

Liberation Recalled

by Eliot Katz

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Liberation Recalled

1

O what heavenly mess we find on earth today! O divine poverty and fright! From which flowery seeds did such crime and disease spring? Walt Benjamin wrote that the angel of history faces the past while propelled toward the future. The wrestling match for history's meaning takes place past present future at once! But what if the match is fixed? What if the rules have been encrypted and locked in secret CIA vaults? What if the contest has been usurped by carnies dressed in xenophobic costumes screaming into microphones on Saturday morning TV? What if the angel's neck got twisted this past decade? What if 1990s angel is two-faced? What if the winds stopped blowing from back to front and now swirl? What if the ultrapostmodernists are right and history no longer a totality of continuities and discontinuities, but now isolated seashells we pick at random self-interest on any clean beach suffering only mild decay? When does spring arrive then? In 1933, propaganda chief Goebbels pronounced, "The year 1789 is hereby eradicated from history." Twelve years later, it was put back into the texts—from two fronts. Can you find it?

2

—Mom, tell me about your family.
—We were in our family ten people.
In 1944 Hitler came into
Hungary and we lived in a city
called Oradea Mare-Nagyvarad.
We were a family of ten, eight children
and my parents, six girls and two boys. I
was the oldest and the youngest was
about three years, two or three years. And when

Hitler came in, what he did, in a very short time, he created a ghetto. All the Jews had to go in one place to live. What they did, the Germans, they took out all the Jewish people from one district and then they took out gentile people from another district. The gentile people had to get out of that district and they put in the Jews there. And they put in one room two families. Our neighbor was a family of ten and we were ten, so 20 people were put in one room. And there was no furniture. The room was all empty. It was a bit of a big room but we almost slept on top of each other. And the kids had to sleep there. My parents had to sleep there. And we lived in that ghetto in that house about three or four months.

—This was in Hungary?
—That was in Hungary, yes, in '44.
—Tell me if any questions I ask, you don't feel like answering.
—Right, go ahead.

3

After a holocaust, who counts the breathless bodies
lying shackled
beneath slaveship floorboards?
Who invents theory justifying tourists' annihilation
of a newly visited continent's
outstretched-hand inhabitants?
After a quarter of its people x'd out by U.S.-backed
Indonesian army, how many American PhDs
can even find East Timor on a map?

What recovery path will end the full-spine shivers
at the word “soviet” felt
by so many who believed in utopian ideals?
After the extermination of European Jewry—
after this holocaust—how does one
learn to sing in a shower again?

4

—What did your parents do?
—My father, Elias, was a businessman
dealing with fruit, wholesale fruit. And my mother,
Freida, stayed home because she had kids, almost
every two years another baby.
—What about your sisters and brothers?
—We were eight kids. I was the oldest. Three
of us survived Auschwitz and were always
together. The younger kids they killed in
Auschwitz the day they took us to Auschwitz—
There was Etu, Bila, and Tsira, the
youngest kids, and then we had two brothers,
Srul and Mandy.

5

Everything one sees in this world comes from complex interrelations
between subjective impulses, shared social experiences, and ideas
gleaned from those that seem the most sensible thoughts studied up
till now—
O ye long lines of lyric bards from whom the stuff of delightful dreams
and nightmares are made, where in this thixotropic ecocidal post-
post-post emergency room ward does one find the Solidarity Wing’s
concealed exit door to sneak a glimpse of cleansed imagination’s
Radiant Orchard reality core?

—What did you like to do as kids?

—We all played soccer in school. That was the most popular game in Europe. And we played with buttons. We had no money so we played with buttons, and we used to cut off buttons from the clothes so we had buttons to play with, which was fun.

—When you were young, did you have political interests?

—No, never. In that time, as I remember, Jewish people couldn't vote so nobody was interested in voting. But I was always outgoing. I always tried to fight, bringing money into the house even when Hitler didn't let us work.

So one time a German person went out and asked my father if he has big girls, if they would like to work, and she would teach them a trade. It was a woman. My father says yes, I have 12, 14 year-old kids.

And if you wanna hire them, go ahead.

So they brought us there to this lady and she taught us how to do dresses with a machine. Hands and knitting things. And right away, just one time she showed us and we did it.

—When did you and your family first become aware that the Nazis were coming to power?

—Probably in 1935-36.

The Jewish people couldn't have a radio.

So we used to gather in a gentile house and they had a radio. We weren't even allowed to listen to it but we—one person—always stayed in the street watching, and we listened to the foreign radios to see what's going on. And that's

the way we found out how the Jews were going to be persecuted and what they're doing in Russia, and the Germans getting ready to take over all these countries. And that's how it started, the pogroms. They called it pogroms. Then the gentile people who lived there already with us treated us very badly. We were afraid to go out, and then the Jews had to wear stars, a Jewish star. —And what were some of the responses to this? Were people trying to organize or did forces seem too powerful? —No, my brother Altasrul—they got organized, the kids, the boys. And we were in Hungary and the borderline between Hungary and Rumania wasn't too far. And then the kids got together and they took other Jews across the border, whoever wanted to run to Rumania. And then my brother came back. And sometimes he wasn't home at night and said he was at his friend's house. But then he told the truth, what he did with the other kids, crossing the border to Rumania. Because on the border nobody was shooting yet. The border was open. So one day he came home and he said to my father: Let's pack and run away because they're gonna kill the Jews. Let's go to Rumania—because Rumania didn't let in Hitler so fast. In Hungary, they called him in. But my father didn't want to run away. He was afraid they were gonna shoot us on the way. Where can we go with ten people, 8 kids. But Srul says: I just took other people with 10 kids—and not just one family. But my father always was

afraid. And then he says, okay, you're not going out of the house no more. Srul said, Look dad, I'm gonna run away and I'm not coming back and I'll be in Rumania. He wouldn't even let him out the house. He wouldn't let him do that. So we all came into Auschwitz. Because it went so fast.

—Did you ever hear what happened to those people who were sent into Rumania?

—They probably lived. They never had a ghetto.

—So your brother helped save a lot of people?

—Yes, yes, yes, but we still don't know what happened. Then later on, near the end, some people tried to run to Israel—but the English people controlled Palestine and they stopped those people. They wouldn't let them go there. So they shipped them God knows where. So it wasn't easy.

7

Speaking to SS leaders, Poznan, October 4th, 1943, Himmler: “The SS man is to be guided by one principle alone: honesty, decency, loyalty, and friendship toward those of our blood, and to no one else. What happens to the Russians or Czechs is a matter of total indifference to me.... Whether other peoples live in plenty or starve to death interests me only insofar as we need them as slaves for our culture.... I want to tell you about a very grave matter in all frankness. We can talk about it quite openly here, but we must never talk about it publicly.... I mean the evacuation of the Jews, the extermination of the Jewish people.... Most of you will know what it means to see 100 corpses piled up, or 500 or 1,000. To have gone through this and—except for instances of human weakness—to have remained decent, that has made us tough. This is an unwritten, never to be written, glorious page of history.”

###

To defy Himmler and bring history's secrets
into animated light:

 does this build empowerment
alongside the overwhelming anguish
 from which one never
 fully recovers?

Should we remember Julius Streicher
 whose posters proclaimed
 without modern hesitation

“The Jews are our misfortune”?
 Wilhelm Marr, 1879 founder
 of pre-Nazi League of Anti-Semites?

Lanz von Liebenfels, 1901 author
 of *Theozoology*—founder
 of Aryan cult worship?

Does it help prevent future repeat to recollect cascadingly
 those who laid the asphalt path
 to annihilation's ovens?

Or does it simply provide the killers another
 fresh-poured concrete platform
 from which to throw their knives?

###

In his newspaper, *Attack*, 1928, Goebbels wrote: We go into the Reichstag in order to acquire the weapons of democracy from its arsenal. We come as enemies! Like the wolf tearing into the flock of sheep, that is how we come.

###

Was it possible to realize at the time
 what a tragic forewarning
 this would become?

How does one rebut the oft-repeated error
that Hitler was democratically elected
to dictatorship
without tearfully remembering
Article 48
of the Weimar Constitution?
Or how a mass grave could be called “Operation
Harvest Festival,” a lofty Orwellian label
designed to produce consent
so many who read the papers
and many who pulled the triggers
could continue to deny & deny
even as they looked
each other
indirectly in the eye?
Who that remembers Walter Darre as inventor
of phrase “blood and soil” will say fascism
sprang from too much reason?

