

GALLERY גלריה

David Stavrou

“My father spoke with me as a friend. He touched offhandedly on the question of whether I was in love with a boy. The question has opened a new page for me ... I’ve always tried to banish the subject from my heart,” wrote a 17-year-old Jewish girl calling herself Hansi in Vilna in 1934. Later, she wrote that the boys in her class ignored her, that she saw herself as “unattractive to the eye” and that the indifference of the boys made her sit on the sidelines and sink into thought while the other girls sat together and shared anecdotes. “That specific situation made it so I didn’t love a single boy,” she wrote. “At a time when I couldn’t stop my feelings, I felt love for boys in general, as the opposite sex, as a group and not as individuals.”

Hansi’s text is only one testament out of hundreds that unfurl over thousands of pages written by young Jews who lived in Poland and several of its neighbors in the 1930s. They were collected by the Yiddish Scientific Institute, which worked in Eastern Europe in the leadup to World War II with the mission of researching and preserving the region’s Jewish life and Yiddish culture.

The organization was established in 1925 in Vilna (then in Poland, now the capital of Lithuania and known as Vilnius) and had branches in Warsaw, Berlin and New York. World War II forced the organization to move its operations to New York, which is the home to its modern incarnation’s headquarters to this day.

The collection of these autobiographical accounts is fascinating in the personal glimpse it gives into prewar Jewish life. Many of the teenagers who wrote them died in the Holocaust,

‘The goal is to get a snapshot of 2024, as it’s a significant year historically. Each story we get will add another piece to the puzzle,’ Greiber says.



Dennis Grossman



Rachel Zuzana Kopytkova

their words now serving as a memorial to the complex, diverse lives that were lost. They wrote about music, literature, ice skating and a myriad of other subjects. Some were politically aware and were Zionists, socialists or members of the Bund movement. There were the religious and the secular, the poor and the rich, the city folk and the rural folk. There were young people in love, the newly married and the divorced. Some dreamed of emigrating to the New World; some were excited about the future, and others were afraid of it.

“In the 1930s, the YIVO institute in Vilna wanted to know what was going on in the minds of young people in Yiddish-speaking countries,” says Daniela Greiber, the Jewish Communal Life grants program manager

War ended a project recording European Jewish youth. 85 years later, it’s revived

The Kaleidoscope project revives an initiative that was interrupted by the Holocaust: An autobiographical writing competition for Jewish youth from all over Europe

at Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe. “They organized a competition for autobiographical writing, and over the course of several rounds, between 1934 and 1939, they received 627 manuscripts. Most were handwritten and dozens of pages long. Most of the writers were boys, but there were girls too, and although the prevalent language was Yiddish, there were also some – including Hansi – who wrote in both Hebrew and Polish.

“The idea wasn’t to publish the manuscripts, but to preserve them so they would serve as raw material for social research,” continues Greiber. “The background for the project was the ‘Yiddishist’ worldview, which believed in the need to develop a sense of belonging and meaning in Jewish life in countries where Yiddish was spoken. There was also a belief among many that there was a future for Jews in Europe that would involve a socialist revolution. This was a time when people studied ethnography and were involved in the discipline of autobiographical writing. Someone had the ingenious idea of asking young people to write their biographies, and to make the manuscripts truthful, it was proposed to do it with anonymity.”

The request was publicized in the press; to increase motivation, a competition with prizes was announced. Each year, several writers won 150 zlotys each. However, the winners in the final round never found out about their accomplishment. The date set for announcing the winner was September 1, 1939, the very day World War II broke out. It’s likely that many of the participants didn’t survive the following years.

The way to reconnect

The Jewish autobiographical competition was abruptly forced to end because of the war, but 85 years later, the Rothschild Foundation has begun to revive the project. It named the new project Kaleidoscope, and it seems almost like the twin of the original one. Once more, young Jews from all over Europe are writing about their lives. This time, the works aren’t only being preserved and collected, but are also being published (in their original language and the English translation) on the project’s website.

Dennis Grossman, one of the first participants in the project, is a young Jewish man from Budapest who grew up participating in Hungarian Jewish schools and summer camps. “I’m 21 years old and I still go to summer camps – now as a counselor,” he wrote. “It is very hard to stay involved in the Jewish community after somebody reaches adulthood. Before that, you can go to camps, Jewish school and youth movements. But you grow out of these when you become 18 years old.

