

**Teacher's
Resource Guide**
Ray Newton, Christine
Penner, and Jessica Penner

My Brother's Voice

**How a Young Hungarian Boy
Survived the Holocaust:
A True Story**

**Stephen Nasser
with Sherry Rosenthal**

A Story Kept Secret Over Fifty Years

About the Authors

Ray Newton is a professor-administrator emeritus of mass communication. He retired in 2000 from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona. He has worked for newspapers, magazines, radio, and television and at one time was the national coordinator and director of *Reader's Digest* Writing Workshops.

Christine Penner will graduate as a history education major from Northern Arizona University. A member of the Honors College and Golden Key Honor Society, she hopes to teach high school world history in the U.S. and abroad. She graduated from high school in the top three percent of her class.

Jessica Penner will graduate with a bachelor's degree in nursing from The University of Arizona, where she has earned first-level honors from the Honors College. She was delighted when one of her essays was chosen in 2005 to be published in the U of A's "A Student's Guide to First-Year Writing."

The Penner sisters are Ray Newton's granddaughters.

Acknowledgements

Ann Raskin is a middle-school English teacher for the Clark County School District in Las Vegas, Nevada. She advocates doggedly that students need to learn about the Holocaust and intolerance and racism in order to combat them. Her insight into student learning processes has benefited Stephen Nasser in developing his school presentations, and the resource guide creators as they explored multiple ways to make the topics meaningful.

Francoise Deighton Nasser, Stephen's patient and supportive wife, provided insight and wisdom into Stephen and his fierce quest to share his story with audiences across the globe. More than anyone, she gently but firmly inspires Stephen to continue sharing his survival story through public presentations and lectures.

Sherry L. Rosenthal, Ph.D., is a professor of English at the College of Southern Nevada. In 2002, she edited the final version of *My Brother's Voice*.

Carolyn Hayes Uber is a talented and dedicated publisher-editor whose constant encouragement has helped Nasser identify even larger and newer audiences with whom he can share his message. Through Stephens Press, she has helped Nasser publicize his book and his availability to speak to thousands of people. It is because of her support that this resource guide became a reality.

Copyright 2009 Stephens Press, LLC
All Rights Reserved

Permission is granted to teachers to reproduce the vocabulary and question worksheets for use in his/her classroom only. No other part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, without permission in writing from the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.

Editor: Jami Carpenter
Designer: Sue Campbell
Publishing Coordinator: Stacey Fott

Print version, ISBN: 1-932173-90-0
ISBN-13: 9781-932173-901

Electronic Version, ISBN-10: 1-935043-06-4
ISBN-13: 978-1-935043-06-5

 **STEPHENS PRESS, LLC**
A Stephens Media Company

Post Office Box 1600
Las Vegas, NV 89125-1600
www.stephenspress.com

Dedication

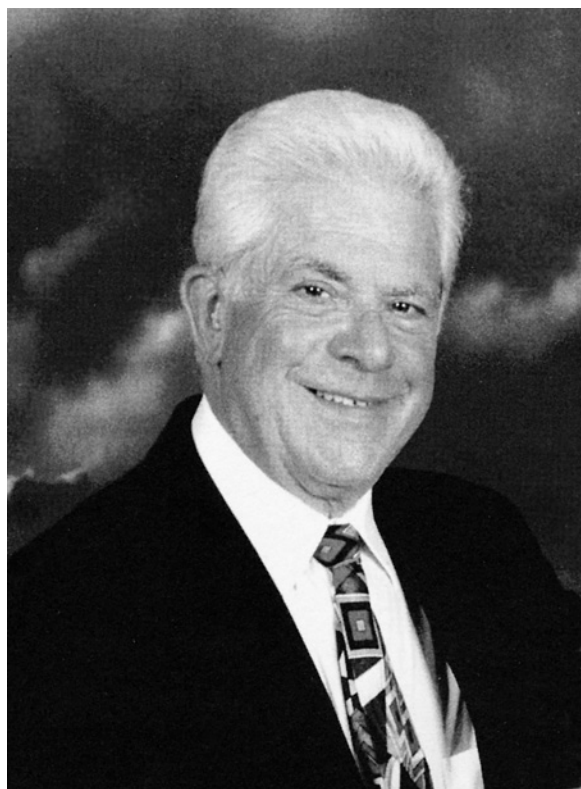
This resource guide is dedicated to my beloved daughter, Michele Kim Nasser Jones. Michele, while still in high school, began the tedious task of editing my rough manuscript. In the years following its publication, she regularly scheduled my book signings and presentations in dozens of Southern California schools.

Michele died unexpectedly on October 20, 2008 at only fifty-one years of age. Michele has joined my brother Andris, to whom

My Brother's Voice was dedicated. They now are both in peace. I vow to keep delivering my message as Michele had always encouraged.

God be with you, Michele.

— Stephen Nasser



Persons, organizations, or institutions interested in inviting award-winning author Stephen Nasser to speak are asked to contact him at any of the following:

Telephone: 702 645-6920

Cell phone: 702 239-9000

Email: mybrothersvoice@aol.com

Because of Mr. Nasser's busy schedule, you are advised to contact him well in advance of the date you wish him to speak.



The artist who used broken metal to fashion the memorial sculpture, "Never Again," posed with his work and Stephen Nasser at Seeshaupt.

Contents

About the Authors	2
Acknowledgments	2
Dedication.....	3
Using This Resource Guide.....	4
Introduction	4
Section One: Language and Vocabulary Exercises	7
Section Two: Discussion Questions	10
Section Three: Map Activities (map on page 14)	13
Section Four: Supplemental Exercises.....	13
Section Five: Classroom Activities.....	13
Additional Resources.....	15
Answer Key.....	16

Using This Resource Guide

As you read (or have your students read) *My Brother's Voice*, you may find it useful to refer to this resource guide. It suggests activities and exercises that will enhance overall understanding and appreciation of the book. We are confident you will find this resource guide to be a valuable tool.

