

Understanding the Holocaust Means Understanding Israel

April is the month when Israel remembers the 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust (sundown April 7-8), when every vehicle stops and humans stand at attention for two minutes while sirens sound.

Then on April 14-15, another siren sounds on Memorial Day for the 23,000 Jewish soldiers killed while defending the land of Israel together with 2,400 victims of terror.

Lastly, Israel celebrates Independence Day (April 15-16), remembering with joy the birth of the modern State of Israel.

In serious conversation, Israelis acknowledge that the horrors of the Holocaust propelled the 660,000 Jews in Israel—many who escaped the death chambers—to such desperation that, against overwhelming odds, they forged the rebirth of the ancient Jewish nation. Just as the birth of the modern state is a part of the DNA of all Israelis, so is the death of one-third of its people.

Explaining the Holocaust is really about telling millions of personal stories. Yet they are so horrendous, so beastly, that few people can bear to hear them. I give you an example:

A mother and her 5-year-old child were standing in the “selection” line of who would live (to be a slave laborer) and who would be gassed. Small children were automatically sent into the death line.

When her turn came, the mother cried out, “Please save my son!” The Nazi officer looked kindly at the little boy and called him to come. The officer picked up the child, hugged him and swung him against a wall, bashing his head until he was dead.

Helena Frank Holits tells her story: "I was on a death march of women only. I asked a guard where we were going. He answered, 'Nowhere. We are marching you until you die.' " The march lasted 106 days, from the snows of January to the rains of May 1945, 800 kilometers in total. Helena was one of a handful who miraculously survived to tell her story.

One million children were shot, gassed, beaten, frozen to death and starved to death.

There were heroic individuals who risked their lives to save Jewish people. Israel is populated with Holocaust survivors, their children and their children's children. Many of them live because a Christian, a priest or a secular European determined to save as many Jews as he or she could. Many of these "righteous Gentiles," as they are called in Israel, gave their lives.

Coming Wednesday, Standing With Israel will publish Maoz Israel's story about Raoul Wallenberg, who saved multiple thousands of Jewish lives.

For the original article, visit .