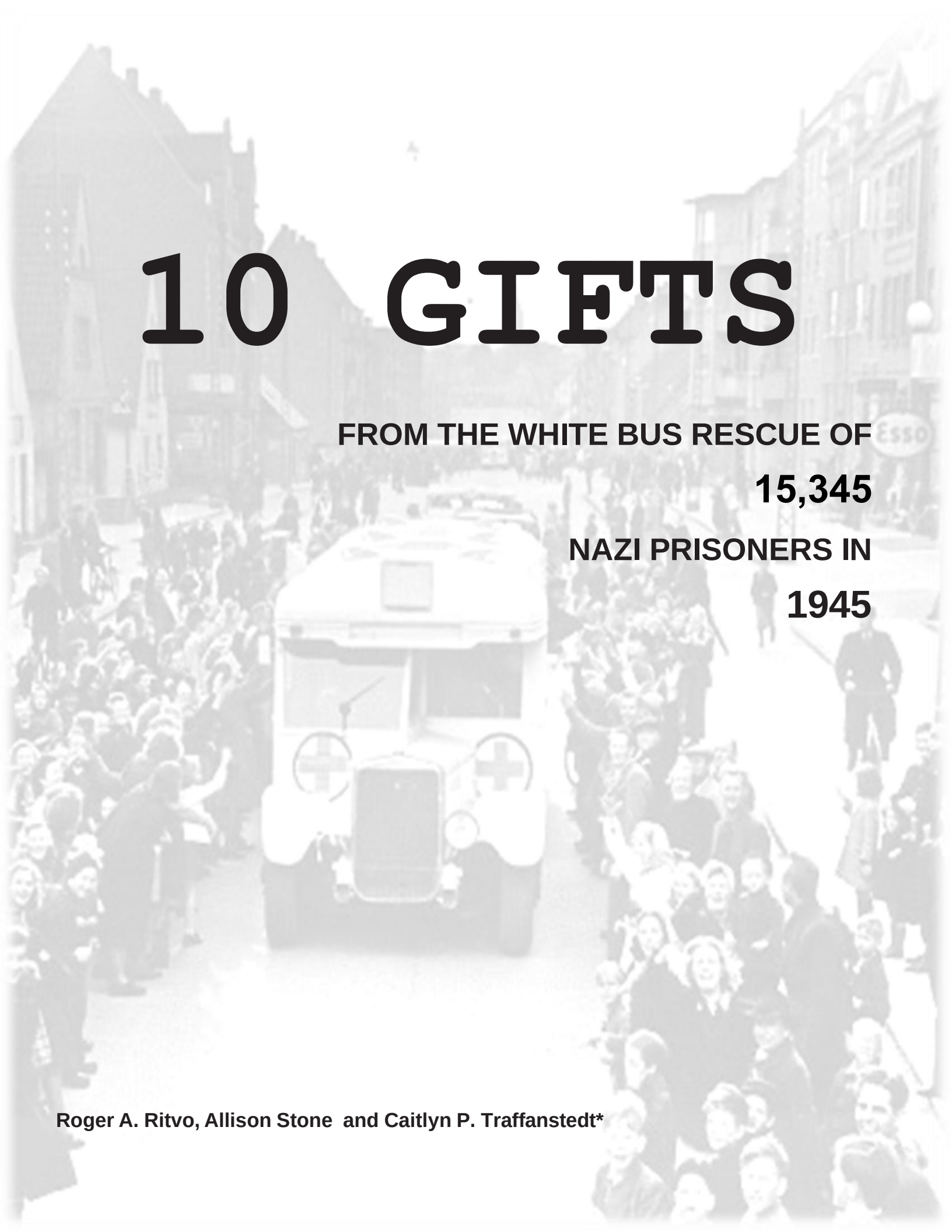

10 GIFTS

FROM THE WHITE BUS RESCUE OF

15,345

NAZI PRISONERS IN

1945

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Introduction

In the late winter of 1945, rumors of Hitler's order for a "final solution" were spreading around Europe. A supposedly "neutral" Sweden opened back-channel conversations with Heinrich Himmler about removing Swedish prisoners from the doomed concentration camps. The diplomatic pressure on Sweden to stop selling materials to the Nazi regime despite their professed neutrality also opened conversations of what they would do about their own citizens being interned in the death camps. These negotiations ultimately led to a plan to lead convoys of buses, and trains into Ravensbrück, Neuengamme and other camps in an effort to rescue the Scandinavian citizens inside their gates.

