

Connecting and Transforming: Eva Engel's Lifelong Outreach Mission

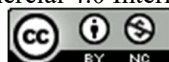
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Abstract

Creation and re-creation are concepts at the core of the lifelong outreach programs that Eva Engel initiated among Sydney's Jewish youth. A Holocaust child survivor, Eva connected with Jewish 'unaffiliated youth', delivering programs in her home environment to counter their alienation and loneliness. Motivated by her understanding of the intergenerational transmission of trauma, she reached out to second-generation Holocaust survivors, who bonded with her children's friends in her home. She noted that socialising promoted their self-confidence, personal agency and self-esteem. She created the Association for Child Survivors in Sydney, a consciousness-raising concept in Holocaust awareness at that time. A believer in the healing power of music, Eva started the B'nai Brith choir, bringing together survivors, newcomers and Australians. Through the prism of Eva's life, this paper affirms that her humanitarian agenda through the decades has powered creative endeavours that enabled participants to re-create their lives constructively. She also reached out to Russian migrants in Sydney, whom she brought together and encouraged to reaffirm their cultural identity and whom she helped to integrate within the Jewish community. All Eva's quotations are from personal interviews conducted with Eva by the author over several months in 2023.

Keywords: Holocaust survivors, Shoah Foundation, Russian migrants, Courage to Care, Righteous Gentiles

This paper is based primarily on the memories of Eva Engel, a Holocaust child survivor, social activist, changemaker and connector. This is her history and her narrative as she remembers it, recorded over several months in 2023 in Sydney, Australia. This paper constitutes an extended oral history recorded and documented in a series of lengthy interviews conducted by the writer of this paper, focusing on Eva's personal narration and memories of her life history and her ideological evolution from childhood to the present. It also includes her recollections and analysis of her past work among child and adult survivors of the Holocaust in Sydney; and her reflections on her work over many decades from the 1930s, as a social activist within the Jewish and broader communities in Australia, as well as her interpretation and attribution of meaning to those recollected experiences. In accordance with the principles of oral history, her actions and perspectives are contextualised with reference



to societal, cultural, psychological, religious and historical scholarship, events and perspectives (“OHA Core Principles”, n.d.; Jessee 2011; Thompson 2000). This personal oral history captures Eva’s biography, her memories, thoughts and emotions as seen through the lens of her evolving and empathic activism in diverse spheres within the Jewish community in Sydney, Australia.

As an example of oral history, this portrait of Eva is predicated on the successful collaborative relationship between subject and interviewer, i.e., Eva and the author of this paper, a research partnership essential for a meaningful and authentic oral history. This oral history places and amplifies Eva’s experiences within a larger social and historical context, which is useful for understandings of the ways that history is constructed. At the same time, the oral historian is aware of and guards against common pitfalls associated with oral histories, such as memory problems, bias and exaggeration, and inaccurate answers concerning specific dates, places or times. There are researchers who query the limits of oral histories, specifically ‘accounts of extreme human experiences, such as narratives of survival and flight in response to mass atrocities’ (Jessee 2011). Erin Jessee affirms the value of narratives ‘of ordinary people living in conditions of social and political stability’, but questions the limits of oral historical methods and theory when considering ‘intimate accounts of extreme human experiences, such as narratives of survival and flight in response to mass atrocities’ (Jessee 2011).

Eva’s biographical portrait can serve as a case study of a Sydney Jewish activist, which includes discussion, with appropriate references to academic literature, detailing how an individual activist within a community can have an impact—emotionally, intellectually, socially and culturally—on the lives and circumstances of child and adult Holocaust survivors, while also impacting society’s perceptions of and attitudes towards these survivors. This case study evaluates the impact of the conspiracy of silence in Holocaust homes, where discussion and questions concerning Holocaust memories and experiences were frequently taboo (Wajnryb 2001, 56). There were, however, homes where there was ‘an endless account of tribulation’ and ‘communication was explicit’ (Wajnryb 2001, 170). Silence or overtalking can impact negatively on the second generation, giving rise to emotional burdens, such as anxiety (Wajnryb 2001, 170). Furthermore, this paper also explores scholarship in the academic literature concerning the transmission of trauma in Holocaust households both intergenerationally, between the first and second generations, and transgenerationally, between the first generation and third and subsequent generations.

Eva Engel’s life has been rich and varied.. As this paper demonstrates, her adult consciousness, aims and ideals have their genesis in the formative experiences of her childhood—history and ideals have powered her ongoing efforts to heal emotional wounds, and provide therapeutic support and pragmatic help to those in need.

This paper examines Eva's life through the prism of creation and recreation, exploring the creative initiatives she launched that brought people together socially and generated new ideas that impacted their lives in new spaces, propelling them forward in new directions. At its core, Eva's life has been about the relationship between themes of trauma and the connections between people and ideas; and translating those ideas into new and pragmatic methodologies. So many of her activities have been acts of creation, allied to and strengthened by her capacity for connection. She has been a changemaker and a trailblazer transforming the lives of others.

This has been a complex pattern—initially as a migrant/refugee in Australia and New Zealand, she created a life for herself, with values shaped by childhood experiences. That was her point of departure from which she launched transformative initiatives that, in turn, shaped the lives of others. Her original programs have empowered participants to recreate their own lives and strengthen their sense of identity, reinforced by a new sense of belonging to Jewish and Zionist culture, politics, history and traditions.

At their core, Eva's endeavours have always been about connection and renewal, bringing people together to enlighten and empower. Always conscious of the 'power of evil', nonetheless Eva has always sought 'glimmers of light';* this was and is her *modus operandi*, to transform trauma into hope, to devise ways to help others begin again, to create and recreate.