###

Let’s not forget to praise resisters— Julius Leber traveling
the country to thread a more tightknit left,
Sophie Scholl & her brother assembling youth
into a White Rose of refusal, Pastor Niemoller
& Jesuit Alfred Delp urging clergy
into emergency leagues,
New Beginnings, founded by SPD and KPD dissidents
pushing the Popular Front, Red Orchestra’s
outspoken intellectuals, Warsaw Ghetto uprisers
Wallenberg deflecting death for thousands,
rebels & rescuers, known & unknown,
the brave who succeeded,
and the countless who failed.

###

What does remembering names and dates
have to do with the feel
or burning of human flesh?

Fill in these blanks, dear reader:

January 30, 1933 Hitler is made _____
_____, the Reichstag fire decree gives Hitler
national emergency powers

March 23, 1933 the _____ Act abolishes the Reichstag

April 17, _____ the first anti-semitic law removes Jews
from civil service posts

May 2, 1933, SA and ___ take over labor union offices

The book _____ occur May 10, 1933

July __, 1933, German one-party state proclaimed on
anniversary of French storming the Bastille

June 30, 1934 final consolidation of _____.

###

8

—So, then the war started 1939.

How did you hear about the war?

— Then it already was in the papers
all over, that the war is on and Hitler
is gonna come in and take all the Jews.

Take them to work. We never thought, I mean,
the word was they were not gonna kill us,
just gonna take the Jews and take them to
work in Germany because they need
workers. And we were gonna be real well off.

But that was all lies. And then we were in a ghetto three or four months and then they picked us up one morning and they put us all in these cattle cars and took us

9

My first Middlesex Interfaith Partners with the Homeless Outreach Center client was a woman with hand smashed by automated conveyor belt sent mistakenly on superhuman high speed chase. I learned to escape Daedalean social service mazes working immense complications of her case. I called the Welfare Board, who referred me to Homeless Prevention, who transferred me to Youth and Family Services who gave me a phone number disconnected two weeks ago. She was an assembly-line full-timer with minimum wage and no medical insurance. Disability checks were delayed by bureaucratic error yet Eviction Brigade was charging with not a moment's hesitation. Tomorrow, she would be locked out despite a full jingling key ring. County Welfare had treated her case number as if a smashed hand the newest unidentifiable communicable plague. In my office, her two boys were loud and rowdy. When I wasn't looking, one took a dump on our waiting room carpet. The boys were unruly even in guarded government offices where weekly they watched mom carrot-and-sticked like the family child. After watching mom degraded over and under, was it social context that created such uncontrollable kids? Was it Poverty's Pressurecooker? Alienating schools? So-called religious institutions? TV daily news broadcasts showing only disconnected random violence first dozen minutes every channel on the dial? Or was it fundamentally the family's fault, inadequate weak-willed mom, tragic young father death crash, untreated disordered genes filling these kids' torn Levis? How to be sure without correcting social ills? Or do nothing but read the paper four years later about an 18-year old with familiar name shooting a college student in the back ten minutes from inner city where violence thought to be contained?

—Could you tell who were the SS and who were Hungarians?

—Sure, the SS men were in uniforms.

They had these, uh, swastikas, on their clothes, and the Hungarians were not the soldiers or police—just regular people.

—But the Hungarian police were not resisting? They were helping?

—They were cooperating, cooperating.

They were helping the Germans to get us faster out.

—So then your whole family was put on one train car?

—Yes, we were all together in one wagon, in one train. But not just one family:

They pushed us all in there. But one day they said: Okay, now we're gonna take you all.

And it was before Passover. My poor

mother got together the Passover

dishes for taking into the ghetto

because Passover's coming. That was like

April. Then, they didn't let us have dishes.

They let us have whatever clothes we had—

to put everything on—so we took nightgowns,

dresses. They didn't let us have any packages,

just like one suitcase, and we took that suitcase

with us and we went. And that train stopped

in Auschwitz. Everything was lighted up.

But we didn't see any people around,

just wires. The whole thing was wired around

and we saw these chimneys—that was the

crematorium. And the light was on.

We didn't know what the hell was going on

and when we came off the trains then the SS

men were there. They put the men and the boys on one side and the women and children, the girls, on another side. And my mother had three little girls, the babies, so I went there to help her pick up the little girl—helping with my sister. The SS men took away my sister, dropped her to my mother. And they took my two other sisters and myself in one spot, because we were older so we can go to work. And the other kids went on the one side and they went all right away in the crematorium.

11

The shape
of the world

changes

too rapidly
for new

graphite globes
to keep up.

Old globes
break

into odd-shaped
stenotopic fragments

swept under
digitally designed

empyrean/imperial
handmade rugs

of modern art
museums

where gleaming
nonetheless

they fetch millions

from investors
in contemporary antiques

while those bound
by land

and clocks
try our best

with 3-D glasses
to read the shape

of unpredictable maps
to follow.

12

—And you saw them walking away?

—Yeah, just walking a little bit, like to
here from across the street.

—That was the last time you saw...?

—That's the last I saw my parents, yes, my
mother and father.

—I remember once you told me that there
was an older woman when you were coming

into Auschwitz who saw the smoke in the chimneys and said that's the crematorium and no one believed her.

—Well, they took us in that night. They gave us a bath, gave us showers, and my sister

Ann they took away separate to give her a shower. And then Marcy and I stayed for the next group to go under the shower. Then I see my sister in another group, all shaved up and naked.

So I said to Marcy, look they put us with the crazy people. Because, in Europe, the crazy people they shaved. They had no hair. And then I went a little closer and that was Ann, my sister. Then they put us there. They shaved us. They took all the clothes away, shoes, everything. And coats.

In April it was still cold. And they only gave us a striped dress; that's all we had. No underwear, no nothing. And then we were sitting in that group all together.

A thousand girls shaved and it was cold and then the SS men—were ladies SS, too, and men—then the ladies came and did something, like with a sponge, and sponged us here and there and all over where hair was, we shouldn't get lice. But it was very painful, it was like ...

I don't know ... burned. It burned like. And then we waited. Then they gave us wooden shoes, no stockings, no nothing, and put us up in a camp. No, not a camp, in a barn, where the cows lived. They took out the cows and we went into a barn. And then a thousand people lived in one barn. And then they had like this room each one, and six of us got one blanket. So we had to sleep on top of each other with one blanket. We were

freezing and crying, but we couldn't do nothing.

—And this was your first night?

—First night.

13

what does it mean to work for justice in your home country as the planet becomes one huge imf cd rom gatt internet? what's a nation in a world where electroshock treatments cross borders with unstoppable ease? when even the moon's shadow holds within it crack epidemics and centuries of ethnic conflict? when back on the sun, it's haymarket square year-round and hangings haunt every uranium street corner? when extinct lions roar through evolutionary cyberspace dreams and revolutionary facial creams? when incurable immune viruses swim neglected mercury rivers and scapegoats are once more cheaper than fiberglass guns or imitation butter?

by the time our packed new brunswick vans rolled into 1987 boston, i had come to believe rosa luxemburg, martin luther king and abbie hoffman could squeeze behind the wheel of doctor williams's car. rutgers students were organizing a countrywide convention of student activists & i went, with my now ex-partner, to the first planning meeting as a thirty-year old supportive observer. it was a wild & woolly intellectual affair. the rutgers contingent, mostly democratic left, proposed accountable structures. new england students, more anarchistic, argued any national structure would be *a priori* oppressive. they favored regional organizing, consensus decisions, no leaders accountable or not. i wondered why take on a nectorous national project if against it from initial swig. why limit to region when dominant powers reaching for more international strangleholds? won't unaccountable elites be born if no accountable ones elected? at one point, rutgers' most well-read student remarked in frustration: i can't believe you're making the same foolish mistake foucault made in '68. you say that bourgeois justice is not justice at all. but justice is justice. we need to expand it. that sounded pretty good to me, but i hadn't read foucault yet. the 40 resplendent hearts here gave me hope for america's next. but the right had money to measure & bind. the left: differing values & discourses to debate

& decipher. america's rightward march could only be halted by more unity than seemed likely anytime soon.

beginning 1989, gusts of change toppled the east bloc's most intractable pillars. then mandela's prison door blew unexpectedly open. maybe change will spring sudden here, too, perhaps national public policy gripping down to prepare for awakening. for the moment, u.s. seems a sisyphian mass hooked to cold war's ironclad anchor even while elevated experts pronounce done-deal victory. meaningful social change won't be easy. it'll take democratic experiment. not a cult of the new, but perhaps a new third party. maybe the new party or campaign for a new tomorrow or 21st century party or labor party advocates or the greens or the blue horse cafe, one awe-inspiring day we'll see where coalitional momentum develops.

one can repair the cosmos by anything one does, even listening to the breath of the atmosphere unwinding. but in politics, as abbie used to say, it's never enough merely to be on the side of the angels.

14

—And by the first night, it was just you and your two sisters?

—Yes, my mother and father were gone.

