

1944. He quickly explains that his group was spared the lethal selection process at the Birkenau rail platform because the SS officers probably assumed that, coming from a labor camp, there were no children in the transport.

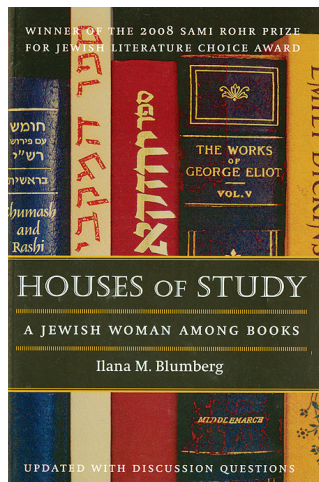
Buergenthal considers himself lucky because at every stage of his journey he found people who tried to protect him. In the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin, he befriended a Norwegian inmate named Odd Nansen, the subsequent founder of UNICEF. And upon liberation, a Polish division of the Soviet army adopted Tommy as their mascot and took him back to Poland, beginning the process by which he found his mother, who also survived.

After the war, he and his mother settled in his mother's former hometown of Göttingen, Germany. There Buergenthal recalls confronting the full force of his feelings: "As I contemplated scenes of happy Germans enjoying their lives as if nothing had happened in the recent past, I longed to have a machine gun mounted on the balcony so I could do to them what they had done to my family," he recalls. "It took me a long time to get over these sentiments and to recognize

that such indiscriminate acts of vengeance would not bring my father or grandparents back to life." Buergenthal's revealing self-portrait provides insight into a career devoted to the international defense of human rights.

### Houses of Study: a Jewish Woman Among Books

by Ilana M. Blumberg  
(University of Nebraska Press, 181 pp., paperback \$14.95)



Winner of a Sami Rohr Choice Award, Ilana Blumberg's memoir explores the tensions, struggles, and dreams of a young Jewish woman trying to find her place within Judaism. Blumberg's questions are particularly acute because

they arise from an exceptional Jewish background. Both of her parents were educated in Jewish day schools and her father taught her to be a Torah reader.

Her grandfather, Harry Blumberg, was the author of the classic Hebrew textbook *Ivrit Hayah, Modern Hebrew*. Though members of a Conservative congregation, her parents chose an Orthodox Jewish day school, the only day school in their community, for her to continue her Jewish studies through high school. Upon graduation, she enrolled for a year's study at a woman's seminary in Israel. There, she quickly discovered, the curriculum for men and boys at the *yeshiva* differed from the women's studies at the seminary: the young men studied texts, while the program for young women seemed at best an afterthought.

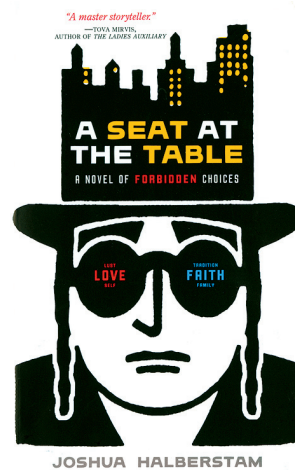
Though she remained religiously

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observant in college, she found that as a woman, her full participation in the Orthodox world was often blocked. At the same time, she was not willing to relinquish the joys of a religious life with other Hebrew-literate Jews. "My entire life I had been looking for a lover in Hebrew," she writes. "This would be the way we would recognize each other." Her story, though uniquely her own, mirrors the existential situation of many educated Jewish women in the 1980s and 90s confronting a social structure not yet ready to receive them as equals. The four autobiographical essays in this volume describe her love for texts, both Jewish and secular, and the two parallel worlds of her intellectual life. Blumberg went on to complete her doctorate in English literature and is currently a professor of English literature and Jewish studies at Michigan State University. She participates in a small *minyan* in her academic community.

### A Seat at the Table: A Novel of Forbidden Choices

by Joshua Halberstam  
(Sourcebooks, 296 pp., paperback \$14.99)



Joshua Halberstam explains the genesis of this novel in his Acknowledgments: "Rummaging in the closet of my childhood home in Boro Park, I came upon a box filled with typewritten Chassidic stories. These were the tales my father wrote and read on the Yiddish radio station WEVD back in the 1950s and 1960s." Savoring the insights in these tales,

Halberstam set them into a novel about Chassidic families in Boro Park.

Elisha, the seventeen-year-old son and grandson of Chassidic rebbes, longs to learn about the world outside of their community. When he declares his intention to enroll in City College, while promising to keep up with his yeshiva studies, his family is doubtful. Soon Elisha himself realizes that his attempt

*continued on page 12*

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