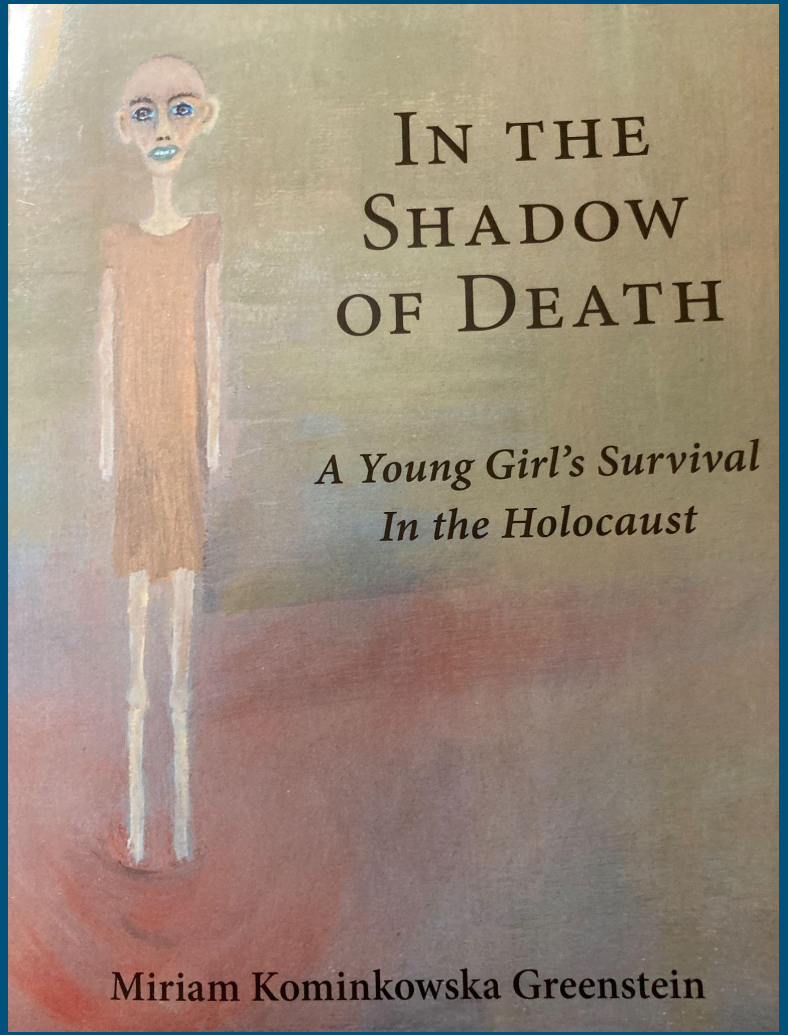
Reading the Holocaust

By David Rutiezer,
Docent at Oregon Holocaust Memorial


In the Shadow of Death
A Young Girl's Survival In the Holocaust
Miriam Kominkowska Greenstein

In the Shadow of Death

By Miriam Kominkowska Greenstein

In the Shadow of Death

1970-2010

One day in 1970, I answered the phone. A man asked if I was Mrs. Greenstein, and I said that I was. He told me that he was fundraising for the American Nazi Party, and asked me for a donation. When I replied, “I am not interested in donating to your party,” his voice became threatening and obscenities poured out of his mouth. He ended his tirade by calling me a filthy, rotten Jew and said, “We are going to get you and yours! We’ll burn your house down! We’ll get you!” Then he hung up.

I stood there speechless and terrified. He had managed to transport me back to the horrors of the concentration camps. Shaking lie a leaf, I called Tole. He was with a patient and couldn’t leave his office. He calmed me down and said to call the police. I followed his instructions, and spoke to the police as well as to an FBI agent. They were wonderful, and for a time provided a special patrol to watch our house.

The terror had returned, but I couldn’t let my children see it. I didn’t want them to inherit my fear. Tole and I informed them of the incident and told them to be observant and aware of anything different in our neighborhood. Nothing happened, and I am sure that my daughters have no memory of that event.

In the Shadow of Death cont.

In 1987, swastikas and graffiti appeared on the walls of businesses in southeast Portland, in the area surrounding Cleveland High School, the school from which all four of my girls had graduated. Skinheads were becoming a common sight in that neighborhood. I was upset and quite nervous, but continued to ignore the situation until one terrible evening in 1988. On November 13th, an Ethiopian student at Portland State University was murdered by racist skinheads while walking on a street maybe a mile from where I lived. His name was Mulugeta Seraw. He was a mere twenty years old, and had come to our country in pursuit of higher education. He was not involved in gangs or any other illegal activities. His crime was the color of his skin!

