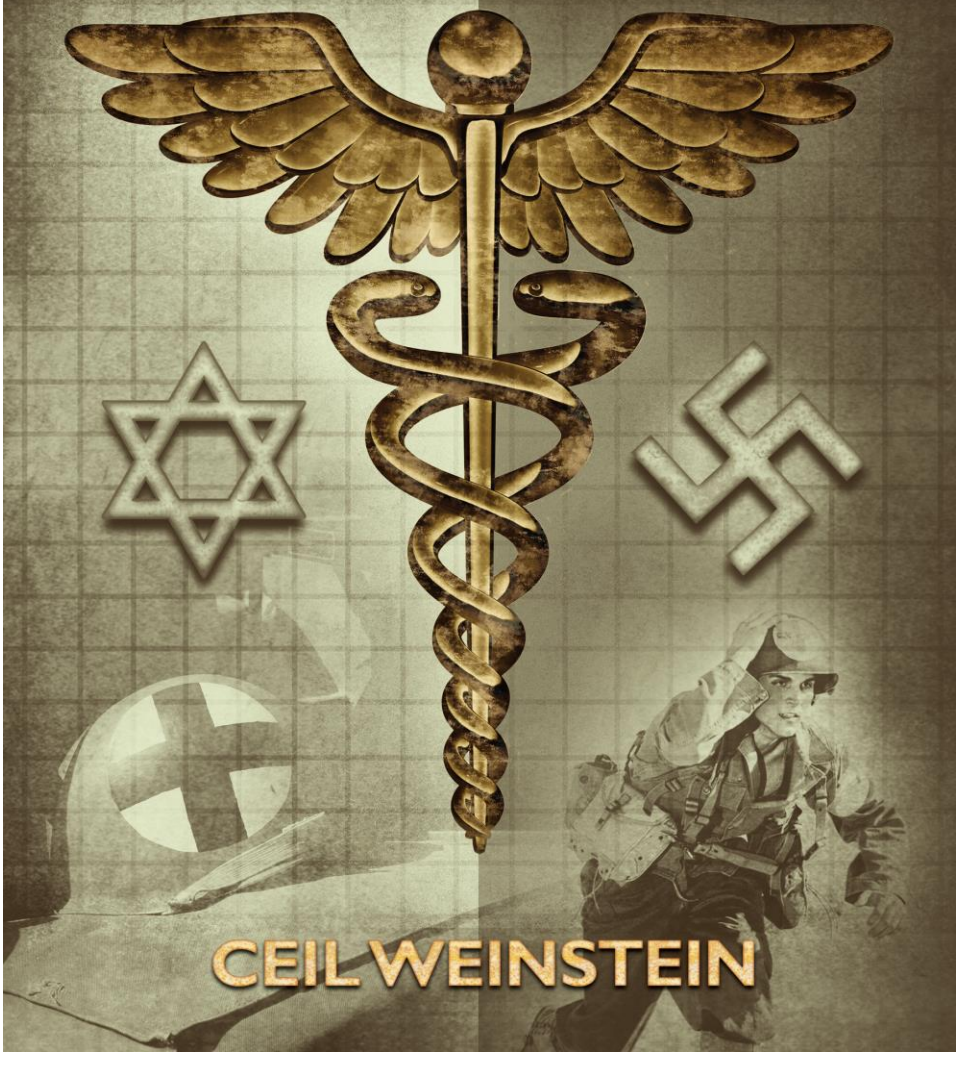
UNSUNG HERO

MY FATHER'S LIFE AS A WORLD WAR II BATTALION SURGEON AND CONCENTRATION CAMP LIBERATOR



CEIL WEINSTEIN

UNSUNG HERO

My Father's Life as a World War II Battalion Surgeon and Concentration Camp Liberator

CEIL A. WEINSTEIN

Unless otherwise stated, all photos are from Ceil A. Weinstein's private collection.

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

First Edition: October 2019

Paperback: 978-0-578-55011-4
eBook: 978-0-578-55012-1

To my father, Captain Alvin A. Weinstein, M.D. and to all U.S. soldiers who preceded him, served with him, and who follow in his footsteps.

Acknowledgments

It takes a village to raise the memory of one soldier. I had so much help writing this book that it is impossible to name everyone who played a part. Here are some of the people who helped me find my way:

First, I'd like to thank my former husband, Robert Alan Hall, who provided me with encouragement and support, traveled with me to interviews, read every chapter of this book and offered honest feedback, scanned dozens of photos for me, and allowed me to commandeer the entire surface of our dining table for more than a year. Thank you, Rob, for all your help and for putting up with abject neglect while I researched and wrote this book.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Suellen McDaniel of the Rainbow Division Veterans Foundation, who searched the archives of the RDVF, unearthed my father's photographs and citations, provided me with books and other materials about my father's battalion activities during World War II, and told me where and

when I could attend Rainbow Division reunions. She was always there for me whenever I had a question, and she gave me continuous encouragement and support. Without Suellen's help, I probably would have given up on this book during the painstaking eighteen-month research phase.

This book would never have been written without Irwin Gzesh. While conducting his own research on his father's life as a Holocaust survivor, he contacted my sisters and me and told us that our father saved his father's life. He also told me about my father's testimony in Dr. Joseph Preil's book *Holocaust Testimonies: European Survivors and American Liberators in New Jersey* and about another Holocaust survivor, Philip Markowicz, who was rescued along with Irwin's father at Lebenau Prison and who wrote the book *My Three Lives*. A very busy attorney, Irwin granted me two hour-long phone interviews that revealed moving details about how my father saved his father's life, both at Lebenau and the nearby hospital at Laufen. If Irwin had not reached out to us, we would still be unaware of our father's amazing accomplishments during World War II.

If it were not for Joseph Preil and the Holocaust Resource Center at Kean University, I would not have learned the critical details I needed to share my father's experiences at Lebenau Prison. Dr. Preil compiled the book *Holocaust Testimonies: European Survivors and American Liberators in New Jersey*, which included my

father's story. His Assistant Director Helen Walzer sent me the hour-long DVD of my father's interview at Kean. My father's letter to my mother from Lebenau Prison is the cornerstone of this book. It is the one artifact that I cherish most, and I wouldn't even know about it were it not for Dr. Preil's book.

I am also indebted to the amazing Rainbow vets who shared their stories with me at the Rainbow Division Veteran's Foundation Eastern Chapter reunion, especially Harold Melinek and John B. Walker. John, along with two other Rainbow vets, Charles Livingston and John W. Brackett, sent me letters detailing their experiences of my father during the war. I will always cherish those letters, which provided me with valuable insight into my father's attitude during the war. When I could not find a photograph of a World War II aid station, Brennan Gauthier, a historian that I met at an RDVF reunion, sent me a few from his amazing collection of World War II artifacts.

Many family members helped me as well. My aunt Elaine Robin allowed me to scan a treasure trove of photos of my parents before, during, and after World War II, and she provided me with details about my parents' lives during that time. My cousin Richard Margolis shared stories and photos of my father, grandfather, and others in the Weinstein clan. He also sent me an article from the *Baltimore Sun* in which my father was interviewed about his experience at Dachau. My cousin

Shelley Weinstein helped me with research about my grandfather's life in Wisconsin. My sister Mary Black corroborated the story of my grandfather's immigration from Russia to America, and her husband Ernest Black took photos of my father's Army medals for me and converted numerous website photos to high-resolution images. An author himself, he also provided advice about the content of this book. Ultimately, Ernie was the catalyst for *Unsung Hero*, because he created and maintained the memorial website about my father that Irwin Gzesh discovered while conducting an online search for my father's name in an effort to reach out to my sisters and me.

Leila Levinson, author of *Gated Grief: The Daughter of a GI Concentration Camp Liberator Discovers a Legacy of Trauma*, informed me of Theresa Ast's work on post-traumatic stress disorder and sent me pages from Ast's dissertation that revealed my father's interview with her. The daughter of a liberator herself, Leila also gave me insight and support while I wrote this book, and she introduced me to Edward Tick's book *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*. Theresa Ast was kind enough to dig into her box of dissertation notes and send me a copy of "Death Trains of Dachau," an article from the *Munich Evening Press*, which my father had someone translate into English.

Many friends helped me along the way. Diana Robinson edited this book. My dear departed friend

and surrogate brother Jon Davidson gave me photographs of Dachau, which he had taken during his trip to Germany, and he provided me with love, support and encouragement every day. Bill Mulligan saved the day when I needed an image of the cloth Star of David that a grateful inmate gave my father from his uniform at Dachau; Bill extracted a still-shot of my father holding up the star from my video of Dad's interview at the Holocaust Resource Center at Kean University. Dr. Stephen Altic researched Ancestry.com and provided documents about my grandfather's immigration and U.S. Army registration. My father's former executive assistant Nancy Greenberg provided information about my grandfather, as well as the places where my father was interviewed about his experiences during the war. Dale Clark provided the inspiration for the title of this book. Paul Frank, who served many years in the military, offered me support, encouragement and valuable research details. I also want to thank Jenny Brown for her invaluable assistance with the design of this book.

Finally, I offer many thanks to Philip Markowicz, author of *My Three Lives*, who captured my heart instantly when I met with him near my Aunt Elaine's home in Florida, not only once but twice. Philip not only provided insight into his experiences as a Holocaust survivor, but he taught me some of the most important lessons about political science, religion, love and the

human spirit. I'll always be a better person for having met him, and I'm grateful that he took the time to share his experience and counsel me.

Table of Contents

Author's Note: Truth, Fiction, or Something in Between?

Facts about war are never absolute. Battle activity, no matter how well planned and executed, is chaotic by nature, and no two people ensnared in the thick of it share identical perceptions about what took place. Traumatic experiences are blocked out; memories fade with the passage of time. When additional facts are introduced, mental images of the particulars tend to change.

For example, consider the testimony my father, Alvin A. Weinstein, gave while being interviewed by Dr. Joseph Preil at Kean University on May 3, 1995. Dad's mind and memory were sharp, unfettered by age-related impediments. As I watched the interview on DVD for the first time, I was astounded by the details he was able to recount fifty years after the fact. Nevertheless, unexplained discrepancies were revealed. During the interview, when Dr. Preil asked my father how the people at

Dachau concentration camp had been killed, my father replied, "They were gassed." Yet in the book *Dachau 29 April 1945* — a book to which Dad had contributed a chapter — a sentence in the editor's introduction reads, "Although there was a gas chamber at Dachau, it was never used. Candidates for gassing were sent to extermination camps elsewhere, including Austria, Hitler's birthplace."[1]

Faced with conflicting stories such as this, it's hard to separate fact from fiction. Did Dad merely assume that inmates at Dachau were gassed because he saw the gas chamber there and the piles of corpses throughout the camp? Was the editor's introduction based on incorrect information? No one really knows for sure, unless he was at Dachau from its inception until the end of the war.[2]

This book shares a montage of stories gathered from my father's interviews, letters, book chapters, and articles, many of which he contributed fifty years after the war ended. Some of the information comes from family lore in the classic oral tradition. Did my father remember everything exactly as it happened? Was the story he told about my grandfather's immigration to the United States completely accurate? Do I remember

1 Sam Dann, ed., *Dachau 29 April 1945*: *The Rainbow Liberation Memoirs* (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 1998), 2.

2 "Dachau," Holocaust Encyclopedia. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005214 (accessed 9 Aug. 2014).

all the specifics exactly as he expressed them? Maybe, maybe not.

I cannot guarantee that every detail in this book imparts absolute historical truth. But this narration does represent what Dad believed, and I'm sure that it is true *to* my father, to the kind of man he was, and how he felt about his contribution to his country and the worldwide Jewish community.

Introduction

What constitutes the sum of a life? When all aspects of a person's words, deeds, intentions, and experiences are assembled, what do they represent?

When people leave this world, we tell stories about them — at their funerals and for years afterward, perhaps up until the day that we too die. We remember them. We miss them. We might even try to be like them, to carry on their traditions and embody their better qualities.

But do we truly know them? Is the image that we carry around in our heads real? This question applies even to our parents, the people who gave us life, raised us, ate meals with us, attended religious services with us, and slept in bedrooms near our own. Do we really know those people? I discovered realities — both uplifting and disappointing — about my father long after he died, details that I never could have imagined. Sides of his nature were revealed that were so unexpected they shook my faith in my own

judgment. In reality he was more fragile than he ever let on — and certainly far more heroic.

There was so much depth to him; whole odysseys took place in his life, and many of them were hidden, unspoken. He shared a treasure chest of gifts with my mother, my sisters, and me, always taking what little spare time he had to immerse us in fine art, music, theater, and ballet; always so open and forthcoming about all things beautiful. But when it came to anything dark or cruel, he closed up like a tight fist, hell-bent on withholding all painful aspects of life so completely that we could neither catch a glimpse nor suffer any consequences from them. Such was his understanding of protection.

Serving as a human shield in this way cost him: He was perpetually overweight, and just under the surface of his genuine merriment was always the faintest hint of sadness in his eyes. It cost us too. My mother was all but incapacitated when he died, having been sheltered from hardship and responsibility for more than fifty years. It took a long time for my sisters and me to grow up, and even now at the threshold of my sixth decade, I often find it very difficult to accept life's challenges. In fact, sometimes I resist the belief that they even exist. When painful situations emerge, and people say, "Well, that's life," my knee-jerk reaction is, "No! It doesn't have to be that way!"

Inwardly, I used to criticize my father for that, and I blamed him for my insecurities. Sometimes, when

adversity came, I found myself angry at him for not preparing me. But now, having discovered the agony he endured in Europe during World War II and the courage and strength he summoned to carry out his duty, I understand his motives better.

Certainly, given my father's commitment to shield us from pain, there was no way he could have brought himself to tell us what he did, saw, heard, and smelled during the war. Until I was in my teens, I had no idea that he even saw battle, much less anything like a concentration camp. He talked about his Army post near Salzburg, Austria, where after the war he functioned as a family doctor to soldiers who were helping refugees find new homes. On rare occasions he recounted a few funny stories about misdeeds and snafus in the field. But it wasn't until the son of a concentration camp survivor reached out to my sisters and me thirteen years after Dad's death, telling us our father had saved his father's life, that I learned about his trek across France and Germany with the famous Rainbow Division, his part in the grueling Battle of the Bulge, and his encounter at Dachau concentration camp. When I heard that in the space of one week he saved 100 prison inmates who were just days from death, I felt compelled to research this part of his past and tell his story.

I've always been proud of my father, the man in the white lab coat who healed people and saved lives. But that isn't the same as saving lives in battle under the harsh conditions of war. It isn't the same as healing

grown men who weighed no more than a small child, who were riddled with lice, consumed by typhus, and had been beaten and tortured. What my father did was extraordinary; and up until the end of his life, when he granted a handful of journalists and Holocaust historians a few short interviews, he had told no one about it.

On his behalf, I offer this story. This is my tribute to my father, Captain Alvin Weinstein, who, because of his father's furtive childhood immigration from Russia, became the savior rather than the saved, who devoted his entire life to alleviating pain and healing the sick, who showed immense courage, fortitude, and compassion in the face of extreme suffering on the battlefield, at Dachau concentration camp, and in Lebenau Prison.

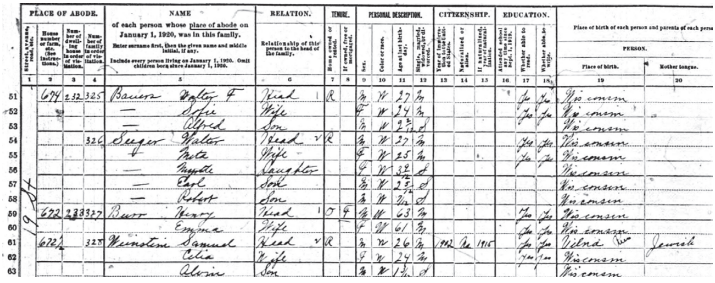
It is my story too: a personal journey of discovery, revelation, and insight into this hidden, secret part of my father's past.

Perhaps in some way it is your story too.

Part I

Unsung Hero

Moses Revisited: Two Boys Are Mailed To America



	PLACE OF ABODE.			NAME of each person whose place of abode on January 1, 1920, was in this family.	RELATION.	TENURE.		PERSONAL DESCRIPTION.			CITIZENSHIP.			EDUCATION.			Place of birth of each person and parents of each person.	
																	PERSON.	
																	Place of birth.	Mother tongue.
	9	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
51	674	232	325	Barron Walter F	Head		R		M	37					Yes	Yes	Wisconsin	
52				— Ida	Wife				M	24					Yes	Yes	Wisconsin	
53				— Alfred	Son				S	2 3/12							Wisconsin	
54			326	Seeger Walter	Head		R		M	27					Yes	Yes	Wisconsin	
55				— Rita	Wife				M	25					Yes	Yes	Wisconsin	
56				— Myrtle	Daughter				S	3 2/12							Wisconsin	
57				— Earl	Son				S	2 5/12							Wisconsin	
58				— Robert	Son				S	9/12							Wisconsin	
59	672	233	327	Burr Mary	Head		1	7	W	63					Yes	Yes	Wisconsin	
60				Emma	Wife				W	61					Yes	Yes	Wisconsin	
61	672½		327	Weinstein Samuel	Head		R		M	26		1913	Na	1915	Yes	Yes	Vilna	Jewish
62				Celia	Wife				M	24					Yes	No	Wisconsin	
63				Alvin	Son				S	1 1/12							Wisconsin	

My father's story begins with his father's immigration to the United States from Vilna, Russia. If my grandfather, Samuel Weinstein, had not left Europe, Dad would have been a Holocaust survivor, not a liberator. It is possible he would not have survived at all. One of his uncles refused to travel on the Sabbath and remained in Vilna when German troops penetrated Russian borders. This resulted in his death, along with other family members who had remained there.

During the decades prior to Germany's invasion, life for Russian Jews was difficult. Jewish boys were kidnapped regularly and pressed into conscription. When Sam was one year old, Tsar Nicholas II had just succeeded his father's throne. The tsar was young (only twenty-six years old), and, like Alexander III before him, he was an autocratic monarch who resisted democracy and suppressed all dissent.[1] Under his rule, boys had no protection and were typically forced into the army by age ten.

When Sam turned nine on April 16, 1902, his mother knew that he and his older brother, Max, were targets. So she arranged passage for them — alone and unaccompanied — on a boat to the United States. To circumvent the legal issues associated with sending minors abroad on their own, the bottoms of their shoes were stamped with parcel post imprints so they could board the ship as "mail."

They survived the trip; but by the time they reached Ellis Island, Max had developed an eye infection, causing the boys to be diverted to an island nearby for a few weeks. They panicked when they were turned away from the mainland, but there was nothing they could do. When Max's infection cleared, the boys were returned to Ellis Island, but by then no one was waiting for them.

1 Michael Duffy, "Who's Who - Tsar Nicholas II," *FirstWorldWar.com*, 22 August, 2009, http://firstworldwar.com/bio/nicholasii.htm (accessed 9 Aug. 2014).

They didn't speak English and were unable to communicate with anyone around them. They sat alone on a bench, crying. A man spotted them and began searching their belongings for clues that would shed light on their situation. Sewn into the inner lining of Max's coat, the stranger found the address of their uncle's house in Belmar, New Jersey and took them there.

By the time they made the voyage, the boys' father had passed away, and neither knew that their uncle was their father's twin. When Mike Weinstein opened the door, they found themselves staring at an identical face. At once, they were sure it was their father. After all, this was America, the place of miracles, a land where anything could happen! Overcome with relief and joy, they began to shout, "Tateh! Tateh!" (Yiddish for "Dad! Dad!"), tears streaming down their faces as they lunged toward him. "No, boys," Mike replied, "I am not your tateh. I am your uncle."

My grandfather never lost his Russian accent, but he learned to speak English perfectly. According to his census papers, he became a citizen at age twenty-two. When he reached adulthood, he moved from the Jersey shore to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. There he met and married the love of his life, Ceil Miller. Over time, he came to own and operate a large furniture store.

Two years following his naturalization, my grandfather returned to Europe while serving in the U.S. Army during World War I. Not much is known about

his military service. Such details are hard to uncover, due to a fire in 1973 at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis, Missouri, which destroyed most of the records for U.S. Army personnel who were discharged between November 1, 1912 and January 1, 1960.[2] One of my cousins recalled that my father received a document with the Presidential seal and signature that honored my grandfather's service in World War I, and he sent me an old photo of Sam posing with some fellow soldiers in what appears to be the early stages of their enlistment. The three chevrons on his sleeve indicate that he was a sergeant.

Shortly after Sam returned from the war, Ceil gave birth to my father. Although they named him Alvin, his Hebrew name was Obbie (pronounced *uh-bee*), which he used as his first name throughout his life. Five years later, Dad's sister, Reva, was born. Sam remained in Milwaukee for the rest of his life, surrounded by his immediate and extended family members in a close-knit community of German- and Yiddish-speaking Jews. Ceil died of cancer when she was only fifty-nine years old. I was conceived on the night of her funeral and given her name.

2 "The 1973 Fire, National Personnel Records Center," *National Archives at St. Louis*, http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/fire-1973.html (accessed 9 Aug., 2014).

Hippocratic Oath: A Life Devoted To Healing

"He saves lives." That's what I said when I was a child and people asked about my father's occupation. Rather than "He's a doctor," this was the answer I was given whenever I asked, "Where's Daddy?" I was simply repeating what I was told.

"He's out saving lives." Who could argue with that? Who was I to complain about an absent father when people's lives were at stake? At first I was under the impression that if my daddy stayed at home with me, people would die. No way did I want *that* on my conscience. In fact, I carried the sacrifice inside me like a secret badge of honor. I would be the good girl, the understanding girl who could go it alone and give up my daddy so that others could live. It made me feel strong, important, and special.

And absent he was. My first memory of my father was when I was about seven years old. My mother had always

chauffeured me, but on this particular day he drove me to a birthday party. As I sat in the front seat of the car with him I felt frightened, because he was a stranger to me, and I was taught to fear and avoid strangers, especially when I was alone with them. "What if he doesn't drive me to the party?" I worried. "What if he kidnaps me and takes me to some strange place, and I never see Mommy or my sisters again?" To this day I remember how relieved I felt when he dropped me off at my friend's house.

Throughout my grade-school years in Deal Park, New Jersey, Dad was already at his office by the time I woke up, and he didn't return home from hospital rounds and house calls each night until I was in bed. On his days off he attended continuing-education classes at medical school and made still more hospital rounds and house calls. He spent time with us occasionally, but it wasn't until I was old enough to be granted a later bedtime that I became better acquainted with him.

