

Through The Concrete Wall

Eva Metzger Brown

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I remember being in summer camp and watching children run one to another, holding a stick and passing it on to the next person, who would then run with it and pass it on to still the next person, who would run further with it and then, pass it on to yet another teammate. I did not know what the children were doing; I did not know the name of the game; I could not ask; I did not speak English. Instead, I looked on and watched. I was an outsider and a bystander with all those feelings connected with being left out and being ignored. But playing the game looked like fun. One day I was going to learn how to play it and join in with the others; I was going to love it and I was going to be good at it. The game was called "relay races." I was sent away to sleep-away camp one year after I had arrived in America. I was four years old.

I wrote down these words five years ago, following a meeting with Elie Wiesel who said, "Write down your story and send it to me." I was already 58 years old, but I had never organized my story, the story of my life during and after the Holocaust, to tell to somebody else. Mine was not a talking family on matters of the Holocaust. My father spoke not at all of the murder of his mother in Theresienstadt, and my mother, whose leg was blown off in the bombing of Angers, made me feel that the topic of her amputation was off limits. After our arrival in America, the focus in our family was not on looking back at the major catastrophes the war had inflicted on our lives or on examining the difficulties my parents and I faced thereafter. Rather, the focus was on recovery and looking ahead. All of my father's energies were directed towards recreating a life that felt financially secure, again; my mother's energies were directed towards regaining her strength and her spirit.

I think I took my parents' example to heart and got busy, too, with learning how to "fit in," learning how to become "American" and learning how to deny and minimize the impact of the traumas in Europe, and the difficulties I faced here. So, going to camp so early, so young, just did not feel like a big deal to me then and did not seem to be a big deal to anyone else either. I think I must have figured that no one would have the time, the interest or the energy to deal with what had happened to me, and I certainly did not want to cause my parents more difficulties by bringing it up; they had had enough difficulties already. Yet, I know now that I was affected, deeply affected, by their silent sufferings, and by my own.

After some years, I got used to camp; eventually I found it, to be a really fun place, where I could meet lots of children, see different ways people behaved, learn new things and leave the sadnesses of my home – at home. I was naturally athletic; I loved nature, and I began to look forward to the camaraderie of other children. Still, I think

now, being sent to camp so young, so soon after I had come to the States, was too soon. I can say this now, after decades of silence, recognizing that it is okay to feel bad about bad things and say these things out loud to others, without feeling guilty that one should feel only grateful for surviving at all and surviving with parents, who did the best they could, given the circumstances. But let me tell my story from the beginning. I hope the reader will hear it as I now feel it, with a diminution of the denial of how difficult life was after we came to America, and with an empathy and compassion for both my parents and myself, as we tried to do our best, after the best had not been offered to us by others.

I was born in Nurnberg, Germany, on July 13, 1938. The family history, as recorded by my grandmother and her two brothers in a red, leather-bound book, told of the history of generations of our family in Germany. No doubt, these deep roots contributed to the family's disbelief that Hitler could or would be allowed to carry out his threats. Even so, with the rise of Hitler to power in 1933, as the first family members began to lose their jobs, emigration began. By the time of Kristallnacht, on November 9, 1938, the night when German thugs entered the apartments of Jewish families, my own included, and with clubs broke everything in sight - including furniture, dishes and crystal - few remained blinded to the true threat of the Manifesto of the Final Solution. German Jews everywhere began trying, desperately, to leave.

The day after Kristallnacht, my father, who had a passport due to his international business connections and had tried to get a passport for my mother for over a year, went to the passport office once more. This time he threatened the local official with the crime of murdering his wife if a passport was not issued to her immediately. The next day a passport was waiting. Two days later we left for Paris. I was four months old and by this time had already lived in an atmosphere of great panic and with a succession of caregivers, each of whom had left Germany, and me, as soon as they could emigrate.

Our decision to go to France turned out to be a poor one for us. Yet, at the time, who could know which choices were the good ones, the right ones, that would lead to survival in the end and which would lead to more suffering and death? One year after we arrived in France, the French rounded up all "foreign aliens," including my father, and sent them to detention camps. The decision was made for my mother and I to move to Angers, a smaller, safer town southwest of Paris. Unfortunately, Angers proved not to be a safe haven for us. On June 17, 1940 the Germans bombed Angers while my mother and I were walking on our street, Rue Fulton. The explosion pitched us into a doorway. I was wounded in the head and on the right side of my body; my mother's left leg was shattered.