I remember hearing about this horrible event on the evening news; his murder was also reported in the *Oregonian* newspaper. I was shaken and outraged by this stupid act of hatred. I recall thinking that something had to be done. *Who can do it? Where do I call?* Suddenly I realized that I was expecting someone else to take steps on my behalf. But who would express the outrage I felt? A paraphrase of a quotation popped into my head: *If not I, then who? If not now, then when?"*

In the Shadow of Death cont.

Shortly thereafter I joined the speakers bureau at the newly formed Oregon Holocaust Resource Center. Unkie and Ciocia were dead. Tole had died in 1985. All four of my girls were married and had children of their own. Not having Jewish-sounding last names, they were safe. At last, silence would no longer suffice. It was time for me to talk about it!

My first speaking assignment was at Cleveland High School. Of all the possibilities, who would have thought that my first time would be at the school my own children had attended! I worried and fretted about the students' sensibilities. How do I tell them about my experiences during the Holocaust? I decided to be gently, and not too graphic in my descriptions. But when I asked the teacher for some feedback a few days later, he said that the students had thought that, compared to Anne Frank, what I had been through was not so bad. The next time I spoke I didn't try to tone things down, and told my story straight out. The fifty eighth-graders were spellbound. From then on I have always treated the students as adults.

In the Shadow of Death cont.

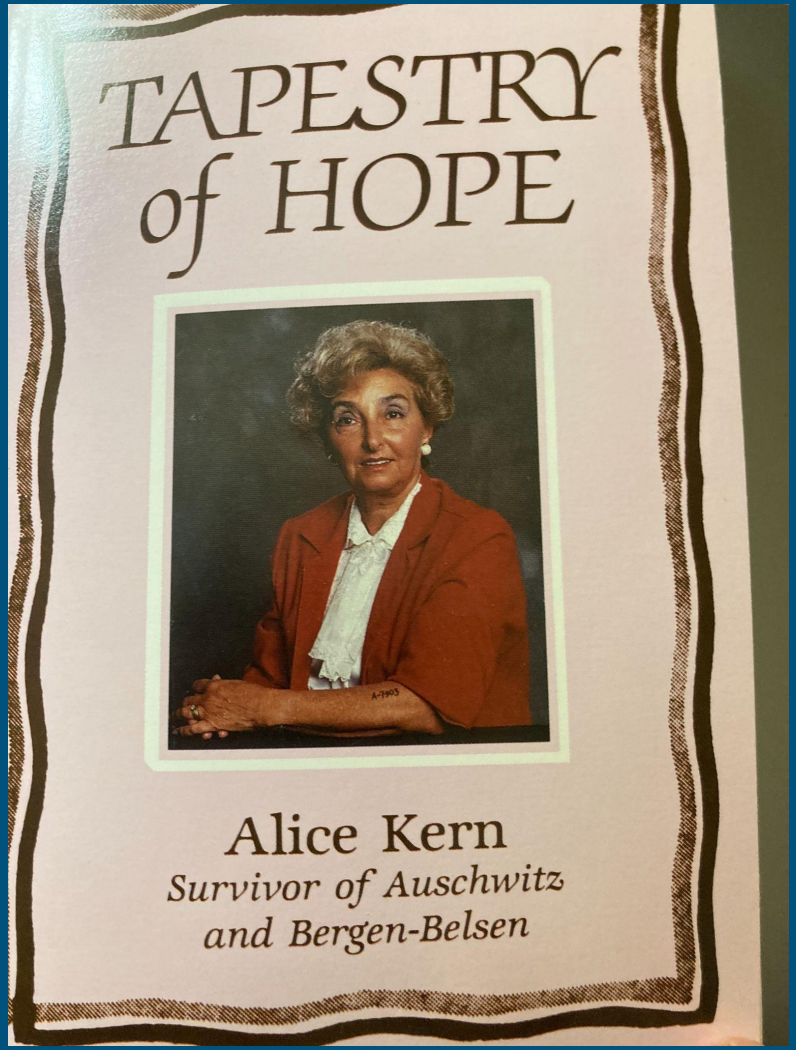
I spoke at middle schools, high schools, universities, to high-school assemblies of as many as seven hundred students. I spoke at juvenile correctional institutions, state prisons, federal prisons. In 1992 we brought an exhibition about the life of Anne Frank to Portland, which was so popular that a smaller version of it was created to travel around Oregon over the following year. Every local Holocaust survivor who was willing to speak about his or her experiences was invited to join the speakers group; during that year I must have spoken two or three times a week, sometimes traveling two hundred miles a day. I even journeyed to Alaska to speak at youth groups and prisons in Anchorage and at schools and other venues in Juneau.