It wasn't much better for my mom, although she never seemed to mind. Back in the days when there were no pagers, cell phones, answering machines, or voice mail, Dad always made a point of telling the box office and ushers in every movie theater, playhouse, concert hall, and opera house to fetch him if they received a call from his answering service; and there were several nights when he had to leave Mom alone in the middle

of a performance to finish the evening without him and take a taxi home.

Throughout my formative years, Dad's profession permeated our home life. Every patient and colleague had our home phone number; it was listed in the telephone book. There was a phone in every room of our house, including his bathroom, so that he'd never miss a call. He answered the phone at the dinner table and carried on extensive conversations about some unnamed patient's bowels or sacroiliac joint until we began to make comical hand gestures in an effort to get him to hang up or move to a phone in a different room. When he finally did hang up, we made bad jokes about how such conversations interfered with our digestion. Ultimately, we all laughed about it; it was a normal part of our home life.

Some of the experiences to which my sisters and I were exposed, however, were no laughing matter. There were dramatic moments that left powerful, indelible imprints not only on my outlook but also on my whole sense of reality. One such experience occurred when I was in grade school, and Dad took my sister Mary and me to the Ice Capades in New York City. Both Mary and I were taking ice skating lessons at the time, and we were thrilled about the prospect of watching professionals. We couldn't wait to hear the music, see the costumes, and gape at all the fancy routines. On the way out of town, Dad parked across the street from a local

gas station. “Stay in the car,” he admonished, “I just have to make a quick stop.”

We’d sat through these brief house calls before; but this time he was gone for almost an hour. By the time our anxiety reached its peak, Dad returned.

“Are we still going to the Ice Capades?” I asked.

“Yes,” he retorted, his face and voice tense.

I was so relieved that he had finally come back and so happy about going to the show that I began to cheer loudly.

“Be quiet!” he snapped.

I was completely taken aback. Dad never shouted at us — about anything. We almost never saw him angry.

“What’s wrong, Daddy?” I asked, my eyes already brimming with tears from his sharp rebuke.

“I need you girls to be quiet right now. I just need quiet. We can go to the show, but I need to concentrate.”

Days later I found out that, while we waited in the car, my father tried to save his patient’s life inside that gas station, and he failed. A man died right in front of him. Dad stayed with the others in the gas station until arrangements were made for the body to be picked up, and then he got back into the car and drove us sixty miles into the city for the show.

Upon learning this, I felt devastated. “Why did you go, Daddy? Why did you take us? We could have gone home. We would have understood. How could you go to an ice skating show after losing your patient? How could you drive all the way to New York?”

"It's okay," he replied gently. "You kids really wanted to go; I didn't want to take that away from you. And these things happen all the time, honey. It's part of my life; it's part of my job."

Those last words hit me like a ton of bricks. My daddy was not just "the man who went out and saved lives" anymore; for the first time, I realized he was also "the man who saw people die." Remembering his reaction when he got back into the car, I understood what a huge toll it took on him, trying desperately to keep every heart beating — and sometimes failing.

Deeply troubled by this, I asked, "How do you deal with losing someone, Daddy? Doesn't it make you feel bad? Don't you feel guilty? Do you ever blame yourself?"

"No," he said, "because I always try my best to save their lives. I do everything I possibly can. I understand that sometimes they just can't be saved. Most of all, I ask myself what their chances would have been if I had not been there in the first place. Yes, I lost my patient, but his odds would have been worse if I had not tried to save him."

This was among the lessons I was taught as a doctor's child: how one learns to be philosophical and where to put one's trust — acceptance of reality, trust in destiny, and faith in oneself. It wasn't always easy for Dad to maintain this point of view, especially when it came to those who were very close to him. When one of Dad's dearest friends — Murray, one of the sweetest men I've ever met — developed amyotrophic lateral sclerosis

(ALS, or Lou Gehrig's Disease), Dad was uncharacteristically overcome with grief about it. One day after I returned from a typical day at high school, Dad came home from visiting Murray, and he began to cry. He shook his fists and shouted, "He's one of my best friends — one of the best people I've ever known! And I can't do anything for him! Not one damned thing!"

I don't remember any day in my life when I felt more compassion for my father than I did on that day. Murray was helpless because he could not control his muscles; Dad felt powerless because he couldn't cure his friend or even alleviate his suffering. I felt frustrated because I couldn't comfort Dad; no one could. I was left with no recourse but to feel sorry for both of them, for myself, and for the whole fragile human race.

It was a hell of a way to live. Dad traveled, partied, and had a fabulous time on his income; and most of the time he seemed cheerful. But the sacrifices he made seemed to outweigh the rewards. Even so, he was always driven, continuing to eat, sleep, and live the art and practice of medicine. As a witness to his suffering, I wondered why he put himself through all of that. When I reached my late teens, I finally asked Dad what made him choose to become a doctor. This is what he told me:

"When I was six years old I was walking down the street with my parents, and a man collapsed on his front steps. Several people rushed over to help him. At that moment I knew I wanted to be a doctor; that was what I wanted to do with my life."

Dad's epiphany set in motion a wave of turbulence that his family had not anticipated. His father made his way in America with the family furniture store, and he always expected his son to go into the business with him. Dad's decision to become a physician instead led to arguments with his father, who was unyielding about his own wishes. Eventually, as Dad's senior year of high school drew near, arguments gave way to bitter words, and Dad left home to live with his Uncle Dave and Aunt Alfa nearby.

Although he held down an after-school job in a beer factory, my father had no money for college, much less medical school. The rest of the family supported his career decision, and they all pitched in to help him attend Marquette University, a Jesuit school.

The majority of Dad's classmates were Irish Catholics, and they often ribbed him about being the only Jewish person in the class. But it was all in fun; Dad's memories of college and medical school were happy, and he handled the disparity with a sense of humor. One of his fellow soldiers in the Rainbow Division told me in a letter, "One of the funniest things I remember [about your father] is his singing a song, 'Oh bury me under the Star of David where the River Shannon flows,'" a parody of an old Irish ballad, reminiscent of his days at Marquette.[3] I suspect that, with his genial nature, Dad

3 Chuck Livingston, letter to the author, October 28, 2010.

made fast friends at school and that he regaled them many times with his own Jewish flavor of that song.

The wound between Dad and Grandpa remained open for years, but nothing could deter my father from becoming a physician. After completing his studies at the Marquette University School of Medicine (now known as the Medical College of Wisconsin) in 1943, he began his internship in New York City.

War Bride

"My life began on the day I met your mother," my father told me repeatedly. Every time he said it, his face glowed as if he had just met the love of his life, even though he had been married for decades.

Dad met my mother Charlotte Klein near her home in New York City when he traveled there with a medical school classmate en route to his internship interview at Queens General Hospital in Jamaica, Long Island, New York. His friend's girlfriend threw them a party, which Mom attended. The minute he laid eyes on her, Dad was spellbound by her beauty, poise, and grace. He approached her immediately and said, "Hello, my name is Obbie Weinstein. You don't know it yet, but I'm going to marry you."

"You hick!" she countered. "Who the hell do you think you are?"

Dad was not unduly self-confident by any means, but he was carried away and, consequently, completely undaunted by her retort. He simply persisted. Shortly after meeting her, Dad wrote the following poem:

> "My life has known of many a joy
> Ere I was but a little boy
> Who started out to win the goal
> Of peace of mind, or heart & soul.
>
> I chose the art of healing ills;
> To revel in the thousand thrills

That comes to one, who through his strife,
Hath sensed the joys of saving life.

I gave up much to gain this end
By sacrificing mirth and friend.
I dreamed of nothing, save the hour
That I'd be gifted with this power.

I felt that once this gift were mine
I would have finished my design
And be content to take my place
To meet life's challenge face to face.

This goal is very nearly here,
For in a single fleeting year
I shall possess this precious prize;
My fondest dream I'll realize.

But now I see that there is more
That barricades the golden door
I've painted as my fond retreat
Ere my ambitions be complete.

For I have met a maid, you see,
A flower from eternity
To whom, unknown to all about
I pledged my life, my love devout.

For I had never known the bliss
That lingered in this maiden's kiss.
And when her lips I touched that night
My heart did dance from sheer delight.

All other thrills then seemed as naught
Compared to those her kisses brought.
T'was then I knew I could not rest
Until I heard her love confess.

Some day I pray she will be mine,
Then all about shall seem sublime.
My dreams; my hopes, my faith shall grow
Until she says 'I love you, so.'"[4]

After returning to Milwaukee, he wrote to her, and she wrote back. They began dating soon after he returned to New York to start his internship. After a while, Dad invited Mom to go to Milwaukee with him to meet his family. At first she did not want to take the relationship that far, but her parents thought the relationship was good for her and persuaded her to go. Reluctantly, she accompanied Dad to his hometown during one of his vacations.

Charlotte always referred to Milwaukee as "the sticks." According to her, New York City was the only civilized place on Earth. But she had a soft heart, and

4 Alvin A Weinstein, poem for Charlotte Klein, 1943.

my father's family was exceptionally kind and hospitable. Sam and Ceil Weinstein welcomed her with open arms, and Dad's Uncle Dave — an exceptionally fun-loving and amusing person — showered her with love and entertained her with his usual assortment of riveting stories. The whole family won her over instantly.

When all was said and done, my mom and dad were meant to be together. Although they grew up in vastly different cities, both had uncles who instilled in them a passionate love of the arts; Dad had played the saxophone in a jazz band, and Mom played the violin; they were both raised by staunchly liberal Democrats; their parents had immigrated to America from central and eastern European Jewish communities; and their interests and values were nearly identical. Shortly after they returned to New York, they became engaged and were married on January 16, 1944. In those days all resources went toward the war effort, so Mom borrowed a wedding dress that had been worn previously by two other women. My father and she moved into a tiny apartment near the hospital where he finished his internship.

According to my mother's sister, Dad was granted a special privilege when the government allowed him to postpone his military induction in order to complete his internship; eligible doctors were usually expected to serve as soon as they finished medical school. Dad volunteered for service on August 1, 1944 and entered active duty three days later with an assignment to the famous 42nd Infantry "Rainbow Division" of the Seventh Army.

First he went to Basic Training for the Medical Detachment at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma, and my mother went with him. There were no barracks for married soldiers, and most of the wives stayed in small rooming houses or apartments in nearby Muskogee, which was a long way from the worldly atmosphere that Mom cherished in New York.

Reveille blew at daybreak, and Dad trained all day, often long into the night. Weekend passes lasted from Saturday noon until Monday morning, so Mom got to spend some time with him, provided he didn't need to catch up on sleep.[5] Neither of them told me any details about their lives at Camp Gruber, but Mom always smiled when she mentioned it — perhaps because every day that Dad didn't have to go overseas and face death was a good day.

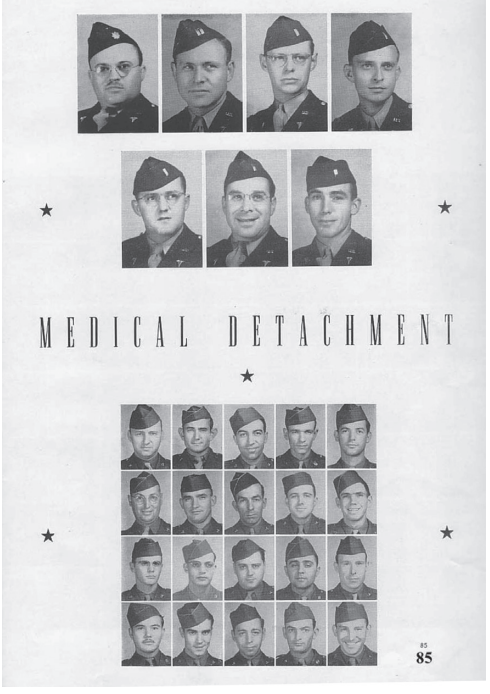
After Basic Training, Dad went to Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, where he received medical training specific to military battle. Shortly after enlisting, he was sent overseas. Before he shipped out, Mom had a professional portrait taken so that Dad could take her photograph with him. Along with Dad's military headshot, that photo hung in the hallway of our house for decades. Once, Mom pointed to it and explained, "This is the photo I had taken for your father just before he left for the war. See the gold heart locket around my neck? He

5 David G. Buck, *The Furnace and The Fire: The Story of a Regiment of Infantry* (Vienna: Dr. Franz Hain, 1945), 12.

gave me that necklace as a gift. I wore it when I had the picture taken so he would know I was always thinking of him."

When Dad left for Europe, Mom went back to her parents' apartment on South Pinehurst Street in New York and took a job as a secretary in the office of a produce company. Eleven months after her wedding, she was a war bride. She was only twenty-four.

Flung into the Maw



Captain Alvin A Weinstein, 2nd row center

On or about November 25, 1944, Dad and the men from the three infantry regiments of the Rainbow Division (the 222nd, the 232nd, and the 242nd) traveled by train from Camp Gruber to New York Harbor. There they boarded the *Edmund B. Alexander*, a ship that was to be their home for a fifteen-day trek across the Atlantic to Marseille, France.

Dad and his fellow soldiers were deployed before they were scheduled to complete training. In fact, Dad had enlisted only three months prior. Dubbed Task Force Linden, their mission was to join ever-thinning Allied forces in blocking the advance of two German armies in the Alsace region along a harsh, hostile thirty-mile battle front (the site of what was to become the Battle of the Bulge). Only partially trained and untested in battle, they hastened to France without the usual backup of their artillery battalions, combat engineers, medical battalion, reconnaissance troop, signal company, and all other forms of division support. For this reason, one infantryman referred to the situation as being "flung into the maw."[6]

Before leaving, all soldiers had to remove the Rainbow Division insignia from their uniforms, and all their phone calls and personal letters were censored. During their journey they were jammed into the ship

6 Rainbow Division Veterans Foundation, *42nd Rainbow Division Veterans Memorial Foundation, Inc. and National Auxiliary Rainbow Year 2010-2011*, (2011), 4.

like sardines, sleeping on crude canvas mats stretched across steel-pipe frames that were stacked in three tiers.

They were among the first convoys to be sent to Marseille, landing there on December 8. According to Dad, his was the first convoy to be sent there.[7] It was the starting point of what was to become the famous Rainbow Trail: 114 days of combat that extended 450 miles across France and Germany.

Upon disembarking, Dad's unit was transported by truck to an Army tent city high up on a mountain. There in the wilderness the men slept on the wet, cold ground, each with one blanket underneath, two on top, and one rolled up under their heads as a pillow. They unloaded equipment, prepared for battle, and moved out ten days later. They were not ready for combat, as stated in *The Furnace and The Fire*:

> "It had been intended that we would train for awhile before entering combat, but now that would be an impossibility with the increase of the tension on the front lines in the Ardennes Forest and around Strasbourg. Troops were desperately needed, whether ready for combat or not, just as long as they had two eyes, the usual

7 Alvin A. Weinstein, interview by Dr. Joseph Preil, Holocaust Resource Center, Kean University, Union, NJ, May 3, 1995.

number of arms and legs, and some knowledge of firearms."[8]

The winter weather in France at that time was the harshest that any of the local residents could remember. Bitter cold, blizzards, and wind ripped through the men's clothing. They lived in foxholes, surrounded by snow. For three days they traveled, jammed into trucks, taking up defensive positions. Cobbled together as quickly as possible, they fought along the Rhine River and around Strasbourg under the command of Brigadier General Henning Linden, assistant to Major General Harry J. Collins.

The Germans had captured U.S. aircraft, and Dad and his men watched in horror as American-made fifty-caliber bullets rained down on them from their own planes. The Germans also attacked them with tanks and artillery barrages. The Americans fought back as best they could.

"I was in the Battle of the Bulge," Dad said during an interview at the Holocaust Resource Center. "I didn't know it was the Battle of the Bulge. All I knew was that it was hell on Earth!"[9]

Forced to retreat in the middle of a fierce blizzard, the men's unit felt defeated and degraded as they

8 David G. Buck, *The Furnace and The Fire: The Story of a Regiment of Infantry* (Vienna: Dr. Franz Hain, 1945), 21.

9 Alvin A. Weinstein, interview by Dr. Joseph Preil, Holocaust Resource Center, Kean University, Union, NJ, May 3, 1995.

witnessed French nationals — the people they were charged to protect — on foot, running away from their homes as the Germans advanced.

Next, they fought in the Ohlungen Forest, braving very deep snow and sub-zero temperatures. On January 21, Dad's infantry regiment (the 222nd) was in a defensive position there, and the men had to stand still in foxholes — some half filled with water — both day and night. How grueling it must have been for Dad to keep the soldiers alive and well in conditions such as that!

During the last week in January, 1945, the Germans launched the last big offensive at the Moder River near Hatten. German artillery pounded the 222nd for more than an hour, while German soldiers crossed the Moder, advancing toward Dad and his men. Enemy troops broke through two of Task Force Linden's company lines and disabled all wire communications. Still, the men fought on. Dad's commander, Colonel Don Downard of the Second Battalion, counterattacked headlong into the face of machine-gun and mortar fire. By January 25th, the battalion had become fragmented, but the men, who were scattered throughout the area, continued fighting with whatever outfit happened to be nearby.

Exhausted, the men managed to push the German soldiers back. A well-planned defensive strategy with several infantry units finally thwarted the German advance. On the night of January 25, enemy soldiers retreated back across the Moder, shut out of the Alsace

region once and for all. This act of sheer will gave Dad and his men renewed confidence. Even though they were inexperienced, cold, hungry, and tired, they stood their ground. Happy with their success, they fell back to Lorraine, France, where they rested, ate, regrouped, and trained.

By stopping the German offensive, the members of Task Force Linden prevented a full-out withdrawal of Allied troops in the area. By this time, after only one month of fighting, half of them had lost their lives in battle.

In mid-February, the 222nd Infantry was sent into the Haardt Mountains to relieve the 45th Division's 179th Infantry. Dad's battalion occupied positions in a town called Kohlhutte. At this point, the men were simply happy that the foxholes had already been dug there and that the snow would stop falling soon. Nevertheless, the terrain was harsh — so rugged, steep, and snow-covered that only mules could carry their supplies. There they fought the 11th Regiment of the 6th SS Mountain Division.

Fortunately, the remainder of the 42nd Division arrived, and Task Force Linden was no longer a splintered, isolated unit. They had the support they needed to proceed with optimism, and jeeps delivered hot food twice a day from small towns nearby. The Germans, on the other hand, were short on supplies, and their morale was low. Heavy spring rains muddied the ground, but

the men in the 222nd were well fed and had a steady supply of clean, dry socks. They stayed in their foxholes — one awake and the other asleep — and when German patrols came through the area, they threw grenades to fend them off. At night, only their hearing could help them detect the invaders. While the U.S. Air Force dropped bombs on the Germans, Ranger platoons from the 222nd ventured out at night to fight. Eventually, the 242nd Infantry relieved them, and the regiment moved on to Schoenbourg, where the men resumed training.

They set out again March 15 to fight their way through the Haardt Mountains and take their first offensive action at the Siegfried Line. With their artillery in support, they pushed the Germans back across the mountains. Many men were wounded, and Dad was busy. The mountainous terrain made the distribution of supplies extremely difficult. By the end of this offensive, the men were eating only K-rations and drinking muddy water. On March 19, Dad's battalion staved off intense enemy counterattacks all day and night so the other men in the 222nd could sleep. Having listened to Dad talk about Colonel Downard, that seems pretty typical; Downard was always the first to volunteer his battalion's services in order to give others some badly needed rest.

The offensive ended on March 21. By noon, U.S. forces had penetrated the Siegfried Line. Almost none of our soldiers had been killed. The 222nd was at the

threshold of the Nazi empire, and they were knocking on their door. They trained for a week and started toward the Rhine River, which was said to be the last vestige of the German's defensive line. The German civilians were surprised to see U.S. forces there; due to propaganda, they had no idea that they were losing the war, much less that American soldiers were occupying nearby towns.

Passing through the devastated town of Worms and crossing the Rhine on a pontoon bridge, the 222nd settled in Mittelbach on the day before Easter Sunday. On April 1, the First and Second Battalions made their way down the hill into Wertheim, where they encountered sniper fire. City fighters now, they cleared the town, and the German soldiers surrendered. The 222nd continued along the Rainbow Trail, capturing and occupying small villages, and then headed toward Würzburg, where the Germans had regrouped.

The bridges in Würzburg had been bombed, and the Ranger Platoon members had to paddle across the Main River in a rowboat, using their helmets as oars; Dad's battalion followed in assault boats. The Germans fired on them immediately, killing some of the men as they made their way across. When the remainder of the 222nd crossed over, the entire infantry pushed into the German defensive lines at Würzburg. The town was heavily defended. There were tunnels under the streets where Germans could

hide, presenting a highly dangerous situation. But one solider from the infantry fired on a tank with a bazooka, causing the Germans to flee. The companies joined together and pushed out the remainder of the enemy forces from Würzburg. By April 5, the German soldiers had retreated to the east.

After clearing more small towns and ever on the offensive, the infantry surrounded the huge manufacturing city of Schweinfurt. There stood a multitude of ball-bearing plants, which were essential to Germany's war effort. Bitter fighting ensued, nonstop for twenty-four hours, and the men were attacked by huge German machine guns. However, the members of the 222nd succeeded in capturing the factories. As they did so, grateful slave laborers greeted them. That was the first glimpse of the massive suffering and privation that the Rainbow Division would soon confront at Dachau. Frightened German civilians hid in their homes, but hunger eventually drove them outside, and the soldiers gave them food. On April 13, while they were in Schweinfurt, the division learned about FDR's death the day before. General Collins arranged for some members of the 222nd to carry all forty-eight of the U.S. state flags in a memorial ceremony there.

Dad's battalion then moved south and east, crossing the Main River to Fahr. They kept pushing forward, clearing town after town, killing German soldiers and taking hundreds of prisoners. The Germans were

running out of places to retreat, and their numbers continued to decline. The war was almost over. Next, they advanced into Nürnberg (Nuremberg) and Fürth, Nürnberg's western suburb. This area was the birthplace of the Nazi Party, and the Germans were committed to defending the city. The Rainbow Division was one of five divisions that were chosen to attack there.

To limit American casualties, General Collins opted to surround the city as he had done in Schweinfurt. Dad's battalion attacked from the south. The German fighters were fanatical, and the soldiers of the Rainbow Division had to fight fiercely to force the Nazis out of the gutted buildings and basements there. It took all day to clear only six blocks. The 222nd captured more than 1,900 prisoners of war — more than they had ever secured in a single day.