We were taken to the Hospital of Angers, where I was stitched up, released, and hidden in a Catholic orphanage, while shrapnel in my brain remained undetected - for decades. For four months, my mother remained in the hospital. The doctor thought that she would die, but determined to recover from her wounds and the amputation of her left leg, she survived. I have little memory of this disordered time, though I do remember two things. I remember the sensation of warm blood running down my face at the time of the bombing and I remember the nuns' hats, the big white hats they wore in the orphanage. For the longest time, I thought these images were insignificant, as they had no words attached to them and fit into no story I knew. I would learn, decades later, that very young children remember things this way, not with words (explicit memory), but through snippets of imagery and sensations (implicit memory).

In October 1940 as northern France began to fall into the hands of the Nazis, the ever-expanding web of detention camps collapsed. Freed, my father began to look for my mother and me. Unable to enter into occupied France and therefore Angers, he contacted the International Red Cross, in the hopes that they could find us. In time they did, and the family was reunited in Toulouse. Without delay, my parents and I headed west, towards the Pyrenees and the ports of Spain, only to learn that ships there were no longer accepting refugees. Retracing our steps, we headed for the southern port of Marseille and found that visas for America were waiting for us. We had made the American quota! Immediately, my father called people he knew in the business world and asked if they could help us secure passage on a boat out of Marseille. They were able to do so and, two and a half years after we had emigrated from Germany, we were able to leave the chaos in Europe for good. We left on one of the last boats out of France. Luck was with us. However, our passage to America was not without some further ordeals.

Once on our way, our French-owned ship, now under Germany's control, was stopped at the English-held Straits of Gibraltar, refused clearance and directed to Casablanca. After some time, through other business connections of my father we were able to gain passage on a Portuguese ship, the Guinea, a barge outfitted for refugees. Portugal, a neutral country throughout the war, maintained free access through the Straits. I remember nothing of our stay in Africa, and little of the trip over. I am told that my mother stayed in quarters on the upper deck, unable to maneuver the stairs to where my father lay below. My father stayed in bed, ill from the malaria he had contracted in Casablanca. I stayed with him, possibly because it was safer for me, an almost – three – year – old not to be running on the deck with a handicapped mother. The one memory I have of this time is the sensation of being rocked, back and forth. Was it by my father? Was it by the boat's movement? I do not know, but I used to wonder, if my love for the cadence of raindrops falling on the rooftops was related to this memory of movement and sound, as the boat rocked backed and forth and the waves lapped rhythmically against its sides.

Before we arrived on the shores of America, we would be forced to make one more stop: Martinique. This presented a new set of problems. Martinique functioned as one of the gateways to the United States, and we had to pass inspection there. I think my parents feared that after their long and arduous escape from the horrors of Europe, they might be denied entrance now, because of my father's illness. In addition, my parents were informed that to leave Martinique they would need exit visas, papers that they did not have. It seemed that unexpected complications arose at each turn, and yet, equally fortunate rescues would appear as well. We were the lucky ones. Through the efforts of our family in America and Rabbi Steven Wise, an exit visa was issued, and through the courageous efforts of my mother complaining to the authorities that "too much was being asked of us refugees after our ordeals," our family was waved through the inspection line. It was finally time to take our last boat.

We arrived in the United States on August 6, 1941. I was three years old. I asked my mother once, "What it felt like to see the Statue of Liberty come into view?" She said solemnly, "We stood on the deck in silence; no one said a word; we did not know if America would take the boat." Two years earlier, the St. Louis had been returned to Germany.

A gripping story in itself, the story of our flight from Europe is only part of any survivor's story. Coming to a safe country after such an ordeal as the Holocaust does not

ensure that a person will feel safe and protected in the new world. For me, coming to the shores of America would close one chapter of my story of disruption and instability, only to open the next one, with its own accounts of continued separations and uncertainties. Upon my arrival in the States, I was left, again, in a strange place and with people I did not know, no doubt to insure than my mother could get some rest but, I did not understand that then. The strangers were the family of my grandmother's brother and his wife and their four teenage children. They had come to America some years earlier and were "settled." I met with one of these "teenagers" recently and asked him how long I had stayed with his family. John, now 80, told me that I had been with his family for a number of months. I wondered, "Why?" and "Why for so long?" He did not know, but he told me also that he had seen me in Paris before our emigration, twice, and then he told me about myself – a rare gift for a child who had no stories of herself from this time. He smiled when he told me these stories, and I smiled with the warmth of his memories.

