

January 2015

Hidden No More: Wilhelmina "Willie" Juhlin '61: A Secret Life

Gerry Boyle
Colby College

Nick Cardillicchio

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine>



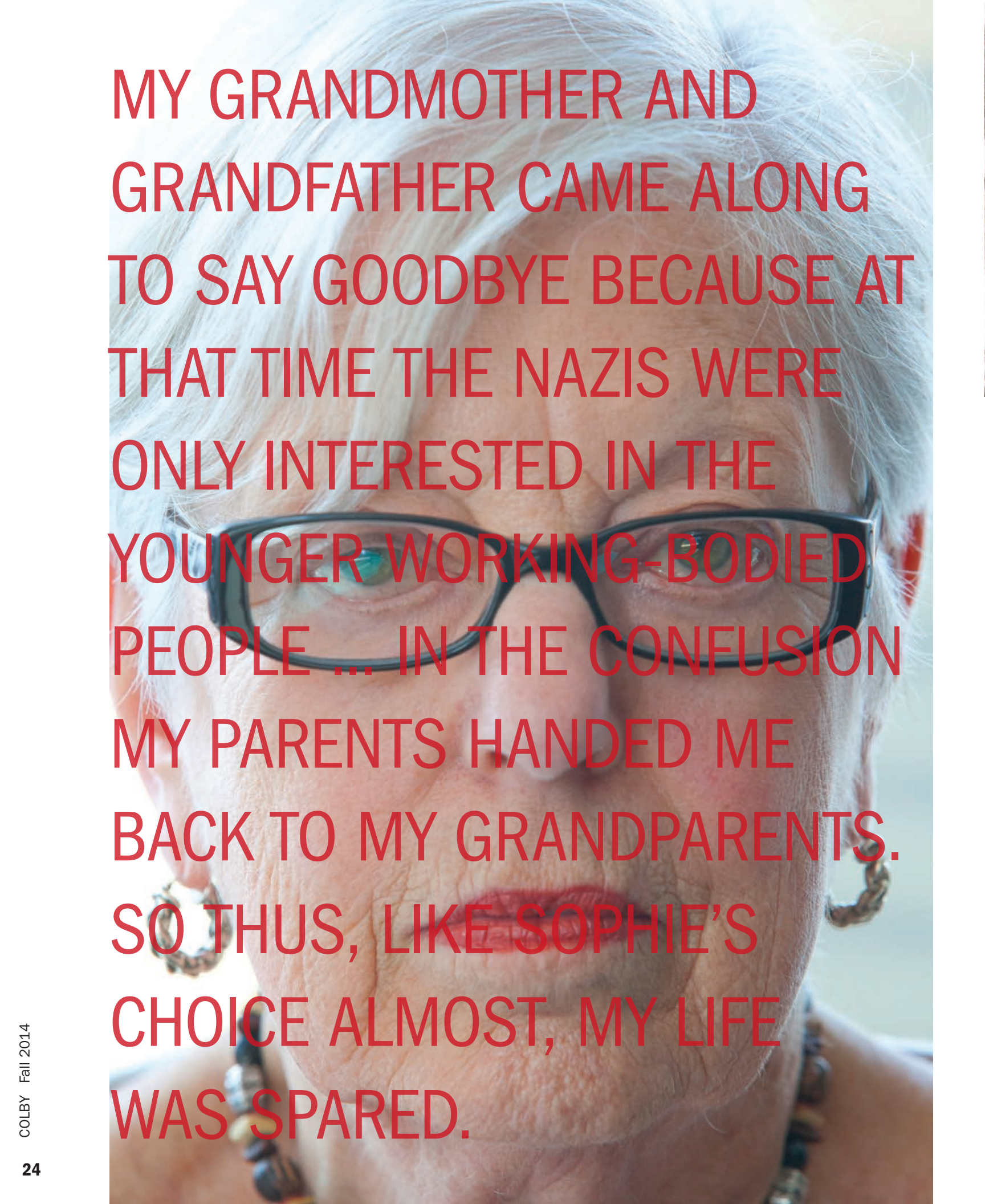
Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Boyle, Gerry and Cardillicchio, Nick (2015) "Hidden No More: Wilhelmina "Willie" Juhlin '61: A Secret Life," *Colby Magazine*: Vol. 103 : Iss. 2 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine/vol103/iss2/7>

This Features is brought to you for free and open access by the Colby College Archives at Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Magazine by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colby.