They continued south, fighting German soldiers along the way. On the morning of April 26, they crossed the Danube River. The Germans had bombed the bridge there, so the engineering battalions had to make a footbridge while under heavy fire. Dad's battalion fought there for six hours. They captured more towns as they moved down toward Munich.

On the morning of April 29, along with the 45th Division, they entered the town of Dachau and liberated the concentration camp. It was their first encounter with the Holocaust. The soldiers were shocked, disgusted, and overcome with emotion at the sights and smells of

Dachau; from that moment on, they fought with more conviction, bringing the war to a close in only one more week.

Next, they traveled a short distance further to Munich. By this time, the German soldiers offered little resistance. Members of the Rainbow Division freed a large number of British and American prisoners of war, who let it be known that the SS had bullied and beaten the German citizens there. Grateful and relieved, these Germans spilled out into the streets, cheering on the American soldiers. Chaos was everywhere: concentration camp refugees and civilians scurried about frantically, and soldiers in the 222nd Infantry had to curtail a bout of looting.

The conquest in Munich was a huge achievement, because it signified the end of the war. While there, members of the Rainbow Division visited the beer garden where Hitler had started the Nazi Party. Still, their work was not yet done; they had to go south into Austria to finish the job. Prisoners of war beseeched them along the way, waving white flags; there were more people than the division could accommodate. After a few days, the soldiers met no more resistance.

The official surrender was issued on May 8. Just days before that, Dad's battalion was sent to liberate elite prisoners of war at Laufen, and he was sent to rescue inmates from a Buchenwald death march at Lebenau Prison. "Our battalion, we were always sent on the tough

jobs," Dad recounted in his interview with Joseph Preil. "In every unit, there's always one group that gets all the tough jobs. [We did] because of Colonel Downard, who was really such a wonderful soldier."[10]

Dad remained at Lebenau for a week before rejoining his battalion. The scenery in and around Tirol, Austria was beautiful, and peace had come at last. Even so, checkpoints had to be set up along roadways to capture SS soldiers who were trying to escape, many of whom were eventually tried at Nuremberg. Shortly after arriving in Austria, the 222nd Infantry found more than $100,000 worth of silver previously owned by the Third Reich, and they discovered underground factories where prisoners and slave laborers had been forced to maintain Germany's war machine.

Most of the work from that point forward involved helping displaced Holocaust survivors find new homes and restoring normal economic and political life in the region. Movie theaters and other recreational activities were set up on the base. The soldiers who stayed behind began to take breaks, sometimes vacationing in the French Riviera, Paris, and other tourist attractions. Dad remained there for one more year as a noncombat Army doctor.

10 Alvin A. Weinstein, interview by Dr. Joseph Preil, Holocaust Resource Center, Kean University, Union, NJ, May 3, 1995.

The Bronze Star and the Purple Heart

While tending to the wounded along the Rainbow Trail, my father received the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart. Records show that his Bronze Star was awarded on January 12, 1945, in France under General Orders Number 76 and the Purple Heart on April 11, 1945, in Germany under General Orders Number 78.

I was unable to uncover any information about how and why he received the Bronze Star. The citations for both medals burned in the 1973 fire at the National Personnel Records Center, and no one in my family has a copy of either one. Apparently, Dad never told a soul about receiving the Bronze Star; when I asked friends and family members, no one knew anything about it.

Instituted in 1944 and awarded retroactively back to December 7, 1941, the Bronze Star is awarded to a person "…that distinguished himself or herself apart from his or her comrades by brave or praiseworthy achievement or service, that did not include participation in aerial flight. The act justifying award of the medal must be performed while fighting an enemy of the United States, or while involved in conflict with an opposing/foreign force. It can also be awarded for heroism while serving with friendly forces engaged in combat against an opposing military in which the United States is not a belligerent party."[11]

11 Powers, "Bronze Star Medal, Criteria," http://usmilitary.about.com/od/armymedals/ss/bsm_3.htm (accessed 11 Aug. 2014).

Although I have no idea what specific act of heroism earned my dad this medal, I was able to piece together what his battalion was doing on the day he received it, thanks to the detailed history of the 222nd Infantry in *The Furnace and The Fire*.[12]

> "When we moved onto the line at Strasbourg on the west bank of the Rhine River, they gave us a surprise that knocked all our efforts for military security into a puddle…. The enemy was extremely well reinforced with armored units and artillery. We had some, but nowhere near enough [to] compete with the strength of theirs. They were well aware of our lack of experience and were determined to drive us all the way back to Marseilles on that deficiency alone, because they were also well aware after a few hours of battle that that was the only one we had. They poured everything they had on us, continuous tank attacks, artillery barrages, attacks by aircraft.
>
> "… This was the university where the American civilian learned how long he could endure the misery of frozen feet — frozen bodies for that matter; where he learned how much hunger he could stand; where he learned

12 David G. Buck, *The Furnace and The Fire: The Story of a Regiment of Infantry* (Vienna: Dr. Franz Hain, 1945).

> that the bridge between life and death was not a bridge at all, nor even a stepping stone, but that life and death paddle along the same narrow stream.
>
> "…here there was no future. In five minutes I'll get shot; tomorrow I may be blown to hell, if I don't get it today; if I don't find some place to get warm in the next ten minutes I'll probably freeze to death. No future, no past, just present. Just living and suffering from abysmal second to abysmal second."[13]

Given this description of the danger, hardship, and privation that the men in the 222nd had endured, perhaps Dad received the Bronze Star along with the others simply for remaining steadfast in battle. Clearly, it took an incredible amount of courage to continue fighting (and, in Dad's case, to continue sewing up the wounded) in the midst of such dire circumstances.

The Purple Heart is awarded to those who are wounded or killed in battle. I was fourteen years old when I learned that my father had been awarded this medal, and, having never noticed any scars, I asked Dad how he got it. He told me his aid station was under attack, and he had to defend it (the tent, his patients inside, and himself). He grabbed his rifle and ran toward a more protected spot nearby where he could shoot under cover.

13 Ibid., 25-26.

He never said so, but I assume that throughout the war it had been rare for Dad to use his gun. Surrounded by chaos and enemy fire, he tripped, fell, and chipped his tooth as he ran. Then a German soldier threw a grenade, and shrapnel penetrated his hand and the side of his neck. There were no other surgeons to help him, and when the worst was over, he had to go back to the operating table and try to save the other soldiers; no one was available to tend to *his* wounds.

According to *The Furnace and The Fire*, this action happened in Schweinfurt, Germany, a city that was heavily defended by a phalanx of German soldiers and immense 88 mm machine guns. As the 222nd approached the city from the west, they were immediately attacked. The Germans held nothing back, and the men in Dad's infantry, along with other Rainbow Division soldiers, had to fight fiercely to drive them back.[14]

When Dad told me about his injury, I asked, "How did you get the shrapnel out of your neck?" Casually, he replied that he had to wait until it worked its way out on its own. Gradually, as the fragments pushed their way to the surface of his skin, he pulled them out. To this day, I remain shocked and dismayed by that. He was always ready to heal the hundreds of men in his care, yet when it came to his injuries, he was on his own.

14 Ibid., 60.

Until the day he died, Dad always kept his Bronze Star and Purple Heart in their original fancy cases in the top drawer of his dresser. Considering what he went through to earn them, it is easy to understand why he kept them so close.

Battling Death: Aid Station on the Front Line

Source: From the private collection of Brennan Gauthier

Very little of what my dad learned in medical school prepared him for the job he faced as a battalion surgeon; he had to receive special training to apply his art to the battlefield. I'm reminded of the legend about the Dutch boy who kept his finger in the dyke to prevent an entire dam from breaking loose. That is how it must have felt to my father, charged with keeping the men in his battalion alive amidst a shower of bullets and shrapnel.

"There were 868 men in our unit when I went overseas," he told Joseph Preil during his interview at Keane University. "We had over 400 casualties that came through my aid station in the war. We had sixty-seven dead."[15]

Each infantry battalion has a medical section, consisting of one medical doctor, one administrative corps officer, and thirty-two enlisted men who were trained in first aid for battle casualties. The job of these medics was to get to the wounded and get them back to the aid station, where the doctor gave immediate first aid and had them transported to a military hospital. "It was a very efficient setup," Dad told Dr. Preil.

In addition to being exhausting, my father's job was also dangerous. "We were up close, within 300 yards of the Germans," he recounted. "When we graduated at Carlisle, the commanding general said, 'Those of you who will be battalion surgeons, if you don't end the war

15 Alvin A. Weinstein, interview by Dr. Joseph Preil, Holocaust Resource Center, Kean University, Union, NJ, May 3, 1995.

with a Japanese or German accent, you won't be doing your job right.' You had to be up close to get to the men, because time was of the essence." He also served as a family doctor to the men, addressing their illnesses, allergies, and exposure to the elements, as well as tending to their war wounds.

He had to be resourceful; sometimes supplies were low, and he had to improvise. One soldier, Chuck Livingston from Company E, told me that he was wounded twice in the mountains near Luneville, France. Among other things, he had shrapnel in his knee. Dad patched him up for transport to the hospital, fashioning a kind of splint so that Chuck's leg would remain bent in a particular position during the ride. Chuck was barely conscious at the time, still groggy from morphine; when his bandage was removed at the hospital, he laughed out loud to discover that Dad had used a beer bottle to keep his leg in place.[16]

Dad also had the daunting task of keeping his men's spirits and hopes high. Chuck said that when he served with the Rainbow Rangers, a small rifle platoon that raided enemy territory at night, he occasionally visited Dad's aid station to have a drink of "medicinal whiskey" and "shoot the breeze." One night Chuck predicted that he would be wounded and said to Dad, "Well, I'm sure I'll see you tomorrow — professionally." Dad protested, "Oh, don't give me that!" Sure enough, Chuck was hit

16 Chuck Livingston, conversation with the author, November 2010.

while hiding in a bombed-out farmhouse.[17] Many soldiers had premonitions prior to becoming wounded or felt extreme anxiety before battle; Dad did the best he could to quell their fears.

In his role as family doctor, Dad also had to deal with patients' resistance to treatment. One of the soldiers, John Brackett, wrote that he had just barely turned nineteen when he fought in the war. "The third time I remember Doctor Weinstein," he wrote, "was in Schwaz, Austria, after the war. He was giving us physical check-ups. When my turn came … he sensed my concern and remarked, 'When someone comes at you guys with a rifle, it doesn't scare you; but when I come at you with a stethoscope, you want to turn and run.'"[18]

Despite their feelings about doctors, the men in Dad's unit clearly respected and trusted him. The following excerpts are from letters I received from soldiers who served with him in the 222nd Infantry:

> "I always wanted to meet him after the war and thank him for looking after me there in Germany. He was a good man and officer."[19]
>
> "…he sure was a fine person. I saw him several times during combat but never as a patient. I always found him to be friendly, caring,

17 Ibid.

18 John Brackett, letter to the author, October 4, 2010.

19 Ibid.

humorous and competent, a real credit to the medical profession!"[20]

"I knew your dad very well. I was a rifle platoon leader in his outfit. Al was a delightful man, full of laughter."[21]

Reading these comments, I was taken aback by that last one. I had never heard anyone refer to my father as "Al." It was as if he had been a completely different person with an alternate life than the one I had known. Whenever I accompanied him, everyone who knew my father called him Obbie. Concierges, maitre d's, and other casual acquaintances always addressed him as "Dr. Weinstein." His patients called him "Doc." Who was this "Al" I was hearing about? Despite the name aberration, one thing remained constant: During the war and throughout the course of Dad's life, he took care of people, he was kind, he made people laugh, and everybody loved him for it.

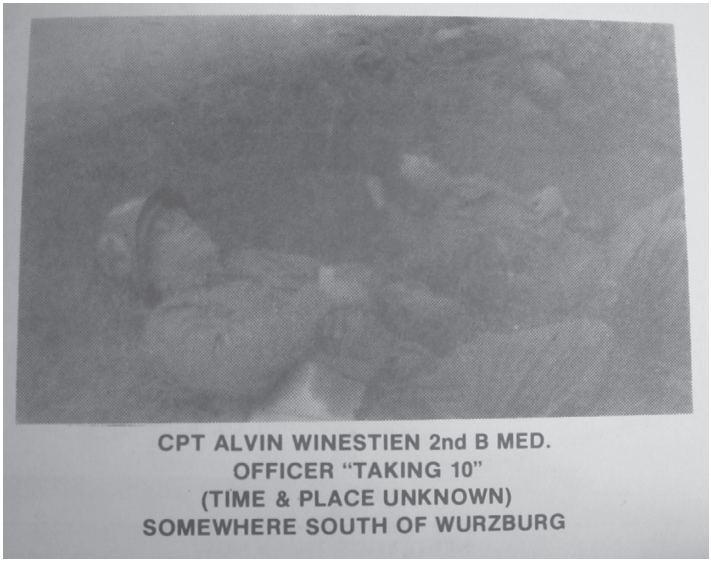
When I look back on the life-or-death emergencies that Dad encountered in his family practice, they always seemed so dramatic, scary, and noble. To picture such experiences under enemy fire is beyond my capacity. The first time I saw a photo of him taking a nap in a foxhole with his helmet on, a voice inside me shouted, "No! That cannot be my daddy! Not him! Not the gentle man in the white lab coat!"

20 John Walker, letter to the author, October 19, 2011.

21 Chuck Livingston, letter to the author, October 28, 2010.

But indeed it was him. His fellow soldiers were intimately acquainted with a part of his life that I will never know and can never share, especially now that he is gone and I can no longer ask him about it. Yet, there is one thing they saw, knew, and remembered about him that I too remember, and it is as familiar to me as my own hand: my father's warmth toward people and his love.

Battling Nazis as a Jewish Soldier



CPT ALVIN WINESTIEN 2nd B MED.
OFFICER "TAKING 10"
(TIME & PLACE UNKNOWN)
SOMEWHERE SOUTH OF WURZBURG

For my father, and I imagine for most Jewish soldiers who fought in Europe during World War II, fighting the Germans evoked a complex web of emotions. Not only was he an American soldier, he was also the target of Hitler's mission to eradicate all Jews from the face of the earth. Dad's feelings about that were heightened exponentially by the fact that, had his father not immigrated to the United States, he would have been killed or placed in a concentration camp himself.

"The anti-Jewish feeling continued," he said during his interview at Kean University. "Anti-Semitism had been a way of life for a century in central Europe. [The Germans] had a very complete plan on the ultimate destruction of the Jewish people."[22]

Dad was not only fighting German soldiers; he was at war with anti-Semitism itself, and it was not confined to Europeans. Even as he joined forces with the people who were destined to push Hitler back and put an end to his plan, some of the Americans who fought beside him — and whose lives he saved — were every bit as anti-Semitic as the enemy. A man from the Second Battalion wrote in his letter to me:

> "There are three specific occurrences that I remember about your father. The first involved an incident which occurred during a lull when a

22 Alvin A. Weinstein, interview by Dr. Joseph Preil, Holocaust Resource Center, Kean University, Union, NJ, May 3, 1995.

> group of us, including Doctor Weinstein, were all sitting around on the ground engaged in a more or less 'bull session' when someone made an uncomplimentary remark about Jewish people. Doctor Weinstein was very much angered by this person and picked up his steel helmet and was about to bean him, but all was resolved peacefully."[23]

I can hardly imagine my father, who was usually very slow to anger, picking up a steel object with intent to hit someone. That is not the person I knew, not from the time I was a baby until the day he died. He was always the healer, not the one who caused pain. Given this uncharacteristic behavior, his feelings about anti-Semitism must have run very deep yet also remained very close to the surface during the war.

What makes Dad's outburst somewhat easier to understand is the fact that Judaism was the core of his identity. When I interviewed him for a college paper, he told me, "My whole identity is wrapped up in being Jewish. I do not see myself as a man; I see myself as a Jewish man. I don't look at myself as a doctor; I view myself as a Jewish doctor. I am not a husband or father; I am a Jewish husband, a Jewish father."

---

23 John Brackett, letter to the author, October 4, 2010.

That surprised me, because I never considered our family to be religious, and Dad never appeared that way. He lived for the arts — fine art, ballet, opera, the symphony, and plays on Broadway; I always thought *that* was his religion. Nevertheless, Judaism was at the heart of his self-image.

It isn't clear whether my father felt that way before or only after Hitler waged his war against the Jewish people. Either way, it could not have been easy for Dad to maintain his focus and the discipline of saving lives under such highly personal circumstances, especially during those times when he was required to save both Allied soldiers and German prisoners of war. The fact that he was defending his own people clearly affected his thinking. In the same letter, Dad's fellow soldier wrote:

> "The second occasion occurred in a small village outside of Fürth, Germany. I was wounded on April 18, 1945 and was evacuated by a German stretcher team and a jeep stretcher unit to a village where your father had a battalion first-aid station. There were quite a number of wounded on stretchers — both Americans and Germans, which your father was treating so that they could be taken by ambulance to an evac hospital. Doctor Weinstein came to my stretcher and told me that the last ambulance was ready to go,

> but it had three Germans in it. He asked me if I would object to riding in this ambulance with the three Germans. I did not object and away we went — quite an experience."[24]

Dad actually considered the possibility that his patient might refuse the last available ride to safety if a few German soldiers shared the ride. I wonder if Dad would have declined if instead he had been the injured party. Perhaps he would have stayed behind, risking his own death rather than ride in an ambulance with them. Yet he was the one who had to sew them up and save their lives.

Until the war was nearly over, Dad didn't know half of what was happening to Jewish people in Europe. As the fighting drew to a close and he went into the concentration camps, no previous vision of Hitler, German soldiers, or anti-Semitism prepared Dad for the atrocities that he witnessed in those places. He was reportedly the third person in the Rainbow Division ever to set foot in Dachau, and when he did, his entire world changed — dramatically and irrevocably. What he confronted at Lebenau Prison was even worse.

24 Ibid.

Camp Liberations: Confronting the Ultimate Horror

I was fourteen years old when I first learned that my father had gone to some of the concentration camps toward the end of the European Campaign. Given the condition of the survivors, it made sense that the military doctors, nurses, and medics were sent to the camps. Nevertheless, I was astonished to hear that Dad was among them, simply because I'd never heard anything about his presence there. Surely something so monumental as saving the lives of Jewish Holocaust victims would find its way into family conversation.

After broaching the subject, I understood why it hadn't. He looked deeply troubled, even though it had been decades since he'd been there. The conversation lasted no more than a minute or two.

"I can't tell you about that!" he barked, when I asked about the camps.

Unaccustomed to a sharp response, I felt startled and confused.

"Why not?" I asked tentatively.

"It's bad enough that I had to see all of that; there's no need to bother you with it too," he replied. "I don't want you to know what I saw."

He paused and continued, with a faraway look in his eyes. "Pits. Bodies in pits," he said. "There were these huge pits everywhere with bodies in them. But that is all I'll tell you."

Conversation over.

I appreciate my father's desire to safeguard my mind and heart by keeping it from me, and I understand now

that he needed to protect himself too. It was too painful to talk about it to anybody, much less his young, innocent daughter. But I wish he had told me more about it.

As fate would have it, the fiftieth anniversary of the Allied victory in World War II coincided with a tendency for some people to deny that the Holocaust had ever taken place. As a result, World War II soldiers were asked to give interviews and write testimonials about their experiences at the concentration camps, and my father was among those who did. Ever the tight-lipped guardian, he never told me about the interviews, even though I was forty-one years old at the time. I wish he *had* told me, because I cling to a fantasy that, if I'd known about the interviews, I could have persuaded him to tell me his story. I imagine him confiding in me: one last incredible bond between father and daughter before his death two years later.

What I find bewildering is the fact that Dad *thought* he had told me. When Dr. Preil asked him about his silence during their interview at Kean University, Dad said that I had asked him about the camps after my bat mitzvah and that he eventually told me about them; yet he never did.[25]

I managed to uncover the stories by locating his interview materials and written testimonials. The following information about Dad's experiences in the camps comes from these resources: the video of his interview with Dr.

25 Alvin A. Weinstein, interview by Dr. Joseph Preil, Holocaust Resource Center, Kean University, Union, NJ, May 3, 1995.

Preil at Kean University's Holocaust Resource Center;[26] his verbal and written testimonies in two books, *Holocaust Testimonies: European Survivors and American Liberators in New Jersey*[27] and *Dachau 29 April 1945: The Rainbow Liberation Memoir*s;[28] his interview with Michael Olesker in the *Baltimore Sun* newspaper;[29] and an obscure article of unknown origin that was typed on my father's office letterhead, sent to me by Dr. Theresa Ast, who had written about my father in her Ph.D. dissertation about post-traumatic stress disorder. Members of my family shared that my father was the third person in the Rainbow Division to have walked through the gates of Dachau.

Dachau Concentration Camp

Who's on First?

When I started researching my father's encounter at Dachau, a friend who had spent many years in the U.S. Army warned me that a feud remains between the members of the 45th and 42nd Divisions regarding which one penetrated the gates of Dachau first. Before I begin the

26 Ibid.

27 Joseph J. Preil, ed., *Holocaust Testimonies*: *European Survivors and American Liberators in New Jersey* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 189-192.

28 Sam Dann, ed., *Dachau 29 April 1945*: *The Rainbow Liberation Memoir*s (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1998).

29 Olesker, "Dachau's Trains Bore Cargoes of Unbridled Misery."

gripping story of Dad's day at Dachau, I'd like to address this disagreement, because much has been written and discussed about it, and I don't want the issue to distract from or undermine his story.

When the 45th Division reached Dachau on the morning of April 29, 1945, they entered from the north, and the 42nd entered from the south. Dad told my brother-in-law that Colonel Downard's jeep was the first one in the camp, and he was in that jeep.

Colonel Downard's testimony in *Dachau 29 April 1945: The Rainbow Liberation Memoirs* states:

> "My soldiers were there before any of the other Rainbow units, or personnel, including General [Linden] and his party, and the Red Cross, news reporters, and the rest of them. Mickey Fellenz was there pretty early, but not before my 2nd Bn soldiers...I was told about the 45th. I guess they arrived from another direction at about the same time my soldiers did. I'm not denying that they were there. I'm only saying that I, personally, never saw a Thunderbird patch."[30]

Dachau was a huge camp, and if the two divisions had entered from opposite directions, they could not have seen each other. Both divisions had the same experience:

30 Sam Dann, ed., *Dachau 29 April 1945: The Rainbow Liberation Memoir*s (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1998), 73-75.

They were the first to set foot in the camp. When it comes to war, it is one's experience that counts; in this respect, they were both right.