In the aftermath of the Hamas invasion of southern Israel on 7 October 2023, Israel's consequent war against Hamas in Gaza and against Hezbollah in Lebanon, the eruption of virulent antisemitism globally, and the impact of these world events on Jewish youth, it is worth re-evaluating some of Eva's proven methodologies that she implemented in the 1960s, 1970s and more recently in Sydney, Australia, strategies aimed at strengthening the Jewish and Zionist consciousness of young people, in particular, those relatively marginalised and unaffiliated with Jewish schools or Jewish youth movements.

Eva's world view was forged in her early experiences in Europe in the 1930s, and these vivid memories have driven her agenda. The events she witnessed and experienced in childhood shaped her future activism and her lifelong agenda of rehabilitating adult and child Holocaust survivors psychologically and emotionally. The intersection of trauma and social activism as a motivating factor is evident in Eva's work with survivors and their descendants, helping them to move 'from alienation to validation'. By means of her personal witnessing and by means of the communal witnessing she facilitated through the organisations she created, she achieved in many instances a transformation of trauma especially in child Holocaust survivors. Eva's life illustrates how 'people who experienced trauma may avert psychological states of helplessness and powerlessness, and processes and

* All of Eva's quotations are from personal interviews conducted by the author in 2023.

conditions by which individuals who endured trauma may develop a humane, compassionate view of self and others' (Milo Haglili 2020). To understand her, one needs to know what happened to her, her connection and disconnection from grandparents and extended family. This dichotomy—the power of connection and the devastation of disconnection—had its origin in childhood memories, saying goodbye to beloved grandparents and clinging to her parents.

Who is Eva Engel?

Eva was born in 1932 to Jewish parents living in Vienna, her birth coinciding with the beginnings of the Hitler period. Her parents, Fritz (Fred) and Grete (Margaret) Stern were patriotic Austrians and her father was a committed activist in the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria (SDAPO) that fought antisemitism. When Hitler recruited the Brown Shirts, mobilised Germany, marched into Austria on 12 March 1938 and annexed Austria, their lives changed drastically. Fritz was a marked man.

At six years of age, Eva felt the tension in their home. She recalls:

There were incidents I remember clearly—my mother pushing me into a doorway so that I wouldn't notice the brutality on the street, where elderly Jews were scrubbing pavements with toothbrushes while jeering crowds kicked them. I saw Jews rounded up by Hitler's bullyboys. Our radio was always on and the news made me anxious and insecure. When our non-Jewish maid took me for a walk, there was a frightening encounter with jack-booted Nazis and, from that moment onwards, I stayed indoors.

The family went into hiding for five months, moving from place to place in the city. 'I remember dark rooms and my constant fear,' Eva says. 'My parents knew we had to get out to survive.'

With the help of her father's engineering partner in Zurich, and with their Austrian passports stamped with a large red 'J', identifying them as Jews, they fled Vienna and spent five months in Switzerland where, with growing desperation, her father applied at multiple consulates for visas. When Australia accepted them, the Australian Jewish Welfare Society paid their fares and, in 1938, they sailed from Marseille on the *Strathaird*.

Eva attended school in Western Sydney where they lived. Her father rented a service station and worked as a car mechanic until the introduction of petrol rationing in September 1939. Seeking work, they moved to New Zealand, first to Auckland and then to Wellington. 'My parents were upstanders and instilled that strength in me, so I told children at my school what Hitler had done to us,' Eva states. 'At the age of 13, I saw a documentary on the liberation of Bergen-Belsen and understood that, had we not left in time, that would have been our tragic story. In New Zealand I met child survivors from the camps, which shaped my consciousness of history and developed my activism.' In 1949, 16-year-old Eva and her parents returned to Sydney.

Unaffiliated Jewish youth

Attuned to the psyches and emotional needs of unaffiliated Jewish youth in Sydney, those who didn't attend Jewish schools or belong to youth movements, she created some of the earliest youth development programs available in the city, promoting constructive change in young lives and creating youth leaders, many of whom evolved into future luminaries and leaders in the community. These teenagers internalised positive values, which they communicated to others in a peer-to-peer process of recreation. Many were high-school friends of her son and daughter. They met fortnightly in Eva's home to debate topics of concern. Their resulting friendships were of paramount importance in their social stability and development. Social cognitive neuroscientist Professor Matthew Lieberman comments, 'When we're socially connected, we are happier, healthier and better citizens.' He adds, 'social support and social connection can buffer us against the stress of difficult moments in our lives' (Lieberman 2013, 250).

The painful silence in the homes of Holocaust survivors

In the 1970s, Eva expanded her groups to include the children of survivors, the Second Generation, who gathered regularly in her home. She ruptured the silence that had constrained any discussion of Holocaust memories in their own homes.

I was Auntie to all of them, I wanted to allay their fears, to make them feel part of a family, a community, to be proud of their Jewish identity, to help them adjust. It was my outreach program for children scarred and marred by the tensions between first- and second-generation survivors. I provided a safe place in my home where they could explore their feelings. This was very liberating for them because for many the Holocaust was a forbidden topic.

Ruth Wajnryb writes that for parents who survived the Holocaust, their infinite losses of loved ones, home, community and education remained 'an ulcerating wound' that precluded closure (Wajnryb 2001, 154). In many cases, parents kept these details from their children in an effort to spare them, 'yet, ironically, the not knowing itself was a source of great anguish' (Wajnryb 2001, 252). She differentiates between exclusions, a 'terrain of discourse' fenced off; and omissions, which refer to the non-existent and the absent, and encourage oblivion (Wajnryb 2001, 278).