He was my mother's first cousin and I was the first baby to be born of the next generation. John led me to believe that this made me special. As the only baby of that generation to be born in Europe, I was the only child survivor in a family of survivors, which left me, an only child, with no one to talk to, if I would have talked to anyone at all about the war anyway. After my parents picked me up, I remember that we moved to a small apartment. I recall having fun playing with another child there, on an enclosed fire escape that we used as our playground. There were a few more moves before we settled in Kew Gardens, Queens, New York City, where we stayed put for some years.

Once in Queens, I was enrolled in a French - speaking nursery school, "to meet other children." Years later, my mother told me it was then that I stopped speaking. Concerned, my parents called the doctor. He felt that too many languages were being spoken around me: French in the school, German at home, and English in the streets. He advised my parents to choose one, preferably English, and suggested that they take me out of my nursery school, which they did. I do not remember nursery school, and I do not remember changing languages, going from French to English, but I know these things leave their mark on very young children. I imagine I must have felt that things were confusing, like a big crossword puzzle, where one tries to make sense of the words across and down so that they fit with one another in a universe of squares created by somebody else. I think I felt the same way when I entered kindergarten.

My school was within walking distance, but a long walk from my home, and I remember my father bringing me to school that first day. We walked up the hill, past a newspaper store and a movie theater, the insides of which I do not remember ever seeing, and over the railroad tracks, coming down the other side, where we walked past a church, and a cemetery, until we got to PS 99. I think I was a little afraid, and my father, who loved to tease me, was not very helpful at the time. Even so, I was always happy to be with him and entered the school, as I did most new things, with a curiosity and a desire to "do the right thing" and "fit in." I remember that kindergarten started out as a scary place. I had no idea what to expect, and my parents did not or could not help me with this. I found a class picture once, in which I am the only child sitting very, very straight, with my hands clasped on the little desk in front of me. To myself, I looked as if I were trying very hard to do what I thought the teacher wanted, not knowing exactly what that really was. Yet even though I was very shy in school, and stayed very much in the background, I think my desire to learn and my ability to do so helped me to adjust in school and not stand out as too different from the other American children.

I remember Mrs. Fuller, my fourth grade teacher. She would tell stories about herself, personal stories about her family, and about her children in particular. I had never heard a person talk about her children in this way, so personally, and happy and carefree. We were not carefree at home, in the beginning. One Easter, Mrs. Fuller brought in little, yellow, sugar-covered marshmallow duckies in a big box which she put by the side of her desk. We could buy them for a few cents each. This seemed like a marvel to me. Perhaps every teacher had a box like this by her desk, but I did not know this, and I did not ask. I asked as few questions in school as I did at home. It was as if I were afraid to make waves and, instead, chose to learn things on my own, through my readings and my observations.

Two years before, when I was eight, there was a major catastrophe in the family, at least that is the way it felt to me. My mother collapsed; perhaps one would call it a depression now. I remember feeling something was terribly wrong when my father talked to the doctor, on the telephone, in a tone that was very serious and that frightened me. I asked him if my mother was dying. She was lying on her bed a lot, or rather upon the pullout couch, where she and my father slept in the living room, having generously given the one bedroom to me. My father reassured me that my mother was not dying, and I think reassured himself that this was not so serious, for he left on a business trip shortly thereafter. However, in so doing, he left me alone with my ill mother. I have a sense that this scared me dreadfully. I am sure I did not understand what was going on or how to deal with my mother's unhappinesses and frustrations, and I think I must have feared losing my mother despite what my father had said. My mother needed me, now, more than ever.

All my after-school time was spent at home, often sitting at the end of my mother's bed, telling her about my day, and thereby filling up hers. I did this for many years, even after my mother got better. I had a sense that she needed me to be there, and only later would I realize that it contributed to my limiting the exploration of my own life and the number of friendships I could make with children my own age. Even though I remember my mother making a concerted effort to help lead my Brownie troop, and even once or twice taking me sledding, I remember more an increasing sense of responsibility for her well-being over my own, and maybe for my father's too. It was not that I was heroic, though I think looking back I was a courageous child. I did what I understand many young children do when they feel that family security is shaky, and that is help, in whatever way they can to maintain the delicate balance, as they perceive it.

