

The memory of the expulsion
& disappearance of the Jewish
community in Prekmurje

THE LAND OF SHADOWS

This book has a history...

The book *The Land of Shadows* was first published in 2012 as a result of the “Neglected Holocaust: Remembering the Deportation of Jews in Slovenia” project funded by the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (IHRA).

With the help of Slovenian Ambassador to Israel, Mrs Alenka Suhadolnik, the topic proved an interesting case study for a design student project.

This is why the book has three parts, the survivors, the Prekmurje micro-study and student artworks.

The Prekmurje micro-study of the legacy of the Holocaust in Slovenia is a story, which in many ways resembles the stories in other parts of Europe. Yet, in order to better incorporate it into the wider European context, the authors, the students who redesigned the book and who contributed their artworks, decided to include the photos of survivors and their children who now live in Israel. The redesign and the included artwork provide the students’ view on the legacy and understanding of the Holocaust at the beginning of the 21st century.

**WHAT WAS
ONE OF THE
SADDEST
CHAPTERS
IN HUMAN
HISTORY?**



Memories of Jewish families from the European countries prior to Second World War II

Before the war, Frida and Benjamin got married in Poland. When the war started, Benjamin was drafted and served as a soldier in Polish cavalry. Frida and the rest of the family fled to Russia, where she gave birth to Solomon in 1939.



Moses Kosteza was born in Zambrów, Poland. He survived Auschwitz-Birkenau and Mthozn. Ruth Kosteza Danzig was born Btzoft. During the Holocaust she was hid and saved by a Polish family.



Moni was an 18-year old from Sarajevo, Bosnia. Moni was incarcerated in Italian concentration camp on Rab Island in what is today Croatia. Later on, Moni fought as a Tito's partisan, while his father and brother did not survive the Holocaust.



Tosiano family, Sarah and their children: Aster, Miriam, Haya, Lea, Malka and Shmuel, survived the war thanks to the family business. After they were transferred to Russia they knitted and sewed fur coats for Romanian and Russian soldiers. The father, Isaac, was a soldier in the Romanian army and was only reunited with his family after the war.



Hanna and Gdalyia Vishnia and their baby Isaac. Hanna and Gdalyia got married in 1945, immediately after the war. In the picture we see Hanna, Gdalyia baby Issac and other family members.



Michael and his family lived in Ostrog, Poland. At the beginning of the war Michael joined the Red Cross and fought against the Nazis. At the same time, Rosa and her family lived in Chisinau. During a bombing her entire family was killed. Rosa and her mother managed to escape the bombing and survived.



Sophia and Anna were born in the famous Mila Street, Warsaw, which was later on the site of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. In 1940 they managed to get false documents, escape the ghetto and come to Berlin. There they made it to the end of the war disguised as Christian Poles working in an ammunition factory.



Prologue

1944 marked the end of an era in Prekmurje, the northeastern province of Slovenia, which was occupied by Hungary from 1941 to 1944 and then by Nazi Germany until 1945. A land that used to be home to a community of three or four languages, three religions and a multitude of different customs was, almost overnight, robbed of people who had, over the previous two centuries, crucially contributed to its economic and cultural development.

It began on an April morning and ended with a November announcement of winter, when the province between the rivers Mura and Raba lost all trace of the members of the Jewish families Sonnenfeld, Hiršl, Weiss, Ebenšpanger, Berger, Arvay and Schwartz... The Nazis, assisted by the Hungarian armed police forces, expelled the Jewish community. This included men, women and children regardless of their age or health.

This is their story or, more precisely, a humble attempt at narrating the reasons why they had to leave and why nothing has remained of their rich culture but tombstones, obscure family stories and half-forgotten names. This makes a person who delves into the history of the province sometimes feel as if they are being drowned in a land of shadows.

The more we struggle to understand how and why this could have happened, the more questions are raised, questions which we will probably never know the final answers to.

Yet, the most confusing question of all is why so little has been known about this tragedy until recently, why the memory of it has been so cryptic and, finally, why some of the houses, workshops, prayer rooms etc. have been either demolished or changed beyond recognition.



WHY, then...?

Why is the plan for the destruction of Jews one of the saddest episodes in human history?

Why do we call it the **Holocaust** rather than the **Shoah** as the Jewish community does?

And finally: Why did the plan for the destruction of Jews find so many supporters throughout Europe and the world? Who bears the responsibility for the fact that during the course of five years almost six million Jews of all ages and standings perished in concentration camps, labour camps and secret killing locations?

Women and children, the young and old, the sick and the healthy alike were killed indiscriminately.

Why is it, that seven decades after the first reports of systematic killing of Jews appeared, we still cannot understand: How could this have happened? Who is to blame? Why did this happen at that particular point in time?

Holocaust

(Gr. holókaustos: hólos, “whole” and kaustós, “burnt”)

in Greek, this term denotes a Jewish sacrificial offering that is burned completely on an altar. Presently, the term stands for the systematic murder of Jews, Slavs, and the Roma people, as well as the mentally and physically disabled, by Nazi Germany during World War II.

Shoah

(Hebrew HaShoah, “catastrophe”)

the Biblical word “shoah” became the standard Hebrew term for the Holocaust in the 1940s, used especially in Europe and Israel. Most Jews prefer to use the term “shoah”, mainly for theological reasons, as they associate the term “Holocaust” with ancient Greek pagan rituals.

Who were the people who elicited so much hatred and contempt? Was it really just hatred? What about jealousy, fear, insecurity...? Did Slovenian Jews share the same fate? What happened to them?

The questions keep on coming, so we better start finding answers. We should first try to answer the most fundamental questions: Who are Jews and why did they suffer such a devastating fate in the middle of the 20th century?

Did the massacre have anything to do with Jews themselves... Or did the blame lie squarely on those who decided that Jews were to be exterminated? What about those who knew about it and did nothing to stop it?

Given that, despite irrefutable evidence, there are still some individuals who try to minimise the blame of the perpetrators, let us be clear at the very beginning: The sole responsibility for the **genocide** of Jews rests on its perpetrators, or rather on those who devised it and those who executed it.

Genocide

(Gr. genos – “race” and a lat. occidere – “kill”)

is any form of systematic murder, in full or in part, of a national, ethnic, racial or religious community.



Adolf Eichman

Adolf Eichmann was without doubt one of the key organisers responsible for the Holocaust. Directly subordinated to Adolf Hitler, the person most responsible for the execution of the “**final solution to the Jewish question**”, Eichmann organised the **deportation** and mass murder of Hungarian Jews, including those from the Slovenian province of Prekmurje. After the war, Eichmann escaped to Argentina, where he was tracked down by the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad fifteen years later. Mossad agents secretly transported him to Israel, where he was found guilty and sentenced to death in a public trial.

“**Final solution to the Jewish question**”

(Ger. Endlösung der Judenfrage)

was the National Socialist term for the envisioned killing of all Jews living in Germany and all occupied territories that were under the control of the German Reich. Adolf Hitler already made his intention to annihilate the Jewish community publicly known on 30th January 1939. The expression “final solution to the Jewish question” was first used on 12th March 1941 by Adolf Eichmann, Head of the Department for Jewish Affairs of the Reich Main Security Office. By that date, thousands of Jews in Poland had already been killed in mass executions by specialised SS squads, and even the first deportations of Polish Jews to ghettos and concentration camps had then taken place. From 22nd June 1941 onwards, German military units entering the Soviet Union were followed by special squads with the task of completing “the full-scale extermination of Jews”. The plan for a large-scale organisation of the “final solution to the Jewish question” was further elaborated on 20th January 1942 at a conference held in Berlin’s suburbs, on the shores of Wannsee Lake. In September 1941 – four months before the “Wannsee Conference” – the first gassing experiments were performed in Auschwitz. The following October, the first order for the deportation of Jews from the German Reich was issued. On 23rd October all Jews were prohibited from emigrating. In December, mass murders began in the Polish Chelmno extermination camp, where victims were lured into mobile gas chambers that were then fed engine exhaust fumes. Between 1942 and 1945, mass transportation devices shipped Jews from all territories under National Socialist power to concentration and extermination camps. According to the results of studies based almost exclusively on SS documents, approximately six million Jews were victims of the Final Solution.



For More Info
Quick Scan

Deportation/ deportees

a process in which a person is first stripped of their freedom and property and then “transported” to a concentration camp.

Why do we stress guilt and responsibility at the very beginning?

Partly because after World War II many attempted to throw the blame on their superiors, saying, “It was our duty to follow orders”, while those who gave orders tried to avoid punishment by claiming that their hands were not stained with blood.

Despite the overwhelming body of evidence, many still claim that the Holocaust never happened, that there were no concentration or extermination camps built to execute people and that prisoners died only of war-related disease and scarcity. The fact is that extermination camps did exist and were used to “industrialise” murder.

But let's go back to the beginning and take a look at where hatred towards Jews stems from and when it started.

Therefore: Since when?

Although the answers to this question may differ, we can see from history that Jews have often evoked hatred and fear, as well as feelings of superiority, inferiority, envy, malice and other negative emotions. To put it more accurately: these feelings could be perceived when Jewish people came into contact with their neighbours, especially during their first encounter with European peoples. Since this was more commonly perceived and intensified during the Middle Ages, the persecution of Jews was more severe during the so-called High Middle Ages, despite the fact that Jews played an important role in the emergence of its first cities.

All of the above provoked feelings of disgust, but also feelings of respect and awe. The second reason for hostility and distrust was the Jewish religion itself, and the ways it affected everyone’s daily life, making it significantly different from the life of Christians.

The Jewish community was also noticeably different in the clothes they wore and the food they ate. Towards the end of the 19th century, Jews were even ascribed certain physiological attributes that we still tend to associate with Jewish stereotypes, including large noses, black shiny eyes, black hair and beards.

We often forget that this way of life was integrated into Jewish culture as early as the Middle Ages. With stereotypes and labels, Jews became “marked and recognisable”, and were hence often perceived as a threat. Any kind of integration into the rest of society thus became impossible.

This meant that Jews:

- * were not allowed to become artisans
- * were not allowed to own land
- * were forced to dress differently
- * were forced to live in designated areas



For Animation
Quick Scan



"Germans, do not forget!" A bad-natured caricature depicting the wealthy Jews alleged betrayal of Germany during World War.

Deutsche,
denkt daran!

Ever since the mid-Middle Ages Christian depictions of Jews and their customs have also portrayed certain rituals revealing Jewish hatred or malice towards non-Jews. In these depictions, we can witness Jews performing malicious acts, such as sacrificing the blood of Christian children or poisoning wells, which was the reason for Christian anti-Semitism.

Physical characteristics became subject to systematic studies only at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, stirring particular interest among medical doctors and other scientists investigating “human races”. While most studies exhibited unbiased scientific interest, some regrettably amounted to a completely unscientific assessments of individual traits.

Unscientific studies were mainly conducted by enemies of Jews, or anti-Semites, who based their prejudice against various races and peoples on supposedly scientific findings. To demonstrate their point, they employed the principles of so-called Social Darwinism, a theory that compares the origin and evolution of animal species to the origin and evolution of human races and nations.

