

The Holocaust Through the Eyes of the Second Generation

Lessons for the Future

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Chava, a Holocaust survivor from Lodz said: "Hitler is dead. But he can still achieve his goal of annihilating us if we would let the hate, the mistrust, the inhumanity win our soul".

This workshop will look at the Holocaust through the eyes of Tali, a daughter of a Holocaust survivor and Thomas, a son of a 'Hitler Youth' member.

We will explore the behaviour and life experiences of two very different youths, the teenaged victim together with the man who saved his life and the young potential perpetrator. We will look at the choices they made and the influence it had on their children's lives.

My father, Moshe (Marion) Turner, was a survivor of the Holocaust. He was 14 years old when the Second World War started, and was forcefully removed from his town of Nowy Targ in the Tatra Mountains of South Western Poland, to work and suffer in 3 different labour and concentration camps (Zakopane, Plaszow, and Brunlitz – via Gross Rosen). When he was 17 years old and a prisoner at the Plaszow concentration camp, he received 25 lashes because potatoes were found in his clothes. In 1944, when the Nazis wanted to destroy the evidence of the mass graves in the camp, they ordered Jews, among them my father, to dig out the bodies and burn them. He had nightmares about it until the day he died.

However, he was one of the lucky ones. He was saved by a courageous German and a member of the Nazi party, Oskar Schindler. Moshe and his brother Chanoch (Heinrich) were part of the legendary "Schindler's List". Schindler, a German, risked his life to save more than 1000 Jews. He took them to his Brunlitz camp, where he protected them until liberation in May 1945. In 1949, Moshe moved to Israel, married Judith, who was born in Warsaw and left Poland in 1937, and had two children, Amir and Tali.

Schindler made a choice. It was not an easy one to make. And like any choice, it came with responsibility and had consequences. His choice was to go against the Nazi Party to which he belonged and to risk his life; the consequence of his

action was saving the lives of many, yet to become penniless in the process. It wasn't the popular thing to do as a German, but it was right.

Throughout my childhood I learned from my father that one should not generalise and judge people. He believed that "Not all Germans were bad. Look at Schindler. He was a German". People have choices, always, every day of their lives. Sometimes the choice is between two or more good options; other times between good and bad. And sometimes it is between bad and worse. As the literary critic Lawrence Langer has said, "In the Holocaust many of the choices were 'Choiceless Choices'"¹.

Schindler is regarded as a righteous – an individual who is doing or thinking what is morally right. Is he regarded as a hero? What is a hero? Steve Henderson said, "A hero is an ordinary person who performs an ordinary task in an extraordinary situation"². What Schindler did was to be true to himself, to have the courage to live according to his convictions. It is very difficult to be true to ourselves all the time, especially in such dangerous situations when fear is controlling the way we think and react. But fear controls us every day. If we think "how many times today did I not say or do something because of fear"? Most times, what we fear never materializes at all. But it stops us from acting. In Pretoria, South Africa lives a Dutch Righteous Gentile, Jaap van Proosdij. He saved the lives of dozens of Jews in Holland during the Holocaust. A few years ago I asked him: "Why did you do it"? He was astonished by my question and answered with a question of his own: "If you see a drowning man, won't you save him"? For him, it was a rhetorical question. But sadly for most of humanity, the answer is not so clear. Most people would not save the drowning man, be it out of fear for their own lives or just the thought that someone else should or would do it.

Schindler came from a place of truth, love and acceptance of others even if different than him and did not act according to his fears. Because of that love, my father and uncle survived.

However, their mother and two sisters, 12 and 16 years old at the time, were not recipients of the same kind of acceptance. They were murdered in the gas chambers of the Belzec death camp in August 1942³. They died together with more than 500,000 men, women and children within 10 months of the camp's existence. Five escaped the camp, yet there was only **one** known survivor, Rudolf Reder, who remained alive when the war ended and was the only eye witness of the mass murder in Belzec.

The murderers, the perpetrators, also made their choices. And again, those choices came with responsibilities and consequences. Did they know what they

¹ Berenbaum Michael, *The World Must Know* (New York, 1993), 196.