Then the next morning when we got up...

—This was still April?

—It was April, before Passover. Maybe it was already Passover. But then

when we woke up, then each barrack—about a thousand people was a barrack—each had two ladies over us, Polish ladies.

Because they were there already so many years. Two ladies had to take care of us and then when we got up in the morning we asked: “Where are my parents? Where can we meet them?” And then the chimney was the flame going out and they said, “They're in Himinlaga.”

“What do you mean Himinlaga?” That means they’re in Heaven. And there they’re burning. That’s what they, she, told us. They were very angry at us.

—I think you first told me that people didn’t believe her when she said that.

—No, nobody believed it. We thought she was so mean. Because she was mean to us. She was very angry at us. How could intelligent people figuring without a fight to come here? Why didn’t you struggle..., put up a fight and don’t come here? We just, we just went literally like lambs. Because we were promised to go to work. And we never went to work. As we went in the wagon—my father was in World War I. He recognized the mountains through the little window the train has, that these mountains are Polish mountains. We aren’t going to work this way, we’re going to Poland.

—So you thought you were going to Germany?

—We thought we were going to Germany to work, and meantime we went to Poland. Auschwitz was Poland.

—Had you heard of Auschwitz before?

—Never. No, no, nobody heard of Auschwitz. We couldn’t *believe* it. Who would believe *that*?

15

With hundreds of countries, thousands of cities, millions of communities, and billions of people on this beautiful blue planet, how do three major TV stations end up showing the same news items night after endless random bullet night?

Is that why they call those faces turning serious for the camera “anchorpersons”?

Along the *Nightline* news van's bumpy ride where genocides and nonevents battle for their labels—
Inside GE/NBC executive suites where new ways to neglect nuclear cleanup are daily devised—
Amid Republican congress's stealthy new chambers where gold-throned welfare collectors wandering lazy streets with metal detectors, undocumented outer space workers clogging the city's hospital corridors, affirmative action magazines playing on too many virtual reality screens, sharp-toothed feminist shadows dimming Super Bowl 38's quarterback battles, happy couples with two moms building purple army-morale bombs, and Karl Marx's nationally endowed & endeared museum-exhibited expressionist beard all vie for Scapegoat Mythic Model of the Year;
where today's youth find a sexy safe peace-dividend place to celebrate their bright future proclaimed by smiling punditry at Cold War's end?

16

—How long were you and your two sisters at Auschwitz?

—When we got to Auschwitz, we were there six months. There, there was no work. Every day we had to get up in the morning, staying in line. And when we got very skinny— we had no food. We got skinny, and they always picked out the skinny people to go to the crematorium. We went once a week—once a day—we had to bring in food with some big cans to feed the girls. And bringing from the kitchen to our barrack was like a half an hour walk. When they gave us underwear, we took potato peelings and we hid them, hiding them in our underpants. And then we washed them and that's what we cooked. And that's why we were a little bit stronger than other people.

—What kind of food did they give you each day?

—Each day they gave us, let's say, a can from here to the bottom, a big can.
—So that's about a 2-foot can?
—Yes, and there they gave us soup, potatoes, sometimes a little meat. Not many times.
—So they gave you a 2-foot can with soup and potatoes for how many people?
—Well, not just one, but we had to go and bring it in for all the thousand girls. Quite a few people had to carry this. But the weak kids couldn't carry that so we had to volunteer, the strongest ones, to carry that from the kitchen to the barrack and then they gave us a little dish. We had to keep our own dish, and they gave us a little soup. One bowl of soup a day. Just one soup a day. And then they gave us like a loaf of bread cut into four pieces. And each girl got one quarter of a piece of bread a day.

17

When American bombs tornadoed Iraq the day after MLK's birthday, a hundred of us met at New Brunswick's YWCA to mourn, plan protests, and watch large-screen TV as Bush's latest Orwellian speech invoked Tom Paine to justify homicidal adventurism. While Pentagon spokesmen tried on more alibis than striped neckties, the nation's hawks knew in their fanged hearts this attack was motivated by oil profits and military macho. After all, this the same Saddam, Sodom, or Say-damn—pronunciation by politicians and press dependent on party affiliation and whether war had already begun—that Bush & Bergen-Belsen-SS-grave-wreath-laying Ronald Reagan funded years despite a clearly traceable trail of monstrous poison gas footprints.

Iraq was viciously criminal to invade Kuwait, but I supported longer U.N. sanctions and talks, not short spin-cycle bombing of thousands in the name of defending ethically dry desert monarchs of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. King George would have rolled over in his

overthrown grave watching 20th-century American military camouflage protecting Saudi's public guillotine feats and royal misogynist streets where women not even allowed to drive a car. With numerous bombing "sorties" reported, it was evident to all at the Y that thousands of Iraqi civilians and young draftees were getting killed, but all one could find on any TV channel was mechanical technobabble about college-educated bombs and a few tearless trails of "collateral damage." Cable TV had added dozens of stations to the digital dial, but not one mixed humane ingredients into First Night's recipe. Computerized maps showed take-off routes and planned paths of ABD bombs that generals assured us were about to pass their doctoral exams. Not one picture of a body at eternal rest, as if newest television technology had developed war photo filters to keep out the uninvited dead. Once the bombs flew, almost no news reports noticed ten thousand grassroots USA groups just saying no to this war. Both politicians and press had learned Vietnam's lessons very well and all wrong.

At anti-war meetings, we brainstormed plans for sanity-enhancing acts. Agreement against war was clear, but so were differences about tactics, strategies, U.N. sanctions, and whether Saddam was a mass murderer or a misunderstood freedom fighter standing tough against U.S. imperialism, a poor kitty defense I didn't understand. We decided to put the ought-to-be-easy questions aside for the night and start a peaceful march down Hub City's George Street. Unlike prewar marches, this time the local press didn't show. With war on, public tolerance was shrinking fast. Half the polled prewar public opposed war, but tonight yellow ribbons were flying all over town. Many on the sidelines had cheered our earlier marches. Hecklers had kept their distance. Now, even the cars grew mean. One Cadillac at my back gave my heel an antithetical whack. Right then I knew my earlier public prophecy of mass protests if bombs dropped would prove my poorest political prediction yet. Other marchers were stunned by cars traveling even greater velocities. This was going to be a tough war to stop. We didn't know how long the war would last. Pentagon propaganda had exaggerated Iraq's Republican Guard to epic proportions to conjure illusion of a fair fight. Threats of Iraq using chemical & biological weapons were hurled. 690,000 young Americans were coerced to take experimental vaccines & pills in amnesiac violation of Nuremburg's bills. This would be a war without a neat ending. That prediction remains.

After it became clear Iraq's army held no magic hammers, Saddam offered a preground war proposition—to withdraw from Kuwait on promise of future Mideast peace talks—that was bushwhacked. The world's most expensive tanks then drove over breathing draftees. Some of Uncle Sam's smartest bombs forgot to hand in their homework. Like a good company doctor, the press kept the goriest details strictly confidential. Patriotic antimissile missiles created unfriendly fire that few had inclination to describe. The body bags that did return snuck around concerto press conferences. Iraqi death counts were painted with neo-abstract brush strokes. Bush's popularity soared and even Democrats volunteered standing ovations.

After war's end, Saddam's Mideast peace talks were held without him. Gulf War Syndrome, with muscle weakness, sores, fevers, hair loss, joint immobility, burning genitals and odd cancers may be caused by the vaccines, chemical or biological weapons, uranium-tipped missiles, even oil well fires, who the hell knows? U.S. Gulf War casualty figures thus remain open-ended, while military manufacturers can once again afford to send their kids to private schools.

18

—And were you asked to do work? You said that you were good at sewing.

—No, no, no, we never did anything.

We were sitting there waiting to die or take us to work. Because every day there were people going out.

—In *Schindler's List*, there were a lot of lines.

Were they taking people out into lines and looking people over each day?

—Yes, every day, yes.

—I remember you once telling me that Dr. Mengele used to be there sometimes.

—Right. We had to go out 6 o'clock in the morning, staying naked in the line.

He came over to check who is skinny, who is strong. And then, if he saw some young, good-looking girls, blond hair and nice hands, he took them out. Then he gave us this tattoo. Everybody wanted to have the tattoo, the number, because whoever got a number was hoping to go to work one day. But we were too skinny. He never wanted to give us a number to go to work. And then he took them out at night, these beautiful girls, and put them in one barrack, separating sisters from mothers. And they, poor girls, were crying. And then he took them out to the soldiers, to the front, the good looking girls, and he gave them nightgowns. One girl, we found out afterwards, she wrote a note and left these notes in the barracks. She was the oldest person there. A Polish man who knew what these SS men were doing when they put them separate, the beautiful girls, saw what was going on. He managed to bring in poison for these kids, for these beautiful girls. And this one person gave all the kids, told them what's gonna happen, and gave them all poison before the Germans came—to take this poison. They took it and they all died. So in the morning when he came to pick up these girls they were all dead.