Somewhat later in that year, my maternal grandmother immigrated to America from Israel, the country to which she had emigrated after Kristallnacht. I was told she came to America to take care of my two cousins, but I secretly believed she came to America to help my mother and me. With her arrival a new chapter began in my life. I remember the first time I opened the door to Granny. She was not as old as I expected, and she was smaller than I thought she would be. She looked tired, too, very, very tired. Yet, upon seeing me she smiled and reached into her purse to pull out a candy for me, a Swedish fish. It tasted like it had been there a long, long time, waiting for me, as I had been waiting for a grandmother to give to it me. Then she said hello to me in English. No one had told me that my grandmother would speak English.

Granny moved into our apartment house, an arc of three floors of apartments surrounding an inner courtyard containing the largest hydrangea bushes I have ever seen. I was allowed to go from my home to hers, on my own, once a week. Her apartment was

small, and her front door opened into a narrow hallway with even narrower bookcases on either side. Each one was lined with small, medium and large-sized jars, filled with different things Granny collected: buttons, yarns, string...things with which her grandchildren were allowed to play. It was fun to look at everything, and all of us stopped there before we entered the large multi-purpose room, with its "railroad kitchen" on one side, the kind where the refrigerator, sink and stove line up against the wall, one after the other, like a row of tin soldiers. At the far end was a window, from which Granny taught me to feed the squirrels from a pie tin. Her other window held rows of tiny shelves, upon which were plants that we watered together.

A dining room table filled half of the room, and once a week Granny taught me German grammar and German writing there. She would say, unless you can read and write in a language, you will forget it. "Understanding" a language when you just listen to others speak it is not sufficient. Every so often, I would watch her make Schnecken there, rolling out the dough, flat, and spreading it with a mixture of raisins, cinnamon and nuts, before she rolled it up again, cutting it into seven or eight chunks before baking it. All her recipes were handwritten, in German, in a small notebook she kept by her kitchen window.

The other half of the room contained a sofa in front of which were two chairs separated by a table on which she taught me bridge. Beyond the great room were a bathroom and a bedroom. No grandchild was allowed to enter her bedroom. Granny was a very private person, but I could see piles of the mystery stories she loved to read as I stood at the doorway, and I could see her eiderdown comforter that she had brought miraculously from Europe.

Later on, Granny would take me to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and introduce me to Rembrandt. I liked his self-portraits the best, especially the one in which he looks old and very wise and self-reflective. And she would take me with her to visit Aunt Lina, a dear elderly relative of hers, who had survived Theresienstadt, and to Kennedy airport when it was still called Idlewild and still being built. Wherever Granny took me and whatever we did together, she taught me something. I loved Granny and I admired her, and while she herself was somewhat stern in manner and not overly affectionate, I felt she was the first person in my life who had time to pay attention to me, and did. Yet she, like my parents, did not talk about what had happened to her in the war – her losses, her regrets and her grief, or how she had lived before the war. I would learn much later that she had lost her mother in Theresienstadt, and that she left behind, in Germany, wealth, social position and a household full of help. Still, I never heard her complain about her small one-bedroom apartment in Queens and the jobs she took taking care of other peoples' children.

Occasionally my mother and her sister and brother and their families would gather at my grandmother's apartment for high tea, a simple spread crowned with Granny's Schnecken or her "bittersweet" Pflaumenkuchen. Granny's plum cake had a buttery Murbeteig on the bottom, with under-sugared plums, cut into flowerettes, on top. We all wished she would use more sugar on those plums, but no one dared ever to tell her. Outside of this, I do not remember that my Granny cooked very much or perhaps it was that she cooked simply and lived sparingly.