“That is why – if you want to stay involved – people usually go work at [camps] as a counselor or get jobs in Jewish organizations,” he continued. “My girlfriend and I started hosting Shabbat dinners for our Jewish friends every other Friday as a way to keep our little community together. We usually say blessings for the wine and challah, sometimes we say kiddush. After that we eat, drink, have conversations and play board games.

“Most of the people who come are our friends from [...] camp, but we also try to invite anybody who has somewhat of a connection to Judaism and is looking for a way into the community,” he added. “There are lots of young Jews in Hungary who either find out about their being Jewish too late or have some other reason for



Young Jews in Poland around 1930.

Ghetto Fighters House Archive. Graphic: Masha Zur Glezman

not getting involved in the community early on. These people get locked out because most of the programs and communities for young adults are just like our Shabbat dinners. Small, because my home can only fit so many, and somewhat closed because we only know the people in our social bubble.

“I am truly frustrated by this dynamic and I’m always looking for ways to get more people involved,” he wrote. “My philosophy is that people should relate to their Jewish identities through experiences they have. These experiences can be anywhere from going to the synagogue to attending a Shabbat dinner or a bar mitzvah. These can overwrite the fact that a lot of people relate to Judaism through the Holocaust or through our history.”

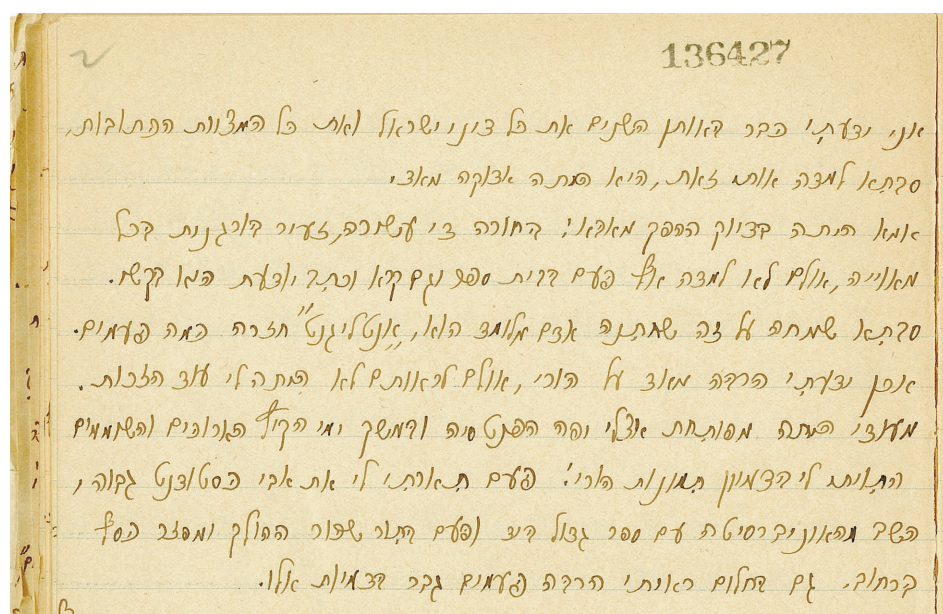
Dennis is the son of an American father and a Hungarian mother who divorced when he was a baby. Most of his mother’s family died in Auschwitz, and those who survived avoided their Jewish identity after the war. His mother started to show renewed interest in her 20s. “My mother always put more emphasis on making these experiences fun and digestible for us rather than following the strict rules,” he wrote. “Because of this, for example, my concept of Shabbat is about having everyone around the table and my mom kissing my head, blessing me, and having peace around us. It is very far from the concept that we aren’t allowed to do certain things...”

Dennis understands the significance of the manuscripts that were written so many decades ago and of the renewal of the project. “It’s trying to understand the period we live in and the significance of being a Hungarian Jew in this time period,” he says. “In my text, I tried to explain the situation so that people understand it. But besides the historical aspect, I also like to express myself in writing, and it feels good to be a part of something like this and to share my Jewish identity with the world.”

In addition to the positive



Yiddish Scientific Institute, 1933, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research



The Hebrew-language entry for the competition by Hansi, in 1934.

YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

aspects of Jewish identity, are there also more challenging aspects?

“For me, it’s not a big challenge to be Jewish. If I wasn’t an active Jew, that would be a greater concession. There’s a fear of anti-Semitism, of estrangement, of discrimination, of the fact that people don’t understand us or think we’re strange, but if we don’t expose ourselves and aren’t active, people will understand us even less. I believe in being a full part of society in general, and I feel that through me, people will understand what Judaism is.