The enforced silence and forbidden questions were features of growing up in Holocaust homes. Melbourne author Arnold Zable remembers that he and his mother would sit for hours at the kitchen table and she would recall a fragment of memory and fall silent. 'In time I began to know the nuances of her silences,' he writes. 'There was the silence that was reverie, the silence that was a scream, and the silence which was a dignified surrender, a letting go' (Grinblat 2002, 135). Numerous members of the Australian political scientist Robert Manne's extended family perished in the Holocaust. After

the ferocity of the Viennese pogrom in 1938, his paternal grandparents and their two sons attempted suicide. Only his grandmother died. After the failed suicide attempt, Manne's uncle migrated to Australia. Manne tried 'gently' to discuss with his uncle what had happened. 'He could not. My impression was that Uncle Sigi ... never recovered from what had happened in his parents' Vienna apartment on May 15, 1938' (Manne 2024, 20).

Many researchers have proposed that the 'conspiracy of silence' constitutes a risk factor in the transmission of trauma to the next generation. In some instances, despite the silence or limited and vague knowledge provided by parents, the child somehow 'knows' about the parents' Holocaust experience from their non-verbal communication. Nevertheless, there remained much that was 'not known about the parents' experiences, which constituted the 'knowing-not knowing' pattern (Krauskopf 2021, 65). At the other end of the spectrum, open communication potentially proved as problematic as silence when parents spoke compulsively, flooding their children with information that focused on horrific aspects of their experience (Krauskopf 2021, 68). Silence or overtalking can impact negatively on the second generation, giving rise to emotional burdens, such as anxiety. Krauskopf concludes that open communication, modulated in an age appropriate and sensitive way, has constructive and positive impacts for the individual, including increased empathy, positive family dynamics, increased psychological health, positive family memories and legacy. It can communicate messages of resilience as well as vulnerabilities, which the second generation can incorporate into their own lives (Krauskopf 2021, 93).

The child psychologist and educator Sarah Moskowitz, who coined the term 'child survivor', broadens the academic discussion by ascribing responsibility to the negative attitudes of society generally; and highlights societal responsibility for some situations where a destructive silence prevails (Moskovitz 1983, 229). She writes that many child Holocaust survivors residing post-war in Lingfield House, a Jewish orphanage in Surrey, England, felt they were outsiders and feared disclosing their true past; and experienced a profound sense of insecurity and shame about being children of the Holocaust (Moskovitz 1983, 229). Moskowitz suggests that such secrecy, shame and fear of disclosure cannot be designated as the problems of survivors alone, 'For they are born in reciprocal relationships with us, whose stigmatizing attitudes and behavior set in motion a tragic process.' (Moskovitz 1983, 229). The feelings of being an outsider, engendered by uprooting, persecution, and murder of one's family, are too often reinforced by attitudes of suspicion or 'pathology-seeking' (Moskovitz 1983, 229). She states, 'No wonder survivors have often withdrawn or formed their own groups, in which they can speak freely, integrating the past, without being stigmatized' (Moskovitz 1983, 229).

For many years, survivor Edith Eger never spoke about her past. ‘Healing can’t happen as long as we’re hiding or disowning parts of ourselves,’ she writes (Eger 2020, 74).

Many school friends of Eva’s children were also second-generation survivors. ‘I could see many of them were fearful,’ Eva said. A parent supported Eva’s efforts. Her sons initiated discussions among both the unaffiliated and second-generation groups, encouraging their friends to join.

Eva’s second-generation survivors’ group in Sydney met every fortnight to debate a ‘forbidden topic’, subjects they could never discuss in their own homes. Author Hadley Freeman points out that the second generation in her family grew up with an instinctive understanding that their parents did not want to talk about the past. ‘They learned it from how hastily their mothers turned off the TV when Holocaust documentaries came on, how sharply their fathers said, “Why do you ask those questions?”’ (Freeman 2020, 418). She maintains this was a choice that had as much to do with pragmatism as with trauma: ‘They wanted their children to be safe and they knew from their own experiences that meant not being overtly Jewish. The past to them was ugly and painful—they were too close to it to see that it was also triumphant—and therefore to be pushed to the back of the closet’ (Freeman 2020, 419).

New York University Professor Hasia Diner rejects this theory of silence concerning the suppression of any discussion of the Holocaust, supporting her view with references from the troves of cultural, journalistic and religious archival material available (Diner 2010). She challenges the view that before the 1960s American Jewry showed little interest in the Holocaust.

American Jews made the tragedy and the need to remember it a profound part of their collective communal existence, inscribing it in books and performances, in liturgies, and in the programs of their institutions. The leaders of their organizations invoked it as they assembled their meetings and public gatherings. (Diner 2010, 22)

David Cesarani and Eric Sundquist also challenged the claims of a post-war silence on the Holocaust, showing that while some individual Jews failed to understand the scale of the *Shoah*, ‘far from lapsing into silence’, individual survivors, researchers, historical commissions, theatre directors and film makers responded to the destruction of European Jews (Cesarani and Sundquist 2011).

In Eva’s teenager groups, she promoted honest discussions focusing on problems of concern to ‘her’ Sydney students—including sexual identity, drugs, antisemitism and the Holocaust. She encouraged discussion of these ‘forbidden’ topics. By bringing these young people together, she also fostered connections between them and the friendships that emerged were of primary importance in their young lives.

