The Seattle Times Newspapers In Education presents

Stories Among Us: Personal Accounts of Genocide

1 Every Wednesday through June 11, we hope you'll join us for **Stories Among Us: Personal Accounts of Genocide,** exploring past and present atrocities through the oral histories of genocide survivors in our region. Produced in partnership with the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

written by Ilana Cone Kennedy, Director of Education, Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center

Stories are all around us. They are everywhere — behind every building, on every corner and within each one of us. Whether it is something that happened recently or in the distant past, these stories become part of who we are. We carry them wherever we go. They are as much a part of us as our skin.

When most of us talk about genocide it seems like something far away — something occurring on a different continent with different people. But in fact, the stories of genocide are right here, among us. The survivors are not distant unknown people; they live in our community and they too carry their stories with them as they walk down the street, go to school or shop in the local store.

Over the next 10 weeks, we will have the opportunity to hear just a few of the stories from those in our own community who have been affected by genocide. We will hear from a woman who survived the Armenian genocide, a Roma (Gypsy) woman whose family perished in the Holocaust, and from three Holocaust survivors — each with very different experiences.

We will also hear stories from a woman who worked with children in Rwanda who were made orphans from the genocide there, and a Bosnian woman who survived the genocide in the Balkans. Finally, we will hear from a Sudanese woman who fled persecution in Sudan and has become an outspoken advocate for action against the atrocities currently taking place in the Darfur region of Sudan.

"Genocide" is a relatively new word. In 1944, Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish lawyer, introduced this word to the English language. In his 1944 book, "Axis Rule in Occupied Europe" (published originally by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), Lemkin explains:

"This new word, coined by the author to denote an old practice in its modern development, is made from the ancient Greek word "genos" (race, tribe) and the Latin "cide" (killing) ... ."

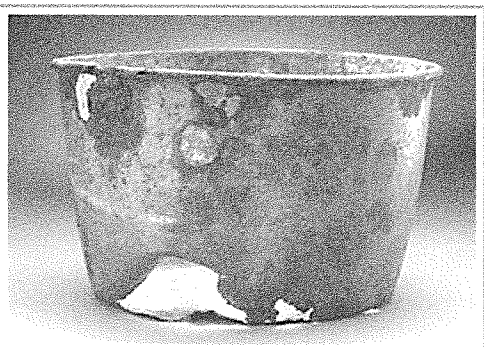

PHOTO: Thomas Blatt's bowl.
"Each of us was given our own eating pot. Each day at five I picked up my pot from under the pillow of my bunk and joined the others in line for supper. When my turn came, the cook poured out about 16 ounces of black liquid that tasted like sweetened warm water. I received dark bread with a warning that it should last me until the next evening."

— Thomas Blatt, survivor of the Nazi death camp Sobibor. He is a member of the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center's Speakers Bureau.

Born in 1900 on a small farm in Poland, Raphael Lemkin was deeply affected by the persecution and mass murder of the Armenians. He later experienced anti-Semitic pogroms (riots) in his own country. He strongly believed in legal protection for groups and fought tirelessly throughout his life for this cause.

As early as 1933, he argued for the need for legal protections for ethnic, religious and social groups; his efforts to create such protections were not successful.

When the German army invaded Poland in 1939, Lemkin escaped and came to the United States. He later learned that 49 members of his own family were murdered in the Holocaust.

Every day, he spoke to government officials, national and international leaders, and anyone who might listen on the importance of recognizing genocide as a crime.

On December 9, 1948, the United Nations approved the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. Lemkin continued to devote his life to the cause. He died in 1959.

Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide (often referred to as the Genocide Convention) defines genocide as:

... any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

(a) Killing members of the group;

(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The Genocide Convention became an internationally recognized law in 1951. Many of the world's most powerful countries, including the United States, delayed support for the ratification of the Genocide Convention for various reasons. The United States ratified the Genocide Convention in 1988.

The effects of genocide do not end when the killing stops. Nor do they end when the perpetrators have been accused and prosecuted. Genocide has a ripple effect: it starts in one place and then begins to spread, over miles, continents, years and decades.

Genocide affects all of us.

For more information on this article or others in this series, please contact the Holocaust Center at www.wsherc.org or info@wsherc.org.

LEARN MORE

- What are the stories among us? What stories have been passed down through your family? What stories will you pass down as you grow older?
- Discuss Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. Review each definition. Why do you think the United States waited 37 years to fully support this?
- Have certain groups in the United States ever faced something similar to genocide?

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Chapter Two

MANNIG'S STORY: THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

Spoken by Mannig Dobajian Kouyoumjian, a survivor of the Armenian Genocide and written by Aida Kouyoumjian, Mannig's daughter

Between 1915 and 1923, the Ottoman government, led by the Turks, systematically targeted and killed Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Ultimately, 1.5 million Armenians — half of the Armenian population — were murdered. This period is now widely regarded as the first genocide of the 20th century.

Below is the story of one Armenian woman who survived the genocide, immigrated to the United States and came to live in Seattle.

Mannig, my mom, and her family of eight suffered through the Armenian Genocide. Only Mannig and one older sister survived to tell their stories.