Each of these buses was painted white, with a red cross to indicate to any troops that they were peaceful and to avoid attack. Even when the convoy stopped, they would spread a huge Red Cross flag on the ground to avoid inadvertent bombing. There were many unknowns going into the mission. Nobody really knew how many prisoners would even be there, how they would react, and if they convoys would make it out alive.
Staffed by a pair of drivers, the typical bus was retrofitted to carry about 8 stretchers plus seats for 36 passengers, care-giving staff and support personnel. The rescue missions were comprised of three units, each with a dozen buses, a dozen trucks plus supply/support vehicles. Each bus only had enough Motyl fuel (a mixture of alcohol and gasoline, usually in equal parts) to cover about 50 – 60 miles on a full tank. Thus, additional support trucks were mandatory to keep the process in motion.

Arriving at the camps on late April of 1945, the convoy of Red Cross buses stood welcoming prisoners as guards simply yelled at them to get "OUT!" One prisoner recounts "we were given a parcel, it was quite heavy.. as… I wasn't very strong after the scarlet fever. I asked my mother if I could leave it. She said: No, there will be food in there. My arms ached but there were delicious things inside. I ate the powdered milk by the spoonful. Some people died because they overate after being hungry for so long." [1]

The shocked volunteers from the convoys met prisoners in bad shape after their time in the internment camps. Nurse Margaretha Bjorcke recalled "I have never in my twelve years practice as a nurse seen so much misery as I witnessed. Legs, back and necks full of wounds of a type that an average Swede would be on sick leave just for one of them. I counted twenty on one prisoner, and he did not complain."[2]

Lieutenant Åke Svenson recalled: "most of the passengers could not walk the minor distance from the barracks to the road. From these barracks a group of creatures were forced, that hardly any more seemed to be human beings." [2]

The bus trips through Germany at the end of a war were full of unknowns and highly dangerous. Questions remained if the roads

1 vii https://www.histclo.com/essay/war/ww2/hol/cou/alpha/s/swe/pe/hcspe-fred.html
2 viii https://wikimili.com/en/White_Buses

would even be passable, and the knowledge that if allied planes didn't recognize the convoys for what they were, bombing was always possible. One convoy were indeed mistaken for troops and bombed on April 18, 1945 killing and injuring members of the convoy. What awaited these released prisoners at the end of their precarious journey to freedom? Many believed this was another cruel Nazi trick even with the food parcels.

Figure 1 Prisoners being driven away from Neuengamme concentration camp on Swedish Red Cross buses. Drawing by Per Ulrich, a former prisoner from Denmark.Tegninger fra tyske koncentrationslejre. Tegnet paa Stedet, Kopenhagen 1945, S.3

When some buses reached Odense, Denmark, other former prisoners were taken to Copenhagen and then sailed to Sweden for quarantine for tuberculosis and other diseases in the Tylosand and Strangnaes facilities. On their arrival to the destination cities and seeing the Swedish doctors, some of the skeletal survivors screamed. "I don't want to burn. I don't want to burn," cried one, imagining SS doctors. Swedish nurses fainted at the sight of the ravaged bodies."

"Many women carried Red Cross boxes; others carried babies. A Dutch woman, Anne Hendrix, carried her two-month-old in a box. French ethnologist Germaine Tillion carried lists bearing the names of those murdered at the camp, including her mother, Emilie.

They were greeted by the Red Cross medical and support staff wearing masks, gloves and other protective equipment. Triage separated the sick who required hospitalization immediately. Others were given showers with 'real soap,' and suffered the stings of disinfecting and delousing chemicals, dust and other cleaning agents. No more lice, a nagging and painful reminder of the concentration and death camps. Wearing "striped dresses felt as splendid as if they were made of pure silk," recalls Manya Friedman (see Gift #5). "We were put up in some school buildings. Each one of us got a mattress covered with soft paper sheets. We felt pampered. Yet, it still didn't sink in that we were really free. At night, if you woke up, you could always see girls looking out the windows to make sure that we were not" in the camps any longer. [3]These became the first steps in a long process to re-enter the world as a survivor.

The reentry and screening process including burning the clothes upon arrival for heath and sanitation reasons. Several months after arrival, Lund University Professor Zygmunt Lakocinski and his colleagues interviewed 514 people to begin the process of documenting the atrocities and crimes against humanity that characterize Nazi rule. They learned that "many women had hidden small objects beneath their clothes, or in the heels of their shoes. A scrap of packaging inscribed with a poem recalled from memory, a tiny cross fashioned of metal bolts, a tiny doll made of scraps of fabric, a miniature hand-written calendar.[4] Some of these items were saved for history.

