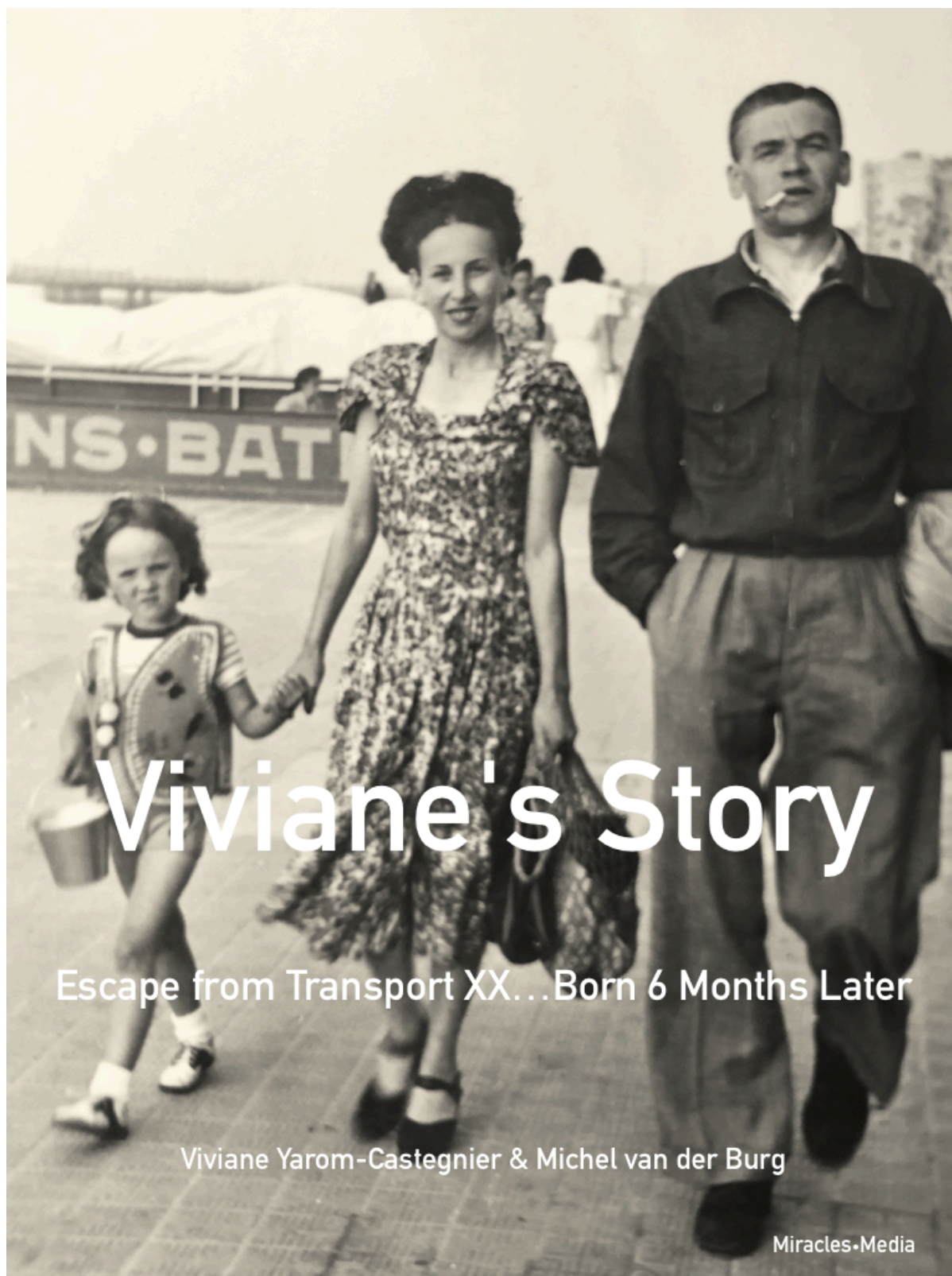


Viviane's Story

Escape from Transport XX... Born 6 Months Later

Viviane Yarom-Castegnier & Michel van der Burg

Miracles•Media



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With a Foreword by Simone Korkus

In cooperation with
Richard Bloom Productions
and Simone Korkus

Miracles•Media

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This e-book is based on posts published (c2009–2019) by Michel van der Burg at michelvanderburg.com

Credits for all media in the [Credits Section](#)

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My life is only miracles. — Simon Gronowski

Dedicated to:

Isabella Weinreb-Castegnier (1919–2013)

Lilly Schwartz-Wolkenfeld (1922–2014)

Elias Gnazik (1895–1965)

Hannah Nadel-Gnazik (1924–2017)

Robert Maistriau (1921–2008)

Youra Livschitz (1917–1944)

Jean Franklemon (1917–1977)

Régine Krochmal (1920–2012)

Simon Gronowski (1931)

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Foreword

This year Belgium commemorates the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. During this war and as part of the “Final Solution”– the Nazi plan for the genocide of Jews – 25,874 Belgian Jews were systematically murdered in extermination camps. This number is still being constantly readjusted by the Belgian research committee of Kazerne Dossin because new files and facts are still discovered.

The survivors of the Holocaust, who emerged from this nightmare and managed to put together the pieces of a new life, have grown old. The ones, who were adults during World War II, are mostly gone, and those few who are left are in the last years of their lives. For the generation of our children and grandchildren, the Second World War and the Shoah gradually might become a story from a distant past, based on official historical data, because soon the considerations, opinions, feelings and memories of those who can tell us in their own words what they saw with their own eyes and who have endured and fought the greatest conflict and atrocities in history might fade from the world’s collective memory.

Never has it been more important and topical than now to tell and register their stories.

The world as we know it today is partly formed by these important and at the same time terrible events. It's about a living past. It's vital and it can speak.

History gets a beating heart through the testimonials of these survivors.

What follows, is the story of Isabella Weinreb told by her daughter Viviane Yarom-Castegnier. Isabella may well have ended up as yet one more entry in the long list of Nazi’s victims and her daughter would never have been born, if it hadn’t been for the intervention and courageous efforts of the Belgian resistance fighters, Youra Livschitz, Robert Maistriau and Jean Franklemon who sabotaged the twentieth transport to Auschwitz as well as the resilience of her fellow Jewish prisoners, who fought to escape and rescued her life; among them Elias Gnazik.

Michel van der Burg has registered this human document with great care and it is thanks to his persistence that Isabella and Viviane’s story will not be forgotten.

Simone Korkus

April 16, 2019

Preface

Today 76 years ago – on the night of the 19th of April in 1943 – Viviane escaped in the womb of her pregnant mother from the Twentieth Train heading for Auschwitz.

Isabella Weinreb-Castegnier was three-months pregnant when she jumped that night in Belgium from the fast moving 20th Death Train to Auschwitz.

It was Passover eve and full moon , just like today.

Isabella escaped with a broken wrist and bruises all over her body, but no other major injuries.

