

Updated May 16,2006 (18 bIyyar 5766)

Workshop Topic #9: Survival through the eyes of a child

Title of Presentation:

Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Youth Before, During, and After the Camps.

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Abstract:

Ultra-Orthodox (haredi) Jewish youth who survived the concentration camps encountered a number of challenges. They had to restore their physical, mental, and emotional health; they met with economic problems; and they were faced with theological dilemmas. We will compare the experience of young ultra-Orthodox Jews before, during, and after liberation from the concentration camps by looking at age and gender differences.

Our main focus will be on two brothers who survived: Israel Meir Lau and Naphtali Lau-Lavie, the sons of the Chief Rabbi of the Polish city of Pieterkowitz, who were 8 and 19 years old, respectively, in 1945. Their physical recovery in a DP camp was relatively short. Their spiritual, emotional, social and economic recovery took place in Israel soon after. This is a good example for teaching because both brothers have written memoirs, each from his own perspective. (Israel Meir Lau became Chief Rabbi of Israel; Naphtali became a journalist and diplomat). We show how memoirs can be used in class to examine the very same situation from different angles. The memoirs cover the Holocaust before, during, and after the war. Written originally in Hebrew, the memoirs are ideal testimonies for use in teaching the Holocaust. For the English translation of Naphtali Lau-Lavi's autobiography see *Balaams's Prophecy* (Cornwall,1998). The autobiography of Rabbi Israel Meir Lau is titled in Hebrew *Al Tishlah et Yadkha el Hana'ar (Do Not Raise Your Hand Against the Lad)*, currently on the bestseller list in Hebrew in Israel, and scheduled to be published in English early in 2007.

In order to highlight some gender differences, we will compare the memoirs of the Lau brothers to the memoirs of two ultra-Orthodox adolescent girls who wrote about their experiences during and after the Holocaust. The girls' experiences are recounted in Livia Bitton-Jackson's *I Have Lived a Thousand Years* and Pearl Benisch's *To Vanquish the Dragon*. We will show how the comparison of the girls' memory of their experiences (written in adulthood) with those of the two brothers can enhance understanding and teaching.

Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Youth Before, During, and After the Camps
By Shira Leibowitz Schmidt

INTRODUCTION

A Holocaust memoir written by an Orthodox rabbi became a surprise bestseller during the years 2005-2006 (Hebrew years 5765-66). Written by the former Chief Rabbi of Israel, Israel Meir Lau, *Al Tishlah et Yadkha el Hana'ar [Do Not Raise Your Hand Against the Boy]* was near the top of the bestselling charts for months. Rabbi Lau

recounts his experience as the son of Chief Rabbi of a Polish city, hiding in its ghetto and surviving the Buchenwald concentration camp. Nicknamed Lulek, he was 8 years old when liberated in 1945. He credits his brother Naphtali, 19 years old at the time of liberation, with saving him and seeing him through recuperation in France, *aliya* to pre-State Israel, childhood and youth in the early years of the State

Using Rabbi Lau's narrative as a basis, we will present selections from each of three other books by young survivors from ultra-Orthodox (haredi) families in order to highlight the similarities and differences. The selections will be preceded by some introductory material and questions. These are only sample examples to suggest to teachers how such Holocaust memoirs can be used. The excerpts are lengthy so that teachers can preview the material before they are able to obtain the actual books. A list of the books and publishers is provided.

The three books which we will compare to Rabbi Lau's memoir are:

Naphtali Lau-Lavie: *Balaam's Prophecy*

Livia Bitton-Jackson: *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing up in the Holocaust*
(memoir of Elli Friedman, the author's childhood name)

Pearl Benisch: *To Vanquish the Dragon*

We will present each excerpt in a different font, to make it easier to identify the different voices. The following key was used:

<i>Our Discussion</i>	<i>Times New Roman</i>	<i>12 italics</i>
Lulek (Israel Lau)	Times New Roman	12 point regular
Naphtali	Arial	10 point regular
Elli	Courier New	10 point regular
<i>Pearl</i>	<i>Courer New</i>	<i>10 point italics</i>

Five topics have been chosen, and selections are given from each of the four memoirs on these topics. The topics are:

1. Before the War;
2. Parting from Parents;
3. The Significance of Hair & Beards;
4. Jewish Holidays: Purim & Passover;
5. Liberation

The names and ages (at the time of liberation) of the four youthful voices are as follows: Lulek (8), Naphtali (19), Elli (14), and Pearl (20). We will keep our introductory analysis for each of topic minimal to allow the teachers to use this raw material as best fits the teaching context. The page numbers for each excerpt refer to the English editions (see table of the sources), except for Rabbi Israel Meir Lau ("Lulek") where the excerpts refer to the chapters in the Hebrew edition.

1. BEFORE THE WAR

It is important to give students a feeling for the richness and normality of Jewish life before the Holocaust. The autobiography of Rabbi Lau, Lulek as a child, has very little because he was two years old when WWII broke out in 1939. However the other three books have vivid descriptions of pre-War Jewish life. Note especially the themes of mountains, water, nature in these selections, as well as the Jewish life which was the focus for these religious youths.

Lulek (Ch.1)

Images of my Father in my memory are rare. The first is a very early recollection, related to other, more distant days, days of innocence, days when war had not yet come to the world. I am a little boy sitting on my father's knees and playing with his curly *peyot*. The next memory is completely different: people are gathered in our house, and my father is discussing the situation, his face furrowed in worry. The feeling of unease that dominated that day dwells inside me always.

Naphtali (p. 24) My childhood in Preshow [Poland] was happy and carefree. I had many friends with whom I played for hours in the big fruit orchards that surrounded our house. .. My mother taught me the Hebrew and the Latin alphabets by the time I was four. When I entered preschool at the age of five, I could readily read Hebrew morning prayers fluently, as well as the opening verses of Leviticus. On my fifth birthday, in recognition of my scholastic achievements, my parents held a festive meal to which they invited community leaders. Extra chairs and tables were brought into the library. I was placed on a chair next to Father at the head of the table, from which I gave a short speech, which Father had written for me. He presented me with a set of the Five Books of Moses and put the gold chain from his pocket watch around my neck. I was very proud. The guests, I suspect, enjoyed Mother's pastries more than my sermon. ... It was in Krynica [a scenic spa resort on the Polish-Czech border] in the summer of 1933 that I first heard the name Hitler.

(p.35) I was to be in Krakow with the family for my bar mitzvah...Father took me to the old fifteenth-century Rema Synagogue...for initiation in putting on the tefillin. ...On our return we walked through the narrow streets of the old Jewish Quarter... He turned off the main street and led me along the river bank, his left arm resting around my shoulder in a gesture of paternal affection. ... Gradually he opened a window before me into the world of men. In reserved language he described the problems of adolescence ... preferring to enlighten me in his own fashion regarding the sexual desires of adolescents. It was a marvelous educational presentation, in which Father proceeded from the down-to-earth plane of my reality. There was no attempt to make a saint out of me. He outlined realistically the unfolding challenges and dangers confronting nascent adulthood.

(p. 41). The date was August 29, 1939. The blasting of sirens pierced the air. .. with soldiers shouting "Wojna!" (War!) soon hit us with grim reality. ..This marked the end of my schoolboy days.

Elli [Summer 1943, Slovakia] (p.12) Ours is a small farming town at the edge of the Carpathian foothills. To the south the Danube, the cool, rapid river, pulsates with the promise of life. How I love to swim in its clear blue, surging ripples, and lie in the shade of the little forest hugging its banks. We children splash all summer in the Danube. Families picnic in the grass, the local soccer team has its practice field nearby...

(p. 13) I love to lie and daydream for hours after dusk. Life is an exciting mystery, a secret enchantment. In my daydreams I am a celebrated poet, beautiful, elegant, and very talented. My poems open the world's heart to me, and I loll in the world's embrace.

I yearn for my mother's embrace. When, on Sabbath mornings, my friend Bonnie and I join our mothers in the synagogue, Mrs. Adler takes Bonnie in her arms and calls her *meine Schoenheit*, my beauty. Mrs. Adler always says German endearments to Bonnie. Mommy only greets me with a hello and a smile, no hug and no words of endearment.

"That's all nonsense," Mommy would respond to my complaint. "Do you want me to call you *meine Schoenheit*? Bonnie's mother makes a fool of herself. Why, everyone can see how plain looking her daughter is!... I don't believe in cuddling," Mommy explains with a smile. "Life is tough, and cuddling makes you soft. How will you face life's difficulties if I keep cuddling you? You're too sensitive as it is. If I would take you in my lap, you'd never want to get off... You'd become as soft as butter, unable to stand up to life's challenges."

My brother is good looking and I am not. I am far from being pretty. He has curly hair and I don't My hair is straight. There is not even an inclination of a wave.

Pearl (pp.2-10) *It was Thursday evening in Krakow, the last day of August, 1939...The city was engulfed in panic. We were young and carefree, and had spent the last two months in a different world. Every summer we girls organized a Bnos camp in the mountains [for haredi Bais Yaakov girls]. This year we had rented several huts in a small village in the Carpathian region. What freedom we had enjoyed in the bosom of nature, taking in the breathtaking scenery all around, breathing the fresh, crisp air, quenching our thirst with water from an icy spring that poured forth and rushed down the stony hill, so eager to give of itself. We arose each day at daybreak to pray together with awakening nature, filled with the awe of its great Maker. Then after breakfast, our day of study began: delving into Tanach and the teachings of the Geonim and the great masters of musar. Those summer taught us to appreciate the people around us, to admire their values, to respect their differences. We learned how to live and how to give; how to love God and enjoy the beautiful world He created. We burst into song, one tune after another. Together with King David, we sang the sweet melodies of his Psalms. ...This was my first summer as head counselor in the camp. I reviewed my every mistake, full of ideas and plans of how to improve things the next time around.*

But the next time never came. Instead we plunged straight from the world of dreams and hopes into the harsh reality of life. ...they were calling up the reserves. The inevitable was upon us, but it had come sooner than we had expected. We had not believed that Hitler would dare attack Poland. ...We woke up the next morning to the wailing of sirens: the war had begun.