My mother cooked simply too. Perhaps it was because my father was away for weeks at a time or perhaps it was because standing and cooking were too much of a strain

for her. In any case, I remember feeding myself, quite often, by eating things that were left in the icebox. The one thing I do remember my mother preparing for me, occasionally, was cocoa and cookies after school. This was a real treat. So were the visits of Mrs. Wertheimer, who arrived to great excitement, selling an array of the most delicious European chocolates and candy: marzipan balls covered with chocolate powder, truffles and orange peel covered in bittersweet chocolate, and, of course, butter cookies and lebkuchen. A gentleman, whose name I do not recall, came too, selling linens and underwear. Years later, he sold my mother damask tablecloths for my trousseau to replace those things that had been lost in the war. I have them still. Both peddlers were survivors who made their living coming to people's houses to sell their wares. Back then it seemed that the only people my parents had to the house were survivors. Some of them had numbers on their arms; all of them had accents.

My mother's sister and her family lived up the street, and her brother and his family a few towns over. And then there was the stream of relatives who visited from different countries: from Israel, from Germany, from England, all places where different branches of our family had settled. One of my father's sisters passed through from Sweden, the place to which she had fled during the war. However, after that one visit, I did not see her anymore. I never met my father's other sister or her family. There was a family rift between my father and his sisters, started before the war, after my father's father had died – when he was three years old - and exacerbated by misunderstandings over who-did-not-help-who-enough during the war and who was responsible for leaving their mother behind to die in Theresienstadt. I think my father suffered greatly from this, though he never spoke of it. He did not talk about sad things with me, and my mother told me not to ask him about such matters. Yet, I knew something was missing, for him, for me.

After a few years we began to celebrate the holiday of Chanukah. It was the only mark of our being Jewish then. No other Jewish holidays were celebrated, no Sabbath lights were lit, I did not go to Sunday School. It was not that my parents turned their backs on their Jewish identity; I think they just did not have the energy for things like this until much later. But with Chanukah, somehow, it was different. There was a part of my father that I would say now was truly a child at heart, which when it seeped out, gave me a sense of having a playmate. At these times, he would tease me, for which my mother would reprimand him with the words: "Ernstle bitte horauf" (Ernest please stop), but I did not mind. I could hear him behind the curtain, hung to cover the doorway to the living room, filling the candy plates with the things Mrs. Wertheimer had brought and admonishing me, laughing all the time, not to come in. For the longest time, I thought that "candy plates" were part of the Chanukah ritual. The gift that stands out most in my mind, after all these years, was one I received when I was about 12.

It was a gift from one of my parents' friends from Europe - a box filled with books of literature and poetry, all for me. I own some of these books still; others fell apart, eventually, from my reading and rereading of them. Those were the first books I had ever owned. My parents did not spend money on books then. Maybe all parents refrained from buying books for their children at this time, but I think my parents did not buy things like this for two reasons. First, they were trying to save money all the time, and second the Holocaust had taught them that everything could vanish – one day to the next.

Between the yearly Chanukah celebrations, it seemed that my father was away on business for most of the year. When he came home, he would go to sleep for what seemed like days on end, to wash away the tiredness resulting from the intense, daily efforts he had made in his toy business. He sold toy cars; tops, some with music, some with none; dolls; doll houses.... and entertained buyers at night in Canada, in South America and in Japan. From England he brought the Match Box cars to the United States. He became a great success here, but it came at a cost to me - his presence in my life. I could see, when he retired and when his grandchildren arrived, what I had missed by his absences. At home, my father liked to listen to classical music on the radio and kept up with the newspapers, but he never talked about these things with me, except for, occasionally, reciting poetry by Goethe - auf deutsch. I loved poetry and music too, but I do not remember sharing these interests with him either.

By the time I entered high school, my father was a financial success, and we moved to Forest Hills, in Queens, New York, a neighborhood with a better high school, which was something my parents wanted for me. Even though I do not remember my parents ever reviewing my homework with me when I was growing up or asking me if I had done it, I did get the message that they supported my education, and I knew by the example of their behavior that they believed that great effort and perseverance would reap its own satisfaction. My education began with the English lessons they gave me to rid me of my guttural German "rrr," and then there were many years of violin lessons. They supported me financially at college and they supported my going to graduate school, at a time in the 60's when for most women my age only marriage and childbearing were considered options. I was not immune to society's message; I got married to a non-survivor and had children, too, three wonderfully healthy children: David Frank, named after my husband's paternal grandfather, Carolyn Metzger, named after my maternal grandmother and Michael Harold, named after my husband's maternal grandfather. For me, having children was like a miracle and I know my father felt that way too, but alongside of having a family, I also attended graduate school, and at 29, in 1967, received my PhD in clinical psychology. As I look back now, my studies started me on a journey of study and practice geared to learning about trauma and what it does to human souls. I did not realize at the time that I was seeking to learn what had happened to my soul too, given the many traumas I had undergone.