MY GRANDMOTHER AND
GRANDFATHER CAME ALONG
TO SAY GOODBYE BECAUSE AT
THAT TIME THE NAZIS WERE
ONLY INTERESTED IN THE
YOUNGER WORKING-BODIED
PEOPLE ... IN THE CONFUSION
MY PARENTS HANDED ME
BACK TO MY GRANDPARENTS.
SO THUS, LIKE SOPHIE'S
CHOICE ALMOST, MY LIFE
WAS SPARED.



HIDDEN NO MORE

By Gerry Boyle '78

Photography by Nick Cardillicchio

AFTER MONTHS OF ANXIOUS WAITING, THEY FINALLY HEARD THE KNOCK ON THE DOOR.

This was in Amsterdam, in August 1942. Three generations of a Jewish family lived in the home: grandparents, their daughter and son-in-law, and the couple's two children, ages 8 months and 2 years.

The men at the door were police. They told the family it was time. Jews, forced to gather in Amsterdam in previous months, were now being rounded up and taken to a theater, the Holinzer Halburg, which had been turned into a staging area for deportation. The couple took their 2-year-old daughter, Wilhelmina, but their son, 8-month-old Martin, had been tucked in a bathtub upstairs and was asleep. He didn't stir, and he was left behind. The grandparents accompanied the couple and toddler to the theater, which was packed with frightened and distraught men, women, and children.

"My grandmother and grandfather came along to say goodbye because at that time the Nazis were only interested in younger working-bodied people, up to the age of forty-five or so," said Wilhelmina "Willie" de Kadt Juhlin '61. "So my grandmother and grandfather had no fear of being taken at that point. In the confusion my parents handed me back to my grandparents. So thus, like Sophie's Choice almost, my life was spared."

Not so for her parents, who were taken from the theater to a transit camp called Westerbork, and then, along with thousands of others, to a concentration camp that would live in infamy: Auschwitz. On Aug. 10, 1942, Louis de Kadt, 29, and his wife Sonja de Kadt, 22, were murdered in the gas chambers there. Sonja's 19-year-old sister was killed in Auschwitz a month later.

Above, from right, Corrie Roggecamp, Wilhelmina "Willie" Juhlin '61, and Anke Roggecamp. Juhlin was bidden as a third "sister" in the Roggecamp family.

In a matter of months, the family would be decimated by the Holocaust. But that morning in the chaotic and crowded theater, a couple saved their grandchild's life. Then they made their way home through Amsterdam's streets and did it again.

As the Nazis tightened their stranglehold on occupied Europe, sending millions to their deaths in concentration camps, the de Kadt family, like all of the 140,000 Jews in the Netherlands, were especially vulnerable. They were strongly integrated into and supported by the general population, and some were affluent and successful, including those who worked in Amsterdam's diamond trade, as did Willie Juhlin's grandparents. But they were exposed by the country's terrain.

Unlike Belgium or France, also occupied by the Nazis, the Netherlands had no forest. It was the most densely populated country in Europe. "There's no natural place to hide," said Raffael Scheck, the Audrey Wade Katz and Sheldon Toby Katz Professor of History. "You have to hide with neighbors and friends. So this leads to the paradoxical situation that the percentage of Jews killed in the Netherlands is one of the highest in Europe, maybe the highest. Between seventy and seventy-five percent." On the flip side, he said, "the Dutch population had an unusually high percentage of rescuers, because there is just no other way one can survive in the Netherlands."

Juhlin's grandparents, Samuel and Margaretha Swaap, sensed that. So, in the weeks following the taking of their daughter and son-in-law, they surreptitiously found hiding places for their Jewish grandchildren.

