



ANDRÉ'S LIVES



Teacher's Guide

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Relationships in Holocaust survivor families are complicated by questions about how much, or how little, to communicate to children memories of the years prior to and during the persecution. The Steiner family, for more than a half century, has been almost totally silent about the past. The father, André Steiner, decided to build a successful career in architecture in the United States, and to cut himself off completely from his Holocaust experience. His wife Hetty went along with his wishes. His son Peter, a child survivor with few memories, was a seven-year-old during the war. George, born in Cuba after the Holocaust, grew up in the United States as a frustrated child of survivors and felt cut off from his family history.

André's sons convince their father to take a "roots" trip back to Slovakia fifty-two years after the Holocaust. Despite their father's anger at having been compelled to recall the past, he learns that he has been honored with a place in history. Even though André was never thanked by any of the 7,000 Jews he saved from death by establishing three work camps, he realizes that he is part of Slovak history. For the first time, André's sons hear validation of their father's role as the "Jewish Oskar Schindler." The children who grew up with a cold, distant father are jolted into appreciating him as a kind, loving man who helped thousands.

Going to the spot where André last saw his mother and father, the work camps, the mountains, and hiding place establishes a sense of rootedness for Peter. Like other child survivors, he has had only disjointed images of his traumatic war life. By meeting his rescuers, and going to the hiding places, he is able to integrate his images,

and to feel that he now has a personal experience he can pass on to his own children and grandchildren. George, like other members of the "second generation," has his own need to mourn family members he never knew; his father lost his parents and fifty other family members. George in effect is doing the mourning his father is denying.

After liberation most survivors spoke only in bits and pieces to their children, or they would reminisce with other survivors, and the youngsters would eavesdrop on their conversations. For example, sitting at a Sabbath dinner eating Challah, a survivor would reminisce: "Oh, my mother used to bake the best Challah in our shtetl." And she would add, "When I was in Auschwitz, where I almost starved to death, I used to dream of eating my mother's Challah again."

A less typical response is incessant talking or total silence, as in André Steiner's case. Survivors' muteness, particularly with respect to their own children, can be attributed to their not wanting their children to know the depth of their humiliation and degradation. Instead, parents want to appear as respected human beings, not

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as helpless creatures. Survivors have an irrational fear that if they will talk about the horrors they might lose their minds and start crying uncontrollably in front of their young ones. By remaining silent, survivor-parents also want to protect their children from pain and from losing trust in humanity.

The first time André spoke about his war years was to Claude Lanzman, who filmed André for *Shoah*. André's silence can be compared to the "still-quiet voices" of the non-Jewish rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust. The rescuers did not boast of saving lives. They felt that what they were

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doing was the right thing. They felt they would not be able to live with themselves if they let these people die. André Steiner, a Jewish rescuer, also did not want recognition for his heroic deeds. In addition, he realized that there were Jews who accused him of collaborating with the Germans in order to save lives. He therefore did not want to bring up the past, lest he be judged.

A year before Hetty died, she spontaneously started talking about her life at a party and left a diary that her sons found only after her death. Comparing the diary to other documents, books, and maps, Peter and George began to compose a family history. Typically, it takes a concerted effort to piece together a sequential narrative of survivor memories.

Confrontation with the past is part of the mourning process. One is engulfed with guilt, anger, rage, sadness, a need to undo the past, and helplessness. Ultimately, mourning the dead involves not only grieving and recalling the past. Feelings and stories need to be transformed into action, such as Holocaust education, political action, promoting human rights, helping other oppressed groups, and raising consciousness through the arts and research.

Remembering the dead is accomplished through Holocaust commemoration. Connections that are life-affirming need to be created, which incarnate the rich Jewish culture that was destroyed and the values that were embraced. André was a very assimilated Jew before the Holocaust, and continued to be so after liberation. Hence, he did not inculcate his children with Jewish culture. By knowing more about the fifty relatives who were murdered, Peter and George and their families will be able to identify with values that were important to the dead and not only identify with their victimhood.

As the adult Holocaust survivor generation is dying, the child survivors and Second Generation have the responsibility to forge the link to the Destruction of European Jewry and pass it on to the third generation. The Steiner family's courage to confront their past will ease the way for others in the post-Holocaust generation to move beyond grief and pain, and educate future generations.



The Steiner's Escape Route



André Steiner born in Dunajska Streda (now Hungary).