The resource guide is divided into several sections. Each section is intended to assist the reader in exploring further, not just the narrative of Stephen Nasser, but also the larger social, political, and economic consequences of the Holocaust. Historic and geographic information is also included.

Several activities will benefit readers. Among these are language/vocabulary and mapping exercises. Short discussion questions are provided for each chapter as well, and additional exercises are suggested for those wishing to go beyond the book. An answer key for each of these sections is included at the back of this resource guide for teachers or study leaders. It is advised that students not have access to the answer key until after they complete assignments.

Readers are urged to find parallels between the book and situations that exist in the contemporary world — conflicts such as the Armenian genocide, Darfur, Kosovo, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, the Middle East, Malaysia, and so on.

A list of additional resources can also be found for those wanting information beyond those cited.

Introduction

Stephen “Pista” Nasser’s story of survival in Nazi concentration camps, *My Brother’s Voice*, is but one of the more than six million Jews and five million non-Jews who were subjected to the unspeakable cruelty under the regime of Nazi Germany.

Reminiscent of the heart-wrenching Diary of Anne Frank, Stephen Nasser shares a harrowing tale from his perspective as a young Jewish boy during what has come to be known as the Holocaust. But whereas Anne Frank’s story tragically ends, Nasser’s just begins. His is especially compelling, because as a thirteen-year-old boy, he wrote his diary under the very noses of the Nazis in the Muhldorf Concentration Camp.

Now some sixty years later, Nasser travels nationally and internationally sharing his story — always ending with the emphatic admonition, “NEVER AGAIN!”

What was the Holocaust? From the Greek word meaning “sacrifice by fire,” the Holocaust was the state-sponsored systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims — six million were murdered; Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), people with mental and physical disabilities, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi Germany. (www.ushmm.org)

History and Background

In 1919, in response to Germany's bleak economic situation following World War I, unemployed German veterans joined to form the National Socialist German Workers Party, what we now know as the "Nazi Party." Adolf Hitler became the leader of the party in 1921. Under his direction, the Nazis assumed power; and in 1933, Hitler was named Chancellor, effectively terminating German democracy. Under Hitler's dictatorship, basic rights of speech, press, and assembly were taken away and replaced with propaganda and curfews, creating an atmosphere of fear and distrust.

Part of the Nazi propaganda was the idea that Jews (as well as Gypsies, homosexuals, Slavs, the handicapped, etc.) were racially inferior to Germans, and therefore needed to be eliminated to preserve the "superior" Aryan race. Persecution came first, however, with boycotts on Jewish businesses, quotas in schools, and bans on marriages between Jews and gentiles. Labor camps such as Dachau and Buchenwald were opened as early as 1933. As time passed, Jews were stripped of more and more of their rights and property.

One of the most blatant episodes of Jewish persecution was Kristallnacht, meaning "the night of broken glass." On November 9, 1938, Jewish businesses, homes, and synagogues throughout Europe were invaded, smashed, and burned by Hitler's storm troopers. Ironically, the Jews were then made to pay the Nazis a fine of \$400 million for the damages.

World War II began in September of 1939 with Germany's invasion of Poland, which housed the largest concentration of Jews in Europe at the time — approximately 3.35 million. During this time, ghettos were created to contain and monitor Jewish populations in preparation for shipping them to the growing numbers of labor camps. Some of the first organized mass killings occurred after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, when SS murder squads called Einsatzgruppen were deployed and began shooting thousands of Jews and Gypsies in fields on the outskirts of occupied cities. The framework for the "Final Solution," Hitler's plan for the eradication of the Jewish race, was being put into place.

On January 20, 1942, Hitler called the Wannsee Conference to coordinate plans for the Final Solution. The first systematic mass killing of Jews at extermination camps using Zyklon-B gas took place at Auschwitz that month. Less structured massacres had been occurring for many years. Following the conference,

the deportation of Jews to these camps throughout Europe began to take place, this time for the purpose of extermination, not just containment and labor. In the next few years, millions of victims died in concentration camps as a result of overwork, starvation, disease, brutality, and execution, usually by gassing. In the final months of the war in Europe, death marches from camp to camp were implemented in a last-ditch effort to prevent Allied forces from liberating large numbers of prisoners.

After more than twelve years of persecution and almost six years of war, the Germans surrendered unconditionally to the Allied forces on May 7, 1945. Hundreds of thousands of survivors were left penniless, without homes and without family. Many found their way back to their homes, while others emigrated to Israel, the United States, or other countries. (Compiled from sources including The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website [ushmm.org] and *A Guide for using Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl in the Classroom*, 1996.)

About Stephen Nasser and *My Brother's Voice* — a Story of Survival

Nasser's painfully true autobiography, *My Brother's Voice*, is a microcosm of what was described in the foregoing paragraphs. Readers will find that Nasser not only details the suffering of his family, but also of an entire population of innocent people whose only reason for being imprisoned was because they were Jewish.

Nasser wrote his book in the concentration camps of Auschwitz and Muhldorf in the years 1944-1945 after he and his family were taken from their comfortable homes in Ujpest (Budapest) Hungary.

Then known as "Pista," the teenage boy had a close relationship with his older brother Andris. From the time he and his brother were interred, Pista was determined to survive. To keep his sanity, even as the Nazis controlled him physically, he remained free mentally. At night, he dreamt of happier times. When awake, he faced the nightmare of imprisonment and recorded those thoughts in his handmade diary, which he hid from his captors.

Having smuggled a small knife that he had carried from his Boy Scout Days into the camp, Pista carved sandstone and wood figures which he traded for food and pencils with the German Wehrmacht (not Nazis). He then used rough paper from cement bags and

bound them together with wire to form a small book — his diary. He attempted daily to record the terrible experiences he and his brother faced.