When my mom became a U.S. citizen in 1982, my siblings and I celebrated her achievement with 150 friends and relatives on Mercer Island. The atmosphere was colorfully festive with Armenian-Arabic-American cuisine, folk songs and dances.

Then, Mannig took the microphone and told her story.

Mannig's Story

"I was six years old when we were deported from our lovely home in Adapazar, near Istanbul. I remember twirling in our parlor in my favorite yellow dress while my mother played the violin. It all ended when the Turkish police ordered us to leave town.

"The massacre of my family, of the Armenians, took place during a three-year trek of 600 kilometers across the Anatolian Plateau and into the Mesopotamian Desert. I can't wipe out the horrific images of how my father and all the men in our foot caravan were whipped to death; my cousin and all other males 12 years and older were shoved off the cliffs into the raging Euphrates River. My grandmother and the elderly were shot for slowing down the trekkers. Two of my siblings died of starvation; my aunt of disease. My mother survived the trek only to perish soon after in an influenza epidemic.

"Of my family, only my sister and I were still alive. The Turkish soldiers forced us, along with 900 other starving children, into the deepest part of the desert to perish in the scorching sun. Most did.

PHOTO: Mannig Kouyoumjian. Printed in the Journal-American, April 20, 1985.

"But God must have been watching over me. He placed me in the path of the Bedouin Arabs who were on a search and rescue mission for Armenian victims. They saved me. I lived under the Bedouin tents for several months before they lead me to an orphanage in Mosul. I was sad about our separation, but the Bedouin assured me that the orphanage was sponsored by good people.

"To my delight, I was reunited with my sister at the orphanage. She, too, was saved by the Bedouin. The happiest days in my life were at the orphanage. We had soup and bread to eat every day and were sheltered under white army tents donated by the British.

"Above all, my sister and I were family again.

"There, I met the love of my life — one of the Armenian philanthropists who visited us often and provided education to the orphans. He was kind, generous and very handsome.

"Marrying him turned my life around like Cinderella. Overnight, I went from the meagerness of the orphanage into the affluence of his mansion in Baghdad, Iraq. We raised three wonderful children and lived a good life."

In 1958, Mannig's husband died suddenly from a heart attack.

"With my daughters in college in the United States and my son in Germany, I was once again without family.

"When my daughters became U.S. citizens, I was able to immigrate to America. I was 60 years old when I settled in Seattle.

"I 'started from scratch' in this country, as you Americans say. I worked as a housekeeper and later in the cafeteria of the UW Undergraduate Library. It was there that I 'was discovered' and hired as a tutor at the UW Foreign Languages Laboratory. For 10 years, I taught and conversed with graduate students who needed to improve their language skills in Armenian, Arabic or Turkish.

"Because I was born in Turkey, people think I'm a Turk. Since I've come from Iraq, they think I'm an Arab. But I say, 'No, I'm an Armenian,' although I've never been to Armenia (in 1982 it was still part of the Soviet Union). I have lived under many flags. None of those banners belonged to me. Neither did I belong to them.

"But now," [Mannig waves the postcard-sized American flag.] "Now, I can say I'm an American and I live under the banner spangled with stars."

Aida Kouyoumjian., the daughter of Mannig, is an active member of the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center's Speakers Bureau. For more information on this story or others in this series, please contact the Holocaust Center at **www.wsherc.org** *or* **info@wsherc.org.**

THINK ABOUT IT

- Define "hope," "faith" and "perseverance" and determine how they were applied to Mannig's story. What other life skills did she encompass in order to rebound from a devastating situation and be able to live a fulfilling life? Can you find an example of these life skills in a story from today's newspaper? Compare and contrast the stories, and discuss.
- Mannig stated, "I started from scratch in this country, as you Americans say." Do you believe that Americans do start from nothing and work their way up? What outside influences and personal traits influence whether people are successful or not? Think of several people you know and their personal and financial situations; does "starting from scratch" ring true in their personal stories?

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Chapter Three

MORGAN'S STORY: A ROMA/SINTI (GYPSY) FAMILY FROM THE HOLOCAUST TO THE UNITED STATES

by Morgan Ahern, A Roma/Sinti in Washington state

I was born lucky — the wish of every Romani mother for her child. For seven years I lived with my people in a traditional manner. My mother and grandmother and my aunts told fortunes, so we had a stable family income. We children each had jobs supporting our family business.

In the evenings, my grandmother, Jenneroze, shared family stories with us. They were always in Romanes, our spoken language. My favorites were the ones she told about herself. She was a hero, not only to me, but to all the Sinti. She was a "drabarni," a wise woman, a healer and leader of her large family.

Life has always been hard for Roma/Sinti in Europe. Even today, prejudice and oppression follow us throughout the continent. When the Nazis took power spreading their domination in Europe, Jenneroze began to plan a safety route for her family. No countries were accepting "Gypsy" refugees.

In 1936/37, Jenneroze purchased Italian citizenship for as many family members as she could with pooled family gold. (Gold was the only currency my people used.) Our family entered the United States as refugee "Italians." One year later, 18 children of my family still in Europe were stolen for Nazi research and put into an orphanage. All the Sinti children, including my cousins, were deported to Auschwitz and murdered in the gas chambers on August 2, 1944. When I was young, stories like these always scared me, but I was miles and years away — these things happened before I was born.