In 1985, a landmark gathering of the Australian Association of Holocaust Survivors was held at the University of New South Wales (Klein 2002). Organised by Albert Halm and his survivor friends, this event marked the

40th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Sarah Moskovitz participated. Eva took 200 teenagers, drawn from her groups for non-affiliated Jewish youth and second-generation survivors, to the gathering. 'They all had so much in common,' Eva stated. As she progressed along her own learning trajectory, Eva invited Israeli emissaries visiting Sydney to address teenager groups in her home, to reinforce their connections to Jewish people, Jewish history, their ancestral homeland and contemporary events. She was encouraged by the children's response and the deepening of their attachment to community. As Holocaust child survivor and historian Saul Friedländer notes concerning his own post-war journey of re-connection with the Jewish people, 'A tie had been reestablished, an identity was emerging, a confused one certainly, contradictory perhaps, but from that day forward linked to a central axis of which there could be no doubt: ... I was Jewish, whatever this term meant in my mind' (Friedlander 2016, 131).

Although Eva had completed Roger Bush's telephone Lifeline counselling course on group and encounter work, run by psychologist Carol Musgrave, she encountered personal and community criticism from those who discounted her youth initiatives as unprofessional. 'Many thought I was dangerous and unqualified to do this work, but I wasn't giving professional therapy—only the therapy of friendship and shared experiences,' she states.

Transmission of trauma from Holocaust survivors to the Second Generation

Children of Holocaust survivors are 'the generation that was never meant to have been born' (Grinblat 2002, 1). For them, 'The Holocaust was the biggest demon' (Grinblat 2002, 74). Their suffering was immense. Librarian and teacher Rita Nash testifies to the pervading gloom in her parental home, which she ascribes to stories told and untold, as well as 'the ghosts of the missing ones whom I had never known but who always seemed to have a presence in our lives'. The horror persisted until she consulted a psychiatrist to explore the 'forbidden secrets of a world which I did not feel part of but which inexorably belonged to me' (Grinblat 2002, 73). Growing up in a survivor household, Arnold Zable experienced 'an oscillation between romance and terror, the magical and the sinister; between a distant realm that radiated intimacy and warmth, and an unfathomable darkness' (Grinblat 2002, 134). Renee Symonds felt anxious at all times and worried 'about when I would eat my next meal'. She writes, 'I struggled between staying immersed in an overtone of pain and sadness, and freeing myself to expand my repertoire of feelings, thoughts and dreams. At times this felt like a life-and-death struggle' (Grinblat 2002, 102). Tania Nahum grew up understanding her mother's vulnerability and was always careful not to upset her. 'I didn't challenge any boundaries that would cause my mother distress, for she seemed so burdened already' (Grinblat 2002, 164).

Valent states that, in some ways, Second Generation children were more vulnerable than child survivors because they carried scars and emotions with no possibility of remembering their origin; and were subject to the memories, anguish and struggles of their parents, who often kept them in the dark (Valent 1994, 286). Children respond to stresses, brutal or subtle, 'with frozen feelings and meanings such as feeling rejected, excluded, different, worthless, unloved, exploited, humiliated and bad. Such responses can be evoked even when parents are victims. That is why by traumatising parents, we traumatise children too' (Valent 1994, 287). Valent highlights the value of re-opening wounds as part of the healing process that fosters love and new connections. 'Along with pain, there is still life and hope,' he states (Valent 1994, 288).

The position of child survivors of the Holocaust is further complicated by the fact that they were also second-generation survivors. Paul Valent states that child survivors of the Holocaust suffered multiple and severe traumas 'in most horrible circumstances and their distress has been widespread, even if unacknowledged till recently' and 'bore silent and unacknowledged witness to their sufferings in many ways throughout their lives (Valent 1994, 4). He contends that children suffered not only in terms of tangible injuries and destruction. Nor are concentration camps the only places where the 'very fabric of children can be torn apart. Children in hiding could suffer as much as anyone' (Valent 1994, 265). He describes child survivor Anne's suffering when torn from her parents, the 'isolation, intimidation, physical cruelty, mental cruelty, sexual abuse and moral depredation', resulting in 'grief beyond endurance' (Valent 1994, 265). He concludes that these attacks on childhood could be worse than hunger, illness and even death itself (Valent 1994, 265).

The situation of child Holocaust survivors was complex as, in many cases, they also contended with post-war complications, such as traumatic separations from family because of their own illnesses or because parents collapsed after years of tension. 'The children added post-war anger and guilt to their frozen emotions' and accepted that their survivor parents had gone through a lot and needed special consideration (Valent 1994, 276). 'They did not see themselves as victims in their own right,' Valent states. 'They continued to live day by day, accepted further uprooting and migration, kept suppressing their thoughts and feelings and hoped that some time in the future things would come good at last' (Valent 1994, 276). Despite distress symptoms such as night terrors, head banging, eating disturbances and stuttering, they became adept at concealing emotions and in leading 'double' lives (Valent 1994, 277). Child survivors felt they didn't belong and were not truly accepted, which impacted their ability to love intimately and to be optimistic and trusting (Valent 1994, 279).

Valent contends that parents—to protect children and to hide their own vulnerability, guilt and shame—filtered, buffered and arranged their children's minds. Parents told child survivors, 'Do not know, do not

remember, you cannot remember, you should not remember, what you remember is wrong'; and were hurt and angry if their children asserted unwanted memories (Valent 1994, 282).