Given the horrors beheld at Dachau, it seems ludicrous that anyone would focus on a point so trivial as "first to arrive." Most of the men from the 42nd who wrote testimonials in *Dachau: 29 April 1945* agreed that the magnitude of the atrocities they encountered — and faced together with the 45th when the two divisions met and joined forces there later in the day — far outweighed the issue of who got there first. In his testimony, Colonel Downard stated, "And I do know that we were first — but who cares! I believe there is no limit to what a man can do if he doesn't care who gets the credit for it."[31] Regardless of who was first, all the men were shattered by what they saw. Whether they came from the 45th or the 42nd, they felt the same shock and cried the same tears. Perhaps it is the pain and extreme anger engendered by the sight of the Holocaust victims that continue to fuel this argument. Who wouldn't want to stake a claim on ending unthinkable cruelty such as that?

When reasoning with Holocaust deniers, facts are critical; they are our only weapon against that particular manifestation of anti-Semitism. However, in this case, whether the 45th arrived just before, just after, or at the same moment that my Dad's jeep entered the camp,

31 Ibid., 75.

Dachau was real. The photographs, films, and soldiers' stories leave no doubt that it happened. Acknowledgment of that fact is all that really matters if we are to eradicate genocide and work toward putting an end to man's inhumanity to man.

Discovery

Of all the testimonies in *Dachau 29 April 1945*, my father's was the most shocking to me, because in it Dad explains that he knew about Dachau long before he joined the Army, and he was the person who told Colonel Downard about it. He wrote:

> "Late in April of 1945, as our Battalion was proceeding south from the city of Furth, we came upon a road sign that read, '5 kms nach Dachau.' I told Colonel Downard that there was a political prison in that town and how I had learned of it. This was later confirmed by a German civilian as we got closer to Dachau.[32]

This account bowled me over, because the Second Battalion might not have even entered Dachau if it had not been for my father. They were part of what was known as "the spearhead," a final push to defeat the German army in Munich. That was their destination, and it appears that they stopped at Dachau because Dad

32 Ibid., 89-90.

saw the sign and informed Colonel Downard about the camp. While Colonel Downard's testimony in 1988 makes no mention of this — he stated only that someone from the town told them about it — it is possible that his dramatic, horrific experience at Dachau caused him to forget decades later that my father told him first, or perhaps he simply meant the German civilian confirmed the prison was there.

In *Dachau 29 April, 1945*, Dad explained how he had learned about the camp:

> "As an intern, I treated a man for meningococcal meningitis at our hospital, Queens General, in New York. This patient suffered a high fever which caused him to rant and rave in German during the early course of his disease. When he recovered, I asked him what it was all about. He told me that he had been an official in a political party that had opposed the Nazis in 1933 when Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. He and other officials of this party were arrested and imprisoned for five years at a Concentration Camp in the Bavarian city of Dachau. He vividly described the horrors of this place; and told me that the Commandant of the Camp was bribed to take him and two other officials of this political party to Rotterdam in Holland, where

> arrangements had been made for them to enter the United States as political refugees."[33]

A footnote in my father's testimony reads, "Below general staff levels, very few if any officers knew the facts about or even the existence of Dachau. Certainly, this information was not yet available to the battalion commanders."[34] Perhaps Colonel Downard would have discovered Dachau from the townspeople as his battalion passed through, regardless of Dad's knowledge of the place. But according to my father, Downard initially learned about it from him. After that, the colonel conducted inquiries in the town and decided to move his men into the camp.

Entry

As the Second Battalion neared Dachau concentration camp, they came under fire on a country road and had to fend off enemy soldiers to get in.[35] When they entered the camp, not one SS officer was present. In Dad's interview with Dr. Preil, he explained that a member of the Swiss Red Cross told Colonel Downard that the high-ranking SS officers had left the camp and put him and his men in charge. The only German officer remaining was a captain, who surrendered the camp to American troops;

33 Ibid., 89.

34 Ibid., 248.

35 Ibid., 74.

all the other officers had cast off their uniforms, donned civilian clothes, and fled.[36] The majority of the people there were the inmates, and they were in a dire state.

"I never saw anything so pitiful, so horrible," Dad told Dr. Preil. "Tortured human beings — it was hard to recognize them as human beings; they looked like skeletons with a yellowish parchment-like skin pulled over them with sunken eyes and sunken cheeks.

> "The entire area as we entered the camp was muddy. Dachau had a moat around it as part of the defense, and it has a tall wall, the top portion of which was electrified wire. Well, there were so many dead bodies in the moat that the drainage was obstructed, and, as a result, it backed up, and everything inside the camp was a mess of mud, dead people lying face-down in the mud, dried blood visible, human excrement. It's impossible to describe.
>
> "And the survivors, those who could stand and speak, learning that I was Jewish, one of them yelled in Yiddish that the Messiah had come, and one kissed my hand, which bothered me terribly. And one man tore this Star of David off his would-be uniform, forced it into my hand, and he said to me in Yiddish, 'Never forget what

36 Alvin A. Weinstein, interview by Dr. Joseph Preil, Holocaust Resource Center, Kean University, Union, NJ, May 3, 1995.

you saw here today.' I carried that in my wallet until a week ago, when I took it and mounted it for another interview. In fifty years, that was the first time it was out of my wallet.

"I'll never forget what I saw or heard or smelled that day. As we got into the camp, the smell of rotting flesh was everywhere and the smell of burned flesh, which smells like burned chicken feathers — a very, very acrid, horrible odor — and the sound of the wailing and the screaming of the survivors, I'll never forget.

"There were many movies. I'm sure most people have seen the movies taken; but that doesn't tell the whole story. There were bodies piled up crosswise, like you would pile up logs to be burned.

"Where I entered, there were two of these furnaces adjacent to a large room where the ovens were. Evidently, they had run out of fuel, and they were unable to cremate them. There were hundreds lying around everywhere. Dachau was a large camp; it covered a lot of area. We, the 42nd Division, approached from one side, and the 45th Division approached from the other side. In our Rainbow souvenir book, they estimated 33,000 had survived. Certainly, a million and a half had been disposed of in that camp."[37]

37 Ibid.

In a telephone interview that appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* newspaper on April 30, 1995, my father had told reporter Michael Olesker, "I saw a skull clearly visible. Whoever built the ovens was so proud that his name and company were engraved on the side of it."[38]

"[Before going to Dachau] I imagined it would be like our high-security prisons in the United States," Dad told Dr. Preil, "even a military prison, such as Ft. Leavenworth … but I had no idea what it was like. My first impression of it was, 'There but for an act of immigration go I.' My father was born in southern Russia. He immigrated to America in [early] 1900. He had a brother who was very, very religious, who refused to travel in any form on the Sabbath, and, as a result, he and his issue completely perished."[39]

Doctor Death

Dad remained at Dachau for about a day and a half. During his brief stay, he had a traumatic conversation with a German physician there. "I was approached by a civilian in a white medical laboratory coat, and this man spoke wonderful English," Dad told Dr. Preil. "He saw my medical insignia on my collar and asked if I could come and see the studies he was carrying on in this

38 Michael Olesker, "Dachau's Trains Bore Cargoes of Unbridled Misery," *Baltimore Sun*, 30 Apr. 1995.

39 Alvin A. Weinstein, interview by Dr. Joseph Preil, Holocaust Resource Center, Kean University, Union, NJ, May 3, 1995.

camp. So I went with him, and he showed me all of his papers."[40]

In his narrative in *Dachau 29 April 1945*, Dad explained this experiment in detail:

> "Using prisoners as subjects, he had been engaged in a series of experiments to determine how far the body temperature could be lowered without causing death. Then, gradually raising the temperature by degrees to discover how much normal physical function could be recovered; and how much would be permanently lost. His particular interest was the reproductive capacity. He very proudly produced a sheaf of 'scientific studies' which demonstrated that, even when the human body was reduced to the extremely lowest limit of degrees Celsius, his 'patients' could experience a full physical recovery … even to the ability to have an erection."[41]

Dad told Dr. Preil that his response to this presentation was, "Well, look, there is plenty written about hypothermia. What's the big mystery?" The German physician replied, "Well, our flyers, who are the purest of our Aryans, had to fly at great heights, and if they had to parachute, their testicles would be exposed to cold

40 Ibid.

41 Sam Dann, ed., *Dachau 29 April 1945: The Rainbow Liberation Memoir*s (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1998), 90.

temperature, and it was very important for us to protect them in order to continue to purify the Aryan race." Dad said, "I asked him what kind of anesthesia he used in these experiments, and with a great deal of disgust, he said to me, 'We wouldn't waste any anesthesia on them.'"[42]

In his testimony in *Dachau 29 April 1945*, Dad wrote, "I was horrified. I asked him, 'How could you do this to human beings?' 'Oh,' he answered, 'they were all going to die anyhow.'"[43]

Death Train

Among the testimonials in *Dachau 29 April 1945*, the experience most frequently shared was the devastating encounter with a long strand of boxcars on railroad tracks that lined the side of the camp. There were approximately thirty-nine cars, all of which were completely filled with the dead bodies of starved, frozen people. It was one of the first sights that confronted Dad and the other members of his unit when they entered the camp, and the impact was more horrifying than any barrage of bullets they had endured previously. They were outraged; many of the men cried.

Due to the lack of odor, my dad surmised that they had all died recently. Stunned, the men in the Second

42 Alvin A. Weinstein, interview by Dr. Joseph Preil, Holocaust Resource Center, Kean University, Union, NJ, May 3, 1995.

43 Sam Dann, ed., *Dachau 29 April 1945: The Rainbow Liberation Memoir*s (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1998), 90.

Battalion drifted past the piles of bodies. Suddenly, one soldier, Anthony Cardinale of HQ Company, saw movement. He wrote,

> "It was a hand. It was poked up between some of the bodies on top of it. It was weakly waving back and forth. It was quite evident that its owner was alive, and had heard our voices, and was desperately trying to attract our attention.… I called out to Colonel Downard … who had already passed that boxcar and was about fifteen or twenty feet ahead of me: "Hey Colonel! Here's a live one!'"[44]

Colonel Downard continues the story in his own testimonial:

> "Immediately, I ran back to the car. There, almost buried under a mass of dead bodies was a hand that was waving so feebly you could hardly notice it. But it was moving! I climbed up into that car, and assisted by the TD Officer [Captain Roy Welbourn], managed to get him out of there.
>
> "To make sure he got to the Aid Station, I decided to take him there myself. We started for the Aid Station, but we came under some small arms fire. My driver cracked up the jeep, and

44 Ibid., 85.

> I was thrown some distance. When I regained consciousness, I was lying on a litter in the Aid Station. On another litter, on my left, was the survivor. He wasn't hurt in the accident. I had a concussion and some contusions."[45]

Decades later, Colonel Downard called my father, asking him to translate "The Death Trains of Dachau," an article from the *Munich Evening Press*, dated April 18, 1994, which he had received from a German journalist. Dad had it translated and sent to the Colonel. The article explained that the 1,500 people in the boxcars died of dehydration, exposure to cold temperatures, starvation, and gunshot wounds. They had been forced onto the train from Buchenwald for a three-day trip to Bavaria, where Hitler had planned a last stand. When Allied forces bombed the train tracks, the train was diverted to Dachau. Due to repeated bombing, the trip was halting and circuitous, taking almost three weeks. The prisoners only had food rations for three days and no water. Civilians threw food into the cars when the train passed through their towns, but any prisoner who picked it up or who stood while the train was in transit was shot. By the time they reached Dachau, few were alive, and fewer still strong enough to stand up and walk through the gates to the sparse offering of food and water inside. The bulk of them were left in the cars to die.

45 Ibid., 74.

The article also explained that the man Colonel Downard had pulled from a boxcar, Gleb Rahr, had survived. He was living near Munich and still worked as a journalist for Radio Liberty. Colonel Downard, upon reading this in the translation, telephoned Dad and told him how happy he was. "At least one of them made it," he told Dad. They savored the victory together, neither suspecting that two days later the colonel would die of heart failure.[46]

Lebenau Prison

Shortly after their brief but piercing stay at Dachau, Dad's battalion moved south to Bavaria to finish off the enemy and end the European Campaign. Ironically, they were on a beautiful stretch of land at the foothills of the Alps, reportedly one of Hitler's favorite places for rest and relaxation. First, they occupied a castle that had held celebrity prisoners, which they quickly converted to a triage hospital for concentration camp victims. Dad was sent to nearby Lebenau Prison, into which 243 men had been thrown with no food, water or facilities. [47]

---

46 The information in this and the previous paragraph was taken from my father's interview with Dr. Preil at the Holocaust Resource Center, Kean University, Union, NJ, May 3, 1995, and from an article sent to me by Dr. Theresa Ast that had been typed on my father's office letterhead.

47 The circumstances under which these prisoners were taken to the Lebenau Prison are described in Morris Gzesh's story in the "Holocaust Survivors: A Living Legacy" chapter of this book.

He tells this story in the following letter, which he sent to my mother within a day or two after arriving at Lebenau.

May 7, 1945

My darling wife,

At one minute after midnight tomorrow night the war with Germany will be officially over. The 7th Army had the "Cease Fire" order at 12 noon yesterday so the war for us ended 3 days sooner.

I want you to know where I was when the "Cease Fire" order came. Believe it or not, I was the commandant of a concentration camp near the Alp Mountains.

I saw 243 starved, tortured, diseased bodies that were once men. 170 of them were Polish Jews who were the only ones remaining alive of the 1600 that left Buchenwald Concentration camp. They had walked 440 kilometers barefoot and in 28 days. They were given 5 potatoes a day and no water. All who fell or accepted food from civilians were shot by the SS troops. When they arrived at their new prison they were all huddled into a barracks with 73 Russians and Poles in as bad condition. The odor in that barracks made everyone who entered vomit or at least gag.

When the American Army came in the SS fled and took with them Churchill's nephew, Field Marshal Alexander's son; Ambassador Winant's son; and several other prisoners of great renown from the nearby internment camp at Laufen.

Our Battalion was given the mission to take Laufen — release the celebrities kept in the Laufen castle internment camp and occupy Lebenau prison for women (where these 243 men and 306 women prisoners were kept). When we arrived the SS had fled with the celebrities and I was put in charge of the Lebenau Prison while the rest of the battalion occupied the Laufen internment camp.

This Lebenau prison was divided into 2 parts — the women's portion which was clean, healthful and a permanent prison with all facilities and the men's portion which were barracks without any plumbing, or ventilation. They had straw mattresses that were covered with lice and the men were barefoot and half-naked. They were all lousy and many were delirious with high fever. Many I am sure had typhus. When the American soldiers came in they cheered and cried that the Messiah had come at last and now they would be free. Everyone had been beaten and kicked and cut besides starved. The interim camp near by had sent them American Red Cross packages

so they were eating the delicacies they had not known since the war. They had cigarettes and chocolates once again and meat — which they could not taste because of their swollen tongues. The things we take as every day habits were gifts of God to them.

I immediately set about preparation for bathing facilities, new clothes and new barracks. With the aid of 5 interns from South America and the States we got a program started. After a while one of the company commanders of our Battalion brought in two German soldiers that had taken off all their insignia. He placed them in the barracks with these tortured people and told them that they were SS troops. These men suddenly gained their strength and beat these Hitlerites until they were almost dead. We went in and stopped them and put the beaten Nazis on a jeep and took them out of the camp. They were so wild with fear that they jumped off of the jeep and tried to run but their guard killed both of them.

When the prisoners heard the shots they cheered and cheered and begged us to bring them more. They wanted no more food or baths or beds — just SS. In a few hours they were quiet again and I went to treat the very ill. It was hard to find any that were strong — none were

healthy. I tried to arrange to have them transferred but the camp was in quarantine so they had to remain there. I had fear that the typhus might spread to the women (many of whom were French and Czech) but there was no way of taking them from the prison. There was nothing more I could do for them. At 12 o'clock noon came the word that this war was over and these men wept with joy. I almost wept with them. Some of the women wandered over to the men's sector and upon seeing the misery wept bitterly. They all wanted to help make the men comfortable and clean but I had to keep them away for health purposes. One girl (who had worked for 36 hours straight through without sleep) cooked for the men and tried to clean the place up. She almost dropped from exhaustion (all of this was done before I came). She herself was the daughter of a German captain who was captured in Serbia and she was a German WAC working as a switchboard operator. She deserted because she hated the SS and was put in prison after being beaten and having had her teeth knocked out.

Another French girl who was now 22 years old had been in jail for 2 1/2 years because she tore up Hitler's picture. Still another had called Hitler crazy and she was in prison for 4 1/2 years. Many were there because they listened to

the BBC or because they were Communists or Socialists. None had committed a crime worth punishing at home.

The women had a clean building, good food, and were well cared for. It was the two extremes of prisons in one institution and one could hardly believe they both were in the same country much less within the same gates.

Darling, no one will believe what I saw the last day of the war — I didn't believe it either — I also thought it was all propaganda but now I know it was all true. Every SS trooper should be tortured the way they tortured these poor refugees. These men whose greatest crime was to be born to a faith, deserve the right to try and sentence the sadistic torturers who killed four and one half million of their comrades.

I know you won't believe me either, darling, so I took movies of the whole thing and when I get home I'll show you in pictures what I saw in the flesh.

My heart is too full. I fought hard in this war but being a Jew I fought for my brother Jews as well as my country and on the last day of the war I was able to set free 100 of these poor people. My mission in this war is complete. My country defeated the armies of our enemy and I was able to free some men of my faith. I ask no more.

Darling, I'll write more tomorrow. I cannot think of anything but the misery I've seen.

I adore you as always.

Your loving husband,
Obbie"[48]

Dad left Lebenau Prison after one week. Two days before his departure, the German military government came to relieve him and conduct the post-crisis phase of the inmates' care. Dad's unit was moved to Salzburg, Austria. As soon as he could get away, he jumped into his jeep and rode back to Lebenau Prison and a civilian hospital at Laufen to visit the men he had saved. "It was spotless," he recounted in his interview, beaming. "People were there, and they were all well. I only recognized one of them — by his fiery red hair. He was strong and healthy. I said, 'You I remember!'"[49]

It was this story, and particularly his letter to Mom, that most motivated me to share Dad's contributions during World War II. For years I slept in a room adjacent to my parents, ate meals with them, they attended my school plays, and we discussed politics and our

48 Joseph J. Preil, ed., *Holocaust Testimonies: European Survivors and American Liberators in New Jersey* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 290-92.

49 Alvin A. Weinstein, interview by Dr. Joseph Preil, Holocaust Resource Center, Kean University, Union, NJ, May 3, 1995.

philosophies of life. All that time, up until and following his passing, I never knew that, almost single-handedly and inside of one week, he saved the lives of 100 men who were just days from death.

Displacement Duty and Noncombat Care

Even though the fighting in Europe was officially over, Dad remained in Salzburg, Austria for one more year. "They sent replacements for the Army of Occupation, but they always forget to send replacements for the doctors. Everyone went home, and I was just sitting there," he told Dr. Preil.[50]

At first, my father worked with the Joint Distribution Committee and HIAS, an international Jewish organization that, to this day, protects refugees and helps them settle into communities where they can take up normal lives again. Although Dad was assigned to a military hospital, he worked there only for about one hour each morning. The rest of the time he was charged with keeping the nearby displacement camps in order and tending to the refugees there.

These places were filled with Eastern European Jews who had been freed from Nazi concentration camps and slave labor factories. They were brought to Austria by a Jewish brigade of the British Army. Initially, these soldiers had gone to Italy to fight with the British 8th Army, and they disappeared; nobody knew what had happened to them. At the end of the war, they went to Palestine, took a circuitous route to the Russian Zone, and brought survivors through that zone to the displacement camps in Austria.

50 Ibid.

The displacement facilities that my father maintained were the focus of American political attention. According to Dad, four U.S. congressmen traveled overseas to inspect one particular camp in his area, where the people were fed well but living in very spare barracks. One of the refugees asked a congressman, "When are you going to get us out of these concentration camps?" The congressmen reportedly raised hell about it with the Austrian government, demanding to know why the German and Austrian citizens in the area were living in luxurious homes while the displaced survivors stayed in barracks and shacks. Before long, Dad's unit received an order through the local military government to move the people out of the camps into twenty or thirty lovely hotels in a very beautiful mountain resort area close by. Austrian waiters were hired to cater to the refugees, and they were treated like wealthy guests.

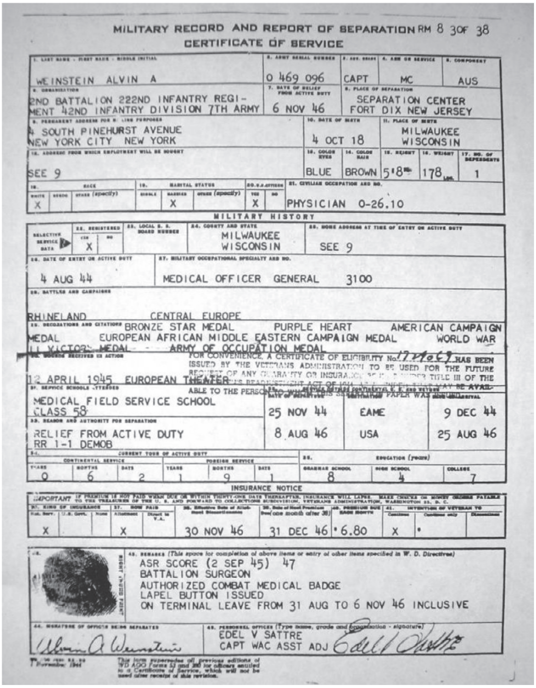
Dad's job was to keep these Eastern European survivors healthy until they could be transported over the German-Austrian border. From there, they were taken to Livorno, a port city on the western coast of Tuscany, Italy. The plan was to get them onto a ship bound for Palestine. Although none of them were permitted to enter Palestine right away — first they were diverted to Cyprus — they did make it there eventually.

After his displacement duty wound down, Dad tended to the colds, allergies, and other noncombat maladies of the men in his unit, and his medical practice

settled into a family doctor's daily routine. Occasionally, he traveled outside Salzburg on leave, but most of the time he was stuck there, waiting and longing for his orders to come home. He felt lonely and homesick.

He befriended several civilians outside his camp and sometimes treated their ailments. Marion and Harry Wolfe, a couple that owned a ski school in nearby Hinterglemm, became lifelong friends. Aware of my father's loneliness, they presented Dad with a little brown dachshund to keep him company in his barracks. They had no idea that Dad was allergic to dogs, but he accepted the gift anyway, figuring that the dachshund's short hair would cause him little trouble, provided that he didn't pet him too often. True to his sense of humor and irony, Dad named him "Kraut." My father truly loved the dog, and Kraut eased his pain of separation from wife, family, and home.

