

**Orphaned Holocaust Teenagers  
and the Rhythms of Jewish Life**

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## **1. Introduction**

This thesis deals with young orphaned Holocaust survivors. It focuses on the significance of Jewish rhythms throughout their early stages of life and asks the question as to what extent these rhythms assisted them in rebuilding their shattered lives after Liberation. I am interested in how these orphans interpreted their Holocaust experiences and how it affected their religious life after the Holocaust. Jewish identification and religious questions are issues to be explored. I hope to establish a link between the pre-war Jewish rhythms of teenage orphan survivors with their post-war lives.

The group selected had lost everything as a consequence of the Holocaust; in particular the moral and emotional security of parental support. The question driving this research is whether the rhythms of Jewish life constitute a defining factor in the re-establishment of this particular survivor group, in the next stage of their lives. I query whether Jewish rhythms, emerging from a *halachic*, traditional or secular framework, would provide a framework which offered structure and meaning for the continuity and rebuilding of their lives. An inter-related question is whether the continuation of Jewish rhythms was related to an ongoing belief in the existence of God; thereby occurring within a religious framework, or whether it related more to Jewish peoplehood and/or culture. In this way, this thesis aims to investigate the complexity of Jewish identity within the framework of maintenance of the Jewish traditions and rhythms by teenage Holocaust survivors.

A further topic to be examined is to ascertain whether the Holocaust changed their pre-war Jewish identities. Would the weight of their shattering experiences drive them towards their pre-war Jewish background or pull them in another direction? For some, the difficult task of dealing with the aftermath signified rejection from any meaningful recovery of the past. Some rejected their faith and others abandoned their Jewish identity. However, the focus of this study is the reasons for and the impact of this decision. I wish to explore the driving force and motivation of those who remained as Jews.

Without the full co-operation of the interviewees and the disclosure of their testimony, this research would not have been possible. I utilised oral history as a means of eliciting data for this research. Oral history focuses on the idea of the

interviewees as active participants in the research process.<sup>1</sup> I considered the interview as a relationship upon which I could derive illuminating, individual accounts that might otherwise never have been told.

The interview method is used to generate testimony which is valid and reliable. However, testimonies need to be approached with an understanding of their inherent strengths and weaknesses.<sup>2</sup> Many survivors have only recently begun talking of their Holocaust experiences. The frailty of memory therefore becomes a significant aspect in terms of reliability. Historians have traditionally rejected personal testimony as a valid and reliable representation of historical events. Nevertheless, in recent years there has been considerable interest by survivors, writers, psychologists and historians in the area of memory and testimony. In fact, there has been a noticeable shift with oral history becoming more academically accepted, not only for Holocaust memory but also in other disciplines.

With the current interest in interviewing Holocaust survivors, there have also been a few survivor historians, such as Saul Friedländer and Raul Hilberg who have recently written their memoirs. (Raul Hilberg passed away in 2007.) Jeremy Popkin suggests this is an acknowledgment that history provides the possibility of an alternative narrative of the Holocaust, namely the first person narrative.<sup>3</sup> He sees the historians' memoirs as a model of Holocaust era memory, linking pre and post-war events to those of wartime. I have attempted to use this paradigm in my research. Martin Gilbert has also given voice to many Holocaust witnesses.<sup>4</sup>

Mark Roseman offers an explanation for discrepancies in testimony accounts. His ground-breaking study focuses on one survivor, Marianne Ellenbogen.<sup>5</sup> In revealing her life story, he draws not only on oral testimony, but also on historical research. A few discrepancies in the testimony were found and documented in a

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<sup>1</sup> Joanna Bornat, 'Oral History', in Clive Seale, Giampietro Gobo, Jaber Gubrium & David Silverman, eds., *Qualitative Research Practice* (London: Sage Publishers, 2004), pp. 34-47.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Rozett, *Approaching the Holocaust: Texts and Contexts* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2005), p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Popkin, 'Holocaust Memories, Historians' Memoirs: First person, Narrative and the Memory of the Holocaust', *History and Memory*, 15, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2003), pp. 49-84.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Gilbert, *The Boys: Triumph over Adversity* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Mark Roseman, *The Past in Hiding* (London: The Penguin Press, 2000).

subsequent article.<sup>6</sup> In outlining these incongruities, Roseman points out that he was not challenging the testimony's fundamental accuracy or veracity. On the contrary, analysis of these inconsistencies sheds light on the processes and reasons for memory confusion.<sup>7</sup> By offering conflicting versions, the survivor in question was attempting to deal with the pain of the loss of her family. During my research, I was compelled to verify with my supervisor some inconsistencies in the testimonies of a few interviews.

Bearing witness after any event has its own set of problems. Survivors have to contend with the inevitable limitations of memory.<sup>8</sup> Primo Levi admitted to memories being erased and changing with time.<sup>9</sup> For Elie Wiesel, the only means of attempting to convey the horrors of the Holocaust is through testimony given by survivors.<sup>10</sup> Other survivors stress the importance of bearing witness. Jean Amery, who worked as a journalist and philosopher in Belgium after Liberation, believed that the resentment, anger and pain of survivors needed to be maintained, in order to preserve a truthful memory of the atrocity. He recognised that there was an urgent moral imperative for survivors to give their testimonies.<sup>11</sup> The interviewees in this research all stressed the necessity of disclosing their Holocaust experiences.

In the immediate post-war period, many survivor stories fell on deaf ears and for a long period, publishers were averse to accepting testimonies. The majority of testimonies, including diaries written during the Holocaust, did not find publishers until the mid 1960s. Primo Levi's first book was written a few months after his return to Italy and yet only attracted attention much later.<sup>12</sup> The same was true of Elie Wiesel's *Night*, which was first published in 1958.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Roseman, 'Surviving Memory: Truth and Inaccuracy in Holocaust Testimony' *The Journal of Holocaust Education*, 8, no. 1, (Summer 1999), pp. 1-18.

<sup>7</sup> Roseman, 'Surviving Memory: Truth and Inaccuracy in Holocaust Testimony', p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Zoë Waxman, 'Testimony and Representation', in Dan Stone, ed., *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 487-507.

<sup>9</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Vintage, 1988), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Elie Wiesel, *And the Sea is Never Full* (London: HarperCollins, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Karein Goertz, 'Body, Trauma, and the Rituals of Memory: Charlotte Delbo and Ruth Klüger' in Julia Epstein & Lori Lefkowitz, eds., *Shaping Losses: Cultural Memory and the Holocaust* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), pp. 161-185.

<sup>12</sup> Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (New York: Collier, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1961).

In the 1970s the number of published memoirs increased. Charlotte Delbo waited years before speaking and writing publicly about her Holocaust experiences. She began writing her memoirs shortly after returning to France but it was twenty years before they were published. Delbo posits that trauma disconnected the link between memory and conventional language for survivors, thus making it difficult for the listener or reader to comprehend the enormity of the event. The narrator's inability to present a coherent sequence of events manifests itself into disconnected visual fragments. Many of her experiences in and memory of *Auschwitz* cannot be shared with her readers. To overcome these difficulties, Delbo introduces symbolic analogies in order to create a clearer image of Holocaust experiences.

Ruth Klüger waited almost fifty years before writing about her experiences. She was born in Vienna in 1931, which placed her in the same age group as the interviewees for this study. She maintains that testimonies of child/teenage survivors were often dismissed as insignificant, compared to the traumas experienced by older survivors. *Still Alive* was first published in German in 1992. In her memoir, she offers a formidable voice of dissent and historical conscience, with a reminder that the past must not be forgotten.<sup>14</sup> For Klüger, closure from her Holocaust experience is unattainable. She argues that remembering should be an active, ongoing process which, in turn, emits descriptions that will engage the listener or reader as active critics.<sup>15</sup>

David Weiss Halivni, a Talmudic scholar, writer and teenage survivor also did not speak of his Holocaust experiences for fifty years. His friend, Elie Wiesel came from the same town, Sighet. They encountered similar Holocaust experiences. Wiesel was able to give testimony, whereas Weiss Halivni kept silent for fifty years. He explained the reason for his silence as being a challenge to his sense of security. The injury had not yet healed and 'there is still the fear that it may all come back'.<sup>16</sup> I suspect that the majority of those who were unwilling to participate in this study experienced similar sentiments.

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<sup>14</sup> Goertz, 'Body, Trauma and the Rituals of Memory', p. 166.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>16</sup> David Weiss Halivni, *The Book and the Sword* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1996) p. 129.

Information based on memory recall is an essential element of this research. One would expect that recording of facts shortly following an event might ensure accuracy. However, for some survivors this was not the case. It took fifty years for Shlomo Breznitz, a psychologist to finally put pen to paper and write about his childhood during the Holocaust.<sup>17</sup> He refrained from writing his memoirs for fear of embellishment and fabrication. Delay in writing assisted him in filtering out false information.<sup>18</sup> Breznitz believes that memories which are to be preserved are best not revealed. The consequence of repeated memory recounts often results in inconsistency between the reality and narrative. According to Breznitz, talking or writing about memory can cause its erosion.

Psychoanalyst Dori Laub wrote about his work with Holocaust survivors. He believes that survivors are not witnesses to their own experiences until they are interviewed. Laub argues that survivors needed to survive so that they could tell their story. However, he also states that the opposite is equally accurate. They needed to tell their story in order to survive. Only by offering testimonies, can survivors move on with their lives.<sup>19</sup> By relating their stories, the survivors were confirming their existence and identity in a post-war world.

Geoffrey Hartman was involved with the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University.<sup>20</sup> He remarks that video testimony brings us closer to the people who bear witness to the Holocaust.<sup>21</sup> This method of collecting data is an intimate form of representation. Survivors who offer oral memoirs should be valued as 'human witnesses to a dehumanising situation'.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, their real strength lies in the descriptions of the survivors' struggle for survival. Hartman found that the suffering and evil endured by survivors generally assisted the

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<sup>17</sup> Shlomo Breznitz, 'The Advantages of Delay: A Psychological Perspective on Memoirs of Trauma', in Steven Katz & Alan Rosen, eds., *Obligated by Memory. Literature, Religion, Ethics* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), pp. 43-51.

<sup>18</sup> Breznitz, 'The Advantages in Delay', p. 44.

<sup>19</sup> Dori Laub, 'History, Memory and Truth. Defining the Place of the Survivor' in Michael Berenbaum and Abraham Peck, eds., *The Holocaust and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 799-812.

<sup>20</sup> This project was founded in 1981. By 1994 it had gathered 3,300 witness accounts from England, France, Belgium, Slovakia, Yugoslavia, Israel and Argentina.

<sup>21</sup> Gary Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar efforts to Experience the Holocaust* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 118.

<sup>22</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, 'Learning from Survivors: The Yale Testimony Project', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 9, no. 2, (Fall 1995), pp. 192-205.

accuracy of recall. He proposes that a remarkable degree of precision remains as a consequence of the memory of evil.<sup>23</sup>

Gary Weissman proposes that testimonial experiences of survivors assist in both experiential and historical understandings of the Holocaust. He argues that 'memory is the surviving witnesses' pre-eminent reality now'.<sup>24</sup>

Lawrence Langer draws a comparison between oral testimony and written survivor testimonies. The latter abides by literary conventions whereas oral testimony provides a more spontaneous voice of memory, conveying the event more directly. Written testimonies demand precision and accountability. In this way the survivor's imagination is dependent on literary procedures that may alter and obfuscate the reality of his/her Holocaust experience. Langer wants to locate truth in videotaped interviews. He feels that by listening to testimonies of survivors, one is able to experience and understand the trauma of the Holocaust.

As a psychologist and playwright, Henry Greenspan's interest has been in the ways survivors' recounting evolves over time within sustained conversation.<sup>25</sup> Rather than relying on one-time interviews, his approach emphasises ongoing dialogue with the same survivors over many years. His work has produced insight into the ways survivors live with Holocaust memories and how they retell their stories. Testimony provided in the immediate aftermath of the war expressed feelings of hopefulness. This may have been a consequence of the general exuberance of liberation itself. With time and the exigencies of living in new countries, survivors' goals grew more constrained. Coming to new communities, where there were no means for sharing, telling or memorialising their experiences created a public silence, which in turn generated a private silence. Feelings of optimism often gave way to simply coping. Greenspan also makes the point that survivors often struggle unsuccessfully to find the words to express themselves. He believes that simply listening to survivors is the most essential factor. This was borne out in my own research. The interviewees continually expressed their

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<sup>23</sup> Hartman, 'Learning from Survivors: The Yale Testimony Project', p. 195.

<sup>24</sup> Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust*, p. 94.

<sup>25</sup> Henry Greenspan, 'The Awakening of memory. Survivor Testimony in the First years after the Holocaust, and Today' *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies. Weinmann Lecture Series*, (May 2000), pp. 1-21.

appreciation to me and how at ease they felt with me as they gave their testimonies.

As a psychiatrist, Shamai Davidson's main objective was to help survivors live productive lives in the present. He appreciated the fact that relating their Holocaust experiences could be a helpful means of healing for some. However, for others, who were continuously driven to retell their experiences, the achievement of closure proved difficult.

### Teenage Survivors

I chose to research young orphaned Holocaust survivors; a group which has only recently attracted attention. Robert Krell, a psychiatrist and child survivor, first spoke of his wartime experiences at a fledgling child survivor group in 1983. Up to this point, he commented that 'adults reminded us that we really had no story of survival worth noting'.<sup>26</sup> Child survivors were only acknowledged as an independent group, separate from adult survivors in the late 1980s.<sup>27</sup> The first Child Survivors of the Holocaust Conference took place in Washington, D.C. in 2000. Consensus was reached to officially categorise them as a specific and separate group. People who were fifteen years or younger by war's end were finally classified as child survivors.<sup>28</sup> The position for the specific ages of child survivors in Australia is less rigid. The NSW Child Survivor Group defines a child survivor as 'a person, who during the Holocaust, lived under Nazi occupation as a child and survived'.<sup>29</sup> Prior to this event, the suffering of child survivors had been considered insignificant compared to that of the adults.

For the purpose of this thesis, the concepts of adult, teenage and child survivors need to be clarified. After Liberation, the problems faced by each group varied according to their age, mentality, self-identification and the experiences endured

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Krell, 'Psychological Reverberations of the Holocaust in the Lives of Child Survivors' *Centre for Advanced Holocaust Studies. Weinmann Lecture Series*, (June 1997), pp. 1-16.

<sup>27</sup> *The Gift of Life, A Commemorative Book of the Holocaust Gathering*, May 1985, Sydney Australia, Australian Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Suedfeld, 'Life After the Ashes: The Postwar Pain, and Resilience of Young Holocaust Survivors' *US Holocaust Memorial Museum. Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies. Weinmann Lecture Series*. (May 2002), pp. 1-22.

<sup>29</sup> *Constitution of the NSW Child Survivor Group*, p. 2. The aim of this group is 'to provide a support group and safe environment for Holocaust survivors who were children between 1928 and 1945'.

during the war. A principal impetus for adult married survivors was to locate their spouses. In finding their partners, they could attempt to resume their previous lives together. Those, unsuccessful in their search, were of an age when they could commence new relationships. There were very few child survivors, between the ages of one to five years who survived.<sup>30</sup> Child survivors were usually placed under some form of guardianship, which assisted them with their recovery process. The situation with teenage survivors was distinctive from the above survivors. Children in their teenage years experienced difficulties that were unlike those pertaining to younger children.

Of great significance for this thesis is the research undertaken by Sharon Kangisser Cohen in her doctoral dissertation. She deals with child survivors rebuilding their lives in Israel, as orphans or with the support of their surviving parents. Kangisser Cohen conducted twenty one interviews with men and women in Israel in the late 1990s.<sup>31</sup> The majority were born in the mid 1930s; placing them in a younger age group than my target group. In doing so, Kangisser Cohen explores the backgrounds of her interviewees and throws light on the impact of the post-war environment on the child survivor experience. Her findings demonstrated many similarities to my teenage interviewees. As with my interviewees, some of Kangisser Cohen's have only recently 'found their voices' and are willing to disclose their innermost feelings. She posits that immediately following the war, child survivors attempted 'to adapt themselves to their new environments and integrate as quickly as possible into their post-war societies'.<sup>32</sup> Integration and assimilation into Australian society was also a desired and encouraged option for my teenage survivors. Kangisser Cohen does not deal with the question of the regaining of Jewish rhythms, possibly because it played a less significant role in the Jewish state of Israel than in Australia.

I was greatly vexed by issues surrounding teenage orphaned survivors. It is a group that did not fit into the accepted categories of adult or child survivors.

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<sup>30</sup> Of the 1.35 million Jewish children in the Central and Eastern European countries conquered by the Nazis, only 150,000 survived the war. According to the Jewish Organisation for Child Care, Children's Aid Society, *Jewish Chronicle*, July 13, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Sharon Kangisser Cohen, *Child Survivors of the Holocaust in Israel "Finding Their Voice"* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

Moreover, it has, to my knowledge not been subjected to critical analysis of Holocaust scholarship. This concern was highlighted by one teenage survivor, who spoke to me about her situation in the immediate post-war environment. Being too young for marriage and having no need for any form of guardianship, she recalled her isolation through not having had any moral support. Her war experiences resembled those of mature adults and yet her post-war trauma difficulties of re-adjustment were often dismissed as insignificant, given her young age. After a period of rehabilitation, survivors of this age group often found themselves alone and making decisions for themselves. My conversation with her gave me impetus to shed light on the problems of teenage survivors in regaining the rhythms of Jewish life without the support of the family.

I propose to establish a more specific age group, namely a teenager survivor group, as distinct from child survivors. Their wartime experiences had been completely different to those of the younger group members. The challenges facing the older group in the post-war period also differed significantly from the younger child survivors. A few interviewees commented that they felt out of place when attending NSW Child Survivor Group meetings. Many of the teenagers endured the war, where they were often treated as adults. Consequently, they considered themselves too old to be regarded as children. Being orphaned as a result of the Holocaust would have exacerbated the situation. The objective is to seek out those survivors who were teenagers at war's end; more specifically those born between 1927 and 1932 and examine the difficulties they experienced in the aftermath of the Holocaust. In doing so, I hope to construct a greater understanding and awareness of this group who constituted a number of the survivors.

This thesis attempts to ascertain a link between the pre- and post-war rhythms of Jewish life of young survivors. Targeting older children has a distinct advantage as they are able to provide greater detail in recalling their pre-war life. Robert Krell analyses psychological effects of the Holocaust on child survivors. He draws comparisons of memory recall between the child and adult survivor. Krell describes the recall of Jewish identity of older survivors as being strong; with 'a memory of family and tradition, daily life and habits, smells and sounds of a past'.

The child survivor, on the other hand, has only disrupted memory fragments.<sup>33</sup> My findings support Krell's conclusions and my interviewees recalled their pre-war family life effortlessly.

Resilience and will power are some of the survival instincts the interviewees demonstrated during their incarceration and in the aftermath period. These characteristics will become evident throughout this thesis. Some research has been carried out focussing on physical and psychological strength of teenagers during the Holocaust. Judith Kestenberg, one of the early scholars to conduct research on child survivors, proposes that adolescents were stronger when compared with younger children.<sup>34</sup> She also suggests that in many ways teenagers, being able to focus on survival and work were emotionally and physically stronger than adults. These resourceful teenagers could adapt to their harsh conditions and in many ways were able to obliterate, if only temporarily the psychological effects during their incarceration. Kestenberg states that teenagers were old enough to have developed a sense of Jewish identity.<sup>35</sup> It is this issue of the maintenance of their Jewish identity that I wish to further explore.

Shamai Davidson classifies the teenage survivors as a separate group.<sup>36</sup> He argues that many of those, who had been incarcerated in ghettos, acquired manual skills, which they could then utilise in subsequent work camps. He suggests the physical and psychological stamina of teenagers made them suitable for the German slave labour camps and thus slightly increased their chances of survival. Moreover, a ghetto period with their families also prepared them emotionally for the difficult times ahead. Despite all the suffering and loss of family, they became psychologically stronger and independent during their wartime experiences.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Krell, 'Psychological Reverberations of the Holocaust in the Lives of Child Survivors', p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Judith Kestenberg 'Children in Concentration Camps' in J. Kestenberg & I. Brenner, eds., *The Last Witness: The Child Survivor of the Holocaust* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press Inc., 1996), pp. 1-25.

<sup>35</sup> Kestenberg & Brenner, 'Children in Concentration Camps', p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> Israel Charny, ed., *Holding onto Humanity: The Message of Holocaust Survivors. The Shamai Davidson Papers* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), p. 71.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

Davidson also found that for most, adult life commenced immediately after Liberation. Many of them faced a void of the religious beliefs in contrast to the communal, ideological, traditional and religious frameworks that had been the essence of pre-war childhood. This factor will become apparent in my research.

Judith Hemmendinger studied the *Buchenwald* Boys, a legendary group sent to rehabilitation in France after Liberation.<sup>38</sup> Originally, she went there to study a group of ninety young survivors. However, when the Director left, she took over the management. Hemmendinger ran the hostel in a way which was insightful to the needs of the young victims, traumatised by the horror of incarceration. By the time the teenagers left the hostel, they had 'regained their former identity, their physical strength, sensitiveness and interest in life'.<sup>39</sup>

Hemmendinger followed the progress and post-war adjustment of many of the *Buchenwald* Boys in the USA, attending *Buchenwald* meetings. Her findings showed that adjustment to a normal life, after the trauma of the concentration camps and separation from parents, was possible. However, age was a determining factor. She found that teenagers, whose sense of Jewish identity was already formed before the camps, readjusted well.<sup>40</sup> A number of my interviewees also spent time in this hostel. I do not claim to be a psychologist and hence will not make assertions of normality or otherwise. However, I am interested in pursuing the extent to which teenagers 'regained their former Jewish identity' according to Hemmendinger's statements.

The majority of survivors have only recently been prepared to speak of their Holocaust experiences. However, current research has revealed evidence which provides a unique insight into experiences and perceptions of young survivors. Benjamin Tenenbaum had immigrated to Israel from Poland prior to the Holocaust. On a return visit to Poland shortly after war's end, he devoted time to Jewish children who had survived the Holocaust, suggesting they record their experiences in writing. He collected thousands of hand-written testimonies from these child survivors and then translated them into Hebrew. The language of the

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<sup>38</sup> Judith Hemmendinger, 'The Children of Buchenwald: After Liberation and Now', *Echoes of the Holocaust*, no. 3 (July 1994), pp. 40-51.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

outpourings of these young survivors was often candid and frank in its simplicity.<sup>41</sup> The survivors I interviewed were similarly outspoken as they recalled their pre-war and war experiences.

### Jewish Rhythms

For the purpose of this thesis, a clarification of the rhythms of Jewish life is fundamental. These rhythms played a significant and essential role in the lives of the interviewees. Belief in God and observance of the festivals and Jewish traditions have created a pathway of life that have strengthened and sustained the Jews for centuries. Jewish laws, rituals and traditions have held the Jews together as an identifiable group and have always sustained Jewish communities. As Jews were dispersed throughout the centuries through trade, migration and expulsion, their traditions and beliefs held them together.

The rhythms of Jewish life encompass the observation and adherence of Jewish traditions and festivals. Traditionally, 613 *mitsvos* (obligations) comprise the foundations of the religious law that regulates the behaviour of observant Jews in all areas of life. At least a third of these refer to Temple ritual, which has not been practised since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70CE. Some of the laws stem from the *Torah*. Included in the 613 *mitsvos* are many laws and observances of social, economic and ritual activities pertaining to rites of passage.<sup>42</sup> The guidelines for consequent laws, set down by rabbis 'are derived from the framework of spiritual values inherent in the Jewish faith'.<sup>43</sup>

Briefly, these rites include the celebrations for the newborn which include circumcision, the *Barmitzvah* and *Batmitzvah*, marriage and conclude with rituals for death and mourning. The *Barmitzvah* and *Batmitzvah* were much later developments. These important stages of life within the religious lifecycle in Judaism are marked by special ceremonies, integrating the private event into the community. They enable an intergenerational transmission which assists families to move to a new stage of life with one another. Judaism requires the need to

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<sup>41</sup> Boaz Cohen, 'The Children's Voice: Postwar Collection of Testimonies from Child Survivors of the Holocaust', *Holocaust & Genocide Studies*, 21, no.1 (Spring 2007), pp. 73-95.

<sup>42</sup> Mark Zborowski & Elizabeth Herzog, *Life is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl* (New York: Schocken Books, 1952), p. 106.

<sup>43</sup> Hayim Halevy Donin, *To be a Jew* (Wisconsin: Basic Books, 1991), p. 270.

affirm family continuity within a public context. These passages of life are commenced in the presence of a *minyan*.<sup>44</sup> Jewish lifecycle ceremonies celebrate change and sanctify the ordinary.

Although the rite of circumcision does not feature to a great extent in this research, it is imperative to explain its significance, being the first commandment to Abraham. Lamm offers an explanation for the function of this rite: Only after Abraham's circumcision was he able to reach a 'state of wholeness' which would bind covenant with God.<sup>45</sup> Circumcision is the first commandment, addressed specifically and uniquely to the Jews. Not only is it a principal symbol, but circumcision is also the first of life's religious celebrations, taking place on the eighth day of the life of all male children of Jewish parents. There is a widespread tradition among Jews to name a child after a closely deceased relative, whose memory they wish to preserve and honour.<sup>46</sup> The majority of the interviewees followed this custom, when naming their offspring.

The day of a *Barmitzvah* is one of the most definitional in the Jewish life-cycle, where the boy recites portions of the *Torah* and from the Prophets. Performing a *Barmitzvah* reflects the male's capabilities and responsibilities. A *Barmitzvah* takes place at the completion of a Jewish boy's thirteenth year, when he is considered a full member of the community, with all the rights and responsibilities laid down by religious law. It is a coming of age ceremony, at which moment the boy is regarded as responsible for his actions and must carry out the precepts of the *Torah*. By Jewish law, he is no longer treated as a minor.<sup>47</sup> It is a significant stage in his life, when he is first permitted to participate and perform rituals, with full membership in the community. The majority of the male interviewees performed this ceremony.

Girls are considered to be religiously mature at the completion of their twelfth year. It was expected that they be familiar with running a household in accordance with the *kashrut*. A *Batmitzvah* ceremony for girls was introduced in Reform

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<sup>44</sup> Quorum of ten men required for religious services.

<sup>45</sup> Maurice Lamm, *Becoming a Jew* (New York: Jonathan David Publishers, inc., 1991), p. 145.

<sup>46</sup> Hayim Donin, *To be a Jew*, p. 272.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

communities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>48</sup> However, its significance was less marked and in fact only one of the female interviewees mentioned having prepared for this ritual.

The Jewish wedding ceremony is recognised as both a spiritual and contractual ritual, bonding the couple before the community and God. By law and tradition, the ceremony creates a new family.<sup>49</sup> Prior to the ceremony is the signing and witnessing of the *ketubah* (marriage contract). The form of this document, written in Aramaic is prescribed in the *Mishna*; the precepts of Judaism including Oral Law compiled in the second century CE. It includes provision for the wife's future maintenance by the husband and is read out during the ceremony. The couple are then united under the *chuppah*,<sup>50</sup> where the public ceremony takes place. The significance of marrying a Jewish partner will become evident as the interviewees reach this stage of their lives.

Death and mourning are further examples of significant Jewish rituals which affected teenage survivors. Prior to the burial, the dead are prepared and cared for by the *Chevra Kadisha*.<sup>51</sup> Traditional Jewish observances surrounding death and mourning maintain the dignity of the deceased and comfort to the mourners.<sup>52</sup> This rite of passage was clearly unable to be fulfilled by most young survivors as the majority of them were separated from their parents and were often unaware of their fate until after the war.

