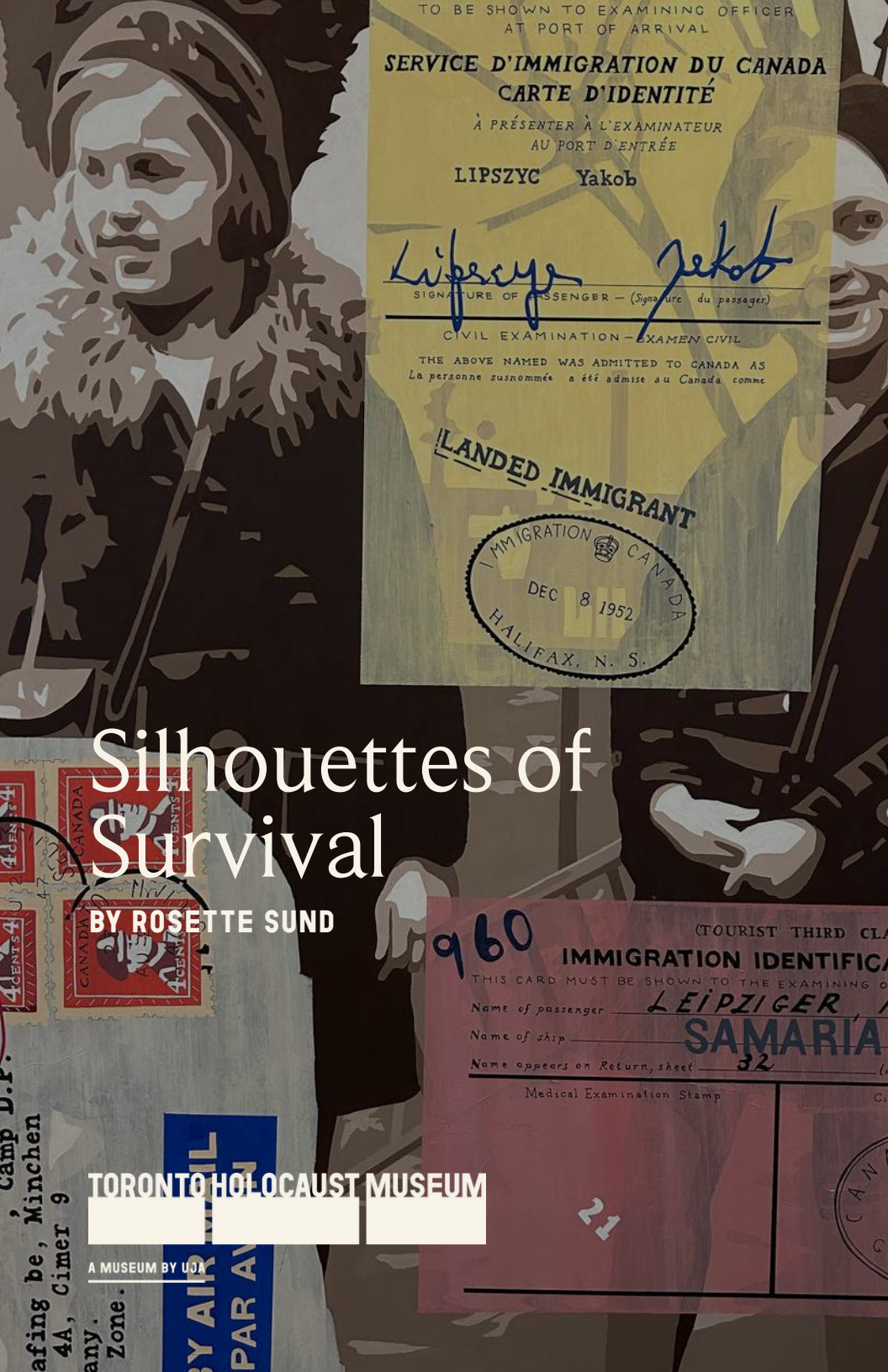


Silhouettes of Survival

BY ROSETTE SUND

TORONTO HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

A MUSEUM BY UJA

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Toronto Holocaust Museum presents *Silhouettes of Survival* in partnership with Jewish Immigrant Aid Services and the Ontario Jewish Archives Blankenstein Family Heritage Centre. This project is generously supported by UJA's Kultura Collective project grant.

The installation honours the multifaceted experience of Jewish refugees. This complex experience includes Jewish people who attempted to emigrate from Europe during the onset of Nazi persecution, those who came to Canada as internees, and Holocaust survivors who immigrated to Toronto after the Second World War.