Homecoming



MILITARY RECORD AND REPORT OF SEPARATION RM 8 3OF 38
CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

1. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE INITIAL: WEINSTEIN ALVIN A
2. ARMY SERIAL NUMBER: 0 469 096
3. GRADE: CAPT
4. ARM OR SERVICE: MC
5. COMPONENT: AUS
6. ORGANIZATION: 2ND BATTALION 222ND INFANTRY REGIMENT 42ND INFANTRY DIVISION 7TH ARMY
7. DATE OF RELIEF FROM ACTIVE DUTY: 6 NOV 46
8. PLACE OF SEPARATION: SEPARATION CENTER FORT DIX NEW JERSEY
9. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES: 4 SOUTH PINEHURST AVENUE NEW YORK CITY NEW YORK
10. DATE OF BIRTH: 4 OCT 18
11. PLACE OF BIRTH: MILWAUKEE WISCONSIN
12. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE SOUGHT: SEE 9
13. COLOR EYES: BLUE
14. COLOR HAIR: BROWN
15. HEIGHT: 5'8"
16. WEIGHT: 178 LBS.
17. NO. OF DEPENDENTS: 1
18. RACE: WHITE X
19. MARITAL STATUS: MARRIED X
20. U.S. CITIZEN: YES X
21. CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND NO.: PHYSICIAN 0-26.10

MILITARY HISTORY

22. REGISTERED: YES X
24. COUNTY AND STATE: MILWAUKEE WISCONSIN
25. HOME ADDRESS AT TIME OF ENTRY ON ACTIVE DUTY: SEE 9
26. DATE OF ENTRY ON ACTIVE DUTY: 4 AUG 44
27. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY AND NO.: MEDICAL OFFICER GENERAL 3100
28. BATTLES AND CAMPAIGNS: RHINELAND CENTRAL EUROPE
29. DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS: BRONZE STAR MEDAL PURPLE HEART AMERICAN CAMPAIGN MEDAL EUROPEAN AFRICAN MIDDLE EASTERN CAMPAIGN MEDAL WORLD WAR II VICTORY MEDAL ARMY OF OCCUPATION MEDAL
30. WOUNDS RECEIVED IN ACTION: 12 APRIL 1945 EUROPEAN THEATER

FOR CONVENIENCE, A CERTIFICATE OF ELIGIBILITY No. 17 [illegible] HAS BEEN ISSUED BY THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION TO BE USED FOR THE FUTURE REQUEST OF ANY GUARANTY OR INSURANCE [illegible] UNDER TITLE III OF THE [illegible] READJUSTMENT ACT OF 1944 [illegible] MAY BE AVAILABLE TO THE PERSON [illegible] PAPER WAS [illegible]

31. SERVICE SCHOOLS ATTENDED: MEDICAL FIELD SERVICE SCHOOL CLASS 58
32. REASON AND AUTHORITY FOR SEPARATION: RELIEF FROM ACTIVE DUTY RR 1-1 DEMOB

DATE OF DEPARTURE	DESTINATION	DATE OF ARRIVAL
25 NOV 44	EAME	9 DEC 44
8 AUG 46	USA	25 AUG 46

CONTINENTAL SERVICE YEARS	MONTHS	DAYS	FOREIGN SERVICE YEARS	MONTHS	DAYS	GRAMMAR SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL	COLLEGE
0	6	2	1	9	1	8	4	7

INSURANCE NOTICE

KIND OF INSURANCE	HOW PAID	EFFECTIVE DATE OF ALLOTMENT DISCONTINUANCE	DATE OF NEXT PREMIUM DUE	PREMIUM DUE EACH MONTH	INTENTION OF VETERAN TO
Nat. Serv. X	Allotment X	30 NOV 46	31 DEC 46	$6.80	Continue X

55. REMARKS: ASR SCORE (2 SEP 45) 47
BATTALION SURGEON
AUTHORIZED COMBAT MEDICAL BADGE
LAPEL BUTTON ISSUED
ON TERMINAL LEAVE FROM 31 AUG TO 6 NOV 46 INCLUSIVE

56. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED: Alvin A Weinstein
57. PERSONNEL OFFICER: EDEL V SATTRE CAPT WAC ASST ADJ Edel V Sattre

After two years of towing the line in Europe, my father finally received notice that he was going home. He left Austria on August 8, 1946 and boarded a ship bound for New York Harbor. When he arrived seventeen days later, he moved into the Manhattan apartment that Mom had been sharing with her parents while working and awaiting his return. Kraut was sent home on an Army cargo ship, but his pet carrier got lost in transit, and he wasn't delivered until four weeks later. During that time, the dog had taken very little food and water, and when he arrived, he was weak, dehydrated, and very near death. Fortunately, Mom and Dad managed to restore him to peak condition, and they nicknamed him "Krauty Boy."

Dad was not separated from the Army until three months later, and he was not ready to practice medicine right away. During his time in Europe, there had been rapid advances in his profession, and Dad was not privy to any of them. So he enrolled in physicians' courses offered by Columbia University at Mount Sinai Hospital. These catch-up studies were the start of his lifelong commitment to continuing education.

According to my aunt, the Army encouraged my father to become a psychiatrist, funded by the G.I. bill, but he refused; he wanted to be a family doctor. A few months after his discharge, Mom and Dad moved to a little bungalow on Franklin Avenue in Ocean Township, New Jersey. It was a short distance from the beach and not very far from Belmar, where Dad's father had begun

his life in America. His uncle, Mike Weinstein, owned a thriving liquor store, and he gave Dad the money to hang out a shingle in Asbury Park. He opened his private practice on May 12, 1947.

At first, the tables, chairs, and other furniture in my parents' living room consisted of nothing but orange crates. But Dad was a gifted diagnostician, an excellent healer, and he had a very warm way with people. Word got around, and it wasn't long before his patient roster was so full that he had to turn families away. Gradually, the orange crates were replaced by real furniture and their standard of living rose.

Krauty Boy was their only company until my sisters arrived; Susan on January 28, 1948 and Mary on January 29, exactly three years later. I came along three years after that. By then they had built a larger place in nearby Deal Park and employed a live-in housekeeper (also named Mary). Although Mary owned a house in Neptune, New Jersey, she had her own room in our home, where she slept on weeknights. The house was on a lovely spot that was once an apple orchard. While working with the architect, my parents spared every fruit tree they could, and I grew up showered in pink and white blossoms that floated through the air every spring and clung to the ground like snow.

All of this seemed as easy and fluid as the path of a river — the natural order of things. I felt safe, secure, and enchanted by my surroundings. I watched robins

feeding their young in a juniper outside our dining room window. Birds of all varieties visited my windowsill regularly, and squirrels romped about. There were lots of kids to play with and plenty of woods to swallow us up and safeguard our childhood secrets and dreams.

But it wasn't like that for Mom.

It wasn't until I was in college that I learned about my mother's gut-wrenching transition from city to suburban life. I had brought a friend home with me during Christmas break. We went into New York City, and Mom took us to an elegant little bistro in Bloomingdales called Le Train Bleu. There, right in the middle of lunch, she launched into a startling, unanticipated litany, confessing that when Dad returned from the war, she had been completely grief-stricken that he moved to New Jersey and separated her from her family and Manhattan.

Speaking primarily to my friend but using the discourse as an opportunity to let me in on her secret, she told him that she had felt isolated, and she dealt with it by keeping her job in Manhattan and riding the train into the city every morning. Then she began to feel nauseated, and it became clear that she was pregnant. She had to give up the job and her daily pilgrimage to New York City, her own personal mecca.

Sensing that I felt sad and more than a little guilty for being the third nail in the coffin that kept her confined to a life of domestic dreariness, she quickly added

that, once she and Dad joined a synagogue and made lots of friends, these feelings dissipated, and she became happy in her new life. It probably wouldn't have been that way if it hadn't been for our housekeeper; but with Mary in the mix, it worked.

Liberator as Survivor

Trauma and the Price of Silence

From the time I was old enough to take an interest in the objects inside our house, I noticed that my father always kept his Army uniform up front in plain sight in his bedroom closet. I also saw that he kept his military rifle there — secured by an empty chamber and a pin that prevented firing — against the inside of the frame, where he could see it whenever he slid back the closet door.

Until recently, I never understood why he kept these two possessions in such close proximity to the clothes he wore every day. He never donned the uniform, never talked about the war, and he never mentioned the gun. In fact, there were no other weapons in the house; they were forbidden. Instinct warned me not to ask him about it. However, after researching his life during the war and uncovering some shocking truths about its effect on him, I realize why my father did that.

The first time I gained insight about this was when Leila Levinson, an author whose family member once worked for my father, informed me that she had read about Dad's postwar nightmares in a dissertation while conducting research for her own book about her father's camp liberation at Nordhausen.[51] Dad's motive became even more obvious when I attended a Rainbow Division Veterans Foundation reunion in New Jersey and

51 Leila Levinson, *Gated Grief: The Daughter of a GI Concentration Camp Liberator Discovers a Legacy of Trauma* (Brule, WI: Cable Publishing, 2011).

discovered that every one of the World War II soldiers there never talked about the war with their friends and families, not even with their own wives. They only discussed it with each other once or twice a year at the reunions, and the conversations were a huge relief to them.

There were probably other reasons that Dad arranged a daily glimpse of his gun and uniform: fond memories of his beloved Colonel Downard or the fact that most Jews believed they should forgive but never forget the Holocaust. But it seems clear that the primary reason he kept them so close was emotional catharsis. They represented his last vestige of those years; they embodied all the strain that Dad endured as he tried to stem the flow of his fellow soldiers' blood while he was under fire. The objects had absorbed and still carried the aura of horror that Dad witnessed at Dachau and Lebenau. And he couldn't talk about it; all he could do was give a silent nod to those harsh realities by glancing each day at those two symbols of his experience there.

Each soldier had his own reasons for silence. Many at the reunion told me that it was too painful to talk about it. Most felt that nobody could understand their experiences unless they had been there. Still others thought that what they saw was so extreme that nobody would believe them. But for Dad, the main reason he kept silent was fear, fear that he could just as easily have been the victim as the liberator. "There but for the grace

of God go I," was his answer when Dr. Preil asked him why he waited fifty years to talk about it.[52] Every step he took, every suture he tied in battle, every mouth he fed at Lebenau reminded him that if his father had not immigrated to America, he would have been in Vilna, Russia with other concentration camp inmates … or dead.

While researching Dad's life during World War II, I discovered that his silence cost him. When Leila Levinson told me that she had read about Dad in Theresa Ast's dissertation, I contacted Dr. Ast and arranged to get a copy. In it, I read the following: "In 1965, Alvin Weinstein was still awakening screaming from nightmares because he saw himself standing in line before a crematorium. At this point he consulted a doctor who urged him to write and talk about his experiences extensively. After doing so, Mr. Weinstein's nightmares finally ceased."[53]

Good God; how did I miss that? My bedroom wasn't far from my parents' room, and I never heard anyone scream in the night. I was eleven years old when his nightmares subsided; why hadn't I heard him?

---

52 Alvin A. Weinstein, interview by Dr. Joseph Preil, Holocaust Resource Center, Kean University, Union, NJ, May 3, 1995.

53 Theresa Lynn Ast, "Confronting the Holocaust: American Soldiers Who Liberated the Concentration Camps," dissertation, (Atlanta: Emory University, 2000), 250-251.

Following doctor's orders, Dad wrote about it, but he didn't speak. He told Dr. Preil in his interview, "I've written stories many times and tore them up. I couldn't talk to anyone, but I would write them out and then destroy them."[54] I suppose he felt they were too horrible, too burdensome to share with others, and discussing it was very hard on him. Reluctantly, he finally talked about it in an effort to stop Holocaust deniers; the frustration of allowing people to rewrite that history was greater than the pain of self-disclosure. When I attended a Rainbow Division reunion, his fellow soldiers told me they felt the same way, and they began to speak up as well. Apart from a handful of interviews, however, Dad's silence was absolute.

There are other reasons that Dad kept his demons to himself, reasons that probably remain on the fringe of every World War II soldier's consciousness, because it is too heartbreaking to confront them directly. One reason is that Americans expected our soldiers to fit a near-perfect image of he-man warriors, joyfully picking up their postwar industrial lives here at home. In his book *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, Edward Tick wrote:

> "American servicemen home from World War II were portrayed as returning with no pain. The

54 Alvin A. Weinstein, interview by Dr. Joseph Preil, Holocaust Resource Center, at Kean University, Union, NJ, May 3, 1995.

> supposed minority of psychological casualties was hidden in the back wards of veterans' hospitals... Millions of people — indeed, our entire society — seemed happy that the great adventure was over. America was proud of its participation in the world-wide battle against evil and moved on to the good life as defined by consumerism."[55]

Furthermore, until the fiftieth anniversary of the Holocaust, few soldiers were given a time, place, or forum to talk about it, and nobody bothered to ask. That is why, to this day, World War II soldiers huddle together at military reunions, telling and retelling their stories to each other in womblike hospitality suites, clinging to a fellowship that slips through their fingers as members pass away, year after year, of old age. Many of them don't even have that; few soldiers enjoy the privilege of a nurturing organization such as the Rainbow Division Veterans Foundation. The rest of them have nowhere to go and no one to tell. Email and social media make it easier today for soldiers to contact each other when their tours of duty are complete. But after World War II, many soldiers lost touch with their war buddies and found themselves isolated in their postwar trauma and grief. In these ways, their silence was not only supported but also subtly enforced.

55 Edward Tick, *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2005), 156.

This chapter is titled "Liberator as Survivor" because all soldiers who return from war are, indeed, survivors. In our innocence, some of us who have never fought in a war create a false distinction between the rescuers and the rescued. However, although they were not beaten, starved, tortured, and marked for death in concentration camps, our brave liberators, my father included, witnessed every bit of that and became traumatized from having done so. For many, what they saw, heard, and smelled in the camps unseated the foundation of their trust in humanity.

Dad in particular was deeply affected, because one simple twist of fate — the moment that the Weinstein family put his father and Uncle Max on the ship from Vilna to New York — reversed his role. He saw himself in the emaciated faces and sunken eyes of those people at Dachau and Lebenau. Without a carefully orchestrated forum and rock-solid support system, how could he talk about that? What could he say?

Survivor Guilt

Many soldiers returning from war feel guilty about their fallen brothers. World War II veterans in particular were hailed as heroes upon returning home; and rather than bringing feelings of happiness or pride, the words of praise and glory gave rise to heartache, grief, and guilt because of cherished friends who did not survive combat. In the book *Flags of Our Fathers*, author James

Bradley recounts what his father said about it: "'I want you to always remember something. The heroes of Iwo Jima are the guys who didn't come back.'"[56]

For my father, this feeling was probably compounded by the fact that he was charged with saving the lives of the wounded in his battalion. These men were far from strangers; he viewed all 868 of them as "his men." He encouraged them when they voiced fears about dying in battle or out on reconnaissance patrol. He knew them, and he felt responsible for returning them safely to their families. Although Dad appeared proud when he told Dr. Preil that only sixty-seven of them died, I'm sure he felt pangs of grief and remorse about every man he lost.[57]

Dad also felt guilty about and frightened by the deaths of European Jews who didn't survive the Holocaust — especially those in Vilna, Russia, because my grandfather's immigration from that city was the only event that separated his fate from theirs. Like many places throughout Europe, Vilna was isolated as a Jewish ghetto after the Germans invaded in 1941. The population declined from seventy thousand to twenty thousand as people died of starvation or were taken away to concentration camps. On March 27,

56 James Bradley and Ron Powers, *Flags of Our Fathers* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2000), 343.

57 Alvin A. Weinstein, interview by Dr. Joseph Preil, Holocaust Resource Center, Kean University, Union, NJ, May 3, 1995.

1944, children there were executed in what was known as Kinderaktion. Then the SS entered Vilna, replacing the German army with the goal of killing all remaining Jews there. Only the invasion of the Russian army stopped them.[58]

As Dad told Dr. Preil at the end of his interview at Kean University, the thought "There but for the grace of God go I" was the primary reason for whatever emotional torment he endured following the war.[59] He never confessed outright that he suffered from survivor guilt, but his uncle and other family members had died in Vilna. Under those circumstances, he could not have escaped it; although he coped with it well, I'm sure he carried that burden for the rest of his life.

Shaken Faith

According to some personal histories in *Holocaust Testimonies*, the unimaginable atrocities in the concentration camps unseated the religious convictions of survivors and liberators alike. No matter how solid their foundation had been previously, belief in God became a struggle at best after witnessing babies being thrown into a fire, seeing dead bodies stacked up like cordwood throughout the camps, and learning that ashes from

58 Joseph J. Preil, ed., *Holocaust Testimonies: European Survivors and American Liberators in New Jersey* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 215.

59 Ibid.

the crematoriums were used to fertilize German soil.[60] After interviewing numerous World War II soldiers, Leila Levinson wrote, "It seemed the loss of faith, at least among the Jewish GIs, had been universal."[61]

Despite this, many of these soldiers, my father included, joined synagogues after the war and resumed lives that embraced Jewish practice. In fact, some felt this was an affirmation that the Nazis' mission of eradicating every last Jew from the earth had failed.[62] When my parents moved to New Jersey, they joined Temple Beth El, my sisters and I received a religious education, and our family observed all the Jewish holidays. Nevertheless, our parents never discussed God or faith with us.

When I was in my twenties, it occurred to me that I lacked faith, and I asked my father if he believed in God. He replied, "Not really. I think of God as science." That confused me: If my father made sure that my sisters and I finished Hebrew school, if we celebrated all the holidays, and if Judaism was the underpinning of his identity, how could Dad not believe in God? Did he expose us to his religion in hopes that it would help us believe what he could not? Did he do it out of obligation,

60 Ibid., 182, 281.

61 Leila Levinson, *Gated Grief: The Daughter of a GI Concentration Camp Liberator Discovers a Legacy of Trauma* (Brule, WI: Cable Publishing, 2011), 113.

62 Joseph J. Preil, ed., *Holocaust Testimonies: European Survivors and American Liberators in New Jersey* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 156-57.

because his parents exposed him to it and he thought he should do the same for his children? Was Judaism more an expression of cultural and family life for him than it was a path to God? Did he once believe in God, only to have his faith shaken by the detritus of the Holocaust? Because he would not talk about the war, I don't know the answer. However, I suspect that the Holocaust did have an impact on my father's belief in God. This suspicion was heightened when I found the following poem, although not dated, among several that he had written:

"On Feeling Morbid

There's many a change in theis[63] of ours,
To make one glad or sad.
The sunshine soon may turn to showers
The good may turn to bad.

The evil may ever be true;
The wicked truly fine;
The blackened sky may turn to blue;
The sea may turn to wine.

The earth itself may be perplexed
By nature's fickle moods.
Its inner eye may be convexed
Towards richer, finer foods.

63 Evidently, Dad believed "theis" to be a word; the closest one in the dictionary is "theism."

The soul may not survive the grave;
The heart survive the tomb;
Our lives may be a single wave;
A stitch upon a loom."

Places of Refuge

Unlike many of the soldiers who returned from World War II, Dad was relatively resilient; he seemed content and even joyful much of the time. How could that be possible with all those painful memories, guilt, and fear? How did he cope and move on with his life?

In addition to writing, a technique he used to dispel his nightmares, my father had a powerful arsenal of distractions that either diverted his attention from the war or channeled his feelings about it. First and foremost was his profession. It seemed that Dad spent almost all his time at his office, making hospital rounds and house calls, and attending continuing education classes. It makes sense that saving and improving the quality of other people's lives would be an effective way to ward off the demons of torture, death, and destruction that he had witnessed.

When he wasn't working or sleeping, he was always immersing himself in the arts. Mom and Dad regularly attended concerts, ballets, and operas at Lincoln Center, as well as art exhibits at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Museum of Modern Art, all in New York City. Because both of them were influenced by uncles who were committed patrons of the arts, my parents' steadfast attendance was largely a matter of upbringing.

Nevertheless, what could be a more effective way to dispel ugly images of war and genocide than constant exposure to beauty? In his book *War and the Soul*, Edward Tick wrote, "The soul is our aesthetic sensibility, the aspect of ourselves that hungers for beauty and both perceives and appreciates it. As such, beauty is food for the soul.… Beauty offers order, purpose, and grace. It reminds us of the inherent goodness of life and the creation."[64]

Another favorite diversion was travel. Mom and Dad often made cultural pilgrimages to gorgeous cities such as Vancouver, Paris, London, Barcelona, and Athens. They gazed at stunning panoramic views at Lake Louise in Canada's Banff National Park, Independence Pass in Colorado, and Bryce Canyon, Utah. They were no strangers to intimate tropical hideaways in the Caribbean. I imagine few would think of Nazi crematoriums while swept up in the allure of such exquisite places.

When he wasn't off in search of all things beautiful, Dad occupied his mind with what I call "some other soldier's war": He was an ardent student of the American Civil War. An active member of our local Civil War Roundtable, he pored over books so numerous that Mom had to store the overflow in our attic. In fact, Dad was so preoccupied with that war that my sister Mary and I teased him about it by collecting tiny Confederate

64 Edward Tick, *War and the Soul*: *Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2005) 19-20.

flags that were served with our steak sandwiches at a little neighborhood theme restaurant named Johnny Reb's — which Dad despised — and sticking them in his shoes, bars of soap, jacket pockets and lapels, and whatever else we could find. His enduring pursuit of the subject became a source of humor among us, but looking back, maybe it wasn't so funny; maybe it was a safe way for Dad to sublimate the psychic remnants of the war that he had fought.

Although he felt compelled to keep his war stories to himself, Dad had one place where he could talk openly about them: the reunions arranged by the Rainbow Division Veterans Foundation. There he could deal directly with all his thoughts and feelings. He discovered the reunions many years after they started, but once he found them, he returned year after year. When my husband and I attended one, we found a camaraderie and openness that is rare among men; it is easy to understand why Dad, along with many other veterans from the illustrious Rainbow Division, took refuge in these gatherings.