² Hayward Susan, *Bag of Jewels*, (Avalon, 1988)

³ Arad Yitzhak, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, The Operation Reinhard Death Camps* (Bloomington, Ind., 1987), 388.

were doing? Did they realize that committing murder was wrong? Could they have said: “No, this, I would not do!” Germans who refused to shoot people in most cases were not executed. One could say no, but most of them did not refuse to murder. Why? Was it not because of fear? Fear has many faces: fear of punishment, of being different, of what would others think of them, or just fear of the “other” – people different from you. Because of fear, they did not say “No”. In 1999 I met a German educator in the International Yad Vashem conference in Jerusalem. With tears in her eyes she told me about her father. When he was a soldier in the Wehrmacht, his commander got an order to use the unit to shoot Jews in one of the towns. The commander refused and the unit was moved to another location and task with no punishment. Yet, her father always knew that if it was left up to him, he would not have had the strength and courage to say no. He would have shot the Jews. This guilt and admission of weakness tortured him his whole life.

Many times we do something we know is wrong and usually those actions are carried out as a result of **fear**. Children call it peer pressure, but peer pressure does not disappear. It may evolve, become more sophisticated, but it is there with us, for as long as we live. When we do something that we know is wrong, when we cross our own personal red line, even if no one else will ever know about it, we know. We alone wake up in the morning, open our eyes, look in the mirror and see our image. We need to live with that image, and to do so in the best possible way.

However, the majority of humanity is neither perpetrators nor righteous. Most people are bystanders. This was the case during the Second World War and the Holocaust and this is still true today. Primo Levi said, *“In spite of the varied possibilities for information, most Germans didn’t know because they didn’t want to know. Because, indeed, they wanted not to know”*.⁴ In fact bystanders always aid the perpetrators just by keeping silent.

Time and again we find ourselves in the position of bystanders, standing near, but not taking part when something happens. We are just onlookers. Are we ruled again by fear? The famous words of Reverend Martin Niemoller, whose condemnation of the bystanders has become a call to early action, comes to mind. He said:

“First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me”.⁵

What we forget is that to be a bystander, is also a choice. We choose not to get involved and we need to take responsibility for that. It is not anyone else’s fault,

⁴ Levi Primo, *The Drowned and the Saved*, (London, 1988), 65.

⁵ Berenbaum, *The World Must Know*, 41.

and there is nobody to blame. We choose to stand on the side and look, whether in a case of a motor accident, a fight, a mugging in the street or Apartheid in South Africa. Even as children we have choices, but are we aware that we make choices all the time? My 7 year old son, Jonny, was worried about the well being of two men who came to fix our broken gate. They finished their job and it was late, dark and cold. They were waiting for their driver to come and pick them up and refused to come into the house fearing that they will miss the driver. Jonny went to the kitchen, made them sandwiches, took apples and fruit juice and went outside the gate to give it to them. At that moment, he made a choice. Children in war torn countries such as Rwanda, are forced to fight as child soldiers. A Hutu teenager that became a killer was told: "Kill or be killed" and felt he had no choice. When asked how he felt, he said: "I am no longer a child. They murdered the child in me. Out of that child, who existed before the war, came out a murderer". In this case of "Choiceless Choices", even the Hutu child had 2 options and perhaps others he was not even aware of. Our challenge is to empower ourselves to be aware of our options and choices. Because, after the Holocaust and the establishment of the UN and the Declaration of Human Rights the words: "Never again"! Was the lesson the world believed to have learned from man's inhumanity to man. But did the world learn? Did each one of us learn?

What did I as a second generation survivor learn? The learning started with my birth. Like most other newborn children of Holocaust survivors, I was named after a family member who had perished in the Holocaust. The naming after murdered relatives was a replacement for the losses of the past. Dina Wardi, a leading Israeli Psychologist and writer on the subject of the second generation, says that many survivors considered the establishment of new families a response to the Nazis who wanted to wipe out the Jewish race. She describes a "memorial candle" metaphor – candles are a Jewish symbol of light, hope and remembrance. Naming children after murdered relatives was common and became a burden and at times a source of confused identity. The survivors' child is projected not only with the dead relative's identity but also with the traumatic memories the name carries and with the parents' 'unconscious wish' to bring the murdered relative back to life. The child will be the link between the past, the present and the future. Second Generation children were viewed as a blessing, a miracle, a gift, and a symbol of victory over the Nazis. They were to be the future, secure, normal, capable, happy, proud members of the human race. Their parents would prepare them for any eventuality of life. They would never be caught off guard or be passively helpless or defenceless in any way. The losses were so vast that it was not physically possible to light candles for every person who was murdered. The child then became a living candle.

