In the past Holocaust scholars and psychoanalysts have assumed that most survivors of wartime trauma would permanently suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome. For some victims the pain is still palpable.\textsuperscript{1} Jewish and Christian religious scholars have also suffered from an assault on their faith. They have sought to reconcile their trust in a just and good God with the horrors that were inflicted on innocent people, merely because they were Jewish. At the heart of this struggle is the question of evil, a problem for which there are no satisfactory answers. Why was it possible for Hitler to convince so many people to attempt to exterminate Jews in so many different countries? Why did otherwise decent people join in the task or at least keep silent when they saw evidence of atrocities? If God had specially chosen the Jews to be his people, many wondered if He had been trying to punish them for some reason.\textsuperscript{2} Needless to say if rabbis and clerics found the task daunting, the rank and file of the Jewish community have also, as well as thoughtful members of the Christian laity. Rather than attempt to explain the inexplicable, it has been far easier to agree with Elie Wiesel’s reaction to the horror of seeing small children burned in the crematoria. In \textit{Night}, published in 1958 when he was thirty-years-old, he asserted, “Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever” (p. 32).

Few of us, however, maintain the vehemence of youth. Over time some of Wiesel’s anger has dissipated. In speeches and essays written during the 1980s, he reported how his religious belief reemerged. The real crisis, he recalled in a 1981 essay, came after the war was over. He withdrew from companionship, beginning “to despair of humanity and God; I considered them both enemies of the Jewish people” (1981, p. 139). For a time he turned to Hindu mysticism, but could not bear the suffering he saw in India. Ultimately he found it possible to speak about his
experiences, and is still “surprised to feel a forgotten need to recite certain prayers, to sing certain melodies, to plunge into a certain atmosphere that defined my adolescence” (Ibid., p. 144). In 1994 after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, he told the story of his return to religion a bit differently. He recollected recovering much of his religious fervor shortly after being liberated (1994, p. 113) and reported studying the Bible and the Talmud at that time. He regained his belief in God but not in unconditional love, saying that “because I love Him, I am angry at Him” (Ibid., p. 402). “I have never renounced my faith in God,” recalled the older man looking back upon the ardent misery of his youth (Ibid., p. 84). Clearly over time both his perspective and his memory have changed. His example demonstrates that living with unresolved ambiguity and unanswerable questions is easier for the old than for the young, especially if their postwar lives have brought them success.3

Wiesel’s metamorphosis has been publicly enacted, but other survivors have undergone similar transformations in more private arenas. Of course, those who have lost most of their family, endured the suffering of concentration or work camp, followed by the stresses of exile have not forgotten the pain and confusion of their youth. Nonetheless, over time they have carved out new lives in a new country and in some cases restored their lost faith. Most married and reared children. In old age some have even found new roles to play. They have taken on the challenge of educating the next generation, as well as those older folk who grew up far from the horrors of World War II. Most appear to have relished their new importance. A positive response to their reminiscences has had a healing effect. Their resilience makes one wonder what characteristics separate them from more troubled survivors, those who like Primo Levi eventually commit suicide or others who have lived a life of seemingly endless complaint. Two texts are instructive: Isaac Goodfriend’s 2001 memoir, By Fate or By Faith: The Saga of a Survivor and Ben Wajikra [Lou Leviticus]’s Tales from the Milestone (2003). According to terms established by a survey of Holocaust survivors in Israel, Goodfriend belongs in the
category of those whose religious practices changed after the war. He grew up in an ultra
observant household, but in adulthood he became highly rather than ultra observant (Brenner, p.
47). Despite the upheavals of his youth, Leviticus has maintained his mostly secular way of life.
Yet, he writes, by choosing the pseudonym of Ben Wajikra— the name means son of Leviticus—
he is paying homage to his dead parents (Wajikra, p. 1).

As Wiesel puts it, survivors of trauma need to live in more than one world, to accept "the
mystery inherent in questions," and to convert "tensions and conflicts . . . into culture, art,
education, spiritual inquiry, the quest for truth, the quest for justice" (1987, p. 195). Although
those who have experienced massive disruption can live with ambiguity, they also feel a certain
need to reconstruct a usable past. Just as Wiesel in later memoirs talks about his religious
childhood with feeling, other survivors remember aspects of their youth that gave them to
strength to endure.

