

This newsletter is dedicated to the memory of Marlene W. Hechtman & Martin M. Staenberg.

# L'Dor V'Dor

From Generation to Generation • The Newsletter of the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society

EDITION 19 • WINTER / SPRING 2011

## Honors Celebrated at the Annual NJHS Meeting



Charlotte Koom



Debbi Josephson & George Shafer



Harold & Linda Mann with Bob Belgrade



Larry Josephson & Rocky Lewis



Beth Staenberg & Nan Katz



Max Neiden & Gail Wishnow



Phyllis Wasserman & Helen Rifkin



David & Sue Millward

The annual meeting of the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society was held on Sunday, August 7th. Gary Javitch served as master of ceremonies. Harold and Linda Mann of the Carl Frohm Memorial Foundation accepted the Mary Fellman Award. Sue F. Millward received the NJHS Shirley Berman Volunteer Award. A dessert reception followed the meeting.

# A Message From Debbi Josephson, NJHS Board President

(The views expressed in this article are solely the opinion of the writer.)

Thirty years old! Can you believe it? What were you doing thirty years ago? Thirty is how old the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society will be in 2012. We'll celebrate with an event in October. It will be a fun afternoon of partying and paying tribute to our founders, Mary Fellman and Oliver Pollak. Watch for more information as the time gets near.

The Historical Society had grown quite a bit in thirty years. When it was founded our office was a broom closet in the JCC and now look at the space we occupy; a large office with computers, The Carl Frohm Archival Center, the Riekes Museum and permanent displays throughout the JCC. And we staff two part time employees, Kathy Weiner and Renee Corcoran our director.

We have all done a good job of keeping the NJHS visible in the community because Renee is often the first person called when another Jewish community organization or Federation agency wants help with an exhibit or an anniversary celebration. We provided memorabilia for the AZA and LOVE anniversaries recently. Often the Jewish Press will search our archives for photos and information. When a group wants to take their members on a "Tour of Jewish Omaha" the Historical Society is the first place called. If someone from out of town wants to know where an Omaha ancestor is buried who is called, you guessed, the Historical Society. This is exactly what the Historical Society is here for; to preserve our memories and help the community recall those memories. It is very encouraging when others call upon us and benefit from our help.

Fiscally the health of the organization is a bit undernourished. We rely on memberships, donations and some very loyal and generous benefactors and foundations to carry on the operations. We are not a portly NJHS but a scrawny thirty year old organization. We manage and very carefully spend the money in our treasury. The rent that the JCC charges us will be going up by about \$350 a quarter. We haven't had a rent increase in years. And we need to be located in the JCC building. We will work hard to find the money needed for this increase.

We have also been asked to increase the amount of money we owe to the Jewish Federation for the Central Services support. This year we will only be able to contribute a portion of our fair share, the Jewish Federation of Omaha has generously agreed to support us for what we cannot pay. Thank you very much JFO, we so appreciate your willingness to help. Maybe the time is approaching to think about the Historical Society joining forces as an agency of the Federation —don't we all want to see the Jewish Community remain a strong and vibrant force in Omaha. The dollars we all struggle to raise need to be used in the most sensible and judicious of ways and possibly combining forces is the way of the future.

I hope you have enjoyed reading the latest edition of the Memories of the Jewish Midwest —Mom and Pop Grocery Stores. We have many people to thank for this publication, but most importantly the thanks is to YOU our devoted members for supplying the material for our biggest book so far. Big thanks to our parents and grandparents for their ability to survive and thrive here.