When I was 7, my world changed. Authorities of the State of New York came into my community and removed Gypsy children from their homes. They wanted Gypsy children to assimilate. Similar actions had been taken with Native American children.

I was first taken to a Catholic orphanage where I was forbidden to speak my language, and my name was changed. Everything was intended to make us forget "Romanipe," our Gypsy life, and become "gaje,": non-Roma.

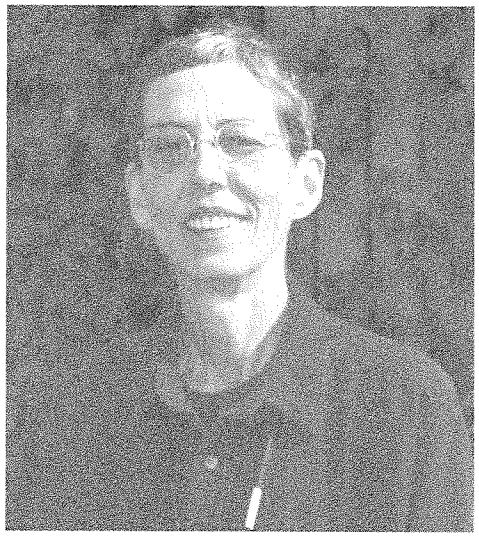

PHOTO: MORGAN AHERN.
The Roma/Sinti people, "Gypsies" as they are commonly called, left their native India circa 1000. Since their arrival in Europe in the 1300s, they have faced discrimination and prejudice. In Romanes (the language spoken by Roma) the Holocaust is called Porrajmos, which means the "Great Devouring." Approximately 60% of Europe's Roma/Sinti were murdered under the Third Reich.

Our people tried many things to get us back. Jenneroze tracked us down several times, only to be arrested and charged with kidnapping. My parents left the community with plans to get jobs and become gaje so that they would be allowed to care for us. Of course nothing worked. My grandmother died of a broken heart. I dreamed many times of returning to my community, but my grandmother was dead and my parents were gone.

I spent the next 11 years as a ward of New York state. I lived in institutions and foster homes, some good, some unbearable. I never heard Romanes. In the beginning, my brother and I would hide and speak to each other in our language, but we were punished severely and eventually we stopped out of fear.

As the years passed and I became an adult, I often looked for my family. I had several tips on my father, sister and mother. One day when I was in my early 40s, I was crossing a street in downtown Denver. At that moment my luck returned. As I passed a woman in the crosswalk I turned to have another look at her and noticed that she had done the same. We both crossed back and she said to me, "Let's go have a cup of coffee. I think I am your mother." She was. That was the happiest day of my life.

In Romanipe, a mother whispers a secret name to her newborn, which is the name for luck to use. No one knows that name except the mother, the child and luck. I heard my lucky name on that day.

I live in the Pacific Northwest and love Seattle. People are supportive and interested in learning about the Roma/Sinti. I have met many Roma who are estranged from their culture either because of programs similar to the one I was subjected to, or because of the racism and prejudice Gypsies experience.

I am a founder of Lolo Diklo/Red Bandanna: Roma Against Racism. We are involved with making people aware of the real lives and history of the Roma/Sinti people. I am proud to be Gypsy.

For more information on this article or others in this series, please contact the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center at www.wsherc.org *or* info@wsherc.org.

MORE TO EXPLORE

- We learn about Morgan's grandmother who was the "matriarch," or female leader of their family. Morgan believed her to be a true hero, a wise woman and a healer. Do you have a matriarch who's a role model in your family, school, church or neighborhood? Discuss the stories with your class, and talk about what makes them so special.
- In today's newspaper, locate a story about a female leader that you admire. Using details from the article, answer why this specific person stands out to you. What are the life skills and personal characteristics she uses in her life? Do you implement any of the same traits in your daily life? If so, give details in your answer.

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Chapter Four

MAGDA'S STORY:
A SURVIVOR OF AUSCHWITZ

Spoken by Magda S., Holocaust survivor and written by Ilana Cone Kennedy, Director of Education, Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center.

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and destruction of European Jewish people by the Nazis and their collaborators, 1933-1945. While Jews were the primary target of Nazi hatred, the Nazis also persecuted and murdered Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Poles and people with disabilities. Six million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust.

Magda S. survived the Holocaust. She was born to a Jewish family in Hungary. In 1944, Germany occupied Hungary; in June, Magda, her mother and brother were deported to Auschwitz. Here is her account:

PHOTO: Magda in 1947 at Feldafing, a displaced persons camp in Germany.

PHOTO: Magda, 2006 in Seattle.

On March 19, 1944, the Germans occupied Hungary. I remember it was a beautiful Sunday afternoon when one of the neighbors came in and told my family the news. It wasn't until the next morning that I started to understand what this meant: If someone was pointed out as a Jew, they were immediately dragged away. The Hungarian Arrow Cross, a party that supported the Nazis, helped the Germans.

We had to wear a Jewish star. One night when I came home from work, a neighbor girl who was supposedly my friend, waited for me and said, "Don't be surprised, your parents and your brother are packed already, and you will have to leave your home."

I took a little suitcase ... how much could I put in a small suitcase? The Nazis took us to an apartment building where 12 people were put in a normal-size bedroom. The Jewish men were put in another house.