The few times Dad did talk about the war at home, he shared sentimental remembrances of his commanding officer, Colonel Downard, or told us funny stories. Humor seemed to be one of his primary defenses against the melancholy that followed his encounter with the camps. Most of these tales, which my father repeated over and over again, were the result of his chronic disobedience. He didn't much care for orders

and sometimes fancied himself smarter than those who handed them down. Colonel Downard once asked him to send two medics and a nurse to a particular location; Dad was to follow them later that day. Downard was very specific about the route they should take, which involved a circuitous series of left turns. Dad looked at the map and thought, "Well, this is just silly! We could get there three times faster if we just take this one road; it would be a direct path." So he dispatched his staff in a jeep and told them to go "his way." They returned within twenty minutes or so, their faces white with fear. They had driven directly into the path of German soldiers and had scarcely avoided capture. Dad then provided the original route stipulated in his orders, and they made it to their destination without incident. Of course, this news got back to Colonel Downard. The minute my father arrived, Downard started in on him. "Weinstein," he screamed, "you're the only Jew in the Army who is on the Nazi's side!"

Another story Dad was fond of telling was an incident that happened after the war was over, when he was carrying out his displacement duties near Salzburg, Austria. My father had met many people in and around the city and had treated several civilians in need of medical care. One of them was a wealthy woman, and she gave my father an expensive car to express her gratitude. An officer got wind of this and sent a soldier to Dad's barracks to tell him that he was not permitted to accept

such a gift, and someone would come back later to take possession of it. Dad smiled and said, "Certainly; tell the officer that I will have it ready for him." As soon as the soldier left, Dad poured five pounds of sugar into the engine, destroying the vehicle. When someone came back for the car and couldn't start it, Dad shrugged and said, "Oh well, I guess that's why she gave it to me; it never worked anyway."

In sharp contrast to these fun anecdotes were Dad's reactions to the subject of war in comedy. He could laugh about funny things that happened during the war, but he bristled when writers used war to make people laugh. The starkest example of this was the much-loved television show *M*A*S*H*. People across the nation, including my sisters and me, were tuning into this hilarious situation comedy every week and talking about the episodes afterward. Dad, on the other hand, hated the show and refused to watch it or the film that preceded it. *M*A*S*H*'s popularity and long run infuriated Dad, and even though his opinion was unpopular, he made no secret about it. "There is nothing funny about men being shot and people trying to save their lives in a mobile army hospital!" he would shout. "Besides, it's ridiculous, all those doctors in one tent! That isn't how it is during war; doctors are lucky if they have enough medics and nurses to help them, much less be surrounded by other doctors!"

At that time I was a teenager who had heard almost nothing about Dad's sacrifices during the war, so I didn't

understand his attitude about the show. I thought he was being childish and narrow-minded. I tried to persuade him to watch just one episode so he could see how harmless it was, but he always refused. It wasn't until I read quotes from his interview in *Holocaust Testimonies* that I could understand his point of view.[65] I wish he were alive today so I could tell him that I finally get it.

After interviewing many soldiers who had been broken by World War II, Leila Levinson told me that my father was very lucky to have been relatively unscathed by it. Most likely, it was his continuous engagement in all these pursuits — writing, practicing medicine, immersing himself in the arts, traveling, studying the Civil War, attending the Rainbow Division reunions, and focusing on the few humorous moments during the war — that spared him the ongoing trauma that pulled down so many other veterans. He kept his life full to the brim until he took his last breath.

65 Joseph J. Preil, ed., *Holocaust Testimonies: European Survivors and American Liberators in New Jersey* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 189-192.

Soldier Farewell

I always thought that when my father died he'd go directly from his office to the grave; in September 1997, that's almost exactly what happened. Nan, his executive assistant, noticed that his manner was unusually subdued. Later that day, she caught him sitting down with a worried

look on his face, taking his pulse. Always known for being a brilliant diagnostician, I'm sure he knew he was on the brink of a heart attack.

He didn't call for help, and he would not allow Nan to do so, but he did let her drive him home. Once there, he told my mother that he was okay; he just had some kind of bug and only needed to sleep. He slept that afternoon, all night and did not wake up in the morning. That frightened Mom. She woke him up and said she wanted to take him to the emergency room at Monmouth Medical Center, just a few miles from their townhouse in Long Branch, New Jersey. Instead, Dad insisted that she take him to his physician in Red Bank, which was many more miles away. Mom frantically telephoned the doctor and told him she was afraid to take Dad so far from the hospital. Realizing that Dad would not consent to treatment in the ER without his insistence, the doctor instructed Mom to drive Dad to his office and keep him in the car. She was to call him on her cell phone when she arrived, and he'd come down to the parking lot. She did that, and he ran over to Mom's car and told him, "Doctor, you need to go to the hospital. Let Charlotte take you to the ER." She drove him all the way back to Monmouth Medical, and he collapsed while sitting on the side of the bed while awaiting treatment.

He never regained consciousness after that. He was moved to intensive care, and his medical team kept him

alive by inserting a pacemaker and keeping him on a ventilator. Dad lived for one more day while my sisters and I traveled from our homes to the hospital. There we were, family members camped out in the same waiting room where Dad had advised, counseled, and comforted countless people in the same predicament, decade after decade during his long tenure as a physician there. The air was heavy with grief and irony.

At one point the medical staff told us that Dad's heart was beating on its own, but he still needed the ventilator to breathe. For a moment, I flirted with the idea that maybe there was hope; maybe he would come back to us. Intuition told me I was only kidding myself, but I decided to believe it anyway until told otherwise. Finally a nurse emerged and told us that Dad would not recover. She asked if we wanted to remove him from life support. After consulting us, Mom made the impossible choice that would separate her beating heart from his forever. They called us all into his room and turned off the machine. We leaned over his bed, each of us with one hand on his chest, resigned to losing him yet determined to feel his last breath. I told him how much I loved him and would miss him, hoping that he could hear me somehow. To this day, I still wonder if he did.

The next day was a blur. Jewish people do not embalm and must bury their loved ones quickly. Also, the Sabbath was approaching, and we had to bury him by sundown on Friday. We made the arrangements for

his funeral service and burial. My mother and eldest sister provided the details for the obituary. There were a lot of people to call.

The service was beautiful. Many poignant, loving, and funny words were spoken. The burial was brutally painful. My cousin Rebecca literally held me up during the Mourner's Kaddish, standing behind me and grasping my elbows as my legs gave out from under me. The worst moment was watching my diminutive, slender mother pick up that big heavy shovel, push it into the ground and throw dirt onto Dad's casket.

Some of Dad's patients were there, wringing their hands and weeping, grief stricken and afraid. They had lost the man who had safeguarded their very lives and that of their parents and children; such is the life — and loss — of a hometown family doctor. "What are we going to do, now?" they asked, looking utterly helpless. My sisters and mother went back to the limousine to be driven back to the funeral home. "Let them wait for me," I thought. "They can wait." The patients were huddled together some distance away; not wanting to intrude, they had stood far behind us. I took them by the arm and walked them to the edge of the grave.

"You don't have to stay back there," I said. "Dad loved you just as much as he loved us. In fact, you probably saw more of him than we did. He loved his family, but he lived for you; you were his purpose in life.

"In fact," I continued, "Dad loved everybody. He belonged to everybody. If a stranger were to come out of those woods over there right now, and Dad were still alive, he'd love that person too.

"But don't worry. You will be okay. Nan will refer you to a very good doctor. Dad was wonderful, but he wouldn't want you to think he was the only one who could take good care of you. That isn't true, and Dad would be upset if you felt that way."

I hugged every one of them and went back to the limo. Only then did I feel finished. Somehow, caring for Dad's patients gave me the strength to face my grief and get on with my life. It was the single most healing encounter I experienced that day.

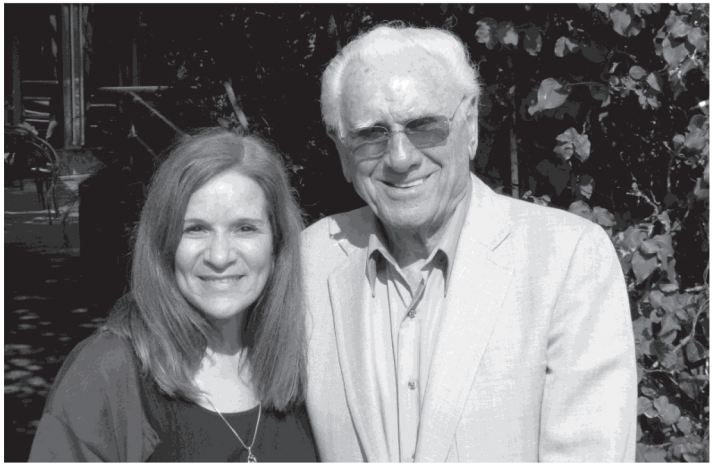
It wasn't until thirteen years later when Irwin Gzesh contacted my sisters and me to tell us that Dad saved his father's life during the war that I realized we all overlooked something of critical importance. There were no military honors at Dad's funeral. There was no flag. Among the long list of Dad's laudable achievements in his obituary, not one word was written about the fact that he had even served in the Army, much less saved hundreds of men as a battalion surgeon and concentration camp liberator during World War II. Because he never talked about it, it was forgotten during the whirlwind moments of stress when we made his funeral arrangements.

He lived and he died an unsung hero.

Part II

Those He Left Behind

Holocaust Survivors: A Living Legacy



Philip Markowicz and me

Many of the men that my father saved during World War II continued living long after he died. He saved countless soldiers during his tour of duty on the Rainbow Trail. Many of them went back to their families because of him. Perhaps even more amazing than that was the survival of the Holocaust inmates that Dad rescued at Lebenau Prison. When I first discovered that Dad had liberated the prison and that some of those survivors were still living in the United States today, my immediate reaction was "I have to meet these people!" I needed to see them, hear their voices, and get to know a little about those whom Dad had restored from barely living skin and bones to full-fledged men. Who are these people?

I was lucky enough to meet one of them, interview the son of another, and read intimate details about a third in a book. I first became aware of Morris Gzesh when his son, Irwin, reached out to my sisters and me. During an ensuing phone conversation, Irwin told me about Philip Markowicz, who had written *My Three Lives*, a fascinating book about Philip's life before, during, and after the Holocaust.[66] In that book, Philip wrote about another Lebenau survivor, Nathan Garfinkel; and when Philip and I met, he told me about *Sara's Children: The Destruction of Chmielnik*, a book written by Suzan E.

66 Philip Markowicz, *My Three Lives* (Pittsburgh, PA: Dorrance Publishing Co., Inc., 2009).

Hagstrom that reveals the miraculous story of Nathan and his sisters.[67]

These men lived on because of my father's work at Lebenau and the tireless efforts of his fellow battalion members at the nearby makeshift hospital at Laufen. The idea of meeting even one of them seemed like an opportunity to steal a glance at my father's face again; just by walking around, they are keeping his spirit alive.

Philip Markowicz[68]

At sunrise on May 4, 1945, Philip Markowicz and his brother Henry were rescued while hiding under some steps outside a small farmhouse. Survivors of a death march from Regensburg, Germany, they were soaking wet, cold, sick, weak, and exhausted. A German man in civilian clothes took them to Lebenau Prison, and two hours later, a Red Cross doctor transferred Philip to the hospital that Dad's battalion had set up at Laufen.[69]

It isn't clear whether my father actually met and tended to Philip personally. According to his letter to my mother, Dad appears to have arrived at Lebenau a day or

67 Suzan E. Hagstrom, *Sara's Children: The Destruction of Chmielnik* (Orlando, FL: Cyberian Management Group, Inc., 2001).

68 The information in this section was provided by Philip Markowicz in an interview with the author on February 19, 2011, and by his book, *My Three Lives*.

69 Philip Markowicz, *My Three Lives* (Pittsburgh, PA: Dorrance Publishing Co., Inc., 2009), 186-200.

two after Philip was transferred to Laufen.[70] But Dad was at Laufen prior to that, and although Philip doesn't recall meeting him, their paths must have crossed in some way; either tending to him directly or by setting up medical relief efforts in both places, Dad contributed to his liberation and healing.

I will always be grateful that Philip survived the Holocaust. Not only did that enable me to spend time with one of the most exceptional people I've ever met, but countless others have also had the benefit of his uncanny intellect, wisdom, generosity, and grace, including Steven Spielberg, who interviewed Philip prior to making the film *Schindler's List*. Philip has made the world a better place to live. That wouldn't be possible if Dad's battalion had not captured the area and set up the hospital when they did: Philip maintains that, if he had not been treated at that precise moment, he would not have lived one more day.

Philip is unusually intelligent and kind. From the moment we met, he and his wife Jojo made me feel welcomed and loved. Although we'd never seen each other before, he greeted me with a broad smile and a big kiss. After three short hours in their company, Rob and I felt as if we were members of their family. Philip answered all my questions with abundant generosity and spirit, even though talking about his past often gives him

70 Joseph J. Preil, ed., *Holocaust Testimonies: European Survivors and American Liberators in New Jersey* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 290-292.

nightmares. There was some ambient noise where our interview took place, and Philip is very soft-spoken (a trait that complements his air of grace and humility), so I held my voice recorder very close to his face. He didn't mind that a bit. He shared his experiences openly, without hesitation. Even though I initiated our meeting, he insisted on paying for lunch.

When I asked how he felt when he and his brother Henry realized they had been rescued, he said that he hugged Henry and cried, "Oh my God! We made it!" But by then, he was so riddled with lice and delirious with typhoid fever that he could not fully respond or truly celebrate. For Philip, the moment of liberation brought a mixture of exultation and the sobering recognition that he was near death. Some people had brought Red Cross rations of chocolates and other luxurious foods to the survivors. But after years of starvation, when food was finally offered, Philip was too sick to eat it; he realized that, ironically, he might die soon, even though the persecution had come to an end at last. He was only twenty-one years old.

He told me that he didn't mind though, because he knew that the Nazis had been defeated. If he died, at least he would have the satisfaction of knowing that. He said that most of the people who were close to death at the moment of liberation felt that way. They were able to accept death, provided that they lived to see the Nazis humiliated and their agenda thwarted.

A huge fan of his first book, I asked him about the second book he was writing at the time. It is a book about the Bible, which provides a more accurate portrayal of events than the English-language versions currently in use. To accomplish this, he read the original Hebrew texts. Those who have read *My Three Lives* know that he comes from a family that is well educated in religious studies. After building a successful business near Toledo, Ohio, Philip retired early to give himself time to take up those studies again. Explaining that translation of the Bible into English leads to misinterpretation and misconceptions, he gave us an example from the story of Abraham and Isaac. His fascinating version not only revealed facts that Rob and I had never heard before, but it made the story much easier to understand.

When Rob asked Philip if his faith in God carried him through his years in the concentration camps, Philip replied, "It was by being in that situation that I came to know God." Explaining how he endured extreme hardship day after day for years, Philip recounted a conversation between God and Moses and said, "God put his hand over my face, that I should not see the horrors; and He told me, 'Live, live, live.' I didn't do it; God was guiding me." In this way, he remained committed to survival.

I told Philip that, while reading *My Three Lives*, I was astounded by his brilliant split-second decisions, which kept him and his brother alive throughout those years of

subjugation, abuse, and random killings. He truly seems to have lived by his wits. But Philip would not take credit for any of that. He said that God acted through him to save his life; that all his spontaneous acts of genius were inspired by God. I asked him if he ever talked to God while he was in the camps and heard God talk back to him. He replied, "Listen to your own mind; follow your instincts. That is how God speaks to us, works through us."

Philip talks a lot about free choice. He explained that, because God is all-powerful, he enables us to do right or wrong equally. It is up to us, what we do with that power. In Chapter Seventeen of *My Three Lives*, he wrote:

> "… humans were given free choice by the Creator to be able to choose what is good and evil, and that He will help them fulfill whatever they chose. God is the all-embracing and only unified power in the universe. Nothing happens without the power of God, Yahovah, except human free choice … because men and women are created in God's image and are a part of God.… That is why each person has God's power to act and choose (free will). That is the meaning in Deuteronomy 14:1. 'You are the children of Yahovah, your God.' We are, so to speak, 'a chip off the old block,' with a spark of the divine (*nitzutz*) in us."

To cope with the suffering that the Nazis caused him, his family, and millions of others, Philip explained, "You had to give up two things: taste and [the willingness to endure] pain. You had to be willing to eat anything that could be digested."

On the night before we met the Markowiczs, as I lay in the dark next to my sleeping husband, I tried to picture what it would be like to be dragged away from him and shoved into a cattle car with strangers. When we interviewed Philip the next day, I told him that, even with the burden of extreme starvation, exposure to harsh weather, beatings, and sleep deprivation, I thought the worst hardship that the Nazis had inflicted on people was to separate them from their loved ones. He heartily agreed, and his book reveals very clearly what that was like for him and his family members. In Chapter Eight, he reflects on whether his sister Tzivia did the right thing by voluntarily jumping onto a departing truck with their mother and her toddler son, an act that resulted in her immediate death. When I asked him what he thought about that now, years after his book was published, he said, "There are certain things you can never resolve." Citing the disparity between logic and emotion, he appears to shoulder the burden of Tzivia's decision surprisingly well; at very least he has learned to tolerate it.

I could write an entire book on what it was like to meet Philip Markowicz and listen to his philosophy of

life. While discussing the interview with Rob afterward, he said, "Whatever that man says about God and spirituality, I'm going to listen to him; because his faith has been tested more than anyone else I've ever met." The time with Philip and Jojo passed much too quickly. At the end of the interview, Philip gave us his card to keep in touch. He signed my copy of his book and graciously agreed to take a photo with me. He gave me another big smile and kiss, and Jojo offered me some encouraging words about writing this book. Reluctantly, we drove away from them. As the miles separated us, I felt as if I were being pulled farther and farther away from a safe place.

Morris Gzesh[71]

Morris (Mordechai) Gzesh, known to his family members as "Motek," which means "brave" in Yiddish, was born and raised in Lodz, Poland. Lodz, the third-largest city in the country, was the primary textile-manufacturing hub in Eastern Europe. Nearly 200,000 Jewish people lived there. Morris was the youngest of eight children in a family that owned and operated a small bakery in the cellar beneath their two-room apartment. His sisters and brothers all worked there. Some of his older sisters were married with children of their own at

71 The information in this section was provided by Irwin Gzesh, Morris Gzesh's son, in a telephone interview with the author, July 19, 2014.

the onset of World War II. His siblings adored him, and he was surrounded by love.

In 1939, when Morris was fifteen years old, the Germans occupied Poland. Within a year, they built walls around the poorest part of the city where Morris lived, confining the Jewish citizens to an area that came to be known as the Lodz ghetto. The Nazis seized the textile factories and converted them to support their war effort. People were not permitted to leave, little food was allowed in, and a nightly curfew was imposed. One night, Morris's brother was shot after leaving their home in search of food and water. Morris's father died within a year and was buried in an unmarked grave in the Jewish cemetery. His other brother got out of the ghetto by volunteering to work in Germany, but he was sent to various labor and concentration camps in Poland instead. Everyone in the ghetto was issued an identity card, which the Nazis used to single out people for deportation to the camps. Eventually, Morris's number came up, and he was sent to a labor camp in Czestochowa, Poland.

At Czestochowa, Morris witnessed many executions of his fellow Jews. Each morning, the inmates were forced to line up and stand for hours while the Nazis counted them. They received little food and water and worked under harsh conditions. Winter was coming. They were cold and suffering from starvation. One morning at lineup, the Nazis asked those who were bakers to step out of line. Morris, who had grown up

working in his father's bakery, did as he was told. That single act probably saved his life. He was transported out of the camp every day to a local bakery, where he baked bread for the German troops. He worked indoors, away from the cold. He had access to food.

Part of the bakers' daily routine was to take the bread to the train station in Czestochowa, help wounded soldiers off a train, and load the empty train with bread. They did this under guard, and one day a German soldier misplaced his rifle. Believing that a baker had stolen the weapon, the soldier ordered them all to search for it, telling them that if it was not found, every one of them would be shot. Morris feared for his life, but he was spared when a fellow inmate found the gun under a rack of bread at the bottom of a wagon.

In January 1945, Russian soldiers were advancing through Poland. When they reached the outskirts of Czestochowa, Morris and other male inmates were loaded onto cattle cars and taken to Buchenwald concentration camp. As bad as Czestochowa was, Buchenwald was far worse. Starvation and disease were rampant; dead bodies were stacked up everywhere. Because of his prior access to food, Morris was not emaciated when he arrived and was able to withstand three months of privation there. Once again, inmates were commanded to stand at attention for hours and be counted. The sum of those present was added to the number of dead bodies to ensure that no one had escaped.

That April, news spread throughout Buchenwald that American troops were near. At this time, Nazi guards began to separate the Jewish prisoners from the others. During morning roll calls, the inmates were told that only Jewish prisoners were to come out of their barracks to be counted. Fearing the consequences, they didn't comply; they remained inside with no food or water. To counteract this, the guards ordered all prisoners to line up. After roll call each day, groups of Jewish prisoners, visible by the yellow stars on their uniforms, were singled out, lined up five abreast, and taken out of the camp in what came to be known as the Buchenwald death marches. At gunpoint, they marched toward a place where they were to build fortifications for Hitler's last stand. Those who were too weak to keep going, who tried to run away, or who accepted food from German civilians were shot or struck down with the butt of a rifle. The SS guards killed others for sport. Some of the German soldiers and SS guards feared retribution from American forces and tried to run away. SS officers shot at them, and those who were caught were hung from trees, bearing a sign that read, "I am a traitor to the Fatherland." During the march, Morris suffered terribly and contracted typhus fever. As an incentive to keep living, he continuously repeated as a personal mantra the section, row, and number of his father's gravesite, where he vowed to return and recite the Mourner's Kaddish some day.

Ultimately, the Germans ran out of time. Before they could reach their destination, American troops caught up with them near the town of Lebenau. As the SS officers approached the town for supplies, they decided to shoot the remaining prisoners. The civilians at Lebenau believed that the Americans would accuse them of the war crime and argued with the officers, asking them not to shoot Morris and the others. When an officer replied, "Well, we will not let them go," the citizens suggested that they put them in a women's prison in town. These were the circumstances under which the victims of the Buchenwald death march were locked up in Lebenau Prison shortly before my father was sent to rescue them.