It was in that diary that he wrote of the death of his brother Andris — and how his dead brother's voice kept inspiring him to be mentally strong and to resist the barbarisms of the Nazis.

When he was liberated by U.S. troops on April 30, 1945, he was discovered — unconscious — under a pile of bodies in a boxcar. He was taken to an American hospital in Seeshaupt, Germany. His original diary was left behind and never recovered. As Pista was recuperating — he weighed only seventy-two pounds — he began reconstructing his diary. He completed the rewrite in 1948 but never shared it with anyone — until fifty years later. Pista kept his secret to shelter his uncle from the knowledge that he had witnessed the brutal murder of his uncle's wife and baby son at Auschwitz.

Through his diary, which in 2003 was converted to a book, Pista shares how he was the only one of the twenty-one persons of his imprisoned family to survive the concentration camps. Yet despite his having witnessed firsthand the horrors of the Holocaust, Pista — now known as Stephen Nasser — maintained a positive attitude about the need to become an active and contributing member of society.

After Nasser's Liberation

At the invitation of the Canadian Jewish Congress, Nasser and twelve other Hungarian orphans boarded the SS Aquitania and sailed to Halifax, Canada, arriving on August 23, 1948. From there, they traveled to Toronto.

While in Toronto, Nasser worked as a blacksmith, jeweler and diamond setter. In 1951, he married his first wife Elsa. They had two children—Daryl in 1955, and Michele in 1957. Following an illness when

he was hospitalized for a year, Nasser lost his job and even worse, was separated from his family.

Nasser emigrated to the United States in 1958. He remarried in 1981 and he and his wife Francoise, a retired nurse who grew up in Montreal, Canada, live in Las Vegas, Nevada. They now travel extensively, nationally and internationally. In 2004, he and his wife spent three months crossing the United States and Canada, visiting more than seventy libraries to introduce his book. He now has made more than four hundred presentations to almost ninety thousand people. His themes—preservation of freedom, the need for positive family values, and most of all, the emphasis upon “Never Again” that occurrences like the Holocaust will be permitted in any form in any society.

Nasser was honored by the City of Las Vegas when it proclaimed August 6, 2008, as “Stephen Nasser Day,” acknowledging him for his efforts in educating others about his experiences and the Holocaust.

His is a memorable story, one that readers—young or mature—will not forget. It is truly an inspirational book. Better yet, *My Brother's Voice* can be used as the foundation for a genuine learning experience when used in conjunction with this resource guide.



In this published news photo of American liberation of a Holocaust death train in 1945 at Seeshaupt, the caption said that in this boxcar alone sixty-four were dead. But Nasser believes one was alive. From the position he was lying when he passed out, and other evidence, he is 99 percent certain that he was the person lying with his head closet to the door.

Section One: Language and Vocabulary

The following words found in *My Brother's Voice* may not be familiar to readers. Identify, learn to spell, and define the following words. Some are biographical or geographical names. There may be multiple definitions or explanations, cite the definition that is relevant to the book. Also included are some words that are not in the book, but are commonly used in association with the Holocaust: *(write in the definitions)*

Allied Nations _____

American/Canadian Jewish Congress _____

Anti-Semitism _____

Appel _____

Auschwitz _____

Axis Nations _____

Bar mitzvah _____

BBC News _____

Black Forest _____

Blitzkrieg _____

CAPOs _____

Communist _____

Concentration camps _____

Crematory/crematorium _____

D-Day _____

Deportation _____

Desensitized _____

Fascist _____

Gemuse _____

Gestapo _____

Ghetto _____

Gulag _____

Gymnasium _____

Heer _____

Adolf Hitler _____

Honig _____

Vera Koranyi _____

Kriegsmarine _____

Kristallnacht _____

Luftwaffe _____

Malnutrition _____

Marshall Plan _____

Muhldorf _____

Nazis _____

Nyilas _____

Occupation Troops _____

Pista _____


Franklin D. Roosevelt _____

Russian Zone _____

Shrapnel _____

SS troops _____

Josef Stalin _____

Star of David  _____

Swastika  _____

Synagogue _____

Tattoo numbers _____

Telepathy _____


Third Reich _____

United Nations _____

V-E Day _____

Raoul Wallenberg _____

Wehrmacht _____

Yellow star  _____

Yom HaShoah _____

Section Two: Discussion Questions

Chapter 1:

Why was Stephen "Pista" Nasser in a railroad boxcar and where was it going? _____

What did he "lose" or leave behind in the boxcar? _____

Where was Pista taken when removed from the boxcar? _____

Who removed him? _____

Chapter 2:

What did Pista's family tell him and his brother about the possibility of "serious trouble" in Hungary? _____

What "rights" were stripped from him and his family? _____

Chapter 3:

How much weight did Pista lose while in the concentration camp? _____

Why did Pista believe his father was "lucky" when the Nazis were making prisoners of the Jews? _____

Chapter 4:

What happened that cut Andris' victory celebrations short? _____

What were the "rumors"? _____

Chapter 5:

Give an example of the atrocities the German SS troops committed in Pista's neighborhood. _____

What jobs did Pista and Andris do in the factory? _____

Why was working at the factory considered safer than staying in the ghetto? _____

Chapter 6:

Why did Uncle Dezso die? _____

What did Pista discover that even in a small way benefited the entire boxcar of prisoners? _____

Chapter 7:

What happened to Aunt Bozsi and baby Peter? _____

Why? _____

Chapter 8:

Describe the meal that the prisoners ate. How did Pista's pocketknife get used for mealtime? _____

Chapter 9:

Why did the SS men beat Pista? _____

What or who was a Capo? _____

Chapter 10:

What kind of work were Pista and Andris assigned to in the concentration camp? _____

What happened to the food and supplies the Red Cross sent to the prisoners? _____

Chapter 11:

What kinds of punishment did the Nazis often use to discipline prisoners? _____

Chapter 12:

How did Pista help himself and his brother obtain more food? _____

Chapter 13:

How did Pista and Andris use the empty cement sacks? _____

Chapter 14:

Why didn't Pista and Andris want to be sent to the "Sick Bay," even when they were seriously ill?