## 2011 - 2012

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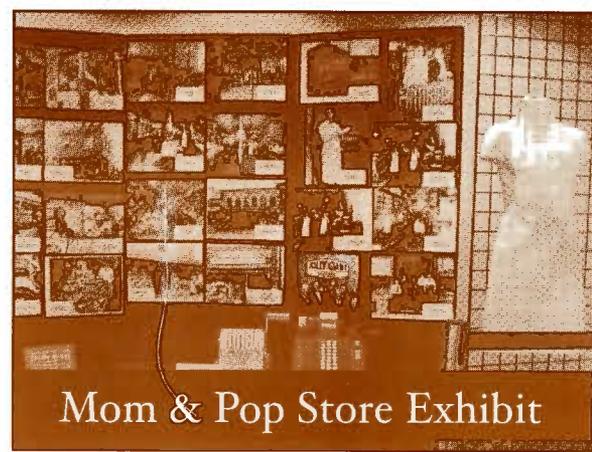
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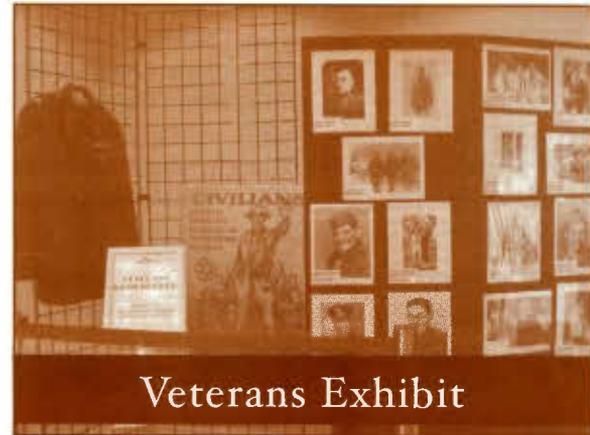
## Current Events & Happenings...



Susan Ravnitz Platt of Santa, Monica, CA contacted the NJHS office seeking information about her family. In August, on the way to a class reunion, she and her husband visited the NJHS office to search through our archival collection. She was amazed at what she discovered. Susan's grandfather, Samuel Ravnitz, was the first President of the Jewish Federation of Omaha from 1905 to 1915!



**We were proud to share these recent NJHS exhibits with the Rose Blumkin Home!**



Veterans Exhibit

*Your Membership is Needed!*

BY: DICK ROCHMAN, MEMBERSHIP CHAIRPERSON

NJHS membership envelopes have been mailed for your consideration. Your membership helps plan programs, exhibits and continue our goal of preserving the history of Jewish families for future generations. Your continued support is very important to us. Our membership year is January 1st through December 31st.

We welcome your suggestions of potential new members. Also, NJHS memberships make excellent gifts and often give a former Nebraskan the opportunity to get reacquainted with our community.

### **Welcome to Our Newest NJHS Members!**

We gratefully acknowledge and welcome our new members. Thank you for your generous and continued support.

**Bernard Bloom**

**Frances Cohen Peterson**

**Steven C. Perelman**

**Joan Kaiman**

**Robert Meyerson**

**Michael & Mimi Silverman**

# More About Mom & Pop Grocery Stores : Ben Wine Grocery Store

BY: NORMAN WINE

My father Ben Wine owned and operated a grocery store for many years. Specific dates are not available because there are no elders left to confirm the facts. However, sometime in the mid to late 1930s my dad managed to buy a very small store on 18th and California Streets. It was a poor neighborhood with many families and low rent apartments. It was a time when everybody was struggling to make a living; dad's store was probably a welcome addition to the area. It was the usual store like everyone else operated; shelves of canned staples, a little fresh produce and a limited meat case. Dad was the butcher, though he didn't carry a lot, he did the cutting when necessary. I know he didn't have fancy cutting equipment. No electric tools, just some knives that he used with self-taught skills.

In the early part of 1940 the store had a fire that caused a lot of damage. It was restored and rebuilt into a more generous space and decent size. I remember bread was delivered to the store. The different bakeries always argued over whose merchandize were most prominently placed on the shelves. Somehow my dad kept them thinking their bread always got the choice spot.

Small stores like dad's had the convenience of a meat truck brought to their door. Armour meat truck called on dad. He could take as much or as little as he needed. I'm guessing this was an economical way to manage

during those days when nobody had extra money.

There really wasn't anything unusual about the store. It was closed Saturday and open Sunday filling the needs of the neighborhood families. There were many very small purchases; a dime's worth of this or a quarter's worth if that. If the dime or quarter wasn't available there was my dad's system of extending credit. A note on a scrap of paper with the name and amount charged was deposited into a small box next to the cash register. I know he carried many who didn't have a cent when they walked into the door.

The most unusual thing about the store was my dad. He was quick to make friends. People could be counted on to stop and kibbutz especially policemen. I'm not sure how it started but he could quickly make a lunchmeat sandwich on fresh bread with a cold bottle of pop and present a free lunch. The cops were his buddies. They knew that Ben Wine was good for a loan of a few bucks until payday.

People knew dad well. He tried to look like a tough guy but was a man softer than a marshmallow. He was a really warm and good guy.