Her daughter Viviane – meaning "full of life", and named so for her will to live and hold tight in her mother's womb – was born six months later on October 30, 1943 in Brussels, Belgium.

Viviane contacted Michel van der Burg in March 2014, to inquire as to where she could watch the documentary film “Transport XX to Auschwitz” (2012) — a film by Karen Lynne & Richard Bloom and Michel van der Burg. ^[1], ^[2] This triggered our correspondence over the next month on the story of the miraculous escape of Viviane — a story we published online April 2014 in a post at the site of Michel van der Burg. ^[3]

This e-booklet ^[4] now presents Viviane's story, expanded with the amazing new findings and events reported in later publications online ^[5], ^[6], ^[7], ^[8], ^[9] — thanks to further research by the Dutch-Belgian author-reporter Simone Korkus, assisted by Hannah, the daughter of Elias Gnazik who helped Isabella jump to freedom.

Viviane Yarom-Castegnier & Michel van der Burg

April 19, 2019

Ve'Ulai



Ameet Kanon singing Ve'ulai
to honor her great-grandmother's memory

Los Angeles. April 28, 2014

Ameet Kanon singing Ve'Ulai ("And Perhaps") a cappella – to honor the memory of Isabella Weinreb – her great-grandmother – at the Israeli Scouts of America ceremony in Los Angeles for Holocaust Remembrance Day, April 28, 2014. ^[10]

"This song is dedicated to my great-grandmother who lost so many in the Shoah. She was a Holocaust survivor ... and this is one of her favorite songs ...

*Ve'ulai lo hayu hadvarim me'olam
Ve'ulai,
Me'olam lo heshkamti im shachar lagan,
La'avdo be'zeiat apai.
Me'olam, be'yamim arukim ve'yokdim,
Arukim ve'yokdim shel katzir,
Bim'romei agalah amusat alumot
Lo natati koli be'shir.
Me'olam lo taharti bi'tchelet shoktah
U'vetom...
Shel Kinneret sheli – Oy Kinneret sheli,
He'hayit, o chalamti chalom?..."*

Transport XX to Auschwitz

April 19, 1943

Attack on the 20th death train

Today 76 years ago – on the night of April 19, 1943 – a remarkable heroic rescue occurred in Belgium, where 17 people were liberated during an attack on the cattle-car train "Transport XX," packed with 1,631 Jewish passengers heading for Auschwitz — and where another 200 more also jumped out.

This attack by three young men who followed their heart, is the only documented attack on a death train during the Shoah.

During the Nazi occupation of Belgium, 28 train convoys with over 25,000 Jews and 351 Roma left the town of Mechelen (Malines) towards the Auschwitz extermination camp.

On the night of April 19, 1943, the 20th Transport headed East with 1631 Jewish deportees crammed into 40 cattle cars.

This Transport XX left the Mechelen transit camp Kazerne Dossin at 10 pm, and was attacked and stopped some 30 minutes later outside Brussels – near Boortmeerbeek.

Armed with only 1 pistol, pliers and an improvised red hurricane lamp, the three young Belgians, Robert Maistriau, Jean Franklemon, and Youra Livschitz – old schoolmates – stopped the train by putting the red lamp in the middle of the rails. They were able to open one of the cattle cars and liberated 17 men and women. Another 200 or more prisoners jumped out of the train before the German border. Many were shot and 26 were killed. Eventually half of them managed to escape.

Documentary film



Trailer documentary Transport XX to Auschwitz.

The attack, rescue, many escapes and escape attempts from this 20th deportation train in Belgium are documented in the documentary film “Transport XX to Auschwitz” (2012) by the first-hand accounts of one of the attackers, Robert Maistriau, testimonies of people who have jumped from the train, and survivors who returned from Auschwitz — the film trailer is shown here.

When the train stops, the attacker Robert Maistriau cuts the barbed wire on the sliding door of one of the cars, opens the door and calls “Fliehen Sie, Fliehen Sie!” ...

At first people are confused and scared – but then 17 people jumped out and escaped while the Germans were shooting.

He next starts working on a second car, but the train began moving...

Simon Gronowski

Simon Gronowski was only 11 years old when he was helped by his mother to jump from the train, and survived – unlike his mother who was murdered at Auschwitz.

Simon was 'lucky.' He was taken care of by the Belgian gendarme Jean Aerts and his wife, and not betrayed.

That salvation was no exception: almost all refugees from the deportation train survived with the help of the Belgian population. Simon Gronowski was the youngest person to ever jump and escape from a death train.



Simon Gronowski beside deportation wagon in Belgium

Lilly Schwartz and her friend Isabella

In a scene from the film – shown here – Lilly Schwartz tells her story of escaping with her friend Isabella: "April 19th, 1943 ... they opened, the door opened, and people started jumping...So when the doors opened, Bella jumped, a lot of people jumped ... and the train was going 60 miles an hour, this wasn't a slow train!"



These are some of the remarkable stories told of the heroic rescue, escapes, and escape attempts from Transport XX to Auschwitz, which occurred on April 19, 1943 – the first night of Passover – when at the same time the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising also began, some 720 miles away.

Bella's face



Isabella Weinreb-Castegnier was three-months pregnant that night on April 19, 1943 in Belgium, when she jumped from the fast moving 20th Train bound for Auschwitz. Isabella escaped with a broken wrist and bruises all over her body but no other major injuries. Her daughter Viviane – meaning “full of life,” named so for her will to live and hold tight in her mother’s womb – was born six months later on October 30, 1943.

March 2014, Viviane first learned about our documentary "Transport XX to Auschwitz" and e-mailed me..."I couldn't believe while searching online that I would find an actual movie made, telling the story of this amazing and unique escape from a death-train!" After watching the documentary, she wrote to me "it was so well-made...I even wished it were longer"... Viviane also shared with me that at one point in the film, she got tears in her eyes when her mother's face appeared in a flash on the screen, while Lilly (Wolkenfeld Schwartz) – her mother's friend – was telling the story..."and Bella jumped"... this was so unexpected, she said "it took me by surprise!"

One year earlier – on Holocaust Remembrance Day, April 7, 2013 – her mother passed away at the age of 93.

April 28, 2014 – Holocaust Remembrance Day 2014 and her mother's yahrzeit – Viviane first shares her story at my website michelvanderburg.com.

Today, 76 years after the famous escape, Viviane's story is reissued below and expanded, including new findings, with the help of author-researcher Simone Korkus on the rescue of Isabella and Viviane by Elias Gnazik who helped the pregnant Isabella Weinreb jump from the fast moving 20th train to Auschwitz, also relating Viviane's emotional meeting with Simon Gronowski in Los Angeles in April 2018.

Michel van der Burg

April 19, 2019



Isabella Weinreb-Castegnier in France, Dec 2012

Escape from Transport XX...born 6 months later



Isabella Weinreb-Castegnier in special edition of film "TRANSPORT XX — installation Brussels" [11].