The story that Isaac Goodfriend records in his 2001 memoir, By Fate or By Faith, follows
Wiesel’s example in both respects. Not only does he reconstruct his religious childhood, but his
later life suggests that he has successfully converted the religious conflicts he experienced into a
remarkable example of “spiritual inquiry” and “the quest for justice.” Goodfriend’s narrative
shows how flexibility, a devout childhood, good luck, a good marriage, impressive musical
talent, and a tolerance of ambiguity have provided him the means to live through the Holocaust
and remake his life far from home.

Throughout the memoir, Isaac Goodfriend showed rare flexibility when faced with difficult
situations. Moreover he ultimately benefited from being unable to live in his childhood
community. Born in 1924, he was just old enough when the war began to share some of his
father’s burdens. Goodfriend adjusted quickly to his family’s altered circumstances and
ultimately made good use of the skills circumstances forced him to develop. For example, he did
not want to leave school at fifteen for an apprenticeship, but learning how to make socks helped
support his family in those desperate early war years (2001, pp. 49, 72). After his father’s premature death from typhoid, Goodfriend was taught to mix mortar by Polish chimney builders (Ibid., p. 97). In a labor camp later on, mixing mortar became his job and a life line. He was so useful to the master masons that they saved his life when he “nearly killed three men” in an industrial accident (Ibid., p. 123). Then in the postwar period, his wartime experience of bartering and scrounging turned out to be essential skills. Once again he profited from an unsought education. Even in the face of radical changes and the murder of his mother and brothers and sisters, three things sustained him: his emotional attachment to the Jewish community, his religious education, and his good fortune in having a beautiful singing voice. Ironically enough, the exigencies of war and the destruction of his ancestral home opened a new path for him to follow, one far more congenial than the world into which he had been born.

Childhood religion and education turned out to be the bedrock of Goodfriend’s later life. He was born into a close-knit Hasidic community, the warmth of which he never forgot nor the lessons of his Jewish education. His narrative contains many Yiddish and some Hebrew words, suggesting the long term importance of the language of his youth. He attended cheder at the age of three, and his musical ability emerged very early. Had the war not intervened he might have followed in his father’s path and run a dry goods store. Although in youth he expected to live in the traditional manner, in retrospect he emphasizes the self-questioning he underwent during his adolescence. His musical gifts would have been considerably restricted by Hasidic conventions. He longed to play the piano but realizing that piano playing was not part of their tradition, he did not dare ask if lessons were possible. He knew other Jews who were not as observant as his family, but to follow their example might well have alienated him from those he loved. Fearing that his musical gifts could force him to disobey the tenets of Hasidism, after his bar mitzvah he wondered if he were fit for this traditional life. As it happened the war came, destroyed the
shtetl and altered the trajectory of his religious life. Those early doubts, he declares, were intensified by the upheaval, not diminished by his suffering (*Ibid.*, p. 50).

Ironically, the exigencies of the early Nazi regime freed young Goodfriend to experiment by reading secular material, long forbidden by Hasidic practice. Moreover he was fortunate in being fifteen and very strong. Had he been somewhat older the Nazis would have beaten him as they did his father. If he had been a young child, most likely he would have perished. In contrast his parents felt responsible for their two-year-old son and aging parents. That situation made it almost impossible for them to flee to Russia as some of their friends planned to do (*Ibid.*, p. 55). Wartime deprivations turned this merchant family into barterers, who searched for anything that they might sell. As Goodfriend remembers, he became expert in trading gold and paper money. Despite Goodfriend’s conflicts about religious practice, his religious education continued to sustain him. He never lost his emotional commitment to his faith. For example, when his father died prematurely from typhoid fever, Goodfriend found new meaning in the ritual prayers of mourning. As he put it later, “it was then that I began to notice the words, when the prayers stopped being automatic and there was meaning in every phrase.” His father’s *shiva*, the mourning that follows a funeral, taught him “to pray, how to conduct the services and give the prayers proper *kavana*, their spiritually unique expression.” This sense of connection, he reports, still emerges “every time I conduct a weekly service” (*Ibid.*, p. 86). These strong feelings demonstrate that the ties to his family’s faith survived the changes in his religious practice. In the long run this connection mattered more to him than the experiments with non-kosher food and the secular life he led for a time during and soon after the war. Not surprisingly his belief wavered in the face of tragedy, such as the moment when his older sister was hauled off by the Nazis. Feeling guilty he remembered, “My heart was heavy, my faith was crumbling. I had watched my entire family be taken away and I did nothing” (*Ibid.* p. 114). Yet a few days later he recovered, saying he was comforted by the High Holiday’s liturgy. In this text “I found
the solid rock of courage. I found a way to hold on to the little bit of faith that remained. In my mind’s eye I saw the legless man [mentioned in an earlier passage], saying Jews don’t despair” ([Ibid.], p. 115). Religion continued to matter to him even though at times it brought him little comfort. For example, he continued to pray even after he had violated dietary laws by eating Polish sausage ([Ibid.], p. 113).