Juhlin's grandmother arranged for 2-year-old Wilhelmina to be placed with her seamstress's sister-in-law and her husband. The family, devout Catholics, lived outside Amsterdam and had two young daughters; Juhlin became the third. Her

Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie

Mr. De Kadt

U.S.A.

Ref.: 820-92.AvB/jvt

Amsterdam, November 13, 1992

Dear mr. de Kadt,

In reply to your letter of September 1st, 1992 I have to inform you that the following information concerning your family is to be found in our collection.

Your parents, Louis de Kadt (13-5-1913 Rotterdam) and Sonja Rita de Kadt-Swaap (8-10-1919 Amsterdam) were deported from das Judendurchgangslager Westerbork to Auschwitz. They were both murdered directly after their arrival on 10-8-1942.

Your grandparents Samuel Swaap (24-5-1889 Amsterdam) and Margaretha Swaap-Loopuit (14-1-1895 Amsterdam) were deported from Westerbork to Bergen-Belsen on 19-5-1944.

Samuel Swaap died there in february 1945. We don't have any information about the day.

Agnes Marie Swaap (7-12-1922 Amsterdam) arrived with the same train as your parents in Auschwitz. She died 30-9-1942.

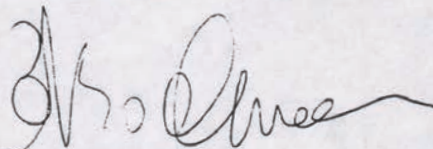
We don't have documentation regarding your question how the members of your family were murdered. With regard to your parents however it is most likely they were murdered in the gas chamber.

I regret to inform you we don't have any documents in our collection regarding the house on the Sophialaan and the diamond business of your grandparents. In this case I would advise you to contact:

Algemeen Rijksarchief
Postbus 90520
2509 LM 's-Gravenhage

I hope they will be able to help you. In our archives I have found some documents concerning the clearing of your father's condensed milk factory. Hereby I sent you photocopies of these documents.

Sincerely yours,



A. van Bockxmeer

A copy of a letter replying to an inquiry about the fate of the family of Wilhelmina de Kadt.

Postbus 19769 | 1000 GT Amsterdam



As an adult Juhlin would later ask her “sisters” why their parents took such a chance, risking their own lives and the lives of their children. It was a matter of conscience, she was told. “It was just something they had to do.”

brother, Martin, was given to a Protestant couple nearby. “We were with two different families because it would have been too dangerous to put us together,” Juhlin said. “But we weren’t far apart. I was able to visit my brother occasionally, but I didn’t know he was my brother. I thought he was just a friend.”

And soon she thought her new family, with a businessman dad and a stay-at-home mom, was her own.

“They became my family,” she said. “I went to church with them. I went everywhere with them. I called him Papa and her Mama. The two sisters were very accepting.”

This was not always the case for Jewish children hidden with Gentile families, according to Scheck. Some children were abused. Some were paid by the child’s biological family. When the money ran out, some Jewish children were turned out on the street. Others were informed on.

In the Netherlands an estimated 6,000 children were hidden. Of those, 4,000 survived and 2,000 were turned in to the authorities and taken by the Nazis. That betrayal often carried serious consequences for the rescuers as well.

If the deception had been discovered in Juhlin’s case it would have been very dangerous, Scheck said. The Gentile parents and children, he said, would have been deported to a concentration camp.

And the Jewish toddler?

“As a two-year-old there would have been no chance [of survival] whatsoever,” he said.

As an adult Juhlin would later ask her “sisters” why their parents took such a chance, risking their own lives and the lives of their children. It was a matter of conscience, she was told. “It was just something they had to do.”

Juhlin later was told that there was one family in the neighborhood thought to be suspicious, and that her adoptive

parents were careful around them. Her early-childhood memories are scant, but she recalled what must have been a subliminal reaction to being taken from her home by the SS troops. “I remember being afraid of anyone in a uniform,” she said. “Whether it was the milkman or the postman or police, I couldn’t tell the difference. I ran and hid under the dining room table.”