Through layered paintings composed of archival photographs, documents, and personal letters, the installation traces the journey from displacement to renewal. Each panel reveals a different aspect of the immigration experience. This immersive work invites reflection and discovery with every viewing and offers bigger understandings of the immigrant journey with a universal message of finding belonging.

ARTIST STATEMENT

“Silhouettes of Survival” focuses on the experiences of immigrants coming to Canada from Central Europe after the devastation of the Second World War. The courageous histories found within the Ontario Jewish Archives Blankenstein Family Heritage Centre provide a rich foundation from which to tell this important story. Each panel focuses on a specific aspect: initial immigration, settling into their new environments, establishing roots, and celebrating with generations to follow. The layers within each painting include photographs and documents to weave a story that highlights these individuals’ courage, perseverance, and hope.

The first of the four panels focuses on the story of immigrating to a new country in the hopes of starting life anew. A prewar photo of two young German girls is juxtaposed alongside immigration identification cards and an envelope addressed to survivors in a displaced persons camp. The next panel continues this journey of settling in Canada, notably Toronto: these new arrivals settle in their new homes and begin building community. An image from Congregation Habonim, a wedding photo from 1968, and store signage showcase their lives taking root.

Each panel is a chapter of this story of survival. Communities continue to grow and notable neighbourhoods like the Bathurst Manor reflect the contributions of these immigrant families within its schools, shops, synagogues, and community centres. The final panel celebrates the future generations that emerged and continue to thrive. A mother and son share a memorable moment and a great grandson writes a sweet note to his great Zadie. The final layer of each painting has a different image from individual family archives that mirrors the specific theme of that panel as each provides a rich silhouette of survival.

Viewers can read through the layers and each time they visit the artwork uncover a new aspect of the narrative. The ultimate purpose of this artwork is threefold: to honour those who lived these histories, to bind the generation who grew up with these legacies, and to continue to impart them on those who follow.

–ROSETTE SUND

PANEL ONE

IMMIGRATING

Photo of members of the K. Gollasch Family, Germany, 1932. The image is part of an album belonging to Willi Holz, which includes photos of family members, friends, street scenes, and landscapes.

After release from a concentration camp in January 1939, Willi tried but failed to immigrate to several countries. He applied and was accepted for a transit camp for Jewish emigrants located in Richborough, England, and arrived that August. Because he was German, Willi was viewed as an "enemy alien." He was moved to several locations before departing from Liverpool, England on the SS *Ettrick*. He arrived in Quebec on July 13, 1940, and was interned in Camp "L." Willi was transferred and detained in two other camps before his eventual release in February 1943 for work at Stark Electrical Instrument Co. in Toronto. In 1946, Willi appeared before a county court judge to take the oath of allegiance. He became a Canadian citizen on May 4 of that year.

WILLI HOLZ COLLECTION. ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, ACCESSION 2023-6-3.

Holocaust survivors Rose and Jacob Lipszyc married in 1949 and immigrated to Canada on board the *Saturnia* ocean liner in 1952. This immigration identification card was issued to Jacob when they landed in Halifax on December 8, 1952. They settled in Toronto where they had three children.

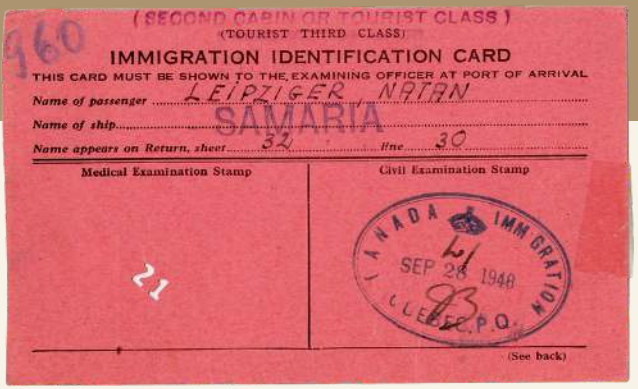
ROSE LIPSZYC COLLECTION. ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, ACCESSION 2023-2-4.

PANEL ONE

IMMIGRATING

D. Banack & Bros envelope addressed to Garbasz Hercka in Feldafing DP Camp, Munich, Germany, August 29, 1947. Many Holocaust survivors lived in displaced persons camps before being accepted by another country. Rebuilding life became a primary goal in these camps and they transformed into active cultural and social centres.

ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, UNITED OSTROWTZER HILFS COMMITTEE FONDS 148.



Nate Leipciger survived the Holocaust with his father, Jacob (Jack). They were liberated together on May 2, 1945. They searched for surviving relatives and lived in Germany until immigrating to Canada in 1948. In Toronto, Nate attended high school and obtained a university degree, where he married his wife Bernice and had three daughters. This Canadian immigration identification card was issued to Nate in September 1948.