When I was born, my father named me after his sister, my aunt Helen, who died in the Belzec Death Camp when only 16 years old. I was the second born child, but the first born girl, to a survivor who lost all female members of his family. I have never known Helen or even seen a picture of her. All I knew was that Helen

was murdered in the gas chambers of Belzec. However, Helen was my second name; my parents decided to give me a real Israeli first name, Tali (Tal means the morning dew, earthy and fresh), as the attitude in Israel was to cut off the Diaspora and bond with the earth and the land of Israel. By giving me an Israeli name, my parents gave me a new identity. Yet the compromise was to give me a second name, Helen, and to tell me always what the name meant to my father. The name became a gift and a burden at the same time. It is always there to remind me that my work in the tolerance and Human Rights field is a born life path and that I have to go on in this path no matter the difficulties and the challenges. Yet at times the name is serving as a great burden – the young teenager Helen that never had a chance to really live.

The survivors tried to go on with their lives and to bring up their children the best way they could. Many survivor parents tended to over-invest in their children and over-protect them. One child of survivors recalled: "...We were continually fed, burped, stroked, tweaked and fondled until we were well into our thirties". Yet many times I felt a reverse of that role and wanted to protect my father instead. I played a role of the parent even though I was only 10 years old.

Children of survivors often had difficulties developing a positive sense of Jewish identity, because they associated being Jewish with being killed. Many survivors have ambivalence to religion and an 'account' with God. From a very young age, my father used to tell me that 'luckily, I did not look Jewish'. I had blond hair and blue eyes, and for him, that was a blessing, because 'if it happens again – I will survive'. Since then I became a Jewish history lecturer, proud of my Jewish identity, yet, when my youngest son was born with blond hair and blue eyes, I found myself exclaiming the same words 'he does not look Jewish', and feeling a great sense of relief.

Survivors who suffered starvation during the Holocaust tend to worry about food, and are feeding their children as if it was a matter of life and death. Issues around food or waste of food can become a problem in such a family. In addition to ensuring their children ate (and ate and ate), for some survivors there was a need to hoard food. My father for example, never threw away food. I remember clearly times when the bread became green with mildew and my father would cut the mildew away and say 'here, it is perfectly fine to eat'. Food was never thrown away!

Children of Holocaust survivors grew up without extended families. It was completely natural not to have uncles, aunts, and cousins. Growing up in Israel in the sixties, there were very few children who had grandparents. Friday night dinners or Jewish holidays were celebrated with one's immediate family or else other friends of the family who were adopted to replace the huge void. I grew up with uncle Moshe, even though he was not a real blood relative, but a survivor friend of my father. This was the reality and it seemed normal.

The Holocaust always penetrated the world of survivors' children. Their parents' past affected their thoughts and dreams in varying degrees. Some felt identification with the victim. Those who had a strong sense of identification, needed to act out the survival in the fantasy: "As a child I had dreams, I would imagine myself as the hero who managed somehow to escape, to run away." Looking again at my own experience, I was dreaming for years of escaping ghettos, camps, forests, and Nazis. I always managed to survive, many times with the help of a good man or woman, usually German. This is not surprising, as my father and uncle were both saved by Oskar Schindler, indeed, a good German.

The attitude of many survivors and second generation alike towards Germany and Germans is a complex issue. For years, many survivors and their children maintained a boycott of German products. In South Africa until today many survivors would not buy a German car. In my family's case, perhaps because a German Righteous Gentile saved my father, he chose to work in a VW car agency in the 1960's. The encounter with the people whose country was responsible for perpetrating your family's loss and suffering is complex. Yet many survivors and their children draw a distinction between the 'young' Germans and the 'parents' generation. I remember distinctly my first visit to Germany when I was just 16 years old; encountering the 'old' generation Germans with suspicion and fear, asking myself the question "what did you do then?" I had a very different experience with the young generation Germans who even joined us in our visit of the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp, where they cried bitterly, sharing with us their feelings of shame and guilt.