“I explain it to them, and I create awareness that way,” he says. “It might be scary to walk around in the street with a kippah, but I wear it when I’m on the way to the synagogue, even though I usually don’t wear [one]. I do it because it’s my opportunity to be a Jewish person on the street and not just one more person on the street. When they see 100 kippot, they’ll accept it and understand what it is.”

He notes that many young Jews in Hungary feel detached from their heritage. “That’s why I started the Keshet Hungary foundation with a few partners, to help to rebuild the Jewish world we lost in the 20th century,” he says. “Our mission is to provide young Jews with a sense of religious and com-

munity affiliation by means of educational programs and events.”

In light of what’s happening now in the Middle East and the nature of the government in Hungary, is there also fear involved in such activity?

“I felt the fear even before October 7, but I choose to overcome it. That’s why when I do [foundation activity] or when I wear a kippah, I feel proud. It’s not just so people see it. It also has religious significance, and that’s why I have a legitimate reason. In other words, there’s an obstacle here and we can and must overcome it. Young Jews are afraid to reveal themselves as Jews. Some overcome it and some don’t.”

Liza Cemal, a 25-year-old who was born in Turkey and lives in Heidelberg, Germany, is also working to understand the role of Jewish identity today. “The choice of being actively Jewish has changed for me over the years,” she says. “I met people and became involved in social programs, and then academic programs, too, which helped me to understand Jewish values that I believe in.

“I studied Hebrew and Jewish studies and it’s a significant part of my life,” she says. “I also like orally communicated memories and traditions, and it’s important for me to know my family history.” Liza began her Kaleidoscope piece with a citation from the Mishna: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?” She explained that the idea encourages an effort to understand who we really are. “I’m proud to be part of something that will be preserved for the future,” she says regarding her participation in the project.

Liza was born in Antakya in southern Turkey. As a child, she moved with her family to Istanbul, and went to study in Italy at the

original project contain a degree of sorrow. “The writers tried to escape where they were living through writing,” she says. “There are tough stories: ‘Our father left us,’ or ‘We were 13 children and only eight survived.’” She adds that the Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe has always been involved in documenting Jewish heritage, but that this time, she wanted to do something that would connect the past to the present using the tools that the foundation is familiar with: libraries, museums and archives. “archives are tools for understanding the past,” she says, “but also an inspiration to young people and guidance for contemporary European communities.”

Greiber adds that initially, “colleagues told me that I should do video biographies, that nobody would actually write texts and that there was no point in asking. But I didn’t want video biographies because I wanted Kaleidoscope to echo the original project, and also because I wanted to give writers an opportunity to do something with greater depth. It’s designed for people for whom writing comes more easily and who are willing to be vulnerable and honest, and it isn’t easy to find such people.”

The challenge doesn’t only lie in the writing process. “It’s hard for young people to find their place in the mainstream Jewish community today,” says Greiber. “That’s nothing new. For 2,000 years now, adults have been saying that the youth aren’t committed enough. But there are now many young people who volunteer and choose to be active in Jewish circles, and who have a positive Jewish identity, not only one that stems from fear and from fighting antisemitism. They invest many hours of their free time to volunteer in youth movements, in school and at cultural events.”

How do you see the project continuing?

“The goal now is to get a snapshot of 2024, as it’s a significant year historically. Each story we get will add another piece to the puzzle.”

Greiber mentions the influence of the October 7 attacks and the ensuing war in Gaza. These are making the ground shake beneath the feet of Diaspora Jews as they contend not just with demonstrations, boycotts and political hostility but, in many cases, also with the loss of friends, isolation, social alienation and dramatic shifts in the public discourse about them.

“We started to develop Kaleidoscope in the winter of 2022,” says Greiber. “The first stories were written and published in September 2023, but most of the stories were written and published at the end of 2023 and in 2024. We couldn’t have fore-

seen that our timing would be so important for recording in real time the European reaction to a central moment in Jewish history. Diaspora Jews’ and Israelis’ sense of Jewish identity, connection and belonging were profoundly disturbed, as reflected in the stories.”

Another young woman who participated in the project is Zippi, a high-school student from Gothenburg, Sweden who, like some of the interviewees in the article, preferred to be identified by only her first name, which is how participants are identified in the project. “Usually, I say that I am Italian, Swedish and American,” she wrote. “I am also half Ashkenazi, half Sephardi.” Her father was born in Stockholm to American parents whose families had immigrated from Poland, Russia and Germany. On her mother’s side, Zippi has Iranian and Italian roots.