Morris remembered my father, a young American physician who spoke Yiddish. "Who are you?" Dad asked them. "We are Jews," they replied, and they told him about their ordeal on the death march. Dad sent word back to Colonel Downard that SS soldiers were on the loose, and troops were dispatched to find them. Delirious and weak from typhus, Morris received treatment at the prison. When he was well enough to be moved, he was transported to a civilian hospital in nearby Laufen and was placed in the same ward as Philip Markowicz. There, Morris continued to deteriorate, and he wasn't sure he would survive. Then a U.S. Army doctor, believed to be my father, checked on the patients there and asked a German civilian physician,

"Why is this boy not getting better?" When the doctor shrugged and replied, "There is nothing I can do," my father pushed him against a wall and shouted, "If this boy dies, I swear to you I will come back and shoot you myself!" The German physician was so terrified that he stayed by Morris's side during the next several days, feeding him broth and helping him recover.[72]

Upon leaving Laufen, Morris went to a displaced person's camp in Frankfurt, Germany, where he checked the lists of survivors. He discovered that the only other member of his immediate family who survived the Holocaust was his brother Hersh (Harry), and they were reunited. Back when they lived in the Lodz ghetto, Morris's father had told them about an uncle and aunt in Chicago. They contacted the uncle, Max Gzesh, who wrote back, asking them to wait until he could get visas for them to come to America. Morris and Harry remained in Germany for several years until they finally made the journey across the Atlantic and back to a normal home life.

72 This scenario was part of the reason that Morris's son, Irwin, reached out to my sisters and me, informing us that our father saved his father's life. He told me that, although he believed it was my father who frightened the German doctor into submission, there was no way to know for sure. However, I know it was Dad, because Morris's story fits Dad's testimony at Kean University. During his interview with Dr. Preil, Dad stated that he returned to Lebenau shortly afterward to check on the men he had saved at the prison.

Among Morris's original extended family members, who numbered more than 100, fewer than a dozen survived. Uncle Max brought all that he could to Chicago, working hard to help them find jobs and settle down. Within two weeks of arriving there, Morris found a job as a baker. When he was twenty-six years old, he went on a blind date and met Agnes, a young Hungarian immigrant who had also survived the Holocaust. They married the following year. During the next several years, Agnes gave birth to two boys. Morris worked nights at a bakery for many years before finding a job where he could work during the day. After that, he began baking at 5 a.m., finished in the late afternoon, caught a few hours of sleep, and woke up again to help out at his brother's small bakery. From that point on, he raised his family and lived in peace.

Despite his ordeal, Morris is described as a gentle, kind human being who treats everybody with love and respect. People light up with joy when he walks into the room. He has suffered from post-traumatic stress, sometimes waking up in the middle of the night screaming from nightmares, but he never let that interfere with his graceful outlook on life and his steadfast devotion to his family and friends. He passed these gifts on to his sons, along with a deep, enduring love for America. "God bless America," Irwin said at the end of our interview. "I love America, as does my dad and all my relatives. America saved our lives."

Nathan Garfinkel[73]

Suzan E. Hagstrom's book, *Sara's Children: The Destruction of Chmielnik*, details the miraculous story of Nathan Garfinkel and his sisters, Bela, Sonia, Helen, and Regina. Most Holocaust victims were lucky if even one family member remained alive, but five of the Garfinkel siblings survived.

Nathan was the first of seven children, and before the war, he was continuously harassed at school in Chmielnik, Poland for being Jewish. Anti-Semitism was even more prominent in Poland than it was in Germany, and after five years of suffering hardship, he quit public school and entered a Hebrew school (yeshiva) instead. Although he excelled in math, his opportunities were limited by government regulations that set small quotas for the number of Jews permitted to attend college.

Prior to the Holocaust, Nathan's father owned and operated a grain store. When Nathan was nineteen years old, he wanted to go to the university and become a teacher; however, Germany invaded Poland, putting a stop to all such dreams. Following the invasion, many of the people in his hometown fled to the Soviet Union, but Nathan, who was fiercely loyal and dedicated to his family, remained in Chmielnik to protect his parents, sisters and younger brother.

73 The information in this section was provided by Suzan E. Hagstrom's book, *Sara's Children: The Destruction of Chmielnik* (Orlando, FL: Cyberian Management Group, Inc., 2001).

As Suzan Hagstrom described in *Sara's Children*, Jewish children in German-occupied Chmielnik were not allowed to go to school; Jewish adults were not permitted to earn a living; they were taxed; their bank accounts were seized; their radios were confiscated; and strict curfews were imposed. Jews were barred from libraries and forbidden to use lights at night. People were shot for infractions such as giving private lessons or baking bread.

Blond-haired and blue-eyed, Nathan didn't fit the stereotype of a "Jewish appearance," and he often traveled to other towns to conduct trades with cousins for needed goods. Twice he was caught and beaten within an inch of his life; the second time, he was roped and dragged by a soldier on horseback. Somehow he survived both episodes, and in 1942 he was ultimately carted off in a cattle car to Skarzysko-Kamienna, a concentration camp that produced ammunition.

Skarzysko-Kamienna didn't have gas chambers or a crematorium. People were killed by being overworked and underfed. The guards often tortured and shot them at random. Prior to his deportation to this camp, Nathan hoped that the worst was behind him; but, after witnessing hideous incidents and enduring severe beatings by guards, he quickly understood that this was not war, it was genocide, and he felt marked for death.

Like many others who survived the Holocaust, Nathan was determined to live. Often the guards baited

the inmates at the camp, hoping to arouse retaliation and have an excuse to beat or shoot them. Although it was very difficult for Nathan — he wanted to hit back — he made a conscious choice to set aside his anger so he could live until someone came to rescue him.

Two of Nathan's sisters, Sonia and Helen, were also at Skarzysko-Kamienna. They saved bits of their food rations for him and gave them to him on Sundays when they saw him at the communal showers. Nathan had such a good heart that, at first, he gave all of it away to other prisoners. As starvation set in, he became desperate for food and was forced to abandon such generosity.

Nathan discussed with other prisoners plans to escape the camp, but he didn't go through with it because he had no one outside the camp to help him survive, and he couldn't fathom saving his own life and leaving his sisters behind. When Sonia became ill, Nathan arranged to carry soup to the hospital to help his sister. When he learned that the "patients" were eventually deported and killed, he saved Sonia's life by smuggling her out of the clinic to women's barracks. Within a week or so, she recovered. Sonia, in turn, saved Nathan's life when he was near death from starvation. She wrote a very emotional appeal to a foreman, asking him to transfer Nathan from the munitions factory to the potato mill where she worked. That put him in contact with enough food to save his life. Once there, Nathan risked his life repeatedly by stealing potatoes

and giving them to the ammunition workers in his barracks.

In the summer of 1944, the Germans, who were losing ground and retreating from the Soviet Union, dismantled the munitions plant at Skarzysko-Kamienna. They relocated the machinery to Czestochowa, Poland. Nathan, Sonia, and Helen were among the 6,000 prisoners transferred there. Miraculously, they were reunited with their other two sisters, Bela and Regina, who had been transported there from a camp in Kielce, Poland. Near the end of the war, Czestochowa was liquidated too, and its inmates were transported out. It was just before leaving there that Nathan got his hand caught in the rollers of a machine in the potato mill. Normally, this meant certain death, because those who were injured or ill were deemed unfit for work, and, having outlived their usefulness, they were killed. Fortunately, the foreman at the potato mill gave Nathan a bandage and some salve. Somehow, he managed to hide his injury until the day of his liberation.

Once again, he was separated from his family, this time from all four of his sisters. Crammed with countless others into a cattle car, he lasted the trip — 400 miles in ten days with no food, water, or fresh air — to Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany. This transport, along with the death marches that followed, was the Nazis' last-ditch effort to kill as many Jews as possible, both to complete their plan of genocide and

to eliminate those who had witnessed their war crimes. By the time Nathan arrived at Buchenwald, one-third of the prisoners in the cattle cars had died from starvation, dehydration, disease, exposure, and exhaustion. Nathan and the others stacked their bodies along the side of the boxcar like cordwood.

At Buchenwald, Nathan separated himself from the others and tagged along with a group of non-Jewish prisoners. In this way, he was able to receive treatment for his mangled hand. After that, he was tossed into some barracks. Every morning and evening, he stood outside for two to three hours for the mind-numbing roll calls during which the guards counted the prisoners.

There was no slave labor, but, lying in his bunk, he witnessed desperate, gruesome attempts of inmates to steal each other's food; ultimately, some prisoners resorted to cannibalism. Although he was literally starving to death, Nathan could not bring himself to do either. Every day, he and some others took the dead bodies outside. Finally, when the Germans' defeat became certain, Nathan and the other inmates were pressed into one of the Buchenwald death marches.

In *Sara's Children: The Destruction of Chmielnik*, Suzan E. Hagstrom wrote, "The forced walks, supervised by armed guards, SS, and soldiers, culminated years of suffering with the worst and final agony. For many, it was fatal. An estimated 250,000 people died or were murdered on the marches, some of which continued after

Hitler had committed suicide on April 30, 1945, and after the Soviet Army had seized Berlin on May 2."[74] Nathan had told her, "The death march affected me most of all. The one month in the death march was worse than all the years in the death camps.… In camp, I always tried to stay away from the perpetrator. In the death march, I was always near my perpetrator. I walked with the criminal together. The day was a year."[75]

Nathan left Buchenwald for the torturous death march on April 9. Ironically, two days later, the American soldiers liberated the camp, freeing thousands of remaining inmates, including Elie Wiesel, a teenage Romanian Jew who later won the Nobel Peace Prize for taking up the cause of all persecuted ethnic groups. During the march, Nathan came close to death when, along with a group of other men, he tried to abate his extreme hunger by eating vegetables in a storage ditch along the road. The guards fired machine guns at them, and Nathan narrowly escaped the bullets. Even with his raw, ravaged hand, Nathan carried a friend who could not walk any longer on his back while simultaneously pushing a cart until a guard forced Nathan to let him go.

Nathan's description of the death march reveals hideous war crimes. There was so much more to it than marching people to death; there was also torture —

74 Suzan E. Hagstrom, *Sara's Children: The Destruction of Chmielnik* (Orlando, FL: Cyberian Management Group, Inc., 2001), 250-251.

75 Ibid., 251.

creative, unimaginable torment that was carried out for "sport." The first time I read my father's testimonial in Joseph Preil's book, *Holocaust Testimonies*, I was horrified that some survivors from the Buchenwald death march tried to beat two SS prisoners to death at Lebenau Prison.[76] It was heartbreaking to discover that the victims had been reduced to the behavior of their oppressors. But having read Nathan's account, I understand that better now. He told Suzan E. Hagstrom: "Many times I thought about killing a Nazi. Anybody could kill a Nazi. I found out if I commit a crime, if I kill a Nazi, they kill me, but they also kill 10 others, 20 others. Every day, I fought to control myself. I was afraid I can be explosive."[77]

Finally, on May 6, Nathan and 163 other Buchenwald death march survivors were dumped into Lebenau Prison, and their SS guards fled from the approaching Americans. It appears that my father arrived at Lebenau that same day: His letter to my mother was dated May 7, and in it he mentioned that he had arrived just prior to that. The survivors were informed that they were being liberated. Like Philip Markowicz, Nathan was too sick from typhoid fever to eat the luxurious foods that had been sent over from the Red Cross. That saved his life,

76 Joseph J. Preil, ed., *Holocaust Testimonies: European Survivors and American Liberators in New Jersey* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 291.

77 Suzan E. Hagstrom, *Sara's Children: The Destruction of Chmielnik* (Orlando, FL: Cyberian Management Group, Inc., 2001), 257.

because those foods killed several prisoners, who were not physically prepared to digest them. After receiving first aid, Nathan was transferred to the makeshift hospital at Laufen the next day. He weighed eighty-four pounds, was nearly dead from disease, his left hand was burned down to the ligaments and infected from his accident at Czestochowa, and he had not bathed in at least five months.

At first, Nathan was given only sweet liquids. Then, gradually, solid food was introduced until he could eat normally. A U.S. Army physician at Laufen saved Nathan's life by providing the hospital with penicillin and teaching the German doctors there how to administer it. This new, miraculous drug was available only through American Army troops.

Nathan eventually recovered. His sisters discovered his location by reading the lists of survivors' names at a displaced-persons' camp. Sonia and Regina were too sick to make the trip, but Bela and Helen went to see him at Laufen. As soon as they walked in, he recognized them, and, overcome with joy, he tried to get out of bed. Too weak to stand, he immediately fell on the floor, and his sisters jumped on top of him, weeping. Reunions involving multiple family members were so rare that the nuns there thought the young women were strangers who were attacking Nathan.

This was the end of the end and the beginning of the beginning for these remarkable people. All five siblings were eventually reunited at the Ainring displaced

persons camp. Nathan traveled around Germany, and, in May 1949, he testified at a war-crimes trial against Hermann Lachmann, a demonic guard who knocked out several of Nathan's teeth by smashing him in the face with the butt of his rifle at Skarzysko-Kamienna.

In 1951 he joined his sisters in the United States, arriving by boat in New York Harbor. He and many other refugees suffered extreme motion sickness, but that faded when Nathan saw the Statue of Liberty for the first time. He told Hagstrom, "It meant to me that I'm an American now."[78] First he lived on Coney Island with his sister Bela and her husband, then he moved to Detroit, Michigan. In 1965, he opened a barbershop and attended night school to get his high school diploma. When history revisionists began to deny the Holocaust, Nathan started lecturing about his experiences, and he encouraged his sisters to do the same.

The story of the Garfinkels' survival, well told in *Sara's Children: The Destruction of Chmielnik*, is uncanny. Although it was never documented until Joseph Preil published my father's testimony, it is clear that Dad played a part in their extraordinary drama. And what a life he saved! Nathan was an admirable man, an uncompromising humanitarian who could have saved his own life countless times but refrained from doing so to protect his family; who gave away precious, lifesaving rations of food; who risked his life to steal food for others; who,

78 Ibid., 297.

although starving, refused to steal food from others; who, almost dead himself from sickness and exhaustion, carried a man on his back while pushing a heavy wagon while one of his hands was severely damaged.

I did not go looking for Nathan, because, when I first heard about him, he would have been 91 years old; I assumed that he had passed on. But, having read his story in Suzan E. Hagstrom's book, I know that if I had met Nathan, it would have been one of the highlights of my life.

War Buddies

John Walker and me

Dad once referred to his experiences at Rainbow Division reunions as one of the greatest "highs" of his life, second only to the birth of his first grandchild. For decades following the war, he didn't even know that the

reunions existed. When he finally discovered them, he and Mom registered for the next one right away. As he strode into his first reunion, his CO, Colonel Downard, turned white and cried, "Weinstein! I thought you were dead!" Somehow, Dad's lack of attendance at these gatherings sparked some rumors of his demise. They both laughed it off, and from that moment until Colonel Downard "passed over the Rainbow," they cemented a deep, enduring friendship.

Although Dad attended a Rainbow reunion only once each year, it was clear they were essential to his happiness and sense of wholeness. When he told me about them, there was a spark of light in his eye, and he seemed almost euphoric. So when the Rainbow Division Veterans Foundation encouraged me to attend the Eastern Chapter reunion, I knew I had to go, that my research about Dad's service during World War II would not be complete until I saw for myself what all the fuss was about.

Having driven ten hours north from central North Carolina to the Port O' Call hotel in Ocean City, New Jersey, Rob and I were not disappointed; nor did we walk away empty handed. The veterans and their wives welcomed us immediately and made us feel like family. In fact, by the time the reunion was over, I felt as if I had been adopted by at least three families. This was no small gift for one who has lost both my parents and much of my extended family.

When Rob and I stepped into the elevator for breakfast on the first day, we were greeted with big smiles by a World War II vet, Bud, and his young friend, Brennan, a historian who had purchased photos of Bud's unit and had subsequently contacted him through a series of referrals. One from Maryland and the other from Vermont, they agreed to meet at the reunion, and Brennan brought Bud a beautifully-mounted enlarged photo of his men, riding on the back of the machine gunner truck that Bud had driven.

They invited us to sit with them at breakfast, where we joined a group of spirited vets and their wives. I passed around a photo of Dad in uniform and explained to them that I was doing research on my father's service during the war. They talked about their wins and losses at the casino in Atlantic City on the previous night with a level of wit that I'd not experienced in a while; these guys could teach us relatively younger folks a thing or two about living. In the midst of all their losses — the illnesses and deaths of spouses, friends, and family members — these seasoned vets of the Greatest Generation know how to laugh and have a good time.

Conversations ultimately turned toward their experiences during the war. This kind of reminiscing is the critical component of these reunions, the primary reason that the vets attend. Over and over, during breakfast and in the hospitality suite after the members' meeting, the vets told their stories to one another. When I asked

them what drew them to the reunions year after year, they said, "It's just being with our buddies; that's the main reason we come … to be with our buddies and to talk about what we experienced. It's hard to talk about it to anyone else."

I asked why they thought they could talk only to each other, and one of them told me that it is difficult for other people to understand. "The conditions were awful," he said. "Unless you were there, you can't really know what it was like. It was a dark world; it was a cold world. The sun went down at three o'clock, and it didn't come back up again until nine the next morning. We only got to shower once a month." This sparked even more discussion and war stories until it was time for the chapter meeting.

I chose to attend the members' meeting rather than go to the Women's Auxiliary one, because I wanted to replicate Dad's experience as closely as possible. I was happy to see another vet's daughter there with her husband, and I was thrilled that two younger vets from the National Guard were present — one who fought in Iraq and another who fought in Afghanistan. The first order of business was to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag, something that neither Rob nor I had done since grade school. I think it was the first time that saluting the flag actually seemed meaningful to me. After that, the invocation was recited and the meeting began. As I listened to these men conduct their business,

the predominant, immutable reality that pervaded all their transactions is that these men are getting on in years. More and more of them are passing away each year, and their numbers are dwindling fast. Because of their advancing years, the ones who remain are finding it increasingly difficult to meet their administrative obligations to the foundation. It was sad.

The man who had been organizing the national reunion year after year (and who gave me copies of several World War II documentaries he had created on video) announced that he is looking for someone to take his place so that he can retire from the job. He also stated that he was worried, because the number of vets who attended this year's national reunion dropped from 181 the previous year to 100; and as the numbers get smaller, it becomes difficult to meet the quotas necessary to arrange tours, busses to events, and so forth. The organizer of the Eastern Chapter reunions also asked for help.

Fortunately, the younger vets from the National Guard took most of the sting out of their predicament and provided some much-needed relief. One of them volunteered to serve as vice president of the Eastern Chapter so that the torch can be passed to the next generation. Additional younger vets attended the banquet, and at breakfast the following morning, one vet who had served in Vietnam shared a wealth of ideas about getting the organization back on track. He seemed eager to take

up the responsibility of moving the foundation forward, and the sadness I had felt during the meeting faded quickly. These younger soldiers were not only interested in preserving their own history; one who had served in Iraq was busy writing down the stories of a World War II vet on the last day of the event.

The most fulfilling part of the reunion was visiting the soldiers in the hospitality suite. We had a fascinating conversation with Benjamin Tupper from the National Guard, who wrote the book *Greetings From Afghanistan, Send More Ammo: Dispatches from Taliban Country*. Rob, Ben, and I talked about war and the military, then we sat around the table with the World War II vets and listened to them exchange anecdotes about life on the Rainbow Trail. Some of their stories were hilarious; others were very sobering. One man talked about an encounter with a single, random German soldier that he and a few other Rainbow soldiers had stumbled upon during the final days of the war. The German reached for his rifle, and they all thought there would be a fight. But, understanding that the war was almost over, the German handed them his rifle and surrendered instead. It was a very poignant story about our soldiers' ever-present brushes with death and those pivotal moments during war when a man's humanity predominates and he resists pointless killing.

One of the greatest thrills at the event was meeting a man from my father's battalion. He had known

Dad only casually because, thankfully, he was never wounded or sick during the war. But he did remember Dad, and being in the presence of someone who served with my father was very comforting to me. The value of these reunions is not only in the details told but also in the presence of the men who fought the war and their proximity to our departed loved ones.

The banquet was magical. The National Guardsmen wore their Class A dress uniforms, and they were exchanging stories with the World War II vets. I listened to an amazing story, told by a young man who served as a nurse in Afghanistan. He had healed a Taliban prisoner who was critically ill, and the prisoner didn't understand that. When he asked the interpreter "Why did he treat me?" the nurse replied, "Well, he is human, after all." Those words flew in the face of all the propaganda the prisoner had been taught about U.S. soldiers there. After being interrogated and released, the prisoner returned to his home and promptly turned all his fellow Taliban members in to local U.S. forces.

When we took our seats for the meal, a chapter member from the National Guard turned our attention to a small table nearby with a single chair and place setting, the table for fallen soldiers. This was by far the most touching moment at the reunion. Every article on the table was explained. The white tablecloth symbolizes the purity of the soldiers' response to their country's call to arms. The single rose in the vase reminds us of their

families and loved ones, who keep faith and await their return; the salt symbolizes the tears they shed as they wait. The yellow ribbon around the vase mirrors the ribbon worn by those who wish to demonstrate unyielding support of our soldiers. A slice of lemon on the bread plate reminds us of the fallen soldiers' bitter fate. The glass is inverted because they can no longer toast with us. The chair is empty; they are not here.

No one eats until all those who were killed in action are acknowledged first. We were asked to stand and drink a toast to them. Then we faced the flag and recited the Pledge of Allegiance once again, the invocation was given, and we shared a meal with our colorful dinner companions. Two of the veterans at our table had married Viennese women whom they had met in Austria shortly after the war, and both women were present. They shared stories about how they met and came to America with their husbands. One of these couples brought their daughter to the banquet. She is an ice skating coach, and, as fate would have it, both she and her mother knew the lady who taught my sister and me how to skate.

After dinner, there was a dance. One of the men who danced all night long was three months shy of his 90th birthday. His wife was 80 and almost as energetic and light on her feet as I was. I got to dance with two of the World War II vets. One of them still remembered the steps to the Lindy Hop. Dancing with these men was a

poignant and nostalgic experience. I felt as if I had my father back and was in his arms again. Moreover, however measured their steps, these people opened my eyes to the idea that, no matter how many decades we have lived, we need never be old.

We left the next morning after breakfast. I felt very sad, partly because I had grown so attached to these people and also because I knew that if I did manage to return the following year, some of them might be gone by then. As we all said goodbye, one of the wives said, "See you next time," and another replied, "God willing; we've got to think positive." For these people, every day is precious, and living for another year is a precarious prospect. People and their unique gifts flow into our lives, and they flow right back out again. I was blessed to share even one day with Dad's war buddies. Now that I've met them, I understand how these reunions lifted the loneliness and isolation he felt about his experiences during the war.