Even though I grew up with the Holocaust in my home in many different ways and studied about it, I was always afraid to go to Poland. Somehow, books, lectures, museums and even discussions with survivors were safe. To go to where it all happened was something completely different. My father had died many years before so I had to make the journey by myself.

The first time I went to Poland I felt a mixture of fear and trepidation. I joined an international Yad Vashem group and had a survivor with us, Pola Susswein, who had spent years in the same camp as my father, the concentration camp of Plaszow near Krakow. The most moving experience for me was to walk on the same soil where my father suffered for more than two years. There is nothing left of the camp which once held more than 30,000 prisoners. It vanished into thin air and all one can see are the memorials. We lit memorial (neshama) candles and I was asked to tell the group my father's story. It was very painful and in between tears, I told them how my father, 17 years old at the time, was working and starving in the camp.

During another journey to Poland in 2000, I visited the Belzec Death camp, at that time a site rarely visited and terribly neglected, where my grandmother and two aunts were murdered. For the first time ever the prayer of "Kaddish" was

recited on my family's murder site. After Poland I proceeded to Israel where I saw my 80-year-old uncle, Chanoch (Heinrich) Turner. My uncle still feels guilty to this day for not saying goodbye to his mother and sisters when they were separated from him during the 'selection' and taken to Belzec and to their deaths. It meant so much to him that a member of his family was there to say that evasive goodbye.

In May-June 2004, my mother, brother and I embarked on another journey to Poland, this time to trace my father's birth place and the different camps where he and my uncle were interned. We found the street in Nowy Targ where they grew up even though the house is long gone and high rise buildings are standing in its place. The most moving moment for me was when we stood at the same soccer stadium where the selection took place in August 1942 separating my uncle Heinrich from his mother Leah Turner and his two sisters, Helen (Hela) and Cyla. He was taken to work and they were taken to the cattle cars which were waiting in the Nowy Targ railway station, across the road from the stadium, and from there, to Belzec. Standing there I remembered his tearful words to me when we spoke on the phone a few weeks before: "I never told them that I loved them. I never said goodbye; I thought I will see them again. I don't even have a picture of my mother that I can kiss before going to sleep..." Standing there had a surrealistic feeling, it was so unreal. Yet there we were on the same spot 62 years later, trying to grasp the meaning of this moment. We ended our journey in Belzec as we attended the dedication of the new memorial and museum there. The neglected, dirty, disrespectful place I saw in the year 2000 changed to an amazingly powerful and respectful memorial. The ceremony was emotional for all of us and standing and touching the name of my namesake Helen, placed on the wall with hundreds of memorial candles flickering underneath it was a moment I will never forget. The whole journey was painful and emotional, yet allowed us to honour our family's past and reach a sense of closure and peace as we stood near the new memorial and grave site of the more than 500,000 men, women and children including our family members.

The Holocaust and my father's experiences and life have a constant influence on me. Despite his premature death in 1974 when I was only 12 years old, I thank him many times for his impact on my life, my thoughts and beliefs and the path he paved for me in my own growth and the way I educate my own children and the tolerance work I do with adults and youth alike.

Thomas' father was a young child during the years of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Yet he was a potential perpetrator and like many others in his town and despite his young age - a bystander, paralyzed by fear of a regime that specialized in terrifying men and women much older than young Heinrich.

Thomas interviewed his father in 2004. The following segment is taken from this interview:

Thomas' father, Heinrich Hagspihl, was born in April 1933 in the German North West town of Meppen. Heinrich's mother died when he was young, but his father remarried and he was raised by his loving stepmother. His father was a banker and his stepmother was a housewife. He started school in April 1939, yet cannot remember much of what was taught, and was not sure if any of it was anti-Semitic or morally wrong. He lived in a very Catholic region and remembers his parents saying to him that 'this regime in the country is against all Christian principles'. His parents used to say that 'these are tough times and we need to hang in there – things will pass'.

