Three Guides, Four Countries:
A Daughter of Holocaust Survivors Travels to Their Ancestral Villages
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At the end of 2008, I began to experience how utterly addicting genealogy can be when a researcher begins to make major discoveries. I have been looking for relatives for more than 50 years, but prior to the advent of Internet research tools, such as Google Translate, I made little progress. This was partly due to my inability to read Hebrew, Polish, Hungarian, Yiddish or German, languages that were necessary to make any steps forward in my family's history.

Both of my parents were Holocaust survivors, and with the exception of my father's mother, none of my aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents survived. Until the day my mother died, she kept trying to find remaining fragments of her Polish family. My father never spoke of his losses, perhaps considering himself fortunate that his Hungarian mother had survived Auschwitz and other unspeakable places. So my quest for information about my family's past was largely an effort to understand what had happened to my parents' families and their lives before and during the war.

After my mother's death in 2008, I picked up the pieces of information that I had about my mother and father's family and discovered JewishGen, JRI-Poland, Google Translate and other Internet resources, and much to my amazement and utter joy, within six months, I had acquired some precious photographs of three of my mother's siblings. A few months later during a remarkable trip to Poland, Hungary, and Germany, I discovered many documents which helped me to assemble the family tree. Within a year, thanks to the staff of the U.S. Holocaust Museum and the wisdom gleaned at an International Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) conference, I found the descendants of my mother's uncle now living in Sweden, descendants of my maternal grandmother's sister living in Canada, and my father's granduncle's descendants in a small town in Hungary. (You can listen to them on National Public Radio: http://www.thestory.org/stories/2009-10/connecting-separated-family).

During my research and journey, I was both discouraged and inspired. Many of my mother's friends, now in their late 80s, could not fathom why I would return to Europe. "It's nothing but a big cemetery," they would say. They also believed that everything, everything, had been destroyed: buildings, documents, artifacts, and their families. Even members of my own family felt that I should not stir up the past.

But they were wrong. While the Jews of Eastern Europe have largely been wiped out, some Jewish communities remain. My father's city of Budapest has a thriving Jewish population, in spite of the anti-Semitism there. Polish individuals are restoring cemeteries and synagogues. Germans have done a particularly good job of what I call "memory work," creating inspiring museums and monuments and carefully preserving the record of unspeakable horrors committed on their soil and elsewhere. In fact,

many millions of records remain about the Holocaust. Birth, marriage and death records also are intact, waiting to be discovered.

I was moved by the many kindnesses of town librarians and state and city archivists who helped me search for the slightest fragments that could complete my family history. I remember young people who worked in a Lodz hotel surrounding me as I worked on my family tree spread out over several kitchen tables; they wanted to know what had happened not only to my family but then in whispered tones, told me about their Jewish grandmother or grandfather. And I will never forget my German friend who sat in his car outside the Dora Nordhausen's concentration camp where my father had been left for dead. Unable to drive after seeing the camp, he wept with me as we contemplated human cruelty beyond description.

When I am asked why do I continue to work on my family's tragic history, I cite the inspirational words of Jewish genealogist Arthur Kurzweil:

> "The Talmud says that when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, the survivors of that cataclysm had to say to themselves, "What are we going to do? Is this the end, or do we rebuild?" The Talmud says that when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, then the Jews did their family trees. A commentator makes the observation, as we know so well, that sometimes if you want to go forward, you first have to go backward. You see where you are coming from, and you know where you are going.

> Thank God we are here today as Jews, because our ancestors who survived that cataclysm did their family trees. I believe, as I am sure you do, that we are in that same kind of situation today. We are a rebuilding generation. We come after two of the worst moments of Jewish history--one, of course, the Holocaust when a third of our people were murdered and two, the mass migration of Jews when our families were torn apart.

> There is probably not a family here this evening that if you go back two or three generations, you will not see that family torn apart--brothers and sisters never saw each other again, husbands and wives, grandparents and grandchildren.

