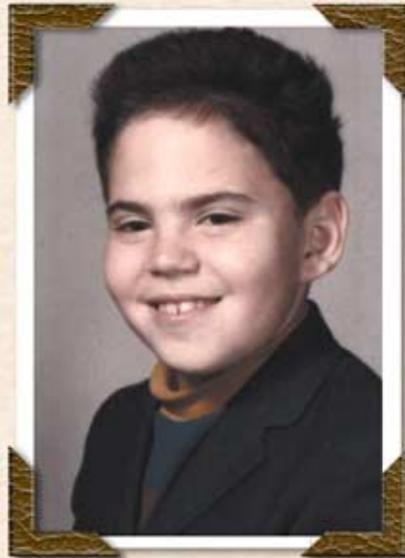
Meanwhile, on July 2, 1938, my father became bar mitzvah. He was the last Jewish boy in his district to have the ceremony. Four months later came Kristallnacht. His synagogue, along with hundreds of others, was destroyed. Six days later the Jewish children were expelled from the schools. At the same time, Jewish males 13 years and older were being conscripted for "labor camps." My father, small for his age, was overlooked. Before long, entire Jewish families were being deported to the death camps. Yet, for some mysterious reason, his family was spared. Their immigration number came up, and in May of 1941 they left what had become Hitler's Germany and traveled to America.

My father learned the English language quickly and, after having been in the States only two years, he was drafted into the U.S. Army. He took part in the invasion

of Europe on D-Day. He fought his way through France and across the Rhine River, ironically, into his native Germany, where he was captured by the Germans! My father overheard the Nazis say they planned to shoot their captives, yet for some reason they changed their minds and took my father to a prisoner of war camp. The conditions were terrible, but he managed to survive. The Allies eventually liberated the POWs, and my father was rescued from Hitler once again.

Knowing what my father had been through caused me to be doubtful of Christians, since I held Christianity responsible for the Holocaust. That was until I read the Scriptures and came to realize that humanity is sinful and that those who used Jesus' name to further their cause of anti-Semitism were following their own evil instincts, not the teachings of Jesus. Jesus taught people to love one another, and the fact that Jesus was a Jew further confirms that Christians who seriously follow Jesus' teachings should love Jewish people.

My brother Steve was the first one in our family to become a believer in Jesus. My father was extremely upset about Steve's newfound faith, so much so that when I, too, became a believer in Jesus, I was afraid to tell him. But on September 29, 1975 my father became convinced that Jesus is the Messiah spoken of in the Hebrew Scriptures. That night he actually saw a vision of Jesus standing in his bedroom doorway. I believe he needed something that extraordinary to overcome his years of narrow escapes from harrowing experiences. My father once remarked that he escaped from Hitler as a refugee, and then he was liberated as a prisoner of war, but he was never truly free until Messiah came into his life.



Rob—school days

SEEING AND BELIEVING

a review of *Survivor Stories*

60 minutes running time
Produced by Jews for Jesus

Video brings images to life in a way that few other forms of media can. And hardly any other theme provides as much vitality as the subject of *Survivor Stories*. The 60-minute documentary-style production tells in vivid detail the true accounts of several people who have at least three things in common: they are Jewish, Holocaust survivors, and have become believers in Jesus.

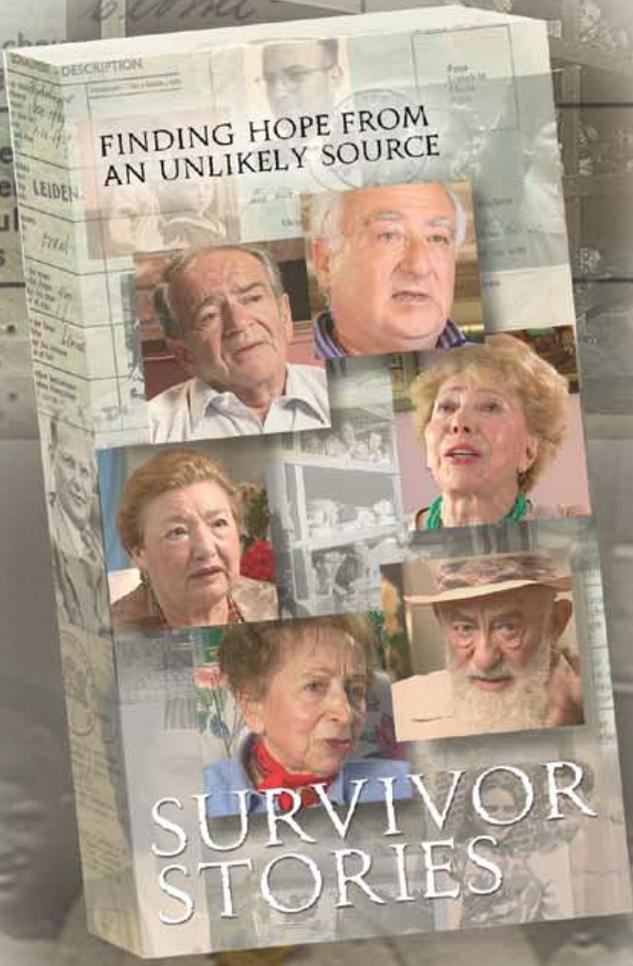
Many people ask the question, "How can anyone believe in God, let alone Jesus, after the Holocaust?" *Survivor Stories* simply allows men and women who actually endured the Holocaust to answer this question for themselves. The viewer is granted the enormous privilege of being invited, in a sense, into their living rooms. From the first close-up of Eliezer Urbach's face as he describes his life in Poland when Hitler came to power, to Dr. Vera Schlamm's and Rose Price's

recollections of their subhuman existence in multiple concentration camps, one cannot help but be gripped by these poignant chronicles. Especially heart-wrenching are Bob Kertesz's account of how he escaped the Jewish ghetto of Budapest only to be sent back, and Marion Parkhurst's encounter with the infamous Nazi butcher Dr. Josef Mengele, who visited her bedside after she delivered a baby in Bergen-Belsen.

The interviews with these remarkable people are interwoven with historical photographs and film footage. The juxtaposition of black-and-white clips with vibrant faces shining with hope as they recount their journeys before, during and after the Holocaust, does quite a bit to enhance the viewer's sense that this is a project about faith, not despair. The well-designed graphic treatments and sensitive musical touches lend continuity to the film so that it plays more like one narrative than a series of disjointed accounts. In truth, one hour seems insufficient to do these stories justice.

While some documentaries suffer from a detached air, such is not the case with *Survivor Stories*. It is apparent that there was a rapport between the off-screen interviewer and the subjects. The film feels as lovingly prepared as a priceless home movie, but is professionally produced. Certainly, the people featured in *Survivor Stories* deserve this kind of quality as much as they merit an audience.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then the value of this video is multiplied exponentially. Those of us who did not experience the Holocaust firsthand can never truly comprehend it, nor can we really understand how faith triumphs over such terror, but this reviewer is grateful for this unparalleled chance to journey deeply into the lives of these heroes. This treasure of a video will surely survive the test of time. —NR



I am not a believer in Jesus and I would like a free copy of *Survivor Stories*.

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