

Dapei Keshet

Beit Theresienstadt Theresienstadt Martyrs Remembrance Association

"And who will remember?
And in what do we preserve memory?"



After 80 years

IN THIS ISSUE

At Beit Theresienstadt	2	At Home, They Called Him "Ottik"/David Sivor	8-9
Yours	3	Dive Into The Past/Dr. Tereza Maizels	
"I May Never Read These Words Again"/Tami Kinberg	4-5	and Nitsan Ravid Elias	10-11
An Artist Meets Testimony/Maya Rave	6	Book Recommendation/Talma Cohen	12
News from the Educational Center	7	Attic honeymoon in Terezin/Amira Kohn Trattner	13-15

Editors and photography: Beit Theresienstadt team **Design:** Studio Orni Drori, Haifa **Translation:** Helene Hart

On the cover: "An Artist Meets Testimony" – the work process of the artist Shachar Sivan inspired by the testimony of Eva Erben

Coming Events at Beit Theresienstadt

Thursday October 7, 2021 19:00	"The Return of the Orchestra" The closing concert for the international masterclass, "History, Music and Memory"	Petah Tikva Cultural Hall. The concert is free of charge, but requires registration in advance By phone: 03-911-3669 Or mail: michala@ptikva.org.il
Friday October 29, 2021 10:00	Continuing Generation Conference	A meet up with Maya and Gal Rave, the creators of the project "An Artist Meets Testimony," and a dialogue with participating artists.
Wednesday November 24, 2021 20:00	"After 80 Years"	An online event marking the 80th anniversary of the establishment of Ghetto Theresienstadt.
Wednesday December 1, 2021 17:30	Intergenerational Hanukkah Conference And opening of the "Dancing on the Edge of a Volcano" exhibition	Beit Theresienstadt



To all members and friends of Beit Theresienstadt



“And who will remember? And in what do we preserve memory?” These are the words with which Yehuda Amichai begins his poem “Hatzharat Kavanot” (“Statement of Intent”). These words are in tune with the words of the late Peter Lang, “Only one who could forget had a chance to get through it...”

(From an interview with him for the project, “An Artist Meets Testimony”).

Eighty years after the first transport arrived to establish Ghetto Theresienstadt, we are facing even more the emphatic question of memory and continuity. This issue includes a few perspectives: first-hand testimony from the diary of the late Antonin Rosenbaum, published by Beit Theresienstadt; the illustrated testimony in Gerti Cohn’s story; and memory as perceived by the third generation in the exhibition we are planning, “An Artist Meets Testimony.” Also in this issue, we remember our friend Prof. Dov Kulka, who passed away at the beginning of the year. His good friend David Sivor (Sucho) tells us about him.

We are nearing the end of the Jewish year of 5771, and it has certainly passed quickly. There have been many changes and we are still left with uncertainty and a feeling that is impossible to plan anything. For a few moments there, we thought that COVID-19 was behind us. In the spring, around Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day, we had groups visiting again, and even a few schools. We managed to hold the annual conference with physical attendance, and for a moment it felt like things were returning to normal. Unfortunately, that feeling passed very quickly. It is unclear to us all what will happen during the coming school year. The situation has also caused a delay in the construction of the new exhibition “Dancing on the Edge of a Volcano,” but I hope we can complete it by November. Saying that, looking back, we

can feel content with the vast activity we did have this year, despite the difficulties that COVID-19 brought.

The educational center has prepared new and interesting study programs and tutorials. The time we had without visitors allowed us to further explore our archive materials, to glean fascinating stories, and learn more important historical facts about the ghetto. Throughout the year, we held online lectures that were very popular, and we will continue to offer them next year, too.

There has been a lot of progress in the archive. With the support of the Claims Conference and the excellent staff there who work with us—Lee Buckman, Batsheva Porat, Noa Dinar and Elinor Kroitoru, we have expanded the archive’s activities and recruited two additional part-time employees—Inbar Dekel Levinzon and Eli Mikulinser. They work hard at scanning, cataloging and reclaiming the information that is regularly uploaded to the website and available to the general public. At the time of writing this, we are busy organizing the International Master Classes Project “History, Music and Memory,” scheduled for mid-August. We are continuing to collaborate with the Petah Tikva Cultural Hall, where we will hold a special closing concert. We had more than 80 participants in the master classes this year.

A special project will reach a peak on International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, 2022: “An Artist Meets Testimony.” Maya and Gal Rave, artists from Emek Hefer took on the special task of documenting the survivors’ stories in a unique way for future generations. There is more on that in this issue.

I hope we will return soon to our routine of seminars, visits and events that will improve with all we have learned and updated during COVID-19
Happy New Year!