In Social Darwinist theory, Darwin’s findings on natural selection and the survival of the fittest no longer applied only to individuals but began to determine the fate of whole communities. In a century marked by the establishment of nation states, societies were no longer simply groups of people settled in a common territory, but were now bound together by a common origin or, in anti-Semitic and racist terms, by the same blood.

Modern anti-Semitism is therefore a combination of biased racial theory and long-established hatred of Jews. At the beginning of the 20th century, widespread anti-Semitism

Racism

is an ungrounded theory that there are innate differences among human beings. In this view, one group of people is valued more than the other, which often leads to abuse and discrimination.

Anti-Semitism

until the 19th century, anti-Semitism was most often based on Christian or Muslim interpretations of the Jewish religion (for example, Christians held Jews responsible for the death of Jesus Christ). For this reason, Jews were often the main targets of religious violence and persecution.

Religious anti-Semitism was directed predominantly against religion and not against people of Jewish descent who converted to another religion.

Economic anti-Semitism is based on stereotypes about Jewish people’s chosen profession and economic status quickly led to the

stereotypically characterised Jews as hook-nosed schemers and murderers of children. Christian anti-Judaism, on the other hand, stemmed from a different interpretation of the Holy Bible. These prejudices soon became the basis for modern racist anti-Semitism, the new development which was largely established on the findings of “racial science”.

Such “findings” helped establish anti-Semitic racial scales, which ranked human races from pure Aryan (from northern Europe) to non-Aryan. Slavs were classified as considerably inferior, whereas Jews, Roma and Sinti were ranked at the very bottom of the racial scale. According to racists, this lowest category also included black people.

An important time to mention here is the period of World War I, which, according to German racists, Germany lost also because of Jews. Namely, after 1919 many interpretations in the popular German press portrayed Jews as war profiteers who let the German army down or even purposefully harmed it in pursuit of their own selfish goals.

This is where the story begins about the conditions that led to the so-called Final Solution to the Jewish question, the Nazi’s plan to destroy the European Jewish people.

In order to understand this, we have to go back to Germany between the two world wars, when Hitler’s National Socialists Party was founded. Although anti-Semitism had been spread across all of Europe for years, it was certainly most prominent in defeated, post-WWI Germany.

characterisation of Jews as wealthy, greedy, heartless businessmen.

Racial anti-Semitism from the 19th century onwards became the prevalent form of anti-Semitism and was based on anthropological ideas from the Enlightenment period. Because of racial science, the hatred or prejudice against Jews as believers is replaced by the idea that Jews are a racial group that is, irrespective of their religious belief or customs, inherently inferior or unworthy.



For More Info
Quick Scan

Racial science

(scientific racism)

draws on the works of 18th-century scientists to employ the use of scientific techniques and hypotheses to sanction the belief in racial superiority or racism.

National Socialism / Nazism

Nazism was built on the German extreme right-wing racist nationalist movement and the violent anti-communist campaign. After World War I, Adolf Hitler used this ideology in an attempt to encourage workers to turn away from communism and embrace popular nationalism. At first the Nazis advocated anti-capitalism and anti-bourgeois viewpoints, which they later replaced with anti-Semitism and anti-Marxism. Nazism promoted the superiority of the Aryan race, which they claimed could only evolve by preserving its purity and instinct for self-preservation. In this respect, the greatest threats to the Aryan race were Jews, as well as homosexuals, Slavs, Roma, black people, political opponents, along with the mentally and physically disabled.



For More Info
Quick Scan



Watchtower in a concentration camp, Poland.

During the last seventy years, this subject has inspired a vast production of scholarly and literary works, as well as many fictional and documentary films. One of the particularly intriguing ways of presenting the Holocaust is in graphic novels, which over the past twenty-five years became a distinguished approach to historical representation. From this point on, we are going to rely on excerpts from two graphic novels: Jason Lutes' Berlin and Art Spiegelman's Maus. These authors found a particularly telling way of describing the events that led to the Holocaust and the genocide itself.

Let's take a look at how Jason Lutes depicted the life of Jewish children in 1930s Berlin, after Nazi propaganda influenced public opinion.



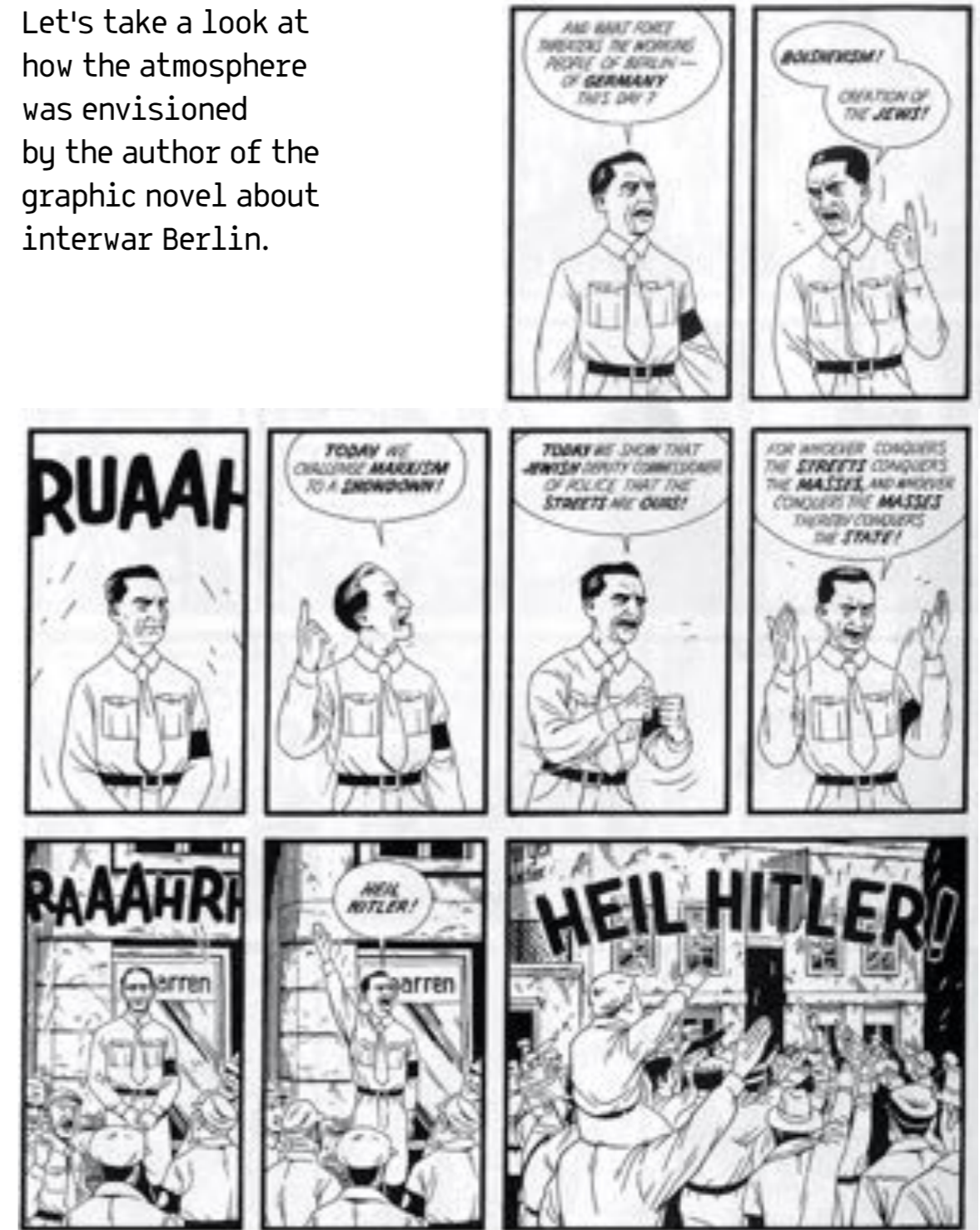
Grown-ups preferred to hide the truth from their children, which is also evident from the accounts of the rare Slovenian Jews who survived the horrors of a German concentration camp. They remember that during the war some people would help Jewish refugees from Austria, which Hitler had annexed as early as 1938. But they knew nothing about the reasons for their plight – just as they did not know that Germany was sending Jews to concentration and extermination camps and began systematically killing them a little more than two years into the war.

On the other hand, grown-ups tried to prepare themselves, if only for the worst. One of the survivors we spoke to offers a very illustrative account of this time of preparation by recalling that a few weeks before she was sent away to a concentration camp her parents took her and her sister to their family woodshed and showed them where they hid the family jewellery and her father's education certificates.

But that was later on. Before the war, the hatred towards Jews and people of different opinions was inflamed also by a severe economic crisis. In combination with rigorous demands for war reparation payments, the crisis was especially severe in Germany, where political extremists, including Hitler, emerged in force in the early 1930s.

However, the Nazis also targeted their political opponents, primarily communists and socialists, whom they denounced as Bolsheviks. The ideological leaders of Nazism (Joseph Goebbels, Heinrich Himmler, Adolf Hitler etc.) even tried to convince people that the greatest responsibility for the spread of Bolshevism lay with Jews.

Let's take a look at how the atmosphere was envisioned by the author of the graphic novel about interwar Berlin.



Neither the Germans nor Jews could have ever anticipated that this kind of hatred and intolerance would lead to such an incomparable catastrophe. The extraordinary carelessness of the coalition parties was made clear after Germany's last free election before WWII, in 1933, when they gave Hitler enough support to form a strong coalition.



What the election would mean soon became evident, since Hitler did not hide his ambitions. Most of his political plan laid out in his book, *My Struggle (Mein Kampf)*, was put into effect immediately after winning the election. The adoption of racial legislation or, more accurately, the Blood Protection Act was part of the so-called Nuremberg Laws, which classified Jews as second-class citizens. Hitler paid particular attention to the economic and cultural destruction of Jews.

Members of Jewish communities were prohibited from nearly everything: from pursuing lucrative and prestigious professions to marrying non-Jews. Those who failed to comply with the legislation were subject to punishment by the law, along with ridicule and violence.

On top of everything, Jews also became unwelcome wherever their presence did not happen to be directly forbidden. Signs stating “Juden sind hier unerwünscht”, or in English “Jews are not welcome here”, or simply “Juden unerwünscht”/“Jews not welcome” appeared across public spaces.

1938 was marked by a campaign of arson and plunder against Jewish property, which followed a policy of ostracising the Jewish population from society. These policies meant that state officials could only be Aryan, that Jews were prohibited from certain jobs, and that Jewish shops were boycotted. In addition, new concentration camps were established.

The first camps opened soon after the 1933 election and were initially intended mostly for non-Jews, i.e. political opponents and criminals. Later on, the camps were increasingly used to detain numerous other groups and individuals who failed to meet the Nazi political and moral norms. Particularly after the beginning of World War II, Jews, Roma, Slavs and prisoners of war were deported and interned in concentration and extermination camps.

Germans and their collaborators introduced similar measures in the occupied territories, where they built “death factories”.

“Death factory” refers to a system of **concentration and extermination camps**, the most infamous being Auschwitz or Auschwitz-Birkenau, which Jewish prisoners were first being deported to in 1942 and where they were systematically killed starting one year later.

Concentration and extermination camps

are camps in which regime opponents, “public enemies” and members of ethnic minorities are detained for the purposes of re-education or extermination. The first concentration camps in Nazi Germany were founded in 1933, with Dachau already founded in March 1933. The number of concentration and extermination camps quadrupled between 1938 and 1942. In this period, many became complicit in the systematic murder of Jews and other “unworthy” groups.