He remembers the Jews who lived in the town and were liked by the local population and were well integrated into the community. A number of Jewish families were very good family friends and the Hagspihl's were often invited to Jewish parties. He recalls how in 1939 a number of Jews were herded into the school hall where they had to stay for the night before they could be transported away the next day. That evening the locals got the SS officers and guards drunk and released the Jews who disappeared into the swamp. The locals knew the swamp and could hide the Jews from the SS.

These swamps were very close to Meppen and were reclaimed land that later had to be cultivated. The Nazis used as manpower German boys who were too young for the war and German people who had dared to question the status quo. Over a distance of 50km along the edge of the swamps were barracks that housed these people - 180 000 prisoners doing hard labour because they were speaking out. [In fact, Meppen was one of the 96 sub-camps of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp].

Heinrich remembers the torture houses that the Gestapo intentionally put into residential areas so that the residents could hear the screams from the people being tortured. Who wants to still resist then? He heard from his parents that any resistance to the Nazi regime was terrorised as early as 1934.

Heinrich was part of the "Jung Volk" which was a junior section of the 'Hitler Jugend'. He remembers marching and the like but also being engaged in constructive projects like building toys for poor people at Christmas time.

He insisted that Himmler and Eichmann were Jews who hated their own people. Hjalmar Schacht – the finance minister was also a Jew...

Heinrich remembers that radios were distributed for free so that people would be exposed to the constant barrage of propaganda. He recalls the propaganda minister Goebbels being "almost devilish" when he came over the radio. His mother used to say – "there speaks the devil".

Although religious education was abolished in Heinrich's school in 1941, when the nuns took over after school they kind of did what they pleased. The teachers

were of course terrified to say anything wrong, as it could then go straight home to the wrong people. At home he was drilled into “what is said here stays here” as they were very much aware of the danger of speaking. Till the last day of the war English was a subject in German schools.

According to Heinrich, his father was faced with the choice many Germans had to face in those days – do military service or be shot. With 5 kids - he did military service and survived the war. His brother was a prisoner of war in England and had a great time there. He helped farmers as cheap labour and built up really good relationships with people he still writes to, to this day.

Heinrich Hagspihl believes the war was caused because of money. The Nazi party gave 8.8 million people who were without a job work after the depression years. They swamped the world with quality products – “made in Germany” and that system had to be destroyed...

He is bitter about the fact that nothing is said about the German prisoners of war who died like dogs in concentration camps in Russia. The terrible suffering that Germans went through – no one bats an eyelid...

When the allies came to Meppen he remembers that the Canadian troops were real gentlemen and that the troops from Birmingham were real pigs, stealing and raping as they went...

Mr. Hagspihl came to South Africa in 1954. He left Germany because the taxes there were huge as they had to build up a country. In three days he earned in South Africa what took him a month to earn in Germany. Thomas' mother came to South Africa because she had TB and the doctor had sent her to visit her sister in Welkom in the Orange Free State; the climate was dry and he hoped she would get better. That is where they met, got married and then moved up to the reef [Johannesburg].

Heinrich Hagspihl's memories are of a child who was born into the Nazi system and grew up entrenched in Nazi ideology. Even though he tries hard at times to distant himself from that upbringing, much of it is still visibly there. The anti-Semitic indoctrination is visible when he says that “Himmler, Eichmann and Schacht were Jewish”. He cannot see or distinguish between the Nazis who started the war and the suffering of the German people and tries to find justifications to prove that actually the Allies are those who started the Second World War. Many times when he speaks, the little child in the ‘Jung Volk’ is clearly visible to us. Most probably, that indoctrinated child is still there. His story is similar to many other stories of families in towns and cities of Germany during the war. It is a story about many layers of fear, indoctrination, choices, keeping quiet and not questioning authority, bystanders and perpetrators. (See an excerpt of the video: ‘Confessions of a Hitler Youth’)

What was the impact of his fathers' past history on Thomas and how was it to grow up in the shadow of the Holocaust?

Thomas' speaks about the influence of his father's past on his life. Before sharing his story he reflects on his cousins in Germany who are his age and still feel bad about what their forefathers did.

