

RELIGION

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Debbie Lord/Living Editor

E-mail: dlord@mobilerregister.com Phone: 219-5705

"It's not simply an historical event that we're trying to help people understand. We're trying to help people understand what happens when people stand by and do nothing."

— Paul Filben, co-chairman, Mobile's Christian-Jewish Dialogue

Diaries of the HOLOCAUST



The diary of Ilya Gerber, left, is included in Alexandra Zapruder's award-winning book, "Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust." On Dec. 4, 1942, 18-year-old Gerber drew this picture of a menorah and wrote: "Today is the second candle (of Hanukkah). There are no miracles to be seen in this century; they happened or took place only when we were not around. Apparently the luck of Jews of former times was better than our luck." Zapruder writes that it's presumed the entire family perished in the Holocaust. Gerber's diary, included in the United

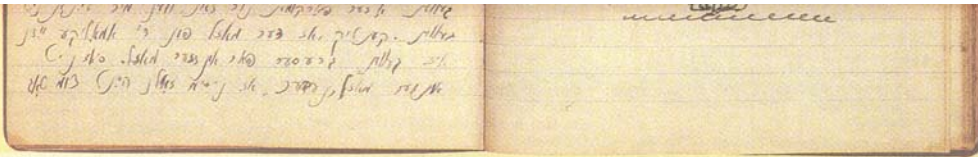


Photo courtesy of the United States Holocaust Museum

included in the United States Holocaust Museum's "Hidden History of the Kovno Ghetto" exhibit, is held by the Vilna Gaon Jewish Museum in Vilnius, Lithuania.

During a visit to Mobile Wednesday, an author shares excerpts of her book, a collection of journals penned by young people

By **KRISTEN CAMPBELL**
Religion Reporter

Three days before Hanukkah, Moshe Flinker hoped for something supernatural. But as he and his family lit the fifth candle of their menorah on Dec. 7, 1942, the 16-year-old took up his diary and wrote: "I cannot hope any longer for miracles on this Hanukkah. Every day more and more Jews are being deported — now from one place, now from another."

Less than two years later, Flinker and his parents were captured in their apartment in Brussels, Belgium, and sent to the gas chambers in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Their story, as told by young Moshe, is one of 14 such accounts Alexandra Zapruder shares in "Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust." Zapruder's collection of journals penned by boys and girls won the National Jewish Book Award for 2002 in the Holocaust category.

At 7 p.m. Wednesday, Zapruder will discuss her work at Mobile Public Library's Bernheim Hall, 701 Government St. Her visit is sponsored by Mobile's Christian-Jewish Dialogue.

"It's not simply an historical event that we're trying to help people understand," said Paul Filben, co-chairman of the dialogue. "We're trying to help people understand what happens when people stand by and do nothing."

For her part, Zapruder said she'd like to help people of all ages wrestle with the questions the young diarists asked of themselves and of their God.

"One of the best things about this body of material is that it is filled with very powerful writing about the human condition — about moral and ethical choices, about the way in which human beings live in proximity to each other under circumstances that are defined by injustice," Zapruder said.

A decade ago, the genre was one unknown to her.

After graduating from Massachusetts' Smith College with a double-major in art history and French literature in 1991, Zapruder began working as the primary researcher for the United States Holocaust Museum's exhibition for youngsters, "Remember the Children: Daniel's Story." The work required that she look for anything that might help illuminate the lives of children who lived during the Holocaust.

Her search through the Holocaust museum's library uncovered several journals written by the contemporaries of the celebrated diarist Anne Frank; each one was out of print.

"I was just completely drawn in by them," Zapruder said. "I was so surprised by the insightful and incisive observations that these diaries were filled with, and just by kind of the sense of freshness of reading a diary like that. ... Something about it was very compelling."

— **Yitzkhok Rudashevski**

Zapruder, now 33, said that before the beginning the project, she hadn't thought about the existence of works by Frank's peers. She spent the next 10 years researching and editing the Holocaust diaries of young writers; the text was published by Yale University Press in April.

Her work, however, remains unfinished.

"I sort of thought I was going to finish the book and go on with my life," she said from her home in Washington, D.C. But Zapruder said she's now contemplating a teach-

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Tuesday the 6th (April 1943)

The situation is an oppressive one. We now know all the horrible details. Instead of Kovno, five thousand Jews were taken to Ponar where they were shot to death. ...

It becomes darker and darker. Suddenly a clap of thunder, a flash of lightning and it begins to rain. The restless, sad people are whipped out of the few little streets. The rain lashes with anger as though it wished to flush everything out of the world.

Information

Alexandra Zapruder, author of "Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust," will discuss her work at 7 p.m. Wednesday at the Mobile Public Library's Bernheim Hall, 701 Government St.