My mother – Isabella Weinreb-Castegnier, became the No. 1153 on this day in 1943 when she was herded on a truck with Jews, Gypsies, and other criminals or “unwanted” according to Nazis’ doctrine. The truck was heading to the Kazerne Dossin in Mechelen – the transit camp the Germans used for direct transports from Belgium to Auschwitz.

Upon arrival, the prisoners were deprived of their identity and all personal belongings. They were assigned tags with numbers to wear on their neck.

For the Nazis they were not humans...just a crowd of cattle to be slaughtered.

My mother was hopeless, she was pregnant and aware that in her condition there was not much chance for her survival, she knew she was doomed...unless she could escape from the death train! And indeed, she would do that on this fateful night of April 19, 1943 when she jumped off that cattle-train on the way to Auschwitz.

She survived...and I was born six months later!

Fleeing from Germany...

My mother was born in Frankfurt-am-Main on November 2, 1919. Her parents were Jews from Poland. They immigrated to Germany during WWI. Some of their family members would later move to Belgium and Holland. My mother and her parents left Frankfurt at the start of 1937 as it became unsafe for Jews to stay in Germany.



Isabella Weinreb in Belgium 1940s

Belgium...

My mother, her parents and her sister moved to Antwerp where their relatives resided. My mother was then 16 year old. She joined the 'Betar' – a Jewish Zionist Youth organization, hoping that one day she would immigrate with her group to Palestine...a dream that would not materialize.



Arrests and deportation...

My mother and her family stayed in Antwerp until the German's invasion of Belgium in May 1940. By the end of that year they were transferred with other Jewish families to rural areas in the province of Limburg. In the middle of 1941, the Jews who had been expelled earlier to Limburg were now forced to relocate again to cities designated by the Germans.

My mother and her father were settled in Brussels, while her mother and sister went to the city of Liege, where they had found employment in a convent under the protection of the Catholic Church. Subsequently, my mother became a sales representative for pharmaceutical-dental products, and she would meet my father who had a dental practice in Brussels.

In January 1943 – my grandfather, Leo (Leib) Yehuda Weinreb, was arrested in Brussels and deported to Auschwitz on a transport from Mechelen.

Around that time, at the beginning of 1943, my parents decided to get married.

Isabella never thought of going into hiding, she believed that she would be safe with my father, Pierre Castegnier – a Belgian citizen, not Jewish, with Catholic roots.

My parents were arrested on their wedding day, and with them the entire wedding party was booked for inquiry, including the officials who had performed the ceremony.

Most likely an informer had denounced them to the German police. My parents were not aware of the German laws regarding "mixed/Jewish marriages."...

They imprisoned my father in the notorious Gestapo headquarters at Avenue Louise in Brussels where they punished him for marrying a Jew.

While he was beaten in their cells, my mother was transferred to the Kazerne Dossin in Mechelen in order to be deported later.

Luckily for my father he would be released from jail after a short time, thanks to a family friend who had affiliations with the German administration.

Kazerne Dossin – collecting camp of Mechelen...

Isabella became a number...no.1153, bound to be deported on the 20th Transport to the death camp of Auschwitz. But she was determined not to get there, she knew she had to escape, it was her only option. Shortly after her arrival in Dossin, my father's family had submitted a request for her release, on the grounds that she was pregnant and married to a Belgian citizen from a Catholic family. They knew a few people of influence in the German government who could intervene, but unfortunately, their petition failed.

My mother was summoned to the camp's commander who stated gleefully: "Your husband was a fool to think that I would ever release a pregnant Jewess, and be assured that you and your offspring, you both will be exterminated!"

As she was reminded once again of her dreadful upcoming fate, my mother decided it was time to join other detainees who had also plans of jumping off the train.

With her friend Lilly she started to organize jumping drills. She and Lilly were training women who were afraid, by teaching them to jump from the highest bunk beds, so that they

could be prepared when they would have to escape from a moving train. There were also children who took part in those exercises.

One of them was Simon Gronowski, a brave 11-year old boy, whom they called “le petit Simon” (little Simon) and who was practicing jumps with other kids.

Escape from Transport XX – the death train to Auschwitz...

On April 19, 1943, the first night of Passover, Transport XX departed from the barracks in Mechelen with 1,631 people crammed in cattle-wagons.

This time the Germans didn't use regular passengers' wagons as in previous transports, but instead they opted for wooden box-cars with tiny ventilations and doors reinforced with barbed wire, which would prevent all attempts to escape. The transport left Mechelen in the late evening for its destination, when at one point, it started stalling, then suddenly stopped. My mother would say that she could hear shouts in German and shots coming from the area of the locomotive. It sounded like the train had come under attack.

My mother (no.1153) and her friend Lilly (no.1152) were both huddled in the same wagon.



Isabella Weinreb in “TRANSPORT XX — installation Brussels”

They were planning to jump off the train as soon as possible, before it would reach over the border to Germany.

Each wagon was equipped with a bucket and a broom – the Germans always caring for cleanliness.

Possibly the broom had been used to open the door, or perhaps a sharp tool that some people had managed to hide and carry from the camp.

My mother could not remember clearly how they had succeeded in making that door open, from inside or outside? She wasn't sure.

But she did tell another story about the broom...how they had dressed it up with a man's coat and a hat, then held outside the door to use as a decoy for the soldiers who were guarding the train. They were expecting the German guards to shoot at that "broom"... and if the Germans were not responding, it would be the signal that it was safe for them to jump out.

People in her wagon then began to jump...taking turns... my mother too was getting ready...but when came her turn, she froze, overcome by a sudden fear, it was dark and the train started to pick up speed. While she was trying to regain control of herself, she felt someone embracing her and pushing her from behind...then finally she got the courage to jump. Bullets were flying around but didn't hit her. She rolled down the ravine, afterwards ran to hide in the nearby bushes.

She got a broken wrist, bruises over her face and legs, but no other severe injuries. It was amazing that she had not miscarried from the fall and remained pregnant...

I was holding tight in my mother's womb!

The next morning, when it was safe to move out of her hiding spot in the woods, my mother went to the nearest tram station to catch the trolley to Brussels and reunite with my father.

Then came the Gestapo again!!!...they were searching the tram for escapees and she was terrified! She was hiding her swollen hand in the pocket of her coat, afraid the police would ask her to take it out. But the men passed her by on the tram without even noticing her – a miracle!

She finally arrived to the tram station in Brussels, but feeling so weak and hungry that the first thing she did was to find a bakery and eat her favorite pastries...

(my mother had always a sweet tooth!)

Then she allowed herself to call my father who could not believe his wife had escaped and returned home...he thought he was seeing a ghost!

Born...

Couple months later, about three weeks before I was born, the police came to my father's house to look for "Isabella Weinreb who had escaped..."

My mother had already obtained new identity papers, therefore my father pretended that "she was not the same wife, but a new one, since the other one he thought had died"...a story the policeman did not believe, but since he was not a German, just a Belgian cop who was in a good disposition toward my father, he decided to do no harm and only said "you are lucky that my colleague didn't come with me today, because he is a Gestapo officer and surely he would have taken this woman away!"

