

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION WEEK

Women in the Holocaust – and afterwards

By Rick Kardonne
Tribune Correspondent

TORONTO – Hannah M. Lessing, born in Israel and bred in Vienna, whose grandmother was gassed at Auschwitz, and who is now Secretary-General of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism, presented a highly informative speech on the topic of Women in the Holocaust at Temple Emanuel on Nov. 4 as part of Holocaust Education Week.

Margo Schwartz, her grandmother, was a talented pianist who was born in 1923. She chose to stay in Vienna following the German Nazi annexation of Austria in order to care for her aging mother. Hannah was close to her. On Oct. 1, 1942 Margo was deported to Theresienstadt and was then sent to Auschwitz in the autumn of 1944. She was gassed there just before the gassings were halted.

In often vivid detail, Hannah described how millions of women like Margo were murdered by the Nazis. Pregnant women were especially targeted. They were sent directly to the gas chambers. Many were sterilized after being forced into brothels to service the German soldiers. Of the many victims of euthanasia, two-thirds were women, both Jewish and non-Jew-

ish.

Under these dire circumstances, women did play a leading role in the Jewish resistance. "Anything that Jews did to prolong their lives was resistance," said Hannah. This resistance took several forms. First, there were the Jewish women couriers. Many of the resistance couriers were women, as Jewish men were easier to detect if caught, than Jewish women due to circumcisions. Nonetheless, to be a courier was extremely risky. The average life of a Jewish courier was three months.

Then there were those who did escape to Mandate Palestine and returned with the British army paratroopers to help Jewish partisans such as Hannah Senesh, who parachuted into Hungary, and Chaviva Reich, who parachuted into Slovakia. Both were captured and killed by the Germans.

According to Hannah Lessing, "a specific form of torture was directed against the Jewish women resisters by the Nazis."

There were non-Jewish women such as Andree Gulin from Belgium who hid more than 300 Jewish children in Christian homes. And, finally, there were Jewish women in Auschwitz such as the heroine Rosa Robota, who led the revolt of late 1944, which led to

the blowing up of the gas chambers and the termination of the Nazi murder machine.

After the war, not only did many of the Jewish women who survived have to justify their survival while so many others died, but also, those who chose to return to Austria were unrecognized. The political emphasis of Austria, the home of Hitler and other prominent Nazis such as Eichmann, Globocnik and Seys-Inquart, was against the Soviet occupying army, not amends for the Nazi past. Denazification was a slow process, even after the Red Army left Vienna in the early 1950s. This was partly due to the fact that the US, UK, and for that matter the USSR assumed that Austria was a victim of Hitler, not a willing collaborator.

Only after the election of Kurt Waldheim as president of Austria in the 1980s and subsequent internal controversy following world condemnation, did Austria come to terms with its role as a willing collaborator with its native son Hitler. Subsequent chancellors such as Franz Panitzky and president Heinz Fischer took an interest in reparations to the Jews. The result of these overdue amends was the establishment, under Austrian government auspices, of the National Fund for the Republic of Austria for Victims of



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National Socialism under Lessing's stewardship. The fund has not only given the survivors a set amount of \$6,000 each, regardless of where they may live, from the government of Austria, but it's also involved in educational projects, support of Jewish communities in Vienna (which now has a thriving Jewish population of 8,000), and in smaller towns such as Linz, Graz and Salzburg.

Austrian Consul General to Toronto Karl Schmidt and Austrian financial government representative Peter Storer – who admitted that "although full compensation to the survivors will not be possible, there is now a recognition that Austria was co-responsible for the Holocaust" – attended Lessing's speech.

Stabbing attempt thwarted

HEBRON – A Palestinian girl tried to stab an Israeli soldier at a military post in Hebron.

Israel Defence Forces soldiers confiscated the 17-year-old attacker's 2.5-inch knife at the army outpost in the city's Tel Rumeida area and held her for questioning.

There were no injuries.

61 'eligible' MKs sign petition for Hebron

JERUSALEM (Arutz-7) – As Jews worldwide read aloud in synagogues this past Sabbath the Biblical account of Patriarch Abraham's purchase of land in Hebron, 61 MKs signed a petition in favour of Jews' right of purchase there.

The petition was written as a result of the case currently before the Supreme Court, in which the right of Jews to purchase land in Hebron has come under question. The ultra-left Peace Now organization demands that a family be evicted from its home on Jewish-owned land that, under Jordanian rule, became an Arab market. Peace Now also demands that a room added on to a Jewish house in the same area be razed.

The petition, which was written before last Sabbath, begins with a mention of last Sabbath's Torah reading: "This coming Sabbath, we will read in the synagogues the portion known as Chaye Sarah, where we read the story of our father Abraham's purchase of the Machpelah Cave for its 'full price.' This was the first Hebrew land purchased in the Land of Israel, and it led the way for generations to come. Even then, our forefather Abraham knew, as did other nations of the world, the value of 'the right to purchase,' and certainly would not discredit it.