Chapter 15:

How did Pista end up in sick bay? _____

What did he do to get more food for Andris? _____

Chapter 16:

What was Andris' last gift to Pista before he died? _____

What did Pista then resolve to do? _____

Chapter 17:

What events allowed Pista to leave the sick bay? _____

What gave him the strength to live? _____

Chapter 18:

What did Pista learn that gave him reason to celebrate? _____

Where was Pista at the end of the chapter and why? _____

Chapter 19:

What did Pista do with the first piece of chewing gum he ever had? _____

What was Pista's reaction when an American officer told him he could go to America? _____

Why? _____

Chapter 20:

Briefly, describe what Pista did to make the journey home to Hungary. Who did he meet who helped him complete his journey? _____

Chapter 21:

What question did Pista's uncle ask that Pista did not want to answer? _____

How did Pista answer? _____

Why did Pista have nightmares? _____

Chapter 22:

Describe how Hungarian schools are organized. How are they different from those in the United States? _____

Chapter 23:

Who was Vera? _____

Why was she important to Pista? _____

Chapter 24:

What did Pista learn about his mother in the letter that was sent to his aunt? _____

Chapter 25:

How long did it take Pista to complete his sixth and seventh grades? _____

What did Pista do to earn money so that he could emigrate? _____

What political situation occurred in Hungary that convinced him even more that he had to leave his native country? _____

Where did he go — and with whose sponsorship? _____

Epilogue:

What is the "Iron Curtain" that Pista mentioned? _____

What is its political significance, not just in Hungary, but also the rest of Europe? _____

Section Three: Map Activity

Refer to map on page 14 for this activity. (You may want to find other maps with more geographic detail for the time period 1939.)

1. Have students identify each country and its capital at the beginning of WWII.
2. Ask students to label each country as being an Allied or an Axis nation.
3. Have students trace Pista's journey from Budapest to the concentration camps and back to Budapest, including these locations (in order): Budapest, Auschwitz, Muhldorf, Seeshaupt, Feldafing, Munich, Schwandorf, Pilsen, Prague, Bratislava, and back to Budapest.
4. Find a current map of Europe. Ask students to identify how boundaries have changed during the past seventy years. Are there any "new" nations? Why? What factors caused the splitting up of countries and the development of new ones? For example, what used to be known as the USSR is now Russia. Czechoslovakia is now the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Section Four: Supplemental Exercises

These questions can be used to broaden students' knowledge and background as extra credit assignments. They can be completed individually or in groups.

1. How many concentration camps were there? Besides Germany, in what countries were they located?
2. Pick a few concentration camps and research them. How many people were in each camp? How many died at the camp? How long did the camp exist?
3. What "side" of the war was Hungary on during WWII — Allied or Axis? Why? What political and social forces were in force?
4. Why were Jewish people singled out among various religious and ethnic groups for imprisonment?
5. What was the political situation in Europe that allowed the Nazis to gain so much power and authority so quickly? Why were other nations reluctant to recognize what was happening?

Section Five: Classroom Activities

These activities are intended to help students develop a better understanding of the physical, emotional and psychological stresses that Stephen Nasser and other Holocaust victims faced. In a group, or perhaps individually, have students complete the following and discuss how they felt about doing these activities with others.

Activity 1:

Use masking tape to create a modified railroad "box-car" outline about 10 feet by 7½ feet. (The actual box-car Pista and his family were in was about 10 feet by 30 feet, where they were crammed in with about eighty other persons.)