The mourning period following the death of a family member is a religious obligation. Remembrance of the dead is essential as it connects Jewish people together from generation to generation. Strong family ties assist the grieving process while simultaneously instilling a sense of family duty of transmitting the tradition of remembering the departed. Intergenerational transmission is evident in the life cycle of death and mourning. The first period of mourning, *shivah* refers to the seven days of mourning following the death and is required of close members

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<sup>48</sup> Judith Kaplan, the daughter of Mordechai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism in America, had the first *Batmitzvah* in the U.S. in 1922.

<sup>49</sup> Hayim Donin, *To be a Jew*, p. 287.

<sup>50</sup> A *chuppah* is a decorated cloth held up by four poles, symbolising the couple's new home.

<sup>51</sup> The *Chevra Kadisha* is the Jewish Burial Society which performs this service with reverence and dignity and maintains the highest standards of Jewish customs and laws.

<sup>52</sup> Hayim Donin, *To be a Jew*, p. 297.

of the family.<sup>53</sup> *Kaddish*, a mourner's prayer, is said for a specific period of time. Without the knowledge of the precise time of death and burial of their parents, these essential elements in the religious ritual of coping with bereavement could not be performed by the interviewees.

The anniversary of the death is known as *yahrzeit*. Both sons and daughters fulfil the duty of keeping the *yahrzeit* in memory of the deceased.<sup>54</sup> The tradition of lighting a memorial candle, visiting the grave and reciting *Kaddish* would not have been viable in situations where the time and place of death were unknown. Jewish mourning is both private and public. *Yizkor* is a memorial service of public observance for the community of the bereaved. It is an essential part of the liturgy of most important Jewish holidays. *Yizkor* is recited on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement and on the three pilgrimage festivals of *Sukkot*, *Pesach*, and *Shavuot*. It is traditionally recited in the synagogue but can be recited privately. Its primary purpose is to remember the dead. It is at these times that the interviewees are able to officially mourn their loved ones.

Within Judaism, there are festivals and appointed sacred seasons, which provide opportunities to celebrate and rejoice in the historical and spiritual events that constitute the faith.<sup>55</sup> The prescribed holidays dominate the life of observant Jews and thus provide a cycle for the individual, the family and society to participate in Jewish rhythms. Adherence to these traditions and festivals forms part of the Jewish rhythms and shape Jewish identity. Parental observance of religious traditions provides tangible rhythms of their Jewish identities to children. For observant Jews, the cycle of the week and the prescribed festivals dominate their lives.

However, there is no day which characterises Jews more than the Sabbath. It is the fundamental feature for all of Judaism. The Sabbath is a separate covenant between God and the Jews.<sup>56</sup> No other commandment contains more 'expressions of affection and devotion as [that] for the Sabbath'.<sup>57</sup> Its importance

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 299.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>56</sup> Maurice Lamm, *Becoming a Jew*, p. 335.

<sup>57</sup> Hayim Donin, *To be a Jew*, p. 61.

is personified in a Talmudic dictum: 'More than the Jews have kept *Shabbat*, *Shabbat* has kept the Jews'.<sup>58</sup> It commemorates the day of rest and is considered the core of the Jewish experience, of the Jewish week and of Jewish family life. *Shabbat* commences every Friday evening prior to sunset and continues until sunset on Saturday evening.

It is a time when the nuclear family is obliged to be together, often meeting and dining with the extended family. This weekly family celebration of praying, reflecting, resting and eating is the most vital aspect of Jewish life. *Shabbat* epitomises Jewish family life. Men, women and children prepare for *Shabbat*. An essential aspect of Jewish traditions is its insistence on performing the rituals at prescribed times. Men often leave work earlier on Friday. Lighting the candles is the privilege of the lady of the house, who performs this at least eighteen minutes prior to sunset in the room, in which the meal will be served.<sup>59</sup> Prior to the ceremonial meal, the *Kiddush* (sanctification) ceremony takes place in the home when prayers are said over bread and wine. The *Kiddush* takes on an integrative meaning by drawing the family together.

A fundamental feature of Jewish life is the cultivation and nurturing of family ties. The family is the core of Jewish society and a centre for Jewish life.<sup>60</sup> Family life is paramount to the everyday world of activity, thought and feeling of Jews. Life takes on meaning and direction within the wholeness of home and family. Men and women pass on gendered traditions deeply entrenched in Judaism. Observance of the Jewish family laws plays a crucial part in the stability of the Jewish family. Jewish rites of passage provide occasions to reveal not only familial cohesion but also the family's connection to the religious community. The important role of the family is evident in all of the above-mentioned rites of passage and performing of the Jewish festivals. This aspect is particularly significant in this thesis as family life, as such, was shattered during the Holocaust.

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<sup>58</sup> Kolot: The Center for Jewish Women's and Gender Studies, Wyncote, PA, USA, *Shabbat and Daily Life*, [http://www.ritualwell.org/shabbat/shabbatlife/index\\_html/overview\\_view](http://www.ritualwell.org/shabbat/shabbatlife/index_html/overview_view), viewed 28 April 2008.

<sup>59</sup> Maurice Lamm, *Becoming a Jew*, p. 341.

<sup>60</sup> Hayim Donin, *To be a Jew*, p. 121.

Another significant religious practice is the dietary laws – the laws of *Kashrut*. These laws include prohibitions and set out times of eating certain foods. It is yet another example of how the Jewish religion penetrates all aspects of daily life and creates a rhythm, which adds a further dimension to practising Jews. Donin proposes that keeping *kashrut* is also instrumental in maintaining ‘one’s spiritual well-being’.<sup>61</sup> Lamm suggests that the functional objective is to render the Jewish people distinct and thus helps prevent them from leaving the faith.<sup>62</sup>

Love for learning and self-betterment through knowledge has always been an intrinsic and significant aspect of Jewish life. One of the first *mitsva* (obligation) is, in fact, that of learning.<sup>63</sup> The Jewish Sages defined the model of excellence for Jewry. In ancient times the scholar and sage, the righteous man and the prophet were the models and paradigms of Jewish tradition. Jewish society had always encouraged sacerdotal intellectuals in the service of the *Torah*. The man of exceptional learning is regarded as the most respected person in the community. The studying of the *Torah* became an ‘act of love’<sup>64</sup> and should never cease. The tradition of learning not only serves as means of transmitting the culture, but also as a cohesive force of keeping the Jews as a unified group.<sup>65</sup> Elie Wiesel, a renowned author and Holocaust survivor describes the passion of learning as an essential part of Jewish tradition. ‘I never saw my father or any of my uncles go anywhere without a book under their arms’.<sup>66</sup>

The tradition of learning from the Sages of the Talmud to the era of Jewish emancipation was relatively unbroken. Learning gives authority, respect, prestige and status.<sup>67</sup> The pursuit of excellence transferred from the context of rabbinical studies to secular life. In times of discrimination, parents perceived education to be a determinant for their Jewish children to assist them in a hostile world. This regard for knowledge is the fruit of a long history, in which learning was a prominent factor in the life of a people, deprived of political power and social

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>62</sup> Maurice Lamm, *Becoming a Jew*, p. 333.

<sup>63</sup> Mark Zborowski & Elizabeth Herzog, *Life is with People*, p. 71.

<sup>64</sup> Maurice Lamm, *Becoming a Jew*, p. 318.

<sup>65</sup> Mark Zborowski & Elizabeth Herzog, *Life is with People*, p. 118.

<sup>66</sup> Elie Wiesel, ‘The World of the Shtetl’ in Steven Katz, ed. *The Shtetl: New Evaluations* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), pp. 290-306.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

acceptance. The Jewish people have always viewed books as the source of their strength.

As many of the interviewees came from *shtetls*, it is critical to briefly portray their lives. *Shtetls* were small towns or villages in Eastern Europe, in which the Jewish communities lived and where the culture of the *Ashkenazim*<sup>68</sup> flourished before the Holocaust. For centuries, *shtetls* became safe havens, where Jews could continue with their way of life; speaking in Yiddish and practising every detail of daily life according to the *Torah*.<sup>69</sup> Religion, values, social structure and individual behaviour were inextricably bound amongst the inhabitants of the *shtetl*. The close dynamics of the *shtetl* offered a community, where each person was linked and identified within the group; almost an extended family.<sup>70</sup> Samuel Kassow suggests that 'the Jewish religion dictated certain communal obligations that in turn helped determine the public space and public life of the *shtetl*'.<sup>71</sup> The acts of helping others and performing 'social justice' were paramount amongst those living in the *shtetls*. Not only was it a *mitsva* to assist those in need, but this act of charity created an inter-dependence within the community of the *shtetl*. Everyone in the *shtetl* adhered to the laws of *kashrut*. The community within the *shtetl* took an active part in the preparation and celebration of the rituals of the life cycles.

No better example of the significance of the Sabbath can be depicted than within the *shtetl*. The whole *shtetl* lived from Sabbath to Sabbath, striving toward the climax of the week. *Erev Shabbat* (Friday is the day of the eve of the Sabbath) is the day on which preparations are made in readiness to greet the Sabbath. In the *shtetl*, this meant numerous activities for the housewife extending from sunrise to sunset; ranging from cleaning the house to making the *challah* (Sabbath loaf), cleaning and preparing the chicken and kneading the dough for the noodles for the chicken soup. The children were cleansed and dressed in specially prepared Sabbath clothes. The men and older boys washed in the *mikva* (bathhouse) and changed into their prepared clothing, specific for the Sabbath. The lighting and

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<sup>68</sup> The community of Jews descended from those living in Germany and France in the Middle Ages and later in Eastern Europe.

<sup>69</sup> Mark Zborowski & Elizabeth Herzog, *Life is with People*, p. 34.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>71</sup> Samuel Kassow, 'Introduction' in Steven Katz, *The Shtetl: New Evaluations* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), pp. 1-28.

blessing of the Sabbath candles was the last duty of the wife before the meal. This weekly flurry of pre-Sabbath activity was typical in all *shtetls* and will become apparent in the comments of the interviewees.

Jewish traditions reinforce the manner in which generations of Jews have performed these rituals and thus provide continuity, so essential in the preservation of Judaism. Jewish lifecycle rituals communicate and strengthen group values and norms and promote family and group bonds. They encourage personal, family and Jewish identity and form an integral part of Jewish traditions. Without the crucial function of strong family ties, these ritual obligations and rites of passage become difficult to fulfil.

### Complexity of Jewish Identity

In order to fully comprehend the responses of the interviewees, it is necessary to elucidate the intricacies of Jewish identity. Unlike other monotheistic religions, Jewish identity can be explained in terms of faith, ethnicity, culture and nationalism. The Jewish rituals and traditions, both festivals and life cycle events can fit into these differing identities. Hence, survivors can lose their belief in God but continue with Jewish rituals, traditions and life cycle events as part of their ethnicity or culture.

Prior to the period of Enlightenment, it was not necessary to justify what was the Jewish way of life. Jews had segregated themselves from all other peoples, by following their ritual practices of diet and dress and the celebration of their festivals and life cycles. Jewish identity was regarded in terms of faith; a system of religious beliefs.

However, since the time of Enlightenment and later Emancipation, Jews embraced the idea of reforming Jewish life, while not abandoning it. They welcomed the ideals and emphasis on reasoning, offered by Enlightenment and the opportunities for upward mobility, made possible by Emancipation. The term 'Orthodox' became a defining factor in differentiating Jews, when previously they had merely been Jews.<sup>72</sup> They saw an opportunity of being accepted as citizens of their national state, whilst remaining Jewish. The move towards modernity,

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<sup>72</sup> Bernard Susser & Charles Liebman, *Choosing Survival. Strategies for a Jewish Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 18.

particularly in Western Europe consigned the faith and rituals of the Jews to a matter for private practice and thus transformed the image of Jews from religious to ethnic or cultural.

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, Western European Jews had become indistinguishable from other Western Europeans in matters of language, dress, occupation and their hair styles.<sup>73</sup> They adopted the local characteristics and mentality of their surrounding societies. For many, the time had passed when being of Jewish origin inevitably inferred following Jewish religious practices or taking part in Jewish communal life.<sup>74</sup> Jewry was transformed by the development of emancipation, secularisation, democratisation, economic modernisation, migration and modern national awareness.<sup>75</sup> This was reflected in my findings with regards to the interviewees from Western Europe, and indeed some from the cities of Eastern Europe. Some interviewees came from backgrounds where faith and Jewish traditions fitted into their national identities, whereas others merely practised a few rituals. This latter group viewed their Jewishness as a cultural identity.

Continuing debates over what constitutes Jewish identity and Judaism have been going on for centuries, among Jews and non-Jews alike. Gilman suggests that the current difficulty of defining 'Jewish' is due to the fact that 'being Jewish has no single common denominator' whether religious, cultural or political.<sup>76</sup> Similar debates apply to the ways in which people define Jewish culture. For some, Jewish culture means exclusively the religious and traditional teachings, texts and customs that make up the world of observant Jewry. Some feel that it includes works of art, music and literature produced by Jews. Yet, others feel that their identity is axiomatic to who they are, despite a lack of conscious practice. This identity does not encompass religion and belief but may or may not include some Jewish practices.

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<sup>73</sup> Sander Gilman, *Multiculturalism and the Jews* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 21.

<sup>74</sup> Kenneth Jacobson, *Embattled Selves* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994), p. 9.

<sup>75</sup> Dan Michman, 'A 'Third Partner' of World Jewry? The Role of the memory of the Shoah in the Search for a New Present-Day European Jewish Identity' in Konrad Kwiet & Jürgen Matthäus, eds., *Contemporary Responses to the Holocaust* (Westport: Praeger Series on Jewish and Israeli Studies, 2004), pp. 123-135.

<sup>76</sup> Sander Gilman, *Multiculturalism and the Jews*, p. 181.

Michman explores a 'new' Jewish identity in continental Europe which has emerged in the last decade as a consequence of a united Europe.<sup>77</sup> Many of its adherents do not participate in Jewish traditions or communal life. Their only identification to Judaism is by acceptance of Jewish biological descent. This is perhaps the most recent manifestation of a redefining of Jewish identity.

Susser and Liebman examine the forms of Jewish identity that have developed in the United States and Israel. Although comparisons can be made between the American and Australian Jewish identity, attention must be drawn to their differences. Susser and Liebman argue the case that adversity does not necessarily signify the 'heightening of Jewish solidarity'.<sup>78</sup> The destruction of European Jewry during the Holocaust is offered as a case in point, which did not ignite revivals of Jewish commitment. They state that there was no significant return to Jewish identity, learning, belief or practice in the aftermath of the Holocaust.<sup>79</sup>

My findings partially support these conclusions. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, I found that there was a great need for the survivors to return to a Jewish identity but at the same time most did not try to create a Jewish religious revival. While many believing Jews abandoned their religious commitment, participation in some of the Jewish rituals offered them structure and meaning and more significantly, a framework for the rebuilding of their shattered lives.

### Structure of Thesis

As the topic of this research implies, I am interested in teenage orphaned survivors and their return or otherwise to the rhythms of Jewish life observed, prior to the Holocaust. In order to achieve a comprehensive and chronological overview of the lives of the interviewees, I gathered information from their earliest memories of their childhood, through their Holocaust, Liberation and recovery experiences and concluding with their lives in Australia. I endeavoured to deal with some of the difficulties of recall and reliability by gathering a group of forty three people.<sup>80</sup> Although the sample number is small, it is representative of a specific age group.

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<sup>77</sup> Dan Michman, 'A 'Third Partner' of World Jewry?', p. 129.

<sup>78</sup> Susser & Liebman, *Choosing Survival*, p. 173.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>80</sup> See Appendix 5.

Within the group, there was also a number who had endured the Holocaust by various means; incarceration, in hiding and rescued by the *Kindertransporte*.

A considerable number of participants came from the same national group and their recounts were quite similar. The descriptions of the pre-war lives of the Orthodox Jewish interviewees who came from the Eastern European countries, namely Poland and Romania, were almost identical. The accounts of those who experienced incarceration in concentration camps followed comparable patterns. Consequently, I was able to compare and contrast the validity of their stories. In cases where there were discrepancies or unusual events, I verified the information with reference books or with my supervisor.

While many interviewees were unable to present comprehensive and factually flawless accounts of the Holocaust, they had no difficulty in recalling significant events during their childhood. My research was predominantly involved with experiential issues, not historical accounts and knowledge. Consequently, recall of historical events was not imperative. The interviewees, via the means of oral history were able to describe in detail the subtleties of certain events of their pre-war lives. Their emotional expressions resulted in personal and powerful testimonies. Childhood memories were not difficult to retrieve, especially if this period was not especially traumatic. The interviewees all experienced their childhoods prior to the war and were able to recall aspects of this period with relative ease. There was, however one exception, where recalling childhood life proved difficult; that of the *Kindertransport* group,<sup>81</sup> which was separated from their parents at an earlier stage of their development. This may have accounted for childhood memory lapses.

This thesis comprises the following chapters:

The 'Methodology' chapter outlines the preparation, approach and theory used to achieve the most extensive results for this research.

In 'Pre-War Jewish Life', I shed light on the pre-war historical and religious settings of the interviewees' countries. The religious and cultural backgrounds of the interviewees are depicted. The significance of the Jewish life cycles, festivals,

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<sup>81</sup> After *Kristallnacht*, domestic and external pressures induced the British government to admit some 10,000 children without their parents in the *Kindertransporte*.

laws and traditions on their lives becomes evident. The chapter also attempts to portray an image of acculturated Jews, where religion no longer played an important role. The crucial role of the Jewish family is revealed to highlight the devastation of the teenage orphans in their post-war lives.

In 'Suffering and Survival in the Holocaust', the interviewees' reactions to their war environments during the war are portrayed and analysed. The strategies and survivor skills they developed are outlined. Comparisons between religious and non-religious responses are made.

The 'Liberation' chapter portrays the state of being and emotions of the interviewees at the time of Liberation.

'Rebuilding New Lives' describes the lives of the interviewees in the immediate post-war period. It depicts the emotional condition of the teenage survivors who are coming to terms with their lives as orphans. The role of Judaism during this period of recuperation and adjustment to normality is examined.

'New Life in Australia' describes the religious responses of the interviewees to the Holocaust in their new environment of Australia. It examines their lives in relation to their belief in God and their Jewish rhythms. Motives and rationale for any shifts in religious practices are explored. It also investigates the religious responses of those who kept their belief in God.

The 'Conclusion' attempts to answer the questions raised in this introduction.

## 2. Methodology

This study is not only based on the findings of scholarly research, but also and foremost on the ‘recollections’ of orphaned teenage survivors. I chose an oral history approach as it is the best method of eliciting testimonies, which provides evidence to support the topic of this research. Oral history permits an in-depth exploration of the research topic with people, who have had the relevant experiences.<sup>82</sup> It is the recording of people’s memories of their unique life experiences and offers a living history, using the power of the spoken word. The willing participation of the interviewee means that the nature of the interview becomes a principal feature of the research process. The interviewee is often prepared to reveal painful experiences in the hope that the information will be safe-guarded. The interviewer is there to listen with sensitivity and to encourage the person to respond to open-ended questions.

I contacted people from various groups and was introduced to prospective interviewees by word of mouth.<sup>83</sup> I attended a Holocaust Children’s Survivors’ meeting, where I spoke about my intended research project and asked for volunteers who matched the criteria; namely ‘teenage and orphaned’ born between 1927 and 1932. I phoned people and gained an approximation of those who were interested in participating in an Oral History project.

I was also given the ‘*Buchenwald Boys*’ list, which contained the names of people who were liberated from *Buchenwald*. Initial communication was made by phone, whereby I introduced myself and the project on which I was embarking. Approximately one third of those contacted declined to take part. Many survivors refuse to talk about their Holocaust experiences. I commenced the project, knowing I would have a minimum of twenty interviewees. Given the age and willingness of the target group, I was pleased with the outcome. Throughout the first two years, by constant searching and phoning, a further twenty three interviewees agreed to participate in the project. Twelve of the participants were female and four of these were on the *Kindertransporte*. In total, I interviewed forty

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<sup>82</sup> Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (London: Sage Publishers, 2006), p. 25.

<sup>83</sup> Diane Armstrong, *The Voyage of their Life* (Sydney: Flamingo Publishers, 2001).

three people whom I had found through a variety of opportunities. Thirty of the interviewees lived in Sydney and thirteen in Melbourne.

Prior to commencing the research, permission had to be approved by the Human Research Ethic Committee of the University of Sydney. The 'Ethics Application for Research involving Humans' form was completed. Attached to the application form were the *Participation Information Statement*,<sup>84</sup> the *Consent Form*<sup>85</sup> and the *Questionnaire*.<sup>86</sup>

The *Questionnaire*, *Participation Information Statement* and *Consent Form* were forwarded to those who had consented to participate in the project. A few prospective interviewees asked for the package for their perusal, prior to making a final decision of consent. The rationale of the questionnaire was to gain interviewee background information in order to support the interviewing process. The purpose was to minimise the interview time spent on basic personal information and rather focus on the research question. An interview plan was prepared for every interview.<sup>87</sup> I guaranteed to keep all audio discs at home under lock and key.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections: Pre-war years, War years, Liberation and Aftermath. Upon receiving the completed questionnaire forms, I coordinated suitable interview times with the interviewees. The individual interviews took place in their homes.

The majority of those who received the questionnaire completed it, whereas a few found the content too confrontational to continue with the project. This latter group of four people probably had second thoughts after reading the questionnaire. One of the shortcomings of the questionnaire may have been its perceived 'Jewish content' by some of the less religious Jewish interviewees. Notwithstanding the essence of the topic in question, some people commented that given their pre- and post-war irreligious Jewish background, they believed they would not be considered appropriate interviewees. The questionnaire offered possibilities of describing the level that Judaism played in their lives; ranging from 'Orthodox' to

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<sup>84</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>85</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>86</sup> See Appendix 3.

<sup>87</sup> See Appendix 4.

'Unaffiliated'. Yet some almost felt almost shameful of their lack of participation in Jewish rituals and traditions.

I managed to convince a few reticent, potential interviewees of their significance to the project. Ideally I would have liked to have found participants who had lost all traces of previously held Jewish identity but this proved impossible. This may have created an additional control group. Also, I would have preferred to have had a more equally gender-balanced group. In essence, the group of forty three interviewees was a self-selecting group. Given the sensitivity of the topic, this was an optimum outcome.

It was essential to carry out the interviews as quickly as possible, given the interviewees' advancing years. This became evident when I interviewed two males, who were already showing signs of dementia. Their interviews proved to be futile as their wives provided most of the answers. I had been unaware of this situation prior to the interview. These two interviews occurred in the initial stages of the project, which emphasised the urgency to complete the interviewing process without delay.

I utilised the additional personal information provided by the completed questionnaires to develop a comprehensive interview outline. The interview, consisting of semi-structured focused questions was divided into similar sections as in the questionnaire. Prior to commencement of the interview, I reminded the participant of his/her right to withdraw from the project if it became too arduous.

Throughout the interviewing process I used an unobtrusive mini-disc recorder which enabled the interviewees' flow of expression without impediments. The audio method of recording was chosen in preference to video which, by its very nature is more noticeable and consequently likely to be intrusive during the interview. With the filming of the interviewees for the Shoah Foundation and the Fortunoff Video, additional people were utilised for the filming process. This factor could inhibit the interviewee's responses. It is optimal when dealing with a sensitive subject matter such as the Holocaust, to create an atmosphere of trust between interviewer and interviewee. This confidence can often be hampered by invasive elements during the interview. Oren Stier addresses the role of media

and its effects of shaping the consciousness of the interviewee.<sup>88</sup> He discusses the obstructions and barriers that occur with videoing of testimonies.

Audio tapes provide detailed recorded talk, which field notes cannot provide.<sup>89</sup> I did not take any notes for fear of causing any distractions during the interview. Tapes can also be replayed to improve transcriptions. In order to avoid unnecessary interruptions, I attempted to complete the entire interview on the single disc, which had a recording capacity of 140 minutes. The interviews took on average two hours to complete. I used the prepared interview questions as a guide but often raised other issues when appropriate. On three occasions the interviewees' spouses insisted on being present throughout the interview. However, they did not hamper the flow of the interview. I suspect they felt obliged to be present in order to protect their spouse, if necessary. Some interviewees commenced the interview by showing me some photographs and sentimental mementos of their loved ones.

During the interviews I was often obliged to pause the recording as some interviewees became very emotional, often shedding tears. I did not let the disc run, for fear of it expiring. On these occasions, I asked them if they wished to continue. They all responded by saying how they felt a need to tell their story. This may have been due to the fact that the interviewees were ageing and therefore considered it critical for the recording to take place. They had often been mute for so long and were now breaking the seal of silence. The unrelenting process of time and the stored-up life experiences provided an explanation as to why survivors were now willing to talk. The interviewees frequently confided in me, recounting that they had never previously related certain details. I felt uncomfortable and humbled when these situations arose, considering myself unworthy of being privy to information that members of the family were unaware of. At the same time, I recognised the important emotional release this provided to these interviewees.

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<sup>88</sup> Oren Stier, *Committed to Memory. Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), p. 71.

<sup>89</sup> Tim Rapley, 'Interviews' in C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. Gubrium & D. Silverman, eds., *Qualitative Research Practice* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), pp. 15-33.

Brenner argues that individuals are often more willing to speak openly to outsiders than to friends.<sup>90</sup> The insistence to bear witness, to impart knowledge and information seemed almost urgent and imperative to many of them. This gave rise to an immediate emotional attachment between interviewee and interviewer. Despite the emotional pain the interview may have induced, most of the interviewees welcomed the intrusion into their lives. For some, it was cathartic and for others, painful memories rose to the surface, causing aroused emotions.

Throughout the interview it often became problematic to avoid the interviewees' recalling of wartime experiences. The majority, in fact had a great desire to describe them in great detail. I often found it challenging to keep them focussed on the questions in hand, without causing any distress to the interviewees or seeming disinterested in their survival stories. Contrary to this occurrence, one interviewee found it impossible to even briefly describe his war years.

I transcribed the interviews immediately so that the essence and sentiments were not lost. I collated the material and created files for each interviewee, which included completed questionnaires and consent forms, my questions, discs and transcriptions. The sections of the interviews that were most relevant for the research were transcribed in full. The section on War Years was summarised. Where the interviewees sobbed, I inserted the word [cried]. Transcribing the interviews was a difficult and time-consuming task. I listened repeatedly to the discs and thus generated, checked and refined my analytical hunches. During the process of transcription, I highlighted quotes which related to the topic.

On completion of transcription, I applied grounded theory for analysis. I selected 'grounded theory' as the method of analysing the data. The purpose for using this method is manifold. The researcher is constantly involved in data analysis while collecting data.<sup>91</sup> It relies principally but not exclusively on qualitative data acquired through interviews. Underlying themes are identified within the data. The analysed data is then 'coded' into categories which offer meaningful

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<sup>90</sup> Reeve Brenner, *The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors* (New York: The Free Press, 1980), p. 4.

<sup>91</sup> Bornat, 'Oral History', p.187.

interpretations for the research topic under investigation.<sup>92</sup> Throughout this stage of categorisation, constant comparisons are made, generating connections and insights by identifying patterns of similarity or difference within the data.<sup>93</sup>

Grounded theory does not require the necessity of a control group and I found this a practical solution to my research. I would have had difficulty finding and making similarities with a comparable religious/ethnic group. By the same token, it would have been problematic locating a similarly sized group of orphaned Jewish teenagers, who had not been through the Holocaust. Towards the completion of the interviewing, my supervisor suggested I locate a small group of survivors, who had had one surviving parent. For this purpose, I interviewed six teenage survivors, who had one surviving parent. This was carried out in order to unearth any differences between orphaned and non-orphaned survivors in regaining of their Jewish rhythms.