Then, one morning, the Nazis decided to take women and girls to the main street of my hometown. They told us to get on our hands and knees and scrub the ground. Most people at that time traveled in horse and buggy — and I can assure you that the street had never been scrubbed. It was a hot day and people were standing on both sides of the sidewalk. Some of the people thought it was a funny sight, but others just moved away.

In June of 1944, we were taken to a train station and loaded into cattle wagons, about 100 people in one section. I was pushed to the little window, and as I looked out I saw my father outside with a little package in his hand. I yelled out, "Dad!" He heard my voice and tried to come to the train. The Nazi guards kept my father back and asked him what he was doing. He said, "I have my family on the train and I have a little package of food for them."

The guards said to my father, "Give us the food. We will give it to your family." My father continued to try to come up on the train. In front of my eyes they beat him and kicked him until he disappeared on the other side of the station. I never saw my father again.

It must have been about 2:00 in the afternoon when the train started to move. We were on the train one night, a whole day, another night, a whole day. Finally, during the night, the train stopped.

We had no idea what "Auschwitz" meant. When we got off the train, the Nazis yelled out for the men and the women to separate. My brother left with the men.

When we got to the front of the line, the SS Officer Mengele pointed my mother in one direction and me in another. I ran after her, but a guard pulled me back. I grabbed my mother and I said, "Mom, I love you and I'll see you later." I never saw her again.

I was in Auschwitz for 10 days and then I was transferred to Krakow Plaszow, a concentration camp in Krakow, Poland. Plaszow was terrible. The work was grueling. I was beaten badly. Many people were shot.

The Russian military was getting close to Krakow. In order to hide what was going on, the Nazis decided to empty Plaszow. They took us back to Auschwitz where I got my tattoo on my arm.

Then came my lucky day. Germany needed 500 Hungarian women to work in a factory where we made parts for weapons. When the factory didn't need us anymore, then again they put us in trains and we were taken to Muhldorf, another concentration camp. After about four weeks, we were put on cattle wagons to be taken someplace to dig ditches and then to be shot.

Their plan was interrupted — Allied troops intercepted the train and we were liberated. It was May 1, 1945.

Magda S. met her husband, right after the liberation, in a displaced persons camp. He was a survivor from Salonika, Greece. They settled in Seattle in 1951 and raised their family.

Magda S. is an active member of the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center's Speakers Bureau. Read Magda's story online at www.wsherc.org. For more information on this article, or others in this series, please contact the Holocaust Center: www.wsherc.org *or* email info@wsherc.org

MORE TO EXPLORE

- Take five minutes to write down all the words, feelings and emotions that you felt when reading her story. With that list of words, create a one-page poem about the Holocaust from a child's perspective.
- Using The Seattle Times, can you find people who are being singled out or treated unfairly because of their culture, race, religion, age, etc.? Why do you think this treatment continues today? Why do some people focus on negativity and violence in the world instead of love and compassion? Do you think the world will ever be at peace?

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Chapter Five

PETER'S STORY: A DUTCH HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

As spoken by Peter M. Written by Ilana Cone Kennedy, Director of Education, Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center

In May of 1940, German Nazi forces invaded the Netherlands. Two years later, when Peter was seven, the Nazis seized Peter's entire family, except for Peter and his mother. This is the story of one young Jewish boy who survived the Holocaust.

One night I was awakened sometime after midnight. I heard trucks pulling up in front of our apartment house. I remember hearing a metal door slamming and the harsh voices of young soldiers yelling "Juden raus!" Jews get out! I could hear kids crying and women screaming and doors being kicked in. I was seven years old.

My mom told me that Aunt Katie and Uncle Leo were gone. "What do you mean 'gone'?" I asked her.

A month later, Grandma and Grandpa M. were "gone." Then my father was "gone."

My mom recognized that it was just a matter of time before we were caught. She got a hold of the Dutch Underground. The Dutch Underground was a group of regular citizens willing to work together to resist the Nazi government. The Underground took care of providing false papers to Jews (papers that gave a different name or indicated the person was a religion other than Jewish), and they would help Jews find a place to hide.

The Underground arranged for us to stay with Klaas and Roefina Post on a small farm in the northeastern part of Holland. The Posts were very courageous — if we were caught hiding on their farm, we would all be killed.

The Nazis began to suspect that Jews were hiding on some of the farms and began going door to door raiding the farms.

The raids became so frequent that we could no longer hide in the house. Klaas went out and dug a little cave in the side of a hill in the forest next to the farm for us to hide in. It was just big enough for me and Mom to lie in snugly.

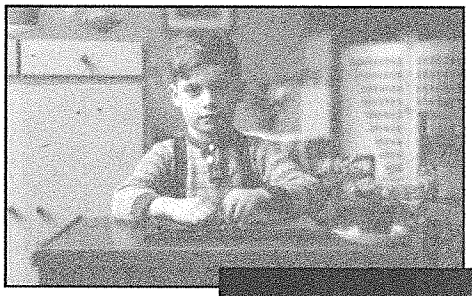

PHOTO: Peter M., 1941 in Amsterdam

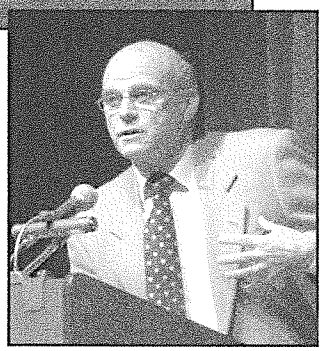

PHOTO: Peter M., 2007 in Seattle.

