

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATORS • A ROTHMAN FOUNDATION PUBLICATION

PRISM

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY • AZRIELI GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JEWISH EDUCATION AND ADMINISTRATION



SPRING 2016
VOLUME 8
ISSN 1949-2707

Henia Szenberg was a 5-year-old preschool student in Bedzin, Poland, whose growth and development were lovingly chronicled in a journal kept by her teacher, Ora Glinka. Researchers Galia Shenberg and Miriam Yeshaya, the latter Glinka's daughter, note that Glinka's journal "is among the last traces" of Henia and the other Jewish children from this Hebrew Zionist pre-school and serves as a "vivid memorial" to those who were murdered in the Holocaust. Layer this essay with the photos curated by Ann Weiss (pp. 26–40), also artifacts from Bedzin.

Galia Shenberg and Miriam Yeshaya

A Portrait of a Student in a Hebrew Preschool in Bedzin, Poland

In 1931, after graduating from Warsaw's Teaching College, the young Ora (Yora) Glinka opened a WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organization) Hebrew preschool in Bedzin, Poland. During this year, she kept a journal in which she wrote a detailed account of the daily routine of the preschool children and described each child's individual physical and mental development. In describing her first year as a preschool teacher, she did not mean to write artistic prose but rather a factual account of the everyday activities in the school, with the objective of documenting the growth of each child and of herself as a teacher. Being human, she could not avoid augmenting facts with her feelings, reflections, and evaluations, both on the children's behavior and character and on the success of the educational process.

When reading the journal, one can picture daily life in Hebrew Zionist preschools everywhere. The routine activities consisted of free and guided playtime, storytelling and sing-a-longs in Hebrew, gymnastics, yard games, field trips, celebration of Jewish holidays and birthdays, and collection of money for the KKL (*Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael*—the Jewish National Fund). Also, the teacher measured the children's height and weight several times during the school year. Ora Glinka's journal, which reflects the young educator's love for her students as well as her enthusiasm for teaching them Hebrew language and culture using various innovative pedagogical methods, is a vivid memorial to the Jewish children of Bedzin who never grew up to become adults: Most were murdered in the Holocaust. The journal is the last, if not the only, testimony of their childhood, which was to be shattered in 1939 with the outbreak of the war. Glinka's moving journal is among the last

traces and perhaps the only artifact of those young Jewish children left behind. [In fact, this teacher's journal is augmented by photos of children from this same community, which were carried by their parents, friends, even teachers, to Auschwitz-Birkenau. See pp. 26–40—Ed.]

By analyzing the journal, which Glinka carried with her when she immigrated to Palestine in the late 1930s to pursue her career as an educator, and which was later kept by her daughter, Miriam Yeshaya, an author of this essay, one not only can reconstruct aspects of Jewish preschool education that flourished in pre-war Bedzin but also can paint a portrait of the young Jewish children in this school. We have chosen to focus on one of these children, a 4- and then 5-year-old girl named Henia Szenberg, who could not have imagined at that time what the future held in store for her.

WRITTEN LIFE

In her book *Written Lives* (2011), Nitza Ben Dov argues that the difference between experiencing life and writing about it is that the life one lives has only one version, while the life about which one writes has many, each focusing on a different subject or period and told from a different point of view. We can apply Ben Dov's insight to painting portraits. A person, the human being, is but one; nevertheless, this certain person can inspire many portraits: written, painted, drawn, or photographed. In this essay, we try to portray one year in a child's life, which is but a glimpse into a young girl's whole portrait.