Given the sensitivity and broadness of the topic and the probability of a plethora of diverse responses, I did not wish to initiate this research with a prescribed hypothesis. As grounded theory does not require 'readymade and precise hypotheses',<sup>94</sup> I was able to utilise this principle in my research. Anticipating the range of backgrounds and Holocaust experiences, I felt it unfeasible to compartmentalise the interviewees into a set hypothesis. However, I anticipated that the majority of the interviewees could not and would not forget their Jewish past and that this, in turn would assist them in regaining some of the rhythms of their previous Jewish life.

The intensive analysis of the grounded theory method minimises the likelihood of merely superimposing preconceived notions on the data.<sup>95</sup> Reading through each transcript line-by-line, I inserted clauses with gerunds for the purposes of initial coding of developing theoretical categories. An example of this is: 'Assessing the role and importance of Judaism in everyday life'. Further analysis occurred with

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<sup>92</sup> I. Dey, 'Grounded Theory', in Seale, C. Gobo, G. Gubrium, J. & Silverman, D. eds., *Qualitative Research Practice* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), pp. 80-93.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>94</sup> Udo Kelle, 'The Development of Categories: Different Approaches in Grounded Theory' in Antony Bryant & Kath Charmaz eds., *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2007), pp. 191-213.

<sup>95</sup> Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 51.

the comparison of incidents from interview to interview. For each chapter, I referred to the appropriate section of the interview. When dealing with the various countries, I grouped the interviews accordingly and further classified them into city versus country group categories. This thesis was structured into a chronological development of events that affected the lives of the interviewees, prior and following the Holocaust.

### 3. Pre-War Jewish Life

The Jewish life cycles shaped and influenced the pre-war lives of all interviewees. Jewish rhythms refer to both *Halachic* directives and personal choices of the interviewees regarding observances of these laws. Clearly, emancipation and the passage of time had a profound impact on the adherence and observation of Jewish rituals and life cycles. This factor varied from country to country, depending on the capacity and desire of becoming integrated within the general society. Many Jews in the broader society were continually redefining their 'Jewishness', as individuals and as communities, to suit their newly-acquired status as full citizens. As Jews became more acculturated, their religious attitudes increasingly diversified, ranging from Orthodox to secular. For some, it evolved into a more 'ethnic encounter', where once religious ceremonies became family occasions or community events.<sup>96</sup>

Jewish identification transformed as a result of the divisional and segmented character of Jewish communities which stretched from religious, secular, cultural, Zionist, personal and social. However, they shared some characteristics. European Jews were traditionally affiliated with a community and with a synagogue and often lived within a short radius of each other. Their attitudes towards the religious calendar with its days of fasting and festivals were ever-present. As the interviewees came from different European countries, their religious life covered a broad spectrum of observance. The diversity of religious practice is apparent in the pre-war lives of the interviewees. More than fifty percent came from observant backgrounds. Those who categorised themselves as non-observant acknowledged keeping a few religious practices, such as participating in a family *Seder* at Passover.

It is imperative to briefly describe the historical and religious settings of the childhood years of the survivors. They were born in the following countries: Germany and Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, France, Romania and Hungary. The country of origin is fundamental as it determines the sequence of

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<sup>96</sup> Kaplan, *Jewish Daily Life in Germany, 1618-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 245.

occurrences, which affected the interviewee and at what age.<sup>97</sup> The impact of the Nazi regime and the chronological events of the war affected the experiences of the interviewees in various ways.

### Germany

After a century of struggle for equal rights, many German Jews had developed strong cultural and social bonds with the country and its people and considered themselves full-fledged Germans. Integration into German society was a natural progression following emancipation which took place in the previous century. They had developed a deep sense of German identity and patriotism. Modern economic life came into conflict with religious practice, resulting in a split between acculturation and the preservation of Jewish tradition. As the desire to integrate into German society grew, the long-standing Jewish traditions appeared to be obstructions to this process. Most German Jews only practised an individualistic religiosity influenced by the life cycles of their families and communities.<sup>98</sup> Jewish traditions played an increasingly minor role in daily life and the knowledge of religious customs and rituals dwindled. This was particularly prevalent with German Jews from the larger urban centres such as Berlin, Frankfurt and Hamburg.

The diverse attitudes of the German Jews towards their Jewishness are reflected in the small sample in this research. The four interviewees came from middle class backgrounds. They had been raised to become loyal Germans. Two grew up in Berlin. They recalled experiencing 'a Jewish awareness'. N.H. recalled: 'Judaism didn't play any role in my early life. My father didn't believe in all this Orthodox Judaism of his parents'.<sup>99</sup> G.S. added: 'My parents were not religious. They just went [to synagogue] during the high holy days'.<sup>100</sup>

By contrast, *Landjuden*, small town or rural Jews were generally more observant. M.M. originated from a small provincial town, which consisted of only eight Jewish families. His parents had been 'very religious. Everybody was very orthodox'.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> R. Krell. 'Psychological Reverberations of the Holocaust in the Lives of Child Survivors', p. 5.

<sup>98</sup> Kaplan, *Jewish Daily Life in Germany 1618-1945*, p. 251.

<sup>99</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 6.

<sup>100</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 25.

<sup>101</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 16.

Jewish rituals were fully observed. R.R. came from Leipzig. *Shabbat* played an essential role in her life. R.R. recalled the family always inviting 'people home for the *Shabbat* meal'.<sup>102</sup>

At no stage when talking about their childhoods in Germany, did the interviewees mention feeling different to German children. In fact, even those who came from religious backgrounds mentioned playing with non-Jewish children. R.R. recalled 'playing with the shopkeeper's [Christian] children. We made things together. My mother invited them to our place and gave them Jewish festival food'.<sup>103</sup> M.M. remembered playing 'with non-Jewish kids. No problem. We mixed with non-Jews'.<sup>104</sup>

The family also remained intrinsic within the framework of Jewish identity. As Jews attended synagogues in lesser numbers than they had previously, the family provided a means of maintaining Jewish culture and traditions. Children, whose parents no longer observed Jewish rituals, often learned about them from their grandparents, who still practised these rhythms. N.H. recalled her first contact with Orthodox Judaism at her grandparents' village in Lithuania. 'We went to the synagogue just up the street. I was sitting upstairs and seeing my brother downstairs and wondering why I can't be there'.<sup>105</sup>

Following Hitler's rise to power in 1933, the situation of the Jewish population in Germany immediately took a turn for the worse. Hardly a month went by after the March election before the first systematic act of violence occurred, demonstrating the disintegration of the constitutional state and the formation of a new *Führer* state. This signified the beginning of systematic persecution for Jews living in Germany. The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 classified Jews as subjects deprived of all political rights. They were increasingly isolated as antisemitism and racism became law. Jews who considered themselves Germans were forced to re-examine their German-Jewish identity. German Jews interpreted the pogrom of *Kristallnacht*, unleashed in November 1938, as a turning point and were forced to seek refuge abroad. Those still caught in Germany were completely unprotected

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<sup>102</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 43.

<sup>103</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 43.

<sup>104</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 16.

<sup>105</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 6.

by law and increasingly experienced isolation, impoverishment and under-nourishment.

The interviewees had vivid memories of pre-war years and felt the changes affecting their lives. For N.H., the impact of Hitler's regime was immediate. Her father, a journalist, had left the family in Berlin to seek refuge in Prague. Some commented on the bullying tactics of German children. M.M. noticed the difference almost immediately, remarking that he experienced more prevalent antisemitism especially on the way to school, when fights would break out amongst school children. G.S. also mentioned the constant assembling of German children 'ready to beat us up'.<sup>106</sup>

By the turn of the twentieth century, the Western European Jew was politically emancipated and education was the pathway to become socially acceptable. Parents aspired to raise their social status and to fully integrate into society. This could only be achieved through the ideology of *Bildung* – education and cultivation. Acquiring the surrounding culture was part of this desire for knowledge. A cultured family signified an acculturated family.<sup>107</sup> *Bildung* was synonymous with German nationalism. The majority of Jews achieved this *Bildung* by combining aspects of German culture with their Jewish traditions and beliefs. The family was the location in which the Jewish middle-class acquired and displayed its *Bildung*.<sup>108</sup>

What is evident from these interviewees is a strong love of learning and political awareness that was instilled in them from an early age. N.H.'s father used to take her on expeditions and to galleries, while explaining the historical and political situation. 'We would do something cultural. There was a love of learning and political awareness'.<sup>109</sup> G.S. also talked about the high expectations his parents had for him. 'I was expected to perform well at school'. As access to secondary schools for Jews was blocked under the Nazis, self education for these young teenagers became a priority. G.S. was encouraged by his parents to continue with

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<sup>106</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 25.

<sup>107</sup> Kaplan, *Jewish Daily Life in Germany*, p.183.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 377.

<sup>109</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 6.

his learning in the home. 'We did all sorts of activities. We read books and played chess'.<sup>110</sup>

### Austria

The effects of the *Anschluss* in 1938 were deeply felt by Su.S.<sup>111</sup> She came from an acculturated Viennese family where being Jewish 'wasn't a big deal'. She remembered 'a very happy family life' spending time with the family at the local café, where her parents played bridge. Although her parents were secular Jews, Su.S. went to after-school Jewish religion studies weekly. She occasionally attended synagogue. 'You were aware you're Jewish and different'. All the family friends were Jewish. Su.S. was aware of the impact of *Anschluss*, resulting in many of these friends leaving. Within little more than a year, more than half the Jewish population had left the country.<sup>112</sup> The pogrom of *Kristallnacht* was also perceived as a defining moment for the Jews of Vienna, who desperately sought refuge abroad. This incident also signalled the beginning of a brutal expulsion campaign. Su.S. was on one of the last transports to be taken by the *Kindertransporte* out of Vienna in July 1939.

### Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia was another classic example of the rapid process of secularisation and acculturation.<sup>113</sup> With urbanisation came the dilution of Judaism. This was clearly evident in the Czech lands where fifty percent of all Jews lived in Prague.<sup>114</sup> Whether their daily language was German or Czech, the Jews were regarded as Czechs or Germans of the 'Mosaic faith'. The separation of church and state facilitated acculturation and incorporation into the Czech people. Many Prague Jews claimed no affiliation to any religion.

The situation differed in Slovakia where Slovakian Jewry was part of greater Hungarian Jewry. Orthodox Jewry formed the main part of the Jewish population. Yiddish was still spoken in Eastern Slovakia and Jewish life resembled that of

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<sup>110</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 25.

<sup>111</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 8.

<sup>112</sup> Gerhard Sonnert & Gerald Holton, *What Happened to the Children who fled Nazi Persecution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 16.

<sup>113</sup> Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 134.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

neighbouring Galicia in Poland. These differences can be observed in the diversity of Jewish backgrounds amongst the interviewees who originated from Czechoslovakia. After the unimpeded fall of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, Bohemia and Moravia became German protectorates. Slovakia became a German satellite under the leadership of Tiso, whose hostility towards Jews led to the deportation of its Jewish population in 1942.

Three of the six interviewees described their pre-war standard of living as high. Two came from Prague and regarded their families as totally assimilated. They made little mention of any Jewish practices. As with many Jewish families, P.R. recalled the Christmas tree in his home. He interpreted his Jewish identity in terms of a religion. With regard to his nationality, P.R. recalled that he had 'felt Czech'.<sup>115</sup> The Sabbath was not observed by the Prague interviewees. D.C. was aware she was Jewish but stated 'we were totally assimilated. We didn't light [Sabbath] candles'.<sup>116</sup>

In contrast, the interviewees born in Slovakia highlighted the pivotal role that Judaism played in their childhoods. The following responses reflect this: 'We had a strictly kosher home'.<sup>117</sup> 'We were an Orthodox family'.<sup>118</sup> 'Being Jewish for me was a way of life'. 'They [parents] took their religion seriously'.<sup>119</sup> 'Friday night was a special event'. B.S., from the eastern part of Czechoslovakia, assessed the differences between city and country life with regards to Jewish observance. 'It was difficult not to keep kosher in a small society. It was different in the city'.<sup>120</sup>

## Poland

Of all the European countries, pre-war Poland had the highest concentration of Jews. They constituted ten percent of the country's population.<sup>121</sup> Cities such as Warsaw, Lodz, Cracow and Czestochowa had extremely high percentages of

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<sup>115</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 9.

<sup>116</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 7.

<sup>117</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 10.

<sup>118</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 35.

<sup>119</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 5.

<sup>120</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 37.

<sup>121</sup> Christopher Browning, Richard Hollander & Nechama Tec, eds., *Every Day lasts a Year: A Jewish Family's Correspondence from Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 61.

Jews, reaching over thirty percent.<sup>122</sup> The influence of Jews within the general Polish economy was most noticeable in commerce. Jews constituted as much as eighty to ninety percent of the inhabitants of some small towns.<sup>123</sup> On the eve of the Second World War, about fifty percent of Polish Jews still lived in *shtetls*.<sup>124</sup> Life in *shtetls* consisted of interconnected networks of economic and social relationships. Everyday life in these small towns and villages was unthinkable without regular business contacts with Jews.

Forty four percent of the interviewees originated from Poland. Most of these were from Central Poland and Galicia. Places of birth ranged from cities, large towns to small villages. S.S. remarked that 'Practically half the population was Jewish. The marketplace, almost all the shops belonged to Jews'.<sup>125</sup> C.G. stated that about ninety percent of his small town was Jewish.<sup>126</sup> J.C. also came from a small Polish village with a population of two thousand families of whom eighty percent were Jewish.<sup>127</sup>

The role Judaism played in the lives of the Polish interviewees varied according to the level of urbanisation and the particular region, in which they lived. As Ezra Mendelsohn states: 'There was not a single 'Polish Jewry' in the pre-war period'.<sup>128</sup> Polish Jews were a community divided by politics, culture and language.<sup>129</sup> Even within the *shtetls*, there had been changes that differentiated one from the other. Some *shtetls* were strongly influenced by the cultural influences of neighbouring cities and consequently became less entrenched in religious traditions. The interviewees, who came from *shtetls*, described their '*shtetl* life' as religious and governed by Jewish rhythms.

Fifty percent of the thirteen interviewees, who were from towns, described their pre-war standard of living as medium to high. They described their childhood in terms of a Traditional or Orthodox Jewish way of life, where the Sabbath was fully

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<sup>122</sup> Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars*, p. 23.

<sup>123</sup> Eli Barnavi (ed.), *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People* (London: Hutchinson, 1992), p. 207.

<sup>124</sup> Samuel Kassow, 'The Shtetl in Interwar Poland', in Steven Katz, ed., *The Shtetl: New Evaluations* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), pp. 102-120.

<sup>125</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 22.

<sup>126</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 34.

<sup>127</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 21.

<sup>128</sup> Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the Wars*, p. 17.

<sup>129</sup> Kassow, 'The Shtetl in Interwar Poland', p. 121.

observed. The Sabbath transformed these Jewish houses into a hub of activity. Preparations for *Shabbat* usually involved the females of the household, entrusted with the tasks of cooking the meal, cleaning the house and baking the *challah*. At sunset, the men and boys went to *shul* (synagogue). It was the custom for the men to bring home guests from *shul* with them.

The preparation for this weekly Jewish rhythm often commenced on the Thursday. The interviewees recalled their *Shabbat* experiences. J.S., who came from a traditional Jewish background, described *Shabbat* as 'a big thing. On Thursday she [mother] used to bake and prepare for Friday'.<sup>130</sup> G.G. recalled Friday as the time 'when the place was cleaned and the cooking was going on. My mother used to do all her own noodles and the baking. It was a weekly thing'.<sup>131</sup>

The Sabbath meal was the special meal of the week. 'Friday night was a special event. We had relatives or friends or a stranger in town [for the meal]'.<sup>132</sup> 'I had special clothes for *Shabbat*'.<sup>133</sup> Even the most humble household became festive with special food, clothes and the warmth of family togetherness. 'At night we had a bit of soup, a bit of meat and bread. We couldn't afford to have a big meal. We all ate together'.<sup>134</sup>

G.G. observed *Shabbat* by going to synagogue both on Friday night and Saturday. S.M. recalled his *Shabbat* by going to the *stibl* (a small prayer room) on both Friday evenings and Saturdays, followed by a meal and singing.<sup>135</sup> S.S.'s childhood experiences were much the same. When describing a typical *Shabbat*, he recalled going to the *stibl* with his father. 'We all said prayers. I had to recite what I learnt'.<sup>136</sup>

In Judaism, *Tzedakah*<sup>137</sup> - charity and social commitment were always considered to be a duty to the community. It is part of the Jewish tradition to help the needy and this was often enacted on the *Shabbat*, by inviting those less fortunate for

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<sup>130</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 27.

<sup>131</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 2.

<sup>132</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 27.

<sup>133</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 34.

<sup>134</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 31.

<sup>135</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 23.

<sup>136</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 22.

<sup>137</sup> *Tzedakah* means charity.

meals. 'On Saturday my father always brought home [for the midday meal] a man from *shul*.<sup>138</sup> N.W. who came from an Orthodox Jewish background portrayed *Shabbat* as a big family affair. In this household, similar values of assisting the poor were held 'There were always a lot of [needy] people brought home from the synagogue'.<sup>139</sup> J.S. recalled how his mother used to bake *challahs* for the needy. 'I remember taking *challahs* and fish to the poor every Friday. It was a *mitzva*'.<sup>140</sup>

Another feature of observing *Shabbat* is the obligation of refraining from performing any physical work. This included 'creating something new'; changing from one state to another. All work has to be completed before the *Shabbat* commences. Included in the obligations is the prohibition of switching on and off of electricity. This aspect was portrayed in the interviewees' responses: 'We didn't light the fire. We had a hot plate on the oven and that kept it warm'.<sup>141</sup> 'On *Shabbat* we didn't cook. We used to take earthenware vessels and we used to make *cholent*<sup>142</sup> and take it to the baker and we collected it after *shul*'.<sup>143</sup>

Similar religious observances were carried out in the homes of the interviewees, who described their pre-war standard of living as low to medium. One interviewee, who depicted his background as 'medium', recalled that the six siblings and parents slept on straw beds in a small three-roomed apartment. Another related how the family had no running water. Yet another had no electricity. The six interviewees from this socio-economic background all originated from Orthodox and Traditional Jewish backgrounds, where *Shabbat* and the Jewish festivals were fully observed.

J.G. recalled his mother 'got up at 4am to bake the *challahs*'.<sup>144</sup> E.W. described the Friday evening as wonderful. 'Everything was spic and span. My grandmother and mother prepared everything'.<sup>145</sup> C.G. evaluated the importance of *Shabbat*. 'Everything was done for *Shabbat*. I went to synagogue with my father on Saturday. We had a real Jewish lunch with fish, soup and *challah*. My mother

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<sup>138</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 29.

<sup>139</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 29.

<sup>140</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 27.

<sup>141</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 22.

<sup>142</sup> A casserole dish that was often prepared for the Sabbath.

<sup>143</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 22.

<sup>144</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 19.

<sup>145</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 24.

used to scrub the wooden floors'. He recalled with pride the synagogue seats his father had. 'We had a good seat near the *Torah*. (first five books of the Hebrew Bible)'.<sup>146</sup>

J.C. recalled his *Shabbat* events poignantly. 'As a kid I used to come from school on a Friday and look on the oven and see nothing cooking. But something came along and my mother managed to make a lot'. He then assessed the importance of *Shabbat*. '*Shabbat* was a big thing. Friday we all had to go to the *mikvah* because we had no baths or showers. We all went to *shul*. We came home in the evening, the candles were lit, the floors were washed, tablecloth. It was nice'.<sup>147</sup>

The objective of highlighting the descriptions of the Sabbath and its preparations in such detail is to emphasise the importance of this single Jewish rhythm, which dominated the lives of these Polish Jews. The *Shabbat* is the day of rest in the Jewish week and at the same time the highest holy day in Judaism. For the Orthodox and Traditional Jew, it was essential to fulfil all the ritual obligations that pertain to the keeping of the *Shabbat*.

Even for acculturated Jews who do not keep the *Shabbat*, the custom of spending Friday night with the family is a common practice. The Sabbath meal signified something for Jews, who no longer adhered to Jewish traditions. It created a separate rhythm and served as an identity-building occasion. Y.G. came from an acculturated Polish background. 'We didn't take it too seriously and yet every Friday we had candles. All the family was around the table. We said the prayers'.<sup>148</sup> S.W. came from a similar background. 'We had Friday nights. I remember the Friday night because I remember the candles'.<sup>149</sup> Ha.R. admitted that there was no religion in her childhood life. However she 'went to a Hassidic friend's for *Shabbat*'.<sup>150</sup>

Celebrating the *Shabbat* meal together with the children nurtured and cultivated the intrinsic Jewish family life. The majority of the interviewees described their childhoods as 'family-orientated', 'caring' and 'encouraging' in the initial

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<sup>146</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 34.

<sup>147</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 21.

<sup>148</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 41.

<sup>149</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 36.

<sup>150</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 40.

questionnaires. Throughout all of the interviews, they depicted their family life as 'very close-knit', 'a very loving family', 'a caring, encouraging family', and 'very happy family life'. Even those who came from poorer backgrounds portrayed their families as 'caring' and 'happy'. The connection between the celebrating of *Shabbat* and the cherished family ties was assessed by N.W.'s father who always said 'Thank God for *Shabbat*. We have the family together'.<sup>151</sup>

Another rhythm that was fundamental to Orthodox and Traditional Jews was the keeping of a kosher home. The non-city interviewees came from backgrounds where *kashrut* was observed. This meant that the rules governing food consumption were rigorously upheld. J.L. remarked that even the acculturated Jews kept *kosher* households by default as 'Jews bought things from Jewish shops'.<sup>152</sup> J.C. concurred with this 'It was easy to be kosher, all Jewish shops'.<sup>153</sup> C.G. agreed 'We kept kosher. Everyone did'.<sup>154</sup> J.M. added 'Everyone was [kosher] because everyone shopped at Jewish shops'.<sup>155</sup>

Polish Jews were the least assimilated of all the Jews in Europe. Contrary to the Jews of Western Europe, the majority of Polish Jews felt no need to adopt the behavioural norms of the surrounding society. In 1931 approximately eighty percent of both Orthodox and secularised Polish Jews declared Yiddish as their mother tongue.<sup>156</sup> The majority of these non-city interviewees spoke only Yiddish in their homes.<sup>157</sup> Jews looked, dressed and behaved differently from other Polish citizens. These differences were encouraged and introduced to Jewish children at an early age, with attendance at religious schools, where only Yiddish was

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<sup>151</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 29.

<sup>152</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 17.

<sup>153</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 21.

<sup>154</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 34.

<sup>155</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 33.

<sup>156</sup> Eli Barnavi, ed., *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish people*, p. 206.

<sup>157</sup> This is the colloquial language of the *shtetl*. It consists of principally Germanic roots; however its written form is in the Hebrew script. It has been used by *Ashkenazi* Jews for the past nine or ten centuries. Yiddish accompanied those who spoke it wherever they migrated to beyond the German-speaking lands of its origin. It became primarily the hallmark of Ashkenazi Jewry everywhere and the vehicle for its folk and cultural traits. It is the language spoken principally by Eastern European Jews.

spoken.<sup>158</sup> This factor prevented proficiency of the Polish language and consequently escalated existing differences. My findings confirm this conclusion.

For those who had yearnings for acculturation into Polish society and above all aspirations for further education in Poland, the Polish language was the desired option. By the 1930s acculturation was making rapid strides and many Jews were prepared to combine their religious way of life with that of the country in which they lived. However, it must be stressed that even with this increasing encroachment of Polish on Jewish life, the Jews were not assimilating into Polish society.<sup>159</sup> The interviewees from Silesia all spoke Polish in the home. Polish Jews took advantage of the more encouraging opportunities of acculturation, by sending their children to government schools. G.G. recalled his parents' high expectations of him: 'I did not speak Yiddish because my parents wanted me to have higher education. She [mother] thought I had a better chance of getting on. Those that spoke Yiddish, their accent in Polish was not quite right'.<sup>160</sup>

J.L. attended a Jewish school where tuition was in Polish. K.E. also stressed the importance of being educated in Polish.<sup>161</sup> S.W., who also spoke Polish at home, stressed the importance education played in her childhood. 'It was normal that I should do well. I always wanted to do as well as he [brother] did. I wanted to be a journalist even at that early age. I loved learning'.<sup>162</sup> She drew the contrast between her acculturated life and that of her Orthodox grandparents: 'She wore a *sheitel* [wig] and he had a beard'.<sup>163</sup>

Six interviewees originated from Polish cities. They all came from backgrounds, where their parents were shop-owners or professionals. Their standard of living was portrayed as 'comfortably-off'. Half of these came from traditional Jewish backgrounds and the other half from assimilated, acculturated backgrounds. Polish, as opposed to Yiddish was spoken in most homes. Education and a sense of achievement played an important role. K.E. commented that he 'was expected to do well. Don't think I did as well as they expected. Like all Jewish parents they

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<sup>158</sup> Christopher Browning et al., eds., *Every Day Lasts a Year*, p. 61.

<sup>159</sup> Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the Wars*, p. 67.

<sup>160</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 2.

<sup>161</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 32.

<sup>162</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 36.

<sup>163</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 36.

wanted their children to be highly educated. I was expected to go to high school'.<sup>164</sup> J.M. remarked: 'I wanted to finish high school. Everyone wanted to'.<sup>165</sup> A.S. remarked about her educational expectations at an early age. 'I took it for granted that I would go to university, even for a little girl. That's what I expected'.<sup>166</sup> N.W. came from a privileged Orthodox background in Poland. Education played a pivotal role in his early life. He attended a Jewish school. However, his father wanted the children to have a rounded education. 'We had the headmaster of a public school who came every day to teach us. The extra education was meant to give us a broader education'.<sup>167</sup>

Judaism with its religious rituals played an important role in the homes of the traditional Jews in the cities. Three interviewees described their Friday nights in a similar manner to those from the rural parts of Poland. They celebrated *Shabbat*, by going to synagogue and having the family Friday evening meal. B.E. commented that 'Judaism was very much part of my everyday life. It was very important'.<sup>168</sup> J.M. was obliged to attend *shul* every Saturday with his grandfather, who was an Orthodox Jew. 'He had a beard with the black satin coat'.<sup>169</sup>

People's understanding of being Jewish consisted of a diversity of interpretations. Y.G.'s comments regarding his *Barmitzvah* were indicative of his attitude towards the religious aspect of being Jewish. 'I didn't have a *Barmitzvah*. I was preparing for it. I wasn't disappointed, it didn't worry me'.<sup>170</sup> Others were aware of their Jewish identity. Ha.R. commented: 'There was no religion in my life. We didn't have *Shabbat* at home. My father didn't go to synagogue. I knew I was Jewish and I couldn't be anything else'.<sup>171</sup> A.S. interpreted her Jewish identity. 'I knew I was Jewish but I had no idea what it actually meant. I was Polish Jewish'.<sup>172</sup> J.L. came from an acculturated Jewish background. 'I was a Jew. We were all Jews but not in a religious way. A Jew is not only one who eats kosher. It's more than a

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<sup>164</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 32.

<sup>165</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 33.

<sup>166</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 3.

<sup>167</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 29.

<sup>168</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 18.

<sup>169</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 33.

<sup>170</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 41.

<sup>171</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 39.