Yours, Tami Kinberg
Director of Beit Theresienstadt

Mission Statement

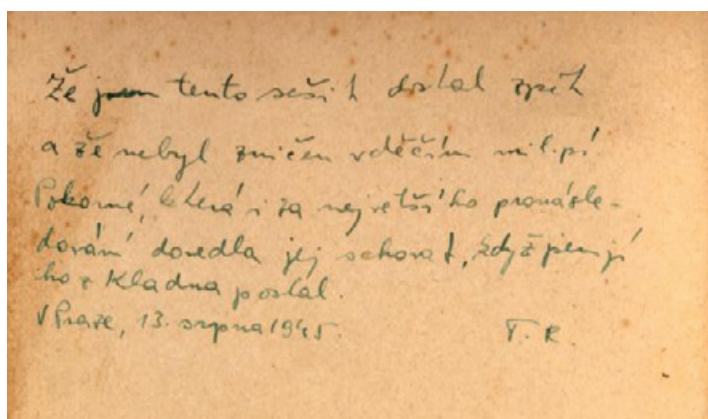
And who will remember? And in what do we preserve memory?
In what is anything in the world preserved?

We preserve in salt and sugar, with high heat and deep freezing
Through perfect sealing, through drying and embalming.
but the best preservation of memory is
to store it in the oblivion that not a single recollection
will ever be able to penetrate and disturb the eternal rest
of the memory.

Yehuda Amichai

"I May Never Read These Words Again"

Of the documents kept in the Beit Theresienstadt's archives, the most fascinating are personal diaries. Antonin Rosenbaum's diary describes the first period in Ghetto Theresienstadt. Rosenbaum, who was born in Prague and was 19 years old at the time, was one of the ghetto founders sent from Prague on the first transport, the AK-I (Aufbaukommando) transport on November 24, 1941. In a plain arithmetic notebook, he described his experiences and how the illusion of the "city of refuge" promised by the Germans faded away, with the realization that the so-called builders of the Jewish city were in fact prisoners. Rosenbaum's diary ends when he is sent on a transport to work in the coal mines in Kladno. He believes that he is embarking on the path to freedom, and does not know that fate is inflicting even greater hardships on him than those he experienced in Theresienstadt. After returning to the ghetto, he was sent to the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in June 1944.



I am truly grateful to Mrs. Pokorna, who hid this notebook in the days of the most severe persecution, after I sent it from Kladno.

It is thanks to her that I got it back.

Prague, 31 August 1945

T.R.

Rosenbaum smuggled his diary to a friend in Prague, who kept it until the end of the war. He survived, immigrated to the United States after the war and changed his surname to Ronek. In 1979, he donated his diary to Beit Theresienstadt's archives. Rosenbaum died in the United States in 2009.

His diary was published this year by Beit Theresienstadt (in Hebrew) and is an important and fascinating document. At the beginning of his diary, Rosenbaum writes:

"An introduction? Foreword? Dedication? I'll start with just a few words. First of all, this is not a document of proof, nor is it a record of the persecution of innocent Jews. It is just my personal notes and some facts about my time in a detention camp for people declared Jews by the Third Reich government, and about my time in Theresienstadt, Bohemia from November 24, 1941 to March 16, 1942. Soon or later,



the day will come when I am living again as a human being deciding my own fate. And when I read what I wrote, I may laugh at all this. Today I am more inclined to cry. I may never read these words again. I may not even complete them."

November will mark the 80th anniversary of that first transport in which Rosenbaum arrived in Theresienstadt, and this is how it is described in the diary:

The letter of summons, which I received from the Jewish community on November 20, 1941, stated that I had been attached to the workers' transport. There was no reason to complain about this. Especially when at the meeting for the transport participants, I met many artisans, auxiliary workers and so on, who were all young people of 20 to 35 years old. We were promised all sorts of things there, everything was described in the most beautiful of colors, so we saw only advantages in being included. We were promised regular mail contact, a travel permit once every week or two, good housing conditions and food, a salary determined by a joint contract, and also, mentioned in a special list, the protection of family members from transports to Poland—a very real danger in those days. To the question, "Where exactly are we going, and what will we do there?" we received the answer: "You are going to a place in Czechoslovakia, not far from Prague,

where you will build housing and prepare a ghetto." That is, a real transport of workers. We were required to fill out what they called a "property declaration," in which we listed all the property we were leaving behind. The date of travel was set for November 24, 1941.

Monday, 24.11.1941

The wooden gate shut with a bang and the wooden beam sank into its iron slot. Only a narrow crack remained open, through which I could see a rifle with a bayonet and a soldier's green coat. We stood glued to each other, and we were each abandoned and all alone. The footsteps stopped and everyone looked quietly at the building in front of us. Behind us, there was a tall brick wall, a locked gate, and a rifle. Before us, there was a two-story building with arches. The hallways' large windows were covered with barbed wire. The monotonous gray color of the walls was not broken up by anything. My thoughts returned to my imaginings. That's how I always imagined a prison: monotonous, gray, barbed wire, and guards. Only my hands, feet, and mouth were free. I wanted to shout and run away...but even if I could have, I just stood there as if glued to the ground by that first hard impression.

And when the whistle blew and we heard the first commands, a light rain began to fall again.