In the same book, Ben Dov emphasizes the importance of an author's home in his writings, positing that an author cannot free himself from his childhood home. This is cer-

tainly true, for example, of S. Y. Agnon, whose hometown of Buczacz was totally destroyed in the Holocaust:

The home is an important theme in every autobiography. Therefore, Agnon's house in Talpiot, and the agonizing process of its building . . . is portrayed in his story "The Sign." His home and the nearby synagogue in Jerusalem were compared to his childhood home in his hometown, Buczacz. (p. 27; authors' translation)

The same might be said of the author of a journal. In Glinka's writings, she referred to her preschool as a true home for the children, a place where they felt love and were loved, where nobody cried when left by his or her parent, where there was no need to monitor the children every minute, where they could be left to play freely. After two months, she noted, at the end of the day, many children did not want to go back to their real homes from school: Their parents had to plead with them to come. Parents understood and also saw the school as a home for their children. Jewish holidays and each child's birthday were celebrated at school, and the parents helped with the celebrations, taking part in them enthusiastically, and accompanied their children on field trips.

One of the parents was Rachel Szenberg, Henia's mother. She took an active part in her daughter's life at school and in the family home. We believe that she taught Henia reading and writing, since Glinka mentions that the child knew how to write and read not only her own name but also the names of the other children. From the journal, we learn a little about the mother, but we learn more about the child. So who was Henia at the age of five?

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF 5-YEAR-OLD HENIA SZENBERG

Henia was born on March 14, 1926, the same day of the year, coincidentally, on which Glinka was born. On that date in 1931, Henia and her teacher celebrated their mutual birthday in their new school by lighting candles, singing with all the other children, dancing, and enjoying chocolate and cookies brought by Henia's mother. For both birthday celebrants, the children played music on their orchestra's instruments, which included cymbals, triangles, and tambourines, and then the children gave Henia a present they had prepared for her—an embroidered picture (Glinka does not specify the picture's theme). Glinka's present was a box containing a tablespoon, a teaspoon, a fork, and a knife bought by the parents. Celebrating children's birthdays was one of the routine activities in preschools then as now, but celebrating both a child's and a teacher's birthday was quite special, and Glinka notes that it took all day rather than the usual half-day.

At the beginning of the journal, Glinka wrote about registration day and the first day of school (September 17,

1931), mentioning Henia specifically: [Fig. 1]

All the mothers left their children in school, but Henia's mother stayed, because I had told the children that in school they have to eat everything, [and] therefore she was afraid, because she was not a great eater. After an hour she told her mother she could go and come [back] after school because nobody made her do a thing she was not willing to do.

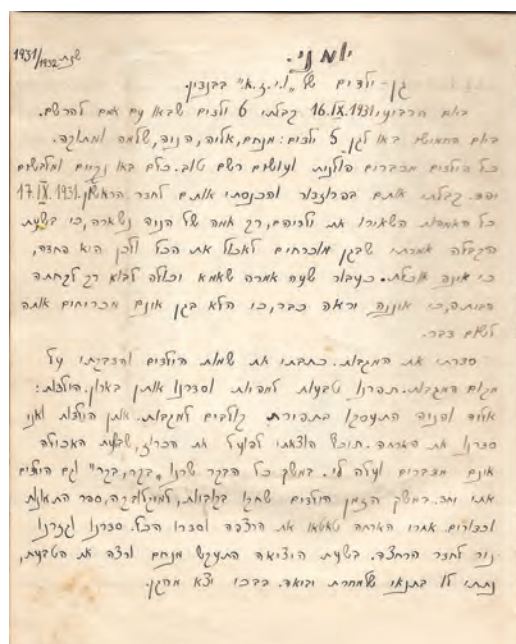


FIG. 1. The first page of Ora's journal.



FIG. 2. The sixth page of the journal, with Henia's photo at the age of 4.