<sup>172</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 3.

religion. I never felt Polish, I spoke Polish. I never had Christian friends. It was a total Jewish identity'.<sup>173</sup>

When comparing the non-city with city interviewees, it is evident that the former came from Jewish backgrounds that were far more entrenched in Jewish traditions. The Jewish rituals and traditions generated a rhythmical pattern to their lives which was best depicted by the interviewees. 'Being Jewish was the only part of my life'.<sup>174</sup> 'Judaism played an important part of my life, no doubt'.<sup>175</sup> G.G.'s Jewish rituals commenced in the early morning, when he 'said the morning prayer before breakfast'.<sup>176</sup>

### France

The established French Jews and the recently arrived Jews from Eastern Europe encountered different experiences. The former worked, studied, travelled and socialised with non-Jews with complete ease and were unaffected by politics and the often antisemitic press.<sup>177</sup> While most Jewish newcomers to France in the 1930s had unpleasant experiences, the majority looked upon France as a land of hope, opportunity and freedom.<sup>178</sup> As with all the landscapes up to this point, in France there was a similar diversity of Jewish backgrounds. Of the two French interviewees originating from Paris, one came from an Orthodox background and the other from an acculturated Jewish background. L.W. talked about his childhood in which the Sabbath was strictly observed and the household was kosher.<sup>179</sup> J.K. came from a home where 'there was no religion at all'. She remembered going to a synagogue once with her father. However she insisted on highlighting her Jewish awareness. 'I knew I was Jewish'.<sup>180</sup>

### Romania

The three Romanian interviewees originated from rural towns. Despite having attained full emancipation, Jews suffered from an ever-increasing rise in

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<sup>173</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 17.

<sup>174</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 23.

<sup>175</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 14.

<sup>176</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 2.

<sup>177</sup> Susan Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), p. 21.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>179</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 4.

<sup>180</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 13.

antisemitism. Race laws were enacted in 1938. A law forbade marriages between Jews and Gentiles. The majority of Romanian Jews felt very much apart from the ruling ethnic group. Inter-marriage and conversion were very unusual, in contrast with the situation in Hungary and in the Czech lands.<sup>181</sup> Jo.S. commented that there 'was a lot of antisemitism. I had to go past the neighbourhood of the non-Jews and the boys used to throw stones at me. I had to find a way to avoid them but you couldn't. You had to run the gauntlet'.<sup>182</sup> They described their Jewish backgrounds as 'very' Orthodox. Yiddish was the spoken language in the home. Jo.S. interpreted the significance of this when describing his Jewishness. 'It was considered not to be *frum* (religious), if you spoke Romanian at home'.

Two portrayed their standard of living as low. Jo.S. recalled not owning socks. His house consisted of a kitchen and a bedroom, where the family of eight slept in four beds. 'We couldn't buy the nice fat meat [for *Shabbat*] because we couldn't afford it. We couldn't afford to have a big meal [on *Shabbat*.] I never remember being full, always hungry'. O.H. interpreted his poor background: 'We were sent to children's holiday camp for the not-so-fortunate kids'.<sup>183</sup>

The interviewees assessed the important role that Judaism and the rhythms of Jewish life played in their young lives. Jo.S. stated that he 'didn't know anything else except Judaism. I used to love going to *shul*'.<sup>184</sup> O.H. felt the same sentiments. 'Judaism played a very important part of our lives. I only mixed with Jews. We went to *shul* weekly but we had to *doven* (pray) at home even without going to *shul*'.<sup>185</sup> The Jewish rhythms signified the very essence of their lives. O.H.'s father adhered to the rituals of not performing manual work on *Shabbat*. Given the family's poor circumstances, his father 'waited for the three stars (which signified the completion of *Shabbat*) to appear so he could make up for the lost time at work'. This ritual was firmly entrenched into the lives of these children. Jo.S. recalled that on *Shabbat* he used to climb the fence and take a bite out of

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<sup>181</sup> Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the Wars*, p. 182.

<sup>182</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 31.

<sup>183</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 26.

<sup>184</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 31.

<sup>185</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 26.

the apples still on the trees. 'Of course you couldn't tear the fruit. You felt bad if you picked it a bit. It's a sin on *Shabbat*'.<sup>186</sup>

The weekly ritual of *Shabbat* was fully observed by these interviewees. E.L. recalled how *Shabbat* was celebrated in her home. 'We were home sitting and reading once the lights were lit. When my father came home from synagogue, we sat at the table and started the whole lot'.<sup>187</sup> Jo.S. recalled going to *shul* and 'then prayers'.<sup>188</sup> O.H. described his *Shabbat* in a similar manner. 'We went to *shul* on Friday night. We came home, we sang, the father made *Kiddush*, we ate, we sang the *bensching* (prayers). It was the same on Saturday'.<sup>189</sup> Keeping the *Shabbat* was an essential rhythm of their lives.

### Hungary

The Jewish landscape of Hungary was unique within the context of Eastern Central Europe in that most Hungarian Jews had adopted Hungarian culture.<sup>190</sup> The Jews played a vital and pivotal role in economic and cultural life, enabling them to achieve middle-class status. Most adopted Hungarian as their spoken language in the home. Another distinct difference from other East European countries was the emergence of Neolog Judaism.<sup>191</sup> The Neolog community consisted of the assimilationist strata of Hungarian Jewry, who moved away from the traditional Orthodox practices of Judaism.<sup>192</sup> Services were conducted in Hungarian and lay leaders led the congregations. This Reform movement was able to flourish, especially in the capital, given the encouragement of acculturation into Hungarian society.

Hungarian Jewry was divided between city and country Jews. Most Jews in Budapest were highly acculturated. The Jews in small towns were largely Orthodox. The one interviewee from Budapest regarded his Jewish background as being more progressive. 'We belonged to the Neolog synagogue. We didn't

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<sup>186</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 31.

<sup>187</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 15.

<sup>188</sup> See Appendix 5: no.31.

<sup>189</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 26.

<sup>190</sup> Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the Wars*, p. 87.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>192</sup> Randolph Braham, *The Politics of Genocide. The Holocaust in Hungary, Vol. 1* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p.86.

have a kosher household. The dietary laws weren't so important for them [parents]'.<sup>193</sup> The remaining interviewees, who originated from country towns, described their Jewish backgrounds as Orthodox and stressed the importance of keeping a kosher home. L.F. talked about the Jewish rituals that were observed in her family. 'My mother went to the *mikvah*. My father laid *tefillin* (phylacteries) every morning. He wore a *kippah* (skull cap) when he ate'.<sup>194</sup> I.V. remarked that his mother did not wear a wig (a ritual for females amongst the Orthodox Jews); however, his grandmother did.

*Shabbat* was fully observed in L.F.'s home in a small town. She described the importance of this rhythm:

We went to the synagogue and came home for dinner. Before we went my mother prepared the candles. I had the best clothes and shoes for *Shabbat*. There were always fresh flowers from the garden on the table. There was always a special meal for Friday night.<sup>195</sup>

T.K. originated from a more progressive Jewish background in Budapest, where *kashrut* was not observed. However, the practice of celebrating *Shabbat* dinner played a significant part in the life of T.K.'s extended family. 'We used to celebrate *Shabbat*, together with the grandparents. Every Friday night I would go to the synagogue with my grandfather or father. My grandparents, on both sides were Orthodox. My parents were not so'.<sup>196</sup>

I.V. came from a small Hungarian town and his grandparents also played a pivotal part in his Jewish education. 'I knew the lifestyle of a religious family and whenever I went to my maternal grandparents, I went to *shul* with my uncles, morning and night. I did all the right things'. I.V. recalled how his 'mother prepared a better meal [for *Shabbat*]'.<sup>197</sup>

It is worthy of note that three of the interviewees had mothers who were far more observant than their fathers. The role of the mother within the Jewish family played an essential part in the nurturing of the family and the running of the

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<sup>193</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 12.

<sup>194</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 40.

<sup>195</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 40.

<sup>196</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 12.

<sup>197</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 42.

household. Jewish housewives prepared the traditional regional dishes and this helped create a sense of family cohesion, especially on Jewish holidays. L.F. recalled: 'My father was more assimilated than my mother'.<sup>198</sup> I.V. interpreted his father's attitude towards religion as such: 'The home was kosher. It didn't mean much to my father but out of respect to my mother and his mother-in-law...'.<sup>199</sup> E.K. had similar experiences. 'My mother was religious, not my father'.<sup>200</sup> This lesser religious conviction amongst the males may well have been due to the fact that they were all reasonably successful in their professions and as a consequence had felt more acculturated and comfortable within their social standing.

The pursuit of higher education was a factor common to all the interviewees from Hungary. E.K. recalled his parents' hopes for his future. 'My parents had high expectations for me. I was to study medicine'. T.K. had developed his personal high expectations. 'I had my own expectations. I wanted to be a high school teacher. I was very interested in history, sociology and geography. I had that ambition since I was twelve'.<sup>201</sup> I.V. had also assessed the value of education at an early age. 'During my high-schooling after the war, I took part in a literature national competition and won a prize'.<sup>202</sup> L.F. also came from a background where education was prized and her parents had had high expectations for her future. 'Every Jewish child was expected to go to the *Gymnasium* (high school)'.<sup>203</sup> This love and hunger for learning, which had been cultivated and developed in these six young people at such an early age was all the more remarkable, given the university restrictions for Jews which had been introduced after World War 1.

This portrayal of the pre-war Jewish lives of the interviewees describes their childhoods in the various countries of their birth. The majority came from Orthodox backgrounds while those who came from more acculturated Jewish backgrounds still identified with Jewish traditions and rituals. This Jewish life, in terms of faith or culture would change dramatically as a consequence of the Holocaust.

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<sup>198</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 40.

<sup>199</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 42.

<sup>200</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 38.

<sup>201</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 12.

<sup>202</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 42.

<sup>203</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 40.

#### **4. Suffering and Survival in the Holocaust**

The forty three interviewees spent the war years isolated from society, incarcerated in ghettos or camps, hidden by others or living in the United Kingdom, separated from their family, as *Kindertransporte* children. They were all forced to acquire survival skills and make individual choices to withstand the horrors they encountered. The spectrum of religious responses ranged from the denial of God's existence, accusations against Him, to repentance and strengthening of religious conviction.<sup>204</sup>

During (and after) the Holocaust the question of theodicy was raised by Jewish theologians and philosophers, who attempted to ascertain the impact of the Holocaust on Jewish thought and faith. The main difficulty was to find an explanation which would offer an acceptable response to the Holocaust, which would be in keeping with the tenets of Judaism. The dilemma was how to justify the existence of God, during (and after) the event of the Holocaust. There was a moral urgency by some to resist abandoning the Divine. It is an error in conflating theological responses with historical analyses of the Holocaust. Holocaust theological responses aim to give meaning to Jewish history within a Covenantal framework. A diversity of theologies has been proposed to understand the murder of six million Jews. The principle protagonists are Richard Rubinstein, Eliezer Berkovits, Irving Greenberg and Emil Fackenheim. They all share the notion that confronting the events of the Holocaust was paramount.<sup>205</sup> However, all four held substantially divergent religious ideologies. The most radical response was the cessation of believing in a covenantal god. The conventional approaches attempted to grasp a contemporary event using more traditional theodicy. Some of their analyses will be discussed in this and ensuing chapters as the question of the belief in God is raised by the interviewees.

This multiplicity of responses is reflected in the recollections of the interviewees. A few used faith, Jewish rituals and festivals as a means of support. For them, the drive to fulfil one's religious obligations became a catalyst. Keeping faith and

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<sup>204</sup> Michman, *Holocaust Historiography. A Jewish Perspective* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), p. 279.

<sup>205</sup> Josh Cohen, 'Post-Holocaust Philosophy', in Dan Stone, ed., *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 469-486.

participating in as many religious practices and festivals as possible offered meaning to the suffering and eased their pain. The will to live and to sanctify life reflected their affirmation of God. Some sought refuge in religion which took forms such as prayer or other rituals. Faith created an order which supported moral values and signified the sanctification of God in the midst of chaos. Religious observances and rituals often played a crucial morale-sustaining role for the incarcerated.<sup>206</sup> These factors generated a meaningful order of existence for those Jews who chose to follow this pathway. A few felt the need to convert to Christianity as a means of enduring their hardship.

However, the majority of practising and non-practising interviewees resorted to strategies, which did not include Jewish faith. This group rejected all forms of religion. They surrendered their religious practices in lieu of more practical means of dealing with the adversity they now faced. Those who denied God's existence recalled how will power, sheer cunning and luck assisted them in their efforts for survival. A few revealed that their good singing voices were instrumental in their daily struggle for existence.

It is fundamental to ascertain why some victims retained their religious faith while others abandoned it. In recent times a few historians have researched the role of religious faith during the Holocaust, revealing that the religious dimension often played an important role in coping with camp experiences. Dan Michman argues that many inmates maintained their Jewish faith, notwithstanding the extreme conditions surrounding them.<sup>207</sup> Faith served to provide an interpretation and meaning and as a result encouraged the will to survive by offering a challenge.<sup>208</sup> God and the eternity of the Jewish people continued for many to be the only significant beliefs which one could embrace. Marcus and Rosenberg suggest that in concentration camps Orthodox Jews used religion as a means of coping with the painful aspects of their lives. Strictly Orthodox Jews created a meaningful order of existence which was perceived to enhance their probability of survival.

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<sup>206</sup> Joseph Rudavsky, *To Live with Hope, to Die with Dignity. Spiritual Resistance in the Ghettos and Camps* (New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc, 1997), p. 183.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>208</sup> Dan Michman, 'Research on the Holocaust in Belgium and in General: History and Context', in Dan Michman, ed. *Belgium and the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1998), pp. 3-38.

Religion acted as a reality which assisted in comprehending their grim surrounding experiences.<sup>209</sup>

Thomas Rahe focuses on the social and psychological importance of Jewish religious practices of prisoners in *Bergen-Belsen*; a camp set up in 1943 as a 'detention' camp for Jews to be 'exchanged' with Germans interned overseas. Some of the privileged Jews brought baggage containing religious texts and ritual objects. Consequently, they had more opportunities for practising religious activity.<sup>210</sup> Following the changes in the social role of the camp in 1944, the practising of the Jewish religion and the possession of ritual objects and texts was not permitted. However, a blind eye was often turned by the SS to religious activities. Many of the prisoners kept some semblance of Jewish belief in their struggle for survival. The social function of the religion for the less religious Jews played a significant role in sustaining morale. A far greater number of inmates took part in the celebration of Jewish holidays whereas the practising of religion comprised of single persons or small groups.<sup>211</sup>

The number of Jewish inmates who managed to observe some aspects of the Jewish tradition in concentration and labour camps is unknown. However, Yaffa Eliach suggests that there was a significant number, representing various countries.<sup>212</sup> Michman highlights the difficulty of ascertaining the number of people who chose any particular direction within the faith.<sup>213</sup> Notwithstanding the threat of death, many Jews clung to their traditions in their struggle against dehumanisation. Jewish holidays, such as Passover, were special events, bringing with them memories and renewed hope. These moments helped inmates to cling to a pre-war experience and generate a connection with an uncertain future. Cohen suggests that any form of spiritual life offered prisoners a 'mental'

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<sup>209</sup> Paul Marcus & Alan Rosenberg, 'The Religious Life of Holocaust Survivors and Its Significance for Psychotherapy', in Marcus, P & Rosenberg, A. eds., *Healing their Wounds* (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp. 227-256.

<sup>210</sup> Thomas Rahe, 'Jewish Religious Life in the Concentration Camp Bergen-Belsen', *Journal & Holocaust Education*, no. 2-3 (Autumn/Winter 1996), pp. 85-117.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>212</sup> Yaffa Eliach, 'Jewish Tradition in the Life of the Concentration-Camp Inmate', p. 204.

<sup>213</sup> Michman, *Holocaust Historiography. A Jewish perspective*, p. 296.

escape.<sup>214</sup> Victor Frankl points out that inmates with strong religious convictions coped better than most under the terror of the concentration camps.<sup>215</sup>

Judith Tydor Baumel cites a group of Orthodox teenage girls from Poland incarcerated in the Plaszow labour camp.<sup>216</sup> The ten girls had gone to the same orthodox girls' school, where qualities such as self-sacrifice, kindness, modesty and chastity had been emphasized. During their incarceration they promoted similar ethics, in which their religious beliefs played a significant role in terms of nurturing, sharing and caring for others.

David Weiss Halivni admitted to having 'no desire to study Torah amid people ready to kill us'.<sup>217</sup> However, in *Auschwitz*, he spent any spare time learning *Mishnah* (oral law) with other rabbis. Halivni commented on his and fellow inmates' love of learning during their incarceration. Their discussions depended on memory as they had no texts to which they could refer to. It was on these days that he was able to lay *tefillen* (phylacteries).<sup>218</sup>

Peter Suedfeld examined behavioural attributes of Holocaust survivors.<sup>219</sup> His findings show that survivors mention external factors, such as luck and assistance from others as reasons for their survival. Suedfeld also points out that survivors generally had low trust in others. However, this conclusion did not negate the significance of internal factors, such as psychological strength and determination.

Some interviewees confirmed that they had found solace in observing the Jewish rhythms that had been so paramount in their childhoods. Even during the extraordinary conditions of the Holocaust, people sought to live and practise as Jews through praying and acting according to custom and tradition. Eliezer Berkovits describes this act of non-submission as authentic faith; a living trust that challenges and yet enables a life of principle and a life with God.<sup>220</sup> They kept

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<sup>214</sup> Elie Cohen, *Human Behaviour in the Concentration Camp* (London: Free Association Books, 1988), p. 149.

<sup>215</sup> Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984), p. 54.

<sup>216</sup> Judith Tydor Baumel, *Double Jeopardy. Gender and the Holocaust*. (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1998), p. 72.

<sup>217</sup> Weiss Halivni, *The Book and the Sword*, p. 47.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>219</sup> Peter Suedfeld, 'Specific and General Attributional Patterns of Holocaust Survivors', *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 35, no. 2 (2003), pp. 133-141.

<sup>220</sup> Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav, 1973), p. 118.

their faith and merely adjusted their observances to the increasingly arduous circumstances. How did belief in God and religious activity help these young Jews cope with the physical and mental anguish? Strength of their inner faith supported their determination in carrying out religious practices.

L.F. was conscripted to a small forced labour camp with her mother and brother in Austria in 1944. When asked who or what helped her most, she referred to her mother's faith and strength as a constant source. The practice of performing Sabbath rituals during incarceration became increasingly more evocative and significant in response to the harsh conditions. This restriction did not deter L.F.'s mother. 'Nobody in our group thought about lighting the candles, only my mother'.<sup>221</sup> Lacking the religious objects, they improvised by making *Shabbat* candles. 'While we were on the farm, my mother lit the candles every Friday night. Somebody in the group made from timber two candlesticks for her. Written on them in Hungarian was 'This Friday night light will lead you home'.<sup>222</sup> My mother kept them all the way'. L.F. remembered how her mother had told her that they would not *sit shivah* (the mourning rite of passage) until they had definite news about the death of her father. 'When we were taken [to *Bergen-Belsen*], she fasted once a week on Wednesday for hope that it will bring him [father] back'. Keeping up her beliefs and performing some rituals gave L.F. and her family strength.

L.F., her mother and brother were then transported to *Bergen-Belsen*, where they were no longer able to continue with these Jewish rituals. *Chanukah* is the Festival of Lights and was particularly relevant for L.F. and her family during this period. It represented the recovery of life. She recalled some of the religious practices her family performed, where attempts were made to observe religious festivals. 'At *Chanukah* we couldn't light the candles but we spoke about it [the festival] when the guard went out and it was dark. We sang'. Equally significant was the Passover festival (*Pesach*), which symbolised the liberation of the Jews. Acknowledging this festival under such circumstances was especially salient. 'It was the same for *Pesach*. We kept *Pesach* by telling the story. We couldn't do the

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<sup>221</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 40.

<sup>222</sup> During the interview L.F. mentioned that these candlesticks were now exhibits at the Hungarian Holocaust Museum in Safed, Israel.

*Seder* [Passover meal]. My uncle spoke for the whole barrack. It was a family *lager*'. She felt that keeping Jewish rituals gave her an inner strength. 'Religion gave us strength for hope. It is an inner belief that gave you strength, otherwise you cannot survive. I believed it helped many people during these terrible times'. During the five months at *Bergen-Belsen*, L.F. and her brother continued with their religious instruction. She recalled learning for her *Batmitzvah*. 'My brother's *Barmitzvah* was in *Bergen-Belsen*. They made a podium outside'.

The Jews of Poland were compelled to deal with the immediate effects of war in 1939. In the very first months of the German occupation, Jews were forced into ghettos that were established gradually. Conditions in ghettos were marked by forced labour, overcrowding, food shortages, starvation, appalling hygiene and despotic acts of terror. Obligations to work, especially on *Shabbat* and the necessity to procure food threatened to destroy the traditions and practices, which constituted the framework of religious life. Religious activities were subject to many restrictions. Consequently, it took great effort, strength and resourcefulness to maintain a religious way of life. During phases of prohibitions, practicing Jews often secretly attempted to continue their traditions of prayer.<sup>223</sup>

The ritual of the *Barmitzvah* took place during the war years of the male interviewees. The significance of performing the ritual of the *Barmitzvah* gave spiritual meaning to the thirteen-year-old males. There is verification in rabbinic literature that the father recited a blessing, thanking God for freeing him from responsibility for the child's behaviour, signalling a transition of responsibility from parent to child. Bearing this in mind, the parental encouragement of the interviewees fulfilling the requirements necessary for performing this ritual would have been imperative, given the period of time. Not only was the thirteen-year-old preparing to accept responsibilities within the Jewish community, but psychologically this rite of passage assisted him in coping with the uncertain future. The fact that the majority of the thirty male interviewees celebrated their *Barmitzvah* during the Holocaust certainly supports the significance of this rite of passage. Those who were able to have a *Barmitzvah* all emphasised this fact.

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<sup>223</sup> Gustavo Corni, *Hitler's Ghettos: Voices from a Beleaguered Society, 1939-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 145.

With the commencement of the war in September 1939, the possibility of completing a *Barmitzvah* became increasingly fraught with difficulty and danger. However, this rhythm remained an essential rhythm in their lives, notwithstanding the perilous times. The following comments came from interviewees from Poland: 'I had my *Barmitzvah* still at home. We had to cover the windows [so no-one would see]'.<sup>224</sup> 'I had a *Barmitzvah* with no guests. My parents had already been taken away'.<sup>225</sup> N.W. recalled having had a small *Barmitzvah*. E.W. also had one with 'no big fuss'.<sup>226</sup> C.G. recalled: 'I had a *Barmitzvah* in 1941. It was a secret. Only the family came'.<sup>227</sup> J.M. stated: 'I had mine in the ghetto'.<sup>228</sup> 'I had a family *Barmitzvah* with a little dinner at home'.<sup>229</sup> Jo.S. recalled his *Barmitzvah*. 'I remember being called up to the *Torah*. I think my father got a bottle of something and my mother baked something and took it to *shul* for the *kiddush*'.<sup>230</sup>

Both male interviewees from Romania celebrated their *Barmitzvahs*. These took place in 1940 and 1941, when Romanian Jews had been expelled from the cultural life of the country. The government had enacted an anti-Jewish statute which codified existing legislation and was accompanied by pogroms and violence. The resolve of performing this Jewish ritual took precedence, notwithstanding the dangers surrounding the interviewees' young lives.

The male interviewees from Hungary celebrated their *Barmitzvahs*. This important male Jewish ritual had been a more feasible possibility in Hungary as the German invasion into Hungary took place in March 1944. I.V. recalled having a large *Barmitzvah* at home in 1942. T.K. performed his *Barmitzvah* at the Jewish high school he attended. 'All members of the family came and we had an afternoon tea at our place. I received my first watch and set of fountain pens. It was a lovely occasion but the clouds were gathering'.<sup>231</sup>

Observance of Jewish rituals in Germany became increasingly difficult with its restrictions and prohibitions. After 1942 the Star of David had to be displayed

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<sup>224</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 2.

<sup>225</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 22.

<sup>226</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 24.

<sup>227</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 34.

<sup>228</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 33.

<sup>229</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 32.

<sup>230</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 31.

<sup>231</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 12.

marking Jewish homes to facilitate the roundups of Jews. Remnants of German Jewry vacillated between fear of the future and an attempt to maintain normal life. Despite this onslaught against Jewish rites and rituals and the attempt to remove any vestige of their religious past, many victims refused to relinquish traditional rhythms.<sup>232</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that G.S.'s parents had been secular Jews and had abandoned most of the Jewish traditions, it was important for young G.S. and his brother to fulfil their Jewish obligations in becoming *Barmitzvahed*, around the period of deportation. G.S. emphasised the importance of this ritual. G.S. performed their *Barmitzvah* in 1942. 'Those who stayed all had *Barmitzvahs*. It was important to have this'.<sup>233</sup>

M.M. recalled 'I had a *Barmitzvah* just before we were shipped out'.<sup>234</sup> He also remembered when the synagogue in Stadtlohn had been burnt down on *Kristallnacht* in 1938. One method utilised by the Nazis for obliterating the Jewish community was the desecration and destruction of *Torah* scrolls. 'The *Torah* was dragged on the streets and the Nazis ordered my grandmother to walk on it'.<sup>235</sup>

Prayer was another response employed to cope with the severity of the situation. Y.K., deported from a village in Czechoslovakia to *Auschwitz*, clung to her Jewish beliefs. She recalled: 'I never lost faith in God. I lived in hope. It was the only way you could exist. I was always praying that I would meet up with my Mum and Dad'.<sup>236</sup> Without hope and prayer, she admitted she would have ceased to exist. Where there was hope, there was a connection with life. J.S. was with his mother when she died in the Kosinice ghetto. 'I was twelve. It was the day before *Yom Kippur*. I said *Kaddish* for her'.<sup>237</sup>

P.R. came from an acculturated Jewish background in Prague, where religion had not played an important factor. However, during his incarceration in *Auschwitz*, he recited a prayer that had been taught to him by his non-Jewish governess. 'The prayer was about a guardian angel. I said it every day. I never forgot it. I must

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<sup>232</sup> Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair. Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 165.

<sup>233</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 25.

<sup>234</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 16.

<sup>235</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 16.

<sup>236</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 10.

<sup>237</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 27.

have kept saying it all the time'.<sup>238</sup> *Rosh Hashana*, Jewish New Year is a time for rejoicing, when Jews as a community join in prayer throughout the world and throughout time. Robbed from his community, H.S. found it difficult to let go of his Jewish beliefs. 'I still believed. I still prayed at *Rosh Hashana*'.<sup>239</sup>

Unswerving religious conviction assisted some. N.W. never lost his belief. When asked whether his Orthodox upbringing assisted him in *Auschwitz*, he responded: 'Religion is something you believe or don't believe [in]. I'm basically a very strong religious person'. By not asking any questions, N.W. was perhaps able to accept his situation. 'I don't know why. I can't reconcile it. I've seen the worst and yet I have no answer and I have no question'.<sup>240</sup>

A few interviewees sought to escape Nazi terror by conversion to Christianity. J.K. adopted a new identity and went into hiding, supported by Catholic women. She became religious as she was forced to attend church and pray to a god, she had previously never known. 'I wanted God. I wanted to do my Communion. I needed it at the time. Hope kept me going'.<sup>241</sup> Margrit Rustow suggests that the Catholic institution, with its strict ritual, provided a safe and secure haven for children and teenagers.<sup>242</sup> It also gave them an opportunity of creating their own new, spiritual and dependable families.

M.R. spent the war years in hiding in the Polish countryside, working on farms. One peasant family, unaware of his Jewish background, suggested that M.R. have his communion. He admitted: 'It was all pretence. I didn't feel anything religious'.<sup>243</sup>

Ha.R. describes her conversion in her memoirs.<sup>244</sup> After escaping from the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942, she lived on the Aryan side using false papers. She was baptised and placed in a convent-run boarding school. When asked whether she

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<sup>238</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 9.