After standing and waiting endlessly, we took the bundles we had brought with us and went up to the first floor. In one room, where 25 soldiers had slept before, they placed 50 people. The room was about 7 by 21 feet. The ceiling was arched and had a large window, which overlooked the unpainted brick wall of the opposite barracks. My room number was 69. All the rooms were very cold, and in the center was a large pile of straw. We were hungry, so we sat down in the hallway and ate. Meanwhile, the empty trucks drove to the station to pick up mattresses. As we sat eating in the hallway, a young officer in the Czechoslovakian gendarmerie lieutenant's uniform with a wrinkled and pockmarked face came walking toward us. He was followed by a short, chubby officer of about 40 years old wearing a dark leather jacket and an SS uniform. They walked along with our supervisor. Later we learned that they were Lieutenant Janeček, who declared that he was German, and Scarabis, an SS officer. No one paid them much attention and we barely made room to let them through. They just walked past us.

In the afternoon they brought a cart of stuffed and also empty mattresses, and we filled them with the straw that was in the rooms. We took the rest out to the stable. We were tired, mostly due to the change in our environment, and we went to bed early. Before that, we put our belongings in the room and groups who were already acquainted got organized together. We quickly fell asleep and the first night was devoted to Theresienstadt.



A page from Antonin (Tonda) Rosenbaum's diary with his portrait.

Rosenbaum's diary was published in Hebrew by Beit Theresienstadt, translated by Rachel Har-Zvi, edited by Gili Carol and produced and designed by Orni Drori.

An Artist Meets Testimony

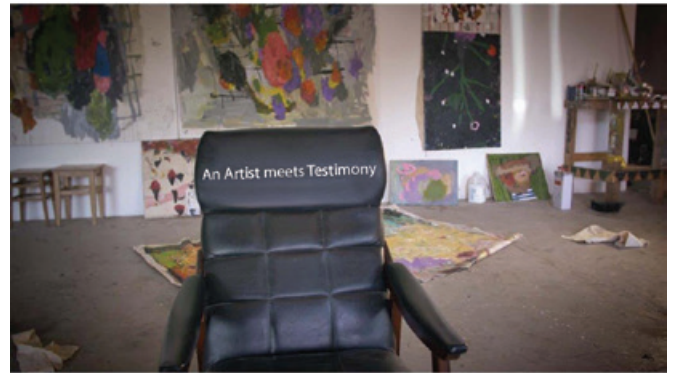
"...If you want to convey a heavy subject such as the Holocaust, you have to use intimate things. Intimacy is created through personal stories, but greater, more significant intimacy is made possible through art..."
(Aaron Appelfeld)

A new Beit Theresienstadt project with artists Maya and Gal Rave mediates the testimony of Holocaust survivors through art. The artwork inspired by the stories will be on display in a multidisciplinary art exhibition on International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, 2022 at the Art & About Gallery in Emek Hefer Industrial Park. Maya and Gal collect testimonies of people who survived Ghetto Theresienstadt. They edit these testimonies to create a strong and significant honed experience from World War II, introduce these testimonies to artists from various fields (painting, sculpture, dance, photography, etc.), and turn them into works of art.



Gal Rave documents the artist Shachar Sivan while creating an artwork following the testimony of Eva Erben

Maya described how the idea grew in her mind: Over the years, tens of thousands of testimonies have been documented on video. Our grandparents were in their sixties when they began talking, and we have heard the same stories only too often. But five years ago, when my grandfather was 90 years old and I went to him and sat him in front of the camera, I heard new things from him. The stories had remained the same, but his experiences had undergone some adaptations. His conclusions, the emotions that suddenly arose and overwhelmed him, surprised me. I suddenly realized that my grandfather was doing some honest and intimate soul-searching with me, just before he left us. This place that people who have developed a close relationship in the past with death have, people who befriended the concepts of parting and the end and felt that there was no rush because death always has time, now understand that their time is short. And the question, "What will be left after we're gone?" is hovering



over them.

My grandfather passed away six months after we finished filming.

The intergenerational connection created between the chilling testimony from then and the life of today creates an interesting encounter that brings out specifically the human experience, the universal qualities common to all human beings. The young artists form their own interpretation by connecting to human emotions that they each identify in themselves: compassion, confusion, sorrow, courage, detachment, faith, love, optimism. They then create their work through this connection.

We want to try to take the Holocaust out of victimization and the sanctity of death, out of mourning and gravestones. We want to make it possible to get closer to the personal story, to the emotion, the pain, the inner strength, and when the witnesses are no longer with us, to leave behind works of art that will continue their path.

The well-known artist Yossi Wassid will curate the exhibition, which combines video clips of testimonies and of the artists' creative process in combination with the works of art by the artists.

If this matter is important to you and you would like to participate in this special project, you are welcome to contribute to its success. (Please find details on how to make a donation at the end of the newsletter).

<https://bterezin.org.il/en/events/artist-meets-testimonial/>

Activities at the Educational Center

Following the easing of the COVID-19 restrictions, we held a great variety of educational activities at the museum during April 2021.