Unfortunately he got sick and died in 1960. By then I was a grown man and expected to run the store in his absence. I ran it with the help of my bride Lois for about a year. I was then called back into the military service as a reserve. With nobody to run it, it was sold

## Three Nebraska Rosh Hashanah Tables

BY: OLIVER B. POLLAK<sup>1</sup>

My UNO food history seminar read *Eat My Words, Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks they Wrote* by Janet Theophano. She wrote, "Taken as a whole, a woman's recipe book is the record of her life.... The act of reading and cooking from her book makes possible a veritable communion with the writer."<sup>2</sup>

Theophano's mother, Greta Longo, a German Jewish refugee, learned English in London while working in other people's kitchens. My English born maternal grandmother, Nellie Bachmann married my grandfather who lived in Germany in 1912. She fled Hannover, Germany in 1938 and served as a housekeeper in Richmond, England. My mother left Germany in March 1939 to become a mother's helper in London.

It is good to eat and think. Karen and I have acquired cookbooks to understand cuisines, cookery, and the social context of recipes, especially synagogue charitable fundraising cookbooks and other nonprofit organizations.

At least twenty-five Jewish cookbooks have been published in Nebraska.<sup>3</sup> We gravitate to the cookbook section in bookstores, and visit cookbook stores in San Francisco, New York and London.

Erev Rosh Hashanah my wife, assisted by Pat Teal cooked for eight. Aveva Shukert provided lunch for six.

Lynda Mirvish, assisted by her architect "sous chef" daughter Lenora, cooked for ten.

The offerings of wine, chocolates, flowers, and a healthy appetite, thanking the women at the table for contributing salads, soup, tzimmes, baked goods, and fruit required a commemorative text.

In 2011 the Omaha World-Herald Rosh Hashanah culinary coverage appeared on Erev Rosh Hashanah. How useful are New Year cooking hints provided on New Year's eve?

Karen plans Rosh Hashanah about six weeks ahead of time. Do we host it or await an invitation? Who should we invite, who will be out of town? We accommodate vegetarians and serve halibut, salmon, or sea bass provided by Whole Foods, Jacobson, and Absolutely Fresh Sea Food. The biggest question – how to sauce the fish? Cookbooks and iPad cover the kitchen table as well food stained brittle newspaper recipes in manila folders, handwritten and typed 3x5 and 4x6 cards, family lore and the kitchen sisterhood.

Degrees of satisfaction mark old recipes - excellent, wonderful, delicious, tasty, make again, easy to make, too bland, Noah did not like, and poor; bad clippings were thrown away.

Karen's over 70 Jewish cookbooks include Cajun, Creole,

## Rosh Hashanah Tables continued...

French, Indian, and Italian styles. Fish, vegetarian, rice, soup, microwave, low calorie, healthy and healing cooking, restaurant and celebrity chef cookbooks reveal eclectic culinary tastes. Thirty Burmese and Southeast Asian cookbooks support my Burmese/Myanmar cuisine research.

Reference works include Larousse Gastronomique, The Gourmet Cookbook, Good Housekeeping, and Rabbi Gil Marks' Encyclopedia of Jewish Food (2010) which contains over 650 subjects in its 654 pages. According to Marks, Rosh Hashanah "is an occasion of great joy and feasting," and "no other holiday has more symbolic foods."<sup>4</sup>

Karen's mother, Reva Atkin, born in Alden, New York, moved to Toronto, Canada, married Joseph Goldstein of Winnipeg and fled the cold for sunny Southern California in 1948. She belonged to Hadassah and Pioneer women. Karen has her 1947 27th edition Settlement Cook Book, Love and Knishes (1956), and a hand-written recipe card for Matzoh Balls.

The evening starts with the woman's brachot over the candles followed by brachot for celebrating Rosh Hashanah, eating apples, bread and honey. Is there a blessing for Costco, local farmer's market, Trader Joe's, Whole Foods, organically grown foods and supermarkets?

No young children were present. Our ages ranged from 24, a UNMC medical student, to octogenarians. Most clumped between 60 and 70. I invited a couple with two young children, but they were already spoken for.

We were from South Africa, England, Canada, and 3rd generation Nebraskans. Our children and grandchildren lived in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Berkeley, Chicago, Indianapolis, New York, and Washington, DC. Regardless of age or place of birth the Jewish calendar, 5772, united us in the spirit of Rosh Hashanah, a time to gather, schmooze and share food.

The guests attended four Omaha and Council Bluffs synagogues. We talked about adult children, growing grandchildren, uttered no lashonhora, and shared ailments, nostrums, and diets. The problem is not what you eat between Thanksgiving and New Year, it is what you eat between New Year and Thanksgiving. The departing guests wished everyone a healthy and happy New Year, Shana tova.

