

happened to them during the war. For example, having been helpless does not mean that one is a helpless person; having witnessed or experienced evil does not mean that the world as a whole is evil; having been betrayed does not mean that betrayal is an overriding human behavior; having been victimized does not necessarily mean that one has to live one's life in constant readiness for its reenactment; having been treated as dispensable does not mean that one is worthless; and taking the painful risk of bearing witness does not mean that the world will listen, learn, change, or become a better place.

Recovery also involves a continuous and consistent unraveling and transcending of an individual's or a family's particular adaptational style, moving instead in the direction of liberation and self-actualization. Many survivors and their offspring found participating in groups helpful because they could share with others concerns and feelings that would be very difficult to confront alone. Children of survivors have also benefitted from researching the factual events of

their parents' experiences, especially if their parents didn't speak about the Holocaust or passed on only selective, fragmented accounts.

Is this pathway to recovery you describe unique to Holocaust survivor families?

No. This pathway has been found to be beneficial by survivors and children of survivors of other massive traumata, such as the genocide of the Armenians; the genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, and Bosnia; and the ongoing genocidal processes in the Sudan. This is true also for veterans of wars and children of perpetrators.

In all these situations we've found that the conspiracy of silence after trauma is not only a new traumatic factor but often determines whether the survivors and subsequent generations will succeed or fail in the immense task of reestablishing themselves as equal, well members of society with dignity, despite their traumatic history. Of crucial importance is the empathetic reception of their communities and societies after trauma and

tragedy. Society needs to commit to providing measures of acknowledgement, apology, and reparative justice (including compensation, restitution and rehabilitation, commemoration and education), so the trauma history becomes a shared rather than a stigmatizing history. The mourning, too, needs to be shared by all, rather than suffered alone by the survivors. And individual nations as well as the international community have to create mechanisms for monitoring, conflict resolution, and intervention to prevent future cycles of traumatization.

How can we better understand and relate to survivors of trauma and their families?

Listen to them, despite your fear of the terrible things you might hear. To forsake this opportunity is not only to perpetuate the conspiracy of silence and thereby re-victimize the survivors, but to deprive yourself of historic memory that connects you with your own and your people's history, and allows you to learn from it. Take the time. You will be forever enriched and grateful for it. □

Revelation

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daughter, a gifted woman now in her eighties. Who paints in oils now, small still lifes. Who got one really good role. I sing her that role. I sing her...her moment in theater. I sing her...singing..."

Did your mother ever see this play?

She saw the video.

And how did she react?

I think she was hurt at first, and on one occasion accused me of betraying her. But she was also very impressed with the play, and eager to correct minor inaccuracies in the script. She also was somewhat wistful, pointing out that the acting career to which she had aspired was being realized through her daughter.

Why did you choose to reveal the secrets your parents had kept hidden?

I do not believe that one can totally conceal Jewish identity or an experience as profound as being persecuted for being a Jew. These things are transmitted some-

how from a loving parent to a child, whether through language or in other more subtle ways: a look, a pregnant moment of silence, a way of listening to the news, singing or moving. Nor do I believe that my parents ever truly wanted to "bury their pasts." That would be like burying the self, denying the heart and soul. On some deep level they both wished to tell, and were signaling this wish in many ways. By my going through the experience of suppression and revelation with them, our bond became stronger, and I am now able to give voice to feelings and insights they have been unable to express. I believe on some level that they were, and are, glad I have done so.

In that summer of 1969, the revelation of my parents' secret past made me realize that I would not have an ordinary life. I believe, with hindsight, it offered me the possibility to do and be more than I may have once thought possible. In my teens I assumed that my life would unfold according to established forms and norms: With my gift for music I would follow a typical academic path of

teaching, scholarship, and the occasional recital. Then, suddenly, the forms and norms no longer applied, for my own life was not what it had appeared to be. I acquired a new, rather ironic, perception of reality: The theater came to represent what was "real," while actual day-to-day life became absurd, illusory, or false. Time has tempered all this, but the adventure of interrelating art and life goes on. I've been reinventing myself every year or two, and then taking yet another leap.

They say that children of survivors are a very ambitious lot.

Yes, I've heard that, and I think you, as a son of survivors, probably feel and experience that too.

Yes. Life has an added sense of preciousness when you realize how quickly your entire world can slip away. And you appreciate that your life has been given to you to make a difference.

That's right. When I discovered my parents' true identities, one of the first thoughts I had was, *My God, it's really quite amazing that I even exist at all!* □