She studied at a Jewish school, attended Jewish summer camps and participated in community activities, but says the community didn’t always provide her with a sense of belonging.

‘My parents’ generation didn’t have the opportunity to live as Jews,’ says Rachel. ‘Our generation has an advantage.’

“The community and Jewish school especially are very small and growing up with the same people, it was hard making new friends,” she wrote. “As a child, I was always very shy and sensitive, and many times felt hurt and excluded by the other kids.

“I never felt that I was able to make any long-lasting friendships within the Jewish community, but it wasn’t easy making friends outside the community either,” she continued. “Being open about my Jewish identity and keeping kosher at non-Jewish schools was quite challenging. My classmates often asked why I ate the way I did. I was already a bit of an outsider because I had different interests and style of clothing, and my strong Jewish identity didn’t make it any easier to fit in. I felt lonely for many years.”

Later, she wrote, things improved. She’s now 17 years old, attends high school and feels that she has found a more mature and open social environment. She takes her Jewish identity seriously but is also involved in other things: rock music, painting and the goth subculture. She says recent events haven’t made things easy. “After the October 7 attack, I thought that I should remove the Star of David from my neck, but after about a week, I felt empty without it, and now I feel that I have to wear it again,” she says. “I feel stronger and prouder and it feels good to be a part of something bigger.”

Rachel, a 20-year-old from the city of Liberec in the Czech Republic who is

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Weather

Unseasonably hot
Wednesday will be hotter than average for this time of year in the hills and inland, and humid along the coast. Thursday and Friday will be similar. Saturday will have unusually hot and dry weather.

Day	Low	High
Thursday	16.7	24.2
Friday	16.7	24.2
Saturday	16.7	24.2

Air pollution index: 16.7, 24.2
● low ● medium ● high ● very high

Jerusalem Tel Aviv Haifa Krayot
Be'er Sheva Karmiel Afula Modi'in

pollution forecast for this morning: low-medium

Judaism, rock and goth culture

Greiber, who spearheaded the revived project, notes that most of the stories in the

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the Iranian regime and its regional proxies Hamas, Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.”

It also calls for other Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, to enter the Abraham Accords and to defund the Palestinian Authority.

Project 2025 additionally calls for the United States to build a security pact including Israel, Egypt, the Gulf states and “potential-ly India” as “a second Quad

arrangement” – a step the Biden administration took by forming a group with Israel, India and the United Arab Emirates.

Finally, it warns that the United States “cannot neglect a concern for human rights and minority rights, which must be balanced with strategic and security considerations. Special attention must be paid to challenges of religious freedom, especially the status of Middle Eastern Christians and other religious minorities, as well as the human trafficking endemic to the region.”

Prominent figures on the

right considered close with the Heritage Foundation have expressed increasing wariness over U.S. support for Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians over the treatment of Christians in the Holy Land. This gained its most notable showcase when Tucker Carlson featured a Palestinian reverend from Bethlehem, Pastor Munther Isaac, on his YouTube show earlier this year.

Despite this seeming empathy, the plan does not mention Gaza nor a two-state solution, and the only mentions of Palestinians exist in the context of punitive action.

PROJECT

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participating in the project is also aware of its historical aspect. “When I wrote my story, I thought about the fact that it would be great for there to be such a collection for future readers,” she says. “Maybe they’ll be able to find strength and a sense of belonging in it when there’s another wave of anti-semitism in the future.”

Rachel has also turned her Jewish identity into her calling: She’s studying to be a

rabbi at the Abraham Geiger College’s rabbinical seminary in Potsdam, Germany, which is identified with the Reform movement. She says her mother, like many other Europeans of her generation, couldn’t fully express Judaism because she grew up in Communist Czechoslovakia.

“My parents’ generation didn’t have the opportunity to live as Jews,” says Rachel. “Our generation has an advantage: there’s a phenomenon of returning to our roots here. We appreciate our Jewish identity, nurture it and delve ever deeper into what our grandparents’ generation did.”