Diary excerpts

Saturday, October 2, 1943

... On Rosh Hashanah and on my birthday we were extremely sad. The weather is so wonderful, as if we were in the middle of summer. But our future is bleak, very dark indeed. What will happen? Will we perhaps be evacuated because the front line is getting closer, will we be put into a harsh ghetto? Will we be killed? What will happen? This is the question on the face of everyone.

— **Miriam Korber**

September 6, 1943

... Now that I have reached the end of the first notebook of my diary, feelings of thankfulness come over me: first to our Lord, the Lord of Israel, who has protected me and my family in such terrible times, and who has given me the privilege of understanding and knowing His divine guidance and heavenly protection. ...

My Lord, so close art Thou to me and yet so far. I search for Thee constantly, my thoughts go out unto Thee, and my acts as well. My Lord, my Lord, do not abandon me. Harken to my pleading voice, and have mercy and compassion on me.

— **Moshe Flinker**

Friday, (January) 30 (1942)

... When fear crawls out in the evenings from all four corners, when the winter storm raging outside tells you it is winter, and that it is difficult to live in the winter, when my soul trembles at the sight of distant fantasies; I shiver and say one word with every heartbeat, every pulse, every piece of my soul — liberation. ... Down with any doubts. Everything comes to an end. Spring will come.

— **Elsa Binder**

Author spent decade researching and editing the Holocaust diaries

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er's edition of "Salvaged Pages" that would help educators make the book more accessible to young people.

Children, she said, might respond more strongly to the story if they were provided with details about the historical context of the diaries. It's also important to show kids how the writings frame fundamental — and timeless — questions about identity in terms of religion, nationality or culture, she said.

"They're thinking about it anyway," Zapruder said, noting that children find it useful to see how contemporaries of another era responded to similar issues.

Fifty years after the publication of "Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl," Zapruder said she thinks enough time has passed that readers might be ready to encounter the writings of other teenagers.

"She was the right person to tell the story" in the 1950s, Zapruder said of Frank. "Americans could identify with her. She was Western. ... She was accessible to them."

But once Frank's diary hit bookstores' shelves — where it sold out in a day — there wasn't room for other young writers who had different experiences, Zapruder said.

"I think Anne Frank's diary is as rich and potent and powerful as any one diary can be," she said. "There isn't a diary out there that's any better. I love her diary."

But, she said, "Diaries are seductive."

"The temptation is to think that we are entering the inner world of an individual person and that inner world or soul is somehow preserved on the page," she said. "That's never true."

During her lecture Wednesday, Zapruder said she plans to recognize the sixth night of Hanukkah by reading some of the diarists' entries penned during the Festival of Lights. Some of the children, remembering the holiday that marks the Maccabees' triumph over the Syrians around 163 B.C., wondered if God would offer them a miracle in their day.

Many of the young writers "looked at the circumstances of their lives through the lens of a very long Jewish history," Zapruder said. Like many Jewish stories, she said, Hanukkah tells of a persecuted people, the struggle for faith and the promise of redemption.

"These young people saw themselves on the front line of a thousands-and-thousands-year-old history," she said. "Very often in these diaries, these writers brought that past into their diaries and into the present. ... What it really speaks to is hope and despair."

Today, many still seek spiritual assurance that hope exists in the midst of despair, said Rabbi Steven Silberman of Mobile's Congregation Ahavas Chesed.

"What people don't realize is that the Maccabean wars led to the last intact Jewish dynasty, which stood for about 100 years until Rome conquered Israel," he said. "Not until 1948 was there a reestablished Jewish homeland."

"Since the fall of the Maccabean dynasty, outside threats have been constant and extreme. Now in its 55th year of life, my homeland again faces constant and extreme and diabolical threats of suicide-murder. The vision of Hanukkah is that someday the Jewish state will be safe and secure."

April 23 (1945)

... My God, the things that are happening here now are difficult to describe. One afternoon (on Friday, April 20), I was at work when we saw a freight train go past. There were people sticking their heads out of the window. They looked awful! They were pale, completely yellow and green in the face, unshaven, emaciated, with sunken cheeks and shaven heads, dressed in prison clothes. . . . and with a strange shine in their eyes . . . from hunger.

I ran to the ghetto straightaway (we're working outside at the moment), to the railway station. They were just getting off the train, if one can call it getting off. Very few could stand on their feet (bones, covered in nothing but skin), others lay on the floor, completely exhausted. They'd been traveling for two weeks with hardly anything to eat. They came from Buchenwald and Auschwitz (Oswiecim) . . .

One transport after another started to arrive now. Hungarians, Frenchman, Slovaks, Poles (they had spent seven years in concentration camps), Czechs, too. No one from our family. And the number of dead among them! A whole pile in every car. Dressed in rags, barefoot or in broken clogs. It was such a terrible sight that hardly anyone had seen before. I wish I could express on paper all the things that are happening inside me. But I'm not talented enough to do that.

— Eva Ginzova