Concentration camps forced prisoners to do hard labour until they died of exhaustion; prisoners also died as a result of torture and medical experiments, malnutrition, epidemics and poor hygiene.

In extermination camps they were killed in gas chambers and mass executions, their bodies were then burnt in crematoria or buried in mass graves.



Map of Nazi concentration and extermination camps.

 Concentration camps.

 Concentration and extermination camps.

The way Jews were collected and transported to camps from local and regional centres across most of Central and Eastern Europe is most graphically illustrated by the American comic-book artist, Art Spiegelman. In his graphic novel *Maus*, he describes how his father, Vladek Spiegelman, experienced the extermination camp.



WE WERE SO HAPPY WE CAME THROUGH. BUT WE WROCKED NOW—WERE OUR FAMILIES SAFE?



LOOK! THERE'S POPPA, WITH BRACK AND SONIA!



WE SAW WOLFE AND TOHA. OUR FAMILY SEEMS TO BE OKAY. DID YOU SEE, MY FATHER?

I COULDN'T SEE ANYWHERE MY FATHER.

BUT LATER, SOMEONE WHO SAID HE TOLD ME... WE CAME THROUGH THIS SAME COUSIN OVER TO THE GOOD SIDE.



SPIEGELMAN TO THE RIGHT.

THEN CAME FELA TO REGISTER...

HER, THEY SENT TO THE LEFT. FOUR CHILDREN WAS TOO MANY.



FELA!



MY DAUGHTER! HOW CAN SHE MANAGE ALONE—WITH FOUR CHILDREN TO TAKE CARE OF?

AND, WHAT DO YOU THINK? HE SNEAKED ON TO THE BAD SIDE!



AND THOSE ON THE BAD SIDE NEVER CAME ANYMORE HOME.

THOSE WITH A STAMP WERE LET TO GO HOME. BUT THERE WERE VERY FEW JEWS NOW LEFT IN SOGNOWIEC...



ONE FROM THREE THEY KEPT AT THE STADIUM... MAYBE 10,000 PEOPLE—AND WITH THEM, MY FATHER.

WELL... IT'S ENOUGH FOR TODAY. YES, ANKE?...!



WHEN DID YOU FIRST HEAR ABOUT ANSCHWITZ?

RIGHT AWAY WE HEARD...



EVEN FROM THERE—FROM THAT OTHER WORLD—PEOPLE CAME BACK AND TOLD US, BUT WE DIDN'T BELIEVE.



THEN THIS SAME NEWS CAME MORE AND MORE, SO WE BELIEVED. AND LATER ON WE SAW—EVEN WORSE!

AFTER WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GRANDPARENTS IT WAS A FEW MONTHS QUIET. THEN IT CAME: POSTERS EVERYWHERE AND SPEECHES FROM THE GEMEINDE...



FELLOW JEWS: ON WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12TH, EVERY ONE OF YOU, YOUNG AND OLD, MALE AND FEMALE, HEALTHY AND SICK, MUST REGISTER AT THE DIENST STADIUM...

OH NO!

HOW WORSE?



...THERE'S NO CAUSE FOR ALARM—IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF INSPECTING YOUR DOCUMENTS AND STAMPING THEM. THIS WILL PROTECT YOU AS CITIZENS OF THE REGION!

I'M NOT GOING. IT'S A NAZI TRAP!

EVERYBODY WAS WORRIED.



—AND OUR JEWISH COMMITTEE IS HELPING THOSE MURDERERS. GOD KNOWS WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO US AT THE STADIUM!

WELL, THEY JUST INSPECTED JEWISH DOCUMENTS IN SOME NEARBY TOWNS. IT WAS NO BIG DEAL.

ANYWAY, WE'VE GOT TO GO. WITHOUT LEGAL PAPERS, WE'RE LOST!

TO GO, IT WAS NO GOOD. BUT, NOT TO GO—IT WAS ALSO NO GOOD.

MY FATHER—HE HAD 62 YEARS—CAME BY STREETCAR TO ME FROM DABROWA, THE VILLAGE NEXT DOOR FROM SOSNOWIEC.



HERE'S A COOKIE, RICHIEU. AVNIT FELA BAKED IT FOR YOU. SAY THANK YOU TO GRANDPA.

AFTER MY MOTHER DIED WITH CANCER, HE LIVED THERE IN THE HOUSE OF MY SISTER FELA AND HER FOUR SMALL CHILDREN.



I NEED YOUR ADVICE, VLADIEK. SHOULD I GO TO THE STADIUM ON WEDNESDAY, OR WIDE AT HOME?



I DON'T KNOW. I'M NOT EVEN SURE WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO. ANJA'S MOTHER SAYS SHE ISN'T GOING. SHE'S SICK AND AFRAID.



AT LEAST ANJA'S FATHER, LOLEK AND I ALL WORK AT THE GERMAN WOODSHOP. WE'RE A LITTLE SAFER. BUT YOU DON'T WORK. YOU HAVE NO TRIFERS. YOU DON'T HAVE ANYTHING!



WELL, OUR COUSIN MORDECAI SAYS HE'LL BE AT ONE OF THE INSPECTION TABLES. I COULD BRING MY PAPERS TO HIM... WHAT DOES FELA SAY?



SHE'S NOT SURE... BUT IF FELA DECIDES TO GO, OF COURSE I'LL GO WITH HER. GIVE ME ANOTHER COOKIE! RICHIEU!

REALLY, I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO ADVISE HIM.



BUT FINALLY HE DID GO. PEOPLE WERE AFRAID TO NOT SHOW UP. SO IT CAME TO THE STADIUM ALMOST ALL THE JEWS OF SOSNOWIEC, AND FROM THE OTHER VILLAGES NEAR, MAYBE 25 OR 30,000 PEOPLE.

The latter is also recounted in the story of Art Spiegelman's father, who arrived in Auschwitz in the dead of winter.



EVERYWHERE WE HAD TO RUN—SO LIKE JOGGERS—AND THEY RAN US TO THE SAUNA... IT'S FREEZING! JUST THANK GOD IT'S NOT GAS! HERE IT WAS THE LIVE SHOWERS, NOT THE DEAD GAS SHOWERS WHAT WE HEARD SOMETIMES RUMORS.



IN THE SHOW THEY THREW TO US PRISONERS CLOTHINGS. ONE GUY TRIED TO EXCHANGE. SCHNELL! SCHNELL! SCHNELL! E-EXCUSE ME. THESE SHOES ARE TOO SMALL. THEY NEVER EVEN LOOKED ON WHAT SIZE THEY THREW.



MAYBE NOW THEY'LL FIT! I WAS A LUCKY ONE. EVERYTHING FITTED ME A LITTLE. ONLY THE SHIRT WAS TORN AND TOO BIG FOR ME... CRACK! THE SHOES WERE WOOD SHOES! THEY REGISTERED US IN... THEY TOOK FROM US OUR NAMES AND HERE THEY PUT ME MY NUMBER.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE JEWS IN SLOVENIA?

Before we answer this question, we must first learn some basics about the Jewish community in the territory of present-day Slovenia.



The survivors from concentration camps after their return to Prekmurje, 1945.

The first Jews arrived to the territory that today is Slovenia during the period of emerging hamlets, settlements and towns. Only rare places were granted town or market town rights without the help of Jewish settlers. Most Jewish families came to the territory of present-day Slovenia either from Carinthia or from the Rhineland and then settled in Trieste, Gorizia, Ljubljana, Maribor and Ptuj. The first verifiable mention of their settlement refers to Ljubljana or, rather, its **synagogue** in the early 13th century. References to Jews in Maribor, Ptuj, Celje and Slovenj Gradec can be found somewhat later, in the first half of the 14th century. At a later date, sources also mention Jews in Slovenska Bistrica.

The constantly strained relations between native populations and Jewish communities underwent a considerable change in the second half of the 15th century, when the Inner Austrian provincial estates demanded from Emperor Frederick III that he banish Jews from Carinthia and Styria, in return for monetary compensation. His son and heir to the throne, Maximilian I, finally yielded to the pressure and issued an eviction notice on 18th March 1496, which not only held Jews accountable for the eruption, spread and consequences of contagious diseases, but also accused them of so-called “host desecration”, which referred to the killing of Christian children and the poisoning of wells.

Jewish settlers in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy earned their livelihood as merchants trading in wine, wood, horses etc., with their partners scattered around the greater part of the Balkans, the central Austrian provinces, Hungary and northern Italy. In the 15th century, Jews from Maribor and Ljubljana established an especially lucrative trade with Venice, from where they imported various kinds of commodities, such as silk, spices, precious stones, and gold. Apart from being merchants, sources also cite Jewish settlers as seal makers, goldsmiths, medical practitioners and landowners.

Synagogue

(gr. *synagogē*)

is a community centre or a Jewish place of gathering, where people pray, study and meet. In modern communities, a synagogue also includes a room designated to religious studies and a library.



Theatre ensemble from Dolenci, 1934.

The biggest and most influential medieval Jewish community in the Slovenian territory was in Maribor, which is also confirmed by a considerable number of documents kept in the Regional Archives Maribor. These documents contain the first mention of the synagogue in Maribor, which dates back to 1429.

Even though the Jewish community in Maribor was younger than the community in Ptuj, the memory of it is much stronger, mostly thanks to a long line of generations of the Marpurgo family, whose many members had established contacts with Florentine bankers. Yet, despite their various trade activities and extensive connections, medieval Jewish quarters have left only a faint mark on Slovenian towns. This was because there was only a relatively small number of Jewish families present in Slovenia and their settlement pattern was rather dispersed. In other words, Jews in Slovenian towns were not limited to individual quarters from which ghettos would later emerge, but to individual houses and streets that later often became called a “Jewish” street or alley. In any event, every such designation required special permission.

Until the end of the 18th century, Jews remained in the margins of the Slovenian provinces. The restoration of the Jewish community in the Slovenian territory was made possible by the modernisation of the economy, which slowly also reached Prekmurje. In 1778, Lendava, too, recorded its first fourteen Jewish settlers. Then, in the middle and the second half of the 19th century, a fair number of Jewish families settled in Beltinci and Murska Sobota.

Ghetto

The term “ghetto” can be traced back to the establishment of a Jewish quarter in Venice in 1516. This was the first case of officially sanctioned segregation of Jews in Europe (although Jewish quarters already existed before). In the 16th and 17th centuries, this practice spread across Europe, as local and state authorities ordered the creation of ghettos for Jews in the biggest European cities at the time, such as Frankfurt, Rome and Prague. The aim of this segregation was to put the Jewish population under strict regulation. Through time, the concept of the ghetto and its characteristics changed considerably. From a “Jewish quarter”, the area of a city traditionally inhabited by Jews, to an ethnically homogenous and, as a rule, unruly and poor segregated area that can be found in many cities of the world today. Throughout history, ghettos were places of poverty and exclusion. A wall, reinforcing exclusion, usually surrounded ghettos. By the end of the 19th century, Jewish ghettos were being abolished and their walls were torn down. The regime of

ghettoisation, or the segregation of the Jewish population from the non-Jewish population, was revived by Nazi Germany. During World War II, Nazi Germany established its own system of Jewish ghettos in Eastern Europe, aiming to terrorise, control, segregate and exploit Jews. In German-occupied Poland alone, the Nazis established at least 1,000 ghettos. During World War II, Germany concentrated the municipal and sometimes regional Jewish population in the ghettos, thus separating certain Jewish communities from non-Jewish population, as well as from other Jewish communities. The first such ghetto was established in Piotrków Trybunalski, Poland in 1939. The biggest was the Warsaw ghetto, with more than 400,000 inhabitants. Some ghettos existed for only a few days, others for months or years. Living conditions were also made terrible due to malnutrition, unbearable hygienic standards, violence and disease. With the implementation of the “Final Solution” in 1942, the ghettos were eliminated. Their residents were either shot or deported to extermination camps.