André studies Bauhaus architecture, an elite school of Modern design and thought, in Brno.



1932

André practices modern architecture in Brno.

1933



André and Hetty Weiner are married.

1934

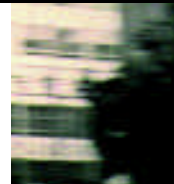
1935



Germany lifts ban on Nazi stormtroopers.

Hitler and Nazis burn Reichstag.

Hitler assumes title of Fuhrer.



Topics for Discussion - Family and Silence



- Does André have a responsibility to tell his story to his sons?
- What does André's history mean to Peter and George?
- Are there questions you wish they had asked André but didn't?
- What is Hetty's significance to André, Peter and George?
- Are there questions you were afraid to ask your own parents about their past?
- Are there incidents in your own life that you would not share with your children?

The Jewish Code was a system of laws that deprived Jews of their civil and property rights.



Peter Steiner is born.

Steiner family moves to Bratislava, Slovakia to escape the Nazi invasion of Brno.

1936

1937

1938

1939

1940

Germans occupy north Czechoslovakia.

Germans occupy Prague. Slovakia is divided from Czechoslovakia and becomes a puppet state of the Nazi regime.

Hitler meets with Slovak leadership in Salzburg, leading to the creation of **The Jewish Code**.

Germany invades Poland.

Slovak government creates the UZ or Jewish Council.

The Ustredz Zidovsky (or UZ) was the sole governing body of Slovak Jewry, created by the Slovak state to enforce the Jewish Code. All other Jewish organizaions were banned.

Topics for Discussion - Discrimination and Survival

- Have you ever been a witness to a situation of discrimination? What did you do about it? What did the people around you do?
- Have you ever experienced persecution because of who you are?
- Does André deserve gratitude from the Jews he saved despite the fact that they survived by being imprisoned in work camps?
- Why do you think survivors in the film did not thank André?



The Working Group was comprised of dissident members of the UZ who sought an end to Jewish deportation and oppression through secret bribes.



André secretly bribes German and Slovak officials, such as **Julius Pecuch**, to prevent deportations. Deportations end for 6 weeks then resume sporadically as secret negotiations continue.

André joins The Working Group.

1941

1942

1943

The Jewish Code goes into effect.



Soviets defeat Germans at Stalingrad.

Allies bomb German cities.

52,000 Slovak Jews are deported to Poland.

Nazis begin implementation of the "Final Solution" to annihilate European Jewry.



To establish Sered, Novaky and Vyhne, three Slovak work camps that kept Jews alive and safe from deportation, André' bribed Julius Pecuch, the director of Slovakia's labor camps.

Topics for Discussion - Rescue and Forgiveness



- Why do you think André remained silent after the war?
- Was André a hero or collaborator?
- Was the Working Group collaborating too closely with the Nazis?
- Should André forgive Pecuch?
- How would you confront Pecuch if you were André?
- How do the circumstances of war affect moral decisions?



1944

The Steiners flee with the Janovics to the **Tatras Mountains**. The Kucarek family discovers them hiding in a hut and brings them to their village of Cierny Balog.

*The Steiners fled to the **Tatras Mountains** after the Slovak uprising. This was the last place André saw his parents.*

André and Hetty operate an orphanage for Jewish refugees at Tatras Lomnica.

The Steiners emigrate to Cuba. George Steiner is born.

The family emigrates to the US. André and Hetty divorce.

1948-58

Germans defeat Slovak National Uprising and renew full-scale deportation.

The Working Group is disbanded and two of its members, Fleischman and Weissmandel, are deported.

Weissmandel escapes on the way to Poland. Fleischman is murdered by the Nazis.

Allies invade Normandy.

Soviets liberate Eastern Czechoslovakia.

Soviets and Allies invade Germany. Hitler commits suicide.

V-E Day.

Andre represented the Working Group in the direct negotiation of bribes to German and Slovak officials in an unsuccessful attempt to stop all deportations.



Topics for Discussion - Rescue and Obligation



- What motivated people like the Kucareks to rescue the Steiner family?
- What obligation did André and Hetty have to the non-Jews who risked their own lives to rescue them?
- What can Peter and George do with their new connection to history?
- If André Steiner were here what would you ask him?
- Do you think survivors are obliged to tell their stories so that future generations understand the Holocaust?



FILM CREDITS

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