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## *The Legacy*

Our years in Israel were a lot more peaceful after the Six-Day War. Our third and fourth children were born in Jerusalem in 1969 and 1975. I always thought I should have had six children, one for every million Jews killed in the Holocaust, to help replenish the lives that were lost. But I stopped at four. I just didn't have the emotional energy for more.

In 1977 we moved back to the United States. Aunt Ita had died at age forty-four. Aunt Elka, now in her late seventies, lives in a nursing home in California near her son.

Sometimes I wonder what my life would have been like had there been no war in Europe, no Holocaust. I would probably have been part of a large, thriving Orthodox Jewish community in Poland. I would have raised my children with friends and family. We would have celebrated holidays and important events together.

I often long for the life and extended family I never had. Since my father's death in 1983, I feel very much alone. I especially feel it during the holidays—an existential loneliness.

I often think about my mother and how depressed she was after the war. My father had the will to go on, but she didn't. He wanted to forget, but she couldn't. My father never talked about Dachau, but my mother talked about the war so much I couldn't bear it anymore. Every single day it was the same thing. Whenever I came home from school, she would say things like, "Did I tell you about the time your grandfather . . . ?" Or,

“Did I ever tell you about your cousin . . . ?” Our life in the Brooklyn apartment would fade, and we’d be back in the *shtetl* in prewar Tomaszów or in the middle of a selection at Auschwitz. Her past took on a reality that her present lacked. The war in Israel gave me a glimpse of what my mother had gone through as a parent. My war lasted six days; her war lasted six years. How she managed with a child for six years I can’t imagine. It’s no wonder she wanted to die when it was over.

We must never forget who we are. A lot of people have no concept of what it is to be Jewish, and that’s very painful for me. In our struggle to be free, to assimilate and succeed in this country, we are losing something very important: our uniqueness. What does it mean to be a Jew? What is our tradition of five thousand years?

People ask me sometimes how I feel about Germans. I know there must be some good Germans and I know it has been a long time since the war, but I can’t forgive them. Maybe my children will, or their children. But I can’t. I have never bought anything German, not even a toothbrush. I can’t even listen to Wagner. What makes the Holocaust so ironic and so terrible is that the most cultured of people allowed it to happen. The Germans weren’t barbarians. They were educated people. Maybe the next generation of Jews will be more forgiving of them, but I can’t.

Years ago my friends from Tomaszów, Frieda and Rutka—her name is Rachel now—and I talked about writing a book about our Holocaust experience. Every year on January 27—the anniversary of our liberation from Auschwitz—we celebrate our “birthdays” together and talk about what happened and try to make sense of it. Every year I kept urging them to write their stories.

After the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened in Washington, D.C., a visitor came to my door. He had read an article about me in the paper that said I was the youngest Auschwitz survivor. He told me he was writing a book about the Holocaust. He wasn’t a Jew but a Christian. He wanted me to tell him my story. I was reluctant. As a non-Jew, how could he possibly understand? But over the next few months, amid the tears and painful memories, I told him, so that others

would know, and I persuaded Frieda and Rachel to tell him, too. A Christian, imagine that! Life is so full of surprises.

Mama once told me, "I don't have much to give you, but one thing I want you to know is, you have to trust, respect, and love yourself. If *you* don't, nobody will." I was only twelve or thirteen then, but I will always remember that.

Did God save me for a purpose? I don't know. It's not as if God came down from heaven and said, "I need you to do this." But since I did survive, I can't just go about business as usual. More than anything, I want Mama to know that despite the pain, I'm going on with my life and trying to make a difference.



*Tova Friedman today*



*Tova's children, Risa, Shani, Itaya, and Gadi, at the Western Wall in Jerusalem*

### *Author's Postscript*

As Tova Friedman checked over her story before it went to press, she told me about a phone call she received from her daughter Risa, who lives in England. Risa had been searching for possible survivors from her mother's family.

"My phone rang at three o'clock in the morning," Tova said. "It was Risa calling from England. 'Mom,' she said, 'I found a Pinkushewitz family. They live in Belgium.'"

Risa had met someone on the train in London who knew the family and their whereabouts. A distant cousin in Antwerp had been found. He knew nothing of Tova's mother's survival. "We are building what Hitler tried to destroy," his wife told Tova later. She was referring to her eleven children.

Gradually, a few other Pinkushewitz survivors and descendants have been found in Europe and elsewhere. One is a French painter who goes by the name of Pink. Hopefully, others, yet unfound, may go by the Polish name Pinkusiewicz.