3 xi https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn598258

4ttps://www.researchgate.net/publication/277668059_%27_this_is_material_arousing_interest_in_common_history_%27_Zygmunt_Lakocinski_and_Polish_Survivors%27_Protocols

One of the quarantine facilities was located about 75 miles from Malmo in Halmstad at the old “Spa Tylohus,” now part of the ”Hotell Tylösand”. When the war finally ended shortly after these survivors were freed, they held a ”peacefest” in their new accommodations. What a celebration it must have been. ”The episode at the Hotell Tylösand may therefore,

Figure 2 Source: https://gamlahalmstad.se/gamlahalmstad/HPhistoriska/SKHP-160312-1-022-Ester.pdf

despite all, be one bright spot in hard and dark time.”[5]

Ultimately the greatest gift of the white buses’ mission was the gift of life. Life for every one of the individuals who were rescued from the concentration camps. A chance at living and thereby giving back through those lives. As we highlight 10 of those lives and the impact they have had on the world, we invite you, the reader, to reflect on the countless other lives that have been changed due to the courage of those participating in the White bus rescue.

We have formatted this article into a collection of 10 “gifts” as a tribute to the works of author Anita Lobel (see gift #1), whose children’s book “10 gifts for Mama Rabbit” was one of the many gifts she gave to the world. Part 1 of this research brings the biographies of 5 White Bus survivors to life. We do this with the hope that their trials, tribulations, and successes in life inspire you, the readers, to ponder how these tragedies occurred and what lessons we can learn today.

Part 2 explores the dilemma Sweden faced as a non-belligerent state when the world was at war. In this light, some of the survivors were in the resistance, were political, and became involved in international relations after the war.

As these stories unfold, keep the words of Manya Friedman in mind: “As a group we are called Holocaust survivors. But each one of us has a separate story, a different story.”[6]

[5] [xiii] Hägge, E. (1977) Tylösand as a refugee camp 1944 in Hägge, E. Lindblom. S, Kollberg, L. (ed) Föreningen Gamla Halmstads årsbok Årsbok 1977 (p. 170–174). The association Gamla Halmstad.

[6] [xiv] Manya Friedman, transcript of testimony. UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM FIRST PERSON SERIES, July 17, 2013.

Part 1
Five Gifts from the White Bus Rescue

Gift #1
Anita Kempler Lobel

"My life has been good. I want more. Mine is only another story." (p. 190)

Young Anita lived in Krakow, Poland with her parents and younger brother. When the war came in 1940 and her parents were forced to disappear to avoid capture, Anita and her brother Bernhard (Gift #2) were taken by their nanny (whom they called Niania) into the Polish countryside to be kept safe. "Aside from the fact that there was an outside force that hated us and chased us, I always felt my brother and I were protected by this person who chose to protect us. I loved her and she loved us, and I think that this was very important."[7]

Young Anita was one of the many rescued from Ravensbrück by the Swedish Red Cross conveys of White Buses and taken to Sweden. With little knowledge of what was happening, Anita and her brother traveled on a bus under the Red Cross symbol to a ferry which landed in Malmo, Sweden, to begin their journey back to life, freedom and contribution.

Among the many stricken with tuberculosis, Anita and her brother joined other children in a sanatorium upon arrival. She recalls the 'restorative' experiences there. Having some friends, learning a new language, reading books, being cared for by "stoic, ...calm", and "reasonable" people in an "orderly" society. Anita recalls that "between the ages of 5 and 11, I knew no libraries, no schools, no books. I did not know how to read. I lived in a wicked country during a wicked time. I was hunted and often hungry."

After the White Bus ride to freedom, she "was recovering from madness and no civilization and tuberculosis, in a sanatorium in the south of Sweden. I discovered books. They were handed to me by kind nurses who gave me food and clean clothes. Who tucked me into a clean bed. Who smelled clean and nice."[8]

Two years after the war ended, Anita and Bernhard reunited with their parents, and after 7 years in Sweden, the Kempler family moved to New York City. Anita graduated from Washington Irving High School and enrolled at the Pratt Institute of Fine Arts. While in a school play, she met the play's director Arnold Lobel. They married in 1955, lived in Brooklyn, had two children, Adrianne and Adam. Together, Arnold and Anita wrote and illustrated over 100 children's books that still enthrall youngsters now three generations later. The Frog and the Toad are often some of the first words kids learn. The numerous awards and honors they received are richly deserved.