2. PARTING FROM PARENTS

In the segments below, the youth describe the degradation to which their parents were subjected, and their feelings of hopelessness. Note the powerful statement by Rabbi Lau: “looking back on the six years of that war, I realize that the worst thing I endured in the Holocaust was not the hunger, the cold, or the beatings. The worst thing was the humiliation. It is almost impossible to bear the helplessness of unjustified humiliation.” It is important also to be cognizant of the different circumstances of each youth. Lulek and Naphtali were from a large city in Poland (Piotrkow), as was Pearl (Krawkow). But Elli was from a small village with few Jews. Pearl’s reference group, in addition to her family, was her circle of Bais Yaakov girls from the ultra-Orthodox schools, youth groups, and summer camps. Lulek and Naphtali clung to each other: Lulek was Naphtali’s reason for hanging on to life, and Naphtali was Lulek’s big brother and, literally, savior at times. Elli had a similar relationship with her mother: together they survived the camps, although often their roles were reversed and Elli acted as the “mother” taking the lead in planning and plotting to save her mother, and herself. Elli had not attended a Jewish school or camp and after the war her mother, and her brother, are her companions in her rehabilitation.

Lulek [Polish city of Piotrkow, fall 1942] (Ch.1) My father standing at the deportation point—this is the picture that accompanies me wherever I go. It is the first childhood memory engraved in my mind.

It is the autumn of 1942. I am a boy of five years and four months, short in stature, terrified. I stretch my neck as far as it will go in order to catch a glimpse of my father. He is standing in the *Umschlagplatz*, the assembly point for deportation, which is next to the Great Synagogue of our town, Piotrkow, Poland. Father, with his impressive beard and black rabbi’s suit, stands in the center, surrounded by Jews. The men stand on one side, the women and children on the other.

I was standing there with my mother and my thirteen year-old brother Shmuel, whom we called Milek. My older brother Naphtali, or Tulek, who was sixteen, lived at the Hortensia glass factory nearby, where he worked....

We felt the enormous tension that day as we stood in the assembly square in front of the synagogue. A threatening silence surrounded us. The captain of the Piotrkow Gestapo approached my father, a deadly look in his eye. He stopped, and pulling out his *maikeh*—a rubber club about three feet long—he began to beat my father on the back with all his might. When the first blow struck my father, from behind the surprise and force of it made him stagger forward. His body bent over as if about to fall. And then, in a fraction of a second, he straightened up to his full height, stepped back, and returned to where he had been standing. There he stood erect, making a supreme effort to hide the physical pain as well as the intense humiliation. I could see Father mustering all his strength to keep his balance and avoid falling at the German officer’s feet. Father knew that if he fell, the spirit of the Jews in our town would break, and he was trying desperately to prevent that.

Everyone there knew why the German had beaten him. When the Nazis had ordered the Jews to shave off their beards, many of the Jews of Piotrkow had come to ask Father whether they should follow this order. His answer was firm: do it in order to save yourselves from punishment. But he was stricter with himself; he kept his beard and sidelocks, his *peyot*, not only to safeguard ancient tradition but also to

preserve the honor of the town rabbinate. His defiance of this order resulted in the *maikeh* on his back.

But the beating was for other reasons as well. The Nazi Gestapo captain had singled out my father for abuse because he was the chief rabbi of the town, and because he spoke fluent German. Father was the representative of the Jews to the Germans. Many of the Gestapo's contacts with the Jews of Piotrkow took place through him, and vice versa. He was a highly respected figure in the Jewish community. Beating him, and especially humiliating him, meant more to the Germans than beating just another Jew; it was an act of enormous symbolic meaning with a powerful effect on morale.

This image is especially engraved in my mind because I witnessed the terrible humiliation. As a child, I did not understand the issue of the beard so well or the significance of the order to shave it, but I did understand that they were beating my father. A child cannot bear to see his father shamed, as he identifies with his father's heroic image. I knew my father was the town's chief rabbi, admired and loved by all. I could not bear to see the beating or the degradation, because he was my father and also because he was the town rabbi. Today, looking back on the six years of that war, I realize that the worst thing I endured in the Holocaust was not the hunger, the cold, or the beatings. The worst thing was the humiliation. It is almost impossible to bear the helplessness of unjustified humiliation. Helplessness becomes linked with that dishonor. Throughout the war years, a Polish word went through my head—*lachago*, meaning, why? What did we do to you to make you stomp on our souls in this way? How great was our crime that this is our punishment? There was no answer. Only this: that we were Jews, and they, the Nazis, saw us as the source of all evil in the world.

When a child sees his father beaten by a Gestapo captain with a *maikeh*, kicked with his nailed boots, threatened by his dogs, falter from the force of the blow, and suffer public shaming, he carries that terrible picture with him for the rest of his life. Yet on the other hand, I carry in my mind the other memory as well—that instant in which Father, with astonishing spiritual strength, braced himself from falling, refused to beg for his life, and stood tall once again before the Gestapo captain. For me, that image of his inner spiritual strength completely nullifies the helplessness that accompanied the humiliation.

Then the door opened and someone came in. I jumped up. For the first few seconds we did not recognize Father, who had returned home beardless. This was the first time I had ever seen Father without his beard, and it was a strange sight. Father told Mother what had happened to him after she had left the synagogue with me. Under his gold-rimmed eyeglasses, his blue eyes spilled tears. My father, who had always been strong as a rock and very reserved despite his sensitivity, was crying. He told us that when he had found out that Shmulek was in the synagogue by himself, separated from Mother and me, he realized that Shmulek was destined for death. Since Father was known to the Gestapo, he went to the captain in their office and begged him to release Shmulek. The captain offered to release the boy in exchange for my father's pocket watch, a valuable gold Schaffhausen on a gold chain. Father immediately pulled out his watch and gave it to the German officer. The German took the watch with great pleasure, but he did not honor his promise to release Shmuel. He merely smiled and turned his back. "We'll never see Shmuel again," Father said in tears, and I understood that something terrible had happened to us and that there was nothing we could do about it.

...Father told Mother about the rumor of a big *Aktion*, or roundup of Jews, that was about to take place, and about the Nazis' thorough searches for the remaining

Jews of Piotrkow. in his arms, until the Germans came and drove him out. Then he walked to the train, head held high. It took him, along with about 28,000 other Jews of Piotrkow, to Treblinka.

I never saw Father again after that meeting with him in our house in Piotrkow, when he told us about the fate of my brother Shmulek and about the impending *Aktion...*

My father accompanies me throughout my life, in whatever I do. I study the pictures of him that hang in my home, and I think about him often. I miss him at every joyous or sad occasion in my life, at every crossroads I face. According to those who knew him, my father, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Lau, was a gifted speaker. Before every speech I make, I ask myself how he would have formulated it. He is with me wherever I go.

But Father was not with Mother and me when the two of us hid in the building at 12 Jerozolimaska Street, near our house, where he had arranged a hiding place for us. This large building had been filled with Jewish residents who then abandoned it for reasons unknown to me. The floor of one room in the top story was littered with wooden boards; the entry to the attic was through this room. Mother and I crowded into the attic along with about ten other Jews. They were constantly darting frightened looks at me, as if threatening me to keep silent, and at my mother, as if blaming her for bringing me to the hiding place and possibly putting them in danger. At least that is the way it seemed to me. I was barely five and a half, and they suspected I would cry noisily or else call out "*Mameh, Mameh,*" giving them all away to certain death. They were busily thinking how to make the child keep silent, but the child did not even open his mouth. Before leaving our house, my mother had accurately foreseen what we might face, and baked my favorite honey cookies. She knew that when I ate them they would distract me. More importantly, they would fill up my mouth so I would be unable to make a sound.

Much later I recounted this story to my father-in-law, Rabbi Yitzchak Yedidya Frankel. He drew my attention to the similarity between my hiding place and that of the infant Moses. *She took for him a wicker basket and smeared it with clay and pitch. She placed the child into it.... Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe by the river.... She saw the basket among the reeds...She opened it and saw him, the child, and behold! a youth was crying.*" Even though Moses was only a three month-old baby, he cried silently, like a young man.

We hid in that attic in October 1942. The war had broken out more than three years earlier; we had been living through it and were well acquainted with its horrors. I could recognize the rumbling of the Gestapo motorcycles from afar. I knew well what a *maikeh* beating was and the reason for the voracious appetites of the Nazis' dogs, which were kept starved. Like an animal with an acute survival instinct, I understood that I had to keep quiet until the fury subsided, and I had no intention of behaving like a small child in our hideout.

Even today, many long years after those days of horror, when I close my eyes and yearn for them, I remember precisely the wonderful taste of Mother's honey cookies. Their memory is my consolation in trying situations; they are the drop of honey with which I sweeten bitter days and the focus of my longing. But at the same time, I remember clearly that I would look at my Mother, my mouth full of cookies, with a penetrating glance that seemed to say, "Mother, this whole business of using the cookies to silence me is unnecessary. I know I mustn't say a word, and therefore I intend to keep quiet. We have already been through all kinds of 'selections' and although I am a child, I understand exactly what's going on."