Thomas grew up in a very conservative home with his parents voting National Party [the political party who started the Apartheid Laws in South Africa and controlled the country until 1994]. They spoke German at home although he went to an English school. They belonged to the Lutheran Church and went to church every Sunday. It was a very protected lifestyle and they were never taught to question the status quo. Thomas recalls "I remember June 1976. Watching the news one evening they showed the burning down of the schools. I remember my father saying how stupid these kids were to burn down the schools that the whites had built for them. I agreed. My father often compared the situation in South Africa to that in Germany during the war".

In high school Thomas was involved in Cadets programme during the 3 YP (youth preparedness) periods per week. He said "I did however not only participate but went through the ranks and became an officer. To qualify I went on a two week cadet camp at Doornkop military base in the South of Johannesburg, during my holiday. That was really tough and it was much like basics in the army. I somehow enjoyed that kind of thing though – I'm not sure why?" He remembers that they had a MP (moral preparedness) period once a week, where they were taught about the "Rooi Gevaar" – the communist threat [in fact the ANC and South African Communist Party, yet meaning the black threat], and that any girl with a bracelet around her ankle was a prostitute.

Thomas reflects about the experience of the Cadet Camp and questions it: "Why did I enjoy the cadet camp in grade 9? Maybe it comes from some of the stories my dad told me about his past that took a young boy's fancy. My father speaks about how if you stole in the German army and if you were found guilty by three witnesses you were shot. Gruesome but somehow I didn't have a problem with that – there was order. I think the order in our household – my dad is very neat and everything is always in the right place – had its effect on how I think, even to this day. Even today when I see the senseless killing, raping and the like I somehow find myself agreeing with how they handled thieves and the like in Germany. My father also relates the story of how a number of Mafia ringleaders were rounded up and gruesomely killed in a public forum. It seems that the Mafia left Germany within a very short time after that incident. Human rights – well.....? Even today sometimes when I hear stories of gruesome crimes that people commit – I find myself leaning to the harsher punishment – for the good of the rest of the people... In the German army you were not permitted to lock up anything – you didn't need to either. I liked that – and still do!"

Then he went to Wits University [University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg] to study engineering and later a BSc degree in Mathematics, Physics and Applied Mathematics. There was no time for politics and the like. He remembers going to a rally in the great hall at Wits where Dr Piet Koornhof [of the National Party] was to speak. There was chaos! On the one side there were the engineers supporting him and on the other were the radicals shouting him down. Thomas just watched in amazement... He also saw how they burnt the flag for the first time in 1981.

Then things started changing. Thomas did Zulu 1 and had a fantastic lecturer by the name of Mangisi Gule. It was a brilliant course based on the traditions of the Zulus. One such tradition was the wedding. After doing all the theory, Gule announced one day that his brother was getting married and that the whole class was invited. This was in 1983 [The height of Apartheid]!! Thomas and a few others decided to go to Soweto and were treated like royalty, "We were asked to sit at the main table and it was quite a moving experience. Everything we had learnt we experienced first hand. I was a little uncomfortable being treated as honoured guests – why should that be the case anyway? It made me feel uncomfortable. I was just a guest – they should not have made such a fuss about us". Thomas tells how Mr. Gule shared with them in class one day that his wife who lived in Durban was not allowed to come and stay with him in Johannesburg because of the influx control laws [Laws which did not permit free movement inside South Africa]. Thomas said "That made a big impact on me, and slowly things started falling into place".

Then he decided to become a teacher and did his H Dip Ed year; "I wanted to work with people and the idea of working as an Engineer just left me cold". The education faculty was "Moscow on the hill". There were many arguments and debates and through that, his whole outlook was revolutionised, "I had to stare hard facts in the face, of what was happening out there and somehow it was not difficult at all to change". He remembers writing an essay on the Black Sash and their involvement in the 1976 riots and it all came back to him, he understood that he had been hoodwinked! "I am sometimes still angry with myself. If I had been there with my present beliefs, I would have probably been locked up" he says.

Then it was time to go to the army. In the months preceding his call up he made a decision to apply for a non-combatant status. He is not sure if his father understood or agreed with what he was doing but he certainly did not hinder him in any way – "he was always a very supportive dad" said Thomas. This also brought a court case with it but was accepted. Thomas' brother who was very much pro the army and also on officers course was called in one day and told that he would no longer be allowed to carry on with his course. No reasons given. It was of course because of Thomas.

