

# The aftermath: How the Holocaust affected survivors

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*Special to the Pendulum*

The physical aspects of the Holocaust may have ended in 1945, but its mental effects continue to linger in the lives of many survivors. The vulnerabilities of survivors show through in the behaviors and emotions of the survivors in the post-Holocaust era.

After liberation, many survivors found themselves marrying one another, according to Aaron Hass, author of "The Aftermath." One survivor mentioned in the book said, "there was at least one wedding a day at Bergen-Belsen."

Many survivors who lost spouses and children married survivors to fill the voids. They paired together out of loneliness. And the opportunity was there in or near displaced persons camps.

Some organizations held dances and parties just to expedite these pairings. Courtships moved quickly into marriage and families. Life moved forward once again.

Survivors found comfort in one another because they could understand the loss and trauma. A person not involved in the Holocaust couldn't possibly fathom the experience.

For many survivors, the Holocaust did



not end when the Americans liberated the camps. The fear lingers even 50 years later.

One survivor residing in Israel was found crouched in the corner of her living room one morning repeating the words, "Please don't gas me, please," after Iraq bombed Tel Aviv during the Gulf War.

The fear passes through generations, leaving a painful scar on children and grandchildren.

Second generation survivors experi-

ence their parents fear in the way they are raised. Parents are often conservative with things like food rations, and most keep all doors and windows locked at all times.

Elon professor Yoram Lubling relates stories of this nature to his Philosophy of the Holocaust class. His parents, both Holocaust survivors, spend 30 minutes checking windows and doors before retiring for the evening.

In another instance, Lubling parents panicked when they heard a rustling in their

kitchen in the middle of the night. That noise turned out to be Lubling fixing a late night snack. They bear this much fear 53 years after the Holocaust.

In the book, "Children of the Holocaust," author Helen Epstein relates the story of one second generation survivor who's greatly affected by the Holocaust: "I wasn't able to trust anybody. It affected my relationships with people. I created walls... I didn't touch other people and I didn't let them get close to me."

There's another side to this coin, however. Some survivors wear masks to hide their fear. Hass explains, "survivors wanted to prove to others that they were not permanently contaminated by the Holocaust."

Another child of the Holocaust interviewed by Epstein said the following about Holocaust survivor families: "I have an emotional reaction when people try to make it (the Holocaust) sensational. When they say that survivors or their children are disturbed. I don't think I'm disturbed at all."

The Holocaust is not simply another act of genocide in the world. It is a living fear in the lives of survivors that grows with each generation. Those bearing the scars of hatred need more than compassion and empathy. They need to be understood because understanding is the only way to ease the pain.

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