Even for those in the Netherlands with no secret to keep, this was a grueling time, according to Scheck. The Dutch hoped to be liberated in September of 1944 as the Allies pushed into Belgium to the south, but the operation failed. Meanwhile, that year the Nazis, taking older Jews, forced Juhlin’s grandparents from their home and sent them to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

The surrounding war cut the Netherlands off from food supplies, and famine spread through the country. Juhlin, then 4, still remembers her family saving potato skins for the next day’s meal and standing in line for soup “that was nothing more than water with some vegetables floating in it.”

Finally, in May 1945, the commander of German forces in the Netherlands surrendered to the Canadian army. Surviving Jews liberated from Nazi concentration camps straggled home. For Juhlin’s grandfather, it was too late. He died in Bergen-Belsen. Her grandmother was freed from the camp but was hospitalized for two months as she recovered from deprivation-related illnesses. She had lost her husband, two of her three daughters, and her son-in-law, but her hidden grandchildren had survived.

She came to see them, occasionally at first. Juhlin and her brother were four years older and to them their grandmother was a stranger. “They let us visit with her more and more, so we could get used to her,” Juhlin said. “And after a sort of transition period, basically she came and got us. We all went on a plane to New York. They told us we would go back to Holland in a year.”

Willie Juhlin didn't go back to the Netherlands, physically or in spirit. Instead, she was immersed in New York, a hustling postwar melting pot where immigrants jostled for space and opportunity. And the path to opportunity was to become

It was a new life, and one in which much was left unsaid. Willie Juhlin knew her grandmother as that. She and her brother also believed that the parents they had left behind in the Netherlands somehow were their biological families as well. When he was upset, her brother would cry, "I want to go to Mama," referring to the Protestant woman who had raised him most of his life, Juhlin said.

Juhlin, the young Willie de Kadt, 6, arrived in New York, having been raised a strict Catholic. Her grandmother was faced with the decision of whether to raise her in the Jewish faith—and chose not to. There was a Catholic family in the apartment building where they lived. The couple, who had a young daughter, took Willie to church every Sunday. She attended public school and went to weekly Catholic catechism classes taught by nuns. "My grandmother didn't want the fact that we were Jewish to hurt us in the future like it hurt her," Juhlin said. "We were raised Catholic by my Jewish grandmother." Later, Juhlin would be married, to Thor Juhlin '59, at St. Patrick's Cathedral.

This choice to sever oneself to one degree or another from the past was common among Jews after the war, Scheck says. While Jewish resistance fighters were admired, those who survived the concentration camps faced a colder reception



Willie de Kadt Juhlin shares a photo history of her hiding family.

American. "At that time," Juhlin said, "you assimilated as quickly as possible. You lost that—whether it was Dutch or German or Italian—you lost your language."

In New York her grandmother was reunited with her surviving daughter, who had left the Netherlands before occupation. It was she, Juhlin's aunt, who helped find the newcomers an apartment in Queens. At 52, the "single grandmom" settled in to raise her second family.



When he was upset, her brother would cry, "I want to go to Mama," referring to the Protestant woman who had raised him most of his life, Juhlin said.

when they returned. "Where there is no choice, there is no merit," Scheck said, describing a common sentiment of the time. "Therefore, the surviving Jews often had a very difficult time being accepted, getting heard for what they suffered."

In some cases, he said, there was even resentment. In Paris, for example, Jews coming back to the city after liberation found other people living in their apartments who didn't want to move out. There was also a feeling that surviving Jews were fortunate to be alive, even if their families had been murdered, their communities wiped out. People thought, "You are the lucky ones," Scheck said.

Those who considered a Jew's mere survival good fortune would have said Juhlin's grandmother, Margaretha Swaap, was especially lucky.

She received money from reparations and from the sale of her late husband's business in Amsterdam, enough to pay to relocate to New York. She went to work in a jewelry store on Fifth Avenue, where she strung custom pearls. The family lived as Americans, and Amsterdam receded into the past—until one day when Juhlin was 11.

"She sat me on a big chair in her bedroom," Juhlin said, "and she told me."

In a single conversation, Juhlin learned the family she thought she had in the Netherlands wasn't her real family. And that her actual parents had been murdered by the Nazis. In a matter of minutes, all of them, in a sense, were snatched away.