Couple weeks after this frightful event, my mother gave birth safely at home...six months after her escape, on October 30, 1943...and my father named me Viviane, meaning "full of life!"

After the war...

My parents stayed in Brussels after the war...my father lived in Belgium until his death in 1986. My mother moved to the South of France when she was in her 80's, wishing to live near her daughter (my younger sister)...and there she would remain in a retirement home until she passed away.

As to myself, I spent my childhood in Belgium, where like my mother I belonged to a Jewish Zionist Youth organization, fulfilling her dream to live in Israel!

At age 20, I went to live on a kibbutz, joining my grandmother and aunt who had immigrated to Israel after the war.

With my family (husband and children) we moved to Los Angeles in 1980 where I've been living since.

I am now retired, taking care of my grandchildren and telling them the story of my mother – their special, brave great-grandmother...along with my own story, as the youngest survivor of the Twentieth Train!

Viviane Yarom-Castegnier

Los Angeles, California

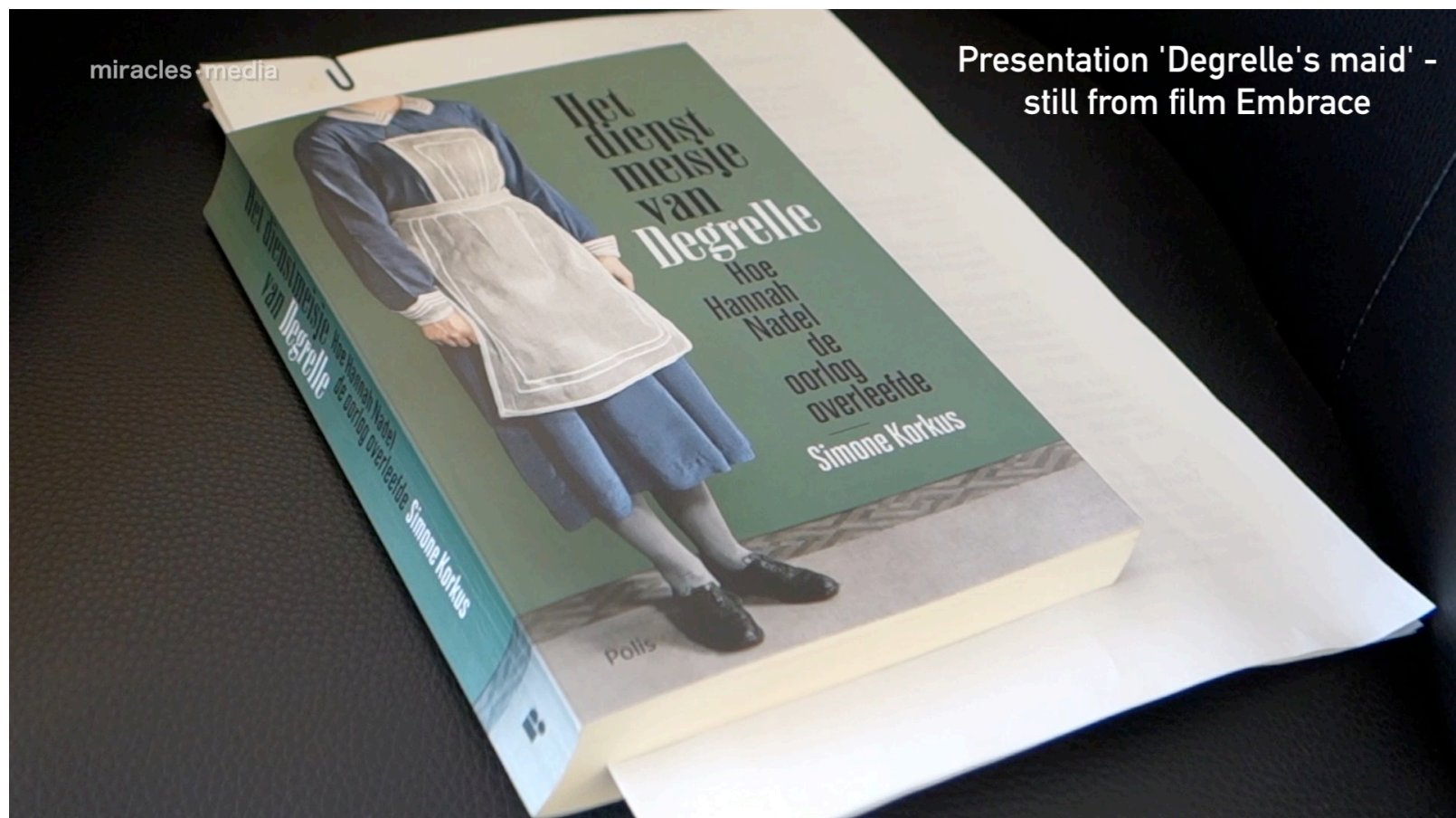
April 28, 2014 – Holocaust Remembrance Day



Viviane and her parents on the walk board in Belgian seaside town Blankenberge, ca 1948

Embrace

Escape with Elias Gnazik



Presentation 'Degrelle's maid' -
still from film Embrace

Isabella , three-months pregnant , froze the moment she had to jump from the fast moving death train heading for Auschwitz. The man waiting in line behind her, did not hesitate for a moment , and embracing her from behind, pushed her out – jumping together they both landed in a ditch.

Isabella escaped with a broken wrist and bruises all over her body but had no other severe wounds, and six months later gave birth to her daughter Viviane.

That man saving Isabella and Viviane was Elias Gnazik – we discovered in the second half of the year 2016 in a joint effort – when the Dutch-Belgian author Simone Korkus had almost finished writing her book about the life of Elias’ daughter Hannah Gnazik (who died January 31, 2017), and contacted me to find out who that woman was, that Elias Gnazik helped jump and escape from that cattle-car of Transport XX to Auschwitz.

For Simone it was a great honor to bring Hannah and Viviane together – the child of the rescuer and the child of the rescued pregnant woman, when Viviane visited Hannah together with Simone, October 2016 in Israel.

This new story became the epilogue in Simone's book, written in Dutch, called 'Het Dienstmeisje Van Degrelle' – which translates to 'Degrelle's maid' – on Hannah's survival during the war by working as a maid for the sister of the foremost Belgian Nazi collaborator Leon Degrelle.

During the discussion at the presentation of Simone's newest book – interviewed by Ingrid Vander Veken – in the Kazerne Dossin museum , I asked Simone to share with us some of her findings about this spectacular story of the probably youngest that escaped that death train.



Background

Simone Korkus (author, reporter) contacted me via Facebook Messenger May 2016, asking for information about Mrs. Lilly (Wolkenfeld) Schwartz, and telling me Mrs. Schwartz had

escaped from Transport XX from the same car as Elias Gnazik, the father of Hannah (Gnazik) Nadel.