Sadly, this love story has an ironic ending. Family man, collaborator in writing and illustrating, Arnold was gay at a time when it was brutally stigmatized. People with AIDS

[7] Lobel, op.cit.
[8] Interview with Anita Lobel by Mr. Schu January 17, 2014

were pariahs in many parts of the US (and world) society. Famous AIDS activist Larry Kramer decried the official inaction to help people with AIDS and to develop medications to fight the disease; his autobiography is entitled *Reports from the Holocaust*. Arnold shared his secret with family in the early 1970s; he and Anita divorced about a decade later. When Arnold died in 1987 from the complications of AIDS, he joined a list which the Associated Press entitled "It has a name: AIDS."

Anita survived one Holocaust, lost her former husband to another, and still had the courage to live a full life. In 2021, her "second husband, the great love and true romance of my life for the past 34 years, died." Her life combines the gift of love with the reality of loss, the gift of romance with the reality of endings. [9]

Anita's life view could be one of horror, darkness, death and hatred. Rather, a survivor, an author, illustrator, singer, actor and teacher, her work remains animated, hopeful and helpful. Her 'children's' books contain clear lessons and profound truths about life for adults.

Reflecting on her childhood experiences which saved her life by feigning to be a Catholic, once Anita became settled in New York City, she realized "Oh well, I am not going to lie any more. I am not going to pretend."[10] A woman coming to terms with her life, its opportunities and her skill to make others' lives richer.

What a gift!

[9] Kramer, Larry. Reports from the Holocaust: The Story of an AIDS Activist. New York: St. Martins Press, 1994.

[10] Rodney Welsh. "Illustrator and Holocaust Survivor Anita Lobel Donates Archive to USC (University of South Carolina). *USC and Higher Education*, November 9 – 15, 2016

Gift #2
Bernhard Kempler

"Resilience is the capacity to find new and creative ways to assert life despite great trauma and obstacles."[11]

Born in 1936 in Krakow, Poland, Bernhard was only three years old when the Nazi forces invaded Poland and forced his father into hiding and his mother to flee. Bernhard and his older sister Anita were left to the care of their governess (whom they called Niania) who took them into the countryside hoping to hide them from the Nazi's. Over time Niania no longer felt it safe and secreted them to a convent for protection. They were discovered hiding in the convent, forcefully removed and taken to Ravensbrück. Bernhard being a young boy should not have been put into the women's and girls' concentration camp, but in an effort to keep him with his sister, he was dressed as a little girl and miraculously remained undiscovered until their rescue by the Swedish White Buses in 1945.

He recalls his experience in the camp saying "I had no idea what was going to happen. I … wanted to survive from day to day. … I didn't know why I was in (the concentration camps) in the first place."[12] Among other limited memories of his time in the camp, he shared that as the war was coming to an end "we were getting American care packages. We had food; it was lying in mounds inside the camp. That was a sign that something good was happening. Of course, I didn't know what America was, or who these people were, or why this was happening." [12]

Bernhard's recollection of the White Buses rescue is also limited. "Almost immediately we got packed into these buses and taken out of the camp. I know now and knew shortly thereafter, that it was the Swedish Red Cross, and we were being taken to Sweden. But I didn't know what Sweden was. Some of these buses on their way up through Germany, and through Denmark were bombed. The people who were too sick were placed in the luggage compartment. They became like hospital beds. But then everyone had to get out of the bus, and go on the side of the road because we were being bombed. I don't know who was bombing us." [12]

Bernhard's first years after rescue on a White Bus convoy were sickly, recovering from tuberculosis, learning Swedish since he had forgotten Polish, "learning how to live just as a child, under normal circumstances, how to play games, how to talk, how to be in class, how to . . . everything was just totally new. Nothing was to be taken for granted" and eventually reuniting with his parents in 1947. [12]

They remained in Sweden for 7 years,

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[11] DeNoon, Daniel. "America's Resilience," WebMd online, October 12, 2001. Interview a month after September 11th. https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/news/20011012/americas-resilience. Accessed February 6, 2022.