The science of epigenetics has shown that trauma can shift the biology of children of Holocaust survivors. Epigeneticist Dr Tammy Bottner states, studies show that most children of survivors actually have altered cortisone levels (stress hormones), regardless of how they were parented. We can now understand these findings not just as a result of these children having grown up with a parent who had experienced trauma, and having 'learned' certain behaviours that resulted from this trauma but at a genetic level. (Bottner 2017, 207-8)

Bottner concludes that these differently expressed genes can be passed to subsequent generations. 'Science seems to support quite strongly the hypothesis that I, a child and grandchild of Holocaust survivors, inherited altered genes that affect my cortisone levels and predispose me to anxiety' (Bottner 2017, 208). Eva understood the transmission of trauma to the second and third generations and the challenge of neuroses that surfaced in later years. She states, 'I understood their pain, some listening to the nightly screams of parents reliving incarceration in the camps; so their suffering was clear to me.'

Integrating Russian migrants

Following US President Nixon's visit to Moscow in 1972, Soviet Jews received permission to emigrate to Israel. Sponsored by the Jewish community, more than a thousand—mainly from Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan—arrived in Sydney, settling around Bondi in the Eastern Suburbs. Their arrival galvanised Eva into action. Once again, Eva demonstrated her passion for connection. 'Many Russian migrants arrived with nothing,' she recalls. 'I approached the Zionist Council of New South Wales to set up an integration committee, which they did and on which I served. I worked with friends, looking for flats, clothing and jobs. Most Russian migrants were in computers or engineering, so we connected them with their Jewish Australian counterparts and, in turn, they formed an association for the Russian community.' Eva encouraged Jewish Welfare (now known as Jewish Care) to rent an apartment where Russian families in transition could stay for a while until they organised alternative accommodation. She invited their children to her home to meet her Second Generation group.

Eva contacted Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins of Emanuel Synagogue in Woollahra, who offered her synagogue spaces where she could gather with Russian women for information and discussions. 'I was looking for a welcoming, safe place', Eva states. 'They were from a different culture and, having lived in a totalitarian state, they were nervous about opening up. I'm a matchmaker, a connector, so they got to know and trust me.' There were also theological

complications. Rabbi Brian Fox, who joined Emanuel Synagogue in 1979, observed that the Russian mothers who came to the Temple were not halachically Jewish yet their children had gained admission to Orthodox Jewish day schools. Eva explains, 'In Russia if your father is Jewish, you're Jewish. These women with Jewish fathers suffered as Jews in Russia and then were discriminated against here when told they were not Jewish because their mothers weren't. I said to our community, let's welcome them.' Eva's understanding of their dilemma and her discussions with them furthered their healing process.

In the 1970s, Eva worked to strengthen Russian cultural engagement with the broader Jewish community and encouraged Russian musicians to create an orchestra, which preceded later attempts to do so by others in the field, such as the Sydney Balalaika Orchestra, established in 1992, which brought together musicians of different ethnic origins to perform Russian folk music in Australia (Moustafine 2011, 62). Eva encouraged the Russian musicians she knew—including Sam Pajdowski, a violinist who had played professionally in the Soviet Union and whom Eva encouraged to contribute to the establishment of a Russian orchestra—to present a free concert and tea at Hakoah Club in Bondi. 'Nostalgic for Russian culture and craving ethnic music, long queues formed on the day, they came in their hundreds,' she recalls. 'It strengthened their Russian identity, and Mira Grynberg, a Russian interpreter and social worker, played a big part in bringing all these people together.' Encouraged by the success of the concert, Eva also organised the first 'Russian seder' the community had ever experienced.

Eva's Custodian Project and Child Holocaust Survivors Group

A challenge was posed by the preservation of Holocaust survivors' stories for future generations. Eva states, 'I've thought about the future as we, the first-generation survivors of the Holocaust, pass from the scene. I believe the seeds of hope lie in an organisation I started called the Custodian Project.'

Eva contacted survivors and university students, who came together in a reciprocal partnership. The survivors told their stories and, importantly, the students listened. The students asked questions about feelings, empathy, loneliness, sex and love. They internalised these personal stories and became their custodians, a novel type of literary executorship. Eva believes volunteers should replicate this custodian program, taking ownership of Holocaust survivors' stories, passing them on to the next generation within the Jewish and general communities. 'In this way, new generations are aware and equipped to engage with their own troubling issues that mirror earlier events in history,' she says. 'Survivors have many stories including those of Righteous Gentiles, who saved Jewish people.'

The first meeting of the Sydney Child Holocaust Survivors group was held on 9 March 1986 at the B'nai B'rith Lodge in Sydney; and Eva formed the group officially in 1987. She recruited child survivor Litzi Lemberg as

spokesperson for her group. Sarah Moskovitz's visit in 1985 to Sydney had inspired Eva's initiative. Eva remembers the acrimonious division between adult survivors and child survivors. 'It was so painful,' she recalls. 'They put me down. "What are you crying about, you weren't there," they alleged.' 'I wanted to build bridges between the groups and thought we should get survivors and child survivors together. After we held a meeting under the auspices of the Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning, some survivors changed and said, "We should have looked after the children."' Researcher Amelia Klein has examined the formation of the Sydney Child Survivors' Group (Klein 2002).

In 1988 in Los Angeles, Eva, Litzi Lemberg and three delegates from Sydney attended the first annual gathering of the World Federation of Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust and their Descendants, where they noted a chasm in understanding between children hidden during the war and those incarcerated in camps. Camp survivors dismissed hidden survivors as not having suffered as they had. Sensitive to this hierarchy of suffering, Eva encouraged hidden and camp survivors to communicate and respect each other's histories.