Simone had actually finished the writing of the story of the Jewish Hannah (Gnazik) Nadel for her new Dutch book “Het dienstmeisje van Degrelle” but felt she would like to get to know more about Hannah’s father Elias's activities in the war.

Mrs. Lilly (Wolkenfeld) Schwartz had helped me and Richard Bloom since 2011 with our documentary "Transport XX to Auschwitz" (published 2012, a film by Karen Lynne & Richard Bloom and Michel van der Burg). Mrs. Schwartz, unfortunately had passed away in 2014.

However, I could help Simone with the story of Mrs. Schwartz’s friend Isabella – Viviane's story , that miraculous story I had first worked on and published together with Viviane in 2014.

Further research by Simone, with the help of Viviane together with Hannah, and researchers Laurence Schram and Dorien Styven of Kazerne Dossin, let Simone to the insight that Isabella had indeed been that pregnant woman Elias Gnazik had helped jump, and thus he had saved Viviane’s life too!

Simone Korkus details this beautiful finding and miraculous story in a final chapter – the epilogue – of her new book, the research, findings, conclusion and her witnessing the emotional meeting of the daughters of the rescuer and rescued in Ramat Gan, Israel.

Simone Korkus findings

The short film 'Embrace' [12] (a new edition of the documentary 'Full of Life ... Escape from Transport XX' [8] highlights our discussion at the presentation of Simone Korkus' Dutch book "Het dienstmeisje van Degrelle – Hoe Hannah Nadel de oorlog overleefde" [The maid of Degrelle – How Hannah Nadel survived the war] — an interview moderated by the Belgian writer Ingrid Vander Veken in the 'Literary Cafe' on October 15, 2017 in the Kazerne Dossin Museum, of Elias' rescue of Isabella and Viviane; the film continues with our visit later to the Kazerne Dossin portrait wall (portraits of deported people) with Simone Korkus and Jan Maes (the first to point Simone to Hannah's story); and ends with me having a short improvised talk in English with a visiting couple.

Documentary 'Embrace'



Documentary 'Embrace' – filmed October 15, 2017 in Kazerne Dossin, Mechelen, Belgium.

Transcript Embrace

Below the full text of the filmed discussion with writer Simone Korkus (SK), moderator Ingrid Vander Veken (IV), audience Michel van der Burg (MB), and visit of the Kazerne Dossin portrait wall with Jan Maes (JM), and monitors with anonymous visitors (VI).

IV : If there are questions from the audience ... I might not pass the microphone — but, if it is not audible, I will repeat the question.

MB : Simone can you also tell us something about your ... I believe your last visit to Hannah ... together with Viviane ... perhaps the youngest saved from Transport XX?

And the rescue action – the role of Elias? [Elias Gnazik – the father of Hannah Nadel]

IV : That is a beautiful story. So a spoiler for those wanting to read the book ...

SK : Yes ... that no longer belonged to the actual story. But as it goes with a story ... a life ... a life does not stop ... it goes on. So, I had already told the story – and the book was finished – and via Michel van der Burg, a Dutch filmmaker, I found out about the baby that was in the womb of one of the women.

I have to tell the story right, of one of the women in the car of the transport to Auschwitz – that same car Elias was in. What was happening: that lady was pregnant, she did not want to jump, and Elias, in a way, embraced her... and he jumped out with her. Elias then also broke his finger, and that finger would never straighten properly again.



Well, I heard that story, and via Michel I found out about a lady living in America who was the daughter of that lady [Isabella], whom Elias had saved. She had been that baby then, in her mother's womb. I have contacted that lady. She is a Jewish lady, Viviane, who by chance had to go to visit in Israel.

We made an appointment – Hannah was still alive – to meet each other. Well, for me, that was perhaps the most emotional, because at that moment, you see ... what an act of one person ... a courageous act of one person...whoever...what that can bring about. Because there was the living proof... and she has children and grandchildren.

IV : A picture shows it in the book by the way.



SK : That's the visit, yes.

IV : That is Viviane visiting Hannah.

MB : Thank you.

IV : More questions ? ... Then I think you now will start your book signing. Thank you for the conversation.

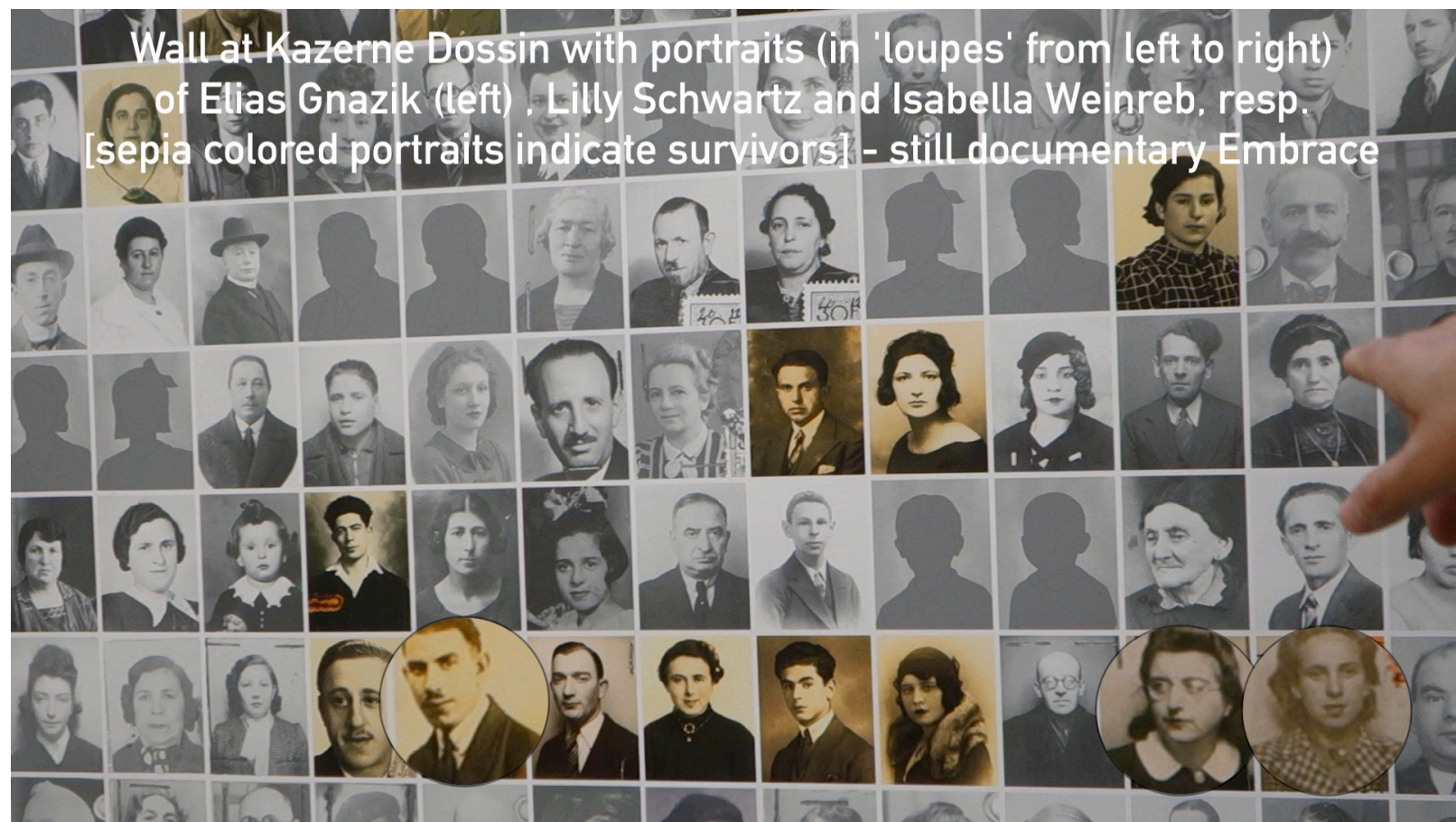
Scene: Visiting wall of portraits with the portrait of Elias Gnazik on row 21, with next to each other to the right (the 6th and 7th portrait to the right) the portraits of Lilly Schwartz and Isabella Weinreb, resp.