In 1979 Granny died after a long, debilitating illness, and I was asked to give the eulogy. It was the first time I would speak, publicly, to the family at large. The Holocaust was not in the forefront of my awareness at this time, and so I did not speak about it. No one in the family was speaking about the Holocaust then. No one in the world was yet paying much attention to it either. Instead I spoke about my memories of a woman whom I loved deeply, and who had made an enormous difference in my life. When my grandmother's household was broken up, I asked my mother for one thing of my grandmother's. It was an oil painting, a portrait of her as a child. I always wondered how it had been chosen to make the trip over from among all of her possessions in Europe. And I wondered how it had survived the journey.

My mother gave me some other things too, including some children's books in German and my grandmother's eiderdown comforter. To these were added one tablecloth with the letters "BB," for Betty Bamberger, her name then, and her cookbook. I was very happy to have these mementos, reminders of the life left behind in Europe.

My parents emigrated from Europe almost two years later than she did and came with far fewer things. However, among these things was a photo album of my mother's family and myself as a baby. This is one of my most treasured possessions. I know that many child survivors have no pictures of the past, and I myself had no picture of my father's family. I did not know what my paternal grandfather looked like until I was in my 60's, but I did have the pictures in my mother's album and I looked at them often, wondering, sometimes, what life would have been like if the atrocities of the Holocaust had not taken place and I had grown up amongst all these people.

In the early 1980's, my father asked me to help him for the last time. He said, "Eva, help me...I am losing my mind." My father had dementia. I was heartbroken. However, this time I knew I could not help him in the way that he meant. It was not that I did not want to – oh, I did want to, but this time I knew I could not succeed in making things all right, no matter how hard I tried. In addition, my mother, quite abruptly decided to move with my Dad to Florida, far away from the family. Some might think this made it easier for me, but I did not think so. All I was aware of was that I felt bad, very bad. It was then that I made a decision to meet with a psychiatrist to try to figure out the impact of my father's impending death on me, its impact on the family unit and my profound sense of loss.

For a long time I did not speak to my doctor about the Holocaust; instead, I focused on the present and made little of the past. It was easier that way, though it was not easy. I think I needed time, a lot of time, to see whether I could trust another person to understand what had happened to me, when I did not understand it all myself. And I think, unconsciously, I knew that I would need a doctor who could care enough and be empathic enough, when he did not, could not, know the extent of my Holocaust wounds because he had not been there. I think, also, my fears kept me silent. I was afraid of what might emerge: feelings I had not allowed myself to feel around being abandoned, losing my way and getting overwhelmed by the unfamiliar.

My history was one of broken and rebroken connections, with no control over how I was left or when I would be picked up - in the hospital in Angers, in the orphanage, at my great-aunt and uncle's apartment when we came to New York, in camp, in kindergarten, the time when my mother took ill, the many times when my father disappeared with no advance notice that he was going and no knowledge of when he would return. So many people had said to me growing up, "You were so young, you could not have been affected." Even professionals I had met, before trauma became the buzzword in psychology and psychiatry, made incorrect assumptions. All these experiences inhibited me from opening up. Instead, my feelings went underground, into hiding, as I see it now, into a deep freeze behind a "concrete wall." I would not be able to break through the wall easily, and yet I think there remained a lingering hope to reconnect - both with what I truly felt, inside, and with others, more "others," than I had let myself do thus far.

The answer to how I began to open up is complex, but it did require two things. One was a growing awareness that, for me, keeping my pain closed in my heart, silently, like a secret, created more pain not less; and second, that needing my doctor to reach out to me was not enough. What was essential was that I open up the wall surrounding the core of my inner self and let him in. When I began to trust him, truly trust him, and trust myself, too, the concrete wall surrounding my inner self began to crack. It is still hard for me to explain in words how this happened, because when the wall began to crack, it was

not words I found...but tears. I thought I would never stop crying; my doctor reassured me that I did not have to. He understood something that I had not allowed myself to feel. He let me know, in not so many words, that Holocaust losses are worth remembering, worth grieving and worth working through even decades later. He let me know that the oversights of the past were important and that he had the time and the patience to listen to them. I asked him once if it had not been hard for him to hear my story. He said, "No, it was a pleasure." He said what was difficult for him was listening to me all those years before, when I did not remember and did not allow myself to feel the feelings that must have been connected to these enormously difficult times.