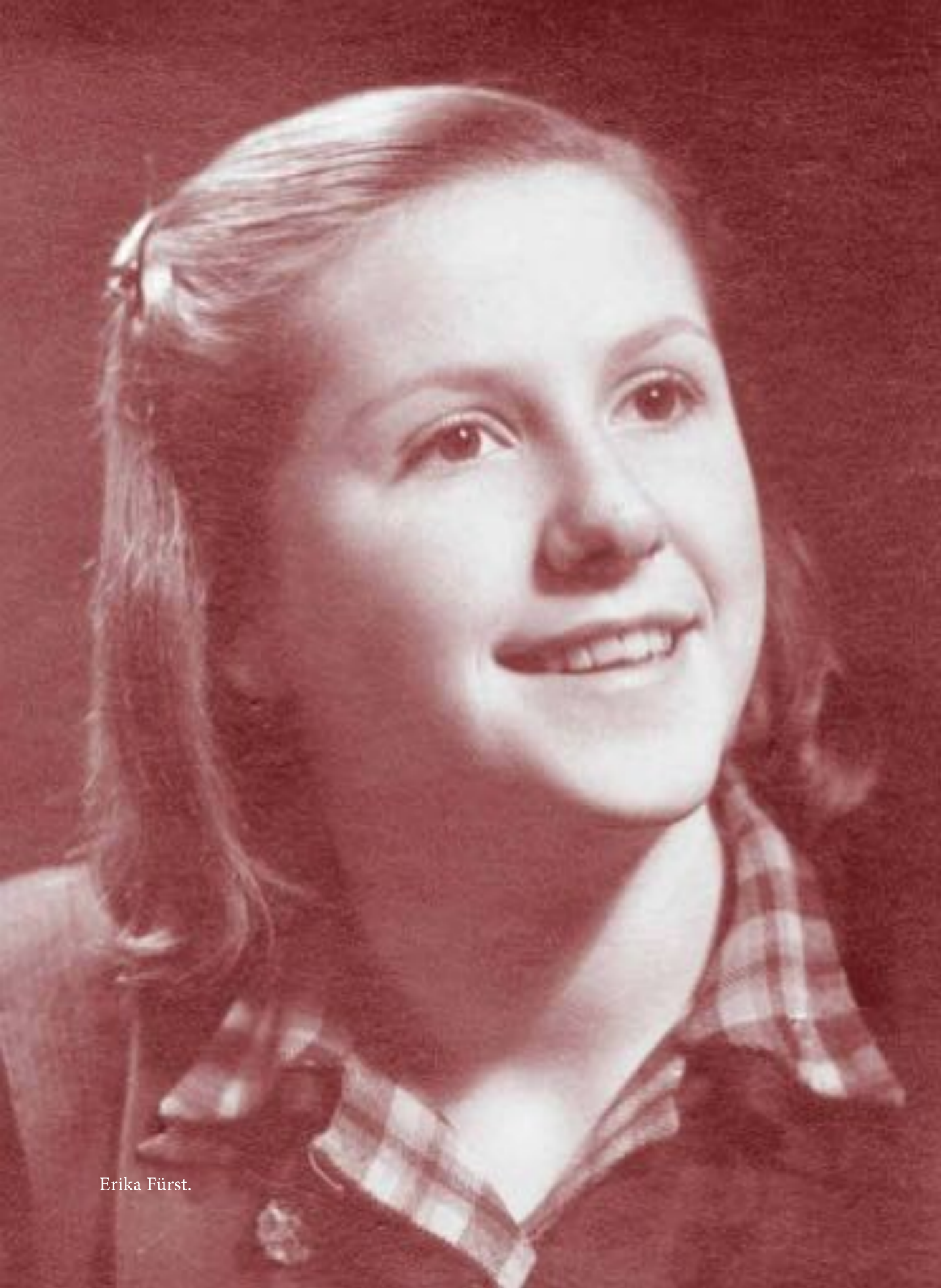
Most members of the Jewish community engaged in trade, while the rest were also innkeepers and butchers. As well-connected tradesmen they first purchased honey, hides, cattle, feathers, and linen from local villagers and later sold them to wholesalers in bigger towns. From the end of the 18th century onwards, Jews could rent and work their own land, while many even became landowners. At this time, they also controlled a major share of the cattle trade.

Therefore, it is little wonder that some contemporaries labelled Murska Sobota the “Jewish nest” or the beginning of the “Jewish dominion”, which supposedly reached as far as Budapest. In the most fervent anti-Semitic discourse this area was nicknamed “Judapest”.

In the early 1930s, the conditions in Slovenia turned from bad to worse. This was primarily due to developments in Germany, from where news spread about the expropriation and persecution of Jews. However, the major cause for alarm was the changing political climate in Yugoslavia. Here, we are referring both to the change that followed the death of King Alexander in 1934, who was regarded as a patron of Jews in Yugoslavia, and to specific legislation that imitated the Nuremberg Laws in Germany in many ways, compelling some Jews to convert to Christianity. The latter process was especially characteristic of the last years before the war, when even Slovenian newspapers would feature articles portraying Jews as swindlers, traitors to Jesus and, even, a “misfortune” for the Slovenian nation.



For More Info
Quick Scan



Erika Fürst.

Around this time, one of the few remaining Holocaust survivors, Erika Fürst, was born as the second child to a Jewish family in Murska Sobota. Her mother was the daughter of a successful merchant who ran a store with his wife in a village some ten kilometres from Murska Sobota. Before she married Erika's father, who was a cargo transporter, she worked as a cashier at her father's shop. Erika had one sister, and the family of four led an ordinary life in Murska Sobota.

When Prekmurje came under Hungarian rule in 1941, the then ten-year-old Erika was still attending primary school. At the end of 1943 she felt like an ordinary girl, no different from her friends at school. After 1943, however, her life and the life of her family began to change. They were forced to wear yellow Star of David, just like Jews in Germany and all over Europe.



Erika Fürst and her aunt.



The synagogue in Lendava in 2010.



Erika Fürst with her sister and aunt.



Erika Fürst with her parents and sister.

|| CHILDREN CONTINUED TO GO TO SCHOOL UNTIL AUTUMN 1943, I THINK, WHEN THEY ORDERED US TO PUT ON THE STAR OF DAVID. THIS IDENTIFIED US AS JEWS. QUITE A FEW GIRLS FROM SCHOOL, FRIENDS, AVOIDED ME IN THE STREET BECAUSE OF THE STAR I WAS FORCED TO WEAR ON MY COAT. I CAN SAY THAT SLOVENIAN CHILDREN WEREN'T ASHAMED TO WALK DOWN THE STREET WITH ME... ||

[Erika Fürst's account is not entirely accurate; in the Hungarian zone, Jews were not forced to wear the Star of David until spring 1944; all quotations hereafter are from an interview with Erika Fürst recorded in August 2011]

The conditions soon worsened for Prekmurje's Jewish community, which was the largest Jewish community in the Slovenian region. Having been placed in the Hungarian occupation zone, Jews in Prekmurje were initially spared the fate of their acquaintances and relatives from countries and provinces occupied by the Germans and the Germans' local allies. Namely, during much of the war Hungary refused to comply with the German demands to deport its Jews to concentration and extermination camps. For this very reason Jewish families in the Hungarian territory and areas occupied by the Hungarian army were initially not directly affected by the "Final Solution".



As the hour of deportation drew near in Prekmurje, Erika's family quickly tried to adapt to the new circumstances. Erika's father showed her and her sister a hiding place for small valuables in the family woodshed:

|| THE WOODSHED WAS FILLED WITH WOOD, [AND] THERE WAS A BIG HIVE IN ONE CORNER. UNDERNEATH IT [MY] FATHER DUG A HOLE... AND TOLD US THERE WERE SOME VERY IMPORTANT THINGS [IN IT], AND SHOULD ANYTHING HAPPEN TO HIM AND ANY OF US MIGHT RETURN, IT WOULD DO AT LEAST FOR A START. BACK THEN I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT IT WAS AND WHAT WAS IN IT. AFTER THE WAR MOTHER TOLD US IT WAS A LARGE STORAGE JAR. IN THIS JAR WAS A BOX AND IN THIS BOX [I FOUND MY] FATHER'S BUSINESS LICENCE AND SOME JEWELLERY... [MY PARENTS] ORDERED US NOT TO TELL ANYONE AND FOR THE FIRST TIME THIS STRANGE FEELING CAME OVER ME THAT SOMETHING BAD COULD HAPPEN TO US. ||

Indeed, on a Monday morning only a few weeks later, two members of the Hungarian armed police force and two state officials knocked on the door of Erika's house at five a.m. The family was woken up and ordered to pack in thirty minutes and turn over all their possessions. Erika and her sister knew that it was going to be a long journey, so they wanted to say goodbye to their best friend living next door:



For Animation
Quick Scan



The railroad track in the entrance to Birkenau.

|| MY SISTER AND I WANTED TO SAY GOODBYE TO OUR BEST FRIEND, AND THE GENDARMES [POLICE OFFICERS] GAVE US PERMISSION. THEY WERE OUR NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOURS. WE WENT THERE AND TOOK MEMORY BOOKS WITH US, SO SHE WOULD STORE THEM, AND WE SAID OUR GOODBYES. HER FATHER HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN IMPRISONED IN A BASE IN HUNGARY, AND HE TOOK IT THE HARDEST. HE PUT HIS ARMS AROUND US, TEARS RUNNING DOWN HIS FACE, AND SAID: "POOR CHILDREN, I'M AFRAID I KNOW WHAT WAITS FOR YOU THERE". THEN, WE HURRIED BACK HOME. ||

Erika's mother was so frazzled that Erika and her sister had to help her pack. One of the officers suggested they should take as much food as possible. When they arrived at the synagogue in Murska Sobota, where they were being assembled, and they saw the German soldiers, members of the SS, Erika realised that the situation was very serious.

|| THE VERY MOMENT WE SAW THE GERMANS, [...] WITH THEIR SHEPHERD DOGS [...] WE KNEW THEY WERE [...] FAR MORE BLOODTHIRSTY THAN THE HUNGARIANS [HUNGARIAN POLICE]. THE HUNGARIANS WERE SOMEWHAT MORE CONSIDERATE. ||

Šarika Horvat, Erika's acquaintance three years her senior told the Shoah Foundation that it was not only the dogs and the ruthlessness of the Germans that frightened her, it was the entire process. After being herded in front of the synagogue, they were forced to wait there for others to be driven over from the nearby villages. In the meantime, the German soldiers repeatedly checked their presence, until "300 OR PERHAPS 400 PEOPLE" were gathered by the evening, "PACKED LIKE HERRINGS IN A BARREL" in the synagogue.