Besides flexibility and a religious background, unlike most European Jews, Goodfriend and some of his relatives had the remarkably good fortune to be hidden by an exceptionally brave Polish family, headed by farmer Wypych Marcinkowski. Just before the first Nazi roundup, on the spur of the moment Mrs. Marcinkowska offered sanctuary to his aunt and her young daughter ([Ibid.], 109-110). One by one Goodfriend’s surviving relatives fled from the ghetto to join the aunt at the farm. Goodfriend stayed on the work site until in 1943 the approaching Russians meant that the Nazis would move the Jews to another camp ([Ibid.], p. 127). Then he and a friend joined their families at the farm where he became a farmer named Roman. Life was not easy. His family clung “to the same old pettiness.” Nearly sixty years later he still dislikes his aunt for refusing to use a Rosenthal china service she had brought with her ([Ibid.], p. 144). Gratitude, however, had its limits. After the war was over the farmer’s nephew, Stanislaw, proposed marriage to Goodfriend’s aunt. The young nephew was forced to explain to his benefactor that such a marriage would show disrespect to his dead relatives and to their God ([Ibid.], p. 162). Fortunately, Stanislaw was religious and accepted this explanation with remarkably good grace.

Unlike many memorists, Goodfriend continues his story into the postwar period and beyond. It took him many years to find a home and a lasting career although he was such a resourceful person that he found many ways to make a living. For a short time he and his friends traveled back and forth bartering. They moved from Lodz, in the Russian zone, to Berlin, under American occupation. Immediately they were struck by the difference in behavior between the two armies. The Russians distrusted us; the Americans gave “with a full heart.” For a time he
almost abandoned his religious traditions, and like any young person he “thrived in this air of freedom” (Ibid., pp. 181-182) During the war starvation and deprivation had caused him to abandon keeping kosher. He deemed it more important to live than to refuse to eat food considered by observant Jews to be unclean. Still, unlike many other young people, he did not abandon his people and customs for long. The pull of the past was too strong for complete independence. Goodfriend was introduced to Aharon Saurymper, an older man who had known his family. He scolded the younger man for abandoning the faith of his ancestors. Fortunately the older man did more than complain. He offered companionship and helped the young one improve his considerable skills as a barterer. Not too long thereafter Goodfriend met and married Betty, another survivor who had grown up in a Lithuanian shtetl.

For many years Goodfriend and his companions avoided reminiscing about the miseries of the war. Reticence became second nature, a fact which may explain why he says so little about Betty’s suffering in the war. Of course, he might well have considered that it was up to Betty to tell her own story. About the only detail he offered was that only one of her sisters survived the war. The rest of her family perished (Ibid., p. 200). Directly after the war, religion was also a taboo subject. “We held on to the feelings that we had a complaint,” he recalls, “a complaint against God for everything that happened during the war.” Quite understandably like other young survivors they longed for some understanding of their suffering. Instead of raising unanswerable questions, “all we could do is talk, reminisce about a time when we had faith in our community and in a God that would deliver us from our enemies” (Ibid., p. 197). Being of a different temperament from the more philosophical Elie Wiesel, Goodfriend remembers avoiding thinking “about adjusting to a religious life.” “Still,” he recalls, “God finds a way.” As in his youth he was led back to belief by his emotions, not his intellect. “The answer lay in who I was, how I was raised” (Ibid., p. 198).
The first event in his journey back to religious practice occurred at Rosh Hashanah in 1946. The congregation where he prayed needed a cantor. The rector approached Goodfriend, even though he was aware that the young man no longer was observant. Using considerable tact, he said, “we forgive you. You should be our shaliach tsibur, our messenger. And you know,” he added, “you can always repent.” Then, having offered Goodfriend the chance to reconcile himself to God, he offered him an aliyah, maftir. That means he paid money so that the young man would have the honor of leading the congregation in prayer. Not surprisingly Goodfriend felt overwhelmed by this gesture, recited the blessing, “and repented though my tears” (Ibid., p. 199).