<sup>239</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 28.

<sup>240</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 29.

<sup>241</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 13.

<sup>242</sup> Margrit Rustow, 'From Jew to Catholic – and Back: Psychodynamics of Child Survivors' in Paul Marcus & Alan Rosenberg, eds., *Healing their Wounds, Psychotherapy with Holocaust Survivors and their Families* (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp. 271-286.

<sup>243</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 14. During the interview M.R. presented me with a photo of the priest, embracing him after the communion.

<sup>244</sup> Halina Robinson, *A Cork in the Waves* (Sydney: Jewish Museum: Community Stories, 2005).

converted to save herself, she explained: 'I was searching for something to anchor me. I had a short period of being a devout Catholic and that helped me very much. When I didn't know what to do, I prayed. When I was scared, I prayed. I had the feeling I had someone guarding me'.<sup>245</sup>

Singing provided a means of strengthening faith in ghettos and camps. The words served to summon hope and courage in the struggle for survival. Incarcerated in *Blechhammer*, E.W. began doubting religion. 'Why did you forsake us, God? I sang this'.<sup>246</sup> He admitted this personal song of prayer helped him come to terms with his existential predicament.

Love for learning manifested itself for J.L., who stressed the importance of educational values during the straightened times of living in a ghetto in Poland. 'My mother arranged a private tutor. It was illegal. We had to smuggle ourselves into a cellar. You know how the Jews are, strong on education'.<sup>247</sup>

Prior to the Holocaust many interviewees came from backgrounds where God had been part of their belief system. They had had no reason to doubt the existence of God. However, confronted with the horrendous circumstances, most challenged the existence of God and resorted to questioning the essence of Jewish faith. For many interviewees, these changes in their belief in God became apparent as the situation deteriorated. Richard Rubinstein attempts to position *Auschwitz* within Jewish theology and in so doing develops a radical viewpoint. An historic event such as the Holocaust generates a radical revision in religious thinking, making traditional Jewish faith impossible. For him, the concept of God can no longer be accepted. In his major work *After Auschwitz*,<sup>248</sup> he refutes traditional covenantal theology, arguing that *Auschwitz* cannot be discussed with traditional Jewish vocabulary. Rubinstein abandons the belief that a covenantal, theistic god is necessary for Jewish religious life. The responses of the majority of interviewees reflected Rubinstein's analysis.

Jo.S. came from a small orthodox Romanian town. His doubts concerning Jewish faith changed when his parents and five siblings were murdered. Attempting to

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<sup>245</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 39.

<sup>246</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 24.

<sup>247</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 17.

<sup>248</sup> Richard Rubinstein, *After Auschwitz* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p.171.

understand the loss, he questioned the punishment meted upon them. 'What about my little sister and brothers? They haven't done anything at all. Why would You take them away? What sin have I done?'<sup>249</sup> I.V. also began questioning his Jewish faith asking 'where was God' and 'how could that happen?'<sup>250</sup> J.S. reiterated the question: 'Where is God?'<sup>251</sup>

Faith by its subjective nature is complex and consequently difficult to investigate. During the war years, only two interviewees mentioned the necessity of clinging onto their Jewish beliefs, whereas two others converted; suggesting some form of necessity of faith. A few resorted to some form of prayer, while some participated in whatever rituals and festivals were possible. The majority of the males performed their *Barmitzvahs* in ghettos, prior to their transportation to concentration camps. However, the majority made no mention of the need of any religious beliefs or practices during years of incarceration. They had abandoned religious views and had lost any semblance of any rituals. It should be reiterated at this point that all the interviewees had been youngsters. Dealing with adversity in this manner may have been a consequence of their youthful age; a factor of their teenage years. They rejected the concept of an almighty God and gradually denied the existence of the Divine.

G.G. recalled: 'Little by little [it] started eroding. I didn't pray every morning anymore'. Religion, once essential to him became irrelevant. 'I looked at the helplessness of religious Jews. Somehow, those who were not religious were able to fight more against the oppressor than the religious ones. They depended on prayer to help them get through'.<sup>252</sup> T.K. survived the war as a courier for the Jewish Council in Budapest in 1944. It was at this time he began to question his religious convictions. 'My beliefs stopped in 1944. I couldn't believe anymore'.<sup>253</sup>

K.E. witnessed his mother's death in the Cracow ghetto and heard that his brother had been taken to *Auschwitz*. In his attempt to understand the horrific situation, he also abandoned his faith. 'No time for religion. You had to find ways to survive.

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<sup>249</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 31.

<sup>250</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 42.

<sup>251</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 27.

<sup>252</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 2.

<sup>253</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 12.

We had to survive. Like street urchins'. Work in kitchens allowed access to vital goods. 'I discovered I could wash in the kitchen and I got extra scraps [of food]'.<sup>254</sup> C.G. also gave up his faith. 'What I saw and all the suffering, I don't believe in God'.<sup>255</sup>

After Liberation, some survivors depicted their war-time experiences in writing. Primo Levi was incarcerated in *Auschwitz*. He witnessed a fellow inmate praying aloud, thanking God for not having been chosen for selection to the gas chambers. He discredits this prayer as it verified divine purpose in a place, where Levi felt none.<sup>256</sup> Although he felt the impulse to pray, Levi thought it blasphemous to turn to God only in times of need.<sup>257</sup>

Sheer will power and resolve were key factors mentioned by many interviewees. In concentration camps, there was a merciless effort for survival. Strategies, other than those which involved religion, were employed. S.S. recalled: 'I knew that if I fell sick, that'll be the end of me. I was trying my utmost not to. I didn't rely on anyone'.<sup>258</sup> S.M. concurred. 'It was every man for himself'.<sup>259</sup> J.M. emphasised the necessity of keeping psychologically strong. He remembered thinking: 'I'm young and I want to live and I decided I had to live to see what happened to my parents. I had to survive and I put my mind to it. I didn't give in'.<sup>260</sup> When asked what gave him the strength to keep going, M.M. responded that he just kept going. 'You just had to survive from one day to the next. Just to keep alive. Survival of the fittest'.<sup>261</sup> G.G. summed up his resolution: 'The will to survive every day was so great, it took over'.<sup>262</sup>

The evacuation of the camps began in late 1944. In harsh winter weather, the inmates were forced to march on murderous treks that lasted for weeks. During death marches, grit and determination kept many of the interviewees going.

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<sup>254</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 32.

<sup>255</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 34.

<sup>256</sup> Primo Levi, *If This is a Man* (London: Abacus Sphere Books, 1987), p. 136.

<sup>257</sup> Marco Belpoliti & Robert Gordon, eds., *The Voice of Memory: Primo Levi* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p. 145.

<sup>258</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 22.

<sup>259</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 23.

<sup>260</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 33.

<sup>261</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 16.

<sup>262</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 2.

Survival for J.L. meant fighting to stay alive, especially on the Death March. 'I knew the moment I stopped marching I'd get a bullet through my head'.<sup>263</sup> E.L. recalled her time on a Death March. 'We had to walk for about two weeks. If you sat down the Germans shot you'.<sup>264</sup> J.G.'s brother was shot in front of him on a Death March but J.G. refused to succumb. 'I never gave in'.<sup>265</sup>

Most of the interviewees equated their survival with luck. The following interviewees had all come from Orthodox or observant Jewish backgrounds and yet made no mention of keeping any element of Jewish belief system or practices in their struggle for survival. J.L. recalled: 'I don't know how I survived. It was just a stroke of luck'.<sup>266</sup> B.S. maintained: 'It's luck but a bit of common sense. You looked after yourself, survival of the fittest'.<sup>267</sup> E.K. agreed. 'It was sheer luck'.<sup>268</sup> G.S. explained his good fortune. 'Whatever people tell you, it was luck. I had several strokes of luck during my period of incarceration. I was sent to a small 'soft' camp. We weren't beaten and got better food than in *Auschwitz*'.<sup>269</sup> C.S. equates his survival to luck, not faith. 'Luck was with me. I can't say God was with me'.<sup>270</sup>

E.W. explained his survival by pointing to 'a combination of luck and cunning'.<sup>271</sup> J.C. stressed natural instinct. 'It's amazing when you get into a situation like that you learn automatically like an animal. It comes to you how to defend yourself, how to survive. Human instinct, you just keep going'. Cunning assisted a great deal. 'I used to pinch the soap. That saved my life. I traded it for extra food, a carrot'. He also admitted that luck played an important part. 'If you were in the right spot at the right time...'.<sup>272</sup> K.E. referred to his own resourcefulness in his

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<sup>263</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 17.

<sup>264</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 15.

<sup>265</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 19.

<sup>266</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 17.

<sup>267</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 37.

<sup>268</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 38.

<sup>269</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 25.

<sup>270</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 30.

<sup>271</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 24.

<sup>272</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 21.

attempts to overcome starvation by finding extra morsels of food. 'You had to find ways to survive'.<sup>273</sup>

The majority of interviewees believed that dependence on one's own survival skills was a preferred option. Inmates developed their own protective armour, crucial for survival. However, one interviewee sought a different strategy. Upon arrival in *Auschwitz*, B.S.'s parents were immediately taken to the gas chamber. As a thirteen-year-old, he sought the 'protection' of a group, finding ten young inmates who helped each other. 'We all did everything together like a pack of wolves. We harmonised. It had to be like the army. We knew where we belonged. We were agile so we were useful'. Luck and resilience played a part. 'It was survival from one day to the next. It's luck but a bit of common sense.' Even though B.S. emphasized the value of forming a supportive group, self-preservation was the principal factor. 'You looked after yourself. It was survival of the fittest'.<sup>274</sup>

The hunger drive, which is connected with the will to live, became a merciless drive.<sup>275</sup> In the long term, no one could survive incarceration living on the meagre rations. Though theft and barter were severely punished, it did not deter many from 'organising' extra food supplies. A few interviewees mentioned stealing as means of staying alive. J.S. recalled: 'You had to find means of a way to survive to get a little bit extra. I used to pinch things and sell them. We were starving. Everyone who survived had to use means of survival. You couldn't live on rations'.<sup>276</sup> 'The whole thing was to survive I stole everything I could. I lined up twice for rations. They didn't recognise me'.<sup>277</sup> M.M. stole potato peels 'and cooked them over steam'.<sup>278</sup> E.L. recalled her ordeal on the Death March: 'At night we used to run out and steal carrots'.<sup>279</sup> J.L. declared: 'I stole Kohlrabi from the fields. I escaped with a friend but we were dobbed in by the farmers'.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 32.

<sup>274</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 37.

<sup>275</sup> Elie Cohen, *Human Behaviour in the Concentration Camp*, p.139.

<sup>276</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 27.

<sup>277</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 34.

<sup>278</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 16.

<sup>279</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 15.

<sup>280</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 17.

Food rations were often stolen during the night. Jo.S. saved pieces of bread for the night shift. 'I would put it in my pocket to save it and others took it from me'. He devised a way to avoid further theft of his rations. 'So with a piece of wire I put the bread through the wire and put it around my thigh'.<sup>281</sup> The will to survive creates ingenious means. In order to deter others from stealing his bread, C.G. hid his bread under his head as he slept. This attempt was futile.

Jo.S. recalled how starvation affected his thoughts during his years of incarceration: 'If I am ever lucky enough to come out alive, the first thing I'm going to do is to go to a field and steal a bag of potatoes. Then I'll build myself a fire and all day long, I'm going to eat those potatoes. That's what I'm going to do, nothing else'.

Good singing voices helped two interviewees in their efforts for survival. S.M. and J.S. believed their good singing voices played a vital role. The SS permitted the establishment of four orchestras in *Auschwitz*.<sup>282</sup> Performances on Sundays and special festive days took place for the SS and privileged inmates. Musicians were recruited from inmates, who had to perform for those departing and arriving from work. While S.M. was humming and singing as he worked, he was approached by an Austrian Jewish performer. 'He performed for the Nazis and he asked me to join them'.<sup>283</sup> When I asked him how he felt about performing for the Nazis, he replied: 'We knew we would get something to eat. After the performance we got a bit of food, a piece of bread. That's how we survived'.

It was during these concerts or other cultural events that the performers were reconnected with their pre-war lives. Singing helped to break through the isolation and offered an escape from the dehumanisation. S.M. explained: 'It helped because you came together with different people. They were not so morose. Performing helped spiritually and kept up morale. It gave me moral support. I was the youngest in the group of about twenty-five'. J.S. was rewarded with extra food for his singing. 'I had a good voice. The Poles taught me dirty songs and I used to

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<sup>281</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 31.

<sup>282</sup> Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 150.

<sup>283</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 23.

sing and I got a piece of bread and a bit of soup. It saved me. It helped me a lot to survive'.<sup>284</sup>

Acts of solidarity amongst inmates played a pivotal role in surviving. Jo.S. recalled a friend, who worked in the kitchen in a forced labour camp and was able to salvage scraps of bread and potato. He believed this gesture saved his life. J.S. remembered how he received a whole loaf of bread for repairing a hole in a step. 'I took it to the barrack and shared it with all my friends'. In order to obtain more bread, J.S. continued to 'break' the step and offered to repair it.

Many inmates volunteered for labour in the hope that in doing so, extra morsels of food would be obtained. By volunteering for a job in *Auschwitz*, N.W. recalled getting 'a few extra spoons of soup'.<sup>285</sup> He admitted: 'You had to be street smart in camp and organise things'. P.R. put his age up to sixteen in order to be selected for labour. J.L. stated: 'If you could work it was okay'. He volunteered for jobs and was fortunate to be sent to a workplace, where Western prisoners of war received Red Cross parcels. 'I looked very young and people felt sorry for me. I was left food and a pair of English shoes to barter with. You learn very quickly'.<sup>286</sup> O.H. volunteered for the most menial jobs for 'extra spoonfuls'. 'I was a carrier of food. I became a night watchman. I carried buckets of urine'.<sup>287</sup>

For some, the only way to deal with the chaos and devastation around them was to function mechanically. I.V. was incarcerated in various ghettos in Hungary before deportation to *Auschwitz* in 1944. The intensity was felt immediately. A few days after his arrival in *Auschwitz*, he was forced to collect items of clothing from the crematoria of *Birkenau*. He claimed to have seen his mother's body on top of a heap of corpses. I.V. was fourteen and was not part of the *Sonderkommando*. 'She was lying there, already nude with all the corpses'. I.V. coped by blocking out his emotions. 'I suppose I was numb to any further and deeper understanding. When I did muster, I did it like everybody'.<sup>288</sup> The keeping of Jewish rhythms, such as the reciting of *Kaddish* did not enter his thoughts at the time.

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<sup>284</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 27.

<sup>285</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 29.

<sup>286</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 17.

<sup>287</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 26.

<sup>288</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 42.

Some survivors believed that promises made to their parents kept them going. S.W. spent the war in Poland, hidden by people and living in the forest. She recalled her mother's last words. 'It doesn't matter what happens to me, you have to survive'.<sup>289</sup> S.W. was the only member of the family to survive. Y.K. also made a last promise to her parents that she would survive. 'I can honestly say that [promise] kept me going'.<sup>290</sup> J.S. mentioned that he 'talked' to his dead mother. 'I asked her which way I should go. I had a great feeling that she's protecting me'.<sup>291</sup>

The experiences of the *Kindertransporte* youngsters, who spent the war with British families or orphanages, clearly differed from those who were in ghettos and camps. The keeping of faith or any semblance of Jewish rhythms proved important for them. Almost ten thousand Jewish children from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia without their parents were given safe haven by the British government prior to the outbreak of the war.<sup>292</sup> For them, problems commenced with the separation from their parents and the necessity of adjusting to life in new homes in the UK. Most never saw their parents again. The experiences of exile left deep consequences, caused by the separation from relatives and the fear and insecurity over the fate of family and friends. Four of the interviewees belonged to the *Kindertransporte* group. They sought some form of religious practice to cope with the effects of their dislocation.

Su.S. experienced a positive change when sent to a Jewish hostel in Yorkshire, which offered her a sense of wellbeing. 'It was better for me. Everybody was in the same boat. I made good friends there. You had to go to synagogue on Saturday morning. You couldn't do anything else on Saturday. It was kosher'. Some of the Jewish rituals offered Su.S. some comfort. 'I remember *Pesach* having to clean out the ladders. I didn't mind the Jewish routine. It gave me a bit of security. We had to say grace after every meal. It didn't worry me'.<sup>293</sup>

Hope and prayer played a part in Su.S.'s strategy of dealing with the separation of her parents. Her anguish and loneliness are expressed in letters, written to a

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<sup>289</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 36.

<sup>290</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 10.

<sup>291</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 27.

<sup>292</sup> Bella Gutterman & Avner Shalev, *To Bear Witness: Holocaust Remembrance at Yad Vashem* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005), p. 59.

<sup>293</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 8.

cousin in America. These letters have since been returned to her and she showed me them. This is an excerpt from one of them:

1943. The last I heard from my mother is about six months ago. I've tried to write to the Red Cross. I have not heard from my father for about two years now. I really am getting worried about my parents. What shall I do? I think you are quite right. We cannot do anything but pray and hope.

R.R. was moved from home to home and attended church with the host families. She tried to draw comfort in prayer and in Jewish rituals that she barely remembered.<sup>294</sup> She recalled her attempts in preserving her Jewish identity. 'I used to fast at odd times and pray. I didn't know when the festivals were. But I never forgot who I was. I wanted to keep my Jewishness'.<sup>295</sup>

N.H. spent ten years with a Congregationalist family in the countryside of Kent. The Jewish festivals were spent at a cousin's in London. 'She would have a *Seder* table and I'd go along with that. This was my introduction to *Pesach*'. When she felt the need for some form of spiritual support, N.H. attended the local church. 'I went to church whenever I felt like it. I knew the rituals. I felt comfortable there'.<sup>296</sup>

D.C. was seven years old when she was placed on a *Kindertransport*. Her experiences were less positive. She was sent to a Jewish hostel in Newcastle. 'Once or twice we were sent to a Jewish family for the festivals. It was so foreign to me to be with strangers. No-one gave me any warmth. The dream of finding my parents never left me'.<sup>297</sup>

As Brenner concluded 'the most pronounced changes in religious belief occurred during the Holocaust'.<sup>298</sup> The dilemma of theodicy was one of the philosophical problems which religious Jews faced during the evolving events of the Holocaust. The majority of the previously religious interviewees abandoned their belief in God. Some clung to rituals, such as performing their *barmitzvahs* and participating in whatever Jewish practice or prayer was possible, given the location and time during the Holocaust. The diverse survival strategies described in this chapter

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<sup>294</sup> Alan Gill, *Interrupted Journeys* (Australia: Simon & Schuster, 2004), p. 159.

<sup>295</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 43.

<sup>296</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 6.

<sup>297</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 7.

<sup>298</sup> Brenner, *The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors*, p. 88.

demonstrate the various individual differences of the interviewees. In their struggle for survival they resorted to whatever means they could and whatever approach, religious or otherwise, that suited their state of being at the time. A few sought religion and prayer as a support mechanism, but the majority used cunning and wile. Luck was a factor that featured significantly in their quest for survival.

## 5. Liberation

Liberation in 1945 occurred at varying times in the different locations. The appalling images of emaciated bodies and walking skeletons in the aftermath of the various liberations of the camps shocked the world.<sup>299</sup> Many of the interviewees were liberated in *Buchenwald* and *Bergen-Belsen*, *Dachau* and *Theresienstadt*. The Liberation of *Buchenwald* occurred on 11 April 1945, when the political prisoners took over the command of the camp. Units of General Patton's Third US Army arrived in the afternoon. The troops were shocked at the emaciated condition of the twenty-one thousand inmates. Approximately one thousand were orphaned Jewish youngsters. Within a week Rabbi Schachter, an American chaplain organised Sabbath prayers and offered pastoral care. This ritual assisted greatly in rekindling Jewish identification.<sup>300</sup>

Prior to the Liberation of *Bergen-Belsen* on 15 April, three transports of prisoners had been evacuated on the orders of Heinrich Himmler, to be used as bargaining chips in his negotiations with the Allies. L.F., her mother and brother and other relatives were amongst them. She recalled this period:

We didn't know where we were going. We were on the train for about a week with only a loaf of bread, nothing to drink. On one side were the Russians and on the other the Americans and the British. The guards and driver left the train. It was stationary for about two days near Magdeburg. The conditions were terrible. The Americans liberated us.<sup>301</sup>

The survivors from the train were taken to the village of Hillersleben. L.F. and her family spent the following six months there until they returned to Hungary. The first day of Liberation was depicted by L.F.'s uncle, who wrote in an abandoned notebook that L.F. found: 'Life is beautiful! Our happiness can permeate through the tears and suffering of our years of hell'. Another entry described the desire for

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<sup>299</sup> Laurence Rees, *Auschwitz: The Nazis and the 'Final Solution'* (London: BBC Books, 2005), p. 334.

<sup>300</sup> Zeev Mankovitz, *Life between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 26.

<sup>301</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 40.

nutrition. 'One more day and we are going home. We'll have water and bread again'.<sup>302</sup>

US troops arrived at *Dachau* on 29 April 1945. The sub-camps of *Allach* and *Kaufering* were liberated in the following days. The dying continued, with survivors succumbing to typhus. D.W., incarcerated in *Kaufering*, recalled the support his father had given him in the last weeks of the war. 'My father gave me moral assistance and hope. Always hope until the last minute. He died a few hours before the Allies came, from weakness'.<sup>303</sup>

Although many inmates were close to death, they were elated at the arrival of their liberators. However for most, Liberation was also a time of devastation, anguish and despair. Their parents had been murdered and the life, which they had known before the war, had been shattered. 'I was seventeen and knew very well that I was alone. I felt like an adult. I had to look after myself'.<sup>304</sup> These survivors were teenagers and had just endured horrific traumas of incarceration. Most of them were malnourished and ill, which confounded any relief that may have been felt. Their most pressing need was urgent medical attention. 'I was too weak to realise what was going on'.<sup>305</sup> 'I was practically dying'.<sup>306</sup> 'I was only bones'.<sup>307</sup> 'I couldn't walk or eat'.<sup>308</sup>

Compounded with weakness and ill health, the young survivors experienced an overriding feeling of fear and confusion. E.M. recalled her immediate response when liberated from *Buchenwald*. 'I felt fear and confusion. People didn't register what happened. It [Liberation] didn't do so much for us. People were dead all around us. Soldiers were afraid and stunned to come in. We didn't look like people. Nobody could walk'.<sup>309</sup> J.L. poignantly remembered the arrival of the US troops. 'An American came in and started crying and he came to me. He asked if he could lift me. He lifted me and cuddled me and then he put me back'.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> See Appendix 7 for entries in Hungarian.

<sup>303</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 5.

<sup>304</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 38.

<sup>305</sup> See Appendix, 5: no. 37.

<sup>306</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 29.

<sup>307</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 23.

<sup>308</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 29.

<sup>309</sup> See Appendix 5: no.35.

<sup>310</sup> See Appendix 5: no.17.

Confusion stifled any positive emotion. 'It was more confusion than anything else'.<sup>311</sup> O.H. felt clearly bewildered. 'I couldn't react. I was too busy getting off the lice from my shirt'.<sup>312</sup> When asked how he felt upon Liberation from *Buchenwald*, C.S. responded: 'How could I be happy? How could I laugh? I'd forgotten how to laugh'.<sup>313</sup>

Some interviewees had been aware of their parents' fate. P.R. was with his parents when they died in the Lodz ghetto. 'They died from disease and malnutrition. I was eleven'.<sup>314</sup> B.S.'s parents went straight to the gas chambers of *Auschwitz* in 1944. 'I was thirteen'.<sup>315</sup> G.G.'s mother and sister had been hiding in an attic in the Czestochwa ghetto. He realised their fate. 'In the distance I saw a woman and a little girl walking with others. My sister had a red coat'. G.G. and his father were sent to Lojewo labour camp. 'My father was still with me for another four to five months. And then he didn't want to get up one morning to go to work and when I came back he was gone' [dead].<sup>316</sup> Y.K. recalls being separated from her parents upon arrival in *Auschwitz*. 'That was the last time I saw them'.<sup>317</sup> Jo.S.'s father was forced to enlist in the Hungarian army. 'Soon after we received a telegram saying he was missing'. At the selection in *Auschwitz-Birkenau*, he was separated from his mother and his brothers. 'I never saw my mother and the others again'.<sup>318</sup> As J.G.'s mother held him for the last time, he recalled her saying that he would be the only one left alive. 'The rest of the family went to *Treblinka*'.<sup>319</sup> 'I knew my parents were gone. At the time I knew I lost them'.<sup>320</sup>

T.K. recalled the departure of his family in Budapest. 'My father was taken on 20 October and my mother on 2 November. Being on the Jewish Council I knew everything that was happening. I was fourteen'.<sup>321</sup> S.W. was separated from her

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<sup>311</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 21.

<sup>312</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 26.

<sup>313</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 30.

<sup>314</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 9.

<sup>315</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 37.

<sup>316</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 2.

<sup>317</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 10.

<sup>318</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 31.

<sup>319</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 19.

<sup>320</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 28.

<sup>321</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 12.

mother from a place of hiding in Poland in 1942. She was informed that her father and brother had been shot in a labour camp a few weeks before Liberation.<sup>322</sup>

Fear of an uncertain future gripped many of the young orphaned survivors. 'You realised you were all alone. What's going to become of us?'<sup>323</sup> 'You realised you're by yourself. There's nobody else, only the people around you. The euphoria of being liberated was gone'.<sup>324</sup> 'I felt relief, confusion and fear, not knowing what's going to happen. No parents'.<sup>325</sup>

These sentiments were also felt by those, who had been sent to the United Kingdom with the *Kindertransporte*. Although they suffered little physical deprivation, their psychological circumstances were similarly distressing. Liberation did not necessarily signify a joyous occasion. Four of the interviewees were on the *Kindertransporte* and three would never see their parents again. N.H. was living in a Czech trust fund hostel in England, learning trades and completing high school. 'I was worried what would happen to me. How soon would I find my mother and brother? Who would help me?'<sup>326</sup> Her last memory of her mother and brother were of them huddled under umbrellas, waving goodbye to her as she was transported to England.<sup>327</sup> She was ultimately reunited with her father, who had been interned on the Isle of Man. R.R. recalled: 'Liberation meant nothing to me as I didn't have my parents'.<sup>328</sup> D.C. aged thirteen stated:

The war ended in May 1945. I frequently went to Bloomsbury House in the hope of seeing the names of my mother and father. As the lists grew shorter and shorter, I slowly became aware that my dreams would not be realised, that I was on my own and had to think of my future. By September there was still no news of my parents or relatives. I was overwhelmed with grief but I tried desperately to accept the situation.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 36.

<sup>323</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 10.

<sup>324</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 2.

<sup>325</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 23.

<sup>326</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 6.

<sup>327</sup> Alan Gill, *Interrupted Journeys*, p. 140.

<sup>328</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 43.

<sup>329</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 7.