[12] Bernard Kempler, Oral History, Bremen Museum, November 20, 1991.

without a home, stateless. “My father had some very distant cousins [in America]. He felt there that there would be better opportunities for him to get started again in some kind of business. I think the main motivation was to get out of Europe. First, we spent a week on Ellis Island … right before Christmas, 1951 . . . Finally, they checked our papers, and found everything in order.” [13]

“We were adaptable . . . we just learned to be adaptable. We wanted to be adaptable. It was difficult, but I didn’t go around, and think, “This is very difficult... I just did it.”[13]

Losing much of his contact with his family upon leaving for college, Bernard did not think about or talk about the war much. Despite his parents socializing and maintaining contact with other refugees, Bernard focused on adapting. Eventually he began to wonder if all these events had really happened to him or not. He tells the story of his return to Krakow and Auschwitz where everything was real again and he knew that he had not made up any of the horrors that he faced as a young boy.

While in Poland he also ran into one of the nuns who had been in the convent where he was hidden many years earlier. She was astonished that he had survived. This trip was important because “one of the main values of going back to these places was to take that part of your past from this never, never land of dream, fantasy, nightmare . . . because it feels that way.”[13]

“I went around Krakow. I saw buildings that my Uncle Sigmund had built. I went to the apartment where we had lived and I remembered. I saw that balcony where I had played as a child of two or three. I went to the park where we had met and seen my mother from a distance. It was not an unpleasant experience. It was a very reality-affirming experience. But it’s not easy to talk about as one story. When I was at the children’s conference, that was a big thing, everybody wanted you to tell your story. It’s difficult to do that, not because you get overwhelmed by your feelings… everyone thinks that that’s the problem…but you end up talking about it like a story. So, it’s a problem. You don’t quite know how to have it, how to be with that past. Including why did I survive when so many others didn’t?”[13]

The Shadow Side of Self-Disclosure[14] represents the intersection of Bernhard’s professional career as a psychologist with his childhood experiences as a Holocaust survivor. He asserts that “responsible” self-disclosure of reactions to events, feelings, and other life events is part of being a mature adult, whereas premature disclosure can be harmful in the short and longer term. An academic scholar and psychologist, Bernhard practiced in Atlanta for decades and served on the faculty of Georgia State University. He helped people through difficult struggles so they could better cope with life’s stresses. He married the former Diane Gail Solomon; their son was born in 1964.

Yad Vashem serves as Israel’s national official memorial to preserve the memories of those who died in the Holocaust, to honor those who helped end the carnage and hopefully prevent such atrocities from happening again. Bernhard Kempler has a special connection to this memorial which

[13] Bernard Kempler, Oral History, Bremen Museum, November 20, 1991.
[14] https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022167887271008

plants trees as a symbol of life, of endurance and recognition. “When I found out about Yad Vashem, [I] decided that it was very proper for me to honor [our governess] Niania (whose real name is Rozalia Natkaniec) who had died right after the war. So, I wrote up [her story], and my story, and..... sent it to Yad Vashem.” She was accepted as a Righteous Gentile on May 2, 1985.

To assert life. To cause life to recognize (one’s authority or a right) by confident behavior. To take a proactive approach despite the circumstances that are inflicted upon oneself. This was Bernard Kempler.

Bernhard’s is a life well lived with the gift of service to others.

Figure 3 Gentile Rozalia Natkaniec and Bernhard Kempler at the dedication of a tree planted foreground) in Rozalia’s honor. *Yad Vashem recognizes “Rozalia Natkaniec (as) a village girl who had worked in the home of the Gruenberg family in Krakow before the war. Immediately after the occupation, Natkaniec decided to remain with the Gruenberg family in order to repay them for their kind treatment and the concern they showed for her while she worked for them. As the persecution of the Jews worsened, Natkaniec came to the assistance of her employers, but was only able to save their daughter Ziuta, after the child’s parents were caught and killed. Ziuta hid with Natkaniec for two years until the liberation, and after the war, she immigrated to Israel. Natkaniec also saved Bernhard and Anita Kempler, Ziuta’s cousins, and they hid under an assumed identity in a monastery in Krakow. Unfortunately, their identity was discovered and the Gestapo transported them to the Plaszow concentration camp. After Natkaniec learned of this, she risked her life and smuggled them out of the camp after which she hid them in her home. The Kempler’s survived and after the war, immigrated to the United States. On May 2, 1985, Yad Vashem recognized Rozalia Natkaniec as Righteous Among the Nations.”* [15]

[15] https://righteous.yadvashem.org

Gift #3 Nelly Langholm

Ships and marine life provide bookends to important chapters in Nelly Langholm's life, surrounding years of horror. Arrested in Norway in 1942, she was a prisoner on board the ship Monte Rosa enroute to Ravensbrück.

