



MAY WE NEVER FORGET!

It was raining heavily last night. So I thought it might be interesting to write about rain in the spring. But now, as I sit down to write, the sun is out. And that is the rhythm of life which is sometimes hard to keep up with or at least disappointing.



Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom HaShoah) begins the evening of next Wednesday, April 11 and ends the evening of April 12. Many people in the United States observe Yom Hashoah. It commemorates the lives and heroism of Jewish people who died in the Holocaust between 1933 and 1945.

Over 10 million people were systematically murdered by the Nazi government in the Holocaust. The majority were Jews.

For me the Shoah was the most significant happening of the 20th century. I once asked a Rabbi friend, who is my age, what comes to mind when he thinks of the Shoah. In typical Jewish fashion he told me a story about the ghetto in Kovno, Lithuania. He quoted from another Rabbi,

"On May 7, 1942 the Germans decreed that those living in the Ghetto are not to have children. Every child born would be shot together with the mother. Nevertheless children continued to be born in the Kovnon Ghetto. I shall never forget one birthing ceremony in particular. A young couple who had been childless for five years was blessed with a child, a baby boy. They had decided to move buildings next to his technical high school so that the noise of the that drowned out the noises made by the child. The ceremony was held there in secret. As it was about to begin, we heard the noise of screeching brakes and slamming doors in front of the building. A group of men from the Gestapo got out of their cars. We were panic stricken. We did not know what to do. How could we possibly save the mother and child? The mother was the most courageous among us. She shouted to quickly continue and finish the ceremony. She said, "They are going to kill us, the child at least should die as a Jew.""



For many years I've had a picture on my desk. It was taken at Auschwitz. Probably by a Nazi. The mother and her children had been transported to Auschwitz in a cattle car. When they got out on the unloading dock the physician, who controlled life and death at that critical moment, directed them toward the gas chambers. And yet their life went on in those precious, few

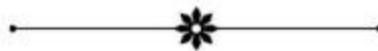
remaining moments. The younger children stayed close to the mother knowing that that being by her side they would be safe. The older child hung back a bit beginning to feel the independence of early adolescence. They all have the seed of beautiful lives within them. When I look at the photograph, all I can think of is, "What was going through the mind of the mother?." What would be going through my mind? How did we ever allow something like this to come about?



The Polish historian Ignacy Schiper (1884–1943), who perished in a death camp, wrote, *"Nobody will want to believe us, because our disaster is the disaster of the entire civilized world."*

Regrettably Schiper was correct. We all said "Let us not forget!" But for various reasons most of the children of the 21st century, with parents both on the right and on the left, have forgotten. And, as George Santanyana (1863–1952) has reminded us, *"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."*

Is that happening today?



The fact is that knowledge and significance of the Holocaust is fading. The number of Holocaust survivors who can tell their story is now diminishing.

In 2000, a conference of 46 nations met in Stockholm, Sweden to discuss ways of promoting “*education, remembrance and research about the Holocaust.*” Their report began with this proclamation, “*The Holocaust fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilization. The unprecedented character of the Holocaust will always hold universal meaning.*”

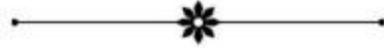


And yet it is fading. Only 54% of the world's adults have ever heard of it. And a large percentage of those do not teach anything about it to their children. Why? Because it's unpleasant. The schools are just as bad. Most students have read the sanitized version of *The Diary of Anne Frank*. But nothing more. Even young people that I respect and admire will say it's just too horrible to study or think about.

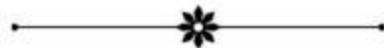
We all must become educators of ourselves and the youths in our lives. *The Boy In The Striped Pajamas*, by John Boyne. about the relationship of two boys who are separated by barbed wire is an example of books good for beginning points of discussions with younger children. For older ones, and for ourselves, there is probably nothing better than Elie Wiesel's (1928–2016) *Night*. Making our kitchen table a book club can be a good idea for discussions of the Holocaust. Films such as *Schindler's List* are also educational for a family to watch together.

The Wiener Library for the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide, in London, has put together an excellent guide for families with older children as well as for schools. It is called *The Holocaust*

Explained. <https://www.theholocaustexplained.org>



When Elie Wiesel received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986 he said that there was a moral imperative never to forget the Holocaust. That imperative has grown ever more intense. Just think of the mass murder in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Syria, Myanmar. The recent atrocious treatment of the Yazidi by ISIS could have come from a Gestapo handbook!



I can think of nothing more appropriate to close with than the words of Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi (1919–1987) taken from a poem he wrote about the Holocaust in 1946,



*Engrave these words on your hearts
When you are in your house, when
you walk on your way,
When you go to bed, when you rise.
Repeat them to your children.
Or may your house crumble,
Disease render you powerless,
Your offspring avert their faces
from you!*

May we never forget!

Brother Toby

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