Israel Electric Company (IEC) senior employees, including the IEC's Chair of the Board, Major General (Res.) Yiftah Ron-Tal, the CEO Ofer Bloch, and the Senior Vice President of Human Recourses Shlomi Tsarfati, participated in a one-day seminar that included a guided tour through the museum exhibitions, a lecture by Tami Kinberg on solidarity and mutual responsibility in the ghetto, and a meeting with Maxi Livni, a ghetto survivor. At the end of the day, the participants held a memorial service in the museum square.



A one day seminar "The human spirit"



MG Hayman with Mariyan Miller and Tal Sondak

Chief of Military Intelligence, Major General Tamir Hayman, and the senior command staff of the Intelligence Corps had a fascinating seminar on "The Human Spirit" at Beit Theresienstadt. The seminar included, among other things, a guided tour of the museum's exhibitions, a lecture on "Ghetto Theresienstadt—The False Show for the World," and testimony from ghetto survivor Maxi Livni. The seminar closed with Tal Sondak's and Marian Miller's chilling show "Still Not Parting Ways." At the end of the day, the Chief of Military Intelligence stressed the importance and contribution of the human spirit in creating physical resilience, hope and the ability to withstand everyday difficulties in surviving.



IDF Technology Division visits Beit Theresienstadt

A third seminar was held for the senior command staff of the Technology Division, headed by Major General Yitzhak Turgeman. During the seminar, the main subject of which was "The Choice of Life," the IDF senior officers toured the museum's exhibitions and heard testimony from Zvi Cohen, a Ghetto Theresienstadt survivor.



MG Turgeman with Zvi Cohen



At Home, They Called Him "Ottik" / David Sivor

The first time I met the late Dov Kulka was in December 1948 at the Czechoslovakian Gordonia-Maccabi Hatzair youth movement's winter camp. The camp was held at the Vlasta boarding house in the Slovakian town of Nový Smokovec in the Tatra Mountains.

A large group of young people gathered at the camp to prepare for immigration to Israel. We were 14 to 15 years old, and we are all eager to immigrate to Israel after five years of living through the Holocaust, which had been no life at all. For the first time, we met all the youths in the group who were designated for the Hevrat HaNoar (youth community) of Kibbutz Kfar HaMaccabi. Dov (who we knew then as Otto) and I were part of the group of 44 young people who left for Israel in early March 1949 and went to live on Kfar HaMaccabi. We were all idealists and eager to help establish our new homeland. We had all been through years of suffering and fear. For four hours a day, we worked according to the work schedule, and for another four we studied, mainly Hebrew. Dov and I quickly became friends. We both had a passion for sport, and Dov was particularly good at athletics. We set up a sports field between Kfar HaMaccabi and Ramat Yohanan, and we practiced there almost every day. As Dov was so outstanding in sports, he participated in a sports instructor course during our period with the Hevrat HaNoar.

For the first two years, Dov and I worked together in the agricultural fields as tractor drivers. The interesting thing is, neither of us ever talked about what we went through during the Holocaust.

The parents of young Czechoslovakian immigrants were unable to make aliya because the communist government had banned Jews from leaving for Israel. Many of us came to Israel without our surviving parents. For Dov, it was his father, Erich. Erich survived the Auschwitz concentration camp, where he, Elly (Dov's mother) and Dov were sent. Elly perished there.

In June 1955, we completed our military service in the Nahal Brigade and together, we were released from the IDF. We were offered the opportunity to visit Czechoslovakia when its government organized the Spartakiada, a mass gymnastics event in Prague. And so, we both went to visit our parents. That's when Dov and I visited his father at his home in Prague. I continued to Bratislava to visit my parents and brother, who was born after the war (my mother returned after surviving Ghetto Theresienstadt). Three weeks later, Dov, his future wife Chaya, and I returned to Israel after taking the opportunity to visit Italy. During this time, we managed to have many talks, and that's when I heard details about what Dov had gone through during the war. Dov and his mother Elly were transferred to Ghetto Theresienstadt in September 1942, when his father was taken to a camp in Germany and from there to Auschwitz. A year later, in September 1943, Dov and his mother were sent from Theresienstadt to the Auschwitz-Birkenau family camp, where they met up with his father. Incredible.

On our return from Italy, Dov and Chaya left the kibbutz, and Dov began studying at university. After he graduated, he worked mainly in historical research of the Holocaust.



Prof. Kulka in a visit to BT with Dr. Shlain and Tami Kinberg



Hevrat HaNoar (youth community) 5 of Kibbutz Kfar HaMaccabi

Dov was born on April 16, 1933 in the small town of Nový Hrozenkov in the Moravian region of Czechoslovakia. Interestingly, his father's name was Erich Dautelman, whereas his mother's name was Elly Kulka. Erich and Dov changed their surname to Kulka in her memory.