In November 1944, Russian army airplanes began to circle above our area. As soon as the Germans realized that the Russian army was approaching, they made it their first priority to prevent the rescue of the Jews. All around, rumors began to fly that the ghetto would be liquidated. Instead of denying those rumors out of hand, Mother began to prepare for the worst-case scenario. She made rucksacks to hold our vital possessions. Then, the rumors were confirmed; the Germans gave the ghetto Jews a few minutes to gather at the assembly point. Each of us came from his place of work to the platform of the train station, where they carried out a “selection.” I clearly recall the German shouts of *schnell, schnell*, and how they packed us onto the platform. Following orders, the women and children gathered on one of the platforms, the men on the other side. I was by then seven and a half years old, but I looked like I was five. Naturally, I walked with Mother and stayed by her side. Naphtali, who was almost eighteen, went with the men’s group.

Being separated on the train station platform did not bode well for us. Over the years, I occasionally have asked myself what are my sharpest and most evocative memories of the Holocaust days. I find myself singling out three things: dogs, boots, and trains. All three of these were there on the platform in Piotrkow. The dogs ran amok, the German soldiers’ boots thundered everywhere, and the trains filled with more and more Jews. In the air we heard the constant shouts of *schnell, schnell*, and the people ran around in a panic, carrying their possessions. We had always known that our stay in the ghetto was only temporary, and that the day would come when they would expel us to an unknown destination. Each of us had his own “expulsion package” that he kept ready and waiting for that bitter moment. Mother had equipped me with a large down pillow to which she had sewn two straps. Because of my small size, this pillow served as a blanket that covered almost my entire body. It was intended to save me from freezing to death. “Lulek, wherever you go, this will be your satchel,” my mother said, hiding some food and clothing inside it. I treasured that pillow for a long time, holding on to it with all my might until I had no other choice. Naphtali, my brother, had a small kitbag. In it were his *tefillin*, the phylacteries that my mother had given him, and the remaining manuscript of Father’s book that he tried to hide.

Mother and I stood on the train platform, which was crowded with terrified Jews and shouting Germans. Before us was a freight car. It had a tiny hatch at the top covered with barbed wire, and sliding doors that bolted shut. The Germans opened these doors in order to pack the people inside. Following their usual organized method, they directed men to certain cars and women and children to other cars. The *maikheh* clubs, the whistles and the dogs helped them carry out the operation. Within a few short seconds, my mother realized what this separation meant. She made an instantaneous decision; in another moment I would be entering the car with her. With the pillow on my shoulders separating us, she grabbed my back with both hands and shoved me in the direction of the men. I didn’t understand what was going on. I only heard her say, “Tulek, take Lulek. Good-bye Tulek, good-bye Lulek,” and I never saw her again.

Her maternal instinct was honed to its sharpest in those few seconds, and she understood that women and children had less of a chance to survive. My guess is that she made this quick calculation based on her experience of the war. At that point in time, in 1944, the war had been going on for five years. She must have understood that with the Russians about to invade, the Germans would need working hands for their war machine, and thus they would exploit us until our last breaths. She must

have felt that it would be for my own good to go with Naphtali rather than with her, and so she pushed me toward him. We did not have time for conversation or consultation, much less to say good-bye. Naphtali caught me as she threw me to him, grabbed me with both hands and shouted in Mother's direction, "What do I do?" She just waved her hand at us, and the Germans shoved her toward a car with the other women.

The moment was intensely traumatic for me. The Germans forced Naphtali and me into the men's car, and seconds later the doors locked behind us. I clearly recall Naphtali beating on the closing door with his fists and shouting in Polish, "There's been a mistake! There's a child here! You must take him back to his mother!" But no one listened to him. No one heard his plea. I screamed in terror, and transferred all my rage at the separation to Naphtali, my brother. I beat my small fists against his chest unceasingly. He tried to hug me and calm me down, but I refused to be comforted. I kept hitting him and screaming, "What have you done to me? Why did you take me? I want to be with Mother!" Several men joined Naphtali in his attempts to console me.

Somehow I lay down on the floor of the crowded car and wept bitterly. I remember the biting cold that penetrated my body, the cold of November 1944. The men around me gave me hot, black coffee to drink, but I spit it out and continued my cries of longing for Mother, until I fell asleep on the floor. Looking back today, this was clearly the hardest moment I experienced in the six years of the war. Never before and never since did I cry like I did on that day of my separation from Mother. To separate from your mother is an inconceivable notion; it hurts your whole being, all the years of your life. It took me a long time to understand that when Mother pushed me toward Naphtali, she saved my life. Mother went her way, and we, ours. We thought her way led her to Bergen-Belsen. Only when the war ended did we learn that on that day Mother was taken to the Ravensbruck concentration camp, where she was murdered. Naphtali and I got off the train at a labor camp in the Polish town of Czestochowa.

Naphtali [Polish city of Pietrkow, fall 1942] (p.78) We stood there, just the two of us, a sixteen-year-old boy heading into the maelstrom alone, and Father, a communal leader and rabbi who would not abandon his flock.. "Take special care of Lulek..He had faith that my youngest brother, Israel, would come through this hell intact in body and soul, continue the legacy of generations faced with the threat of extinction. This was a difficult and emotional talk, the first and last of its kind that I ever heard from him. .. Then he read from Jeremiah (31:16) : "And there is hope for your future, said the Lord, you're your children shall return to their own borders." Jeremiah's prophecy is not just a figure of speech, but a recommendation to those who come out of this. God willing, if you come safely through this scourge, you will know how to find your home, not here, and not on any alien and hostile soil. Your home will be in Eretz Israel, the Land of Israel. Even it has to be acquired at the cost of great pain and suffering, they will be pains of love."

[Fall 1944]. (p.93) The SS guards ...were already in place around the compound to take us we knew not where. Screaming like madmen and firing warning shots, they burst into the courtyard of the camp, pulled us out of the buildings, and lined us up for roll call by the exit gate. Mother took out my *tefillin* from her sack and handed them to me without a word. Apparently she had a premonition that we would be separated. The SS guards made us march to the railway siding... and stand next to the "death train" as we named it after witnessing the many transports to Treblinka. Lulek clung to Mother, afraid of being separated. Clearly, if they were going to separate men from women, he would go with her. There was no time for us to consider the various options open to us, as the SS began to chase us into the wagons. In a split second, Mother hugged both of us and thrust Lulek into my arms. "He stands a better chance with the men," she said. There was no time for discussion. She hugged us again, kissed each of us and, with brimming eyes, parted from us

– forever. For what seemed to be an endless wait, Lulek and I stood there, clinging to each other amid about one hundred men crammed into the wagon. Lulek cried incessantly; I couldn't calm him. Finally, after hours of standing in a crowded, rocking train, the two of us, at the end of our strength, slid to the floor. Lulek dozed off in my arms.

Elli [Chapter titled, "Daddy, How Could You Leave Me?" May 14, 1944] (pp.53-56) Daddy...hurries to the gate of the ghetto. The guards hands him a summons...to go to a forced labor camp...He is to report at 5 am. Is this the beginning of the "liquidation?" grim and tight lipped, Mother is packing Daddy's knapsack. Mommy was looking forward to labor camp, but did not think Daddy would be taken away from us. Daddy is in the kitchen helplessness. I wanted to tell him how much I loved him...I wanted to tell him that our long walks, our long silent talks together, were the happiest times of my life...And together in the Danube on the long, hot summer afternoons, were the happiest afternoons of my life. But I did not speak. I could not bridge that distance with words. ..I did not cry. I was numb with the horrible foreknowledge of finality. "Go to sleep now, Elli. It is very late." "Daddy, I want to speak to you in the morning. I want to tell you something." "Okay. In the morning." Quietly he walked me to the bedroom door. And then he sat down at the kitchen table with a huge folio of the talmud. He beckoned to my brother Bubi, and the two of them, talking to my brother. As I huddle in bed, my stomach is twisted in knots like a rubber hose. "Mommy, if I fall asleep, will you wake me at four thirty? Do you promise? Please, Mommy..." "Okay, okay. I'll wake you. Just go to sleep." ..Daddy had called me into the kitchen and told me to take care of Mommy. "Don't be frightened, Elli," he said. "The Almighty is going to be with you all. He will take care of my family. You're a strong girl, Elli. Remember to help Mommy in every way." He took my face in his two gentle yet muscular hands...I wanted to speak, but my words drowned in a morass of pain and began to study the Talmud in hushed tones. "This is how I wish to part from you, " he said to my brother, "Learning a passage of the Talmud. Remember this passage when you remember me."...The sound of clattering carriage wheels wakes me. The house is dark. Everyone is gone. I run out of the house in my nightgown, barefoot. In the early dawn I can see the silhouette of a small crowd at the gate of the ghetto. I reach the gate, the crowd, But Daddy is not [there]. Daddy! I force my way to the open gate flanked by armed military police. Daddy! Carriages are clattering in the distance. The last carriage is barely visible now, but I can see Daddy's erect figure sitting among several men. His back is turned, and the outline of his head, neck, and shoulders is sharply etched into my mental vision by searing pain. A sudden, violent shiver shakes my body. The chilly dawn is rapidly brightening into shrill morning. All at once mother becomes aware of my presence. "Elli! In your nightgown! And barefoot!" "How could you do it? You promised to wake me! How could you do this to me? I did not even say good-bye to Daddy. I could not even kiss him good-bye. How could you do this?" My hysterical sobs surprise everyone. I know what I wanted to tell my father in the moments of parting, and I was robbed of those moments. ..Oh, Daddy! How could you leave without saying good-bye? How could you leave me, Daddy?