Nonetheless, the path to a renewal of religious faith was not a steady one, but one that for several years depended upon the community in which the young people lived. For a time the Goodfriends lived in Paris, where Isaac learned to be a tailor. Both learned French and enjoyed the freewheeling French life. As a result of the French influence, Betty and he decided against emigrating to Israel. Instead they wanted a visa to go to Canada or the United States, but to obtain one they had to move back to Berlin. Once back there, they rejoined the congregation and in time Goodfriend became its cantor. The congregation arranged for him to take music lessons at a conservatory as well. As he describes the situation, many moments in the couple’s life were marked by surprises and contingencies. They ended up leaving for Montreal, Canada, in 1951. Unlike the Americans, the Canadians welcomed Poles as immigrants. The officials were impressed by his career as a tailor and his mastery of French. In Montreal he became the cantor of a well-established congregation.

Although in Montreal Goodfriend proved himself to be a successful salesman, as well as a tailor, music turned out to provide a more satisfactory long-term career. Despite success he had to live with his recognition of the impermanence of his place in the world. In the short term, he not only became a cantor, but he also continued his musical education. He gave lieder recitals
and sang opera to the consternation of his Montreal congregation, most of whom disapproved of such secular activities. Rather than face disapproval, he made several more moves, from Boston to Cleveland and eventually to Atlanta. There he met Governor Jimmy Carter and later used his talents to convince his old friends in Cleveland to vote for the Georgia politician. The highlight of his later life occurred when Carter asked him to sing the national anthem at his inauguration in 1977.

Goodfriend takes pride in that memory, but he has not forgotten the losses of his youth. To borrow Wiesel’s ideas, success made Goodfriend realize that he had a foot in two worlds. He became “a man who somehow managed to build a bridge between two distinct lives: the ashes from whence I came and the heights to which I soared.” When he contemplates his legacy, however, “the fog of accomplishment lifts and the memories come flooding back, of a time when everything was dark and everything was bleak and when we said that there was no way out.” Rejecting the idea that he was somehow special, he declares, “God gave me a chance; He gave me life. He gave me another sixty or seventy years, and this is who I am” (Ibid., pp. 267-268).

In contrast to Goodfriend, Lou Leviticus reacted differently to the trials of the war. The key factors that explain his reactions include the nature of his religious upbringing, the specifics of his war time trials, his age, and postwar experiences. Unlike Goodfriend who was fifteen when the war began, Leviticus was born in 1931. He was only nine in 1940 when the Germans invaded the Netherlands, eleven when he lost both parents, and fourteen when liberated. His memoir is remarkable for its candor about religion, sex, violence, and anger. He writes with refreshing honesty about his actions and the ensuing “demonic feelings of hatred and guilt” (Wajikra, 2003, p. 2).

For many years after the war Leviticus did not talk about his experiences. Then in the 1990s he was interviewed by a man from the Spielberg Foundation. When he saw the videotape afterwards, “I was dissatisfied with my performance.” He realized that he had spoken “only of a
tiny fraction of the many things that happened” during the war and “was not able to express my feelings about them” (*Ibid.*, p. 2). One of the reasons he composed his memoir, he confides, was “to purge myself of the bitterness, the sadness, the guilt of being alive, the guilt for what I did to stay alive, and all the other feelings which had accumulated as a young boy and had kept hidden” (*Ibid.*). Thanks to the Nazis several times he had been faced with what Lawrence Langer calls “choiceless choices” (1995, p. 46).