<sup>1</sup> The author thanks Karen Pollak, Aveva Shukert, Mary Day, and Lynda Mirvish for their assistance.

<sup>2</sup> Janet Theophano, *Eat My Words, Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks they Wrote* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 116.

<sup>3</sup> Oliver B. Pollak, "Nebraska Jewish Charitable Cookbooks, 1901-2002," in *Food & Judaism*, eds. Leonard J. Greenspoon, Ronald A. Simpkins and Gerald Shapiro (Omaha and Lincoln: Creighton University Press, 2005), 133-48.

<sup>4</sup> Gil Marks, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 506-7.

<sup>5</sup> Aveva's daughter Rachel likes this cake so much her mother sent her the recipe. Rachel baked it once, and said it took too long, now she eats it when Aveva sends it or when visiting Omaha.

<sup>6</sup> Lynda, who does not eat meat, prepared a wonderful lamb for her husband and visiting daughter. Her daughter generally does not eat meat, but likes her mother's lamb. Contradictions pave the way to our stomachs. We supped on festive leftovers.

# The Menus

## Karen Pollak & Oliver

Honeycrisp Apples & Honey  
Challah – from Great Harvest & Bagel Bin  
Hearts of Palm & Artichoke Hearts - Peru  
Green Olives - Italy  
Butternut Squash & Pear Soup - recipe from Karen's cousin in Winnipeg, Celia Sarbit. Includes Chardonnay (2007) Felino, Mendoza, Argentina  
Arugula Potato Salad - adapted from recipe, Mary Day  
Halibut Fish - Wild. Flown in from Pacific Coast, Whole Foods, New York Times 2000 recipe  
Tzimmes - by Aveva, recipe from Myra Hamburg Saxon, her cousin in Milford, CT  
Rosemary Roasted Potatoes – Karen's evolving recipe  
Apple Galette - Karen from online recipe  
Honey Cake - by Aveva from Pearl Hamburg Hahn, her mother, of blessed memory  
Fresh Fruit & Seasonal Berries – Chris Hicks Sauvignon Blanc (2006) & Gewürztraminer (2009), Kenwood, California.

## Aveva Shukert. & Marty

Honeycrisp & Granny Smith Apples & Honey  
Raisin & Plain Challah – Great Harvest  
Hummus & Crackers  
Three Cheeses: Strawberry, Cheddar & Drunken Goat  
Red, Yellow & Orange Baby Peppers  
Vegetable Soup - Ariel Shukert, daughter, Los Angeles  
Harvest Salad with Carmelized Pistachios & Green Golden Delicious Apple - Karen from OmahaWorld-Herald, 2007  
Balsamic-glazed Salmon: orodioliva.com, store selling gourmet infused vinegars and olive oils  
Green Beans, Yellow Squash, Purple & Red Radishes - from Farmers Market in Old Market  
Sweet Kugel - Lucille White, Beth El cook, of blessed memory  
Layered Jello: Doris Shukert, Aveva's mother-in-law, of blessed memory  
Chocolate Chip Bundt Cake - Joan Dubinsky, Aveva's friend, formerly of Austin, TX, with whom she lost touch<sup>5</sup>  
Chardonnay- (2009), Simi, Sonoma County

## Lynda Mirvish. & Sidney

Jonagold Apples & Honey  
Home Baked Raisin & Plain Challah  
Butternut Squash Soup - Silver Palate Cookbook  
Salad: Artisanal Lettuces, Homegrown Tomatoes, Cucumbers, French Dressing - from maternal grandfather who mixed oil, vinegar, mustard, sugar and salt and dressed and tossed the salad at their Cape Town, South Africa, dinner table.  
Lamb & Homegrown Mint- old family recipe<sup>6</sup>  
Couscous with Garbanzo Beans & Vegetables - The New Basics Cookbook  
Peas with Chopped Mint  
Biscotti - from her own 1993 book "Mayhem and Murder in the Kitchen: Dishes to Die For".  
Honeycake - online recipe  
Brownies - late lamented Gourmet Magazine  
Chocolate Chocolate Cookies- recipe un-known, Malbec - (2009), Mendoza, Argentina

# Jewish No. 3 Commando Troop

BY: DAVID MILLWARD,

Ex 3rd Commando Brigade, Brigade Reconnaissance Force

I intended to do this article several months ago when my original British Commando Unit reverted back to its former wartime designation of "30 Commando".