As I began to talk with my doctor about the war and the years after the war, the walls of silence began to crumble. Feelings that had been blocked began to flow in one continuous stream. It was then that I allowed myself to realize how much I had lost, how much I had denied, how much I had avoided dealing with my sadness, loneliness and grief. Perhaps it would have been too much to deal with when I was small; perhaps it was too much to deal with when there was no one to tell it to. Slowly, I began to put things together, unconnected bits and pieces of my memory and my feelings that I had minimized before: the sensation of warm blood running down my face, a glimpse of the nurses in what to me were their strange and unfamiliar hats, the boat rocking as it went across the Atlantic, going to camp when I was so young, entering kindergarten alone, eating meals from the icebox by myself, watching my father, from a distance, as he slept off his exhaustion after a business trip, feeling the pain of sitting by my mother with her one leg off, befriending the new and lonely children that appeared and disappeared in school. There were so many feelings I had kept to myself, buried, hidden and out of my awareness. I had been taught that it was my past and the past was over. That is what I had learned growing up: Deal with the present challenges, submerge the past horrors and face the future with courage and determination.

Maybe it was helpful in 1941, but it was not helpful to me now, because what was submerged was still there in the different levels of my consciousness, and in my heart and in my soul. As I faced letting go of the pain surrounding the loss of my father, I let go of my silence, and with it all the unwept tears of my childhood flowed up to the banks of my eyelids and flooded over. It seemed to me that the streams of tears would never end, but every so often they did, and then I would begin talking with my doctor. And slowly, I began talking with others too.

In 1988 I was asked to speak to my Jewish congregation on the occasion of Rosh ha-Shanah. I retold the story of the Akeda in terms of the meaning of the survival of Isaac. Then I talked publicly, for the first time, about my own Holocaust survival. The response to my talk was overwhelming. Friends, acquaintances, people I did not even know came into the aisle as I returned to my seat, to press my hand or give me a hug. I felt overwhelmed; I could have cried, but I did not. However, the experience changed something for me. I saw, I learned, I felt that there were some people out there who were not as afraid of my past as I was and who had the kindness to show me. I had taken the critical step of "coming out" as a survivor; it was now in the open.

In 1990 I began to study for my adult bat mitzvah motivated in part to fill a gap in my life, that of a Jewish education. While I had helped my children prepare for the occasion of their bar and bat mitzvahs, now I wished to learn Hebrew and study the sages for myself. Another reason was that I had just become a grandmother and I wanted to be knowledgeable enough so that I could answer my grandchildren's questions or at least

know where to direct them to find answers, if they asked me for them. In the end, I created a bat mitzvah service that celebrated my “coming of age” and commemorated my Holocaust beginnings.

In 1992 I left the confines and safety of my Jewish community and accepted an invitation to speak at my first Survivor Reunion, the Nurnberg\Furth Reunion. After I finished speaking, a member of the audience came up to me and said, “You are a Child Survivor; you should call Dr. Judith Kestenberg in New York.” Her words struck me like a thunderbolt. I had never heard the name, “child survivor” before, but I knew it was mine. (I would learn later that it was coined in 1980.) I had always felt that the impact of the Holocaust on me was different from what it had been on my parents, but I did not know that there was a name for who I was or what it implied. I would learn that for a very, very young child to survive the Holocaust, in the midst of her developmental years, was different, very different, than to have survived as a teenager or as an adult. It seemed that with each step I took on this path of going public, I discovered something very important about myself.