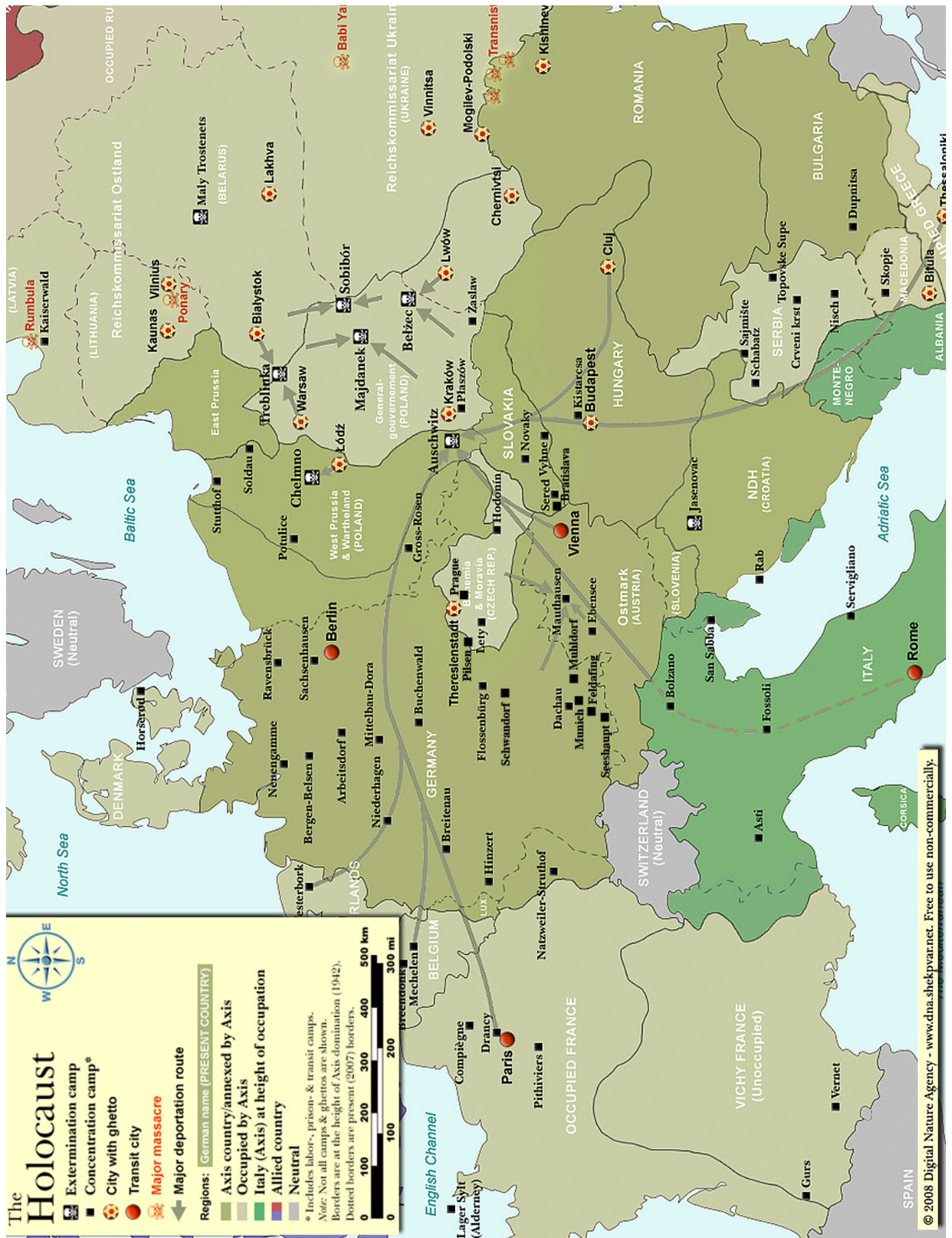
Have twenty students stand inside the boxcar outline. No body parts — arms, legs, feet, anything — can be outside the marked borders. Also, remember each person had a small suitcase. Imagine where would you put it? Then have everyone try to sit down — or lie down — and again, no body part can be outside the borders. Imagine being in the boxcar for four days, as Pista was, unable to lie down. Further imagine the task of using the restroom in such a space. This exercise will help students imagine the horror that those on the transport cars had to endure.

Activity 2:

Ask students to put themselves in Pista's circumstances when he and his brother Andris were at the Martinovits factory (Chapter Five). If students knew they were never going to see their families again, what would they say to their mothers? Other family members?

Activity 3:

Have students imagine that they have been asked to create a tribute honoring the Holocaust victims. What would they do? Their tribute can be written, musical, sculptural, photographic, etc. Tributes are limited only by the students' imagination.



Additional Resources

Listed are a few of the hundreds of pieces of information about the Holocaust and related events. Most are available through school and public libraries. Even more information is available on the web. Have students select a topic or concept about which they would like to learn more and explore it in detail.

Movies and television

Schindler's List. A story about a Czech businessman who saves Jews from the gas chambers at Auschwitz.

The Diary of Anne Frank. The Oscar-winning film about a young Jewish girl, Anne Frank, who was forced into hiding with her family in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam.

Anne Frank: Remembered. A documentary discussing the life of Holocaust victim Anne Frank.

Life is Beautiful. Italian film about the horrors of concentration camps as seen through the eyes of young victim Joshua and his father, who tries to make the best of the camp for his son.

Perlasca. Un eroe Italiano. Also known as *Perlasca: the Courage of a Just Man*, the film tells the story of an Italian living in Hungary during WWII who saves many Hungarian Jews from death camps.

Murderers Among Us: The Simon Wiesenthal Story. A 1989 television show that portrays the life of a man in an Austrian concentration camp and how he reacts after the camp's liberation.

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas. This 2008 movie depicts the Holocaust from the perspective of a young German boy who befriends a child in the concentration camp where his father works.

Books

The Ghetto Anthology, by Roman Mogilansky. Published by American Congress of Jews, June 1986.

With a Camera in the Ghetto, by Mendel Grossman. Published by Ghetto Fighters' House, 1970.

The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945, by Saul Friedlander. Published by Harper Perennial; Reprint edition, April 1, 2008.

Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl, by Anne Frank with introduction by Eleanor Roosevelt. Published by Bantam, June 1, 1993.

Witness: Voices from the Holocaust, by Joshua M. Greene, Shiva Kumar, and Lawrence L. Langer. Published by Free Press on April 16, 2000.

One Woman in the War: Hungary 1944-1945, by Aline Polcz. Published by Central European University Press, October 1, 2002.

Newspaper Articles

"Smiling, Everyday Faces Of the Killers at Auschwitz," by Neil Genzlinger. *New York Times*, April 26, 2008. Saturday Late Edition — Final. Discusses an Auschwitz SS soldier's photo album displaying other soldiers in their spare time.

"A Survivor's Optimism," by Maura J. Casey. *New York Times*, October 20, 2006. Page A22. Illustrates that Nasser is not alone in his enlightened spirit towards his hardships and gives the brief story of another victim like him.

