



MUSEUM
OF JEWISH
HERITAGE

A LIVING
MEMORIAL
TO THE
HOLOCAUST

36 Battery Place, New York, NY 10280
(646) 437-4200 www.mjhnyc.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 5, 2007

Contacts: Betsy Aldredge
(646) 437-4337
baldredge@mjhnyc.org

Abby R. Spilka
(646) 437-4333
aspilka@mjhnyc.org

JEWES WHO RESISTED THE NAZIS FOCUS OF GROUNDBREAKING EXHIBITION

Daring to Resist: Jewish Defiance in the Holocaust
at the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust

NEW YORK, NY – Conducting a Passover seder in a forced labor camp, partisans fighting in the forests, dangerous courier missions, and illegal underground newspapers tell a fascinating, but rarely heard story. The brave act of defying the Nazis — whether with words or with actions — is the subject of the new, extraordinary exhibition *Daring to Resist: Jewish Defiance in the Holocaust*, opening at the **Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust on April 16, 2007. A press preview will take place on April 12, 2007 from 9:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.**

During the Holocaust, Jews throughout Europe, in individual and collective acts of resistance, sought to undermine the Nazi goal of annihilating the Jewish people. Jews engaged in a range of resistance activities with the aim of preserving Jewish life and dignity despite unimaginable difficulties. Their efforts powerfully refute the popular perception that Jews were passive victims. Through testimony, archival footage, and authentic artifacts, the exhibition will help visitors to understand the dilemmas that Jews faced under impossible circumstances. Whether praying clandestinely, documenting the experiences of Jews in the ghettos, or taking up arms to fight, these responses took many forms, but each and every one was a courageous act of resistance.

This large-scale exhibition, presented in association with Ghetto Fighters' House, Israel, finally brings to light the stories of courageous men, women, and children who risked their lives to protect their communities, their humanity, and in some cases, their right to die with dignity. "This exhibition will reshape the way the public thinks about Jews during the Holocaust by focusing on the Jewish narrative." Museum director Dr. David G. Marwell said. "This exhibition is not about what was done to the Jews by the Nazis, but rather about Jewish responses and actions. The general public has not been exposed to this part of history, this way of thinking. Jews fought Nazi occupation within their homes, their communities, in the ghettos and the forests, in the concentration camps, and in their hearts."

One such person was Tema Schneiderman, an underground courier. Her forged work document is on display in the exhibition. She carried it with her on some 20 missions between the ghettos of Vilna, Bialystok, and Warsaw while she carried news of mass executions and brought ammunition for revolt. On a mission to Warsaw she was deported to Treblinka and murdered.

Focusing on several different types of resistance, the exhibition starts with the time period leading up to the Nuremberg laws of 1935 and continues through the end of the war. The exhibition is chronologically organized into sections documenting Response to the Rise of Nazism, Resisting Occupation, Resisting Deportation, and Resisting Mass Murder and explores in great detail, the themes of armed, spiritual, political, and cultural resistance to the Nazis' campaign against the Jews.

(More)

The armed resistance took up weapons to physically attack the Nazis or to sabotage their efforts, as partisan Faye Schulman remembered, “Our task was to blow up trains, to attack the Nazis, to ruin everything so the Nazis would not have possibilities to take stuff to the front line.”

Spiritual resisters continued to practice and study their religion despite the circumstances and the danger. Filip Mueller recalled when his father’s body arrived on a trolley in Auschwitz, “My fellow prisoners bore his corpse to the crematorium and placed it on the trolley in the cremation room. In front of the blazing ovens a team-mate recited the *Kaddish*.”

Those who resisted politically published underground newspapers and communicated with other isolated Jews in order to shatter illusions encouraged by the Nazi policy of deception and secrecy, and to call for armed action. Mordechai Tenenbaum wrote in his memoir, “We organize attack units, draw up a detailed plan, prepare materials for arson and diversion, and create posters calling for Jews to defend their lives and their dignity. We explain to deportees that they are not being ‘resettled in the East to labor units,’ but to death.”

Cultural resistance often culminated in providing social welfare services and trying to lift the community’s spirit through concerts, plays, and lectures. In the Vilna Ghetto, residents performed Yiddish playwright David Pinski’s play about the Jewish struggle against the Roman Empire. *The Eternal Jew*, performed in 1943, boosted morale in the ghetto and provided employment for actors and musicians.

Highlights of the exhibition include images taken by George Kadish, the photographic chronicler of the Kovno Ghetto in Lithuania. One powerful scene he captured was of the aftermath of a pogrom that killed over 800 Jews. Kadish’s photo is of his murdered neighbor’s last words. The desperate message written in Yiddish by the neighbor with his own blood reads “*Yid’n nekama!*” (“Jews, revenge”). Kadish took his own revenge by documenting the not only the atrocity, but the struggle for life in the ghetto. He buried his photos in the ghetto and retrieved them after the war.