The 30 Commando Unit is an intelligence, surveillance and target-acquisitions unit. These soldiers are tasked with gathering information behind enemy lines. The unit is tucked quietly away within the British 3rd Commando Brigade and has the title of BRF – Brigade Reconnaissance Force. The former Director of Naval Intelligence first founded this team - author Ian Fleming (of James Bond fame).

Any member of the British Armed Services can volunteer for admission to this unit but they must first pass a grueling commando training course. Many volunteers don't "cut the mustard" and are returned to their units. These entrance requirements have not changed since WWII.

This brings me to the reason for this article - The establishment of a small elite unit, part of the British forces that was designated as No. 3, "Miscellaneous" or "X Troop"). This unit was one of the best-kept secrets in the Second World War.

The No. 3 consisted of young German-speaking, Jewish refugees, mainly from Germany and Austria (but also some from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and other European countries) with blue eyes and blonde hair. They were an extraordinary bunch trained in the skills of explosives, parachuting and intelligence gathering, as are all British Commandos. But their training was even more difficult with additional precision training in field craft, camouflage, compass marching, street fighting, housebreaking and lock picking.

Prior to the D-Day landing of the Allies this unit was tasked with doing reconnaissance along the Normandy shoreline. They dressed in German uniforms and engaged German sentries in conversations as if they were part of an adjacent unit. They succeeded in capturing many German soldiers who were then transported back to England for interrogation. They were also dispatched into their home countries to find and save scientists and intellectuals who contributed to Britain's war efforts.

Of the eighty eight men that passed through the ranks of X Troop, only twenty were killed in action. They won many metals and commendations from the Allies. But the numbers of awards are derisory considering their exploits and the inevitable death sentence they faced if captured – not to mention the danger to any of their surviving relatives in Nazi Europe.

They never fought as a unit. They were dispatched as-needed in small groups, often alone behind the lines. Therefore, they never achieved the recognition given to the larger fighting forces. They were the men of legend hidden behind enemy lines in dangerous conditions, waiting for the moment that made their fight against Hitler all worthwhile.

In September 1945 the whole commando was disbanded. Many of the No. 3 "X" Troop continued in sensitive and secret work in the Occupation Forces, searching out Nazi resistance groups, tracking war criminals and translating captured documents.

After the war in April, 1946 Bryan Hilton-Jones wrote in a secret report, "the No. 3 Jewish Troops were conspicuously successful and earned high praise all round... They were the most interesting and worthwhile branch of No. 10 Commando. For them, perhaps more than for any others, it was a question of self-respect and self-justification."

Most of the men who fought in this troop settled in England after the war. They Anglicized their names and blended with the citizenry of their new country. Not one could return to his homeland after the war for fear of retribution.

Though the Official War Secrets Act protects many of the details of their assignments and will never be known now, 65 years after the fact, their story is being to unfold as another chapter in Jewish history.

There are two significant publications available regarding the brave men of No. 3, 10 Commando. They are "Ten Commando 1942-1945" written by Ian Dear and another "Striking Back - A Jewish Commando writes" by Peter Masters, a wonderful study of this amazing group. To the men of No. 3 Troop, No. 10 Inter-Allied Command – I salute you.

P.S. I am not an author. I write only to raise your awareness for this piece of history. As a part of my British Commando training, we were taught the history of these WWII Commandos. The stories that were shared served to remind us of the high standards we had to meet and emulate while we were "slogging away" to win our own green berets. It was hard going and constant, and with just one sign of weakness, you could be RTU (Returned to Unit).

An instructor on my commando course said that since the Second World War, thousands of people, of all shapes and sizes, have passed the commando course because they wanted to do it. He also said when doing the Commando course, "Do not use your head, you will fail. Use your legs; they will keep you going until you drop dead." That advice may have saved me and many of my fellow soldiers.



X-Troop: A memorial to the No. 10 Jewish Commandos in Aberdovey, North Wales, where they trained.

# Ten Reasons to Study the Holocaust

BY: MICHAEL GENDLER, NJHS Board Member

*Commando Troop continued...*

A recent gift from the Louis and Francis Blumkin family will create a new professorship in Holocaust and genocide education in the history department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. This is a good thing. Although it is sometimes suggested that there is a kind of “overkill” in Holocaust studies these days, the fact is that there is still a widespread need for even basic understanding of what happened during those terrible years from 1939-1945 in Europe. Perhaps even more important is the lucid dissemination of first rank scholarship to a broader segment of the public. So, the new professorship is a most welcome one.