By 1994, all that talking brought on frequent nightmares, in bright Technicolor. In the middle of one night I got out of bed and found an empty canvas and my painting supplies. I set a small easel on the counter of my kitchen island, and furiously proceeded to slash paint all over the canvas. My memories of the Holocaust were pouring forth. I painted nonstop for months, never knowing what might come out of me. My paintings were a work of my subconscious, emotions and memoires buried deep under the veneer of culture and sophistication.

In the Shadow of Death cont.

Now, as I write this, I am rapidly approaching old age. So far, I am still continuing to speak at schools and various other venues, and I serve as a docent for the Oregon Holocaust Memorial. Thousands of people visit our Memorial every year, including organized tours for students. For the past twenty-two years my mission has been to educate people, primarily young people, about intolerance and its consequences. I talk about the awful things that occurred, but I also tell them about the acts of kindness.

I throw a little pebble into a still pool of water, in the hope that the ripples it creates reach the shores of acceptance and respect.


TAPESTRY
of HOPE
Alice Kern
Survivor of Auschwitz
and Bergen-Belsen

Tapestry of Hope

By Alice Kern,
survivor of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen

Tapestry of Hope: Preface

For many years the time I spent in Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen was a constant haunting horror. Yes, I did survive the Holocaust, but only because I refused to die.

In 1944, when I was taken away from my warm and secure home with Mother and two little cousins, we were told that we were going to a Labor Camp. Our lives in the ghetto, where we were concentrated away from the core of the city and its Gentile society, had become so unbearable and humiliating that when the order came to leave it seemed like a relief.

With only the clothes on our back we were driven into cattle cars. Upon arrival in Auschwitz we were “selected” under the bright spotlight beaming down on us; Mother and the cousins went to the left. That was the last time I saw them.

Tapestry of Hope cont.

All the experiences thereafter were impossible to forget, I was alive, I had my eyes open, yet my mind lived in the past. There was no future and the present was uncertain. It was hard to imagine how it would be to live again under normal circumstances – not to be afraid that your fellow citizen would hurt you, condemn you or hate you for numerous unknown reasons. To become one of the people who has the right to come and go and not be persecuted was less difficult than being able to forget the past hurts.

For many years I felt I could not function, until one day I took a pencil and started to write. Onto the pages poured memory after memory until I found myself creating this manuscript. My life until then had seemed like a pretense; I was filled with pain from many wounds, yet I could not cry or burden anyone with what troubled me. The silent, white sheet of paper took all my tears, aches, and pain. I felt reborn, finally able to concentrate on the present and even to anticipate a future. I no longer felt a need to remember the smallset details of my cherished memories. I could let them go now. It was all down in black and white forever.

Tapestry of Hope cont.

The past and the pain will last forever. I had to teach myself to be human again – to love and be loved and not to hate. I did not know who my enemies were, except the few who inflicted direct pain upon me. I refused to hate a whole nation, since some good deeds had been done by them, and some had dared to stand up against the Hitler regime. A deep pain will always be inside me, yet I will not accuse one person unless I know him to be guilty.

Hatred is a sickness I did not and do not wish for. I picked myself up and started again, as I was taught at an early age. This was how my parents lived and I did not want to change the direction they pointed out for me.

Still, it seems, complete innocence is not a good thing. One should be prepared to see when others wish to inflict harm. To be alert may be to avoid the hurt. All the worldly goods left behind in the ghetto when we were taken away were lost. Nothing from my past was recovered. I could not return after the liberation because of ill health. That does not matter – I have my life.