—How many were there?

—Hundreds, hundreds. And then in the morning, we found out they were all dead. And then we saw we had to take out the bodies in a group where the apple, or I don't know, who the hell...

—Did you just put them in a pile?

—In a pile.

—Dad, can you tell me about your life during the Depression?

—When I was younger, I never knew we were in the Depression. I knew we didn't have a lot of money, but we didn't know any difference. I knew it was a major problem one day when I was probably about 10 or 12 years old, and my younger brother was playing with a half dollar that my parents had left on the table. And he dropped it between some cracks in the wall. It was a major thing that we should find it. I remember that vivid incident so I assume we were quite poor because a half dollar was so important to my parents that they got excited about losing it.

—Do you remember whether your father liked the New Deal or Franklin Roosevelt?

—He was not strong on politics. Politics was something that was in the background and not something in the forefront.

—Was that true about you as well?

—It was true about me as well. I had no appreciation for politics—right, left, middle. At that time, we were too busy earning a living, and worrying about food on the table. And I was worried about school.

—Where did you get your compassionate temperament from?

—I think part of it is attitude. My parents were open-minded toward people and did not have any major prejudices. They treated everyone

like they would want to be treated themselves.
And I did a lot of reading even
in high school.

—Once the war began, families could not
easily escape world affairs. You joined
the army, right?

—I volunteered for the army in
'43. And went in, actually,
after two years of college. I served three
years. I did basic training at Edgewood
and went overseas from Oakland,
California, on a boat that zigzagged
over the Pacific Ocean until
we got to New Guinea. I was in New
Guinea maybe about three or six months.
And then went on what was called, I believe,
an LST boat—a boat with a
very flat bottom, such that when we went
from New Guinea to the Philippines the
boat would rise up and slap the water
until it looked like it would fall apart.
As we were traveling, you could see welders
on other boats in the convoy. And it
was not a comfortable feeling. I'm
not enthused about cruises or going
on the water since then—I'm allergic
to going on water. I was in the
Philippines, Manila, on VJ Day,
when victory over Japan was called.
I was one of the first troops that went
into Japan to take control of many
Japanese weapons that were handed to
U.S. troops.

—Were you wounded at one time?

—I wasn't wounded. While I was in Japan,
it was found that I had a spinal cyst.
I had an operation in the U.S.

Army's Tokyo area. I came home on a hospital ship—Japan to San Francisco. They operated on my back in Japan. I was on my stomach three weeks while the wound was healing. So I was in pretty bad shape on my back quite awhile. It may have been related to an infection in New Guinea, but it was not a war wound. I was never really on the front lines of the action. I was on secondary lines, although a good friend got a secondary assignment with an Air Force group near us and he was killed in a crash.

—What made you volunteer? Did you know what was at stake? Did you know the Nazis were exterminating Jews?

—I knew that the Nazis were antagonistic to Jews. I didn't really know that they were exterminating Jews. I don't think that was really too well known. I knew, though, that they were punishing Jews and not treating them well. And then I was disturbed by the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. I had a patriotic feeling about our country. I knew that our country had been doing some good.

—When did you find out the extent of the genocide against European Jews?

—I never really knew the extent of genocide until, I think, well after I was back in the United States after the war was over. I didn't realize the extent until after I met your mother. When she emphasized the tales of horror, then I really could see the factors involved in Hitler's Holocaust.

—Tell me what it was like to be with someone who had just gone through such horrible tragedy.

—I could tell that she must have had a very traumatic experience because she was very nervous. You could see how she reacted to sudden noises with shock. Walking on the street with her, if a policeman went by, you could see a traumatic reaction. Often, when I was sleeping with her, she would wake up screaming, shivering or sweating. That was the case during the early years of marriage. So you could see they went through very difficult times. They were still not recovered. I tried to support her and gradually, I think, up to the present time, those fears have eased.

20

—I know there must have been incredible sadness about your family. And fear about what was going to happen to you and your two sisters. Can you talk about some of the mental survival strategies that you used to get to the next day?

—Yes, because we never believed our parents are dead. We thought this lady's so mean, she tells us that they're in Himinlaga. We never believed it. To the bitter end, we didn't believe that people could do so much to other people. And we didn't believe that they killed them.

—Until when?

—Probably until we were liberated.

—Even after you went to two other camps, you still thought at the end of the war you would see your family again?
—That’s right, that’s right, that’s right. Because after the war when we were liberated we wanted to go home to Hungary to find our parents. We couldn’t believe it. Yet, we were in such a condition there, that they died every morning—and burying—when we were first in Auschwitz. Then finally they took people out to work. When they came into our barrack, they needed more people to do work, so they took my two sisters in the line. And me, they wouldn’t take because I was very skinny already. So I was hiding in the barrack where I wouldn’t go into that line where they go to Auschwitz—I mean to the crematorium—because I didn’t want to be with the skinnier people. So I ran to the toilet and there came a little girl, about 10 or 12 years old. She spoke very beautiful German so they liked this kid. She was in her regular clothing, civilian clothes, dressed elegant. She used to help count—a messenger she was. She came into the barrack, into the toilet, and said: Why are you crying? I said there are my two sisters in that line and I can’t go there because they separated me. And I wanna go there. So she took off her jacket. She says: Okay, take my jacket, put it on, and you go to the line. And when you get to the line, drop my jacket off and I’ll go pick it up. So I did that. Then, when they had to count a thousand people, the last line was one

more person. So there was a young kid with a mother. They separated the mother. They threw away the mother and the kid came with us. And I felt all my life so guilty. She was an elderly person and might not have survived. But that's when I took away somebody else's spot.
—I showed you earlier this book, *Holocaust Testimonies*. And it seems like almost everyone who survived the death camps has a story like that. It was so random. The violence was so random.
—Right, yes, right...

21

Dadaism	Imagism	Surrealism
Objectivism	Vorticism	Futurism
Expressionism	Dynamism	(Auschwitz-Birkenau)

22

—How did you go on? Did you have hope? Were you thinking about what you would do when you got out?
—Yes, I always had hope that I'll survive. Somehow, somewhere, God is gonna let me live. Because we were religious people, brought up religious by my father. We always prayed that we should survive. In fact, that was my pledge: If I ever survive, I always will help other people.

—So, you were actually thinking that at the time?

—Yes, always.

—And you were praying?

—I was praying.

—And in your prayers you were saying?

—And I said, if God lets me live, I'll always,

for the rest of my life, I'll devote to

help other people. In the back of my mind,

that's what I always thought. And I always

remembered that, and always tried to do that.

So you can see why I'm always involved,

with the phone, helping people. So, then what

happened...

23

since you asked here's a national snapshot telegraph from november 1994
step by the time you open this album things will have moved in one direction
or another step in national elections the so-called republicans just took
control of both congressional homes step a pesty newt has nipped the
clintons' neck calling the couple countercultural mcgovernicks step ah if
only if only if only step the cold war must be reinvented and once firmly in
place re re re invented step ha ha ha ha ha honk step with the donkey
wearing elephant snout people voted the real elephant step honk honk honk
step with no progressive answer easily attainable people often go atavistic
& ballistic rather than stay the sickly status quo step will pendulum swing
back when newest righter-wing solutions prove old solutions prove no
solutions or do we keep moving even further right step step step don't wait
for the red light step step step move aside step step step outadawaylosers
stepstepstep newflash pure american products go crazy stepstepstep make
way for the gingrich about to steal your christmas bonus and health care
package while winking for your trust with lines from your favorite steamy
drugstore novel stepstepstep let's have a warm welcome for the
distinguished sepulchral senator from north carolina step he has lost his

appestat and just threatened to have the president ... step tomorrow he will be appointed the senate foreign relations chair stepstepstep stepstepstep will democrats learn some real lessons and invent a new melodic nonatomic lipotropic liberalism or will they too persist walking further to the unrequited right stepstepstep who wants to help build a new new left stepstepstop

24

—So you had hopes that you would ...

—Survive, yes, I always prayed I would survive.

—But were you depressed a lot? Were you afraid also?

—Oh, sure we always were afraid. And poor Anna, she was once caught, they beat her up real bad. She was caught because she went at night to steal potatoes for us and they caught her. And then I come in from the kitchen, and there she is. They beat her up. They had to give her over the naked tuchis with the rubber thing, twenty. Everybody was hollering. I didn't know my sister was in there. And she never cried. She never cried. And the SS man liked her because she didn't cry and he stopped at ten. He didn't beat her all the way. He stopped at ten. Because she was always good looking, broad shoulders. Another Jewish girl, this Polish lady, squealed that she was stealing.