One of the other iconic images in the exhibition illustrates the importance of faith and hope in defiance of the Nazis. Rabbi Dr. Akiva Posner was the last rabbi of the prewar Jewish community in Kiel, Germany. His wife Rachel took a photo from the inside of their home on Hanukkah 1932. The menorah is proudly displayed in a window, with a swastika flag looming on the opposite side of the street. On the back of the photo Mrs. Posner wrote: “ ‘Death to Judah’ the flag says, ‘Judah will live forever’ the light answers.”

Some of the remarkable artifacts in the exhibition include: a typewriter from Belgium, which had Hebrew keys, used to produce an illegal newspaper; and a diagram of the mass murder site at Ponar, saved in the Vilna Ghetto archive of Hermann Kruk.

Powerful filmed testimony rounds out the exhibition. The films intersperse archival films and photographs with narrated memoirs and present day interviews with survivors. Survivors from Poland, Latvia, France, Greece, Hungary, and beyond tell their stories of survival and defiance. One such survivor, Shalom Yoran talks about what motivated his own resistance, “Before being separated from my mother, she told me, ‘Go fight...try to save yourselves, avenge our death, and tell the world what happened.’ These are the words that guided me through that dark period, what gave me strength to fight, and what inspires me to share my story today.”

Vladka and Benjamin Meed talk about joining the underground resistance, hiding ghetto fighters, and acting as couriers on dangerous missions such as the one in which Vladka hid a description of Treblinka in her shoe. “The underground really singled me out on the other side to be a courier,” Vladka said. “So this was

the high point of my remaining in the ghetto after the family was taken. It was not a question of being afraid. It was just the opposite. I didn't pick it by myself. I was only proud and happy to be chosen."

In an incredibly emotional scene artist Alice Lok Cahana revisits Auschwitz and remembers secretly celebrating Shabbat in Auschwitz. "And we started to sing 'Shalom Aleichem malachei ha-shalom...' And as we sang the melody other children came around us and they started to sing with us. Somebody was from Poland, somebody was from Germany, somebody was from Hungary....all thrown together ...and suddenly the Hebrew songs and prayers, the Shabbat united us in the latrines of Auschwitz."

*This exhibition was made possible through major funding from: Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, the Elizabeth Meyer Lorentz Fund of The New York Community Trust, the Edmond J. Safra Philanthropic Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.**

Generous leadership gifts were made by: Frank and Cesia Blaichman, Patti Askwith Kenner and Family, George and Adele Klein, Ingeborg and Ira Leon Rennert, David and Klara Ringel and Family, and Shalom and Varda Yoran.

Additional support was provided by: The David Berg Foundation, Nancy Fisher, Robert I. Goldman Foundation, The Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation, L'Oréal USA, Righteous Persons Foundation, and Gil and Claire (Israelit) Zweig.

Media sponsorship provided by The Jewish Week.

**Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this exhibition do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*

The Companion Volume to the Exhibition

Daring to Resist: Jewish Defiance in the Holocaust, the companion volume, includes original and thought-provoking essays by exhibition curator Yitzchak Mais, Holocaust scholar David Engel, and psychologist Eva Fogelman, all of whom offer new insights about this important chapter of Jewish history. The book also contains a unique anthology of more than thirty memoirs, oral histories, and letters, some published for the first time in English, which documents—from a Jewish perspective—the vitality and resilience of Jewish life under Nazi oppression. The soft-cover book will be published in April 2007 and retail for \$22.95. The text of the book is available for review.

Public Programs

This year's **Annual Gathering of Remembrance**, New York City's oldest and largest commemoration to honor the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust will take place at the Museum on **April 15 at 2 p.m.** In conjunction with *Daring to Resist*, the commemoration will reflect on the brave men and women of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Former secretary of state **Henry Kissinger** will be the keynote speaker. Call 646-437-4490 for tickets or email agr@mjhny.org.

On **Yom HaShoah**, Holocaust Remembrance Day, also **April 15**, Museum admission is free for all. Come to the Museum to remember those who were lost, and learn from those who survived. Hear personal stories from artifact donors, Holocaust survivors, and their families.

The Museum will present the critically acclaimed film *The Partisans of Vilna* on **April 18 at 7 p.m.** The film features interviews with survivors of the Jewish resistance movement. It tells the largely unknown

story of young Jews and others who organized an underground resistance in the Vilna Ghetto and fought as partisans in the woods. Among those featured are Israeli poet Abba Kovner, a resistance leader, and Chaika Grossman, former Israeli Knesset member. Following the screening, producer Aviva Kempner and survivors featured in the film will discuss their experiences. For information and tickets please call 646-437-4202 or visit www.mjhnyc.org.

About the Museum

The Museum's three-floor Core Exhibition educates people of all ages and backgrounds about the rich tapestry of Jewish life over the past century--before, during, and after the Holocaust. Current special exhibitions include *From the Heart: The Photojournalism of Ruth Gruber* and *Daring to Resist: Jewish Defiance in the Holocaust*, opening on April 16. The Museum offers visitors a vibrant public program schedule in its Edmond J. Safra Hall. It is also home to Andy Goldsworthy's memorial *Garden of Stones*, as well as James Carpenter's *Reflection Passage*, Gift of The Gruss Lipper Foundation. The Museum receives general operating support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and is a founding member of the *Museums of Lower Manhattan*.

###