1Figure 4 SS Monte Rosa used to deport Jews from Norway to Germany.

She remained silent for "almost 50 years before I talked to anyone about the experiences." Yet, the atrocities she witnessed and endured are clear. A teen-ager with a crush on someone who "said his name was Wolfgang Grimm and he had come to see me. I didn't know why and he wouldn't say. But he talked to me and he was so lovely and sweet and played the piano. And he came back the next day. And the next day. And I fell in love with him."[16] After her uncle was killed by a German explosive and losing a cousin to the Nazi police, Nellie did what young adults do: she wrote a "Dear Wolfgang" letter, ending the infatuation. "The next day the Gestapo came to my house and arrested me. They told me they had read the letter in which I said I was an enemy of Germany."

Imprisoned for nine months in two Norwegian transit camps, she arrived in Ravensbrück on June 2, 1943.

Being so young, she probably did not understand the larger picture of a world-at-war. Being arrested "felt right in a way; I had done this terrible thing by fallen in love with a German and the Germans had killed our family. I thought I should be punished.' Images from this undeserved 'punishment' include:

- *Witness*: German shepherd guard dogs mauling a 15-year-old Yugoslavian girl to death.
- *Memory*: When lucky enough to have underwear, it was verboten to wash it.
- *Witness*: starvation rations resulting in massive weight loss.
- *Memory*: "I was so greedy that I ate a large piece of pork without sharing it. I became very ill afterwards" because her system was shutting down.
- *Witness*: the relative excitement when an all-too-meager Red Cross package managed to get through to prisoners, minus whatever the Nazi guards secreted away.
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- *Witness*: "Christmas and New Year's days in 1943. On Christmas eve, we were sent out of the barracks in the evening and dressed stark naked for de-lice. We stood for many hours while the snow came down. To keep warm, we

[16] https://www.aftenbladet.no/magasin/i/Ra0J2/menneskeliv-var-ikke-mye-verdt

stood close together."[17]

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- *Memory*: Norwegian prisoners would disappear in the "Night and the Fog" (see 3rd paragraph of Lise Borsum, Gift #4).
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- *Witness*: Prisoners about to be executed were so thirsty that they threw themselves into little puddles to try to drink the murky moisture.
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- *Memory*: "crying with homesickness."[18]
-
- *Memory*: Sewing and hard physical labor in horrific conditions.
-
- *Memory*: Suffering from tuberculosis, Nelly was saved by the White Buses on April 9, 1945.

After the war, she reconnected with, and married, a Norwegian journalist who had also been a prisoner; they had three children. Nelly never forgot the Red Cross parcels while a prisoner in Ravensbrück and those heroes of the Swedish Red Cross and the White Buses. "This made me make an important choice; I was to spend part of my life working for the Red Cross."[19]

And she did. After training at a Red Cross nursing school, she staffed an emergency room in Oslo; in 1971 she became a psychiatric nurse. Several years later, Nelly landed "the dream job as a cruise nurse on «Sagafjord», on what was then the world's finest cruise ship."[19] Later, in her mid-50s, she became a nurse in the North Sea working on oil rigs and supply ships. She was also honored to christen an oil company support vessel for Mobil Oil in June 1985 in honor of her service on the «Statfjord A».

Once imprisoned and transported by ship into Hell, Nelly Langholm's life voyage included service on land and on the sea helping others.

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[17] https://www.aftenbladet.no/magasin/i/Ra0J2/menneskeliv-var-ikke-mye-verdt

[18] ftenblad.no. Op.cit.

[19] https://full-english-books.net/english-books/full-book-if-this-is-a-woman-inside-ravensbruck-hitlers-concentration-camp-for-women-read-online-chapter-116

Gift #4
Lisa Borsom

Born September 18, 1908, Norwegian citizen Lisa Børsum was “just the wife of wealthy Norwegian doctor Ragnar Børsum”[20] until her circumstances required her to become much more. When World War II broke out she rose to the occasion becoming part of a network to help Jews escape to Sweden.