Eva's actions in this realm were mirrored by activists in countries abroad and, gradually, there was a seismic shift in the way survivors acknowledged the claims of the 'hidden children' among them. In August 1992 in Amsterdam, for example, the Society for Jewish Social Work held a Conference for the Hidden War Child, attended by 500 'child hideaways'. Many were haunted by the feeling they did not belong in the world. The conference circulated a daily newspaper, recording delegates' experiences and responses and, for the first time, their stories. 'As children who had grown up in isolation, almost all felt that the sharing of stories was something they had always lacked and craved' (van Es 2018, 282). The Mayor of Amsterdam, himself a wartime child hideaway, said, 'To whom should we have spoken? Who was really able to listen to our story? The story of hiding has defined our whole existence, but we—at least most of us—have tried desperately all our lives to drive that story away' (van Es 2018, 282). Hidden child and Sydneysider Francine Lazarus states that she still suffers symptoms related to traumatic experiences. She writes, 'My traumas were caused by antisemitism, Hitler and the Nazis, the war and subsequent neglect and abuse' (Lazarus 2017, 199). Research has found 'that hidden Jewish children still report severe post-traumatic symptoms sixty-five years later, often considered "as high or higher than children who survived the camps"' (Lazarus 2017, 200). 'My purpose was to stop the painful comparisons,' Eva said. 'The hidden children felt they were second-class citizens, lesser survivors than child survivors of the camps.' Gradually, 'hidden children' became accepted terminology among survivors, psychologists and historians.

Spielberg's Shoah Foundation, Courage to Care and B'nai B'rith

Serendipitously, an American called Engel contacted Eva to explore potential genealogical connections. While they discovered they were not related, he told her that he worked with the University of Southern California (USC) Shoah Foundation in the United States, which Steven Spielberg had founded in 1994. The Foundation preserves the testimonies of Holocaust survivors and witnesses of the *Shoah*, in their own words in audio-visual interviews, which are available for research, education and outreach 'for the betterment of humankind in perpetuity'. Eva pursued the connection and suggested he and his team come to Australia to interview the many survivors in the country. Together with survivor Olga Horak, she compiled a list of potential interviewees and put forward their names. Eva reflects, 'John Saunders, who established the Sydney Jewish Museum in 1992 together with members of the Australian Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, fully supported our efforts, providing rooms where Shoah Foundation personnel could conduct interviews.'

Eva attended a Courage to Care exhibition initiated in 1992 by the Melbourne Jewish Museum and was so impressed that she wanted to bring it to Sydney. She approached the President of the Councils of B'nai B'rith, Andrew Havas, urging him to bring the exhibition to Sydney. At the same time, the Chairman of the Anti-Defamation Commission, Grahame Leonard, strongly recommended the exhibition to Andrew, who saw the possibilities of the program and updated it to include an educational component that was lacking previously (Sarzin and Sarzin 2010, 102). Eva wanted to enliven the exhibition and thought the presence of survivors would change its dynamic, enabling visitors to interact with witnesses to history.

Eva contacted survivors she knew to encourage them to participate.

I knew all the survivors helped by Righteous Gentiles, so I brought them together to participate in Courage to Care in Sydney. Every day I rang survivors and asked, "where were you, what did you do?". I recruited every survivor who had a story of survival. With Andrew Havas behind the scenes, I worked hard, talked to people, drew them out. I told them we should tell the world about standing up and not being a bystander, and that good can outweigh bad. I urged them to get involved and they did.

This constituted the formal beginning of Courage to Care in Sydney, an organisation dedicated to addressing bias and prejudice, focusing especially on 'upstanders', those 'Righteous Gentiles' who stood up for Jewish victims of persecution during World War Two. The first program ran in Armidale in 1999. Today, Courage to Care delivers upstander programs to schools, workplaces and groups throughout New South Wales. They inspire and empower others to stand up for those who are vilified, disenfranchised and dehumanised.

Eva's experience with teenager encounter groups convinced her of the value of this methodology in helping second-generation survivors impacted

by exposure to their parents' trauma. 'I got professionals to work with me and I planted the seed of a new initiative, Person-to-Person, which evolved into an informal counselling service under the auspices of B'nai B'rith. People sat together and talked and we encouraged creative thinking,' she states. 'Very often the friendships formed led to relationships and marriage.'

Eva's husband, Paul Engel, came from a musical family. Paul's brother, Yehuda, became a composer and musician of note. Paul studied composition at Sydney University's Conservatorium of Music. He and Eva attended classical recitals at Sydney's Town Hall, and Eva believed that music could heal or ameliorate the pain of ongoing trauma. 'I loved singing and wanted to start a proper choir. There was a sceptical response but when I have a good idea I'm never discouraged, I don't think of 'buts', I just go forward,' Eva says. Rosie Hirsch, who taught singing at Moriah College, agreed to lead a choir under the aegis of B'nai B'rith. Immediately after the Six Day War, ten choristers gathered at Eva's home for the first time to sing Naomi Shemer's 'Jerusalem of Gold', with Dahlia Dior as soloist. 'I invited the choristers, and Rosie sorted the voices,' Eva recalls. Shirley Singer offered her home in Bellevue Hill and they rehearsed a repertoire of Yiddish and Hebrew songs. In 1993, to mark the 150th anniversary of B'nai B'rith, they sang a B'nai B'rith anthem composed by Eva's brother-in-law Yehuda Engel.

With the participation of the B'nai B'rith choir, Eva organised a 'Resistance concert', with a program of partisan songs and speeches by survivors. Accompanied by Fay Adler at the Hakoah Club in Bondi, 'it raised community consciousness about resistance and honoured the spirit that powered Jewish fighters and partisans,' Eva says.

Inspired by a course conducted by the Melton School of Adult Education Learning, Eva envisaged and planned a concert illustrating the sweep of Jewish history through songs and words. She approached Rabbi Raymond Apple, Chief Minister of the Great Synagogue in the city, who wrote a historical review; Dr. Joachim Schneeweiss contributed an account of the Nazi Holocaust; and Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins spoke on contemporary Jewish history. This 'Light to Darkness' concert featured a linking narration by TV newsreader Sonia Humphrey. The B'nai B'rith Singers prepared a repertoire of Sephardic and Ashkenazi songs, thus bringing these diverse communities closer together.