"It was a very painful afternoon," Juhlin said.

And yet, it was a pain that was quickly put aside, at least outwardly. "It was a story I was told and we shrugged it off," she said. The message from her grandmother was that this was something not to talk about, not to worry about. "My grandmother was damaged by this," she said. "She wasn't the warmest person in the world. She kept everything at a distance."

But her grandmother was only reacting to the message from society, Juhlin now realizes.

"We were told that we really didn't suffer because we weren't in a concentration camp. I don't have a tattoo on my arm. And I was well taken care of during the war in somebody else's home," Juhlin said.

End of story? For a time.

Juhlin, like her grandmother, kept her background and her feelings to herself. But privately, and over time, she did grieve. She realized that had there been no Holocaust, no war, her life would have been very different. And she regretted that she had no mother to confide in or to comfort her. When her friends made reference to their parents, she kept her mouth shut.

"Still do," Juhlin said.

She attended high school in New York and was a strong student—something her grandmother exhorted her to be. Juhlin chose Colby because she wanted to go far away from home. She was a French major (she no longer spoke Dutch), and during college she met her husband-to-be, who was two years older.

After graduation Juhlin moved back to New York and worked as a bilingual secretary for an import-export business on 42nd Street. She and her husband had three children and

THESE SCHOLARS CAME TO COLBY TO ENSURE STORIES LIKE THAT OF WILHELMINA "WILLIE" JUHLIN '61 ARE NOT FORGOTTEN.

An international symposium, "Exploring Women's Testimony: Genocide, War, Revolution, the Holocaust and Human Rights," took place Oct. 8-10 at Colby, the University of Maine at Augusta, and the Holocaust and Human Rights Center of Maine.

The intent, said Assistant Professor of French Audrey Brunetaux, was to consider human rights abuses—from the perspective of gender, in a variety of conflicts and cultures, and through the lenses of scholars, activists, educators, and artists.

"We wanted to talk not only about literature, but also about media, visual arts, and art," said co-organizer Brunetaux. Nearly 20 scholars from around the world gathered to present on topics ranging from Romani women in the Holocaust to the Rwandan and Armenian genocides to women's rights in Afghanistan.

Brunetaux, whose scholarship includes an emphasis on Holocaust narratives, said the theme of the symposium connects the Holocaust with abuses of recent years.

"Human rights issues, discrimination, extermination—they are still going on," she said. "I think it's still necessary to highlight those problems and have people come and talk ... about what they are doing."

Scholars from Rutgers, São Paulo, Michigan State, Bates, Bowdoin, and Colby, among others, participated, along with playwrights, video journalists, and activists from Uganda and Rwanda.

Brunetaux, a member of the Holocaust and Human Rights Center board, said the goal is to sustain conversations. "Sometimes students forget the past is still important, and there are repercussions in the present. With human rights we see that."

THE EMOTIONAL POWER OF REFLECTION

Reflections of Jews hidden as children, memoirs of concentration-camp survivors, films that explore the residual effects of the Holocaust—the stories are shared in different ways but all have the power to compel audiences to consider past, present, and future.

For Assistant Professor of French Audrey Brunetaux it was the work of memoirist Charlotte Delbo—sent to Auschwitz as a captured member of the French Resistance—that inspired a scholarly career focused on French film and literature related to the Holocaust.

“I had a very emotional reaction to that text,” Brunetaux said. “I wanted to know why.” She went on to study Delbo’s work in graduate school. “The way she writes is very powerful and provokes the readers. I wanted to look at text and films that do that.”

