

Portraits of survival

"There's a deep hurt somewhere when you've been a refugee – when your country kicks you out and wants to kill you." Fred Jamner, local Holocaust survivor



KAREN TELLEEN-LAWTON

Nazi Germany was the high point of my military career." His interest in preserving knowledge led him to found ABC-CLIO with his wife Inge in 1960. The Santa Barbara publishing company specializes in historical bibliography.

Erika Kahn's photo reveals her as an artist, sitting beside her easel on a hilltop overlooking Santa Barbara. Her content smile belies the story she recounts in the exhibit. "We were even afraid to talk in our own homes – the walls had ears," she says. "On November 9, 1938, Kristallnacht, on my way to school I passed the grand synagogue on Fasanen Street. It was in flames. In my mind I can still hear the echoes of these shrill voices of the mob yelling curses." She fled to her school but found it a burning ruin; no fire fighters or police came to help. Her grandparents, their brothers, and their families perished in Auschwitz.

Nevertheless, six grandchildren later she is sure she has been blessed. "What a good

life it turned out to be, how very fortunate," says Kahn. "I can hardly believe my good luck."

Maria Segal's portrait shows her standing leisurely beside a sandstone cliff on the beach. She also counts her six grandchildren as treasures, having lost her parents and all six siblings when the Nazi scourge reached Poland. Her adolescence was a series of harrowing escapes, including being smuggled out of a Warsaw ghetto, hiding in fields and attics, and being disguised by Polish doctors as a diseased person with yellow powder.

The exhibit's designers, Leib Kopman, Carla Rose Shapiro, and W. David Winitzky, gave each survivor a personal dignity by presenting the horrific memoirs simply, as if they

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FOUND THIS POIGNANT quote tucked away on Chapala Street, in the "Portraits of Survival: Life Journeys During the Holocaust and Beyond" exhibit at the Jewish Federation. "Portraits" is described as "An interactive display of contemporary portraits, narratives and archival material" recounting Santa Barbara survivors and refugees before, during and after the Holocaust. I was introduced to the exhibit by my friend Josie Levy Martin, a featured survivor and author of a memoir, *Never Tell Your Name*.

The room-sized artwork has such intimate appeal that I was drawn in as if to a wall of family photos. The silver-framed storyboards display a large recent photo of each local Holocaust survivor. The hinged frames swing open to reveal a mini-autobiography surrounded by stark black and white photos covering war-torn childhoods superseded by more tranquil adulthoods.

Eric Boehm's modern day portrait reveals a confident man with a ring of white hair holding the family menorah he rescued from the ruins of his parents' house in northern Bavaria. Reaching America in 1934 at age sixteen was the defining experience of his life; the point at which he shut Germany out of his life. When he became an officer in the U.S. Air Force, his language skills and education landed him an assignment as an interrogation officer. "I was the interpreting officer at the arrest of German Field Marshall Keitel. He was sentenced to death and hanged. Being personally involved in the capitulation of

IF YOU GO

- ▶ Tours by arrangement at the Jewish Federation of Greater Santa Barbara, 524 Chapala Street, (805) 957-1115.
- ▶ Resources in the Federation's library:
 - Historical books, journals, tapes, and teaching materials
 - DVDs of full-length interviews made by UCSB Film Studies students
 - Documentaries for circulation or purchase
- ▶ Survivors stories online: www.jewish-santabarbara.org/section.html?id=1294

Speaking of the 'net, if you haven't yet found the link for last week's Backyard Santa Barbara column on Project Budburst, here it is: www.BudBurst.org.

sometimes lost their own lives to harbor them. The project changed the lives of the survivors as well: Segal and Kahn are currently in Poland with the exhibit's director, Dr. Elizabeth Wolfson, presenting at the 2007 Legacy of the Holocaust Conference in Krakow. Segal will visit Wanda Hadrysiak, who helped her survive.

Segal shares her experiences, "in hopes that my words encourage tolerance and help prevent another Holocaust from ever happening." Reading the stories of survivors who

settled in beachside Santa Barbara, it occurs to me that intolerance and injustice are like the tar on our beaches. No matter how much we take care to avoid it, we find ourselves still having to scrub it off our own feet.

Karen Telleen-Lawton's Tuesday column is a mélange of local people, nature, events, and observations transporting the reader around the world and back to Santa Barbara. She is a local writer and the author of Canyon Voices – the Nature of Rattlesnake Canyon.

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were recounting birthday parties and holiday travels. Shana Aires, the Foundation's Outreach and Administrative Assistant for Portraits, says one measure of the gallery's impact is how many visitors make comments like, "Oh, I know her, she's my neighbor! I didn't even know..."

I was enchanted by the poignant and beautiful lives presented: those who were saved and those who risked and