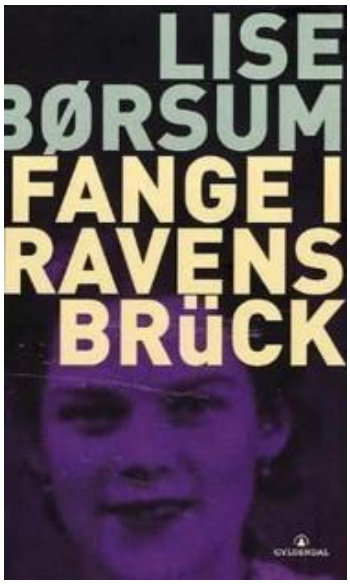
Taking great risks to use their home as a base for the network and creatively using piano concerts as a cover for their illegal and punishable activities, Lisa and Ragnar were key players in the escape of many Norwegian Jews.

Their work with the escape network was discovered in 1943, and despite her husband being able to escape, Lisa was taken to Germany and eventually transported to Ravensbrück as a “Nacht und Nebel” prisoner.[21] She was also transported on the MS Monte Rosa, the ship which took Nelly Langholm (see Gift #3) to Ravensbrück.

These “Nacht und Nebel” (Night and Fog) prisoners were part of a directive that Hitler issued in late 1941 to target “political activists and resistance helpers in the territories occupied by Nazi Germany”. The directive outlined that they were to “be imprisoned, murdered, or made to disappear.” Most people arrested under this directive were never heard from again.

Lisa was. And her voice became a loud one.

After her rescue by the White Buses in April of 1945, Børsum continued her involvement in the resistance and began writing books about her experiences as a prisoner in the concentration camps. *Prisoner in Ravensbrück* was published in 1946, followed shortly thereafter by *Reflections* in



[20] Fearless Females: 10 Resistance Fighters from World War I & II You Might Not heard of (historycollection.com)
[21] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nacht_und_Nebel

1947.

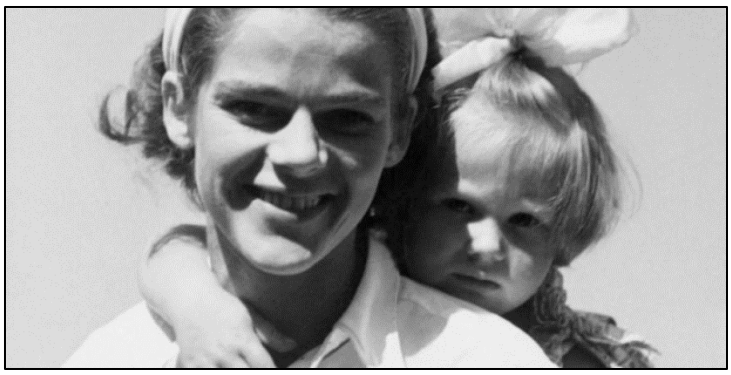


Figure 3 LIse Børsum with her daughter Bente

She continued her work through service on the National Council Fund to help victims of war and became a member of The International Commission Against the Concentration Camp Regime[22] with a goal to root out and destroy concentration camps all over the world. Part of this commission led to her publishing another book in 1951 on the Soviet concentration camps, *District Court of Moscow from today's Berlin and Soviet Prison Camps*.

She was also a freelance writer for Norway's Dagbladet Newspaper, and mother to famous Norwegian actress Bente Børsum. Bente currently serves on the International Ravensbrück Committee, taking over for Nelly Langholm (see Gift #3). Bente states "I remember everything from the war, especially [when] my mother was away from me for two long years". By the time of her death in 1985, Lise Børsum was known as a fearless leader and a powerful voice. Her writings and membership on international committees since her rescue in 1945 have installed her as a significant contributor to the betterment of the world and an example to future leaders and activists against the horrors of war and imprisonment.

Compelled by her own experiences and unable to remain silent, Lisa has given the world an immeasurable gift of knowledge and an example of what it means to stand against all odds to protect our fellow brothers and sisters. Her courageous involvement in human rights throughout the rest of her life impacted people across the globe. Her gift was an unselfish courage and stalwart activism.

[22] founded in The Hague in 1950, with a view to denouncing the existence of concentration camps in the world today and to protecting the human rights defined by the charter of the United Nations

Gift #5 Manya Friedman

Manya grew up very close to the German border in a small town called Sosnowiec. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Manya's parents met with their close friends "to decide what to do". Manya's parents and "everybody" were sure "Hitler would be stopped before reaching Central Poland". Unfortunately, the most feared, yet unexpected happened. According to Manya, "from that day on there was no peaceful moment". Interestingly and sadly, the "deportation" of citizens was instead referred by the Germans as a "resettlement". As Manya discusses decades later in an interview with the very own Holocaust Museum she later would volunteer for, not only were European Jews murdered, but also "Pols, gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, any race, women and children". Not only were they murdered and killed "because of what they had done, but because of who they were".