Held in a theatre in Gosford, the community was surprised by the presence of the Evangelical Sisters of Mary, whom Eva later recruited to participate in Courage to Care. 'Our community was suspicious of their presence, but these sisters, on their own initiative, then arranged a Kristallnacht commemorative concert at the University of New South Wales's Clancy Auditorium, where our choir joined theirs in song and, together, we danced the *hora* in front of their congregants and our supporters.'

March of the Living (MOTL) meeting with Irena Sendler

The Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Sydney wanted to expand connections with the Jewish community. The Consul-General, Ryszard Sarkowicz, liaised with Polish-Jewish journalist Halina Czernuszyńska Robinson, who put him in touch with Eva. Eva suggested to him that the next March of the Living contingent from Australia, scheduled to visit Auschwitz in Poland in 2007, should meet one of her heroines, Catholic social worker Irena Sendler, who had saved 2500 Jewish children incarcerated in the Warsaw Ghetto during World War Two. In 1942-43, Sendler smuggled them out of the ghetto and brought them to the homes of Polish gentiles. When war ended, she discovered that 98 percent of the children's parents had perished. Sendler relied on her memory to identify and track the hidden children, in an attempt to match them with family members abroad. In 1965, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem acknowledged Irena as a Righteous Gentile among the nations.



Figure 1: Australian MOTL participants meet Irena Sendler. Source credit: Photo by Emmanuel Santos, used by permission.

‘I did what I could to make this meeting a reality in 2007 between our schoolchildren and Irena Sendler,’ Eva says. Following complex arrangements, a MOTL contingent—comprising students Ellie Braitberg and Sami-Jo Adelman, with Holocaust educator and MOTL Australia President Suzanne Hampel, together with translator Emanuel Santos—met Irena Sendler in Poland (see Figure 1).

The impact of this meeting had an impact far beyond Eva's expectations. As a 17-year-old Year 11 student from Bialik College in Melbourne, Ellie

Freeman (née Braitberg) was one of only two students chosen to meet Irena, and that meeting changed Ellie's life. She attributes her choice of career—she currently works as a social worker at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne—to meeting Irena, who exemplified for her all that a dedicated social worker could do and achieve.

Consolidating further links with the Polish Consulate General in Sydney, Eva invited Dr Sarkowicz to a B'nai B'rith function that honoured Raoul Wallenberg. Eva also invited George Farkas, whose father John Farkas had worked as Wallenberg's chauffeur. John, a Resistance fighter, was one of the last people to see Wallenberg alive (Ireland 2013). Eva also invited Swedish diplomat Jan Anger, the eldest son of Per Johan Valentin Anger, who worked with Wallenberg at the Swedish Legation in Budapest during World War Two, supplying Hungarian Jews with Swedish identification papers, rescuing Jews from deportation trains en route to the camps and rescuing Jews from death marches in the final weeks of the war. Eva built bridges between different constituencies, in this instance promoting understanding and strengthening ties between the Polish, Swedish and Jewish communities.

Postscript: 2023 and beyond

Now in her ninth decade, Eva's initiatives are ongoing and still proliferating. Israel's Black Sabbath on 7 October 2023 triggered nightmares associated with the *Shoah*. 'I dream that I am running away and trying to hide,' she says. 'I see the cemeteries'. When she said goodbye to her granddaughter who flew to Tel Aviv early in 2024, Eva remembered her own painful farewell as a six-year-old when she cried saying goodbye to beloved grandparents in Vienna. So many traumatising memories are back. It is as if Eva's personal history has come full circle. But this time there is a Jewish State, Israel, to which she directs her efforts, focusing on supporting major organisations and grassroots initiatives such as support for medical supplies for her granddaughter, a doctor working with survivors of the 7 October massacre; and support for a Jerusalem family preparing meals for soldiers. 'People say it's too hard. It's all very well talking about it but we have to do something,' she says with firm resolve.

Eva views herself as a connector, bringing people together to launch constructive initiatives. She dreams of creating a multicultural choir in Sydney to celebrate diversity and enhance societal cohesion and harmony.

Eva has connected with Indigenous Australians, whom she invited to address her Child Holocaust Survivors Group in Sydney. She believes Indigenous and Jewish Australians have much in common concerning transgenerational transmission of trauma. In recent days, the alienation of some Indigenous people from Jewish Australians has disturbed Eva; and, at the same time, she is encouraged by the courage and support of Indigenous Australians such as Nova Peris. Eva hopes she might help to stem this tide of indifference and hostility. She continues to connect and network with contacts

old and new, reaching out to the 'other'. 'Consciousness has to be raised,' she says of her unrelenting quest to create and recreate opportunities for the wellbeing of all, for tolerance and harmony, so all may thrive.

After the events of 7 October 2023, Eva experienced a serious degree of re-traumatisation and a reawakened and more intense desire to engage once more in social action, reflecting one of the core issues in social psychology and social movement research, 'the issue of how an activist identity develops' (Corning and Myers 2003). Throughout her life, Eva has been directly concerned with 'sustaining life after massive trauma' and this led to and shaped the recovery programs and processes she instituted in Sydney over several decades to ameliorate trauma in survivors. Now at the age of 93 she is contending again with the aftermath of horrific violence, both past and present. True to her empathic mission of transforming and healing trauma, she continues to articulate and action her belief that she is personally responsible for others' welfare at this critical time. This reflects her empathy and her altruism born of suffering, as well as her 'positive orientation toward people' (Staub and Vollhardt 2008).