> The fact of six million Jews being killed during the Holocaust is unfathomable to us. I don't know what to do with the Holocaust. Most people in the world don't know quite what to do with the Holocaust. But I think we genealogists have found out what to do with the Holocaust. We remember names. When the Nazis rounded us up, they took away our names and they gave us numbers. What we are involved with doing is taking away the numbers and giving them back their names."

Here are some of the resources I used along my journey:

My guides:

Poland: Krzysztof Malczewski, email: krystek@krystek.a4.pl

Hungary: Karesz Vandor, email: info@hungarianroots.com

My resources:

INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE, BAD AROLSEN, GERMANY
Forms available at ITS website: https://www.its-arolsen.org/en/information/request-for-information-on-victims-of-nazi-persecution/

THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM, Washington, DC.
http://www.ushmm/org/remembrance/registry
The Museum is more than worth a full day visit. The library, archives, and photo center are robust resources of information. The survivor and victim registry can be searched online, however. Find information about people persecuted under the Nazi regime. The database contains millions of names indexed from various lists and historical documents in the Museum's extensive archival collection.
You can also explore a broad range of historical documents by place name or keywords, including census records, registration forms, ghetto inhabitant lists, death lists, concentration camp or displaced persons camp lists, and many more. The database contains thousands of fully cataloged lists and other name sources.

YAD VASHEM, ISRAEL
http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/about/archive/information_services_request_form.asp.
In particular, researchers should look at the Pages of Testimony. Yad Vashem is the Jewish people's living memorial to the Holocaust. It was established in 1953 as the world center for documentation, research, education and commemoration of the Holocaust

JEWISHGEN

http://www.jewishgen.org website for names, locations, registers, and current research by topic and location. Pay special attention to the 'Infofiles,' Holocaust Database, Jewish Genealogy Family Finder, Cemeteries and Special Interest Groups links. Yizkor Books (memorial books for towns) may also be a good resource.

AVOTAYNU, THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF JEWISH GENEALOGY:
http://www.avotanyu.com.
Search the website for useful, up to date, articles about Holocaust research.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SHOAH FOUNDATION INSTITUTE FOR VISUAL HISTORY AND EDUCATION
Online catalog of survivors who gave their oral history at http://vhaonline.usc.edu/
The USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive allows users to search through and view more than 53,000 video testimonies of survivors and witnesses of genocide. Initially a repository of Holocaust testimony, the Visual History Archive has expanded to include testimonies from the Armenian Genocide that coincided with World War I, the 1937 Nanjing Massacre in China, the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, and the Guatemalan Genocide of 1978-1996. Also being added to the Archive are collections of Holocaust testimonies recorded and owned by other organizations, such as Jewish Family and Children's Services (JFCS) Holocaust Center, and a consortium of 9 Canadian archives which represent the Canadian Jewish experience across Canada.

The interviews have been conducted in 63 countries and 40 languages. Each collection adds context for the others, providing multiple pathways to learn from the eyewitnesses of history across time, locations, cultures and sociopolitical circumstances.

Viewable on the VHA Online are about 1,600 testimony videos from survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust and a limited selection of testimony videos from survivors and witnesses of the Armenian Genocide, the 1937 Nanjing Massacre in China, and the 1994 Rwandan Tutsi Genocide. Testimony videos not viewable in the VHA Online can be viewed onsite at many institutions around the world. Videos can be viewed at your local college, university and some libraries.

OTHER RESOURCES

To locate persons who may have gone to Israel, Mrs. Batya Unterschatz-Landsman conducts research for a fee. Email is batyal@netvision.net.il. Be aware that the person's last name may have been changed to a Hebrew version of a European name.

Place an ad in TOGETHER, published by the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors by emailing allgenerations@aol.com. This magazine has started a 'Searches' column and the editors accept notices for publication.   Place ad with allgenerations@aol.com. Serena Woolrich, President of Allgenerations, Inc., administers this email group of survivors and children. The notice will reach the survivor community quickly and efficiently.

A general list of Holocaust research resources can be found here: http://www.genshoah.org/ holocaust_ genealogy.html

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