Websites (Blue URLs are hyper-linked)

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <http://www.ushmm.org>

Holocaust Survivors. Gives several survivor accounts of WWII and includes a photo gallery. <http://holocaustsurvivors.org>

U.S. Army Investigation and Trial Records of War Criminals. Gives an account of what happened after the end of WWII and the trials of the leaders of the Muehldorf camp. <http://www.archives.gov/research/captured-german-records/microfilm/m1093.pdf>

Third Reich In Ruins. Shows 1940s pictures of the concrete arches built by the Muehldorf concentration camp inmates, along with current pictures. Also an overview of the purpose of the arches. <http://www.thirdreichruins.com/muehldorf.htm>

Jewish Virtual Library—Raoul Wallenberg. Detailed biography of Raoul Wallenberg. <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/biography/wallenberg.html>

Academy of Achievement—Elie Wiesel. Autobiography of humanitarian and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel. <http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/wie0bio-1>

World War II Database—The Wehrmacht. More information on Wehrmacht soldiers. <http://worldwar2database.com/html/wehrmacht.htm>

Las Vegas Review-Journal—Holocaust Survivor Stephen Nasser. John L. Smith article on Stephen Nasser. <http://www.lvrj.com/news/35276819.html>

Answer Key

Following are suggested responses to section one: language and vocabulary; section two: discussion questions; and two of the activities of section five.

Section One: Language and Vocabulary

These responses and definitions are those most commonly associated in context with the language and terms relevant to the Holocaust and World War II:

Allied Nations: United States, British Empire, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and later, China

American/Canadian Jewish Congress: An organization which helped Jewish Holocaust survivors become rehabilitated and relocated if necessary

Anti-Semitism: Behavior or action that is hostile to persons of Jewish or Semitic background

Appel: To make stand at attention, as in a roll call or a group countdown

Auschwitz: Notorious German concentration camp in Poland where thousands of Jews were exterminated

Axis Powers: Germany, Italy, and Japan

Bar mitzvah/bath mitzvah: Ceremonies for Jewish boys and girls at age 13, signifying they were entering adulthood

BBC News: British Broadcasting Corporation — the major source of “free” and uncensored news for much of Europe during World War II

Black Forest: Heavily wooded mountainous region in southern Germany

Blitzkrieg: Intense warfare waged with speed and force

CAPOs: Political prisoners assigned to supervise other prisoners with brute force

Communist: Form of government used by Soviets to control its people and politics

Concentration camps: Prisons created by Nazis to house prisoners before and during World War II

Crematory/crematorium: Facilities used to burn and execute thousands of German prisoners

D-Day: The beginning of the Allied invasion of Europe, June 6, 1944, which brought about the end of the war in Europe

Deportation: Forced removal of people from their homes and country

Desensitized: To force or compel persons to ignore their feeling or emotions

Fascist: Absolute autocratic control by central government of all aspects of society — education, business, commerce, industry

Gemuse: A soup or stew made of vegetables — potato peelings, carrot and turnip tops, stems, etc.

Gestapo: German secret police

Ghetto: Areas of cities or communities where Jews were isolated and forced to live

Gulag: Prisons or forced labor camps, often associated with the Soviets

Gymnasium: Common European word for the eight years of education that follow the first four years of elementary school

Heer: German Army

Adolf Hitler: German chancellor and Fuhrer (leader) of Third Reich

Honig: Honey, a sweet substance

Vera Koranyi: Girl whom Pista met and fell in love with when he returned to Budapest after his liberation

Kriegsmarine: German Marines

Kristallnacht/ “Night of Broken Glass”: Official days authorized by Hitler — Nov. 9-10, 1938, when Nazis were told to burn synagogues, capture or kill Jews living in Germany

Luftwaffe: German Air Force

Malnutrition: Being undernourished, starved because of lack of food

Marshall Plan: A United States-sponsored economic reconstruction plan for Europe begun in July 1947

Muhldorf: Another infamous German concentration camp where Jews were used for hard labor

Nazis: Abbreviation for National Socialist German Workers party

Nyilas: Hungarians who became members of the Nazi party

Occupation Troops: Military personnel left by the Allied nations to bring order and stability back to Europe

Pista: Hungarian nickname for Stephen Nasser

Franklin D. Roosevelt: The U.S. president during World War II

Russian Zone: A portion of Europe, especially East Germany, occupied by Russian forces following World War II

Shrapnel: Pieces or bits of exploded bombs, mines or shells

SS Troops: Common abbreviation for Hitler's personal army

Josef Stalin: Russian politician and dictator during World War II until his death in 1953

Star of David: Ancient Jewish symbol associated with Israel's King David 

Swastika: A symbol adopted by the Nazis and Third Reich 

Synagogue: Jewish house of worship

Tattoo numbers: Numbers permanently printed in ink on forearms of Jewish prisoners to identify them

Telepathy: Communication of thoughts from one person to another without signs, symbols, or speech

Third Reich: Term used to describe the German totalitarian government from 1933 to 1945

United Nations: International coalition for diplomacy and peace founded July 26, 1945 by 51 nations in San Francisco

V-E Day: End of World War II (May 7-8, 1945) when Germany surrendered unconditionally

Raoul Wallenberg: A brave Swedish diplomat who helped save 24,000 Hungarian Jews from 1944-1945

Wehrmacht: Draftees or volunteers for German regular army

Yellow Star: A yellow symbol shaped like the Star of David that Jews often were required to wear for identification purposes 

Yom HaShoah: Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and its victims

Section Two: Discussion Questions

Chapter 1

Stephen "Pista" Nasser was in a German boxcar headed through the Bavarian countryside because the Nazis wanted to evacuate all the concentration camps before the Allied troops arrived. Pista "lost" his handmade diary when he was removed by U.S. troops and taken to a hospital in Seeshaupt, Germany, for medical treatment and recovery.

Chapter 2

Pista's father told him that the Nazis had taken control of Germany and were going to try to exterminate all European Jews. His father also told him that the Hungarian government had stripped Jews of their citizenship.

Chapter 3

Pista had lost sixty-eight pounds from the time he was captured until he was liberated. He weighed one hundred and forty pounds when he was imprisoned — and only seventy-two pounds when he was liberated. Pista believed his father was fortunate to have died a year before the Germans took the Nasser family as prisoners. His father was not alive to see the horrors of the Holocaust.