Now when we heard the trucks coming, Mom and I would crawl in there. We spent many nights in that cave, hardly able to breathe because we were so afraid.

Mom and I were on that farm for 2 ½ years. It became increasingly dangerous for us to be there.

The Underground arranged false papers for us, and a small room with two women in The Hague. It was 1944 and I was nine years old. These women made my mom clean and scrub the apartment, but at least we were given shelter.

After about eight months, we found out that these women were going to turn us in. The Underground found us a safe place in Amsterdam, but we didn't have a way to get to Amsterdam. The highway to Amsterdam was to be used only by Nazis.

I woke up one night and saw my mom sitting by candlelight with a bunch of sheets in front of her. She was sewing — she made a skirt, a shirt and a hat on which she sewed a red cross. Around 3 o'clock in the morning, she put on these new clothes, bundled me up, and we went out into the snow. We walked toward the highway that led from The Hague to Amsterdam.

When we reached the highway, my mom stuck out her arm to flag down a ride. A flatbed truck stopped and a Nazi officer got out. The SS officer yelled at mom, "What are you doing with this child? This road is for the fatherland! No civilians allowed!"

My mom explained, " ... his parents were killed. As you can see, I work for the International Red Cross and I am taking him to an orphanage in Amsterdam."

Mom sat between the two SS officers in the cab. I sat in the snow in the flatbed truck. They took us to Amsterdam.

On May 5, 1945, the Canadians liberated Holland. No one in my family returned. Mom and I were the only survivors. Three years later she remarried, and in 1949 we arrived in New York and then moved to California. I was 13-and-a-half. In 1999, I came to Seattle.

I truly believe that my mother and I belonged to the fortunate ones who survived the Holocaust because of the goodness of Klaas and Roefina Post. I will forever be in debt to them for what they did for my mother and me.

Peter M. is an active member of the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center's Speakers Bureau. Read Peter's story online at www.wsherc.org. For more information on this article, or others in this series, please contact the Holocaust Center: www.wsherc.org *or* info@wsherc.org.

MORE TO EXPLORE

- The Dutch Underground was a group of regular citizens willing to work together to resist the Nazi government and help Jewish people locate a safe place to hide. They were courageous and helped save many lives. Imagine that you are living in Holland in 1940, would you and your family put your own lives at risk to help those who had no place to go and if found, would be sent to a concentration camp? Please give detailed answers as to why you would help them, or not.
- Peter's mother sewed a white skirt, shirt and a hat on which she put a red cross. She pretended to be a nurse, telling the Nazi truck drivers that she was taking an abandoned child (her son) to an orphanage in Amsterdam. Here is another example of true courage. What do you think she was feeling as she boarded that truck with the SS officers? What does the "red cross" symbol mean and how did that help her and her son survive that trip?
- In today's newspaper, find an example of courage or heroism. Share the article with your class.

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Chapter Six

FRIEDA'S STORY: A CZECH HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

As spoken by Frieda S. Written by Dee Simon, Co-Executive Director, Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center.

In 1933, the Nazi party was elected in Germany and Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor. Hitler and the Nazi Party quickly put into practice their belief that Germans were "racially superior." Jewish people were not only defined as "inferior," but became the primary target for Nazi hatred.

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland and World War II began. By the end of that same year, Nazi forces occupied Czechoslovakia. For the next five years, Nazi forces occupied country after country in Europe.

In 1943, at the age of 14, Frieda was deported to Theresienstadt, a concentration camp in her native country of Czechoslovakia, because she was a "mischling" — half Jewish. Frieda's mother was not Jewish, but her father was. Against the odds, Frieda survived the Holocaust in Theresienstadt.

After the war people told me I was lucky to have been sent to Theresienstadt. It was the model camp. Intellectuals, artists and individuals who might someday provide something to the Reich were sent to Theresienstadt. I was sent to Theresienstadt because I was a "mischling" (half Jewish). I didn't feel lucky.

I didn't know at that time that 1.5 million children were going to be murdered because they were Jewish. I also didn't know that of the 140,000 Jewish people sent to Theresienstadt between 1941 and 1945, 15,000 were children. Only 10 percent of the children sent to Theresienstadt would survive the war (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum - USHMM).

What I did know was that people around me were starved, beaten, shot and sent away on trains. I did know that I was taken from my home and my family; I was hungry all the time and made to work long hours. I know now that it is only because of luck that I survived.

PHOTO: Frieda S. in Seattle, 2008.

My childhood before the war was filled with picnics, hikes, skating and celebrations. I grew up celebrating Passover and Christmas. I knew I was Jewish but religion was not a central part of my life. When Germany invaded Czechoslovakia, my religion came to define me.

In 1943, when I was 14, I was deported by train to Theresienstadt. My mother, who was not Jewish, didn't have to go. My father was in a local jail for his political beliefs.

I was taken to Theresienstadt with others from my hometown, Ostrava.