Pearl (pp.65-68) *It was December 4, 1939. SS soldiers had surrounded our building...Now they stormed in, smashing the doors down: four tall, robust thugs in green uniforms and long, painstakingly ironed*

coats, and the high boots, black and shiny, that always terrified me. Their rifles were in combat position. But whom was there to fight?...The tall animal in human skin ordered Father to stretch out on the table: "Face down!" Father did not move. Two of the subordinates (Predators of a slightly lower order) seized my father in their paws and stretched him across the table, face down, under the raised knife..I shrieked and tried to stop them, but they were too strong. The big monster pinned my arms to my sides and held me face-to-face with my father. I creamed, cried, kicked, begged for mercy: no use. These were not beasts after all; beasts are not capable of such malevolence. Now they were ready with their horrific scheme, such as surely no child in the world had ever witnessed. My father, whom I loved and adored, my father, whom I followed and worshipped, lay there, his neck outstretched, the two executioners looming over him, holding the lowered sword over his neck and another gripping me, all relishing the scene with satanic leers. I looked at my father . He raised his head just a little between the table and the blade. His features were as relaxed as always.His features were as relaxed as always, strong and confident: the face of a man who is his own master. He gazed at me and at the monster holding me without a trace of panic, indifferent to the unfolding events. Then he smiled his knowing, mocking smile [at the SS men] as a chief might smile at some mentally deficient underlings. I was fascinated by this display of superior disdain toward his oppressors. ..they hauled my father off the table. He lurched to his feet, his expression unchanged. The tormentors changed places , and the tall beast extended his paws and began to slap my father across the face, left, right, again, and again. Father stood erect, only his head swaying to and fro. His face swelled until the blows, blood spirited from his nostrils and mouth, his eyes puffed shut. I creamed, wailed, shrieked, kicked - all to no avail. "What are you doing to my father? Why? Leave him alone,"I begged ."Please, it's enough. Please let him go, " I pleaded."I took care of that smile. Let's go, Kurt...the Jew is dead, smile and all." He administered a parting kick with his jackboot, and they left. I ran to my father and put my ear to his chest. I heard his heart beating and breathing. "My God, he is alive!" I washed the blood off his dear, contorted face and his gray beard. "Father, " I cried, "open your eyes . Please open your eyes, Tatteh."Finally he opened his eyes.

3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HAIR AND BEARDS

At this point it would be good to discuss – who is the audience being addressed by each memoir writer? Who is the publisher? Sometimes the publisher can make a great difference. Pearl Benisch writes for an Orthodox Jewish publisher, and is limited as far as certain topics she can discuss, such as the painful subject of the forced stripping of inmates when being inducted into the camps, about which she is reticent. In contrast Elli writes for a general, secular publisher and goes into some detail about these subjects. Most obvious in the following excerpts is the difference between the way Elli relates traumatically to the hair shaving, and the way the boys take it in stride.

Lulek (Ch.1 –see full quote above in Parting from Parents) It is the autumn of 1942. I am a boy of five years and four months, short in stature, terrified..... I stretch my neck as far as it will go in order to catch a glimpse of my father. He is standing in the *Umschlagplatz*, the assembly point for deportation, which is next to the Great Synagogue of our town, Piotrkow, Poland. Father, with his impressive beard and black rabbi's suit, stands in the center, surrounded by Jews.... Everyone there knew why the German had beaten him. When the Nazis had ordered the Jews to shave off their beards, many of the Jews of Piotrkow had come to ask Father whether they should follow this order. His answer was firm: do it in order to save yourselves from punishment. But he was stricter with himself; he kept his beard and sidelocks, his *peyot*, not only to safeguard ancient tradition but also to preserve the honor of the town rabbinate. His defiance of this order resulted in the *maikeh* on his back.

Lulek [Buchenwald, winter 1944-45] (Ch.4) On that first day in Buchenwald, we had to remove all our clothes and our shoes, and throw them into the pile that towered in the center of the hall. When my turn arrived for the haircut and shave, no one bothered anymore to ask what I was doing there. No one cared about the fact that I was a child, tiny and emaciated. They all performed their work like robots. No one was interested in the person that lived inside the flesh-and-blood body. Years later, I understood that this was a psychological defense mechanism used by the prisoners who were appointed to act as guards. To prevent themselves from collapse due to the realization that those individuals they faced were going to their deaths, those who performed the work did not view the other prisoners as human beings. They created a protective barrier for themselves that blocked all feeling.

Like robots, they washed and shaved the men from head to toe, using brushes to sterilize the shaved areas. They dipped these brushes in a vat of chlorine, black with mold. Perhaps because I was small, and thus an unusual sight in the camp, I managed to escape the brushing from the stinking, repulsive vat.

I stood in a long line, where I was pushed relentlessly. Then I passed the shaving (from which I was exempt, of course) and the haircut stations, finally reaching a doctor in a white coat, who gave the vaccination shots. Like all the rest, he worked like a robot.

Naphtali [Buchenwald, winter 1944-45] (p.109) In the second large hall we were told to take off all our clothes and shoes and throw them on a steadily growing pile. Kapos appeared with clubs in their hands and chased us into a nearby hall. On benches along both walls stood inmate barbers with hand-operated electric shavers. They shaved every hair on our bodies, from head to toe. Then we were made to run into yet another hall. At the entrance stood two

prisoners with paint brushes, which they dipped into pails of a stinging disinfectant and applied it to the sensitive places on our bodies that had just been shaved. The excruciating stinging was merely a prelude to the agony of immersing ourselves in a chlorine tub.

[Buchenwald, Feb.1945](p.133) Four days before Passover, on March 25, 1945, I succeeded in finding Lulek and talking to him. He looked well, smiling, his hair grown back and his clothes clean. He looked at me and noticed the shaved strip dividing my hair down the middle of my head. It had still not grown back, leaving me marked as a concentration camp prisoner. He stared at my hair with surprise, obviously forgetting that he too had had his head shaved when he arrived at Buchenwald. My impression was that he was living on a different planet from mine.

Elli [Auschwitz May 31, 1944] (p.73) A huge sign catches my eye: AUSCHWITZ. ..The marching column comes to a sudden halt. An officer in a gray SS uniform stands facing the lines. Dogs strain on leashes held by SS men flanking him on both sides. He orders each group to march on. Fast. I tremble as I stand before him. He looks at me with friendly eyes. "*Goldene Haar!*" he exclaims and takes one of my long braids into his hand. I am not certain I heard right. Did he say "golden hair" about my braids? "*Bist du Juden?*" Are you Jewish? The question startles me. "Yes. I am Jewish." "*Wie alt bist du?*" How old are you? "I am thirteen." "You are tall for your age. Is this your mother...You go with your mother." With his riding stick he parts Aunt Serena from Mommy's embrace and gently shoves Mommy and me to the group moving to the right. "Go. And remember from now on you're sixteen."

Auschwitz, May 31, 1944 (p.77-79) we are ordered to file through the entrance hall. "Everyone undress! Everything off! *Los!* The room is swarming with SS men. Get undressed? Right here? In front of the men? No one moves. "Didn't you hear? Take off your clothes. All your clothes!" I feel the slap of the whip on my shoulders and meet a young SS soldier's glaring eyes. "Hurry ! Strip fast. You'll be shot. In five minutes anyone with clothes on will be shot!" I look at Mommy. She nods. "Let's get undressed." I stare directly ahead as I take off my clothes. I am afraid. By not looking at anyone I hope no one will see me. I have never seen my mother in the nude. How awful it must be for her. I hesitate...Just then a shot rings out. The charge is ear shattering. Several women begin to scream. ..We are lined up, and several young women in gray dresses start shaving our hair - on our heads, under our arms, and in the pubic area. My long, thick braids remain attached while the shaving machine shears my scalp. The pain of the heavy braid tugging mercilessly at the yet unshaven roots brings tears to my eyes. I whisper a silent prayer for the shaving to be done quickly. For this unexpected torture to be over soon. As my blonde tresses lie on the ground, the husky, indifferent hair butcher remarks, "A heap of gold." With a shudder I remember the scene at the selection-the SS officer admiring my "*goldene Haar,*" the separation from Aunt Serna. Where was she now? Was her hair shorn off as well? Did she also have to strip naked? Had my hair been shorn off before the selection we would be together with her now. ..It was because of my blonde braids that Mommy and I were sent to the other side. ...The shaving of hair has a startling effect. The absence of hair transforms individual women into like bodies. Indistinguishable. Age melts away. Other personal differences melt away. Facial expressions disappear. In their place, a blank, senseless stare emerges on the thousand faces on one naked, unappealing body. In a matter of minutes, even the physical aspect of our numbers seem reduced -there is less of a substance to our dimensions. We become a monolithic mass. Inconsequential. The shaving of hair has another curious effect. A burden is lifted. The burden of individuality. The burden of associations. Of identity.

The burden of the recent past. Girls who had continually wept since the separation from parents, sisters, and brothers, now keep giggling at their friends' strange appearances -shorn heads, nude bodies, faceless faces. Some shriek with laughter. Others begin calling out names of friends to see if they can recognize them now. When response comes from completely transformed bodies, recognition is loud, hysterical. Embraces are wild, noisy. Disbelief is shrieked, screamed, gesticulated. ..I look for Mommy. The hair cropping has not changed her for me. I have been used to seeing her in her kerchiefs, every bit of hair carefully tucked away. Avoiding a glance at her body, I marvel at the beauty of her face. With all accessories gone, her perfect features are even more striking. ..She does not recognize me as I stand before her. Then, a sudden smile of recognition: "Elli! It's you! You look just like your brother Bubi. Strange, I've never seen the resemblance before. What a boyish face! They cut off your beautiful braids..." "It's nothing. Hair can grow." ... As we emerge from the other end of the building and line up quickly in rows of five, shivering wet in shapeless gray sacks, with heads clean shaven, the idea strikes me. The strange creatures we saw as we entered the camp, the shaven, gray-cloaked bunch... we are them! ...With the tip of an authoritarian stick on the shaven head of the first girl in every row of five, we are initiated into the camp. We have become members of an exclusive club. Inmates of Auschwitz. (p.81) Shorn and stripped, showered and uniformed, we marched. ..We survived the entry into Auschwitz. Unknowingly, we survived the selection of the diabolical Doctor Mengele, the handsome psychotic monster who had tenderly stroked my "golden hair"... We march,,, When we reach the Lager, the sun is high. It scorches my freshly shaven scalp. ..As I touch my smooth scalp it burns my palm.