Chapter 4

Pista's brother Andris and his team were winning a soccer game when the game was interrupted by people running through the streets yelling "The Germans are coming." The arrival of German troops in Hungary signaled the beginning of oppression for Jewish people.

Chapter 5

The German SS troops robbed houses and businesses, shot Jewish merchants and sent Jewish people into ghettos controlled by the Germans. Pista and his brother Andris were sent to a factory, where they made war products for the Nazis. They were safer there than in the ghetto because of air raids and other battles. The factory had an air raid shelter.

Chapter 6

Pista's Uncle Dezso was killed by an SS trooper. When the SS trooper fired a gun next to the sleeping man's head, the man reacted and jumped up, frightened. The German shot him.

Later, when Pista and others were jammed into a

boxcar headed toward the concentration camp, Pista found a small hole in the boxcar floor through which people could use as a toilet.

Chapter 7

Pista's aunt and her baby were brutally killed by SS troops when his aunt refused to give her baby up as people were being separated to go to different concentration camps.

Chapter 8

At one meal, when Pista and his brother were being transported in a boxcar to another concentration camp, they ate a slice of dried bologna that Pista sliced in two to share with Andris. Later, they ate gemuse, a soup made of vegetables (often spoiled). They also ate sawdust bread, a small piece of margarine, and a slice of liverwurst, and some honig. Pista again used his knife to slice the bread.

Chapter 9

When Pista sneezed in the prisoners' barracks, the SS troops beat him across the back with a whip. Capos were political prisoners who were nevertheless given more privileges than the Jews. Capos often were in charge of disciplining their Jewish prisoners.

Chapter 10

Pista and Andris were assigned to clear trees and stumps from the forest by using shovels, axes, and picks. The food and supplies sent by the Red Cross were confiscated by the Nazis, and the prisoners received little more than new uniforms and shoes.

Chapter 11

The Nazis often punished prisoners by binding them and then beating them with whips.

Chapter 12

He carved small figures from broken clay bricks and traded them with a friendly Wehrmacht guard for food.

Chapter 13

Pista and his brother took the empty cement sacks and cut them into jackets and leggings to protect themselves from the cold, wet weather. But more important, Pista cut cement bags into small sheets of paper and bound them together so he could start his hidden diary.

Chapter 14

Being assigned to the sick bay was virtually the equivalent of being sentenced to death. Those sent to sick bay were left to die.

Chapter 15

Andris became ill and was sent to sick bay. Another prisoner told Pista that his brother was quite ill, so Pista stole food from the dining hall. A second chef in the kitchen caught him and beat him so severely that Pista was sent to sick bay. While in sick bay, he hoarded his food.

Chapter 16

When Pista was sent to the sick bay where his brother Andris was kept, Pista tried to feed Andris the food he had hoarded. But instead, when Andris died in Pista's arms, Pista found food that Andris had been hoarding to give to him. That was Andris' last gift. Pista then resolved that no matter what, he would survive.

Chapter 17

Following an Allied air raid on Muhldorf, Pista and two others left the sick bay to help repair the damage done by the bombing. Pista became ill again, but because he felt his brother's love — his brother's voice — Pista resolved once again to refuse to die. He was expelled from the "Dying Room."

Chapter 18

When Pista left the sick bay, he went to a man he had known earlier. The man, Mr. Brichta, gave Pista the diary someone had found while cleaning the "Dying Room." He later was told that Hitler had died and the Allies were coming. He and other prisoners were ordered to board another train to Bavaria where they would be executed.

Chapter 19

In this chapter — a "flashback," Pista is in the same hospital as he was in Chapter 1. As he was leaving that hospital, a U.S. soldier gave him a stick of chewing gum — which he promptly chewed and then swallowed. Later, he was told he could go to North America, but instead he told the U.S. officer that he wanted to return to Hungary.

Chapter 20

Pista went to a railroad depot and planned his route home — through Munich, Schwandorf, Pilsen, Prague,

Bratislava, and Budapest. He met a giant of a man and his friends from Kolozsvár, and they helped him sneak back into Hungary. He swam across the Ipoly River.

Chapter 21

Once Pista arrived home, he met with his surviving family including Uncle Karoly (the husband of Aunt Bozsi and father of baby Peter). His uncle asked about his wife and the baby, and Pista lied, saying they had been separated and he never saw them again. And even though at home and free, Pista routinely had nightmares about his horrible experience in the concentration camps.

Chapter 22

Hungarian schools were organized much differently from those in the United States. In Hungary, when Pista was a student, students attended four years of elementary school. They then entered gymnasium, which they attended for another eight years. If students had good enough grades after graduating from the gymnasium, they could go to the university. Otherwise, they became apprentices or took up a trade.

Chapter 23

Vera Koranyi was a girl Pista met at the apartment where he stayed with his aunt after he returned to Budapest. They dated — and fell in love. She was the first girl that Pista ever loved.

Chapter 24

While at his Aunt Mancsi's home, Pista was given a letter which told of his mother's death in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. She died of typhus two weeks after the camp had been liberated. All of Stephen's family who had been imprisoned were now dead.

Chapter 25

In order for Pista to complete his education, he had to pass all his remaining classes in only one year. But he wanted to emigrate to North America, so he began his own business: Dr. Pista's Doll Hospital, where he repaired broken dolls. He also learned more about the Communist Party taking control of Hungary and decided he had to leave if he wanted to maintain his freedom. He finally decided to leave through the sponsorship of the Canadian Jewish Congress. On July 6, 1945, he left Hungary for Canada.

Epilogue

The "Iron Curtain" is not a physical barrier but rather a political term used to describe the authoritarian control the Soviet Union had over eastern European nations it controlled following World War II. The term was used initially by Sir Winston Churchill when he described the tyrannical and repressive government of the USSR.