Just because so many are familiar with the word “Holocaust” and a few facts surrounding it, does not mean that there is much in the way of real understanding, much less wisdom about this cataclysmic event. After all, we are “familiar” with our bodies, but many know very little about their own anatomy and physiology. All one needs to do is look at the back covers of some of the literature that gets churned out about this genocidal nightmare. It is sometimes presented as if it were primarily a backdrop for miraculous people who somehow emerge alive and whole with an inspiring story to tell. Yes folks, it is another happy ending. If only it were so. Of course there were heroes and amazing stories about survival under desperate odds. But we must not let that begin to make blurry, however unintentionally, the identities of the six million who perished. That Hitler and the Nazi state murdered two-thirds of European Jewry and virtually destroyed Eastern European Jewish culture can only be seen, with great sadness, as a victory for Hitler. We lost.

**But did we learn?** This is at the heart of my own field of history. The word itself comes from a Greek root word which means “to inquire.” The extreme nature of the Holocaust makes it possible to see the lineaments of critically important lessons right away. As we focus the powerful lens of scholarship more closely, these lessons come into sharp relief. The learning as a whole is inexhaustible. For now, here are 10 lessons that good scholarship has helped to bring into our intellectual arsenal by studying the Holocaust carefully (this is not to say that they have not been learned by other means, just that the Holocaust has given them a new context). It is also to be understood that all of these lessons are not mutually exclusive.

In my senior year of college, I wrote a paper dealing with the changes, if any, that I found in a few select philosophical journals just after World War II. One of my findings was that there seemed to be greater acceptance in the journals of the idea that “good” and “evil” actually existed just after 1945 as opposed to the period before the war. This is not surprising. **One lesson** that emerges with profound power from the Holocaust is the need to appreciate the difference between good and evil. In the diary of the commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Hoess, he praises himself for how much more efficient Auschwitz has become in the disposal of bodies since he encouraged the burning of older victims of the gas chamber right next to babies so that the greater fat content in the babies would help the elderly, with lower fat content, to burn more quickly. This is to know evil. To read testimony about Mengele

*Continued on page 8...*



D-day: Soldiers land on the coast of Normandy in 1944. The Jewish commandos' job was to creep into enemy strongholds unseen, find the information they were looking for and depart without being detected.



Commando Insignia.

### *Ten Reasons Continued...*

sewing the bodies of two dwarfs together, combining their circulatory systems and leaving them to struggle in agony—is also to know evil. Just as certainly, the efforts of the Trocme family in Southern France, in risking their lives to hide Jews from the Nazis, were manifestations of goodness.

A **second concrete lesson** that emerges from the Holocaust is the danger of blind obedience to authority. In fact, the entire profession of psychiatry has been influenced the survivors and other Jewish emigrants to America who have written passionately about the hazards of turning over one's personal autonomy to another. In the case of the Holocaust, it was simply a matter of German law that Hitler's word was, by definition, the law of the land. His legal title, *Der Fuhrer* (the leader) was something that was more than just a word. In law it meant that Hitler was the incarnation of the German people as a whole. Therefore, to obey Hitler was to obey the German people. It is a matter of great interest that Italy, a country not exactly known for its tradition of obedience to state authority, also was a country whose soldiers were frequently unwilling to go along with orders to send Jews to camps.

Never has the destructive potential of racism and anti-Semitism made itself felt so strongly as during the Holocaust. This third lesson is critically important. It suggests the terrible destructive potential of anti-Semitism and how important it is that we always take it seriously. Actions often stem from ideas. Hitler's decision to murder all the Jews that he could get his hands on, whether it came in 1919, 1925, 1933, 1939, or the summer of 1941, was based upon one thing—his unwavering anti-Semitism, which he reiterated just before he carried out the one truly positive act in his life (putting his Walther pistol in his mouth and pulling the trigger). As one Holocaust expert, Erich Goldhagen put, if he had to use one word to explain the cause of the Holocaust, that word would be "book." The spate of hatred coming from the presses in Europe played a vital role in moving Hitler to his position on the Jews.