On the sixtieth anniversary of the Liberation in 2005, the 'Buchenwald Boys' living in Melbourne held their annual ball. The inaugural speech given by one of the survivors epitomised the resilience and courage of the group. He stated:

During all the long dark years when death followed so close to our heels we had just one wish, one desire, one dream – to survive. We did not think of what we will do with our survival – survival itself was our final goal. But when survival came, after the gates of *Buchenwald* and other death camps opened and the survivors began streaming out, and we began to realise the impossibility to comprehend the dimensions of our tragedy, when we came face to face with the total life shattering and life altering drama that has happened to us, the greatest miracle began. At that time the dream to survive was behind us and forgotten, we have survived. But then we began to bleed with a reality that was day after day destroying our desperate hope of finding out who of our near ones had survived. We had no one and nothing to start our liberated life. The crust of bread in the first hours of our freedom was not our own. This was when the miracle of life itself happened – our desire to go on; continue; to build. We became without realising the most important witnesses to life. With our bodies we spoke to the future of our people telling the future that life has its own strength, its own limitless desire to continue. No one like us can witness that strength of life the way we did in the days and months immediately after our liberation.<sup>330</sup>

The survivors were a traumatised group who spoke different languages, came from various countries and had survived the war by enduring a range of experiences. They had subscribed to differing levels of religious observance both prior and during the Holocaust. For those who knew of their parents' fate, Liberation implied life as orphans. A period of desperate searching awaited those who were unaware of their family's outcome. They were teenagers, facing the challenges of establishing their lives, principally without the support and guidance of family units or relatives.

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<sup>330</sup> Part of the speech made by Abraham C. at the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Liberation of *Buchenwald*, Melbourne, 11 April, 2005.

## 6. Rebuilding Lives

The interviewees lost their parents and as a consequence family ties were broken. Religious, social and family traditions, which had often played such an essential part in the lives of these young victims, were shattered. Many of them grew up in Jewish communities with a rich cultural spirituality and communal structure, in which they had developed their sense of belonging and identification. They had been part of a family which had been an intrinsic component of a cohesive Jewish community. Without the support of these family and communal ties, would they be able to regain the Jewish rhythms that had been an essential part of their lives?

For some, the fate of their parents had been uncertain. Their first goal was to find a relative. As with all other survivors, this group of teenagers also embarked on long journeys, searching for missing families or relatives. 'I went back to Berlin because I thought my father may have survived'.<sup>331</sup> 'I went back to Hungary to see if I could find anybody'.<sup>332</sup> 'I was hoping my parents and my grandparents would survive. Went back to my town [in Germany] to see if anyone was coming back'.<sup>333</sup> 'Went to my home-town [small town in Poland] looking for family. I felt confused. I never found out about my family. I waited for six to twelve months. No-one came back'.<sup>334</sup> J.K. survived the war in France in hiding and believed her parents would be returning. She recalled: 'I was happy thinking I would see my parents again'.<sup>335</sup> She waited in vain.

Rebuilding shattered lives took courage and resilience for survivors, especially orphaned teenagers. After years of incarceration, many needed much time and care in order to 're-enter' normal life. The Red Cross arranged for the orphans from *Buchenwald* to be sent to France and Switzerland. Special homes were established to rehabilitate them. Their schooling had been completely disrupted and the majority had no high school education. School and vocational training were vital elements of the gradual process of returning to normal life.

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<sup>331</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 25.

<sup>332</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 38.

<sup>333</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 16.

<sup>334</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 14.

<sup>335</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 13.

Resuming their education or training was an essential aspect of their recovery. For those in good health, training consisted of a variety of pathways. For J.M., it was leather goods. B.E. learnt machinery. E.W. started architecture. J.C. studied engineering. C.S. learnt a tool-making trade. G.S. chose the option of becoming a dental technician. H.R. also attempted this course. J.G. learnt tailoring. K.E. learnt metal-work. S.S. 'learnt to be a furrier'.<sup>336</sup> M.R. lived in a Jewish hostel and learnt tailoring in the evening. Jo.S. learnt the shoe trade.

The younger ones were sent to school. Resuming their education in a foreign language proved overwhelming for some. 'It was too hard for me. I'd missed five years of school. Then we had a class of our own with our own teacher. We were there about three years. I learnt the basics'.<sup>337</sup>

Resuming education in one's mother tongue was an easier task. T.K. continued his education in Budapest. 'I continued with schooling. The Jewish high school re-started in March. I finished the year accelerated'.<sup>338</sup> T.K.'s teachers helped him adjust to his new life as an orphan. 'The real moral support was through the high school. When I went back to school after the war, the teachers were really my best support. They gave me a lot of confidence'.

Education had always been a prime motivator in G.G.'s family. G.G. spent some time with a cousin in Germany. 'In Germany I went back to the principle that my mother gave me. I learnt how to be a dental mechanic. I took a German teacher to teach me history, geography and maths. I was trying to get a bit of an education'.<sup>339</sup>

Vocational training came later for those who required rehabilitation. J.L. spent two months in hospital, after being transported to Switzerland. Following his recovery, he studied radio mechanics. N.W. stayed at a sanatorium for four years until fully recovered. Unable to attend any formal training courses, he found great pleasure from reading. 'There was a professor who looked after us and he brought books. I started reading a lot of classics and this opened my eyes to a different world. I became very well read. I started writing plays. I thought I might become a writer'.

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<sup>336</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 22.

<sup>337</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 23.

<sup>338</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 12.

<sup>339</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 2.

The professor spent precious time with N.W. 'I saw Charlie Chaplin's 'The Great Dictator' and for months the professor talked to me about the film. I got a lot out of it'. This love of learning had been instilled in him from childhood. 'My mother was an ardent reader. There was the religious part and the cultural part, the love for learning'.<sup>340</sup>

The question of the emotional well-being of these young survivors became an issue in the immediate aftermath of the war. They were teenagers, approaching or undergoing the trials and tribulations of maturing children. However, many of them had been forced to work and conduct themselves as mature adults. Having endured the traumas of the Holocaust and now orphaned, did they consider themselves as children, teenagers or adults?

T.K. assessed his life in these early years following Liberation: 'There was no use feeling sorry for yourself. You had to get on with life. We became very streetwise. We grew up very quickly. We lost our teenage years'.<sup>341</sup> Y.K. reiterated these sentiments. 'I suddenly became an adult overnight after I came back from *Auschwitz*'.<sup>342</sup> E.K. was seventeen when liberated in *Buchenwald*. 'I felt like an adult and had to look after myself'.<sup>343</sup> J.M. explained: 'Your teenage years were gone. You miss something but you don't know what it was. I hadn't grown up emotionally. I was still a kid'.<sup>344</sup> J.L. declared: 'After all these experiences I went from baby to being an adult. I was a teenager but felt like an adult. I looked like a child'.<sup>345</sup> For six months following her liberation in *Auschwitz*, E.L. admitted: 'I didn't feel like an adult, but I didn't feel like a child either and I didn't feel like a teenager. I don't know what I felt. You become so hard, numb'.<sup>346</sup>

G.G. described the emotional conflicts he felt after Liberation. He spent the first year working for the *Bricha*; the largest and most successful illegal immigration movement of Jews across occupied zones to Palestine. He recalled this period:

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<sup>340</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 29.

<sup>341</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 12.

<sup>342</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 10.

<sup>343</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 38.

<sup>344</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 33.

<sup>345</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 17.

<sup>346</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 15.

I felt like a child. I was on the border and I was by myself. I was waiting to take a trainload across the border at night. The snow was deep and after a few times I used to cry. I cried because I was on my own and I knew by then that none of my family had survived and I thought what am I doing this for? And then the next transport comes and then you feel like an adult again, helping all these people and kids. You feel these people depend on you. So you're not a child. I never thought as a teenager. It was either as a child or an adult.<sup>347</sup>

The traumatic experiences often instilled a sense of independence. D.W., the youngest of the six surviving siblings was liberated in *Kaufering*. He declared that he 'just wanted to be independent'.<sup>348</sup> K.E. is one of the six interviewees, who was not orphaned. He remembered the challenging times when re-united with his father in Munich. 'We didn't get on after two days. It was very difficult. He thought I was still a little boy. He tried to dominate my life'.<sup>349</sup>

What role did Judaism play in the lives of these teenagers in the aftermath of the Holocaust? Brenner argues that 'Fewer Holocaust survivors after the war remained religiously observant. And for those who remained observant there was a marked diminution of their practice'.<sup>350</sup> The observant Jew was more likely to modify his Jewish behaviour than the non-observant'.<sup>351</sup> Living in Israel however, tended to strengthen the religious observances of those who had previously been non-observant.<sup>352</sup> Do these conclusions apply to teenage orphaned survivors?

David Weiss Halivni returned to Sighet in search of surviving relatives. He remembered fasting there on *Tisha B'Av*, not out of sorrow for the destroyed temples 'but out a sense of historical continuity'.<sup>353</sup> He suggested this ritual of fasting preserved contact and provided continuity with a past, which had left no living remnant.

Irving Greenberg, an Orthodox rabbi, advocates dramatic changes in Orthodox practice and belief following events such as the Holocaust. He questions how the

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<sup>347</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 2.

<sup>348</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 5.

<sup>349</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 32.

<sup>350</sup> Brenner, *The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors*, p. 38.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>353</sup> Weiss Halivni, *The Book and the Sword*, p. 73.

integrity and distinctiveness of Jewish life can be maintained in the new social and cultural world. When the world and its sufferings do not fit within this faith's paradigm, it is possible to have 'moment faith' whereby the individual has moments of doubt.<sup>354</sup> For Greenberg, religion is open to historical interpretation and thus a more pluralistic approach can encompass this ebb and flow in faith. 'God is responsible for having created a world in which man is free to make history'.<sup>355</sup> His notion of a 'voluntary covenant' offers an explanation why and how Jewish life continues after devastating assaults on the covenant. Jews voluntarily choose to take it on partially or completely following onslaughts, such as the Holocaust. Greenberg claims this is the most authentic means of being Jewish.

During this stage of recuperation, the religious responses of the interviewees varied. The majority resumed their identity by participating in Jewish festivals and rituals. For a few, faith played an essential element of their healing. For others, all traces of their previous Jewish life vanished. The dramatic changes suggested by Greenberg affected the religious responses and practices for the majority of the interviewees.

The '*Buchenwald Boys*' developed firm friendships in Switzerland. Without the family support system, together they created a 'family' atmosphere as a group and became each other's family. Most had come from Orthodox backgrounds and they longed for some of their Jewish past rituals. J.C. explained: 'We were Jewish. But there was no home or Jewishness. There was no such thing as Friday night. We didn't go to synagogue. But you can't change the boys, we spoke Yiddish'.<sup>356</sup>

Participation in a few Jewish practices was an essential aspect of the healing process for some of the orphaned teenagers. Celebrating the Jewish festivals was symbolic of being part of a Jewish community. Local Jewish families in Switzerland invited the *Buchenwalders* for the *Shabbat* meal. This hospitality offered many an opportunity in regaining their some of their Jewish rhythms and practices. B.E. remembered: 'The Jewish organisation helped us a lot. There were

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<sup>354</sup> Henry Knight, 'Locating God', in David Patterson & John Roth, Eds., *Fire in the Ashes: God, Evil and the Holocaust* (Seattle: University Washington Press, 2005), pp. 84-95.

<sup>355</sup> Michael Morgan, *A Holocaust Reader. Responses to the Nazi Extermination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 101.

<sup>356</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 21.

teachers and Jewish culture'.<sup>357</sup> The Swiss Jewish community was good to us. We were invited for the [Jewish] festivals. This helped me adjust to my new life'.<sup>358</sup> H.R. recalled going to synagogue at the time of the festivals. 'It helped being with Jews. You belonged there'.<sup>359</sup> E.W.'s visits to synagogue served to meet people. *Shabbat* dinners and synagogue visits assisted the orphaned teenagers in overcoming their sense of isolation.

This hospitality helped the majority in regaining a sense of normality. However, N.W. encountered emotional difficulties when invited to Jewish homes. 'This was the most difficult thing. It brought back memories'.<sup>360</sup>

The experiences of the *Buchenwald* Boys sent to France differed slightly. Participating in Jewish festivals and rituals was not perceived as important to the authorities of some of the orphanages. S.M. was housed in an orphanage in the countryside, which was run by assimilated German Jews. Coming from an Orthodox background in Poland, he longed for the Jewish rituals that had been part of his childhood. 'In France we had no Jewish upbringing at all. One *Yom Kippur*, we were taken to Paris to a *shul*. We missed it'. He recalled how he and the other orphans improvised the *Shabbat* ritual. 'Every Friday night after dinner we used to sit around and sing Hebrew and Yiddish songs. It was just the boys. There was a feeling that something was missing'.<sup>361</sup> S.S. did not attend synagogue during his four years in France. 'No rhythms of Jewish life in France'.<sup>362</sup> C.S. found great comfort from the *Buchenwalders* in Paris. 'Saturday night we went to Jewish dances'.<sup>363</sup> The Jewish rhythms and practices of these boys were fading, without parental or communal support.

Judith Hemmendinger, the director of the Taverny Hostel in France, commented that the young *Buchenwald* survivors, who were resettled there, requested kosher food.<sup>364</sup> They had come from strictly Orthodox homes and undoubtedly longed for

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<sup>357</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 18.

<sup>358</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 25.

<sup>359</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 28.

<sup>360</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 29.

<sup>361</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 23.

<sup>362</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 22.

<sup>363</sup> See Appendix 5, no. 30.

<sup>364</sup> Judith Hemmendinger & Robert Krell, *The Children of Buchenwald: Child Survivors of the Holocaust and their Post-War Lives* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2000), p. 169.

some of their pre-war rhythms. Hemmendinger added that many however 'no longer believed in God or held ambivalent attitudes towards religious observance'.<sup>365</sup>

P.R. returned to Prague with his brother and lived with an aunt and uncle. He recalled some of the Jewish activities while resuming his high school education. 'A rabbi came to the school and taught us once a week. We also went to two Jewish camps outside Prague organised by the Jewish community'.<sup>366</sup>

The following two interviewees were not orphaned during the Holocaust. I.V. was liberated in *Blechhammer* in January 1945. He was taken to Belarus, where he participated in Jewish activities. He recalled this period:

There was a room which was declared as a *shul*. I, as a kid took a piece of timber and with the help of a very strong magnifying lens, sitting in the sun for hours, I was burning in the timber the outline of the tablets and the letters of the ten commandments. That was used above the improvised *bimah* [altar]. I offered to do the task because I knew the prayers by heart. I felt I had to do something that was part of me. It helped me. I contributed something Jewish. There was a big *Pesach* there. And being the youngest I had to say the *Manishtano* [a segment of the Passover ceremony].<sup>367</sup>

Once back in Hungary, I.V. joined his old synagogue. 'I went to *shul* occasionally with my father because it was part of my tradition. Some of the traditions were there. It was part of the parts you were trying to pick up. You can't divorce yourself completely'. However, he questioned his faith. 'My religious convictions were very wishy-washy'.

In 1949, when the menace of Communism became a reality, I.V. and his father escaped to Vienna. A communal *Seder* (Passover meal) was held there and I.V. convinced his father to attend. 'I told my father that in all these years I was used to being part of a *Seder*. It meant something to me. So we went. I felt good about it. It was a spiritual thing for me, not religious'. Undoubtedly, these rituals assisted

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>366</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 9.

<sup>367</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 42.

I.V. in his recovery process. 'They helped me because it was part of my former identity. I had to rely on what I had before. I needed them to get on with my life'.

For Y.G., the rituals were disrupted and yet Jewish identity remained. He came from an acculturated Polish background, where the *Shabbat* meal had always been an intrinsic part of his childhood. However, this changed when he returned to Cracow with his mother. 'No more Friday nights. Not enough room. No reason to do it. No more synagogues. The rhythms stopped completely'.<sup>368</sup> Nevertheless, Y.G. felt a need to re-establish his Jewish identity. 'It was important for me to resume my Jewish identity. I had Jewish friends. I felt more Jewish than Polish. I still felt Jewish, absolutely'.

D.W.'s religious attitudes are representative of the group which had abandoned all aspects of Jewish ties. After a brief recovery period in hospital, he went to Prague to search for surviving brothers and sisters. He had come from a religious background in Slovakia, where 'Jewishness was very much part of our lives'. All previous Jewish rhythms and practices ceased for D.W. He attended *shul* only once. 'We didn't celebrate any festivals. You didn't ask why. You were just in neutral. You can describe it as in a total shock. And I didn't miss it. I missed my parents. I immersed myself going to college, studying engineering'.<sup>369</sup>

For a few survivors, returning to Jewish rituals and regaining faith was imperative. Eliezer Berkovits, a Jewish theologian attempted to explain the Holocaust, using the traditions of the past without any theological revision. New self-interpretation of Jewish life is impossible without recovery of the past. Berkovits suggests *Auschwitz* can be placed within the biblical and rabbinic texts from which God's relation to human experience and history can be detected. His conception of the content of Judaism and Jewish faith is unconditional. Berkovits refers to God, whose concealment is not a refutation of His presence: 'The God of History must be absent and present concurrently. He hides his presence'.<sup>370</sup> He stresses that Jewish survival testifies to the Lord of History.<sup>371</sup> No Jewish faith could be more

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<sup>368</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 41.

<sup>369</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 5.

<sup>370</sup> Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, p. 107.

<sup>371</sup> Irving Greenberg, 'History, Holocaust and Covenant', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 5, no.1, 1990, pp. 1-12.

authentic for those who survived. For Berkovits, the Holocaust facilitated revival and rejuvenation.

L.F. pursued her dental technician studies in Budapest, living with a non-observant uncle. She was eager to keep the dietary laws.

It was very important to me to keep kosher. I didn't eat there [uncle's]. I went to the kosher *mensa* to eat. We had classes on *Shabbat* but I didn't write or draw. I walked there on *Shabbat*. I was fifteen and wanted to keep it up. I went to synagogue on Friday nights. I felt a need to carry on in the same way. I had the will to do it. It was important for me to continue'.<sup>372</sup>

L.F. was one of the few interviewees who did not abandon her belief in God during her incarceration. The rituals observed prior to the war were an important feature of her pathway to recovery. 'When I had to leave one of those things [rituals], I didn't feel well'. Joining a Zionist movement reinforced her Jewish identity. 'Not only the religious part. My brother and I joined and then we went to Israel. When I couldn't manage kosher like I wanted to on the way to Israel, I accepted it but I didn't feel well emotionally for it'.

Faith had played no role in K.E.'s struggle for survival during his incarceration. However, in the process of rebuilding his new life, K.E. recalled the help received and impulse to regain his previous Jewish rhythms:

I was invited for *Shabbat*. It affected us positively. We started *dovening* [praying]. The rabbis helped. We had a *shul* in their homes. We ate together, worked together and studied together. If there were prayers, you go to the prayers. We studied Ivrit. [Hebrew]. I felt I needed to get back to my Jewish roots. If we survived, we were Jewish and we needed continuity. This is the answer to Hitler. I didn't become angry with God. I tried to read a lot. I tried to find out. I immersed myself in Jewish literature in German. I was lost and trying to find myself. I chose the *Mizrachi* group, which was similar to the way I was brought up. I wanted to continue with the same rhythms, exactly. I ate at a kosher restaurant.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 40.

<sup>373</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 32.

In the post-war years these youngsters were required to re-adjust to their lives as orphans. It was also a period of psychological and physical recuperation from the ravages of incarceration. For some, the resumption of Jewish rituals played a vital role in the process of rehabilitation. For others, participation in Jewish practices assisted with the reconnection to a Jewish identity. Was this to be a temporary support mechanism in the immediate post-war period or would the rhythms of Jewish life assist them in the next stage of their lives? For L.F. and K.E., resumption of traditions included an intrinsic belief in God. Would faith be part of the future lives of the interviewees or would the presence or absence of God be questioned?

Exposure to the horrors of the Holocaust unquestionably affected the religious responses of the survivors. The principle question posed by the survivors was the existence of God. Their attempts at comprehending the enormity and devastation to their lives constantly drew them back to this dilemma. The religious responses of the survivors resembled the vast schism of responses and included some of the range of justifications proposed by some of the post-Holocaust theologians.

## 7. New Life in Australia

Australia offered the teenaged orphaned survivors a new home.<sup>374</sup> They settled principally in the urban centres of Sydney and Melbourne. A few of the interviewees spent some time at the Isabella Lazarus Children's Home in Sydney.<sup>375</sup> The Jewish community, the families of survivors and the American-Jewish welfare organisations assisted them greatly, with financial and moral support.<sup>376</sup> However, as refugees, they were confronted with the burden of integrating and conforming to the social mores of a new country.

Sixty five young survivors of *Buchenwald* came to Australia, fifty four settled in Melbourne.<sup>377</sup> Having left behind them all that was familiar and deprived of family support, they were forced to rebuild their shattered lives in yet another country of displacement. They were faced with social structures and cultural traditions alien to them. Many shared accommodation and found jobs in the same workplaces. They could not speak English and had no job skills, apart from the vocational training received in Switzerland and France. They socialised together and provided each other with a sense of belonging. They found comfort in each other and without words they were able to understand one another's pain. Deep bonds of friendships and love were formed which enabled them to rebuild their lives. J.C. described this bond. 'We were a group that couldn't split up. We were so bonded. Four or five of us rented a house'.<sup>378</sup>

Australia signified an opportunity for the young survivors to commence new lives. Their Jewishness often took on a different reality. The majority of the interviewees now maintained a separation between religious beliefs and Jewish identity. They rejected religious commitment, while retaining a strong sense of Jewish identity. The changes in Orthodox practice and beliefs, Greenberg advocates, become

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<sup>374</sup> For further information, see Suzanne D. Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora: Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia* (Sydney: Collins, 2000) and Suzanne D. Rutland, *The Jews in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>375</sup> An orphanage built in 1939 to provide facilities for Jewish refugee children, whose parents were interned or murdered in the Nazi concentration camps.

<sup>376</sup> Suzanne D. Rutland, 'Subtle Exclusions: Postwar Jewish Emigration to Australia and the Impact of the IRO Scheme', *The Journal of Holocaust Education*, vol. 10, no. 1, Summer 2001, pp.50-66.

<sup>377</sup> *The Buchenwald Boys. A Story of Survival*, Immigration Museum (7 March–22 May 2005), Melbourne.

<sup>378</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 21.

apparent in many of their religious responses. They demonstrated difficulty in belief in a God, who had been all important in their pre-war lives. In order to overcome this difficulty, many would adopt a more pluralistic approach, which would encompass Greenberg's 'voluntary covenant'.

Halivni was once challenged by a Hebrew philosopher, who posed the following dilemma: 'I understand those who were religious before and became irreligious after, and those who were irreligious before and became religious after. I can't understand those who were religious before and remain religious after. Something must have changed'.<sup>379</sup>

The following research was carried out in the early seventies and the target group consisted of much older survivors. Brenner revealed the changes, rejections, reaffirmations, doubts which have so deeply affected the faith and Jewish rhythms of survivors.<sup>380</sup> He examined the responses of seven hundred survivors in Israel. His investigation is perhaps the most similar to my research. In fact, some of the questions he proposed throughout his book were comparable to those I asked the interviewees. I came across this book towards the closing stages of my research and was somewhat taken aback by the similarities in the conclusions. Brenner examined the effects of the Holocaust on survivors in regaining their faith and Jewish traditions. He is interested in how and why survivors were changed by their Holocaust experiences. His research took place in Israel, where he considered it unnecessary to practise religious observances or express belief in God to declare one's Jewish identity. Brenner's study confirmed the effect the Holocaust played with regards to keeping faith. 'Fifty three percent of all the survivors consciously and specifically asserted that the Holocaust affected or modified their faith in God'.<sup>381</sup>

The majority of the interviewees came from Orthodox backgrounds, where religiosity and observance of Jewish rituals and festivals were upheld. Needless to say, all that pertained to the Jewish religion greatly affected the daily lives of the observant interviewees. Brenner's findings showed: 'An observant survivor was

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<sup>379</sup> David Weiss Halivni, *The Book and the Sword*, p. 161.

<sup>380</sup> Reeve Brenner, *The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors* (New York: The Free Press, 1980).

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

the more likely to be influenced religiously by the Holocaust than his non-observant counterpart'.<sup>382</sup> The majority of those who came from religious backgrounds generally abandoned their belief in God. Brenner's study also shows that: 'Fewer Holocaust survivors after the war remained religiously observant. And for those who remained observant there was a marked diminution in the intensity of their practice'. 'Over the course of the years from Europe to the present in Israel, the observant Jew was more likely to modify his Jewish behaviour than the non-observant'. 'Nearly five times as many observant European Jews relinquished their religious practices as non-observant Jews'.<sup>383</sup>

The interviewees were questioned on matters of keeping or abandoning faith in their new country of Australia. Their responses confirm Brenner's findings. The majority relinquished their belief in God. Prayer played a diminishing function in their new lives. Their religious responses reflected Greenberg's assertion that God is no longer all-powerful.<sup>384</sup> S.M. questioned the very presence of God, equating his sins with punishment. 'What sin have I done to deserve that? I was free of sin. Where was God? I had my religious doubts'.<sup>385</sup> M.R. reiterated the questions. 'If there is such a thing as God, where was He? What did I do to deserve this? The children, what did they do wrong?'.<sup>386</sup> Jo.S. expressed his religious doubts following the murder of his parents and four of his five siblings. He referred to the sins he may have committed, when he broke *Shabbat* rules of not performing any manual work. He questioned whether these crimes matched the punishment. 'What sort of sin have I done? If I used to pick up the apples with my mouth or my hand [on *Shabbat*], was that such a strong sin that I have to be punished like this?'.<sup>387</sup>

Doubts in faith gave rise to a continual struggle for many of the interviewees. This culminated in conflicts with rabbinical authorities. Religiosity ceased to be important for T.K. He admitted to having had arguments with his religious scripture

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<sup>382</sup> Brenner, *The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors*, p. 51.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>384</sup> Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 191.

<sup>385</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 23.

<sup>386</sup> See Appendix 5: no.14.

<sup>387</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 31.

teachers. 'Where was God? How could you let this happen? The killing of children and innocent people! I turned away from religion as such'.<sup>388</sup>

C.S. also divulged having had bitter arguments with his rabbi about the presence of God during the Holocaust. 'Where was God? If they haven't got an answer, so why should I believe in God? It makes me angry'.<sup>389</sup> C.S.'s frustrations were intensified, as he questioned the rabbi regarding his sermons on God. 'You're speaking about *Hashem* [God]. Why don't you ever speak about what happened to the six million Jews?' C.S.'s Messiah differs from the one mentioned by the rabbi in one of his sermons. 'You're speaking about *Moshiach*. [Messiah] My *Moshiach* came in 1945, when I was liberated'.

E.L. lived in Israel for ten years, prior to coming to Australia. Her comments revealed a contrast to the persecution, she had experienced as a youngster in Romania. 'I felt free. It was the first time I could say I was Jewish and I wouldn't be punished. Jewish identity was able to develop. It helped me to get my self-respect back as a Jewish human being'.<sup>390</sup> However, her belief in God could not be rekindled. 'After seeing all that, if there is a God, I don't believe it'.

Emil Fackenheim endeavours to address the difficulty survivors and Jews may have in responding to the Holocaust, which he regards as destruction without adequate precedent. He describes *Auschwitz* as an irremediable break in history, beyond salvage<sup>391</sup> and argues that the uniqueness of the Holocaust is 'inassimilable to traditional and conventional thought'.<sup>392</sup> Jews have an obligation and a commitment to Jewish survival: not to grant Hitler a posthumous victory of destroying the faith, which he labels as the 614<sup>th</sup> commandment.

Fackenheim attempts to reconstruct a Jewish identity in response to the Holocaust without abandoning God or Jewish tradition. For the purposes of recovering in the Jewish present, it is necessary to recuperate the past which involves continuity with previous traditions. He refers to biblical texts which offer means of retrieval for the continuity for a post-Holocaust existence. For survivors

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<sup>388</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 12.

<sup>389</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 30.

<sup>390</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 15.

<sup>391</sup> Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 135.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

who have difficulty in believing in God, Fackenheim refers to the Bible and *Midrash* (commentary on the Bible) for His presence. He articulates a relationship between history and Jewish identity: faith has not been destroyed by other historical events which devastated the Jewish population. History and Jewish tradition are the principle definers for articulating Jewish identity in a pluralistic context. He holds to the more orthodox argument that the Jews who were killed in the Holocaust are holy people.