Jan Maes at Kazerne Dossin, monitor with portrait of Elias Gnazik - still
documentary Embrace

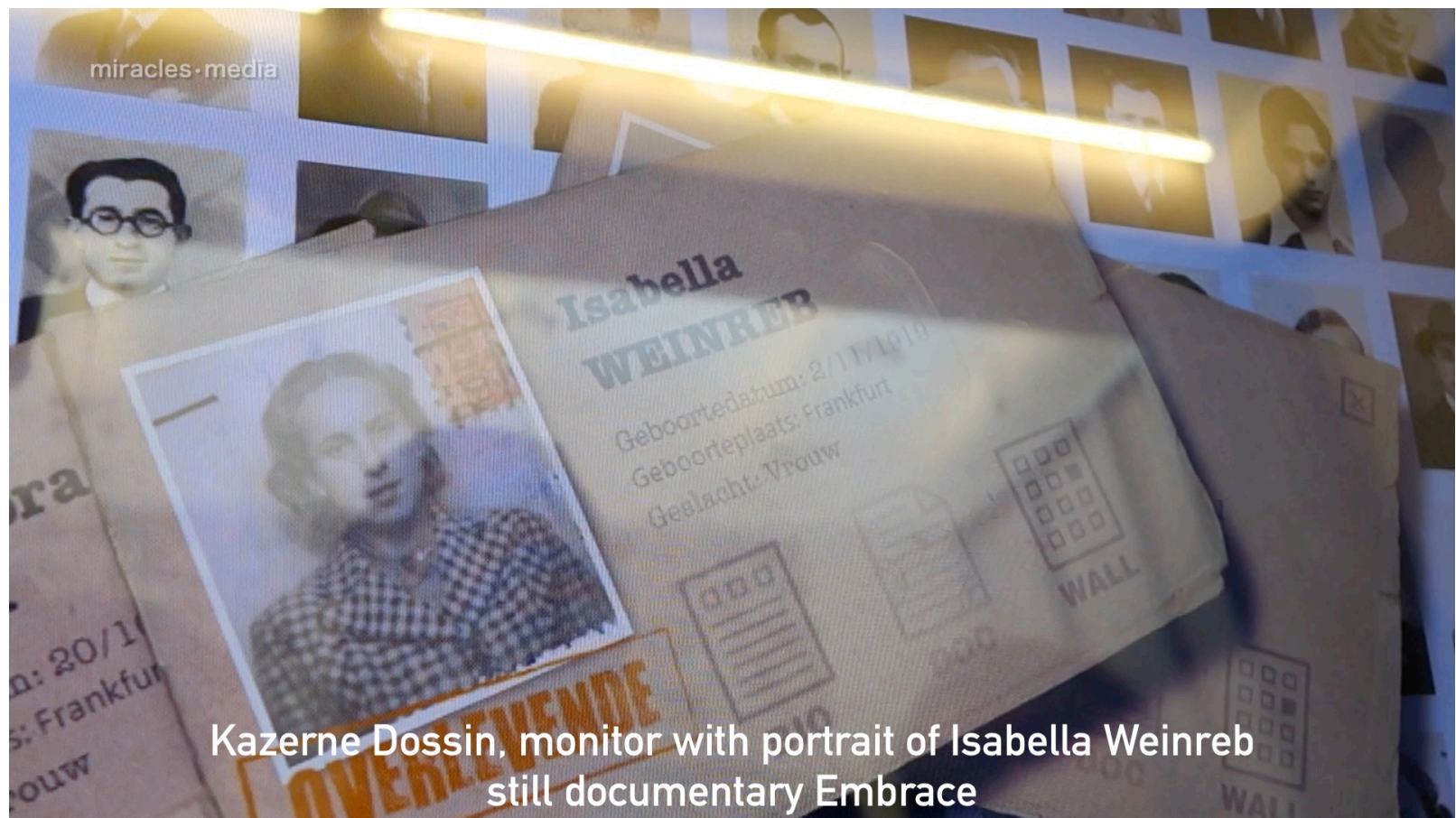
JM : Here is his picture. Row 21.

SK : And, he ... who helped her jump during the transport to Auschwitz.



JM : Yes, that is her, Isabella Weinreb.

SK : And she was pregnant.



Kazerne Dossin, monitor with portrait of Isabella Weinreb
still documentary Embrace

MB : [typing 'Isabella Wein' ... in the search field] It's the woman, the young woman who was pregnant with a daughter later called Viviane. And when they escaped from the train car she was afraid to jump. And then, Elias, whom the book is about today – Elias, the father of Hannah – he helped her jump out.

VI : And that way saved her life.

MB : That way he saved her life, and about six months later her daughter Viviane was born.

I told that story to Simone [PM – I mean 'Viviane's story' as published 2014] when she asked about someone else who was also in the car [PM Lilly Schwartz] – I also know someone else 'Isabella Weinreb' who was pregnant. And then she remembered the story from Hannah, that her father had helped a woman jump, with a baby, or pregnant – she was not sure . And then Simone came here to the Kazerne Dossin where she was helped by the researcher Laurence Schram. So they looked at all the people in the cattle-car, and there were no women with babies in there. So now, it is concluded that Elias saved the life of Isabella — he went to her back, he put his arms around her ...

VI : And helped her down, and ...

MB : ... and they jumped together.

Viviane & Simon 75 years later

April 16 , 2018 — Viviane and Simon Gronowski meet



Viviane and Simon Gronowski meet at The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, April 16th, 2018.

Viviane was born on October 30, 1943 in Etterbeek, a neighborhood of Brussels, and remained in Brussels with her parents for many years, before leaving Belgium at age 20 to live in Israel, and in 1980 moved to the USA to settle down with her family in Los Angeles.

Simon Gronowski was born on October 12, 1931 also in Etterbeek, Brussels. Simon stayed in Brussels where he is working as a lawyer and author.