Those who study the Holocaust should not have been surprised that some of the leading figures in the al-Qaeda terrorist organization are very well educated. That education and civilization are no guarantees of morality is one of the most counter-intuitive lessons of the Holocaust. However, it is all too clear that some of the most vicious members of the SS had doctoral degrees and even headed special groups (*Einsatzgruppen SS*) whose job it was to follow Nazi soldiers into Russia and murder the Jewish people (men, women, and children by October, 1941) that came under their control. Over 1 million were murdered this way. Joseph Goebbels, the Propaganda Minister of Nazi Germany, and a devoted follower of Hitler to the end (when he committed suicide after arranging the murder of his own six children and his wife first) had received a Ph.D. in literature from the University of Heidelberg. His specialization was romantic novels. This **fourth lesson** makes it strikingly vivid that morality and education are not necessarily one in the same.

Ironically, the great Indian leader philosopher, Mahatma Gandhi, was a contemporary of those who were murdered in the Holocaust. Gandhi had an answer for the Jews who faced this evil: non-violence. Pacifism! It just does not even sound right in this context. Once and for all, **the fifth lesson** of the Holocaust places the last nail in the coffin of pacifism as a justifiable approach against evil. The result of such an "action" whenever it was tried against the Nazis was almost always the death of the innocent. The only way that it was possible to end the torture and death meted out by the Nazis was through the use of organized violence—that is, military force. It is difficult to ignore American military film crews' footage of concentration camp inmates smiling and taking hold of an American or British soldier's hand as they came into the camps. Gandhi could never have liberated Dachau; Patton's Third Army with its tanks, machine guns, and brave men behind them, did. The old cliché, "violence never solved anything" is simply wrong, as long as the violence is being carried out against evil, rather than in its name.

There are many reasons why the Nazis did not choose to invade Switzerland. One of the reasons however, was that the Swiss people were armed to the gills. Every family had a rifle and the man of the house (and often others) was combat trained with it. Passes in the Alps Mountains were already scouted for ambushes of incoming Nazi soldiers should the event take place. Some of the mountains were even hollowed out for the storage of tanks and other weapons. This arsenal of weaponry in the hands of those who cherished liberty for themselves and others was the road to peace, not war.

Perhaps the most directly applicable lesson to current problems is **lesson number six**. We learned, as we never learned before, the profound danger of extreme ideologies and their associated organizations and the importance of stopping such movements early in their development before they become too powerful. The Holocaust took place because of decisions made by human beings, human beings who believed in ideas calling for the murder of a particular group of people as if they were bacilli in a living organism. If only the elite of the National Socialist Party had been killed in the late 1920s or early 1930s, world history and Jewish life would be much different. After 9/11, G.W. Bush and his advisors, to their credit, recognized the danger of radical Islam and sought to kill its leaders. The U.S. military under both Bush and Obama have been extraordinarily successful. Thank heavens; no more attacks like 9/11 have happened since. Unfortunately, this is a difficult lesson to learn but a critically important one. In our country it is easy to forget how vicious some sets of ideas can be.

The **seventh lesson**, closely related to the first and the sixth, is the danger of embracing cultural relativism—the view that every culture must be respected as much as every other culture because, after all, such things are only matters of perspective. After Auschwitz, this outlook is difficult to maintain. Yes, Nazi Germany had its distinct cultural values—brutality ("what is weak, kick" was a favorite slogan), the supremacy of the state over the

individual, the importance of race as the key to human and social worth. We now know to what end these values took us. Nazi culture was bankrupt, Germany, as the great German historian, Koppel Pinson put it, had “gone berserk.” It should not have been respected as a political culture from the beginning.

Not as widely known as it should be, Nazi propaganda repeatedly emphasized the importance of looking to nature as a model for morality and society. What a lesson is **number eight!** As the great psychologist, William James put it, “Life is a struggle between good ideas and bad ideas.” This notion of looking to nature as a guide to morality and society is a bad idea—that is the lesson. To Hitler and his coterie, all young Germans must learn to regard nature as something sacred, something holy. “Blood and Soil” was a widely used slogan in Nazi propaganda. They were critical of Jewish and Christian scripture for having devalued nature and placing an abstract “God” over it. For the Nazis, one must embrace the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth itself—the soil!!! Heck, for many young Americans today this might actually sound pretty good, given all the environmentalist education they have received since childhood. The problem is that in this passionate celebration of the natural world, the values that the Nazis derived were all too true to nature—the survival of the fittest and death to the weak. Mercy and compassion were seen as contrary to the affirmation of health and strength. What is more, they looked upon their country as if it were a living thing. Any part of it that was perceived as alien (such as the Jews) must not simply be resisted. It must be excised or exterminated—just as one would do to a bacterial infection that descended upon a human being. What a miserable way to view the world. Compare that to the vision of our nation’s founders who saw this country and its government as a great place to secure rights for individuals so that each could make her own life in the world, rather than be cemented to the state as a bee to a hive.