NATE LEIPCIGER COLLECTION. ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, ACCESSION 2022-8-7.

PANEL ONE

IMMIGRATING

Liza Schein (née Esanu) met her husband Sam while living in a displaced persons camp in Bad Gastein, Austria. During the Second World War, Sam survived four concentration camps and Liza survived in hiding. The couple immigrated to Canada in September 1948. Liza is pictured here on the SS *Samaria* en route to their new home.

LIZA AND SAM SCHEIN COLLECTION. ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, ACCESSION 2019-12-8.

PANEL TWO

SETTLING

Interior view of Beth Habonim, Toronto, 1979. Photograph by Sid Tenenbaum. The synagogue was founded in 1954 by Holocaust survivors and services were originally held downtown. In 1958, the congregation moved to its current building where it continues to serve its community with spiritual and cultural offerings.

ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, THE SHULS PROJECT FONDS 64, SERIES 2, FILE 50.

In 1965, Holocaust survivors Lilian and Rabbi William Rosenthal moved to Toronto with their family. They opened a Judaica store at the corner of Bathurst Street and Caribou Road. They ran the store for more than forty years before retiring in 2007. Miriam's Judaica is still open today and it offers the community a place to continue Jewish rituals and support their Jewish life.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LILIAN ROSENTHAL. ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, ACCESSION 2018-7-22.

PANEL TWO

SETTLING

Wedding portrait of Andy and Maggie Réti, December 1968. The photo appears in his book, *The Son of an Extraordinary Woman* (2001), a sequel to Andy's mother Ibolya Grossman's book, *An Ordinary Woman in Extraordinary Times* (1990). In 2016, the books were combined and published as *Stronger Together*. Andy continues to share his family's story of survival.

ANDY RÉTI COLLECTION. ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, ACCESSION 2022-7-1.

Andy and Maggie Réti – Dec. 1968...

PANEL TWO

SETTLING

A group of new immigrants at a Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (JIAS) citizenship class, 1964. The blackboard at the front of the classroom has a listing of historical events. Established in 1922, JIAS continues to support immigrants and refugees to Canada. After arriving in Toronto and adjusting to their new lives, many survivors sought citizenship and proudly embraced their identities as new Canadians.

ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, FONDS 9, SERIES 12, FILE 28.

PANEL THREE

BUILDING

An Ernest Goodman Real Estate brochure for Bathurst Manor, c. 1955. Commonly referred to as the Manor, many Holocaust survivors settled in this area when rebuilding their lives in Toronto. It remains a lively Jewish area with shops, parks, schools, and synagogues for Holocaust survivor and Canadian-born families.

JUDY KASMAN COLLECTION. ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, ACCESSION 2022-2-4.

Holocaust survivors Rose (née Goldman) and Sam Pacht married in 1948 in Toronto. They had four children, Ben, Larry, Michael, and Lisa. Pictured are Larry, Ben, and Michael Pacht clearing snow from the driveway of their Bathurst Manor home, 1960s.

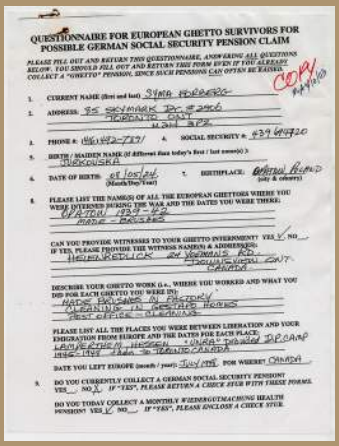
PACHT FAMILY COLLECTION. ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, 2022-4-3.

PANEL THREE

BUILDING

The Forberg family lighting the candles at Esther Forberg's Sweet Sixteen celebration in April 1965. Identified from left: David, Syma, Billy, Joe, Esther (m. Michaels), and Honey (m. Silverberg).

FORBERG FAMILY COLLECTION. ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, ACCESSION 2022-7-10.



QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EUROPEAN GHETTO SURVIVORS FOR POSSIBLE GERMAN SOCIAL SECURITY PENSION CLAIM

PLEASE FILL OUT AND RETURN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE, ANSWERING ALL QUESTIONS BELOW. YOU SHOULD FILL OUT AND RETURN THIS FORM EVEN IF YOU ALREADY COLLECT A "GHETTO" PENSION, SINCE SUCH PENSIONS CAN often BE RAISED.