Now I would start to travel. I traveled to New York to meet with the inspiring Dr. Kestenberg, the founder of the Child Development Research project, a part of the International Study of the Organized Persecution of Children, and I would travel there again to meet with Dr. Bass, who would interview me. It was she who would validate for me that “blood running down my face” was a childhood memory and not an incidental thought with no meaning. I would travel to Israel to meet with Dr. Yolanda Gampel, the Israeli counterpart for the Child Development Research project in Israel, and after meeting her I would write my first poem on “tears.” I would travel to Boston, not to give a talk, but to participate in the Boston Child Survivor Group founded by Freida Grayzel, where I was welcomed with open arms as the “sixth Eva” in the group. Growing up, I had known no other child with the name of Eva. It was in this group that I realized also that not only had we, child survivors, been raised in silence, but that in turn many of us had raised our children, the second generation, in silence too. This led me to create the project called Intergenerational Healing in Holocaust Families at the University of Massachusetts, a project that attempted to bring together members of the second and third generations.

And I would travel back to Europe to find the graveyards of my paternal grandparents, one buried in the old cemetery of Nurnberg, where headstones still lay smashed and overturned from the war, and the other buried in a mass grave in Theresienstadt. My maternal grandfather lay buried on the Mount of Olives in Israel, and my Granny was buried in New York. Everywhere I went, I laid stones for myself and for each of my children and grandchildren to let the buried “know” that they had a family, a growing family. It was as if in visiting the cemeteries of all my grandparents, dispersed as they were in different lands, I was looking for one place for all of them to be. I would find that that place was within myself, within my heart and within the memories I was creating by visiting them in their last resting places. My travels proved to be a way not only to mourn my losses, but a way to connect with that part of my Holocaust family tree that had been lost to me.

In 1995 I returned to Angers, I think to capture something I could not quite identify. Angers was a place I could not remember, but I had arranged to meet there with Madame Helene Vernhes, a woman who had befriended my mother and me during the war. At our first meeting, she embraced me, saying over and over again, “Ma petite

Bebe.” I cried as I hugged a woman I could not remember, but whose open arms made me feel accepted. She cried too. Helene had hired an interpreter for our meeting, a second generation German, fluent in French, German and English. He was warm and friendly and, in his own way, wounded too. He would tell me his story later, but first he told me he had been hired to give me a choice in which language to speak. I used English and a broken French and he translated it all. We talked for a full day in the lobby of our hotel and I taped our conversation. The next day we walked around Angers.

Helene brought me to where I had lived on Rue Fulton and where I had been bombed. She brought me to where the hospital and orphanage had stood and stood no longer. I remembered nothing of the place, but something miraculous did happen. On Rue Fulton and in front of the church, which had stood near the orphanage and which was still standing now, I began to feel an overwhelming feeling of sadness, and I began to feel a new compassion toward myself. Many feelings were surfacing, and as they did, I began to write them down. When I left Angers, I started writing “Through the Concrete Wall,” a poem in which I begin to talk not about what had happened to me in Europe or in America, but about my inner experience of “breaking through the wall,” of truly shedding my silence and of coming out of hiding.

I had been wanting to meet Elie Wiesel for a very long time, but had not had the courage to ask. In 1996 I sent him a piece of my writing and asked if we could meet. To my great joy, an appointment was arranged. Upon meeting, he asked me, “What can I do for you?” and I asked him the main question for which I had come. I asked him how he had broken his silence “so soon.” He smiled and sighed and told me, “It took me 10 years.” I thought, “For me, for whom it took five decades, that would have been a very short time,” but then I understood what he was trying to tell me. For the silent, a decade, a year, a month, a week of silence is too long a time. And then he smiled at me again and asked if I would write down my story for him and send it to him when it was done. He said it was the most important thing a survivor could do. I think he thought I needed a push to do it, and he was right. He gave me that push and helped me start to collect the “smashed glass” and “shattered shrapnel” of my life in Europe and in America.

For me writing is like having a conversation with myself. It is a way I find the words for the inner story that was kept so long in hiding. Every writing and retelling, every response and every new scrap of memory that emerges, every visit “back,” shifts the picture in some important way. Like a kaleidoscope in which every movement creates a new and yet undiscovered image, every step in the process of breaking my silence and going public holds the possibility of creating a broader and more balanced perspective for me. Today I try to live my life in the present, without denying the details of my past. One and a half million children died in the war. They never got the chance, as I have had, to find their voice, to find a loved one and to have loving children who begin new generations. For them I will never stop grieving, but for myself I feel I am now free to move on to the next chapters of my life, less burdened by the things that were once kept so hidden, so immobilized and so fearfully inside.

Adapted from an unpublished memoir on healing, *Through the Concrete Wall: A child survivor comes out of hiding.*