As a result of the court case, he was soon thrown out of the Infantry School in Oudtshoorn where all graduate teachers were sent. He had seen it as a savage ploy by the government, as teachers who are the most influential people in the

lives of children other than of course their parents, were brain washed for a whole year at the Infantry School before doing their second year as an officer somewhere else. His army was different: “After basics in Bethlehem I was transferred to the Quarter Master General in Pretoria and had a cushy job as a filing clerk for 21 months. It drove me round the bend. As a qualified teacher I had to file papers for almost two years. Yet, I never regretted doing what I had done and knew it to be the right thing”.

Towards the end of his first year of service, he saw an advert for a “Redenaars Kompetisie” – a best speaker’s competition. He entered and started his speech saying that PW Botha [The second last Apartheid state president] did not have the solutions to the countries problems. His speech was without a doubt the best by far, and many said that, but how could they award the prize to such a speech? The adjudicators agonised over the decision for such a long time that the entertainment band almost ran out of songs to play. Needless to say Thomas was not awarded the best speaker. Reflecting back he says that he had no regrets and his family was very supportive of his decisions.

Thomas’ mother almost never spoke about the war: “What I know of her story came from my father. Marion’s [Thomas’ wife, also of German descent] father also almost never spoke, but when he did, it was with anger – especially how unfairly the Germans were and are treated now”.

Thomas wonders sometimes “why my father never taught me to question? Why did my school not do it? Why did I not question myself? Edward de Bono says that thinking is painful and that people often just don’t think because it is just that – painful and hard work. I have now become someone that questions everything and some people find that quite a pain. Matric dance dresses..... Sheep mentality prevailed”. Yet now, Thomas reflects, he does question everything; yet so many others don’t? “I’m beginning to think it all has to do with education and exposure and then a little compassion chucked in. It was easy, once I had seen the light, thanks to the people I had the privilege of coming into contact with. My older brother for example (who went through the same home as I did) does not think like I do – he is quite a racist at heart. But then he was never exposed to the people I met and the studies I did”. (A video clip will be shown of an interview with Thomas)

He thinks that “the scary question I suppose we need to continually be asking is “what injustice are we missing right now?” Are there things right now in our lives that we are blinded to? Also I suppose one can’t fight for every cause – which one do I devote my time to?”

Thomas is an educator in one of the most prestigious high schools in South Africa. He struggles with his own past and its lessons for him and what does it mean to the young generation today. “Do our kids question today? I mean really question, rather than just bucking the system at times, like most teenagers

should? Do they question the fact that they drive to school in an X5 BMW and not 10 km down the road are starving people that have been cold all night? Are we as teachers being forceful enough in insisting that our pupils think for themselves? Many of us as adults do not think for ourselves and question!" How do we make history and the experiences of people who lived in a past full of trauma and pain become relevant and useful to our present society? Do the students in our schools really question the Status Quo beyond rebelling against the obvious things like school uniform or other petty rules? Without questioning, many youths today feel apathy to world events and to the suffering that happens right next to their doorsteps. Reflecting back to his father's childhood he poses the question "at what age one becomes a bystander? Are children bystanders in big issues such as war or the Holocaust? Sure they are bystanders when their friends get bullied and they don't do anything..." For Thomas, perhaps it is easier to ask the question in relation to his students at school, yet more difficult in relation to his father's involvement in the war years.

So how do we develop strategies to teach the children of today to think critically and not to just follow and accept everything they are told? How do we educate them to question and challenge?

Challenging is not an easy task. Many kids are not allowed to even confront their own parents, yet alone their teachers, especially in certain cultures. However we expect them to go out into the world as adults and start challenging and questioning everything. How can we assist them to face up to the world in the best possible way?

A starting point will be to begin with 'Self'. This is essential to building a person who knows and feel comfortable with who they are. It is important that we are aware of our own biases and the ways in which we intentionally and unintentionally feed into the hurt and oppression of others and ourselves. There are many exercises a teacher can do in class in order to build up the 'Self'; exercises about our identity, values, names, feelings and much more. (See hand outs of workshop) This will have a two fold benefit – to know myself, and to have more information and insight about the others in my group, making them less of an "unknown other". Listening to others' life stories is an important tool to narrow the divide between "us" and "them".