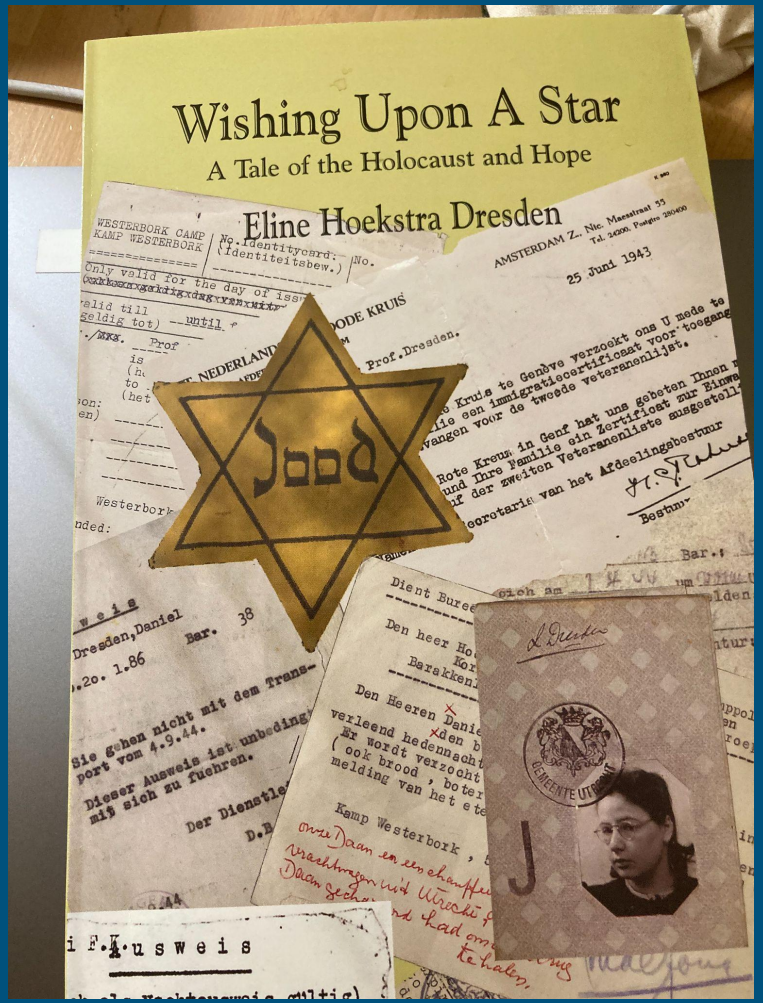
Tapestry of Hope cont.

But one memory haunts me: a promise my Mother made long ago.

I was still very young when my brother Zoli was studying in Paris to become a doctor, making Mother the proudest Mother in town. As the years went by, she kept preparing my dowry, yet the most precious needlepoint tapestry was promised to Zoli for his office when he became a doctor.

To some day recover that needlepoint tapestry, so that my brother can hang it up in his doctor's office as Mother wished, would be one wonderful reward of this writing.

The tapestry is four feet by five feet and is copied from an original painting of a French family gathered around a table covered with a white lace table cloth. An entertainer is playing for them. The father of the house is standing behind a seated mother in her French rococo dress wearing a necklace around her neck with a pendant in the shape of a T. in the original painting there was a cross, but in our religion this symbol is not acceptable, so the top of the cross was left out. On each side of the table the beautifully-dressed daughters are looking toward the mandolin player who is standing on the right side. A plumed velvet chapeau is on the


Wishing Upon A Star
A Tale of the Holocaust and Hope
Eline Hoekstra Dresden
Jood
WESTERBORK CAMP
KAMP WESTERBORK
Identitycard
(Identiteitsbew.)
Only valid for the day of issue
AMSTERDAM Z., Nic. Maesstraat 35
25 Juni 1943
Prof.Dresden.
Dresden,Daniel
Bar. 38
Sie gehen nicht mit dem Trans-
port vom 4.9.44.
Dieser Ausweis ist unbeding
mit sich zu fuehren.
Der Dienstle
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Tools for Survival

From *Wishing Upon a Star: A Tale of the Holocaust and Hope* by Eline Hoekstra Dresden

During my years of public speaking, I have been asked repeatedly, “How did you live through the Holocaust?” I usually answer, “I really don’t know.” However, the following list provides examples of things that worked for me (along with luck).

Tools for Survival - keep these in good repair!

By Eline Hoeskstra Dresden

- Be alert, not paranoid
- Be optimistic, but realistic
- Find strength in faith (whichever!)
- Recognize hidden danger
- Do not ever show weakness
- Listen to “gut” feelings
- Use humor daily!
- Draw on inner strength
- Take care of your health
- Stay productive
- Don’t let your guard down
- Face danger with courage
- Share your fears with others
- Do not ever give up hope
- Before going to sleep, imagine better times
- Draw sustenance from memories
- Be a quick thinker