One interviewee considered conversion as a response to his suffering. E.K. expressed doubts in his belief system. Fackenheim's 614<sup>th</sup> commandment resonates. 'I was thinking of changing religion after the war, but I didn't, because it would have been a full victory for Hitler'.<sup>393</sup> E.K. is currently enrolled in a Jewish studies course with a rabbi. He is interested in the customs, not the religion. 'I feel strongly Jewish, not religiously. I don't believe in God. Now I'm more definite about it'.

The interviewees, originating from less observant backgrounds expressed similar religious doubts. G.S., who came from an acculturated German Jewish background, explained: 'I find it very difficult to accept the concept of God. Before, I believed in God because I was taught that at school'. After the war, he reconsidered his views. 'I thought a lot about it. Either He doesn't exist or if He does and He allowed my parents to go to the gas chambers, I'd rather not meet Him'.<sup>394</sup> J.L. concluded: 'What I have seen [during the war years] [I wonder] if there is such a thing as God'.<sup>395</sup>

In contrast to those who relinquished the religious component of Judaism, seven interviewees encompassed God in their beliefs. David Weiss Halivni reiterates the unwavering sentiments of faith pertaining to religious Jews. The religious Jew is awe-stricken both by the mystery of God and by the value of keeping the commandments, which in turn brings man closer to God:

He is grateful to the tradition for having kept alive through the ages the connection between God and the performance of the mitzvot, so that he can

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<sup>393</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 38.

<sup>394</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 25.

<sup>395</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 17.

now relive it, re-experience it and bequeath it to his children. Without tradition, he would not have found his way to God: it is his religious lifeline.<sup>396</sup>

K.E. admitted to having given up his faith during the Holocaust. However, immediately after the war, he found the necessity to return to his Jewish roots. His views endorse Fackenheim's thoughts; it is necessary to recover the past in order to recover the present. K.E. also challenged survivors who questioned the presence of God during the Holocaust. 'I'm against people who say 'where was God''. He strongly opposed the sentiments of *Habad*.<sup>397</sup> 'I'm against people who say the Holocaust was a punishment from God'.

K.E. feels that it is not sufficient to simply experience and be familiar with the traditions. He is of the opinion that in order for Judaism to continue past the immediate generation, a more committed effort is required. Having belief in God as well as observing Jewish rituals should be incorporated in one's daily lives. 'I think it's a question of survival. You have to bring up your children in a Jewish style if you want continuity'. He disputes whether merely having a Jewish identity is adequate for Jewish continuity. 'If you're Jewish in your heart, how does your child know that you are Jewish? Just because you are born Jewish. I think it's a contradiction in terms'.<sup>398</sup>

A few interviewees never gave up faith during their incarceration and have continued with their beliefs. Throughout her years in *Auschwitz*, Y.K. always kept her belief in God. 'You needed the spiritual help for your soul'. This belief in God has never vacillated for her. 'If you have no belief, you waver. I have never lost my faith and I feel very comfortable'. She loves listening to the singing in synagogue. 'If I hear a *hazan* [cantor] singing, I love it. The spiritual thing is to listen [to the music]. That is the most wonderful experience'. She described how keeping faith gave her emotional support. 'You need the spiritual help for your soul. I bounced back. I wasn't going to let the Holocaust destroy the rest of my life. If you can discipline your mind and your body, you can go a long way'.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Weiss Halivni, *The Book and the Sword*, p. 113.

<sup>397</sup> Jewish ultra-orthodox religious movements such as *Habad* put forward axioms that God had punished Jews for their failure in keeping faith and traditions.

<sup>398</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 32.

<sup>399</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 10.

Y.K. came from an Orthodox background in Czechoslovakia. She explained the reasons for keeping a kosher home. 'Rhythms were going to be part of my life even before I met John [husband]. That is something that gives you security. You have something to hold onto'. As a married couple, they continued with this rhythm. 'We started to build a home and we built it on Jewish foundations. We still do and all our three kids have kosher homes. That's the way I was brought up. It's in memory of my parents. It's as little as I can do'.

During his incarceration in *Auschwitz*, N.W. had also never lost his belief in God. Upon arrival in Australia in 1949, he lived with his uncle. 'My uncle was not religious and this was a problem for me. It was a difficult problem. I wanted to keep *Shabbat*'. He yearned for Orthodoxy and felt uncomfortable in a non-Orthodox environment. 'I started going out with [Jewish] girls who were not religious. I thought this was not my scene. It felt soulless. Sometimes it was difficult but I became very strong about it'. N.W. wanted to return to his pre-war rhythms and gave his reasons for doing so: 'I didn't want to break the connection. I wanted a continuation the same way as my family and remembering them. The memories were dear to me. I felt it would be better for me'. N.W. is satisfied with his endeavours and outcome of returning to the rhythms of his parents. 'Sometimes it was difficult but I became very strong about it. I'm not sorry. I'm proud that I had the strength, the stamina. I started taking out religious girls. The Orthodox invited me. I got strong myself. I became confident'. He offered suggestions how faith assisted him. 'Religion helped me move on. It helped me mentally'.

N.W.'s interpretation of his belief in God is worthy of note. He felt that God had castigated him, by permitting his parents and five of his six siblings to be murdered. 'God has punished me so much'. However, now N.W. feels rewarded by God for his blessed life. He regards his wealth as being attributed to a blessing by the Divine. 'Now He really wants to make it good for me. I never dreamed that my prayers were [would be] answered'. He married a religious woman and now 'there are fifty of us. We all are a very religious family'. Being a religious man, N.W. considers himself to be blessed by the Divine. N.W. cried as he reminisced about his parents, revisiting the notion of God's punishment. 'I wish I had my parents. And this is my biggest punishment. I've never said this before. You look

around and you've got everything but your parents'. He then likened this punishment with the inability to fulfil one of the most significant Jewish rituals of mourning. 'How lucky people are when they can sit *shivah* and mourn their parents. This is one of these punishments'.<sup>400</sup>

L.F. never considered changing her beliefs and Orthodox rhythms. After the war she went to Israel, where she married and had a child. Even during the arduous journey to Israel, adhering to her Jewish rhythms was an essential part of her well-being. 'When I couldn't manage kosher like I wanted to on the way to Israel, I accepted it but I didn't feel well emotionally for it'. Living in Israel reinforced her sense of Jewish identity. 'You know what plus I had. I found the Zionist movement. It strengthened my Jewishness'. The abstinence from work on *Shabbat* proved somewhat difficult on the *Moshav* (co-operative). 'You must milk the cow on *Shabbat*'.

During the interview I asked her whether she had questioned the existence of God during her years of incarceration. Her response demonstrated an unswerving faith:

When I saw the corpses burning in the open fire and with spring always came the smell of burning of the bodies, I thought how terrible it is. But I am not a philosopher. I am a simple soul and I didn't think about it. We never lost faith. We had the thought that we would survive.

L.F.'s mother and brother survived. They received Red Cross information that her father had been shot on the Russian front in 1943. The last time L.F. saw him was in 1942. 'What I am thinking is why my father didn't get back and how my whole life would have been totally different, if my father had lived'. She continually spoke about her mother's strong beliefs and how this helped her during these horrendous times. 'Thanks to my mother. She was very strong'.<sup>401</sup> L.F. has kept up these beliefs.

J.G. has also kept up his beliefs and his pre-war rhythms. Praying is a significant part of this ritual. 'Praying helped me. A person must have something in your mind. It's important symbolically'. J.G. rationalises his suffering with the following

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<sup>400</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 29.

<sup>401</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 40.

comments: 'You have to take the good and the bad. I didn't ask 'where was God'. We keep a kosher home. *Shabbat* is important for me and the children'. The synagogue also plays a pivotal role in his life. 'I never missed going to *shul* on *Yomtov* [religious days, including the Sabbath]. I go every week. Synagogue became my home, my spiritual place'.<sup>402</sup>

E.M. assessed the reasons for clinging to beliefs and rituals. 'I wanted to go back to who I was. I felt you cannot deny your heritage. I can't be something else. I believe and know the Jewish faith. I suffered for my faith and I wanted to stick to it. I lost everyone because I am Jewish. I had to cling to my faith'.<sup>403</sup>

S.S. believes in God because 'you have to believe in something. Some supreme being conducts the orchestra'. However, his approach to Judaism has become more traditional compared to his Orthodox upbringing in Poland. He celebrates the Sabbath with his family but does not keep a kosher home. 'I want the Jewish identity but not to the same extent as I had before. I'm not strict in my rituals. I wasn't going to lose them but I changed them'.<sup>404</sup> S.S. kept his beliefs but modified some of his previous rhythms.

Keeping beliefs was imperative for seven of the interviewees, whereas the majority tended to abandon their previously held faith. However, keeping some practices, such as the celebration of *Shabbat* proved to be an indispensable feature of their lives in Australia. I shall now attempt to interpret the effect of the Holocaust on the resumption or rejection of rhythms. For some, the practice of a previous rhythm took on a different function. A closer examination of the rhythms and practices will shed light on the restorative process they played for the young survivors.

As mentioned, the Sabbath is one of the most pivotal Jewish rhythms. The enjoyment and adherence of *Shabbat* is the cornerstone of Jewish worship and life. The majority of the interviewees observed it fully in their pre-war lives. The less observant ones participated in the practice of enjoying the Friday night meal; an intrinsic component of *Shabbat*. Consequently, it is of interest to examine the

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<sup>402</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 19.

<sup>403</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 35.

<sup>404</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 22.

significance and function of this rhythm and its various practices for the interviewees in Australia. It is likely that the rekindling of family ties with the future generations would feature prominently, following the destruction of their families during Holocaust. The practice of the *Shabbat* meal celebration would provide an ideal opportunity to attain this.

Eighty two per cent of the interviewees acknowledged the importance of celebrating the *Shabbat* meal with their families. For most, the Sabbath signified a means of passing on a tradition and simultaneously being with the all-important family. 'Every Friday night we have fourteen to sixteen members of the family here [for dinner]. All the grandchildren come'.<sup>405</sup> K.E. has retained his Orthodoxy, celebrating the Sabbath on a large scale. 'It's always fifteen to twenty five for *Shabbes*'.<sup>406</sup> 'We do the candles with my grandchildren and say *Kiddush*'.<sup>407</sup> '*Shabbat* is important for me and the children'.<sup>408</sup> 'On *Shabbat* we have *Kiddush* for the children's sake'.<sup>409</sup> M.M. emphasised the importance in keeping the family united. 'Friday nights keeps the family together. One day a week. You've got to get them all together'.<sup>410</sup>

Rejoicing the Sabbath meal remained a significant occasion for those interviewees, who no longer regarded themselves as Orthodox. 'Friday night we have *Kiddush* [prayers] and *challah* and say the prayers. But we're still not kosher but it's a tradition to show the children'.<sup>411</sup> 'Orthodox, I'm not. We light the candles on Friday and say the *brocha*' [prayers].<sup>412</sup> 'We do Friday night with the family. We say *Kiddush*. We don't keep kosher'.<sup>413</sup> J.M. identified the significance of *Shabbat*. 'We still do the candles. Kids come every Friday night. It keeps the family together. They never miss it'.<sup>414</sup> Su.S.'s family had never kept a kosher home in Vienna. However, as a parent she perceived the importance of this rhythm. 'We

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<sup>405</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 5.

<sup>406</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 32.

<sup>407</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 27.

<sup>408</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 19.

<sup>409</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 31.

<sup>410</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 16.

<sup>411</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 22.

<sup>412</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 14.

<sup>413</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 42.

<sup>414</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 33.

kept Friday night. It's important for the children'.<sup>415</sup> D.C.'s upbringing was comparable in Prague. Celebrating *Shabbat* is one way of keeping a Jewish identity for her and her family. 'Every Friday night we get together and light the candles'.<sup>416</sup>

It is necessary to examine the function of the *Shabbat* meal for the young survivors, prior to their marrying and having families of their own. This practice assisted some in overcoming the loss of their family by regaining a sense of family and compassion from a host family. P.R. recalled his early years in Brisbane with his brother. They were brought here by the Jewish Welfare Guardian Society. The involvement in Jewish rituals assisted him in adjusting to an alien environment. 'I went to Brisbane Grammar School as a boarder. On Saturday morning I went to the Margaret Street Synagogue, where Rabbi Fabian was the rabbi'. P.R. remembered the rabbi's sermons. 'He was wonderful. I liked his sermons. He really gave it so much thought. He always came up with some [interesting] topic'. Partaking of the Sabbath meal had never been part of P.R.'s acculturated background. However, this ritual assisted him. 'Soon after, he [the Rabbi] invited several of us to dinner on a Friday night. I remember it. It was so nice. It definitely helped'.<sup>417</sup>

The *Buchenwalders* were also invited to family homes for *Shabbat*. Some of them found it problematic being with family units, as it brought back memories of the families, they had lost. S.M. was one who had struggled at his first *Shabbat* dinner in Australia. The occurrence of facing this familiar experience with strangers proved too overwhelming for him. 'I was eighteen when I arrived here. I remember my first *Shabbat*. Memories came back from my Jewish life back home. I got very emotional and terribly upset. I went home and cried for the first time ever. I couldn't sleep'.<sup>418</sup> S.M. continued describing his turmoil. 'I listened to the radio and heard a tune and wrote a song in Yiddish about my mother'.<sup>419</sup> This creative process assisted him in overcoming his grief and loss of his mother.

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<sup>415</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 8.

<sup>416</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 7.

<sup>417</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 9.

<sup>418</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 23.

<sup>419</sup> S.M. asked me if he could sing his song to me in Yiddish. English translation is in Appendix 6.

The pain of revisiting the past with fellow survivors and celebrating the *Shabbat* meal was difficult for G.G. He was a *Buchenwalder*, who arrived in Sydney in 1949. He made a conscious effort of not socialising with Jews. 'I'll tell you why I didn't mix with Jewish people. Invariably the majority of Jews were survivors, so when you meet somebody what do you talk about? The past'. Remembering the past proved difficult for G.G. 'I realised that if I keep doing that, I will really go bananas. It was a survival strategy. I had to live like a normal human being'.

However, G.G. recognised the significance of celebrating *Shabbat* and the Jewish festivals, notwithstanding the emotional anguish they provoked. 'When I went to my cousin's for the festivals, it did bring back memories. You can see yourself sitting there at home. All those things came back to you. You just can't wipe them off'. He realised the important function of the Jewish festivals of bringing together the family. 'It was sad but at the same time it also gave me a certain satisfaction and pride that in spite of all that I survived that we as Jews were still able to establish ourselves'.<sup>420</sup>

As mentioned in the introduction, rites of passage define Jewish identity. This is particularly relevant for the Jewish marriage, which is pivotal for the continuity of traditions and rhythms of Jewish life. The marital union is the commencement of intergenerational transmission of Jewish rituals. As the teenage interviewees reached this stage of their lives, this rite of passage was to play a significant role in the regaining of their Jewish rhythms. Most marriages took place in the 1950s. This life cycle had a profound and lasting impact on the future Jewish pathways of the interviewees. The contrast within this relatively short period of time proved to be quite marked, especially for those who had had difficulty in socialising with other Jews. Non-religious interviewees sought wives who would provide them with the opportunity to continue their family lives with a Jewish identity. It was additionally imperative for the young men to marry Jewish females as the Jewish religion and identity is passed on matrilineally.

The following comments demonstrate the urgency to draw on marriage as a means of continuing Jewish identity. 'I always wanted to marry Jewish. I wouldn't

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<sup>420</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 2.

marry out'.<sup>421</sup> 'I always wanted to marry Jewish. 'I wanted to marry a Jew'.<sup>422</sup> 'I wanted to marry Jewish'.<sup>423</sup> 'I would never have married a non-Jew. It's a different life-style'.<sup>424</sup> 'I wouldn't have married a non-Jew'.<sup>425</sup> Two of the interviewees suggested reasons for marrying Jewish that alluded to Fackenheim's 614<sup>th</sup> commandment. 'There's no question about it. To marry out I would have been betraying the Jewish tree. Hitler wanted it that way. I wouldn't have been able to live in a Christian structure'.<sup>426</sup> 'I don't think I would have married a non-Jew. It would have been a full victory to for the Nazis if I had given up my Jewishness. I didn't want to marry a Gentile'.<sup>427</sup>

The *Buchenwalders* assisted each other in their quest for finding Jewish partners. They socialised together and met girls at Jewish dances. As one of them married, another would be introduced to a female friend. The *Buchenwalder Boys* were invited to the family homes of their future wives and enjoyed the traditional Jewish cooking and customs. Many of them were best men and groomsmen at one another's weddings. The *Boys* and their partners formed lifelong friendships.

It is apparent from the interviews that a Jewish marriage was an essential aspect of their recovery process. Marriage undoubtedly assisted many of the interviewees in regaining some of their pre-war Jewish rhythms. This is reflected in their comments. In Sydney, Jewish dances were held at the Maccabean Hall in Darlinghurst, where many of the young survivors met their future partners. 'I met my wife at the [Jewish] Maccabean Hall. Then I fully participated in rhythms. I went to *shul* every Friday'.<sup>428</sup> 'When we married, things were different. I became 'Jewish' and I believed in Judaism. We kept a kosher household because my wife's parents were kosher. She [wife] taught me a lot of things'.<sup>429</sup> 'I met my wife in 1953. My wife came from a Jewish family life. She even lights the candles. It

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<sup>421</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 31.

<sup>422</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 30.

<sup>423</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 27.

<sup>424</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 22.

<sup>425</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 15.

<sup>426</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 37.

<sup>427</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 38.

<sup>428</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 16.

<sup>429</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 30.

suited me'.<sup>430</sup> Y.K. stressed the importance of 'building a home on Jewish foundations'.<sup>431</sup> 'After a couple of years of marriage when we could afford it, we kept a kosher home'. 'I met my future wife very soon. I used to go to her place all the time. Her family became my family. They helped me'. K.E. enjoyed participating in this Jewish rhythm with a family. '*Shabbes* at Kitty's [future wife] home was homely. You felt you belonged to something'.<sup>432</sup>

M.M. assessed the role marriage played in regaining his rhythms. 'It's easier when you're married to keep the rhythms going because you've got a home. Once you've got a partner in life, you can organise yourself and carry on from there'.<sup>433</sup>

D.W. met his wife through *B'nai B'rith*<sup>434</sup> and acknowledged the support she gave him in finding his Jewish pathway. 'If I hadn't met Nelly I don't know which direction I would have taken. Nelly, she got me back. She was traditionally Jewish. We married in 1954. My pre-war Jewish education assisted me, it was not hard'. Marriage with someone of the same faith provided him with the means of continuing his pre-war Jewish practices. 'Only when I found a partner, was I able to regain the rhythms'.<sup>435</sup>

G.G. had consciously broken away from any Jewish social life. In the early years following his arrival in Australia in 1949, he had non-Jewish girlfriends. When the time came to get married, he reconsidered the situation. 'I think I was waiting for someone Jewish. In the back of your mind even if you try to break away from it, it's still there. There's still that Jewishness'.<sup>436</sup>

There is an aversion amongst Jews toward inter-marriage. History has shown that through inter-marriage, Jewish ties are abandoned. From the interviewees' comments, it is clearly identifiable that the majority never contemplated marrying out. This applied to Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews alike. However, a few of the interviewees married out. It is interesting to note how they dealt with their Jewish identity, following this break with tradition. P.R. described his wife as 'very

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<sup>430</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 21.

<sup>431</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 10.

<sup>432</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 32.

<sup>433</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 16.

<sup>434</sup> *B'nai B'rith* is an international Jewish social and service organisation. It covers all religious variations within the Jewish community.

<sup>435</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 5.

<sup>436</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 2.

supportive'. He attends synagogue alone on the High Holy Days and follows some rhythms. 'We still have a *Seder*. After *Yom Kippur*, we have *anbeisen* [the breaking of the fast]'.<sup>437</sup>

J.L.'s first wife was Jewish. 'I got married because I was dying to have children. I wanted my Jewish identity to be passed onto my children. They have a strong Jewish identity'.<sup>438</sup> His second wife is not Jewish. The necessity of continuing with a sense of Jewish identity became less apparent. 'I think compatibility is more important than religion. Jewish identity is not only to eat kosher. Keeping *Shabbat* doesn't mean anything to me'.

C.G.'s wife converted to Judaism and he was able to continue with some of his pre-war rhythms. 'My four children all had *Barmitzvahs*. We didn't have a kosher home but she did everything. We did *Pesach*. We continued with the festivals and I went to *shul*'.<sup>439</sup>

The *Halachic* status as a Jew is passed on through the mother, according to Orthodox Judaism. However, if the husband fails to encourage Jewish rhythms or practices in their children's upbringing, the impact can be devastating. J.K. encapsulated the dilemmas of Jewish continuity as a consequence of marrying out. 'My late husband wasn't Jewish. My son doesn't feel Jewish. It hurts me that my son doesn't feel even half-Jewish. That's the only thing I regret about marrying out. The continuity is gone'.<sup>440</sup>

According to Fackenheim, Jews have an obligation and a commitment to Jewish survival. There is no greater way to achieve this than by creating a family. This life cycle also assisted the interviewees in regaining their Jewish rhythms. Children offered the ability to rekindle a sense of trust and attachment. Every Jewish child born after the war was viewed as a 'miracle', proof that Hitler's victory was not total. Naming a child after a dead relative is a common Jewish practice. Most interviewees complied with this practice by carrying out this rhythm.

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<sup>437</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 9.

<sup>438</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 17.

<sup>439</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 34.

<sup>440</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 13.

Twenty four of the thirty two interviewees, who came from Orthodox backgrounds, abandoned their belief in God. Halivni's quote, 'Something must have changed'<sup>441</sup> is evident in the interviewees' responses. Rejection of belief was the noticeable factor that generated the most significant change of these survivors. Their young lives had been shattered with the loss of their families and consequently God no longer played a part in their codes of religion. Their Holocaust experiences had impacted on the belief systems that symbolised their childhood lives with their families. This life was destroyed.

Devastation of belief systems did not affect feelings of Jewish identity for these survivors. This meant that many participated in the occasional Jewish festival and often celebrated the *Shabbat* meal with the family. There was an implicit necessity to cling to a few of these practices, in order to give meaning to their Jewish identity. 'I'm hanging on to the identity'.<sup>442</sup> 'Maybe I don't go praying every day but I'm very proud to be a Jew'.<sup>443</sup> 'I wanted to forget my past but not my Jewish identity'.<sup>444</sup> 'I had doubts of religion but I still wanted the rhythms to be part of my life'.<sup>445</sup> 'I needed that Jewishness to hang on to'.<sup>446</sup> 'The Jewish rhythms were going to be part of my new life. It's traditions without beliefs. Beliefs stopped but the rhythms kept going. I turned away from religion as such but I still kept my Jewish identity'.<sup>447</sup> 'I was invited to celebrate the festivals. It gave me a sense of identity'.<sup>448</sup> For this group, Jewish identity implied a few Jewish practices but no belief in God.

For a few, however, not even the rituals were part of their Jewish identity. They admitted to losing all previous Jewish rhythms and practices and yet held onto a Jewish identity. 'There was nothing that I did that was Jewish, apart from an inner identity. All the previous Jewish rhythms were gone, only the identity'.<sup>449</sup> 'I don't have strong feelings any more. This changed because of the Holocaust. I'm

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<sup>441</sup> David Weiss Halivni, *The Book and the Sword*, p. 161.

<sup>442</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 26.

<sup>443</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 27.

<sup>444</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 18.

<sup>445</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 14.

<sup>446</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 21.

<sup>447</sup> See Appendix 5: no.12.

<sup>448</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 7.

<sup>449</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 41.

Jewish but I don't participate in the Jewish rituals'.<sup>450</sup> It is worthy of note to mention that with the advent of marriage, children and grandchildren, the perspectives of these two interviewees towards their Jewish identity modified. They incorporated some practices in order to pass on a Jewish identity to their children and grandchildren. 'We have the *chanukiah* [the nine-candle candelabrum to celebrate the festival of Hanukah] for the children'.<sup>451</sup> 'I went to *shul* with children to give them a Jewish identity. On *Shabbat* we have *Kiddush* for the children's sake'.<sup>452</sup>

Perhaps the following comments best summarise the impact on those who came from religious backgrounds and abandoned their belief in God:

The Holocaust broke my rhythms. Since I didn't want it to be totally broken and I didn't want it to disappear completely in my mind, I left a little string to be attached to it. But, that string could have been broken too, if I hadn't met Nelly [his future wife]. I was lucky I left a little string.<sup>453</sup>

D.W. observes many of the Jewish practices, such as keeping a kosher home and celebrating the Sabbath meal. However, he does not regard himself as religious. 'I feel Jewish in a cultural way, not a religious way. I knew the system of the Books from my childhood education. I'm knowledgeable in Jewish history. When I pray I know what I'm saying.' D.W. appreciates and understands Jewish history and wants this knowledge passed on to his grandchildren. 'I look at the prayer book as some beautiful compositions. What a culture we have! The five Books of Moses were canonised two thousand years ago. I look at it not from a religious side but from a cultural side'. Every Friday evening, sixteen members of the family celebrate the *Shabbat* meal together at his home. 'We have very lively discussions about Judaism, but not the religion itself but the history'.

It is crucial to investigate the motives of these interviewees as to the purpose of adhering to some of these practices. For many, participation in the rituals offered solace and focus in their task of attaining 'normality'. 'The rhythms came back subconsciously. They helped me because it was part of my former identity. I

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<sup>450</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 31.

<sup>451</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 41.

<sup>452</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 31.

<sup>453</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 5.

needed them to get on with my life'.<sup>454</sup> 'The rhythms of my previous life were definitely going to be part of my new life. They gave me some direction. Rhythms helped me get on with my life. It gives you support and you can start all over again. Otherwise you have nothing'.<sup>455</sup> 'The heritage helped me to adjust to my new life. It was left in me'.<sup>456</sup> One interviewee stressed the continuity of Jewish rhythms in his life. 'It was important to regain some of the Jewish life I'd had before. If you're Jewish you've got it in your system. It comes automatically. When it's in your heart you can't change it'.<sup>457</sup> 'All the religious influences helped me come back but in a different form'.<sup>458</sup> The Jewish rhythms and practices of their childhood provided a means of structure which assisted them in the rebuilding of their lives.

For some interviewees, the continuation of their Jewish rhythms and practices were perceived as defiance to the intentions of the Holocaust. Fackenheim's 614<sup>th</sup> commandment resonates in the following responses: 'The Holocaust tried to destroy my life but it didn't succeed. No-one was going to take the Jewish traditions away from me'.<sup>459</sup> 'You're born into the rhythms. Anyhow we do it [keep the rhythms] out of spite'.<sup>460</sup> 'Despite all of the evil, we survived and our tradition and chain have not broken'.<sup>461</sup> D.C. was on a *Kindertransport* and survived the war in England. 'I felt Jewish. When I was invited to celebrate the festivals, it gave me a sense of identity. Damn it, my parents were killed because they were Jewish'.<sup>462</sup> These interviewees stressed the necessity of continuing with their Jewish rhythms, notwithstanding the destructive attempts of the Third Reich.

Brenner's finding shows that 'The more intensely observant, the more frequently the Holocaust is associated with religious change'.<sup>463</sup> Some interviewees commented that they were now able to 'practise' Judaism in a manner more

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<sup>454</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 42.

<sup>455</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 33.

<sup>456</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 27.

<sup>457</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 18.

<sup>458</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 24.

<sup>459</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 37.

<sup>460</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 16.