I was tall and strong, so I was given the job of farming. Every day, I worked planting, tilling, harvesting and moving rocks. Sometimes I stole vegetables. I knew I would be shot if caught, but I also knew that this was keeping me and others alive. Although I witnessed daily horrors, somehow I grew up. I had girl friends, I had my first kiss and I found ways to keep going.

Every day, the trains took people from Theresienstadt. We didn't know where they were going but I thought it had to be a place better than this. One day, although not on the list, I stood in line to get on the train. As I tried to board the train a Nazi SS officer yelled at me and told me to go back. I was so angry. Later, when I learned the trains took people to Auschwitz, I realized I was lucky — the Nazi officer saved my life.

My father and brother were deported to Theresienstadt a few months before the war ended. When the Russians liberated Theresienstadt in 1945, my father stole a horse and wagon from a nearby farm and loaded it with children from Ostrava who had survived Theresienstadt. He took us all back to our hometown. When we returned to Ostrava, many of the children found they had no home or family left. They came to live with me and my family until they could find a place to go.

When I was 18, I decided to go to Israel. I met my husband Aaron in Haifa. We had three children and then immigrated to the United States. I now live in Seattle, my children are grown, and I have five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

In a lecture my daughter gave recently, she said she is proud of survivors because they bear witness with dignity. I think that so many of us are humbled by the guilt that we survived while others did not. We are reluctant to share the fact that we witnessed cruelty and inhumanity in its most unimaginable form, but we also feel lucky. For us, bearing witness with dignity is not an option — it is a continuing act of survival.

For more information on this article, or others in this series, please contact the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center: www.wsherc.org *or* info@wsherc.org.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Hitler and the Nazi party believed that Germans were "racially superior" and Jewish people became the primary target for their hatred. What is your opinion of race relations in America? Do you feel that everyone is equal? Why do you think some people believe they are better than others? Do you see racial barriers in the current presidential election?
- Find an example of race relations in today's newspaper? Share your findings with your class.
- Frieda's daughter described pride in the "survivors because they bear witness with dignity." Frieda feels that survivors are humbled by the guilt that they survived and the others didn't and feels it's not an option, but "a continuing act of survival." What is your view on these two perspectives in describing the feelings of the survivors?

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Chapter Seven

MARIE'S STORY:

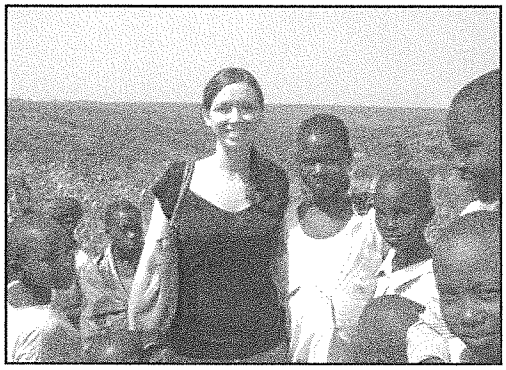
A WITNESS TO THE LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES OF THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE

Written by Marie Berry, Office Manager and Speakers Bureau Coordinator, Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center

Throughout 100 days in 1994, an estimated 800,000 Tutsis, and Hutus who sympathized with Tutsis, were killed in Rwanda during the fastest genocide in modern history. In 2007, Marie Berry, a graduate of the University of Washington, traveled to Rwanda with Global Youth Connect, to work with orphans of the genocide and explore the state of human rights in Rwanda today.

As the gatekeeper slowly pushed open the first door, I stood frozen with horror. Behind me lurked a tall dark man I had seen before in pictures — I recognized him by the deep bullet wound scarring his left brow. Beyond the open door lay dozens of bodies. Somewhere here, at the sight of one of the Rwandan genocide's most horrific massacres, lay the family of the tall man behind me. Lime powder, for preservation, dusted the dead bodies of men, women and small children — all murdered 14 years ago in this room where I was now standing. The bodies lay there, frozen in time, as a reminder and a memorial of the genocide that took the lives of 800,000 people.

Seven years earlier, I sat in my World History class as a sophomore in high school. A list of research topics circulated the room. By the time the list reached me, the selection had dwindled. Toward the bottom of the list was a single word: Rwanda. I had a vague idea that Rwanda was a country in Africa, and, assuming I would be researching gorillas, I wrote my name next to my selection. That night, my parents mentioned something about an "ethnic conflict," and referred me to a book recently published about Rwanda, "We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families" (Gourevitch, 1998).



Marie Berry with children in Rwanda, 2007

Over the next several years, I continued to research Rwanda, genocide and the roots of ethnic conflict. Finally, in June 2007, I arrived in Rwanda. The country I found seemed tranquil and safe in comparison to the country I had read about during the genocide. It was strikingly beautiful and although many Rwandan people bore the scars of their recent history, they amazed me with their kindness and generosity. As I went to work at *Uyisenga N'Manzi*, an organization that helps child-headed households establish economic self-sufficiency, I met dozens of children struggling to create a sense of normalcy in their lives after the deaths of their parents. Hundreds of thousands of children were orphaned during the genocide [UNICEF]. Even today, 14 years after the genocide, nearly 100,000 children still live in child-headed households [UNICEF]. Organizations such as *Uyisenga N'Manzi*, which provides economic, legal, mental and medical assistance, are essential to the rebuilding of the fractured nation.