(p.87) Suddenly I spot a tall figure wandering about, shouting, "Laura!Laura!" "Aunt Celia!" It is Mommy's sister, my youngest aunt. My beautiful, stylish aunt. Even now, as she meanders about in the drab gray garb with shaven scalp, she looks distinguished. She grips my shoulders and stares into my face with..disbelief. "Ellie! My little Elli! Is it you? She is kissing my scalp. And we both weep. [Auschwitz June 3,1944] (p.96 "Teen Vanity") My hair has started to grow on a scalp flaming red from the onslaught of the sun. The sharp, yellow bristles against a scarlet backdrop make my head look like a blushing porcupine. ... I am a disfigured scarecrow.

[Plashow labor camp, July 20-Auschwitz August 8,1944] (p.116) In these seven-and-a-half weeks I have grown into a concentration-camp inmate. I have learned to live with fear and hunger and abuse. I have learned to swallow dirt , and live worms...I have become very thin and very tall. My neck is long. My hair has grown, and now it stands erect, about an inch high, like a crown of yellow bristles about my head. Other girls have boyish hairdos. Some have curls framing their faces. But I have a crown of thorns like a porcupine.

Pearl (p.26) The series of anti-Jewish decrees continued... Next the men were to cut off their beards. The pretext offered was that Jews were dirty, and their lice-infested beards spread typhus. But for the Eastern European Jew, as they knew full well, the beard was a badge of glory; this decree was meant as an assault on his dignity. The men began hiding to save their beards; when venturing outside they tied kerchiefs around their faces as if they had toothaches. In the meantime the Germans became obsessed with the great fun of shearing Jews of their beards. SS thugs hunted for victims in the streets; when none were to be found, they ran from house to house. I had my first encounter with this diabolical game on my way home one afternoon, when I found a large group of young men lined up against a wall, their hands raised. What is it? A robbery?...There stood a young

SS officer with shining black boots, clutching a whip...Another SS man wielded a pair of scissors, jeering as he ripped beards off of the agonized, bleeding faces. "Hands up," the dog trainer shouted, "and pray to God. Let Him help you." ...I ran over to him, determined to stop his whip. With a scornful laugh he pointed at the bleeding, half-shorn boys. "Did you ever see anything like that in the twentieth century?" He meant the beards...One of the day's victims...was my brother, Avrum Chaim. He never cut off the other half of his beard, and walked around proudly just so in defiance of his tormentors.

(p.136) At long last he emerged, accompanied by two men. I recognized my father's erect walk, but could not recognize his face as he approached me. His distinguished gray beard had been hacked off roughly, making his face look even more drawn and exhausted. My dear father, what have they done to you? How have they disfigured your face, those scoundrels? More painful than the sight of it was knowing that I could do nothing to alleviate his suffering. The agony of it cut through me like a razor. How helpless, how forlorn I was. (p. 150-51) I turned the key slowly, dreading the thought of opening the door. ..As I looked around I noticed gray hairs, some slightly curled, some straight, scattered across the floor. My father's beard. I bent down to pick up the strands. Slowly I raised them to my lips and kissed them, the remnants of my lost love and admiration. "Father, they must have hurt you when they hacked off your beard. It must have hurt Mother even more.: I could imagine her protests at they attacked father. The impact struck me now. They were truly all gone. How could I live without them? Without Father's wisdom, Mother's love, the sound of Torah learning in the house day and night? What life was left me now? I started to cry, convulsed in agony and despair. then I lost consciousness.

4. JEWISH HOLIDAYS: PURIM AND PASSOVER

Of the descriptions of Passover below, the most detailed is by Pearl Benisch. She describes 4 Passover seder observances from 1942 to 1945, from the Krakow ghetto to the Plashow slave labor camp to Bergen-Belsen, the death camp. Naphtali's description relates only to Buchenwald, and his concern for educating and involving his brother is evident. Elli experiences Passover with her mother, and they try to keep some minimal observance under the most lonely and difficult circumstances.

Lulek [Buchenwald, spring 1945] (Ch.4)

Despite my identity as a non-Jewish Polish child, Naphtali's continual updates kept me informed of what was happening among the Jews in the camp. Since I was very young, I had not had time to learn about Judaism, and my knowledge of customs and holidays was very limited.

As Passover approached, Naphtali and his friends were determined to do anything to avoid eating leavened foods during the holiday. Although the only such food available to them was the daily ration of three and a half ounces of bread, still, it was important to them to observe the laws of Passover. Months in advance, at the beginning of January, they began to prepare by collecting potatoes. They told me about their arrangements and tried to explain their significance to me. Before January, the prisoners had organized a trade in potatoes: three potatoes were worth the daily bread ration. But as the holiday approached, the rules of commerce changed. I did not keep Passover then, mainly because I did not know anything about it. One day, a feeble Naphtali dragged his feet toward block eight and stood next to the back barbed wire fence. Hearing his weak voice calling my name, I rushed out to him. He pulled a few potatoes from his pockets, and explained that he could not carry them because they hindered him while working with the bodies in the crematorium, so he was bringing to me the goods he had set aside for Passover. He asked me to guard them carefully. Then he explained to me, for the first time, why potatoes were so important, adding a few words about the prohibition against eating leavened foods. I guarded those potatoes with my life.

Meanwhile, as my brother and his friends collected potato after potato in anticipation of Passover, the holiday of Purim arrived. I heard the following story of the Purim celebration in the camp long afterward.

Like Passover, the Jews in Buchenwald decided to celebrate Purim as best they could. They could not fulfill the *mitzvot* of sending portions of food to friends, giving gifts to the poor, or holding a festive meal, but they could attempt to read the Scroll of Esther. No one had such a *megillah*, yet they did not concede defeat. Several days before the date, some of the older Jews in the camp held a meeting. They resolved to shake off their despair and try to reconstruct the *megillah* from memory. Each man would write whatever verses he remembered by heart, and a committee of the elders of the block would try to reconstruct the proper order of the text. Everyone remembered the most important verses, such as "In the days of Ahasuerus"; "For the Jews there was light and happiness, joy and glory"; "There was a Jewish man in Shushan the capital, whose name was Mordechai"; "Mordechai would not kneel or bow." They wrote out the verses with charcoal

on yellow paper scrounged from sacks of millet. On Purim eve, the Jews of Buchenwald read the improvised scroll. They could not recite the blessing, since the scroll was incomplete and not written on parchment, and thus did not fulfill the

conditions of the law. Still, with whatever they had dredged up from the depths of their memories, they managed to create a traditional Purim atmosphere, albeit modest, due to the circumstances. At the end of the evening, the Jews sang the symbolic lines, charged with meaning: “The rose of Jacob rejoiced and exulted.../ You have always been their salvation, their hope in every generation / ...all who place hope in You shall not be put to shame / nor shall all those who trust in You be disgraced forever.” When they sang “Cursed is Haman, who sought to destroy me,” no one had any doubt to whom the verse referred, and the phrase “Blessed is Mordechai the Jew” inspired everyone with great hope.

...The Jews also celebrated the Passover Seder in Buchenwald. Over and over they sang the holiday song *Karev Yom*, from memory, “The day is approaching that will be neither day nor night / He has placed guards over your city all day and all night / The darkness of the night will be lit like the light of day.” They had no Haggadah and no matza. Still, among them there was no leavened food to be seen—only potatoes. In the impossible conditions of the camp, the Jews tried, as best they could, to preserve their Judaism.

Naphtali [Buchenwald, Feb.1945] (p. 127) A number of Jews in Block 62 were known as scholars. At least two had served as rabbis. One of them decided that Purim (celebrating the deliverance of the Jews from extermination in Persia twenty-five centuries ago) should be observed despite the bleak atmosphere. Someone found a copy of the Book of Esther. We formed a makeshift congregation of about twenty in a corner of the block, and listened to the reading of the story of Esther. This was the closest we could come to observing the joyous Purim celebration, manifestation of miraculous divine grace.

