**Against the odds, two sisters survive**

Chapter 24

By JOYCE APSEL

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| photo [Photos from Anne Frank: A History for Today ] For Ruth Wallage-Binheim the horrors of the Holocaust are so strong that even today it’s difficult to say the word "gassed." |

Ruth Wallage-Binheim, a Jewish girl born in Germany in 1926, was the same age as Margot Frank, Anne's sister. Ruth, along with her brother and sister, fled Germany in 1939 to escape the Nazis and went to the Netherlands.

The Frank family left Germany in 1933 and all four members were able to leave the country. But by 1939, it was much more difficult to legally obtain visas and countries restricted the number of immigrants allowed in. Many Jews and other refugees from Nazi persecution found the doors closed and no more refugees allowed in.

The United States, like other countries throughout the world, increasingly refused to admit refugees. Ruth Binheim's parents were not able to get a visa from the authorities and made the difficult decision to break up the family and send their children out of the country rather than risk remaining in Nazi Germany.

Today, just as during World War II, individuals and families threatened by persecution and escalating violence -- including war, ethnic cleansing and genocide -- face unfathomable choices: Hide; flee as individuals; or flee as a family unit.

In 1940, the German Army overran the Netherlands and like the Franks, Ruth and her sister, Hanna, found themselves once again under Nazi tyranny. In 1942, Ruth and her sister were among the approximately 50,000 Jews deported to Auschwitz from the Netherlands during the war. The Franks, Hermann van Pels and Mr. Pfeffer were deported from Westerbork in the Netherlands to Auschwitz; Edith Frank and Mr. van Pels were killed there.

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| photo Ruth and her sister, Hanna, 1946. |

Ruth Wallage-Binheim recalls the death camp:

"After arriving in Auschwitz my sister and I survived the selection. Our heads were shaved and numbers were tattooed on our arms. Then we asked the other prisoners about our mother, Frieda Binheim, who we knew had been taken to Auschwitz. They looked at us: Didn't we understand? Then they looked up at the sky.

"Later we did the same thing. When newcomers asked us about their family members we just looked up. It's a word that you couldn't utter. It's still hard, even now. Today I can say it: "Gassed.' Because that's what happened!"

Ruth Binheim describes how important it was that her sister, Hanna, was with her throughout the ordeal in Auschwitz.

"I got very sick one time. I had jaundice and I couldn't stand up. Thanks to Hanna, who supported me, I was able to stand during the roll call. If you were sick you were not included in the count. You were sent to the infirmary. That was the end of you -- we knew that.

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| This year's Newspaper in Education series **[Anne Frank: Lessons in human rights and dignity](http://www.sptimes.com/annefrank/)** [**Introduction, previous chapters and Web Links**](http://www.sptimes.com/annefrank/) |

"We had to open the backpacks belonging to the people who had been gassed and sort out their belongings -- the dresses, the jackets and so forth. These things were sent to the German population as "liebesgaben" (gifts).

"If Hanna and I got a chunk of bread we always shared it. If I divided it I gave her the bigger piece, and vice versa. I think that had to do with our will to survive. If Hanna and I had not had each other, we would have not survived."

-- From Anne Frank: A History for Today (Anne Frank House, Amsterdam)

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What Ruth Wallage-Binheim described in Auschwitz was the Nazi construction of a death camp where targeted groups, including Jews, Gypsies, Slavs and others were killed. It is estimated 11-million people were victims of genocide during World War II.

Look at excerpts on this page from the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This document was drafted after World War II by the United Nations in response to the intentional targeting and killing of groups of people because they belonged to a specific religious, national, ethnic or racial group. Ruth Binheim and her family, like the Franks, were intentionally targeted because they were Jewish.

Ruth arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau, which was part of a huge complex of concentration and extermination camps. Like Ruth, millions of people went through the selection process where those deemed physically fit for slave labor were "selected to live" while children, elderly and others were "selected to be killed" in gas chambers. Many people did not know what was waiting for them since the gas chambers were camouflaged by the Nazis as showers with a sign over the door stating "decontamination unit." In fact, once the doors were locked, Zyklon B gas was forced through shafts, killing the people inside. Their bodies were then burned. By 1944, up to 10,000 humans a day were being gassed and burned in this intentional, assembly-line destruction process.

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Prejudice can spawn discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes. Continuous education is needed to prevent such harmful by-products from evolving into even more horrific results such as the Holocaust's mass killings.

It is important to be aware of hatred and violence, and to see people as human beings, who may have differences or similarities to ourselves. Exclusion of certain individuals and groups can lead to discrimination, persecution and violence.

"Dear Teacher: I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness: Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians . . . So I am suspicious of education. My request is: Help your students become human."

-- Educator Haim Ginott

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What is your reaction to Haim Ginott's words? How do we learn to be caring, loving human beings? How can we teach others to be so?