Like Paul Steinberg (1996) who describes the many feelings dredged up by composing his memoir, Leviticus records how the act of writing affected his daily life. He worried that his recollections about the traumas of his youth might cause him to misrepresent the sequence of events. To insure the accuracy of his memories, he consulted Karel Brouwer, his foster father during the war, Harry Theeboom, a slightly older survivor, and Elly Duits, who also spent much time at the Milestone, Leviticus’ house of refuge (*Ibid.*, p. 3). He also consulted several books on the war and the resistance, most of which were written in Dutch.

The memoir can be divided into four main sections: his prewar upbringing, hiding with his parents and escaping capture, being sheltered by members of the underground, and finally being placed against his will in an orphanage run by Orthodox Jews. He stayed there until 1949 when he turned eighteen. The latter experience inflicted gratuitous injury on the boy. He had bonded with the Brouwers, his Gentile foster parents, but his mother’s surviving relatives were very observant Jews. They objected to the Brouwers who had become Roman Catholics during the war. Apparently his relatives had fewer objections to Protestants, but on the whole they were determined to restore the boy to his familial heritage.

Unfortunately for the adolescent boy he had no positive recollections of any religious practices. His parents had led secular lives but felt obliged to give him some religious education to please his mother’s orthodox relatives. In youth he had found his aunt’s religiosity offensive. To make matters worse he had reason to believe that this aunt was “a liar and a hypocrite” (*Ibid.*, p. 5).
Once a week Hebrew Sunday school bored him as well. He was well aware that his parents sent him there only “to placate my mother’s family” (Ibid., p. 51). Before the war began he had identified with his Dutch heritage not his Jewish one. After the Nazis occupied his country, suddenly being Jewish became a grave misfortune. He was forced to wear a yellow star and was deserted by all his erstwhile friends. When he was summarily dismissed from his junior league soccer team, he “felt a bitter hatred toward the whole world, including those damned lousy Jews who had made me one of them” (Ibid., p. 53). In frustration and rage he wondered why he had been singled out. Lacking positive attitudes about his Jewish heritage, he began to internalize the pervasive Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda.

At the same time he recalls the horror of being victimized by the Nazis. The new regime, he recalls, created “tacit bystanders and cooperators out of many ‘devout’ Dutchmen” (Ibid., p. 53). As a result he remembers hating “being a Jew” (Ibid., p. 51) and resenting the Dutch bystanders who failed to assist victimized Jews. “That feeling of resentment,” he decided in retrospect, hurt him worse than the physical pain he endured. “It destroys one’s trust in people” (Ibid., p. 55). He had good reasons for feeling powerless and seeking revenge. Many of his school friends disappeared one by one, including his beloved German refugee classmate, Anita Maria Grünewald. He describes hunting for her after the war and breaking into sobs when he learned of her death at Sobibor. He recalls still feeling “this terrible loss when rewriting and rereading this–sometimes I do lose it and break down in the solitude of my little office in the basement.” Although he feels sustained by the love of his wife, Rose, “sixty years later I still cannot forget her [Anita], it still hurts and I still don’t understand the reason for it all” (Ibid., p. 68).

Physical cruelty added considerably to his sense of powerlessness. He describes in vivid detail one episode in which Nazi youths set upon him and his friends. He emphasizes the sexual elements of the cruel bullying and the unwillingness of adults to intervene. Some grownups were intimidated by the vicious behavior, but at least one of the observers clearly enjoyed the
sight of the spectacle (Ibid., pp. 62-63). Looking back on the episode, he realized that he was grateful to have more or less escaped from the worst of the attack, but he also felt guilty because the Nazi youth had broken the fingers of one of his friends after attempting to attack him sexually.

Then in 1942 his parents decided to leave Amsterdam. Some brave Dutchmen had formed an active underground. Just as his classmates had disappeared, one day he left school never to return. He was escorted from the building by a man whom he called Oom (uncle), who turned out to be “a plain-clothes detective in the Amersfoort police” (Ibid., p. 82). Oom Piet took Leviticus to a farm near Amersfoort where he joined his parents. The farmer was willing to hide the family because he needed money badly. He housed the boy in the barn far from the adults, a situation of which the farmer’s daughters quickly took advantage. The elder girl, Riek, was sixteen and Stien, the younger, was fourteen. Both were older and taller than young Lou.

