

by Dr. David Silberklang and Gabi Hadar

Anka My Dearest! More than 18 months have passed since we were most brutally parted. During all that time, I have not stopped striving and searching for an opportunity to relate to you, at least in some small measure, my sad experiences throughout those dark months since our separation. A much too difficult task for my worn-out strength....

I wish that this bundle of memories, soaked in blood and tears, will serve as a perpetual tombstone for you, my dearest, and for our children, parents, brothers, sisters, and the millions of men, women and children who were murdered together with you.

With these poignant words to his murdered wife, Oskar Strawczynski began his Treblinka memoir, written while hiding in a Polish forest in 1944.

encourage their families to struggle on and to survive, or wished to leave a legacy after their own certain death. Whereas only a fraction of what was written has survived, that small amount provides an insight that is inaccessible from other sources. These writings open a window onto a scene that the rest of us can understand only from a distance.

Yad Vashem has published dozens of diaries and other first-hand accounts and documents over the years. The insights into what Jews thought, what they discerned regarding their circumstances and their fate, and how they reacted are invaluable to our understanding of the Holocaust and of human behavior in extreme adversity. Many more such books are planned during the coming years. Will this body of first-hand, contemporaneous accounts explain the Holocaust for us? Of course not. But their contribution to our understanding

In Their Own Words

Personal Writing from the Shoah

Israel Cymlich, who escaped from the Treblinka I penal forced labor camp in April 1943, began his memoir more bluntly: "I have decided to describe my war experiences. Two considerations prompted me to do so: my slim chances of surviving the war; and my desire to communicate my fortunes to my sister in Argentina."

These two memoirs, written clandestinely during the war, comprise the newest release in the Holocaust Survivors' Memoirs Series: *Escaping Hell in Treblinka*. Cymlich's is one of the very few Jewish accounts of Treblinka I, which lay only two kilometers from the extermination camp, Treblinka II. Strawczynski's memoir is one of the first two written eyewitness accounts of the 2 August 1943 uprising in Treblinka II. Both accounts provide new information and insight about the life of the inmates in that infamous death camp.

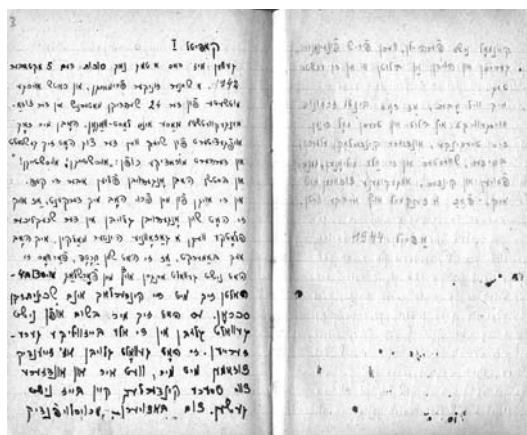
Until this publication, very little was known about the Jews in Treblinka I. Much of what Cymlich relates about the brutally harsh conditions, the camp population (mostly Jewish, it turns out), its operation, and many of the officials and prisoners is new. Strawczynski's sometimes graphic descriptions of vicious Jewish camp officials and German staff, the corruption and debauchery in the camp, preparations for the uprising, and life after the mass escape are equally riveting.

Why did people write during the war? To whom were they addressing their thoughts? For what purpose? The reasons are as varied as the people themselves. Some simply wished to communicate, report events or find some kind of normalcy in their lives through their writing. Others sought to

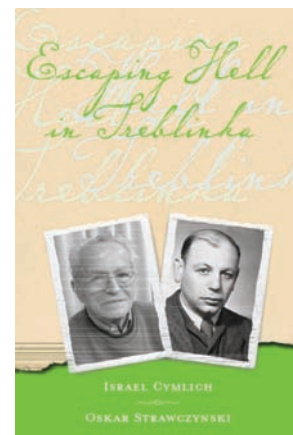
is immense; without it we understand very little indeed. And with that in mind, Yad Vashem Publications will continue to try to retrieve those voices from the oblivion to which the Nazis sought to confine them, in the hope that we can shed additional light on the event that has ruptured history as we know it.

The Holocaust Survivors' Memoirs Project, an initiative of Nobel Peace Laureate Prof. Elie Wiesel, was launched through a generous grant from Random House Inc., New York.

Dr. David Silberklang is the Editor-in-Chief and Gabi Hadar is the Director of Yad Vashem Publications.



Excerpt from the handwritten copy of Oskar Strawczynski's 1944 Yiddish memoir about his experiences in Treblinka



New Editor-in-Chief of Yad Vashem Publications

Dr. David Silberklang, current Editor-in-Chief of *Yad Vashem Studies*, has been appointed as the new Editor-in-Chief of Yad Vashem Publications, replacing Dr. Bella Gutterman. During her eight-year tenure, Dr. Gutterman transformed the status of Yad Vashem Publications from a small, quality operation to a major publisher of Holocaust books in Hebrew, English and other languages. Yad Vashem Publications also embarked on numerous joint publication ventures with publishers from around the world, and has succeeded in generating a wide variety of books that have reached ever-broadening audiences.

Dr. Silberklang is a well-respected scholar in the field of Holocaust research, with rich experience in the editing field. For over a decade he sub-edited Prof. Yehuda Bauer's journal *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, and ten years ago became Editor-in-Chief of *Yad Vashem Studies*, changing the face of the esteemed publication that is now published twice a year. Together with Yad Vashem Publications Director Gabi Hadar, Dr. Silberklang will undoubtedly make a significant contribution towards the challenges that lie ahead in the field of Holocaust publications.