Immediately after her first-day notes, she devoted a special page to the portrayal of each child, to which she attached a photo. The first child was Metuka, the second was Eliya, and the third was Henia. The special page devoted to Henia consists of a current photo centered at the top of the page and a written text [Fig. 2]. On the left-hand side of the photo, she wrote, "Born 14. III. 1931." This is a mistake: Henia was born in 1926. On the right-hand side, she wrote a short physical description of Henia: "Short dark-blond hair, taller than the average for her age. Also, she weighs more than is necessary for her age." Under the photo, she wrote the name Henia Szenberg and added five full lines with a detailed depiction of Henia's emotional and cognitive condition. We think that this depiction was begun after Glinka interviewed her and her mother before the beginning of school, and then completed a few days after school began:

A quiet girl. Does not eat. Knows the colors very well. Well developed. Is clever. Likes to work. Is disciplined. Needs encouragement, otherwise she is sad. Feels good when she is by herself, but when someone is coming to pick her up from school she clings to him. Very attached to her family. Very serious, more than appropriate for her age. Conveys her feelings aloud: Repeats that [she] loves me.

Glinka's first language was Polish; her written Hebrew was not as rich and versatile as the Hebrew of native speakers. Hence, a few of the adjectives are not accurate, and it is sometimes difficult to understand what she actually meant. For example, when Glinka writes "She needs encouragement, because otherwise she is sad," it sounds strange, because the adjective "sad" has a meaning that pertains to emotions and not behavior; yet the teacher does not console the child or humor her, as one would a sad child, but rather encourages her to change her behavior and try to be more independent. Later in her notes, Glinka tried to be more accurate with her adjectives and noted that Henia was too serious for her age.

Then, with a different pen, which makes us think it is from a later date, she writes more about Henia's cognitive and emotional development:

Got used to the school and its atmosphere. Likes this atmosphere. Very clean and all her projects are also clean and neatly organized. Very emotional, but the situation has improved. Has many talents. Already knows reading and writing. Influenced both by her home and by me.

In the beginning of the journal, Glinka mentions Henia often, because she was one of the first six children

to register for this new school; at the end of the year, there were 24 students, a tribute to Glinka's success. During the first three months, Henia was the *toranit*, the child in the class who helped to prepare lunch and then cleaned the room and the yard, almost every day. She was not talkative, but very practical and responsible. She helped the teacher, but she was not her pet. We infer this because when Glinka let the children choose their own classroom representatives, they chose Henia again and again, which would not usually happen with someone perceived to be a teacher's pet. Even if she was not chosen, she helped the others. For instance, on Day 19 (October 13, 1931), she helped clean the yard, as she did on Day 20, while on Day 21, she was chosen to be *toranit*, and on Day 22 she helped paint a shelf. On Day 23 (October 18), she helped class representatives Hanna and Metuka.

Another example that teaches us about Henia's popularity with her peers is an incident that happened on Day 61 (December 2), when Glinka let one of the boys conduct the orchestra and he was laughed at by the other children. Then she let Henia do so with two other girls, and it went smoothly: "I called Shlomo to conduct, but he began to cry, because children laughed at him. Then Henia conducted nicely with Metuka and Elia." Indeed, Henia excelled in musical activities: She played the cymbals, she sang solos, and when a piano was brought to the school, on Day 104 (March 2, 1932), she played it beautifully:

After we ate, the children painted for a while, and then we prepared for the orchestra. . . . It went wonderfully. . . . A remark: Henia played the song "Big Clock" on the piano, and I sang twice.

Although Henia was not her pet, Glinka was very attentive to her. We can see this, for example, in the attendance lists. When Henia was absent from school, Glinka wrote her name first or second in the list, which usually contained a number of names. Also, Glinka often mentioned Henia's gift for managing a game, a dance, or a sing-along, especially during the Hanukah celebration and at Purim.

Soon Henia began to show signs of what we think might be considered perfectionism. Of the Hanukah celebration, which included an audience of attentive parents, Glinka wrote:

And then Henia conducted. She conducted very nicely and the children played nicely. . . . The orchestra was very good. . . . We danced in a circle. . . . The first one who entered it was Henia, who sang "*Sevivon*" (Dreidel) . . . Because Henia's [Hanukah] present fell down while [she was] walking, she began to cry. Immediately she got it back.



FIG. 3. The extended Szenberg family in Bedzin, 1942. Third from left on top is Henia; next to her on the right is her mother, Rachel. Her father, Joseph, is fourth from right on top.