Leviticus’ ensuing sexual initiation aroused considerable confusion and conflict in him. The daughters took turns introducing the eleven-year-old boy to sexual play, but they combined their advances with threats to betray him to the Germans. He describes how confusing was the mixture of intimacy and danger. As a result his reactions bear some resemblance to those of children abused by Catholic priests. The boy, who was quite ignorant about sexual matters, was not always aware of what was happening to his body. In contrast the girls had been as active sexually as they could be in a boarding school run by Roman Catholic nuns. Leviticus describes the scenes in detail explaining how befuddled he became when he ejaculated for the first time. He felt as though his “insides were coming out” (Ibid., p. 91). Nonetheless he soon rejected the role of victim. After a relatively short time, he convinced himself that he was in love. His “love” life did not last long. In August 1942, his parents arranged a quick departure from the farm without taking time for him to say goodbye to the girls. Only after they settled in Amersfoort did he learn that the farmer had tried to increase the fee for hiding their family. Like
his daughters he threatened to turn them in to the Germans if they did not give him the money he required. As a result the family fled.

The move turned out to be disastrous for the parents. For a time the family hid in a third floor apartment owned by a coachman and his wife. They had to be quiet all day long and be vigilant lest the neighbors see them. Unfortunately someone must have betrayed them. In November the police arrived. His mother began to scream in terror. The boy, aided by his father, jumped over the railing of the porch and managed to hide out under a wash tub in a nearby apartment. His parents were arrested and killed at Auschwitz before the end of the year. Miraculously the young boy managed to escape and made his way to the house of the milkman, who was part of the underground. He soon discovered that the milkman’s family thought it best to turn him over to the police, assuming that one so young should be with his parents. He thought that “the suggestion was probably made out of genuine compassion and ignorance of the fate which awaited us Jews and the wish to do the best for me and for themselves.” Realizing that his life was at stake, he ran away early the next morning before the family arose. He returned to the farm from which he and his parents had been summarily expelled. This time the farmer refused to take him in permanently, but he did make contact with the Dutch underground who later paid him “handsomely” (Ibid., p. 108). During his short sojourn on the farm, the older sister Riek returned and for the first time had intercourse with Leviticus. Fortunately she had listened carefully to the boy’s escape story so that he felt nurtured by her concern. As a result, the sex seemed consensual, not as coerced as the earlier encounters had been.

Young Leviticus felt much safer and less confused during the next section of his life when he lived with the Brouwers at “De Mijlpaal,” the Milestone. Because day-to-day events were less upsetting, Leviticus describes in detail the activities of the TD, an underground organization devoted to obtain or create false identity cards for Jews. Karel Brouwer, Leviticus’ foster father, was one of the leaders who created false documents for Jews and other Dutchmen whom the
Germans sought to imprison. He subverted the system of universal registration that ordinarily benefited the Nazis’ plan to exterminate Jews. Fortunately the administrators lacked computers, which could have created one vast database. The central registry in The Hague depended on local registrars sending them updated information about the movements of residents. Each citizen had to carry identification, and Jews had a large J on their card. Karel Brouwer was an undersecretary of his municipality, which meant he had intimate knowledge of the workings of the identification system. He created a method of converting data by giving Jews duplicates of the cards of non-Jewish citizens. Occasionally both citizens met, but Brouwer wrote legalistic-sounding letters that mostly confused the officers of the municipality. When the Germans added special stamps to the identification records, the TD group learned how to copy them. The TD group saved the lives of 400 Jews and about 10,000 non-Jews. According to Leviticus, after the war Brouwer spent two years correcting the records by removing the false information (Ibid., p. 126).