A **ninth lesson** emerges from this. That is, after World War II, and what we saw in Nazi Germany, there was a renewed enthusiasm for our Judeo-Christian tradition. You could see it in the eyes of the survivors when they looked upon their rescuers. American soldiers were not like the Waffen SS. By and large they came from Christian homes where they were taught to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. They went to church and sang hymns about mercy and love rather than the importance of being one with the earth, fast as a gazelle, and strong as Krupp steel. I could not help but give a passing thought to this as I recently attended a public elementary school Christmas program. But it was not called a “Christmas” program. It was labeled an “It’s Cold Outside Program.” The major theme of the program was “snow:” snowflakes, snow drifts, how deep the snow falls in the winter, how cold it can get. There was even a song about what families do at night in December—guess what? They drink hot chocolate. Let me see, is there anything else that often happens in America during December???? Could it be CHRISTMAS!! How sad that we have learned the wrong lesson. In an effort to be fair

to everyone and leave nobody out, the program is (with the best of intentions, I fully admit; also the program that I witnessed was charming) part of a trend that is killing the goose that laid the golden egg. One of the core strengths of our democracy comes from the Judeo-Christian tradition and its refusal to stand by and let the weak perish. To purge this from our schools is sad, despite the intentions.

The Holocaust demonstrated how thin the veneer of civilization really is. Germany went from a civilized, cultured democracy, to totalitarian barbarism in the years of the Third Reich (1933-1945). Civilization is fragile, including our culture’s religious traditions that counsel justice and mercy. Moves in the direction of nature worship, in whatever form, should be taken with an eye to the caution light.

**Lesson number ten** relates to the reason for the building of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in the first place. As you may recall, there was some dispute as to whether it even belonged in Washington, D.C. After all, Americans were not victims, bystanders, or perpetrators of the Holocaust. Henry Kissinger was among those who suggested that it simply did not belong in the hallowed ground of the nation’s capital, in the midst of purely “American” monuments. One of the most persuasive among those who advocated the placing of such a memorial there was the columnist, George Will. In a brilliant editorial he wrote that it is vital for a liberal democracy such as the United States to have a museum such as this. Why? He argued it is because of the “recuperative power of innocence in a liberal society.” That is, in a free country such as ours, where we so rarely encounter real horrors generated by political leaders, we can easily forget the “furies” that may be forming outside of our borders. We must never forget what happened in the Holocaust. We must keep our defenses ready to the maximum. These weapons must be the best and we should have the most, for we never want to be at the mercy of any conqueror, let alone the kind of monster that was Nazi Germany. If only, when the SS came for them, Eastern European Jews had been organized in military units, with a well thought out battle plan including artillery, tanks, machine guns, assault rifles, pistols, knives, and hand grenades. The story would no doubt still be a brutal one. But it would be a preferable one.

For the historian, memory is crucial. But can any private citizen afford to ignore the recoverable past, especially her or his own? To do so is to lessen self-understanding, the derivation of lessons from the past and even happiness. It is with this in mind that I want to express my thanks to the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society for all of their wonderful work and especially to Renee Corcoran for the incredible job she does every day for the society, including the maintenance and display of the vibrant past of the Omaha Jewish community through the photographic exhibit as well as other archival records. These all help better inform us about our heritage and therefore about ourselves.

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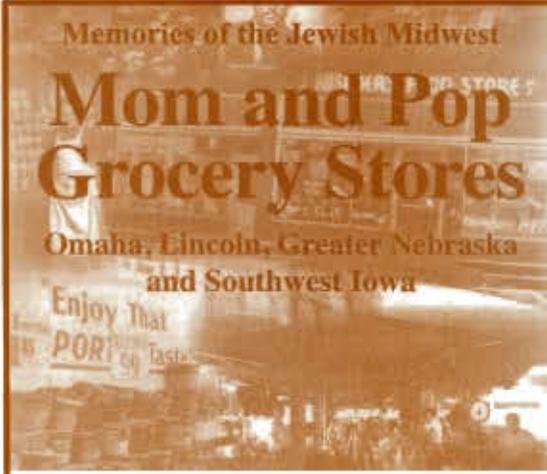
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