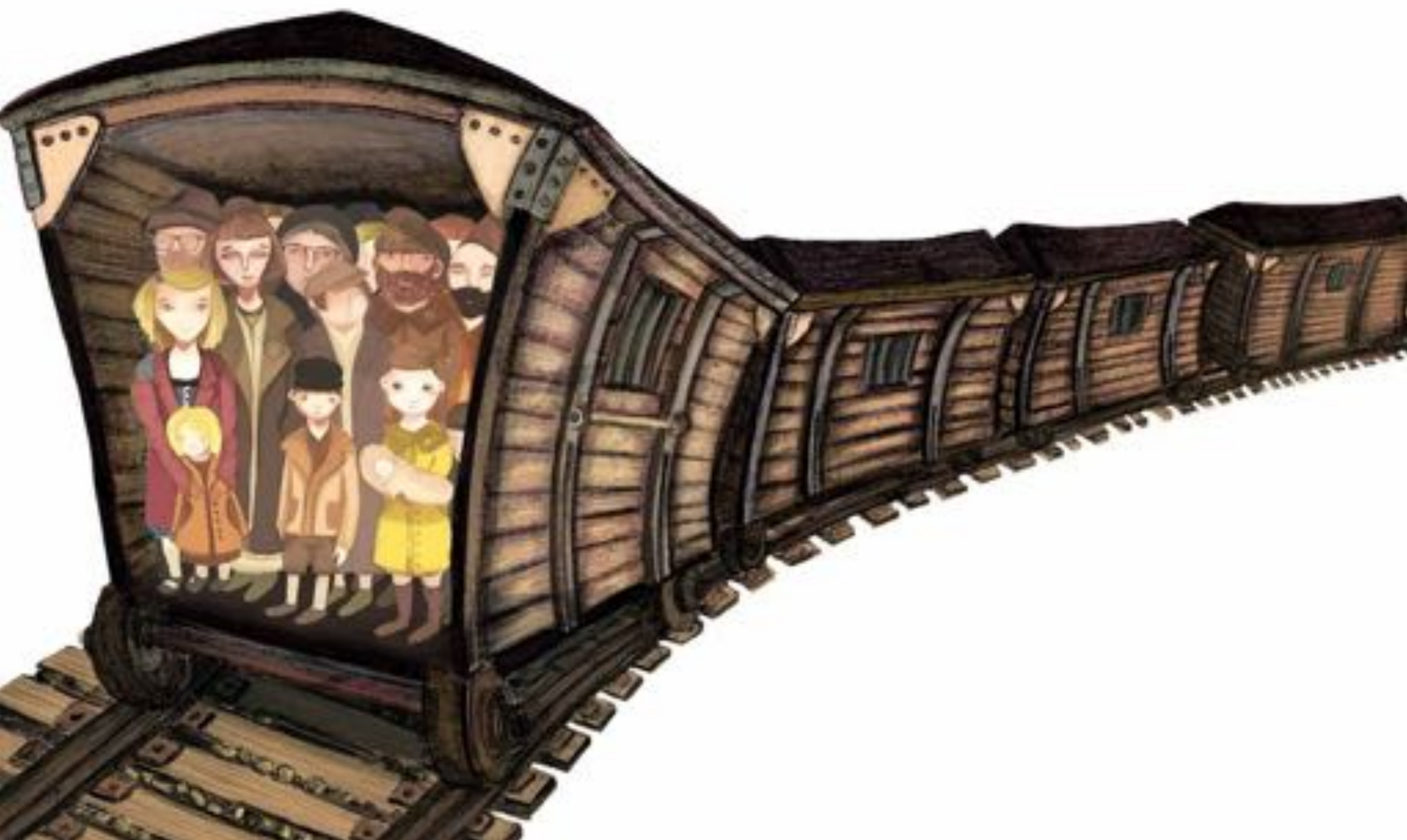
THEN WE WERE TAKEN TO ČAKOVEC, SOME OF US IN WAGONS AND THE REST WERE TAKEN BY TRAIN. IN ČAKOVEC THEY LOCKED US IN A SCHOOL BUILDING. WE SLEPT ON THE FLOOR. WE WERE HELD THERE FOR TWO DAYS UNTIL THEY EXAMINED EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US. THERE WAS A SMALL ROOM IN WHICH TWO OFFICERS WERE SITTING. THEY CALLED EACH ONE OF US BY NAME, EXAMINED US AND ASKED WHETHER WE HAD ANY MONEY OR JEWELLERY LEFT. I WAS SHAKING WITH FEAR THEN, I WAS ONLY 13 AND ALONE WITH THE AGGRESSIVE OFFICERS, [WHO LOOKED] THREATENING. THEY HAD A DOG; THEY SEARCHED ME FROM HEAD TO TOE, THINKING I WAS STILL HIDING SOMETHING. [...]

THEY SEARCHED ALL OF US. THEY HAPPENED TO FIND A BROKEN FILLING ON MR HIRŠL KARMAN FROM MURSKA SOBOTA AND THEY BEAT HIM UP SO BADLY THAT HIS FACE WAS ALL SWOLLEN UP AND COVERED WITH BLOOD. TWO DAYS LATER THEY LOADED US ON CATTLE TRAINS AND TOOK US TO NAGYKANIZSA [TO A DEPORTATION CENTER].

The next morning all young men and girls were assembled in the courtyard. Sadly, this group also included Erika's father, who was sent back to collect his luggage, along with others. They were lined up and taken to the railway station. This was the last time Erika saw her father:

EVERYONE WAS CRYING. WE WERE ALL LOCKED IN CLASSROOMS, WATCHING OUT THE WINDOW, WAVING TO OUR FAMILIES. I WILL NEVER FORGET THAT LOOK, THAT SAD LOOK ON MY FATHER'S FACE. THEY TOOK HIM TO THE RAILWAY STATION AND TO AUSCHWITZ. THAT WAS THE FIRST TRANSPORT TO AUSCHWITZ.





Although some data may differ, we can safely claim that in April 1944 about 330 Jews were driven from Lendava, Beltinci, Murska Sobota and nearby villages. That was the first wave of deportations that spared only Jews who had earned special merits for Hungary.

The first group of deportees was followed by a second group at the beginning of May, a third one on 20th October 1944, and in November the smallest and last group was arrested after having escaped previous deportations based on the aforementioned “merits for the Hungarian nation”. The pattern of the expulsions was more or less identical: early morning arrests were followed by rounding up, identity verification and transportation to Croatia and Hungary, from where deportees were taken to Auschwitz.

Erika’s arrival to the concentration camp was an unforgettable experience and, in her words, a “true ordeal”:

|| THEY OPENED THE WAGONS, GERMAN SOLDIERS WERE SHOUTING AT US “ALLE RAUS”, EVERYBODY OUT. WE WERE NOT ALLOWED TO TAKE ANYTHING – WOMEN WERE NOT EVEN ALLOWED A TOILETRIES CASE, NOTHING. THERE WAS WORD GOING AROUND THAT WE WOULD ONLY BE LEFT WITH WHAT WE WERE WEARING. SO WE PUT ON SOME UNDERWEAR, A BLOUSE DRESS, A SKIRT TO COVER THAT, THEN A WINTER COAT, AND A TRENCH COAT OVER THE WINTER COAT. MY SISTER AND I LOOKED OLDER, STRONGER, AS WE JUMPED OFF THE WAGONS. WE WERE THEN LINED UP BY SOLDIERS WHO WERE CONSTANTLY SHOUTING, “FASTER, FASTER”, AND THEN WE WALKED ALONG THE RAILWAY LINE UNTIL WE REACHED A FORK IN THE ROAD [...]. ||

Similar experiences were documented by a German soldier. The photograph was first published in a book written by two concentration camp survivors, Ota Kraus and Erich Kulka, a little more than ten years after the war. They were among the first to refer to Auschwitz as the “Death Factory”.

Soon after her arrival, during the selection process, Erika found herself face to face with the infamous doctor Mengele, who performed experiments on people, preferably twins.

|| [HE SENT] ELDERLY PEOPLE, CHILDREN AND YOUNG MOTHERS TO THE RIGHT [...], AND THE FEW OF US WHO WERE FIT TO WORK WENT TO THE LEFT. WHEN WE CAME UP TO MENGELE, MY SISTER AND I WERE WEARING THE SAME CLOTHES AND WE WERE OF APPROXIMATELY THE SAME HEIGHT, THOUGH MY SISTER WAS TWO YEARS OLDER THAN ME, SO HE ASKED MY MOTHER WHETHER WE WERE TWINS. MOTHER SAID NO, WE WEREN’T. “HOW OLD ARE THEY?” SHE SAID 17 AND 15, AND ADDED IN GERMAN: “WE WANT TO WORK”. THEN HE SMILED LIKE A WEASEL AND SAID, “LEFT”. THAT’S HOW WE STAYED ALIVE AND WERE NOT DRIVEN STRAIGHT TO THE **CREMATORIUM**. ONLY 34 WOMEN SURVIVED FROM THE ENTIRE TRANSPORT. I KNOW THAT BECAUSE WE WERE LINED UP FIVE IN A ROW IN SIX ROWS, AND BECAUSE THERE WERE ONLY FOUR IN THE LAST ROW. ||

Crematorium

a facility intended for burning human remains; in German extermination camps cremating technology was used for burning corpses after gassing.

The horror of the concentration camp was further worsened by the process of dehumanisation, which Erika faced when she was stripped of all her personal belongings, including her clothes, and sent to the showers with others:



Barbed wire fence in the extermination camp Birkenau, Poland.

|| WE WERE TAKEN TO A BUILDING WHERE WE WERE FORCED TO STRIP NAKED. THEN THEY CUT OUR HAIR, AND WE LEFT OUR SHOES AND ALL OUR CLOTHES IN A PILE. MY MOTHER KEPT A FAMILY PHOTO AND AN SS WOMAN PULLED IT OUT OF HER HANDS, SAYING: “WHAT’S THIS? YOU WON’T BE NEEDING THIS”, AND TORE IT UP BEFORE OUR EYES. WE WENT TO THE SHOWERS. THE WATER WAS LUKEWARM AND WE WERE COLD, BECAUSE OUR HEADS WERE SHAVED BALD. WE CAME OUT ON THE OTHER SIDE AND WE HAD NO TOWELS, NOTHING TO DRY OURSELVES OFF WITH. WE WERE GIVEN GREY DRESSES; NO SOCKS, NO UNDERWEAR, ONLY DRESSES AND SHOES. MY SISTER AND I HAD RATHER SMALL FEET, SO THE SS WOMAN ALLOWED US TO TAKE OUR OWN SHOES. MY MOTHER WAS GIVEN A DIFFERENT PAIR, WHILE SOME WERE GIVEN WOODEN SLIPPERS. ||

The photographs of new arrivals record their transformation from terrified and tired newcomers into increasingly expressionless concentration camp prisoners.

Shivering with cold, dressed in rags and shaved “ALL THE WAY”, Erika, along with other children and women from Murska Sobota, realised that it would be difficult to survive in their new environment. The peak of this initial systematic dehumanisation was when each prisoner was tattooed with a camp number.