Both Simon and Viviane escaped that night of April 19th, 1943 from the 20th Death Train to Auschwitz, but they had never met — not until last year, 75 years later, on April 16, 2018 at The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles. When Simon Gronowski was visiting Los Angeles, April 2018 – to tell his story and reunite there with his childhood friend Alice Weit – Viviane fortunately was able to meet Simon for the first time, together with her three daughters and her oldest granddaughter, Ameet.

Simon Gronowski was only 11 years old , when he was helped by his mother Chana Gronowski-Kaplan to jump from the train near the village of Kuttekoven, and survived — unlike his mother who was murdered in Auschwitz.



Simon was "lucky." He was taken care of by the Belgian gendarme Jean Aerts and his wife, and not betrayed. That salvation was no exception: almost all refugees from the deportation train survived with the help of the Belgian population.

Simon's story is told in more detail in the documentary "Transport XX to Auschwitz" — a film by Karen Lynne & Richard Bloom and Michel van der Burg. The film can be viewed both online and is available for viewing worldwide in Holocaust museums and centers. The film

is available – distributed for free – for screening at Jewish and other film festivals, as well as for Holocaust educational programs – via either Richard Bloom (Richard Bloom Productions – USA) or Michel van der Burg (michelvanderburg.com).

At the time of publication of this book we are working on the documentary "Miracles," on the life of Simon Gronowski (miracles.media).

Simon Gronowski was the youngest person to ever jump and escape from a death train. Viviane was the youngest to escape while still in the womb of her 3-months pregnant mother Isabella Weinreb — thanks to the courage of her mother and Elias Gnazik who embraced Isabella, helping her jump and escape in Belgium from the cattle-car of Transport XX to Auschwitz.



Credits

Special thanks to Simone Korkus for sharing the findings of her dedicated research and cooperation and bringing the story to life; and special thanks to Simon Gronowski – always willing to talk to others... testify and show ways how to deal with that past.

Sincere thanks to the team of Kazerne Dossin Museum – especially Marjan Verplancke, Laurence Schram and Dorien Styven, and co-workers on the project “Give them a Face.”

The "Give Them a Face" project of the Kazerne Dossin aims to bring together many portraits of deportees from the Dossin barracks in Mechelen as possible, giving them back their face and keeping their memory alive.

To many others...thank you for contributing in various ways to make this work possible, especially Jan Maes, Ingrid Vander Veken, Harold Polis, Marc Michiels, Philippe Renette, Christopher Allison, Romain De Nys, Sébastien De Nys, Ilana Borsuk-Nadel, and our family co-workers: Michel's wife Sonja van der Burg - partnering from start to end in this work, and Viviane's girls Sigal, Ossie, Dorit and Ameet for their help making and providing copies of photos and videos of Ameet's song and the Los Angeles meeting with Simon Gronowski.

Photo and film credits

1. Cover image : Belgium ca. 1948. Viviane and her parents on the walk board at the seaside town Blankenberge. Photo : private archive Viviane Yarom
2. Ve'Ulai song by Ameet Kanon. Lyrics by poetess Rachel [pseudonym of Hebrew poet Rachel Bluwstein]. Audio : Ameet Kanon. Still (edited) from video: Viviane Yarom/ Michel van der Burg
3. Trailer documentary Transport XX to Auschwitz. Film: Richard Bloom Productions
4. Simon Gronowski beside deportation wagon in Belgium. Edited still from interview (Simon Gronowski) video: Michel van der Burg. Original photo: Pierre Salmon
5. Lilly Schwartz in a scene from the film Transport XX to Auschwitz. Film Lilly Schwartz by Michel van der Burg. Edited scene from documentary film Transport XX to Auschwitz (Richard Bloom Productions). Interview of Lilly Schwartz-Wolkenfeld is from the archive of the USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education. For more information: <http://sfi.usc.edu/>

6. Isabella Weinreb's portrait in scene from documentary Transport XX to Auschwitz where Lilly Schwartz recounts : "So when the doors opened, Bella jumped ..." . Still from video: Michel van der Burg
7. France. Dec 2012. Isabella Weinreb-Castegnier. Photo: private archive Viviane Yarom
8. Isabella Weinreb-Castegnier in special edition of film "TRANSPORT XX — installation Brussels." Film: Michel van der Burg. Kazerne Dossin digitalized the photos of the Dossin's prisoners, that mostly are from the "National State Archives of Belgium, Ministry of Justice, Public Safety Office, Foreigner's Police, individual files". The TRANSPORT XX Installation in Brussels was organized from 27 January to 15 March 2009 by the BELvue Museum in collaboration with the JMDR / Kazerne Dossin. The photographic portraits were displayed outside in the Royal Park (Le Parc Royal) in Brussels (opposite the Royal Palace).
9. Belgium. 1940s. Isabella Weinreb. Photo: private archive Viviane Yarom
10. Courtyard Dossin barracks 1942 – collecting camp of Mechelen. Photo : JMDV – Fonds Kummer
11. Isabella Weinreb-Castegnier. Still from film "TRANSPORT XX — installation Brussels" : Michel van der Burg
12. Belgium ca. 1948. Viviane and her parents on the walk board at the seaside town Blankenberge. Photo: private archive Viviane Yarom
13. Presentation of Simone's book 'Degrelle's maid'. Still documentary Embrace : Michel van der Burg
14. Mechelen – view from Kazerne Dossin Museum. Still documentary Embrace : Michel van der Burg
15. Documentary Embrace – filmed October 15, 2017 in Kazerne Dossin Museum, Mechelen, Belgium. Film: Michel van der Burg
16. Kazerne Dossin (Hof van Habsburg) – Former Dossin barracks photographed from balcony of Kazerne Dossin Museum, Mechelen, Belgium, August 18, 2016. Photo: Michel van der Burg
17. Discussion with moderator Ingrid Vander Veken (left) and writer Simone Korkus (right). Still documentary Embrace: Michel van der Burg