Henia participated successfully in the celebration, but when one minor, single thing did not go well, she cried. However, there is no mention of her as a crybaby beyond this case, and thus we think it implies that she held high standards for her conduct in front of the parents and the other children.

HENIA'S FATE

Because the journal was written by the teacher, we do not know what Henia felt about the school and teacher. We looked for other sources, but found little. In *Pinkes Bendin: A Memorial to the Jewish Community of Bendin (Poland)* (Stein, 1959), the Hebrew preschool is mentioned briefly (p. 2740), but there is nothing about Henia or the other members of her immediate family. We do not know what elementary school she attended. When we visited Bedzin in 2013, we found out that she had attended the Furstenberg Yavne Gymnasium, a Hebrew-Polish bilingual school. From the late Hellen Stone, her cousin who passed away in 2012, we know that Henia was a very good student and excelled in math. Beyond that, we know nothing of the remainder of her life. Henia, along with her mother, father, and younger sister, was deported in 1943 to the lo-

cal ghetto, where she was photographed with her extended family at age 16 [Fig. 3].

We cannot be sure of Henia's ultimate fate. According to the oral testimony of her cousin Hellen, sometime in 1943 Henia was shot dead by the Gestapo in Bedzin for breaking curfew. However, in Yad Vashem, a page of testimony written by Freida Szenberg, the second wife of Henia's father, Joseph, notes that she was murdered in Auschwitz. We do know that her mother and her younger sister, Miriam, were deported to Auschwitz, from which neither returned.

Henia's father, Joseph, had been deported earlier to the Blechhammer camp near Auschwitz and subsequently survived the Death March from Auschwitz to Buchenwald. After the war, he returned to Bedzin, but nobody was waiting for him. In 1949, he married a woman named Freida Roth in Krakow and they immigrated to Israel. His only son, Isaac, was born in Israel in 1950 and is the husband of Galia, one of the authors of this essay. Isaac did not know he had half-sisters until he was in his early twenties: neither his father nor his mother had ever spoken to him about them, and there is no written or oral testimony in which Joseph mentions his daughters.

However, after Joseph moved to Israel in 1950, he and his second wife searched for and found Glinka and her husband and became very good friends with them. Isaac remembers that although Glinka lived in Raanana, which at that time was considered very far from Tel Aviv because public transportation was not frequent and there was no direct line, Joseph and his wife visited Glinka and her husband quite often. This post-war friendship hints at an appreciative and warm relationship between Henia's father and her pre-school teacher from pre-war Bedzin.

CONCLUSION

Henia's portrait is far from complete. More is unknown than is known, and perhaps the puzzle of who she actually was and who she grew to become will never be solved. However, we are thankful for the discovery of the journal, which helped us search out more information and remind us of the child she was.

We began to look for Joseph Szenberg's former family, who perished in the Holocaust, only after his second wife, Freida, passed away in 2003. Why did we not look for that information earlier? We don't know. Perhaps we did not want to offend Freida or, because we were younger, we had at that time more pressing interests, such as establishing our own families and careers. Only in the last five years, as our grown children have begun to ask questions we cannot answer, have we begun to search for more information about this family.

This essay is but a preliminary attempt to create what Pnina Rosenberg (2011) describes as a portrait of and a dialogue with and between our known and unknown family members murdered in the Holocaust. The preschool journal let us view Henia at the ages of 4 and 5 and identify fascinating similarities between her and her younger brother, Isaac, who is 24 years her junior. Very much like Henia, he was a quiet child, serious, intelligent, and practical. Like her, he played the piano as a child: His rendition of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" was the main attraction at his bar mitzva. He also was close to his parents and loved by his peers, and until today he is a perfectionist.

What would have become of Henia had she survived? There is only a speculative answer to this haunting question, but knowing her father and her brother, we believe that her murder, like those of all the others murdered in the Holocaust, left the world bereft.

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