"As of now, the undersigned, Members of Knesset from various parties, call on the government of Israel to honour the 'right of purchase' of Jews in the City of the Patriarchs, and to allow Jewish settlement in those homes and lands which were purchased for their 'full price,' including:

- houses and lands pur-

chased by Jews over the generations which were stolen as a result of the 1929 massacre [in which 67 Jews were slaughtered in their homes and synagogues by their Arab neighbours], and

- buildings purchased recently for their 'full price,' for example, *Beit HaShalom* [Peace House] between Hebron and Kiryat Arba."

The signatories include all MKs of the Likud and National Union parties, and all the United Torah Judaism MKs, except for one who is abroad. Among the coalition parties (ministers and deputy ministers are not permitted to sign petitions) all the eligible MKs of Shas and Gil (Pensioners) signed, 7 of 9 non-ministerial Yisrael Beiteinu MKs, and 8 of Kadima's 17 eligible MKs.

The Kadima MKs who signed are Zev Elkin, Tzachi HaNegbi, Yoel Hasson, David Tal, Michael Nudelman, Ronit Tirosh, Avigdor Yitzchaki and Otniel Shnellor.

Hebron, the petition states, is the city in which the Jewish monarchy commenced with King David, and where Jewish settlement is anchored by ancient historic privilege, by contemporary government decisions, and by recent international agreements. Mass visits of hundreds of thousands of Jews each year prove that the Jewish people vote with their feet in favour of a continued Jewish presence in Hebron. "Therefore," the petition concludes, "there is no justification for the state of Israel to prevent Jews from actualizing their 'right to purchase' those properties that were legally purchased for their 'full price.'"

Domestic Contracts are not Fool Proof

Imagine Rebecca falling in love with a very wealthy older man. His children insist that before marriage she must sign a domestic contract and promise not to make any claim for support or division of property under either the *Family Law Act* or the *Succession Law Reform Act*. Rebecca is young, in love and knows that this man loves her. She agrees. Fast forward twenty years later and Rebecca's husband has died. He has left her nothing in his Will and she has no means of support. Is there anything Rebecca can do? Maybe.

There are two very relevant pieces of legislation in Ontario which may provide Rebecca with a possible window of opportunity. In determining whether to grant support applications under the *Succession Law Reform Act* the court has discretion to make "... an order, despite any agreement or waiver to the contrary". In dealing with applications under the *Family Law Act*, the courts are less likely to interfere when spouses made agreements unless its results are unconscionable or the applicant spouse is on social assistances or if the other spouse defaulted in the support payments contemplated under the agreement.

So how do the courts apply the discretion granted to them by the legislation? There was a 1985 Ontario case, *Re Goldhar*, where the couple entered into an agreement prior to marriage. Mr. Goldhar had three sons from his first marriage and upon his death he bequeathed the bulk of his

estate to them. Unfortunately, Mrs. Goldhar was in need and her inheritance was not enough to support her. The Ontario Divisional Court ruled that *the Domestic Contract was only one factor the court had to take into account in dealing with Mrs. Goldhar's support application under the Succession Law Reform Act*.

The purpose of that legislation was "remedial" and should receive a broad interpretation. Mrs. Goldhar needed an additional \$17,000.00 each year to make ends meet and despite the existence of a contract, in which she agreed not to ask for support, the court awarded her that support. Despite howls of protest from academics who found fault with the decision, the courts have remained steadfast in applying the remedial provisions to help dependants in need.

In my view, Domestic Contracts are only part of the solution for parties entering into marriages. The best way to discourage litigation is for estate planning to include a fair support scheme for the surviving dependants. Too often the disputes cannot be resolved and end up in court. This is especially so when family members are at odds with one another and believe that they are being treated unfairly. Despite the temptation to jump to conclusions, it would be a mistake to substitute this review of the topic for substantive legal advice. For those considering this option, there is no replacement for a competent solicitor's own research, analysis and judgment.



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JUSTICES OF THE PEACE Ontario Court of Justice

(i) Central West Region (ii) West Region

The Justices of the Peace Appointments Advisory Committee invites applications for full-time justice of the peace appointments to the Ontario Court of Justice.

For a detailed description of the position and the application form, please visit the Ontario Courts website at www.ontariocourts.on.ca or contact:

Janice Cheong, Coordinator, Justices of the Peace Appointments Advisory Committee
720 Bay Street, 3rd Floor, Toronto, Ontario M5G 2K1
Telephone: 416-326-4957

Applications must be received by 4:30 p.m. on Friday, November 23, 2007. If applying for both regions, you must submit separate applications.

Justices of the peace should be reasonably representative of the population they serve.