War Buddies Once Removed

When my sisters and I discovered that Dad had given an interview at Kean University for their Holocaust Resource Center's Oral History Project, my first thought was, "I've got to get a copy of that video!" I contacted the center, and the assistant director told me she remembered Dad. That impressed me, because he was interviewed only once, fifteen years prior, and the center had interviewed many people. Soon after, I received a DVD of Dad's interview in the mail, and Dr. Preil, the man who had interviewed Dad and edited the book *Holocaust Testimonies*, phoned me to make sure I had received it. During our chat, he told me that he too remembered Dad and their discussion on May 3, 1995. He made a point of commenting on Dad's letter to Mom on the night of May 7, 1945, which he had reprinted in his book.[79]

79 Joseph J. Preil, ed., *Holocaust Testimonies: European Survivors and American Liberators in New Jersey* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 290-292.

Watching the interview was an astonishing experience. First, it was otherworldly to see and hear my father again, thirteen years after his death. Moreover, for the first time since serving in the military, he finally talked about his war experiences, information that no one had heard previously. During the interview, Dad talked about his commanding officer several times with much admiration, respect, and affection. He said that Colonel Downard was a terrific leader, always looking after his men, "… always finding a way for us to get food, even when we weren't supposed to; always finding time for us to rest, even when we weren't supposed to."[80] He talked about Downard's courage; how he went right back into battle with a broken arm as soon as it was bandaged.

After watching this interview, I thought that Colonel Downard's family should have the benefit of seeing and hearing it. Surely they would appreciate the kind words that Dad said about him, and the people at the Holocaust Resource Center gave me permission to copy and distribute the DVD to family members, friends, and other interested parties. I contacted the Rainbow Division Veterans Foundation and asked if any of Downard's family members were listed in the Family Members Information Database, a program that helps Rainbow Division vets and their families contact one another.

80 Alvin A. Weinstein, interview by Dr. Joseph Preil, Holocaust Resource Center, Kean University, May 3, 1995.

Colonel Downard's widow was listed, as was his son. I phoned them both and left a message.

Downard's son, Don Downard, called me back, and we had an amazing conversation. It was a profound encounter that I'll never forget. We both discovered that our fathers talked about each other. I knew that Colonel Downard and Dad had kept in touch, but I didn't know that Downard talked about Dad to his family the way Dad talked to us about him.

"My dad talked about your dad all the time too." Hearing those words made me feel as if Dad were alive again. In a way, he *is* still alive through the memory of his CO's son. Furthermore, I discovered that, like my father, Colonel Downard had kept silent about his service during the war, and Don wanted to know more about it.

"That is one of the few things I regret, that history is lost," he said.

"Well, it isn't completely lost," I replied. "There is a lot of information available." I described the video and other publications that the Rainbow Division Veterans Foundation had sent me for a nominal fee. Don had no idea that these windows into our fathers' lives existed, and he was very excited about it. Sharing that information with him was a truly joyous experience for me. He gave me his address, I told him that I'd send him Dad's interview DVD, encouraging him to make copies for his mom and the rest of his siblings, and we hung up. I knew

that someday I would see him again and that we share a special, personal connection: a continuation of the friendship between his father and mine. That experience was beyond rewarding. Not only had I made a new acquaintance, I also enjoyed the added bonus of knowing how thrilled my father would be that I had touched base with the son of his cherished CO and friend.

The story doesn't end there. After we talked, Don called his half-brother to tell him about our conversation; and two weeks later, that man called me. I sent him the DVD of Dad's interview at Kean University and shared the same information with him that I had told Don. Talking to this man was a very moving experience. He is Colonel Downard's first child; his mother and father married while Downard was still serving overseas, shortly after the war ended. He didn't know very much about his father, and I had the sense that I was serving as a bridge between this man and the part of his past that accounted for his very existence.

As I contemplated the whole set of experiences with Colonel Downard's sons, Don's words kept echoing in my mind: "My dad talked about your dad all the time too." Suddenly, it occurred to me that the children of those 868 soldiers of 222nd Infantry's Second Battalion are walking around somewhere. As sons and daughters of American soldiers, almost all of them probably live in the United States. Their fathers knew my father too; he was their doctor. For those who were wounded in battle,

Dad was their first line of defense against death. I wonder who they are. I wonder how many of them would tell me, "My dad talked about your dad."

This revelation helped me understand why the Rainbow Division Veterans Foundation is so meticulous about gathering family contact information and why they formed a special chapter for the children of veterans. Very large numbers of men and women served together during World War II, and they were thrown together into a well-oiled machine. They never would have met each other if not for that, but some of them became friends for life; some of them truly loved each other. That makes us, their children, "war buddies once removed." We are part of a lineage of relationships that have been passed down from our parents to us. And some of us are carrying their stories around inside our heads.

Most of our parents didn't talk about the war very often. It was horrifying, and they wanted to put it behind them. But I imagine lots of people in the Baby Boom generation have heard a story or two. All that history didn't die with our fathers and mothers; little pieces of it are still inside us. No matter how small or seemingly inconsequential, every tidbit is worth telling and preserving. As our parents pass on, we mourn the loss; but if we reach out to each other and share what they told us about their time together overseas, we can breathe life back into their memories and further history at the same time.

Part III

Personal Perspectives

Anti-Semitism and Me

During my formative years, I was sheltered from anti-Semitism. By my parents' design, I grew up in a neighborhood that had a fairly high percentage of Jewish residents. We had so many Jewish teachers in our township that the schools were closed during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Growing up in this community, not once did I hear a single anti-Semitic comment or slur. Attendance at Northwestern University was no different. People were worldly and cultured, and there were many Jewish students. If anti-Semitism existed there, I had no knowledge of it.

Because I had not yet experienced anti-Semitism first-hand, I had little sympathy for the older people in our synagogue who occasionally vented their feelings about the Holocaust, shouting, "Forgive, but don't forget! Never again! Never again!"

"Why don't they just get over it? It happened a long time ago," I thought, a mere adolescent who had not lived long enough to understand how recently the Holocaust had occurred and had not suffered enough

to have developed any compassion for those who were speaking. My cavalier indifference was fostered by my parents' determination to protect us from the horrors of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Having witnessed such bigotry and hatred themselves, and out of their love for us, they kept it as far away as possible from my sisters and me for as long as they could. And we were complicit in that effort; we avoided the subject as well. I don't remember any of my Jewish classmates mentioning the Holocaust or attempting to study it.

The first time I encountered anti-Semitism was during my short tenure at a theatrical playhouse on Long Island, New York, during the summer following my freshman year at college. I was working as a resident properties mistress and one-time assistant choreographer. All the apprentices and employees were housed in barracks, and the young woman whose tiny cubicle adjoined mine was the first openly anti-Semitic person I'd ever met. Word got out that she detested Jewish people and that I was a target for her hatred. Upon hearing this, my reaction was one of bewilderment. I was not angry or afraid; I was simply confused and mystified. I had done nothing to this woman; I treated her kindly and with respect. Why, then, should she hate me just because of my religion?

After that experience, I wasn't subjected to anti-Semitism again until I moved to the South to attend postgraduate school. Bewilderment gave way to shock when someone I met in town — a twenty-six-year-old

grownup — discovered that I was Jewish and said, "You're Jewish? But I thought Jews had horns!"

"What?"

"Horns! You know, horns — on your head."

My hands fluttered up to my head as if they had a life of their own; a part of my body but not my soul. I rubbed my fingertips over my scalp. Looking back at that moment now, I believe I was subconsciously searching for them, making sure that, indeed, there were no horns before I spoke.

"No, sorry, no horns," I said. "Where did you hear such a thing?"

"I don't know. Just around, I guess. That's what people say."

From that moment on, I kept every piece of religious jewelry tucked away, even when I moved back to Chicago, where once again I was surrounded by Jewish people, and when I subsequently raised my family in New Jersey, not far from the area where I grew up. I felt no shame; I simply wanted to prevent people from prejudging me because of a symbol. I never wore such jewelry again until very recently, when I learned about Dad's heroic deeds during the war; I purchased a Star of David dog tag from Medals of America to wear in honor of his service to our people and his country.

During the time that I hid my heritage, I made a concerted effort to defy every Jewish stereotype, going out of my way to pick up the check while dining with non-Jewish friends. I also refrained from disclosing my

religion until people had formed the opinion that I was a good person. In this way, I consciously attempted to educate people, to send the message, "You don't have to be a Christian to be sweet, to be kind, to be charitable, or to know God. Jewish people, Muslim people, Hindu people, and those who have no formal religion are all capable of what white America ascribes to Christian values." I didn't believe I could change the world by making bold statements or engaging in debates; all I could do was show people that stereotypes about Jewish people are not true.

This exercise came to a crashing halt when I learned about my father's heroic deeds and began researching the Holocaust. Suddenly, it seemed cowardly for me to hide my background, and unfamiliar feelings of guilt about doing so encroached on my sense of honor and well-being. So now, for the first time in decades, I venture out with the Star of David around my neck. I feel more vulnerable than I felt without it. Will my coworkers change their minds about me just because of the star? Will the star prevent me from forging new professional relationships? Will it provoke attitudes about which I'd prefer to remain blissfully ignorant? Sometimes I feel like I'm clinging to my faith in humanity by a very thin thread; will people's reactions to the star make that worse?

I have neighbors who fly a Confederate flag in front of their houses. That's their symbol. What does it mean?

Does it mean that they respect their Southern history? Does it mean that they are white supremacists? If they are white supremacists, do they hate Jewish people as well as African-Americans? Would they make an exception in my case? If I don't want people to prejudge me because of the star around my neck, doesn't it follow that I shouldn't prejudge them because of the flags in front of their houses? Can I learn to love and respect them even though they display that symbol?

Why do some people refer to Judaism as "the Jewish race?" I am a Caucasian; that is my race. Judaism is the religion into which I was born. There are no easy answers to this question; anti-Semitism is so old that it's unlikely anyone can pinpoint its exact origin. People tend to believe what they are taught. If parents, friends, and church members view Judaism as a "race," then it is very difficult for Jewish people to change their minds.

How can I help stop this age-old bigotry? Should I go back to hiding the star, let people get to know me, and then tell them that I am Jewish, hoping they'll discover that the stereotypes are false? Should I wear the star, hoping that the symbol will not be a barrier to reason, that it won't prevent people from seeing me clearly, and that they will learn that Jews can be kind, good people who share the same values as those of other faiths? I don't know. I am still feeling my way along, trying to "get around" anti-Semitism, trying to "do business" with it. The only thing I do know is that it is still more

difficult for me to wear the star than it is to keep it in my drawer. Maybe I should wear it anyway; perhaps by doing so, I can learn something about myself and what it takes to face the prejudice that plagued my ancestors for so long.

Bigotry and Genocide

Genocide, euphemistically termed "ethnic cleansing," existed long before the Holocaust, and, as my father acknowledged in his interview with Dr. Preil at Keane University, it continued long afterward and still exists today.[81] Bosnia, Rwanda, Darfur, and many other countries carry the same scars as Germany. Here in the United States, white settlers engineered the genocide of the Native Americans in what we now refer to as "our country." On balance, I see little difference between the Buchenwald death march and the Trail of Tears that preceded it.

Like war, genocide seems to emerge when people from different tribes or ethnic groups are competing for land and natural resources. Deep-seated bigotry, however, is a fundamental cause as well. If we can eradicate our intolerance for those who seem different from us, it stands to reason that genocide will fall away on its own. Although we appear to be making strides in this

81 Alvin A. Weinstein, interview by Dr. Joseph Preil, Holocaust Resource Center, Kean University, Union, NJ, May 3, 1995.

endeavor, bigotry still exerts its chokehold on our society. The Holocaust is over, and my fellow Jews are grateful for that; but look around: Although it gets little media attention, anti-Semitism still exists. African-Americans are no longer slaves, and one became the president of the United States. That's terrific, but African-Americans continue to struggle against the poverty, health issues, and crime that result from being denied their rightful place in our society. There is no more enforced segregation, yet many African-Americans and Caucasians still live in separate (and unequal) communities. Some people in the U.S. still bristle when people of different races marry each other.

Currently, there is a lot of talk about Mexicans taking "our jobs," that they should "go back home." They came here long after we arrived in boats from Europe and established immigration laws, and many of them, out of desperation, have broken those laws. Fair enough. But Native Americans inhabited the land before we came here. Why was it okay for white Europeans to elbow their way into the Land of Opportunity, but it is not acceptable for the people from South and Central America to do the same? There are fewer resources available to those people than there are here at home. Consequently, they cross over to survive. In response, we build a fence to keep them from coming here and getting some of our resources. Given their motives for breaking our immigration laws, how different is that

fence from the walls that the Nazis built, cutting Jewish people off from food until they starved? If people from Mexico and other countries south of our border were not hungry, they wouldn't risk the journey in the first place; some even place themselves in the hands of criminals to get into our country. Why are we having a debate about allowing them to stay so they can live?

Since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, a new prejudice has emerged against Muslim people. Some U.S. citizens who practice Islam are afraid to wear their headscarves now, because a fringe group of twisted, extremist so-called Muslim people hijacked airplanes and attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, killing nearly 3,000 people. After that, Muslims were prevented from building an Islamic Center near Ground Zero in New York, and people who are not of the Islamic faith spread lies about the Quran, a book they've never even read. The current president, Donald Trump, was even talking about registering all Muslims in the U.S., a measure that is frighteningly similar to what Hitler carried out against Jewish people. Haven't we learned our lesson from the guilt we brought upon ourselves after throwing Japanese citizens into internment camps following the Pearl Harbor attack in World War II? Our current attitudes about Muslims are no different from that paranoid, judgmental action.

How are we any different from the Nazis when we malign peaceful Muslims and cast doubt about them in

social media? Do we really think we are immune from repeating the savagery that the Germans unleashed on the Jewish people? In his interview at Kean University for the book *Holocaust Testimonies*, David Altholz, a survivor from western Poland stated, "If you want to hate somebody, you'd have to hate the entire world's population, because we are all subject to the same weaknesses and the same shortcomings and imperfections. And the right circumstances can bring out the worst in us."[82]

How can we overcome this separatism and move away from bigotry? For one thing, we might want to think independently instead of allowing ourselves to be influenced by people in our social circles. We can be courageous about voicing what might be unpopular attitudes instead of hiding how we feel when friends and acquaintances make bigoted statements. This is the same challenge that German citizens faced in the early stages of Hitler's campaign against their Jewish neighbors. Many of those people did not like what was going on, but they were afraid to speak up. Perhaps if enough people had done so, the whole movement could have been stopped before it became too dangerous to disagree. Change involves more than resisting harsh government policies. It also requires that we refuse to

82 Preil, *Holocaust Testimonies: European Survivors and American Liberators in New Jersey* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 37.

conform to the attitudes of people who are close to us; that is where it starts.

We might also consider teaching our students about the dangers of bigotry from the time they are in kindergarten or first grade. If we wait until they are in middle or high school, it is often too late. We could also teach ethics to young children and keep it in the curriculum through high school. Granted, there are gray areas in ethics, but there are also universal truths that can be taught without encroaching on individual family values. We teach little children about the dangers of smoking, and some of them come home from school and scold their parents about it. Why can't we do the same for our social well-being?

We could be more willing to talk about bigotry, not just in school but also at our parties, card games, clubs, and other social gatherings. People talk about sports until they run out of breath; it's a safe subject. Maybe we'd have a healthier society if conversations about bigotry weren't considered taboo in those settings. I have friends who disagree with me about immigration, but we can talk about it, and we should.

We can also pay attention to our word choices. Altholz said in *Holocaust Testimonies*, "The first thing I teach my children is that the word *hate*, even though kids very loosely use that term — Oh, I hate this one, I hate that one — I have simply forbidden that word. I've stricken it, in my household, from the dictionary.

That word should not be used at all."[83] Like so many others, I thought it was perfectly acceptable to refer to the Holocaust as the attempted "extermination of the Jews." But during my interview with Philip Markowicz, he asked me to stop parroting that phrase, explaining that, in an insidious way, the word "extermination" fosters the idea that Jewish people are no better than bugs. I was shocked when he said that to me; I hadn't thought of that. I had not listened to myself as I repeated words that I'd heard over and over again since childhood. Words carry subtle overtones, and they reflect and cultivate attitudes. Rather than embracing words as a matter of course, it might help to examine them first and think before we speak.

On a larger scale, I like former U.S. Congressman Dennis Kucinich's idea about establishing a Department of Peace in the U.S. Cabinet. Some people thought it was redundant, because we already have a Department of Defense and a Department of State. But the congressman's proposal included local spheres of conflict, starting close to home by funding more centers that mitigate domestic violence and branching out by teaching conflict resolution in our schools and helping students create peer counseling groups.

There are many viable ideas about how we can change our attitudes and end the fear and hatred of people who seem different from each other. I believe human beings

83 Ibid.

can eradicate bigotry and genocide; that it is within our reach. All we need is a willingness to take an honest look at our prejudices and a desire to overcome them.

Pacifism and War

During my high school years, young people protested the war in Vietnam. In fact, my father once walked with me and a crowd of other students in a march against that war in our community's Memorial Day parade. He donned the same armband that we did, a white cotton cloth with a green dove stenciled on it. He often voiced outrage about the U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the military draft. When I asked him why he felt that way, given his service during World War II, he said, "It's not the same thing."

At that time, I believed that all war, all killing, was wrong. For me, pacifism was a brazen, self-centered conviction that persisted over a number of decades until I read the testimonials of Holocaust survivors while conducting research for this book. Only then did I understand that defenseless people were wasting away, praying that my countrymen would step in, fight the Germans, and rescue them.

In his book *My Three Lives*, Philip Markowicz explained that, even though he and his brother were

knocked down and injured by bombs dropped by the Allies, he was delighted by it, knowing that someone was finally avenging his persecution. He wrote:

> "I didn't mind the bombers — just the opposite. I was glad that they were coming. I didn't want the Allies to stop fighting the Germans or not hit targets in Regensburg just because it happened to be that Henry and I were there. Even if something should happen to me, I would be like the weak and blinded Samson from the Bible. He wanted so much to avenge the Jews with the cruel Philistines that he begged God to give him the strength to bring down their temple, even if it would bring his own death."[84]

In his interview for *Holocaust Testimonies*, a survivor named Morris Rubell from western Poland said, "After a while, the pain was not your survival, the pain was not a question of life. The pain was more of the noncaring people in the outside world, that nobody really cared."[85] Rose Feig Lazarus from Central Europe, recalling her ordeal at Auschwitz, said, "…that was the last day, the last time, when I saw my family. You see, we all really

84 Philip Markowicz, *My Three Lives* (Pittsburgh, PA: Dorrance Publishing Co., Inc., 2009), 182.

85 Joseph J. Preil, ed., *Holocaust Testimonies: European Survivors and American Liberators in New Jersey* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 108.

thought that the world will come and save us. The world will save us. No, nothing can happen to us. But, unfortunately, nobody saved us."[86]

Upon reading testimonials such as these, images of planes dropping bombs and soldiers brandishing guns took on a new meaning for me, and I gave up my steadfast conviction that people should never fight. For the first time, it occurred to me that combat is not always patently wrong; sometimes it saves more lives than it takes. This understanding can help soldiers recover from the trauma of war. In his book *War and the Soul*, Edward Tick wrote, "Thus, from its beginning the Judeo-Christian tradition has taught that it is wrong to wage war for power or riches, but it may be necessary to fight for the survival of loved ones… we must use it solely to restrain violence rather than indulge in it.… A warrior's first priority is to protect life rather than destroy it."

In his book, Tick quoted a Vietnam helicopter crew chief who said, "War is always terrible, but your lifetime of suffering is based on whether or not you know in your heart that you did good."[87] A lot of the soldiers who were sent to Europe during World War II didn't understand why they were fighting until they saw the concentration camps at the end of the war; then they knew.

86 Ibid., 241.

87 Edward Tick, *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2005), pp. 113, 251, 275, 279.

If it is necessary "to fight for the survival of loved ones," for whom do we fight? Who are "our loved ones?" Often I hear people complain that the U.S. has no right to intervene in conflicts beyond our borders and that we need the money and resources right here at home. That seems reasonable, but how significant are borders when it comes to the well-being of citizens outside our own? Aren't families in Syria just as worthy of protection and freedom as those in the United States? If the Japanese had not bombed Pearl Harbor, would the U.S. have participated in World War II? If not, what would have happened to all those people that American soldiers liberated from the concentration camps throughout Europe?

Organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which continues to expand its membership and its purview, try to answer the call to global justice. We need to strengthen these alliances and to step forward when it is time to restore or keep the peace. If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes nations to maintain a village.

Bibliography

42nd Rainbow Division Veterans Memorial Foundation, Inc. and National Auxiliary Rainbow Year 2010-2011. Rainbow Division Veterans Foundation, 2011.

Ast, Theresa Lynn. "Confronting the Holocaust: American Soldiers Who Liberated the Concentration Camps." PhD diss., Atlanta: Emory University, 2000.

Bradley, James, and Ron Powers. *Flags of Our Fathers*. New York: Bantam Dell, 2000.

Buck, David G. *The Furnace and The Fire: The Story of a Regiment of Infantry*. Vienna, Austria: Dr. Franz Hain, 1945.

Dann, Sam, ed. *Dachau 29 April 1945: The Rainbow Liberation Memoirs*. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1998.

Duffy, Michael. "Who's Who – Tsar Nicholas II." Last modified August 22, 2009. http://firstworldwar.com/bio/nicholasii.htm.

Hagstrom, Suzan E. *Sara's Children: The Destruction of Chmielnik*. Orlando, Florida: Cyberian Management Group, Inc., 2001.

Levinson, Leila. *Gated Grief: The Daughter of a GI Concentration Camp Liberator Discovers a Legacy of Trauma*. Brule, WI: Cable Publishing, 2011.

Markowicz, Philip. *My Three Lives*. Pittsburgh, PA: Dorrance Publishing Co., Inc., 2009.

National Archives. "The 1973 Fire, National Personnel Records Center." Accessed August 30, 2016. http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/fire-1973.html.

Olesker, Michael. "Dachau's Trains Bore Cargoes of Unbridled Misery." *Baltimore Sun*, April 30 1995. http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1995-04-30/news/1995120034_1_dachau-kestenberg-freight-train.

Powers, Rod. "Bronze Star Medal, Criteria." Last modified August 11, 2016. http://usmilitary.about.com/od/armymedals/ss/bsm_3.htm.

Preil, Joseph J. *Holocaust Testimonies: European Survivors and American Liberators in New Jersey*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

Tick, Edward. *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2005.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Dachau." Holocaust Encyclopedia. Last modified July 2, 2016. http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005214.