Eva's life represents a case study of social activism born of experiencing and witnessing trauma. Her life strengthens the hypothesis of researchers who conclude that 'individuals who had suffered from adverse life events would be more likely to help the outgroups in need than those who had not suffered.' (Vollhardt and Staub 2011).

It has been documented that, as a result of trauma, a significant minority feel called upon to engage in a wider world, which is true of Eva, who has a distinct survivor mission. According to Judith Herman,

Social action offers the survivor a source of power that draws upon her own initiative, energy and resourcefulness but that magnifies these qualities. It offers her an alliance with others based on cooperation and shared purpose. Participation in organized, demanding social efforts calls upon the survivor's most mature and adaptive coping strategies of patience, anticipation, altruism, and humor. It brings out the best in her; in return, the survivor gains the sense of connection with the best in other people. In this sense of reciprocal connection, the survivor can transcend the boundaries of her particular time and place. (Herman 2015, 303)

Today, in the aftermath of the Black Sabbath and the subsequent escalation globally of Jew-hatred, Eva is especially concerned about the safety of young Jewish school-leavers starting university, as campuses erupt in protests against Israel and student demagogues harass Jewish students, endangering their mental wellbeing and physical safety. She remembers her unaffiliated Jewish youth groups, as well as the second-generation Holocaust survivor groups, and the methodology she employed to reinforce their Jewish identity and strong appreciation of Israel; and believes much could be achieved by reviving these strategies. She is still determined to raise public awareness of these issues, as otherwise those that forget the past will be condemned to repeat it. 'We have to find good ways to equip our young people, the 18- and

19-year-olds, as they enter this inhospitable terrain,' she says. 'Even if it means going back to past methods to achieve that. We can't leave our youth unprotected.'

Matthew Lieberman concludes his book on social cognitive neuroscience with the observation, 'When we experience social pains or feel the distress of withheld social connection, we are unable to focus on much else until this need is met' (Lieberman 2013, 300). He maintains that evolution has given us an arsenal of social weapons to help satisfy these social needs and ensure group cohesion (Lieberman 2013, 300). In Sydney, Eva Engel has dedicated her life to validating personal journeys and ensuring group cohesion. While she created a new life for herself, simultaneously she recreated the lives of others, always observing and listening and formulating agendas of action that gave stability, strength and a sense of belonging to young and old.

The early manifestations of global Jew-hatred that erupted after 7 October 2023 rang alarm bells for Eva, who has seen it all before. For her, it was an immediate and resounding wake-up call. 'This is how it all began in Vienna in the 1930s,' she warns. Once again, she is motivated to strengthen resistance among those experiencing this onslaught for the first time in their generation. She is finding her voice once more, connecting and re-connecting with others and speaking out to raise awareness of what should and can be done, efforts that also include the making of a film documenting her experiences in launching strategies to engage with and strengthen Jewish youth.

Eva continues to celebrate and validate social diversity within a pluralistic society. A communicator within the Jewish community, she reaches out to other ethnicities and faiths, consolidating friendships that enhance social harmony and inculcate respect for the 'other'. She continues to radiate warmth, interest and curiosity; and manifests an openness to new cultures, while honouring religious traditions and respecting different backgrounds. Eva personifies the innovative role model who inspires others to action, someone who represents humanitarian values to which all can aspire. Her life is instructive, as it has intersected with significant moments of history. As a witness to history, she understands the ongoing traumatic effects of historical persecution, injustice, dispossession and marginalisation. As oral historian Erin Jessee notes, '[oral] historians typically rely on the collection and analysis of life history and thematic interviews to engage with versions of the past that are typically absent from official sources of historical knowledge' and 'records that retain as much as possible the original voices of their informants', which the principle of 'sharing authority' and decision-making—despite the privileged position of the interviewer/researcher—in documenting Eva's story has ensured (Jessee 2011).

As a connector and changemaker, Eva continues to address with compassion the past and present traumas of young and old. She understands recovery is never complete; and that the impact of a traumatic event reverberates throughout the survivor's life cycle and post-traumatic

symptoms are likely to recur under stress. In words that are especially apt when applied to Eva, Herman notes,

The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity (Herman 2015, 313).

Herman also notes that when groups develop cohesion and intimacy, a complex mirroring process comes into play. 'As each participant extends herself to others, she becomes more capable of receiving the gifts that others have to offer. The tolerance, compassion, and love she grants to others begin to rebound upon herself' (Herman 2015, 315).

In January 1987, Sarah Moskovitz presented to Eva a copy of her book, *Love Despite Hate*, with an inscription that highlights Eva's gift for uniting people in good causes, 'With admiration for your leadership style and ability to get diverse people to work well together'. Indeed, the role of the group leader that Eva's life exemplifies must be based on a clear understanding of its therapeutic task, providing 'a structure that protects all participants adequately against the dangers of traumatic reenactment' (Herman 2015, 317). Eva herself is subject to nightmares and flashbacks. She knows the value for herself and others of crisis intervention and mobilising support for the survivor. This has been her lifelong mission. She has found comfort in the groups she created, 'The group helps each individual survivor enlarge her story, releasing her from her isolation with the perpetrator and readmitting the fullness of the larger world from which she has been alienated' (Herman 2015, 324). 'Over the years, the original people in the child survivor group in Sydney became the core of a support network that continues today. I am proud and honoured to still be an active member of that bonded group,' Eva says.

Eva values laughter and celebrations and is life-affirming. Her light still shines brightly, illuminating the lives of others.

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