All these years, we kept in touch with Dov and Chaya, who, by the way, lived in our neighborhood in Bratislava during the years we spent in hiding during the Holocaust.

After the members of the Czechoslovakian Hevrat HaNoar left the kibbutz and went their own ways, we continued to meet up every year. Dov participated in the get-togethers every year until he passed away. Unfortunately, only 9 of the 44 youngsters we were at the time still remain.

I remember that in 1999, when Dov was 66 years old, he told me that he had cancer and had therefore decided to write his book, *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death*. It was published only in 2013 and is one of the most unique books on the Holocaust! About a year ago, while in Prague, I found his book

in a bookstore in Czech. I read the Czech original, and on my return, called Dov and arranged to visit him to ask him about a detail I had read in the book. Dov had written that his parents were separated in Auschwitz, and that he saw his mother being led away with other women, as he stood watching. Dov was about 11 years old at the time.

We met up in Jerusalem and I asked him, "How does an 11-year-old boy react after watching his mother being led to a place from which she will never return?" Dov's answer was engraved in my memory: "In such a situation, you, the child, are impervious to reactions." It was very touching.

A year ago, at the beginning of January 2020, I wanted to visit Dov and Chaya in Jerusalem, when Dov said to me, "Sushko (my nickname), please don't come, I don't feel well," and we never saw each other again. It was only on the morning he died that Chaya called me and told me that Dov had not wanted me to see him in the condition he was in then.

I am truly sad...

Dive Into The Past / Dr. Tereza Maizels and Nitsan Ravid Elias

One of the fascinating challenges in our work lies in identifying the items we receive for Beit Theresienstadt's collections with only some or no information at all. It is not only about identifying the person who created the item (sometimes the artist's usual signature as it appears on other works in the collection is missing), it is also about identifying a character or the story depicted in the painting, or for whom the item



Peter Kien

was created. As such, we cross reference the data while we catalog these items.

About a year ago, Nurit Dayag, a member of the association, brought in a watercolor portrait painted by the architect Albin Glaser without any mention of the name of the person depicted in it.

The portrait was painted in 1941. Uploading part of the photograph collection to the online archive revealed a photograph of Peter Kien, one of the most talented artists active in Ghetto Theresienstadt. Kien, born in 1919, was sent to the ghetto in December 1941, where he worked in the drafts room of the technical department. Apart from doing artwork, he also wrote literature, was involved in theatre and music, and was one of the leading figures in the ghetto's art scene. In the second half of October 1944, he was deported to Auschwitz, where he perished.

Through the ongoing process of cataloging the archives, and by placing the photograph and painting side by side, we made a discovery. Kien and Glaser, born in the same year, knew each other, and Beit Theresienstadt had a painting of Glaser by Kien. It seems they painted each other in the ghetto workshop. While dealing with requests from the archive, we were asked to make copies of wishes to Jenka and Mantzi Manuel on the occasion of their wedding—wedding wishes that are part of the Beit Terezin collection. Among the illustrated greeting



Albin Glaser, Portrait of Petr Kien

cards, there was one from the youth who worked in the vegetable garden. On the right side of the drawing, there is a signature consisting of the initials MH.

By comparing the signature to others and to the information we have on the people who worked in the vegetable garden, it seemed very likely that it was the work of Marianne Herrmann. Marianne Herrmann (Mousy), was born in 1921 and studied fashion and graphic design in Prague. In April 1942, she was sent to the ghetto, where she worked in agriculture. In her spare time, she drew and painted everyday scenes from the ghetto. In December 1943, she was sent to Auschwitz. Before she was sent to the camps, she asked a friend, Peter Erben, to take care of her paintings. After the war, Mousy and Peter met again and he returned her paintings to her.

Another item, donated to the collection by Arie Fertig, is a charm necklace. Arie Fertig, received the necklace from his mother who had been in the ghetto. The cutting technique used to create the necklace is similar to that



Arie Fertig, Necklace with 10 Brass Pendants

used in other pieces of jewelry in the Beit Theresienstadt collection. Hence, we concluded that there were probably a number of people who created different jewelry items as gifts or souvenirs in exchange for cigarettes or a chunk of bread. Some of the charms on the necklace include the medical symbol, a lice comb (typical of the ghetto due to the lice problem in the crowded rooms), a compass (perhaps as a symbol to show the way home, an expression of longing to return home and continue living) and a soup ladle.

The necklace has an important charm, a coin engraved with the word Terezin and a transport code (M), as well as a personal I.D. number (410). These personal details led us to look up the transport in question to find who the I.D. number belonged to.

We arrived at the name of the prisoner Olga Singerova, who was born on April 23, 1921. Notice the date 23.4.42 on the lower part of the coin—it appears that someone made



this pendant for her as a birthday gift. There is another charm that supports the idea that it belonged to Singerova—the last charm on the necklace, of a toilet. The toilet lid says "Olly," perhaps a pet name for Olga.