Section Five: Classroom Activities

Activity 2: Letter to family

What follows is the letter that Pista wishes he had been able to write to his mother and his family after they had been separated (See Chapter 5). Have students read his letter and compare it to what they wrote.

To my dearest Mother:

Mom, I want to assure you that Andris and I are holding our own. We miss you a lot, and wish we could all be together during these trying times. Just know that because of you, we are safer here in this factory than you have been in the ghetto. Mr. Martinovitis has been a true friend to Andris and me.

Also, Andris is the best brother any boy can have, and he is my best friend.

You and Dad, before he died, taught us how to be positive. Even now, while our lives are possibly in danger, we want you to know you taught us how to survive. We plan to. The Nazis will never break my spirit. I know the day will come when we look back at the nightmare we are in the midst of. We'll be alive because of the courage you taught us to have.

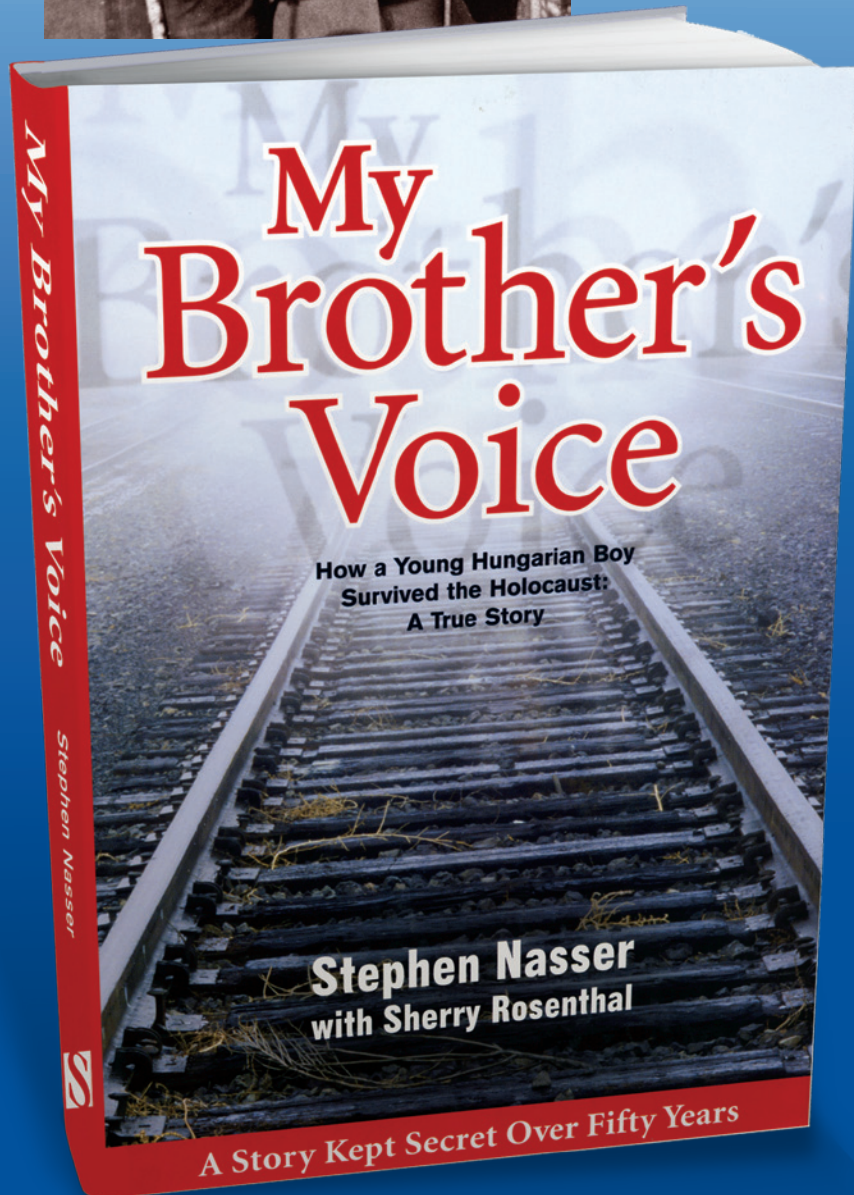
*Your loving son,
Pista.*

Activity 3: Tribute honoring Holocaust victims

Ask students to visit some websites and find what others — governments, communities, individuals — have done to honor Holocaust victims. Have the students compare what has already been done to what they created. What are the differences? Similarities? Ask students how they would modify their tributes once they have seen how others created theirs?



Stephen "Pista" Nasser was 13 years old when the Nazis whisked him and his family away from their home in Hungary to Auschwitz. His memories of that terrifying experience are still vivid, and his love for his brother Andris still brings a husky tone to his voice when he remembers the terrible ordeal they endured together. Stephen's account of the Holocaust, told in the refreshingly direct and optimistic language of a young boy, will help every reader to understand that the Holocaust was real, and that, if you have enough love, determination, and will power, there is always a better tomorrow!



Stephen Nasser somehow dug deep within his soul to survive the brutal and inhumane treatment his captors inflicted on the Jews. He was the only one of his family to survive — but the memory of his brother's dying words compelled him to live.

Writing in a straightforward, narrative style, Nasser avoids the cloying or maudlin language that characterizes some stories of the Holocaust. Perhaps it's for that reasons that readers will find his book one they won't forget — and one they recommend to others as a "must read."

— RAY NEWTON
Former National Coordinator
Reader's Digest Writing Workshops

One can see a lot that can "harden" one to life's experiences, but what Nasser went through as a 13-year-old, can cause even a hardened individual to tear up. I recommend this book to all who study the devastation a tyrant can bring to the world. Those who do not learn from history can expect to experience it again.

— CHARLES L. SHREVES
Colonel, US Army, Retired