To my initial surprise, most of the Rwandan people with whom I worked closely were reluctant to discuss their own experiences during the genocide. I met only one young man, named Musoni, who was eager to divulge his personal nightmare. He took me to his parents' grave, showed me where his mother was struck down with a machete while his infant brother clung to her back, and where his sister was flung into a deep well with dozens of other bodies and left for dead.

The political climate in Rwanda today discourages people from speaking about their memories of the genocide, except in court where cases against perpetrators are still being tried. The Rwandan government recently prohibited usage of the words "Hutu" and "Tutsi" in an effort to expedite the country's return to normalcy. Yet, visible tensions still remain. Many survivors expressed concern that testifying in court would jeopardize their safety.

After my return to Seattle, I resumed my work with the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center. One of my first projects was to locate Rwandans living in the Seattle area and encourage them to join our speakers bureau of genocide survivors. Yet, everyone I talked to declined to participate, ostensibly because it is still too difficult to speak. Fourteen years is not long enough to dissolve pain, to "forgive and forget." Yet 14 years has been enough time for genocide to occur again, first in Bosnia and more recently in Darfur, Sudan. My extensive research on Rwanda and my experiences there enabled me to recognize the lasting impact of genocide in every society, the profundity of trauma and the relevance of these atrocities to our lives, as human beings halfway across the world. Perhaps, most importantly, I learned that genocide isn't ancient history; it is our history, and it is up to us to never forget.

For more information on this article, or others in this series, please contact the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center: www.wsherc.org *or* info@wsherc.org.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Approximately 100,000 children still live in child-headed households. What do you think it would it feel like to be a child having to raise younger brothers and sisters, finding a job, shopping for groceries, cooking meals and paying all the bills?
- The article states that "the political climate in Rwanda discourages people from speaking about their memories of the genocide, except in court." Do you think not speaking about their experiences will help them heal? Why or why not?
- Choose an article in today's newspaper where people are going through difficult times and share with your class.

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Chapter Eight

SELENA'S STORY: A SURVIVOR OF THE BOSNIAN GENOCIDE

Written by Selena Salihovic, survivor of the Bosnian Genocide and a UW student.

Between 1992 and 1995, the Muslim population of Bosnia, a country located in Eastern Europe, became victim to a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing and genocide. By the end of 1995, Bosnian Serb forces, under the leadership of President Slobodan Milosevic, systematically murdered over 200,000 Muslim civilians and displaced two million.

My name is Selena Salihovic. I was born in 1989 in Bosnia and Herzegovina — more specifically a town called Bijeljina. I am Bosnian. The following story is one that my family and I lived through though I only remember it in pieces. I was too young to really understand the politics of the war.

In 1992, the small town of Bijeljina had dozens of nightclubs that attracted many of the townspeople. Among those clubs, two were nationalist clubs: one called Istanbul and one called Serbia. Each club represented a religious group within Bosnia — Istanbul for the Bosnians (who were primarily Muslim) and Serbia for the Christian Orthodox. On the night of March 31, someone bombed the club called Istanbul. Luckily, the bomb didn't kill anyone and injured few.

Zeljko Raznjatovic, better known as military leader Arkan, had his army, the Serb Volunteer Guard, waiting in a village next to Bijeljina. Arkan's army was waiting for a sign: a sign that would trigger an attack on the Bosnian population. The Istanbul bombing was the excuse and the sign that he needed.

On the eve of April 1, Arkan's army had already infiltrated Bijeljina. They robbed the banks and occupied the radio stations, police stations and City Hall. On the morning of April 1, his army waited in the center of the town and systematically began moving through Bijeljina, killing everyone who was not a Serb. To counter this, the common people set up barricades around the town center, urging people to go back to their homes and alerting them of what had happened. In the three days Arkan's army occupied our town, they murdered hundreds of innocent people just because they were not Serbs.

Selena Salihovic in Seattle, 2008.

On the morning of the third day, the neighboring Serbian villages heard the news of Bijeljina. They gathered the buses from their villages and came to assist the Bosnians. They were offering us refuge on a large government-owned farm surrounded by a fence. We trusted them.

When we arrived at the farm, the Serbian villagers separated the Bosnian males and females. The males spent the night standing in the open. The women and children were either in an office building or outside on the grass. We realized that this was not the safe haven we had expected. In the morning we all demanded to go home. The guards agreed to let the females go home, but they wouldn't allow the men to leave. They assured us that they would let them go sometime later that day. Shortly after, a truck with a covered canopy arrived. In the back of the truck was a man who claimed to have witnessed the rape of two Serbian nurses. This witness was brought to the location to find and pinpoint the two men who had allegedly committed the rape. If he waved his hand, you were free to leave but if he simply stuck it out from behind the canopy, you were not allowed to go. All of the men were gathered, including my father and his good friend Maid, a soccer player who knew every soul that resided in Bijeljina. All but two men were granted leave; Maid was one of them.

As my family and I walked back to Bijeljina, we heard two shots behind us. Maid and the other man were dead.