Rachel describes her training for the rabbinate as a relief. “I felt like I could finally breathe,” she wrote in her Kaleidoscope article. “I no longer had to feel strange when I felt a connection to God (which is rare in the atheist Czech Republic) and when I wanted things in life to have a greater meaning. I move among my people, and I don’t have to explain what a [kippah] is, or a synagogue, or why I go there every Friday. These are things that my non-Jewish friends cannot fully understand because they don’t live this lifestyle – I don’t hold it against them, and I appreciate their tolerance for my culture.”

When I ask her about the new challenges that have appeared in our era, she replies, “It’s true that Jews aren’t popular, especially now. But that’s how it was in the past, and today there are more people who are becoming close to Judaism and taking an interest in it. There’s a sense of a community that’s becoming connected, and that gives people



Rally of the Jewish Socialist Labour Bund, 1917.

strength and a feeling of being understood.”

Israel as a source of inspiration

The new project also revives ideas held by the historical Bund secular labor movement, which supported the development of Jewish cultural life in Europe and whose ideology is often manifested in the original project. Although it collapsed after the Holocaust, in some senses, the Bund’s views have gained new relevance for young people living in Europe, says Greiber.

“The Jewish world isn’t only Israel and the United States,” she says. “There’s Jewish life in Europe. There are enough Jews who see it as a home, and there are also ancient communities.” She doesn’t see the new project as Bundist in the sense of combating emigration from Europe or having a socialist ideology, but says it reflects a coming to terms with a positive Jewish European identity that goes beyond the fight against antisemitism and the struggle for being able to maintain a Jewish identity.

The four young people who

were interviewed for this article aren’t religious in the Israeli sense of the word, but they’re connected to Jewish values, tradition and culture. They differ from one another in their attitude towards Israel, but it’s clear that it’s an important part of their identity, even if not the only or most important one.

Dennis, for example, says he’s invested in Israel’s future prosperity because its very existence as a Jewish state that will exist even if his community disappears contributes to his security. However, he sees his job as being in the Diaspora. “The more people leave for Israel, the less community there will be here,” he says. “The Hungarian Jewish community is important. I have to stay here, to support and strengthen it.”

Liza also likes and supports Israel. She can see herself living there, but currently she “really likes her life as a Jew in Europe.” She says that “Israel must exist, with its values based on decency, human diversity and a guarantee of peace and unity between various communities and safety for Jews

in danger.” Zippi says that in addition to the sense of security that Israel gives her, it also provides inspiration for her art. She describes herself as a Zionist but doesn’t see herself living in Israel. “I believe in Israel’s future,” she says, “but I’m worried about its present situation and hope that it continues to exist and to prosper in a brighter and more peaceful future.”

Rachel disagrees with the recent negative, extremist connotations given to the word “Zionist,” and she believes it’s clear the existence of a Jewish state is important. She doesn’t rule out the possibility of living in Israel someday. “I haven’t spent much time there,” she says, “but I felt at home there. I had this profound connection that made me think more about where I, as a Jew, really belong.”

Despite their statements of support, it would be a mistake to consider these young Jews in Europe only in terms of their attitude towards Israel. They’re part of a broader group, and they’re taking part in rebuilding an ancient tradition that was interrupted and that was said to have no future.

What’s left is to wait and see if the members of this younger generation succeed in presenting an alternative to Israeli and American Jewish identities; if they develop ties with immigrants from Israel and, perhaps, other minorities in Europe, such as the Muslim one; and whether, despite the historical baggage, they’ll be able to revive a Jewish culture that once flourished and that many claimed had no future after it was destroyed nine decades ago.

sudoku

© Puzzles by Pappocom

The game board is divided into 81 squares, with nine horizontal rows and nine vertical columns. A few numbers already appear in some of the squares. The aim is to fill in numerals 1 to 9 in each of the empty squares, so that every row and column and every box (a group of nine squares outlined in boldface) contains all of the numerals 1 to 9. None of the numerals may recur in the same row, column or box.

9	2	7	4	5	6	3	8	1
8	4	3	2	7	1	6	5	9
6	1	5	9	3	8	2	7	4
3	6	4	7	8	5	9	1	2
1	8	9	3	4	2	7	6	5
7	5	2	1	6	9	8	4	3
4	7	8	5	2	3	1	9	6
5	3	1	6	9	7	4	2	8
2	9	6	8	1	4	5	3	7

Tips and a computerized version of Sudoku can be found at www.sudoku.com

			3					
2	6				4	9		
	1				5		6	
		6	2			8	9	4
		2	6	9			3	1
8			5		3			
	3	8					1	
1	7		8					
		5			6		7	

Difficulty: Medium