(p.133-37) The approach of Passover aroused expectations. We had hoped that spring [1945] would bring increased pressure on both military fronts. Many firmly believed in the symbolism of Passover, the festival of freedom, and were sure that we would be liberated during the eight-day holiday. In the meantime, there were those who sought substitutes for bread for the festival, when eating bread is forbidden. A brisk trade began well before the holiday. A week earlier, a day's bread ration could buy three cooked potatoes. As demand for potatoes increased, the value of bread declined. By Passover, on March 29, I had more than four pounds of potatoes stuffed into my two pants legs. My only fear was that the strings tied around the bottom of my pants would not take the strain. Returning to Lulek's block, I deposited most of my potato treasure with him for the Passover holiday. I spent the *seder* night (the recounting of the delivery of the Jews from slavery in Egypt) in Block 63, with a group of people who had planned to celebrate the *seder* together. Arich Eizner, a Ger *hassid*, led the *seder* and helped others recite passages of the Haggadah (*seder* text) from memory. Some, lying on the bunks, contributed comments and interpretations, while others offered military and political analyses. In between, we sang the traditional songs, of the *seder* and the festival. The most popular songs were “Karev Yom” (A day is coming that will be neither day nor night) and “Next year in Jerusalem.” We dispersed with the feeling that the day of deliverance was very close. In the middle of the night, there were loud explosions, which some believed to be artillery shells, rather than aerial bombs. ...This was the last flutter of a dying Nazi regime...A volley of gunfire into the building brought me to my feet. ..To my great amazement, I landed in the midst of a group of *hassidim* shielded from the stairway, reciting the *Hallel* in the Vizhnitz melody. I couldn't believe my eyes. These Jews had somehow succeeded in locating a prayer shawl, which was now wrapped around the man leading the worship. They all prayed with great fervor. At that particular moment I was hardly in the mood for prayer. But the fervid cry, “Please save us, O Lord, we beseech thee. ..Please give good fortune, O Lord, we beseech thee,” convinced me that it might be advisable to invoke divine mercy. I know no one there, but joined in the prayer. With an easier heart and more self-confidence, I broke a window and jumped out... we entered the forest. Here and there we found isolated vegetables, spoiled and frozen beets or potatoes – our feast for the final day of the Passover festival.

Elli [Augsburg, April 1, 1945] (p.164) We are lined up in the factory yard, to be sorted out for our assignments...As we stand there I am terribly hungry. It is the fifth day of Passover. Mommy and I had decided that one of us would observe Passover by not eating the bread ration. The other one would compensate for the bread by sharing her ration of the cooked meal at noon and in the evening. I had volunteered to be the one to give up the bread ration. Mommy had agreed because she was in far worse physical shape than I. So I had only black coffee in the morning , and one-and-a-half bowls of soup at noon and in the evening. All that liquid without the ration of solid bread made me ravenously hungry, and by the third day of Passover I felt quite weak. Now on the fifth day, having been deprived even of morning coffee, I am feeling faint. ... Much later we find out that was the night Daddy died--on the fifth day of Passover.

Pearl [Krakow ghetto, 1942] (p.103) Passover was upon us, and despite the hardships all around we readied ourselves to celebrate this beautiful festival. The first and most important task was to procure matzas. My father obtained some wheat and ground it at a neighboring farm...With the boys' help the oven was made kosher for Passover and the exciting job of baking matzas began...as prescribed by Jewish Law. ...The next hurdle to surmount was the Passover wine, enough for four cups for each of us at each of the two Sedarim. It was a struggle even to get enough raisins to make the wine with. The we bought some beets for borscht, a few onions, and plenty of potatoes. The price we paid for these items was a beautiful set of damask linen that my mother had hand-embroidered to have been part of my dowry. How rich and happy we felt, being able to acquire all these staples! Now we looked forward to the Festival of Freedom... we learned how to make fishless gefilte fish, sumptuous meatless meatloaf, and almost anything from turnips, which were the lowest-priced vegetable in Poland...The table was covered with a snow-white tablecloth and set with the fine china... Mother wore her silk Shabbos blouse...Father seated himself at the head of the table in his white kittel and brown fur streimel, he presented a truly regal figure... He explained in Yiddish the thought behind the Kiddush: "For You have chosen us among the nations to become a kingdom of priests... In blood and in fire You have purified us," he cried, "so we might never become such beasts as our oppressors are!" "The bread we are eating now is literally the bread of affliction. Let anyone who is hungry come in and share it with us; let everyone who is needy come and join us." Is it easy to share your bread with others when you sit at a sumptuous table. It's easy to answer the knock of the needy at the door of an affluent home. But now we have to share our bread of affliction, our plain potatoes, with the hungry. "Now is the time," Father went on, his voice cracking with emotion, "for us to open our humble home to the needy, to open our own agonized hearts to others' pain; to comfort them and share our hope ...May we be free people next year." [Author's note: Of the roomful of people who attended the seder , none survived to share it precious memory with me.]

[Plashow, slave labor camp, 1943] (p.227) Spring was in the air; the Festival of Freedom was approaching. Surely at this season of Redemption Hashem would redeem his tortured people from the modern-day Pharaoh, as He did so many generations ago. With that flicker of hope we "prepared" for Pesach. We would have to survive for eight days without bread, the one commodity of which we usually had enough...We consulted the rabbis at the camp library, and Rabbi Hirsch ruled that we might eat legumes this Passover, in view of the emergency circumstances. They were not real chametz after all...Matzas were baked in the Plashow concentration camp, right under the

Nazis' noses, according to the strictest precepts of Jewish Law. We women had the good fortune of obtaining one of these matzas over which we might make the blessing on the first seder night. After that we ate potatoes, lentils, and beans when obtainable, and starved when not, and so survived Pesach. It was a pleasure to return to routine and to bread [after Pesach]. That item was our chief sustenance.

[Plashow, 1944] (p.279) Spring was coming. Passover, too, was near, the season of miracles. Busily the men prepared for the holiday. The boys in the bakery kashered the oven by bringing it to its maximum possible temperature; this done they baked a few matzas. We girls, being "rich," provided the flour and were rewarded with a few matzas for ourselves and our steady customers, the library inmates. Once again we would be able to recite the blessing over matza. It proved to be a difficult week. Food was scanty. Our ordinary staples of bread and flour were, of course, forbidden. With great difficulty we obtained some potatoes and beets, and somehow, with God's help, survived our second Pesach in Plashow as we had the first one.

[Bergen-Belsen, 1945] (p.392-398) The first days of spring had come, heralding the approach of Passover, the joyous festival of freedom and redemption. Would anyone be left in Bergen-Belsen to celebrate, or survive to witness his own redemption? Our group... was separated by the epidemic of typhus. Some had returned from the infirmary... a few were still hallucinating in the infirmary... the rest were waiting their turn. Even in this condition, it was a double blessing to go to work: for the sense it gave us that we still existed... and for the turnips. "What now?" Rivkah asked one day. "It's almost Pesach, and we have no matzas." I had already contacted the men who had a better chance than we did of baking matza. They had promised to help, but thus far nothing had been forthcoming. All I wanted was one matza for us to say the blessing over. Only one thing was plentiful: maror - bitterness, misery, sickness, death, pain, cruelty. Thousands would greet Passover in Bergen-Belsen this year, some sick and dying, but most of them piled stiff and white all over the camp. The peeling-room crew sat down for a seder on the first night of Pesach. There were the two Rivkahs, Ruchlka, Rega, and several other Beth Jacob girls in the reduced crowd. Rivkah Englard said kiddush over some ersatz coffee saved from the morning ration. Then came the Haggadah. Someone started from memory; everyone contributed what she remembered. I had prepared three "matzas" - white, thin, almost round. As I covered them with a rag, the assemblage waited for the surprise. "Here are the matzas," I announced, uncovering three thin slices of turnip. They looked like matzas - almost. "What kind of matzas are those?" the girls asked, laughing. I was quite serious. "And what kind of a seder is this? Those are the matzas I was able to make: the rest is up to Hashem. "Don't you remember the story of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa? One erev Shabbos his daughter ran to him, crying, 'I poured vinegar into the candlesticks instead of oil. How will they burn?' Rabbi Chanina put her at ease. 'Don't cry. He Who told oil to burn can tell vinegar to burn.' Miraculously, the candles shone brightly all that Shabbos. "Wouldn't it be as easy for He Who turns dough into matzas to turn turnips into matzas?" I asked seriously, waiting for a miracle to happen. It is not. The embarrassed white turnip did not turn into a crisp matza. So at that night's seder we did not say the blessing over matza. But we did say it over the karpas (the sweet turnip) and the maror. Of maror there was plenty... "If I live though this Gehinnom," Rega declared fervently, "the most important food on my seder table will forever be a turnip." This was the cue for nostalgia for seders gone by, with everyone exchanging stories. Later came Chad Gadya the story of a lamp that Father bought for two zuzim... God Himself descended to earth to judge the

generations that would not let the innocent lamb live in peace- the lamb that He had bought for two zuzim to bring light, justice, and joy to this world. We finished with the song and prayer, "Next year in Jerusalem" - a song of hope against hope, a tiny spark of life in the Valley of Death... Luba was luckier. That first seder night [she was called to conduct the seder in the infirmary.] Luba glanced at the table and gasped. There, miracle of miracles, lay a matza - a real matza. "Here I am, a palpable miracle, a real matza for a seder in Bergen-Belsen." One little miracle had already occurred, it was lying on the table. Then a greater one took place. There, in the pitch darkness in Bergen-Belsen, a group of women ravaged with typhus said the blessing, "Al achilas matza."

5. LIBERATION

These passages about liberation speak for themselves. By now, the students should be able to suggest what questions would be most appropriate to ask in order to highlight the similarities and differences among the four youths.

Lulek [Buchenwald, April 1945] (Heb.Ch.4)

In the first few days of April, we heard the sound of cannon-fire approaching and fading. Rumors flew that the war was nearly over, that the Nazis were defeated, that there was hope, perhaps a chance, we might remain alive. ... With the last remains of his strength, he called my name. He spoke to me for just a minute, but every word that came from his mouth remained engraved in my mind, as if they were his last words.

“Lulek,” he said, “they’re taking me. I hope, but I can’t be sure, that we will see each other again sometime. There is no way back from where they’re taking us. You’re a big boy now, you’ll be eight in a few months. I can’t and won’t hide the truth from you. I see no chance of being saved from this hell. It’s the end of the world. We have no father, they took Milek as well, and I don’t know what happened to Mother. She probably thinks and talks about us all the time, but I’m not sure she’s alive. Now they’re taking me, too, and you’ll be alone. I see that you have friends here. Hammann, the block commander, is a good man. Fyodor likes you, and Margolis also takes care of you a bit. Maybe there’ll be a miracle and you’ll stay alive, and all this will end sometime. I’ve come to tell you that there is a place in the world called Eretz Israel. Say ‘Eretz Israel.’ The Land of Israel. Again. Repeat after me.”