—She squealed to get in favor with the guards?

—Yeah, but those guards who were with us didn't appreciate that. They didn't want to do it.

But if the Jewish girls themselves squeal, what can they do? But then he felt so bad the next day. The next day they put me in the kitchen to cook, this SS man, because he knew I'm Anna's sister. The Polish

lady came to say, don't take this girl because
she's Anna's sister, she'll do the same thing.
Then the SS man said to me, in German,
you're not her sister, right? He went like that
I should say no. I said no. She says, yes
she is. And the SS man went like that.
—So there were some guards who did some little
things to help...
—Who had a heart, yes. But these, these were not
SS men. This guy was Wehrmacht. They were
regular soldiers.
—Did you ever meet anybody after
the war who had any news about your
family? Who went in the line with them?
—No, nobody in the line was alive.
I don't think anybody stayed alive
after that line.

25

In the midst of early American modernism,
35,000 workers were killed
& over 700,000 injured
in 1914's industrial accidents.
That year, more than 100 socialists
elected local office
by pure products
of Oklahoma.
The *Brooklyn Eagle* fired Helen Keller
after she self-declared socialist
pointing out
her physical limitations
as if deafness & blindness
entered her life
as bodily defense against
ideological transformation.

In 1919, Seattle workers sustained a citywide strike
nonviolently,
about which

Anise wrote in labor's paper:

“The businessmen / Don't understand

That sort of weapon...

It is your SMILE

That is upsetting

Their reliance / On Artillery, brother!”

Not many read Anise's poems anymore.

And Seattle now renowned

for grunge rock & coffee shops.

In 1924, KKK Nights of Abhorrent Cloth

masked America

with over 4.5 million

white hoods.

In 1932, the Bonus Army came to D.C.

imploing early depression-era payment

of World War I bonuses

already pledged:

twenty thousand vets were smacked back

by McArthur, Eisenhower & Patton—the best
military minds the U.S.

could muster against its own.

Oposing the most elegant thuggery

big business could buy,

1.5 million U.S. unionists nonetheless

went on strike 1934.

Since then wars have been fought—

wars have been stopped.

MLK's birthday declared a holiday—

his radical democratic legacy quietly ignored.

Developing World materials and misery

prop up the western wardrobe

yet laughter & music become

more internationalized than ever.

Despair/Desire, sorrow/hope, stenotypic/
eurytopic—old stories witnessed
in new ways. What is history
if not a bit of wishful thinking?

26

—So, how did you end up leaving Auschwitz?
You were there for one year?

—No. Six months we were in Auschwitz. Then they
took us to work in Ober Schlesien, where
the movie *Schindler's List* was made. We were
in that town, but not in his camp.

—What was that called?

—Ober Schlesien's in Krakow, Krakow.

—So you were in Krakow?

—Yes, Krakow. But not in his camp. We had
another camp where we were in the outskirts
digging schaufelgrab, digging ditches, for
the soldiers to hide. When the war came closer,
they hid in those ditches. We made the ditches.
We were in the same town, but we didn't know
each other. I wish I would have been in
his camp.

—You and your two sisters were still together?

—Right. We were always together.

—And how were the conditions in Krakow?

Were they the same as in Auschwitz?

—No, no, no, no. In Krakow, was a little
bit better because we were working.

Every morning we went to work. Then
at night we had hay still in the cows' barracks.
The cows they took out, but they left the hay
so we slept on the hay. But each person
got a blanket. We got clothes back. We got
underwear. We got a sweater. And that

is when we got our own clothes back. Then we started looking in the envelope, in the shoulder pads, and we opened them up and I found 20 dollars. And when I found the 20 dollars I gave it to this German guy who was in the kitchen. I said I got 20 dollars, please tell them I should work here with you peeling potatoes. And I said—he was so dumb—I said this 20 dollars can buy you a whole house and he believed me. And he took my 20 dollars and didn't squeal on me. He could have squealed. And he put me into the kitchen to peel potatoes. That's why I had it pretty good. I never went out to the ditches.

—Did they feed you better in Krakow than they did in Auschwitz?

—Yes, we had all the foods. I cooked the food. And we had cow's meat.

—And you weren't as worried about getting sent to the crematorium?

—No. Not there, there was no crematorium.

—So once you were in Krakow it seemed like you were going to survive?

—Yes.

—And was the SS still there?

—Yes.

—Did Mengele visit this camp?

—No, Mengele was gone. Mengele stayed in Auschwitz. He never came with us.

But then Auschwitz was evacuated because the Russians came. As we ran, we saw the bombing, the fire. And then even the SS men, the Wermacht—it wasn't the SS men—said don't come with us, please don't come, stay here. Hide in the woods. Run away. The war is almost over. Don't come, because

you're gonna get killed. Run run. And many
of our kids ran. Ran away to deep in
the woods. And they stayed alive. And I was
afraid to run. Anna wanted to run.
I said no, let's stay together. Because
sometimes when we run away they were shooting
us. We couldn't believe them. Are they gonna
shoot us or what?

27

For first trip to self-described socialist country, I would've preferred
Sandinista Nicaragua—where democratic credentials proven by stepping
off stage at elected time.

In 1989, I took Aeroflot flight Pyongyang, North Korea—part of
diverse 100-person U.S. delegation to 13th World Festival of Youth &
Students.

Every North Korean citizen wore lapel button with Great Leader's
snapshot—every third billboard marked days Great Leader had stood
that spot—museums exhibited pot from which Great Leader scooped
boiled potatoes—

he alone defeated Japanese & Americans—built world's first electric
tractor—personally taught each farmer to plant rice—he who built
world's tallest hospital—Pyongyang's material development did seem
impressive & well distributed.

But officials removed all banners honoring slain student Tianenmen
heroes, nonevent in North Korea's state-run press—no disabled persons
visible anywhere—lesbians from Denmark forced to add second clubhouse
balloon “except in Korea” to original “lesbians are everywhere”—

I wandered into private meeting North Korea's Ministry of
Culture—amiably asked about my poems—to inquire any curiosities—
“don't hold back”—

I wanted be polite—ease future friendship possibilities—was
thankful for generosity of guides and astounding friendliness felt on
sidewalk—also nervous in secluded smoke-filled back room—

asked who owned printing presses—“the state”—I described subtle
and overt market limits on American literary publishing—asked criteria

here—“high aesthetic quality” and “educating the people”—15 novels
600 short stories and over 1,000 poems printed each year—Kim Il Sung
over 1,000 lifetime books—does tradition of love poems exist?—“yes,
love for the people”—said I thought people might like to hear some
private love poems too—

We’d come for festival and weren’t disappointed—huge international
panels with U.N.-style translation headphones held in six centers—

first night, danced Nicaragua’s clubhouse, Hasenfus’s captured CIA
parachute and made-in-USA plastic C4 explosives displayed on wall—

U.S. delegates met daily with youth I might never visit: Salvador,
Sweden, Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Vietnam, African National Congress,
Sinn Fein, Israeli & PLO Peace Movements—who could foresee how
quickly Soviet Union cease to exist?—Yugoslavia devolve decompressed
ethnocentric civil warred slaughters?—

how soon ANC take its longshot presidential seat?—strides taken
toward pacifistic two-state Mideast cessation to bulldozing rifle
occupations and terrorist detonations?—

Older members chaired meetings—my turn with Vietnamese—
soulful privilege for one so shaped by reading antiwar movement—
which I described—offered hopes for renewed relations & presented gift
Abbie Hoffman memorial T-shirt—

they didn’t know Abbie but apprehended gesture—knew American
youth, even soldiers, had not been military decision-makers—their
expressed historical forgiveness a bit surreal—

most had lost family, friends—some walked artificial plastic legs,
shook hands with one arm left—after 7 million bomb tons & 3 million
deaths, now offering total friendship—economically imperiled, even
inviting U.S. to dig into oily shores—proposed official trade accord
shaped right there—had brought along TV cameras & binding
signatories—

as contingent’s chair, perhaps I should’ve signed?—but explained
diplomatic cadence we were basically ragtag group concerned youth
with wide spectrum political ideas but no official backing—our
signatures would not adhere—I could autograph the T-shirt but a treaty
light-years beyond my humble grasp—

Vietnamese delegates laughed—then we had a party—amazing how
young people could get along without official obstacles in the way.