Marianne Herrmann, Good Wishes to Wedding

One of the charms is of the Czechoslovakian emblem, which means that the necklace was made by or for a Czechoslovakian, and Olga was born in Prague. The identification is not certain—we do not know for sure if someone made the necklace for her and how it came to be in the possession of the Fertig family. Arieh's daughter, Tami Horviz gave us a number of letters and we hope they will provide answers to these questions.



A pendant in the shape of a toilet lid with the name Olly on it

We would like to take this opportunity to ask for your help with collecting materials. Through the items we collect, we can continue to tell the story of Ghetto Theresienstadt, remember the victims, and preserve the memory of the Holocaust for future generations.

Book Recommendation / Talma Cohen

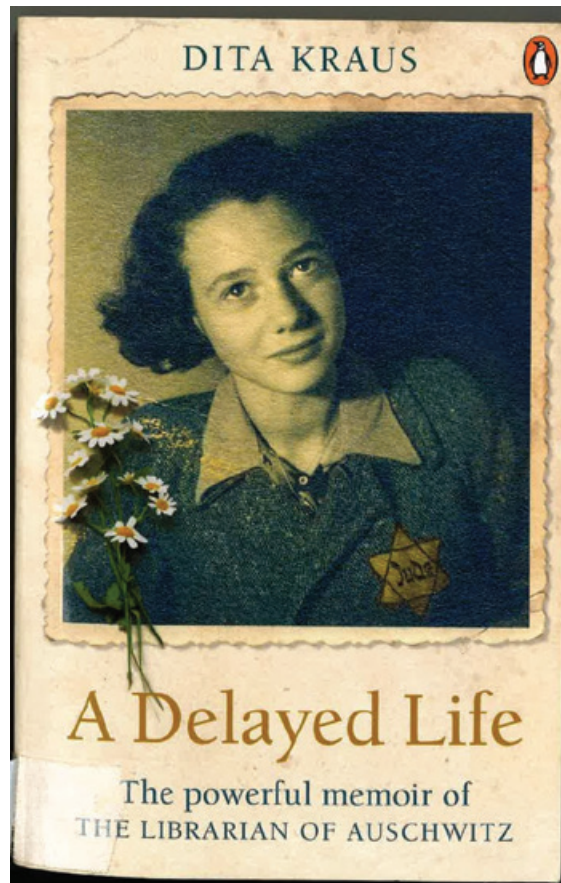
A Delayed Life, a new book by Dita Kraus

In her new memoir, Dita shares the events in her life from childhood to the present day. Her book is replete with memories and impressions of people, objects, colors, nature, and of course, the war. I read it with great interest. The reader gets to tag along with Dita as she takes her first steps in Prague and the area while learning about her family and lifestyle at the time. Her beautiful and innocent life was disrupted in childhood, when the Nazis arrived and her anxieties began. The family was exiled to a village and was later banished to Ghetto Theresienstadt. Dita writes about her family's experience when they arrived at Ghetto Theresienstadt, the harsh conditions, her experiences in Auschwitz and Hamburg, and she relates it as if it all happened just yesterday.

Her memory is excellent, and through her descriptions of her life's course, the reader feels right there with her.

Once in Theresienstadt, Dita meets Otto Kraus. After the war, they married in Prague, where they remained for several years and where their first son was born.

In the late 1940s, they immigrated to Israel and made several pit stops before arriving at Kibbutz Givat Haim, and later at Hadassim Youth Village as teachers-counselors. Growing up on Givat Haim, I knew Dita and Otto, who was also my English teacher. For me, reading this book was a fascinating and instructive experience. Dita's unique ability to tell her life story had a great impact on me.



At the end of the book, Dita writes:

Dear reader, I cannot stop here, leaving you feeling sorry for my life's sorrows and losses. Miraculous things happen to everyone and to me too, of course. Here they come. I have been lucky to reach the respectable age of eighty-nine (at the time of writing this). I am still reasonably healthy, despite being half deaf. I can travel, listen to music, drive my car, read books, paint flowers, play bridge, swim in the Mediterranean, meet old friends, and make new ones. I have recently even become the heroine of a book named The Librarian of Auschwitz.

Dita's book was published by Penguin publishing house. It was written in Czech and has been translated into German, English, Italian, Spanish, French, Dutch and Romanian. ■

Attic honeymoon in Terezin / Amira Kohn Trattner

Franta Kohn, my mother's first cousin, was deported to Theresienstadt in 1941. Both his parents died in the concentration camps. While Franta survived the brutal conditions of the death march without any food or water, he witnessed his best friend, Pavel Weinberger, die from starvation just one day before being liberated.

Franta kept Pavel's little leather bag containing broken needles, threads, shoelaces, a broken toothbrush, and a mirror. It was all that remained of him.

which, combined with having had the foresight to wed before their deportation, allowed them to have their "honeymoon" in Theresienstadt.

Regrettably, their honeymoon came to a rather abrupt end when they found out that the SS command office had moved into the premises just below their attic retreat. Gerti and Pavel decided that it was safer to move out as soon as possible, so as not to be in such close proximity to the SS command. They separated to the men's and women's barracks and rarely saw each other, but not for lack of trying.