We stayed in Bijeljina for three more years, not wanting to leave my ill grandfather behind. The violence in Bijeljina continued, but it was muted. Unlike Sarajevo, no bombs were dropped on our city. Instead, people began disappearing or being killed in the middle of the night. We lost many friends and many members of our extended family.

In 1995, our family escaped from the country and went to a refugee camp in Hungary. After a year our family was able to come to the United States. We try to go back to Bosnia once a year or once every two years. It is never the same place that we left 11 years ago. Our family is no longer there.

For more information on this article or others in this series, please contact the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center: www.wsherc.org *or* info@wsherc.org.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Serb Military leader, Arkan, waited for a sign to trigger an attack on the Muslim population, what was that sign?
- Why do you think there is religious conflict in the world? Using today's newspaper, can you locate an example of violence that resulted from being a different religion? Do you see similar religious barriers for people living in the United States? Why or why not? Share the article and your personal opinions on this subject with your class.

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Agnes Oswaha, Seattle, 2008

Chapter Nine

AGNES' STORY: FROM SUDAN TO SEATTLE

Written by Agnes Oswaha

As the largest country in Africa, Sudan is home to many different religions, ethnic groups and languages. Since its independence from the British in 1956, the country has been consumed by violence between the Arab/Muslim government in Khartoum (northern Sudan) and the largely Christian regions in the South.

Agnes Oswaha grew up as part of the ethnic Christian minority in Sudan's volatile capital of Khartoum. In 1998, Agnes immigrated to the United States. She has become an outspoken advocate for action against the atrocities occurring in Darfur.

There is a saying that my mother, my reservoir of strength, always used: "When two elephants fight, the grass underneath suffers the most." This has certainly been the case in Sudan, a nation that experienced peace for only about a decade since its independence from British-Egyptian colonialism on January 1, 1956.

During the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983–2005), the violence between North and South Sudan destroyed the lives of many people, especially southern Sudanese. According to the U.S. Department of State, more than two million southern Sudanese died and four million were displaced. I have lost brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents and precious friends in what is now the longest civil unrest in history.

In October 2004, my baby sister Esther, a medical student, was lit on fire near our house in Khartoum. Although Esther survived the gasoline/kerosene fire, she is still living with the physical pain, deformity and paralyzing fear of being attacked again by those who hate her because of her ethnic and religious background.

For the first 20 years of my life, I lived as a southern Sudanese Christian minority in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan. In Khartoum, Arab-Muslims are the majority and hold the positions of power. Growing up, I faced educational and social obstacles as a young Christian female in a predominantly Muslim nation. I was forced to learn the Arabic language, read the Koran and abide by the teachings of Islam.

Despite facing tremendous persecution, I managed to excel in school and was admitted to law school. I was an active member of the Student Union in college, which challenged the current system and favored democracy. Questioning the practices of the school or government was viewed as "anti-government."

The war escalated in the late 1990s and, as both a minority in northern Sudan and an outspoken member of the Student Union, I was particularly at risk. I lived in fear of the Sudanese government and its sympathizers, including my neighbors. I had to quit school and live in hiding, fearing for my life.

In 1997, the Student Union held demonstrations to fight for democracy. At one of the demonstrations, a man right in front of me was shot by the Sudanese military. The government ordered the military to stop these demonstrations by any means. I lost brilliant colleagues and beloved friends.

Luckily, I made it to the United States in September 1998. Because of the danger I faced if forced to return to Sudan, I was granted political asylum in the U.S. This has given me a second chance to speak about the atrocities in my country of birth. I can sleep through the nights now without the fear of being killed or kidnapped by the Sudanese government or their army, although the nightmares have not stopped.

Today in Sudan, the Janjaweed militias, backed by the government of Sudan, are mercilessly killing the people of Darfur. Since 2003, some 400,000 Darfurians have been killed and 2.2 million displaced (according to statistics from Save Darfur). Our children in southern Sudan and Darfur are suffering the most. They, along with their mothers, have been victims of crossfire, land mines, rape, slavery and human-created famine.

For years, I have been an active member of Save Darfur Washington State (SDWS), an organization of advocates who are outraged by the ongoing genocide in Darfur, Sudan.

Along with Harriet Dumba, I co-founded Hearts of Angels for Health-Sudan Initiative (HAH-S), a nonprofit organization focused both on improving health and empowering Sudanese women and men to overcome their traumatic pasts and learn new skills in conflict resolution.

My personal experiences of persecution and living in a war-torn environment put me in close contact with the needs and challenges of people around the world facing various injustices. As long as violence, persecution and discrimination continue in Sudan and beyond, I will continue to fight for social justice and human rights amongst the most marginalized and too often forgotten in our world.

For more information about this article, or others in this series, please contact the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center: www.wsherc.org *or* info@wsherc.org.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Agnes' mother said that "When two elephants fight, the grass underneath suffers the most." Read the article and then reflect on what this phrase means in a larger, global sense? Do you agree or disagree with her statement?
- Sudan has been consumed with war and violence since 1956 and it still continues today. Do you think the people who live there become numb to what's going on? Why don't you think world leaders and countries aren't doing more to help countries and people who are involved in modern day genocide?
- Using today's newspaper, find ways that the United States is helping other countries through aid, food, military, etc. ... Do you think the U.S. will enter Darfur or Sudan to help them? Why or why not?