<sup>461</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 27.

<sup>462</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 7.

<sup>463</sup> Brenner, *The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors*, p. 67.

suitable to their modern environment. 'I was freed from those restrictions. I dropped all these shackles. If I had been at home, I would have grown up to be religious; go to *shul*, pray before eating'.<sup>464</sup> 'I want the Jewish identity but not to the same extent as I had before. I'm not strict in my traditions. I wasn't going to lose them but I changed them. I made it easier for myself'.<sup>465</sup> When S.S. was asked whether the Holocaust had changed his rhythms of Jewish life, his response was: 'Oh yes, I would have been more traditional'.<sup>466</sup> These interviewees welcomed the possibility of adapting their practices and changing their pre-war rhythms to their new environment.

Brenner's study shows that 'East European survivors were far more likely to change their religious behaviour than Western survivors. East European observant survivors relinquished their Jewish practices after the Holocaust nearly three times as often as Western observant'.<sup>467</sup> The responses from Western European interviewees confirm Brenner's findings; they tended to retain their pre-war Jewish practices. 'I have continued with the same Jewish rhythms as my parents had in Germany; more cultural Jewish'.<sup>468</sup> M.M. also came from Germany. 'That's the way I grew up. That's the way my parents would have wanted it and my grandparents and I wanted it too'.<sup>469</sup> Their pre-war Jewish practices, already adapted to their Western European environments required no change in Australia.

A few Eastern European interviewees came from acculturated backgrounds, in which they had already adapted their Jewish practices to suit the environment. Their religious behaviour did not change in Australia and they continued with the Jewish rituals, their parents had practised. 'I go to *shul* on *Yom Kippur* to say *Yitzkor* for my parents. I was never religious'.<sup>470</sup> 'I don't care about traditions. We have our Jewishness as a natural thing. We do the Passover as a celebration. Of course, we're Jewish. We don't go to synagogue'.<sup>471</sup> The rhythms of Jewish life remained the same for this non-observant group. They were able to transfer

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<sup>464</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 31.

<sup>465</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 22.

<sup>466</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 22.

<sup>467</sup> Brenner, *The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors*, p. 81.

<sup>468</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 25.

<sup>469</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 16.

<sup>470</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 17.

<sup>471</sup> See Appendix 5; no. 41.

previously-practised traditions into their new environments with relative ease and no adjustment was required. Previous acculturated Jewish life blended into their lives in Australia.

Some interviewees defined their Jewish identity in terms of the Jewish music, language, theatre and food they enjoyed. They talked about how the Jewish culture and music assisted them on their road to recovery. T.K. described his Jewish identity in terms of his love for Jewish culture:

My Jewish background, my Jewish heritage and traditions survived. I continued to practise those traditions. I observe the high holydays and I love the Jewish *klezmer* music. In Paris I used to go to the Yiddish theatre with all the Jewish songs and traditions. The ethnicity of Judaism was equally as important as getting used to the Australian way of life. Everything we practised at home continued with me also in our family. It was very important to me. I thought it was part of my background. It was natural, not anything new. It was what I was used to. I always thought that my father would be very happy, and my grandparents, of course. It was their tradition and their life. I found my rhythms as soon as I arrived. I went to synagogue purely because I was used to it before the war. I used to love the singing. The rituals still meant a lot to me.<sup>472</sup>

T.K. came from a more progressive Jewish background in Hungary. He was able to transfer these rhythms with ease into his new environments.

G.S. commented on the role Jewish culture plays in his life: 'I love Jewish music and Jewish food. I love Yiddish and I love Hebrew. I love being Jewish. I am more of a cultural Jew'.<sup>473</sup> His sentiments have remained so.

R.R. came from Germany where her father had been a cantor. 'Singing has helped me to regain the rhythms of Jewish life. I joined the Temple choir in 1966. The words of the songs came back to me from my childhood and my father'. Being part of a Jewish community assisted her. 'I knew when the festivals were

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<sup>472</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 12.

<sup>473</sup> See Appendix 5: no 25.

and I felt part of a community again. It has helped me find the Jewish cycles and rhythms'.<sup>474</sup>

Brenner's findings showed that 'There is a definite correlation between Jewish education and the retention of religious behaviour'.<sup>475</sup> It is interesting to note that the majority of the interviewees who kept their belief system came from backgrounds where education was valued and encouraged. Their responses confirm Brenner's conclusions. This may be partially due to the fact that they followed the modern Orthodox rhythms, which were more transferable than the traditions followed in the *shtetls*. Education had played a crucial role in their upbringing. L.F.'s rhythms continued immediately as she continued with her education. She described her motivation for regaining the pre-war rhythms:

In the dental technician course we had classes on *Shabbat* but I didn't write or draw. At the end of the year I came first! I won the competition. I walked there on *Shabbat*. I was fifteen and wanted to keep it up. I felt a need to carry on in the same way. I had the will to do it. It was important for me to continue.<sup>476</sup>

When asked whether she ever wanted to modify her practices, L.F. responded that she 'never thought of changing it. There was no reason to change it'. Once in Australia, she also kept the same rhythms. 'We still keep kosher. It's no problem'.

Both K.E. and N.W. came from backgrounds where education was highly valued. 'I searched to keep the same rhythms. I think it's a question of survival. I wasn't going to let the Holocaust destroy my life. I was going to continue with my previous rhythms of Jewish life'.<sup>477</sup> Like L.F., K.E. was brought up in a Jewish environment, which combined Orthodoxy with the modern-day trappings of the local surroundings. This perhaps explains the relative ease of transferring the same rhythms. 'I was brought up in the modern way, so it was easier to blend in'.

N.W. encapsulated his background: 'My background was *frum*, but also a love for learning. There was the religious part and the cultural part, the love for learning'. Going out with non-religious girls proved difficult for N.W. Socialising with religious girls solved his dilemma. 'I found the biggest luck in my world. I found a gorgeous,

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<sup>474</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 43.

<sup>475</sup> Brenner, *The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors*, p. 82.

<sup>476</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 40.

<sup>477</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 32.

gorgeous girl from a very religious family'. N.W. is pleased that he has kept the same rhythms. 'I'm glad. I'm very strong, religiously Jewish. My identification towards Jewish life is totally complete as with all my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren'.<sup>478</sup>

L.F., K.E. and N.W. came from Orthodox backgrounds, where secular learning had been essential aspects of their upbringing. The incorporation of education within their religious background made the transition, which included the 'retention of religious behaviour', possible.

No significant differences were unearthed between the orphaned teenagers and the six interviewees, where one parent survived. This latter group made their individual choices of Jewish rhythms, independent of their surviving parent. L.F., whose mother survived, lived with her non-observant uncle in Budapest, while she continued with her education. She decided not to eat meals with him as he did not follow the laws of *kashrut*. 'I had a separate place in the kitchen, where I kept my plate'.<sup>479</sup> L.F. also kept up with her strong belief, without the presence of her mother. She seldom saw her mother. 'I went home twice a year for *Pesach* and *Rosh Hashana*'. I.V.'s father survived. His need for returning to his previous rhythms was unrelated to those of his father's. 'My father knew it meant more to me. So, he did it for me. We joined the Cremorne synagogue when it was built'.<sup>480</sup> K.E. made his decisions of returning to his faith without his father's influence. They parted soon after Liberation. 'He [my father] went to Israel'.<sup>481</sup> Their reunion had been unsuccessful.

By the end of the Second World War and the ensuing years, the face of Jewish life in Australia had changed, as a consequence of the large influx of refugees. Australian Jewry was moving towards the concept of cultural pluralism.<sup>482</sup> Since then, there has been 'an increased desire to maintain a separate Jewish identity'.<sup>483</sup> This pluralistic change within Australian Jewry, brought about by the

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<sup>478</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 29.

<sup>479</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 40.

<sup>480</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 42.

<sup>481</sup> See Appendix 5: no. 32.

<sup>482</sup> Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora: Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia* (Sydney: Collins Australia, 2000), p. 223.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

refugees, facilitated a plethora of approaches of expressing Jewish identity, which has been described in this chapter.

## **8. Conclusion**

My thesis was designed to shed light on the numerous ways in which a small group of forty three orphaned Holocaust survivors adapted to their new lives in Australia, whilst keeping their preferred Jewish practices. I have attempted to explain the reasons for their choices in doing so. The majority abandoned their belief in the existence of God but felt obliged to keep, preserve and manifest a Jewish identity. This was achieved by celebrating some Jewish traditions. A few retained both belief in God and Jewish practices.

Many practices changed after the Holocaust. The orphaned survivors reacted differently in a new country, where adaptation to the norms of society was deemed as desirable. It is difficult to determine whether change in religious behaviour can be attributed to the impact of the Holocaust or to other factors such as marriage, immigration, education and personality traits. The evidence collected suggests that those, who originated from strictly Orthodox backgrounds, have adapted their customs to merge into life in Australia in the 1950s. Traditional religious observances were replaced by other forms of practice.

The relatively small size of the sample group in this research highlights the range of differences which emerged. All interviewees were born between 1927 and 1930, except for one, born in 1932. They originated from seven European countries and came from homes where the degree of Jewish observance varied. They survived the Holocaust whether incarcerated, in hiding or rescued by early *Kindertransporte*.

The purpose of introducing a control group of six non-orphans was to expose any discrepancies between orphans and non-orphans and their regaining or relinquishing of Jewish rhythms. The findings from this research demonstrate that there are no significant differences between the two groups. Having a surviving parent or eventually creating a family may or may not have assisted the interviewees in regaining their Jewish rhythms. Survivors from both groups chose varying forms of religiosity and/or Jewish practices to secure their Jewish identity. Further research utilising a larger non-orphaned teenage survivor group may reveal more significant differences.

The education and schooling of all the interviewees had been disrupted as a consequence of the Holocaust. A few continued their studies and completed tertiary education at university or technical college. The remainder embarked on acquiring various skills, which eventually assisted them in their occupation. My research also demonstrates that the level of education or professional skills bear no correlation to the level of religiosity. Two interviewees, who completed university, came from acculturated Czech and Polish backgrounds. These are two examples, who continued with similar Jewish practices.

In terms of changes in Jewish practices, with the exception of the *'shtetl'* interviewees, no significant differences were found across the genders. Twelve of the forty three interviewees were female and none came from *shtetls*. The females maintained the same Jewish rhythms that had determined part of their pre-war lives. Those who kept their faith came from backgrounds where Orthodoxy had been practised. The acculturated female interviewees continued with similar Jewish practices. The thirty one males chose Jewish rhythms and practices, which reflected their way of life in Australia. As with the females, those who kept their belief in God came from backgrounds where Modern Orthodoxy had been practised. Those from acculturated backgrounds continued with comparable Jewish rhythms. One third of the males came from *shtetls* and changed their Jewish rhythms.

As mentioned, the interviewees came from seven countries. Within these nationalities, the interviewees practised Judaism with varying degrees of religiosity. The scope of Jewish backgrounds across the nationality spectrum ranged from acculturated to Orthodox Jews. Interviewees from Polish backgrounds revealed significant modifications in Jewish practice; in particular those born in *shtetls*, where Orthodoxy had dominated. Jewish practices among the remaining interviewees resembled the practices of their parents; with very little or no variation.

The age group of the interviewees in this research was limited. No evidence came to light that age played a role in the variation of practices.

From the findings already mentioned, it can be surmised that all the interviewees who came from acculturated backgrounds, continued with corresponding Jewish

practices in their adult years. Belief in God had played no major role in the lives of their parents. However, practice of certain rituals had been integrated into their Jewish identity. Transporting these rhythms to Australia caused no difficulty for these interviewees in their post-war lives.

A considerable transformation of Jewish rites and rituals occurred amongst the interviewees, who came from *shtetls*. Their previous unswerving belief in God had been challenged, so that it was either weakened or, in many cases, vanished. The adherence to Jewish traditions and laws had diminished. Many relinquished observation of the laws of *kashrut*. The Sabbath was no longer observed and revered as it had been in the pre-war years. The contrast of such entrenched Jewish traditions from *shtetl* lives to suburban life in Australia in the 1950s was too great.

A significant difference emerged within the group of six interviewees, who kept their belief in God. Their backgrounds were Modern Orthodox. They came from larger towns or cities in three countries. Education had played a crucial part in their early life. Learning, in conjunction with adherence to religious traditions and laws had shaped their childhood and upbringing. The retention of faith and Orthodox traditions correlated with their love of learning. Modern Orthodox practices could be more easily maintained than the traditions followed in *shtetls*.

All forty three interviewees kept their Jewish identity in one form or another. As Jewish identity can be explained in terms of religiosity, ethnicity, culture and nationalism, this continuity was possible. Survivors, who lost their belief in God, were able to continue with Jewish rituals, traditions and life cycle events as part of their ethnicity or culture.

There is no doubt that for the large majority of the interviewees, the Holocaust affected their religious life. Losing their parents and siblings as a result of the Holocaust shattered their beliefs and resulted in an abandonment of their previously held beliefs and trust in God. As a consequence, changes occurred in their Jewish identity. They considered themselves as Jews, without adhering to any religious form. However, they were not prepared to relinquish all traces of Jewish identity. The memories of their lost families proved too treasured to allow them to abandon all Jewish ties.

It is my conclusion that the rhythms of Jewish life constituted a defining factor in the re-building of their shattered lives after the Holocaust. They provided a framework which allowed and maintained the continuity of Jewish existence, their belief in God and Jewish rites and rituals. For those interviewees who abandoned their belief in God, Jewish rites and rituals served to provide identification with Jewish peoplehood and culture. However, many of the teenage survivors practised these rhythms and rituals in a secular/cultural manner, rather than emanating from a belief in God. These reactions reflect the complexity of Jewish identity in the modern and post modern world.

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## Appendix 1



**The University of Sydney**

**Department of Hebrew,  
Biblical and Jewish Studies**

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**Professor Konrad Kwiet**  
Adjunct Professor for Jewish Studies  
Roth Lecturer for Holocaust Studies

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### **Participant Information Statement**

Topic: The Impact of the Holocaust on Orphaned teenage Survivors in regaining the rhythms of Jewish Life.

My name is Ruth Wirth, a student at the University of Sydney. This study is being conducted to meet the requirements for a Master of Philosophy degree under the supervision of Professor Konrad Kwiet (02-9351 3172) of the Department of Hebrew, Biblical and Jewish Studies, University of Sydney. I shall be conducting this research on how teenage Holocaust orphans were able to recommence their Jewish traditions without a nurturing family environment. My thesis is that many survivors could not and would not forget their past and this would help them in resuscitating their Jewish past.

Each interviewee will receive a lengthy questionnaire to be completed one week prior to participating in an interview with the researcher. The questionnaire could be completed in ½ an hour. The purpose of the questionnaire is to provide me with preparatory information that will help me with the interview. The 2-hour interview will be recorded by audiotape.

Any information or personal details gathered during the course of the research are confidential. The questionnaires distributed to the participants will be identified by the use of their first name only. They will be used specifically for the use of this research project. The recordings, labelled by initials only will be stored under lock and key and be used only by the researcher. The recordings will be disposed of after 7 years in line with the Human Ethics Committee. The identity of the participants in the completed work will be guaranteed by the use of their initials only. The results of the study will be available to scholars upon demand. Participants will be given the opportunity to preview the results or interview transcripts before they are used.

## **Appendix 1** (continued)

At any time during the course of the research the participant can withdraw from the research project without having to give a reason and without any consequences. If this is the case, all information received from the above participant will be destroyed. At any time during or after the interview, the participant can amend any information given.

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Manager for Ethics and Biosafety Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 9351 4811.

## Appendix 2

### Consent Form



**The University of Sydney**

**Department of Hebrew,  
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I \_\_\_\_\_ have read and understand the information above, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I may withdraw at any time. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name: .....  
(block letters)

Participant's Signature:..... Date:.....

Investigator's Name:.....  
(block letters)

Investigator's Signature:..... Date:.....

### Appendix 3



**The University of Sydney**

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#### ORPHANED TEENAGE HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS QUESTIONNAIRE 2004

First Name only: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Pre-War Years

Year of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Country/City of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Parents' Occupations: Father: \_\_\_\_\_ Mother: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupations:

Number of Siblings: \_\_\_\_\_

Names and years of birth: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ ; \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ ;  
\_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ ; \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_

What type of school did you attend? Religious   
Private   
(you can tick more than one option) Public

Were you expected to perform well at school? Yes  No   
What expectations did your parents have for your future? High   
Take on business   
None

What kind of religious education did you have? Jewish school   
Private tuition   
None

How would you describe your pre-war religious background? Orthodox   
Traditional   
Reform   
Unaffiliated

How often did you attend a synagogue/temple? Daily   
Weekly   
3 times per year   
Never

**Appendix 3** (continued)

How did you observe Shabbat? Fully   
Attending religious services   
Socially   
Not at all

How would you describe your childhood? (you can tick more than one option)

comfortable (financially)   
happy   
caring   
difficult (financially)   
difficult (emotionally)   
family-orientated   
encouraging   
uncaring

How would you describe your standard of living?

High   
Medium   
Low

How did you spend your holidays during your childhood?

at holiday resorts with the family   
at children holiday centres   
at home

**War Years**

**Incarceration**

Were you incarcerated during the war? Yes  No

If your answer is yes, please list wartime locations of incarceration chronologically:

Year	Place
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

When did you become aware that your parents had not survived? \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 3** (continued)

In Hiding

Were you hidden during the war? Yes  No

If your answer is yes, please list wartime places of hiding chronologically:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Person responsible for the place of hiding</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

When did you become aware that your parents had not survived? \_\_\_\_\_

Were you in hiding with your siblings? Yes – all the time   
Yes – some of the time   
No

Did you conceal your Jewish identity? Yes  No

Did you resume your Jewish identity? Yes  No

If yes, when did this happen? \_\_\_\_\_

Was it a natural process? Yes  No

When did you come out of hiding? \_\_\_\_\_

Kindertransport

How old were you when you were sent to the United Kingdom? \_\_\_\_\_

Were you brought up by a Jewish family? Yes  No

During this period did you have any connection with Jews? Yes  No

When did you become aware that your parents had not survived? \_\_\_\_\_

Liberation

When and where were you liberated? \_\_\_\_\_

What emotions best describe your feelings upon liberation? (you can tick more than one option)

confusion   
relief   
fear   
happiness   
sadness

**Appendix 3** (continued)

Were you liberated with other family members or friends? Yes  No

If your answer is yes, please list them:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Relation</u>	<u>Age</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Where did you go or where were you sent at the time of Liberation? \_\_\_\_\_

If you were still unaware of the whereabouts of your parents, when did you finally learn of their fate? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you the sole survivor of your family? Yes  No

Were you ever interned in a Displaced Persons camp? Yes  No

If your answer is yes:

<u>Country</u>	<u>Name of camp</u>	<u>Year left</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Were you reunited with any other members of your family? Yes  No

If your answer is yes, please list them:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Relation</u>	<u>Age</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Did you meet up with other survivors/previous friends? Yes  No

Who played a major role in assisting you through these times?

<u>Name</u>	<u>Relation</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____

**Appendix 3** (continued)

At this stage of your young life, how did you see yourself? as a child   
as a teenager   
as an adult

Where did you go then? Country \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

What were the circumstances that resulted in you coming to Australia?

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**Kindertransport**

How long after Liberation did you stay in the U.K.? \_\_\_\_\_

What were the circumstances that resulted in you coming to Australia?

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**Aftermath of the war: regaining the rhythms of Jewish life**

When did you arrive here? \_\_\_\_\_

How old were you when you arrived? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you always lived in Sydney/Melbourne? Yes  No

If your answer is no, where else in Australia have you lived? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

With whom did you come here?

<u>Name</u>	<u>Relation</u>	<u>Age</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

With whom did you live? other survivors  relatives  other   
alone

If you lived with relatives or in an orphanage, was it difficult to adjust to your new surroundings? Yes  No

How did you learn English? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you feel isolated? Yes  No

Where did you meet and make new friends? \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 3** (continued)

Did you continue with your schooling/education? Yes  No

If your answer is yes, where did this take place?

<u>Year</u>	<u>Place</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____

What profession/career did/do you work in? \_\_\_\_\_

In those early years (when you were still teenagers) what was important to you? (you may tick more than one option.)

- completing your education  making new friends
- finding a girl/boyfriend  finding a substitute family
- becoming 'financially' independent
- resuming your previous identity/life (as much as possible)
- participating in Jewish communal life  forgetting the past
- discarding all traces of pre-war life
- socialising with people from all walks of life (Jewish or non-Jewish)

Did your pre-war (Jewish) life assist you in adjusting to your new life? Yes  No

If your answer is yes, did the following aspects play a part? (you make tick more than one option)

- memories of Jewish festivals
- previous Jewish religious observances
- keeping a Kosher home
- participation in Jewish youth groups
- socialising with Jewish people

If your answer is no, did the following aspects resemble your situation?

- was not brought up in Jewish environment
- wanted to forget my past (Jewish) life
- thinking of my past only made the present worse
- there was no-one from my past life who could help me

In those early years how difficult was it being an orphaned teenager in an alien country?

Extremely  very  quite  not

### **Appendix 3** (continued)

If your answer was 'extremely' or 'very' or 'quite', would the following have been reasons? (you may tick more than one option)

- loneliness  lack of role models (male and female)   
inability to mourn for loved ones  lack of English   
strange customs  poor health   
inability to adjust to life without parents

If your answer was 'not', would the following have been reasons? (you may tick more than one option)

- wanted to start a new life   
ambition   
ability to "get on with it"

Were you invited to people's homes to celebrate Jewish festivals e.g. Passover, Jewish New Year? Yes  No

Were these occasions important to you? Yes  No

If your answer was 'yes', why? (you may tick more than one option)

- they reminded me of my happy pre-war life   
they gave me a sense of belonging to a community   
I felt part of a family again   
my feelings towards Judaism were reawakened and renewed   
they provided me with the feeling of continuity which had been shattered

If your answer was 'no', why not? (you may tick more than one option)

- I did not want to have anything to do with the Jewish religion and its observances   
being Jewish had only caused me grief   
I never celebrated these festivals in the past, so why should I start now   
I was beginning to have doubts about my feelings towards Judaism

Did you join any Jewish Youth movements? Yes  No

**Appendix 3** (continued)

Did they help you in regaining your lost youth? Yes  No

If so, how did they help? (you may tick more than one option)

they provided me with a sense of belonging

I met young people, some who had shared similar experiences and others who had not

they gave me some focus in life and enabled me to start enjoying my life again

they became my new family

they provided some continuity with Jewish life

Did you start attending synagogue/temple services? Yes  No

If your answer is yes, why did you go? (you may tick more than one option)

I always went as a child with my parents and wanted to carry on with this tradition

I never went as a child and now felt the spiritual need to attend

it provided me with a spiritual place of belonging and comfort

the synagogue/temple became a home for me

it was here that I prayed for my parents

the rabbi helped me with my losses

If your answer is no, why not? (you may tick more than one option)

no place of worship could bring back my parents

I was forced to go as a child and now I did not have to

I was beginning to have doubts about religion

I did not have the spiritual need to attend

I was too busy trying to cope with my new life in a new country

Did any particular person become a mentor/role model for you during this difficult stage of adjustment? Yes  No

If your answer is yes, how did this person help you regain the rhythms of Jewish life? (You can answer this briefly as I shall be asking it again during the interview.)

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Were there any other factors/organisations/people who assisted you in regaining the rhythms of Jewish life?

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Was it only when you found a partner and married that you were fully able to participate in the rhythms of Jewish life? Yes  No

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## **Appendix 4**

### **Interview**

#### **Pre-war Years**

1. Tell me about your life as a child before the war.
2. Describe your religious upbringing. What role did Judaism play in your life?
3. Was being Jewish for you more of a 'cultural way of life'? Describe your Jewishness?

#### **War Years**

4. Although the focus of my interview is on post-war life, could you tell me briefly about your circumstances during the Holocaust?
5. Tell me about anyone who gave you any moral support during these times.
6. What gave you the strength to keep on going?
7. What singular event or experience during these years affected your future life?

#### **Liberation**

8. Upon Liberation (1945) describe how you felt?
9. How were you going to make up for lost time?
10. Although you were still a child (teenager), you had witnessed so much horror and had been given adult responsibilities. What part of you felt like a child? What part of you felt like an adult? How did you see yourself?
11. How did your surviving relatives perceive you? As a child who needed looking after? Or as an adult who could look after yourself?

#### **Aftermath**

12. How did you adjust to life after the Holocaust?
13. How important was it for you to regain the type of Jewish life you had before the war? Why?
14. How had the Holocaust destroyed your life up till now? Were you going to let it destroy the rest of your life? How were you going to achieve this goal? Were the rhythms of Jewish life that had been part of your previous life going to be part of this process?

## Appendix 5

### Interviews

#### Sydney

1. Ja.S. interviewed on 11 July, 2004
2. G.G. interviewed on 20 July, 2004
3. A.S. interviewed on 30 July, 2004
4. L.W. interviewed on 4 August, 2004
5. D.W. interviewed on 9 August, 2004
6. N.H. interviewed on 12 August, 2004
7. D.C. interviewed on 2 February, 2005
8. Su.S. interviewed on 13 January, 2005
9. P.R. interviewed on 11 February, 2005
10. Y.K. interviewed on 17 February, 2005
11. E.G. interviewed on 23 February, 2005
12. T.K. interviewed on 4 March, 2005
13. J.K. interviewed on 7 March, 2005
14. M.R. interviewed on 10 March, 2005
15. E.L. interviewed on 15 March, 2005
16. M.M. interviewed on 23 March, 2005
17. J.L. interviewed on 19 May, 2005

#### Melbourne

18. B.E. interviewed on 3 April, 2005
19. J.G. interviewed on 4 April, 2005
20. H.S. interviewed on 4 April, 2005
21. J.C. interviewed on 5 April, 2005
22. S.S. interviewed on 5 April, 2005
23. S.M. interviewed on 5 April, 2005
24. E.W. interviewed on 6 April, 2005
25. G.S. interviewed on 6 April, 2005
26. O.H. interviewed on 6 April, 2005
27. J.S. interviewed on 7 April, 2005
28. H.R. interviewed on 7 April, 2005
29. N.W. interviewed on 8 April, 2005
30. C.S. interviewed on 8 April, 2005

## **Appendix 5** (continued)

### Sydney

31. Jo.S. interviewed on 5 May, 2005
32. K.E. interviewed on 9 May, 2005
33. J.M. interviewed on 27 May, 2005
34. C.G. interviewed on 30 May, 2005
35. E.M. interviewed on 22 June, 2005
36. S.W. interviewed on 7 July, 2005
37. B.S. interviewed on 12 July, 2005
38. E.K. interviewed on 1 August, 2005
39. Ha.R. interviewed on 22 November, 2005
40. L.F. interviewed on 9 January, 2006
41. Y.G. interviewed on 1 March, 2006
42. I.V. interviewed on 10 March, 2006
43. R.R. interviewed on 11 March, 2006

## Appendix 6

### English Translation of S.M.'s song written in memory of his mother

The sun gives out its rays  
And the sky becomes very red,  
It's already been seven years  
Since my mother was slain dead.  
I still feel her gentle hands  
Cradling me to sleep,  
Now I will never see her again  
No, never again  
The sun 'puts away' its rays,  
And the sky grows like coal,  
Between mountains and through valleys  
My lonely heart wonders,  
Wonders and wonders  
My lonely heart.

## Appendix 7

### L.F's uncle's entry:

Megis csak szép az élet!

Nincs az a pokol, szenvedés, könnytömeg mit át ne törne az öröm az emlék sugara.

### Another entry:

Egy nap meg es hazamegyünk, lesz majd vizünk es kenyérünk.