

Zvi Rosenvein

## How are We Doing with the Second Generation?

More than seven years ago, I wrote an article under the heading "*The Departing Generation*" (*Der Allgemeiner Journal*<sup>1</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1984), where I touch on the sad fact that our generation - the generation which lived through the Holocaust - is departing.

Needless to say, nowadays - more than seven years later - this fact is [even] more obvious. Lately, we hear, from all directions, of Jews from the *Surviving Remnant* who are leaving us.

Our much-esteemed Editor-in-Chief, Gershon Jacobson, also wrote about this theme lately in the leading article [entitled] *We are Going to Funerals*. Also, Judith Miller, the well-known writer for the New York Times, has written lately that time is working in favour of the Germans and their helpers because, according to Chancellor Helmut Kohl, it is already high time to "draw a line of peace" over the past, and the Germans must finally cast away their feelings of guilt for having exterminated the Jewish people in Europe.

Judith Miller stresses the fact that, as the *Surviving Remnant* is dying off, this helps the Germans to make the world forget about the great destruction, because the *Surviving Remnant* Jews are the those who do not allow the world to forget about the German massacres.

Therefore, it is of great importance for us, the Jewish Holocaust survivors who are still alive, to know what the second and third generations of the *Surviving Remnant* Jews look like. Can we expect them to continue the pressure of not letting the world forget the great destruction?

A great change is sure to take place, as we, the departing generation, still had the honour to live and work together with the Jewish people of many millions in Poland and other Eastern European countries. We had the honour to become imbued with the creative, effervescent and tempestuous Jewish life in Poland. We had the great honour to inhale the air, to absorb the aroma and the atmosphere of the great spirits and minds, which the life of the Jewish masses in Poland produced.

Inside us sings the immortal tune of the bygone, rich life of the Jewish people - the folklore, the music, the Yiddish and Hebrew languages, the rich literature in Yiddish and Hebrew. Inside us sings the tune of a thousand years of creative Jewish life.

We were with our people in its most tragic and horrific days and nights of our people's undoing. We trod the path of thorns - the pain, torments, tortures, insults and humiliations - along with them. We saw the fires of the burning synagogues and study-halls. We saw the burning bodies of women and children. The desperate cries for help of our parents still ring in our ears, "You must not forget, and [you must] not forgive."

---

<sup>1</sup> [TN: *Yid.*, "*The General Journal*"; Yiddish-language newspaper based in New York City.]

Much has changed since those days and nights of destruction. An entire Jewish people has been annihilated. Whole towns and shtetls were burned down with everything and everybody - an entire civilisation of a thousand years of Jewish life and creation, with a language, a culture and a folklore. What we have today are groups of Jews instead of the life of a people, and sects instead of a nation.

The deceased author H. Leivick has left behind a book of poetry entitled "*I Was Not in Treblinka*", in which he greatly endeavours to put himself in the world of the thoughts of the eradicated Jewish people. However, he admits this is impossible for him, for those, who were not in Treblinka, will never be able to comprehend what occurred there.

In any case, we cannot expect our children, the second or third generation, to understand and react to the Holocaust as we understood and reacted to it - although there are a few special individuals who have an interest in discovering what happened there.

A book [entitled] "*Mice*" ("*Maus*") was recently published, which made a big impression. The author, Edith [sic Art] Spiegelman, is the son of Polish Jews, who lived through the whole German hell and survived.

This book, in two volumes, is written in an original, cartoonish manner (comics). The Germans are represented as cats, the Jews as mice and the Poles as pigs. Until he wrote the book, it took the author many years to obtain from his father, Wlodek Spiegelman, all the details about his life in the ghettos and camps. The relationship between father and son had always been stressed.

An older brother of the author perished in Auschwitz, and this left a permanent grief at home. His mother, who had also lived through all the ordeals and German hells and survived, afterwards, already living in America, committed suicide. The book was awarded the very prestigious Pulitzer Prize.

This is a solitary case. Perhaps there are cases of sons and daughters of *Surviving Remnant* Jews, who have done research and written about the lives of their parents. Sadly, I am not aware of any.

I know that there are large groups of sons and daughters of Jewish Holocaust survivors, who are active in religious circles, but I would have liked to see them in the leadership of the national Jewish organisations. It is already high time for the inflow of young Jewish blood into the veins of Jewish life in America.

Friday, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1992