I knew not one word of Hebrew, but I repeated these two words—Eretz Israel—without understanding their meaning. Naphtali explained:

“Eretz Israel is the home of the Jews. The foreign nations exiled us from there long ago, and to there we must return. This is the only place in the world where they do not kill Jews. If you stay alive, you will surely meet people who will want to take you with them to other places, because you’re a nice kid. But you aren’t going anywhere else. Remember what I say, only Eretz Israel. We have an uncle there.”

(Chapter 5, “Liberation” Heb. pp.64-80) As a driven leaf I hid in Block 8 on the day Buchenwald was liberated, April 11, 1945. I hid and I simply wanted to survive. Planes circled around in the skies above. I liberation in my mind is connected to those planes and the image of the people’s reactions: every time the planes circles, the inmates waved their hats and screamed from the bottom of their throats, Hurrah! Hurrah! [This was a term I did not understand] but it conveyed some kind of joy, and I didn’t quite understand to whom they are shouting Hurrah, and why. But I did sense the joy embedded in those shouts. ... After six years of closed gates, the gates suddenly opened, and new life began. A whole new world opened up. There was a deep feel of a new genesis. ... I ran towards the gate with the others who were like a raging river of people breaking through a dam. .. I broke away from my protector, Fyodor and ran by myself to the iron gate. In April 1945, I was not yet right years old. Many of my memories of that day are not really my own, but are mixed with those of people who were there and have recounted before me over the decades the events of that day.

Naphtali [Buchenwald, April 2, 1945] (p.134) There was nothing left to do but to say good-bye [to Lulek] and instruct him about the future. In my heart I believed I would still see him again. To be on the safe side, I told him what was likely to happen and made sure he knew all he needed to know about himself: his full name, the probably location of relatives in the Land of Israel, where he must go it left alone. Bursting into tears he begged me to come back quickly. I promised and prayed that it would indeed turn out that way.

(p.160) It was April 11, 1945 Two American planes flew very low over the camp, and later in the afternoon two jeeps with American soldiers burst through the gate and stopped at the center of the assembly area...our saviors for whom we had waited so long. Suddenly, there was a shout. "Hurrah!" and we stormed the six embarrassed men. "What is this place?" "Buchenwald" "Tens of thousands have been murdered here" "There are thousands of bodies in the camp. Those of us still alive need urgent medical care." The soldier translated into English, and his comrades exchanged glances of disbelief. As if on signal, they began to hand out chewing gum, candies, and cigarettes. ...Standing among my liberated comrades, I feared that I would not meet the health requirements. My legs failed me and a cold sweat covered my forehead. Shalom Tepper... pulled me to my feet and helped me back to the block... I was burning with fever, only partly conscious, and was barely able to speak to my brother, who stared at me in shock.

Elli (p. 200) Perhaps our guards no longer care whether we escape or not. The doors of the boxcar stand wide open. The train [from Dachau] moves on all day... I mid-morning sounds reach us. Human voices. Two tall men in strange uniforms stand in the doorway. "Who are you? Are you Jews?... We are Americans. Are you men or women? ... the Germans surrendered, What prison camp do you come from? Are you men or women? "We are Jewish women from the concentration camp Dachau. We are unable to walk..We've not eaten for many days. Many days," I manage to speak. So this is it. Liberation. It's come. I am cold. I am very tired. A middle-aged German woman approaches me. "We didn't know anything. We had no idea. You must believe me. Did you have to work hard also? At your age, it must've been difficult... It must have been harder for the older people." "How old do you think I am?" **She looks are me uncertainly. "Sixty? Sixty-two?" "You think I am sixty? I am fourteen. Fourteen years old."** She gives a little shriek and makes the sign of the cross. In horror and disbelief she walks away. I am fourteen years old, and I have lived a thousand years.

Pearl [April 15,1945] (p. 426) *I was still flat on my back and very sick when the girls burst into the infirmary with the exciting news. "The British are here! The Germans are running about like headless chickens. The British have liberated us. We are free. Free!" ...Only I was indifferent to the outpouring of exuberance. I only felt anger and disappointment. "You say the British are here. They came a little too late, .. Whom did they liberate? Thousands of dying bodies lying on the floors of the barracks. Piles and piles of corpses all over the camp. And who came to greet them? Skeletons who barely made it through the typhus. Bones wrapped in skin. Walking shadows welcomed the liberators."* Then amidst the raucous revelry, I fell asleep.

AFTERWORD:

In order to conclude on a positive note, we include these passages which point each of the religious youths to the future. They all are aiming to go to the Land of Israel, but only the Lau brothers go there directly. Eventually Lulek goes to yeshiva, becomes a rabbi, and is appointed Chief Rabbi of Israel. Naphtali has a career in journalism and diplomacy in Israel. The two girls have constraints, and go on "aliya gimmel" which was a nickname for aliya to Israel, via America. Elli (today Livia Bitton-Jackson) goes to New York with her mother and brother, marries there and raises a family before eventually settling in Netanya, Israel. Her post-Holocaust experience is told in two books which form a sequel to the book in our study (see the chart of books). Pearl (Benisch) goes on to raise a family in the United States, but eventually gets to Israel, somewhat later in life.

Lulek (Ch. 4) My older brother Naphtali is my real hero. Every day of my life, I see the picture in my mind of Naphtali jumping from the car of the death train, not to save his own life, but because he left me—Lulek—alone in block eight in Buchenwald. In his ears rang Mother's voice from November 1944, when she threw me into his arms at the train station in Piotrkow: "Tulek, look after Lulek." And Father's order that we continue the dynasty. Naphtali had a mission, and he could not allow himself to fail. This mission helped him to stay alive. He suffered weeks of sleeplessness, cold, hunger, and disease, which brought him to lose all interest in life. But he knew he could not sink. He could not give up.

Naftali (p.) For fifty years, I carried the responsibility passed on to me by my father before he went to his death in Treblinka. He placed in my care a weak child, who was five years old but looked like he was only three or even younger. For three years, I served as father and mother, guardian and protector to my younger brother Israel Meir, or Lulek, as we called him. I often felt despair attacking me, flinging me helplessly to my destruction. I think it was the mission my father gave me, to bring my younger brother to safety and to ensure the continuation of our family's rabbinic dynasty, that kept me alive and gave me the will to continue fighting for our lives, rather than succumb to the horrible fate that befell the rest of our family

Elli p.212 I want to go to Palestine, the Jewish Land, and live among people who share my inner void. I want to hear the echo of that void reverberate in the voices of my fellow students, my fellow shoppers, my fellow pedestrians. Can the void ever be filled? Perhaps it can be shared. Perhaps in the Jewish land. But I have a problem. My brother Bubi received an affidavit from a school in New York, and soon he will be leaving for America. The three of us had vowed never to be separated again. We must follow Bubi to America as soon as we can.

Pearl [DP camp Bergen-Belsen] (p.419) Right from the start the British put pressure on us to register as Displaced Persons (DPs)...So it wasn't long before an organization of inmates sprang up, dedicated to aliya [the Land of Israel] in all its facets... A mood of unity prevailed then among us [the religious youth]: "Achdus", [unity] in fact, became the slogan of the day and our organization of inmates became known as "der Yichud"...Our Beth Jacob circle [of haredi girls],

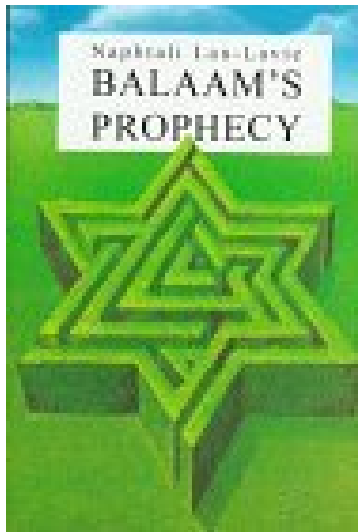
which had widened considerably... was looking to provide an opportunity for aliya, so we tried every possibility and hoped for a solution to come along.