Using our insights about ourselves can give us a window into the feelings and behaviours of others and explain better oppression. These in turn will help us to work out ways of challenging the oppression. Oppression is sometimes referred to as "prejudice plus power". Certain groups in society are targeted as less than and deprived of society's benefits, while the "In" group has unearned privilege. It is essential to understand power, its use and abuse on a daily basis. Any group can potentially oppress another group. An exercise about power is essential to understand and internalise this concept (See hand outs of workshop).

Our awareness grows through sharing our life stories including those times when we were less than “saintly”, and discriminated against others. One participant recalled how “tough it was to remember a time when I was the discriminator. Yet, with this awareness I can make a choice as to how I bring about change in myself and my classroom”. Awareness and reflection of our past and present actions can empower us to change our choices in the future.

The only way to grow is through tolerance, respect and human rights. A veteran prisoner in Sachsenhausen concentration camp, used to tell new prisoners about the rules of the camp, of the difficulties they would have to endure, of the darkness that awaited them. He told it all, honestly and directly. He concluded his remarks with the words:

*“I have told you this story not to weaken you.
But to strengthen you.
Now it is up to you!”⁶*

The experiential work and sharing of life stories with both adults and youth comes for this purpose - to strengthen us, to give us a base to start from. The rest is up to us. The philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti said, *“In order to change the world we must begin with ourselves... For no matter how small may be the world we live in, if we can bring about a radically different point of view, than perhaps we shall effect the world at large”⁷.*

A question I ask myself often is what are the lessons learned by the second generation following their parents’ experiences. Events that happened before they were born had a huge impact on the lives of the children of survivors and of Germans alike. Yehuda Bauer, the great Holocaust historian summed up a moral and educational lesson using a prohibition: *“You, your children, and your children’s children shall never become perpetrators; You, your children, and your children’s children shall never, ever allow yourselves to become victims; and You, your children, and your children’s children shall never, never, be passive onlookers to mass murder, genocide, or (may it never be repeated) a Holocaust-like tragedy”⁸.* How much of this would those children adopt as their motto? How much did Thomas and I adopt? Are we similar in our reaction to the traumatic events in our father’s lives? Yael Danieli, a leading psychologist and researcher, found in her research on second generation that many children of survivors fight against oppression of any kind and are liberal in their political approach. She also found that many of them chose teaching, healing or helping professions for their life career. Both second generation survivors and children of Germans or Nazis were born to their difficult circumstances, and to events that happened years before they were even born. Both Thomas and I were born in the early 1960’s,

⁶ Berenbaum, *The World Must Know*, 3

⁷ Krishnamurti Jiddu, *Education and the Significance of Life*(San Francisco, 1981), 84

⁸ Bauer Yehuda, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (Yale University, 2001), 273

far away from Europe in “new land”, Israel and South Africa. Where we both victims of our parents’ past? For many years Second Generation Holocaust survivors were trying to deal with their life and emotions, and were not thinking much about the other side. German or Nazi second generation children meanwhile were trying to come to terms with their own issues. Many of them did not make any contact with Jews, usually fearing their reaction. Marion, Thomas’ wife tells how sometimes she is scared to admit she is German to her Jewish colleagues even now. Some managed to deal with it better than others. Yet, many feel torn inside. On the one hand, it was their father and they loved him. On the other, they cannot live with the knowledge of what their father did during the Holocaust. For Thomas it was always a struggle to even listen to his father’s stories, again and again, the same stories repeating excessively without healing. He felt uncomfortable witnessing his father’s anger and emotions, so different from the calm and controlled man he usually knew as his father.

Ilana Berman-Frank, a second generation living in Israel said:

“...The lesson is the importance of tolerance. Tolerance between people. And...not to follow prejudice, to accept people not by prejudice but to try and know them. There has to be ...strict education against prejudice... That people are just people, wherever you go, and whether they’re German or Chinese or Palestinians means nothing about whether they’re good or bad...”⁹

⁹ Fox Tamar, *Inherited Memories, Israeli Children of Holocaust Survivors* (London, 1999), 189