Gerti Gans and Pavel Weinberger

Upon his return to Prague, Franta ran into Pavel's widow, Gerti Gans Weinbergerova. Gerti and Pavel, already engaged to be married before the war, pushed up their wedding date as their Rabbi advised, in the hope that they would be more likely to stay together when they were deported. Gerti and Pavel were indeed deported together, soon after their wedding. Gerti, in describing Theresienstadt, said: "At that time in 1941 and 1942, one could not walk around freely in Theresienstadt—only in guarded kolonnen (units). Only after the Jewish ghetto locked up and Czech gendarmes, SS, and German guards were present at all time could one move freely within the ghetto."

When they were deported to Theresienstadt in 1941, Gerti and Pavel were given permission to live together in a small attic apartment. Pavel held a prominent position in the ghetto,

Gerti worked in the Art Department in Theresienstadt and was asked with drawing Christmas and other holiday cards. In honor of Pavel's upcoming 26th birthday, Gerti arranged to have Lotte Popper, a painter who worked in the same art department, paint eight specific scenes that had special meaning for them. Gerti paid for these eight paintings with chunks of bread.

Gerti had planned to give her husband Pavel these paintings on his birthday, along with a birthday cake she made from bread, margarine, and sugar. On Pavel's birthday, Gerti tried to get into his barracks by volunteering with the cleaning crew, but the German guard did not allow her to enter. She was unable to see Pavel or deliver the gifts she had for him.



Here is a translation of Gerti's description of the paintings, which she wrote in 1997:



I. The arrival of a new transport (1942) in Theresienstadt, guarded by Czech gendarmes and SS. At such times, all windows had to remain completely shut.

II. An arbeiter kolonne (work unit) of young men—Jewish inmates helping to distribute people's belongings in the barracks. At that time, men and women had to reside in separate barracks.



III. Women in the basement peeling potatoes, and in the back one can see our men in the arbeiter kolonne arriving with new sacks of potatoes. This way, we could sometimes see our menfolk.

IV. At work, for example here in the W.P.A. (Wirtschaftsabteilung-Produktion) bureau, my husband (Paul Weinberger) worked there. He had to take his hat off, present the gendarme with identification papers, and request permission to be admitted to the workplace.



V. From the kasserne (barracks) for elderly people—a dead person is being taken away. (Gerti's grandparents died in Theresienstadt).



VI. Me, volunteering to a cleaning kolonne so that I could enter the barracks where my husband resided. Since it was his birthday, I made him a torte out of bread, "coffee" and sugar. That time, the gendarme was mean and did not let us into the barracks.

VII. A "landwirtschafts areite kolonne (land work unit)" that worked outside the ghetto under guard. One can see the walls, which completely confined the ghetto.



VIII. Our palace, a huge exception, where during the last year, my husband and I could live together and be completely alone. It was a former chicken coup that we could enter only by using a ladder, and we could not stand up straight in it, but we were so happy there. I made a curtain from a potato sack on which a chicken and rooster were painted.

The paintings were painted in 1942. Gerti and Pavel were deported to Auschwitz on the last transport from Theresienstadt, in October 1944. Prior to their deportation, Gerti asked a Danish woman in Theresienstadt to hold onto her small suitcase, in which the paintings were. Gerti thought that the Danish Jews would not be deported east and hoped to protect the few belongings she still had. The Danish woman agreed to hold onto Gerti's suitcase, but when she was repatriated to Denmark (as arranged by the Danish King), she was unable to take the suitcase with her.

When Gerti returned to Theresienstadt after surviving Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, she weighed 84 pounds and could barely walk. Her closest friend, Fela Urbach, remained in Theresienstadt throughout the war and told Gerti that the Danish woman had been forced to leave her suitcase behind. Fela told Gerti about a storage room in Theresienstadt with some old suitcases and a lot of junk all over the floor, where she might find her suitcase. Although she found her suitcase open and most of her belongings missing, she did find all her paintings scattered on the floor with all the junk. Gerti took them to Prague.

Upon Franta and Gerti's chance meeting on the streets of Prague, they connected through their shared sorrow over Pavel's death and the immense grief of losing their parents. They found consolation in being together.

They shared not only their love for many people and things, but for art, too. Just as Gerti had commissioned eight painting in honor of Pavel's birthday, Franta had commissioned a painting from a different artist in Theresienstadt, named Leo Haas.

In 1946, my grandparents traveled from Palestine to Prague to search for family and friends who might have survived the concentration camps. My grandfather ran into his nephew Franta, one of the few remaining survivors in our family. Franta, orphaned by the war, asked his uncle to stand in for his father at his upcoming wedding to Gerti in the town hall. Franta and Gerti remained in Prague until 1948, living under the communist regime. Eventually, Franta's uncle, who was a



Gerti and Franta Kohn at their wedding day on 10/23/1946 in Prague. With my grandfather, Franta's uncle, Victor Kohn.

diplomat in Venezuela, helped them and three other couples emigrate to Caracas.