Table of the 4 Holocaust memoirs compared in this study

Name/Nickname:	Lulek	Naphtali	Elli	Pearl
Name as author :	Rabbi Israel Meir Lau	Naphtali Lau-Lavie	Livia Bitton-Jackson (childhood name: Elli Friedman)	Pearl Benisch
Date, place of birth:	June 1, 1937 Piotrkow, Poland	1926 Krakow, Poland	1931 Somorja, Slovakia	Birthdate not clear; Krakow, Poland
Age in 1942:	5 years	16 years	11 years	17 ? years
Age in 1945 at Liberation:	8 years	19 years	14 years	20 ? years
Date, Place of Liberation:	April 11, 1945 Buchenwald	April 11, 1945 Buchenwald	April 30, 1945 Dachau (Seeshaupt)	April 15, 1945 Bergen-Belsen
Title of Book in English (the edition used in this analysis):	Hebrew title: <i>Al Tishlah et Yadkha el Hana'ar</i> [Do Not Raise Your Hand Against the Boy]	<i>Balaam's Prophecy: Eyewitness to History 1939-1989</i>	<i>I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing up in the Holocaust</i>	<i>To Vanquish the Dragon</i>
Book publisher:	Yedioth Ahronoth Books, Tel Aviv	Cornwall Books, Cranbury, NJ	Simon & Schuster NY	Feldheim Publishers NY
Publication :	2005	1998	1999	1991
Approx.cost:	Softcover \$19	Hardcover \$25	Paperback \$5 (also available in hardcover)	Hardcover \$25
Comments:	Book to be published in English early in 2007; exact title & publisher not yet decided		The above book is abridged for youth from the full length book <i>Elli</i> (see below)	
Other Holocaust related books by author:		Hebrew version: <i>Am K'Lavie</i> (Sifriat Maariv 1994)	<i>Elli: Coming of Age in the Holocaust</i> (Harpercollins, 1986) from \$ 9	Hebrew version: <i>Ruah Gavra al Hadrakon</i> (Feldheim, Jerusalem, 1993) \$10
Other Holocaust related books by author:			<i>My Bridges of Hope: Searching for Life and Love After Auschwitz</i> (Simon & Schuster, 1999) \$1-\$5 used;	<i>Carry Me in Your Heart</i> (Life&Legacy of Sarah Schenirer) Feldheim, has Holocaust material
Other Holocaust related books by author:			<i>Hello, America : A Refugee's Journey from Auschwitz to the New World [in Britain Towards Freedom]</i> (Simon&Schuster, 2005) \$5-\$10	

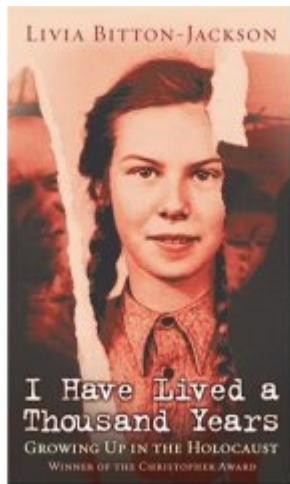


Author: Rabbi Israel Meir Lau
Hebrew title: <i>Al Tishlah et Yadkha el Hana'ar</i> [Do Not Raise Your Hand Against the Boy]
Yedhioth Ahronoth Books, Tel Aviv
2005
Softcover \$19
Book to be published in English early in 2007; exact title & publisher not yet decided



<i>Author: Naphtali Lau-Lavie</i>
Balaam's Prophecy: Eyewitness to History 1939-1989
Cornwall Books, Cranbury, NJ
1998
Hardcover \$25
Hebrew version: <i>Am K'Lavie</i> (Sifriat Maariv 1994)

Hebrew version: *Am K'Lavie* (Sifriat Maariv 1994)



<i>Author:</i> Livia Bitton-Jackson
<i>I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing up in the Holocaust</i>
Simon & Schuster NY
1999
Paperback \$5 (also available in hardcover)
The above book is abridged for youth from the full length book <i>Elli</i> (see below)
<i>Elli: Coming of Age in the Holocaust</i> (Harpercollins, 1986) from \$ 9



Author: Livia Bitton-Jackson

<i>Elli: Coming of Age in the Holocaust</i> (Harpercollins, 1986) from \$ 9
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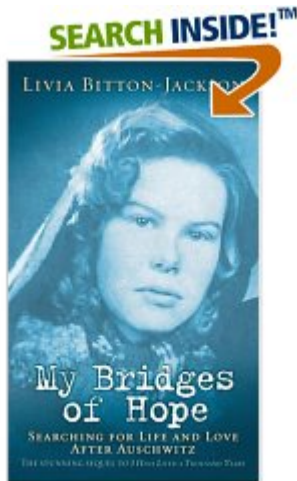
This is the original memoir of Elli Friedman (today, Livia Bitton-Jackson). It was abridged and adapted for youth under the title *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*.

Publishers' summary

From her small, sunny hometown between the beautiful Carpathian Mountains and the blue Danube River, Elli Friedmann was taken-at a time when most girls are growing up, having boyfriends and embarking upon the adventure of life-and thrown into the murderous hell of Hitler's Final Solution.

When Elli emerged from Auschwitz and Dachau just over a year later, she was fourteen. She looked like a sixty-year-old.

This account of horrifyingly brutal inhumanity-and dogged survival - is Elli's true story.



Author: Livia Bitton-Jackson

My Bridges of Hope: Searching for Life and Love After Auschwitz (Simon & Schuster, 1999) \$1-\$5 used;

From Publishers Weekly

The author continues her memoir, begun in *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*, at age 14 as a survivor of Auschwitz. PW called her story "utterly involving. The volume adds an important chapter to the ongoing attempt to understand the Holocaust and its consequences." Ages 12-up.

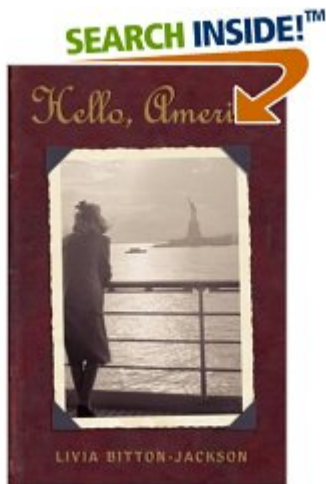
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From School Library Journal

Grade 6 Up-This touching memoir, the sequel to *I Have Lived a Thousand Years* (S & S, 1997), covers the years between the end of the war in 1945 through the author's emigration from Europe to the United States in 1951. These years were filled with many things for Elli, as she was then known. Chief among them was her desire to learn as much as she could about her Jewish heritage and her commitment to it. Part of this dedication was the work she did for the Briha, an organization that helped transport refugees to Israel. She also became a teacher and found a new identity as a learned young woman. Elli felt very strongly about joining the pioneers in Israel but her mother was not up to the physical challenge of moving to the developing nation. Instead, they escaped from Czechoslovakia into Austria and eventually Germany to await departure to join Elli's brother in America. The young woman's story recounts a time in her life that was filled with both anxiety and hope, tears and joy. More than the simple account of a Holocaust survivor and the often terrible postwar years in Europe, this book is also the tale of a young woman discovering who she is and how she wants to spend the remainder of her life-something to which every young adult can relate. A fine conclusion to Bitton-Jackson's autobiography of her youth.

Carol Fazioli, The Brearley School, New York City, NY

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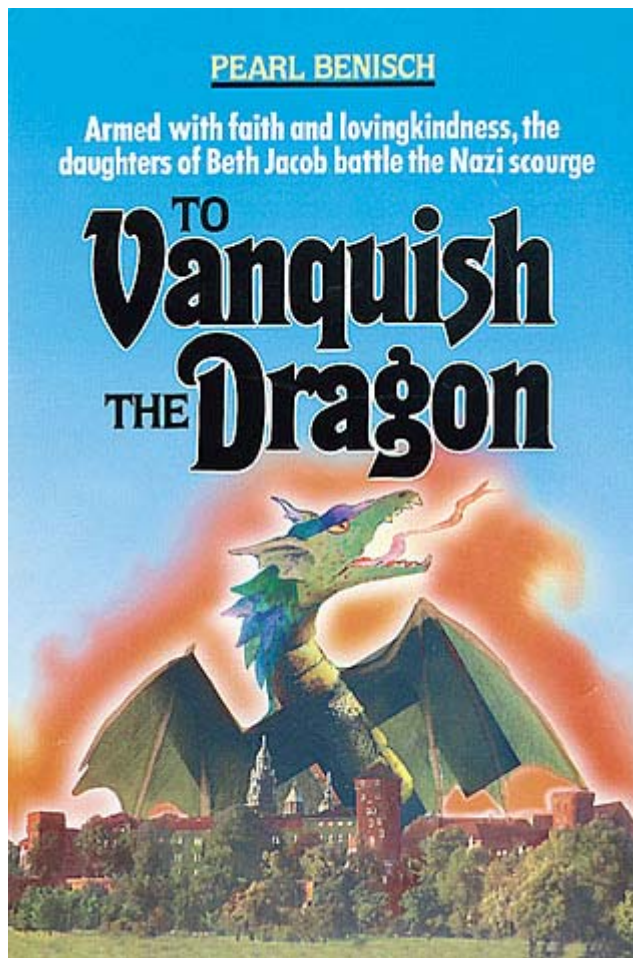
Author: Livia Bitton-Jackson

Hello, America : A Refugee's Journey from Auschwitz to the New World
[in Britain Towards Freedom] (Simon&Schuster,2005) \$5-\$10

From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 9-12. The author of the Holocaust memoir *I Have Lived a Thousand Years* (1997) writes about what it was like to immigrate to America as a young woman in 1951. Elli Friedman's bond with her mother is as close as when they protected each other in Auschwitz and survived the refugee camps. Now they move in with family in Brooklyn, and Elli slowly finds friends, love, and work, always sustained by her Orthodox Judaism. There's too much of the daily detail for many readers, but Elli's "greenhorn" mistakes are funny, and her romance with Alex is bittersweet--he needs her to be a helpless immigrant; but she wants to make her own way as a teacher. Most powerful is her survivor experience, told with terse understatement in the present-tense narrative. Haunted by horror, guilt, and grief, she is shocked to find prejudice in America; even Jews don't want to know about the Holocaust, so she must hide the number tattooed on her arm. *Hazel Rochman*

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Author: Pearl Benisch	
<i>To Vanquish the Dragon</i>	
Feldheim Publishers NY	www.feldheim.com
1991	
Hardcover	488 Pages
\$25	

Publisher's summary:

The stirring memoir of the courage and strength of Beth Jacob students and the acts of kindness and heroism they performed even while caught between the jaws of the Nazi monster. In the ghettos and in the concentration camps, the fire of Torah and faith burned strong and clear in the hearts of these young martyrs and survivors



Author: Pearl Benisch

Title: *Haruah SheGavra Al Hadrakon* [To Vanquish the Dragon]

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