Brunetaux shared this reading and viewing list of Holocaust literature, starting with Delbo:

TEXTS:

Auschwitz and After, Charlotte Delbo

Maus I & II: A Survivor’s Tale, Art Spiegelman

Rue Ordener, rue Labat, Sarah Kofman

This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Tadeusz Borowski

Night, Elie Wiesel

The Long Voyage, Jorge Semprun

FILMS:

Goodbye Children, Louis Malle

The Birch-Tree Meadow, Marceline Loridan-Ivens

Shoah, Claude Lanzmann

The Pianist, Roman Polanski

The Pawnbroker, Sidney Lumet



Willie de Kadt Juhlin '61 tells of her life as a hidden child so that this chapter in history is remembered and in hopes that it will not be repeated.

for several years she was a stay-at-home mom. The family moved from city to city up and down the Eastern Seaboard as Thor Juhlin '59 rose up the corporate ladder for a large construction company. The last job was back in New York City, and the family settled in Morristown, N.J. Willie Juhlin earned a master’s degree at night, and in 1980 she took a job as an English as a Second Language teacher in a local public school.

Thor Juhlin, who died in 1997, knew the Amsterdam story, as did a few of Willie Juhlin’s closest friends. “My own children had heard in dribs and drabs,” she said. When she did talk about her childhood, it wasn’t extensive and she never used the term “hidden child.” As far as she knew, “it just happened to me,” she said. “I knew nobody else. Nor did my brother.”

The phenomenon of hidden Jewish children was known to scholars, Scheck says, but it became more public in the 1980s and 1990s. The children of the 1940s were aging and looking to document their experiences. The end of the Cold War allowed for access to information in Eastern Bloc countries.

It was only then that Juhlin learned she was not alone.

Just as the moment she learned about her family is seared in her memory, so is the weekend she learned that she was

As far as she knew, “it
just happened to me.
I knew nobody else.
Nor did my brother.”

—Willie de Kadt Juhlin '61

one of thousands of hidden children. In 1991, at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in New York City, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith sponsored a conference titled the First International Gathering of Children Hidden During World War II. Organizers expected 900 people to attend; more than 1,500 showed up. Willie Juhlin was one, along with her brother, Martin. “It was mind-blowing,” she said. “My growing up years, including my time at Colby, I didn’t realize I was a hidden child.”

Speakers included heads of Holocaust survivors’ groups, a rabbi, and a filmmaker. Juhlin still has her now-faded program, annotated with carefully written notes: children deprived ... old before they were young ... lost so much ... no trust in others ... they are survivors ... talk about it.

So she started to do just that.

At first it was in the middle school in New Jersey where she worked, when she spoke to students who were reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* or the Lois Lowry novel *Number the Stars*. Later she spoke at other area schools and even visited her grandchildren’s school, where her grandchildren heard much of the story for the first time. “No matter what kind of student, ... whether it was a small group or a large group, you could hear a pin drop,” Juhlin said.

Now retired, she doesn’t give the talks very often, and when she is asked, she sometimes hesitates. To speak about her experience, she said, “I have to take all that stuff off the back burner. But I end up doing it because it’s a story that needs to be told.”

She talks not only about her own story and the Holocaust but about prejudice and people attacked because of their religion. “I feel evangelical about it. I think everybody is getting older and ... certain people say there was no Holocaust. And so I feel obligated, in a way, to keep this story real for people. Especially for young people because they’re so far removed from it now.”

That can’t be said about her own children and grandchildren. Last year Juhlin took them to meet her extended “hidden family” in the Netherlands. They met her hidden sisters, saw her grandmother’s house in Amsterdam, now an office. The younger generation was fascinated—and disturbed.

“I said, ‘Good,’” Juhlin said. “My message came across.” ©

MAZZEO TO WRITE OF ANOTHER RESCUER, “THE FEMALE SCHINDLER”

Irena Sendlerowa, a social worker in Poland during World War II, is known to some as “the female Schindler.” Now bestselling author Tilar J. Mazzeo, Clara C. Piper Associate Professor of English, is bringing Sendlerowa’s story to life.

In a new book Mazzeo will detail how Sendlerowa and women in her office created a secret network that saved 2,500 Jewish children from the Treblinka death camp. The children were given new identities and hidden in foster families and convents. Sendlerowa took enormous risks to keep a complete list so families could be reunited.

Most families did not survive, but nearly all of “Irena’s children” did.

Olek Lato '15, a biology and philosophy major and Mazzeo’s research assistant this summer, completed translations of Holocaust testimony and helped to compile other materials for *Irena’s Children*, which will be published by Simon & Schuster in 2016.