COPY

1. CURRENT NAME (first and last): SYMA FORBERG
2. ADDRESS: 85 SKOMMER DR #2005 TORONTO ONT M2H 3P2
3. PHONE #: (416) 492-7371
4. SOCIAL SECURITY #: 439 044 720
5. BIRTH / MAIDEN NAME (if different than today's first / last name(s)): SIEKOWSKA
6. DATE OF BIRTH: 21 JAN 24 (Month/Day/Year)
7. BIRTHPLACE: GHETTO ROUND (city & country)
8. PLEASE LIST THE NAME(S) OF ALL THE EUROPEAN GHETTOES WHERE YOU WERE INTERNED DURING THE WAR AND THE DATES YOU WERE THERE: SKARZYSKO 1939-42 RADOM - BRZOZIE

CAN YOU PROVIDE WITNESSES TO YOUR GHETTO INTERNMENT? YES Y NO
IF YES, PLEASE PROVIDE THE WITNESS NAME(S) & ADDRESS(ES):
HELMREICH 24 VERMAIS RD. TORONTO ONT CANADA

DESCRIBE YOUR GHETTO WORK (i.e., WHERE YOU WORKED AND WHAT YOU DID FOR EACH GHETTO YOU WERE IN):
RADOM EXCHANGE OF FACTORY
CLEANING IN GERMAN BARRACKS
POST OFFICE CLEANING

PLEASE LIST ALL THE PLACES YOU WERE BETWEEN LIBERATION AND YOUR EMIGRATION FROM EUROPE AND THE DATES FOR EACH PLACE:
LAUFEN/ESTER HEIDEN 1945 - 1948 DP CAMP
1948-1949 1948 to TORONTO CANADA

DATE YOU LEFT EUROPE (month / year): JULY 1949 FOR WHERE? CANADA

9. DO YOU CURRENTLY COLLECT A GERMAN SOCIAL SECURITY PENSION?
YES ___ NO X IF "YES", PLEASE RETURN A CHECK STUB WITH THESE FORMS.

DO YOU TODAY COLLECT A MONTHLY WIEDERGUTMACHUNG HEALTH PENSION? YES Y NO ___ IF "YES", PLEASE ENCLOSE A CHECK STUB.

Syma Forberg's completed questionnaire for European ghetto survivors, submitted for a German social security pension claim in May 2003. These pensions were available to survivors who worked forced labour in ghettos. In 1944, Syma met her husband David while in a labour camp in Poland; they survived together. In 1948, they arrived in Canada with their two young children. They settled in Bathurst Manor where they had two more children.

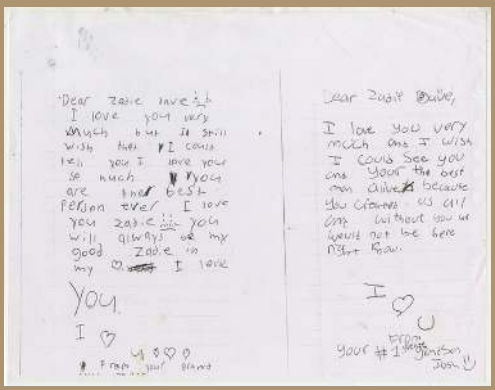
FORBERG FAMILY COLLECTION. ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, ACCESSION 2022-7-10.

PANEL FOUR

GROWING

Bella Rosenbaum (née Rotbard) with her son, Murray, boating on Lake Muskoka, Gravenhurst in July 1971. Bella met her husband Henry in Italy after the Second World War. They were part of the illegal immigration to British Mandate Palestine in 1946 and married in their apartment in Ramat Gan that same year. Bella, Henry, and their daughter, Brenda (b. 1949), immigrated to Toronto in 1952.

ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, HENRY ROSENBAUM FONDS 121, SERIES 1, ITEM 206.



Dear Zadie I love you very much but I still wish that I could see you I love you so much You are the best person ever I love you Zadie You will always be my good Zadie I love you

I ♡ U

Dear Zadie Bubbe,

I love you very much one I wish I could see you one Your the best man alive because you created us all and without you we would not be here right now.

I ♡ U

your #1 Fffffff Jamison Josh

A letter written by David Forberg's great-grandson, Josh. In it, Josh writes, "You're the best man alive because you created us all and without you we would not be here right now."

FORBERG FAMILY COLLECTION. ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, ACCESSION 2022-7-10.

PANEL FOUR

GROWING

Holocaust survivors Freda and Abe Blankenstein met in Toronto and married in 1956. They built a life together and had four children, Annette, Sharon, Harvey, and Larry. Pictured are Freda and Abe lighting the Hanukkah menorah with their family in Toronto (c. 2000). Identified from left, Freda, Abe, unknown, Sharon, Dani, Nicole, and Cali.

BLANKENSTEIN FAMILY COLLECTION. ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, ACCESSION 2022-8-2.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

JIAS | JEWISH IMMIGRANT AID SERVICES

UJA FEDERATION of Greater Toronto | ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES BLANKENSTEIN FAMILY HERITAGE CENTRE

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