Eventually Manya would be forced into the Gleiwtiz camp, where there were very rarely days off and the few times she had what was considered to be "off" from forced labor responsibilities, she and other girls would be "checking each other's lice" because of the desperately poor conditions (Benson, 2013).

Manya would later travel to various other camps over the next several years and end up at the Ravensbrück camp, where again they would be numbered, counted and accounted for every day as this was custom to Manya's new way of life.

Ravensbrück also had a crematorium attached to it and from Manya's account, the physical conditions were much worse than any other camp. There were "10 times" as many prisoners as there were at other camps and any sense of cleanliness was from "a few drops of water" when it rained "to apply to your face to wake up". Manya describes constantly seeing "naked corpses" and the only thing holding their bones together was their skin.[23]

When the White Buses arrived, Manya was "picked out suddenly" and did not know what the next few minutes of her life would look like. Was she going to die? Was she selected to go to another camp? Was she chosen for other work? No, she was told to get on a "white truck."[23] Unfortunately, Manya and other girls that were also chosen were extremely weak, so weak a crate had to be brought to sit on the ground for them to physically get up into the truck. They had no idea what this was and where they were going, but what could be worse than where they already were and had been? First thing they saw in the white truck: a package.

Manya and the others saw food. "Cocoa and sardines, milk powder, crackers". Manya recalls

[23] Manya Moszkowicz Friedman. Behind Every Name a Story. United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum, Transcript of Oral testimony. https://www.ushmm.org/remember/holocaust-reflections-testimonies/behind-every-name-a-story/manya-friedman

that they ate the food immediately, some having severe digestion issues afterwards due to malnourishment for so long. Not even sure if this would be their last meal, they didn't care.

Upon arrival in Sweden, she recalls "with uncertainty we followed the Red Cross workers, clutching the few filthy possessions we had salvaged while leaving the camps, or some remnants of the Red Cross packages given to us on the bus. As we were taken to the showers, we followed with suspicion, hesitating to enter, not trusting anyone" (enter Citation). Manya and others had to constantly be reminded that water came out of the shower (Benson, 2013). Hearing "the war's over with" from others made it difficult to comprehend the rescue.

Manya would immigrate from Sweden to the United States in 1950 (Manya Friedman Obituary, 2013). She then would marry Joseph Friedman, another survivor of the Holocaust, and they would have two children together – Gary and Linda. Around this time in Manya's life, "she learned that her family had been deported to Auschwitz, where they perished" (Manya Friedman Obituary, 2013). Her husband Joseph would later pass away in 1975, but Manya did not let overwhelming darkness discourage her. Manya volunteered at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), spoke at various engagements with the Speaker's Bureau and wrote multiple essays for the Memory Project, the museums online resource page for information about individual victims in the Holocaust and the Nazi persecution. As Manya says in her interview during the USHMM First Person Series, we have a voice and "we can speak up", and that's exactly what Manya did and is still doing through the footprint she's left.[24]

Manya remains a true legacy to the White Buses liberation. Her grit, survival physically, mentally and emotionally give her the tenacity to allow her story to live on. Prisoner number 79357, will remain her name forever, but she chose to not let this name define her. Hardened by deprivation, lies and a seemingly endless internment, they carried on. One day at a time.

[24] Manya Moszkowicz Friedman. Behind Every Name a Story. United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum, Transcript of Oral testimony. https://www.ushmm.org/remember/holocaust-reflections-testimonies/behind-every-name-a-story/manya-friedman

Conclusion

Heroism comes in many forms. This first of two parts documents the background of this rescue and 5 survivors whose lives became gifts to others because Count Bernadotte and his extensive network of politicians, volunteers, supplies and civilians gave the gift of life to so many. Part Two raises the larger questions of Swedish 'neutrality' as it shares the biographies of four additional survivors and pays tribute to those too-often nameless people who risked their own lives to rescue strangers from Hell.[25]

Lest we forget!

[25] Please note that the authors would be most appreciative for your comments, feedback, suggestions, questions and indeed corrections. Any errors belong to us and getting these stories right remains our primary function so people can learn. Contact Roger Ritvo at rritvo@yahoo.com.