- So you were older than your sisters and you were making a lot of the decisions?
- Yes, and they listened to me, my two sisters.
- That was a heavy responsibility for somebody who was still in their teens.
- We had to, because we saw how they killed them. From Auschwitz, we went to Bergen-Belsen first before we went to other places.
- Before Krakow?
- No. After Krakow. When the war came closer there, and everybody ran and we ran and we ran. Finally, in the morning, they took us again to another place. But we had to walk. The train was no train, because they were bombing. So we had to walk for six weeks. To Bergen-Belsen.
- So you were in Auschwitz for six months?
- Yes.
- Then how long were you in Krakow for?
- About three months.
- For three months. And then you began to walk for six weeks?
- To Bergen-Belsen. We were there six weeks. We were liberated in Bergen-Belsen.

Thomas Paine: “The vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave is the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies....It is the living and not the dead that are to be accommodated.”

Paine’s uncommon legacy: to see with interpretive eyes beyond the Founding Fathers’ original intentions—

and yet, what to do with all those buried allies
that long to be embraced?

Despite some disproportionately long claws, history is not only
a memoir of superpowers. Look at Khmer Rouge murders,
Mobutu's pillage, Baltic & Rwandan ethnic conflict
reborn in modern genocide's nest.

It's difficult to be certain where imperialism's malinfluence ends,
but it's clear India's slaughters outlasted British rule.

In Mideast, the proof is plain to read
in Torah, Koran, New Testament:

So why hasn't the god of oil & water crowned its victor yet?
U.S. role in Latin American death squad force is undeniable,
yet those countries have their own home-grown hit men
of horror who ought not to be forgot.

But all nations have purple ribbons of heroic democracy as well:
a nation like an artistic form never embodying
mere monolithic potential—a toast offered here
to a dazzling array of American traditions:

to Tom Paine, Harriet Tubman, W.E.B. Dubois, Emma Goldman,
Ella Baker, Norman Thomas, Charlotte P. Gilman, Cesar Chavez,
MLK, Abbie, Mother Jones, Izzy Stone,
Sitting Bull, Joe Hill, C.Wright Mills,

League of the Iroquois, Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments,
Port Huron Statement, Harrington's Other America, the Nearings'
Good Green Life—too many to name, so stop now,
to be continued another day—

a toast to Gandhi's earth-shaking marches
& Rosa Luxemburg who insisted a new society
could never be built by decree, who wrote:
“freedom is always and exclusively freedom

for the one who thinks differently,” who predicted:
“Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom
of press and assembly, without a free struggle
of opinion, life dies out in every public institution,

becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only
the bureaucracy remains”—to dissident poets dead or alive
who have raised the ceiling of human potential:
Akmatova, Claribel Alegria, p’Bitek, Brecht, Hikmet,

Blake, Breton, Serge, Szymborska, Cesaire,
Cardinal, Cavafy, Neruda, Mayakovsky,
Whitman, Doolittle, Rukeyser, Hughes,
Ginsberg, Baraka, Reznikoff, Rich—

millions of visions known & unknown from which to draw—
how much did America’s most well-known modernist poets
know of popular democracy, accountable institutions,
all citizens with a say in the social & economic decisions

affecting their lives?— brilliant elegant Ezra making a pact
to begin with Whitman, then chipping away
the most democratic slivers—a dream
perhaps unfinishable, but one we can aim toward,

across borders, utopian & all, even across temporary boundaries
of life and death: Illuminated Vision remains lit—though the body
be exiled or imprisoned, struck by
invisible sniper or unspeakable crime.

30

—And where did you sleep on the way? You just
slept along the road?

—On the snow, along the road, wherever
we felt we laid down on the snow since we

couldn't walk. But all these kids who couldn't walk anymore had to stay in the back. And Anna, since she was still strong, had to dig the graves to bury them. Because whoever couldn't walk they just shot 'em, the SS men.

Because they couldn't walk no more, what can you do with them? There was no wagon to carry them, nothing. So he shot them and buried them there. And quite a few, my sister buried them. Her own girlfriend they had to kill there and bury there.

—So then you went to Bergen-Belsen?

—Then we got to Bergen-Belsen. We slept twelve in two rooms of beds. We slept there, with very little food. And then they gave us some kind of poison, not poison, some kind of medicine that we should never get our periods. So, nobody had periods. They put us together with Russian people, too, not Jewish. And they went to work every day. They couldn't treat them like us. They were fighting. They were shooting, fighting. I don't know how they got guns, but they were shooting, fighting.

—The Russians in the camp with you had guns?

—In the camp. Had hidden guns. Somehow, somewhere. I don't know how they got them. Maybe they slept with the SS men, who the hell knows? And they were strong. We were so weak. They were sleeping in the daytime and going to work at night.

—Were they helping you at all?

—No, no. They felt sorry. They had to fight for their own lives. But they had more food and blankets. So in the daytime while they were sleeping, I used to go and steal their food, their bread, and blankets.

—And were you again on lines every day?
—Yes. Then, when I stole the blankets, I stole some knives from them. They had knives, too, I don't know how they had knives. Then the SS men came and they said whoever—because the war came so close—whoever has knives, they can come in the kitchen and peel potatoes. So I had a knife, I went to peel the potatoes. But then they got very mad and they came in to our camp again saying: Who knows how to sew? So Anna volunteered with other kids. And they took them to sew their dresses, civilian dresses. The wives or the SS ladies threw away the SS clothes—the war came so close—and put on civilian dresses. Then, when she finished the dresses, he came and banged on the kitchen and said: Who sewed my wife's dresses? And my sister again volunteered. She thought she's gonna get something for it. He started beating her up. And beating her up so bad, hitting with a screwdriver in the head. And made holes in her head. And we couldn't cry, because if we cry he sees a sister. We didn't cry. He put her in a barrel and hit her with an ice... with a screwdriver—and bleeding. Then he went away. He hit so many like that, and then they ran away because the war was over. But we didn't know.
—So, the war was over at this time?
—Yes, but because we didn't know, he beat all these kids up who'd sewed the dresses and ran away. And then the war was over. All of a sudden we had no SS men with us. Then we saw other people coming in. The English people came.

I summoned Rosa L. for a brief moment
 during midnight meditation and weeping:
 “With death at hand, it wasn’t my own life
 which flashed before my eyes
 but the upcoming terror:
 Huge consuming fires rolling down European Hills
 unprecedented earthquakes sucking entire cities
 down to the molten planet core
 body appendages flying like cannonballs,
 stray elbows splashing
 into Old World fountains.
 The tragedy was I knew it could be stopped—
 but for the angry glances
 of erstwhile friends.

One usually gets wiser after it’s too late.
 Enjoy life—in spite of everything.
 Don’t make a virtue of necessity.
 Contribute. Humor yourself & others.
 It’s okay you’re approaching forty
 without permanent accomplishment,
 without a career,
 with long periods of uncertain love.
 It’s all right to spill coffee on your manuscript.
 Forgive yourself. Take speech lessons.
 Exercise. Don’t worry
 about tucking in your shirt.
 Consider the general strike.
 Be experimental. Exhale.”

—The British were the ones who came to liberate
 the camp?

—Right, the British. And there were doctors.
Between the soldiers were doctors. And then
I ran to the doctor. He couldn't speak...
he was Belgian. He didn't know English
and we didn't know nothing.
—You only knew Hungarian at this time?
—Yeah, and Jewish. A little bit German.
I talked a little bit German. But this guy
didn't know nothing. Then we brought my sister
to this man—because he said he's a doctor.
—Did they explain to your sister why they
were hitting her about the dresses?
—No.
—They didn't tell her that she didn't sew
the dresses right? Or...
—No, No, NO!

33

I've worked for Middlesex Interfaith Partners
with the Homeless
eight years, helping to push
people's rights across stubborn legislative desks
& cracked social service nets. Here's a few
confidential voices of women passing through:

—I ended up homeless again. I had
domestic violence with my daughter's
father in 1989. Then I
had the TRAP program but the apartment
was condemned. The TRAP program—that stands for
Temporary Rental Assistance Program,
but everybody calls it by its nickname,
even the welfare workers. I ended
up back into the shelter again.
Then I got a motel through welfare, where

I stayed for 3 years. Welfare only paid for the first year. I had to take them to a judge to get that. At the end of that year, the shelter had no room, no nothing. So I paid the second two years at the motel myself. There was no place for my daughter to play, no kitchen, only one double bed. And lots of times the lock was broken. My whole check went to the room. We lived on food stamps only. I was with him 3 years, putting up with him leaving, coming back, leaving, and coming back. When he left for good on July 5th, I made sure he got on the train with a one-way ticket. I guess right after he left, my daughter turned around and said that she don't want—she told me what happened. Now, I don't need nobody, which I'm glad of 'cause I don't have nobody. I finished a college computer course. That's what I was crying for. Half of it was happy tears. —I'm 24. I have two children, a 3-year old and a 1-year old. When I walked in the door, I was scared to death. When I was pregnant with my first child, it seemed like every move I'd try to make, the powers that be, I must say, were not very cooperative. I was living at home with my mom. She was an alcoholic. She still is. I was like “how can you judge me” when you're sitting there getting sloshed and peeing under the couch cause you think it's the bathroom. When I was 9 years old I had to dress her to take her to bed. That was no responsibility for a kid.