Throughout Leviticus’ stay at the Brouwers he felt reasonably safe. Using the name Rudy Van Der Roest, he attended local schools whenever classes were in session. In many ways Leviticus’ experiences in the farm town were similar to that of London evacuees, whose lives are described with great sympathy by Joyce Cary, the Anglo-Irish novelist, in Charley is My Darling (1940). The Amsterdam boy spoke standard Dutch and had received an education superior to that of the farm children. Being short, he learned to fight hard with his clogs when attacked by another boy. Needless to say he took advantage of his precocious sexual education with local girls, including one named Lien Kieviet. She and her sisters were notorious collaborators who had their heads shaved after the war ended (Ibid., p. 139). Most important, fear of capture had taught him to live by his wits. His trust of adults was severely limited. Therefore he took precautions lest the situation deteriorate. He stole money from farmhouses in case he needed funds to make a quick escape.
During the last “Hunger Winter” of the war, the situation deteriorated for the Dutch. Food was in very short supply, and the Germans were busily rounding up able-bodied men. The Dutch who were not taken into custody felt as helpless as some Amsterdam adults had felt when witnessing Nazi youth brutalize young Jews. Just as the peril increased for Jewish prisoners, many of whom died on death marches out of concentration camps, so civilians were more at risk. If hunger did not kill them, angry Nazis might (Ibid., p. 159). On February 8, 1945, a crisis arose. Two men left the Mijlpaal to fetch wood and ran into Germans. They fled into the Mijlpaal’s garden. Rita Brouwer, Karel’s pregnant wife, and Leviticus were both fast thinkers and managed to hide incriminating evidence of their identity card-manufacturing activities. In the process Leviticus became identified as part of the group and had to be whisked off to a nearby farm.

Unfortunately young Leviticus’ troubles were not over. For a time he lived relatively peacefully with the farming family, attending Catholic mass with them. He remembers loving the service, the organ music, and the singing. He was baptized but did not take the rite very seriously. He found the catechism “very easy and as silly as the stuff they had tried to teach me at the Synagogue in Amsterdam.” On the other hand, being baptized protected the priest and him somewhat. The priest, he reports, was glad to receive a convert, one who “stayed awake and sang well and would help clean the church” (Ibid., pp. 167-168). He realized that the war was nearly over and created two sustaining fantasies, neither of which came to fruition. The first was that he would return to the Mijlpaal and the Brouwers, the second that he would be reunited with his parents.

When the Allied troops arrived, the farm provided a pivotal point in the skirmish between Germans and Canadians. A few days later two German SS soldiers appeared to commandeer food. One of them dragged off Trijn, a daughter of the family, to the back of the farmhouse, probably with rape in mind. The other made the mistake of hitting Leviticus in the kidneys. He
responded by hitting the German with his “pit-spade,” killing him immediately. When the second soldier left the girl in order to avenge his friend, Henk, the farmer’s son, “launched the pitchfork like a harpoon into the German’s back and thereby saved my life.” In a rage of fear and fury, Leviticus plunged his spade repeatedly into the soldier’s body until he died. All members of the farm family were hysterical by now, but they quickly pulled themselves together to bury the dead soldiers (Ibid., pp. 174-176). In the aftermath Leviticus recalls being “shocked, shamed and exhilarated” (Ibid., p. 177). The farm family was frightened by his “crazy temper.” They did not respect him, for in his rage he had “made them accessories to murder” (Ibid., p. 178). Looking back upon the carnage, Leviticus insists he suffered no guilt or nightmares from the slaughter (Ibid., p. 167), for the killings were unavoidable. Nonetheless, he longed to tell the village priest, do penance, and be absolved. Realizing that would be too dangerous, he kept quiet. Luckily for them all, the war was drawing to a close thereby reducing the chance that German soldiers would come looking for the missing men.

After the war ended Leviticus felt some pride in having dispatched his enemies and avenged those whom he loved who had been killed by the Nazis. In retrospect he realizes that he was lucky to have survived. “I neither dream of the event nor do I feel that I was a monster–just a fourteen-year-old under lots of pressure” (Ibid., p. 179). He distinguishes between the two killings. He killed the first soldier accidentally, but the second he dispatched in a murderous rage. “Of course, he [the second SS officer] would have eliminated us, had he been given the change. But still. . . .” Not until his son died in the 1973 Israeli war did he feel much sympathy for the families of the slain officers. Only then could he entertain feelings of compassion impossible for the beleaguered youth. He reports having agonized over the decision to include this incident in his memoir. Ultimately he decided ‘to write the truth and let the chips fall where they may” (Ibid., p. 180).
For a short time after the war he was reunited with the Brouwers, but his religious aunt was determined to seize control of any reparations that might come to Leviticus. She willingly told lies about the Brouwers. She snatched the young boy from this family to put him in an orphanage full of traumatized Jewish children. Those who ran the orphanage had little idea how to be helpful youths. Hearing about the problems of others served no useful purpose. “We were too mixed up ourselves and too engrossed in, and ignorant of, our own problems,” Leviticus recalls, to learn from the suffering of others (Ibid., p. 181). The counselors did not understand the children and did not talk about sexual abuse, which many including Leviticus had experienced.6

The orphanage officials hoped to create a new generation of Jews from the orphans, but their insensitivity subverted their efforts. Rather than acknowledging that righteous Gentiles had saved many of the children from extermination, some teachers tried to teach them to distrust Christians. As a result many of the orphans rejected orthodoxy when they were free to choose for themselves. Leviticus believes also that many of the children, like him, resisted indoctrination.7 Their experiences had taught them to equate being Jewish with persecution.