Erika and the rest of the survivors were sent to the women’s camp, called Camp A, and settled in the barracks. There, the women first saw the kind of conditions that were waiting for them. Erika was hungry, thirsty, terrified and shivering with cold. She suffered terribly. She was given scraps of food, a piece of bread and a small tin plate of soup. The bunks in the barracks looked like “SHELVES”.

Then began the long roll calls or “appells”, beatings and hard labour. Šarika took a few beatings as well, although children were less likely targets of physical punishment than older prisoners. Erika had a great problem getting used to the poor toilets and the fact that she could not go to the toilet when she needed to, but only when she was allowed to: “THERE WAS ONE SS MAN MAKING HIS ROUNDS TO STOP YOU IF YOU HAPPENED TO BE SQUATTING FOR FIVE MINUTES MORE”. On top of it all, she was extremely cold in the beginning, especially at night. Bedbugs were a terrible pest and kept her from sleeping:

“IN THE MORNING WE ALL HAD OUR FACES COVERED WITH BLOOD. [...] AFTER THEY MOVED US TO CAMP B [...], THERE WERE NO BEDBUGS, BUT THERE WERE LICE; ONLY BEDBUGS ARE FAR WORSE THAN LICE”. Sleepless nights alternated with days of slave labour:

|| WE DID HARD WORK. WE WERE LOADED WITH BRICKS AND FORCED TO CARRY THEM IN OUR HANDS SEVERAL KILOMETRES AWAY. THE ROAD BUILT WITH BRICKS FROM AUSCHWITZ STILL STANDS TODAY. ||

While for Erika, a girl of barely thirteen years at the time, life in the concentration camp was an even harder ordeal yet, it was her youth that saved her life. After she was separated from her mother and sister, Erika had no one to talk to. However, in the barracks she was transferred to, she was spared long roll calls at least. But there was still plenty of work; it was, indeed, not as physically demanding, but still:

|| BIGGER CHILDREN WERE SENT TO A SPECIAL ROOM EVERY DAY WHERE WE WERE ORDERED TO SORT OUT WOOL. PEOPLE BROUGHT ALL SORTS OF THINGS TO THE CAMP, INCLUDING HEAPS OF WOOL. NOT IN SKEINS, BUT WOOL OF VARIOUS COLOURS, TO HIDE GOLD, AND MAYBE SOME MONEY. OUR JOB WAS TO SPIN THESE BALES OF WOOL INTO YARN OF VARIOUS COLOURS. I WORKED WITH TWO HUNGARIAN GIRLS... ONE DAY WE FOUND A GOLD RING AND A PAIR OF EARRINGS IN A YARN. THE OLDER GIRL PUT THEM AWAY. SADLY, I NEVER SAW THESE GIRLS AGAIN. THEY PROBABLY FOUND THAT GOLD ON THEM AND TOOK THEM TO THE CREMATORIUM. ||

This is roughly how more than one million Jewish and Roma men, women and children, disappeared from Auschwitz and nearby extermination camps, along with a considerable number of Russian prisoners. A million... It is impossible to imagine such a number, just as it is impossible to think how many had died just before the liberation or during the evacuation of the concentration camp. The following is one of the saddest and most cruel episodes of this story.

Although the German army was in great disarray by January 1945, that did not deter them from undertaking preparations for the so-called “Todesmarsch”, or the death march. Erika made a split-second decision that she would not go, since she did not want to leave her sister and mother behind. She jumped into the snow and remained hidden until the rest of the prisoners were gone. On either side they were escorted by armed soldiers with dogs:



For Animation
Quick Scan

“ I WAITED [...] THERE, [AND THEN] HEADED FOR THE BARRACKS WHERE MY MOTHER WAS, AND HID UNDER HER BUNK. THE GERMANS WERE STILL COMING BACK, TEARING THE FEMALE PRISONERS FROM THE BUNKS AND SHOOTING THEM... ”

Meanwhile Erika took care of her mother and sister. Between the Germans' departure and the arrival of the Russian liberators, she kept her sickly and weak family alive by searching for food and clothes in the abandoned camp:

“ [MY] SISTER AND MOTHER WERE UNABLE TO STAND ON THEIR FEET. [...]. I WALKED AROUND THE STORAGE FACILITIES WITH OTHER PRISONERS [TO SEE IF] THE GERMANS LEFT ANY FOOD. [...] WE COLLECTED WATER FROM THE POOL [...] THAT THE GERMANS USED TO BATHE IN DURING THE SUMMER [... AND] I FOUND FLOUR IN ONE STORAGE COMPARTMENT [...]. I PUT IT IN MY SCARF AND LATER MADE ŽGANCI [A DISH MADE OF BUCKWHEAT FLOUR COOKED IN WATER] WITH IT. [...] IN ANOTHER STORAGE ROOM [...] I ALSO FOUND [A TIN OF] CABBAGE. THE TIN WAS [TOO] BIG TO LIFT, SO I ROLLED [IT] [...] TO OUR BARRACKS. ”

That tin kept the three women alive until the arrival of the Russians, who, as Erika recounts, came to the camp ten days after the Germans evacuated it. They were wearing:

“ WHITE SHEETS [...], AS CAMOUFLAGE, AND SOME FEMALE PRISONERS WERE KISSING THEIR FEET, THROWING THEIR ARMS AROUND THEM, AND SOME OF US WERE TERRIFIED. WE COULDN'T TELL WHETHER THEY WERE REALLY RUSSIANS [...], [UNTIL] THEY BEGAN TO SPEAK IN RUSSIAN. THEY WERE SHOCKED BY THE SIGHT OF US, THE STATE WE WERE IN. WE WERE NOTHING BUT SKIN AND BONE [...] ”

Russians took the survivors to Auschwitz and settled them in the barracks of former guards and soldiers, where they could recover some of their strength and begin to make preparations for their return home. Since the war was still going on, the journey to Murska Sobota was not possible until the beginning of May. And even then they could only go as far as Krakow and from there through to Budapest through Prague.

“ THEN [...] MY MOTHER DECIDED THAT WE WOULD GO HOME WITH A ROMANIAN TRAIN [...], THERE APPEARED TO BE MANY ROMANIANS, AND THEY WERE COMING TO COLLECT THEIR RELATIVES IN KRAKOW [...] THE FIRST TRAIN [...] WAS ROMANIAN. [...] THE JOURNEY WAS LONG, HARD, WE RODE IN OPEN WAGONS UNTIL WE REACHED THE CZECH BORDER, I THINK, [...] THEN THROUGH PRAGUE [...] TO BUDAPEST. AT THE BUDAPEST RAILWAY STATION WE WERE AWAITED BY PEOPLE FROM THE JEWISH MUNICIPALITY; THEY TOOK US TO SOME SCHOOL AGAIN AND GAVE US FOOD [...] ”

In Budapest an international Jewish organisation (it is impossible to say with certainty which one it was) offered to organise their emigration to the United States:

“FOR PEOPLE LIKE US, THE JEWISH COMMUNITY WOULD ARRANGE A JOURNEY TO AMERICA. BUT MY SISTER AND I WOULDN’T HEAR OF IT, BECAUSE OUR FATHER’S LAST WORDS WERE: “SEE YOU BACK HOME”. WE WERE CONVINCED THAT HE WAS THERE WAITING FOR US. ||

Therefore, instead of going to America, they went back to the Budapest railway station:

“WE BOARDED AN OPEN WAGON [...] STACKED WITH POTATOES, AND ON THAT TRAIN [...] WE THEN CONTINUED TO SZOMBATHELY, WHERE [...] THE JEWISH MUNICIPALITY [...] ARRANGED [...] FOR US TO SLEEP AT SOME GENTLEMAN’S HOUSE. THERE WE COULD TAKE A BATH, WASH AND THEN [...] CONTINUE [...] TOWARDS KÖRMEND ON FOOT. ||

From there to Prosenjakovci in Prekmurje they were frequently stopped by Russian soldiers who took them for refugees. In Prosenjakovci they were awaited by their father’s acquaintance, who took them to Murska Sobota, where they found everything in a shambles:

“ONE BARN AND ONE CELLAR WERE DESTROYED, ONLY THE WOODSHED WAS STILL STANDING. THE HOUSE WAS OCCUPIED BY THE PARTISAN ARMY. THE FLOORING WAS TORN OUT, THE ELECTRIC WIRING LIKEWISE. THE PARTISANS SLEPT ON THE FLOOR, ON HAY. UPON OUR ARRIVAL, THEY EMPTIED THE HOUSE IMMEDIATELY. BUT THE HOUSE WAS A COMPLETE MESS, [SO] WE STAYED A FEW DAYS [...] WITH A FAMILY IN MURSKA SOBOTA. MY MOTHER WAS GRANTED A LOAN, I CAN’T IMAGINE ON WHAT BASIS, SO SHE HAD THE HOUSE PAINTED AND NEW ELECTRICAL INSTALLATIONS FIXED IN THE KITCHEN AND ONE ROOM. WE SLEPT ON THE FLOOR DRESSED IN [...] WHAT WE WERE WEARING UPON OUR RETURN FROM THE CONCENTRATION CAMP. [...] WITH NOTHING. [A FORMER] FARMER BROUGHT A SMALL POT OF LARD, NEIGHBOURS PITCHED IN A BIT OF FLOUR, AND SO LITTLE BY LITTLE WE WERE COMING BACK TO LIFE. ||