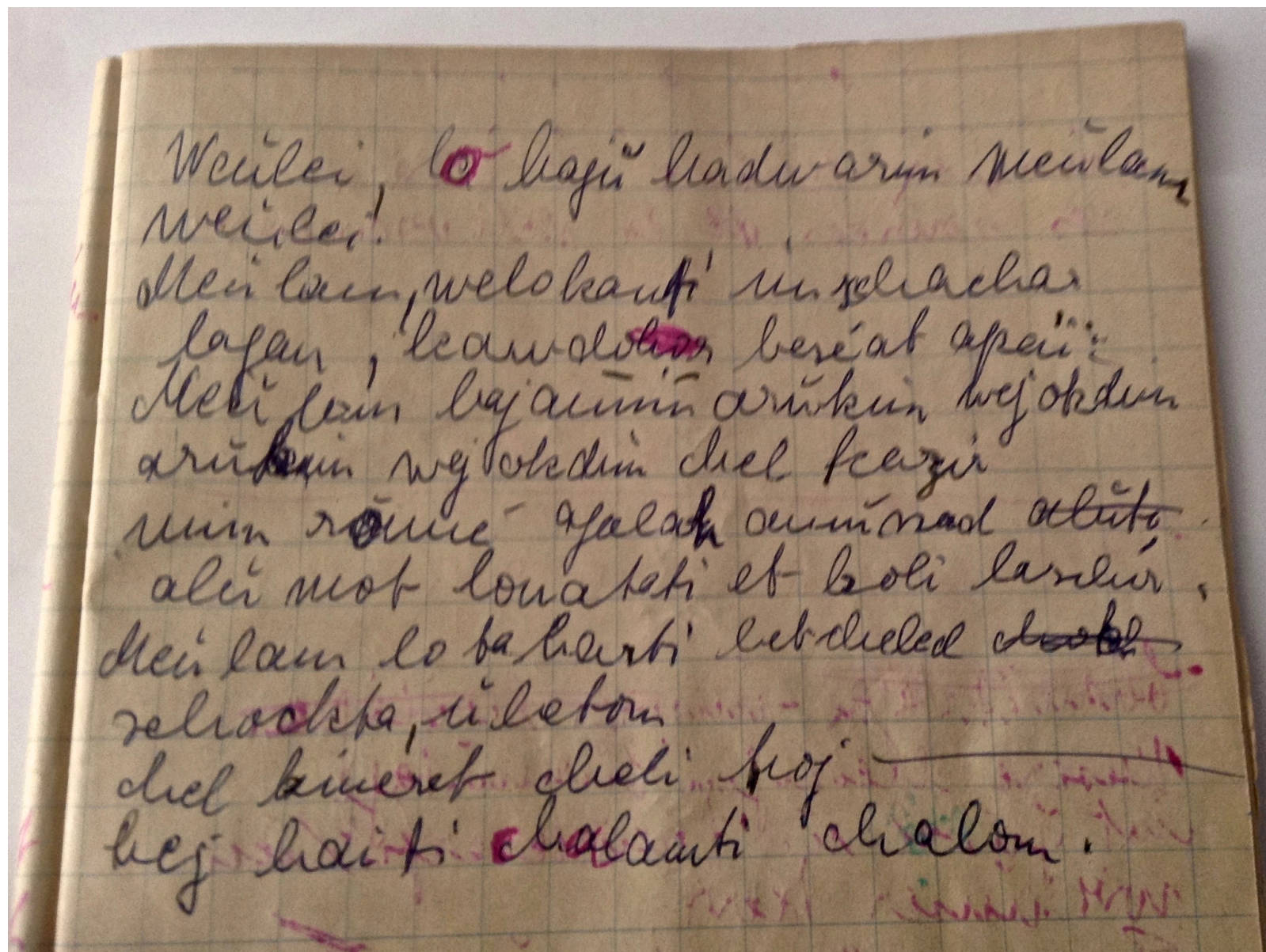
18. Picture in Simone's book of Viviane visiting Hannah in Ramat Gan, Israel. Still documentary Embrace: Michel van der Burg
19. Jan Maes at Kazerne Dossin, monitor with portrait of Elias Gnazik. Still documentary Embrace : Michel van der Burg
20. Wall at Kazerne Dossin with the portraits of (in 'loupes' from left to right) Elias Gnazik, Lilly Schwartz and Isabella Weinreb [sepia colored portraits indicate survivors]. Still documentary Embrace: Michel van der Burg
21. Kazerne Dossin, monitor with portrait of Isabella Weinreb. Still documentary Embrace: Michel van der Burg
22. Viviane and Simon Gronowski meet at The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, April 16th, 2018. (Outside filming by Christopher Allison). Film : Viviane Yarom/ Michel van der Burg
23. In a scene from the film “Transport XX to Auschwitz” Simon Gronowski stands at the spot where he jumped from the train 70 years ago – near the village of Kuttekoven. Photo: Marc Van Roosbroeck/Michel van der Burg
24. Simon Gronowski with Viviane and her girls in Los Angeles, April 2018. Photo: Sébastien De Nys/Viviane Yarom
25. “Ve’Ulai” Hebrew transcript handwritten by Isabella Weinreb – a song she cherished and herself would sing on special occasions. Photo : private archive Viviane Yarom

Notes

Websites

- [Kazerne Dossin](#)
- [Richard Bloom Productions](#)
- [Miracles.Media](#)
- [Michel van der Burg](#)
- [Marc Michiels](#)
- [USC Shoah Foundation \(Los Angeles, CA\)](#)

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“Ve’Ulai” Hebrew transcript handwritten by Isabella Weinreb – a song she cherished and herself would sing on special occasions.

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- ² Michel van der Burg. 2013 Apr 19. Documentary film “Transport XX to Auschwitz” [regularly updated post]. Boskoop (Netherlands): Michel van der Burg | michelvanderburg.com; [embedded film updated 2015 Apr 19; accessed 2019 Mar 28]. Post with full details, including the online available full film, regular updates , and news. Short-link <https://wp.me/p14gqN-hA>
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- ⁶ Simone Korkus. 2017. Het dienstmeisje van Degrelle: hoe Hannah Nadel de oorlog overleefde. Antwerpen (Belgium): Polis . Paperback ISBN 978-94-6310-093-9 / E-book ISBN 978-94-6310-300-8 . E-book fragment online – https://issuu.com/uitgeverijpolis/docs/preview_het_dienstmeisje_van_degrel .
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- ⁸ Michel van der Burg. 2018 Apr 19. Full of Life ... Escape from Transport XX. Boskoop (Netherlands) : Michel van der Burg | michelvanderburg.com ; [accessed 2019 Apr 10]. Short-link <https://wp.me/p14gqN-niQ>
- ⁹ Michel van der Burg. 2018 Oct 30. Viviane & Simon ~ 75 Years After Escape Transport XX to Auschwitz. Boskoop (Netherlands): Michel van der Burg | michelvanderburg.com ; [accessed 2019 Apr 10]. Short-link <https://wp.me/p14gqN-nk4>

¹⁰ "Ve'Ulai" – Hebrew transcript handwritten by Isabella Weinreb – a song she cherished and herself would sing on special occasions. Lyrics by poetess Rachel [pseudonym of Hebrew poet Rachel Bluwstein].

"And Perhaps" – English translation of "Ve'ulai"

And perhaps these things never were
And perhaps,
I never rose at dawn to the garden,
To work it by sweat of my brow.

Never, not on long and blazing days,
Long and blazing days of harvest
On top of a cart full of sheaf,
I did not raise my voice in song.

Never did I wash in the peaceful azure
And innocence,
Oh my Kinneret...oh my Kinneret,
Did you exist, or did I dream a dream?

¹¹ Michel van der Burg. 2009 Apr 19. TRANSPORT XX — installation Brussels. Boskoop (Netherlands): Michel van der Burg | michelvanderburg.com ; [last updated 2017 Nov 30; accessed 2019 Apr 12]. Short-link <https://wp.me/p14gqN-ak>

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