My husband and I visited Franta and Gerti in Caracas, Venezuela almost every year, until it became too dangerous to travel there. During one of those visits, Gerti mentioned the eight paintings she had commissioned for Pavel's birthday. She took out a folder with the eight paintings of scenes from Theresienstadt painted by Lotte Popper. It turned out that just as Gerti had packed up her paintings and taken them to Prague at the end of the war when she was liberated, she packed them up again in yet another suitcase and took them with her to Venezuela when they fled the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia in 1948. She had kept them in a drawer for over fifty years. Gerti said that she would like me to have seven of them. I felt humbled and honored.

It was during that same visit that Franta told us about some of his experiences in Theresienstadt, one of which involved some paintings.

Upon arriving in Theresienstadt, Franta befriended a farmer named Walter Fuchs. Franta had brought his harmonica to Theresienstadt and often played Czech music while the other young men listened and hummed along.

One of these young men was Walter Fuchs. Franta asked him, "I have to do something to help my parents—when they come, I'll have to give them my food card. So where could I do some useful work?" Walter Fuchs told Franta he had a job for him tending the fire in the bakery. "I didn't tell him he was crazy, but I did tell him, 'First of all, I don't know how to fire anything, and secondly, I cannot eat coal.'" Walter said, "Don't worry. Just shut up and take it."

Walter Fuchs showed Franta how to light the baker's oven. He picked it up immediately. "My title was fireman, and I did it

well." Occasionally, Franta was able to go into the room where the dough was prepared by hand to help knead the dough and put it on iron plates. There were times when he was able to steal a little and hide it behind the toilet until the end of his shift. Then he would squeeze the dough between his legs and bring it to his parents and friends. Sometimes, he squeezed baked chunks of bread into his groin area because he knew that this was the only place the Germans would not physically check him. "They still had a little bit of civility," Franta said. Franta missed being at home and having some of the familiar artwork to create a homey feeling. He decided to ask Leo Haas to duplicate three of the paintings that were left behind in his family's empty apartment after they were deported to Theresienstadt. In exchange for these paintings, Franta gave Leo Haas some bread he had stolen from the bakery. One of these paintings was of a vase with three flowers.

Many years later, in a drawing he made for our family to show where he had hidden the paintings, Franta wrote:

Dear Amira,

I am trying to draw the floorplan of the attic in the Hannover kaserne, where I hid the three watercolor paintings that Leo Haas painted for me in exchange of some bread. On October 26, 1944), I rolled them up and put them on top of the wooden beams underneath the roof, not visible from the floor, naively hoping that one day I would find them again. I never returned to Theresienstadt, so I think it would be a miracle to find them after so many years and after so many people have been through that place.

Love,
Franci

My husband and I, along with my son and daughter-in-law, went to Theresienstadt in the mid-1990s in search of Franta's paintings. His sketches were clear and precise, and we found the exact location in the Hannover barracks. My son climbed into the attic and searched all the beams but there was no trace of the paintings or of anything else.

Gerti, who has just turned 100 years old, continues to live in what she calls her "gilded cage," the three-story house she and Franta built on top of a small hill on a quiet cul-de-sac, with a lovely terrace and garden that blooms with Bougainvillea and orchids.

She lives there with two Colombian sisters who take care of her. Her friend Fela, who is 95 years old, still drives and checks in on her regularly.

There, in that "gilded cage," she keeps the last painting that she commissioned Lotte Popper to paint as one of her most cherished memories: of the small attic room that she shared with Pavel for several months in Theresienstadt. ■



BT Annual Conference 2021 with the Ghetto Survivors: Eva Hefer, Tana Stern, Zvi Cohen, Gerda Steinfeld, Ruth Meissner, Eva Erben, Vera Idan, Handa Drori, Hannah Sternlicht and Dita Kraus, together with the Czech Ambassador Martin Stropnický, Tami Kinberg, Deputy Ambassador of Slovakia Ľubomír Lúčan and Daniel Shek.

Membership Dues for 2020: 70\$ single, 100\$ couples

For donations or payments:

Payment to P.E.F. by Credit card: <https://www.causematch.com/en/bterezin-2/>
 or by check made out to P.E.F. with explicit order to transfer the money to Beit Theresiesntadt - its number at the P.E.F. is 2210
 P.E.F. Israel Endowment Fund, Inc
 630 Third Avenue Suite 1501
 New York, Ny 10017
<https://www.jgive.com/new/en/ils/charity-organizations/1599>



Dapey Keshet (Newsletter) is supported by:



Claims Conference ועידת התביעות
 The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany

Beit Theresienstadt, Theresienstadt Martyrs Remembrance Association (R.A.)

Givat Haim Ihud, M.P. Emek Hefer, 3893500, Israel
 phone +972-4-6369515, fax +972-4-6369793
 e-mail: info@bterezin.org.il web: www.bterezin.org.il