—Here was where I lived, right in the middle of drugs and alcohol and fights and violence and prostitutes and everything else. This was my wonderful surroundings. I lived with my mother, my 2 kids, my boyfriend, my big sister and my sister's son in a 2-bedroom apartment. I had my first kid when I was 20. That's when the domestic violence problem started, with the fighting, the arguing, the beating. And my mother made me feel like shit. When I was pregnant with my first, she told me every damn day she was embarrassed, nobody has to know, why don't you get rid of it. She told me the baby was shit. I can show the scars that I got till I grew bigger than she was. I was raised out here. It was dangerous, but it taught you how to survive, how to deal with shit. I was always like "fuck you." Me and my best friends would hang around here and tell off the people, especially the ones who tried to push drugs. I never did drugs. I seen everybody wasting their lives, dying, getting sick, and I didn't want that. There's nothing to do around here. There is the bridge where I met him. Every time I see it I want to blow it up. When he went to jail that's when I became homeless. I thought I met the man of my life and it was the nightmare of my life. I thought, I guess, that this was the man who was gonna save me from my problems. And, oh lord, no. The way it happened opened my eyes.

—So, a lot of times the violence that they gave was not explained?

—No, no, NO! NO! On purpose. Because he was so mad they have to run away. And she sewed those dresses. Because they had to run away they went crazy. The SS men probably went crazy. Why would they give a reward of beating them up?

—So how did you feel when the British came?

—Oh, we were very happy! But then they did a very stupid thing, the British. Very stupid. Because we were very hungry. Well, the Germans poisoned the water, we shouldn't be able to even drink the water.

—Before they left?

—Before they left, SS men poisoned the water. They poisoned the water so we couldn't drink. But whoever drank got very bad diarrhea. And all the sicknesses.

I had a little bit, a little water.

But that's why I went into the hospital.

The stupid thing the British did—they were so dumb—they made these big packages of food with delicious meat, like canned food. I never saw canned food in my life. Chicken and food and everything and very salty.

And we didn't eat a little bit at a time.

We just ate everything and that's why they were killed, lots of kids.

—People were killed?

—Because they ate everything and then they had to drink the poisoned water and that's how they died. And we were all very sick.

That made us even worse, sicker than we were.
That's what killed lots of them.

35

in "frame," adrienne rich makes explicit point to situate her subjective position, boston, 1979, standing just outside action frame watching innocent undergraduate female lab student beaten by police. such a compelling stylistic move, i vowed

to use the tactic in some future poem, so here i am, home in new jersey, at desk, transcribing tapes w/ inexpensive handheld battery recorder & laptop computer, flipping assorted historical books, tapping lucky imagination's daily secretions, bad back propped

against foam lumbar roll, here in state still nicknamed after now-extinct gardens, where famous contemporary fragrance now emanates midnight industrial elizabeth smokestack, where car window serves as jersey turnpike's respiratory guard of last resort,

whitman's restplace, now curled barbed wire fence concrete cube jailhouse directly 'cross street from good gray poet's final home, state where first alleged "welfare reform" passed to deny increased grants to welfare mothers' newly born children,

new scapegoating sippet sweeping the newt republican nation. on plus side, first state introduce profound legislation mandating highschool holocaust classes—when bill introduced, some senators attempted amendatory inclusions, each press conferencing

a world genocidal lesson plan: contemporary bosnia, pol pot's cambodia, stalinist russia, turkish armenian slaughter, all named, all crucial instructions. yet no senator named even one genocide directly or indirectly american-induced—no germey blanket,

smoking monster slaveship, burnt atomic bomb, book of the dead's bhopal billows, vietnam's fiery children on the run, cancer's nuclear atmospheric blasts & rotting plutonium soup cans threatening a thousand generations, u.s. presidents whispering indonesia's

east timorous ears, latin american death squads southern-hospitality-trained. as dad says, this country has truly done much good that needs carrying on. yet part of poet's citizenly duties also the daily reminder, democracy begins at home. the difficult historical decisions—

which suitcases to drop. paul revere riding through town sounding the alarm. you ask, what is home? after eight years as housing advocate, my reply still changes minute by minute. how many think home till exact moment tornado rips the roof off? how many homes

have served as mere launching pads to cattle cars, cotton fields, broken treaties, rickety boats navigating between lightning streak roars across oceanic hurricane floors? in *grapes of wrath*, muley proclaims to tom & preacher casey, "places where folks live is them folks,"

a humanity-defining protest shout, voiced just before joads forced to ride those damn lying roads. yet, homeless, many rode those roads with dignified humanity rubber cemented intact—what a different world that was, when being shoved off land was a shock,

when disillusionment with modern america actually surprised. what odd notion it would seem in contemporary novel that average characters believe in a right to own their own land, today, when american ceo's take salaries 150 times factory workers,

when 358 international billionaires own more wealth than 40% of the planet, when blake's most attentive readers instinctively know that plowed land forgives the plow but eventually is ceded to the plow's corporate manufacturer. so, where was i? 2 a.m. home writing

this line, late 30's radical jewish atheist praising the infinite kabbalistic splendor of the universe, the spacious world constantly coming, extoling the sacred seed within, the brain's brain, we were born on this earth to learn, each honest insight invigorates the breath of creation,

so here offering up subjective contradictions, believing we need respect diverse histories yet transcend nationalisms & notions of pure identity. opposed to mystical paradox as policy solution, yet knowing public spiritual crisis real & relevant as housing food medical emergencies.

subconscious imagery has subverted too many activist meetings, where difference between family & state not yet clear to much youthful energetic ire. what happens after death still unsolved dilemma driving millions to stressful early graves. yes, e. katz, okay to rest awhile

in the unknown. no more teleologies! neither to guarantee success nor resigned to flubbed failure. the future unknowable—dependent on human actions here on. admitting defeat beforehand no help and non-sense. fuck adorno's anti-enlightenment pessimistic shit

that capital's culture industry will always co-opt our holiest visions, his turning the dialectic on its side where it can kick & scream, but no longer even potentially motor history along, his turning milk into iron prison camp bars. they're winning—

i can admit that. for the moment, able to incorporize both tangible & otherworldly dynamics, even innovative montage, manifold forms once thought untouchable hip techniques, indeterminate styles lurking in incorruptible corners, waiting to pounce. as long as they win,

they will co-opt old forms or new. that's why the whole shebang needs replanting, spring roots & all. as long as it means all have a say, i don't care what a third way is called—democratic socialism, radical democracy, liberty equality fraternity, feminist anti-racist enlightened

mixed economic ecological cooperation, egalitarian democracy, simple freedom, compassion in action, blue horse, red green pepper—probably different names, some catchy & new, for different contexts. but let's begin working to win, nonviolently as possible.

martin luther king: a nation that continues to spend more money on defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death. doctor, is there time?—to save the spiritbody's pulse, yes. maybe historically contingent universal values

will satisfy the skeptical & safeguard our well of diverse earthly delights? ah mandela, in this often disheartening world—full of rising zhironovskys, karadziks, l'pens, dukes—your election a stirring rebuke to political fatalism and tribute to principled prismatic persistence,

an anticipatory illumination & verification of hope. from his grave, i hear ernst bloch applaud. what can be imagined can be made real: poetry prefiguring the popular front, bringing the not-yet into the room. that's where i am. for the moment fending off destructive life patterns,

but not mistake-free. it took awhile to learn let pleasure-armor down w/o defeating dionysus in a gin mill round. now done alcohol self-defeat mechanism & enjoying occasional red wine toasts. i don't have walt whitman's ability to be everywhere at once,

but have tried to form a decent set of cosmic eyes. my dad grew up during the depression. my mom is a holocaust survivor. i wouldn't be here if not for uncle sam. in the next race, i'm betting Unrealized Possibilities and Unspent Dreams. thanks. now i gotta go. driving,

with lyrical instincts & obsolete maps,
pulled steady through this magnetic
& hazardous spiral of time

—Did you celebrate or were you too sick?

—No, there were no celebrations, no.

But what happened—they took home the Russian people first. The Russian government came and they went home. Because they were all strong.

There was a Jewish lady with a kid and we told her don't go home. It's not gonna be good in Russia. Come with us wherever we go. I had an uncle in America.

We'll go to America. Come with us.

—You had an uncle in America?

—Yeah. But I didn't know an address.