Erika Fürst with her husband

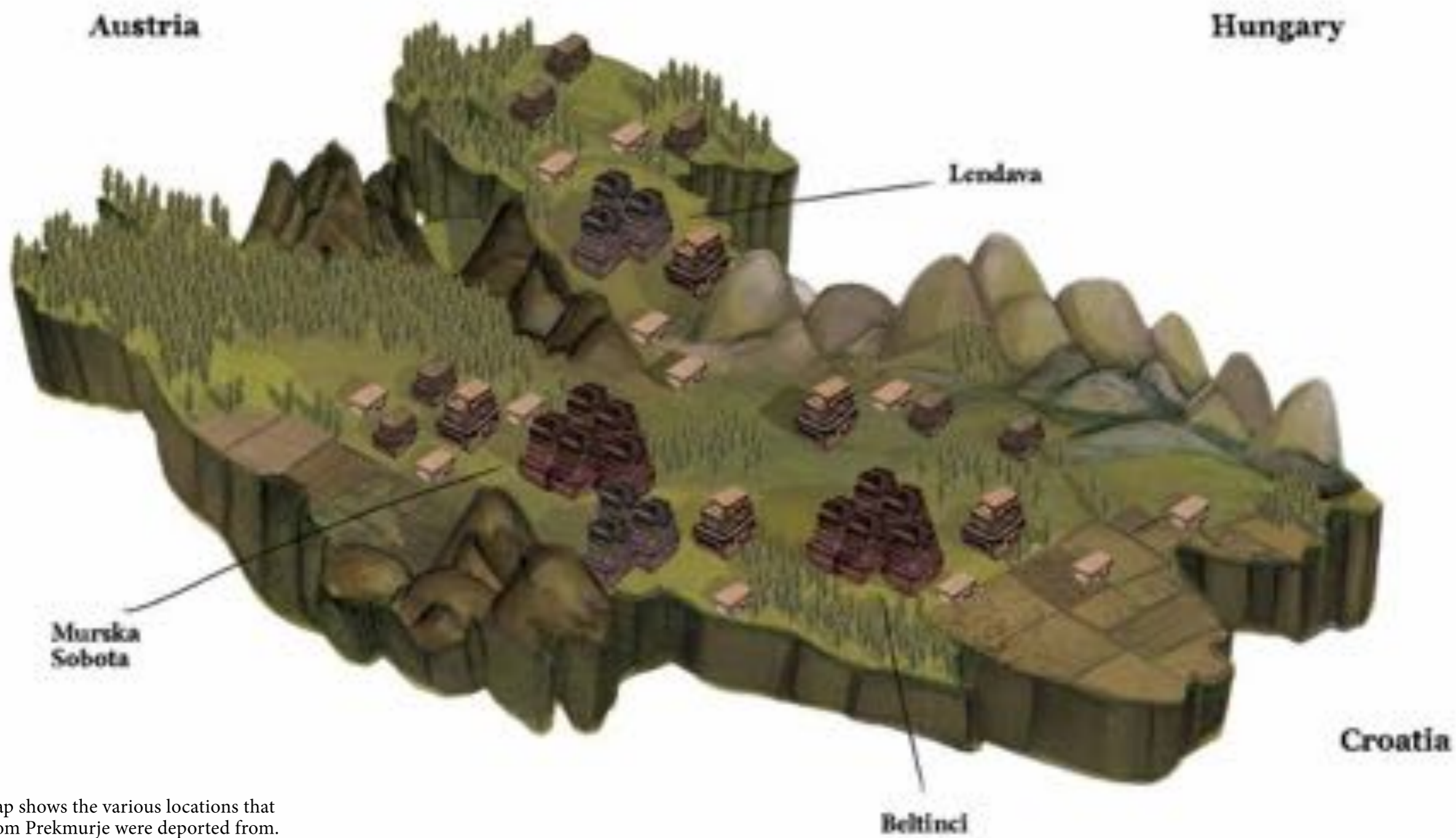
At that time and until the summer, twenty-five other citizens of Murska Sobota and twenty-three Jews from Lendava returned home, like Erika, her sister and mother. Together with the survivors from other towns and villages, sixty-five Slovenians returned to their homes in Prekmurje, or a little less than twenty per cent of those who had been deported a year before. According to the data presently available, 387 Slovenians from Prekmurje, including Erika's father, died either in a concentration camp or as a result of forced labour and the death march. Auschwitz claimed the highest number of deaths. Therefore, after waiting for a while, Erika, her mother and sister assumed that he might have died there as well, even though the circumstances of his death remained unclear. Not least because her mother's sisters had met him at least once on their return to Birkenau from work in Auschwitz and reported that his feet were very swollen and covered with blisters, which was why he was most likely sent to the gas chamber.

After the war Erika nevertheless wrote to the Red Cross in Buchenwald, having heard some rumours that her father had died in that camp. Most of the survivors came from other camps, while only six people returned from Auschwitz camps, one man and five women.

It later became clear that, in fact, very few men returned home. According to statistics, a little more than one-fifth survived. The survival rate for the Jewish community in Prekmurje was also higher for women, most of whom left Prekmurje soon after the war. They mainly migrated to Palestine and the United States, while others moved to other parts of Slovenia. Erika's sister moved to Maribor with her husband, where she died not long afterwards in a home accident, having caught on fire during ironing.

After 1945, Erika, her mother and her sister tried to lead a life as normal as they possibly could. As early as the end of May, the girls returned to school to complete their exams and courses.. It was the first winter that she would "GO TO SCHOOL WITHOUT STOCKINGS" and in a knee-high coat.

|| THEN MY UNCLE GAVE ME A PAIR OF MEN'S KNEE SOCKS AND SOME BOOTS [...] PROBABLY MY AUNT'S. I HAD TWO AUNTS IN MARTJANCI, WHERE PEOPLE IN THE VILLAGE WOULD STORE A LOT OF THINGS FOR THEM AND THEN GIVE THEM BACK. UNFORTUNATELY, THIS WAS NOT POSSIBLE IN SOBOTA. ||



This map shows the various locations that Jews from Prekmurje were deported from.



She clearly recalls that she had terrible problems concentrating, that she could not remember anything. What she learned in the evening, she had forgotten by morning. Evidently, the subconscious need to forget the past year's horrors also began to eat away at her newly acquired knowledge. Erika's problems with memorising school lessons were shared by the majority of survivors who sought "comfort" in conscious oblivion.

There are several reasons for this phenomenon, but the survivors have most often mentioned fear that something similar might happen again and the desire to forget the horrors they had faced as soon as possible. The number of those who resorted to hatred was, according to survivors' testimonies, somewhat lower. Regardless of how survivors dealt with the consequences of their experience during the war, most of them left Slovenia and Europe. Apart from the US, Australia and Great Britain, their most frequently mentioned destination was Palestine or Israel from 1948 onwards. As data suggests, nearly two-thirds of all Jews who left Prekmurje forever after 1945 migrated to the newly established Jewish state. With this, the Jewish community in northeastern Slovenia was almost entirely destroyed. More than 85 per cent were killed during the war and an additional ten per cent left soon afterwards. By that time, there were not enough Jews in Murska Sobota and Lendava to restore the religious community.

The physical extermination of the Jewish community by the Nazis was followed by the **nationalisation** of Jewish property by the new Socialist state. This had nothing to do with religious or racial background – only with property. Those Jews who did not have Yugoslav citizenship upon the outbreak of war were expropriated as German nationals, which was particularly painful for them. Even though they had gone to great lengths to obtain citizenship that was

Nationalisation

was the process of socialising private property after World War II in the the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and other socialist countries. Through nationalisation, most industry, including the food processing and transport industries, was brought under state ownership, along with most private property.

never granted to them due to strong local anti-Semitism, Jews were expropriated after the war because they had not been citizens of the pre-war Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Worst of all, they were now officially equated with the nationality of their persecutors.

This is another reason why there is absolutely no justification for post-war trials to have "overlooked" the fact that the majority of Jews were, in fact, "Yugoslav citizens of Slovenian nationality and Jewish religion" and whose documents, like Erika's, stated that they were Slovenians.

No less striking is the modest scale on which the memory of Jewish victims was honoured in the first decade after the war. One of the first reports to appear in the *Obmurski tednik* (a local weekly newspaper), for instance, was a short announcement that “Jews from Sobota” were “also” driven to concentration camps. While the author of the announcement also gave an incorrect estimate of 117 Holocaust victims, he did devote more attention to Ali Kardoš, one of the main instigators of the resistance movement in the province. It seems that there was little room for individual Jews and their stories during socialism unless they appeared in the role of revolutionaries.

The post-war attitude towards Jews was also manifested by the demolition of the synagogue in Murska Sobota. The City People’s Committee of Murska Sobota purchased the building for a modest sum of money in mid-1949 and five years later decided to demolish it. The future was brighter for the synagogue in Lendava, which was renovated in the 1990s and presently serves as a performance venue.

The synagogue in Beltinci was subject to the most persistent process of erasing historical memory. A simple family house converted into a synagogue in 1859 apparently met with the same destiny as the local Jewish cemetery. After the last burial took place there in 1943, that of Jewish Jan Ebenšpanger, “the Jewish cemetery in Beltinci was plundered to the core. Not a single monument has been preserved”, as Bojan Zadavec states.

Until 2009, no other memorial had been built in the memory of the Holocaust in Prekmurje. To the contrary: by setting up a monument to the victims of Fascism among the tombstones in the Jewish cemetery in Dolga vas in 1947, the municipality had, deliberately or not, caused the memory of the deportation and killing of the majority of Jews in Prekmurje to fade even quicker. In a similar way, the worst consequences of the war on Prekmurje soil were left out of the teaching curriculum, so that new generations from Prekmurje, as well as other Slovenians, have until recently lived in the belief that the Holocaust took place only somewhere far away.

At least two generations have lived in the belief that gas chambers of the Holocaust were part of German but not of Slovenian history. In recent years, this memory is slowly being revived, mostly with the help of teachers and professors who encourage their pupils to explore the Jewish cemetery in Dolga vas and Jewish culture. Slovenian history is, moreover, still oblivious to the destiny of the Roma in Lower Carniola and Prekmurje. The Roma of Lower Carniola were mainly shot by the partisans while the majority from Prekmurje were driven to labour camps by the Hungarians.

Nothing has, likewise, been heard about people who aided Jews and were thus recognised as **Righteous among the nations**. They are considered the few brave individuals who were willing to risk their lives and the lives of their loved ones by hiding Jews, forging their documents and trying in various ways to save them. Among the tens of thousands whose names are inscribed in the park of the famous Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem, there are also seven Slovenians.

Righteous among the nations

In 1963 Yad Vashem, the World Center for Holocaust Research, Education, Documentation and Commemoration, initiated a worldwide project to pay tribute to the Righteous among the nations, that is, non-Jews who, in the time of Nazi rule, under threat of death and terror, risked their lives to save Jewish men, women and children.

During the Holocaust the plight of Jews was met mostly with indifference or hostility. Most often, people stood by watching as their former neighbours were rounded up, taken away, and eventually killed. Some collaborated with the perpetrators and many benefited from the expropriation of Jewish property.

There were, however, a small number of people who were so disturbed by the horrors of these events, who decided to stand up against them. Some acted out of political, ideological or religious convictions; others were not idealists, but merely human beings who cared about the people around them.

In many cases these rescuers were completely unprepared for the far-reaching decisions they had to make in order to save the people they cared about. In their accounts there was usually a “turning point” that set them in action: witnessing either murder, deportation or confiscation. In many cases it was Jews who turned to non-Jews for help. However, the rescued Jews should not be viewed as passive in this process, but rather as active in negotiating the hardships of the total annihilation of their rights and in resisting the Nazi regime.

The price that rescuers had to pay for their action differed from one country to another. In Eastern Europe, the Germans executed not only the people who sheltered Jews, but their entire families as well. Some members of the Righteous Among the Nations were also incarcerated in camps and killed. Forms of help by the Righteous can be categorised in four different types:

Hiding Jews in the rescuers' home or on their property. The rescuers would provide a secluded part of their home or arrange for a dugout under houses or barns. Living conditions in dark places were harsh. The rescuers, whose lives were under threat, would provide what little food they could and tend to their needs as best they could. Sometimes the hiding Jews were presented as non-Jews, as relatives or adopted children. Jews were also hidden in apartments in cities, and children were placed in convents where the nuns concealed their true identity.

False papers and false identities. Assuming the identity of non-Jews required false papers and assistance in establishing an existence under an assumed name. In this case, rescuers were forgers or officials who facilitated false documents, for example fake baptismal certificates.

Smuggling and assisting Jews' escape. This entailed smuggling Jews out of ghettos and prisons or helping them cross borders into unoccupied countries or into areas where persecution was less intense, (Switzerland, Italian-controlled areas or Hungary before the German occupation in March 1944).

Rescuing children. Parents faced agonising dilemmas when separating from their children and giving them away to increase their chances of survival. In many cases individuals decided to take in a child, while in some countries, especially Poland, Belgium, Holland and France, underground organisations tried to find homes for children and to provide them with food and medication ("About the Righteous").