Although one would like to think that propaganda would not have long term effects on vulnerable children, his memoir suggests that it can, especially when the war was followed by insensitive treatment. On the other hand, Leviticus has had a successful life. Like some of his fellow orphans he “sought help from professionals or support groups later in life” (Ibid., p. 183). He retired from being a tenured professor of Agricultural Engineering at the University of Nebraska in 1997. He is still married and has children and grandchildren and has maintained his ties with the Brouwers. In September 2004, he took a 1650 mile trip in the American west with one of his host Dutch “sisters.”8 He travels to the Netherlands frequently to see members of his host family and has also kept in touch with some of the orphans from the institution. No doubt
his success in later life has made it possible for him to reassess his early life and compose this engrossing memoir.

In conclusion, successful survivors have learned to live with “a system of gaps” (Rubenstein, p. 296). As Elie Wiesel put it in his 1986 Nobel Prize address, survivors of the Holocaust live with unanswerable questions. They cannot explain why good people witnessed atrocities but turned away when they saw the suffering of Jews. Instead of assuming that God wanted to punish the Jews as some theologians and survivors have argued, Wiesel places his hope in the power of memory balanced by judicious forgetting. He finds inspiration in the story of Job, who after great undeserved suffering “still found the strength to begin again, to rebuild his life” (1986, p. 248). Goodfriend, Leviticus, Wiesel, and other survivors who have remade their lives in far away places may serve as an inspiration. Their stories sustain us as we encounter unresolved questions and tensions in our own lives.

Notes

1 Sara Houghteling, Envisioning Paris (2004) describes a painful interview with a woman “war orphan.” She screamed at Houghteling for having the temerity to attempt to write a novel about the Holocaust. “I wish it were fiction,” the woman shouted, “that I lost my four brothers and my parents in the Shoah.” The interviewer reeled “back at the chasm of her grief” (n. p.).

2 After Auschwitz some Jews have found it impossible to continue to believe in “the transcendent God of the covenant and election.” An alternative path attracted them. They have responded to the appeal of “mysticism and nature paganism,” a position described by Richard Rubenstein in After Auschwitz. According to Rubenstein turning to “Buddhist enlightenment is to choose a synthesizing system of continuity over a dichotomizing system of gaps” (Rubenstein, 1992, p. 296).

3 Amir Cohen-Shalev, Art in Old Age, describes a similar process in the lives of artists and their characters. For example, Cohen-Shalev argues that in Ingmar Bergman’s Fanny and
Alexander, at the end of the film the grandmother finds that “empathy replaces, or rather preempts, the need to ‘make sense’ or to ‘mend’ the loose fragments of her experience. . . . Late-life freedom has supplanted hierarchy as the source of authority” (p. 133).

4 Goodfriend, 2001, pp. 85-86. Lou Leviticus wrote me that kavana actually means purpose (e-mail message sent, October 15, 2004).

5 Wajikra, 2004, p. 104. The milkman also had to hide the next day. The whole group had been betrayed (Leviticus, e-mail, October 15, 2004).

6 Unlike the Israeli children who have lost family members under traumatic circumstances but have learned to help each other at summer camp, the Holocaust orphans had experienced too much pain to become “wounded healers” without professional help, cf. Freedman, “Young Lives, A21.

7 Judaism still has little place in Leviticus’ life. “My religion is in what is above my house and back yard” (Leviticus, e-mail, October 18, 2004).

8 He described the trip in an email message, September 28, 2004. In another message, October 15, 2004, he said that he has eight sisters and three brothers from the host family. Several have visited him in the United States.
References


Leviticus, Lou. 2004. E-mail messages, October.