But then I said, okay, let's go to Sweden.

I don't wanna go back. Whoever wants to go back, they took 'em home. Whoever wants to go to Sweden can go to Sweden.

And I decided we'll go to Sweden.

And then, soon as we arrived in Sweden in the ship, we were happy then because we were alive on a ship. And they gave us such a beautiful home overlooking the harbor. The most beautiful town. It's called Vikengsill. To live there and feed us.

They didn't even let us make the beds.

Elegant ladies with diamonds came to wash the floors for us, make the beds. I said: What the hell? Where are we now? It was cold in Sweden. Then they took everybody into a big department store. We had a right to take two coats, winter coats, summer coats, nobody was in the store. And two suitcases, big suitcases. We had a ball there. Whoever wanted, take

whatever we wanted. We packed 'em and then we took off. And that's what they did for us. I'll never forget that. And then they took us to operas once a month. They were nice people. But they didn't know we were Jewish.

—They didn't?

—They thought we were Hungarians.

—And when they found out you were Jewish, they treated you differently?

—Then they were a little bit different, yes. But they treated us very nice.

Gentile people treated us. Jewish people were afraid to come to us, they might catch our sicknesses.

—How long were you in Sweden?

—From '45, three years.

—So you came to the United States in 1948?

—Yes.

—And you had an uncle here?

—Yes. Oh, that was interesting. I didn't know an address. I knew a Berkowitz.

Sam Berkowitz. Go find Sam Berkowitz, right? So the Jewish organizations always said: Give us addresses. I knew he lives in New York and I knew he was a furrier. How the heck can you find—lots of Sam Berkowitzes.

—So they found him?

—No, another mother and daughter lived with us and they had a brother. The mother found her brother. And the brother said, please, if there's other kids, give me their names and I'll find them. And that mother's brother found my uncle.

Now that even Gilgamesh drinks Pepsi Light, new international songs of
 desire fill the next century's dusty lungs
 Global workers study the tune of holy planet shifts, a Sympathy Strike
 lyric rebounds off a satellite dish
 National flags are ripped to shreds, fine psychedelic handkerchiefs to
 catch the new flu
 Blake's ninth night arrives, when lions roar from deep furnaced caves
 amazed how it is we have walked through fires yet not been consumed
 As the war of multiple discourses begins to replace daily terror of
 nuclear pocket swords & plutonium hair triggers
 Reason passion sensation & instinct embrace, poetry's saxophone
 sounds the cosmopolitan call: universal citizenship shortly awaits all
 Acrobatic voters tumble across ancient bugle boundaries to march in
 world literacy's welcoming parade
 The endangered owl opens its eyes wide to guide the sundrenched
 carpenter where best to strike the nail
 Insatiable whales bark to let the navigator know near which rocks the
 last ship disappeared
 An honest wind warms an honest face, the old window blinds cry out to
 be replaced
 A shooting star, the world's most renowned astronomer announces the
 galaxy will never be the same
 A trustworthy politician, peace through peace, a concerned attentive
 public, a radio talk show designed to end bigotry
 The sociology student who dreams herself president awakens in control
 of her cabinet's affairs
 A cyberspace doorbell rings, a roving internet with potential companion
 in its sweet adhesive chords
 MTV's Top Forty songs convince the world's most stubborn rock to pour
 its cool liquid forth
 Divine genitals perpetually replenished, the Milky Way's dynamic power
 restored, desire below completes the symmetry above
 Supersonic transport jets gravel-dust the earth's forests, demineralized
 soil says a prayer then drinks up

Ghosts of dead cattle call out for soybean seeds, the fastfood ballgame is
down to its last out
Awake, awake, the melody of those yearning for love can now continue
until the next comet falls

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—Did you hear rumors through the years about
your brothers or your sisters?

—We were checking. There were organizations
we could go and check. Then when I went to
Israel to bring Anna over, then again
I went to an office to find my cousins.

And I went to look for my brothers.

Because I thought my brother was such an
organizer. He was a fighter. So

I went to look for my brothers. And I found
the same name, my cousins, Alta and Mandy.

My father's brother's kids had the same name,
and we found them in Jerusalem.

—Did the pain of the memories come up
often through the years? And how did you
deal with it?

—Well, I couldn't talk about it for
about 40 years. Till about five years
ago, I couldn't even talk about it.

You know that. Just a little bit I said.

When they asked me to go to speak in schools
here and there, I couldn't even talk about

it. The first time I spoke was about five
years ago in the local high school. Then

when I spoke about it, I said to the kids:

I probably was your age. I wasn't

any older than you and I went so

much through life and therefore please get your
education. Because that's very

important, and then you'll know that human beings have to love each other, not hate.

—So, for forty years you tried not to think about it too much?

—That's right. I thought about it. We had dreams, many times we woke up.

—You woke up sometimes in the middle of the night?

—Yeah, sure, lots of times, lots of times.

—Now, does it help you feel better to talk about it?

—That's right. I feel better when I talk about it. And I hope that people, the way I talk, should never come to this situation. We should never go through, any nationality, any living soul, should go through like that. Because this is no good for anybody. We have to have peace or else the whole world is...

—When you got out, did your friends and you talk much about politics? Did you talk about some of the signs to recognize so that we would see when it's rising again: What is fascism? Or why the Russians, who were allies during the war, became enemies of the United States with the Cold War soon after the war was over?

—The Russian politics was never good, because our father was captured during World War I in Russia. All the Jewish people were in a little shtetel, a little town, like here, a little village. He had a very good voice since he was a cantor. He used to go up on the trees singing for all the neighbors for this whole village, all kinds of songs, Russian too, because he was there four years in prison.

—Your father, your father was in prison?
—A prisoner of war, four years in Russia.
Then the people in Russia were very
good but the politicians were not.
They tried to kill Jews. Because of his
beautiful voice they let him live. When they
heard my father's voice singing, they let him live.
And he had to sing for the Russian people
with the dead people around him.

39

Now, in the eurythmic imagination,
political evolution's seedy vibrations
are replanted
from their most opportunistic beginnings.
It no longer matters to the epoch's skeptical eye
why surging social democrats
withdrew from the soapy well
of leaderly responsibilities—
no longer matters why international cp's
ducked under the red dictator's devouring reach
to widen Hitler's gate
by declaring social dems the enemy.
In this contentious dimension, archaic walls crumble,
the Berlin armadillo down, Korean swept over with fine dirt,
the Great Wall grizzly napping happily upon a pillow
of a million uncensored interpretations.
In this silvery time frame, slitthroat Stalin never arose,
no Maoist forced mass-cultured migrations,
no bloodsoaked Khmer Rouge gravitational fields—
actually existing socialism nowhere to be found!
On the samizdat cushions of poetic simulation
we can ride free
of instrumental traffic signs
to begin at the dream again.

Now, here, no attic dust of actually existing democracy either,
no mercurial elections bought and paid,
no two-party bully pulpit winner-take-all
congress of lessers
no more antimissile missile displacement
of life's unbuttery menu of nutritious necessities,
no more handheld computerized triggers
causing bloodless street corner death,
no constructing underground crutches for contraindicated
Savimbis and Shahs. No cleanshaven dictators labeled
emerging democratic because their death squad pen names
are inked in the NSA checkbook.
No more thick denial-filled skulls & laser stun guns guarding
the public information safe. No more oxygenated indoctrination
techniques so subtle we don't even feel
our wet cement shoes hardening.
No more business's multinational vulture boards
pecking out the ecologic eyes of our time.
Now the terrifying transoceanic Cold War monster
is once more unborn!

Sophie Scholl, student cofounder of White Rose resistance,
awaiting the Nazi firing squad, exclaimed with diamond defiance:
"what we have written and said is in the minds of you all,
but you lack the courage to say it aloud."

A common Holocaust survivor's refractive refrain:
To understand you have to go through it—
you cannot ever understand
yet you must understand.

The multiple contradictions and cataclysmic voices
are unresolvable. Memory's radical eyes never sleep.
A century after slavery declared dead
slaves still lie awake
with imperishable nightmares below deck.
American Indians still see brothers & sisters falling
along the trail of slaughtered tears.
Oven smoke still stings the open eye.

Personal illustrations of bone-thin survival
spread Compassion's catenated shadows
that both heal & amplify
the elastic ache of family loss.

The simplest integers don't add up:
carnage's advanced technology and heartless roots
difficult to comprehend—
one likes to think everyone
has moral nuggets at their deepest core.

These four nighttime headache remedies for the next century:
recall, speak up, raise consciousness,
and organize movements
to send the world toward an international
egalitarian democracy
with respect for ecology &
every single human on the planet.

—that's cool doc exactly what now?

Eliot Katz
1994-97