So far Yad Vashem has recognised the Righteous from 44 countries and nationalities, among them also seven Slovenians: Uroš Žun, a solicitor from Radovljica, who saved the lives of sixteen girls; Andrej Tumpej, a parish priest who saved the Jewish family Kalef from Belgrade; Zora Pičulin, who saved a baby whose parents were deported; Ivan Breskvar, who helped save Jewish children in Croatia; Ljubica and Ivan Župančič; Olga Rajšek Neuman and Martina Levec Markovič. Very little is known about these people. However, we can still remember the story of Father Tumpej, which has also been told in the film *Three Promises* (Centropa 2011). Although he dedicated his life to helping others, to this day his most-remembered deed remains saving five Jewish women in World War II Serbia, for whom he arranged false papers and identities. Two of these girls were discovered seeking work in Germany and all traces led to father Tumpej. He was arrested and interrogated by the Gestapo and released only after a few months in prison. This was a time of great fear for the other three Jewish women, Antonija Kalef and her daughters Matilda and Rahela. Father Tumpej knew he was breaking the law that

prohibited and sanctioned any kind of help offered to Jews. In spite of this danger, he arranged for false papers, using Antonija's maiden name, Ograjenšek. "From now on, your surname is Ograjenšek. You, Mrs. Kalef, now go by your original Slovenian name Antonija Ograjenšek. Matilda, you are now Lidija, Rahela, you are Breda". Thus father Tumpej became their saviour and lifelong friend. Rahela Kalef even decided to keep her new name after the war, as a sign of gratitude. After the war, father Tumpej continued his philanthropic journey, asking to be relocated to Skopje after the earthquake in 1963. He stayed there until his retirement in 1971. He was a nationally conscious Slovenian and a dedicated Yugoslav, deeply attached to the Balkans. He is buried in the Belgrade military cemetery Topčider (Aleksič, 2001; Toš, 2012).

The deeds of other the Slovenian Righteous are waiting to be rediscovered.

Sadly, we do not need to discover anti-Semitism anew, as the hatred and distrust of Jewish people has been preserved almost intact. This is also evidenced by the events that have taken place over the last two decades in Slovenia, including Prekmurje.



For More Info
Quick Scan



The survivors from concentration camps after their return to Prekmurje, 1945.

STUDENTS WORK

Graphic design students exhibiting a series
of postcards on Holocaust remembrance

The International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem and The Neri Bloomfield School of Design and Education have collaborated on this special Holocaust-related educational initiative. Advanced graphic design students have exhibited a series of postcards (12 x 18 cm) focusing on Holocaust remembrance. The postcards provide a basis for age-appropriate activities, developed by Yad Vashem staff, that can be implemented in both formal as well as informal educational settings. It is hoped that these graphic designs will trigger a dialogue about Holocaust awareness between young designers.

The Neri Bloomfield School of Design and Education from Haifa have participated in a full-day study seminar at Yad Vashem, and attended additional workshops carried out by Yad Vashem staff in their school.

Objectives:

- Create an educational process between students from Israel and abroad.
- Facilitate an international dialogue about Holocaust consciousness.
- Promote Holocaust remembrance and universal, human values.

January 27

More than thirty countries around the world have legislated Holocaust Remembrance Days, and many nations mark this day on January 27, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau on January 27, 1945.

In January 2000, 46 governments signed the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, noting, “The Holocaust (Shoah) fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilization. The unprecedented character of the Holocaust will always hold universal meaning. After [more than] half a century, it remains an event close enough in time that survivors can still bear witness to the horrors that engulfed the Jewish people. The terrible suffering of the many millions of other victims of the Nazis has left an indelible scar across Europe as well. [...] We share a commitment to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and to honor those who stood against it. We encourage appropriate forms of Holocaust remembrance, including an annual Day of Holocaust Remembrance, in our countries.”

We extend gratitude to the professional staff:

The Neri Bloomfield School of Design and Education, Haifa: All the design students who participated in this project, Guidance by Shai Golan.

Yad Vashem: Tamar Don, Rinat Maagan-Ginovker, Inbal Kvity Ben-Dov, Dorit Novak, Shulamit Imber, Stephanie Amara, Rachel Karlinsky, Jonathan Clapsaddle, Lilach Orpeli, Liz Elsby



The subject we decided to concentrate on is DP camps. after the war a lot of jews left with out any home or a safe place to come back to, so the wining sides of the war built camps and gather all the refugees together those were a difficult time for the jews who were mentally scarred and, suddenly had the promise of a normal life . that is what our postcards are talking about, the illusion of a normal life u can the the hard life of the DP camps that are in grey color and our illustration on top of it in color that is symbolise our cynical opinion of the new life the jews had promised.

Designed by: Yossi Madar & Tal Segev





The project deals with the complexity of the memory of the Holocaust that makes it difficult for the survivors to build and live "new" lives after the war, together with past memories that won't let go.

Through these postcards we reflect the various coping forms taken by the survivors on their way to "new lives"- some tried to forget what they had before the war while others brought their old memories into their daily routine.

Designed by: Hadar Mizrahi & Mor Glick





The language we use today has become extremely deterministic. Trivial things that once were not given a second thought, have now become critical and every minor incident is inflated into a crisis. We wanted examine the parallels between the use of a highly “fatal” vernacular in contrast to the most crucial catastrophes to transpire in the twentieth century. When slight changes cause minor things to be blown out of proportion we diminish our ability to regard significant events that have happened, and are continuing to happen, with the respect they deserve. Designed by: Helena Misyura & Elad Mizrahi



"As we all know, an object can never and under no circumstances, contain life. Only an object that had a constant connection to people, could change, by the power of it's presence in their lives. Only such object can be referred as a living thing." -Petr Ginz, murdered in auschwitz in the year 1944.

Designed by: Shiran Tsabari & Tal Frid





This project reveals the hidden anti-Semitism all over Europe.

In Jan' 2012 the ADL (Anti Defamation League) made public survey in several countries in Europe . They asked the participants a few questions about their attitude to jewish society in their country. The results were very disturbing, the survey revealed high percent of anti-semitism about issues regarding jews in Europe. These postcards show the contrast between the beauty of selected Europe sites and the rising racism inside the European population.

Designed by: Aviad Oren & Gal Eliash



The family destiny of the Holocaust survivors photographed and presented at the beginning of the book



After the war, Frida and Benjamin were reunited and got two more sons, Isaac and Yehiel. In 1956 they emigrated to Israel and worked in the orchards. In the picture: Isaac and his wife Bathsheba, their children, their grandchildren and brides.



Moses and Ruth Kostz'bh met in Israel and got married in 1950. They had two children, four grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. After a long life Moses passed away in 1999 and Ruth in 2014.



In December 1948, Moni came to Israel and met Bujina. They got married in 1953. Moni and Bujina have two children and five grandchildren. In this picture they are dancing at their daughter's wedding.



They have eight grandchildren and eleven great-grandchildren. In the picture we see Hanna and Gdalya with their son Issac and their great-granddaughter, Ilil.



The family emigrated to Israel from Romania in 1952, settled in Ramle and worked in agriculture in a Kibutz. In the picture we see Lae's son Nati with his cousin Ilana Malka's daughter.



Malka with her daughter Ilana and her granddaughters at the birth of the youngest granddaughter.



Itsik, son of Michael and Rachel, and 3 daughters. They met in a bar in Rishon lezzion. They found out they grew up two streets a way from each other. They got married three months later.



Sophia and Anna were the only two survivors in their family. They emigrated to Israel and had large families. Sophia had one son, Jacob, while Anna had three children, Naphtali, Zila and Jacob. In the picture we see Zila's sons holding her first grandson.

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- Photo credit: Page 24: Photo: Gideon Botsch et al, *Die Wannsee-Konferenz und der Völkermord an den europäischen Juden*, Katalog der ständigen Ausstellung – Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, Berlin 2008.
- Pages 46, 49, 52, 54, 56, 58, 84, 94: Courtesy of Erika Fürst.
- Page 55: Photo: Aleš Topolinjak, (c) Sinagoga Maribor.
- Page 81: Photo: Marko Zaplatil, (c) Arzenal.
- Pages 29, 64, 74: Photo: Natalie Shimony.

The Land of Shadows

The memory of the expulsion and disappearance of the Jewish community in Prekmurje

Authors: Oto Luthar, Martin Pogačar

Translator: Manca Gašperšič

Copy editor: Mitch Cohen, Hanna Szentpeteri

Collaboration initiator: Prof. David Alexander (NB School of Design & Education)

Creative direction & guidance: Yaron Shin - Jewboy (NB School of Design & Education)

Design & illustration: Yaara Hirsh, Natalie Shimony (NB School of Design & Education)

Animation: Aviv Tal, Yaara Hirsh, Natalie Shimony (NB School of Design & Education)

Additional guidance: Gil-ly Alon-Curiel (NB School of Design & Education)

Photographs: Courtesy of Erika Fürst, Boris Hajdinjak, Fotodokumentacija Dela,

Marko Zaplatil, J. Kodrič, Sinagoga Maribor, Yad-Vashem, Natalie Shimony

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Proofreading: Hanna Szentpeteri

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המרכז האקדמי
ויצו חיפה
THE NERI BLOOMFIELD
SCHOOL OF DESIGN



Published: Haifa, 2016

This is a book about violent death and destruction, a book about despair and sorrow. But this is also a book about survival. A book about solidarity, friendship and the will to live.

However, it is not another book about the Holocaust, but merely a reflection on it. A reflection on the second and third generation of those who survived the Shoah. At the same time, it is not a story about some Shtetl in a region heavily marked by Jewish presence, or about a well-off Jewish community in one of Europe's capitals. Our interpretation does not consist of women with wigs and men with curls, or famous rabbis and their original reading of the Torah. To the contrary, this is a story about a modern, middle-class family that was once a part of a small Jewish community. This family was well integrated into the multiethnic community in the western part of the Austro- Hungarian Monarchy which was later renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after World War I.

Although similar to other stories of young victims of the Nazis, such as Ana Frank, Eli Wiesel, Imre Kertezs, and Miriam Aviezer Steiner, who later became literary icons, Erika Fürst's story is a unique description of the life of a completely ordinary family of four in a province whose name was hardly familiar to anyone beyond this region.

With the help of the 'NB School of Design & Education' Visual Communication Department students, Natalie Shimony, Yaara Hirsh and Aviv Tal who belong to the third generation of survivors after the Holocaust, we have decided to feature Erika Fürst together with all those who miraculously survived the concentration camps and other forms of persecutions. Because of what happened to her in Auschwitz Erika could not have children of her own, which is why we believe she should, at least virtually, become part of the community of all survivors. The children of those who escaped death in concentration camps should be familiar with her family story as well. Nevertheless it is the next generations who, seventy years after Auschwitz, carry on the memory of World War II. It is their reflection on their family's pasts that makes the Holocaust comprehensible even to those who have never experienced anything like it.

Former neighbours of those who had disappeared forever knew that their community had changed, that something was missing, but no one talked about it. One of the best representations of this strange situation is the work by Shiran Tsabari and Tal Frid, students of the NB School of Design, who, in memory of those who perished in Auschwitz, designed spaces of emptiness. In their postcards it is obvious that someone or something is missing but we cannot tell who or what that is.